

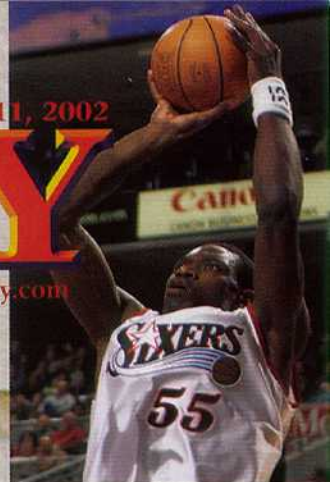
"THE BATTLE IS THE LORD'S" (1 SAM. 17:47)

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Dikembe Motumbo:
Man on a Mission



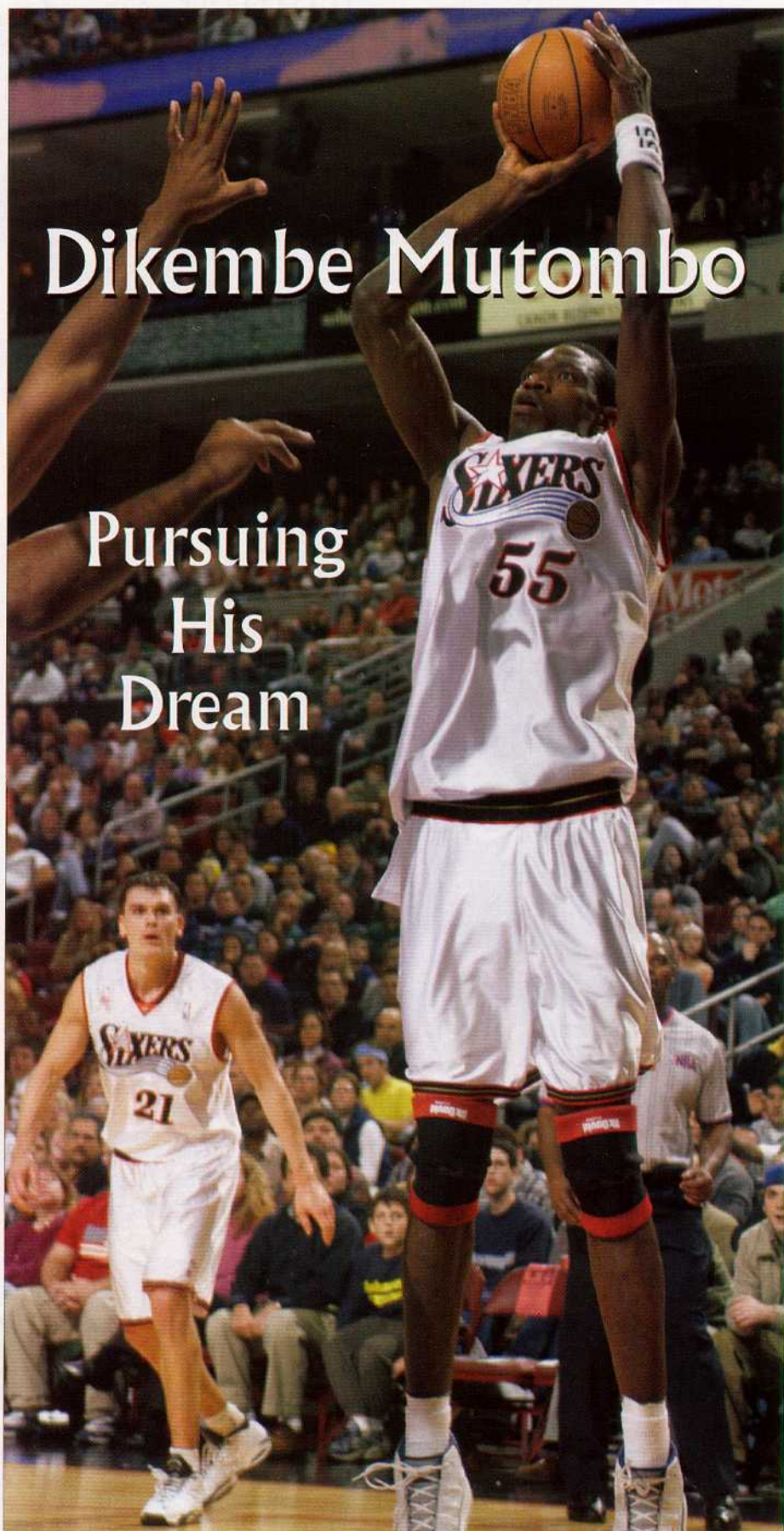
Corps Officers on the Frontlines



Imagine that you are 7-foot-2, 265 pounds, playing center for the Philadelphia 76ers. You are a four-time winner of the NBA Defensive Player of the Year Award, and have just appeared in your seventh career All-Star game. You graduated from Georgetown University with degrees in linguistics and diplomacy, and are fluent in four languages and five African dialects. During a trip home to the Congo in September 2000, you contract a mild case of malaria, receive treatment and miss the first five games of the season.

