

RUNNING FROM 2017- The lights, high ones

Word on the street is that the year is ending, the Roman year (time we had our own).

Last year a time like this I sat down and mulled over my running year and then I bored you with the details, it's already a time like this this year and I'm thinking why not do it again?

Like everyone else, it's possible I've had my running adventures and misadventures, highs and lows, longs and shorts, hills and flats...so here I am, looking to help waste a few of your 2017 dying minutes.

Disclaimer; as a rule, at this time of year, that mass occupying the real estate inside my skull is unreliable, and tends to misfire a lot on account of junk accumulated through the year. This is therefore a caveat that although what I write here will be fact, there may be moments where my thought process may be considered unconventional or bizarre, should this happen, please take note that on the strength of this caveat, I shall not be judged.

By category

- **Longest run-** In my many living years I've learnt mother earth specializes in variety; mountains, seas, deserts, forests, grasslands, bare nothingness etc.let's think mountains and forests. Somewhere on the earth surface is the Beskidy Mountains, somewhere within the Beskids is a town they decided to call Szczyrk (your dilemma is noted), Szczyrk, Population Five thousand and something sits in Southern Poland, Szczyrk annually hosts a mountainous trail run that goes by name Beskidy Ultra Trail (BUT), BUT has the following distances; 20, 40, 60, 90 (actual 96.7), 130 and 305 KMS. It is here, 6 days after Berlin Marathon that I luckily registered my longest run of 96.7 kms. And did you know that 3 out of 28 starters completed the 305kms? ...You probably don't, but yes, 3 finished the 305 kms unsupported race; one in 70 hrs and two in 75 hrs....what's that? 3days and change? (in case you're interested in the somber details of my run you can check my diary entry [here](#))
- **Hottest run-** Magadi. A run which felt like I was running on the surface of the sun, a run of two Suns. Let's give a little history- this was the third time I was doing this run, in the two earlier years heat was not too much an issue. But this time was different, and I blame it on the Government's misplaced priorities. You see, last year and the year before, the road to Magadi was 50ish% tarmacked, interspersed with 'dirt' or 'earth' fillings kind of leopard skin pattern, this time it was 100% tarmacked (why would they do that? What happened to public participation?), so apart from the sun on my head, there was another sun under my feet. There I was, running 51kms on tarmac at sunny rift valley, fried from above and fried from below- a proper barbecue run...
- **The Beautiful Ones-** last year I expressed my displeasure at this category as it makes me think due to the number of exceptional runs- I tend to avoid thinking when I can, but here it is again. **Kimunye**, in its debut in the Swara Calendar, takes the prize. This was a run mostly inside Mt. Kenya National Park, you get to flirt with the mountain, half expect a Jumbo to cross your path, magnificent sights. Beautiful.



Kimunye

- **Wildcard run of '17- Voi.** Distance 45.39 km, elevation gain 2069.7 M. This one that took me by surprise. When I thought Voi, I thought low altitude, I thought flat and that any hilly interruptions would be nothing to write home about. I wrote home about it. Records were broken here- Voi unexpectedly delivered my first elevation gain above 2000 m and is now the highest elevation gain run in the Swara calendar, a distinction I'd theretofore thought firmly belonged to Fluorspar.
- **The fast one- Berlin;** fast by my standards- I have to qualify this or else Davis, James and their tribe of 'we don't know slow' may be spotted rolling their eyes like 'puhleeze, if he calls that fast what will we call ours?' Well I dipped under 3 in Berlin. Reality check though, our Caucasian cousins take this running business quite seriously. While spying on the marathon results, I noted that the persons who finished around same time as myself were mostly my seniors by around 15 years, an awakening experience especially for a bloke that comes from the melting pot of world distance athletics.
- **The Hardship ones;** Some runs will straddle categories here; every year, certain runs, let's call them Mercenaries, are sent tom try and break me; in 2017 they sent Beskidy- for obvious reasons, Magadi- the run of 2 suns, Voi- where I DNF'ed, Mau Forest-I'll touch on it pale chini and Ilovoto.
- **Fluorspar** remains a sentimental favourite. In 2017 I visited Fluorspar twice, first with Swaras, secondly as a lone sojourner to gain favor of the marathon spirits ahead of my Berlin sub 3 assault.

Here come the random bits and tids... you are advised not to expect any order...

- **New frontiers**
 - Night running; means running at night, in the cover of darkness, and the nuisance of a headlamp; first in Fluorspar then in Beskidy.
 - Time on feet; 15hrs 34 mins, longest running time. Before this my longest had been 7hrs 28 minutes for Mt. Kenya ultra 2016
 - Distance; The 96.7 km ultra brought me to smelling distance of the landmark 100 km- from the scent big 100 felt worth tasting. So, I don't know, there may be a chance I'll be tempted to breach 100 sometime in the future.

- Elevation gain; 4985 M in one run. I'll let that one speak for itself.
- Annual mileage; 2863 kms for me. If I had run blind-no gadgets, I'd have thought I did 10,000kms... I see people that run 4000km a year and wonder 'what's wrong with those people'. No offence to the 500km ones, is that what they call lanes?

Things I got good at

- DNF'ing- I DNF'ed at least four times; most famously at Voi, it could be lofty ambitions, it could be ill preparations, but whatever the excuses my DNF resume got thicker.
- Running in random places- My time with Swaras has shown me that one run anywhere, at any time, in any weather conditions. So running gear has become my stubborn companion whenever I head out of town.
- Hitting the long runs- somehow I did a total 10 runs in excess of 40kms (three of them competitive races). Not that it is a wise thing, literature says many such long runs not good for you. Probably true- I don't know.
- Avoiding speed work- I'd habitually cheat on speed work with long runs and later reason that 'speed work would have contributed only 10km to my mileage haul' , 'look, I ended up doing 25k, 15 more kms!' then I'd sleep devoid of guilt... until I realized my target marathon time was going to suffer...then I still continued cheating...

