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## **How to win a football match in Cameroon : an anthropological study of Africa's most popular sport**

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# How to win a football match in Cameroon



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# How to win a football match in Cameroon

An anthropological study of  
Africa's most popular sport

Arnold Pannenberg

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(Centenary Stadium in Limbe)

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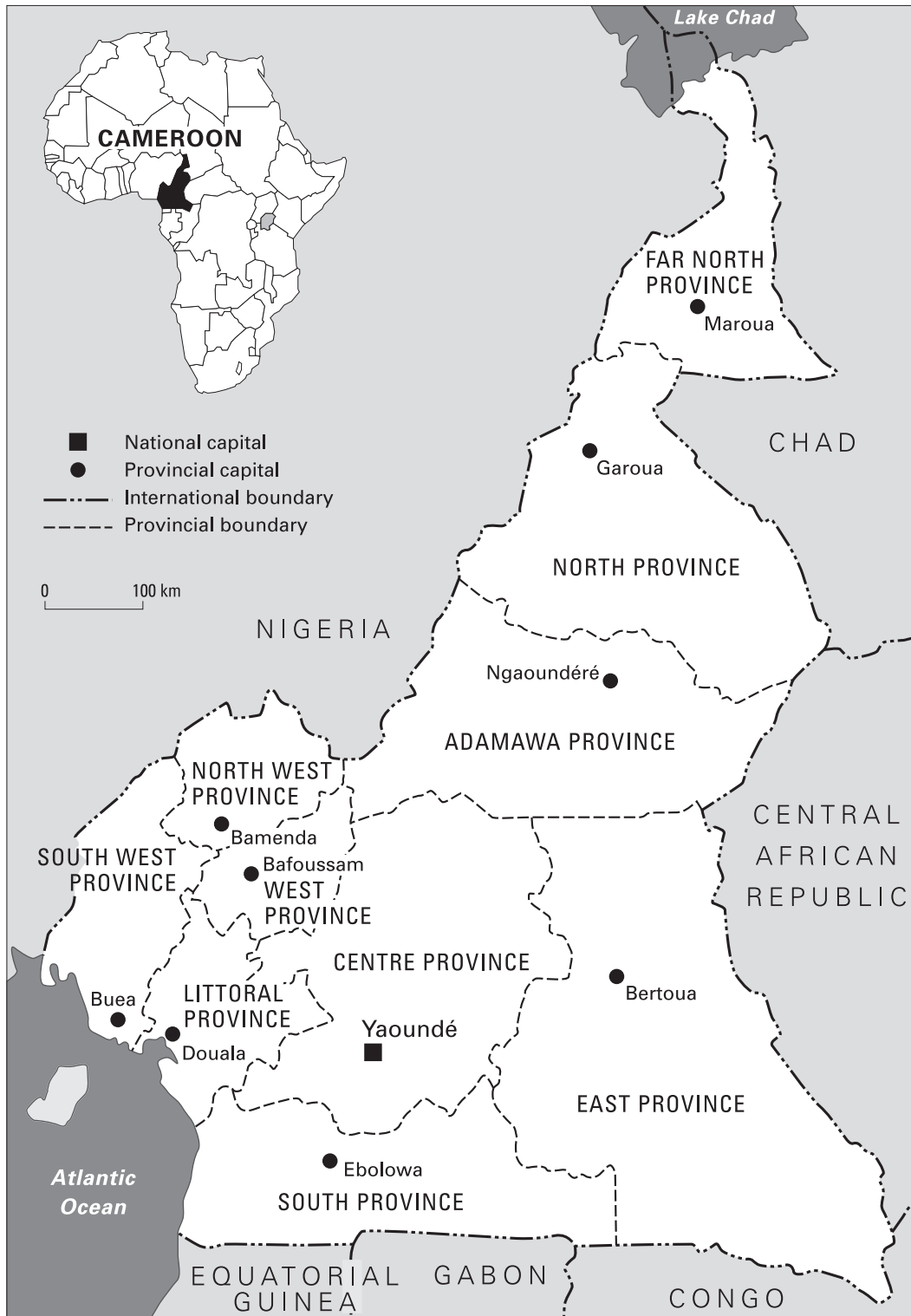
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## Map of Cameroon



## Introduction

Mali, 10 February 2002. The African Cup of Nations had reached its end. It looked as though no extraordinary things had happened. Over the past four weeks, 16 national teams had tried to get to the final of the most prestigious football tournament on the African continent. Cameroon and Senegal, two strong African football nations, made it to the finals. Cameroon beat Senegal after a penalty shoot-out and won the Cup for a fourth time.

But something did happen. About 90 minutes before the start of the semi-finals between Cameroon and host nation Mali on February 7, the Cameroonian goalkeeping coach Thomas Nkono got himself involved in a fight with the riot police. Some of these policemen dragged him away from the pitch onto the nearby running track, beat him up and then handcuffed him. Winfried Schäfer, the coach of the Cameroonian Indomitable Lions at that time, was furious and demanded his release. However, former African Player of the Year Nkono was banned from sitting on the reserves' bench for the rest of the tournament.

It turned out that the police had allegedly seen Nkono throw something onto the pitch. They thought it was a magic charm that could have influenced the outcome of the match. A member of the riot police even ran back onto the pitch to pick up a suspicious-looking object off the grass. It is likely that they reacted in this way because Cameroon was about to take on their national team. Mali's success was at stake.

At first, the Confederation for African Football (CAF) found Nkono guilty of causing an incident at the stadium. He was banned from football for one year. Two months later, the CAF lifted the ban, apparently because of new evidence brought to light by Cameroon's football federation. In the meantime, President

Alpha Oumar Konare of Mali had managed to soothe a diplomatic crisis between Mali and Cameroon by publicly apologizing for the coach's arrest.

When I first heard about this affair, I was not only surprised to learn that there were magic charms involved but also that it had led to such firm action by the riot police. But soon I found out that magic charms are an indispensable part of a witch doctor's extensive spiritual repertoire. The witch doctor, in turn, is an indispensable part of any African football match. He is hired by officials of the national teams for one purpose only: to win the football match. And there is always trouble and chaos whenever a witch doctor or his black magic is seen on or around the pitch.

Almost exactly a year after the incident in Mali's capital Bamako, I arrived in the small town of Buea in the South West Province of Cameroon to conduct anthropological fieldwork into the occurrence of witchcraft, sorcery and magic in the local football league. If such match preparation was performed at the level of the national team, this would certainly also be the case at club level.

Indeed, it took some time before people started to talk about it but when they did, it turned out that all the clubs in the first and second division leagues were involved in such spiritual practices. In fact, there is not a single football match going on without somebody hiring someone to prepare something. But that was not the whole story. It seemed that witchcraft, sorcery and magic were also used by players, coaches and club executives against each other. They employed these spiritual forces to attain their own individual goals in life.

But football in Cameroon, and in Africa in general, is not just a story about witchcraft, sorcery and magic. I have seen, heard and experienced things that relate to many other aspects in football such as the organization of football clubs, ethnic groups using football as a stepping stone to gain power, corruption and bribery within the competition and within clubs and teams, the violent nature of some supporters but also the enthusiasm and joy of others, and of course the day-to-day lives of football players in Buea.

A book about football in Cameroon would not be remotely complete without mentioning these aspects as well.

## Roger Milla and his belly dance

First, let me present a general overview of African football as I know it. I will start in 1990, the year in which I was first introduced to the world of African football – or, more particularly, Cameroonian football.

As a kid, I went to a summer school on the Dutch island of Texel. About 25 classmates and I were staying in a huge barn in the middle of nowhere with only one modern device: a television set. On June 8, everybody gathered around the

TV for the opening match of the World Cup between the world champions Argentina and a completely unknown nation at that time, Cameroon.

There was not a single human being on the planet who gave the poor Cameroonians a chance against Maradona and his team mates. They were going to be seriously beaten and that would be the end of the 'African adventure' at the World Cup in Italy. But then, in the 67<sup>th</sup> minute of play, Francois Omam-Biyik received a pass from Cyrille Mekanaky and scored the first and only goal of the match. Afterwards, the Cameroonians were the talk of the day. Who were these guys? And where did these Indomitable Lions come from?

When Cameroon played the second match in Group B against Romania, Coach Valeri Nepomniachi put in his joker card: Roger Milla. Although Milla also came in as a substitute during the first match (for only the last ten minutes or so), this time the 38-year-old football veteran was sent on to the pitch after 58 minutes of play. He scored within 15 minutes and repeated the trick five minutes before the end of the match. After each goal he ran to the corner flag to perform his memorable belly dance. Cameroon beat Romania 2 goals to 1. The subsequent surprising loss of the Lions to Russia (0-4) did not really matter. Cameroon topped Group B with four points; Romania came in second with three points.

In the second round, Cameroon had to take on Colombia with its famous long-haired captain, Carlos Valderrama. The official 90 minutes of the match ended without a goal being scored. Then, in extra time, it was 'Milla time' again. He scored two goals in four minutes and at the end Cameroon had beaten Colombia 2 goals to 1. For the first time ever, an African country had made it to the quarter finals of the World Cup.

By now, all the kids and the teachers in the barn on the island of Texel were supporting the Cameroonian national team, not only because the Netherlands had already been eliminated but also because of the impressive football skills of this bunch of complete outsiders at the World Cup. We were not the only ones who were cheering for them though. Most people in Holland tuned in for the quarter-finals between Cameroon and England to see what the 'Africans' were going to do.

Especially in developing countries, people were waving the green, red and yellow flag of Cameroon. After all, Cameroon represented the 'Third World' at a 'First World' tournament and poor people around the world wanted them to beat the powers that be. For them, football was the one and only way in which poor nations could be stronger than the rich ones. Roger Milla once said: 'It's thanks to football that a small nation could become great' (Kuper 1996 [1994]: 113).

The quarter-final match between Cameroon and England was one of the toughest matches in the tournament. David Platt put England in the lead in the 25<sup>th</sup> minute and most of us thought the dream of Milla and his team mates would

end here. In the second half though, Cameroon fought back. They forced a penalty. Emmanuel Kunde scored and the teams were level again. Four minutes later, Roger Milla passed the ball to Eugene Ekeke who then caused cheers and screams throughout the barn. Cameroon was leading 2 goals to 1. But then striker Gary Lineker scored a penalty for England, and then another one in extra time. Everybody agreed that Cameroon had been the better team, but they were out of the tournament. Even England's coach Bobby Robson admitted that Cameroon had been unlucky.

A lot of people felt sorry for the Cameroonians. I felt depressed – but only for one night. Elsewhere in the world things were worse. Journalist Simon Kuper (1996: 118-119) wrote that when 'England knocked out the Lions a Bangladeshi man died of a heart-attack and a Bangladeshi women hung herself. "The elimination of Cameroon also means the end of my life," said her suicide note'.

Roger Milla, however, told the French magazine *France Football* that he was happy that Cameroon had been eliminated by England. 'I'll tell you something: if we had beaten England, Africa would have exploded. Ex-plo-ded. There would even have been deaths. The Good Lord knows what he does. Me, I thank him for stopping us in the quarter-finals. That permitted a little pliancy' (Kuper 1996: 102).

Everybody seems to remember Cameroon's success at the 1990 World Cup only in direct relation to the team's star player, Roger Milla. The funny thing is that he was not even called up by the coach before the start of the tournament. Paul Biya, the president of the Republic of Cameroon, insisted that Milla – who was playing in an insignificant league on the island of Réunion in his retiring years – be selected for the squad.

A year after the World Cup, Milla was voted African Footballer of the Year.

## The Brazilians of Africa

The 1990 World Cup put Cameroon and Africa as a whole on the map. That is what football usually does. On the one hand, the image of the Cameroonian footballers was very positive: one of strong, fast and happy players. Cameroon, too, sounded like a nice place to visit one day. 'For a month we were told daily that this was a happy-go-lucky place with lots of voodoo, and the comparisons with Brazil cannot have hurt either' (Kuper 1996: 124). Indeed, Cameroonians were portrayed as the 'Brazilians of Africa' who were dancing in the streets all the time. I remember grabbing a map of the world right away to find out where these people lived – and how I could get there myself.

But there was another image of Cameroon – and Africa – as well, one with rather more negative connotations. Although Cameroon had already participated

in the World Cup back in 1982, this was actually the first time that many Westerners had ever seen Africans play at a major tournament. But most of them did not see regular football players on the field, they saw Africans on the field. The Cameroonian players, and African players in general, were stereotyped as opposed to things they were not: modern, Western, professional. Instead, they were portrayed in a pre-modern way, namely as ‘magical’ and ‘irrational’ (Giulianotti 1999: 140). Bale (2004: 244) noted:

The survey of images of the 1990 World Cup revealed that the players from Cameroon were written as having “football in their blood”; they “obtained their skills as whippersnappers on the streets”; their play brought “magic to the game”; they were “instinctive footballers”, “refreshingly attacking” and “not at all inhibited”. European soccer, on the other hand, was represented by “modern” images – those of “the artificial” and “the machine”....

One of the most persistent ideas at that time was that Africans in general did not play according to any football tactics or strategies, they just went onto the field and *played*. As Kuper (1996: 103) explains, Westerners ‘believe that Africans have no notion of tactics. “They go out there to enjoy themselves”, say our commentators’.

Of course, the success of the Cameroonian national team demanded a somewhat different view. ‘For a long time we said that Africans could not play football. After 1990, we invented an explanation. Africans can play, we said, because they were born that way. They are naturals. They have no idea of what they are doing’ (Kuper 1996: 103). The people who said these things, though, probably did not know anything about Africa’s long football history. After all, the game of football had been introduced into South Africa as early as the 1860s. And in 1923, Egypt was the first African country to join FIFA. The Egyptians were also one of the founding members of CAF in 1957, which now is the largest continental football body in the world with more than 50 members.

Yet since African nations were not successful on a global football stage – at the World Cup – most Westerners thought that Africans were nothing but ‘children’ in terms of football. However, one of the reasons why Africans teams did not seem to perform well at the World Cup was because there were hardly any national teams from the African continent present in the first place. Between 1934 and 1970, only one African team participated in the World Cup – and only briefly, I may add. Egypt played its first match against Hungary in 1934, lost 4-2 and went home again.

Armstrong & Giulianotti (2004) argue that the African continent was completely and utterly ‘neglected’ before João Havelange took over the FIFA presidency in 1974. ‘African nations gained directly from Havelange’s stated aim to expand the game competitively. Without a guaranteed place at the World Cup finals since 1934, African nations were represented in turn by Morocco, Zaire and Tunisia at successive tournaments during the 1970s’ (Ibid.: 10).



In making the World Cup more competitive, the Brazilian Havelange needed more teams – from all over the world. In the first decade of his presidency, though, Africa did not really seem to take advantage of its reserved place at the World Cup. Although Morocco's and Tunisia's appearances at the World Cups in 1970 and 1978 were not very successful to say the least, Zaire's World Cup campaign in 1974 may well have been the worst in the tournament's history. The year 1982 was the turning point for Africa at the World Cup. Cameroon drew all three of its matches in Group A and was eliminated on goal difference only by the Italians. When the World Cup landed in Mexico in 1986, Africa had officially earned two places, which were (unsuccessfully) taken by Algeria and Morocco.

Cameroon's performance and Milla's belly dance in 1990 most likely made a huge impression upon Havelange because in 1994 he granted the African continent three places. Cameroon, Morocco and Nigeria were the lucky ones to go to the World Cup, but only Nigeria's Super Eagles made it past the group phase. At the start of the 1998 World Cup, five (out of the 32) places were reserved for African nations. It may well have been João Havelange's last gift to Africa before retiring after 24 years as president of FIFA. The national teams of South Africa, Cameroon, Tunisia and Morocco all flew to France and returned just two weeks later having failed to qualify for the second round. Nigeria was again successful in the group phase but again did not survive the first round of the knock-out phase.

At the World Cup in South Korea and Japan in 2002, Senegal became the second African nation to reach the quarter finals, only to be eliminated by Turkey (0-1). South Africa, Cameroon, Nigeria and Tunisia did not perform very well. By the start of the century, though, African football players were no longer viewed as savages with no tactical skills; instead, they were seen as fierce opponents, ready to beat any team at anytime.

## Africa's leg drain

Before 1990, African football players were viewed as a curiosity, completely unpredictable and sometimes even a liability in a team. After 1990, African football players were 'hot' – in the eyes of European football agents. They were fast, strong and, above all, cheap. And so the movement of African players to the West increased. By 1999, Bale (2004: 230) notes, 'over 890 African professional footballers were listed on the rosters of European professional clubs'. 'Five countries (Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Morocco and Angola) supply over half the African "output". Add four other nations (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ivory Coast, Senegal and Algeria) and over 70 per cent of those moving to Europe are accounted for' (Ibid.: 235).

There is a way in which you can really see the difference *before* and *after* this ‘magical’ year of 1990, namely by looking at the African Footballer of the Year award, which was first organized by *France Football* in 1970 and was taken over by CAF in 1994. *Before* 1990, the majority of the winners were employed by the major clubs in Africa. To be precise, 13 of the 20 African Footballers of the Year were playing on the African continent. Big names were Ibrahim Sunday (playing for Asante Kotoko), Tarak Dhiab (Esperance Tunis), Mahmoud Al Khatib (Al-Ahly) and, of course, the arrested goalkeeping coach at the Nations’ Cup in Mali, Thomas Nkono (Canon de Yaoundé).

In the 1970s and 1980s, Cameroon topped the chart with five African Footballers of the Year. Three of them were playing for the two major clubs in Cameroon’s capital Yaoundé: Canon and Tonnerre. It is said that Canon de Yaoundé was ‘arguably the best African team in the late 1970s’ (Nkwi & Vidacs 1997: 126), having won the African CAF Champions League in 1971, 1978 and 1980, and the African Cup Winners’ Cup in 1979.

Roger Milla used to be Tonnerre de Yaoundé’s star player. Between 1974 and 1977; he scored 69 goals in 87 official matches. Milla and Tonnerre won the African Cup Winners’ Cup in 1975 and made it to the finals in 1976 as well. In the year I was born – 1976 – Milla won his first African Footballer of the Year award. The other two Cameroonians who were chosen as the best African player of the year – one of whom was Theophile Abega who was almost as popular among Cameroonians as Milla himself – were playing in the French national league.

*After* 1990, however, *all* the African Footballers of the Year were playing in the European leagues. They were big players such as Ghanaian Abedi Pele (playing for Olympique Marseille, France), Liberian George Weah (AC Milan, Italy), Nigerian Nwankwo Kanu (Inter Milan, Italy & Arsenal, England) and El Hadji Diouf (Rennes, France & Liverpool, England) from Senegal. Currently, Michael Essien, Didier Drogba and Samuel Eto’o are the very best African players in Europe. The Cameroonian striker Eto’o, who is playing for FC Barcelona, even won the African Footballer of the Year award three times in a row.

Three things can be concluded from the preceding statements. One is that Europe seems to be draining Africa of its best players, ‘leading to a deskilling of players in African leagues’ (Bale 2004: 238). This has led to a so-called leg drain – as opposed to a brain drain – with the best African players now playing in profitable football leagues in Europe. In Africa itself, the leg drain has caused a devaluation of the national football leagues in the various African countries. In Cameroon, for instance, the two clubs – Canon and Tonnerre de Yaoundé – have not made any impact in the CAF Champions League in years, most likely because the best Cameroonian players are playing elsewhere.

The second conclusion may be that players who are active in the local African leagues (excluding the North African region) no longer have any chance of making it to their respective national teams. Prior to Milla's road to stardom, national teams in Africa consisted mostly of players who were playing in African competitions. Even the Cameroonian national team that beat Argentina in 1990 consisted of five players who were playing for local clubs in Yaoundé.

These days many African national teams are made up of players who are employed by clubs outside the African continent. 'Of the 311 players making up the 16 national squads in the 2002 African Nations Cup' Bale (2004: 230) argues, '193, or 62 per cent, were employed full-time in Europe. In the cases of Cameroon, Nigeria and Senegal, every squad member was domiciled in Europe'. However some say that African national teams are profiting from the increased skills of their European-based players.

The third conclusion may be that the old view of Africans as instinctive footballers who do not know what they are doing has for the most part vanished. Instead, some of the very best football players in Europe are Africans and they are playing for the biggest clubs in Europe: Bayern Munich, AFC Ajax, AC Milan, FC Barcelona, Chelsea and so on. These players have now become necessary and sometimes even decisive factors within their respective teams.

## Football experiences in Africa

Football is the most important sport in many of the 53 African countries. It is no surprise that football is generally known here as the 'King Sport' or, in French, *le Sport Roi*. In Cameroon, people say that 'Christianity is our first religion, football our second one'. Africa itself is the second largest continent on earth and is inhabited by around 900 million people. The majority of these people will surely have watched their teams perform at the African Cup of Nations and the World Cup in 2006.

The African Cup of Nations is a kind of football barometer that measures which African nations are hot and which are not. Traditionally, West African and North African nations have always dominated the Nations' Cup. In 2006, in Egypt, all the 'power houses' were there: Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, but also Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. In the finals of the 25<sup>th</sup> edition of the Cup, Egypt beat Ivory Coast after a penalty shoot-out and won the tournament for a record fifth time. In terms of Cup winners, Cameroon and Ghana are runners-up with four titles each. And the Nations' Cup in Egypt showed the strength of Ivory Coast's upcoming national team, as well as the decline of South Africa's Bafana Bafana, who were eliminated in the group phase. This has shed

serious doubts about the national team's performances at the next World Cup ('Twenty-Ten') on South Africa's home soil.

But the 2006 African Cup of Nations appeared to be only a warming-up for the biggest sporting event on earth: the World Cup. A decade ago, Kuper (1996: 108) wrote that in the World Cup

only the rich, stable African countries do well. The seven African nations that have reached the World Cup since 1970 are Morocco, Zaire, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Cameroon and Nigeria. Of course, measured by African standards, only Zaire – the one World Cup flop – is a poor country. The spread of wealth in Africa closely matches the spread of footballing success.

There are always countries in Africa that are being torn apart by war or are simply too poor to be able to have a national team participate in international tournaments. This is why the majority of African nations never usually play any role in the Nations' Cup, the World Cup or the CAF Champions League.

The 2006 World Cup in Germany, however, was a notable exception. In the last round of qualification in 2005, the big African football nations were all eliminated: Cameroon, Nigeria, Senegal, Egypt – and South Africa as well. Instead, three newcomers were given tickets to the World Cup: Ivory Coast, Togo and Angola. These countries – instantly coined 'the new kids on the block' – had been or were still suffering from civil war, or were just very poor. The two other tickets were taken by Tunisia and Ghana. Despite a civil war going on in Ivory Coast, the Elephants made an impression at the World Cup but were unfortunate to have been allocated to the 'Group of Death'. Angola, too, did not get far but nonetheless showed some football talent. Ghana made it to the second round where the Black Stars were defeated by Brazil. Tunisia went out quietly.

Most attention, however, was given to the Togolese Hawks, whose maiden World Cup appearance ended in extreme disappointment among the five million inhabitants of this West African country. Two problems plagued the national team: a row over match bonuses and a disorganized national football federation. Apparently, Togolese star player Emmanuel Adebayor and his team mates had been promised a lot of money but had received nothing by the start of the World Cup. They threatened to go on strike and high-ranking Togolese government officials had to travel to Germany to resolve matters. By the end of June 2006, Togo had finished last in their group without any points and without having scored even a single goal. Players, coaches and officials from the Togolese football federation were still fighting amongst themselves until FIFA finally intervened and paid the players out of Togo's appearance fee at the World Cup. The row over the match bonuses and the refusal of Rock Gnassingbe – president of the football federation and brother of the president of Togo – to pay the money he had promised beforehand, is typical of the state of affairs in African football.

Even though some African countries are relatively rich and good at football, their football associations (FAs) and governments do not only seem to lack the necessary funding, the officials also lack organizational skills and tend to interfere with team affairs. And although it is difficult to prove, many allegations of corruption have been made against officials of various African football federations. As Kuper (1996: 109) stated,

Senegal is a rich nation and good in football, but its FA clean forgot to enter for the 1990 World Cup. ... Or take Nigeria, another rich country, with more than 100 million inhabitants, where from time to time the government fires all the officials of the FA. This last happened a couple of years ago, when the Nigerian kit manager forgot to take the team's shorts along to a home match against Burkina Faso.

Even in Cameroon, the national team suffers from interference by officials from the *Fédération Camerounaise de Football* (FECAFOOT) or by the Minister of Sports. Former coaches Artur Jorge and Winfried Schäfer both resigned when the Minister of Sports not only became personally involved in the team's line-up but also did not pay their salaries for months on end.

In Cameroon, and Africa as a whole, officials taking over the coach's job of recruiting and selecting players for the national team are more the rule than the exception. This is mainly related to what we call 'tribalism', or the process by which players from certain ethnic groups are favoured over others. For instance, almost 90 per cent of the 1990 Cameroonian national team consisted of players from the Bassa. Even today, the majority of the Indomitable Lions belong to the country's economically and politically powerful ethnic groups, for instance the Beti. Other groups, such as the Bamileke from the West Province, are under-represented in the national team.

In the Cameroonian national team, and in other African national teams as well, one can easily see how football lends itself to both ethnic and nationalistic sentiments. Football is even an important vehicle for gaining or maintaining political power in Africa, as is the case in many other places in the world as well. Financial difficulties, a lack of organization and tribalism are also very visible in the Cameroonian football leagues. We will see plenty of examples in the chapters to come, including cases of corruption, bribery and nepotism. Since many African countries are to be found at the lower – negative – end of the Corruption Perception Index, one sees or hears of cases of bribery occurring in most African football tournaments and competitions.

Last, but certainly not least, in tournaments such as the African Cup of Nations and the World Cup, one can see how the African national teams use spiritual forces such as witchcraft, sorcery and magic to win their football matches. The arrested Cameroonian goalkeeping coach at the Nations' Cup in Mali in 2002 was just one example. Many people in Cameroon told me that all the national teams on the African continent employ witch doctors to ensure

victory in the field. In fact, they say, officials from the football federations are involved in finding, hiring and paying these witch doctors. At every match, there can be as many as five to seven witch doctors working for a team. They either work from 'home' or are flown in to prepare the team in person.

During the World Cup too, African teams employ witch doctors who 'do' match preparation. Sometimes a European team is even suspected of using black magic. When France won the World Cup in 1998, many people in Africa thought that the Africans in the team had employed witch doctors to win the final against Brazil. Indeed, Ronaldo's famous blackout in the dressing room minutes before the start of the match was allegedly the work of an African witch doctor.

Of course, most Westerners would immediately ask why no African team ever won the World Cup if their magic is so successful. People in Cameroon believe that European and Latin-American teams also use magic to win their matches. European teams such as Germany and England simply have more modern and stronger forms of magic at their disposal, which is related to the view among Africans that mind-boggling inventions such as computers and planes are the result of 'white man's witchcraft'. Brazil and Argentina are even seen as having the most powerful forms of magic on the planet.

Most Westerners seem to regard witchcraft, sorcery and magic as superstition at best and a 'load of mumbo-jumbo' at worst. Even some Africans see *muti* or *juju*, as magic is called in Southern and West Africa respectively, as proof of the continent's lack of modernity and a proliferation of all things traditional. They say that match preparation gives Africa a bad name and that it only confirms the old image of Africans as being 'magical' and 'irrational'.

Some Westerners and Africans alike also point to the view that witchcraft, sorcery and magic in football can lead to a fatalistic attitude among footballers who, after all, do not have to train anymore because magic will ensure a team's victory on the field. However, most players in Cameroon are well aware of the fact that training sessions are more essential than the witch doctor and his magic. We will see later how witchcraft, sorcery and magic themselves also function at a psychological level, providing confidence and team unity.

The reason why some Westerners are so surprised when hearing about these African practices may be because they receive most of their information from journalists who report on the strange and bizarre excesses of witchcraft beliefs. But I have never seen players urinating on the football field or eating monkey meat, as some stories would have it. Of course, many things happen but the majority of the practices are far more subtle and form part of a complicated set of ideas and practices that have been present in Africa for centuries and are still very much alive in all aspects of contemporary Africa. At the end of the day,

athletes from all over the world perform religious rituals, and everybody attaches different labels to the practice:

Western observers may ridicule such “savagery” while conveniently forgetting that all players and supporters practise their personalized forms of witchcraft as pre-match “superstitions”. Professional footballers are renowned for such fatalistic practices as eating a particular pre-match lunch, being last onto the field, not wearing their shirt until they reach the field, sporting lucky socks, talking to or avoiding specific team-mates, and shooting into (or purposefully missing) an empty net in the pre-match warm-up. Supporters are little different, ritually availing themselves of their charmed attire, digesting their “lucky” football nourishment and securing their favourite seat. (Giulianotti 1999: 20)

## Research on football in Cameroon

This book is not about African football in general, it is about football in Cameroon. However it may be worth noting that many of the issues discussed in the previous paragraph – a lack of finance and organization, tribalism, corruption and spiritual forces – occur at various levels of football: local, national and international. This book about local football in Cameroon can, therefore, easily be extrapolated to Cameroonian football including the national team and to other African countries as well.

I have already explained how I came up with the idea of doing research on the occurrence of witchcraft, sorcery and magic, among other things, in football. The answer as to why I performed this research is equally simple: it just sounded, and still does, like a perfect anthropological research project. I did not have to think for a long time either about where to perform my research. Not only is Cameroon, as we now know, one of the strongest African football nations, it is also a place where beliefs in witchcraft, sorcery and magic thrive (although this could also be said of other countries such as Nigeria or Ghana too).

One of the main reasons for choosing Cameroon, however, was a very practical one. I had a contact in Buea, the town where I stayed for five months. Robert Akoko is a lecturer and researcher in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Buea and it was he who helped me get settled and provided the atmosphere in which I could perform my research in a meaningful way.

Before I say something about the research methods and the population, I will first provide a brief description of the research setting. Cameroon lies on the divide between West and Central Africa and borders Nigeria, Chad, the Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. With an annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of around €30 billion, Cameroon may be poor but it is relatively wealthy compared to most Sub-Saharan countries. The average annual income in Cameroon is approximately € 1,000 per person.

One should not be fooled by these statistics, however, because at least 50 per cent of the Cameroonian population lives off less than US\$2 a day. In the town of Buea where I conducted my research, many people were very poor. Having a bathroom, running water or even electricity inside one's house or compound was a luxury that many did not possess. There was, however, an abundance of food and most people seemed to cope reasonably well with poverty.

In Cameroon and at least a dozen other West and Central African countries as well, the currency is the *Communaute Financiere Africaine* franc (CFA franc or FCFA). €1 is equal to FCFA 655.

When travelling through the country, one might think that Cameroon is a relatively peaceful country. On closer inspection, though, it can also be seen as a police state, which has been governed by the current president, Paul Biya, for a quarter of a century. Democracy is a rather empty concept in Cameroon as the president and his party usually win elections with an astounding majority. The press enjoys relative freedom, that is if you are not writing critically about the people in power. Corruption abounds and is visible in all aspects of life.

Buea itself is a relatively small town in the South West Province. This town – pronounced *Boy-ya* – is located in one of the wettest areas of the country, and even of Africa. While its close vicinity to the equator results in a tropical climate in most parts of Cameroon, Buea is relatively cool with average temperatures around 20 to 25 degrees Celsius. This is due to the presence of Mount Cameroon, one of the highest mountains in Africa. However, it can be extremely hot, even in Buea.

In Buea, and Cameroon in general, there is a rainy season from April to October and a dry season from November to March. The northern part of the country is generally hotter and drier than the other parts, with average temperatures around 35 to 40 degrees Celsius. On the other hand, the southern part has relatively high rainfall throughout the year and constant temperatures of around 25 degrees Celsius.

An important aspect of my research was the location of Buea, namely in the western part of the country. The South West and North West Provinces together constitute the Anglophone zone of Cameroon. The other eight provinces are officially known as the Francophone zone. Aside from English and French, the approximately 17 million Cameroonians speak numerous local languages, which can be divided into at least 24 major language groups. In and around Buea, most people speak Pidgin English, which is English but not quite.

Cameroonians can also be divided into around 250 ethnic groups. At least 40 per cent of the population have so-called indigenous beliefs, 40 per cent are Christian and 20 per cent are Muslim. In reality, there is a great deal of syncretism between indigenous beliefs and Christianity and Islam and belief in one



does not exclude belief in the other. However, there are clear boundaries between the Christian South and the Muslim North.

I conducted my research in Buea with two clubs: the first-division team Olympique de Buea and the second-division team Buea Boys. I joined both teams in training sessions for at least the first three months and I went to see every football match I could in Buea, Limbe and sometimes Douala. A few times I was allowed to travel with the players in the bus to away matches. For instance, I joined the Olympique de Buea players when they were going to Yaoundé for a match against the big team Canon de Yaoundé, and to a town called Mbouda for a match against Bamboutos.

Besides this method of participant observation, I conducted many interviews with footballers, team managers, a witch doctor and others. In short, my research was of a qualitative nature. This is also the main reason why I did not choose Cameroon's national team as the focus of my attention. I wanted to be among football players for several consecutive months, which would surely have been impossible had I chosen the Indomitable Lions. They only get together once in a while to practise for an international match, play it, and then leave again for their respective European cities or elsewhere. It would also have been extremely difficult to get close to players such as Eto'o or Rigobert Song, and the coach or a FECAFOOT official would not have allowed it in any case.

In Buea, I was able to be part of the teams for a relatively long period of time. The football players were my primary research population, the two clubs – Olympique de Buea and Buea Boys – the main focus of my attention. Before I left for Cameroon, I had thought that it would be vital to get close to at least a couple of football players if I wanted to get some information on the topics of witchcraft, sorcery and magic. Indeed, it turned out that most people in Buea regarded these spiritual forces as some sort of African secret, which they were not supposed or willing to share with a white guy. It was only after a few months in the field, when my friendship with the football players Essomba and Ashu started to develop that I heard my first stories of match preparation in the local competition.

Since I (rightly) had the impression that my research topic was not easy to investigate and since I wanted to know more about Cameroonian football in general anyway, I decided not to include the words witchcraft, sorcery or magic in the research question. Instead, I kept the whole question somewhat vague. This allowed me more room to manoeuvre, although I had to be careful not to lose my broad research focus.

The research question implicitly relates to the main goal of football and to the reason why people employ witch doctors, engage in tribalism or bribe referees, among other things. The question therefore goes as follows:

*How do teams in Cameroon try to win football matches?*

Some sub-questions were:

*What is the role of the club and its executives?*

*What are the roles of football players, coaches, supporters and officials?*

*What is the role of ethnicity or tribalism?*

*What are the roles of corruption and bribery?*

*What are the roles of witchcraft, sorcery and magic?*

These are all very descriptive questions, which led to descriptive answers. Of course, I did include anthropological work by others in my book. However, I found that research on football in Africa has yet to be fully developed. There are a couple of anthropological books about football in general and football in Africa in particular. Two of them are collections of articles and both are edited by Armstrong & Giulianotti: *Entering the Field* (1997) and *Football in Africa* (2004). Both volumes include articles written by Bea Vidacs, who has done extensive research on football in Cameroon, mostly with regard to topics such as ethnicity and politics. Earlier, in 1974, Clignet & Stark published an article about football in Cameroon, which I quote in places in the book.

Surprisingly, only in one of the volumes mentioned above does one find an article about witchcraft, sorcery and magic in African football, namely by Leseth, who has written about witchcraft in Tanzanian football. It seems that anthropological research on this topic is scarce. I mention Scotch (1961), Leseth (1997) and Royer (2002) in some parts of this book. In most cases though, I had to rely on my own research and the data I collected in Buea. But again, this book is mostly a descriptive work, not an analytical one.

I gathered information from several people in Buea – players, coaches, team managers, club executives, supporters, a witch doctor and employees of the provincial branch of FECAFOOT. All this information is presented in this book. However, I only introduce a few of my informants in the story. There are the two football players, Essomba and Ashu, with whom I interacted the most. In fact, Ashu even stayed at my place for a few months at the end of my research period. These two players definitely provided the bulk of the information in this book. They are both Anglophone players and I have to emphasize that this research will probably reflect the Anglophone perspective on Cameroonian football more than it will the Francophone angle.

Zé is a third person who features in the story. He is a witch doctor from the coastal town of Limbe. However, I stop referring to people who prepare magic as witch doctors, as this is a rather negative term for Zé's profession. He himself asked me to label him as a spiritual adviser, so that is what I do. I had many conversations with this spiritual adviser, both in Buea and in Limbe. I stayed in

his house for a few weekends and he explained many interesting things to me about the uses of witchcraft, sorcery and magic in Cameroonian football.

Finally, there is Kalla, the team manager of Olympique de Buea. He may play a somewhat smaller role in the story but he provided me with a lot of information nonetheless. He was actually the one who shared some very sensitive information with me, particularly about how Olympique de Buea has used corruption and bribery in trying to win (some of) their matches. The names Essomba, Ashu, Zé and Kalla from Olympique de Buea and Buea Boys are fictitious for reasons of privacy.

