



Running the Race in Kenya

Highlights of a Sports Medicine mission trip to Iten Kenya with Drs. Jeremy Henrichs, Chad Carlson, and Tracy Ray.

In January 2018 a group of sports medicine physicians travelled to Iten, Kenya for what I hope was the first of many sports medicine mission trips. Our mission was two-fold: 1) To transform hearts for Christ, and 2) Initiate the development of a sports medicine program for the disadvantaged athletes in Iten.

There are over 1000 elite and prospective runners in Iten during peak training seasons. Most are Kenyans looking for a way out of poverty, many also come from Europe, and a few from surrounding east-central African countries. The Kenyan national cycling team is also training near Iten. Even with all these athletes there are no sports medicine trained physicians, sports physical therapists or athletic trainers within a 3-4 hour drive. Basic sports medicine care is lacking. Often a simple hamstring or calf strain becomes chronic and may lead to a career threatening injury. There is great opportunity for sports medicine within this small community.

Planning for the trip began in late 2016 after a medical missions trip to Kenya with my family. During that trip I met Joseph Cheromei, a coach with many connections in the Kenyan running community. In the summer of 2017 I met Tarah Korir, an elite Canadian runner, during a meeting with coaches at Iten County Hospital. Cheromei and Tarah, were crucial connections to the

runners in Iten. During that trip I also conducted a handful of sports medicine clinics at the local hospital which were well received. It was clear that the next step was to bring a small group of sports medicine specialists in 2018.

The Starting Line.

From the very beginning in 2016 I began praying that God would bring a group of physicians and therapists together to make this trip. Dr. Chad Carlson and Dr. Tracy Ray were the first names that came to mind. Thankfully they shared my excitement for this opportunity. We were also able to add a sports physical therapist whose skills were essential to this endeavor. Our group included the three physicians, (Jeremy, Tracy, and Chad), a sports therapist, (T.J. Moore), a prospective medical student, (Tracy's son Daniel), and a farmer, (Shane).



Daniel, Tracy, Shane, TJ, Chad, and Jeremy with a view of the Kerio Valley near Iten.

This plan was to have daily clinic hours, conduct a sports medicine seminar for coaches and athletes and develop a vision for sports medicine ministry in Iten. We also hoped to establish new connections within the running community, find a clinician at the hospital to assist with future trips and telemedicine consults to maintain continuity between visits.

God was clearly at work on this trip from the very beginning. The very first day we were unexpectedly recognized by the Kenyan Minister of Health during a ceremony at Iten County Hospital. This led to a meeting later in the week with the county governor to discuss what resources would be needed to establish permanent sports medicine services in Iten.

Soon after we arrived we also met Tarah's husband, Wesley Korir, who was the 2016 Kenyan Olympic team captain. We had no idea who he was at the time. He invited us to visit a training session with his academy followed by breakfast at his home. Cheromei also had his athletes at the track that morning, including Mary Keitany, (the women's marathon world record holder).

We connected with a local pastor who has several runners in his congregation. He is excited to assist us with ministry opportunities on future trips. We also met an international agent, numerous coaches, and visited Cheromei's running camp. Our sports

medicine seminar was attended by 38 coaches and athletes. The sports medicine clinics were well attended and we established a connection with a medical officer, Caroline Yego, who will be able to help with future trips. Caroline will also assist us with telemedicine consultations which will provide some continuity of care in between visits.

The final day in Iten we were treated to a visit with Brother Colm from St. Patrick's school. He has trained numerous Olympic medalists at the school including David Rudisha, the 800 meter Olympic gold medalist/world record holder. Brother Colm has been in Iten for 40 years and gave us a brief history of running in Iten.

All the glory belongs to God for these connections and opportunities. I had planned for the clinic and seminar but left the rest up to God. I was apprehensive at the start of the trip. Would we have patients in the clinic or would anyone attend the seminar? How would the group function together as a team? Would we be able to connect with other coaches and athletes? God provided abundantly in all these areas. Chad said it best...it truly was a "God-ordained" trip.

The Next Step...

Short term goals include recruiting more sports medicine physicians, physical therapists, and athletic trainers for future trips. The plan is to have a team of physicians, physical therapists and ATC's in Iten for 1-2 weeks each month.

The broader vision includes partnering with Dr. Jeff Mailu, a Kenyan sports orthopedic surgeon, in developing sports medicine in all of Kenya. Part of this vision may involve incorporating sports medicine training into the curriculum for family medicine residents at Iten County Hospital.

I hope to organize another trip in late January 2019. There are many more details to share but not enough space here. More information will be presented at the 2018 AMSSM Annual Meeting chapel on April 29 at 7:00 a.m. If you are interested in joining the conversation please email your contact information and inquiries to itensportsmed@gmail.com.