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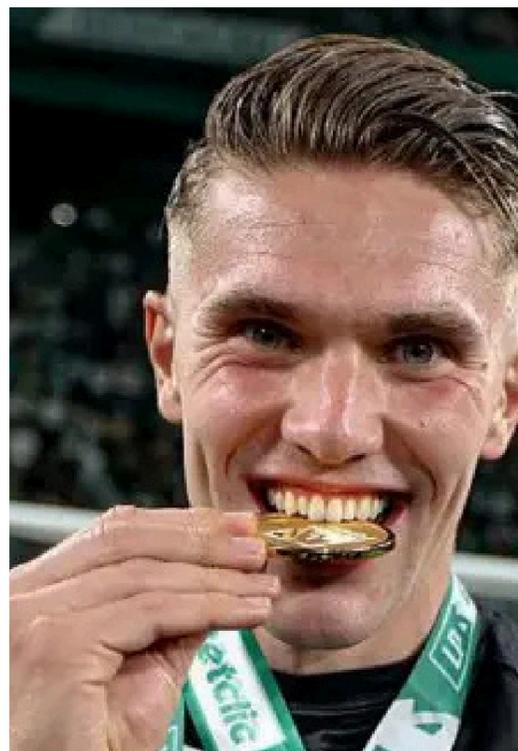
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COPPER QUEENS COACH AIMS TO DELIVER ZAMBIA'S FIRST WAFCON TITLE

By Lucky Chama



Nora Häuptle, head coach of Zambia's Copper Queens, is embracing one of the toughest yet most exciting challenges in African women's football: turning Zambia's talented squad into genuine contenders for the Women's Africa Cup of Nations (WAFCON) title.

At 41, Häuptle brings a wealth of experience to the role, having previously led Ghana's national women's team to WAFCON qualification. But for the Swiss coach, guiding the Copper Queens offers more than just another professional milestone—it represents a personal and professional fulfilment.

"It's an honour for me to work with such exceptional players," Häuptle told CAF Media. "We have incredible talent on this team, but what impresses me most is their humility. On a human level, they're very grounded, deeply connected to their roots—even though they're superstars."

That humility, she adds, is reflected in the players' daily commitment.

"In February, the training fields were in poor condition. I expected them to complain, but they didn't say a word. They trained with full commitment. I appreciate that they never forget where they come from, that they support their communities, and that they are role models."

Häuptle believes her leadership style—collaborative but decisive—has helped build trust within the squad.

"For my part, I try to engage with them as equals—collaboratively, always open to their input. Of course, I have to make the final call, but for now, I feel a very strong bond and deep commitment within this group."

While this will be her first WAFCON tournament, Häuptle is no stranger to high-stakes continental football.

"Yes, it'll be my very first WAFCON, my first major tournament on the continent. With Ghana, I had qualified the team after three years of work. That was a great journey. Now I have the pleasure of participating with Zambia. For me, it's a kind of fulfilment."

But this isn't just about participation—Häuptle is here to win.

"It's also a chance to prove our worth at the highest level. We've invested so much into this team, with so much passion. And in Zambia, we all share one vision: to bring a trophy home. That's a huge motivation for me. I just want to make sure we move forward step by step, with curiosity and enthusiasm. I can't wait for the tournament to begin."

Häuptle also knows what lies ahead in the group stages. Drawing on her experience coaching in West Africa, she expects a tough path to the top.

"It's a fairly diverse group in terms of playing styles. I know Senegal a bit from my time with Ghana. They're a very physical team, with technically skilled players. Many of them play in France, a physically demanding league."

She also points to DR Congo's strength, noting that the reigning CAF Women's Champions League winners TP Mazembe form the backbone of their national team—a factor that could make the match particularly challenging.

"As for Morocco—you can clearly see the results of their federation's investment, for both men and women. Their game is more possession-based. Zambia recently played them in Olympic qualifiers, so we're familiar with their approach," she added.

With quiet confidence and a clear plan, Häuptle is determined to lead Zambia to its greatest achievement in women's football yet. The road will be hard—but the Copper Queens, under her guidance, are dreaming bigger than ever.

"ONE DAY, I WANT TO WORK WITH TOP PLAYERS LIKE BARBRA BANDA" – GLORIA MUNKONDE'S DREAM FUELS HER JOURNEY IN FOOTBALL

By Lucky Chama



"One day, I want to work with top players like Barbra Banda."

It's a simple but powerful dream that keeps Gloria Munkonde going as she quietly plays her role behind the scenes at Kansanshi Queens Football Club in Solwezi. As the team's Kit and Equipment Manager, Gloria isn't scoring goals or making tackles—but her impact is just as important. With only a year of experience in the role, Gloria has already built a reputation for being selfless, dedicated, and disciplined. Her job? Making sure every kit, boot, and piece of training gear is clean, complete, and ready for matchday battles.

"To become the Equipment Manager for the Zambia National Team and work with top players like Barbra Banda," Gloria says confidently when asked about her biggest goal in football.