The book consists of seven chapters that correspond to the seven days of the week. During this week, Olympique de Buea is preparing for a match on Sunday. Each chapter, and therefore each day of the week, is devoted to one theme. For instance, on 'Monday' I say something about the different football leagues in Cameroon and which clubs have proved to be dominant over the years. 'Tuesday' deals with expenditures, club sponsorship and the role of the African big man. 'Wednesday' discusses tribalism – based on ethnic groups and language – in the football leagues and within the teams. On 'Thursday', various aspects of corruption, bribery and nepotism are explained, both within the league and within the clubs and teams themselves. Next, on 'Friday', I elaborate on the spiritual forces in football, particularly witchcraft and sorcery within the clubs and teams and, on 'Saturday' I focus on match preparation in the football leagues and the role of spiritual advisers. Finally, 'Sunday' is match day, and this is where I discuss a match between Olympique de Buea and Bamboutos de Mbouda and consider the role of the ancestors, supporters and referees during football matches.

The story takes place in 2003, the year I did my research in Buea.

## Monday

The expression on their faces says enough. The players are about to start a training session but they do not seem to be jumping with joy about playing football. On the contrary, they are really angry and do not even take the trouble to hide their frustration from the assistant coaches and the supporters who, evidently, feel exactly the same way. But one man is absolutely infuriated with the team and this happens to be the man who has the means to do something about it. And that is exactly what he did today.

I heard it on the radio this morning. Breaking news. The club president has suspended the team manager, the team doctor and the head coach as a result of yesterday's dramatic loss to one of the team's main rivals. Anyone who saw the match could not have been surprised by this news. Only minutes after the match, which ended 0-1 to the visitors, the club president walked onto the field towards his coach, slapped him in the face, and then left the stadium with a couple of bodyguards by his side.

It was not only yesterday's match that had led the club's president to suspend his staff. It had something to do with last week's match as well, and the match before that one, and the match before that. First-division team Olympique de Buea has lost six matches in a row. They have tumbled to eleventh place in the league table this season, which is a personal insult to the president who has invested so much in his club and has such ambitious goals for it.

On top of losing so many matches, and perhaps the worst thing of all for Olympique de Buea, is being beaten by rivals PWD Bamenda. This is just inexcusable.

## Derby at the Molyko Stadium

It is early Sunday morning and there are no indications whatsoever that today will not be a good day. It is already hot, maybe even a bit too hot. But then again, we are in the middle of the dry season when temperatures can easily rise to well over 30 degrees Celsius. The morning fog has started to retreat to nearby Mount Cameroon. The sky is clear and a soft wind is blowing through town.

Some people in Buea had advised me to come to the stadium a little bit early. And when I walk towards the football stadium around two o'clock, Buea's main road is already jammed with cars and buses. These cars and buses, in turn, are packed with enthusiastic supporters, some of whom have found themselves a 'seat' in open boots or on top of the buses.

Hundreds of people are walking up the main road, some of them drinking, some of them talking to girls, but all of them discussing the upcoming match. Today, Olympique de Buea (South West Province) is playing PWD Bamenda (North West Province). It is a derby between two teams from Cameroon's so-called Anglophone zone. Derbies like this attract thousands of spectators from all over the province.

I have arrived at the Omnisport Stadium, which is in the middle of a neighbourhood called Molyko and most people therefore refer to the stadium as the Molyko Stadium. Looking at this structure is actually shocking when one realizes that Cameroon is one of the biggest African footballing nations of all times: Molyko Stadium is only a stadium if you are willing to consider a brick wall around a football field as such. I have read somewhere that this place can host up to 8,000 spectators.

Some of the supporters quickly pointed out that Cameroon hosts only three major stadiums: in Yaoundé (with a capacity up to 50,000 spectators), Douala (40,000 spectators) and Garoua (35,000 spectators). These are the stadiums where the national team plays its international qualification matches for the African Cup of Nations or the World Cup. All the other stadiums look very similar to the one here in Buea, with capacities ranging from 2,000 to 10,000 spectators.

There is a gate of solid steel inside the brick wall. Supporters are clustering around a couple of holes on both sides of the gate to buy tickets for the match. The scenes in front of the stadium are absolutely chaotic. One of the Olympique de Buea players, who is not playing today because of injury, takes me by the hand towards the entrance to the stadium. It is guarded by a couple of soldiers. 'He's the new coach,' the player says, while pointing at me. The soldiers glance at me for a minute, then look at each other and finally let me through. 'I thought he was a new player,' I hear one of the soldiers saying to his colleague. A little

while later, when the player and I have reached the side of the field, we are still laughing. It is not the first time we have pulled off a stunt like this.

Suddenly, the player pushes me and some other bystanders aside. A bus is driving dangerously through the main gate into the stadium. The bus throws up huge dust clouds that block our view from the field. It is the official bus of the opposing team. The players of PWD Bamenda are getting off the bus and are slowly walking onto the field. Despite the intense heat, none of these players leaves the field for the next hour although they could have rested in one of the dressing rooms that are reserved for the visiting team. The Olympique de Buea players, on the other hand, are relaxing in their dressing room. When they come out some time later, we are ready for the football match.

There is only one wooden stand in the stadium and it is almost collapsing under the weight of hundreds of supporters who are jumping up and down. The rest of the supporters are standing behind a fence that surrounds the entire field. The fence itself is full of holes.

The referee blows his whistle to start the match. Whenever a PWD Bamenda player is in possession of the ball, he is cheered by the many supporters on the sideline. It is funny how the majority of the supporters in the stadium seem to be supporting the visiting team.

The match is very close and neither team has a lot of chances. But then, somewhere in the second half, one of the PWD Bamenda players escapes from his opponent and scores the match's first and only goal. The ground is literally shaking. Thousands of people are clapping, screaming and shouting. Before the referee can resume the match, I see hundreds of supporters running away from a particular area on the far side of the stadium. Some of the supporters are being hit on the head by rocks thrown by other supporters. A few supporters are bleeding heavily and need urgent medical treatment.

The referee continues the match. And then it is over. Olympique de Buea has been defeated. The player and I are already walking out of the stadium, when I see the club's president walk onto the field towards the coach.

One week from now, the local sports magazine *Global Football* will print an article entitled '*L'arène des violences*' ('The stadium of violence') which will be complemented with several pictures of seriously bleeding spectators. By that time, officials from the Cameroonian football federation FECAFOOT were deciding whether they should penalize Olympique de Buea for crowd trouble or shut the stadium down for a while. They did neither.

## Playing football in Buea

The Olympique de Buea players finally start performing some simple exercises, although they do not seem to be happy with the whole situation. Due to the absence of a head coach, the players limit themselves to stretching, jogging and running around the field. The players of this first division team are known as the 'Lava Boys' because of the nearby presence of Mount Cameroon, the tallest mountain in West Africa with its peak at 4,095 metres. The mountain – known as Mt Fako in local terminology – is an active volcano that has already erupted six times over the last century. The last eruption took place in 1999 and traces of lava flows are still visible on the ocean side near Limbe.

Buea, the capital of the South West Province, has a total number of approximately 40,000 inhabitants. Some people in Buea call it a large village; others think of it more as a small town. I heard that if one adds up all the inhabitants of the surrounding neighbourhoods, the total number of people living in the area on this side of the mountain is around 150,000. Buea itself consists of one main road that stretches for miles on end, with ditches on both sides. One will know why these ditches are there when the rainy season starts.

On one side of Buea lies the campus of the only Anglophone university in Cameroon, namely the University of Buea. Some of the Olympique de Buea footballers make use of the road on the campus for jogging and running. There is also a student football team that trains on a grass field on campus. The university lies in the Molyko area which, as a result, is filled with student houses and Internet cafés, and there are always students with school books under their arms walking up and down the road.

On the other side of Buea, there is a neighbourhood called the Government Residential Area (GRA) where, as the name implies, one will find the provincial government offices. In between the Molyko area and the GRA area, one will find two neighbourhoods called Small Soppo and Great Soppo, where there is a provincial hospital and a large, popular marketplace.

Buea's football heart, though, is definitely the area around the stadium in the Molyko quarter. This neighbourhood is surprisingly full of bars, small eating spots and a few restaurants. There are no nightclubs in this part of town. For drinking and dancing, one should consider going uptown. In the Molyko area itself, there is a well-known hotel called the Paramount Hotel, where players sometimes watch football matches or just have a drink outside on the terrace.

Two or three houses further up, there is a bar with a very small pool table outside that attracts numerous young people. One of my football friends, Essomba, lives close to this bar. Across the university campus, there is a large and reasonably expensive bar where one has a good chance in meeting up with

the team captain of Olympique de Buea. It is only on rare occasions that he is not in his favourite bar. If one really wants to meet a lot of first and second-division players, one should look out for a small eating place not far from the stadium. On first inspection, it looks very much like a beach bar with its round bar, a television set and friendly staff serving lots of drinks. The players come here to have breakfast, lunch and dinner, to discuss football with their colleagues and to watch Nigerian movies till late into the night.

Most players also live close to Molyko Stadium. For some reason, there are always three, four or five players living in the same compound. The compounds, in turn, are scattered around the area. I myself live in a (student) compound down at a crossing called Malingo Junction, which is near the university campus. From there, I can reach most of the players' houses on foot in ten minutes.

All in all, however, Buea is not really a lively, vibrant place. Most players, at one time or another, have complained that they miss the atmosphere in the towns of their former clubs – such as Bafoussam, Bamenda, Douala, Garoua or Yaoundé – and say that they were quite bored here in Buea.

To continue with the story, Olympique de Buea is Buea's only first division team. The club was formed back in 1999 and that makes it a really, really young team when one considers the history of football in Cameroon. It all started in the city of Douala, a massive urban area an hour's car ride from Buea.

## Cameroon's introduction to football

It was in Douala that Cameroonians first came into to contact with football at the beginning of the twentieth century. Douala is Cameroon's largest city with more than 1.5 million inhabitants (some say over two million) and it is also the centre of economic activity. The major reason for Douala's economic dominance is the presence of a harbour which spreads out over a vast bay. One can actually see the bay when standing somewhere in Buea Town, the uptown part of Buea that lies on the lower slopes of the mountain.

The international diffusion of football into West Africa came alongside its colonization by the major European powers, particularly France and the United Kingdom. From 1884 onwards, Cameroon was a German colony called Kamerun but after Germany's defeat in World War I, the area of present-day Cameroon became a League of Nations Mandate under British but most of all French rule. 'We can see how various contemporary sports evolved from very misty, ancient roots and how others were disseminated from Europe, primarily from England since it was the centre of the most extensive colonial empire and had by far the largest commercial sea trade in the late 1800s ..., carrying sports via ships' crews throughout the world' (Wagner 1989: 5).



It was the French though, not the British, who introduced football to Cameroonians in the 1920s. As Bairner (2001: 13) points out, ‘ironically, association football ... has arguably spread more rapidly and with greater success in countries which were not part of the British Empire than in those that were’.

At first, the European colonizers did not play football anywhere else but in the larger urban settlements, particularly Douala, and the country did not have an official football league in the 1920s. As Clignet & Stark point out in their article ‘Modernisation and Football in Cameroun’ (1974: 410), ‘During the 1920s, the only public contests to be officially sanctioned were those against merchant or naval vessels visiting Cameroun – for example, the match on 23 March 1929 between the European “Sporting Club” of Douala and the team from the French cruiser *Duquesne*’.

In the whole of Africa, and Cameroon as well, it was the ‘teachers and missionaries, soldiers, and colonial settlers [who] were the most prominent practitioners’ (Armstrong & Giulianotti 2004: 8-9). In general, the Europeans did not allow the ‘natives’, as they called Africans at the time, to participate in their sports because they thought that there had to be some sort of segregation between Westerners and the local population. This reluctance to let Africans participate in football falls under the colonial idea that ‘free competition is only allowed when the outcome systematically confirms the pre-eminence of the colonisers’ (Clignet & Stark 1974: 410). ‘As elsewhere in Africa, and in the colonial world in general, the colonizers attempted to exclude the “natives” from playing against them, and thus several early clubs had a European and an “indigenous” team’ (Vidacs 2000: 104).

Clignet & Stark (1974) provide us with the example of Etoile Sportive de Yaoundé, which had a European team and an African team with players who were mostly expatriates. ‘Thus, on 11 November 1930, when celebrations were organised to welcome the crew of a French submarine to be stationed in the port of Douala, two white teams first played each other, and it was only thereafter that Africans took possession of the field’ (Ibid.: 410).

The above situation changed during World War II when most Europeans colonizers turned their attention to more prestigious sports such as tennis and sailing (Ibid.: 411). Eventually it came to the point that ‘the isolation of Europeans from the metropolis and their declining numbers made segregation both unpractical and politically dangerous’ (Ibid.: 411).

From then on, it was mostly the Cameroonians themselves who were involved in football. Cameroonians have since incorporated and modified this new and modern sport into their own culture and society. ‘The imposition of sports of Western origin on non-Western peoples was clearly part of the history of colonization and spread of Empire in the 19th and 20th centuries ... Yet it is abun-

dantly clear that colonized peoples adapted these colonial forms of sport to suit local aesthetics and conditions' (Carter 2002: 413).

Carter gives us the well-known example of how the peoples on the Trobriand Islands changed the game of cricket to fit their own ideas. Leach's documentary shows that their new way of playing cricket was a 'sophisticated activity, thoughtfully and creatively adapted by local people for local understandings about the world' (Ibid.: 413). We will see how Cameroonians did a similar thing with football, with the exception that they did not change the official rules of the game.

Ever since its introduction in the 1920s, football has been the number one sport in Cameroon. There's no other sport that comes even close to being as popular. When the national team plays, the streets are empty and the bars are full of people. Even the local football league, most of whose matches are not broadcast on television, is a favourite subject of discussion.

## Who is dominating football?

According to Nkwi & Vidacs (1997: 124), the first football clubs were set up in Douala and Yaoundé in the 1930s and 1940s. Both cities are located in the Francophone part of the country.

After Germany's loss of *Kamerun*, the French ruled most of the territory now known as Cameroon, whereas the British had to settle for a small strip in the western part which, so it seemed, belonged more to (British) Nigeria than to (present-day) Cameroon. Football in British West Cameroon and French East Cameroun actually developed in a different manner. We will hear more about it in the next chapter. For now, it is important to realize that the 'double' colonization had an impact on the structure of the local football league.

The first football league consisted of two separate competitions. Clubs in so-called West Cameroon played in one competition, while clubs in East Cameroun played in another. The clubs from both sides of the country only played against each other in the tournament called the Cup of Cameroon. The two separate competitions were still going in the first few years after Cameroon's independence in 1960 and the West and East only joined up in May 1972, twelve years after independence. Until then, Cameroon even had two separate national teams, for which only players from either the West or the East part of the country were selected.

The official national football league started in 1960, a year after FECAFOOT was set up and two years before the Cameroonian football association joined FIFA. The first-division league in Cameroon was called Division One (D1) or, in French, the *Championnat de Première Division*. In its first year, 11 clubs

participated in the D1 competition. Three clubs were based in Douala (Caiman, Vent Lolanne, and Oryx), three teams came from Yaoundé (Union, Diamant, and Dragon), one from Nkongsamba and the other four teams were also from the country's Francophone region.

The city of Douala was completely and utterly dominant in the first decade of D1 competition. Ten football seasons passed and nine championships went to a club based in the country's economic capital. Oryx de Douala truly was the number one football club at that time, winning six titles (1960, 1961, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966) and almost all of them in consecutive years. Three other championships were won by Caiman de Douala (1962, 1968) and Union de Douala (1969). Diamant de Yaoundé, the representative from the political capital, won the D1 competition in 1966.

The year 1970 was a turning point when Canon de Yaoundé managed to win the national first-division league. The dominance of clubs from Douala slowly but surely faded in favour of the main club from Yaoundé. In the 1970s, Canon de Yaoundé took home the championship trophy four times (in 1970, 1974, 1977 and 1979). The other six titles went, of course, to clubs in Douala but, in addition to Canon's march to the top, there was another difference between the two decades. Oryx de Douala, for instance, completely disappeared from the championship list and was 'replaced' by two other clubs from the harbour city: Léopards de Douala (1972, 1973) and Union de Douala (1976, 1978).

In the 1980s, the power in football completely shifted in favour of two clubs from the capital: Canon de Yaoundé and Tonnerre de Yaoundé. Canon won the national league four times (in 1980, 1982, 1985 and 1986), Tonnerre de Yaoundé even five times (1981, 1983, 1984, 1987 and 1988). None of the clubs in Douala was able to put up a meaningful fight against the two giants from the capital. The main difference between Douala and Yaoundé turned out to be that only two clubs dominated in Yaoundé, while Douala was full of big clubs struggling to win the championship.

The overall dominance of Douala and Yaoundé was so overwhelming in the first three decades of the D1 competition that only two clubs from other places managed to win the championship in this period, namely Aigle de Nkongsamba (1971) and Racing de Bafoussam (1989). The other 28 championship titles were evenly divided between clubs from Douala and Yaoundé (14 each).

It is not surprising though that clubs from these two cities were always winning the D1 competition. First of all, Douala and Yaoundé are inhabited by the dominant ethnic groups in the country, namely the Bassa and the Beti. Second, the Littoral Province (Douala) and the Centre Province (Yaoundé) were major urban areas at a time when the rest of the country still consisted of mostly rural

Table 1 List of champions of the D1 competition

Year	Football club	Province
2006	Coton Sport de Garoua	North
2005	Coton Sport de Garoua	North
2004	Coton Sport de Garoua	North
2003	Coton Sport de Garoua	North
2002	Canon de Yaoundé	Centre
2001	Coton Sport de Garoua	North
2000	Fovu de Baham	West
1999	Sable de Batie	West
1998	Coton Sport de Garoua	North
1997	Coton Sport de Garoua	North
1996	Unisport de Bafang	West
1995	Racing de Bafoussam	West
1994	Aigle de Nkongsamba	Littoral
1993	Racing de Bafoussam	West
1992	Racing de Bafoussam	West
1991	Canon de Yaoundé	Centre
1990	Union de Douala	Littoral
1989	Racing de Bafoussam	West
1988	Tonnerre de Yaoundé	Centre
1987	Tonnerre de Yaoundé	Centre
1986	Canon de Yaoundé	Centre
1985	Canon de Yaoundé	Centre
1984	Tonnerre de Yaoundé	Centre
1983	Tonnerre de Yaoundé	Centre
1982	Canon de Yaoundé	Centre
1981	Tonnerre de Yaoundé	Centre
1980	Canon de Yaoundé	Centre
1979	Canon de Yaoundé	Centre
1978	Union de Douala	Littoral
1977	Canon de Yaoundé	Centre
1976	Union de Douala	Littoral
1975	Caiman de Douala	Littoral
1974	Canon de Yaoundé	Centre
1973	Léopards de Douala	Littoral
1972	Léopards de Douala	Littoral
1971	Aigle de Nkongsamba	Littoral
1970	Canon de Yaoundé	Centre
1969	Union de Douala	Littoral
1968	Caiman de Douala	Littoral
1967	Oryx de Douala	Littoral
1966	Diamant Yaoundé	Centre
1965	Oryx de Douala	Littoral
1964	Oryx de Douala	Littoral
1963	Oryx de Douala	Littoral
1962	Caiman de Douala	Littoral
1961	Oryx de Douala	Littoral
1960	Oryx de Douala	Littoral

Source: [www.fecafootonline.com](http://www.fecafootonline.com)

areas. It is in these two regions that football was first developed and where the majority of football clubs can still be found today.

However, something changed in the 1990s. The year 1989 definitely was the focal point of a shift in power from Douala and Yaoundé to several other areas in the country, particularly the West Province. In 1989, as we know, Racing de Bafoussam won the national championship. It is one of the oldest clubs from the West Province, a region that is inhabited by the Bamileke people. Over the last two decades, the Bamileke have risen remarkably in economic and political power.

In the 1990s, five winners of the national league were clubs from the West Province, namely Racing de Bafoussam (1992, 1993 and 1995), Unisport de Bafang (1996) and Sable de Batie (1999). Aigle de Nkongsamba won the D1 competition in 1994. Union de Douala and Canon de Yaoundé may have won the title in 1990 and 1991 respectively but both regions have definitely lost their monopoly over football in the country.

Traditionally, Douala and Yaoundé are the cities that deliver between four to six teams each season, although in 1994 there were six teams from the West Province participating in the D1 competition. The numerical dominance of clubs from the Bamileke region in the national league continues to the present day.

Somewhere in the 1990s, yet another club and region made its appearance on the football scene. Coton Sport de Garoua, a club from the North Province, won the national championship in 1997 and 1998 and has since been an undisputed powerhouse in football. Sponsored by a successful agricultural company, the club's dominance after 2000 is even more impressive than that of the clubs from Yaoundé in the 1980s. Coton Sport won the league in 2001 and also took home the title in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. Granted, Fovu de Baham (West Province) won the league in 2000 and Canon de Yaoundé came back strongly in 2002 to win the title, but it is only fair to say that Coton Sport de Garoua is the best club in Cameroon these days.

## Division two and the (mini-)interpools

In contrast to the D1 competition which is a national league, there is another football competition called, not surprisingly, the second division or Division Two. Between 1960 and 1973, the second division was also a competition at a national level with second-division teams from all over the country competing against one another. In 1974, however, the second division officially became a provincial league. There are ten second-division leagues in Cameroon since there are ten provinces in the country. Traditionally, the Littoral Province, the Centre

Province, the West Province and the South West Province are the strongest second-division leagues in the country.

Teams from the same province are divided into two or more football pools in which they play a home and an away match against the other teams in the same pool. The size of each pool and the total number of pools depend on the number of teams in the respective province. The teams that end up at the bottom of their pool will be relegated to the third and lowest division and are replaced by the best teams from the third division. The second-division teams that emerge at the top of their pools will go on to play the so-called mini-interpools.

The mini-interpool tournament is definitely the most popular provincial football tournament in Cameroon. In the South West Province, for instance, the mini-interpools are held somewhere in the middle of the regular football season and usually take place in two of the following towns: Buea, Limbe, Tiko or Kumba. For a period of two weeks, these towns are the football centres in the province, attracting thousands of spectators from various places. The reason is that the second-division teams, if they manage to win the final match of the tournament, can collect a precious ticket to the national interpools.

The national interpools are usually held somewhere between September and November. The interpools are an extremely popular two-week tournament, perhaps almost as popular as the final of the Cup of Cameroon (see below). Here, the winners of the mini-interpools in the ten provinces are divided into two pools of five (or more) teams. Until 2002, the four 'big' provinces mentioned above were allowed to send two teams each but from 2003 onwards, each of the ten provinces can only send one team to the national interpools.

The interpools are a very tense period for the participating teams. For one thing, they only play about four matches in total throughout the entire tournament. Each and every match is therefore vital, especially since the only objective is to end up at the top of the pool. A draw in the interpools is actually almost equal to losing the match. We will see how the second-division Buea Boys, having reached the national interpools at least four times, has never been successful in the tournament.

Some things have changed in the setup of the national interpools since the 1990s. Most importantly, the interpools are no longer always held in Douala and Yaoundé, as was the case for many years on end. Instead, the interpools now take place in the capitals of two different provinces each year. In 2001, for instance, they were held in Bertoua (East Province) and Ngaoundéré (Adamawa). In 2002, the interpools returned to Douala and Yaoundé but in 2003 the hosts were Douala and Garoua (North Province).

In the end, there is an obvious relationship between the D1 and D2 competition. The teams at the bottom of the national league will be relegated to the second

division at the end of the season. Likewise, the teams that emerge as winners at the end of the interpools will move up to the more prestigious D1 competition in Cameroon. Nowadays, the link is even more evident. The worst teams from the national league and the best teams from the provinces will meet face to face during the interpools. The sole purpose is a ticket to the national first-division league.

## The Cup of Cameroon

Alongside the first, second and third-division leagues, there is another competition which runs parallel to the leagues mentioned above. The Cup of Cameroon is a knock-out competition for clubs in the first, second and third divisions. For second and third-division teams, the competition is a means by which they can not only play against the big Cameroonian teams but they can also play matches in front of huge crowds, thereby collecting a lot of money from gate fees.

At the start of the season, it is the teams from the third division that battle against their bigger colleagues from the second division. The clubs from the national (D1) league only start playing at a later stage of the competition. It happens regularly that teams from the lower divisions manage to beat one or several big clubs from the national league. From the quarter finals onwards, however, teams have to play two matches, at home and away. It now becomes increasingly difficult for the second-division teams (the third-division teams have most likely all been defeated by this stage) to stay into the competition.

The semi-finals and especially the final of the Cup of Cameroon are prestigious matches for the clubs. The final is even the country's biggest sporting event of the year. Traditionally, it takes place at the Ahmadou Ahidjo Stadium in Yaoundé. The match is watched by more than 50,000 spectators including the president of Cameroon, who is responsible for determining the date of each year's final. The winner of the Cup of Cameroon enjoys almost as much respect as the winner of the national championship.

The history of the Cup of Cameroon is easily comparable to that of the national D1 competition. The Cup of Cameroon started back in 1960 and the competition has also been completely dominated by clubs from Douala and Yaoundé. Indeed, the first three decades of the Cup of Cameroon delivered 28 cup-final winners from either Douala (10 times) or Yaoundé (18 times), just like the D1 competition. Only once did a club from Yabassi (Dihep Nkam, 1984) and one from Banganté (Panthère Sportive, 1988) bring home the Cup.

Between 1960 and 1989, Union de Douala won the Cup four times, Oryx de Douala three times, Dynamo de Douala two times, and Dragon de Douala one

Table 2 List of Cup of Cameroon finals since 1960

Year	Final (score)	Winner (province)
2006	Union de Douala – Fovu de Baham (1-0)	Union de Douala (Littoral)
2005	Impôts FC Yaoundé – Unisport de Bafang (1-0)	Impôts FC Yaoundé (Centre)
2004	Coton Sport de Garoua – Union de Douala (1-0)	Coton Sport de Garoua (North)
2003	Coton Sport de Garoua – Sable de Batie (2-1)	Coton Sport de Garoua (North)
2002	Olympique de Buea – Sable de Batie (2-1)	Olympique de Buea (South West)
2001	Fovu de Baham – Cintra Yaoundé (3-2)	Fovu de Baham (West)
2000	Kumbo Strikers – Unisport de Bafang (1-0)	Kumbo Strikers (North West)
1999	Canon de Yaoundé – Coton Sport de Garoua (2-1)	Canon de Yaoundé (Centre)
1998	Dynamo de Douala – Canon de Yaoundé (1-0)	Dynamo de Douala (Littoral)
1997	Union de Douala – Port de Douala (2-1)	Union de Douala (Littoral)
1996	Racing de Bafoussam – Stade Bandjoun (1-0)	Racing de Bafoussam (West)
1995	Canon de Yaoundé – Océan de Kribi (1-0)	Canon de Yaoundé (Centre)
1994	Olympique Mvolyé – Tonnerre de Yaoundé (1-0)	Olympique Mvolyé (Centre)
1993	Canon de Yaoundé – Léopards Douala (2-0)	Canon de Yaoundé (Centre)
1992	Olympique Mvolyé – Diamant Yaoundé (2-1)	Olympique Mvolyé (Centre)
1991	Tonnerre de Yaoundé – Racing de Bafoussam (1-0)	Tonnerre de Yaoundé (Centre)
1990	Prévoyance Yaoundé – Tonnerre de Yaoundé (1-1)	Prévoyance Yaoundé (Centre)
1989	Tonnerre de Yaoundé – Diamant Yaoundé (1-0)	Tonnerre de Yaoundé (Centre)
1988	Panthère Banganté – Racing de Bafoussam (1-0)	Panthère Banganté (West)
1987	Tonnerre de Yaoundé – Diamant Yaoundé (4-2)	Tonnerre de Yaoundé (Centre)
1986	Canon de Yaoundé – Rail Douala (1-0)	Canon de Yaoundé (Centre)
1985	Union de Douala – Canon de Yaoundé (2-0)	Union de Douala (Littoral)
1984	Dihep Di Nkam Yabassi – Union de Douala (1-0)	Dihep Di Nkam (Littoral)
1983	Canon de Yaoundé – Union de Douala (3-2)	Canon de Yaoundé (Centre)
1982	Dragon Douala – Dihep Di Nkam Yabassi (4-1)	Dragon Douala (Littoral)
1981	Dynamo de Douala – Union de Douala (2-0)	Dynamo de Douala (Littoral)
1980	Union de Douala – Canon de Yaoundé (2-1)	Union de Douala (Littoral)
1979	Dynamo de Douala – PWD Bamenda (3-1)	Dynamo de Douala (Littoral)
1978	Canon de Yaoundé – Union de Douala (4-3)	Canon de Yaoundé (Centre)
1977	Canon de Yaoundé – Caiman de Douala (1-0)	Canon de Yaoundé (Centre)
1976	Canon de Yaoundé – Racing de Bafoussam (2-0)	Canon de Yaoundé (Centre)
1975	Canon de Yaoundé – Aigle de Nkongsamba (2-1)	Canon de Yaoundé (Centre)
1974	Tonnerre de Yaoundé – Canon de Yaoundé (1-0)	Tonnerre de Yaoundé (Centre)
1973	Canon de Yaoundé – Diamant Yaoundé (5-2)	Canon de Yaoundé (Centre)
1972	Diamant Yaoundé – Caiman de Douala (3-2)	Diamant Yaoundé (Centre)
1971	Diamant Yaoundé – Caiman de Douala (3-2)	Diamant Yaoundé (Centre)
1970	Oryx de Douala – Aigle de Nkongsamba (2-0)	Oryx de Douala (Littoral)
1969	Union de Douala – Oryx de Douala (2-0)	Union de Douala (Littoral)
1968	Oryx de Douala – Prisons Buea (2-1)	Oryx de Douala (Littoral)
1967	Canon de Yaoundé – PWD Bamenda (1-0)	Canon de Yaoundé (Centre)
1966	Lion Yaoundé – CAMBANK Yaoundé (3-1)	Lion Yaoundé (Centre)
1965	Lion Yaoundé – CDC Victoria United (4-1)	Lion Yaoundé (Centre)
1964	Diamant Yaoundé – PT Social Club Buea (3-0)	Diamant Yaoundé (Centre)
1963	Oryx de Douala – Tonnerre de Yaoundé (2-1)	Oryx de Douala (Littoral)
1962	Lion Yaoundé – Union de Douala (4-3)	Lion Yaoundé (Centre)
1961	Union de Douala – Union Yaoundé (4-0)	Union de Douala (Littoral)
1960	Lion Yaoundé – Canon de Yaoundé (2-1)	Lion Yaoundé (Centre)

Source: www.fecafootballonline.com



time. In the same period, Canon de Yaoundé managed to win the Cup no fewer than eight times, Lion de Yaoundé four times, Tonnerre de Yaoundé three times, and Diamant de Yaoundé also three times. In short, the 1960s showed evenly shared Cup victories for the clubs from Douala and Yaoundé, the 1970s were more successful for the clubs from Yaoundé, and in the 1980s the trophy was almost equally shared again.

In the 1990s, Olympique Mvolyé was a household name in Cameroon. The club from a village not too far from Yaoundé employed several players of Cameroon's future national team. Olympique Mvolyé collected the Cup of Cameroon in 1992 and 1994 but was never successful in the D1 competition. In fact, the team was mostly active in the second division of the Centre Province. Other winners in the 1990s were clubs from Yaoundé (four times), clubs from Douala (twice) and Racing de Bafoussam (once).

Just as in the D1 competition, the list of winners in the Cup of Cameroon changed with the turn of the century. Of course, the West Province made it to the list with Fovu de Baham, the club that won the title in 2001. And then there is Coton Sport de Garoua, which won the Cup final in 2003 and 2004. However, Impôts FC (Yaoundé) won the Cup in 2005 and Union de Douala in 2006, indicating that clubs from these two cities still play a role in football.

Most importantly, it is in the Cup of Cameroon that we first see the real and relatively successful presence of teams from the Anglophone part of the country. Kumbo Strikers, a team from the North West Province, won the Cup of Cameroon in the year 2000. It was actually a very good year for this Anglophone team in general, but we will hear more about that later on. And then there is Olympique de Buea, the team that has earned a place in the football statistics as the second Anglophone team to have won the Cup of Cameroon. The team managed to bring the Cup back to Buea in 2002 after beating Sable de Batie (2-1) in the final.

There have been other relatively successful Anglophone clubs in the Cup of Cameroon, some of which have become household names in the South and North West Provinces. Both Prisons Buea and PWD Bamenda have made it to the final of the Cup of Cameroon twice. Prisons Buea is the oldest team in Buea, alongside Olympique de Buea and fellow second-division team Buea Boys. The team's training ground is in Buea Town.

PWD Bamenda is arguably the best-known and most popular club in the North West Province, if not in the whole Anglophone zone. Since the city of Bamenda with its approximately 500,000 inhabitants is fondly called Abakwa, its players are nicknamed the 'Abakwa Boys'. Bamenda, the most important city in the Anglophone zone, is about five or six hours by car from Buea.

Finally, there is the other first-division club in the South West Province, namely Victoria United, which is based in the coastal town of Limbe. (In the old days, the Germans called the town Victoria.) When one takes a taxi or bus from Buea to Limbe, one will arrive at this tourist spot with its approximately 85,000 inhabitants within half an hour. The team has not won the Cup of Cameroon (yet) but it is one of the fiercest opponents of Olympique de Buea. Victoria United is also known as Opopo which, as some people in Limbe told me, means 'One People One Power'.

*'This is very bad!'*

One of the players of Olympique de Buea is standing next to me at the side of the field. His name is Essomba. I met him some weeks ago when I started training with the team. He is usually a very friendly person who laughs a lot. But he is not laughing now. 'We're in big trouble,' he says. 'The club president is very angry. We shouldn't have lost to PWD Bamenda.'

Essomba is one of the players who was on the field yesterday. Right now, he does not want to discuss the match. He is too upset. And so are his team mates. The training session seems to be over and most of the players are walking towards the main road with their football boots in their hands. 'We're going to train early in the morning,' Essomba says. 'You should come on time. The assistant coach told us that the new coach doesn't like people who are late.'

'Is there a new coach already?'

'Yes,' Essomba replies. 'He's a guy from the East Province. Nobody really knows him. Nobody has ever heard of him before. Maybe he's a friend of the club president or something.'

Essomba says goodbye and walks down the main road straight to his compound. I myself go back to my own compound, not far from Essomba's place, to get some rest. Tomorrow is going to be a very tough day.

## Tuesday

It is seven o'clock in the morning. I have just entered the stadium for a training session with Olympique de Buea but there are only a couple of players on the field. Some other players are slowly walking into the stadium.

Then a loud noise fills the air. A bus drives straight through the gate in the direction of the stand. A dozen players get off the bus. Most of them sit down on the stand to put on their training boots and jerseys. 'They're coming from the Sporting Centre,' Essomba says. 'Some of the players of Olympique de Buea are living at the Centre. They have their own rooms and they are always playing football there.'

I went to the Sporting Centre myself once to meet up with the club president. The Centre is not far from Buea, a little further from the neighbouring village of Muea. The club president owns the Sporting Centre, which is a training ground for young and talented players in Cameroon. I heard that the president's ultimate plan is to sell a lot of players to the major clubs in Cameroon and abroad, so as to make money out of the sport. The training sessions of Olympique de Buea, however, always take place at the Molyko Stadium.

The new coach has arrived. His first impression is not a very good one. The coach is a middle-aged man with a big stomach. In fact, he does not look like he has ever played football. 'This man has been drinking too much,' Essomba says quietly. 'Is he supposed to teach us how to play football? I'll bet he cannot even shoot a ball into the net!'

Today, it turns out, is not going to be a tough day after all. Instead it seems as if the coach wants to get acquainted with the players first. The coach is assisted by two other coaches. One of them is a physical trainer, the other is a former player with Prisons Buea and the Anglophone national team. His football career

goes back a long way. Currently, he is both an employee of the provincial FECAFOOT branch in Buea and the assistant coach at Olympique de Buea.

The coach tells us to split up into six groups of six players or more. Olympique de Buea consists of at least 40 players, which is far more than the average football team in Cameroon. We are playing an easy game where someone in the middle of the circle has to take the ball away from the other players. These players, in turn, are shooting the ball to their colleagues as fast as they can. Most of the players are enjoying themselves today. They are making fun of each other, they are laughing and relaxing.

The coach cuts the training session short after only an hour. He informs the group that there will be two training sessions the next day, one early in the morning and one late in the afternoon. In this way, the players do not have to play in the middle of the day when it is simply too hot outside. It seems that the coach will go straight on to the Sporting Centre to see the club president, most likely to finalize his own job arrangements.

## Meeting Essomba

Essomba is still laughing when we walk towards his compound. 'I cannot believe that this man is replacing our former coach,' he says. 'You know the other coach, right? He's one of the best coaches in the country. He should never have been suspended.'

Essomba and the former coach – who seems to have been fired, not suspended – were good friends. The former coach has quite a reputation in Cameroon, a positive and a negative one. On the one hand, the coach took Olympique de Buea to the national interpools and then straight into the D1 competition a couple of years ago, and he was also the one who brought the Cup of Cameroon back to Buea. In short, he does appear to be a great coach. On the other hand, he is said to be very arrogant and, some people claim, susceptible to corruption. He supposedly made the club president very angry on several occasions, which is generally speaking not the best thing to do. We will hear more about this later on.

There is an eating spot in front of Essomba's compound. This is where we have breakfast after every morning training session before we take a rest in Essomba's room. It is almost daily standard procedure.

I got to know Essomba during one of my first training sessions with Olympique de Buea, at a time when things were not much better than today. The only exception was that the team had lost only one match (one so important that we will give it a lot of attention in the chapters to come), which was the first match of today's 'score' of six lost matches. Soon I realized that Essomba is just not the kind of guy who would ever be worried about the future. He is a hugely opti-

mistic and energetic person. He is about 27 years old, but I am only guessing here. He has never told me his actual age and always claimed it was a 'private matter'.

