

= Zersenay Tadese =

Zersenay Tadese (Tigrinya : ?????? ??? ; born 8 February 1982) is an Eritrean long @-@ distance track , and road running athlete . He currently holds the men 's half marathon world record . His bronze medal in the 10 @,@ 000 metres at the 2004 Athens Olympics made him the first ever Eritrean Olympic medallist , and his 20 km title at the 2006 IAAF World Road Running Championships also made him the country 's first athlete to win at a world championship event . He does not use a sprint finish to win races : his strategy relies upon a combination of efficient running and fast pace setting .

Zersenay (' Tadese ' is his father 's name) has found most of his success over the half marathon distance , with four consecutive victories in the World Half Marathon Championships from 2006 to 2009 , a fifth title in 2012 , and a world record at the Lisbon Half Marathon in 2010 . He has also excelled in cross country running , winning a gold , one silver , and two bronze medals in the long distance race over five IAAF World Cross Country Championships . He is a three @-@ time Olympian (2004 , 2008 and 2012) .

In 2009 Zersenay became only the second man (after Paul Tergat) to win three World Championship medals over three different surfaces in the same year : winning World Cross Country bronze , 10 @,@ 000 metres World Championship silver on the track , and gold in road running at the World Half Marathon Championships . He is a popular public figure in his home country ; 2500 guests attended his wedding to Merhawit Solomon , which was broadcast live on Eritrean television . His brother , Kidane Tadese , is also a professional distance runner .

= = Career = =

= = = Early life = = =

Zersenay Tadese was born in Adi Bana , Eritrea , and had a peaceful , rural upbringing with his six siblings , largely avoiding the troubles of the Eritrean War of Independence . He became interested in cycling in his teenage years and , after winning a number of races , he set his sights upon becoming a professional cyclist in Europe . However , the races of 30 ? 50 km fell short of the distances needed to compete on the European circuit and he was ill @-@ prepared for a transition to top @-@ level cycling .

He was a relative late @-@ comer to competitive running : in his late teens , scouts from a local athletics club suggested that his cycling stamina might translate to running and invited him to compete . He won the race and was spurred on by the victory to start taking the sport seriously and focus on running . Zersenay was adamant that his early years in cycling had given him a firm foundation for endurance running .

His first foray into the international athletics circuit came in 2002 , when he attended the 2002 IAAF World Cross Country Championships in Dublin . Although he was wearing ill @-@ fitting shoes and was somewhat puzzled at hearing a starting gun for the first time , he managed to finish in 30th place with a time of 36 minutes and 37 seconds . However , he remained some distance off the winner Kenenisa Bekele . He competed at his first IAAF World Half Marathon Championships in May of that year , finishing just outside the top twenty runners with a time of 1 : 03 : 05 . He competed on the track at the African Athletics Championships , taking sixth place in the 10 @,@ 000 metres race in Radès , Tunisia , rounding off a modest debut year .

The 2003 season saw Zersenay establish himself as an emerging force in cross country : he broke into the top ten at the 2003 IAAF World Cross Country Championships , and finished in the top three in all of his six races in Europe that winter . A 5000 metres win at the KBC Night of Athletics brought Zersenay an Eritrean record of 13 : 11 @.@ 07 , and a place at the IAAF World Championships in Athletics . At the 2003 World Championships , he improved his record further to 13 : 05 @.@ 57 and finished in eighth place in the 5000 metres final . More improvements came at the World Half Marathon Championships in Vilamoura , Portugal , where he recorded a personal best of 1 : 01 : 26

to finish in seventh position .

= = = Olympic medallist = = =

The 2004 season represented a breakthrough for Zersenay and he established himself as a serious contender in distance running . He signed a contract with Adidas Spain and brought the team victory at the European Clubs ' Cross Country Cup in February . The following month he bettered his previous showings at the World Cross Country Championships with a sixth @-@ place finish . With the help of team mates Yonas Kifle and Tesfayohannes Mesfen , among others , he took Eritrea to third position in the team competition ? the first time the country had reached the podium at a world cross country event . Two months later he finished second in the 10 km Great Manchester Run ; his time of 27 : 59 was five seconds behind winner Craig Mottram . He took to the track in June at a meeting in Gavà , Spain , and recorded another national record , this time in the 10 @,@ 000 m with a time of 27 : 32 @.@ 61 .

