

Nuamah doubtful for AFCON qualifiers

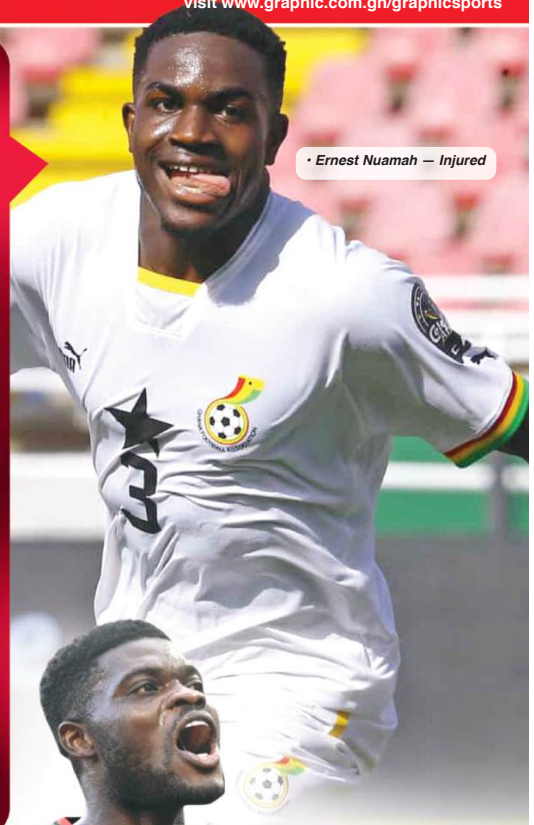
• **Ayew eyes fresh start at Leicester**

Story: Maurice Quansah

BLACK Stars head coach Otto Addo faces the prospect of missing his promising forward Ernest Nuamah for Ghana's upcoming Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers against Angola and Niger. Nuamah, who has been making waves at Olympique Lyonnais, lasted

just 17 minutes on the pitch during his team's 2-0 defeat of Mohammed Salisu's AS Monaco at the Parc Olympique Lyonnais last Saturday. The 20-year-old was forced off due to a thigh injury, leaving the

• Continued on back page



• Ernest Nuamah — Injured

FC Samartex, Nsoatreman FC face North African challenge

— Back Page

• Coach Yaw Preko guided Nsoatreman FC to the next round



Partey Time at Arsenal

— Page 7



Voice of Graphic SPORTS

MONDAY, AUGUST 26 — SEPTEMBER 1, 2024

Time for sustainable action in Ghana's sports revitalisation

The unveiling of the National Democratic Congress's (NDC) sports agenda marks a pivotal moment for Ghana's sports sector. With a comprehensive plan to revitalise the nation's sporting infrastructure, the NDC's manifesto launched last Saturday, at Winneba promises much-needed reforms. However, as with all ambitious initiatives, the real test is in the execution and sustainability of these plans.

The party's commitment to the emergency refurbishment of pitches at major national stadiums, including the Accra Sports Stadium, Baba Yara Sports Stadium, Essipon Stadium and Aliu Mahama Stadium (Tamale), is a necessary first step. These iconic venues, once the pride of Ghana, have deteriorated over the years, struggling to meet international standards. The proposed upgrades are essential, not just for hosting

international events but for restoring national pride and providing a platform for our athletes to excel.

Beyond the immediate infrastructure improvements, the NDC's pledge to establish an international-standard stadium in every region and multi-purpose sports facilities across the country is commendable. This initiative could decentralize sports development, encourage regional sporting events and foster inter-school competitions. Such grassroots efforts are crucial for discovering and nurturing the next generation of Ghanaian sports talent.

A particularly noteworthy aspect of the manifesto is the focus on the welfare of footballers. The plan to augment the salaries of all registered footballers, with additional allowances addresses a critical issue that has long plagued the sport in Ghana. Ensuring fair remuneration is not just about improving the livelihoods of players; it is about creating an environment where talent can thrive and where football can be a viable career option.

The NDC's vision also includes equitable investment in national teams, with special emphasis on women's football, para-sports, juvenile teams and lesser-known sports. This approach reflects a commitment to inclusivity and the recognition that all athletes, regardless of their discipline, deserve support and resources to succeed.

The proposed transformation of the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) Sports College into a

modern sports university is another ambitious goal. By offering specialised training in sports medicine, science and management across multiple campuses, the NDC aims to build a robust foundation for sports education and administration in Ghana. This move could have long-term benefits, ensuring systematic and sustainable investment in the sports sector.

