

# FIRST TOUCH

February 2019

SAMUEL CHUKWUEZE

**REMEMBER THE NAME**

FIFA WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

**ARE YOU READY FOR JUNE?**

FT 2019 PREVIEW

**AFCON19 IS ON THE WAY**

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE TITLE RACE

**AFRICANS PROVE PIVOTAL**

AFRICAN FOOTBALL

**AND MATCH FIXING**



# KALIDOU KOULIBALY

**THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE FOR RACIAL ABUSE**

FirstTouch Africa



# Football Fact



**Camp Nou is the home stadium of FC Barcelona since its completion in 1957. With a seating capacity of 99,354, it is the largest stadium in Spain and Europe, and the third largest football stadium in the world in capacity.**



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February 2019



The Senegalese defender was at his job on a typical matchday Sunday in the Italian Serie A before the unfortunate incident took place. Some of the Inter Milan fans started making monkey noises directed at Kalidou Koulibaly in the match.

pg. 11

## ATTACK

**pg.4**

REMEMBER THE NAME SAMUEL CHUKWUEZE

**pg.6**

DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT MISSING OUT ON THE FIFA WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

**pg.8**

VITESSE, PSV EINDHOVEN AND FEYENOORD OPENING ACADEMIES IN ZIMBABWE?

## MIDFIELD

**pg.9**

THE QUESTION OF MATCH FIXING IN AFRICAN FOOTBALL

**pg.10**

AFRICANS TO CONTINUE HEADLINING PREMIER LEAGUE TITLE RACE

**pg.11**

THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE FOR RACIAL ABUSE ON KALIDOU KOULIBALY CONTINUES

## DEFENSE

**pg.12**

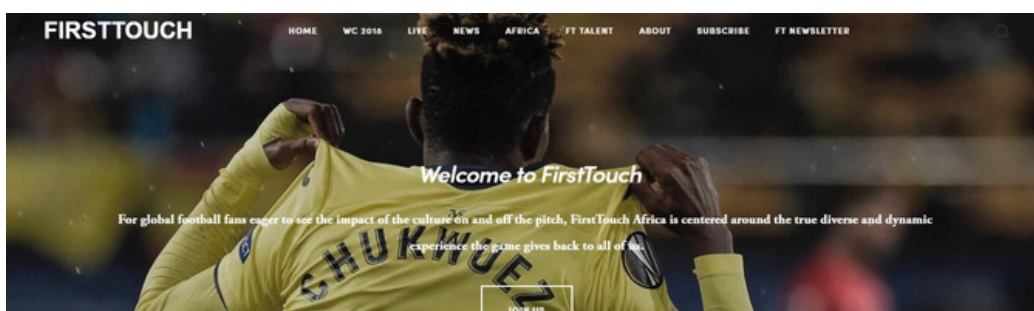
AFCON19 IS ON THE WAY!

**pg.13**

DORTMUND'S YOUTH ENDING BAYERN'S BUNDESLIGA DOMINANCE

**pg.14**

AFRICAN ACES TO CONTINUE POPULATING THE ITALIAN SERIE A



Produced by FIRSTTOUCH FT



# REMEMBER THE NAME SAMUEL CHUKWUEZE

Written by: Dennis Takaendesa

**“He is the type you don’t introduce to the “big league” but rather entreat the big game to welcome the youngster, roll out the red carpet if they have to.”**

— Dennis Takaendesa, FirstTouch Africa

When one receives the ball on the flank, gets enough time to switch it to his favored left foot, goes at Marcelo, drops a shoulder to call in Casemiro to assist his compatriot, before Toni Kroos and Sergio Ramos are required to put out the fire - you know what’s up. An unknown attacker just knocked at Real Madrid’s door unannounced and introduced himself to the world in a language punctuated by yet another left foot for Real Madrid to lose sleep over. The Nigerian teenager, Samuel Chimerenka Chukwueze, looks to be a real talent.

