

Otto Addo stands firm on dropping

...Eyes long term success

Story: Maurice Quansah

IN a move that has ignited lively debate among fans and pundits, Black Stars Head Coach, Otto Addo, has staunchly defended his decision to leave Captain Andre Ayew out of the squad

that clinched victories over Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR) in the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers.

Despite Ayew's recent standout performances for his French club, Le Havre, the coach is looking towards the long-term future of

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MONDAY, JUNE 18 — JUNE 23 2024

Otto Addo must be allowed to make his own decisions

In the midst of the whirlwind of recent victories for Ghana's Black Stars in the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers, one decision by the head coach, Otto Addo, has sparked intense discussion and speculation. The omission of veteran captain Andre Ayew from the squad for the crucial matches against Mali and the Central African Republic has left many fans and pundits questioning the coach's strategy. However, amidst the clamour, Otto Addo remains resolute in his belief that these decisions are crucial for the long-term success and revitalisation of the national team.

The Black Stars captain, a titan of Ghanaian football with 118 caps to his name and impressive performances in the French league this season, found himself sidelined by Otto Addo. The coach's decision, he clarified, was not a dismissal of

Ayew's illustrious career but rather a strategic move to integrate younger talents and ensure sustainable team success.

In a recent media engagement, Otto Addo underscored the necessity of making tough choices for the team's future, acknowledging Ayew's immense contribution while emphasising his duty to foster a new era in Ghanaian football. "Andre is a living legend," Otto Addo affirmed, "but as a coach, I must look forward and make decisions that serve the best interests of our nation."

Critically, Otto Addo's stance mirrors a broader vision of blending experienced campaigners like Ayew with promising newcomers. This approach was vividly displayed in recent matches where players like Brandon Thomas-Asante of West Bromwich Albion made his international debut, injecting fresh energy into the squad. Otto Addo's commitment to nurturing young talents, irrespective of their background, underscores his intent to build a team capable of competing at the global level.

The coach's strategy extends beyond mere squad selection; it encompasses a holistic approach to player management. Reflecting on past instances where Ghanaian football icons retired under contentious circumstances, Otto Addo emphasised his resolve to ensure players like Ayew exited the stage with dignity and respect when the time came. Learning from history, where figures like Asamoah Gyan departed amidst controversy, Otto

Addo is determined to manage transitions smoothly, honouring the contributions of stalwarts while steering the team toward future triumphs.

In essence, honouring Otto Addo's decisions epitomises a calculated effort to balance tradition with innovation, leveraging the best of Ghana's footballing heritage while embracing the potential of emerging stars. His unwavering focus on the team's long-term prospects has not only revitalised the national hope but also reignited a fervent debate about the future trajectory of Ghana's football.

As Ghana progresses through the World Cup qualifiers under Addo's stewardship, the outcome of these bold choices remains uncertain. Yet, what is clear is Addo's commitment to shaping a team that not only competes but excels on the global stage. His insistence on strategic foresight and respectful player management stands as a testament to his vision for the Black Stars—an ambition anchored on both honouring the past and embracing an ambitious future.

In the ever-evolving landscape of international football, where legacies are defined by both victories and the manner of the transition, Otto Addo stands at the helm, steering Ghana towards a promising new chapter—one where success is not just fleeting but enduring.

Trossard's 'crazy' path to becoming Belgium star



IN Leandro Trossard, Belgium and Arsenal seem to be blessed with a world class forward.

He is also an anomaly; a late bloomer. At 29 he has only recently broken through as a regular for his national team.

Speak to those who knew him as a teenager and a vibe emerges.

Yes, he was "gifted on the ball", and yes, he made defenders "go crazy with his technique". But, at 16, he was a small boy playing at a small academy in an even smaller league.

To go from there to where he is now 13 years later - essentially Eden Hazard's replacement in Belgium's starting XI - is almost unbelievable.

'On the pitch he was different'

Trossard ended last season, his second with Arsenal, in brilliant form; netting six goals across his final 10 matches - games that were taking place in a white-hot title race.

Those who grew up with him are not surprised with his late, rapid rise. As a 14-year-old, with his grandfather at his side, Trossard signed for Bocholter VV, a club on the Dutch border in the nation's third division in the under-15s pyramid.

"He was so small and without any sort of ego, but on the pitch he was different," remembered Bocholter's current goalkeeper Stijn Wertelaers, Trossard's former teammate and friend.

"His first season was totally mad and that year he directly made us champions. It was crazy what he could do with the ball and his scoring level was incredible."

After two seasons Bocholter tried to convince 15-year-old Trossard to stay by offering him a spot in the first team. Instead, with seemingly half the Belgian Pro

League after his signature, the forward turned to the region's biggest club - Genk.

Wertelaers would reunite with his friend in 2010, as back-up goalkeeper in Genk's youth team behind Thibaut Courtois.

In training Wertelaers was facing shots from Kevin de Bruyne and Christian Benteke. And there, in that all-star squad, Trossard was holding his own.

"At that age me and my friends wanted to drink beer and experience our first parties," added Wertelaers. "Trossard wasn't that interested. He was always so focused on football."

"It was frustrating facing him as a goalkeeper because he was already so gifted with the ball."

While De Bruyne and Courtois headed to Chelsea, Trossard stayed and at age 24 captained Genk to their first league title in eight seasons.

He joined Brighton in 2019 and spent four seasons with the Seagulls before switching to Arsenal in January 2023 in a deal worth up to £27m.

At moments last season he looked ludicrously talented, beating players with his low centre of gravity and superb dribbling skills.

He scored 17 goals, including a crucial goal against Porto in Arsenal's Champions League last-16 win and another in the first leg of their quarter-final against Bayern Munich.

"That's the story of his whole career - you don't think he will reach the next level but he hits the top every time," added Wertelaers.

"I played with all those players, De Bruyne and Courtois, but Leandro's path from the third division at 16 to Arsenal now is the craziest I've seen."

It feels like Trossard's journey is one

celebrated by the whole municipality of Bocholt, tucked away in the north-east corner of Belgium.

"He is almost impossible for us to comprehend," said Bocholter VV board member Chris Kwanten.

"We're a pretty small club in a small country. Genk and Anderlecht is a huge level for us.

"We can barely picture the size of a club like Arsenal. Seeing him play for the national team against the very best teams in the world, we are very, very proud of that."

Like Trossard, the Belgium team has also come a long way over the past two decades.

The Red Devils were held to draws by Kazakhstan in 2006 and 2007. They ended a 12-year absence from major tournaments when they reached the World Cup in 2014.

Now there is an expectation. Belgium have reached the quarter-finals of the past two European Championships. They were in the semi-finals of the 2018 World Cup, and - somewhat unforgettably - were knocked out in the group stage in Qatar.

Roberto Martinez was the manager then. The federation is now pinning its hopes on former RB Leipzig boss Domenico Tedesco.

Trossard, who was in Belgium's last Euros squad, is very much Tedesco's man having started four of their past five matches.

So will Hazard's heir apparent and his team-mates finally deliver silverware to a nation of 12 million?

"I'll be watching the games with my friends who also played with Trossard at Bocholter," said Wertelaers.

"When he scores the winner it will be incredible. Not just for him or for Belgium, but for all of us." -BBC