

Pinball remembering forgotten

BY JIM MASON
Staff Writer

One minute, Pinball Clemons is at his wise-cracking best.

The head coach of the Toronto Argos is working the luncheon crowd at Christian Blind Mission International on Stouffville Road Wednesday as if it was Yuk Yuk's.

The next minute, there is complete silence.

The signature Pinball smile, as wide as a CFL field, is long gone. The quiet is suddenly broken as he smashes an egg and drops a saucer on the table in front of two dinner guests.

Mr. Clemons appears near tears.

The broken egg represents the broken hearts of children, he says.

Children in Uganda he visited with his wife, Diane, and a Blind Mission entourage over 10 days in April.

"These children are forgotten," he said. "They have no names, no addresses."

"It was shocking. I've never seen poverty at that level. Imagine that the only clothes you have are the ones you're wearing. Imagine having no refrigerator, no food."

Mr. Clemons was launching a campaign to raise money to provide care and medical treatment.

The campaign features a DVD, Meet the Forgotten Children, from the trip.

After lunch, eight Argos, including Heisman trophy winners Ricky Williams and Eric Crouch, helped their coach load a container of medical equipment

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bound for Kumi Hospital in Uganda.

Students from area schools, including Stouffville Christian, Wesley Academy, Glad Park, Orchard Park and Summitview, delivered toys for the shipment and visited with the football players.

David McComiskey, executive director of the mission, said children in Uganda still suffer from polio, serious bone injuries and other disabilities.

Mr. Clemons brought another egg back from the trip. It was a gift from the grandmother of Emmanuel, a seven-year-old boy with cerebral palsy. Blind mission care workers worked with him for three years, taking him from only being able to lie on his back to walking and doing chores.

"I'm giving you this egg because it's fragile and it's precious, just like my grand-boy," the grandmother told Mr. Clemons. "You came and saved my precious Emmanuel. This egg is to thank you."

The egg is a reminder of the little boy.

"It makes me so upset, even a little angry, to hear that this same story is played out again and again in countries throughout Africa and Asia," he said. "Precious little children like Emmanuel are misunderstood, undervalued and they're treated recklessly."


Mr. Clemons, an Oakville resident, was guest speaker at the mission's 100,000 Miracles dinner in Markham last year. When he asked how he could be more involved with the organization, the Ugandan trip was suggested, Mr. McComiskey said.

The blind mission is the leading organization rescuing and restoring people trapped in poverty by disability. It has more than 1,000 projects worldwide in more than 100 low-income countries.

Mr. Clemons is also honorary chairperson of a 75-bed Teen Challenge drug and alcohol rehabilitation program for young adults being established in Aurora. He was an integral part of launching The Argos Foundation's Stop The Violence campaign last year and was named chairperson of the Youth Challenge Fund by Premier Dalton McGuinty in February.




Pinball Clemons (centre), coach of the Toronto Argos, helps load a trailer destined for Africa at Christian Blind Mission International on Stouffville Road with players including Jordan Younger (left) and Ricky Williams Wednesday.



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