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SPORTS

Editor: Mark Conley

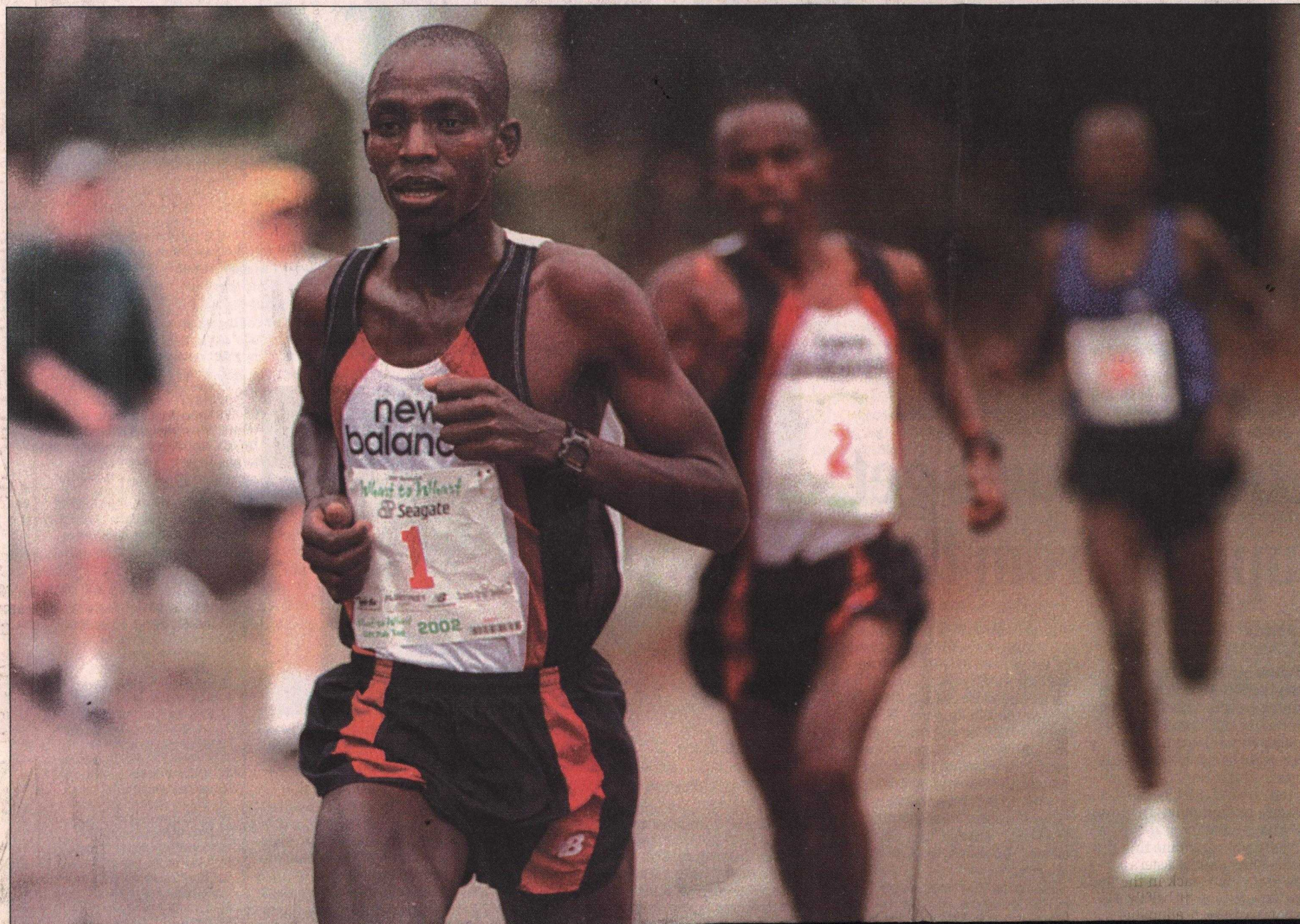
MONDAY, JULY 29, 2002

Wharf to Wharf

30th WHARF TO WHARF RACE

7-29-02

ANOTHER KENYAN SWEEP



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

ABOVE: Kenyan Evans Rutto strides toward a repeat victory in the 30th annual Wharf to Wharf race Sunday. **BELOW:** Esther Kiplagat does an interview after her victory.

