



# GOING GLOBAL

APRIL'S ITU WORLD SERIES VISIT TO CAPE TOWN WAS A LANDMARK FOR TRI IN AFRICA. HERE 220 EXAMINES THE CHANGING PICTURE FOR MULTISPORT IN BOTH AFRICA AND INDIA, AND MEETS THE TRAILBLAZERS WITH A VISION TO TAKE TRI GLOBAL

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→ Local children show support at the Slanghoek Triathlon, 200km outside of Cape Town



→ Star of the future? Intrigue factor is high in the Ghanaian town of Dodowa

**S**aturday 26 April 2014. As impressive as Jodie Stimpson's winning performance in Cape Town was, the date will go down as a landmark in triathlon history as the day that the ITU World Triathlon Series first visited the continent of Africa. International coverage and a field containing 2,000 age-group athletes would ensure the race was a success, with the ITU strongly hinting that the event would be there to stay for the foreseeable future.

"Coverage of the event was fantastic on both a local and international level, and feedback from competitors has been widely positive," says the ITU President Marisol Casado to 220. "There were of course kinks to work out as the inaugural race, but I have no doubt any hiccups we had in logistics for the first year will be solved for the second."

**SOUTHERN HERITAGE**

While the ITU should certainly be applauded for launching its premier series into Africa (Continental Championships and Cups have long been held at destinations like Mauritius, Morocco and Mozambique), there's no escaping the fact that Cape Town, South Africa, was a fairly predictable choice for WTS's maiden African destination.

"Cape Town has a vibrant athletic and lifestyle sports community and is a major media market, which is ideal for WTS events," adds Casado. The city hosted six FIFA World Cup matches four years previous and was

recently named as the 'best place in the world to visit' by the New York Times.

South Africa's triathlon heritage is also indisputable, from nurturing the formative years of Britain's five-time ITU World Champion Simon Lessing and the eight-time Ironman World Champion, Zimbabwe's Paula Newby-Fraser, to being the home of multiple Ironman winner Raynard Tissink.

The Rainbow Nation's current crop of athletes includes four-time Xterra World Champ Conrad Stoltz, rising Ironman star Kyle Buckingham and top ITU athlete Richard Murray, who was fifth on that historic weekend in Cape Town. Fifty kilometres east of Cape Town, Stellenbosch is the current go-to winter destination for many a pro athlete, with Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape hosting one of the world's greatest long-distance events, Ironman South Africa, scene of Chrissie Wellington's 2011 Ironman world record.

Of Cape Town's 2,000 age-group athletes, the vast majority were from South Africa, with six from Zimbabwe, five from Namibia, and Kenya, Libya, Angola, Mauritius and Ghana all represented by a sole athlete. So what is the state of triathlon in these less-storied tri nations? Can we expect a Team Rwanda MK2 in triathlon? Will Egypt establish tri against the backdrop of political unrest? And, looking further afield to Oman in the UAE and India (population 1.2 billion), can it establish roots in the face of religious practices and a lack of multisport tradition? Our investigation starts in, er, the leafy London suburb of Richmond upon Thames... ↩

## FEATURE

Devouring a roasted pepper tartlet in a swish west London deli may not conjure up visions of running on dusty west African trails, but sat before us is Tarek Mouganie, the shining light of Ghanaian triathlon. Following Chris Symonds' outing for Ghana at the 2006 Commonwealth Games, Mouganie is the second athlete to represent the west African nation in triathlon, finishing fourth in the 30-34 age-group category in Cape Town, before racing again at Hyde Park in May.

A second generation Ghanaian (Tarek's grandparents hail from Lebanon), Mouganie is a man well-travelled, earning a PhD in something called Applied Superconductivity at Cambridge before working in high-powered positions in the City. Mouganie came to tri in 2009 and, despite having never swam or cycled in his life, completed his first tri that summer under the watch of coach Fiona Ford. An Ironman followed in 2010 before Tarek moved back to Ghana in 2012 to start a company that invests in small businesses.

It was here that he met Bawah Fuseini, the then secretary of the Ghana Athletics Association. Together, under the umbrella of the Ghana Athletics Association, the duo formed the Ghana Triathlon Federation in the capital Accra. "The results won't be overnight, but I truly believe it can be done," enthuses Mouganie. "It's a blessing that we're not inheriting something with issues, but rather starting it from scratch."

