

Fall 2009

# Train Hard, Win Easy: Running on the Periphery in Rural Kenya: The Last Shall Be First

Jordan Apfeld  
*SIT Study Abroad*

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# **TRAIN HARD, WIN EASY**

Running on the Periphery in Rural Kenya: The Last Shall Be First

Jordan Apfeld

SIT Kenya: Development, Health, & Society

Fall 2009

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have intentionally set my Independent Study Project in isolated Kenya, a notion which last year seemed to me farfetched and a bit quixotic. I would like to take this time to recognize in particular some of those people who have allowed me this luxury—to be a tiller at windmills for a semester, and especially for November 2009.

First of all, I must thank those who initially supported my coming to Kenya—my loving parents, who have spent continued mental, emotional, and financial energy to supply my higher education; specifically, allowing me to forego a semester at Brown University to play investigator on the ground in Kenya. Also, thank you to Professors Dan Smith, James Harper III, and Patrick Heller, for sitting down with me in January 2009 and encouraging me to pick up my things and to go visit the area of the world by which I was fascinated—sub-Saharan Africa.

I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to those few who made my ISP logistically possible: to my dear AD Oduch Pido and his wife Donna, for introducing me to Kenya, for supporting my ideas and setting up arenas to discuss them, and for helping me to check the feasibility of my ambitions; to my indispensable AD Jamal Omar, who helped me to locate a suitable setting for my studies; to the great marathoner Ibrahim Hussein, who generously offered me lodging at his athletics camp in Kapsabet; to my advisor Professor Mohammed Jama, for reading my ISP draft proposal, for meeting with me individually to advise my goals, and for giving me invaluable insight into the intellectual direction of my paper; and to Milton Omondi, for being my homeboy.

I am extremely grateful to my multiple gracious hosts since I have arrived in Kenya: thanks to Mama Asha, Baba Turukey, William and Liz Kundu, Peninah Munyasia and her family, Abraham Maiyo, and Lornah Kiplagat. Most importantly, I need to thank Said and Grace Aziz, who have hosted me for one month at the Hussein Camp. Coach Said, thank you for welcoming me with open arms, for being the chief source of information and insight into the Kenyan running community, and for befriending me as a fellow citizen of the world.

And last, but not least, I cannot forget the runners. Thanks for christening me as a Kenyan athlete, for showing me love, and for demonstrating to me how fertile downtime can be.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Past years have proven Kenyans dominant in the sport of athletics. Today, runners from the Rift Valley win more major middle- and long-distance running events than those from any other nation in the world. Although athletics is not the most lucrative of sports, modern marketing has resulted in creating a sport with various financial incentives. These include prize money, sponsorships, and the opportunity for a new life. However, runners from rural agricultural backgrounds find it very difficult to translate their athletic talent into dollars at the finish line. This study examines the economic prospects for young male runners from Kapsabet and the surrounding areas. It asks the question: how effectively is Kenya's athletic resource being extracted? In turn, how can this famous comparative advantage be directed in order to most effectively benefit a runner, his family, and his community? The entire paper constantly revisits the background of these runners that is centered in a subsistence-based socioeconomy, with a huge emphasis on communalism. In the section entitled "Discussion, Findings, and Analysis", I make it clear that the economic forecast for the Kenyan running project looks bleak, both in the short-term and the long-term, even if some individual athletes see tremendous rewards. However, I offer some substantial, basic, and concrete solutions that might enhance the financial prospects for athletics in the Rift Valley, and specifically in Kapsabet. This paper stands as a resource both for people genuinely interested in finding out what is behind these runners featured on television AND for people traveling to Kenya who need a basic "road map" on runners or for places like Kapsabet. Finally, this long essay is a perfect starting point for more in-depth study into either athletics in Kenya OR rural agronomics in the Rift Valley. Hope you enjoy!

## EPIGRAPH

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.*

--Charles Dickens, 1859

# INTRODUCTION

This project will examine the prospects for economic progress in the town of Kapsabet, working within a larger regional context that includes the industrial hub city of Eldoret. More specifically, I intend to consider the economic benefits Kapsabet reaps from its most famous resource—the Kalenjin runners. Since the discovery of Kenyan running prowess in the 1960's, athletics (the Kenyan term that comprises road running, cross country, and track & field) has dominated the sports scene in Kenya. While Kenya has marginal talent in boxing, cricket, and rugby, and while many Kenyans are captivated with English Premier League soccer, this country's runners are its true superstars. At the international sporting level, runners from Kenya constantly come out on top in events ranging from the 800 meter run (in track and field) to the marathon (on the roads). These athletes are so dominant that Kenyan national races often prove more competitive than international invitationals. In fact, 40% of all recognized major international competitions (featuring long distance running events) find Kenyan champions. And the most mind-boggling fact about Kenyan athletics is that *one ethnic tribe* encompasses 75% of its elite performers—the Kalenjin. This tribe hails ancestrally from the western Rift Valley and its overlooking highlands. In fact, one subdivision of the Kalenjin, the Nandi, wins the vast majority of Kenya's Olympic and World Championship medals, not to mention most major half and full-marathon titles. Another sub-tribe of only 200,000, the Marakwet, statistically encompasses the remaining world-renowned Kalenjin athletes (a few are Keiyo, Masai, or Kipsigi). For my Independent Study Project, I have lived in an area ancestrally-linked to the Nandi and Marakwet and have studied how Kenya's most skilled runners contribute to the region's economy. There has proven no better way to do this than to live within walking distance of both the Nandi (Nandi) and Cherangany (Marakwet) Hills.

## I. Background

Before the 1960's, Kenyan athletic dominance could never have been foreseen. In 1964 Wilson Kiprugut actually won the *first Olympic medal ever* for his country, claiming bronze in the men's 800 meter in Tokyo. The great Kenyan running epoch was officially commenced in 1968 (Mexico City Summer Olympics) when Kiprugut won the silver in the same event, and Kipchoge Keino upset the favorite, American Jim Ryun (first high-school runner ever to break

the 4:00 mile), to win gold in the 1500 meter run; he also returned a few days later to win Silver in the 5000 meter run. Within a few years Kalenjin runners were feverishly breaking world records; in an 81 day stretch in 1978, Henry Rono broke *four* world records (in the 10,000m, 5,000m, 3,000m steeplechase, and 3,000m flat races). At this point in time, the gross amount of manpower and resources that supplied the Kenyan national distance squad was dismal compared to conditions in the present day. Neither the Kenyan government nor the international sporting bodies spent much time, energy, or funding to make athletics financially desirable—world notoriety on the long-distance circuit was the main objective for the first famous Kenyan runners. In addition, Kenyan women failed to show their faces at international competitions, for reasons to be discussed later.

Conditions changed drastically after 1980. Ibrahim Hussein ushered in the age of amazing Kenyan marathoners by prevailing at the Boston Marathon three times (1988, 1992, 1993—Kenyans have reigned supreme in Boston every since); he also managed to win a handy purse and a rare sponsorship at the same time. In the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, Pauline Konga became the first Kenyan woman to medal (Silver Medal, 5000m), henceforth proving that Kenyan females had aptitude in long-distance running as well. Catherine Ndereba has since been unofficially recognized as the greatest women's marathoner of all time (4-time Boston champion); Lornah Kiplagat joins her as maybe the greatest women's road racer ever (world records in road 5K, 10 mile, 20K, and 21K/half marathon). Before the 1990's, many Kenyan athletes' training was sponsored by in-country parastatals such as Kenyan Police (Keino), the Kenyan Postal Services, the Kenya Ports Authority, the Kenya Prisons Service (Ndereba), and the Kenyan Armed Forces. Now, an elite middle- or long-distance athlete may, if given a race of considerable exposure, earn a hefty one-year's salary in one triumphant day.

Athletes from the Rift Valley earn money from many different sources, namely from corporate sponsorships (usually from apparel/shoe companies—especially Nike, Adidas, Puma, Reebok, and Aasics), race prizes (for top-finish performances and course/event records), home-country rewards, and race entry incentives offered by acquisitive race managers. These financial bonuses are the predominant reason that the Kalenjin enter running as a profession, although pursuit of fame could be a small contributing factor. Once an athlete gains an international name and to some degree becomes financially self-sufficient, he or she is able to reinvest into an



already-impressive comparative advantage in athletics. First on the docket comes regular high-tech training shoes, running kits, and training facilities. Many racing studs enhance their professional mobility, traveling to or living in areas that present unique fitness variables in terrain, altitude, track surfacing, or training partners. In order to best insure success, runners hope to hire a coach of reasonable stature, and in order to locate the best money-making opportunities, the most successful athletes hire one or two managers. Both managers and coaches gravitate to Western Province in order to satisfy this need, so this area around Eldoret is really seen as a running hub, and consequently, the center of the economic activity resulting from the wealth of its athletes.

As will be thoroughly discussed later, the Kenyan runners who have “made it” in their sport or event choose to channel their money in a wide variety of ways. Some revenue usually goes to supporting the family, some to entrepreneurial investment, some to rare luxuries (big-screen TV’s, automobiles, full-time house help, and chic clothing from Nairobi), and some to assist fellow up-and-coming athletes. One of the most accepted and prevailing modes of giving back to Kenya’s athletics workshop is by either starting or funding a running camp. Athletics camps are scattered all over the Rift Valley and especially on the escarpment that runs the western border of the province. They come in many different flavors, from casual training groups that agree on a common meeting point each morning to full room-and-board running complexes. Some are established, funded, and managed by personnel within a sponsor company, such as the Nike Camp in Ngong Hills (the nearest camp to Nairobi). Many are supervised by managers who bring their athletes to a common apartment complex or hostel—Gabriela Rosa (working with his son Federico), maybe the most well-known athletics manager in the world, oversees a slew of camps across the country, especially in Kapsabet, Iten, Eldoret, and Kaptagat. These four towns (Eldoret is a huge city) and their surrounding rural districts have been home to almost every successful Kenyan distance runner, so Rosa’s placement is strategic. His company Rosa & Associates has the financial capability to supply new runners with rental accommodation, a per diem, and even training gear. In fact, Nike gives Rosa a certain number of sponsorships to hand out annually—to runners of his choosing. He employs his own coaches to oversee each camp while he feeds them instructions from a specialty camp in his native Italy. Other examples of camps would be the hybrid running clinics started by Peter Rono and Lornah Kiplagat: these camps assist younger men and women in Kenya to train for fast times while

simultaneously readying themselves to apply to universities in Europe and the United States. Finally, some famous athletes give back to Kenya by constructing their own camps, inviting promising runners, and then entrusting the coaching, upkeep, and promotion of said camps to able Kenyan personnel. This has been the case for Moses Kiptanui (4-time World Championship medalist in the 3,000m steeplechase, silver medalist at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics 3,000m steeplechase) and Ibrahim Hussein (3-time Boston Marathon Champion), in Eldoret and Kapsabet, respectively. For many reasons, confirmed and elucidated during my ISP prep travels, I decided to stay among the runners at the Hussein Camp in Kapsabet for my Independent Study Project.

