



• Morifing Donzo produced a man-of-the-match performance and the winning goal for Asante Kotoko

Supremacy!

Porcupines dominate Hearts again

Sports Desk Report

ASANTE Kotoko once again asserted their dominance over bitter rivals Hearts of Oak, emerging 1-0 victors in a tense Super Clash at the Accra Sports Stadium yesterday. A 44th-minute penalty expertly slotted home by Morifing Donzo proved decisive, earning the Porcupine Warriors

all three points and extending their bragging rights for a third successive season.

The win marked Kotoko's fourth triumph in their last five matches and their 19th league victory over Hearts since 1958. With this clash—the 119th between the two sides—Kotoko now lead the historic head-to-head 41

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Graphic SPORTS

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Stakeholders must commit to deliver on boxing reforms

PROFESSIONAL boxing in Ghana is back. Last Thursday, the National Sports Authority (NSA) announced that sanctioned bouts could resume, following months of suspension that exposed deep flaws in the sport's governance and safety systems. The announcement, made after consultations with the Ministry of Sports and Recreation and the Interim Management Committee (IMC) overseeing normalisation, marks a pivotal step in reviving Ghana's storied boxing heritage.

But resumption alone is not enough—the reforms must be fully embraced by all stakeholders if the sport is to flourish. The suspension followed the tragic deaths of Ernest Akushey and Nigerian boxer

Oluwasegun Olanrewaju, whose fatal bouts underscored glaring weaknesses in medical oversight, anti-doping protocols, and administrative structures. Public confidence had been shaken, and international investors were wary of staging events in the country. The government acted decisively, establishing the Ghana Boxing Interim Management Committee (GBIMC) to implement urgent reforms, strengthen anti-doping measures, enforce medical safeguards, and guide the sport towards democratic elections for new leadership of the Ghana Boxing Authority (GBA).

Under the leadership of former GBA chairman Samir Captan and with boxing legend Azumah Nelson as vice-chairman, the IMC has delivered a comprehensive overhaul of the sport. Reforms include published medical and safety manuals, a functional interim medical commission, a centralised medical database, certified ringside and medical personnel, and an approved insurance framework. Oversight by the Ghana Boxing Medical and Anti-Doping Team ensures full implementation and compliance with international standards. The NSA has praised stakeholders for their patience and cooperation but issued a clear warning: the sport's revival depends on the unwavering commitment of promoters, athletes, and administrators. These reforms are not optional—they are essential for building a professional, safe, and globally

respected boxing ecosystem.

The commercial potential is immense. British promoter Eddie Hearn's Matchroom Boxing will make its African debut in Accra on December 20, while Bishop Promotions stages "Best of Bukom 2" on January 1, 2026. Local promoter Ayitey Powers is also awaiting clearance for a rescheduled "Judgement Day" card. These events signal international attention is returning—but only if the medical and safety protocols are rigorously enforced.

NSA Director-General, Yaw Ampofo Ankrah, describes the suspension as a necessary cleansing of Ghanaian boxing. "The suspension has sanitised Ghanaian boxing, giving confidence to international investors that the right structures are now in place," he said.

For the Graphic Sports, the message is clear. Ghana can no longer tolerate shortcuts or complacency. For the sport to reclaim its rightful place on the global stage, all stakeholders must uphold accountability, prioritise athlete welfare, and embrace the reforms fully. The rules are in place, the framework is ready, and the international spotlight is returning.

The ring can now be safe again, but only if those inside it respect the responsibility they bear. Ghanaian boxing is at a crossroads, and the path chosen will determine whether the sport thrives—or falters once more.

Valuable lessons, tough losses for Sabalenka

A MISSED shot is greeted by gritted teeth, an eye-roll, a choice word towards her coaching team. Winners and aces bring a huge roar to the heavens, clenched fist raised high.

Her emotions fuel her - but they can also hinder her. Nowhere was that more obvious than the French Open final. Seventy unforced errors flew from Sabalenka's racquet as she was outsmarted by Coco Gauff on a windy Paris evening.

She broke down afterwards, apologising for "the worst final I ever played". She went further in a news conference, saying Gauff won "not because she played incredible [but] because I made all of those mistakes".

Sabalenka was heavily criticised for the comments. She apologised to Gauff, but some questioned if her emotions, such a crucial part of her game, would prevent her from winning another Slam.

"Women get criticised a lot for emotion," the great Billie Jean King told BBC Sport at Wimbledon.

"Girls are taught to be perfect and boys are taught to be brave. But nobody's brave all the time, and nobody's perfect.

"The best players, everybody always talks about 'they're mentally stronger' - no, they're emotionally



• Aryna Sabalenka

stronger.

"When you're on the court, you have to feel you deserve it."

Sabalenka ended the year a Grand Slam champion, having defended her US Open title, and kept the top ranking for 55 weeks in a row.

But the 27-year-old will also be left reflecting on another near-miss after losing the season-ending WTA Finals title match to Elena Rybakina, where she admitted she had "overthought" her game.

Sabalenka is one of the most powerful hitters in the women's game, but that was her undoing in her first few seasons on the tour. She initially struggled at the

major, suffering a string of early exits before reaching the Wimbledon semi-finals in 2021.

Slam success seemed assured - but her serve, and her sheer desperation to win, got in the way.

In a match in Adelaide in early 2022, Sabalenka hit 21 double faults. At one point, she resorted to underarm serves. It was so bad that the umpire asked Sabalenka if she was OK, thinking she was injured.

After serving out the next game to love - and hitting an ace on the final point - Sabalenka hunched over next to her coach, hid her face in a towel, and cried.

She ended 2022 with 428 double faults - 151 more than

anyone else on the WTA Tour - and no titles.

There was also the emotional stress Sabalenka had experienced. Her father, Sergey, died in 2019, and she was desperate to fulfil their shared dream of a major singles title.

"I really wanted to win a Slam for him, to put our family name into history," Sabalenka said in 2022.

"When he passed away, I started thinking too much about it. Now there is zero in my pocket. I just put so much pressure on myself."

Sabalenka previously worked with a psychologist but stopped during the 2023 pre-season, saying she realised "nobody other than me would help me".

She began the year with a tweaked serve and her first title for 18 months. Four weeks later, she was at long last a Grand Slam singles champion. Her new serve, and sheer determination, led her to the Australian Open title.

Three more Grand Slams came over the next two years and Sabalenka seemed to find a healthy balance with her emotions.

She faltered in the 2023 US Open final, overwhelmed by the 24,000-strong pro-Gauff crowd, and obliterated her racquet backstage afterwards. But four months later she defended her

Melbourne title in serene fashion, losing just 31 games overall.

Afterwards, she said a conversation with her mother had brought a form of "relief".

"When I told her I want to win a Slam for my dad, she said 'what are you talking about? He was proud of you after each match you won. Every match for him mattered and titles weren't a big deal for him'," she said.

"I felt free."

Sabalenka started this year bidding to become the first woman since 1999 to win three successive Australian Open titles, but lost to a brilliant Madison Keys. She then let her emotions run riot on and off court in her Roland Garros loss to Gauff.

"You lose the final of the biggest tournament and you don't think cleanly," she said.

"I had to sit back and reflect on everything, and make sure that people understand my point - that I was completely wrong.

"It was a tough lesson but it helped me in so many different ways."

Sabalenka battled her emotions at Wimbledon, most impressively against home favourite Emma Raducanu in the third round. "Maybe earlier in my career, I would just go crazy and lose that set," she said afterwards. - BBC