

Dan Rather Reports

Episode Number: 725

Episode Title: In the Running

Description: From a small town in Kenya come most of the world's greatest runners. These men and women could win almost any road race in the world — but here they are just another face in the crowd. On the eve of the Olympics, we travel to Kenya to see why they can run so fast, so far.

ACT 1: TEASE

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TONIGHT...RUNNING FARTHER...FASTER...THAN YOU CAN POSSIBLY IMAGINE...ON THE EVE OF THE OLYMPICS, THE KENYANS KICK IT INTO HIGH GEAR.

WILSON KIPSANG, MARATHONER

“I can win.” That’s really what comes into my mind, that I can beat these guys. No matter how painful the situation is, no matter how hard it is. I can make it.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ALSO, AN UNLIKELY COACH. MEET THE MAN WHO HELPED BRING THESE AFRICAN ATHLETES FAME AND FORTUNE.

COLM O’CONNELL, COACH

I didn’t come as kind of a savior, I didn’t come as somebody who is really going to shake up the whole community and do something extraordinary. I just was willing to kind of learn the culture and then, ever so slowly, work from within.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PLUS...WHY ARE THEY SO GOOD? SCIENTISTS WANT TO KNOW WHY ATHLETES FROM ONE SMALL TOWN HAVE BECOME THE BEST IN THE WORLD AT THEIR SPORT.

YANNIS PITSILADIS, UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Countries can spend a lot of money on the preparation of the elite athletes, using every technology that’s available. You can’t circumvent hard training and the desire to succeed which is so paramount here.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE'LL BRING YOU THE NEWS, TONIGHT ON DAN RATHER REPORTS.

ACT 2: IN THE RUNNING

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

GOOD EVENING. IN THREE DAYS ATHLETES FROM 216 COUNTRIES ACROSS THE GLOBE WILL COMPETE IN THE LONDON OLYMPICS - ALL AIMING TO BE CALLED THE BEST IN THE WORLD....

BUT IN LONG DISTANCE TRACK EVENTS... THIS EPIC INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION MAY END UP BEING A FIGHT AMONG A HANDFUL OF ATHLETES FROM A TINY TOWN IN JUST ONE COUNTRY...THAT'S HOW MUCH KENYAN ATHLETES HAVE COME TO DOMINATE LONG DISTANCE RUNNING.

TONIGHT, WE TAKE YOU TO KENYA, ON THE EAST COAST OF AFRICA ...TO UNCOVER THE SECRETS OF HOW ATHLETES FROM ONE OF THE POOREST COUNTRIES HAVE ALL BUT TAKEN OVER ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR SPORTS IN THE WORLD.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

KENYA... A LAND OF MAJESTIC BEAUTY...WHERE MOTHER NATURE IS AT HER MOST SPECTACULAR.

DRIVE A FEW MILES IN ANY DIRECTION AND YOU'LL FIND VISTAS YOU COULD ONLY DREAM ABOUT IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD...BREATH TAKING WILDLIFE...LIVING AS IF TIME WERE STANDING STILL.

BUT FOR ALL THESE RICHES, KENYA IS ALSO A POOR NATION. FOR MANY PEOPLE HERE, SIMPLE SUBSISTENCE IS STILL THE NAME OF THE GAME.

IN MUCH OF THE COUNTRY, LIFE IS ABOUT AS SLOW AS IT GETS...BUT THERE IS ALSO A NEW KENYA...MOVING AT A WHIRLWIND PACE. IN A SMALL VILLAGE, ABOUT SIX HOUR'S DRIVE FROM NAIROBI, IS A PLACE WHERE ATHLETES FROM THIS IMPOVERISHED COUNTRY ARE BEING GROOMED INTO SUPERSTARS...THE BEST LONG DISTANCE RUNNERS IN THE WORLD.

WELCOME TO ITEN...A FARMING VILLAGE 8,000 FEET UP IN THE MOUNTAINS OF THE GREAT RIFT VALLEY. MANY RESIDENTS HAVE NO RUNNING WATER...THERE ARE NO STOPLIGHTS... AND THE ONE STADIUM IN TOWN HAS A TRACK THAT IS SO RUNDOWN, PRETTY MUCH ANY HIGH SCHOOL TRACK COACH IN AMERICA WOULD DEEM IT UNFIT FOR COMPETITION.

BUT THAT DOESN'T STOP THE THOUSAND FULL-TIME RUNNERS WHO LIVE HERE.

ON ANY MORNING OF ANY DAY, YOU WILL FIND HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE - WORLD CHAMPIONS ALONGSIDE THOSE TRAINING IN THE ONLY RUNNING CLOTHES THEY OWN -- OUT FOR A RUN ON THE TOWN'S RED DIRT ROADS.

BY 6 A.M. RUNNERS ARE ALREADY OUT POUNDING THE DIRT... FOR MANY, IT'S THE FIRST OF TWO OR EVEN THREE RUNNING SESSIONS OF THE DAY IN WHICH THEY GRIND OUT AS MANY AS 24 MILES. THESE ATHLETES COULD PROBABLY WIN NEARLY ANY ROAD RACE IN AMERICA. BUT HERE IN ITEN...THEY ARE JUST FACES IN THE CROWD.

SOME OF THESE RUNNERS KNOW WHEN THEIR NEXT RACE IS...OTHERS ARE JUST HOPING TO GET NOTICED ONE DAY BY A SPORTS MANAGER WHO MIGHT SIGN THEM UP FOR AN OVERSEAS COMPETITION.

