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DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY**

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**AFCON 2025
MOROCCO AT THE HEART OF
AFRICAN FOOTBALL'S DESTINY**



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SUMMARY

FOCUS AFCON

- 6-17 The Winning Double Play :
National Investment and
Launchpad for the 2030 World Cup
How Morocco Cemented its
Leadership in Africa
Gianni Infantino : The Swiss Who Is
Reshaping African Football
From Mines to Myths : How
Motsepe is Building African
Football
Fouzi Lekjaa : The Discreet
Architect of Morocco's New
Leadership
Walid Regragui : The Man Who
Recreated the Moroccan Dream

ZOOM

- 18-42 Who Are the 24 Contenders Vying
for the Trophy?

LEADERSHIP

- 43-49 Benin Football Federation :
Mathurin de Chacus, a president
who shakes things up...
Jean Guy Blaise Mayolas,
President of the Congolese
Football Federation : «Morocco
Has Established Itself as a Major
Player in African and Global
Football»
Samuel Eto'o's Filis : The Dazzling
Destiny of a Champion Turned
Embattled Football Boss
Venancio Tomás Ndong Micha
Avomo : The Builder of Equatorial
Guinean Football

PERSPECTIVE

- 50-51 Massive Investments
Commensurate with the Prestige
of an African Giant
Mohammed VI Football
Academy : A Futuristic Project
Stemming from a Royal Vision



HISTORY AND MEMORY

- 52-58 An Event Etched In Great African
History
Roger Milla : The Eternal Star of
African Football
Little Secrets About the AFCON...
Great Moroccan Players Who Made
Their Mark on the AFCON
Ahmed Faras : Story Of A Afcon
1976 Legend

FOOTBALL AND SOCIETY

- 59 WHEN FOOTBALL TELLS THE
STORY OF TODAY'S MOROCCO

SPORT

- 60-61 Pape Seck, Content Creator, on His
Presence at the AFCON : "My goal
is not to go viral, but to be useful"

DIGITAL ECONOMY

- 62-66 Reinaldo de Sousa Viriato :
The Architect of Africa's Digital
Sovereignty



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CAN 2025: MOROCCO OPENS THE STAGE FOR A REINVENTING AFRICA

The Africa Cup of Nations 2025 kicked off on December 21 in Rabat at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Sports Complex, with a symbolic opening match: Morocco vs. Comoros.

This showdown marks the start of a highly anticipated continental showdown, driven by the Kingdom's ambition to deliver one of the tournament's most innovative editions in history. Amid popular fervour, sporting stakes, and sports diplomacy, CAN 2025 is already shaping up as a pivotal moment for African football.

More than a tournament, CAN 2025 will be a revealer. A revealer of our ambitions, contradictions, and collective strengths. It will also show the world what Africa means: an Africa that creates, builds, projects itself forward, and refuses to let others dictate its future.

Thirty-seven years after the 1988 edition, Morocco hosts the continent's biggest sporting celebration once again. But the context has changed profoundly: Africa has evolved. On and off the pitch, a new generation of talents, entrepreneurs, leaders, and fans is reinventing our relationship with football. This edition of *Hommes d'Afrique* magazine tells that story.

As a meticulous host, Morocco has chosen to make this CAN an unforgettable epic. A symbol of modern infrastructure - stadiums, roads, transport, hospitality. A symbol of bold sports diplomacy, turning football into a lever for influence and integration. Above all, a symbol of a continent claiming its ability to host world-class events with professionalism, ambition, and creativity.

Yet CAN is more than organization. It is a social mirror reflecting our joys, frustrations, and multiple identities. In the streets of Cotonou, Casablanca, Dakar, or Nairobi, the same scenes will unfold: families glued to

screens, children mimicking their idols' moves, fans waving colours like flags of the heart. In Africa, football is not just a spectacle. It is one of the few common languages of a plural continent.

The 2025 edition will also gauge football's growing economic impact. Sponsors, broadcasters, kit suppliers, tourism operators: an entire industry now powers the CAN. Still, none of it would exist without its stars - the players, first and foremost, who carry a nation's hopes. Figures like Achraf Hakimi (Africa's 2025 Ballon d'Or), Bryan Mbeumo, Mohamed Salah, Victor Osimhen, Lamine Camara, Sadio Mané, Brahim Diaz, Nicolas Pepe, Rayan Aït-Nouri, Ademola Lookman... or Mohammed Kudus embody a conquering, talented, unapologetic Africa. But African football also thrives on visionary coaches, committed leaders, and women breaking barriers - journalists, referees, administrators, entrepreneurs.

Finally, there is memory. CAN 2025 is a moment to celebrate the legends who shaped the tournament: Roger Milla, Drogba, Merry Krinau, Abedi Pelé, Eto'o, Yekini. A reminder that African football builds on continuity, transmission, and fidelity to a rich, sometimes turbulent history.

By devoting many pages to CAN 2025, Hommes d'Afrique pays tribute to a continent that advances, occasionally doubts, but never stops dreaming. Beyond goals, dribbles, and trophies, CAN is one of the rare moments when Africa looks at itself—with pride, clarity, and passion.

May this CAN be beautiful and vibrant, carried by a continent advancing with confidence. May it be strong in its emotions, feats, and unifying power, mirroring an Africa in motion: creative and resolutely future-focused. Let every match reflect it, every victory writes a new chapter. Long live CAN 2025, and long live African football.



THE WINNING DOUBLE PLAY NATIONAL INVESTMENT AND LAUNCHPAD FOR THE 2030 WORLD CUP

For the Kingdom of Morocco, hosting this major competition serves as a true catalyst, carrying massive economic stakes and crucial geopolitical ramifications for its continental influence.

The Economic Lever: Infrastructure and Global Showcase

Hosting the AFCON 2025 represents Morocco's largest infrastructure upgrade operation in decades. The colossal investments aim not only at ensuring the tournament's success but

are intrinsically linked to the country's preparations for co-hosting the FIFA World Cup 2030 with Spain and Portugal.

Investment Plan and Employment

Billions of dirhams have been mobilized for the modernization and construction of six international-standard stadiums (notably in Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakech, Agadir, Fez, and Tangier). This effort is accompanied by parallel development of supporting infrastructure:

Hospitality and Tourism

Boosting hotel capacities and improving services to accommodate hundreds of thousands of fans and delegations.

Transportation

Upgrading road and airport networks to streamline logistics for teams and spectators. These projects have generated significant employment momentum, particularly in construction and services, directly boosting national GDP.



Brand Image and Tourism

The AFCON 2025 is the ultimate showcase for positioning Morocco as a premier sports and tourism destination. Organizational success will send a strong message to the international community about the Kingdom's ability to manage large-scale events—an invaluable asset for the 2030 bid. Global broadcasting of the event provides priceless free publicity for the tourism sector.

Geopolitical Stakes: Soft Power and African Leadership

For Moroccan diplomacy, the Africa Cup of Nations is a soft power tool whose impact extends beyond borders.

Consolidating the African Strategy

Hosting the AFCON fits perfectly into the strategic African vision led by His Majesty King Mohammed VI. Since its return to the African Union, Morocco has multiplied South-South partnerships focused

on economy, training, and cooperation.

Regional Influence

The AFCON 2025 elevates Morocco to key actor status, reaffirming its strategic position as a continental hub and privileged crossroads between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. This major event materializes its active South-South cooperation policy. Flawless organization also scores points in a regional geopolitical competition context, particularly with its Algerian neighbor, bolstering its credibility as a continental leader.

2025: The First Step on the Road to 2030

The AFCON 2025 is viewed as a full-scale test for the 2030 World Cup. Experience gained in security, fan flow management, accreditations, and communication infrastructure will be directly reused. Succeeding with the AFCON is essential to dispel any potential reservations from European partners and FIFA regard-

ing co-hosting the World Cup.

Sport in Service of Sovereignty

Sport is a powerful vector of national unity and international recognition. Organizational success, and ideally a stellar performance by the Moroccan national team, will positively impact citizen morale and strengthen national pride. Diplomatically, it allows Morocco to project an image of stability, modernity, and development.

The Double Victory

In essence, the AFCON 2025 for Morocco is far more than a mere football tournament. It is a strategic investment with a dual objective: maximizing immediate economic returns and paving the way for the 2030 World Cup, while consolidating its position as an indispensable regional power and reliable partner on the African continent. Morocco is playing—and already winning—on the fields of diplomacy and economy.

Wilfrid DIANKABAKANA

How Morocco Cemented its Leadership in Africa



Over the past decade, Morocco has established itself as the new center of gravity for African football. More than just a rise in sporting prowess, this is a comprehensive strategy integrating training, infrastructure, governance, the organization of major events, and sports diplomacy. Today, the Cherifian Kingdom is perceived as a structuring force in continental football, a model that several countries are now seeking to replicate.

December 10, 2022. Al Thumama Stadium, Doha. The entire world had just witnessed Morocco's qualification for the semi-finals of the Qatar 2022 World Cup. The Atlas Lions triumphed over Portugal (1-0, with a goal from Youssef En-Nesyri in the 42nd minute). With this goal,

Walid Regragui's men became the first Africans to reach this level of global competition. This achievement came after England had crushed Cameroon's dream in 1990 (3-2) just ten minutes from ecstasy; after Senegal was crucified by a golden goal from Turkey in 2002 (0-1); and after Ghana narrowly missed a penalty, and a few centimeters, against Uruguay in 2010 (1-1, 4-2 pen.). Prior to Portugal, Morocco had eliminated Spain (0-0, 0-3 pen.) in the Round of 16.

The Moroccan performance is not a matter of chance. It is the culmination of a model whose cornerstone is investment in the training of players and coaches. This model is based primarily on a strong political will. Indeed, under the impetus of King Mohammed VI, the Kingdom has embarked on a vast

sports modernization plan, supported by a particularly active Royal Moroccan Football Federation (FRMF), led by Fouzi Lekjaa. This convergence of ambitions has given rise to a coherent ecosystem where sporting performance is combined with massive investment in infrastructure and training.

Thus, one of the pillars of Moroccan leadership is the quality of its infrastructure. The Maâmora technical center, often compared to European standards, has become a continental benchmark. It regularly hosts African national teams, CAF referee training camps, and coach training sessions.

In parallel, several stadiums have been modernized in Rabat, Tangier, Agadir, Marrakech, and Casablanca, allowing Morocco to host international competitions and be per-

ceived as a country «ready» at any time.

A Talent Laboratory

The Mohammed VI Academy is today one of the biggest successes of the Moroccan model. It produces a generation of players technically trained to international standards, some of whom are already shining in Europe or on the national team.

The FRMF has also made coach training a major focus: multiplying CAF Pro, A, and B License sessions; establishing partnerships with European clubs; and enhancing the skills of local technical staff. Morocco has thus become an exporter of expertise to other African federations. From Europe to Africa and Asia, Moroccan coaches continue to shine on the international scene, demonstrating the quality of Moroccan training and proudly representing the Kingdom in leagues and competitions worldwide. It is worth noting that in June 2025, two Moroccan coaches took the reins of teams in Africa and Europe: Abderrahim Talib at the Rwandan Patriotic Army FC (APR FC) and Issam Charaï, appointed coach of KVC Westerlo, a club playing in the Belgian Jupiler Pro League.

Morocco has also opened an unprecedented chapter: the accelerated development of women's football. The creation of professional leagues, the construction of dedicated centers, and the performances of the women's national team (quarter-finalists at the 2023 World Cup) have positioned the country as a leader in this still-emerging segment in Africa.

Aggressive Sports Diplomacy

Beyond the pitch, Morocco has strengthened its leadership by becoming a strategic partner of the Confederation of African Football (CAF). For several years, the Kingdom has hosted CAF General Assemblies, executive meetings, technical workshops, referee congresses, and, crucially, major

events like the CAF Awards, for which Rabat has become one of the natural capitals. This position makes the country an influential decision-making center in the dynamics of continental football.

Thanks to its infrastructure and stability, Morocco has also transformed into the continent's «permanent Plan B.» Qualifying tournaments, women's competitions, youth championships, interclub cups—the country has become one of CAF's favored hosts.

Morocco's organizational credibility rests on controlled logistics, solid hotel capacity, reliable transport, good security, and recognized event

become a vector of economic and diplomatic attractiveness for the Kingdom.

The 2022 World Cup, and the historic performance of the Atlas Lions reaching the semi-finals, gave Moroccan football global resonance. On the continental level, Moroccan clubs regularly dominate CAF competitions, securing several titles in the Champions League and Confederation Cup over the last decade.

Morocco has demonstrated that sports leadership in Africa can be built on vision, investment, and consistency. With CAN 2025 in sight, the expansion of regional academies, and the continued professionalization of clubs, the Kingdom intends to consolidate its position as a structuring power.

More than just a sporting actor, Morocco has become a strategic partner for the future of African football, a role it fully embraces, with ambition and method.

ON THE CONTINENTAL LEVEL, MOROCCAN CLUBS REGULARLY DOMINATE THE COMPETITIONS...

expertise. These assets were decisive in the award of the CAN 2025, presented as the flagship continental event of the coming years.

A Structured Economic Model

Moroccan leadership is not limited to sporting prestige. It is also based on an intelligent economic model built on public-private partnerships in infrastructure, massive investments from the tourism sector through hosting CAF events, the professionalization of clubs (notably Wydad, Raja, and RS Berkane), the development of sponsorship and TV rights, and the export of players and technical experts. Football has

CAN 2025 as a Major Test

CAN 2025 will be the culmination of the Moroccan strategy. It will allow for unprecedented international exposure, stimulate tourist demand, accelerate urban renovations, attract new sponsors, and create temporary and permanent jobs.

This event could definitively anchor Morocco as the economic leader in African football. This is because Morocco has not only developed high-performing football; it has built a complete sports industry, articulated around public investments, private partnerships, event organization, operational excellence, and sports diplomacy.

By combining governance, human capital, infrastructure, and economic strategy, the Kingdom has transformed its football into an instrument of continental power.

Moroccan leadership is not accidental: it is the result of a coherent, methodical, and forward-looking vision.

By Bernard Bangda



GIANNI INFANTINO

The Swiss Who Is Reshaping African Football

Gianni Infantino, elected FIFA President in February 2016 following the Blatter scandal, embodies the transformation of an organization once synonymous with corruption into a machine generating record revenues.

Born in Switzerland of Italian descent in 1970, the former lawyer and UEFA marketing director has quadrupled FIFA investments, increasing the figure from €400 million to €1.4 billion per four-year cycle for global football projects. His mantra: «redistribute football's wealth to the confederations, with Africa at the forefront,» as he affirmed in 2019 during his triumphant re-election.

Under his leadership, the World Cup was expanded to 48 teams starting in 2026, a bold gamble to democratize the beautiful game. In Africa, the FIFA Forward program has injected billions into infrastructure, boosting leagues and academies from the AFCON to the Confederations Cup. «Infantino has transformed FIFA into a pan-African leverage point, aligning local ambitions with global geopolitics,» an African football official told *Hommes d'Afrique*.

