Shalane Flanagan complicated her Beijing Olympics plans in early May when she set a U.S. record in her 10,000-meter track debut. Flanagan ran 30 minutes, 34.49 seconds in Stanford, Calif., to break Deena Kastor’s 2002 mark of 30:50.32.

Now Flanagan, who ran the 5000 at the 2004 Olympics, has to decide if she’ll run the 5000 as planned at the June 27–July 6 Olympic Trials in Eugene, Ore., or switch to the 10,000. A double is impractical.

“We’ll have to sit down and look at where my best chances to medal are,” said Flanagan, 26, who last year set U.S. records at 5000 outdoors and 3000 indoors. “I don’t know where I stack up against people in the world. I’ll talk with my coach and we’ll consult with a lot of people, I’m sure.”

Flanagan finished eighth at last year’s world championships in the 5000, fatigued after a long season that re-established her career after a couple of sub-par years due to a foot injury. This year the plan is to get to Beijing as fresh as possible.

She made her record run at the Payton Jordan Stanford Invitational look easy. She and runner-up Kim Smith, who set a New Zealand record (30:35.54), traded the lead after the rabbit dropped out at about the midway point.

“We don’t ever preplan to help each other, but it just seems to work out that way once we get on the track,” Flanagan said. “Last night it felt more like a workout, like we were teammates and just switching laps and helping each other achieve a big goal of running fast.

“Not until the last lap did I kind of remind myself, ‘Hey, this is a race, you know. You should make an effort to maybe win.’ There was so much camaraderie I didn’t feel the need to beat Kim. I felt the need to beat the clock.”

John Cook, Flanagan’s coach, told her before the race she was capable of 30:30.

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“‘I was kind of baffled at that,’ Flanagan said. “I thought for a debut, that’s really a big goal.”

Clearly the distance isn’t a stretch for Flanagan, who won two NCAA cross country titles at North Carolina.

“I’m really glad I did a 10K because it
presented a new challenge and it’s opened my eyes to the possibility of longer distances,” said Flanagan, whose parents were good marathoners. “My genetic makeup, I think, is predisposed to the longer distances, but I really have a fun time trying to fine-tune my speed.”

**Marathon Man …**

Ryan Hall, called “the future of the marathon” by 2004 Olympic champ Stefano Baldini, is living up to the billing. Hall, 25, competing in only his third 26.2-mile race, finished fifth in April’s London Marathon in 2:06:17, the fastest time ever by an American-born runner. The only American to run faster is Morocco-born Khalid Khannouchi, who in 2002 ran 2:05:38 in London and 2:05:56 in Chicago.

Hall has stamped himself as a contender for major marathon titles and as a medal hopeful in August in Beijing, where the hot, humid conditions make both marathon running and predictions difficult.

“I think there’s definitely room for improvement,” said Hall. “I’m pleased. I think this was a big step in the right direction for me for Beijing in terms of learning to go out with these guys and see what it looks like to be with them from the gun.”

In his marathon debut in London last year, Hall stayed with the secondary pack until catching the leaders at about mile 14 and hanging with them until the final 1½ miles, finishing seventh in a U.S. debut record of 2:08:24.

“That race was totally different. We were running much slower,” Hall said, “whereas (this year) we really got after it from the get-go.”

Hall was with the leaders, paced by rabbits who took them through the half-marathon in 1:02:13, 17 seconds faster than scheduled.

“It wasn’t even so much how fast it was, but how we ran it,” Hall said. “It wasn’t very even. The (per-mile) pace was like 4:39, then 4:50. We were kind of all over the place. So it wasn’t a very smooth 62:13 either. That came back to get me a little bit.”

But not immediately. At 25 kilometers (15.5 miles) with the leaders, Hall set a pending U.S. mark of 1:13:47. After 17 miles, Samuel Wanjiru pushed the pace with a 4:35 mile. “I was like ‘I’m not in position to go with that,’” said Hall. He fell 10 seconds back but kept the leaders in sight and rejoined them before the 22-mile mark, before falling back again.

