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## COACHING IN AFRICAN FOOTBALL: WHEN FOREIGN COACHES TURN RUBBISH

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**The debate about who are better - local or foreign coaches - has for long been a hot topic on the African continent. Robert Muggaga lists the achievements of both foreign and African coaches and concludes that African coaches have achieved more success managing their teams than expatriates.**

This year's edition of Africa's most prestigious soccer tournament, the African Cup of Nations kicks off in two weeks' time in the west African country of Mali. Once again like during previous major tournaments, the focus will be on the coaches' capabilities to deliver.

Fans will be looking forward to see which participating countries' soccer expatriates will prove better and push their teams far in the three weeks' tournament - let alone lifting the premier soccer title on the continent.

Whereas some countries like Algeria, (Rabar Madjer) , Liberia (George Weah), Nigeria (Amodu Shaibu) Egypt (Mohamed El Gohari) and Ivory coast (Lama Bamba) will go to Mali under the guidance of local coaches, others like Morocco (Portuguese -Humberto Coelho), Burkina Fasso (Argentine-Oscar Fullone), Senegal (German- Peter Schnittger), and Tunisia (French-Henri Michel) have put their hopes under the servces of foreign white coaches.

### The fall and rise of coach Fabisch

The debate about who are better - local or foreign coaches - has for long been a hot topic on the footballing continent. Just four weeks ago the 3-1 defeat of Kenya's national football team, popularly known as Harambee Stars, by little known Ethiopia in the finals of the East and Central African senior challenge cup held in Rwanda was enough to cause a soccer storm.

Kenyan soccer fans were so disappointed by the results that they thronged Jomo Kenyatta international Airport, Nairobi in big numbers not as usual to welcome the team back but to abuse and call for the sacking of the coach, German-born Reinhard Fabisch.

"Fabisch is rubbish, Fabisch is rubbish" some were heard shouting at the veteran coach what has now become a popular saying to the disgruntled fans in Kenyan football. Fabisch who last year returned for the third time to coach the team shortly after the arrival from Kigali told a press conference that winning the regional tournament was not his major priority but moulding the team for the future especially leading it to the 2004 African Cup of Nations and the 2006 World Cup finals.

It was like adding fuel on fire when Fabisch said that his was a team for the future and that those expecting instant results should instead hire the services of Jesus Christ. His statement even drew more

anger from the Christian community which called for his deportation and accused the German of dragging the name of Jesus Christ into trivial soccer matters.

Many other soccer fans including former Kenyan Football Federation (KFF) treasurer, Noordine Taib, maintained their belief that Fabisch was indeed rubbish.

"Fabisch has been promising to take the team to the African Cup of Nations for so long but nothing has happened and this time is talking about 2004 and 2006 so that he can buy more time," he told one local daily.

Interestingly, Fabisch returned to manage Harambee Stars mid- last year at the time when many fans were calling out and dying for his name and services, believing he was the only Messiah capable of saving Kenyan football from imminent extinction. Earlier on, a fools day story appearing in one of the two leading English dailies that Fabisch had been re-appointed the country's national coach was enough to cause wild excitement among the soccer fans.

During his reign as coach of Harambee Stars, Fabisch guided the team to the finals of the 1987 Fifth All African Games held in Nairobi where they narrowly lost 0-1 to Egypt. Again when on the steering, Kenya lost in the final of the 2001 Castle Lager Cup to hosts Tanzania before falling to Ethiopia in the Challenge Cup final in Kigali. He also failed to qualify the team for this year's Nations Cup finals slated for Mali.

Surprisingly Kenya last won a major soccer title, the regional Challenge Cup in 1983 when under the guidance of "son of the soil" (local) coach Marshal Mulwa. After him another Kenyan, Hussein Kheri twice succeeded in steering the team to the Nations Cup finals in 1988 and 1990.

## **Foreign coaches 9 - African coaches 13**

It's such situations experienced in African football that has kept on the hot debate about who are better, local or foreign coaches? The answer though seem to vary from country to country and from federation to federation.

Just consider this; In the year of Our Lord 2000 South Africa named Portuguese Carlos Queiroz to replace home boy Trott Moloto as national team, Bafana Bafana's new coach, turning the former coach into assistant.

The same year several Ghanaian players threatened to boycott the national team, the Black Stars unless the contract of their Italian born coach Guiseppe Dossena was renewed. The country's football association had sacked the coach rightly after losing patience waiting for success.

In fact, despite this great attraction and obsession many African have with foreign (read white) coaches history and statistics seem to offer something else; that African coaches have achieved more success managing their teams than the "expatriates".

In the 45 year-old history of the Nations Cup, only nine imported coaches have led African teams to the title compared to 13 locals.

The nine expatriates are; Hungary's Ferenc Csanadi (Zaire in 1968) , Yugoslavs, Blagoje Vidinic (Zaire-1974) and Rade Ognanovic (Cameroon- 1984). Others were; Romanian Ghorge Mardarescu (Morocco-1976) , Brazil's Otto Gloria (Nigeria- 1980), Welshman Michael Smith (Egypt-1986), Frenchmen Claude Le Roy (Cameroon-1988) and Pierre Lechantre (Cameroon-2002). Without forgetting Dutch Clemens Westerhof (Nigeria-1994).

Not surprising too that African countries have given their local coaches fewer opportunities to manage their teams in the more prestigious World Cup tournaments even when it 's the locals who might have made the trip possible. Only four African countries have been managed by locals in the past World Cup tournaments compared to 11 non Africans. (Chetali Abelmajid-Tunisia in 1978, Mahieddine Khalef and Rabah Saadane for Algeria in 1982 and 1986 World Cups respectively and Abdallah Blinda-Morocco in 1994).

And talking about the capability of local coaches, who will ever forget the 1992 Nations cup held in Senegal where Ivory Coast's little known national team's coach, Yeo Martial, beat an army of loud talking expatriates to the trophy by defeating Ghana in the most spectacular spot kicks ever witnessed in the tournament's history.

And lest Ugandans forget, the superb Uganda Cranes' team of 1978 which lost 2-0 to hosts Ghana in the finals of the Nations Cup was coached by local coach, Peter Okee (RIP). Since no other coach has managed such a feat for Uganda , local or foreign.

Some nurse a belief that most appointed local coaches fail to deliver due to lack of motivation and support like the one rendered to the expatriates when they come. The likes of grass root campaign to spot and develop talent early plus the availability of enough training facilities would certainly make the work of local coaches easier.

Otherwise just accepting the widely held view that Africans are simply inferior to other races even when it comes to sports is self defeating. How then can we explain some of the following facts; Ghana winning the 1991 under 17 World Cup, Liberian George Weah being named the 1995 European and FIFA world footballer of the year, Nigeria and Cameroon winning the 1996 and 2000 Olympic Gold medals respectively.

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