Controversies and Strategic Alliances

Yet, the Infantino era is synonymous with controversy. Accused of nepotism - his secret 2020 meeting with Swiss prosecutor Michael Lauber verged on the unethical - he has seen investigations dropped, much like the suspicions surrounding his «insulting» \$2 million annual salary. The 2022 Qatar World Cup, marked by worker tragedies, tarnished his image, while the expansion of the calendar - including a 32-team Club World Cup in 2025 - has provoked



the fury of players' unions and European leagues, who see it as an exhausting «tipping point.»

Recently, his closer ties with Donald Trump, re-elected in 2024, raise questions about FIFA's neutrality. Infantino awarded the US President a «FIFA Peace Prize,» praising his support for the 2026 USA-Canada-Mexico World Cup, and shared his box during a match in July 2025. «Security is our number one priority,» he stated at the White House, even mentioning a possible revocation of Seattle's hosting rights if «issues» arose. Critics abound: «Infantino is sacrificing sporting autonomy for vulgar political alliances,» laments a sports governance expert.

Pan-African Legacy Ahead of AFCON 2025

As the Morocco 2025 AFCON approaches, Infantino positions himself as a champion of Africa. He has advocated for a continental rotation of World Cups - the 2030 edition being shared by Africa/Europe - and increased CAF prize money by 50% post-2022. A concrete example: the \$200 million allocated to Africa via FIFA Forward since 2016, financing stadiums

in Senegal and academies in Nigeria. «African football is no longer a mere talent pool but a global economic pillar,» he proclaims in a fictional quote for our edition.

His detractors, however, point to a unilateral leadership: «Infantino decides alone, disregarding professional leagues,» grumbles one observer. Nevertheless, his 2023 re-election with 205 out of 211 votes seals his domination. For AFCON 2025, he promises an «ethical showcase» post-Qatar, focusing on female inclusion and anti-racism. «Africa is changing the rules of the game under Infantino,» summarizes a Cameroonian sports consultant.

In summary, Gianni Infantino is a visionary reformer to some, an opportunist to others. At 55, he commands \$7 billion in annual FIFA revenues but risks a calendar implosion ahead of 2030. He appears today as a cosmopolitan Swiss who has globalized football, even if it means politicizing it. For many Africans, he remains the man who is placing Africa at the center of the global game - imperfect, yet indispensable.

By S.T.

FOCUS AFCON

FROM MINES TO MYTHS

HOW/MOTSEPE IS BUILDING AFRICAN FOOTBALL

Patrice Motsepe, the South African billionaire and President of the Confederation of African Football (CAF), embodies an audacious vision: transforming African football into a powerful driver of economic and social development. From Soweto to the continental stadiums, his journey illustrates how governance, infrastructure, and global partnerships can redefine the future of African sport.

The Rise of a Mining Magnate

Born in Soweto in 1962, Patrice Motsepe personifies the meteoric rise of an entrepreneur who overcame the apartheid context to become one of the continent's most influential figures. His father, a shrewd merchant, instilled in him the basics of management and business acumen early on. This initial training forged a discipline and strategic vision that would prove decisive. In the 1990s, as South Africa opened up to new economic prospects following decades of segregation, Motsepe founded African Rainbow Minerals. The company prospered thanks to a bold strategy and post-apartheid reforms. Within a few decades, he became South Africa's first black billionaire and one of the continent's wealthiest men. Yet, for him, wealth is not an end in itself. «Prosperity is only meaningful if it contributes to collective progress,» he once stated at an economic forum in Johannesburg.

This conviction led him to invest in sectors beyond mining, notably in sport, which he views as a lever for social and economic transformation. His path highlights a central idea: the 21st-century African entrepreneur cannot merely accumulate fortunes; they must build lasting institutions.

African Football as a Reform Laboratory

Motsepe's passion for football is longstanding. As the owner of Mamelodi Sundowns, he transformed the club into a continental powerhouse, accumulating national titles and winning the CAF Champions League. However, his ambition extends beyond trophies. He invests in developing young talent and infrastructure, two areas often neglected in Africa. «Football must not just produce stars; it must create opportu-

nities for millions of young people,» he declared in 2019.

His 2021 election as President of CAF marked a turning point. The institution, weakened by governance scandals and a credibility deficit, became a testing ground for him. Motsepe identified three priorities: transparency, infrastructure, and sustainable financing. He enforced regular audits, financial management standards, and a zero-tolerance policy against dubious practices. The objective was clear: restore the confidence of sponsors and investors.

His approach is reminiscent of a corporate executive applying modern governance principles to a sporting organization. «Motsepe introduced a culture of accountability that the CAF sorely

MOTSEPE'S STRATEGY IS BASED ON A SUBTLE ARTICULATION BETWEEN GLOBALIZATION AND LOCAL ROOTS.

lacked,» analyzed a London-based consultant. Concurrently, he launched stadium renovation projects and the construction of training centers. These initiatives aim to bridge a structural gap: Africa possesses an exceptional talent pool but suffers from a severe deficit in infrastructure.

Under his presidency, CAF strengthened partnerships with FIFA and private actors. African competitions received new funding, while grassroots development programs emerged in several countries. Motsepe insists on the importance of local anchoring: «African football must be global in its ambitions but local in its foundations.»

A Global Vision, a Lasting Legacy

Motsepe's strategy rests on a subtle balance between globalization and local roots. On one hand, he attracts foreign capital and forges alliances with international federations. On the other, he invests in community projects that use

football as a tool for social cohesion. In many regions, the sport provides an alternative to poverty and violence. «Football is a universal language, but in Africa, it is also an instrument of dignity,» he emphasized.

This holistic approach is transforming African football into an emerging industry. Motsepe envisions a model where African clubs can compete with their European counterparts, not only on the field but also in their organization. He promotes professional management, quality training, and modern infrastructure. «If Africa wants to be respected, it must provide the means to be so,» he stated at a conference in Accra.

His legacy transcends sport. By embodying a new generation of African leaders, he demonstrates that sport can be a vector for economic and social transformation. The values he champions - solidarity, perseverance, responsibility - resonate beyond the stadiums. They inspire a youth searching for role models and an African elite intent on building credible institutions.

Motsepe's impact is already measurable: better-structured clubs, more attractive competitions, and more confident sponsors. But his ambition is to leave a lasting mark. «I want that in twenty years, people say African football changed its dimension,» he recently affirmed. This vision, both pragmatic and audacious, illustrates rare leadership on the continent.

Patrice Motsepe is not just a South African billionaire. He has become the architect of a continental project where sport serves as a catalyst for development. His journey, from Soweto to the pinnacles of finance and football, embodies a powerful idea: Africa can transform its fragilities into levers of strength. By introducing structural reforms, investing in infrastructure, and mobilizing global partnerships, he is giving African football a real chance to prosper.

His already tangible legacy will mark the decades to come. Through him, Africa asserts its ability to be a major player on the global sporting stage. As one Cameroonian observer summarizes: «Motsepe is not content to merely dream African football; he is building it brick by brick.»

By Sylvestre Tetchiada



المملكة المغربية
وزارة الشؤون الخارجية
والتعاون الإفريقي
والمغاربة المقيمين بالخارج
تصام المغربية المقيمين بالخارج

FOUZI LEKJAA

The Discreet Architect of Morocco's New Leadership

In the landscape of Moroccan sports and institutions, few figures spark as much fascination as Fouzi Lekjaa. An agricultural engineer by training, a seasoned senior civil servant, an influential sports executive, and now a pillar of the government, he embodies a rare trajectory: that of a technocrat who became an international strategist. From Berkane to the inner workings of FIFA, Fouzi Lekjaa has established himself as one of the most influential men in modern Morocco, at the intersection of sports, diplomacy, and public finance, without ever seeking the spotlight. A compulsive worker, a discreet strategist, an elusive figure with a cool charm, he quietly shapes the destiny of national football and the Kingdom's financial agenda.

This is an intimate portrait of a man who does not chase glory... but whom glory always manages to catch. Born on July 23, 1970, in Berkane, in the Oriental plain, Fouzi Lekjaa belongs to a generation for whom social advancement passes through education. The son of a middle-class Amazigh family, he grew up in a rapidly changing rural Morocco. Those who knew him in his childhood speak of «a studious, discreet boy, but obsessed with organization: the one who arranged teams during school tournaments, checked scores, and managed the balls like a treasure.» Very early, at 18, he left the Oriental region to pursue studies as an agricultural engineer, then entered the National School of Administration. He was quickly noticed for his mathematical mind and his ability to analyze a system holistically. His entry into the Ministry of Finance in the late 1990s offered him the ideal field of expression in a demanding, technical environment where one

only shines by mastering their files.

At the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the young Fouzi Lekjaa climbed the ranks «with a mix of rigor and political acumen,» colleagues from that time recall. After being promoted to the rank of financial inspector, he managed major issues such as agricultural compensation, sectoral budgets, and public expenditure rationalization reforms. His style was already identifiable: extreme rigor, late-night meetings, detailed memos, and a results-oriented culture. His collaborators speak of «a demanding but fair superior; sometimes abrupt, but never improvised.» This exceptional work ethic would naturally lead him to another sphere where Morocco sought modernization: football.

RS Berkane: The Executive's Crucible

In Berkane, where football is a family passion, Fouzi Lekjaa found that the Renaissance Sportive de Berkane (RSB) had long languished in the lower divisions. After joining the club's management in the early 2000s, he became president in 2009, when it was going through a period of financial and sporting doubts.

Lekjaa transformed RSB into a laboratory for his method, based on management professionalization, strengthening the training academy, targeted recruitment, financial planning, and structured governance. Results were quick to follow: first, promotion to the first division, then national finals, and finally, continental consecration. The club became one of Moroccan football's standard-bearers. For many, «Berkane was the first testing ground for an executive who demonstrated that a provincial club can become a powerhouse if the foundations are solid.»

It was under similar arrival conditions to Berkane that Fouzi Lekjaa was elected president of the Royal Moroccan Football Federation (FRMF) in 2014, during a period of institutional crisis. This election marked a clear break between a federation perceived as bureaucratic and a model inspired by international standards.

To lift the FRMF out of the slump it was in, the new president developed a restructuring program around three pillars that reflect his vision.

First, the construction of world-class infrastructure. The creation of the Mohammed VI Complex in Salé is the symbol of this ambition. A true football campus, equipped with futuristic architecture and cutting-edge technologies, it is considered one of the best in the world. This is where all national teams, from U17 to seniors, are trained.

Next, he initiated a profound governance reform. At the Federation, Fouzi Lekjaa imposed strict financial standards on clubs, reinforced professional licenses, and demanded transparency and accountability. His reputation as a technocrat was strongly reasserted: every project had to be quantified, costed, and sustainable.

The third pillar of this Moroccan football overhaul was Morocco's rise on the international stage. Thus, under his mandate, and with the support of King Mohamed VI, Morocco hosted CAF Executive Committees and General Assemblies, the CAF Awards regularly returned to Marrakech, the Kingdom multiplied bids for international competitions, and the country invested massively in African sports diplomacy. This strategy helped reposition Rabat as a major player in African football.

The 2030 World Cup: A Global Ambition

This is probably the most emblematic file of his influence. By championing the Morocco-Spain-Portugal bid for the 2030 World Cup, Lekjaa positioned himself at the heart of a very complex sports and diplomatic negotiation. He worked closely with FIFA, multiplied continental trips, and unified networks. For many observers, he is one of the engineers of this symbolic victory for Morocco.

However, his ascent does not stop at Rabat. A member of the FIFA Council, he is also president of strategic committees, but most notably First Vice-President of CAF in 2025. This naturally positions him as the potential successor to Patrice Motsepe at the head of CAF in the coming years - a prospect that will not surprise his long-time collaborators who see him as a methodical man.

Minister Delegate for the Budget: Rigor and Reforms

In 2021, Lekjaa officially joined the government as Minister Delegate in charge of the Budget. Here, he leads major projects such as the generalization of social protection, tax reforms, the modernization of revenue collection, and the balancing of public accounts.

While this dual role (finance and football) sometimes fuels criticism from his detractors, his supporters argue that «Morocco is currently in a phase where efficiency takes precedence over appearances. And, in terms of efficiency, Lekjaa remains a benchmark.»

Fouzi Lekjaa is not a man of flamboyant communication. He seeks neither celebrity nor self-promotion. He prefers figures to speeches, files to podiums. His inner circle describes him as «a compulsive worker, a methodical strategist, a direct decision-maker, a man of discreet networks, a patriot obsessed with performance.» This combination, rare in the world of sports, partly explains the transformation of Moroccan football over the last ten years.

Those who follow his trajectory see him as «a builder, a systems organizer.» Whether modernizing a provincial club, repositioning Morocco in global football, or piloting public finances during a difficult economic period,



Lekjaa stands as a central figure of modern Morocco: demanding, ambitious, and structurally impactful.

He often arrives at the office very early, even before Rabat awakens. A black coffee placed next to a notebook filled with numbers, names, dates - nothing is left to chance. Simply dressed, Fouzi Lekjaa, with a discreet appearance and rectangular glasses, is nothing like the flamboyant executive. And yet, behind the scenes of modern Morocco, his name circulates as that of a man who changes everything he touches.

From Berkane to the hushed halls of

FIFA, passing through the endless corridors of the Ministry of Finance, Fouzi Lekjaa has over the years become an almost novelistic figure: that of a technocrat who became a global strategist, a modest man who became an influencer despite himself, a child of the Oriental region who became one of the continent's most powerful decision-makers. His story is not just that of a sports executive. It is that of a state technocrat who became a global actor, a man who has made rigor his trademark, and influence his signature.

Bernard Bangda

WALID REGRAGUI

The Man Who Recreated the Moroccan Dream

In the glamorous backstage of global football, few figures manage to combine charisma, simplicity, and meteoric success. Walid Regragui, head coach of the Atlas Lions, has emerged as an inspiring story that captivates both sports enthusiasts and admirers of remarkable human trajectories. A man who is humble, elegant, and discreet - yet whose determination has conquered Morocco and the world.

Born in France, in Corbeil-Essonnes, into a modest Moroccan family, Walid grew up far from the spotlight. Nothing predestined this shy young man, who loved football and was attached to his roots, to become one of the most influential coaches on the African continent. His father insisted that he pursue his studies - which he did - but Walid never gave up on his passion. The beautiful game was his true school of life, his path to emancipation.

Before becoming a coach, Regragui was a professional player for several French and Spanish clubs. On the field, he was not a media star, but a hard worker, respected for his mentality and his team spirit.

He kept the same mindset when he moved to the other side of the touchline. First as an assistant with the Lions, then coach of FUS, and later Wydad Casablanca, whom he led to victory in the CAF Champions League, Regragui built a reputation as a serious, methodical, but above all, profound and humane man.

The Coach Who Rewrote History

His appointment to lead the Atlas Lions in August 2022 reads like a modern fairy tale. Young, smiling, outspoken, and speaking «like the people,» Regragui took charge of the national team three months before the World Cup.

