

'LET US RALLY AROUND THE FLAG': FOOTBALL, NATION-BUILDING, AND PAN-  
AFRICANISM IN KWAME NKRUMAH'S GHANA

Author(s): Paul Darby

Source: *The Journal of African History*, 2013, Vol. 54, No. 2 (2013), pp. 221-246

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43305103>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of African History*

## ‘LET US RALLY AROUND THE FLAG’: FOOTBALL, NATION-BUILDING, AND PAN-AFRICANISM IN KWAME NKRUMAH’S GHANA\*

**Paul Darby**

University of Ulster

### **Abstract**

The nationalistic fervour that greeted Ghana’s performances in the 2010 football World Cup in South Africa powerfully evoked memories of an earlier period in the history of the Ghanaian state that witnessed Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana, draw on the game as a rallying point for nation-building and pan-African unity. This article uncovers this history by analysing Nkrumah’s overt politicisation of football in the late colonial and immediate postcolonial periods. This study not only makes a novel contribution to the growing historical and social scientific literature on what is arguably Africa’s most pervasive popular cultural form but also deepens our understanding of one of the continent’s most significant political figures.

### **Key Words**

Ghana, sports, nationalism, pan-Africanism.

Driving westwards along the Accra-Afflao highway from Sogakope in the Volta Region towards Accra almost two months after the conclusion of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, it was clear that Ghana remained intensely proud of her national football team’s exploits in reaching the quarter-finals of the tournament and narrowly missing out on becoming the first African nation to qualify for the semi-finals.<sup>1</sup> Roadside shack dwellings, corporate edifices, and advertising hoardings were festooned with iconography of the national team, the ‘Black Stars’, and prominent players, particularly Michael Essien, the team captain and one of Ghana’s most famous football exports. A range of prominent politicians eager to accrue the political capital that comes from association with a successful national sports team, were also featured in congratulatory football-related imagery. Three posters were particularly prominent. The first captured a photograph of the then Ghanaian president, John Atta Mills, holding the World Cup trophy below the slogan, ‘Let us rally around the flag and support the Black Stars’, words that were explicitly aimed at invoking a sense of unified national pride and identity. This echoed comments

---

\* I am grateful to the three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and constructive criticisms. Author’s email: p.darby@ulster.ac.uk

1 Asamoah Gyan missed a penalty in the last minute of extra time in their quarter-final against Uruguay that would have seen Ghana win the game. Ghana went on to lose the penalty shoot-out.

from Arthur Kobina Kennedy, former Director of Communications for the New Patriotic Party (NPP), following Ghana's first appearance at the World Cup finals in 2006, when he suggested that the Black Stars performances, 'gave us a glimpse of what we could be – all of us, regardless of faith or ethnic origin, united in common purpose of building a great nation'.<sup>2</sup> The other two posters highlighted that the symbolic importance of the Ghanaian team extended beyond narrow nationalism. With one bearing the slogan 'Bravo Black Stars, Heroes of Africa' and the other 'Ghana, Africa, One Love', it was clear that the success of the Ghanaian team was also being celebrated in terms of its contribution to a broader sense of pan-Africanism.<sup>3</sup> This infusing of a pan-African flavour in the Ghanaian team also manifested itself during the tournament in South Africa. When the host national team, nicknamed 'Bafana Bafana', exited the competition along with Africa's four other representatives, local fans and media dubbed the Black Stars, 'BaGhana, BaGhana' to signify broader African support.

The depiction of the national team in this manner powerfully evoked memories of an earlier period in the history of the Ghanaian state when Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana, drew on football to assist in the nation-building process and in the promotion of a pan-African consciousness. This article uncovers this history by analysing Nkrumah's overt politicisation of football in the late colonial and immediate postcolonial periods. It also assesses some of the unintended, contradictory consequences of this process, particularly the role that football played in helping to build powerful centrifugal forces in the Ghanaian polity that ran counter to Nkrumah's unitary vision. In doing so, it adds to the growing historical and social scientific literature on African football. Perhaps of more importance to the study of African history and politics, this article also enhances our understanding of Nkrumah by analysing the intersections between football and his wider political agenda and efforts to influence identity politics in Ghana, a theme that is barely mentioned in the broader historiography on Ghana's first president.<sup>4</sup>

In order to foreground its contribution to our understanding of football, politics, and society in colonial and postcolonial Ghana, the article begins by briefly locating this study within some of the broader academic literature on African sport, particularly football. Thereafter, the place of football in Nkrumah's Ghana is contextualised. This is done by charting the diffusion of the game from Britain to the Gold Coast, examining the extent to which it became entwined in broader ethno-regional chauvinisms in the 1940s and 1950s, highlighting the role of football as a bulwark of anti-colonial sentiment in the Gold Coast and elsewhere on the continent, and accounting for the broader political context within which these processes took place. This clears the ground for a detailed analysis of Nkrumah's promotion of football as a tool to overcome ethnic division, generate a unified sense of *Ghanaianness*, and promote his pan-African ideals. In order

2 Cited in O. Bonna, *Ghana, the Rediscovered Soccer Might: Watch Out World!* (Philadelphia, PA, 2006).

3 Field notes, 28 Aug. 2010.

4 See, for example, D. Birmingham, *Kwame Nkrumah: The Father of African Nationalism* (Athens, OH, 1998); H. L. Bretton, *The Rise and Fall of Kwame Nkrumah: A Study of Personal Rule in Africa* (London, 1967); J. Milne, *Kwame Nkrumah: The Conakry Years – His Life and Letters* (London, 1990); M. Sherwood, *Kwame Nkrumah: The Years Abroad, 1935–1947* (Accra-Legon, 1996); Y. Smertin, *Kwame Nkrumah* (New York, 1987); D. D. Rooney, *Kwame Nkrumah: The Political Kingdom in the Third World* (London, 1988).

to frame Nkrumah's overt politicisation of football, the article engages with important secondary literature on the political history of the Gold Coast and independent Ghana and the place of Nkrumah therein.

The empirical evidence detailed in this article is drawn mainly from archival materials sourced at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City and the offices of the Ghanaian Football Association (GFA) in Accra, the Confédération Africaine de Football (CAF) in Cairo, and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) in Zurich. These materials have been collated since the late 1990s across a number of projects. While collectively, these archives have allowed me to gather much of the empirical material found in this article, individually, their value proved to be mixed. Various records and minute books from FIFA and CAF allowed me to piece together a broader analysis of the place of Africa within the context of FIFA politics published in 2002.<sup>5</sup> However, holdings from these sources specifically on the history of Ghanaian football were slim. Negotiating access to archival materials at the headquarters of the GFA proved problematic although some useful secondary source material was made available. Somewhat ironically, the Schomburg Center in New York held the largest collection of materials on Ghanaian football accessed for this study. Indeed, the purpose of the visit to the Center was to obtain the report of a judicial review into corrupt practices in the migration of young Ghanaian football players in the 1990s that I was unable to secure during a number of visits to the GFA's offices in Accra. In order to compensate for these difficulties in sourcing evidence, the study also draws on observations and some oral history interview material gathered during ethnographic field work for a broader project exploring Ghanaian football labour migration.<sup>6</sup>

## GHANAIAN FOOTBALL, NKRUMAH, AND THE SCHOLARSHIP ON SPORT IN AFRICA

In his review of William Baker and James Mangan's ground-breaking collection on the social history of sport in Africa published in 1987, Kurt Jefferson noted that the contributors had begun the process of 'documentation, reflection and analysis' of sport across the continent and that the book ought to be read by 'those academics who have not yet recognised the social significance of sport, particularly for African studies'.<sup>7</sup> While this process of documenting, reflecting on, and analysing sport in Africa predated Baker and Mangan's contribution,<sup>8</sup> it has certainly gathered pace since and there have been a growing number of scholarly articles, books, and postgraduate theses on the socioeconomic, cultural, historical, and political significance of sport in African societies. These span academic

5 P. Darby, *Africa, Football and FIFA: Politics, Colonialism and Resistance* (London, 2002).

6 This project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (RES-000-22-2617).

7 W.J. Baker and J.A. Mangan (eds.), *Sport in Africa: Essays in Social History* (New York, 1987); K.W. Jefferson, 'Book review: *Sport in Africa: essays in social history*', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 27:4 (1989), 703.

8 See, for example, N.A. Scotch, 'Magic, sorcery, and football among urban Zulu: a case of reinterpretation under acculturation', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 5:1 (1961), 70-4; and R. Clignet and M. Stark, 'Modernisation and football in Cameroun', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 12:3 (1974), 409-21.

disciplines and various periods of African history. An acceptance of Kurt Jefferson's call to academics in African studies to recognise sport as an important field of social scientific and historical enquiry has greatly abetted the expansion of the literature in this field. The organisation of panels on sport and leisure at recent annual conferences of learned bodies such as the African Studies Association and the hosting of symposia and conferences dealing specifically with sports in Africa at prestigious universities and study centres is evidence of this acceptance. Perhaps of more significance, though, is the publication of papers on African sport in recent years in esteemed African studies journals such as *Africa Today*, *The Journal of African History*, *Africa*, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, *Politique Africaine*, *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, *African Studies*, *African Historical Studies*, and *Afrika Spectrum*. The increase in journals devoted to the historical and social scientific study of sport has provided the main avenue for the dissemination of high quality research on sports in Africa while the launch of *Impumelelo: The Interdisciplinary Electronic Journal of African Sports* in early 2005, represents the first outlet dedicated to publishing academic analyses in this field.

