

Viola Jepchumba Flirts With World Record

Kipyatich Surprise Men's Winner

Prague, Czech Republic

Last April, Kenya's Viola Jepchumba thundered through the first 10 kilometers of the Sportisimo Prague Half Marathon in 30:29 and then sailed on to victory in 1:05.51. Her 10K split was a world leader and made her the #3 10K road performer of all time. But wait, there's more. Her world-leading finishing time also made her the #3 half marathon performer of all time. As the road racing world reflected on Jepchumba's achievement – and the improbable way the dazzling 10K and half marathon clockings were achieved in the same race – many wondered just how good this 25 year old upstart could be. Tonight we caught a glimpse.

As dusk fell on this idyllic European capital, the Birell Prague Grand Prix 10K got underway. The shadows were lengthening, but the start time temperature was still pushing 30 degrees Celsius [85 degrees Fahrenheit] – uncomfortable for all in the field. Jepchumba flew away at the opening gun. Early on, countrywoman Joyciline Jepkosgei attempted to keep pace, but soon Jepchumba easily broke away to go it alone. Without the aid of bona fide competition – or even pacers – the young Kenyan, intent on taking down the course record of 30:55 set the prior year by Paris Jepchirchir, stormed on, almost oblivious to pace. Running alone, Jepchumba split 5K in a verified 14:46. Slowing but undeterred, the unthreatened Jepchumba pushed it all the way to the line, stopping the clock at 30:24. Her winning time improved her 10K world leader, elevated her to the #2 10K road performance and performer of all time, and scared the 2003 world record 10K road mark of 30:21 set by Paula Radcliffe. “I didn’t know what the record was,” offered a reserved but obviously contented champion. Jepchumba deflected an inquiry about a possible future competition against Jepchirchir. “I will continue to train hard and work to do my best”. offered the new champion, smiling on the homestretch, finished 2nd in 31:08 – a 20 second PR. Preventing a Kenyan sweep, Ethiopian Afera Godfay crossed in 31:49 for 3rd.

The men’s race turned out to be the competitive dogfight all expected. The surprise was that none of the big dogs – defending champion Daniel Chebii, Prague favorite Daniel Wanjiru, or former marathon world record holder Patrick Makau – won. An underdog did. Lightly-touted Abraham Kipyatich trusted his fitness and went out with the favorites at course record pace – passing 5 kilometers, as instructed, in 13:46. The lead pack of Kipyatich, Kenneth Keter, Mathew Kimeli, Emmanuel Kipsang, roared by 5 kilometers, as instructed, in 13:46 – placing Geoffrey Ronoh’s 2014 course record of 27:28 in jeopardy. Heading west on the north side of the Vltava River, the pack was joined by always-dangerous Wanjiru as the racers careened downhill toward the government parliament headquarters, It was then Kipyatich – perhaps the least likely of the lead pack – sprung his surprise. Aided by the downhill, the 23 year old Kenyan pressed the pace and kept the heat on through the descent, the turn-around, and the climb back toward the Stefanik Bridge. Wanjuri took up chase and looked good doing it – exhibiting superior leg speed and an alert countenance. But Kipyatich would not be denied. Drenched with sweat but never looking back, he spun onto the bridge and picked up the pace. Wanjuri responded in kind, but it was too little too late. Kipyatich hit the line first in a world-leading 27:40 – clinching the victory, and harvesting a massive 39 second PR under challenging conditions. Wanjiru, the two-time defending champion of the Sportisimo Prague Half Marathon crossed 2nd in 27:43 while Emmanuel Kipsang completed the Kenyan sweep finishing 3rd in 27:47. 5th place finisher Mathew Kimeli’s 27:53 proved to be a U20 world leader. The victor was delighted to join the Sub-28 Club. “I am very proud [of my performance],” beamed the winner, who indicated that his pre-race plan called for his surge at 8 kilos.

After a subpar performance the prior week at the Czech Club Championships, top Czech finisher Milan Kocourek [20th in 30:32] may have timed his taper just right. He'll toe the line again at next week's Mattoni Usti nad Labem Half Marathon – where Kipyatich will step up to serve as a pace-setter. 1500m/5000m track specialist Kristiina Maki was the top Czech woman, finishing the 10K in 34:19 for 15th place. When asked if her PR performance might entice her to tackle a 10,000 meter race on the track, the 24 year old "shook her head.. “”It's too hard,” she frowned.

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