The rest is history: qualification for the semi-finals of the 2022 World Cup - a first for Africa and the Arab world - the construction, in a short span of time, of a cohesive, popular team that plays with heart, and the transformation of the international image of Moroccan football.



In the stands, families, flags, and chants accompanied the victories. Morocco was buzzing, and the world was watching. Amidst it all, Regragui always appeared simple, smiling, often wearing a cap, speaking of humility, hard work, and patriotism. A star in spite of himself.

International magazines adore him. Social media has embraced him. Why? Because Regragui is not just a coach: he is a symbol. A symbol of diaspora success. A symbol of discipline and resilience. A symbol of a proud, modern Morocco, open to the world. He is appreciated for his candidness, his way of owning his choices, his subtle humor, and his closeness to his players. Several Lions describe him as «like a big brother,» a confidant, a natural motivator.

Between Family, Values, and Ambition: The Other Face of Regragui

Away from the stadiums, Walid remains a family man, attached to his loved ones and his origins. He is rarely seen in social circles, avoids controversy, and prefers simple moments.

He often mentions the role of his parents, his summer trips to Fnideq, and his values of education and discipline.

A modern coach, yes, but one profoundly rooted in a humility that is rare in an often-

flamboyant environment.

Today, Regragui is more than a coach: he is a national figure. He continues to inspire a new generation of young Moroccans, convinced that work and will can change a destiny.

His impact transcends sport: he influences popular culture, national pride, and Morocco's image on the international stage.

While rumors sometimes send him to prestigious clubs, Walid remains focused on his mission: to grow Moroccan football and confirm that the 2022 adventure was not a miracle... but the beginning of an era.

The 2022 World Cup: Triumph of the Lion

The moment Walid truly became a global star was during the 2022 World Cup. Appointed coach three months before the tournament, he transformed a young and ambitious team into a dream-making machine. Morocco reached the semi-finals, a historic achievement for the African continent and the Arab world.

Anecdotes abound: in the stands, he is often seen shaking hands, taking selfies with children, and sharing moments of camaraderie with his players. In Doha, he was even caught running to catch a young supporter who wanted to hug him on the pitch after a historic match. These gestures, simple yet charged with emotion, captivated the global audience.

Today, he continues to roar on fields worldwide, leading his Lions with passion and fascinating others with his style and humanity. With his touching anecdotes, natural elegance, and glamorous discretion, Walid has become a true icon, a personality admired as much for his victories as for the person he is. In short, Walid Regragui embodies the perfect balance between a football star, a public icon, and a deeply human man. A modern Lion, who knows how to roar with elegance.

Bernard Bangda



AFRICA CUP
OF NATIONS
MOROCCO 25

Who Are the 24 Contenders Vying for the Trophy?

The 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON), scheduled to take place in Morocco from December 21, 2025, to January 18, 2026, promises to be one of the most unpredictable tournaments in its history. Never before, since the inception of the AFCON in 1957, has the competition seemed so open, with at least five to six nations capable of seriously challenging for the title. Who will lift the Grail? Morocco, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Algeria, and Egypt, all qualified for the 2026 World Cup, start as the bookmakers' favorites.

JOSEPH KAPO

THE FAVORITES



THE ATLAS LIONS DREAM OF HOME GLORY

Nearly half a century after their only continental triumph, the Atlas Lions are determined to make history at home.

The Atlas Lions approach the competition not only with the home advantage but also with a fierce resolve to secure their second Africa Cup of Nations title since 1976.

However, hosting the tournament is not necessarily an advantage. Out of the 34 editions of the Africa Cup of Nations since 1957 (including the inaugural one), the host country has only won the tournament 12 times, representing approximately 35% of the cases. Since 2000, only Tunisia (2004), Egypt (2006), and Côte d'Ivoire (2024) have triumphed on home soil.

The Lions' performance during the qualifiers speaks for itself. Morocco is the only team to have won all their matches, a feat that confirms their status as

natural favorites. After reaching the historic semi-finals of the 2022 World Cup, the country is regarded as one of the continent's major footballing nations. Furthermore, Morocco's squad, combining experience, technical skill, and game intelligence, provides the Lions with all the tools to compete with the best African teams. Notably, the Kingdom counts Achraf Hakimi, recently named African Player of the Year, among its ranks.

The home advantage is also an asset that Morocco can exploit to gain an edge over its opponents, as they can rely on massive public support. This is the same support they benefited from in 1988, though they failed to win the trophy at home, being eliminated in the semi-finals by Cameroon.

Morocco, despite being the only African nation to reach a World Cup semi-final (in Qatar 2022), has only won one AFCON title, in 1976, across 19 appearances.



THE PHARAOHS SEEK AN EIGHTH CROWN

The Egyptians disappointed after losing the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) final to Senegal in Yaoundé on February 6, 2022. They intend to reclaim their leading role.

Seven-time African champions, the Egyptians will once again be close to continental glory. The most decorated team on the continent, ahead of Cameroon (5 titles) and Ghana (4 titles), Egypt combines youthful exuberance with experience, a blend that has always allowed them to play a major role in continental tournaments.

Under the management of Hossam Hassan, the national team plays faster and more vertically while maintaining its legendary tactical discipline. Several players symbolize this ambitious new generation, who will be highly anticipated in Morocco. The king among the Pharaohs, Mohamed Salah, is undoubtedly the lynchpin of the offensive setup. Despite a recent dip in form at Liverpool, the 33-year-old forward remains a key asset for the national team.

For his fifth AFCON, he will be supported in attack by Omar Marmoush (Manchester City), Mostafa Mohamed (FC Nantes), and Mahmoud Trezeguet (Al Ahly). This could finally be the year he wins the trophy he has often come close to (two lost finals) but never managed to conquer.

Egypt represents the eternal dynasty of the Pharaohs in the AFCON kingdom. Between 2006 and 2010, the Egyptians achieved an unprecedented feat: three consecutive titles, an undisputed domination of the continent. In 2006, in Cairo, Drogba's Côte d'Ivoire was defeated on penalties. Two years later, in Ghana, Egypt once again crushed Côte d'Ivoire in the semi-finals before beating Cameroon thanks to a goal from Aboutrika. In 2010, in Angola, the Pharaohs, the only undefeated team in the tournament, triumphed over Ghana.

Hassan Shehata, the coach, entered the legend books. Egypt was authorized to keep the trophy, which was mysteriously lost, with the time and circumstances still unknown today.



African champions at home in 2023 after an epic run, the Ivorians approach this AFCON with the status of reigning title holders.

Thanks to the trophy won at home in 2024, Côte d'Ivoire automatically assumes the mantle of logical favorite in a competition they have won three times, including twice in the last five editions. Under the leadership of Emerse Faé, the Elephants arrive in Morocco with the ambition of retaining their title. But the challenge is formidable.

Since the AFCON's inception (founded in 1957), only three teams have successfully defended their title. This was the case for Egypt in 1957 and 1959, and during their historic treble in 2006-2008-2010. Ghana won in 1963 and 1965, and Cameroon in 2000 and 2002.

Does Côte d'Ivoire, the reigning African champion, have what it takes to secure a fourth star on Moroccan soil? The team, known for its

offensive firepower, has also become defensively tough to break down. To go far in competitions, a solid defense is essential, and the Elephants possess it.

In their last 11 matches, the Ivorian national team has conceded only two goals. These came in friendly defeats (1-0) against New Zealand and (1-0) against Saudi Arabia. In 10 matches of the 2026 World Cup qualifiers, the Elephants have not conceded a single goal. Even after facing Gabon twice, they kept a clean sheet. Emerse Faé could build on this aspect to pursue a fourth continental title.

This defensive solidity is embodied by Evan Ndicka, the defense marshal. Whether he is paired with Emmanuel Agbadou, Ousmane Diomandé, or Odilon Kossounou in the center, the defensive structure remains formidable. The defensive machine, featuring full-backs Wilfried Singo on the right and Ghislain Konan on the left, is well-oiled.



TERANGA LIONS ARE SERIOUS TITLE CONTENDERS

The Senegalese, who claimed their first star four years ago after losing two finals in 2002 against Cameroon and 2019 against Algeria, will be asking if they have what it takes to go all the way this time.

Crowned at the 2021 AFCON but prematurely eliminated two years later, Senegal seems to be regaining its balance under the leadership of Pape Thiaw, successor to Aliou Cissé. Built around experienced core players Sadio Mané, Kalidou Koulibaly, and Idrissa Gueye, the Teranga Lions can also count on the integration of talented young players into the demanding continental competition.

The Teranga Lions are, along with the Atlas Lions of Morocco, the two highest-ranked African teams in the FIFA rankings, sitting at 18th and 12th respectively. Senegal, which dominated its World Cup 2026 qualifying group, will rely on continuity and stability to repeat the success of 2022.

Senegal is drawn in Group D and will face DR

Congo, Benin, and Botswana. This group is widely within their reach, given their rich potential. In goal, Edouard Mendy (Al Ahli, Saudi Arabia), Mory Diaw (Le Havre, France), and Yehvann Diouf (OGC Nice, France) seem to be the top choices. The defense relies on Mamadou Sarr (Strasbourg, France), Kalidou Koulibaly (Al Hilal, Saudi Arabia), Moussa Niakhaté (Olympique Lyonnais, France), Ismail Jakobs (Galatasaray, Turkey), and El Hadji Malick Diouf (West Ham, England), among others.

In midfield, Idrissa Gana Gueye (Everton, England), Lamine Camara (AS Monaco, Monaco), Pathé Ciss (Rayo Vallecano, Spain), Pape Alassane Gueye (Villarreal, Spain), Habib Diarra (Sunderland, England), Pape Matar Sarr (Tottenham Hotspur, England), and Mamadou Lamine Camara (RS Berkane, Morocco) are key figures.

The attack remains more open, featuring Sadio Mané (Al Nassr, Saudi Arabia), Nicolas Jackson (Chelsea, England), and Ismaila Sarr (Crystal Palace, England), among others.



THE FENNECS IN CATCH-UP MODE

After the Belmadi era, marked by the euphoria of the 2019 triumph followed by two traumatic eliminations (AFCON 2021 and World Cup 2022), Algeria approaches AFCON 2025 with a clear goal: reclaiming its status as a credible powerhouse.

Following double failures at AFCON 2021 and 2023, where they crashed out in the group stage, the Greens and Whites are determined to turn the page. To achieve this, the Federation has handed the reins to Vladimir Petković, the Serbo-Swiss coach renowned for forging a compact, disciplined Swiss team capable of upsets against Europe's top nations. The 2019 African champion generation is gradually fading, making way for a new wave led by Fares Chaïbi, Housseem Aouar, Rayan Aït Nouri, and Badredine Bouanani. Natural favorites in Group E, the Algerians

enter AFCON 2025 with a mix of ambition and caution. Facing Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, and Sudan, Algeria must finally live up to its billing and break the cycle of disappointments. The Fennecs will have to contend with their old demons - including two former tormentors, Burkina Faso and Equatorial Guinea - plus a resilient Sudan ready to defy expectations. Natural group favorites, title dark horses, but still seeking consistency: Petković's men will be under scrutiny.

Since the 2019 triumph, Algeria's AFCON record has been a string of letdowns. Last in their group in 2022 after a loss to Equatorial Guinea, the Fennecs relapsed in 2024 with another early exit... and a frustrating draw against Burkina Faso. Fate pits them against their executioners once more, this time in Morocco - a geopolitical context unlikely to ease tensions.

THE OUTSIDERS



INDOMITABLE LIONS IN TURBULENT WATERS

Eliminated from the 2026 World Cup, the Cameroonian national team will seek redemption in Morocco at the AFCON scheduled from December 21, 2025, to January 18, 2026.

Belgian coach Marc Brys was sacked due to the national team's poor performances, which missed qualification for the next football World Cup jointly hosted by Canada, the USA, and Mexico. David Pagou has taken the helm of the selection. Appointed by Samuel Eto'o, the elected president of the Federation, the Cameroonian technician has made his mark by rejuvenating the squad.

Key players like Michael Ngadeu, Vincent Aboubakar, and André Onana were surprisingly left out of the Moroccan expedition. The group will rely on other talented players, such as Bryan Mbeumo from Manchester United, Carlos Baleba from Brighton, Christopher Wooh from Spartak Moscow, and Dany Namasso from

Auxerre... Joined by newcomers like Eric Junior Dina Ebimbe from Brest or Christian Kofane from Leverkusen.

This is the group tasked with the heavy mission of conquering a new continental title - the sixth after those won in 1984 in Côte d'Ivoire, 1988 in Morocco, 2000 in Nigeria, 2002 in Mali, and 2017 in Gabon. A daunting challenge given the progress made by African countries in football. Group F is particularly unpredictable, with tough opponents like Mozambique, Gabon, and especially the Elephants of Côte d'Ivoire, the reigning African champions.

In 2024, at the 34th AFCON edition, Cameroon was eliminated by Nigeria in the round of 16, 0-2. Rigobert Song, the coach who had delivered a respectable performance at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, was thanked. The arrival of Belgian Marc Brys changed nothing for the team, which will not participate in the first 48-team World Cup, with nearly 10 spots for Africa.



DR Congo

LEOPARDS PROGRAMMED FOR SUCCESS

Sébastien Desabre has selected 26 players for AFCON 2025. A dense, balanced squad armed to shake up the hierarchy in a tough group.

Days before the AFCON 2025 kickoff, DR Congo is signaling its intentions. Sébastien Desabre unveiled a 26-player list where the absence of Yoane Wissa, sidelined by a knee injury, is the only real setback. The staff has nevertheless built a highly competitive group, built around experienced leaders and an ambitious new generation.

In Group D dominated by Senegal, the Leopards aim to play spoilers and secure qualification. In defense, DR Congo boasts one of the tournament's strongest units. Aaron Wan-Bissaka (West Ham), Chancel Mbemba (Lille), Axel Tuanzebe (Burnley), and Arthur Masuaku (Sunderland) provide the coach with a rare defensive foundation in the competition.

Versatility, power, and experience: the Leopards

have technical and mental guarantees. In mid-field, Desabre can rely on a blend of impact and creativity: Ngal'ayel Mukau (Lille), Noah Sadiki (Sunderland), Edo Kayembe (Watford), and Charles Pickel (Espanyol) form an engine room capable of matching the continent's most athletic teams.

An attack primed to strike hard. DR Congo lacks no options despite missing its striker, Wissa. The trio of Cédric Bakambu (Betis), Fiston Mayele (Pyramids), and Meshack Elia (Alanyaspor) carries the nation's offensive ambitions. Add Samuel Essende (Augsbourg) and Simon Banza (Al-Jazira): Desabre has a varied arsenal of speed, penetration, and finishing.

The team is riding high after qualifying for the intercontinental tournament, a pathway to next year's World Cup. The Leopards fear no one, having beaten two continental heavyweights - Cameroon and Nigeria - in the Africa zone mini-tournament in November.



Nigeria

SUPER EAGLES READY FOR ACTION

After topping a tough qualifying group with Benin, Libya, and Rwanda, the Nigerians enter AFCON 2025 aiming for their fourth continental title - a goal that has them fully motivated...

