

ninth to first in the batting order, and at .416 had the highest on-base percentage among Harvard starters. One of two players to play all 42 games, he led the team with 55 hits, 13 doubles, and 17 stolen bases, recording a .325 batting average—to go with a .990 fielding percentage. After the season, in which Harvard went 22-20, he was one of three Crimson players voted First-Team All-Ivy.

“I think junior year was when everything started to slow down,” Skinner said. “I don’t

think there were any major physical adjustments I made per se, but all of a sudden I was just seeing the ball a lot better.”

In the first couple hundred milliseconds after a pitcher throws a ball, Skinner might notice a dot-like pattern in the spinning seams, alerting him that the pitch is a slider. If he’s preparing to steal second and notices a pitcher getting locked into a routine, he can take off at the moment the pitcher lifts his left foot. And though he is

the team’s only engineering concentrator, he said his approach to baseball and engineering are separate. Engineering is about analysis; baseball is about instincts.

Sometimes it’s no secret that Skinner will steal second. The pitcher knows, the catcher knows, everyone in the stadium knows. It is at times like these where everything slows down and his intuition kick in. Then, it’s just a footrace.

“That’s the most fun,” he said, smiling.

One Shoe, No Problem

BY THE TIME Kieran Tuntivate '20 gets on the line for a race, he’s already run it countless times in his head. During warm-ups, throughout practice, at night before the meet, he’s imagining how much it’s going to hurt: his form stiffening, his legs overloaded with lactic acid that won’t go away. He thinks about how fast the pace might be and which runner will challenge for the lead and when.

About two laps into the Ivy League Indoor Track and Field Championships 3,000-meter final, at Harvard’s Gordon track, on February 23, Tuntivate’s left shoe popped off. In the scenarios he had rehearsed, this one had not come up.

It wasn’t a shoe-tying problem. Some 300 meters into the race, a runner from Columbia stepped on the back heel of his left shoe, pulling it under his foot like a slipper. For 100 meters his options—none ideal—raced through his head. His first thought was to slip the shoe on while running, but the maneuver wasn’t possible. He thought about

moving to an outside lane and adjusting, but he had tightly tied his spikes beforehand and didn’t know if he could slip it on without falling hopelessly behind. He then allowed himself a moment of annoyance at his unluckiness, subtly pointed out his shoe situation to Alex Gibby, associate head coach, and let the shoe fall away without breaking stride.

“And when the shoe came off, my fourth thought was just, ‘Alright, whatever, relax,’” Tuntivate recalled. “I could almost feel some of the nervousness from some of my teammates and from Coach Gibby. It’s weird, but their nervousness almost helped me relax.”

Tuntivate makes relaxing seem easy, but it’s not. Lost shoe aside, this was his biggest weekend of the indoor track season. He came into the race as the favorite, but there were 15 other competi-

tors, and he had a target on his back. He was also hoping to race, and win, the 5,000-meter championship less than 24 hours later. The focus during the 3,000 was not just on winning, but doing so without any undue strain.

Injuries while running barefoot were also a concern. Harvard’s indoor track, renovated right before this season, has a “tuned” layer of butyl rubber with embedded granules, giving runners more bounce and traction. “It’s not sandpaper, but it’s damn close,” said Gibby. Indoor tracks generally stretch half the length of an outdoor track, so there are more frequent and tighter turns, placing an increased centripetal-force burden on his now-shoeless left foot. Continuing the race meant both coach and athlete accepted that the foot was going to be carved up by race’s end.

Even more serious, every athlete was wearing track spikes: ultra-light, tightly-fitting running shoes equipped with metal spikes for increased traction. In a race of this caliber, no one would wear a bulkier, more supportive, spike-less running shoe. In a sea of spikes, one does not want to be barefoot. But Tuntivate continued. “Generally, I’m not going to drop out unless my coach literally pulls me off the track,” he said. “It would’ve been nice, but it was never a really a serious option.”

As the shoe slipped off, Gibby considered pulling his athlete out of the race, watching for any signs that he was losing control. “Kieran, in general, is somewhat of a stoic,” the coach said. “You’re looking for mechanical changes. You’re looking for tension, frustration—things of that matter boiling up. And none of that was present.” He was also thinking about the long-term consequences of the race. If the injuries were serious, Tuntivate could be hindered for weeks or months, jeopardizing his competitiveness in major outdoor meets. A dual-citizen of Thailand and the United States, Tuntivate has national-class ambitions. After dominat-



**Kieran Tuntivate '20,
shoeless and in the lead**

ing Delaware's distance scene in high school, he's continued his success at Harvard. In an interview, he did not bring up his 2019 Ivy League Cross Country Championship victory, nor did he mention his Thai national records in the indoor 3,000-meters and the outdoor 3,000- and 5,000-meters. Even if this race didn't derail his training, the 5,000-meter final the following day would be totally out of the question.

