

Jonathan Niva: Profile:

Niva was born on May 16, 1942 to Petro Muchuma and Rebecca Inyanji of Samitsi, Malava, Kakamega. On the day of his birth a missionary teacher at Samitsi Primary School, Festo Likhaya from Isukha, was called to come and offer prayers for the newborn. Holding the baby in his hands, Festo prayed, "...Niiba Nyasaye noyanza, lekha omwana wuno amenye...(God, IF you Will, let this child live)..." The baby was named Niva and was destined for great things.

Since Petro had lost several children at young ages, the prayer came at an appropriate time. His only surviving children at this time were Jediddah Khevali and Yosiah (Josiah) Liru, first and second (born), respectively. Niva was one of those who would eventually survive early child mortality.

Sadly, Niva's mother was struck by lightning while "mudding" a new family house. She died on the spot.

His elder brother, Yosiah and immediate follower, Lebanon Thaddeus, recall playing "elisubo" (papers and pieces of cloth tied bound together with strings into a ball) with Niva during their early years. They considered themselves lucky whenever they found a tennis ball that they used as a football. As fate would have it, Yosiah was left physically challenged after a bout with polio. The most he could do was watch his brother play his favorite game. Lebanon's enthusiasm for soccer waned with time but Jonathan was different.

Neighboring schools or teams were known to "steal" him on his way home from school to play for them. His services were in high demand. Some would bundle him from the Siimba (a house for unmarried young men) he slept in. He would be guided through the thickest of bushes and marshes to a place he had never gone before. His abductors promised to return him home in one piece after he played for them. His brothers and cousins were, on several occasions, at a loss to explain to the fire-breathing Petro the whereabouts of his son. Muchuma would not rest that day until he hunted down his son and returned him home. And on those occasions, Niva was punished for "agreeing to be stolen" which resulted skipping school and failing to complete his domestic chores.

Nonetheless, Niva's road to greatness turned to a highway when he joined Sigalagala College . He no longer had his father raining hail and

brimstone on him. His father used cypress tree branch to cane him. Dad confided in me that the resilience of the cypress canes, compared with several other trees around, provided his father, Petro, with more time to “rain” discipline in him before the sticks broke.

In his “Fond Memories of Coach Niva,” Nelson O. Obota describes Jonathan as “...symbol of all that a player should be: strong, tough, energetic, vibrant, charismatic and disciplined” He goes on to say that, “...to capture his greatness; one needs to get a glimpse at the calibre of people he played alongside or against – Joe Kadenge, Daniel Anyanzwa, Anthony Mukabwa, Johnstone Madegwa, William “Chege” Ouma, Stephen Yongo, James Siang’a. But he, Niva, stood out like a colossus...”

In 1972, one of Simba’s remarkable years, he took over the national team as coach-cum-player from a German coach, Eckhard Krautzun, barely three weeks before the African cup of Nations. This was the first time ever for Kenya to qualify for the tournament. After beating Ethiopia and Mauritius, Kenya lost 1-2 to The Indomitable Lions (Cameroon). They drew 1-all with both Togo and Mali, the losing finalist. Because of this loss, Kenya’s Harambee Stars was locked out of the semi final. Of the three goals for Harambee Stars, Simba wa Kenya (the Lion of Kenya) had two to his credit. He was voted the best player of the tournament. Thus the team had at least one consolation trophy to take back home.

Back home, the story was the same. Ya Mayeye [Luhya for (the lion) with a mane] had scored 27 goals in the National League. He scooped the “Player of The Year” award.

His nickname variants helped determine on which assignment he was. He was called Simba, the Kiswahili version for Lion, when on National assignments and just “Ya Mayeye” when Abaluhya or (later) AFC Leopards were mauling away at their opponents. I guess Leonard Mambo Mbotela had a way of interchanging the two, in addition to “Niva na mpira...” (Niva with the ball) without biting his tongue during his exhilarating radio broadcast of matches. Mambo’s broadcasting style took everything happening in a stadium to the hearts of his distant frenzied listeners. Leonard Mambo is yet to be rivaled at the art.

At one time, when the Kenya National Team paid a courtesy call to President Jomo Kenyatta at the State House, Nairobi , the President

caused laughter when he asked Niva whether his name was specifically tailored for football or whether it was his real, natural name. Jonathan answered that it was his real name.

Simba hung up his boots in 1978.

Source: <http://www.nivaunltd.com/site/en/about/jonathan.html>