The best athletes on the planet will gather in Tokyo this summer, hoping to etch their names in the Olympic record books. For track star Noah Lyles, it’s a convergence of passions. The 2019 world champion is a favorite for the medals podium, having posted the year’s fastest 200-meter time at the U.S. Olympic track and field trials. Off the track, Lyles is as colorful as he is thoughtful. The 24-year-old Alexandria native is a connoisseur of anime and manga, Japan’s popular forms of storytelling, utilized for fiction and nonfiction alike. For “Chasing Gold,” Washington Post reporters interviewed Lyles and the people around him. Scenes reflect the subjects’ memories and other reporting, though some dialogue has been edited for length, clarity and style.

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The Washington Post
TOKYO OLYMPICS
Usain Bolt’s retirement has left an opening in the world of track and field, a vacant throne with no shortage of speedy sprinters eager to lay claim to the legend’s crown!

A young man from Virginia heads to Tokyo with his sights set on world records and gold medals. Noah Lyles will run the 200 meters and the 4x100-meter relay at the Summer Games. But to understand his Olympic journey, we have to go all the way back to the starting line...
I'm not sure about a frat party. The school year just started—

—and we need to meet some people, Keisha. We're going!

I hear you're a 400 runner. I run track, too.

Yeah, and you better get used to running behind me.

Noah!

I didn't know you had a dog!

The mom was an All-American and the father medaled at the world championships?

No wonder this little guy is in a hurry.

That's Noah. His asthma keeps us awake!

Mom, can he help me stop coughing?

He hasn't been to school in a month.

I hope that medicine works.
Gainesville, Fla., 2004

Call me WIND BOY!

Someone call me some help.

School? They’ll have to catch Wind Boy first!

...dyslexia and attention-deficit disorder. It’s a challenge.
Whoa, are you guys twins?

Nah, I'm 1 year, 4 days and 1 minute older than Josephus.

But I'm faster... depending on the day!

North Carolina, 2008

Go!

Dad, this is brrrrring.

Stop complaining. Just cuz they're faster than you--
Who’s faster now?

Those guys can run.

Baltimore, Md., 2012

...another gold medal for Usain Bolt and another Olympic record!

That’s gonna be us someday.
That was some race, kid!

Thanks. Here, I'm running to be the best, not prizes.

Boys, you've gotta decide. Schools keep calling!

Coach, we got questions--

--and they gotta pronounce Josephus's name.

University of Florida!

No national record is safe.

I'm gonna say that, too.

It doesn't matter what it is.

No national record is safe from us.
Dang. Just 0.09 from the Olympics.

Baby, you still set a high school record.

...it's Bolt again! The fastest man in history!

Next Olympics, they will be telling your story.
Alexandria, Va., 2016

You sure? No turning back.

College would be great, but we're ready.

Happy 18th birthday, little bro.

Clermont, Pa., 2017

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

You getting along with the other runners? They're Olympic medalists!

Mom, if you put them on a pedestal...

...you'll never beat them!
Kid, you ready to be the next Usain Bolt?

I just want to be the First Noah Lyles.

“Introducing the fastest man in the world…”

Let’s see them catch me.

The fans got what they wanted. Let’s do it again.
“Time to show them.”

Noah Lyles has just won both the 200 and the 4x100 relay. Look out, Tokyo!
Clermont, Fla., 2020

...virus spreading across the world...

...thus postponing the Olympics a full year...

...another black man killed at the hands of police, heightening racial tensions...

Mom, now I understand why you worry so much about me.

Noah Lyles, OLY @LylesNoah • May 31
It hurts my heart because as an athlete I love running for my country. But as a human being it is disheartening that my people are being killed while I go out and win medals for them to try and make the U.S. look good.

How are you coping with the unrest the entire nation is feeling right now?

Recently I decided to get on antidepressant medication. That was one of the best decisions I have made.
Monaco, 2020

And in Lane 7, from the United States, Noah Lyles

I see you, bro!
U.S. Olympic trials - Eugene, Ore. 2021

This is it - Tokyo or bust.

I think I've found a new state of mind, Coach.

I hope it's an aggressive state of mind.

Nah, it's a smooth state of mind.

—and that's the fastest time in the world this year! Noah Lyles is headed to Tokyo!
You're an Olympian, Noah. Tell us, what comes next?

I want it all. And I don't think I'm crazy for saying that.

The world is about to know Wind Boy, huh?

Nah, mom. But they'll know Noah Lyles.