

# Golden in the Eyes of Many

Featuring Daniel Igali

Newspaper Article



## Newspaper article: Daniel Igali's School Project

By James Christie. globeandmail.com. October 12, 2001

Before wrestler Daniel Igali was bathed in glory for the Olympic gold medal he won for Canada, he bathed in a dirty stream in his native Nigeria. "In my village, there's one steady running stream that people drink from," said Igali, who now lives in Surrey, B.C. "But they also bathe in it, throw their debris, [urinate] in it, everything. You can appreciate the number of infections and diseases. Any kid who makes it out of that situation, God just lets them survive."

The 27-year-old mat hero vowed that if ever he made good, he'd try to change the lot of the village that raised him. On Friday, he joined forces with teacher Kevin Matheny of Mission, B.C., and an amazing 10-year-old humanitarian, Ryan Hyrljac of Kemptville, near Ottawa, to take on two major projects. They are raising funds to build a school and create a well for clean water in the Nigerian town of Eniwari.

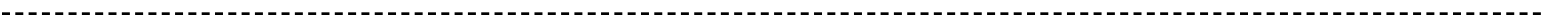
Igali, supported by his corporate sponsor, Cheerios, is trying to raise \$200,000 and will travel to the town of 4,000 in southeast Nigeria in December to set up the projects. Matheny, Igali's "adoptive brother" from the family that took him in after the 1994 Commonwealth Games, will follow up in March with 15 students from Mission's Heritage Park High School to get construction under way.

Wells are the specialty of Hyrljac, who four years ago was so affected by his Grade 1 teacher's talk about the lack of clean water in the Third World that he set about raising money first by doing chores, then soliciting donations as a captivating young speaker. His Ryan's Well Foundation has raised \$400,000 to date and installed 75 wells.

"He's one pretty special kid," Igali said. "I always promised myself if I had a chance to help in that situation, I'd do all I could," Igali said. "Kevin had a Global Education project taking Grade 12 students to underprivileged places and he found Ryan. Getting together on this project is something I'm pretty proud about." Yesterday, Igali met with the Nigeria's ambassador in Ottawa, then attended a presentation at Hyrljac's Holy Cross School in Kemptville.

The Eniwari project will replace a thatch roofed school with branches for walls. It calls for a six-room school building, a gym, an office for teachers and a couple of washrooms. The school will be named for the late Maureen Matheny, Kevin's mother. Igali recalls her as "my adoptive mom, who encouraged me I could be a champion and that education was important. Like my birth mother, Maureen was a teacher. Where I grew up, we had to evacuate the school when it rained hard because the rain poured in. We never wore shoes and the floor was always wet and cold and you caught colds all the time. My sponsor has supported this project wholeheartedly from the start. They have the attitude that children worldwide should be able to learn in a safe, healthy environment."

The Royal Bank of Canada also is supporting the project. Hyrljac, now in Grade 5, said he was motivated to start helping out in the Third World four years ago when he found out entire towns were dying from a lack of clean water when wells could be drilled for as little as \$70. I looked around the classroom and said, 'That's not fair,'" he said.



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"I went home and asked my parents for \$70. I kept begging them. They said they wouldn't just give it to me, but I could earn it with extra chores like cleaning branches from the ice storm."

The first well was dug in the middle of Uganda, where he learned that children from Angolo Primary School had to walk two hours to get clean water. "I haven't done this project alone," he said. "I talk about once a week and try to inspire people to help. I try to make the message count by telling people to look around them at what they have in the room. To see how little it takes to change things and make them happy, it makes you want to do it more."

Kevin Matheny heard about the Ryan's Well project on television and located Hyrljac by surfing on the Internet. They began corresponding in May, and Matheny saw a way to combine the visions of a boy and wrestler and an educator. Matheny adopted the idea of the Global Education course from one of his own high school teachers. Last year, Matheny took students to the Dominican Republic, where they learned firsthand about living in a poor village with no amenities and no showers. Before they left, they installed Canadian-made water filtration devices to give clean water to about a thousand people.

Matheny said that in addition to cash donations, the group could use the donation of cargo space on a ship to transport donations of clothing and supplies from the Mission community and filtration equipment purchased by Ferndale Elementary School in the B.C. community.