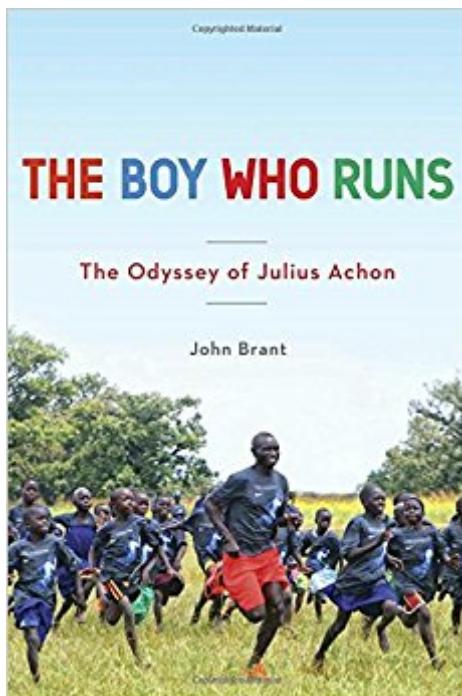


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# The Boy Who Runs: The Odyssey Of Julius Achon



## Synopsis

In the tradition of Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* by way of Christopher McDougall’s *Born to Run*, this is the inspirational true story of the Ugandan boy soldier who became a world-renowned runner, then found his calling as director of a world-renowned African children’s charity. “Julius can’t remember who first saw the men. He heard no warning sounds—no dog barking or twig snapping. Until this point, events had moved too swiftly for Julius to be afraid, but now panic seized him. In another instant, he realized that his old life was finished.” Thus begins the extraordinary odyssey of Julius Achon, a journey that takes a barefoot twelve-year-old boy from a village in northern Uganda to the rebel camp of the notorious Lord’s Resistance Army, where he was made a boy soldier, and then, miraculously, to a career as one of the world’s foremost middle-distance runners. But when a devastating tragedy prevents Julius from pursuing the gold at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, he is once again set adrift and forced to forge a new path for himself, finally finding his true calling as an internationally recognized humanitarian. Today, Julius is the director of the Achon Uganda Children’s Fund, a charity whose mission is to improve the quality of life in rural Uganda through access to healthcare, education, and athletics. While pursuing his destiny, Julius encounters a range of unforgettable characters who variously befriend and betray him: the demonic Joseph Kony, a “world-class warlord”; John Cook, a brilliant and eccentric U.S. track coach; Jim Fee, an American businessman who helps Julius build a state-of-the-art medical center deep in the Ugandan bush; and finally Kristina, Julius’s mother, whose own tragic journey forms the pivot for this spellbinding narrative of love, loss, suffering, and redemption. Written by award-winning sportswriter John Brant, *The Boy Who Runs* is an empowering tale of obstacles overcome, challenges met, and light wrested from darkness. It’s a story about forging your true path and finding your higher purpose—even when the road ahead bends in unexpected directions. Advance praise for *The Boy Who Runs*: “Brant proves again why he is one of our best sportswriters, masterfully weaving a compelling narrative of an African country at war, along with the transformation of a young man from athlete to humanitarian. . . . [Achon’s] life story is a shining example of the Olympic spirit.” Booklist (starred review): “Fantastic . . . Brant does a beautiful job of chronicling the tension. . . . Indeed, his work is first-rate throughout the book, and it makes for a read-in-one-sitting story.” Publishers Weekly (starred review): “Inspiring . . . Achon’s difficult journey as an athlete and humanitarian reveals how sport can provide a valuable avenue of hope for those seeking to rise above tragic

circumstances.Ã¢ ¸Ã¢ ¸â •Library JournalÃ¢ ¸Ã“This is an astonishing story about an amazing athlete who outruns not only the grinding poverty and deprivation of the Ugandan bush but brutal war and imminent death, then dedicates himself to saving his family and friends. This man has the heart of a lion. I couldnÃ¢ ¸â„¢t put this book down.Ã¢ ¸Ã¢ ¸â •John L. Parker, Jr., author of Once a Runner Ã¢ ¸Ã“An instant classic . . . John Brant has given us an epic, moving, and ultimately hopeful story about the power of sport and friendship to transcend boundaries and make the world a better place.Ã¢ ¸Ã¢ ¸â •Daniel Coyle, author of The Talent Code