“I had to find my own rhythm,” said Hall, who grew up at altitude in Big Bear Lake, California, and does much of his training at altitude in Mammoth Lakes, several hundred miles to the northwest. “That’s where doing all those tempo runs in Mammoth by myself really paid off.”

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Terrence Mahon, Hall’s coach, gave the runner high grades for handling the competition and conditions that ranged from sunny to pelting rain: “He ran smart the whole time. He was comfortable sitting in the back of the pack. I think he learned that watching Khannouchi and how he ran here. He’s beginning to understand, ‘I can sit in the back, try to relax and wait until the big pressure points start.’”

“He did a great job running a little differently than normal. He solved a lot of mental problems when he did get dropped by 10 seconds not to fold his cards up. He made the right moves when he had to get back in the pack in terms of weather and wind. For someone the first time ever in the front of the pack of such a world-class field, he made a lot of right moves. That speaks to how quickly he’s growing as a mature athlete.”

Hall’s next stop was Boston’s women’s Olympic Trials, where he cheered training partners Deena Kastor, who won, and Kate O’Neill, who dnf’d, and also attended his first Boston Marathon, as a spectator.

“I’m going to make sure I recover well so I’m able to train really hard for Beijing and get in better shape,” Hall said.

…and marathon women
Californians dominated those women’s trials on April 20 in Boston, run the day before the Boston Marathon on a downtown criterium course.

Deena Kastor, the reigning Olympic Bronze medalist, won in 2:29:35, with Magdalena Lewy Boulet (2:30:19) and Blake Russell (2:32:40) earning the other berths. Four years ago in St. Louis Boulet was fifth and Russell finished fourth after leading much of the race.

Boulet led most of the race in Boston, but not by running a fast pace. She went...
out at about 2:30 pace, running 5:40s, but the pack let her go, in part because neither Kastor nor Russell recognized their fellow Californian. It wasn’t until the first turnaround, at about 4.5 miles, that Kastor realized Boulet was the lead runner.

“There was a long set of miles in the middle of the race when I thought I might have misjudged it,” said Kastor, who fell two minutes behind. “I was already succumbing to second place.”

At 17 miles Kastor started running 5:30s while Boulet slowed to 5:50s. In the midst of a 5:29 mile, Kastor passed Boulet at about the 23.5-mile mark.

“I did feel much more comfortable once I started picking up the pace,” Kastor said. “I didn’t want to do anything too abrupt. I wanted to stay in the right energy zone.”

The three women plus the three men’s marathoners—Hall, Dathan Ritzenhein and Brian Sell—were scheduled to meet with Dr. David Martin and other physiology experts to learn strategies for the difficult conditions in Beijing. A similar program in 2004 helped lead to Kastor’s Bronze and a Silver by Meb Keflezighi.

“The good news is, of the six, none has asthma,” Martin said. “We’ll let the rest of the world worry about the air pollution in Beijing. We’ll concentrate on how to beat the heat and humidity.”

Hot event

The mile scene in the U.S. could be entering a hot era. Not long ago the worry was finding domestic runners who could meet the A standard for the Olympics or Worlds in the 1500.

Now, someone good is going to be left off the U.S. men’s 1500 team for Beijing. It’s been a while since the U.S. had a quartet like this:

• Alan Webb. Set the U.S. mile record last year of 3:46.91, breaking Steve Scott’s 25-year-old mark. Also had the best 2007 time in the 1500. Didn’t begin this season impressively, finishing 16th in a 10K road race, dropping out of a 5K road race and scratching from the Drake Relays mile.


• Lopez Lomong. One of the Lost Boys of the Sudan who escaped violence there as a six-year-old in 1991—running and walking 120 miles on foot through wild country to find refuge in Kenya—Lomong became a U.S. citizen last year. He has scary range. Won NCAA 1500 title at Northern Arizona last spring then took third at NCAA cross-country last November.

