

SURPRISE, SURPRISE

Wharf to Wharf

Kenya's Oyugi stuns men's field

By **ANDREW MATHESON**
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CAPITOLA — If Nelson Oyugi came into the 41st annual Wharf to Wharf as a relative unknown to his competitors, the 21-year-old Kenyan's sizzling performance in Sunday's race will ensure that won't ever happen again.

"Never seen him," fellow countryman and competitor Shadrack Kosgei said afterward. "But I know him now."

Oyugi, who turned 21 on Tuesday and came to the United States for the very first time a day later, fell under the radar for many. Yet, he quickly and aggressively dashed to the lead, and the limelight, of the six-mile road race.

Recording a time of 27 minutes, 12.04 seconds, Oyugi

SEE **MEN ON B8**

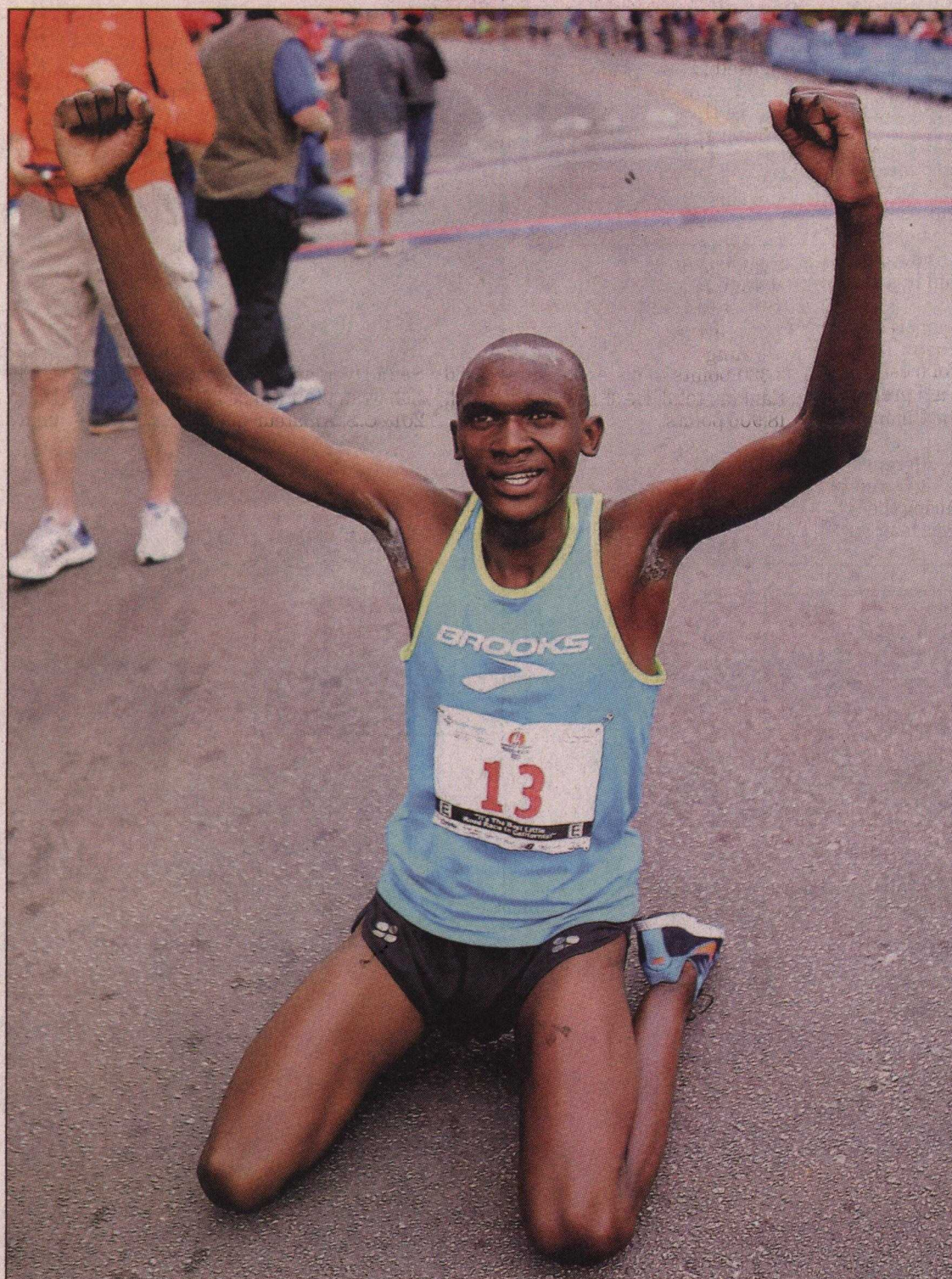
TOP FINISHERS

MEN

- 1. Nelson Oyugi, Kenya, 27:12.04
- 2. Shadrack Kosgei, Kenya, 27:24.23
- 3. Brett Gotcher, La Selva Beach, 27:30.74
- 4. Aschalew Meketa Neguse, Ethiopia, 27:33.74
- 5. Ben Bruce, Flagstaff, Ariz., 27:52.23