BUT ONE THING IS FOR SURE -- NONE OF THESE PEOPLE ARE JOGGING SIMPLY TO STAY IN SHAPE OR TO LOSE A FEW POUNDS...HERE, RUNNING IS A JOB...WITH THE CHANCE OF A SERIOUS PAYCHECK. AND EVERYONE IN ITEN IS RUNNING TO WIN.

IT'S THE MANTRA WILSON KIPSANG, RESIDENT OF ITEN AND LIGHTENING FAST LONG DISTANCE RUNNER, REPEATS TO HIMSELF BEFORE EVERY RACE.

WILSON KIPSANG, MARATHONER

"I can win." That's really what comes into my mind, that I can beat these guys. No matter how painful the situation is, no matter how hard it is. I can make it; I can beat the guys.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND BEAT THE GUYS HE DID...WINNING THE LONDON MARATHON THIS APRIL AND OUTRACING, WHAT SOME SAID, WAS THE TOUGHEST FIELD EVER.

KIPSANG

You know when you're fast, there's something you've done. You don't just wake up and find yourself fast. So if I don't train very well, you find that maybe that day you find yourself, you are beaten. The reason: the other athlete did more than you.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

KIPSANG STARTED RUNNING LATE IN LIFE -- HE DIDN'T DISCOVER HIS TALENT UNTIL AFTER HE HAD FINISHED HIGH SCHOOL AND JOINED THE POLICE FORCE. ONCE HE

REALIZED HE COULD BE ONE OF KENYA'S TOP RUNNERS, HE MOVED TO ITEN IN ORDER TO PURSUE TRAINING FULL-TIME.

LIVING IN THE TOWN OF ITEN IS A WHO'S-WHO OF RUNNING'S BIGGEST STARS ... A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE ARE OFTEN INTRODUCED NOT BY THEIR NAMES, BUT BY THEIR MARATHON TIMES. AND IN THE CASE OF WILSON KIPSANG THAT WOULD BE AN ASTONISHING 2:03:42.

PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD STILL WATCH YOUTUBE CLIPS OF THE 2011 FRANKFURT MARATHON...WHERE THE THEN-UNKNOWN KIPSANG CAME WITHIN 4 SECONDS OF BREAKING THE WORLD RECORD. THAT'S A PACE OF 4:34 PER MILE -- FOR 26 MILES.

NOW THINK BACK TO THE TIME YOU RACED A "MILE RUN" IN GRADE SCHOOL. YOU PROBABLY FINISHED IT IN SOMEWHERE BETWEEN SIX AND EIGHT MINUTES - RUNNING AS HARD AS YOU COULD. NOW IMAGINE RUNNING TWICE AS FAST...AND KEEPING IT UP FOR OVER TWO-HOURS. BUT KIPSANG SAYS, THE REAL TEST IS NOT WHAT YOUR LEGS CAN DO, BUT YOUR MIND.

KIPSANG

Sometimes we race until it reaches a point where you find that it's painful, or you feel like dropping, but what really comes into my mind is that each and every athlete is tired. But the one who's going to hold for some time is the one who's going to win the race. It's like you're communicating to your body: you can do this, you can do this, let's go. You can do this. . .take me more.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

KIPSANG IS ONE OF SIX KENYANS – THREE MEN AND THREE WOMEN -- WHO WILL BE REPRESENTING KENYA AT THE OLYMPICS IN THE MARATHON.

ON THE WOMEN'S SIDE, EDNA KIPLAGAT IS ALSO HOPING FOR GOLD.

EDNA KIPLAGAT, MARATHONER

It's going to be a history, because it's not like any other city marathon ever. So I'm hoping that it's going to be a history for me. And it's going to be a big achievement too.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS MOTHER OF TWO IS THE REIGNING MARATHON WORLD CHAMPION AND HAS WON SEVERAL BIG INTERNATIONAL RACES. BUT EVEN WITH ALL THESE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, BEING NAMED TO KENYA'S HIGHLY COMPETITIVE MARATHON TEAM MAY BE THE BIGGEST HONOR OF ALL.

KIPLAGAT

I was very happy because it was my dream that, uh, maybe one day I can have chance to represent my country and so the first time when they called my name that I am in the team, I was so excited. I couldn't believe that I'm one of the athletes representing Kenya in the Olympics.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

KENYA'S MARATHON TALENT IS SO DEEP, THAT THE CURRENT WORLD-RECORD HOLDER, PATRICK MAKAU AND THIS YEAR'S BOSTON MARATHON CHAMPION, SHARON CHEROP, DIDN'T EVEN MAKE THE OLYMPIC TEAM.

AND IF THAT DOESN'T IMPRESS YOU, THINK ABOUT THIS: SINCE 2011, 361 KENYAN MEN RAN AN OLYMPIC QUALIFYING TIME OF FASTER THAN TWO HOURS, FIFTEEN MINUTES. ONLY TWENTY-EIGHT AMERICAN MEN ACHIEVED THAT TIME.

AND WHEN YOU CONSIDER THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS MORE THAN SEVEN TIMES AS MANY PEOPLE AS KENYA, THAT STATISTIC IS EVEN MORE AWE-INSPIRING.

AND AS FOR THE TOWN OF ITEN ITSELF -- IT IS HOME TO ALL SIX KENYAN OLYMPIC MARATHONERS... AND IT HAS ITS OWN UNLIKELY SUCCESS STORY.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

HOW THE KENYANS LIVE...WHAT THEY EAT...IT'S ALL PART OF A FASCINATING LOOK AT MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE BECOME THE BEST IN THE WORLD. WE'LL GIVE YOU A LOOK AT WHAT IT TAKES TO BUILD A CHAMPION LATER THIS HOUR...BUT FIRST THE STORY OF THE MOST UNLIKELY KENYAN COACH, AN IRISHMAN WHO CAME TO KENYA AND CHANGED THE SPORT FOREVER. THAT'S COMING UP...

