



CHICAGO MARATHON

FAITH, CHARITY DRIVE KORIR

Kenyan runner uses own money to aid poor

BY DALE BOWMAN
For Sun-Times Media

It is more than charitable to say Wesley Korir of Kenya is the favorite son of the Bank of America Chicago Marathon, which will take place Sunday.

The story of Korir's connection to the Chicago Marathon is almost mythical. In 2008, he wasn't allowed to run with the elite field because he hadn't posted fast enough times before. All he did was run the fourth-fastest time. And executive race director Carey Pinkowski paid him fourth-place money.

Korir's racing career was under way, his plans to go into premed were put on hold and the rest is history.

Korir has run in every Chicago Marathon since. Last year, he finished second — in a personal-best 2 hours, 6 minutes, 15 seconds — to countryman Moses Mosop, who set a course record. Then Korir won the Boston Marathon in a tactical race this year.

On Sunday, Korir will be among the favorites for the men. But his connection to the Chicago Marathon goes beyond his skills as an elite runner. He might be the greatest symbol of running for charity.

Korir is unabashed about sharing his faith and his charity.

"I am motivated but will also try to run my race and

THE FACTS

What: The 35th annual Chicago Marathon through the city's neighborhoods.

When: Sunday. Wheelchair start, 7:20 a.m. Start of runners, 7:30-8 a.m.; Wave 1 starts at 7:30; Wave 2 starts at 8.

Where: Begins and ends on Columbus in Grant Park, as far north as Addison, as far west as Damen, as far south as 35th.

Who: 45,000 marathoners.

Info: chicagomarathon.com.

Radio/TV: 670-AM, Ch. 5

Men's best (Chicago): 2:05:37, Moses Mosop, Kenya, Oct. 9, 2011.

Men's world record: 2:03:38, Patrick Makau, Kenya, Sept. 25, 2011, Berlin Marathon.

Women's best (Chicago): 2:17:18, Paula Radcliffe, Great Britain, Oct. 13, 2002.

Women's world record: 2:15:25, Radcliffe, April 13, 2003, London Marathon.

do the will of God," Korir said before he spoke to a DePaul class last month.

It was no coincidence that Korir — who lives in Louisville, Ky., where he went to school — spoke to and ran

with Team World Vision the next day. With some 1,700 runners expected to line up Sunday, TWV is the top charity group participating in the marathon.

"I get myself to the start line healthy and safe, and God will get me to the finish," said Korir, who was born Catholic but now attends Southeast Christian Church in Louisville.

TWV focuses on providing clean-water projects in Africa. That kind of thing matches up with Korir's ideals. A medical clinic/hospital he built in Kenya with his prize money was completed this year. The first medical team from Louisville treated 3,500 patients in 2½ weeks.

"They did six life-saving surgeries," Korir said. "Those kids were going to die. That was really fun [saving them]."

Now he is working on filling a 40-foot container with medical supplies to ship to the clinic.

Korir, who was able to pursue formal schooling because of the generosity of a priest, has provided scholarships for 40 kids through his Kenyan Kids Foundation. Understanding Korir means understanding the past and present of his life and how he perceives both.

"My life has come to be where I am because of God," he said.

"I believe God has a plan for everything and a master plan for me."



Wesley Korir of Kenya will be among the men's favorites Sunday in the Chicago Marathon. | SUN-TIMES