

How to Become A
**Professional
Football Player**



Anselem Okafor

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Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my dear wife, Mrs Immaculata Anselem Okafor for her constant encouragement for me to go ahead and put this work together. She has giving me nothing but her support and encouragement throughout the time of putting up this work. Without her support, this book would never have become a reality. I am grateful for all that she brings into my life physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all aspiring footballers who due to one reason or the other could not make it to the top of their professional career. It is worthy of note to recognize their efforts and the work they put in towards making their dreams come through, which unfortunately didn't come to be.

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Introduction

Football (or Soccer as it is called in some countries) is one of the oldest and the most popular sports in the world. It's also one of the most recognized sports all over the world. In 21st century, football has been played by over 250 million people in over 200 different countries of the world, and that makes it the most popular sports in the whole world.

The pinnacle of the international football game comes in form of the FIFA World Cup. There are also tournaments such as Champions league, UEFA league, Copa America, the African Cup of Nations and the Asian championship cup. Then we also have the FIFA under 17, 18 and under 20 World cups. And of course, we have the Olympic football tournaments. Domestically, the strongest leagues come from England (English Premier League), Spain (La

Liga), Italy (Series A) and Germany (Bundesliga). In the United States of America the sport is also known as Soccer.

In a word cup year, over a billion people are involved with the game of football directly or indirectly all over the world. This consists of the organizers, the administrators and of course, the fans and supporters as well as the press and the media.

All this statistics makes playing football at the professional level very lucrative for young kids and indeed it is.

The average salary for a Premier League footballer has exceeded £3m a year for the first time, according to the 2019 Global Sports Salary Survey. Same goes with the other top European clubs, like Real Madrid, Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Juventus, Paris Saint German and the whole rest of others.

As we can see from all these statistics, the financial rewards for players at the top end of the game are

spectacular, although as we drop down the leagues, depending on which country's league, we notice a significant drop in pay, revenues and earnings.

The aim of football is to score more goals than your opponent in a 90 minute playing time. The match is divided into two halves of 45 minutes each. After the first 45 minutes, players will take a 15 minute rest which is called "Half time". The second 45 minutes will resume and any time deemed fit to be added on by the referee (injury time) will be communicated accordingly to the match officials who will in turn apply the minutes that have been decided to be added on to the match.

The popularity of the game has made the interest of youngsters who dreamed to become professional footballers jump to higher rates all over the world. It is not easy to make it in the professional football irrespective of how good one is. There are thousands of very skillful young football talents all over the place just waiting to get

noticed by scouts or clubs and be given a chance to excel at the professional level. It is quite obvious that this choice of career is difficult for players to get to the top, but who says it is going to be all easy?

This brings us to the question of how a player gets noticed and scouted for and eventually gets to play at the top and live the life of a professional football player. Well there is absolutely no sure way that guarantees you a 100% chance of making it right to the top as an aspiring professional footballer. But YES, there are a number of things that you as an aspiring professional footballer can do to give you the best chance to make yourself stand out among the crowd.

Would you like to reach your full potential as a professional football player? You'll need more than great technique and ambition. To become a great professional player, you'll also need to master other important aspects of the game, for example, game intelligence, physical

fitness, and the proper mindset. And what exactly constitutes techniques, game intelligence, physical fitness, and proper mindset?

These and many more we have taken our time to put together in this work to make it an easy tool for you to have at all times and in all places. Taking the good advantage that the modern age and the internet have offered to us, you can have this book in your PC and/or your phones. We can never think of any other sure way to make this book as handy and closer to you as we have done so far. We advise that you go through it diligently, practice what we have put together and by doing this, you are bringing yourself closer to your dream of becoming a professional football player.

Another purpose of this book is to lead all aspiring footballers as much as we can, step by step, towards getting that professional contract which is the ultimate goal of every aspiring professional footballer. We are not

saying this is the only means a player can follow in order to secure a professional contract; neither is this work a guarantee that every player who reads it must get a professional contract.

There are so many other pathways which can lead a player to securing that professional contract. Nevertheless, we think that we have done a good job in providing you with one of the best ways you can get and if diligently adhered to, will help in a great deal towards securing a professional football contract. In this book you will find loads of tools, facts and figures, professional advice and experiences of those who have played football to the top level, all these are to equip and enable you develop a professional football career. Hence our advice that you follow what we have put down in this book diligently, it will be of great help to your career. See you at the top.

Chapter 1

WHO IS A PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL PLAYER?



A professional footballer or a professional football player is an athlete who plays football at a league level and earns a living from it. That's all; that's the job of a professional footballer. Train on weekdays, play by weekends. Of course in the modern football of today, they also play by midweeks or any other days of the week but the general routine of a professional footballer is basically what we explained above. So we can as well say rightly that a professional footballer is someone who plays football at the highest level in order to earn a living.

Football as we all know is arguably the most popular sports in the world today judging by the number of people who follow and watch it as a sport. In fact, a lot of people all over the world are addicted to the sport, some have gone to the extreme and bizarre extent of harming themselves and even taking their own lives just because their team or club lost an important match or lost a champions league cup. But that's not what this book is all about, rather, this book is focused on helping an aspiring

kid out there on what and what he should do and not do in order to achieve his dream of getting to the top as a professional footballer. It is also a tool for parents who desire to see their children and/or help them in their journey towards achieving this goal.

Football is a sports that drives a lot of people crazy including myself as a lover of the round leather game, but I am also of the opinion that it is not worth taken one's life for; nothing is worth taking your life for actually.

In order to become a professional football player, there are quite a number of things you are required to do or to know which will make you stand out among the enormous crowd of people who have the same interest as you do. But before we talk about things that you should have as an aspiring professional footballer or qualities you must possess to stand you out, let us first of all look at the statistics.

According to the last FIFA survey (FIFA Magazine), it is estimated that there are over 265 million football players all over the world, and this includes both male and female footballers. This excludes about 5 million referees and officials of the beautiful round leather game, so this brings us to about 270 million people that are involved with this game called football. And we are yet to talk about those who are directly or indirectly involved in the game, for example the press, the fans, the coaches etc.

So what is the first thing that you as an aspiring professional footballer must have?

Passion!

Yes, you have to have the passion for the game of football, anything you do in life and you don't have passion for, you won't go very far on that and our candid advice would be for you to sit down and re-evaluate your reason of being there. For you as an aspiring pro you have to be a lover of football. And to you parents, the first things that

you should look out for in your kids are these qualities also; his passion not just to watch or discuss football matters but to play it. Have you ever seen a child who upon all the toys he has in the house prefers to play with the football even when then mother is trying to feed him he is trying to grab his football? I don't mean to be too harsh on you but you shouldn't let such a potential slip off your fingers.

As an aspiring professional footballer, it is your passion for the game that will help draw the other qualities that is needed from you as a footballer and to develop them. The passion will lead you to hunger to continuously train and develop yourself, and the continued training will not only bring about your development as a player but also the needed skills which is another major ingredient that is needed if you must make it as a professional footballer.

The second quality every aspiring footballer must have is skill. Call it technical skill, it is the same thing. In as much

as power, strength and speed can often be improved on during the latter stages of a player's development, it is clear that technical skills must be worked on at the early age. All modern professional footballers must possess sound passing skills wherever they play on the pitch. Touch or ball control is also a vital skill to players in all positions but, unfortunately, this has been an area in which many players are lagging behind. Touch or ball control involves bringing the ball under control effortlessly, weighing passes correctly and generally being comfortable when in possession of football. This is why we advised earlier of the need to get yourself acquainted with the ball, make it your companion.

Physical Attributes

While there is no doubt that genetics play a large part on how strong and quick a footballer is, both speed and physical strength can be worked on with regular training and coaching. Football has never been so competitive,

which means both upper and lower body strength are very necessary. General cardiovascular fitness is a prerequisite to becoming a professional footballer, but it's important to remember that this fitness can be acquired simply by playing and training regularly. You must never underestimate to what extent training and playing regularly can be beneficial to your career as an aspiring footballer.

Tactical Ability

Tactical awareness is more important now than it has ever been. The modern professional footballers must have a natural aptitude for macking, team tactics, making space, counter-attacking and a great many more tactical skills. We will explain this in details in the consequent chapters. Tactical ability involves knowing when to make a pass, when to stay in possession and when to run into space. This is often what separates good club players from the professionals, though this is something that can be

developed over time; it is often an attribute that players either have or don't have. Of course, the best professionals are tactically aware in all areas of the pitch. As the game is now extremely tactical, footballers lacking in this attribute will find it very difficult to make it into the professional game in any position. As an aspiring professional footballer, this is one area that can stand you out among the crowds when it's time to go for trials.

Psychological Attributes

The top players are not only gifted, they possess mental strength and determination that set them apart from the tens of thousands of gifted players that never made it as professionals. If you must make it as a professional footballer, you must copy from them. The ability to concentrate is vital, as the tactical side of the game is so dominant in modern football. What is also important, and not something that can be easily taught, is the ability to perform under pressure. While excelling on the training

pitch is a great way to improve, it counts for nothing if the player cannot replicate that level of performance in a match situation. But when you learn from your early stages, you become the master of these acts when you turn pro and it becomes part of you.

Intuition, decision making and creativity are all important psychological factors for a professional footballer.

However, attitude is equally important if players are going to defy the odds and make a living from football.

Determination, single mindedness and an element of aggression are also required of the modern day footballer as well as sound communications skills.

Thousands of young aspiring professional footballers are given a youth contract by a professional club every year. It would be a wasted time and effort if you fail to make the grade haven gotten this far because of your lifestyle. Being a professional footballer requires a huge amount of dedication, and invariably that means sacrificing elements

of the social life that most young people take for granted. Breaking into a professional first team requires a healthy lifestyle that is completely geared to bring out your best performance on the field. The days when footballers could spend a Friday night in the pub and then turn in a performance on a Saturday afternoon are long gone.

The demands placed on the professional footballers are greater now than they have ever been. While a good club player might possess all the basic attributes needed to make it professionally, this will count for nothing if that player doesn't have the skill and aptitude to decide when each one is required. Knowing when to use strength, when to rely on creativity and when sheer mental strength is required is what separates you from the rest of the professional aspirants. Young players who have all the required attributes, and instinctively know which ones are required in specific situations, are the ones most likely to achieve their dreams of making it as professional footballers.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STARTING EARLY

Have you ever heard of the acronym "Catch them young"? Yes; I know you have, and this aptly fits into anyone who is aspiring to be a professional football player; the younger they are incorporated into the world of football, the better for them. You should try as much as you can to start your football career early. The importance of starting early cannot be overemphasized, so if you are still young and you aspire to be a professional football player now is the time for you to start, don't postpone it anymore, not even for another week. In Europe for example, we have youth leagues across all ages ranging from six years. Once their parents take notice of their passion and love for football, boom, and the next thing they are enrolled into one of the evening training programs. They have small academies all over the place for them to train during the week and they organize competitions for them once in a while to actually help them grow in experience and have a feel of the real football pitch even though they obviously won't have to

make use of the full length of the pitch. Once in while you see the parents of these kids drive them to their various football schools in the evening time and coming back to pick them once trainings are over while some stay behind to watch and encourage them. This is also a very good thing to give an aspiring professional footballer-encouragement.

Back home in Africa, we don't have this type of setup for you even though there are academies to help you develop your skills. So what are the things you should do before you begin to be noticed by these academies and what should you do if you must start early? You might think wow this people already have everything planned out and already have an advantage over you in Africa, but no, you are wrong; that's not always the case.

If you are from Africa or south America, you might think that those of your colleagues from the European countries have gone well ahead of you but like we said earlier that's

not always the truth, you still have your own learning ground where you can hone out your skills, and these are the streets, the local football pitches, the schools assembly grounds etc. Go out there and practise, play as many times as you can, practise alone, play with friends, learn new tricks, dribbling skills, perfect them, good ball controls make the ball your friend, learn how to keep the ball close to your feet. All these skills are what you will leverage on as we will see in the next chapters of this book. We all know and it is a fact that many top professional footballers come from Africa, South America and Asian continents and they went on to become famous professional footballers. They are too many to number them now and they made it with the same tools and conditions that are available to you nowadays. We can even say you have it better today because in their days they were not allowed free hand to play football as football wasn't seen as at that time as a lucrative way of making a living unlike this modern days where one football player alone is capable of

carrying the economic burden of the whole of his community. Most of them in their days got scolded and or punished by their parents for playing football even when they were in school. Some went as far as making up all types of excuses in order to stay behind and play football without the knowledge of their parents and this goes to show how much zeal and passion they had for the round leather game. Many of them were denied the opportunity to go to school by their parents because they insisted in playing football. Some ended up in the street as a result and this turned out to be a sort of blessing in disguise to them and to their career as it afforded them a lot of time to train and play football on their own and on the streets. Their education became playing football morning, afternoon and night; they played until they cannot either see the ball again or their legs due to nightfall. And they just keep getting better and better and by the time they are no longer teenagers, they have accumulated a lifetime of football education for themselves. This is what we

recommend that you do as well; train, play at every opportunity you have to touch the ball, make use of it.

