

A true South African welcome

The culture of South Africa is a melting pot of all nations from all corners of the globe. The best way to indulge it is to taste the food and beverages. One thing about the African Ubuntu is that from saying hello in isi-Zulu perspective, you are acknowledged. Sawubona means “I see you”. This is you have come into my territory and I see you and will not shoot you for instance. The next matter at hand you must eat without fear of being poisoned. This give me a chance to eliminate you there and then or embrace you through-out your stay in my presence. The Hollywood block-buster movie the Avatar’s creators played with this initial cultures collision concept. So, taking the Egyptian maestro to a Zulu middle income family whose children do Academic chess development with my Academy for a scrumptious dinner was a welcome experience and somewhat fulfilling. He sure was acknowledged upon arrival. The true African way would have elicited a praise singer who would orate his achievements including the GM title and continental crowns. All along his entry root the young Ntombi’s(Girls) would be ululating and throwing Rose pedal along his walk path. Hell no! This is not how it went down. Our original cultures have evolved, they have in some instances been consumed by the modern life-style we have assumed. Thus, the GM was treated to a western kind of evening. But the meal was unmistakably prepared the African way. Mr. Khumalo is a traditional Zulu man. His family lives a carefully chosen western life when it proves best. Any excuse for him and his family to embrace his roots is clearly very welcome. This is reflected in every aspect of his family-life, and in his thought provoking editorials in the Review section of the biggest Sunday newspaper (www.thetimes.co.za) in South Africa. Reading these articles will paint’s a picture of the RSA environment. The articles does it in a way that if you landed on earth from outer space for the first time, you will somewhat know what is cooking in this part of the world. I strongly recommend the read.



(Dinner time!)

GM. Bassem is a modern young man who is easy going. Either I misunderstood what a chess grandmaster is from all the writings about viciousness and crushing opponents mercilessly. This top chess player is kind hearted to a fault. Before the dinner was served he was already embroiled in a chess struggle with the Khumalo kids. The focus was for a while lost in chess. He elaborately told fascinating stories of his upbringing in a spell-bounding manner. The youngest challenged him to a chess game to which the GM chose to handicap himself as blindfolded. Now this shocked, of course with delight, the adults in the room. Something that had us all stunned was when master Bassem was demonstrating his IQ and cognitive abilities, recalling the entire game blindfolded and naming the location of the pieces at any interval, the young Khumalo (Opponent) exclaimed that he could also do the same. We all witnessed an amazing sudden feat; the Six year old

recalled the game with a few hints and recalled several piece positions at requested intervals! The GM was really impressed as well. He heaped praise to the young man and wished him well!



The dinner was delicious! Soup for starters. Main course was al carte; beef Oxtail, chicken, lamb and several others on buffet to choose. Veggies so fresh if not harvested they'd still be growing! Cooking is cooking, but eating what's cooked the African way makes food extra delicious. It is your usual menu, but man after a few bites you forget what the menu was and you taste Africa! This beats eating at a restaurant if you know what I mean.

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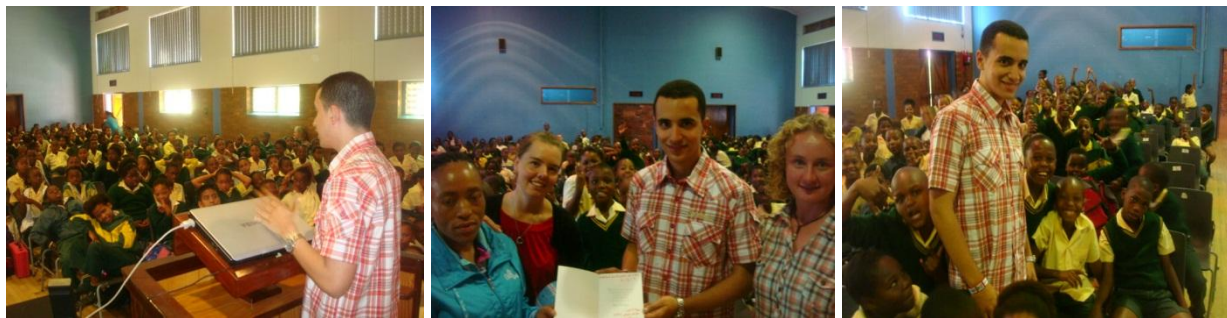


(GM. Bassem with the Khumalo clan, the three lovely kids, Mama Khumalo and Papa Khumalo!)