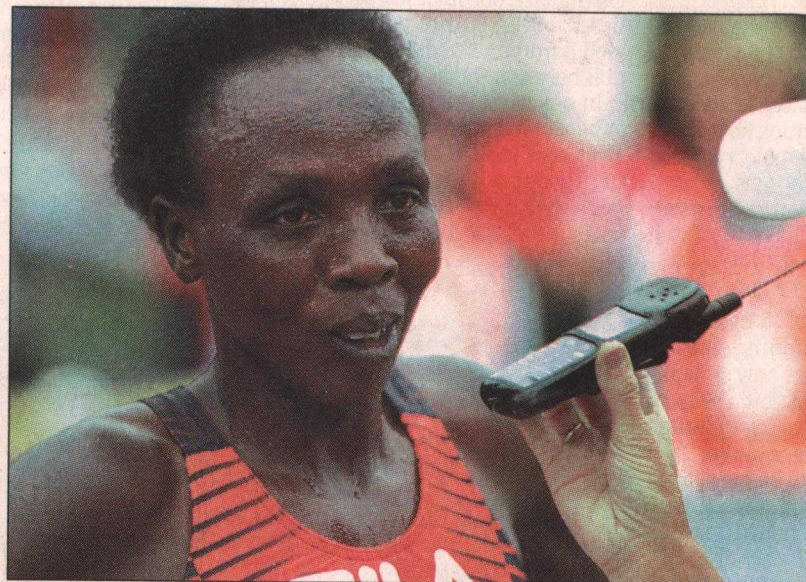
Men: Rutto the repeat winner

By **JULIE JAG**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

CAPITOLA — When he's not busy training in Kenya, Evans Rutto helps his brother tend a cattle ranch. He may soon switch to farming flowers, however. After all, buying new buds to fill his Wharf to Wharf winner's cup every year is starting to get expensive.

Rutto secured his second silver cup Sunday by defending his title as the winner of the Wharf to Wharf men's race. He broke away from countrymen John Gwako and Patrick Nthiwa in the final half mile of the six-mile race to win in 27 minutes, 38 seconds.

Please see **MEN** on **Page B2**



Women: Kiplagat posts new record

By **JIM SEIMAS**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

CAPITOLA — Thirty-six-year-old Esther Kiplagat of Kenya knew something was wrong with the leaders' pack as she approached the first mile marker of the six-mile Wharf to Wharf race Sunday morning.

Roadside fans watching the 30th annual roadrace, which stretches from Santa Cruz to Capitola, sensed something was strange too.

"There's a woman in that group," they said before applauding her efforts.

Kiplagat kept pace with the men for the first mile

Please see **WOMEN** on **Page B2**

Note to self: Full bladder and Wharf to Wharf don't mix

Baaaaaaaaaaaa.
For much of Sunday's 30th annual Wharf to Wharf race, that was the only thing 13,999 of my closest race-registered sheep friends in running shoes could utter.

That's one of the things you quickly discover as a Wharf to Wharf first-timer: You are not alone.

People love this race. (Sheep would too.)

This is good.

It is also baaaaaad.

In those moments of calm and sanity, the pulse of the surging horde of 14,000-plus falls in sync with the rhythm laid down by the bands lining the course, feeding the neural impulses which keep the arms and legs in



forward motion.

In those delirious moments where you think you've somehow morphed into Jim Ryun and can actually catch the pack of mad-dashing Kenyans at the front, picking your way through the masses is an awful lot

like navigating the I-5 in Los Angeles on a Friday afternoon: touchy business.

For a guy who believes the most important of our cardiovascular art forms is the beer run (by car, not foot), it was probably for the best.

Afterall, without a little hardship, what sort of highlight reel material would there be from my first-ever Wharf to Wharf experience?

■ **Pre-race** — At 9:50 p.m. on Saturday night, I realize safety pins are not included with the official race number they send you in the mail. This is not good.

A quick drive to the drug store reveals the smallest size pins (size 0) only come in brass and run \$6.98 for a box of 150. Let's look at

the upside here.

They're small — gotta stay light. No rusting — could be foggy out there. One hundred and fifty — I'm set for the next 36 years.

Sold.

■ **Mile 1** — I had been told by numerous Wharf to Wharf veterans that I would ride the surge of the crowd all the way to the finish line. Well, not me. I'm the one riding the surge of the bladder.

