

Galen Rupp

Kicking Back



Photo by Jim Flory

Galen Rupp was competing in the 10,000 meters at the 2011 World Championships in Daegu, South Korea. He had ran with the leaders for the first 9400 meters and only had 600 meters to go. However, time after time at the international level, Galen had faded as the pace cranked up over the final lap. His lack of competitive speed over the final lap was leaving him out of the group of elite runners in the world. What Galen needed was the confidence and speed to finish strong with the top runners in the world. He didn't have it in Daegu and finished seventh. He had one year to improve and reach his dream of medaling in the Olympic 10,000 meters.

Only two Americans had ever won an Olympic medal in the 10,000 meters. The last medal was the upset win by Billy Mills in 1964. What Galen needed was the belief in his finish, just as Mills had demonstrated to perfection.

It had been a slow and steady build-up for Galen. He began working with his coach, Alberto Salazar when he was in high school in Portland, Oregon. Salazar, the former marathon great, deliberately brought Galen along slowly and was careful not to over-train or over-race him. Despite having an illustrious career and winning NCAA championships,

Galen was unable to respond to the late surges of world-class runners, as his strength and speed were not fully developed. Galen and Salazar stuck to their training plan and the physical and mental components of a strong finish began to come together. At the 2012 Olympic Trials, Galen won the 10,000 meters and then came back to win the 5000 meters in a meet record time, breaking the great Steve Prefontaine's record and, in the process, outkicking the great finisher, Bernard Lagat, for the very first time.

The London Olympics featured a hometown favorite, Mo Farah, in the 10K and 5K, the same events Galen would run. In fact, the two had trained together in Portland, Oregon and both were coached by Alberto Salazar. The pace was slow in the Olympic 10,000 meters race. Farah took the lead with four laps to go and his training mate, Galen, was positioned fourth at the bell with a lap to go. Farah opened up the lead, but Rupp maintained contact, and with 90 meters to go, he moved past Kenensia Bekele, the defending Olympic champion, to win the silver medal. Galen Rupp made U.S. running history by remaining focused with proper training.

Questions for Thought:

1. Galen Rupp identified a weak spot in his racing and worked to develop that into a strength. Do you have a weak spot that you could develop into a strength?
2. Along with improved physical ability, what can you do to improve your mental ability?
3. Galen had a great training partner in Mo Farah. How can you use others around you to get better?