



RUNNER'S WORLD

99-Year-Old Upsets 92-Year-Old in Thrilling Sprint

Seven years and 0.05 seconds separated Orville Rogers and Dixon Hemphill at the 2017 Masters Indoor Track Championships.

By [Kit Fox](#) FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2017, 9:04 AM
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Dixon Hemphill wishes he would have simply leaned at the finish. Maybe he didn't do it because of lack of experience—he was, after all, the youngest of the two competitors in the race. Or maybe he didn't do it because of his replacement hip.

"I think had I leaned a little bit, I would have won," Hemphill, 92, told *Runner's World* on February 21.

Donning a pair of prescription sunglasses because he lost his normal reading glasses while traveling, Hemphill (in lane 4 in the video above), a retired businessman from Fairfax, Virginia, was just beaten in the 60-meter-dash at the USATF Masters Indoor Track & Field Championships on February 18. It was a photo finish—five-hundredths of a second separated him and the only other runner in the heat, 99-year-old World War II veteran and pilot Orville Rogers.

Hemphill led for 55 meters but was nipped at the line.

"I took off, and I was a little bit ahead so I thought, 'This is going well,'" Hemphill said. Rogers executed a late surge to achieve the come-from-behind win. He finished in 18.00, Hemphill in 18.05.

The elder competitor credits the victory, in part, to the visualization he does while training up to three times a week at a gym near his home in Dallas, Texas.

“I started years ago visualizing success in whatever race I participate in,” Rogers said. “That’s still my objective: I train hard and I visualize crossing the finish line out in front. And I work at it pretty consistently. It’s very rewarding to be able to accomplish what you set out to do.”



Orville Rogers, left, races Dixon Hemphill at the 2017 USATF Masters Indoor Track & Field Championships on February 18 in the 60-meter sprint. DAVE ALBO

Hemphill and Rogers have raced before. The pair met four years ago at a masters track meet—neither remembers which one. They’ve since developed a friendly rivalry. They run in the same heat as they are often the oldest runners in the meet, although they compete in different age groups and don’t vie for the same medals.

Rogers has defeated Hemphill in the 60-meter-dash at the USATF Indoor Championships four years in a row.

“I guess he has the speed and I have the distance,” Hemphill said while chuckling.

The sprint was the shortest of five events both runners completed over three days. They also faced off in the 200, 400, 800, and 1600 (Hemphill finished in 17:30, Rogers in 19:23). Hemphill was faster in each of the longer events, though they both were awarded five age-group gold medals.

Rogers said because of the sparse competition, he is less worried about podium position and more focused on time.

“I have no competition at all,” he said. “All I have to do it show up, suit up, and finish to get a medal.”

Which is why he is happy to have Hemphill on the track in the adjacent lane. They push each other to go faster.

Over the past decade, Rogers [has become a stalwart at national masters track meets](#). He has set age group world records in 13 events, from the 60 meters to the 3,000. He started running at age 50, after reading a book titled *Aerobics* by Dr. Ken Cooper.

“I love the thrill of preparation and training,” he said. “When I compete, I am not just running against the people out on the track at that moment, I am running against everyone who has run the event before me. That is gratifying to me.”

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On February 1 of this year, Rogers published his own book called *The Running Man*, which follows his journey as both an accomplished masters runner and a decorated pilot.

Hemphill began running 50 years ago after signing up for the mile race at a small track meet. He was a pole vaulter and discus thrower in college but joined the local Potomac Track Club later in life to stay in shape.

While training for his 61st triathlon at age 74, a car stuck him during a bike ride. He suffered a collapsed lung and broke several ribs and his pelvis, spending 41 nights in the hospital. He recovered and returned to running, not stopping for the past 18 years except for a brief period after hip replacement surgery in 2008.

“I compete at these events for the joy of running and the competition,” Hemphill said. “And then the comradeship.”

This year in Albuquerque, he traveled and roomed with a 72-year-old lawyer whom he met at a meet three years ago.

Rogers and Hemphill will next meet on the track this July at the USATF Masters Outdoor Championships in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Leading up to the next clash, Rogers said his younger competitor is trying to earn an advantage.

“I think he has tried to gain a little information through my book and through our visits together,” Rogers said with a laugh a few days after the meet. Rogers had just completed a 2.5-mile run, deciding to skip his normal weightlifting routine because he was still tired from competition.

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Hemphill, for his part, seems confident he can win the next time they surge on a straightaway.

“I know I can improve for the future,” he said. “There is training that I am not doing that I should.”

Maybe next time at the line, he will lean.