

LOBI STARS FOOTBALL CLUB OF MAKURDI AT THIRTY-FIVE: HISTORICISING THE PROS AND CONS

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Abstract

Football which is also known as soccer is a source of leisure and entertainment. Leisure and entertainment are among the most critical aspects of any society, the world over. However, this area of social history has been grossly neglected by historians. Few attempts made at reconstructing the phenomenon under study are done mostly by scholars of Physical and Health Education, Human Kinetics, and Sports Management, among others. In this connection, this paper investigates the historical foundations of Lobi Stars Football Club of Makurdi between 1981 and 2016. It discusses the funding of the club under consideration. The paper also highlights the impact of Lobi Stars on the economy and society of the people of Benue State and beyond. The study espouses a plethora of challenges that hampered Lobi Stars but it concludes with emphasis that, there is a prospect for the development of the club because of the achievements it has recorded. In line with the said challenges that hindered the development of the club, the paper proposes a pathway which it felt, would avert the said challenges. The discussion of this paper is based on historical methodology using primary and secondary sources of data collection.

Key words: Lobi Stars, Football, Club, Impact, Challenges, and Prospects.

Introduction

This piece of work represents an earnest contribution to the discourse on sport and entertainment industries in Benue State, particularly on football. Football is one of the most critical entertainment industries that received a wider acceptance and prominence in Nigeria and the world over. In Africa, Nigeria and Benue State precisely, many football fans do not have the opportunity to watch international and national matches directly in the stadium where such matches are played. Rather, they watch on television in viewing centres, houses and offices, among other places. People love football to the extent that those who play locally on streets and other sub-standard places in Benue State and elsewhere in the country adopt names of some international, national, and professional footballers. For example, Ason Ioryue adopts, Ziko Brazil (a Brazilian Footballer), Terfa Gbar adopts Terfa Kpakor (who was a super football player before his death) and a lot more.

The passion that the Benue inhabitants have for football (soccer) has led to the formation of football clubs in the State such as; Otukpo Township Football club, Adikpo Township Football Club, Vandeikya Township Football Club, and Lobi Football Club, Makurdi, among other clubs. However, for the purposes of this study, attention has been focused exclusively on Lobi Football Club, Makurdi. The paper attempts to specifically investigate the establishment and funding of the club, its impact on the State and beyond. It further discusses the challenges and prospects of the club under consideration. Some useful suggestions are made, not only to address the teething challenges hampering the development of Lobi Football Club but also to provide lessons for other clubs of the same kind.

To get this done, the paper employs the use of primary (oral informants) and secondary sources (published works) that provide information concerning the club. At this point of analysis, the article will take a brief look at the conceptual issues of football and club, and allow a sense of history to prevail in addressing the issues involved in the study.

Conceptual Clarifications

Conceptual clarification is necessarily fundamental for the progress of this work because it paves the way for easy comprehension of the discourse. The key concept captured here are football, club, and football club. For the purpose of clarity and easy understanding we shall conceptualize one after the other. The word soccer was first used in England, first appearing in the 1880s as an Oxford “er” abbreviation of the word “association” (Harvey, 1970). Within the English speaking world, association football is now usually called football in the United Kingdom, and mainly soccer in Canada and the United States. Other countries such as Australia and New Zealand to mention but a few, use either or both terms (Harvey, 1970).

Conceptually, football is a team game played in all countries of the world with an overall ball on a field marked out as a gridiron, play in such a game

especially when stylish and entertainment (<http://www.100lang/whatisfootball>). Furthermore, football, also known as soccer, refers to a sport played between two teams of eleven players with spherical ball. It is played by 250 million people in over 200 countries; making it the world's most popular sport. (*The Times*, 2007). The game is played on a rectangular field with a goal post at each end. The objective of the game is to score by using any part of the body apart from the arms and hands to get the ball into the opposing goal post (*The Times*, 2007). The goal keepers are the only players allowed to touch the ball with their hands or arms while it is in play (*The Times*, 2007). Outfield players mostly use their feet to strike or pass the ball but may use their head or torso to strike the ball instead. The team that scores more number of goals by the end of the match wins. If the score is tied at the end of the match, either a draw is declared or the game goes into extra time and/or a penalty shootout depending on the format of the competition.