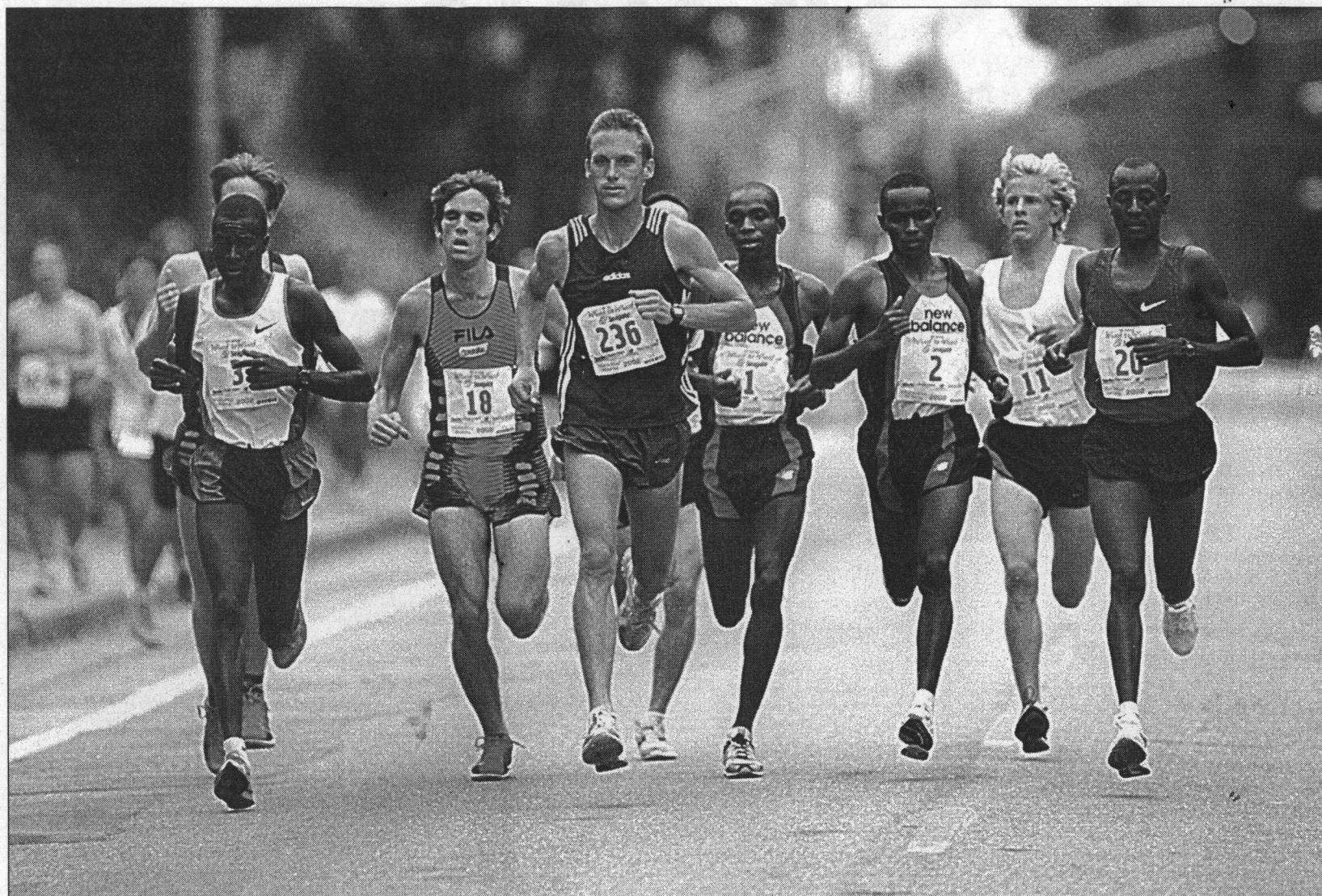
Apparently my attempts at hydration ("Several glasses of water several hours before the race," or so the pre-race literature instructed.) backfired. On the bright side, having some pain from the very first step will probably serve me well.

