



# URBAN SWARAS RUNNING CLUB

USRC NEWSLETTER | JUNE 2019 | ISSUE NO. 006

## AVANI : A 6-STAR JOURNEY

### EDITOR'S NOTE

Hello Swaras,

This edition is late by two weeks, not excusable especially for a club where runs start promptly at 7 am. Editor regrets the delay.

But we're here and have some great stories for you.

Avani's story presented a rare editing dilemma, she submitted 5,400 words of pure gold - easy conversational prose with hardly anything to edit out. So the summarized version presented here feels like cheating, but at a small fee we can give you the unedited version.

Our appreciation also goes to Ken Waichigo, Claire Baker, Daisy Ajima, Michael Nawari, Kevin Kinyanjui and Raoul Kamadjeu for sharing their stories... not forgetting the two new Swaras Janet Barsulai and John Murimi. Karibuni to the club.

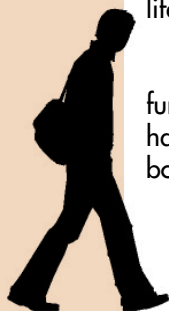
There has also been a healthy interest in ultra-running and the subject features prominently in this newsletter.

Lastly, this Editor takes a break and the indispensable Jerusha will take over editorial duties for the upcoming editions.

Adios!

Cheruiyot

Editor-USRC Newsletter



**M**y quest for the coveted Six Star medal from Abbotts World Marathon Majors started in 2017. Whether finishing the World Marathon Marathons takes a few years or a few decades, the accomplishment of completing these is phenomenal and life-changing.

I definitely don't look like a runner. It's funny how every time someone hears I have run marathons they scan me top to bottom and wonder whether this round

mama can really run. Being used to this analysis, I always say I am a runner by heart not body!

I never even dreamt that I would be running marathons, I now tell myself that I got my running gene from my mum who was born in Eldoret. Before I got into running, I had always worked out in the gym and doing aerobics since I was 16 years old. In school I was more into team sports like basketball, volleyball, rounders and netball.

## AVANI FACT FILE

- Introduces herself as Avani Shah/Patel
- She's lived for a total of 47 years
- Mother of two
- Is a foodie
- Is a talker
- Is 'Mhindi': She insists on this. It also makes her achievement more incredible - the more than 1 billion people of her heritage are definitely not known for running.
- You will hardly find anyone as proud of their achievement, Avani almost sounds as if she is still in denial of her running accomplishments.



## The beginning

I started running in 2008 when I was a stay at home mum looking after my 2 daughters. I had added 20 kg in both pregnancies. Being short and a foodie, it was a challenge to lose baby fat.

Initially, I would spend 3 hours in the gym - 2 hours on aerobics and an hour doing strength training. Soon I felt I'd reached a peak level of fitness and needed to move to the next level and that's when someone suggested that I run the Parklands mini marathon. I signed up for 5 km and loved it though I was so slow. I took 50 minutes to complete a mere 5 km!

The following week, the organiser of Parkland marathon encouraged me to sign up for the 10 km Dettol heart run and by the 3rd week, he persuaded me to take the leap into my 1st half marathon, Sotokoto. I convinced my husband Niraj to accompany me to Sotokoto, and he agreed. That's where Niraj and I started running half marathons.

Sotokoto started at 10 am, in serious heat! The course had elevations that shocked my body, the water ran out, but having committed to enduring the distance I had no intention of giving up. I ended up taking a police officer's water. This experience is why you will never see me without a hydration pack,

also baptised 'oxygen tank'. I finished in 2 hrs. 27 min, nauseous but elated to have crossed the finish line alive! Niraj was just as pleased to complete his 1st half marathon. That's where the insanity, passion and obsession all started from. I have never looked back.

Thereafter, I met Urban Swaras in 2010, a great and inspiring bunch of runners of all abilities. They motivated me not only on running but also enlightened me about giving back to society. I had always felt I would do my charity work once I retired but learnt that there is no time like the present. Swaras like Wahome, Joyce Nduku and Joe Wagendo made me feel we should do more for society in whatever causes we believe in.

I continued running various half marathons from 2010 to 2013.

## Into the Marathon world

In 2013 I ran with Kimmie, a New Yorker who was in Kenya for a few months and had joined the Swaras. She encouraged me to run my 1st full marathon. After a 26 km test run, I went for it.

I chose the Safaricom Lewa marathon, ranked among the hardest marathons in the world, as my first marathon. Set in Laikipia in a game reserve, it is a hot, hilly, high altitude, and dry trail

run. I had a 10-week 'jua kali' training. I followed none of the marathon programs available, a few short runs in the week and a long run on Saturday. I got used to being called crazy, insane, mad etc. during my training, but this motivated me more to prove to myself that I could complete one of the toughest marathons in the world.



After conquering Berlin

I enjoyed running the Lewa marathon, especially after 22 km when I was alone for miles and miles in nature. The peace and tranquillity of the trails was surreal.

After Lewa, I was knocked out of action because of an injury. 4 months with zero running left me so miserable and depressed that I ended up adding a lot of weight. I made a slight comeback in 2014 where I ran Victoria falls half marathon and in 2015, the Two Oceans half marathon.

In 2016, I decided I had to take a step from the doughnut world to DO NOT WORLD. All that extra yummy mummy tummy had to go.

### The Majors

In 2 years from April 2017 to April 2019 I completed the 6 Majors making me the 1st Kenyan-Indian, 3rd female and 8th overall Kenyan to achieve this. Approximately 6,100 people in the world have complete the Majors. Never in my wildest dreams had I envisaged this journey.

This crazy dream began in October 2016. I was randomly selling my daughters' outgrown toys and baby items when I realised that there was a market for 2nd hand baby items. I sold all my items and kept getting inquiries about baby items and toys. I sourced 2nd hand toys, and it became a hustle. Realising I could raise money, the idea was born – why not run a marathon for a charity and give back to society? So, I wrote to 3 London charities and got a place with Action Aid – that was a superb charity that helped many projects in Kenya like the drought we faced in 2017.

Asking for donations for my running made me feel guilty, so I raised 80% of my money hustling and 20% from family support from abroad. In Kenya, I found that few people will give money to help a good cause and many people have their own preferred charities.