The laws of the game were originally codified in England by the Football Association in 1863 (*The Times*, 2007). Association of Football is governed by the International Federation of Football Association (FIFA) known in French *Association Internationale de Football* which organizes a world cup every four years. It should be noted that the earliest recorded type of football games from Europe included *Episkyros* from ancient Greece and the Roman version *Harpastum*, which is similar to pre-codified “Mob Football” involved more of handling the ball than kicking. Other competitive games involving the kicking of a ball have been played in a few countries through history such as *cuju* in China (*The Times*, 2007). Club on the other hand implies an association dedicated to a particular interest or activity. It also means an association of two or more people united by a common interest or goal (<http://www.100lang/whatisfootball>). Koppen (1973) conceives club as “an organization composed of people who voluntarily meet on a regular basis for a mutual purpose other than educational, religious, charitable or financial pursuits”. A club is any kind of group that has members who meet for a social, literal, or political purpose such as health club, country club, book clubs, and football clubs (Koppen, 1973). The above clarification brings us to the conceptualization of football club.

A football club is a bunch of football teams like an Under-17 team, an Under-21 and then a professional team. Clubs such as Manchester United Football Club has their professional team and then their younger teams. Lobi Stars Football Club, Makurdi also have a similar group of teams known as the junior and senior team. According to D. Humbe, “members of the junior team receive training for a stipulated period of time before determining to get to the senior team or not. This promotion is based on the assessment of their performances” (Oral Interview with Humbe, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

In the context of this work, a theory is a set of ideals devised to explain a group of

facts or phenomenon under review. Theories are very fundamental in academic work such as this in that they serve as the pillars of the work. In this wise, the researchers employ and apply the theory of social interaction to back up their analysis.

Interactionism is a theoretical perspective that derives social process (such as conflict, cooperation, identity and formation) from human interaction (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). It deals with how individuals act within society. The theory has grown in the latter half of the 20th century and has grown to become one of the dominant sociological perspectives in the world today (Ritzer, 2000). G. H. Mead, as an advocate of pragmatism and objectivity of social reality is considered a leader in the development of interactionism. H. Blummer expanded on Mead's work and coined the term of symbolic interactionism (Ritzer, 2000). The interactionist theory or the theory of interactionism has several subdivisions such as phenomenology, verstehen, social action, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism and social constructionism.

Interaction is micro-sociological and believes that meaning (positive action or achievement) is produced through the interactions of individuals (<http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/interaction>). It also includes animal interaction such as mating. The interaction includes all languages (including body language) and mannerisms. The goal of the social interactions is to communicate with others. If the interaction is in danger of ending before one intends it to, it can be conserved by conforming to the other's expectations by ignoring certain incidents or by solving apparent problems. In his contribution to this theory, E. Goffman, cited by Ritzer (2000), underlines the importance of interaction as thus:

One must attempt to control other's behaviour during the interaction in order to attain the information one is seeking and in order to control the perception of one's own image. Important concepts in the field of interactionism includes the social role and Goffman's presentation of self.

The preceding theory is situated for the analysis of this research issues in that the achievements so far recorded by Lobi Stars Football Club of Makurdi is not an individual effort, but the end product of the interactions of the club members especially the team officials and players. Theory fits in because communication is inevitable in the club. This is necessary during training exercises and match plays. In the course of this communication, sometimes both the coach and players do adopt the use of body language in order to impact effective training or connections to score their goals or achieve their targets. It is on this premise that the social interactionist theory stands as a hub for our analyses.

