

Ethiopian Gold medalists...

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Ethiopian Gold medalists at 37th IAAF Competitions in Amman, Jordan

Focus on Athletes - Gebre-Egziabher Gebremariam Gebre-egziabher Gebremariam (whose names mean "Servant of God" and "Servant of Mary") began running in school at the urging of his older brother Gebrselassie ("Servant of the Trinity"), who had done some running himself in the Ethiopian Air Force. In 2001, Gebre-egziabher won schools competitions at 5000, 10,000 and half-marathon and progressed through regional races, eventually representing Tigray at the Ethiopian nationals, placing 7th in the 10,000 (31:04.61 at altitude) and 4th in the 5,000 (14:13.74). That gained him entry into the Banks athletic club, whose members include 2000 Olympic 5000m champion Million Wolde and 2003 World Cross women's long course champion Werknesh Kidane. Gebre-egziabher made his international debut that autumn in Tanzania, placing in the top five over 5000 and 10,000. Several weeks later he ran his first cross country race in Addis Ababa and won comfortably, running barefoot. He won the junior race at Ethiopia's 2002 World Cross trials, also barefoot, and took gold in the same category at the Dublin World Cross, where he started out shod but wound up barefoot after losing a shoe mid-race and removing the other. He wrapped up his junior career with a gold (10,000) and a bronze (5000) at the 2002 World Junior Championships in Kingston, and went on to record impressive times (7:55.40/ 13:12.14/ 27:25.61) on the European GP circuit. Back in Ethiopia, he won the second annual Great Ethiopian Run 10K in November, ahead of Kenenisa Bekele, who was coming back from injury. With Kenenisa out sick, Gebre-egziabher won the long race at Ethiopia's 2003 World Cross trials—this time in shoes—and then placed 3rd behind Kenenisa and Kenya's Patrick Ivuti in the long race in Lausanne. He kicked off his track season in the Ethiopian nationals, where he broke the championships record at 10,000m (28:45.4, an impressive time at Addis Ababa's 2300 meter altitude) only to lose to Sileshi Sihine. He then turned in a series of unspectacular showings in five GP meetings (best performance: 13:03.19 PB over 5000m for 6th in Paris GL) and was initially reported not selected for the Ethiopian team at the Paris World Championships. But he was in fact entered in the 5000m, where he finished a creditable 6th in the celebrated final, notching a PB (12:58.08) in the process. He closed out his season with a bronze at 5000m in the World Athletics Final and silvers at 10,000m in the All-African (27:43.12) and Afro-Asian Games (28:08.79). 2004 began with a highly successful cross country season: three 1sts and a 2nd on the European circuit and a double in the Ethiopian World Cross trials—1st in the long race ahead of Sileshi Sihine and 2nd in the 4km behind Dejene Birhanu. (Kenenisa didn't run in the trials.) Then, doubling in the Brussels World Cross, he notched a pair of silvers behind Kenenisa's two golds, as well as his first team golds as Ethiopia broke Kenya's seemingly unbreakable streaks in both races. In a limited pre-Olympic track season (four races), he recorded two major PBs: 12:55.59 for 4th in Rome (behind Sileshi, Dejene and winner Eliud Kipchoge), and six days later 26:53.73 for 2nd in Ostrava behind Kenenisa's world record. He was selected for the 5000 in Athens, where he finished a respectable 4th in the final behind Kenenisa, Kipchoge and Hicham El Guerrouj, the three medallists from the Paris 5000. Since Athens, Gebre-egziabher's form has remained consistent. In November, he helped the Ethiopian team to another victory in Japan's Chiba Ekiden road relay. Then next month he recorded a couple of strong wins on the Spanish cross country circuit, and in January he finished a close 3rd behind Kipchoge and Dejene in the Edinburgh International cross country. He cruised to a pair of 2nd places in the short and long races at the Ethiopian World Cross trials, reminiscent of his double silver in Brussels last year. Is he now ready to convert his successive World Cross podium finishes into an elusive senior gold? (IAAF) Genzebe keeps the Dibaba family at the top of the world - Amman 2009 Genzebe Dibaba imposed herself on a tough course and tough opposition to take her second junior women's World Cross Country title. With older sisters Tirunesh, three times senior long-course champion, once short-course champion and a former junior champion, and Ejegayehu, second to Benita Johnson in the 2004 long-course race, not here, Genzebe Dibaba made sure the family name stayed on the victory dais by coming out on top after a race long battle with Kenya's Mercy Cherono. Not only was her win a personal triumph, but it cemented a team win as both Ethiopia and Kenya tied on 18 points. Had Cherono won, Kenya would have regained the title it lost in Edinburgh last year. As it was, it was the higher place for fourth finisher Emebet Anteneh, seventh one ahead of Kenya's Hilda Chepkemboi Tanui, which clinched the outcome. Dibaba thought back to Edinburgh two ways, both for her first win and the absence of her sister, who won the senior race. "I am extremely happy I won, even though Tirunesh was not here," she said after the race, "I'm happier even than last year, because this year's race was extremely difficult." Dibaba described the hilly Bisharat Golf Club circuit as almost too difficult to handle. Cherono was no easier to combat. After Kenya's Jackline Chebii injected the first surge early in the second lap, Cherono took over and it was Dibaba v Cherono for the individual title. Dibaba first made her intent plain when she barged her way out of the pack, clashing arms with both friend and foe, to track Cherono's initial move.

