

HOW AN ACCIDENT TURNED CHEPTEGEI INTO A FARMER

I DIDN'T GIVE UP

COURTESY PHOTOS

By Hope Ampurire



Former national team athlete Sam Cheptegei harvesting cabbage



The Irish potatoes harvesting is another busy moment for Cheptegei

In the summer of 2023, Chengdu, China, became the epicenter of ambition for over 10,000 student athletes.

Among them was Sam Cheptegei, a long-distance runner from Makerere University then, for whom the FISU World University Games represented a dream come true moment, a high stakes stage where eight gruelling months of elite training in the high-altitude camps of Kenya finally met the roar of the crowd.

Upon competing in the men's 10,000 meters and half marathon, he returned charged with the invaluable experience and euphoria that defines a young athlete's rise.

Despite all that, Cheptegei's experience in Chengdu was supposed to be a continuation of his elite development, instead, it was the start of a gruelling domestic marathon.

He found his father battling a severe kidney condition. As the family's strength, Cheptegei (pictured right) pivoted from the track to the bedside, parenting his younger siblings while his mother struggled to manage the crisis.

The nightmare deepened, during a routine trip to the bank to settle a sibling's school fees, a violent

accident left Cheptegei with a dislocated left leg.

"It was a harsh reminder that life is unpredictable," Cheptegei reflected the nasty accident.

"I had to pivot from being a high-performance athlete to figuring out what was next. The track taught me to push limits, but life taught me to adapt," he told Vision Sports.

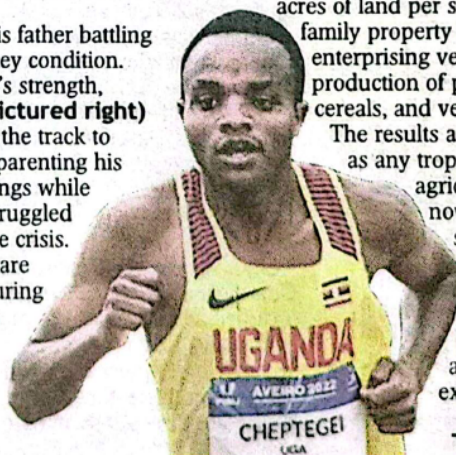
For many, a career-altering injury is a full stop but for Cheptegei, it was a detour. He leaned heavily on the foundation he built at Makerere University, admitted on national merit, Cheptegei had already proved his intellectual mettle before he ever represented the Ivory Tower on the international stage.

He refused to see his transition into agriculture as a fall-back for a broken athlete, instead, he treated it as a new purpose. Today, the discipline that once drove him to hit his splits is being poured into the soil.

Cheptegei currently manages 31 acres of land per season, balancing family property with his own enterprising ventures, overseeing production of potatoes, corn, cereals, and vegetables.

The results are as impressive as any trophy cabinet, his agricultural output now earns him over sh60m a year.

"Running and farming seem different, but the disciplines are identical," he explains.



Turn to Page 39