

AFRICAN LeadHERs ORIGIN STORY

*The moments that shaped Africa's next generation
of women leaders in sports.*

AfricanLeadHERs x BAL4HER Teaming Up Sports Mentorship Program

Third Edition

A partnership between Speak Up Africa and the Basketball Africa League

Sponsored by the Qatar Foundation

FOREWORD

Yacine Djibo

Founder and Executive Director, Speak Up Africa

Every young woman who has ever sat on a bench, wondering if there was a place for her in sport, is the reason this booklet exists. At Speak Up Africa, we have spent years working at the intersection of health, governance, and social change across the continent, and we have learned again and again that Africa's development cannot be separated from its investment in its women and girls. Sport is one of the most powerful and underused platforms we have to prove that belief true, because it teaches discipline, resilience, and leadership in ways that translate far beyond the court.

The Teaming Up: African LeadHERs meet BAL4HER sports mentorship

programme was built on a simple conviction: talent is universal, but opportunity is not. Across the continent, brilliant young women are entering sport as players, students, and volunteers, and too many of them hit a ceiling not because of what they lack, but because of what they have never been shown is possible. When we open doors for young women in officiating, media, health, operations, and business, we are not only building individual careers. We are building the infrastructure of a fairer, more complete sports ecosystem for the whole continent, one where the people managing, protecting, and telling the stories of African sport reflect the full breadth of African talent.

The stories in this booklet are proof of what happens when access meets ambition. Each woman featured here arrived with drive; what the programme offered was a door, a mentor, and a community willing to walk through it with her. I am proud of every mentee represented in these pages, and even prouder of the sisterhood they have built along the way, a network that I have no doubt will keep shaping African sport long after this cohort's formal mentorship has ended.

Amadou Gallo Fall

President, Basketball Africa League

...

Safia M. Al-Naimi

Director of Sports Strategy, Qatar Foundation

I had the privilege of meeting the women featured in this booklet in Kigali, Rwanda. Although they came from different countries and backgrounds, I was struck by what they shared: ambition, resilience, and a desire to learn.

Over just a few days, I met future leaders who are shaping sport in ways that often go unseen, through coaching, safeguarding, officiating, storytelling, nutrition, psychology, and more. Their passion, confidence, and commitment to making a difference left a lasting impression on me.

At Qatar Foundation, we believe that when women are given access to mentorship, opportunity, and strong networks, they do more than succeed individually; they help transform communities and create pathways for others to follow.

I am proud that Qatar Foundation supported the Teaming Up: African LeadHERs meet BAL4HER program, and even prouder to celebrate the remarkable women whose stories are captured in these pages.

This is where their stories begin. I have no doubt their impact is only just beginning.

PREFACE

Tagaty Badio

Project Consultant, Health Social Impact, Gender, Speak Up Africa

Every leader has an origin story.

Before the awards, titles, and accolades, each leader was once a young girl navigating her own path through doubt, expectations, and obstacles. She was the one sitting on the bench who dared to imagine a different role, the one who picked up a camera to reshape the narrative, the one who crossed borders, both literal and figurative, to impact people's lives.

African LeadHERs: Origin Story captures the pivotal moments that transformed participants of the Teaming Up mentorship programme into changemakers across Africa's sports ecosystem. These are raw, honest accounts of how ordinary girls became extraordinary leaders on the continent.

What unites these women? It is the mentor who believed in them before they believed in themselves; the moment when "no" became fuel; and the courage to enter spaces where they were told they did not belong. Their stories prove that when African women are given access, mentorship, and opportunity, they rise—and they lift others with them.

The women featured in this booklet represent different professions across five key areas of the sports ecosystem. Demonstrating the breadth of opportunities available within African sport, their stories remind us that the future of sport will not be built by athletes alone. It will be built by the coaches, officials, psychologists, nutritionists, photographers, marketers, and leaders working alongside them.

Together, they form the engine of the sports industry.

AFRICAN LEADERS MEET BAL4HER
TEAMING UP
A Gender Equality Sports Mentorship Program

SpeakUpAfrica.

Official Community Partner
مؤسسة قطر
Qatar Foundation

TEAMING UP SPORTS MENTORSHIP PROGRAM 3RD EDITION

ON-COURT

Allison Feaster
Reem Moussa

Dorothy Okatch
Nelly Louange Igirimbabazi

HEALTH & PERFORMANCE

Serra Temay
Saritha Keza Icyeza

Dr. Kensa Gunter
Dr. Robina Onwong'a

PLAYER MARKETING & STORYTELLING

Ashley Combs
Sarjo Baldeh

Ros Gold-Owunde
Ketsia Mambi

Arielle Chambers
Christianne Murengerantwari

MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS

Chrysa Chin
Sharon Ogaji

Sara Rehane
Mindiss Ndour

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

Mmaphuthi Morule
Nomfundo Khanyile

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Nelly Louange IGIRIMBABAZI

Burundi · 23 · Basketball Referee (OTM), FEBABU

“

I wanted to be the best and youngest woman referee my country had ever seen.

”

Biography

My name is IGIRIMBABAZI Nelly Louange. I am a young basketball enthusiast and official scorer in Burundi's national league. With a Bachelor's in Law, I balance my love for the court with academic prowess. As a firstborn, I developed strong leadership skills, bringing precision and focus to every game. Off-court, I am an active communicator with a vibrant presence, always connecting with others.

THE DREAMER

Nelly grew up loving basketball and played as part of a team in Burundi. She was passionate, committed, and always at training. However, she found herself sitting on the bench more often than not, watching others get the court time she craved.

THE CHALLENGE

Without the experience or recognition to break into the starting lineup, Nelly risked becoming invisible in the sport she loved. She could have walked away entirely.

THE TURNING POINT

A friend changed everything with a simple suggestion: stop waiting on the bench; try refereeing instead. That friend was the first person to tell her that her future in basketball might look different from what she had imagined, and that opened an opportunity. A selection process was underway for girls who wanted to become referees. Nelly took the test. She passed.

THE LEADER

Nelly is now a national league referee in Burundi, the *youngest referee* in the country. She started at 17 and has been building her reputation every season since.

INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Category: On-Court Roles

For decades, officiating has been one of the most male-dominated areas of sport. Across the world, women have had to fight for opportunities to officiate elite competitions in environments where authority has traditionally belonged to men.

In Africa, the challenge is even greater. Many girls enter sports as players but are rarely exposed to the idea that they can build careers as referees. Limited access to training, certification programmes, mentorship, and professional development means the pathway remains narrow. In some countries, including Burundi, female officials are still the exception rather than the norm.

As basketball continues to grow across the continent through national leagues, youth competitions, FIBA Africa tournaments, and the Basketball Africa League, demand for qualified officials is increasing, including the fact that more African women referees need to access decision-making powers on the court. As one of Burundi's youngest female referees, **Nelly** represents a growing generation of women stepping into these positions.

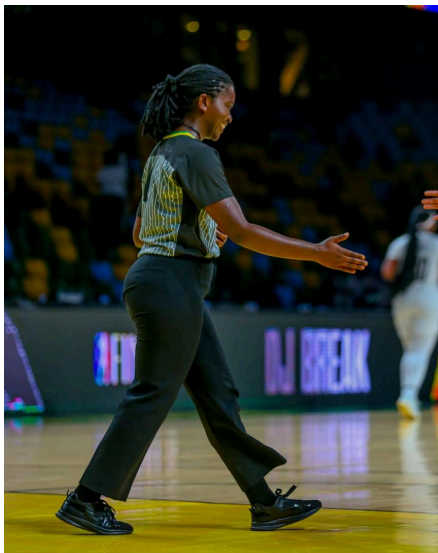


TEAMING UP JOURNEY

Mentor Match: Dorothy Okatch, Basketball Referee

Inside the BAL

At the BAL Elevate Camp for U26 in Kigali, Nelly sharpened her skills as a referee and attended a referee clinic before stepping into the BK Arena to officiate her first game, the U26 Showcase Game.



THE LEGACY

Nelly plans to mentor future female referees and teach them how to score-keep and work as referees, giving them the same gift of choice she was given. She also hopes to continue refereeing in Belgium, where she plans to study, carrying Burundian basketball wherever she goes.

Sarjo Baldeh

The Gambia · 25 · **Sports Photographer & Founder, Baldezz Multimedia**

“

My challenges are what shaped me into who I am.

”

Biography

I am Sarjo Baldeh, a Gambian sports photographer, media professional, and entrepreneur. I am the first CAF-accredited female photographer from The Gambia, with experience covering major tournaments, including the Africa Cup of Nations.

I serve as Media and Communications Officer for Fortune and Colley Stars Football Clubs, where I manage content and match coverage. I am also the Vice Chairperson of the Sports Journalists Association of The Gambia and Chairwoman of the Women's Sports Writers Commission, where I promote women's participation in sports media.

I am the founder and CEO of Baldezz Multimedia Limited, a platform focused on photography, videography, and digital storytelling. Through my work, I train and mentor young creatives and support the growth of sports media in The Gambia.

THE DREAMER

Sarjo was a student at Starfish International, an after-school programme in The Gambia. At 15, she attended a two-week summer photography workshop run by a US volunteer named Shelly. When Shelly left, most students moved on. Sarjo did not.

THE CHALLENGE

Photography was not seen as a profession in her community. It was seen as something you did when nothing else worked out. Even her family, though ultimately supportive, was uncertain. Her peers were studying to be doctors and lawyers. Sarjo was looking through a lens, imagining angles.

THE TURNING POINT

Sarjo credits Starfish International as the spark that showed her what was possible. After the workshop, something in Sarjo's perception of the world permanently shifted. She began seeing everything as a potential frame. She started approaching friends to be her subjects. She kept practising, kept researching, kept shooting — and eventually her work began to speak for itself.

THE LEADER

Sarjo founded Baldezz Multimedia, named after a character in a film known for being fearless and courageous, qualities she chose to claim for herself. She is also Chairwoman of the Women Sports Reporters in The Gambia, creating capacity-building opportunities for women across the creative industry. She has trained photographers who now run their own businesses.

INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Category: Player Marketing & Storytelling

Sports photographers shape how athletes are remembered, how fans connect to teams, and how entire generations understand sporting history. Their images become the moments that appear on billboards, websites, newspapers, documentaries, and social media feeds around the world.

Yet for much of history, the people behind the camera have overwhelmingly been men. Women in sports photography often face barriers that extend beyond technical

skill. They may struggle to gain access to major events, receive assignments, secure equipment, or be taken seriously in environments where photography is viewed as physically demanding or unsuitable for women.

Across Africa, the profession is growing rapidly. The rise of digital media, professional leagues, athlete branding, and global sports coverage has created an increasing demand for visual storytellers. But while the industry is expanding, women remain significantly underrepresented in sports media roles.

Sarjo's work with the camera matters because representation behind the camera shapes representation in front of it. The stories that are captured, the athletes who are highlighted, and the moments that become iconic are all influenced by who is holding the lens.



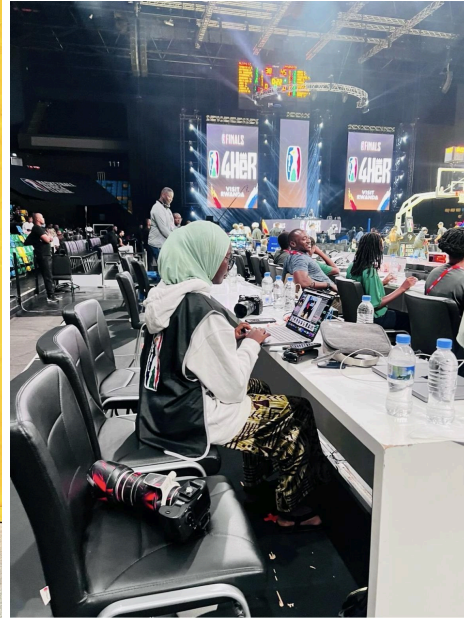
TEAMING UP JOURNEY

Mentor Match: Ashley Combs, Vice President, Basketball Marketing, Excel Sports Management

Inside the BAL

At the BAL Elevate Camp for U26 in Kigali, Sarjo taped the players to support coaches in providing feedback on their play. She also photographed the players at

the BK Arena during the Showcase Game, marking her first time photographing basketball on court.