Nigeria's squad features an unusually deep lineup in every department. No surprises in goal, with Stanley Nwabali, Maduka Okoye, and Amas Obasogie leading the group. They are joined by Francis Uzoho, Adebayo Adeleye, and teenager Ebenezer Harcourt (16 years old), whose inclusion reflects Chelle's commitment to building depth beyond his usual picks.

The defensive pillars are all present. Captain Troost-Ekong, Calvin Bassey, and Semi Ajayi - arguably Chelle's most reliable defenders - retain their spots. Newcomers Ryan Alebiosu, Adeleke Adekunle, and Emmanuel Michael are

also selected as the coach broadens competition across positions.

The midfield selection feels familiar. Wilfred Ndidi, Alex Iwobi, Frank Onyeka, and Raphael Onyedika - all staples since Chelle's arrival in January - return once more, bringing continuity and balance.

The attack, Nigeria's most competitive sector, is predictably stacked. African Ballon d'Or winners Victor Osimhen (2023) and Ademola Lookman (2024) lead a fearsome cast that also includes Moses Simon (Paris FC), ex-Montpellier's Akor Adams, Nice's Terem Moffi, Samuel Chukwueze, Chidera Ejuke, and Tolu Arokodare.

With three titles (1980, 1994, 2013) and five lost finals, Nigeria ranks among Africa's football powerhouses. It will compete in Group D alongside Tunisia, Uganda, and Tanzania.



South Africa

THE BAFANA BAFANA: FEARLESS AMBITION

With two consecutive qualifications for the TotalEnergies CAF Africa Cup of Nations and a renewed presence at the World Cup, South Africa arrives in Morocco with the stated ambition of playing a leading role once again.

Belgian coach Hugo Broos has published the list of twenty-five players who will defend the South African colors. The team is built around a solid core. The winner of the 2017 AFCON with Cameroon, remaining faithful to his strategy, is once again relying on players from the local league, seasoned by their campaigns in the TotalEnergies CAF Champions League and the TotalEnergies CAF Confederation Cup. This strong foundation is reinforced by a few attacking talents from abroad. In goal, Ronwen Williams, voted best African goalkeeper at the 2024 CAF Awards, natu-

rally resumes his role as the leader. In front of him, Hugo Broos retains a dense and athletic defense, designed to hold firm in major tournaments.

The attack will be spearheaded by Burnley player Lyle Foster, well supported by promising talents Mohau Nkota and Relebohile Mofokeng, symbolizing a South African generation that continues to grow in stature.

South Africa appears well-armed to pursue the final title in this 35th edition of the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON 2025). They have participated in Africa's flagship competition 12 times in the past, specifically in the 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2019, 2021, and 2023 editions. They achieved their best performance in 1996, winning the tournament after defeating Tunisia 2-0 in the final. The Bafana Bafana will compete in Group B, alongside Egypt, Zimbabwe, and Angola.



THE EAGLES SOAR HIGH

Their qualifying run was marked by four victories and no setbacks, highlighting a notable offensive efficiency with ten goals scored and only one conceded.

The Eagles of Mali arrive at AFCON 2025 in Morocco with an impressive status! Drawn in a group including Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and Eswatini, Bissouma's teammates showed relentless dominance, finishing top of the standings with a remarkable total of 14 points. Their journey was characterized by four wins and no defeats, emphasizing a clear offensive effectiveness with ten goals scored for just one conceded. This high-caliber defensive performance, combined with demonstrated attacking power, allowed the Malians to secure their participation in the continental tournament

without the slightest difficulty.

The draw pits them against Morocco, but the Eagles are clear favorites against Zambia and Comoros in Group A. Tom Saintfield must prepare the Eagles to play at their optimal level. The Belgian coach, known for his expertise in African football acquired during his tenures in Kenya and Togo, and his staff, have the essential mission of mentally preparing their squad to avoid any overconfidence.

Many football specialists agree that Mali has the potential to cause a major surprise against Morocco, provided they express their best form. Tottenham midfielder Yves Bissouma, 28, with three previous appearances, is the centerpiece of the system, and hopes rely heavily on his physical form, especially as he is returning from a recent injury sustained against Madagascar.



Angola

PALANCAS NEGRAS FACE TOUGH COMPETITION

Against formidable opponents in Group B, notably South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Egypt, the Angolans will be able to count on a solid defense led by Clinton Mata.

Coach Patrice Beaumelle has revealed the list of 28 players called up for AFCON 2025, which will take place from December 21, 2025, to January 18, 2026, in the cities of Casablanca, Tangier, Marrakech, Rabat, Agadir, and Fez. The Palancas Negras, in Group B, will face South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Egypt. In the position of outsiders, the Angolans will rely on a solid defense led by Lyon's Clinton Mata.

Angola thus approaches AFCON 2025 with Patrice Beaumelle at the helm, who has just unveiled the 28-player selection list. This list includes confirmed key players like Olympique Lyonnais defender Clinton Mata, and expe-

rienced players such as Show, Fredy, and Gelson Dala. These players will bring solid experience and valuable leadership to the team. Defense will be a key sector for the Palancas Negras as they confront formidable opponents. The opening match against South Africa will be crucial for the Palancas Negras, who, facing tough competition, will target a third-place reprieve. To find his team's balance, the coach, appointed only three months before the start of the competition, has planned a preparation camp with friendly matches against DR Congo and then Mozambique. However, FIFA's decision to release international players only starting December 15 complicates matters. The French coach succeeded Pedro Gonçalves, who had led the Palancas Negras to the quarter-finals of AFCON 2024, where they were eliminated by eventual finalists Nigeria.



For this 35th edition, Sami Trabelsi's players will compete in Group C alongside Tanzania, Nigeria, and Uganda.

Tunisia, which hasn't missed an AFCON since 1994, will contest its 22nd finals after those in 1962, 1963, 1965, 1978, 1982, 1964, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2023. Its Palmares boasts a single title, won in 2004 after a 2-1 final victory over Morocco.

For their 16th consecutive finals - a record streak in progress - the Carthage Eagles arrive with few certainties. Tunisia's traditionally solid defense remains the team's foundation, bolstered by battle-tested veterans and long-standing tactical discipline. After years of instability and controversies, coach Sami Trabelsi's return

appears to have finally brought some stability. Tunisia dominated 2026 World Cup qualifiers in Group H, qualifying without conceding a goal - a feat to temper given opponents like struggling Namibia and Equatorial Guinea, plus weak Liberia, Malawi, and São Tomé and Príncipe.

«It's a team always at the AFCON party, but with a glass ceiling around the quarterfinals. I'm not sure they have the tools to break through this time,» analyzes Canal+ consultant Xavier Barret. «Eliminated in the group stage in 2024, it would already be an improvement if they avoid repeating that flop.»

In AFCON 2025 Group C, the Carthage Eagles will face Nigeria, the reigning African vice-champions, Uganda, and Tanzania - future co-hosts of AFCON 2027 with Kenya.



Gabon

PANTHERS ON A STEADY TROT

A stark paradox for a team exuding collective serenity, with individuals capable of making the difference at any moment.

When Thierry Mouyouma was officially named coach on October 7, 2023, few backed him. Two years later, his squad rivals Africa's elite and nearly grabbed direct qualification for the 2026 World Cup. They gave reigning African champions Côte d'Ivoire a real scare in qualifiers, ultimately edging them out by just one point. Despite playoff elimination in Africa's intercontinental zone - beaten by Nigeria, the African vice-champions—Gabon's national team arrives in Morocco highly motivated. Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mozambique in Group F should beware.

Thierry Mouyouma dreams big, targeting round-of-16 qualification by matchday two. «It's

a very interesting group. In Africa, there's no good or bad draw: it all comes down to the final result. With a team progressing mentally, technically, tactically, and physically, starting against Cameroon is a golden opportunity. It'll be a Central Africa derby,» declared the Panthers' coach. Next up: Mozambique.

Gabon is reborn, fueled by a promising blend of experience and youth. In defense, Bruno Ecuele Manga remains a pillar, while Mario Lemina injects freshness and dynamism in mid-field. Up front, Marseille star Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang leads as the talisman. He now seems on a mission with Gabon to erase that «unfinished» taste.

Off-field behavioral issues appear consigned to history. This Gabon radiates renewed ambition, with a tighter collective and positive momentum.

14



Zambia

CHIPOLOPOLO HOPE TO RECREATE 2012 MIRACLE

The Copperbelt nation, a symbol of resilience, secretly dreams of reliving the magic from 13 years ago. It will need peak performance to reach the round of 16.

In 2012, Zambia and French coach Hervé Renard scripted one of football's most improbable tales: becoming African champions against all odds, toppling Didier Drogba's powerhouse Côte d'Ivoire. Thirteen years on, the Chipolopolo aim to prove they're not just a romantic miracle from the past, but a competitive, ambitious force once more. For their 20th AFCON finals, the Chipolopolo will play in Group A with hosts Morocco, Mali, and Comoros. Their sole title came in 2012, hosted by Equatorial Guinea and

Gabon, where they beat Côte d'Ivoire 8-7 on penalties after a 0-0 draw.

At the heart of that unforgettable epic: Christopher Katongo, exemplary captain, charismatic leader, and soul of the Chipolopolo who lifted the trophy in Libreville. He remains a respected figure in African football, lauded for stellar club and international performances.

«Winning the AFCON in 2012 changed everything - for me, our country, and the world's view of African football. That tournament taught us no 'small team' exists in Africa. Every qualified nation deserves respect,» he told Cafonline.com, reflecting on memories, the tournament's evolution, and what makes African football unique.



Burkina Faso

THE STALLIONS DETERMINED TO REACH NEW HEIGHTS

The team can rely on its high potential, with world-class players (Edmond Tapsoba, Dango Ouattara, Traoré...) and the motivation of its fans to chase what it has never achieved in this competition: the trophy.

Burkina Faso's national team will compete in Morocco for its 14th TotalEnergies CAF Africa Cup of Nations. As in previous editions, the Stallions arrive with high ambitions, having been runners-up in 2013 and semi-finalists in 1998, 2017, and 2021. Brama Traoré and his players know they are expected to deliver. Their mission is to erase the disappointment from Côte d'Ivoire, where they suffered an early eighth-final exit against Mali.

In the qualifiers, Burkina Faso was drawn in Group L alongside Senegal, Burundi, and Malawi.

The Stallions finished second with 10 points, behind leaders Senegal on 16.

Edmond Tapsoba, who plays for Bayer Leverkusen in Germany, is the boss and rock of Burkina Faso's defense. The defender is a key figure in the setup - an all-risks insurance policy.

In Morocco, Tapsoba will contest his third AFCON after the 2021 edition in Cameroon and 2023 in Côte d'Ivoire. With him, the team showed solidity in Cameroon, finishing fourth overall.

After the Stallions' underwhelming performance at last year's AFCON in Côte d'Ivoire, the Burkina Faso Football Federation opted for a local coach. The governing body appointed Brama Traoré on March 11, 2023, to lead the senior team, replacing Frenchman Hubert Velud. His prior experience with several Etalons players in youth categories has eased his transition.

THE SPOILERS

16



Comoros

THE COELACANTHS' COMEBACK

After missing the 2023 AFCON in Côte d'Ivoire, Comoros are back with force. Now led by Stefano Cusin, the Coelacanth are delivering enticing football that has thrust them back into the spotlight. They secured qualification convincingly, topping Group A ahead of Tunisia with 12 points from six matches - three wins and three draws.

The prospect of facing the host nation doesn't faze the technical staff. «Pressure exists for every team reaching the finals of a major continental tournament. Morocco will naturally face far more, playing at home with the obligation to win the title. For us, it's positive pressure that pushes us to give our best,» Comoros' Italian coach Stefano Cusin told the CAF website.

Addressing his players, he added: «I expect them to give their all, fight hard, and translate two years of progress onto the pitch. The team has improved tremendously. Nothing is decided in advance in football. They should enjoy it and go all out - that's it.»

After stints coaching teams and national sides in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, the 56-year-old Italian settled in Comoros on September 21, 2023. Since then, he has transformed the national team with a philosophy blending defensive balance and attacking creativity.

With players like Youssef M'Changama and Faiz Selemani, Comoros are in Group A alongside hosts Morocco, Mali, and Zambia. They kick off the Africa Cup of Nations against the hosts on December 21, 2025, at Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium in Rabat.



Uganda

THE CRANES DREAMING OF THE KNOCKOUTS

Paul Put was officially appointed Uganda coach in November 2023. Two years on, the Cranes have made huge strides.

After missing the previous AFCON, Uganda qualified brilliantly for the next edition. The Cranes finished second in Group K qualifiers with 13 points, just behind South Africa on 14. They didn't stop there, nearly securing a spot in the 2026 World Cup Africa playoffs.

In Group G's 10 matches, the team earned 18 points—six wins and four losses. As a result, the Belgian coach extended his contract through 2028. Paul Put targets knockout qualification while impressing with cohesive play.

The Cranes have reached the finals just eight times, their best run a 1978 final appearance.

Under Put, the team has focused on discipline, tactical balance, and mental strength to make waves in North Africa.

«Ideally, we want to advance to the next round. But above all, our performances must reflect modern football: balance, total commitment in every phase, and consistency. Earning respect from Africa's giants and reaching the knockouts would be a major achievement,» he told CAF's official media.

Uganda's Cranes face Nigeria, Tunisia, and Tanzania in a fiercely competitive Group C at the 2025 AFCON in Morocco. Their opener is against Tunisia on December 23, 2025, at Rabat's Moulay Abdellah Sports Complex. Midfielder Allan Okello is the Ugandan player to watch.



THE NILE CROCODILES' RISING POWER

The country may not boast big-name players, but it is capable of causing an upset at AFCON 2025. Since the arrival of Kwesi Appiah, the team's level has steadily improved.

Sudan qualified for the AFCON with 8 points in Group F. In the 2026 World Cup qualifiers, the team started well, even holding first place before slipping in the final matchdays. They ultimately finished third in Group B with 13 points.

Sudan is a defensively solid side. They explode upon ball recovery and impose a physical challenge on all opponents, making them a difficult team to break down. Before AFCON 2025, the national team will benefit from strong preparation by competing in the Arab Cup. In an interview with CAF, Kwesi Appiah sent a clear message: his team is not coming just to make up

the numbers.

«We respect them, but we don't fear them. If you start thinking about prestigious names before a match, you've already lost mentally. My message to the players is simple: believe in yourselves and play to show what Sudan is capable of. We are coming to fight, not just to participate,» he declared.

Sudan is drawn into Group E, alongside Algeria, Burkina Faso, and Equatorial Guinea. They will open their tournament with a direct clash against Algeria on Wednesday, December 24, 2025, at the Prince Héritier Moulay El Hassan Sports Complex in Rabat. The Nile Crocodiles could prove difficult for their opponents to handle. The first match will provide an initial indication of how the team might create difficulties in the group stage.