ACT 3: IN THE RUNNING

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

JUST THIRTY YEARS AGO ITEN WAS BUT A SPECK OF A TOWN... A PLACE WHERE MOST RESIDENTS GREW THEIR OWN FOOD AND WHERE OWNING ONE'S OWN COW WAS A MARKER OF SUCCESS.

HOW THIS TINY VILLAGE BECAME THE CRADLE OF A RUNNING CIVILIZATION MAY BE ONE OF THE UNLIKELIEST SPORTS STORIES YOU'LL EVER HEAR ...

AND IT STARTED WITH THE ARRIVAL OF AN IRISH-CATHOLIC MISSIONARY. HE HAD NO PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THE SPORT OF RUNNING WHEN HE CAME TO ITEN IN 1976 TO TEACH GEOGRAPHY IN A BOY'S HIGH SCHOOL.

BROTHER COLM O'CONNELL, COACH

I didn't come as kind of a savior, I didn't come as somebody who is really going to shake up the whole community and do something extraordinary. I just was willing to kind of learn the culture, learn the-- how things are done. And then slowly, ever so slowly, work from within.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HIS NAME IS COLM O'CONNELL...BUT EVERYONE AROUND HERE CALLS HIM BROTHER COLM. WHEN BROTHER COLM FIRST ARRIVED IN ITEN HIS ASPIRATION WAS SIMPLY TO FULFILL HIS THREE YEAR TEACHING COMMITMENT AND RETURN HOME TO COUNTY CORK, IRELAND.

IN 1976, KENYA HAD BEEN INDEPENDENT FROM GREAT BRITAIN FOR ONLY 13 YEARS AND THIS PART OF KENYA WAS STILL SO PROVINCIAL THAT IT HAD NO ELECTRICITY, NO TELEPHONES, AND NO PAVED ROADS. BUT IT DID HAVE ST. PATRICK'S -- A BOARDING SCHOOL KNOWN FOR ITS TOUGH ACADEMICS.

O'CONNELL

Education was a big thing after independence. Kenya were investing highly in education because they saw it as a way forward, they saw it as a very significant in the development of a young country. I felt part of that and I felt also that I had a contribution to make.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BROTHER COLM EVENTUALLY BECAME THE PRINCIPAL OF ST. PATRICKS... BUT HIS REAL CONTRIBUTION WAS DIFFERENT -- AND BIGGER -- THAN HE EVER COULD HAVE IMAGINED.

O'CONNELL

It was never my intention to become an athletics coach. Maybe the fact that I came in as somebody not knowing very much about the technicalities of the sport, um, helped me because I learned my athletics from the athletes. Not from college, not from books, not from studies, so I came in with a fairly open mind.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BROTHER COLM'S ORIGINAL GOAL WAS SIMPLY TO USE RUNNING TO GIVE TEENAGE BOYS AN OUTLET TO BURN OFF SOME ENERGY, GAIN SOME CONFIDENCE, AND LEARN THE VALUE OF TEAMWORK IN THE PROCESS.

THEN HE DISCOVERED HE HAD A SECRET WEAPON: AN UNCANNY ABILITY TO SPOT AND DEVELOP TALENT.

IN LITTLE OVER A DECADE AFTER HE STARTED FORMALLY COACHING, BROTHER COLM HAD TEN BOYS FROM ST. PATRICK'S COMPETING IN THE 1988 SEOUL OLYMPICS ...

O'CONNELL

So here, at the end of the dining hall, we have a photographic display of athletic achievements. So these are twins Cheruiyots, which was a little unusual. They were both high school students in the school at the time they went to the Olympics. This top right hand young man is Ibrahim Hussein, when he was a student in the school. He went on later to win Honolulu Marathon three times, Boston Marathon three times, and became the first Kenyan, the first African, to win the New York Marathon in 1988.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND THAT LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE CONTINUES AND NOW INCLUDES WOMEN TOO. AS BROTHER COLM EXPANDED HIS YOUTH RUNNING PROGRAM TO INCLUDE NOT JUST ST. PATRICK'S BOYS, BUT TALENTED STUDENTS FROM NEIGHBORING SCHOOLS TOO.

O'CONNELL

I never really count up medals, or things like that, but I would say, I mean I'm just giving you rough figures, I would say at world championship level at various categories, world youth, world junior, senior and Olympics...I would say major medals, gold medalists 30-plus...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THOSE "THIRTY PLUS" MAJOR MEDALS HAVE MADE THE SCHOOL ... AND THE TOWN OF ITEN... FAMOUS AROUND THE WORLD FOR THE ATHLETES THEY'VE PRODUCED. AND AFTER THIS YEAR'S OLYMPICS -- WITH TEN ALUMNI OF HIS YOUTH PROGRAM HEADED TO LONDON -- BROTHER COLM IS ALMOST SURE TO ADD A FEW MORE MEDALS TO HIS RESUME. HIS RECIPE FOR SUCCESS HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO BEGIN COACHING POTENTIAL STARS WHEN THEY'RE YOUNG.

O'CONNELL

I take them right from beginning to end; almost when they're young kids and bringing them right up to Olympic or world record holders level. No other coach approaches it in that way.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND THAT'S THE WAY HE TRAINED HIS CURRENT SUPERSTAR... 800 METER WORLD-RECORD HOLDER AND WORLD-CHAMPION, DAVID RUDISHA...WHOM HE FIRST SPOTTED

WHEN RUDISHA WAS A TEENAGER. YOU MAY NOT KNOW HIS NAME YET -- BUT YOU SURELY WILL AFTER THE OLYMPICS.

