UNHCR & a Decade of Sport Programs

UNHCR has been using sports activities since 1994, when a partnership came about between the UN refugee agency and the International Olympic Committee. Since the launch of the Giving is Winning Campaign, the IOC and UNHCR have continued collaborating, including projects in Uganda, Venezuela, and Panama using sport to advocate against violence. In 2010, UNHCR and the IOC launched a three year program in Namibia’s Osire refugee settlement to engage youth in sport.

From 2006-2012, the ninemillion.org campaign with Nike and Right to Play, UNHCR, brought sports and education activities to children in refugee camps in over 30 countries and about 10 million dollars in support. The last bit of funding is still trickling through and making an impact. More recently, UNHCR Kenya has launched the youth-led 2012 Dadaab Sports Initiative which reached 10,000 people in the world’s biggest refugee camp through equipment, training, and workshops.

To compliment the momentum of the London 2012 Olympic Games, in June, Samsung, the IOC, and UNHCR launched a 2 year initiative to get sports kits to refugee camps in 20 countries. The kits will be distributed to locations in Africa, Asia, and South America.

GIVING IS WINNING

Did you ever wonder where the extra clothing goes that nations prepare for their Olympic teams? Well, UNHCR and the International Olympic Committee teamed up in 1994 to get the clothing to those in need. For the past three Olympic Games, in Athens, Beijing, and most recently in London, the Giving is Winning Campaign has donated almost 200,000 pieces of clothing to refugee camps around the world. The beneficiaries of the 2012 donations include refugees in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and South Sudan.
South Sudan’s former refugees compete for gold

Luol Deng, Guor Marial, and Lopez Lomong (pictured at left) were all born in South Sudan but all competed for different teams in the 2012 London Games.

Luol Deng (pictured in blue below) is a world class athlete, U.S. President Barack Obama’s favorite player, and he is featured on the Brixton pound banknote. But what most don’t really know about Deng is that he grew up in Africa and left as a refugee. Born in Wau, Sudan, Deng and his family escaped the civil war for Egypt and eventually Great Britain. He became a British citizen in 2006. This past month he competed on the world stage for the country that granted asylum to his family. While the GB basketball team didn’t win gold, Deng fulfilled a life long dream to play for his new country and host nation and in many ways to say thanks. His NBA squad, however, did not want to see him play in the Olympics, for fear of injury. Having been plagued by a sore wrist, and despite any concerns from the Chicago Bulls, Deng was determined to represent Great Britain. He did so with flying colors, averaging 15.8 points, 6.6 rebounds, and 4.6 assists. We look forward to keeping up with Deng in his next NBA seasons with the Bulls. “I feel like I was representing South Sudan even though I was not wearing it.”

Guor Marial’s (pictured above) story like Lopez’s was headline news. After being asked to compete for Sudan, he politely declined and petitioned to run as an independent in the marathon event. His story received much attention as he raced to get approval from the IOC and then a visa in time for the last event in the Games. Rather than represent the country that caused him so much pain, Marial ran on behalf of all South Sudanese people and wore the Independent Olympic Athlete jersey instead. While he finished without a medal, his story touched millions and he shed light on what is happening in his corner of the world.

Lopez Lomong (pictured in red below) also grew up in what is now South Sudan and after being captured by armed soldiers, escaped to Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. After ten years, he was taken in by an American family in New York. He remembered running during his time in Kakuma as a peaceful escape and started again once he was in NY. He got the attention of his high school track coach and the rest is history. After qualifying for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, Lomong was the flagbearer for the American team, an honor bestowed upon him by his peers. While he came up short in Beijing and London, he is determined to represent Team USA again in Rio. He will travel to Kenya and South Sudan in early 2012 as part of his work with international NGO World Vision. He hopes to raise 500,000 USD for access to water, healthcare, education, and nutrition in his native land.

Rohullah Nikpai was welcomed home as a national hero in Afghanistan after winning his second bronze medal in back to back Olympic Games. After winning bronze in Beijing, Nikpai again placed third in the 58kg taekwondo competition. Rohullah Nikpai was Afghanistan’s only medallist.

Growing up in Afghanistan, Nikpai was forced to flee to a refugee camp in Iran to avoid violence in Kabul. It was in this refugee camp that he took up the sport. In 2004, he returned to Kabul to train and eventually make history by winning his country’s only two Olympic medals ever. The nation cheered him on in London and were united by his success.

