

Sport in National Integration and Cohesion in Africa: Focus on Football Development in Nigeria, 1945-2008

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Abstract

The role of sports in society cannot be overemphasized or doubted. The influence of sport in the society dates back to nine century B.C in ancient Greece era. Wars were postponed or suspended and peace made during the period of the Olympic. Over the years, other organized modern societies have copied this example. In the case of Nigeria, for instance, we find that since independence, life has become interwoven with almost all sporting activities. We find also that sport has integrated with almost all cultural activities: political, economic, social and psychological aspects of life. There has been intermixing between youths of diverse backgrounds, and this has created a healthy competitive spirit, a feeling of oneness or team spirit among athletes and spectators with the playing team, and produced sport men and women of high caliber where there is no discrimination of language or religion. By paving the way in building up the spirit of integration at the local level and finally at the national level, sport became a common denominator of national integration in Nigeria. Obviously, a development such as this calls for a re-centring of the concept of sport, particularly, football, in nation-building. The main thrust of the paper, therefore, is to assess how football has galvanized Nigeria and made it an absolute integrated football unit, through a sophisticated football governing body called the Nigeria Football Federation. Focusing on the historical trajectory, environment, and structure of the game, the paper finds out that football played a role as a major catalyst and uniting force in Nigeria's checkered history, and we have the national teams to salute for the wonderful job of lifting trophies upon trophies in international competitions. However, the paper posits that considering the noble attainment of football in Nigeria's annals, the full potential of the game should be well harnessed towards the development of the country. This would pull Nigeria's football industry out of the present state of underdevelopment due to negligence. This paper is historical; hence, it adopts a qualitative method of analysis. Useful pieces of information were drawn from the Internet, relevant extant literature, published documents and media reports on football matters.

Keywords: National integration, Sport, Football development, Nigeria. Promoting peace

Introduction

Nigeria as at the time under review, 1945 to 2008, maintained an enviable height as "the giant of Africa" even though it is recorded that peace was eluding the giant of Africa at home. It may be that in the near future, if right and purposeful integrative policies are not put in place, Nigeria could cease to be the most important federation in Africa. As a product of colonialism, Nigeria is one of the most heterogeneous African societies composed of peoples of diverse ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural backgrounds who were unkindly lumped together as one entity by the erstwhile colonialist, Britain. As Ojo succinctly points out, "Nigeria is a conglomerate national state comprising three heterogeneous, powerful and autonomous regions, each promoting its' identification at the expense of national identification¹". So it was, then, that at the period of independence, in 1960, anthropologists confirmed that four hundred and fifty five (455) ethnic groups domiciled in Nigeria².

This had earned Nigeria the delicate epithet as a country united in diversity. Be that as it may, it is indubitable that Nigeria remains in many respects a greatly divided country. This division is accompanied with serious suspicion, distrust, and antagonism among its' diverse peoples. Nigeria is also periled by one of the most common challenges of plural societies, namely, the issue of ethnicity, which has posed the challenge to its' political development and creating unity among heterogeneous groups in the state³. These problems have had grave consequences for the robust health, orderly growth, development, unity and survival of the Nigerian state.

Nigeria, however, is not alone in these problems. No country can boast of absolutely homogeneous and monolithic population. Not even France, which is called the first modern nation, is without divisions and internal altercations. In this sense, all political systems are constantly in the process of integrating their peoples, and this process, in the view of Leslie and Bryan, is basic to nation-building⁴. As stated above, Nigeria is not facing these problems alone. Thus, it had, like France, Germany, the United States of America and Ghana striven to keep above the threshold level of integration or internal unity to maintain its' image as the largest economy as well as

