LOOK TO THE STARS

For Edwin
Moses,
winners of
the Laureus
World Sports
Awards are
a symbol
of hope to
children all
over the world

Sport's Game Changers

To have the power to inspire and drive social changes in the name of sports, is an honourable victory that goes far beyond the medals and trophies earned, learns Demie Tan

Portrait Photography Allan Casal

t would have been an uncomfortable journey for most people living in big cities. But the four-hour bumpy bus trip along the dirt roads to Moruleng—a town in the North West province of South Africa—were exciting times for young Sibusiso Xhoba and his friends, who come from some of the poorest areas in South Africa. A day in their shoes will expose you to communities plagued by infectious diseases and a constant struggle to make ends meet. It's a way of life that many of us fortunate individuals are sheltered from. But having said that, nothing could have killed the chatter coming from the vehicle as it travelled the distance that day. The children were about to come face-to-face with some of the biggest names in football and the atmosphere within the bus was as exhilarating as it was nerve-racking. It was the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the year that Spain became the crowning glory of the football world, and the children were scheduled to witness a practice match between England and South Africa. After the game that ended 3-0, they were invited onto the field for the moment they had been waiting for.

Their eyes bulged in disbelief as the England team that at the time consisted of superstars such as David Beckham, Wayne Rooney and manager Fabio Capello warmly greeted them...





You could almost tell by their actions, that their hearts were beating furiously. How exciting it must have felt for them to be in such close proximity to their sporting heroes. Seeing the smiles on their faces as they had their photos taken with the footballers, it really must have been a dream come true.

"I choose to play sports and not do drugs and alcohol," says a happy Xhoba to one of the project managers for the trip.

This is one of the many efforts organised by Laureus, and it is people like Xhoba and his friends, who inspire all the great athletes in the world to play a part in promoting social change through sport. A phrase that is so often used, the late President Nelson Mandela puts it best when he says, "Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope, where once there was only despair."

Mandela's moving speech—which can be viewed on Youtube—opened our eyes to the ideology of sport for development.

His words are the driving force behind the success of Laureus, which currently comprises three separate bodies.

The Laureus Academy is a prestigious organisation that is made up of some of the greatest athletes the world has ever seen. These members have the ability to influence change with their words and actions, because you don't just buy your way into the academy, you actually have to earn the right to be part of it. These sporting legends are the individuals who vote for the winners of the annual Laureus World Sports Awards. And

"True to the words of President

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we said we were going to do"

these winners, they harness the power of sport under the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, to help tackle

together with

pressing social issues that are happening around the world. The projects under the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation seek to guide communities to help themselves. Some of the challenges that are currently being tackled include cases from gun and gang violence, to discrimination as well as health and education. From funding to

counselling and training, the foundation's current philosophy states that it's not about the quantity but rather the quality of support that is being offered. In conjunction with the 2014 Laureus World Sports Awards that was held in Kuala Lumpur, *Malaysia Tatler* had the opportunity of meeting Laureus Academy chairman Edwin Moses—the leading man behind this movement—as well as three influential individuals, Mick Doohan, Marcel Desailly and Andre Villas-Boas, who have helped spread the vision across the world.

ike all great success stories, the creation of Laureus started with a dream. It was an aspiration to use sports as a hook to improve the lives of children in disadvantaged communities. "I did not know what to expect, nobody knew what to expect. We had no direction, no formal policy. We just had a group of academy members who pledged to use sports to make a social change," recalls the articulate Moses who has been chairing the academy since 2000. The charismatic man is a living legacy in the 400m hurdles, with two Olympic gold medals, three World Cup titles and two World Championships. He was an invincible machine, holding an impressive record of being unbeaten in 122 consecutive races. Moses is also currently a motivational speaker with a background in financial consulting. He fondly remembers the time when he first assumed chairmanship of the academy, all he had was a small office with a handful of people. But like all the great sports people of

the world, the rule of thumb is to never give up. "I have been to business school for my MBA so I know how to organise and motivate people. A lot

of the work was during the first seven years where I had to make decisions on almost everything." He lightens the mood as he jokingly adds, "I remember how the chairman used to be the only full-time academy member working on a day-to-day basis!"

Under Moses's guidance, the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation has improved the lives

of over a million children by creating 150 different projects across 50 countries. It's a spectacular achievement, compared to 13 years ago, when it only had six projects in four countries. "Now every day of the year, someone is doing something somewhere," comments the transformational leader.

