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Two Hours: The Quest To Run The Impossible Marathon

TWO HOURS



The Quest to Run the Impossible Marathon

"The topic is one of the most profound there is, the absolute limits of human performance."
—SEBASTIAN JUNGER

ED CAESAR



Synopsis

Two hours to cover 26 miles and 385 yards. Its running's Everest, a feat once seen as impossible for the human body. Now we can glimpse the mountaintop. The sub-two-hour marathon requires an exceptional feat of speed, mental strength, and endurance. The pioneer will have to endure more, live braver, plan better, and be luckier than any who has run before. Ed Caesar takes us into the world of elite runners: the greatest marathoners on Earth. From big-money races in the United States to remote villages in Kenya, *Two Hours* is an audiobook about a beautiful sport that few people understand. It's about talent, heroism, and refusing to accept defeat. It's a book about running that is about much more than running.... It's a human drama like no other.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The fly-on-the-wall insider account is a hallmark of sports literature, and when the subjects are open and engaging and on-field happenings dramatic and captivating (think *A Season on the Brink* and more recently *Collision Low Crossers*) these books can be some of the best of genre. Long-distance running, more spectator-unfriendly than most other non-Curling sporting activities and beset by slim literary pickings once fictional (the John L Parker novels are decent but always dragged for me when Quentin wasn't running) and instructional (*Lore of Running* and *Daniels' Running Formula* are essential training guides but not exactly beach reads) fare are excluded, has never been subject to the insect-atop-plaster treatment. This changes on October 27th, a little less than a week before this year's New York City Marathon, with Ed Caesar's *Two Hours*, a much-needed book that finally

addresses the gap. *Two Hours* peels back the curtain on elite Kenyan runners and their training through three years of reporting and extensive interviews. Primarily centered around 2011 Boston Marathon champion Geoffrey Mutai, Caesar offers a peek into the life of an elite Kenyan marathoner and what it is like to subject oneself to running an elite marathon time (spoiler alert: turns out it's rather unpleasant). Many people may see the winners of big-money marathons as a revolving door of genetically-gifted Kenyans with amusing names and boring personalities (I'm sure that whole "English as a third/fourth language" thing doesn't help matters).

Running a marathon under 2 hours is the most sensational human endurance barrier left. Is it possible? Ed Caesar's new *Two Hours* (Simon & Schuster) explores the plausibility of breaking the two-hour marathon barrier with narrative and research that will convert a fitness runner to a marathon fan. Romantic and reverent, Caesar develops the characters and brings us inside the story with documentary storytelling and well-researched technical insight. *Two Hours* Grips you like a leg cramp at mile 23, holding on and not letting go. From an opening sprint that takes you inside the closed world of elite marathon running and on into the long, slow distance of endurance sports research Ed Caesar sheds new light on a old sport than has been eclipsed in recent years by the drama of Ironman triathlons and the sensation of made-for-TV novelty events. *Two Hours* reignites the romance and mysticism of the marathon. Author Ed Caesar returns the reverence to marathon running and puts a face on the athletes who contest the sport at the highest level. He provides fascinating insights into their staggering training mileage and gossamer physical and mental fragility. His accounting is journalistic but his treatment of the subject matter is laced with meaty passion. The combination of the two makes for a tingling read. I had starting line goose bumps nearly the entire time. Here's an excerpt: "As the gun sounded the lead pack was briefly surprised by an unknown competitor. A white athlete, who was not part of the elite field, sprinted the first few hundred meters ahead of the race favorites, if only to say he had- for a time- led the London Marathon.

While running as a participatory sport has grown to new heights in recent years, the sport's ultimate signature event for endurance, the marathon, has not enjoyed the same popularity as a spectator sport or as one in which there is much reading material. While there are plenty of books on training for a marathon and some biographies of runners such as Steve Prefontaine, there is very little written about the marathon that a reader can read much like a novel or story and learn about the event. That void has now been filled by "Two Hours", an excellent book on the quest by elite

marathoners on attempting to break the barrier of running the 26-mile-385-yard event in under two hours. Ed Caesar's account of the world of marathon running, told through his interviews and stories of some of the best runners in the sport from Kenya, give a unique perspective of the sport that has not been available to readers before. While the most prominent runner in the book is Geoffrey Mutai, the 2011 Boston Marathon winner, it is not all about him. Just about every subject that is applicable to running the marathon is covered. Whether it is the psychology of a runner, the question of doping in the sport similar to cycling, the training involved, the politics and money of the sport, or the evolution of shoes, Caesar covers it all in a manner that is not too technical for the reader. They all give credence to the belief that at some point in the near future, a runner will be able to break the two-hour barrier, much like Roger Bannister did to the four-minute mile barrier more than 50 years ago. Even if the reader is not a runner or follows the sport closely, he or she will be able to read the book at a leisurely pace and not get too bogged down with too many details.

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