In the time that it took Gibby to process the situation, Tuntivate had already begun the process of "zoning out." Will Battershill, another Harvard junior, had jumped to second place and was running along his right shoulder. Though Battershill did not notice his teammate's bare foot, Tuntivate was confident he would give him space to run. With adequate spacing and the familiarity of a teammate, his comfort increased. He said he barely remembers anything from the middle third of the race. Maintaining a sense of calm while churning out laps well below a 4:30-minute-mile pace requires superb muscular and cardiovascular fitness, even for the dual-shoed.

With about a mile and a half to go, Battershill picked up the pace. Tuntivate realized the original race plan—which he had mentally scrapped—was still on. The two were supposed to start pushing the pace here, stringing out the field and leaving all but the most fit competitors behind. A lap later, two runners surged into the lead pack, with one passing him and one close enough to touch. He hoped that more runners weren't on the way and that no one would clip his foot. "The more people that pass you, the harder it's going to get to physically pass them back," he said. "And mentally, it would be really draining just to feel 15 people pass you."

The unguarded foot, uncomfortable but manageable for most of the race, began to worsen with each step as he accelerated. His thick callouses had worn away and he could feel skin clump beneath his foot. He compared the feeling to "running on a pebble." (Several news sites that published pictures of his post-race foot included a content warning.)

With 400 meters to go, Tuntivate bolted into the lead, in a final effort for the win. He remembers his brother once telling him that in a race like this, you get one, maybe two chances to make a move. This was it. If he got passed again, he didn't think he'd have the strength, mentally or physically, to come back. Brian Zabilski, Columbia's 2018 Ivy League

10,000-meter champion, was not going to let him off easy, running an arm's-length away.

Tuntivate doesn't remember how his foot felt until the final turn of the race, when he was running an under 4-minute-mile pace in a sprint to the finish and it was under maximum strain. From the roar of the crowd, he sensed that the race was not over, and that he could not relax in the final meters. He crossed the line about a half-second in front of Zabilski.

"And he did it without his left shoe at the end!" the announcer exclaimed. Neither he, nor almost anybody else watching, had realized the shoe had been gone for about 13 laps.

Tuntivate stood, hands-on-knees, at the edge of the track as the Harvard coaches gathered around him. Nicolas Benitez, the team's athletic trainer, cradled him like a small child and carried him to the trainer's table, and handled his foot. The award ceremony was delayed. He accepted his medal on crutches.

There was no question in anyone's mind that Tuntivate would not run the next day. His foot looked like the victim of a cheese-grater ambush. Gibby remembered

estimating the chances at 0 percent. His brother, who had traveled to watch the race, got one look and texted his family that he'd be out the next day.

Tuntivate, for his part, prepared for the next day's race as if nothing had happened. He visualized the possibilities over and over again, this time factoring in the extra pain. The morning of the race, he asked his brother to get his pre-race coffee for him—a precaution to limit wear on his foot. Skeptical, his brother told him he'd do it if an hour before the race he actually looked ready. When it became clear he would actually race, his brother brought him a coffee.

Tuntivate won that 5,000-meter race, too, beating 22 competitors in his regular, spikeless training shoes, because it hurt too much to wear his track spikes.

"There's a lot of attention on the 3K and winning that with one shoe, and that was really impressive," Gibby said. "But honestly, what I think is far more impressive was him organizing and setting himself up mentally and emotionally to compete the next day."

Surely Tuntivate's pre-race visualizations now include one more scenario.

~JACOB SWEET

A Cathedral of Sweat

Basketball teams fall short of NCAAs again.

MOMENTS AFTER Harvard lost to Yale 97-85 in the Ivy League tournament championship, Stemberg coach Tommy Amaker congratulated the Bulldogs on their victory while sitting in the Eli Trophy Room. Bulldog pawmarks were everywhere: the walls adorned with portraits of famous alumni (including baseball player George H.W. Bush), display cases filled with footballs celebrating the Harvard-Yale rivalry. There was even Yale-branded bottled water

Noah Kirkwood '22, the Ivy League Rookie of the Year, emerged as one of Harvard's top offensive threats.



SIDELINE PHOTOS BY THE IVY LEAGUE

in front of the coach and point guard Bryce Aiken '20, who looked downcast despite having scored 38 points to break his own single-game tournament scoring record. Amaker declared the Bulldogs "very deserving of the victory and representing our conference in the NCAA tournament."

The previous night, Friends coach Kathy Delaney-Smith had sat in the same spot, star-