

# FIRST TOUCH

Welcome to 2019

WHICH WAS YOUR FAVORITE?

**TOP 10 MOMENTS OF 2018**

GOLDEN YEARS

**EPL AFRICANS PEAKING?**

AFCON HOSTING RIGHTS IN LIMBO

**HOST NATION CONUNDRUM**

NIGERIA 9X CHAMPIONS

**AWCON18 REVIEW**

#WEWANTKOULIBALY

**MOST WANTED IN EUROPE**

WHAT A TIME FOR SAFA TALENT

**BANYANA VS BAFANA**

# GLOBAL REIGN

**OF THE EGYPTIAN KING**

FirstTouch Africa



## Football Fact

Nooit opgeven altijd doorgaan,  
Aangenaam door vermaak en  
nuttig door ontspanning,  
Combinatie Breda

is the longest football club name in the entire  
sport; the Netherlands-based team is  
commonly referred to just as NAC Breda.



# FT

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"He truly became the Egyptian King; graffiti of his face all across the North African country, a 'brawl' over image rights for his face, his shooting boots immortalized at a museum in Britain, spoiled ballot papers in Egypt's presidential election with many voting "Mo Salah" and many other intriguing events which could take forever to lay down."

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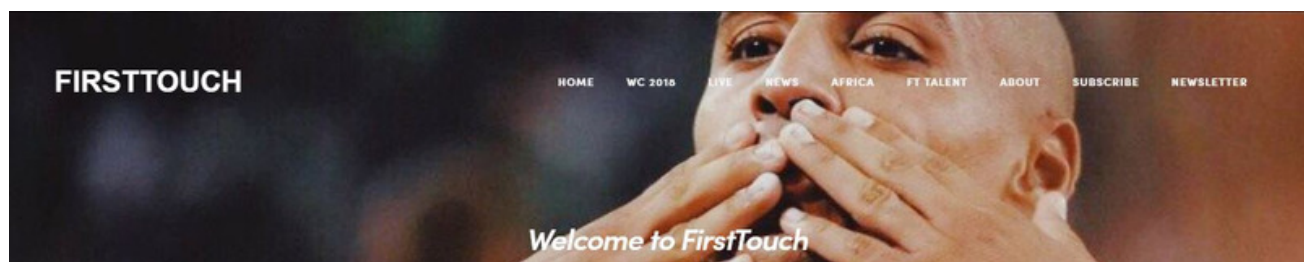
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# ARE AFRICANS PEAKING IN THE ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE?

Written by: Dennis Takaendesa

**“The Egyptian King won the match ball after scoring a hatrick and gave away his Man Of The Watch Award to James Millner, who clocked 500 premier league appearances in the tie. Last season’s golden boot winner and first runners up to the FIFA Best Male Player of the Year award is finally silencing critics who labelled him a “one-time season wonder.”**

— Dennis Takaendesa, FirstTouch Africa

We have had legendary African icons repping the continent in the world’s most watched club football league, the English Premier League. I am talking about the likes of Didier Drogba, Samuel Eto’o, the tall striker in Nwankano Kanu and even the controversial Emmanuel Adebayor who represented both of the North London clubs in Arsenal and Tottenham. It’s easy to remember forwards, but they are not all of the Africans who played the game at the highest level. Do you remember Lauren? The Arsenal defender who owned the right wing of the famous “Invincibles” setup? More interestingly, now more than ever – it seems African players are reaching unprecedented levels. They are becoming the extra special toppings of the Premier League cake.

Over the weekend, we once again saw Gabon’s Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang leading the line for the Arsenal. Before that, in midweek, the Gabonese captain had two delightful chances of extending his lead at the top of the scoring charts and required perhaps the world’s best goalkeeper to deny him twice after two wonderfully worked shots. Over the weekend, he was also not on the scoring sheet but put in a solid striker performance, eventually serving up the only assist of the match as Lucas Torreira scored the only goal of the game.



Idrissa Gueye of Everton and Senegal

Arsenal consequently stayed close to top four positions and did not fall out any further away from the leading title challengers in Liverpool and Manchester City. Which other African is evidencing this peak?