## **II. Setting & Study Sample**

For my ISP, I stayed in the small town of Kapsabet for approximately 21/2 weeks, which has an urban population of around 18,000 and a total population of almost 65,000. Kapsabet is located exactly halfway between the larger cities of Kisumu and Eldoret (the third and fifth most-populated cities in Kenya, respectively). The town is situated along the escarpment that skirts the western edge of the Rift Valley. It sits just southwest of the Nandi Hills (aptly named) at a relatively high altitude (1,981 meters), as is the case with most running camps in the country. The climate, altitude, topography, and lifestyle of Kapsabet are all conducive to a perfect training regime for the aspiring distance runner. This point is evident when ones strolls downtown along either Pamela Jelimo Street or Wilfred Bungei Lane; the streets are named after 2008 Olympic Gold medalists in the women's and men's 800 meter run, and both hail from Kapsabet. Other famous runners from around Kapsabet are Robert Kipkoech Cheruiyot (4-time Boston Marathon winner and current record holder), Peter Rono (1988 Olympics 1500m champion), Martin Lel (multiple London and NYC Marathon champion), and Bernard Lagat (naturalized US citizen and world-renowned 1500m runner). Living at 2,000 meters induces these runners' bodies to (1) manufacture more red blood cells and hemoglobin (for effective oxygen transport to the muscles) and (2) develop more efficient mechanisms for using oxygen during cellular respiration (starting with more effective storage of O<sub>2</sub> by the protein myoglobin), the process through which the body receives energy for normal-day activities as well as for exercise. In addition, 2,000 meters is not so high as to significantly impair the speedwork of runners, but the hills will send athletes into

oxygen debt (inflicting the lactic acid which is produced as a metabolic waste product, a signal for the impending “heavy feeling” in tired legs); this, along with the region’s mild climate, allows a runner to effectively stress his or her endurance system. Runners also train at other altitudes—Eldoret is 2116 meters and Iten is the extreme at nearly 2,500 meters—but middle-distance runners tend to flock to Kapsabet because their high-speed workouts (necessary to work the quick-reaction phosphocreatine energy pathway and the crucial anaerobic system) would be physically impossible in Iten. As a result of this “medium-altitude training”, recovery times drop, VO<sub>2</sub> max increases, more mitochondria are produced in the body, and lactic acid is broken down faster in the bloodstream and liver. Although the Nandi people are neither universally predisposed to running nor particularly adamant about nurturing new runners, there *is* the debate that the Kalenjin lifestyle might have historically helped the legendary “Kenyan running genes”—particularly, former nomadic and pastoral roots, intricacies in diet, and the necessity of walking/running long distances to school. The reason for these running genes is probably a conglomeration of all these possibilities, but Kenyan excellence in athletics is undeniable—and it gives athletes from Kapsabet a fair chance at earning a lot of money.

The Hussein Athletics Camp is situated one kilometer outside of central Kapsabet, secluded and off from the main road, yet very accessible to town. The camp was the brainchild of Ibrahim Hussein, who after winning three Boston Marathons and one New York Marathon, retired with pre-formed designs for how he would use his winnings. Hussein is quite the poster child for one whose unselfishness perfectly complements his sensibility in making spending decisions. This great runner, when I spoke with him in Nairobi, explained how he was determined to give back to the great sport which had made him both famous and prosperous—in a homegrown Kenyan way. He has orchestrated the building of the Amedo Center in downtown Eldoret and meanwhile has become the chairman of the Athletics Kenya North Rift branch, also in Eldoret. This means he oversees the administrative decisions dealing with facilities, race schedules, and runner/event sanctioning for Kenya’s most running-fertile region. However, the camp in Kapsabet was his special project for many years.

The Hussein Camp started as a Kenyan self-help group, thought out and funded almost solely by Ibrahim. Essentially, the project has been an unregistered, altruistic community-based organization with the beneficiary being young runners and the provider being Hussein and his

acquaintances with influence inside athletics circles in Kenya and throughout the world. I would characterize the endeavor as having three phases, if we may view the camp through a stereotypical NGO lens. Hussein first used much of his prize money to erect the physical capital that is the sixteen block houses that sit together on the outskirts of Kapsabet. Each house is bisected into two equal sections, each with two bedrooms, a kitchen, a hallway, a porch, and a large multi-purpose den. With one person in each room, the camp sleeps 32 runners, but today the running population is spread out in a less uniform special arrangement; some houses accommodate fewer runners along with their families, but in some houses, runners have generously invited one or two other athletes to share space in their rooms. I would best estimate that around 40 runners reside in the camp today, with maybe 10 non-athletes. There is a borehole in the yard of the camp and a stream with crystal-clear water one kilometer down the dirt road. Electricity is available if the runners pay to rewire it to their individual unit, which most have not done. The complex is gated, and the one remaining building is a metal shack which was intended to be the runner's communal kitchen, but has since been transformed into the dwelling of the camp's self-employed janitor, mzee Sudi, who distributes water, guards the compound, and completes odd jobs here and there.

Initially, Ibrahim Hussein brought athletes (mostly male) to the camp with the intention of coaching the entire group—the second phase of the projects history. With his personal experience with all facets—physically, mentally, and financially—of successful international distance running, he was to be an all-purpose counselor for the boys. He would be de-facto coach, manager, friend, mentor, and sometimes even race organizer (his position with Athletics Kenya allowed him to have the inside scoop on upcoming event specifics). From all indications, the athletes Hussein chose developed nicely as a group, and some became internationally recognized. I also understand that there came a time when many runners moved on to other more-lush living arrangements and even times to more alluring managers in Europe or America. At this point in his venture's time-profile, Ibrahim reached a crossroads—ostensibly stage three of his project. As part of a continued effort to contribute fruitful ideas to his global running family, he registered as an official with the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) at their offices near Kasarani Stadium in Nairobi. In Hussein's opinion, the two conflating circumstances, (1) his new position, which in his opinion represented a conflict of interests (between IAAF resources and his runners in Kapsabet), and (2) the noticeable (albeit

very temporary) vacancies at his camp, called for a “changing of the guard”, so to speak. Ibrahim entrusted the new contingent of young runners with Coach Said Aziz, who was born and raised as a runner 20 kilometers from Kapsabet. Aziz had suffered a knee injury a few years back, and had found professional refuge as a coach at a poorly-functioning camp on the other side of Kapsabet. When the manager of the camp pulled his support, along with the financial backing of shoe and apparel company Mizuno (both for reasons not known), Said was left stranded and consequently happy to be picked up by Hussein’s project.

Ibrahim has effectively handed over the reins to Coach Said, although he stops by the camp from time to time. His largest involvement is in trying to garner the highest possible IAAF coaching certification for Said, although with all things considered this credential is not an urgent objective. Said now administers to the camps most important needs—mainly in coaching duties and in large administrative decisions, especially dealing with the admission of runners as residents at the camp. Some runners are left over from Hussein’s original training group; these few, along with a few at-large members, workout separately from Said’s coaching umbrella. Otherwise, the remaining runners at the compound, plus a myriad of aspiring non-resident athletes from up to thirty kilometers away, subject themselves to Said’s tutelage at least six times weekly. Said’s coaching comes at no upfront monetary cost—only a required display of discipline and respect. There is an understood agreement that any financial success derived from work within the training squad will be partially re-invested into the group, and especially to repay the group’s unsalaried leader. Speedwork goes on maybe four times a week when select athletes are not away at races, but each runner might exercise two or three times a day. For the rest of each day, each individual is left to his own devices, although Said is always available for one-on-one attention. I happened to live in the same unit as Said, who resides with his wife and two girls (one in primary and one in secondary boarding school), and he proved more than accessible from dawn until dusk. Overall, I counted over 50 regular hardworking athletes that showed up each day for Said Aziz’s workouts, so I will for all intents and purposes consider this figure my ISP sample size. I must say that these athletes have been so welcoming, facilitative, and insightful that I should have been satisfied with a sample size of ten.

### **III. Statement of Problem**

Upon departure towards Eldoret for my ISP prep, I had pre-meditated certain problems that I would have liked to solve. I hoped to find copious sociological and human-subject material on the savings/investment decisions of successful runners. With millions of Kenyan Shillings to be won, as aforementioned, surely I could chronicle the numerous caches, assets, and mercantile ventures to which such massive winnings would be deposited. However, after speaking with Donna Pido, my American ethnocentricity towards a Western capitalist socioeconomic system was exposed for correction. Donna explained that the rural Kenyan economic cycle was nothing like the capitalist cycle of economic growth—taught to us by Professor Jama and predominant in most development economics textbooks. I realized that my ISP's approach needed to be tailored for a Kapsabet society that is historically agricultural and indisposed to the habitual and extreme marketization seen in the Global North. In fact, most athletes from Kapsabet must also tailor a profession with very western values to accommodate traditional filial and community-based ties. For these reasons, I have now recognized that my first problem is in reconciling what it means to win instant cash-dollars and then to return to a lifestyle re-routed towards day-to-day subsistence. Only by understanding the semantics of earning within agricultural families can I move on to my initial questions.

A second problem lies in the ostensible ease with which Kenyan's dominate the races on the silver screen. From the ostensible supremacy portrayed by American movies and on daily ESPN specials, it might seem as if the Kalenjin's natural skill in running and the money that derives from that talent is both valuable and given. However, the fact that Kenyan's win races does not mean (1) that runners as a holistic group ultimately benefit from this money-making opportunity and (2) that communities see tangible benefits from producing these great athletes—whether politically, socially, *or* economically. On top of this, there is no guarantee that this prevalence in Kenyan running triumphs meets the true potential of these Nandi runners. This is the next problem that must be addressed. An endurance runner's legs can be looked at as a resource, and if responsible parties—that is to say coaches, Athletics Kenya (AK), the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) division in Kenya, the Kenyan government, the local people and authorities, and the athletes themselves—are not fostering that resource to the best of their ability, then there is room for improvement. Especially when great

poverty exists and the need for racing revenue is dire, runners and their communities see the harshest consequences from agents that exploit the runners, a government who does not properly appreciate and compensate its athletes (evident from the diaspora of elite runners to hungry countries like Bahrain and Morocco), lack of proper training facilities, and failure to suitably educate these runners in both organized school and informal life skills (money-managing, etc.). For example, many young athletes could submit times to American colleges that would merit a Division I NCAA athletics scholarship, but they slip through the cracks because of test scores, visa problems, or just failure to recognize the magnitude of their comparative advantage. Many problems exist in effectively “mining” this special resource.

Finally, one of the most overwhelming problems is given in this true story: Pamela Jelimo, one of Kenya’s elite 800 meter runners, was the youngest-ever Kenyan woman to win an Olympic gold medal (Beijing 2008), and recently she completed six victories on the European circuit to win the Golden League Jackpot—one million US dollars! No Kenyan athlete has ever won that much money—ever. Previously in 2008, Jelimo had also won the 800 meter run at the African Championship in Athletics (setting a national junior record of 1:58.70); a few weeks later, she won the Hengelo Grand Prix (setting an *international* junior world record of 1:55.76). After her conquest of the Golden League, she went on to win the IAAF World Athletics Final in Stuttgart, Germany, crowning an unbeaten season—at age eighteen! The revenue stream following Jelimo’s performances during the summer of 2008 is unprecedented for a female Kenyan athlete. So this begs the question: if Jelimo holds both her interests and her community’s interest in high priority, where will she distribute her money? This amount of cash could be worth more than the entire GDP of her hometown of Kapsabet. Maybe even all of its people’s economic assets (the caveat being the difference between economic and subjective wellbeing). So, the question of where to channel capital is key, since Jelimo’s goliath-like achievement only happens once in a blue moon. Does she invest in a business or with a firm in Eldoret in the hope that her money grows, as the modern capitalist theory reads, or does she put money into buying land for her family and relatives, following traditional Kenyan subsistence and agricultural practices? Does she give to charity, or to individual acquaintances? Does she start her own organization? All these questions solicit great intellectual debate and warrant in-depth economic analysis.

#### **IV. Objectives**

In order to fully understand the factors contributing to the livelihoods of both a Kenyan runner and his/her rural family, I propose five major objectives:

1. Appropriately characterize a professional Kenyan's role within his indigenous rural family and the greater community.
2. Identify core obstacles that a long-distance runner sees on his quest for athletics stardom and the ensuing financial rewards. This recognition will indicate whether or not this Kenyan comparative advantage in running talent is being effectively "mined".
3. Analyze the different approaches successful Kenyan runners take towards using their cash winnings and miscellaneous rewards. Also evaluate which parties benefit from the athletes' spending decisions and whether these decisions in turn optimize potential benefits—a subjective quandary, to say the least.
4. Explore opportunities for steady improvement on the Kenyan method for tapping its potential in athletics. How can performances be boosted; how can more runners achieve breakthrough performances in time, place, prestige, or exposure; and how can financial benefit from these performances be ensured. How can I help?
5. Make a careful value judgment on the viability of Kenyan athletics, as a sport and as an income-generating profession.

