

Kenyan wins race, comes up short in bid for record

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Arizona Daily Star

Tucson, Arizona | Published: 12.03.2007

When race officials asked the elite runners to move to the front before the start of the Holualoa Tucson Marathon, only Gideon Talam of Kenya stepped forward. "So we all knew that guy's going to win," runner Sam Van Volkenburgh said.

Talam, a 32-year-old who has lived in the United States since July, jumped out to a significant lead early and coasted to victory in 2 hours 24 minutes 59 seconds in his first Tucson Marathon. He ran alone for most of the race on the sunny, calm Sunday morning when the temperature was in the high 40s. Van Volkenburgh of New York finished second in 2:32:08 in his first marathon.

The victory was a comeback of sorts for Talam, who lives in El Paso. He posted a personal-best time of 2:14 in a marathon in 2002 in Bolzano, Italy, but eventually suffered from Achilles tendinitis, knee pain and tightening in his calf muscles. He did not run in 2005 and 2006.

Foot Solutions, a health and wellness franchise, has worked with Talam, giving him foot inserts to correct his alignment and alleviate his knee pain. He said he suspects one of his legs is longer than the other. He has been training with the company's elite running team for two months.

Talam said he felt slight pain in his left knee during the 26.2-mile race north of Oro Valley, but it was not severe. He wore light inserts inside his shoes.

"It was nice. I felt (the pain) a little, but it disappeared," he said.

Talam was hoping to break the race record time of 2:18:32, set by Bassirima Soro in 2000, but Talam said he wasn't pushed, as he ran alone. By Mile 5, Van Volkenburgh didn't see Talam again.

As for the record, Talam said, "Maybe next year."

"I liked it very much," he said. "It is scenic. You see the mountains."

Van Volkenburgh and third-place finisher, 22-year-old James Miles of Tucson, ran together for the first half before Van Volkenburgh pulled away. Van Volkenburgh, a Freeport, Maine, native who ran for Williams College, met his goal of qualifying for the Boston Marathon. Relatives from Tucson and Phoenix cheered him during the last two miles.

"The last six miles were extremely tough," he said. "I was just hoping to get to the finish."

Brandy Erholtz of Bailey, Colo., was the women's champion in 2:49:16. She called the victory "bittersweet" because she missed the Olympic trials qualifying time of 2:47.00. The deadline to qualify is March 23.

"That might have been my last shot," said the 30-year-old, who ran for the University of Minnesota-Duluth. "If I wait until February or March, I have nothing left for the trials."

Erholtz felt fatigued after Mile 15, but a friend handed her caffeine gum that helped, and some raspberry power gel during Mile 21 gave her another boost of energy.

She ran with friend Katie Koski, who was also trying for the time standard, for the first 18 miles, but Koski dropped out after experiencing muscle tightness.

"There's nothing to complain about," Erholtz said. "It's just meant to be."