Please see **CONLEY** on **Page B2**

30TH WHARF TO WHARF RACE

Top 100 Men

1. Evans Rutto, Kenya	27:38
2. John Gwako, Kenya	27:48
3. Patrick Nthiwa, Kenya	27:56
4. Mbarak Hussein, Kenya	28:00
5. Jim Jurcevich, Columbus, Ohio	28:39
6. Juerg Stalder, Menlo Park	29:20
7. David Spiller, Harrisburg, Va.	29:21
8. Brett Gotcher, Watsonville	29:22
9. Ryan Hayes, San Luis Obispo	29:28
10. Steve Moreno, Oakland	29:46
11. Dan Gonzalez, Mountain View	29:55
12. David Jackson, San Luis Obispo	30:12
13. Jeff Porto Jr., Patterson	30:17
14. Nick Bingham, Reno, NV	30:22
15. David Volk, Palo Alto	30:33
16. Mark Yuen, San Jose	30:46
17. Erich Ackermann, Castro Valley	31:01
18. Brandon Collins, Orangevale	31:24
19. Liam Jones, Santa Cruz	31:26
20. Kenrick Sealy, Campbell	31:35
21. Jason Bouey, San Luis Obispo	31:35
22. David Ulibarri, San Luis Obispo	31:36
23. Jeff Hongo, Campbell	31:37
24. Gary Blanco, Chico	31:42
25. Christopher Ziemann, Felton	31:45
26. Wayne Hopp III, San Jose	31:50
27. Kevin Selby, Martinez	31:51
28. Eric Ollila, Sunnyvale	31:53
29. Justin Neuroth, San Luis Obispo	31:54
30. Sean Phillips, Goleta	32:01
31. David Beals, San Luis Obispo	32:01
32. Will Kraemer, Saratoga	32:02
33. Rigoberto Ramirez, San Jose	32:08
34. Christopher Phipps, San Francisco	32:10
35. Danny Chaves, Los Gatos	32:12
36. David Beauley, San Jose	32:18
37. Joshua Small, Santa Clara	32:24
38. Patrick Rainey, Rocklin	32:25
39. Grant Guenther, Aptos	32:26
40. Robert Pickens, Santa Clara	32:27
41. Ben Greenberg, Slingerlands, N.Y.	32:27
42. Ruben Esparza, Stockton	32:28
43. Franco Violich, Aptos	32:28
44. David Kessler, Santa Cruz	32:29
45. Stephen Overgaard, Stockton	32:29
46. Alan Jackson, Los Gatos	32:30
47. Shaun Wanford, Walnut Creek	32:31
48. Javier Naranjo, Soquel	32:32
49. Martin Mumenthaler, Palo Alto	32:33
50. Ngoan Phan, San Jose	32:35
51. Michael Seaman, Edina, MN	32:43
52. Rob Nast, Saratoga	32:48
53. Bobby McConville, Watsonville	32:55
54. Scott McConville, Watsonville	32:56
55. Lynn Mentzer, Sparks, NV	33:00
56. Saul Payan, San Juan Bautista	33:01
57. William Rice, San Jose	33:05
58. Jeff Bellato, Stockton	33:06
59. Cuco Chavez, Hollister	33:13
60. Dirk Vandepol, Stockton	33:13
61. Clyde Matsumura, Santa Monica	33:17
62. Gilbert Munoz, Watsonville	33:18
63. Steve Pappa, Hayward	33:22
64. Ian Blair, Santa Cruz	33:26
65. Jon Gire, San Jose	33:28
66. Steve Brusig, Lincoln	33:29
67. Robert Grove, Folsom	33:31
68. Alex Gonzalez, San Jose	33:31
69. Dan Sauers, Mountain View	33:33
70. Oscar Ruiz, San Jose	33:37
71. Ken Wilner, Belmont	33:37
72. Jim Angelopoulos, San Jose	33:42
73. Steve Goddard, San Mateo	33:43
74. Michael Kinter, Morro Bay	33:44
75. Nathan Huerta, Prunedale	33:45
76. David Liotta, Santa Cruz	33:47
77. Joe Fabris, Capitola	33:48
78. Dave Fronckowiak, Gilroy	33:49
79. Jeff Thomas, Los Gatos	33:59
80. John Martin, San Jose	34:00
81. Greg Hales, Aptos	34:03
82. Jimmy Elam, Manteca	34:06
83. Andy Coe, Salinas	34:08
84. J.D. Allegrucci, Sunnyvale	34:10



NOTEBOOK

Local runners get support from fans

By NIC LASNIER

SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

CAPITOLA — As important as the race itself, the Wharf to Wharf is all about having a good time. Both competitive runners and casual fans rave that the Santa Cruz to Capitola race is among the most beautiful and enjoyable events in the world.

Before the race began in Santa Cruz, the spectators in Capitola were piling along the orange fencing near the finish line ready to cheer on the first finishers of the 30th annual race.

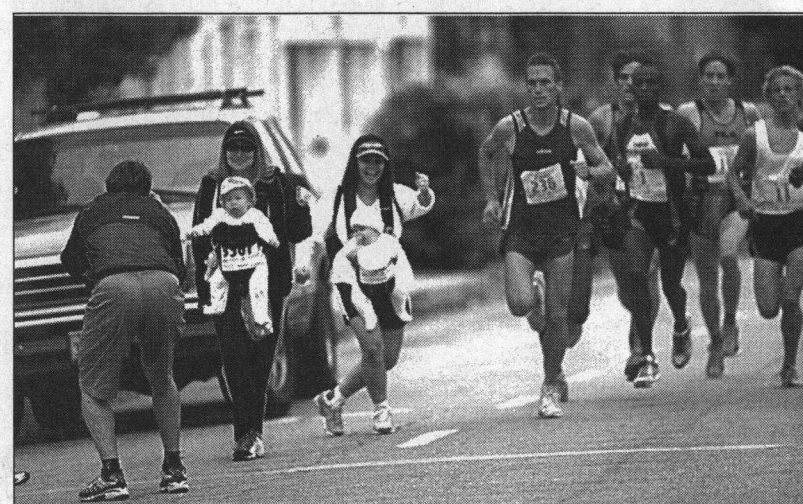
Portions of the radio broadcast of the race were played over the sound system, keeping the crowd informed on the

Gotcher graduated from Aptos High this spring, and will attend Stanford in the fall where he will run track and cross country.

