

BU's Brown Arena Basketball Floor Gets a New Life in Jamaica



January 2005 was a bad month for the floor at Boston University's Brown Arena. After 30 years hosting men's and women's hoops – coaches like Rick Pitino, Mike Krzyzewski, Jim Calhoun, players like Reggie Lewis, Christian Laettner, and Grant Hill – after holding up a tennis court for Billie Jean King and Chris Evert, after hundreds of concerts and graduations and special events – it was shoved into a warehouse, pushed aside by a brand new floor at the new Agganis Arena.

There it sat for almost five years. In the dark, lost, forgotten.

It would probably have sat there until doomsday, except that last year BU landed a role in a movie. Hollywood needed the warehouse, Hollywood got the warehouse, and the Brown Arena floor got in the way.

That could have been the end of the story. Basketball floor in the way; basketball floor in the dumpster; goodbye. But since 2007 BU has had a different approach to handling surplus property. BU has linked up with IRN, the Institution Recycling Network. IRN matches BU's surplus with a network of charities in the U.S. and around the world, where BU's excess stuff is used for disaster and poverty relief. In 2009 alone, more than 142 tons of BU surplus were sent for reuse through IRN.

So when the Brown floor needed to disappear, BU called IRN. IRN called a nonprofit partner, Food for the Poor, who claimed the floor in a heartbeat. The match was made to a school in rural southern Jamaica, where Food for the Poor has been active in poverty relief for many years.

So in early October the Brown Arena floor got a new life. A crew of IRN movers took the floor out of the warehouse and back into daylight. It was packed into shipping containers, trucked to the port of Elizabeth, NJ, and loaded onto a ship for the week-long voyage to Jamaica. There in Kingston it made the short trip to Food for the Poor's local warehouse. It sat for just a few days before it was taken out again and installed in its permanent home in Sandy Bay, about 40 miles from Kingston.

Where it will probably live on for another 30 years, almost certainly under the feet of more than a few Jamaican kids who'll end up in the NCAA, the Jamaican National Team, or the Olympics.

One of the missions of higher education is to show what good can be done with creativity and imagination. Reusing the Brown Arena floor to benefit Jamaican kids definitely lives up to that goal. Good for BU. Good for the kids in Jamaica. Even good for BU's budget; shipping the floor to be reused cost a lot less than tossing it in dumpsters. Good things all around.