Historical Foundations of Lobi Stars Football of Makurdi, 1981-2016

Football which is also known as rugby or soccer is a type of sports that involves varying degrees, kicking a ball with the foot to score a goal. But the origin of the

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game is obscure and highly controversial as others claim it originated from Greece, where it was called *Harposton* or *Harpaston*; this was described as a “very rough and brutal game” (<http://www.hornetfootball.org/document>). However, Reilly & Gilbourne (1988) opine that in spite of its complex nature, the rules governing the game were simple; points were awarded when a player crosses a goal line or throws the ball across the line to another player. Some claim it was played as early as 4000BC by the Chinese and in AD 200 by the Romans. Nevertheless, enough evidence proved that organized football began in England with every sense of dedication as captured by Fitzstephen (1978) thus:

After lunch, all the youths of the city go out into the fields to take part in a ball game. The students of each school have their own ball; the workers from each city and craft are also seen carrying balls. Older citizens; fathers and wealthy citizens come on horse backs to watch their juniors competing and to relieve their own youth vicariously: you can see their inner passions aroused as they watch the action and get caught up in the fun being had by the carefree adolescents.

Due to their seriousness as disclosed in the above quotation, they formed English Football Association in 1863 and the world football governing body, Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) was founded in 1904 (Ityodugh, 2008).

In Nigeria, Ityodugh (2008) is of the opinion that, the exact year that the game of soccer actually started is unknown. However, it was introduced into the country by the early European visitors and missionaries. The game was first introduced to the coastal cities of Nigeria: Lagos, Port-Harcourt, and Calabar. He further asserts that the colonial officials played a match in Lagos in 1841. By 1906, football clubs began to emerge and these were organized as town or city games club competition (Ityodugh, 2008). The Beverly Cup was introduced in Calabar in 1906 (Ityodugh, 2008). This quickly spread to the nooks and crannies of Nigeria. It is worth mentioning here that, the first organized Football Association started in 1937 known as the Lagos District Football Association (LDFA), followed by Ibadan Football Association (IFA) in 1937 (Kpakor, undated). This motivated the formation of other district football associations in the country in 1990 (Oral Interview with Kpakor, 2013). According to Kpakor (undated), the decree establishing the Nigerian Professional League was decree No. 101 (23) of 1990. An oral informant, Kpakor (2013) contends that the pioneer clubs of the league in 1990 include:

ABC Football Club, Lagos; BCC Lions Football Club, Gboko; Bendel Insurance Football Club, Benin; Rangers International Football Club, Enugu; Shooting Stars Football Club, Ibadan; Obanta United Football Club, Benin; Rancher Bees Football Club, Kaduna; Highlander Football Club, Jos; Iwanyanwu Nationale Football Club, Owerri; Rovers Football

Club, Calabar; Stationary Stores Football Club, Lagos; Kano Pillars Football Club, Kano; Bendel United Football Club, Benin; J. I. B. Rock Strikers Football Club, Jos; Enyimba Football Club, Aba; and Julius Berger Football Club, Lagos.

Apart from the aforementioned clubs, others emerged such as Oturkpo Township Football Club, Adikpo Township Football Club, Vandeikya Township or Kunav United Football Club (later changed to Vandeikya Rocks), Lobi Stars Football Club (formerly known as Lobi Bank, BBL Hawks and Hawks), and so forth. These clubs have provided job opportunities to the Benue youths and beyond, generated revenue for the state and local governments, and also provided entertainment to the general public. It is on this premise that the researcher embarked on scholarly articulation of the emergence of Lobi Stars Football Club, Makurdi with a view to understanding its evolution, achievements or impact, and challenges as well as proffering solutions.

Lobi Stars Football Club, Makurdi was officially formed in 1981 during the administration of the first civilian government of Benue State, Mr. Aper Aku. The club was then called Hawks Football Club and had the McCarthy Stadium as its home ground. In 1990, when the Aper Aku ultra-modern sport complex was completed; the club moved to Aper Aku stadium as its home ground (Kpakorundated).

