

# Bernard Lagat gives fans a memorable Olympic trials win

Kylee O'Connor, Special for azcentral sports Published 10:17 p.m. MT July 9, 2016 | Updated 4:38 p.m. MT July 11, 2016



(Photo: Kirby Lee/USA TODAY Sports)

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EUGENE, Ore. - Bernard Lagat didn't finish his 10,000-meter race on day one of the U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials. On day nine, he came back to let his 5,000-meter race end the same way.  
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GPS-  
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He wanted to remind his supporters that he was still here after dropping out of the 5,000 meters at the Prefontaine Classic last month.

"The fans have known me, and let me tell you, these are the same people that saw me in college, and we develop a certain relationship with people," Lagat said. "That is why, really, when I did not run well in the Prefontaine Classic, when I was sick, I didn't want that to be the last image that people saw.

"That crushed me, it hurt me, but I think in a way that helped me concentrate more, and you know, training hard to know that whenever I come over here, I do not want to disappoint. But then again, 10,000 happened, and again—out. More disappointment, so I was like, 'Is this the way it really is going to happen?' It's not going to happen that way."

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At age 41, Lagat took charge with 100 meters to go Saturday in the 5,000-meter final to win and qualify for his fifth Olympic Games. He won in 13 minutes, 35.50 seconds, out-kicking Hassan Mead by 0.2 seconds. He ran his last lap in 52.82 seconds.

Lagat, who lives in Tucson, won medals in the 2000 and 2008 Olympics running the 1,500. He was fourth in the 5,000 at the 2012 London Games.

From the moment he stepped onto the track, Lagat had the support of the record-breaking 22,847 in attendance. When his name was called, the Hayward crowd roared, arguably louder than even Oregon graduate Galen Rupp.

"When they introduced me, I was number 16 on the line, and let me tell you, I heard everybody cheering and I actually had to stop and look," Lagat said. "Because here's the thing, I appreciate what the fans do. And they know whenever I go into races, I give my honest effort."

His competitors feel much as the fans do.

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"I've been looking up to Bernard Lagat," third-place finisher Paul Chelimo said. "I've been looking up to him and I'm trying to find my racing start. I want to be like Bernard Lagat in the future. I'm hoping when he retires, I'm going to take over."

After Lagat dropped out of the 10,000 on July 1, many thought his track and field career would end at the trials. (Lagat has said he will move to road racing next.) Lagat said that his coach, James Li, reassured him that the 10,000 would do him good, even though he didn't finish the race.

"Coach Li changed everything," Lagat said. "He said, 'That 10,000 meters was just another workout, a tempo run. So you're going to benefit from that race—it's going to help you 10 days later.' And it really did."

Along with wanting to finish strong in front of his Hayward crowd, another factor going into Lagat's final Olympic trials race was his children. He wanted to win it for them.

"My daughter has been telling me, 'Daddy, I want you to make it to the Olympics so I can go watch gymnastics.' So, I made my daughter's day today, so I'm happy about that," he said.