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## Battle of the Feet or Fists? A Historical Narrative on Hooliganism in Ghanaian Soccer, 1957 – 2007

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### **Abstract**

*This work recounts, chronologically, acts of vandalism and violence committed by some players, officials and spectators in the game of football (soccer) in the history of the sport in Ghana. The history of sports in general and football in particular has not received much attention by historians and researchers within the historiography of Ghana. It is against this background that this paper, using newspaper publications and interviews, attempts an exposition on the causes and effects of hooliganism in Ghanaian soccer from 1957 to 2007. The paper shows that the beauty of the sport (both locally and on the international scene) had been blighted by acts of hooliganism arising from wide and varied issues including ignorance of the laws governing the sport and corrupt practices among some match officials and administrators which mostly infuriated spectators to cause violence hence destroying properties and causing harm to people.*

### **Background**

The game of soccer, which is commonly called football, is an important sporting activity the world over and Africa and Ghana have not been left out of its attraction. The interest of Ghanaians in football is seen in almost every corner of the country, where people (mainly males) of all ages play the game at backyards, beaches and on street corners. Soccer is a recreational activity that brings people from different backgrounds together and hence nations organise local league matches and cup competitions; continents have continental football tournaments, while the world at large holds periodic world cup tournaments. Apart from serving as a good form of exercise and entertainment for the players involved, football also serves as a strong source of unity amongst players and supporters of competing teams and promotes teamwork amongst players.

## Introduction of Soccer to Ghana

In February, 2015, the world football governing body, the Federation of International Football Associations (FIFA), ranked Ghana the twenty-fifth (25)<sup>1</sup> best footballing nation in the world and third (3<sup>rd</sup>)<sup>2</sup> best in Africa. That enviable position in terms of international football makes Ghana a football nation. It is usually said that the about twenty-five million Ghanaians are all football coaches because they love the sport and seem to have much knowledge on it. The country got that far from a very humble beginning. The sport was introduced into the country by the British. It came with the advent of Europeans to the shores of West Africa.<sup>3</sup> Cape Coast, which was the centre of European activities and then later capital of the Gold Coast colony, was the first place where the game was introduced and it was from there that football, later, got to other towns and cities. The introduction of to Cape Coast was because the city, at the time, had a large European population than anywhere else in the territory. Consequently, these European soldiers, missionaries, traders, explorers, among others, occasionally engaged in the game of football during their leisure times. It is thus not surprising that the first football team to be established in the Gold Coast<sup>4</sup> colony (now Ghana) was in Cape Coast and it was known as Cape Coast Excelsior. It was founded in 1903.<sup>5</sup>

Individuals started coming together to form football clubs in their localities with the spread of the knowledge of the sport to other parts of the Gold Coast. The sport got to Accra in 1909<sup>6</sup> and Kumasi in 1920.<sup>7</sup> Thus on the eve of Ghana's independence in 1957, when the maiden national league was introduced, clubs such as Accra Hearts of Oak, Accra Great Olympics, Accra Stand Fast Arrogant, Cape Coast Vipers and Cape Coast Dwarfs had been formed. Others included Kumasi Asante Kotoko, Sekondi Hassacas, Sekondi Eleven Wise and Kumasi Cornerstone. As the league grew with the passage of time and the sport became more competitive, Ghanaians took exceptional interest in it. Players who excelled in the various teams were eventually selected to form the national team - the Black Stars. The development of the game in the country was rapid and within a short while Ghana became a giant in African and world football competitions. The country's senior national team, the Black Stars, later went on to win the coveted Cup of African Nations trophy on four occasions – in 1963, 1965, 1978 & 1982,<sup>8</sup> and have since participated in the World Cup on three

consecutive times - 2006, 2010 and 2014.<sup>9</sup>

## When the Beautiful Game Turns Ugly

What originally was a sport meant to unite people sometimes turned violent. Violence led to the destruction of property within or outside stadiums and, on some occasions, degenerated into the maiming or death of fans and officials associated with the game. This act of violence which usually caused damage is termed hooliganism.<sup>10</sup> Hooliganism has thus been defined by some as “people taking the law into their own hands and flouting the rule governing a specific sporting activity.”<sup>11</sup> It has also been defined as “anything outside the acceptable norms of cheering and supporting, which has the potential to result in violence.”<sup>12</sup> Although hooliganism is not restricted to soccer, it has always been an important issue in football matches the world over. Hooliganism has been part of the game almost since its inception. In fact, the history of soccer cannot be recounted without making mention of hooliganism. The world's football stage, as well as the continental, national and local football matches have all been marred by acts of supporters' violence. The situation is no different in Europe, where the sport was developed, and on other continents (including Africa) where the game was later introduced. It has been argued that acts of hooliganism are common with contact sports such as rugby and soccer as against sports such as tennis and golf because it is only through such close contact that players or their supporters find reason to be vicious.<sup>13</sup>

The Ghanaian soccer history began having its share of hooliganism from the mid-1920s when competitive football was introduced into the country. These were mainly on the local scene, with a few international incidents. While some of those were alleged to have been sparked by suspicion of bias by referees, others were started by the sheer lack of tolerance amongst supporters of competing teams. Regardless of the ways by which such incidents started, the overall consequence on the teams and sometimes the nation(s) was devastating.

