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Corruption in African football by Kristian H. Carlsen

I wish that African football could develop, which also means that something needs to be done about the game fixing and corruptions in African football. There are some serious problems and setbacks that have to be solved before they can develop. The problem is that it looks like nobody care about it, and that everybody just accept it even they are tired of 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 months, I have learned and experienced a lot about Ghana and African football. I already published two articles in the Daily Graphic sport (April 9th and April 20th 2010 issues). I also collected other articles about corruption in Ghana football. 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 can 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? You can judge yourself after reading some true stories about Ghana football in this paper.

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 the coach for Metro was threatened by my life and banished from the stadium before the game started.

Among more teams, I have been coaching Seama Metro as a friendly guest the last months. This Sunday we were playing a game against Tarkwa RTU in Tarkwa. Since we arrived a little early, I went to a nearby restaurant relaxing while the players did their first preparation for the game. I arrived at the stadium around 60 min prior to the game. Now I experienced a lot of crazy things. It started with the guard at the gate who stopped me and asked me very impolite were my ticket was. I responded that I am the coach for Metro and I never use to pay a ticket to coach my team. 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 some of my contacts in 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 and just went inside.

Now I experienced more things I could not believe. First, the pitch was very bad and not close to the normal standard for top football in Ghana. 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 our 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 if the military should be allowed to enter the stadium or not. I replayed that I think it is good if the military were allowed to come inside because I think they are incorruptible. Now the same guy turned totally crazy and aggressive and accused me for insulting him. I did not reply because I feared that he could attack me physically. He did not stop until one of the staff from Metro tried to calm him down while I took cover further back.

Finally, 10 minutes before the game our players were allowed to enter the field. However, they could not do any warm up because there were around 50 RTU supporters on the pitch. These supporters behaved very aggressive and they were pushing and threatening the Metro players.

Again, I did not believe my eyes so I took a picture of it because I wanted to have a proof from this crazy game. Now one person ran towards me, with very aggressive behaviour and 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, I just stayed calm and did 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 also 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 officer 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, especial 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 asked 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 now 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 football.



A picture that shows some of the controversy that happened in the game between Tarkwa RTU and Seama Metro in Ghana in April 11th 2010.

Sadly I have more sad experiences 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 proposed a clear tactical and psychological strategy of how they could survive, and I could still do this for free. The supporters, the co-coaches, the players, and many from the management wanted me to take over as their head coach. However, the CEO did not want me to do that since he got money from other Premiership clubs if he lost on purpose. And hiring an incorruptible 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 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 a small thing to let me inside or buy a ticket. At the gate the manager did not want to talk to me and told me to leave. I told him that I am the coach for Seama Metro, and then he replayed harshly “*identify yourself*”. I replayed that I did not have any identification with me, but that I could call one of my contacts 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, and he said he could 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 police officers hit me with his baton and demanded me to leave. I left knowing that this kind of behaviour only happened when there is a lot of game fixing involved.

There are more crazy 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. Stories like this happen in other African countries too. However, it seems like nobody does care even thou FIFA know that this is happening. I am also quite sure that more things are happening behind the scenes in the international football than people are aware of. In regard, we have some serious problems with corruptions in football, and we also need to ask how much corruption that is taking place within FIFA.