

SPORT

Water replaced sugary tea when I moved in with the Kenyans

It was 2005 and I wasn't fulfilling my potential on the track. I mentioned to my agent Ricky that I was looking for somewhere to live. "Why don't you try living with the Kenyans?" he said.

PACE [my management company] represented numerous Kenyan athletes. Whenever they were competing in Europe, they would stay in a house on a leafy road in Teddington. I had always been curious about what the Kenyans were doing differently that made them so much faster in competition. "There's a room free at the house," Ricky explained. "The rent is cheap. It might open up your eyes a little, Mo."

It would turn out to be a life-changing decision.

From the outside, the house isn't much to look at. Inside, though, it was a different story: it was home to some of the most talented Kenyan athletes in the world, and they had very clear ideas about how to eat, sleep, train and rest.

The first evening after I moved in, I was getting ready to go to the cinema with some mates. I went downstairs to see if any of the Kenyans wanted to come. They were getting ready to go to bed. I looked at my watch. It was half past eight. I was woken up at 6am the next day by the sound of church music. The house was filled with the sound of a choir singing hymns to a blaring organ accompaniment. It was like waking up on the set of *Songs of Praise*.

The Kenyans would go out for their first run of the day no later than 7am. I remember shaking my groggy head clear and staggering out of bed to join them. By the end of the session I was knackered.

After our first training session, we went back home and the guys would rustle up some food. They cooked simple, home-grown foods in these massive pots, typical Kenyan staples like ugali, a maize flour mix rolled into a doughy lump. This was new to me. Kenyan runners swear by ugali.

After food, they'd sleep. In the afternoon, they trained again. In the evenings they ate, rested and went to bed early. They did this every day. It was an almost monk-like existence.

For entertainment, they played chess. There was no proper chessboard, so they made one from a piece of cardboard and used bottle caps for the pieces. In the evenings they watched running videos. That's all they ever did. No TV shows, no comedy, no movies. Just videos of old Olympic races. All I wanted to do after a hard day's training was go out to town or play Pro Evolution Soccer. Anything to take my mind off running. But then it hit me just how little I knew about running compared to these guys. Running was their life.

It was like a switch had been turned on inside my head. Like that, I knew what I had to do to win. No more late-night trips to the cinema or dancing at Oceana. No more jumping off bridges. I couldn't be doing with any of that. From that day on my attitude changed completely. I went to bed early. I trained hard. I ate more healthily.

I took naps in the afternoon. I drank water, which I never used to do: I used to drink tea. I would have six or seven cups a day, taken with three or four lumps of sugar. Water didn't taste good to me. I was like: "Who drinks this stuff? Tea is way better." On race days, I might have a few sips. That was my limit. I was so used to not drinking water that I never really noticed it.

The late nights I'd enjoyed at St Mary's were a thing of the past. I even changed my mobile phone number so that people couldn't get hold of me and tempt me into going out. It was a bold decision, but the way I saw it, I didn't have any choice. What else was I going to do? I had no back-up plan, no qualifications. It was running or nothing.