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THE FIFA¹ GOALS LANDMARK CONTROVERSY: A CASE FOR RECORDS KEEPING IN INTERNATIONAL SPORTS MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Lionel Messi's record for the most goals scored in a calendar year is being officially challenged by both the Zambian Football Association and by Brazilian side Flamengo. The officially recognized tally by FIFA is Gerd Muller's 40 year record of 85 goals set by the Bayern Munich's striker in 1972 but recently overtaken by the Barcelona superstar. The controversy generated by the foregoing points to a failure to manage records from the point of creation, capture and preservation. It remains a fact that records are created or received in the conduct of business activities and provide evidence and information about those activities. To serve this purpose, records should be authentic, reliable, have integrity and be usable. Manipulation of information is prevalent in the absence of well-managed records. What this saga epitomises is minimal recognition of the value of sports documents. As a consequence, activities such as records management are unfamiliar in many sports organisations and this brings to the fore issues of accountability, transparency and access to information. The controversy generated by this incident might turn out to be a blessing in disguise as it does put archives in the spotlight and it is therefore hoped the profession will be given the long overdue recognition in view of the fact archives as resource centres are in a state of neglect particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Key words

Records keeping, access, preservation, sports archives, records

Reflecting on the saga

It has been in the news of late that the Zambian Football Association is planning to officially challenge Lionel Messi's record for the most goals scored in a calendar year, claiming the Barcelona forward's tally of 88 was beaten in 1972 by Kabwe Warriors striker, the late Godfrey Chitalu who scored 107 goals in 1972. In yet another twist, the Brazilian side Flamengo is also challenging this landmark tally with the claim that the former Brazilian captain Zico scored 89 goals in 1979 (Lionel Messi at the double... 2012). The officially recognized tally by FIFA is Gerd Muller's 40-year record of 85 goals set by the Bayern Munich's striker in 1972 but recently overtaken by the Barcelona superstar.

The controversy generated by the above statistics points to a failure to manage records from the point of creation, capture and preservation. It remains a fact that records are created or received in the conduct of business activities and provide evidence and information about those activities. To serve this purpose, records should be authentic, reliable, have integrity and be usable. It is therefore evident that records are a concern for both institutional and personal records creators.

According to Cox (2001:25), an individual maintains records for generally the same reasons as an organization – to meet the needs of accountability, evidence and corporate memory and this view is also shared by Mnjama (2004), Akotia (2005:4) and Ngulube and Tafor (2006). Personal records are created to capture transactions, document activities, serve legal and administrative functions and provide a basis for memory. They come in all kinds of format and media and

1. The acronym stands for International Federation of Association Football and its mission is to reach out and touch the world, using football as a symbol of hope and integration (FIFA 2012).

McKemmish, Piggott, Reed and Upward (2005:iii) rightly stated that there is no area of human activity not shaped in the most fundamental ways by the archival storage of information, and no continuing form of culture or community is possible without it.

Commenting on the importance of documentation in any area of human activity, Sjoblom (2009:2) noted that:

There is often also minimal recognition of the value of sports documents. As a further consequence, there is no well-structured plan for what is worth preserving, and activities such as records management and appraisal are unfamiliar in many sports organisations --- the lack of a proper archiving scheme can also result in documents being lost or destroyed purely unintentionally, or because of lack of expertise.

It is therefore quite interesting that the Zambian Football Association has commissioned an independent team to interrogate the documentation in the archives and record minute-by-minute each of the goals scored by Godfrey Chitalu. Millar (2010) correctly noted that archives help us remember the past and that they safeguard us against inaccurate recollections. Without taking anything away from Godfrey Chitalu, the fact that he won Zambia's player of the year award five times could be enough ammunition to support this goal tally claim but then, is there conclusive and verifiable evidence to support this assertion? Football analysts on ESPN SoccerNet Press Pass (2012) seem to give credit to the Zambian legend provided the documentation is verifiable and as noted by Colin Udoh, a Nigerian football analyst, this appears a mammoth task in view of the fact that save for South Africa, mistakenly though, records keeping is not that spot on or meticulous in Africa.