O'CONNELL

It's always amazing when you come to a track like this and you watch a variety of athletes and then you see somebody who's special and say, 'That's the difference.' There are a lot of little things that make him what he is. You're not just talking about his running ability. You're also talking about his plan. Knowing what's important. His lifestyle. His attitude.

Feeling OK? Nice and Comfortable? Relaxed?

DAVID RUDISHA, RUNNER

Yeah.

O'CONNELL

That's good, that's good, that's good.

We don't get to talk very much, we have a mental connection.

RUDISHA

During the race, the first 200...

O'CONNELL

You develop that rapport with your athletes. He'll do a little part of his session and then I'll join him. And I just walk with him. I talk, he talk, then silence. But we're also talking during the silent period, in a sense.

Do you want to do a few more?

Maybe another athlete would feel more comfortable that you tell him what to do and that you give them instructions when he's trainin ... I kind of, um, feel my way along rather than talk my way along with the athletes.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

FOR BROTHER COLM, THIS IS LIKE A FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIP THAT HAS LEFT HIM BEAMING WITH PRIDE.

O'CONNELL

I had kind of selected David out of obscurity. Here was somebody who moved to this side of the country away from his home area, who is willing to entrust himself to me.

You qualify there, then we see.

You know, it's very moving that somebody will be prepared to hand themselves to you and say, "Well, do the best with me you can," and then he turns out to be a world record holder.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TODAY, RUDISHA IS ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS PEOPLE IN KENYA ... INSPIRING CHILDREN ALL OVER TO GROW-UP TO BE LIKE HIM.

O'CONNELL

The kids in the area around here, see them out training every morning. You know, so they can so easily identify with the success associated with the sport. They see their role models driving cars, owning farms, living in big houses -- travel, recognition...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THAT'S WHY YOUNG VICTOR TANUI SAYS HE COMES EVERY DAY AFTER SCHOOL TO TRAIN ON HIS OWN, HERE IN ITEN ...

SARI AVIV, PRODUCER, DAN RATHER REPORTS

What do you want to be when you get a little bit older?

VICTOR TANUI, YOUNG RUNNER

Be a runner.

AVIV

What runner from Kenya do you hope to be like?

TANUI

Rudisha

O'CONNELL

All Kenya's elite athletes come from very rural, humble backgrounds. And to see them coming from that very obscure, simple situation, to become world-beaters is just unbelievable. It's incredible to see what a little guy can do from nowhere.

ACT 4: KENYAN RUNNERS

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IT'S THE MIDDLE OF JUNE, AND THE OLYMPICS ARE JUST FIVE WEEKS AWAY.... BUT FOR THE PEOPLE OF KENYA...YOU COULD CALL THIS 'THE REAL OLYMPICS.' ANY ONE WOULD TELL YOU THERE'S PROBABLY AS MUCH TALENT IN THIS STADIUM AS THERE WILL BE IN LONDON'S OLYMPIC STADIUM...THESE ARE THE KENYAN OLYMPIC TRIALS. PLACE FIRST, SECOND OR THIRD HERE AND YOU'RE OFF TO THE GAMES.

AND THIS IS NIXON CHEPSEBA...WHO'S ATTEMPTING TO QUALIFY AT THE 1500 METER DISTANCE. HE'S WON PRESTIGIOUS RACES AROUND THE WORLD, BUT THE KENYAN OLYMPIC TRIALS MAY BE HIS TOUGHEST TEST. AFTER YEARS OF TRAINING, THE NEXT THREE-AND-A-HALF-MINUTES COULD BE A LIFE-CHANGING TIME.

NIXON CHEPSEBA, RUNNER

In Kenya a trial is not something easy. Most of the people are good athletes, so what we are aiming only to run good and to qualify for the Olympics. I know it's not easy.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NOT EASY BECAUSE THE TOP THREE RUNNERS AT HIS DISTANCE...ALL LIVE IN KENYA...AND CHEPSEBA IS ONE OF THEM. AND HE GETS OFF TO A GOOD START...BUT HE HAS THE OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST AND THE REIGNING WORLD CHAMPION ON HIS HEELS...

CHEPSEBA

Everybody in Kenya is strong. The ten or the twelve qualify for finals, all are strong; nobody is very weak.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

CHEPSEBA IS 22...IN HIS PRIME...HE'S NOW AN ELITE TRACK ATHLETE... BUT TO GET THERE WASN'T EASY....AND HIS STORY IS NOT SO DIFFERENT FROM SO MANY OF KENYA'S OTHER TOP RUNNERS.

CHEPSEBA

You know in Kenya you're used to living in hardship. You see the young children here they are living in hardship. They used to go far here, almost 10 kilometers collecting the animals down there and then they come back almost at 7:00. They just take breakfast in the morning, until now they have not take lunch. So I think they're used to hardship.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

CHEPSEBA GREW UP AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GREAT RIFT VALLEY OF KENYA. ... WITH 17 SIBLINGS ...A COOP FULL OF CHICKENS, AND NO RUNNING WATER. AS A CHILD, HE RAN SEVEN MILES TO AND FROM SCHOOL EVERYDAY, UP THIS DUSTY ROAD -- BAREFOOT. YOU COULD CALL IT ENDURANCE TRAINING BY NECESSITY. WHEN CHEPSEBA WAS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL, BROTHER COLM PICKED HIM OUT AT A LOCAL RACE, AND RECRUITED HIM INTO HIS RUNNING PROGRAM.

