

PRESS RELEASE

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Keflezighi; Flanagan win U.S. Olympic Team Trials - Marathon

HOUSTON (Jan. 14, 2012) – Two of the fastest races in Olympic Marathon Trials history took place on the same day Saturday in Houston as the six men and women who will represent Team USA in London earned their way on the squad. Shalane Flanagan set an Olympic Trials record of 2:25:38 in only her second marathon, while Meb Keflezighi earned his third Olympic berth by winning the Trials in a personal best time of 2:09:08. Flanagan led a Trials record five women under 2:30 while Meb led four men under 2:10 for the first time in Trials history.

Men

Keflezighi's performance (Mammoth Lakes, Calif) came only 69 days after his last marathon, where he also ran a then personal best time of 2:09:13 to place sixth at the 2011 ING New York City Marathon. The 2009 ING New York City Marathon winner and 2004 Olympic silver medalist became the first man to win both the U.S. Olympic Trials and the New York City Marathon in his career. At nearly 37 years old, he is the oldest man to win the Olympic Marathon Trials.

Defending Olympic Trials champion Ryan Hall (Flagstaff, Ariz) led much of the race en route to securing his second Olympic berth. Hall set a torrid pace early, with a projected finish of 2:06 that held up through the half-marathon mark. Wind and leg fatigue slowed Hall's pace, as he shook his arms out regularly, but it wasn't enough to keep him from again making the Olympic marathon team as finished second in 2:09:30.

Abdi Abdirahman (Tucson, Ariz.) turned heads in the lead pack. Entering the Trials with the 14th-fastest qualifying time, Abdi hadn't run under 2:14 since setting his personal best of 2:08:56 in 2006. Soldiering through a year and a half of injury, Abdirahman finished third in 2:09:47 to clock his fastest marathon since 2006 and make his fourth Olympic Team at age 34.

Dathan Ritzenhein (Portland, Ore.), the top American marathoner at the 2008 Olympics, knelt at the finish with his head in his hands as he was 4th in 2:09:55. Ritzenhein had fallen off from Keflezighi, Hall and Abdirahman at approximately the 18-mile mark, and at one point lost sight of the leaders, but he rallied to finish only eight seconds behind Abdirahman.

Brett Gotcher (Flagstaff, Ariz.) led the chase pack through much of the race and held his position as other men fell off the back of the pack to place fifth in 2:11:06.

Women

Flanagan (Portland, Ore.) bettered the women's Olympic Trials Marathon record by two minutes and forty-seven seconds in her Olympic Trials marathon debut - just the second marathon of her career. Flanagan was in the lead pack throughout the race, but did not step forward as the clear leader until the 21st mile once the lead group of three was clearly set. Flanagan exchanged the lead with Desiree Davila (Rochester Hills, Mich.) several times before surging ahead at mile 24 to run away with the lead. Her winning time was a personal best by nearly 3 minutes.

Davila on Saturday added the word Olympian to her growing resume. Davila led portions of the race from five miles on before dueling with Flanagan in miles 22 through 24. Once Flanagan took the lead for good, Davila held on to finish in 2:25:55, only 18 seconds back.

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The 2007 World Championships bronze medalist at 10,000 meters, Kara Goucher (Portland, Ore.) claimed her first spot on the Olympic Marathon squad by finishing third in 2:26:06 After not competing in 2010 due to maternity, this is Goucher's second marathon in nine months after her 2:24:26 showing at the 2011 Boston Marathon.

Amy Hastings (Mammoth Lakes, Calif.) appeared to be the last runner dropped by the top three as she fell back around 16 miles, but moments later she charged ahead to take the lead. However, by mile 20 she could no longer hold her position and fell back for good to finish in fourth in 2:27:17. Janet Cherobon-Bawcom finished fifth in 2:29:45, a nearly eight minute PR.

Notables

Today's race was the first time ever four men ran under 2:10 in the Olympic Trials. It was the first time five women ran under 2:30 in the Olympic Trials. The women's top-three all have medaled in either New York, Boston or both. The men's top three also boast experience as the oldest Olympic bound trio Team USA has ever sent on the men's side with an average age of 33 and have a combined 9 Olympic appearances among them.

Quotes

Meb Keflezighi: "It's an honor to be on the Olympic Team for the third time. The race started great. It was tough getting it down to as few people as possible. We got it down to five people and then said hey, let's be on the team. With 3 guys with four or five miles to go, it was all about being on the team. It's not about being first, second or third. I'm just delighted to be part of these guys to go to London. I'm honored to win this race but a lot of guys would be glad to be in our shoes and be on this team."

Ryan Hall: "I was telling them after the race, I watched you guys making the 10k (Olympic) Team when I was in high school! They make me feel very young, and I'm 29. You realize what an honor it is to be on this team and what it takes to get here. The potential we have to go win medals is great. He (Meb) is going to be a great leader for us. The pace car was getting me riled up when I saw 2:06 up there for projected finish, and it got down to 2:05 once. It got increasingly windy and the concrete was kind of brutal on the quads."

Abdi Abdirahman: "It has been a long journey for me. The last year and a half I struggled with injury. I'm also honored to be sitting here with these two great guys. I've been friends with Meb close to 20 years probably. Ryan took it out at 63 high (half marathon) pace and I felt good. Meb and I said let's work together and make this team. Meb felt a little better these last two miles. This is going to be my fourth Olympics."

Shalane Flanagan: "It was a huge day, I think one that all of us will remember. The last mile was a cross between savoring the moment and just being really grateful that I was almost done. I knew Desi was charging hard and I told myself I had to have one last gear if she came up on me. I tried to view it as a track race for the last mile. I didn't really enjoy that last mile. It felt really long. I'm just grateful to be on the same team with these women."

Desiree Davila: "Going into the last mile it was kind of this internal conflict where I really wanted to make a push and see what I had left. At the same time I knew Kara was right behind me, and Amy had made huge surges throughout the race. I couldn't assume she had been dropped. My calves were just cramping up and ultimately I was like, finish it off and get the job done. I didn't have enough confidence in being able to catch Shalane and I didn't want to lose the spot I had."

Kara Goucher: "I never really imagined myself winning this race based on my short period of training. I definitely ran outside of my fitness for a few miles trying to get away from Amy (Hastings). The last miles I was just hanging in there basically. I was really happy with the slow start."

Amy Hastings: "It was pretty solid through 20, then they just pulled away. I didn't have quite enough left. I tried to fight back but it wasn't there. It was an emotional last mile for sure."

More information is available at Houston2012Media.com, including athlete quotes, Team USA press conference audio and fast facts about the men's and women's races.

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About the Houston Marathon Committee, Inc.

Established in 1972, the Houston Marathon Committee, Inc. (HMC), a Running USA Founding Member, annually organizes the nation's premier winter marathon, half-marathon, 5K and kids' fun run. In 2010, more than 30,000 runners participated in four race weekend events organized by 7,500 volunteers, creating Houston's largest single-day sporting event. In addition to hosting numerous world-renowned road races, including the USA Men's and Women's Half Marathon Championships since 2005 and 2007 respectively, and the 1992 U.S. Women's Olympic Marathon Trials, HMC will host the 2012 U.S. Men's and Women's Olympic Team Trials - Marathon on January 14, 2012.

For more information, visit houstonmarathon.com or call 713.957.3453.

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