The status of football as the continent's most popular cultural pastime and its historical, social, political, and cultural significance for African societies has meant that the game has featured prominently in the academic discourse on sport in Africa. There are numerous journal publications dealing with African football and issues including but not limited to politics, colonialism, protest, migration, identities, fandom, media, gender, class, race, governance, globalisation, mega-events, and development. Full-length book treatments are much less abundant.<sup>9</sup> The geographic scope of the key academic studies has spanned the continent, but it was not until the publication of Peter Alegi's *Laduma!* that a research monograph focused on the development of the game in a single African country.<sup>10</sup> Unsurprisingly, the hosting of the World Cup on African soil for the first time in 2010 served as a stimulus for the further enrichment of the literature on the African game and there were a number of notable collections focusing on football in South Africa and legacies surrounding the 2010 World Cup.<sup>11</sup>

Some of the extant literature addresses the broad themes at the core of this article albeit in different contexts and to varying degrees. Laura Fair's, Hamad Ndee's, and Wiebe Boer's work on the politicisation of football in colonial Zanzibar, Tanzania, and

9 There have been a number of notable journalistic accounts of African football: see P. Auf der Heyde, *Has Anybody Got a Whistle?: A Football Reporter in Africa* (Manchester, 2002); S. Bloomfield, *Africa United: How Football Explains Africa* (Edinburgh, 2010); M. Broere and R. van der Drift, *Football Africa!* (Oxford, 1997); I. Hawkey, *Feet of the Chameleon: The Story of African Football* (London, 2009); F.M. Ricci, *Elephants, Lions and Eagles: A Journey Through African Football* (London, 2008); A. Versi, *Football in Africa* (London, 1986).

10 Darby, *Africa, Football and FIFA*; G. Armstrong, and R. Giulianotti, *Football in Africa: Conflict, Conciliation and Community* (Basingstoke, UK, 2004); P. Alegi, *African Soccerscapes: How a Continent Changed the World's Game* (Athens, OH, 2010); P. Alegi, *Laduma!: Soccer, Politics, and Society in South Africa, From its Origins to 2010* (Scottsville, South Africa, 2004).

11 P. Alegi and C. Bolsmann (eds.), *South Africa and the Global Game: Football, Apartheid and Beyond* (London, 2010); U. Pillay, R. Tomlinson, and O. Bass (eds.), *Development and Dreams: The Urban Legacy of the 2010 Football World Cup* (Cape Town, 2009).

Nigeria respectively is especially significant and their work is alluded to later in this article.<sup>12</sup> It should also be noted that a number of other studies have touched on some of the ways in which Nkrumah availed of the symbolic capital associated with football to contribute to his broader aspirations for Ghanaian and African unity.<sup>13</sup> However, these have been part of works with research questions that extended beyond Nkrumah's relationship with football and none have examined the contradictory political implications of his use of the game to strengthen Ghanaian national consciousness. Some of my own earlier work on the role of football in postcolonial Africa and on the history of Ghanaian football migration has also briefly examined Nkrumah's use of football.<sup>14</sup> However, this study is the first to place at the centre of its analysis the politicisation of football in Ghana, its overt use as a vehicle for nation-building, and its role in contributing to regional fragmentation in the late colonial period and the first decade after independence. The analyses here are informed by Bea Vidacs's assertion that 'studying sports can yield important insights about non-sporting aspects of African societies'.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, this article is as much a study about the construction of identity at regional, national, and continental levels, and the struggles of a powerful, authoritarian politician to control this process as it is about the history of football in colonial Gold Coast and independent Ghana. Before turning specifically to Nkrumah's relationship with football, some history of the game and its role in local identity politics in the Gold Coast is required.

## FOOTBALL'S DIFFUSION TO THE GOLD COAST

British sports forms were transported to the Gold Coast in the 1870s and were initially focused around Cape Coast, the administrative capital at the time. The establishment of Accra as the capital in 1877 facilitated the broader spread of a range of sports. Football was slow to emerge and for a time cricket was the most prominent sport for British settlers

12 L. Fair, 'Kickin' it: leisure, politics and football in colonial Zanzibar, 1900s–1950s', *Africa*, 67:2 (1997), 224–51; H. Ndee, 'Sport, culture and society from an African perspective: a study in historical revisionism', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 13:2 (1996), 192–202; W. Boer, 'Football, mobilization and protest: Nnamdi Azikiwe and the goodwill tours of World War II', *Lagos Historical Review*, 6 (2006), 39–61.

13 J. Rosbrook-Thompson and G. Armstrong, 'Fields and visions: the "African Personality" and Ghanaian soccer', *Du Bois Review*, 7:2 (2010), 293–314; K. S. Fridy and V. Brobbey, 'Win the match and vote for me: the politicisation of Ghana's Accra Hearts of Oak and Kumasi Asante Kotoko football clubs', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 47:1 (2009), 19–39. The former locates Nkrumah's use of football in the projection of the 'African Personality' within a broader analysis of the migration of young Ghanaian soccer talent and the management of the Ghanaian game in contemporary times. The latter touches briefly on Nkrumah's employment of domestic and international football competitions to promote an ideological agenda of national unity, patriotic consciousness, and pan-African solidarity in order to set the scene for a social history of the rivalry between Ghana's two most prominent clubs, Accra Hearts of Oak and Kumasi Asante Kotoko.

14 Darby, *Africa, Football and FIFA*; P. Darby, "'Go outside": the history, economics and geography of Ghanaian football labour migration', *African Historical Review*, 42:1 (2010), 19–41.

15 B. Vidacs, 'Through the prism of sports: why should Africanists study sports?', *Afrika Spectrum*, 41:3 (2006), 337.



and the African elite.<sup>16</sup> Organised football matches did begin to occur, albeit intermittently, as early as 1882,<sup>17</sup> and this laid the foundations for the growing popularisation of the game in the last decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> In the first decade of the twentieth century, football began to develop deeper roots. The first club in the colony, Cape Coast Excelsior, emerged in 1903 from the playing fields of the Government Boys School where the game had been introduced by the colonial educationalist, A. G. Fraser; the school's Jamaican-born headmaster, Mr Briton; and visiting British sailors. The then Governor Sir Frederic Hodgson responded to this development by making arrangements for Excelsior's first games against Europeans which saw them lose to a team of sailors before beating a select drawn from the British colonial civil service.<sup>19</sup> During the remainder of the decade, other clubs, with names that revealed a British influence such as Everton Energetics, Sports Swallows, and Bolton Wanderers were founded.<sup>20</sup>

While schoolmasters in a range of educational establishments that possessed a strong British ethos were important in football's popularisation in this period, the historian Ray Jenkins argued that the key proselytisers of the game may not have been British colonialists but rather Africans returning to the Gold Coast following educational sojourns in Britain.<sup>21</sup> The experiences of educated Africans on their return to the Gold Coast, particularly their exclusion from the higher reaches of the colonial administration from the turn of the twentieth century onwards, likely influenced their support for football. Indeed, not only did they view it as an enjoyable pastime but in the context of declining colonial influence in the Gold Coast colony, they also saw football as possessing counter-hegemonic potential. However, others from the business and intellectual elite as well as influential Euro-African elders felt that it was morally corrupting and interfered with the business of capital accumulation in what was a rapidly expanding trading metropolis.<sup>22</sup>

These attitudes did little to stunt the growth of the game and organised clubs continued to emerge. The most prominent, at least in the capital, was the Accra Invincibles, founded in 1910, which drew its recruits largely from the Jamestown area. The football landscape on the Gold Coast was significantly enriched a year later with the establishment of Accra Hearts of Oak, who remain one of Ghana's leading clubs. Comprised predominantly of players from neighbouring Ussher Town in Accra, the club quickly developed a strong rivalry with the Invincibles.<sup>23</sup> The emergence of this rivalry was perhaps the first indication of the extent to which football in the Gold Coast could generate oppositional identities. It is likely that the relationship between Hearts of Oak and Invincibles in this period reflected broader urban tensions between chiefs and residents from these two parts of the city as

16 P. Vasili, *The First Black Footballer—Arthur Wharton, 1865–1930: An Absence of Memory* (New York, 1998).

17 *Ibid.*

18 Hawkey, *Feet of the Chameleon*.

19 D. Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round: A Global History of Football* (London, 2006).

20 *Ibid.*

21 R. Jenkins, 'Salvation for the fittest? A West African sportsman in Britain in the age of the new imperialism', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 7:1 (1990), 23–60.

22 S. S. Quarcoopome, 'A history of urban development of Accra, 1877–1957', *Institute of African Studies Research Review*, 9:1–2 (1993), 20–32.