As an aspiring professional footballer from African, South America or Asia, don't count yourself unlucky when you look at your European counterparts. If you make use of the tools available in your region or vicinity coupled with your love and dedication to always work hard to better your skills, then you are well up on the right track to making your dream come through.

The advantage you have is that scouts often target these parts of the world to find the next up and coming Ronaldo and Messi of our own time. This doesn't mean that it is going to be all Uhuru for you all the way. The modern football is played at a very fast pace unlike what we had decades ago. A lot of things have changed in modern football, so if you are aspiring to be a footballer you must be ready to equip yourself with as much information as you can. We are not saying this in order to discourage you;

far from it. You need not be at all but rather you should be ready to put in more work and your time both in the training ground and in developing yourself on your own skills and technique.

In conclusion, the top players are not only gifted; they possess mental strength and determination that set them apart from the tens of thousands of gifted players that never made it as professionals. The ability to concentrate is vital, as the tactical side of the game is so dominant in the modern era. What is also important, and not something that can be easily taught, is the ability to perform under pressure. While excelling on the training pitch is a great way to improve, it counts for nothing if the player can't replicate that level of performance in a match situation.

Intuition, decision-making and creativity are all important psychological factors for professionals. However, attitude is equally as important if players are going to defy the odds and make a living from football. Determination,

single-mindedness and an element of aggression are also required of the modern-day footballer as well as sound communication skills.

Thousands of young footballers are given a youth contract by a professional club every year, only to fail to make the grade because of their lifestyle. Being a professional footballer requires a huge amount of dedication, and invariably that means sacrificing elements of the social life that most young people take for granted. Breaking into a professional first team requires a healthy lifestyle that is completely geared to optimum performance on the field of play. The days when footballers could spend a Friday night in the pub and then turn in a performance on a Saturday afternoon are long gone.

The demands placed on the professional footballer are greater now than they have ever been. While a good club player might possess all the basic attributes needed to make it professionally, this will count for nothing if that

player doesn't have the skill and aptitude to decide when each one is required. Knowing when to use strength, when to rely on creativity and when sheer mental strength is required is what separates the professionals from the good club players. Young players who have all the required attributes, and instinctively know which ones are required in specific situations, are the ones most likely to achieve their dreams of making it as professionals.

Practice Makes Perfect

The best players in the world would not be where they are today without practice. Ronaldo, Messi, Neymar and Mbape of this world and other professional footballers would practice free kicks over and over again, striking the ball in different ways, changing their approach to the free kicks and trying to hit a particular spot in the goal time after time. They stay behind after general trainings to continue with their own personal trainings and workouts.

This is what separates the greatest players in the world today from the rest.

A football goal in your garden will help to improve your free kicks and shooting techniques. Hours and hours of training, often on your own will improve your touch and control.

It is up to you now.

Chapter 2

MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE
FOR CLUBS TO NOTICE YOU



In order to make yourself available for clubs, and agents and scouts to notice you, there are certain things you must do. Gone are the days when aspiring footballers only waited for the scouts to come to them, but not anymore, you can actually make them come to you and that's exactly what we are asking you to do. The world and football have evolved and rightly so, you too must follow the rhythm of this change. As you read further, you will discover the things that you must have to do to stand out among the crowd.

It is very important for you as an aspiring professional footballer to be a student of the game, and we have talked much about that in chapter one of this book. By now, you should have started building a resource library for yourself. We are not asking you to start preparing a big room that you will use as your resource library; no, this could be a small corner of the shelf in your personal

room or in your dad's sitting room. We reiterate again that this is very important as they are the tools and building blocks of your professional career. This is a place set aside and dedicated totally to your professional football career. As we suggested earlier, it could be a shelf in your room or in the sitting room where you display all your trophies and award. No matter when and at what stage of your football career you won those awards, it is still relevant to be in your award display shelf. So what else can we add here, you may ask? Well, you can include your certificates, your achievements, DVDs, magazines and personal pictorial collections of your favorite professional football player or your role model. As an aspiring professional player this is your work tool. The same way a carpenter, a mechanic and every other workman out there has their work tools and cannot do without them, so are you as an aspiring professional footballer should also prepare and have your own work tool to enable you carry out your work with some measure of convenience. If you think that

you are just going to make it up as you go along, then you are definitely going to fail. You should have a plan and you surely need to as this is what guarantees you of your success and also helps you to measure your success, whether you are making any progress or not. You must not depend on the comments that people around you or your friends are making about your football prowess; they might not be telling you the truth, after all, some friends just tell you what you want to hear so as not to hurt your ego. Once more, I know you might have heard the saying which says that "He who fails to plan, has already planned to fail". You cannot let that wonderful talent of yours slip at this moment just like that, will you?

Keep up to date with changes in football and all that is happening in the football world, the top leagues in Europe, the players, the clubs and their managers, their home grounds etc. Thank God for the internet, this won't be much of a problem for you as you can easily get all these information from the internet.

PREPARE YOUR CV

What? Do I have to have a CV? Yes my dear; you definitely have to get yourself one, and you need it. Let us assume that by now you are sixteen and are through with your secondary education and probably preparing to go to higher institution of learning, we congratulate your achievement so far and you should be proud of yourself. We want to advise that you do not abandon your educational career to pursue your professional football career; your education is as much important as your football career and you are advised to take it as serious as you take your football because you never can tell what you will fall back on after your retirement from football career. So we always advise never to put all your eggs in one basket.

So yes, it's time to get your curriculum vitae ready. The same way we discussed the need for you to have a shelf kept apart, which will contain all your football collections,

achievements and trophies won in all football competitions you have been involved in, that is the same way your Curriculum Vitae is going to have all the academies you have attended or played in, all the competitions you have played in, mention all the awards you have won so far e.g. golden boot awards, best player of the match, best goalkeeper of the competition etc. We advise that you write the link of your YouTube profile in your CV so that your agent or the club interested in you can go and check you out. The aim is for you to show them a bit of how you look like. The collections in your shelf are for you and your friends or families but the CV is for the potential scouts and clubs who might be interested in signing a contract with you. The more information you make available for the agents the better your chances of getting looked at.

Your football CV will focus on your football history and skills. We advise that anything you include in your CV must be facts. The content of a football CV is similar to a

normal CV. You have your full names, so that the teams know who you are, your age, height, weight and the position you play in. Email address or contact number in case a team is interested so that they can get in contact with you. Your age is very important so that teams that are interested will know what age group to put you in. It's of no need to start writing how good a footballer you think you are; leave that area for the scouts or the managers to decide. Do not put pictures of you playing football in your CV if you have included your social media link in it. The only picture that should be in your CV is your passport photograph. You should also state if you are left or right foot player.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTUBE CHANNELS

Of course, I am sure you don't need me to tell you the importance of YouTube in your life as an aspiring footballer. It is obvious you must have watched many videos of your favorite players on YouTube, but what we

are saying here is not just that you must watch those videos; we advise that by now you must have opened your own YouTube channel, open an account on YouTube and upload your own training videos, edited videos of you working with the ball, showing your skills on ball control, your workout routines, ball juggling skills etc. You can also include a full video of a competitive match which you got actively involved in, maybe like a final or semifinal match which you scored the winning goal. It is also important to note that the person recording your match videos focus only on you when you have the ball or going for a macking your positioning and all of that instead of recording the whole 22 players running around the pitch.

What you are doing is selling yourself, so never hesitate to include all these things, but always make sure that they are facts.

One other best place you can advertise yourself as an aspiring professional footballer is the Facebook. Open up a profile page on Facebook and make it clear there that you are an aspiring footballer, using your correct full names and stating your country of origin. We are not ruling out also the use of Instagram, Twitter, Tinder and the rest of them all. The aim is to make yourself easily seen and identified from the rest; you never can tell who will come across your page. Many scouts now rely on the internet to source the type of players they are looking for before actually making contact with that very player, so you see why you should make use of every available tool out there to sell yourself to the potential clubs out there looking out for your type of skill.

Now having done all these things, dedicate yourself to playing football, continuous learning and honing out your skills. If you are lucky and your parents have been able to get you into an academy by this time, endeavor to make good use of it, listen to the instructions of your coaches. If

they ask you to engage in any physical exercise do it without squeezing your face. Always wear a smile in your face, they meant well for you and your coaches will never deliberately try to jeopardize your career. This is also the stage you start to work on your technique. Your coach should be able to give you home work to work on your ball control or any other area he feels that you are lagging behind. By this time you should have known that football is a team game, so try and focus more on the team instead of your individual goals, work to help the team more in training and in real matches, play for the team and help them get the result.

And if you are not lucky to make it into an academy by this stage of your career, don't lose hope. Take every opportunity to attend holiday camps and coaching clinics. Enter tournaments, be it five-a-side or local season's competitions. Find that pitch where there are always regular football players playing every evening every day of the week. Join and play with them, the idea is that you

never stop playing football at every opportunity you have and with time, it becomes part of your habit and you find yourself longing for more every day.

Never be afraid to make mistakes at this stage, but be open to corrections and be ready to learn new tricks of football and practice what you have learnt so that during the match proper you can gradually introduce those tricks to your game without fear. The fact that you are not in any academy doesn't mean scouts will not see you. Remember if you have put all the things we already discussed in this chapter in place then you should know that you still stand a big chance of getting yourself noticed by European clubs or their scouts. Moreover, local scouts do attend matches in lower football competition matches or even in local sponsored competitions to try and fish out the raw talents.

Finally, remember it does not matter what age level you are at. In every level and at all matches as an aspiring professional footballer you should be ready to give 100%

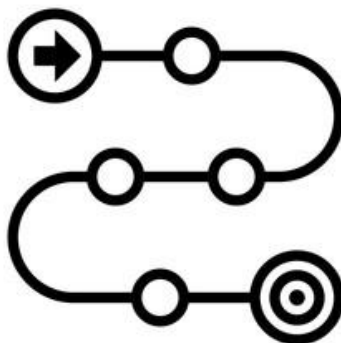
effort in order to reach your goal. If you are halfhearted, we advise it is time to give up now and focus on your academic career and just play football for the fun of it. In modern football, only those who are seriously committed to it will eventually make it. But we are not saying you should have to be angry when or while playing football, all we are saying is that you should be ready to give it all your energy, your time, efforts and focus to give yourself a realistic chance of reaching your goal. If you do this as we urge you to, you will most likely and definitely increase your chances of success. Don't forget that your continuous effort, commitment and work rate are unquantifiable measures that permit the less talented players to match up on the playing field with their highly talented counterparts.

Whenever you step into the pitch, it is very important to exercise a very high level of commitment in order to be successful towards your goal of becoming a professional football player. In every stage of your development, never forget to always update your football CV, adding all the

awards and achievements you have won from the last time it was updated. Build a small library of your football videos, we have said this before, this will enable you to approach coaches, agents or scouts with enough materials of your own. Your CV alone could secure you a trial with a professional team

Chapter 3

CREATE A ROAD MAP



In everything we do in life we have got to have an outline, something like a road map as a guide for us to achieve that goal.

The ultimate goal of every aspiring professional footballer is to land a professional contract with any of the top teams in Europe. However, only a few numbers go on to achieve this goal, why? You may ask, well this is as a result of many factors. It could be something as simple as attitude.

A famous retired Nigerian journalist once told a story in one of his sports columns back then in Nigeria of how a very good talented footballer was sent on trials abroad by his agent and he scuffled the chance of him getting signed by that club even before kicking a ball. How did this happen?