CHEPSEBA

He really assisted me a lot. Because not everybody can give you shoes and can tell you, you can join Saint Patrick's. Because he was the one to bring me to Saint Patrick's and say you, "You are a good runner."

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TODAY, NIXON CHEPSEBA IS A HERO IN HIS SMALL VILLAGE.

CHEPSEBA

I'm the only person in the village who have go abroad. They see me now like a big person in the village. The role model in the village. Sometimes they call me ambassador.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

CHEPSEBA NO LONGER LIVES AT HOME -- FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS, HE HAS LIVED HERE, AT A CAMP CALLED ONE-FOUR-ONE WITH 17 OTHER WORLD-CLASS ATHLETES. HERE HE CAN DEDICATE HIMSELF 100-PERCENT TO RUNNING.

THE PRACTICE OF ENCOURAGING ATHLETES TO LIVE AN ALMOST MONASTIC LIFE IN CAMPS ...WHERE THEY DO NOTHING BUT SLEEP, EAT AND BREATHE RUNNING... WAS ACTUALLY STARTED IN ITEN BY BROTHER COLM IN THE 1980'S. SINCE THEN, DOZENS OF COACHES HAVE MODELED THEIR OWN CAMPS ON BROTHER COLM'S ORIGINAL IDEA.

CHEPSEBA

You know, when you are here, nobody can disturb you. If you are a visitor, or a friend, nobody can come here unless you are a member of this camp. So yeah, it's very good because nobody can come without permission.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WHILE ALL THESE ATHLETES HAVE LUCRATIVE SPONSORSHIPS WITH SHOE COMPANIES LIKE ADIDAS OR NIKE, THE LIVES THEY LIVE HERE ARE SIMPLE. THERE IS NOT EVEN A TREADMILL...OR A FLUSH TOILET.

CHEPSEBA

This is mine. This is my bed. This one is the schedule

SARI AVIV, PRODUCER, DAN RATHER REPORTS

So what's on that schedule. What does that say?

CHEPSEBA

This is the program of the day. Slope, exercise. On Tuesday I go for interval. And then this one is my motto: "If you do not limit your thinking, we will not limit your opportunity".

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AT THESE CAMPS, ATHLETES HAVE ALMOST NO DISTRACTIONS, AND WHEN THEY ARE NOT RUNNING, THEY ARE RELAXING. THEY ARE NOT WORRIED ABOUT WORKING A SECOND JOB OR FULFILLING ANY OUTSIDE OBLIGATIONS.

CHEPSEBA ONLY LEAVES THE CAMP TO SEE HIS WIFE AND BABY DAUGHTER ON SUNDAYS. BUT SHE UNDERSTANDS. CHEPSEBA AND THE HUNDREDS OF OTHERS LIKE HIM ARE NOT LIVING IN CAMPS TO PURSUE A HOBBY ... THIS IS THEIR PROFESSION. WINNING A RACE CAN BRING IN \$10,000 A POP...PLUS EVEN BIGGER ENDORSEMENT DEALS.

CHEPSEBA

Just like somebody want to be a doctor...He has to study all the night. Study and study all, many books, doing some research. Even us runners, we do some research.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND IF CHEPSEBA WANTS TO PROVIDE FOR HIS FAMILY ... HE MUST DO HIS RESEARCH ...AND WIN RACES.

CHEPSEBA

Why I take seriously in sports? So my parents will live in a good house, they will stay in a good environment, they will eat good, they will sleep good so that make me to focus in sports – running.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IN THIS COUNTRY – WHERE 84-PERCENT LIVE WITHOUT ELECTRICITY AND FEWER THAN ONE-PERCENT HAVE CARS ... PRIZES OF EVEN A FEW THOUSAND DOLLARS CAN CHANGE THE LIVES OF MOST KENYANS.

CHEPSEBA

My first race I won I come and build the house for my father. This one, that one here. Then I educate my brother, who finished school last year, and I opened some small business to my brothers and my sister.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE TRIALS...IT'S THE FINAL STRETCH...CHEPSEBA IS FIGHTING FOR A TOP THREE SPOT ... AND RUNNING AT A STAGGERING THREE-MINUTE, FORTY-FOUR SECOND-PER-MILE PACE.

HE FINISHED SECOND ...

CHEPSEBA WILL NOW STAND AMONG THE TRACK TITANS OF KENYA HEADED TO LONDON...AND WILL HAVE HIS CHANCE TO COMPETE FOR OLYMPIC GOLD.

CHEPSEBA

When I made the team, I say it now maybe when I come maybe my life will change, the life of my family will change, the life of my friends will change. Yeah. And my name will come up as an Olympic champion.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

JUST AHEAD ON OUR PROGRAM ...WE INVESTIGATE WHAT EXACTLY MAKES THE KENYANS SO MUCH FASTER THAN THE REST OF US...YOU'LL WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT.

ACT 5: KENYAN RUNNERS

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE HISTORY OF THE MARATHON GOES BACK TO ANCIENT GREECE...WHERE, LEGEND HAS IT, A SOLDIER RAN TO ATHENS TO TELL OF A GREAT MILITARY VICTORY...THE RUNNER STARTED IN THE TOWN OF MARATHON AND RAN ABOUT 25 MILES TO ATHENS.

THE OFFICIAL DISTANCE NOW OF 26.2 MILES WASN'T ESTABLISHED UNTIL THE 1908 LONDON OLYMPICS. IN ORDER TO SUIT THE ROYAL FAMILY, THE MARATHONERS STARTED AT WINDSOR CASTLE AND THEN RAN ABOUT 26 MILES TO THE OLYMPIC STADIUM...WHERE THEY THEN RAN 385 YARDS AROUND THE TRACK AND FINISHED IN FRONT OF THE ROYAL BOX.

