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Nyantakyi tipped for world title glory

• Fights July 5 in Kumasi

Page 04

Kudus leads peace drive in Black Stars

Story: Maurice Quansah

BLACK Stars' dynamic midfield talisman, Mohammed Kudus, has committed to fostering unity and camaraderie among the new generation of players in the national team as essential for future

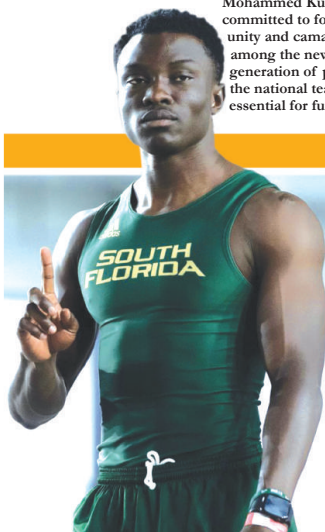
success as Coach Otto Addo embarks on a rebuilding mission.

Taking centre stage at the sixth Ghana Football Awards last Saturday, the West Ham midfield star underscored the importance of team cohesion and harmony for

• Continued on back page

Saminu vows to seize moment at Paris Olympics

Back page



• Mohammed Kudus — Wins back-to-back Footballer of the Year awards

Voice of Graphic SPORTS

MONDAY, JULY 1 — 7, 2024

Ghana's athletes must prepare well and seize their moment in Paris

AS the June 30 deadline for athlete confirmations for the 2024 Paris Olympics elapsed yesterday, Ghana's aspirations for a strong presence at the Summer Games have been starkly dashed. With boxing, football, and other sports missing out on qualification, Ghana's hopes lay with its track and field athletes. Yet, the recent African Athletics Championships in Douala, brought more heartbreak than triumph in the quest for Olympic slots.

Despite a valiant effort, the primary objective of increasing Ghana's Olympic delegation was unmet. Only three athletes—high jump champion Rose Amonimaa Yeboah, sprinter Abdul-Rashid Saminu (200m), and the men's 4x100m relay team—have punched their tickets to Paris, either through meeting entry standards or by ranking globally. Promising athletes like high jumpers Cadman Evans Yamoah and Kennedy Ocansey fell short of the mark, underscoring the challenges Ghana faces in solidifying its presence on the global stage.

The African Athletics Championships offered moments of brilliance. Ghana secured three medals—two golds and a silver. Yeboah soared to gold in the high jump with a leap of 1.87 metres, and the men's relay team, featuring Fuseini Ibrahim, Isaac Botsio, Edwin Gadayi, and Saminu, sprinted to victory. The women's sprint relay team, comprising Mary Boakyie, Anita Afrifa, Hor Halutie, and Deborah Acheampong, clinched silver, finishing behind Nigeria but ahead of Liberia.

Saminu's performance in the 200m final was a mixed bag. He finished in 20.66 seconds, tying with Cameroon's Emmanuel Alobwede Eseme, but was controversially denied a bronze medal due to a marginal time difference favoring the home athlete.

Despite not adding more names to the Olympic roster, Douala provided invaluable experience for Ghana's relatively young 18-athlete team, many of whom were competing in their first African Athletics Championships. This exposure is crucial, potentially laying the groundwork for future successes, including the 2026 African Championships in Accra.

Across Africa, other athletes also grappled with disappointment. Botswana's men's 4x100m relay team, led by world 100m silver medalist Letsile Tebogo, set a new national record in the semi-finals, yet their efforts were insufficient for Olympic qualification. Liberia's Joseph Fambullah dazzled with double gold in the 100m and 200m, and Nigeria's Mary Eke continued her long jump dominance with her eighth consecutive gold. Despite these standout performances, the event saw no new records, a reflection of the broader challenges faced by athletes on the continent. Amid these trials, Ghanaian athletes have a unique opportunity. Saminu, representing the University of

South Florida, embodies the spirit of determination and optimism. He told the Graphic Sports (see Back Page) that he was thrilled to be among the athletes who made it to Paris and was looking forward to participating in his first Olympics, enjoying every moment and making the most of the opportunity.

