

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 capital of £200 in 1945 set the wheel of soccer revolving. Simultaneously, the introduction of the Governor's Cup football competition, which is today the Challenge Cup—the nearest thing to the F.A. Cup—sustained the new idea of league and knockout football competitions. From the meagre number of 32 in 1950, affiliated clubs to the Nigeria Football Association (N.F.A.) rose to 74 in 1958. Today no fewer than 90 affiliated clubs participate in this cup competition, which has grown in influence and significance.

#### MORE MATCHES ABROAD

Ideas grew fast, and the N.F.A. began to think in terms of internationalism. Before 1949 outside engagements were confined to the neighbouring territories of former French Togoland and Dahomey and the former Gold Coast. But in that year Nigerian football moved as far as Sierra Leone and also made its first impact in the United Kingdom when a touring party played nine matches there, winning two, drawing two and losing five.

After this tour, the N.F.A. had to face the stark fact of our low standard in soccer. The idea of securing professionally qualified coaches was put into practice in 1957 and today there are three foreign coaches and two Nigerian football coaches. The visit to Nigeria of the great English footballer, Stanley Matthews, stimulated further interest. Another visit, the following year, by an English touring party—a mixture of amateurs and professionals—further boosted the game, even though the tourists won four of their five matches, the last being abandoned because of rain.

The way to world soccer was now open as exchange visits with other countries became the order of the day. Nigeria entered the Olympic football tournament and did not go beyond the preliminary round. And this year Nigeria entered in the World Cup tournament, grouped with Ghana, Sudan, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Wales and Spain. But she was stopped in the preliminaries again, losing to Ghana, who beat her 4-1 away and drew 2-2 at home.

#### ENCOURAGING ATHLETES

Next in popularity are track and field athletics. Here, again, facilities are lacking. There are no coaches available, except a number of physical education instructors, who do not serve the needs of modern athletics. Only the occasional short visits by reputed world athletes like the West Indians Arthur Wint and McDonald Bailey, the Americans Malvin Whitfield and the former world-retained hurdler Jack Davis and the American coach Gilbert Crutier—all of whom conducted coaching courses during their tours—have tended to inspire the athletes. Apart from these, Nigerian athletes have had to depend solely on their natural talent.

To think that organized athletics are only 16 years old and to equate this with the progress made is a healthy sign of future growth. In this short span,

Commonwealth Games in Auckland, New Zealand, where 13 nations competed, a small Nigerian team of four won a silver medal in the high jump.

In 1954, at the Vancouver Games, where 26 countries vied for honours in track, field and the ring, Nigeria's team of 13 won 11 medals, one of which was a gold in the high jump, and gained two Commonwealth records—in the high jump, where Emmanuel Ifeajuna (a Helms Trophy winner) cleared 6ft. 8in., and the sprint relay, where the Nigerian quartet shared the record-breaking time of 41.9sec. with the Canadian quartet. Nigerian sprinters have proved their quality once again when the Nigerian quartet clocked 40.1sec. while coming second to the United States in the semi-final of the 400 metres relay in this year's Olympics, beating Venezuela and Britain to third and fourth places respectively, but they were disqualified. In the Cardiff Games in 1958 the Nigerian team won two medals—a silver in the sprint relay and a bronze in boxing.

The natural ability of Nigerian athletes in some events cannot be doubted. The height of 6ft. 6in. in the high jump is commonplace and two athletes have in the past five years beaten 6ft. 9in. In the sprints also, Nigerians are not far from world standards. What they need is some sharpening in modern techniques. Boxing as a sport in Nigeria is faced with the same difficulties as football

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 the United Kingdom in the fifties, which eventually brought Hogan Bassey fame and the world featherweight title, were mainly prompted by the spirit of adventure rather than by the financial gains.

#### FEW RACE TRACKS

Popularity of horse racing in Nigeria, as everywhere in the world, is principally helped by the gambling urge. But the breed of horses and their performances are nothing compared to those of other horse-racing countries. Bookmakers exist on a small scale; race tracks are few; and except in Lagos, the capital city of the Federation of Nigeria, no totalisator or photo-finish is used. Dividends on 5s. tote tickets are sometimes fantastic. That may have helped to sustain interest and to compensate in a small measure the low prize money.

While the same difficulties of lack of facilities and coaching confront games like cricket, hockey, table tennis and lawn tennis, there is an added setback because these games are expensive. Because of low income the average Nigerian interested in any of these games gets frustrated because he cannot keep up with the recurring expenses of rackets, hockey sticks, cricket bats

confined to annual contests against Ghana and sometimes against Sierra Leone.

There is no doubt that the vastness of the country makes the spread of sport rather slow. But the preparedness of Nigerians to learn quickly and their enthusiasm for outdoor games hold great promise. Gates of more than £3,000 have been recorded at big football matches and public appeals for funds in the cause of sport have received strong support.

