

KENYAN MARATHON RUNNING

Kenyan athletes have dominated most of the big city marathons this year with relentless enthusiasm, setting records and showing the rest of the world how it's done.

by *Lennon Wicks*

Kenya's Martin Lel, Richard Limo, and Evans Rutto leading the 2006 London Marathon. Getty Images

Below: Kenya's winning team from the 2005 Chiba Relay, includes superstars such as Catherine Ndereba. Getty Images



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FORGET the traditional 3,000m steeplechase, which was a Kenyan fundamental until the Qataris stole the best local athletes with promises of untold riches. Cast aside the 5,000m and 10,000m races, which Kenyans made their own before the Ethiopians crashed the party. Marathon running is Kenya's new forte. This year alone they have won close to eighty percent of the major road races in the world.

These marathon victories have made millionaires out of a number of Kenyan athletes, and the escalating reputation of Kenyans as potential record breakers means they attract top-dollar appearance fees and compete for purses in the region of US\$100,000.

Despite their well-known dominance in the shorter distances, Kenya's marathon success

is nothing new. The nation's marathon victories stretch back to the 1960s. The late Kanuti Sum is regarded as Kenya's pioneer marathoner, despite history showing he raced with limited success.

Kenyans truly took the marathon world by storm in the 1980s when the likes of Hussein and Douglas Wakiihuri came onto the scene.

Hussein was a big city marathon king, winning the Boston Marathon three times. Wakiihuri, by contrast, captured the nation's hearts after patriotically taking part in and winning World Championship, Olympic and Commonwealth titles. Their exit from the event saw the emergence of Ndeti, who made Boston his own, winning and setting the course record.

The 1990s were boom years for Kenyan marathon runners with Tegla Loroupe, Joseph

Chebet and Moses Tanui dominating. Loroupe in particular was in a class of her own, recording a series of victories on her way to shattering the world record.

Thanks to the current generation of ace marathoners, led by Paul Tergat and Catherine Ndereba, the momentum has continued into the 21st century. Tergat claimed the marathon record in Berlin in 2003, less than two years after making his debut over the distance. A former world record holder, Ndereba has also won Olympic and World silver medals.

In recent times, Kenyans have dominated the marathon circuit. One of the most recent triumphs came in the London Marathon, where Felix Limo and Martin Lel defied the odds to claim first and second places respectively. Ethiopian pre-race favourite Haile Gebrselassie was

blown away by the punishing pace set by the Kenyans and walked across the line in ninth place. 2004 Olympic Champion Stefano Baldini, double World Champion Jaouad Gharib and former World Record Holder Khalid Khannouchi proved no match for the Kenyans.

This feat came barely a week after Kenyans also claimed glory in the Boston Marathon, winning both the men's and women's races. It was a similar result in the Rotterdam Marathon, as the world's second fastest marathon runner Sammy Korir led a Kenyan sweep.

Their total domination of the big city marathons, however, stands in contrast to their poor form at championship events, such as the Olympics and the World Championships.

Three time Boston Marathon champion Ibrahim Hussein Kipkemboi attributes Kenya's dominance in big city marathons to the attractive incentives on offer. "The difference with the Olympics is that in big city marathons, there is a guarantee of returning home with something,

whereas in championships one has to win to be sure," Kipkemboi explains. "Here they are guaranteed of the appearance fee depending on your value, victory purse, plus other bonuses from the shoe company."

Former two time Boston Marathon champion Moses Tanui agrees, saying that Kenyans will continue dominating big city marathons for some time to come. He thinks the reason why Kenyans are not performing well in the championship events lies with athletics management. "To have good runners you must invest in them.

Kenyans are performing

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Above: The depth of Kenyan marathoning is truly phenomenal; a small group is seen competing here in the 2006 Rotterdam Marathon. Getty Images

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He adds that being put in camp for a month is not enough to notch victory. "To win Boston or London you need to dedicate yourself to training for slightly over four months." Tanui thinks most top runners turn down opportunities to run for Kenya because the training is hurried and

haphazard. Besides, there is little in terms of incentives.

Kenyans have always made successful runners, from the 5km to marathon, and with only New York and Chicago as the major marathons left in the year, it's clear that this African country is becoming an unbeatable force in the event. The question remains though - how will we learn to defeat them? **RAYL**



Paul Tergat just manages to edge past Sammy Korir to set a new world record at the 2003 Berlin Marathon. Getty Images

Osaka Marathon - 29/01/06

1. Catherine Ndereba 2.25.05

Dubai Marathon - 17/02/06

1. Joseph Ngeny 2.13.02
3. Elias Chelimo 2.15.01
5. Julius Sugat 2.15.34
7. Henry Cheron 2.16.50
8. Wilson Kenei 2.16.54
10. David Kiptoo 2.19.55

Los Angeles - 19/03/06

1. Benson Cheron 2.08.40
2. Laban Kipkemboi 2.10.08
3. Simon Wangai 2.10.35
4. Thomas Onwenga 2.11.47

Rome Marathon - 26/03/06

1. David Kipkorir 2.08.38

Lisbon Half Marathon - 26/03/06

Men
1. Martin Lel 59.30

2. Robert Cheruiyot 59.35
3. Samuel Wanjiru 59.37
4. Tergat 59.42
5. Felix Limo 1.01.12

Women
1. Salina Kosgei 1.00.52
2. Susan Chepkemei 1.08.00
3. Rose Cheruiyot 1.09.34

Prague Half Marathon - 01/04/06

Men
1. Stephen Kibiwott 1.01.15
2. Stanley Salil 1.01.38
3. Justus Kiprono 1.05.08
Women
1. Caroline Kwambai 1.10.08

Paris Marathon - 09/04/06

2. Kiprotich Kenei 2.08.51

Rotterdam Marathon - 09/04/06

1. Sammy Korir 2.06.38
2. Paul Kiprop 2.06.44

3. Charles Kibiwott 2.06.52

Boston Marathon - 17/04/06

Men
1. Robert Cheruiyot 2.07.14
2. Benjamin Maiyo 2.08.21

Women
1. Rita Cheptoo 2.23.38

London Marathon - 22/04/06

Men
1. Felix Limo 2.06.39
2. Martin Lel 2.06.41
Women
3. Susan Chepkemei 2.21.46

Belgrade Marathon - 22/04/06

Men
1. Japheth Kosgei 2.10.54
2. Kioko Kikum 2.11.30
3. Ruben Mutumwo 2.13.31
Women

2. Chemkil Chilapong 2.36.10