## Violence in Local Matches: 1957 to 2001

Since the days of Governor Gordon Guggisberg, football clubs in the then Gold Coast and what is now Ghana have locked horns in contest for supremacy on soccer fields. While some of the competitions were regular

and national in nature, others were organised to commemorate events or celebrate achievements of some outstanding individuals. Among the football matches which were organised were the Sir Gordon Guggisberg Cup, Spit Fire Trophy, United Nations Peace Cup, SWAG Cup, 31<sup>st</sup> December Cup, AU (African Union) Cup and May Day Cup. Others were the Premier League Championships and the Confederation of African Football (CAF) League matches. The teams involved showed passion, regardless of the nature of the competitions, because the competitions served as opportunities to prove their prowess in the battle of the feet and also to win, importantly, the bragging rights for days on end. Supporters of competing teams also attached equal passion sometimes to the extent of engaging in fisticuffs just to defend their sides. As a result, some of the matches ended abruptly or in violence because supporters either disagreed on issues or were intolerant of their opponents. Other common forms of spectator aggression in the country's stadiums and elsewhere included verbal attacks on members of opposing teams or referees; missile throwing; invasion of the field; destruction of property; kicking; and stabbing. Such acts of hooliganism took place before, during and/or after soccer matches.<sup>14</sup>

The period before 2001 in Ghanaian soccer history witnessed several acts of crowd violence in the stadiums. Many of those acts of hooliganism were between the two football giants in the country at the time, Accra Hearts of Oak and Kumasi Asante Kotoko, although there were others between other minor teams or between either of the two giants and some minor teams. The level of rivalry between Hearts of Oak and Asante Kotoko was strong and similar to situations in other African and European countries. For example the rivalries between Manchester United and Manchester City in England; Barcelona and Real Madrid in Spain; and Inter-Milan and AC Milan in Italy.

On Wednesday August 31, 1966, four footballers were sentenced to six months imprisonment for assaulting a referee in a football match.<sup>15</sup> The four, Kwakye Adjetei; Isaac Kofi Adjei; Moses Hinneh and Oteng Baah,<sup>16</sup> were charged for assaulting referee Appiah Kubi who officiated in a match between Kumasi Cornerstone and Brong Ahafo United at the Kumasi Sports stadium. The accused were, ostensibly, not satisfied with some decisions of the referee and hence resorted to physically abuse him. They

believed that the alleged wrong judgements on the part of the referee were deliberate and that was what resulted in the defeat of their team. The four beat up the referee, mercilessly, and stamped on him, almost to death, on the floor. But for his timely rescue by policemen at the scene, referee Appiah Kubi would have died that day.<sup>17</sup>

As has been indicated earlier, many of the incidents of hooliganism occurred during matches between Hearts of Oak and Asante Kotoko. In as much as it is understandable that the two were dominant in the country and hence matches between them, normally, generated tension as there was much at stake, it was unfortunate that such tension degenerated into chaos. That was the case in many of their encounters, with the degree of hooliganism varying from match to match. In May 1979 the two teams met in a league match in Kumasi and at the end of the match, fifteen people died with dozens others injured.<sup>18</sup> The deaths of spectators were not caused by the usual suspicion of bad officiating by referees. Rather it was triggered by the sheer lack of tolerance on the part of spectators. Supporters of Kotoko, allegedly, could not tolerate jubilation by their opponents who had won the match by a 2-1 score line. As a result, the *Fabulous* fans attacked their *Phobia*<sup>19</sup> opponents with chairs and other missiles leading to a pandemonium in the stadium. A stampede resulting from the confusion made one of the railings on which the fans leaned collapse under the weight of the crowd. Consequently, some supporters who were trapped under the broken railings were trampled upon by others who tried to escape for their dear lives. Among the dead were children between the ages of 10 and 13 years.<sup>20</sup>

This intolerance of home defeat was not peculiar to Asante Kotoko fans since there were several other situations of fans not tolerating defeat in their own backyards. Some teams and their supporters considered their home turfs as “Waterloo”<sup>21</sup> What it meant was that no team should be permitted to go to a “Waterloo” and win or draw. In the example above, it was the home of Kumasi Asante Kotoko and that meant they possibly outnumbered the Hearts supporters, hence the Kotoko fans believed that they (Kotoko fans) could, out of impudence, attack the *Phobians* and get away with it hence resulting in needless and avoidable deaths of spectators.

One cannot lose sight of the contribution of structural defects at the stadium to the high death toll since it was the collapse of the railings that



made people trample on each other. The issue of poor maintenance culture at the various stadiums in the country contributed to some of the ugly sights in the football history of Ghana. On December 4, 1977, 30 fans were injured when the roof of one of the stands at the El-Wak stadium caved in at an international match between Hearts of Oak and Hafía of Guinea.<sup>22</sup> Apart from the fact that some fans suffered near-fatal injuries, the incident was an embarrassment to Ghana since it happened during a continental club match which had media lenses from all over the continent on Ghana. It is imperative to note that if the awkward event had made those in authority take a serious look at maintenance, they could have averted a recurrence of that unpleasant spectacle on May 5, 1978.<sup>23</sup>

It is, however, worth mentioning that the rather unhealthy violence that characterised Ghanaian football in the period mentioned above did not deter the national teams from striving to excel in world and African competitions. An evidence of that was that the senior national team, the Black Stars, won the African Cup of Nations for the third time in March 1978. What made the victory more exciting was the fact that the nation had won the cup on two previous occasions and so the 1978 victory was for keeps.<sup>24</sup> The Black Stars was nicknamed the "Brazilians of African soccer" because of their impressive performance at the competition which was likened to the Brazilian soccer prowess. Among the players of the winning team were Kyenkyenhene, Acquaye, Yawson and Carr.<sup>25</sup>

There was yet another display of intolerance by fans of Asante Kotoko and Accra Hearts of Oak in 1988.<sup>26</sup>irate fans of the teams ran into the inner perimeter of the stadium after the match had ended. The two parties engaged in the throwing of objects against their opponents. Supporters of the home team, Asante Kotoko, accused the referee, G.M. Affizie, of making "controversial" decisions and that made them want to punish him as well as both the supporters and players of Accra Hearts of Oak who benefited from the 'blunders'.<sup>27</sup> In the end, some fans of the away team, together with the referee, sustained various degrees of injury and were sent to hospital for treatment.<sup>28</sup> It must be added that prior to the clash, the Kumasi Sports Stadium had suffered a one year ban because of such acts of indiscipline exhibited by supporters of Asante Kotoko in the previous year.<sup>29</sup>

