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Sharon Lokedi: For me to get here, it wasn't easy. And for her to be able to be comfortable and enjoy life, just do her own things, the things that we never ever imagined that we could be able to, just to see that you can do that through just running and believing in yourself.

00:00:21

Speaker 2: Well, what a treat this is. We are here in Kenya at the home of Sharon Lokedi and her mother, Rose. And Sharon, we've had you in New York so many times on our podcast. Obviously you're a former champion of the TCS New York City Marathon. We figured it was about time that we came to you. You come to us all the time, but this time we're coming to you and it's such a treat for us to be here in your home, in your mother's home. You've given us an incredibly warm welcome here and it is just incredible to be with you here in Kenya.

00:00:56

Sharon Lokedi: Thank you. I'm really grateful that you guys are here. I honestly cannot believe we're doing this here.

00:01:01

Speaker 2: Neither can I.

00:01:03

Sharon Lokedi: I remember this just being like we were just talking about this and now it's finally happened and it just shows anything is possible.

00:01:12

Speaker 2: Yeah.

00:01:12

Sharon Lokedi: So yeah.

00:01:14

Speaker 2: This is the first official visit of New York Road Runners ever to Kenya, which is remarkable when you think about it. First decades and decades we've had Kenyan athletes coming to New York, many of them like you, winning the marathon, winning other events. What does it mean for you, for others? We're going to have a number of Kenyan athletes that we're going to visit while we're here. What does it mean for all of you to have the people who run one of the major marathons in the world come here to Eldoret, to the cradle of so many marathon champions?

00:01:50

Sharon Lokedi: It's definitely the biggest pleasure just to have you guys come here, visit, see the things, see where we run, the things that go into running, our families and how we just live life on this other side of the world. And I think usually when we're there, it's like race, you're focused, all this, but here you get to see a different side of us, which is when we're more relaxed, more in training. Which is, I mean for me specifically, I think it's very special. It's one of those things that you just imagine things but you never really believe they would happen. And then now that you're here sitting right here, it's great. Yeah.

00:02:34

Speaker 2: Yeah, if you think it's great, it's even better for me, for our team that's here. We see all of you. We know what you all go through to train and to get to the stages like the New York Marathon or the Boston Marathon. But it's one thing to kind of understand it intellectually, what it's like for you where you come from, but then to come see it is something else. And we've seen it the last few days. We've been in Eldoret. We've been in Iten.

We saw the road in Iten where the runners, they're just going this long kind of red clay road where you stop by the side of the road and you'll see 10, 12 runners go by and you may not even know who they are, but chances are, you can tell they're good. You can tell they're a very serious runner. What is this running community like here when you come back? Because we know you spend about half your time, maybe more in the United States, you're in Flagstaff, Arizona, but when you come back here to rejoin the running community here in Kenya, what is that like for you?

00:03:41

Sharon Lokedi: It's very beautiful. It's very humbling. As you can see, when you're out there running, you always see someone running. You always see someone just working so hard, just even no matter what time of the day, everyone is just trying to get the best of what they could with running and all that. And I feel like every time I come here, it just reminds me of where I came from, where my running started. And it just brings you back and you just get to appreciate so many things that this running has given you. It's made me go to places like run races that I never imagined. And when you're here and you're seeing people working hard and you can only wish for them to get to experience this and be out there and get to celebrate and just win races, which is something that I wish everyone could feel how it feels and experience that. Yeah.

00:04:39

Speaker 2: Yeah. And I've gotten to see a bit on this visit just today really how people react to you here now and they know you, they know Sharon because you're local, you're one of them. But now you're not just Sharon, you're New York City Marathon champion, you're a Boston Marathon champion. And how different is it for you now when you come back with that success?

