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# I'm running the marathon to help these kids ... and to beat Ed Balls

## THE DISPOSSESSED FUND

David Cohen Campaigns Editor

WHEN Sadiq Khan was asked to run the 2014 Virgin Money London Marathon for the Evening Standard Dispossessed Fund, his response was emphatic: "No way!"

The shadow minister for London and shadow justice secretary instructed his parliamentary office staff: "Find me an excuse, any excuse, to tell the Standard, 'NO'"

But when the 43-year-old Labour MP for Tooting discussed the offer with his

wife Saadiya, a solicitor like him, her reply took him by surprise.

"You're just being a big chicken," she said, before extracting promises that any training routine would not be at the cost of family time.

By the time Mr Khan met me a few days later to give his final decision, his eyes were bulging with fear.

"I have never run more than 10 kilometres in my life and to be frank I am terrified," he said, before launching into a litany of why it was a terrible idea.

"My big problem is my right nipple. My



staff find it extremely funny whenever I mention this, but when it starts rubbing against my shirt, it's no joke."

He paused. "Okay," he said, bubbling over with enthusiasm. "I'm in, I'm committed, I'm bloody going to do it! I compare it to the scene in Rocky II when Rocky is training with his coach

and can't catch the chicken and his wife turns to him and says, 'Win,' and once he has his wife's backing, he catches the chicken."

To be fair to Mr Khan, who is touted as a 2016 London mayoral candidate, we had asked him to run only five days before entries closed on January 31.

Most runners training for the London Marathon would have had a good four to eight-week head start. Mr Khan would have only 10 weeks to ramp up from 10km to 42.2km.

I told him that I had faced a similar challenge when I first ran the London Marathon two years ago. I also told



him he was in for the toughest, most painful, but most exhilarating day of his life.

He would be the highest profile member of our team of five – including me and three friends, Patrick Tobin, Derek Lubner and Carolina Graterol – running to raise money for the £1.2 million Dispossessed Fund, launched by the Standard four years ago to tackle inequality in London.

So why had he decided to catch the chicken? "It's one of those things I've had on my to-do list before I die." He grinned. "And then there is the Ed Balls factor."

"Our shadow chancellor is running the London Marathon for the third time and for two months before the race, he becomes unbearable, in the nicest possible way of course, and you hear of nothing else. [Although] actually he's been encouraging and has given me loads of advice."

But most importantly, Mr Khan said, it was the opportunity to raise awareness for the Dispossessed Fund that convinced him the time was right.

"I grew up on the Henry Prince Estate in south London, the son of a bus driver, and if not for the positive family influence I was blessed with, I could have been one of the dispossessed. Few of my peers on the estate went to college and some ended up in prison."

"Recently I was on a visit to Wandsworth prison when I heard someone call my name and I turned round to see a guy I had grown up with who was inside for drugs."

"So the cause of the Dispossessed Fund is close to my heart, because I know many people who have taken wrong turns and who are helped by the hundreds of charities supported by the Dispossessed Fund, including in my constituency."

Mr Khan is patron of one of the Dispossessed grantees, the Klevis Kola Foundation, which received a

£5,500 grant in 2011. It provides advocacy and support for local refugee and asylum-seeking families – some of whom we arranged to meet a few weeks later.

By now it was late February. Mr Khan had been training for three weeks and was gearing up to do his first half-marathon, hoping for a creditable sub-two-hour time.

How was it going? "I feel great!" he beamed. "I run 10km twice a week and do my long slow run on Sundays and so far I have built up to 20km, so I'm halfway there."

"I bought new trainers, a tub of Vaseline to sort out my nipples, and I've cut out the late night kebabs. I've never slept better and I've lost half a

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Sadiq Khan

stone, a whole notch on my belt. People stop me and say, 'you've lost weight, what's your secret?' I even get the odd person saying I look like George Clooney!"

He has kept his entry into the marathon secret, until now. "Ed Balls tried to out me the other day at a Chinese for Labour party fundraiser by telling the audience that not only was he running the marathon, again, but that I would be joining him. It got a good laugh. People clearly thought, 'Sadiq is not that stupid.'"

Over at Tooting Bec Athletics Track, children helped by the Klevis Kola Foundation had gathered to give Mr Khan's marathon hopes a boost by racing him around the track.

Mustafa, 10, had his doubts. He slowly shook his head, saying: "I think you are going to humiliate your-



## News

Ready, steady... got Sadiq Khan trains at Tooting Bec Athletics Track with children helped by the Klevis Kola Foundation, far left, and with the Standard's David Cohen, left

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