Essomba is not very tall but is incredibly broad across the chest and broad-shouldered. An average man of the same age would probably fit into Essomba's chest *twice*. His physique is even more impressive when one considers that there is no gym in town. He managed to acquire all these muscles just by playing football, running a lot and doing abdominal exercises.

Essomba's favourite thing is to walk around the Molyko area and engage in conversations with everyone in the street. You can make a solid bet that he will tell a joke or two every five minutes or so. He is also very fond of his little daughter and, for that matter, of all the children in Buea. Thus you will most likely run into Essomba while he is doing either one of the following things: discussing something with somebody or walking with a neighbour's child on his shoulder. Essomba is sort of an uncle for all children in Buea, or at least those in the Molyko area.

The most likely other activity one will see him doing is arranging a date with one of the many girls in town. Most of all, however, he loves playing football. He is so dedicated that even on a day off he will run for an hour to the next village and back again. One will know how much he loves to play football when one sees him wearing football shirts day in day out. He definitely always looks like a football player.

There is only one thing Essomba does not like to do. It is drinking alcohol. Although most players were not very successful in trying to hide their drinking habits, I have actually never caught Essomba drinking even a single beer. It is not that he does not visit bars. He does visit bars. He visits them a lot. He is just one of those customers who orders only one soda for the whole evening.

Essomba has been playing for Olympique de Buea for the last two and a half years. His regular position in the team is on the right front. He is a winger – the one who passes to the attackers. He used to play for one of the big teams in the capital of Cameroon, Tonnerre de Yaoundé. He always tells me what a magnificent club Tonnerre is and how professional its organization is. It is thus reasonable to think that Essomba got a really lucrative contract from Olympique de Buea. Why else would a player leave one of the best clubs in the country to go and play for a relatively new club in a small town? I know he could have stayed in Yaoundé. In fact, his wife and daughter still live in the capital. They visited Essomba for a few weeks during my stay in Buea.

Essomba and I are having rice and chicken for breakfast. His next-door neighbour passes and waves in our direction. Essomba punches me on the shoulder. 'Do you like her? I can set you up for a date.' This is another daily routine I have

to go through. Saying no to players who are literally ‘offering’ me a girl is an exhausting activity.

## Olympique de Buea: From third to first division

Essomba is an Anglophone from the North West Province. It is where he started his career as a football player. Before he signed a contract at Tonnerre de Yaoundé, he was playing for, among other clubs, Kumbo Strikers, the team that won the Cup of Cameroon back in 2000. So Essomba has already won the Cup twice. Indeed, he is more than willing to tell you the story of how President Paul Biya of Cameroon shook his hand and gave him (and the rest of the team) a football medal. He is very proud of it.

Today, Essomba is taking me to see someone he refers to as ‘brother’. It is the fired team manager of Olympique de Buea, who is originally from the same village as Essomba. ‘No, no,’ the team manager says when we are at his house a little while later, ‘I’m really only suspended. The president will take me back before you know it. I’ve known him for a long time.’

The team manager’s name is Eric Kalla. Most people in the Anglophone zone have an English first name. Essomba and Ashu, whom we will meet later in this story, have very common English first names. Kalla is a middle-aged, married man who owns a pharmaceutical shop in Buea. The store is actually located right across from the football stadium and also functions as the club’s administrative office. Kalla is well-spoken and friendly, although at the moment he is not really happy with Olympique de Buea. ‘You know, I’m one of the co-founders of the club,’ he says. ‘The club president, the vice-president and I set up Olympique de Buea back in 1999.’

In Cameroon, it is a rule for a new football club to start playing in the third (and lowest) division. In this division, as we know, teams from the same geographical sub-division (in this case, Fako division) compete against each other. In its first year, Olympique de Buea won eleven out of a total of 13 matches, which turned out to be enough to qualify for the second division. It seems that the relationship between the third and second divisions is the same as the one between the second and first divisions. ‘We’ve got 18 second division teams in the South West Province,’ Kalla explains. ‘Three teams from the second division that don’t perform well will drop down. Three teams from the third division that perform well will go up. In that particular year, the teams Muyuka and Ekona FC entered the second division with us. We only played one season in the second division.’

We are halfway through the 2000 season. Two second division teams from the South West Province – Olympique de Buea and Elec Sport Limbe – made it to

the national interpools, which at that time were organized in Bamenda and Bafoussam. Olympique de Buea was playing in the pool in Bamenda where they ended up top of the table with 12 points. Then Olympique de Buea had to play a match against Unisport de Bafang, which was the winner of the pool in Bafoussam. Olympique won the match. In short, Olympique de Buea managed to go from the third to the first division in two straight years.

Team manager Kalla is proud to tell me the history of the club. He shows me a book that is filled with newspaper articles and photos of the club executives, the coaches, the players and the matches they played over the past few years. Of course, Kalla realizes that the club's history is peanuts compared to that of many other clubs in the country.

Canon de Yaoundé, for instance, was set up as early as 1930. Tonnerre de Yaoundé was formed back in 1934. Union de Douala was created in 1957. Bamboutos de Mbouda was set up in 1966. Prisons Buea, PWD Bamenda and Victoria United were already active in the Cup of Cameroon competition in the 1960s. These are old football clubs with rich histories, as we saw in the previous chapter. 'In terms of Cameroonian football Olympique de Buea is only a baby. But we've been learning very fast,' Kalla says.

Indeed, when Olympique de Buea entered the D1 competition in 2001, they immediately ended up in sixth spot in the league table. In 2002, they finished in fifth place. The club president had really hoped that the 2003 season would bring Olympique de Buea straight to the top of the D1 competition. Unfortunately, his dream is almost unattainable now that the team has already lost six out of ten matches. That is probably the reason why the team manager is sitting at home right now. He has been sent away from the club he helped to set up because of these lousy results.

## The expenditures of a football match

Kalla says that his management was essential in the team's previous successes in the league. He also admits, though, that the club president put a lot of his own money into the team. This is a more probable explanation for the team's rapid rise in Cameroonian football. After all, as the team manager explains, a football team is a very expensive enterprise. 'You have to pay the club executives, the coaches, the doctor and the players,' he says. 'These are fixed expenses of the club. And then there are irregular costs attached to the team. There are travel expenses, there's the food for the players and you also have to rent a lot of hotel rooms.'

Kalla gives me a calculation of how much a typical away match in the *third* division to the neighbouring village of Muea would cost. It is probably the

cheapest trip a football team in Buea will ever need to undertake. A return ticket to Muea costs FCFA 1,000. This means a total of FCFA 18,000 (€ 27) for all 18 players and another FCFA 7,000 for the three coaches, the team manager, the team doctor, the vice-president and the technical director. Since the team can leave one or two hours before the match, hotel expenses are not necessary.

I talked to the team manager of second-division Buea Boys earlier. He gave me a calculation of a typical *second* division match in the South West Province. Let us say Buea Boys has to play a match against the team in Nguti. The team will rent a bus for FCFA 100,000 (€ 152) including petrol. The players and four club executives (three coaches and the team manager) will have lunch in Kumba for FCFA 500 per person – which adds up to FCFA 11,000 (€ 16) – and another lunch and thus FCFA 11,000 after the match. Then they have to buy 24 bottles of water (FCFA 400 each) which are used during the match, which comes to a total of FCFA 9,600. If the team wins, the club will give each of the 18 players a match bonus of FCFA 5,000 (FCFA 90,000 or € 137 intotal); the four executives receive FCFA 10,000 each (FCFA 40,000 or € 70 in tdal). In total, the costs of a Buea Boys away match are around FCFA 261,600. That is almost € 400. Many people in Cameroon would have to set aside their whole salary for at least four months (and not spend any of it) to be able to send the team for one away match.

Team manager Kalla gives me an idea of the expenditures of a *first* division away match against, say, Canon de Yaoundé.

The 18 players of the team will get FCFA 5,000 each for pocket money on the road. That is about FCFA 90,000 (€ 137). The doctor and the team manager also take FCFA 5,000. That makes FCFA 10,000 (€ 15). Then the bus will cost us about FCFA 200,000 (€ 305) for a return trip. The hotel itself takes nine double rooms for the players, making FCFA 90,000. Then there are three rooms at FCFA 15,000 each for six executives, which is FCFA 45,000 (€ 68). Finally, the doctor has his own room, which costs FCFA 25,000 (€ 38). In short, the hotel costs FCFA 160,000 (€ 244). The players and he executives eat once when they arrive in Yaoundé, and the next day again after the morning training. Each meal costs about FCFA 3,000 (€ 4.50). So, each day we spend about FCFA 75,000 on food which is FCFA 150,000 (€ 228) for two days. The executives get an additional FCFA 30,000 for expenses. Now we look at the doctor's expenditures. For each match I give the doctor FCFA 20,000 to buy medicine. Finally, the driver costs FCFA 5,000 and has a room for FCFA 10,000. So, in a nutshell, it costs about FCFA 675,000 (slightly over € 1,000) to go for a match.

We see that the first, second and third division leagues each have different price tags for the teams. The third division is relatively cheap since the teams will only play matches in their own sub-division. This limits the travel costs and so on. The second division is also not too expensive although the teams do have to spend a lot of money during the mini-interpools and, if they make it, the interpools. The club president will then have to pay for a hotel and a training ground for a period of two weeks. He also, as we will find out, needs to pay spiritual advisers for their services and he needs to bribe the referee and the linesmen. These are issues to which we will return in the following chapters.



Going from the second to the first division, then, is a really expensive endeavour. It is in the first division though that the teams spend the most money. Teams have to play 30 matches during the season, 15 of which take place in the town of the opposing team. A first-division club therefore needs structural funding for survival or, even better, success in the D1 competition.

The different locations of the first-division clubs are also important when considering the financial costs. The majority of the teams in the current (2003) D1 competition are to be found in the western part of the country, particularly in the Littoral, Centre, South West and West Provinces. Teams from these areas travel distances up to a maximum of about six hours by car or perhaps a bit more if, say, Canon de Yaoundé had to play against PWD Bamenda. The teams in the West Province have the lowest costs of all. Not only can these teams play six out of 15 away matches somewhere in their own relatively small province, the province itself is located in the middle of the four most club-populated provinces.

Coton Sport de Garoua is the major exception to this story. The North Province is located far away from the four 'football provinces'. The team's travelling expenses are, therefore, significantly higher in comparison with the other teams. An employee of the provincial FECAFOOT office in Buea gave me a calculation of Coton Sport's expenses for an average away match. Let us say Coton Sport de Garoua has to play against Olympique de Buea. They could take the bus all the way to the South West Province but this is not recommended. They could also take the train, which takes them first to Yaoundé and then to Douala. The total amount of travel time would surely be around a day and a half. Of course, they would have to rent hotel rooms the night before the match and probably also the night after the match. I heard that Coton Sport sometimes makes use of the local airline. In this sense, having a team in the North Province is a disadvantage compared to having a team in one of the other areas of the country because of the extra expenses involved.

Some say, however, that having a team up north is an advantage as well. Coton Sport is in the habit of winning most of its home matches during the football season. The reasoning is that the players on the visiting team are simply too tired after such a long journey and hence will be defeated. On the other hand, Coton Sport also plays 15 away matches that demand long and exhausting trips.

The difference is that the team from the North Province is rich; and the club executives can afford to send the players on the trip two or three days before the start of the match. This leaves them plenty of time to rest. Vice versa, most other teams cannot afford an extra night in a hotel and usually arrive in Garoua the night before match day or even on the day itself. Combine the players' fatigue with the incredible heat of the north of Cameroon, and you can guess the end result.

Table 3 The 16 clubs playing in the D1 competition in 2003\*

BAMBOUTOS DE MBOUDA  West Province Stade de Mbouda (capacity: 12,000 spectators)	CAIMAN DE DOUALA (a.k.a. Akwa Boys)  Littoral Province Réunification Stadium de Douala (40,000)	CANON DE YAOUNDÉ (a.k.a. Khakum)  Centre Province Ahmadou Ahidjo Stadium de Yaoundé (50,000)	CINTRA YAOUNDÉ  Centre Province Ahmadou Ahidjo Stadium de Yaoundé (50,000)
COTON SPORT DE GAROUA  North Province Omnisports Stadium Roumde-Adja (35,000)	FOVU DE BAHAM  West Province Stade de Mbouda (12,000)	OLYMPIQUE DE BUEA (a.k.a. Lava Boys)  South West Province Molyko Stadium de Buea (8,000)	PWD BAMENDA (a.k.a. Abakwa Boys)  North West Province Municipal Stadium de Bamenda (10,000)
RACING DE BAFOUSSAM (a.k.a. T.P.Q.)  West Province Municipal Stadium de Bamendzi (5,000)	RENAISSANCE DE NGOUMOU  Centre Province Ahmadou Ahidjo Stadium de Yaoundé (50,000)	SABLE DE BATIE (a.k.a. Sandsand Boys)  West Province Municipal Stadium de Bamendzi (5,000)	STADE BANDJOUN  West Province Municipal Stadium de Bandjoun (8,000)
TONNERRE DE YAOUNDÉ (a.k.a. Kalara Boys)  Centre Province Ahmadou Ahidjo Stadium de Yaoundé (50,000)	UNION DE DOUALA (a.k.a. Nassara Boys)  Littoral Province Réunification Stadium de Douala (40,000)	UNISPORT DE BAFANG  West Province Municipal Stadium de Bafang (5,000)	VICTORIA UNITED (a.k.a. Opopo)  South West Province Limbe Centenary Stadium (10,000)

\* a.k.a. = also known as

## Salaries, signing fees and bonuses

The real expenses of a football team are, of course, the players themselves. It appears that Essomba received a fairly good deal when he signed for Olympique de Buea. Essomba and other players in Buea call it a 'signature premium'. 'The club president offered me FCFA 2.5 million (€ 3,800) when I came here,' Essomba says. 'That is a one-time amount he's supposed to give me. And then there's my salary. Each month I receive about FCFA 100,000 (€ 152).'

The signing fees and salaries of the players are far from fixed amounts. An average player with Olympique de Buea would probably receive between FCFA 500,000 (€ 762) and FCFA one million (€ 1,520) as a signature premium and about FCFA 50,000 (€ 76) as a monthly salary. In contrast, a very talented player who has shown his worth in the past probably receives between FCFA four and seven million (€ 6,000 - € 10,000) as a signature premium and between FCFA 150,000 and FCFA 200,000 (€ 228 - € 305) as a monthly salary. These are very large amounts of money when compared to what most people in Cameroon receive from their (average) jobs.

Olympique de Buea's president is said to have wanted the very best Cameroonian players to play for his team in 2003. Before the start of this season, the club's technical director was handed the task of luring the best players away from their respective clubs, which were mostly the bigger ones in the country. The technical director, so his supporters say, was quite successful. For instance, he managed to buy the goalkeeper of Coton Sport de Garoua, who many claim is the best in Cameroon. He also managed to buy the D1 competition's top scorer of last season from Racing de Bafoussam. These two players definitely receive the highest salaries of all the Olympique de Buea players. In other words, signing fees and salaries are dependent on a player's past performance.

So now we know why some of these players, who were playing for the big clubs in the country, choose Buea as their new habitat. The club president just offered them an awful lot of money, something they could not refuse.

The amount of the signing fees and monthly salaries are also dependent on whether the player is originally from the area in which the club is based or whether he was born and raised somewhere else. A local player is referred to as a *son of the soil*. He is literally a boy from the area, a brother of the local ethnic group, part of the town. Local players are usually only offered low signature premiums and salaries for two reasons. First, they still live with their families and therefore do not require any housing from the club. Second, local players are supposed to be proud of their town and their ethnic group. It is their obligation to make sure the team wins the matches so that their ethnic group earns respect in the country. In short, a local player should feel honoured to play for the team and should not ask for much money.

There are about seven or eight Anglophone players in Olympique de Buea, of whom some are originally from the North West Province. There are only a few players from the South West Province and these are the true sons of the soil. For instance, there is a very young player who signed a contract for FCFA 500,000 (€ 762) and receives only FCFA 50,000 in salary every month.

There are two major exceptions to the above. The team captain of Olympique de Buea – a local boy – is one of the most famous and talented players in Came-

room and, some players claimed, received a very high signature premium and earns a high monthly salary. Another exception is an attacker who scored the decisive goal against Sable de Batie in last season's Cup of Cameroon final. He is a local boy from Buea Town and makes more money than most players in the team. One's reputation sometimes overrules locality.

The opposite of the sons of the soil are the players from out of town. They are referred to as the *strangers* on the team. Essomba, as a North Westerner, is one of those strangers in Olympique de Buea. Most Olympique de Buea players are actually Francophones and are therefore strangers. They cannot rely on family support in Buea, nor do they have a house in the area. Since the club takes care of these financial aspects, the strangers generally make more money than the sons of the soil. But although they may get better salaries, the strangers are also more easily fired when the team starts losing matches. They were brought to the team for one purpose only, namely to bring success to the team. Why should a club president pay all that money if they cannot live up to expectations? Sons of the soil are more likely to survive the bad times of the club.

So money can buy the best players in the country. These players, in turn, can make sure your team will start winning matches. But money is also an incentive for players to perform better. This is evident if we take a look at some other club expenditures, namely training allowances and match bonuses. We have already seen that the Buea Boys players receive a match bonus of FCFA 5,000 (€ 7.60) when they win a match. They also earn FCFA 500 in training allowances for every day they participate in the team's training session. It is a way of stimulating the players to come to the training ground.

The training allowances and match bonuses in the first division are certainly a lot higher than those in the second division. If Olympique de Buea wins a match, the players receive a match bonus of FCFA 25,000 (€38) each, except for the players who were not among the squad of 18. Also, the players will have participated in at least five days of training sessions which earns them an amount of FCFA 1,000 (€ 1.50) a day.

So, if we take the price for an average first-division match (FCFA 675,000) and added the weekly training allowances for 30 players (FCFA 150,000) and the match bonuses for 18 players (FCFA 450,000), it would mean that the club president at Olympique de Buea has to spend at least FCFA 1,275,000 (almost € 2,000) on a single match. That is twice the annual income of the average Cameroonian.

But that is not all. The match bonuses are as irregular as the signing fees and the monthly salaries. They tend to go up when the team plays an important match such as matches in the (mini-)interpools, matches in the last stages of the Cup of Cameroon or derbies between teams from the same area. For instance, when he

was playing for Tonnerre de Yaoundé, Essomba and his team mates were promised match bonuses of FCFA 80,000 (€ 121) each if they won the derby between Tonnerre and Canon de Yaoundé. It is a way for the club president to make sure that the players will do everything they can to win a match.

## Club sponsorship in West and East Cameroon

It is evident, then, that clubs need money to attract good players and to be able to participate meaningfully in the football league. But how do they get it? Let us go back for a brief historical view of club sponsorship in Cameroon, which has developed differently in the Anglophone and Francophone zones.

Football clubs in the Anglophone zone have usually had a strong financial tie with either a locally based company or a local government branch. Indeed, it is easy to trace the sort of sponsorship by looking at the names of the clubs. PWD Bamenda used to be sponsored by the Public Works Department of the local government in the North West Province. The Victoria Area Council Club received its money for the town council in Limbe.

Since the largest part of the West Cameroun economy was in the hands of large-scale agricultural companies which imported their labour from the most economically underdeveloped regions of the country, few Africans had enough resources to support a team. As a result, the most important clubs today are still organised on the basis of occupational solidarity. For example, the *Public Works Club* of Bamenda, the *Victoria Area Council Club*, the *Prisons Club* of Buea, and the *Power Cam* of Victoria are all dependent upon modern administrative or economic organisations. (Clignet & Stark 1974: 413)

The relatively successful history of Prisons Buea is not only closely related to its financial support from the local prison but also to the fact that the players used to be prisoners themselves. There used to be a football competition played in the prison's courtyard and the best players were selected for Prisons Buea. These players could only leave the prison when the team had to play a match somewhere.

Some of the Anglophone clubs were sponsored by local companies. For instance, Victoria United used to be called CDC Victoria United because of its sponsorship by the Cameroon Development Company in the South West Province. It is an agricultural company that specializes in the growing and selling of bananas, among other things. In Limbe, one will find the electricity and power company AES Sonel. This company used to be the main sponsor of Power Cam of Victoria, a club that has been renamed Elec Sport Limbe.

A lot of things have changed in the sponsorship of Anglophone football clubs since the appearance of Clignet & Stark's article in 1974. Most importantly, local government branches in the South West and North West Provinces have taken their hands off the football clubs. Although PWD Bamenda still carries the name

of the Public Works Department, the club no longer enjoys its sponsorship. Also, the Victoria Area Council Club, after losing the financial support of the town council, has either completely disappeared or become an insignificant team in the third division. Prisons Buea, too, can no longer rely on funding from the local prison and its players ceased to have a connection with the correction facility in Buea. Finally, it is said that the electricity company AES Sonel has stopped its club sponsorship permanently.

There are several possible explanations as to why the Anglophone zone has witnessed a decline in club sponsorship. Some Anglophones claim that most of the local companies have been taken over by Francophones. For example, AES Sonel, with its headquarters in Douala, is said to be run by Francophone managers who do not see any benefit in sponsoring Anglophone clubs. Likewise, the oil company Sonara, with its refinery at Limbe, is in the hands of Francophones and has never engaged in financing a locally based club.

Armstrong & Giulianotti (2004: 11-12) associate the withdrawal of African club sponsorship by companies to the World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programmes, and thus to international political-economic policies:

The broad structural decline of African economies, and the implementation of Washington Consensus policies, has adversely affected the African football infrastructure. State-owned enterprises had helped to run football clubs that were important community resources. Following their takeover by TNCs (trans-national corporations), the newly privatized institutions have tended to reduce expenditure in all social programmes, including sports-related associations.

I also heard stories about sponsorship being ended after allegations of corruption. For instance, team manager Kalla of Olympique de Buea told me that Elec Sport Limbe lost its sponsorship by Sonel because 'the management of the club misused the money by spending it on personal interests rather than on the players'.

Club sponsorship in Francophone Cameroon developed somewhat differently, mostly because of 'the ambivalent attitudes that the French authorities have always adopted ... towards all types of voluntary associations, including sports clubs' (Clignet & Stark 1974: 411). The ambivalence is clear when looking at football in East Cameroon. On the one hand, the French colonizers wanted to encourage Cameroonians to play football since they thought that 'Camerounians should transfer their frustrated *political* energies into less controversial areas of participation, such as religion or sport' (Ibid.: 411, emphasis in original). On the other hand, they regarded voluntary associations, such as football clubs, as political vehicles that could undermine the centralized structure of the French colonial government.

The French decided to keep a firm grip on football and did so by implementing a strict set of rules and regulations for all voluntary associations. Initially

they even went as far as to forbid local clubs from copying the names of the big European clubs. For instance, Olympic de Douala (named after Olympique de Marseille) was forced to adopt a new name and the club became known as Oryx de Douala. Clignet & Stark (1974: 412) state that the French

did not encourage private firms to help with the diffusion of football and, more specifically, with the formation of stable local clubs. All those initially sponsored along occupational lines in East Cameroun either disappeared (e.g. the *Corpet Louvet*, a team of railway workers in Bonaberi), or declined in importance (e.g. the *A.S. Police*), or experienced an internal transformation (e.g. the *Diamant Club* of Yaoundé ceased to recruit civil servants). Correspondingly, the only form of solidarity upon which a club could depend effectively was territorial in nature.

Clubs in Douala and Yaoundé are, as we know, the oldest in the country and receive a lot of support from their respective local communities. The territorial commitment, of which Clignet & Stark spoke, is especially visible among the two great clubs in the capital. Tonnerre and Canon de Yaoundé are said to have the most loyal and enthusiastic supporters in the country. ‘The oldest teams have generated support among local Africans that is expressed in familial terms, as a bond between the current generation and their ancestors who founded these cultural institutions’ (Armstrong & Giulianotti 2004: 14).

Since private firms and local governmental branches did not engage in football sponsorship, finances had to be provided by loyal supporters within the local communities. Let us take Tonnerre de Yaoundé as an example. Clignet & Stark (1974) explain how a few wealthy local men were sponsoring and, as a result, also running the club back in the 1970s: ‘... the president of *Tonnerre* is a prosperous landowner who owes his success to real estate development; two of his vice-presidents are wealthy traders, while the third is a director of the only large Cameroonian export-import firm ...’ (Ibid.: 414).

In a local newspaper, *The Post* (9 May 2003), I read that Tonnerre had the status of an association until the mid 1990s. When the club’s founder sold it to a wealthy local man, the latter transformed it into ‘a Limited Liability Company with the possibility for people to buy shares’. It is said that the new club president owns approximately 80 per cent of the shares.

## Clubs are run by big men

Nowadays the situation regarding football sponsorship in Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon is similar to the earlier description of Tonnerre in the 1970s. In fact, almost all the clubs depend on the financial support of a few wealthy local men. In other words, clubs are sponsored and run by local *big men*. For instance, Olympique de Buea is financially supported by its club president. The president is a wealthy Bamileke big man from the West Province who is the

founder and owner of a successful company that sells satellites and insurances, among other things. In fact, the vice-president of Olympique de Buea probably got his job because of his day-to-day profession as vice-president of the club president's company.

The club president is a big man in the true African sense of the term and definitely looks and acts as one. As I said before, I met the president once at the Sporting Centre near the village of Muea. When I went into the Centre through the gate (there is a huge wall around the entire area with guards on top of it) and walked onto the main square, I saw the club president sitting in the middle of a terrace drinking a glass of beer. The tables on the terrace were 'protected' from the sun by sharp triangular rooftops, a distinctive trademark of Bamileke architecture. The traditional clothing, the golden rings on *all* his fingers, the thick sunglasses, the impressive physical posture and the bodyguard right behind him truly complemented the picture of the club president as a man of wealth and power. He was flanked by the director of the Sporting Centre on his right and the club's vice-president on his left.

As is custom with chiefs and *fons* (local rulers) in Cameroon, the club president did not speak to me directly and I think I was not even supposed to look at him. Instead, I talked to the vice-president who then translated my words to the club president. The club president posed only one question to me after I had asked his permission to start training with the team. 'What's in it for me?' I thought about it for a moment and then answered: 'I'll write a book about the club to give the team some media attention'. The club president, so it seemed, was not really satisfied with this answer but the vice-president gave me his permission anyway.

I also met the club president of Union de Douala and saw the club president of PWD Bamenda one day. Both of them looked very similar to the club president of Olympique de Buea. The club president of PWD Bamenda, for instance, is also an incredibly rich businessman whose name alone is enough to make even the loudest North Westerner become quiet and humble. Indeed, many Bamendas in Buea spoke of him with respect and awe. He was, in their words, 'a very, very powerful man'.

In short, all these club presidents have two things in common: they are businessmen and they are filthy rich. Sometimes these big men use money from their own companies to sponsor a football team, such as the club president of Olympique de Buea. Sometimes, however, they are the elected general directors or managers of companies and use company money for football purposes. The club president of Fovu de Baham, for instance, is the general manager of a dairy company in the West Province. He uses money from the company to support the team.



The club president of Victoria United is also the general manager of the CDC in the South West Province. We have already seen that the CDC used to be the main sponsor of Victoria United. These days the situation is slightly different because Victoria United is indirectly sponsored by the CDC through the assistance of its club president. So when the direct sponsorship of local government departments and companies in the Anglophone zone disappeared, there were local big men to take over financial matters in the clubs in this area of Cameroon.

It is easy to understand why a football club would benefit from having a rich big man as club president. After all, they provide the financial stability that any football club ultimately needs and they are able to attract talented players. But since football is not really profitable in Cameroon for various reasons, it would be logical to ask why such big men would spend their money on a football club. It seems that they use football clubs to increase their economic and political power.

Armstrong & Giulianotti (2004: 14) argue that ‘... powerful clubs often emerge in townships under the influence of local “big men” whose patronage is gained in exchange for the club becoming a more personalized symbol of the success of charismatic leadership’. As Clignet & Stark (1974: 419) argue, ‘... if individual clubs are anxious to attract those who occupy a high position in the general social structure, there is nevertheless a *quid pro quo* in this respect. While clubs are able to benefit from the network of influences established by a successful member of the elite, this also tends to reinforce his socio-economic and political pre-eminence.’

The overall importance of football in Cameroon makes sure that club presidents are always in the spotlight and are respected for keeping football alive in the country. A club president will be especially respected within his own community if he manages to be successful with the local football team. He will earn the support of the local community and uses this support to gain political power. ‘The club presidents use football as a stepping stone to gain popularity so that people will vote for them,’ someone in Buea told me. ‘Without football the people would not have known them but now everybody knows them.’

The political aspect of sponsoring a club is especially visible in the West Province. We already know that the Bamileke have made their province into one of the main football provinces in the country over the last few decades. The Bamileke are businessmen, they ‘are well known for their entrepreneurial spirit’ (Nkwi & Vidacs 1997: 127) and they are even referred to as the ‘Jews of Cameroon’ (Vidacs 2000: 101). Some say that the Bamileke are now using their economic wealth to gain political power.

As Nkwi & Vidacs (1997: 127) note, ‘Bamileke themselves openly admit that their rise in football is part of an attempt to show the world what they are capable

of in a political context where many Bamileke feel that they are being marginalized by the country's political powers'. These days a number of Bamileke big men are also the presidents of several first-division clubs. All of these club presidents have become Members of Parliament (MPs) because of their sponsorship of their respective clubs. Indeed, the club president of Olympique de Buea is also a parliamentarian and is addressed as 'Honourable'.

## Public versus private clubs

Olympique de Buea is a private club. You could regard the club as the pet project of the club president, who not only founded the club but is also its main sponsor. The club is his personal property and as such, he has sole power over the team and is able to do whatever he pleases. In one way, Olympique de Buea is a very lucky club because it will always have the financial support of its president, as long as he does not abandon the team.

Most clubs in Cameroon, however, are so-called public clubs. They are the property of the village or town where it is located. It is the local town council and the local community who decide what happens to the team. They are also the ones who are supposed to provide funding for the team. The sponsorship of public clubs normally comes from two different sources: a big man and a town congress.

First, how does the local community attract a wealthy big man for its public club? Traditionally, the big man must be a native of the area in which the club is located. In other words, he must be a son of the soil. I heard that it is a custom for the local community to form an organizing committee. The chairman of the committee is usually a big man himself. Before the start of the season, a delegation from the committee will visit a wealthy man (or the wealthiest man) in town. The general idea of this visit is clear. If a person is sick, find a doctor. If a team is in need of money, find a wealthy man. The head of the delegation will speak to the big man. 'You are a son of the soil,' he will say. 'You know that our team is not doing well. The team is desperately in need of money. We rely on you to help our team.' Usually the big man will accept becoming the club president for reasons we have seen earlier.

The second way of raising money is to organize a town congress. A congress normally takes place before the start of the new football season. The committee of the public club will make an announcement on the radio, in newspapers, at the local market or via a loudspeaker on a minibus. The message will be that the local football team has brought prestige and respect to the local community. In order to keep having success in the competition, the team needs money. Players need to be signed, a coach needs to be appointed and jerseys need to be bought.

Everybody is urged to come to the congress. The committee will send special invitations to the prominent people in town who will have a good seat at the front of the crowd during the congress.

At the start of the congress, the new club president will be officially introduced to the local community. It is customary that the club president is the first to contribute a significant amount of money and after that, the crowd is supposed to give individual donations. Not all contributions are of a financial nature. Some people will offer to cook food for the players, some people will offer a bus, and others will provide the jerseys.

People in Buea have told me that the fundraising at a congress is really a 'fake show' because the contributions of the public are peanuts compared to those of the club president. More importantly, contributions from the public are only made once a year but the club president has to provide money throughout the football season.

It is therefore essential for a public club to have a wealthy big man as its club president. In fact, most clubs in Cameroon could not survive – and, more importantly, be successful in the competition – without the financial aid of such big men. Let us take PWD Bamenda as an example. Although it is one of the oldest and most popular teams in the North West Province, it has not always been playing in the D1 competition. After a spell in the second division, PWD Bamenda managed to win the national interpools in 2002 and returned to the highest football league. Bamendas agree that the club president (the 'very, very important man') was the one who made this happen. During 2003, PWD Bamenda had a very good season and the team ended up in third place in the D1 competition. In 2004, the success of the team declined until finally, in 2005, PWD Bamenda was relegated to the second division. The downfall of the team coincided with the club president withdrawing his leadership and finances from the club.

Victoria United too has been moving back and forth between the first and second division. Things went reasonably well in 2003 when the general manager of the CDC was president of the club. However, at the end of the 2003 season, the big man resigned as club president, saying that he did not get the necessary support from the local community in Limbe. In 2004, Victoria United was relegated to the second division. Two other examples are PWD Kumba and Kumbo Strikers, teams from highly commercial, Nigerian-dominated towns in the South West and North West Province respectively. These relatively successful teams dropped down to Division Two when the Nigerians stopped sponsoring them.

Clignet & Stark (1974) argue that the teams from the more rural areas find it more difficult to reach the D1 competition in comparison to teams from large urban areas. The reason is that numerous wealthy big men can be found in the larger cities such as Douala and Yaoundé. As they put it, '... it is the clubs of

smaller towns which most frequently drop out of the National League' (Ibid.: 414). Indeed, the teams from the more rural areas in the country tend to be financially instable and seem to be regularly switching between the first and second-division leagues.

The clubs from the West Province are an exception to the argument stated above. Most of the first-division teams in this region are located in villages or small towns. Teams such as Fovu de Baham, Unisport de Bafang and Sable de Batie are all financially stable and reasonably successful clubs thanks to the support of their respective club presidents. In fact, Bamileke villages and towns are so full of wealthy big men that it sometimes even has a negative impact on the local public team. A well-known example is Stade Bandjoun, a club based in the town where the richest man in Cameroon was born. He was the club president back in the 1980s but let go of the team some years later. Afterwards, the current club president of Olympique de Buea took over the leadership of Stade Bandjoun before starting his own private club in Buea. In 2003, there was no big man in Bandjoun ready to be the new club president. Some people claim that these big men are afraid that if they manage to be successful with the team, the richest man in town would become interested in the team again. He always has the power to take over the role as club president simply because he is the richest man. So despite the fact that there are numerous wealthy big men living in Bandjoun, the public team is not able to attract any of them.

This leaves us with one last issue. Why did the club president of Olympique de Buea leave Stade Bandjoun to create his own team far away in Buea? Why did he move from a public club to a private club? It appears that the president of a public club always has to share his power with the local community. They can say 'no' to his decisions and object to the way he runs the club. Apparently, the club president was fed up with interference from the local population in Bandjoun and decided to create a club where he would have complete decision-making powers. There is no one within Olympique de Buea who dares to argue with the club president. He is the absolute king of the club.

So now we know why the clubs from the large urban areas such as Douala and Yaoundé have always been the dominant forces in football in Cameroon. In Yaoundé, for instance, the two big clubs are now led by famous former players. Roger Milla is the club president of Tonnerre de Yaoundé and Theophile Abega is the club president of Canon de Yaoundé. Their popularity reflects the popularity of these two clubs. We also know why the clubs from the West Province have been so successful in the last two decades.

There is only one remaining mystery. What is the reason behind the success of Coton Sport de Garoua, the club from the North Province? The rise of Coton Sport de Garoua in the D1 competition coincides with the period in which a

company called Sodecoton took control of the club. The club president of Coton Sport is also the general manager of Sodecoton, which is a huge agricultural company that specializes in the production and selling of cash crops. The company officially takes care of all financial matters related to the club.

In short, when I was doing a local sports quiz with Essomba, he easily answered the following two questions. What is the most successful Cameroonian club of all times? 'Canon de Yaoundé!' Which is by far the richest club in the country? 'Coton Sport de Garoua!' Everybody knows why Coton Sport has been Canon de Yaoundé's fiercest competitor in recent years.

## Wednesday

Walking up the road towards Molyko Stadium means walking straight towards Mount Cameroon. As always early in the morning, the mountain is almost completely invisible because of fog and clouds. The fog does slowly burn off during the morning but you will still only have a very slim chance of seeing the top of the mountain. In fact, I have only seen the peak once in a period of five months, and people in Buea say that you can enjoy this view only a couple of times a year.

There are many myths related to the mountain. Most of them have something to do with witchcraft and the presence of the spirits of the mountain. Traditional Bakweri beliefs have it that there is a God called Efasa-Moto who lives on the mountain. This God is portrayed as half human, half stone. He is said to be the male component of the Goddess of the Ocean, called Liengu la Mwanja, who is portrayed as a beautiful woman. The Goddess is said to reside around two rocks in the ocean near Limbe. These two rocks are part of Mount Etinde – or Little Mount Cameroon – which is a smaller volcano connected to its big brother on the west.

Efasa-Moto is the spiritual protector of the mountain. In the old days, not even too long ago, as Essomba told me, the local ethnic group (the Bakweri) used to sacrifice albinos in honour of the God of the Mountain. On the top of the mountain, Efasa-Moto is said to maintain a sugar plantation, well known because of its intense sweetness. It is forbidden, though, to take the sugar canes away. The God will not allow it.

There are several trails leading right up the mountain but many people in Buea have never been to the top. They do not have any intention of doing so either, as the mountain's mysterious appearance and the presence of the God and spirits

scares them. However, once a year hundreds of sportsmen and women run up the mountain during the so-called Mount Cameroon Race of Hope. The contest and its route, which starts at Molyko Stadium and is approximately 40 kilometres long, are said to be incredibly tough.

