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Hearts, Matic in pay dispute

• FIFA slaps transfer ban on Phobians

Story: Peter Sarbah

IN a sensational twist to Accra Hearts of Oak's ongoing feud with their former coach, Slavko Matic, the club is poised to escalate the dispute by taking the matter to FIFA or the Court of Arbitration for Sport

(CAS), raising the stakes in their payment feud.

The heart of the matter lies in an unpaid salary owed to Coach Matic, which has resulted in FIFA imposing a player transfer ban on the club. While Hearts officials have signalled their readiness to settle the outstanding

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Medeama SC and Dreams FC carry Ghana's pride in Africa

GHANA'S footballing pride is on the line as Medeama SC and Dreams FC embark on crucial journeys in their pursuit of continental glory. The two clubs represent the nation in the CAF Champions League and CAF Confederation Cup, respectively, and their upcoming return leg matches are laden with significance, not only for them but for the entire Ghanaian footballing community.

Medeama SC face Guinean side Horoya AC at the Stade General Lansana Conte in Conakry, while Dreams FC will take on Sierra Leonean outfit Kallon FC at the Samuel Kanyon Doe Stadium in Monrovia, Liberia,

with the aggregate winners securing coveted spots in the group stage of their respective competitions.

Medeama SC enter the return leg with a promising two-goal advantage, having triumphed 3-1 in the first leg at the Cape Coast Stadium. However, the Guineans are not ready to concede defeat just yet; they are determined to stage a comeback by scoring more than three goals and advancing to the next stage.

Horoya AC are known for their resilience and experience in facing Ghanaian opponents. Many years ago, they were narrowly defeated by Hearts of Oak, ultimately allowing Guineans to progress. Medeama SC aspire to replicate that achievement, drawing inspiration from Dreams FC, who earlier ousted another Guinean side, Milo FC, from the Confederation Cup a few weeks ago. Nevertheless, Coach Augustine Evans Adotey faces a challenging task, having lost key players to the Maltese league following significant transfers before the competition. Additionally, influential club captain Vincent Atinga has completed his contract with the Ghanaian champions. Adotey acknowledges Horoya AC's strength, highlighting the need for his team to capitalise on their chances and maintain their lead. Nana Kofi Babil, Nurudeen Abdulai, and Kofi Asmah, the scorers from the first leg, are expected to play crucial roles in securing Medeama SC's place in the group stage. Horoya AC, a team with a rich history in the CAF Champions League and 20-time champions of Guinea,

is determined to protect its pride and thwart Medeama's advancement.

For Dreams FC, the shift in the return match to Monrovia provides a unique opportunity. The Samuel Doe stadium will serve as a neutral ground, as Kallon FC lacks a CAF-approved stadium to host the match. Despite this advantage, Coach Abdul Karim Zito and his team anticipate a tough encounter, especially after Kallon FC managed to score a vital away goal in their 1-2 loss in Accra.

The importance of Medeama SC and Dreams FC holding their ground and advancing to the group stage cannot be overstated. It goes beyond individual glory; it is about preserving Ghana's pride in continental football. Recent years have seen a decline in the number of Ghanaian clubs participating due to poor performances. The nation's quota of two clubs has been reduced to one. Medeama SC and Dreams FC must succeed to reverse this trend, guarantee a share of the prize money, and give their sponsors the value they deserve for their unwavering support.

As these two clubs prepare for their high-stakes matches, they carry the hopes of a nation. Their victories will not only be celebrated by their fans but will also rekindle the flame of Ghanaian football on the continent.

Onana's difficult start at Man United

THIS was perhaps the most intriguing verdict pronounced this week amid the negative noise surrounding Andre Onana's start to the season.

United signed the 27-year-old Cameroonian goalkeeper from Inter Milan for an initial £43.8m after David de Gea left when his contract expired after 12 years at the club.

The pressure was immediately on Onana, who has become only United's third clear number one goalkeeper since 2005.