Well, the dude was a very talented kid back then and very well known in the Nigerian league; I don't think it's

important mentioning his name. He was sent on a trial with one European club and on getting there, after the initial normal protocol of welcoming him and showing him around the clubs facilities. He was asked to go to the dressing room to change and come to the training ground. He probably was expecting to be given new training kits but was not given any, apparently the coach wanted to see him train on his old training boots before giving him some new pairs. After waiting for some time for the guy to come out from the dressing room and he didn't appear, the coach sensing that he might have lost his way went back to look for him, only to find him sitting in the dressing room and without putting on his playing kits yet. The manager tried to find out what's going on and the dude said he had no kits. The manager was thrown aback. "No kits and you came for trials?" "What then did you came with?" A call was quickly put to his manager in Nigeria to let him know what is happening. The agent asked to speak with the guy and after some minutes the dude went back

into the dressing room and came out well kitted, with his own old kits which he initially claimed he didn't bring along. It appeared that he was doing a mini protest because he thought they were not going to give him a new kit.

Of course, he never got the contract. You can see the point we are trying to make. Because of little little things, he missed out on the big deal. What is a new kit compared to the potential contract that he would probably have gotten, you may ask? Well that's the kind of attitude we are talking about which you should never have. Don't give away the big thing that lies ahead for little meaningless things. This is a typical example of how your attitude if not put in check can stop you from fulfilling your goal of landing that professional contract.

Therefore, in order to achieve a particular dream, these are some of the steps you should consider.

- Identify your dream.

- Believe in it and believe in yourself.
- Release all fear.
- Build a plan.
- Take action.
- Copy the successful ones in that chosen field.
- Set deadlines.
- See your mistakes as lessons and not as excuses to give up.

If we diligently take note of the steps we have outlined above, we will see that as an aspiring professional footballer, some of those steps we have above have already been put in place knowingly or unknowingly and we encourage you to take a look at the ones you are yet to incorporate into your road map and apply it where necessary. You must take responsibility for your success.

You must create your own opportunities. By making yourself seen through the social media platforms we talked about earlier, you are creating opportunities for yourself. Nothing will be handed to you on this journey. If you think you will become a professional simply because you are “good enough”, you will fail to achieve your goal. We will never stop telling you this because it is very important you take note of it. Ask yourself how many well talented footballers have excelled in the competitions like the under 17 and under 20 FIFA World Cup competitions but fail to make it to the highest level? Do you think it just happened or maybe you are thinking it is Jazz? Well no, it is not. Rather, it is as a result of these little factors which are why we are pointing them out for you not to make the same mistake as they made.

Becoming good enough and **CONSTANTLY** getting better is only the first step. The most important action is constantly putting yourself in situations where you will have opportunities to prove yourself.

The worst thing you can do is WAITING: No one is coming to find you. You must go and find them or at least put yourself out there for you to be found. We have told you how to do that by using social media platforms.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Many a time when we talk about being a professional footballer we tend to mix things up here, and we need to point this out.

Becoming a professional footballer is quite different from your ambition of playing for a particular club. You have to learn to separate one from the other. For example, we get e-mails quite often from young lads telling us they want to play for Real Madrid Football Club or Barcelona and when you ask them what club they play for in their various countries, their answer will be none yet. You see, the point is don't wait until Barcelona or Madrid comes for you, you have got to start from somewhere and that somewhere is your local club, in your own country.

If you can't break into the professional leagues in your own country, how are you going to play for the biggest clubs in the world? We are not saying this to crush your dream or discourage you. We just want you to be realistic. Make a list of all the potential clubs around your area, clubs which you are interested in playing with and or going for a trial with. The mistake most parents make when they are looking for a club for their kids is that they immediately start thinking of the best clubs in England, Germany or Spain. You can't do that when your child is yet to build experience from the local teams close to you or has even been to any academy. We advise that parents should use those local teams as a springboard for their wards to gather enough experience that will prepare them for what lies ahead.

Stop looking down on the local leagues in your country simply because they don't pay as much money as their European counterparts. Agreed they don't pay much, but they have other quality things to offer to your kids'

ambition of making it as a professional footballer. One thing at a time, step by step as the saying goes and one day you will be able to play for that club of your dreams. Be it Manchester United, Chelsea or Liverpool. However, you need to work your way to that level, most often through these "local clubs". But what is more important here and that's what we want you to note, that there are multiple levels of "professional football" in different countries around the world, where you can get paid to play the game you love.

So not everyone will eventually play for Real Madrid or Barcelona, Chelsea or Manchester United but there are other clubs in other European and Asian countries where your kid can fulfill his dream of becoming a professional football player and at the same time earn big money.

This is a good thing and this actually means that your goal of becoming a "professional football player" is more realistic than you think.

Nevertheless, if your dream is to play for that big club, do not let anyone else discourage you from that dream. Focus on taking small steps to your goal, this is our advice and remember our aim of putting this book together is to help you on your way to achieving that ultimate goal.

READ AND INVESTIGATE ON YOUR OWN

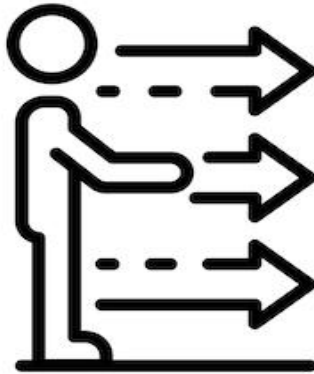
As a potential professional football player, you have got to read books concerning football, read about the laws of the game and the FIFA rules of the game. You might not always have these books in your library but you can easily get to look them up on the internet, at the FIFA's official website.

When you know the rules of the game far better than your opponents, you apply them to your advantage. Take note that the rules may vary slightly depending on the country or the league association you are playing in, though

football rules are generally the same across the league countries. There are other interesting books you can read, and topmost is the one written by the famous football referee Pierluigi Collina. He titled the book the "Rules of the Game", a very interesting book and from someone who should know because he has been in the game for long before his retirement. You can also take a look at the book called "The Discipline Handbook".

Chapter 4

WHAT KEEPS YOU GOING



In this chapter we are going to look at what will keep you motivated in your search of becoming a professional footballer. These are in other words your support systems. They could be your family and friends, your coaches and managers, mentors, physiotherapist or your role models. These people should be able to help you, always be there to guide and assist you, to support and enable you and so on.

The dream of playing football professionally in front of packed stadiums for a living should provide motivation enough for every aspiring footballer but even the most passionate young player can lose sight of why they want to become a professional soccer player.

Focusing on being the best, never losing sense of why they started playing football in the first place, remembering to keep smiling and enjoying the game are helpful motivations. Combining diligence with having fun is

always essential to remaining motivated. Listen to what Messi had to say concerning what motivates him as a football player. His words “The only thing that matters to me is playing; I do it because I love it.”

This highlights how building an enjoyment, love and passion for the game over the years is fundamental to the success of a player.

If a young player want to become a professional footballer, it's vital that they are confident in their abilities and have the desire to always improve them. If they don't have a belief in what they can do, then chances are that an academy won't either. Self-belief in footballers comes in many forms; from body language, communication and positive thinking, to preparations that ensure they are ready for any situation.

Belief is the key to success. When a player possesses self-confidence, he is more likely to play creatively and stand out in the crowd. He needs high confidence levels on and

off the pitch, with or without the ball. The ability to learn from the past (might be a team mates past experience) is vital to player's development.

The best way to ensure your total concentration and success as a professional footballer is to have a team working on your behalf.

YOUR FAMILY

Your family is a very important factor in helping you progress in your quest to becoming a professional football player. Recently we have seen some young professional footballers who their parents went as far as being their own representatives. This is not because the said players could not afford to hire another person outside their family to do the job but this is as a result of the huge support and unconditional love your family can offer you which is most times very difficult to find outside your immediate family. If you take a look at many great professional footballers, there is one thing in common with

almost all of them and that is that they surround themselves with their family members. From Lionel Messi who his father had to move to Barcelona with him when he was just a kid to Cristiano Ronaldo who his mother is always with him no matter whichever club he signs for to Kylian Mbappe, Neymar and a whole lot of them. The list goes on and on and this goes to show the importance of your family sticking around and helping you in your quest to making your dream of being a professional footballer come to pass.

MANAGERS AND AGENTS

The work of a professional licensed football agent is to help promote and market your football career, while that of your manager is to see that he brings out the best performance in you both in training and in the match.

In football, the term agent is used as a representative and intermediary that handles the interests of a player or multiple players. An agent's core responsibilities include

negotiating contracts to achieve the best possible outcome for their client and ensuring lucrative endorsement and sponsorship deals. He is responsible for dealing with your club, managers, coaches and other individuals associated with professional football clubs. He should be able to negotiate a professional football contract on your behalf. You can find a list of FIFA licensed agents on the official FIFA's website.

Football agents do not earn salaries, but commissions. Whenever a player that they are representing signs a professional football contract they take their cuts and move on to doing their job. You will never realize how hard these agents work unless you are close to one and knows the nitty-gritty that is involved in his work. They are the ones working behind the scenes to make everything about you getting to lay for that club of your dream happen, making sure that they bargain for you to get the best deals among the offers that he has on the table for you. It is the job of your agent to advise you on which

offer to take and which one not to take. You should be able to trust his judgment as his primary duty is to serve you and make sure you get the best deal. He should also be able to find for you other sources of incomes like sponsorship deals and the rest of them. Some football agents can also advise you in your finances and investments. Make sure you pay your taxes to the corresponding agencies.

It is our opinion that as a professional footballer you should be able to trust your agent in his duties in order to avoid distractions and focus your energy into playing football. You should be able to rely on him for guidance in every aspect. An agent can sign you up at a very young age and be able to work with you all through your professional career, so if you are able to get an agent who signs you up at an early age like 15 or 16 years you have no choice than to trust him to guide you through your apprentice age of 15 to 18 years old.

Professional football contracts can be unnecessarily complex and or lengthy, so it is advisable to get an agent who has a background in law and has knowledge in finance risk management/analysis, business management and in sports management. However it is not always possible to find what you are looking for or what you actually want in a single individual, it is then left to you to know how you source for these individuals before you sign any professional football contract. All we are saying is and insist on is that the more knowledgeable your agent is and the more multi-tasking he can be the better for you. If your parents or any of your trusted family members has these qualities and can perform these duties diligently the better for you as a professional football player.

Many years ago, some football players didn't have an agent to represent them and they paid dearly for it. A lot of them got shortchanged by clubs who gave them an underwhelming contract and they ended up earning below what they actually deserved. Some of them played

for many years and are now retired but they have nothing to show for it; no investments, no savings; some of them had to beg for donations from the public in order to foot their medical bills, leveraging on their once famous exploits in the round leather game to solicit for financial assistance from the general public. We do not want that to be your case and of course not in this modern age.

Another reason why you should trust the judgment of your agent and listen to his professional advice is that it's not always the club with the highest bid that you should go for, sometimes you should look at what you stand to gain in the long run with the club that would easily facilitate your improvement and progress in your career. Although we advise that it is in your own interest to never let any opportunity to earn more money in your football career pass you by, so long as it is not a contract that will enslave you in the long run. One other important thing is that we advise that you check with the football association of the country you wish to contract your agent from to

make sure that the said agent is duly accredited with the country's FA. Failure to take this simple step will definitely end in disaster for you, and if things eventually go wrong you might not have the recourse to correct the problems that may occur from it.

COACHES

The job of a football coach in the life of a professional football player cannot be over emphasized. Football is a very popular game played all over the world and we are all used to watching the games week in week out and we all know to what importance the work of a coach is, in the game of football. But what is the importance of a coach in the life of a professional football player, you may ask?

A professional coach is a great asset in the life of an aspiring professional football player. He is the one to teach you, give you directions and instruct you tactically and technically on the training grounds and in the match. The responsibilities of a head coach in a professional football

club are not limited to the following- selecting the team of players for matches, and their formation, planning the strategy, and instructing the players on the pitch and motivating players before and during football matches.

The coach is the one to assist you in most aspects of your football development, and this includes both the mental and physical side of the game. He will train you to get better in the physical aspect of your game and guide you in certain ways on the mental and psychological part of the game too. The coaches usually have an abundant wealth of knowledge about the football game. They have excellent previous knowledge and experience of the game as well. The role of your coach is to transfer to you as much of this knowledge and experience as soon possible so that he can develop you as an extremely skilled football player. He should also have a great reservoir of knowledge about football tactics and strategies.