The Ghanaian football team, plenty of whom are millionaires, recently made headlines for demanding \$3m in cash from the government for appearance fees at the World Cup, with one player seen kissing his \$100,000 wad of cash. Already unsavoury, the story also highlights the skewed priorities of state funding in Ghana. "It's very hard to get money off the government as they've cut all funding for sport apart from football, and our annual budget for this year is \$5,000.

"We could buy equipment but who do we give the bikes to? We have no idea who the athletes are! So we're going to target everyone who has a bike, an ability to swim and see what happens," continues Tarek. "Some of the athletes will be great, some just curious, and that'll help us figure out what the talent is out there. And then we'll see how we can replicate that across other cities in Ghana and incubate talent that way. It could be *Cool Runnings* or Eric the Eel!"

### GENETIC DEBATE

Unlike the East African Olympic giants of Kenya and Ethiopia, Ghana's Olympic record is negligible, winning four medals in its history and none of those on the track. So what hope does Tarek have when there isn't a strong swim, bike or running heritage in Ghana?

"There's very little endurance sport in Ghana, but cycling is improving in popularity and there's now a Tour of Ghana. The talent is there though. I was doing a 10km run on the track and a 16-year-old boy started running by my side. I did it in 34mins and he was with me



→ Tarek Mouganie in Cape Town becoming the second triathlete to represent Ghana in history



→ One of Ghana's paved roads, but the facilities in the country generally aren't suitable for tri

every step of the way. After the race he was smiling and wasn't out of breath. So I asked him, 'What's the longest you've ever run?' He said, 'That was!' We just need to galvanise these athletes."

Research by David Epstein in *The Sports Gene* and by the University of the Copenhagen suggests Kenyan runners (namely the Kalenjin tribe) are genetically suited to endurance running. Additionally, the Jamaican medical researcher, Errol Morrison, has a hypothesis that believes "malaria in Western Africa forced the proliferation of genes that protect against it and that those genes, which reduce an individual's ability to make energy aerobically, have led to a shift in more fast-twitch muscle fibres", which isn't conducive to the largely slow-twitch endurance sport of triathlon. So are genetics against the Ghanaian would-be triathletes before they've even begun?

"I think climatically and culturally there are issues in West Africa. First of all, the

climate in Ethiopia is easier as parts of it are at 2,000m, which is cooler, and then you have the performance benefits of training at altitude. So when you come down again you feel like a rock star. It's just too hot and humid to run in Ghana for three hours. We have a marathon here, but it starts about 4am and the coolest it'll ever be is 28°C. I think it's the lack of facilities that are holding people back."

### IF YOU BUILD IT...

Ghana boasts the second largest economy in Western Africa (if you ate a Cadbury chocolate bar today, there's a high chance it came from Ghana), but how does it compare with South Africa in structure? "South Africa is a developed country with paved roads, so it's hard to follow their model. The infrastructure in Ghana is so poor and it's very hard to set up a sport like javelin or long jump let alone an expensive sport like triathlon, because it involves equipment," adds Tarek.



Team Rwanda Cycling have become a major source of pride in post-genocide Rwanda

“The facilities aren’t there for mass-participation swimming either but, where there are pools in Ghana, they’re used. There’s a village called Keta with an estuary going into the ocean. There are great swimmers from there who are famous around Ghana for swimming. So, to paraphrase *Field of Dreams*, if you build it, they will come.”

And what does the future hold for Tarek in the Ghanaian tri-suit? “I’m 32, so I doubt I’ll have any elite dreams, but I have the hunger to progress. I have goals and my new coach [British racing great] Spencer Smith has goals for me. It’d be great to have him come to Ghana to lead some coaching sessions.” And with that tantalising image, Tarek is off, an infectious whirlwind seemingly buoyed by the vast challenges that lay ahead.

**SPORT’S POWER TO HEAL**

Twenty years on from the Rwandan genocide and the statistics still have the ability to shock,

distress and anger. From April to July 1994, the Hutu majority orchestrated a mass slaughter of Tutsis and moderate Hutus, killing (mostly by machete) seven people per minute for 100 days to leave around one million dead in the Central African country.