Either Edwin van der Sar (2005-2011) or De Gea (2011-2023) played 88% of United's games over the past 18 seasons.

But United's start to this season has not been great, and neither has Onana's. They have conceded 10 goals in five Premier League games, more than winding trio Sheffield United, Everton and Bournemouth.

He also let a soft Leroy Sané shot squirm past his body to give Bayern Munich the lead on their way to a 4-3 win over United in the Champions League on Wednesday.

"It's all been focused — as it happens very often — on one incident: the mistake of Onana," said journalist Guillem Balague on the *BBC Radio 5 Live* Euro Leagues podcast.

"It was 19 shots from Bayern, nine from Man United. That tells the story. The focus has been on one mistake.

"The big picture is a team that don't defend very well. Man United don't have a clear idea of how they want to defend."

When Onana replaced De Gea this summer it was largely seen as Erik ten Hag, Onana's former manager at Ajax, wanting a goalkeeper who was better with the ball at his feet.



• Andre Onana

Last season Onana only conceded 36 goals in 41 games, keeping eight clean sheets in Inter's 13-match Champions League run, which culminated in them losing 1-0 to Manchester City in the final.

He conceded 10 goals in Europe's top competition from shots that came with an expected goal tally of 17.8. The 7.8 goals he effectively prevented was the highest total in last season's competition.

"He's presented as this playmaker in gloves, but there's more to him than that,"

said reporter James Horncastle.

"I don't think he's been signed exclusively for line-breaking passes and helping United beat the press. They want a shot-stopper as well instead.

"He kept Inter in games last season with his hands, not his feet. In time we'll see the true value of Onana.

"But right now, as with everything at Manchester United, it's a club that doesn't have a stable environment, everything is highly pressurised. It's not an easy environment to come into."

Among the 23 goalkeepers to play in the Premier League this season, Onana is joint sixth for saves (20) but only joint 13th for percentage of shots saved (67%).

He is fourth for passes (174) but only seventh for successful passes (129). His passing accuracy of 74% sees him 14th — and he ranks bottom for passing accuracy to the opposition half, with only 15%.

United have conceded three or more goals in three consecutive games for the first time since December 1978.

After the error at Munich's Allianz Arena, Onana came out to speak to TV to say he "let the team down" and they "lost" because of me".

Horncastle said: "He's a big character. He showed mettle in coming out and claiming responsibility even though he wasn't responsible for the entire defeat. A midfielder that goes missing is also culpable."

Balague said: "I've asked three Premier League goalkeepers about what he did wrong and they all said the same thing — to dive on the left side to get the ball you have to take a step to your right first which he doesn't fully do.

"From that moment everything was

wrong, he was late going down, he didn't know whether to push the ball away or hold it and made a technical mistake.

"Because he's not the smoothest technically he makes little mistakes that sometimes cause goals. He's fantastic with his feet. Sometimes he does saves for the gallery but he does save impossible balls too.

"He's not the perfect goalkeeper but good enough for Man Utd."

However, that technique — which three English top-flight goalkeepers criticised — has changed the way Ajax's young goalkeepers are coached.

"Ajax's sporting science and analytics department looked at his technique when it came to diving and realised it was unorthodox," said Horncastle.

"He said it's because I think I can get to the ball quicker this way. They wired him up to see if it was the case and they found out he was right.

"With his technique he could get down quicker than the technique they were teaching in their academy.

"So Ajax began teaching their young goalkeepers Onana's technique as an optional extra because he'd proven to them it works.

"We can all focus on what happened in Munich, but over the course of his career that technique is one of the reasons he is where he is.

"I thought United underpaid for him when you see the price of Kepa, Alisson and Ederson."

Onana's £43.8m move made him the third most expensive goalkeeper ever — although well behind the world-record £71m Chelsea paid for Athletic Bilbao's Kepa Arrizabalaga in 2018.

Alisson's £66.8m move to Liverpool from Roma the same summer ranks second. Ederson's move from Benfica to Manchester City in 2017 for £35m is next, after Onana. — **BBC**