

**Review of Dosunmu and Robinson's
*The African Game***

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To celebrate the 2006 Africa Cup of Nations in Cairo and the 2006 World Cup in Germany, filmmaker and photographer Andrew Dosunmu and writer Knox Robinson joined forces with PUMA North America to create *The African Game*, a pictorial representation of soccer in Africa. Focusing specifically on the national powerhouses of Senegal, Cameroon, Egypt, and Ghana, they have created a sort of evolution of emotion, from the anticipation of upcoming matches, the excitement of the competition, and the sensations experienced regardless of the result.

Beginning with Senegal, photos highlight the all-encompassing love for the sport and the national team. Pictures of streets in Senegal show a myriad of individuals from a woman carrying a Puma bag on her head, a fan wearing El Hadji Ousseynou Diouf's national team jersey juxtaposed with women wearing traditional clothing, children wearing the jerseys of their favorite national team member playing soccer on a dirt pitch. There are stadium shots, with fans cheering on their national team, so tightly packed into the stadium, it is a wonder there is still room for air. For those not attending the match, they crowd around their TV, their walls covered with pictures of Diouf and Senegalese hip hop stars. In the write-up on soccer in Senegal, the authors examine the difference between playing for club and the national team: one has meaning while the other is a job because playing for nation means more than playing for self. Inexplicably, however, the authors then spend more than half of their time

focusing on Senegalese superstar Diouf. Their devotion to Diouf seemingly contradicts the all-for-one national team spirit they make great effort to illustrate.

Moving along the coast, the next section stops in Cameroon. Here, the authors do a much better job of explaining the Cameroon relationship with its national team. They discuss the emergence of music videos created by fans in support of the Indomitable Lions, using local music instruments. They offer a quick history of Cameroon's accomplishments, highlighting 1990's World Cup quarterfinals appearance and Olympic gold medal in 2000. Robinson recaps the Cameroon's World Cup qualifying match against Egypt, the painful defeat, and the subsequent tension between Cameroonian superstars Samuel Eto'o and Pierre Wome, the latter having missed a penalty shot that would have sent Cameroon to the World Cup. The most poignant piece of the story was the fan who rushed onto the field after the match in Yaounde yelling "Cameroon is dead" and then took his life by slitting his throat. In this story, you begin to understand how deeply soccer runs in the blood of the people of Cameroon. *The African Game* would certainly have benefited from more personal stories and insights into the people's feelings for their country, their team, victory, and defeat. The strongest photos are those of stadiums and fans who have painted their faces (for some, their entire bodies) to show their undying support for their team. For example, the Cameroon section has a photo patchwork from the Cameroon-Egypt match. From the faces of fans of all ages, these photos demonstrate what was otherwise incommunicable: that their Lions did not triumph and would not demonstrate their strength on the international stage of the 2006 World Cup. Other photos highlight a team training on the beach, with the progression ending

with the team gathered around their trophy. The trophy's significance is of no real importance to the reader. The message is in their faces, their joy, the glimmer in their eyes that only the team as a whole can fully understand.

Unfortunately, however, these styles of photos are not the standard. While all the pictures certainly tell a beautiful story, many of them seem out of place and from any moment in time or a good opportunity to highlight a Puma product. The sexualized images of two women at a bar certainly do not seem to tell the story of *The African Game*.

The next sections, which are much smaller, highlight Ghana's and Egypt's runs in the Africa Cup of Nations. The lesser time devoted to Ghana and Egypt is most likely because of the widely accepted belief that both Senegal and Cameroon would qualify for the World Cup. In reality, Ghana was the most successful African team at the World Cup, advancing to the Round of 16 and Egypt won the Africa Cup of Nations. The Ghanaian section focuses on the team itself, showcasing a team photo with a number of individual player shots. Notably absent was Ghanaian midfielder Michael Essien, arguably the foundation of Ghana's national team and one of the best players in the world. Photos representing the Egyptian game focused on the streets of Cairo, TVs tuned to Egypt's matches, and another beautiful photo patchwork of Egyptian fans.

In the conclusion, Robinson comments on the racism in European football and the increasing Africanization of the professional leagues there. Two of Europe's most dominant players, Eto'o and Didier Drogba of Ivory Coast, are shown in the parting shots while being rushed by adoring fans. He comments on what he sees as the definitive moments in African soccer: Nigeria's

Olympic gold in 1996 and Cameroon's gold in 2000. He recounts his experience during the Ivory Coast-Morocco match and the Italian flags Ivorian fans were waving, most likely because they were the closest equivalent to the Ivorian flag that could be found in Cairo. Despite the defeat, he writes of the welcome home celebration the national team received. Although they lost to Morocco, the stadium was filled beyond capacity and the crowd went wild for their team, which was equally grateful to their faithful.

Logistically, there are a few issues. There are no names listed on any of the photos. In order to identify the members of the various national teams highlighted in *The African Game*, a list is included in the back of the book with page number and name. However, there are no pages numbers printed anywhere in the book. Perhaps anonymity was the goal because, as discussed earlier, they sometimes believe the team is larger than any individual. Although as an interested reader, it was frustrating not being able to put a name to the face. Despite these issues, Dosunmu's talent is clear and Robinson's appreciation of the game is obvious.

So then, what is the African game? Robinson writes that "To understand the African game means approaching Africa on its own terms . . ." Unfortunately, to speak in such cliché does a disservice to the high level of play African teams have and continue to produce while also creating that homogenous Africa that many have worked to deconstruct. I was hoping that the conclusion would be that there is actually no answer to that question but I am still unsure what Robinson and Dosunmu's response would be. I would like to believe that if they were to define the "African game," they would rethink their use of Puma product placement and let the people

in the photos do the talking. As one who understands funding issues, it remains a disappointment nonetheless. The African game should not create another opportunity for commercialization of sport but rather an appreciation for the unity it can and does create.

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