




URBAN SWARAS RUNNING CLUB

USRC Newsletter | March 2019 | Issue No. 005

EDITOR'S NOTE

Hello Swaras,

In line with the Women's day celebrations held in March, we decided to celebrate some of our lady Swaras in this issue. The plan was to have an all women publication. Well, that was until Davis registered a sterling performance in Tokyo that just could not wait to be featured in any other issue. You have to read about it. 

March also proved to be a great month for the ladies. We have Carol, Martha and Lyma sharing their fantastic stories of sweat, tears, strength and resilience to sit at table 42. Avani, shares her incredible story of achieving her marathon PB in horrid conditions.

We hope that these stories will inspire you in your various running endeavours.

And we can't wait to hear from many of you. You can send in your stories to the editor (usrc.editor@gmail.com).

Jerusha,

USRC Newsletter.

DAVIS THE GREAT

It is recommended that you be upstanding as we introduce DAVIS MUNENE. The reason is obvious. He has achieved the 'breaking 2' equivalent of local recreational running. He ran Tokyo marathon in a time of 2:39:55. His stats show an average pace of 3:38 /km, for 42.2 km. To put this into perspective, less than 10% of recreational runners in Kenya can maintain that pace for just one km, one.

Jack Ndegwa's 2:42:28 in Chicago 2018 looked like it would last as the record for long. With Davis' feat, breaking 2:40 which looked like a psychological barrier in our recreational running circles, we don't know what to expect anymore. Having been shaken twice in a space of 6 months.

The clear majority of us mortals will never get close to such fast times, but within our personal goals and abilities, we can definitely benefit from Davis' journey of resilience and tunnel focus. This story looks at his running journey, building up to his Tokyo feat.

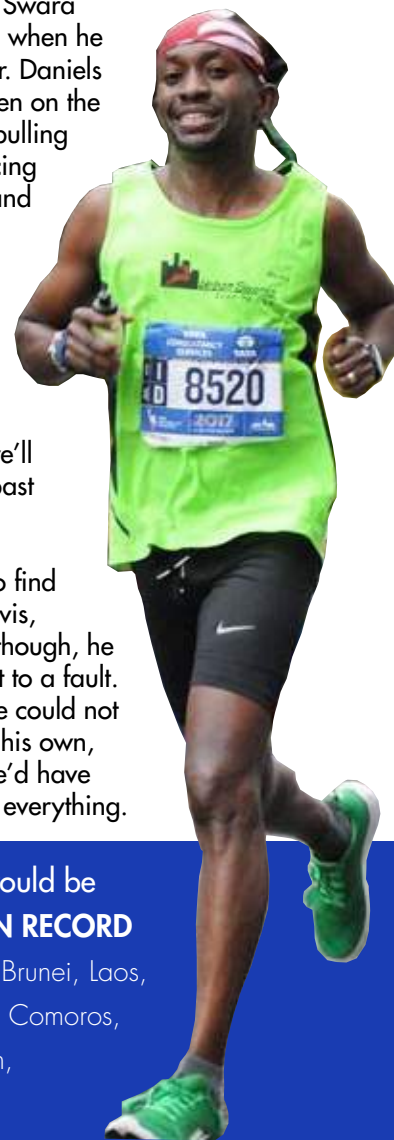
Davis the person

Davis is a human, 42-year-old.
Davis is a family man.
Davis is an 8 to 5 professional.
And of course, Davis is a recreational runner.

Which means he has to juggle between his daily hustle, family and demanding training schedule. Not to mention the costs of travel, shoes, physio sessions among other running expenses.

Davis also loves life. Apart from wearing that serious running face, he can be spotted closely nursing a Mr. Jack Daniels during the downtime at Swara outings. And when he sets down Mr. Daniels he will be seen on the dance floor pulling off a convincing moonwalk, and other 'back-in-the-day' dance moves... he must have been a smooth youngster (we'll only talk in past tense).

It is hard to find fault with Davis, there is one though, he is too modest to a fault. That's why he could not write this on his own, otherwise, he'd have downplayed everything.



Number of countries Davis would be the **NATIONAL MARATHON RECORD HOLDER**. Including: Bhutan, Brunei, Laos, Mauritania, Monaco, Liberia, Comoros, Oman, Samoa, Tonga, Yemen, Equatorial Guinea.

He is an easy inspiration figure and many runners hang on to his every word. His earnest approach to running has made him a role model and de facto coach to several runners across different running clubs some of who are guided by his comprehensive running plans.

Davis has a big heart and has been seen pacing runners in races as far back as 2015 and as late as the 2019 Beyond Zero half marathon, you can also catch him supporting runners at Stanchart marathon on his bike.

Davis starts running

Davis was running before he started running, he ran as a youngster in primary school, representing his school in 10,000 metres. But then he retired.

In high school he exercised his running through basketball, where his main value was running down opponents, his other strength was finishing first in the warm-up training runs. He was however hopeless in netting points for his team, that and the fact he is 'short' means no one expected him to land in the NBA. So, he took the wide road, went to college, where he was a couch potato. After college, he found himself in an 8 to 5 job like everyone else.

Davis ran as an adult in 2006. Registering as a team alongside his workmates in the Standard Chartered Marathon. He was sure he would take prize money for the 10 km race, maybe because of his 10 km racing background in primary school. He 'trained' a few times and felt ready for the prize money assault. The race started, and he was hopeful until 2-3 km at which point he says he was 'panting like a donkey' (we'll ask him to demonstrate the 'donkey pant'), his prize money dream flew out of the window. Apart from losing the cash, he suffered chafing and other running tribulations. He was in pain for a week and vowed not to run ever again. But as expected that vow was broken and he would take up the challenge repeatedly and was soon running half marathons. He never earned prize money though.