However, Lobi Stars had at various times passed through different sponsorships which also caused the name of the club to be changed accordingly. The club was called Hawks Football Club from 1981-1985 when it was sponsored by the Benue State government. In 1986, the club secured a sponsorship deal with Benue Brewery Limited and the new owners changed the club's name to Benue Brewery Limited Hawks Football Club (BBL Hawks FC) and in 1990, the club again had new sponsors, Lobi Bank Limited, the state owned bank, and the name of the club was again changed to Lobi Bank Football Club of Makurdi (Kpakor undated). Interestingly, it was under this new management that the club qualified for the National Amateur Division Three League, which the club won and represented Nigeria in West African Union Cup and eventually got into the final of the tournament, losing to Asec Mimosas of Ivory Coast. It is worthy to mention that Lobi Bank Football Club won the Central Bank Cup in 1990 and 1991, and also gained promotion to play in the second tier of Nigeria Professional League in 1991. By 1992, Lobi Bank Limited was experiencing severe financial crisis and was unable to manage the club effectively. Thus, the state government took over sponsorship. However, the situation did not get better either, as the club went through a disastrous financial period spell. Despite the financial crisis, the players and coaches remained committed to their task (*Oral Interview with Imenger, 2013*). By 1993, the club had some financial respite under the then governor of Benue State Rev. Father Moses Adasu. The governor presented a brand new coaster bus to the club and several other financial incentives as well as payment of some outstanding funds.

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The club's darkest moment came between 1994 and 1996, during which the government was unable to manage it, thus the club was relegated to the amateur ranks (*Oral Interview with Adingi, 2013*).

However, life returned to the club in 1997 when the military administrator of the state, LT. Col. Aminu Isa Kontagora revived it with enormous cash/funds and appointed a new management committee for it, vested with the task of getting the club back to the Professional League by 1998, Colonel Dominic Oneya became the military administrator of Benue State and as a sportsman himself, he took delight in turning the club into one of the best in the country. The military administrator ensured that all outstanding bonuses and salaries, and other allowances be paid immediately, with this motivation, the club played itself out and gained promotion to the Professional Division One League for the first time in its history. By 1999, the club finished fourth on the league table thus qualifying to play in the Super Four Competition which it eventually won and represented Nigeria in the 4th edition of CAF Champions League in 2000 (*Oral Interview with Adingi, 2013*). Lobi Stars also won Nigeria's Super Cup in 2000 beating 1999 Challenge Cup winners Plateau United by two goals to one (2-1). Lobi Stars also qualified for the Super Four Competition in 2001 but unfortunately, they could not secure a continental ticket. However, Lobi Stars hit national limelight again three years later when the club won the 2003 Challenge Cup by beating Sharks Football Club of Port-Harcourt in the one-legged final at the Ahmadu Bello Stadium Kaduna. However, the club lost to Enyimba Football Club of Aba on penalties (penalty kicks) in the 2004 Super Cup (*Oral Interview with Kpakor, 2013*).

In 2005, Lobi Stars Football Club again played in the final of the challenge cup but lost on penalty kicks to Enyimba Football Club of Aba at the Liberation Stadium in Port-Harcourt. Similarly, the club also lost in the final of the 2012 Challenge Cup now called the "Federation Cup". Lobi Stars was beaten by Heartland Football Club of Owerri formerly called Iwanyanwu Nationale of Owerri (Kpakor, undated). In spite of all these, the club is still one of the most entertaining and admired teams in the Nigerian Football Globacom Premier League because of the victories or achievements it has recorded in different years as indicated in the table below.

Nigerian Football Globacom Premier League showing the performances of Lobi Stars Football Club of Makurdi

SN	League Title	Year
1	Benue State Super League Champions	198 2
2	Chairman's Cup (Makurdi LGA) winner	198 2
3	Major Addingi's Cup winners	198 2
4	Benue Challenge Cup	198 3
5	Benue Challenge Cup	198 4
6	Benue Challenge Cup	198 6
7	Benue Challenge Cup	199 2
8	Benue Challenge Cup	199 9
9	Benue Challenge Cup	200 1
1 0	Benue Challenge Cup	200 2
1 1	Benue Challenge Cup	200 3
1 2	Benue Challenge Cup	200 4
1 3	Benue Challenge Cup	200 6
1 4	Benue Challenge Cup	200 8
1 5	Benue Challenge Cup	200 9
1 6	Benue Challenge Cup	201 0
1 7	Benue Challenge Cup	201 1
1 8	Benue Challenge Cup	201 2
1 9	Central Bank Cup	199 0
2 0	Central Bank Cup	199 1
2 1	West African Football Union Cup (WAFU) finalis	199 1
2 2	Super Cup Champion	200 0
2 3	Federation Cup winne	200 3
2 4	Federation Cup Runner up	200 5
2 5	Federation Cup Runner u	201 2

