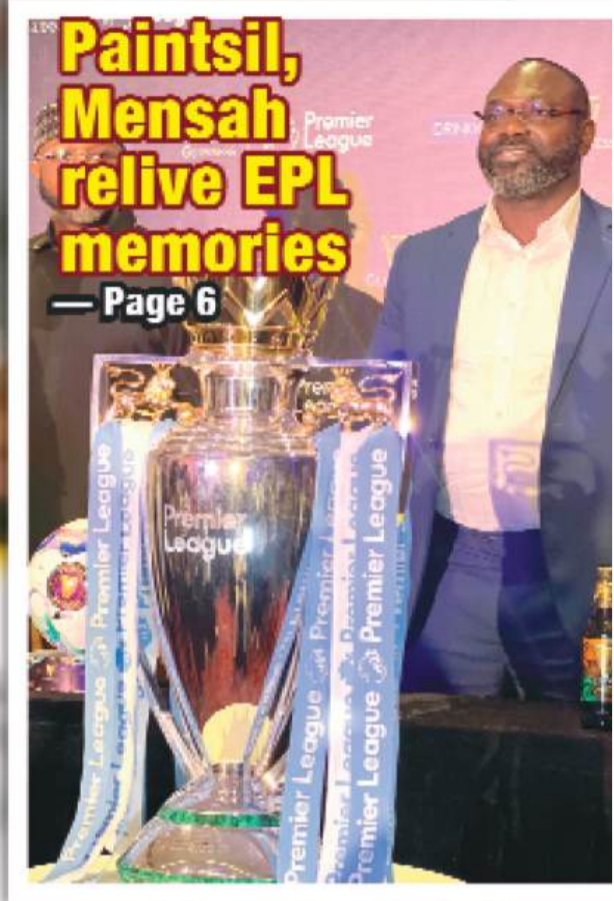




• Skipper Jordan Ayew (right) leads the Black Stars' World Cup campaign



Paintsil, Mensah relive EPL memories — Page 6

Redemption time for Otto, Stars

• Jordan leads troop for World Cup qualifiers



• Coach Otto Addo — Under pressure

Story: Peter Sarbah

GHANA'S Black Stars and their embattled Head Coach, Otto Addo, face a defining moment as they return to action in the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers, knowing that anything short of victory could spell disaster.

On Friday, the Black Stars host Chad at the Accra Sports

Stadium in a must-win clash, knowing that a slip-up could make their hopes of returning to football's grandest stage — the expanded 48-team FIFA World Cup, which offers Africa nine qualification spots — more challenging.

For a team bruised by their shocking failure to qualify for the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) — their first absence from the continental showpiece

in two decades — and a coach walking a tightrope after back-to-back failures, this World Cup campaign is Ghana's last shot at redemption. But for the coach, who has survived the sack, it is much more than just qualification—it is about saving his job and restoring faith in a team that has been in free fall.

Otto Addo, who has
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Voice of

Graphic SPORTS

MONDAY, MARCH 17 — 23, 2025

Black Stars cannot afford another costly slip-up in World Cup quest

GHANA'S Black Stars and their embattled head coach, Otto Addo, stand at a critical crossroads as they resume their 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign. Friday's clash against Chad at the Accra Sports Stadium is not just another fixture—it is a must-win encounter that will determine whether Ghana remains on course for the expanded 48-team tournament in Canada, Mexico, and the USA.

For a nation still reeling from the shock of missing out on the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) for the first time in two decades, failure is not an option. The Black Stars' recent trajectory has been alarming, with back-to-back early exits at the last two AFCON tournaments and a dismal qualification campaign that saw them fail to register a single win. Now, their World Cup quest faces

another test, and Otto Addo, whose tenure has been marred by disappointment, knows his future is at stake.

Ghana currently sit second in Group I with nine points, level with leaders Comoros but trailing on goal difference. However, their abysmal form in recent outings has left fans frustrated and faith in the team at an all-time low. The painful 2-1 defeat to Niger in Accra, which sealed their AFCON elimination, was a stark reminder of how far the team have fallen. A repeat of that disaster against Chad would all but end their World Cup hopes and push Otto Addo closer to the exit door.

The Ghana Football Association (GFA) has responded with sweeping changes, the technical bench in a last-ditch effort to rescue the campaign. Veteran forward Jordan Ayew has been entrusted with the captain's armband, while the GFA has brought in experienced German tactician Wilfried Schäfer and rising Ghanaian coach Desmond Osei as assistant coaches, among other reinforcements.

