



On April 6, 1994, the plane carrying the President of Rwanda was shot down on its approach into Kigali, the country's capital. The incident precipitated one of the most horrific and efficient mass killing sprees in history. In the space of only 100 days, over 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed by Hutu extremists, most with simple farm implements, such as machetes, hoes, and clubs. When the killing finally stopped, the country lay in ruins – economically, socially, and psychologically.

Each year, between April and June, Rwandans take time to remember the victims of the genocide and recommit themselves to ensuring their society never descends to the same depths again. Particularly during the month of April, public commemoration events are ubiquitous. This year, which marks the 20th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, events took on an even greater solemnity, and numerous foreign dignitaries descended on the country to express their solidarity with the Rwandan people. In the 20 years since the genocide, much has changed. The country has rebuilt itself on the back of strong economic growth; poverty has fallen, life expectancy has risen, and nearly all kids of primary-school age are in school. Rwanda imagines its future as the Singapore of Africa, a hub for business, information technology, financial services, and tourism at the crossroads of East and Central Africa. But even 20 years on, with a post-genocide generation now reaching maturity, the wounds the genocide inflicted on Rwandan society have not fully healed.



Long after the dignitaries left, Rwanda Rush, known locally as the “Dream Team Football Academy,” paid its respects to the victims of the genocide. On May 30, 2014, Rwanda Rush’s under-17 team visited the genocide memorial in Kigali, where over 250,000 victims are buried. The team and coaching staff laid a wreath at one of the mass graves and toured the memorial in quiet reflection.

“At Dream Team Football Academy, we strive to develop a complete person – not just his or her football skills. Our vision is to ‘develop champions in football and champions in life.’ Learning about our country’s history, tragic as it is, is an important part of youth development in Rwanda. The more the youth understand about the past, the more likely they are to stand up in the face of such injustice in the future. Those are the types of men and women we hope to develop at Dream Team Football Academy,” says Jacques Kayisire, one of the Academy’s founders.

In fact, the Dream Team Football Academy was created in 2010 to promote healing and understanding of differences through soccer. The founders, all Rwandan ex-professional players, are convinced that soccer can be a powerful force for peace and reconciliation. The Academy works with over 200 youth, including young children and girls, one of the few clubs in Rwanda to do so. In less than four years, it has placed two players on Rwanda’s under-17 national team, four players in Rwanda’s Top Division (D-1), and four others in the Second Division. Its partnership with Rush Soccer was formalized in December 2013.

Rwanda Rush’s future is bright. As the program continues to grow, so does its contribution to Rwanda’s continued peace and development.



Staff Profile: Jacques Kayisire, a founder of Rush Rwanda / Dream Team Football Academy and currently its Vice-President, was a member of Rwanda's under-17 national team and played professionally for local club STIR at the time of the genocide. His father, one of several politicians supportive of a transition to multi-party democracy, was targeted for execution and killed once the genocide broke out. After the genocide, Jacques went on to have a successful career with one of Rwanda's most well-known clubs, Rayon Sport. He then obtained his Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering from PSG College of Technology in India and holds a Master's Degree in Communication Management from the Kigali Institute of Technology. Jacques now works at the Government of Rwanda's National ID Agency as Director of Information Communication Technology. Virtually all of his spare time is devoted to helping Dream Team Football Academy become the top youth club in Rwanda. He is married to Florance Ingabire and has a three-years-old son, Ezra Kwizera.

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