The three athletes caught up in the Olympic village and cheered each other on throughout the Games (picture top left). The South Sudanese should be proud of their representation in London despite not having any athletes officially wearing their flag. We look forward to their progress and the hopes for a South Sudanese Olympic team in 2016 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
REFUGEES INVOLVED BEHIND THE SCENES

While refugees made a significant contribution as athletes in London, their work behind the scenes should also be applauded. As part of UNHCR's long-standing relationship with the IOC, 60 refugees were employed in the London Olympic Games. One standout, Cynthia Masiyiwa, sought asylum in the UK from Zimbabwe because she faced political persecution. Her mother was a part of the opposition party and was at risk. As an active youth voice, she was recognized this year by David Cameron and others as Young Leaders of the Year with the Action of the Year Award for her efforts to combat youth unemployment and violence.

IDP COMPETES IN PARALYMPIC MARATHON

Elkin Serna was forced to flee Medillin, Colombia when he was just eleven years old because of the problems with his family's security in the region. He suffers from a visual impairment but nonetheless began running because he had to travel 6 km each way to school everyday. He won the silver medal in the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games becoming the first ever to do so for Colombia.

FOUNDER OF PARALYMPICS IS A REFUGEE

The Paralympic Games followed the Olympics in London from August 29th to September 9th. Sir Ludwig Guttman, a neuropsychologist, fled Nazi Germany during the war for the UK in 1939 after it became clear that Jewish doctors would not be allowed to work. In 1948, he recognized the rehabilitative value of exercise and sport for disabled war veterans and patients of his. He then organized a host of events, including archery and table tennis, for 16 of his patients. This officially became an international event in 1952 when a Dutch team participated. In 1960, Guttman lobbied the Roman hosts to allow a parallel event to take place with 400 wheelchair athletes and thus the Paralympics were officially born. The Paralympics is now the second largest sporting event in terms of participation.

PARALYMPIC STAMPS CREATED

On August 17, 2012, the UN Postal Administration honored six paralympic sports with the issuance of commemorative stamps at an event hosted in Vienna, Austria.

RESOURCES

Catch up on ten years of collaboration, the latest news, and events from the UN’s Office on Sport for Development and Peace’s website: [www.un.org/sport](http://www.un.org/sport).

Beyond Sport is a global organization that promotes, develops, and supports the use of sport to create positive social change across the world: [www.beyondsport.org](http://www.beyondsport.org).

Stay informed about the latest developments in sport and development on this international platform, top online resource, and communication tool: [www.sportanddev.org](http://www.sportanddev.org).
In an upcoming series of email newsletters, you can learn how sports can contribute to achieving important UNHCR objectives and improve the well-being of UNHCR’s population of concern. Keep reading to learn about the specific topics and how they are valuable to refugees, IDPs, returnees, and stateless persons.

Why sport?

SPORT AND CHILD PROTECTION
Child friendly spaces are often set up within 72 hours of an emergency. Read more about how they help children return to normalcy.

SPORT AND COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION
The Mbekweni Community Center in South Africa used youth, who have been involved in the activities there, to raise awareness about its positive affect on the community.

SPORT AND DISABILITY
Know what sitball is? Well find out more about sports specifically designed for people with disabilities.

SPORT AND EDUCATION
World Camp for Kids in Malawi uses an interactive curriculum to teach environmental awareness and public health education including the use of the ever popular parachute to break the ice with the kids.

SPORT AND HEALTH
Read about the 3rd Annual Kick N Test Tournament that used sport to gather people, inform them HIV/AIDS, and immunize them against TB.

SPORT AND LIVELIHOODS
Alive and Kicking is a unique business model that makes soccer balls for Africans, by Africans, and in Africa.

SPORT AND PEACEBUILDING
Ultimate Peace uses frisbee, a gender neutral sport, to bring together Arab and Israeli children in the Middle East.

SPORT AND WOMEN & GIRLS
Skateboarding + Afghanistan = Skateistan, where Afghani NGOs use the gender neutral sport to empower women and girls.

ABOUT UNHCR
The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly. The agency is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country. It also has a mandate to help stateless people. In more than six decades, the agency has helped tens of millions of people restart their lives. Today, a staff of some 7,685 people in more than 125 countries continues to help some 33.9 million persons.