*He needed only 4-minutes*

Of course the night belonged to former Arsenal midfielder, Santi Cazorla but was seemingly scripted in Chukwueze’s hometown of Ikwuano, Abia State in Nigeria. Cazorla, 34, grabbed a brace as the yellow submarine of Villareal shared the spoils with the European and club world cup champions in a La Liga matchday 18 encounter. The 19-year-old Samuel was however completely focused on other business, touching every ball as if it was the last time - very much persuaded to leave it all on the pitch as he took the rare chance afforded him by Luis Garcia. After making his first team debut for Villareal on 20 September 2018, Chukwueze has already created experiences that justifies him being mistaken with more established stars of the modern game. One other notable experience occurred just four minutes into the Madrid match, the boy is surely not one to have cold feet. Chukwueze burst into the Los Blancos box inviting world cup



Samuel Chukwueze of Villareal and Nigeria

winner, Raphael Varane to challenge for the ball before dropping a shoulder and squeezing a delightful pass between Casemiro and the former. The pass met the unmarked Cazorla who had the simple task of curling it into the far bottom corner.

There isn’t actually a lot to tell about Chukwueze who signed for Villareal’s youth side in 2017 from his home town’s Diamond Football Academy. He made his senior debut for the Yellow Submarine’s reserve side on 15 April 2018 before the first team debut in September of the same year against Glasgow Rangers in the 2018/19 UEFA Europa League. Samuel first tested Spanish La Liga football early November against Levante, also making his international senior debut later that



month for the Super Eagles in a 0-0 friendly draw against Uganda. As you can tell, he hasn't had a lot of caps or minutes come his way, with only 8 league appearances where he has contributed 2 goals and 1 assist. He has however shown his worth on every occasion. He is the type you don't introduce to the "big league" but rather entreat the big game to welcome the youngster, roll out the red carpet if they have to. He knows what it means to take his chances and at this rate, only a few stops will he need to reach global stardom if any at all. What about his playing style?

#### *The "reincarnation" of Arjen Robben?*

One famous "one legged rooster" in the global game is about to call it quits but may be re-incarnated in the 2015 FIFA U-17 World Cup Bronze Boot winner. Chukwueze has been likened to Bayern Munich's Arjen Robben who is famous for terrorising defenders on one foot. The Dutch footballer is literally flat footed, able to play with only his left-foot and the young Nigerian looks to be resembling the same trait. Running at players in full speed, cutting inside the box unhindered, laying up passes or going at goal - almost like a hot knife cutting through butter. Just like Robben who swirled in the Spain box at the 2014 FIFA world cup, twisting and turning Ramos, Pique and Casillas who almost kindly started sweeping the pitch with their arms, before he banged the ball into the roof of the net - Samuel looks well capable to re-introduce such. It's another beautiful 2019 day, another Nigerian and African star added to the fold. The high school that gave the infamous African novelist, Chinua Achebe to the world, has added a second gift in Samuel Chimerenka Chukwueze.





**FIFA.com**

## **DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT MISSING OUT ON THE FIFA WOMEN'S WORLD CUP**

Written By: Dennis Takendesa

The wheels just keep on rolling as far as women's football is concerned, and 2019 will be no different. After an exhilarating 2018 in the women's game on the African continent, the best there is on the planet are scheduled to have a showdown in France from the 7th of June to the 7th of the ensuing month. The men set a wonderful precedence by tearing each other apart in Russia this just ended year and the women cannot be in a better position to follow suit or open new territories and levels.

