



## **Exceptional New Talent Discovery at the Ile-Ife Heritage Marathon Maiden Edition By Dayo Oyebade Akinbode and Gary Reiman**

The icing on the cake for the organizers of the Ile-Ife Heritage Marathon (IHM) during the maiden edition was the emergence of Ile-Ife resident teenager, Peter “Pan” Olayinka, as the winner of the race.



The key core focus of IHM is to create a positive impression about the event. The event showcases the rich cultural heritage of Western Nigeria to foreign marathon runners and local runners. The IHM is designed to create a platform to support the local community with a lasting legacy.

Peter Olayinka’s emergence as the winner of the race with a time of 2hours 44minutes and 51 seconds has provided a rallying motivational message for the Ile-Ife Heritage Marathon (IHM). The message is that even a young struggling athlete can compete and become a role model for the Nigerian youth.

The story of Peter begins with several text messages I received stating Peter wanted to participate in the marathon because he is a good runner but did not have the NGN 16,500 registration fee. I repeatedly responded by saying the event was a paid event only and participants needed to register as is required worldwide. Then I was asked if Peter could just run alongside the other runners and I responded bluntly that whoever runs on the marathon course without a running bib would be taken off the course by security agents. He was very persistent and I received messages along this line almost every day. Then two days prior to race day I was



informed the registration fee had been raised, Peter was registered, and was going to run. I was too busy to pay any attention to that message or send him a reply. How could I have known that the last person to register would be the first person to cross the finish!

On the day prior to the race when runners came to pick up their event packets, a tall lanky man walked into the Pick Up Centre with someone who appeared to be a young boy. I heard him say to one of the volunteers at the registration desk, that he had come to pick a running bib. I couldn't help but intervene when the young boy stepped forward to identify himself as the registered runner before collecting the running bib.

“Are you Peter?” I asked

“Yes ma” he responded

“Did you register to run this marathon?” I further asked

“Yes ma” he responded again.

I have heard many people say they ran a 5km marathon or a 10km marathon or ask me how many kilometers I ran when I say I ran a marathon. I keep educating people that a marathon is a set distance of 42.195km so I assumed the young boy didn't know extent of the marathon distance. He assured me he was well aware of what a marathon distance was as I set out to educate him. He confidently said to me he was planning to run a 2hr 45min marathon. My eyes grew wide, as I took a closer look at him! I had to restrain myself from inappropriately laughing because he certainly didn't look like a runner. I wished him good luck and the lanky man with him confirmed Peter had been training for a 2:45 marathon. I failed to remember ‘Never judge a book by the cover!’

The Ile-Ife Heritage Marathon was a small playing field compared to many international marathons and apart from meeting the stringent international marathon guidelines and standards, the organizers intended to give the runners a memorable experience was a key core value. On race day, there were cyclists riding beside the runners on the lonely marathon route. Bimpe Temowo, the Captain of the Lagos Cycology Cycling Club, rode beside Peter from start to



finish. I remember sighting both Bimpe and Peter on one of the return legs when the runner I was cycling with was just on Km 4. In my mind, I thought they were fast and would soon burn out.



The race started smoothly at 6:15 am, and a call was put to me around 8:30 am to inform me the leading runner was heading towards the finish line at the Palace. “That cannot be possible” I said. “We are only about 2hrs 30 minutes into the race.” Well, you better start heading to the palace to receive him and hand him his medal I was told. My assigned runner and I were just at km 20 at this time and I had to quickly put my bicycle in one of the security vans patrolling the route and I headed to the palace.





Peter had crossed the finishing line before I got to the palace. The entire environment was agog with excitement. Nobody expected a time that close to the world record of 2hrs 2 seconds. A new star had just been born!



I rushed to the Medical tent where Peter laid nearly unconscious. To be candid I was afraid he had lost consciousness when I saw him flocked by so many medical personnel. We had the Red Cross team, medical doctors, nurses, and the lanky man. They were all huddled around Peter! They had yanked off his shoes and shirt, and they were all working to revive him. I got down on the floor and started talking to him as I dangled his medal in his face. I whispered his name and told him to open his eyes so he could see what he had earned. He started moving while opening his eyes, as he continued to





recover. I put his medal around his neck. The media began taking pictures with



Peter in the spotlight. I went to the Finish Line after I was certain he was OK to wait for the other runners to cross the Finish Line. Time seemed to stand still before the next runner crossed the finish line at 3:16:46!

Photo credits Bimpe Olufemi and Mide Omolaju