the most populous African country within the period under review. An integrated Nigeria will without doubt bring order, security, pride, national morale, and even a stronger sense of identity the Nigerian people may need. Over the years, however, the strivings of different administrations at the centre to preserve and generally keep Nigeria as one indissoluble entity cannot be said to have yielded the desired results as evidenced by the increasingly monumental crises of insecurity, ethnic prebendalism, banditry, terrorism, sectarian violence, kidnapping for ransom, militancy, political instability as well as threats of secession and disintegration. Yet, in spite of the above, it is a thing of wonder to note that the only time Nigerians were seen to have felt as one people and seemed to have forgotten their tribal differences happened to be the moments when the national football teams adorned in the national colour were playing or competing at the international arena for trophies. But reclined to their tribal default the moment the competition came to an end. Why? It is against this background that the paper moves to examine the role of football in ensuring peace, harmony and unity in Nigeria within the period under review. The paper, therefore, looks into the use of football officially from nineteen forty five through to post-independence times to execute many agenda aimed at promoting peace, national unity and national pride among Nigerians. It further examines how football eclipsed the other sporting activities that were introduced by the British in Nigeria. The paper finds that football was not just a mere leisure activity and that with the introduction of football in Nigeria and founding of the Nigeria Football Association (NFA), it became a major catalyst for national cohesion; a rallying factor to socialize Nigerian peoples about freedom (nationalism) and to show the Nigerian capability. It was also used by extension further down the line to pursue some of the Nigerian government's foreign policy initiatives which included African unity and the government's stance against apartheid in Southern Africa. However, football has its often neglected dark area, which is the capability to cause acrimony, violence or disunity and thus work against the primary goal of nation-building. Within this paradigm lies the positive and negative attributes of football as a form of sport, which makes it dangerous if left unharnessed for the common good of all by any serious government that knows its onus.

Conceptual Clarifications

Sport: The term "sport" derives its meaning from the Anglo-Saxon word "disport" which translates to "divert oneself". In essence, the original idea of sport was to provide a recreation or play activity, which is carried out to divert people's attention from rigours and pressures of daily life. Sport differs radically from recreation and play, because it involves physical exertion, which, in fact, produces stress and strains on participants who are technically referred to as athletes⁵.

For some other observers and commentators, sport is a physical activity always associated with competition among states or teams for the pride and glory of winning. The English writer and journalist, George Orwell defines sport swiftly as, "war minus the shooting"⁶. For Orwell, although he may not be completely right, the objective of competitive sport was defeating the opponent at any cost while humiliating them and their supporters. It is his view that, "serious sport has nothing to do with fair play; it is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence"⁷. Sport includes all forms of competitive physical activity or games which through casual or organized participation by an individual aim to use, maintain or improve physical ability and relatively complex skills while providing enjoyment to participants and in some cases, entertainment to spectators. Participation in sport can be motivated by a combination of intrinsic satisfaction associated with the activity itself and the external rewards earned through participation.

There are several types of sport such as acrobatics, baseball, boxing, bowling, car racing, basketball, archery, badminton, football to mention just a few. That being said, the main focus of this paper is football. Football is a form of sport classified under ball sport. Ball sport includes those categories of games that use a ball in play such as ball-over-nets (e.g. football), ball-and-bat (e.g. cricket), and ball-and-stick (e.g. hockey). Also called association football or soccer, football is a form of game played between two teams of eleven-aside players on a marked rectangular field with goalposts at each end and whose object is to get the ball over a goal line.

Integration: Integration is a concept that is commonly use in all the fields of social sciences and it means different thing to different disciplines. It literally refers to cooperation and not coercive unification efforts. Without much delay, it suffices to take a cursory look at what some scholars of different trainings think about the concept. In the view of J. Elaigwu, national integration involves attempts at integrating the various groups –adopting different approaches and policies-in order to build a 'nation' out of a state of many nations such as Nigeria⁸. Gabriel. A. Almond *et al* describes integration as the process whereby people transfer their commitment and loyalty from smaller tribes, villages or petty principalities to the larger central political system⁹. On his part, Duverger sees national integration as the final result of political antagonism and as a process of unifying a society which tends to make it harmonious, based upon an order its members regard as equitably harmonious¹⁰. Furthermore, national integration has been conceptualized as "a process whereby the quality of relations among autonomous ethnic units (kinship groups, cities, trade unions, trade associations, political parties etc) change in such a way as to erode the

autonomy of each and make it a part of a larger aggregate”¹¹. Limbert, while agreeing with this definition, gives supporting definitions of integration as “the process whereby nations forgo their desire and ability to conduct foreign and key domestic policies independently of each other seeking to make joint decisions or to delegate the decision-making process to a new central organ.”¹².