It is your job to try as much as you can to always obey and follow the instructions of your coach as you wouldn't

want to be in his bad books. The better relationship you strike with your coach as an aspiring professional football player the better for you and your career. Most coaches have their own working methods and this is why we advise that it's better for you to obey and follow his instructions. He has a deep understanding of the rules and regulations of the game and is able to advise you on how to take maximum advantage of them for your good. Your coach would also be able to teach you some little tricks of the game which you can combine with the ones you already have if you are obedient to him and ready to listen and take corrections, as no one wants to work with an arrogant player or someone who does not take corrections.

We have said this before and we will say it again: get yourself a copy of the rules of the game and know it by heart, it will help you on your journey to becoming the best of the game and always remember that the more you know about the rules of the game the better player it makes you on the pitch. Most importantly, your coach

should be able to make sure that you are provided with a drug free environment in which to train and play. He should be able to act as a role model on and off the pitch, as any coach who is worth anything should ensure that you as a player are safe and protected at all times during games. What you do with your lives outside the training ground is your own responsibility and we have talked much about how of much importance discipline and responsibility is to your professional career.

PHYSIOS

Physio is the short term of the word physiotherapists. They are specialized doctors who help people affected by injury, illness or disability through movement and exercise, manual therapy, education and advice. They maintain health for people of all ages, helping patients to manage pain and prevent diseases. Physiotherapists are experts in movements and functions of the body. He is the person

who will be there for you to treat and manage acute injuries such as bone fractures, knee and ankle injuries and bone fractures. They will also help in the treating and managing chronic pain conditions such as, lower back pains, heart diseases and nerve pains. Nerve pain treatment is very often effective with physiotherapy. Nerve physiotherapy is effective in bringing nerve pain relief due to nerve irritation or compression. Along with physio, nerve pain can also be treated with medications to reduce pain and sensitivity.

There are so many painful situations and areas of your body where a physio can help or advise you on the best ways to protect yourself. Some of them are sprained femurs, tibia, spinal injuries, joint pains, lower back pains, sciatica, neck and arm pains, shoulder and collarbone pains, soft tissue injuries and sprains, exercise induced pains and so on.

As an aspiring professional footballer you need to have access to a physiotherapist at all times. He is an important part of your support team. His main focus is on prevention of injuries and we advise that you always consults your physio before taking part in any sporting activities; it's better that way instead of having to go to him with an injury.

ROLE MODELS

A role model is generally anybody who serves as an example to the other person, or a person whose behavior is emulated by others. People choose whether to be role models or not but there are professions that you do and you automatically become a role model to others, people will automatically look up to you and want to be like you. Although there are good and bad role models especially in the professional football world, we see and read about them on daily basis, their lifestyles both on and off the pitch, most times some of them don't give a hoot about

being a role model. What we advise the young and up and coming footballers is to look up to and emulate the good ones among them and avoid following the examples of the bad role models. This is common sense. Sometimes, people do stupid things in the name of having fun without thinking about the consequences or damages it could bring to their careers. We advise that you have to always think before you act. The little mistakes you make as a professional footballer can go as far as destroying your entire career.

Football is the most popular sports in the whole world. The money that professional players make in just a week is astonishing. Think about players like Cristiano Ronaldo, Messi, Neymar and Kyrian Mbape's of this world. Some of them are absolutely role models to so many young footballers out there but even among these players already mentioned, we can outrightly guess who among them are good role models and should be emulated and who amongst them are not. Professional footballers get turns of

scrutinizes, we must admit. And sometimes, it's not good to lose one's privacy. We think that everyone deserves the right to his own privacy, but I guess that's one of the prices you have to pay in order to become a professional footballer. But the constant scrutiny from the press puts footballers and their families out there to the public domain. This means that they are constantly in the eyes of those who regard them as their idols and of course, the young ones always want to copy what their idols do. So what happens when these professional footballers act out of order either on or off the pitch? Well there you have your answers; hence we advocate that you always pick the good examples.

Whether or not these players we mentioned earlier see themselves as role models is irrelevant to us but as far as we are concerned, their actions greatly affect and influence the young ones and they need to be held responsible for it. In this modern football world, due to the passionate nature of the game and bearing in mind that footballers

are put under a lot of constant pressure, sometimes they can let themselves down. That is normal, after all they are humans as well, but a good role model knows when he has let himself down.

Some professional footballers are truly inspirational, some of them go on playing as if nothing has happened even when they have recently lost a member of their family or they have someone sick in the hospital bed. These ones are a good example and their acts are commendable and should be a good example for those ones coming up. There are a lot of professional players who use their wealth and influence in the game of football to help the young and up and coming ones back in their various countries. Some of them do this by building up football schools and academies where young talented kid are brought to football limelight, while some others through poverty alleviation programs. One player went back to the area where he grew up, an area well known for crimes and this player came back to set up a football competition to keep

the kids away from crime and the streets. It became an annual event where winners gets the opportunity to go for trials in a professional club and gets a chance for clubs and scouts to have a look at them. This is a great example of how role models should be.

During the covid-19 pandemic, a lot of professional players made pledges running into millions of dollars to help people and governments to purchase sanitary materials to help in fighting the Corona virus. This is another great example of how role models should behave. We must commend them for their work and service to humanity and in this case it wasn't just professional footballers but some other sports personalities like Rodger Federer and Rafael Nadal. Some professional basketball players from the United States of America also contributed towards this noble cause and must be commended as well. Amidst the pandemic there are players who openly declared their unwillingness to donate for the pandemic. We are not going to begrudge them, as it is their money.

What we are outlining here are the steps you as an aspiring footballer should follow or who you should emulate.

These examples prove that professional football players can be good role models as well and in some cases as we have seen above exceptional role models. Most often the media plays a big role in giving the most exposure to footballers, and the professional footballers are the easy target. Sadly enough, the spotlight most of the time falls on those who should not be emulated. This is the fault of the media because they want to write about the spicy and most interesting stories that they think the public will want to read. It's all about making money for themselves. The media as we know always tends to feed on the negatives. People generally are not going to be interested in stories that depict the normal, boring, straightforward, standoff stuffs of our daily lives.

There is always going to be a debate about whether or not professional football players make good role models. We don't see this question being answered in the nearest future. But we know that young kids will continue to emulate and imitate their favorite players. We also hope that there are always going to be the good ones to emulate from and they will always be in the majority. Professional footballers do have to realize that their actions influence the young ones and they must personally be held accountable for what they do. The press in our opinion should carefully consider what they write as they are providing information to the general public. This makes them just as influential as the professional football players.

MENTORS

One of the best ways to keep you going in your quest to become a professional football player is to learn from someone who has already been there. A person's mentor is someone who gives them help and advice over a period of

time, especially help and advice related to their job. In this case your mentor should definitely be someone who has played the game of football, who understands what it takes to be a successful professional footballer. Find someone who has already reached the level you desire to play at. Get close to them, make them your friends, ask them questions and listen attentively to them, you will need all the guidance and advice you will be getting from them. Be ready to learn from their successes and also from their failures. If you cannot get someone you can be this close to as your mentor then you have to look for a mentor anywhere you can, they might not necessarily be close to you but you a mentor in your quest as an aspiring professional footballer. You can look for one who is not close to you but who you can learn from once in a while, and there are so many of them out there in the modern football world. Professional football players can teach you a lot by the way they play and the way they conduct themselves both on and off the pitch, in both good and

bad ways and we insist you always choose the good ways because that's the only way forward for you to reach to the topmost level of your career.

Earlier on we talked about the need of your parents been very close to you to offer their support. We gave examples of players that their parents had to move abroad with them at a very tender age in order for them not to be too lonely in a foreign land. But here, we will advise you to desist from making the mistake of choosing your father as your role model. Of course, this does not mean that your father does not have the qualities to be your role model, no, the point we want to make is that there is an emotional side of this when you use your father as your role model in football. Anyone who watches their children play competitive football would have seen the aggressive father in action, even at kids training ground; it happens often. Every father thinks his kid is the best or that another kid has used some sort of aggression in winning over the ball from his own kid and before you say jack, both parents are

already exchanging punches at the stand. And most often than not, the kids on the pitch doesn't understand what's going on and they end up been the ones that separate their parents from the fight. As a father that is involved in this type of act, what type of a mentor do you want your child to have? You are not the ideal mentor for your child and also not for anyone who aspires to be a professional footballer. However, a father who is full of encouragement for his wards and is actively involved in helping with the progress of his child and has a great self-control is a blessing to have.

Some parents go as far as interrupting with the instructions of coaches at the training grounds; this is confusing for the youngsters. They are confused of whether to listen to their parents or their coaches. As an aspiring football player, the best option is to ignore your parents instructions while on the training ground and always listen to your coach. From what we have witnessed from our numerous visits to training grounds in Spain and

some other parts of Europe, we do advise parents that it is important to allow your children enjoy their football both from the exercise and the playing point of view.

Sometimes we expect too much from our children at a very young age. It is good to be able to know at what limit we can push them and when to get off their backs and just allow them enjoy the game of football as a sport. To you an aspiring footballer, we also advise that you adopt a mentor who is calm, reasonable and polite, one who will always reassure you and recognize the efforts which you are making.

Mentoring is important, not only because of the knowledge and skills aspiring footballers can learn from their mentors, but also because mentoring provides professional socialization and personal support to facilitate success in your career and beyond. Quality mentoring greatly enhances students' chances for success. One may ask why I have to have a mentor. Or why do you want to copy someone who is already a professional

footballer? Here we have got a list of some reasons why we think mentors are important to your journey of becoming a professional football player.

- A mentor will teach you the best way of doing things to get the best result.
- Willingness to share skills, knowledge, and expertise
- He will keep you focused on the path to success.
- He will stop you from doing stuffs and crazy things that could endanger your career.
- He will show you how to avoid making the same type of mistakes he made when he was your age.
- He will refine your football tricks and even teach you more on the modern techniques of the game.
- He will give you a blueprint on what you need to do to be successful in your football career.

- Your mentor will surely introduce you to influential people among his friends who might in turn help you in your professional career.

Chapter 5

FITNESS & SKILLS, TECHNIQUES & STRATEGIES



In the beginning of this book, we made it clear that we might not be the best in teaching you how to become a professional footballer but we can boast of our in-depth knowledge about the football game and we have made sure on the course of writing this book that we have made a very profound investigation from professionals of the game and people who know much more than we do on football matters

PHYSICAL FITNESS

Physical fitness is an essential element to achieving success in professional football. The modern day football match lasts for 90 to 95 minutes and in some cases (e.g. in a final match) up to 120 minutes, with very few subs. According to Livestrong, midfielders run an average of over 11 kilometers per match. Wingers perform the most “high-intensity” runs averaging nearly 150 sprints of at least 75% of their full speed per match. Apart from goalkeepers,

center-backs run the least but still average 9.5 kilometers per match. But this is not always the case; the modern day football requires every player to actively participate in the game while defenders go up and attempt to score goals when their team is on attack. The attackers are also expected to come and defend the ball during corner kicks against their teams. What this entails is that as a professional footballer, you can be in one end of the football pitch at a moment and in the next moment you are expected to be at the other end of the pitch and for you to achieve this you must be physically fit.

In addition to endurance and speed, footballers need balance and physical strength to defend the ball at their feet, to shoot, to pass the ball long distances, to win balls out of the air, etc. Becoming a professional football player who wants to play at the professional level, you can only achieve this if you are at the very peak of your fitness. This is because extreme level of speed, toughness and endurance are required during the course of professional

football game. Physical fitness in football comprises of these 4 essential elements, and they are: endurance, balance, coordination and speed.

ENDURANCE- According to dictionary.com, endurance is the ability or strength to continue to last especially despite fatigue, stress, or other adverse conditions. In this case, endurance not only refers to a player's physical fitness and ability to make it through the entire 90 minutes. It also refers to a player's mental strength and ability to continue despite the overwhelming fatigue he or she might feel. The modern day professional footballers must not just endure physically but also mentally. As the body gets tired on the pitch; control, focus, and decision making become more and more difficult. The ability to perform both physically and mentally for more than 90 minutes is crucial to achieving success in football. And that is why many football coaches all over the world pay more attention to the physical fitness of their players. In many elite clubs when players are going for summer break, they are given

a benchmark on the weight they should go pass while returning back for pre-season. This is to limit the amount of work that the coaches would have to do trying to beat you into the ideal footballer weight so that they can save precious time and focus on other important training matters.