### **METHODOLOGY**

In order to accomplish my objectives, I conducted a proficient schedule of primary data collection, secondary data collection, focus group discussion, and unremitting general observation, both inside and outside of Said Aziz's training group. In total, I spoke with numerous running coaches, athletics officials, middle- and long-distance athletes, their families, and even ordinary citizens with no direct tie to running. I was able to sample each of these target groups in more than one area within a 75km radius around Eldoret.



## I. Primary Sources

I structured my entire ISP itinerary with the preliminary goal of giving myself access to prevalent primary source material. Finding a spot at the Hussein Camp ensured this accessibility, but I also traveled outside of the compound—both to camp and to other townships—in order to have a more holistic foundation for my primary source data.

**Runs.** By far my most valuable information was garnered during daily exercise (*mazoezi*) with both male and female runners. Luckily most athletes work out many times daily, so I picked and chose slow, easy workouts in which to participate; on a long, boring run, most runners I met were more than ready to open up. I also attended around four speed workouts per week, where I would meet runners residing outside the camp and also would observe body language and interactions between athletes who ostensibly compete for the few profitable slots available to Kenyan athletes on the international stage. Runners hyped up on endorphins, appropriately observed in close proximity to their professional lives, render the most invaluable human data.

**Interviews.** Of these countless runners, I was able to gain more “intimate” access to around fifteen of them. To clarify, by the end of November I felt as if I had received an honest life story (along with commentary from other acquaintances) from each and every of the fifteen athletes. Around five of these extended encounters began with one-hour interviews; another five initially voluntarily opened up to me, aware of my genuine interest as well as my upcoming ISP paper; and the last five naturally revealed their near-complete life narratives within our daily conversations. Most were men (two women), and most hailed from Said’s training group. However, I was privileged to sit down with Abraham Maiyo, Lornah Kiplagat, and Belal Ali Monsoon, all three of which are internationally decorated athletes—I actually stayed overnight with each one in spontaneous instances of good fortune.

**Mingling with the public.** After the first few days in Kapsabet, I expanded my study’s horizons to include non-athletes and runners outside of Said’s squad, intent on understanding the agricultural roots of these athletes. I visited one runner’s homestead in Kapsabet, one a fifteen kilometer run from the town, and one a ninety-minute *piki-piki* ride away near Kapkoi, where I witnessed the Kalenjin circumcision ceremony *cheptilet* (specifically *tundoab nandi*). I went to the local club *Sunshine*, where I actually learned quite a bit while also accepting an offer for a

ninety-minute tour of the Chimoni Tea Factory the next day (recognized as the second-best tea in Kenya). I stayed for two night in Eldoret: the first night with a suburban farming family, whose connections led me to a morning jog with runners who introduced me to the Eldoret Kiplombe Athletics camp. By chance, the second night I stayed with Abraham Maiyo (after meeting him at the Lands Commissions Office) at one of Gabriela Rosa's camps; the next morning we ran with maybe the most elite group of marathoners in Kenya, starring Robert Cheruiyot (4-time Boston Marathon winner) and Duncan Kibet (second-fastest marathoner ever). The following night I spent in Kitale with the extended family of Mary Nabuley. Mary's brother-in-law walked me around a handful of farm plots the next day and showed me the Kenya Seed Company office for which he used to work. In addition, two weeks later in the trip I had the opportunity to tour the Doinyo Lessos Creameries Cheese Factory on my way through Eldoret, the ultimate destination being the small town of Iten around forty kilometers away—another Kenyan running nucleus. I stayed at Lornah Kiplagat's High Altitude Training Camp in Iten for four days, getting to know a new horde of runners, meeting some important managers and physiotherapists, and especially getting acquainted with the younger scholar-athletes that Lornah has taken under her wings.

## **II. Secondary Sources**

I sought out secondary sources in order to brush up on both my knowledge of athletics and my knowledge of rural development economics. For these purposes I used books and articles, officials, and close friends such as my classmates, teachers, and other acquaintances from Nairobi.

**Literature.** As described in my upcoming literature review, I read a few complete books directly relating to running and rural development/sociology. I also consulted the Daily Nation or The Standard each and every day (the editions tailored for Western Kenya). Frequently I sought advice from online articles and journals through Google Scholar. I also picked up literature from some of the offices and camps I visited.

**Officials.** I consider the officials with whom I spoke “secondary sources” because they handed me literature, fed me some general information, and spoke about my primary subjects as fellow observers. I spoke with an official at the Eldoret Lands Commissions Office, the Eldoret Deputy Town Clerk, the Eldoret Town Drawer, Coach Letting at the Eldoret Ministry of Sport, and

Ibrahim Hussein at the IAAF offices in Nairobi. I thank all of these administrators for their time and patience.

**Personal Contact.** I also received thoughtful advice and critical information from acquaintances in Nairobi. My SIT classmates, all from different academic backgrounds, sat down with me at SIT and even at an Ethiopian bar down the street to discuss my ideas. Simultaneously, Oduch and Donna Pido each took time to enlighten me about conditions in rural western Kenya. Finally, I interviewed Peninah Munyasia, Alysso Russell's host parents, and Mary Nabuley about their hometowns—Eldoret, the outskirts of Eldoret, and Kitale, respectively.

### **III. Focus Groups**

I led or participated in a few cooperative problem-solving discussions that could best be characterized as focus groups.

**Henry Rono Scholar-Athlete Camp.** After asking to meet the coach of the Henry Rono Camp in Kapsabet, I was surprised to be invited to give a talk to the runners after showing up after one of their training sessions. I was able to fill in a wealth of cracks in their knowledge about college and NCAA Athletics in the United States, and at the same time I learned a tremendous deal.

**Problem-Solution Analysis at the Hussein Camp.** Maybe the most fruitful feature of my stay in Kapsabet was the recurring yet informal discussion with Said Aziz about his camp's goals, modus operandi, and results—with input from some of his key runners. We discussed group self-awareness, predicaments for some or all of the runners, and most importantly, opportunities for me to help with this project started by Ibrahim Hussein.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

All three of these books were indispensable to my Independent Study Project, both as effective secondary sources and as thematically inspirational works of literature—without the help of these authors, I would have been writing inside a self-imposed scholarly vacuum.

## **Rural Development: Putting the Last First – by Robert Chambers**

I started reading Chambers' gateway book on rural development, published in 1983, the minute I returned from ISP prep. Over the weekend I had learned to appreciate the necessity of studying these runners within the rural agricultural setting that defined their childhood. Chambers' work was an excellent resource in sculpting this type of approach to living and writing in November. According to him, an economic viewpoint nurtured within a framework of subsistence existence prevails within *all* aspects of a Kenyan's social, economic, and political existence. Therefore, as Chambers stresses, First World solutions will not see optimal uptake when applied to Third World problems. The author also suggests that this dilemma exists within and permeates social interaction, gift-giving, and even small research projects like my own. In order to map out a worthwhile study project, I would have to show "cognitive respect" to these runners' socio-economic modus operandi and *learn from them first* (Chambers, pg. 209). Before qualifying information for the purposes of university study in the States, I must first properly replace my results-oriented mindset with one that is receptive—a blank slate instead of a novel with needy margins. Chambers was the perfect resource to guide my ISP's methodology.

## **Rural Sociology and Rural Development: Its Application in Kenya – by Phillip Mbithi**

Whereas Chambers' more general overview only mentioned Kenya in sparse examples throughout his book, Phillip Mbithi asks relatively similar questions within an East-African context in his book *Rural Sociology and Rural Development*, published in 1974. Mbithi is a Kenyan citizen who cites specific case studies to illustrate many of the theories the Chambers introduces in his own book. However, Mbithi is able to incorporate issues of land and ethnicity in a fundamentally Kenyan context while simultaneously demonstrating the multi-dimensional identity of a farmer. Mbithi gave me the most adequate assessment on reasons for poverty and vulnerability in western Africa (Rift Valley Province and Western Province). Without Mbithi's help, I would have been unable to characterize the social dilemmas underscoring a young man's decision to become a professional athlete.

## **Winning Running: Successful 800m & 1500m Racing and Training – Peter Coe**

I was fortunate to begin this ISP with well-founded knowledge about the principles that guide an effective training regimen for a long-distance runner. In high school I ran under one of

the best male cross-country coaches in Tennessee and for four years picked up many tips about an all-inclusive and internationally-accepted practice system. However, I had never run alongside the greatest athletes in the world and had no idea about mankind's physical limits in speed, intensity, endurance, and recovery potential. Most of the athletes in Said Aziz's training group picked Kapsabet for its climate and terrain—both ideal for a picture-perfect middle-distance training routine. I found Peter Coe's book helpful because it described the ins and outs of the training of Sebastian Coe—the sixteen-year record holder in the 800 meter run, and second fastest runner of all time at this event. Although I could not perform most of the workouts mentioned in the books, these practice descriptions served as a great comparison to regimens of Said Aziz and other coaches I met. With the help of this book, I left Kapsabet with a gauge on the high points and holes within the Kenyan training method.

## **Discussion, Findings, and Analysis**

When I arrived in Kapsabet, it took me a full three weeks to even begin to assess the level of poverty this area approximately forty kilometers southwest of Eldoret. In light of the 2009 drought in Kenya, it has been reasonable over the past few months to ask the question: "How has the lack of rain effected your township?" This is a relevant question, as Kenya runs on mostly hydroelectric power, is home to key lakes and rivers that supply the entirety of East Africa, and sees 75% of its populous dependent on its world-renowned agricultural sector. But whereas this query works to distinguish between recent hardships and lucky breaks (from the drought), it gives little data on (1) a community's predisposition towards deprivation and (2) towards its ability to buffer against this same deprivation. In fact I received many different answers to the drought question while in Kapsabet; even though the region (European Highlands area past the escarpment bordering the Rift Valley) as a whole lucked out and met a mild drought, some households were unphased, whereas many saw a  $\frac{3}{4}$  drop in their fall maize harvest (specific number from farms in Kitale). Eventually I realized that quality of land was the crux of this discrepancy—that in Kenya, its main crops see crop yields drop exponentially with both less rainfall *and* with unfertile soil. So two men with seemingly identical plots might survive until they meet extenuating climate circumstances such as a drought; at that point, the farmer with

fertile soil might see a 10% drop in harvest while the farmer with rocky soil will lose his entire year's crop. To explicate further, a plot with ideal soil and climate in Kitale might only require *one-tenth* of the land necessary to yield the same crop amount in the hot, arid, and destitute Turkana region. This is a perfect example of poor buffering capability, and I have searched for a suitable way to represent this debacle. In *Rural Development*, Robert Chambers draws a figure that cites five factors—poverty itself, physical weakness, vulnerability, powerlessness, and isolation—which together define the trap that is deprivation (Appendix I). In this section I use these five disadvantages frequently to identify barriers to development and prosperity for both projects in the agricultural economy and in the sport of athletics in Kenya.

## **I. Rural Agricultural Setting**

Situated in the greater rural area of the White Highlands, Kapsabet acts as a satellite town to its industrial superior Eldoret. Named after the Masai word for “stony river”, Eldoret definitely acts as a river bed for the abundant resources of both the Highlands and the Rift Valley, acting to both redistribute and, more importantly, export the fruits of Kenya's most fertile soil. In general, Indians and Kikuyus have become the linchpin merchants in heading a fully corporate city. In Eldoret: The National Cereals Board, Raiply (the biggest sawmill and general manufacture), E.A. Tanning Estates, Kenya Co-operative Creameries, Uasin Gishu Quarry and Agricultural Finance Corporation essentially handle most primary resources; the local munitions factory, bottling company, Rivatex (textile factory), and Kenya Industrial Estates pretty much fulfill all industrial or manufacturing requirements; and communications, transportation, hospital care, nightlife/tourism, higher education, and even energy find their control centers for the surrounding districts. As a key stop on the Mombasa-Kampala Railroad, Eldoret has been a perfect example for efficient and sufficient city planning, as demonstrated by their Investment and Tourism Catalogue, Strategic Plan for 2008-2013, and Service Delivery Catalogue for 2008.

