

# Varsity sports facilities paralysed

By Tom Indimuli

The University of Nairobi is unable to run its games department which is slowly grinding to a halt.

The once vibrant sports power house can no longer boast of top athletes or footballers.

According to John Ngugi, the sports tutor, the woes started with the cost-sharing system introduced four years ago, when each of the various campuses became semi-autonomous in operation.

Many of the facilities at the main campus are under-utilised or totally neglected.

A visit to the games facilities reveals the contempt with which the department is treated. A casual look at the head of the university's games department secretary's desk reveals a telephone set. Alas! The facility has been non-operational for two years. With such an attitude, is this department really relevant at all to the University's goals?

The University of Nairobi is renowned for its great sportsmen in the past two decades. Some of the sports greats include, Edward Rombo who starred for *Mean Machine*, football stars Joe Masiga and William Obwaka, who turned out for the national team *Harambee Stars* and Alfred Khangati who starred in volleyball, among others.

The inter-university games which provided a forum for the students to exhibit their skills collapsed a decade ago.

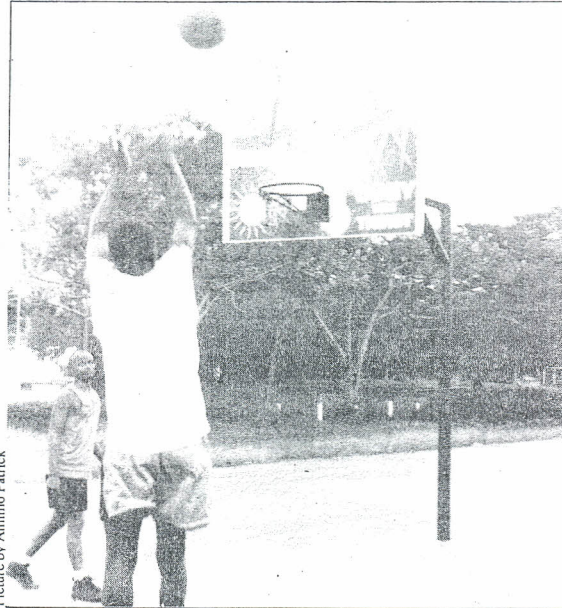
In the past, students toured various parts of the country to take part in tournaments, this is no more. "We can no longer afford this! The modalities of taking teams out for competitions have changed greatly," he observes.

Consequently, students have to pay Ksh. 500 for extra-curricular activities.

The monies are paid at the constituent colleges. Consequently the activities are controlled from the colleges leaving the University's games department bare.

The Pay-As-You-Eat (PAYE) system has also affected the games department. The games tutor complains that students now have little or no time left to think about sporting activities. "The students are busy thinking about survival. How do you expect them to have time-off for extra-curricula activities?" Ngugi says adding that the hard economic times have made talented students to turn out for corporate teams with the aim of getting some allowances as a means of survival.

Though the issue of finance has been key to low morale, frequent closures and the semester system has also taken its share. The recent



Picture by Animo Patrick

**Sports: On the verge of collapse. Students fine tune their act using the few facilities at the university sports ground closure following the Karura forest saga is a case in point.**

Ngugi regrets that the Inter-Campus sports event which was just around the corner has had to be shelved indefinitely. He complains that the irregular semester system has made it difficult for his depart-

ment to assemble a University team at the hour of need. Despite the dark moments in the sporting endeavours, the university teams have turned out some brilliant performances in their respective disciplines. The all time flag-bearer has been the *Mean Machine*, the varsity

rugby side. The team currently featuring in the Kenya League has over the years registered impressive results. Credit must also go to the men's basketball side, the *Terrorists*, who were promoted last year to the country's first division league.

Is all lost in the struggle to revive the games department?

"Certainly not," quips Ngugi exuding confidence. "Just like all other Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) taking place in all the country's sectors, we are also in the re-engineering process."

Currently, the university has adopted a decentralised system to oversee the operations of games activities in all constituent colleges.

All colleges have formed teams in various disciplines with the best players being enlisted to the university team. Games at the college level have received a new lease of life with the requirement that each student pays an annual activity levy of Shs. 500.

To reactivate interest among the students, the university has established a department of physical education. The department, to be based at Kikuyu Campus, will be enrolling its pioneer students soon. "The trick here is to stimulate interest as well as to accord sports the seriousness it deserves," Ngugi explains.