Furthermore, maybe in response to Gabriel Almond et al adumbration of integration, Elaigwu clarifies that integration does not involve transfer of commitment and loyalties from narrow or parochial levels of ethnic groups to a larger political unit, such as Nigeria. For him, an Igbo will remain Igbo, a Yoruba will remain Yoruba, likewise a Kikuyu, because identity is not transferable and does not change simply by declaration¹³. However, incidentally, Ali Mazrui in his study of political integration identifies four stages of national integration with the first stage being “coexistence”. At this stage people merely coexist within the same borders and need not know of one another’s existence. At the second stage, groups at least have ‘minimum’ dealings with one another. They interact. At the third stage, there is a compromise; here the dealings between the groups have become sufficiently complex, diverse and interdependent. The last stage in Mazrui’s categorization is the stage of coalescence in which identities coalesce, “rather than merger of interests”¹⁴. Meanwhile, Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu on his part sees integration as active nation-building”. By that, he means “forging out a nation out of our diverse ethnic groups” he further avers that the failure to achieve this in respect of Nigeria is that “tribalism and ethnicity have become a potent source of friction, rather than diminish in the face of an emergent, virile and modern nation”¹⁵

Looking at the various concepts of national integration highlighted above one may want to ask “What is the end-product of national integration? In other words, what is the aim of national integration? Ojo seems to have provided a succinct answer to this important question when he opines that the aim of national integration is to create the largest nation out of many lesser nations which when the chips are down effectively commands men’s loyalty, and overriding the claims of the lesser nations within it¹⁶. What can be inferred from the above is that any such large nation of many lesser nations that lacks peace, unity and justice has failed the basic goal of integration. Thusly, it has also been contended in another quarter that regardless of how the people were brought together either through referendum or colonial fiat as in the case of Nigeria, national integration is an acknowledgement of the minimum need to resolve the problems of collective social existence, and progressively to coordinate actions in order to achieve some presumed or agreed goals with an increasing degree of trust and predictability¹⁷. Our takeaway from all this is that national integration is a process built on the fact of diversity and the desire to maintain mutual accommodation. In the final analysis, national integration is a conscious effort to wield together a plural society in the mold of Nigeria so as to achieve peace and unity and enhance development without endangering ethnic identity which Elaigwu has maintained is not transferable and does not change simply by pledging loyalty to the largest community formed therefrom. It suffices to state therefore that the term “national integration” as used here represents what the above exponents have stated it to mean.

The Idea of Sport as a Tool of National Integration

Whereas Arnold¹⁸ conceives of sport as having the capacity to bring people together and tear them apart, awaken nationalistic feelings, intolerance and even violence, both in athletes and supporters, there is also a sector of society that supports the notion that sport can serve as a means to advance social development and integration processes. In this connection as far back as the 9th century BC, the Ancient Greece used sport to bring about social change. During the period of Olympic Games, for example, wars were postponed or suspended and peace made. In Igbo traditional society, wrestling, for example, as captured in *Things Fall Apart*, was revered and served to promote social solidarity and good relations between villages. This goes to show that the idea of sport for peace was not unknown to African society. In modern time where almost all aspects of life have become interlinked with sporting activities, other countries have followed these examples. In this direction, the use of sport to bring about peace, unity and development has been recently promoted by a variety of international bodies, notably the United Nations (Sport for Development and Peace), international development agencies, Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) and the International Olympic Community (IOC) among others. Sport is universal and so found in any human society. This implies that sport is a household affair of every society. This is because it cuts across all societies. Sociologists agree that sport is one of the most potent human activities in its capacity to give meaning to life, to create inter-connect sense of achievement and identity. Sport also has a complete and important interaction with nationality and the phenomenon of nationalism.

