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Dr Naimanye: making of the road engineering guru from Jinja to UK



Dr Eng Naimanye (2nd R) with his family alongside the Kyabazinga of Busoga at the occasion

Dr Eng Andrew Naimanye, the executive director of the Uganda Road Fund (URF), is a reclusive CEO who prefers to live a humble and quiet life to let work do the talking. However, on August 27 when he celebrated his 50th birthday, dozens of eminent people graced the event at his home in Mirembe Villas, Kigo and it is here that he revealed the trials and tribulations that shaped his career and the need to celebrate his golden jubilee, writes **DAVID LUMU.**

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Profile

Dr Andrew Naimanye: making of the road engineering guru from Jinja to UK

My invitation to this top-level celebration had a bold and precise disclaimer: 'No excuses for missing out.'

Whoever has come close to Dr Naimanye knows that in spite of the fact that he is a man of few words, he is always full of wit and reason. On a personal note, he loathes the limelight and this was evident throughout this momentous occasion.

This, perhaps, was down to the fact that the event was graced by eminent people such as the Kyabazinga of Busoga William Wilberforce Gabula Nadiope IV as well as the Lango Paramount king, Dr Eng Moses Michael Odongo Okune. Also in attendance was Jane Abodo, the director of public prosecutions, KCCA executive director Dorothy Kisaka, and several other dignitaries.

As the main attraction, Dr Naimanye initially preferred to engage guests at personal level but at the end of it all, he had to open up about his upbringing and life challenges that have shaped his glittering career as an engineer.

"I was born in Jinja to Mrs Margaret and Eng Naimanye and I am the last born of six children. They provided a very supportive environment, taking me to Kiira Nursery School, Mwiri Primary School, King's College Budo (KCB) and subsequently Leeds University. My interest in engineering started at an early age through seeing my father working as an engineer at Uganda Electricity Board," he said.

It was at this point that his father recalled some of the decisive moments in Dr Naimanye's career.

"It was a tumultuous time in 1980 and we dreaded finding army vehicles on the road due to their aggressiveness. In one incident as I tried to avoid a head-on collision, an army Land Rover still rammed into me and forced a young Naimanye to be ejected out. Luckily, he landed feet-first on the tarmac and avoided serious injury," he said.

Indeed, Dr Naimanye would go on to survive three different failed plane landings as well as a train crash. "It is really God at work. I believe he has good plans for me. He has given me a fully packed 50 years thus far and I believe I am still far away from my full potential," he said.

All this laid the ground for Dr Naimanye to start of other life-changing events in Dr Naimanye's career and one of the guests, a former classmate at Budo, pointed out to him that chess was his turnaround in fortunes. To this, Dr Naimanye agreed that Budo transformed his life to a great extent. "Back in the day, our intake was crème de la crème of Uganda with the best Primary Leaving Examination students joining my stream in Senior One. I had to up my academics as all my classmates were extremely brilliant both in academics and sports. Whilst in Senior



Dr Eng Naimanye and wife Margaret Rwomwijhu Naimanye

2, I learnt how to play chess and the rest is history. I managed to excel academically both at O and A-levels whilst excelling in chess at continental level. With the nurturing Budo school environment, supportive teachers and highly competitive fellow students, the setting was able to propel me to the highest levels of chess in Uganda and the East Africa region. By 1988, whilst in Senior four, I was the school chess champion having competed against the likes of Felix Okoboi [current board chairman of Uganda Development Bank]. A year later, I was the national junior chess champion and also won a bronze medal at the third Africa Junior Chess Championships held in Lagos, Nigeria. I won several chess championships and represented Uganda in so many chess tournaments including the 30th World Chess Olympiad in Manila, Philippines. By



Dr Eng Naimanye plays chess with his son Edward Kagoda Naimanye



Dr Eng Naimanye

Senior Six, I was the national chess champion (at both junior and senior levels)," he recalled with poise.

"By the time I exited Budo in 1991, I had the highest chess rating in East and Central Africa and became a FIDE master! The chess record stood for 25 years and indeed, Budo gave me confidence and also inculcated in me the culture of thinking big and remaining focused."

At this point, the Kyabazinga was eager to know how far Dr Naimanye went with the sport and the influence it had on his career.

"Chess is synonymous with mathematics and critical thinking which are some of the requirements for successfully pursuing a civil engineering career. Also, chess gave me the opportunity to travel outside Uganda at an early age and international exposure is priceless. I

represented Uganda right from junior level up to the Olympiad," he said.

Indeed, Dr Naimanye would return to Uganda about 12 years ago as part of the team that set up Uganda Road Fund and he is currently privileged to serve as the executive director. Over the years, the Road Fund has superintended over road maintenance financing of over Shs five trillion and they manage the maintenance financing of Uganda's \$8 billion road network.

Dr Odongo noted that at URF, Dr Naimanye has managed to steer it clear of controversies and scandals. To this, the latter attributed it to his personality.

"Humility is extremely important as well as managing expectations of both your internal and external stakeholders. Critical thinking and problem solving skills are important," he said.

By now, Kisaka was eager to find out what drives Dr Naimanye's energies, to which he said he does a lot of voluntary community work in his home area of Lubowa as well as part of rotary and Busoga kingdom.

"I am also actively involved at All Saints chapel, Lweza. I do a lot of reading; and regular physical exercise and listening to music to manage stress," he said.

"I am married to Margaret Rwomwijhu Naimanye and we have three biological children; Andrew, Amanda and Edward."

To sum up the occasion, Dr Naimanye revealed that despite his privileged situation, he has no intention of joining politics but is simply content to continue in a career as an engineer.

"I enjoy community and voluntary work. Most likely, at retirement from institutional corporate governance, I will end up running a charitable foundation," he said.