Eyewitnesses blamed referee G.M. Affizie for the post-match violence. He was accused of awarding a contentious penalty to Hearts of Oak but denied Kotoko of a similar infringement even though its player, Alhassan Yussif, was fouled by a Hearts player in the penalty box.<sup>30</sup> These alleged misjudgements on the part of the referee were not taken kindly to by the supporters of the home team who were convinced that the match would have ended in a win for them and not the 2-2 score line.<sup>31</sup>

One wonders how players and supporters of teams which felt cheated were able to determine which mistakes of referees were deliberately committed to the advantage of the opposing team and which ones were mistakes without malice. It was necessary for supporters to be able to make such distinction even before they took any further actions, if any. It, however, appeared that both players and fans considered every error of referees against them as acts of bias in favour of their opponents and hence their (players and fans) use of violence to cure the mischief. Contemporary soccer history and technological advancements in the game have shown that decisions by officials of the game could not be right at all times because of several genuine challenges they encounter in their attempt to preside over the game. And it was for this and other reasons that FIFA, for instance, introduced the Goal-line Technology<sup>32</sup> in the 2014 World Cup in order to minimise errors that referees committed even at the highest level of competition in the game.<sup>33</sup> The increase in the number of linesmen (Assistant Referees) from two to five was to help centre referees make more accurate judgements.

It is surprising how supporters and sometimes players often take matters into their own hands and meted out what could best be described as instant justice on referees. The only reason that comes to mind is the fact that the football governing bodies, locally and internationally, were unable to do much to correct errors committed by officiating officers in the sport and to give players and supporters confidence in the fairness of matches. For instance, results of matches were not reversed even when post-match reviews revealed that misjudgements on the part of referees or their assistants contributed to the defeat of a team. In Ghana the best pacifier to the defeated team was for the referee who officiated the match to be sanctioned by the Referees' Appointments Committee. It is possible that sanctioning referees was not enough consolation for the vanquished hence

the resort to violence.

### Violence at the International Level: 1950s to 2001

Ghana's diplomatic relations with other countries both in the West African sub-region and beyond have sometimes been marred by acts of indiscipline by some supporters of football. Some acts of hooliganism threatened to cause irreparable damage to Ghana's international relations. Although some acts of hooliganism involving Ghanaian teams in international matches led to irreparable damage to relations on both sides, many supporters could not forego the flitting moments of pain or pleasure in the game of soccer but chose to go the violent way and not worry about the consequences. This resulted in several clashes between supporters of the Black Stars or even local teams (Asante Kotoko, Hearts of Oak, etc.) who played on the international stage.

Players and supporters of the Black Stars were subjected to severe beatings when they played their Nigerian opponents in a World Cup elimination match in Nigeria on February 10, 1973. The two countries were amongst the continent's best footballing nations at the time and the enmity between them was equally great. Hence matches between them were almost always fiercely contested. In fact, ardent supporters of the two teams, most often, sided with whichever team their opponents played against. It was, therefore, not surprising when a crucial World Cup elimination match degenerated into disorder.

The Super Eagles of Nigeria, who played host, took an early lead and scored in the fifteenth minute<sup>34</sup> but the Black Stars equalized and were in the lead by a 3-2 margin almost close to the end of the match. Supporters of the Super Eagles did not take kindly to the fact that they could lose the game and thus vented their disappointment on the supporters and players of the Ghana national team.<sup>35</sup> Stones and bottles were thrown onto the pitch and into the stands where the Ghanaian fans were seated,<sup>36</sup> making the supporters of the Black Stars rush onto the inner perimeter of the stadium to seek refuge. The pandemonium led to the game being brought to an abrupt end with the playing body of the Black Stars escorted from the field by Nigerian security agencies. The volatile nature of the situation, coupled with the possible danger that could be caused to lives and property by the irate Nigerian football-loving supporters, made the then military Governor

of Lagos State, Col. Mobolaji Johnson, personally lead the rescue mission of the Ghanaian players and their supporters.<sup>37</sup> It was during the onslaught that the bus for the Ghanaian supporters was set on fire.<sup>38</sup>

Apart from the fact that some people were injured, property were destroyed and the cordial relations that existed between the two countries was strained because of acts of disorderliness by a few hundreds of people. The incident also gave the two countries and Africa a negative publicity in international media because the episode was given negative publicity by international media houses including the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).<sup>39</sup>

In another incident, some Ghanaian immigrants in the city of Treichville in neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire died while others were injured because of reprisal attack on them by their Ivorian hosts.<sup>40</sup> Others had to run into hiding at the Ghana embassy in Cote d'Ivoire, police stations, factory yards and empty garages for fear of being attacked. Even those who went to seek refuge in police stations were not safe because they were "besieged by a stone-throwing mob who demanded that the police allowed them (the mob) to lynch the fugitives."<sup>41</sup> The youth in other parts of the country stopped buses on the roads and searched them for Ghanaians who were trying to escape from the gruesome killings of their kinsmen.<sup>42</sup> The Ghanaian government had to evacuate some Ghanaians for fear of being harmed in the chaotic situation.<sup>43</sup>

The attacks were because of a football match between ASEC Mimosa of Cote d'Ivoire and Asante Kotoko of Ghana, although it did not start on the football field, which is the usual place where such acts began. The attacks were based on reports by supporters and players of the ASEC team that they were assaulted on their way to and from Ghana for a football match.<sup>44</sup> The ASEC team was earlier in Kumasi to play a crucial African Champion's Cup semi-final match against their Ghanaian opponents but their supporters were not allowed into the stadium. Although the players were allowed into the stadium, it wasn't without some drama. They were allegedly stripped and searched before the start of the game.<sup>45</sup> It was argued that the conduct of the Kotoko supporters resulted in a two-nil defeat of the Ivorian team and hence saw the exit of the latter from the competition.<sup>46</sup> Those reports of maltreatment, obviously infuriated the Ivorian population hence they decided to vent their anger on the Ghanaian populace in their

country. It is worth mentioning that although the Ivorian football authority appealed to the Confederation of African Football (CAF) for punitive measures to be meted out against Kotoko and their supporters, the Ivorian fans, who either could not wait for the appropriate punitive processes to be exhausted or did not have confidence in CAF, resorted to the use of violence and the principle of “an eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth”.