BALANCE AND CO-ORDINATION- Great balance and coordination are necessary skills for professional footballers. The modern footballers are often moving fast in small spaces either weaving through defenders or, on defense, keeping up with the moves of attackers. Moving quickly in small spaces with one foot on the ball requires a superb amount of balance and co-ordination. Balance and co-ordination added with speed is what makes a player agile, and agility is a necessary skill for the best footballers. A very good example is Lionel Messi. This is one player who shows what it means for every good professional footballer to be able to work on both feet. It is difficult to

be balanced and co-ordinated if you can only work comfortably with half of your body.

Another major way of improving your co-ordination is by playing physical sports, maintaining your fitness level and learning more and more about your body. This entails knowing what your body likes and what it doesn't like; we are not talking about low calorie burning sports here like chess or Ping-Pong. These ones are not going to improve your skills and techniques as a professional footballer. We are talking about sports such as lawn tennis or swimming or any other non-contact sports. This is to avoid getting into a situation that you may have to injure yourself and that is why we advise that it has to be sports with a low possibility of getting injured. Do yourself some good by treating every form of your physical activities as training for you even if it is a simple walk. But then, speed it up a little bit by putting in a spring here and there. While you are out there enjoying your time and you get a chance to engage yourself in another sport irrespective of whether

you are good at it or not, do it with eagerness, put on a smile and do it happily and never forget that they are only there as compliment to your football physical fitness.

SPEED - Speed is a very necessary skill for footballers in terms of both quickness and quick feet and speed to cover greater distances. Speed in terms of quickness and quick feet goes hand in hand with balance and coordination. This type of quick speed in small spaces contributes to a player's agility and ability to weave through defenders. The quickness is also essential for defensive players to keep up with their mark and to keep offensive players from dodging them or sprinting past them with the ball. As an aspiring professional footballer, you can train to raise your speed by these simple but effective methods.

1. Run with your body slightly leaning forward. This allows the runner to keep the core contracted to lift the knees and drive forward. Additionally, such form makes it easier to land with the knee just over the toe.

2. Never strike the ground in front of your center of gravity as you not only run the risk of injury but also lose power.

3. It is always better and advisable to run with short quick strides instead of stretching and over-striding your legs. This makes it difficult to strike the ground in line with the knee and results in risk of injury and loss of power.

Proper running form is a semi-controversial topic. Some opinions say that the runner should land on the forefoot rather than the heel of the foot. Others say that the runner should always strike the ground from heel to toe. Seeking professional advice or attending a camp designed to improve running form would be a great investment for an aspiring professional football player who's interested in increasing their speed.

Additionally, functional strength training could greatly increase running speed. By functional strength training we mean running with parachutes or weight sleds, or running

in partners with bungee cords or elastic ropes tied to your waist while also being tied at the other end too as you make a sprint across the pitch.

The second kind of speed is speed across greater distances. Such speed helps footballers in beating their opponents to the ball and also beating them in long runs down the sidelines both on offence and defence. Speed is a baseline skill for professional footballers and is of utmost importance. A player might be super agile with the ball at their feet, but if they're slow and can't beat their opponents to the ball, they'll never get the opportunity to show off their agility.

TECHNIQUES

Technique is perhaps the most visibly obvious element to success in football. Even an amateur can recognize good technique. Do they have good ball control? Are they fast with the ball at their feet? Can they dribble through their opponents? Do they pass to feet? We cannot forget to

mention the importance of ball dribbling and ball juggling in the modern day football even though it's not advisable to over dribble with the ball but if you have got the skill to dribble why not? You can go ahead once in a while to showcase what magic you can do with the ball, after all, that's what the fans have come to see and that's what they are paying for. So why not go ahead and entertain them once in a while but make sure that you do not over do things and give the ball away in a very dangerous position as that could put your team in danger and could cost your team valuable points. Every player with a good technique has these four elements in them: they have good dribbling skills, good ball control, passing accuracy and body control.

Dribbling skills refers to a player's ability to move up and down the pitch with full control of the ball. A player with good dribbling skills can move the ball in different directions at different speeds with both feet. They can successfully maneuver through opponents without losing

possession of the ball. Superb drilling skills are essential to achieving success in football for players of all positions.

Most times having a good dribbler in a team gives that team an added advantage and that's why we have to say that in order to be a professional footballer you have to be able to dribble with the ball. It is a technique that you should be able to practise every day by simply increasing the amount of touches you get on the ball every day. The more touches you get on the ball, the better a dribbler you do become as this will increase your overall ball control.

The easiest way to start getting more touches on the ball is to start dribbling with a ball anywhere you go (apply common sense.). Dribbling around the house (if you won't break anything), weaving the ball through the obstacles from room to room, could be a mini ball. This will improve your skill and enhance your technique. Outside the house too you can dribble with a mini ball or a lawn tennis ball, just keep refining your touches to be as skillful

as you can. It's needless to do fancy tricks in the house to avoid injuries.

The main objective is to get used to keeping the ball very close to yourself at all times. Remember we said earlier that becoming a great dribbler is all about how many touches you get on the ball so wherever you are, get your touches on the ball and lots of them; the movement and weaving will come naturally as your confidence with the ball grows.

Ball juggling is similar to that of ball dribbling. It is all about your ability to control the ball and keep it within your reach without touching the ground. Ball juggling is what all the most technically gifted professional footballers do on a day to day basis. As an aspiring professional footballer you need to be committed to your development of the game and juggling will definitely be of great help to you. It is surely the best way to improve your ball control. To measure your progress on this, set yourself

some objectives. Start by using one foot, and then switch over to the next foot without letting the ball touch on the ground. Then continue to switch over from one foot to the other. Try to beat your previous records until you are able to get at, say 1000 touches then you can concentrate on other juggling exercises.

Good ball control also refers to a player's ability to collect the ball and gain control of it using all parts of the body (except his hands) including feet, legs, chest, and head. A player with good ball control is able to receive passes both on the ground and out of the air with clean first touches keeping the ball close to their body.

Ball control also refers to a player's ability to maintain possession of the ball, successfully protecting it from opponents. The ability to turn quickly and sharply with the ball is also of utmost important to achieving success in football and falls under the ball control element.

When defending, one of the mistakes defenders make is to allow the ball bounce in their defensive areas before attacking it. A skillful attacker who realizes that defenders do this can be on the ball and around you; and before you know it, the ball is already at the back of your net.

Henceforth the need for you as an aspiring professional football player is to master the art of ball control very well in any area of the pitch you play. Try as much as possible to meet the ball head on instead of allowing it to bounce in front of you. Even if you may have to take few steps forward or backwards but always try and meet the ball in the air as a defender and send it back towards the opposition's area.

You may wish to control the ball with back headed pass to your teammate or your goalkeeper but always do that when you are sure that no opposing player is lurking behind and that your goal keeper is well aware that you are sending the ball towards him.

When you let the ball bounce, you give your opponent a chance to get the ball and cause problems in your defensive area of the pitch.

Passing accuracy refers to a player's ability to use both feet to send the ball to the player's desired destination. That could mean sending the ball straight to a teammate's feet with power and precision, sending a through pass into space with proper weight, crossing the ball accurately in front of the net, or, for strikers shooting the ball accurately and powerful into the back of the net. Players cannot achieve success in football without being able to pass accurately with both feet.

How often have you heard a coach shout to a particular player, "pass and move"! This is one of the fundamentals of the game. You don't just pass a ball and stay back in your position; that's not the way to play attacking football, you have to pass and change position quickly, moving

forward in an advantaged position to receive the ball again from your teammate.

For a team to master this they have to constantly practice and train on it and this is very fundamental as a professional footballer because a team that constantly passes the ball and moves forward is definitely going to be a successful and entertaining team. Obviously there are still other important aspects of the game for example shooting and scoring goals but passing and moving is fundamentally important to the success of every team.

Passing and moving into space involves players being able to pass the ball and move into an open space, ready to receive the ball again from his teammate and once he gets the ball, he should be able to control it with a good first touch to put the ball under control, pass to another teammate who is free in an open space and run into open space himself again. He should be able to dribble around once in a while without losing the ball while looking to set

up his teammate who is in a better position to score the goal. That's all about it; touch, pass, run into space, receive the ball, pass again and move forward; *tiiki taka* kind of football as the Spaniards would call it.

Lastly, body control refers to a player's ability to move their body fluidly to optimize balance and coordination. Body control falls under the category of technique rather than physical fitness. It refers mostly to correctness of form. Long strides, correct running form, and a low center of gravity are good indications of good body control.

In training grounds or the match proper, whenever you receive the ball, you should think about your body positioning. Do you prefer to receive the ball in a particular way that allows you see the entire football pitch or at least to see as much of the pitch ahead of you as you can? Let your team mates know how best you would like to receive the ball; for example, on the run or you prefer it

to be given to your foot so you can make the run with the ball by yourself.

When you receive the ball with your back to the rest of the pitch you cut off your options. Always do your best to position your body in a way that will allow you to select more options.

STRATEGIES

The modern day football is on a whole new level in terms of strategies that a team uses in a particular match. This tends to vary depending on the manager and the characteristics of his team, his individual players ability or the opponents he is playing against. Nevertheless we will be touching a little on this topic. Just as mentioned before, a football strategy is a team individual method for each game scenario. The word strategy is versatile for each game different situation. What this means is that a team can decide to change from a defensive formation to an attacking formation within the same match as the situation

demands. The strategy that the manager decides to employ in a particular game depends on what he wants to achieve with that game and to some extent the opponent. He could decide to attack or defend in numbers or press the opposition high up the pitch in order to put pressure on the opposing defenders and cause them to make mistakes. He can also decide to attack expansively or defend tightly and close mark his opponents one on one.

Chapter 6

DON'T WAIT UNTIL YOU ARE
A PRO BEFORE YOU MARKET
YOURSELF



If you want to play professional football, you can't sit back and wait for clubs, scouts or managers to contact you. Even you have gotten yourself ready by following all the steps we put out in chapter 3 of this book, you need to take it a step further. Don't sit and wait for them to find you, go out there and make yourself available to be found. Only those who are already professional footballers and are on top of their games can afford to sit and wait for clubs and agents to come to them with offers. Why? Because they are already well known and well exposed in the game. The rest (which is almost all aspiring professional football players) need to market themselves or at least have someone do that for them in order to catch the attention clubs and coaches.

One of the ways in which you as an aspiring football player can get noticed is to move abroad, to a more well-known country where football is given more attention.

You can also get yourself enrolled in any of the European football academies. Playing in an academy is one of the best ways to make yourself noticed by foreign clubs and their scouts.

We understand the difficulties that many people especially the young ones encounter in trying to move abroad and we advise that when that option is unavailable or impossible, you have to do all you can to enroll yourself to any local academy in your country of origin.

If you live in Nigeria for example, there are many good football academies that you can enroll yourself in as a kid to refine your football skills and give yourself a chance of earning big from the round leather game.

Here is a list of some prominent football academies in Nigeria:

- Pepsi Football Academy
- Barcelona Football Academy In Nigeria

- Midas Football Academy
- Kwara Football Academy
- Papilo Football Academy
- Abuja College Of Football
- Siaone Soccer Academy
- Edusko Sports Academy

These are only but a few of the football academies scattered all over Nigeria where young kids from the age of 3 to 16 can go and refine their talents and dreams of becoming professional footballers. Most of these academies are owned by famous Nigerian ex internationals who have paid their dues in the game of football and have played it to the highest level.

Therefore it is safe to say that every gifted young kid out there can be assured that he is in the best of hands and will

have the opportunity to showcase his skill and eventually be exposed to as many as possible.

The process of joining these academies from what we found out on the course of our investigation is similar among all of them. If you are a young talented football kid and you think you have what it takes to make it to the academy, all you have to do to join the football academies is to first go to any of the academy's training centers and introduce yourself to the coaches. The coaches will make an assessment of the applicant's football skills and attributes say, for examples touches, balance and speed. If the coaches are satisfied and believe that the applicant has what it takes, he will be given an application and registration form for the academy with the fees that are to be paid. (These fees vary from one academy to the other). Applicants are allowed to take the forms home and complete them.

Eligible applicants are to go with their parent(s) during their registration. Applicants are to submit their forms with other required documents. Once your application has been accepted, you can proceed to pay the necessary fees at the bank. Now the fees vary depending on which of the academies you are dealing with.