■ Second-place finisher John Gwako stays at the Albuquerque, N.M., home of fellow Kenyan and fourth-place finisher, Mbarak Hussein, every year before the Wharf to Wharf (except in 2001 when Gwako was injured). The two then fly to California together.

Hussein even occasionally cooks dinner for Gwako, yet Gwako has defeated Hussein every year they have both run.

"He's not a very good guest," Hussein said. "He's supposed to let me win."



TOP: Brett Gotcher of Aptos (second from right) hangs with the leaders early in the race Sunday. He would be the first local to cross the finish line. **ABOVE:** Baby-toting mothers pose for pictures as the leaders pass by on Seabright.

arms, but I'm fairly used to (running with a walking stick)."

Chavarria, who was able to finish without needing to shift the pole to his left arm, crossed the finish line with the main pack.

ner on each side holding a dome over his head, the septet tried to form a feature of the male anatomy.

■ After the awards were handed out to the top finishers, a two-person trip to Hawaii was raffled off. Stephen Blum

Top 100 Women

1. Esther Kiplagat, Kenya	30:42
2. Agnes Ngunjiri, Kenya	31:10
3. Grace Momanyi, Kenya	31:25
4. Kimberly Fitcher, Palo Alto	31:31
5. Naomi Wangui, Kenya	32:16
6. Heather Tanner, Palo Alto	32:24
7. Cori Mooney, Boise, ID	32:56
8. Anna Brzezinska, Poland	33:52
9. Tenaya Adams, Saratoga	33:55
10. Jill Gaitenby, Pelham, MA	34:16
11. Maria Trujillo De Rios, Los Gatos	34:45
12. Cathy Dubay, Santa Rosa	35:36
13. Ramona Young, Watsonville	35:44
14. Casey Nevitt, Aptos	35:47
15. Kimberly Cloud, Turlock	36:09
16. Rachel Cook, La Selva Beach	36:12
17. Brooke Murphy, San Francisco	36:28
18. Kristina Mathias, Mtn. View, AZ	36:33
19. Jessica Dahlberg, San Luis Obispo	36:48
20. Tina Mychiow, Redwood City	37:00
21. Katy Spink, Stanford	37:05
22. Kirsten Kempe, Mountain View	37:17
23. Lara Salamacha, Mountain View	37:19
24. Lisa Renteria, Los Gatos	37:24
25. Kara June, Fresno	37:32
26. Michelle June, Fresno	37:33
27. Megan Johnson, Redding	37:34
28. Angela Matthews, Sacramento	37:36
29. Chris Lundy, Palo Alto	37:38
30. Kristen Dowell, Aptos	37:40
31. Missy Lendl, Redding	37:54
32. Kazumi Nigro, Shasta Lake	38:10
33. Dina Farage, San Jose	38:12
34. Trina Cox, Santa Rosa	38:25
35. Celeste Dunlap, Cupertino	38:28
36. Carmen Winant, Santa Cruz	38:28
37. Teresa Gaims, Santa Cruz	38:34
38. Kathy Hess, Reno, NV	38:43
39. Diana Harlick, San Mateo	38:46
40. Anna Slattery, San Francisco	38:48
41. Angela Tangnetti, Sacramento	39:06
42. Nicole Von Germeten, Castro Val.	39:09
43. Karen Steele, Merced	39:13
44. Patty Campbell, Antioch	39:15
45. Kimberly Hammett, San Jose	39:25
46. Lisa Kelly, Cupertino	39:25
47. Lindsay Peters, Santa Cruz	39:31
48. Megan Farrell, Santa Cruz	39:34
49. Karen Ribble, San Francisco	39:37
50. Honor Fetherston, Los Gatos	39:40
51. Teresa Clark, Portola Valley	39:43
52. Sherri McQuaide, Santa Cruz	39:45
53. Deborah Leale, San Jose	39:46
54. Christine Stavalone, S.F.	39:51
55. Meredith Mills, Redwood City	40:06
56. Sheri Mulroe, Saratoga	40:06
57. Krisit Cangimilla, San Jose	40:10
58. Erika Watson, Santa Cruz	40:14
59. Stacy McGihon, Piedmont	40:17
60. Eva Mendez, Oakland	40:21
61. Theresa Brown, Citrus Heights	40:24
62. Stephany Marks, Corralitos	40:26
63. Candace Joseph, Shasta	40:30
64. Jennifer Cullen, Menlo Park	40:30
65. Jeanene Harlick, Scotts Valley	40:34
66. Evelyn Reed, Capitola	40:34
67. Sandra Gillis, San Jose	40:35
68. Michelle Ruiz, Los Altos	40:40
69. Luisa Gomes, Santa Clara	40:48
70. Sarah Kerlin, Santa Cruz	40:49
71. Monique Silva, Aptos	40:53
72. Wendy Bowers-Gachesa, Wats.	41:01
73. Ann Elam, Manteca	41:10
74. Kimberly Thomas, Santa Cruz	41:14
75. Marianne Zerebko, Tahoe City	41:15
76. Sarah Guetschow, Redding	41:17
77. Jennifer Kerwin, Los Gatos	41:19
78. Erin Ballard, Fishkill, N.Y.	41:19
79. Ellen Wallace, Sunnyvale	41:24
80. Anne Chippendale, Olympic Valley	41:26
81. Adair Paterno, Santa Cruz	41:28
82. Missy Sandeman, Homewood	41:29
83. Elizabeth Nast, Saratoga	41:32
84. Zaliika Davis, Los Angeles	41:32
85. Emily Trexel, Watsonville	41:34

