

NINA MOINI: A new podcast from ESPN tells the story of Samia Yusuf Omar, a Somali sprinter who captured hearts when she represented her country at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. Samia dreamed of competing again at the 2012 Olympics in London, but she faced enormous obstacles pursuing that goal. She died at 21 years old while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea in search of a better future.

The podcast *The Fastest Girl in Somalia* features Abdi Bile, a former world-champion runner who inspired Samia. And today, Abdi lives in Minnesota, where he mentors young runners in the Somali community. He's with me now. Thanks for being with us, Abdi.

ABDI BILE: Thank you so much, and thanks for having me.

NINA MOINI: This is a wonderful tribute to Samia. Tell me about the impression that you had of her while she was kind of on the rise and during what her career looked like.

ABDI BILE: I met Samia in, I mean, 2008, in Beijing Olympics. I was a national coach of Saudi Arabia. And just when I met her, Samia was a little girl with lots of energy, big dream, and full of life. And, I mean, you could tell right away. I mean, you get that vibe from her.

She really wanted to run the Olympics one more time in a different circumstances. Very well trained and do much better performance this time around than what she did in China. So for her, it was a redemption, really. She was really looking forward to. She wanted to represent her country, which is a huge responsibility for a little girl. So I was really impressed.

NINA MOINI: You think of all the challenges anybody faces to get to the top of their sport, and how much discipline and the resources and dedication. Samia also faced a lot of other challenges and was able to still make it to sort of the top of the game. Can you describe what it was like to be an athlete in Somalia at the time, particularly for a young woman?

ABDI BILE: It was a difficult time in so many ways. For one thing, I mean, the country is just in a bad situation. And the security was not good. So she faced a lot of challenges in her, but the passion was there. I mean, what we interested and really we were just talking about is just the passion she had. And in her running career, I don't know where she could end up performance-wise, but her dedication was very obvious and she was very determined to give it all.

And we all just wanted to see her reaching her potential. Reaching your potential is everything. But she was facing a lot of challenges back home, and it was tough. I mean, the Shabaab, the problem is for a little girl running on the unsafe streets.

NINA MOINI: But she kept going.

ABDI BILE: --her father got killed. So it was not easy at all. It was not the right place. It was not the right time. But this little girl was determined, and she loved running. And it was what she had in mind. And what was giving her peace and pleasure was running.

NINA MOINI: That's beautiful. Let's talk a little bit, if you would, about your life here in Minnesota now. You're a coach and mentor to young runners. Tell me the story of how you ended up here and how coaching has become an important part of your life after your competitive career.

ABDI BILE: Interesting. First, I came to-- one summer, I came and visited Minneapolis. And when I came, I met the mayor, Mayor Frey, whom I had known before.

NINA MOINI: Mayor Frey.

ABDI BILE: Yeah, Mayor Frey, and I met a large community here. I interacted with them and meet so many of them. And I got great reception from everyone, good vibe all around. I was just like, wow, this city, these people, this mayor, this is a good place. Plus, I found out that Minneapolis and Minnesota is really beautiful in the summer because I used to only hear that it's very cold. It's very cold called Why did Somali-- so some people even go there?

So I just had a negative ideas in a way. But Minneapolis, Minnesota, this region is really beautiful. The 10,000 lakes. I've been to a lot of lakes and a lot of running trails and bike paths, and I really enjoy it and said, wow this is a good place to be. And that was my encounter and my kind of just coming first time and just loving it.

NINA MOINI: Abdi, I wonder before-- we just have a couple minutes left. I wish we had more time together, but I do want to know just what your message would be to other-- maybe they're young runners, or maybe just young people who, maybe similar to Samia or so many other people, know that they have the talent and the drive, but that that isn't always going to be enough. What do you tell people? And I mean, I know you coach and mentor people all the time. What do you say to young people to motivate them to keep going?

ABDI BILE: Just basically what I promote and I make a difference is just to encourage our community, Somali community, and the rest of the Minneapolis. I train youth, I train adults both in Somalis and non-Somalis. And overall, my mission is to promote active health lifestyle and outdoor activities.

So the kids, I encourage more. This is their outlet, this is where-- I mean, we're just talking Samia. And without having the opportunities, without having the right place, without having the right support. Nothing, but she had a passion and she had a goals and she had a full life of energy, of trying to be the best you could be.

But you are here. You have everything. Everything in your discretion. Please take advantage. This beautiful country, this beautiful land, all the support you get from your parents, from schools, from educators. And just find the niche that really feels right for you.

NINA MOINI: The inspiration is there.

ABDI BILE: But be active. Be active.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, and the inspiration is there from--

ABDI BILE: --it's the most important thing.

NINA MOINI: Absolutely, and I just wanted to say the inspiration is there for them through Samia Yusuf Omar's story and through your actions and your story and tribute here as well. Abdi Bile, thank you very much for your time. We appreciate you.

ABDI BILE: Thank you so much for having me.

NINA MOINI: Take care. Abdi Bile is a world-champion runner. He now coaches and mentors young runners in Minnesota and is featured in ESPN's new podcast, *The Fastest Girl in Somalia*.