

Veteran sportswriter Larry Ngala recalls 50-year journey in journalism



Larry Ngala

Larry Ngala, who has been involved in journalism for the last 50 years, started writing sports articles as a Form Three high school student. During the Kenya International Sports Film Festival (KISFF) that was held in

December last year,

Ngala told the panel on sports journalism that one of the reasons that induced him into writing was to compliment the efforts of a longstanding Mombasa-based sports correspondent who wrote only about football and didn't care much about the other sports.

"I asked the man why he concentrated only on football and for that matter only on Mwenge and Feisal, yet there were other sports like cricket, hockey and boxing among other activities in the 1950s and 1960s," Ngala pointed out. The old man threw the gauntlet at Ngala's feet and there began the veteran's journey that he is still traversing to date. Not long after that, Ngala sent a story to Taifa Leo and editor, George Mbuguss was so impressed that he summoned Ngala for a meeting in Nairobi during school holidays and the Nation Media Group editors asked him if he could join Ahmed Abbas, who is father of legendary Kenyan goalkeeper Mahmoud Abbas, in filing stories. "I went to the United States for further studies and my interest was football, which was not popular in America then. My attachment was with Voice of America and they were just starting the Swahili Service," Ngala remarked.

He said his first experience as a student of journalism was an assignment to cover the 1970 World Cup in Mexico, adding it was a good experience for him. Ngala's covered the 1972 Munich Olympic Games including all the issues that surrounded the terrorist attack against the Israeli team. Ngala returned to Kenya in 1976 and decided to continue writing sports, except cricket, which he confessed he did not know much about. And then the trajectory of his sports journalism career shifted when he met golfer John Mucheru, who advised him to concentrate on golf.

"He introduced me to Karen Golf Club in 1978, where I joined as a member and showed me a lot of things

about golf. Unless you play the game, one might not be in a position to write good stories, Ngala, who once served as an official of the Kenya Volleyball Association said. There were only 848 Kenyan golfers when I started writing about golf, but now we have more than 10,000. The reason I've been covering golf all these years is because of the passion that I have for the game. Without passion, one cannot succeed in any venture," he noted.

Government support key to development of parasports

Susan Masila, CEO of Special Olympics Kenya, commended the government for the support it has accorded the organisation that include air tickets and athletes' allowances. "Some of our athletes have received the cash awards from the government. I am aware different competitions have



Susan Masila

been classified with different gratuity, but I feel Special Olympics World Summer Games should be recognised at the same level as the Olympics," Masila said. Douglas Sidialo there is huge pool of talent and athletes should come out and showcase their ability during the Special Sports Association of Kenya, which organises sports for schools at the national level in April. Josephtha Mukobe, Principal Secretary in the State Department of Heritage, said the government has issued a directive for persons with disability to use public stadiums and sports facilities free of charge.

KBC staff 'sold original sports tapes to private TV stations'



Kariuki Thige

Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), which was founded by the white settlers and which has undergone myriad re-births, is no exception to the vagaries that plague national broadcasters in Africa. Founded in 1924 the institution made the first broadcast in Kiswahili and six other African languages in 1953. In 1954, Kenya Broadcasting Services was established, and in 1961 KBC was formed and nationalised three years later and christened Voice of Kenya (VoK). However, in 1989, VoK reverted to KBC. In his report for the year ending Jun.30, 2016, Auditor-General Edward Ouko raised a concern of rot in ostensibly KBC. Kariuki Thige, who worked at the national

broadcaster, said Metro TV, which was commissioned by KBC in 2000 purely for entertainment and sports channel, had a problem because of lack of content thereby forcing the staff to be innovative.