Botswana

THE ZEBRAS HOPE TO CREATE A SURPRISE

The Southern African nation, making only its second AFCON appearance after the 2012 edition, will face Senegal, Benin, and DR Congo in the group stage.

While traveling to this competition with a modest track record, Botswana will draw inspiration from the Ivorian edition, which proved that the gap in African football has narrowed considerably over the years, with the continent's footballing level progressing in leaps and bounds.

Botswana, who failed to advance from a tough Group D in 2012 (comprising Ghana, Mali, and Guinea), struggled to secure a spot in Morocco. They had to demonstrate resilience against stronger opponents in the qualifying Group C. The Zebras defied all predictions by finishing second behind Egypt, edging out Mauritania and Cape Verde to qualify.

The player to watch is Tumisang Orebonye, who will be key for the Zebras in Morocco, where he will be on familiar ground. The 28-year-old is with AS FAR, having previously played for USM Alger in Algeria, where he became the first Botswanan player to win the TotalEnergies CAF Confederation Cup.

Another key figure is the South African coach. Morena Ramoreboli has made a name for himself since taking charge of the Botswana team. Well known for causing upsets against more prestigious teams during his time in South Africa, he continues to uphold this reputation, having secured a remarkable run with Jwaneng in the TotalEnergies CAF Champions League last season. It was during that same season that they eliminated South African giants Orlando Pirates, followed by a resounding away victory against former Champions League winner Wydad Casablanca.



Equatorial Guinea

NZALANG READY TO BE A NUISANCE AGAIN

Nicknamed «the annoying team» by many African football specialists, the Equatorial Guinea national team has built its reputation on daring performances against the continent's heavyweights.

With Juan Micha at the helm, the Nzalang has adopted a pragmatic and bold playing style, blending defensive intensity with attacking creativity. Micha, an emblematic figure in Equatoguinean football, relies on experienced leaders like Ibán Salvador, the team's true engine, to galvanize his squad. By qualifying for this edition after an arduous yet deserved campaign, Equatorial Guinea reminds everyone that they are always capable of defying predictions.

The Nzalang Nacional has established itself as a team to follow, notably through its performances in recent editions. Today, the objective

is clear: to continue writing its history and, why not, to offer another memorable chapter at the TotalEnergies AFCON 2025.

Placed in Group E, Equatorial Guinea navigated troubled waters during their qualifying campaign. With 2 wins, 2 draws, and 2 losses, the Nzalang nonetheless managed to secure their TotalEnergies AFCON qualification as runners-up to Algeria.

Since his arrival, Juan Micha has transformed the Nzalang Nacional, both tactically and mentally. His efforts have elevated Equatorial Guinea among the respected teams on the continent and strengthened their reputation on the international stage.

Ibán Salvador, 29, is the player to watch for the Nzalang Nacional. A true leader on and off the field, he embodies the engine of the Equatoguinean team, thanks to a unique blend of talent, determination, and natural leadership.



27 players were retained by coach Gernot Rohr after a training camp in Morocco, with the ambition of causing an upset in Group D against African powerhouses Senegal and DR Congo.

Coach Gernot Rohr settled on a preliminary squad on December 3rd for a preparation camp. Unsurprisingly, the list includes Steve Mounié in attack, Sessi D'Almeida in midfield, and Olivier Verdon in defense. These Cheetahs have become key figures in the team, bringing their leadership to every line.

The main novelty in this preliminary list is the call-up of Charlemagne Azongnitodé. The young central defender from AC Oulu (Finland) is called to the Cheetahs for the first time, a sign that the technical staff is not neglecting squad renewal, even on the eve of a major competition. FIFA's recent decision to only mandate the release of international players by clubs starting December 15 has jeopardized the Franco-

German coach's plans. «It's going to be very complicated now,» sighed Gernot Rohr on RFI.

Clouds are gathering over Benin, who also learned they will be without five key players for the first match: Junior Olaitan, Steve Mounié, Andreas Hountondji, Mohamed Tijani, and Marcel Dandjinou will be absent against DR Congo, suspended after accumulating cards during the qualifiers.

The Cheetahs, whose first appearance dates back to 2004 in Tunisia, subsequently qualified for the 2008 (Ghana), 2010 (Angola), and 2019 (Egypt) editions. AFCON 2025 could allow them to achieve an unprecedented feat: a victory. The Beninese have simply never won a match in their Africa Cup history. Even during their historic run in 2019, they secured their ticket to the second round by finishing among the best third-placed teams with 3 draws. Then, in the Round of 16, their success against Morocco was achieved via penalty shootout, which is statistically considered a draw.



Mozambique

THE MAMBAS DETERMINED TO ADVANCE PAST THE FIRST ROUND

To create a surprise, the Mozambican national team is banking on one player in particular: Geny Catamo.

The Mozambican national team will compete in a second consecutive AFCON for the second time in its history. This is a testament to the team's progress under the guidance of Chiquinho Conde. Their first appearance was in 1986 in Egypt, followed by qualifications in 1996 (South Africa), 1998 (Burkina Faso), 2010 (Angola), and 2023 (Ivory Coast). On every occasion, they were eliminated in the first round.

To create a surprise, Mozambique is banking on one player in particular: Geny Catamo. The 24-year-old winger plays in Portugal for Sporting CP. He has already scored 1 goal and provided 1 assist this season in the Champions League, contributing to the Portuguese side's current 8th place after 5 matchdays.

For the national team, Geny Catamo boasts 13 goals and 7 assists in 38 caps. He is just one goal shy of

Dominguez, the Mambas' all-time top scorer (14). AFCON 2025 could therefore be doubly historic for Catamo, who could become his nation's leading goalscorer. Notably, this will be his second AFCON, after the 2023 edition where he scored 1 goal and provided 1 assist in 2 matches. The Mamba could bite and hurt opponents in Morocco.

While Catamo is the team's star, the man shaping its soul is none other than Chiquinho Conde. He already helped Mozambique achieve their best AFCON showing two years ago in Ivory Coast, conceding 2 goals in three matches (both in 2-2 draws against Egypt and Ghana). The style of play produced by the Mozambicans had impressed observers, despite the 3-0 loss against Cape Verde. This approach allowed Mozambique to score 4 goals in Ivory Coast, their most prolific campaign ever.

For their 6th AFCON, Mozambique, drawn into Group F with Ivory Coast, Cameroon, and Gabon, will aim for an exploit and to advance past the group stage for the first time in their history, following first-round eliminations in all previous editions.



TAIFA STARS ON A HIGH

Tanzania is preparing for its second consecutive participation in the TotalEnergies CAF Africa Cup of Nations.

With four previous appearances, Tanzania secured their place by finishing second in their group, having defeated Guinea and Ethiopia. Under the guidance of coach Hemed Morocco, the team emphasizes an offensive style of play. With his focus on attacking creativity and fast transitions, Morocco successfully motivated his squad, particularly during the qualifiers.

The Taifa Stars have never progressed beyond the group stage, but they have consistently demonstrated fighting spirit. Tanzania is considered an outsider, without obvious strengths. However, if they replicate their qualifying form, they could cause a surprise.

Qualification for AFCON 2025 marks the first time Tanzania has reached the tournament twice in a row, although their spot was recently challenged by Guinea. Due to an alleged irregularity

regarding a player's jersey number, Guinea appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). The CAS has since rejected the appeal. Consequently, the tournament schedule for this 35th edition remains unchanged.

This appeal had previously been rejected by the pan-African body (CAF). Guinea then took the matter to the CAS, demanding either a victory by forfeit (3-0) or Tanzania's exclusion from AFCON 2025 and their replacement by Guinea. Following a physical hearing held on November 17 in Lausanne, the court's headquarters, the CAS examined the arguments presented and unanimously rejected the appeal from the Guinean Federation.

This decision ensures that the established AFCON 2025 schedule, set to begin on December 21, will not be disrupted. Ally Samatta and his teammates retain their place in the final draw. They will compete in Group C, facing Nigeria (December 23), Uganda (December 27), and Tunisia (December 30).



ARDUOUS MISSION FOR THE WARRIORS

Zimbabwe returns to the TotalEnergies CAF Africa Cup of Nations after missing at least the last edition held in Côte d'Ivoire.

Zimbabwe qualified for the TotalEnergies CAF AFCON Morocco 2025 by finishing 2nd in Group J with 9 points, behind Cameroon (14 points). The Warriors achieved the feat of outperforming Kenya (6 points) and, notably, Namibia, who had reached the Round of 16 in Côte d'Ivoire.

Placed in Group B, coach Michael Nees and his players will face a tough challenge against Egypt, the most successful nation in the competition with 7 trophies; South Africa, third-place finishers in the last edition; and Angola, quarter-finalists last year. However, they can rely on their compact defense and strong collective spirit to create an upset in this difficult group.

Zimbabwe has participated in five previous AFCON

editions (2004 in Tunisia, 2006 in Egypt, 2017 in Gabon, 2019 in Egypt, and 2021 in Cameroon) and must deliver their best performance to hope to reach the Round of 16 at AFCON 2025.

The Southern African team has never managed to qualify for the knockout stage of the tournament. To achieve this goal, head coach Mario Marinica of Romania has called upon top players based in South Africa, Denmark, England, the United States, Scotland, Germany, Finland, Italy, Belgium, and even Tanzania.

This list includes forwards such as Bill Antonio, Prince Dube, Tymon Machope, Tawanda Maswanhise, Walter Musona, and Washington Navaya.

The Warriors will start their campaign against Egypt at the Adrar Stadium in Agadir on December 22, before their second match in Marrakech against Angola on December 26, and South Africa three days later on the same pitch.

BENIN FOOTBALL FEDERATION

Mathurin de Chacus, a president who shakes things up...

Mathurin de Chacus was born on November 9, 1958, in Cotonou, specifically in Tokpa Hoho, commonly known as Gbogbanou. He grew up in Attakè, Porto-Novo. Coming from a family of avid soccer enthusiasts, the president of the Benin Football Federation dove into the sport at an early age.

Thanks to his father, Edmond de Chacus, the financial director of the capital's club, Étoile Sportive de Porto-Novo, he took his first steps in football at the Cemg d'Adjarra in the current Charles de Gaulle stadium (of which he is the owner), playing first as a striker then as a defender for the club Les Onze Petits Pelés.

In 1989, he launched OFMAS International, a construction company with over 1,500 employees through which he built his fortune. Following in his father's footsteps, he became president of the Ouémé Dragons football club in 2011, after serving as its main donor and sponsor for over ten years.

Mathurin de Chacus joined the Benin Football Federation in 2011 as vice-president. In addition to this role, he was appointed match commissioner for the Confederation of African Football's inter-club competitions.

In August 2018, Mathurin de Chacus was elected the 13th president of the Benin Football Federation with over 73% of the votes. He was then reelected for a new four-year term in August 2022, securing unanimous support with 69 out of 69 votes.

In March 2021, at the 43rd Ordinary and Elective General Assembly of the Confederation of African Football (CAF) held in Rabat, Mathurin de Chacus was elected to the prestigious FIFA Council, the governing body's oversight and strategy organ.

Three months before the kickoff of the 35th edition of the Morocco AFCON 2025, Mathurin de Chacus was appointed



president of FIFA's global youth football development commission, in recognition of his efforts to promote local and world-wide football.

Notable achievements at the helm of the FBF

Several key developments are credited to Mathurin de Chacus since he took over the Benin Football Federation (FBF) in 2018. He is recognized for restoring calm and stability within the federation, which had been plagued by internal divisions. It was also under his leadership that the national team changed its name

and became known as the «Cheetahs of Benin.»

He achieved a historic milestone by reaching the quarterfinals of the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) for the first time in the country's history.

Sports infrastructure development continues under his tenure. Site visits for youth football excellence centers, particularly for girls, have taken place under his oversight. Mathurin de Chacus remains a respected economic operator, praised by FIFA for his management of funds provided by the world governing body.

Ferdinand Gade

JEAN GUY BLAISE MAYOLAS, PRESIDENT OF THE CONGOLESE FOOTBALL FEDERATION «Morocco Has Established Itself as a Major Player in African and Global Football»

From public administration to the football stands, he transformed a passion into a mission. Today, the man leads the supreme governing body for football in Congo, shaping the future of the game across Central Africa. Jean Guy Blaise Mayolas is not just a name; he is the architect of institutional football in the Republic of Congo and an essential figure on the Central African chessboard. In this interview, he shares his vision for Congolese football, as well as for the upcoming AFCON 2025.

Morocco is preparing to host AFCON 2025. As a sports leader and FIFA member, what is your comment?

Morocco has established itself as a major player in African and global football. Its organizational capacity, modern infrastructure, strategic vision, and constant commitment to football development make it a natural host for a competition of this scale. As a FIFA committee member, I welcome this dynamic, which raises Africa's profile and serves as an example for all federations, including ours. This AFCON 2025 will be a showcase for African potential.

How does FECOFOOT ensure transparency in the use of funds (State, FIFA/CAF, sponsors) to guarantee the trust of partners and the public?

We have strengthened our financial governance mechanisms. FECOFOOT now operates based on centralized accounting, audited annually by an independent firm. FIFA/CAF funds are allocated to clearly identified projects: league development, training, infrastructure, and support for national teams. We regularly publish execution reports and report to our institutional partners. Transparency is at the core of trust. Unfortunately, as of today, we do not receive state funds, nor do we have a sponsor as such.



What are the current relations between FECOFOOT and the Ministry of Sports?

Our relations are based on respecting regulations and the complementarity of our missions. FECOFOOT is an autonomous sports association, but the State is an essential partner for football development. When collaboration is harmonious, football progresses. When misunderstandings arise, we always prioritize dialogue and the search for constructive solutions. Our common objective remains the advancement of Congolese football.

What is the main achievement or major structural change you would like to be remembered for during your tenure?

I want people to remember the modernization of our structures: the reform of the Leagues, the gradual professionalization of national football, the strengthening of training for supervisors and referees, and the improvement of administrative management. My ambition is to leave behind a FECOFOOT that is stronger, more organized, and performance-oriented.

What is the essential roadmap for the next five years?

FECOFOOT must focus on five priorities:

- Making the national league regular and competitive.
- Investing in training (players, coaches, referees).
- Strengthening regional infrastructure.
- Further professionalizing club governance.
- Improving the performance of national teams with a clear technical project.

It is at this price that Congo will reach a new continental level.

The state of the national league is often discussed. What initiatives are you taking?

We have initiated the reform of the Leagues to strengthen their organizational autonomy. A club licensing system is being gradually introduced. We are working to guarantee a stable calendar, better preparation for referees, the establishment of youth competitions in all departments, and administrative support for clubs. The league must once again become the showcase of Congolese football.



As a member of a FIFA commission, how do you use this position to benefit Central Africa and Congo?

My presence within international bodies allows me to defend the interests of our sub-region, attract more development programs, facilitate access to FIFA training, and promote the participation of Congolese executives in international projects. I use this platform to bring Central Africa closer to global standards.

What is UNIFFAC's role in the competitiveness of the zone?

