

**RECENT DEATHS IN ATHLETICS IN NIGERIA**

**WHAT NEXT?**

**BY**

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**BEING**

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## **Introduction**

Though this workshop is to examine the causes of recent deaths in soccer fields in Nigeria, in this write up, I have deviated a little from finding reasons or causes of such deaths. My belief is that we have on this occasion competent medical practitioners. Not only practicing medicine but associated with sports medicine per se. So it is my strong belief that they can feed us with enough medical jargons that will certainly provide food for thought.

## **Accidents in Sports**

It should be bored in mind that any physical activity that the human being is involved in is accident prone. Be it mere beating of pepper in the local mortar in the kitchen, not to talk of sports which involve physical activities that exerts pressure on the heart of the participant. There can be accidents of various kinds, examples knee injury, head injury – concussion, heart failure etc.

Let us take a look at some cases that have occurred in the United States of America (USA), according to Nicholas as reported by Michener (1977), there are reports that each year, sports in America, are responsible for seventeen million accidents serious enough to require the attentions of a doctor. He went further to report that for young people under the age of fifteen who participate in normal sports, parents and guidance should anticipate one accident each year for every three players. Some of the accidents can be fatal.

He reported further that he personally kept a running record of a number of deaths occurring each season which could be attributed to football, that is American football.

Now that I want us to take a look at is that, cases of death and occurrence of (appendicitis in young athletes this is with particular reference to the Sports Institute of Rivers State, Isaka) are recent phenomena in Nigeria. And that is why the surprise all over the place. This phenomenon, death, is associated with most human endeavour. It is not an abnormal thing no matter the occupation. As such I will really want us to tackle this problem in the light of this. May I put it to you now that causes of deaths in sports vary depending on the season and place. Sometimes heat may cause death in extreme dry season. Young girls are more prone to this type of death in sports. If they are kept in serious physical activities that involve long distance running especially when the load is above their capacities, they may drop dead. Young boys are also susceptible to death by that. Example of this occurred in 1985/1986 at Church Missionary Society (CMS) Grammar School, Bariga. The first secondary school in Nigeria. A teenage boy who was involved in a middle distance race in the sun fell down and dropped death.

Injuries of the neck and spine caused by specific coaching procedure can cause death also.

It should be bored in mind that all sports involve risks. One risks a minimum of injury in order to gain a maximum advantage to one's health, economy and prestige. To be able to compete for your nation is like going to the battle for the country. What the individual needs is courage as a prime necessity for the average citizen of this country, if he is to be a good citizen or a patriot.

Athletics (sports) are good especially in their rougher forms, because these tend to develop such courage. This goes for the competing young athletes. Even spectatorship at a thrilling game involve dangers of heart attacks.

For older people the danger from sports can be very real. For somebody of forty-five and above who has been sedentary for the past two decades to suddenly engage in violent sports is suicidal. Let me take a close look at this case. The first on the list of strenuous or violent sports for older men here is jogging according to Michener (1977). This miserable post school sports has already killed several people both in and out of this country. The case of Late Aper Aku, a former civilian governor of Benue State is a case in point. He was reported death and a lot of people wrote that jogging was dangerous. Yes, in one sense I share the opinion dangerous on one hand, on the other hand, No, jogging is not dangerous.

Jogging can be dangerous for that individual who have been sedentary for about two decades and he is forty-five and above and suddenly goes into the exercise without proper medical check ups and not getting the prescription from qualified professionals who will gradually take him in the exercise.

On the other hand not dangerous for the man who has been in the active sports and now that he can no more participate in very active sports get involved in jogging to keep fit.

What is jogging then? Jogging is a kind of exercise in which you transform yourself into a machine. Running and intermittently walk, looking neither side, panting the man machine. The goal is the soothing miraculous feeling of relief when the chug-chugging which is jogging is finished. Apart from soccer, which present in recent times several cases of deaths, competitive handball, tennis singles and squash rank next in potential lethality of

middle-aged people who plays these games – whether once a month or everyday without first having had his heart checked at least by the treadmill – electro cardiographic test. Though certainly, it is not full proof but recommended here.

Sports like basketball, soccer, handball can also be dangerous for teenagers, particularly after a moderate sized meal.

However, apart from the dangers inherent in violent sports moderate exercises are usually recommended for the middle-aged. It is believed that man has always felt better physically and psychologically after indulging in physical or bodily exercises.

