

A Tall order

He is a true basketball **hero**. His full name is Dikembe Mutombo Mpolondo Mukamba Jean-Jacques Wamutombo. Friends call him “Deke”. He once hoped to be called Dr.Mutombo. But life gave him another way to help people: as an **athlete**.

A Mind for Medicine, a Body for Basketball

Dikembe was born in 1966 in the African town of Kinshasa, in Zaire, now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The first time he touched a basketball was 1979. He was thirteen years old. At the time, Dikembe was 7 feet tall and still growing. In his first game, he fell and cut his face. He decided he hated basketball. Dikembe told his parents he wanted to **quit**. For weeks, they **argued**. His parents said he had the perfect body for basketball. They told him to keep playing. Dikembe said he was more interested in studying medicine.

But Dikembe realized basketball could pay for his education. He then started to practice seriously. A few years later, in 1985, Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., gave him a scholarship. Soon, Dikembe was on a plane traveling to the United States.

A difficult new life

Life was not easy for Dikembe in the United States at first. He had learned eight different languages in Africa. But English wasn’t one of them. Also, he couldn’t **afford** to call his family in Africa. He often felt sad and lonely. So he filled his time with work. During the day, he studied English in Georgetown’s ESL program. At night and on weekends, he practiced basketball. But Dikembe never imagined he would play in the National Basketball Association (N.B.A), the professional men’s basketball league in North America.

He **doubted** his ability. Basketball was new to him. He often made mistakes while playing. Dikembe’s coaches told him to be patient. Over time, he **improved**. When he graduated in 1991, he was invited to play in the N.B.A. Dikembe was delighted. With his long arms, he became an expert in defense. He won Defensive Player of the Year **awards** in 1995 and 1996.

Dikembe’s Big promise

By 1997, Dikembe was a famous athlete with a high **salary**. Then one morning he received a phone call that changed his life. His mother had died in Africa. Suddenly ill, she hadn’t been able to **reach** a hospital. Dikembe bitterly remembered his dream of becoming a doctor. He made a promise: He would build a hospital in his hometown of Kinshasa.

It took Dikembe years to save the money. In 2006, at age forty, he became the oldest player in the N.B.A. Each year his knees hurt more, and his salary went down. At times, he wanted to quit. But he never forgot his promise.

In 2007, his sixteenth year in the N.B.A., his dream finally came true. A new hospital opened in his hometown. It had space for thousands of patients. “If I was a doctor for the rest of my life, I could never treat this many people,” he said. Because of Dikembe, life is better for many people now. That is why Dikembe is a real hero. He found his own way to care for others.

Vocabulary check

Complete the diary entry with the boldfaced words from the reading.

Amy's Basketball diary

November 24, 2010

Three years ago, I wasn't a good player. But then I practiced and I (1) _____. Now I play well. The only problem is I can't (2) _____ the basket, even when I jump as high as I can.

Learning to play basketball was difficult for me. I often (3) _____ myself- I thought I couldn't succeed. Sometimes, I wanted to (4) _____ and never play again.

My parents didn't want me to be a(n) (5) _____. They said playing sports was a waste of time. They wanted me to study all day. We always (6) _____ about that. But then I got a basketball scholarship from my university- now my parents are happy!

One time I hurt my foot really badly during a game. The doctor in my hometown couldn't (7) _____ me, so I had to go to a hospital in the city.

My favorite basketball player is Tamika Catchings. She is my (8) _____. I want to be just like her. She wins lots of (9) _____, including WNBA Defensive Player of the Year. I want to go see her play one day, but I can't (10) _____ a ticket right now. They are so expensive! Oh well, maybe I'll see her in the future, when I have a job and a good (11) _____.

Comprehension check

- A. Put the events into the correct sequence. Write 1 next to the first event, 2 next to the second, and so on.

- _____ 1. Dikembe's mother died.
- _____ 2. Georgetown University offered Dikembe a scholarship.
- _____ 3. Dikembe won awards for his great defense.
- _____ 4. A new hospital opened in Kinshasa.
- _____ 5. Dikembe fell and cut his face.
- _____ 6. Dikembe started to practice basketball seriously.
- _____ 7. Dikembe started learning English at Georgetown.
- _____ 8. An N.B.A team invited Dikembe to play.

- B. There are ten mistakes (including the example) in the summary of Dikembe's story. Find the mistakes and correct them. The first one is done for you. When you finish, look at the reading again to check your answers.

Dikembe was born in Washington, D.C, in what is today called the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He played basketball for the first time when he was thirteen years old. At first, he loved basketball. He hoped to become a basketball coach. Then one day he realized basketball could pay for his education.

Dikembe went to the United States to play basketball, and life was easy for him at first. He could afford to call his family in Africa, and he didn't speak English.

When Dikembe went to the N.B.A in 1991, he became famous for his defense. He won two scholarships for defense in 1995 and 1996.

But then one day in 1997 Dikembe's father died. Dikembe felt very sad. He decided to build a university in his hometown. He saved money for months. Over time, his arms started to hurt from playing, and his salary went down. Then finally, his dream came true in 2007.