An Indiana Basketball Coach Starts a Movement

Manny Ohonme was like many boys in his Nigerian village. They loved to play outside undeterred by the fact they didn't have shoes. That changed for Manny when he was 9 years old and he won a contest sponsored by American missionaries. The prize was a pair of shoes which outfitted Manny for his dream to win a basketball scholarship in America like Nigeria's success story, Hakeem Olajuwon.

Manny did indeed win a college scholarship to play hoops in the states and he became a success story as well. However, his path led not to the NBA but rather a career in the logistics industry which prepared him to now lead a multinational ministry distributing shoes to a growing number of the 300 million children around the world that walk their dusty villages without any protection. Unbeknownst to most of the industrialized world, millions of children die each year from foot-borne diseases as infections enter their bloodstream after stepping on rocks, nails and glass littering undeveloped roads.

Many have joined Manny in this cause and one Indiana basketball coach started a movement with his courtside advocacy. On January 24, 2008, Indiana University Purdue University – Indianapolis head basketball coach Ron Hunter barked out calls to his team wearing a nice suit, his game face and no shoes or socks. The world took notice. An astounding 439 media outlets covered the story including CNN and ESPN. ABC News named Coach Hunter their person of the year for raising over 100,000 pair of shoes and personally delivering them with his team to children in Lima, Peru.

Today, over 3,000 coaches nationwide have joined the Barefoot Coaching movement including such national powerhouses as LSU and Florida State. Nearly 1,000 pastors have preached their sermons in bare feet joined by governors from several states and business executives who are using their leadership platform to signal their troops to meet this urgent human need.

These national leaders join thousands of Samaritan's Feet volunteers in distributing shoes as a simple act of servant-leadership. Volunteers look each child in the eye as they pass along a message of encouragement and hope while they wash the child's feet and fit them with new socks and shoes.

Samaritan's Feet was honored at the recent NCAA Final Four basketball tournament in San Antonio and they are an official charity of Super Bowl XLVI.

All images are courtesy of Samaritan's Feet.