London marathon opened my eyes to the Majors. After the race, I bumped into a runner who had his 6-star medal. The special medal caught my attention, and I asked the runner about it, he told

### Avani's Sound bytes:

"... I had to take a step from the doughnut world to DO NOT WORLD. All that extra yummy mummy tummy had to go."

"... I love running but equally love talking, I can talk for the entire distance I run – some people love it while some avoid me because I leave them gasping for breath".

"... running a marathon like child birth you feel the pain but once you have your baby in your hand you forget about the pain."



me that's what one gets for completing the 6 WMM series. Back then we had 1 Kenyan, James Waliuala, who had completed the 6 Majors. I wasn't aware of the 6-star medal though and had always thought the Majors were only for fast runners and I'd never considered running the series. But that bling' was too enticing and a great goal to work for, I could prove something by showing that slow runners can achieve the WMM goal too.

And so, 2 weeks after London, I signed up for Berlin marathon in September 2017 running for a charity that raised funds for children with

a disability in sport. And the rest is history.

Running the 6 WMM has been more than a thrilling experience. It has given me the opportunity to motivate and inspire other slow runners like myself. There are many runners in my running category who have ventured out to run a full marathon after seeing me do it. My motto is that if I can you do it so can anyone. It has been a great way to see the world, a life-changing experience to mingle with all races and cultures from all over the world and as a food lover a chance to try out different cuisines.

## THE MAJORS IN BRIEF

<p>LONDON MARATHON</p> <p>APRIL 2017</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I ran my 1st World major in London because all my non- runner friends and family always asked whether I had run it. It seemed to be the only marathon non-runners associated with running.</li> <li>London was one big street party and costume party with such costumes as rhinos, hot dogs, wedding outfits, Indian dancing costumes and even a fellow in full armour. The one that shocked me the most was a fellow who ran as Jesus with a cross on his back and barefoot.</li> <li>My highlight was a pub where there was a bunch of Kenyans with the Kenya flag. I was so excited, and they too were when they saw the Kenya flag on my t-shirt. There is nothing like the support from your very own Kenyans when you're not in Kenya.</li> </ul>
<p>BERLIN MARATHON</p> <p>SEPTEMBER 2017</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once I signed up for Berlin, I quit gym training and trained haphazardly 3 times a week – 10 km twice and a weekend long run. Less than 50 km a week, pathetic training for a full marathon.</li> <li>Oh boy, did I get the biggest slap on my face! By 15 km my back locked up, I had to drag my feet run-walking the entire distance to the finish. I cursed, swore at myself – I learnt the biggest lesson of marathon training - FAILING TO PREPARE IS PREPARING TO FAIL. After that day I promised myself NEVER to run a marathon without a full commitment to training.</li> </ul>
<p>CHICAGO MARATHON</p> <p>OCTOBER 2018</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After the harsh lesson of a disastrous Berlin Marathon, I committed to training well for my back to back Chicago and New York Marathons. This time I bought a book "Hanson training Method" to guide in my training. It involved 6 days of running, strength training and stretching.</li> <li>My highlight of this marathon was meeting a 62-year-old with 95 who had done marathons and a 64-year-old marathon granny with 120 marathons under her belt!</li> </ul>
<p>NEW YORK MARATHON</p> <p>NOVEMBER 2018</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This one was only a month after Chicago. It thrilled me to be the Flag bearer for Kenya which meant I would lead the Kenyan runners at the marathon parade with the lead flag.</li> <li>NY marathon has many climbs making it challenging after running Chicago the prior month. I don't run to chase time, I enjoy the whole shebang of crowds, signs people put out, high fiving kids and enjoying the entertainment by spectators and crowds. Therefore, I took it easy in NY.</li> </ul>
<p>TOKYO MARATHON</p> <p>FEBRUARY 2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training went very well for Tokyo. I had learnt how my body works best and stayed free of running injuries.</li> <li>I want to run till the day I die so I only push my body to 70% capability. I also changed my diet by cutting down on all processed sugars as chocolate was my greatest weakness. This transformed my body significantly, I lost weight, I had more energy and felt better as I gained strength and speed.</li> <li>Despite poor weather, Tokyo is my fastest Marathon to date at 4 hrs 37 min.</li> </ul>
<p>BOSTON MARATHON</p> <p>APRIL 2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My last Major</li> <li>The experience in Boston was magical. It is a small town and full of runners wearing marathon attire from previous Boston marathons or other WMMs they have run. It's the only time you can walk to any runner and make conversation. The only time where it's ok to talk to strangers without any danger!</li> <li>After 21 km I felt nausea and dizziness combined with stomach cramps I knew if I stopped at a medical tent they wouldn't let me continue so I took it easy and ran-walked. My daughter had sent me a message that morning saying, "MUM I BELIEVE IN YOU". I kept repeating those words and knew I could not let her down. I knew the end would take longer than anticipated but I would get there no matter what, even if I had to roll or crawl to the finish. It was one of the toughest moment of my running experience, but I feel strong and more resilient from my experience. I had hoped to finish Boston with a big bang. Ah, well...I was disappointed, but I will settle for enjoying the crowd support and the scenery in each town along the course.</li> </ul>

## Parting Shot

Anyone who knows me well knows that I love running but equally love talking. I can talk for the entire distance I run - some love it, some avoid me because I leave them gasping for breath. But I'll try to summarise my thoughts:

- Run because it makes you happy, don't compare yourself and don't compete with anyone except yourself. It's not a race, set your own goals and work at them. That way you will be a happy runner.

- I have seen so many runners run with me and surpass me, and I am happy about their progress. I don't run to please or compete with anyone but myself.
- I couldn't have done this without the Urban Swara family. Having met so many runners in this group, I have learnt and taught many other runners a few things about running.
- My greatest pillar of strength has been my husband Niraj and my daughters who have been very supportive and understanding with my passion.

- Not forgetting my running buddy throughout my 6 majors Daisy – who I met while training for the London marathon in 2017. I encouraged her to run her 1st marathon, and she has since bettered me and has completed 5 marathons and ultras. We continue to be each other's supporter and number 1 cheerleader throughout our various marathon trainings.

