

OLYMPIC DREAMS

1 x 60



International

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CONTACT

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Sierra Leone is one of the smallest teams to enter the Olympic stadium in August 2004 but their journey to Athens has been more punishing than any Olympic event. Filmed over two and a half years, this is the story of a group of young athletes from Sierra Leone—one of the poorest countries on earth—as they struggle to achieve their dream of competing at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens.

In August, 2002, Sierra Leone sent a team of 23 athletes to the Commonwealth Games in Manchester, England. It was their first international outing since the end of the country's 11-year civil war. At the end of the Games, the team had won no medals, and 21 of Sierra Leone's top athletes illegally stayed in the UK to try and make better lives for themselves.

The Manchester fiasco is the incentive for former Sierra Leonean Olympic sprinter, Sanusi Turay, to return home from the UK to re-build an athletics team for Athens. Dynamic, opinionated and openly critical of the old athletic officials and their out-dated training methods, Sanusi has less than two years to achieve his dream. There is only one track in the entire country, no electronic timing device, not even a starting pistol—as the sound of gunfire usually spreads panic amongst an already traumatised population.

Sarah Bona is Sanusi's most promising female athlete. The rebels took over her family's house during the war and stripped it bare when they left. Sarah's athletics career offers her family their best hope of earning the money they need to re-build their lives.

Daddy Alie Bangura dreams that sporting success will lift him out of a life of poverty. He was kidnapped by the rebels and forced to live with them until he managed to escape. He now lives in a shack with his grandmother. Athletics is Daddy Alie's "whole life career." Success will help support his grandmother and fund his education.

Sarah and Daddy Alie's raw talent, coupled with Sanusi's US training experience, look like a winning combination but the battle is not just on the track. In Sierra Leone, athletes also fight corruption and poverty. For the World Championships in Paris, Sierra Leone's visa application lists two athletes but also the names of several relatives of the old athletics officials. All the visas are denied. Daddy Alie and Sarah face fierce competition from other athletes as well as fighting their own personal battles. Daddy Alie contracts malaria and, at the height of her success, Sarah becomes pregnant and has to make the toughest decision of her life.

No Sierra Leonean athlete makes the qualifying time for Athens but under the Olympic "Adam and Eve policy," every country can send one male and one female athlete. Two athletes are chosen to represent Sierra Leone—two others are bitterly disappointed.

CREDITS

Producer: Ilona Benjamin

Directors: Laura Ashton and Ron Orders

An Urban Films Production for WGBH/Boston.

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05.02.003



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