

Course records fall at the Chevron Houston Marathon

Ethiopia's Deriba Merga broke the 20-year-old Chevron Houston Marathon course record by more than two minutes en route to winning the 37th annual race on Sunday (Jan. 18) with the fastest marathon run in Texas.

Aided in the early stages of the race by three pacesetters, Merga, 28, set a blistering pace, which, at mile 18, found him in range of running the fastest marathon ever on U.S. soil. When the final pacesetter stepped off the course after mile 17, Merga ran solo to hit the finish line in 2:07:52, breaking the course record of 2:10:04 set by Richard Kaitany (KEN) in 1989.

"I really tried to get the record," Merga said through a translator of his attempt to run under 2:05:42, the fastest marathon run in the U.S. by Khalid Khannouchi in 1999. "I can run better next year."

Merga's winning time was nearly four minutes faster than runner-up Benson Cheruiyot (KEN), who ran 2:11:33. Yuriy Abramov (RUS) finished third in 2:12:21.

The course record in the women's race also fell, as Teyba Erkesso (ETH) made it an Ethiopian sweep of the marathon titles. Running her debut marathon, the 26-year-old Erkesso won in 2:24:18, 22 seconds faster than the time fellow Ethiopian and training partner, Dire Tune, ran in Houston in 2008. Erkesso's time also set a new marathon standard for Texas.

Romania's Nuta Olaru finished second in 2:27:25, a time that would have won all but two previous women's marathons in Houston, while Lioudmila Kortchaguina of Canada was third in 2:30:43.

Both Merga and Erkesso earned \$35,000 for their victories and bonuses of \$10,000 for the course records.

Keflezighi, Boulet set personal bests en route to USA titles

Meb Keflezighi (San Diego, Calif.) rebounded from an injury-plagued 2008 to win the 2009 USA Half Marathon Championships, hosted by the Aramco Houston Half Marathon.

Keflezighi, 33, who suffered a serious hip-flexor injury following the 2008 Olympic Trials Marathon, took the lead within the first mile of the race and ran to the finish virtually unchallenged to win his first U.S. championship since 2007.

Dathan Ritzenhein (Eugene, Ore.), the race's No. 1 seed, was second in 1:01:35. Brett Gotcher (Flagstaff, Ariz.) was third in 1:02:09, which established a personal record by nearly two minutes.

Magdalena Boulet (Oakland, Calif.) broke from a pack of about five at mile 10 and went on to win the women's USA Half Marathon Championships in 1:11:47, 19 seconds in front of second-place finisher Kelly Jaske.

The victory earned Boulet, a naturalized citizen born in Poland, her first national title, was third in 1:12:16.

Including participants in the EP5K, more than 22,000 runners competed in the three Chevron Houston Marathon weekend events, establishing a participation record for the event for the eighth consecutive year.