23 Fridy and Brobbey, 'Win the match'.

they struggled to position themselves socially, and politically, with the introduction of indirect rule in the Gold Coast colony.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the emergence and rapid popularisation of the pugilistic sport of *asafo atuwele* (group fighting) among the urban poor around the time that these two clubs formed was partially rooted in the fact that it facilitated the expression of competing community and political identities between residents of Jamestown and Ussher Town.<sup>25</sup>

The continued emergence of clubs in this period led to growing calls for the introduction of regular competition structures. The colonial administration responded by initiating a formal league in 1920. Two years later, the then Governor Sir Frederick Gordon Guggisberg donated a silver trophy, the Guggisberg Shield, for this competition and it quickly became the most sought after prize in local football.<sup>26</sup> Most of the teams that competed in this league were based along the coastal belt, particularly Accra and Cape Coast. However, by the late 1920s, the establishment of clubs such as Sekondi Eleven Wise gave the game a much more geographically diverse complexion. In the same period, football's appeal had begun to spread further north and, by the early 1930s, the game was well entrenched in the Asante region. This was largely a consequence of the establishment of The Rainbow Football Club in Kumasi in 1924, who were subsequently renamed Ashanti United in 1926 before finally assuming the now famous moniker Kumasi Asante Kotoko in 1935.<sup>27</sup>

The renaming of this club in 1926 and 1935 was not a mere cosmetic measure but rather reflected a broader political context in the region characterised by a revival of Ashanti pride and identity. Between 1896 and 1924, the British had held the Ashanti King Prempeh I and a number of other important chiefs in exile and had replaced them with other local rulers who helped to facilitate colonial interests. This process was initiated with British success in Anglo-Ashanti wars in 1896 and 1901 and cemented with the formal annexation of Ashanti in 1902. In 1926, the year of Kotoko's first name change to one that more adequately captured regional pride (Ashanti United), Prempeh I was reinstalled as King, albeit of Kumasi rather than Ashanti. In 1935, Prempeh II was returned to the Golden Stool of Ashanti by the British, a move that was symbolically important for the Ashanti people.<sup>28</sup> The adoption of the name, Kumasi Asante Kotoko in the same year can clearly be located within this broader revival of Asante nationalism. Indeed, the club quickly came to be viewed as representative of the Asante 'nation', a fact evidenced by the appointment of Asantehene Prempeh II as life patron in 1935 and the adoption of the porcupine (Kotoko), the symbol of the Asante army, as the team's nickname.<sup>29</sup> The close association of the club with the Asante region and people prompted deep rivalries with some of its southern counterparts, particularly Accra Hearts of Oak. The role of football in

24 J. S. Parker, 'Ga state and society in early colonial Accra, 1860s–1920s' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1995).

25 E. Akyeampong, 'Bukom and the social history of boxing in Accra: warfare and citizenship in precolonial Ga society', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 35:1 (2002), 39–60.

26 <http://www.fifa.com/classicfootball/clubs/club=2147481480/index.html> accessed 7 Jan. 2010.

27 W. Kwateng, *Asante Kotoko F. C.: Golden Jubilee, 1935–1985* (Kumasi, Ghana, 1985).

28 J. M. Allman, *The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana* (Madison, 1993).

29 K. Bediako, *The National Soccer League of Ghana: The Full Story, 1956–1995* (Accra, 1995).



contributing to broader senses of regional distinctiveness and competition in this period not only impacted how the game subsequently developed but also influenced its politicisation in the late colonial period and early years of independence.

## FOOTBALL AND REGIONALISM IN THE GOLD COAST

By the early 1940s, the growth and spread of football in the Gold Coast had led to the game's governance becoming fragmented with a number of bodies taking responsibility for football development in particular parts of the country. Richard Akwei, an Oxford educated Accra-based schoolmaster who became president of the Accra Football Association in 1943, grew increasingly concerned at a lack of unity and the transfer of wider regional tensions into the administration of the game. As a consequence, he began canvassing for the idea of a single governing body.<sup>30</sup> Despite his best efforts, a serious split in his Accra Association led to the emergence of two bodies, the Gold Coast Football Union based in Accra and led by Akwei, and the Gold Coast and Ashanti Football Union situated in Kumasi and controlled by John Darkwa, the first chairman of Asante Kotoko.<sup>31</sup> The relationship between these associations was often characterised by the sort of posturing and attempts to assert primacy that were evident in the broader ethno-regional politicking between the Asante and those from other ethnic groups from the capital. This was particularly evident during the planning for the Gold Coast football tour of Britain in 1951.

This football tour to Britain was one of five by the colonies of Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Trinidad, Uganda, and the Commonwealth region of the Caribbean during a ten-year period beginning in 1949. These tours were conceived by British diplomats as an opportunity to balance emerging nationalism in Africa and the Caribbean with a desire to ensure that any transition to self-rule would be managed in a manner that protected British economic interests. As Phil Vasili observed:

The agenda, all ways round, was as political as it was sporting: to instil in the mind of the African and Afro-Caribbean an attitude that was sympathetic to capitalism and western ideas; to illustrate how superior the British political and economic system was to the alternative (Eastern European) model on offer.<sup>32</sup>

Of course, the tour also provided an opportunity for representatives of the Gold Coast to demonstrate their readiness for self-government. It might reasonably have been anticipated that Nkrumah's victory and the success of his Convention People's Party (CPP) in the Gold Coast's first general election in 1951 and his desire to see the 'nation' unite around his election platform of 'freedom' would help to focus the minds of indigenous football administrators and allow them to overcome regional self-interest. When the idea of a tour was first mooted, it did appear to have the potential to ameliorate regional fissures and at a meeting in Kumasi in 1949, the Accra- and Kumasi-based associations came together to form the

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> K. Bediako, *Black Stars: The Long Road to Greatness: A Photographic Documentation of Ghana's Football History* (Tema, Ghana, 2010); Kwateng, *Asante Kotoko F. C.*

<sup>32</sup> P. Vasili, *Colouring Over the White Line: The History of Black Footballers in Britain* (Edinburgh, 2000), 73.

United Gold Coast Amateur Football Association (UGCAFA) with Darkwa appointed chairman and Akwei, the vice-chair. However, any hopes that this would bring about harmony in the governance of the game were short-lived and preparations quickly became mired in ethno-regional arguments. While the UGCAFA took care to ensure that an equal number of players were drawn from Accra and Kumasi (eight apiece), the decision to bring six officials and a relatively small squad of players (eighteen) led to the Kumasi Football Clubs Union, a body linked to the Ashanti Football Association, passing a resolution objecting to the composition of the touring party. The *Ashanti Times* was also critical of the funding arrangements for the tour, arguing that a government grant and loan constituted an abuse of public money. This tone contrasted sharply with generally supportive commentary found in the Accra-based *Daily Echo*.<sup>33</sup>

The decision of UGCAFA in 1954 to discontinue the Guggisberg Shield, the game's primary colonial competition, seemed to indicate that the association was at least capable of uniting around the shedding of British influence in the local game. However, football was unable to insulate itself from wider fragmentary currents. Following his election success in 1951, Nkrumah recognised that one of the key tasks of his CPP government was to create from the four, loosely connected territories of the Gold Coast a nation that would ultimately be ready for independence.<sup>34</sup> Early signs were generally positive although the 1954 electoral campaign did reveal an appetite for federalism in some quarters.<sup>35</sup> While Nkrumah secured a landslide victory in the 1954 election, he continued to warn against the dangers of pursuing regional, sectional, or religious interests rather than national ones and set out to overcome the forces of political fragmentation and eradicate what he referred to as 'this emerging evil in our national life'.<sup>36</sup> However, in the following two years, Gold Coast politics became riven with narrow self-interest and acute conflict between unitarists and federalists.<sup>37</sup>

The spark for this conflict was the handling of a dramatic upward spike in the price of cocoa, the Gold Coast's primary export, in 1954 by Nkrumah's government. The fixing of the price paid to farmers for a four-year period, ostensibly to protect them from price fluctuations and raise money for development projects, provoked a wave of resentment from farmers and businessmen. Much of this emanated from across Asante where half of the cocoa was grown and in the region's capital where a significant proportion of the private enterprise associated with the cocoa industry was conducted.<sup>38</sup> A coalition of disaffected interests rooted in a desire for Asante autonomy and federalism and disdain for Nkrumah's centralism quickly emerged, and this coalesced in the establishment of the National Liberation Movement (NLM) led by Dr Kofi Busia. The resultant two-year struggle for ascendancy between the CPP and the NLM, characterised as it was by

---

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> The Gold Coast at this time was divided into four disparate entities: a coastal colony, a conquered kingdom (Asante), a northern protectorate (Northern Territories), and a United Nations trust territory (Volta region).

<sup>35</sup> Birmingham, *Kwame Nkrumah*.

<sup>36</sup> Cited in *Ibid.* 51.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> M. Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (London, 2006).

militancy, bitterness, and political violence posed a serious if fleeting threat to Nkrumah's unitarist vision.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the CPP's election success in 1956 and what had become an inexorable march towards independence, regional fissures lingered. As had been the case in previous years, they filtered into football. This was particularly apparent in events surrounding an attempt to organise a national league in 1956. In a heady atmosphere of anti-colonial sentiment and anticipation of self-rule, it might have been expected that there would be unanimous support for the establishment of a league that would be completely controlled and run by Ghanaians. However, Richard Akwei's involvement in this initiative tempered enthusiasm for the league, especially among Asante-based clubs because it led to a perception that the league would be organised and structured in a way that favoured teams from Accra and the south. This view resonated with broader Asante discontent at what was considered a wider accretion of power in the capital.<sup>40</sup> In light of this sort of resentment and in the context of two years of fierce political division, it was not surprising that Kotoko as well as four other Kumasi-based teams – Cornerstone, Great Ashanti, Kumasi Dynamos, and Evergreens – decided to boycott the competition. When the UGCAFA suspended these clubs, they responded by persuading others to withdraw from the league leaving the inaugural competition with only two teams, Accra Hearts of Oak and Sekondi Eleven Wise.<sup>41</sup>

## FOOTBALL, THE POLITICS OF RESISTANCE, AND NKRUMAH

Given the troubled late colonial history of football and Nkrumah's belief that national unification and not some form of fragmented federation was the only way forward for an independent Ghana, it was perhaps somewhat incongruous that he identified in football the raw material with which to forge a unified national consciousness and pan-Africanism. Indeed, the fractured organisation of the game and the tendency for infighting between regional bodies appeared an anathema to Nkrumah's broader aspirations to rid Ghanaian political and social life of ethnic and regional divisions.<sup>42</sup> His belief in the value of the game in the articulation of the African personality may also be considered paradoxical given that football was ultimately an imported, European cultural form, one that had previously functioned as part of the imperial project in Africa and had been used to socialise African populations into accepting colonial social and political norms.<sup>43</sup>

39 J.M. Allman, 'The youngmen and the porcupine: class, nationalism and Asante's struggle for self-determination, 1954–57', *Journal of African History*, 31:2 (1990), 263–79.