However, the impressive development of Eldoret has in some ways precluded similar development from nearby areas—especially Kapsabet. Even though a forty kilometer matatu ride is expensive for any farming family from this area, there is no sensible reason for the government to either reallocate or duplicate some key industries or service headquarters away from Eldoret, and foreign direct investment (FDI) always appreciates centrality and stability,

both for which El-D fits the mold. As Chambers emphasizes time and time again, rural areas on the periphery do not see progress at the same rate as those in the center; in fact, those athletes that become wealthy enough often migrate to Eldoret for this exact reason—any of their investments would see less traffic in Kapsabet or Iten, so a profit-seeking entrepreneur bets on where the consumer will be. As a result, Kapsabet is home to only one business in the western sense. The local KTL Tea Factory is the only completely mono-dimensional business among many other assorted *dukas*, although a few electronics stores seem to be scaling up to some degree (even though they will never become “chain stores”). In general, any specific projects in Kapsabet are by nature “self-help projects” in the *majimbo* sense, except they will use the community’s resources, not those of the Kenyan Government or the Eldoret municipality. This is why effective devolution inherent in Kenya’s new Harmonized Draft Constitution would best help the farmers that have always been the heart and soul of the Kenyan economy. In the last twenty years, percent investment in agriculture has decreased from over 30% to well under 5% in the industry that easily employs the most Kenyan people. Also, Agricultural Society of Kenya (ASK) shows tend to avoid addressing the most pressing issues with agricultural in Kapsabet, and during my ISP I heard frequent complaints about the minimal relevancy agricultural research in Nairobi has to the most valuable crops and pastoral animals on the peripheral ground. Around the world today there is, in fact, very little examination into the science of raising goats or of growing invaluable crops like *kasava* or *maharagwe* or non-cash-crop *mboga*. There is no science for the poor, only unnecessary research for the rich (genetically-cloned sheep come to mind)—a perfect indication of Chambers’ “isolation”.

Let’s consider all of this by looking at a vulnerable (one of Chambers’ five indicators) farmer toiling away as he would have done in the 1960’s before independence, but operating within a greater system which is frantically developing, namely in Eldoret. After Kenyan independence in 1963, large plots of land were consolidated and given to rich Kenyans, many of which were Kikuyu. This consolidation has continued with the individualization of Kenyan land tenure (creating freehold titles) in the 1980’s. Now land prices have shot up so acquisition of new plots takes greater sacrifice, but farmers are so vulnerable that sometimes they must give up their own land in order to pay for bride wealth, fund a relative’s funeral, or settle a dispute. This is why holding a cluster of goats or sheep is so critical, and when a suffering family gives up this group, they see “the ratchet effect”—a procession towards deprivation that cannot be reversed

once assets have been surrendered. The same ratchet effect results from frantic urbanization: because of favorable job availability in cities like Eldoret or Nairobi, rural men decide to migrate to the nearest metropolis in search of salaried jobs. However, this influx cannot be absorbed by a steadily growing city, and widespread unemployment follows. Population and economic growth, as expected within the Western conception of development, will see urban prices slowly rise. Unfortunately, the residual rural income from sale of crops *does not* rise at a commensurate rate. Essentially, selling your farm's surplus is not as profitable as it once was, those same plots are shrinking (due to shared inheritance between siblings—population growth in most African countries has not ebbed, even though development theory suggests this should happen with a rise in GDP as Kenya saw in the 70's), and essential manufactured goods, medical care/drugs, secondary school fees, and especially western miscellaneous goods and electronics become beyond unaffordable. This is the system through which the farmers in Kapsabet descend to the lowest rung of prosperity.

Another functionality which helps to extract profit from the rural poor on the periphery is the global supply chain—from harvest by the farmers to final sale to the consumer. As of late, people in Kapsabet have occupied the most unfavorable end of this continuum. The following opposing examples illustrate these malicious forces with both a destructive economic scheme and an effective one. First of all, in Kitale I learned that the maize-flour industry is distorted against the poor farmers. According to Appendix II, farm workers have periodic and seasonal changes in their time spent doing farm work. Consequently, during idle periods of the year planters must attend to other odd jobs, family responsibilities, and economic capital-building activities (to be explained in following paragraphs). However, when harvest time comes around, these families must quickly and powerfully mobilize in order to pick, de-husk, dry (sometimes), transport, and sell their maize. However, the Kenyan Government and the Kenya Cereals and Produce Board (KCPB) haphazardly buy up individuals' maize in unspecified amounts. If the government never shows, the farmers are forced to sell to the predatory prices of the milling companies who take advantage of the farmers at the very last minute before their harvest rots. In turn, they grind the maize at a streamlined, low cost and in turn store it in their silos to artificially impose monopoly pricing—sometimes as informal cartels. This process creates food shortage through a failure to distribute the food surplus as well by generating maize flower bags at well-inflated prices. The weak points of this system lie in the inability of both the KCPB and the



Minister of Agriculture to secure maize preservation, in the opportunistic rent-seeking of the milling company, and in the powerless position of the farmers, who cannot afford “to wait”.

The system through which tea is produced in the greater Kapsabet area presents a more effective approach at food preservation and effective, equitable distribution of profits. During my travels, I visited both the locally-oriented KTL Tea Factory and the British-owned Chimoni Tea Factory—a conglomerate aimed at wholesale export of pre-ground Kenyan tea. Not only is tea a wonderfully-profitable product of the Rift Valley (during high harvest season tea-pickers will round the same plot at least once a month), but there also systems in place to ensure its supply to tea-drinker abroad and in Kenya. While the Chimoni Factory serves India, Europe, and the United States at East African auctions in Mombasa, the KTL Tea Factory offers competitive prices to local farmers, buys up smaller units of tea, and produces tea in individual one-kilogram sacks for the Kenyan people. This is dramatically different than the coffee and sugar industries, where the highest-quality product goes abroad for the highest prices, and then Kenyan government parastatals import lower-quality sugar—*with substantial tariffs*—to sell to the citizens at a higher price than would be asked if the original sugar or coffee was simply rerouted. Simply preposterous! As for the Chimoni Tea Factory, the company makes huge dollars by exporting five million kilograms of tea per year out of Mombasa. Although some might claim that the Mombasa people are servicing this industry without seeing their due benefit, I witnessed how Chimoni used its profits to equitably give back to the indigenous people. First of all, all everyday laborers and even some factory managers grew up near Kapsabet and received freed training to work at the factory. The Chimoni facility is spotless and is cleaned regularly so that it appears immaculate. It is a two-row assembly line with the highest-level industrial equipment (supposedly imported from Eldoret and Great Britain), and both safety and quality standards (each tea order must have units of “two leafs and a bud”) are adhered to at all times. In addition, this company has reached deals with respective tea farmers for fair deals, and at the end of each work-year, these original suppliers receive a sizeable bonus if the company makes profits. The Chimoni Factory has recently spent the effort to become certified with the Rain Forest Alliance (RFA, an NGO based in New York City), and now they are able to sell their product at a premium. To be a member a produce company must respect workers’ rights, avoid predatory-pricing strategies, and enact measures to prove corporate social and environmental responsibility. Accordingly, the Chimoni Tea Factory has agreed to recognize a tea-farmers’ guild, to power

their boilers from four separate and rotating forests that the factory owns, and to deposit waste into a series of strategically-placed wetlands that *naturally* treat runoff from the production process. Although the factory (and the greater tea-growing and refining system) might not be flawless, I was overwhelmed at the degree to which tea growers, factories, and buyers aim “to first do no harm” (Easterly).

Maybe the most enlightening aspect of my trip to Kapsabet was the discovery of certain clever coping mechanisms that both the townspeople and the runners possessed to protect themselves and survive in difficult times—which could be an all-year-round unremitting necessity. Patrick Sang, a world-class 3000 meter steeplechaser and specialist in giving back to his sport, informed about the unusually high dependency ratio among Africans, and especially among rural Kenyans. This is one of the toughest things about moving to the city to help support your family; just like immigration through Ellis Island in the United States, you unintentionally (but knowingly) renounce many of your vital ties with family, friends, and even informal patrons. For example, the janitor at the Hussein Camp is completely unemployed, for all intents and purposes. However, he survives doing odd jobs around the compound and by receiving the token of a few hundred shillings from Coach Said every week. I officially employed him for my final week at the camp, and he will live off the 1000 Ksh I paid him for maybe the next month; the importance of my faith in his capabilities showed in how meticulous an uneducated, unemployed man could see a job to its execution. My handouts, which I felt bad about, were safe with him because he will continuously hope for supplementary jobs in the future. The poor cannot wait for ideal jobs—they instantly pounce on *any* job.

Other examples of this intricate system of interdependency really how the poor use “self-help” to create human safety nets which are under-furnished by the central government. The Kalenjin’s unwavering support for MP and Agricultural Minister William Ruto is the most well-known adjunct to politicians who hold a foothold in power, influence, and available funds (which spell prosperity); Ruto’s policies have enacted a brutal sugar shortage and an incompetent KCPB, and yet siding with Ruto represents the most probable and timely opportunity for a changed life. Politicians in Nairobi repeatedly disappoint their constituents, but the poor cannot afford to wait. Also, a study socioeconomic capital would be best for further examination of this issue, as we see mechanisms such as the local tea factories and the system of unregistered maize-

grinding machines for which these types of favors are necessary. Many well-off farmers in Kapsabet have bought miniature machines for personally skipping the expensive and inefficient maize profit-chain, and they now charge a small fee for farmers to feed themselves from their neighborhood and not from the supermarket. This system, which has also witnessed communally-purchased contraptions, saves at least 40 Ksh, “Kenyan money”, on each bag of maize-flour. Picking just a miniscule number of examples that I have observed since arriving in Kenya: (1) loyalty between homegrown matatu business, where the driver of an Eldoret shuttle to Kisumu will recommend a particular driver towards Kitale, if that is indeed where you intend on going; (2) unofficial agreements between ladies at the Kapsabet market that they will share the combined profit from selling *sukumawiki* (for example), which at the bazaar tends to be identical across merchant-stands; (3) granting of free medicine to a farmer by a *duka ya dawa* chemist, in return for a week’s worth of *viazi* when harvest season comes around (a variety of “in-kind transfer); and (4) even families sponsoring the migration of *kaka* or *dada* in the hope that eventually income from a newly-acquired farm or government job will boost the income-level of the entire extended-family (this also assumes a repayment from said beneficiary). In conclusion, this series of convoluted ties and trusts represents a “socially-good” externality, where the well-known tragedy of the commons would represent a “socially-bad” outcome. Shortly I will show how these same functionalities carry over into life as a runner at the Hussein Camp in Kapsabet.

