

## ANALYSIS

ALTAF MANSOOR:

## Messiah of Mwanza basketball

THISDAY CORRESPONDENT

Mwanza

THE Moil Inter-Secondary Schools basketball tournament being held in Mwanza annually has one person to thank for having made the plan to put the competition in place a reality.

Indeed, tournament organisers Mwanza Regional Basketball Association (MRBA) and the participating schools owe businessman Altaf Hameed Mansoor 'Doga' a huge debt of gratitude for offering to sponsor the tournament.

Mansoor sponsors the annual competition through Moil company with a view to getting basketball loving students in Mwanza fully engaged in the sport and develop their career in the game they love the most.

"We thank Mansoor for his willingness to pour support into the Inter-Secondary School basketball tournament which serves as a useful avenue for promoting Mwanza's youngsters in the sport," says tournament coordinator Kizito Bahati.

Mansoor is also the patron of schools and colleges basketball tournament in Mwanza and he fully uses his capacity to ensure that plans to effectively promote basketball in the region are implemented.

He has for the past five years been working hand in hand with MRBA in ensuring smooth organization of the Inter-Secondary Schools tournament and feels proud to be part of the event's success.

"We requested Mansoor to be the patron of schools and colleges competitions back in 2005 and he readily accepted. He went as far as offering attractive prizes to winners of both events," says Bahati.

"There has been notable improvement in the organization of the Inter-Secondary Schools tournament with Mansoor providing MRBA with trophies for winners."

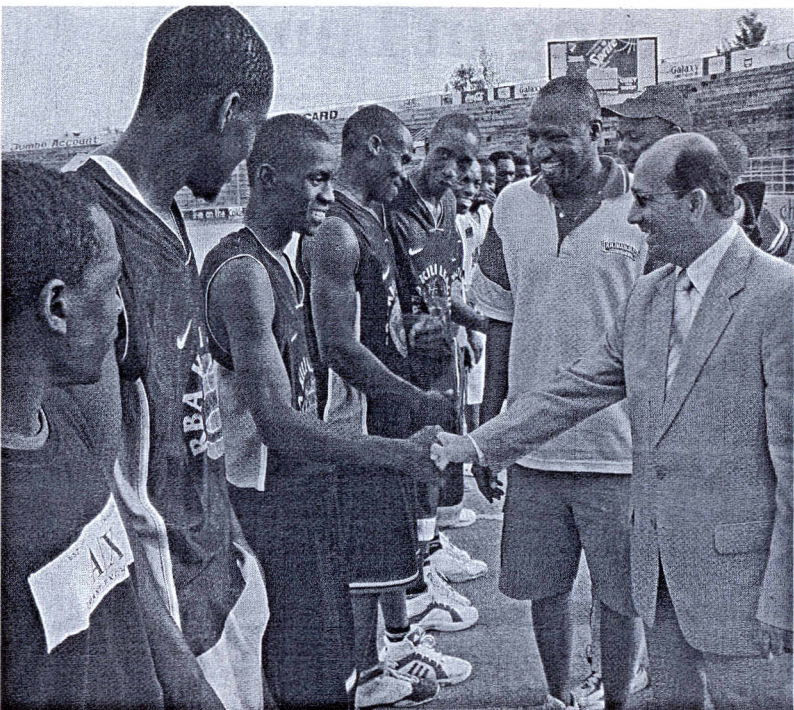
Mansoor believes that effective participation in sports is a better way of keeping local youths away from immoral behaviours, including promiscuity and drug abuse.

"I want Mwanza students to concentrate on studies and play sports successfully than immoral deeds," he says.

Mansoor has pledged his continuous support to basketball, which is increasingly attracting the attention of the majority of the region's youths. Apart from the participating schools, MRBA has in turn benefited a lot from the successful organization of the Inter-Secondary Schools tournament.

The association gets the chance to select best players from the region who later represent the regional basketball team 'Rock City' in various national competitions.

"Rock City has consequently emerged as among the most successful regional basketball team alongside Dar es Salaam's regional team, Dream Team," says Bahati.



Patron of Mwanza schools and colleges' basketball tournaments Altaf Mansoor (R) greets Bugando Heat players during the opening ceremony of the Robert Cup tournament at the CCM-Kirumba Stadium in Mwanza in this file photo. Looking on (C) is tournament coordinator Kizito Bahati.

PHOTO: STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Students participating in the Inter-Secondary Schools tournament are also presented with the opportunity to join several basketball clubs in the region and promote their career upon finishing studies.

Bahati says Mansoor's willingness to support the sport at all levels, apart from schools and colleges, has further inspired better performance in major local competitive tournaments.

"Mansoor's support in basketball has not only been focused on schools and colleges, but also covers other levels of the game as he has also been putting his weight behind the Rock City," he says.

"Mansoor, for instance, contributed 1m/- to Rock City prior to travelling to Kampala, Uganda to compete in the East African Inter-Cities basketball tournament in 2006," he says.

Bahati says the support proved to

be a huge morale boost to the team as it performed well in the tournament.

Many hope that Mansoor will continue supporting the sport and fully cooperate with basketball stakeholders to meet challenges facing the game in Mwanza Region and the country in general.

One of the challenges is the lack of enthusiasm among girls to fully engage themselves in basketball.

Mansoor has shown concern on the fewer number of girls teams participating in basketball in the country after witnessing a small turnout of girls in the tournament.

Mansoor insists that participation in basketball is beneficial to the girls' health and will also boost their academic performance.

He has, therefore, appealed to girls to participate in the sport in good numbers to match the zeal shown by

the boys. However, his efforts to encourage girls to play basketball have hardly yielded fruits.

Only two girls teams participated in the 2008 Moil Inter-secondary Schools tournament and this year's National Basketball League held in Dar es Salaam witnessed only a handful women team take part.

As a result, the Tanzania Basketball Federation was forced to keep the door open to teams wishing to participate in the league after receiving a poor response from women teams.

Mansoor notes that serious promotion of basketball among local girls now turns to be a huge challenge to TBF as it seeks to make the sport one of the most successful at the local level.

"There is certainly a handful of local girls in the streets who fancy to get their hands on a basketball thus

concerted efforts are needed to tap such talents," he says.

Mansoor has advised TBF to ensure that Tanzanian teams participate in all regional and international competitions.

He says competing in these tournaments will enable the country to promote the sport at the local level and subsequently make it a force to reckon with in East Africa.

"When Tanzanian teams stay away the local basketball players miss the opportunity to garner valuable experience by playing against other nations in the region and beyond," says Mansoor.

He says problems such as financial constraints, which have proved to be a persistent drawback to sports development in the country, can only be solved if BFT and other national associations work hard to win sponsorships.