Fast forward to 2015. He joined the Urban Swaras, met some deeply inspiring people and within 6 months he had run his first two marathons; Lewa and Standard chartered Nairobi marathon.



Davis with handbag after the 2015 Lewa Marathon

Rookie mistakes and the learning curve

For all his achievements, Davis has had his share of green-eyed rookie mistakes and hard times. Back in the day before he matured into a methodical pacing machine, some runs used to break him.

2015 Fluorspar is a perfect example. He ran all too well on the flat sections then on getting to the endless hill he sprinted away from everyone, but the Fluorspar hill is no respecter of persons, he was found later intermittently walking and sitting by the roadside.

Another example is Maasai Eco Lodge still in 2015. He set out to run 30 km, as usual, he got to the hills and sped away. But the afternoon Kajiado sun carefully roasted him as the hills broke his spirit. He got to the 15 km turning and shamelessly took it, which ended up as a 20km. He considers it as his toughest run and is plotting revenge this year.

Then there was Standard Chartered the same year – his worst marathon experience. He set off aggressively with a dreamy sub 3 target (he must have been high, considering his PB then was 4:02). Anyway, he reached halfway in a time of 1:30, still strong, then he got to 24 km and wheels came off, his pace plummeted, he was seen walking dejectedly along Mombasa road, spectacularly burnt out. He crossed the finish line in 3 hrs. 36 min. First-half in 1 hr. 30 min and the second half in 2 hr. 06 min. Ladies and gentlemen, this is a perfect example of 'how-not-to-run-a-marathon'. He was devastated. Davis is not one to whine but it's usually easy to read his unspoken frustrations when a run doesn't go to plan.



Fluorspar 2015 - Walking too will get me there



2018 Chicago Marathon

He quickly learnt his pacing lessons and the next marathon, Kilimanjaro 2016 was a tactical race that he executed clinically, finishing in 3:25, beating a more realistic goal of 3:30.

But not everyone was happy with his learning curve. Immediately he mastered pacing, nasty injuries reared their ugly heads.

Battle with injury

Davis is probably one of the most unlucky runners with injuries. 2016 was a bad year. After Kilimanjaro marathon, plantar fasciitis, his worst injury experience to date, visited him and kept him out of action for close to a year. He also played host to another injury, ITB (Iliotibial Band Syndrome). He had registered for Kigali marathon and despite the injuries decided to give it a go. Sadly, his injuries won, and he registered his first DNF at Kigali.

Apart from Plantar and ITB, a lower back issue which keeps recurring before his marathons and has affected his performance in Victoria Falls and New York. However, with experience he has learnt how to manage the injuries. He tries to religiously do proper stretching, not overdo runs, wear proper shoes and have physio sessions.

Training regime

Davis runs a weekly mileage of 120 km during the peak weeks of marathon training. His weekly training is roughly in the following format:

Monday	Hill work
Tuesday	Speed
Wednesday	Mid-week long run (max 25 km)
Thursday	Tempo (10 - 15 km)
Friday	Easy run, less than 10 k
Saturday	Long run
Sunday	Rest

Davis has had no issue with weight, but weight and intense training don't agree, one has to give way. In 2017 he shed 10 kg, starting the year at 73 kg and moving all the way down to 63 kg by the time he ran New York marathon in November, where he ran an incredible time of 2.52. New York is the toughest



Major, with a good number of climbs, but Davis made little work of it, running a negative split. A negative split is where you run the second half of a marathon faster than the first half, a very satisfying phenomenon. Anyone paying attention would recognize Davis' New York feat as a sign of things to come.

He is also a firm believer in stretching, he says,

"...you are a better runner if you spend more time stretching than running longer distances. If two people have one hour to train, the first stretches for 15 mins, runs for 30 mins and stretches again for the last 15 mins he or she will be a better

02:39:55

runner than another person who runs for the entire 1 hour. You need to incorporate days for short runs, long runs, speed runs and easy runs when training as the body needs to recover from hard workouts. Cross training is very beneficial, and I ensure I do this at least three times in one week not to mention the core work which should be done religiously."



2019 Tokyo Marathon. Can you feel the power?



The smile of a winner.
2017 New York Marathon

What Next?

Davis has now completed three of the six Abbot Majors: New York, Chicago and Tokyo, all with progressive times of 2:52, 2:50 and 2:39 respectively. He is still on the journey to conquer the remaining three: Berlin, London and Boston.

He is as slippery as Kipchoge on target marathon times. But we still asked him what he would go for should training go as planned and injuries stayed in check.

Q: *Do you think you can go faster than 2:39? Especially in Berlin which is considered the fastest Major.*

Davis: *I think Berlin is a faster course, won't say I can go faster, but anything can happen Berlin being faster.*

Q: *What do you have as a tentative target time for Berlin Marathon?*

Davis: *It's too early to set a target time for Berlin, we will know when it nears.*

(He intends to run it in 2020.)

Word of advice, don't bother asking for his target when the time nears, he'll expertly dance around your questions. With a straight face.

