



Photo taken at Chepkoilel Campus marrum tarck near Eldoret. It can get very muddy following rain, we waited a couple of days to fit this session in! 800m runners Anna Ndege (TAN) and Jeruto Kiptum are just finishing a 400 rep. The men at the side are lining up to start their next effort. Among those visible in the group are Daniel Komen (WR holder at 3000m - 7:20, and the only man in history to run two miles sub 8min), Paul Bitok (2 time Olympic 5000m medallist), John Kosgei (Commonwealth Games s/c champion, paced Komen to his records), Benjamin Limo (World XC 4k and World 5000m Champion) and a few 3:35/13:0x guys. Leading the B-group coming up the home straight are Willy Kirui (3rd Commonwealth 5000 - Ismael's brother, Moses Kiptanui's cousin) and Abraham Chebii (12:52, World XC medallist).

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM KENYAN ATHLETES, THEIR TRAINING AND THEIR LIFESTYLES?

Being asked this question seems strange. Kenyans got most of their knowledge on training from European coaches. Questions we need to think about....

What has happened since the days when Coe, Cram, Ovett, Elliott, McKean, Stewart, Foster, Bedford, McLeod, et al ruled the roost?

Why are Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda and Tanzania dominant in distance terms?

Should recent American performances give us hope?

Why do do our women seem to be doing better?

What do Kenyan athletes think we need to be doing?

MY BACKGROUND

Raised on a Harrier tradition in Newcastle and have run for Elswick Harriers, TVH, Hounslow, St Mary's Richmond AC

University of Nottingham (Psychology), Brunel University (Sport and Exercise Sciences), UKA Level 3 Endurance

In 2000 started to work for Kim McDonald as an Athlete Supervisor, after his death became Athlete Services Manager and then IAAF Athlete Representative and Marathon coach for PACE Sports Management. During that time athletes from my squad won the Greatest Race on Earth, the World Half Marathon title, multiple Boston Marathon Masters titles, 2nd in Amsterdam,....

KENYAN CHILDREN

Kenyan children do indeed run to and from school. People often live miles away from villages and towns and that distance has to be commuted daily. They often go home and help around the plot of land doing manual labour, they play with sticks and balls, and they chase passing athletes down the road. These children are fit. Alberto Salazar commented that they have run circa 15,000 miles more than the average Western child by the time they are 18. He also said that the easiest way to close the gap between 'us and them' would be to send a load of school buses and computers out there to make the children's lifestyle more like ours. Ironically, among the least conditioned of the children in Kenya are the children of athletes who live in nice houses with satellite TV and a driver!

Remember too that these 15,000 miles have all been run at between 6000 and 8000 feet of altitude where they have been living all their lives. The benefits to aerobic performance of living (and less so training) at altitude are well documented.

All the time, children are expected to show respect to elders and people in authority; at home, and at school. This disciplined approach to life has an important role to play in their later training.

There is a commonly held belief over here that some athletes lie about their age to compete in junior competitions. My belief is that some of this has happened in the past but that authorities are much stricter on it now. I know of one female athlete who lied about her age claiming she was *older* than she was so she could compete in the Olympics in 2000 when under age.

KENYAN MOTIVATION

It is quite clear that the motivation for a Kenyan to become an athlete is now a financial one. There are so many role models who have gone abroad, made money and been able to change their family's life. Even a few hundred dollars can buy a small plot of land for growing maize, or a building made of stone rather than a mud house.

The most successful athletes normally buy land near their birthplace, build a large house there and also own a house in the town. Most are farmers but many have invested in shopping arcades, petrol stations or other businesses and spent money on schools near their home. For the successful athlete balancing businesses and training can be difficult and many make the wise decision to wait until retired to start a business. Komen, Kiptanui and Ngeny all invested in property in Teddington.

KENYAN TRAINING CAMPS

Most camps are run by agents (PACE, Global, the Rosas) some by retired athletes (Moses Tanui). Athletes stay there through the week and many go home after the Saturday morning session and return on Sunday evening in order to go to church with their family. Rent is paid for by managers, athletes generally contribute to food. Younger development athletes bring produce from home if possible and/or help around the camp to earn their place. An established athlete will act as treasurer.

