

PRESS RELEASE

Fun and Games as Japanese football stars Hide Nakata and Tsuyoshi Kitazawa Play and hand out sports equipment to children at Johannesburg School

Johannesburg, 27 June, 2009... It was the day after exams ended and schools closed for the winter holidays, but children at the East Observatory Primary School, joined by children from the Johannesburg Japanese School happily returned to school for a fun morning of football with renowned Japanese football star Hidetoshi Nakata, head of the Take Action Foundation and former Japanese national football player Tsuyoshi Kitazawa, last Saturday.

The visit was organised by UNICEF and its key sport for development partner, Let's Play, to expose Mr. Nakata to the work being done to improve the lives of children through sport in South African schools.

Through the generous donation of the Take Action Foundation, Hide Nakata and children from the Johannesburg Japanese School handed over 240 footballs as South African children, played, practised and showed off their fancy moves. Mr. Nakata, who posed for photos with the excited children and faculty, has committed to providing funds to procure 20, 000 more footballs for South African children.

“Our children were very happy to come out for a day like this,” said Mrs. C. DeMatos, principal of the school. “Despite their desperately poor circumstances, they love to come to school and excel in most sports such as athletics and netball. The girls open team were gold medal champions last year and the boys are passionate about soccer.”

Addressing children’s right to play

In partnership with Let's Play, the development arm of the African sports broadcaster, SuperSport, UNICEF helps provide opportunities for play as part of its child friendly schools initiative in 585 under-resourced schools in the country identified by the Department of Education.

The programme aims to improve both social and learning conditions of children through six key components: respect for children’s rights, safety, strong relations with the surrounding communities, gender sensitivity, health promotion and quality education.

“UNICEF sees sport for development as a key vehicle for supporting adolescent development in a targeted and holistic manner through participatory interventions aimed at curbing the spread of HIV among young people, whilst promoting the acquisition of sustainable life skills”, said Yvonne Duncan, Chief of External Relations and Strategic partnerships for UNICEF South Africa.

According to school reports, up to 20% of the children have lost either one or both of their parents due to HIV and AIDS. For them, the morning spent with a global football star and his

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entourage represented a grand opportunity for fun and recreation, which is key to children's development.

Providing Adequate Facilities and Equipment

Of course, adequate facilities and equipment are needed to encourage play, one of the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which celebrates its twentieth anniversary this year. "Give a child a football and watch him or her change instantly right before your eyes. That's the power of play," said Vaughn Bishop Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Manager at SuperSport. "When learning is built into that, as comes naturally with sports engagement, the benefits are even more profound."

Under the umbrella of the Let's Play a Million campaign, launched two years ago, Let's Play and UNICEF plan to distribute 1 million soccer balls to under-resourced schools by 2010. Mr. Nakata's Take Action Foundation is now an official partner in this campaign.

Meeting with Mr. Pitso Mosimane

Underscoring his commitment to Sports for Development, Mr. Nakata met briefly with Bafana Bafana Assistant Coach and UNICEF Celebrity Advocate, Pitso Mosimane to talk about the Confederations Cup, their shared support for UNICEF and passion for football. The meeting also provided an opportunity for the two stars to discuss the UNICEF programmes with which they have been involved, and their personal reasons for supporting the children's organization.
