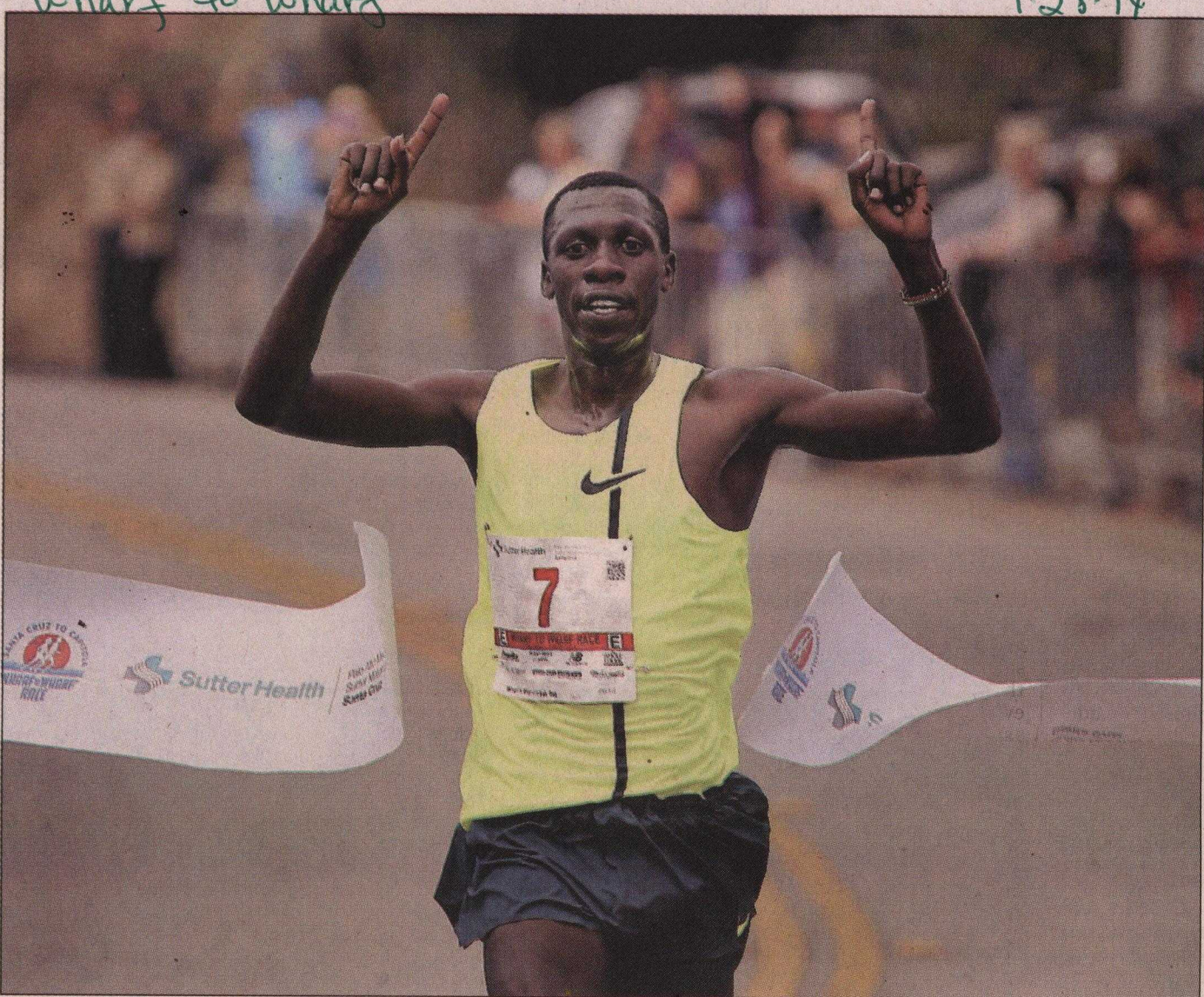


SIMON SAYS WIN

Fellow Kenyan Rotich is top woman, shatters record



PHOTOS BY KEVIN JOHNSON — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Simon Ndirangu of Kenya crosses the finish line to take first place in the 42nd annual Wharf to Wharf road race in Capitola on Sunday morning.

Men: First-time Kenyan entrant benefits from advice from 3-time champion

By Andrew Matheson
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CAPITOLA » Simon Ndirangu had never competed in the annual Wharf to Wharf Race prior to Sunday's 42nd edition, but he likely fooled just about everyone in the field and everyone watching along East Cliff Drive. The 28-year-old Kenyan, who nearly led the six-mile footrace from wire-to-wire, knew when to make his move and pull away from the lead pack to the finish line in Capitola Village.