WOMEN

- 1. Emily Infeld, Portland, Ore., 30:51.99
- 2. Almaz Negede Fekade, Ethiopia, 31:06
- 3. Risper Gesabwa, Kenya, 31:13
- 4. Stephanie Rothstein Bruce, Flagstaff, Ariz., 31:16.23
- 5. Kellyn Johnson, Flagstaff, Ariz., 32:31.98



Kenyan Nelson Oyugi celebrates at the finish line of the 2013 Wharf to Wharf race in Capitola on Sunday after finishing in first place.

KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

Unheralded Infeld is top female

By **HAVEN LIVINGSTON**
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CAPITOLA — Before Sunday, 23-year-old Emily Infeld couldn't list her personal record for six miles — she had never run a race that distance. The Ohio native and current Portland, Ore., resident had never even run a road race before this weekend's Wharf to Wharf.

Now she has an unofficial record of 30 minutes, 51.99 seconds, and bragging rights for winning the "The best little road race in California."

Not that she's ready to start bragging. The win took Infeld as much by surprise as it did the rest of the women's field. Infeld didn't even realize there was a cash prize. She won \$4,000 for first place and \$1,000 for being the first American woman finisher.

SEE **WOMEN ON B8**

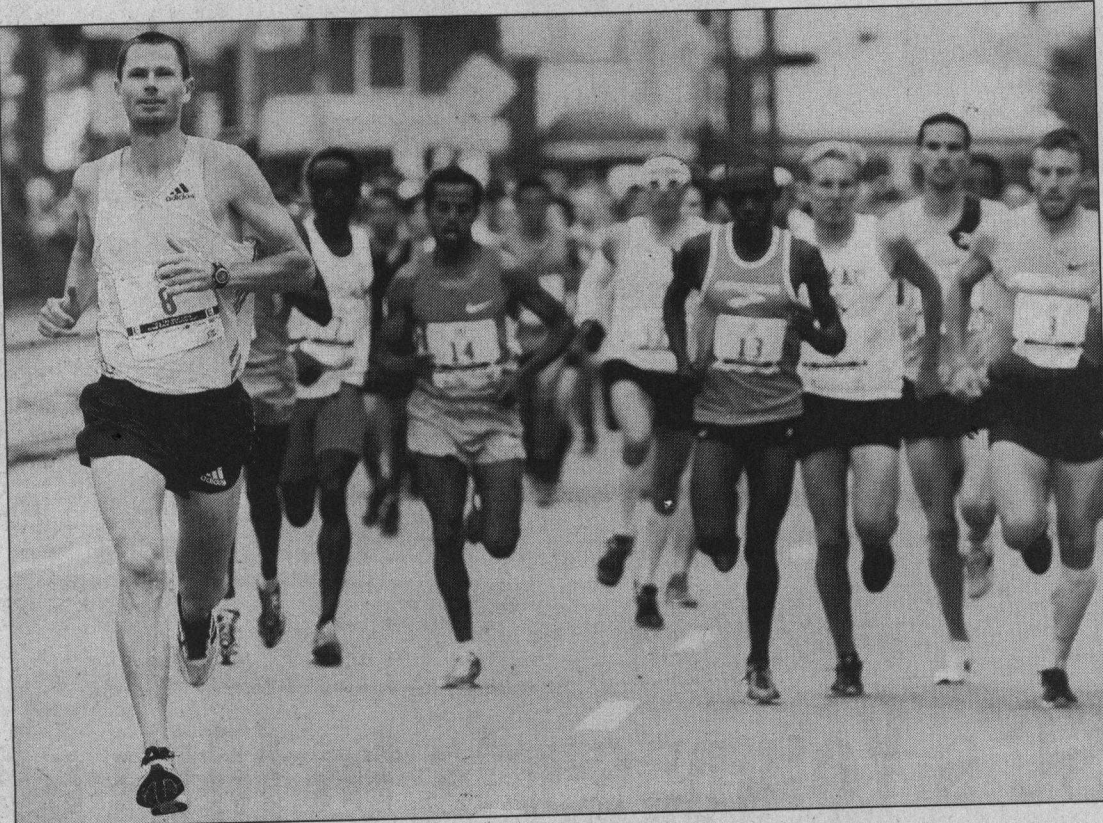


MORE ONLINE

PHOTOS: Thousands of runners from across the globe gathered in mass by the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf on Sunday morning to participate in the annual 6-mile Wharf to Wharf race. See the slide show at photos.santacruzsentinel.com

