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Corruption in African football by Kristian Carlsen

I want to help African football to develop, which also means that I would like to try to work against some of the game fixing and corruptions in African football. In that case, Africa football has some serious problems and setbacks that have to be solved before they can develop. The problem is that it doesn't look like anybody care about it. I took my stories to the Ghana Football Association (GFA) and ministers in Ghana, but they did not respond. Then I sent the story to CAF and FIFA, but they have neither done anything.

After working in Uganda three years ago and coaching top teams in Ghana for the last three months with great success, I have learned and experienced a lot about Ghana and African football. In that case I have already been publishing two articles in the Daily Graphic sport (April 9th and April 20th 2010 issues). I have also collected other articles about corruption in Ghana football. Some of these are attached to this email. All in all it seems like the football in Ghana is 100 % corrupt, and that it is the money that decides who will win the league and who will go to relegation. More, it seems like the Local Football Association (GFA) don't want or have the skills to do anything about it. One reason for this can be that the people working for the local Football Association in Ghana and many other African countries have their own clubs and players which they wish will succeed so they make more money. In regard we need to post some questions about the African football in general. Are these stories you will read here representative for most of the African countries? Why don't CAF and FIFA do anything about this? Are they part of it too? Or don't they like that African teams shall challenge the European and South-American teams? Is it possible to develop the African football and close the gap to the rest of the world if you do not stop the corruption? Can we trust that the World Cup in South Africa will be fair? I will follow up these questions later after telling you the true stories about Ghana football.

From my first day in Ghana people told me that the football here and in most of the African countries is corrupt at all levels. In the beginning it is a little hard for a foreign coach to believe that. However, I have felt it and seen it myself so I know it is true. There are in particular three situations that gave me a clear picture of the football here. My worst experience with Ghana football was in the Sunday (11th April) match between Tarkwa RTU and Seama Metro in first division. The headline is that I as a tourist and a football coach from Europe, wanted to help Ghana football for free, was threatened by my life and sent out of the stadium because I took a picture, and even though I had paid my ticket.

Among more teams, I have been coaching Seama Metro as a friendly guest the last two months. As a consequence of this I was travelling with them this Sunday to watch their game against Tarkwa RTU in Tarkwa. Since we arrived a little early, I went to a nearby restaurant relaxing while Metro did their first preparation for the game. I arrived at the stadium around 60 min prior to the game. Now I experienced the worst things I have ever seen. First the person at the gate stopped me and ask me very impolite were my ticket was. I responded that I am coaching Metro and I thought I did not have to pay a ticket since visiting teams normally have some free tickets. The guy there replayed harshly that I have to pay and told me to step aside. I tried to tell him again that I am a coach at Metro, but he did not listen and physically pushed me back from the gate. In the meantime one of the staff from Metro arrived and paid the ticket before I actually understood the whole situation. On my way inside I told the guy that I will report it to the GFA if they do something wrong. This comment made another RTU supporter or staff come into my face behaving very aggressively and screamed “*why do you come here and say bad things to us*”. I did not replay but just went inside and sat down on a bench with some staff from Metro.

Now I experienced more things I could not believe. First, the pitch was very bad and I don't think 1.division should play games on pitches like that. Second, there was no changing room for the Metro players. Third, the Metro players were not allowed to step inside the field to do their warm up. We could not do anything so we were just sitting on the bench while ours players tried to prepare for the game. A little later a lot of people inside was arguing and making a lot of noise. One of the supporters from RTU told me that they were arguing that they do not want the military to enter the stadium. I replayed that I think it is good that the military come inside, because then I will feel safer and I think they are unbribeable. Now the same guy turned totally crazy and aggressive and accused me for insulting him. Of experience I did not say anything

because I feared that he could attack me physically. He did not stop so some of the staff from Metro had to try to calm him down while I took cover further back.

Finally, 10 minutes before the game our players could enter the field. However, they could not do any warm up because there were around 50 RTU supporters on the pitch. All of them highly aggressive and they were pushing and threatening the Metro players. Again, I did not believe my eyes so I took a picture of it. I am also a tourist in Ghana and I wanted to have a proof of this so I could show it to my friends and family in Norway. If not they will never believe what happened here. Now one person ran towards me, with very aggressive behavior, and he screamed; *“put that away or I will kill you”*. He repeated *“do that again and I will kill you”*. He was supported by two other people with the same aggressive body language and verbal harassment. Again, my experiences told me to behave calm and not say anything, but just look at their body movements if they actually were going to hurt me physically. They continued talking bad to me and they told me to leave. I showed them that I have paid my ticket, but they just commanded me to leave. Again one of the staff from Metro had to support me and escort me out of the stadium. In this situation it felt a little strange that none of the 20-30 police officers standing around and nearby showed any interest in interfering. Later I know why they did not interfere.