A fellow countryman provided him some helpful, pre-race pointers.

"My teammate, Shadrack (Kosgei), he is a three-time winner here," Ndirangu said of his training partner Kosgei, a fan favorite who won the Wharf to Wharf in 2004, '10 and '12, and finished runner-up a year ago.

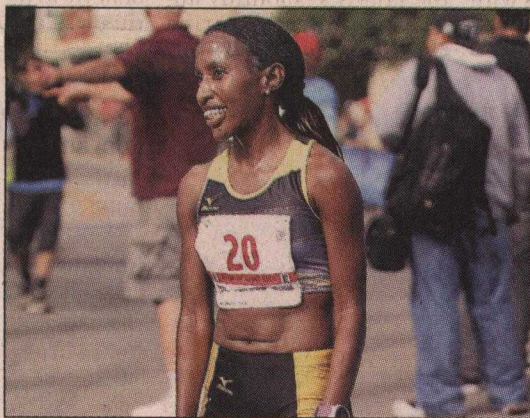
"He told me the course is challenging. He told me to try and make a move at this point," Ndirangu added. "What he always does, I did today, so I was happy about that."

For as dominant as Kosgei has been in past races, never had he won a Wharf to Wharf as comfortably as Ndirangu did Sunday. Recording an unofficial winning time of 27 minutes, 33.30 seconds, Ndirangu pulled away from the competition near Corcoran Lagoon and defeated his nearest opponent, Scott Bauhs (27:58.83), by more than 25 seconds.

While the race was tight the first four miles, Ndirangu made sure the final result wasn't close.

"Simon was gone," said Bauhs, of San Luis Obispo, who was awarded \$1,000 for finishing as the top American and an additional \$3,000 for placing runner-up. "He was just the fittest of anybody, so he won."

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Caroline Rotich of Kenya makes her way past the finish line of the Wharf to Wharf race in Capitola on Sunday.



Wharf to Wharf elite runners Ben Bruce, from left, Scott Bauhs, Simon Ndirangu and last year's winner Nelson Oyugi round a corner in Santa Cruz on Sunday.

TOP FINISHERS

MEN

1. Simon Ndirangu, Kenya, 27:33.30
2. Scott Bauhs, San Luis Obispo, 27:58.83
3. Ben Bruce, Flagstaff, Ariz., 28:07.29
4. Nelson Oyugi, Kenya, 28:22.60
5. Tonny Okello, Uganda, 28:22.60

WOMEN

1. Caroline Rotich, Kenya, 30:17.44
2. Risper Gesabwa, Kenya, 30:28.15
3. Aliphine Tuliamuk-Bolton, Kenya, 30:41.79
4. Emily Infeld, Portland, Ore., 31:15.69
5. Tara Erdmann, Eugene, Ore., 32:26.94

+ Online: For complete Wharf to Wharf stories and photos, go to: santacruzsentinel.com/wharftowharf.

Women: Rotich breaks Kiplagat's mark from 2002, cruises to victory

By Juan Reyes
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CAPITOLA » Esther Kiplagat's all-time course record at the Wharf to Wharf Race held up for 11 years.

Perhaps Caroline Rotich's mark lasts even longer.

On Sunday morning, Rotich, a 30-year-old Kenyan competing in the race for the first time, set the new record, finishing the 42nd running of the 6-mile footrace in 30 minutes, 17.44 seconds — crushing the mark set in 2002 by Kiplagat of 30:42.

"I feel great and I feel happy to come here and win," Rotich said.

Rotich said the race, which starts in front of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk and ends in Capitola Village, was close from the second mile on. But she managed to take the lead over runner-up and 2012 Wharf to Wharf champion Risper Gesabwa (30:28.15) and third-place finisher Aliphine Tuliamuk-Bolton (30:41.79) for a Kenyan sweep.

It was the first time since 2009 that an American did not place in the top three.

Rotich said she struggled, but it wasn't with the course or other runners around her. Instead, it was the short distance that threw her off, coming from a background of running marathons.

"The pace was really high and I didn't look back," Rotich said. "I just saw three ladies and a group of the men together, but I pushed it until about the fourth mile."

And she pushed herself into a top place finish in the women's division.