Of major interest to us, are Africa's three representatives. Nigeria, Cameroon and South Africa who enter the tourney as the three lowest ranked teams of the twenty-four finalists but after a "bloody" 2018 AWCON from whence they secured their qualification spots, major upsets are inevitable. The tournament will take place across nine cities with the opening match to be played at Parc des Princes, Mbappe and Neymar's home ground. Lyon's home stadium will host the final match where the likes of the defending champions in USA, Germany and the hosts are considered to be favorites. Africa will also be thoroughly represented among the match officials, with three referees from Zambia, Rwanda and Ethiopia making an appearance. Four other African assistant referees will also be in France, even representatives from a country as small as Mauritius. Quite notably, are the English officials who will also miss the 2019 June-July world cup after failing to land a spot at the 2018 World cup in Russia. Only one assistant English referee

made the cut this time around. Quite a lot is at stake, with UEFA using the tournament to select three representatives for the 2020 Summer Olympics in Japan. Debutants namely, Scotland, South Africa, Jamaica and Chile will have their nations on song for the first time ever.

Here at FirstTouch, we will soon release a full special preview assessing the finalists' chances. For the meantime, here are the six groups from which the top two and the four best third placed teams will proceed to the round of 16.

Just as a side note, the fable that women's football in Africa or around the world being not the real deal, is actually yesterday's news!

**"Of major interest to us, are Africa's three representatives. Nigeria, Cameroon and South Africa who enter the tourney as the three lowest ranked teams of the twenty-four finalists but after a "bloody" 2018 AWCON from whence they secured their qualification spots, major upsets are inevitable."**

— Dennis Takaendesa, FirstTouch Africa



#### GROUP A



FRANCE



KOREA REPUBLIC



NORWAY



NIGERIA

#### GROUP B



FRANCE



CHINA PR



SPAIN



SOUTH AFRICA

#### GROUP C



AUSTRALIA



ITALY



BRAZIL



JAMAICA

#### GROUP D



ENGLAND



SCOTLAND



ARGENTINA



JAPAN

#### GROUP E



CANADA



CAMEROON



NEW ZEALAND



NETHERLANDS

#### GROUP F



USA



THAILAND



CHILE



SWEDEN



# VITESSE, PSV EINDHOVEN AND FEYENOORD OPENING ACADEMIES IN ZIMBABWE?

Written By: Tinotenda Magiye

It's of no doubt that football in Africa has been lagging behind on many aspects. The number of quality players that make it to the professional scene versus that of those that fail to find opportunities and are forced to change professions before their mid-twenties is astonishing. Many have talked about these things and some have even suggested solutions which are yet to yield impactful results. Clemens Westerhof, the former Nigeria and Zimbabwe national football coach has something brewing for Africa.

## *Background*

Apart from the fact that the Dutchman has coached the national teams of Nigeria and Zimbabwe, the 78-year old football veteran has had some experience in coaching at club level in Zimbabwe. He coached one of the biggest clubs in the country, Dynamos, who have a rich history admired by many.

## *His Plan*

The Netherlands born coach, Clemens Westerhof is contemplating the possibility of coaching at a telecom club in Gweru, Zimbabwe and taking up a challenge of building an academy ground-up. The latter is the more interesting part which has been touched by some football greats like Johan Cruyff who influenced the structure and style of play at Ajax, a successful club and academy that has a rich scouting network. Westerhof admires how Ajax have setup a network in South Africa i.e. Ajax Cape Town which has developed players like Thulani Serero. This partnership has brought some developments to the country through the spread of high-quality training techniques applied in other parts of the world.

Clemens Westerhof assumed an advisory role at the Peter Mubi Academy. The football academy wants him to improve their academy and hopefully achieve what he achieved in Nigeria in the past and improve the level of football in Zimbabwe. He is looking to collaborate with Dutch football clubs. The experienced coach wants to take advantage of his network and approached PSV Eindhoven, coached by a football great in Mark Van Bommel who played for Barcelona, Bayern Munich and AC Milan. He is quoted as having said the above.



**Thulani Serero of Ajax in action during the pre-season friendly match between Norwich City and Ajax at Carrow Road on July 31, 2012 in Norwich, England.**



# THE QUESTION OF MATCH FIXING IN AFRICAN FOOTBALL



Written By: Simiso Shabangu

In 2018, the African football arena was shocked by the Ghanaian scandal. In the many publications that we saw, it was not just the glaring financial corruption that disturbed us, but it was also the allegations of match fixing that made us lay back and question the game's future in Africa. In Zambia, the former international player Nchimunya Mweetwa has started a foundation that educates people about the ills of match fixing. It's an incredible move, but the problem still needs more hands on deck. How do we then come up with more sustainable solutions to combat this?

