



Iustum Center for Democracy
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RETHINKING THE BLACK STARS:

Let's Go Back to the Basics



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The recent performance of the Ghana Black Stars and other national teams, alongside the declining competitiveness of clubs in the domestic league in continental competitions, highlights a weakening national football identity and a deterioration in long-term football success, underscoring structural and developmental challenges within the football ecosystem.



Historically, Ghana's most successful teams were built on strong local foundations, with players progressing from Colts football and the domestic league into the national team, as seen in the 2006 and 2010 World Cup squads.



However, recent squads, particularly in the Black Stars, have increasingly depended on externally developed players, reducing the link between the national team and local football systems.



In contrast, Morocco and Senegal demonstrate how structured investment in academies, grassroots football, and talent integration can produce consistent international success while strengthening domestic leagues.



This paper therefore recommends rebuilding Colts football, strengthening and regulating academies, prioritising locally developed players in national team selection, leveraging national team participation for domestic football investment, and establishing a unified national football development identity.



1.0 BACKGROUND

The Ghana national team has just been eliminated from the 2026 FIFA World Cup after playing four matches, recording one win, two losses, and one draw. Last night, as Ghana faced Colombia, and for some time now, we have been watching a Black Stars team in which the majority of the players do not sing the national anthem when it is played before major matches. This could be due to a lack of patriotism or simply because they do not know the words to the national anthem.

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This situation stems from the way we have treated the Black Stars over the years, much like community basic and senior high schools assemble teams for sports competitions. A PE master or sports director often goes into the community to identify talented athletes, many of whom are not active students and some of whom are students only on paper, while others play for local Colts or Division Two clubs. They are drafted into the school's sports team for competitions and, after the games, simply return home, expecting to be called again for the next tournament.

This has increasingly become the approach to selecting players for the Black Stars.

This paper examines the development trajectory of Ghana football and argues that over-reliance on foreign-born players, combined with weak grassroots structures, has weakened national identity and long-term football sustainability. It examines the successes achieved by the Black Stars at the 2006 and 2010 FIFA World Cups and draws a link between those performances and the inclusion of locally based players in the national team. It further explains how such inclusion not only strengthens the Black Stars but also benefits domestic football, creating a mutually reinforcing, win-win situation. The paper concludes by offering recommendations for consideration by policy-makers.



2.0

GHANA'S 2006 SUCCESS



The core of the Ghana Black Stars team that made history at Germany 2006, Ghana's first-ever FIFA World Cup appearance, included Sammy Adjei, then playing for Hearts of Oak; George Owu, then with Ashanti Gold; and Richard Kingson (Olele), a former goalkeeper for Great Olympics.



IN DEFENCE

In defence, there was Samuel Osei Kuffour, who had played Colts football in Ghana and was part of the Ghana Under-17 national team (Black Starlets) that won the 1991 FIFA U-17 World Championship. Emmanuel Addoquaye Pappoe had played for Liberty Professionals, captained the Ghana U-21 team that won silver at the 2001 FIFA World Youth Championship in Argentina, and was a member of Ghana's U23 football team at the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. There was also Shilla Illiasu, who had played for Real Tamale United (RTU) and Asante Kotoko and was with King Faisal at the time of the World Cup. Habib Mohammed had represented Asante Kotoko and King Faisal and was adjudged the Best Defender in the 2004 Ghana Premier League.

The defensive unit also featured John Paintsil, who had played for Berekum Arsenal and Liberty Professionals; Hearts of Oak's Dan Quaye; Asante Kotoko's Issah Ahmed; and the "Rock of Gibraltar," John Mensah, the Obuasi-born defender who had played Colts football in Ghana before moving abroad.



IN MIDFIELD

In midfield, there was Michael Essien, formerly of Liberty Professionals, who was part of Ghana's U-17 team that won bronze at the 1999 FIFA U-17 World Championship. Stephen Appiah had played for Hearts of Oak, was a member of the Ghana U-17 team that won the 1995 FIFA U-17 World Championship, and represented Ghana at the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. Sulley Muntari had also played for Liberty Professionals and was part of Ghana's U-20 team that won silver at both the 2001 African Youth Championship and the 2001 FIFA World Youth Championship. The midfield also included Eric Addo, Otto Addo, and also Haminu Dramani, who had played for Hearts of Lions.



IN ATTACK

In attack, there was Asamoah Gyan, formerly of Liberty Professionals and a member of Ghana's football team at the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. Also in the squad were Alex Tachie-Mensah, who had played for Cape Coast Mysterious Dwarfs and Sekondi Hasaacas during the early stages of his career; Matthew Amoah, who had represented the Black Stars since 2002; and Razak Pimpong, who was also a member of Ghana's football team at the 2004 Athens Olympic Games.