At last, he has revealed that he had a target of 2:40 for Tokyo and is thrilled he dipped under 2:40. We can't wait to see what else he has up his sleeves. [US](#)

FASTEST SWARA MARATHON TIMES

1. Davis Munene	2:39:55	Tokyo, 2019
2. Jack Ndegwa	2:42:28	Chicago, 2018
3. James Waliaula	2:48:09	Tokyo, 2015

DAVIS' MARATHON TIMES

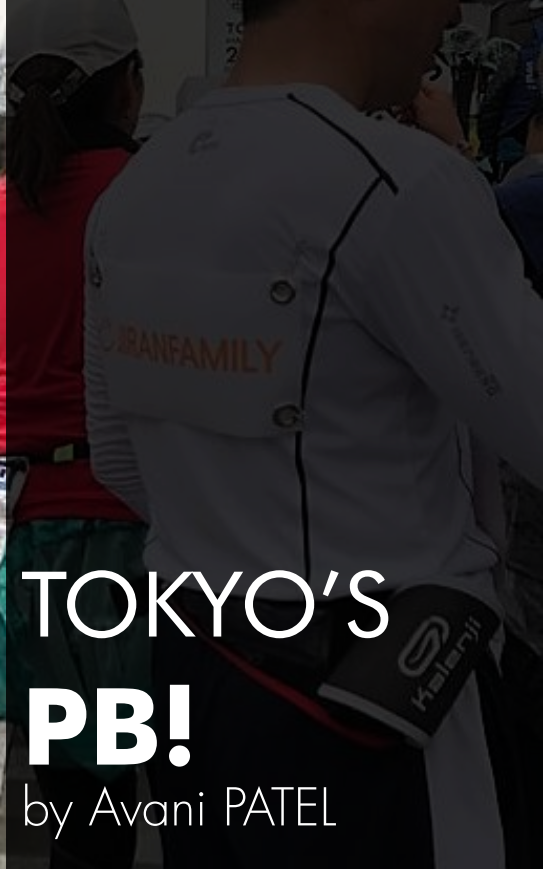
MARATHON	YEAR	TIME
Lewa	2015	4:02:34
Standard Chartered Nairobi	2015	3:36:41
Kilimanjaro	2016	3:25:58
Kigali	2016	DNF (injury)
Victoria Falls	2017	3:23:30
New York	2017	2:52:33
Kilimanjaro	2018	2:58:33
Chicago	2018	2:50:33
Tokyo	2019	2:39:55



03 MARCH
2019

KILIMANJARO MARATHON
TOKYO MARATHON





TOKYO'S PB!

by Avani PATEL

Lead up to Tokyo Marathon

Training for Tokyo has been difficult for me, I can't lie. I have been in training mode since June last year where I wanted to break my PB in Chicago. I chose a programme called the Hanson Training Method that calls for 6 days of running. I loved this program as I built up mileage without realising it. It also incorporated speed and tempo runs that I have never worked on in the past. Using this programme, I aimed for a 4:40 finish time in Chicago. I managed a 4:43:28 so I used the same method for Tokyo where I set a modest target of 4:35 and managed 4:37:28, smashing my PB by 13 minutes!

Here's the thing, when training for a marathon we never factor in weather conditions for any marathon training except for a marathon like Lewa where it's hot. It is no wonder I put no thought process into Tokyo weather until a few weeks to the marathon. When I checked the weather, I found that it was rainy, and the temperatures were near 5 to 7 °C. For a Kenyan, 15 °C is cold. This factor bugged me for a few weeks. Wondering how I would dress, what if I got too cold or too hot, how would I handle it if snows (it snowed for one Tokyo Marathon).

Landing in Tokyo

I had planned to do the Tokyo marathon as the 1st marathon in Asia. Having been to Asia numerous times,

I loved their hospitality and food. This time around, I was super excited to be back doing one of my favourite things - running and seeing the world on foot.

The day I landed in Tokyo the weather was awful - cold, windy and raining. The rain was a little heavier than a drizzle but less than a downpour. This would not dampen my spirits. I had travelled miles and miles, run km after km - I had to do what I came to Tokyo to do - RUN my best and hopefully beat my Chicago PB. Goals I set for myself. I don't compete with anyone. I believe you get what you put in. Train hard till your mind and body can handle it. I had to scale my training to 80 per cent effort because of 3 trainings for 3 marathons close to each other - October (Chicago), November (New York) and Tokyo in March. A runner's greatest fear is the word - INJURY. To keep that at bay, I had to train sensibly and draw lines and limits to how far I would push my body.

Marathon Day

I checked the weather day before the marathon to complete on my running gear. I settled on a warm heat gear top, Urban Swaras vest, a wind jacket and a plastic rain poncho topping it all with an icing of a shower cap. I didn't want my head getting cold and the only waterproof solution I had was a shower cap I thought would be covered by the poncho, but it kept coming out and I let it be and ran with the shower cap the entire race till

41 km - (had to have a decent finisher's photo). I looked super stupid, but I would not risk getting hypothermia after the Boston group experience last year.

The marathon start was not the best as it rained from the time I left my hotel and continued to the entire time.

The marathon route passed through some iconic places, but I noticed nothing. It was hard, no, IT WAS BRUTAL running in cold windy rain conditions. I later came to learn that this year was the coldest in the history of the race conditions. I planned on just concentrating on running, unlike my past marathons where I soaked in the atmosphere of the spectators and surroundings.