Some of these academies are known for producing talented players in the past that has gone on to ply their trade in Europe and also play for the country's national team. Such players are John Obi Mikel who is believed to be the wealthiest Nigerian footballer (according to 360dopes.com, his net worth is up to 60 million U.S. dollars). And he is not the only superstar of the Pepsi Club. Others include Echiabhi Okodugha and Joseph Akpala, to name a few. It is one of the best schools in the football industry that can be found in our country. It has existed since the 1990s. It has helped many boys and girls to turn their hobby into a job. It is worthy of note that not only Nigerian citizens study at the Pepsi football academy.

Kwara Football Academy is owned by the government of Kwara state. It can be a good choice for boys who are between the ages of 10 to 20 years old. Why? It is because this organization works as both school and training facility. In other words, you can study there and at the same time improve your football skills and develop your talents. The organization currently trains about 150 citizens. You can easily find more information about Kwara FA and learn how to join the academy by looking them up on the internet.

Papilo Football Academy is another good school that was founded over 19 years ago, back in 2001, also called PNKFA. This organization belongs to the famous Nigerian and Arsenal player Nwankwo (Papilo) Kanu. I am very sure you do know him or have heard about his exploits in the round leather game. Who will forget him in a hurry after single-handedly destroying the great Brazilian team in the 1996 Olympics?

The coaches are outstanding here. Students who sign in for courses can expect to develop their talents and become real professionals. Maybe you can be just as lucky as Stanley Okoro or Joel Obi or even more; no one can tell.

Siaone Soccer Academy is also one of the best soccer schools here in Nigeria. Shortly called SSA, this educational institution is located in Abuja. The famous Super Eagles' coach and ex international Samson Siasia founded it. Young people who love to play with the ball and can score should develop their talents here. This educational facility has professional coaches. And its teams participate in matches all across Nigeria and at international levels.

Even after you have gotten yourself into one of these academies, don't relax yet; this is where the work just begins. Remember our focus is to make it to an elite football club in Europe. So getting ourselves into the

academy is just the beginning and we have to use the academy as our springboard to these elite clubs.

May we remind you once again that there is no substitute for hard work, skills, the right mindset and talent. So the same energy we put into our studies and daily routine trainings same way we have got to continue to market ourselves out there using all the necessary tools that the internet world has made available to us. These are some of the tools you can use to market yourself as an aspiring professional football player.

- Create and upload a professional video on YouTube.
- Have your own YouTube channel.
- Create customized Video Thumbnails.
- Customize all your social media platforms and use them wisely.
- Run a Video Campaign on Facebook or Twitter.

- Build your own brand name.
- Reach more people.
- Ask people to share your videos.
- Be seen by scouts and sports people.

So what can you do to promote and market yourself, get your name out there and increase your chances to be seen?

Of course, just like with everything in life, all the above tips require a plan, discipline and consistency. Right moves and choices implemented consistently will eventually help you promote yourself and increase drastically your chances of not being missed.

When we say online media, we mean all the modern ways to promote yourself online, including a website, social media, online marketing, viral marketing, etc.

Video is the most consumed medium of our era. What does this mean? Video in all categories (sports, fashion,

lifestyle, and online marketing) is the content that online users mostly engage in. The same applies to your chosen career. If you have a really entertaining and skillful football video, your chances are much better than just using images or info, etc.

Raw footage is also good to post from training on a daily basis but not to showcase your talent in a professional way but mainly to showcase your daily routine work rate. A good highlighted video needs to provide full picture about yourself and your football skills. Make sure you have the most updated version of your video always.

We also talked about customizing your videos. We advise that when you create your customized videos, use thumbnails. A video thumbnail is the first thing that most people see when they interact with a video. A thumbnail image is also what is shown in search results. Thumbnails are especially helpful in a library with many media files because they give viewers a preview of the video content.

Statistics shows that the attention of someone for a video when scrolling through his feed in Instagram, Facebook or YouTube can be increased by up to 50% when a video uses an impactful thumbnail.

Customize all your social media platforms and use them wisely. As we said earlier, your social media platforms are your own personal media. It's like you own a TV station and you can broadcast whenever you want to for free. That makes imperative the existence of a strategy and a wise use of each medium in order to help your personal promotion as a brand or just as an aspiring professional footballer.

Be mindful of what you put out there as per the comments you make and how you interact with other people, as you don't know who is reading your comment on the social media. Avoid making comments that will come back to hunt you in the future or be a stumbling block to you signing that future contract. Be open to every professional

club out there even though you have your preferred club. Be open-minded with your career; that's what being a professional entails.

Create the wow factor in your social media video uploads. Give a professional impression to anyone who visits your channel, or profile or page. Remember what we told you before in this chapter and that is, you are a brand and as such you have to take care of your image. Having a goal, a clear schedule and be consistent and success will definitely be yours. That is it; it doesn't come by chance or luck, you have got to work for it, and when you work for it, you will have it.

Once more, if you have a personal profile on Facebook and Instagram you probably already share your sports moments with your followers and friends there. However, a personal Facebook profile can only reach as many people (as up to 5.000 friends, not sure they have made changes on that number yet).

To let Facebook for example, market your career, you have to create what is called, Facebook fan page.

A fan page means you can separate your private life from your public life. Facebook limits the number of friends you can have on your personal profile at 5000, but there is no limit to the number of likes you can have on your Facebook fan page.

Furthermore, with a Facebook fan page you can start building your own fan community. Fan pages are indexed on Google and other search engines results, increasing the probability of discovery by fans or sponsors who might be looking for you.

You can appoint other people as administrators of your fan page, letting them post on your behalf. This is very convenient especially when you hire professionals to do that for you.

Remember to pay attention to your bio and overall info (about section of a Facebook page, or YouTube channel). Do not assume that everyone knows you. It is your job to tell them who you are, where you are from and what you do or the clubs you have played for and the ones you wish to play for. And don't assume that everyone will follow you. Give them a reason to follow you. Use an engaging reason why someone should follow you. For example it could be, "This is my journey so far towards my ambition of becoming a professional footballer. Watch me making it happen!" You see, captions like this get people drawn to your video and when they watch it, they share it and that way your outreach is becoming larger by the day.

Instagram also allows you to add one link to your bio. Use this option to link one of your other social media accounts. It could be your YouTube channel, Twitter, Facebook, or even your website.

Shamelessly ask people to share your videos. No, is the answer for everyone who is not asking? You can never know if you don't ask right. Sometimes people don't do anything if you don't tell them what you want them to do. Take a cue from the great entrepreneurs when they advertise for their products; they call it "A call for action", so make your own "call for action" when you upload your videos on social media and tell people to share it. Reach out to your friends, your teammates and even local Sports media you know. Tag others in your videos on Facebook groups or LinkedIn groups that showcase sports talent.

Reach out to your team, your academies or your league. If your video is great, the chances are they will repost it and tag you. This will give you a great reach to very relevant audience, each time you have something new to share.

Email your football videos to the right people or to big Instagram accounts and do shout outs. If you want to reach specific people you don't have to run a campaign or

do any massive promotions. Rather, all you need to do is to reach out to agents and coaches that need to see your videos. Instagram is one of the most engaging communities out there. It is advisable to engage with similar accounts.

Where would most of your fans likely come from? If you are not playing in Europe or the English Premier League, chances are that most of your engaged fans will be fans of your team, or from your city/state etc. But where you want to take your outreach is where you want to play as a professional footballer, so that's where you have to target your video outreach. Of course, we are not saying you should neglect your local fan base. They are as much important as well.

Search for hash tags that Instagram users in the area that you wish to play professional football are using and consider adding them to your photos or videos.

Finally, keep in mind that being able to market yourself does not give you a license to underperform. Always bear in mind that the first step to get ahead is to be excellent in what you do. This will complement these "online marketing strategies" that can increase your reach. The better you become at marketing yourself, the bigger your 'brand' becomes and more people will get to hear about you. You will capture the attention of sports agents and product brands as well.

Whatever your goal is (find a sponsor, be seen, increase your fan base, etc.), establishing a strong presence online is very vital. The ways we've suggested in this chapter to promote aspiring footballers can give you an edge over others but please, never leave behind your effort to become a better football player. It is our desire to see you at the top of your career and above all, happy.

Chapter 7

CHASE YOUR DREAM



How you wish it were a smooth ride, right? Well nothing good comes easy, anyway. The twists and curves we encounter in life sometimes leave us to be full of negative thoughts and doubting our own ability to succeed.

In fact, you may be accepting your situation as fate and settling for defeat. No, don't give up yet!

Listen to this from Amy Tan; it's one of my favorite quotes: "We dream to give ourselves hope. To stop dreaming — well, that's like saying you can never change your fate." So long as you still have that dream of yours in your head, why give up bro?

To keep your dreams alive, you must keep working hard and avoid making certain mistakes. You must realize that you're the pilot, and you can take charge of your dreams and fly to that place you've imagined in your heart and

mind. Whether you make it or not as a professional footballer really isn't important, what is important really is who you become by trying to achieve this goal.

Live your life without regrets and you will be a better person because of it. What do you do when no one supports you? No one believes you can do it? When your friends, teammates, and even parents don't think you should pursue this particular dream?

The most successful people in the world were once told their ideas were stupid and that it would never work. Your dream is not theirs. Why would you expect them to understand it? It's your dream. Therefore, it's your responsibility to turn it into reality. There are always going to be obstacles in your life. How you choose to look at these obstacles will determine your success.

Do you focus on the problem? Or you work to find the solution? You can complain about your situations but that will not help you achieve your goal. Complaining has

never helped anyone and will never do. There are players who have been in the same situation as you or even worse and they have found a way to overcome it in order to make their dream a reality.

Whether that difficult situation, it is as a result of lack of support, lack of money, lack of opportunities, poor location etc. They found a way. You too can do this. You can either let these obstacles defeat you or you grow and become strong enough to overcome them. The choice is actually yours to make. Most parents don't want their kids to pursue their professional dreams. It's not because they don't believe in you. It's simply because they love you and care for you. They are trying to protect you.

We have all had our personal share of this type of behaviors from our parents or from the people who love us. Some of us were severely beaten and punished in one way or the other for daring to leave your cures and going out there to "risk" your life playing football. All these were

done to make us abandon our dreams of pursuing a career in football, and not because we are not talented enough but because we were coerced by our parents due to ignorance, as they probably saw it as a dangerous game.

What this means is that they must have to show enough passion, interest, love and enthusiasm in the game before they can be able to successfully pursue a career in professional football.

Having seen how the world of football has practically changed from what it was then to what it is now, should we then turn around and blame our parents? No. In our opinion, you wouldn't blame them; what they did then was what they thought to be the best for their children. We had no one to motivate us, no books to read as per to help show you the way, no internet, just a few TVs which of course were not found in every home. We depended mainly on radio, which was what was common in those days.

The point here is that we never had the tools that this generation is blessed with today. But we bear no grudges against our parents as we believe they did it for the love and protection of their kids. They just wanted us to be safe and they too wanted to be safe themselves. But unfortunately, taking the safe road never leads anyone to greatness.

Today we look and back and say we failed because of this or that but you as an aspiring professional of today do not have that peculiar problem, therefore it is safe to say that you are the only one that is standing between your success and your failure.

What should you do if you don't have the support of your parents? Don't just focus on excelling on the football pitch. You must also be a superstar in the classroom, get the best grades possible in your studies. Be the best son or daughter you can be to your parents, help them around the house, respect your parents, and do what they ask

from you. Start to take care of yourself. Help them at the shops or in whatever they do to make money, build your body, and improve your brain. If you prove to your parents that you can and will be a success no matter what happens, they will be more likely to support your choice of career in life. Although most often than not no one will believe in you until you actually achieve it. All that matters is that you believe in yourself.

Sometimes you might just be lucky to have that one person who believes in you even when no one else does. If you find that person around you, please stick with him/her, as such people are not easy to come by and they are there for a purpose; to encourage you when you are down. They are always there to lift you up with encouraging words. These type of people should be treasured and appreciated because they are very rare to come by.

Never let discouragements overwhelm you. Take the risk. Are you going to be scared? Oh, yes, you'll be petrified. Remember that your professional football career is not going to be a straight forward path. Take mini steps and be consistent with your work of developing your skills. Even if you don't reach the goal you've set for yourself at some certain time, you'll learn, grow, and perhaps even find new opportunities through the process of stretching yourself, not giving in to fatigue or discouragements.