85. Keith Hedlund, Salinas	34:11
86. Michael Higgins, Santa Monica	34:13
87. Greg Mislack, Carmel Valley	34:14
88. Jacob Evans, Watsonville	34:15
89. Keli Parker, Watsonville	34:16
90. Carlos Melchor, San Jose	34:21
91. Javier Alonso, Corralitos	34:24
92. Jon Tannehill, Danville	34:26
93. Russ Smith, San Jose	34:28
94. John Carver, Pacific Grove	34:28
95. Ahmet Gokcek, Cupertino	34:35
96. David Jones, Moraga	34:41
97. Bill Joseph, Shasta	34:44
98. Kyle Dando, San Jose	34:46
99. Terry Richardson, Merced, CT	34:50
100. Tom Knauer, San Francisco	34:51

Men

Continued from Page B1

The victory, which was 17 seconds slower than his 2001 winning time, earned him \$3,000 and the silver Mayor's Cup. Rutto said an exact duplicate of the cup is sitting in his Kenyan home "decorated nicely with some special Kenyan flowers."

He said he didn't mind a matching set.

"What I like is that it is a good remembrance when I stop running of when I came to American and won this race," said Rutto, 24.

When Rutto looks back on this victory, he should be able to recall the views and the bands as much as the race itself, considering he was at the front of the pack nearly the entire way.

In fact, he may remember some of the fans a little too well, as a few jumped in his way in their eagerness to impress the television and press cameramen who were shooting from a truck just a few feet ahead of the runners.

"I just said, 'Go, go, go!'" Rutto recalled.

That interference was the only hindrance Rutto had in his race, unlike Gwako and Nthiwa, who both were hindered with injuries. Gwako, who won the Wharf to Wharf in 1998 and 2000, was running his first race since he injured his Achilles' heel a few months ago. Nthiwa, 19, came up with a side stitch in the last mile and was nearly caught by fourth-

runners' progress. Few were interested, though, until Evans Rutto of Kenya was seen striding toward the finish.

They crowd saved its loudest applause for the local runners, however. Watsonville's Brett Gotcher received a boisterous ovation from his fans as he came in at 29:22 — eighth overall.

Gotcher was the Wharf to Wharf's Santa Cruz County champion for the second straight year. He ran the race 36 seconds faster this year, improving on his 11th place finish in 2001.

"It's a great race," Gotcher said.

him anything. He is my friend."

■ One participant chose to show his patriotism by running the six-mile race with a large American flag fluttering above his head.

Johnny Chavarria of Salinas usually carries a walking stick, and decided it would work great doubling as a flag pole. Chavarria flew his flag along with his stars-and-stripes running shorts and a band hanging from the pole, reading: "9-11-01."

"It was getting pretty tough," Chavarria said. "I thought I'd have to switch

place finisher Mbarak Hussein (28:00), also of Kenya.

Hussein said he noticed Nthiwa wasn't running smoothly in the final mile and was looking back to see how close his pursuers were getting. Hussein made a break, but the part-time Albuquerque, N.M., resident didn't have enough time to catch Nthiwa and steal his \$1,000 third-place purse.

"At the end, everyone was praying for it to be over, but I was hoping for one more mile," said Hussein, a marathoner, who added that he had just started to get warmed up when the race ended.