“We created a show called, ‘Going for Glory’; which was about football matches that were played in the past. For the footage on the Mandela Cup which Gor Mahia won in 1987 and which was aired on KBC, we only found the second half of the match,” Thige said. Topi Lyambila, who is also a product of KBC, said that he wanted to do a sports review for the past 50 years, and especially the 4th All Africa Games, that he was part of, but was told that there was no material on the games! “They were taken to some storage facility in either Ngong’ or Langata and most of the tapes were erased and other programmes dubbed on them. “My thinking was that the All Africa Games would be a prime matter in celebrating our sporting history, and when I asked if I could get some of the football matches, I was told there was nothing,” Lyambila said. “If you go to some leading private TV stations, which I will not name, you will find whole original tapes from KBC, which allegedly were sold cheaply,” he added. The pilfered tapes are part of KBC’s assets and source of income as well as national heritage. It’s the seemingly small thefts that add up to huge losses, amounting to millions of shillings.

Tuwei advises athletes to prepare for life after retirement



Lt. Gen (Rtd) Jackson Tuwei

A senior sports official in Kenya has advised athletes to prepare for life after retirement from active competition. Jackson Tuwei, President of Athletics Kenya (AK), said Kenyan athletes retire at a relatively young age, some even before they are married and therefore lacking life skills. “Most of them retire from active competition before they reach 40. At the federation, we encourage them to pursue and at the same time prepare them for life outside sports,” Tuwei said. The official said that after retiring, the athletes come under a lot of pressure from the community, which sees them as rich, where many want them to contribute to their personal or communal well-being in one way or the other. “If they retire without good preparation, the community can abuse their generosity by turning the athletes into a cash cow” Tuwei said.

To prevent such incidences from happening, AK organises seminars to instill in the athletes a mindset that will help them during in their active sports life and post-sports life.

The association held such a seminar in December last year, which was attended by over 200 elite athletes. “We invited experts to talk to them on the subject of investments because most of them earn a lot of money while still young and need guidance on how to spend their hard-earned money,” Tuwei noted.

He said the athletes face several challenges from a society that praises them when they are winning races but forgets about them once they fade from the limelight, where they grab newspaper headlines like “From grace to grass”. “When retirement beckons, they start wondering what they will be doing because they are used to a certain routine in life that will soon come to an abrupt end,” Tuwei said, adding that many have sunk into depression and alcoholism upon retirement.

He noted that athletes should be counselled and prepared before they retire and assured that retirement is not a death sentence, adding that they should be taught that the process is unavoidable. Retirement does not necessarily come because of old age, it can also come because of lack of form, a career-ending injury or long suspension for transgressions, like taking prohibited substances.

Athletes cautioned to beware of over-the-counter medications

Mercy Okiro, an accredited mediator and arbitrator, said some of the athletes who get caught in the crosshairs of anti-doping agents mostly do not dope intentionally. “How is an athlete who is in some far-removed location in the country expected to know about doping issues? Some athletes appear before the tribunal yet they don’t know why they are there in the first place. It is stripped liability,” Okiro said.



Dr. Pramod Shah

Dr. Pramod Shah said that some common painkillers for sinuses contain a derivative of cocaine that an athlete will test positive for in the next two days. Unfortunately in Kenya, pharmacists do not have the guidelines for athletes who take a medication unaware they are ingesting a substance that is prohibited. He advised athletes with high blood pressure conditions or other ailments to contact Anti-Doping Association of Kenya (ADAK), four weeks before they go for a competition so that they can get a therapeutic use exemption (TUE) so that they can fill out the athlete’s forms.



PS Josephtha Mukobe and Rose Tata-Muya share a light moment during the Kenyan Music Festival in Nairobi. Rose Tata-Muya, Personal Assistant to the festival...



Kenya International Sports Film Festival held in Nairobi in December 2018 as John Aasif Karim looks on

History of Tennis in Kenya

Extract from the coffee table book; *The Karims –A Sporting Dynasty*

Tennis in Kenya has a varied history, played as it is by all sections of the society. Evolving from a sport played in whites-only clubs to a much loved popular sports for all, it is a vital part of Kenya's sporting history and a stellar example of how sports can function as an equaliser in the nation's cultural history. Although a seemingly impossible ideal, sports in Kenya, and tennis in particular, as on occasion managed to rise above race and gender to become a unifying force. The first tennis courts in Kenya, about eleven of them, were built in Rumuruti by the settlers in the 1920s. The Kenya Lawn Tennis Association (KLTA) was registered in 1927. It was a 'Europeans-only' club which organised regular tennis tournaments at the Nairobi Club and Parklands Sports Club. Professionally run and managed, the KLTA maintained a regular tennis calendar.