THE LEGACY

Sarjo's goal is to make Baldezz Multimedia a leading sports media institute in The Gambia and across Africa. She wants to attend the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics with her camera. More than anything, she wants a Gambia where girls grow up knowing that the creative industry is a legitimate, powerful, and professional path.

Sharon Ogaji

Kenya · 26 · **Safeguarding Officer for the International Mixed Martial Arts Federation & Part-time consultant with the National Olympic Committee of Kenya**

“

People's talent fades away just because nobody was there to defend them.

”

Short biography

Sharon Ogaji is currently pursuing a Master's in Sports and Entertainment Management, with a strong legal background and a growing focus on safeguarding and athlete welfare in sport. She is an IOC-certified Safeguarding Officer, passionate about creating safe, inclusive, and empowering environments for athletes.

Deeply committed to women's empowerment, Sharon is driven by the need to see more women in leadership within the sports industry, a path she actively aspires to. Her work and interests sit at the intersection of sports, policy, and safeguarding, where she aims to contribute to building stronger and safer systems across Africa.

Sharon is particularly interested in advocacy that promotes safeguarding and increases women's participation in sport, with a focus on ensuring that policies are not only developed but effectively implemented. She is dedicated to shaping environments where young people, especially girls, can participate confidently, safely, feel protected, and reach their full potential.

THE DREAMER

Ogaji grew up in Nairobi, one of eight siblings, discovering sport early. She ran barefoot because her family could not always afford sports shoes. She trained in football, sprinting, triple jump, and, eventually, basketball. Ogaji was a student who was a B+ academic and an A+ athlete, doing it all at once.

THE CHALLENGE

Her father prioritised education over sport, as many African parents do. Ogaji navigated between his ambitions for her and her own love for the game. She earned a law degree on a basketball scholarship at Strathmore University. But when she graduated, she knew litigation was not her path. Telling her father she was changing careers was one of the hardest conversations she has ever had.

THE TURNING POINT

Playing basketball at Strathmore, Sharon experienced bullying from a coach and the pain of feeling excluded as the only player who had come from a different school background. That experience planted a seed: someone should have been there to protect her. Years later, a full scholarship through the National Olympic Committee of Kenya gave her the chance to become that person through a certificate in safeguarding.

THE LEADER

Ogaji is now a certified safeguarding officer working with the International Mixed Martial Arts Federation, managing athlete welfare at major events, including in Abu Dhabi. She is completing a master's in sports and entertainment management in Qatar and is part of a small but growing community of women building Kenya's safeguarding infrastructure.

INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Category: Management & Operations

Safeguarding is one of the newest and most important professions in modern sport. It focuses on protecting athletes from abuse, harassment, exploitation, discrimination, bullying, and neglect while creating environments where individuals can reach their full potential with dignity and security.

For many years, safeguarding was treated as an afterthought. Around the world, stories emerged of athletes experiencing harm at the hands of coaches, officials, teammates, and institutions that failed to protect them.

The result has been a global movement demanding safer sport.

Across Africa, safeguarding systems are still developing. Many federations and organisations are working to establish policies, reporting mechanisms, and educational programmes that place athlete welfare at the centre of sport. However, a

shortage of trained professionals remains one of the biggest challenges facing the continent.

This creates a significant opportunity for a new generation of leaders. **Sharon**'s work sits at the heart of this transformation, building systems that many athletes before her never had access to — systems designed not only to protect athletes, but to help them flourish.



TEAMING UP JOURNEY

Mentor Match: Managing Director, NKSFB

Inside the BAL

At the BAL Elevate Camp for U26 in Kigali, Sharon coordinated all the operations and logistics regarding the players, making sure that every girl was well taken care of.





THE LEGACY

Ogaji is working with fellow Kenyan safeguarding officers to build a system modelled on the US Safe Sports framework — customised for African contexts and cultures. Her vision is an Africa where every athlete trains in safety and every federation has the policies to guarantee it.

Mindiss Ndour

Senegal · 26 · **Event & Venue Management Coordinator, Dakar 2026 Youth Olympic Games Organizing Committee**

“

An obstacle is only a door that wasn't meant for you.

”

Biography

I'm Mindiss, from Senegal. I am a project manager passionate about Communication in all its shapes and forms.

I hold a Bachelor's degree in Business IT and am currently pursuing a Master's in Project Management on the weekends. At the moment, I work in project management in the Sports industry, contributing to the delivery of a high-end event.

I have a soft spot for aesthetics and enjoy making things not just work, but look and feel right. I like to think of myself as a bit of an artist, whether that's through graphic or fashion design.

Outside of work, I'm curious by nature. I enjoy origami, boxing, and pedagogy-related topics like learning Spanish.

THE DREAMER

Mindiss earned her degree in information systems, ready to build a career in tech. But her passion was always pulling her elsewhere, and she didn't know where yet.

THE CHALLENGE

Straight out of her IT degree, Mindiss didn't yet know how to translate her technical background into the leadership path she actually wanted. That uncertainty deepened in 2022, when she spent over a year unemployed. Determined not to be seen as someone who got ahead through connections, she was rigid about doing everything herself — reluctant to lean on her network, even when it might have opened doors faster.

THE TURNING POINT

Her business school's managers saw something in her and invited her to lead a Junior Enterprise, a student-run, non-profit consultancy delivering real projects for real clients. Stepping into that presidency was her first real exposure to project management, and it reframed what she wanted her future to look like. Later, that same instinct to say yes led her to apply for the Dakar 2026 Learning Academy, where she trained in Event and Venue Management under facilitators who had worked at Paris 2024 and other Olympic editions.

THE LEADER

Mindiss joined Dakar 2026 as an assistant coordinator, advanced to coordinator, and recently stepped into her current role as Event Operations Manager. Looking back, she no longer sees her early insistence on being "self-made" as the full picture: opportunity often comes through who you know, but it's the quality of your work that keeps you in the room and moves you up.

INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Category: Management & Operations

Delivering a global sporting event takes a trained workforce fluent in the standards and operational demands of hosting at an international level. Historically, that expertise has been concentrated in a small circle of countries with a long hosting history, leaving local talent on the sidelines of events held in their own backyard.