AN ITALIAN PASTRY CHEF FINISHED FIRST -- AFTER COLLAPSING FIVE TIMES IN THE FINAL QUARTER MILE. RACE OFFICIALS SAID THEY WERE AFRAID HE MIGHT DIE IN THE PRESENCE OF THE QUEEN.

AS THE MARATHON GAINED IN POPULARITY, WESTERNERS RULED THE 26.2 MILE DISTANCE THROUGHOUT MOST OF THE 20TH CENTURY ...HEROES LIKE AMERICANS FRANK SHORTER AND JOAN BENOIT AND NORWEGIAN GRETE WAITZ...BECAME HOUSEHOLD NAMES.

DAN RATHER (ON CAMERA)

BUT SUDDENLY IN THE 1990'S, KENYANS STARTED TO COMPLETELY DOMINATE THE DISTANCE. FOR SOME PERSPECTIVE ON HOW DEEP KENYAN TALENT RUNS CONSIDER THIS...IN 2011, THE TOP 20 FASTEST MARATHON TIMES IN THE WORLD WERE ALL RUN BY KENYANS

AND WHILE ONLY TWO AMERICAN MEN IN HISTORY HAVE RUN A MARATHON FASTER THAN TWO HOURS AND EIGHT MINUTES -- SINCE JANUARY OF THIS YEAR ALONE, 25 KENYANS HAVE BEATEN THAT TIME.

AND IT'S NOT JUST MARATHONS. COMING INTO THE OLYMPICS THIS WEEK, KENYANS HAVE RUN THE FASTEST TIMES OF 2012 AT EIGHT DISTANCES FROM 800 METERS TO THE MARATHON.

WHICH BEGS THE QUESTION -- DOES THIS OVERSUPPLY OF TALENT JUST COME DOWN TO AN OBVIOUS GENETIC GIFT? OR DO KENYANS SIMPLY KNOW HOW TO TRAIN -- AND PERFORM BETTER THAN EVERYONE ELSE?

YANNIS PITSILADIS, UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

We know, um, that in all the major city marathons around the world the, the winner and probably number one until number ten will be East African. Uh, why is that? So over a decade ago I decided to go and try to find out.

Diresibachew, Can I have a syringe with a needle?

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

DR. YANNIS PITSILADIS IS A LECTURER OF EXERCISE PHYSIOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW IN SCOTLAND. FOR THE LAST DECADE, PITSILADIS HAS SPENT TIME IN KENYA, TRYING TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF WHY KENYANS ARE SO MUCH FASTER THAN THE REST OF US. HIS ASSUMPTION, INITIALLY, WAS THAT HE WOULD FIND A GENETIC EXPLANATION.

PITSILADIS

Collecting some DNA, which is not difficult to do, analyzing that and coming up with those genes. Well, ten years later I've not found them, you know, but that was the motivation to start off with.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AT HIS LAB IN ELDORET A CITY 20 MILES FROM ITEN -- THE DOCTOR AND HIS LAB ASSISTANTS ARE COLLECTING BLOOD, SALIVA AND URINE SAMPLES FROM LOCAL ATHLETES...SEARCHING FOR WHAT HE CALLS "THE HOLY GRAIL," WHICH MIGHT LIE RIGHT INSIDE THIS FREEZER ...

PITSILADIS

So that tells me you've been sweating a lot.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT AFTER YEARS OF TESTING...HE'S FOUND NO SPECIAL GENETIC TRAIT. BUT HERE'S WHAT WE KNOW:

ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE ASPECTS OF THE KENYAN PHENOMENON IS THAT IT IS REALLY NOT A KENYAN PHENOMENON AT ALL -- BUT A KALENJIN PHENOMENON. THE POPULATION OF KENYA IS MADE UP OF 42 TRIBES. ABOUT 10-PERCENT OF KENYANS ARE KALENJIN ... BUT THEY COMPRISE ABOUT 90-PERCENT OF KENYA'S RUNNING STARS. WHY THE KALENJIN?

PITSALADIS

The answer is quite straightforward. It's the altitude. Um, the altitude in this particular area, uh where the athletes tend to reside, ranges from about 2,200 meters to about 2,800 meters, which is ideal altitude for middle and long distance training.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

RUNNING AT HIGH ELEVATION HELPS IMPROVE LUNG CAPACITY. BUT IF HIGH ALTITUDE WERE THE ONLY FACTOR -- YOU MIGHT EXPECT TO SEE SOME NEPALESE OR SWISS RUNNING STARS.

DR. PITSILADIS AND HIS TEAM WANT TO KNOW IF A SECRET TO KALENJIN SUCCESS CAN BE FOUND IN THEIR LEG MUSCLES. THEY ARE CURRENTLY STUDYING MUSCLE TISSUE FROM KENYA'S DIFFERENT TRIBAL GROUPS.

BUT WHILE THOSE TESTS CONTINUE...DR. PITSILADIS HAS ALSO DISCOVERED POSSIBLE CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS, WHICH HE BELIEVES ARE THE MAIN DRIVERS OF KALENJIN SUCCESS.

PITSALADIS

I would argue the most important finding has been the documentation or the providing of evidence for the first time that the African way of life is so strenuous, so demanding, that you know it's not surprising that the children, if they continue with what they're doing which is running, can make it to the very top.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THERE ARE HARDLY ANY SCHOOL BUSES IN KENYA -- WHICH MEANS, MANY CHILDREN ACTUALLY RUN TO SCHOOL.