Beyond the statistics and rankings, the realm of sport reveals a lot about human perseverance, ambition and focus among many others. Many believe that these are life skills that can change not only how children view the world but also more importantly, how they view themselves. It's a statement that academy member and retired Ghanaian-born French footballer Marcel Desailly is happy to elaborate on. Having participated in many different projects, the former France World Cup captain believes that sport can help drive an individual's ambition. Known to all as one of the greatest modern French

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footballers, a serene Desailly drops the names of several countries from Morocco to Italy and Ghana, but his experience in Kenya is one that he will always remember. "You and I both know how the slums in Kenya are like," he starts to say, "They've got nothing, no water, and sometimes there are even rats in the bedroom. But when we go and do something small like creating a football field in the middle of the community, the kids come to life just like how flowers blossom. You suddenly understand what they love

EVERYBODY NEEDS A HERO

MotoGP racing legend Mick Doohan is just the man to inspire you to achieve more than you could ever imagine

IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD

The Malaysian champions who compete with a winner's attitude

DATUK LEE CHONG WEI

The pride and joy of Malaysia, this shuttler has truly placed our country on the world map for sport. The sixth Malaysian to win an Olympic medal, Datuk Lee Chong Wei has enjoyed an illustrious career as a professional badminton player. His rise

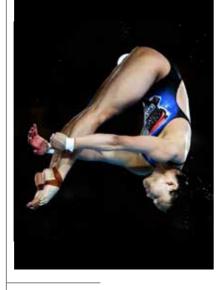


to success can be attributed to hard work, perseverance and mental toughness. This is one man who truly understands the meaning of 'no pain, no gain'.



DATUK NICOL ANN DAVID

Ask this beautiful Laureus ambassador about her secrets to sporting success in squash, and she will tell you that it all boils down to five key factors: Power, skill, creativity, mental toughness and drive. Datuk Nicol Ann David is the current world number one in women's squash, making her the first Asian woman to achieve such an honour.



PANDELELA RINONG

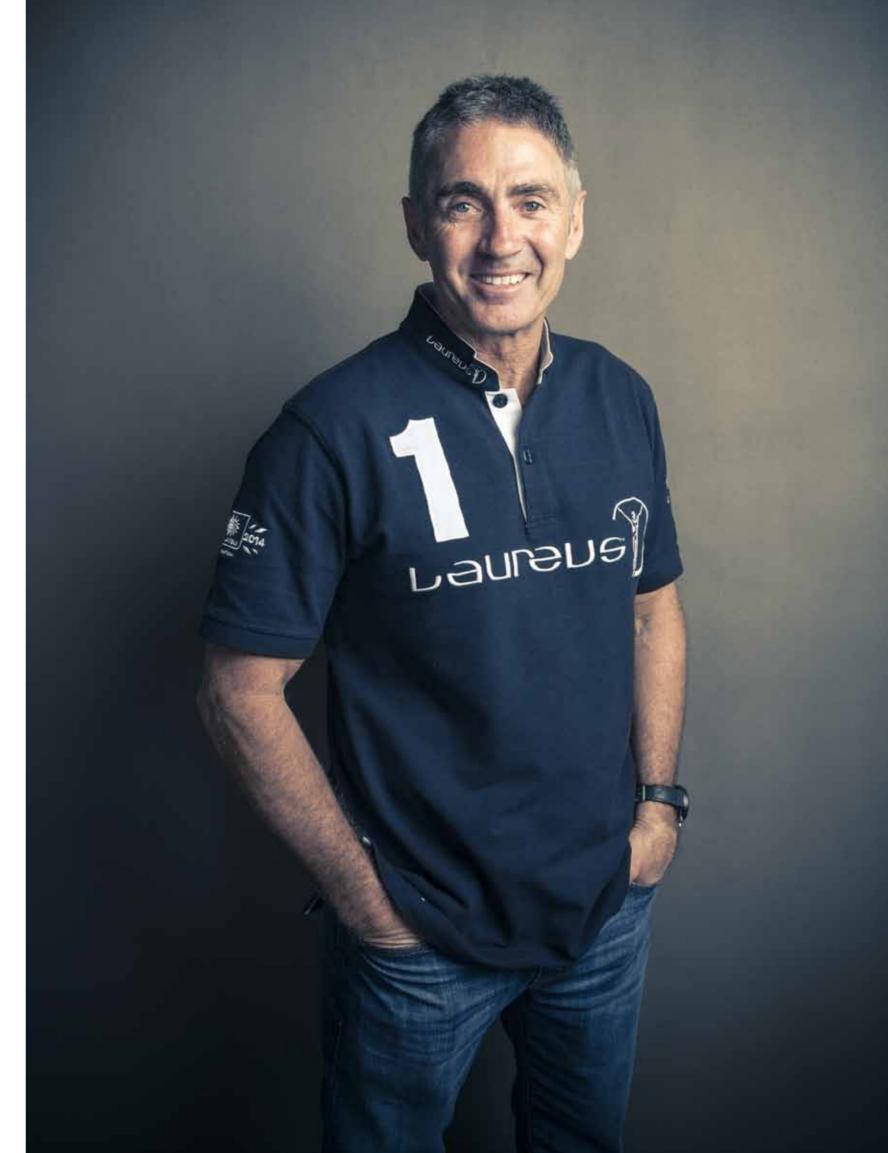
The sky is the limit when it comes to this national athlete who received a standing ovation when she won a medal at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. Pandelela Rinong made national headlines when she became the first female Malaysian athlete to win an Olympic medal. Additionally, it also marked the first time Malaysia had won in a game other than badminton.