One name will always be associated with the Race of Hope. Sarah Liengu Etonge has managed to win the race four times in a row and, in February 2005, she won the race for the seventh time in her career. She is, therefore, called the Queen of the Mountain for good reason. People in Buea say that Etonge could have won the race only because she is a local Bakweri woman who lives in Buea. The God of the Mountain is not in the habit of letting non-Bakwerians win the race more than once.

‘Why?’ Essomba and I are sitting on the stand in the shade. We are waiting for the training session to start. I just asked him if he wants to join me in climbing the mountain. Someone told me that it takes two to three days to go to the top and come back down again. ‘What do you want to do at the top?’ I guess this means no.

## Financial difficulties

Almost the entire squad of Olympique de Buea is standing on the pitch at seven o’clock sharp. Whenever there is a new coach, Essomba explains, the players will want to prove themselves to the ‘boss’. They will be right on time and they will practice harder than usual. A new coach means a fresh start. All the players know that this coach did not have a conversation with his predecessor. He is therefore somewhat dependent on the information given to him by the assistant coaches. Most of all, however, his decision about who will play the official matches will be based on their performances during the training sessions. The new coach thus offers new perspectives for the players who have been sitting on the reserves’ bench.

The team captain first leads the team into the inevitable warming up. There is a lot of simultaneous sprinting, jumping, difficult footwork and hand clapping involved, as if we were rehearsing for an upcoming musical or dance. In between our choreographed performance, we are stretching our muscles every five minutes or so.

The voice of the coach echoes over the field and the players gather around him in a circle. The coach seems to be a man of few words. ‘Forget about the last disastrous matches,’ the coach says in French. ‘There’s an important match coming up on Sunday. We’re going to play Bamboutos in Mbouda. You all understand that it will be a tough match but we are going to win. There are other

important matches this weekend so we can really make a difference by beating Bamboutos!’

We have a thorough training session for the next hour and then it is over. ‘We’ll have another training session at four o’clock,’ the coach says, ‘and then we’ll focus on ball techniques.’

When Essomba and I are changing our boots for simple sneakers, there is something happening on the other side of the field. Most players are clustered around a short man wearing some sort of Hawaiian t-shirt. They are shouting and pointing at the man. ‘He’s the technical and administrative director of the club,’ a Rasta player tells me. ‘He’s a very important man. He’s supposed to give us our allowances and bonuses.’

One of the players is extremely angry and all of a sudden starts attacking the technical director. His team mates are having trouble restraining him. The technical director does not really seem to be bothered by the player’s aggressive behaviour. ‘This man still has to pay us our allowances for the training sessions from the last two weeks,’ Essomba says, somewhat irritated too. ‘We’re also still waiting for the match bonuses for the three matches we won at the beginning of the season. We’re supposed to receive almost FCFA 100,000 (€ 152) each.’

Since the club president is out of town on business, it is the technical director who is in charge of all financial matters related to the club. The vice-president may outrank the technical director but the technical director is now in control of money management. This, so the players say, is something he does not do well. ‘Olympique de Buea is an amateur club,’ Essomba says. ‘But you receive your salary every month, don’t you?’ I ask him. ‘If I received my salary every 25th, 26th or 27th day of the month,’ Essomba replies, ‘then yes, I would consider Olympique de Buea to be a professional club. But we never get our salaries on time. Sometimes we have to wait for months before we get some money.’

This lack of payment by the club even extends to the signature premiums, as Essomba explains. ‘I’ve been playing for Olympique de Buea for a couple of seasons now. But I didn’t even get my signature premium yet. Where’s my FCFA 2.5 million? The club president keeps on telling me that I have to wait a little longer. But how long am I supposed to wait? We’re playing all these matches for the president, but he doesn’t pay us. Is it right to put so much effort into the team without getting any money?’

‘I’ve heard that the club president does give you money to buy boots and jerseys?’ I ask him. ‘Yes,’ Essomba says, ‘that’s a very good aspect of our club. Many clubs don’t give you any money for boots and jerseys.’ At the start of this season, the club president gave all the players some money to buy football boots. Training boots cost about FCFA 30,000 (€ 45) when you buy them in Douala or



in Bafoussam, Essomba tells me. Match boots are more expensive. The club also provides the official jerseys to play matches.

However, Essomba emphasizes that Olympique de Buea is still an amateur club. ‘They always pay you your money far too late and sometimes they don’t pay you anything at all. This is the reason why so many players in Cameroon leave football. Most of those players really want to play but they will come to a team and are promised FCFA 500,000 (€ 762) as a signature premium. But in the end the people from the club will only give them FCFA 50,000 and say they will make up the balance – that is FCFA 450,000 – in two or three months’ time. The boy will suffer, he will feel discouraged and he will not want to play again. Then he will abandon football and maybe learn how to drive a taxi because he needs to earn a living.’

We have seen in the previous chapter that a club president can use money to encourage his players. Of course, he would have to actually give the money he promised beforehand. The lack of financial support is causing unrest among the Olympique de Buea players. ‘We really need some motivation to keep on playing,’ Essomba says.

Some of the players are still arguing with the technical director. He now holds a piece of paper in his hand with the players’ names written on it. The director calls the players one by one and gives them an FCFA 10,000 note. When the first players step forward to collect the money, their faces show pure disbelief. ‘What is this?’ one of them says. ‘Is this supposed to make me happy?’ ‘I’ve got a wife and child!’ another player says. ‘This is a joke,’ Essomba adds, when he too collects his money.

The players grudgingly leave the stadium.

## Second division team Buea Boys

The financial difficulties within the second-division Buea Boys look as though they are far worse than is the case in Olympique de Buea. Buea Boys is about to start a training session only fifteen minutes after the first-division players have left the field. The Buea Boys players are certainly a lot younger and smaller than their higher-level football counterparts in Buea. Most of them are probably between 16 and 20 years old, while the Olympique de Buea players are more likely to be between the ages of 20 and 30.

One of the Buea Boys players tells me that they have not received any money for several weeks now. He claims that they usually go to the training ground without having had any breakfast. It has certainly been difficult for me to communicate with these players because of their financial situation. Most of them never stopped asking me for money, food and drinks and they did not want to

talk about anything else. In contrast, none of the Olympique de Buea players have ever asked me for any financial favours. Essomba has even regularly paid for food and drinks when we were relaxing in an eating spot or a bar.

Another indication of the first-division players being a lot richer than the Buea Boys players is the fact that Essomba and his team mates all have cell phones. These phones are really a status symbol for the Olympique de Buea players. Whenever a number of players gather in the beach bar near the stadium, they all place their phones on the round bar, visible for all to see. The Buea Boys players, on the other hand, have to make use of the phone booths beside the main road when they need to talk to somebody.

Strangely enough, Buea Boys is generally regarded as one of the richest second-division teams in the South West Province. The club was founded in the 1990s by a local Bakweri man who is the current club president. Since he has been living in London for the last few years, the day-to-day affairs are taken care of by the team's German head coach. This coach has told me that he is having a hard time convincing the club president to send money for the team.

The view of Buea Boys as a relatively rich team is confirmed if we consider the club's performances over the years. Buea Boys is almost always present during the South West Province mini-interpools and has also managed to reach the national interpools at least four times. Every time they play the interpools, though, something goes wrong and it is usually connected to money and internal fights. We will hear an example of the 2002 interpool campaign at the end of this chapter.

In the meantime, it is important to note that the management of Buea Boys is in the hands of some club executives who reside in Buea. They are part of the club's so-called Executive Board. The problem, as I learned from the coach and the players, is that there are two local families struggling to gain control of the club. The club president is part of one family, the vice-president (a high-placed figure in the Cameroonian army) is part of the other.

The 'feud of the families' is even said to be the main reason behind the disastrous 2004 season in the first-division league. At the end of this season, Buea Boys managed to reach the national interpools and even made it through to the D1 competition for the first time in the club's history. Once in the prestigious D1 competition, however, the two families began fighting each other and as a result, the players and the club's staff went without pay for months on end. The local newspaper *The Post* (2 December 2004) added that the club did not attract any new players who were accustomed to the level of play in the first division. Buea Boys, a team consisting of mostly young, inexperienced and badly paid players, thus failed to be of any significance in Cameroon's highest division.

In 2005, Buea Boys returned to the second division. They did not reach the interpools in 2005 and 2006, and Kumba Lakers and Tiko United, respectively, were the representatives of the South West Province in the national tournament. The team was led by the 2003 assistant coach, after the German coach had left the club due to frustration with the chaos within the club's management.

Let us return to the present day, wednesday. While the Buea Boys players are undergoing an intensive training session, the assistant coach tells me that the team has qualified for the mini-interpools that are due to begin in a few weeks' time. This year's (2003) mini-interpools are to be held in Buea and Limbe. Later on, the head coach expresses his fear that Buea Boys may not even be able to participate in the tournament because of lack of funding.

### Ashu, captain of the team

He is wearing traditional clothing and classy shoes. He is walking very upright, full of confidence, a true leader. He is probably the only Buea Boys player to own a cell phone. His name is Ashu. Ashu just invited me to join him at a restaurant where, he said, there will be a meeting with all the players and coaches. He went home for a minute to change his clothes and now we are going down the main road.

I met him a little while back, after I had already befriended Essomba. Whereas Essomba came to me during one of the first training sessions, I was the one who initiated contact with Ashu. One day, I made an appointment with him somewhere in a bar to discuss the situation within Buea Boys. He turned out to be very friendly, well-spoken and, most importantly, willing to tell me things about the team.

Ashu has been the captain of Buea Boys since the beginning of this season. He was chosen as captain by the German head coach who he has a very good relationship with. Later on, we will see that his relationship with the assistant coach is a lot worse. Ashu was born in a town in the North West Province and so is an Anglophone. His father is the chief of his native town and so Ashu comes from a relatively well-to-do family. You can easily see that he grew up in an upper-class environment and this may be the reason why the head coach picked him to be team captain. Ashu speaks English (and French) very well. He always talks in a way that sounds like he is giving a speech to convince people about something.

Ashu is a somewhat ambiguous figure in the team. On the one hand, he usually mingles with the other players to find out what is going on. He regularly says that he has to keep himself informed of all things related to the team. On the other hand, he does not live near the other players and seems to be far more

reserved and more responsible than his team mates. He has got some friends in the team but, as we will find out, also a couple of enemies. Ashu is older than most of the Buea Boys players. He must be about 26 years old (but again I am not exactly sure). Whereas most of the players have not played for other clubs, Ashu has played for at least seven (first- and second-division) clubs, both in the Anglophone and the Francophone zone. In his younger years, for instance, Ashu played for Olympique Mvolyé near Yaoundé. He has also been selected once or twice for the national junior Olympic team.

In one way, Ashu is exactly the opposite of Essomba in terms of character. He is far quieter and is more of a loner than my friend in the first division. On the other hand, Ashu is as confident as Essomba and is very self-assured when it comes to playing football. He definitely trains a lot and does seem to be regarded as a very good football player. All that is left to say is that Ashu plays as a number nine – a striker.

We just passed Malingo Street and are now walking up a low green hill on the right-hand side of the main road. At the top of the hill is a restaurant, which serves as the team's club house. The restaurant is owned by the club president's mother who cooks for the players now and again. There are about 25 Buea Boys players sitting at different tables inside the restaurant. I think almost all the players, if not all of them, are present.

There is a large table in front of the other tables. A white man is sitting behind this table, flanked by the assistant coach on one side and the vice captain of the team on the other. The white man is the German head coach. He is generally not very friendly with the players and usually only discusses issues with Ashu. Before Ashu sits down at the main table as well, he tells me that the head coach will give the players their match bonuses and training allowances from the last two weeks. As is the case with Olympique de Buea, the players with Buea Boys are also very upset because there is no money coming their way. The only reason why they are not looking too angry at the moment is because the club president's mother is serving them some food.

The head coach calls the players one by one and gives them a FCFA 5,000 note each. Captain Ashu confirms the payments by checking the names on a piece of paper. Some players next to me are complaining that this is not the total amount of money they are supposed to receive. It does not include all the training allowances and match bonuses of the past few weeks.

When Ashu and I are walking up the road again, he says that most of the players received signature premiums up to FCFA 150,000. He claims that the club president actually paid the players their money at the beginning of this year. Most players, however, have already spent it. Ashu too has spent his signature premium. Apparently Ashu is about to get married. His fiancée is staying with

his parents, waiting for him to raise money for the wedding. He sent his signature premium to his fiancée and her parents earlier this year.

## Anglophones versus Francophones

There is something wrong again. I have entered Molyko Stadium for the afternoon training session of Olympique de Buea and most of the players are engaged in a heated debate with each another. One of the Francophone players explains what is going on. 'You see,' he says, 'the majority of the players are Francophones but it's mostly the local guys who are playing the matches.'

I have noticed that a typical line-up of Olympique de Buea consists of at least six Anglophone players, including the team captain, the attacker from Buea Town, and Essomba. The Francophones are complaining that this is not a fair representation of the entire squad. After all, we know that there are only seven or eight Anglophone players in a squad of at least 40 players.

Most of all, however, they do not like to see an Anglophone player as their team captain. A team captain is supposed to fulfil an intermediary role between the players and the club executives but the Francophones think that an Anglophone player will not take their needs and problems into consideration. The team captain starts laughing when I confront him with the complaints of the Francophones. 'A Francophone captain? No way! The team is based in the Anglophone zone.'

The discussion stops when the coach announces the start of the training session. We are divided into four groups. Two teams will play on one side of the field, the other two teams will play on the other side. In this game, each team is supposed to defend two goals. The coach urges everybody to play really fast. At one point, we are only allowed to touch the ball once (*one touch*), then we are allowed to touch the ball twice (*two touches*).

The training session is over. Tomorrow's training begins at three o'clock, the coach says.

Essomba and I are walking down the road. 'How do you see the problem between the Anglophones and the Francophones?' I ask him. 'The Francophones are always complaining,' Essomba replies, 'but at the same time they enjoy all kinds of privileges.' Essomba says that the Francophones have already received their signing fees, while most Anglophones are still waiting for their money. 'We're playing most of the matches,' he says, 'and we're scoring most of the goals. But we don't get our money.'

It appears that the Anglophone players are having a meeting this evening to discuss their financial problems. Essomba does not want me to be present at the meeting but a little while later he tells me that they have agreed to send the team

captain to the club president. The captain will negotiate on behalf of the Anglophone players.

Later on, the Francophone Rasta player denies Essomba's statement that only the Francophones have received their signature premiums. 'No no,' he says, while exhibiting some irritation towards his Anglophone colleagues, 'all the players received their money at the beginning of this season. But the Anglophones think that they have the right to play the matches only because they are from around here. I don't think that's fair.'

It appears that the problems between the Anglophones and the Francophones are also present within Buea Boys. I have just come across Ashu, the Anglophone team captain, while walking down the main road. 'You have noticed the problem, haven't you?' he says. 'There are two groups in our team, the local guys and the Francophones. I, as the captain, have to endure a lot of criticism from my Francophone team mates. Last year we had another Anglophone captain. There was some trouble between him and a Francophone player who wanted to take over his position. The Francophone players said that there should be a Francophone captain because the majority of the players were Francophones. This year there are more Anglophones than Francophones in the team so they have no right to complain. Still there's a Francophone player who doesn't want me to be captain.'

Ashu says that one of the main problems between the two groups is the simple fact that they speak a different language. I know that most of the Francophones in Buea Boys and Olympique de Buea do not speak English and that some of the Anglophones do not speak French. This means that they cannot communicate if there is a problem in the team. 'This is where I usually help out,' Ashu says. 'I'm bilingual, so I speak both French and English. It's also my job to make sure that things are running smoothly in the team and that everybody is happy with each other.'

Essomba also speaks French very well but it is generally known that the team captain of Olympique de Buea is only able to say a couple of sentences in French. Ashu adds that the Francophone players in Buea Boys are causing trouble at the moment because of the lack of money. 'There's a match coming up on Sunday but they don't want to play. They are planning a strike.'

It appears that the situation within Buea Boys is exactly the opposite of the one in Olympique de Buea, where the Anglophones are anxious to get their money.

## The Anglophone problem

The different languages aside, it was the festivities on 20 May that made it abundantly clear to me that the antagonistic feelings between the two groups were a result of post-independent political affairs in the country. On this particular day in 1972, the French and English parts of Cameroon joined to form the United Republic of Cameroon. However, many Anglophones told me that they do not consider Unification Day to be a national holiday at all. When I asked Essomba to come with me to see the festivities, he looked as though I had just proposed something horrible. ‘No, you go! For me, there’s nothing to celebrate!’ he told me.

Back in October 1961, West Cameroon was unified with East Cameroon instead of with (English-speaking) Nigeria. Then, in 1972, President Ahidjo changed the subsequent political structure based on federalism (two areas, one name) into a unitary state (one area, one name). The idea among Anglophones of an equal power relationship between them and the Francophones turned out to be an illusion.

They (Anglophones) started to resent their region’s loss of autonomy and the allegedly subordinate position of the Anglophone minority in the unitary state. Their numerous grievances were mainly of a political, economic, and cultural nature: notably their under-representation and inferior role in national decision-making councils; the neglect of their region’s infrastructure and the rape and drain of its rich economic resources, especially oil, by successive Francophone regimes; and the attempts at “frenchification”. (Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997: 211)

In the long run, ‘...this created an Anglophone consciousness: the feeling of being “marginalised”, “exploited”, and “assimilated” by the francophone-dominated state, and even by the francophone population as a whole’ (Ibid.: 207).

There have been only two presidents since Cameroon’s independence and both Ahmadou Ahidjo (1961-1982) and Paul Biya (1982-present) are from the Francophone zone of the country. In fact, until the 1990s Cameroon’s ‘democratic’ political system rested on a one-party policy, namely the (Francophone) Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM). After a lot of Anglophone resistance to the political domination of the French-speaking population, President Biya was forced to allow other political parties. The system of multipartyism in the 1990s has given rise to the most prominent opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), which is an Anglophone party from the Bamenda area. The party and its founder, John Fru Ndi, and therefore also the Bamenda area, are considered to be the most ‘rebellious’ against the Biya-regime.

The dominance of Francophones over the Anglophones is kept alive through the process of neopatrimonialism (also known as tribalism):

The essence of neopatrimonialism is the personalisation of rule in flagrant disregard of the rational-cum-legal principles that underpin the functioning of a modern state. ... In this form of politics, the rational and effective management of the state is truncated and replaced by a reticulated network of ties of personal loyalty and support, governed by materialistic considerations. A clientelistic relationship evolves naturally from the entrenchment of personal rule to support the system. The patron prives security (of any sort) including appointments to high positions of his clients, in return for support – which is in the main political. (Mbuagbo 2002)

Neopatrimonialism, or tribalism, is widespread not only in Cameroonian politics but also in almost all aspects of life, including football. The underlying idea is that people are not put in certain places because they have the appropriate certificates or skills but because they are ethnically related to the person who appointed them. Generally speaking, specific Francophone ethnic groups are dominant within the government and they let their families and friends share in the wealth and power. ‘When your brother is in heaven, you can never go to hell,’ one person in Buea told me. Thus one’s tribesmen will always help a ‘brother’ out.

In this perspective, the Anglophones feel that the Francophones will never allow an Anglophone team to win the national D1 competition. The statistics seem to confirm this view. We know that there are only two Anglophone teams that have won the Cup of Cameroon (Kumbo Strikers in 2000 and Olympique de Buea in 2002) but no Anglophone team has ever managed to win the national D1 competition.

Many Anglophones told me that Kumbo Strikers would have won the ‘double’ in the year 2000 (meaning the Cup of Cameroon *and* the national league), were it not for a controversial decision by the Francophone-dominated FECAFOOT. At the end of the season, Kumbo Strikers was officially top of the league table. FECAFOOT, however, decided to penalize the team due to spectator violence during one of its last matches. The football federation deducted six points from Kumbo Strikers, who then dropped down the league table, and Fovu de Baham suddenly won the national D1 competition.

According to Anglophones, part of the answer to the research question must be sought in the Anglo-Franco issue. Anglophones would argue that they do not have less chances of winning individual matches but that they do have less or no chance of winning the first-division league.

The story of Anglophones versus Francophones goes further in the sense that there is also a division between the Anglophones themselves. There are strong antagonistic feelings between the ‘coastal/forest people in the South West Province and the ‘grassfield’ people in the North West Province’ (Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997: 211). ‘The North West is very poor,’ Essomba explains. ‘Many Bamendas have moved to the South West for business reasons. Here in Buea you



can see that most shops and restaurants are owned by people from the North West.' Of course, South Westerners are very sceptical about these developments.

Since the early 1960s the North West elite has continued to play a dominant socio-economic and political role in both provinces, and its acquisition of the best jobs and lands in the South West has provoked strong resentment ... Such sentiments have been intensified by the fact that the "entrepreneurial" North Westerners have gradually succeeded in dominating most sectors of the South West economy, in particular trade, transport, and housing. (Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997: 212)

The overall idea is that the Francophone government of Paul Biya is trying to divide the Anglophones, '... often capitalising on existing contradictions between the North West and South West élites. Some of the latter have been appointed to key positions in their province in response to complaints about North West domination' (Ibid.: 224-225). 'The use of regionalism in terms of selective appointments to high offices by the Biya regime has put the two provinces on a collision course. In the logic of divide and rule, the North West and South West Provinces are made to believe that they are enemies. Mutual stereotyping and exclusion ... downgrade all areas of potential unity and leviathan state thrives on such cleavages' (Mbuagbo 2002).

Generally speaking, it matters if one is an Anglophone or Francophone if the two meet, but it also matters if one is a North or South Westerner if two Anglophones meet each other. Therefore, a match between PWD Bamenda and Victoria United may be an Anglophone derby but it is also a match between the North West and South West Province.

## Traditional and non-traditional teams

In the evening, when Essomba and I are relaxing in a bar down at the University Junction, I learn that one earlier statement needs to be revised. This statement – Olympique de Buea is the second Anglophone team to have won the Cup of Cameroon – may be officially true but is not perceived as such by most people in Buea. Essomba says that although the club is based in the Anglophone zone of Cameroon, it is actually associated with the Francophones. To be more precise, he adds, the club is associated with the Bamileke from the West Province.

At first, I was under the impression that the team was partly Francophone because of the origins of the club president, one of the assistant coaches and the team doctor, and partly Anglophone because of the origins of the vice-president and the team manager. But people in Buea associate the club with the Bamileke just because the club president is a Bamileke big man. This would solve another mystery, namely the fact that Olympique de Buea does not have many supporters in town. Buea Boys and Prisons Buea both enjoy far more support from the local population because of their perceived Anglophone identity. I said earlier that

most people who were watching the match between Olympique de Buea and PWD Bamenda at Molyko Stadium were supporting the visiting team. Now we know why. Not only do many Bamendas live in Buea, most Bakwerians do not support Olympique de Buea anyway. It is as if PWD Bamenda played a home match last Sunday here in Buea.

The case of Olympique de Buea shows that there are two kinds of teams in Cameroon: traditional teams and non-traditional teams. In the first instance, the ethnic background of the club executives and supporters coincides with the ethnic background of the local population where the team is based. In the latter instance, the ethnic background of the club executives is not the same as the ethnic background of the population where the team is located.

The best way to explain traditional and non-traditional teams is by looking at the West Province. In the 2003 season, there are six teams from the West Province in the D1 competition: Stade Bandjoun, Racing de Bafoussam, Sable de Batie, Fovu de Baham, Bamboutos de Mbouda and Unisport de Bafang. All the teams that are located in Bamileke land are sponsored by the Bamileke themselves. These teams are traditional teams because the club executives' tribal affiliation coincides with the ethnic group that is located in the same area of the club.

It is the same thing as PWD Bamenda being run by the Bamendas or Victoria United being run by the coastal Bakwerians. Also, the two most popular teams in Yaoundé, Canon and Tonnerre, are associated with the local Beti ethnic group. These are all traditional teams.

However, the Bamileke also run Union de Douala which is not located in Bamileke territory. It is the area where the Duala and Bassa live. There is also a Bamileke big man who is the club president of Renaissance de Ngoumou (Centre Province). This is not Bamileke territory either. And, of course, there is a Bamileke man running Olympique de Buea in an area where the Bakwerians are the sons of the soil. In short, these teams are non-traditional teams.

In the 2003 season, there are about nine Bamileke big men who are club presidents of teams in the first-division league. That is exactly 50 per cent of all the teams in the D1 competition. Three of these club presidents are leading teams in non-Bamileke areas. It is not only the fact that the West Province is so dominant in today's football that has made the other ethnic groups weary of the Bamileke, but also that the Bamileke are sponsoring football elsewhere in the country.

Traditionally, it has always been the Duala and Bassa from Douala and the Beti from Yaoundé that have dominated football in Cameroon. These groups are looking suspiciously at the Bamileke who are obviously taking over football in the country. 'The dislike felt by the citizens of Douala and Yaoundé for the Bamileke ... offers a case in point. ... Indeed, the Bamileke-dominated *Union* of

Douala climbed steadily in the first division between 1967 and 1970, and such was the pre-eminence of inter-ethnic antagonisms over urban loyalties that the citizens of Douala preferred the national championship to be won by the *Canon*, the leading club of Yaoundé' (Clignet & Stark 1974: 416).

You can understand the agony of the people of Douala when you realize that Union de Douala is one of the most successful clubs from this city. In contrast, Dynamo de Douala, a traditional team associated with the Bassa, is not nearly as successful but far more popular in Douala nevertheless. I think that there are also Anglophones who have the same negative feelings towards Olympique de Buea's club president.

### Football derbies and ethnicity

With respect to tribalism in football, one second-division player told me that there are two kinds of matches in Cameroon: *big matches* and *important matches*. The latter refers to matches at the end of the D1 competition, the matches in the interpools, and the semi-finals and final of the Cup of Cameroon. These are important matches because of the actual prizes involved.

Big matches are matches between teams from the same village or town, province or region. For instance, Canon de Yaoundé versus Tonnerre de Yaoundé (the same town), Stade Bandjoun versus Racing de Bafoussam (the same province) and PWD Bamenda versus Victoria United (the same region) are all big matches. These matches are big because the prestige of an ethnic group is at stake. In short, these matches are called derbies (and matches between teams from the same town are called 'true derbies'). Big matches are always related to ethnicity or tribalism.

We know that there are two kinds of ethnicity in Cameroon, one based on language and the other based on tribal affiliation. First, there is the division between the Anglophones and the Francophones. Nkwi & Vidacs (1997: 125) argue that 'in most contexts being Anglophone overrides other distinctions, and is used widely both as a term of reference and of self-appellation'. Some people say that these two groups can easily be regarded as two different ethnic groups.

Second, there are about 250 ethnic groups living in Cameroon. The most prominent ethnic groups in the history of football so far have been the ethnic groups I mentioned earlier, namely the Bassa and Duala, the Beti and the Bamileke. On a somewhat smaller scale, we can easily mention the Bamenda as well. In short, these are the ethnic groups who live in the Centre Province, the Littoral Province, the West Province and the Anglophone zone of Cameroon. The ethnic groups in the other provinces have never had much influence in football.

The different types of derbies and, hence, the different levels of support can be explained by Evans-Pritchard's (1940) description of fission and fusion in Nuer politics. Let me first explain how it works by looking at the Anglophone zone. If Prisons Buea played a match against Victoria United, it would be a match between the inland Bakwerians and the coastal Bakwerians. Likewise, a match between PWD Bamenda and Kumbo Strikers would be a match between two different Bamenda sub-groups. These derbies are characterized by the highest amount of fission possible.

If Victoria United plays a match against PWD Bamenda, however, all the Bakwerians will most likely support the team from Limbe in the same way as the Bamendas would support their team. There is fusion taking place here because the coastal and inland Bakwerians from the South West Province have united for 90 minutes against the Bamendas from the North West Province. If PWD Bamenda had to play the final of the Cup of Cameroon against, say, Racing de Bafoussam, more fusion will take place. It is likely that the entire Anglophone zone would support PWD Bamenda.

The same process occurs in the other provinces. Let us take, for instance, the Beti of the Centre Province who are, as Vidacs (2000) explains, not the homogeneous group they appear to be. 'Their emergence under the collective name Beti dates back to the 1982 rise to power of Paul Biya, who is a Boulou. Traditionally, these societies of the southern forest region of Cameroon were small, autonomous, acephalous societies, with very little sense of commonality' (Ibid.: 102).

There are several sub-groups among the Beti who have given support to different clubs in the city of Yaoundé. For instance, the Beti can be subdivided into the Ewondo, the Eton and the Boulou. As Clignet & Stark (1974: 416) explain, '... the *Canon* is the fiercest opponent of the *Tonnerre*, and such are the associated intra-ethnic conflicts between the Mvogabi and the Mvog Ada – both sub-groups of the Ewondo – that transfers of players are considered and treated as acts of "treason"'.

The matches between Canon and Tonnerre de Yaoundé are the toughest matches in the country. This is fission at its peak with Beti sub-groups in fierce opposition to one another. However, if Canon de Yaoundé played in the final of the Cup of Cameroon against Dynamo de Douala or, particularly, Union de Douala, all the Beti inhabitants of the capital would probably lend their support to Canon.

Likewise in Douala too, there are sub-groups who are associated with the different teams in the city. As Clignet & Stark (1974: 416) write, '... the rivalry between the *Oryx*, the *Leopard*, and the *Caiman* tended increasingly to supersede traditional antagonisms among the three main local sub-groups: the Bell, the

Deido, and the Akwa'. But, again, if Dynamo de Douala were to play in the final of the Cup of Cameroon against PWD Bamenda or Coton Sport de Garoua, the people from Douala would surely *en masse* support Dynamo.

Lastly, let us take a look at the Bamileke of the West Province. This is where we see fission and fusion in its most extreme form. 'The term Bamileke unites a number of groups from Cameroon's Grassfields who live in highly hierarchical societies. However, these are fairly independent units which do not really constitute a centralized whole' (Vidacs 2000: 102). On the one hand, the Bamileke man would like to support a Bamileke team when it plays a match against a non-Bamileke team from outside the West Province. On the other hand, fission is at its greatest within the province and is causing the Bamileke teams difficulties in winning their matches. Team manager Kalla of Olympique de Buea explains the situation:

Normally, if there were no hatred in Cameroonian football, every year the champion would come from the West Province. But the man from Sable does not want to see Racing. The man from Racing does not want to see Unisport. The man from Unisport does not want to see Bamboutos. The man from Bamboutos does not want to see Fovu. So the man from Sable wants to be at the top alone. The man from Fovu wants to be at the top. Everybody wants to be at the top. So who will finally be at the top? Nobody! They will use all their powers to stop each other. There's a total war inside the province. The teams are obstructing each other spiritually, morally, financially. That's the reason why Stade Bandjoun is going to drop. It's because there is no agreement among the teams. They don't like each other. That's why Coton Sport de Garoua and Canon de Yaoundé have a monopoly over Cameroon football. They don't have so many people to fight against.

What the team manager is trying to say in the last sentences is that the six Bamileke teams from the West Province have to play 10 matches against one another throughout the football season. We can also add the three non-traditional Bamileke teams in Buea, Douala and Ngoumou. The matches between the Bamileke teams are, therefore, numerous and extremely tough.

One particular story with regard to fission and fusion needs to be addressed here. It relates to Racing de Bafoussam, one of the most traditional teams in the West Province. Because of its history, Racing de Bafoussam should be the province's most popular club. This, however, is not the case. Many Bamileke support their own teams in towns such as Baham, Bafang and Batie and this has led to a decline in support for the great club from Bafoussam. On Friday we will see how the supporters of Racing de Bafoussam are using witchcraft, sorcery and black magic against some of the other Bamileke teams.

### Tribalism within the team

When I think about Essomba's and Ashu's football careers, it is obvious that they have travelled a lot over the years. Essomba first played in his native town in the

North West Province, signed for Kumbo Strikers, then moved to the capital to play for Tonnerre de Yaoundé and finally landed in the town of Buea in the South West Province. Ashu too went from his native town in the North West Province to clubs all over the country, including Olympique Mvolyé near Yaoundé, Unisport de Bafang and, of course, Buea Boys in the southern Anglophone zone. Sometimes they were the sons of the soil, sometimes they were the strangers in the team.

The point is that an average football team consists of players from all over Cameroon. Especially Olympique de Buea seems to be full of Francophones who were all born in faraway and completely different places.

In the 'old days', when Clignet & Stark wrote their article (in 1974), they concluded that players in the teams from West Cameroon were less likely to be born locally than players in the teams from East Cameroon. In fact, it was mostly the old and traditional teams from Douala and Yaoundé where players tended to be primarily recruited within the local area: 'Whereas 75 per cent of the players affiliated to the most prestigious and traditional teams of Yaoundé and Douala share the same ethnic origin, the corresponding percentages drop significantly among the more recent and less well-known teams ... For the *Union* of Douala, the *Aigle* of N'Kongsamba, and the *Diamant* of Yaoundé, the corresponding figures are 60, 50, and 33 per cent' (Ibid.: 415).

These days the ethnic composition of the leadership of most Cameroonian clubs may still coincide with the ethnic composition of the local population but it seems that this is increasingly no longer the case regarding the players in the team. In other words, the club president and the supporters of the team may be sons of the soil but the players are more likely to be strangers from other tribal areas. Indeed, as Vidacs (2000: 107) argues, '... teams and especially coaches, who do much of the recruiting, are often willing to find the best players regardless of ethnic origin'.

There is a positive side to this story. Football, to a certain extent, supersedes ethnicity because Essomba, Ashu and all the other players meet and interact with people from all over the country. It leads to 'a crossing of boundaries on the level of the everyday practice of the sport' (Vidacs 2000: 107). Within Olympique de Buea, for example, Essomba interacts with Bassa, Beti, Bakwerians, Bamileke, and so on. In short, football '... creates linkages among people who would not otherwise be linked. In the course of a sporting career, football players come into contact with a great many people from all walks of life' (Vidacs 2000: 107). Both Ashu and Essomba have played in the Francophone part of the country, learned to speak French, and have met numerous different people along the way.

There is, however, also a negative side to this story. First, most of the club executives still select players because of their tribal affiliation. For instance,

when the club president at Olympique de Buea left Bandjoun to settle in Buea, he took many Bamileke players with him. Also, the team manager and the vice-president brought some players from their own North West Province along. Equally, the former coach of Olympique de Buea personally selected many of his own players. 'When a coach moves to another club,' a player with Buea Boys told me, 'he always takes some players along. When these players hear that they are in the team, they just pack their bags, go straight to the office and sign their contract, because the coach has already said: "This is my player!"' This is pure tribalism. Some of the players in the team are not selected because of their football skills but because of their ethnic backgrounds.

Second, players may be moving from one club to another and meeting people with different tribal affiliations, but this does not mean that they will always be friends with one another. We have seen the problems between the Anglophones and Francophones within both Olympique de Buea and Buea Boys. I have not heard anything about possible tensions between players from different ethnic groups within the team of Olympique de Buea though.

Within Buea Boys, however, there are not only problems between the two language groups but also between the Bamenda and the Bassa players. There seem to be quite a lot of players from both areas in the team. Ashu told me that the assistant coach used to be the head coach at Tiko United where there happened to be a lot of Bassa players. When the coach left that team and went to Buea, he took many of these players with him.

The Bassa players in Buea Boys feature in the only story in which I noticed that different ethnic groups within the team could clash with one another. Buea Boys went to the national interpools in 2002. The team played three matches and managed to win two of them and draw one. They had only one match to play. Winning this match would mean that Buea Boys had made it to the semi-finals of the interpools. But their opponents happened to be PWD Bamenda. Ashu and the team manager of Buea Boys told me this story:

The match against PWD Bamenda was a crucial one for both teams. Two times before we could not qualify for the first division, but now we really had the chance to make it. The problems occurred when our head coach had to leave for a few days. Buea Boys has an Executive Board with about five big men. It was mostly the members of the Board who caused us to be defeated in the interpools in 2002. Just before the match against PWD, the Bassa players went to the members of the Board to complain about the Anglophones, specifically the players from Bamenda. According to the Bassa players, the Bamenda players had sold the match. They supposedly took money from PWD Bamenda to let them win the match. The members of the Board did not consult the head coach and decided to leave all the Anglophones out that day. Normally there were nine Anglophones in the team, but now there were mostly Bassa players on the field. We lost the match two goals to nil. PWD Bamenda went to the first-division league at our expense.

However, although the coup was forced by the Bassa players and was directed against the Bamendas, it was also a clash between Francophones and Anglophones. In fact, Ashu and the team manager used the words Bassa/Francophones and Bamenda/Anglophones interchangeably throughout the story. The story also tells us that there is a relationship between tribalism and corruption. In fact, a similar incident occurred in 1979 when PWD Bamenda lost in the final of the Cup of Cameroon to Dynamo de Douala. While the latter is a Bassa team, ‘... rumors ran high about a Bassa player in PWD Bamenda having sold the match’ (Nkwi & Vidacs 1997: 127). We will hear more about corruption in the next chapter.

It is after nine o’clock. ‘I have to go,’ Essomba says. ‘It’s getting late.’ I’m quite surprised to hear that he wants to go home already, especially since there is no training session in the morning. Later on, I find out that his real motivation involved a girl. I myself jump into bed not long after we have said goodbye because I have decided to train with Buea Boys in the morning.