It seems football fans have no regard for the golden rule which admonishes people to do unto others what they want to be done unto them. This is because the very things fans resented and complained about were the exact things they subjected their opponents to, when they felt the tables had turned. The Ivoirians were said to have earlier on denied their Ghanaian opponents (supporters of the Kotoko team) the opportunity to enter the stadium when the first leg of the semi-final match was played in Cote d'Ivoire.<sup>47</sup> The Kotoko team played without the support of their fans and lost by a 3:1 margin.<sup>48</sup> Obviously, reports of that reached Ghana and hence the Ghanaian football-loving population in general and supporters of Kotoko in particular hoped to repay ASEC on the second leg of the competition and that was exactly what they saw through. Unfortunately the Ivoirians suffered from “selective amnesia” when it was their turn to take a dose of their own pill. Probably what infuriated them the most was that by the 2:0 score line in Kumasi, the ASEC team exited the competition. It was possible that if the victory had not guaranteed their exit they would have reacted differently. Instead, a wild mob, armed with knives, clubs and rocks ransacked the province of Treichville in search of Ghanaians to punish for the defeat of their team back in Ghana. According to Joseph Nwaneampek, Counsellor at the Ghanaian Embassy in Abidjan, some Ghanaians were stripped naked and killed with broken bottles by the enraged mob.<sup>49</sup> The furious mob attacked Burkinabe, Guinean and Malian nationals in the country. This thus made ambassadors of those nations call on the Ivorian government to ensure the safety of their residents.<sup>50</sup>

Because of the escalating tension amongst citizens of the two nations, the governments of Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire engaged in high-level discussions to ensure that things did not degenerate any further.<sup>51</sup> The government of Ghana, particularly, was concerned about the safety of Ghanaians in Cote d'Ivoire and hence worked with the Ivorian ambassador in Ghana at restoring calm and finding a lasting solution to the situation.

Even though there was a restoration of some tranquillity between the two nations, subsequent relations between them, especially whenever it came to the game of football, remained frosty. There was always tension whenever the two nations locked horn in football matches, be it at the club level or in international competitions.

In yet another episode of supporter violence, the Confederation of African Football fined the Ghana Football Association (GFA) and imposed a one year home ban on the Accra Sports Stadium in February 2001.<sup>52</sup> The sanction followed violence by supporters of Accra Hearts of Oak against Esperance du Sportive in December 2000.<sup>53</sup> On December 17, 2000, Hearts of Oak played host to Esperance Sportive of Tunisia in their second leg match of the African Champions League final. In the course of the game some angry fans of Hearts pelted members of their team's technical bench and Assistant Referees with stones and other objects. The action of the crowd was in protest to the poor performance of their players which they blamed on the technical bench. The accused the technical bench for not making substitutions which the Hearts team needed. The crowd disorderliness necessitated a quick response by the police to curb the tide.<sup>54</sup> Policemen at the stadium thus fired teargas canisters into spectators and this resulted in mayhem on the playing field and in the stands. Consequently, the match was held-up for close to 18minutes.<sup>55</sup>

By way of punishment, CAF ruled that Hearts of Oak could not use the Accra Stadium for their home matches for a stipulated length of time. The rationale behind the punishment was that the offending team could, for the duration of the punishment, not benefit from the massive support of their home-based fans. This was because the team would have to play their subsequent matches at a venue far from their home and that could deter fans from travelling long distances to support the team. Again, if there were fewer fans of the offending team at the new venue then there was also the possibility that those supporters would be incapacitated from repeating their misconduct. Accordingly, Hearts was directed to use the Kumasi stadium instead, which was the home of their arch-rivals – Asante Kotoko. A fine of \$ 3,000 was also imposed on the GFA for poor organisation of the match.<sup>56</sup> It soon became evident that banning teams from using their home stadiums for home matches was not been punitive enough because it did not deter supporters from engaging in acts of rowdiness in the future. Probably



prosecuting people for criminal misconduct could help deter hooligans from carrying out their trade.

Another difficulty in that form of punishment was that the faceless individuals behind acts of hooliganism are emboldened to continue with their activities since they know they were, personally, not be punished for the illegalities which they engaged in, hence they continued with it whenever they felt it necessary. There were instances when teams were punished because some people who were suspected to have started acts of violence during matches wore colours of the teams.<sup>57</sup> Asante Kotoko was once punished because a supporter who started violence in a match which involved Kotoko was in a red<sup>58</sup> T-shirt.<sup>59</sup> The Ghana Football Association disciplinary Committee based their punishment of Kotoko on the colour of the attire of an individual knowing very well that anyone could have been in red.

Again, overzealousness on the part of police officers at the stadium could be blamed for the mayhem that characterized the football match on the said day. Things may have been better handled if the police were more professional in reacting to the mass indiscipline. This is because shooting teargas canisters into a charged crowd aggravated the level of catastrophe. The crowd, in their attempt to run to safety, stampeded each other and hence resulted in injuries to humans and destruction of seats at the stadium. It was that same poor display of professionalism on the part of the police in their crowd control techniques that resulted in the otherwise avoidable deaths of over a hundred spectators on May, 9<sup>th</sup>, 2001, less than 5 months after the December 17 incident.