The success at Germany 2006 was built on a strong foundation of local talent developed through Ghana's clubs, Colts football, and youth national teams. It was a reflection of our own soil, our own system, and our own identity.



3.0

2010 WORLD CUP



Going into the 2010 FIFA World Cup, Ghana's most successful World Cup campaign, the core of the 2006 squad was retained, with a few promotions from the Ghana Under-20 team that won the FIFA U-20 World Cup in Egypt in 2009.



The new additions included Fatau Dauda, who had played for Okwahu United and Ashanti Gold; André Dede Ayew, who captained the Under-20 World Cup-winning squad; Dominic Adiyiah, who had played for Asante Kotoko; Prince Tagoe of Hearts of Oak; Emmanuel Agyemang-Badu, who had played for Berekum Arsenal and Asante Kotoko and had also featured for the Under-23 national team; Anthony Annan, who had played Colts football in Cape Coast before featuring for Sekondi Hasaacas and Hearts of Oak; Yusif Chibсах of Asante Kotoko; Samuel Inkoom of Asante Kotoko; Kwadwo Asamoah, who had played Colts football and later for Liberty Professionals; John Boye, who had played in the Ghana Premier League for Hearts of Lions; and Isaac Vorsah of Asante Kotoko, among others.



Even in 2014, the core of this group remained in the squad. But for all the negative issues that surrounded the team, all indications suggested that the Black Stars could have progressed further.





4.0

LINK TO THE SOIL



What was unique about these two generations of players, who also enjoyed significant success at the Africa Cup of Nations despite not winning the trophy, was that they all had a connection to the soil. They had either played in the Ghana Premier League (as most of them had) or progressed naturally from the youth national teams to the senior national team.

Although there were one or two foreign-born players in the squad, they did not constitute the core of the team.

5.0

CHANGES



What has changed since then is the unbridled desire to import foreign-born players into the national team, many of whom have no direct connection to Ghanaian football.

In the 2022 FIFA World Cup squad, for instance, apart from Thomas Partey, Mohammed Kudus, Daniel Afriyie Barnieh, the Ayew brothers, and Baba Rahman—who played for Dreams FC and Asante Kotoko—the core of the team consisted of foreign-born players.

The starting eleven for many of Ghana's matches included Lawrence Ati-Zigi; Tariq Lamptey, who had represented England at Under-21 level and only switched allegiance to Ghana after failing to earn a call-up to the England senior national team; Alexander Djiku, who was born in France and, until his debut in Ghana's 3-0 friendly defeat to Mali in October 2020, had virtually no connection with the country; Mohammed Salisu, who began his professional career with Real Valladolid and made his first appearance for Ghana only in November 2022; and Daniel Amartey, who was initially selected for Ghana's squad for the 2013 FIFA U-20 World Cup but did not participate after his club, Djurgården, retained him because the tournament coincided with the Swedish Allsvenskan season. He eventually made his senior debut for Ghana at the 2015 Africa Cup of Nations.

Also in the team was Iñaki Williams, who switched allegiance to Ghana after failing to secure a call-up to the Spanish senior national team.



6.0

DEVELOPING FROM WITHIN



This seems to be the crux of the issue, aside from other challenges such as technical, political, and economic factors. There is a lack of patriotism and urgency among some members of the team. There is little sense of loyalty or desire to make a name for themselves under the national flag.



It is about time Ghana reconsidered the importation of foreign-born players. It is time to go back to the basics by redeveloping Colts football and rebuilding confidence in locally developed players.



It is also time to emulate the Morocco and Senegal blueprint. While both countries also recruit foreign-born players, they have structured systems through which these players are integrated and assimilated into their national football culture.



To build a winning Black Stars team that truly reflects the aspirations of the Ghanaian people, we must invest in our own talent pipeline, strengthen our local leagues, and foster a deep sense of national pride and purpose. The future of Ghanaian football depends on it.



7.0

THE MOROCCO AND SENEGAL BLUEPRINT



Following a group-stage exit at the 1998 FIFA World Cup, failure to qualify for another World Cup until 2018, and missing three editions of the Africa Cup of Nations, the Royal Moroccan Football Federation embarked on a comprehensive football development strategy.

In 2009, with Moroccan football at a low point, King Mohammed VI established a football academy at a cost of €13 million to develop football at the national level. The academy provides both academic education and elite football training, complete with dedicated learning facilities and a state-of-the-art sports medicine department designed to produce future professionals. The academy has since become a major source of talent for Morocco's national teams and a key pillar of the country's success on the world stage.

Morocco also prioritised youth development through its clubs by requiring structured youth systems, invested in women's football, developed local coaching capacity, and created a seamless pathway from grassroots football to the national teams. Supported by consistent leadership, sustained investment, and professional planning, these reforms have transformed Morocco into a global football powerhouse across men's, women's, youth, and futsal competitions.