Things I did not learnt

- Maintaining a state of relative fitness off-season. Loss of weight associated with PB chasing is undesirable both to myself and the people that have to look at me on regular basis. So I usually tend to aggressively replace the lost Kgs off-season. Getting fit in early 2017 after aggressive Kg regainment was especially cruel resulting in unwanted injury. So I sat down with myself and we agreed I would be wiser after my 2017 season...fast forward to now, I'm worse off than I was this time in 2016- in my kind heartedness I've offered refuge to 8 homeless Kilograms in the last two months...now for another round of hard work.
- Cross training- here I am total fail. I avoided weight training, core workouts and all their relatives; I sort of agree with what they say that cross training is key in injury prevention. So it happened that I had my fair share of injury. On a positive note, I discovered stairs; they were excellent company during my runner's knee spell. Those stairs are probably the unsung heroes of my sub 3 success.
- Running late in the name of hitting mileage targets; saw someone get mugged some 50 metres ahead of me (a non-runner) in what you would think is a safe stretch of road... I had personal experience in 2016 (out of carelessness) which led me to rethink late running. So I hope to be a safe runner come 2018- safe in terms of human risk though.

Things I've learnt

- Oversized shoes equals no blisters and equals no 'black as sin' toenails (not that I mind the sin toenails, those are scars of war to be worn proudly, but blisters I mind)...one or two blisters used to habitually visit my toes in those long runs a' la Fluorspar, Magadi, Ilovoto. Then this year I happened on these Brooks Glycerin 14, at the risk of drawing the ire of same-shoe users, I'd say

them Brooks are my tractor, clumsy on the smooth, genius on the rough, I finished my mountainous 96.7kms ultra with no single blister, no black toes, no points of irritation- nothing.

- I've probably learnt other things but too bad, I have no time to recollect.

Things I hope to learn in 2018

- Same things I hoped to learn in 2017.
- And that speed work is necessary evil; my lungs have always maintained speed work is the devil himself, and my feet agree hence the two are always on **#resist** mode despite any amount of cajoling and blackmailing from the HQs @the brain...
- And to be a more responsible runner; don't know what that means but sounds like a thoughtful thing to say.
- That it's just recreational running...should be taken easy and enjoyed, those uncomfortable obsessions with mileage and speeds are vanity (yeah right), not going to win nothing...

Adrenaline moments;

Wajir- In my earthly engagements I happened to be disrupted from Nairobi. So on 2nd May I found myself in Wajir, come evening I headed for a run out of town, wilderness, its dusk, at the back of my mind there is some little tug of insecurity anxiety, Northern Frontier insecurity. But I don't give it much thought...three kids appear from the bushes, they ask 'wewe ni mwanajeshi?' (of course I'm no soldier), they run with me kidogo, tell me to be careful, that I was running towards some Hyenas- at this time I was already headed back to town so I had no luxury of changing direction. Adrenaline flowed, hair stood on end, nerves on full alert, I had no intention of being anyone's dinner. (In case you're wondering, I became no Hyena's dinner- I'm writing from 'this' side of life).

Mau Forest- Over Easter, on April the 15th, I got infected by a mild bout of wildness, it made me think- why not run along the edge of Mau forest for 50kms? On my one side the Mau, on the other side lush tea Plantations of Kericho- hallmarks of a great run. There is little beaten path so I was mostly running through overgrown bushes- an energy sapping experience that led to a DNF at 30kms. So I'm there minding my own business, it's stillness and quiet all round, only interrupted by my running- and birds, then suddenly, a metre in front of me, this sizeable snake (probably 1.5 metres long), leaps from the tea bushes towards the forest. I had scared it probably out of its morning nap. I don't know who was scared more- me or the serpent- what I know is that adrenaline flowed freely and my heartbeat was off the charts. Thence paranoia took over and every little noise had me on full alert. Later, reflecting on the experience, it occurred to me this was not the serpent that offered apple to our ultimate ancestors, Adam and wife, and I know this how? Because he/she (the serpent) did not attempt to engage me in conversation... (OK, ignore this last sentence).



Mau

And lastly, you cannot write about a year of running without mention of injury. Runner's knee was my nemesis this year, putting me out of action for a while. Before that I coexisted with one or two injuries, the ones that are like regular flu, they are nuisance but don't put you down; so I'd run with the support of those Kinesiotape (K-tape) things.

It is with this K-tape background that I'll narrate an experience. K-tape became part of my running gear luggage, but K-tape doesn't work alone, it has to travel with a pair of scissors- for to cut the tape, so on 10th of May, my luggage was scanned as I prepared to head to Nairobi, the security guy asked why I was carrying a 'weapon', on quick thinking I realized I didn't have a gun, and that I was yet to learn the workings of a bomb... the long and short of it is that my 'weapon', the scissors, was confiscated. I'd actually gone through a good number of security checks with that weapon. The experience put me to serious thought; and the result of my serious thoughts was this, that I had two options 1. Not to travel while on injury 2. Maybe I should learn to use my teeth, on the tape... not as a weapon.

And so waste Inc. is almost here to unclog the mess in my skull and empty the accumulated 2017 debris. You are politely requested to disremember any material in the foregoing paragraphs that you may consider as, well, featherbrained. Thank you.

And with that, maneno mekwisha (end of words)...It's skippety skip into twenny eighteen.

To a 2018 lived at your preferred terms.