

# Nthompe, resilient marathon soldier

**CALISTUS KOLANTSHO**  
Staff Writer

**R**evered Kenyan long-distance runner, Eliud Kipchoge once quipped, "only the disciplined ones in life are free. If you are undisciplined, you are a slave to your moods and your passions".

This is a quote that aptly sums up the life of local marathon runner, Godiraone Nthompe. Whenever there is a marathon in Botswana, Nthompe's name is always amongst the top five winners.

His recent achievement was a third-place finish at the 2022 Diacore Marathon 42.2km race where he recorded a time of 2:18:18. But after the winner of the marathon, Zimbabwean, Munyaradzi Jari was disqualified after failing a drug test, Nthompe moved to position two. His passion for running started at a young age, but it was all about passing time with his boys in the dusty streets of Lecheng.

By then he was a student at Mokgalo Junior Secondary School, unaware that one day the passion will put bread on his table.

"After completing Form 5 in 2004 at Moeding College, I joined BDF (Botswana Defence Force) in 2006. That was when I started running professionally," he said.

Nthompe said joining BDF Athletics Club was a challenge at the beginning because of the competition. As time went by, the soft-spoken Nthompe started recording faster times, which earned him a national team slot. "Initially, I was running 21km and 1,500 metres. I started running 42.2km in 2017," he said.

His first race was the 2017 Phikwe Marathon where he finished in the second spot clocking 2:24:00. In 2018, he finished second at the Mayor's Marathon in Gaborone where he recorded 2:30:00. The 36-year-old Nthompe said his major break through came in 2019 when BDF sent him to Wuhan, China. Before then, Nthompe was included as part of the Diacore Marathon programme, which featured up to



On the road: Nthompe

12 elite long distance runners in 2016. "Through the Diacore Marathon running programme, I started working with coach Mark Wolff from South Africa in September 2019. In just six weeks, there was a lot of change ahead of competing in the Wuhan marathon where I registered 2:18:00. I was the first Motswana to run that time," he said.

It was the most exciting time for Nthompe who started to believe that he had something special for road running. Nthompe did five marathons, but failed to run under 2:20:00. "I wanted to run faster in 2020 unfortunately there was COVID-19. I repeated 2:18:00 again at the 2022 Diacore Marathon. I had tough competition from athletes from outside the country. For the first time, I was able to cross the 30km mark with them. (Coach) Mark (Wolff) believes a lot in strength and I am someone who never went to the gym room. That

has changed," he said. Nthompe said Wolff has introduced long runs every weekend, which include building strength, patience, and stamina. "I was fortunate to be supported by Diacore. They sponsor and register us for races in and outside the country. The lifestyle of a professional athlete is expensive," he said.

Nthompe believes that foreign athletes will always dominate local races because there is no support for local runners. He said there is a lot of talent that needs support and the private sector should borrow a leaf from Diacore. He said there is a need for local long-distance runners to get opportunities to compete in international races. He said it is difficult to run good

times in Botswana due to the weather and it is important for runners to train in high-altitude areas.

Nthompe looks up to veteran runners such as Raobina Ramoseka and Kabo Gabaseme. Meanwhile, Diacore Botswana managing director, Kfir Teichman said their involvement as the marathon title sponsor dates back to 2012.

"The first edition in 2010 was staged in Phakalane by PGM Foundation. The PGM team consists of Thola Magang and Teddy Egner. In 2011, the marathon was cancelled and they approached us the following year," he said.

Teichman said being title sponsors meant they called the shots as organisers. The marathon had 2,000 runners in 2012 and the race moved to the Grand Palm Hotel a few years later where it is currently housed. Teichman said they always want the marathon to match international standards hence a budget of P4 million which is used for preparations the entire year. "It is a huge budget for a single-day event. This is a World Athletics accredited event, a qualifier for the Commonwealth Games and Olympics. We bring in route markers from South Africa to mark the route," he said. The 2022 event attracted around 11,000 runners and all the proceeds are donated to charity. Teichman said as Diacore, they are proud because they had wanted to have a flagship of social responsibility. "The Diacore board is supportive of this initiative hence availing funds all the time. The intention is to keep this race rolling. Each year, we renew ourselves and come up with a different theme motivated by issues affecting the society,"

he said. He said this year's participants were running in support against gender-based violence (GBV). Teichman said there were many GBV cases that were reported in areas such as Letlhakane. He said Diacore has for many years worked with Journey of Hope Botswana. The 2019 edition was in support of breast cancer awareness. The Diacore Marathon is celebrating 10 years next year. Teichman appreciated the support they get from runners annually and that the support from First Lady Neo Masisi gives the event royalty.