Emily Infeld — the 2013 Wharf to Wharf winner — finished fourth in 31:15.69, despite coming off a foot injury that sidelined her for five months.

Infeld said she knew coming

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Men

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Ndirangu earned \$4,000 for his top-spot finish.

Ben Bruce, of Flagstaff, Ariz., placed third in 28:07.29 and earned \$2,000, while defending Wharf to Wharf champion Nelson Oyugi earned \$1,000 for finishing fourth in 28:22.60.

"I ran about as fast as I could have today," Bauhs said. "I had a great race today. I couldn't have asked for anything more."

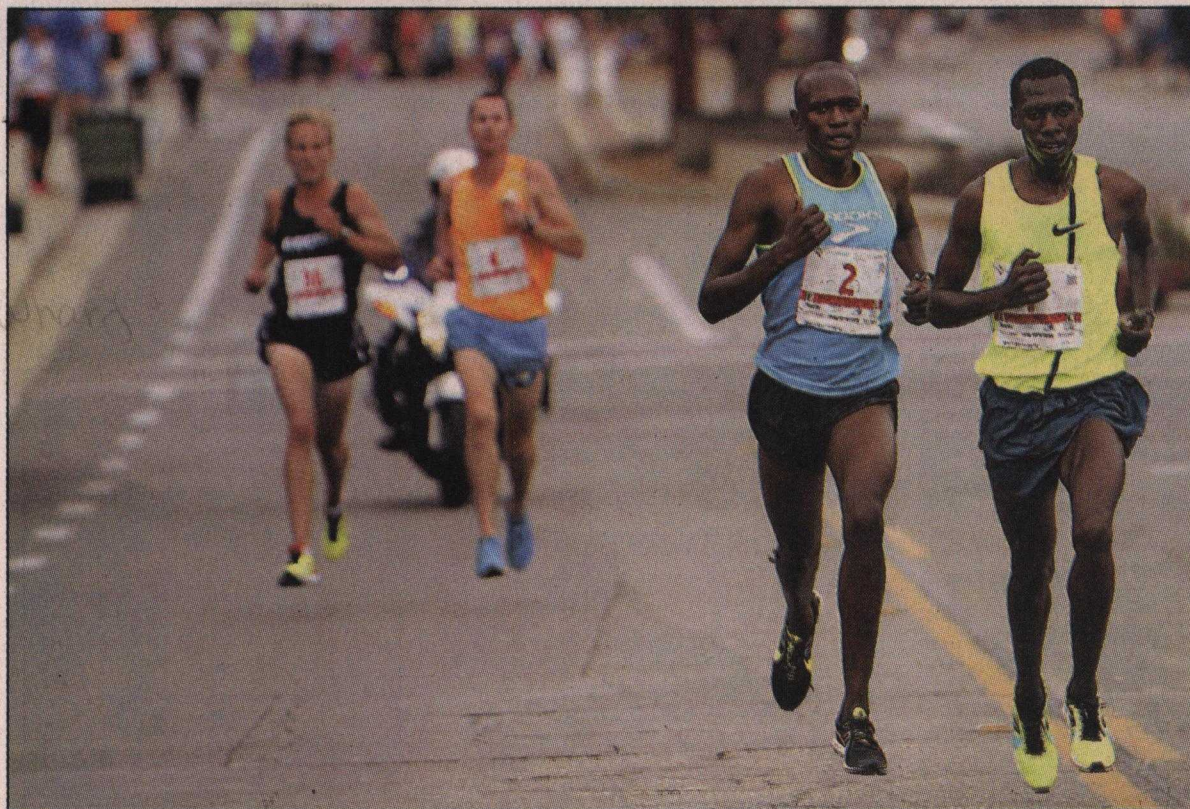
One harrier who wasn't pleased with his time was Dayne Gradone, who finished in 30:57 but was seeking a time about a minute faster. Still, the 2009 Aptos High graduate was the first local to cross the finish line.

And Gradone, who has competed in the Wharf to Wharf about 13 times and never won top local, got right to the point why he was able to finally earn the honor.

"Brett Gotcher wasn't running today," Gradone said of the Mariner alum and longtime Wharf to Wharf veteran, who has competed in the annual race 12 times and earned top local honors nine times. Gotcher didn't run this year after competing in the Boston Marathon in April.

"I think that was the main difference," Gradone laughed. "But, I mean, I'll take it."

