

Nketiah to get Black Stars debut call-up?



• Eddie Nketiah

Story: Peter Sarbah

Black Stars head coach Otto Addo is likely to hand a debut call-up to England-born Ghanaian striker Eddie Nketiah, as Ghana prepares for the upcoming Unity Cup tournament in the United Kingdom later this month.

The 25-year-old, who recently helped Crystal Palace secure their first-ever domestic cup title with a historic win over Manchester City in the FA Cup, has reportedly declared his readiness to switch international allegiance and represent Ghana, following years of



• Otto Addo — Black Stars coach

being

overlooked by England.

A product of England's youth system, Nketiah who was born to Ghanaian parents, has featured for the Three Lions at U-18, U-19, and U-21 levels.

However, his patience appears to have

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Time to rescue Ghana Premier League from empty stadiums

AS the Ghana Premier League season draws to a close, the Ghana Football Association (GFA) deserves a nod for organising a relatively smooth campaign.

In a season marred by unfortunate events—such as the untimely death of Asante Kotoko supporter, Francis Yaw Frimpong or Pooley—the GFA has managed to keep the league alive and running. That is no small feat.

However, one issue continues to haunt the domestic game: the deafening silence of empty stadiums.

Week after week, matches across the country are

played in front of near-empty stands. Even marquee games involving traditional giants such as Asante Kotoko and Hearts of Oak fail to attract half the capacity of major venues such as the Accra Sports Stadium. This is not just disappointing—it is alarming.

For a league that lacks major sponsorship deals, gate proceeds are not just helpful; they are essential. With fans staying away in droves, clubs are starved of revenue.

Some teams now play to virtually no spectators, raising the fundamental question: how are they surviving?

The blame for this crisis cannot be placed solely on fans. Several factors contribute to this growing apathy. The quality of play often does not match what local audiences see from foreign leagues that dominate television screens.

Adding to that is the poor state of stadium infrastructure, lack of comfort, safety concerns and inadequate playing surfaces, and it's clear the match-day experience is far from appealing.

But perhaps, the most underestimated and neglected factor is marketing. The local game is suffering from an identity crisis. While global football leagues invest millions in branding, promotions and fan engagement, the Ghana Premier League appears invisible in its backyard.

There is no consistent narrative, no sustained campaign and no meaningful effort to make the league a cultural product worth consuming.

It is unacceptable that in 2025, the GFA and clubs have not jointly prioritised the commercial and promotional side of the league. How can we expect fans to show up when they are not even reminded that something worth watching is happening?

Marketing is not a luxury—it is a necessity. Even the most glamorous leagues in Europe rely on it to maintain relevance and attract crowds.

The GFA must learn from these examples and take urgent steps to rebrand the league, partner media outlets, create compelling digital content and re-ignite interest in the domestic game.

If nothing changes, we may soon reach the point where teams routinely play in empty stadiums. The long-term damage to club finances, player morale and the growth of Ghana football would be catastrophic.

It's time for a national football rethink. The local game is not dead—but it is struggling for air. And unless deliberate action is taken to revive it, we risk losing more than just revenue—we risk losing the soul of Ghana football.

How Flick turned Barca's 'young musketeers' into champions

WHEN former Liverpool defender Alan Hansen declared at the start of the 1995-96 Premier League season "You can't win anything with kids", Alex Ferguson's young Manchester United stars went on to prove him wrong.

The Class of '92 won the Premier League and FA Cup Double that season before establishing themselves as one of the best teams in the world - and many are now tipping Barcelona's 'young musketeers' to have a similar impact.

Hansi Flick's - predominantly - young braves were confirmed as La Liga champions with a 2-0 win at Espanyol last Thursday, having already won the Copa del Rey in April.

And the sheer bravado, fearlessness and almost reckless abandon that has taken Flick's side to the Double and has brought the smiles back - not just to Barcelona but to lovers of the beautiful game.

As football fans marvel at the impudent brilliance of Flick's talented youngsters, including 17-year-old Lamine Yamal, 18-year-old Pau Cubarsi and 22-year-old Pedri, some believe they could have a similar impact to Pep Guardiola's all-conquering Barca side from 2008 to 2011. Too much to ask? Only time will tell.

But, with their average age of 25 significantly the lowest in La Liga, financial issues at the club

undoubtedly helped create the necessary platform for the club's youth to shine.

It is easy to forget Barcelona were in dire financial straits. Forget signing big-money players - the club, for a long while, were not even able to register the ones they had.

But it is more than just the harnessing of youthful genius that has brought the good times back to Barcelona.

So how has Flick worked his magic?

When former Bayern Munich and Germany boss Flick arrived at Barcelona, he found a number of players were performing well below expectations.

Experienced stars like Robert Lewandowski, Raphinha and Frenkie de Jong were low in confidence, simply because of the lack of trust they felt they had from their previous coach, Xavi.

Raphinha would rarely play more than 60 minutes before being replaced, while Lewandowski was made to play with his back to goal in a style alien to him.

In addition, none of the three felt particularly welcome at the club with De Jong rightly convinced that Barcelona wanted to sell him to help alleviate their financial plight.

One of the first things Flick did was to tell the three of them how important they were to his plans. This season Lewandowski



Lamine Yamal— One of Barca's youngsters

top scorer with 25 goals, while Raphinha has a league tally of 18.

Flick also sensed an established culture where the club's irrepressible youth was not at the heart of the team, and not given the prominence they believed they merited.

Youngsters had been given their debuts because of financial constraints - and Xavi deserves praise for working under such restrictions - but they wanted more. They wanted to take over the team.

Flick's approach allowed the likes of Gavi, Yamal, Alejandro Balde (21), and Marc Casado (also 21) to do just that. He helped them find their voices, even going as far as allowing them to pick the dressing-room music.

popularity among the team.

He also never allows himself to be influenced by the very powerful and demanding Barcelona media, and has remained honest to his players - an approach severely tested when they lost four games and collected just five points out of a possible 21 before the Christmas break.

'Flick's treatment of Lamine has been done with care'

Flick has had to learn along the way.

With De Jong and Olmo starting, he discovered what he believes is his best XI in that heart-stopping 5-4 win in January against Benfica in the Champions League first phase.

On a crazy night in Lisbon, Flick really discovered the importance of Raphinha who showed how much of a leader he could be to everyone at the club once he had been given his regular place in the side.

He also very soon identified his need for a leader at the back, and saw what he was looking for in Inigo Martinez.

Flick knew he was going to have to ask him to do what he hadn't ever done before in a defensive context, namely marshal an extremely high line.

The 33-year-old Martinez would be the first to admit he is not the quickest player, and has previously always played from a much deeper position. —BBC