Local phenomenon and Aptos High graduate Brett Gotcher kept up with the lead pack of about 10 runners for the first half of the race. Like several other top runners, however, he couldn't keep pace with Rutto, Nthiwa and Gwako going up the long, gradual hill leading out of Twin Lakes.

"They went out a little slower than I expected, so I hung with them," Gotcher said. "But then they just took off."

Nonetheless, Gotcher finished as the top male Santa Cruz County resident by finishing eighth in 29:22. The time and place were improvements for the Stanford-bound runner over last year, when he took 11th in 29:58.

Gotcher said he plans to return for the 31st running of the Wharf to Wharf next year, as do Hussein and Gwako. Rutto expressed some worry that he'll not be invited back.

"Maybe if I win too much, they'll not invite me," he said.

The Wharf to Wharf committee will most likely extend him an invitation, but they might have to think of a new award for the winner. After all, there's only so many things a guy can do with a silver cup.

■ Only a few racers wore costumes — unlike San Francisco's Bay to Breakers, where the outfits (or lack thereof) are often more important than the race. On Sunday, one man wore a bunny ears headband. A pair of teenage girls carried a human-sized Jolly Green Giant doll between them.

In a possible sign that the Wharf to Wharf could soon see more of a Bay to Breakers look, a group of seven runners went with a more graphic costume. With five runners in single file carrying a long sheet, and another run-

of Seaside won the prize.

"It was worth running the race even without winning the trip," he said. "It's a good way to spend a Sunday morning."

An avid participant and fan of road races and triathlons, Blum hopes to use his vacation during the Hawaii Ironman triathlon.

"I didn't qualify for it this year," Blum said. "But I hear it's a lot of fun to volunteer for. I hope to have fun and help out with the race."

86. Karlyn Nieland, Lodi	41:35
87. Rena Rico, San Jose	41:42
88. Mary Rogers-Crum, WA	41:42
89. Karen Kelly, Pasadena	41:42
90. Lynn Sestak, Santa Cruz	41:46
91. Melissa Wedlock, Davenport	41:51
92. Kelly Emo, Campbell	41:55
93. Sherie Schmidt, Tahoma	41:59
94. Julie Browne, Scotts Valley	42:06
95. Barbara Miller, Modesto	42:08
96. Kari Gallant, Santa Cruz	42:09
97. Chris Irving, San Jose	42:13
98. Loreli Trippel, Belmont	42:14
99. Amy Moran, San Jose	42:19
100. Eileen Brown, Santa Cruz	42:26

Women

Continued from Page B1

(clocked at 4 minutes, 51 seconds), and pulled away from countrywoman Agnes Ngunjiri in the fourth mile to win in record time.

In a coed field that was capped at 14,000 entrants, Kiplagat, making her first appearance in the event, finished in 30:42 for a \$3,000 payday.

Kenya earned a sweep in the women's field, and accomplished the feat on the men's side as well.

Ngunjiri finished second in 31:10 and won \$2,000, and 2001 champion Grace Momanyi took third in 31:25 for \$1,000.

The previous six-mile course record of 30:48 was set by fellow Kenyan Jane Omoro in 1998.

"I'm so happy I broke the course record," Kiplagat said. "I never do that. It's good to leave your name in the race."

Kiplagat was surprised about sticking with the men in the early going.

"I was thinking, 'What's wrong with the men?' They don't want to move," she said. "After they saw their split for the first mile, that's when they took off. It was a slow pace for them."

Oddly, Kiplagat wasn't exhausted at the finish line. She said she believes she could've run faster on the cold morning with overcast skies.

"I wasn't tired," she said, noting she was worried she might cramp in the cold conditions. "The course records seem to

come when you're not aware of them."

Not only competing in the Wharf to Wharf for the first time, it was Kiplagat's first visit to California.

She left the state later Sunday to prepare for an upcoming race in Maine, but promised next year she'll stick around for a couple of days following the event to enjoy the area's beauty.

She loved the competition, the ocean vistas from much of the course, and the support of the fans, she said.

"I could hear them cheering for me," she said. "They were saying, 'This is the first woman! Come on, go harder!' When you are tired and people push you, you get an extra boost out of nowhere. Sometimes spectators help a lot more than the runner (helps herself)."

Kiplagat was also motivated by event organizers, who informed runners of their split times at each mile marker. Seeing she was running 5-minute miles she knew she wasn't slowing her pace.

She pulled away from fourth-place finisher Kim Fitchen, the top American finisher, around the two-mile mark and left Ngunjiri at the four-mile mark.

Fitchen was upset she finished a spot out of the money. She ran 120 miles last week and 80 miles this week, and figures not tapering her workouts cost her late in Sunday's race.