Now imagine that you are a young child, growing up in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire). Your country—approximately one-quarter the size of the United States, with a population of 47.4 million—has an infant mortality rate of more than 1 in 10, with almost 1 in 5 dying before their fifth birthday. For those who survive, life expectancy is only 47 years. Each day children die from diseases such as measles and polio, which have been virtually eradicated from developed countries through immunization programs. Mosquitoes and black flies carrying tropical diseases such as malaria, yellow fever and onchocerciasis (river blindness) pervade the land. Access to health care is extremely limited. Victims must often travel great distances, usually by canoe or on foot, to reach a hospital.

Dikembe Mutombo knows both of these worlds. He has dedicated his life to making a difference both on and off the court, establishing a foundation to improve health care and build a \$14 million hospital in his home country.



NBAE Photos/Getty Images



Mutombo administers polio vaccine to children at the Kalembe-Lembe Pediatric Hospital in the capital city of Kinshasa.



A young girl with polio at the Kalembe-Lembe Pediatric Hospital enjoys a visit from Mutombo during her physical therapy exercises.



Mutombo attends a wheelchair basketball event in Kinshasa to support the Polio Eradication Campaign.

Since 1999, Dikembe Mutombo has taken part in a polio eradication effort in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In August 1999, through the joint efforts of U.N. agencies, the Congolese government and Rotary International, the vaccination campaign reached 8.2 million of the country's 10 million children under five years of age. Mutombo also records messages for the Voice of America to encourage polio immunization.

Close Family Ties

Mutombo's faith developed as a natural result of going to church each week. "Attending church was a very important thing to my family," says Mutombo, who remembers it as "a nice part of growing up." Today he continues that same tradition, attending church with his own children.

"My parents played a big role in my life," Mutombo remembers. "My mother looked after us when my father was going to work every day to bring food home. She made sure we didn't get into trouble. That was something very important. I grew up in a neighborhood where there was violence and drugs. My parents helped me to stay away from drugs, drinking and those kinds of things."

Mutombo attended a Salvation Army school for five years, from seventh through eleventh grades. "It was great," he recalls. "We wore black and white uniforms, and had a great principal. Every day we would sing the national anthem, and then pray."

A Nation Torn Apart

Mutombo's homeland has been rav-

aged for years by civil war. "I think things have been worse since President Laurent Kabila was shot dead [in January 2001] during an attempted *coup d'etat*," says Mutombo. But despite the chaos that followed the assassination, Mutombo believes that God has brought a great blessing to his country. "We felt God looking out for us," he says.

He believes a major reason for the conflict is that people are looking after "their own personal interests. They are

power, but at the same time, power can destroy you."

Mutombo continues to hope for true reconciliation in his country, and looks forward to the day when the citizens of Congo will "be safe and free to travel from north to south and east to west—and be able to speak their minds."

Giving Something Back

Mutombo has a deep love for his homeland. "Africa is a huge continent," he remarks. "There are miles of rivers, resources and beautiful deserts. It contains a large and strange variety of animals in the forest and mountains. And it has beautiful national parks."

"I respect myself as being an African and that is the reason why I felt I really didn't want to change my citizenship" after coming to the United States, he says. "I love living in America, but my body and soul belong to the

place where I was born. ... [often people] come here and have such a beautiful life, but I am not happy as long as

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The Dikembe Mutombo Foundation is building a new 300-bed general hospital on 10 acres in Kinshasa. It will include state-of-the-art facilities and equipment, with inpatient beds, an outpatient clinic, emergency services and a pharmacy, and will offer services in surgery, obstetrical care, radiology and nuclear medicine.

not looking at the reasons [people are dying] and instead are looking for personal gratification. I think that is why the country suffers. ... It is good to have

Dikembe Mutombo: Pursuing His Dream *continued*

my people are still suffering and dying day to day for some of the things we take for granted in America. There is so much I can do; I try to give something back."

As a child, Mutombo dreamed of becoming a doctor so he could help

efforts on the delivery of health care services, prevention, research and advocacy activities on behalf of the community.

The foundation's main project is the construction of the 300-bed hospital in Kinshasa. Mutombo has contributed \$3.5 million of his own funds toward the \$14 million project, which broke ground this past September and is expected to open in late 2004. After its completion, he would like the foundation to build an elementary school.