The word "fixing" in general has a positive connotation. It looks like it's about making things right and I thought the same would apply in football. In this case, however, match fixing involves manipulating a team's results by either bribing the players or the referees to ensure that one team advances over the other. It is usually driven by people who have bet on the game and want to ensure that they surely win the bet. The major problem is that match-fixing takes away the fun and growth in the sport as it diverts players' attention from the main goal. After all the training that a player invests, they have to make sure that they do the exact opposite of what they have been taught. I cannot begin to imagine the harm that this imposes on a person's conscience. They say all their team chants, smile at their team players and fans but then intentionally do the exact thing that will take away all those smiles and hope. Acknowledging the ills is not enough, how then do we eradicate this?

Success does not exist in a vacuum. It only exists when the environment around it has been cultivated well enough for it to grow. In an interview with BBC, Nchimunya Mweetwa alluded to the fact that some of these match fixing temptations come because players do not have enough money to cater for their everyday needs. Money from a game fixer then becomes an irresistible temptation. Trust me, I am not using poverty as justification for unethical behaviour, but this is surely a sign of the root cause. This means that government departments, coaches and other sports official should then ensure that what players earn from sports is enough to make their ends meet so much that they are not easily lured by unclean money. On another note though, can money ever be enough? Will paying enough really solve the problem? It might not completely eradicate the problem but it is surely a viable place to start.

There are of course other solutions that can include harsher sentences for offenders with the hope that other people will be deterred. That too can be explored, but the most effective solution is one that does not wait for people to commit the

offence before we solve the problem. We should also invest in ethical development and training where we remind our players how the game adds to their comprehensive growth and why they started playing in the first place.

Because match fixing does not just affect the immediate stakeholders, it also trickles down as disappointment to fans, it should be a problem for all of us to fix. In a report by Thomson Reuters, match mixing was dubbed as the biggest threat in the 21st century. However, it could also be our biggest chance to solve something big, together. We cannot let our players lose out on the one thing that should be fulfilling them.



A Burkina Faso supporter poses ahead of the 2017 Africa Cup of Nations quarter-final football match between Burkina Faso and Tunisia at the Stade de l'Amitié Sino-Gabonaise in Libreville on January 28, 2017. / AFP / GABRIEL BOUYS

# AFRICANS TO CONTINUE HEADLINING PREMIER LEAGUE TITLE RACE



Written By: Dennis Takendesa

Stranger things and customarily premier league things have happened and will continue to happen as one of the world's most followed club football league comes to a close in May 2019. Manchester United have recently hit new form under the guidance of the baby faced assassin Ole Gunnar Soljaskaer, Pep Guardiola's "immaculate" City slipped up in the festive period, succumbing to three league defeats in four matches and Unai Emery's Arsenal served a horror defensive show at Anfield as Liverpool ran out 5-1 winners on the day. Transfers will come this January, the out of favor troopers will leave for greener pastures, some managers may or may not

get the sack and other dedicated sides will have to face the chop of relegation. In all the anticipated uncertainties, there is an anticipated certainty. With Aubameyang, Salah and Kane going at each other, at the top of the scoring charts in December, the first two setting a precedence for the peaking of Africans in the league – more is coming. It's no secret that Senegal's Mane and Egypt's Salah had Liverpool one foot in the title race long before it started. Mahrez could still very much be Man City's secret weapon as they chase the Reds with the Algerian forward yet to reach top gear under Guardiola and we know what he can do when he does, as was the case with the 2015/16 premier league title winning Leicester City.

