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**KENYA TAKES SIX MORE TITLES AS AFRICAN CHAMPIONSHIPS CONCLUDE IN ASABA**

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Kenya captured six more titles on Sunday (5) to claim bragging rights as the winningest squad in Africa as the 21st edition of the continent's championships concluded in Asaba, Nigeria.

Competing before another raucous near-capacity crowd at the Stephen Keshi Memorial Stadium, Kenya took home titles on the track and on the field on the final day of competition to up their gold medal haul to 11.

Many of those were delivered in most impressive fashion, beginning with the women's steeplechase where freshly-minted world record holder Beatrice Chepkoech, clearly in the rarest of forms, led a medal sweep for the east African powerhouse. The 27-year-old dominated the race en route to an 8:59.88 run, near the top of the short list of fastest un-paced performances in history.

As the field, led by three Kenyans, approached the end of the opening lap, Chepkoech said she had to make a choice: to decide with medal was hers. As she broke away and turned the race into a solo exhibition, her decision became obvious.

"After the world record and now the African title, this will open many doors for me," she said. Behind the first door is a spot on Team Africa for next month's IAAF Continental Cup Ostrava 2018.

Celliphine Chespol was a distant second nearly 10 seconds back, clocking 9:09.61, with Fancy Cherono taking bronze.

## AFTER TAMPERE TRIUMPH, ZAKAYO CONQUERS ASABA

Next came the men's 5000m where it was Edward Zakayo, the 16-year-old who emerged prominently on the scene after winning the world U20 title over the distance last month, to take centre stage.

Third at the bell behind Yemane Haileselassie of Eritrea and Ethiopian Getaneh Molla, Zakayo bolted off the final turn to finish unchallenged, crossing the line with his tongue wagging and arms spread wide, in 13:48.58.

Molla was second in 13:49.06 with Haileselassie an exuberant third in 13:49.58 to capture one of Eritrea's two medals at these championships.



*Kenya's victorious 4x400m relay squad at the African Championships in Asaba (AFP/Getty Images) © Copyright*

“I used the strategy to run with my competitors and maintain the pace, which I did, and then to pull away.” Next on the teenager’s agenda? “To win the world championship. But I must work even harder first.”

About 20 minutes after Zakayo crossed the line, the gun sounded the start of the men’s 1500m, a tactical affair largely driven by Kenyan aces Elijah Manangoi, the world champion, and his training partner Timothy Cheruiyot, this year’s world leader who’s chiseled together an unbeaten season on the IAAF Diamond League circuit.

Manangoi made his move with about 300 metres to go, unleashing a long, sustained kick that Cheruiyot couldn’t meet or beat. Manangoi clocked 3:35.20 to take his first continental title, Cheruiyot 3:35.93. Uganda’s Ronald Musagala closed strong to take bronze in 3:36.41.

Meanwhile on the infield, 2015 world javelin throw champion Julius Yego won his specialty with a second round 77.34m effort, defeating South African Philmar Van Rensburg (76.57m) with Kure Adams of Nigeria taking bronze with 75.69m.

## **CHAMPIONSHIPS RECORD IN THE 4X400 RELAY**

Then, an inspired Kenyan quartet of Aron Koech, Alphas Kishoyian, Jared Momanyi and Emmanuel Korir brought the curtain down on Asaba 2018 with victory in the 4x400m relay in 3:00.92, a championships record. South Africa was second in 3:03.50 followed by host Nigeria in 3:04.88.

Kenya’s medal haul began in the early morning hours with when Samuel Gathimba prevailed in the 20km race walk, clocking 1:25:14 to beat South African Lebogang Shange by 11 seconds. The battle for second was close, with Shange just holding off Hassanina Sebei of Tunisia. Both were credited with the same time of 1:25:25.

## **SEMENYA TAKES THE DOUBLE**

South Africa ended a strong week with three more titles to up their total medal tally to 30, an impressive 11 more than Kenya and hosts Nigeria who each



collected 19 in all.



*Caster Semenya and Francine Niyonsaba congratulate each other after the 800m final at the African Championships in Asaba (AFP/Getty Images) © Copyright*

As expected, Caster Semenya successfully defended her 800m title with a dominating gun-to-tape front-running performance. Starting in lane 1, the world and Olympic champion made up the stagger on the field about 150 metres into the race, and extended her lead over the next 450 metres. The challengers, led by Francine Niyonsaba of Burundi, made up some ground over the final half lap, but by then the race had already been decided. Semenya clocked 1:56.06 to clip 0.20 from the championships record set by Maria Mutola in 1993.

"Today was just to see how we could run after a hard 400 metres," she said, competing two days after her 49.96 victory and national record over one lap. "Which wasn't a bad thing to do - to test my limits after running 49. And 1:56.06, that's a beautiful time. I couldn't have asked for more."

Semenya confirmed that she'll contest both distances at the Continental Cup and was pleased to learn that the 400 would be run first. "Perfect," she said.

Niyonsaba was second in 1:57.97 with Ethiopian Habitam Alemu taking the

bronze in 1:58.86.

Ncincihli Titi took a convincing victory in the men's 200m in 20.46 with Nigeria's Oduduru Ejowvokoghene edging Luxolo Adams to prevent a South African 1-2. Both clocked 20.60.

On the infield, Ischke Senekal took top honours in the shot put reaching 17.24m to win by nearly half a metre to add to her discus bronze.

### THREE MORE WINS FOR NIGERIA

Nigeria's gold medal total was bolstered by the aptly named Glory Nathaniel who won the host's first title of the day, taking the 400m hurdles by more than a second in 55.43. Lamiae Lhabz of Morocco was second, clocking 56.66 with South African Wanda Nel (57.04) taking bronze.

Grace Anigbata won the triple jump with a 14.02m leap in the second round, before Nigeria also claimed the penultimate event, the women's 4x400m relay, prompting the day's loudest roar from the nearly-packed house. The Nigerian quartet dominated the race winning in 3:31.17, more than four seconds ahead of runners-up Kenya who clocked 3:35.45. Zambia claimed the bronze in 3:38.18.



*Marie Josee Ta Lou after her double dash victory at the African Championships in Asaba (AFP/Getty Images) © Copyright*

## TA LOU COMPLETES DASH DOUBLE

Marie Josee Talou of Ivory Coast, the 100m winner on Thursday, also took home an expected double after dominating the 200m in 22.50. She was nearly as fast afterwards when changing her shoes and socks before rushing off to catch her ride to the airport. "I can't wait until the Continental Cup," the year's 100m world leader said.

Bevia Abessolo of Cameroun was second in 23.36, just 0.02 ahead of Ghanaian Janet Amponsah.

Elsewhere, Odile Ahouanwanou of Benin scored an upset victory in the heptathlon, tallying 5999 points to beat defending champion Marthe Yasmine Koala of Burkina Faso by 32 points. Erika Nonhlanhla Seyama of Swaziland took the women's high jump at 1.83m.

Yamjaleye Beletew Mitiku opened the day with a surprise victory in the women's 20km race walk, defeating favourite Grace Wanjiru of Kenya by more than four minutes in 1:31:46. Chahimez Nasri of Tunisia took the bronze in 1:37.20.