



Zizi Afrique
Foundation

Volleyball Lifts Kwanthanze School Girls to the World Stage



By Ray Polo

Before many can even pronounce their school's name properly, girls at Kwanthanze Mixed Secondary School in Machakos County, in Kenya, have already perched their presence on the world map through sport.

They are the towering African giants in the game of volleyball. They have lifted the Kenya national volleyball championship trophy as well as the East African cup multiple times. Their peers often see dust when they play. No wonder a local daily once tagged Kwanthanze, 'a hotbed of volleyball talent in Kenya' and it arguably seems to be, going by their streak and stay on top of the game.

"National team coaches come to visit us because they know that Kwanthanze is the nursery of the Kenyan national volleyball team," said Justin Kigwari, the team's coach who also teaches at Kwanthanze.

A young team which sprouted in 2010, only armed with passion and scanty training equipment, has risen through the years to become giants who have marked their territory on the volleyball pitch.

"It was a simple start, starved of training kits and equipment. The girls have earned their space by sheer hard work, respect, and sustained team spirit. Their resilience has been amazing," explained Kigwari.

Kwanthanze's bright star shone in 2013 and 2014 when, for the first time, they clinched both the national and east African cups in a row.

Their dominance was, however, startled in 2015 and they had to settle for the second position in both national and regional games. In 2016, they did not see one mesh of a door to the national or regional tournaments. However, they intensified training, with fresh energy replacing girls who had graduated from the school to higher institutions of learning.

"The loss helped us to evaluate our team and strategize until the girls rose up again to spike their way back to the top," Kigwari noted.

In 2017, Kwanthanze team regained their grip of the national cup and did not let it slip away until 2023, when Kesogon Girls from Trans Nzoia County whipped them out of the cup. Nonetheless, Kwanthanze girls went ahead to reclaim the regional title and are the reigning East African champions in the game.

"I feel proud to be part of the winning team. Very proud. I am happy that our hard work has paid off," Observed a smiley Fridah Boke who is the captain of Kwanthanze Girls Volleyball Team.

On October 16, 2023, a team from Zizi Afrique Foundation visited the school to appreciate the secret to the girl's winning ways. The visit was spearheaded by Action for Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) program. We learned that through Kwanthanze volleyball team's victories and losses, there is a common thread that interweaves resilience and teamwork.

"The girls thrive in simplicity and humility. These alongside respect and responsibility, are the values we encourage, and we ensure they do not veer off their academic paths," said Anthony Kitungi, the Principal at Kwanthanze Mixed Secondary School.

The girls cut their hair short as if it were part of their school uniform. They do not have sophisticated games gear, but every evening, they dare the dusty Ukambani grounds, to scale new heights in the tall game.

Another skill which is hard to ignore is that of collaboration. The girls coordinate their game like a harmonious band spewing a classical rendition in the air. There is no one touch! The ball bounces creatively through three pairs of hands, as much as it is in the girls' power to do so. Their pitch of communication and collaboration speaks maturity. They focus on the ball not on faults. When a team member flops, she is cheered up and when a win emerges, all celebrate and ready for the greater task ahead. We are curious to know whether these skills extend to the classroom.

"Sure," says Coach Kigwari, "The backbone of any talent is discipline. We instil values of respect in the girls so that they do not neglect their academic work. After winning, we settle down and talk to them and let them know that there is more to life than just being volleyball champions. We make them aware of the destructiveness of being celebrities and feeling that they are on top of everything. We also challenge ourselves to cushion them so that they do not neglect their primary duty as students, the books! In short, we help them walk in the path of humility as talented students and players."





After a whole afternoon of playing and talking with the girls, staff members from Zizi Afrique Foundation honoured the team with new games kits and a token for lunch. They also engaged the girls on life skills and values that are useful both at school and beyond. The Foundation is keen on nurturing life skills and values and promoting sports as a motivation for wholesome development of learners.

Meanwhile, hard work, teamwork and determination has earned Kwanthanze girls a ticket to Europe. In 2024 they will be heading to Serbia for the world championships. Kwanthanze principal promised that in the Serbia games, the girls will play in kits donated by Zizi Afrique Foundation as an honour to the organization and as icons of values from the heart of Africa.

“Our prayer is to go and win for Africa at the world championship in Serbia,” Kigwari implored.

We wish the team success as they prepare to showcase their talent to the world!

Kwanthanze Volleyball Team

