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No.4161

JUNE 24 — JUNE 30, 2024

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• **Rose Amoanimaa
Yeboah** — Retains the
high jump title

Golden Girl!

• Rose blossoms, leads Ghana's medal chase

From Rosalind K. Amoh,
Douala, Cameroun

ROSE Amoanimaa Yeboah once again made history for Ghana by securing the country's first medal at the ongoing African Athletics Championships in Douala, Cameroon. The 2022 African

Championships gold medalist replicated her triumph on Day 3 of the competition yesterday, overcoming tough competition from Guinea's Fatoumatou Balley and Nigeria's Adenisa Temitope.

Yeboah, 22, cleared a height of

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• **Mohammed
Kudus**
Credit: Cr

West Ham won't sell Kudus despite Saudi interest

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Voice of Graphic SPORTS

MONDAY, JUNE 24 — 30, 2024

2026 African Athletics Championships: Ghana's moment to shine

GHANA'S selection as the host for the 2026 African Athletics Championships is a significant milestone that underscores the country's growing prominence in international sports. This achievement follows the successful hosting of the 2023 African Games, which showcased Ghana's organisational capabilities and infrastructure readiness.

The decision by the Confederation of African Athletics (CAA) to award the championships to Ghana, with a decisive 15-3 vote, highlights the confidence placed in the nation's ability to deliver a world-class event.

Despite entering the bidding process later than other contenders, Ghana's proposal was compelling due to the strong support from the government and recent enhancements in sports infrastructure. The newly built facilities for the 13th African Games played a crucial role in convincing the CAA executive council. Ghana Athletics President,

Fuseini Bawa, emphasised that the country's track record in athletics and the success of the African Games were pivotal in securing the bid. This is the first time Ghana meets the standards required to host such a major event, thanks to substantial investments in state-of-the-art facilities.

However, Ghana's task ahead is not just to host the championships but to avoid the organisational flaws seen in the ongoing African Athletics Championships in Douala, Cameroun. The Douala event has faced severe criticism for its poor management, with issues like unreliable transportation, inadequate facilities, and poor communication with athletes. These shortcomings led to public complaints from prominent athletes such as Shaun Maswanganyi and Letsile Tebogo, who expressed their frustrations over health risks and disorganisation.

These failures in Douala provide a critical learning opportunity for Ghana. Ensuring meticulous planning and execution will be essential to avoid similar pitfalls. Efficient transportation, top-tier accommodations, reliable communication, and robust health and safety measures must be prioritised to guarantee a smooth and successful event.

The upcoming championships will serve as a qualifying event for the 2027 World Championships, adding another layer of importance and attracting top-tier global interest. This places an additional responsibility on Ghana to deliver a world-class event that meets and exceeds international standards. Ghana must build on the experience gained from hosting the African Games and the CAA

Region II meet earlier this year. The foundation has been laid with the new infrastructure and trained personnel. What remains is to enhance these elements with comprehensive planning and a focus on detail.

Ghana's athletics chief Bawa has expressed confidence in Ghana's ability to rise to the occasion, emphasising the importance of leveraging the legacy of the African Games. The support from the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the National Sports Authority will be crucial in this endeavour. Their involvement ensures that the necessary resources and political will are in place to achieve success.

Hosting the 2026 African Athletics Championships offers Ghana a unique platform to set a new standard for excellence in sports event management on the continent. By learning from past mistakes and building on recent successes, Ghana can ensure that the 2026 Championships are remembered as a benchmark for future events.

The Graphic Sports believes strongly that all stakeholders must collaborate to ensure a successful championship as it will not only enhance Ghana's reputation in the international athletics community but also inspire other African nations to invest in their sports infrastructure and organisational capabilities. If executed with precision and foresight, this event could mark a significant milestone in the history of African athletics and solidify Ghana's position as a leading sports destination.

Is Spain's trophy wait over?

THEY may not have been favourites a couple of weeks ago - but two matches in and Spain have announced themselves as serious Euro 2024 contenders.

Thursday's impressive 1-0 win over Italy - sealed by Riccardo Calafiori's own goal - saw them become just the second team to qualify for the last 16 in Germany.

With youngsters Nico Williams and Lamine Yamal thrilling on the flanks, Spain will be wondering how they didn't beat a surprisingly flat Italy by more.

Spain have made a perfect start - also thrashing Croatia 3-0 in their first Group B match - as they hope to end a 12-year wait for a major trophy.

They are winning with style too. Spanish football expert Guillem Balague described them as "the best Spain team since 2012" while BBC pundit Chris Sutton called their victory over Italy a "total mismatch".

'Sky is the limit' for Spain

Spain dominated world football between 2008 and 2012 - winning two European Championships and a World Cup - but their record at recent major tournaments has been underwhelming.

The team has been dumped out at the last-16 stage at every World Cup and European Championship since 2016, the one exception being their run to the semi-finals at Euro 2020.

Manager Luis de la Fuente took over in 2022 having led the under-21 side to European youth glory in 2019.



• Lamine Yamal (left) and Nico Williams are considered as some of the best young talents in the Spanish national team

He lifted the Nations League title with Spain last year and now believes his young and exciting team are at the top of their game.

"[It was] the best Spain performance [since] I've taken charge," said the 62-year-old.

He added "the sky is the limit" for his side, a feeling shared by many of BBC Sport's pundits.

"There is no argument that this is the best Spain team I have seen since we beat Italy in the 2012 final," Balague told BBC Radio 5 Live.

"It is very rare that there is such a big gap between two big teams, very rare.

"This was the perfect performance. It had absolutely everything."

Premier League winner Sutton said that other teams "won't want to be facing [Spain]

in the knockouts" and that their win over Italy was a "total mismatch".

Meanwhile, Italy manager Luciano Spalletti said Spain "have played the best football for the longest time now".

Williams applauded by team-mates in dressing room

Spain's wingers Williams and Yamal have a combined age of just 37.

Sixteen-year-old Yamal made headlines with his man-of-the-match performance against Croatia last Saturday. This time it was Williams who particularly caught the eye.

The Athletic Bilbao forward - who was also in Spain's 2022 World Cup squad - regularly got the better of experienced Italy right-back Giovanni di Lorenzo, even nutmegging his opponent in the first half.

He was inches away from getting the goal his performance would have deserved when he rattled the crossbar with a fierce long-range shot late on.

The 21-year-old came off to a great reception in the 78th minute and told reporters he was applauded by his team-mates in the dressing room after the match.

"Williams has pure quality. He has real pace, can go left and right," ex-Manchester United captain Roy Keane told ITV1.

"[He was] the best player on the park. When young good players come into your group, it lifts everyone. They won't be playing with any fear."

BBC World Service's John Bennett was in Gelsenkirchen and added he was "genuinely astounded by [Williams'] talent". —BBC