The peak of his season came at the 2004 Athens Olympics , where he became the first person in Eritrean sporting history to win an Olympic medal . Zersenay took the bronze in the 10 @,@ 000 metres at the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens , Greece behind Kenenisa Bekele , and Sileshi Sihine . His performance of 27 : 22 @.@ 57 represented a dramatic improvement as he had beaten his previous best by ten seconds , despite unfavourably hot conditions . Zersenay refused to politicise his medal win behind his Ethiopian counterparts , stating : " we have always been friends with the Ethiopians . Now we are a nation ... I can say I am very happy . " The Eritrean @-@ born runner Meb Keflezighi , representing the United States , won silver in the marathon a few days later , highlighting the country 's improving standards . Zersenay finished his first Olympics by reaching another event final : he took seventh place in the men 's 5000 metres race , confirming his position as a world @-@ class runner .

He opened 2005 with a second win in the European Clubs ' Cross Country Cup . He won his first World Cross Country Championship medal soon after , finishing second to Bekele to take silver at the 2005 edition . On the track , he recorded a 5000 m personal best of at the Qatar Grand Prix in Doha , and qualified to compete at the World Championships in both the 5000 and 10 @,@ 000 m . At the 2005 World Championships , he broke the national record in the 10 @,@ 000 m final , but his time of 27 : 12 @.@ 82 was only enough for sixth . The 5000 m final held little reprieve for the Eritrean as he finished in second last position . He ended the season on a positive note , however , improving his 10 @,@ 000 m best to 27 : 04 @.@ 70 at the Memorial Van Damme , and winning the Great North Run with a world best time of 59 : 05 ? which was only his second outing over the half marathon distance .

= = = Road and cross country world champion = = =

Zersenay failed to make the podium for a second time at the 2006 World Cross Country Championships , but his fourth @-@ place finish headed the Eritrean team towards silver medal in the team competition . The following month , Zersenay overcame both Fabiano Joseph and Boniface Kiprop to win the Great Manchester Run . He sprinted to the line with a finishing time of 27 : 36 ; an Eritrean record and the second fastest that year . In August that year , he significantly improved his 10 @,@ 000 m best at Memorial Van Damme ; his time of 26 : 37 @.@ 25 knocked almost thirty seconds off his previous mark , but he still finished behind the emerging Micah Kogo who ran the tenth fastest ever time . A new best of 59 : 16 by Zersenay at the Rotterdam Half Marathon equalled Samuel Wanjiru 's course record and boded well for the upcoming championship race .

He scored a striking victory at the 2006 IAAF World Road Running Championships in Debrecen , Hungary , finishing the 20 km race in 56 : 01 ? a time which was second only to Haile Gebrselassie 's world record and was forty seconds faster than the silver medallist Robert Kipchumba . It was first time that an Eritrean had won a major world title in sport . As Zersenay did not possess a strong sprint finish (crucial for success on the track) commentators suggested that a move to the

marathon distance seemed an obvious career progression , but he downplayed the idea , stating that he would not change distances in the near future . He closed the season with a run at the New Year 's Eve 10 km road race : the San Silvestre Vallecana in Madrid . Zersenay and Eliud Kipchoge were awarded the same time of 26 : 54 , but Kipchoge was announced as the race winner . Although this was faster than Haile Gebrselassie 's world record of 27 : 02 at the time , it was not ratifiable as the runners benefited from the race 's downhill circuit .

The 2007 season brought Zersenay his greatest medal haul , as he succeeded on grass , track and road . For the first time in his career he overcame all opposition , including five @-@ time champion Kenenisa Bekele , to become the 2007 World Cross Country Champion . The hot conditions in Mombasa forced a number of runners out of the race , but Zersenay maintained his pace to finish over twenty seconds ahead of the next runner . At the Cáceres Half Marathon , he stated his intention to try for the world record and , although he won the race , poor pacing left him some distance from a record time . He returned to the Great Manchester Run and again improved his best , recording 27 : 24 , but this was not enough to beat Micah Kogo who won in a UK all @-@ comers record time . He competed at the Prefontaine Classic for the first time , and set a two miles best of 8 : 19 @. @ 34 , although he was some distance behind winner Craig Mottram .

