

The gap between the management and success of elite middle and long distance runners in Kenya

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Abstract

Kenya has been very successful at middle and long distance races in international competitions for the last five decades. However, Kenyan world record beaters have denounced the motherland flag by switching nationality, sought training in alien bases under foreign managers, been living under deplorable conditions after athletic career, or they have been the victim of neglect-induced death at a prime career age. There is extensive research available on the success of Kenyan athletes, but no study to the knowledge of the researchers has linked the management of Kenyan athletes to that success. As a foundation for further research, the current exploratory study was designed to determine whether elite athletes, their coaches, and administrative officials (Athletics Kenya [AK] officials) differed on the effectiveness of the sampled managerial practices (personnel, equipment/facilities, motivation, patriotism, team selection, and training programs) in facilitating the success of Kenyan elite runners. The study further details the effect of nationality change and the role of foreign managers towards the success of Kenyans in distance running. The study took place in Nairobi, Kenya. The sample comprised 185 elite athletes, 49 coaches, and 34 AK officials. The Chi-square (χ^2) test for independence ($\alpha = .05$.) analysis was used to determine a consistent and predictable relationship between the variables. The pairwise comparisons showed that athletes differed significantly with coaches and AK officials on the sampled managerial practices while coaches did not differ significantly with AK officials. Suggestions for further research are given.

Keywords: Kenya, middle and long distance runners, management, nationality change, doping, athlete retirement.

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Introduction

The science of sports management entails the deployment of material, human, and financial resources within the design of sports organizations, structure, and development (Bucher & Krotee, 2007; Parks & Quarterman, 2003). The

management of elite athletes involves planning and organizing for training and competition, counseling services on investment, doping, nutrition, legal liabilities, contracts, personal relationships, media, and planning for the retirement (Bridges and Libby, 1996; Kanyiba, 2008). Bucher and Krotee (2007) also affirm that sport management involves the interaction between the administration and the athletes and the importance of synergy among personnel within an organization. Several authors (Bucher & Krotee, 2007; Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson, 2001; Williams, 2005) have emphasized that management in athletics should involve working with and through individuals to effectively accomplish the goals of an organization. Athletics governing organizations in Kenya include the Athletics Kenya (AK), National Olympic Committee of Kenya (NOCK), and Kenya National Sports Council (KNSC). These organizations are mandated to, but not limited to, the organizational goals of talent development, provision of quality equipment and facilities, effective athlete selection, training for competitions, and availing counseling services to athletes (Kanyiba, 2008).

Running has been a sport in Kenya for about 70 years. The first known organized track and field competitions in Kenya existed between World Wars I & II (Bale & Sang, 2003; Ward, 2001; Wirz, 2006). To the novelty of the competitions, the winners were simply rewarded with a hurricane lamp and a blanket before the introduction of medals after 1944 (Ward, 2001). The formation of Kenya Amateur Athletics Association (KAAA - today AK) in 1951 and the Kenyan Olympic Association (KOA - currently NOCK) in 1954 was pivotal in introducing Kenya into the international sporting arena. The two organizations were mandated to preparing athletic teams for Commonwealth and Olympic Games (Ward, 2001; Wirz, 2006). Pioneer Kenyan athletes were amateurs who patriotically competed as a national duty, though expecting some recognition and incentives from the government.

International sport competitions have long been associated with nationalism, expression of political ideologies, as well as diplomacy (Adjaye, 2010). Kenya gained independence from Britain in December 12, 1963. Years before the independence, Kenya as a British Colony had already become renowned worldwide for her talented athletes. While the change of guard brought about a myriad of administrative changes across most of the departments in the nation, the young government recognized the role of athletics in geopolitics and supported the previously established athletic organizations. Athletics thus played (and still does) a major role in the global recognition of Kenya as a Republic (Wirz, 2006). During the 2008 and 2012 summer Olympic Games in Beijing and London respectively, Kenya was the most successful country worldwide in middle and long distance races (Evans et al., 2015). During the Berlin (2009), Daegu (2011), and Moscow (2013) World Championships, Kenya was ranked third (2009 and 2011) and fourth (2013) in the world, and first in Africa. All

medals came from middle and long distance races (International Association of Athletics Federations; IAAF, 2015). It is inarguable that the majority of the world citizens associate Kenya with her prowess in distance running (Kanyiba, 2008).