40 For Asante federalists, this manifested itself in the political domain as evidenced in what was considered an inequitable allocation of seats in the Gold Coast's Legislative Assembly following the 1951 and 1954 elections. Allman, 'The youngmen and the porcupine'; R. Rathbone, 'Kwame Nkrumah and the chiefs: the fate of "natural rulers" under nationalist governments', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 10:1 (2000), 45–63.

41 Bediako, *National Soccer League*.

42 Birmingham, *Kwame Nkrumah*.

43 P. Darby, 'Football, colonial doctrine and indigenous resistance: mapping the political persona of FIFA's African constituency', *Culture, Sport, Society*, 3:1 (2000), 61–87.

Irrespective of these apparent contradictions, the broader politicisation of football across the continent resonated with Nkrumah and helped to convince him of the logic of using it to build popular support for his nationalist and pan-African aspirations. Not only did Nkrumah recognise that football had significant popular appeal in the Gold Coast, particularly among young, urban working-class men, but he also understood the fact that elsewhere on the continent the game had been gradually wrested from European control, Africanised, and had come to represent an important vehicle for local self-expression and popular resistance against colonial rule.<sup>44</sup> This process accelerated significantly in the post-war period and football became a focus for the articulation of anti-colonial sentiment and aspirations for independence. As Ossie Stuart has remarked, '... soccer at different times became an embodiment of the political aspirations of the African people'.<sup>45</sup>

Nkrumah, a close observer of political developments in neighbouring Nigeria, would have watched with particular interest, Nnamdi Azikiwe or 'Zik', as he was popularly known, become proactive in drawing on sports for the purposes of mobilising colonial resistance and building support for independent nationhood. As editor of the Accra-based *African Morning Post* between 1934 and 1936, Zik became aware of the value of sport in the growing resentment against colonial rule in Ghana. Indeed, his newspaper reported frequently on the sort of politicisation of *asafo atwele* that led to the British banning it in 1935.<sup>46</sup> Two years after his return to Nigeria in 1938, he formed Zik's Athletic Club (ZAC) in Lagos to use the appeal of sports to embody African self-organisation.<sup>47</sup> Football was central in this strategy. For example, between 1941 and 1942, the Lagos ZAC football club embarked on tours throughout Nigeria that provided Zik with opportunities to make speeches to his fellow Nigerians that challenged British colonial authority. Further tours, coupled with politically-infused portrayals of the game in the *West African Pilot*, the formation of the Nigerian Football Association in 1948, and a tour by a Nigerian select team to Britain in 1949 further embedded the notion of an independent Nigerian nation in the public consciousness some ten years prior to the formation of the Nigerian nation-state.<sup>48</sup>

Given the popularity of football in colonial Gold Coast and Nkrumah's place at the vanguard of political opposition to British rule, the game slowly became entwined with populist mobilisation and agitation for independence. By the time Nkrumah had arrived back in Ghana in 1947 to take up the position of general secretary with the United Gold Coast Convention, following his twelve-year university career in the United States and Britain, football was well on its way to being thoroughly Africanised, administratively and in terms of fandom and playing styles.<sup>49</sup> In keeping with the growing radicalism in the game elsewhere on the continent, Nkrumah sought to explicitly politicise football and

44 Darby, *Africa, Football and FIFA*; Alegi, *African Soccerscapes*; Ndee, 'Sport, culture and society'; Fair, 'Kickin' it'.

45 O. Stuart, 'The lions stir: football in African society', in S. Wagg (ed.), *Giving the Game Away: Football, Politics and Culture on Five Continents* (London, 1995), 34.

46 Akyeampong, 'Bukom and the social history of boxing'.

47 Boer, 'Football, mobilization and protest'.

48 Alegi, *African Soccerscapes*.

49 Bediako, *Black Stars*.

sport more generally. This was clear from his response to a visit to Accra by the noted British Olympian, Lord Burghley, in the late 1940s, which he interpreted as a subtle attempt on the part of the colonial administration to use sports to strengthen imperial bonds and divert the city's populace from their efforts to end colonial rule. His response, published in an editorial of an Accra-based newspaper, revealed that even at this time, he viewed sport as having considerable potential in contributing to Ghanaian nationhood;

We like sports, but we want self-government first so that we can be masters not servants in our own country. When we get self-government, you will be amazed at what we can put into the field at the next Olympic Games; and you will also be amazed at the stadiums that will glorify sporting activities in the new Ghana.<sup>50</sup>

These sentiments suggest that Nkrumah would have viewed the emergence of 'national' football teams in the Gold Coast and opportunities to participate in international competition as symbolically important in the broader context of his 'self government now' campaign. Thus, the organisation of football matches between representative teams from Accra and Nigeria in the late 1940s, the sanctioning of an inter-colonial competition between the Gold Coast and Nigeria for the Jalco Cup in 1951, and the inception of an annual match against Sierra Leone in 1953 provided opportunities to give vent to a fledgling sense of national identity.<sup>51</sup> As independence neared, Nkrumah sought to position himself more closely to a cultural form that he recognised could capture and mobilise the youth movement in the Gold Coast's urban centres, build populist approval for the political agenda of his Convention People's Party (CPP), and help solidify an embryonic nationalism. For example, in the lead up to the Gold Coast football tour of Britain in 1951, he attended some fundraising matches between local teams and even 'kicked-off' one match between Accra Hearts of Oak and Standfast.<sup>52</sup> When it became clear that independence was imminent, Nkrumah assumed much more direct responsibility for the management of football and this allowed him to project his vision for the game as a vehicle for generating the sort of emotional and cultural bonds that he believed were necessary for both the creation of a harmonious Ghanaian state and pan-African unity.

## FOOTBALL, NATION-BUILDING, AND PAN-AFRICANISM: NKROMAH'S VISION FOR THE GHANAIAN GAME

On Ghana's inauguration as an independent nation in March 1957, Nkrumah summed up the feeling that had underpinned the drive to break free from colonial rule; 'From now on there is a new African in the world. That new African is ready to fight his own battles and show that the black man is capable of managing his own affairs.'<sup>53</sup> Central to this 'new African' was the concept of pan-Africanism that for Nkrumah was to function as the bed-rock of liberation across the continent and the subsequent promotion of African interests

50 K. Nkrumah cited in C. L. R. James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (London, 1977), 118.

51 *Evening News* (Accra), 29 Jan. 1960; Alegi, *African Soccerscapes*.

52 Vasili, *Colouring Over the White Line*.

53 Cited in A. A. Mazrui and M. Tidy, *Nationalism and New States in Africa from about 1935 to the Present* (Nairobi, 1984), 40.



on the world stage.<sup>54</sup> If Ghana was to take the lead in this movement, his experiences at the head of the CPP government between 1951 and 1957 made him acutely aware of the need to build unity at home. While football had become embroiled in regional political chauvinisms, on achieving independence the government quickly identified the game as invaluable in building a sense of *Ghanaianness* that they felt would transcend all divisions.

The placing of the game centre stage in the country's independence celebrations in the first half of 1957 was a clear sign of Nkrumah's intention to use it for nationalistic purposes. As part of these celebrations, Accra Hearts of Oak invited the late Sir Stanley Matthews to play a series of exhibition games and, during his trip, the legendary English player was installed as *Soccerthene* (King of Soccer) by the Ghanaian authorities.<sup>55</sup> Thereafter, Nkrumah, aided by the Ministry of Education and Information that also had responsibility for sport, quickly set about forging a sound base for the game at both the international and domestic levels. The Ghanaian Amateur Football Association (GAFA) was established in 1957 to replace the UGCAFA, and at a meeting in Accra in September, Richard Akwei was replaced by Ohene Djan as chairman. Djan would go on to become an instrumental figure in implementing Nkrumah's ambitious plans for football and his first step was to establish a new eight-team national league.<sup>56</sup> In a move that revealed a shrewd understanding of the need to portray GAFA policymaking as motivated by the 'national' interest, the league was comprised of two teams from each of the four major municipalities of Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi, and Cape Coast.<sup>57</sup>

Beyond the local game, the GAFA played its part in registering Ghana's presence in the international community of sovereign nation-states by affiliating to the continental and world governing bodies for football, the Confédération Africaine de Football (CAF) and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) in 1957 and 1958, respectively.<sup>58</sup> These affiliations not only cleared Ghana's path to participate on the international football stage but also provided the platform for Nkrumah to use the newly formed national team to mobilise the youth of the country around a common identity and sense of pride. To this end, Ohene Djan immediately sought out international fixtures for the

54 Nkrumah had been heavily involved in the pan-African movement long before Ghana's independence. Whilst a student in England, he served as the joint organising secretary of the Fifth pan-African Congress held in Manchester in 1945 that did so much to revive pan-Africanism, intellectually and politically. Nkrumah subsequently served as general secretary for a working group on pan-Africanism that was established following the Manchester congress and chaired by W. E. B. Du Bois. Shortly before he was invited back to Ghana by the organisers of the United Gold Coast Convention, he had joined a group of fellow committed students in *The Circle* that was comprised of only the most ardent supporters of pan-Africanism. K. Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite* (London, 1963); A. J. Olaosebikan, 'Kwame Nkrumah and the proposed African common government', *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 5:5 (2011), 218–28.

