

## Joseph Koech Named USA Track & Field – New England Athlete of the Month for September



*Photo: unknown*

BOSTON – **Joseph Koech**, age 40 of Somerville, MA who competes for Team RUN, has been named USA Track & Field – New England’s Athlete of the Month for September 2009. Koech scored double victories at two USATF New England Road Racing Grand Prix championship events. On September 12, running through a hard rain, Koech captured the Ollie 5 Miler in South Boston in 23:53. On September 20, Koech ran to victory in the scenic Lone Gull 10K in Gloucester with a time of 30:20 – winning margin of 19 seconds. These would be excellent accomplishments for any runner – the fact that Koech won these open events as a master’s runner is amazing.

It is easy to believe that Koech has entered the masters ranks after a long career as an elite racer, but the true story is more compelling. Koech was born in Kenya as a member of the famed Kalenjin tribe, which makes up about 10% of Kenya’s population but contributes more than 75% of the nation’s elite runners. As a young man, Koech was a competitive runner, but

never fast enough to qualify for national championship events and eventually stopped competing and became a cattle farmer in the highlands.

In 2000, Joseph’s half-brother, Christopher Kelong died in a road accident. Kelong, who had represented Kenya at the World Cross Country championships and other international events, was a source of inspiration to Koech and motivated him to resume serious training in 2001. In 2004 Koech moved to Mexico and it is there that he achieved his best open performances, running 1:02:45 for a half-marathon in Chihuahua in 2006 (age 37) and running 2:18 for a marathon in 2007.

Since moving to the Boston area, Koech has not only excelled on the roads, he has also been an energetic motivator, mentor and role model for youth members of Team RUN, based in Lowell, MA. Reflecting on his training approach, offers a variation on the Kenyan philosophy of “train hard, win easy,” saying that when he trains hard, he is able to go into a race relaxed – confident that he has fully prepared himself.

Looking to the future, Koech plans to run the 2010 Boston Marathon with victory in the masters division a feasible but far from easy goal. Over the winter, he is planning to go back to Kenya for a significant part of his training.