

BOOK REVIEW

Itamar Dubinsky. *Entrepreneurial Goals: Development and Africapitalism in Ghanaian Soccer Academies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2022. iii + 177 pp. Works Cited. Photographs. Index. \$79.95. Cloth. ISBN: 978-0-299-33560-1.

Soccer (football) is the quintessential game that knits together the diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious populations on the African continent. The game's popularity has elevated its standing among its devotees, placing it just behind Christianity in terms of numbers of adherents. Itamar Dubinsky's volume, *Entrepreneurial Goals: Development and Africapitalism in Ghanaian Soccer Academies*, examines soccer academies in Africa, with a focus on Ghana, through numerous lenses. He carries out extensive interviews with parents, players, entrepreneurs, vendors, local leaders, coaches, agents, and the larger community about soccer academies and their impact within the community. He maintains that soccer academies serve as "expressions of Africapitalism." The concept of Africapitalism means an effort to "rethink the role of businesses in developing countries," and its goal is to empower a generation of successful for-profit entrepreneurs who will drive Africa's economic and social transformation (18).

The central thesis of this volume is that local soccer academies are financial ventures for their funders, and these entities contribute to sustainable development in their respective local communities. Dubinsky argues that soccer academies emerged as a solution to the growing pain and injustice that African players endured from their manipulation and abuse by various clubs, unscrupulous agents, and speculators.

The author distinguishes Soccer Academies and Colts. Soccer academies are football organizations that provide skilled knowledge and education about the sport to young boys and girls. These academies groom young boys and girls and provide a holistic approach to the players' development through training, education, nutrition, and accommodation. Soccer academies provide educational opportunities, empower youths, advance gender equality, address health issues, and serve as a source of pride and identification with local fans. The Colts system, on the other hand, is made up of "local football teams with grassroots appeal" (32). The focus of the Colts system is on training and playing, and it does not combine football with education. These

grassroots organizations are owned and operated by local coaches and entrepreneurs, whose main goal is to reap some financial benefits from their investments. The Colts systems are relatively less expensive compared to soccer academies.

Dubinsky explores the three major soccer academies in Ghana (Mandela Soccer Academy [MSA], Kumasi Sports Academy [KuSA], and Unistar Soccer Academy [USA]), laying out the goals, leadership, and community involvement of each academy, and stressing the reasons for their success or lack thereof. Starting with the Mandela Soccer Academy, the author identifies Issa Mohammed as the owner of the academy. Mohammed's vision was to use the academy as a platform to enrich the education of the youth and unchain them from poverty and misery. However, for the youths, soccer was considered a pathway out of poverty, and hence, they were less interested in education. Profit-making was not the goal of MSA. The failure of MSA to train and sell players caused the organization to be financially vulnerable. Anticipating failure, Mohammed abandoned the academy.

The second academy Dubinsky interrogates is Kumasi Sports Academy. King James Asuming is the entrepreneur behind this academy. His primary goal was to use the academy to "advance his personal wealth and status." Hence, KuSA was a for-profit venture. Asuming attached a social agenda to the academy to boost his financial motives. The academy integrated sports and education and promoted girls in the organization. Three female players who brought success to KuSA include Entoah, Agbomadzi, and McCathy. Financial management was a major challenge for KuSA.


Unistar Soccer Academy is the third major academy explored by author and the most successful of the three. Owned and operated by Kufuor and wife Emma, the Unistar leadership believed in a holistic approach in developing the youths, on and off the field. The academy championed progress and prosperity through partnership with the local community and the outside world. Kufuor's goal was to use soccer to stimulate personal and community development. To accomplish this, money from sales of players was used to sustain the academy. The facility was fenced, and parents and players were required to pay fees. Unistar acquired land and transformed it into a park for communal gatherings and celebrations, weddings, and corporate events. Unistar's success and prosperity emanates from "its structure, which is based on social capital, trust, professionalism, and localism" (13).

The author speculates why some of the academies were successful and others were not. The successful academies, according to the author, formed a strong network with local leaders and influential figures. They also built parks that attracted tourists and the locals, and they required payment of fees to enter the facilities.

Dubinsky's pioneering research on soccer academies in Africa is a highly recommended read for scholars, researchers, coaches, and agents of soccer. The book is well written and thoroughly documented with interviews from

participants in their own words. This would be a useful resource for future researchers at soccer/football academies.

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