

Over in Uganda, they're cheering the Thunder

It's thanks to an effort to give kids a sporting chance

BY LISA WALLACE, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN APRIL 18, 2009

Algonquin College's sports teams have plenty of fans, but few realize that some of the Thunder's biggest live in Uganda.

Thanks to the generosity of athletic director Ron Port and former student Jimmy Sebulime, children in Uganda are wearing clean shirts and getting the opportunity to play sports they love.

Sebulime, who played four seasons with the Algonquin Thunder men's basketball team, now works for the Canada Africa Community Health Alliance, an organization that offers basic health care to isolated African villages.

In addition to the health care services, the alliance also helped build a resource centre in the small village of Kamengo, which included the construction of a basketball court.

For Sebulime, it was a huge accomplishment. He knows too well what the gesture means to the community's youth.

Sebulime, originally from Uganda, says there are many children who show promise, both academically and athletically, but have few opportunities at their disposal.

The 31-year-old considers himself extremely fortunate to have moved to Canada as an adolescent, but is determined to help make a difference for the children of Uganda.

"When I first came to Canada, I went to a boys and girls club and it was wonderful," Sebulime says. "We wanted to do something like that in Kamengo."

Sebulime says Port's generosity has supplied the centre with basketballs, soccer balls and various other sports equipment. Port has also donated T-shirts and used team apparel.

"We try to teach members of the community hygiene," said Sebulime. "Being able to give them clothes really helps. I was on their end at one point and getting these items gives them hope and vision."

Port is more than happy to help Sebulime. He believes the project is of value and is pleased for the chance to help a former student.

"Jimmy was always a hard worker both on and off the court," Port says. "He's a motivated individual who is dedicated to the projects in his homeland."

Sebulime says he'll always be grateful to Port for his friendship and support.

While he was a student at Algonquin, Port hired Sebulime to work at the athletic facility to help relieve some of the financial burden the young student was facing.

"He always looked after me," Sebulime says.

Port says seeing pictures of the youth from Uganda wearing the T-shirts with the Thunder logo brought home the importance of his gesture.

"It makes you feel like you are making a difference, as small as that may be," he says. "I am always kidding Jimmy, asking him to make them smile or laugh because they look so serious in the pictures."

Sebulime has been working with CACHA for four years and left Sunday for another trip to Kamengo, where he will be assisting on a 10-day medical mission.

For story ideas or comments, please contact lisa.burke1@sympatico.ca.

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Jimmy Sebulime, above, who played basketball for the Algonquin Thunder as a student, greets children in his native Uganda. He now works for the Canada Africa Community Health Alliance, who with help from Algonquin athletic director Ron Port, provided sports equipment and apparel for youth in Kamengo, Uganda. An unidentified woman shows off one of the Algonquin team T-shirts.

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