UNIFFAC plays a role in sports integration. It allows us to pool expertise, create regional youth competitions, harmonize technical policies, and raise the level of our national teams. Upcoming initiatives

concern the development of U15 and U17 competitions, coach training, and administrative cooperation between federations.

You have called for «changes» in the management of the national team. What reforms are being implemented?

We have undertaken a restructuring of the administrative unit, clarified responsibilities between the different technical structures, reinforced medical and logistical monitoring, and worked on annual planning. On the sporting front, we want to establish technical continuity, discipline, and a coherent game plan for all categories, to ensure a fluid transition to the senior team.

What message do you have for the Diables Rouges supporters and the Congolese youth?

I want to tell them that Congolese football has immense potential. We work every day to rebuild a competitive national team focused on victory. To the youth, I reiterate that success comes through hard work, discipline, and perseverance. To the supporters, I ask them to remain united behind our teams: their passion is our strength. Together, we can write a new chapter for Congolese football.

Interview conducted by
Wilfrid DIANKABAKANA

**THIS 2025
AFCON
WILL BE A
SHOWCASE
OF AFRICAN
POTENTIAL...**

SAMUEL ETO'O FILS

The Dazzling Destiny of a Champion Turned Embattled Football Boss

Samuel Eto'o Fils has never been an ordinary man. A global football star, a child prodigy turned legend, then a passionate and feared leader, he continues to set Cameroon ablaze long after hanging up his boots. Between resounding success, a fiery temperament, controversial management of the Cameroonian Football Federation (Fecafoot) and spectacular clashes with the Ministry of Sports and coach Marc Brys, the Indomitable Lions icon remains a fascinating figure, as charismatic as he is confrontational.

In the African imagination, Samuel Eto'o Fils occupies a special place. A symbol of success, perseverance and boundless ambition, he belongs to that rare category of athletes whose lives transcend the pitch. Born on 10 March 1981 in Nkon, a modest neighborhood of Yaoundé, Eto'o Fils very early dreamed of conquering world football. At fifteen, while many young Cameroonians struggle even to enter a professional academy, he flies to Europe and joins Real Madrid, launching an exceptional trajectory that would make him one of the greatest strikers of the 21st century.

In his early years in Spain, he endured the frustrations of waiting, bouncing between repeated loans and brief returns. It was only at Mallorca that he truly exploded, becoming the club's idol and attracting insistent interest from Europe's elite. His move to FC Barcelona in 2004 marked the beginning of a golden era. The Catalan public discovered a ferocious, fast, disci-



plined striker, driven by an almost visceral will to win. Eto'o gave Barça unforgettable nights, scoring decisive goals, including in the 2006 and 2009 UEFA Champions League finals. During these years, he built

a global reputation and secured his place in the pantheon of African legends, alongside the likes of Didier Drogba, Abedi Pelé and George Weah.

After Barcelona, he joined José

Mourinho's Inter Milan, a figure with whom he shared a taste for challenge and an obsession with total performance. Together, they won a historic treble in 2010, earning Eto'o another European crown and cementing his place at the summit of world football. The rest of his career took him to Russia, Turkey, England and Qatar, where his fame extended beyond sport to the realm of pop culture.

When Samuel Eto'o announced his international retirement and prepared his transition, many imagined he would become an agent, pundit or ambassador for African football. But the Cameroonian nurtured a deeper, more political ambition: to take back control of the governance of his country's football. From 2021, he multiplied signals, meetings, promises and trips across Cameroon. His objective was clear: to become president of the Cameroonian Football Federation. His campaign was waged with the same inner fire that fueled his playing career. Charismatic, direct, persuasive and sometimes unpredictable, he crisscrossed the regions, met the delegates, galvanized amateur clubs and convinced local leaders that he was the man of change.

His election as Fecafoot president in December 2021 was greeted like a positive earthquake. In the streets, people sang; social networks erupted. The public saw the return of a hero coming to free Cameroonian football from its old demons. From the very first months, Eto'o launched what he wanted to be radical reforms. He involved himself in everything: from team equipment to competition schedules, from TV rights management to players' bonuses. His style was direct, passionate, sometimes excessive. For his supporters, he finally embodied a modern president. For his critics, he over-personalized the federation, interfered in details and was too impulsive.

Very quickly, his presidency hit a major obstacle: the tense relationship with the Ministry of Sports and

Physical Education. Eto'o insisted on the total independence of Fecafoot, in line with FIFA statutes. The ministry, for its part, stressed its role as administrative supervisory authority. This difference in interpretation sparked a series of power struggles that spilled into the public arena. Discussions, far from being discreet, often played out in front of cameras, feeding the media and captivating public opinion.

The peak of this confrontation came in 2024 with the Marc Brys affair, involving the Belgian coach appointed directly by the ministry without consulting Fecafoot. For Eto'o, it was a clear violation of the rules. For

TODAY, SAMUEL ETO'O FILS REMAINS AN ESSENTIAL FIGURE IN THE CAMEROONIAN SPORTS AND SOCIAL LANDSCAPE.

the government, it was an urgent decision to save the Indomitable Lions' results. The war broke out immediately, taking on the contours of a national soap opera. Meetings turned stormy, interviews multiplied, statements rained down, and tension reached a level rarely seen in the history of Cameroonian football. During an official meeting, a heated altercation erupted between Eto'o and Brys, filmed and commented on around the world.

This crisis revealed a side of Eto'o that those close to him know well. He is a man of conviction, sometimes uncompromising, who refuses to back down when he believes he is in the right. The determination that made him successful on the pitch has become, in the administrative

arena, a driver of confrontation. His charisma, usually a strength, sometimes turns into a source of instability. His inner circle tries to rein him in, but passion often prevails over political calculation.

Yet beyond the tensions, Eto'o retains genuine popularity among many Cameroonians. He embodies a story of success, a self-made man who owes nothing to anyone, a symbol of resistance to systems seen as archaic. Many see in him a potential statesman, a figure who could one day seek a broader political role. Others see a loose cannon, hard to contain, unpredictable and too emotional to fit sustainably into the codes of institutional power.

Behind the scenes, those close to him describe a man deeply attached to his country, obsessed with the idea of leaving a lasting legacy. They speak of his work ethic, his remarkable memory, his ability to handle several issues at once. They also mention his sudden outbursts of anger, his abrupt silences, his unshakeable loyalties and his brutal breakups. The man oscillates between light and shadow, between empathy and rigidity, between glamour and roughness. It is this complexity that makes him so compelling.

Today, Samuel Eto'o Fils remains an unavoidable figure in Cameroon's sporting and social landscape. He embodies the contradictions of a young, vibrant, ambitious country still searching for institutional maturity. His tenure at Fecafoot will go down in history as a period in which reformist zeal, power struggles and nationalist passion were deeply intertwined. His name continues to trigger admiration, criticism, emotion and debate, proof that he remains at the center of the collective imagination. Whether loved or feared, Eto'o continues to symbolize a certain idea of Cameroon: that of a country that rejects mediocrity and fights, sometimes turbulently, to claim its place among the great football nations - and beyond.

VENANCIO TOMÁS NDONG MICHA AVOMO

The Builder of Equatorial Guinean Football



Discrete, affable, almost elusive to those who do not know him, Venancio Tomás Ndong Micha Avomo has nonetheless never been more visible. As the head of the Equatorial Guinean Football Federation (FEGUIFUT), he embodies a new generation of African leaders: rigorous, strategic, connected, yet fiercely committed to discreet elegance. In a country where football is both a popular passion and a symbol of national unity, he has established

himself as one of the silent architects of the Nzalang Nacional's revival. A long-form portrait, enriched by the perspectives of those who observe him closely.

In the turmoil of African football, where thunderous declarations and sharp stances are part of the game, Venancio Tomás is distinguished by his restraint.

«What is striking about him is his calmness,» confides a long-time collaborator at FEGUIFUT. He des-

cribes Venancio Tomás as «someone who can be in the middle of a tense debate and remain unperturbed. You get the impression he always sees two moves ahead.»

His discretion is intriguing, sometimes fascinating. Unlike other African leaders accustomed to television appearances, he speaks little, but his rare statements are measured and thoughtful. «He never speaks just to fill the silence,» notes a Malabo sports journalist. «When he speaks, it's because he has

something important to say.»

The Man Behind the Nzalang Nacional's Progress

Under his leadership, Equatorial Guinean football has turned a corner. The Nzalang Nacional's results in recent continental competitions are no accident. «We felt a difference in organization,» explains Emilio Nsue, one of the national team's historical figures. «With him, everything became more professional: logistics, training camps, communication. We felt respected and better prepared.»

Several international players share this sentiment. A young forward playing in Europe confides that «the president is not the type to come into the locker room just to show off. But he is there, always available. I remember a call before an important match. He told me: 'You have nothing to prove, just play your football.' That helped me a lot.»

Venancio Tomás works behind the scenes. He observes training sessions, talks briefly with players, and reassures without imposing himself. It is a method that is appreciated: «He is a president who listens,» emphasizes a member of the technical staff. «We have rarely seen that in this country.»

His work is starting to be noticed beyond national borders. «He represents this generation of rigorous African leaders, more focused on modern management,» analyzes Cameroonian consultant Albert Kenmogne, a specialist in Central African football. «He avoids controversy. He builds. And the CAF sees that,» our source continues.

His presence on several specialized CAF committees confirms his rising continental influence. «When he speaks in meetings, people listen. He is precise and gets straight to the point,» remarks an administrative executive at the Confederation. The latter points out that «he sometimes recalls the technical details that everyone else forgets, but which change the quality of decisions.»

A similar perception exists among

African leaders who work with him. «Venancio is a man of method. He has a calm vision of African football, not naive, but with great ambition,» confides an official from a West African federation.

The Man Behind the Position

«People don't realize it because he is discrete, but he is a deeply human person,» says a former international player who is now a coach. «He checks in on everyone. He knows if a player is going through a difficult period, even abroad,» the new coach continues.

«With him, we feel like we are part

IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE VERTICALITY AND OPACITY HAVE LONG DOMINATED, HER APPROACH STANDS OUT.

of a project, not just a selection,» confides a Nzalang Nacional full-back. «He talks to us like men, not like subordinates.» An administrative collaborator adds: «He wants to understand, not just decide. That's rare in our federations.»

Modern Leadership, Far from Vertical Traditions

In an environment where verticality and opacity have long dominated, his approach is a stark contrast. «The Federation communicates better, works better, plans better,» analyzes Equatorial Guinean journalist Joaquín Ondo. «You clearly see the impact of an organized leader.» This modernization is also praised by external observers.

«FEGUIFUT has become an

example of an upgrade in the sub-region,» says Ivorian sports analyst Noël Kouadio. «There is a concrete effort to structure football, not just manage emergencies.»

Many stakeholders interviewed see him as a future major decision-maker in continental football. «He has the right profile to take on an important role at CAF tomorrow,» asserts a former member of an African sports commission. «He knows the issues, he knows the realities on the ground, and he knows how to negotiate.»

Others remain cautious but confirm his potential. «He is someone who can rise higher because he never rushes the process,» analyzes a Ghanaian professor-researcher specializing in sports governance. «His strength is his consistency.»

His track record is tangible: a stable national team; a modernized federation; a better international image for Equatorial Guinean football; increased presence in African bodies; and a positive relationship with the players.

«He has brought dignity to our football,» summarizes a sports journalist from Bata. «And that is quite something.» According to an Equatorial Guinean international player, «the president is kind of like a silent father. You don't always see him, but you know he is watching over the team.»

In conclusion, Venancio Tomás Ndong Micha Avomo is considered «the very example of a leader who asserts himself without seeking the spotlight, who builds quietly, who advances without controversy. His style, characterized by control, preparation, and emotional intelligence, restores an image of stability and ambition to Equatorial Guinean football.»

In a continent where football oscillates between passion and chaos, he represents a rare figure of equilibrium. And the world of African football, increasingly attentive to profiles like his, certainly has not finished reckoning with him.

Massive Investments Commensurate with the Prestige of an African Giant



Morocco has spared no expense. For the organization of this AFCON, which the Cherifian Kingdom intends to be spectacular and successful, they have thought big. To welcome Africa, the directives of His Majesty King Mohammed VI were clear: to impress Africa and the world with ultramodern infrastructure. The investments have followed suit...

To provide high-quality infrastructure for a dazzling spectacle, Morocco has planned to offer Africa impeccable stadiums. After all, competitions are played in the arenas.

Over the past two years, Morocco has thus decided to modernize six existing stadiums and build a new one in Benslimane. A total of 20.5 billion Dirhams has been disbursed to achieve this, approximately 1.8 billion Euros. 9.5 billion Dirhams were allocated to upgrade the six existing stadiums (Tangier, Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakesh, Agadir, Fez) between 2023 and 2025

to meet CAF (African Confederation) standards. A second phase of upgrades (2025–2028) is then planned to meet FIFA standards, with an estimated additional budget of between 4.5 and 6 billion Dirhams.

As for the new Hassan II Stadium, located in Benslimane (Casablanca), its cost is estimated at around 5 billion Dirhams. It will have a capacity of at least 115,000 seats - a true architectural masterpiece.

**MOROCCO HAS
ALLOCATED
APPROXIMATELY
24.35 BILLION
DIRHAMS
FOR ROAD
INFRASTRUCTURE.**

Investments in Road Networks...

With the aim of improving traffic flow during and after the AFCON, Morocco has earmarked around 24.35 billion Dirhams for road infrastructure. These infrastructures, which will serve both the AFCON and the upcoming World Cup, involve several kilometers of structural highways and roads. They will also include the rehabilitation of 1,075 km of roads.

For example, in and around Casablanca, a specific component involved building and improving routes to facilitate stadium access: one instance is the new Tit Mellil - Berrechid section, approximately 30 km long, estimated at 2.5 billion Dirhams.

In the same area, Morocco has carried out work on the strategic road interchanges at Ain Harrouda and Sidi Maarouf, aiming to absorb the traffic anticipated during major events. These developments are said to cost 500 million Dirhams. For this AFCON, Morocco has clearly not held back on its resources.

By Irène Djipohi

MOHAMMED VI FOOTBALL ACADEMY A FUTURISTIC PROJECT STEMMING FROM A ROYAL VISION



If Morocco shines today in football, both in Africa and globally, it is because His Majesty King Mohammed VI quickly understood that football is a powerful lever for international prestige and dominance. This vision was realized through the Academy that proudly bears his name.

The project took shape in 2007. The construction of the Mohammed VI Academy is the embodiment of King Mohammed VI's comprehensive, futuristic vision for football. This architectural masterpiece demonstrates Morocco's intent to elevate itself among the great footballing nations.

The Mohammed VI Academy cost nearly 140 million dirhams (approximately €13 million). After three years of construction, the facility was delivered in September 2010, in Rabat-Salé. Built on nearly 18 hectares, it

offers every amenity for the perfect learning of the beautiful game.

A tour of the impressive complex reveals numerous football pitches with various surfaces, ranging from natural to synthetic turf. Furthermore, covered fields are available for practicing football during inclement weather. The complex's founders had long-term vision, as the pitches were constructed to international standards. Nothing was left to chance.