Labour of love

Grandmaster Bassem is one of the nicest young-man with a pleasant personality. Straight from the airport he hit the road running by opting to join our Academy's presentation at a school's parent meeting. He even stood and spoke eloquently for the merits of chess in schools citing personal experience. Next was a face to face encounter with some budding young players who asked questions ranging from politics to how they can follow in his foot-steps. The GM had them mesmerized with some blind-fold exhibition. Parents of some children were in attendance as well. The GM seemed to love this type of work.

The learners of the school Jozua Naude' were treated to a motivational lecture in fluent English, a cognitive brain demonstration showing exquisite Memory and Logic. They asked question plus were handed a memorable "well wish" card written in Arabic!



(GM. Bassem squared off with almost 1 000 learner, the entire teachers corps and several parents on this day)

The day ended with a hands-on practical workshop between the educators the Chess Academy were GM. Bassem demonstrated cognitive acumen inherent with what made him travel regularly on chess tours, missing school attendance. Regardlessly coming back to easily catch-up and overtake all within the learning curve. The blind-fold chess demonstration startled many. One teacher believed that since it was guessing within 64 squares, winning the lottery is clearly something Grandmaster can easily achieve!

The school authorities then showered GM. Bassem with presents (Cricket T-shirt, Mandela's Book and a Vuvuzela).

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The above visit was repeated in several other schools during the GM stay in South Africa. He woke-up every day with enthusiasm and zeal, looking forward to each and every visit. He even started comparing RSA schools with Egypt and predicted that with my Academy program, the Egyptian chess dominance is soon going to be a thing of the past.

GM. Bassem for Bafana-Bafana soccer national team!

This is a visit that clearly ranked tops. The school is situated a stone throw from Mr. Mandela's home in Houghton. The children of this school are amongst the most underprivileged in the South African schooling system. Most learners travel long distances to attend what is perceived to be a "good school". This migration in the morning and in the afternoon adds to the gridlock the roads are bulking under. But it's with the children who wake in ungodly hours to arrive back home way after dark that the school is amongst the lowest performing primary age

school in the country. Learners travel from Soweto, Tembisa and Katlehong!



A new young Principal, a rejuvenated team of educators and a “chess in schools” project, seem to be the kind of combination that promised a tactical winning formula. The Grandmaster and the Africa chess champion visit sky-rocketed the hope for the school. Hope that the Mathematics average at the highest grade will improve from the low twenties percentage.

During the question and answer session Bassem revealed how his farther, who is a Medical doctor, taught him chess under no formal program. The fact that the learners have an academy working to formally institute the game is a huge advantage.



(Pupils and their Master! – Keeping hope alive!)

Grandmaster Bassem's visit had an almost immediate impact on the day. Asked what he does on his spare time, does he watch TV led to a motivational discussion that revealed how much he would not succeed if he spent one moment glued onto such frivolities? Learners vowed to turn-off the TV and do their home-work because they rather travel the world for real than watch it on TV go by!

At the end of the visit the school presented Grandmaster Bassem with a soccer T-shirt of Bafana-bafana as a token of appreciation. It was imprinted with the name GM. Bassem at the back. This was interesting because the two countries are slated to clash at the FNB Stadium. Bassem had earlier visited the site of this imminent collision!



Quizzed on who he will blow the Vuvuzela support, the chess grand maestro played it safe, true to his style of chess by saying his head will be for Bafana and his heart for the Pharos! He felt it was a pity that he will be back in Egypt watching the clash on TV instead of being inside the stadium!

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In the Shadow of NELSON MANDELA

The trip of Bassem to South Africa was divided in two parts. He worked hard in Johannesburg and relaxed in Cape Town, one week each. While in Johannesburg, we made time that he visits Mr. Mandela, especially in the light of one school giving him Mandela Book as a present. Bassem knew that there was no chance the book can be autographed because it is the giant bronze statue that we were visiting. This is situated in the posh Sandton Square aptly named Nelson Mandela Square.



(Grandmaster Bassem meets Nelson Mandela's bust!)