Furthermore, the use of sport today has also grown in economic and political dimensions and many countries now use it as a legitimate part of foreign policy and as the vehicle to show country’s mood towards another. For instance, Nigeria boycotted the Edinburgh 1986 Commonwealth Games to register its disapproval for the apartheid policy perpetuated against the indigenous peoples of South Africa who actually owned the land of South Africa. In the second half of the nineteenth century and development phase, sport was a highly contested field and utilized

for nationalism. For instance, the emergence of Gaelic football appears to be the most overt example of the rise of football in the service of Irish nationalism against Britain¹⁹.

Pierre Nkurunziza, the former President of Burundi was quoted by Aamir Bilal as having recognized the power of sport when he opined that, “sport has become a truly unifying element in my country and we have made initiatives to make sport a tool of national integration, thus strengthening social cohesion and peace in Burundi”²⁰. Yet the idea of using sport to advance peace and unity has also been used in countries like the Balkan states, Congo, Rwanda, South Africa et cetera. Buttressing the role sport plays in national development, Omolawon and Adelakin maintain that “sport contributes to character building, mental development, human communication, physical fitness and health. These attributes, he continues, have been clearly restated in the national sports policy”²¹. Onifade on his part holds that sport competition, seminars and meetings of all types provide the opportunity for exchange of and fertilization of ideas and knowledge, which in turn would be of immense benefit in educating the citizens of the country²². Speaking before the 1995 Rugby World Cup that helped to unite the post-apartheid country of South Africa Nelson Mandela was quoted to have said that sports have the power “to change the world... to inspire... to unite people”²³.

The realization of the power of sport on the part of the Nigerian political ruling elite attests to the reason why governments at all levels spent millions of naira in budgetary allocation for sport facilities, sport promotion and development. Sport events such as Olympic game, African Nations Cup, World Cup and many others had witnessed government participation and sponsorship. Sport for peace and national integration, however, is highly specialized, and if left to incompetent staff and non-experts, then the result could be a disastrous repeat of what happened during football match in Egyptian port of Said, where over seventy (70) people lost their lives due to concussion and stabbing. Although it is noteworthy that sport alone is not a panacea to Nigeria’s instability issues or that it alone will guarantee peace and unity, sport can be regarded, according to the international non-governmental organization Right to Play, as a highly effective tool in a broader toolkit of development, and should be applied in a holistic and integrated manner with other interventions and programmes to achieve optimal results²⁴.

Sport and National Integration in Nigeria up to 2008

The march towards the formation of a sport development policy in Nigeria started when sport was brought more into the focus and under government direct control at the ministerial level with the attainment of independence. The policy guideline commenced with the establishment of the National Sports Council in 1962, with a statutory responsibility to administer, regulate and coordinate sport development in Nigeria. The post-civil war values of sport mostly in the ability to forge national unity and enhance patriotic spirit led to the upgrading of the National Sports Council in the early 1970s to the National Sports Commission with some measure of executive responsibilities for sport management, development and organization throughout the country. Decree 34 of 1971 formalized and legalized the NSC as the apex Federal Government agency to control, regulate and organize sports in Nigeria²⁵. Specifically, the Commission was established with the following mandates:

- To establish a technically efficient institution for sports development and participation.
- To develop the sports sector to world class standard.
- To provide continuous improvement of quality of life for the entire citizenry through sports²⁶.

The Commission had twelve branches that spread across the six geo-political zones of the federation. There were forty-one agencies and several departments under the National Sports Commission charged with specific responsibilities, amongst which includes the National Institute for Sports (NIS) and Nigeria Football Association (NFA) but later renamed Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) in 2008.