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

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AchonÃ¢ ¸â„¢s difficult journey as an athlete and humanitarian reveals how sport can provide a valuable avenue of hope for those seeking to rise above tragic circumstances, and how true sportsmanship is not about winning but about harnessing strength that contributes to creating a better world.Ã¢ ¸Ã¢ ¸â •Library JournalÃ¢ ¸Ã“Inspiring . . . With breezy, accessible prose,

Brant's profile incorporates African history and insider details on the physical demands of race-running, strategies for success, and how Achon personally paved the way for others like him to succeed with pride and humanitarianism both on the track and in everyday life. A bright, uplifting biography about determination and giving back. *Kirkus Reviews* "This is an astonishing story about an amazing athlete who outruns not only the grinding poverty and deprivation of the Ugandan bush but brutal war and imminent death, then dedicates himself to saving his family and friends. This man has the heart of a lion. I couldn't put this book down." •John L. Parker, Jr., author of *Once a Runner* "An instant classic . . . John Brant has given us an epic, moving, and ultimately hopeful story about the power of sport and friendship to transcend boundaries and make the world a better place." •Daniel Coyle, author of *The Talent Code* "Ace writer John Brant unearths meanings and connections forged in the fires of competition. Julius Achon runs for his life, then for his sport, and finally for his people. This is a book you can't put down and won't forget." •Benjamin Cheever, author of *Strides: Running Through History with an Unlikely Athlete* "The Boy Who Runs" tells Julius Achon's story with gripping detail and anecdote, while never once slipping into cliché or sentimentality. It's an inspiring tale of linked cultures •African and American •and what they can achieve together. •Amby Burfoot, *editor-at-large, Runner* "World

John Brant is the author of *Duel in the Sun: Alberto Salazar, Dick Beardsley, and America's Greatest Marathon*. He is a writer at large for *Runner* and a contributor to publications ranging from *Outside* to *The New York Times Magazine*. Brant's stories have appeared numerous times in the annual *Best American Sports Writing* collection. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

John Brant's masterful telling of Julius Achon's inspirational story is a marvelous gift to any reader. I felt as if I was right there with Julius through his seemingly insurmountable challenges and his numerous hard-fought triumphs. Brant's ability to "see" through Julius' eyes helped me to understand and appreciate Julius' character, forged under extraordinary circumstances. As this story unfolds it illuminates salient aspects of both Ugandan and American cultures. Achon is clearly a role model for the ages and Brant is a gifted writer at the top of his game.

I have a huge collection of books on Africa. This is a good addition to my library.

This is a great read. If you would enjoy a real insight into how part of national track and field works, learning more about Africa and how an individual overcomes great odds to go beyond the limits of his village, then chances are you will truly love this book. Great background research as well.

how can you not be inspired by the story of remarkable determination, vision, and dedication to family and community. anyone who thinks they have overcome hardships in their life can put things in their proper perspective by reading this story.

An inspiring story easily read in a sitting or two. The writing style is simple but the story of the protagonist alone is enough to grip the reader and keep one hooked. Would recommend for runners.

It was very hard to put it down after I started reading. Amazing story! A must read!

