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➤ Muturi cruises to 2:08:51 course record in Xiamen

Time: (2009-1-5)

Xiamen, China - In a surprising turn of events Kenyan Samuel Muturi and Ethiopian Negari Terfa both broke the course record and their own personal bests at the 7th Xiamen International Marathon on Saturday (3).

The Xiamen International Marathon is an **IAAF Gold Label Road Race**.



"When I was at the starting point, I knew everybody could be champion," said the 22-year-old Muturi. "When I saw a guy push, I just pushed with him."

Coming into the race, Muturi was just 12th in terms of personal best times and Terfa ranked 18th.

Muturi, who clocked 2:08:51, broke free of his running partner in the last stretch of the race leaving him trail 10 seconds behind. Terfa still clocked well with 2:09:01, about 4 minutes ahead of his 2:13:19 previous personal best from Porto in October.

Terfa's wide smile dominated the podium where his fellow runners looked more solemn when taking the questions from the press. "I'm very happy," said the 25-year-old Ethiopian.

Third place went to 33-year-old Moroccan Rachid Kisri, who came in nearly a minute and a half later but well ahead of fourth place finisher Sammy Kurgat also of Kenya.

Kisri's time of 2:10:33 also surpassed by nearly a minute his own personal best by nearly one minute of 2:11:31 from the 2008 Beijing. Kurgat clocked 2:11:00.

The city of nearly 2.3 million had braced for the 33,000 runners from over 40 countries who competed in the 5 km and 10 km races, Half-Marathon, and Marathon. This year attracted the most runners since its creation in 2003 including about 6,800 marathon runners.

Fear of strong frontal winds had hampered many of the athletes' hopes for stronger times but the weather conditions had cleared allowing for their personal breakthroughs in the first marathon of 2009.

Muturi had made a steady advance toward the finish line from 10th place at the 15-km mark, 9th place at the 25-km point before positioning himself ahead into third at 30 km (1:32:26) just behind Terfa. They were a mere 5 seconds apart at the 35-km mark (1:47:22) and were even at 40 kilometres (2:02:07).

"After 25 kilometers I felt strong. I felt I could win," Muturi said.

Terfa had been in the top five since the 20-km mark. Kisri was second at the 20-km mark (1:00:30) and stayed at the heels of a group of fellow Africans until he fell 30 seconds behind the top three at the 35-km (1:48:08).

Last year's winner, Kenyan Kiprotich Kenei, who was leading for most of the race until the 35-km mark was forced to slow down due to a muscle cramp.



"I had to come slowly because me, I like finishing," Kenei said. "I'm a marathon runner not a pace-maker."

Kisri made his push and moved into third at the 40-km mark (2:03:32) more than a minute behind Terfa and 20 seconds ahead of fourth place finalist Kurgat.

"I feel very happy though I would have preferred second or first position," said the Moroccan. "The course is difficult because it's hilly."

All three had lagged behind the leaders through the 5-km and 10-km marks. They moved up by 20-km, just before Kenyans William Biama, Benjamin Kolum Kiptoo and Jonathan Kipkorir Kosgei, and Frenchman Simon Munyutu dropped out. Munyutu had said he was using the Xiamen race as a test to measure his own fitness ahead of the upcoming Paris Marathon.

Yanmin Hou was the first Chinese national in the top ten, finishing in seventh position with a time of 2:13:26, better than his PB of 2:16:38 from Hangzhou last year. Hou was followed about a minute and a half later by Longyun Ren (2:15:05) and last year's third place finisher Haiyang Deng (2:15:48).

Comfortable victory for Chen in women's contest

The women's race was a disappointment compared to last year when the course record was set by the then 18-year-old Zhang Yingying with 2:22:38.

Twenty-year-old Chen Rong finished first with 2:29:52, behind her PB of 2:27:05 set in Beijing in 2007. Yingying took second place with 2:32:57, nearly 10 minutes off of her record last year.

Perhaps the best performer in terms of progress is Wang Jiali who finished third place with 2:33:58, more than five minutes better than her 2:39:04 PB set in 2007 in Beijing.

The last of the top ten clocked at 2:42:40, a range of more than 12 minutes, significantly larger than the men's range of about seven minutes.

First and second-place holders walk away with the prize money and an additional prize of 15,000 USD for breaking the course record of 2:09:03, set by Ethiopian Hailu Negussie in 2003.

The finish of the marathon came as a surprise following yesterday's fear of unfavorable weather conditions. But the wind died down and the air stayed cool throughout the race.

Bing Liu, in the press office of the Xiamen Municipal Sport Bureau, said he was "glad" the record had been broken because it will "upgrade" the Xiamen marathon. "A top marathon needs a better performance."

In a ceremony preceding the race, the mayor of Marathon in Greece, Spyridon Zagaris, and Xiamen's mayor, Liu Cigui, signed an agreement to create a sister city relationship.

Cyrille Cartier for the IAAF

Leading Results -

MEN:

1. Samuel Muturi Mugo (Ken) 2:08:51
2. Negari Getachew Terfa (Eth) 2:09:01
3. Rachid Kisri (Morocco) 2:10:33

4. Sammy Kiptoo Kurgat (Ken) 2:11:00
5. Frederick Cherono (Ken) 2:12:31
6. Elias Kiptum Maindi (Ken) 2:13:12
7. Yanmin Hou (Chn) 2:13:26
8. Longyun Ren (Chn) 2:15:05
9. Haiyang Deng (Chn) 2:15:48
10. Zachary Njoroge (Ken) 2:16:07

WOMEN:

1. Chen Rong (Chn) 2:29:52
2. Zhang Yingying (Chn) 2:32:57
3. Wangj Jiali (Chn) 2:33:58
4. Feng Aiping (Chn) 2:35:05
5. Zheng Wenrong (Chn) 2:36:08
6. Jin Lingling (Chn) 2:39:15
7. Zhu Yingying (Chn) 2:39:40
8. Wei Yanan (Chn) 2:40:35
9. Xu Junliang (Chn) 2:42:30
10. Zhang Xin (Chn) 2:42:40



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