With the building of the Liberty Stadium in Ibadan, capital of Western Nigeria, the National Stadium in Lagos, at enormous cost, the reconstruction of the Enugu Stadium in Enugu, capital of Eastern Nigeria, and one shortly to be built in Northern Nigeria, great changes await sport. These schemes and the Independence celebrations have prompted the first West African Games, patterned after the Pan-American Games, the Asian Games and, of course, the Commonwealth and Olympic Games, with its own novelties and innovations. They will be held in Lagos in October. There is also to be a post-Games match between a West African athletic team and an overseas Olympic team, drawn from teams of United States, West Indies, Britain and Australia, most of the athletes medal winners in this year's Olympics. Already, in the East and West, a Sports Commission and Sports Council

Positive support for sports by the Federal Government is still slow although there is an annual subvention, shared by about eight associations, affiliated to the central amateur organization, which is coordinating all amateur sports—the Nigeria Olympic and British Empire and Commonwealth Games Association.

#### GHANA'S CHALLENGE

There are two schools of thought on Government support to sports. One feels that sport should be strictly amateur, free from financial ties with the Government and outside its control; the other thinks that to sharpen efficiency and to keep abreast of sport in other parts of the world the Government should come out boldly and finance it. The challenge of the neighbouring Republic of Ghana, which has now adopted the eastern European system, has stepped up the controversy. A recent statement by the Prime Minister to the effect that when Nigeria starts moving in the world of sports "she will overtake many" seems to offer a ray of hope. But it is pretty certain that no sporting organizations in Nigeria can, in the next 20 years, afford to build stadiums, gymnasiums, and boxing arenas and then maintain qualified professional coaches.

## HOGAN BASSEY: FROM CHAMPION TO OLYMPIC COACH

By A Special Correspondent

**I**N Nigeria, it is said, sport, and in particular boxing, comes second only to politics as a national occupation. It is thus not surprising that Hogan Bassey, who in 1955 won the world featherweight championship and has recently, as coach to the Nigerian Amateur Boxing

Association, been training the Nigerian Olympic team, is regarded throughout the country as a very favourite son. He is one of the few Nigerians so far to have had a taste of international fame, and his modesty and cheerfulness have made him a welcome visitor in overseas countries in a period when Nigeria had no official ambassadorial representation.

Outside Nigeria Bassey has been given the nickname "Kid". Inside the country he is more frequently known as "Killer" and "King". Bassey. He was born, 28 years ago, at Calabar, in Eastern Nigeria, one of a family of five. He has always been physically small. It was speed, hard work and shrewdness that won for him both the world and British Empire



Hogan Bassey and his wife display his M.B.E., awarded in the New Year Honours of 1958, for services to sport in the Eastern Region.

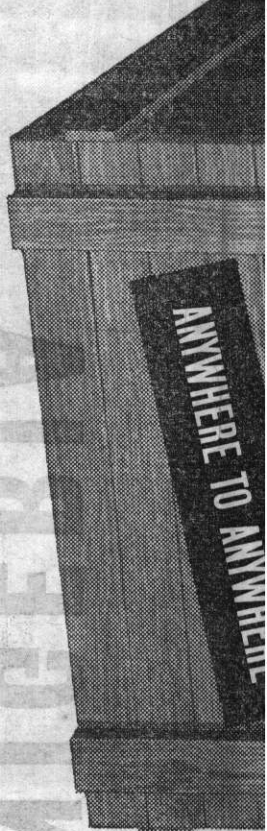
titles. He took up professional fighting in 1949, and left it with some reluctance 10 years later after he had lost his title to the American Davey Moore and failed to regain it. He regrets not having kept the world title for Nigeria's independence, but has had to work hard to bring his Olympic team into shape. Though none of them reached the quarter-finals, Young got through to the third round of the fly-weight competition and three others survived the preliminaries. Nigeria's future boxers should at least not be lacking in confidence. The experience, and the prospect of another four years of Bassey's coaching, promises better things for the 1964 games in Tokyo.

Allied to the determination that made him defy his mother's wishes and take up boxing, Bassey has always had great assurance. In the past it has sometimes lost him a fight, because he has relaxed too soon and an apparently conquered



Hogan "Kid" Bassey, the first Nigerian to win a world boxing title.

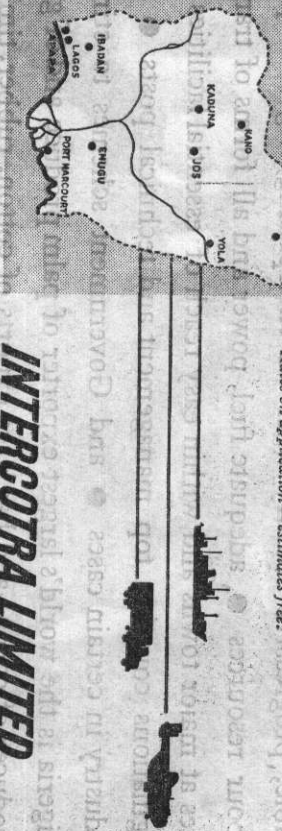
opponent has fought back because he has been allowed to. Now, as national coach and national hero, Bassey needs to instill some of the same confidence to the rapidly growing team of Nigerian sportsmen, but confidence tempered with wisdom drawn from the lessons of his own career.



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