Gradone didn't feel his



KEVIN JOHNSON — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Nelson Oyugi, left, and Wharf to Wharf winner Simon Ndirangu are cheered-on by the crowds as they compete in the annual race on Sunday.

pace was fast enough early on, so he likely missed the sizzling start by the race's elite.

Bauhs was one of a five-man pack that jumped out to a blistering, course-record pace through the first mile. Along with Bruce, Uganda's Tonny Okello, Ndirangu and Oyugi, the lead pack immediately pulled away from the field while turning away from the Santa Cruz Beach

Boardwalk and onto Third Street.

"At the start, there was no messing around. People got after it," said Bauhs, who recorded a 4:29 mile split. "That's a pretty quick first mile, but that's not even doing it justice. I bet our first 800 (meters) was 2:10. It was mostly right at the beginning."

"And it was a little unnerving. But we definitely settled in after that."

Bruce noticed the "pretty aggressive pace," too. The Wharf to Wharf veteran, who finished fifth a year ago, said he's clocked about 9:08-9:10 through the first two miles the last couple of years.

Sunday, the lead pack was running at 8:58 through the first two miles — four seconds off the course record.

"That extra 10 seconds over the first two (miles), you've got to be willing to commit. And there were

only five guys who were willing to commit," Bruce said. "So, the second half of the race was a matter of who can hang on."

And the second half of the race remained surprisingly close through three miles, when Oyugi and Ndirangu found a little separation from the Americans, Bruce and Bauhs, on an uphill climb. Just before mile four, though, Ndirangu sprinted through a down-

hill stretch into Corcoran Lagoon and quickly built a 10-second lead.

Ten blocks later along East Cliff Drive, Ndirangu's lead was 20 seconds as the Kenyan appeared to use an energy reserve — as well as the knowledge gleaned from Kosgei, a late scratch due to an Achilles injury.

"Nobody was making a move," said Ndirangu, who respected his competition and didn't want to pull away too early. "But I was feeling good. I was waiting to see if anyone would do it."

"Then, I decided to go ... I decided to try it and I'm happy it worked."

And the only thing left to decide was second, third and fourth place.

Oyugi, who won last year's event in 27:12.04, quickly fell behind Ndirangu and that record pace. He then quickly fell behind Bauhs around mile four, then Bruce around mile five.

It could have been a result of the initial pace at the start. Oyugi couldn't be reached for comment afterward.

"Simon was obviously the man of the day," Bruce said. "And when they pulled away, he still had the strength."

"But that's the race," he later added. "You've got to make the decision to go with or hope they come back."

"One came back, and one didn't."

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Women

FROM PAGE 3

into the race she wasn't 100 percent, but was still pleased with getting back to running.

"I'm happy with how I finished," she said. "I ran fast and I didn't exactly know what I was capable of today. I think fourth was all I had in me. I don't think I would've been up with the top three. They ran incredible."

Infeld didn't go home empty handed. The top four placers earn \$4,000, \$3,000,

\$2,000 and \$1,000, respectively. Infeld collected an additional \$1,000 as the top American finisher.

She was with the lead pack early. But she said shortly after passing the first marker her pace began to slow down, allowing it to be a three-person battle between the three Kenyans.

"I saw my time was 4:52 across the line and I knew I had to track off," she said. "I was thinking the girls would fade back to me, but I never caught sight of them after that."

Watsonville's Amy Schnittger — an Aptos High graduate and current Chico

State track and field member — posted the top local time, finishing in 34:11.

"That's all I wanted," Schnittger said. "That was my goal for the race, I'm so happy that it happened. I was a little ambitious in the first mile but I felt pretty good, pretty solid."

Schnittger said the last two miles were tough, but she continued to persevere.

"It's always such a nice look when you see the last two miles and you're like, 'All right, I can do this,' she said.

Kirsty Legg — who moved from Indianapolis to Santa Cruz last week

— finished in the top 10 in 33:28.68.

Legg, noting she spent 38 hours driving on the road trip, wasn't sure what to expect results-wise.

"I wasn't sure how today was going to go because I drove from Indiana," Legg said. "But I was really pleased with the way I felt. I kind of felt a little sick in the middle, but then I got it going again towards the end."

In fact, she was still up to running some more.

"I'm going to run back to Santa Cruz. It's only six miles," Legg said. "I feel good enough for that."



KEVIN JOHNSON — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Elite runners Risper Gesabwa, left, and Sarah Kiptoo meet at the starting line of the 42nd annual Wharf to Wharf in Santa Cruz on Sunday.