PACE have a camp in Kaptagat, a small hamlet 40km east of Eldoret. Circa 30-40 athletes stay there. Accommodation is basic, dorms of two to six beds with the best athletes getting the best rooms. A cook is employed who cooks over a fire in an outbuilding. There are a handful of marathon runners based there (we used to have a separate marathon camp up the road) but most are XC/track runners.

These camps operate all year as opposed to the camps run by Kenya Athletics which precede championships. There is a general consensus among athletes that they like the National Squad Camp (normally in Embu) prior to the World Cross, but prefer to be allowed to train in their normal groups prior to track championships. The governing body like to be in control of things.

Often aspiring athletes who are not of the standard to be invited to be in the camp will find lodgings nearby and 'appear' every time there is a run in the hope that they will be spotted.

A TYPICAL DAY AT PACE KAPTAGAT

06:00 Rise before sunrise. 40-60min relaxed on unsurfaced roads (starts very slow and picks up). Athletes stretch and do basic exercises

07:30 Breakfast - white 'Mother's Pride' type bread - sweet with preservatives, and milky chai - tea made from leaves, milk and *lots* of sugar - an acquired taste!

08:00 Sleep

10:00 Jog to forest roads or drive to track for main session

12:30 Wash or shower - hot water heated on fire

(the athletes are generally missing the golden 60min window to kick start refuelling - something we can do aim to do better)

13:00 Lunch - Rice, tomatoes, potatoes, beans, salt. More chai

14:00 Various activities - some athletes rest, some pop to Eldoret (not encouraged), younger athletes wash kit to earn place in camp

16:00 Easy run 30-40min on trails, slow throughout, stretch and exercises

17:00 Wash or shower, TV - news - local and international - WWF, terrible Kenyan soaps, phone calls

19:00 Dinner - Ugali (playdough texture made of maize flour - pure carbs), greens (spinach type local produce, strong iron taste), stew made of tomatoes, mutton (all possible parts of it), stock powder for taste

20:00 TV, pool, darts

21:00 Bed

There is very little snacking or grazing between meals. What little there is is usually on fruit - normally only the senior athletes with money. Some drink bottled water (and I would recommend that) others drink from the spring.

MENTAL APPROACH

The mental approach of the vast majority of Kenyan athletes is a real strength. They are generally focussed, disciplined and determined. They rarely dwell on poor performances, accepting that they must take the rough with the smooth.

"The Kenyan athletes do not set limits on themselves. They run free. They are not scared to push themselves to the maximum but if things don't go to plan they don't over-analyse the situation. Today I miscalculated, tomorrow is a new day." - Ricky Simms, Director PACE Sports Management

This positive approach to the mental side of things played a big part in Noah Ngeny winning the Olympic Games in 2000. Kim McDonald had spent the previous months telling Ngeny that he would win the race.

TRAINING

Kenyan athletes train in large groups of athletes of a similar ability. They train a lot.

There are only three tartan tracks in Kenya and all three are in Nairobi. Two of them are within 200m of each other as one was built as the warm up track to the main stadium track at Kasarani Stadium when the African Games were held in Kenya. Other tracks are made of a marram surface which gets very

waterlogged when wet. When very dry, it can be loose and very dusty.



Olympic 1500 Champions Noah Ngeny's legs

Most roads in Kenya are not surfaced and athletes stick rigidly to the unsurfaced roads, they hate running in tarmac. Even marathon runners avoid the road - and has lead to race-day problems in the past. These roads can get very muddy after the rains and the mud is thick and clay-like. Runs are finished completed with shoes that weigh five times what they did when you started.

Morning runs start before sunrise and at Altitude it is very cold. Athletes generally head off in hats gloves, tracksuits and tights - a little over kill I always thought as I'd be boiling by the end of the run when the sun had risen. John Kellogg has written a good article on the way these runs are run, starting very easy and building the pace throughout when the body is ready.