Source: M. A. Kpakor, *The Pride of Benue Football*. Unpublished Text, 2016.

Funding of Lobi Stars Football Club

Football clubs like any other club, business, organisation or industry cannot exist without revenue (funds/capital). In this respect, we take a breakdown of sources of funds of Lobi Stars Football Club, Makurdi thus: government funding, sales of match tickets, winning of competitions like championship, agencies, philanthropists, sales of club jerseys and the likes. In order to enhance a better understanding, each of these sources are analysed herein.

In the course of fieldwork, it was revealed that the Benue State Government of Nigeria usually allocates a reasonable amount of money to the Sport Ministry when planning her budget and a reasonable amount of that goes to the club under review. Nonetheless, from time to time, they solicit for funds from the government whenever the club is having financial crises. This amount is helpful hence it pays the salary of players and other workers without which the workers will not be motivated; rather, they will lose their enthusiasm and record failures instead of the desired success (Ahile, 2013).

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Another source of revenue to the club is the sales of club jerseys and match tickets. Lobi Stars Football Club, Makurdi is a club that was established in 1981 and opened to the public, any member of the public who intends to entertain himself during the football match competition usually goes there and pays a stipulated amount of money as gate fee to watch the match as he or she desires. The tickets they sell from every match generate a good source of income in running the affairs of the club. It is worthy to note that AperAku Stadium is the home ground of Lobi Stars Football Club, Makurdi. The stadium has a capacity that holds 15,000 persons which also boosts the of revenue to the club (http://www.en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/lobi_stars_fc.).

Furthermore, the club does generate her income from the advancement in competition like champions league. This comes in two forms; sometimes by winning and sometimes there are prizes for scoring the highest number of goals and in this club where Lobi Stars wins the trophy it also constitutes a source of income to the club (Oral Interview with Anyia, 2014).

Sale of players to other teams is also a good source of funds to the club. As it is a tradition with the football club, it should be acknowledged that Lobi Stars Football Club, Makurdi also sells some of her players to those clubs intending to get manpower from Lobi and the amount of money they pay for the services of these players becomes a source of revenue for administering the football club in question, (Oral Interview with Kpegh, 2014).

In addition to the above discussed source of revenue to the club is philanthropies. Some well-wishers of the club like Dr. T. Suswam from time to time lavishly and whole-heartedly donate a reasonable sum of money to the club in order to strengthen the economic strength of the club. As earlier noted, in spite the fact that the club in question was not formed to act as a financial organisation, it still generates money for the running of its affairs (Oral Interview with Atsaka, 2014). cognizance should be given to the fact that without the above enumerated and related sources of funds, the operation of the club will be vague or in vain.

Impact of the Club on the Economy and Society

This aspect of the work examined the noticeable impact of Lobi Stars Football Club, Makurdi on the economy and society of the people. Firstly, the club provides employment opportunity to the Benue populace and beyond. It is worthy enough to point to the fact that with the establishment of the club, a lot of people especially the youths gained employment. Prior to the establishment of this club, some people were not working but when the club was established, it offered employment opportunities to players, coaches, team management officials, cleaners drivers, and a lot more (Oral Interview with Tsonov, 2014). This, to some extent, betters their standard of living and their family members.

Secondly, the club serves as a source of revenue to the state government. The relationship between Benue State Government and Lobi Stars Football Club is reciprocal. This is because the government injects money into the club annually and the money the club generates in return, a reasonable part of it goes back to the

state government through the Ministry of Sports, this money is also supposed to be used by the government in administering the state (Oral Interview with Sogo, 2014).