The final thing I must add about the rural agricultural setting in which Kenyan runners are born and raised (over 90% of those surveyed had parents that are still farmers—the exceptions being a Somali with parents who are owners of the supermarket, one whose dad is in jail and whose mother is a “hustler”, and one whose father is an athletics coach) is that the socioeconomic make-up of the farming family is changing in response to both development, greater education (and therefore opportunity), and diversification to meet a growing need for a rising monetary income—as described above. When visiting families across the escarpment (in Iten, Kitale, Eldoret, Kapsabet, Kakamega, and Kapkoi), I started to realize the emergent *plurality in job-persuasion*, nascent *within* the boundaries of a single family. Now, when I would aim to visit a “farming family”, I would find myself among adults with a mixed bag of income-generating activities. I would attribute some of this trend to the enactment of the Kazi kwa Kijana bill by the central government, which has the goal of employing young men in a

variety of new professions when they are in dire need of work; this usually is the case after adolescence and secondary school. In my adventures, one family had a father who was a farmer-turned-teacher, who after earning enough money was revisiting becoming a successful farmer. Mary Nabuley's brother-in-law was a retired University graduate with a degree in Agriculture, who acquired a job at the Kenyan Seed Company, has since become a small-scale farmer with various supplementary professions such as pioneer restaurant/*hoteli* owner, investor, and unofficial advocate on the peoples' behalf for the Kitale Chief and Kitale Counselor. This William Kundu advises the retired teacher with his deep agricultural knowledge, hosts officials at his restaurant (return favors to come in the future), and owns a small maize mill that he offers for communal use—all perfect illustrations of the previously-mentioned socioeconomic safety nets. In addition, most families (even in Shirazi village on the Indian Ocean *pwani*) have one brother working in a far-off urban setting, maybe one attending school, and another watching over the family farm. One runner I met hailed from Kapkoi, bought a plot of land for his new house (using prize money), and was sending his youngest brother to university while the final brother worked as a teacher and main authority in the runner's absence on the new family farm. Numerous other examples with merchants, ministry officials, and urban labor jobs abound, but the critical point is that the income-generating activity within the family is rapidly diversifying.

## **II. Excavation of Running as a Resource**

### **a. Foxes and Hedgehogs**

A young rural Kenyan's choice to make running his or her profession can be looked at through a lens defined by the previous section. As I learned from visiting Kapkoi for a Nandi circumcision ceremony, once a Kalenjin boy becomes a man—usually recognized by this festival—he is expected to employ himself for the good of the family. With Kalenjin women, this choice depends on how progressive the family is; either way, the woman will be completing a wide variety of household chores for the entirety of her life (I am mainly considering men in my study). A job as a highly-skilled runner fulfills the role of a supplementary cash-earning job, adding to the money earned from the sale of surplus from the small-scale farm (usually). The one peculiarity with this vocation is the “lumpy nature” of the revenue deriving from prize money and other aforementioned race rewards. Earning money is never ever for certain,

especially during an athlete's development phase. In fact, most families who sponsor the future success of their young male runners make an investment with huge ramifications that will not be rectified until that athlete's eventual success. These relatives give up a prime farm worker, or if not, a young man who has the potential to earn a salaried living wage. In Kenya, the lack of a salaried existence means one cannot receive loans to invest in business ventures—another disadvantage intrinsic in a young runner's startup. Finally, most runners will travel away from their homesteads to train with better coaches and more-talented runners, and henceforth they will abandon many valuable social ties like those abovementioned. As a matter of fact, many of my acquaintances at the Hussein Camp came on location and immediately worked to develop new socioeconomic capital among athletes in their new community—ostensibly meeting stand-ins for close contacts back home. These runners that I have met, after training for four or five years, essentially develop and exist on one-skill resumes. Robert Chambers puts it well: “Beyond these common characteristics, two dominant strategies stand out. A proverb of the Greek, Archilochus, says ‘the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing’. Poor rural people separate into foxes and hedgehogs” (Chambers, pg. 177). Chambers also expounds on the fact that “more and more is known about less and less”; he says that the most terrifying reality about this aphorism is the converse—“less and less is known about more and more”. This is the truly regrettable thing about a young Kalenjin's choosing athletics over alternative professions.

However, there are many exciting advantages to being a developing runner; within Said's training group, most athlete's begin training seriously after secondary school and after alternative professions did not pan out (this usually happens with runners in their early or mid-20's). Although every runner in my survey cited financial reasons for joining the group, many fancy a job that will bring themselves, their families, and their tribe pride and honor. In addition, the nature of the job makes running ecologically friendly and especially high-earning in the spring and summer—a low-paying period for agricultural workers. With a mono-dimensional job comes the appeal that if one perfects a skill to its maximum, the celebrity effect carries trails of financial riches and social splendor. This has been the case in the past and will continue to be the case as long as Kenyan prominence in athletics remains. At the pinnacle of elite performance achieved by the likes of Wilfred Bungei, Martin Lel, and Robert Kipkoech Cheruiyot (all from around Kapsabet), the rewards from such excellence are simply awe-inspiring. There actually

seems to be a three-rung trend that defines the hierarchy of Kenyan running performance. There is the first rung which identifies most runners—new or unproven athletes who have yet to travel abroad, to earn significant prize money (for our purpose, 1000 USD), to find a manager, and to have that same manager track down a sponsorship with a sports corporation. When these objectives have been reached through fast times, impressive finishes (with respect to place), or successful exposure, a budding Kenyan runner has reached the second rung. Finally, if that same athlete becomes dominant at the world stage—by breaking course, national, and world records, by medaling at the Olympics or the World Championships, or by winning major road races/marathons—he or she has reached the third rung and will be forever remembered in popular runner’s lore. My concern is in helping athletes reach that second rung, since all of those on the first rung are blazing-fast but dirt-poor. To continue, the most effective way to analyze the prospects for making running economically viable is to examine obstacles a runner confronts on his way towards this second rung.

#### **b. Impediments to Success**

Robert Chambers, in his chapter entitled “The new professionalism: putting the last first”, talks about obstacles: “For reversals towards the rural poor, big obstacles lie in the citadels of professional purity in the metropolitan cores”. This passage perfectly describes how the resources that have become incentives for Kenyan runners are tied up in the western centers of power and influence. Lindsay Bibee, in her Fall ’09 ISP, brings up the dichotomy of central resources and peripheral needs. For athletics in Kenya, the resources reside in Europe, Asia, and the Americas, but the needs exist back in rural agricultural Kenya. Runners, at the beginning, cohabit this needy region that is the Rift Valley, whereas the dealers of financial reserves (race managers, sports management companies, skilled physiologists, and high-level coaches) occupy positions in the terraces of “the center”. Lindsay claims that political capital connects resources with needs, which might very well be true. However, this section presents obstructions that lie in the passageway between the runners of the rural periphery and the professionals in the urban center. Each obstacle is accompanied with a short depiction of a runner I met within Said Aziz’s training group.

**Management.** This is the key variable—finding a good manager is what all runners salivate over. In essence, all other obstacles soon to be mentioned can be overcome with the acquisition

of a famous manager such as Gabriela Rosa, Mark Golasso, Ricky Simms, or Giani Demardona. An athletics manager has the ability to provide the seed money to jumpstart a runner's career. A few brand-new pairs of shoes, training suggestions, and a plane ticket (provided at the appropriate phase during training) are the needed investments in order to tow a young man onto the second rung. Races in Kenya have negligible cash-prizes, exposure (few results ever appear on the internet), and performance times; due to poor track surfaces, high altitude, and pollution (in Nairobi), very few Kenyan athletes become recognized in their home countries. Instead, managers know where to look for fledgling runners with potential, and they wager on a few runners and give them the opportunity of a lifetime. Runners need a manager for his or her valuable connections with race managers, travel agents, and potential sponsor companies. This necessity demonstrates the state of isolation that many athletes find themselves in. In order to "get a race" in the US or Europe for the first time, a manager must convince the race manager of a particular runner's promise, and then the race committee may or may not pay for the runner's plane ticket (sometimes they promise to pay back the price of the ticket if the competitor turns in an acceptable performance). Otherwise, the manager must loan his new runner the funds, since no other companies will back a non-salaried rural Kenyan with a \$1000 loan. Hopefully, after a successful season, this new runner will have turned in a breakthrough performance, been offered a hefty sponsorship, reached the second rung, and made the manager's initial investment worthwhile. Some managers even have a set number of sponsorships they can dole out to athletes of their choice!

Although managers have done wonders for most of the elite long-distance athletes of the modern day, they may also represent an exploitative, destructive force for a runner's career. As a practice, most managers deal directly with travel agents, race managers, and corporate sponsors, since a runner agrees to work with a manager for this expertise in negotiation. However, these agreements signed on behalf of an elite athlete usually remain confidential between the talent manager and the race manager/sponsor. This becomes problematic because there is no way for an athlete running races under a sponsorship to hold their own manager accountable. All winnings (undisclosed amounts for the most part) remain in the manager's home country account, and periodically a runner may have portions of their winnings wired to them through Western Union. From this favorable position a manager might force a runner to overrace, might keep much of the sponsorship merchandise (shipped directly to his house) for

him or herself, or might keep some of the entry fee and just lie about the total amount to his or her client. If a runner begins to speak out against some of these injustices, this patron-client-esque relationship is weakened; many runners subsequently lose contact with their manager and are unable to recover the rest of their winnings—with no feasible legal recourse. On the other hand, the manager *always* gets paid (or paid back). However, poor Kenyan athletes do not have the time or luxury to wait for a manager with high morals.

**Samuel Davis.** Sam is a Marakwet who lives and trains with Said at the Hussein Camp. He runs road races and competed at the Kenyan Olympic Trials in the 3000 meter steeplechase. He is the third-born of four siblings (two males) with a father who worked as an accountant for the Kenya Revenue Association (now a farmer) and a mother who has always been on the small-scale farm. One day he pulled out of school on his own accord after Form 2 because he was needed on the farm. Eventually he lived in Nairobi with his brother who had a job at the airport (JKIA). He eventually “shifted” to Eldoret and would start to observe the workouts of elite runners at Kipchoge Keino Stadium. After jumping in a few workouts, he received an invitation to run at the famous Giana Demardona’s Nike Camp in “El-D”. After six months’ training everyone went home and he was not ever invited back. After being invited to the Hussein Camp in 2007, Said Aziz found Sam a temporary manager for a few races in Austria, and then an Italian manager signed him for the summer of 2008. He was to eventually run eleven races in three month, many of which were multi-day events. He came back worn-out, verbally abused by the coach/manager, and having won a few thousand dollars—most of which has not been sent to Kenya yet. After a year he is now back to living off crumbs. He is 25 and told me he will use any future prosperity to put his siblings through school. He feels like he needs a manager for any of this to happen.

**Facilities.** The most frequent complaint I heard from runners in Kapsabet was the incessant need for proper facilities—training shoes, racing shoes, running “kits”, and sometimes an affordable weight room. At home I complain about the lack of massages, ice, or rubber track (they use a dirt track). A manager capable of obtaining a sponsorship for a runner most readily fulfills this need, and in this case one runner can order many shoes to pass around (shipments come maybe twice a year). In fact, I discovered this was the only option (although some people



give shoes away through charities), since it was impossible to find a well-stocked running store in the hub city of Eldoret! However, the sensible guideline for the life of a running shoe is around 300 miles; this takes me three months at home, but Kenyans do this easily in one month. Infrequent handouts do not come at these intervals. It puzzles me how some of them are on the same shoes after over 1000 miles. Running kits (warm-ups, shorts, socks, and breathable tops) are not as big of an issue, as they are quite reusable, but the local gym has a daily rate of 50 Ksh—out of the question for almost every runner, unless they want to give up morning tea. Or socks without holes.

**John Franklin.** John also trains with Said Aziz at the camp. After high school he became “a hustler” near his home on the outskirts of Eldoret, buying maize from select homes and reselling it in town. His father was an alcoholic farmer who also happened to be a running coach, and John thought he could help his father by agreeing to train for him. He became fast instantly and traveled three times to try out for Said’s training group in 2008. He has traveled to race in Austria only once, and now competes for the University of Makerere in Uganda. He wins a certain amount of scholarship money in the spring for each track race he places in, but must pay the school if he does not reach the full-ride figure—a terrible amount of pressure inimical to a healthy training regime. In the fall he trains at the camp with Said and cites a lack of training shoes as easily his greatest obstacle. He has the most raw speed of anyone in the camp and therefore competes in the 800 meter run with a blistering time of 1:46.51; he has the most to gain by receiving the token of proper training gear. As a middle-distance runner, he would be benefited by a supplementary weight-training schedule, but he definitely cannot afford the local gym. He is 25 and will use his future prize money to improve his training.