It was about 5 to 8 °C with light headwinds in some sections. Most runners have self-conversations when running. More often than not, questioning their sanity. I am not any different. As I faced these windy conditions, I found myself deep in solo conversation, *"Avani, you have spent all this money trained for the last few months. Deal with it!"* When life throws lemons at you, make lemonade, they say. I sucked it in and stopped feeling sorry for myself and concentrated on the marathon. I set small targets of running a little fast and slow from traffic light to traffic light which were stationed almost along the entire course, within a short distance of each other.

It was impressive how the spectators, children included, came to cheer the runners. The rain notwithstanding, they were out in huge numbers! Despite not understanding what they were saying one felt encouraged that they attempted to come and cheer the runners. Hats off to the spectators. This is something I would like us to do at the Nairobi Stanchart marathon – encouraging runners to feel special. Tokyo was interesting in what they gave out to eat during that marathon. They had cherry tomatoes and dumplings at the food stands - something unique. There must have been an interesting reason for this food to be handed out on course.

The course was like Nairobi Stanchart marathon's where it loops, and one can see the runners on both sides. It was exciting to see all the elites but the thought of them being 2 hours ahead of you makes you think damn I want to swap places. With the awful weather, I ran not aiming for a serious time even though I followed a program for a 4:35 to 4:38 finish. I was super impressed that I managed a 4:37:28 finish improving my PB from Chicago of 4:43:28!

On finishing the first thought in my head was how much I had hated the marathon's running conditions. It even took time to comprehend the joy of a PB. I was just glad to stop and hoped to get out of the wet cloths ASAP.

End Thoughts

I would not say this is my favourite world major marathon but can say it's my favourite city from the 5 majors I

have done. Japan is a beautiful country with awesome food, beautiful temples, famous for their cherry blossom flowers, super organised system where everything works, and people obey the rules – a lesson we could learn from Japan.

I may not be the fastest runner but when I embarked on the marathon journey in 2013 - Lewa marathon - I wanted other slow runners like me to try out the distance irrespective of the time. I hope to encourage others in believing that it's not always about the time, it's about the distance and the whole journey of self-discipline, motivation, perseverance, difficulties the thrill of crossing the finish line and making a difference to someone or inspiring someone out there.

I ran the Tokyo marathon for a charity called Kamonihashi - which supports children that are sold for sex. These children are rehabilitated and taught to be self-sufficient. It's heart breaking to see sick people out there abusing children.


04:37:28

This marathon experience taught me that we have to face whatever situation that is thrown to us in life, whether it's a marathon or other situations in life. I felt less pain after I saw the posts from all my friends that ran Kilimanjaro marathon. The tough and baking conditions made me realise I was better off in the cold temperature.

6-star finishers

Tokyo was special as we had two 6-star finishers. Carol Ongeri who used to live in Kenya now in the UK finished her World Marathon Majors journey in Tokyo to become the 2nd lady in Kenya to finish the Abbott World Marathon Majors.

Another one is my friend Piyush from the UK aged 64. Tokyo was his 99th marathon and final World Majors. Completing Tokyo at 3:44 is remarkable for 64-year-old not forgetting a Muhindi that can run. Quite inspiring!

These are some of the experiences that one enjoys from running international races and meeting people who have done remarkable runs. 





MY JOURNEY TO CLUB 42

by Carol MUNGAI

I joined the Urban Swaras Running club in November 2015 at a friend's invite. That run was at Ambo Gardens. I remember it was a wet day and to date, despite everything I don't understand how and why I went. I mean I woke up at 5 am on a Saturday to go attempt something I had never done before! Once the Chairman blew the whistle, off everyone left. I was among the last ones and as we went through a neighbourhood court and came out to the other side, I saw where we had begun from and I gloriously strolled back! That is the day I more likely than not took the most coffee in my life as I waited for my friends to return. Their stories regarding the run were not exciting at all and I was happy I never attempted to run. Of course, I blamed the rain for that.

One of the Swara runs in January 2016 was in Oosotua, some place close to the escarpments. This time round, I dreaded going for it as it was hot. I ran with Lyma and she talked me into running slowly – a step at a time. She actually chanted, 'one-two' 'one-two' and to date when I'm totally worn out I practise this. Thanks to her, regardless of the numerous valleys and ridges we made it back to the starting point at around 1 pm. The entire of 2016 I kept running only on Saturdays with the Club. Despite only doing the Saturday runs, I still ran my first half marathon at the Nairobi Stanchart in under 3 hours. After this, I swore I would run nothing past 20 km. 'It's never that serious' I would remind myself. This

was my learning year as I learnt that a great deal goes into running - not just waking up to go run. For example, it is important to consider the running gear - particularly shoes and attire and the programmes to follow. Above all, one needs interest and loads of discipline with a commitment to this cause. In 2017 I was better equipped, and I increased my weekly runs to at least three times. On top of that, I ran my first ever Mt. Kenya Ultra 35 km with Urban Swaras at Karatina, Nyeri.

In 2018 I was ready for a marathon and was determined to do my first one out of the country because of the horrendous stories of the Nairobi Stanchart Marathon.... Specifically, 'the Mombasa Road Loop'! So, my choice was Vic Falls. However, I was turning a

prime age and I opted instead to run a distance equivalent to my age as is the custom with the Swaras. I engaged Davis Munene, the fastest recreational runner so far. Kudos Coach! He prepared a programme for me to follow which dictated that I should run six times a week, including a Monday run! Those were three extra runs to my week. Damn! Just what did I get myself into?! The best thing he did was to prepare me mentally. My speed was wanting but he told me to forget about it and focus on training and following the programme as much as possible with a goal to finish on the D-day. That I did on August 4th ... 45 @ 45. My system (read my body) was now ready. I had accumulated the mileage and I was told that I would easily conquer the Nairobi Stanchart.