Mohamed Salah was back amongst the goals, plenty goals for that matter as Liverpool walked away 4-0 winners at difficult Bournemouth, moving above City to the top of the standings. The Egyptian King won the match ball after scoring a hatrick and gave away his Man Of The Watch Award to James Millner, who clocked 500 premier league appearances in the tie. Last season’s golden boot winner and first runners up to the FIFA Best Male Player of the Year award is finally silencing critics who labelled him a “one-time season wonder.”



It's not only the forwards that give us something to pride in but other players as well. For instance, Everton's Idrissa Gueye is only second to Crystal Palace's Wan Bissaka on tackles won this entire campaign. Twice as much as the likes of Arsenal's heralded signing in Lucas Torreira or the FIFA World XI finalist in Ng'olo Kante. The Senegalese is still pretty much an underrated midfield gem.

Conclusively, just looking at the premier league scoring charts and seeing Aubameyang and Salah tied at the top with ten goals each just goes a long way in highlighting the immediate dominance of Africans in the English Premier League.







## 2019 AFCON: HOST NATION CONUNDRUM, A CONCERNING SIGHT?

Written By: Siphosethu Thwala

As African football wraps up the year, there couldn't be a worse cloud than that of the AFCON 2019 event. At the beginning of December news broke about changes to the hosting country of the AFCON 2019 tournament. Cameroon, the initial hosting nation were stripped of the right to host the competition after security issues were cited as a leading factor to the unanimous decision agreed by the CAF executive committee during a meeting held in Ghana. Quite concerning if you ask me.

CAF stripped Cameroon of the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations soccer tournament rights mainly because of security concerns hovering over the country. These include the horrific event that took place in 2010 in Cameroon, where a number of players were attacked by rebels from Angola, aside from the delays in infrastructure preparations, confederation President Ahmad Ahmad disclosed. To refresh the reader's memory, gunmen attacked a bus transporting the Togolese national team to the 2010 AFCON in Angola, killing three people and wounding many others. As such, CAF alluded that they do not want a repeat of a similar situation, taking into account the political riots currently faced by Cameroon, which includes the Boko Haram insurgency in some parts of the country.

With all this in mind, one can't help but ponder a question

as to whether CAF rather leave it too late before acting on this. Did they not see it when the hosting decision was made? I raise these questions because a lot of investments have gone into the preparations leading up to hosting the tournament in Cameroon, and to leave it up to the last minute before taking a stand is quite a cause for concern.

Now at the back of such disappointing news, South Africa have been approached to assist in taking up the offer of hosting the event which literally kicks off in mid-June. Hosting the AFCON would obviously mean Bafana book their spot in the 24-team competition automatically, taking pressure off coach Stuart Baxter who has had a not so convincing qualifying campaign despite remaining unbeaten.

Above all, Cameroon's failure to host the AFCON 2019 leaves a lot to be desired in terms of Africa's readiness to not only host tournaments such as the AFCON tourney, but also some of the world's biggest sporting events. Moreover, it also raises questions pertaining the ability of those in power on whether or not they are capable of driving the ship if such problems are still reacted upon and rather not proactively resolved. The final decision is expected to be made early January according to CAF. What do you make of the AFCON 2019 hosting dilemma?

# FT Top 10 Moments of 2018

At FirstTouch, we have a saying that goes like, “a year is never over until we close it.” In the spirit of that ideal, we took our time to look back at the ten most defining moments of 2018, as far as African football is concerned. Could you guess what they are? Join us in finding out.

Written By: Dennis Takendesa



## 10. Morocco, the brave bidders from North Africa

South Africa became the first African country to host a FIFA World Cup tournament back in 2010 and Morocco almost became the second or will probably become the second.

One of the hottest piece of news in the year 2018 was that of Morocco standing toe-to-toe with a joint bid from the USA-Canada-Mexico for the exclusive rights to host the 2026 tournament. Looking at their opponents' names and status in the sporting world and not least in politics, one would have mistaken Morocco's dreams as a lame joke or fleeting fantasy. But they would be wrong, in every possible way.

The North African country's bid looked dapper and dapper by the day up to the final day where it would not have taken even a fortune teller to predict the winner. They had huge tracts of land ready to set up the proper infrastructure, a warm and peaceful enough environment to welcome people of all races, color, religions and creed as well as an effective world cup bid team travelling across Africa and the world to raise awareness. They were just ready.