The end of amateurism and the beginning of professional running did not gain momentum until the early 1990s, bringing complexity into the business of managing athletes (Turrini, 2010). The emergence of professional running turned Kenya into a gold mine for foreign athletics managers. Foreign managers rapidly established high altitude training camps in Kenya, fully equipped with a blend of local and foreign agents, coaches, and scouts. The managerial influence of the AK in the new era of professional running was relegated to merely team selections and brief preparations for international championships. Outside the international championships, foreign managers mainly from UK, Italy, France, Germany, Netherlands, and USA took over the management of elite athletes. According to Wirz (2006: 44), "The Kenyan Athletics Federation (AK) has failed to remain in control of its athletes. Today, agents have the power...The agents are the ones to decide together with the athletes and the meet organizers who will run where and when". Foreign managers further provide training opportunities abroad with state-of-the-art facilities, equipment, and athletic training personnel for elite Kenyan athletes, a deficiency AK has not confronted. Kanyiba (2008) surveyed 20 Kenyan top athletes and found only 6 were based in Kenya, while the rest were mainly based in Europe.

Beginning the early 1990s, prominent Kenyan middle and distance runners started defecting into other countries, especially the oil-rich Gulf States, Europe, and America (Adjaye, 2010; Simms & Rendell, 2004). Wilson Kosgei Kipketer, the world record holder in 800m for thirteen years until August 2010, was the first Kenyan to defect to Denmark in 1990. Between 1990 and 2008, over 30 elite athletes had denounced their Kenyan citizenship (Kanyiba, 2008). The Kenyan government and the rest of the athletics governing organizations have consistently pleaded with athletes to embrace nationalism by staying and competing for Kenya (Adjaye, 2010; Voice of America; VOA, 2005). Defected athletes have cited stiff competition at home, limited resources for training and competition, lack of recognition by local coaches, limitations of dual citizenship, and the obvious reason, little or lack of financial incentives (Adjaye, 2010, Kanyiba, 2008). According to Simms and Rendell (2004), the defected athletes are local heroes who give young and upcoming athletes a model of emigration while depriving a mother country of talent and cultural continuum.

Pioneer runners immensely contributed to putting Kenya on a global map despite not enjoying privileges of professional running/coaching, or even selling their talent to the highest bidder for monetary and material returns. These athletes upon retiring have lived in a deplorable state without any government pension,

and some have died from curable diseases due to lack of medical coverage (Kanyiba, 2008; Wirz, 2006). Some of the former athletes who have died of sheer neglect include: Naftali Temu, Richard Chelimo, and Samson Kimobwa. Charles Asati (Olympic, Commonwealth, and All African Champion) is an example of a pioneer athlete living in dire poverty. Very few pioneer runners, such as Kipchoge Keino and Michael Boit, later became successful in life due to their involvement in sports administration in the country and pursuing higher education. Stronach, Adair and Taylor (2014) recommended that career advisers within sport organizations should be aware of the aspirations of athletes and partner them with governmental agencies and other organizations to help athletes thrive during retirement.

Considering the overwhelming involvement of foreign managers, the switching of nationality and the lack of welfare for the retired athletes, can the success of Kenya's distance runners be attributed to the competence of the organizations mandated to managing athletes? Despite plethora of research on the success of Kenyan runners (Kanyiba, 2008; Onywera et al., 2006; Ward, 2001; Wirz, 2006), no study to the knowledge of the researchers has linked the management of Kenyan athletes to that success. Based on the premise that management in athletics involves working with/through the interaction between the administration and the athletes (Bucher & Krotee, 2007), the current exploratory study was designed to determine whether elite athletes, their coaches, and administrative officials (AK) differed on the effectiveness of the sampled managerial practices (personnel, equipment/facilities, motivation, patriotism, team-selection, and training programs) in facilitating the success of Kenya's elite runners.

Primary null hypothesis

In the management of middle and long distance runners in Kenya, the status in athletics has no significant influence on the opinion about athlete management practices.

Methodology

Construction of Athletics Management Questionnaire (AMQ)

The AMQ questionnaire items emanated from our personal and expertise knowledge on athlete management. The second and third authors had researched extensively on Kenyan runners and considered the 14 items on AMQ valid statements regarding the management of Kenya runners. Five items inquired demographic information of gender, status in athletics (*athlete, coach, and AK official*), number of international competitions, experience, and team affiliation. Nine items sought opinions from respondents on chosen athlete management

statements as applied to Kenyan runners, classified into five categories (strongly agree/very adequate/very effective, agree/adequate/effective, no idea/no comment, disagree/inadequate/ineffective, strongly disagree/very inadequate/very ineffective). Coefficient alpha was used to examine internal reliability (Green & Salkind, 2008). The scale was based on opinion rating and not psychological construct. Nineteen (19) national-level runners (males [$n = 15$] and females [$n = 4$]) were used for reliability testing. Cronbach's alpha yielded a good internal reliability, $\alpha = .63$ (Green & Salkind, 2008).