Running truly is living. US



# DO WE HAVE AN **ULTRA** EPIDEMIC?

**T**he recreational running scene in Kenya has been experiencing a revival for the last few years. The latest trend is the emergence of a crop of ultra-runners, and Swaras are in the thick of things.

## The past

By the turn of 2018, there was one outstanding ultra-runner within Kenyan Running Circles, one Sean Nowak, who runs under the radar and has a good number of 100-milers under his belt.

We did not know any local runners who had breached the three-digit barrier of 100 km. The main Ultras in our vocabulary were Comrades and Two Oceans ultra-marathons down in South Africa.

## The present

2018 changed all that with Victor Miringu running 100 km for his 40th birthday accompanied by one Katara Wawa, who to date is the only Kenyan female with a 100 km to her name.

And it was all downhill from there, now Swaras boast of a 100 km ultra-event and close to 10 runners with 100 km runs under their belts.

The Ultra tribe also organizes runs under the banner of "Ultra-runners in Nairobi", these ladies and gentlemen of questionable sanity, drawn from all running outfits headlined by names like Wingkei Chan have plans that will soon include a 100-miler.

Some of the recent ultra-outings include:

- **5th Jan 2019, Circum-lake Naivasha:** a 74 km run around Lake Naivasha, obviously
- **Longonot Five loops:** one loop of Longonot is 12 km with an elevation gain of 780 metres, one man finished the entire 5 loops - Victor Miringu
- **The Last Survivor:** Involved running a 6 km loop every one hour until one 'man' is left standing. The run

is modelled after the "Big Dog Backyard ultra" race in Tennessee, USA. The model is that there is only one finisher, the last man standing. Everyone else DNF's. The finisher, in this case, was (again) Victor Miringu, completing 19 loops, that makes 19 hours and a distance of 114 km.

- **Nairobi Naivasha Ultra:** a 90 km run from Nairobi to Naivasha.

In Swaraville some Swaras just conquered 60 km of unending Voi hills. The Mt. Kenya Ultra is also only 3 months away and word on the ground is that this year the course is to die for, or is it to die at?

## The Names

Other dominant Swaras in the ultra-scene include Antony Mwasaru, Peter Muia, Michael Nawari, Daisy Ajima, Kevin Kinyanjui among others...keep off these names if you plan on maintaining your sanity. **US**



Daisy Ajima



Peter Muta



Sam Nyingi



Michael Nawari



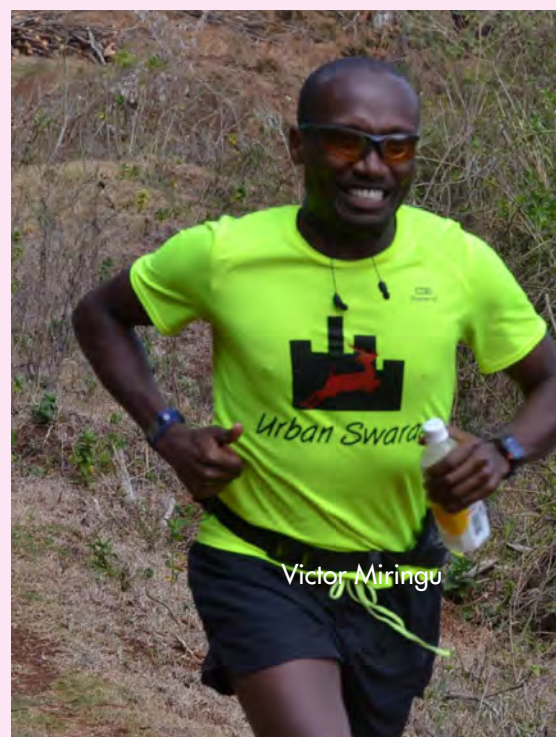
Anthony Mwasaru



Joshua Cheruiyot



Katara Wawa



Victor Miringu



EMERGING ULTRA QUEEN  
**DAISY AJIMA**



# 12:36:00

Let's face it, those who know Daisy Ajima don't expect her to run an ultra-marathon, at least not out of the blues. Mainly because of her happy-go-lucky persona.

But that's exactly what she did. On April 27th Daisy ran a 50-mile ultra, the North Face Endurance Challenge in the USA (50 miles translated to English is 80 km). This feat was totally unexpected and unforeseen. Daisy is not the kind to surprise people with a run, but this was treated as a state secret, catching everyone by surprise when the info was leaked on Swara's Facebook page by one Nyokabi on the very day of the race.

This newsletter got curious and sought her out to get the story behind this unlikely feat. Daisy didn't plan for the ultra. She was to run a regular marathon in Europe on the 28th of April. However, a series of unfortunate events scuttled her plans for the marathon. But what happens to all her training? So in a cloud of disappointment, she looked for an alternative race.

The North Face Endurance Challenge, in Washington D.C., caught her attention. She set her eyes on the 50 km race and promptly registered for it, reasoning that the difference in the distance with a full marathon was negligible. But then voices in her head couldn't let her sleep, 'what if' voices, 'What if you do the 50-miler? It's only 30km more'. She tried to shut out the voices, failed. Two days to race day the voices won and Daisy, at a cost, upgraded her run to the 50-miler.

There was a catch though, the 50-miler had a strict cut-off time of 13 hours. Daisy's longest training run in 2019 was 33.5 km, hardly a relevant run for an 80 km race with strict cut off, but she stuck to her unsettling decision and went for it.

