

Post Independence's Enviably Eritrean Footballers

Written by Essayas fshaye

Wednesday, 14 October 2009 07:49



To start with, in the early 90s Eritrean football clubs and its great number of superb players was a pride for Eritrea. Undeniably, the root of foot ball as a popular game dates back to the late 50s or early 60s. Eritrean players, then under Ethiopian colonization defied all the political barriers and proved their superiority. Despite the unwelcome attention they were getting, Eritrean players were the most important and dominant members of the Ethiopian national teams...

If Ethiopia is a pioneer of international competition in Africa playing its first international match in 1947 and African Nations Cup in 1957 at its inaugural ceremony, Eritrean players were the backbone of the Ethiopian teams. Ethiopia was African Nations Cup champion back in 1962 when it fielded 9 Eritrean star players in its squad. About half a century since then, that sole historic victory stands momentously and remains the only Ethiopian African Nations Cup trophy to date.



Eritrea's post independence soccer history has also produced lots of enviable players. A goal post well defended by 'eagle's eye' Berhane Araya, Abdusalih Fetushie, Samson Fessahaye and Gergish Debesay was a quality of its own that we still remember. In fact, Berhane Araya's nickname 'eagle's eye' was given by a BBC journalist in the mid 90s in a game against Tanzania for his superb performance. Samson Fessahaye was Berhane's reserve goal keeper both at club and national team.

A defense that included players like Salih Ali, Negash Mohammed, Tecleab Isack, Mezgebe kasa, Daniel Estifanos (Cheai), Berhane A/berhan (Kerkasa), Amanuel Kahsay, Lule Fessahaye, Elias Debesay and others were once termed as a fence not even a bulldozer could pass through for its bullet proof quality that was often witnessed at different international competitions.

The extraordinary contest in midfield that included heroic Negash Tecklit, Alem Redae, Yasin Mohammed Berhan, Yonus Ibrahim, Amanuel Iyasu, Biniam Araya (Ocie), Alemseged Efrem, Micheal Habte, Fasil Abrha, Tedros Negash (Salambini), Habtom Hagos, Tesfamichael Tewolde and Efrem Beyn was better known for its entertaining aspect.

The then professional player Yohannes Zemichael, Efrem Meles, Tedros Tesfagiorgis

Post Independence's Enviably Eritrean Footballers

Written by Essayas fshaye

Wednesday, 14 October 2009 07:49

(Alemtso), Yednecachew Shimangus and Yonas Fessahaye were Eritrea's greatest post independence attackers.

Yohannes Zemichael is the best attacker that Eritrean football has ever seen in its post independence period. In fact, Eritrean National Football Federation crowned Yohannes Zemichael as the best Eritrean player in the past fifty years on the occasion CAF's Golden Jubilee celebration in Asmara in 2007. Yohannes passed away in Sudan while playing for Al-Hilal as a professional footballer in 1993-94.

During those years, without any difficulty, two to three best national teams could be selected and still other promising players could be left out.

The club competition among Adulis, Red Sea, Asmara Beer and Altahrir was as exciting and highly anticipated to local fans as the encounter among the best four English premier league teams that we see these days. Food Corporation team, better known as Megbi, came from nowhere and started dominating the best four clubs for a short period of time the way Manchester City is copping up to the 4 master class premier league clubs. Megbi's domination brought up the introduction of some new and talented players like Yonas Mengsteab and goal keeper Gergish Debesay. Unfortunately, Eritrean National Football Federation was not recognized by FIFA and CAF until 1998. Thus, most of the aforementioned players and, largely, the strongest post independence Eritrean football players and teams were not fortunate enough to take part in any FIFA/CAF recognized qualification matches in their heyday.

In mid 90s, a collection of best elementary and junior students throughout the country under team names Maitemenay, Mendefera, Nakfa, Assab, Barentu, Gindae and Keren took part in Gothia, Dana and Norway Cup competitions for three or four consecutive years. Their results were stunning. In every European tournament those Eritrean teams participated, they managed to climb up on the podium and lift trophies. The then many European and Brazilian players whom they played against are now part of big European clubs and national teams – needless to mention their names. Henok Goitom, who is now playing in Spanish La Liga, is a product of such competitions. But the trophy lifting Eritrean footballers couldn't be as successful as they deserved in pursuing professional football careers for different reasons. Eritrea's expectation from the players, and specifically from Maitemenay star player Filmon Tsegay, who was a wonder kid in Europe, was very high. Lack of necessary facilities, infrastructures, encouragement, training, nutrition and largely the sports administration are some of the main cause for the weaknesses that followed.

We hope the young Warsay players, aged 12-13, who took part in 2009 Norway Cup and lifted a trophy won't be deprived of the necessary care and encouragement in developing their football career further more.