Track sessions aren't anything fancy, just standard fare. There is a discipline in the way they are performed though. Athletes cross the line in single file so if the first man runs 58, they all run 58. Compare this with most tracks in the UK where athletes race off the bend. Athletes take turn to lead reps out and an athlete struggling to keep the pace will often be made to take the next rep so they *have* to keep it going.

There is a definite progression throughout the year. Track athletes will take three or more weeks completely off after the summer, jog for a couple of weeks at home and then return to camps on 1st November. In the winter and spring everything is controlled, no one is forcing things and sessions have target times. Again, compare with the number of groups in the UK who are eye balls out down the track every Tuesday or Thursday. I remember seeing Moses Kiptanui really lay in to athletes for going too fast in a hill session.

Come the competitive season athletes are working hard.... Tracks in Portland, Kingston and Twickenham have seen some amazing sessions. Think 4x1600 in 60sec laps! They know they have to work hard at this time and there is a general belief that sessions can be harder than the races.

Track sessions at *all* times of year are followed by quick strides, 15min jogging and stretching. They are preceded by anything from 15-25min running, 'loosening exercises' (to call them drills would be misleading) and strides of up to 200m.

I believe reported mileages of Kenyan athletes are very approximate as distances are very hard to measure. Typically kms might be marked out for 'road' reps (measured by a car) and there are some measured loops but lots of runs are not measured. Dr Rosa uses a famous route with his marathon runners which starts with 19km of continuous uphill running and then a flat section to finish at their camp.

All runs are followed by sit ups, other miscellaneous exercises and stretching. Often there is striding too.



Athletes of all disciplines are spread across the altitude areas of the country, however there is a higher percentage of 800m runners based in Nairobi than in other areas of the country. Similarly, a higher percentage of 800 runners than runners of other events spend time away from Kenya to train. With the poor weather in early spring, it is not possible to train at 200/400 pace consistently hence the migration to Nairobi's tracks and abroad. For others, they will arrive in Teddington ahead of 5000 runners and have a solid block of speed work to bring them up to race shape for the European season.

For PACE athletes, group sessions are set by the coach in Britain with a Kenyan coach overseeing and reporting back. It is important that these coaches are people whose judgements can be trusted in order that appropriate training and races can be planned. Noah Ngeny fulfils that role currently having retired from competing. He is trusted and respected by the athletes which works well.

Easy runs are very very easy. Kenyan athletes sleep a lot. They walk to the shops very slowly. If they aren't training, they are resting!

MEDICINE

Athletes training in Kenya have no access to sports medicine although there is a research hospital in Eldoret to deal with more mundane medical issues.

Athletes generally get massage once or twice a week. This is rarely from qualified masseurs but from people they trust and give information to on the massages they've received in Europe. PACE used to bring a masseur over to watch Gerard. These are very deep, very painful massages. There is a belief among many of the athletes that if it isn't hurting it isn't working.

The use of ice is very limited because of the lack of a freezer at the camp, but athletes recognise the role ice baths can have. At the old PACE marathon camp athletes would sit on a ledge in the deep stream running by the camp after long sessions and runs.

'STRENGTH & CONDITIONING' AND RUNNING FORM

There are no S&C coaches in Kenya! However, Kenyan athletes are generally exceptionally strong, flexible and most possess amazing style.

When Kim McDonald was alive they had a camp in Nyahururu where Jimmy Beuttah was the main coach. He was a retired Navy soldier who had been a boxer. Hands like a bunch of bananas but the calmest most thoughtful and intelligent person you could hope to meet. Conditioning was his speciality. He would put athletes through their paces at 10:00 on days when there was no session. These were all basic exercises but could be described of as mixture of plyometrics, core work and lower limb work. Least favourite among the athletes was the 'sitting on the toilet reading the newspaper' exercise which was a static quad/gleut strengthening exercise - you can imagine the position held!



In Portugal pre-World Indoors David Lelei was struggling with a tight hamstring which probably cost him a medal in the race. Con Milton was there with his group and couldn't believe he could still kick his feet above his head doing drills. (Incidentally I've never seen anyone down a litre of coke as quick as Lelei after a session in Kingston!)