Of course the votes came in from all of the world's 150 football federations in June and the numbers weren't in their favour. Its however pretty much safe to say that Morocco and Africa at large, were extremely proud of the Kingdom of Morocco's stance. Of course not all African countries as some football federations from the continent opted for the other

bid. Now, talks of a possible alliance between Spain and Morocco for a 2030 world cup joint have surfaced and the future couldn't brighter for the African country's football at this point.



## 9. Oh Hail, King Hakim

By now it's almost an undisputable fact that every football fan no matter which part of the world, have heard the names Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane. Liverpool's literally high flying wing men who are arguably the best there is as far as African football is concerned and very much leading the charge as the Merseyside club soars higher. Not the same can be said about Morocco's star man.

The year 2018 is one that Hakim Ziyech reached a level where beyond reasonable doubt, football fans everywhere would agree that he is a talent to adore. The 25-year-old effectively became one of the hottest playmakers in the modern game. With an arm like left foot, eagle eye for goal and horse-like work rate, Ziyech entered the class of the likes of Arsenal's Mesut Ozil, Manchester City's Kevin De Bruyne, Lionel Messi or Juan Mata. How far he falls in that list is a debate for another day but he is definitely a player that increasingly deserved a mention as the year went by.

The Dutch Eredivisie player is the reigning top player in the league after winning the most recent award to celebrate his



greatness. Even in the running year, he is already on seven goals and four assists in just 12 appearances for Ajax. Adding cream and extra toppings to the cake was his world cup performance for the Lions of the Atlas in Russia, though bowing out in the group stages but recognizable in his approach and football wit. Consistence became one his key attributes as the impressive showings continued even in the UEFA Champions League, leading Ajax to the knockout stages of the 2018/19 tournament. His nation loves him, bagging Morocco's recent two goals as they sunk Cameroon in the 2019 AFCON Qualifiers to secure a place in next year's finals.

With such talent, loads of consistence – only one can imagine how far Hakim will go in the coming year. Indeed, Oh Hail, King Hakim!



## 8. The world's brightest talent still rooted in Africa

The year 2018 happened to be one of the most exciting ones in this decade as far as talent is concerned. In many ways than one, we were reminded of why Africa is the number one unending source of the biggest and the brightest football talent in the whole world.

It's with pride that we recall the exploits of one Kylian Mbappe for example. A world cup winning teenager, even scoring in the final thereby earning the FIFA Young Player Of The Tournament Award, just some of the achievements and accolades bestowed on the young lad. Of course he is French but you can never takeaway his African roots after being born to a Cameroonian father and a French mother. Ousmane Dembele is similarly a French player of African descent who made the news both positively and negatively just like any other story of a young, growing and top talented player. Even closer to home are the likes of Ivorian Nicolas Pepe who has been leading the charge for Lille OSC in the French Ligue 1, scoring ten goals in sixteen games so far in the league. Pepe has had Europe's clubs such as Arsenal on high alert for the prospect of securing his coveted services.

Furthermore, more than the dominance of Africa in the talent pool, immigrants everywhere were gifted with a big win after France's 2018 FIFA World Cup triumph. With five of Les Blues' starting XI in the world cup being players of African heritage,

the world was once again reminded of how much we can do, together – not separated by racial lines or differing identities. Even the likes of Belgium who made it all the way through to the semi-finals, eventually finishing 3rd in Russia had a decent amount of children of immigrant parents in their ranks to stir their campaign. Notable mentions go to the likes of Belgium's historic leading goal scorer in Romelu Lukaku, Nacer Chadli and Vincent Kompany. Even England was boosted by the likes of Dele Alli born to a Nigerian father and so did other not so celebrated participants such as Denmark who had Uganda born Pione Sisto adding some wings to their attack.

The timeless fact of globalization and its benefits was rehashed and Africans persistently seen in places of glory.



## 7. African Exodus to China

Things change everywhere and every time, not least so in football. The year 2018 witnessed a big shift in terms of the preferred destination for African stars.

Europe used to be the ultimate dream for any living footballer whether the one just starting out in the dusty streets of Kumasi, Ghana or the new professional who just signed for a top domestic club in one of Africa's local leagues. It's not just the prospect of a bulky salary from the likes of the English Premier League, or the festivities such as the Oktober Beer Festival surrounding the Bundesliga neither the rich history and competitive nature of the La Liga that attracts top players. Adding to that, there is something about playing in front of a 60,000 crowd who are faithful to throng the stadiums with their numbers every week and sing "glory, glory Man United!" or "you'll never walk alone." It's priceless to the journey of self-actualization for any professional. The newest sponsor of such dreams for African players happen to be the Chinese Super League.