EVERY SINGLE PROFESSIONAL RUNNER WE SPOKE TO DURING OUR TIME IN KENYA, OFFHANDEDLY MENTIONED RUNNING TO SCHOOL AS A CHILD. AND NOT JUST TO SCHOOL -- USUALLY BACK AND FORTH FOUR TIMES A DAY -- IN THE MORNING -- BEFORE AND AFTER LUNCH -- AND AT THE END OF THE DAY. OFTEN ADDING UP TO FIVE OR SIX MILES A DAY. AND THAT DOESN'T INCLUDE TAKING CARE OF ANIMALS, CARRYING WATER, OR WORKING IN THE FIELDS AS WELL.

THESE ARE ALL CRUCIAL KEYS OF PREPARING THEM TO BE ABLE TO HANDLE 120 MILES A WEEK OF TRAINING LATER IN LIFE.

PITSALADIS

So it's that incredible toughness. They experience this pain, or this hardship from a young age, while in the developed world, in the US or Europe, typically our children are very used to comfort, and you ask them sometimes-- I tell my son to walk to school, and he'll complain halfway to school saying, "Oh my legs are sore!" and he's only walked 800 meters.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND MOST WESTERN KIDS WOULD PROBABLY ALSO COMPLAIN IF THEY HAD TO DO ALL THESE ACTIVITIES WITH NO SHOES -- BUT DR. PITSILADIS SAYS ... THAT ACTUALLY HELPS THE KIDS GROW INTO TOUGHER AND MORE GRACEFUL RUNNERS.

PITSALADIS

The children not only have stronger feet, they have greater arches, they have less incidence of injury, and more recently we've started a study looking at the economy when running, and they appear to be more economical when they're running barefoot.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

GO OUT TO ANY PARK IN THE U.S. AND YOU'LL NOTICE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE KENYAN AND WESTERN STYLES OF RUNNING -- ELEGANT WE ARE NOT, AS MANY OF US AWKWARDLY SUSTAIN PLODDING PACES. SCIENTISTS SAY THIS IS PARTLY BECAUSE WE IN THE WEST LEARNED TO RUN WEARING SHOES, SO WE LAND HEAVILY ON OUR FEET. PLUS, WE WEIGH MORE.

YOU'LL NOTICE, KENYANS HAVE EXTREMELY SLENDER FIGURES. PART OF THIS IS DUE TO DIET -- YOU SIMPLY CANNOT FIND MUCH JUNK FOOD IN RURAL KENYA. EVEN THOUGH A SPECIFIC GENE HAS NOT BEEN FOUND, IT'S CLEAR THAT THE "RIGHT" GENETICS ARE ESSENTIAL TO BEING A SUCCESSFUL ATHLETE.

ONE ADVANTAGE OF THE KENYANS' -- THEY HAVE THIN CALVES. AND SIMPLY BY A MATTER OF PHYSICS -- LESS WEIGHT TO CARRY WITH EVERY STEP MEANS YOU CAN PICK UP YOUR FEET FASTER.

A TEAM OF DANISH SCIENTISTS CONDUCTED A SERIES OF RESPECTED STUDIES ABOUT WHY THE KALENJIN EXCEL AND THEY CONCLUDED THAT THEIR NUMBER ONE ADVANTAGE WAS THEIR "BIRDLIKE LEGS" WHICH HELPED THEM TO "BOUNCE AND SKIP" OVER THE GROUND IN A FLOWING RUNNING MOTION.

BUT AGAIN - IF SKINNY LEGS WERE THE ONLY ANSWER - IT WOULDN'T FULLY EXPLAIN WHY KENYANS DOMINATE...STILL OTHERS HAVE SURMISED THAT THE KENYANS' HIGH CARBOHYDRATE, LOW FAT DIET HAVE TURNED THEM INTO SPEED DEMONS. BUT A 2004 STUDY FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN FOUND THAT KENYANS PERFORM WELL IN SPITE OF THEIR DIET, NOT BECAUSE OF IT. KENYANS -- LIKE THESE BOYS AT ST. PATRICK'S HIGH SCHOOL -- EAT A FAR NARROWER CHOICE OF FOODS THAN WE DO IN THE WEST -- THEIR STAPLES ARE KIDNEY BEANS AND CORN -- OFTEN IN THE FORM OF UGALI. IT WAS ACTUALLY SURPRISING TO US HOW LITTLE THE KENYANS SEEMS TO EAT, GIVEN THEIR ENORMOUS ENERGY EXPENDITURE. EACH ONE OF THESE BOWLS OF BEANS FEEDS 10 TEENAGE BOYS.

DR. PITSILADIS SAYS THE REAL SECRET MAY JUST COME DOWN TO THAT WELL WORN SAYING "PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT" - AND KENYANS PRACTICE LIKE NO ONE ELSE...

PITSALADIS

It is so intense -- it's actually quite interesting to watch. If you go to one of the tracks here, outside Eldoret you'll often find a few Europeans, actually even African athletes from other African countries, coming to actually train, or try and train, with the Kenyans and you find with a lot of them, when you speak to them after a few weeks, say, "I'm not going to come back again." Because when they come here, they get burnt out. They can't cope with that training, and let's remember these intense training sessions, which they call bone breaking, they conduct them at high altitude. You know, so it's remarkably hard. So going back to your point about genetics, the athletes who you say to them, 'Oh, the achievements come down to your genes,' feels like you're robbing them of their hard work.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

KENYANS TRAIN SO HARD BECAUSE FOR MOST OF THEM ...THEY HAVE NO PLAN-B JOB PROSPECTS. THE AVERAGE INCOME HERE IS \$1700 A YEAR -- WHICH MEANS MOST KENYANS AREN'T SO POOR THAT THEY GO HUNGRY, BUT THEY ARE POOR ENOUGH THAT DEVOTING THEIR LIVES TO RACING TO WIN \$10,000 TO \$20,000 DOLLARS A YEAR -- IN THE CASE OF A MODERATELY SUCCESSFUL ATHLETE -- IS A TANTALIZING PROSPECT. AND TOP ATHLETES CAN EARN SEVERAL HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS A YEAR -- GIVING KENYAN RUNNERS HUGE MOTIVATION.

