

The Kenyan Summer

<https://www.runnersworld.com/advanced/a20787412/the-kenyan-summer/>

How to show up for fall practice fitter and faster than ever.

School will be out soon, and your coach will give you instructions to put in summer miles before coming back for cross country. Come fall, what will you be able to say? Will it be like last year? "I played some video games, hung out at the lake, worked at the grocery store—and I got in a few runs when I could, but then it got hot, and I got more work hours, then my family went on vacation..." So you start where you did last fall: reasonably fit, but not really trained. And you may be a bit faster just because you're older and have been running another year—but you know you could do better.

What if this summer were different? What if you showed up in the fall fitter, stronger, faster than before, ready to jump up a level on the team? Make varsity or make it to state—maybe even place at state? What if you showed up at fall practice with no regrets?

We're not going to promise that one summer will change you from the back of the pack to state champion, but a solid base of training will raise you a level on the running pyramid and make times you thought out of reach accessible. And you have to start now—no matter how hard you work in the fall, your foundation will determine the heights to which you can build your season. This summer, don't just try to fit a few runs in now and then; don't just do the minimum necessary to make sure you're not embarrassed when practices start in the fall. Go all in: Make running who you are; make this summer The Kenyan Summer.

What makes a summer a Kenyan Summer?

RUN MORE Don't figure out how little you can run and stay fit—go for how much you can run and not overdo it. It's more than you think. Forget moderation! You're young and strong. Don't put limits on how far or how often you can run.

RUN EVERY DAY Make the question, "When can I run?" not "Will I run?" When that's normal, try running twice a day. Doubling is an easy way to get in more miles, and particularly effective in summer to avoid the heat of the day.

RUN WHEREVER YOU ARE Run when you go to camp. Run when you're on vacation. Run on the days you're staying in a cheap hotel at your little sister's swim championship. Don't let anything stop you from running.

RUN EVERYWHERE Kenyans use running or walking as transportation, adding thousands of miles to their legs that Americans usually don't get. Run (or walk) to the store, run to work, run to the pool, run to your girlfriend's or boyfriend's house. If your family is going to the lake for the weekend, throw a bag in the car, tell them you'll meet them there and make it a long run.

RUN LONG Once or twice a week, go long: 8, 10, 12 or more miles. Make it interesting; find new, creative routes. Run somewhere: around the lake, around the mountain, to the top of the mountain, to the next town. At least once in the summer, run somewhere far—far enough people have trouble believing you ran there.

RUN BAREFOOT DIAGONALS Diagonals consist of strides from one corner of the football or soccer field to the other, with a recovery jog along the end zone. Do four to start, twice a week. Work up to 10 minutes of diagonals every time. Yes, you have to get barefoot—it strengthens your feet and your stride, and it will make you feel Kenyan. A goal: Surprise the football coach by having an X worn across his field by the end of summer.

DO DRILLS Kenyans don't just run. They spend time every day doing drills and dynamic stretches. Do drills like lunges, high knees and skips before and after your runs. Practice balancing on one foot when you're at work. Do planks, donkey kicks and fire hydrants in the evening when you're watching TV (before you fall asleep). When you feel you're pushing the edge of what you can handle in mileage, but want to do more, add more strength exercises.

FIND A GROUP Kenyans rarely run alone. Friends help you be consistent, keep your pace honest, make it fun. Plus, come fall, you'll all be better, and cross country is a team sport. Establish a routine with your running buddies—meet every morning at a set time and place, or a couple of times per week: Tuesday for short hills, Saturday long run.

RUN FAST Most of your miles should be comfortable, conversational pace. A couple of times a week, however, you want to run faster. Do these two different kinds of fast running:

1 - "LATE-FOR-SCHOOL" RUNS Lornah Kiplagat said of her childhood runs that sometimes she had to focus, because she had to get back to school after lunch and was running late. After starting easy, do one run per week (30–45 minutes) at this pace. Think that you want to get there in time, but don't want to be exhausted, so you're running as fast as you can without straining. Run the last few minutes faster to make it before the bell. (Coaches would call these "tempo" runs or "progression" runs.)

2 - "LET IT WAIL" RUNS This is your chance to forget pacing, forget holding back and let everything out. Do eight–10 times up a short, steep hill (10–12 seconds). Sprint as hard and as explosively as you can—engage every fiber and nerve in your body—then take as much time coming down as you need to feel ready to do it again, just as fast and hard

EAT LIKE A KENYAN Find a staple dish that you eat every day to fill you up. Go all out and make ugali, or find an equivalent that's easy and convenient. Keep your diet simple and fresh—mostly stuff you know where it came from and what it looked like before it was processed. Stockpile fruit. Eat it instead of fatty snacks and instead of dessert. Decide you just won't eat chips or guzzle soft drinks this summer (soon you won't miss them). Learn to love water.

MAKE DO Not everything is going to be perfect. Life in Kenya is much less structured, less predictable and controllable than ours typically is. Kenyans deal with it and become better runners because of it. Some days work goes late and you can't run when you want to—run later. Sometimes you'll be in an unfamiliar place and you won't know how far you ran—put in the time and don't worry about it. Some days when it's time to run the weather will suck—relish in running in it anyway. Some days your shoes and clothes will still be wet from an earlier run in the rain or mud (common in Kenya)—make do, run in wet clothes. Make every obstacle an adventure. This mental flexibility will serve you well in races come fall.

WILL YOU GET HURT? Not if you run most of your miles easy, build gradually and listen to your body. Start with your max mileage week in track or cross country for a couple of weeks, then add about 10 percent each week. If something aches unusually and doesn't go away on the run, take it easier for a few days.

WILL YOU GET TIRED? Yes. But it's a good tired, an "I did something today" tired. And, the more consistent you are, the more you get used to the daily miles, the stronger you'll get. By summer's end, you'll attain what legendary coach Arthur Lydiard called a "tireless state."

BE THE KENYAN

BE the one your friends know to buy a bottle of water for rather than a soft drink when you stop at a convenience store.

BE thin enough that your mother worries about you, at least until she realizes that you're eating so much that every trip to the grocery store results in sticker shock.

BE the one people see running everywhere they look. Be the one they expect to see in running clothes at any time.

BE the one people expect to go home after the party (rather than go to the party after the party). Make them wish they were you, because you know who you are, and you don't need anyone or anything but your shoes and the road.

BE so hungry oatmeal tastes like ice cream and so thirsty water satisfies better than soda.

BE so tired you fall asleep whenever you sit down. Don't worry about missing this season of your favorite show, or losing track of the MLB standings. Be your own hero.

Have a Kenyan Summer

What makes a Kenyan Summer?

1. Run More:
2. Run Long
3. Do Drills:
4. Run with a Group (Your Team):
5. Run Fast:
6. Eat Like a Kenyan:
7. Run Barefoot Diagnosis:
8. Learn To Rest:
9. Make Do:
10. Be Fearless:

BE THE KENYAN

BE the one your friends know to buy a bottle of water for rather than a soft drink.

BE the one people see running everywhere.

BE the one they expect to see in running clothes at any time.

BE the one people expect to go home after the party (rather than go to the party after the party). Make them wish they were you, because you know who you are, and you don't need anyone or anything but your shoes and the road.

BE so hungry oatmeal tastes like ice cream and so thirsty water satisfies better than smoothie.

BE so tired you fall asleep whenever you sit down. Don't worry about TV/movies. Be your own hero.

BE thin enough that your mother worries about you, at least until she realizes that you're eating so much that every trip to the grocery store results in sticker shock.

BE fit enough that your "spare" time is devoted to abs, stabilizers, flexibility, and hydration.