Programmes like the Dakar 2026 are changing that, building a homegrown pipeline of games-delivery talent. As an Event Operations Manager, Mindiss represents the kind of African-led operational leadership that major sporting events on the continent will increasingly depend on.



TEAMING UP JOURNEY

Mentor Match: Sara Rehane, Head of League Production, Basketball Africa League

Inside the BAL

During the BAL Conference in Rabat, Mindiss supported the organization of the BAL PowerHour Conference.



THE LEGACY

Mindiss wants to help shape the future of sport in Africa, whether that means going abroad first to learn from the best and bringing that knowledge home, or joining an organization already doing that work on the continent. Either way, she's not waiting for the door to open on its own; mobilizing her networking, experience, and go-getter energy to open the doors that she seeks.

Saritha Keza Icyeza

Rwanda · 23 · Sports Nutritionist/Specialist, APR BBC



I knew the French people didn't need me. I had to come home and help.



Biography

I am a Rwandan sports nutritionist, passionate about improving athlete performance through nutrition. I have worked with professional basketball players, including with APR Basketball Club during the Basketball Africa League season, where I supported performance, recovery, and overall athlete health.

Through these experiences, I saw how often nutrition is overlooked in African sports systems, despite its critical role in performance. This led me to create Fuel The Game Africa, an initiative focused on educating athletes, coaches, and organizations on the importance of nutrition in sport.

My goal is to contribute to building stronger sports systems in Africa, where athletes are supported not only by talent but also by access to proper scientific and nutritional guidance.

THE DREAMER

Saritha grew up in Rwanda wanting to help people — she imagined herself as a soldier, then a pastor, then a doctor. When she moved to France for studies, she discovered nutrition and realised it offered everything she was looking for: a way to support people's wellbeing through something everyone does every day: eating.

THE CHALLENGE

Saritha was the only Black student in her nutrition programme in France. She was navigating a new language, a new country, and a system that did not reflect or require her. Her professional path has been shaped by the conviction, formed early, that Africa needs people who come back, not people who stay comfortable in France.

THE TURNING POINT

For her academic internship, Saritha could have stayed in France. Instead, she reached out to APR Basketball in Rwanda. She sent a message to the team manager, and he went quiet. But she showed up to their training anyway, introduced herself, and made herself indispensable.

THE LEADER

Saritha is now a performance nutritionist working with athletes and teams in Rwanda, focused on meal planning, hydration, recovery, and budget-conscious nutrition that is realistic for African athletes and contexts.

INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Category: Health & Performance

Nutrition has become one of the most important components of modern sport. What athletes consume affects energy levels, recovery, injury prevention, mental focus, sleep quality, and long-term health. At the highest levels of competition, small nutritional improvements can create meaningful performance advantages.

Around the world, professional teams increasingly rely on nutritionists and dietitians as part of their performance staff. These specialists work alongside coaches, physiotherapists, doctors, and psychologists to support athlete development.

In Africa, however, sports nutrition remains an emerging field.

Many athletes still have limited access to specialised nutrition guidance. Resources can be scarce, budgets are often constrained, and recommendations developed in Europe or North America do not always reflect African food systems, cultures, or realities.

This gap presents both a challenge and an opportunity.

The future of sports nutrition in Africa will depend on professionals who can combine world-class expertise with local understanding. People like **Saritha** who recognise that performance solutions must be practical, affordable, and culturally relevant.

She represents a generation determined to ensure African athletes no longer have to choose between local realities and elite performance.



TEAMING UP JOURNEY

Why she joined the program

Mentor Match: Serra Temay, Performance Dietitian, Brooklyn Nets

Inside the BAL

At the BAL Elevate Camp for U26 in Kigali, Saritha led a Nutrition workshop to raise awareness of the importance of nutrition to enhance the players' performance on the court – the first session of its kind for the majority of the players.





THE LEGACY

Saritha's vision is to serve African athletes across the continent, providing performance nutrition support that is relevant, accessible, and grounded in African food culture and budgets. She believes the gap in sports nutrition on the continent is enormous, and she intends to fill it.

Dr. Robina Onwong'a

Kenya · 32 · Psychologist, Daima Mbele, LLC

“

If something contributes to Black liberation, joy, and love — I can be a part of it.

”

Biography

Dr. Robina Onwong'a is a consulting, performance, and licensed psychologist, and founder of Daima Mbele, a boutique consultancy dedicated to cultivating human-centered, high-performing leaders and communities. Her work integrates evidence-based insights from psychology, performance science, and belonging research to support high performers and high-impact teams in a culturally sustainable manner.

Serving as a leadership coach, consultant, and facilitator, she designs and delivers programming that advances leadership and personal development, performance, and wellbeing across sectors, including sport.

Her work is grounded in a commitment to empowering individuals and communities to thrive, with a growing focus on integrating holistic athlete wellbeing and mental performance into sport systems across Africa. Learn more at jronwonga.com.

THE DREAMER

Dr. Robina was born in the United States, raised in Kenya in her family's village, then returned to the States for school, all the way through a PhD in Counselling Psychology. She grew up as the eldest in an African household, naturally becoming a caretaker, a listener, and a leader.

THE CHALLENGE

In her clinical practice, Dr. Robina worked with individuals processing trauma with limited autonomy — circumstances they had not chosen and could not easily escape. She cared deeply, but realised she was drawn to a different kind of work: supporting people

who already had the will but lacked the resources to excel, and helping them reach their full potential.

THE TURNING POINT

Watching the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya, a country she also called home, crystallised something in her. She wanted to work in a way that addressed not just individual suffering but systemic wellbeing. Eventually, a pull back to basketball — a game she had always loved- brought her into the sports world, where performance and psychological health collide.

THE LEADER

Dr. Robina holds a PhD in Counselling Psychology and is licensed to practice in both the United States and Kenya. She works at the intersection of mental performance, talent development, and organisational health — supporting athletes, coaches, and leaders to perform and lead from a place of genuine wellbeing.

INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Category: Health & Performance

For decades, sport focused primarily on physical preparation. Strength, speed, endurance, and technique were seen as the foundations of success. Today, athletes and organisations increasingly understand that performance is also psychological.

Sports psychologists help athletes develop the tools needed to perform under pressure while supporting their overall well-being. Their work extends beyond competition, helping athletes navigate injury, transition, identity, relationships, and life beyond sport.

Across Africa, mental performance and mental health support remain underdeveloped despite growing recognition of their importance. Stigma surrounding psychological support, limited access to specialists, and resource constraints continue to create barriers for many athletes.

Yet attitudes are shifting.

Athletes are speaking more openly about mental health than ever before. Organisations are beginning to recognise that wellbeing and performance are not competing priorities, but that they are deeply connected.

Dr. Robina is part of a growing movement helping redefine what success in sport looks like through mental health and performance.

TEAMING UP JOURNEY

Mentor Match: Dr. Kensa Gunter, Director of Mind Health, NBA

Inside the BAL

At the BAL Elevate Camp for U26 in Kigali, Dr. Robina led a mental health workshop on how mental health can affect performance, breaking cultural taboos about the subject. Dr. Robina also co-hosted a skills development module on mental health and well-being for the Teaming Up mentees alongside her mentor Dr. Kensa Gunter.



THE LEGACY

Dr. Robina envisions holding a leadership position within a major sports organisation, one where she can shape how performance and people are integrated. Her longer mission is to contribute to Black liberation, joy, and love through every piece of work she does.



Reem Moussa

Egypt · 32 · Head of Women's Basketball Department at Zed East Sports Club and Assistant Basketball Coach for U18 Girls Egyptian National Team

“

Every step I'm taking is towards that goal.

”

Short biography

An Egyptian with a passion for basketball and a drive to achieve greater things, Reem Moussa has been a trailblazer on the court as a player and is eager to carry that momentum into coaching. With a focus on skill development, leadership, and mentorship, she is dedicated to inspiring young athletes to pursue their goals fearlessly. By combining experience, ambition, and a commitment to empowerment, she aims to create lasting impact within the basketball community and support the next generation in realizing that they can achieve anything they set their minds to.

THE DREAMER

Reem played basketball in Egypt for years, earning a reputation as a sharp-thinking point guard who already saw the game the way a coach does — tracking every player's movement, anticipating the system, knowing what everyone needed to do. She was always the one calling things out, directing, leading.

THE CHALLENGE

There are no female head coaches of Egypt's women's national basketball team. Reem is aiming to be the first. The road to that role has no clear map. She has chosen to walk it anyway.

THE TURNING POINT

In college, the assistant coaches assigned to work with point guards became her closest relationships. Watching the coaches work, she knew: this is what I want to do when I finish playing. When she retired, she did not take a single day off. The national team called and asked her to intern as an assistant coach for the Afrobasket preparations. She said yes immediately.

THE LEADER

Reem is currently both the Head of the Women's Basketball Department at Z East Sports Club and the Assistant Coach of the U18 Egypt Girls National Team, two roles she stepped into within her first year of officially coaching, after retiring from playing.

INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Category: On-Court Roles

Despite the influence coaches have on sporting careers, coaching remains one of the least gender-balanced professions in sport. In many countries, women athletes are still coached primarily by men. Leadership roles within federations, professional clubs, and national teams remain disproportionately occupied by male coaches.

Africa is no exception.

While participation among women athletes continues to grow, the pipeline of female coaches has struggled to keep pace. Access to licensing programmes, mentorship opportunities, leadership networks, and decision-making positions remains uneven.

With women's basketball growing across the continent, there are new opportunities for female leaders to emerge. Increasingly, young athletes are able to see women not only competing on the court, but directing the action from the sidelines.

Reem's ambition to become the first female head coach of Egypt's women's national team is larger than a personal goal. It is part of a broader movement expanding what leadership in African basketball can look like.

AFRICAN LEADERS MEET BAL4HER
A Gender Equality Sports Mentorship Program

TEAMING UP
A Gender Equality Sports Mentorship Program

SpeakUpAfrica

Qatar Foundation

IT'S A MATCH!

Allison Feaster
Vice President of Team Operations & Organizational Growth, Boston Celtics

Reem Moussa
Head of Women's Basketball Department at Zed East Sports Club and Assistant Basketball Coach for u18 Girls Egyptian National Team

My passion is inspiring others to break barriers. Through this program, I hope to empower the next generation of female athletes to chase their dreams without limits.

Reem Moussa
32, Egypt

TEAMING UP JOURNEY

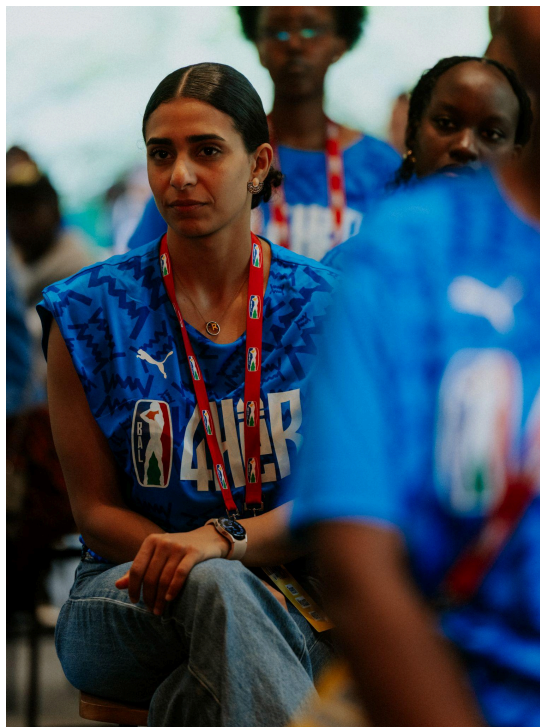
Why she joined the program

Mentor Match: Allison Feaster, VP of Team Operations & Organizational Growth, Boston Celtics

Inside the BAL

Reem was one of the coaches at the BAL Elevate Camp for U26 in Kigali, leading the players into improving their game.





THE LEGACY

Reem's goal is to become the head coach of Egypt's women's national basketball team. She does not know exactly what the path will require. She has decided to do whatever it takes to find out.