## Thursday

There is a knock on my door. Another knock. And again. I open the door of my room, still only half dressed and very sleepy. Essomba and a few other players are standing on my porch. 'What is this?' Essomba asks me. 'The sun is already up. And you should be too!'

Essomba steps into my room. He looks around, as though inspecting the place, and then he turns his attention to me. 'This place is too dirty! Look at your bed, your closet, your stove! There are ants all over the floor, even on your desk. How can you live in a place like this?' I have come to think of the ants as part of the interior decoration, but Essomba seems to be of a different opinion. 'I know you have a girlfriend. Why doesn't she tidy up the place?' I am feeling a little uncomfortable. 'I don't think she will do anything about my room,' I reply. 'Why not?' Essomba asks me. 'Because she has to go to the university in the morning.'

I hear laughter outside. The players on my porch are shaking their heads. Essomba is unstoppable now. 'So? Why doesn't she clean the house before she leaves? She is not behaving like a normal Cameroonian girl! And you, you should say something about it. Or else I will!' 'No, no,' I say. 'It's okay. I don't want her to do it. I will clean the place myself.' Essomba is getting upset now. 'Are you crazy? No! I will ask the landlady here if she can send her daughters to come and clean your house!'

Essomba says that I still have a lot of things to learn about Cameroon. In time, he and other players will give me lessons in how to handle girls, particularly regarding household matters. For now, Essomba and his team mates came to tell me that there will be a special training session today. 'You should come and pick me up around two-thirty.'

Ashu looks tired. I have just met up with him in Molyko Stadium where Buea Boys is about to start a training session. It is around eight o'clock in the morning. 'I did not sleep well,' he says. 'I just heard that my fiancée is very sick. She is in hospital in my hometown. She normally stays at my parents' place.'

Unfortunately, the financial difficulties in Buea Boys have not been solved. The players are far from happy with the meagre FCFA 5,000 they got the other day. Ashu went to see the head coach last night. 'I told the coach that the players need money,' he explains. 'They are worried. They have to feed themselves. A few players have a wife in another town and some of them even have children. I want to go to my hometown to visit my fiancée. When I go, I have to take money for her and for my family. In Africa, it's tradition to send money to relatives. It's also tradition to bring food and other stuff to your parents' house. But at the moment I do not even have money for transport.'

Soon I will find out that Ashu has several other problems as well.

### Ashu's black-out

The Buea Boys players are sitting in the shade in the middle of the stand. The assistant coach is waiting for them to come onto the field but nobody is responding. Team captain Ashu is talking to the players. Or rather, he is giving a strong speech, sometimes speaking English, sometimes French. It appears that the players who did not want to play the matches anymore also decided to stop training as long as there is no money. 'This is not the solution,' Ashu says. 'The money will come soon, you have to believe me. But you cannot give up now. The team needs everybody.'

'Most of us come to the training session without breakfast,' one of the players replies. 'Many of us only eat twice a day, and it's mostly only a little food. How can we train when there's no money for us to buy food?' The majority of the players agree with him. 'You don't solve anything by not playing or training,' Ashu says. 'You have to train, even if it's only for yourself.'

The captain now addresses one of the older players in the team. 'Please say something from your own experience, something that will make the youngsters feel at ease.' The older player agrees with captain Ashu that the players cannot afford to stop participating in the training sessions, but he adds that a solution needs to be found quickly.

'All of this is troubling me,' Ashu tells me when we walk onto the field. 'I cannot motivate them much longer. I'm having problems explaining to my team mates why they should keep on playing. You see, most of those players have only had a very low-level education. They don't understand me, so they get angry.'

The assistant coach is leading today's training because the head coach is busy with organizational aspects of the club. We are in for a tough training session today, especially since it is already swelteringly hot in the stadium. The coach orders us to run around the field and tells us to go faster after each round. After a while, he starts clocking the players and increasingly starts to shout at the players who are a bit slower than the rest. Ashu is without any doubt the fastest player today. Later on I find out that he wants to prove himself to the assistant coach who seems to be in charge of the team because of the absence of the head coach. Even though Ashu has an excellent relationship with the head coach, he is being criticized openly by the assistant coach because he has not scored any goals for several matches in a row.

After about an hour there is a bit of chaos and confusion at a corner of the field. One of the players has fainted. He is lying on the ground, out of breath, and covered in sweat. A couple of players run off to fetch water from a large bucket near the centre circle. Then, to my surprise, the same thing happens to Ashu. He crashes onto the field and for a while, he is completely out of this world. Three of his team mates lift him up and carry him off to a spot underneath the stand. He is slowly drinking water from a plastic cup. His team mates assure me that he will be okay soon.

Since Ashu is too weak to play on, I agree to escort him back to his compound. We cross the main road and walk into an alley which takes us into the quarter. Soon we pass a huge compound where the majority of the Buea Boys players live. They hang around that particular area most of the time, sitting on their porches, calling for girls, playing local card games and so on. Ashu says that the club takes care of housing for all its players and that two players have to share one room. Apart from the fact that it saves money, this is also said to improve unity within the team.

A little further from the compound is Ashu's room, which he also shares with one other player. The interior decoration is what we would call minimalist: there is one large bed, a drawer, a closet for his clothes and a carpet on the floor. Ashu must be the only player in town without any football posters in his room. Instead he has three huge Bollywood film posters on the wall.

The toilet is somewhere in the compound, Ashu explains. When he wants to cook, he uses a small portable stove in a corner of the room. What about bathing or washing clothes? 'There's a well a few hundred meters from my house,' he says. 'You just fill a bucket with water to wash yourself and to clean your football jersey. I usually send one of the landlord's daughters to fetch water for me. They will do that for me since I'm a senior.'

'How much do you pay for the room?' I ask him. 'This room costs me about FCFA 10,000 a month. Most players occupy cheaper rooms, usually around

FCFA 5,000 to 7,000 per month. But the club takes care of our rent.’ And how did you find the room? ‘It’s the supporters and the president of the supporters union who find rooms for the players.’ The supporters seem to help the players in a lot of different ways. It is not uncommon for supporters to invite players for lunch or dinner and for drinks in the bar. Also, when the players are walking off the field after a match, the supporters usually give them some money for food.

## Footballers and girls

‘Life’s not easy for us in the second division,’ Ashu says, when we are sitting on his bed. ‘The head coach promised me that he would give me some money to visit my fiancée. But I’m not sure if that money will be enough for the journey to the North West Province.’ He says that most of the players with Buea Boys suffer from a lack of money. Many players are supposed to send money and items to their families in the villages. Most of them have little brothers and sisters who need food, clothing, shoes and the like – especially if the father has passed away.

Then, secondly, the players have to take care of their wife, fiancée or girlfriend who stays with them in Buea or is in another town. Ashu guesses that there are four or five players in Buea Boys who are officially married. A few of them even have children. The captain says that a part of the signature premium goes directly to the girl and her parents. During the football season the player has to send part of his match bonuses and training allowances to his wife.

What every player wants is to get into a first-division club where he receives a high signature premium. His wife can then use the money as capital to start a small business, such as keeping a phone booth or opening a hair saloon. Most players in the second division, however, can hardly provide for themselves, let alone their girlfriends and families. That is why I have heard the following statement countless times during my stay in Buea. ‘We have to manage life!’

But there is another side to this story and this also involves girls. Most players have only one official wife or girlfriend but they have several girlfriends on the side as well. One funny example is my frequent yet strange encounters on the main road with one of the older Buea Boys players. His name is Joseph. Every time we passed each other on the street, he had a girl at his side and he would ask only one question. ‘Arnold, I want you to meet my girl! Now tell me, have you ever seen me with another girl?’ Considering the delicate nature of the whole situation – the girl was listening too – I had to give but one answer. ‘No, Joseph, never!’ ‘You are right,’ he would reply. ‘This white man would not lie to me. I’m not like the other players. I don’t go out of the house much. All I do is eat, sleep and practice football.’ The girl then smiled and off they went. But it turned out he

was just like the other players, especially because he would ask me this question in front of a *different* girl nearly every week.

‘Girls just like football players,’ Ashu says. ‘They will come to you after the match to make an appointment. The players don’t even have to look for girls, the girls come and look for them.’ Ashu, who knows many things as captain, says that these girlfriends support the players in terms of food and money. Joseph explains what usually happens on a first date. He buys the girl a soda, talks to her and walks her back to her house. The next time they meet somewhere, he will make sure that she pays for everything. ‘Do the girls know that the players have other girlfriends as well?’ I ask him. ‘Most of them do, yes,’ Joseph replies. ‘It even gets to the point that the girls are numbered in order of importance. Some of those girls even know which number they are.’

I have learned a lot about ‘handling’ girls from the football players, at least in the way they are accustomed to. All of them told me that, to put it bluntly, in Cameroon the men are in control of women, meaning that the man is always the one who makes the decisions. Therefore it is his job as a man to make so-called programmes to which the girls have to abide. Several girls, including Essomba’s wife, even told me that this is what they expect of a man.

So when a guy meets a girl, he would say something like this. ‘I am a busy man. I don’t have a lot of time. Therefore I will give you a programme so that you know when we can meet.’ Ashu explains it as follows. ‘One of my team mates used to say to a girl: “You can only come on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I am very busy during the rest of the week, so it would be useless to come and look for me. I don’t want any untimely visits. I don’t want any surprises.”’

Such ‘programmes’ are solely meant to prevent two girlfriends finding out about each other. This is also the reason why most players do not meet up with the girls in their own rooms. Such encounters, however, do happen. ‘When they meet coincidentally,’ Ashu explains, ‘we call it a traffic jam. You hear something like: “I had a traffic jam this morning at the junction.” These things always happen. It’s only how much the girl loves him and her interest in being with him. They quarrel and after one or two weeks she comes back. Then the girl knows that when she is there the other one is not and life goes on.’

So what happens when two players in the same team find out that they are sleeping with the same girl? This apparently happened in PWD Kumba at a time when the spiritual adviser, whom we will meet later on, was the head coach:

When I was the coach of PWD Kumba, I had a problem between my two best attackers. One of them went out with a certain girl. At some point the girl also started going out with the other attacker. He did not know about his team mate. After some time, the girl was in the room of attacker no 1 when attacker no 2 dropped by to visit him. Attacker no 2 heard the girl’s voice and ordered her to open the door. The girl happened to like the guy outside more than the guy inside, so she opened the door. Attacker no 1 and attacker no 2 started fighting.

When I found out about the issue, I called for the girl. I said: "You have to make a choice, because you cannot date both of them." The girl then chose attacker no 2.

Now, PWD Kumba was playing an important match. At some time we were leading one goal to nil. But the club president was very angry with me. "Why is it that my two best attackers are not playing?" I explained the situation to him but he refused to listen. So I put both players in the field. The opponents scored the equalizer. The president came back to me and demanded an explanation. I said: "These two players don't like each other, so they will never give each other the ball. When they are both on the field, we cannot win." The president agreed that one of the players should be changed.

After the match I called for the players. I said: "Next training session I want you all to bring your girlfriends to the field, so that everybody knows who belongs to whom." Many players asked me: "Which one should I bring, coach?" I said: "You have to bring your number one girlfriend, the most important one, your fiancée, or the one with whom you have a child." After that there were no more problems.

Girls can lead to problems within a team but they can also be a problem for individual players. The latter is related to the fact that girls bring about a paradoxical situation. A player who is successful in the team is a popular man in town. A popular player attracts a lot of girls. 'These girls just want to hang around you so that they go out with a star player,' Ashu says.

Being successful means that the player is popular and has the girls, but it also means that he has to train very hard to stay in shape. But how can you play good football when you have all these girls? And then, how can you have the girls when you start playing badly? 'If you have sex with girls now and again, you grow weak,' Ashu says. 'It's a long-term effect. At that moment you think you're strong. Meanwhile, you are breaking down your strength. After two years you drop and you will find it very difficult to regain your normal level again.' In the end, it is up to the coach to impose discipline on his players by forbidding them to have many girlfriends.

It is disturbing to hear, though, that most of the players do not use condoms. At least, that is what Ashu claims. 'There was a time when the coach and I gave away condoms to the players for free,' he says. 'But I know that most of them just take them home and leave them lying in a drawer. They think it's too much of a hassle to use condoms.' Joseph, Essomba and other players in Buea confirmed this view. The fact that the players have multiple girlfriends in their town of residence, see girls in the towns where they play matches and also change clubs and therefore towns almost every other season leads me to think that they could be responsible for spreading HIV/AIDS in the country in the same way that truck drivers in most of Africa do.

I can see that Ashu is feeling a lot better already, so we agree to meet again in the evening.

## Players and godfathers

First-division players definitely have more luxurious accommodation compared to the Buea Boys players. The difference is obvious when I visit Essomba in his room. It includes a bathroom and a cooking stove. Still, the room cannot be larger than 15 square metres. The price of the room, Essomba says, is FCFA 15,000 per month and is paid by the club.

Essomba confirms Ashu's story by saying that he too has the responsibility of taking care of his wife and child. 'My wife's living in Yaoundé and I pay for her house,' he tells me. 'She's a student at the university. I also have a junior brother in the village who likes playing football. So I buy him jerseys and boots. And I have to look after my little daughter.' Essomba estimates that about five players in Olympique de Buea are married. Only one wife actually lives with a player here in Buea. Many players have children around the country and most of them take care of them financially.

Yesterday Essomba and I discussed the role of tribalism in the team. There is something else going on in and around the football clubs which is a form of corruption, namely nepotism. Generally speaking, both nepotism and tribalism refer to the politics of favouring family and friends for specific positions, regardless of their education, expertise and experience. One could also describe it as favouritism. It is said that this happens a lot in the current government of President Biya, who seems to favour his own Beti ethnic group above others when considering high-level appointments.

We have seen relevant examples in the previous chapter (Wednesday) when we discussed the problems between Anglophones and Francophones and the dominance of certain ethnic groups over others. The workings of tribalism were especially visible during the recruitment period when club executives brought their own players into a team. From the perspective of the players themselves, these club executives could be labelled as 'godfathers'.

The concept of the godfather, however, surpasses mere tribalism in the sense that the godfather and the player are not necessarily ethnically related to each other. In both cases, though, the player is put into a team through outside influences and not necessarily because of his football skills. A player with Buea Boys explains how it works through the analogy of the *note*:

If you want to succeed in African football, you need somebody to push you forward. This could be somebody in the team, a coach or a manager. It should be someone who has a say in the team. This person will make sure that you play. He will write a note for the coach, saying that this is my brother, cousin or friend, and I want him to be included in the team. Since he is a big man, you will be fine. If a club signs 40 players I know that they will sign 25 players because of their skills and 15 players because of their connections.

For me, I wanted to play at a certain club in the North. Luckily my sister was married to the governor of the province. I went to see my sister. I told her that I have indulged myself in

football and that I wanted to play with the team in the area. My sister wrote me a note and then sent me to the director of the local Ministry of Youth and Sports.

I went to see the director, introduced myself and gave him the note. This is authority! This is a note from the governor of the province. The director sent me to the training ground with another note. I presented the note to the coach. I was selected instantly.

A godfather can also be someone from outside the club. According to Ashu, he was selected for many teams because of his own godfather – who he referred to as his tutor or guidance in football – who is a captain in the army. Ashu says that the man likes to see him play football and has used his influence to find a suitable team. The captain in the army also made sure Ashu was selected by Buea Boys.

In Cameroon, it is normal for a club to organize training sessions for about a month in order to select the right players for the team. The club announces the start of the recruitment period over the radio. Everybody can come and try to get into the team. Ashu usually went to the training ground with a letter from the army captain. He was always selected. Of course, Ashu wishes to emphasize that such a letter or note is merely an extra incentive for the coach to recruit him. If he were a bad player, such a note would not have helped him. A coach needs to think about creating a strong team as well.

Godfathers can thus be club executives or captains in the army, but they can also be businessmen or any other powerful person in society. Not only can the godfather arrange to get his player selected for a team, he can also make sure that his player is among the players who go to a match. ‘A godfather will meet up with the coach,’ Joseph says, ‘and he will say: “What’s going on? Why is my boy not playing? I need to see him play.” The coach will say: “Okay, next match I will let him play.”’

Although he will never admit it, Essomba too enjoys the protection and influence of a godfather. I noticed it when we were visiting the vice-president of Olympique de Buea at his house one day. I already knew that the team manager came from the same ethnic group as Essomba but it appears that the same is true of the vice-president. Some time from now, Essomba will make an appointment with the vice-president over the phone because, as I overheard, he wanted to discuss some issues. Both of us were greeted elaborately and Essomba especially was treated as though he was the vice-president’s son. ‘How are things?’ the vice-president asked. ‘Not so good,’ Essomba replied. ‘I haven’t been playing for a while and I don’t understand why. It’s because there’s a new coach.’ ‘This is a disgrace!’ the vice-president fumed. ‘Who does he think he is? He has no right to treat you like that. Don’t you worry; I will take care of it.’ Not long afterwards, Essomba was playing matches again.

In the end, the godfather does not actually give money to the right people but instead uses his influence to have a player selected into a club or for a particular



match. The coach is in one way or another forced to agree to the demands of the godfather. In this sense, the coach has no option but to deviate from the tactics he himself had in mind.

Supporters too can influence the coach if they want a certain player to be on the field. They can give the coach money or a girl or they can simply threaten to beat him up if he does not comply with their demands. This means that the coach is under constant pressure from the club president (who usually interferes during matches), godfathers and supporters.

## Corrupt club executives

Nepotism is part of a broader concept called corruption, which could be loosely defined as ‘the use of public office for private gain’. Since Cameroon is one of the most corrupt countries in the world (according to Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index) it comes as no surprise that corruption is part and parcel of everyday life.

I noticed cases of corruption in government departments, in the job market, in the local university, and also in the police force. For instance, one time I was watching a European Champions League match with one of the Buea Boys players. All of a sudden, a group of soldiers entered the bar and arrested everybody who could not present valid ID. These raids happen frequently, not because the law enforcers are looking for criminals but because it is an easy way for them to make money. Unfortunately I was arrested as well for failing to take my passport to the bar. A couple of bystanders advised me to pay the soldiers FCFA 5,000 or FCFA 10,000. This is the only way to get yourself out of this mess, they argued. Luckily, the player from Buea Boys had warned some mutual friends in town, some of whom were high-placed big men. When these men showed up, they convinced the soldiers to release me.

Football is no exception when it comes to corruption, as team manager Kalla of Olympique de Buea tells me. ‘Everybody in football is corrupt – from the president of FECAFOOT to the last player in the league. In Cameroon we believe that if you give something, you should get something in return. In your case, when you’re doing research and are talking to somebody, he will expect that afterwards you will give him money for it. We are not prepared to do something for nothing. It’s in the blood of all Cameroonians.’

At a more general level, Bayart (1993: xvii) argues that practices of corruption can be described as the ‘politics of the belly’. In Cameroon, he says, ‘... they know that “the goat eats where it is tethered” and that those in power intend to “eat”’:

It refers chiefly to the food shortages which are still so much a part of life in Africa. Getting food is often a problem, a difficulty and a worry. Yet, very often, the term “eating” conveys desires and practices far removed from gastronomy. Above all, it applies to the idea of accumulation, opening up possibilities of social mobility and enabling the holder of power to “set himself up” ... “Belly” also of course refers to corpulence – fashionable in men of power. It refers also to nepotism which is still very much a social reality with considerable political consequences. (Ibid.: xviii)

Of course, ‘those in power’ are not necessarily politicians but could very well be club executives. Indeed, the phrase ‘to eat’ was used by people in Buea whenever a club executive (supposedly) misused club money by pocketing it for private use.

Some players have told me that the technical director of Olympique de Buea has abused his role as a recruiter. He adopted a certain policy to be able to put a significant amount of money, given to him by the club president, into his own pocket. It is said that the technical director received a lot of money (some say FCFA 70 million, more than € 100,000) at the beginning of this season to recruit players. This is what the director supposedly said to several players: ‘I want you in my team and your signature premium will be FCFA 3 million (€ 4,500). But I will take half of your signature premium. You can either take this offer or leave.’ The technical director will then go to the club president to say that he has contracted a player for FCFA 5 million (€ 7,600) while in reality it was only FCFA 3 million. In this way, he is able to collect even more money.

Apparently, the technical director has been very enthusiastic in recruiting players because this year Olympique de Buea – as we already know – has far more players than the average team in Cameroon. This *could* mean that the director was able to collect a lot of money for himself but, of course, it is difficult to prove such matters. In any case, Essomba has never hidden his contempt for the technical director. ‘He’s a crook; he’s a very bad man!’

Both Ashu and Joseph confirm this kind of corruption by saying that such things also occur within Buea Boys. ‘You can go to the coach,’ Joseph says, ‘and discuss with him that if you sign for FCFA one million (€ 1,520), he will get FCFA 500,000. If the coach accepts your offer, he will take you to the president and say: “He is a good player. We have to select him.”’ So it is also possible for players to willingly make financial deals with technical directors or coaches to get into a team. In the end, the person who does the majority of the recruiting probably gets the most money.

Joseph gives me a story of the corruption involved when he was trying to get selected by Buea Boys. ‘There were players who were offering money and I did not, so the coaches didn’t want to select me. But our head coach, who is a German, did not know African tradition – he was just doing his job. He said: “Write his name on the list.” But the other coaches didn’t write my name but

instead put the names of their own players on the list. So when they called out the list in public, my name was not there. I went to the German coach and wished him good luck. He said: "What's the problem?" I said: "My name is not on the list." He called for the other coaches. They said they had forgotten my name. The coach made them cancel another name and he put mine on the list.'

There is a lot of corruption within the organization of football clubs. We have seen that the technical director and the coach can take money from players in return for being selected in a team. I also heard of cases of corruption in other circumstances. For instance, it is said that the financial problems within Olympique de Buea are related to the technical director. We know that whenever the president is out of the country on business, it is the technical director who takes care of money matters. While the president gives him money to pay match bonuses and training allowances, it is generally understood that he puts some of this money into his own pocket. He usually gets away with it because it is difficult for players to prove the corruption.

This week's dismissal of the Olympique de Buea coach is allegedly related to corruption practices. The story goes that the coach kept some money for himself – money that was intended to pay the native doctor for his 'magic' services. I do not know if the dismissal of the team manager and the medical doctor are related to corruption charges as well.

Both Ashu and Joseph told me that the match against PWD Bamenda during the 2002 interpools involved a lot of corruption. 'Since the match was very important, the president promised us FCFA 100,000 (€152) each if we won the match. The members of the Executive Board pulled some tricks so that they could keep the money. It is said that the executives sold the match because they wanted us to lose the match. If we had won the match, they were supposed to pay us all that money. If we lost the match, they could keep it for themselves.'

These cases, though not based on solid facts, tell us that corruption in football can be negative for a team's efforts to win matches. First, corruption during the recruitment period does not lead to the selection of the best players but mostly to the selection of players who pay the most money. Second, the role of the godfather is usually negative, since the coach is forced to select players for his team or put players in the match squad who are not necessarily the best ones. Third, it cannot be but a bad thing when club executives take money that is intended for players for their own private use. Players will not be doing their very best during matches for financial reasons. The last case concerning match bonuses is an example of losing matches through corruption. Although the impressive match bonus was supposed to be a motivation for players, it turned against them when other people supposedly wanted the money for themselves.

## The grand match

Essomba and I have decided to rest for a while. Before I fall asleep on the bed, I notice many posters on the wall with mostly European teams. He appears to have taken them from the French magazine *Onze*. For Essomba and the other players in Buea, Europe is the place they ultimately want to go. The players in Buea know everything about the European leagues and European clubs and really seem to keep themselves informed about the latest football news. Since the players do not have a television at home, they usually visit the Paramount Hotel in Buea where they watch Canal Plus for the foreign football competitions – mainly those in Europe. The French competition is probably the most popular football league here in Cameroon.

Locally, the television network Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) has three weekly football programmes: *Fou Fou Foot* (in French), *Sports Panorama* (French/English) and *Sports Vision* (English). Sometimes they show matches from the local D1 competition, mainly matches that have been played in Douala, Yaoundé and Garoua. CRTV is also responsible for all the matches of the Indomitable Lions. Every national team match in the African Cup of Nations, the World Cup and the Confederations Cup is in the hands of the state-owned CRTV.

An incident during the match between Cameroon and Brazil in the Confederations Cup made me realize how passionate Cameroonians are about football. Every Thursday evening Buea is in darkness because of an energy-saving programme. This means no street lights, no radio, no computer and certainly no television. Apparently, the managers at the power company were unaware of the football match and shut off the electricity. Within minutes, Essomba and I could see most of Buea's inhabitants running up and down the main road looking for a place with an emergency power generator. Groups of angry people were already walking up the road to attack the power company's office when the managers realized their mistake and corrected it just in time.

It is three o'clock in the afternoon. Essomba and I have arrived at the stadium. A number of supporters in the stadium are waiting for Olympique de Buea to start the grand match. In fact, the reserves' bench is completely surrounded by supporters as if they are making the decisions instead of the coach.

The temperature must be around 30 degrees Celsius. I take out a small tube of sun lotion and start rubbing it on my arms and face. The activity of the white man attracts an inquisitive crowd – as if I am rubbing some secret ointment on my body. Such ointments, however, are thought to generate a more spiritual result than I expect of my sun lotion. Some players instantly want to know what I am doing. 'Oh, nothing much, it's just to protect me from the sun. White men burn,

you know.’ ‘Burn?’ The futility of my explanation is clear when looking at their faces.

The coach has divided the team into two groups of 11 players. One of the assistant coaches will act as a temporary referee. The grand match is just like a regular match with the exception that there is nothing at stake. For the players, however, this match is utterly serious because this is their chance to get themselves selected for Sunday’s match. The coach has probably already formulated his tactics for the upcoming match against Bamboutos de Mbouda. Now it is time to find out which players fit into his system of play and which players are physically fit.

The supporters, too, are discussing the qualities and shortcomings of the players. I find out that there is something of a controversy between the two main goalkeepers of Olympique de Buea. As we already know, the technical director attracted a well-known goalkeeper from Coton Sport de Garoua. He is now struggling to be the number one in the squad at the expense of the older goalkeeper. One of Olympique de Buea’s weaknesses, so the supporters say, is the defence. Some of the defenders have the dubious quality of letting through attackers on the opposing team a bit too often. It is said, though, that the real weakness of the team is its midfield.

Today the supporters are mainly focused on the attackers. As a result of the recruitment policy, the coach has at least seven good attackers at his disposal. The problem is, though, that these players are not scoring goals as often as they should. Particularly last year’s top scorer, the player from Racing de Bafoussam, certainly has not lived up to expectation this season. And then there is the captain of the team. He is always the subject of gossip since the president of the club is trying to ‘sell’ him to a club abroad.

## The coach’s player

As we know already, the grand match is a way for the coach to select his players for the next match. To return to matters of corruption, we now know that the coach does not only look at the football skills of the players. First, the coach can be put under pressure by a player’s godfather to put him in the squad. Second, as it is generally understood that all the players want to play the match, there is a specific form of corruption between the coach and the players in the team.

It is here that we discover the issue of the *coach’s player* or, put differently, the son of the coach. These players are the coach’s favourites, sometimes because they are from the same ethnic group or area but mostly because they give the coach money on a regular basis. Such a player will automatically be selected for an official match. The player, who then collects the match bonus, has to give

half of it to the coach as part of the deal. For both player and coach this is a win-win situation because if the coach does not select the player, the latter cannot receive any money at all and the coach cannot collect half of something that is not there.

There will always be a few players who pay the coach money in order to play. Usually these players are fairly young and inexperienced. The reasoning is that an experienced player will have more chance of getting selected for the match because of his football qualities. Unlike the older and experienced player, the younger player still has to prove himself. He can either decide to wait and see whether the coach will select him or he can speed up the process by offering money. However, corrupting the coach does not necessarily involve money. Sometimes the player offers the coach a girl or something else. 'You can give the coach a bottle of wine to keep him happy and make him think about you,' Joseph says.

To me it was strange that everybody seemed to be aware of who the coach's players were and who were not. 'Is it not a secret?' I ask Joseph. 'Why? There is nothing hidden!' he replies. 'Sometimes you will see the coach selecting a player who is inferior to the one on the bench. Sometimes you see the coach giving taxi money to a few players, while the training allowances are not there.'

The spiritual adviser confirms this explanation. 'There is no secret under the sun. The only secret is in the grave where people have stopped talking and listening. Most of these players are not doing this because they want to. Nobody wants to see other players take FCFA 20,000 for themselves while he has to give the coach FCFA 10,000. So he has to discuss his grievances with at least one person. And this person too has his own person with whom he shares his secrets. That's how the secret comes out. That's how people know things.'

When the coach accepts money from players, he puts himself in an awkward situation. On the one hand, he wants to have as much money as possible. Therefore he will try to get money from many players by promising to select them for the match. However, if the coach accepts money from too many players, it means that the team will consist of too many average players. The coach then puts in jeopardy his primary goal, namely winning the match. Thus the dilemma is to make sure that he collects enough money and at the same time makes the team strong enough to be sure of victory.

The coach can solve the problem by adding these players to the squad but leaving most of them on the bench during the match. In this case, the players receive the match bonus and the coach gets his share, while the other objective – winning the match – is also accomplished. 'The coach can just keep the player on the reserves' bench,' Joseph says. 'He knows that this match is more than the

player's capacity. So he cannot play because the coach will not want to lose the match. That's why not all the players who give money to coaches can play.'

Joseph continues by saying that the coach can also solve the problem by creating a team with a majority of good players and a few average players. 'The coach knows that he has eight good players on the field. This means that in the team there are eight players who can give him the victory and three of them are just average.' So the coach will probably not put the worst players on the field because the risk of losing is too great. A certain mechanism thus ensures that this kind of corruption does not get out of hand.

When the ninety minutes are over, everybody leaves the field – the players to take a shower, the coaches to discuss tactics and the supporters to get a drink in one of the many bars around the stadium. Essomba and I walk down the road to his compound. As usual, many people on the side of the road are calling out his name and those of other players as they pass by. It is not easy to prevent him from stopping every other second because his eyes are more focused on girls than anything else. He first makes a date with a girl in a hair saloon who, as he claims, calls him after every training session. A few hundred metres further, Essomba is talking to another girl, who appears to have been his reason for going home early yesterday evening.

When we reach his compound, he tells me that there will be another training session tomorrow morning at seven o'clock. This gives me the opportunity to go and visit the spiritual adviser in Limbe on Friday afternoon. I make an appointment with him via a mobile phone in one of the phone booths. Like Internet cafés, these have grown to extraordinary numbers over the last few years.

### Club president, coach and amateurism

I might as well say something about tomorrow's conversation with the spiritual adviser, which deals with professional football and the issues of tribalism and corruption. The spiritual adviser used to be a respected football coach in Cameroon. In fact, he was the head coach of Kumbo Strikers in their successful year in 2000 when they almost won the national D1 competition. He may have made the switch to another profession but his opinion about how to run a football team have not changed at all. The spiritual adviser asked me to call him Zé.

In professional clubs there is a strict hierarchy among the executives, such as the president, the vice-president, the technical director, the team manager, the team doctor, the head coach and the assistant coaches. Each should have specific duties for which only they are responsible. In this case, the club president should not be allowed to intervene directly in matters that concern the technical director or the coach, as spiritual adviser Zé explains. 'In Manchester United in England,

a president cannot put players on the field. He has given all that power to the manager. He knows who to buy and who will play. Manager Ferguson went after Djemba Djemba and he bought him. Football in Cameroon should be run as it is in Europe. There they give the manager a budget for recruitment. He's in charge of buying and selling players.'

The problem with most teams in Cameroon is that they are governed by one rich man. This one-man show means that the club president has too much power and he is more than willing to use it. For instance, we already know that club presidents do not feel any restrictions about telling the coach what to do. 'We have coaches who work under the influence of the executives, so there is no democracy,' Zé says. 'They have to take instructions from the club executives. The club president tells him: "I spend my money so you will do what I say."' Let's say that the president sends a player to the coach. Will the coach say no to that player? No! He cannot do that. But within most professional football clubs, it's not only one person who spends his money. This is why the lack of sponsorship is killing us because most clubs belong to one man.'

Whereas the head coach should have complete power over his team without any interference from the club executives, this is not the reality in most Cameroonian clubs, including Olympique de Buea. We already know that most of the executives have brought their own players into the team. The coach may be the person who is working with the players but he cannot apparently select all the players himself. In fact, the coaches in most clubs do not have much say in team affairs at all. 'As a coach you should have the auto-power to solve problems,' Zé says. 'Here in Cameroon the coaches don't have that right. The coaches are supposed to take the players onto the field, train them and it ends there.'

Most clubs also have to cope with financial difficulties which can have a negative influence on the coach's performance. I have learned that the coach takes home twice the training allowances and match bonuses that the players normally receive. So if Olympique de Buea plays an official match, the coach gets FCFA 50,000 as a match bonus and FCFA 2,000 for one day's training. This may seem reasonable but people have told me that coaches do not get paid much in terms of salary. If one considers the corruption in Cameroonian society, one can easily figure out what happens next – and we have seen it earlier in this chapter. 'Coaches are not paid well,' Zé explains. 'And when you don't have any money, when you don't fear God, and when you don't have a conscience, you are bound to be influenced by people. You will fall victim to everything that comes your way. It's just like a poor woman. When she is poor, she can be influenced by anybody. She can be taken to bed because she needs the money. That's how the system of football is.'



The problems in Cameroonian football, the spiritual adviser says, are not only the result of outside influences on the coach, his meagre salary or the widespread corruption but also that coaches are not disciplined themselves. If coaches are not disciplined, he says, how can one expect players to be disciplined? And if the players are not disciplined, how can one expect them to perform well and be united as a team? 'Disunity in a team depends on the structure of the team, the law governing the team and the attitude of the coach,' Zé says. 'When the coach is disciplined the players have to be disciplined. The first law of a football coach is to look at what's good for the team and not to look at which player is his beloved son. But they abuse that law. When a coach takes money from a player, then this player has to play. It doesn't matter whether that player is good or not. It's a contract.'

'Sentiment,' Zé continues, 'is one thing that spoils team spirit. We are all human beings and we are born to love and hate. A coach may prefer a player to an even better player because he is a friend who he loves. But then the other players will be jealous. The same is true for the godfathers. When a player doesn't go to the training session three times in a row, he cannot play the match. But when he has a godfather, the coach will put him on the field. If a player without a godfather does something wrong, he's out of the game. The players without a godfather will be angry. All these things destabilize the team.'

Let us take Olympique de Buea as an example. There are sanctions for players who break rules such as going to a nightclub the night before the match. The problem is, however, that these sanctions are randomly enforced. For instance, since the captain of the team is supported by the club president, he can do whatever he wants. Everybody knows that he misses several training sessions every week and that he usually goes to nightclubs, but these things do not seem to affect his position in the team. He still plays all the matches on Sunday. Spiritual adviser Zé is not surprised that Olympique de Buea currently lacks team unity. 'If the players see that a team mate can go out to a nightclub and still play the match, they will feel overlooked. Hence there cannot be any unity. In any team where there is discrimination, there is never unity.'

In summary, it is clear that all of the things mentioned above can have a very negative effect on the team's performance in the league. Professionalizing the football leagues in Cameroon is the solution, Zé argues. 'In many places, such as Ivory Coast and Nigeria, there are professional leagues. In those leagues, there's a limit to temptation. Here there are temptations due to lack of money. What is done here is terrible. It won't stop unless the pastor and the priest come to the bench and start coaching.'

## Selling the match

It is very dark outside in the quarter at half past eight in the evening. Ashu and I are sitting in a tiny dining place. We have just ordered two eggs and spaghetti with coffee when I ask him about corruption in the team. Ashu tells me a story that happened before and during the match between Littlefoot Tiko and Buea Boys earlier this year. For Buea Boys the match was not important because they had already qualified for the mini-interpools. For Littlefoot Tiko, however, winning the match was essential for a place in the mini-interpools. It is a typical case of players 'selling the match'.

We left for Tiko at three o'clock. The head coach was not there. Two of our players had convinced him to stay at home because they had heard that supporters of Tiko wanted to beat him up. They already talked to him after the training session the day before. Both players are originally from Tiko. The head coach thought these guys were advising him but actually they were planning a plot against him. They did not want him to see the match.

During the first ten minutes of the match two of our defenders were playing extremely bad. One of them was the vice captain who plays in the centre midfield. Still, we managed to score twice in the first half. Then our vice captain gave away a penalty. They scored. Then the other player from our team also gave away a penalty. The score was 2-2.

At halftime the players were very angry and shouted that some players had sold the match. The question now was who to put in for the second half? We decided that the vice captain, the other defender and yet another player were going off, and two players and myself would come in.

The second half started. One of our players caused another penalty. Tiko missed. All these penalties were very dubious. Our players were causing them and the referee was awarding them too easily. At some time people from Tiko walked to our goalkeeper and offered him FCFA 20,000. He refused. Then those people came to our team manager and offered him FCFA 50,000. He refused. At the end of the match one of our players caused a penalty. He got a red card. Tiko scored. They won the match 3-2.

In total the referee had awarded four penalties to Tiko and he had given seven yellow cards and one red card to our players. I heard that the referee had taken FCFA 100,000 from Tiko executives.