In addition to the state-of-the-art pitches, the Mohammed VI Academy boasts comprehensive sports facilities, including a weight training room, a medical room, a physiotherapy room, and a hydrotherapy room.

The Academy also seamlessly blends sports and academics. With this objective in mind, the builders equipped it with modern classrooms, including dedicated

rooms for computer science and NICT (New Information and Communication Technologies) training. Students benefit from a peaceful and focused environment thanks to the on-site boarding facilities.

This serene climate allows for the blossoming of talents that Morocco proudly showcases today. Azzedine Ounahi (who played for Marseille), Youssef En-Nesyri, and Nayef Aguerd are among the many talents nurtured by this Academy who are now shining across Europe.

Recently in Chile, Academy residents brought honor to their coaches. For the first time, Morocco's U20 team won a global trophy. The title was hard-fought and secured against Argentina, whose pedigree underscores the magnitude of the achievement by the young Moroccan Academy players.

By Huberson DIGBEU

AN EVENT ETCHED IN GREAT AFRICAN HISTORY



Hosting an Africa Cup of Nations is never insignificant: it inscribes a nation into the continent's memory while summoning decades of sporting, political, and cultural narratives. The AFCON 2025, organized in Morocco, represents a particularly symbolic edition. It is the convergence point between a rich past of achievements, an ambitious present, and a future focused on African unity.

The AFCON is an ever-evolving legacy. Since 1957, it has recounted the story of Africa: its independences, conflicts, hopes, and reconciliations. It tracks the trajectories of nations and reveals their profound identities. By hosting the 2025 edition, Morocco fully participates in this historical continuity.

Morocco, Land of Football and Memory

Moroccan football holds a special place in the collective imagination of the continent. Entire generations have been thrilled by the exploits of the Atlas Lions: the historic victory in 1976, the memorable qualification for the second round of the 1986 World Cup, the performances of African clubs, and legends like Faras, Bouderbala, Timoumi, Naybet, Hadji, and more recently Hakimi, Bono, or Ziyech.

AFCON 2025 revives all these memories. It recalls the popular passion that has always animated the country, from the neighborhoods of Casablanca to the Rif mountains, from the Souss villages to the avenues of Rabat. Organizing the AFCON is about celebrating these stories, these emotions,

these generations of supporters who have passed down their love for football as a family inheritance.

For Moroccans, this competition is also a tribute to the pioneers: players, coaches, officials, radio commentators, photographers, and supporters. All have contributed to writing a national saga that AFCON 2025 extends.

The AFCON as a Witness to the Continent's Political Evolution

The Africa Cup of Nations is more than just a sports competition. It has often been crossed by the continent's major political events: democratic transitions, regional conflicts, and national reconciliations. Some editions have been marked by tensions, others by messages of peace or symbols of unity.

In this context, AFCON 2025 takes on a particular dimension. Morocco, long absent from the competition for political reasons, returns today as a key player in African football. Its organization of the AFCON also marks a moment of strengthening diplomatic relations through football. The country positions itself as a bridge between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, between tradition and modernity, between memory and innovation. The AFCON thus becomes a tool for sports diplomacy. It allows nations to gather, strengthens African integration, and tells another story: that of a continent building itself through sport.

Stadiums as Sites of Living Memory

Every Moroccan stadium holds a history. The mythical Mohammed V Stadium in Casablanca is a true theatre of African emotions. Raja and Wydad have written legendary pages there, memorable continental finals have been played, and chants still resonate in memory.

The stadiums in Marrakech, Tangier, Agadir, Fez, and Rabat also carry their narratives: historic matches, electric derbies, and magical nights of international cups. For AFCON 2025, these venues become sites of living memory. They host not only matches but also ceremonies, tributes, and cultural gatherings.

Beyond the infrastructure, the cities themselves hold a memory: Casablanca and its African history, Rabat and its institutional role, Marrakech and its cosmopolitanism, Tangier and its international openness, Agadir and its Amazigh heritage. The AFCON allows these cities to tell their stories, enhancing their unique identity while placing themselves within a shared continental history.

Heroes and Narratives Shaping a Legend

Every edition of the AFCON creates its own heroes. Some players become legends in a matter of weeks. Others leave images forever etched in the public memory. AFCON 2025 will likely be a moment of revelation: new stars will emerge, coaches will make history, and unexpected moments will



become myths.

In Morocco, these narratives are all the more important because they feed a deeply rooted football culture. Supporters still recount the matches of 1986, Naybet's debut at La Coruña, Ziyech's exploits, Bono's saves, and Ounahi's dribbles. AFCON 2025 will enrich this collective fresco.

The competition is also a way of transmitting memory: parents tell their children their own football memories, the matches watched on black-and-white television, the clay pitches, and local legends. Football becomes a generational continuity, a bridge between the past and the future.

An Edition Focused on Digital Memory

While traditional archives - photos, newspapers, documentaries - still play a major role, the memory of African football is now also digital. Viral videos, YouTube analyses, podcasts, Instagram stories, and TikTok archives contribute to creating a participatory, collective, and living memory.

AFCON 2025 will undoubtedly be one of the most documented editions in the tournament's history. Every goal, every skill move, every scene of popular fervor will be captured and shared. Thousands of citizens will become the archivists of the tournament, producing a new memory that is more democratic and accessible to all.

An AFCON to Write the Future

AFCON 2025 in Morocco will certainly be a moment of memory, but also a moment for the future. It extends an ambitious dynamic, reinforces Morocco's deep roots in continental football, stimulates cultural exchange, and creates new shared narratives. This tournament is a synthesis of heritage and projection. It brings together history and modernity, memory and creation, the heroes of yesterday and the champions of tomorrow. By hosting this AFCON, Morocco participates in writing the history of a proud, resilient, and passionate continent.

By Cir-Raoul HOUNGBEDJI

ROGER MILLA

THE ETERNAL STAR OF AFRICAN FOOTBALL



If African football had an embodied soul, it would likely bear the name of Roger Milla. Born Albert Roger Mooh Miller on May 20, 1952, in Yaoundé, Cameroon, Milla became one of the brightest symbols of African football's passion, talent, and originality. His legend is measured not just in goals or trophies, but in the emotion he sparked, the inspiration he offered to entire generations, and the flamboyant image of a player who seamlessly combined technical skill with infectious joy on the pitch.

Roger Milla grew up in a modest family in Yaoundé, where he dis-

covered a passion for football early on. Like many Cameroonian children of his time, he played in the streets, often with a simple ball or improvised objects. This informal

**HIS GOALS
AGAINST
COLOMBIA AND
ARGENTINA WILL
REMAIN ETCHED
IN HISTORY...**

playground became the cradle of his incredible creativity and his signature dribbling ability.

In his teens, Milla joined local clubs, quickly demonstrating a rare talent. His professional career truly began in 1970 with Tonnerre Yaoundé, a flagship club in the Cameroonian league. There, he developed his sense of team play and his capacity to score in decisive moments. His performances quickly made him one of the most closely watched players in the national championship.

Cameroon and African Recognition

Roger Milla was not content with

being merely a talented club player. Starting in the 1970s, he made his mark internationally, joining the Cameroon national team. His initial appearances with the Indomitable Lions were characterized by an energy and creativity that drew attention across the continent. With Milla, Cameroon began to assert its presence on the African stage, participating in continental competitions and forging an identity of audacious and spectacular play.

Over the years, Roger Milla became one of the national team's leaders. His vision of the game, his ability to exploit space and surprise opposing defenses, made him a formidable player. But beyond his technical performances, what set him apart was his communicative joy on the field. His famous corner flag celebration, dancing with unique exuberance, would become a symbol of his career, etched into the memories of fans worldwide.

A Successful European Career

In the early 1980s, Roger Milla took a significant step by moving to Europe, where he played for several French clubs. He notably featured for Monaco, SC Bastia, Saint-Etienne, and Montpellier HSC, leaving a lasting impression thanks to his speed, goal-scoring instinct, and ability to adapt to different styles of play. Despite an era when African players were still few in European leagues, Milla earned respect and admiration for his professionalism and charisma.

This European experience enriched his career, allowing him to hone his techniques and acquire invaluable international experience, which he would later pass on to younger Cameroonian generations. His success abroad also helped enhance the visibility of African football at a time when the continent was beginning to emerge on the global stage.

The 1990 World Cup: The Triumph of a Legend

However, it was at the 1990 FIFA World Cup in Italy that Roger Milla

truly entered global legend. At 38, many thought his international career was winding down. But Milla proved that talent and passion are ageless. During the competition, he scored four memorable goals, including one against Colombian goalkeeper René Higuita, propelling Cameroon to the quarter-finals—an historic first for an African team.

His goals against Colombia and England will forever be etched in football history, but what captivated the world was his unique celebra-

AFTER HIS ACTIVE CAREER, ROGER MILLA NEVER DISAPPEARS FROM THE RADAR...

tion in the corner of the field after each strike. A joyful and spontaneous dancer, Milla introduced an iconic gesture to football, a symbol of African joy and creativity on the world stage. At 38, he became a role model for the youth and a source of pride for an entire continent.

Timeless Icon and Ambassador of African Football

After his playing career, Roger Milla never faded from view. He dedicated himself to promoting football in Africa, participating in development initiatives for young players and serving as an ambassador for FIFA and other sports organizations. His fame transcends mere sport: he is a cultural symbol, a bridge between generations, and a model of perseverance and passion. His flamboyant personality, *joie de vivre*, and humility make him an adored figure, not only in Cameroon but across the African continent and beyond. Football enthusiasts remember him not only for his

goals but for the way he embodied the pleasure and enthusiasm of the game.

Beyond the field, Roger Milla is also known for his legendary anecdotes and sense of humor. He is remembered for his famous dances, as well as his involvement in charitable and educational work. He has helped support projects for underprivileged youth and promoted sport as a vehicle for social cohesion.

In popular culture, he has become a symbol of African success and festive spirit. Generations of African players, from Samuel Eto'o to Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, cite Milla as an inspiration. His unique style, blending audacity, creativity, and joy, redefined what an African player could be on the world stage.

The Legacy of Roger Milla

Roger Milla's legacy is not measured solely in numbers or trophies. It lies in the inspiration he provided, the visibility he gave to African football, and the way he embodied the talent and vitality of an entire continent. Even today, decades after his exploits, he remains a benchmark for players and fans, a timeless model of determination and passion.

Roger Milla transformed African football into a global phenomenon, demonstrating that Africa could produce talents capable of competing with the best, while remaining true to its creativity and joy. His name is engraved in memory, his image as a dancing goalscorer in the corners of stadiums is iconic, and his influence on African football will remain indelible.

In short, Roger Milla is not just a legend of Cameroonian or African football. He is a universal figure of sport, a symbol of joy, perseverance, and creativity, and a timeless ambassador of African pride on the world stage. His career, his goals, and his celebrations will continue to captivate and inspire future generations, serving as a reminder that football can be, above all, a joyous art accessible to everyone.



LITTLE SECRETS ABOUT THE AFCON...

Ahead of the Africa Cup of Nations opening in Morocco, *Hommes d'Afrique Magazine* offers its readers some key insights on the AFCON. This will further enrich their general knowledge of the continent's premier football event.

The first Africa Cup of Nations football tournament took place in 1957 in Khartoum, Sudan. It featured three teams: Sudan, Ethiopia, and Egypt - after South Africa's withdrawal due to its Apartheid policy.

Since then, several African countries have reached the top of the continent. AFCON history records 15 nations that have won at least once to date. In alphabetical order: Algeria, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Morocco, Nigeria, DR Congo (formerly Zaire), Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tunisia, Zambia, and Congo-Brazzaville.

Anglophone Nations

Among these, we can classify by official language. Five English-speaking countries have won the AFCON: Cameroon with 5 titles, Ghana with 4. Zambia, South Africa, and Sudan complete the list.

Arabophone Nations

Among Arab-speaking countries, Egypt leads with 7 titles since 1957. Algeria follows with 2. Tunisia, Morocco, and Sudan have each won once.

Francophone Nations

Côte d'Ivoire, with its 3 titles in 1992, 2015, and 2023, is the top francophone nation. It is followed by Algeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) with 2 titles, Tunisia with 1, Morocco with 1, and Senegal with its recent triumph.

Many African nations chase their first historic continental title. Since 1957, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Central African Republic (CAR), Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Eswatini, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Uganda, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Chad, Togo, and Zimbabwe have yet to taste victory. Thus, 38 countries have not yet savored continental glory...

Countries That Have Lost at Least One Final...

To claim a title, some African nations endured heartbreak. At least twenty have lost at least one final since 1957. Among the unlucky finalists: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, Uganda, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tunisia, and Zambia. That's 18 nations that have lost a final in their journey. In total, 34 African countries have fallen short in a final since the inaugural 1957 edition.

Legends Who Never Won the Trophy...

To paraphrase Simplicie de Messé Zinsou, former president of Africa Sport National, the Africa Cup burns. The Nations Cup has scorched the fingers of many African legends. We could cite the 1970 African Ballon d'Or winner, Mali's Salif Kéita (aka Domingo), Ivorian Laurent Pokou (the man from Asmara). Liberia's George Weah never led his country to AFCON glory. Despite his stature and stellar international career, Didier Drogba will forever regret his two lost finals in 2006 and 2012. Senegal's El Hadji Diouf joins this unfortunate list... What about Nwankwo Kanu and Emmanuel Adebayor too...

Countries That Have Never Won the AFCON

Valéry FOUNGBE

Great Moroccan Players Who Made Their Mark on the AFCON



Despite having won only one AFCON to date, Morocco has left its imprint on the competition's history with legendary names. Exceptional players who have etched their legacy into the Africa Cup of Nations.

Undoubtedly, Ahmed Faras, the 1975 African Ballon d'Or winner, stands as the first iconic Moroccan figure in AFCON history. The 1976 AFCON champion and standout player of that edition tops the list.

Alongside him, Ahmed Makrouh, known as "Baba," was one of 1976's heroes. This dazzling, speedy winger remains a legend of Chabab Mohammédia. Morocco remembers him for scoring the victorious goal that clinched the title in 1976, off a pass from none other than... Ahmed

Faras.

Badou Zaki, the legendary Moroccan goalkeeper and Africa's top keeper of the 1980s, is a defining figure for the Atlas Lions in AFCON lore. A

**MOROCCO
HAS HAD
EXCEPTIONAL
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runner-up with his country in 2004, he remains an indispensable presence across multiple editions.

Mustapha Hadji, the 1998 African Ballon d'Or winner, is one of those Moroccans football fans can't forget. A technical maestro, Hadji shone brightly at the 1998 AFCON. Morocco also produced a giant like Nourredine Naybet, one of Africa's greatest defenders ever. He staunchly carried his nation through several AFCONs.

His compatriots - Abdeljalil Hadda ("Camacho"), Mohamed Timoumi (1985 African Ballon d'Or), Abdelkrim Merry ("Krimau," the speedy 1980s striker), Salaheddine Bassir, and Youssef Chippe - can all be counted among the Moroccan players who shaped AFCON history.