### Her words on the run:

*"Running the Ultra was a painful experience. At the 4 am start I doubted my sanity, what was I doing in a forest in a foreign country armed with just a torch on my head? At 40 km I was happy. At 60 km I was completely broken and remained broken until a fresh burst of energy and endorphins took over from 75 to 80 km. There is nothing as amazing as finishing an Ultra.*

*I also learnt Swaras and the recreational runners' community are such wonderful people. I finished the run at around 1 am Kenyan time, by the time I got online the cheering and congratulatory messages that came through were overwhelming (thanks to the Nyokabi leak). I was especially touched that some tracked my run, apparently for almost 4 hours there was a technical hitch on the tracking and I couldn't be located on the course.*

*Swaras kept sending messages concerned that something had happened to me. There was a collective sigh of relief when I completed. For sure this is a great community and I'm hoping we'll see ladies come in big numbers to do 60 plus km at the Mt. Kenya Ultra in September."*

Daisy finished the ultra in a time of 12 hrs. 36 min – just 24 minutes to spare. Only one other female Swara has a longer distance to her name, Katara Wawa with two 100 km runs. Something seems to have been activated by the 50 miler success story and distance has nothing on Daisy anymore as evidenced by the 60 km with 3,000 m elevation gain she just ran in the Voi ultra. US

MONTHLY MILEAGE		LONGEST RUNS IN 2019	
January	154.2 km	30 km	February 16
February	228.6 km	42.2 km	March 3*
March	252.5 km	30 km	March 23
April	207.5 km	33 km	March 30
		33.5 km	April 13
		*Kilimanjaro Marathon	



Night running



Crossing the finish line



6:25 AM on Wednesday, December 12, 2018  
All By-Passes, 100km run

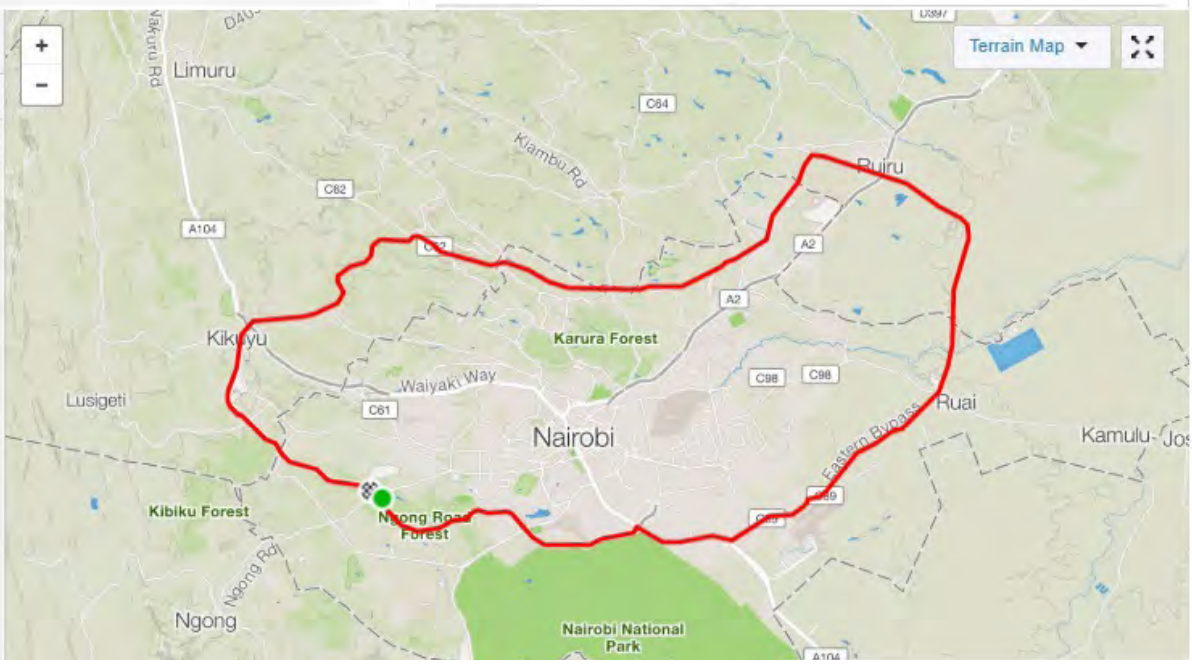
Add a description

100.05 km 12:55:55 7:45 /km  
Distance (?) Moving Time Pace

Elevation 960 m Calories 7,955  
Elapsed Time 14:18:22

Splits

KM	Pace	GAP	Elev
1	6:24 /km	6:32 /km	-12 m
2	6:11 /km	6:20 /km	-12 m
3	6:03 /km	6:01 /km	-1 m
4	5:56 /km	6:13 /km	-22 m
5	6:24 /km	6:32 /km	-10 m
6	5:44 /km	6:16 /km	-43 m
7	5:50 /km	5:59 /km	-18 m
8	5:52 /km	5:55 /km	-10 m
9	6:10 /km	6:12 /km	-6 m
10	5:48 /km	6:03 /km	-19 m
11	6:54 /km	7:05 /km	-14 m
12	5:45 /km	5:49 /km	-8 m
13	5:41 /km	5:45 /km	-8 m



# LESSONS LEARNED FROM ULTRA RUNNING

by Michael NAWARI

I like running, but I love Ultrarunning. For an Ultra-runner a marathon is just a warm-up. We run 80 km, 100 km and then there is a rare breed of Ultrarunners such as the 100-Miler Joshua Cheruiyot, who are known as Extra-Ultra Runners who run 160 km or more, or who will run for 24 hours and more without a wink of sleep. Ultra-runners are a special group of runners who have discovered the joy of running through trees rather than traffic, around in trails rather than around in circles, and up mountains rather than speed bumps.

Ultra-runners have discovered something special: if you slowdown from your marathon pace, and keep moving your legs, you could go on ... and on ... and on. The endorphin highs triggered by running make it as addictive as heroin, it's unspeakably amazing. Ultra-runners push their bodies, mind and spirits beyond what most people would consider the limits of pain and exertion.

Up to March 2018, I had never run an ultra-distance. I had never run a foot more than a marathon, but the thought of doing an ultra intrigued me. So, in March 2018, I took part in the 56 km Two Oceans Ultra Marathon, and at the end of that race as I sat at the Cape Town university grounds, urged on by the searing pain spreading throughout my feet and the aching tendons, I thought to myself, "Why the hell do I do this?" It felt like death, I swore that I would never do anything as stupid as this again. Those who know me, know that I am telling the truth when I say I have never run a foot over 56 km.

Whenever I share my running milestones, people ask me why I run such long distances? I rarely have a deep, reflective answer, but I take comfort because runners world over are not known to be deep thinkers, so do not expect me to betray my tribe. I often mumble something like "because I enjoy it", the answer is very unconvincing even to me, but addictions are hard

to explain. I am sure you have your reasons why you run.

