RUNNER'S WORLD

Motivation: I'm A Runner

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I'm A Runner: Anthony Edwards

The star of *ER* is running the 2009 New York City Marathon for the charity Shoe4Africa, raising $1 million to build a pediatric teaching hospital in Kenya.

By Sarah Lorge Butler

Occupation: Actor
Age: 47
Residence: New York City

So have you run today?
No. I did eight yesterday, nine tomorrow.

My typical routine is a six-miler in Central Park three days a week. But now we're in full marathon training mode, so I'm getting into the long runs. We're in and out of Connecticut. I do my hill work here.

Do you do a long run every weekend?
Um, I kind of do whatever I'm told. The commander says, do this, I do it. Toby Tanser is our commander. I don't want to know too much in advance, I just want to know what the week's mission is.

What has your longest run been?
I ran Chicago three times.

I saw your name in the results in 2003 and 2001.
I ran my first marathon in 1999, under a pseudonym. I ran under Blake Stanton, who was my assistant at the time. ER was huge then. Before I started training, I had never run more than two miles. I was just like, "Oh god." I had no idea. At 37, it was like a whole new world.

And how did you do?
I think I was like 4:13.

Did anyone recognize you?
Yeah, I was at about mile 14, some guy runs next to me and he goes, "Hey, you're Anthony Edwards, you're Dr. Greene." And I said, "Yeah." "Oh, that's great, can we take a picture together?" I'm like, "Sure, I'm not stopping." So his buddy had their camera and he got next to me and took the picture and he wanted to take a picture of his buddy so he turned around he's running backward, we're jogging slowly, and right after he took it he went, "Aah," and grabbed his hamstring. I think he pulled something there. Lesson: Don't run backward

in the middle of a marathon.

So it's been six years since your last marathon?
Yeah, I had no intention of doing it again, but the work I'm doing for [the charity] Shoe4Africa to build a pediatric teaching hospital in Kenya and our ties with the New York City Marathon, we thought, well, we've got these charitable entries. I made the first phone call to a friend, going, "Hey, you want to run the New York City Marathon for Shoe4Africa?" And halfway through the conversation I went, How can I ask people to run the marathon if I'm not doing it. So I went, Oh god, you know what? Yes, it's true, I've got to go do it again. The light went on. Gotta go do it now. It has made it fun to ask people now.

How big is the team?
I guess we've got about 20 right now. We've got people running for us who are already entered. That are just raising money on their own, we'll kit 'em out in our shirts and run as a team. We've got a wonderfully eclectic group of people, myself and Sarah Jones and Tegla Loroupe and Richard Whitehead [the English runner who is a double amputee]. So he's like, "Yeah, that would be a fun slow run for me." The doctor who I based Mark Greene loosely on, one of my oldest friends, my sister's first boyfriend growing up, Paul Castillo, he's a doctor, he's coming out from L.A. to run.

Are you trying to run together?
No one's going for personal bests. We're running for a cause. We want to spread the word. This hospital will be the first of its kind in all of Africa. There's a couple of different ways to build it. Six foundations come together and each put in a million dollars each or get a million people to give $10 and we're done. We're going to really do a social network, viral spread—what is it, more than 30 million runners in the United States? Running is a great, selfish thing to do. I think by nature, runners love to give back. It's a perfect thing—I'll give anybody $50 so I don't have to run the marathon. I just love the spirit of it, a group of people, the idea of it, we'll put in our four months of training and do this in the spirit of building something that has never existed before, and will have a huge impact on the health of Africa. It's just so cool.

So if someone wants to give $26.20, they can do that?
Exactly, and the thing that we're most proud of is it's 100 percent donation; there's no fee going to any kind of administrative costs. Anyone who donates to Shoe4Africa will get their name on the hospital's wall. If we have to put a million names up, we will. It will be awesome to have it be built by runners.

Have they broken ground?
No. Our goal is to get to a million dollars by November and then we'll break ground. We have $400,000 now. It's a $15 million total, but it's $4.5 to $5 bricks and mortar. Which is the unsexy part of fund-raising, the building. But that's a four-story building. The $11 million is beds and equipment. That's much easier to do once you have the building. Because there are lots of wonderful organizations that import used equipment. You've got to have that house to put it in first.

How did you get roped into it?
Through a friend. We had moved to New York after I left *ER.* I was still running for a friend. A guy I was training with said, there's this crazy tall skinny guy who used to be a professional athlete, he has just become a 501(c)(3), it has to do with Africa and health and shoes. We just hit it off. It was like long lost brothers. We're kind of like Frick and Frack. My wife refers to him as my boyfriend. Your boyfriend is here, she says. He's come to drink all our coffee.

Was the mission to get shoes?

