

STARTING LINES

African Athletes Get a Running Start

Check the results of any marathon in the United States and you're likely to find proof that East Africans are dominating the running world. With the average family salary in these countries hovering around \$3 a day, prize money from races, especially large marathons, is a small fortune for these talented athletes.

While not every great talent can become an elite racer, sports are often the best means to a better life for athletes, their families and their communities. Harnessing and supporting that talent is where groups like New York's A Running Start come in. Created by Canadian Karl Keirstead, who works as a research analyst on Wall Street, A Running Start began as a dream to help one or two kids get ahead with shoes, training and nutrition. After a monthlong visit to East Africa, Keirstead expanded the idea to include camps and scholarship programs across Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya. Just a year into the project, A Running Start is currently working on seven different projects across the four countries.

"I really believe in helping talented individ-

uals in impoverished countries," says Keirstead. "If I can help several dozen or hundred athletes harness their talents and succeed, then they in turn help the communities. There's leverage to helping talented individuals."

Keirstead points to one young athlete with a running scholarship at Fairleigh Dickinson in New Jersey, who works part-time at the local New Balance store. He sends that money home to Kenya and with a part-time salary he is able to support 25 family members. "That's the kind of leverage I'm looking for," says Keirstead, "empowering them to help themselves rather than just giving them money."

Among its projects are a youth club in Ethiopia that provides teens with running shoes, equipment and nutritional support; sponsorship of two running camps in Kenya as well as helping high school graduates to get full scholarships to American universities. "The only cost for ARS is the SAT," says Keirstead. "Each test is about \$75, which is a fortune to athletes and their families. But for a couple hundred dollars a teenager gets a five-year American education.



Karl Keirstead with young athletes and local children at A Running Start's training camp in Uganda.

It's the most incredible tool to help out East Africans—I would do it all day long."

In Tanzania ARS sponsors a girls-only training camp that houses and feeds 25 of the best teenage athletes as well as sponsoring races; and in Uganda, ARS built the first training camp to house and feed 20 athletes.

ARS's projects also work with other African charities including Toby Tanser's Shoe4Africa, which you can read more about on our website at www.metro-sportsny.com. For more information see www.arunningstart.org and www.shoe4africa.org.