

**Athletes take centre stage!**

# Akpokavie charts bold new era at GOC

Story: Kwame Larweh

**G**HANA'S Olympic movement erupted with fresh hope last Saturday as Richard Akpokavie crushed his

rival, Mike Aggrey, to storm into office as the new President of the Ghana Olympic Committee (GOC) — vowing to put athletes, not politics, at the very heart of the Olympic dream.

In a stunning show

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## Voice of Graphic SPORTS

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# Pivotal moment for Ghana's Olympic movement

RICHARD Akpokavie is stepping into the most crucial chapter of Ghana's Olympic movement, having secured a resounding victory in his bid to become the new President of the Ghana Olympic Committee (GOC). His thumping 44-19 win over Mike Aggrey is not just a personal triumph but a decisive mandate for the change that the country's sports ecosystem desperately needs.

Mr Akpokavie's election heralds the dawn of a new era, one where athletes, rather than politics, will be at the heart of Ghana's Olympic aspirations.

The seasoned sports administrator brings a wealth of experience to the table. Having served as GOC Secretary-General and as President of the Ghana

Hockey Association, Akpokavie possesses the institutional knowledge and leadership qualities that are crucial at this pivotal moment. He takes over from Ben Nunoo Mensah, whose leadership saw Ghana through two Olympic cycles. However, with the passing of the baton, it is now Mr Akpokavie's responsibility to take the movement forward, uniting fractured federations and building on the gains made during his predecessor's tenure.

In his victory speech, Mr Akpokavie made it abundantly clear that his focus will be on the athletes. This athlete-first approach is a sharp departure from the politics and infighting that have too often dominated Ghanaian sports. The new GOC chief's promise to make women's welfare a cornerstone of his administration is equally significant. He pledged to create mechanisms that would encourage greater female participation in sports, an area that has long been underrepresented.

But beyond the rhetoric, Mr Akpokavie's vision is clear and practical. He says that sports must be an avenue for youth employment and revenue generation for the state, emphasising that Ghana's sports industry should contribute to the economy as much as it contributes to the nation's pride. This pragmatic approach reflects a broader understanding of sports as an economic engine,

capable of creating jobs and fostering growth. The GOC President's leadership will face its first true test in uniting the various federations that have long struggled with internal disputes. His call for federations to establish Alternative Dispute Resolution structures to resolve conflicts without resorting to legal battles is a crucial first step.

However, as the dust settles from the elections, the advice from Ghana's Minister of Sports and Recreation, Kofi Adams, must serve as food for thought. With the election behind them, it is time for the GOC leadership to work hand-in-hand with both Olympic and non-Olympic sports federations to provide opportunities for young talents. The sports ecosystem must be reset to ensure sustained growth and success.

A key project that must now be completed under Mr Akpokavie's leadership is the Amasaman OlympAfrica Project, a community sports facility that promises to nurture Ghana's next generation of athletes. This project holds immense potential, and its completion must be a top priority.

Mr Akpokavie has been handed a tremendous mandate, and now he must deliver. With the right leadership, vision, and unity, Ghana can rise to its full sporting potential on the global stage.

# Soap opera twists and fatherly love — But what next for Eubank and Benn?

**W**HEN the camera panned to a grinning Chris Eubank Sr stepping out of a black car, you half expected the Eastenders duff-duffs to swiftly follow.

His arrival for his son's bout with Conor Benn last Saturday night was a scene worthy of any soap opera plot twist.

In a sport of fine margins, the reconciliation may just have given his son, Chris Eubank Jr - who said before the fight he had not spoken to his father for years - the edge over Conor Benn in a rivalry steeped in history and drama.

After 12 gruelling back-and-forth rounds at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, the usually composed Eubank fell to his knees when his name was read out as the winner.

Benn welled up, tears masked by a stone-faced expression as he battled the disappointment.

Anyone who has even loosely followed boxing these past two years will be acutely aware how badly both men wanted the win. It all began with a clash of personalities and a bloodline feud inherited from their fathers' iconic duel in the 1990s.

The rivalry was blasted to heights higher than Katy Perry's recent brief space jaunt after Benn failed a drugs test, which led to the cancellation of their scheduled 2022 bout.

And it ended with both men, rather fittingly, in the arms of their legendary fathers.

As an emotional Benn took his defeat with humility, he also struck at what has

been at the heart of a fight that captivated a nation.

"A relationship with your father is special, I'd pick a relationship with my dad over boxing any day," Benn said.

"If this fight brought Chris and his dad together then that's worth its weight in gold."

In the moment, it's all too easy to rave about the spectacle and exceeded expectations.

But is a rematch the best move for the fighters and British boxing?

Or after a two-year doping scandal, unnecessary egg slap and a criticised weight agreement, should we move on from this family feud?

## An orchestrated fight with many conditions

Eubank Sr beat Nigel Benn in 1990 before a contentious draw three years later. But their sons were so far away in weight and experience that, on paper, they never should have shared a ring.

The smaller Benn had operated most of his career at welterweight, whereas former world-title challenger Eubank was a seasoned pro up at middleweight and super-middleweight.

Such was the demand for the match-up, though, a carefully constructed environment was created to make the fight make sense. This is not uncommon in the world of boxing, see Jake Paul v Mike Tyson for further reference.

A rehydration clause limited Eubank from adding more than 10lb on the morning of fight night.



Chris Eubank Sr was at the ringside to support his son

Benn was approved to use firmer horseshair gloves instead of foam padding and an 18ft ring was used instead of the standard 20ft - both of which suited his explosive style.

Eubank was a fighter who, at the back end of his career, struggled to make the 11st 6lb weight limit.

The clip of him in a sweatshirt - in discomfort and pain - trying to shed whatever fat was left on his body was a sorry sight for the sport.

But promoter Hearn feels too much was made of Eubank's weight cut.

"He has made it the last five times but he just messed up, that's it," Hearn said at the post-fight news conference.

"Apart from his dad, no-one ever said 'do you think it's dangerous for Benn to be moving up two divisions and fighting someone the size of Eubank?'"

But regardless of whether you feel Benn or Eubank was at the bigger disadvantage, if so many conditions needed to be met to create a level playing field, should they have been fighting each other in the first place?

— BBC