He didn't really have a mission. He just saw a need. There he is, a professional runner, at the starting line of a race in Africa, in new shoes and new clothes and realizing he could put new shoes on everybody at the starting line just from what was under his table in Sweden, given the excess of shoes he had. So he started bringing them down. He saw the power they had in motivating people. And then it turned into health. Now that's where we are at with it—the ability to use sport as a foundation to then bring in health and educational initiatives. Because a lot of people want to do things in Africa. But it's difficult to get a big group of people together. But if you put on a running race and give away used shoes and T-shirts, you get a lot of people showing up, especially women.

So it is about getting people to run.
Exactly. It's about inspiring through empowerment. The empowerment that happens, as every runner will say, when they started to get exercise into their life, their life changed. This Shoe4Africa and this hospital are about giving people opportunity; it's the only thing missing in Africa. For women to have the opportunity to come together and run together, it inspires other things. All of a sudden where we've had running races, there's a weekly soccer game. It works on a lot of levels besides the shoe. The shoe is really a metaphor for movement.

Even though Kenyans have been so successful as runners? People don't have enough shoes?
Yeah. When you get into the slums, there's the health aspect. Like, we brought 12,000 pairs of shoes into Kibera last December, which was specifically about a health issue because hookworm is a huge issue there. It's the largest slum in Africa, it's more than a million people living in a space the size of Central Park with no running water.

Was that the worst you've ever seen?
It's certainly the most dense, impoverished population I've ever seen. There's tremendous spirit and survival among the women in the communities, but lacking opportunity, 50 cents a day to feed a family of four. They don't have access to shoes, and the shoes they do have they need for school. So there is the health component to that, and that leads to other dreams, to have a Kenyan-run shoe factory. It also works in a way of education, running as a way to promote education.

Did you collect shoes at the end of the marathon?
Yeah, on Central Park West, illegal. The New York Road Runners wouldn't let us be in the park. We got the word out, and we collected a ton of shoes. We did it the day after the marathon. People coming by with their shoes. That's what's interesting about shoes, the idea of excess. Every pair has a story behind it, people are like, "I ran whatever in this," or "This is my first training shoe." We like people to think about that in relation to the excess we live in in this country. It's so out of balance. The health statistics are so insane, they're so fixable. That's why people like to work in Africa, a little goes so far.

We have an address in Kenya to send to. But we're really not soliciting for them. The real priority—you can recycle them with someone else—put $10 and know that 10 dollars is going to the hospital. We would love that image of 500,000 or however many thousands of people come together and micro-donate and change the health of millions of people in Sub-Saharan Africa. That's what's exciting, there's no voice or action for pediatric health in that part of the world.

How long have you been a runner?
It will be 10 years this summer, I started when I was 37, and I'll be 47. I had never really run before. I met someone on a plane who said, "I lost 80 pounds and it changed my life, and all I did was follow this simple Hal Higdon training program." It was online and you download it for free, it's 16 weeks. It was like, there's

something I never thought I could do, let me try. I think that's the way everyone approaches it, there's no way they could do it.

It seemed like an impossible thing, and as an actor, it's a funny thing. You spend your whole life pretending. Completing a marathon was the first time in my adult life I had done something that had a huge physical attachment to it. It required everything, not just my imagination, and that connection of your body and your imagination working together is, I think, why people go out in the morning and get their 40 minutes in.

Did you find it painful?
I still find it painful. That's why I like Toby Tanser so much, his whole idea of train hard, win easy. Trying to find a way that the pain is okay, that's a good part, your body knowing that you're pushing it. And not to kill yourself, to balance that.

Have you ever had to go to the ER after a run?
No. I have too much survival instinct for that.

Are you setting a goal for yourself in New York?
I think we're in the 3:45 to 4:00 range. We'll do whatever it is.

When you go out for your six-milers, do you go in the morning?
I'm definitely a morning runner. When I do the long stuff, I go at 5:30 so I'm not awake for the first six miles. Last Sunday I did 15.

Do people recognize you out and about in the park?
Yeah, people do, but New York is friendly that way—used to people they recognize running around. It's summertime, we travel a lot. That's what I love most about running, running in places I've never been before, kind of getting lost a little bit, and discovering new places.

Do you do speedwork?
Yeah, we do some, but his [Tanser's] philosophy is that that's not the most important thing in marathon training. Getting your body used to that time and distance is.

How about an iPod?
No, never. I think that's dangerous.

Other people you meet to run?
Sometimes. Plan a week ahead and get a run in. I have four kids and kind of a crazy life. I like that I'm-off-on-my-own zone-out time. If I run with somebody once every two weeks, that's good, but I also like that zone-out time.

How did you fit it in around "ER"?
The same as anyone with a schedule, you get your runs in when you can, and don't kill yourself if you miss something.

Did you have downtime during the day?
Sometimes I'd run at lunch. The problem of course is heat—always try to avoid the heat.

Was the character Mark Greene a runner?