Thirdly, the club provides a medium of social interaction; this is mostly seen when Lobi Stars Football Club is having a competitive match. A lot of people come around from far and near, even enemies come together to watch their football competitions from different teams creating a sense of unity to some extent. In an oral interview, M. J. Tsonov (2014) opines that “when the game of football is in progress, even enemies forget and forgive each other till it is over”. The implication of the above quotation is that even when enemies meet in the stadium, their aim is to watch football rather than expressing the acrimonies which might lead to quarrel that may aggravate into fight.

Fourthly, the football club serves as a source of entertainment to the public. On the days of football matches, the interested persons normally go there to watch and relax. The fun created in the course of playing and watching football normally eases stress of those who watch it. Nevertheless, Lobi Stars Football Club have a sport training session, they train sports men in team B and when the trainees acquire the desired skills and improve on their performances, they are being promoted to team A which is the more mature team of the club. The training they receive helps them in diverse ways, namely, to play for the team, to play to others teams outside and keep their body fit, (Oral Interview with Humbe, 2013).

In as much as Lobi Stars Football Club, Makurdi is not a political set up, it still wields political impact on the society of the people in that the club ensures the act of discipline. By so doing, it took a form of politics; policies are formulated to benefit both the club members and the management of the club. The club has its constitution to make sure that every of her members must act within the confines of the constitution (Oral Interview with Takerada, 2013). This as a matter of fact, infuses the spirit of discipline in the club members.

Challenges Associated with Lobi Stars Football Club

In spite of the achievements and impact recorded by Lobi Stars Football Club, Makurdi during the period under review, the club is still beset with some serious problems which hampered its growth and smooth development. Noticeable among these bottle necks were:

Lack of adequate funds: cognizance should be given to the fact that Lobi Stars Football Club requires large amount of money to purchase sporting equipments and also to improve on the quality of the existing facilities such as stadium, football field, to mention just a few. However, they lack the sufficient amount to do so (Oral Interview with Takerada, 2013). The above problem and the related issues prompted

some people to leave the club for other clubs; this actually reduced the quantity and quality of the club especially the football players.

Another problem faced by Lobi Stars Football Club is financial misappropriation. It is worthwhile to note that Benue State Government remits a reasonable sum of money to the club but instead of the management team to use this money judiciously, they rather divert it to their personal bank accounts or purses leaving the club financially strangled. The club has poor camping facilities; the home of football players of Lobi Stars Football Club is the McCarthy Stadium which is not good enough for human habitation. This discomfort goes a long way in making the team members have lack of zeal and ambition (Oral Interview with Anum, 2014).

Leadership crises in the club also constituted the challenges to the club. The leadership tussles like in any other club or organisation, contributed seriously to retard the progress of the club. Benue State has a lot of indigenes with knowledge of football; most of these indigenes want to be chairmen of the club. The most noticeable of these indigenes are Moses AkuhaKpakor and Dominic Iorfa. When they scrambled so much for the post of chairman, senator George Akume who was the then governor of Benue State announced himself as the chairman of the club while Dominic Iorfa became the vice chairman and Kpakor was saddled with the responsibility of being the team manager. However, this situation was later heightened as the crises of leadership accumulated into a do or die affair and led to the abandonment of Kpakor without payment of his benefits for years (*Oral Interview with Kpakor, 2013*). This stunted the growth of the club in question.

Related to the above problems is tribalism and ethnicity. It should be acknowledged that in some cases, the appointment of the club officials is done by ethnicity, favouritism rather than merit (*Oral Interview with Ako, 2014*). The arrangement of line up players too in some instance are done in bias ways, this actually led to the under-performance of the club and its football team in particular. This is because some players are better qualified to play than others but in some instances, the coach ignores them and places them on the bench line, and in most cases they are not substituted till the end of the whole match.