00:05:05

Sharon Lokedi: It's a bit different, but it's also motivating in a way because now every time I see someone and I can just see the joy in their faces, I can see the smile that they're so excited to meet me and I'm like in a way I have maybe inspired them or I've given them hope that they can be able to get there and get to the point that we are just through running, through just believing in themselves. And so it gives me so much joy that I get to share and encourage each person and just be like, "This is possible. You can do it." And just if someone, I feel like when I was young, every time I met someone that had run or done something, I used to be so happy and I'm like, "I've met this person." And I'm sure for them when they get back they're like, "oh, I met Sharon and she did and this." And I think it motivated me and I hope it does the same for them too.

00:06:01

Speaker 2: Yeah, I think it does. I can tell.

00:06:02

Sharon Lokedi: Yeah, yeah.

00:06:02

Speaker 2: And then for your mother here, who's in this beautiful home, we know this is the home that she was in watching on a cellphone when you won the 2022 TCS New York City Marathon, changed your life, I'm sure changed hers.

00:06:17

Sharon Lokedi: Yes, yes.

00:06:17

Speaker 2: How has your success in the sport allowed you to help change her life? We've met your siblings in there, you've got brothers and sisters here as well. How have you been able to change the lives of others as well with what you've been able to accomplish?

00:06:31

Sharon Lokedi: I feel like even just for my mom, every time she's going somewhere, they're like, "Oh, that's a mother of the champion." Every time she's like, "People just recognize me through you and all this." And she's like, every time she's like, "I just want you to keep working hard." Because for me to get here, it wasn't easy. And for her to be able to be comfortable and enjoy life and just do her own things, the things that we never ever imagined that could we be able to. And just to see that you can do that through just running and believing in yourself and just getting opportunities like you guys believed in me and gave me that opportunity. And I'm here now because of that chance that I got. And every time I go, I pray for someone to just get that chance because you never know, it might change their life. It did change mine. So I hope people can see that and relate through that, so.

00:07:29

Speaker 2: We spent some time today, Sharon, together as the Roadrunners team visited an amazing organization, Tirop's Angels, an organization that's named after Agnes Tirop, a talented female Kenyan runner who tragically was murdered, a victim of domestic violence here in Kenya. And there have been many examples of women in Kenya, including professional runners who have had this problem, who have fallen into relationships that were abusive gender-based violence as a real problem in Kenya. And that's what Tirop's Angels and our friend Viola Cheptoo and your friend is working on doing something about. Can you talk about that organization, Tirop's Angels, what they're trying to do, what Viola is trying to do? And I know you've been a big supporter of it as well.

00:08:25

Sharon Lokedi: Yeah, I think it's very impactful because I feel like for a long time I used to see it from a distance and I'm like, "Oh, this is such an organization that, such a good platform that supports people and people can go and get help and just feel like they're heard, their voices are heard." And then just to have Viola as my friend and to see her working day in, day out, just trying to change one life at a time, just to try to change either it's like a kid or just someone that needs support and all that, it's just been very, very encouraging in a way. And I feel like it's even made me more want to see how it goes and be able to help and support in a way or in one way or the other.

But I'm really grateful to see her and the people at Tirop's Angels just doing the work. And even today at those meeting and even the things they were doing today, I'd never seen that side of other things. So every time I get to be

there and see them working and having these forums or platforms and sometimes they have seminars and just to go there and just see from a distance how they're making change in our communities, it's very special. It's very special.

And I'm really grateful for you guys that you're here to support and help her get better and even reach out to so many people and get the things that she needs to be able to support other women and girls and even young kids because this is not something that can be done by one person. It needs a whole ... Everybody else to chip in. And you guys to be here and do this, it's very special. It's very special. And we're grateful. We're grateful for all that you do and we continue being grateful and may God continue blessing you.

00:10:21

Speaker 2: Thank you. Thank you.

00:10:22

Sharon Lokedi: Yeah, yeah.

00:10:23

Speaker 2: We're happy to be able to shine a light on, it's a very important topic. So you have a title to defend in Boston and coming up in just a couple of months.

00:10:33

Sharon Lokedi: Yes, yes.