Generally, the Chinese are quite adventurous people and their drive to loop in top stars into their football system to build it up is one manifestation of such ambitions. With a population of more than 1.3 billion, almost twice that of Europe, you can sure bet that it's only a matter of time before China becomes one of the biggest stages of the game as we love it. Africa has



had a huge chunk of their stars leaving for the Asian country, not to wind up their careers like old times but to actually play and develop. The likes of DR Congo's Cedric Bakambu joined Beijing Guoan in a then African transfer record back in March and has just secured his first silverware and the first for the club in 15 years by winning the Chinese Cup. He is no small man as the 27-year-old had become the first and only African Player to win the Spanish La Liga Player of The Month before moving to China. Now, he is more than settled with 23 goals and 7 assists in just 28 appearances for Beijing Guoan. On the League's scoring charts, only three players better his record including Nigeria's Odion Ighalo who bagged 21 league goals.

The list goes on and on with Cameroon's 2017 AFCON winning captain, Benjamin Moukandjo, Nigeria Women's 2018 AFCON winning ace, Asisat Oshoala, Zimbabwe's Nyasha Mushekwi, Super Eagles captain in John Obi Mikel also on the growing list of African stars who have jumped ship to China.



## 6. Riyad Mahrez gets his move to Manchester

Ever since Leicester City pulled off the miracle of winning the 2015/16 English Premier League with the most insignificant odds, Riyad Mahrez had always been linked with a move away from the King Power. The 27-year-old Algerian impressed potential suitors by his stellar performances on the right wing of Claudio Ranieri's set up, scoring a couple of goals and setting up late bloomer, Jamie Vardy for the Premier League Golden Boot Award of that campaign. Riyad became mostly known for his famous Mahrez chop of cutting inside from the wing, chopping defenders and sagging the far side of the net.

Talks of how much more the Algerian could contribute given what he achieved with the diminutive Leicester City. Many neutrals, especially Africans wanted him to move and they grew increasingly impatient as the move never seemed to surface. Top European clubs such as Arsenal were one of the teams' who for a long time had Mahrez on their wish list but with no success. It was the noisy neighbors of Manchester who eventually won the Algerian's signature in the summer of 2018. Even after Pep Guardiola's plans to get Riyad to City were derailed in January of the same year. The dream transfer became a reality and in Manchester City's typical lavish spending style, with a record transfer fee for the club of £60 million also becoming the record transfer fee for an African

player.

With City looking like they can repeat yesteryear's record breaking season, Mahrez looks settled in Pep's squad already making a huge impact in their journey to possible European dominance.



## 5. No mercy, Percy

One of the most celebrated African footballers of the year became the 24-year-old Percy Tau, another South African who was highly rated in his home country and electric enough for the world to take notice.

Percy Tau was in sizzling form for Mamelodi Sundowns in their title winning 2017/18 ABSA Premiership campaign. Tau partnered with Zimbabwe's Khama Billiat upfront in Bafana BaStyle's setup, also winged by the likes of Themba Zwane and Vilakazi to perfect their infamous shoe-shine piano football (one touch passing). Percy increasingly became ruthless in front of goal, winning the top goal scorer award for the South African League and two other more coveted individual football awards in the country, including the Player Of The Season Award. It was clear to many that the young lad had his whole future ahead of him, with the likes of Senegalese legend in El Hadji Diouf citing that Percy was just as good as Mohamed Salah or Sadio Mane, if not even better. Of course, there were no satisfactory grounds to consider Diouf's claims given Percy was just a mere star shining in a less known leagues in the Southern-most part of the world. However, the inevitable did happen.

One of the most anticipated friendly matches that took place at the end of the football league season in May 2018 was contested by Mamelodi Sundowns and the mighty Catalanian giants, Barcelona. The match dubbed a Nelson Mandela challenge matchup ended in favour of the La Liga giants. In as much Messi and his colleagues were guilty of a frenzy in Johannesburg, with the Barcelona faithfuls eager to take selfies or see them play live, the night belonged to Percy. The former Mamelodi Sundowns man was unmoved as he rubbed shoulders with Europe's elite. A wonderfully crafted assist crowned his night which was full of sidesteps and dribbles. That's how he announced himself to the rest of the world,

eventually landing a South African record transfer deal to Premier League side, Brighton & Hove Albion. A rare chance for a South African footballer was grabbed by a rare footballer.

