

## Afriyie's World Cup formula:

# Beat Panama first, then shock England!

Story: Prince Dornu-Leiku

Former Ghana Football Association Vice-President, George Afriyie, has urged the Black Stars to keep their feet firmly on the ground ahead of the

2026 FIFA World Cup, warning that any dreams of upsetting England will count for little unless Ghana first overcome Panama in their opening match.

Afriyie believes the Black Stars can do it.  
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• Antoine Semenyo — Black Stars top striker



Tay, Zakaria revel in Black Queens triumph — Page 5



• Andre Ayew celebrating his goal for NAC Breda against Feyenoord

## Dede opens Breda account

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## Pink Ladies triumph signals rebirth of the Black Queens

*Ghana's Black Queens may have lifted the Pink Ladies Cup in somewhat unusual circumstances in the United Arab Emirates, but the significance of the triumph goes far beyond the modest trophy presented in a quiet ceremony in Sharjah. Beneath the anticlimactic ending lies a far more important narrative — the steady reawakening of a team that appears to be rediscovering its identity and competitive edge under head coach Kim Lars Bjorkegren.*

*The Queens produced two commanding performances to secure the title, dismantling Hong Kong, China 4-0 before repeating the same emphatic scoreline against Russia. Their scheduled final fixture against Tanzania was cancelled due to logistical disruptions linked to tensions in the Middle East, forcing organisers to end the competition prematurely.*

*Yet even with the abrupt conclusion, the message from the Ghanaian camp was unmistakable: the Black Queens are gradually regaining their rhythm.*

*For a team preparing for the rescheduled Women's Africa Cup of Nations later this year in Morocco, the tournament in the UAE served as a valuable dress rehearsal. The performances offered a glimpse of a side that looks increasingly organised, confident and tactically coherent — hallmarks of the deliberate rebuilding process that Bjorkegren has quietly been undertaking since taking charge.*

*The statistics alone underline the progress. Two matches, two convincing victories, eight goals scored and none conceded. Such numbers may not define a team's destiny, but they certainly reflect growing stability in both attack and defence.*

*Central to the Queens' attacking surge was forward Doris Boaduwa, whose clinical finishing earned her the tournament's top scorer honour. Her sharp movement and composure in front of goal provided the cutting edge Ghana had occasionally lacked in recent years.*

*Equally impressive was the defensive solidity marshalled by deputy captain Cynthia Konlan, who emerged as the tournament's Best Goalkeeper after keeping two clean sheets. Her assured presence between the posts reflected the growing defensive discipline that has begun to characterise the team.*

*However, beyond individual brilliance, the most encouraging sign lies in the collective structure taking shape under the Swedish coach.*

*Bjorkegren has largely maintained a stable core of players while gradually introducing fresh talent to intensify competition and expand the squad's depth. New faces such as Rose Baah, Diana Amoako, Alexandra Emefa Tay, Sharon Sampson, Helen Alomenu and Ajegipena Zakaria were handed valuable opportunities to integrate into the national*

*team environment.*

*Such calculated squad-building is essential if Ghana hopes to restore its once formidable reputation in African women's football.*

*Ironically, just as the Queens appeared to be building competitive momentum, the Confederation of African Football's decision to postpone the tournament from March to July has temporarily slowed their stride. The rescheduling of the Women's Africa Cup of Nations inevitably disrupts the team's rhythm at a moment when cohesion and confidence were visibly growing.*

*But the delay may yet prove beneficial.*

*The additional months provide Bjorkegren and his technical team valuable time to refine tactical systems, evaluate emerging players and deepen squad chemistry before the continental showdown in Morocco.*

*More importantly, the Pink Ladies Cup triumph has rekindled belief within the squad and among supporters that the Black Queens are once again moving in the right direction.*

*For years, Ghana's women's national team has struggled to consistently translate its rich talent into continental dominance. Now, there are early signs that a more structured, disciplined and purposeful side is emerging.*

*The journey back to the summit of African women's football will require patience, consistency and sustained investment.*

*But if the performances in the UAE are anything to go by, the Black Queens may finally be rediscovering the foundation upon which future continental success can be built.*

## Morocco turn to Ouahbi for leadership

**M**OROCCO have begun a new chapter in their national team journey after head coach Walid Regragui stepped down from his role, with the Royal Moroccan Football Federation (FRMF) accepting his resignation only months before the start of the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

The decision brings to a close a period of uncertainty following Morocco's defeat in the final of the 2025 TotalEnergies CAF Africa Cup of Nations, a result that intensified debate over the future direction of the Atlas Lions.

