



PUBLICATION
Jun 18, 2020

CHIME THROUGH THE YEARS

“BEND IT LIKE ISHA” BY ISHA JOHANSEN

CHIME FOR CHANGE Through the Years: The Female Fabric is a series curated by CHIME Managing Editor Mariane Pearl featuring stories from the CHIME journalism platform archives by women around the world.



Football is part of my existence- genetically, culturally, and historically. In a nutshell, it is in my DNA.

A professional banker by profession, my father was chairman of one of the most successful and institutionalized football clubs in Sierra Leone called the EAST END LIONS. **He transferred his unconditional love for the club and sport to me by taking me to the national stadium, exposing me to the sometimes heated and emotional executive club meetings, thereby absorbing all the emotion and the makings of a soccer administrator.**

As a child and the only daughter growing up with my two bothers I was the perfect definition of a tomboy. I never had a doll nor did I have a teddy bear or any of the cute pink cuddly accessories associated with being a girl.

Today, as the founder of one of the most successful premier league clubs in Sierra Leone called FC JOHANSEN, I use football to empower and inspire our youth and our womenfolk.

I never bought a premier club, nor did I seek to own or inherit a club with the view of the kind of financial potential football has today. FC Johansen was borne out of a humanitarian venture by my Norwegian husband and myself to assist young children, some displaced, some orphaned, whom I saw every day for months playing football in a neighbourhood field a few metres way from our house. Before long, FC Johansen became the Harlem city globetrotters of Sierra Leone travelling around the world participating in youth world cups in Sweden, MAYORS CUP in Las Vegas, playing against the youth side of REAL MADRID, to name but a few.

In 2011 I had thrown my hat in as a candidate a week before the position for the highest seat in football in the country was officially closed. I simply wanted to ruffle the feathers of the male candidates by challenging them to explain what they have done for football in Sierra Leone. To cut a long story short, **I won against the odds and to the shock and horror of the male competition who had earlier branded me as a disillusioned female with too much money to burn, or too little sense to venture in the male entrenched cabal.**

My nightmare was only to begin as cabals grouped and regrouped, political plots unfolded, and for the past four years I have endured intimidation and sexist bullying that is hard to put into words. How I have managed to remain sane and or alive is anyone's guess except to say that for every punch came the strength to absorb and endure the pain.

It is this inspiration that has built the wall of resilience that we have today, we are the fortunate minority and we owe it to our womenfolk to give that helping hand in the name of sisterhood.