Ramona Young of Watsonville took 13th and was the top Santa Cruz County finisher in 35:44. Young beat out Aptos' Casey Nevitt (14th in 35:47) and La Selva Beach's Rachel Cook (16th in 36:12) for the honor.

Conley

Continued from Page B1

At least the end of Beach Street brings a pulse other than the knocking and pinging of my bladder, with the first musical offering from a bon-go band. This is followed soon thereafter by a solid bagpipe outfit on San Lorenzo Boulevard.

So many runners are being herded through the course at this point that some deem it acceptable to cheat. You can see a pack scurrying across the train trestle south of the Boardwalk — easily a good half-mile detour.

As I crawl the first East Cliff hill at little more than a stand-still, the pack's collective body heat rising, I hypothesize that perhaps cheating isn't such a baaaad thing after all.

■ Mile 2 — The band's straddling Seabright Beach are rocking and, surprisingly enough, my legs are still rolling.

The crowd's energy is showing no signs of waning, as conversations and laughter are still ever-present. Little kids no older than 7 run hand-in-hand

with parents up ahead.

Wait a second: that means I'm getting beaten by a 7-year-old! Turning on the passing gear, moving past the pint-sized Prefontaine, feeling much better about myself now.

Just as East Cliff bends onto Seabright Avenue, several men with fishing poles are perched atop a balcony looking down upon the sea of not-yet-anguished running humanity. Wait, they have bait dangling from their lines: Powdered sugar doughnuts.

Mmmm. "WWHSD," I think. What Would Homer Simpson Do?

■ Mile 3 — Past the yacht harbor, where clearly the race's most inventive musical outfit to this point (the Pot 'n Kettle Band) is stationed with, you guessed it, pots and kettles in hand, and I'm still feeling amazingly good.

Apparently one of the lone bathrooms on the course resides here at Twin Lakes Beach, but I'm too much in the zone to even notice.

A guy pushing his young son in a jogging stroller hums right along next to me. I ask him for a lift. He politely declines.

Up the hill past Schwan Lake, beneath the cover of eucalyptus trees, the course takes on an almost surreal stillness. All you can hear are the pitter-patter of running shoes on pavement.

But the San Jose State Pep Band, just up ahead wailing away on large percussion instruments, will happily take care of that.

■ Mile 4 — Around the bend at 17th Avenue we go, the crowd thinned ever so slightly. Feeling good, feeling like this — being one of my favorite stretches of Santa Cruz coast — should be one of my favorite miles of the race.

Wrong.

The bands are rather blasé, the hamstrings are tightening slightly and there are still plenty of people chugging along in front of me who just shouldn't be.

Against my better decision-making skills, I pass the guy in the way-too-short shorts, pass the pack of giggling high school girls and use the turbo passing gear for the 60-something grandma.

Only problem: the tank is on 'E' without a service station in sight.

■ Mile 5 — I cut across traffic to get right near the cliff at Pleasure Point and gaze out at the glassy lake of an ocean, hoping for some inspiration.

Just before the last-mile marker I slow to a crawl to test out a twinge I feel in my left ankle. Another young female runner turns into a walker as well, though her reasons for doing so are perhaps a bit better than mine. "If I hadn't (smoked so much) last night and stayed out partying so late, I'd probably be doing better," she says.

Uh, no argument there. But what's my excuse? I was out scoring a 150-pack of safety pins at 10 o'clock.

Must run faster. Must beat party girl.

■ Mile 6 — Ouch.

Opal Cliffs has never looked so horrible. Before the five-mile mark I had looked at my watch and noticed that a really solid final mile could have me touching down at the finish line just past the one-hour mark — respectable for a non-running first-timer.

Now that I've burned everything in the tank in the first 100 yards, I'm pretty much hurting, just hoping to make it home by car rather than

ambulance.

To my left I spot a woman sitting in front of her house with a cat lounging comfortably across her lap. For a moment I daydream about laying there without a care in the world, without another three-quarters of a mile to slog through.

Snap out of it, you fool. You're almost there.

Down the stretch I come. Aching, tightening, bladder knocking and pinging. If I pass at least 20 more people on the downhill stride into Capitola Village, maybe I'll make the top 8,000.

Pass the finish line in 1:06.44, turn off the engine, collect goodie bag with coveted race T-shirt.

All around me, my fellow sheep. Sweaty, exhausted, exhilarated. Despite the crush of humanity, the

doses of humility and the pain, I'm absolutely sold.

I may not be a runner, but that doesn't mean I can't be a Wharf to Wharf runner on the fourth weekend of each July.

Now, has anyone seen a bathroom?

Mark Conley is the Sentinel's sports editor. Contact him at mconley@santa-cruz.com.

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