**Coaching.** Coaching is indispensable, even though most new runners in Kenya are never confronted with the option for one. Said Aziz is quite the anomaly, as he accepts almost any runner that can show discipline and loyalty to the group. In addition, runners owe no money to him until they make it big at a race, and then they respect the informal but spoken agreement to compensate Coach Said. Athletes see huge benefits by training together: as new runners they see everyday what it will take to beat the world (beating other Kenyans might be more challenging), and established, developed runners have a group of cheeky novices to test them. From my

reading and experience, Said's methods are extremely tough but necessary if a select few are to be weeded out to be the world's greatest. Although workouts are brutal and often too much for some under his tutelage, his encouragement with trademark phrases such as "play the game", "no pain, no gain", "trust your speed" serve as a pick-me-up during the roughest times. Said also spends a lot of time seeking connections for his athletes and traveling as a coach with or without them; this in turn transforms his job from specialized coach to leader of self-help running project. Unfortunately, many managers have eliminated the need for a local-level coach by feeding personalized workouts to their own signed runners; although this might be a cost-saving procedure, it eliminates the possibility for a responsive and personalized supervision of training. It also undermines the prospect for a more bottom-up, Kenyan-owned solution towards mining its comparative advantage in athletic talent.

**Richard Telo.** Richard is an exciting case study, as this 800 meter runner (24 years old) has only been running for a year. Said offered to coach this athlete from the beginning, and in a short time Richard has run a best time of 1:48.49—an extraordinary feat for such a recent convert to the sport. Because this runner is new and promising, Coach Aziz is doing extra groundwork to make sure his talent is not squandered. Specifically, Aziz gives him extra attention and care, especially if he is feeling worn down. This December Richard is being included in the annual trip to Austria to run a few track races on the European Circuit. From past experience Said has learned that some of his best athletes have left him after becoming big-time (to be explained in following pages), so the coach is making every effort to foster and preserve Richard as a fast runner and valuable asset to his program.

**Physical Weakness.** Runners deal with physical weakness (also one of Chambers' indicators) on a daily basis. Part of the reason coaching is so important is that individual runners cannot always tell when to rest and when to test their limits. In this rural agricultural setting, many of Said's group run over twenty kilometers to reach the camp each day, which puts ridiculous pounding on the legs and wears out shoes, but which also hardens the mind and strengthens the aerobic system. Luckily dirt roads are a relatively good surface as long as athletes beware of twisted ankles, so habitual endurance running is healthy as long as nutritional needs are met. Here introduces another variable effecting physical weakness, where most runners at the Hussein

camp eat white bread for breakfast, nothing for lunch, and *ugali na sukuma* for dinner. No vitamins, no supplements, no Gatorade. There is a running debate as to whether this minimal diet is totally adverse to a runner's goals or if it induces the body to metabolize small amounts of energy more efficiently. Finally, injuries do not plague many participants in Said's training group (although routine soreness does); however, when athletes become hurt, there are no quick fixes. The only specialty hospitals are in Eldoret and unaffordable, so an array of chemists in Kapsabet Town represents the only remedy to a suffering runner. While I was staying at the camp, runners contracted malaria, typhoid, bronchitis, and diarrheal diseases, all of which set back training and are costly to treat with efficacy. Physical weakness is maybe the most instantly-debilitating obstacles runners face on their way to the second rung. After that point, it becomes easier to overcome this obstacle, for a variety of obvious reasons.

**Simon Bensam.** Simon comes from a village fifty kilometers away and is a long-distance road racer. He was one of Said's first runners at the Hussein Camp and has seen slow but steady recovery. Two months ago his knee began to hurt, so he tried everything from rest to ice in order give that leg a break. Anti-inflammatories did not diminish the pain, and now the pain while running is unbearable. The local chemist, who claims to have a doctor's degree, has suggested a cortisone shot, but the price of the injection and other suggested medications (to be taken following the shot) is well beyond what Simon can afford. The "doctor" will spot him the money, but is it the wisest decision to go into debt just because of an ambiguous diagnosis? To make matters worse, Simon is maybe the poorest runner in the camp, has a seven-year-old child out of wedlock, and is almost thirty years old. He told me he would spend big prize money on "basic things and necessities".

**Exposure.** As mentioned before, most Kenyans run first in their home countries because it is affordable and because managers sometimes come to races here to recruit promising young talent. One would expect the problem of athlete exposure to be handled by Athletics Kenya (the AK), the body responsible for overseeing the quality and quantity of success in Kenyan long-distance running. Other institutions that could serve as stand-ins for the AK would be the Kenyan Ministry of Sports in Nairobi (with an office in Eldoret) or the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF). After asking coaches, citizens, and athletes themselves all

around the Rift Valley, it has become obvious that these organizations do basically nothing to assist in the real welfare of the Kenyan runners. Sure, they set up a series of district, regional, and national cross country races in order for their athletes to be discovered by foreigners. Sure, they have started to reward Kenyan excellence on the international circuit. BUT, there are no systems in place to judge and improve on the general health of the sport and its athletes. When asked on my survey if anyone had ever helped them personally in their career pursuits, *not one* athlete from Said's group mentioned anyone but their own families, running partners, or Coach Said himself. The IAAF has a system for registering and training long-distance coaches and also has set up a small scholarship fund for Kenyan athletes, but this is the extent of central help for the athletes in the rural periphery. The only time the Kapsabet runners see the AK is at the long drawn-out ceremonies following AK-sanctioned meets in their area; as an onlooker after the Kapsabet 10K Peace Run, all I saw was a bunch of bureaucrats patting each others' backs in excess pageantry and a speech by famous 800 meter Olympics silver medalist Janeth Jepkosgei. Athletics Kenya supports you when you make the national team, but the minute you slow down they drop you like a bad habit.

**David Green.** Apart from Lornah Kiplagat, Ibrahim Hussein, and Duncan Kibet, probably the most talented runner I met was David Green, who somehow managed to finish fourth at the 2008 Kenyan Olympic Trials in the 10,000 meter run—one spot away from making the Kenyan Olympic team. His time of 28:08 makes him a prime candidate for both superior management and a high-level sponsorship. And yet he has neither. His old manager passed away last year, and he was unfortunately left high and dry. He is still to this day unrepresented, and I could not figure out why. Many big-time managers told me this was impossible unless he is running extremely poorly right now, but David told me he is still fit and training himself every day. In general, runners are forgotten about in a hurry, possibly because Kenyans (and especially Kalenjins as a group) have similar names, and so they all represent the same marketable East African speed-demon; unfortunately these *individual athletes* are no longer marketable because of the saturation of Kenyan runners on the international lon-distance scene. David is 27 and lives with his family just outside of Eldoret.

**Kalenjin Identity.** Coach Said cited two personal traits of his runners that prohibit them from optimizing their self-advocacy and gumption to compete in places like Europe, Asia, and the Americas. First of all, Said referred to the ultimate readiness of any of his runners to figuratively prostrate themselves before managers or officials from the Global North. Chambers says that, for the poor, “accepting powerlessness pays”. If the runner causing a fuss about deal negotiation makes him or her appear a liability, the athlete is replaceable; thus, most young competitors just count their losses and do not mobilize for fair managing, coaching, or sponsorship. Also, I found there exists a condition for many of the runners where they find an odd form of solace in being the oppressed and others being the oppressor: “[There is a] tendency of solidarity groups to search for rivals and enemies and on occasion to invent them. The internal analogue of this is the tendency of solidarity groups to find scapegoats, often outside their group. In self-help activities former colonial masters, present government officials, and local politicians fill this category quite nicely” (Mbithi, pg. 193). In order to interpret their own poverty (runners and non-runners), the Kalenjin poor might find reasoning present in the coercion of “outsiders”; possible culprits could be professionals from the Global North, Athletics Kenya, or the rival Kikuyu tribe. I was not impressed with the caliber of self-advocacy I witnessed inside of Aziz’s training group, and this becomes unequivocal when a young naïve athlete goes to Nairobi to ask for a traveling athlete visa, writes his application essay to a foreign university, or requests favors from one capable of charity. In my last week in Kapsabet Town, I received a multitude of last-minute favors with no previously-thought-out rationale—especially from those I had met in passing. Whereas in America you befriend someone first and possibly ask favors second, the Kenyan value system requires favors first as a precondition for authentic friendship. This disconnect steps in the gap between resources in the First World and needs in the Third World, and the less-privileged runners in Kapsabet are caught in the crossfire.

**Frank Brown.** Frank is a road racer who has thrived under Said Aziz’s coaching system. He is a step away from competing internationally, as he does well in most ten kilometer races in the area. He was managed by a low-level manager from Austria for a year or two, and life was comparatively great. One day this manager decided he would only administer to marathoners, sent Frank an email, and then quit representing him. Frank is now a victim of the ratchet effect, where he was previously renting a one-room block in Kapsabet for 3000 Ksh, and now he is forced to run frequent races around the Rift Valley

to keep his quarters (his landlord is fortunately very flexible). Instead of becoming indignant, Frank consents to having been the victim duped by an unequal system. The same thing has happened after this runner was denied a visa at the German Embassy in Nairobi—no fight, only acceptance of “an enemy”. And yet Frank ironically hosted three Kikuyu runners during the 2008 post-election violence and physically stopped a few Kalenjin boys from burning down his Kikuyu landlord’s compound. When it comes to running, however, he does not discriminate between real and scam opportunities, as demonstrated when he told me that I could ask to be his manager tomorrow, and he would not need any convincing. The poor do not have time for triage. Frank is 24, and with a large paycheck he would *first* help his family, siblings, teammates, and coach.

**Common Sense Issues.** Going along with the just-mentioned obstacle, Said also spoke volumes about the practical intelligence level of his athletes. Essentially he said that most runners do not use any common sense in the way that westerners do. This starts with runners being their own promoters, as I have already said. In my third week in Kapsabet, a South African management firm contacted Said about the profiles of his best athletes. Instead of his runners begging to help him contact the manager, Said had to collect their passports and scan all their information to the company personally. His runners miss race entry deadlines, show up at visa offices lacking the necessary documents, or show up unprepared for a workout. I agreed to watch a few runners practice who wanted my assistance, but none of them seemed to realize that I would need a top-level performance in order to plug for them in my home country—for races or for university. One kid showed up after having run a tough *fartlek* (Swedish for “speed play”) workout twelve hours beforehand, ran a comparatively terrible workout, made some excuses, and then wondered when the bacon would come, so to speak. Instead, most runners at the camp lie about their fastest times in order to get what they want, which undermines Said’s credibility as well as the credibility of their group-mates and successors on the training squad. On the survey that I handed out, I received answers from many that were meant to appeal to an American in a powerful position; instead of gathering valuable numerical data on aspirations and living standards, I learned a great deal about the runners’ inability to answer questions directly and thoughtfully. In short, most young Kenyan runners do not do their homework, do not plan for certain peak performances during the year, and do not spend enough time being their own publicist. A hedgehog might do only one thing well, but he must do it comprehensively well.

**Arthur Lancaster.** The high dependency ratio within the Hussein Camp is largely due to Arthur, who has competed in America, Europe, and Asia. He has reached the second rung towards running stardom, and has some extremely fast times. Most runners hang out at his house on his leather sofas watching his television (he is the only runner with electricity). As far as training goes, Arthur could not take a more methodical and sensible approach. He always seems to run fast in races, and is on track to be a very good marathoner in the next five years. However, Arthur has unwittingly hurt his prospects by failing to approach his work with common sense. In Said's old camp, headed by a manager in Europe and sponsored through Mizuno, Arthur was one of a contingent of runners who became fast under Said's tutelage and with the help of the manager's goodwill. Nevertheless, most of these runners ran off to other camps or to different managers at this point, Arthur included. He presently has numerous informal agreements with different managers who are starting to get frustrated with his disloyalty. Ironically he has come to the Hussein camp to regroup with his former coach. *But* he has decided to run his debut at the Israel Tiberius Marathon in January, even though he agreed with Said that he should wait until later in the year to peak for his marathon coming-out party. Finally, he chooses places to train based on the excitement in the area (friends, parties, etc.) instead of the benefits to training conditions that the same area brings to the table—he has spent a great deal of time at low altitude in Texas and North Carolina, paying for his own plane tickets instead of re-investing in his powerful legs. Arthur is slowly but surely chipping away at his capability of being a professional athlete.

