

TCS NYC Marathon

Sunday, November 7, 2021

New York, New York, USA

Peres Jepchirchir

Viola Cheptoo

Ababel Yeshaneh

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Top women in the open division. This was a historic year in the running of the TCS New York City Marathon. In our top three, we've got the third, fourth, and sixth fastest times ever run by women on this course. Of course, we also saw the top American time in fourth. So a very fast day as you heard on the broadcast earlier.

Third place with a time of 2:22:52, from Ethiopia, Ababel Yeshaneh. In second place from Kenya with a time of 2:22:44, Viola Cheptoo. And the winner, in the third fastest time ever run here at this race, 2:22:39, the Olympic gold medalist from Kenya, Peres Jepchirchir. An incredible field.

First, I want to ask you a question. You made it a race, and I'm sure the viewers at home and here in the streets were excited to watch that, but was that what you had planned going in, or did you want to pull away earlier?

PERES JEPCHIRCHIR: It was my great time today. It was my great honor to be the winner of the New York City Marathon and the only champion from the Olympics to win the New York City Marathon.

It was a great opportunity for me, and it was my plan. Preparation was short, but I tried my best to see if I can fix on my own preparation. When I go in today, I managed the win the race.

THE MODERATOR: Viola, first marathon. Pretty good debut. How are you feeling?

VIOLA CHEPTOO: I feel really great. I'm so honored to be here. I'm really grateful to New York Road Runners for bringing me back after that 10K in June. I'm so grateful to everybody, especially during this pandemic time, for making it happen.

THE MODERATOR: Ababel, you have an incredibly fast

half marathon time. Did you think you might have had the kick to catch these two coming into the park?

ABABEL YESHANEH: Yes, it's true I do have a good half marathon time. I know the winner. We've run together before. I know she's a very strong athlete. However, every athlete comes here aiming to win, and I was hoping to. But it's also my first time running in New York.

So I'm very happy to have been third, and I want to take this opportunity to thank the race organizers for inviting me.

Q. It was a very exciting race, especially towards the end. Viola, you were awfully chatty coming towards the end. Can you please tell us what you were talking about and what you were saying to your two opponents there?

VIOLA CHEPTOO: I don't know what happened around 27K, Peres and I just -- I caught up with Peres and Ababel, and from there I just kept talking to Peres and asking her, could you please help me until at least 35K? She was really nice enough to just go with me.

Then when it came to Central Park, south Central Park, she told me to just hold on a little longer. That way you know I could end up in at least the top three or top two. So she was just encouraging me to keep pushing and end up in a good position.

Q. Viola, it's a little bit late in your career to be debuting at the Marathon. I'm curious why you decided to race here and how special it was to have your brother watching you cross the finish line. For Peres, obviously racing in Sapporo was incredibly hot and humid. I'm curious if the conditions of that marathon made you question which of the major marathons you wanted to do in the fall and if that was the reason why you decided to do New York City as opposed to some of the others.

THE MODERATOR: Viola, we'll start with you, the question about the late debut and how important was it to have your brother watching?



VIOLA CHEPTOO: Deciding to come to New York was really easy for me and my management because we've had a good relationship with New York Road Runners for a really long time. When I was a track athlete, I would come here to race the Fifth Avenue Mile, and I always had a great time here in New York.

I know David was involved in the Fifth Avenue Mile, and him and Jim were really nice to me. So we've continued with that kind of friendship. When someone approached us about coming here after the 10K, it was easy for me because also I've watched my brother race here and I knew New York was so fun. It's a tough course, but it's also fun to race around here.

So I just wanted to come here and compete and just have a great time.

THE MODERATOR: Peres, the question for you, the conditions in Sapporo were hot, humid, flat. How did that play a role in which choice you made for a fall marathon?

PERES JEPCHIRCHIR: Before I go to Olympics, I was invited to come to New York. New York was my second opinion from the Olympics. Sapporo, the humidity was high, and the weather was not good. But here, the weather was good. Third, the challenges were the up and down, the hard course, but I like running in a cold condition than hot conditions.

THE MODERATOR: No Olympic gold medalist has ever come here and won, and you did it. How does that feel?

PERES JEPCHIRCHIR: I feel great. I'm so happy. I'm so, so happy, yeah.

Q. Question for Viola. You almost broke the course record today in your debut. I'm wondering, do you regret not moving to the marathon earlier in your career?

VIOLA CHEPTOO: I think, yes, I do. I think I should have moved a little bit earlier. My coach kept asking me to move up to at least 10K, but I was stuck in track for some time. But when I decided to, it was really good that my body could hold up to the training that I was doing.

The success today, running almost a course record, was due to the kind of training that my coach had planned for me that really went according to plan, and my body was able to hold up to that kind of training.