In the bus one player stood up and told me in front of everybody that one of the defenders had told him to allow goals to go in. Then another player told me that the team manager had advised him to score an own goal. Then I called for the vice captain and two defenders. I said: "You have sold the match!" They did not respond. In the bus they were very quiet. They had guilty faces. They were not laughing and singing like the rest of us because we were going to the mini-interpools.

I told the team manager to drive straight to the head coach's place. One player came up to me and said that I should be very careful because the team manager was involved as well. Later the bus driver told me that the team manager and four players went to Tiko yesterday evening to discuss matters with the Tiko executives. All of these players are Tiko boys. They are originally locals from Tiko.

I let the team manager talk to the head coach. But he was not telling him the whole story. The head coach said: "We lost? No problem. We have to make a programme for the mini-interpools." Then I started talking about the players selling the match. The head coach said: "Forget about it. Don't bring any problems into the team." That was the end of the story. Nobody got punished. The players had their money.

It may sound quite unbelievable that the Tiko executives openly offered money to the players and the Buea Boys team manager but I have seen a similar case with my own eyes. Buea Boys had to play a match against Ekondo Titi in Limbe in one of the early rounds of the Cup of Cameroon. The stakes were high since the loser would be out of the competition and the winner would have the opportunity to play against a first-division team in the next round. About five minutes before the end of the match, when the score is 2-0 for Buea Boys, the referee awards a penalty to Ekondo Titi. They manage to score but for some reason the referee disallows the goal. Then supporters and executives of Ekondo Titi rush onto the field and it is evident that they are offering money to the referee. After about ten minutes of unrest, the referee allows the goal after all. It did not help them very much though because Buea Boys scores again and they win the match by three goals to one.

Ashu's story is a clear case of the methods employed by teams to win matches. I counted three instances of bribery. First, the players of Buea Boys had been offered money before the start of the match. Second, the referee had been offered money as well. Third, people from Tiko offered money to specific players and to the team manager of Buea Boys *during* the match. In short, Littlefoot Tiko had done everything it could to make sure that the team would win the match. But why did the Tiko executives not bribe the Buea Boys attackers (who almost made Littlefoot Tiko lose the match even after so much bribery)? The attackers were not originally from the Tiko area, so they were probably not very susceptible to corruption in this case. The story also shows that corruption cannot necessarily guarantee an easy victory on the field.

Anyone who is wondering why the head coach was this easily convinced to stay at home should know that a particular match in the previous season in Limbe ended in a huge fight – and that the same head coach was beaten unconscious by supporters of Tiko United, the other team in the town of Tiko. Ashu will tell us all about this match on Saturday.

## Bribing the officials

The most direct way of winning a match through corruption is by bribing the referee, the linesmen and the match delegate (who also acts as the fourth official). Winning the match means scoring goals and preventing the other team from scoring. If one can make the referee award his team a penalty and deny one for the other team, then he has directly succeeded in this objective. Also, making the linesman look away when a player is offside, or vice versa, or raising the flag when a player is definitely not offside are all methods by which a team can win a match.

Furthermore, the referee can send players off the field by giving them a red card. This will give the opposing team a clear advantage in the match, as team manager Kalla of Olympique de Buea explains. 'The referee can give a red card to one player on the opposing team so that the team cannot play well. For example, Olympique de Buea was playing Canon de Yaoundé. After fifteen minutes our captain played rough. Yellow card. He commits another foul. Red card. He's an important player, so it will demoralize the team.'

Bribing a match delegate is especially remarkable for he is the one who is supposed to guarantee a fair match. It will be useless for the opposing team to complain to the match delegate after a dubiously given penalty. 'There is money in his pocket,' Kalla assures me, 'so he cannot change his decision.'

This kind of corruption means that the rule of equal opportunity for both teams, which is the basis of modern sport, is put in jeopardy. According to Giulianotti (1999: 101), '... corruption of match officials is probably more shocking than that of the players' because the 'notion that the referee and his assistants are "impartial" is the cornerstone of any game'. 'Football is not managed in an honest way,' Kalla explains. 'Normally the referee's duty is to lead the match in a fair way. It's about fair play, there's not supposed to be any bias. Money invites bias.'

Within the D1 competition there are prominent cases of corruption between teams that involve bribing the referee, the linesmen and the match delegate. Team manager Kalla says that corruption happens in most first-division matches – and the amounts of money are certainly higher than those in the second division. He explains the specific kinds and figures that Olympique de Buea has used in winning their matches. 'If you want to manage a team in Cameroon, you must make a budget for motivating the referees and match delegates.'

The idea is that referees have to be persuaded to do something for the team and the best way of doing this is by offering money. Many people have called this kind of corruption 'motivation' for the referees. Likewise, a coach's player who is paying the coach to put him into the squad for the match is motivating his coach to do something for him.

Recall that Kalla gave me calculations of the expenditures of the team and had written costs for travel, hotels and food on a piece of paper (see Tuesday). 'You see,' he continues, 'since you want to have facts about football in Cameroon: there is this issue of match fixing but FECAFOOT does not allow that.' So, after calculating the competition expenditures at the price of FCFA 1,275,000, he adds an amount of FCFA 1,000,000 – which is the cost of bribery for an average first-division match. The amount of FCFA one million (or € 1,520), which is divided between the referee, the two linesmen and the match delegate, brings the expenditures of a typical away match to a total of FCFA 2,275,000 (€ 3,400).

Kalla says that the club accountant even writes it down in the books. 'They call it match expenditures.' Just like the bus and the hotel? 'Yes, because they can adjust the prices of the bus and the hotel. The price of the bus will go up to FCFA 400,000 (€ 600), the hotel FCFA 300,000 (€ 457) and so on.' In the end, everything adds up just fine and there is no reason to think that there is bribery involved.

I learned that both the bribery of officials and the amounts of money that go along with it could be extended to most clubs in the D1 competition. At the start of the 2002 season, a suspended senior referee in Cameroon said openly that the entire referee 'corps is very sick and can't operate impartially because its hands are tied'. 'When a referee disburses FCFA one million for such a favour,' this referee said on the BBC website, 'you should expect that he uses all possible means to recover the money.' The funny thing is that this referee's own suspension is also said to be related to practices of corruption.

Kalla says that costs for corruption are irregular. 'Some matches go up to FCFA two million (€ 3,000). They give the referee FCFA one million, the first and second linesmen FCFA 300,000 each, and the match delegate FCFA 400,000.' I learn that the level of corruption depends on the importance of the matches. For big matches, such as intra-tribal or intra-region derbies, the prices for the referees go up significantly.

Also, corruption in the Cup of Cameroon tends to increase from the first round to the quarter-finals, semi-finals and final. Team manager Kalla gives me the example of the Cup of Cameroon final in 2002. 'The Cup final, that one is bigger. We gave about FCFA 2.5 million to one person, that is the referee. We also gave FCFA 500,000 each to the two linesmen. And we gave FCFA 500,000 to the match delegate too.' In total, Olympique de Buea spent FCFA four million (€ 6,000) on the officials only to win one match, which they did.

The mini-interpools and interpools give rise to the most impressive forms of bribery. It is here that teams will do everything they can to get themselves into the first division. The team manager tells me that Olympique de Buea 'spent about FCFA 95 million (€ 144,000) in two weeks during the interpools in 2000. 'It takes five times the normal amount of one million to win a match in the interpools,' he says. 'The match has already been played in the office before it has even started.' The above figure of FCFA 95 million includes travel expenses, hotels, the training ground, food, bribery and magic.

The level of corruption also goes up during important matches or matches at the end of the competition. Indeed, in the last few weeks of the D1 competition, one can expect anything to happen, as is clear from the following story by team manager Kalla:

Let me tell you a story about what happened a couple of years ago. Coton Sport de Garoua had 52 points. Canon de Yaoundé had 53 points. There were only two matches to be played before the end of the competition. Canon had to play Coton in Garoua. Now, Olympique de Buea had to play Bamboutos de Mbouda. We had 35 points. Bamboutos had 52 points.

Coton came to us and gave us FCFA two million to beat Bamboutos. Canon came and gave us FCFA 1.5 million to beat Bamboutos. If Coton beat Canon, they would be second. Bamboutos would be third. Canon and Coton drew 1-1. And then Olympique de Buea, after taking FCFA 3.5 million, beat Bamboutos 2-1 on their own field to give a chance to the other two teams. So Coton went up to 53, Canon to 54 points. Bamboutos still had 52 points.

The final day was Olympique against Canon in Buea and Coton against Tonnerre in Garoua. Coton came and gave us FCFA 1.5 million to beat Canon. And Canon brought FCFA two million and said: "Give me the match". Coton beat Tonnerre 1-0 in Garoua and went up to 56. Then Olympique and Canon played 0-0, so Canon went up to 55. Coton became the champion that year.

Coton does not play better than any other team but they have the money and so they have the means. And when you have the means you have the referees.

Although the remark that Coton Sport de Garoua does not play better than any other team is merely the team manager's own opinion, it does tell us that rich clubs have more means to bribe officials. Spiritual adviser Zé, team manager Kalla and a few players in Buea even claim that Coton Sport employs the most important referees in the country, meaning that they receive a fixed monthly salary.

It is interesting to note, however, that the level of corruption tends to be even greater at the bottom of the D1 competition where the teams will do whatever it takes to avoid being relegated to the second division.

It may seem as if bribery is a sure way to win football matches. But bribery does not necessarily lead to a victory because of the fact that the other team may have given the referee even more money. So which team will have the support of the referee? Of course, it will be the team that manages to really motivate the referee. 'The highest bidder wins the day,' Kalla says.

He says that there is another reason why bribery does not always allow a team to win matches. 'Take a team like Stade Bandjoun that is now heading for relegation. They are also giving money to referees because they want to win. But they keep on losing. Why? Because they don't have the players who can deliver the goals. None of the attackers is able to go and shoot at goal. So Stade Bandjoun can give the referee a lot of money but that money has no grounds. So sometimes money is not the answer.' So when attackers are not strong enough to make it to the penalty area of the opposing team, how can the referee award them a penalty? And if their defenders are too weak so that they have to deal with attack after attack, how can the referee stop the other team from scoring goals? You need at least a decent team to start winning matches.

After having eaten the eggs and spaghetti, Ashu and I begin drinking our coffee with milk. Some time later I say goodbye to him and he disappears into the darkness. When I descend to the main road, I come across a group of players

from both teams in Buea. 'What are you guys doing this evening?' I ask them. 'Nothing much,' one player replies. 'We're just strolling up and down the road. There's nothing else to do in this town.'

I turn left at Malingo Street and walk down to the compound.



*Photo 1* Buea's main road with one of the two ditches on the side and Mount Cameroon in the background



*Photo 2* Buying a ticket for the big match between Olympique de Buea and PWD Bamenda at the Molyko Stadium





*Photo 3* Chaos in front of the Molyko Stadium prior to the big match between Olympique de Buea and PWD Bamenda



*Photo 4* Supporters of PWD Bamenda just before the big match



*Photo 5* The field in Buea as seen from the far side of the Molyko Stadium



*Photo 6* View from the stand in the Molyko Stadium just before the start of the big match





*Photo 7* Buea's main road is jammed with cars and supporters about fifteen minutes after PWD Bamenda won the match in Buea



*Photo 8* Three players of Olympique de Buea are walking out of the quarter near the stadium



*Photo 9* The referee is arguing with the match delegate as to which of these two second-division teams will begin the match (Centenary Stadium in Limbe)



*Photo 10* The players of the two second division teams are performing the ritual of (friendly) hand shaking





*Photo 11* You have to take a good look in order to see the players and coaches of a first-division team jumping over the fence at the Centenary Stadium in Limbe



*Photo 12* Supporters of a second division team are celebrating a goal at the Centenary Stadium in Limbe



*Photo 13* Olympique de Buea's rented bus is parked in Douala for a short stop before the team continues the route to Yaoundé for a match against Canon



*Photo 14* Some of the players of Olympique de Buea are waiting for the start of a first division match at the Molyko Stadium





*Photo 15* A typical training session of Olympique de Buea at the Molyko Stadium with Mount Cameroon in the background





*Photo 16* A player of Buea Boys is standing near the 'beach bar' in Buea

## Friday

It is almost seven o'clock in the morning when I walk up the main road towards Essomba's compound. The football player is not in his room or in the compound, despite the fact that we had an appointment to go to the field together. I am not really surprised. Essomba is always somewhere doing something and he does not care much for appointments.

'Pssst! Arnold! Pssst!' Essomba has his way of making you know he is there. He is not only a very sociable person but is also definitely one of the noisiest people around. His tone of voice is always firm and demanding. There is only one thing you can do when a guy like that calls for you: you obey. My football friend, who stands inside a blacksmith's place next to the main road, never calls me by my nickname, the one that most of his team mates use when passing me on the street. It was given to me by Olympique de Buea's tallest player and frankly, I am quite happy with it. It must be the hair for sure. All day long, when I walk up and down the main road, the words 'Van Nistelrooy!' echo from out of the quarter.

Essomba is repairing his boots at his friend's place not far from his compound. (His friend happens to be a blacksmith.) We shake hands. 'How?' 'Fine!' Essomba has a slight problem with one of the six metal screws on the bottom of his boots. The screw, he says, is too long. He is adjusting it right now. He says the referee will not allow any irregularities in the players' outfits, especially regarding those dangerous, injury-causing screws.

There is something different about the team but I cannot quite see what it is. Most of the players have already started the warming-up when Essomba and I arrive at the stadium. The team's vice captain is making everybody perform exercises, such as jumping into the air and pretending to header a ball. A little

later the three goalkeepers are walking towards one of the goalposts with a wooden bench. While one of the goalkeepers shoots the ball against the bench, the other goalkeeper has to dive and catch the ball when it bounces back. I have never seen wooden benches on the pitch before but there has to be a first time for everything.

The other players are divided into circles of five to six players and they start passing the ball amongst themselves very quickly. Half an hour and some stretching exercises later, everybody gathers around to hear the coach's plans. The players have to split themselves up into two groups of 11 players, just like the grand match yesterday. Thursday's grand match was a means by which the coach could observe any failures in the tactics of his players. Now, the next day, he can try to correct the mistakes he saw. The coach is running along with the players, like a referee, as they play a match amongst themselves.

Suddenly I realize what is wrong with the team. Olympique de Buea is short of players, maybe five or even ten. The Rasta player explains that the president of the club had to 'let go' of ten Francophone players who did not play much anyway.

The players gather around the coach for the second time to hear him read the names of 18 players from a list. Most of the names belong to Francophone players. Essomba's name is on the list as well. 'The bus leaves tomorrow morning at nine,' the coach says. 'Don't be late!'

## The night-poison dream

Essomba and I slowly walk out of the stadium. Not surprisingly, somebody calls Essomba from the main road. One of his friends, a taxi driver, is waving from his car. And off he goes.

I walk straight into the quarter towards Ashu's house. Ashu steps out of his room with an empty teapot in his hand. He used the water inside the teapot to wash his ears, face, hands and feet before saying his prayers. Ashu is a Muslim. 'You cannot pray to God when you're dirty,' the captain of Buea Boys explains, before walking into a cornfield on the compound. 'I have to tell you something,' he says, while breaking off pieces of corn from a plant. 'I had a disturbing dream last night. It proves my suspicions that somebody is trying to hurt me.' Ashu steps into a small brick house to roast the corn on an open fire. It is sweltering hot inside.

We enter Ashu's room without any shoes on but with the roasted corn in our hands. It seems that Ashu has been feeling ill since yesterday's accident in the field. 'After you left the other day, things were not moving well,' he says. 'I had to throw up at least six times. My stomach's still very upset.' 'You should go to

the hospital to see a doctor!’ ‘No!’ he says. ‘The doctor cannot help me because it is witchcraft.’

Ashu starts telling me about his dream while we are sitting on his bed:

I’m standing in a supermarket. I’m taking chocolate and start eating it. Then I notice one of my team mates. He’s a waiter. He sits me down at a table and serves me food. A few other team mates try to steal my food but I send them away. I’m eating the food. Then the waiter falls right on the floor. All of a sudden the supermarket has turned into a hospital. I see doctors checking him out. Then they carry him away. I don’t think that he will make it. Now there are team mates all around me but nobody’s eating.

Ashu looks worried. ‘I really know that somebody has poisoned me. I was dreaming about eating food and the next moment my stomach was hurting and I had to throw up. When somebody offers you food in your dream, it’s night poison.’ Ashu does not know who poisoned him but it is definitely not the waiter who served him the food in his dream. ‘I saw his face,’ he says. ‘When it’s night poison, you can never see the face of the person who is poisoning you. All you can see is a black or blurry spot right there where the face should be.’

The captain suspects one of the Francophone players who appears to be openly challenging him for the captain’s band. They have had several arguments on the field before. We know how some of the Francophone players do not like to see an Anglophone team captain.

I heard that when a player sustains an injury or falls ill, he usually thinks that there is witchcraft or sorcery involved. Ashu cannot believe that a well-trained sportsman such as himself would just fall on the field and be very sick afterwards. Something is wrong.

Only an hour later I find out that if what he is saying is true, then history repeats itself. Ashu and I have taken a taxi straight up the main road to a friend of his, who is currently the team manager of Buea Boys. The team manager had to retire from football last year. In fact, he was the team captain of Buea Boys only last season before he had to endure an attack similar as Ashu’s. This indicates that the captain of a football team is especially vulnerable to such attacks.

Ashu insisted that we visited the team manager at his house. ‘He’s willing to tell you everything that has happened to him,’ Ashu said earlier. ‘Now you will learn more about the dark side of football.’ The team manager is a young, very friendly guy, perhaps even a bit shy. When he starts talking about the events that took place last year, however, you can tell that he is still very angry about the whole affair.

Last year I was made the team captain. Another person wanted to be the team captain but the coach said no and decided to make him my assistant. After one training session I took my boots and went home. I felt feverish so I went to the hospital. They gave me drugs but it didn’t change anything. After two days my leg started to swell. The doctor gave me a few injections but they still didn’t help. I stayed in the house without leaving my bed for ten days. My leg was swollen and it was hurting me. I also had a serious headache.

At first, I thought it was just an innocent pain. But when I took all types of medicines and nothing helped, I consulted my father. He said that I should consult a native doctor. We went to a native doctor and the man said that it was a friend of mine in the team who caused all of this. He described the player and told me everything about him. He also told me what happened the day before I had the injury. Now I knew this man was real.

The native doctor told me that my leg had been shut with a fibre stick, a clipper and a millipede. These things are mystical. The native doctor said that he could only give me first aid. He then directed me to another person who was a herbalist. The herbalist, he said, would be able to treat me. By then I had to be carried on a stretcher.

I went to see the herbalist. He told me to bring a cock. He started to treat me by rubbing the medicine on my leg. These were special leaves that he had warmed up above an open fire. Then he tied my leg with a bandage. After five minutes he removed the bandage and discovered the evil things. He discovered the millipede. The herbalist removed all these things mystically. He doesn't operate, you see.

The native doctor told me that I should come back to him after seeing the herbalist. I went back with the items. The native doctor gave me some medicine and bandaged my leg again. I had to lie down with the bandage on for two days. On the third day, my leg started to be its normal shape. It turned into an abscess. The native doctor said that I should go to the hospital now for treatment. The problem was that the illness had already affected my bones. That's why I cannot play now. I'm still receiving treatment.

The native doctor told me that the person who had done this to me would be the first person to greet me on the field and ask me about my health. The next day I went to the field and that was exactly what happened. I told the player that I was fine. I did not let him know that I knew what he had done. After some time the person realized that I had discovered what he had done to me and he started to avoid me.

This player wanted my position. He was a Francophone.

There are many interesting things to learn from his story. For now, it is important to notice that the team manager went to the native doctor who confirmed the attack. When I ask Ashu when he is going to see a native doctor, he says that his 'own' native doctor lives in his parent's village. It is only when he has money for transport that he can check whether his illness is related to witchcraft or sorcery or not.

## Witchcraft is related to misfortune

The Mile 17 Motor Park is a busy crossroads not far from my compound. There is a gas station and a bus depot and one will see a lot of economic activity all around. Women are selling lots of fruits, men are trying to sell you supposedly cheap seats in a taxi. Of course, the best way is to go to the ticket counter and buy a one-way ticket which, in my case, costs about FCFA 400.

A little while back I said goodbye to Ashu and the team manager and took a taxi down to the Motor Park because I had plans to visit the spiritual adviser in Limbe. The bus is already crowded but we are waiting for it to fill up with people completely. In the meantime, little children are offering us foodstuffs and other items. I take two sticks of *soya*, which is roasted cow meat. Some time later, the

bus driver takes us away from the Motor Park and away from Buea. We are heading for the coast. Within no time at all, I find myself in a conversation with some of my fellow travellers after I told the person next to me that I am doing research on football. As usual, the subject of football immediately sparks a debate.

I am thinking about what Ashu and the team manager told me earlier on. My thoughts are directed to one particular famous book on witchcraft and sorcery. It is a classic book but still very relevant. In *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, Evans-Pritchard (1976 [1937]: 18) argues that if 'any failure or misfortune falls upon anyone at any time and in relation to any of the manifold activities of his (Azande) life it may be due to witchcraft'.

Evans-Pritchard (1976: 19-20) gives a clear example of what the Azande, a people from southern Sudan, think about witchcraft:

A boy knocked his foot against a small stump of wood in the centre of a bush path, a frequent happening in Africa, and suffered pain and inconvenience in consequence. Owing to its position on his toe it was impossible to keep the cut free from dirt and it began to fester. He declared that witchcraft had made him knock his foot against the stump. ... I told the boy that he had knocked his foot against the stump of wood because he had been careless, and that witchcraft had not placed it in the path, for it had grown there naturally. He agreed ... but added that he had kept his eyes open for stumps, as indeed every Zande does most carefully, and that if he had not been bewitched he would have seen the stump. As a conclusive argument for his view he remarked that all cuts do not take days to heal but, on the contrary, close quickly, for that is the nature of cuts. Why, then, had his sore festered and remained open if there were no witchcraft behind it?

Although you cannot really compare Cameroonians to the Azande, you can compare the basics of the witchcraft beliefs of the latter to the former. Indeed, there are many general similarities between the beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery of the Azande and those of the players within the football teams in Buea. In the cases of Ashu and the team manager of Buea Boys, we can see that their stories relate to seemingly ordinary situations like sustaining an injury or falling sick during or after a training session. These situations are not uncommon in themselves and players are well aware that football can easily lead to injuries or illness.

In the case of Ashu, however, the ordinary situation turns extraordinary when he realizes that passing out suddenly during a training session is not very common for a healthy player. Also, he must train at least twice a day, ten times a week, month after month. Why would he pass out on the field at that particular moment? It is then that the player may consider witchcraft or sorcery as a possible explanation.

Evans-Pritchard (1976: 21) gives us the follow-up of the boy who knocked his foot:

What they explained by witchcraft were the particular conditions in a chain of causation which related an individual to natural happenings in such a way that he sustained injury. The boy who knocked his foot against a stump of wood did not account for the stump by reference to witchcraft, nor did he suggest that whenever anybody knocks his foot against a stump it is necessarily due to witchcraft, nor yet again did he account for the cut by saying that it was caused by witchcraft, for he knew quite well that it was caused by the stump of wood. What he attributed to witchcraft was that on this particular occasion, when exercising his usual care, he struck his foot against a stump of wood, whereas on a hundred other occasions he did not do so, and that on this particular occasion the cut, which he expected to result from the knock, festered whereas he had dozens of cuts which had not festered. Surely these peculiar conditions demand an explanation.

Why did the team manager of Buea Boys develop a fever after the training session? Why did his leg start to swell up after a few days? Why did the injury not heal when he received treatment from the doctor at the hospital? It just did not seem to be a normal football injury.

I had an appointment with the spiritual adviser in front of the Limbe Centenary Stadium. The only problem is that I never bothered to ask what he looks like. And now I am standing there, outside the bars in front of the football stadium, hopelessly trying to recognize a man I have never seen before. But I could not have possibly been prepared for the appearance of this spiritual adviser anyway.

There, out of the corner of my eye, I see a man winking at me with his hands. The man is not very old, probably in his early forties. He is standing on one foot at the side of the bar while drinking coke from a small bottle. Frankly, it looks as if he is about to engage in an intense physical activity. A marathon, perhaps. The man is wearing a training outfit with matching running shoes. He looks as though he is still partly involved in his previous profession as a football coach. On top of it all, he is wearing sunglasses. 'Let's take a walk,' Zé says in a soft voice.

So this is the man of whom some of the football players in Buea spoke so fondly. This is the one who prepares many first- and second-division matches in Cameroon, who has worked for several first-division clubs in the country, and who apparently knows a lot about 'match preparation', as football magic is usually called. I will return to this subject in the next chapter.

However, Zé also knows many things about witchcraft and sorcery in general. This is what he says as we are walking towards Limbe's Botanical Gardens:

Witchcraft is a natural phenomenon in Africa. In every African home there is witchcraft. Since you will see it in every home, you will also see it in football. There are people who are from a home of witchcraft and who are also football players. Let's say I'm a football player. My mother is a witch and my father is a wizard. You are playing the same wing with me. My father can bewitch you so that either you cannot play or feel dizzy in the field. Or maybe you will get an injury. The injury will never ever be healed. But when you go and consult an oracle, he will tell you that you cannot be well because somebody has influenced that injury. It's something normal and it's happening in African football.

Then, secondly, there are particular players who go to oracles who come in to bewitch their colleagues. You will see a good goalkeeper catching a ball and it just goes out of his hands. When you go into detail, you realize that it's one of his team mates who's bewitching him so that he does not perform well.

I am particularly interested in the phrase 'the same wing' because Essomba, Ashu and many other players as well as the team managers of both Olympique de Buea and Buea Boys, have mentioned this aspect of witchcraft to me before.

## Witchcraft or sorcery?

First, however, let me explain something about witchcraft and sorcery. For instance, how can a player bewitch his team mates? How did the wannabe captain bewitch Ashu or the other wannabe captain bewitch the team manager of Buea Boys when he was still the team captain? The most obvious way has been described by the spiritual adviser when he said that players can be witches or are from a home of witchcraft. When one is a witch, he or she can injure or make sick another person by psychic means. According to Evans-Pritchard (1976: 1), the 'Azande believe that some people are witches and can injure them in virtue of an inherent quality. A witch performs no rite, utters no spell, and possesses no medicines. An act of witchcraft is a psychic act.'

Bowie (2000: 219) explains witchcraft as follows:

One of its most fundamental ideas is that of a life force, essence or energy within people ... This life force can be captured or harmed by others whose own life force is more powerful, malevolent, or in some way out of control. The metaphor is often one of cannibalistic consumption or draining of the victim's life. This harm is effected at the psychic level, but will be reflected in the biological and material state of the victim.

The idea in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa is that the witch '... seeks to "eat" the flesh of the victim, causing him or her to sicken. Witchcraft is "hot" and needs to be "cooled"' (Bowie 2000: 220). Although many African peoples believe that 'witchcraft is a substance in the bodies of witches' (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 1), this by no means accounts for all of them. A more common notion is that of the 'soul of witchcraft' (Ibid.: 10-11):

... Azande generally think of a witch sending his soul on errands by night when his victim is asleep. It sails through the air emitting a bright light ... This light is not the witch in person stalking his prey but is an emanation from his body ... The witch is on his bed, but he has dispatched the soul of his witchcraft to remove the psychical part of his victim's organs ... which he and his fellow witches will devour.

Attacks like this one can normally '... be perceived only in dreams. It is not an evident notion but transcends sensory experience' (Ibid.: 31). Ashu, for instance, began to think of a witchcraft attack after his night-poison dream. 'Witches also shoot objects, called *ahu mangu*, things of witchcraft, into the bodies of those



whom they wish to injure. This leads to pain in the place where the missile is lodged, and a witch-doctor, in his role of leech, will be summoned to extract the offending objects, which may be material objects or worms and grubs' (Ibid.: 14). Recall the objects found in the knee of the team manager of Buea Boys, for instance the millipede.

Evans-Pritchard goes on to say that a witch 'does not immediately destroy his victim. On the contrary, if a man becomes suddenly and acutely ill he may be sure that he is a victim of sorcery and not of witchcraft' (Ibid.: 13-14). In this case, sorcery is a second means by which players can harm their team mates. They visit a traditional doctor who uses his knowledge to bewitch the team mate for them. 'Sorcery is a skill that can be learnt, rather than a disposition that is inherited' (Bowie 2000: 223). To the Azande, '...the difference between a sorcerer and a witch is that the former uses the technique of magic and derives his power from medicines, while the latter acts without rites and spells and uses hereditary psycho-physical powers to attain his ends' (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 176).

However, not all African peoples make a distinction between witchcraft and sorcery. An example is that of the Bangwa of the South West Province in Cameroon who '... make no distinction between sorcerers and witches, the term *lekang* ... being used to translate the English terms "witch," "sorcerer" and "spirit"' (Bowie 2000: 227).

In most cases, however, the stories I heard from football players indicate that most of the occult or spiritual forces that occur in football could be labelled as sorcery. After all, football players knowingly visit native or traditional doctors to harm their team mates. It is the native doctors who perform rites of sorcery, not witchcraft. It is mostly a matter of classification though. In theory, many cultural anthropologists make the distinction between witchcraft and sorcery but in reality the end result is the same, namely the 'bewitchment' of a player in order to harm him. The players in Buea do not seem to make any distinction at all.

I learned that there are many ways for a native doctor to bewitch a player. 'If the player doesn't play the match, he meets a native doctor,' Kalla explains. 'Since the native doctor wants his money he will ask: "Bring the name of the other player." Then he might give the player something and say: "You should throw it on the field and when you are throwing it, call that player's name." And during a training session all of a sudden the other player breaks his leg. It happens everywhere in the country.'

Sometimes the native doctor gives a player a coin and says: "Give it to the other player. When he takes the coin, you have taken away his luck." Then the player will either get an injury very easily or he will get sick. The native doctor

can also tell the player to bury something in the field before the training session so that the other player will get injured.

Sometimes they give the player a powder and tell him to put it into the boots of his team mate. When the team mate steps into his boots, his feet will start to swell. He is no longer able to play. This is why the players are all very protective of their own equipment; nobody is allowed to come anywhere near their boots and jerseys. Also, the player can put the powder in the goalkeeper's gloves, resulting in bewitchment.

'Some of them don't even give anything,' Zé tells me. 'Some might tell you to call the name of the goalkeeper three times at a junction. Or you have to go to a cemetery and call this goalkeeper's name seven times, shout "catch ball" and leave. You go back to your house without looking behind. You have already bewitched him. There are many ways. It all depends on how the traditional doctor operates.'

### The same wing

Within a football team the most spiritual attacks take place between players who normally play in the same position. Take for instance a midfielder. He can decide to 'eliminate' another player from midfield through sorcery. 'At the moment we are witnessing a lot in midfield,' says Kalla. 'The fighting must be really powerful in midfield.' So perhaps the supporters' remark on the weak midfield during yesterday's grand match was related to witchcraft and sorcery.

However, it is mostly the attackers and goalkeepers who 'bewitch' each other. Zé even puts witchcraft and sorcery among goalkeepers at the top of the list. 'The goalkeeper is the backbone of the team,' he explains. 'When the goalkeeper is not catching well, the team will be conceding goals. So it's a very important position on the field. If a goalkeeper's allowed two goals to get in, will you put him in goal again? No. That's how he loses his place.'

Witchcraft and sorcery can be the reason why goalkeepers start messing up in their goal areas. According to Zé, this is exactly what is currently happening in Olympique de Buea between the old goalkeeper and the goalkeeper from Coton Sport de Garoua. 'The old goalkeeper (A) has been playing with Olympique de Buea for several years. This year the president bought a new goalkeeper (B) from Coton Sport. B is a very talented goalkeeper. The rule is that the original goalkeeper cannot be replaced just like that. But the coach immediately took goalkeeper B as his first goalkeeper. Goalkeeper A was very angry.'

'Goalkeeper B has been the best goalkeeper in Cameroon for the past three years,' Zé continues, 'but when he came to Olympique de Buea he could not perform. He knows somebody is bewitching him because he never even catches a

ball. The ball simply comes out of his hands. He is a cat as far as football is concerned, but in Buea everything's falling apart.'

Team manager Kalla of Olympique de Buea is aware of the situation. 'There was a time,' he says, 'when goalkeeper B complained bitterly that the other goalkeeper blocked him from performing well. Goalkeeper A was called up for questioning. And the next match goalkeeper B was playing well again. Then what do we do? Should we start believing that he was the one who's making goalkeeper B not do well? That's witchcraft.'

The situation is much worse among Olympique de Buea's attackers. There are a lot of attackers this season and they all seem to be eager to play matches. However, none of the attackers is scoring a lot of goals. The most unfortunate player is the one who was bought from Racing de Bafoussam. According to several players, he was a revelation last season, scoring goals almost every match. 'He's not even a shadow of the player he was last season,' Zé tells me. Essomba told me: 'Can you believe that he has scored only one goal so far? And that was from a penalty. Everybody knows there's something going on.' In other words, one of his team mates is obstructing him at a spiritual level.

Why do players who play in the same position bewitch each other? The reason is very simple. Everyone wants to play the official matches but there are only 11 players who feature in the line-up. The rest have to watch the match either from the reserves' bench or, worse still, from the stand. There can also be only one team captain. Players thus have to compete to gain a place in the line-up.

Of course, in capitalist reasoning, competition between players to gain a specific position can lead to an overall increase in team quality. For instance, just before the match against PSV Eindhoven in the Netherlands (7 February 2004), a sports journalist informed Ronald Koeman, at that time the coach of AFC Ajax, that he had a 'luxury' problem, being able to choose between three attackers. 'Competition between players is a good thing,' Koeman said, 'since it will lead to better performances.' In Cameroon, players who are competing for the same position sometimes use unorthodox methods to eliminate their fellow team mates.

I heard that money can be a motivation for witchcraft and sorcery. 'When your colleague is sick, you play the matches and get the money,' Kalla says. Since only the 18 players who are selected for a particular match are entitled to the match bonuses, the other players do not only stay at home but stay at home without any money. The team manager says that money is to some extent related to witchcraft. 'I remember that when we qualified for the interpools in 2000, I put the idea to the club president that all the players should participate in the bonuses. I said that we had to reduce the bonuses of those who were playing, so that the money could be extended to those who didn't play. And that was done.'

The man on the field takes FCFA 150,000 (€ 228); the player on the bench gets FCFA 75,000 (€ 114); and the player who doesn't feature in the line-up receives FCFA 50,000 (€ 76). So when the players are playing the match, their team mates who are sitting on the bench and the ones in the stands are cheering them on and hoping they will be successful. Everybody is happy. And that's how we succeeded in the interpools without any witchcraft stuff.'

I doubt if the last sentence is actually true but the general point is clear enough. If all the players got their money, then the need to bewitch a team mate would no longer be so urgent. However, most clubs lack the finances to accomplish such a goal. Also, as Zé rightly says, it would be impossible to give every player the opportunity to play every match. 'Travelling with all 40 players of Olympique de Buea requires at least two vehicles which means double expenditure. The club doesn't have the money for it. That's why there are limitations. Also, let's assume you are playing at home. It's a FIFA law that you cannot select more than 18 players for any one match.'

But what is the real reason behind all this witchcraft and sorcery? The answer is jealousy. One player is playing the official matches. He is able to show his football skills to the public. He is standing in the spotlight, he is popular, he gets the money, and he probably also gets the girls. The other is, well, sitting on the reserves' bench, or worse. In this case, not only corruption but also witchcraft and sorcery can be a way of doing something about it. Evans-Pritchard (1976: 45) gives us the motivations of a Zande witch:

A witch attacks a man when motivated by hatred, envy, jealousy, and greed. Usually if he has no enmity towards a man he will not attack him. Therefore a Zande in misfortune at once considers who is likely to hate him. He is well aware that others take pleasure in his troubles and pain and are displeased at his good fortune. He knows that if he becomes rich the poor will hate him, that if he rises in social position his inferiors will be jealous of his authority, that if he is handsome the less favoured will envy his looks, that if he is talented as a hunter, a singer, a fighter, or a rhetorician, he will earn the malice of those less gifted, and that if he enjoys the regard of his prince and of his neighbours he will be detested for his prestige and his popularity.

It is not difficult to replace the hunter, singer or fighter with a football player.

### Witchcraft, sorcery and social relationships

Witchcraft and sorcery are, as we now know, related to situations where misfortune seems to have struck a player. However, 'the concept of witchcraft is not that of an impersonal force that may become attached to persons but of a personal force that is generalized in speech' (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 13). In other words, although players would say that an injury is the result of witchcraft and sorcery in general, they actually mean that they think *someone* bewitched them.

Both Ashu and the team manager of Buea Boys see a Francophone player as the cause of their illness and injury respectively. Such cases thus imply a specific relationship between two people – be it players, supporters, club executives or people from outside the club who have a problem with the club's executives or players. Evans-Pritchard (1976: 47-48) argues that

... witches only injure people in the vicinity, and that the closer they are to their victims the more serious are the attacks. We may suggest that the reason for this belief is that people living at a distance from one another have insufficient social contacts to produce mutual hatred, whereas there is ample opportunity for friction among those whose homesteads and cultivations are in close proximity. People are most likely to quarrel with those with whom they come into close contact when the contact is not softened by sentiments of kinship or is not buffered by distinctions of age, sex, and class.

Nevertheless, witchcraft and sorcery attacks (or accusations) traditionally take place between members of the same family. Ciekawy & Geschiere (1998: 4) point out that in many parts of Africa, '... witchcraft is explicitly linked to "home" and to the family'. They add that 'in southern Cameroon, the "witchcraft of the house" is seen as the most dangerous form' (Ibid.).

