

Editorial: African Soccer and Brain Drain: Potential Developmental Impacts

Ian Yeboab

African Soccer has come of age. I was fortunate to watch, first hand, some of the games in the 26th MTN Africa Cup of Nations (CAN 2008) in Ghana. I saw the opening match between Ghana and Guinea in Accra, as well as the most anticipated game between Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria in Sekondi. I watched several other games on television. Between the 20th of January and the 10th of February, sixteen African countries converged on Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi and Tamale to compete for the most coveted trophy on the continent. The irony of this African success story is that it occurred just as Kenya (one of the more stable countries in the region) was unraveling and descending into chaos.

Even though Ghana only won the bronze medal, I was impressed with the high quality of soccer and the excellent organization that the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) put together. The eventual winner, Egypt, deserved to win the trophy for the 6th time but they had to endure tough competition from Cameroon, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Morocco, Zambia, South Africa, Guinea, and Benin. Even relatively unknown countries like Angola, Sudan (despite Darfur) and Mali gave excellent performances as soccer nations.

The high quality of soccer was a result of players from various European leagues competing for their national teams. Some of the big names from European leagues, such as Abuterika, Drogba, Eto'o, Essien, Yakubu, Kanu, Muntari, Kalu, Diouf, and the Laryea brothers, were on display in Ghana. For me, this was my chance to see these million-dollar stars up close and personal. To match the presence of these high quality players, Ghana spent about \$157 million revamping both Accra and Kumasi Stadiums and built ultra modern ones at Sekondi and Tamale (BBC 6th March 2008).

Being Africa, there were glitches in organization of the tournament. For one, the sale of tickets was poorly done to the extent that many matches were played in relatively empty stadiums, even though spectators would have liked to watch games live. In addition, reporters