

1996 MEN'S OLYMPIC 10,000M FINAL

In 1996, Haile Gebrselassie's rise to the pinnacle of world distance running was all but complete. After winning the 1992 World Junior Championship double over 5000m and 10000m, he came as close as you could to repeating the feat in his first year as a senior, winning the 10000m and finishing 2nd in the 5000m at the 1993 World Championships. 1995 was another stellar year for the Emperor of Ethiopia as he shed 9 seconds off the 10000m World Record before defending his 10000m World Championship and then tearing an amazing 11 seconds off the world record for 5000m.

WHILE Gebrselassie was dominating on the track, Paul Tergat was making his presence felt at Cross Country, winning the 1995 and 1996 World Cross Country Championships.

In the lead up to the 1996 Olympic Games the competition for the 10000m became even hotter when Moroccan smooth mover, Salah Hissou, took Gebrselassie's World 10000m record from him. Gebrselassie was not going to have it all his own way trying to win his first Olympic Gold. But for his challengers the problem of beating this great champion was not an easy one. How do you beat someone who has an absolutely devastating turn of speed in the last 200m, but has the fitness to run world records? If you are from Kenya, the answer is simple: you run as a team and try to tear his legs off.

The field for the 1996 Olympic 10000m final contained three Kenyan, three Spanish, two Ethiopian, two British and two Moroccan athletes, among others, and

a host of athletes that would later taste success over the full marathon distance including Abel Anton, Stefano Baldini, Jon Brown and Paul Evans. The conditions on the evening of the final were oppressive for distance runners with a temperature of 27 degrees, humidity of 72% and a track surface so hard it had pounded the athletes feet to oblivion from running the qualifying heats.

The early pace was pedestrian and allowed Stefano Baldini to open up a 40 metre gap by throwing in a 65 second lap, but the gap was quickly closed down by Stephan Franker from Germany with the rest of the field hot on his heels. Once the field was again back together Nizignama from Burundi made sure that a solid pace ensued and the field began to stretch out. Interestingly, Gebrselassie had decided Hissou was the man to keep a very close eye on and was sitting tentatively on his shoulder in around 6th position. The Kenyans were yet to be seen in the race as they sat patiently behind the great Ethiopian. A fifth lap of 62 seconds and the strain was starting to show on a lot of the athletes.

Three km was passed in 8.17 and the Kenyans were starting to move through the field. Machuka (2nd to Gebrselassie in the World Junior Championships in 1992) moved to the front and then the pace was completely shut down for 200m while no one wanted to lead. It did not last long before Nizignama was

back at the front again stringing out the field. Gebrselassie was now paying closer attention to the Kenyan whose presence closer to the front of the race had not gone unnoticed. The two Moroccans, Hissou and Skah (former world cross country champion and defending Olympic champion), were still happy to sit back in seventh and ninth place respectively.

Nizignama was still leading as the field passed through 5km in 13.55 with a lead group of twelve, still with all of the big hitters, starting to break away from the rest of the field. Then it began. Koech sprang into the lead, Gebrselassie covering his move very quickly and the racing had begun in earnest. A 62 second lap carved the lead group down to six athletes: the three Kenyans (Koech, Tergat, and Machuka), Hissou, Gebrselassie and Dieudonné Disi of Rwanda.

