

Black Stars battle for AFCON slot

All eyes on Kudus, Nuamah

Story: Peter Sarbah

GHANA'S poster boy, Kudus Mohammed, and the emerging talent, Ernest Nuamah, will be in the spotlight as Coach Chris Hughton leads the Black Stars to a high-stakes encounter against the Central African Republic counterparts on Thursday at the Baba Yara Stadium in Kumasi.

Hughton's and his charges missed an automatic qualification spot after playing a scoreless draw with Madagascar in Antananarivo, thereby pushing their quest for a spot at the continental competition to the final lap of qualification to

the next Africa Cup of Nations where they hope to coast to a victory and secure a 10th straight Nations Cup qualification ticket.

Thursday's clash will be fiercely fought as Group E leaders Ghana, Central African Republic and Angola all chase two qualification tickets to the continental tournament in Cote d'Ivoire in

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Voice of Graphic SPORTS

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Boxing needs heavy investment to unlock full potential

GHANA'S boxing talents have long been a source of pride for the nation, with the sport winning more laurels for the nation than any other sporting discipline on the international stage.

For a country that has produced 10 world champions over the last 50 years, including the iconic Azumah Nelson, boxing sadly does not receive the needed attention in spite of its rich heritage and huge potential.

The recent call by the England-based boxer, Seth Gyimah (known as Freezy MacBones), a member of the national amateur team, for more significant investment in the sport is both timely and crucial.

While MacBones rightly emphasises the need for improved training facilities and specialised equipment for the national team, it is equally essential to address the state of privately-owned gyms in Accra where most of Ghana's boxing talents are discovered and developed.

These privately-owned boxing gyms, often run by individuals with limited resources but fuelled by their unwavering passion for the sport, play a vital role in nurturing young boxers. However, they face significant challenges primarily due to the lack of government support and financial constraints.

The government must recognise the critical role these gyms play in the development of boxing talents in Ghana. It is not enough to invest solely in the national team; we must also ensure that the grassroots level receives the attention and resources it deserves. This involves retooling and upgrading of the boxing gymnasiums in Accra and beyond.

Many of these gyms lack basic equipment, which is essential for young boxers to develop to their full potential. Punching bags, speed bags, boxing rings and protective gear are just a few examples of what these gyms need to provide quality training experiences for aspiring athletes. Without access to these fundamental resources, young talents may never have the opportunity to progress to higher levels of competitions.

By investing in these privately-owned gyms, the government can create a more conducive environment for talent development. This support should include financial assistance, equipment provision and coaching

resources. It is about empowering passionate gym owners who are committed to shaping the future of Ghana's boxers.

Moreover, government's support for these gyms aligns with broader goals of youth development and job creation. Boxing provides an avenue for young people to channel their energy and passion positively, potentially steering them away from negative influences. As these gyms around Bukom and other parts of Accra thrive and produce more talented boxers, they become hubs for community engagement and economic empowerment.

The success of Azumah - a member of the exclusive International Boxing Hall of Fame - and other Ghanaian boxers on the international stage should serve as inspiration. With the right investment and support, there's no limit to what our boxers can achieve. Ghana can once again become a dominant force in global boxing, just as it was in the past.

While Freezy MacBones's call for investment in the national team is essential, we must not forget the grassroots where our boxing talents are nurtured. The government must, as a matter of urgency, step in to retool and upgrade the privately-owned boxing gyms in Accra and provide the necessary resources to enable young boxers to reach their full potential. By doing so, we not only invest in the future of Ghana's boxing but also contribute to youth development and job creation in our communities. The time for comprehensive support for Ghana's boxing ecosystem is now.

Why Saudis spending big cash on players

BRAZILIAN soccer player Neymar has transferred to Al Hilal of the Saudi Arabian League in the Middle East.

