

American Record Set in half marathon

HOUSTON, Jan. 14, 2007 – Ryan Hall separated himself from his competitors with a blistering 4:36 first mile, then ran the rest of the Aramco Houston Half Marathon alone on Sunday en route to a U.S. half marathon record.

The 24-year-old from Big Bear, Calif., ran 59:43 and became the first American to break an hour in the 13.1-mile distance. Hall beat the previous American record, set in 1985, by a minute and 12 seconds. He obliterated the previous Aramco Houston Half Marathon course record set last year by 2:24.

“I train in altitude,” Hall said when asked about this significant record. “I saw my splits around 4:30 and then thought, ‘I can do this.’”

Hall, in his half-marathon debut, ran the last 12.1 miles through the streets of Houston alone in what was arguably the best-ever performance by an American distance runner.

Fasil Bizuneh and Meb Keflezighi, the silver medalist in the 2004 Olympic marathon, were left to battle for second place, finishing two seconds apart in second and third place, respectively, but more than two minutes behind Hall. Brian Sell, the 2006 U.S. half marathon champion who won the race last year, finished sixth.

Hall took home \$21,000 for his efforts: \$12,000 for his first-place finish, \$4,000 in bonus money for the course record and an extra \$5,000 for the American record.

Hall wasn't the only one to set a record. Dire Tune, 21, came to Houston to set a course record, according to her agent, and could proclaim “mission accomplished” 2:26:52 later. Tune broke the old course record set 23 years ago by former world marathon record-holder and Olympic gold medalist Ingrid Kristensen – by 59 seconds.

Her previous best was 2:30:48 set in Los Angeles in 2005, where she finished fourth. The Ethiopian pocketed \$25,000 for first place and an additional \$10,000 for the course record.

In the men's Chevron Marathon, Feyisa Tusse of Ethiopia crossed the finish line almost three minutes ahead of his closest competitors to win in 2:11:39. David Cheruiyot, 36, who won the race in 2005 and 2006, finished fifth. Tusse took home a \$3,000 bonus for running a time below 2:12 in addition to the \$25,000 first-place prize.

In the women's U.S. Half Marathon Championship, Elva Dryer and Kate O'Neil battled for the lead throughout the race. Dryer pulled ahead in the final stretch, clocking 1:11:42 at the finish, a five-second victory over O'Neil. “I had to maintain a good steady pace,” Dryer said. “A couple of us were together at the beginning. I knew she wasn't far behind the whole time.” Dryer collected \$12,000 for her run.

Fourteen athletes qualified for the U.S. Olympic Trials in Sunday's race. In the marathon, five men broke the Olympic A standard by running under 2:20. Another five men qualified by running sub-2:22, the Olympic B standard. Four women qualified by beating the Olympic B standard of 2:47.