Furthermore, the penchant attitudes also hinder effective growth of the club. It is gathered that despite the continuous supervision of activities of Lobi Stars Football Club, Makurdi some members of the staff do not totally commit themselves doing the work they were employed to do (Oral Interview with Ako, 2014). They have divided loyalty on whether to save the club or to be at home relaxing, others staffers work under supervision and conceive that they work under pressure as such they are not happy with the

management of the club because of thorough supervision.

Transportation barrier, it should be noted that there were incessant attempts made by the management of the team to have a big bus (for conveying staff members to and from the areas of training or competition). The football club still suffers lack of effective transportation. Lamenting on the same issue, in an oral interview, Baka (2014) affirms that “the number of vehicles at Lobi Stars Football Club, Makurdi are not enough hence the lack of staff strength of the fans to be conveyed by one large bus to areas of football matches”.⁵⁰

The challenges facing the development of Lobi Stars Football Club cannot be discussed successfully without mentioning inadequate constant power supply. As power is relevant to all the sectors of the Nigerian economy, the sports sector too needs it since some sport facilities in the stadium are power driven. However, Nigerian government claimed to feature huge hydro-electric power schemes in their development plans right from 1960s but the impact is not felt. This constituted a cog in the wheel of development of industries. During the field work, it was revealed that because of the epileptic power supply in Makurdi and Benue State on a broader perspective, the club usually uses their standby generators to carry out their work especially in giving of commentaries during football matches. Due to astronomical increase of petrol products, a lot of money from the club treasury is spent for the purpose of power (*Oral Interview with Nyior, 2014*).

Prospects of Lobi Stars Football Club Makurdi

In spite of the numerous challenges hampering the development of Lobi Stars Football Club, indications from the research has shown that the prospects of advancement of the club still remain viable. The club has provided employment opportunities among Benue youths and beyond. Some employees are drivers; others are cleaners, and more importantly football players. To add, to this the club also constitutes a good source of revenue to Benue State Government.

Another prospect is that the club won a lot of matches such as Benue State Super League Champions 1982, Chairman's Cup (Makurdi Local Government Area) winner 1982, Major Adingi's Cup winner 1982, Benue Challenge Cup winner 1983, 1984, 1986, 1992, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012. The club also won the Central Bank Cup 1990 and 1991 respectively. Lobi Stars Football Club is also credited for winning the West African Football Union Cup (WAFU) 1991 finalist. Considering the above ills that stunted the progress of the club to the society, if the above ills are eliminated, the club will perform up to the expectation of the Benue society and her fans nationwide.

Conclusion and Proposals on the Way Forward

This paper has focussed on the emergence and growth of Lobi Stars Football Club, Makurdi. It has discussed the funding and impact of the club to the society and economy of Benue State since its inception. The factors limiting the healthy growth and development of the club under review has also been highlighted. It is argued that, in spite of the said challenges, the club still possesses great potentials for a viable prospect.

Concerning the problems bedevilling or stunting the progress of the club under study, the following recommendations become pertinent:

Firstly, the Benue State Government should from time to time empower Lobi Stars Football Club, Makurdi by giving them a grant to enable them meet up with the modern standards of sporting facilities.

Secondly, the State Government should ensure that the appointment of the club officials is based on merit and competence rather than favouritism, ethnicity, corruption, and god-fatherism.

Thirdly, the State Government through the club management should liaise with JOS Electricity Distribution Company (JEDC) to supply steady power to Lobi Stars Football Club because some sports facilities are power driven and without it, commentaries of the game will not be run smoothly.

Fourthly, internal appointments such as coach, captain, technical officials, and others should be done without fear or favour. Staffers of the club should show a sense of commitment and not divided loyalty in order to record more achievements for the club. Besides, the salaries of staff members should be attractive and promptly paid to enable stability of members since a lot may not move about from time to time looking for greener pastures.

Additionally, the club management should liaise with the state government to provide more transportation means for conveying people to and from the areas where matches are being played since football needs a lot of fans to cheer up the players for effective performances. Furthermore, private investors should consider football as a lucrative business in which private ownership of Lobi Stars Football Club can lead to the success of the club. Finally, the players on the other hand should be more focused and give their best towards the success of the club.

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