A little. They kind of dabbled in it a little, but they never really—I would joke that it would be great if he ran the marathon and because it's Chicago, but those are really complicated logistics. To jump into 30,000 people.

There might have been a couple of scenes?
I think there were. But he was dealing with so much heaviness in his life all the time; it was always a distraction. People liked Dr. Greene because they knew their lives were never going to be that bad.

How about Goose Bradshaw?
His was good right up until the end.

He wasn't much of a runner I'm thinking.
No.

Maybe just to get through basic.
Right.

Are you competitive at all? Do you track your times?
I do a bit with myself. I'm certainly not a racer. But I have that, I think that everybody has, where you come in, if you think you did really well, and you check your GPS—I have a Forerunner—and it's like, Oh, it wasn't quite as fast as I thought. And then those great surprising things, Oh, that felt awful, and then you're like, Ohmigod, I was faster than I thought.

Do you keep a comfortable pace?
I always try to start off slowly and build. I feel good when I have energy to push it for the last mile or two. It's gotta be fun.

Which direction do you run in Central Park?
I alternate—I try to run on the bridle path. I cut across the top, because from my house to the park and across is six miles. But I do try to stay off the pavement. In Connecticut there are great trails. Everything I've ever read about, it's so good not to be on the same surface for your foot strength. It slows you down, but it doesn't all have to be about speed.

Is there anything you hate about running?
Yeah, usually about mile three. Usually I'm going, Ugh, there's no way I could run a marathon. And then all of a sudden—there's this point in a run when it doesn't feel good.

But that's what's fun about it, you know no matter how hard it is or how awful part of it is, when you're done you will never regret having gone for that run. Toby and I pride ourselves on running through the winter in New York. And we're like, rain, snow, sleet, ice. When you're done, it always feels good.

Do you have a postrace reward?
Massage and a hamburger.

Where's your favorite burger joint?
I actually love to cook; it's got to be homemade.

Do you ever hop in the weekend races in Central Park?

I got enough stress in the rest of my life, this is the fun part. This is the part that's for me, that makes me feel good. It has never been a part of me.

I think I like running because it isn't about winning or losing, but the experience of it. That's one reason I like it. I also love to eat. And as long as I'm running, I can eat pretty much anything. There is that simple vanity of being an actor; it's a good way to stay trim.

I've become really good friends with Sarah Jones. We talk about it.

Tegla Loroupe?
I ran into her in the park, the day after the Mini. I didn't recognize her. She's from the Pokwot area, which is near where the hospital will reach. She has come on board with us. I love reading about it. When we were in Nairobi, Robert Cheruiyot and Martin Lel took us to the top of the Ngong Hills and showed us where they train. It's insane what they do, the hills where they run. Besides being beautiful. It's amazing where they train.

Do you watch the Olympics and the Boston Marathon and things like that?
Yeah, and I've gone to Boston just to watch. Toby is such an incredible dictionary of running. When we do our events in Kenya, we'll have 30 great ex Kenyan champions show up for the event, because they want to support and help. Running has changed their lives, these people have come back and built schools and health centers.

Martin Lel drives around in a beat-up old truck, because he's always giving his cars away for people to use.

You're bringing the whole family?
Yeah. 7-, 8-, 12-year-old girls and a 15-year-old boy. We took a year off and traveled around the world. Saw one of Toby's big events. It was intoxicating. You could see the change happening.

What's the weirdest thing anyone has ever yelled to you while you were running?
I get the back and forth between Goose and Dr. Greene.

So people feel compelled to say something?
Yeah. Mostly it's just to say hello. People don't generally yell out, "You're the worst actor I ever met!"

Were you ever late to filming because you were running?
No, but I did have to work the Monday after the first time I ran Chicago. People thought I had been hit by a truck. It was a little difficult to go up and down any stairs.

Long days on set?
They were 12-hour days.

Did that help you as a marathoner?
I think it's all so psychological. That's what's so good about it. You have to combine that experience of the long run with your mindset of it. Its like bungee jumping, your body is like, Don't do this, don't do this. Stop.

What's the hardest part for you?
The hardest part, once you hit 21 or 22, the mantra in my mind was, Okay, I promise, I'll never do this again, if you just do these next five, next four. Just two more and we'll never do this again. This bizarre reasoning

you're having with your legs.

I did it every other year. The second time, I really wanted to break four hours. Then I did something wrong with my watch. Set my watch wrong, I did 4:04. I don't know how I did it. I thought I ran 3:57.

The third one, I ran with a friend. It was really fun. It was a blast, had that experience at the end. My knees were killing me, but I didn't want to slow down. So we powered each other through.

Anything else?
The whole spirit of this is about the hospital. We're doing this for a reason, the idea I really want to convey is that we're all runners, we all contribute in different ways. I can do it this way and work on the foundations, but their $10 will go really far, their name will be on the wall of that hospital. There's lots of wall space and we will put every name on that wall.