55 Broere and van der Drift, *Football Africa!*, 83–5. In January 1957, Matthews had been gifted a symbolic stool of chieftainship of the Gold Coast from Accra Hearts of Oak. *West African Pilot* (Lagos), 18 Jan. 1957, 4.

56 Bediako, *National Soccer League*.

57 The teams were Hearts of Oak and Great Olympics from Accra, Asante Kotoko and Cornerstones from Kumasi, Hasaacas and Eleven Wise from Sekondi, and Mysterious Dwarks and Venomous Vipers from Cape Coast. *Ibid.* The national league was complimented by the Aspro Cup, the first nation-wide knock out competition that was inaugurated in the same season. Kwateng, *Asante Kotoko F. C.*

58 Versi, *Football in Africa*.



national team.<sup>59</sup> For example, in March 1958, Ghana took on an English FA select team at Independence Stadium in Accra. They also regularly competed against other newly independent African nations, playing annual fixtures against both Sierra Leone and Nigeria. When the latter secured independence in 1960, Nnamdi Azikiwe, by then the Nigerian head of state, donated the Azikiwe trophy for this annual series.

The significance of Ghana's participation in international football in the years immediately following independence extended beyond nationalism and there was a clear aspiration on the part of Nkrumah's government and the GAFA to have the team function as a representative of the whole continent. In a move replete with pan-African symbolism, the national team, under Nkrumah's direction, adopted the moniker, 'Black Stars', deliberately evoking the name of the shipping line established by Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican-born pan-Africanist, that aimed to facilitate travel and trade between the Americas and Africa, and became a symbol of black pride.<sup>60</sup> The significance of Nkrumah's use of the Black Stars to foster pan-African sentiment is articulated by Benjamin Koufie, a former player and assistant coach of the national team, who recently recounted that,

Kwame Nkrumah used football to reach the whole of the continent so he wanted to make sure that the Black Stars of Ghana were a shining example... Nkrumah was telling the whole world that there is a continent called Africa which could compete with any other continent in the game of football.<sup>61</sup>

Whilst the naming of the national team in this way was important symbolically, it was the organisation of the 'Kwame Nkrumah' Gold Cup in 1960 that perhaps did most to exemplify the Ghanaian head of state's intention to use football to promote his pan-African agenda. This tournament emerged out of the founding of the West African Soccer Federation in February 1959, a body that Nkrumah viewed as a potential vehicle for African unity. He attended the inaugural meeting and mooted the idea of an annual tournament that would involve all independent nations in the region. Once agreement was reached, he donated a thousand-guinea gold cup and a preliminary competition was organised in advance of a four-team tournament to be hosted in Ghana.

The pan-African complexion of this venture was evident even before it began. On the eve of the tournament featuring Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Portuguese Guinea, Tommy Thompson, a correspondent for the Accra-based daily, the *Evening News*, gave voice to the underlying principle of the competition; 'With the coming of tomorrow our prospects of uniting Africa through soccer ... gradually and steadily grow better. With the coming of ... this Gold Cup competition the dream of our illustrious Prime Minister will be a reality.'<sup>62</sup> The Chairman of the GAFA Supporters Union, Prince Yao Boateng, echoed these sentiments by calling for local fans to put aside parochial loyalties and

<sup>59</sup> F. Mahjoub, 'Power games', *African Soccer*, 50 (1999), 20–3.

<sup>60</sup> Hawkey, *Feet of the Chameleon*.

<sup>61</sup> Cited in 'Africa Kicks – Part One', BBC World Service, 8 Jan. 2009, <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/documentaries/2010/01/100108\\_africa\\_kicks\\_one.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/documentaries/2010/01/100108_africa_kicks_one.shtml)>, accessed 10 Jan. 2009.

<sup>62</sup> 'There is no choice left, our boys must win', *Evening News* (Accra), 30 Jan. 1960.

support 'all the visiting teams as brothers'.<sup>63</sup> Following Ghana's 6–2 victory over Sierra Leone in the final of the tournament at Accra's Independence Stadium on 7 February 1960, Nkrumah again underscored his commitment to use football as part of his pan-African aspirations; 'I selected and donated this cup not for its intrinsic value, but rather because it is symbolic of the sound foundation upon which we can build the unity of West Africa and of the great value I attach to the success of this movement.'<sup>64</sup>

While football was singled out for specific state support, given its wide popular appeal, Nkrumah was also convinced that sport in general possessed great value in building bonds of fraternal brotherhood across West Africa. For example, two weeks after the final of the Gold Cup, Nkrumah sent a message of support to a meeting of the cricket associations of Ghana, Gambia, and Sierra Leone that had been convened to discuss the possibility of establishing regular international cricket matches in the region. The tenor and substance of his comments made it clear that he saw other sports forms playing a role in his pan-African project; 'I cannot imagine a better means of preparing the way for unity than by Africans from all parts of the continent joining hands in an atmosphere of brotherhood in the arena of sports.'<sup>65</sup> Shortly afterwards, at the opening ceremony of the Kumasi Sports Stadium, Nkrumah provided his clearest policy statement on sport. His comments on the value of sport in engendering an emergent Ghanaian nationalism, promoting Ghana on the world stage, and encouraging African unity were particularly revealing and are therefore worth quoting at length:

The Convention People's Party and my government have always been eager to encourage sports amongst the youth of Ghana. Not only can sports contribute towards the development of our nation and improve the physical fitness of our men and women, but they can also play a great part in the development of unity and understanding between the regions of Ghana ... they have another and even more important role to play in present-day Africa. Through international competitions with other African States, sports can provide that necessary basis of mutual understanding which can so greatly assist the realisation of our ideal of unity in Africa. The youth of Africa, by meeting together in the field of sport in one another's countries, will learn what our elders were prevented from learning – that all Africans are brothers with a common destiny. When, therefore, progress towards the attainment of African unity is made at the political and economic level, one can hope that interchange of sports and cultural activities will have made its influence felt in the creation of a healthy atmosphere for African unity and independence.<sup>66</sup>

In order to facilitate these aspirations, the Central Organisation of Sports (COS) was established in July 1960 and Nkrumah's trusted confidant in sports matters, Ohene Djan, was appointed the country's first Director of Sports while Nkrumah himself was appointed patron of COS. The national football team remained a focal point for the government's strategy of using sports to generate an 'atmosphere for African unity' and Nkrumah increasingly cast it in an ambassadorial role. For example, he personally sanctioned the participation of the Black Stars in exhibition games as part of both Kenya's

63 'All eyes focused on Ghana', *Evening News* (Accra), 29 Jan. 1960.

64 *Evening News* (Accra), 8 Feb. 1960.

65 *Evening News* (Accra), 20 Feb. 1960.

66 Cited in S. Obeng, *Selected Speeches of Kwame Nkrumah*, Vol. 1 (Accra, 1997), 29–30.

and Zambia's independence celebrations and during General Joseph Désiré Mobutu's inauguration as president of the Congo in 1965.<sup>67</sup> In addition, following their victory in the 1962 African Cup of Nations, Ethiopia were invited to Ghana for a game that Djan suggested 'will help bring our two nations still closer in the great family of African brotherhood'.<sup>68</sup>

The GAFA also welcomed a number of prominent club and national teams from Europe and South America to Ghana to play friendly matches against local club teams, regional select sides, and the Black Stars. For example, Austria Vienna visited in 1958, Fortuna Düsseldorf embarked on a three-match tour in 1959, the English club Blackpool played the Black Stars in Accra in May 1960, Russia's Moscow Dynamo and Locomotiv Moscow travelled to Ghana in 1960 and 1961, respectively, and West Germany played a number of exhibition games in May 1962.<sup>69</sup> The Black Stars also played friendly fixtures beyond the confines of Africa. In 1960, they contested matches in the Soviet Union, defeating Dynamo Moscow XI in the process.<sup>70</sup> In 1962, they played in Germany, Austria, Russia, and England and, early the following year, they took on and drew with the then European champions, Real Madrid, before travelling on to Italy where they recorded a 5–2 victory against the Italian national side.<sup>71</sup> For Nkrumah, these matches against European teams were more than mere football contests and he felt that Ghana's creditable performances were useful not only for instilling national confidence at home but also as a means of challenging prejudices about Africans in Europe.<sup>72</sup>

While the Kwame Nkrumah Gold Cup, exhibition matches, and overseas tours were important, the biennial African Cup of Nations, inaugurated in 1957 by CAF, was to become a focal point for the state's support of football. Ghana acquired hosting rights for the 1963 tournament and conscious of the opportunities that this offered to showcase itself on the African and international stage, Nkrumah took a close interest in the Black Stars preparation and personally stressed to the players the importance of a favourable outcome for the host nation. Charles Kumi Gyamfi was personally appointed by Nkrumah to manage the team after being sent on a one-year coaching placement with the German club Fortuna Düsseldorf in 1960 to prepare for the role.<sup>73</sup> According to Gyamfi, the prime minister's promptings added increased motivation for the players;

He (Nkrumah) would come up and talk and advise us what to do ... it was not only kicking the ball as such but we were doing politics with it. Wherever we go and we were playing a game and

67 Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round*; H.D. Chipande, 'Introduction and development of competitive football in Zambia (1930–1969): a historical perspective', (unpublished MSc thesis, Norwegian School of Sports Sciences, 2009).