Outside the stadium I met three other persons from the Metro management that also were denied to enter the stadium. After this experience I was a little worried for my safety, especially if Metro was going to win the game. Of this reason I asked a police officer if he could watch after me after the game if Metro did win. He did not respond to me at all. Therefore, I had to ask a military officer about the same, and he said *“no problem”*. The rest of the game, which was 35 minutes delayed, was as all of you understand a big mess with supporters entering the field during the whole game. It reached a top in the end of the first half when some supporters physically attacked the referee and pushed him into the ground. Moreover, the ball boys around the field were not kids as normal, but adults that were saying bad things to our players every time they had a set piece. After the game the Metro players and staff told me that this is Ghana. Is that true? All this is daily happenings here in Ghana and Africa? And you think that your football will develop when the whole thing is just about lies, cheating and bribing, and not about skills?



The picture that shows some of the controversy that happened in the game between Tarkwa RTU and Seama Metro in Ghana in April this year.

Sadly I have another bad experience about corruption in Ghana football. I have also been working as a football coach Sekondi Hasaacas, helping the premiership team and their academy. Six games before the end of the season Hasaacas was taking the last position in the league with big margin. However and according to the quality of their players, I still thought they had a chance to survive. In that case I gave some form the management a clear tactical and psychological strategy of how they could survive. I was still willing to do this for free, which I have been doing during my whole period in Ghana. The supporters, the coaches, the players, and many from the management wanted me to take over the team. However, the CEO did not want me since he got money from other Premiership clubs if he lost on purpose. And hiring an unbribeable European coach with this clear strategy might make them win, and therefore be bad business for him.

My last terrible experience was Sunday May 10th in the qualification game in Accra between Dwarfs and Meadeama. As normal I wanted to watch the game from “V.I.P” stand. This is due to the fact that this stand has shadow, it is safer, and I can meet agents, scouters and other people working with football in Africa. In regard I went to the entrance and tried to introduce myself and ask if I could enter this stand. My team played in the same division as these teams so I thought it should be small thing to let me inside or buy a ticket. At the gate the manager or staff did not want to talk to me at all and told me to leave. I told him that I am the coach for Seama Metro, and then he replayed harshly “*identify yourself*”. I said I did not have any identification, but that I could call somebody at the GFA to verify what I said. He continued with his impolite behaviour and told me to go back and do the call. I explained the situation to one of my contacts

in the GFA who told me to let him talk to the man at the gate. However, the manager at the gate did not want to talk to him. I tried to explain, but he just got angrier and pushed me away. I was still in the phone with the person from GFA when both the manager and the police screamed at me and told me to leave. The manager and police behaved more aggressive and physically pushed me away. I hang up the phone and try to tell them to calm down. Then one of the Military police there hit me with his baton and demanded me to leave. I left and everybody in Ghana knows that this kind of behaviour happened when there is a lot of game fixing involved.

There are more stories like when one premiership team stole all the cables from the TV Company so they could not show the game on TV. Now they could bribe the referee since he would not be judged by 1000s of people. I heard that stories like this happen in other African countries too. However, it seems like nobody is doing anything important even thou FIFA has to know that this is happening. In addition, we can imagine what the world will think about these cases if Africans teams do badly in the world cup. Would they not look for possible explanations? Could this corruption in African football be the main reason? On the other side, if African teams perform well in the world cup, will the rest of the world be sure that was a result of the skills and fair play after reading cases like these from African football? What will happen if an African team beat one of the favourites from European or South-American in the World Cup do to some controversy referring? Will they think that this is part of the possible corruption in CAF and FIFA, which so bad wish that the African teams will succeed this time? We all still remember that many people ask questions about the results of South Korea in the World cup 2002. More, what will the teams from other continents do with these stories in front of their games against African teams? Further, will these stories make some journalist start to dig a little deeper into the African football, and the work of CAF and FIFA? Perhaps they will find more politics, corruptions and drugs in the football industry than people dear thinking?

So far FIFA have not done anything about these and 1000s of other stories like this in Africa. I am also quite sure that more things are happening behind the scenes in the international football than people are award of. These stories are just the visible stories and represent only the top of the iceberg. In regard we have some serious problems with corruptions in football, and it can be proved first by the fact that GFA, CAF and FIFA do not work for Fair play since they do not solves cases like I have experienced. Second, according to human rationality, it seems strange that an organization is 100 % corrupt up to a certain level (here CAF), and then it is 100 % clean at the next level (FIFA).