

# MARIO THE KIDNEY BOYS

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**Documentary**  
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Mario van Niekerk, a reformed gangster, has rescued a thousand children from a perilous fate in the Cape Flats, a notorious district outside of Cape Town.

This truly compelling story quietly unfolds on the outskirts of Cape Town away from the spectacle of the World Cup as Mario continues his unaided eight-year-old struggle to win the hearts and minds of youth through the power of the beautiful game.



# MARIO & THE RUDE BOYS

Rarely does one uncover an epic struggle by an unsung hero to save young minds from a hopeless existence. *Mario and the Rude Boys* is such a rarity.

While the eyes of the world are dazzled by soccer stars shimmering in the spotlight of the 2010 World Cup, this inspirational story quietly unfolds on the outskirts of Cape Town, one of the host cities.

Meet Mario van Niekerk, a reformed gangster who created Great Commission United (GCU), a soccer academy dedicated to winning the hearts and minds of youth through the power of the beautiful game. Entirely funded by donations, Mario has recruited other reformed gang members to coach the boys, acting as positive role models and mentors. In exchange for team membership the boys must undertake a 'life skills' programme that focuses on basic literacy and numeracy. To ensure the local girls do not miss out, a rope skipping project has also been launched.

In the 1960's, the apartheid regime ejected thousands of coloureds, Malays and blacks from their homes in District Six to keep Cape Town racially pure. The majority of those displaced were forced to move to the Cape Flats, a barren sandy wasteland open to the elements and lacking infrastructure.

With their communities splintered and crime endemic, gangs sprung up to defend their territories. Within a few years, these gangs would rule the Cape Flats spawning one of the most violent gang cultures in the world. This is the home of the Ugly Americans, The Mongrels, The Hard Livings and the Rude Boys. Opposing them is Mario and GCU. It is a tough battle where out of a population of 80,000, 90% of adults are addicted to 'tik' (crystal meth) and 80% of children grow up fatherless.

When Mario spots special soccer talent in Pitta, a member of the Rude Boys, he sets out to target the gang, challenging them to a soccer match. World-class players like Bennie McCarthy (Blackburn Rovers), Quinton Fortune (ex-Manchester United ) Nasief Morris (Panithanikos), and Stanton Lewis (Ajax Amsterdam ), have emerged from the Flats. Perhaps Pitta can join their ranks or at least be inspired by hope for a better life.

"When they put a soccer shirt on, you can see it in their eyes. All the pain, it just goes away. Because for this one time, they can be something, and they can be someone, and they can be important. And that alone is victory in itself" - *Mario van Niekerk*

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