The other question that made me take deep and reflective thinking is when I was asked to share on lessons I have learned from ultra-running and its relevance in real life. Some of the lessons I have learned from ultra-running are:

## 1: Running through the Pain

Ultra-running is hard, and it calls for steely determination to run it. One lesson that an ultra-runner quickly learns is that running through pain is a burden they must bear and one which must be overcome. There is a point during the run, where you will curse the organizers and as somebody said, even the hills. During such moments of crisis, you call a meeting with yourself and remind yourself why you are doing it, and that you must reach the finishing line. Accomplished ultra-runners have mastered the art of running through

their pain. And, when you run through the pain, the most amazing thing happens, it disappears, and your body readjusts and comes to a point of acceptance and you do not feel the pain anymore. The run becomes enjoyable and you could run forever.

## 2: Run in the Present

One other lesson I will tell you, if you are new to ultra-running, is to run in the moment, never thinking so much about how many kilometres you have left. An ultra-marathon is conquered one kilometre at a time, one aid-station at a time. It can be very discouraging to look at your watch and realise that despite several hours of running, you have 70 km to go.


## 3: To Run Further, Run Slowly

Ultra-runners have discovered something special: if you slowdown from your marathon pace, and keep moving your legs, you could go on ... and on ... and on...

And yes, walking is part and parcel of ultra-running strategy, but I am sure Mwasaru he of "I showed those hills dust, I ran through all-of them without stopping" will cringe in his seat. Some ultra-runners strategy involves walking for a minute every 10 km, walk on steep hills if you need to. Why spend all your energy? Save it, and after all you still have over 70 km to conquer.

## 4: Plan your Hydration and Nutrition well

Ultra-races can go on for long hours. Think of hydration past 4 hours, talk to experienced ultra-runners, read a lot, practice it in training. One thing you will suddenly realise is that, most runners cannot stomach solid food six hours into the race. Plan for alternative foods you could use.

Armed with these pearls of wisdom, you can plan to run an ultra. However, the above lessons will also apply to somebody planning to run a Marathon or to upgrade from 10 km to a half-a-marathon. Whatever your running goals are, never forget to enjoy your run. 



Here with running partner, Sam Nyingi on Ngong' road during the Nairobi-Naivasha 90 km Run on May 11, 2019



10 hours and 90 km later...



Keenly listening to instructions at the start of the All-By passes 100 km run on December 12, 2018

I don't know why I chose such a title for a simple explanation of what has transpired since the last write up. Most probably it is my lame attempt at capturing the reader's attention, especially this being a running club's magazine, but I digress. The running tales continue. After gaining an international finisher's medal at the OMTOM 2018, I was hungry for more and registered for the Virgin Money London Marathon 2019. I applied for the balloting system. But for this marathon, winning a ballot slot is exactly what the Bible termed as a camel going through a needle hole, and to this effect, I guess I was a camel, and my bid was unsuccessful.

That notwithstanding, I still felt the need to race in Europe, and by far the compromised race after failing London was Paris. Hang on, my first international marathon was the most beautiful marathon in the world and now I was gunning for 'the world's most beautiful city' aka 'city of love'. What

was better than pounding my love for running on this city's tarmac, enjoying the beauty with my family in tow? Perfect!

As soon as my London Marathon bid fell through, I registered for Paris Marathon and got a new lease to my running. The sub-3-hour goal kept nagging and gracing my dreams. At some point, I dreamt that I had crossed the finish line at 2:59:59. I guess all dreams are valid, but what is the obsession with this time? That is a story for another day.

# ECDYSIS IN THE CITY OF LOVE

by Ken WAICHIGO

The marathon was to be held on 14th April 2019. Having completed the registration in September 2019, I had enough time to train for it. Great! You'd think I would have followed a structured program for the training, right? I did the opposite. All my runs depended on how I woke up feeling – a good feeling translated to a long fast run, while other moods translated to runs that were not worth writing home about. I must confess that the latter was more common than the former. However, this 'training plan' seemed to work until after a self-review, panic set in after I realised I had not done any long runs.

Here's the thing though, no Swara has an excuse to claim not to have a channel of good preparation of races, not with the variety of runs – long distance, hilly, trails, tarmac – served every Saturday morning without fail. But, I am a different breed of Swara – I defied all logic. As I have mentioned before, my race training strategies were ill-informed based on the day's feeling and mood. Luckily, I sneaked in four runs of 30 km about six weeks to the marathon. Two weeks to the race, I suffered an injury during a friend's homecoming run on flat terrain in Karen. I pushed myself hard on what was supposed to be a 30 km run but at 20 km I experienced a twitch on my left calf, which developed into an unbearable pain and I had to call it off at 25 km. A week later, I went in for a much-dreaded physio session. I was under strict instructions not to run at all until race day and advised pulling out of the race should the pain flare up to avoid tearing the calf muscle.

The city of Paris sure is pretty. Champs-Élysée, where we put up, was just 1.5 km to the starting line. I walked a lot to acclimatise to the



Having my moment



Paris marathon crowds are huge and difficult to manoeuvre fast

new location. As a tradition, before marathons, I try to have a strategy of how I'd conquer it. But for this race, I focused on not aggravating my injury and just finishing. I reported to my coral sub 3:15 knowing I was in for a whole day's job of run-walking to the finish line. Injured or not, there was no way I would leave without a finisher's medal!

As usual, the curve-ball moment was brought about by the weather from a two-digit temperature it dipped to 2 °C on race day. I was freezing but surprisingly relaxed as I waited for the gun to go off. Finally, it was time! Off we went.

I didn't chase the wind like I always do. Humbled by the physio's near-death pain experience and fear of a DNF tag at the end of it all I remained calm. The start to a marathon, as usual, is okay since the air is filled with adrenaline and we all feel like equals till the pounding starts. This was my first ever marathon to stand at the start line without fear or anxiety to outperform my expectation. I later learnt that this was what my running journey should have been – it should not be painful, uncertain or to a far extent stressful to my life.

The Paris marathon, like most races I suppose, has a bottleneck of moving lots of runners cramped together for the first 5 km. This to me was like a blessing in disguise since I couldn't get off at a pace that would lead to my wheels

coming off as it has always been the case. I felt like I was on cruise control, my breathing was normal and my legs (apart from the left calf forcing me to land flat foot to avoid aggravating the pain further), were okay. However, my mother used to say, *"When things are calm in life, it's when the devil throws a spanner in the works"*.