Athletes often join the Armed Forces to guarantee an income away from running and beyond their running careers. It would always be a worry when an emerging athlete had to go to an AF camp for months at an end on signing up. Without fail, most of them would come out stronger, more robust and more successful. AF Champs remain a fertile recruiting ground for managers.

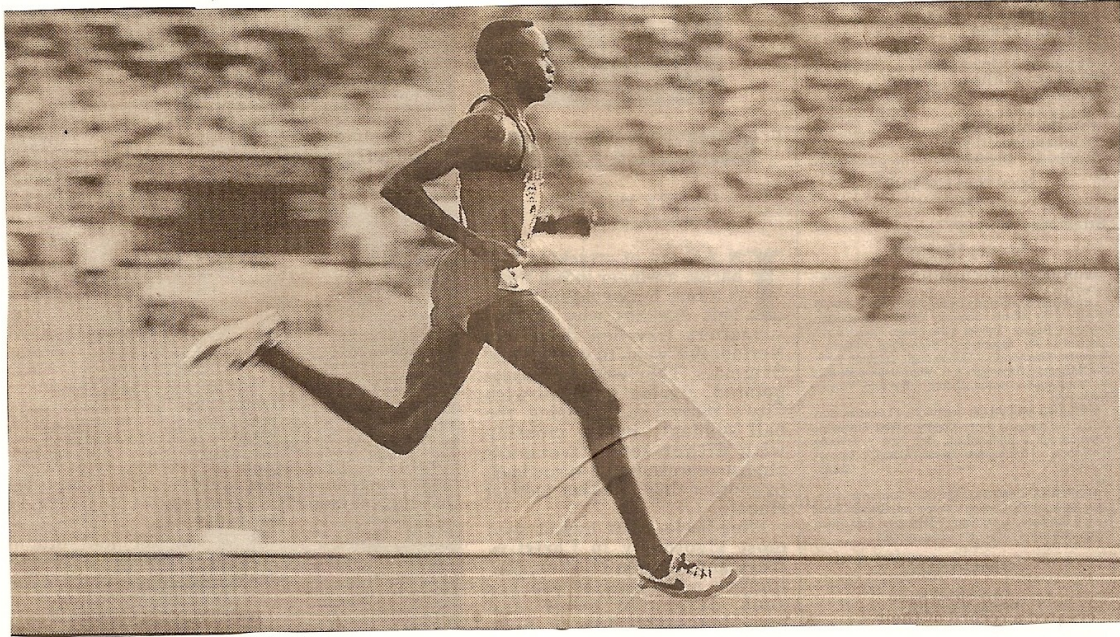
Mud from the trails provides an obvious form of resistance training. It always amuses me when TV commentator say on the TV that 'the Africans' won't like the conditions! It is us who avoid the mud and stick to the road when it rains!

Feet are strong from an early age as they run barefoot a lot of the time.

It is well known that Kenyan's mostly posses very good posture. Gerard Hartmann once commented to me as we saw Kiptanui walk down Teddington High Street "It is good to see he is still humble". It was tongue in cheek as Moses was walking so tall and proud it looked like the affected walk of an Emperor.

I often wonder whether the trails and mud also contributes to their long stride and the high carriage of their heel through close to their buttocks. Certainly the fewer strides they have to take the better, and running on trails and clearing branches, stones etc encourages knee lift and heel. Think mini hurdles? Quick feet?

The gentle cycle
of Kipketer's feet
is aesthetically
delightful blur



Hang around sport for long enough and the best — the very best, that is — seem to be able to step out of the flat background, come off the page, if you like. The sharp intake of breath that tells you that brilliance is being unfurled before you is certainly induced by Kipketer. Coe's 800m record of 1m 41.75sec has stood as a British fortress for 16 years. Kipketer equalled it in Stockholm a month ago and is closing on the outright record like a yacht gliding across still seas.

It ought to be established by some scientific inquiry that Kipketer's feet actually touch the ground.

No evidence of that is available to the naked eye.

Kipketer is Coe's heir in two senses. He wins the struggle against time just as emphatically and he moves with the same beautiful ease. Those who examined Coe's running style closely say he had the same power to rise almost hydraulically on the track and an equally fluid and friction-free cadence.