00:10:34

Speaker 2: Talk about your training. So you're here, by the way, one of the reasons, I'm sure you come back here, just like in Flagstaff, good altitude to train out here. I think we're at about maybe 5, 500, 6,000 feet above sea level here. So it's good altitude. Obviously, amazing group you have to train with here. Talk about your training in Kenya, how that's going and how it helps you when you come here to train for another marathon major.

00:11:02

Sharon Lokedi: It's special. I feel like even when I did my build up that leads to 2022 New York, I came here because I just wanted to be with people and get to run with a group of people that they've done this before. And I just wanted to get that experience. And I feel like it's just been so special that I can always look back and be like, "This is where I started all this." So every time I come back, I go to Kaptagat because that's where I know that's where I did my build up, I did all my marathon build and it's very special and humbling.

You get there, and everybody, no one cares who you are, it's training. You're there to get the work done and you run, you go sleep, you come back again, which is a really good routine to do. And then it gets also very special because then I get home here and I get to see my family. It can be in a day or so, but it's very, very special that I can, just 30 minutes away, I can be here, see my family, get some milk, get some vegetables, go back to the training camp.

00:12:04

Speaker 2: It must be back to basics for you, right?

00:12:06

Sharon Lokedi: Yes.

00:12:06

Speaker 2: I mean, because this is where it all started for you. I'm sure it's great in Arizona too, but how is it different for you when you're back in your original element, around your family, in these groups that you've known for a long time? Does it kind of help reset you to bring you back to the things that made you successful at the beginning?

00:12:27

Sharon Lokedi: Yes.

00:12:27

Speaker 2: Yeah.

00:12:27

Sharon Lokedi: Yes. It's very, very humbling in a way. I just don't know how, but I just feel like this is where ... Everything just feels so put together.

00:12:37

Speaker 2: Calming?

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Sharon Lokedi: Yes, yes. And it's not like I feel the same in Flagstaff, but Flagstaff, it's busy. You have friends, you have things to do. You always are thinking about what's next. But here, sometimes you're not even thinking about tomorrow. Sometimes you don't even know what you're doing tomorrow. You only get to focus on today. And I think that's something that when I'm here, I get to appreciate more, that I'm just like here, I'm present. I'm just enjoying everything possible. And then when tomorrow comes, I get to think about what's coming.

00:13:09

Speaker 2: One of the things that people ask a lot about the marathon and why Kenyans are so successful, it's one of the questions I get a lot from people when they see, oh, another Kenyan has won the New York City Marathon or the Boston Marathon is why? Why Kenyans? Why do they win so much? And coming here just to see it with my own eyes, I have to say I see it in a different way. Obviously the altitude, obviously there's a lot of natural talent here, no question about it, but it seems maybe more than anything, it's the culture.

00:13:38

Sharon Lokedi: Yes.

00:13:39

Speaker 2: There's a culture of running and it's what little kids dream to be. And there seems like there's an infrastructure here of coaches and runners and people here to support each other and show each other the way. And that when it comes to being successful in the sport is so much of the battle is having people help you believe in yourself and show you the way to being successful.

00:14:01

Sharon Lokedi: Yeah, yeah. And it's also one of the things that when you're out there, you're running, you see someone and you're like, "I am dying here". But then you see someone passing you and it seems like they're not doing anything and they're still like, "Oh, you can do this, you can do this." So it's like-

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Speaker 2: And it's just a random person.

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Sharon Lokedi: Yes.

00:14:17

Speaker 2: You don't know who they are.

00:14:17

Sharon Lokedi: Yeah, yeah.

00:14:17

Speaker 2: But they could be competing in a major in a professional field, you might not even know it.

