

Ghana lacks strikers

- **Hearts coach bemoans over goal drought**

Story: Peter Sarbah

ACCRA Hearts of Oak's head coach, Martinus

Koopman, has expressed his frustration with his team's goal-scoring drought in the betPawa Premier League, after his side failed to find the net in a scoreless draw with FC Samartex 1996 at the Accra Sports Stadium last Saturday.

Hearts of Oak have only managed to score one goal in their first five matches of the season, and currently find themselves in 15th place in the league standings, with one win, two draws and two losses. Their only victory – and only

goal in the competition -- was a 1-0 home win against Nsoatreman FC on September 24.

After supervising a second barren draw in consecutive matches, the coach distanced himself



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• Martinus Koopman
— Hearts head coach



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Koopman highlights need for solutions to league's scoring challenges

THE betPawa Premier League, Ghana's flagship football competition, is facing a grave concern that is dampening the excitement of the game — the alarming decline in goal-scoring rates and the acute shortage of top strikers and wingers.

Accra Hearts of Oak's head coach, Martinus Koopman, recently voiced his frustrations as his team continued to grapple with a goal-scoring drought, reflecting a more extensive issue affecting Ghanaian football.

Koopman's exasperation is shared by many coaches and fans alike, as the betPawa Premier League struggles to provide the thrilling goal-scoring action that fans have come to expect. After five matches, Hearts have managed only one goal, placing them at the bottom half of the

league table. Koopman, in a post-match interview after his side's scoreless draw with FC Smartex in Accra last Saturday, emphasised that the problem extended beyond his team, infecting the entire league. He pinpointed a scarcity of quality wingers and strikers as the root cause of the scoring crisis.

The 2023/24 season paints a grim picture of this issue, with an average of just 1.80 goals per match after Matchday Five, a sharp decline compared to previous seasons. The overarching question is why the league is facing such a scarcity of goals. A key factor is the continuous exodus of top strikers and established players from the league each season. Star players who once graced the league have left for greener pastures, depleting the league of its most lethal finishers.

Top strikers have been leaving the betPawa Premier League in search of opportunities abroad. The plight of last season's top scorer, Abednego Tetteh, who has yet to play this season due to contractual disputes, and the departure of Hafiz Konkoni, the second-highest scorer, exemplify this trend which extends over several seasons, with notable strikers such as Yaw Annor and Franck Mbella Etouga also moving to overseas clubs after standout performances two seasons ago.

The uncontrolled exodus of the league's best talents has become an unending trend. Players such as Diawisie Taylor, Benjamin Afutu Kotey, and Joseph Esono have all left for foreign leagues,

predominantly in North Africa. The situation further worsened as key players, including Augustine Okrah and the Kotoko duo of Mudasiru Salifu and Razak Abalora, also left the league in search of better opportunities two seasons ago.

The consequences of this exodus are glaring. The league is losing prolific goal-scorers and exciting talents with each departure, leading to a drop in the overall quality and excitement of the competition. The challenge now is for local clubs and authorities to find ways to retain their talent and enhance the league's competitiveness.

While Coach Koopman's concerns about the scarcity of quality wingers and strikers are valid, the situation is exacerbated by the exit of star players. The solution to this issue lies not only in developing young talents but also in creating a conducive environment for players to stay and thrive in the local league. Club coaches, like Koopman, must work diligently to improve their players' scoring abilities. As we witness the ongoing struggle for goals in the betPawa Premier League, it is imperative that stakeholders in Ghanaian football take concerted efforts to address these concerns. The league's future success hinges on its ability to nurture talent and retain its star players, restoring the excitement of goal-scoring in the beautiful game.

Will Bellingham match Ronaldo's legacy at Madrid?

JUDE Bellingham has had an unbelievable start to his Real Madrid career, but how does his record after 10 matches stack up to Cristiano Ronaldo's?

Of course, Ronaldo went on to become arguably Real Madrid's greatest player of all-time scoring a record 450 goals and winning countless trophies along the way.

From a personal standpoint, the Portuguese forward had an excellent start in Spain, although he had to wait quite some time to get his hands on his first trophy.

Real Madrid went trophyless during Ronaldo's debut season in 2009–10 and he only won the Copa del Rey during his second season. However, Real Madrid's golden era was only around the corner.

Ronaldo eventually left the Santiago Bernabeu in 2018 having won 15 trophies, including two La Liga titles and four Champions League trophies.

Bellingham certainly has a long way to go before his trophy cabinet even looks half as good as Ronaldo's, but the early signs from his time at Real Madrid have been hugely promising.

Carlo Ancelotti has certainly been impressed with the 20-year-old midfielder as the Italian boss has regularly sung Bellingham's praises throughout the season so far.

"Good players with personality suffer a bit less than the others," Ancelotti told reporters when asked about Bellingham's electric start to life in Madrid.

"There's no other reason. A player with personality above all, more than quality,

means that an important shirt like Real Madrid's doesn't weigh so much.

"Bellingham is being assessed right now based on what he's doing on the pitch, and he's doing well," he added. "Maybe he wasn't as well-known because he played in

Germany, he didn't have the role he has now, playing for an important club in an important league.

"He's a player who's very focused, very serious, very professional. He's not someone who could lose his head if someone speaks well of him."

Ancelotti's side currently top La Liga, having taken 24 points from their first eight league matches. Come the end of the season, there's every chance that Bellingham gets his hands on some silverware.

"We've taken a closer look at Bellingham's first 10 matches at Real Madrid and have compared his stats with Ronaldo's first 10 games with Real Madrid in 2009–10.—MSN



• Jude Bellingham (left) is being compared to Cristiano Ronaldo