Since then, Tau's summer move to Premier League side Brighton & Hove Albion was immediately followed by a loan to Belgian side Union SG. Though it initially took a few games, his work ethic has started to create opportunities for more minutes and impact on the pitch, resulting in 7 goals and 6 assists through 19 matches.

Maybe Percy's true value has shown in 2018 with his performances for South Africa in the 2019 AFCON qualifiers, drawing praise from his opponents, specifically Nigeria coach Gernot Rohr. Ultimately, Tau helped Bafana Bafana qualify behind the Super Eagles for the 2019 competition with some exhilarating performances, whether he was scoring himself, setting up his teammates, or tiring out his opponents with his relentless work rate.

As they say in Percy's former camp in Mamelodi Sundowns, the sky is truly the limit for the 24-year-old.



#### 4. Banyana writes new history

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This happens to be one of the more recent of moments but easily one of our favorites. The South African football team became the perfect illustration of how women's football is developing on the continent.

Banyana Banyana which means, "Girls, Girls" in their local dialect were arguably the women's team of the year in my humble opinion. South Africa blew teams away in the 2018 Africa Women Cup of Nations qualifiers, which seemed like routine victories but ones that were ushering in the winds of change. With one of the continent's most respected teams, Cameroon, invited to the COSAFA tournament in Zimbabwe, South Africa went all the way to lift the Southern African glory trophy defeating the She-polopolo of Zambia in the final. It got even more interesting.

The Super Falcons of Nigeria who happen to be the most successful women's team on the continent by winning eight

AWCON trophies had made the game predictable and somewhat not so interesting. Thomas Dennerby's girls still won the ninth title this month but under very different circumstances. They were humbled to a 1-0 defeat by South Africa in their opening match, narrowly booked a finals place by edging the Indomitable Lionesses of Cameroon on penalties and even triumphing over Banyana also via a penalty shoot-out in the final. All this coupled by some interesting upsets that involved the likes of Mali eliminating the revered tournament hosts, Ghana from the tournament, signal the evolvement of women's football on the continent as the playing field becomes more level and interesting.

Banyana in particular have a lot to celebrate as they secured their first ever FIFA World Cup qualification guaranteeing them a trip to France next year. Even the balance of power in terms of the most outstanding individual performances usually rooted in the Nigerian camp was not to be. Banyana's Thembi Kgatlana scooped the top goal scorer award for the 2018 AWCON after some brilliant solo performances. There are really exciting times ahead as far as the continent's women football is concerned.



#### 3. Morocco 'bullied' opponents

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The 2018 FIFA World Cup group game pitting Morocco and their neighbors Spain, underlined interesting changes which happen to be the order of the day for modern African football. On paper, it was what they call, "a dead rubber" match given that Morocco's elimination was already confirmed after suffering two painful defeats in their opening group matches against Iran and Portugal. Defeats that came about by conceding late goals even though they had put up impressive performances.

With Spain and many other European teams largely viewed to be more tactical and flowery in their style of play, they were not the only ones to enjoy great passage of play. Morocco bowed out of the FIFA World Cup with a well fought 2-2 draw against Spain exhibiting nothing that suggests Africans as being less flowery in their style of play. Nordin Amrabat and Ajax's Hakim Ziyech were a constant menace for the likes of Pique and Sergio Ramos. It was the kind of performance they put up against Portugal who grabbed the lead through a



Cristiano Ronaldo header early in the match. The Lions of the Atlas literally had Ronaldo and his teammates on the ropes for the rest of the match though they nervily held onto the 1-0 win.

Iran was no exception, with the Asians getting a fortunate 1-0 win through an own goal even though they had been dominated by Herve Renard's men in the 90 minutes. It was not only Morocco, but Nigeria at times played some great football especially against Iceland and Argentina signalling the re-writing of a narrative that described African teams as just "physical" without a cool enough head to exhibit entertaining passage of play. With the AFCON 2019 on the horizon, fans everywhere would be delighted with the development of the game on the continent and would surely be convinced that the best is yet to come.



