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Kerr Calls Bold Move 'A Dumb Decision' And It Pays Off With Victory And British Mile Record

By Lori Shontz for DyeStat

John Napolitan photos

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EUGENE -- The directive from his coaches was clear: Don't do it.

But **Josh Kerr** said he “never really listens to other people when comes to race strategy,” and that includes the coaching staff at Brooks Beasts. So, with 600 meters to go in Saturday's Bowerman Mile at The Prefontaine Classic, he made his move. He took the lead.

Why?

“Because I thought it was a dumb decision,” Kerr said. “And I knew if I thought it was a dumb decision, then it probably was. And that was going to scare myself and everyone else around me.”

None of the other competitors mentioned being frightened, but couldn't they stick with him. Kerr held the lead the rest of the way to win one of the most anticipated mile races in recent memory, a field with the defending Olympic 1,500-meter champion, the past two 1,500-meter World champions and just about every other top middle-distance runner around.

Kerr's winning time, 3:45.34, broke the British record set 39 years ago by **Steve Cram**. Kerr crossed the line .26 ahead of **Jakob Ingebrigtsen**, who has become his archrival, then took off his signature mirrored sunglasses and yelled something. He said later he couldn't remember what it was.

“I was just excited to go out at race against a world championship field and go out and show I'm still the best in the world,” he said.

Depth of the field notwithstanding, the hype for this race centered on Kerr and Ingebrigtsen, who have been trading barbs since immediately after Kerr outkicked Ingebrigtsen to win the 2023 world



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1,500-meter title in Budapest last summer. After the race, Ingebrigtsen said he was sick, implying that had he been healthy, Kerr would not have won.

Since then, Kerr has called Ingebrigtsen “insecure” and suggested that he didn’t know he had weaknesses because he was surrounded by “so many yes men.” Ingebrigtsen has called Kerr “just the next guy” and responded to Kerr setting the indoor 2-mile record by declaring, “I would have beaten him in that race, blindfolded.”

By the time the two arrived in Eugene for their showdown, everyone was ready for some fun.

At the pre-race press conference, American record holder **Yared Nuguse** was asked to compare himself and his competitors to Pokémon characters. He decided Ingebrigtsen is Charmander, a salamander with orange skin and a flame at the tip of its tail, because “he’s got a fiery vibe to him,” and Kerr is Squirtle, a light blue turtle that swims at high speed when it withdraws into his shell because “that just feels right for him.” (Nuguse said he is Bulbasaur, the blue green amphibian that Bulbapedia calls “both a rare and well-behaved Pokémon.”)

When the press conference ended, the moderator said, “Do your best MMA photo op,” and what resulted was the world’s most awkward post-press conference group photo, with the three runners standing as far apart as they could from each other while still fitting in the frame, without any of the joking around or hugs that are common in such situations.

Ingebrigtsen deployed the double-thumbs-up with a stiff grin, while Kerr stood more solemnly, hands at his side.

But the race was more than just a grudge match. It was also an early season test in an Olympic year, and the protagonists were coming in with different buildups. Kerr had followed up his World title with that world record in the indoor 2-mile and a 3,000-meter indoor world title in his home country of Scotland. Ingebrigtsen, however, had missed the indoor season while recovering from an Achilles injury, and Saturday’s mile was his first race in 251 days.

The Hayward Field pace lights were set for a time of 3:47.83, although Kerr said he wasn’t paying any attention to that.

Pacesetter **Abraham Alvarado** led the field early, with **Abel Kipsang** behind him and Ingebrigtsen tucked in just behind. Kerr settled in at the middle of the pack, then began moving up – first gradually, then stronger down the backstretch of the third lap, and he passed everyone to move into the lead with 600 to go. Ingebrigtsen and Nuguse tucked in behind.

Kerr kept pushing the pace, and finally only Ingebrigtsen remained within striking distance.

“I tried to fight him,” Ingebrigtsen said. “But I thought for me today, it was more of a time trial. Of course, we’re racing, but there’s definitely some differences of approach into this race.”

Kerr had plenty of strength and speed to hold the lead, and then had enough energy left to run down the homestretch, celebrating with fans. Ingebrigtsen finished in 3:45.60, and Nuguse placed third in 3:46.22.

“I’m glad I raced before that,” said **Nia Akins**, Kerr’s Brooks Beast teammate, who had just finished third in the 800. She laughed. “That would have been too much excitement and enthusiasm for me.”

Ingebrigtsen pronounced himself happy with the result, and he made sure to note, “I’m not a big fan of the mile even itself because it has nothing to do with my culture – it’s definitely something British and American, which I’m not familiar with.”

The British milers – specifically the Scottish milers – had a strong day. In addition to Kerr’s win, **Neil Gourley** finished fourth in a personal-best 3:47.74, despite coming off a string of injuries, and **Jake Wightman**, who outkicked Ingebrigtsen to win the 2022 World 1,500-meter title but was injured for the 2023 season, finished fifth in a personal best 3:47.83, exactly with the pace lights.

In short, the race was likely a preview of a potentially excellent 1,500-meter final at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

“There’s a difference in the way that we all kind of see this race, but it’s a good fight,” Ingebrigtsen said. “Some of my competitors have clearly taken a step in the right direction. Not as big a step that maybe is needed to be the favorite in Paris. But I think if anything, this is going to be an exciting summer.”

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