When we watch the Olympics this week, or anytime we watch coverage of a major marathon or track event, it's hard not to notice the dominance of African runners. Unless you have some reason not to, you might assume you know their stories, and assume that their stories are all pretty much the same. In some ways, Julius Achon fits the stereotype of the African runner who quickly rises to the ranks of world-class athletes. But as John Brant writes in *The Boy Who Runs: The Odyssey of Julius Achon*, Achon's story diverges from the stereotype in many ways. Achon grew up in the tiny village of Awake, in northern Uganda. His family was so poor they couldn't afford a plastic jerrycan to fetch water. Julius used to run away from school when the teacher asked him to pay his school fees. He expected that he might join the army or the police, or, more likely, become a farmer like his dad. When Julius was a boy, Joseph Kony was beginning his reign of terror in Uganda. A band of Kony's men raided Awake, kidnapping Julius and some other boys. Forced to march cross country and serve at the behest of one of the "captains," Julius spent several months as a boy soldier. Finally, during an attack on Kony's men, Julius was able to escape and return to his family in Awake. At school, Julius began to distinguish himself as a runner. When he qualified for a meet forty miles away, he could not find anyone to drive him there. So he ran the forty miles, and the next day swept the three events in which he competed. (He was thrilled with the prize: a jerrycan to carry water!) He then won at a national meet in Kampala, accepted a scholarship to an elite prep school

there, and became an elite runner. The world running community took notice, and he went to George Mason University, where he set an NCAA record and led his team to an indoor national championship. His appearance at the Atlanta Olympics was a disappointment, but, for a while, he was among the best middle-distance runners in the world. With his running career faltering, he supported himself by running small races around Portugal for cash. Eventually his old college coach invited him to be a pacer for runners he was training in the U.S. That job got Julius back to the U.S., working out on the Nike campus in Portland, and selling running gear at the Nike employee store. For a runner who had aspirations for world championships and Olympic gold, and realistic potential to get there, all of this was a let down. In his doubts, "the means by which he had temporarily escaped Uganda--running around in circles faster than the next guy--suddenly seemed like a pathetic sham." However, during all this time of running for cash prizes and working for subsistence wages, he faithfully sent a large portion of his earnings back to Uganda. He bought land for his family, where they built a compound, keeping them relatively safe from the unrest around them and enabling them to care for war orphans. Eventually, with the help of a partner in the U.S., Achon not only supported orphans but built a clinic in his old hometown. He began to realize that none of the good he was able to do would have been possible without his running. "For a long time he had felt bad about his running, as if he had failed to make full use of the gift God had given him. But as the foundation grew, he concluded that his disappointments with running were all part of God's plan." Achon's life turned out to be a strange series of contrasts between life in Uganda and outside of it. In Portugal he lived in borrowed space in the basement of an athletic club, but it was a palace compared to his family's living conditions. In the U.S. he made so little money, with no benefits, that most high school graduates would scoff, but he still sent half his salary home, where it was a small fortune. As he neared the opening of the health clinic, he reflected that "Here in Uganda, he may be courted by the president. In America, however, Julius had been just another migrant from an unlucky country, hustling back to the storeroom to fetch a pair of size nines." *The Boy Who Runs* does not sugar coat the life of the athlete. Nor does it idealize life in Africa--far from it. Brant does show, in the remarkable life of Julius Achon, that even when life doesn't seem to be going your way, there may be a bigger plan than what we can see in the short term. Achon achieved that bigger plan through his hard work, his devotion to his family, his devotion to God (about which I would like to have heard more), and his discipline to get up and run. Thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for the complimentary electronic review copy!

*The Boy Who Runs: The Odyssey of Julius Achon* by Julius Achon, and John Brant is the story of

Julius Achon, who was born in Uganda. The story follows Julius Achon who rose from nothing. He grew up in a small village and eventually he became a world class middle distance runner. He was able to compete in the Olympics and now he does humanitarian work to improve life in Uganda and where ever there is a need. The reader first learns about Achon's childhood. The good and the bad. Throughout the beginning of the story, the reader learns early on that there is something special about Julius. Achon does not always do the right thing, but he tries his best to do so. As he grows so does his running. Eventually he makes it to the US to train and become an Olympic runner. The reader is able to follow Achon through his life. The reader sees how his choices are not always his. The authors did his research to get to know Achon and the important people in Achon's life. In the end, there is a hopefulness and happiness in seeing the kind of man Achon has grown into. Brant also seems to understand what it is to be a runner, based on how he describes Achon's training regimes and how they affect him along the way. This is a book for any runner, and really anyone wanting to hear an uplifting story of a man growing out of poverty only to turn around and help those still in it. I received this book from Random House Publishing Group- Ballantine, and Ballantine Books via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

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