

Good Counsel Wins Distance Medley at Penn

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Graves anchors win in 4:17

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As far as rallying cries go, it's not a bad one. And as far as titles go, Good Counsel may never win one bigger.

Behind the electric anchor leg of Kyle Graves, the Falcons won the Championship of America distance medley at Penn Relays in 10:09.07. It marked the first title for a Maryland team in the event since 1964.

"I wasn't expecting to win," said Cortlandt Harris, who ran the 400 leg. "I didn't even know it was possible to win Penn Relays. But it feels good."

Minutes after the finish, Graves couldn't stop bouncing. His teammates, well, it hadn't hit them yet, even after posing with the biggest plaque any of them ever will win in their lives.

"I'm kind of tired from the race," Fola Shokunbi said. "I am sure it will hit me when I step off the track. This is one of the biggest moments of my life."

It was made possible by Graves, who spurred Shokunbi with three words that probably will live on in Good Counsel lore. As Shokunbi headed into the second lap of his 800 leg, Graves shouted a reminder: "This is Penn."

"Yeah, I definitely heard it," Shokunbi said. "I kept my head in the race, and that gave me a little extra help. My coach always preaches that I gotta go in the third 200. When I heard Kyle, that was motivation."

He managed to give Graves the baton six or seven meters behind Colin Savage, the anchor from Liverpool (N.Y.). Graves closed within five meters after the first lap and managed to take the lead by the second. Savage didn't back off, sitting on Graves until the bell, where he passed Graves and cut him off in the process. Graves stumbled but didn't fall.

"When he went ahead, he cut me off," Graves said. "That caused me to slow down a lot. I was not going to let him lead the last lap."

And he didn't. Graves retook the lead, and he and Savage battled until the start of the final turn. From there, Graves showed the necessary gumption, pulling away for a 4:17 split and the victory.

"Once I saw that he was not far ahead, I knew I could get him," said Graves, who ran a 4:13 at the Florida Relays earlier this season. "My teammates did all the work just to get me in position."

It didn't look that way early. Leadoff leg Thomas Tallerico has a strained calf, which has made it hard for him to start. He was near the back of the field early before moving up to fifth or sixth. Harris then romped through his leg, moving the Falcons up to the top three.

"We thought if we got Kyle in a good spot, he can do what he usually does," Tallerico said.

And that's exactly what Graves did.