Here with my coach, Davis.



05:22:59

I set my eyes on the Dubai Marathon in January 2019, that meant I had to train during December, including the Christmas week! How now? But I managed to! Unfortunately, the response from the organisers took so long that I gave up on this marathon.

My coach advised that I should go for the Kilimanjaro Marathon. All I heard about this marathon was about the 10 km hill that one encounters at 20 km. That did not go well with me, I hated hill work and all I did whenever I came across a hill during our normal Saturday runs/trails/hikes was just to walk. To tackle this, I joined a group of Swaras who run in Ngong' once or twice a week. I must say that although I went to Ngong' only two times for the 8 km hill work to the famous 'sahani', those two sessions helped me a great deal at Kili. An 8-hour exhausting journey to Moshi did not help to calm the anxiety.

Donned in our beautiful bright Club tees, we did a 2 km warm up to the stadium and took loads of photos, but when we started I never saw most of the guys I took photos with. I ran in the company of my run sister Nyokabi and our Patron Wahome who paced us well up to the 12 km point, at which Nyokabi and I stopped to take photos with the iconic Mt Kilimanjaro in the background.

We never saw him again. The heat had become unbearable and we soon realised that dehydration was real. I had my 'oxygen tank' and I was well prepared, I thought. When I reached the 21 km mark I met a smiling official who directed me towards the 42 km side just as I almost turned to the stadium trying to figure out why I had another 21 km to go. The infamous real hilly stretch started right there and after every corner, it was more and more uphill until kilometre 30. Even though I was ambling, my only aim was to finish. To curb the heat, I soaked myself with water which I grabbed from a water station. When I turned to start downhill I saw peels of melon and pineapples and wondered why there weren't any remaining. I was desperate for some!

On the downhill stretch, as advised by runners who have done this stretch before, I remembered not to push myself too much at the risk of losing my toenails. I had sworn to quit running the moment I lost any of my toenails. What would my pedicure lady work on? That was the thought in my head as I tackled the downhill. In addition to that, I was a bit nervous as I had defied all theories of breaking into new shoes before a major run and ran in a pair with just 20 km mileage on them.

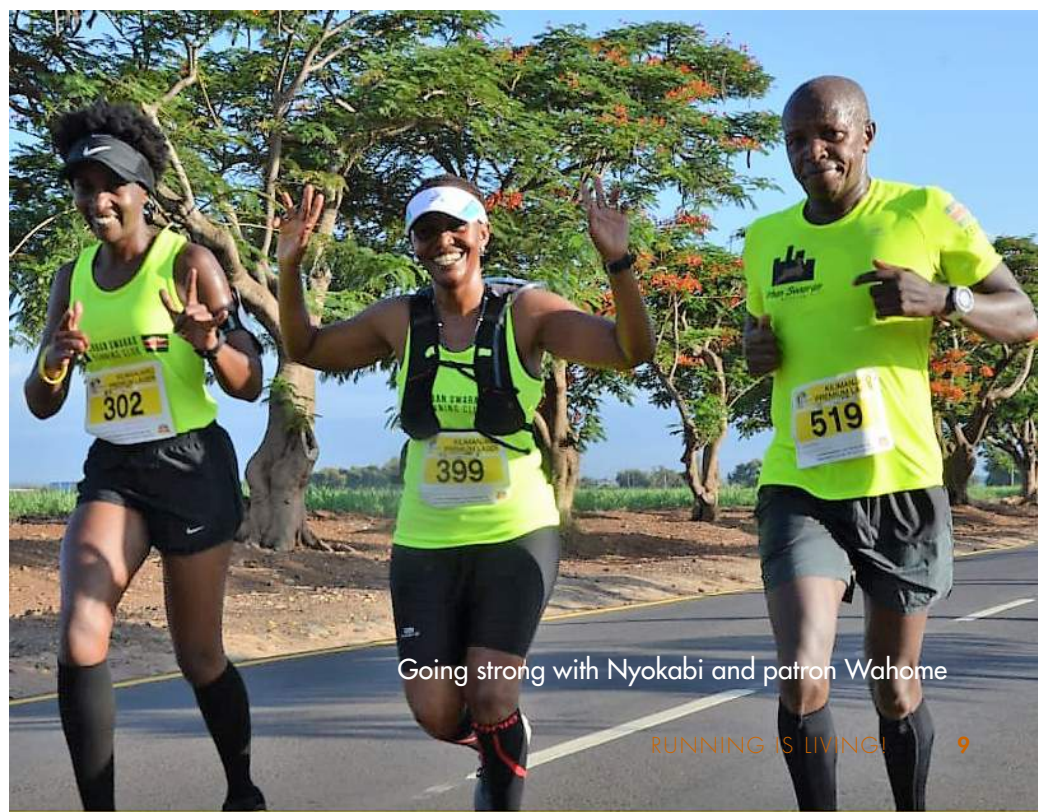
However, despite my fears, I quite enjoyed the downhill as the speed was great. I kicked away any fears of hitting

the 'wall' at 35 km by focusing on the goal to finish no matter how long it took. After all, I had done an ultra before, so this was not any different.