It's not only those who steer their teams to much needed goals or keep the goal from assailants such as Aubameyang who matter in the title race; there are others who get points off points contenders in a rare exciting fashion. Ghana's Jeffrey Schlupp netted an important goal as Crystal Palace handed City their first home defeat of the campaign and quite recently, Adama Traore was unplayable as Wolves came from behind to beat Tottenham 3-1 at Wembley, momentarily putting them out of contention.

This and more will continue in 2019, and we will be there to cover the African stars at the centre of the thrills and spills in the English Premier League.



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— Dennis Takaendesa, FirstTouch Africa



# THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE FOR RACIAL ABUSE ON KALIDOU KOULIBALY CONTINUES

Written By: Tinotenda Magiya

We cannot not deny the impact of the efforts that have been made by the responsible authorities over the years to curb racism but still, players of color often receive this kind of abuse on and off the pitch. On the 26th of December 2018, Napoli defender Kalidou Koulibaly was a subject of racial abuse in a match with local rivals, Inter Milan. We have been made to believe that the due process to deal with such issues is to report it to the FIFPro and UEFA who will launch a probe on the matter before making a decision. However, no action has been taken so far against the disrespectful fans. Here's a recap.

## THE INCIDENT

The Senegalese defender was at his job on a typical matchday Sunday in the Italian Serie A before the unfortunate incident took place. Some of the Inter Milan fans started making monkey noises directed at Kalidou Koulibaly in the match. The player was then sent off after picking up 2 yellow cards. He was suspended for two matches as punishment for sarcastically clapping off the referee after receiving marching orders. In the aftermath, Napoli coach Carlo Ancelotti came out to say that they made calls to end the match after hearing the abuse but it fell on deaf ears. He was not pleased with the way the officials handled the matter in the game.

## KOULIBALY'S SUPPORT SYSTEM

Not so long after, Manchester United midfielder Paul Pogba wore an armband in support of Kalidou Koulibaly after the incident. The player's message was clear and directed to the perpetrators who are fighting against the game's values of honor, tolerance and respect. He was not the only one to show much needed support to the player. Even the Inter Milan coach, Luciano Spalletti was quoted to having said, "We were with Koulibaly, as we are at the side of all those who are targeted during the games."

Also, fellow African Faouzi Ghoulam of Napoli wore Koulibaly's No 26 shirt in the warm up for the game against Bologna in which the defender was suspended. He was joined by the fans who held up anti-racism banners and photos of Koulibaly.

## ANCELOTTI'S THREAT

Carlo Ancelotti has since threatened to lead his team off the pitch if there is a repeat of such an incident. There is no place for racism in the game of football and everywhere else. He said, "The boy was on edge, he's an educated footballer who was targeted. What happened today was bad, not only for us but also for Italian football."

## THE AUTHORITIES' ACTIONS

The Italian League judge gave the verdict that Inter Milan would play the next two home matches behind closed doors. This means that their supporters would not be allowed to populate the stadiums and support their club. Also, the verdict included a partial closure for the club's third home game. However, the culprits who led the chants have not been punished. The Italian FA should do more and make sure that these fans are banned from the stadium for life.



# AFCON19 IS ON THE WAY!

Written By: Dennis Takaendesa

**“Think about it for a second, all those young and old mesmerisers who continue to dominate the game on a global scale from the La Liga, Bundesliga, Premier League, Chinese Super League, ABSA etc. will come home to Africa and go at each other for the continent’s biggest prize.”**

— Dennis Takaendesa, FirstTouch Africa

Even though the host nation is yet to be confirmed this January after Cameroon was stripped of that right late in 2018 courtesy of infrastructure readiness and security concerns, a few other things are pretty certain. This will be the first time for the Africa Cup of Nations finals to feature 24 finalists, with more faces and flags bearing more hearts and an equal prospect of heartbreaks given the winner will always be one. Mean as it sounds, this is actually what makes a tournament go off the charts. The final 2019 qualification spots are yet to be filled with a heated final match day of the qualifiers coming to our screens from the 22nd to 26th of March 2019. The finals will run from the 7th of June up to the 30th, actually colliding with the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup in France. Spectators of the game, have never been more captivated.

