



## Kingston, ex-stars take charge

In a strategic move to rejuvenate Ghana's teams, the Ghana Football Association (GFA) has entrusted promising coaches with the task of reshaping national teams and

nurturing talent for future success.

Laryea Kingston, a former Black Stars player with a distinguished career spanning two Africa Cup of Nations tournaments, has been appointed to lead the rebuilding of the Black Starlets, aiming to restore the team to its former glory on

• **Mercy Tagoe-Quarcoo**  
— U-23 women's team

• Continued on back page

• Laryea Kingston  
— Black Starlets



• Players of Asante Kotoko celebrating their victory against FC Samartex



## Kotoko win at last

— Back page



## Kenpong Academy strikes deals in Europe

— Page 5

## Voice of

## Graphic SPORTS

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## Unlocking the power of data in Ghana's football's development

*IN the dynamic world of football, where every pass, tackle, and goal is scrutinised, data has emerged as the game-changer, reshaping how*

*teams strategise, analyse players, and ultimately compete. As the heartbeat of modern football, data analytics has become indispensable for clubs worldwide, offering insights that go beyond the surface and into the intricate details of the game.*

*For Ghanaian clubs navigating the competitive landscape of African and global football, investing in data analytics is no longer a luxury but a necessity. In an era where success is measured not just by passion and talent but also by precision and strategic acumen,*

*harnessing the power of data is paramount.*

*At the forefront of this revolution stands individuals like Mohammed Shaban, whose pioneering work as a statistician has elevated the discourse surrounding Ghanaian football. Shaban's meticulous analysis and deep insights have not only shed light on player performances and tactical nuances but have also provided a roadmap for clubs seeking to gain a competitive edge.*

*In the quest for success, data-driven decision-making is the cornerstone upon which champions are built. From scouting prospects to devising match strategies, data analytics offers a treasure trove of information that can make all the difference on the field. By harnessing the power of data, Ghanaian clubs can identify talent more effectively, optimise player development programs, and fine-tune their tactical approach to match the ever-evolving dynamics of modern football.*

*Moreover, data analytics transcends the boundaries of the pitch, extending its influence to areas such as fan engagement, marketing, and revenue generation. By understanding fan preferences and behaviour through data analysis, clubs can tailor their outreach efforts, enhance the match-day experience, and build a stronger connection with their supporters.*

*In an increasingly globalised football landscape, where competition knows no borders, Ghanaian clubs must embrace innovation and adapt to the changing times. The days of relying solely on intuition and tradition are long gone; today's champions are those who harness the power of data to their advantage.*

*Fortunately, the tools and technologies needed to leverage data analytics are more accessible than ever before. From advanced tracking systems to sophisticated statistical models, Ghanaian clubs have a wealth of resources at their disposal to unlock the full potential of data-driven decision-making.*

*In an era where data reigns supreme, its importance in football cannot be overstated. For instance, the GFA's statistician Shaban Mohammed uses data analysis to reveal intriguing trends, including statistical analysis across various leagues and competitions, including the Access Bank Division One League, Women's Premier League, MTN FA Cup, and Women's FA Cup, as well as providing insights into the national teams.*

*However, investing in data analytics requires more than just financial resources; it demands a cultural shift within clubs, embracing a mind-set that values evidence-based decision-making and continuous learning. By fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration, Ghanaian clubs can harness the transformative power of data to propel themselves to new heights of success.*

*As we look to the future of Ghanaian football, one thing is clear: the path to greatness lies in the data. The Graphic Sports is convinced that by investing heavily in data analytics, Ghanaian clubs can not only remain competitive but also redefine the standards of excellence in African football. The time to embrace the data revolution is now, for those who dare to innovate will be the ones who write the next chapter of footballing history.*

# How Leverkusen banished their bridesmaid tag (II)

**A** TEAM including Ballack, Kirsten, Hans-Jörg Butt, Oliver Neuville, Carsten Ramelow, Bernd Schneider, Lúcio, Zé Roberto, Dimitar Berbatov, Jens Nowotny, Yıldırım Bastürk, Diego Placente (the list of famous names goes on) had a remarkable campaign.

They were top of the Bundesliga for the majority of the second half of the season, through to the final of the DFB Cup and made a name for themselves in Europe as they beat the likes of Barcelona and Juventus, then knocked out Liverpool and Manchester United to become the sixth German club to reach the final of the Champions League/European Cup.

They were on for an (at the time) unprecedented treble.

It all then unfolded in the space of a month. A draw at Hamburg followed by defeats to Bremen and Nuremberg saw them lose first place in the Bundesliga going into the final day. A 2-1 win against Hertha Berlin wasn't enough to get back ahead of Borussia Dortmund, who came from behind to beat Werder by the same score.

One week later, they were beaten 4-2 by Schalke in Berlin in the DFB Cup final.

A treble had become nothing and the Vizekusen name became common parlance among German football fans.

The media even worried that Vizekusen syndrome would impact the national team, which included five Leverkusen players at the 2002 World Cup. Yes, Germany finished

**• Xabi Alonso built a formidable Bayer Leverkusen side which won the Bundesliga unbaten**



runners-up... But Lúcio was on the winning side for Brazil.

It was the fourth time in six years that

Bayer had been Bundesliga runners-up.

Opposition fans have since been more than happy to sing "You'll never be champions".

Leverkusen supporters eventually started to laugh at themselves and would sometimes chant "We'll never be champions". Parent company Bayer AG even trademarked the term Vizekusen in 2010 – the year the team made a 24-game unbeaten start to the campaign under Jupp Heynckes but still finished fourth.

The season after came a fifth runners-up finish behind Jürgen Klopp's Dortmund in 2010/11. Only Bayern, VfB, Bremen and Schalke have come second more often in the Bundesliga. Schalke and Leverkusen also held the unwanted status as the only clubs to have been runners-up more than once but never Bundesliga champions. The Royal Blues would always point to their seven pre-Bundesliga era championships.

"Admittedly, it was annoying at the start," said honorary club captain Ramelow in April 2024. "But at some point you get over it."

And now the entire club have gotten over it, after years of false dawns and misplaced hope.

The class of 2023/24 have banished the Leverkusen curse in considerable style, winning the Bundesliga with five games to spare after a campaign that also saw them set a German record of 43 competitive fixtures unbeaten to begin the season.

"I'm very, very relieved, but still as nervous as previously," said Reiner Calmund, the club's former managing director during both the glory days of the UEFA Cup and DFB Cup success but also the runners-up finishes at the turn of the millennium, in the week leading up to being confirmed Bundesliga champions.

It could still get even better for Leverkusen as they prepare to face second division Kaiserslautern in the DFB Cup final in May. Or will it finally be Treblekusen with the addition of the UEFA Europa League? Just no more Neverkusen.