With 4 km remaining, I was offered a banana which I would have greatly appreciated at kilometre 25. When I made my last turn and it read 2 km to go I knew I had it and was more than ever determined to finish even though I must admit that these were the longest 2 km I had ever run. The cheering from the other runners was great but hated it when the Tanzanians said 'pole dada'. Who says that? It's not like I had been forced to run, it was my wish... I got to the stadium after 5 hours 22 min 59 sec. I thank God I made it to the finish line in one piece. Those who have run Kili before says it's one of the toughest marathons to run and to have chosen it to be the debut one, I did well.

Big up to my Soul mate, my Coach, my running Club - Urban Swaras and to everyone who inspired, advised, encouraged and pushed me to do this. I will go back to Kilimanjaro again better prepared and for another medal! The lesson I learnt was that running is a mental game and when you put your mind to it, you will conquer. Nothing can stop you! And that goes for everything else in life.

Strong! US



Going strong with Nyokabi and patron Wahome

MY DEBUT MARATHON

by Lyma MWANGI

As a young girl in the village, we ran for bread at breakneck speed because there was motivation.

In High school, we ran so we could collapse and be given glucose and stay in a sanatorium and avoid double maths and physics. There too was motivation.

I constantly read how most of us are literally running away from diseases, weight, prescriptions, mid-life crisis, bad experiences, or because it's the in thing. I still wonder where I lie in all this. I'm still discovering myself.

Nevertheless, during the last AGM, words were thrown around about maiden full marathons, these words happened to fall in my ears, which I must say was not the intended audience.

Still, I decided to debut in Moshi and these voices are still haunting me even after doing it on March 3rd.

It takes two to tango, on January 3rd, in my usual bubbly self, I declared I would do Kilimanjaro marathon. Peter became my anchor and from then on executed his ambitions to murder my feet. I had less than two months to prepare.

The first run, a 5km, happened the evening I made my declaration. Long story short, thereafter followed a painful 57 days of running, hill work, speed work, gym work, massage sessions I booked.

On the night before the marathon, our 100-miler Champ declared I would conquer the 42.2 km, Ruth the Moshi Champion said it would be like any other run. I had nightmares I would start from the wrong side of the stadium, the stomach too had its issues out of anxiety but fasting was not an option.

Well earned. Worth the tears, 6 hrs. 31 min later

The Run

It was a real test of resilience and achievement beyond my wildest expectations. I still don't want to talk about the body massacre, the heat, the lonely running for over 20 km. I had no thoughts of quitting, the cold morning training had already made me a superhero. Moreover, the long hill training and suffering during training had got me my fair share of quitting, and this one I could endure.

But I did it. It's therefore doable, manageable, it will test your patience, it will tempt you to quit, it will move you to higher levels but of course not the level of the Most High!!

Lessons I took away

- Put your mind into your goals and you'll achieve
- Be always self-motivated
- Pain means something is happening and it's not always bad
- The body can do anything for you if you train it
- Sometimes just show up without excuses and just do it
- If it scares you it's good for you
- Swaras can perfect you if you want to achieve your goals

About Lyma:

- She started running 9 years ago after delivering her last born. The reason for running was to fit back into her clothes
- She first did a 10km at Stanchart Marathon, then moved to Half Marathons for 7 years. Other of her half marathons include: Ndakaini, Mwea, Kigali Peace Marathon and MTN Uganda Marathon. She has 21 Half Marathon medals (how appropriate).
- She refused to give us an old photo of herself, but says she has 'really evolved'.



The aftermath...

My biggest appreciation goes to God 'mueza yote'; Peter, my rock, who introduced me to running and taken in all the pains and anxieties and sponsored everything I've needed; Ngong team; Tabitha my twin sister; many friends, you know yourselves; and my eyes for betraying me in Moshi (tears), and my feet for not giving up on me!

Running is living!! US

06:31:02



The end is nigh...Peter 'the Rock' back there making sure his investments pay off...



MY DEBUT MARATHON: KILLING KILI KILOMETRES

by Muthoni wa MAINA

Some girls run homes. Others, to quote Beyoncé, “run the world”. And then there are girls, like the True Nyerian who runs marathons.

After having done a sub 2 for a half marathon in July 2018 in Mauritius, running a full marathon was on my bucket list. This called for a change in mindset. As George Bernard Shaw said, “progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything”.

I wanted to tick this item off my bucket list at the Kili Marathon. And I wanted to do it ASAP. I knew that the longer I waited, the further this item would be pushed down my bucket list.

Running a full marathon is not for the faint-hearted. Which is why all along I was looking for someone who had two pairs of legs and which they would lend

me on the last miles when the going got tough. After all the horror stories I had heard from The Villager, aka Maina Ngatia, and my running friends, I bought time and skipped the Standard Chartered Marathon last year as I was neither physically nor mentally prepared.

One sunny December 2018 as we were making running plans for the New Year with The Villager - who is my husband and training partner - it became clear that tackling a full marathon was a must.

December is usually a festive season. So, I slept over it and picked up the thoughts in January 2019. The Villager had always told me that “Kili” marathon was tough. And as my first marathon, I was initially developing cold feet, which is not a good thing for someone who primarily uses their feet to “work”.

Well, what has to be, has to be. I had

to find a way of killing my cold feet. They say a journey of a thousand miles, or in this case, a marathon starts with one step. Sometimes that one step is getting over the fear. Or just by wearing your running shoes and tying the laces. It is the little victories, which may seem inconsequential, which determine if one will go the full hog or not.