Dikembe and actor Danny Glover with Nkosi Johnson, an 11-year-old AIDS orphan who opened the 13th International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa. Nkosi was the inspiration for the creation of Nkosi's Haven, the first and only care center in South Africa to house HIV/AIDS infected mothers and their children. Nkosi died last year from AIDS complications.

the many sick and dying children in his country. With that goal in mind, he came to the United States on a USAID scholarship to attend Georgetown University. During his second year, Georgetown coach John Thompson convinced him to join the basketball team. His life would never be the same.

His career ambitions turned to basketball, but he never forgot his lifelong dream to help those suffering in his home country.

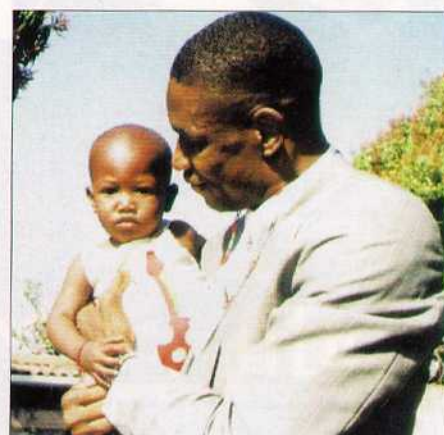
In 1997 Mutombo established the Dikembe Mutombo Foundation, with the mission to improve the "health, education and quality of life for the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo." The foundation aims not only to prevent and treat disease, but to assist each individual in achieving his/her full potential through the "promotion of health policy, health research and increased access to health care and education."

The foundation concentrates its

efforts on the delivery of health care services, prevention, research and advocacy activities on behalf of the community.

Carrying the Weight

"Whenever I travel in different countries I am shown such great respect. The people are very proud to see what I have accomplished coming to America." This responsibility weighs heavily on Mutombo. "It is not easy to carry that much weight. You feel it night after night," he explains. But Mutombo does not reject his role as a celebrity and role model. "I must accept what God gives me," he says. "You cannot say, 'I don't want to be bothered by that.'" A good friend once told him "to use whatever leverage you have while you are here because when this game is over you will wonder when you walk through the airport and no one even says 'hi' to you. No one



"Judge not the poor for their poverty, but judge the community for its indifference," says Mutombo, drawing on a Talmudic proverb. Here he holds a child in KwaMashu township outside of Durban, South Africa. By the end of 1999, 11.2 million children were orphaned by AIDS, 95 percent of them from sub-Saharan Africa.

remembers who you were. You have to enjoy this time and thank the Lord for having this moment and opportunity right now. There are so many people who would love to be in the same shoes as you."