Her work requires long hours and attention to detail—responsibilities that some see as better suited for men. But Gloria dismisses such outdated thinking.

"Some friends think being an equipment manager is a job for men, but I don't let that affect me. I love what I do. Criticism doesn't define me—my work does."

In a male-dominated space, her calm confidence has allowed her to thrive. But the job isn't without challenges.

"Occasionally, items like jerseys go

missing, and managing that can be tough but it's part of the job," she admits.

For Gloria, football is about more than just the game—it's a platform for social change.

"Though I haven't faced gender-based violence in my role, I believe football has the power to address major societal challenges," she says.

Her humble leadership is reflected in the way she views her position as a role model for other young women who might consider careers off the pitch.

"By being disciplined and respectful, especially to elders. I always strive to carry myself with dignity, both on and off the pitch," she explains.

And her message to girls dreaming of joining the football world—even in roles many overlook—is clear and uplifting.

"It's a rewarding job. You get to travel, work closely with the team, and there's no stress when you're passionate. Girls, don't be afraid to take up space in football!"

Gloria's quiet but determined journey proves that women can thrive in every part of the football world—including the ones that rarely make the headlines. With her eyes set firmly on the national team and the hope of working alongside stars like Barbra Banda, Gloria Munkonde is paving the way for others to follow.

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ZAMBIA TABLE TENNIS TEAM WITHDRAWN FROM AFRICAN YOUTH GAMES DUE TO FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

By Lucky Chama



In a heartbreaking turn for Zambia's young table tennis talents, the national team has been forced to withdraw from the upcoming African Union of Sport Region 5 Youth Games in Windhoek, Namibia, due to lack of funding.

Collins Mwenda, Technical Director of the Table Tennis Association of Zambia (TTAZ), confirmed the news with deep regret.

"It is with a heavy heart that I share the news that the Zambia table tennis team has been removed from the upcoming African Union of Sport Region 5 Youth Games in Windhoek, Namibia due to financial constraints," Mwenda said. "This decision, communicated to me last week, is a significant setback for our athletes who have worked tirelessly for four years, with this year's event being their first major international competition."

For the seven young athletes, this was more than just a sporting event—it was the opportunity of a lifetime. Four of the players have never travelled outside Zambia, despite playing table tennis since 2019. Several are ranked in the country's top four senior players, and last year

three members of the team brought home two gold medals from a tournament in Botswana.

"This competition would have been a game changer for us," Mwenda lamented. "We were hopeful of coming back with medals."

The cancellation hits especially hard for the Garden Table Tennis Academy, where Mwenda has volunteered for years, mentoring youths from challenging backgrounds.

"Table tennis has been a beacon of hope for many, providing an opportunity to stay away from crime and substance abuse. The thought of these young athletes losing this platform is truly disheartening," he said.

One player, Mwenda revealed, had previously been drawn into street life and substance abuse but returned to the sport after being inspired by the promise of international competition. "We already managed to return a few players who had gone that route because we promised them there was hope and one was working hard to make it for the games next year. Hope we do not lose him again," he

added.

Despite this blow, Mwenda remains optimistic about the future of Zambian table tennis.

"Despite this setback, we remain committed to promoting table tennis as a tool for positive change. The World Table Tennis (WTT) organization hosts over 50 youth competitions annually, and our region is growing. Opportunities abound for our players to shine, and with collaboration and support, we can continue to nurture their talent," he said.

He urged stakeholders, sponsors, and the wider community to invest in the sport and help restore hope for these aspiring athletes.

"I urge everyone who believes in the power of table tennis to join hands with us. Together, we can create a brighter future for our young athletes and help them achieve their full potential."

For now, the paddles are packed away, but the fight to keep Zambia's table tennis dreams alive is far from over.

ZWANE EXCITED FOR SUNDOWNS TO TAKE ON THE WORLD

By SuperSport



Mamelodi Sundowns veteran Themba Zwane says the opportunity to take on teams from outside Africa at the Club World Cup is an exciting prospect as the South African champions seek to test themselves.

"Obviously, we are excited as a team and we are excited that we are going to represent Africa as a whole.

"And, yeah, for us as a team, we are excited because of the experience that we are going to get," Zwane said on arrival in the United States where Sundowns are one of four African teams representing the continent in the new-look 32-team tournament.

"It feels great; we just give hope to show other teams that are in Africa that it's doable. Hopefully, next time, we'll have more numbers that will come from the outside to represent Africa.

"The excitement will be amazing. They really love football and the stadiums will be fully packed. And it will be a nice thing for us as players to play on that stage."

Sundowns start their campaign next Tuesday against Ulsan of South Korea in Orlando and then have a

prestige match up with German giants Borussia Dortmund, who last season were runners-up in the Uefa Champions League.

"Obviously, firstly, we are going to watch them – but we have been watching them, and we know that they are a good team. We know that they have good players and we respect them, but we don't fear them. And, yeah, we are going to go there and play our football – try to win the game and match them in terms of the quality and the pace of the game."

