

A Kenyan sweep on the track

AFRICAN RUNNERS-FOR-HIRE CLAIM ALL THREE MEDALS IN 5,000M

GUANGZHOU — An athlete from Bahrain won the men's 5,000 meters at the Asian Games with runners from Qatar taking silver and bronze.

Or, looked at another way, it was a Kenyan sweep.

Mahboob Ali Hasan Mahboob came home ahead of James Kwalia and Felix Kibore to take gold.

Meanwhile, Ethiopian-born Shitaya Habtegebrel, running for Bahrain, was third in the women's 10,000m, wrapping herself in the flag to receive her medal.

One arresting statistic from the 2006 Asiad in Doha was that Kenyan-born runners won the men's 800m, 1,500m, 5,000m, 10,000m, 3,000m steeplechase and marathon events.

Apart from a bronze in the marathon, and two minor medals in the 800m, all the male podium finishers were African.

Even in the sprint events the Africans are making their mark, with two Nigerian-born runners racing for Qatar — Samuel Francis in the 100m and Femi Ogunode in the 400m.

Francis spends about three months a year in Qatar. He also trains in a range of other countries such as the United States and Poland. When asked how it feels to appear for Qatar, he said: "I'm still who I am. It feels very natural."

He said he is well looked after by the sporting authorities in Qatar and does not spend much time in Nigeria. "I just go to visit my parents."

Ogunode said he spends about five or six months a year in Qatar.

However, it is in the longer-distance events that the hired help from Africa really make their mark.

Kenya-based Kibore, who switched to Qatar in 2007, trains at high-altitude in his homeland and explains that Qatar is also very hot.

He said he likes to run for Qatar and hoped the country would be successful in Guangzhou.

Silver medalist Kwalia, who won the 5,000m at the 2006 Asian Games in Doha, said the three Kenyans knew what to expect from one another tactically.

"I know them and they know me also," he said. "We are Kenyans representing other countries."



Mahboob ali Hasan Mahboob of Bahrain leads Qatar's James Kwalia and Felix Kibore as he heads to the finish line to claim gold in the men's 5,000m final at the 16th Asian Games on Sunday.

Kwalia, who switched to Qatar in 2004, said he spends "not more than one month a year" in Qatar, instead basing himself in Kenya and Europe.

For the runners themselves, the benefits of appearing under the flag of a borrowed nationality can be many.

Often competition for places in their home countries is so strong that they might never appear internationally.

There is also the lure of better

pay, win bonuses and expenses paid beyond the realms of what they could earn at home.

"You have to look for where you can be looked after," Kwalia said, adding that facilities in his homeland are not as good as in Qatar.

But he insisted: "I didn't run away from representing Kenya."

Other medal hopefuls among the women are the African-born Mimi Belete and Genzeb Shumi Regasa, along with Fatima Fofanah

in the women's 100m hurdles.

Fofanah, now running for Bahrain, was, incredibly, the flag bearer for the Guinea team at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

For the men there is middle-distance runner Belal Mansoor Ali, formerly known as Kenyan John Yego, Tareq Mubarak Taher (Denis Kipkurui Keter) in the 3,000m steeplechase and Khalid Kamal Yaseen (Peter Ndegwa) in the marathon.

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Youth and batting key for China

GUANGZHOU — China needs to tempt a generation of school children away from basketball and soccer if it is to build a cricket legacy in the country, Pakistan's coach said on Monday.

China was brushed aside by its mighty rival in the Asian Games quarterfinals by 128 runs, prompting Pakistan coach Mohammad Sadique to lay out a roadmap on how to expand the sport's frontiers here.

"They have a lot to learn," said Sadique after seeing skipper Khalid Latif make an unbeaten 103 in a total of 183-1 off 20 overs.

"They have to work on their batting, that is the most difficult thing in cricket.

"They also need to introduce cricket in schools in China so that the young generation can come up and learn the sport. This way China can improve in five to 10 years' time."



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Khalid Latif plays a shot against China during their cricket quarterfinal match.

Sadique also believes the pitch being used for the games at the Guangong Cricket Stadium is too slow.

"The pitch is too soft. It's not hard enough, so it's more suitable for spinners. The Chinese team needs a better and harder pitch."

China's manager Zhong Guowei has also set a five-year improvement target and believes the squad is slowly making progress.

"Pakistan won the toss and let us bowl first because it wanted to practise and prepare for its next game," said Zhong.

"There are four levels of cricket — A, B, C and D. We are at C. But I think we can compete with teams like Pakistan in five years."

Zhong said a full assessment of the team's performance at the Asian Games would be completed soon, along with a development plan.

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