Nomfundo Khanyile

South Africa · 35 · **Brand & Marketing Strategist, HB Giants BAL S6 and The Cage 1v1 Basketball**

“

We all deserve a chance for our story to be told.

”

Biography

I am a strategic marketing leader, entrepreneur, and brand builder with over 10 years of experience growing brands across Africa. I started my career at Unilever Africa, where I worked on leading brands like Shield South Africa and Lifebuoy Africa, building a strong foundation in consumer insights, 360 campaign management, and commercial acumen.

Today, my focus sits strongly in the sports space. I currently serve as the Lead for Brand and Marketing at the Johannesburg Giants Basketball Club, where I lead brand strategy and positioning, digital growth, and brand development. I have played a key role in positioning the Giants as a culturally relevant South African lifestyle 'BRAND' and contributing to the team's journey to the BAL season 6.

I am passionate about shaping the future of basketball in Africa and building sports brands that are both culturally powerful and commercially impactful, and tell authentic African stories. Alongside this, I am also an entrepreneur building a marketing consultancy and a beauty lounge.

THE DREAMER

Nomfundo — known by everyone as Nomfundo — grew up in Durban, South Africa, with an instinct for people and stories. She is, by her own description, a 'people's person' who has always been intrigued by how different human beings are from one another, and by the unique story that lives inside each person.

THE CHALLENGE

Breaking into the world of brand strategy and sports marketing in Africa means working in a space where the infrastructure for professional women's sport is still being built —

where telling the stories of African athletes means first convincing people that those stories deserve to be told at all.

THE TURNING POINT

For Nomfundo, there was no single dramatic moment — instead, a gradual, lifelong crystallisation of the truth that she was most alive when she was helping others be seen. Living and working in Johannesburg for seven years, far from home in Durban, Nomfundo built her own community of like-minded thinkers — people who understood that branding is not advertising. It is the art of making someone feel that they belong. Nike, she will tell you, is her clearest example of what a great brand does: it makes you feel like your story — wherever you started — is worth something.

THE LEADER

Nomfundo is a brand manager and brand strategist who describes marketing as something that runs through her veins. She is now applying that expertise within the sports industry, working to ensure that Africa's athletes and organisations are seen, felt, and remembered.

INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Category: Business Development & Partnerships

Brand strategists and marketers are responsible for building that connection. They help athletes, teams, leagues, and organisations tell stories that inspire audiences, attract sponsors, create communities, and generate revenue.

In today's sports industry, visibility has become one of the most valuable assets an organisation can possess. Across Africa, sports marketing is becoming increasingly important as leagues, clubs, and athletes seek to professionalise and compete for attention in a crowded digital landscape. The rise of social media, athlete-driven content, and international partnerships has created unprecedented opportunities for growth.

Yet many organisations continue to face challenges related to branding, audience engagement, and commercial sustainability.

Marketing professionals like **Nomfundo** help ensure that African athletes are not only performing at a high level but also being seen, valued, and remembered.

AFRICAN LEADERS
MEET BAL4HER

TEAMING UP
A Gender Equality Sports
Mentorship Program

SpeakUpAfrica.

Official Community Partner
الهيئة العامة للغذاء والدواء
Qatar Foundation

IT'S A MATCH!

Mmaphuthi Morule
Head of Marketing Partnerships, NBA Africa and BAL

Nomfundo Khanyile
Brand & Marketing Strategist, HB Giants BAL S6
and The Cage TV1 Basketball



AFRICAN LEADERS
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Qatar Foundation

I am hoping to gain a deeper understanding of how basketball teams, players & leagues are being built and scaled across the continent, especially on the commercial, partnerships, and brand storytelling side. I really want to learn from women who are leading in this space and be part of a network that is intentional about growing the game in Africa. Most importantly, I want to walk away better equipped to contribute meaningfully to the future of sports and basketball and help shape how these grow on the continent.

Nomfundo Khanyile
35, South Africa



TEAMING UP JOURNEY

Mentor Match: Mmaphuthi Morule, Head of Marketing Partnerships, NBA Africa/BAL

Inside the BAL

At the BAL Elevate Camp for U26 in Kigali, Nomfundo supported camp logistics, making sure the players were taken care of.



THE LEGACY

Nomfundo wants to be a voice for African sports brands and athletes who are not yet being seen in the way they deserve. She believes the continent's next chapter is being written right now — and that the women who tell those stories will shape what Africa's sports identity becomes for the next generation.

Ketsia Mambi

Kenya · 25 · Product Growth, Mediakits.io & Content Creator

“

This is my brand. My page — that's who I am.

”

Biography

Ketsia Mambi is a Nairobi-based digital storyteller with a background in Political science and Psychology from The George Washington University. Her work sits at the intersection of sport, culture, and social impact, with a growing focus on how these spaces shape communities across Africa.

Professionally, she works across product and marketing within the creator economy, contributing to solutions that empower creators to better articulate their value, and build more sustainable careers. She has also worked in public affairs and legal environments, strengthening her foundation in research, communication, and advocacy.

As a content creator, Ketsia has found a deep appreciation for the power of sports in Africa as a tool for storytelling, community, and change. She creates content that feels real and relatable, capturing moments, experiences, and conversations in a way that connects with people and leaves a lasting impression.

THE DREAMER

Ketsia grew up talkative, curious, and impossible to quiet down. She was the kid in class whose report card always came back with the same note: she talks a lot. Where teachers saw distraction, Ketsia was simply trying to connect with her classmates and stretch her curiosity.

THE CHALLENGE

When the pandemic propelled many onto social media, Ketsia started posting just to stay connected and entertained, hopping on TikTok trends like everyone else. But chasing social media trends left her without a voice of her own. There was also a quieter fear underneath it: being watched, being misread, letting strangers into her life.

THE TURNING POINT

Ketsia stopped performing trends and started telling her own stories — her experiences, her perspective, her corner of the world. She let go of overthinking who was watching and simply posted. The people who stayed, who engaged, who related — those became her community, not just her audience.

THE LEADER

With a growing social media following, Ketsia is now known for storytelling that pulls people in — content that feels less like marketing and more like a conversation. Her page has become her brand and the space she uses to inspire other people like her.

INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Category: Player Marketing & Storytelling

Social media has become one of the most powerful distribution channels in sport and business alike, often reaching audiences that traditional ads and billboards cannot. Yet the space rewards authenticity over imitation, and creators who find their own voice stand out in a landscape saturated with trends.

Across Africa, a new generation of storytellers is using these platforms not just for entertainment, but to shift how brands, athletes, and communities are seen and understood.

Ketsia's work matters because storytelling shapes perception and creators who can build genuine community are becoming indispensable to how brands connect with athletes and African audiences.



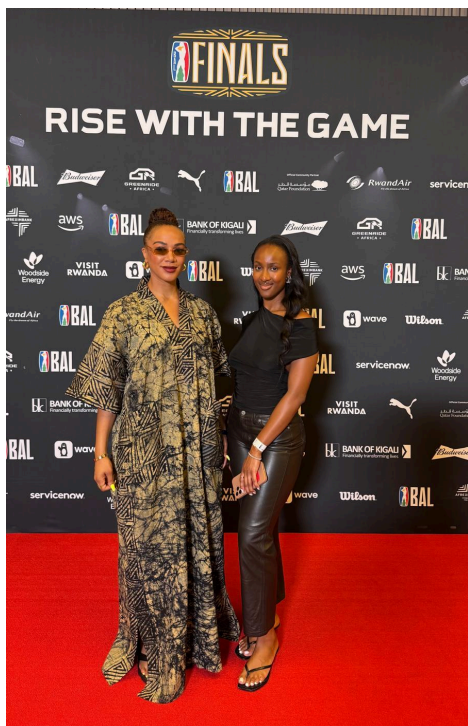
TEAMING UP JOURNEY

Mentor Match: Ros Gold-Owunde, Sports broadcaster, NBA WNBA Analyst Host Reporter

Inside the BAL

For Malaria Day, Ketsia shadowed the media team during the Basketball for Health and Advocacy tournament in Benin. In collaboration with the IAM Foundation, she supported activations that engaged regional youth by merging health advocacy and sports.





THE LEGACY

Ketsia wants to turn her storytelling into strategy, helping African women and the brands they represent understand and grow in the digital space, the way an agent champions their talent.

Christianne Murengerantwari

Rwanda · 25 · Founder & Creative Director, Rebound Realms

“

If an athlete shares their story, people will feel like they're part of their success

”

Biography

Christianne Murengerantwari is a Rwandan sports storyteller, creative director, and founder of Rebound Realms, a platform dedicated to elevating African sports narratives. Her work focuses on documenting athletes and sports organizations through visual storytelling that strengthens visibility, identity, and long-term impact.

She has worked across game coverage, athlete features, and digital content strategy, collaborating with players and organizations to amplify their presence and shape how African sports stories are told. Beyond content creation, Christianne is deeply interested in the intersection of storytelling, leadership, and ecosystem development within African sports.

Through her work, she aims to contribute to a more visible, structured, and globally competitive sports industry by building platforms that empower athletes and redefine representation.

THE DREAMER

Christianne's love of photography began in 2019, the gap year between high school and university. Rather than sit at home waiting for the next chapter to start, she signed up for a three-month photography course she'd seen advertised on social media, convincing her father to let her go. She didn't yet know she had talent; what those three months gave her instead was a love for the craft itself.

THE CHALLENGE

Photography is a very technical craft, and Christianne had to learn all of it from scratch. She then chose to specialize in sports storytelling, a lane almost no one else in her environment was choosing, while she had never played a sport before. Basketball, in particular, was unfamiliar territory in a country where football dominates.

THE TURNING POINT

Courtside, camera in hand, Christianne was energized by the game until the thrill of a good shot stopped being enough. She wanted her work to do more than make her happy; she wanted it to benefit the athletes in front of her lens. That shift in purpose became Rebound Realms, founded in 2022: a platform where African athletes tell their own stories, rather than having their narratives told for them.

THE LEADER

Now in its fourth year, Rebound Realms has grown beyond photography into a storytelling platform, brand-connector, and merchandise line for African athletes. Having also worked inside Rwanda's basketball federation, Christianne saw firsthand how often athletes were left out of decisions made about their own sport — and, as a woman in that same system, she recognized the feeling of being undervalued. That dual awareness now drives her mission: giving athletes a platform before anyone else defines their story for them.

INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Category: Player Marketing & Storytelling

Across Africa, sports has great influence over the media infrastructure — fan culture, broadcast deals, and athlete storytelling. Basketball is growing fast, but the athletes behind it remain largely invisible outside the arena: their sacrifices, setbacks, and personalities rarely reach the public in their own words.

That gap has real consequences. Athletes without a public narrative are more vulnerable to being misunderstood, undervalued, or targeted by fans who only see the game, not the person. Christianne's work with Rebound Realms sits at the center of closing that gap using visual storytelling to build the same emotional connection between basketball fans and athletes that football has long enjoyed, one story, one athlete, at a time.



TEAMING UP JOURNEY

Mentor Match: Arielle Chambers, Sports Commentator and Journalist

Inside the BAL

At the BAL in Kigali and Dakar, Christianne captured players' moments and stories both on and off the court.





THE LEGACY

Christianne wants Rebound Realms to grow into a community — not just for athletes, but for the artists and career experts who support them, all under the roof of basketball. Her vision is a continent where fans feel as personally invested in basketball players as they already do in footballers, built through the same tool: storytelling.

THE AFRICANLEADERS + BAL4HER EFFECT

Burundi · Kenya · Egypt · Rwanda · The Gambia · Senegal · South Africa

The mentees arrived from different corners of the continent, bringing with them unique experiences, cultures, languages, and professional backgrounds. Among them were coaches, referees, nutritionists, psychologists, photographers, safeguarding specialists, communications professionals, and emerging leaders shaping the future of African sport.

At first glance, their journeys seemed vastly different. Yet as the program unfolded, a common thread emerged: a shared commitment to growth, leadership, and creating opportunities for the next generation of African women.

Through Teaming Up: African LeadHERs meet BAL4HER, the mentees discovered that mentorship extends beyond the mentor-mentee relationship. They found something equally powerful: each other.