• Leonel Manzano. The University of Texas senior won the NCAA 1500 title as a freshman and is favored to do so again this year, especially with

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Lomong having relinquished his collegiate eligibility. Born in Mexico, Manzano’s family moved to the U.S. when he was four, and he became a U.S. citizen in 2004. Strong closer who finished second in the USA Championships last year.

“May the best man win,” said Manzano, after anchoring Texas to titles in the distance medley and 4x4 mile at the Penn Relays in April.

“The better competition we have, the better team we’ll send (to Beijing).”

**Running and mourning**

There may not be a bigger sentimental favorite than Alicia Shay during the Olympic track and field trials in Eugene. She is the widow of Ryan Shay, who died of heart failure 5.5 miles into the men’s Olympic trials marathon in New York in November.

Alicia Shay resumed running in January, planning to contest the 10,000 at the trials.

“All day I have thoughts and memories of Ryan and us moving into my mind,” says Shay. “When I’m not with people I can let down with, I’m constantly over-riding and repressing those thoughts, memories and emotions. That’s when a small thing can set me off and it all comes crashing down.

“A lot of times at night, it really gets hard. You lie there and there’s nothing to distract you. I’m trying to get better at surrounding myself with people that I can express my emotions to. Sometimes, if I can say it out loud, I can move on. Or I cry and five minutes later, I can handle the rest of the day.”

There’s a toughness to Shay, a two-time NCAA 10,000-meter champion who grew up on a ranch in Gillette, Wyoming. Once when she was four, she was kicked in the face by a horse, losing teeth and breaking a jaw.

“We got home from the hospital and she wanted to ride,” said her mother, Sally Craig. “She’s always had such a strong drive, a personality with strength to it.”

**Heck of a run**

John McDonnell announced his retirement, effective at the end of track season, after 36 years, 42 NCAA team championships and 83 conference titles at Arkansas. The native of County Mayo, Ireland, who turns 70 in July, won five triple crowns—taking NCAA titles in cross country, indoor track and outdoor track in the same academic year.

In announcing his retirement McDonnell praised his assistants, Dick Booth, whom he called “the greatest field event coach, not in America, but the world,” and Kyle White, the sprint coach for the past two years. White replaced Lance Brauman, who served prison time for mail fraud charges and committed NCAA violations that could cost the Razorbacks a couple of titles once the NCAA rules on an appeal filed by the university.

“I would have stepped down two years ago it wasn’t for the NCAA penalties and issues that came about,” McDonnell said. “I wanted to see that through.”

McDonnell said he’d continue to coach post-collegians and planned to remain in Fayetteville.
“To be a good coach, you have to be a little hardnosed and tough on kids,” he said. “But I call it tough love—and I always make sure to give an athlete a pat on the back before he leaves.”

Bell lap

- Usain Bolt of Jamaica, better known as a 200 runner, ran history’s second-fastest time in the 100 with a 9.76 in April in Kingston.
  “I am not surprised because he has been doing well in training,” said his coach Glen Mills. “This is just the beginning.”
  Bolt, 21, second to Tyson Gay in the 200 at last year’s world championships, would like to add the 100 to his duties. Mills always thought the 6-5 Bolt would be better in the 400. But Bolt extracted a promise last year: If he set the Jamaican record in the 200, which he did with a 19.75 last year, he could run a 100 this season.

“The night was just right; everything was just perfect,” said Bolt, who benefited from a 1.8 meter-per-second wind, .2 under the legal limit. “So you never know, this might just be one good race, but I am hoping it’s not.”

- Bolt’s countryman Asafa Powell, who set the 9.74 world record last year, withdrew from April and May meets, citing a chest muscle injury.
- Tim Montgomery, who set the 100m world record of 9.78 in 2002 before losing it to a drug violation, was arrested in Virginia in May for heroin distribution. He was denied bail because the judge noted that he is accused of selling heroin four times to an undercover agent after pleading guilty to involvement in a counterfeit check ring. Montgomery is due to be sentenced in mid-May in the check case and is scheduled for trial in the drug case in July.

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