True to form, my left-hand fingers froze and before even coming to terms with that, my shoelace came undone and to my surprise, I couldn't re-tie it with my frozen fingers. I had to seek help from a marathon supporter, but she wouldn't understand a word of English I spoke. I had to, somehow, do it despite being unable to feel my fingers.

All this time the guy leading the 3:15 bus was behind me, but I could not set sight of the 3:10 bus. When I got back to running, my cruise control was still working ok, and I resolved to push myself when I got to the 37th km. I thought that there was no way I would burn out at the last 5 km. But to my surprise, there was no fuel left in the tank at this point. I tried another surge at 39 km and again, it was an effort in futility. The 3:15 bus caught up with me and no matter what I tried to do, they disappeared into the horizon. By this time, I didn't care much since the smell

of the medal was beckoning and if I threw a stone at every dog that barked I would drain myself and gain the DNF title.

So, one leg before the other, I trudged on. Eventually, I got to the 500 meters to finish sign amid jubilation from the crowds. I crossed the finish line at my personal best time of 3:17:42! And technically achieving a Boston marathon qualifying time! But most importantly, it was my personal best mental modelling run of my life and shedding the novice skin I have always had in my running. Now I know that it doesn't matter the time I take to finish the race, but how good it feels while at it.

**Disclaimer:** Should my mum ever get hold of this document and read what I said about her, I will deny and swear it's the editor's fabrication

And now the meaning of the article title **Ecdysis**: it means moulting or shedding the skin as some insects and reptiles do. **US**

# 03:17:42



Signature sign depicting the bucket list item ticked off. Moving on to the next challenge.



# KEVIN KINYANJUI: A CURIOUS CASE

The general rule in running is that you start small in terms of distance and difficulty and gradually progress to the longer and tougher stuff. That's the general rule. However, we seem to have an exception here.

## Who is Kevin?

Kevin is a young gentleman who joined Swaras in November 2018.

His longest distance back then was 21 km, Standard Chartered half marathon with a running regime of something like 10 km a week. His only claim to fame was he was a hiker too. But hiking is more or less a fancy name for walking.

## A Big Mistake

On his third-ish Swara run at Karinde, on 17th November 2018, he by happenstance got to run alongside two Swaras, Victor and Cheruiyot. These two Swaras have been around a bit and gone through the standard life cycle of a runner and were at a

point where discussing a run up Mt. Kenya on 29th Dec 2018 was normal conversation. But Kevin was running alongside them, and he overheard, and he must have thought this was normal Swara activities. So, after the run, he pulled aside Cheruiyot and asked to be remembered in prayers sorry, plans for the Mt. Kenya thing. Cheruiyot wasn't sure it was a good idea, but since Kevin had once "hiked" up Mt. Kenya in the regular three-day expedition for normal people, he was remembered in the plans, on an understanding he would turn back whenever he felt uncomfortable.

## Things deteriorate fast

- **29th December 2018:** Kevin prematurely does his first 'run' over 30 km, a one day climb up Mt. Kenya, from Old Moses camp at 3,300 m asl to Point Lenana at 4,985 m asl – 32 km distance, 1,780 m elevation gain.

And then, it gets creepier... during the climb it transpired

that Victor and another climber, Katara Wawa, were planning to run around lake Naivasha the following week. Kevin should learn to close his ears to such talk.

- **5th January 2019:** Kevin prematurely does his first ultra, circum-lake-Naivasha. A 75-km run. He started at 7.30 am in the morning, finished a few minutes before 7 pm, the last runner, but he finished.

The man has since tried to make things right by filling important gaps in his running resume. He now has a full marathon ticked off at Kilimanjaro in March. And we believe he is doing something about getting normal again.

## Moral of this story

New Swaras should be very careful who they run with, and if you must run with some of these people, temporary deafness would come in handy. **US**

Safaricom 4G 18:51

Feed Run

Kinyanjui Kevin  
January 5, 2019 at 7:27 AM

### Circumlakenaivasha Ultra 74K



Distance	Avg Pace
75.67 km	7:29 /km
Moving Time	Elevation Gain
9:26:21	956 m
Calories	Max Elevation
0 cal	2,040 m

Feed Explore Record Profile More

Around Lake Naivasha



Kevin at Point Lenana, Mt. Kenya



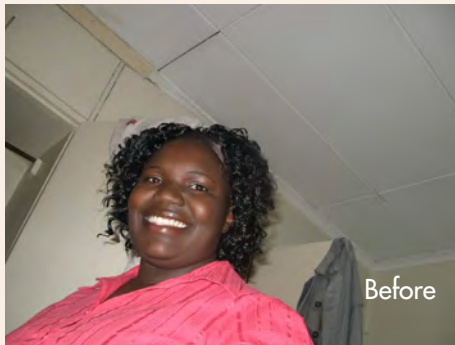
Daring the waters of Mathioya river in a recent run

# PERSPECTIVE FROM NEW SWARAS

**W**e thought we'd touch base with a few new Swaras to hear their voices and welcome them into this great club. Here are their words:

## JANET JEPKOSGEI BARSULAI

I joined Urban Swaras in March 2019. I'd heard of the club many years ago from Nduku when we met at physio. More recently I was amazed by



the transformation of George Rutto and that's when I decided to join Swaras.

My first run was in Gitaru where I did 10 km. Of course, I walked part of it. I then did Kiambu, Valley Arcade, and Kabete. My longest distance was in Valley Arcade where I ran 15.71 km non stop.

Joining Swaras has helped me health-wise. I've reduced my weight from 86 to 75 kg the last time I checked. The aim is to get to 60 kg as well as run for life. I had an accident that resulted in a slipped disc so running has helped because it's the only recommended exercise. I am happy I joined Swaras.

I now run from town to Lang'ata three times a week!

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## JOHN MURIMI

I joined Swaras in April 2019.


I was introduced to Swaras by my two neighbours Mary Muturi and Henry Ochieng. We used to jog together some years back but I quit due to a knee injury. What I didn't know was that they (Mary and Henry) took their runs a step further by joining Swaras. Mary would always remind me to join Swaras every time we met. In 2019 I took up the challenge and now there's no turning back.