Then she took over up the steep hill midway through the second lap and broke away for a significant lead. Now it was Cherono's turn to dig deep. Down the long hill starting each lap and along the one flat section of the loop she narrowed the gap, then took the lead herself on the uphill section. Now it would be decided on the final climb, a brutal 300 metres in which the course rises almost from its lowest point some 40 metres to its highest. Surely Cherono's strength would prevail now. But it was Dibaba who first edged back up, then away from the Kenyan runner. At the line, she was 20 metres to the good. Cherono was followed in by her teammate Jackline Chepngeno, with Frehiwat Goshu (Eth) fourth, Nelly Chebet of Kenya fifth, Sule Utura (Eth) sixth, Anteneh seventh and Chepkemi Tanui eighth. It came down to that fourth place, a true test of team depth.

Japan packed extremely well with Nanaka Izawa (17), Erika Ikeda (18), Asami Kato (20) and Aki Otagiri (21) to take the bronze medal. Great Britain was fourth, the USA fifth, Eritrea sixth, Australia seventh, with Russia rounding out the top eight. Australia's Emily Bricachek was the first non-African finisher in 11th place, with Britons Lauren Howarth and Charlotte Purdue 13th and 14th respectively. (IAAF) Ayele Abshero reaches the top step of the podium this time - Amman 2009 Digging deep into his reserves up the final climb towards the finish, Ethiopia's Ayele Abshero wasn't going to settle for a second successive silver medal at the 37th IAAF World Cross Country Championships at the Bisharat Golf Club here today. And Abshero's strength duly saw him go one better than he had in Edinburgh last year as he took the gold from Titus Mbishei (Kenya) and Moses Kibet (Uganda). Mbishei had perhaps deserved more for it was he who had pushed the pace along for much of the 8km race. But Abshero lived up to his billing as the pre-race favourite, taking control with a surge up a short hill with some 600m to go and never looking back. Mbishei stuck to Abshero's heels briefly but fell away to finish 25 metres down. At least Mbishei had the satisfaction of leading Kenya to team gold, although Ethiopia came mightily close to ending Kenya's run of 10 successive titles, a figure which now moves onto 11. Backing up Mbishei was Paul Tanui (4th), Japheth Korir (5th) and John Kipkoech (9th) for a total for 20 points. Ethiopia scored 22 with Abshero followed home by Atalay Yirsaw (6th) Gashaw Biftu (7th) and Debebe Woldesenbet (8th). While Abshero was runner-up last year behind his compatriot, Ibrahim Jeylan, Mbishei was fifth. The Kenyan ran like a young man who knew he had to draw the finish from Abshero and, after the Eritrean squad had made the early running, Mbishei took charge. He led through the second and third laps as Abshero buried himself in the lead group outside the top three. As the bell for the fourth and final lap sounded, the number of contenders was down to seven: Mbishei, Yirsaw, Biftu, Abshero, Kibet and Korir bunched close together with Tanui five metres back. But, once Abshero had made his surge, taking Mbishei with him, only the bronze was left to fight for and it was Kibet who edged out Tanui to become the first athlete from outside Kenya or Ethiopia to take an individual medal in this event since his fellow Ugandan, Boniface Kiprof, took bronze in 2004. Abshero had laid down markers which pointed to his victory here with a series of fine performances during the winter. He won the Cross Internacional Juan Muguerza, in Elgoibar, Spain, on 11 January, beating the last two runners-up from the senior World Championship - Moses Mosop and Leonard Komon. One week later Abshero finished fifth in the IAAF permit series meeting in Seville but only a few strides behind the first two, Moses Kipsiro and Tariku Bekele. In the Ethiopian trial last month, Abshero was as comfortable winner of the Junior race. He should, however, be aware that history is not on his side when it comes to a prospective senior title.

In the 36-year history of the World Cross Country Championships (pending today's Senior Men's race) only Ethiopia's Kenenisa Bekele has gone on to win the class Senior Men's 12km title having triumphed as a junior. Mbishei now has a pair of individual silver medals at global level, having finished runner-up over 10,000m in the 2008 World Junior Championships, in Bydgoszcz, Poland. He is the latest of a long line of Kenyans to have developed his early fitness by running to and from school, 4.5km each way in his case. On top of that his running would be put to the test herding sheep and hunting rabbits with his father. Team bronze medals went to Eritrea, their squad led home by Goitom Kifle (14th) and completed by Malue Andom (18th), Nassir Dawud (19th) and Merhawi Tadesse (21st). Despite his concerns over a recent injury, German Fernandez the world's fastest ever junior miler was the first non-African across the line in 11th place. After breaking the record for the second time this season, Fernandez suffered what he described as "a stress reaction" to a foot and had been running for the last two weeks in pain. While he achieved the top 15 place he had been looking for, he leaves without the team medal he had his eye on. The US had to settle for fifth place behind Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda. (IAAF)