

Komezza – the golden law of rugby

By Mark Adler

THE word translates roughly as “play on” and it is pretty useful when your knowledge of the Rwandan language is sketchy and you’re trying to teach youngsters the basics of the game – and they’ve never even seen a rugby ball.

But for Somerset referee Duncan Fiskin, a trip to Rwanda to join a charity encouraging people to take up the game, was unforgettable, in any language.

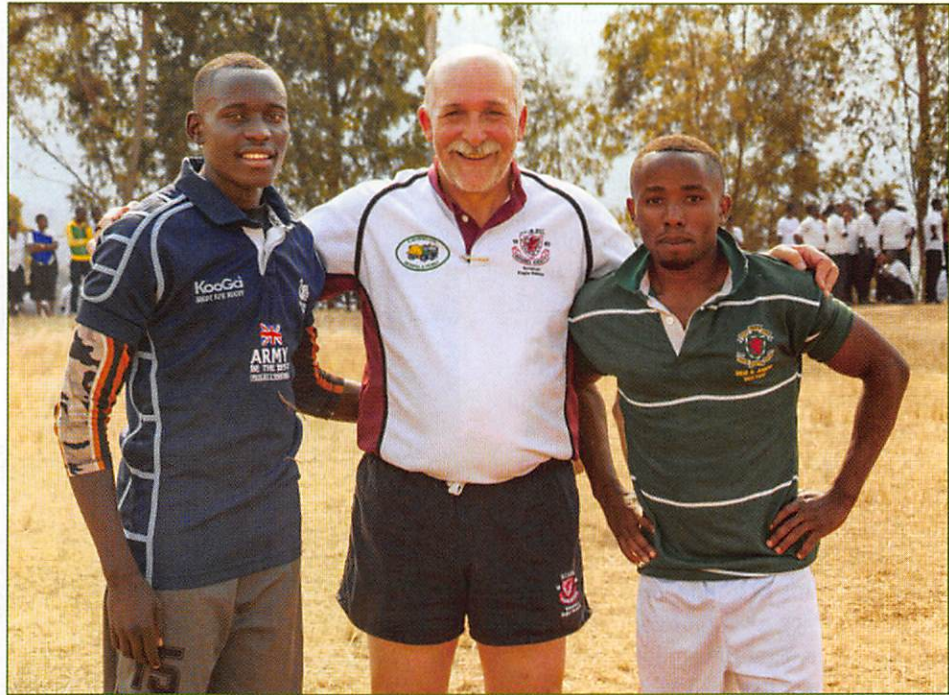
Rugby is playing an increasing role in the ongoing reconciliation process in the now peaceful, stable country.

Duncan, from Frome, is a member of the Somerset Referee’s Society and paid for his own trip to Rwanda as part of the Friends of Rwandan Rugby scheme. As well as teaching youngsters the basics of the game, Duncan also ran coaching sessions for aspiring referees.

The members of the charity saw youngsters progress from having absolutely no knowledge of rugby to competing in a tag tournament within the space of just a week or so.

Soccer is the main sport in Rwanda and Duncan and the team were forced to make improvised rugby goalposts by lashing poles to the uprights of the football versions. There is one established rugby club in Rwanda – but the Thousand Hills club in the capital Kigali doesn’t have a clubhouse and most games are played on concrete-hard surfaces baked by drought.

Despite the tough conditions, Duncan said he saw huge potential for the future of the game in Rwanda. There are full time rugby development coaches in place



Duncan – in his Somerset referee shirt – with the two captains at a 7s match in Huey

and the Rwandan national side – called the Silverbacks – has competed in the Kowloon 10s tournament in Hong Kong that runs alongside the world-recognised 7s competition. He said: “There was real talent on display; some of the older players are very athletic and, whilst I can’t see schools playing 15-a-side at this stage, they could become a very good force in sevens.”