68 Cited in *The Ghanaian Times* (Accra), 13 Jan. 1962.

69 Bediako, *Black Stars*; *Evening News* (Accra), 16 May 1960; *The Ghanaian Times* (Accra), 3 May 1962.

70 M. Morozov, 'Red footballers: story of Russian tour of Mali, Guinea, Ghana', *West African Pilot* (Lagos), 9 Jan. 1962.

71 The Black Stars played 12 matches during the course of their 42-day tour, winning eight games, drawing one and losing three. K. Obeng, 'The sporting youth salute the party', *The Ghanaian Times* (Accra), 13 June 1964; Hawkey, *Feet of the Chameleon*; Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round*.

72 Versi, *Football in Africa*; Obeng, 'The sporting youth'.

73 *Evening News* (Accra), 28 Jan. 1960. The placement was arranged during Fortuna Düsseldorf's three-match tour of Ghana in 1959.

we were being beaten, you find your team-mates and you look at their faces and you say 'what are we doing. What are we going to tell Kwame Nkrumah?'<sup>74</sup>

Spurred on by their head of state's personal investment and interest in the tournament, Ghana secured their first continental crown, a feat that the *Ghanaian Times* observed, 'marks the fulfilment of Osagyefo's desire to see Ghana as a great sporting nation'.<sup>75</sup> The significance of the victory, though, extended beyond the purely sporting. The Black Stars first triumph in international competition did much to engender a strong sense of patriotism among the Ghanaian populace and further wedded football to Ghanaian nationhood. As Anver Versi observed in the aftermath of the tournament, 'their [the Ghanaian national team] picture, with the late Dr Kwame Nkrumah, first president of Ghana sitting in the middle, adorned almost every Ghanaian home'.<sup>76</sup>

Ghana's successes in inter-continental competition, coupled with its membership in FIFA, clearly whetted the appetite for drawing on international competition as part of the broader drive to promote the country and the whole African continent on the world stage. On the eve of Ghana's play-off match with Tunisia to determine who would join the United Arab Republic and Morocco as Africa's representatives at the 1964 Olympic football tournament, Willie Kwateng, then one of Ghana's leading sports journalists, captured this aspiration. He did so by framing the match less in terms of narrow national interest and more for its significance in allowing Africa to present a 'united front at the world sporting scene' as part of a 'relentless bid for world soccer recognition'.<sup>77</sup> This is not to say that national success was entirely subordinated to pan-Africanism. Indeed, Nkrumah, Djan, and the broader Ghanaian populace enthusiastically lauded Ghana's victory against Tunisia and their qualification for the Olympics as well as their subsequent performances in reaching the quarter-final.

These successes were most welcome. However, the government had loftier ambitions for the Black Stars and it increasingly recognised FIFA's World Cup competition as the platform towards which the national team should be aspiring. Indeed, in launching a three-year 'soccer development plan' in 1960, Kojo Botsio, then chairman of the GAFA and minister of foreign affairs, declared 'we are determined to be world soccer champions one day'.<sup>78</sup> Three years later, Botsio repeated this conviction, suggesting that the progress of African national teams was compelling their Latin American and European counterparts 'to acknowledge the fact that the glory of African soccer is glittering the horizon'.<sup>79</sup> In order to fulfil their aspirations on the world stage, Ghana and other African national teams required access to the World Cup tournament. Up until this point though, FIFA was an organisation characterised by a deeply embedded Eurocentrism, evidenced not least in the allocation of places for the 16 team finals which were dominated by

74 Cited in 'Africa kicks'.

75 '13 meet Kwame Nkrumah with cup', *The Ghanaian Times* (Accra), 3 Dec. 1963. Nkrumah was often referred to as 'Osagyefo,' which translated as 'victor in war', but was more loosely taken to mean 'the redeemer'.

76 Versi, *Football in Africa*, 75.

77 W. Kwateng, 'Africa's glory matters most in Tokyo', *The Ghanaian Times* (Accra), 19 June 1964.

78 *Evening News* (Accra), 4 Apr. 1960.

79 Cited in *The Ghanaian Times* (Accra), 25 Nov. 1963.

European nations. Despite the rapid growth in FIFA's African constituency during the early 1960s, the continent did not have an automatic qualification berth at the competition. Instead, after winning the African qualifying tournament, the continent's best team was required to participate in a play-off game against the best Asian team in order to make it through to the finals.<sup>80</sup> Under such circumstances, opportunities for African nations to play on the game's premier international stage and accrue the visibility and prestige that this would furnish were extremely limited.

In keeping with his cherished pan-African principles, Nkrumah advocated a continent-wide response that involved boycotting the qualifying rounds for the 1966 tournament. This idea quickly gained approval from CAF and at its executive committee meeting in Cairo in July 1964, a resolution was passed in opposition to Africa's 'outrageously unfair' allocation of places for the World Cup and a boycott aimed at making the competition 'a real world manifestation far from any exclusivism' was announced.<sup>81</sup> Djan, who had been appointed to FIFA's Executive Committee for a two-year term in 1964, was instrumental in working out the finer details of the boycott strategy.<sup>82</sup> He articulated the rationale behind this move by invoking Nkrumah's philosophy around the place of Africans in the post-colonial world; 'We are not asking this as beggars. We are putting forward just and moderate demands, taking account of the huge progress made in our football.'<sup>83</sup>

Despite the African nations being joined by the majority of those from the Asian Football Confederation, FIFA responded by fining the boycotting football associations. CAF officials clamoured to publicly criticise FIFA's position. For example, Mourad Fahmy, CAF's general secretary, wrote to his counterpart in FIFA decrying what he called the 'absurd' allocation of one guaranteed berth for the World Cup finals to three continents comprising almost half of the world's national football associations.<sup>84</sup> CAF's president, Ydnekatchew Tessema, added to the criticism by arguing that 'FIFA has adopted a relentless attitude against the African Associations.'<sup>85</sup> The pan-African tenor of the response to the boycott vindicated Nkrumah's view that acting in unison, African nations were stronger politically. Indeed, their unity contributed significantly to FIFA's decision, taken at its 1966 Congress to grant the continent its own qualifying berth for the 1970 World Cup.<sup>86</sup> Although qualifying from what was likely to be an intensely competitive African pool remained a stern challenge, Nkrumah's aspirations of seeing the Black Stars one day take their place on the game's most prestigious international stage had at least become more achievable.

Were Ghana to qualify for the 1970 tournament, the capacity of Nkrumah to maximise the symbolic capital that would come with this was of course depended on him remaining Ghana's head of state. To ensure this, he clearly had to seek ways of shoring up his

80 Darby, 'Football, colonial doctrine'.

81 Fédération Internationale de Football Association Archives, Zurich (FIFA) Confédération Africaine de Football (CAF), *Circular Letter to FIFA From the CAF Executive Committee*, 21 Aug. 1964.

82 FIFA 'Minutes of the XXXIVth Ordinary Congress', Tokyo, 8 Oct. 1964.

83 Cited in M. Katimia, 'The fight for recognition', *African Soccer*, 35 (1998), 52.

84 Personal Communication to Dr Helmut Kaiser from Mourad Fahmy, 16 Aug. 1965.

85 *Ibid.*

86 FIFA, Minutes of the XXXVth Ordinary Congress, London, 8 July 1966.



popularity, on the one hand, and tackling political fragmentation, on the other. Nkrumah was clearly able to wring significant political capital from football. However, as cracks in his personal and political persona widened during the 1960s, he was unable to control the extent to which opponents at home were able to draw on the game to support their own agendas. Ironically, the use of football as part of a broader anti-government stance was most explicit in response to what was perhaps Nkrumah's most deliberate use of the game to garner support for his unitary vision.

## FOOTBALL, ANTI-NKRUMAHIST DISSENT, AND THE POLITICS OF FRAGMENTATION

In the six years preceding independence, Nkrumah had successfully negotiated a path from self-government within a colonial framework to an independent Ghanaian state, one that was welcomed by the majority of the populace. Nonetheless, despite the euphoria that greeted freedom, the politics of fragmentation that had become particularly marked between 1954 and 1956, lingered just below the surface of the Ghanaian polity. The defeat of the NLM in the 1956 election may well have put an end to organised, coordinated opposition to Nkrumah but resentment remained among the Asante aristocracy and across the region more broadly.<sup>87</sup> In this context, Nkrumah and Djan would have been conscious of the fact that football had the potential to widen or, at least, reflect ethno-regional schisms and they sought to use the game within Ghana to transcend such divisions. As noted earlier, measures were put in place to ensure that the domestic league would encourage a shared sense of Ghanaianess rather than parochial ethnic or regional loyalties. Nkrumah's most significant effort in this regard was his establishment of the Real Republikans Sporting Club in March 1961.<sup>88</sup>

This club, based in Accra, encompassed a breadth of sports, including cricket, athletics, boxing, hockey, volleyball, and, of course, football. Its aims were in keeping with Nkrumah's broader policy of using sport to build internal unity and promote pan-Africanism and 'the new spirit of the African man'.<sup>89</sup> Unsurprisingly, Nkrumah closely associated himself with the football wing. Indeed, as well as being dubbed the 'mother' club of Ghana, from the 1962–3 season onwards, Real Republikans became known as 'Osagyefo's Own Club' with the letters OOC emblazoned on their playing kit and tracksuits.<sup>90</sup> In a move intended to encourage Ghanaians from across the country to identify with Real Republikans, the club's recruitment strategy involved the government selecting two players from each team in the national league.<sup>91</sup> The team, coached by C. K. Gyamfi, was entered into the national championship initially only on a non-points scoring basis. Many of the Republikans players subsequently formed the nucleus of the Black Stars squads that lifted African Cup of Nations' crowns in 1963 and 1965.