Believe in yourself and the possibility of your dreams coming true, without letting discouragement rob you of the faith you have in yourself.

To successfully chase your football dream means never accepting "No" as an answer. It means never giving up even when the odds are against you. Stop listening to people who tell you that you cannot do it. If possible, avoid them entirely they are not of any help to you and they won't do you any good either. The best thing to do

when one is confronted with a problem or is in bad situations is to continue looking for solutions, that's the only way forward. You might have heard about the popular saying that "He who is down fears no fall". Or that "The only way when you are down is up". These are true and wise; don't give up until you have achieved your dream. Chase this dream day and night, we assure you that in every situation where dreams have been achieved the people involved never gave up.

Hard work, dedication and endurance, discipline and consistency are the key essential instruments for you to achieve your goal. To achieve your dream, you have to be totally dedicated and motivated through all the hardship and difficulties that you will encounter on the way.

There will definitely be setbacks. Who doesn't have setback in their lives? We all do. The difference between the winner and the loser is simple and we all know it, right?

The winner never quits and those who quit along the way end up as losers.

In order to achieve your dream, it is very important you believe in yourself. You have a lot of people who now want to be friends, to stick around simply because you have made it but when you were in difficult situations no one wanted to associate; everyone was looking from a distance. Life is like this; it happens all the time not only in football. But you should be able to know the kind of people you mingle with.

Aside believing in yourself, you need to totally commit to the goals that you have set for yourself, to work hard in improving your game techniques, skills and ability.

Always stay motivated and disciplined. As you try to avoid failure also look at those who have failed and learn from them, what made them fail and avoid going the same way.

When you have this burning desire to succeed and you wake up every day to remind yourself that your only way to achieving success is through hard work, discipline and dedication and you adhere to all of these, then you can be rest assured that you are on the right track, and you will definitely get to the top of your dream. It's all about being passionate and relentless in your daily work knowing that what you are doing will eventually pay off. This is the way that will lead you to accomplish your goal and turn your dream into reality.

We will never stop to encourage you and let you know that if your focus and aim is to be a professional football player, then hard work is very necessary, coupled with a good amount of patience. You have to have it in mind that turning into a professional football player is a gradual process during which you continue to learn to build and better your football skills technically and otherwise. Build your knowledge of football and most importantly, market yourself to the rest of the world.

Another important thing that will help you towards achieving your dream as an aspiring professional footballer is never to neglect your body. Don't ever forget to take care of your body. Treat it like a temple that it is. If you don't, you will get sick, mentally and physically, and this will slow down your work towards your goal.

However hard you're working, take time off to calm your nerves, to disconnect once in a while engage in other sporting activities of your interest and don't forget to eat healthy foods. Don't starve yourself.

As a professional footballer, it is your duty to maintain your body and keep it to the best possible shape at all times. This entails staying fit, resting your body appropriately, keeping healthy and looking after your body at all times. The only way to do this is by eating the right food, having a healthy and a balanced diet that will provide your body with the right nutrients and proteins at all times.

Avoid all forms of alcohol as an aspiring professional football player; it can ruin your health and career if care is not taken. Burgers or take-away foods and any type of fried food are not good for you, as they are high in oil and fats. The basic answer to your food intake is to eat in moderation. Freshly prepared fruits or smoothies and vegetables are highly recommended. A grown adult needs about 2000 calories a day and if you are an athlete, always try and exceed 2000 calories per day. Why? Because as you train and exercise yourself daily, you burn off these calories. This means that your calorie rate can run down to zero through physical exercises and you need to replace what you have lost without which you will be in lack of energy to continue with your trainings.

Dieting is simply controlling what you eat, how and when you eat it and in what volume you eat it. So long as people are different with different body compositions, constitutions and digestive systems, so do we need different and individual diets? However one thing that is

clear for us is that we need to take responsibility for what we eat and manage our bodies with care.

Personal hygiene too is necessary for the preservation of your health. It is a vital part of your professional football career and even goes beyond that. Good hygienic activities are preventive measures that reduce the chance of spreading diseases and getting ill; not only to you but also for the people around you.

The importance of good hygiene cannot be over emphasized; we all are witnesses to how every government of the world had to rally round, spent and budgeted more money on education and prevention of diseases during the period of covid-19 pandemic that just ravaged the world.

Most importantly, don't forget to pray. It'll nourish your soul and give you inner peace.

Your dream is a vehicle, and you're the driver. You should be in total control of the wheel. Don't let the passengers decide which way to follow for you. Stop trying to win over the people who don't believe in you or who criticize you. Only seek help from those who support and encourage your dream because they will cheer you on along the way.

- Hold fast to your dream of becoming a professional footballer.
- Gear up to fight the storms that will eventually arise on your way.
- Keep that banner shining and wear that smile on your face even while you are training.
- Never give up, and never give in to distractions of any kind.
- Stand up and face the fear, for it is all in the mind.

- Your dream is counting on your ability to weather the storms and obstacles you find on the way.
- It is our desire to see you to the top and we wish you all the very best. Never doubt your ability to make it to the top.

Chapter 8

DESIRE MORE



There is absolutely no limit to what we can achieve when we hunger for a particular thing. If we train our minds to desire and hunger for more always, then we can achieve whatever we set out to achieve in life.

When playing on the pitch or in training as a professional football player, there are two situations you can find yourself in. You either are a passenger on the pitch (that's the term normally used) or you decide to totally get involved and make a serious impact on the pitch.

What this means is that the choice to actively participate in a game and be able to make the difference lies in your ability to desire and hunger for more success. You can step up and make the difference every time you get onto the pitch; make an impact on the game; make and win big tackles; set your teammates up to score or even score the goal by yourself if you are in a better position to; lead and organize your team. Whatever you do, make a difference

on the football pitch. Be the player who initiates all the moves in the game. Of course, most of the time this is not always possible but bear in mind that you can do it and always do it whenever you can.

It is very important as an aspiring professional footballer to celebrate your small victories and achievements as you progress through life. Always congratulate and reward yourself for achieving the little good things you have achieved on your journey so far. Your journey should always be in the process of continuous refinement and improvement of your skills. Always have the desire to move forward, to ask yourself for more and always be wanting to achieve more.

One major trait among the greatest footballers who have played to the highest level of the game is their ability to always trying to give more, always trying to improve their game and their never give up attitude. They were able to get to the top because they never settled for anything less.

Even when they are in the best clubs in the world, they always wanted more, and they still want more even when they are the ones scoring the goals for their respective teams. And even after winning all the individual awards, they didn't relax; they kept pushing themselves. The rivalry between Cristiano Ronaldo playing for Real Madrid and Messi playing for FC Barcelona Football club comes to mind. These two players pushed themselves to the limits, trying to outdo each other, winning personal awards and scoring important goals for their various clubs. Both of them gave a good example of what it means to always ask for more from yourself even when they were already playing for two of the best clubs in the world.

Play hard and fair and be serious in what you do on the pitch. This will help your game positively. Measure each pass or shot, don't just shoot to clear away the ball from your end. Control and caress the ball. We have talked about the need to treat the ball as your friend, be close to it, always keeping it close to your feet. Be confident with the

ball; don't be in a hurry to put out the ball as soon as it gets to you, as this doesn't show confidence on your part.

When you are out there on the pitch, don't stop talking, as this will help your team mates in a positive way. Help when they lose the ball and you can help, correct them with love and not shouting in anger but encourage them in a positive way when they make mistakes. This will help get you more involved in the game and in a positive way too, as this gingers everyone to give their best on the pitch.

HUNGER FOR GOAL.

The modern football requires that each player on the pitch be able to score goals. Gone are the days when it's the duty of the strikers to do the scoring. As a professional footballer, you have to have the hunger to go for goal scoring opportunities. The best goal scorers could score with their eyes well closed or even without lifting their eyes up to look where the goal post is located. Why?

Because instinctively they know where the goal post is at all times.

Whatever position you play on the pitch, you should be able to know the distance from where you play to your opponent's goal post. Most of the time while in the heat of the game, you may not have enough time to look up to know where the goal post is before your opponent closes down on you. This is why it is very important that you are aware of the distance between you and the goal post at all times.

GO FOR THE BALL

Most times because of the charged atmosphere in the field of play, and all the noise all around the stadium, your teammates might not see or hear you even when you are in a better position to score than them. So if you want the ball, you have got to go for it. You need to be more vocal and outspoken. If you are the type that struggles with being vocal and demanding, then you have to really work

on this one quickly because timid players and generally not noticed on the field of play. You have got to do all you can to make sure that you get noticed by your teammates when on the pitch.

It's not necessarily all about shouting yourself hoarse or shouting to your teammates in order to get noticed but you can do this not only by being vocal but also by hand gestures. Raising your hand or both hands to alert your teammate when you think you are in a better position is also another good way of communicating with your teammates on the pitch. Point to them where you want to receive the ball while you do not forget that football is a team play. If you want to be actively involved in the game then you have to demand for the ball, shout for it to be given to you when you are better placed on the pitch.

GET MOTIVATED BEFORE EVERY GAME

Before each game, you have got to be in the right frame of mind to be able to put in your best on the football field.

The match is days or hours away, but your palms become sweaty and your mind races every time you think of stepping on to the pitch. You're excited and nervous at the same time. All these feelings are normal in a professional footballer's life. You have done all you could to prepare for the big day and the day finally arrives. But you are very nervous and afraid and you want to make sure you focus that energy effectively and ensure you are the best player you can be on the day of the game. What are the best ways to get psyched up before a big game? How can you channel those nervous jitters and transform them into focus and precision on match day?

Well we have got your back. Here are some research backed tips on how to make sure you have the best mindset for your next big competition.

FIND A ROUTINE

Have you ever seen professional football players behave in a particular way every time they are about to enter the

football pitch or just as they arrive the match venue? Have you ever asked yourself why they do it? Not to worry we will tell you. They are trying to concentrate on the match and stay focused. That's it. Every player is different from the other, therefore a player's routine might differ from the other. Some listen to a particular music in order to stay focused while others perform one type of ritual or the other. Lebron James, for example, does his famous pre-game "chalk toss" before every game.

Some players like Marcelo kneel on the pitch. Christiano Ronaldo either jumps into the pitch or he touches the touch and kisses his fingers just as he walks into the football pitch. Rafael Nadal has to walk on to the court with a racket in his hand, eat an energy gel and drink his hydration drink in the exact same way each time? All of these are just examples of how professional players stay focused just right before starting a game. You too will do yourself a lot of good to find a routine to follow each time

you are to play a game; this is just to help you stay focused and ease tension.

Pre-match routines may sometimes look more like rituals, but they help you get into the right mindset before a game. Find what calms you, motivates you or provides you with the direct focus that helps you perform best before a big game.

While you might have your own rituals, try creating some team rituals as well. Participating in pre-game routines as a team also helps to improve performance and create a positive bond amongst team mates.

VISUALIZE SUCCESS

Imagine yourself making those free throws, scoring those goals or taking the right steps to receive that perfect pass and weave through the defensive line. Imagine yourself scoring that goal. Doing this will have a significant impact on your actual performance during the game.

Let's hear from one of the best professional footballers in his time, ex Manchester United's and Everton's goal poacher Wayne Rooney.

"I always like to picture the game the night before. I'll ask the kit man what kit we're wearing, so I can visualize it. It's something I've always done, since when I was a young boy. It helps to train your mind to situations that might happen the following day. I think about it as I'm lying on bed. What will I do if the ball gets crossed in the box this way? What movement will I have to make to get on the end of it? It is just different things that might make you one per cent sharper."

LISTEN TO SOMEONE WHO MOTIVATES YOU

Most often than not, we see all this things happen just before every game, but maybe we don't take notice of them because we are not professional footballers but it does help a lot to remain calm and motivated before a game. We see players, some anyway with their head

phones, listening to probably some music of their choice. Others might be listening to some motivational talks, you can never know. Everyone just wants to remain focused on the big game that about to take place and no one wants to be in the heats of it all believe me. As a professional football player, get your mind busy and away from the pressure of the match proper by any means you think will be of help to you.

Motivational pre-game speeches from your coach can be useful, but you have to be connected and inspired by what they say. If you don't always feel inspired by your trainer's inspirational pre-match talks, spend some time watching or listening to famous motivational speeches online delivered by players or coaches you admire. As you get prepared for a game, watch their motivational videos to get motivated. Imagine that they are giving the speech to you and focus on each phrase and message that the speaker is trying to deliver.

