

The GOAN VOICE

www.goanvoice.org.uk



Norman Da Costa: A Brief Bio

Few are fortunate enough to have their childhood dreams come true. Mine did and this Kenyan journalist in retirement today can reflect on a job that brought satisfaction and rewards along the way. How many sat metres away from the finish line at track events at the Olympic Games, or occupied boxing ringside seats or given the front row at World Cup soccer and cricket matches at the greatest stadiums in the world? Or for that matter shake hands and interview these superstars minutes after winning a gold medal or the World Cup.

Ever since my high school days at Nairobi's Dr. Ribeiro Goan School, I had one goal in mind and that was to become a journalist - and not just any journalist - but specifically a sports journalist. After all I had a stellar career as captain of the school's field hockey and cricket teams and was also a member of the 4x100 yards team that in 1963 won the Nairobi schools relay championships. In life one needs a lucky break and mine came in 1964 when I, freshly out of school and wanting to pursue my career in the print media, bumped into sports reporter Cyprian Fernandes outside the Nation offices. As luck would have it Cyprian wanted someone to cover the M.R. de Souza Gold Cup matches as he had another assignment. Sports editor Brian Marsden was so impressed with the first match story I submitted that he asked me to cover the entire tournament. Since he couldn't offer me a full-time position he did the next best thing – rang John Dickenson at the Sunday Post and had me hired on the promise he would call me when there was an opening at the Nation. A year later Marsden, a man true to his word, gave me a full-time job.

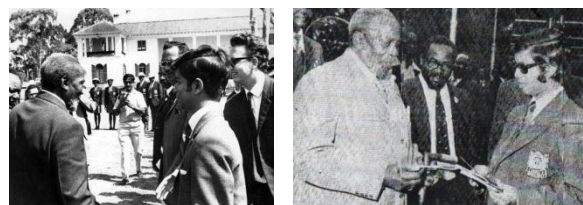
I was fortunate to get into journalism when Kenya was fast becoming the focus of world attention for producing world-class athletes. A young policeman named Kipchoge Keino was busy blazing a trail of track supremacy. This was a glorious time for Kenya sports and I became a close and trusted friend of these superstars and a photograph with them hangs with pride in my home in Brampton, Ontario.



1965 Brazzaville Games: Philip Otieno, Ben Kogo, Peter Francis, Norman Da Costa, Wilson Kiprugut Chuma and Kipchoge Keino

My greatest thrill came in 1972 when I was on hand in Munich recording the country's nine-medal haul. One frightening and unforgettable moment for me came hours after Charles Asati, Hezekiah Nyamao, Robert Ouko and Julius Sang won the 4x400 metres relay gold ahead of Britain and France. In a city on high alert following the massacre of the Israeli athletes, I tried to scale a fence separating the athletes' village and the press village to file my copy. It would take me a mere 10 minutes, but the press bus took an hour. Halfway up and a German guard cocked his gun barked at me to get down or be shot. That's the only time I can remember wetting my pants while on assignment.

In 1974 I became the first South Asian sports editor of a daily newspaper in East Africa, if not the continent and the same year was presented with a gold medal at a ceremony in Barcelona for my contribution to sports journalism by the AIPS, the International Sports Writers' Association.



Apart from covering every major event in East Africa the job had other perks as well. I met President Jomo Kenyatta on two occasions – including presenting him with the official Olympic

brochure in 1972 – which I helped produce. While covering the Kenya-Uganda boxing contest I had an exclusive interview with President Amin, the country's past heavyweight champion. Met with British Prime Minister Ted Heath and Princess Anne at Lancaster House in 1974 and the princess talked about how her mother was Kenya when news filtered out that she would be the next queen. In 1972 met Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda in Lusaka during the East African cricket championships.

I was actively involved off as a field hockey player – representing Kenya B on three occasions; a Kenya Hockey Union national selector, managed Kenya's national to India's Gold Cup tournament in 1975. In between I formed the Kenya Sports Writers Association and became first chairman of the Nairobi Hockey Association.

Not being a citizen of the country although I was born in Nairobi in 1945 my wife Delphine and three young children – Meryl, Nigel and Elaine – emigrated to Canada just prior to the 1976 Olympics. It was a tough life for a young family in a new country and since I did not work on Fleet Street chances of landing a job here were slim. But we survived as the late Horst Dassler, owner of adidas and one of the most powerful men in sports, offered me a job until I could get into my own line. As sports editor back home I assisted Dassler establish contacts in the government to open a factory producing soccer balls. I worked with the adidas public relations office in Montreal during the Olympics and then in Toronto for a year before finally being hired by the Toronto Sun. Sports editor George Gross was impressed with my first soccer report and I became the paper's soccer correspondent and covered all of the Toronto Blizzard's matches in the North American Soccer League and that included a three-week "summer training" stint with the team in Portugal. In 1981 I was simultaneously offered jobs by the Toronto Star, Canada's largest newspaper, and the Globe and Mail, the country's national newspaper.

I joined the Star in 1981 as a copy editor, moved to reporting, a stint as assistant sports editor and back to reporting before retiring after 27 years in 2009 having covered the Barcelona Olympics, three World Cups, two women's World Cups, the 1991 Pan Am Games and the 1999 cricket World Cup in England. As chief soccer correspondent I travelled extensively reporting on Canada's men's and women's national teams that included Canada's Gold Cup triumph in 2000, the most by any Canadian journalist.

The highlight of my journalistic career came in 1989 when I broke the biggest story that had captivated the world in Seoul. Ben Johnson was stripped of his 100 metres gold after being found guilty of taking anabolic steroids. Dr. Jamie Astaphan admitted to me that he had indeed administered drugs to the sprinter and the story made front pages on most newspapers around the world. Prior to that, I revealed a couple of Canadian soccer players were bribed to throw a game in an international tournament in Malaysia.

I enjoyed a great innings before retirement in 2009. The enjoyment now comes with spending time with my five grandchildren and taking vacations around the world. There is still work involved as I am a member of the Brampton Sports Hall of Fame, write a weekly cricket column for the Sun chain newspaper chain and president of the 55 Plus Goan Association that has 650 members. Did I say I was retired?

