

HELLEN'S SOCCER PROWESS

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By Fred Orido

Twelve-year-old Hellen Nyawira is already making her presence felt in top flight soccer. And she is undoubtedly causing ripples among the soccer enthusiasts. Her efforts in the pitch have paid dividends and many prizes. But trophies and certificates aside, Hellen has been able to earn a scholarship, thanks to Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA).

The class six pupil at Daima School, Nairobi, got the scholarship two years after she had joined MYSA. She was then in Class Four and she was showing impressive performances both in the field and in academics. "My challenge is to work hard in class so as to reciprocate the honour I have received," she says. While she loves football, she says her career interest comes first. Hellen, who aspires to be a banker, has maintained top three slots in class work despite so much of her energy going into MYSA tournaments.

But back to the field, her achievements since she joined football have been very remarkable. During this year's Norway Cup, Hellen led the Mathare United Under-14 side to bag the bronze medal. "Although it was difficult to play seasoned sides, we show-cased perfect soccer skills throughout the tournament," she said.

In their first tie, they hammered a team from Zimbabwe 4-1, with Doris and Sarah Wanjiku slotting in two goals. Her criss-crossing passes fuelled all the goals. After, a breathtaking and entertaining first match, Hellen and her teammates were set to go far, and their ultimate goal was only to scoop the gold medal. But then, the next fixtures were not just going to be easy rides.

They were pitted against an Australian team in their second tie. The game started in a slow pace, with the Aussies doing much of the runs. At this moment, Hellen was carefully watching the set pieces from the bench. With no major goal mouth raids from both sides, the match ended in a barren tie at half time.

Then Hellen entered the field, and her skills in the second half, totally turned the tables. She was constantly loosening the compact Aussies defence and making more raids in their turf. In the 80th minute, Hellen made a remarkable run from the centre, then dribbled confidently and skilfully passed five defenders, much to the delight of crowds in the stadium. She then made a low pass to her striker, Doris who finally drove in a powerful, majestic curling shot to the right hand-side corner, which caught the Australian 1-0. At the end of the match, the frenzied crowd broke into cheers and jubilations in her team's favour.

Then came the USA team in the semi-finals, which was a real hard nut to crack. "They appeared more organised technically, probably because they had had more international exposures," Hellen quipped. With an early goal favouring the US team and a defensive game that kept off other goals to the end, the team was bundled out of the finals. But they were pretty contented with the bronze medal, even as US won the gold.

"Hellen is an unwavering midfielder, who proves to be a thorn in the flesh for any opponent's defence," says her coach Peter Achola who was also in-charge of Hellen's team in this year's Norway Cup. "She is capable of altering the pattern of a game and her dribbling skills enable her to break strong bonds of opposing teams."

But she has won her laurels at home too. In 2000, she was named the best player during the Jesus Cup, a tournament that was held at the Don Bosco's grounds, Nairobi. She then defended the title successfully in 2001. The same year, she was named the best player at the "Watoto Wamo Haki" tournament held in Korogocho.

She attributes her success to a number of reasons. "My mum and elder sister Florence (national women team's striker), have supported me all through". She says her sister has been training her the dribbling skills while her mum has encouraged her to exploit her talents without any reservations.

Outside the pitch, Helen enjoys swimming as well as watching movies. In the International scene, she fancies the skills of Real Madrid's duo Roberto Carlos and Raul Gonzalez. The last born in a family of two children, Helen is a girl with great determination. "Everyone has a dream and no one should lose hope in achieving his or her dreams and aspirations. No matter what the obstacles!"

Hmm...She is undoubtedly right.