NEWS

Meet Tanaka Chonyera, the man aiming to inspire next generation of rocket scientists



Christine Tannous
Indianapolis Star

Updated Oct. 29, 2026, 10:26 a.m. ET

Ad

0:02 / 0:15

Tanaka Chonyera hopes to inspire next generation of rocket scientists

Tanaka Chonyera founded the High-Power Rocket Boot Camp, a program that allows kids to build a rocket completely for free, from the assembly to the launch. He talks about the program Saturday, May 30, 2026.

Sitting in his apartment in downtown Indianapolis, Tanaka Chonyera is surrounded by high-power rockets. Boxes around him housing different rocket parts and tools to required assemble them. A whiteboard behind him lists details for upcoming rocket build days.

On an average day, you can find Chonyera here – assembling rockets and running tests on how to build them more efficiently.

"I've always wanted to live a really exciting life," Chonyera said.





Tanaka Chonyera hopes to inspire the next generation of rocket scientists

Tanaka Chonyera hosts the High-Power Rocket Bootcamp, a program that allows students to learn to build and launch a rocket, completely for free.

Chonyera, born in Zimbabwe and grew up in Batswana, has always been interested in science. In high school, he built his first high-power rocket from scratch for a competition through the STEM club. His club won the competition with his rocket.

"I was running amok all over campus," Chonyera said. "Anytime there was smoke going off, they were like, 'Oh, that's probably Tanaka.'"

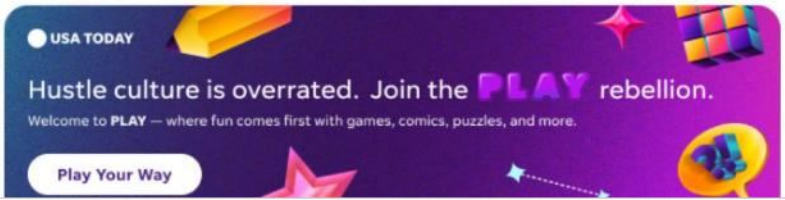
In 2019, Chonyera won an essay contest on satellites against entries from around the African continent. Part of the prize was a trip to watch a rocket launch in French Guiana.

Chonyera describes winning the essay contest as a formative experience for him.

"It was a really big thing to beat the entire continent," Chonyera said. "That gave me confidence that I previously did not have in my own abilities going forward."

After attending Michigan State, he moved to Indianapolis to work as a project manager for Eli Lilly. Continuing to pursue his love of rocketry, he joined the Minority Engineering Program of Indianapolis, where he launched a free rocket bootcamp for kids in 2025.

His High-Power Rocket Bootcamp program funds the entire process of building a rocket for participants, from the assembly to the launch. Any child over 8 is eligible to participate. Over 350 kids have gone through the program, with over 330 high-power rockets built as of October 2026. The program has received funding through a variety of organizations, including the Minority Engineering Program of Indianapolis, Eli Lilly and Cummins.



"I know what rocketry has done for me in my life, and I think it's something that is super inspirational to pursue," Chonyera said. "It really opens their mind."

Chonyera believes his passion for rocketry comes from a desire to challenge himself.

"I want to prove to myself that I'm capable of great things," Chonyera said.

Chonyera's goal is to break the record for launching the most high-power rockets per-capita in the world next year. To get involved with his bootcamp, either as a participant or volunteer, you can reach out to him through his website or on social media.

Captured October 29, 2026 from https://www.indystar.com/story/news/local/2026/10/29/indianapolis-man-aims-to-inspire-next-generation-of-rocket-scientists/92243424007/ (page 5 of 5)