

Chelimo headed back to the Olympics, Kincaid and Fisher achieve the distance double

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Paul Chelimo (center), Grant Fisher (right) and Woody Kincaid (left) top the podium in the men's 5,000 meter at the Olympic Trials. Photo by Otto Horiuchi

By Caela Fenton and Kate Walkup

The final day of the 2020 Track and Field Olympic Trials kicked off early with the men's 5,000m final starting at 10:00 a.m. to ensure cooler temperatures.

Sixteen men toed the start line with a trackside temperature at 88 degrees, feeling like 95. Six of them, including the University of Oregon's Cooper Teare, had already achieved the Olympic standard of 13:13.50.

Heading into the race, 10,000m Trials champion Woody Kincaid wasn't sure what to expect.

"I was standing next to Paul Chelimo on the start line [...] I thought he was probably going to take us out hard, he said that he really likes the heat and he's known for taking races out hard," Kincaid said post-race. "As soon as the gun went off I looked at Paul and he immediately went to the back, and I was like 'okay, so this is probably going to be a slow race.'"

The race saw tactical, championship-style racing, with athletes jockeying for spots. Hillary Bor, Garrett Heath and BYU's Conner Mantz all made attempts to pick up the pace and string out the race, but in the end, it came down to a crazy final lap to decide the 5,000 team bound for Tokyo.

The last lap was a full-out sprint, with Chelimo, Kincaid, Teare and Grant Fisher—who also qualified earlier in the 10,000m—all in contention. Chelimo swung wide as he tried to stave off a pressing Fisher, followed by Kincaid.

Chelimo's tactical race ultimately paid off with a win in 13:26.82, securing his return to the Olympics.

Chelimo was followed by the BTC dynamic distance duo of Fisher (13:27.01) and Kincaid (13:27.13). The top three men closed out the race with a blistering 52-second final lap.

Only six American men have placed top three in both the 5,000 and 10,000 at the same Olympic Trials. Only three men have done it in the past 60 years, the last being Galen Rupp, who is Tokyo-bound in the marathon. Teammates Kincaid and Fisher are the first to do it as a pair.

Both runners see it as a testament to the strength of their training group, in both the physical and mental sense.

"You know, to make a U.S. team, you've got to beat some very, very talented, experienced and hardworking runners," Fisher said. "It helps to train with that exact demographic of guys every day."

"I think a lot of people know what a team culture is with cross country and I think what's interesting about Bowerman, we have that kind of team culture with track," Kincaid said, and he appreciates racing with Fisher. "I think it's a huge advantage to have somebody there that you know you've been training with, that you know is going to help you if you need them."

Oregon Duck senior Teare hung with the lead pack every lap of the way. But, in the final stretch, the three medalists extended their lead just enough. Teare crossed in fourth, finishing in 13:28.08.



Oregon's Cooper Teare mixing it up in the Olympic Trials 5,000 meter, finishing fourth in 13:28.08. Photo by Otto Horiuchi

"I wanted to be on the rail as long as possible," Teare said. "I think I made a couple of stupid moves, I was worried about getting left behind."

Race commentator and Olympian Kara Goucher described his race differently: "I am so impressed. He ran so smart, calm, collected. You wouldn't know he just finished up a collegiate season."

You also wouldn't know how he felt during the race based on his performance.

"I'm proud of the way I ran," Teare said. "I was hurting from pretty far out, my stomach was like a brick. Subway at 6 a.m. this morning was disgusting."

However, Teare still seemed to have a chance at the very end when the leading three looked as though they were running toward the stands.

In the final stretch, Chelimo moved out to lane three, ultimately pushing Fisher and Kincaid to run farther. This gave Teare the opportunity to remain on the inside and maybe have the chance to lean past Kincaid at the finish line.

"I thought it might have had a little opportunity to maybe nick Woody at the line," Teare said. "I mean I think they knew they had it locked up and it was kind of just a fight for a second and you don't want anyone passing on the inside. I thought maybe there's a lane on the inside, but it just didn't work like that."

For Chelimo, this race was more of an opportunity to come out and test his fitness level before performing on the bigger stage of Tokyo. He wanted to make sure Fisher and Kincaid were working for their spots on the team.

"All these guys are really fit, probably better than me," Chelimo said. "The goal is you've got to play with their mind, you've got to do mind games and that's where the experience comes in. Take them all the way and make them run the longest distance."

But that wasn't the only mind game Chelimo played during the race.

The 5,000 champion talked to five or six of his competitors throughout the event. At one point, he mentioned his look back to Kincaid and finger wave was him warning Kincaid to not get too close and clip him. The nature of the race was a tight, competitive pack with many lead changes.

"My momentum was just getting messed up, but at the end of the day, I'm a really nice guy," Chelimo said. "When it comes to putting in work, it's work time, no games. We are friends now, but on the track we're not friends."

Neither Fisher nor Kincaid was annoyed with the race tactics.

"We closed pretty hard today, and 10ths of seconds are really important," Fisher said. "So, if you have good positioning and someone else has bad positioning, you don't want to just give it to them. That's just smart racing."

"In the trials race, there's clipping and there's talking," Kincaid said similarly. "You've got to do what you can to win the race and I think he made the right choice. Certainly, credit to him."

All of that was forgotten at the finish line of course, as the three athletes embraced. As of now, both Kincaid and Fisher plan on completing the 5,000/10,000 double in Tokyo, leaving 21-year-old Teare as a force to be reckoned with in three years time.

And after today, people can definitely stop asking Paul Chelimo if he's retired.

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