Participants/ Procedure

The target population (N) was 355 athletes, 107 coaches, and 42 AK officials at the Kenyan national athletics championships in Nairobi. Simple random sampling procedure was used to select 52% ($n = 185$) athletes; 46% ($n = 49$) coaches; and 80% ($n = 34$) AK officials. The total number of respondents was therefore 53% ($n = 268$), considered representative in a survey research design (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999).

The research permit to conduct the study was issued by the Ministry of Education, Kenya. The athletics governing body (AK) further approved access to officials, coaches, and athletes. The AK officials were accessed at their respective offices for the administration of questionnaires. Athletes and coaches were accessed at Nyayo national stadium Nairobi, the venue for the championships. The researchers organized with respective team managers and coaches for the teams to complete the questionnaires early in the morning on arrival at the stadium before the events. The first author supervised the activity, ready to respond to emerging questions.

Data analysis

IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) statistics version 19 was used for data analysis. The data were summarized into 3 x 5 contingency tables with rows corresponding to categories of status in athletics (*athlete, coach, and AK official*) and columns corresponding to categories of the distribution of reported opinion on a chosen statement on athlete management (*e.g. strongly agree, agree, no idea, disagree, and strongly disagree*). The Chi-square (χ^2) test for independence ($\alpha = .05$.) analysis was used to determine a consistent and predictable relationship between the variables (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009).

Cross tabulation analysis was initially conducted on all 9 items to check for restrictions for calculating Chi-square (Green & Salkind, 2008). Majority of the items yielded expected frequencies of more than 20%. To satisfy the assumptions and ensure validity, categories that had small marginal totals were collapsed from the respective tables (Table 1) (Blaikie, 2003). The second cross

tabulation analysis was conducted after the correction. Cramér's V was used to measure the effect size of the hypothesis tests outcome (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009). Power analysis (Cohen, 1988) was used to measure the strength of reported Cramér's V . Pearson χ^2 on every item presented an omnibus test (Green & Salkind, 2008). Holm's sequential Bonferroni method (at .05 level) was used to control for Type 1 error in all pairwise comparisons. The follow-up tests were conducted following a significant Chi-square.

Results

Table 1: Summary of collapsed categories and respective expected frequency count yield

Item No.	Item	Level collapsed	Expected Frequency		
			Athlete	Coach	AK official
1	Extent of motivation to Kenyan runners	No comment	13.1	3.5*	2.4*
		V.	13.1	3.5*	2.4*
		Inadequate			
2	Kenyan runners are managed by adequate and qualified Kenyan coaches	No idea	9.0	2.4*	1.6*
		S. Disagree	18.6	4.9*	3.4*
3	Kenyan runners move to foreign countries due to better management of athletes there	No idea	9.7	2.6*	1.8*
		S. Disagree	17.3	4.6*	3.2*
4	Kenyan runners are provided with adequate athletic facilities and equipment	No idea	4.8*	1.3*	.9*
		S. Agree	16.6	4.4*	3.0*
5	Runners in Kenya are provided with adequate funds to cater for training and competition needs after selection into national team	No idea	9.7	2.6*	3.4*
6	National championships qualifications and wild card are effective team-selection criteria	No idea	18.6	4.9*	3.4*
		S. Disagree	15.2	4.0*	2.8*
7	Training programs are centrally drawn for all Kenyan national-level runners	No idea	20.0	5.3	3.7*
8	Number of career advisors and counselors available for Kenyan runners	V.			
		Adequate	18.6	4.9*	3.4*
		V.	22.1	5.9	4.1*
9	Comment on the overall management of Kenyan runners	Inadequate			
		No comment			
		V.	2.1*	.5*	.4*
		ineffective	14.5	3.8*	2.7*
		V.	16.6	4.4*	3.0*
		Effective			

Note. *Cells with expected frequency less than 5. AK = athletics Kenya.

Status in athletics and opinions on athlete management statements: Adequacy and qualification of Kenyan coaches ($\chi^2(4, n = 228) = 6.67, p = .16$, Cramér's $V = .12$), provision of adequate athletic facilities and equipment ($\chi^2(4, n = 237) = 3.35, p = .50$, Cramér's $V = .08$), and overall effectiveness to which Kenyan

runners were managed ($\chi^2 (2, n = 220) = 1.71, p = .43$, Cramér's $V = .09$) were not significantly related. The null hypothesis for these items was therefore accepted. To adhere to text/tables ratio and pages limit, tables for these results were not submitted with this paper (American Psychological Association; APA, 2010).