Prepping for Killing Kili

I embarked on my training in the second week of January 2019. I knew this was not the ideal training schedule as I was late in starting it. One requires at least 16 weeks of training for a full marathon. But I had to make do with the time I had. I may not have had 16 weeks but I had 16 tons of foolish courage.

I developed a seven-week training programme with two weeks of tapering and shared it with The Villager for

review. He gave fantastic insights on how to improve it. I also shared with Davis Munene, the elite recreational runner, for input. I then hit the ground running because time was of the essence.

"This plan is very ambitious, but as you train, listen to your body," The Villager advised me.

I had to make adjustments to my training by moving my base from the village aka Kitengela to Nairobi. I also increased my weekly mileage to ensure I was well prepared to finish my debut full marathon. The village terrain is flat as opposed to Nairobi which is higher in altitude and has more challenging terrain.

I ran five to six days a week. Monday easy runs, Tuesday speed training, Wednesday tempo runs, Thursday hill work and Friday rest days. I joined the Urban Swaras on Saturdays for long runs. I saved Sundays for recovery in the village.

I religiously followed my program for the seven weeks as I also integrated strength training as a key foundation. I also had physiotherapy sessions at least twice a month. Besides, I made sure I stretched well after every run to guard against picking up injuries. These are some of the small matters that can throw one's training regimen into a tailspin. I did not pick an injury.

The training period went by too fast. Before I knew it, it was taper week and the marathon was two weeks away. I wished there was more time. But I convinced myself that Sunday would come and go like any other day. The deal was sealed. There was no turning back now. Not after all the sweat and tears, I had shed over the weeks to prepare for my first ever full marathon.

Moshi bound

The day before travelling to Moshi, these words came out of The Villager;

"You can finish the marathon with 4 hours 30 min," he said, "however enjoy your run ... take it as a long run."

Such advice from pros is what a first-timer needs. Why? You might end up pushing yourself too hard, turning the run into a punishing undesirable undertaking, and turning the experience short and sour because you dropped out. For a runner who's attempting a full marathon for the first time, the rule of thumb is 'easy does it'.

In my mind, I was okay with a Sub 5 hr. On 2nd March 2019, armoured with tons of foolish courage, I packed my bags for the road trip to Moshi. The Impala Shuttle picked us along the way as the village is on the way to Moshi, Tanzania.

From my village to Moshi is a six-hour trip by road. We stopped at the

Namanga Border and the long wait at the Immigration was not helping. The queues were moving at snail pace and the immigration workers were too slow. It took almost three hours for everyone to clear with immigration and at 2 pm we continued with the journey.

We got to Lutheran Guest House in Moshi at about 5 pm. I heaved a sigh of relief. We were allocated our bibs and rooms and it was time to rest and prepare for the D-Day.

I got my running kit ready ensuring I had all I needed ready the night before as there was no much time in the morning. I needed Chapati power for my run and at 4 am I woke up and made some hot chocolate and munched my Chapati. That gave me some confidence. I was psyched. Before I could even close my eyes, the alarm was already ringing and it was time to get ready. At 6 pm, The Villager and I joined the other Urban Swara club members for a briefing and a photo session.

We then all had a warm-up for 2.5 km to the starting point getting there about 15 minutes to the start time.

At exactly 6.45 am the gun went off. That's when reality hit home I had to do this. The warm-up from the hotel really helped. I started off well until the hills and the scorching sun weighed down on me as Kili whooped me hard.



The hills began from 12km all the way to 30km. I ensured I stopped for water and soda in all the points to avoid dehydration. I also kept on tagging on to other runners running at my pace but the hilly section was lonely.

It's these hilly sections that test one's mettle. They can either kill or make your marathon. Because you are alone with your thoughts, and aching muscles, you have to look for inner strength to propel you on even if you are moving at snail's pace. You have to take these hills in your stride. The mistake that some runner make is trying to keep up with other runners who are "chewing" the hills. The trick is to know your body and study the terrain as you go. Listen to your body, and adjust your pace and speed as you go. Like I said before, easy does it.

At 32 km, the terrain became friendlier and I increased my pace. The distance markers on the route kept motivating me. When I saw '10 kms left' on one of the route markers it seemed too near yet too far. I was also scared of "hitting the wall" on this final stretch. Not sure what it was like to hit the wall as I had never experienced it, I was cautious.

There were many moments during the marathon I wanted to stop and walk but I kept setting down one foot in front of the other, having to dig deep into my inner reservoirs to ensure I finished my debut marathon. As Bart Yasso (a running coach) once quipped: "Running is not how far you go, but how far you have come."

Every time I saw the reducing kilometres on the road markers, I got a burst of energy that helped me move to the next kilometre. Running a marathon is about taking one kilometre at a time. When I passed the Lutheran Guest House, I knew I was almost done.

Swaras cheering the runners on the road also motivated me to the finishing line. I was so elated on finishing, I was handed my finishers medal, wore it around my neck and joined the other Kenyan runners in the stadium who were celebrating and cheering. It was memorable when my Garmin beeped 42.195 km, I knew I had done it and ticked a full Marathon off my bucket list.

For sure finishing, a Marathon is a state of mind that says anything is possible!

Climax

After a few minutes' rest, I looked for The Villager in the Stadium and he was so proud of my achievement on my debut marathon. We celebrated and danced and took great photos with the other Swaras. I still could not believe that I had finished my debut marathon with a time of 4hrs 38 min.

