



## The Beam Sports

Sports at its best!

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**I**t was on the temporary bridge between the media centre and the Ellis Park Stadium back in June when an expert in African football boldly advised me to have a bet on Ghana to win the 2010 World Cup.

The Black Stars' certainly have no worries as the frantic last round of African qualifiers gets underway as they have already made it through to South Africa with two games to spare after winning the first four of their third qualifying stage matches without conceding a goal.

At least one bookmaker quotes them at 40-1 outsiders to lift the trophy next summer and that's a handsome price for the most likely of all the African nations to win the competition on home continental soil.

The current South Africa side is not good enough to get beyond the last 16 stage. So, all of Africa will be hungry to get behind another team and with that following Ghana could take some stopping.

Under their Serb coach Ratomir Djukovic, they surprised a few people in Germany 2006 by beating the Czechs and USA before a second round loss to Brazil that was closer than the 3-0 scoreline suggests.

Eight of the side that day, plus Chelsea's Michael Essien, who was badly missed against Brazil because of suspension, will be expected to star again in 2010.

Once again they have a wily Serb in charge. Milovan Rajevac, a craggy defender in his time, worked wonders taking FK Borac from perennial Serbian league relegation struggles into the UEFA cup and hopes are high in Accra that he will perform another miracle next summer.

He has some very good players to work with - the midfield that helped clinch a place in the finals with last month's 2-0 home win over Sudan epitomised their potential.

Essien is a world star and alongside him he had the excellent captain Stephen Appiah, whose commitment to his country was made clear at the 2006 African Cup of Nations when he played all three games despite his ankle being strapped because of injury.

It was Appiah's penalty that beat the USA to take Ghana beyond the group stage in Germany but he has one major concern though. Having fallen out with Fenerbahce, he is not playing club football and his fitness could suffer in coming months.

Also at the heart of things is Anthony Annan, a pocket powerhouse in the Essien mould, who has just won the Norwegian title with Rosenberg. He's nicknamed Aimar after the tricky Argentine which



## Can Ghana create history?

suggests he can play a bit as well as break up opposition attacks.

Suley Muntari completed the midfield last month. Returning to the side for the first time in six months he scored the first goal and was back to the sort of form that won him an FA Cup winner's medal with Portsmouth and the Serie A title with Inter Milan last spring.

Jose Mourinho has criticised Muntari's lack of fitness this season and he has had wrangles with the Ghanaian FA in the past, but on his day he can be terrific and his scoring rate of 15 goals from 48 internationals demands respect.

Haminu Draman (whose name was misspelt as Dramani on his 2006 shirt) has genuine pace as a left-wing option and the under-20 captain Andre Dede Ayew, son of former African Footballer of the Year Abedi Pele, could fight his way into the squad after shining at the current U20 World Cup in Egypt.

He scored a 25 yard belter in the 4-0 win over England the other day and nearly got another with an acrobatic back heel. Premier League clubs will be watching the youngster who was playing in the Champions League for Marseilles at 18 but has lost his way in France a little bit.

Another member of that under-20 side who will probably be in South Africa is full-back Samuel Inkoom. Premier scouts have been impressed by his club form at Basle and his recent performances for the full international side.

Ghana's defence also has experience in World Cup '06 veterans, John Pantasil of Fulham, Sunderland's versatile John Mensah and Roda's Eric Oddo but keeper Richard Kingson is not getting enough football at Wigan.

Up front Asamoah Gyan of Rennes has six goals for club and country this season and 16 for Ghana in 30 appearances, while Matthew Amoah, who played in Germany

'06, has been a regular scorer over the years with Vitesse Arnhem and NAC Breda.

Amoah is a small, quick, elusive scorer of important goals, netting three in qualifying for 2006 and another four so far this time.

Junior Agogo will be familiar to English fans after a nomadic career in the Football League. Apollon is currently his 14th club, but he is another who could be called upon to get goals.

