

The First Rwandan in Space: How Commercial Spaceflight Can Advance Positive Social Change

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Abstract

In 2012, Adrien Niyonshuti rose from the ashes of the Rwandan genocide to compete as a cyclist in the London Olympics. He re-emerged four years later to enter the 2016 Olympics in Rio. But his journey was not simple. Adrien had lost 60 family members on his mother's side alone (including six of his brothers) to that single year of harsh brutality. Through the help of many, Adrien and his teammates have now risen beyond their tragedy to inspire others around the world through cycling. We now seek to take the Rwandan journey one great step into the beyond by putting the first Rwandan in space through a commercial suborbital space flight.

Overview

After the genocide, Jock Boyer arrived in Rwanda. Jock was the first American to ride in the Tour de France. He took a group of orphans and feral children that were casualties of the genocide, and molded them into a cycling juggernaut.

Whereas the roads leading out of Rwanda were once filled with two hundred thousand refugees hauling what personal belongings they could carry, they are now filled once a year with up to 3 million people who assemble to watch the Tour du Rwanda Cycling Race in Kigali. The Rwandan team, comprised of Hutu and Tutsi men who live, train, and laugh together, frequently competes in conflict zones. When they do so, the locals often come up to them and state, "You have given us hope. Since you have escaped conflict, we, too, believe that we will one day escape this conflict."

So, the Rwandan cyclists have emerged as messengers of hope.

This entire story was captured in the highly successful documentary "Rising from Ashes," which was narrated by Forrest Whitaker and directed/produced by TC Johnstone (and winner of 19 film festival awards). For several years, now, Dr. Michael A Schmidt of Sovaris Aerospace has been a medical and performance advisor to the Rwandan National Cycling team. Dr. Schmidt has assembled a team of collaborators that intend to help the Rwandans take yet one more step beyond the genocide and have their beloved Adrien become the first Rwandan in space via suborbital spaceflight.

Conclusion

This collaboration of Sovaris Aerospace, Team Africa Rising, Space for Humanity, Gratis 7 Media Group Foundation, and Apogeo Spatial seeks to use this mission to inspire. For the Rwandans, it will further show how one can attain the unimaginable through hard work and the support of others. It will show what's possible. For Adrien, he will glimpse the Earth as never before (overview effect) and take this message of the sacredness of our planet around the world. For the commercial spaceflight community, we birth our new world of citizen space travelers, sharing an enlightened message of how spaceflight can be used to inspire, educate, and build human connection. And we will become part of the next documentary film on Adrien's journey of hope.