

Ghana in battle of survival

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Paintsil: Black Stars have quality to progress

Story: Peter Sarbah

GHANAIAN football star, John Paintsil, remains unwavering in his confidence in the current Black Stars squad as they face a crucial encounter against Mozambique in the ongoing 2023 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) tournament in Cote d'Ivoire.

Paintsil remains optimistic about the team's continental campaign in Cote d'Ivoire despite a winless run, having lost 1-2 to Cape Verde, and drawn 2-2 with Egypt. The team's final group clash with Mozambique this evening (kick-off: 8 p.m.) is very pivotal if Ghana is to avoid another early exit.

The 42-year-old, who earned 89 caps for the national team, believes the setback from their clash

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Graphic SPORTS

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Government sponsorship of supporters needs review

In the wake of the ongoing African Cup of Nations, the Ghanaian government finds itself embroiled in a contentious issue concerning the use of state resources to mobilize supporters overseas.

The recent incident in Cote d'Ivoire, where over 300 passionate supporters threatened to abandon their posts due to unmet expectations, sheds light on the financial challenges associated with such ventures.

These supporters, transported to Cote d'Ivoire by the Government of Ghana to rally behind the Black Stars, expressed their disappointment at the lack of coordination and support from the organizing bodies. Frustrated and feeling neglected, they collectively issued a threat to return home, prompting negotiations with government officials.

After rounds of discussion, each disgruntled supporter was eventually paid \$400 to address

their concerns. While this may have pacified the immediate grievances, it raises broader questions about the prudence of using state resources, especially in a country facing economic challenges, to sponsor supporters for sporting events.

The incident in Cote d'Ivoire brings to the forefront a lingering issue that dates back to the aftermath of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. In response to criticism and backlash over the use of state funds to fly supporters to Brazil, the government accepted recommendations by the Justice Senyo Dzamefe Commission. The government's White Paper on the Commission's report stated that henceforth, state funds would no longer be used to send supporter groups to tournaments.

The 2015 directive emphasised the need for private sponsors to take on the responsibility of funding supporter groups at subsequent tournaments. The reasoning behind this shift was to ensure financial prudence, accountability, and to avoid instances where supporters found themselves stranded in foreign countries due to lack of resources, as witnessed in Brazil.

In light of the directive, the recent use of state funds to support the Black Stars' fans in Cote d'Ivoire appears to be a departure from established policy. This raises concerns about the judicious use of state resources, particularly when the country is grappling with economic

challenges and could redirect such funds to other critical aspects of sports development. It is imperative for the government to reassess its approach to sponsoring supporter groups for international tournaments, especially considering the potential financial strain and negative perceptions associated with such practices. The directive issued in 2015 should not be treated as a mere formality but as a blueprint for fostering financial responsibility and accountability in the management of state resources.

In the face of economic crises, the Graphic Sports believes the allocation of substantial amounts for sporting and accommodating supporters should be carefully weighed against other pressing needs within the sports sector.

Moreover, there is a need for increased transparency in the handling of funds allocated for such purposes, as seen in the recent incident where supporters had to resort to threats to have their concerns addressed.

The latest incidents again highlights the importance for the government to prioritise financial prudence and adhere to established directives, avoiding the unnecessary use of state resources for ventures that may be tainted with corruption or mismanagement.

Has gap between AFCON elites and underdogs narrowed?

THE 2023 Africa Cup of Nations started last week, with hosts Cote d'Ivoire defeating Guinea-Bissau 2-0 courtesy of Seko Fofana and Jean-Philippe Krasso.

However, the following day, three of the tournament favourites, Nigeria, Egypt, and Ghana dropped points against the so-called underdogs.

Egypt who finished as runners-up at the last AFCON, survived a scare against Mozambique who had taken an early lead in the 58th minute before Liverpool's talisman Mohammed Salah secured a point for the Pharaohs through a penalty in the 97th minute.

Nigeria's strength in depth up front did not live up to the expectations of their fans. Having conceded, Victor Osimhen scored two minutes later to put back Nigeria in contention for the three points.

Despite all the rich talent in Nigeria's squad, Jose Peseiro's team struggled to tack away opportunities in the final third hence settling for a draw.

It is too early to conclude but there are many red flags that could haunt Nigeria as the tournament unfolds in a month if they do not

work on it as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Ghana's loss to Cape Verde was jaw-dropping in the context of Ghana's

performance. Statistics speak for themselves.

One would wonder what exactly Ghana was trying to display in their

first game. While they truly missed Thomas Partey in midfield due to injury and Muhammed Kudus who has been in superb form at West Ham, still, it does not give them a pass for the underwhelming performance.

With the underdogs upsetting the tournament favourites in match day one, what begs the question, is if the gap between the small and big teams has narrowed.

Out of the 24 teams taking part in the ongoing AFCON edition, only five teams (Tanzania, Namibia, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, and Mozambique) have never progressed out of the group stage.

That shows you how tough this tournament will be for the majority of the teams and also considering that we have already seen some eye-catching results.

The Gambia and Tanzania are the lowest-placed teams in FIFA's world rankings, 126th and 121st respectively.

The Gambia reached the quarter-finals at the last edition, so not even Senegal or Cameroon can underestimate them.

Tanzania being the only team from East Africa that will have a lot on its shoulders and that alone will inspire them to fight for the flag.

With that said, AFCON will always be unpredictable and that is exciting enough to keep us on the edge of our seats.—MSN



The Black Stars are one of AFCON elites who fell to an underdog