Status in athletics and opinions on athlete management statements: Extent of motivation to Kenyan runners ($\chi^2 (8, n = 230) = 27.29, p < .01$, Cramér's $V = .24$), change of nationality ($\chi^2 (4, n = 229) = 10.69, p = .03$, Cramér's $V = .15$), funds for training and competition ($\chi^2 (6, n = 254) = 29.38, p < .01$, Cramér's $V = .24$), team selection criteria ($\chi^2 (4, n = 219) = 9.75, p = .05$, Cramér's $V = .15$), drawing of training programs ($\chi^2 (6, n = 239) = 15.17, p = .02$, Cramér's $V = .18$), and availability of athletic counselors ($\chi^2 (4, n = 268) = 25.48, p < .01$, Cramér's $V = .28$) were significantly related. The null hypothesis for these items was therefore not accepted. Further analysis was limited to three items that yielded the largest Pearson χ^2 (funds for training and competition, extent of motivation, and availability of athletic counselors) due to the page limitation.

The proportions of athletes, coaches, and AK officials who agreed runners were provided with adequate funds for training and competition were .30, .10, and .15 respectively. The proportions of athletes, coaches, and AK officials who had an opinion the Kenyan runners were adequately motivated were .43, .30, and .21 respectively. Lastly, the proportions of athletes, coaches, and AK officials who had an opinion the athletes had inadequate counselors were .43, .74, and .81 respectively. The follow-up tests were conducted on the three items above to ascertain the deference amongst their proportions. Two pairwise differences of athletes vs. coaches and athletes vs. AK officials were significant while the pairwise difference of coaches vs. AK officials was not significant in all the three items. The probability of an opinion that the elite middle and distance runners in Kenya were provided with adequate funds for training and competition was 2 times (.30/.15) more likely when a response was given by an athlete compared to when given by a AK official.

Discussion

The present exploratory study attempted to determine whether there is a relationship between the status in athletics and the opinion on the effectiveness of the sampled managerial practices in facilitating the success of the Kenyan elite middle and long distance runners. The majority of the athletes agreed that they were provided with adequate funds for training/competition and were adequately motivated (30% and 43% respectively) while the majority of coaches and AK officials disagreed (51%/54% and 49%/66% respectively). The observed differences above could be explained by the involvement of foreign managers in athlete management. Wirz (2006) noted that in the past, Kenyan athletes used to

train as a team under the AK for the common good of the national team but in the age of professional running, “the national team was not the main thing but the success for Adidas, Nike or whichever personal sponsor was involved” (p. 46). The findings could also be interpreted as an acknowledgement by the AK and the coaches that the organization could not adequately motivate or fund the training/competition needs for the athletes without external assistance. The failure of athletic organizations to adequately motivate athletes could be an explanation as to why the majority of athletes (51%), coaches (39%), and AK officials (39%) either strongly agreed or agreed that the majority of Kenyan athletes prefer to relocate to foreign countries in search for better management.

The respondents unanimously agreed that counseling services available to athletes were inadequate (athletes: 42%, coaches 74%, and AK officials 81%). The findings confirmed observations by Adjaye (2010) and Wirz (2006) that retired athletes, despite having made millions, died poor or are living in deplorable conditions due to poor counseling in investment. A few Kenyan runners have in the past been banned from international competitions after testing positive for banned substance ingested unknowingly, some after seeking unsupervised medical treatment (Kamau, 2013). Doping cases among elite runners however have been rampant in the last 5 years with the 2014 Boston and Chicago marathons champion Rita Jeptoo being the highest profile athlete to receive a two-year ban in January 2015 (Wachira, 2015). In 2011, Kenya lost a young and promising marathon Olympiad, Samuel Wanjiru under mysterious death (Odula, 2011). Wanjiru had been battling numerous personal relationships prior to his death. Availability of adequate counseling services could help alleviate the challenges by guiding athletes on choice of competitions for longevity, investment for retirement, doping, contracts, and personal relationships among others.

Based on the current study, the researcher concluded the following; first, the organizations mandated for management of athletics in Kenya cannot be independently credited for the success of Kenyan distance running. Second, the influence of foreign management has superior influence to the performance by Kenyan distance runners. It is recommended that the organizations such as AK, NOCK, KNSC, and the Department of Sports, Culture, and Arts must initiate or improve on athletic development programs, remuneration, anti-doping interventions, human resource capacity, facility and equipment development/upgrade, to claim the success of the Kenyan distance runners.

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