Yet, while administrative changes provide some optimism, results on the pitch remain the only currency that matters. With their final group fixture against Madagascar in Morocco looming on Monday, Ghana cannot afford to slip up against Group I's bottom-placed side. Chad, rock bottom without a single point, may

not seem a major threat on paper, but complacency could be fatal. The Black Stars have struggled against supposedly weaker opponents in the past, and Chad, with nothing to lose, will be eager to exploit Ghana's vulnerabilities.

Injuries to 12 key players have further complicated Addo's task, limiting his options ahead of this crucial tie. However, the return of Thomas Partey, Antoine Semenyo, and Kamaldeen Sulemana provides a timely boost. Mohammed Kudus, despite an inconsistent club season, remains Ghana's most dangerous playmaker and must be at his best.

This match is not just about securing three points—it is about sending a statement. Ghana must win convincingly, not only to boost morale but to ensure that goal difference does not become a deciding factor in the qualification race.

The pressure on Otto Addo is immense.

Anything less than a dominant victory will invite further scrutiny and increase the pressure on the coach and the team, as missing out on a second successive major tournament would be a catastrophic blow.

For the Graphic Sports, Friday's match is more than a game — it is a fight for redemption. The Black Stars must rise to the occasion or risk plunging further into obscurity.

Howe's transformed Newcastle's search for trophy

IT is November 6, 2021 and a 1-1 draw at Brighton leaves Newcastle second bottom of the Premier League and facing the very-real prospect of a return to the Championship.

Weeks earlier, the club had been taken over by a Saudi Arabian-backed consortium, who talked up the idea of Champions League football and winning trophies.

Despite the optimism among fans about entering a new era, such thoughts seemed a million miles away.

But watching on in the stands that day against the Seagulls was Eddie Howe, Newcastle's soon-to-be-appointed manager who, in just 18 months, would oversee a return to Europe and now has the club a win away from ending their 70-year-wait for a major trophy.

How it all began — the making of Howe.

Howe arrived at Newcastle having done a remarkable job at Bournemouth where, across two spells punctuated by a year at Burnley, he saved them from relegation out of the Football League and then took them all the way to the Premier League.

The Cherries job had been his first as a manager, having been a coach at the club following his retirement from playing at the age of 29 because of a knee injury.

There were two people who hugely influenced the type of manager he wanted to be and would ultimately become — his former Bournemouth boss Sean O'Driscoll and legendary basketball coach John Wooden.

O'Driscoll and Howe crossed paths when the former was still a player at Bournemouth and the latter was 14 and in the club's youth setup.

At that time, they were living in the same village and O'Driscoll would drive the young Howe to training.

O'Driscoll would eventually manage Howe, who became impressed with the former Republic of Ireland international's management style.

"I certainly believe Sean had a huge part in my management style," Howe said.

"I was very lucky, as a young professional, to have such a forward-thinking coach as Sean."

O'Driscoll's football philosophy was based on creativity and possession, while his man-management style was not to shout and criticise players, things that can now be attributed to Howe.

Meanwhile, in his office at Bournemouth, quotes such as "make each day your masterpiece" adorned the walls.

They were from Wooden, considered one of basketball's finest teachers and the other person to have had a significant impact on Howe's thinking after he came across one of his books early into his management career.

Howe was inspired by Wooden's views on getting the best out of players, not treating them all equally but instead as individuals, with their own issues and concerns.

From this, Howe became determined to ensure he would get to know every player individually as a player and as a person and work on improving any weaknesses they had.

'Father figure' who improved players

Howe immediately set about imprinting his methods at Newcastle. His working day would begin at 6am and he would often not finish until late into the evening.

Players' days off were reduced while training sessions were brought forward to an earlier time and became more intense.

"Jonjo Shelvey said that when Howe first came in he would be so tired by the training that he would be in bed by 8pm," BBC Radio Newcastle's Matthew Raisbeck said.

"The players were shattered but he made them fitter, he made them better individually and he made the team better."

Newcastle United defender Dan Burn said that while training was much more intense, he found it enjoyable.

"What I find crazy about the gaffer's training is that we never seem to do the same session twice," he told *BBC Radio 5 Live*.

"He has so many sessions saved and every single day is something completely new. I really enjoy training and it's something I look forward to every day."

According to Burn, Howe quickly instilled an "us against the world" mentality and that, combined with the rapidly improving fitness, resulted in Newcastle's form improving.

Newcastle finished 11th in the Premier League, 14 points clear of the relegation zone after being cut adrift when Howe came in.—BBC



• Eddie Howe — Newcastle manager