Similarly, Senegal's football success has been built on a structured development model that combines grassroots participation, elite youth academies, and strategic international partnerships. Academies such as Generation Foot, Diambars, and Dakar Sacré-Cœur provide quality coaching, education, medical support, and clear pathways into professional football.

The long-standing partnership between Generation Foot and FC Metz has accelerated player development and created opportunities for exposure to European football. Strong scouting networks and sustained investment in youth development have produced a continuous pipeline of talent, with nearly half of Senegal's 2025 AFCON squad graduating from local academies.

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The experiences of Morocco and Senegal demonstrate that long-term planning, investment in youth, strong institutions, and a clear development pathway are key to building a sustainable and competitive national team.



8.0

BENEFITS



There are clear benefits to adopting a model that prioritises players with a strong connection to the local football system for the national team. These benefits include tourism, international recognition, economic gains, and entertainment value, among others. In particular, the economic advantages are significant, as it channels resources into the local football economy and supports domestic sports development. This, in turn, creates a self-sustaining cycle, where reinvestment in local structures continuously produces quality players who eventually feed into the national team.



Every team that provides players for the FIFA World Cup receives financial benefits through FIFA programmes. For the 2026 FIFA World Cup, FIFA is paying clubs through the FIFA Club Benefits Programme approximately US\$5,000 per player per day, while clubs also received US\$2,362 per player for every qualifying match in which the player was named in the match-day squad. This means that if Ghana were to have between five and ten locally based players in its 26-man World Cup squad, substantial financial resources would flow directly into the domestic league to support local football development.



There is also the potential for transfer income for local clubs. The World Cup provides a global platform for local players to showcase their talents and secure lucrative transfers abroad. Consequently, their clubs receive transfer fees. Beyond the initial transfer, subsequent transfers throughout a player's career continue to generate solidarity and training compensation payments for the club that developed the player. In 2024 alone, football clubs worldwide received US\$125 million through FIFA's transfer-related redistribution mechanisms. In practical terms, if, for example, Benjamin Asare secures a transfer to Toulouse FC, as has been rumoured, Hearts of Oak would receive a transfer fee. Subsequently, every future transfer involving the player could generate additional solidarity payments for Hearts of Oak. This represents valuable revenue flowing back into Ghanaian football to support its development.



There is also the culture of giving back to local football. Many Ghanaian professional footballers actively support their former clubs and the broader domestic football ecosystem through football academies, club ownership, and community philanthropy. Players such as Asamoah Gyan, Michael Essien, Frank Acheampong, Thomas Partey, and Awudu Issaka have established football academies to promote youth development. Others have donated astroturf pitches, football equipment, buses, and other resources to clubs and communities, thereby contributing to the growth of football in Ghana.



Investing in our own players, clubs, and systems is not just a patriotic choice; it is a strategic investment in Ghana's football future. The benefits—on and off the pitch—are enormous, lasting, and generational.



9.0

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above, the following are recommended



1. Rebuild Colts Football as the Talent Engine:

Revive structured Colts (youth) football nationwide as the foundation of player development, linking schools, communities, and regional leagues into a clear pathway to the Black Stars.



2. Make Local Academies the Backbone of Development:

Formally support, license, and regulate football academies to ensure quality coaching, education, and welfare, while integrating them into the national football pipeline.



3. Prioritise “Made-in-Ghana” Players in Selection:

Introduce a deliberate policy that ensures meaningful inclusion of locally developed players in Black Stars squads to strengthen identity, cohesion, and long-term team stability.



4. Turn the National Team into a Domestic Investment Tool:

Deliberately link Black Stars participation to domestic league growth by maximising FIFA payouts, solidarity funds, and transfer revenues for reinvestment in local football.



The future of Ghana football lies in building from within, trusting our own, and creating systems that make excellence inevitable. When we invest in our soil, we harvest glory for our nation.





10.0

CONCLUSION



It is argued that the long-term success of the Ghana Black Stars is closely tied to the strength and integration of domestic football structures. Historical evidence from Ghana's 2006 and 2010 World Cup teams shows that squads built from locally developed players who progress through Colts football and the domestic league tend to exhibit stronger cohesion, identity, and competitive resilience. In contrast, increasing reliance on externally developed players risks weakening the connection between the national team and the local football ecosystem. Lessons from Morocco and Senegal underscore the importance of structured investment in grassroots development, academies, and clear player pathways to success.



Building a winning Black Stars team is not just about importing talent; it is about cultivating our own. By investing in our local football ecosystem today, we secure sustained success, national pride, and a brighter future for generations to come.