00:14:23

Sharon Lokedi: Yes, yes. And it's just sometimes you're like, "Okay, these people, they're very stronger than I am." But it's just like they haven't gotten the chance and either you have this opportunity, why can you not go out there and use it and just represent other people. And Even sometimes when I'm running out here and someone is like, "Oh, congratulations." Someone out of nowhere, it can be like some woman just walking and is like, "Oh, work hard, keep working hard, my daughter." And it gives you that excitement. You're like, "I get to do this. I get to do this for a living and have these people cheer me even without knowing who I am." And that's something that it's very motivating and it's just special to have here.

00:15:04

Speaker 2: Well, Sharon, everyone's going to know who you are when you show up in Boston this year. We know that. You cannot sneak up on anyone anymore. Having won, you're the defending champion, everyone knows you're coming. How is that going to be different for you going into Boston with that target on your back?

00:15:24

Sharon Lokedi: Like any other race, I treat it as it's a different race. I treat it as if I haven't been there before. Yes, I've been there, but it's in my mind I just try to make sure that I'm just there to compete. I'm there to put myself out there. And yes, as you said, I am going to be there. Every move I make, everyone is going to ... But I just have to be strong. I just have to be mentally prepared for that. Because as you know, it's not easy to defend your title.

00:15:50

Speaker 2: No.

00:15:50

Sharon Lokedi: It's the hardest thing you can ever do because it's not even just the training, there's the mental aspect of it, and that is just way tougher than it is physically.

00:16:01

Speaker 2: Do you feel more pressure or less pressure? I could see it going either way. You've already won the race, you've proven it.

00:16:07

Sharon Lokedi: Yeah.

00:16:08

Speaker 2: So in some ways maybe there's less pressure or do you feel the pressure to defend?

00:16:12

Sharon Lokedi: Yes, because everyone is expecting you to. And you yourself, of course you want to win, you want to be able to celebrate again and be like, "I just won again." But you also have to be humble about it. And those two things can be really tough sometimes to deal with, but you just have to just find the balance of figuring out what to do and how to do it.

00:16:37

Speaker 2: One thing that's going to be very different for you in Boston this year is your friend, your rival Hellen Obiri will not be there at the starting line with you. It's almost hard for me to imagine you in a race without Hellen Obiri. You guys have had such great battles. I love watching the broadcast of the two of you. I remember in Boston all the conversation the two of you are having, talking to each other about things. And I remember speaking to you actually at a lunch that we were at sometime after the Boston Marathon, I think it was at the MasterCard Mini 10K.

And we talked about, what were you talking about during the Boston Marathon last year? You were comparing notes about when is that hill coming again? Is that this next mile? When is that happening again? You're just chatting. How is it going to be difficult? And do you think it's easier or harder for you to take on a race like this without Hellen in the field?

00:17:30

Sharon Lokedi: Harder I think because I feel like I'm just so used to her and I'm always like, "I'm prepared. I know she's definitely going to be there." And I'm always, I'm like, "Okay, so when is she going to make the move?" And I think she always thinks the same thing. And it gets to the point where it's like, "We're not talking anymore, we're just working." And it's just like a step after the other. So it's going to be a bit different this year. And I think in a way I'm really excited for her, to see how she races in London. But yeah, I think I'm going to miss her. I'm going to really miss competing with her. Yeah.

00:18:02

Speaker 2: Yeah, it'll be different. It'll be different for you, for the fans, so it'll be a good test for you. Learn how to run without Hellen.

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Sharon Lokedi: True. True.

00:18:10

Speaker 2: It's going to have to happen eventually.

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Sharon Lokedi: Yeah. But I'm pretty sure there'll be other people out there-

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Speaker 2: Of course.

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Sharon Lokedi: That will be tough to compete with.

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Speaker 2: Yes, yes, yes.

00:18:18

Sharon Lokedi: And I can just picture them and put Hellen face in them.

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Speaker 2: I love it. I love it.

00:18:22

Sharon Lokedi: So yeah.