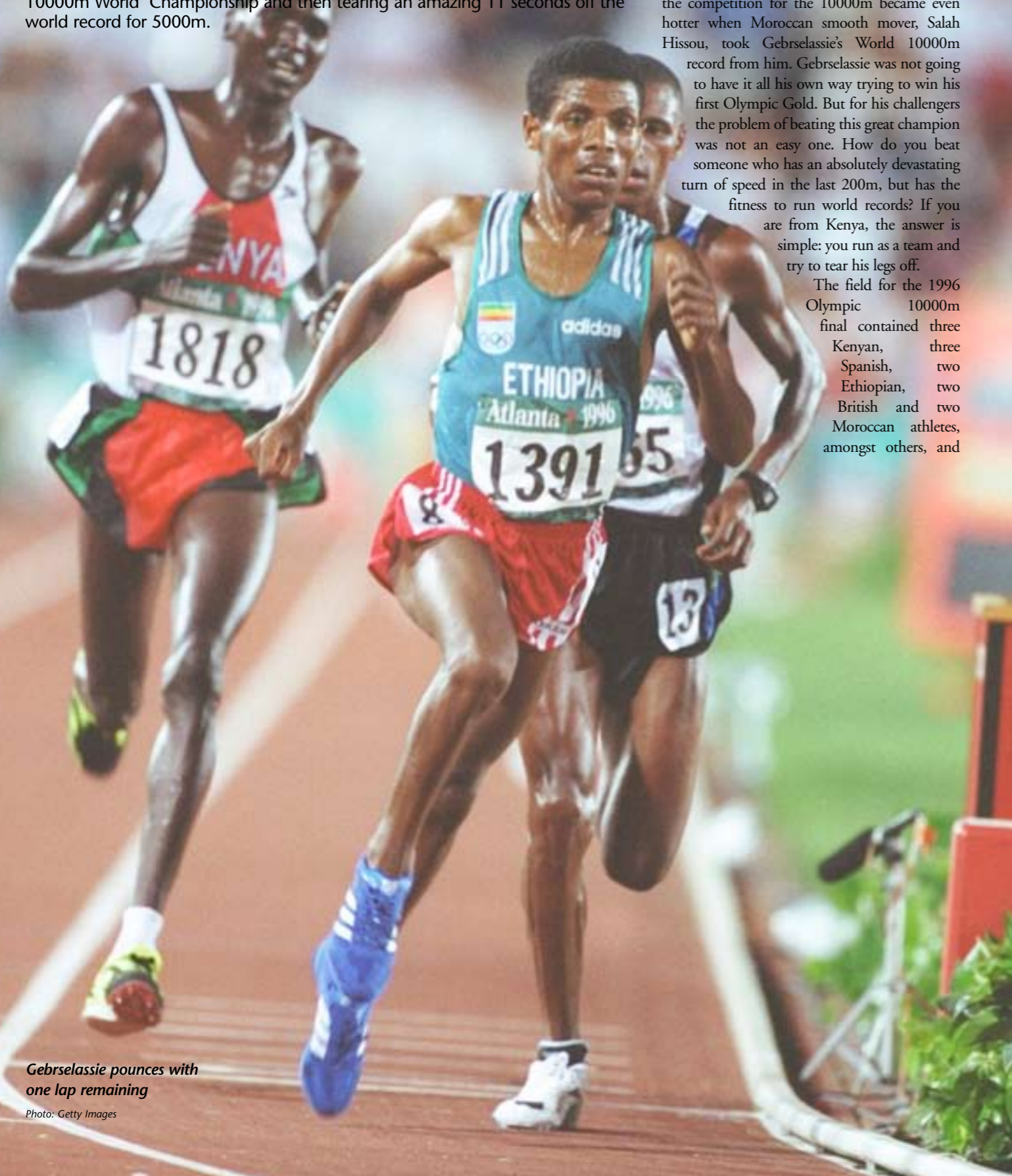
The relentless pace continued as Machuka and Koech did their best sacrificial lamb impersonations and Tergat sat comfortably at the back of the group. Seven kilometres was passed in 19.18 and the Kenyans had not visibly made any impact on the form of Gebrselassie or Hissou, but the main course was just about to be served. At exactly eight kilometres (22.01), Tergat sprang from the back of the pack to hit the lead for the first time in the race. Gebrselassie sensing the urgency immediately covered the move, while Hissou was left lagging with the rest of the group. In just one lap devastating lap of 60.5 seconds,

the two leaders had put over 30 metres into the other competitors with the exception of Hissou who was 5 metres back and fighting to get back in contact. Another scorching lap of 62 seconds and Hissou was now running for bronze, it was a battle of the two greats, a classic battle of Kenya versus Ethiopia. The conditions were starting to take their toll on the remaining athletes who were now over 100m behind and the strain was really starting to show as Tergat again led Gebrselassie through another 62 second lap. Two laps remain and Tergat was still unable to put even the smallest margin into his adversary.

As they approached the bell in what had been yet another 62 second lap, Gebrselassie pounced, putting three, then five, then ten metres into Tergat before he hit the 200m mark. But Tergat was not done, he lifted up the straight and closed the gap ever so slightly without making any real impression into Gebrselassie's lead. A closing lap of 57 seconds, a winning time of 27.07 and a new Olympic record (by 14 seconds), Gebrselassie showed he is truly one of the greatest runners of all time and this was certainly one of the Greatest Races of All Time. **RAYL**

RESULTS

1. Haile Gebrselassie	27.07
2. Paul Tergat	27.08
3. Salah Hissou	27.28



Gebrselassie pounces with one lap remaining

Photo: Getty Images



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