



• Mohammed Kudus was red-carded for attacking Tottenham players

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Build Black Stars around local players

• **Dr Nyaho-Tamakloe urges Otto Addo**

Story: Peter Sarbah

Former Ghana Football Association (GFA) chairman, Dr Nyaho Nyaho-Tamakloe, has urged the Black Stars Head Coach, Otto Addo, to prioritise local players in rebuilding the national team.

According to Dr Nyaho-Tamakloe, the overreliance

on foreign-based players has hindered the formation of a strong, competitive squad. He highlighted Sudan's recent 2-0 victory over Ghana in the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) qualifiers—achieved with a team largely made up of domestic talent—as clear evidence of the potential of home-grown players.

In an interview

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Voice of Graphic SPORTS

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Prioritising Local Talent: It's time to heed to call for change

IN the wake of Ghana's disappointing campaign in the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) qualifiers, a clarion call has emerged from prominent figures in our football community, including Dr Nyaho Nyaho-Tamakloe, a former chairman of the Ghana Football Association (GFA), who has urged Black Stars Head Coach, Otto Addo, to shift focus towards nurturing local talent as the national team looks to rebuild. Dr Nyaho-Tamakloe's perspective is rooted in a troubling reality: the overreliance on foreign-based players has hampered the formation of a competitive squad. His observation follows Sudan's remarkable 2-0 victory over Ghana, a match that highlighted the potential of a team primarily composed of home grown

players. As Dr Nyaho-Tamakloe pointedly remarked in an interview with the Graphic Sports, the national team coach cannot gather different footballers from Europe a week before a match and expect to win easily. This truth resonates deeply as the Black Stars stand on the brink of missing out on the continental showpiece for the first time since 2004. The veteran administrator did not shy away from addressing the broader context of Ghanaian football, attributing the decline of the Black Stars in part to the government's waning interest in the sport. He underscored the importance of significant investment in the national team, drawing parallels with past administrations that actively supported football development. The glory days of Ghanaian football, particularly the triumphs during Dr Kwame Nkrumah's leadership as Ghana's first President, serve as a poignant reminder of the correlation between support and success. The firebrand administrator also highlighted how the commitment of former heads of state like General Kuti Acheampong and Jerry John Rawlings led to historic AFCON victories in 1978 and 1982, respectively, often against the odds. In stark contrast, he lamented the current

state of affairs where the government appears disinterested, jeopardising the national team's chances of reclaiming their competitive stature on the continental stage. Against this backdrop, Coach Otto Addo's recent commitment to prioritising players from the Ghana Premier League offers a glimmer of hope. His assertion that "when a player is good, he is good regardless of where he plays" must be matched with decisive action. However, his latest squad selection, which features only two home-based players raises concerns about his dedication to this promise. With the Black Stars highly unlikely to qualify for the 2025 AFCON in Morocco, the imperative for prioritising local talent in Otto Addo's teambuilding effort is more urgent than ever if the team are to become competitive again when the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers resume next year. The calls for a change by many meaningful personalities, including Dr Nyaho-Tamakloe, should resonate with football authorities and the government alike, reminding us that nurturing home-grown talent is key to the future of the Black Stars. It is time to refocus our efforts and reclaim our place in African football.

Resilient journey of Calafiori from injury to Premier League

ON Riccardo Calafiori's arm there's a tattoo featuring the words "never give up". For the 22-year-old Arsenal and Italy defender it is a reminder of just how close he came to his dreams of a career in football being ended before it had really started. At the age of 16, Calafiori suffered a serious knee injury while playing in a Uefa Youth League match for AS Roma, rupturing all of the ligaments in one of his knees. It was so bad he feared he even might struggle to walk, let alone kick a ball again. "This was my first tattoo and it was for this reason," he said. "It was so tough. I was 16 and suddenly you start to think I can't play football ever again." But Calafiori did return to the pitch and this summer realised a dream of playing in the Premier League as he joined the Gunners for £42m. On Saturday's Football Focus, he sits down with presenter and Arsenal fan Ronan Kemp to talk about how the move to the Gunners came about, learning English through Netflix and UK drill music, and give his thoughts on fish and chips. It may not have felt like it at the time, but that serious injury is what Calafiori

credits for making him into the player he is today. "You appreciate more small things and you grow up as a man," he explained. "It helped me become a better player. "I remember the first month I came back I was going into every duel like crazy, I had no fear any more." During his recovery he was visited in hospital regularly by Roma and Italy legend Daniele de Rossi, who also gave the teenage Calafiori lifts to his physio sessions. Not only did Calafiori look up to De Rossi as player, having dreamed of playing alongside him when he was a child, but the two also became friends, with the latter to this day playing a key role in Calafiori's career decisions. "He is one of my friends and I always ask him about my biggest decisions and he always gives me good advice," he added. "I spoke to him about coming to Arsenal and he said 'this one of the biggest opportunities for you to improve as a player.'" It took almost a full year for Calafiori to recover from injury but the long road to a career in football was complete in August 2020, when he made his full debut for Roma. He made a total of 10 Serie A appearances for the Italians and also had a spell on loan at Genoa, before deciding to



• Riccardo Calafiori

make a permanent move to Swiss side Basel in 2022. "It was the best choice I ever made," said Calafiori. "[Moving abroad] you learn a lot as a player and a man. "It was the first time I was living alone outside my country. You have to do all the things your own. If you have a bad day, you are alone. "They gave me the chance to feel like a player for the first time. I felt important for this club."

Calafiori spent a season at Basel but, having been unable to establish himself at his first club Roma, he felt there was unfinished business back home and secured a move to Bologna. "I wanted to prove to Serie A fans I was not the player who played there before, I wanted to prove them wrong," he said. It proved the right decision as he swiftly became a key player for the Italians, helping them to secure a return to the Champions League for the first time in 60 years. Calafiori credits Bologna's coach at the time, Thiago Motta, with helping his career take off by switching him from left-back to being a central defender. "Last season was my best season," Calafiori added. "The coach helped me a lot. He was the first guy who put me as a centre-back after I had always played left-back, then I had my best season so far." For Calafiori, a sightseeing trip to London in January - which included a visit to the Emirates to watch an Arsenal game - would ultimately set him on the path to joining the Gunners. "I came as a coincidence to visit the city, I had never been before," he said. "Arsenal were playing Crystal Palace, they won 5-0. At that point I wasn't even thinking about coming to the Premier League." Four months later, in May, he spoke to Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta about the possibility of joining Arsenal. — BBC