WHARF TO WHARF SOCIAL MEDIA MASH-UP: We compiled a collection of #wharftowharf posts from Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Look for yourself and your friends online at http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/ci_23746220

WHARF TO WHARF NOTEBOOK



Ben Bruce of Flagstaff, Ariz., looks strong as he takes an early lead during the Wharf to Wharf race in Santa Cruz on Sunday.

KEVIN JOHNSON/
SENTINEL

Former race director Nicol runs in first race

Sentinel staff report

Longtime Wharf to Wharf race director Kirby Nicol, who stepped away from the position last year, completed the six-mile course between the Santa Cruz and Capitola wharves for the very first time Sunday.

It's safe to say he enjoyed himself.

"I told (Wharf to Wharf committee president) Ken Thomas that if I had known it was going to be this much fun," Nicol, 71, said afterward, "I would have retired a long time ago."

Nicol was race director for 28 years, and he had been so focused on the logistics of the race that he never actually found time to compete in it — until Sunday. He clocked an unofficial time of 1 hour, 36 minutes and 27 seconds.

"It was a hoot," he said.

Nicol ran alongside family and friends and was able to experience the Wharf to Wharf — this time, from a runner's perspective. He was able to better enjoy the weather, the camaraderie among the competitors, and the music, he said.

"I usually didn't see the bands playing," said Nicol, who would often be riding in the officials' truck ahead of the lead pack. "I didn't realize we had that quality of entertainment."

As per Wharf to Wharf tradition, retired board members receive a bib number that is theirs until "perpetuity," Nicol said. There are about six retired bib numbers, Nicol added, each of which were given to board members who served roughly 20 years or more. It was to Nicol's surprise,

though, when he received the No. 1 race bib, which is usually reserved for either the men's or women's defending champion.

"But I told people the bib numbers were given out by height," joked Nicol, who is well over 6 feet tall. "And then I saw someone taller than I was, so I had to change my story."

RACE COMMITTEE DONATES 20 BIBS TO LAW ENFORCEMENT

Local law enforcement ran on behalf of Santa Cruz Police detectives Sgt. Loran "Butch" Baker and Elizabeth Butler, who earlier this year were shot and killed following a house call on North Branciforte Avenue and Doyle Street. Twenty bibs were donated to law enforcement and family members that knew the two fallen officers.

"The Board of Directors, upon hearing about the murders, made an organizational decision to support friends and family of the officers," said race director Scott McConville, who took over the post from Nicol following last year's event.

"It shocked the community. Our organization wanted to create an outlet to remember those people," McConville added. "Santa Cruz is a tight-knit community and [the race] brings everyone together."

Police officer Laurel Schonfield was one of the officers running in Sunday's road race between the Santa Cruz and Capitola wharves. "The race is a large community event. The donation was a good gesture by Scott," said Schonfield, who finished in 1:44:11.

RACE T-SHIRTS PAY TRIBUTE TO FALLEN OFFICERS

Each of the 15,000 competitors in the Wharf to Wharf received a T-shirt that included a special tribute to those fallen officers.

The T-Shirt includes the images of two badges — one with the badge number of Baker (105) and one with the badge number of Butler (172).

MCCONVILLE FINISHES FIRST YEAR AS NEW RACE DIRECTOR

McConville, who coaches track and field at Aptos High, completed his first year as race director of the Wharf to Wharf.

He said it was a success, but he owes much of that to the 2,000 or so volunteers that pour their "heart and soul" into the event every year.

"If something goes wrong or turns out unexpected, they make adjustments on the fly," McConville said. "It's that passion that makes everything go."

"I just make sure they all get a phone call and a hat and T-shirt, and they'll do the rest."

McConville shadowed Nicol as race director last year. Prior to that, he had been the elite athletes coordinator since 2009.

OFFICIALS WILL REVIEW CORRAL SYSTEM

McConville is looking forward to getting feedback from key volunteers to see if the newly implemented corral starting system made any difference in the number of bandit runners this year.

"It's nearly impossible to

tell right now," McConville said. "But we'll be watching samples of video from the finish to count bandits and see if there were changes. Otherwise, the race went super smooth."