The National Institute for Sports was established in 1972 as a parastatal under the National Sports Commission with the mandate to drive manpower development in sport. Nigeria Football Federation was established as Nigeria Football Association in 1945 with the overall responsibility to control and organize domestic and international football in Nigeria. Thus, within the period under it organized three leagues: the Nigerian Premier League, the Amateur League and the Women’s League. This is in addition to five competitions, including the Federation Cup and Women’s Cup. Although it is an agency under the National Sports Commission, Nigeria Football Federation operated largely within the code of the Federation International Football Association (FIFA).

Having realized the importance of sport to national development, government started investing huge sums into the organization of sport festivals, school sport, increased funding of sport events as well as engaging in capital intensive construction of sport facilities like stadia, gymnasias, swimming pools, and courts for various ball and racket games.

In spite of the foregoing efforts, it has been observed that sport development in Nigeria seems to have fallen short of expectation because of the clear lack or absence of a well-defined policy as well as guidelines for its

implementation. It is for this reason that Ojeme in his analysis of the sport delivery in Nigeria concludes that the system could be described as haphazard²⁷. However, in 1989, the Federal Government of Nigeria embarked on a systematic sport development policy with the aim to among other goals utilize sports as a means for promoting a sense of patriotism and nationalism as well as enhancing the social wellbeing of the citizenry²⁸. The 1989 sport policy did not only map out an ambitious plan for utilization of sport to solve both economic and social ills of the nation like unemployment and anti-social behavior in the society. This document represents the first government official policy guidelines directed at systematic sport management in Nigeria. It put sport matters on a firmer foundation coupled with the valuable guidelines of implementation which clearly assigned to all responsibilities towards forging ahead in sport management²⁹. Having realized that sport is a goldmine of occupational skills and has the capacity to influence policies and achieve desired objectives, Nigeria's government used it to pursue its foreign policy and diplomatic agenda. Also, it was used to foster national unity and socio-cultural integration. For instance, Nigeria's government used sport to demonstrate to the world that Nigeria is united, safe and secure by the hosting of the 1973 All Africa Games. Nigeria equally boycotted the 1978 Commonwealth Games in protest against the apartheid regime in South Africa. From the foregoing, it has been demonstrated that sport policies had been systematically enunciated as well as used towards achieving stipulated goals by the Nigerian government.

Football Development in Nigeria in Historical Perspective

The history of football development and organization in Nigeria dates back to the early part of the twentieth century. It is on record that football was first introduced into Nigeria by the British colonialists about 1904. A Briton by name Baron Mulford, is thought to be behind the introduction of football into Nigeria and it was he who organized weekly matches between European and Nigerian youths in the area known then as Lagos³⁰. It was not until about 1935 that the idea of the formation of a body to govern football in Nigeria was initiated by the like of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. Others who teamed up with him were Mr. R.G. Marshal, Chief Etin Bassey, Dr. Isaac Ladipo, Baron Mulford and Mr. D.H. Holley. However, the Second World War in 1939 delayed the realization of that lofty dream. The dream of these personalities was eventually realized in 1945. Following the end of the War, the Nigeria Football Association (NFA) was established. Dr. Azikiwe, then a member of the NFA, led a delegation of the Association to the then Governor-General in the person of Sir Arthur Richards, and appealed to him to donate a trophy that would be competed for by teams throughout the country. Thus started the Governor's Cup competition, today known as the Federation Cup³¹.

In 1949, the first Nigerian national team was birthed and travelled to the United Kingdom to play series of friendly matches. The first international match involving Nigeria took place on October 8, 1949, when the UK Tourists (as the Super Eagles were then called) played Sierra Leon in Freetown which ended 2-0 in favour of Nigeria. On April 24, 1959, the Nigeria Football Association (NFA but now NFF) became an affiliate of the Confederation of African Football (CAF), and the following year it joined the Federation of International Football Association (FIFA). On January 8, 1972, the first national league competition flagged off. It was started with six (6) teams. However, before 2008, there were about 20 football clubs across the country participating in the National League. Eighteen (18?) of these twenty? Clubs were state-owned thus underscoring the fact that governments at all levels recognized the importance and place of football in our national life.

