
Running for My Life: More Than Just a Sport

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Abstract:

Running for My Life is not just another story about athletics—it goes beyond sport. As Maya Angelou said, "You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them." Lopez Lomong personifies this by taking his fate into his own hands, hoping beyond hope, and persevering through hardships to get where he is today. His memoir is a powerful testament to resilience, courage, and the ability of sports to transform lives. From escaping a child soldier camp in South Sudan to competing in the Olympics, Lomong's story is one of unbreakable determination and faith. His journey is not just about running—it is about survival, identity, and using one's platform to uplift others.

Keywords: Resilience, courage, Olympics, refugee story, faith

Introduction

Sports are often seen as pursuing medals, records, and personal achievement. However, for Lopez Lomong, running was never just about competition—it was about survival, identity, and hope. In his memoir *Running for My Life*, Lomong recounts his harrowing escape from a child soldier camp in South Sudan, his years in a refugee camp, and his eventual rise to becoming an Olympic athlete. His story is a powerful testament to the idea that sports can be more than a game; they can be a path to freedom and transformation. Through his journey, Lomong proves that running is not just a sport but a symbol of resilience and the power of the human spirit.

A Childhood Defined by Survival

It takes courage to grow up and become who you are, but for some, being courageous is the only option when they do not experience a childhood. Lopez Lomong was only six years old when his life changed forever. He was kidnapped by rebel soldiers while attending church during the Second Sudanese Civil War. The other children in custody informed him that they had been forcibly recruited to become soldiers. There were only two foreseeable futures: kill or be killed. However, he escaped through a hole in the fence and began running for his life. Covering 70 kilometers in three days, he ended up in a Kenyan refugee camp

(Kakuma), where he lived for 10 years.

Running as a Symbol of Freedom

While in the refugee camp, the children played football, or soccer, as Lomong liked to call it. He loved to score goals, and nobody could match his speed, but he never really passed the ball. So, they made him a goalkeeper. He did not argue; instead, he tried to be the best goalkeeper in Kakuma. As more children arrived at the camp, the football field became crowded. The older boys devised a plan: they had to run around the camp before anyone could step onto the football field. The sooner they finished, the sooner they got to play. Running 18 miles in the hot Kenyan desert sounds like a nightmare, but Lomong loved it. Running allowed him to escape the realities of life in the camp. When he ran, he did not think about his empty stomach or how he had ended up in that place. Running became his therapy.

From Refugee to Olympian

In 2001, Lomong's remarkable life journey took another turn. At age 16, he was among the nearly 4,000 "Lost Boys" who were resettled in various cities across the United States as part of a U.N. and U.S. government program. A family adopted him in Tully, a small town in upstate New York, where he went to high school and started thinking of running as a career. He became a U.S. citizen in July 2007, and one year later, he made the national Olympic team, taking part in the 1,500-meter race in Beijing. Though Lomong did not make it to the finals, he was honored by his fellow athletes, who selected him as the flag bearer for Team USA.

"That is the most incredible thing I take away from the Olympics," he said. "It is not only track and field. There are swimmers, everybody is, wrestlers, everybody is united, and we are all walking together to bring as many medals to our country as possible. Those are the things that I will never forget—I was very excited to be part of that and carry America's flag into the opening ceremony." (Lomong and Tabb 178)

A Mission to Give Back

Lomong has partnered with World Vision to improve the lives of innocent casualties of the Sudanese Civil War. Through his foundation, 4 South Sudan, he offers a better future to families in South Sudan in the areas of clean water, education, health care, and nutrition. In 2012, Visa named him Humanitarian of the Year. His story is a testament to the idea that sports can drive social change, transcending medals and records.

Conclusion

Lopez Lomong's story reminds us that sports are more than just physical contests—they are opportunities for transformation. Whether as a means of escape, a tool for self-discovery, or a way to uplift others, sports can change lives. *Running for My Life* is not just a sports memoir; it is a call to recognize the deeper impact athletics can have on individuals and societies.

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