Valery FOUNGBE

AHMED FARAS

STORY OF A AFCON 1976 LEGEND

Ahmed Faras, born on 7 December 1946 in Mohammedia and who passed away on 16 July 2025, is perhaps the greatest legend in Moroccan football. At the end of a remarkable career, he carried his country to the summit of African football in 1976. A look back at a Lion with an exceptional career.

"I remember a very tough match. We were physically exhausted, there were many injuries, and Guinea's Syli National were a bit like the Brazil of Africa, with Cherif Souleymane, Petit Sory and Papa Camara. We were dominated by our opponents, all the more so as the referee had sent off Semmat," Ahmed Faras told Jeune Afrique in 2019, recalling his memories of the 1976 AFCON.

Ahmed Faras, a prolific Moroccan striker, renowned for his elegance and outstanding record - notably the African Ballon d'Or in 1975 - remains a legend in his country. Without any doubt, he is the man who enabled Morocco to win its only continental trophy, at the 10th edition of the AFCON in Ethiopia in 1976.

"Cherif Souleymane opened the scoring, which made our task even more difficult. But we let the storm pass before taking back control. Then, in the 86th minute, on one of the rare balls I managed to get, my teammate Baba asked me to set him up for what would be the goal of deliverance," recalls the hero of Addis Ababa.

With Chabab Mohammedia...

Ahmed Faras was first and foremost a one-club man: Chabab Mohammedia. An exceptional loyalty led him to spend his entire professional career there, from 1965 to 1982. With the club, he won the Moroccan Championship in 1980, the Throne Cup in 1972 and 1975,



and the Moroccan Super Cup in 1975.

Faras also stood out by collecting individual honours. He finished top scorer in the Moroccan Championship in 1969 and 1973. He remains the all-time leading scorer and most decorated player in the history of SCC Mohammedia.

An exemplary international career...

Ahmed Faras's career is inseparable from that of the Moroccan national team. He is a legend there - perhaps the greatest of all. With the "Atlas Lions", Faras is still the all-time top scorer for Morocco, with 36 goals in

94 caps.

At the 1976 AFCON, he captained the team. As skipper, he led Morocco to its only title. His decisive goal in the final group match against Guinea sealed the ultimate triumph. He was also named player of the tournament.

Ahmed Faras is, moreover, still the all-time leading scorer for Morocco's Olympic team, with 14 goals in 23 appearances. He remains to this day the first Moroccan winner of the African Ballon d'Or. Achraf Hakimi's distinction in 2025 underlines just how deeply Faras is rooted in the annals of Moroccan football. Nicknamed "Moul Lkoura", "the owner of the ball", he was a virtuoso of the game, wielding a lethal left foot. After his playing days, he devoted himself to youth development, passing on his immense knowledge. He will be remembered for turning down Real Madrid in 1973 and for playing at the 1976 AFCON despite suffering from typhoid fever.

Valéry FOUNGBE

**FARAS'S CAREER
IS UNDOUBTEDLY
INTERTWINED
WITH THAT OF
THE NATIONAL
TEAM...**

WHEN FOOTBALL TELLS THE STORY OF TODAY'S MOROCCO

When Morocco secured the hosting rights for the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations, the news quickly transcended the realm of sport. It echoed in living rooms, ignited debates in working-class neighborhoods, inspired artists, energized entrepreneurs, and even stirred emotions across the diaspora.

Because in Morocco - as everywhere on the continent - football is never just a game.

It is a common language, one that connects generations, social classes, and regions. It is a shared memory passed on from stadium to stadium, from triumphs to heartbreaks, from heroes to legends. It is also a space where society expresses itself, reveals itself, and projects itself forward.

The announcement of CAN 2025 therefore celebrated far more than a sporting event: it cast a spotlight on a country and a continent in full transformation. Through football, dreams are articulated, identities affirmed, and social dynamics unveiled.

And in this vibrant mirror that the sport offers, Morocco now looks to the future with renewed intensity.

A National Fever That Sweeps Away Social Barriers

In the months leading up to the tournament, excitement rises everywhere. Flags appear on balconies, cafés set up giant screens, and conversations grow more animated. Host cities reinvent themselves, rural regions engage in their own way, and even the smallest villages organize their own "village CAN."

This is the magic of football: it dissolves boundaries. Social classes, generations, linguistic identities... all converge under a single national emblem. For an entire month, Morocco beats to the same rhythm: the rhythm of passion.

A Youth in the Driver's Seat

A young country, a young CAN. Thousands of young people get involved: volunteers, technicians, content creators, fan-zone hosts. On TikTok, Instagram,



and YouTube, they turn the tournament into a viral phenomenon. Tactical analyses, humor, musical challenges - Moroccan creativity surges.

But the impact goes deeper. Beyond the festivities, the tournament opens crucial conversations: employment, integration, training, sports professions, cultural diplomacy. Schools, associations, and local authorities multiply initiatives. Football becomes a catalyst for citizenship and a springboard toward the future.

The Silent Feminine Revolution

CAN 2025 also marks a turning point for women. The rise of women's football, the global visibility of the national team, and the increasing presence of women across sports professions have reshaped mindsets.

In the stands, behind microphones, and within the organization, women are everywhere. An irreversible momentum that encourages society to rethink the role of women in public space, challenge discrimination, and promote safe, inclusive, and respectful stadiums. Football becomes a laboratory for equality.

Popular Economy and Modernity Side by Side

The tournament stimulates both the

informal economy and modern infrastructure. Around stadiums: street vendors, artisans, flag makers, food sellers. In cities: renovated hotels, upgraded roads, strengthened transport networks, digital ticketing, and enhanced security systems.

The event also brings culture together: arts, fashion, concerts, exhibitions, African cuisine. CAN has moved beyond football - it has become a festival, a showcase, an accelerator.

A Large-Scale Lesson in Citizenship

CAN serves as a sounding board for major civic issues: cleanliness, respect for public spaces, civic behavior, road safety, and violence prevention. Awareness campaigns encourage responsibility and invite Moroccans to welcome visitors from across the continent warmly. In schools, neighborhoods, and associations, sport becomes a tool for education. And this may well be the most essential point: CAN 2025 is not simply a tournament, but a moment of collective awakening - an opportunity to show the world a Morocco that is united, ambitious, African, and firmly oriented toward the future.

By Cir-Raoul HOUNGBEDJI

PAPE SECK, CONTENT CREATOR, ON HIS PRESENCE AT THE AFCON

"My goal is not to go viral, but to be useful"

Beyond physical injury, what has been the greatest mental and emotional challenge you have faced in your career, and how did this experience ultimately forge the resilience behind the "new Pape Seck"?

I was never a professional footballer, but I played at amateur level from age 4 to 16, first with Marseille, then Mazargues and Aubagne. After finishing high school, Covid struck. That was when I became a content creator.

The hardest part wasn't giving up football, but accepting that my dream of becoming a professional player would not come true.

But every hardship carries its own reward. It allowed me to discover new skills, meet new people, and ultimately give birth to the Pape Seck that people know today. In content creation, I found a new field where I could express my passion for football.

How do you define the unique relationship you have with players, and to what extent does your background as a former player shape the way you film or interact with the national team?

I believe football insiders can sense that I come with no façade. That I am here to support them and highlight what they experience. My background as a player helps a lot, because I know the locker-room language, the codes, the right moments to film. The golden rule is to respect players' privacy.

"I capture the soul of a team, not just its image."

Being labeled the team's "good-luck charm" at the AFCON is significant. How did you handle the pressure that came with this unexpected status during following competitions, and do you feel you must now maintain



some sort of performance or ritual to meet fans' expectations?

Many people tease me about it, and I take it in stride... but the truth is, it is the players' performance that makes the difference on the pitch. My only responsibility is to be professional, positive and respectful of the team. If I am present, it is to work, not to bring luck. If people see

me as a good-luck charm, then so be it. I see it above all as gratitude, and I thank them for that. My only superstition is doing my job well.

Becoming a content creator after a sports career is an increasingly common path. How did you navigate the shift from passion to an economic

model? Is it difficult to remain independent and preserve your authenticity when major institutions (FIFA, CAF) and brands approach you for collaborations?

In the beginning, I earned nothing. I made videos because I loved it: filming behind the scenes, telling emotions, making people smile. Then came brands, and later institutions. That was when I had to learn how to structure my business. Major institutions such as FIFA and CAF have always trusted me, and I owe them my full gratitude. I have received many collaboration requests, but I only accept projects that align with my values and allow me to deliver quality work.

WITH FOOTBALL MISSION, WE WANT TO GO FURTHER: CREATE INFRASTRUCTURE, TRAIN EDUCATORS, SUPPORT LOCAL PROJECTS.

Your humanitarian commitment through Football Mission is inspired by your father. What, in your view, is the difference between one-off assistance (such as donating jerseys) and the structural impact you seek to create?

Football Mission is my link to my father. It is my way of carrying on what he passed on to me. My commitment is the continuation of the education I received. Donating a jersey or a ball matters. It makes a child dream and sparks motivation. But we can do much more. With Football Mission, we want to go further: build infrastructures, train coaches, support local projects. "I do not want to offer memories; I want to offer opportunities."

With the AFCON and the World Cup on the horizon, what is your next



major goal - not as an influencer covering events, but as a content producer?

With the upcoming events, my goal is to leave a lasting mark. To tell football stories with authenticity, emotion and respect. Not just viral content, but an art form that stands the test of time. For the AFCON, for instance, I want to

highlight the talents and unsung heroes who shape African football - teams, coaches, staff, supporters, the Moroccan people, the diasporas... I want to create a format that touches, inspires and reveals. Something that speaks to players, children, families... to all those who experience football as an emotion, not just a sport.

DIGITAL ECONOMY



REINALDO DE SOUSA VIRIATO

THE ARCHITECT OF AFRICA'S DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY

For decades, African wealth was defined by what came out of the ground: oil, minerals, diamonds. But a new generation of entrepreneurs - armed not with drills but with code and algorithms - is redefining the notion of capital. At the center of this quiet revolution is Reinaldo de Sousa Viriato, Chairman and CEO of INTELLICO, the man who conceptualized and industrialized the idea of the “Digital Mine.”

Far from the traditional figures of the energy oligarchy, Mr. Viriato champions a radical and urgent vision: African states are losing more than USD 10 billion each year in digital revenues that simply slip through their hands. These funds - generated by Application-to-Person (A2P) messaging flows, cross-border e-commerce, and OTT (Over-The-Top) platforms - constitute an invisible fortune that the continent has struggled to capture. INTELLICO's challenge is not only to secure this wealth, but to return it to the states.





Mr. Viriato's Angolan roots are significant. Coming from a country whose economy has long relied on oil extraction, his approach stands as a powerful countermodel. He proposes a post-extractivist growth paradigm built on intangible assets. Founded in 2019, INTELLICO positions itself at the critical intersection of cybersecurity and Mobile Engagement, with a two-pillar strategic mission:

- To Generate New Sovereign Revenues: By helping governments identify, audit, and tax A2P message flows (OTP notifications, banking transactions, etc.) and international e-commerce transactions crossing their

infrastructures.

- To Strengthen Digital Sovereignty: By offering a com-

THE ANGOLAN MODEL IS, IN REALITY, A REPLICABLE PAN-AFRICAN MODEL..

prehensive national cybersecurity program to protect state infrastructures against surging cybercrime.

For Mr. Viriato, the loss of these billions is a form of institutional capital flight. His message is unequivocal: "When properly implemented, this Digital Mine yields between USD 2 million and USD 15 million per month for each country - debt-free, with no major investment and no risk."

The Business Model of Trust

What gives INTELLICO its unique credibility among African governments is its partnership model built on proof-of-concept

and operational efficiency. Based in Switzerland, with strong Angolan roots and offices in Dubai and Croatia, INTELLICO does not arrive with promises but with measurable results.

Documents confirm its presence and strategic partnerships with leading governments, notably in Ghana, Uganda, Malawi, Kenya, and with Ethio Telecom. This geographical diversification demonstrates that the Angolan model is, in reality, a scalable pan-African solution.

One of the strongest arguments for any Minister of Finance lies

THE ANGOLAN MODEL IS, IN REALITY, A REPLICABLE PAN-AFRICAN MODEL...

in INTELLICO's rapid-deployment approach. After the signing of an MoU, the company promises immediate implementation and the generation of first state revenues within 45 to 60 days. This near-instant fiscal impact stands in stark contrast to long and costly public infrastructure programs.

Security: An Economic Prerequisite

Angola itself illustrates the urgency underscored by Mr. Viriato. Ranked 37th globally in cybercrime exposure (and 8th in Africa), the country is a prime target. Cybersecurity is no longer a support expenditure; it



has become a precondition for macroeconomic stability.

INTELLICO's offering goes far beyond fiscal optimization. It covers the six most common types of cyberattacks (Malware, Phishing, Ransomware, etc.), protecting the State's most valuable asset: its data and transactional flows.

Crucially, Mr. Viriato removes the risk barrier for governments.

By providing cybersecurity insurance certified by international banks - with no cap on coverage depending on institutional requirements - the company turns a cost into a guaranteed investment. INTELLICO's offer is not merely a technical safety net; it is a financial and insurance shield that reassures Ministers of Finance.

BEYOND THE NUMBERS

SOCIAL IMPACT AND HUMAN CAPITAL



INTELICO's approach extends beyond revenue recovery. Each partnership is designed as a catalyst for local development.

Mr. Viriato insists on the importance of economic soft power: the company commits to generating jobs and income in the regions where it operates. It also invests in knowledge transfer through sector-specific training programs tailored to local needs, helping upskill national teams in areas such as psychological analysis, technical English, and basic IT. It reflects a core conviction: "Digital sovereignty requires mastering our own tools and training our own experts."

Choosing African Leadership

In a technology market dominated by Western and Asian players, choosing INTELICO is a political and identity

statement. The question Mr. Viriato implicitly asks is not which technology to use, but who should hold the keys to a nation's digital economy. The company's model is intrinsically tied to African realities. It does not impose foreign systems; it adapts cutting-edge expertise to the conti-

«DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY REQUIRES MASTERY OF OUR OWN TOOLS...»

nent's specific challenges, proving that disruptive innovation can emerge from a country like Angola and serve all of Africa.

Mr. Viriato is shaping a narrative in which digital sovereignty is not purchased - it is regained through leaders who understand local stakes while operating at global standards.

His call to African leaders is direct: "Digital flows belong to you. INTELICO enables you to take back control."

It is the message of a man who has reduced the complexity of digital finance to a simple sovereignty equation. For Africa, ignoring this Digital Mine is no longer an oversight - it is a political decision to allow its own wealth to slip away.

By Samirat Ntiaze, in Luanda

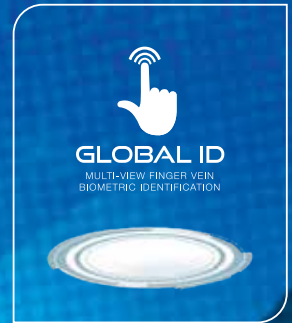


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