Your Sadio Mane, Mo Salah and Naby Keita who are inspiring Liverpool’s premier league title charge will be there and perhaps as English champions by then. Heavyweights such as Ivory Coast, Morocco, Nigeria and defending champions Cameroon have

already confirmed their place bringing with them global stars such as Dutch Eredivisie’s Hakim Ziyech, Wilfried Zaha, Alexander Iwobi and PSG’s Eric-Maxim Choupo Moting. Homebred stars will also be in the hunt with Uganda’s Cranes being an instance of a squad adorned with such players, captained by Mamelodi Sundowns’ Denis Onyango who has the chance to enter the finals without conceding a single goal. Exciting debutants such as Madagascar are bound to have say. Think about it for a second, all those young and old mesmerisers who continue to dominate the game on a global scale from the La Liga, Bundesliga, Premier League, Chinese Super League, ABSA etc. will come home to Africa and go at each other for the continent’s biggest prize. This time, with no club commitments at the back of their minds given most domestic leagues would have ended. There will be nothing but fireworks.

FirstTouch will be there and we will share the entire experience with you all.







# DORTMUND'S YOUTH ENDING BAYERN'S BUNDESLIGA DOMINANCE

Written By: Dennis Takaendesa

After winning six straight Bundesliga titles, from the 2012/13 season to the most recent one, Bayern Munich had almost rendered the German top flight, a predictably boring contest. But now, half way through the season as the league paused for the festive break, with Dortmund six points ahead of the champions, there is hope for a twist of fate.

Lucien Favre's men have been outstanding, outscoring everyone and nothing short of spectacular as they lost only once in seventeen Bundesliga appearances. There is a reminiscence of Jurgen Klopp's Die Borussen who won back to back championships between 2010-12, also reaching the UEFA Champions League final. It comes as no surprise with strikingly similar features accompanying the current team, young blood all around the pitch and a few immaculate seniors providing the balance. More interestingly is one of their young full backs, Morocco's Achraf Hakimi. Three assists in three champions league matches and three more in twelve Bundesliga appearances is not bad for the 20-year-old defender on loan from Real Madrid. In fact, transfer rumours suggest that the German club will go all the way to tempt Los Blancos to sanction a permanent move for the youngster. He really is one of the best young full backs in the world right now, has been important in Dortmund's electric form and will continue to be as the new year unfolds. Nineteen-year-old Dan-Axel Zagadou and twenty-year old Abdou Diallo, the French internationals of Ivorian and Senegalese descent respectively are also part and parcel of the Bundesliga leaders defence that is linked up to the attack with those who need no introduction. The eighteen year-old Jadon Sancho and USMNT's Christian Pulisic who is twenty and soon to depart for Chelsea. The team also had a "midas-touch" effect on former Barcelona forward, Paco Alcacer who misfired at Camp Nou but became a scoring freak at Signal Iduna, scoring a remarkable twelve goals in seven matches. Even the prodigal son Mario Gotze, returned and got rejoined with former pitch-partner, captain Marco Reus.

