

13 MINUTE MARK IN SIGHT FOR TOP AMERICANS

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To run a 5,000 meter race in under 13 minutes, a runner must average less than 63 seconds per lap, or just under 4:12 per mile, for 3.1 miles. Running that fast for such a distance is an elite athletic accomplishment, with the 13 minute barrier in a 5,000 meter race comparable to what breaking four minutes in the mile meant years ago. Any while a number of athletes from other countries have gone sub 13 for the 5K distance (there have been a total of 178 sub 13 performances to date), only two American runners have done so to date. Bob Kennedy's 12:58.21 clocking in Zurich back in August 1996 ranks as the fastest 5,000 meter time ever run by an American. Kennedy also ran 12:58.75 five weeks earlier in Stockholm to record the first-ever sub 13 minute performance by an American runner. Bernard Lagat, an Olympic silver medalist at 1,500 meters and recent American citizen, ran 12:59.29 in a 5,000 meter race in Berlin, Germany to join Kennedy in the sub 13 club. On July 29th, Lagat outkicked world record holder Kenenisa Bekele of Ethiopia to win the London Grand Prix 5,000 meter race in 12:59.22. He now joins Kennedy with two sub 13 efforts and will look to lower Kennedy's 10 year old U.S. mark. There are also a handful of other top American runners knocking on the door, with the potential of making the all-time U.S. list a bit more crowded between 13:00 and 13:10. Here's a look at some American runners that have led the U.S. resurgence at the 5K distance and have the potential to join this elite group:

MATT TEGENKAMP – The former Wisconsin Badger's recent eye-opening 13:04.90 clocking gives him the fourth fastest American 5,000 meter time ever (Sydney Maree ran 13:01.15 in July 1985 for #3). A 10 time All-American at Wisconsin, Coach Jerry Schumacher has been able to keep Tegenkamp healthy for the past two years, and the consistent training has paid off. In June, Tegenkamp finished 2nd to Lagat at the USA Outdoor Track and Field Championships to further establish himself as a legitimate contender for a spot on the 2008 Olympic team.

ADAM GOUCHER - On July 22nd, Goucher, a former NCAA Cross-Country champion at Colorado, ran 13:10.00 for 5,000 meters in extremely warm conditions. Only Kennedy, Lagat, and Tegenkamp have run faster. The 31 year-old Goucher has struggled with injuries in past years, but seems to have regained his old form under Coach Alberto Salazar. After finishing a disappointing 19th at the 2004 Olympic Trials at 5,000 meters, look for Goucher to be out in front in 2008 as well.

ALAN WEBB – Best known for breaking Jim Ryun's national high school mark in the mile, the Nike prodigy has a 13:10.86 5,000 meter personal best to his credit and a ton of leg speed to go along with it. Showing his versatility at the longer distances, Webb ran the fastest-ever debut by an American for 10,000 meters with his 27:34.72 clocking in April. Despite winning the 1,500 meter race at the 2004 U.S. Olympic Trials, Webb ran a poor tactical race in the Olympic Games and failed to advance out of the opening round in Rome. Much like the legendary Steve Prefontaine, Webb may find 5,000 meters to be his best racing distance.

DATHAN RITZENHEIN – "Ritz" also set a personal best at the 5,000 meter distance in 2005 (13:22.23). In 2004, a third career stress fracture in his foot knocked him out of the Olympic Trials, but he secured a spot on the team at 10,000 meters when Bob Kennedy suffered an Achilles injury. Lacking the pure leg speed of Webb or Goucher, Ritzenhein and his coach Brad Hudson have decided to focus on the marathon this fall, with Ritz committed to make his 26.2 mile debut at the ING New York City Marathon in November.

ABDI ABDIRAHMAN – Abdirahman, like Ritzenhein, is a strength runner, with a 13:13.32 5K best and a 2:11:24 marathon to his credit. A two-time U.S. champion at 10,000 meters, Abdirahman finished a strong 5th in last year's ING New York City Marathon and will probably focus on the longer races for the 2008 Olympic Trials.

TIM BROE - Michigan's Tim Broe ran a personal best 13:11.77 for 5,000 meters last July and claimed his 3rd consecutive 5,000 meter U.S. outdoor title. Broe, the American 3,000 meter indoor record holder, returned from a broken foot in 2003 to win the Olympic Trials race a year later. He would go on to finish 11th overall in the 5,000 meter final in Rome.

IAN DOBSON – The 2004 Stanford graduate finished runner-up to Broe in the 2005 U.S. Championships and has run 13:15.33 for 5K. A two-time state high school cross-country champion in Oregon, Dobson clearly has the talent to get to the next level.

RYAN HALL – Hall, a former teammate of Dobson at Stanford, ran 13:16.03 last season. Hall has shown tremendous success during his academic years. He was the 2005 NCAA Champion at 5,000 meters outdoors and in high school, Hall finished third in the 2001 Footlocker Cross-Country National Championships Race behind two of the countries top distance running prodigies, Dathan Ritzenhein and Alan Webb.

JORGE TORRES – Torres, like Goucher also a former NCAA Cross-Country champion from his Colorado days, ran a personal best of 13:20.57 in 2005 and recently claimed the U.S. 10,000 meter title.

The recent 5,000 meter personal bests by Lagat, Tegenkamp, and Goucher have given the U.S. hope for a return to prominence at this distance. To keep things in perspective, however, Bekele's world record of 12:37.35 is light years ahead of where the current American contingent is right now. And Bob Kennedy, who owns an amazing 14 of the fastest 17 U.S. times ever run, announced his retirement from competitive racing in 2006 (Kennedy's U.S. record ranks only #133 on the all-time list). By avoiding the allure of road race prize money and instead focusing on the European track circuit, Kennedy was the runner who raised the bar for the Americans. But there has been plenty of progress and the outlook is promising for the current crop of U.S. runners who have continued to improve at the 5,000 meter distance.

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