

But just when it appeared the outcome was history, Dennis gathered himself and came back, ran the next incline hard and took the lead.

The pair went through two miles in 9:56 with Dennis in the lead, and Kahsay tucked in behind him, but the upper Manhattan resident knew then that the race was his.

"He (Dennis) is probably very good at longer distances," Kahsay said, "but I knew then that he didn't have the foot speed."

Dennis' assessment exactly.

"I did all right at the pace we ran for the first two miles," he said. "But once he picked up, I couldn't stay with him; the legs didn't respond.

"But through three miles, I

tried not to lose contact because I wasn't sure how he felt."

Everything was fine with Kahsay, except his time. "It was slow," he said, "so after 2½ miles, I just went my way."

An 18-second lead on the turn on to Luten became 35 seconds at the finish.

Proffitt also ran that last 1½ miles, but for a completely different reason.

"I don't have a great kick; plus, I haven't been on the track much," she explained.

"I had run the first mile conservatively — I've blown too many races on that first mile — and I was afraid someone would come up on me on the straightaway on Luten."

Smith had designs.

"She (Proffitt) was running on the outside, so I saw her at around 2½ miles," said Smith, fresh from the ECAC championships on Friday and her graduation Saturday.

"I decided to try to catch up."

Too late.

"I tried to push on that last hill," Proffitt said. "I like hills; I seem to do better on them."

"I wanted to get enough of a cushion."

Which she did.