**Note on Woman's Issues.** As I stated earlier, this paper's focus is predominantly on young male athletes. However, it is worth noting that female athletes face these same obstacles *and more*. As professionalism increases within the Kenyan farming family, women are forced to take on more and more household duties (even some jobs that are traditional male) as their men go off to study at university, to work in urban centers, to take civil service jobs, and to farm new land. If a young girl chooses to take on a role as a professional athlete, it will have to be *in addition* to these necessary familial obligations. Lornah Kiplagat was always encouraged by her parents to seek her dream of running stardom, and she took on a "me-against-the-world" attitude while training at camps with narrow-minded males during her formative years of training (they used to unsuccessfully request that she do their dishes and clean their houses). Nonetheless, Lornah is

one of the few exceptions. Kenyan women have not saturated international long-distance competition as their male counterparts have, although most people are catching on to the promising payoffs that come from investing in these talented females. The future remains to be seen.

### III. Money Decisions

#### a. *Sukumawiki*—Pushing the week

Just as many rural Kenyans rely on kale to hold them through the week, athletes who have won prize money must savor their cash winnings for an extended amount of time. As previously stated, income for Kapsabet runners is either nonexistent or “lumpy”, and there is no guarantee that follow-up cash will be able to support an athlete indefinitely. In the meantime between races, I soon found out that the poorer of the runners at the Hussein Camp “go to town” every weekday *not* to visit with friends but to ultimately borrow money for living expenses; this is until they make it big, and then they will pay back the goodwill of their compatriots. The same situation happens within the walls of the Hussein Camp, where runners like **Arthur** lend money to their friends and basically supply every pair of training shoes for the neighboring athletes. Maintaining social ties goes hand in hand with survival when an athlete has not yet reached the second rung; in fact, this means that a young runner’s existence is very similar to that of a farmer. The main difference between a struggling farmer and a struggling runner, as shown in Appendix III, is that a farmer has constant help from family and friends, plus he has more time to earn his keep, as it were. The income-generating potential (represented as a graph) for an agricultural worker has a constant maximum that extends over his entire life, whereas an athlete has maybe ten years to win enough prize money to support himself (or herself) and his family for the rest of his life.

This dilemma brings up two crucial points about the precariousness of being a professional runner. One, an aspiring athlete must plan to perform at a high level for a continuum of at least ten years, which makes even more calamitous the impediments to success that were listed in the previous chapter. For example, if a runner pushes his body too hard in an effort to reach his peak or to race ten times in a summer, but as a result wears his legs out, he might have just ruined his chance for a “big break”—ruining his career and rendering him poor



and “unskilled”. Every runner has a tiny chance to perform well at a big-exposure race, and only some of those high achievers are picked up by managers or invited to races abroad. Once this happens, the clock starts for the chunk of time an athlete possesses to win his fortune. A second point that must not be taken for granted is *how athletes spend their money*. Kipchoge Keino and Henry Rono were the first two bigshot Kenyan runners—the two athletes that, through their legs, introduced an era of Kenyan running supremacy, bringing pride and glory to their nation. Keino has personally added a wing to the Eldoret Children’s Hospital, has started a charitable organization for orphans, and has built a primary and a secondary school that both bear his name. The Eldoret City Council once christened a newly-built track in their city “Kipchoge Keino Stadium”, and in 1996 Keino was inducted into the World Sports Humanitarian Hall of Fame. If Keino can be compared to the altruistic Bill Gates (who has give 58% of his money in charitable donations), Henry Rono could probaly be compared to the Walton family (founders of Wal-Mart, who have given lowly 1% of their money to charity). Rono did nothing with his money except spend it; ironically, Rono was privileged to spend a lot of time at American Universities, and Keino was not. Years after setting four world records in eight-one days, Rono was broke and living on the street. Drinking and bad training habits shortened his career dramatically, and he never competed at the Olympics. He is now a recovering alcoholic who is rehabilitating as an assistant coach at a high school in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This is not meant to be a malicious comparison but to serve as a caveat that winning the money does not ensure its productivity. In this section I feel it necessary to further examine how some Kenyans use their money, for good or for ill.

#### **b. Putting Money to Work**

From a combination of primary source evidence, conversations with runners, and observations from my survey, I have a pretty good idea where money travels once a Kenyan athlete earns significant amounts of prize money. No matter if the figure is 10,000 Ksh or 10,000 USD, the first recipients on the spending docket are a runner’s family, as one might expect from the previous section on the rural agricultural setting of Kapsabet. Basic needs, more land, and a rebuilt house are the first tokens of appreciation that a runner’s parents receive. What comes next differs from runner to runner; very frequently, what members of Said’s training group wrote on the survey is not what actually happens once they *earn the money*—I saw this

disconnect when I would visit the homesteads of newly-prosperous athletes. Spending decisions I observed were (1) new land entitled to that individual runner, (2) a well-furnished new house, (3) a car, (4) household possessions and appliance, such as nice flatscreen TV, and (5) investment of some kind—this is the best semblance of an order that I could surmise. Investments *almost always* come in the form of real estate ventures, since renting out apartments or buildings (to merchants, businesses, etc) is not time-intensive and can be overseen by a hired manager; this allows a runner in his or her prime to focus completely on athletics while simultaneously seeing invested prize money grow. While I was at the Lands Commissions Office in Eldoret I met successful marathoner Abraham Maiyo, who was buying a parcel of land for this exact purpose.

Also included in a runner's spending decisions are (A) compensating the coach or manager, (B) helping fellow runners out with money or in-kind transfers such as shoes, and (C) giving back to the community in some sort of charitable way. Depending on the runner and the situation, these three options might come in any order or distribution. Once an athlete has reached the second rung, it becomes easier to consider more costly investment, although the total amount of investment by world-class runners is an altogether paltry amount. However, Haile Gebrselassie, probably the most successful and famous Ethiopian distance runner of all time (and current marathon world record holder), has done it all—helped his family, started charities, donated to runners all over his home country, bought buildings, and even established businesses in Addis Ababa (not just in real estate). He might be the biggest-ever celebrity in Ethiopia, and it is all because of his success on *and off* the track. However, altruistic giving is not the overarching trend with famous runners, as I could tell by living on the ground in the rural hometowns of all-star Kenyan athletes. Giving back is a very contentious subject for debate (both publicly and privately) among runners and their communities, so it would be useful now to reference the financial decisions of a few of my acquaintances during my ISP—all runners who have reached the second rung.

**Ibrahim Hussein.** As I have already described in full detail, Hussein has contributed most of his financial resources into building his camp in Kapsabet. He has also become a high-up member of the IAAF in Nairobi.

**Patrick Sang.** I met Patrick for an interview at an Eldoret Coffee Shop. He was a three-time silver medalist (once at the Olympics) in the 3000 meter steeplechase back in the 1990's. His story is interesting because he attended the University of Texas as an undergraduate student (bachelor's degree in economics) and Iowa State University as a graduate student (master's degree in city planning), *and then* he won his silver medals! On returning to Kenya, he decided to live in Eldoret but not to participate as an official on the City Council (as some runners have done); he thinks that politics and greed control the bureaucracy that is the Ministries. He instead works as a farmer and as an adviser for the Dutch managing companies Global Sports and One-for-One. He coaches many athletes under these firms, and also volunteers his time to help athletes manage their money. He used to advise at Talent Achievers Limited, which is a company that offers the same general service. Sang represents one of the only resources available to athletes in Eldoret looking to spend their winning wisely. Nothing like this exists in Kapsabet. Patrick Sang was probably the most intelligent runner (and person, actually) that I met during my ISP travels.

**Lornah Kiplagat.** During the third week of my ISP I visited Lornah Kiplagat's High Altitude Training Camp in Iten. Lornah is one of the greatest female road racers in Kenyan athletics history. She has used some of her winnings for a nice house in Iten overlooking the Rift Valley but most of her winnings on her high-tech camp. Featured on location at the camp are physiotherapy rooms, a western-style weight room with included cardio equipment, an outdoor pool, two locker rooms with showers, a dining hall, two cooks, first-rate accommodation for up to forty people, and a restaurant which is being built. The camp is completely sustainable—ecologically, with solar electricity, biofuel, and a nearby organic farm; financially, with a reasonable rooming fee for foreign visitors who want to train with the Kenyans; and socially. The camp is socially sustainable because it gives back to the Iten Community. Each year, Lornah personally selects around twenty secondary school students who are graduating from local schools for her KENSAP program. Essentially, she has two managers (one in the states) that help the young kids train in athletics and apply to universities in America. They become fast, ready themselves for the SAT and TOEFL tests, and then submit their applications. To date, Lornah continues to annually send a contingent of kids from Iten to Ivy League Institutions—for free! Although this ISP does not deal directly with student athletes in Kenya, my visit to Lornah's camp (and meeting some of the girls and boys she has helped) was study

enough to see that running really can change your life in this country. In addition, Lornah uses her connections as a new Dutch citizen (she married her Dutch manager) and world traveler to network for potential jobs for her runners that graduate from college in the US. If they have an idea for a business venture in Kenya, she and her husband will even provide seed money to kickstart that idea. Finally, Lornah has also built a primary school, is in the process of building a secondary school sports academy, and helped to co-found the NGO Shoe4Africa, which collects used shoes to give to young Africans (Lornah organizes giving out of shoes at Shoe4Africa races around Kenya). She is the most unselfish runner that I met in November.

**Peter Rono Camp.** If Lornah's KENSAP program and HATC have one fault, it is that only a few elite young men and women receive help. Although others can pay to use the camp, few Kenyans step inside the walls of the camp unless they are in KENSAP. The feeling at the HATC is not one of a town community center, and most of the young KENSAP students help each other from this point on. Many will not come back—they will regrettably remain in the urban center along with the other Ivy League graduates. Peter Rono (1988 Olympic Gold Medalist in the 1500 meter) has also tried to help scholar athletes but has taken a different approach. He has created a camp in Kapsabet, with a Coach Chumo playing the role of coach, mentor, and academic facilitator. The difference is that the coach charges a fee for his service (KENSAP is free), that anyone is welcome at the camp, and that Peter Rono networks personally for the program in the states. The fee is the main disadvantage of the Rono camp, along with the base lack of knowledge among the runners about the logistics of becoming a scholar athlete. I had to lead a focus group in which I essentially lectured to around thirty kids: I filled in their negligible knowledge about (1) quality of various American schools, (2) quality of their respective running programs, and (3) what scores and times would make winning an athletic scholarship achievable. I had some kids with only marginal times wanting to go to sub-par universities with unknown running programs, because most Kenyan athletes do not know how to discern between very different levels of opportunity—the information asymmetry, I learned, is huge! Rono has established a camp with the right idea but with insufficient groundwork at this point.

**Pamela Jelimo.** Jelimo represents everything that is wrong with selfish Kenyan runners. Earlier in my paper I described both her achievements and her winnings in the summer of 2008 as groundbreaking. One thing I did not mention is that Said Aziz found her after secondary school

and had been coaching her up until the end of summer 2008. Every day he had given her workouts, and they had traveled together to most of the Golden League meets. At the end of the summer, Jelimo's manager instructed her to leave Said, the reason being that Aziz had asked the manager to let Pamela sit out indoor track to recover from a miraculous summer. Since Pamela left Said they have not talked and her performances have gone downhill. She did not even qualify for the World Championships last year and has not won a major competition. What is worse, she has not given a dime back to Coach Aziz or the training group—both of which were absolutely critical to her discovery, development, and perfection as an elite runner. As a multi-millionaire who was born and raised in Kapsabet, she has handed nothing back to her community. Instead she has moved away from the town, another problem present when modern-day athletes want to avoid the social pressure to share their wealth. Many wealthy Kenyans (even non-runners) actually hide their prosperity in order to avoid feeling this pressure, so the rural poor in Kenya often make it a habit to snuff out the deceivers amongst themselves. In fact, the same has been accused of Said, since people assume he has money when in reality Pamela ripped him off. What Pamela has done, considering her good fortune, is completely selfish, irrational, and immoral.

