

Give a Sporting Chance: The young christian orphanage at Nakamwa College, Uganda

Visit report – Dominic Brown (Tonbridge AC and Sheffield University) – July 2018

Apologies in advance for the length of this but since seeing it first-hand this is a cause really worth knowing about. As many of you reading this will know, Mark Hookway was recently approached by a fellow coach and keen runner from Uganda. He was asking for support for his orphanage that he is hoping to build, to give young runners from across Uganda, so that they can have a place to stay and train while they are studying at schools in the capital, Kampala.

Almost all of us have received those annoying scams from 'Nigerian princes' or dodgy sounding charities asking for money to help support families who, in reality, will never see a penny; and to many this could sound no different. However, Mark took a chance on this individual and delved a little deeper to find out more about this seemingly fantastic cause to aid talented individuals whose potential as athletes would otherwise be wasted.

As athletes from a comparatively very wealthy country, many of us have a plethora of spare kit that we end up just throwing away or that just sits in the back of our drawers, never to be used. With this in mind, and a better knowledge of the scheme in Uganda, Mark started rounding up all the spare kit he could from athletes at Tonbridge AC, resulting in a horde of 60kg to be donated to these athletes. Coincidentally, I was due to be heading out to Uganda to work in a local Kampala hospital while Mark was seeking a way to best get this kit out to Uganda. So asked me if I could meet up with Mukasa Edward, the coach behind charity which Tonbridge AC are donating to.

Mukasa was more than happy to show me around and gave me the opportunity to see first-hand the fantastic work he is doing. As well as being a devoted coach and a keen runner, Mukasa is a qualified physiotherapist and works as a teacher in a local Kampala school.

Uganda is an athletics mad nation, every person you speak to knows the results from the latest diamond leagues or recent area champs. Unfortunately, with hardly any funding available, this huge pool of talent is very rarely given the opportunity to realise their massive potential on a stage.

Since 2013, Mukasa has been helping to support disadvantaged children from villages outside of Kampala; merging his passion for athletics with a desire to support children from the poorest of backgrounds to get an opportunity for a stellar education, which otherwise would be impossible for them. Many of the top Schools in Kampala offer scholarships to the most talented athletes to come and compete for them while offering them a free education. Mukasa travels to the impoverished communities in villages outside of the city, seeking out the most talented and passionate athletes. Taking these athletes under his wing, he coaches them for a number of weeks/months before encouraging them to compete and display their immense talent to the schools and ensuring these children have an opportunity to escape the poverty that they have grown up in. Mukasa is a humble man and cannot himself provide the equipment for these children that is required to aid their progression as



Mukasa in his home, made up of a single room with a bed and some storage. As well as being a devoted coach he is a keen athlete himself

athletes, so relies heavily on any donations that he can get to help them. While at these schools these children not only have access to Mukasa and other coaches, but also a track they can train on, access to a gym and injury treatment; all of which are fundamental for athlete development.

In 2017, as his pool of athletes in education continued to grow, Mukasa bought a plot of land. This land was bought with the intention to build the Young Christian Orphanage. The use of the word orphanage in this sense is simply to provide a place to stay for these children while they are away from their families. Some of Mukasa's athletes live very far from the schools and in impoverished conditions, the orphanage gives them a place to stay and still be able to train throughout the year, even outside of school term time. Despite the land being bought a year ago, not much work has been done on the site so far. The cost to build an orphanage that can accommodate 12 children with running water and electricity on the site is around £10,500, this is money that very few in Uganda have anything close to. So, despite thorough plans laid out for the development and planning permission granted many months ago, Mukasa with the help of his athletes have only got as far as making the bricks required for the construction of the home.



Myself and Musagala, a friend of Mukasa and 1:45 800m runner, who helps with athlete coaching, stood by the track the athletes have access to.



The plot of land that Mukasa bought, using money from his own pocket and some donations. Progress so far has been slow as money is very tight. The orphanage when built will house 12 children giving them access to clean running water and electricity, a luxury to many in Uganda.



The athletes that Mukasa

first helped in 2013 are now at the point of graduating from their high schools. After speaking to a number of them it was fantastic to hear how the nurturing of their athletic talents has truly transformed their lives. Alongside a number of finalists in the Ugandan national senior championships, including a few winners and medallists, some of them are now looking for places at university to follow careers in engineering and medicine. A world away from the lives they would be living had Mukasa never sought out their talent and developed them as athletes and students. I would encourage anyone reading this piece to donate, if they can do this excellent cause so that Mukasa can continue this fantastic work and enhance the lives of these incredibly talented individuals.



A number of the athletes supported by Mukasa, many of whom have come from some of the poorest areas of Uganda now attending some of the top schools in Kampala.

Far right: Myself, Mukasa and the headteacher from one of the schools, a friend of Mukasa and big supporter of his project and huge athletics fan.