## How I started running

My work involves sitting a lot and 10 years ago I suffered serious lower back complications (misalignment of disks). After several hospital visits, my doctor advised me to start exercising and do less sitting. That's when I ventured out but I couldn't even complete one 400 m track lap, but I graduated over time to 5 km, 10 km and eventually 20 km. 3 years ago, I had a knee injury and stopped running until April 2019 when I joined the Swaras.

My initiation run was the Ngong Run (Ngong'athon) and what an experience and a welcome that was! I remember Loise (Treasurer) asking whether I really wanted to start with that run. I decided to do 15 km, and that was a humbling welcome into the Club. So far, I have taken part in 5 runs with Swaras and looking forward to more. From 15 km I graduated to 20 km and ran 25 km in the last run, Karen-Hardy.

My short-term aim is to regain my full fitness then I can set personal run targets. The fitness experiences shared on different Swara forums e.g. WhatsApp have been very helpful; I am managing my knee well and so far so good.

Swaras have given me a different perspective of runs with humbling trails, terrains and this makes me always look forward to the next run. Despite the tough trails, everyone runs with a smile on their faces and always encourage each other. What a family to belong to! Totally USRC infused. 







# VOI • LA!

by Claire BAKER

Let me take you on a journey, from Nairobi, to the Taita Hills, produced by the Urban Swaras, featuring the Urban Swaras, and special guests, release date the 1st June 2019.

You may be getting déjà-vu, and rightly so. I did indeed share a write-up about the same time last year, about the same run, but this year's run couldn't have done a better job of giving me fresh content to make this write-up a world away from the other. So keep on reading, and I promise you'll have a new experience.

The build-up was big. Everyone had been talking about how amazing last year's Voi run had been, so the registrations came flooding in throughout the month of May. We had Swaras, hashers, Medal Hunters, independent candidates, and even a Tanzanian delegation joining the mix, showing that, true to Wesonga's AGM ambitions, Swaras really are vying for world domination. In true takeover style, the majority of the party headed out of Nairobi in a safari-style convoy, with buses packed with yoga mats, beer (more on that later) and more

kit than the Karen Hub Decathlon. The others were to be joining in Voi, making their way by other, more Chinese or independent means (oh they do like to be difficult don't they)?

But whoever says all Swaras do is drink tea and run is WRONG. And I will shout at them so, from the hilltops (quite apt, given we get to a lot of

hilltops with the Swaras). We also do game drives. And bus orgies...I mean naps. Yes, we all slept together in our safari vans. At one point I opened one eye, tentatively, from my daytime slumber, and saw everyone else's heads lolling to the side just as mine had been a moment earlier. Felicita was cosying up to me in a semi-conscious state, and I could see Rosemary, the Patels



The orgy/group-napping bus



Snapped during the warm-up run



Breathtaking Mzima Springs

and the Scovilles equally looking like the nodding dogs you see in cheap gift stores. Ahhh, it's a true sign of camaraderie when you can safely sleep in each other's company.

Now back to the game drive, which took us through Tsavo West (or is it East?...Well, it was one of the Tsavos... the one with all the animals) and it's safe to say we got our money's worth, with many selfies and semi-pro wildlife shots being taken, and many giraffes and elephants eyeing up our convoy possibly thinking 'hmmm, could we outrun these animals? Not so sure...'. We didn't have to hunt down our prey, as Wahome's crew from Afrika Lodges served us a savannah feast, just as our stomachs were turning in on themselves.

In the meantime, those who made their own way there ventured out for

the warm-up run, duly marked by Benja, and also featuring some token elephants. No wonder they ran so fast. Once we were all reunited at Afrika Lodges we shared stories, bucket-loads of solid carbs, and a few liquid carbs, before getting an early night for the day ahead.

All assembled promptly by 5.45 am to see the idiotic 60 km lot. I say that because I was amongst them, armed with nothing more than a pair of trainers and some tissue in a discreet hiding place in case of emergency (60 km is a long way to go). Some of my companions had all the fancy gear (mentioned earlier) and were raring to go, and I eyed them enviously. The 50 km, 40 km, 30 km, and so on, lined up behind us, eagerly awaiting their turn, which would come once they boarded the buses and were dropped at their

respective starting lines. The atmosphere was alive with energy, enthusiasm, and the sweet, sticky smell of energy gels. And so off we went. Kilometre after kilometre we tackled dust, hills, sun, hills, clouds, traffic, hills, dehydration, and...did I mention hills?

I lost my companions, Mwasaru and Peter, after 35 km, in a scene reminiscent of Titanic, where one lover lets go of the other to save themselves. I was saving myself from the embarrassment of showing them how I would drown in the hills, so let them go. They thanked me later. I hear that many Swaras had adventures on those hills: soda stops, storytelling sessions, fits of hysteria, boda boda rides (not mentioning any names, Dessale), false promises of beer (again, no names Chairman, Chairman, Chairman, CHAIRMAN), and the like.

Some of us made it the 2 km to the very top of the highest hill in Coast Province, Vuria Hill, and basked in our glory. The others basked in tea and fresh mandazi, which I hear is even more fulfilling, 2 km further down the hill.

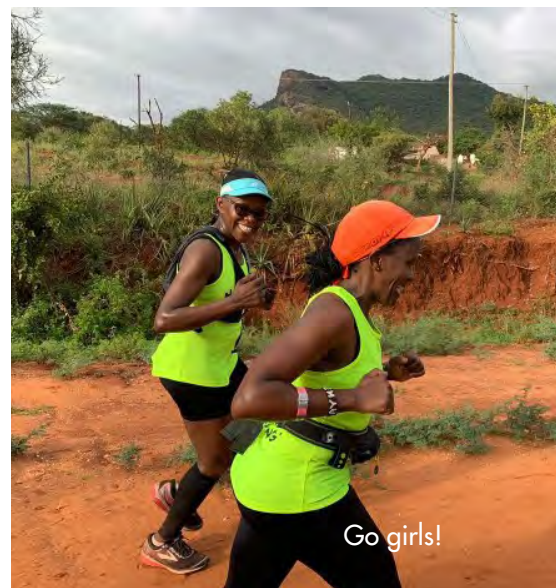
I'm filled with pride at how many Swaras beat their personal distance records, and also at how many showed, grit, determination, and peer support on the trail. It's testament to hard work but also to an attitude of 'if you want to go fast, go alone...if you want to go far, go together'.