Majid Cockar in action in the 60s

In the late 1950s, Hon. Justice (Rtd.) Abdul Majid Cockar became the first Asian to win both the Parklands and Nairobi championships. The Hon. Chief Justice (Rtd.) recalls that his father Abdul Rahman Cockar used to play tennis at Nairobi's Goan Gymkhana in the late 1920s. Sixteen years later, in 1939, his father introduced him to the game. Twenty years after that, Majid's wife, Fahmida entered the

world of competitive tennis. The fact that she was a Muslim woman, who wore shorts and competed in public made her sporting career controversial, raising a few eyebrows in the community.

Kenya hosted international tennis players for the first time in 1960. Hassan Rattansi a prominent and respected personality in Kenya and Sharad Rao, former deputy Public Prosecutor for Attorney General and Hon. Charles Njonjo, a former Attorney-General in the Kenyatta and Moi governments who played at the Nairobi Gymkhana joined the KLTA council. They encouraged professional tennis players, travelling from Europe to South Africa to visit Nairobi. In the early 50's and 60's annual tennis matches between Asians and Europeans were held fairly regularly.

The Nairobi Sports Club was closed to non-whites for a few years even after Kenya gained independence; the latter were allowed in only for 'special events'. When Rattansi and his Asian co-players organised a friendly match at the Nairobi Club, they were refused permission as it did not fall into the Club's predefined category of 'special events'. Unflustered, Rattansi gained permission by including a tea party as part of the event. When the Nairobi Club finally opened its doors to all, Rattansi was elected as its first nonwhite president. The Rattansi family has an educational trust that has benefitted many



Left to right Dr. Hassan Rattansi, Mr. Haiderally, Mrs. Maniben Rattansi, Sir. Evelyn Baring and Mr. Mohamedally Rattansi

Kenyans over the years to date. Sharad Rao served as the secretary of the KLTA from 1960 to 1967 before becoming its president. He still remembers the gross discrimination that existed even five years after independence. The European and colonial domination in Kenyan tennis was broken by Saeed Cockar who later on became Kenyas industrial court judge, winning the Kenya Open Tennis in the late 50s. He was Majid Cockar's brother. He was then followed by Yashwin Shretta who went on to become Kenya's tennis icon in the 60's and 70's.

Yusuf Karim from Mombasa was known as the 'King of Cement Courts' went on to win 25 years unbeaten in Mombasa, (1951-1977) probably a world record. His sons, Aarif and Aasif continued winning at the coast for several years.

In the 60's and 70's, several world tennis champions visited Kenya to play exhibition matches. Rod Laver, Stan Smith, Arthur Ashe, Ramanan Krishnan were among many who played in Kenya. The high point of Kenyan tennis to date was the indigenous star Paul Wekesa who went on to play at all the grand slam events in the 90's. At one time in 1995, he was ranked top 100. Paul went on to play an instrumental role in Kenya's progress in the Davis Cup tie in the 90's. Kenya went on to play in the European-African Division 1. Several quality players were successful form the 50's to 90's before the decline started with the standards going down due to interest diminishing with youngsters, including poor administration.

The junior tennis standards were very high in the 70's and early 80's when the KLTA organised tournaments in various parts of the country. This helped improve tennis as these junior players went on to play at a higher level. Since the turn of the century, the tennis standards in Kenya have fallen drastically. The new administration has been making efforts to revive the sport but it will take several years before this can happen. For the sport to flourish, we must have several players of an international level who win tournaments abroad and encourage our youngsters to take up the sport. This includes a yearly calendar of events for both juniors and senior tournaments around the country.

Aasif Karim is Chairman of Safinaz Foundation and Kenya International Sports Film Festival (KISFF). He is a former Kenyan International Sportsman (Cricket and Tennis) as well as a businessman and FELLOW Arbitrator and Accredited Mediator, including being a Mediator for the Kenyan Judiciary for Family and Commercial disputes.

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