For instance, as the team captain of Olympique de Buea is abroad for a test match, I overheard a conversation between a taxi driver and a few passengers while driving down the main road. They had heard rumours that the father of the captain bewitched him so that he would fail to be accepted by a football club outside of Cameroon. Also, Ashu told me that he suffered an illness a few years ago, which he thought was caused by his own father. I occasionally heard players complaining that their fathers did not like to see them play football, mostly because of the uncertain future perspectives it offered. When the father of the Rasta player of Olympique de Buea visited his son in Buea, he told me that he was still very disappointed that his son had dropped out of university a few years ago to play football. But why would a father bewitch a son who is about to make a lot of money in a foreign football league? It does not really make much sense.

Every player was quite determined as to how they could avoid bewitchment by relatives, namely, as I already mentioned earlier, by bringing a lot of presents for family members. 'You give your father's brothers and your mother's sisters and all the rest something once in a while just to make them know that you think about them,' Essomba said. In this case, everybody is happy and nothing bad will happen to the player. On the contrary, a close relationship with family members, especially with both parents, is even said to protect oneself against witchcraft attacks. 'The tradition of the house is the best,' Essomba told me. 'When your parents love you, no person can kill you. They are always praying for you so it's very difficult for somebody to come and touch you. You can visit them once every six months just to make sure they know that you love them.'

Once in a while, Essomba goes to visit his mother in the village. 'When I go home my mother performs a ritual with water and palm wine. She takes care of such things now that my father is dead. She rubs something on my chest. Then she pours palm wine in the cup, the one that my grandparents used to drink from. She pours the palm wine on the ground and wishes me good luck. It will protect you in life so that you won't have an accident. It means that your house is clean. The ancestors will take care of you.'

Ashu told me a similar story regarding his father:

My father prepared a traditional benediction last year at the graves of our grandfathers. My father called for those who are dead. They are the ancestors. He told them that they put him on the throne. They gave him the powers and the authority. Now he called upon them to give his son the energy, power and strength to play football. He said: "This is your son. He wants to go to Europe and play football. You should protect him against evil and magic. He's a good son." Then my father threw some prepared food, the liver and feathers of a fowl and the palm wine from the cup on the tomb of the forefathers.

According to Ashu, these benedictions take place every five years or so. 'If you don't do that, you shouldn't feel very confident in your protection. But when you have done it, you will have 100 per cent protection wherever you go.'

In short, the family is capable of harming and blessing the player, depending on how the player behaves towards his relatives.

When witchcraft and sorcery occur between people who have some sort of social relationship, it is easy to see that such practices also happen within a football team. After all, a team consists of 25 to 30 players who are in close contact with one another six or seven days a week. They meet every day for training sessions, they play official matches together, and many players also spend a lot of time among team mates in the evenings.

Let us take two instances in which witchcraft practices are said to be more widespread than on other occasions, namely the interpools and the recruitment period. First, the (mini-)interpools are a time when a team will go on tour for at least two weeks. This is what Ashu told me with regard to last year's interpools in Douala. 'We were camping at a governmental school. There were 38 of us players. We all slept in a huge dormitory. We weren't allowed to leave the premises without a good reason.' This means that the players are stuck with one another for a very crucial two-week period. The close contact and the importance of the matches in the interpools can easily fuel ill feelings among the players.

Moreover, every player wants to play the matches, even more so than in the regular competition. Not only do the players receive higher match bonuses but, as Joseph explained to me, the interpools are also a means by which players are 'discovered' by the big clubs and recruited for the following year's D1 competition. It is clear that only the players who play the matches have the chance to prove themselves to the 'nation' (the interpools are broadcasted on television).

Ashu tells me the story of the 2002 interpools:

At first we had one player (A). We all witnessed how he collapsed on the field. He had a stroke. This was a player who has been playing for long. As the story was given to us, another player (B) went to see a traditional doctor in his village. You see, some players sneak out to do such things. He now had the chance to play the two remaining matches. But then B had the very same thing happening to him because A had also gone to his village to find out. His traditional doctor said that he sent it back to B. B's legs were swollen. So our coach took him to hospital. He came back but he couldn't play.

These examples just go on and on. For instance, during the 2002 mini-interpools many things happened. 'We had one player who had a cold the entire time,' Ashu explains. 'We had a player who never played a single match because he was sick. He had a bad stomach, fever, headache, things like that. We also had a player who had sprained his ankle. And then there was our captain, who is now our team manager. He was also sick and couldn't play.' These illnesses are, especially when participating in such an important football tournament, usually thought to be related to witchcraft and sorcery.

Let us take a brief look at another time where witchcraft and sorcery accusations are widespread, namely the recruitment period. When Ashu went to Bafang to join in the selection of new players for Unisport a few years ago, he sustained an injury. 'At the selections there were 90 players. They took on two attackers and I was the first one. I was very happy but they did something to me. I don't know the person who did it. My leg got twisted and I got an injury right there on the field. Luckily I was already on the list. Then some of the players came to me. Some of them went to the toilet to smoke *banga* (marijuana). They saw candles and the names of players. They saw my name. I saw it too. Terrible things! Then I started playing in Bafang.'

It is not difficult to understand why players want to bewitch their colleagues (or think they are being bewitched) during the recruitment period. Just as all players are anxious to play official matches, they are equally anxious to get into the team in the first place. Therefore some players will try to bewitch their direct competitors, namely other players who play in the same position. According to Ashu, it is not unlikely that a godfather will even put in money to pay for a traditional doctor. Sometimes the godfather is the one who visits the traditional doctor, who in turn makes the 'competitor' injured.

## Traditional doctor or medical doctor?

Now let us take a look at the person who has sustained an injury on the field. It has to be emphasized that injuries and illnesses are by no means always attributed to witchcraft and sorcery. 'It's very normal for a player to get injured on the field,' Essomba says. 'At the moment, I have a fever. We should not be

thinking of witchcraft. You cannot always run to the traditional doctor whenever you are hurt.'

Kalla tells me that he used to be responsible for the players' well-being, so his job was to see that injuries were treated properly. The player is usually taken to hospital to get a medical report, some medicine and a few injections. There are two instances in which the player can decide to see a traditional doctor afterwards. First, I heard that when a player has broken something, it is likely that he will visit a traditional doctor. Kalla:

We Africans believe that there are certain things that cannot be treated fast in hospital. The hospital has a gradual process for treating a fracture. Say, a leg gets broken. It's very difficult for a hospital to treat it in a month's time, but the native doctor can treat a broken leg in 14 days. He uses the bones of a lion and a leopard. He rubs herbs on the broken leg and then he ties the bones to the leg very strongly. We believe that the leg will get as strong as those of the bones.

Whereas it will probably take two months for a broken leg to heal with hospital treatment, the traditional doctor can do it four times faster. Of course, the sooner the player gets well, the better. Another advantage is that the traditional doctor is less expensive than the hospital. 'It depends on the gravity of the problem,' Kalla says. 'If it's a broken leg you can spend about FCFA 15,000 to FCFA 20,000 (€ 22 to € 30). But in hospital it will be FCFA 100,000 (€ 152) or more.'

'You will go to the native doctor,' the team manager goes on. 'The native doctor will ask you for a calabash of wine, a fowl, salt, oil, cowries, and when you add it all up, it's not more than FCFA 10,000. Then he tells you that the spirit's bag is FCFA 10,000. Most of them have contracts with spirits but there are some who have become masters of themselves. When he tells you about the spirit's bag, it's his payment.'

According to the team manager, the player will usually go and see a medical doctor afterwards to see if the traditional doctor has done his job well. So it is not a question of either the medical doctor or the traditional doctor but rather both of them because they are thought to operate in different ways.

The second reason for going to the traditional doctor is when the injury somehow does not appear to be very normal. I heard that most traditional doctors will tell the player that it was indeed witchcraft or sorcery that caused the injury. Now, there are several types of traditional doctors, as Kalla explains, depending on what the player wants from him. For instance, there is a difference between wanting to know who caused the attack and wanting the injury to be cured. Of course, most players will ask for both.

'The native doctors can be divided into three categories,' Kalla says. 'There are the ones who see and do not treat; the ones who see and treat; and the ones who only treat. Some of them know the herbs to treat your broken leg but he does



not know the cause of it. There are some that know the cause but cannot treat it. He can throw cowries on the floor and call somebody's name. He foresees and tells. If it's natural, he will tell you. But if a player has done it, he will tell you and he can direct you to another person who can treat you. And then there are some that see and treat.'

The team manager – alias the former team captain of Buea Boys – has already provided us with an example of how the traditional doctor finds the identity of the perpetrator. He also gave us an account of how a traditional doctor is able to treat a patient. From his story we learn that there can be good and bad traditional doctors. A good traditional doctor will only ask you to bring him some items and leave it at that. He will not ask you for much money. Also, a good doctor looks at the injury and then directs the player to a doctor who is able to treat the injury. A bad traditional doctor will always treat the player himself, even if he does not know how to do it, simply to collect the money. 'There are good and bad people in every business,' spiritual adviser Zé says. 'There are people who don't even know but they pretend as if they do.'

The team manager of Buea Boys knew that the first doctor was a good one because he detected the problem and directed the team manager to a herbalist who could treat the injury:

You know, to do harm to somebody is very easy but it's difficult to do good to somebody. You can have one hundred sorcerers around town but just a few are good ones who can perform miracles. The others are just there because they are looking for money. When you come, he plays his tricks and collects money. A bad sorcerer first of all asks your reason for coming here and when you tell him, he uses what you have said and can even create enmity between friends. He could say that your friend is the cause of your illness.

But if it's a good sorcerer, he starts to tell you about yourself without you telling him anything. After consulting his oracle, if he can cure you, he's going to tell you, but if he cannot, he will direct you to another person who knows how to cure it.

But these liars who pretend that they can do it immediately start asking for fabulous sums of money. He can even ask FCFA 100,000 for the first treatment. When you come back the following week, he will tell you that you have to pay an extra FCFA 700,000 (slightly over € 1,000). He knows you cannot afford that and that you will abandon the whole thing. Your FCFA 100,000 is gone.

A very good sorcerer doesn't ask for too much money. The person who cured me didn't even have a signboard. They just directed me to the person. But when you go around town, you see those liars with signboards outside their houses. Sometimes you have to go to another village to find a good sorcerer.

We also learn from this story that a bad traditional doctor will always point out someone who put witchcraft or sorcery on the player, even if that player has had nothing to do with it. Most of the time, the traditional doctor makes sure he knows the latest gossip. For instance, he may know that the player has a problem with another player in the team and in this case he can easily use the information to find the perpetrator.

One attack can easily lead to another, even if there was never any witchcraft or sorcery in the first place. So although accusations are bad news for the functioning of the team, the domino effect it can create is even worse. Zé tells me that goalkeeper B in Olympique de Buea, after ‘discovering’ that the old goalkeeper had bewitched him, retaliated in exactly the same way. ‘I’m sure he (goalkeeper B) realized what was going on because you saw how the old goalkeeper (A) was catching against the team from Ghana during the international match. He was also catching just like the other goalkeeper, so that’s how witchcraft operates.’

To round up this story, Kalla says that the hospital bills and those of the traditional doctor are being paid by the club. If a player comes to see him and says that another player has bewitched him, the team manager will tell the other player to refrain from using witchcraft and sorcery and the case is closed. Nobody gets punished. ‘We, the management, don’t look at it as a problem caused by the players,’ Kalla says. ‘We look at it as something that happens naturally.’

## Levelling and accumulation

Witchcraft and sorcery are traditionally said to function as a levelling force in society. When the national government is far away, people in the villages and small towns have to settle their own disputes and find ways of making sure that local peace is maintained. Inequality is a fertile ground for unrest because unwanted emotions, such as jealousy and anger, lie around the corner. Bowie (2000: 220) describes it as a ‘notion ... of limited good’:

There is only a certain finite amount of health, wealth, and happiness to go around. If someone is particularly successful, fertile, and fortunate in life there is an assumption that they have profited at someone else’s expense. The prosperous may fear those who are less well-off, because of the power of their jealousy, and perhaps from a sense of guilt and arising from the shared assumption that in a zero-sum game the only “fair” system is one in which good fortune is distributed as evenly as possible.

Witchcraft and sorcery are usually directed against people who are doing well. Within the football teams in Buea, we have seen that attacks are thought to be directed against the players who play matches and receive the match bonuses and who are, therefore, the popular guys in town. Such accusations are, in turn, usually made against the players on the bench who normally play in the same position as the unfortunate, bewitched colleague.

The levelling function is clear since these witchcraft beliefs make players who do well afraid of witchcraft and sorcery. In this sense, witchcraft functions as a moral framework by which unequal distribution of wealth is seen as immoral. As Leseth (1997: 166) argues, this ‘... idea of equality is related to practice, it is morality of conduct rather than a morality of being’. The morality in witchcraft is also visible in the motives and actions of witches themselves which, as Gluck-

man (1955: 86) explains, are equally immoral and anti-social: ‘... witchcraft as a theory of causation embraces a theory of morals, for it says that witches are wicked people. It is their wicked feelings which cause their witchcraft to do harm. Azande say: “Jealousy comes first and witchcraft follows after”. The ethics of witchcraft thus disapprove of the common anti-social vices and approve of the virtues of many societies.’

The levelling function aside, beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery are also explanations of *why* some people are rich, famous and progressing fast. Geschiere (1998: 814) argues that witchcraft ‘... is supposedly used as a levelling force, undermining inequalities in wealth and power, but the same force is often supposed to be indispensable for the accumulation of such wealth and power. *Witchcraft is both jealousy and success*’ [my emphasis].

Fisiy & Geschiere (2001: 227) lift the subject of witchcraft to a higher level when they argue that

... it is precisely this ambivalence of being a force for both levelling and accumulation of power and riches that explains why witchcraft remains such an omnipresent image in present-day Africa, despite all modern changes. Witchcraft is often associated with jealousy – that is, with hidden aggression by the weak against the rich and powerful ... However, at a more hidden level, witchcraft is equally associated with those who are doing well. Rumours also link it to the rich and powerful who allegedly owe their success to the use of varied occult sources and forces.

So witchcraft and sorcery are not only used against others to level things up, they are also used by people to gain wealth and success by itself.

In this respect, Ashu told me an interesting story about Olympique de Buea’s team captain. Apparently, Ashu is very suspicious of the captain’s career in football so far. Both Ashu and the captain are about the same age but while Ashu has had to cope with all sorts of misfortunes, the captain’s career has skyrocketed in only a few years. Three or four years ago, the captain was discovered by the president of Olympique de Buea at a time when he was still playing in a third-division team in a village near Limbe. He became the star of the team during the interpools that led Olympique into the D1 competition and nowadays he is one of the most promising players in the country. In fact, at the end of my stay in Cameroon, the president of Olympique de Buea manages to ‘sell’ his team captain to a major club in Ghana.

First of all, Ashu told me that a football player simply cannot progress at such a fast pace due to natural physical limitations. Second, the somewhat dubious lifestyle of the captain is, according to Ashu, not compatible with his career. Drinking, smoking, having many girlfriends and going to nightclubs every weekend should not be leading to such impressive football performances. Ashu suspects the captain of having received supernatural powers from the mountain here in Buea. The mountain, as we already know, is said to have immense powers.

Some traditional doctors know how to obtain and use the powers from these areas, but at significant cost. Whenever a person – in this case a player – wants to progress in life, he can go up the mountain in the company of such a traditional doctor.

However, whereas the traditional doctor usually asks for some sort of animal sacrifice, the stakes are somewhat higher this time. According to Ashu, a person has to give a ‘loved one’ to the traditional doctor and the loved one has to be a ‘blood relation’. The traditional doctor will sacrifice this blood relation to obtain these powers. ‘They can even ask for your mother,’ Ashu says. ‘One time a simple carpenter who makes furniture became extremely rich in one or two months. He lost his mother and he became extremely rich.’

In short, in cases such as the captain’s career progressing unusually fast, some people might think that he had received supernatural powers – and made a human sacrifice in the process.

Now Ashu has a similar story to tell about himself when he was playing for Unisport de Bafang. It appears that a human sacrifice is not always required when obtaining supernatural powers. Instead, money can sometimes also do the trick. One day, two old traditional doctors came up to him and said: “You’re a good player. You can become better than those players at the top.”

They said that they could help me. First, I had to bring FCFA one million (€ 1,520). They were going to buy things with the money. Then they would put me into a deep valley with a waterfall. I was supposed to stay there for seven days. They said that seven days was the conclusion of the process of the powers to get into me. They said: “After this time you will see the miracle yourself. Then you are going to be very powerful.”

They told me they have to keep the money in a certain place and when we go back we will not see that money. It means the spirit has accepted the money. They will see what they were supposed to buy with some directory. So what they are going to buy is to come from the spiritual world. They were also supposed to bring a new spear. They said: “When we come afterwards, the spirit will have replaced the spear with something else.”

We all know that these types of things are not good. It’s a sect. These are powers, yes, but destructive ones.

In the end, Ashu refused to accept the offer because the amount of money was too high and he thought it was too dangerous. It seems that these powers can even kill the person who has accepted them, as we shall see later on.

## The test match

Football is a relatively new way for Cameroonians to succeed in life and is, therefore, closely linked to witchcraft’s dual function of levelling and accumulation. Every player in Cameroon wants to play in a country where football is profitable, at least more so than in this country.

The situation in Cameroon and the rest of Africa correlates with Wallerstein's (1974) world systems theory, which is readily applicable to contemporary world football. He argues that an interdependence exists between all nations in the world and that there are strong and intimate relationships between the so-called core areas such as Europe and the peripheral areas in the so-called Third World. While the core dominates the peripheral areas, neither the core nor the periphery can sustain themselves independently. We can see that the flow of footballers is mostly a one-way affair, namely from the peripheral areas (Latin America, South East Asia and Africa) to the core countries in Europe.

Of course, there is also a semi-periphery which is a core area in a peripheral area. As for football in Africa, it is evident that football players from Mali, Sudan, Zambia and Rwanda, among others, are more than willing to be transferred to clubs in South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana or North African countries. Many African football players also go to clubs in Japan, South Korea or the Middle East (particularly Saudi Arabia).

For Cameroonian and African players in general, there are three ways to achieve their objective in finding a club abroad:

Some migrants arrive as a result of their own initiatives ... A second group is made up of migrants who are recommended by an agent and may be drawn to Europe on the basis of a videotape or an invitation to demonstrate their abilities. ... The third group is made up of players who are known to European coaches or African scouts who have witnessed these promising players at first hand. (Bale 2004: 238-239)

For most players in Buea, Europe is a true image of (football) paradise. 'The way of living there is good,' Essomba explains. 'I can go to Holland and play for three or four years. I will have more money than somebody who has worked for the Cameroonian government for ten or fifteen years.'

As Armstrong & Giulianotti (2004: 11) argue, '[f]or the handful [of players] that succeed, social status and economic security go alongside the pleasure of playing the game regularly'. Indeed, there are numerous examples of African players who gained fame and fortune in major European clubs. The successful players who return to Africa now and again confirm the European ideal, especially those who play in the various national teams.

However, the majority of the players who have failed to become football stars are easily forgotten. Bale (2004: 237) has argued that the '... systematization of recruitment, migration and work of African footballers can be read as a form of neocolonialism and exploitation in the well worn European traditions of scrambling for Africa'. In general, African players can be regarded '... as relatively "cheap labour", in Western terms' (Ibid.: 235). Broere & Van der Drift (1997: 84) give an example of European scouts who look for promising African players and then have them sign highly unfavourable contracts.

Although the players' ultimate goal is to play in one of the European leagues, they usually have to settle for a country in Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe or South East Asia. In general, players would like to be invited for a 'test match' at a club abroad where a player can then participate in training sessions for a few weeks to give the coach an idea of his football qualities and mental skills.

Whenever a player leaves Cameroon to play in a foreign football competition, he is called a *bushfaller* in pidgin dialect. This simply means that the player will fall out of the bush (Cameroon) to go and play in a European football league. There he will make a lot of money, after which he falls back into the bush now and again to share his riches with friends and family.

There is a lot of witchcraft and sorcery involved in the international aspirations of Cameroonian players. The main reason is, again, jealousy. 'When somebody is jealous of you, he always tries to block your future,' Essomba explains. 'He blocks you because he doesn't want you to progress. He can go to the medicine man to block you. He can do any mystical thing so that you won't progress.'

First, the captain of Olympique de Buea has been selected for at least five test matches in Asia, the Middle East and Europe, mainly through the connections and efforts of his godfather, the president of Olympique de Buea. Unfortunately for him, no club has yet offered him a contract. Other attackers in the club are said to be jealous and angry of the fact that the club president sends the captain for test matches but does not even think about them. Listening to the rumours in town, I learned that one or more team mates therefore bewitched the captain so that he would fail in every test match. This time around, the captain and club president have kept the test match in Japan a secret and, instead, spread the rumour that he was going to the village to bury his dead brother. In this case, nobody knew anything about the test match and no one would thus think of bewitching the captain.

Second, Ashu is one of two players who have been selected by the head coach of Buea Boys to go for a test match. The head coach and the club president both have a lot of connections in European football. Although Ashu was supposed to go to Germany sometime in April 2003, he had not left the country by the time I returned home in late August. A few years earlier, Ashu got the chance to go for a test match at a club in Indonesia. After he had bought the ticket, it mysteriously disappeared at his parents' house two days before his departure. Some time later, Ashu was supposed to go to a club in Ghana. Upon arrival in Accra, he suddenly fell extremely ill and had to return to Cameroon right away. In both cases, Ashu suspects that some Buea Boys players bewitched him to prevent him from succeeding in a foreign competition.

Witchcraft and sorcery can thus be seen as an explanation as to why some players manage to get selected by foreign clubs and become rich in the process, while other players are 'denied' such chances and keep on struggling in their own impoverished football leagues. Witchcraft discourses can explain success and failure, wealth and poverty, good luck and bad luck. However, witchcraft and sorcery can also be seen as personal attempts by players to blame their own failures on the jealous behaviour of others. As Gluckman (1955: 89) states, '... clearly the selection of a witch is guided by a man's own view of his personal relations, by his own grudges, ambitions, and similar sentiments. But his accusations also have to appear reasonable before a general public.' Players who do not play official matches or fail to get accepted by foreign clubs may think of witchcraft, while others would perhaps say that their skills leave a lot to be desired.

Since witchcraft accusations are selective and personal, it is necessary to look at the motivations of the 'accuser' and the relationship between the 'accuser' and the 'accused'. A clear example is Ashu's accusation against Olympique de Brea's team captain. Also, since witchcraft accusations usually arise between persons who have some sort of social relationship, Bleek (1976: 527) suggests the need to '... take into account some of the characteristics of gossip'. During his fieldwork among the Kwahu, an Akan sub-group in Ghana, he discovered that '... witchcraft accusations in that society were far from formal public affairs. Most accusations were expressed covertly, some could hardly be called accusations ...' (Ibid.: 526).

Also, '... witchcraft accusations were ... characterised by many conflicting versions and it would have been incorrect to select one of them as the "official version". All of them should be studied in their own context and given due attention' (Ibid.: 526). Indeed, the captain of Olympique de Buea's unsuccessful test matches provided fertile ground for many witchcraft rumours around town.

## The death of Marc-Vivien Foé

While injuries and illness are usually a clear trigger for rumours involving witchcraft and sorcery around town, the death of a person is the ultimate and most important producer of gossip. Moreover, it is when somebody dies that we can see how rumours and gossip may lead to different explanations for one and the same event. After all, nobody actually knows all the facts. The death of Marc-Vivien Foé is such an example. Foé used to be a respected player in the Cameroonian national team and he also played for Manchester City and Olympique Lyon, among other clubs, in England and France.

Essomba and I were watching that fateful semi-final match of the Confederations Cup on 26 June 2003 in a bar along the main road. Cameroon was leading

Colombia 1-0 when, in the 75th minute of play, Foé all of a sudden fell down on the field without the ball or any opponent near him. His eyes were completely white, like a zombie. Beer bottles fell on the floor of the bar in Buea. Men and women were screaming and shouting and waving their arms around. Essomba stood up, sat down, stood up and sat down again, saying: 'This is bad! This is really bad!'

A little while later, when the television commentator had announced that Foé was dead, Essomba and I were walking back towards his compound. We passed the Rasta player who had played together with Foé at Canon de Yaoundé in the 1990s. Essomba was really worried about things to come. And he was also very angry. 'Tomorrow morning I will go to the club president to ask for my signature premium. How can I keep on playing now? Football is a dangerous sport! I don't want to die without getting any of my money. Who will take care of my wife and little daughter?'

Essomba added something else as well. 'Now you just wait and listen. Tomorrow people will start to talk. There will be a lot of stories about how Foé died.' Indeed, over the next few weeks, I put together three major storylines surrounding the death of Marc-Vivien Foé, who, according to the coroner, died of a heart attack as a result of fatigue.

The first story is related to witchcraft within Foé's own family. It is said that Foé was one of the richest Indomitable Lions but that he was either sharing his wealth only with certain family members or with no family members at all. We know that family members can be very upset when nothing comes their way. One way of dealing with such a situation is witchcraft and sorcery. Some older family members allegedly visited a traditional doctor to bewitch the football player. The result is that Foé died doing what made him rich in the first place, namely playing football. After Foé's death, the family split up because of the controversy. Some members accused Foé's wife of keeping all the money for herself. For instance, Marie-Louise Foé received a cheque for US\$ 250,000 after a memorial football match between Foé's friends and a so-called All Star team in the stadium in Lyon where he died. She collected a lot of money from different events and activities but, according to family members, never shared it with them.

The second story relates to the rumour that Foé received supernatural powers in order to play football. Remember Ashu's story about the Olympique de Buea team captain. It is said that Foé called upon supernatural powers with the help of a traditional doctor. We can assume that the spirits did not ask for any sacrifice because nobody around Foé died during that period. He probably had to give a lot of money to the traditional doctor. However, anyone who calls upon these supernatural powers should know that the powers are pure evil and are usually far too strong for any man to control. At least that is what the players in Buea



would say. It can happen that such powers ultimately destroy the player, which is exactly what some people in Buea claim happened to Marc-Vivien Foé. In fact, most players in Buea believe that the successful African football players in Europe have all relied upon such powers at some point during their careers. They surely could not have gotten where they are now on their own account. Sorcerers and other traditional doctors must have helped them on their way to the top.

The third story is about Cameroon's national team and a secret society. It is said that the Indomitable Lions and a couple of officials from FECAFOOT visited a secret society before the start of the Confederations Cup. A secret society can make your wishes come true. But they expect compensation for their work. This compensation usually consists of a human sacrifice. As was the case with the captain of Olympique de Buea, the person to be sacrificed should be someone very close to you. The Indomitable Lions' wish was to win a major football tournament. The downside was that they had to sacrifice one player from their midst to reach that goal. That player turned out to be Marc-Vivien Foé. Cameroon did manage to reach the final of the tournament where they beaten 1-0 by their former colonial ruler, France. Why Cameroon did not win the Confederations Cup was probably the main topic of new rumours and gossip.

The case of Marc-Vivien Foé shows how the death of a player can lead to multiple spiritual explanations. In this instance, and in others as well, one will never know who is telling the truth or, in fact, if anybody is even remotely close to telling the truth. Indeed, I wish to emphasize that all stories of witchcraft and sorcery lie within the misty realm between truth and fiction since most of the stories are a direct result of human emotions and hidden agendas.

## Bewitching the coach, the field and the team

Zé and I are now walking along one of the eight official trails through the Botanical Gardens. There are trails leading to the ocean side, to places where lava used to flow down the mountain to the sea, and to areas with centuries-old trees. We decide to visit the nearby amphitheatre in Jungle Village. The spiritual adviser's voice echoes from all four corners of the theatre as he starts talking about witchcraft and sorcery among the executives of the clubs.

It is not difficult to understand that if players can be angry and jealous of each other, the same emotions can be found among club executives too. It is mostly the head coach who has to endure a lot of witchcraft and sorcery against his person, such as the coach of Olympique de Buea. As gossip went around town, I heard that the last coach was either bewitched by the former technical director of the club or by coaches from other clubs. To begin with the former technical director, he was very angry when he had to leave the club. It is said that he went

to a traditional doctor to put witchcraft on the team as long as the coach was still employed by Olympique de Buea. This, then, is the reason why the team lost six matches in a row. Finally the president found out about it and had to fire the coach to bring luck back to the team.

In the second story, the same coach supposedly said during a press conference in Yaoundé that there were no good coaches in Cameroon. Naturally, the coaches were very angry and, as the story goes, bewitched him to make sure his team would stop winning matches. Thus, in addition to the already mentioned corruption, the coach may have been dismissed because of a witchcraft or sorcery attack.

When executives start putting witchcraft and sorcery on each other, the team is bound to start losing matches. Usually, it is one of the assistant coaches who bewitches the head coach in order to take his place. If one wants to get rid of a head coach, the thing to do is to stop him from having success with the team. After a few lost matches, the president will surely fire him.

To take Olympique de Buea as an example again, I know that the assistant coach started to dislike the new head coach. It was said that he put medicine on the team so that the team stopped winning matches. Indeed, the president fired the head coach (after losing a match to Caiman de Douala) and he made the assistant coach the new head coach. When the fired head coach left Buea to return to his village in the Eastern Province, he was said to have complained about the witchcraft practices of the assistant coach.

According to Essomba, at the very moment he became the new head coach, the assistant coach removed the medicine from the team so that he could win matches again. 'Most coaches are not friendly,' he says. 'Some of them will not want the other to be the head coach. Sometimes the head coach is not as well-trained as the assistant coach so he will always be angry that he's only the assistant. The assistant coach will go and see a traditional doctor. He will do some traditional medicine. He will block the team so that it will lose five matches. The head coach will be sent away and the assistant coach will be the head coach.'

Zé has a similar story to tell about Fovu de Baham from the West Province. This story involves a 'white' head coach.

Ever since their white coach came, they have not been doing well because the black coaches around him don't want the white coach. So they are trying to use a spell to discourage the team, so that any time the white coach stands as the head coach, the team doesn't win. That's what's happening to Fovu. When they bring in a white coach they will play about five matches without winning even one.

So this time when the white coach came they lost six straight matches. The club president said: "Okay, they have started again." He knows what's going on! He's an African. The man has experience. On so many occasions he wondered: "Why is it that the team is doing fine, but when I bring in a white technician everything falls apart, and not even once or twice?"

He told the black coaches at a meeting that even if the team club loses matches and goes down to division two, this coach was not going. He said: "I brought him here and he has to be here. I used my money in bringing him here."

So the black coaches were afraid that the president had understood them and they stopped. Now they have won three straight matches with the same coach.

The examples of witchcraft and sorcery among team mates and executives are all related to people within the same team and club. It proves that a team and a club are not as homogeneous and united as they sometimes appear. Individual executives and players have their own goals in life and these do not always correspond with the goals of the team or club in general.

Supporters too can become jealous of each other or, in this case, of supporters of another club. This is actually the first story of witchcraft, sorcery and black magic I heard after arriving in Cameroon. Everybody in Buea knew about the story of Sable de Batie. Sable de Batie is, as we know, a club from the West Province. It was formed back in 1996 but managed to win the D1 competition just three years later. It is therefore known as one of the bigger clubs from the Bamileke region. The club, however, has had to endure a lot of hatred from the supporters of Racing de Bafoussam. This story confirms what Kalla said on Wednesday, namely that internal conflicts and tribalism in the Bamileke region prevent these teams from winning the D1 competition each and every year. Zé, Kalla and several players in Buea explained the situation to me.

Batie is a village near Bafoussam. Baham is a village near Bafoussam. Neither team has a decent field in their village. Some years ago the teams decided to start playing their first-division matches in Bafoussam. Bafoussam is the capital of the West Province and home of one of the oldest teams in the province, namely Racing.

Sable de Batie and Fovu de Baham are doing well in the competition. They are even doing better than Racing. The supporters of Racing are getting very jealous. Racing wants its name back in town. It wants to be the most popular team again.

The supporters of Racing went to see a traditional doctor. They asked the doctor to spoil the field for Sable and Fovu. The traditional doctor went to the field and performed certain rituals. So every time Sable and Fovu played their home matches on the field in Bafoussam, they wouldn't be able to win the match.

Last year Fovu found out that the Racing supporters were interfering with their matches. They wrote a letter to FECAFOOT to say that they would no longer play in Bafoussam. So they started playing their home matches in Mbouda, which is another village near Bafoussam. The team in Mbouda, Bamboutos, didn't mind if Fovu went to play its matches in the village. And since then there were no more problems for Fovu.

At the beginning of this year Sable also wrote a letter to FECAFOOT in which they said that they would play their home matches in Douala. FECAFOOT said that there were already several first-division teams in Douala so they refused Sable's request. The football federation said that if Sable wanted to play in Douala, they would have to do it in the second division. So Sable had to stay in Bafoussam.

Now, halfway through the competition they haven't won a single match in Bafoussam. They have drawn six matches and lost two. So Sable has to find a solution.

This is what Essomba tells me about the story of Sable de Batie. 'Whenever Sable is ahead with 25 points and Racing has 17, the Racing supporters will do

something to block Sable. Sable will also block Racing so that they go ahead. You cannot imagine that since the season started, Sable has won only two away matches. It's very bad. So they can win outside of Bafoussam, but not in Bafoussam.' Note that the supporters of Sable de Batie started doing the same thing, namely having a native doctor bewitch or spoil the field to obstruct Racing de Bafoussam.

People from outside the club can also exhibit angry or jealous behaviour towards the team. This is exactly what happened to Tonnerre de Yaoundé in this year's D1 competition (2003). We already know that Tonnerre is one of the oldest and best-managed clubs in the country. Their problem is that somebody has *blocked* the team altogether. This kind of witchcraft or sorcery is also called 'lock the team', 'tie the team' or 'putting a padlock on the team'. A traditional doctor is the person who has put the padlock on the team and he is the one who holds the key. Zé and several players in Buea told me the following story.

The owner of Tonnerre died a few years ago. He was the club's founding father. A general in the army put down FCFA 300 million (€ 457,000); the secretary-general of the club FCFA 200 million (€ 304,000). The first became the president; the second the vice-president. They bought a lot of good players, like George Weah, and then sold them for a lot of money. The club's income was FCFA 100 million (€ 152,000). Tonnerre was better organized than any other club in the country. They could pay each player a salary of between FCFA 250,000 and FCFA 500,000 (€ 381 to € 762) every month.

So after the two men took over, the club was doing fine, better than before. They were running the club like a company. After some time the general left the club. The secretary-general became the president.

All of a sudden the wife of the founding father discovered that there was money in the club, so she wanted the club back in family hands. The club president said: "You are too late. You can buy shares and be a shareholder." The wife went to court, but the judge agreed with the president.

Then the wife said openly that the team would drop down to the second division if they didn't give it back to her. Tonnerre is a very big club so people didn't take her very seriously. The widow went to see a traditional doctor. This doctor put a spell on the team. He tied the team. At the moment, Tonnerre is third from last in the league. They have the best players and one of the best coaches, but they cannot win their matches. They are trying very hard to untie the team but so far they have not been very successful.

The club has been divided into two camps now. Most of the followers of the team are behind the woman's family because they are from the same area. For example, the man who owns Victoria United in Limbe is a local man. But let's say that somebody from Tiko becomes the club president. Then the people from Limbe will say: "We want our team back." The majority of the supporters are behind that woman because the father was the founder of the club.

Why do people suspect that a team is bewitched as there can be many reasons for a team to lose matches? Zé told me that he had seen Tonnerre de Yaoundé play a match against Union de Douala. 'Tonnerre played very well and they had many chances to score. When they play like this and still lose the match, I knew something was wrong. Anybody could see it. They cannot put the ball into the

net. It's like there is somebody who's blocking the ball when it is coming into the net, which is possible.'

He said the same thing about matches of Fovu de Baham when the black coaches were obstructing the white head coach. According to him, there is great unity within the team, the individual players are very talented and they employ good tactics, but they still lose their matches. So, if people realize that 'normal' circumstances cannot be the reason for a team to lose matches, they are more likely to search for a spiritual explanation. Another instance of suspecting that there is witchcraft and sorcery involved is when a team such as Olympique de Buea loses six matches in a row. Indeed, we now know that the former technical director may have blocked the coach and, therefore, also the team.

Zé and I are walking back towards Church Street in the centre of Limbe where taxi drivers are waiting for passengers. I say goodbye to him and get into a taxi with one other person. The time of departure is set according to the ability of the taxi driver to attract enough passengers – in this instance, three of them. The sun is dropping rapidly behind one of the many hills. Nightlife in Limbe is about to start. As the bus gains speed on the main road, I can see that two vehicles have hit each other head on. I have to think about Ashu's words when he said that a traffic accident is usually caused when a witch or sorcerer steps into a taxi or bus. He will make the vehicle crash and then he just walks away. Considering the numerous accidents in Cameroon, it is no wonder that people look for explanations in the spiritual world.

Then my thoughts are directed towards the bewitchment of Tonnerre de Yaoundé. 'Locking the team' must be by far the most direct way of making teams lose football matches throughout the season.

### Ashu's ring

It appears to be an ordinary ring. It is made of gold and I can see a bit of engraving on the side. Ashu bought the ring in a market a few years ago. I am not quite sure why I have to take a look at this ring. Five minutes ago I knocked on Ashu's door to see if he was still feeling ill. He said he was okay, closed the sheets hanging in front of the window and started to speak softly. 'If I didn't have my ring, I could have been seriously ill.'

