



Ghana's Rising Star

For those in the know, there's no question that Asamoah Gyan is going to be one of the big names to emerge from the World Cup in South Africa. Earlier this year, the striker fired the Black Stars to the African Cup of Nations final and now he intends to blow apart the defences of Serbia, Germany and Australia in Group E. Laid back as ever when we catch up with him at the Puma Unity Experience in Paris, Gyan talks to Pumafootball about the great expectations of him, dreams of moving to a big club and missing 'inspirational' Michael Essien...

Ghana did very well getting to the final of the Cup of Nations this year. Can you transfer that success to the World Cup?

We did well in Angola but the World Cup is a different thing altogether from the Cup of Nations. We need to keep calm because all the other teams will be going to win it too. But we have an advantage in that it's in Africa and all the African fans are going to support the African teams.

You scored some crucial goals for the Black Stars in Angola. How does it feel to have become such an important member of the team?

I'm the spearhead for Ghana now. I've scored some quite important goals for the team so everybody will be expecting a lot from me. It won't be easy but I'm looking forward to it.

If you carry on playing as well as you have been for Rennes and Ghana it's likely that a bigger club will want to sign you – is that something you are hoping for?

Sure I dream of playing for a big club; every football player wants to get to the top level. But right now I'm not thinking about big contracts or whatever because I'm focusing on the World Cup and then I will see what happens from there.

What does it mean to you to play in the first African World Cup?

I think it will be a big advantage that the World Cup is in Africa because it means we are playing at home. If the fans are behind you then it is 20 percent of the game and really boosts players' morale.

How far can the Black Stars go in the tournament?

Last World Cup was Ghana's first and we got to the last 16. Now everyone in Ghana is expecting more than what we achieved in 2006. I do think we can go further this time because we've gained experience but it's not going to be easy.

Do you believe you can win your group?

It's not an easy group. Serbia qualified in first place against France. Germany is statistically one of the favourites. Australia qualified so you can see how good they are. People think we are underdogs but we can surprise them – we are ready to prove people wrong.

There will be no Michael Essien at the World Cup for Ghana. How big a loss is that?

It's a big blow losing Michael Essien. He's a guy who inspires the team and when he's in the team everybody is so happy. He is one of the best midfielders in the world and there's no doubt that if he's

in the team he makes you better – makes the midfield so strong but unfortunately we've lost him. However everyone in this team can play. I pray to God that whoever replaces him can do as well as Michael because he's the best player in our team and I wish him a speedy recovery.

Could Stephen Appiah be Michael Essien's replacement? Due to his injuries he's hardly kicked a ball for two years...

The past two years have been difficult for Stephen Appiah and I'm so happy he's back in the team. He's a good captain. Psychologically when he's in the national team he feels better because we make him happy and he forgets about the past and concentrates on the now. Something in his game may have changed but when he's with us he's the same player.