### **When Passion Surpassed Reasoning: May 9<sup>th</sup> 2001**

The most unforgettable incident of hooliganism in Ghanaian soccer history over the period under review occurred on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2001. It was a Wednesday and qualifies to be described as the “Black Wednesday” in Ghana soccer. The day began as an ordinary Wednesday with people going about their usual activities. The only major event with regards to sporting activity were the mid-week local league match fixtures. As was the practice, league matches were played on Wednesdays and during the weekends. One of the matches for that day attracted the most interest in the country and that was the match between Kumasi Asante Kotoko and Accra Hearts of Oak.

The meeting of the two adversaries in Ghana soccer was considered as the Ghana version of the Spanish El-Clasico.<sup>60</sup> People closed from work early so they could go to the Accra Sports stadium and watch the high-profile match which was to start at six O'clock p.m.

Supporters of the two football giants flooded the stadium in anticipation of their teams winning. The Kotoko fans were clad in their traditional red-hot apparels with their opponents in their rainbow colours. The referee's whistle blasted for the commencement of the match and the two teams engaged in a fierce battle of the feet. As the match wore on supporters, on the other hand, cheered their teams or booed their opponents as they deemed fit. Both teams were determined to win as none of them was prepared to be the vanquished at the end of the 90 minutes allotted for the match. It was when the Phobia boys, who played home in the encounter, were leading with a 2-1 margin, with just about five minutes to the end of proceedings, that some Kotoko fans started throwing objects onto the field in protest at the score line.<sup>61</sup> The main reason was that they were not satisfied with the score line because they believed that the referee was biased against them.<sup>62</sup> Their argument was that the second goal of the “rainbow boys” should have been disallowed because the Hearts player was in an offside position.<sup>63</sup>

Although the reaction of the Kotoko fans was unhealthy to the beauty of the game of soccer, it was nothing, since the preceding paragraphs have shown that there have been several such incidents in the past. What made the May, 9<sup>th</sup> incident cataclysmic was that the police on duty at the stadium responded to the conduct of the irate fans by shooting teargas into the stands where the supporters were seated.<sup>64</sup> This thus worsened the already chaotic situation as fans engaged in further pandemonium in their attempt to run away from the teargas. Unfortunately for them the gates leading out of the stadium were locked hence the strong stampeded over the weak.<sup>65</sup> The end result was the death of 126 soccer fans, leaving several hundred others with various degrees of injuries.<sup>66</sup> Both the injured and the dead were transported to major hospitals in Accra for treatment or for preservation, as the case was. The victims of the tragedy included men, women and children<sup>67</sup> and it was described as the worst of its kind in Africa.<sup>68</sup>



News of the tragedy surprised Ghanaians everywhere since it was not the expectation of anyone that rivalry between the two clubs could degenerate into such carnage.<sup>69</sup> People from all walks of life besieged major hospitals in Accra to ascertain whether their friends and/or relations were involved in the tragedy. Medical personnel in and around the capital were also asked to go to the hospitals and assist medics and paramedics on duty in the treatment of the injured. There was mourning across the length and breadth of the nation. The Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, cancelled his planned trip to the United States of America and Europe because of the disaster.<sup>70</sup> He decided to call-off his trips because he was and still is the Life Patron of Asante Kotoko Football Club and thus considered it his responsibility to ensure that things were put right. According to the king, "... Both Kotoko and Hearts belong to me therefore any problem confronting them is my problem."<sup>71</sup> He further expressed his sympathy to the injured and his condolence to the families of those who died.<sup>72</sup> The incident also attracted sympathy from people outside Ghana. The President of FIFA expressed shock at the news and described it as a "very sad day for our sport."<sup>73</sup>

The May 9 incident had the potential of having a devastating effect on Africa's bid to host the World's largest football competition, the World Cup tournament. This was because South Africa had just won the bid to host the world cup but the incident in Ghana made some European nations question whether Africa was indeed ready for the World Cup. In fact, it is possible that among the critical indicators of the continent's unpreparedness was the manner in which the police reacted to the crowd. In addition, there were three major acts of hooliganism in Africa within a period of four weeks in the early months of the year 2001, Ghana's being the fourth. Crowd violence in South Africa on April 11 led to the death of 43 fans in Johannesburg; 8 lives in Lubumbashi, DR Congo, on April 29; and 1 life in Ivory Coast on 6<sup>th</sup> May. FIFA and its president, however, did not find it appropriate to deny Africa its turn because of the Ghanaian incident.<sup>74</sup> The spokesperson for FIFA president, Markus Seigler, noted that "...the stadium tragedy in Ghana would have no bearing on Africa staging the World Cup...."<sup>75</sup>

The President of the country, J.A. Kufour, declared a three-day national mourning in memory of the departed. He also instructed that an

inter-faith service be held on the 13<sup>th</sup> of the same month at the State House.<sup>76</sup> The government promised to take the full cost of medical expenses of those who were injured in addition to setting up a committee led by J.H. Mensah to ensure a befitting burial for the dead.<sup>77</sup>

While the country mourned, the general public were outraged by what they described as the lack of professionalism on the part of police personnel present at the stadium on the night of the incident. It was argued that the throwing of teargas into the fans caused supporters to run and hence resulted in the stampede and suffocation. As a result, there was the demand for the people responsible to be held accountable.<sup>78</sup> It was, probably in this light that six police officers were interdicted by the Inspector General of Police for their lack of professionalism which contributed to the deaths<sup>79</sup> and that was one of the rarest occasions when some police officers were to answer for their conduct after a wave of similar unprofessional conducts in the past. The six officers, Assistant Superintendents of Police John AsareNaami, FaakyeKumi, Frank Awuah, Francis Aryee, Benjamin B. Bakomora and Chief Superintendent of Police, KorantengMintah, were arranged before a High Court but were later set free by a seven-member jury.<sup>80</sup>