Schooling is free in Rwanda but parents must pay for uniforms – basic – and books, so many cannot afford to send their children to classes. Duncan and the other charity members held coaching sessions at a charity project run by an English woman, which provides schooling

for some of the deprived youngsters.

Duncan and the team took out rugby balls, training bibs, shirts – donated by clubs across England and Wales – tag belts and a bag full of referee’s whistles.

Most importantly, they took sets of teeshirts to give to the youngsters. “For many of the children, they couldn’t believe they could keep the teeshirts – these are kids who maybe own just one shirt and pair of shorts,” said Duncan.

He added: “Despite the poverty and lack of facilities, my abiding memory is of smiling faces. People are genuinely happy.”

It was, Duncan said, a life-changing trip and he plans to return next year, possibly



Friends of Rwandan Rugby – their work is a force for good

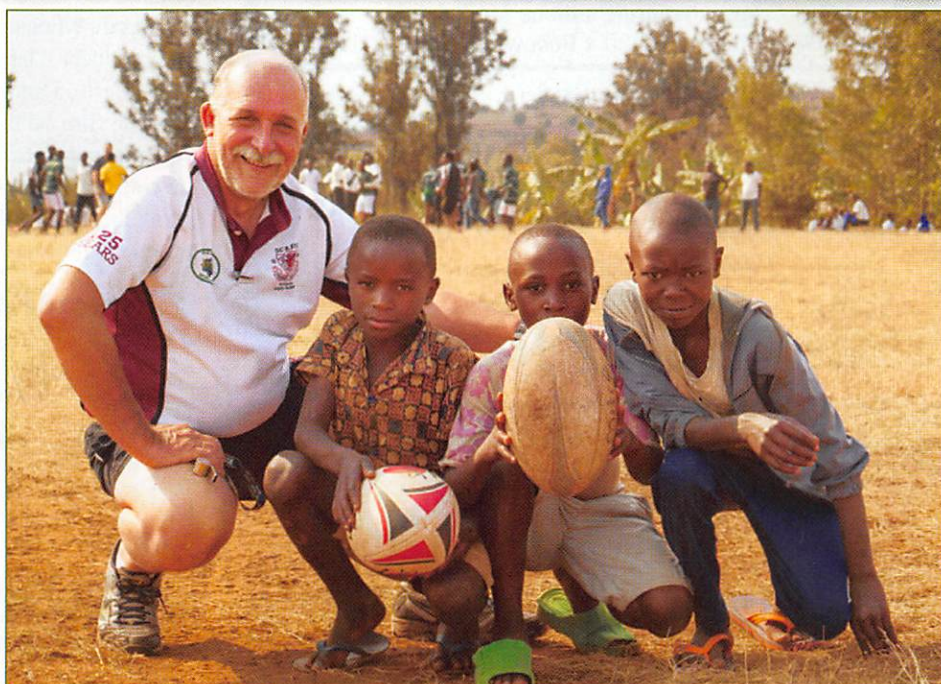


Playing conditions were unusual

with his son who is a keen rugby player. He is also part of a team which is exploring the idea of sending teams from four schools – probably independent schools – from across the UK to take part in a sevens tournament in 2018. One of those schools might be Prior Park College in Bath, where Duncan coaches and where his friend, the former Bristol rugby player and coach Paul Hull, is Director of Rugby.

Duncan added: "Refereeing a game of rugby is the same all over the world; it's all about communication and about letting the game flow. The whistle is a last resort and 'Komeza' certainly came in useful!"

● The educational charity visited by Duncan in Kigali is called the Kinamba Community Project. Based in Lancashire, but known in Rwanda as the Meg Project, it costs £20 a month to sponsor a child to attend primary school. For details, visit: www.kinambaproject.org.uk



Duncan with some of the youngsters: most had never before touched a rugby ball

(Photos courtesy of Amanda Brook)

For details about the Friends of Rwandan Rugby, visit: www.friendsofrwandanrugby.com

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