

# Love of Sport a Heritage from the British

By PETER CHUKWUMA OSUGO

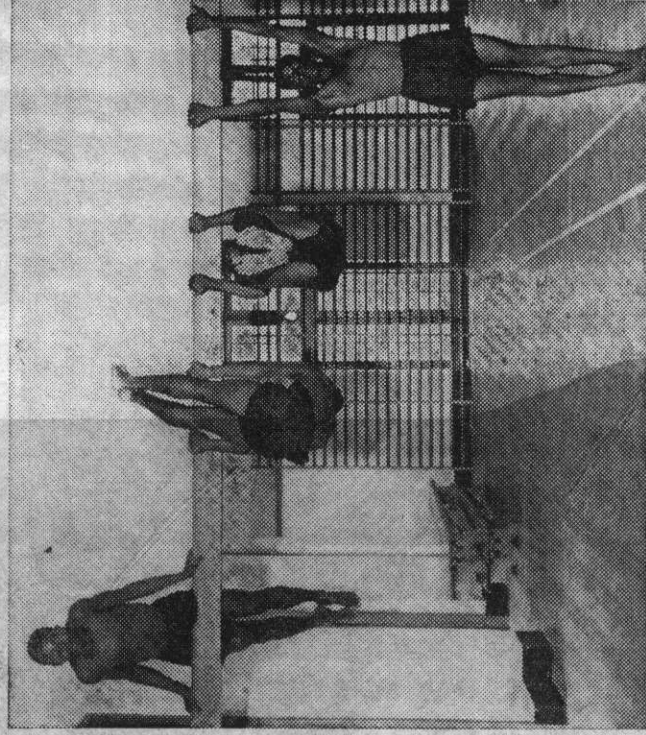
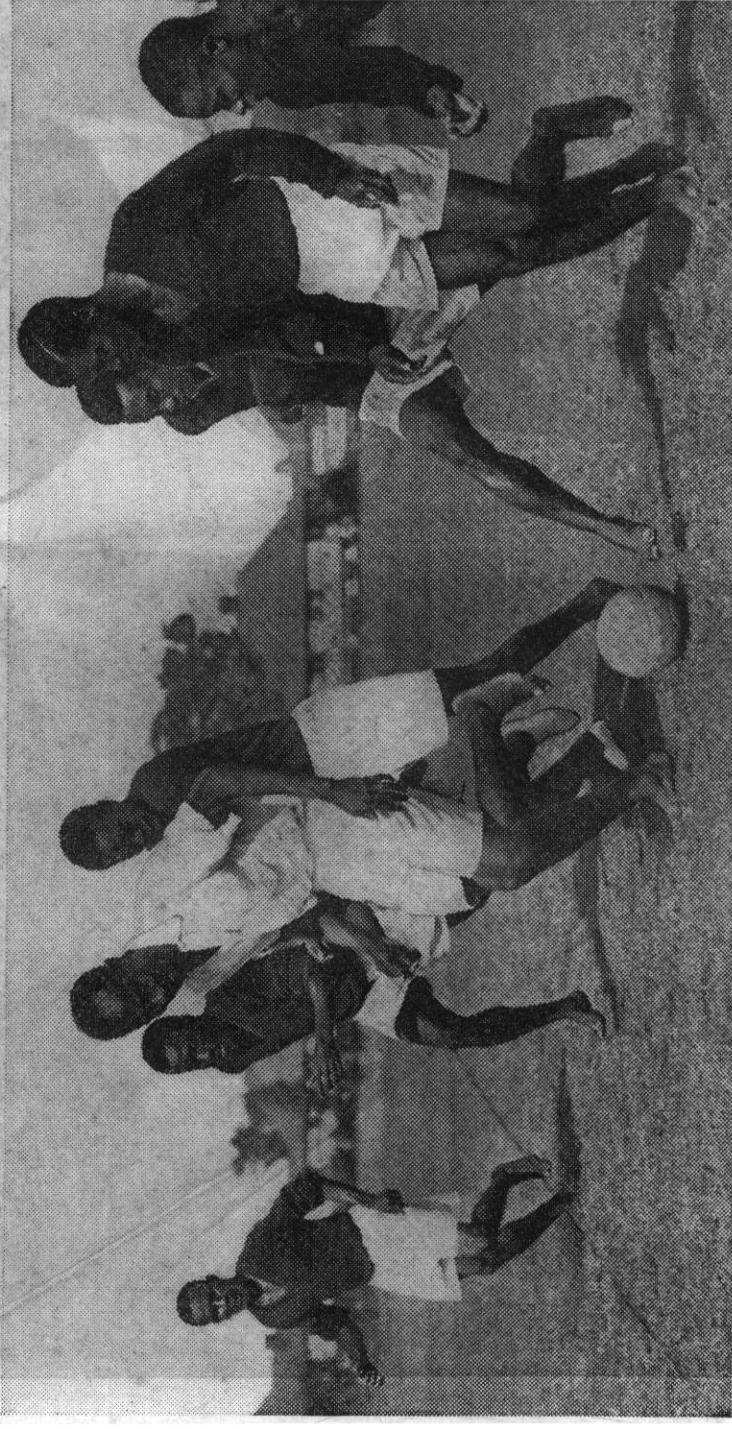
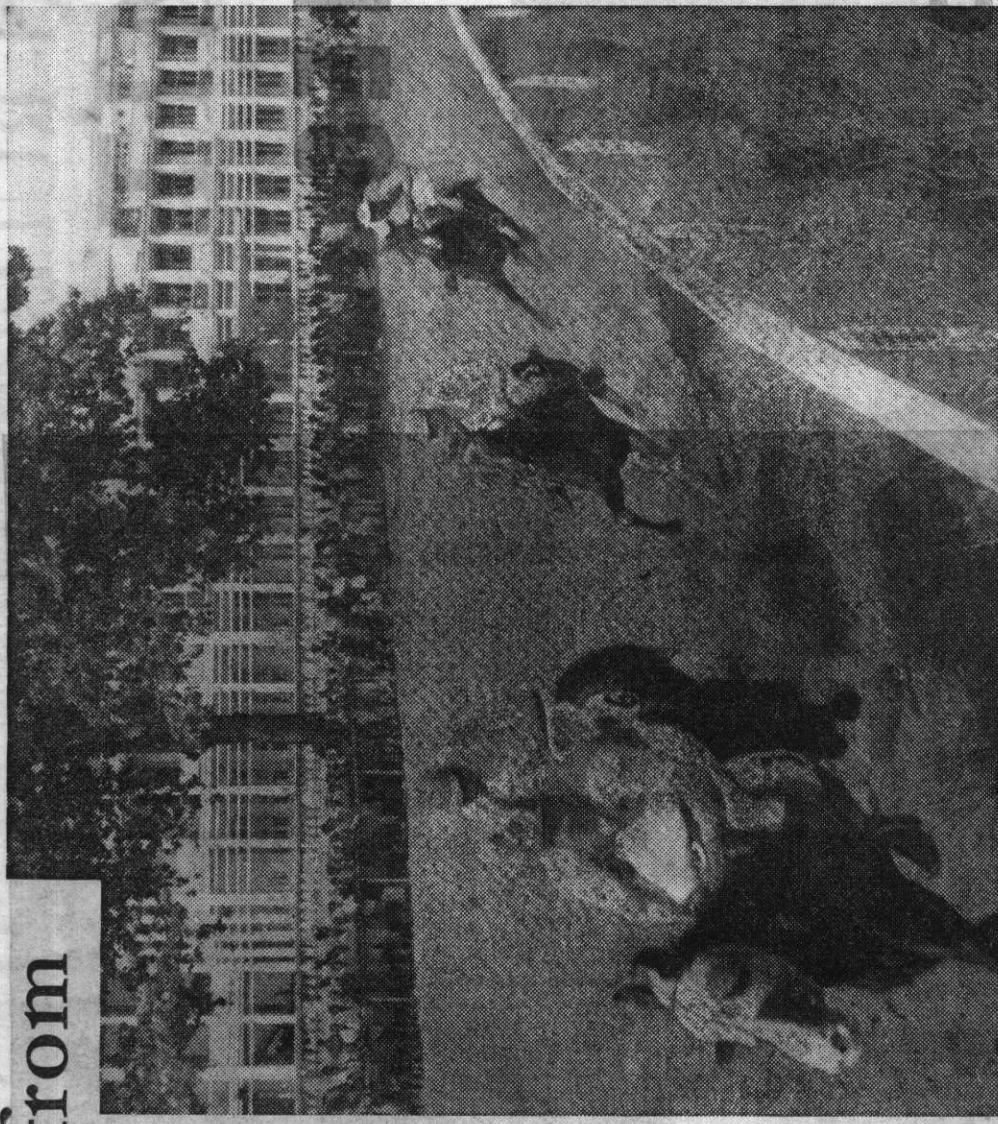
SPORT, as we know it today in Nigeria, has become part and parcel of the general phase of the country's development. Naturally, the bulk of the major sports has come to us as a heritage from the British. Behind this modern setting, there are scattered around the rural communities indigenous sports like wrestling, swimming, hunting, archery and angling. But, apart from the physical satisfaction by participants in these sports, they hardly stimulate interest and are not in any sense organized.