The 2007 All @-@ Africa Games represented a double landmark victory for Zersenay : he became the first Eritrean medallist in the competition 's history , and won his first ever gold medal on the track , sealing victory in the 10 @,@ 000 m final with a Games record time of 27 : 00 @. @ 30 . The following month he competed at the 2007 World Championships in Athletics , and he edged closer to a podium finish ? he led the 10 @,@ 000 m race up to the 8 km mark , setting a fast pace , but ultimately ended up in fourth position . Preparing for the road championships that year , he ran the 10 @-@ mile Dam tot Damloop race in September and won in 45 : 51 (the world 's fastest that season) , finishing some distance ahead of runners up Bernard Kipyego and James Rotich . Zersenay emphasised his position as one of the world 's most dominant half marathon runners with a second victory at the 2007 IAAF World Road Running Championships in Udine , Italy . Although he was close to world record pace at the 15 km point , he slowed behind the leading pack of Makau Musyoki , Evans Kiprop Cheruiyot and Deriba Merga . In the final kilometre , he burst away to take the lead and the gold medal , setting a national and championship record time of 58 : 59 in the process . Following these achievements , a medical team did a study of his running economy and found him to be one of the most efficient runners ever to be tested .

= = = World Half Marathon champion = = =

Bekele was keen to regain his cross country title from Zersenay and the 2008 cross country season was a competitive one . At the Great Edinburgh International Cross Country race , Zersenay was pipped by the Ethiopian at the line , finishing just one second behind . The following month , Zersenay beat Eliud Kipchoge to win the Cinque Mulini race in the buildup to the 2008 IAAF World Cross Country Championships . On the day of the Championship race in Edinburgh , Scotland , Zersenay took the lead early on and set a strong pace at the mid @-@ race point . However , near the finish Bekele and Kenyan Leonard Komon surged ahead to leave Zersenay as the bronze medallist .

A win at the World 10K Bangalore , where he beat Moses Kipsiro in 27 : 51 , was the highlight of a low @-@ key build up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics . In August , Zersenay was among some forty runners competing for the medals in the 10 @,@ 000 metres Olympic final . Zersenay 's brother , Kidane , was also competing and he led for most of first half of what was a quick race . Zersenay Tadesse had the lead at the 7 ? 8000 m mark but Bekele and Sihine sprinted into first and second . Although Zersenay 's time almost equalled the previous Olympic record for the event , he ended up one second behind Kenyans Moses Masai and Micah Kogo , taking fifth place overall .

After the Olympics , Zersenay returned to Eritrea and trained for one month to prepare for the 2008 World Half Marathon Championships in Rio de Janeiro . He won his third consecutive title over the half marathon distance with ease , taking the lead early on and beating the second @-@ placed Patrick Makau Musyoki by almost two minutes . His success caused much celebration in his home

country , so much so that the President of Eritrea greeted him at the airport upon his return . With a strong history in the half marathon , Zersenay announced he would try the full marathon distance the following season .

Zersenay took third place at the 2009 IAAF World Cross Country Championships in a closely contested race , finishing just behind a resurgent Gebregziabher Gebremariam and Ugandan runner Moses Kipsiro . He competed in his first ever full @-@ length marathon in April , signing up for the London Marathon . His first appearance over the distance was much anticipated following his cross country and track success , but he could not finish the race , pulling out around the 35 km mark .

He rebounded , however , taking silver in the 10 @,@ 000 metres at the 2009 World Championships in Athletics , finishing behind Kenenisa Bekele . Zersenay had led for a large part of the race , setting a fast pace , but he was beaten to the gold by Bekele 's sprint finish . Following this , he won his third World Half Marathon title , setting a Championship record of 59 : 35 and also winning a silver medal with Eritrea in the team competition . The gold medal over the half marathon distance made him the second runner ever to win a World Championship medal in cross country , track and road racing all in the same year , a feat achieved previously by only Paul Tergat .

