



• Aboubakar Ouattara
— Returns to Ghana
Premier League

Ex-Kotoko coach to lead Hearts

Story: Peter Sarbah

ACCRA Hearts of Oak will go into the second round of the Ghana Premier League with Coach Aboubakar Ouattara as their new head

coach, as the Ivorian gaffer makes a return to Ghanaian football after almost two decades.

The coach becomes the third man to lead the technical department of Hearts after

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Ibrahim Osman

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Voice of

Graphic SPORTS

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Inclusive approach,
engagement key to
football revival

THE recent disappointment of the Black Stars at the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) has prompted the Ghana Football Association (GFA) to embark on a comprehensive journey towards rejuvenation of the sport at all levels. Recognising the gravity of the situation, GFA President Kurt Simeon-Okraku last week led his Executive Council to engage journalists in Kumasi during which he emphasised the pivotal role of stakeholder engagement in formulating effective strategies to revive Ghanaian football.

During his address, the FA boss underscored the necessity of collective effort, stating that the journey toward success

begins with inclusive engagement. This sentiment reflects a profound understanding that the input of diverse stakeholders is indispensable for devising holistic solutions.

The GFA's commitment to embracing feedback, even from its staunchest critics, signifies a departure from conventional approaches. Rather than operating in isolation, the association is casting its net wide, inviting ideas from various quarters to inform its strategy. This approach not only fosters transparency but also cultivates a sense of ownership among stakeholders, garnering their support as the FA endeavours to address the challenges facing Ghanaian football.

Central to the GFA's revitalisation efforts is the forthcoming launch of a developmental initiative aimed at fostering sustainable growth in football across Ghana. This initiative, which includes the reintroduction of Colts football across the nation's regions, underscores the FA's commitment to nurturing talent from the grassroots level upwards. By investing in the development of young players and enhancing coaching methodologies, the GFA seeks to lay a solid foundation for the future of Ghanaian football.

Moreover, the GFA's commitment to continued investment across all tiers of the sport also reflects a holistic approach to

rejuvenation. From grassroots development to elite competitions, the association is dedicated to nurturing talent at every level. Additionally, efforts to retain top talents within the domestic leagues underscore a proactive stance towards enhancing standards and competitiveness.

Crucially, the GFA President has emphasised the need for a collaborative relationship with the media, dispelling any notions of antagonism. Recognising the media's role as a vital conduit of information, he advocates mutual respect and adherence to established rules. This collaborative spirit fosters an environment conducive to constructive dialogue and ensures that the FA remains accountable to the public it serves.

The Graphic Sports believes that to chart a course for the revival of the Black Stars and Ghanaian football at large, the GFA's new approach is commendable. By embracing diverse perspectives and fostering collaboration, the association is laying the groundwork for a brighter future. As the FA embarks on this transformative journey, the collective efforts of stakeholders will be instrumental in realising the vision of a vibrant and successful footballing nation.

From Paris to the world — Football's hottest talent factory

I BRAHIMA Traore smiles as he parks his black Range Rover outside the apartment block where his footballing story began.

He is back in Pantin, just outside the north-east corner of the periferique - the ring road that separates central Paris from its suburbs.

Amid the din of sirens and the aroma of fast food, Traore buzzes in and takes the lift to the fifth floor. The doors open and his brother is waiting to welcome him back to their childhood home.

Inside, there are photos of the pair's Guinean father and Lebanese mother, as well as shots of grandparents and younger generations of the family. Dominating the view through the floor-to-ceiling windows, across a dual carriageway and tramline, is a vast sports complex, with two 4G football pitches.

"That's our Camp Nou, our Anfield," Traore says. "We used to jump over the fence at seven in the morning to practise our free-kicks. Before school and after school, it was football. Only football."

For many of the kids growing up here, constant practice can lead to the ultimate reward - a career in the professional game.

Traore, now 35, played more than 250 games for four different clubs in Germany's Bundesliga and captained Guinea at the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations.

His inspiration growing up came from the success around him, rather than the television screen.

"I remember just across the street, we had



Ibrahim Traore

the player who used to play for Manchester United: Gabriel Obertan," says Traore. "It's the dream from everyone and then even more when you have someone who comes from the same suburb who makes it.

"When you hear that it's possible that, being from this area, you can play for a team like Manchester United, that is something that you want to follow, you want to pursue."

As the clock strikes 4pm, children and coaches flood on to the pitches below. Aston Villa's Moussa Diaby, former Arsenal winger Nicolas Pepe and France and Monaco defender Youssouf Fofana all started out at the same facility, which is shared by local clubs Esperance Paris 19ème and Solitaire Paris Est.

On the biggest stage of them all, Paris' finest are everywhere.

Thirty players at the 2022 men's World Cup in Qatar were born in the vicinity of France's capital. Compare that to two other hotbeds of youth football: Sao Paulo provided 12 World Cup players and Greater London eight.

There were 11 Parisians in the France squad that lost to Argentina in the final, with the other 19 spread across eight national teams: Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Ghana, Cameroun, Portugal, Germany and Qatar.

And then you have the icons of the recent past. World Cup winners Thierry Henry, N'Golo Kante and Paul Pogba all grew up in the banlieues(suburbs) of the French

capital, as did Kante's former Leicester team-mate Riyad Mahrez.

How has Paris become a city that churns out more football talent than anywhere else?

Post-war immigration from football-loving former French colonies in north and west Africa is the obvious reason why Ile-de-France - as suburban Paris is known - is such a remarkable football factory.

Traore was born in Paris before moving to Guinea, settling back in the French capital from the age of four with his mother and siblings.

"You have a lot of people from North Africa round here; we used to say they are the real street footballers," he adds.

"Then you have a lot of Senegalese, Guinean, Malian people round here. In the

summer, we used to do an Africa Cup. All the Guinean players would be in one team. All the Malian players, they will be in one team. Cote d'Ivoire... whatever you want. It's crazy, because everyone is defending his country, and then it's just insane."

It was during one of these informal tournaments that a local scout spotted Traore and set him on the path of a professional career.

But that influx of talent and culture also emerged into an environment perfect for super-charging player development.

A local government policy of building high-quality football facilities in every Paris banlieue, partly to keep kids off the streets and out of trouble, has been fundamental to making the sport cheap and accessible to all.

—BBC