**Belal Ali Monsoon.** I stayed at Belal's house for two nights of my ISP. He is a Kenyan from Kapsabet, who now competes for Bahrain. He has a hefty Nike sponsorship and competes in the 800 meter and 1500 meter runs with best times of 1:44 and 3:31, respectively. He has definitely reached the second rung, and has the resources to help his community. Unlike Bernard Lagat, a Kenyan who has since become a naturalized American citizen, Belal has chosen to live amongst his family, friends, and original neighbors—and chosen to assist them. To start with, he is helping his parents build a new house. He has built a terribly nice house furnished with all the latest electronics, has two cars, and is in the process of buying a building in Nairobi. In addition, he hosts Cornelius Lagat, a friend and teammate from high school, at his house; he shares food, accommodation, and his training regime in order to help out a kid who attends college in Uganda half of each year. Although what he has done with Cornelius is admirable, Belal has also been irresponsible in my view. He was also coached by Said but has left the training group and the Hussein Camp and given little back (although he still sends shoes on occasion). Over the years he has lied about his age (the issue I mentioned before) and has actually landed himself in jail, which perfectly highlights said problems in common sense. Also, he has spent his money quite

liberally on his himself and close friends (which is perfectly justified) but has apparently put little thought into projects for the community. Belal is a nice young man with the opportunity to do great things, so I pray that he will make the best of decisions in the future.

#### **IV. Athletics Problem-Solving in a Rural Agricultural Setting**

In the last two weeks of my ISP, I spent a lot of time pondering the incessant question: “Why are you here?” In Kapsabet, besides laughing at the crazy *mzungu* wearing terrible short-shorts, most people were confused by the fact that I was “just studying”. Mentioning my ISP paper clarified the puzzlement for some and frustrated others, who wanted to know what I would give back for a months-worth of questioning and observation. It made sense to help the runners that I had studied, so I put my mind to work. Ideally, the best possible option would be to help as many runners reach the second rung as possible. However, this would require a “big push”, and I would have to have massive amounts of time, money, and effort—I have one of those three. Economist and Columbia University Professor Jeffrey Sachs, in his book *The End of Poverty*, talks about “the big push”—a concerted effort amongst many individuals to lift a population out of a seemingly unavoidable pit of poverty. Sachs’ scholarly rival William Easterly takes a different line of reasoning, one that I agree with more. Easterly says that projects can be run by “planners” that enact measures from the top, or by “searchers” who seek small concrete solutions to problems defined on the ground and by the people. I have learned from Easterly that a lot of aid money can do less than a little hard and well-directed work. In Kapsabet, I DID NOT find a perfect way to raise many runners to the second rung, but I DID locate small areas in which my expertise could help these runners *with the needs they explicitly expressed*. Due to time, space, and content constraints, I will list the small favors I was privileged enough to complete for my hosts in Kapsabet—Coach Said Aziz and the many athletes:

- **HATG Website** – I was able to use a Google template to create a website for the Hussein Athletics Training Group, featuring group information, profiles of the runners, contact info, and performance archives. The website will garner more effective exposure for the runners, will boost self-esteem, will post links to performance records (making them more legitimate), and will define Said’s roster so that athletes decide if they are part of the running project or not.

- **Kapsabet Time Trial** – We held a group-wide time trial so I could see the runners post fast times. In the future, I (as an American and “neutral bystander”) will be able to legitimate the runners’ ability for universities, race managers, and talent managers.
- **Peter Rono Camp Focus Group** – I was able to talk extensively, in two focus groups—one large lecture and one smaller computer tutorial. As described earlier, I filled in critical gaps in the knowledge of both coach and runners.
- **Scholar-Athlete Assistance** – I was able to connect an athlete named Cornelius Lagat with a coach at an American University. By personally witnessing Cornelius’s speed on the track, test scores in school, and everyday English skills, I was able to see that Cornelius was offered a full-ride scholarship to the University of Tennessee.
  - On an unfortunate side note, the US Embassy makes student visa applications very tricky, a problem that I am going to help Cornelius overcome. Nevertheless, I also tried to help one Isaac Kitur—who has a scholarship in the US but has been denied a visa twice—and this effort has fallen up short so far. Both cases are pending, so to speak.
- **Medical Advice** – With the runner whose alias is **Simon Bensam**, I was able to consult with him about his medical injury, advise him on literature found online, and accompany him to the doctor’s office. After much consideration, I decided to order the cortisone shot and Simon seems to be recovering from an once eternally debilitating injury.
- **Hussein Camp Exercise Equipment** – I was able to hire the camp janitor to assist me in constructing a pull-up bar and dips rack (two body-weight exercise machines). They are now up and running, so runners can cross-train without having to pay 50 Ksh at the local gym. As I left the runners called the small gym “a monument that I was leaving in my stead”. I have yet to buy some remaining free weights in Nairobi to make the setup complete. It is still a work in progress.
- **Homegrown Management Business** – I am tentatively planning to start my own managing business come next summer (2010), starting with a few athletes from Kapsabet. The complexity of this venture is enormous, and is an intellectual discussion for another day.

All of these ideas worked out to perfection, but their success depends on my continued effort. Every small grassroots project is by nature perpetual, so I need to be ready for future work and any possible “scope creep” in each project. The good thing is that scope creep allows for greater and more effective expansion.

## CONCLUSION

In November I went off to live with Kenya’s greatest runners—the Kalenjin—and over four weeks we did everything that living entails—*pamoja*. Throughout my time spent in Kapsabet and the surrounding areas, I constantly asked these questions: in light of the commonly-recognized truth of Kalenjin long-distance running prowess, what does it take for a young Kalenjin man to become an elite runner on the international athletics circuit, and what are the semantics of that success considering this person’s rural agricultural background? This huge inquiry is a mouthful that covers both a broad intellectual map and an even larger problem-solving map; but going into the month with a strong baseline allowed me to ask big, workable questions. Robert Chambers emphasizes how “the practical world demands breadth, intelligibility and usefulness, while academics are freer to dig deeper down into narrow ruts, so often in the process becoming esoteric and obscure” (Chambers, pg. 179). Keeping within the academic framework of the SIT Kenya program, I tried to make my studies as basic and practical as possible. To do this I used the following outline: the first section introduces the topic, the setting, some relevant problems, and my objectives for the month-long ISP. The paper moves on to describe my methodology and secondary sources I used. After this comes the section on discussion, findings, and analysis, where first the rural agricultural setting is further investigated. Next, taking into account this setting, the paper introduces the main obstacles that stand in the way of a successful running career. In addition, included are portrayals of successful Kenyan athletes and how they have chosen to use their immense winnings. Finally, the paper investigates the prospects for basic problem solving in Said Aziz’s Kapsabet training group.

In conclusion, I have found that I can make a short and long term value judgment on the Kenyan running project. In the short term, running is an excellent way to make a boatload of money which represents an even greater purchasing power back home in Kenya. Unlike in the



past, there are very real systems in place that can essentially take a young farming boy and make him an Olympic champion in a short amount of time. Unfortunately, these systems are ones with very unequal power structures, where runners sit in the vulnerable and isolated periphery and European officials dwell at the powerful center of the system. Professional athletes see a very tough set of obstacles on their journey towards far-off international glory, enough so that pursuing might even seem reckless and precarious. They represent a product—not in Kenya but in the Global North, where the market does not grant them much autonomy over their new lives. A young Kenyan man can become a mishandled product in what is now a global commodity chain, with the main culprits being a negligent AK, predatory managers, and callous bureaucracies. The only justification against these huge odds is that small bit of hope for financial prosperity, which happens enough to runners in the Rift Valley to perpetuate that optimism.

In the long-term, the future looks bleak for Kenyan long-distance running. Unlike for women, men's athletics is almost saturated on the world scene, with either Kenyans or Ethiopians winning *all the prize money* in the most important races. Nike will not be handing out a greater sum of sponsorships, and managers will not sign more runners unless they can beat their competitors to the certain number of elite international spots. The development economist Dani Rodrik speaks of the "race to the bottom" for cheap international labor, but in this case Kenyans are fighting other Kenyans in a "race to the top"—one in which only a few will win. And Americans, Spaniards, Russians, and other Africans have joined the mix! The only saving grace is that race purses are slowly growing, and that a few mid-level races are being added to the racing calendar every year. But as far as major races go, the spectators of the world just want to see a Kenyan running a ridiculous time and it does not matter which one—all the names appear the same anyways. . . In addition, the degree to which becoming a specialized runner disembeds a young man from his proper role in the rural agricultural socioeconomy is now startling to me. Families suffer as a result of this gamble in athletics, and there is no guarantee that a newly-famous sportsperson will even remember the community that helped him or her achieve stardom and affluence.

However, there *is room for improvement* in this famous Kenyan running project, as indicated previously in this paper. There are bad players in the game, there are ways to bring out

better performances, there is more money to be won, and there are better ways to redistribute this monetary gain. My chief caveat is that improvement will come from the grassroots, and the best actors are those athletes that can give back to the running system and back to the communities. Lornah Kiplagat and Patrick Sang are the only types of people who can genuinely have the complete interests of the poor at heart. They need to own development along with the poor communities from which they hail. Chambers puts it best: “Bottom-up analysis starts with the conditions of poor people, their resources, aspiration, and problems. It might better be described as within-poverty analysis, for it entails trying to see from within, to adopt a diametrically opposite world view in order to see what might and ought to be done” (Chambers, pg. 184). It is in this way that resources at the top can be connect properly linked with needs at the bottom.

## **Recommendations**

Here I will assert my humble opinion about the Hussein Camp in Kapsabet, Coach Said Aziz’s training group, and my study with each. I do not think I can fault Ibrahim Hussein for what he started so many years ago. He intended to coach athletes to success, he did that, and then it was time to move on. At this stage Hussein left a camp behind for others to use in the future, and each and every tenant knowingly benefits from his generosity. In addition, Ibrahim found and introduced a very able coach in Said Aziz, who has a successful project which still sees many of the same problems that are widespread in Rift Valley camps—namely athlete loyalty, undersupply of coaching personnel, and under-furnished facilities (shoes, kits, equipment, and living expenses). As we have learned, the lack of various training aids is not a quick fix, so I am not being critical; Said tries to meet the needs of as many athletes as possible, and that is all one can ask. Nevertheless, further study is needed at the camp. Objectives might be to finish perfecting the website I started, to assist in widening the connections network with officials outside of Kenya, and to draft a careful agreement between Said and his athletes—one for coach-athlete association within the training group, and one for the camp manager-tenant association inside of Hussein’s compound. I plead future scholars to build on my research before delving into unrelated muddy waters. These people need your help!

In addition, if I had more time, I would have crafted my Independent Study Project to include a few more aspects. I would have talked to a few more officials, both in athletics and economic planning circles; specifically I would have visited the Ministry of Sport in Nairobi (NSSF building). I would have crafted another survey with more direct quantity-relevant questions for in-depth data analysis; my questions had the aim of getting a holistic grasp on the thoughts, aspirations, background, and semantic awareness of the runners. Finally, I would have collected more secondary economic data from the Town Halls in Kapsabet, Eldoret, Iten, and Kitale—namely dealing with soil fertility, crop dependency distributions, land plot sizes, family and community demographic data, and GDP and income level estimates. These figures would have been helpful and would have made my study more comprehensive but would be even more beneficial if placed at the crux of a new, more specified ISP or research report. My paper is an excellent overview dealing with the athletics as it relates to the rural agricultural economy in a specific area—Kapsabet. Please use it as a pedestal on which to build even higher statues.