By moderate physical activity is meant any form of exercise whose execution does not in anyway cause serious panting, excessive acceleration of the heart beat, that is, it should not beat above 120/80 beats per minute or leave the individual unduly fatigued. Walking your staircase up and down is recommended. Or you may avoid the lift at the secretariat complex in Port Harcourt once or twice a week and walk to the top most floor of blocks A, B, or C. Swimming usually, this should be non-competitive at your leisure time, riding on a bicycle along your street or around your compound, billiards etc. are forms of recommendable exercises.

For the teenager, he/she can compete in more vigorous and violent sports. American football alone has accounted for more deaths in the United States of America, in the earlier days of that game than all automobile accidents put together. Michener (1977) within the period 1983 – 65, a total of 642 fatalities occurred which could be attributed specifically to football. Nobody can change it because it has really become a part of the

American, life that nobody in authority can really stop the game, as he puts it.

“Football has been so enshrined as a spectator sport both in college and professionally, that it would be impossible for revisionists to alter it without protest of an almost revolutionary character”.

This game, American football has become the American form of violence, whereas Spanish bull fighting is pretty despicable. It is said, one practitioner is usually killed about every four years.

Now coming back home, soccer which is the most popular sport in Nigeria, is of recent showing its side teeth in terms of death tolls. This is not entirely a new phenomenon in sports in the world, only that the new wave of accidents resulting into deaths is gradually coming down on us.

It is the death of Samuel Okwaraji, that really brought the issue of death resulting from participation in sports to the door steps of many people. It is expected that more deaths will happen streaming from greater number of people participating in sports with particular reference to soccer. It is now a means of livelihood like any form of means of living, it has its associated problems. The man at the production line of the National Fertilizer Company, Onne (NAFCO) is prone to accidents that may probably result in death, so it is in several other occupations. In the light of the foregoing analysis the question is, WHAT NEXT?

Should our teenagers and professionals keep playing soccer which has physically injured several of them, rendering some incapacitated leaving some with permanent scars including the author and finally sending some to the great beyond?

Leaving me a tackle this question alone, I will say we have no option than to participate in sports especially soccer which is not only used as a means of livelihood these days but also used by almost the countries of the World to test their supremacy over others. Since physical wars is not usually easy these days, it is used as war without shooting. Nigeria, more than anything else use sports especially youths soccer to build her already battles image, battered through drug peddling abroad.

The country felt on top of the world and relayed it over national news programmes, her defeat of two world powers, namely the Soviet Union and the United States of America, in the FIFA – Under 20 Coca Cola World Cup in Saudi Arabia, in the 1989. This alone is enough to encourage more people to engage in the sports.

What of the health of the nation resulting from proper and regular exercising? Though people may ask whether I have not talk of an impending danger in exercising. I mentioned it and the category of individuals the will affect and I also recommend a remedy which I said the medical doctor should check the individual in health status before coming into exercise. That a treadmill electrocardiographic test should be used for such individuals. These equipment can be found right here in Nigeria, even here in Rivers Sate to come right down home.

Exercises help in the growth of children and as such they cannot be removed from such exposure. Avoidance may lead to developmental suicide for the growing child.

on the whole I have given very simple causes in this paper of deaths in the sporting arena without bothering you with very gigantic terminologies.

I stand to defend sports as a valuable field of endeavour both for the purposes of livelihood or for the personal well-being of the nation and especially soccer for image making.

After taking you through cases of death in sports, will recent deaths on soccer pitches and especially that of Samuel Okwaraji, an abnormal case?

### **Attributions**

Some Nigerians attributed it to team mates. Accusing fingers have already been pointed at team mates. Some said because he wore the jersey another player was to wear. Even then medical report has it that it was heart failure.

Some others attribute it to the Stadium. They said the National Stadium needs to be cleansed by the performance of certain rituals.

Apart from Samuel Okwaraji, another death happened in Port Harcourt. within the same period. Could this be attributable to same reasons given for Okwaraji's death?

This shows our level of superstition. Though superstition is part and parcel of sorts, but not the negative aspect of it. What should we then attribute deaths in other countries sports to?

I, therefore, conclude this paper by saying that sports and exercises should be engaged in by individuals, but proper medical check ups should be prescribed by qualified personnel who know really hat it takes for such graded programmes of exercise.



## References

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