= = = Half marathon world record = = =

Zersenay 's first road race of 2010 was the Lisbon Half Marathon . The organisers had modified the course and assembled a field of fast runners in order to facilitate a quick race . Despite the top five athletes all running personal best times , Zersenay was alone at the very front from 10 km onwards . He fell four seconds short of the 15 km world record , but significantly revised Haile Gebrselassie 's four @-@ year @-@ old 20 km world mark to 55 : 21 , beating it by almost half a minute . Samuel Wanjiru 's half marathon world record was next to fall as Zersenay crossed the line at 58 : 23 minutes , a clear ten seconds ahead of the previous mark .

He managed to finish his first full @-@ marathon at the 2010 London Marathon , although his time of 2 : 12 : 03 for seventh place was not as strong a transition as expected . He made his first appearance at the Giro di Castelbuono in Sicily in July and , although he described the course as " very hard " , he won the race ahead of Samuel Wanjiru . He attempted for yet another title at the 2010 IAAF World Half Marathon Championships , but Wilson Kiprop brought an end to his four @-@ year reign ? the Eritrean took the silver medal , labouring towards the end and pulling up in injured at the line . He was still suffering from the injury at the San Silvestre Vallecana some two months later , although he managed to beat Ayad Lamdassem to win the race .

He was at full strength at the 2011 Lisbon Half Marathon : he missed his world record mark but ran the second fastest of all @-@ time (58 : 30 minutes) . In the outdoor track season he ran 26 : 51 @.@ 09 minutes for the 10 @,@ 000 m at the Prefontaine Classic and came close to a personal best with a win at the Barcelona Meeting with a time of 12 : 59 @.@ 32 minutes . Making his fourth consecutive appearance in the event , he took fourth place in the men 's 10 @,@ 000 m at the 2011 World Championships in Athletics . He ended the year with road wins at the Porto Half Marathon and the São Silvestre de Luanda , setting course records of 59 : 30 minutes and 27 : 44 minutes , respectively .

At the 2012 World 's Best 10K he came third , beaten by Sammy Kitwara and Vincent Chepkok . He won the Lisbon Half Marathon for the third straight year , but was slower than previous times (59 : 34) due to warm conditions and having the flu . A run at the 2012 London Marathon saw him perform better than he did in 2010 , but he lost touch with the leading pack after the half @-@ way point and came fourteenth with a time of 2 : 10 : 41 hours . He was chosen as Eritrea 's flag bearer at the 2012 London Olympics and ran in the 10 @,@ 000 metres final . He set the pace early on in the race but was defeated in the sprint finish , finishing in sixth place some three seconds behind the winner Mo Farah . After the Olympics he ran at the 2012 World Half Marathon Championships . He dominated the race from just beyond the 5 km point , and won it convincingly in a time of 1 : 00 : 19 hours , 32 seconds ahead of the runner @-@ up , Deressa Chimsa . Only two weeks later he entered the Great Birmingham Run , but he appeared tired and finished third in a race where the top three all dipped under Haile Gebrselassie 's course record .

== 2013 ? 14 seasons ==

Zersenay managed only seventh at the World 's Best 10K in February but returned to the top of the podium in his speciality at the Prague Half Marathon , edging out his training partner Amanuel Mesel with a time of 60 : 10 . He clocked another win over the distance at the Gifu Seiryu Half Marathon , beating the defending champion Martin Mathathi and setting a course record of 60 : 31 minutes . In October , he attempted to run the Chicago Marathon , but dropped out shortly after the halfway point . He did not compete again until February 2014 , when he won at the small Cáceres cross country in Spain .

== Personal life ==

A quietly spoken athlete , he frequently states that his victories are a tribute to his country . Eritrea is one of Africa 's newest and least populous countries , and Zersenay 's achievements on the world athletics stage have made him one of the country 's most identifiable sportsmen . He is a popular public figure in his home country ; 2500 guests attended his wedding to Merhawit Solomon , which was broadcast live on Eritrean television . His brother , Kidane Tadese , is also a professional distance runner who has competed at the World Cross Country Championships and the 2008 Summer Olympics .

== Personal bests ==

All information taken from IAAF profile .

== Major competition record ==