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Tadala facilitating the Achinyamata Ojaka Mental Health session in Dzaleka



Junior athletes captured in a group photo during their championship



MATCH Foundation beneficiaries at the National Spelling Bee.

COMING UP IN APRIL

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MATCH Foundation Hosts First Junior Tennis Tournament

When the sun sits high in the Lilongwe sky, as our elders say, "even the lizards seek the shade," but not the student-athletes of MATCH Foundation. The red clay courts became a battlefield on March 29, 2025 where 72 warriors from Ntcheu, Blantyre, and Lilongwe, still tender in years but mighty in spirit, crossed rackets in a dance as old as competition itself. They say, "a child who washes his hands can dine with elders," and these young players had certainly earned their place at the table of respect. Each swing spoke volumes of the Play & Stay project's hidden purpose not merely to train athletes, but to nurture and develop strong, resilient, and enduring character traits in young athletes.

MATCH Foundation invited junior players who qualified from their regions to compete at this first junior tennis tournament for 2025. With a total of 72 players, the foundation sent 30 athletes, Ntcheu team 18, Lilongwe Golf Club team 23 and 1 from Blantyre. As they moved across the court like gazelles dancing with the wind, while playing with determination the young athletes showcased great tennis potential. Ultimately, out of 18 medals, our athletes managed to secure a remarkable 10, Ntcheu took home 7, and Blantyre earned 1. The sound of balls meeting rackets became the heartbeat of Lilongwe that day, a rhythm that said, "I am because we are," as the U10s chased each point with the energy of sunlight, while the U14 players were creating very complex and detailed strategies.

As the sun began its journey home, painting the sky in colors that would make a peacock envious, the tournament drew to a close. On this day, we had nurtured both the player and the person, proving that when given wings, the children of Malawi would not just fly—they would soar beyond the horizon where even eagles fear to venture. This tournament is part of the Play & Stay project which provides safe space for children and youth to thrive through sports and mentoring. It is through this same project that 6 of MATCH Foundation's athletes are part of the Malawi Junior Tennis National Team.

Mental Health Through Sports at Dzaleka Camp

Driven by the weight of isolation and a desire for connection, our dedicated team journeyed to Dowa on March 20, 2025, where they encountered the transformative work of the Fountain of Hope organization at the Dzaleka refugee settlement. They were warmly welcomed by Jacques, Morisho, a passionate representative who showcased the organization's comprehensive approach to community empowerment.



Students during the mental health training

The day's most powerful moment came during an exchange with standard 8 and form 1 students, where formal interactions of our Achinyamata Ojaka Mental Health Project transformed into deep sharing of life experiences. In that space, hope became tangible energy that bridged circumstance gaps and offered a collective vision of possibility, demonstrating how true community healing occurs when with compassion a listening ear, enabling individuals to tell their own stories of resilience.

The students and staff expressed the great need to establish a mental health club as part of the school's activity. "When we first arrive here at the camp, we are placed in a 40-day quarantine tent. This is the most difficult time to process things as you are all alone. We need help there because after the 40 days, you have to look for your own place of stay, something which is very terrifying as you do not know where to begin", he expressed. MATCH Foundation plans to establish a mental health club through Fountain of Hope as a sustainability plan for the project. This project is made possible with funding from the Segal Family Foundation.

The Road to National Spelling Bee



Settie Chizimba, in a celebratory pose, following his progression in the spelling bee

On March 22, 2025, our students-athlete's arrived at Lilongwe Girls Secondary School with hearts pounding and minds racing. Five exceptional students who qualified during the MATCH Foundation's spelling bee Settie Chizimba, Naomi Major, Christina Ben, Jenifer Mwaya, and Wisdom Banda stood ready to face Malawi's finest young linguists in the National Spelling Bee. Months of pre-dawn practice sessions and after-school study had prepared them for this moment. Their dedication was evident in the confident way they carried themselves despite the intimidating atmosphere of the packed auditorium.

As the competition progressed, the words grew increasingly challenging obscure terms with silent letters and deceptive pronunciations that would challenge even the most seasoned linguists. While four of our students were eventually eliminated in round two, it was 14-year-old Settie Chizimba who captured the audience's heart, his voice growing stronger with each perfectly articulated letter of his final word, earning thunderous applause as he advanced to the next round while his teammates cheered him on with genuine pride and support.

The day represented far more than a spelling competition; it embodied the transformative power of education. The students, many having overcome significant obstacles in their academic journeys, stood confidently on a national stage demonstrating what becomes possible when talent meets opportunity. As our bus departed the day end, exhaustion had given way to inspiration, with strategies for next round's competition already forming a proof to the extraordinary potential within these young minds and the certainty that this accomplishment was merely the beginning of their remarkable journey.