

LBE 2009 – Migration

Episode 7:

The Football Player

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Characters:

Narrator:

Voiceover:

Félix, male (29)

Fariqou Oumarou, young male

Introduction

Hello and welcome to a new episode in our Learning by Ear series about migration between Africa and Europe. Today, we begin to consider those Africans who have returned home after spending some years abroad. What did they achieve? What's their life like back in Africa? What do they think about their experiences abroad? Let's first meet one of those young Africans who went to Europe to become a professional football player. Sports, and especially football, are a profession that attracts many young Africans. They see the big stars making big money in Europe or the Americas. Hzeina Félix from Cameroon tells us, that it is not at all easy to build a career as a professional footballer overseas. After all, he was able to start up his own company after he returned – and he serves as a role model for young Cameroonians who want to follow in his footsteps.

1. Atmo_garage of Hzeina and Sons

2. Voice clip Félix_1

My name is Hzeina Félix. I played for Cameroon in the A team. I took part in the LG cup in Iran. Then I spent a whole season in China. Then I ended up with the whites. And now I'm in Cameroon where I was born and, to be precise, I'm back in my region – Adamaoua. I have set up a real estate and transport business. I think I can help people and families by providing them with taxis. The kids love playing ball and I also help them travel so they can take tests for football clubs.

3. Atmo: fade out to young footballers training in the background

4. Narrator:

Hzeina Félix is 29 years old. At least once a week, he attends training sessions at different clubs in Ngaoundéré and gives advice to young players in the city that set him on his way. He used to be a forward for Pyunik FC Yerevan in Armenia, on the border with Turkey. But he hung up his shoes two years ago because of injuries. He decided to invest some of his money into helping young footballers. At the same time, he also invested in real estate and transport so he could help the young people of his home town make ends meet. He doesn't know anything about accounts and management so he has employed other people to do this.

5. Voice clip Félix_2

I keep an eye on what I have, but indirectly. There are a few people who are in charge of what I own. They keep me up to date by phone. If decisions need to be taken, we don't hesitate because we have to increase this money that was so hard to make. So we tighten our belts. They profit from my money and I profit from their help.

6. Atmo_phone reception *(from archive)*

7. Narrator:

Hzeina and Sons is the only luxury car and taxi rental service in the city of Ngaoundéré. There are over 60 cars in the car park. The company employs some 100 accountants, garage workers and drivers. The teams change shifts in the morning and in the early evening. Felix found it hard at first...

8. Voice clip Félix_3

It's really hard because footballers who reached a certain level find it hard to convert to another profession. It's like being asked for the sky and the earth. But we always know that as soon as the body drops us we'll have to convert, to do something else close to football. We can't leave football and become bricklayers for example. But it's easier for young players who don't yet really know the reality of the ball. He just has to make the right choice...

9. Atmo_ young footballers training

Music

10. Narrator:

Félix thinks the best way to achieve his ambitions is to exchange ideas with young footballers and his company managers. He takes time to check out the different football grounds in the city of Ngaoundéré and to find rare talents. He doesn't compromise when it comes to helping young players develop their skills. He explains what he does:

11. Voice clip Félix_4

At this level, we look at everyone - both physically and technically. We look at how they use the ball because some are scared. They need to be encouraged. When someone is good, whether as a forward or in defense, we give advice. We tell him to work on certain areas. Physically, tactically or speed or stamina. We give them advice because we've gone through it ourselves. We want to give them a hand so that every time they go onto the pitch they think about what their elders have said. They can really succeed if they have the will.

Music

12. Narrator:

Félix never dreamed of being the head of a company. He wanted to become a professional footballer. He admired the Cameroonian players and managers that he met. And this is what convinced him to choose this new job – to detect new talent that might later

please the fans. But he warns young Africans who want to play in Europe that it's a tough journey and far from easy!

Many of those self-appointed “managers” who travel to Africa in search for young talents are not much different from human traffickers. They promise a bright future to the young men and their parents. But when these young men arrive in a foreign country far away from home, they often find themselves with an unknown third-class team in a small town nowhere close to Real Madrid or Manchester United. In those places they are not seen as future stars but as cheap labor and they are often treated very badly. Thus, the disappointment Hzeina Félix felt, is a feeling many African footballers share when they first arrive overseas.

13. Voice clip Félix_5

It wasn't easy. It's a catastrophe when an African lands among the whites – I had to live through certain scenes, which did not help matters. At one point I was really discouraged. I wanted to drop everything. But I thought to myself: "Why go all this way only to turn back?" I thought I had to persist and gain the trust of the trainers and I had to make a mark on the team. That's what I did. There were too many racists but I didn't care. I was a warrior and I was out to conquer. That's how I was able to win the battle.

14. Narrator:

Félix says that if you want to play football you shouldn't hesitate even if it's tough. Football makes enough money to create jobs in his country. And the profession brought him satisfaction, which is why he goes on Sunday to the city stadium to watch Ngaoundéré University Football Club:

15. Atmo_stadium

16. Narrator:

Félix appreciates the enthusiasm with which the teenagers play football. But he has one regret: that so many young people neglect their studies to only play football. He says this is bad for their future.

17. Voice clip Félix_6

I would tell a young person who wants to play football to do both because you need knowledge before facing the football pitch. I mean this because I know. I wanted to play football when I was 18 and I put all my hope in the game.

18. Atmo_television

19. Narrator:

It's time to have a drink in a local bar, which is popular because it broadcasts European sporting events. Felix has one eye on the screen and says that sometimes he is very tempted to return to Europe and get back into competition. But for the moment he wants to stay and help people here. He also calls on his fellow Africans in Europe to follow in his footsteps.

20. Felix's "final declaration"

I would tell any young person finishing his football career or ending a contract to think first about himself and then about those who don't have anything – there are always players who haven't been able to migrate and who don't have a job. We have to make a step backwards by trying to invest in real estate or in companies or even in fortresses so that each young person who is struggling says: "Thanks to that person I have my daily bread." That would be the best thing. We have to think about ourselves in Africa!

21. Atmo car starting up

22. Narrator:

After his hard day at work, Félix, who has two children, gets in the car and goes to the gym to keep himself in shape before facing the next day of sport and business.

Music

23. Atmo: fade out to young footballers training in the background

24. Narrator:

The young footballers in Ngaoundéré have one wish – to finish their careers in European teams and then to come back and invest in their country like Félix Hzeina has done. Farigou Oumarou is the goalkeeper for the Ngaoundéré University Club. He admires what Félix has done with his life:

25. Son Fariqou Oumarou :

Hzeina Félix is our reference point here in Ngaoundéré. I liked it when he was playing. There's no other professional that does as much for young people as he does. He has also given me advice. It would be great if everyone who's been able to leave the country took him as an example.

Music

Outro:

Thank you for listening to this episode of "Learning by Ear". To find out more, to listen to other Learning by Ear programs or to give us your feedback, please visit our website at: www.dw-world.de/lbe. And don't forget to tune in next time!

(THE END)