Regarding the Diacore Marathon running programme, Teichman said it had to be cancelled after three years.

"We did not see improvement and we did not want to waste anyone's time. The money and commitment were still there, but the programme was not working. There was no reason to continue with it," he said. Teichman said it is difficult to say local runners can win international marathons because there are different circumstances for that to happen. Sponsors of this year's marathon were Stanbic Bank, Mascom, The Grand Palm, GIA, Bomaid, Lucara Botswana, Sefalana, Blue Crystal, Coca-Cola, and Yarona FM.

## FACT FILE

**Full names:** Godiraone Nthompe  
**Date of birth:** March 15, 1986  
**Place of birth:** Palapye  
**Profession:** Long-distance runner  
**Club:** BDF Athletics Club  
**Sponsor:** Diacore Botswana  
**Fastest time:** 2:18:00

## Russian court jails US basketball player

**A**Moscow court has convicted the US basketball player Brittney Griner on drug charges, sentencing her to nine years in prison and a 1m rouble fine in a politically charged verdict that could lead to a prisoner swap with the US.

Griner, a basketball talent who played in Russia during off-seasons from the Phoenix Mercury, was arrested for cannabis possession in Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport in February. Her arrest was just days before Russia invaded Ukraine, launching frantic backdoor negotiations between the US and Russian intelligence services as her trial played out in a small courthouse just outside the Moscow city limits.

Her formal conviction, which was a foregone conclusion, would be a necessary step towards a prisoner exchange. US officials say Russia wants to swap Griner and Paul Whelan, a former US marine arrested on spying charges in 2020, for the convicted arms dealer Viktor Bout.

A handcuffed Griner said "I love my family" as she was led out of a Russian courtroom.

"Russia is wrongfully detaining Brittney," said US President Joe Biden. "It's unacceptable, and I call on Russia to release her immediately so she can be with her wife, loved ones, friends, and teammates." Griner's defence team said they were "disappointed" by the verdict and would appeal.

While she pleaded guilty to the drug charges, the US has classified Griner as "wrongfully detained", launching a process similar to hostage negotiations with Iran and other countries. A senior US embassy official attended Thursday's hearing and verdict, where police spetsnaz (special forces) and bomb-sniffing dogs patrolled the hallways. Prosecutors asked for a nine-and-a-half-year prison sentence for Griner and a hefty fine, nearly the maximum in her case.

In an emotional closing statement on Thursday, Griner apologised to her teammates and told the courtroom that she had made an "honest mistake", adding "that is why I pled guilty to my charges but I had no intent of breaking the law".

She has also rejected the political implications of her case, making an emotional appeal directly to the judge, Anna Sotnikova.

"I know everybody keep talking about 'political pawn' and 'politics', but I hope that is far from this courtroom," she said, asking for leniency. In the end, it was not shown.

Prosecutors in the Russian court said Griner's arrest on drug charges was "fully proven". Her defence lawyers pointed toward irregularities in the investigation and described the pressures on the basketball star, whom she compared to the sprinter Usain Bolt. A conviction is usually required in cases that could lead to a prisoner

exchange, because it would allow the Kremlin to issue a pardon or reduce a sentence without blatantly interfering in an ongoing trial.

A lawyer for Whelan told the *Guardian* on Thursday that he was "sure that a trade will eventually be made", but added that a final agreement did not seem to have been reached. He claimed that the US said that Russia offered a trade for Bout in 2020 shortly after Whelan's conviction on spying charges.

Russia is said to be seeking the freedom of Bout, who is believed to have armed the Taliban and the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone, Charles Taylor's regime in Liberia, Unita in Angola, various Congolese factions and Abu Sayyaf, a militant Islamic group in the Philippines. He was arrested at a luxury hotel in Bangkok in a US sting operation and was sentenced in 2012 to 25 years in prison. His case has become an unlikely cause célèbre amongst some senior Russian officials.

Russia has already exchanged Trevor Reed, a former marine arrested in Moscow, for Konstantin Yaroshenko, a pilot who was held for nearly a decade in the US on a drug smuggling conviction. The exchange at an airfield in Turkey recalled a cold war thriller, as the two men walked past each other to board planes back to their respective countries. (*The Guardian*)



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