

Gus Envela Jr. (1968-)

By David Lewis (Takelma, Chinook, Molalla, Santiam Kalapuya)

Gus Envela Jr., an émigré to Oregon from Equatorial Guinea, grew up in Salem and became a star athlete at Douglas McKay High School. Envela set nearly all state high school sprinting records in the early 1980s. Later, he gained national recognition by attaining All-American status and became the first to represent Equatorial Guinea in four consecutive summer Olympic games—in 1984, 1988, 1992, and 1996—setting a record of attendance by a sprinter. Envela's best finish was placing fourth in the 100 meters in 1992.

Gustavo Bodjedi Envela-Mahua Jr. was born in 1968 in Equatorial Guinea, where his father, Gustavo Envela-Makongo Sr., was that country's first ambassador to the United Nations. To escape the violence in his country, Envela Sr. moved his family to Salem in 1970. Gus Envela remained a citizen of Equatorial Guinea. Envela Sr. died in 2005 and is buried in Corvallis.

Envela's talent in sprinting was such that while representing Waldo Middle School he easily outpaced his closest competition, usually by half the track. While attending Douglas McKay High School in Salem, he participated in football and track and field and continued to excel in sprinting. He set state records in the 100 (10.49 seconds), 200 (21.33), and the 400-meter dashes (46.78) and took first place in the state meet in each of those events from 1984 to 1986, itself a state record. During the 2006 Class 4A state track and field championships, he won the 100 and 200 and 400 at Hayward Field in Eugene.

Following high school, Envela attended Stanford University, where he ran for only one year due to conflicts with the coach. He graduated in 1990 with degrees in political science and African American studies. Following graduation, he briefly tried out for three NFL teams.

In the 1990s, Envela lived in Los Angeles, California, with his wife Tomiko and their children. In 2000, they separated and are now divorced. He is the president of Voice of Democracy, a consultancy company for Americans seeking access to Africa. Envela has acted in films and television shows, including the movie *Sgt. Bilko*.

Since the 1990s, Envela has also committed himself to reforming politics in his native Equatorial Guinea. In 2009, he stated that he intended to run for president against dictator Teodoro Obiang, who had come to power in a 1979 coup. However, the government of Equatorial Guinea would not renew Envela's lapsed passport, and official records do not indicate that he registered as a candidate; Obiang won the election with 95% of the vote.

Sources

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The Oregon Encyclopedia

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