Since being declared a failed state in 1994, the Tutsi-led country has made some positive strides in tackling poverty, and building education and the economy. The renaissance of Rwandan cycling has also captured the imagination and acts as evidence of sport’s ability to empower, with the exploits of Team Rwanda Cycling outfit celebrated by Tim Adams’s brilliant book, *Land of Second Chances*, and the documentary *Rising From Ashes*, the launch of which was backed by one Chrissie Wellington.

In both media, the story of how cycling has become a source of pride of Rwandan sport is vividly told, with Rwandan athlete Adrien Niyonshuti (who lost 60 of his family in the



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# INDIAN ANALYSIS

Race organiser Kimberly Shah gives her account of hosting India's largest-ever tri

The Indian tri population is incredibly small. The largest race in the country previously had 85 participants. At our Ahmedabad Super Sprint Tri in April we had 311. The biggest challenge was not executing the race as a director, it was educating the athletes on what triathlon was, the rules, getting them geared up, teaching them about transition. We couldn't introduce a new sport to a society and then not offer support. So we held group sessions for 60 people to teach them everything from transitions to gear, running efficiency and brick workouts.

In terms of getting participants to sign up, the *Times of India* promoted the race. And then we did what anyone would who wants to put on a successful event... we hustled. We went to fitness clubs and introduced ourselves to everyone. We talked to trainers and swim coaches, and appeared on radio, newspaper, social media and used word of mouth. You name it, we pushed it.

Many religions - Sikh, Jain, Hindu, Christian and Muslim - took part. We wanted to be sensitive to women and cultural differences like wearing bathing suits around men, so we offered them the final wave. What shocked me was the participants over 70 (Premshankar Pandya, 77, is pictured). Obviously there were more affluent people racing, but we tried to keep entry cheap and had people from all working classes racing together.

The Indian Tri Federation barely exists. Their website hasn't been updated for years and the national coach lives in Australia. It's sad that the athletes don't have access to the support that other countries do; it's going to take a lot of outside support to build the sport in India.



► Premshankar Pandya, 70, at the Ahmedabad Tri in April



► Half of Rwanda's five million population are said to follow the annual Tour of Rwanda



► Could Rwanda's 'land of a thousand hills' become a future host of ITU triathlon?

genocide) representing the country in a mountain bike event at the 2012 Olympics and the Tour of Rwanda being followed by half of the country's 10-million strong population. But, in a landlocked country lacking in swimming opportunities, what hope is there for triathlon to join this remarkable tale?

"While Rwanda doesn't yet have a strong pipeline of athletes," says Marisol Casado, "they have a strong federation that's committed to developing the sport by training coaches and officials in hopes of creating triathlon clubs." The part-time volunteer leading that federation is Heineken employee Alexis Mbaraga who, with his team of four, hosted their second round of technical and community coaching courses in June.

"Two years ago no one knew about triathlon, but now we have lots of people very interested in it," says Mbaraga from the capital Kigali. "We've hosted two or three local races at swimming pools in Kigali and there's Lake Kivu on the border. Cycling is popular because

we now have Team Rwanda, but combining sports is also gaining some popularity."

With swimming in Kigali restricted to hotel pools and entry costing around £2.50 per session (the average hourly wage is 40p), the first discipline of tri is out of bounds for the majority of the capital's population. And, despite Team Rwanda's donation of 100 bikes to school children in the eastern city of Rwamagana, it's reported that only one adult in 40 can afford a bike in Rwanda. Mbaraga is undeterred, however, stressing that multisport has an advantage because it doesn't require sophisticated infrastructure, with athletes showing potential for the run/bike/run format of duathlon.

"We've had some funding from the ITU and Team Rwanda have been in touch," adds Mbaraga. "And we've just had two athletes represent Rwanda internationally at March's African Cup race in Sharm El Sheikh."

Tucked away in the junior results from Egypt, Irankvnoa Isiaka placing fifth and

Uwineza Hamani third out of three may not suggest world-beating talent but, in time, their feats may be hugely significant in the formative years of triathlon in Rwanda. If any country knows about overcoming adversity, it's Rwanda.

## EGYPTIAN PROMISE

Chat show host, owner of a major Egyptian media production company and now the volunteer tasked with overseeing the development of tri in Egypt and Africa: General Ahmed Nasser is a man with his fingers in many pies. A former world-class athlete in modern pentathlon, Nasser is the first Arab to hold a position on the ITU Executive Board and is now president of the African Triathlon Union.