The likely first XI looks strong but the rigours of tournament football could test the questionable quality of the rest of the squad.

The African Cup of Nations in the New Year will be an interesting dress rehearsal. They finished third on home soil in 2008 and have not lifted their continental crown since 1982.

If they do triumph in Angola, just watch their World Cup odds tumble.

## Referee chief wants Ferguson ban

**T**he head of the referees' union wants Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson banned for claiming match official Alan Wiley was not fit enough.

Ferguson has since apologised for any embarrassment his remarks after the draw with Sunderland may have caused.

But Alan Leighton, head of officials' union Prospect, told BBC Radio 5 live the apology was "half-hearted".

"A punishment should be a Uefa-type coaching ban, which is more than a touchline ban," said Leighton.

"A Uefa ban involves a ban for a greater period of time during, before and after a game."

An analysis of Wiley's fitness following the initial remarks from Ferguson after the recent 2-2 draw at home to Sunderland showed the referee's performance proved he had run more than most of the players during the game.

The Football Association has asked the Old Trafford boss to explain his comments by 16 October and, even though he has issued an apology, Leighton has criticised the manner of it.

Ferguson said he would be contacting Wiley to talk to him personally but he still left a question mark hanging over the fitness of referees in England.

"My only intention in speaking publicly, was to highlight what I believe to be a serious and important issue in the game, namely that the fitness levels of referees must match the ever increasing demands of the modern game, which I hope will now be properly addressed through the appropriate formal channels," added Ferguson in his statement at the weekend.

Leighton responded: "I think it probably exacerbates the position rather than resolves it."

"He clearly hasn't retracted his statement about Alan being unfit so it's not an apology to Alan for the main offence caused. He then widens it to question the fitness of other referees in the select group."

"He seems to be opening another can of worms, which I don't think is helpful at all."

He stated: "One of the things I've done as a result of this is to call on the employer (Professional Game Match Officials Ltd) to issue a report about the fitness of the referees, showing how fit they are."

## Heartland Qualify...

*Contd. from back page*

In the first half, Moses Ogaga failed to direct his free header from inside the box at target as Pillars piled on the pressure in search of the opening goal.

Heartland by no means stayed back in their defence as they also launched several attacks of their own. Two-goal hero from the first clash, Agba tested the agility of Theophilus Joel early in the second half with a swerving free kick.

Zambian striker Signs Chibambo also saw his chip over a diving Joel fly over the bar and late on, Emeka Nwanna almost drew first blood for the visitors, but his final effort crashed against the side netting.

But overall, the best openings fell to the home side. The team's leading scorer in the Champions League, Victor Namo, forced at least three saves from the Heartland goalkeeper with the most notable being in the 62nd minute, when Brown had to spectacularly block the striker's shot from the top of the box.

Bello Kofarmata and Ogaga also had chances to get on the score sheet, but their finishing let them down even inside the box.

And just when it looked like this match-up will finish in a draw, Agba's stunning effort bounced right in front of goalkeeper Joel for the only goal of the day. It was Agba's sixth goal of the Champions League.



## Heskey will consider Villa future

**E**mile Heskey will consider leaving Aston Villa in the January transfer window as he looks to secure a place in England's 2010 World Cup finals squad.

The 31-year-old has started only one Premier League match this season.

England coach Fabio Capello appears to favour Heskey but the striker still fears for his place in South Africa.

"I will have to sit down and think about my next move," he said. "I don't know whether I can get a World Cup place if I'm not playing for Villa."

Heskey played in the 1-0

defeat in Ukraine on Saturday and has started six of England's nine World Cup qualifiers in the current campaign.

"I'm happy to be playing for England and, obviously, not playing at club level is difficult," he stated.

"It's something I will have to look at when I get back and try to address it."

The former Liverpool striker joined Aston Villa from Wigan for £3.5m in January, linking up again with manager Martin O'Neill after a previous spell together at Leicester City.

Heskey has won 57 England caps since making his debut