Over the next few months, race officials will watch the finish line video to also see if there were heavy packs of runners trying to cross at once, which means the course was overcrowded, likely from bandits. If runners come across the finish spread out, it means the corral system helped keep out bandits and allowed the runners more space as they left the start line.

FELTON RESIDENT WINS TRIP TO NEW ZEALAND

Ellen Firenzi of Felton won a trip for two to compete in the Wharf 2 Wharf race in New Zealand.

The first thing she said on stage was, "I've never won anything before!"

Firenzi was thrilled and said there was no doubt she and her husband, Paul, would be making good on the win.

"I have about 45 days of vacation I need to use and this will be the perfect vacation," Paul said.

DUNN, WICHELMANN RUN AGAIN

Santa Cruz's Tom Wichelmann and Bill Dunn, who have run in every Wharf to Wharf since its inception in 1973, each completed the race for the 41st time.

The 72-year-old Wichelmann completed the race in 1:24:32, while the 82-year-old Dunn finished in 1:16:55.

Andrew Matheson, Haven Livingston and Michael Hopek contributed to this report.

MEN

Continued from B6

easily defeated the defending champion Kosgei (27:24.23) and his hopes of winning a record fourth Wharf to Wharf title — by more than 12 seconds.

"I feel good. I thank God," said Oyugi, who built a 10-second lead on Kosgei — his nearest competitor — and the rest of the pack less than three miles into the race. Admittedly relaxed with his sizable cushion, Oyugi coasted down the final hill and into Capitola Village amidst cheers and celebration from the admiring crowd.

Oyugi broke the tape and dropped to his knees, arms outstretched before giving an enthusiastic fist pump.

"The unknown ones are usually the most dangerous," said Aptos High alum Brett Gotcher, who, after not competing in last year's event, returned to his usual spot as the Wharf to Wharf's top local finisher. Clocking a career-best 27:30.74 on the six-mile course, which runs between the Santa Cruz and the Capitola wharves, Gotcher placed third overall and was the top American finisher as well.

"He started fast today," Gotcher said of Oyugi. "He's not unknown anymore, that's for sure."

Ethiopia's Aschalew Meketa Neguse, who was in third for much of the race, placed fourth in 27:33.74 following a late surge by Gotcher, while American Ben Bruce, of Flagstaff, Ariz., narrowly missed out on the money by placing fifth in 27:52.23.

The top four placers earn \$4,000, \$3,000, \$2,000 and \$1,000, respectively, with an additional \$1,000 going to the top American.

"I've never made any money at this race before, so it was a good day," Gotcher said with a smile.

The money should be especially helpful for Oyugi, who came to the U.S. earlier this week without a pair of racing flats. But he and his manager, Scott Robinson, of the AmeriKenyan Running Club in Santa Fe, N.M., purchased a pair of Nikes from Athletic Performance in San Jose. It was the first — and only — pair Oyugi tried on that day.

Less than 24 hours later, Oyugi was busy breaking them in at the track at Soquel High, making sure they weren't going to cause blisters.

On Sunday, Oyugi looked comfortable in setting a blistering pace that settled below 27 minutes at times — a barrier that has been cracked only twice before in Wharf to Wharf history.

"I wanted to test it," said Oyugi, who was part of a lead pack early on that unofficially ran a 4:36 first mile. On the second mile, Oyugi, Kosgei and Neguse pulled away at a 4:21 pace.

"If I made that surge, I

would have been done by the two-mile mark," Bruce said. "You've got to make your own decisions. You've got to assess where you're at and go off that."

Oyugi was noticeably quick with his decision making. It was at the turn onto East Cliff Drive — with still less than three miles of the race completed — where he decisively pulled ahead for good.

"About four to five kilometers in, I decided to go. I felt comfortable," said Oyugi, who, despite his large lead, continued to look over his shoulder for any oncoming competitors.

"Nobody was coming for me," he said.

It was the type of race where many of the top competitors afterward said they were pleased with how they performed; it was just Oyugi's day.

"I'm feeling good. I ran my best," said Kosgei, who last year finished first in 27:20. "I was trying to catch up, but he was running very fast. I couldn't catch up with him."

"But I was doing my best. ... I was thinking I might come back to him, but he kept going and going and going."

At times, Gotcher may have been thinking the same thing, as the distance between him and Neguse for third appeared just as great as Oyugi's was on Kosgei for first. And even after the La Selva Beach resident pulled away from Uganda's Tony Okello on the fourth mile, he still had plenty of distance to make up to reach the 25-year-old Ethiopian.