00:18:26

Speaker 2: Well, you have a race before Boston here with us in New York. There I should say in New York with us at the United Airlines NYC Half. And we have so many people come run the UA NYC Half every year who are preparing for Boston or maybe London. How do you think you'll approach that race? I remember talking to you about this in the past. You've done this before and asking you, "Are you just going to go to use it as a training run? Are you going to go win?" And you've always said you're going to go win. And it seems like that's how you approach it. Is that how you're going to approach it this year?

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Sharon Lokedi: Sometimes even when I'm telling you I'm going to win, deep down, I'm like, "Oh God, is it going to really happen?"

00:19:06

Speaker 2: Yeah, yeah.

00:19:08

Sharon Lokedi: But I just have to be confident. And yes, so of course, like any other race, I'm still going to fight for it. And depending on how it is, I'm still going to try and go for the win because, I don't know, there's something about just being out there in New York and competing and all that and every other race is yes, it's different. It's different crowd, but there's always something that's the same, the people and everyone that's out there cheering. And it's so special because every time I'm like, everyone's like, (inaudible), it's like I can hear my name more and more and I think that's very motivating. And yes, when I'm out there, yes, I'm fighting for the win. And this year, it might not be like last year, it might be a little bit different, but anything is possible, so.

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Speaker 2: The course, is it a course you find useful in training for Boston? We have some hills.

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Sharon Lokedi: Yes, yes.

00:20:01

Speaker 2: We have a lot of the similar topography. Do you find it's just a good setup race for you to help get you ready for Boston?

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Sharon Lokedi: Yeah. Yeah. But I even think New York is hard in a way, which is really great because then it gives you the confidence. Last year it gave me so much confidence heading into Boston. And yes, I'm going to try and emulate the same thing again this year and just see how that goes. So it's very exciting and there's nothing like going back and just trying to win again and being there and being present and supportive. Yeah.

00:20:34

Speaker 2: Well, we can't wait to have you back in New York, but most of all, we can't thank you enough for welcoming us into your family's home here in Kenya. It's been such an honor to be here with you, with your family. And I think we'll all see you and all your fellow Kenyan runners a little differently now than we've been where you all are from. And I recommend honestly any American who loves distance running, who loves the sport, take the opportunity if they ever get it to come over here and see what it's like here because it really does give you an incredible perspective. So thank you so much. It's great to see you.

00:21:13

Sharon Lokedi: Thank you. Thank you.

00:21:13

Speaker 2: We'll see you in New York.

00:21:13

Sharon Lokedi: Thank you. I'm really grateful. Thank you all. Come again.

00:21:17

Speaker 2: Thank you.

00:21:17

Sharon Lokedi: Feel very welcomed and at home. And I don't know, this is so special. I feel like we do this always, but it's different.

00:21:25

Speaker 2: This is different.

00:21:26

Sharon Lokedi: We're doing it at my mom's home.

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Speaker 2: Incredible.

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Sharon Lokedi: Which is very special in Kenya.

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Speaker 2: I'm going to go inside and have some more of that tea.

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Sharon Lokedi: Yes, please.

00:21:32

Speaker 2: Delicious tea that your mom is serving.

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Sharon Lokedi: Please. So this is going to be a memory to remember forever. So thank you.

00:21:39

Speaker 3: Peloton's most advanced tread yet is here. The new Peloton cross-training series, Tread+ powered by Peloton IQ. Designed for runners who want top tier performance, it features premium hardware that makes every run and workout more efficient, effective and motivating. And it accelerates

your personal growth mile after mile. The rubberized slap belt cushions every single step and creates an energizing running space for each stride. And with strength workouts, you can stack right into your routine. You'll build lower body muscle to support stronger runs. With auto incline adjusting automatically to match instructor cues, your intensity stays exactly where it needs to be, so you can stay in the zone and focus on your workout. Experience our most advanced tread yet at onepeloton.com. Peloton, the official digital fitness partner of New York Road Runners.

00:22:36

Speaker 2: Well, that does it for a very special episode of Set The Pace. I want to thank Sharon, her family. Thanks all for watching, and we'll see you back in New York.