SAMWEL ETO’O’S FOOTBALL INITIATIVE EXPANDS INTO NOBLE LEAGUE IN LAIKIPIA

By OSCAR PILIPILI

Four years ago, Zeitz Foundation founder Joachim Zeitz convinced Cameroonian and Chelsea football icon Samuel Eto'o to patron a football initiative in Laikipia County.

While launching the programme dubbed Laikipia Unity League (LUL), Zeitz was by then director of Paris Sports. To show his commitment in supporting the programme, Eto'o would personally attend the 2010 and 2012 editions of LUL tournament where he presided over trophy presentation ceremony at Narok County Stadium.

With 110 registered teams, the overwhelming success and popular demand for participation, the noble initiative has now evolved into Laikipia Unity Programme (LUP).

The programme incorporates Laikipia Unity Programme League, Laikipia Unity Cup and Samuel Eto'o Laikipia Unity Football Academy, among other projects.

This year’s edition of the league that started at regional level three weeks ago has qualified four teams to the final to take place at Narok County Stadium on December 2.

Teams that advanced to the final after battling it out at dusty pitches and scorching desert sun are Laikipia University and Narok Youth (men) and Maua and Community Outreach (women).

But Narok fans are not left out on this occasion as the four times African Player of the Year Eto'o would not be available to grace the finals.

Zeitz Communications manager co-ordinator Enam Lung’Ot said: “We’ve not invited our patrons (Eto’o) to attend the finals because he’s engaged at his Chelsea Club.”

But we expect him to come for the final of the inaugural Laikipia Unity Cup next year,” he said.

The league that is one of the greatest events in Laikipia is endorsed by Football Kenya Federation (FKF) Mt. Kenya branch.

Nvanwyuso said: “Our league is unique in that 50 per cent of points are scored through football achievements and 50 per cent through conservation or community projects that each team has to undertake on an ongoing basis.”

“All teams are required to actively participate in environmental and social activities throughout the year and during the League events, Nyamayo said. “Selection for the regional and Laikipia finals is judged on football skills, environmental and community activities and leadership skills,” he said.

For the past few months, the teams have been actively involved in the establishment of tree nurseries, tree planting initiatives, conservation agriculture, rain water harvesting, water and sanitation.

Community clean up campaigns and box-keeping are among activities the teams engage in to raise their off-pitch points.

According to Nyamayo, Eto'o Unity Football Academy and Edana school developments are based on a unique architectural design developed by Featured Africa.

“The buildings are designed for high yield rainwater harvesting,” he explained.

The academy will consequently serve as the major rainwater harvesting demonstration site for Laikipia.

The Eto'o Academy and Edana school will also incorporate an Environmental Education and Outreach Centre.

The institution will serve as headquarters for the Laikipia Unity League LUL and a hub for environmental outreach activities throughout the county.

The Zeitz Foundation is a non-profit organisation based in Nairobi. Its goal is to maintain or improve the integrity of ecosystems through effective, sustainable management through the holistic balance of conservation, community, culture and commerce (the 4Cs).

The Zeitz Foundation’s Ambassador, Specials and Friends including Eto'o and Usain Bolt are individuals who have become internationally recognised for their contributions in their fields and who inspire change by raising awareness and contributing across each of the 4Cs.

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