Under Nasser's watch, a vast triathlon training centre with offices and lecture space has been established in Cairo, and all of this despite the backdrop of political unrest following the Arab Spring. "We've had



→ Egypt's most prominent athlete Omar Nour in action at the 2012 African Champs



→ Ahmed Nasser, left, and the ITU President Marisol Casado at the opening of Cairo's tri centre



→ May 2014 witnessed tri's first appearance at the African Youth Games in Botswana

## A VISION FOR OMAN

British ex-pat Geoff Wilson details the embryonic state of racing in Oman

**T**ogether with a handful of Omani locals in 2013, I helped create Muscat Triathlon Club here in the Sultanate of Oman in the UAE, with the aim of forging a path to put triathlon on the map in one of the hottest (currently it's 44°C and rising) countries in the world. We've got a coastline of 1,600km and facilities like outdoor pools, so we've thrown a lot of effort into tri here. But everything is underlined with 'In sha'Allah' (god willing), and the Ministry of Sport isn't particularly interested. They favour camel racing over football and see tri as an expensive pastime with little reward.

Although a rich country due to its oil reserves, getting sponsorship is a hard exercise – and certainly tri, to the greater population of only four million, is still a strange concept. Getting female Omanis to participate is tough as they have the full regalia on and I've never come across a native female triathlete here in Oman. We're also in Ramadan so our (foreign) female members have to be clothed to the knee and you can't be seen drinking during the day. Yet we've been running ad-hoc events for 18 months now and, following increased demand, have started a race series across the Sultanate, with seasoned triathletes as well as novice and children's races.

Already we're a far cry from our initial events that had public car parks as transition areas, where fold-up chairs were bike racks, and stopwatches and honesty were the best timing mechanism. When you compare that against our UAE neighbours, who host races like the Abu Dhabi Tri, we seem a world away, not 400km down the road. In spite of this, we persevere and we're in negotiations with a major race organiser about hosting an event in 2015.



a rough three years, but we now finally have an elected president," says Nasser. "Despite all the circumstances it's going through, the Egyptian government has helped throughout with funding and gave us an area inside the Cairo International Stadium to work with, including the use of swimming pools, hotels and areas for technical biking."

Like Brad Beven and Greg Welch in Australia circa 1990 and the Brownlees around the 2012 Olympics, there's a sense that central or northern Africa needs superstar athletes to heighten the appeal of the sport. 220's knowledge of Egyptian triathletes has previously been limited to Omar Nour, the triathlete who verbally sparred with Ali Brownlee ahead of the Abu Dhabi Tri in 2013 ("This is not Yorkshire heat, this is desert heat!"), before finishing a respectable eighth. So can we expect to see an Egyptian star on the worldwide circuit soon? "It doesn't take a blinking eye to make a professional athlete and people have largely been consumed with

the political situation recently. But our ambitious plan for the future, which I'm promoting around Africa, is to target schools and grassroots triathlon. We now have 15 clubs that we're linking with," continues Nasser, "and a National Champs for youth, juniors and elites and age-groupers."

This targeting of youth has seen tri included in the African Youth Games schedule for the first time in its history, hosting eight races in Gaborone, Botswana, in May. "I was taken with what was achieved in Botswana. We're now educating people and hosting technical camps for youth athletes of each gender, with coaches nominated from each country."

### FUTURE FOCUS

The development of triathlon in Africa has witnessed a steady growth of African countries becoming members of the ITU, with the number now sitting at 32. "I'm amazed at what the countries are doing," Nasser adds, "with Senegal and Ivory Coast forming government

bodies and Cameroon participating in competitions. Libya is doing well despite all they're facing, and Morocco and Tunisia now have good athletes. But you can't just add further countries to the list. You need these countries to be able to manage the sport and have interested participants. But a key part of our long-term vision is to see athletes achieving Olympic qualification and for central or northern Africa to host a World Triathlon Series race."

Chicago, Madrid, London, Hamburg, Accra... the name may jar somewhat alongside the established cities on the ITU World Series, but imagine the Brownlees, Gomez and the rising stars of African tri duking it out on the streets of Ghana in the not-too-distant future? With the efforts of the ITU and the energy displayed by the Nassers, Mbarage and Mougany on the continent, maybe the idea isn't too far-fetched after all. Triathlon's journey to becoming a truly global sport is shortening by the day. ■ 220