Where Michael Johnson is all upright scurrying power, the gentle cycle of Kipketer's feet is an aesthetically delightful blur. "He looks at the 400m point the way Michael Johnson does at the 200," said Mark Everett, of the United States, who was fourth in the first semi-final. "I do what I can, but he's in a class of his own."

STEEPLECHASE

Despite their perceived global domination of the event, it may be that the steeplechase is the distance event (over 1500) at which we might have the most chance of closing the gap. In my years of working with Moses Kiptanui and Stephen 'Shaheen' Cheronu I have never known of a Kenyan training over barriers on the track, either in sessions or in hurdle drills. The most I have seen is strides over two hurdles at the end of a session, or some young athletes making ramshackle hurdles out of pieces of wood which they assembled in the camp's sloping garden and proceeded to do figure of 8 loops over and around. French and Swedish (admittedly African-born) athletes have shown that global medals can be challenged for in the event. By encouraging our best distance runners to 'chase', addressing the technical side of the event, and 'beating them' over the barriers we can compete in the race.

QUESTION PUT TO ATHLETES

WHAT CAN I TELL BRITISH COACHES AND ATHLETES ARE THE SECRETS OF KENYAN SUCCESS?

ANSWERS

"Be committed and persevere, believe in yourself. Nothing is impossible, but nothing comes easy. Be hard and enjoy" Luke Kipkosgei (7:27, 12:56, 2nd World XC 4k)

"Hardwork, dedication, obedience, encouragement from coach. Understanding from both sides. Athletes to follow programme fully without fail. The coach from time to time to gauge progress by making athletes compete among themselves. Lastly exposure to let them eradicate fear from their opponent." Stephen Ndungu, 2:09, two time LA marathon winner

"Let them love athletics as a career. Endure pain in training so they can fight easy. Follow programme fully and obey coaches. Above all discipline is the key to ever success. Let them emulate elite athletes knowing they can also do like or better than them." John Kibowen (3:30, 7:29, 12:54, 2 time World XC 4k Champion, World 5000m Bronze

"First they must take note have discipline, be committed and train as team and finally the coach's program" - Ondoro Osoro 2:06:54 - world's fastest debut marathon after the time..... ran 2:10 after being shot through neck by thieves who kidnapped his child, never regained full use of one arm - one tough cookie

"..be simple, serious, disciplined and focussed towards achieving the aim of success in any level from training to competition. Be the best at all times." Paul Koech (12:56, 26:36, 2:07, 2nd World XC, 1st World Half)

"What made UK mid-distance running a power house in the early years?" - Jimmy 'Simba' Beuttah, coach IAAF camp, Eldoret

....and with Beuttah's comment we are back where we started.

We hold a number of advantages over Kenyan and other East African runners which we shouldn't forget about. Collectively, we have as much or more knowledge as the Kenyan coaches We have superior medical services. We have more trained physiotherapists and masseurs. We have better training facilities which are not as weather-dependent.

As coaches we need to develop that endurance base British children miss out on progressively over a number of years but (as Liz McColgan has said recently) we shouldn't shy away from introducing children to endurance training. This can be done without losing speed. The Kenyans have a head start but we can catch up. We shouldn't expect our marathon runners to reach maturity at the same age as Sammy Wanjiru!

Kenyan athletes look lean, they are often tall and with long limbs but we have the knowledge and skills to develop good running skills and actions from a young age. Teach them about posture.

We have to inspire our athletes to the match the levels of commitment and dedication shown by previous British runners. They should be encouraged to make the most of the make or break 6th form and University years before they have to work.

Working in groups is a must. Getting runners together to share the load is of benefit to everyone.

The importance of rest and recovery should never be downplayed. Make the most of the knowledge we have regarding refuelling

I like the quotes from the athletes. Hard work. Discipline. Communication. Positive mindset. (Read Charlie Spedding's book). As coaches we should do all we can to help athletes develop and fulfil their potential. As suggested by the athletes we should only work with athletes who 'buy in to' the programmes we set up. It must be a two-way relationship.

Harambee - *working together to achieve more*