Sundowns last game in their group is back in Florida, where they are based, against Brazil's Fluminense.

"Yeah, it's going to be an interesting one, you know. We know they are skilful; we know (that) they know football. They enjoy football: they are happy whenever they play football. So, it's going to be an exciting game, when we meet them.

"Our confidence is high and so far, so good – the team is doing well. We are preparing very well and I think we have enough depth, enough quality to compete in the tournament."

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PACERS BEAT THUNDER TO TAKE LEAD IN NBA FINALS

BY BBC



Tyrese Haliburton praised a team effort from the Indiana Pacers after they beat the Oklahoma City Thunder 116-107 to take a 2-1 lead in the NBA Finals.

Haliburton scored 22 points and made 11 assists and nine rebounds as the Pacers overturned a five-point deficit going into the fourth quarter in game three of the best-of-seven series.

The Pacers bench outscored the Thunder by 49-18, with reserve Benedict Mathurin contributing 27 points at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis.

"So many different guys chipped in," said Haliburton. "Ben Mathurin was amazing off the bench. We just had guys make plays after plays."

Mathurin said: "The main thing is you have to be resilient. You have to be the aggressor in order to win games."

The Pacers, who went into the game after a 123-107 defeat in game two, extended a run of not losing consecutive games since March.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, the NBA's Most Valuable Player, scored 24 points for the Thunder but only three

in the fourth quarter.

Jalen Williams top-scored for the visitors with 26 points, while Chet Holmgren scored 20 points and made 10 rebounds for a Thunder side that gave up 19 turnovers which led to 21 points for the Pacers.

"In the fourth quarter I just thought they really outplayed us on both ends," said Thunder coach Mark Daigneault.

Game four will take place at the same venue at 20:30 local time on Friday (01:30 BST, Saturday).

TRIVIA-BUSTING RABADA JOINS ELITE LORD'S CLUB OF TWO

By BBC



South Africa fast bowler Kagiso Rabada has joined an elite Lord's club of two.

Famously, any player who takes five wickets or scores a century in a Test match has their name etched on to an honours board in gold lettering.

Before the first day of the World Test Championship (WTC) final, only one other Test player in the storied 141-year history of the longer format at Lord's has appeared on the honours board in both the home and away dressing rooms.

That quirky mark of cricket trivia belonged to legendary West Indies

opener Gordon Greenidge.

His knocks of 214 not out and 103 against England in 1984 and 1988 respectively adorn the board in the away dressing room.

But less well known is the fact he is also on the home dressing room for the 122 he made for the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) against the Rest of the World in 1987.

With South Africa allocated the home dressing room for the WTC final at the home of cricket, Rabada's five-wicket haul was enough to see him join Greenidge in the exclusive club.

A piece of sticky batting tape with Rabada's name written on it in pen has been attached to the board for his figures of 5-51, as is the tradition for players during matches. The gold lettering should soon follow.

And with no place for neutral Tests at Lord's on the honours board since they were refurbished in 2018 it may well be stencilled on there permanently.

"It was cool to have it in the home changing room now," said Rabada, whose name is on the board in the away dressing room for the 5-52 he took for his country in a Test against England in 2022.

'GYOKERES WILL NOT LEAVE SPORTING FOR £59M'

By BBC



Sporting have not received an offer for striker Viktor Gyokeres and there is no 'gentleman's agreement' for him to leave for £59m, says club president Frederico Varandas.

Sweden international Gyokeres, 27, has been heavily linked with Manchester United and Arsenal after scoring 97 goals in 102 matches during two seasons in Portugal.

He has a 100m euro (£85m) release clause in his contract.

It has been widely reported that, after staying at Sporting last summer, Gyokeres and Sporting agreed he could leave for 70m euros (£59m) this summer.

However, Varandas said the club's only promise to Gyokeres was that they would not demand his full release clause.

"I can guarantee that Viktor Gyokeres will not leave for 60m euros plus 10m euros because I never promised that," Varandas said.

"To this day Sporting has not had an offer for Gyokeres - neither today nor last season."

Gyokeres spent three seasons with Coventry City in the Championship before joining Sporting under Ruben Amorim.

Manchester City director of football Hugo Viana was sporting director at Sporting last summer, when Gyokeres' agent sought assurances about his leaving if a suitable offer arrived.

"One of the agent's biggest concerns was whether we would demand the termination clause," said Varandas.

"He wanted to guarantee certain things. And what was agreed? That Sporting would not demand a release clause now.

"For one reason: he was going to be 27 years old and no player leaves Portugal at 27 for 100m euros or 90m euros.

"In that same meeting the agent wanted to anchor the exit to a value. I said this sentence: 'It's not worth us setting a value because I don't know what will happen in a year's time. I don't know if it will be 40m euros, 60m euros or 80m euros. What I can guarantee is that I will not demand 100m euros.'"

