

Play the Game Award 2015 to Bob Munro and Mathare Youth Sports Association

This year's recipients are celebrated for their admirable efforts to create sustainable social progress, for their courageous battle against corruption in sport, and for their continuous fighting spirit and belief in humanity

Motivation speech held by international director Jens Sejer Andersen on behalf of the staff and board of Play the Game, at the farewell dinner of the 2015 conference, Wednesday 28 October

One of the most famous novels of a Danish author, today best known internationally as a movie, carries the title "Out of Africa". If a novel was written about the person who will receive the Play the Game award 2015 it should be named "Into Africa".

30 years ago, this person arrived in Kenya, and Kenyan football has not been the same ever since. We could offer a day programme at Play the Game – perhaps an entire conference - discussing the sports political themes and case stories that Munro has been involved in. Such conference would be just as broad and varied as in the past four days, and at least as exhausting.

However, I have only a few minutes to resume why we give the Play the Game Award 2015 to Bob Munro, kindly requesting him to share it with the youth of the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) whose around 30,000 members have accepted to assume responsibility for their education, their health and their community: the Mathare slums that count a little less than a million inhabitants living under deplorable conditions.

With the Play the Game Award comes no money, but a piece of graphic art made by the Danish tennis champion, musician, poet, journalist, philosopher, filmmaker and artist Torben Ulrich. The artwork is painted with a tennis racket, and completed by shooting a tennis ball marinated in blue onto the paper – and then it is all processed digitally. I am ready to spend the evening explaining Torben Ulrich's artwork and history with anyone interested.

The other material part of the award is an invitation for the next Play the Game conference with all expenses paid, and I kindly ask Bob to ensure that a promising youth leader is selected among the Mathare citizens to join him for our 2017 event.

We have selected Bob Munro and MYSA for outstanding efforts in four areas:

- 1) creating a sustainable framework for the use of sport to promote social progress, environmental protection, education, individual self-esteem,

team spirit, health protection including HIV/AIDS awareness – and, by the way, a successful professional football team, Mathare United. Bob Munro may be the chairman and main catalyst of this development, but it is the youth of Mathare who ensures that this vision is becoming reality under harsh living conditions, marked by poverty, violence, shootings and crime.

- 2) Taking up the seemingly impossible challenge of fighting corruption in Kenyan football and succeeding in creating an independent Premier League run by lawful and transparent business and administration operations. It has taken tireless work to lead the battle against the many thieves that had taken possession of the Kenyan Football Federation, and it comes at a considerable risk. For whatever reasons Bob Munro has received several death threats over the years. Apparently they have not been carried out successfully.
- 3) When Munro and Mathare's fight against corruption was at a peak moment some ten years ago and the government interfered to help rooting out corruption in the Kenyan Football Federation, FIFA intervened and banned Kenya from international football. Munro succeeded in turning FIFA around by doing a thing he is terribly good at: Arguing and insisting until he gets his way. FIFA's international director at the time was a person named Jerome Champagne, and he ensured that FIFA lifted the sanctions and targeted the culprits by raising a series of demands. When these demands were not followed, eventually FIFA launched a new boycott, this time for the right reasons. As a result, the government intervened again, this time to protect the crooks. They summoned Bob Munro, because they suddenly discovered that there was something wrong with his nine year old permanent work permit. Munro was publically shamed by the government in a time with much political violence in Kenya, demonstrations against him were arranged in the streets, shots were fired at his house and he was facing expulsion from the country in spite of having adopted three Kenyan children. National and international pressure fortunately remedied the conflict so Munro could stay.
- 4) The perhaps most difficult moment for Bob Munro and MYSA came only a few years ago, at the beginning of this decade, when one of the most important private Norwegian foundations supporting MYSA decided to pull its financial support declaring that they did not feel MYSA was taking charges of sexual assaults and corruption seriously. This was a huge blow to MYSA's economy, to the trust in their leaders and to the reputation of their members.

At Play the Game, we have revised as much of the publically accessible information that we could find about these serious allegations, including the documents published on MYSA's own homepage and critical analyses in the Norwegian media. The latest article by one of Norway's best investigative journalists was coincidentally published last Saturday, three year after the culmination of the conflict.

To the best of our knowledge and to the best of our judgment, MYSA and Bob Munro has responded to this crisis with a sense of transparency, accountability and responsibility that most other clubs, federations and institutions in sport should envy them. Already before the conflict arose, numerous policies, structures and processes were in place and effectively carried out to secure good governance, prevent corruption, defend the integrity of the institution and – first and foremost – protect the safety of the youth.

MYSA members are part of very difficult social environment, MYSA leaders are imperfect human beings, and it is too much to expect that the sporting and cultural activities of MYSA are exempt from the various risks of a slum neighbourhood.

We are not passing judgment on the specific case stories and conflicts, and we are not pretending that MYSA and Bob Munro are infallible. We have asked ourselves one question: Are we convinced beyond any reasonable doubt, on the basis of the information we have access to, that MYSA's leaders do every effort they possibly can to safeguard their members and secure that the policies and guidelines are carried out.

Our answer is a resounding "yes".

So for their admirable efforts to create sustainable social progress, for their courageous battle against corruption in sport, and for their continuous fighting spirit and belief in humanity, we are proud to hand over the Play the Game 2015 award to Bob Munro and the Mathare Youth Sports Association.

The Play the Game Award has been given at every Play the Game conference since 2002 in pursuit of the goals of the initiative: to strengthen the basic ethical values of sport and encourage democracy, transparency and freedom of expression in world sport. It pays tribute to an individual or a group of persons who in their professional careers or as volunteers in sport have made an outstanding effort to strengthen the basic ethical values of sport. The award was decided this year by the governing board and staff of Play the Game.