BE POSITIVE YOURSELF

Cut out phrases like “I’m going to fail”, or “I’m going to miss my shot” from your thoughts in the lead up to the game. This type of thinking only kills your morale. Instead, allow positive and instructional self-talk. Instructional self-talk helps you revisit tactics and techniques that lead to better performances. Positive confessions and self-talk can boost your confidence. This will help you perform better during a football match.

If you are having troubles eliminating negative self-talk from your inner thoughts, start by having a deliberate instructional self-talk sessions. Open confessions, open your mouth and voice it out loud! When you have a moment to yourself, revisit the techniques you have practiced over and over during your training sessions and say them out loud. There is power in positive thinking and confessions. Once you feel comfortable with instructional self-talk, only allow yourself to say positive things about

your abilities and your performance. Include what you see when you visualize yourself succeeding.

The whole idea of “getting psyched up” before a game implies being in the right mental state of mind to perform at the optimal level. In other words, it refers to the power the mind has to help us play the best we can on the field. What this means is that we need to train our bodies as well as our minds when preparing for every game.

Whether you believe it or not, the truth is, there is a significant connection between your state of mind (thoughts, feelings and ability to focus) and your performance. There is an entire field of psychology dedicated to this called “Sports psychology”. This field has skyrocketed in popularity over the past several years because research has shown how important it is to be mentally prepared before a game, and to maintain the right mindset throughout the duration of the game.

Studies have shown how mental health has a significant impact on an athletes' success in sport; up to 85% of athletes can be deemed successful or unsuccessful after measuring their mood and personality structure.

Some factors, like setting goals, visualization and routine all have an impact on a footballer's performance and all three of these elements are different from training on the pitch, and have everything to do with getting into the right mindset. "Getting psyched up."

Lastly, being the best player you can be on the football pitch isn't just about putting time into practice and training. It is also about the need to pay attention to what is happening in your brain. Getting into the right mindset has a significant impact on how well you do on the field during big games.

Remember, however, that everyone has their own unique routines and rituals to help them feel confident, focused and directed before a game, and maintaining that

mentality throughout the duration of the game. If you haven't found yours yet as an aspiring professional footballer, then it's time to start experimenting.

If you are struggling with getting into the right mindset, talk to your coach or teammates about your worries. Ask them for tips on how they get psyched up before games. If you feel like your internal challenges go beyond anything you can discuss with your teammates or coach, consider talking to a counselor or therapist. A counselor will help you take meaningful steps towards improving your mental health, which will result in benefits both on the field and in your life in general.

KEEP CALM AND CONTROL YOUR TEMPER

During the match proper, there are high impact and high tension activities going on; tackles flying in here and there, players being quite physical with each other as they tackle themselves for the ball. Amidst all this, don't look for revenge yourself even when you feel the opponent is

being malicious with his tackle. Get up and keep playing whenever you can, unless you are feeling so much pain.

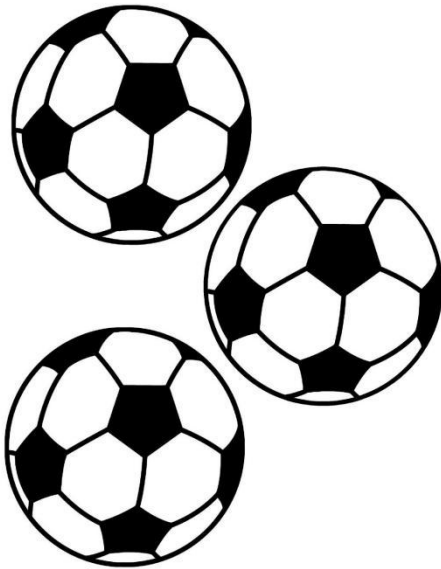
Players can be very verbal sometimes, and in the wrong way. Sometimes they are out to provoke and get you sent off by the referee. Don't fall into these traps, hence the need to always keep calm, or else you put your team at risk. Whatever happens be a professional; don't forget that you need to keep your cool at all times while on the field. Don't let the incidents that happen on the pitch affect and make you do stupid things on the pitch. While some players can handle pressures very well others cannot handle it so well and if you are the type that doesn't handle pressures very well then we advise that you need to look for programs that will help you put this under check.

There are lots of helpful programs out there today for professional football players. You just have to find a way to put it under check and deal with it. There is no other

way around it other than face it head-on and put it under check. Losing your cool can be costly not only to your teammates but also to the entire club. Condition yourself and never forget that your aim is to become a professional footballer. Most professional footballers have already gone through this phase and have learnt how to deal with difficult and aggressive situations like this. When you lose your temper and get into arguments with your opponents or the ref, it only means you are not focused or that you have lost it; and that's not a pleasant scene to display. Remember that being able to keep your temper in check always is all part of becoming a professional football player.

Chapter 9

HAVE A PLAN "B"



Having gotten to this stage with us and having seen all the statistics and the odds against your chances of making it as a professional football player, it is not in our interest to bore you again with the negative statistics. Neither do we want to start discouraging you at this stage. It is our desire to help you as much as we can towards making your goal of becoming a professional football player come to reality. But the big question is what happens if you don't make it to the top level for any reason whatsoever? What happens if your career is cut short by injury or you get laid off by your club for any reason? What even happens after you have retired as a professional footballer? Ever heard about the need not to put all your eggs in one basket?

In this chapter we are going to look at what other options are available to you should you for any reason fail to make your dream of becoming a professional footballer comes

through. Or maybe it is after you have retired from active football. The life span of your professional career is between 10 and 15 years at the top; obviously it is a relatively short career. Majority of the professional players will retire by their mid-30s, with few continuing in elite competition beyond 35 years old. It's slightly a different case for goalkeepers; many of them play on until they are 37 or 38 years old. Nevertheless few exceptional outfield players have managed to extend their careers beyond what many can achieve. They've done so in a number of ways, with all of them escaping serious injuries, which is one sure way of being able to play for more years at the top level even when you are past 32 years of age.

There is a general pattern among the top divisions in England, Spain, Germany and Italy. All these leagues have had many players continue well into their late 30's. But this is not what we want to discuss in this chapter.

Plan how to survive after retirement. Having an alternate career plan is a smart way to go while aspiring to play football professionally, and this is why we advised earlier of the need to take your educational career seriously and pursue it with the same vigor you pursue your football career. That way, when you retire you will have what to fall back on in the event that you decide to stay away entirely from the world of football and still be happy. There is no better time than now to start preparing your plan "B" as you are still in the academy level and still have the opportunity to pursue an educational degree while still playing football. Even if you have gone on to secure a professional contract, it's not still late to try and churn out a degree in other career of your choice. We never can tell what will happen the next day and no one knows when his/her career will eventually come to an end, but it is in our hands to prepare for situations like this ahead of time. There are two aspects that might bring you to having to opt for your plan "B". The first scenario is when you have

finished your professional football career and have retired from the game, while the second is where your professional career has come to an abrupt end through injury or having been laid off by your club.

During the course of your football career, we advise that you don't neglect your educational career. We cannot stop saying this because of the importance we attach to it; you will need to fall back on something when your career eventually comes to an end. Let us even look at the experiences of some of the professional football players who have once found themselves in the exact situation we are talking about.

Michael Hazeldine, born on the 28th of November 1986 joined Wigan Athletic at age 13 as a striker. He became a reserve team regular for the Latics and played one first team game before being released in 2006 at age 19. He went on to study medicine at Edinburgh University. In his own words, he tells us "I think I always dreamed of being

a professional footballer, I felt I was good enough and I had the opportunity, so I thought that was the way I was going to go."

But unfortunately, it never ended the way he thought it was going to end. Many aspiring professional footballers will sadly find themselves in Michael's situation, what you choose to do now aside pursuing your professional career might probably be what will save you in future.

Michael Hazeldine's story didn't end there. He was taken up by Wigan Athletic as a talented 13 year old. Hazeldine went on to earn a three-year trainee scholarship at the age of 16. By 18, he was playing regularly for the reserves and training with the first team, continuing with his story he said "It was a big step. Just mixing with the players, around the training ground or in the canteen, seeing these big names like Jimmy Bullard and Jason Roberts, they were very exciting times for a young player. It felt like

we'd got to the last step and things were within touching distance."

But as it is with many young aspiring professional football players, Hazeldine found the last step the most difficult. Sad, you may say; but let's find out more about what happened.

When his youth contract ended, he and his fellow scholars were summoned to the manager's office to receive the dreaded news; none of them would be offered a professional contract.

"Paul Jewell (the then manager of the club) called me in and said, 'Your dedication is second to none, but you're not ready to go into our first team.'" "The other lads were devastated because all their eggs were in that one basket."

But unlike most of his mates, Hazeldine had prepared for the possibility that he might not be kept on and to his credit, he didn't put all his eggs in one basket. During his

academy Wigan had offered him the opportunity to attend college once a week to pursue A-Levels. A chance he grabbed with both hands which in turn saved him a big embarrassment. "I was always aware of the need to have a backup plan," he says. "You see the number of players who are released, so you know the chances. I spent most of my free time studying from the age of 15 to 19. That's what you need to do although football is a fantastic way to go, a lot of players don't make it." Hazeldine later went on to University of Edinburgh to study medicine and has since graduated to become a medical doctor.

Even if you may not want to hear it, we think it our duty to let you be aware of the truth concerning your choice of career and to point out all the pitfalls so you prepare well ahead of time for these types of eventualities.

How many young lads out there do you think have failed to heed this advice? And suddenly your contract or career ends and you are in the wilderness? All the while during

the course of your career, you were aware that you might not make it, but you thought you would, which obviously is a good thing to do. But then, in life sometimes, that reality which nobody wants to come, but it comes. The earlier you have a plan "B" the better for you. You have heard it now.

So if you have played to the highest level and you are retiring, here is a number of things we suggest you can do. Put your finances in order. Learn how to manage your money effectively. While still in active football career, invest your earnings wisely. Start well ahead of time to prepare for what to do once you retire instead of leaving everything to chance until your retirement. If you have had any plan "B" during your academy days, this might be the right time to do something that has to do with what you studied during those years. Presently most retiring professional footballers go into coaching. This is understandable because it aligns with their choice of

career and it keeps them close to the football world and their passion.

You can start the development of your plan "B" by observing what's going on around your environment and maybe take a course in business management or any other thing of interest to you. This is not a time to be idle because you will absolutely get your life bored out. The best thing to do is to keep yourself busy and happy. Search for ways that you can immediately contribute to your changing situations. Consider networking with your fellow professionals and make contacts in the area which you think you are going to get involved into. It won't be bad to volunteer for professional work or helping kids who are trying to come up in the game. All in all, there are a whole lot of things you can get your hands busy with once you retire from professional football, be it football related one or outside of football entirely.

About the Book

Among the most popular sports in the world, football or soccer happens to be the number one most popular sport of all time.

This sport is loved by almost everyone on earth with estimated fans numbering into 3.5 Billion.

As a result of this many young people all over the world have come to embrace playing football as a professional career and quite understandably so.

Moreover, it is sad to say that most of these aspiring footballers have no idea how to go about achieving their dreams of becoming professional footballers or they end up into the hands of dubious individuals and football agents who end up giving them away to clubs who will not be of any help towards the advancement of their careers. Some end up signing away their future and talents because they have fallen onto the wrong hands.

Hence I have decided to put this book together.

This book is like taking you by hand and showing you what to do and what to avoid at every level of your playing career in order not to fall by the wayside just like many young talented and promising players has failed to go ahead and play at the professional level after shining very well at the underage levels.

About the Author



Anselem Okafor, just like many other Nigerians born in the late 70's, grew up to play football on the streets of the eastern part of Nigeria. During his primary and secondary school days he was actively involved in sporting activities; especially football, track and field events. He went on to represent his school in sporting activities up to the state level and also qualified to represent his state - the then old Anambra state in the 1988 edition of the National sports festival held in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

He travelled to Europe in pursuit of a professional career in football in early 2000. His passion for football and the desire for him to show the younger generations the way to go towards achieving their dreams made him put together this wonderful guide for youngsters out there who have chosen professional football as a career. Nothing gives him joy than seeing young talented kids work their way up to becoming professional footballers.