



Bekele finishes his 2017 racing with a victory at the TSK25K

Kolkata, 17 December 2017 (for immediate use): Ethiopian running icon Kenenisa Bekele fell short of his target of running a 25km personal best at the Tata Steel Kolkata 25K but he still dominated the race in the Indian city after breaking away from his rivals just after 18 kilometres before coming home in 1:13:48.

Bekele had talked at Friday's press conference about beating his best for the distance of 1:12:47 – an intermediate time in the 2016 Berlin Marathon which he went on to win in 2:03:03 to go second on the all-time list for the classic distance – but it quickly became apparent that was going to be a tall order after a very conservative pace over the first half of the race.

The leading group went through the 7.5km checkpoint in a sluggish 24:24. Just before halfway, Bekele briefly went through a bad patch and drifted off the back of the leaders, with his compatriot Asefa Diro leading at 12km in 39:09 and Bekele seven seconds adrift in fifth place.

However, the multiple world champion and world record holder soon got back up with the group containing Diro, Eritrea's Tsegay Tuemay, Tanzania's Augustino Sulle and India's Avinash Sable before surging away with just under seven kilometres to go.

His move almost immediately splintered the leading group with nobody able to stay with him once he moved into a higher gear. Tuemay eventually crossed the finish line on Kolkata's historic Red Road in second place in 1:14:21 with Sulle third in 1:14:41.

One accolade that did fall to Bekele was the course record. In the first year that the TSK25K has had an elite international field Bekele improved the previous rather modest record of 1:17:16 from 12 month ago by more than three minutes.

"I feel fantastic. It was a fast time and I'm glad to be winning and making history," said Bekele, reflecting on the fact that the race had opened its arms to international runners for the first time.

It also put behind him the spectre of his failure to finish the Berlin Marathon in September, when he dropped out at 30 kilometres, and meant Bekele finished his 2017 racing campaign on a high note with a confidence-boosting victory.

Notably in fourth place was the leading local runner Sable, who ran an Indian best for the distance of 1:15:17.

With less than a year of serious running to his name, the 23-year-old Sable won the Indian 3000m steeplechase title in September and in Kolkata he was courageous and talented enough to stay with the leaders for almost three-quarters of the race.

If the men's race was a dominated by the favourite, the women's race unfolded in a completely different manner.

At 23km there were still four women in contention, Kenya's Helah Kiprop, Tanzania's Failuna Matanga and the Ethiopian pair of Degitu Azimeraw and Dibabe Kuma.

Just before the 24km marker was passed, Kuma began to drop away and with 600 metres to go Azimeraw, in her first ever international race, sprinted for home and left behind firstly the diminutive Matanga and then the 2015 IAAF World Championships marathon silver medallist Kiprop.

Azimeraw crossed the line in 1:26:01 to pick up her first prize cheque of US\$7500 and celebrate the biggest payday of her life, as well as making it an Ethiopian double triumph in Kolkata. Kiprop hung on for second in 1:26:04 with Matanga third in 1:26:11.

In fifth place, emerging local star Loganathan Suriya continued her run of fine form.

At the Airtel Delhi Half Marathon last month, she ran an Indian record of 1:10:29 for that distance and in Kolkata she ran a national 25km best of 1:26:53, staying with her African adversaries until just before 20km.

Leading results:

Men

1. Kenenisa Bekele (ETH)	1:13:48
2. Tsegay Tuemay (ERI)	1:14:26
3. Augustino Sule (TAN)	1:14:41
4. Avinash Sable (IND)	1:15:17
5. Asefa Diro (ETH)	1:15:37

Women

1. Degitu Azimeraw (ETH)	1:26:01
2. Helah Kiprop (KEN)	1:26:04
3. Failuna Matanga (TAN)	1:26:11
4. Dibabe Kuma (ETH)	1:26:28
5. Loganathan Suriya (IND)	1:26:53

For more information about the Tata Steel Kolkata 25K, the event website is: <http://tsk25.procamlrunning.in>

Other links:

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/TSKolkata25/>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/TSK25K>

Instagram: <http://www.instagram.com/tskolkata25>

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