

RUNNING



Martin Hehir, of Philadelphia, Pa., finishes second in the Classic 10K Sunday in Middletown. Hehir, a former star runner at Washingtonville, had to rush off after the race for the birth of his first child. [PHOTOS BY KELLY MARSH/FOR THE TIMES HERALD-RECORD]

Kiplagat wins 10K just shy of course mark

Runner-up Hehir rushes off for birth of child

By C Jackson Cowart
Times Herald-Record

MIDDLETOWN — It took just a mile in Sunday's Crystal Run Healthcare Classic 10K for Linus Kiplagat to seize an early lead. Every few hundred meters, he'd glance back, almost a courtesy gesture for his challengers.

He didn't need to. It was his race from the start.

"It was not easy," said Kiplagat, an elite runner from Kenya. "(But) with a few miles to go, I was feeling strong."

He made it look easy, crossing the finish line at Faller Field in 28 minutes, 55 seconds — just 22 seconds short of the course record set in 1984. It was 20 seconds

faster than Washingtonville graduate Martin Hehir, 25, the second-place finisher and crowd favorite.

"I had my eyes on the prize the whole race," Hehir said. "I just couldn't quite close the gap."

Hehir, a former All-American track star at Syracuse University, kept pace with Kiplagat for much of the race, the two separating from the pack after the course's first big hill. But the hometown hero lost ground at every mile marker, even with support from longtime friends and former coaches along the roadways. After two miles, Kiplagat knew it was his race to lose.

This race was no sweat for Kiplagat, 23. He has track speed — running 1,500 meters in 3:36.60 — and finished a half-marathon in 1:04:50 a year ago. His trainer,



Owen Anderson, says he's run one in under an hour.

It showed in Sunday's race, his stride seemingly effortless for the entire 6.2-mile course.

"I just kept doing what I could do and hoping he came back," Hehir said of Kiplagat.

"But he stayed strong all the way through."

Sunday's result took a back-seat to Hehir's personal life. Moments before the race, he learned his wife's water had broken — eight days before the due date of their first child.

Linus Kiplagat, of Kenya, receives his medal for winning the Classic 10K Sunday in Middletown. His time of 28:55 in the 6.2-mile race was just 22 seconds off the record finish set in 1984.

But he ran anyway, joking that he needed a way to burn all of his energy and excitement. He skipped the awards ceremony, leaving for the hospital just minutes after crossing the finish line.

That came right around when Askale Merachi clocked in with a time of 33:47, just edging out Margaret Wamahiga as the top female runner. Merachi, 31, was the oldest of the six prize-winning athletes in a group that included four runners from Kenya, one from Lansing and Hehir, the Washingtonville native.

"This is the easy part of my day," Hehir said after the race. "I've got to get some coffee and hope this baby comes fast."

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