In consequence, two issues come to the fore namely whether there was proper documentation that time as earlier pointed out and whether that written documentation was properly preserved in the archives and adequate measures taken to ensure its accessibility in the long term. Three decades down the line might not be far off but interrogating that evidence, assuming that it is there, and that it is authentic, reliable, usable, has integrity and is reproducible appears a herculean task as it will put to test the credibility of the sources.

To compound the problem is a fact that in sub-Saharan Africa, there is no centralized sports archives administration as the archives of major sports organisations are in the custody of the national archives, in some cases even the national libraries.

A survey conducted by Mnjama in 2005 on the state of archival institutions in ESARBICA² region revealed that many of these institutions are faced with many challenges ranging from inadequate funding, lack of training, poor storage facilities, ineffective and outdated archival legislation, shortage of qualified competent staff and challenges brought about by the onset of modern ICTs. Sjoblom (2009) poignantly commented that whilst the situation of sports archives worldwide is gradually showing signs of improvement, at national level there are still huge differences and much needs to be done in order to minimise the risks of valuable material being destroyed.

2. The East and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) was established in 1969, in Kenya and is the regional arm of the International Council on Archives (ICA). It brings together individuals and institutions concerned with the creation, use, preservation and management of recorded information in Eastern and Southern Africa. It is made up of seventeen member states namely; Angola, Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, South Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zanzibar and Zimbabwe (ESARBICA 2012). The mission of ESARBICA is the advancement of archives through regional co-operation.

Secondly, the timing of the appeal by the Zambian Football Association only serves to reignite the Euro-centric and Afro-centric debates on sensitive issues pertaining to the African continent, in this case the race issue. The *Guardian* (2012) quoted a Zambian Football Association spokesperson to have preposterously commented that:

We will then send that (the evidence gathered) to CAF [Confederation of African Football] and FIFA so that we can show that, while Messi's record is there, while Müller's record is there, the actual record holder in terms of goals per calendar year is actually an African. It's actually Godfrey Chitalu (Lionel Messi at the double... 2012).

It is my view that Müller's record should have been challenged earlier to set the record straight considering that football is supposed to unite nations and this polarization is unnecessary as it comes in the wake of some unsavoury incidents in the game of football of late bordering on racism. On the other hand, the Confederation of Africa Football (CAF) and the Zambian Football Association both need to put their houses in order in as far as professional documentation management is concerned and this is the point from an Afro-centric standpoint that Chitakasha (2012) seems to be putting across when he states that: "Records should be kept especially of African achievements; otherwise we will forever be celebrating other people's records". Chitakasha's views were also shared by Kwenaita (2012) who pointed that: "When something good comes out of Africa, it is downplayed".

Commenting on the same issue, the legendary Zambian commentator Dennis Liwewe (2012) echoes similar statements but brings another dimension to the whole saga by making a startling revelation:

Following the tragic plane crash in 1993 that led to the decimation of the entire Zambian team including the man at the centre of this debate, Godfrey Chitalo, who was the then Zambian coach, FIFA visited Zambia for the profiles of the players and Chitalo's goal scoring prowess record was documented in his biography given to FIFA.

This assertion might prove to be a breakthrough provided FIFA owns up to this damning "allegation" from a governance perspective but at the same time, Liwewe (2012) appears to contradict himself by admitting that when Chitalo scored the 107 goals in 1972, there were no records at that time from an African perspective and he goes further to draw parallels with the build-up to the staging of the 2010 World Cup in Africa that had racial overtones.

It therefore follows that for CAF and FIFA to have missed this opportunity to put the record straight is enough justification to understand the Zambian concern and hopefully the commission comes up with tangible evidence to prove this case that has seismically shaken the global sporting arena. At the same time, this saga calls for research into the records management practices of these organizations to ascertain the levels of professionalism in terms of records keeping standards. On the other hand, the controversy generated by this incident might turn out to be a blessing in disguise as it does put archives in the spotlight and it is therefore hoped the profession will be given the long overdue recognition in view of the fact archives as resource centres are in a state of neglect particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

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