As Ghana looks toward Paris 2024, this is a pivotal moment for the nation's sports authorities, the Ghana Olympic Committee and the Ghana Athletics Federation, to ensure they provide these athletes with all the support necessary to excel in Paris, from top-notch training facilities to expert coaching and mental health resources.

Beyond the immediate Olympics, this moment presents a unique opportunity to build a foundation for the future of Ghanaian athletics. By investing in grassroots programs, nurturing young talents, and creating development pathways for emerging stars, Ghanaian authorities can transform this setback into a springboard for long-term success. This dual approach will not only maximize current opportunities but also foster a culture of excellence that will see Ghana rise on the international stage for years to come.

In this way, Saminu's journey and the challenges faced at the African Championships serve as a reminder that while the road to the Olympics is fraught with obstacles, every athlete's dream can illuminate the path for those who follow. Now is the time for Ghana to seize this moment, champion its athletes, and set the stage for a brighter sporting future.

Hostility confirms Southgate's era nears an end

THREE large plastic cups hurled at Gareth Southgate from behind the goal in Cologne were the headline grabbers, but wider hostility aimed at England's manager sharpened the sense that an era is coming to an end.

Southgate will have seen and heard the angry mood of supporters as he made his way across the pitch at the end of a grim goalless draw with Slovenia that at least goaled his side topped Group C at Euro 2024.

He still went to offer thanks but instead got a toxic reaction that—given Southgate's previous statements saying "I will not outstay my welcome"—will surely play into his thinking when his future is clarified at the end of the tournament in Germany.

Southgate's voice clearly faltered when he was asked on BBC Radio 5 Live if he was hurt by what had happened.

Normally a polished composed presence, here he hesitated over his words before saying: "Look, I'm not going to... I need them behind the team. I need them behind the team so it's fine. I have to deal with that. I wasn't going to back away from thanking people for coming and giving us support."

He added: "I understand the narrative towards me and that's better for the team than it being towards them, but it is creating an unusual environment to operate in."

There were fans who supported Southgate and returned his applause but there was no mistaking the larger strength of ill-feeling among England followers, who also jeered at half-time but supported the



Gareth Southgate

team magnificently during the game.

When questioned pre-match about former England striker Gary Lineker's graphic four-letter description of England's display in the 1-1 draw with Denmark, Southgate insisted he had only just heard about it and said: "I am oblivious to it."

This did not appear to be the case in Cologne, Southgate struggling momentarily to answer the question about whether he was wounded by the reaction before turning attention away from himself.

It prompted an immediate flashback to almost exactly two years ago and a night at

Molineux when Southgate suffered personal abuse after a 4-0 loss to Hungary in the UEFA Nations League, with chants of "you don't know what you're doing" ringing around the stadium.

Southgate was unnerved by the adverse reaction from fans to such an extent that it made him question whether his presence as manager was a problem that he might need to resolve himself by leaving. It had, for a while, a profound effect upon him.

He stayed—then stayed again after the World Cup quarter-final defeat by France in Qatar in December 2022 when many inside

the Football Association thought they would soon be looking for a new manager.

Southgate's deliberations back then were shaped by the largely sympathetic reaction to England's exit and their performances in Qatar, demonstrating again that while he has always been willing to front up and shield his players at times of strife, he is fully tuned in to criticism and aware it has the capacity to spread.

This is why Southgate's treatment on Tuesday and its subsequent fall-out has a wider significance.

Explaining his reasoning for staying on after Qatar, he told BBC Sport: "The last thing you want as a manager is that your presence is divisive and inhibits performance. I never want to be in a position where my presence is affecting the team in a negative way."

What happened in Cologne revisited every concern Southgate has had about becoming a negative influence after eight years in charge. Will he step back from the brink this time?

It is very unlikely to be a tiny group using plastic cups as missiles that will exercise his mind come the end of Euro 2024 but the anger of the wider fanbase, despite England finishing at the head of their group.

He admits himself that he is unlikely to remain as England manager if they do not win Euro 2024 and even if they do triumph—a long stretch it seems on current form—moments like these are likely to come into calculations about his future given attention he has paid to them before. — BBC