

# Serving In Africa

By GEOFF BOWER

"DO YOU EVER ALLOW VISITING PROS? IF YOU DO, I WOULD LOVE TO COME."

"WE'D LOVE TO HAVE YOU."



It was last February, when I found myself at the PTR tennis symposium in Hilton Head, South Carolina chatting with Dr. Liz Odera, a warm and friendly coach, from Kenya. She began telling me about her tennis facility (Sadili Oval Club) in Nairobi, Africa. Little did I know that chance meeting was to later catapult me to an international voyage that was to be one the best experiences of my life!

Teaching tennis to African children, living in the local community and going on a safari sounded very exciting. My boss, Karl Hale, who's been to Nairobi, strongly encouraged me to go. I was a little nervous; I didn't really know quite what was in store, but I figured that was

part of the excitement. I knew the deal would be teaching the kids camp for a week, they'd take care of meals and accommodations and I'd get to go on a 5 day safari!

In December, I boarded a plane from Canada to the Kenyan capital of Nairobi. On the drive to the village from the airport, we drove through various police check points which I later found out was common place around Nairobi. I spent the first week of my African adventure at the Sadili Oval Club where I helped run a tennis camp for 40 kids, ages 5 -16. Going to work was pretty fascinating; I'd pass the local women returning from the market with live chickens under their arms or goats over

their shoulders, kind of the Kenyan version of going to Pusateris! I was a little uncomfortable about walking around by myself early on, but people got to know me pretty quickly. Word gets around fast when there's someone new in the community.

I slept under a mosquito net and each new day I awoke to the Kenyan Alarm Clock (dozens of roosters) at 5:30am. My morning routine consisted of teaching yoga to Billy (local tennis coach and my amazing tour guide), cold showers, yummy instant coffee and a breakfast of mango and sim sim (sesame snaps). I introduced myself as "Coach Pinky" (kids I taught in Jamaica called me this because of the effect the sun has on my

A group of children and a young man are sitting on a green metal bench outdoors. The young man in the center, with blonde hair, is covering his eyes with his hands. He is wearing a black shirt. To his left, a girl in a purple school uniform is holding a yellow cup. Next to her is a boy in a white polo shirt, also holding a yellow cup. To the right of the young man is a girl in a grey hoodie and a blue and white checkered skirt, holding a yellow cup. Next to her is a girl in a light blue school uniform, also holding a yellow cup. In the background, other children are sitting on the bench, and a boy in an orange shirt and pants is walking away. A tennis racket is visible on the ground near the girl in the light blue uniform.

“Mzuri sana” - in Swahili, which means  
“I’m fine.” They all laughed.

Aside from getting used to the wild-life - which I saw plenty of during a five-day safari during the latter half of my trip - I also dealt with ball-control issues, because of the extremely high altitude, the balls just take off. I was completely baffled why I couldn't keep the ball in the court (not that it's much better at home). It wasn't until I met a local pro who used to work in Toronto who shared with me his experience of

getting used to the off-putting near-to-the-equator-strange-gravity conditions.

I came away from Kibera wanting to help. Tennis is giving these kids opportunities, hope, and something to look forward to and get excited about. My goal is to start a scholarship fund to give the Kibera children an opportunity to play tennis. I'm currently working on this with Dr Liz Odera (owner of Sadili). For \$300.00 a year the children will be able to play tennis twice a week for a year and have meals included in their training. My goal is to sponsor 10 children a year. Through tennis and the Sadili Oval, these children can have a place to go where people believe in them and provide a positive, safe and healthy environment. What a great feeling it would be to be able to be part of that.

The club, which emphasizes nutrition, provided two snacks and a lunch every day. Some of the kids from Kibera only have the opportunity to eat when they play tennis, and that is why the club includes snacks and meals in their training. Monday is usually a low energy day for the Kibera children because they often don't get proper nutrition over the weekend.

I was pretty impressed with the gener-