

Kevin Thompson's personal journey has taken him near and far

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Kevin Thompson's personal journey has been an interesting one, and he's about to add a new chapter. (Derek Alvez/Staten Island Advance)

The journey is never-ending for Cornell assistant track coach and native Staten Islander **Kevin Thompson**.

The 50-year-old Curtis graduate got himself into the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, where he ran track, then into Cornell's graduate program. He then attended the Kennedy School at Harvard and became a firefighter in the city of Brookline, Mass., just outside of Boston.

That was before heading to Ithaca College where he coached the school's track team and founding the Ithaca United Youth Track Club for kids ages 9-13.

"I'm involved in a lot of things," said Thompson, in what is surely an understatement. "I'm kind of all over the place."

But it's the Big Red program that has always been in Thompson's heart.

Seven years ago, Cornell head coach **Nathan Taylor** convinced Thompson to return to his former school. Since, they have won six straight Ivy League Outdoor Championships and 3 of the last 5 Indoor titles.

"I want to say it's all me," laughed Thompson, whose team also won the 2008 Heptagonal Championship with a meet record 205 team points and another record for margin of victory (56 points over rival Princeton). "But seriously, this coaching staff does a great job. Coach Nathan Taylor just has an unbelievable work ethic. We really work well together and we make sure the team is well-prepared."

Recently, Thompson has spent a lot of time on a different endeavor, Cross World Africa, his not-for-profit organization that was born out of his friendship with **Dr. Kipchoge "Kip" Keino**, the legendary Kenyan runner who upset heavy American favorite **Jim Ryun** in the 1,500 meters at the 1968 Olympics.

"It's so surreal," said Thompson, who said he remembers watching Keino's Mexico City gold-medal winning performance at home with his brother. "You idolize someone and now they become one of your best friends?"

Cross World Africa helps prepare students in Africa for the SAT to give them a better chance to get into American universities. And while Thompson spends a lot of time with that, now it's time to hit the track and he is re-focused.

"I absolutely think we can do it," he said of Cornell's prospects of going for a seventh straight Ivy Outdoor Championship and fourth Indoor in six seasons. "What I've learned in my time here is that the beauty of establishing this type of program is that it doesn't matter if you lose great athletes, because the kids you brought into the system really step up to replace them. And we lost a great graduating class, including (former Advance All Star) **Saidu Ezike**, who had a great career."

This will likely be Thompson's last year as Cornell assistant, as he plans to move to New Orleans, where his wife, **Michelle** (a Ph.D. from Cornell), has accepted a professorship at the University of New Orleans.

"This is my dream job. And we have a dynasty. Unfortunately, I think it's going to be my last year," said Thompson. "This will be sort of my farewell year, I guess, so I am really going to be on these guys."

The Park Hill native says he'll focus more on Cross World Africa, but the move doesn't mean he'll give up coaching for good.

"I never say never," said Thompson.

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