## 2. Senegalese fans dripping sauce

The 2018 FIFA World cup was arguably the most anticipated events of 2018 at the commencement of the year and truly lived up to the hype. Of course it was a day off for Africa as all of its five representatives failed to reached the knock out stages of the competition but was not without positives to pick up moving forward as a footballing generation of the continent.

One such positive was an off-field event that elevated the fans of the Lions of Terranga. It's no secret that in many places around the world, Africa is seen as a dirty, war torn and starved place, and its people rowdy and uncultured. Even narratives such as, "Senegal the physical team" were prevalent towards the Russia tournament, not because of the admiration of their physical prowess but an undertone suggesting them not being so good tactically. The Senegalese people present at the world cup took the time to be just themselves by cleaning up after each of their three group matches against Poland, Japan and even after the most heart-breaking one against Colombia, when their side's elimination was confirmed. Confirmed by reason of not having less points or goals but being on the receiving end of the most number of yellow cards in the group. No explanation needed here to describe the kind of people they are and the kind of African people as a whole.

Of course it was not only the Senegalese fans, but their partnership with the Japanese of keeping Russia clean gained them global recognition and was awarded with a nomination under the FIFA Best Fan Of The Year Award category.



## 1. The Global Reign of the Egyptian King

The world runs at a pace so fast that some truly extraordinary occurrences seem like a lifetime and then a moment at the same time. It's only been a year since the name Mohamed Salah got global acclamation but seems like forever. The 26 year-old Egyptian couldn't stop making the headlines. After returning to the Premier League in the summer of 2017, Mo Salah used the early half of 2018 to silence all doubters and remarkably regained Africa's place among the world's best footballers. With odds almost 1000/1 to achieve everything he did, he did it anyway.

Salah sent tongues wagging as he ran down the Liverpool wing all the way to a Players' Player of the Season, the Football Writers' Association Player of the Season, and a Premier League's Golden Boot award with a record 32 goals in 36 league starts. As if that was not enough, he added a couple more goals in the UEFA Champions League eventually leading the Merseyside club to a UCL final in as many years. Even the BBC African Player Of The Year and the CAF African Player of The Year awards had the Egyptian's name inscribed on them. Did I mention, the FIFA Puskas Award of the Best goal scored in 2018 or being the first runners up to the FIFA Best World's Player Of The Year eventually won by Croatia's Luka Modric ahead of the likes of Messi or Ronaldo. It was quite delightful to see an African's name on the FIFA Best Awards, which had been robbed of a mention since the days of Liberian President, George Weah. Perhaps the most priceless of Mo Salah's achievements to the Egyptians, was a historic 2018 FIFA World Cup appearance in as many years.

He truly reached Egyptian King status; graffiti of his face all across the North African country, a 'brawl' over image rights for his face, his shooting boots immortalized at a museum in Britain, spoiled ballot papers in Egypt's presidential election with many voting "Mo Salah" amongst other intriguing events in 2018.





# AWCON 2018 REVIEW: THE EVOLVEMENT OF ASISAT OSHOALA AND NIGERIA

Written By: Simiso Shabangu

After being crowned more than any other team in the Total Women's AFCON, the Super Falcons are struggled to keep their heads above the water in this year's tournament. After losing their first match to Banyana Banyana by 1-0 scoreline, their win against the Shepolopolo of Zambia was the only reason why they were not knocked out earlier in the tournament. Have they evolved, the Nigeria side who were once like a gun packed with bullets? I mean, they have Asisat in their team. Now that they have taken the title home, how much weight of the club has this lady carried on her shoulders.

**"Her dedication to her talent has gone a long way to show us how much an African woman can achieve if she dedicates herself to it. Babe, we love you regardless of just being counted as a good substitute."**

— Simiso Shabangu, FirstTouch Africa

## First and second match

The coach, Thomas Dennerby expressed his disappointment not only because of the Super Falcons' loss but even when they won. He mentioned that the goals that they scored did not match the quality that he had cultivated into the team. Even Asisat was not playing at the expected level that we had also praised her at in our deep dive about her. She was held responsible for missing several chances that came to the Nigerian side. Notably, in the 69th minute, she collided with a good opportunity which was however, eclipsed by her teammate Ordega. Even though she was the best goal scorer in the same tournament two years ago, she was not able to score up to that point. Two matches with nothing? Babes, you got us worried at that point.