The self-drivers setting off for their warm-up run



Ready, set, GO!



Go girls!



Hills. Hills. Hills.



At the top



2 km further up...

## What next?

Oh yes, beer.

The beers and wine I had carried from Nairobi didn't make it to the top of the hill, unlike us (does that mean that (wo)man is stronger than beer?), but Patron and his team stepped in with Afrika Lodges beer replacements to the rescue, and I ensured that every Swara got something frothy to celebrate their moment at the top.

With the main event out of the way, we could all relax a little more, into the medal ceremony and the afterparty. The Deputy Governor of Taita Taveta praised us all as she handed us medals, and received praise (mostly from the male Swaras, who clearly had not spent all their energy on the hills), and promised to set up a Swara outpost in Voi. Watch this space...

I hear some made it to 4 am, and I hear that some slept soundly well before that, wrapped in a blanket of contentment and deep heat.

Whatever the experiences of that night, everyone got what they came for.



No need for a caption :-)

I hear the FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out, for those born before 1989) in Nairobi was palpable from all four corners of the city, and led to a promise by some to do their own Voi run, and sneak into TQ's house to get their medals. There was also a request by others to hold another such run this year, but perhaps we should let Patron catch his breath before following up on that request.

My gratitude, and that of all Swaras in attendance, go to all involved in planning and executing this trip, and to our legs for getting us from point A to point B and through all the kilometres we did, whether 15 km, 62 km, or anything in between.

#RunningIsLiving but #HillsGiveMeThrills. 🇺🇸



Taita Taveta county Deputy Governor being told off for not running



Afrika Lodges



Ever smiling Swaras



Hills? What hills?



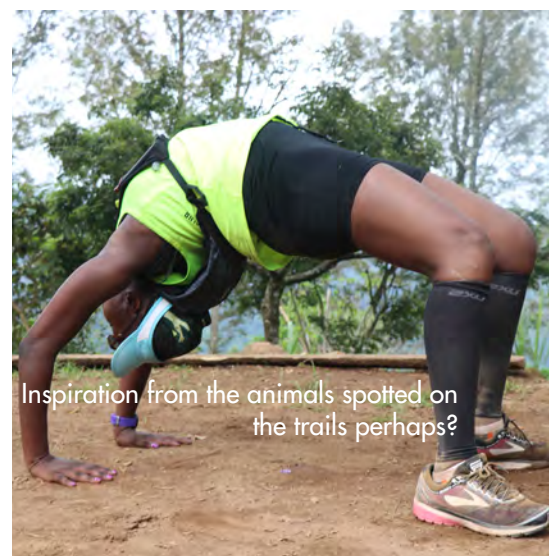
Patron conquering 'his' hills



The hills seem to have brought out the crazies



Been there, done that. Next?



Inspiration from the animals spotted on the trails perhaps?



# COMRADES: THE ULTIMATE HUMAN RACE

by Raoul KAMADJEU

**O**n 9 June, I ran the Comrades Marathon, 88 km up run from Durban to Pietermaritzburg. The Comrades Marathon is one of the oldest and biggest ultra in the world and was ran uninterrupted, by thousands of enthusiasts since 1921. Comrades deserves its appellation of **“Ultimate Human race”** and I will tell you why.

I am not sure for how long I have trained for Comrades. The idea of running Comrades matured in my mind progressively with each of my longest run and after four consecutive Two Oceans Ultra (56Km).

When the gun went off at exactly 5:30 am, anxiety set in. Almost immediately – thoughts such as “How the heck did I end up here?” or “What I am doing here?” flew by. The anxiety grew even stronger with the sight of the orange/red inescapable signboards showing “86 KM to finish, 86 KM to finish, etc..”. I fought hard to clear my head of some uneasy thoughts in the likes of “will my legs carry me to the finish?”.

You take Comrades 1 km at the time through cities streets, villages, open spaces, up-hills (mostly), down hills, straight lines, curves, bridges and flats towards a finish line that never seems to come. I experienced first hand the true meaning and spirit of Comrades – people of all races, religions, ethnic groups, gender, shapes, and background, united by a single goal,

encouraging each other, stopping to check on fellow runners, sharing tips with struggling fellows, running and running. The orange/red count-down signs were painfully and slowly counting down – 60KM to finish 55KMM to finish etc... You could see pain and suffering wherever you looked; runners crying like babies, people cursing their failing legs or treacherous crampy calf muscles, folks puking on the roadside or throwing tantrum for no obvious reasons.

The crowd along the route was amazing, cheering and encouraging runners, sometimes by names - more than once I could hear “Raoul you look great...! Keep going”. Water, juice, banana, cakes, chocolates, boiled and salted potatoes, biscuits, candies, and even beer were spontaneously proposed to suffering runners. I had my share of boiled potatoes, biscuit and bananas to keep me going.

The signboards held by supporters were even more entertaining and made you forgot the pain for a while. Here are some of the memorable ones:

*“Chuck Norris did not run Comrades”,*

*“Remember you paid for this”,*

*“It’s all downhill from here but go check it out yourself”,*

*“Just a few more km to go – Sorry, I am kidding”,*

*“You thought your wife was trouble? What do you think now?”*

*“Remember the cold beer at the finish”*

*“Pain is temporary, that Facebook post is forever”*

*“Pain is French for bread”*

*“If you think you are too slow, then you are doing the right thing”*

At last, I could spot with relief the 10 km-to-finish orange/red sign, I checked my watch and knew I would finish the race comfortably.

2 km: I sped to the finish and finally crossed the line after 11 hours of running. What I saw at the finish was memorable - people looking tortured and beaten, few looking comatose, a couple of dudes obviously delirious, few puking God knows what, some taken away on stretchers, many in tears and, overall, a profusion of hugs. All these runners had in common a great sense of achievement, the feeling of having completed something great.

Just like childbearing pain, all this will be forgotten in a few days and most of these tortured souls will come back for more next year.

I will be among them. **US**