PITSALADIS

Countries can spend a lot of money on the preparation of the elite athletes, using every technology that's available. You can't circumvent hard training and the desire to succeed which is so paramount here. If you can't run, what is there for you as far as your future is concerned? Unemployment? Sitting on the side of the road watching life go by? You know, and that's the reality, I'm afraid...

DAN RATHER (ON CAMERA)

OF COURSE, GIVEN THE KENYANS' DOMINANCE OF THIS SPORT -- AND THE PACE AT WHICH RECORDS HAVE BEEN FALLING -- THERE IS THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THERE IS ANY USE OF PERFORMANCE ENHANCING DRUGS IN KENYA. WE ASKED MANY PEOPLE THIS QUESTION AND WERE TOLD THAT WHILE CHEATING IS AN UNFORTUNATE REALITY IN ALL SPORTS, DOPING IS EXTREMELY RARE AMONG KENYAN ATHLETES. ALL OLYMPIANS ARE SUBJECT TO DRUG TESTING.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WHEN WE COME BACK, A CONVERSATION WITH OUR OWN RESIDENT MARATHONER ABOUT WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO RUN WITH THE KENYANS...

ACT 6: FINAL THOUGHT

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

AND FINALLY TONIGHT, REPORTING FROM KENYA- WHERE WE WERE FORTUNATE TO HAVE A REPORTER/PRODUCER FOR THIS STORY WHO KNOWS A THING OR TWO ABOUT RUNNING. SARI AVIV IS NOT ONLY A FIRST RATE REPORTER, SHE'S ALSO A PRETTY FAIR RUNNER. COMPETING IN AND FINISHING 11 MARATHONS.

RATHER

Sari, what was it like for you to be in Iten?

SARI AVIV, DAN RATHER REPORTS

It was almost the equivalent of a huge baseball fan getting to go to spring training and hang out in the dugout of their favorite team, um, and just watch it all happen. I mean the amazing thing about being there is that there's a handful of international runners who have made a name for themselves. But you go there and it's not just those runners that you're seeing, you know run past you in the morning, but it's literally hundreds of people and if they had had the good fortune to be born in Australia, or England, or even the United States they'd probably all be Olympians, but because they're Kenyans they're just another guy in the street. And, um, the amount of talent is just unbelievable. Before I had gotten there I heard a rumor that people are introduced by their marathon times, and it's completely true. We had this guide, um, named Godfrey who was a former professional runner and we'd go out in the mornings and he'd literally say, "Oh that guy's 2:05, 2:06, 2:07. Oh that woman is 2:20." And like these times I mean 2:05 - there's been two Americans who have ever run faster than 2:05 or... one 2:05 and one 2:04. And we're talking about just guys on the street, 2:05, 2:05, 2:05 you've never heard of them which is just really unbelievable.

RATHER

Well did you run with the Kenyans?

AVIV

I did. I viewed it as a once in a lifetime experience, otherwise it would have been a, um, exercise in public humiliation. Every week on Thursday mornings they have this run, it's called a fartlick. It means it was two minutes hard, one minute easy for an hour. And you start, basically at this one intersection. All these people come and then they just go at 9:00. And I quickly found myself in the very back of the pack. Um, I was lucky enough to have one woman who was pushing me, but she definitely made sure to tell me that she's not normally in the back that she hadn't run for three months and that's why she was so slow so.

RATHER

What is the secret? Or is there any secret?

AVIV

Well first of all, they train so hard. I mean they're running let's say 120 miles a week if they're a marathoner. Which if you take one day off a week is at least 20 miles a day, but they're not doing anything else when they're not running. They are sleeping, or resting, or reading. I mean they're not going to work or worrying about a job, or worrying about anything else and so they're just so mentally focused and so, you know, when they're not running they can think about how they're going to tackle their next workout. And you have this will to win that is, um, when you don't have anything else, you know that this is your path to the future. This is your path to getting out of poverty I think you might want it a little bit more.

RATHER

What did you learn, of anything, that will have you watching the Olympics, in particular the running competitions in the Olympics, or perhaps your next marathon differently?

AVIV

Well I think that there's sort of a sense that the Africans at the front of the pack are boring. I mean every major marathon you're gonna see these Kenyans at the front of the pack. You have no idea who they are and you're just like "Ugh, another Kenyan." I mean... can't someone else win a race for once?" But, now I know who they are and where they come from. You know, if you think about an American marathon runner, if they win or if they don't win... they're gonna be okay. I mean they're gonna go back to their nice house and their big sponsorships. They're gonna be fine. If you think about some of these Kenyan runners, the difference between winning and coming in fourth could be the difference between having a great life and just scraping by. It's a really big deal for these people and so I think I want it more for them because I know how it will change their lives.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

AND THAT'S OUR PROGRAM FOR TONIGHT. WE ALWAYS LIKE HEARING WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY, SO PLEASE JOIN IN THE DISCUSSION ON OUR FACEBOOK PAGE OR SEND YOUR COMMENTS TO VIEWER@AXS.TV.

FROM NEW YORK, FOR AXS-TV... DAN RATHER REPORTING. GOOD NIGHT.