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Black Princesses fired up for World Cup glory

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Barca land Ghanaian wonderkid

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THE young Ghanaian talents, David Oduro and Felix Afena-Gyan, grabbed the headlines at the weekend as the European summer transfer window shut, with Oduro securing a dream switch to FC Barcelona and Afena-Gyan embarking on a new journey with Juventus, hoping to reignite his career.

While Oduro's move to Barcelona was

expected, Afena-Gyan's transfer to Juventus on a season-long loan from Cremonese caught many by surprise. The 20-year-old forward, who once showed immense promise at AS Roma, has seen his career stall in recent times. However, this move to the Bianconeri offers him a golden opportunity to reignite his form to prove his doubters wrong and catch the eye of Black Stars head coach, Otto Addo, once again.

From Accra to Camp Nou

At just 18 years old, Oduro's meteoric rise has been

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• Felix Afena-Gyan



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Black Stars to explode against Angola

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Voice of Graphic SPORTS

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 2 — 8, 2024

Breaking the group-stage hoodoo: Black Princesses' moment of truth

AS the Black Princesses of Ghana prepare to kick off their 2024 FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup campaign this evening against Austria, the anticipation and pressure are palpable. Ghana's young heroines have been regulars on the world stage, making seven consecutive appearances at this prestigious tournament. However, despite their consistency, they have yet to progress beyond the group stages—a haunting hurdle they are determined to overcome this year.

Their journey in Colombia is one of redemption and ambition. The Group E opener at the El Techo Stadium in Bogotá is not just a game; it is an opportunity to rewrite history. The Black Princesses carry with them the dreams and expectations of a nation yearning for success. Their

journey, starting with Austria, will also see them face formidable opponents in Japan and New Zealand. But this time, they are not just aiming to participate—they are determined to break the group-stage curse and chart a path to glory.

Much of this ambition rests on the shoulders of their experienced coach, Yussif Basigi. Having led the Princesses to victory at the African Games earlier this year, Basigi's tactical acumen will be crucial. His experience and success at previous tournaments have shaped him into a strategist who knows how to navigate the pressures of international competitions. His belief in the team's potential is unwavering and he believes his girls are ready to take on their group opponents and aim for glory in Colombia. This time, they carry the expectation of Ghanaians to live up to expectations at a tournament they are accustomed to.

Preparation for the World Cup has been intense. The Princesses engaged in tough friendly matches against Mexico and South Korea, both ending in draws. These encounters served as crucial testing grounds, helping the team identify and address any weaknesses before the main event. The squad, brimming with talent, includes standout players like goalkeeper

Afi Amenyaku, defenders Comfort Yeboah and Sarah Kulible, and forwards Mary Amponsah and Salamatu Abdulai. Together, they form a formidable unit capable of making a deep run in the tournament.

Yet, the task ahead is daunting. Austria, though new to the World Cup scene, should not be underestimated. Coached by Markus Hackl, the Austrian team has shown resilience, even in the face of challenging friendly matches against Brazil and Morocco. Their squad, featuring talents like Valentina Maedl and Nicole Ojukwu, will be eager to prove themselves on the global stage, posing a significant challenge to the Black Princesses.

This World Cup, which features an expanded roster of 24 nations, marks a new era in women's football. The competition is fiercer than ever, with debutants like Austria eager to make their mark. But for Ghana, the goal is clear: break the group-stage hoodoo, build on past experiences, and aim for nothing short of glory.

The Graphic Sports believes that the journey to that glory begins tonight, and the nation will be watching, hopeful that this time, the Black Princesses will finally ascend to the heights they deserve.

Will Sterling go from Chelsea exile to Arsenal 'masterstroke'?

RAHEEM Sterling started transfer deadline day staring into oblivion as a member of Chelsea's exiled 'Bomb Squad' but ended it back in the chase for major prizes at Arsenal.

Gunners manager Mikel Arteta's surprise loan move for the former England forward was probably the most eye-catching deal to go before the window closed, and signalled the swift and dramatic change in fortunes for Sterling.

Until Arsenal made their move, the 29-year-old was facing the prospect of spending months as an expensive outcast at Stamford Bridge - condemned to train away from the first team as the most high-profile victim of Chelsea's apparently chaotic transfer policy under owner Todd Boehly's Clearlake group.

But he has been rescued from a career in cold storage by Arteta, who worked with Sterling at Manchester City when he was assistant to Pep Guardiola.

Arteta's belief that Sterling can add an extra dimension to Arsenal's attack gives the forward an unexpected chance to reverse a decline in fortunes from the first poster boy of Boehly's Chelsea regime to being told he had no place in new manager Enzo Maresca's plans - warned he would "not get any minutes" if he stayed.

Sterling's fall from grace at Chelsea was brutal. After being described by Maresca in pre-season as "one of our important players", he was dropped for the opening



• Raheem Sterling (left) has signed a new contract with Arsenal

game of the campaign against Manchester City - prompting a statement from his camp demanding "clarity" on his position.

He suffered the added indignity of being stripped of his number seven shirt, which was handed to Pedro Neto when he arrived from Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Maresca insists he likes wingers - as the deadline-day loan signing of Manchester United's Jadon Sancho to add to Neto's arrival proves - but he said Sterling was "not

the type of winger I like", adding: "That says nothing about Raheem."

Chelsea's transfer strategy has prompted much debate and criticism, with the notion of Sterling sitting idle - or training with the club's youngsters - while on the five-year deal worth a reported £300,000-a-week he signed when arriving from Manchester City in a £50m deal in July 2022 a prime example of its dysfunction.

Even in a world in which players

increasingly resemble commodities, and in which Sterling himself was not slow to push for a move from Liverpool when Manchester City came calling in 2015, there was sympathy in some quarters at his treatment.

But after Arsenal's late intervention, Sterling has been presented with the ideal outcome and opportunity. He is able to stay in his native London and joins a club hoping to bridge the gap to Manchester City and become Premier League champions this season, with the added attraction of Champions League football.

Arteta has never hidden his admiration for Sterling, saying recently: "We built a really strong relationship together at Manchester City. He was unbelievable at that time. He is someone I have really strong feelings about."

It is a chance Sterling must have thought was a distant prospect when deadline day began, with reported interest from Manchester United and Paris St-Germain failing to materialise and options limited.

While it is true Sterling has not made the impact expected at Chelsea, he can hardly be branded a failure with his 19 goals in 81 appearances, including 10 in 43 games last season as they finished sixth and returned to Europe under Mauricio Pochettino.

• To be continued