KHAIRUL ANUAR

Joining the national archery team in 2011, Khairul Anuar finished second at the European Grand Prix in France before making history as the first Malaysian to qualify for the archery World Cup Finals in Paris. This driven man is currently ranked world number nine in archery.







EMPATHY IN ACTION

Going into projects with an open heart, Andre Villas-Boas shows how a little bit of compassion can go a long way

SPORT FOR UNITY

The inagural Olympic Games is the perfect example that showcases the powerful tool of sport as a peace mechanism as people from different cultures get together under a common passion on the subject. Respect and honour are among the values upheld during these prestigious games. Sport has the unique power to attract, mobilise and inspire individuals. The very nature of sport itself, is about participation and the right to play, according to the United Nations Sport for Development and Peace. This noble organisation is pushing for more recognition that sport should be seen as an important investment in the present and future, particularly in developing countries because it plays a significant role in strengthening social ties and network, which is important when it comes to promoting the idea of peace in the world.

and from there you can start to work on changing their lives," says the man who clearly has a beautiful way with words. In Desailly's opinion, once that hook has been established, "parents can now say, 'no more sport if you don't go to school,' and it works. I don't know if they will end up in university or what they will become but I do know that Laureus builds the foundation for them to start better lives." Desailly's words ring true to his fellow academy member and MotoGP racing legend, Mick Doohan. Adding on to the former footballer's words, the Australian says, "In many socially troubled communities, problems occur when youths have got too much time on their hands. What I notice when I get into these projects is it removes them completely out of their environment. Their guards are down and they aren't trying to be 'supercool' or 'super bad'. And if we can direct their focus into being winners or to just be part of a team, sometimes it can make them realise that there is more to life." Doohan is a living example of how selfdetermination can overcome the odds. The high achiever was set to win his first World Championship back in 1992, when he came close to death after a practice lap crash.

be amputated, Doohan's choice to put his life in the hands of one particular Italian doctor proved to be a lifechanging decision. Fearlessly staring death in the face, he miraculously survived. The man struggled to regain fitness and a restricted use of his right foot before going on to win his first World Championship in 1994. He was a legend that dominated the class for five consecutive years after, and even to this day, he is still considered as an inspiration to many MotoGP riders around the world. "Through Laureus, we give kids the inspiration to be like any of us. It provides a platform to help these children. But the problem is sometimes getting people to embrace changes," adds the man in a concerned tone.

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thought would

jured leg that many

Current manager of soccer team Zenith Saint Petersburg and also ambassador for

Laureus, Andre Villas-Boas believes that in order for a Laureus project to work, it's got to be a two-way street. In his opinion, it's also important that the children are equally as passionate as the guys who visit them. The projects that Villas-Boas has participated in so far are mainly football related due his managerial experience in the field. He says, "We take kids on the streets who live in poor areas, most of them from difficult upbringings. If we can organise games for them and maybe show them the importance of teamwork, they can take that message with them." For a man with zero experience as a professional football player, Villas-Boas has had a colourful career, managing top teams from Porto to Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur. "I have always loved sports. I was lucky to have a good upbringing without any social problems. I also had the support of my parents when I wanted to coach. That is very important when you're growing up, especially when it comes to achieving your dreams," says Villas-Boas. Knowing all too well on how much of a difference support can make, he aims to continue encouraging young talents in socially challenged environments. An empathic Villas-Boas shares, "I know that the steps they need to take in life are even harder than the ones that I had to take. So in some ways, that is why we can never do enough. I am always inspired to do more. I believe you can send out a meaningful message through sport and I always tell them that I want to do more because I have so much to give back."

By crossing boundaries and making sports accessible to everyone regardless of gender, ability or region, the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation continues to break barriers and acknowledge the positive impacts of what sports can have all over the world. As of now, there is talk of having 11 fully funded projects in Malaysia, however, details of that have yet to be confirmed. But, it's really only a matter of time before that vision turns into reality.

"We always make sure that we find the right type of project that can hopefully change some lives. We do that wherever we go. And we will always come back to make sure that we are continually involved. And true to the words of President Mandela, we have done what we said we were going to do," declares a confident Moses. •

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