### Beyond May 9: A People with Short Memory

Apart from the families of the 126 who died and the many others who were injured it appeared the May 9 incident and similar ones in the past did not leave any lasting prints on the minds of many football-loving Ghanaians. It was only when 9<sup>th</sup> of May came and ceremonies were organised in memory of the departed that people remembered that incident in Ghanaian soccer history. Or when people walked past a giant bronze monument erected in front of the Accra Sports Stadium in the memory of the departed that they remembered the tragedy. The researcher makes this argument because there were not much changed in the conduct of supporters since 2001. In fact acts of hooliganism were on the ascendancy after 2001. Referees, allegedly, continued to collect bribes while spectators continued to be intolerant of opponents at the stadiums and hence hurled insults or missiles on them on the field of play. Some fans also continued to use brute means to resolve their suspicions of irregularities on the part of referees or the opposing teams. Consequently there were several other acts

of hooliganism at the nation's stadiums both in local and international matches. The only difference was that those did not degenerate into mass death of supporters. For instance, in just a little over a decade after the calamity there was yet another supporters' stampede in a Hearts-Kotoko match in Kumasi. That incident claimed five lives.<sup>81</sup>

### Who is to Blame?

There were a myriad of factors which accounted for crowd hooliganism at football matches all over the world. While some of the factors were genuine, some others were triggered merely by suspicion instead of reality. Regardless of their cause(s), the effects of such conduct were devastating on the individuals involved, the teams and sometimes the entire nation. Among the causes were neutrality of referees or the lack of it; the conduct or misconduct of spectators; the performance of the player on the field, the role of spirituality (magic) in football, the lack of understanding of the rules of the game by fans, the role of some team officials in inciting fans against referees and the lack of professionalism on the part of the security personnel at football matches.<sup>82</sup> The failure of some supporters to understand that football matches could either end in a win, lose or draw also made supporters of a defeated side resort to violence because all they wanted was a win.<sup>83</sup> But for purposes of this paper only a few would be discussed.

Many of the spectator violence were caused by alleged actions or inactions of referees. Supporters were, most often, provoked to cause mayhem because they detested some judgements of the officiating man at the centre of the field. Most of the acts of hooliganism discussed in the preceding paragraphs started because spectators suspected that a referee was biased in favour of the opponents hence the need to do one of two things; either they verbally or physically attacked the referee or vented their frustration on the supporters of beneficiary opponents in the stands. It was believed that some clubs bribed some referees in order to gain favour from them (the referees).<sup>84</sup> The result of such an arrangement was that the referee failed to be fair in his duty as a neutral umpire and rather did the bidding of one team against the other. Consequently, questionable infringements were awarded in favour of the team that paid the bribe while the opponent was denied opportunities due them. It was, difficult to ascertain whether a referee's unfair officiating was the result of bribes he had collected or were

pure mistakes.

The issue of bribery was a controversial issue in Ghanaian football with referees denying taking bribes, although some coaches, football administrators and owners of teams confessed paying bribes or being asked to pay bribes for matches to be fixed for them. The owner and bankroller of Kumasi-based King Faisal Football Club openly confessed that he paid bribes to referees.<sup>85</sup> Alhaji Karim Grunsaah also noted that the phenomenon was not peculiar to him since other football administrators also engaged in the act.<sup>86</sup> Alhaji Grunsaah's confession and challenge were corroborated by other football administrators who also accused referees of taking bribes. A former Ghanaian international, Tony Yeboah, claimed that his decision to quit football administration in the country was because of the incessant demand for bribes by referees.<sup>87</sup> Tony Yeboah noted that the cost of bribes he had to pay to referees so they could give his team "fair officiating" was too much to bear hence his decision to stop running the team.<sup>88</sup> It is not clear what the football legend referred to as "fair officiating" but it is evident that he admits, tacitly, that he paid bribes to referees. That, thus, is an indication that the issue of corruption in football in Ghana was not a perception but reality although there are some, including the President of the GFA – Kwasi Nyantekyi, who vehemently denied that there was bribery in Ghanaian football. A former referee, however, confessed taking bribes when he officiated matches.<sup>89</sup> He noted that the act of bribing was prevalent in the game but was quick to add that there were some referees who had never been corrupted in the discharge of their duties.<sup>90</sup> Rev. Bofoa intimated that "...referees do not go in search of bribes, it is the management of clubs who bring bribes to referees."<sup>91</sup> He went on to recount a bribery incident which took place during his career. He recounted that:

I remember I once went to the B.A. [the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana] to officiate a match. The home team, which was responsible for my accommodation, housed me in the best hotel in the region. That evening [before the match day] some members of the host team's management came to see me to talk issues and to settle [give bribe] me. As they were about to leave, we heard a knock on the door so we all responded... when the door opened we realised those coming in were some management members of the opposing team. They had also come to do the same [bribe me].<sup>92</sup>

Because of the perception that referees and clubs were engaged in bribery, there was always the suspicion that all blunders committed by referees in their line of duty were deliberately done because they had taken bribes. The result had been to attack referees and players/supporters of the opposing team. While some referees were severely beaten till they collapsed, others were maimed while some others, for example Kwame Kyei Andoh, reportedly died a few days after he had been beaten by angry supporters.<sup>93</sup>

To every sporting activity there are laws and they are to guide the officiating. The rules governing football were vested in a referee who applied them as and when necessary. Some over enthusiastic supporters, sometimes, believed certain rules had been misapplied by referees to the disadvantage of their teams.<sup>94</sup> These suspicions which were sometimes based on the supporters' inadequate knowledge of the rules, triggered acts of hooliganism. Hence although the referee might be right in his rulings a "mis-educated" spectator could incite acts of hooliganism.<sup>95</sup>

The role of security personnel, especially police officers, in sometimes aggravating acts of hooliganism cannot be underestimated. Although they did not deliberately do things that would make supporters go wild, it was their reaction to acts of hooliganism which determine how much havoc hooligans caused to others or to themselves. The May 9<sup>th</sup> 2001 incident at the Accra stadium claimed lives because the police on duty decided to rain teargas on spectators even when those spectators were trapped in parts of the stadium. Such conduct of the police compelled the trapped football fans to engage in what is known as the 'survival of the fittest'. Here they were prepared to do anything to stay alive hence leading to the death of many others.