87 Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*; Birmingham, *Kwame Nkrumah*.

88 The club celebrated its one-year anniversary in March 1962, an occasion that was marked by Nkrumah gifting six live sheep to the club's assistant manager B. B. Bismarck. *The Ghanaian Times* (Accra), 8 Mar. 1962.

89 E. Quansah, 'The fall of a soccer empire', *West Africa: Special Edition* (March 1990), 36.

90 Bediako, *National Soccer League*.

91 Interview with former Real Republikans player, Cecil Jones Attuquayefo, Accra, 20 Jan. 2009.



Cecil Jones Attuquayefio, who was recruited to the Republikans in the early 1960s, provides a concise and insightful overview of the rationale behind the establishment of the club and its significance for Nkrumah's efforts to build a united, proud, viable nation-state:

those were the days when Nkrumah was doing a lot for Africa. He wanted to use football to foster peace and harmony and use it as a stepping stone to become a national figure. He had a lot of interest in football. He was a football man through and through and had a lot of ideas about football development ... the idea was that we could keep the national players in one team and at the same time they had the opportunity to play for the 'Black Stars'.<sup>92</sup>

The inception of Republikans then was rooted in a concern to help develop a cohesive, successful Black Stars squad and, hence, contribute to the national interest and a unitary vision that *all* Ghanaians might embrace. Ultimately, though, the extent to which the populace would commit to this vision was always shaped by the popularity of Nkrumah and the success or otherwise of his programme for government. Despite considerable early progress and popularity, opponents grew vocal at the emergence of a 'cult of personality' that began to evolve around Nkrumah. Others complained about corruption and cronyism at the highest political levels. The establishment of the Republic in 1960 that gave Nkrumah the power to rule by decree and his relentless pursuit of critics and opponents through the Preventive Detention Act of 1958, raised concerns about the general slippage towards an authoritarian state. A sharp dip in the world price for cocoa in 1961 brought economic difficulty and the imposition of high levels of taxation by the government engendered much resentment. Those who organised widespread strikes against the resultant decline in living standards were swiftly imprisoned, further revealing growing authoritarian inclinations.<sup>93</sup> While Nkrumah argued that all of this was necessary in the interests of the Republic, there was no shortage of public, political dissent, particularly in Asante, the traditional heartland of anti-Nkrumahism.<sup>94</sup>

Despite his intentions for Real Republikans to function as a symbol of unity, the club's strategy for recruiting players increasingly became a target of the broader groundswell of criticism that led to the end of Nkrumah's presidency in 1966. While it is difficult to determine with certainty whether the bitter disputes that followed the Republikans played a direct role in Nkrumah's downfall, it is clear that his use of football had unanticipated, contradictory political implications that proved counter-productive to his vision for Ghana and his capacity to hold on to power. Within one year of the establishment of Republikans, those clubs that lost their key players as part of the government-controlled selection process began to speak out, arguing that the whole concept was illustrative of Nkrumah's broader centrist, autocratic tendencies. A dispute over the Republikans' attempts to recruit Modibo Toe from the Sekondi-based club Hasaacas for the 1962–3 season is instructive in this regard. Toe, born in Liberia but raised in Ghana, was widely recognised as the most talented player in the western region and his performances for Hasaacas quickly brought him to the attention of the Republikans. When Djan made it clear that he intended to sanction Toe's transfer, Hasaacas announced an indefinite

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Meredith, *The State of Africa*.

<sup>94</sup> Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*.

suspension for their player and threatened to withdraw from the national league. Djan's response, undoubtedly approved by Nkrumah, was ruthless, dismissing Hasaacas from the league, annulling Toe's 'suspension', and 'in the national interest', transferring him to Real Republikans where he played for two seasons.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, the decision to gift Hassacas's place in the top league to the Sekondi-based second division team Independence, which was run by Ambrose Yankey, one of Nkrumah's closest political aides, was reflective of an increasingly entrenched culture of cronyism within the government.<sup>96</sup>

The acrimony that developed in the local game as a consequence of these sorts of exchanges and disputes reflected broader regional, political divisions as opponents of Nkrumah imbued them with wider political significance. It was no surprise that Asante Kotoko was among the most vociferous critics of the Republikans' approach to player recruitment and, indeed, the CPP's control of football, more generally. As noted earlier, Kotoko had long functioned as the club of the Asante 'nation' and had come to be considered as representative of the interests of the Asante people in independent Ghana. This growing politicisation of Kotoko was augmented by the fact that Dr J. B. Danquah, who helped establish and lead the NLM and who remained a vocal critic of the government, was closely aligned with the club in the period immediately prior to and following independence.<sup>97</sup> In this context, the relationship between the state-controlled GAFA and Kotoko was often prickly. For example, in May 1960, it was alleged in the *Evening News* that a Kumasi-based official had hired 'ruffians' from the city in an attempt to disrupt GAFA's annual general meeting and depose Djan from his position at the helm of football.<sup>98</sup>

With the establishment of the Republikans, Kotoko's relationship with the GAFA rapidly deteriorated. A recruitment strategy that effectively forced the Kumasi giants to transfer its two best players each season to its closest rival was viewed not only as a threat to their football pedigree but also as a challenge to the place of the Asante people in the emerging nation-state. Thus, just prior to the commencement of the 1962 season, Kotoko threatened to boycott the national league in protest. The GAFA responded by suspending them from playing home fixtures for the first half of the season, a move that further reinforced a perception that the game had become an adjunct to Nkrumah's authoritarianism.<sup>99</sup> Tensions persisted for the remainder of Nkrumah's reign largely because Kotoko officials perceived the GAFA and Djan's Central Organisation of Sports to be acting in the interests of the Republikans and seeking to blunt the sporting threat posed by their Kumasi rivals and, hence, the extent to which the team could serve as a rallying point for the Asante people. There was some justification in this perception.

---

95 Bediako, *National Soccer League*.

96 *Ibid.* Yankey went on to head Ghana's Special Intelligence Unit, founded in 1963 to monitor anti-government dissent.

97 Fridy and Brobbey, 'Win the match'. Interview with C. J. Attuquayefio.

98 Nkrumah himself was moved to publicly criticise those who led the attempted 'coup'. 'Stop this rowdyism and hooliganism. It does not pay', *Evening News* (Accra), 20 May 1960.

99 Bediako, *National Soccer League*.

In 1963, for example, Kotoko's star player, Wilberforce Mfum, was suspended by COS for six months and the club fined fifty guineas for an incident during a game against Real Republikans where Mfum allegedly 'frequently challenged' the referees decision. The fact that Mfum only received a caution during the game, suggests that the suspension and fine was disproportionate.<sup>100</sup>

There were some efforts to develop a more conciliatory relationship between both clubs but even these became mired in simmering tensions. For example, in July 1963, chief patron of Kotoko, B.K. Edusei donated an 800 guineas cup for an annual 'African Unity Cup' match between Republikans and their Kumasi rivals. Despite its mollifying intent, the match was postponed until concerns raised by Kotoko over their share of the gate proceeds were resolved.<sup>101</sup> At the start of the 1963–4 season, Kotoko were again aggrieved at what they considered a league fixture list that offered Republikans a more favourable set of matches in the second half of the season. The view of club chairman at the time, Nana Darko Kuffour, was that this 'violated accepted league conventions' and that it had the 'singular motive of placing the ... strong opponents of Republikans, at a disadvantageous position'. Under such circumstances, Kotoko again threatened to boycott the national league.<sup>102</sup>

The fractious relationship between the country's two biggest clubs clearly undermined Nkrumah's desire to see domestic football contribute to his unitary vision. As noted earlier, he was more successful in employing the national team for this end and in promoting his pan-African agenda. He viewed the African Cup of Nations as a particularly invaluable vehicle for developing cross-continent sporting exchanges that would contribute to the pan-African project and he soon looked to the potential that the club game offered in this regard. In 1963, Nkrumah was proactive in discussions around the possibility of establishing a continent-wide competition between Africa's most prominent club teams. This aim was realised at CAF's sixth annual congress in Accra in November 1963. At a reception for the CAF delegates at Flagstaff House, the official presidential residence, Nkrumah presented General Abdel Mustapha, president of CAF, with a 205 guinea trophy for the first edition of the African Cup of Champions Clubs, the final of which was to be staged in Accra in 1964.<sup>103</sup> In outlining the rationale for involving himself in this venture, Nkrumah again spelt out his views on the relationship between football and the broader pan-African agenda:

It is encouraging to note that with progress towards the attainment of African unity at the political and economic levels, the interchange of sports and cultural activities is making its influence felt in the creation of a healthy atmosphere for African unity and total independence. It is for this reason that I, as a citizen of Africa, have donated the Osagyefo trophy for the annual African clubs' championship to help consolidate the foundation of a continental movement to bring all Africa together in the field of sports.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>100</sup> *The Ghanaian Times* (Accra), 11 Jan. 1963.

<sup>101</sup> Kwateng, *Asante Kotoko F. C.*

<sup>102</sup> *The Ghanaian Times* (Accra), 3 Oct. 1963.

<sup>103</sup> *The Ghanaian Times* (Accra), 25 Nov. 1963.

<sup>104</sup> Cited in Versi, *Football in Africa*, 33.