The contract runs through 2025, with a salary of 300 million euros (about 45 billion yen) over two years, and a total of 400 million euros (about 60 billion yen), including piecework. At the end of last year, the Portuguese national team's rival Cristiano Ronaldo moved to Al Nasser in the same league for an annual salary of 200 million euros (about 30 billion yen). The Saudi Arabian League's "buying spree" of star players was not limited to the acquisition of big-name players by a single club.

Even the famous general Guardiola said, "I can't tell them to stop going.

On August 11, the new European soccer season began in England, Spain, and other countries, and the transfer market is undergoing a tectonic shift. Neymar, a world-class name, has decided to leave Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), where he played for six seasons in the French First Division, for Al Hilal of the Saudi Arabian League.

At his press conference, he

said, "I want to make new history.

The Saudi Arabian League has players with tremendous energy and quality," he said with satisfaction.

Neymar had been released by PSG this past offseason.

His first choice was to return to Barcelona, but the conditions just weren't right," said the soccer reporter.

Neymar's salary at PSG was 30 million euros per year. The Saudi Arabian league had also offered Argentine ace Messi the astronomical sum of 180 billion yen over two years, as well as plans to acquire key players from Japan's national team, including Kubo Takefusa and Kou Itakura.

Manchester City manager Guardiola, who won the first-ever European treble with two clubs last season, also had his club's players poached by the Saudis.

"This is not a problem, but a reality. We receive unbelievable offers from Saudi Arabia. (I can't tell [the players] to stop going.

The desire to bid for the World Cup in the year '30 or later

The trigger for this bombing was struck in June of this year. In June of this year, a government-affiliated fund, the Public

Investment Fund (PIF), acquired the four clubs in the Saudi Arabian Sports Authority's Al Nasser, Al Hilal, Al Ittehad, and Al Ahli league. The new owner is Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, the fund's manager, who is just 37 years old and has also served as the country's prime minister since last year. He has held summit meetings with successive Japanese prime ministers when they have visited Saudi Arabia, and he will eventually become the country's king.

In 2017, the PIF invested more than 4 trillion yen in Japan's Softbank to expand its domestic IT business.

Not to mention the overflowing oil money, the PIF released its annual report last year on the 6th of this month, announcing that it had 594.45 billion dollars (about 861.923 trillion yen) in assets under management. In 2021, it will buy Newcastle of the English Premier League for 300 million pounds (about The company is acquiring the English Premier League club Newcastle for £300 million (about ¥46 billion). It is a small investment for the PIF, such as the annual salaries paid to Neymar and



• Brazilian star Neymar being unveiled by his Saudi club, Al-Hilal, after his blockbuster move from PSG

Clirona. The purchase of world-class players is the beginning of a huge project that will go beyond the strengthening of a single club.

It will also make all sports leap forward.

The biggest reason for Saudi Arabia's increased investment in soccer is its desire to bid for the World Cup in 2030 and beyond. A reporter in charge of Japan's national soccer team revealed the following.

Qatar, a small country in the Middle East, hosted a very successful World Cup at the end of last year. That was a big trigger.

The Qatar tournament, which opened last November, was the first ever to be held in the Middle East. Before the tournament, there was a lot of negative publicity about the harsh work conditions for foreign workers and the ban on alcoholic beverages at the games, but on the other hand, the huge air-conditioned stadiums and

infrastructure facilities greatly helped to increase Qatar's global name value.

Qatar and Saudi Arabia broke off diplomatic relations from 2005 to 2009. The tension between Qatar and Saudi Arabia was so great that it was feared that a war in the Middle East was imminent. A soccer journalist with knowledge of the Middle East revealed, "Saudi Arabia is a strictly Islamic country.

Saudi Arabia strictly adheres to Islamic teachings, but Qatar allows foreigners to drink alcohol. When the two countries were cutting off diplomatic relations, Qatar was ahead of Saudi Arabia in hosting the World Cup. That is why they wanted Clirona and Neymar. When it came to negotiating Messi's contract, I heard that not only the PIF but also the Saudi Arabian state was on a mission to conclude a contract because they would pay any amount.