Football as a Major Catalyst for Tribal Bond in Nigeria

Football is generally referred to as the most popular sporting activity in the world, and it is estimated by FIFA to be played by 265 million people, while other games such as cricket, baseball and basketball, attract the interest of millions of spectators and participants worldwide³¹.

It is a game in which two teams of eleven players aside meet to struggle for victory, while observing rules of the game. Football is the most popular of all games in Nigeria and it remains arguably a major catalyst and uniting force in Nigeria's checkered history. We have the national teams of both men and women athletes to salute for the wonderful job of flying the national colours on the global stage and lifting trophies upon trophies in international competitions. Just like in Brazil, football is gradually becoming, if it has not already attained that lofty height, a religion in Nigeria as it was the norm for the lovers of the game to use the words "my team" whenever any club they are supporting was playing. One way that the goal of integration was achieved was by the establishment of an overarching football governing body called the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF).

To understand how football wielded Nigeria together, it is worthy to note that the Nigerian football administrators created a structure for the game that mirrored the structure of the Nigerian State, with associations for each state united in an overarching federal body. In other words, each component of the federation evolved a multi-ethnic football club following the establishment of cohesive cup competitions that incorporated teams from every part of Nigeria. Hence, there were in existence teams such as Abiola Babes FC of Ibadan, Rangers International Football Club of Enugu, Bendel Insurance Football Club of Benin City, Shooting Stars Sports Club of Ibadan, Anambra Pillars Football Club of Onitsha, Spartans FC of Owerri and many others. This football landscape

assisted in the creation of an integrated federal state and underpinned the country's creed of peace and unity. Furthermore, the structure of this game is such that every period in the year it had a major activity that brought its followers together. There were for instance the men and women world cups, the African Nations' Cups, the European Nations' Cups, the COPA America, the European Champions League, the African Champions League, the English Premiership, the Spanish La Liga, the Nigerian Football League among others. Each of these competitions had their teaming supporters, who drummed and sang their teams to victory. Among these football spectators and supporters were Nigerian youths who supported one foreign or local club or another. Although united in their love for the round leather game, Nigerians were divided among the big clubs like Real Madrid FC, Arsenal FC, Rangers FC, Enyimba FC, Kano Pillars, Shooting Stars, Chelsea FC, Barcelona FC and many others. Nigerian youths who were divided along ethnic, political and religious lines usually forgot their differences and unitedly displaying their brotherly love and warmth whenever the Nigerian national teams were playing and competing for a trophy. The craze for football grew to the level whereby some football enthusiasts wore the merchandize of their favourite clubs as a symbol of their identity. As the passion for the game grew, there were the proliferation of viewing centres for the game in villages and urban centres in the country. One question that readily comes to mind is how did Nigeria get to this point?

At the time of independence, many developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, were integrated into the global governance of major sport. FIFA grew from fifty four to one hundred and forty-nine member countries. In the same period sport governing bodies prioritized the global development of sport, which mirrored the modernization policies favoured by international bodies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank³². Back at home, following the formation of the national teams, Nigerian youths of diverse backgrounds were mobilized and brought together under the national team where they imbibed core values like sportsmanship, unity, teamwork, fair play as well as acquire inter-connect senses of achievement and personal identity.

Ever since then, the national teams have gone on and won the African Nations Cup in 1980, Under-17 World Cup in Japan in 1993, African Nations Cup again in 1994 and the biggest so far was defeating Mexico, Brazil and Argentina to win Gold at the football event of the Olympic in Atlanta, U.S.A in 1996. After these major events the love of football grew tremendously in the hearts of many Nigerians. Football automatically became the country's number one sport knocking out other games like boxing, volleyball and basketball out of the main sport scene in Nigeria.