I would not have made it without the great support of my villager, friend and mentor aka Maina Ngatia and our three lovely children. To my running club Urban Swaras, I can testify that "Running is Living".

This is only the start to Club 42. My feet are itching for the next one, I can only look back on this experience proudly.

Running is living... onto the next 42.195 km. 

04:38:39



IN SUMMARY...


Kilimanjaro Marathon was a heat wave for the over 70 Swaras who had headed down south for glory. They hadn't budgeted for the brand new full marathon route which also came with a brand new fully charged sun.

Still, Swaras are a hardened lot, many using tough Kili as the venue of their first full marathon. Debutantes Lyma Mwangi, Martha Maina, Carol Nganga and George Rutto called the Sun's bluff and all finished convincingly.

Other Swaras made a strong showing: Ruth Macharia rocketing onto the podium as the 9th female finisher, Eddah Gichangi, in her glamorous smooth-running form gliding home as the second female Swara while the ever-strong Claire Baker, who has made a habit of outrunning Kenyans, finished as the third Swara lady. On the gentlemen front, Victor Kamau, the Ultrarunning sensation, proved that he devours marathons for dessert, finishing just shy of a sub 3. Anthony Mwasaru, whose dictionary

lacks the word 'slow', closely followed powering home in second place just ahead of speedy Peter Muia who is of late ruling the podiums (or is it podia?) of all local trail runs.

The rest of the Swaras taking on the full of half -marathons were melted in varying degrees by the happy sun, but thankfully they all earned solid un-melted medals for their troubles.

As if on cue, the four Swaras out east in the land of the Japs taking on Tokyo Marathon were subjected to an inverse of the Kili conditions, but the four bossed the freezy rainy conditions and ran away with impressive PBs. More power to them!! 

MARATHON TIMES

Victor Kamau	3:00:58	Martha Mwangi	4:41:39
Anthony Mwasaru	3:05:09	James Wahome	4:42:36
Peter Muia	3:11:13	John Gichuhi	4:43:50
Joshua Cheruiyot	3:23:24	Charles Njoroge	4:47:05
Ruth Macharia	3:31:34	Olcaý Karadayi	4:52:54
Joseph Masika	3:46:09	Ameet Shah	5:02:22
Michael Nawari	3:48:44	Josephat Kosgei	5:12:21
Timothy Macharia	3:48:43	Daisy Ajima	5:16:19
Per Sindrup	3:51:26	Mwendwa Maundu	5:20:43
Raoul Kamadjeu	3:54:26	Jerusha Nzembi	5:21:38
Eddah Gichangi	3:55:58	Carol Mungai	5:22:19
Stephen Wachira	3:56:40	Eugenie Mufou Taghwe	5:27:18
Andu Debebe	3:57:42	Susan Okoma	5:30:35
Claire Baker	3:59:46	Rose Kimotho	5:34:14
Thomas Bond	3:59:41	Ferrah Etyang	5:36:10
Wanjau Muriu	4:04:20	Eric Nderitu	5:44:36
Maina Ngatia	4:08:08	Nyokabi Kamotho	5:50:40
Samuel Ndungu	4:18:31	Jack Saxo	5:50:57
Kevin Mbugua	4:22:41	Lilian Onduko	5:56:10
Tim Ngugi	4:24:50	Katwa Kigen	6:21:15
Francisca Achuka	4:28:15	Lyma Mwangi	6:31:02
George Rutto	4:28:59	Judy Muhoro	6:49:25
Alix D. Massop	4:29:08		
Elvis Obonyo	4:29:39		
Linda Omondi	4:34:26		
Peter Macharia	4:34:09		
Loise Mbogo	4:37:42		

HALF-MARATHON TIMES

Niraj Shah	1:43:59
Joseph Kibugu	1:55:12
Sarah Wawa	1:58:07
Irene Mithia	1:59:11
Amai Olubayi	2:01:57
Marylyne Chebet	2:02:07
Chistopher Gitau	2:04:54
Oliver Manyasi	2:05:27
Leah Kimathi	2:13:02
Benson Washika	2:14:21
Winfred Gichuru	2:16:07
Albert Gitonga	2:21:19
Beatrice Ouma	2:28:08
John Mugambi	2:28:33
George Mogaka	2:30:33
Mildred Mavindu	2:36:46
Kangau Keega	2:36:48
Leah Mbugua	2:46:30
Serah Njoroge	2:54:37
Doreen Mulera	2:55:27
Eric Kamau	2:56:48
Norah Mola	3:02:32
Beverly Munialo	3:02:33
Esther Ikonya	3:03:39
Carolyné Kanaiza	3:05:52
Nzisa Liku	3:08:40
Agnes Nyambura	3:20:27
Anthony Kamau	3:34:12
Mary Wanjiru Macharia	3:37:14



Andrew

BEYOND ZERO HALF MARATHON

NAIROBI, MARCH 10, 2019



Joe with the gents



Psyching up to brighten up the Nairobi streets



Waichigo



Mzee Kijana 'inspecting the guard of honour'



Not even severe Achilles tendon injury could stop Ruth from being the 32nd Lady finisher



Lopua



Oclay



Diana aka Dee



Joe with the ladies





This is the look of people well on track to hit their PBs.



Eva and Carol



A rare photo of Joe that's NOT A SELFIE! \o/



What do you think Deputy President Ruto (extreme left) was admiring?
Martin's (a) Form (b) Pace (c) Swara Tee (d) All of the above



Samuel