Q. My question to both of you, Peres and Viola, after the incident that happened with Agnes Tirop, both of

you are very vocal against gender-based violence. How did you switch from that depressing situation? And what does this one-two victory mean for the women back home in Kenya? A quick second question to Ababel. The developments in Ethiopia, the political situation, how did it affect you mentally coming into this race?

VIOLA CHEPTOO: With Agnes situation, it's been really challenging, especially to me because I was with Agnes -- I think the last time I met with Agnes was in Germany. We had a race there that was organized for Adidas athletes -- when was that -- just a month before she was murdered. It's been really hard on me because I kept thinking, what could I have done? Because we flew together back to Kenya.

There were no signs of abuse because you know she kept it to herself. Just knowing how she was murdered, the pain that she went through has really affected me. And most of my time, before and after the funeral, I was really focused on bringing awareness to gender-based violence.

That's why before coming here I had to work with a group of women, and I came up with Agnes Tirop Foundation and Tirop's Angels, and that is supposed to bring awareness to gender-based violence. We want women who are going through these situations to be able to speak up. We know a lot of athletes are suffering in silence.

So the reason why Tirop's Angels foundation was started was to at least reach victims of gender-based violence and at least have them speak up about this issue. So it's been really hard.

I run really hard having Agnes in my heart today. I ran this race for Agnes. When it got really tough, I just kept thinking, you know, Agnes could be running in New York in a year or two because what she did in Germany, running that world record in 10K, I knew she was soon going to be moving up to half marathon, and in a year or two, she would be debuting here just like me. So it was really difficult.

Knowing that people are supporting this cause and really coming together with other women to bring awareness to this is at least comforting.

ABABEL YESHANEH: Of course it's a very trying time in Ethiopia right now. For us athletes, there's nothing in particular during our preparations that has happened to us, but because we hear every day what's happening and what other people are going through every day, every hour, it's something that's extremely stressful. So it's been a very trying time in Ethiopia at the moment, but it has not

affected my training in any other way. But it is frightening, and it is worrisome.

THE MODERATOR: The question from the virtual press conference. Viola, what was going through your mind when you dropped back? What did you tell yourself to get back up there with Peres and Ababel?

VIOLA CHEPTOO: My agent and I spoke before this race, and he was telling me just keep looking at your watch. If you feel like you're going faster than 3:20 pace, slow down, and you'll catch up with everything because, when we hit Fifth Avenue, it's going to be a difficult place for a lot of people. They'll drop back, and you'll be able to pick it up.

Going up that bridge, I don't know what happened. Ruti Aga just dropped a little bit, and I was able to catch up with her. I thought she was going to go with me, but when I realized she wasn't going to go with me. And Peres looked back, she saw I was coming, and they slowed down a bit, or I caught up with them.

For some reason, I just got some energy and kept pushing. I kept telling Peres, let's go together. Let's push. Let me know if you want me to push a little bit for 1K, and you can come back and push another one. So it was really nice to work together.

Q. Peres, can you just tell us about the last 800 meters of the race, the surge that you made going up the hill was incredible, so explosive. Have you ever done that before in any other race?

PERES JEPCHIRCHIR: Yes, this is my -- I can say this is my second time to run in 800 meters or 400 meters. Last year in Poland, we run up to 400 meters, and where the time I accelerate, and I won my gold medal in Poland.

For sure, I knew myself I have finishing kick because the way I used to train in Kenya, I trained harder near the end of my programs. So I believe myself, when you are with people, it's when seeing the finishing line just to give an effort that I don't know where it comes from because I knew this is the victory.

Q. My deepest condolences to all of you regarding your comrade, and I'm sure from all of us, on her passing. Can we talk about another comrade of yours, Mary Keitany? Has she been any inspiration, or have you communicated with her to get some advice about how to run the marathon, considering all of her success here?

VIOLA CHEPTOO: Yes, since the passing of Agnes, I've been able to work with Mary Keitany through the funeral

process and everything. After that, she has joined in on the Tirop's Angels, so I've been with her until right before the race. So she gave me a few tips on how to run the New York Marathon.

She told me the first time she came here, she ran almost world record pace until halfway, and then she just faded. So I knew today coming in that I had to slow myself down, especially being a half marathon athlete. I had to pace myself and not go too fast at the beginning and then die at the end. So, yeah, she's been really inspirational.

I look up to her. She's one of the athletes that I always want to run like her. I've watched her a few times when I've been here in New York. She's been really great to watch.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We will wrap this up. Our top three women in the 50th running of the TCS New York City Marathon, Ababel Yeshaneh, Viola Cheptoo, and Peres Jepchirchir. Congratulations.

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