So when we talk of sport in Nigeria, we think immediately of association football, track and field athletics, boxing (amateur and professional), lawn tennis, table tennis, horse racing, hockey and cricket. Even these are still in the experimental stages, although, gradually, Nigeria has been making reasonable impact on world athletics and boxing.

Pride of place in Nigerian sports goes to football, which is today being played in almost every hamlet. So enthusiastic



A bout in progress during the Lagos Amateur Boxing Championships. Right: Race day at Lagos, a great day for the Hausa horsemen of the north.



Members of the Nigerian football team that toured England in 1949 at practice; they played matches with leading amateur clubs. Right: Students in the gym at Warri college.

are Nigerians that in far remote areas a piece of orange fruit or grape serves well the children until some good friend comes along to make them a gift of a tennis ball or an unburstable ball.

In towns and cities the contrary is the case. Although football was played in the early twentieth century in a few areas in the country, nationally organized football in Nigeria can be said to be 82 years behind English football. The formation of the Nigeria Football Association with a borrowed constitution

and athletics. Amateur boxing grew in recent years out of the need to harness the potential in the country. From the early thirties until now, professional boxing has never come handy as a means of making money, but rather was a medium of expressing the boisterousness of youth. There were days when boxers received £5 for a championship fight and a promoter had to turn to loans after a show to meet the expenses. Even the exodus of boxers

to Leona. There is no doubt that the vastness of Ghana and sometimes against Sierra Leone. Positive support for sports by the Federal Government is still slow although there is an annual subvention, shared by about eight associations

and table tennis sets. Moreover, the response of the public does not seem to prompt expansive and bold programmes. But the talent is there even in new sports like rugby and basketball, where the Army are grooming quite a number of Nigerian players. So far, Nigeria's outside engagements in these sports are confined to annual contests against

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