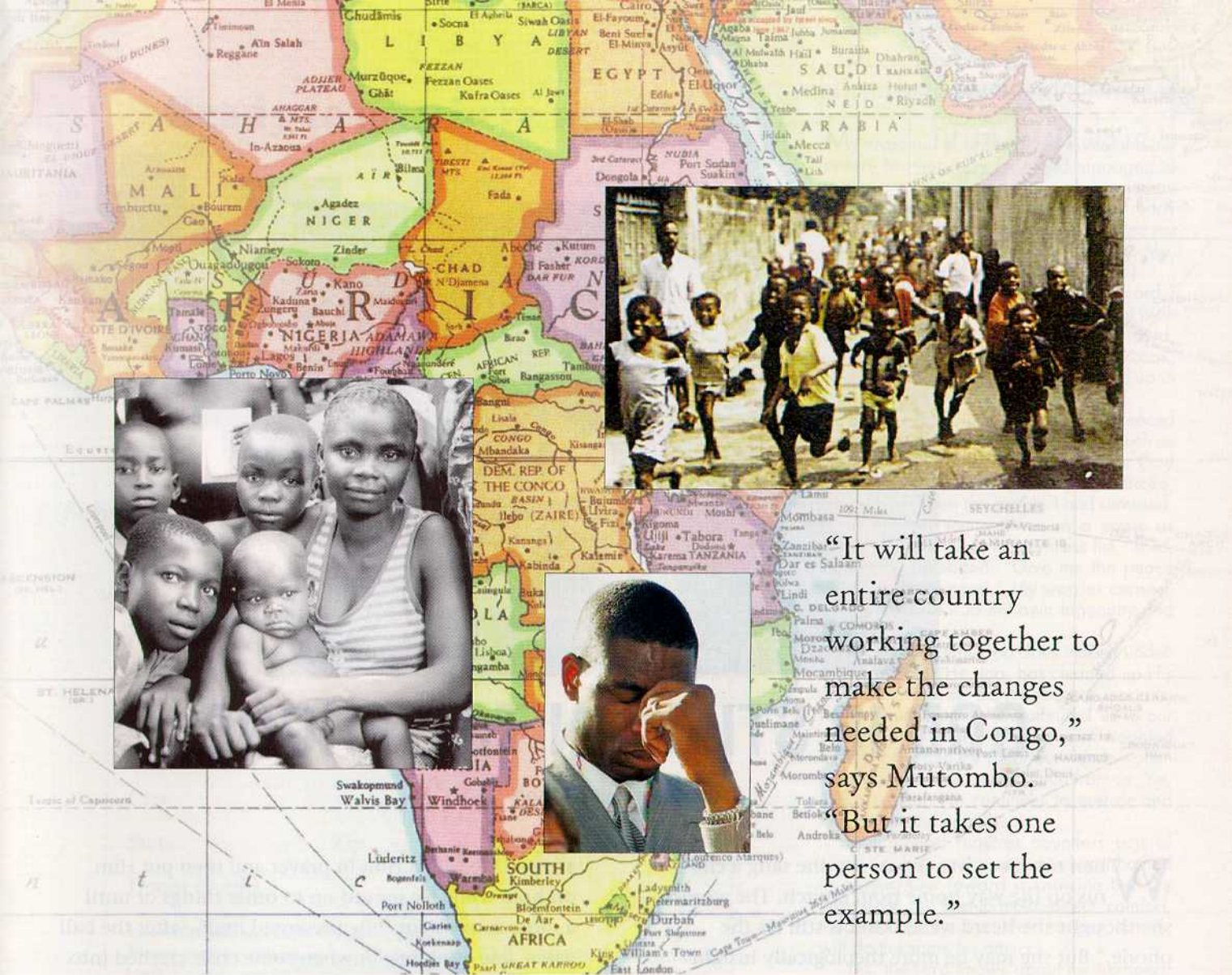
Mutombo's generosity, apparent on the basketball court and in his travels in the United States and abroad, is perhaps best expressed in his own home. He and his wife Rose have adopted four of his nieces and nephews. Since then, they have had two children of their own, daughter Carrie and son Jean-Jacques. "Being married and hav-

In June 2000, Dikembe Mutombo was among 20 winners of the President's Service Award, the nation's highest honor for volunteer service. Mutombo's other awards include:

- 2001 J. Walter Kennedy Citizenship Award
- Essence* Magazine's 2001 Achiever
- Sporting News* No. 1 Good Guy
- USA Weekend* Magazine's Most Caring Athlete
- The NAACP Phoenix Award
- ABC's Person of the Week
- The Henry P. Iba Citizen Athlete Award
- The Ernie Davis Humanitarian Award



Former President William J. Clinton presents Mutombo with the President's Service Award.



"It will take an entire country working together to make the changes needed in Congo," says Mutombo. "But it takes one person to set the example."

ing children changes your entire life," Mutombo observes. "Your responsibilities are not the same. You are not the same person anymore."

He also maintains a close relationship with his family back home in Congo. He speaks with them "every day on the phone," he says. "They pray for me a lot. We pray for all of our safety."

A Persistent Faith

Mutombo attributes his success on the court, and in life, to the Lord. "Before the game, we go to a little chapel and listen to the Word," he says, "and I listen to what God has to tell me before I walk on the court. Then I sit in the chair and take a minute to pray as well."

"We understand that we are there to help each other. I believe our prayers

have helped us," he continues. "We pray before the game and we leave our game to the Lord. There are so many guys who don't walk off the court by themselves. It is a blessing when you go to a game night after night and you get a chance to walk to the locker room on your own. ... It really doesn't matter how much strength and how many weights you can lift, but the protection you are getting from above."

Prayer is an important part of Mutombo's life off the court as well. "I pray every day I wake up in the morning," he says. "There are so many people who go to sleep and never wake up. When you close your eyes night after night and you get up again you must thank God that you have a chance to see the sun. Even though they say the sun will rise tomorrow,

how many of us shall see the sun tomorrow?"

For the past few years, Mutombo has been studying the Bible. "I think reading the entire Bible is so important," he says. "I love reading the New Testament because it reflects the life of Jesus. I love reading the Old Testament because God sent so many great prophets to show that Jesus was coming. I love to see how God reveals Himself through people in the Bible."

"I try every day to do as much as I can while I am still on this earth. I think God has put all of us here to fulfill some duty."

For more information on the Dikembe Mutombo Foundation and how you can help, write to: 4413 Northside Parkway, Suite 137, Atlanta, GA 30327 or go to their website: www.dmf.org. Photographs courtesy of the Dikembe Mutombo Foundation, Dr. Ben Mathes and Richard Franco.