

Why Nigeria will remain second tier football nation

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Monday, 02 May 2011
Last Updated Monday, 02 May 2011

Falcons primed to fail in Germany

To the uninformed, the successes of the Eagles teams are a sign that things are turning the corner. My response is a sly smile, a nod and a sinking feeling in my heart. Let me tell you why??

To date, we operate our leagues on a hap hazard basis, with no structures or processes to formally coordinate operations. Our Female national team is heading to Germany within a month, and they have to wait for the Maigari led board to return from SA to focus on them (meanwhile, other teams are in training camps in Europe preparing for the competition), our plans for the female world cup is on paper and waiting for attention. We have a Female national team coach who, it was recently revealed has not received salaries for 2 years, is living in fear of being replaced at any moment, and has lost 2 of her most trusted assistants (whom no clear and immediate replacements have been announced or drafted to her team). Surely, Nigeria expects her to get to the Quater Finals..... Only God know how we pull off these miracles...I am here in Washington DC, and attended an olympic development program (ODP) retreat for regional coaches. I was one of the youngest regional coaches to have worked in the program, as far back as 1996, in San Francisco California. Then I was also licensed by the USSF, NSCAA, having passed my USA license coaching coach, and my NSCAA Advanced Nationals, I was then seconded to Go Ahead Eagles and Germinal Berschoot Antwerp GBA (under coaches Luc Verheyen, Theo Van Zele and co...). That knowledge afforded me the opportunity to learn about planning for tournaments, coordinating and multi level training executions and opposing team scouting. Plus the countdown dateline process that allows national team coaches to align training programs and schedule, plus player biometry analysis that watches fitness and conditioning cycles of each player selected for the national team. This weekend's retreat was an eye opener for me. Having not actively participated in coaching since 2004 (my last assignment was as a supporting back room staff (freelance)/scout for my friend, Ablak Wafik, Chief Coach of Fran Boran (Former Captain of the Atlas Lions) in the Belgian third Division), I was glad to be back, I was glad to have to listen to US National Team coach drill ODP regional coaches on what is expected from them and how they must manage the players under their care. I also listened to administrators from the USSF National selector's team talk about how to manage and coordinate the various schedules of these athletes, how to work with their school coaches, on maintaining the same training regime, they talked about sharing knowledge on players, they talked about even passing on knowledge about Foreign players living and playing in the US to the national selectors and their coaches. I was grateful to my friend (who requests to remain anonymous) for inviting me to this retreat. I added knowledge about player nutrition, health and safety issues, player management (not transfers and ITC, but real organization of a footballer's lifestyle), and modern training methods with the utilization of ICT tools, and the importance of having a strong backroom staff. I never would have understood the importance of the team's data miner (that word would be French to many Nigerian coaches-this is the guy who keeps all the stats, of every person, in every game, in every play at every time), the nutritionist, psychologist, physical trainer, strength and mobility trainer, flexibility and orthopedic specialist, and finally, the coaches and the MANAGER (two very different functions, but in cases of lower division sides, can be handled by one very versatile person, but in professional and national teams, are two distinct but complementary people). I learned of how schedules have improved, I saw software, I saw programs, I saw methods, I saw systems. Today's coach is an ICT compliant and computer savvy person, who are forever reading, researching and is informed, analytical and very aware. Today's administrator is a "can do" person, a builder, a total package, an informed technocrat, with savvy business acumen, who leads an army of technocrats that have the pulse on sports update, player profiles, data on performance, finance, a network of local and international administrators, key government decision makers, sporting goods manufacturers, sponsors, journalists and coaches alike. These persons have the pulse on any player of interest, in any corner of the world and they can reach anyone in football in 3 telephone calls or less. In my anxious and mischievous inquisitiveness I tracked down the front office of DC united, where I begged for an unofficial tour of their operations and asked over a hundred questions, from their training facility, to player welfare, to how much they pay for allowances, and about sponsorship, the USSF grants, to health issues, to how they operate and how their books are kept (I had to peek over the accountant's shoulder to look at the software being manipulated to show me their season tickets takings and other income sources (merchandising, surprisingly ranks as number two source. You will never guess their number source of income.....Hospitality)..... I wowed and ouches and oooooohed until I was sounding melodramatic. This was a revelation for me... If the American were taking this level of detail to drive development. Where are we???? For any Nigerian national team to play and secure victory against any team from a developed country, we must give that coach a national award..... For winning that game..... Talk less of coming second or third or even winning an international tournament. God is really a Nigerian. So, to my uninformed friends, who see the victory of the Eagles teams as a sign of better things to come. Alas, you are like the supporters of Arsenal football club, you will soon be used to disappointment, a heart attack syndrome, and many frustrating and suicidal tendencies soon enough. This board has no clue, this board may have all the good intentions in the world, but they are doomed to fail and fail woefully. The signs are there... With all good intentions and ability of Eucharria, our darling, long suffering, dedicated Female National team coach, she is set up to fail in Germany. Compare Eucharria's training plans, structure, current mindset, environment, materials she is working with, to the likes of her 21 other counterparts (Nigeria is 22nd in Women's Football, abi!), compare the set plans of the Germans, I want to even think that by now, the German even know the cycles of the Nigerian players, since they already have bio data on each of the players ever to wear a Falcon, Falconet, Flamingo

