

KENYA AT THE OLYMPICS: 1956 - 1996

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ABSTRACT

Kenya has taken part in nine Olympiads since making her inaugural appearance in 1956 during the Melbourne Games in Australia. To date, Kenya has won a total of 47 medals, including 14 gold, 17 silver and 16 bronze medals. Majority of the medals (85 %) have been won in athletics with the men's team accounting for 30 % of all the medals won. However, apart from the athletes, Kenya has also been represented at the Olympics in six other sport disciplines including boxing, field hockey, judo, shooting, weightlifting and wrestling. Out of all these disciplines, medals have only been won in athletics and boxing. Additionally, women have won only one medal. Thus, out of seven different disciplines, Kenya has produced medal winners in only athletics and boxing. Furthermore, the number of gold medals won at each Olympiad has declined from 5 in 1988 Seoul Olympics to only one in the 1986 Atlanta Games. This decline could be attributed to, among others, the increasingly crowded athletics calendar leading to possible burnout, the competitiveness of the Olympics trials in athletics leading to top contenders being eliminated, the lack of control over the athletes by KAAA, the greed for money in the grand prix circuit and the increased competition from other countries in similar events. It is recommended that Kenya should diversify her sports disciplines, improve her management of athletes, revive the declining sports disciplines such as hockey and boxing, encourage and expose more women athletes, and incorporate the scientific component in the coaching and management of the athletes as well as other sports persons.

Key words: *Scientific component, grand prix, Olympiad, burnout.*

INTRODUCTION

Kenya made her maiden appearance at the Melbourne Olympic games in 1956 (Amin and Mool, 1992). Since then, she has consistently participated in the games except in 1976 and 1980 due to the politically instigated boycott of the games (Bhushan, 1987; Ouko, 1989; Kubai, 1991; Ndo, 1992; Stuart 1993). Since her inaugural appearance, she has continued to make progress. Thus, to date, Kenya has won a total of 47 medals, including 14 gold, 17 silver and 16 bronze medals. Table 1 shows the medal breakdown won by Kenyan athletes and teams at the Olympic games. Out of all the medals won, 40 (85.1 %) have been in athletics alone. The medals break down in athletics is 13 gold, 17 silver and 10 bronze medals. Of all the medals in athletics, the majority have been won in 3000 metres steeplechase for men (6 gold, 5 silver and 01 bronze), which comprised 30 %

Table 1: Medals won by Kenya at the Olympic games

YEAR	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTAL	%
1964	nil	nil	01	01	2.13
1968	03	04	02	09	19.15
1972	02	03	04	09	19.15
1976	boycotted				
1980	boycotted				
1984	01	nil	02	03	6.38
1988	05	02	02	09	19.15
1992	02	04	02	08	17.02
1996	01	04	03	08	17.02
TOTAL 14	17	16	47	100	

of all the medals won in athletics. The other events in, which medals have been won include 400m (2 bronze), 4 x 400m relay (1 gold, 1 silver), 800m (2 gold, 2 silver, 3 bronze), 1500m (2 gold, 1 silver, 1 bronze medals). 5000m (men and women - 1 gold, 4 silver, 1 bronze medals), 10,000m (1 gold, 2 silver, 2 bronze) and marathon (1 silver, 1 bronze). The percentage of medals won in athletics is shown in table 2.

Thus, the most productive athletics events include 3000m steeplechase, 800m, 5000m and 10,000m. Boxing has produced a total of 07 medals including 1 gold, 1 silver and 5 bronze (Ndoo, 1992; Stuart, 1993). However, since 1988, no medal has been won. All the boxers were eliminated in the preliminary rounds in both the Barcelona 1992 and Atlanta 1996 Olympic games.

The other sports disciplines where Kenya was represented at the Olympics included field hockey, Judo, shooting, weightlifting and wrestling (Bhushan, 1987; Ndoo, 1992). It is unfortunate that no medal has been won in all these sports. It is worth noting that field hockey, where Kenya had displayed creditable performances declined to the last position in 1988 and never qualified for the games thereafter. Yet Kenya had been Africa's torchbearer at the Olympics since 1956.

Table 2: Percentage of medals in different events

EVENT	MEDALS		
	NO	%	Rank
4000m	02	5.0	6
4 x 400m relay	02	5.0	6
800m	07	17.5	2
1500m	04	10	5
3000m s/c	12	30	1
5000m	06	15	3
10, 000m	05	12.5	4
Marathon	02	5.0	6
TOTAL	40	100	

It is therefore, because of athletics and formerly boxing that Kenya made a major impact on the medal standings. Her remarkable showing has fared favourably when compared to other super powers such as the United States of America, Great Britain, Germany and Russia. It is this performance especially in the middle and long distance events that has undoubtedly made Kenya Africa's most successful and best-known sporting nation (Mazrui, 1986; Ouko, 1989; Burfoot, 1992; Stuart, 1993).

However, the success of Kenya in the track events has and continued to be limited. She has received international recognition mainly in the middle and long distance events (Mazrui, 1986; Burfoot, 1992; Stuart, 1993). As the Olympics continue to grow in magnitude, more countries would present talented and well-prepared athletes to the games hence the competition would become more difficult. The serious attempt by other nations to dislodge Kenya from dominating these races will negatively impact on her performance in the games (Tulloh, 1982). Already, fewer gold medals are being won by the Kenyan team, declining from 5 in 1988 Seoul Olympics to only 1 in the 1996 Atlanta Games. The fact that 45 nations won medals in athletics compared to 35 in Barcelona 1992, and that 24 different countries produced Olympic champions (Velzisz, 1996) sends a warning to Kenya that it is time they diversified their sport performances. One area where Kenya should lay emphasis on is the women's sector (Owino, 1994). For the first time, a Kenyan woman won a silver medal in the Olympic games' 5,000m event. Given Kenya's women dominance in cross country and road races, it is time that dominance was transferred to the track. Other possible reasons why Kenya's medal tally has declined includes:

1. The crowded athletics calendar leading to possible burnout.

2. The competitiveness of the national Olympic trials, which leads to better medal prospects being eliminated.
3. Overseas-based runners usually fail to prepare adequately for the national championships given the lucrative grand prix circuit.
4. The top athletes are basically under the control of athletics agents as opposed to KAAA hence no controlled participation in meetings.
5. The increased competition from other countries in Africa such as Morocco, Algeria, Ethiopia and Burundi that are also producing middle and long distance runners.
6. The attractiveness of the prize money in the grand prix circuit, which leads to too many races for athletes keen on making more money.
7. Administration and managerial lapses such as absence of incentives, chaotic residential camping, corruption and poor selection of teams.
8. Predictable running strategies that are basically tailored for the team running and the poor tactical adjustment to meet the demands of the situation.
9. Decline in the quality of boxers sent to the games and the low coaching standards in the sport.

CONCLUSION

Kenya has so far done well in establishing herself as a power to reckon with at the Olympic games especially in track events, and previously boxing. However, the increased competitiveness as well as participation by more countries have continued to chip away the advantages that Kenya had. It is therefore recommended that Kenya diversifies her sports disciplines, improve her management of athletes, revive the declining sport disciplines such as hockey and boxing, encourage and expose more women athletes and incorporate the scientific component in the coaching management of the athletes, if it is to continue making an impact at the Olympic level.

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