Buttressing the primacy and popularity of football in their National life, Tamuno Danogogo states that, "Whenever there is a national or international sporting event [football], Nigerians forget their religion, ethnicity, gender, age, cultural divide and unite as one to support a common goal because sport redefines what we are or stand for: a peace-loving, [football-loving] nation³³". In this same vein, Attah Ogbadu says that "It is only when the national team take to the fields that Nigerians come together not only in terms of physical support but spiritually united in fasting and prayer for the national team's victory³⁴."

Extrapolating from the above, football has grown from a humble beginning as an entertainment and recreational past time to a prominent phenomenon whose influence is felt in the lives of football-loving Nigerians. Nigerians were sport-loving people with very keen interest in football and high appetite for winning. Success at competitions created a euphoric atmosphere and with an injection of vibrancy and pride in the citizens. Onifade explained that Nigeria experienced prestige, status and respectability when her soccer team won the maiden edition of the Under-16 World Championship in China in 1985³⁵. When Nigerian athletes performed excellently well at the Atlanta Olympic, it was given an extensive media coverage and threw the country in a special limelight. The football victory brought the much happiness, relief and joy for the Nigerian people, thus testifying the statement of king of Bhutan-Jigme Singye Wangchuck- who was quoted to have said "gross national happiness is more important than gross national product and therefore happiness takes precedence over economic prosperity in worst of financial crisis³⁶". On the contrary, poor performance by Nigerian athletes at international football competitions had left a lingering gloom, sourness and contagious sadness that enveloped all and sundry irrespective of age, sex, creed, tribe, religion or tongue, with negative effect on their health, psyche and activities. Such was the case in 2008 during the Africa Nations Cup, when the national football team under Berti Vogt was defeated by Ghana two goals to one and was eliminated at the quarter final.

In the final analysis, football is as important to Nigerians as food. Consequently, football has become an important aspect of Nigerian culture due to its popularity among the citizenry. It is a thing of joy to behold Nigerian irrespective of tribe and religion sitting cheering the national teams to victory. It was hugs, handshakes and jubilation each time a player scored a goal. That they could put aside their differences and show each other so much love during football matches attests to the fact that football is the much needed bond to cement Nigeria's

relationship and harmony. A country as rich and diverse as Nigeria deserves better and football seems to a sure way out of division along ethnic, political and religious lines.

Conclusion

Maybe it is time Nigeria vigorously pursued sport for development as never seen before and channel bigotry of her citizens into something productive, football. You see, football is not built only by the players, but also by football lovers and supporters who are extremely loyal to what their clubs represent. It would best serve the interest of Nigeria if it would utilize the hatred for one another and ethnicism to launch a well-oiled football industry for the growth and development of the nation-state. Imagine if the ideologically multi-ethnic clubs such as Enugu Rangers FC, Remo FC and Kano Pillars were nurtured and renamed Biafra FC, Odua FC and Arewa FC, it would be observed that this novel football landscape would not only assist in the creation of an integrated federal state and underpin the national creed of 'brotherhood and unity', the stadia would be filled to the brim, and the people would watch Nigerian football. The large viewership that will result from this would translate to huge revenue for Nigeria.

This essay has described how within the contest of sport, football has galvanized Nigeria and made it an absolute integrated football unit, through a sophisticated football governing body called the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF). Its football administrators created a structure for the game that mirrored the structure of the State, with associations for each region/state united in an overarching federal body, which is the body responsible for regulating football in the country. However, this regulation and structure of the game have not always translated to success in terms of cohesion and national integration. Because elite and football administrators have historically been accused of corruption and conducting sport in a way not beneficial for Nigeria. The government has continued to interfere unduly with the operations of the football governing body in manners that could best be described as unhealthy for football development. Similarly, the composition of the national teams has often come under sharp criticism by people alleging biasness and marginalization and this, if actually true, works directly against the aim of football for integration. It is only when football policies have been developed and consciously used to facilitate local, national and international integration and brotherhood without having the biased tendencies of politics, then only it will bear fruits and will fall in line with what F.S. Smith said, "I maintain that the British tendency to put sports first and politics second is a healthier tendency."

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