Some have argued that some acts of hooliganism were meant to ensure that the right thing was done.<sup>96</sup> This normally happened when one side suspected and indeed were right to believe that match officials had been bribed by the opposing team. In such instances, supporters of the team (that had suspicions) engaged in acts of hooliganism before and/or during the match to scare referees so that they (the referees) could not be biased in the discharge of their mandate on the field. In that instance "hooliganism had been used to ensure that the right thing was done".<sup>97</sup> But the researcher is of the view that hooliganism, whether to correct a perceived wrong or carried out under unjustified reasons, was unwarranted and unpardonable

when it involved destruction of anything.

## Conclusion

Hooliganism in Ghanaian soccer history is as old as the introduction of soccer into the country, although the types and levels of violence have differed over the years. The first five decades of Ghana's independence witnessed some unwholesome sights of hooliganism both at the local and international levels of Ghanaian football competitions with some devastating effects on lives and property as well as causing potential threats to diplomatic relations between Ghana and other nations. The highpoint of such acts of vandalism occurred in May 2001. These acts of spectator savagery were sometimes made worse by the lack of professionalism exhibited by security agents stationed at the stadiums to ensure security and safety.

Whatever the causes were and however the situation was handled in the past, it is imperative for administrators of the sport and the nation as a whole to adopt a revolutionary approach in curbing this menace once and for all. Revolutionary in the sense that the sport of soccer has come to stay and hence there should be the tightening of the of the rules governing the game so as to plug some of the loopholes which are occasionally exploited by fans, referees and other stakeholders to cause mayhem. There should also be proper enforcement of the laws and penalties meted out to people who take the laws into their own hands. This would help restore the original beauty of the game. There is also the need to educate players, officials, and fans in the laws of the game and the need for peaceful competitions.

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup>"Ghana moves 12 places up in latest FIFA ranking", [Ghana moves 12 places up in latest FIFA ranking-citifmonline](#), Accessed 2/3/15

<sup>3</sup>Ohene, Djan, *Football in Ghana*, Accra: Gapo Publications, 1980, 4

<sup>4</sup>Gold Coast was the name given to the territory by the Europeans. The name was changed to Ghana at independence in 1957

<sup>5</sup>Ohene Djan, *A Short History of Soccer in Ghana*, Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1964, 3

<sup>6</sup>Djan, *A Short History of Soccer*, 5

- <sup>7</sup>I. O. Amporbeng, *A History of Soccer in Asanti*, Accra: LutuxPrinx, 2003, 4
- <sup>8</sup>“Ghana Record at Africa Nations Cup”, [www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/blackstars/can\\_record.php](http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/blackstars/can_record.php), Accessed 2/3/15
- <sup>9</sup>“Black Stars to play U.S. in first match at World Cup”, [www.ghanafa.org/pages/blackstars/201312/9046.php](http://www.ghanafa.org/pages/blackstars/201312/9046.php), Accessed 2/3/15
- <sup>10</sup>Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ND, 616
- <sup>11</sup>Interview with Godwin Asante Forkuo, Aged 35 years, Programs Manager/Head of Sports, Atlantic FM, Cape Coast. Studios of Atlantic FM, Cape Coast, 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2015
- <sup>12</sup>Interview with Prof. Joseph K. Mintah, Aged 54 Years, Psychologist, Black Stars of Ghana and former Coach of Cape Coast Abusua Dwarfs, Cape Coast, 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2016
- <sup>13</sup>Interview with Dr. Patrick Ofori, Former Psychologist of the Black Stars of Ghana and a lecturer at the University of Cape Coast, Aged 35years, University of Cape Coast, 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2015.
- <sup>14</sup>Forkuo
- <sup>15</sup>“Four Soccer Players Jailed”, Daily Graphic, Thursday September 1, 1966
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid
- <sup>18</sup>Noi, Lartey, “Tragedy at K'si Stadium...15 people die after Hearts-Kotoko Match”, Daily Graphic, Friday May 5, 1979, 1
- <sup>19</sup>Fabulous and Phobia were the popular names of supporters of the two teams, Kotoko and Hearts, respectively.
- <sup>20</sup>Lartey, “Tragedy at K'si Stadium”
- <sup>21</sup>The word Waterloo was used in reference to Napoleon's fateful defeat at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 by a combined force of Prussia and Britain, especially when it appeared he had won several of his previous wars in his quest to rule the world. It was in that context the Waterloo was used in the Ghanaian football parlance in reference to any football pitch or team that appeared to be the nemesis of another team
- <sup>22</sup>Ibid
- <sup>23</sup>Ken Bediako, “Home at Last, African Cup is here for Good”, Daily Graphic, March 20, 1978, 1
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid
- <sup>26</sup>Albert Sam, “Kotoko Fans go Wild Again... they inflict injuries on Referee, Players”, Daily Graphic, Monday May, 1988
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid

- <sup>29</sup>Ibid
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid
- <sup>32</sup>The Goal-line Technology (GLT) is a method used to determine whether the ball has completely crossed the goal line in between the goal-posts and underneath the crossbar with the assistance of electronic devices. It also referees in awarding a goal or not. The GLT must provide a clear indication as to whether the ball has fully crossed the line, and this information will serve to assist the referee in making his final decision.
- <sup>33</sup>Goal Line Technology at Brazil 2014 - FIFA.com, [www.fifa.com/.../news=goal-line-technology-at-brazil-2014-2408684.ht...](http://www.fifa.com/.../news=goal-line-technology-at-brazil-2014-2408684.ht...) (Accessed 4/5/15)
- <sup>34</sup>“Ghana Bus Set Ablaze...as Black Stars Win in Legos”, Daily Graphic, Monday February 12, 1973, 1
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid
- <sup>40</sup>“Ivorian attack Ghanaian: 50 killed, 100 Injured”, Daily Graphic, Wednesday November, 3, 1993, 1
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid
- <sup>43</sup>“Government Delegation visit Returnees”, Daily Graphic, Thursday November 18, 1993, 1
- <sup>44</sup>“Ivorian attack Ghanaian”
- <sup>45</sup>Ibid
- <sup>46</sup>Ibid
- <sup>47</sup>Ibid
- <sup>48</sup>Ibid
- <sup>49</sup>Ibid
- <sup>50</sup>“Government Shows Concern”, Daily Graphic, Wednesday November, 3, 1993, 1
- <sup>51</sup>Ibid
- <sup>52</sup>“CAF Bans Accra Stadium, fins GFA”, Daily Graphic, Monday, February 12, 2001
- <sup>53</sup>Ibid
- <sup>54</sup>Ibid
- <sup>55</sup>Ibid
- <sup>56</sup>Ibid
- <sup>57</sup>Ofori
- <sup>58</sup>It must be noted that red is the traditional colour of Asante Kotoko and hence



most of their supporters usually thronged the stadia clad in red attire.

<sup>59</sup> Ofori

<sup>60</sup> El Clasico is the name given in football to any match between fierce rivals Real Madrid F.C. and F.C Barcelona

<sup>61</sup> Kent Mensah, "May 9, 2001 – When the Beautiful Game became Ugly", [www.goal.com/.../may-9-2001-when-the-beautiful-game-became-ugly](http://www.goal.com/.../may-9-2001-when-the-beautiful-game-became-ugly), (Accessed 1/4/2015)

<sup>62</sup> Charles Benoni Okine & Eric Enchill, "120 Fans perish: It's the Worst National Disaster", Daily Graphic, Thursday May 10, 2001, 1

<sup>63</sup> Forkuo

<sup>64</sup> Okine & Enchill

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

<sup>66</sup> N. Josiah-Arhey, "Death at the Martyrs Stadium", Daily Graphic, Thursday May 16, 2001, 7

<sup>67</sup> Doreen Allotey, "126 Died in Stampede", Times, Friday May 11, 2001, 1

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Freeman Yeboah, "13<sup>th</sup> Year of May 9<sup>th</sup> Disaster Marked", [allsports.com.gh/.../painful-reflection-13th-year-of-may-9th-stadium-disast...](http://allsports.com.gh/.../painful-reflection-13th-year-of-may-9th-stadium-disast...) (Accessed 1/4/2015)

<sup>69</sup> Okine & Enchill

<sup>70</sup> Baffour Opoku, "Otumfuo Cancels Trip Abroad", Times, Friday May 11, 2001, 1

<sup>71</sup> Ibid

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> "Accra Stadium Tragedy...FIFA Shocked...but says it would not affect the Africa bid", Times, Friday May 11, 2001, 8

<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> Ibid

<sup>76</sup> "Government Declared 3 Days of Mourning", Daily Graphic, Friday May 11, 2001, 2

<sup>77</sup> Baffour Opoku, "Nation Goes into Mourning: 3 Days of Mourning; C'ttee to Plan Funeral; C'ttee of Enquiry Set Up", Times, Friday May 11, 2001, 1

<sup>78</sup> Mensah

<sup>79</sup> "The Accra Stadium Disaster, 6 Police Officers Interdicted", Daily Graphic, Friday May 11, 2001, 3

<sup>80</sup> Mensah

<sup>81</sup> Yeboah

<sup>82</sup> Mintah

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Richard Anthony Muntana, Aged 29 years, Sports Department, Kessben FM & TV, Via Phone, March 15, 2015

<sup>84</sup> Mintah

<sup>85</sup> Evans Gyamera-Antwi, "I Bribe Ghana Referees: Alhaji Grunsah Confesses",

[www.goal.com/.../ghana/.../i-bribe-ghana-referees-alhaji-grunsah-confess...](http://www.goal.com/.../ghana/.../i-bribe-ghana-referees-alhaji-grunsah-confess...) (Accessed 10/4/14)

<sup>86</sup> Ibid

<sup>87</sup> "Corrupt Ghana Referees Force Soccer Legend Yeboah to Quit Football", [ghanasportsonline.com/.../2360-corrupt-ghana-referees-forces-soccer-le](http://ghanasportsonline.com/.../2360-corrupt-ghana-referees-forces-soccer-le), (Accessed 10/4/15)

<sup>88</sup> Ibid

<sup>89</sup> Rev. Kwame Nsiah Boafo, in an interview on "Peace Power Sports" on Peace 104.3 FM, 31/05/2016, 7:25a.m.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid

<sup>91</sup> Ibid

<sup>92</sup> Ibid

<sup>93</sup> Ameenu Shardow, "Tragedy: Ghanaian Referee Dies Days after Suffering Severe Beating in a Third Tier League", [www.ghanasoccernet.com/tragedy-ghanaian-referee-dies-days-suffering-...](http://www.ghanasoccernet.com/tragedy-ghanaian-referee-dies-days-suffering-...) (Accessed 10/4/15)

<sup>94</sup> Forkuo

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid

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