"I don't think I was in third place until the last 10 meters of the race," said Gotcher, who edged Neguse by three seconds. "I think I surprised a lot of people — even myself. I didn't really think I was going to catch (Neguse). But I just kind of had my eye on him. I could see the downhill and I know if your legs are done, the downhill is tough. So I saw him kind of slowing up, and I thought, 'All right, let's give it a go.' And I just barely nipped him."

Consider it a hometown advantage. Gotcher's competed in the Wharf to Wharf roughly 12 times, and has been named the top local finisher nine times. He's been training on the six-mile course all winter and spring, he said.

That's what perhaps makes Oyugi's run all the more special.

With little biographical information next to his name, the only thing the competitors knew of the Kenyan was that he reportedly ran a 28:51 in the 10,000 meters three years ago — in Nairobi, at altitude.

Although those stories sometime get lost in translation, Bruce said, the Wharf to Wharf newcomer backed it up Sunday.

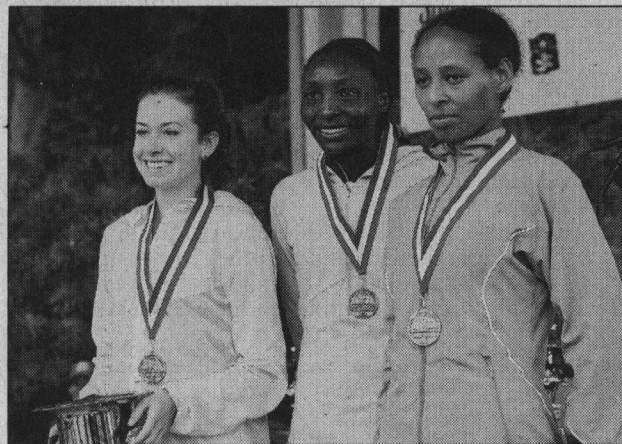
"He went out there and pressed it," Bruce said, "and he took everyone to school."

WOMEN

Continued from B6

"Everyone raves about this [race] and I heard it's super fun, so my coach decided I could just come down here and see what kind of fitness I'm in and have fun running it," Infeld said at the finish line.

Infeld may be new to the Wharf to Wharf, but she is no stranger to running. The recent Georgetown graduate was the 2012 NCAA champion in the indoor 3,000 meters. She placed eighth in the 5,000 at the 2012 Olympic Trials and set a new school record. She holds All-American honors, is a Big East champion and Penn Relays champion, and is currently part of the group trained by Jerry Schumacher in Port-



KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

Champion Emily Infeld, left, third-place winner Risper Gesabwa and runner-up Almaz Negede Fekade are honored at the awards ceremony in Capitola on Sunday.

land.

"I only started back to my full training schedule two weeks ago and I have plans to race more track this summer, but after this I really

want to do more road races!" Infeld said.

Let the future women's elite runners be warned: Infeld plans to return next year.

Runner-up finisher Almaz Negede Fekade clocked in 14 seconds after Infeld at 31:06.00. The 25-year-old Ethiopian is shy in speaking English, but gave a broad smile in response to an inquiry about her finish and held up two fingers.

Last year's women's elite winner, Risper Gesabwa, delivered a third-place finish on Sunday and knows exactly why she wasn't in the lead this time around.

"I just did a half marathon race last week in Peru, and it was cold with snow!" Gesabwa explained after the race on Sunday. She crossed the finish line in 31:13.00.

"Normally I need two weeks of easy recovery and start my serious training in the third week, but instead I only had one week. It was also a 12-hour flight to get here and a change in climate.

When I was doing my warm-up, I felt like my legs were tired and my body wasn't moving."

Gesabwa has learned from this race and said she'll be back next year, but will skip the half marathon before the Wharf to Wharf.

"I like this distance better anyway. I don't need to do the half marathons," she said. Gesabwa will also be keeping an eye out for new girl Infeld next time around.

While cash awards go four deep from \$4,000-\$1,000, medals are only awarded three deep. So even though fourth-place finisher Stephanie Rothstein-Bruce will be taking home a check for \$1,000, she didn't make it to the podium with her time of 31:16.23.

"[The lead group of women] broke up with about two miles to go and there was a stream of us heading to the

finish. I looked ahead and thought to myself, Emily is winning my race, because I had placed second last year and wanted to win this time. But at least an American won," Rothstein-Bruce said as she prepared for her warm down. The last time an American born woman won the race was Kim Fitchen-Young in 2004.

The top local woman, Michelle Prowse, had only done the Wharf to Wharf once before, in 2010.

"It's a great race to target when I'm training because I get to be out here with the support of the Santa Cruz Track Club and local supporters and I see some of my physical therapy patients out here," Prowse said. "I ran even faster than I had planned and kept it under 36 [minutes]."

Prowse finished in 35:26.