



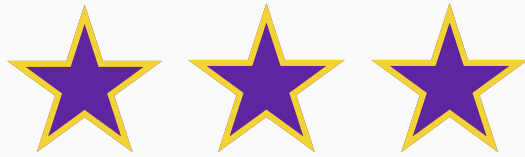
Refugee, immigrant, athlete, scholar, Hall of Famer, Olympian, humanitarian, philanthropist, man of faith and U.S. Army member. These words all describe Dee Salukombo and his compelling story. While his athletic accomplishments at LHS are the reason for his induction into the Hall of Fame, his significant accomplishments after graduation deserve equal notice.

Dee was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in the village of Kirotshe, near the Rwandan border. When he was 5, his family moved to the city of Goma where his father was a teacher and his mother was a housewife and entrepreneur. The Congo War began in 1996. During that time, his father was imprisoned after being targeted for execution during a prior war as well as to extort whatever money he had. With the help of a guard, who was later executed for his actions, Dee's father escaped the country in 2000. In 2001 Dee, then 12, his mother and eight siblings fled to Uganda where they joined their father and remained for 3 years in a refugee camp, where he learned English and played soccer.

In 2004, Dee and his family found themselves in Northeast Ohio pursuant to assistance from Catholic Charities. At LHS, Dee assimilated well and thrived. Guidance counselor, Jeanne Hoopes, noted at the time that Dee was 'a friend to everyone, always smiling, optimistic, kind, gentle and interested in people.' Describing himself as a 'decent' soccer player, Dee found a home on the LHS team immediately, but his speed was noticed by the LHS cross-country coach who encouraged him to pick up the sport. Dee soon found that he liked running distances and joined the cross-country and track teams. At the same time, Dee was excelling in academics and ultimately accumulated 35 hours of college credit courses by graduation.

In cross-country, Dee made a huge impact. His accolades include 2007 conference champion, twice All-District, two-time All-Region, and two-time All-Ohio. As a result, letters from hundreds of colleges, including Big 10 and Ivy League schools who had also noticed Dee, came pouring in. While Dee and his parents valued education, it was uncertain if Dee would have any money to pursue his education. Jeanne Hoopes stepped in to assist. She helped Dee sift through the offers to find the right fit. Denison University stood out. With Jeanne's help in conjunction with the late Denison Coach, Phil Torrens, Dee was able to secure close to 100% full 4-year coverage for his Denison education.

At Denison, Dee flourished as a scholar and a runner. He was a dominant member of the Denison track & field and cross-country teams. His accomplishments in track & field, which are many, include three-time All-American honors, North Coast Athletic Conference (NCAC) Indoor Track and Field MVP 2011 and Outdoor Track & Field Distance MVP 2010. At the conference level, Dee was a 15-time All-NCAC performer and nine-time conference champion in indoor and outdoor track & field. He won the indoor conference title in the 3,000 three years in a row and won a conference title in four different events in outdoor track & field. Dee holds five Denison track & field records including the indoor mile, 3000, 5000, distance relay and outdoor 5000.



In cross-country, he was a three-time All-American, four-time All-Great Lakes Region, four-time All-NCAC honoree, and Denison's second-ever athlete to be named both NCAC Newcomer of the Year and Runner of the Year. He won the conference championship in 2011 with a time of 25:01.1 and qualified to compete in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Great Lakes Regional and NCAA Division II Championships all four seasons. Dee was named to the NCAC's 30th Anniversary All-Decade Team in both cross country and track and field.

While at Denison, Dee served the Central Ohio Community as a volunteer with the Big Brothers and Sisters Program. At the same time, he directed his humanitarian interests to his home in DRC and he started the non-profit organization, Project Kirotshe, later named Kirotshe Foundation, with the philanthropic vision to inspire young students to become leaders and role models in their community and build a future generation to break the cycle of poverty and war. Dee has been able to give back to the youth of his home village of Kirotshe and surrounding areas, first by building a learning center/library, then raising funds to provide books, computers, and supplies and training instructors to provide educational and athletic opportunities. As a Denison junior, just after competing in a national meet, Dee ran one hundred and twenty miles from Granville, Ohio to Lakewood over three days to raise money for the effort. The Torrens Learning Center, named after Denison Coach Phil Torrens, was inaugurated in 2013. Through the Kirotshe Foundation, Dee has helped thousands of youth avoid joining militia groups. His work has also prevented girls from getting married at very young ages because they could not afford to be in school. Via the Kirotshe Foundation, Dee has also helped train athletes to become national and continental champions as well as Olympians. Dee graduated from Denison in 2012 with a degree in Chemistry and a minor in French. He was inducted into the Denison University Varsity D Association Hall of Fame in 2023.

Dee's running career has continued since his graduation from Denison. The third Olympian and second Olympic runner to emerge from Denison, Dee, who holds dual U.S. and DRC citizenship, represented the DRC in the opening ceremony of the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and competed in the marathon event. One of his DRC teammates was Beatrice Kamuchanga, who had come through his Kirotshe Program. A year later, Dee won the gold medal in the marathon at the 2017 Jeux de la Francophonie in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Dee barely missed the 2024 Olympics by running a 2:18.46 in the marathon. The qualifying time was sub-2:18.

Dee worked in Cleveland as a case manager for Catholic Charities and an admission counselor at Marietta College. He continues to raise funds in support of the Kirotshe Foundation and to date, he and his team have raised thousands of dollars and shipped thousands of books, hundreds of computers and substantial athletic equipment to supply the Torrens Learning Center and the running team. He has assisted the village of Kirotshe in creating a bakery that produces bread and provides an income for the women who staff the bakery. As war continues in the DRC, Kirotshe is providing daily meals for children whose families have been displaced by the fighting.

Dee is currently serving in the U.S. Army and pursuing a Master's degree in Project Management. Dee and his wife, Esperance, have two children and reside in Colorado Springs, CO.