jersey. And am sure, there are other countries that are sharing information about our team, the South Americans and the US, share data. What is the board doing in this regard....? We have heard Austin Eguavoen complain about the lack of data before matches, we also have heard how Sam John sent home two players on the eve of a major tournament, for "technical reasons" (according to OBJ: I dey laugh ooo) My question to Chris Green is thus: What is the structure of the technical dept to supporting the national teams, do we have data enough that is being updated on a weekly basis, do we have intel on all Nigeria's opponents (should Siasia engage Dan Amoukachi as a consultant, since he watches more la liga than anyone else in Nigeria, to provide intel on Argentina for June 1 match). What are the structures being put in place to ensure systematic availability of data for our teams? We have Nigeria's international competition schedules, do we have scouts doing work for us right now. Do we have relationships with other FAs in the region of our international opponents, who have played against these teams that can share intel with us, on short notice. Do we have a modus operandi for the training of local league coaches, or having workshops for premier league managers, coaches, supporters coach chiefs, etc.... what is the plan for 2011-12 for the technical department, are we working with IBM, Intel, Microsoft to support the technical departments, as I read is being done in CONCACAF, UEFA, CONMEBOL countries??? The FIFA goal project, what is the next stage of the FA technical committee's objective for it?? What is the technical committee's view point on Grassroots soccer development?? it would be interesting to get some clarity, on these issues, and they can be posted on the technical committee's space on the NFA (or NFF) website..... (this century, of course). Not holding my breath on getting answers from the Maigari group (I must clarify that I believe Alhaji Maigari, to be a gentleman, nice enough to be my friend, but I don't honestly think, he is cut out to be the President and custodian of Nigerian football Simple). With the way things are going, I fear for our national teams (wouldnt even go into our teams in the continental tournament... Please God bless you guys, know this, that you are on your own). With what I have seen of recent, I strongly believe that our national teams will continue to be second rate in the international sphere, and would marginally succeed, and will only continue to expose our lack of a structured and reformed football environment. I give South Africa 5 more years; they will join the North Africans to dominate football in the continent. If Congo can institutionalize the structures created within the TP Mazembe organisation, they too will climb to that elite group. Nigeria, will lead the 2nd tier and might struggle, if Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Sudan and Libya can liberalize their leagues fast enough (cash alone cannot guarantee success). As I fly back to Nigeria, I bid my family and the experiences adieu, till the summer when I return, but not without stating my new found resolution, to attend as many football info sessions, worldwide (I must go back to get my USSF A license revalidated, must finish my UEFA B license, and for good measure, finish that application to FIFA for Football Agent's license, so that I speak with authority, since Naija like paper well well), because like Caesar said Veni, Vidi, Vici (I came, I saw, and I conquered my fear on holding back my thoughts about Maigari led NFA or F, my desires and expectations for Nigerian football, and the execution of my action plan for Nigerian football, can't sit on the fence anymore)..... I will be back, and you certainly will hear from me on the way forward.....