However, while these plans are laudable, it is imperative that the NDC, if elected, ensures a sustainable source of financing for these initiatives. Too often, grand promises are made during election campaigns only to fade into obscurity due to a lack of funds or political will. If the NDC party wins the General Elections in December to form the next government, it must demonstrate that these plans are not mere rhetoric but are backed by a concrete strategy to secure the necessary resources.

Ghana's sports industry has immense potential, but it requires consistent and well-planned investment to realise this potential. The NDC's manifesto offers a vision for the future but it is up to the party to ensure that this vision becomes a reality. Only through sustained action and genuine commitment can Ghana's sports sector be revitalised and positioned for long-term success.

Why Saudi Pro League quiet in transfer market?

THE 2024-25 Saudi Pro League season kicks off on Thursday, 22 August. A year ago, it seemed there was a star player arriving in Riyadh, Jeddah and elsewhere on a daily basis.

In all, more than £700m was spent on the likes of Neymar, Karim Benzema and Riyad Mahrez among others who joined Cristiano Ronaldo in the Middle East.

If there were expectations that this summer would be as free-spending as the last, they have not yet been met, though there has been a general downturn in the wider transfer market.

"It has been a relatively quiet summer across global football," Simon Chadwick, professor of sport and geopolitical economy at Skema Business School in Paris, told *BBC Sport*.

Chadwick attributes it to "a combination of harsh economic conditions, the late finishing of continental national team tournaments, and clubs across various territories trying to navigate local financial regulations".

While there have been links to Liverpool's Mohamed Salah and Real Madrid forward Vinicius Jr, there has yet to be an earth-shattering transfer deal in Saudi Arabia this summer.

Brentford and England striker Ivan Toney is the latest name of interest, with the Bees rejecting a £35m bid for the 28-year-old from Al-Ahli last week.

"The problem with spending big on expensive imported talent is that sustaining

it means continuing to do so in perpetuity," added Chadwick.

"This is expensive, doesn't guarantee success, can engender instability, and undermines national-team performances.

"Inside Saudi Arabian football there is likely to be some more considered and strategic thinking right now, compared to two years ago."

There is plenty of existing star power in the country however, with most of the big names still there. The league sent 14 players to the European Championship this summer, including Merih Demiral — Al-Ahli's Turkey centre-back.

"We showed everyone that the Saudi Pro League is not an easy league,"

Demiral told *BBC Sport*.

"We are working very hard here — our training and our games are not easy like many people think."

The 'big four'

Al-Ahli are one of the 'big four', owned by

the same country's Public Investment Fund (PIF) that backs Newcastle United and finished third in the Saudi Pro League last season.

Al-Hilal were dominant and strolled to a 19th domestic league title, finishing 14 points clear of Al-Nassr, and extending their own world record for consecutive match wins to 34.

Aleksandar Mitrovic and Ruben Neves arrived from Fulham and Wolverhampton Wanderers. The Serbia forward was outscored only by Ronaldo, and Neves was out-assisted only by Mahrez, while the defence which included Kalidou Koulibaly was miserly.

The big question is when Neymar, who played just five games before damaging knee ligaments in October, will be back. September is the hope.

Riyadh rivals Al-Nassr ended the season empty-handed despite scoring 100 goals and finishing 17 points above Al-Ahli in third.

The fact that Al-Nassr were a winning machine has not

stopped the pressure on coach Luis Castro after a poor pre-season, which culminated on Saturday in a 4-1 defeat by Al-Hilal in the Super Cup final.

Ronaldo will once again dominate the headlines, though it remains to be seen if he can match his 35 goals last season - a league record. The 39-year-old has the likes of Sadio Mane, Aymeric Laporte and Marcelo Brozovic alongside him.

Jeddah's Al-Ittihad were deserved champions in 2022-23, but finished fifth last year despite signing N'Golo Kante, Benzema and Fabinho. Manager Nuno Espirito Santo did not last long, and neither did his successor Marcelo Gallardo.

The Argentine has been replaced by Laurent Blanc. With no Asian Champions League commitments and the signing of Moussa Diaby from Aston Villa for about £50m in the summer's biggest deal so far, fans are expectant.

Neighbours Al-Ahli also have attacking riches with Mahrez, Roberto Firmino and Firas Al-Buraikan, the league's leading Saudi scorer.

Allan Saint-Maximin has left for Fenerbahce in Turkey, but there are signs in pre-season that former Liverpool forward Firmino, not at his best last time around, is looking sharp.

The club's famous army of green-clad fans will want the third-place finish under 36-year-old German coach Matthias Jaissle to be a platform for a title challenge this time.



• Cristiano Ronaldo is the biggest star in the Saudi Pro League