## Third Match

Francisca Ordega #17 of Nigeria celebrates her game-tying goal against Sweden with Onome Ebi #5, Asisat Oshoala #8 and Ngozi Ebere #23 during the FIFA Women's World Cup Canada 2015 Group D match between Sweden and Nigeria at Winnipeg Stadium on June 8, 2015 in Winnipeg, Canada.

(June 7, 2015 - Source: Kevin C. Cox/Getty Images North America)

Chances do not just come, but they do come to revive lost hope. In their third match, against Equatorial Guinea she snatched 3 goals out of 6, to her name. That is incredibly carrying half of the weight of the team on her shoulders. In as much as some claimed that this was not her full potential being realised, it was still in line with the greatness we always anticipate from her. They say the higher you go, the colder it becomes, but that was not the case for Nigeria.



The higher they went up the game, the hotter and harder it became. Their match against Cameroon led to a goalless 90 minutes of just running around the pitch. However, when it came to the desperate measures, penalties, Asisat was put on the spotlight and she lived up to the expectation and scored. That was another 25% of the team's victory carried on her head the same way some African women carry water pots on their heads.

### Final Match

We are not sure if it came with the nerves that was exerted by the pressure or what, but she missed the penalty which happened to be Nigeria's only chance to snatch the trophy under normal time. She also lost the Top Goal Scorer Award to Thembi Kgatlana from South Africa. At least her name appeared in the best substitutes' list. Has she fallen from glory?

Sometimes it is not your present performance that affords you credit, but your past contribution to the team is what we cannot forget. Asisat might have not performed at the expected level in this tournament but we know how much she has done, not just for herself but for the Nigerians and the rest of African women. Her dedication to her talent has gone a long way to show us how much an African woman can achieve if she dedicates herself to it. Babe, we love you regardless of just being counted as a good substitute.





# KOULIBALY: IS THERE A BIG CLUB WHO DOES NOT WANT SENEGALESE & NAPOLI PLAYER?

Written By: Simiso Shabangu

When I was growing up, all I knew was that nothing sells better than hot cookies on a cold day. But, now that I am this old I have realized that talent sells more than anything in soccer. Kalidou Koulibaly has seen this “my phenomenon” come true in his life, as every day, he and Napoli have to continuously reject big European clubs that want to add him to their squads. What is it that these clubs are really looking to get from the Senegalese defender?

## A precious gift for Mourinho after failing to land Alderweireld

Jose Mourinho and the Red Devils, did not even go behind the walls to admit this but backed his wish to have the 27-year-old Senegalese defender in his team by tabling an £80 million offer.

Even though this is an incredible price for a defender (which would surpasses the world record defender fee of £75m), reports insist that Napoli player demanded £90 million for what they have groomed with intricate care. It is not, however, clear if the Red Devils will succumb to this demand but all we know is that, right now, Koulibaly is still doing bits at Napoli.

## Chelsea have their eyes on him

During the World Cup, Chelsea also had their eyes set on the Senegalese “wall,” impressed by Koulibaly’s physique that enables him to make short passes while keeping an eagle’s eye on the opponent. He was voted amongst the Top 11’ at the annual Oscar del Calcio gala last November. Chelsea tried their luck with €100 million but it was not enough to tempt the Italian club. The response was a straight up “Koulibaly is not for sale.”

## Even Liverpool wanted a piece of Koulibaly

At some point before acquiring the Virgil Van Dyk in a current record deal for a defender Liverpool also tried their luck with a £36.7million bid and they too got the same rejection. Even though Koulibaly did express that he would be interested in playing for a Premier League club (not specifically Liverpool), right now he has to stay with Napoli. But will he really?

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#### The catch

If the player is in such high demand, why can't his club really let him go? The player has a contract that obligates him to be with Napoli until the June of 2023 so that is why his club has such a strong grip on his negotiations. At least, all these clubs have about 5 years to sweeten their deals, polish their approaches and spice up their baits until they get hold of this player. The player is also personally committed to the team and his coach. He was reported saying, my coach "rediscovered me, he gave me confidence. He really is a genius, he sees things others don't see. He makes you understand how football is and isn't predictable."

After all is said and done, take my word for it, it looks like it's going to become increasingly harder to keep the one of the world's finest of not "the finest". A potential move is imminent. The real question is when?



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