For the remainder of his presidency, Nkrumah's commitment to his cherished pan-African philosophies and his belief in the power of sport to contribute to their fruition continued to manifest itself in Ghana's sporting life. It was no coincidence that the second match in a two-game series against Congo-Brazzaville in Accra in October 1965 was timed to coincide with a summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in the city, thus allowing most African heads of state to attend the game.<sup>105</sup> Locally, Nkrumah's CPP continued to invest significantly in both 'constructive mass participation' and high performance across a range of sports.<sup>106</sup> The latter approach brought Ghana further success in the international arena as evidenced in the Black Stars retention of its African Cup of Nations crown in 1965. The response to this victory appeared to indicate that Nkrumah's political ambitions for football were still being realised. For example, shortly after the tournament, Kwaw Ampah, national secretary of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), used the *Ghanaian Times* to argue that the Black Stars had helped challenge lingering prejudice against Africans around the world and, in so doing, had gone some way to 'expunge the contempt that history had poured on the African'.<sup>107</sup>

Despite investment in grassroots sport, the continued success of the Black Stars, and the rousing nationalist rhetoric that accompanied their feats, by the close of 1965, Nkrumah's popularity was at its lowest ebb. A number of major economic misjudgements, a 60 per cent drop in the global price in cocoa, dwindling support for African unity across the continent, and a rapid decline into outright authoritarian rule precipitated by the establishment of a one-party system in 1964, combined to generate unprecedented levels of public dissatisfaction and political opposition.<sup>108</sup> As this article has revealed, this disaffection with Nkrumahism had seeped into football in ways that reflected long-standing divisions in the country. It is distinctly possible that this contributed to the president's diminishing reputation at the level of civic society in Ghana. Ultimately, however, it was other forces that heralded his unseemly demise. On 24 February 1966, just a matter of months following the Black Stars' successful defence of their African title and with Nkrumah out of the country on a state visit to North Vietnam and China, the Ghanaian military and police, led by Lieutenant General Joseph A. Ankrah, seized power. Thus, Nkrumah's reign was brought to an abrupt end and with it, his employment of football to promote nation-building and pan-Africanism.<sup>109</sup>

Following the *coup d'état*, a long period of economic difficulty, political instability, and civil unrest ensued. These conditions not only constrained Ghana's broader development but also proved to be counter-productive to building on the infrastructure that Nkrumah, COS, and the GAFA had established around football. While the close association between the game and Nkrumah's leadership and political philosophies did much to energise the sport, by 1966, all levels of football had become utterly reliant on

105 J. Aggrey, 'Visitors ready', *The Ghanaian Times* (Accra), 24 Oct. 1965. The match was dubbed the 'OAU Match' in the Ghanaian press.

106 Obeng, 'The sporting youth'.

107 *The Ghanaian Times* (Accra), 30 Nov. 1965.

108 Meredith, *The State of Africa*; F. Agbodeka, *An Economic History of Ghana from the Earliest Times* (Accra, 1992).

109 F. K. Buah, *A History of Ghana* (London, 1980).

state support. This left it vulnerable to Ghana's growing economic difficulties and an increasingly unstable political environment. The game ultimately paid a heavy price. On assuming power, General Ankrah's military government recognised that it could not be seen to be supporting acolytes of or institutions heavily backed by Nkrumah.<sup>110</sup> Thus, some of Nkrumah's highest profile football related initiatives were quickly reversed by the new military regime. By the end of 1966, Djan had lost his job at COS; C. K. Gyamfi was replaced as head coach of the Black Stars; Sekondi Independence, the team run by Nkrumah's close political ally, Ambrose Yankey, had been dissolved; and the Real Republikans were disbanded. The new domestic season was also delayed for a number of months and, by its conclusion, three teams – Kotoko, Great Ashanti, and Cornerstones – had withdrawn due to financial difficulties.<sup>111</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The wider historiography on Nkrumah has said much about his political career and his struggles to assert influence and power at multiple scales very often in the face of ethno-regional dissent. However, Nkrumah's efforts to employ one of the continent's most pervasive popular cultural forms as part of a focused effort to galvanise national identity has received relatively scant coverage, at least in mainstream African studies circles. This is not to say that the place of football in Nkrumah's vision for Ghana and, indeed, Africa has been completely neglected in academic discourse. As outlined earlier, there have been some analyses of the relationship between the game and Nkrumahism. However, this is the first study to place football centre stage in Nkrumah's drive to generate national unity, patriotic consciousness, and pan-African solidarity, and to analyse the ways in which the game fed into the often fractured and unpredictable response to this agenda.

As this article reveals, the significance of football in the lead-up to Ghanaian independence extended beyond the merely sporting. During the late colonial period, the game had become an important social, cultural, and political resource that the colonial administration, local politicians, nationalists, chiefs, the Asante royalty, and the urban populace drew on for various ends. Although football had become subject to ethnic and regional tensions from the 1940s onwards, Nkrumah recognised its potential as a locus for developing a unified national consciousness as independence loomed. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, he began to test the value of the game in this regard and his earliest statements on sport were infused with a deeply politicised rhetoric. Responding to the emergence of the NLM in 1954 and the subsequent intensification of ethno-regional opposition may well have consumed much of Nkrumah's political energies but it did not dampen his belief in the power of football to overcome division and build a unified Ghanaian state. The establishment of the GAFA and COS, the inception of a new national league, membership in both FIFA and CAF, government support for the Black Stars, the facilitating of continental competition, and the founding of the Real Republikans amounted to a highly effective machinery not only for developing football, but also for fostering nation-building and

<sup>110</sup> Interview with C. J. Attuquayefio.

<sup>111</sup> Kwateng, *Asante Kotoko F. C.*



pan-Africanism. Nkrumah's positioning at the heart of all of these initiatives attests to the strength of his resolve to employ football for these ends.

This is not to say that the politicisation of football in support of the fledgling Ghanaian state was without risk or was an uncontested process. As was the case elsewhere in the world, the game in Ghana was capable of arousing powerful, contradictory emotions that not only had the capacity to connect individuals to large-scale entities such as the nation but also allowed them to give vent to much more localised expressions of identity. As the last section of this article demonstrated, during the 1960s, football became implicated in the broader tensions between an authoritarian, unitary vision for Ghana and an assertive federalist political discourse. This article does not suggest that resentment against the Real Republikans or Nkrumah's co-opting of the game for his own ends contributed directly to his downfall. That said, it is perfectly plausible to suggest that his overt politicisation of football, while initially useful in helping to build popular support for his vision, gradually came to be seen by his opponents as a further illustration of his autocratic, centrist inclinations.

Nkrumah may well have been misguided and perhaps arrogant to presume that he could completely control and channel the powerful emotions that football is capable of unleashing. Ironically, this possibility was largely lost on those who led the *coup* and who had been among his most vocal opponents. General Ankrah, for example, who had sought to rid the game of Nkrumah's and Djan's fingerprints, closely associated himself with Asante Kotoko's success in reaching the final of the African Cup of Champions Clubs in 1967 in order to shore up popular support for the military government.<sup>112</sup> His successor Lieutenant General Akwasi Amankwa Afrifa did likewise and was pictured on a number of occasions being introduced to Black Stars players prior to international fixtures.<sup>113</sup> Dr Kofi Busia, the long-standing anti-Nkrumahist and Ghanaian prime minister between 1969 and 1972, followed suit, hosting the Black Stars and a GAFA delegation at Osu Castle, the official seat of government, in January 1970 and welcoming the Kotoko squad to the same venue following their victory in the African Cup of Champions Clubs a year later.<sup>114</sup> Since then, virtually every Ghanaian head of state, democratically elected or otherwise and regardless of their political hue, have recognised the political utility of football.<sup>115</sup> This was exemplified most recently in February 2012 when in his state of the nation address to the Ghanaian parliament, former President John Atta Mills reserved part of his speech to laud the Black Stars for their performances at the African Cup of Nations in Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, suggesting that this was linked to the broader

<sup>112</sup> Bediako, *Black Stars*. General Ankrah is pictured in this publication shaking hands with Kotoko's Wilberforce Mfum prior to one of their games.

<sup>113</sup> Kwateng, , *Asante Kotoko F. C.*

<sup>114</sup> Bediako, *Black Stars*.

<sup>115</sup> Prior to Ghana's hosting of the 1978 African Cup of Nations, General Ignatius Acheampong and a tournament organising committee dominated by the military government invested heavily in the preparation of the Black Stars, a move that bore fruit with a third continental title for Ghana. In 1982, Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings welcomed the Black Stars in person when they touched down in Accra following their fourth African Cup of Nations title. A year later, Rawlings decorated the Asante Kotoko squad with medals following their first African Champions Clubs Cup success. Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round*; Bediako, *Black Stars*.



governmental programme of 'building a better Ghana'.<sup>116</sup> The fact that the relationship between football and Ghana's polity remains close at the national, regional, and local level is clearly a legacy of the Nkrumah era. Those holding or aspiring to hold high political office continue to view it as part of a broader armoury to win hearts and minds, and curry political favour. What appears to be forgotten from Nkrumah's experiences with football, however, is the capacity of the game to generate unpredictable emotional attachments and counter-hegemonic currents that can breed disunity and threaten those in power.

---

<sup>116</sup> Ghana Soccer Net, 'Ghana President Atta Mills Congratulates the Black Stars', 16 Feb. 2012, <<http://www.ghanasoccernet.com/ghana-president-atta-mills-congratulates-black-stars/>>, accessed 26 Mar. 2012.