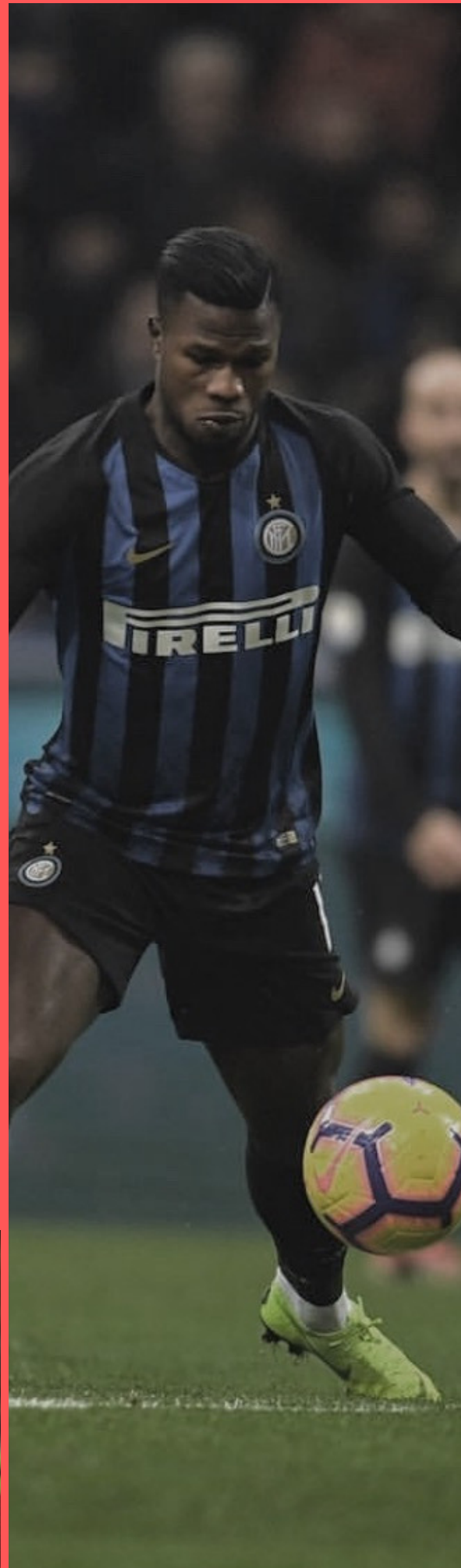
Make sure you have Dortmund on your watchlist for 2019, they are definitely paving the way for many other great things to come.

# AFRICAN ACES TO CONTINUE POPULATING THE ITALIAN SERIE A

Written By: Dennis Takaendesa

Since the days of Cameroonian legend, Samuel Eto'o in the colors of Inter Milan, the Italian Serie A has been shy of major African footballing icons shaking the world. This may not be the case any longer. The year 2018 witnessed a lot of booming and blossoming young footballers that are bound to grow and obviously usher in a fresh area of rapid rise of such players in the league.

AC Milan's Franck Kessie is one such player whom many may classify as a possible re-incarnation of Ghanaian Kwadwo Asamoah when he first appeared in Juventus' black and white. Just like the younger Kwadwo, 22-year-old Kessie is a solid defensive midfielder who has earned Genaro Gattuso's trust, starting all of Milan's 18 matches in the league so far. We are only going to see more of such a promising player gifted with astute leadership qualities evident in things even as small as being handed the penalty taking duties for the team by Gattuso at such a tender age. In that same bracket, is 23-year-old Keita Balde featuring for the other Milan side on loan from Monaco. The Senegalese started the season slowly, sitting out matches but as the year came to close, he started giving a glimpse of what everyone has always seen in him from the get go. Balde has since scored 4 times and assisted 2 others in only 7 starts for Inter Milan. He is one that you can't help but notice in the unfolding year as he steals the headlines. If you have never heard of the Gambian wonderkid, Musa Barrow who stole the headlines after rivalling age-mate Kylian Mbappe's scoring record back in September, you shall, soon enough. The 20-year-old defines the word potential. He has admirable upper body strength, ruthless in front of goal and described as one that almost glides on the turf by those who cannot take their eyes off him. He might be going through a major goal drought since netting 4 times and assisting 2 others early in the season, but an individual of his ability cannot be robbed of stardom, this will serve as just an important learning curve. With Kessie having climbed up the ranks through Atalanta, there is no reason to suggest why Barrow will not do the same if not better it. His 14 goals in 19 appearances for Atalanta's youth is one of the pieces of evidence why he deserves the faith that's been put in him so far. The above three and many others will likely continue claiming a stake among the Italian Serie A's elite just as many other African stars have done in the premier league, celebrating the likes of Kwadwo, Koulibaly and Medhi Benatia who have come, saw and conquered the league.





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