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Defending champion Korir looking to repeat in 2010 Honda LA Marathon
Race record holder thinks the new Stadium to the Sea could be the fastest ever

LOS ANGELES – February 24, 2010 – Almost no one expected Wesley Korir, a Kenyan who graduated from the University of Louisville in 2008, to win the 2009 Los Angeles Marathon. Not even Korir.

“In my mind, the possibilities of me winning weren’t there at all,” he said during a West Coast training swing last week. “But I was prepared to give them a run for their money. I wasn’t just going to let them win easily, but I knew there were really good people. I had done my training and I felt I was in really good shape. But I was definitely not thinking about winning.”

But when he was running stride for stride with pre-race favorite Tariku Jufar of Ethiopia at the 23-mile mark, “I looked at him, he looked at me with his eyes that ‘I can’t believe you’re still here.’ And I knew that he was scared and he was hurting, so I just took off.”

Korir won the race, the men vs. women Los Angeles Marathon Challenge and time bonuses with a new race record of 2:08:24 for a total of \$188,705, including a new Honda Accord EX-L. And he’s looking forward to being one of the favorites for the 2010 Honda LA Marathon presented by K-Swiss, to be held on the new Stadium to the Sea course on Sunday, March 21.

“I think this race this year will be complicated. Mostly, the racing [in marathons] normally starts at the half-marathon [mark], 20 miles in, 21, 22, 23, that’s where the race starts. But when you look at this course, from the half-marathon, 20 miles in, 23 miles in, it’s downhill. Everybody can push themselves downhill. So this race will be won in the first 10k, or in the first 10 miles.”

The new course starts at Dodger Stadium and then runs downhill into downtown Los Angeles during the first five kilometers, but then includes an arduous climb up 1st Street, Grand Avenue and Temple Street out of downtown and into Echo Park in the second five kilometers. From that point, a little more than six miles in, the course is fairly flat through the halfway mark (13.1 miles/21.1 km) before a long descent to the finish on Ocean Avenue in Santa Monica, with only one small hill in the 21st mile.

“If somebody breaks away eight miles in or 10 miles in, by the half-marathon, definitely you will know the winner. It will be over. This is going to be a very fast course. 2:07, or 2:06, I won’t be surprised,” he said. “The thing about it, if you can overcome these 3-4 miles in the beginning and if you can get yourself [to the 8-mile mark] strong, all of this is a piece of cake. People are going to be rolling.”

Korir said his life did change a bit after his big win in last year’s race. “When I get in a race now, people say ‘That’s Wesley, he won in L.A. last year.’ That is definitely my identity now: the L.A. man. And I love L.A., I love this city. I love what it has meant to me. I love to be associated with L.A. I love that identity, to be known as the ‘L.A. man.’”

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Wesley Korir looking forward to 2010 Honda LA Marathon
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Korir maintains a busy schedule at home in Louisville. "I work for the university as a maintenance guy. I fix stuff. I fix everything. I can fix electric wiring; right now, we are changing the light fixtures, we are installing new fans, so that's what I do.

"I work full-time and I train full-time. It's a marathon by itself, but it makes me become a strong person. I want to prove to myself that I can do it. After I come back from work, I know I've done 40 hours, eight hours a day and then I go out and run. It's good because my boss is really flexible with me; he lets me work on the weekends, and work until 3 o'clock, and at 3 I go running. So I still have time to run and I still have time to work.

"People think that I don't have time off, but I do. I plan my time very well. I wake up at 6 o'clock in the morning, go out for a run, come back, go to work; from work, come back, go running and then I have the rest of the night to enjoy. That's how my life is."

He said that he and his fiancé go to the movies, but are also involved with charitable work. "I work with my church down there, with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, so I travel a lot to different schools, talk to kids and have fun with the kids. I work with a homeless shelter in Louisville, so I go visit the homeless. I like doing stuff like that, I don't like being idle; you never find me playing video games or watching TV. But I like being active, because it keeps me going."

Korir will be going for two wins in a row in his favorite race, the Honda LA Marathon, on March 21. But unlike last year, he'll be wearing the bib no. 1 as the defending champion.

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