What began as a cohort quickly evolved into a community. A nutritionist could offer guidance on athlete wellness. A psychologist could share insights on mental health and performance. A legal professional could offer advice on safeguarding and governance. A storyteller or photographer could help elevate a colleague's work and amplify her impact.

Together, they became a living network of knowledge, experience, and support.

But their connection reached beyond professional development.

Throughout the program, the mentees shared candid conversations about the realities of being African women navigating leadership, ambition, family expectations, relationships, self-confidence, and personal growth. They celebrated one another's successes, offered encouragement during moments of uncertainty, and created a space where vulnerability was met with understanding rather than judgment.

The relationships formed through the program are not bound by geography or profession. They represent a growing pan-African network of women committed to opening doors, sharing opportunities, and lifting one another as they rise.

The program connected mentors and mentees. But perhaps its greatest achievement was creating a sisterhood that will continue to shape careers, communities, and the future of sport across Africa for years to come.

This is the African LeadHERs + BAL4HER Effect.

It is the understanding that leadership is not built alone.

It is the belief that when African women come together, share their knowledge, and support one another's dreams, their impact extends far beyond individual success.

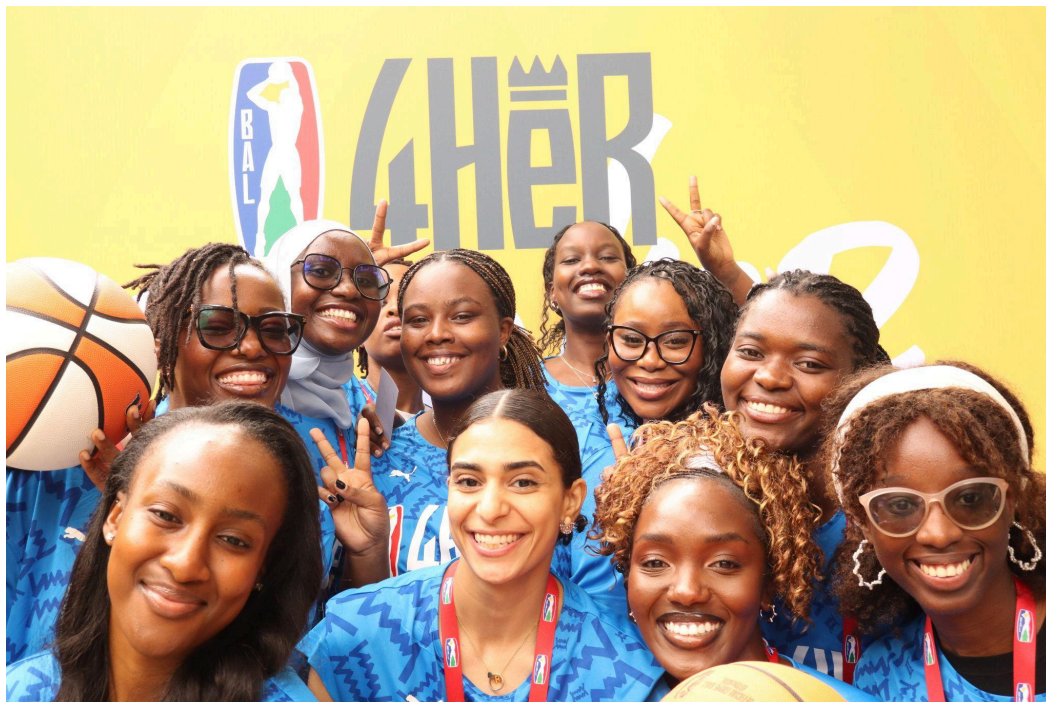
These women came from seven countries. They work in refereeing, safeguarding, photography, nutrition, psychology, coaching, and brand strategy. Together, they represent the breadth of what African women in sport can and do contribute — not just on the court, but in every structure that surrounds it.











THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

Every origin story begins with a single moment: a dream, a challenge, a decision, or a person who believed when no one else did.

For the women featured in these pages, that moment became the beginning of a journey that led them to the Teaming Up: African LeadHERs meet BAL4HER mentorship program. Yet their stories are far from complete. They are still being written; on basketball courts, in boardrooms, behind cameras, in training facilities, in classrooms, and within communities across Africa and beyond.

Over the course of this program, these women have gained more than mentorship and industry exposure. They have gained confidence, perspective, meaningful connections, and a sisterhood that transcends borders, languages, and disciplines. They have discovered that leadership is not only about personal achievement, but about creating pathways for others to follow. As they return to their countries, organizations, and communities, they carry with them the lessons of their mentors, the support of their peers, and a renewed belief in what is possible.

The future of African sport will not be shaped by one leader alone. It will be shaped by networks of women who choose collaboration over competition, community over isolation, and collective progress over individual success.

These are their origin stories.

The next chapters belong to them.

ABOUT US

About Speak Up Africa

Speak Up Africa is an African-led, Senegal-based organization working with leaders and changemakers in Africa and beyond to solve Africa's pressing sustainable development challenges. Speak Up Africa is dedicated to supporting African leaders and citizens to take an active role in identifying and developing solutions to tackle the challenges facing our continent. Speak Up Africa's aspiration is to be unparalleled in lifting African actors to drive equitable and sustainable change toward healthy and thriving African societies. Driven by the conviction that women and youth will drive the next wave of social and economic development in Africa, Speak Up Africa is here to unleash the untapped potential of the continent's women and youth.

About the BAL

The Basketball Africa League (BAL), a partnership between the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) and the NBA, is a professional league featuring 12 club teams from across Africa that completed its fourth season in June 2024. Headquartered in Dakar, Senegal, the BAL builds on the foundation of club competitions FIBA Africa has organized across the continent and marks the NBA's first collaboration to operate a league outside North America. Fans can follow the BAL (@theBAL) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Threads](#), [X](#), and [YouTube](#), and register their interest in receiving more information at BAL.NBA.com.

About the Qatar Foundation

AFRICAN LEADERS
MEET  **BAL4HER**

TEAMING UP
A Gender Equality Sports
Mentorship Program



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مؤسسة قطر
Qatar Foundation