Regragui travelled to Morocco in recent days to complete the necessary administrative procedures that formally ended his contract, concluding a tenure that lasted just over three years.

During that period, he guided Morocco through one of the most remarkable chapters in African football history, but his departure now signals a shift in focus as the country prepares for its next challenge on the global stage.

Regragui confirmed that the decision to step aside was taken with the team's future in mind when he was honoured by the FRMF on Thursday night following his decision to leave the position.

"The team needs a fresh face, a different energy, and a new perspective with a new coach," he said.

"I think the team needs a new lease of life before the World Cup, a new vision to continue progressing. My decision to leave is part of this team's evolution."

The departure marks the end of a chapter that many Moroccan supporters regard as one of the most influential in the nation's football history.

Morocco captain Achraf Hakimi paid tribute to the outgoing coach on social media, saying Regragui had "left an unforgettable mark on the history of Moroccan football".

### AFCON woes spark change

Pressure on the Moroccan coaching staff increased significantly after the Atlas Lions failed to secure the continental title at the 2025 AFCON, which they hosted on home soil.

Expectations had been high throughout the tournament, with many observers predicting Morocco would lift the trophy in front of their supporters.

However, their hopes were dashed in the final when Senegal secured a narrow victory after a tense, dramatic contest in Rabat.

In the aftermath of that defeat, speculation grew over whether Morocco would maintain continuity or opt for a fresh approach ahead of the World Cup.

### End of a memorable era

Regragui's tenure will nonetheless be remembered as one of the most successful periods in Moroccan football.

Appointed in August 2022, he quickly transformed the Atlas Lions into one of the most formidable teams in international football.

His greatest achievement came at the 2022 FIFA World Cup, where Morocco became the first African nation to reach the semi-finals of the tournament.

Their fourth-place finish captured global attention and raised expectations for the team's future.

That historic run established Morocco as a rising force in world football, while also increasing pressure on the national side to



• Walid Regragui

deliver continental success.

In response to Regragui's departure, the federation has appointed Mohamed Ouahbi as the new head coach of the senior team.

By appointing Mohamed Ouahbi and attracting top-tier talent, we are strengthening our standards and raising our expectations daily, within a framework of harmony and integration." Fouzi Lekjaa, President of the Royal Moroccan Football Federation, said.

"Morocco 2030 represents a motivating horizon for us: our ambition is to sustainably establish ourselves among the best national teams in the world, and to achieve the expected performance starting this summer and continuing until 2030."

Ouahbi's promotion follows his

impressive achievements with Morocco's under-20 side, which he guided to victory at the U20 World Cup in Chile in October 2025.

"I am honoured to have earned the trust of the Royal Moroccan Football Federation. We will work diligently and humbly, relying on a clear methodology and collective ambition: progressing match by match, establishing high standards in our daily work, enabling the national team to achieve a qualitative leap in upcoming competitions, and living up to the aspirations of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, may God grant him victory, and the expectations of the Moroccan people," Ouahbi said.

Although he has not previously managed a senior national team, the federation believes his success with youth development and his understanding of Moroccan football make him the right figure to lead the next phase of the national project.

### World Cup task ahead

Morocco's immediate focus now shifts to the 2026 FIFA World Cup, which will be hosted jointly by the United States, Mexico and Canada.

The Atlas Lions have been drawn in Group C alongside Brazil, Scotland, and Haiti.

Ouahbi is expected to oversee his first matches in charge during upcoming friendlies against Ecuador and Paraguay, fixtures that will offer early insight into his tactical plans and the direction he intends to take the team.

For Morocco, the coming months represent a period of transition but also opportunity.

After rewriting African football history in Qatar four years ago, the Atlas Lions now face the challenge of proving that their rise was not a one-off moment but the foundation of a new era in global football. -- CAF