Apparently, the ring has defensive powers against witchcraft and sorcery. 'When I returned home from my test match in Ghana, I was sick for a long time,' Ashu says. 'It was then that I noticed that people could bewitch you. I had to find protection against this.' It seems that parental protection through traditional benediction and the ancestral cup is not enough; players need more protection against all sorts of evil powers.

When Ashu went to see a sorcerer in his hometown, the man took a metal pot, put powders and herbs in it and placed it above an open fire. He started grinding the herbs in the pot. The ring was placed inside the pot until it turned red. Then the sorcerer placed the red-hot ring on Ashu's finger. It did not hurt him at all. Now Ashu had a specially prepared ring that would protect him against all kinds of witchcraft and sorcery. Most players would call such items talismans or lucky charms.

Ashu says the ring has protected him before. In that case, he suspects the same Francophone player who injured the former captain (now the team manager) of Buea Boys of bewitching him as well. His story starts at the beginning of the 2003 football season when the head coach made him team captain. This story is not about the recent spiritual attack (yesterday's black-out on the field) but about one that happened earlier.

The Francophone player who bewitched the former captain of Buea Boys had been disappointed again. When Ashu came to the training session one day, the Francophone player greeted him and shook his hand. Some time later the ring broke into several pieces on the field. Ashu quickly picked up the pieces and called for two of his team mates. 'I told them to see it for themselves, but I didn't want them to tell anyone. I wanted them to be eyewitnesses. Then I wrapped the remains of the ring in a piece of paper. I will keep the ring until I take it to the person who gave it to me. Then he will see what has happened because he's the only one who can tell me what's going on with the ring. If he tells me, I can tell you. For now I only know that it was for defence.'

One of these players was Joseph who confirmed the story later on. There was an attack and the ring had indeed been broken but the perpetrator had failed to hurt Ashu. Luckily the sorcerer gave him a second ring, the one he is wearing now.

I am still trying to comprehend this story when Ashu takes a cardboard box out from underneath his bed. He unwraps the four remaining pieces of ring. 'You know,' he says, 'just before the attack I knew something was about to go wrong. Whenever there is danger, the ring will turn black. That's what happened the day before the attack.' If this should happen, the sorcerer told Ashu, he would have to remove the ring quickly because the blackness and the subsequent heating of the ring could cut off his finger. After removing the ring, he would have to wash himself in hot salty water. Afterwards he had to squeeze a lime and rub the juice all over his body.

The sorcerer had not only given Ashu the ring with a detailed set of instructions but the latter was also informed about the ring's 'expiry date'. Apparently, a prepared ring like that cannot hold its protective powers forever. This particular ring is only 'valid' for the period of one year. Every protection has its own expiry

date, ranging from six months to two years to even 15 or 20 years. Also, every protection has its own strict rules for the bearer – and these usually have something to do with women.

So Ashu has yet another reason for going to his village. ‘His’ sorcerer can tell him what happened on the field at the beginning of the year *and* earlier this week. But Ashu tells me that everybody knew that it was the Francophone player who had bewitched him. Soon after the attack, the head coach dismissed the player from the team. Now there is another player who is challenging him for the captain’s band. This time the player will not be dismissed so easily, since he enjoys the protection of the assistant coach.

Ashu tells me that whoever has tried to bewitch him this week should be very afraid. It seems that there are different kinds of protection. Some only protect the bearer from witchcraft and sorcery but others will protect and strike back at the same time. For instance, the ring is comparable to a mirror because it sends the attack back to the perpetrator. Whereas some forms of protection will only send the original attack back to its ‘owner’, other forms, such as the ring, will send the original attack back and with much more force. According to Ashu, his ring can even strike the perpetrator in a deadly fashion.

I am quite confused when I leave the compound, although I am glad that Ashu is feeling better. He said that the short nature of his illness proves that his protection was ‘sound’. I am walking down the main road towards the beach bar where a lot of Olympique de Buea players are hanging out right now. Some of them are sitting at the bar with a Pamplemousse (soda) watching a Nigerian movie on television. One of the players is eating *fufu* and *eru*, which is made of leaves and cassava.

The person I want to meet is not at the bar but some time later I come across him in his compound. Essomba wants to buy me some food at a bar down the main road. He orders two big fish and a woman puts them directly on a grill in front of the bar. This is what Cameroonians really like: roasted fish with onions and pepper. It is imperative for me to buy a bottle of beer to wash away the spicy pepper. Suddenly I hear a strange loud cracking sound. The head of the fish just disappeared into Essomba’s mouth. It is difficult to get used to the fact that everybody likes to order ‘head fish’. I myself usually go for ‘tail fish’, although without intending to actually eat the tail. Essomba informs me that the eyes are ‘very sweet’ and that they ‘melt in your mouth’.

### Essomba’s lion skin

We are relaxing in Essomba’s room. Now that I have heard something about protection against witchcraft and sorcery, I might as well ask him about his own.

After all, Ashu has just assured me that *every* player has protection. At first, Essomba is hesitant to tell me anything. 'I believe in God. That's enough.'

Then he changes his mind and opens a side pocket of his bag. 'There is something in my bag. I move everywhere with it but it's not good to tell you, because it's dangerous.' This 'something' looks like an ordinary seed from a particular kind of fruit. It was given to him by his grandfather in the village. He says that he brings the seed along whenever he leaves the house. 'I don't show it to people,' Essomba says. 'Most people don't know. You may see it in my bag but you will never know what it is. It's just for protection in life against people. When they try me, they will know that I am strong. And they will not want to come close to me because it disturbs them. The seed protects me from accidents, from bad people, those who are jealous, witchcraft ...'

The seed is protection in general and so is the black powder he is showing me. He says he uses the powder three times a day – by placing some of it on his tongue – whenever he is going 'to a party or on tour because your friend can always put something in your food. If they do something, it will not affect me.'

Essomba says he also has specific protection for football. He takes a small jar out of the bedside cabinet with some sort of black liquid in it. He applies it to his face and it seems to be changing colours. 'I've been using it for three years now. If I want to play, I just rub it on my face.' Why the face? He tells me that whenever a traditional doctor wants to put sorcery on a person, he has to be able to see the face – in a bowl of water, a glass sphere or whatever he is using as a device. The liquid makes the face invisible to the doctor; hence he cannot do anything to hurt the person.

The black liquid also protects him in a more direct way. 'The opposing team might have used a type of medicine and when they touch you, you might suffer some effects,' Essomba says. 'When I have rubbed this medicine on me, it will not work.' For instance, when there is a match, it is customary for players from both teams to shake each other's hands. 'They have rubbed something in the palm of their hand and they shake your hand,' he explains. 'During the match you will be feeling dizzy but after the match you will be fine.'

So, in this case, can a player not simply decide to avoid shaking hands? 'How will you refuse to shake hands with him? Football is a friendly sport so you must greet your opponent by shaking hands. Did you listen to what Desailly (a player from France) said during the Confederations Cup? Desailly said that FIFA is spoiling everything. What is the need to greet people from one end to the other end? You can just greet the person beside you. Desailly is from Ghana so he knows those types of things. Later on FIFA said that greetings in football don't really mean anything. If you don't want to greet other players you can stay where



you are. But I greet by shaking hands. I'm not afraid because I'm already protected by a good native doctor.'

Essomba pushes his fist against mine. 'This is what some players do,' he says. 'They use a different style of greeting. It means that these players do not have enough protection.'

But how does Essomba know that the black liquid is actually working properly? It seems that traditional doctors perform tests on whatever it is they have prepared for their 'client'. 'After giving you the medicine, the traditional doctor greets you with another medicine to make sure you are not weakened. By using the other one that makes people weak, they will touch you and see the effect.'

Now Essomba becomes more mysterious as he walks towards a corner of the room. He stands on a chair and reaches on top of his closet and grabs another small plastic jar. 'This is the most powerful protection I have,' he says. I am allowed to take a look inside. It is difficult to identify the content but it seems to be some sort of feather and a bone with red powder around it. 'It has so many things that they have brought together and joined, like the skin of a lion. That red powder is to make the medicine stronger so that it cannot be destroyed.'

Essomba tells me that he uses both the black liquid and the skin of the lion before he goes to a training session or an official match. However, the jar with the skin of the lion never leaves the house. 'I only take it and put it in front of me and pray. Then I touch it before leaving. I don't carry it anywhere. When I pray, I don't open my door. When somebody is knocking I don't answer until I finish praying. I will pray and touch it and say: "God, I have never tried to do anything bad to anybody and I don't see why any of my friends should do anything to me. May you protect me because I am pure. I don't do any evil as I am living. I don't want anybody to harm me." Then I will cover it and go to the match.'

So how did he find the right traditional doctor to get protection? Again, there are many bad traditional doctors and most players know of good ones through relatives, friends or even supporters of the club. 'There may be some supporters who like me,' Essomba explains. 'They know some good and strong medicine people. I can be going along the road and they will call me and ask: "Have you protected yourself?" If not, they will advise me to go somewhere. He is a supporter. He loves you as a football player. He will show you one guy and you will be protected very seriously.'

With regard to the skin of the lion, it was Essomba's uncle who put him in contact with one particular traditional doctor. The uncle took him from the village to a faraway place.

My uncle said I should buy some whisky and *savon*. The man doesn't accept any money. The man is old, around 68 years. He's not married. He's just living there with his goat, fowl and dog alone. He's a very good man. If a friend is planning evil, he will tell you. He will give you a calabash and you will go and fetch water. He tells you everything about the

friend. You will say to him: "I am a football player. I want to protect myself from enemies, especially those who want to put medicine on me." He will then ask you to bring things, like a fowl, cat, a snake. He will prepare something for you.

After that you would go fishing. He will show you a certain lake. You will fish around the lake for an hour. If you succeed in catching a fish, then your protection will be proper but if you don't catch anything, he will ask you to go and come back the following day. Catching the fish means that the gods have accepted what you have asked for. You will catch the fish from the lake and bring it to him. He makes some medicine. He also cuts a place from your skin and blood will come out. He puts something inside the fish's mouth and the fish swallows it and it's thrown back into the lake.

So sometimes there is an ordeal involved before getting the right protection. I ask whether the traditional doctor specifically prepares protection against fellow players. 'No!' Essomba cries out. 'Do you think that when you are playing on the field, everybody will like you? Not only players can be jealous of you. Good protection is to protect you from the society you live in.'

I ask him if his necklace is also prepared but he says it is only there for 'make-up'. It seems that Essomba is not too fond of prepared necklaces, or rings for that matter, because one can always lose them. 'Those protections that they give you to wear are very bad. You shouldn't take them. Good protection is the one they put in your blood. They cut you with a razor blade and they put white powder inside. They can also do it by putting you in a drum of water and do some traditional thing to you so that it will go to your skin.'

Many players, Essomba and Ashu included, seem to have been cut by razor blades on their arms, chest or sometimes even on both cheeks to be protected against witchcraft and sorcery. After having seen three striped scars running parallel to each other on several places on Essomba's body, I say goodbye to him. It is getting late and we have to get up early in the morning for the trip to Mbouda.

## Saturday

When I visit Essomba in his room, he is busy packing his football jersey, his boots and some other things in a travel bag. It feels like we are going camping and that is exactly what people call it here. With the protective seed hidden inside his bag, Essomba and I are leaving for the stadium. It is almost nine o'clock.

The latest news is already coming our way. An Olympique de Buea player informs us that the new goalkeeper (B) is very angry with the coach because he is not the team's number one goalkeeper. He is especially upset because of the fact that the old goalkeeper (A) has been in goal the last couple of matches. Hence he has decided to stay at home as a form of protest. When we reach the stadium the news is confirmed by the third goalkeeper who was called up only half an hour ago to accompany the team to Mbouda. The first goalkeeper for tomorrow's match will be the old goalkeeper.

Since the bus has not arrived yet, Essomba and I sit ourselves down at an eating spot. He orders *okro* soup with beef for both of us. The vice-president and (former) team manager Kalla join us for breakfast. Normally, the vice-president does not accompany the team but this time he has received orders from the president to do so because this match is very important for Olympique de Buea.

At ten o'clock a medium-sized bus drives dangerously fast up the road, only to stop for about fifteen minutes in front of the stadium. It is a rental bus from one of the many private companies in Cameroon. I learn that Olympique de Buea's official bus is way too old for long journeys such as this one. The driver is loading the bags of the players and executives into the baggage area underneath the bus, while everybody finds a seat inside. There is not enough space for all the bags, so a few players have to keep their bags on their laps. It appears that the

policy of overcrowded buses has extended to this particular bus because the players have to sit almost on top of each other to make room for the entire team.

## On the road

When the doors have closed, the driver takes 18 players, three coaches, one vice-president, one technical director, one team doctor and a white guy straight out of Buea. As for the team doctor, Essomba says he is a nurse from the local hospital. The bus turns left at the major roundabout near Tiko and after a while we have officially entered the West Province. Today we are only driving as far as Bandjoun for the simple reason that the president of Olympique de Buea owns a large hotel in this town.

I am sitting next to Essomba and the Rasta player. One player behind me is reading a book about fasting and a few other players carry the Bible with them. Most players are silently looking out of the window. It is still early and we have a journey of about four hours ahead of us. The landscape is slowly changing from a flat and somewhat colourless terrain into green hills and valleys with small villages everywhere. Essomba tells me that the West Province is rich in foodstuffs, especially now that the rainy season has started. I can see a lot of cows and sheep as we drive towards Nkongsamba which, as we know, had a team participating in the very first D1 football season in 1960. Not long afterwards, we make a right turn and half an hour later the road leads us through Bafang, the hometown of Unisport.

Then we come across a roadblock with soldiers on both sides of the road. One of the soldiers makes certain gestures that any normal person would interpret as a stop sign. Our driver parks at the side of the road. The soldier discusses something with the driver, the vice-president and the technical director. 'Can't you see that we are Olympique de Buea?' shouts the vice-president. 'Let us pass!' The soldier wants to know why he cannot see the name of the club on the side of the bus. 'It's a rental bus, you fool!' is the only thing the guy will hear because the driver has already taken us back onto the road.

The rule in Cameroon is that first-division teams are guaranteed free passage when on the road to an official match. Since the D1 competition falls directly under the Ministry of Youth and Sports and since players and executives have specific football ID, there is no reason to stop the bus for a check. Considering the many roadblocks, this 'football rule' saves us a lot of time – and most definitely also a lot of money.

Thirty minutes later we pass the village of Batie where we find the Sable team, the one with the problem in Bafoussam. Only fifteen minutes later we are driving through the town of Baham with its sometimes very successful first-division

team Fovu. Finally, we have arrived at the club president's hotel in the town of Bandjoun.

The technical director divides the rooms among the travellers. Each player will share a double room with one other team mate. Many players seem to have preferences when it comes to choosing a roommate. We have seen earlier that the Buea Boys players always share a room in Buea. This time the reason is exactly the same: letting two players share a room is said to improve team unity.

The club executives are entitled to a room of their own. Since I am not allowed to sleep in any of the players' rooms, I accept the team doctor's invitation to share his room. The doctor's room is by far the biggest room with a large bathroom, a bedroom with one king-size bed and an extra room where he can treat players. We are both unpacking our bags in the bedroom. The doctor places a carpet in one corner of the room. He is a Muslim. As far as I know, the third goalkeeper is the only other Muslim in the team.

It is four o'clock in the afternoon. We have just got on the bus again for a trip to the football stadium. It is time for one of the last training sessions before tomorrow's match. The stadium is located at the top of a hill and provides a panoramic view over the town. Dark clouds are hanging low and a cold wind is blowing over the field.

The stadium here in Bandjoun looks very similar to the one in Buea with only one wooden stand, a poorly maintained field and a thick brick wall around it. The difference is that the field is not grass or little rocks from the ocean but instead is made of red gravel. 'The problem with this gravel,' one of the assistant coaches tells me, 'is that it cannot absorb rain too well.' As a result, the water stays on the field for a long time which slows down play. Also, when the sun shines after it has rained, it reflects in the red gravel and the players cannot even see the other end of the field, let alone the goalposts. This kind of field is dangerous for the players since they can easily get seriously injured.

Today's training session is easy. The coach involves the players in some tactical games of football. Afterwards, I see a few players contacting the local girls.

## What is football magic?

I am watching television in the dining room. A couple of players are also watching whatever is on television. Others are chatting in the lobby, others still are probably playing cards in their hotel rooms.

The other day when I was visiting Zé, we got talking about something that was neither witchcraft nor sorcery but which was related to both nonetheless. This was football magic, and it may well be one of the most important aspects of Cameroonian football. It is the core activity of this spiritual adviser's profession.

He is hired by clubs for match preparation – and he is said to be pretty good at it as well.

Whereas yesterday's stories had more to do with witchcraft, sorcery and other very negative powers, magic is generally speaking a rather more positive or innocent way of getting certain powers as a player or a team. 'Witchcraft and sorcery are always evil,' Zé said, 'but magic hardly ever does evil.' His magic is mostly harmless to the players but it does make the team win its matches. That is also the reason why he does not like to be called a witch doctor. 'The word sounds so negative,' Zé explains. 'Besides, I don't do "witchcraft". I'm merely an adviser in spiritual affairs. That's why I like to be called a spiritual adviser.'

Zé told me many things about magic, as did team manager Kalla of Olympique de Buea, Ashu and Essomba, and many others. But what is football magic anyway? 'Magic is the skill to make the impossible possible in a very short period of time by using herbs and spirits,' Ashu told me. Zé has the following statement about magic. 'When you look at a white object and somebody changes it to blue – just now as we are sitting here – that is what we call magic. When you make things happen that are impossible in the eyes or the mind, that is magic.' Magic, however, is not considered to be a trick but is thought to really 'do' something in the real world.

Magic is, as I said before, not the same thing as witchcraft. Witchcraft is a natural force that is found within people. Magic is not necessarily found within people but since it is a skill, just like bricklaying, it can be mastered and practised by people. In this case, magic is very similar to sorcery. Both magic and sorcery are man-made spiritual powers in the sense that someone knowingly has to call upon such powers. Evans-Pritchard (1976: 176-177) argues that '... magic and sorcery alike involve magical rites using objects fashioned from trees and plants. These objects are what we have called "medicines"'.

In a sense, sorcery lies closer to magic than it does to witchcraft because of the skills involved, but sorcery also lies further from magic and closer to witchcraft because of its evil proposition. But to complicate matters even further, magic too can be used for good or for evil. Evans-Pritchard (1976: 188) states that certain '... medicines are classified as good, certain medicines as bad, while on yet others there is no strong moral opinion ...' Thus making the opposing team play poorly throughout the match is usually considered to be good or white (and thus harmless) magic because the opponents will feel quite alright when the match is over. Causing a player to break his leg or to feel suddenly extremely ill is considered to be bad or black magic for obvious reasons. The latter, in turn, cannot really be distinguished from sorcery and, perhaps, witchcraft.

The difference between good and bad magic is subjective and depends on the actors and the context within which it occurs. As Evans-Pritchard (1976: 193)

argues, ‘... whereas subjectively there is a clear division of magic into good and bad, objectively there are only medicines which men use when they consider that they have good grounds for employing them’. In other words, you have to look at how and why someone uses medicines to determine whether it is good or bad. ‘Good magic,’ Evans-Pritchard explains, ‘is moral because it is used against unknown persons’ (Ibid.: 189). Although sometimes players’ names are written down on a piece of paper, football magic really is meant to weaken an entire team regardless of the personality of specific players. ‘Bad magic,’ Evans-Pritchard continues, ‘is made against definite persons ...’ (Ibid.: 189-190). We have seen that witchcraft and sorcery are directed against specific people in one’s own surroundings.

The most important distinction between good and bad magic is that practitioners of the former are labelled as magicians, while practitioners of the latter are called sorcerers. Magicians prepare white magic, sorcerers employ black magic. In Malinowski’s (1984: 421) case, the Trobriand Islanders certainly are afraid of sorcerers who are ‘... feared as ghosts are feared by us, as an uncanny manifestation. One is afraid of meeting him in the dark, not so much because he might do any harm, but because his appearance is dreadful and because he has at his bidding all sorts of powers and faculties which are denied to those not versed in black magic.’

While the image of a sorcerer is similar to the monster under the child’s bed or in the closet, the image of the magician or spiritual adviser may be one of an artist who is asked to do something without hurting anyone. Sorcerers always operate at night but the work of spiritual advisers is generally *not* associated with the night and with darkness. ‘The other magicians and their art do not inspire such strong emotions in the natives,’ Malinowski (1984: 422) argues, ‘and of course in any case the emotion would not be that of dread. There is a very great value and attachment to systems of local magic, and their effects are distinctly considered as an asset for a community.’

An example, as told by Zé, is that of the magic involved in constructing a specific bridge in Limbe. In the transitional period between the dry season and the wet season in 2003, local government officials employed traditional doctors who were supposed to stop any rainfall while construction workers were building this very important bridge. Although it did rain occasionally in an otherwise exceptionally dry period, the example gives us an idea of the beneficial functions of magic in society.

I already said before that players in Buea do not really make any distinction between all of these spiritual forces. Some scholars even fail to distinguish witchcraft from sorcery and magic. In discussing *juju* practices in Tanzanian football, Leseth (1997: 159) starts out with the concept of ‘football magic’ but then conti-

nuously speaks of 'witchcraft' and 'witch doctors'. But there is a difference and it would not be fair to Zé to put him in the same category as witches and sorcerers. He definitely would not appreciate that.

The fact remains, though, that there is white and black magic being prepared in football. We will now see some examples of both.

## Individual magic

Generally speaking, there are two kinds of magic in football: individual magic and collective magic. Starting with individual magic, it is possible for a player to go to a spiritual adviser and receive magic to give him certain advantages on the field. Individual magic does not really make a player play better physically. It alters the surroundings to the extent that a particular player can take advantage of it – sometimes at the expense of his team mates or the players of the opposing team. There are numerous kinds of individual magic but I do not know many of them. I will just give a few examples.

As in protection against witchcraft and sorcery or asking for the bewitchment of fellow team mates, individual magic is usually 'collected' from a native doctor in the villages of the respective player. First of all, they are relatively cheap and trustworthy. 'In the village the native doctors will want to give you something,' Essomba says, 'because you, as a football player, can make the village proud.' Most players collect magic before the start of the competition and some of them get more between the first and second halves of the competition.

The first example of individual magic is related to older players in a team. Zé told me that 'Africans believe in names, not in what you can do,' meaning that well-known players, mostly older and experienced ones, enjoy a certain respect in football. An example is a midfielder with Olympique de Buea who has played a major role in bringing the Cup of Cameroon to Buea. This year he has certainly reached the end of his football career but he still enjoys the full confidence of the president, vice-president and supporters of Olympique.

However, the new coach does not share their view and, instead, will leave him out during upcoming important matches. The point is that it is inevitable for an old player to lose his credibility in the eyes of (at least some) club executives, supporters and the coach because he will simply be too old to play well. In this case, the traditional doctor can prepare specific individual magic that makes everybody love the player when he is on the field, no matter how bad his performance may actually be. 'It's just like what some women do,' Zé explains. 'They make a charm and when you see them, you are mad about them.'

Although younger players may also use this kind of magic, it is especially practical for the older players. 'They feel that they're already old,' Zé says.



‘They’re leaving the game and they know they have been unable to make money out of football. The old player fears his retirement because when he leaves, nobody will see him and he loses everything. None of these players has FCFA three million in their bank account so if they stop now, their retirement will be catastrophic. That’s why they fight to be there. Some of the players take this magic so that they can be seen and needed by the president.’

Let it be noted that I am not suggesting that the Olympique de Buea midfielder has used this kind of magic. He was merely an example of an older player.

The second example relates to magic that can influence the referee during the match. Essomba tells me that some players hold magic in the palms of their hands when they greet the referee before the start of the match. The powder’s magic affects the referee to the extent that he will not show any cards to those players. ‘I can do something to the referee,’ Essomba says. ‘I will play so many bad games and he will not give me any yellow cards. Most people will think that we are friends. You see some people play a bad game but they don’t get any yellow cards. At certain times you will have serious doubts. You will think: this man is supposed to get a red card. Why doesn’t he get one? Because he has done something to influence the referee. The referee will see your bad play like some innocent thing but the supporters are shouting “bad game”. So even the referees have to go to the native doctor for protection so that they cannot be confused.’

This magic is similar to the magic of the older players since both are intended to make somebody else like you. Also, both examples are explanations of why older players are still playing matches and why some players receive a card for bad play and others do not. However, other explanations may be that the old players, as we have seen earlier, still enjoy ‘protection’ by the executives and supporters. Also, the referee who gives one player a red card and the other nothing for a similar offence may have been bribed.

I heard that club executives regard individual magic as something that may harm the unity of the team for two reasons. First, when there is a lot of individual magic in the team, the different kinds of magic can start working against one another. In this instance, the magic will have worked counterproductively for the unity of the team. This is said to have happened within Olympique de Buea and it is also given as a reason why the team started to perform badly in the competition after several weeks. Second, individual magic can obstruct the collective magic in a team in the same way that individual magic can work against other individual magic.

In the end, it is difficult to know if a player has indeed used individual magic or not. For one thing, a player will not want another player to know what he has in terms of magic because the other player can do something to disturb or counteract the magic. The same applies to witchcraft protection, which is supposed to

be a private and secret matter. Another point is that no player will ever tell anyone that he needs magic to play football because this would be equal to admitting that he is not a good player.

## Dinner time

The driver takes the bus back to the hotel. It is quarter past five. Most players are getting some rest in their rooms before dinner. The doctor's room is probably the busiest place in the hotel right now. Players are walking in and out, asking for medical attention. Usually they want a massage and the doctor accompanies the player to his room. After two hours of walking from room to room, the doctor returns to inform me that dinner will be at 7.30.

The players have already picked up their food at the bar when I enter the dining room. I have to sit and eat with the coaches, the doctor and the vice-president. It is a rule in Olympique de Buea that the players have to eat among themselves to enhance team spirit.

The food for the players is not chosen at random. The former medical doctor at Olympique de Buea, who lives in Limbe, told me that he designed a specific food schedule for the players to ensure that they perform optimally. Apparently, the club is still using this doctor's schedule. The players are not allowed to eat heavy food the evening before a match and certainly not in the few hours before the actual start of a match. Essomba tells me that he and his team mates cannot eat *garri*, *fufu*, *batafufu*, *fufu* and *eru* or beans, among other things, because these foods will sit too heavily on their stomachs.

Rice and pasta are considered to be light foods. So this is why the players are served rice or spaghetti with chicken as a main course and different kinds of fruit for dessert. Sometimes they get a salad with carrot, avocado, lettuce and bread as a starter. Cooked or baked plantains are also allowed to feature in the main course. The chicken seems to be unusually soft by local standards, which is probably better for the players' digestive systems.

It does not take long for the players to finish their dinner and soon everybody leaves the dining room to return to their own rooms. I will not see them anymore this evening, except for Essomba who stays a little longer with me in the dining room. When he starts telling me the advantages of going on tour, it appears that they also spend the night before every *home* match in a compound on the club president's private property.

When players stay at home the evening and night before the match, people can 'disturb' them, as Essomba calls unannounced visits. 'In football,' he says, 'you cannot just get up in the morning and play. This is the first division. A good player always needs to concentrate on the match. You have to have good morale,

so that you can play a good match. You do not only play for yourself. You play for your supporters, for your president, and you want to make a good career because you have chosen football. Everybody in this world, whatever they do, they should have the goal of progressing, to get higher. I choose football, so I must do anything to have a good career.'

Going on tour is a way the coach and the club president can keep an eye on the players. 'If a player stays at home, you don't know what he will do. Going to a nightclub is not good. You'll only drink beer and dance till four o'clock in the morning.' Essomba now makes a sleepy gesture. 'You are coming like that to play the following day? Then you will not play a good match. And if one player in the team does not play a good match it means the whole team will suffer.'

I noticed that the president of Olympique de Buea makes sure that the team goes on tour before each and every match. In the case of Buea Boys, they only go on tour before an important match or when the town really is too far away. Usually such decisions are based on financial considerations.

## Bottles of water, digging holes, throwing coins

While Essomba and I are conversing in the dining room, it is approaching nine o'clock. He is supposed to go up to his room around ten. It gives me some time to ask the question about *collective magic* that has been on my mind for a while. Many people in Buea have asked me whether I saw the match between Victoria United and Olympique de Buea in Limbe, but I arrived in Buea a few weeks afterwards.

It was the fifth match in this year's D1 competition. Olympique de Buea had won the first three matches and drew the fourth, which was a very good start to the season. The match against Victoria United turned out to be the first match they lost in the well-known tragic row of six defeats. The reason behind the club losing this and five more matches appeared not only to be witchcraft inflicted on the coach by the former technical director but also the fact that Victoria United 'stole Olympique's magic'. It seems to be one of the bigger cases of magic in football in this year's (2003) competition.

The commotion during and after that particular match was related to a bottle of water – or Tangui, as bottled water is called. 'There was information that everything was in that water,' Zé says. 'That's what the supporters of Victoria United believed. So that's why they took away the water from Olympique de Buea's goalkeeper. Since that day things have not moved. Before that match the goalkeeper was wonderful. They played three matches and he didn't let in any goals. But this was the end of him. He's not playing as well as before.'

So now we have a second story surrounding the new goalkeeper (B). Besides the suspected witchcraft and sorcery by the old goalkeeper, the new goalkeeper apparently lost 'his' prepared bottle of water during this match in Limbe. Kalla tells us the story of the match.

Victoria United is a neighbour of Olympique de Buea's. Both teams became enemies as soon as they entered the first division. A match between Victoria and Olympique is more important than the Cup of Cameroon. The supporters of Victoria will say: "The president of Olympique is not an indigenous person. We will prove to you that we are indigenous to this land and that we have all the witchcraft of the land."

We needed to blind the eyes of the Victoria United attackers so we needed the bottle of water. Our water was meant to confuse the attackers. An attacker might see the pool clearly but in reality it's not the pool. And when he kicks the ball, the ball goes out because the bottle has covered the pool. Our players knew that the opponent was struggling to shoot inside the pool but he couldn't do it.

After halftime, the Victoria United supporters realized that the bottle had to be removed from that area – and they fought on the field. The referee sent them off but when he turned to concentrate on the field, they came back. Our goalkeeper fought with a boy while the match was going on. That boy was beaten and he died because of that bottle. He was a true supporter of Victoria United.

We were defeated 2-1. The issue of the bottle created awareness so we decided never to use the bottle again.

This story tells us many things. First, matches between 'enemies' such as Victoria United and Olympique de Buea call for drastic measures with regard to football magic. Second, Victoria United supporters rushed onto the field during the second half of the match to take away the bottle of water. Essomba told me that the players of Olympique de Buea, and especially goalkeeper B, started fighting with the supporters of Victoria United. Some time later one young Victoria United supporter tried it again and was beaten unconscious by the players of Olympique de Buea. A few days later he died in hospital. Fighting and subsequent deaths are not uncommon when it comes to football magic. It is clear, then, that the average Cameroonian regards magic to be a serious affair.

Third, Cameroonians would call something in the goal a *deviative weapon* because it is supposed to divert any balls being shot at goal. A deviative weapon can also make it seem as if the goal is somewhere else. For instance, an attacker can shoot a ball in the direction of the goal, which turns out to be only an illusionary projection of a goal. In reality, the goal is located a bit to the left or right on the field.

Victoria United was suspected of having a deviative weapon in their goal during the big match against PWD Bamenda. At halftime, a group of executives and supporters of PWD Bamenda came onto the field and started to dig about in the gravel near the Victoria United goalposts. 'The players of Victoria United had thrown a concoction onto the field. That's what PWD Bamenda went in to

look for,' Zé explains. 'When the goalkeeper of Victoria United went to the other goal at halftime, he planted it again inside the goalpost.'

As Royer (2002: 466) argues, such objects are also used in Burkina Faso: '... goalkeepers may place a bag full of charms at the base of the net [which] ... will cause players on the other side to miss the goal throughout the entire game. Alternatively, objects can be left in the opponents' goal to affect their goalkeeper, slowing his reactions or making him see not one ball but several, or a lion instead of the ball.' Indeed, the Olympique de Buea goalkeeper always checks his own goal before the start of the match and before the second half.

Going back a little further in time, to 2002, Olympique de Buea employed a spiritual adviser from the North West Province who prepared concoctions for every match. The team used to circle around one of the corner areas and bury something on the field just before the start of the match. 'We buried something near the corner flag,' Essomba tells me. 'It was some medicine and some pieces of a cat and a needle. It was very powerful. We used it throughout the season and we won most of our home matches. Most people would come and start digging. When we buried our medicine, we dug another hole just to distract them. Then they would dig another hole, thinking that we had buried it there. There's always a lot of fighting everywhere we bury it. When they discovered the medicine we lost a lot of matches.'

Apparently, one other team dug up the magic and that was the end of it. It appears that every time the opposing teams find out about the specific magic being used, the team has to abandon it and look for other magic.

At the beginning of this year, Olympique de Buea employed the same or another spiritual adviser from the North West Province. According to Kalla, this man gave advice on how to handle the match.

The native doctor told me: "You should always prepare your match to score two goals. I will open the way for two goals." He gave me two prepared stones. He dropped the stones in water with herbs, then he put them in a fire and let them burn for 30 minutes. The stones first became red, then black. Then he tied them and gave them to me.

He said: "Give these to a midfielder and a defender. Let the two of them go onto the field first and throw these stones in an open space. This will make them score a goal." When one of our midfielders threw the stone, Olympique de Buea would score a goal within 10 minutes. When we scored, the defence would become stronger so that they couldn't score against us. So play was opened up to us. Our native doctor will be there controlling everything.

If I didn't use the stones in the right way, we would suffer. But when I did it in the right way and all the players respected the rules, it was good.

Within Buea Boys, it was usually Ashu who had to throw a stone or an egg onto the field. Most of the time, however, he was given a prepared coin (FCFA 5) to throw into the opposing team's goal. This had to be done in secret because

players or supporters of the opposing team could cause trouble on the field if they happened to see him throw something.

The main reason for throwing something in the goal of the opposing team is related to what people in Buea have called the *artificial mountain*. Just before the start of the match, the 11 players of many teams in Cameroon line up next to each other on the goal line. As their feet touch each other, they entirely close off the goal and the players simultaneously recite some incantations. In doing so, they block the goal by placing an artificial mountain in front of the goal. When Ashu throws the coin into the goal, he has countered this kind of magic by weakening or destroying the artificial mountain.

Besides letting specific players throw something on the field or in the goal of the opponents, the spiritual adviser to the North West Province also prepared the jerseys of Olympique de Buea. To be more precise, the team manager received instructions as to how to prepare the jerseys himself. 'I had to put all the jerseys on a table,' Kalla says. 'I lit five candles around it, a red one, yellow, black, blue and green. I was merely following orders. He wanted me to fill a glass of water and say some prayers. The water turned green. This means that the spirits were present and helping. The water started to give out a very strong scent. I poured the water over the jerseys. The next day I gave all the players their jerseys. Any evil spirits that may have been among them would disappear. If one player had a quarrel with another, they would both forget about it during the match. It brought unity to the team. One spirit.'

Deviative weapons, throwing prepared coins, artificial mountains, burying medicines on the pitch and preparing team jerseys: spiritual advisers have a wide variety of magic to choose from, depending on their own field of expertise. Some spiritual advisers even employ different methods for one and the same match. The overall task of the spiritual adviser is to prepare the whole team in order to win the match.

### Powerful magic and its *anti*

Many teams won a number of matches in a row by using powerful magic. Some teams employ spiritual advisers with a specialty in burying something on the field at the beginning of the year. For instance, PWD Bamenda had a spiritual adviser from the North West Province who did that and most other teams could not beat PWD at home. Kumbo Strikers also employed a spiritual adviser who did a similar thing on their field, leading to the team's biggest success in the 2000 D1 competition.

Essomba can tell us the story because he was playing for Kumbo Strikers (North West Province) that year. 'We didn't lose any match because we had one

strong man who was working with the team manager. The man came to the field and wrote down the names of all the players in the first-division teams. Then he put the medicine and the paper in the mouths of a white cat and a black cat. He buried the cats under the field very deep. He did all those things in the night. Then he left without looking behind. We the players were not there. We would only be there on the eve of the day when we are going to play a match. We just come and surround the centre and pray and leave. That's all.' One of the consequences of the paper with the names is that, as Essomba explains, 'the other players will be very heavy and unable to run fast on the field. They will just feel tired.'

Another example is that of Olympique de Buea when the assistant coach had taken over the role as head coach. Essomba told me that after every match the head coach goes to his village in the West Province to get his magic. One of the 'rules' with his magic is that he cannot sit down during the entire 90 minutes of the match. I have witnessed on several occasions that the coach just stood next to the reserves' bench with something in his hand. Even when the referee and the match delegate urged him to sit down, he did not respond and just stayed there. According to Essomba, this kind of magic is difficult to beat since none of the players have to throw or bury something and, as a consequence, nobody can find out what the team is using.

Essomba also told me the following story. 'The coach is doing something to block the other team so that they cannot score. They can play very well but it will be very difficult for them to score against us. That's why we've been winning 1-0 for more than four to five straight matches now. Most teams are really struggling to destroy what we're using but for the moment they don't know. So we're winning. But when they discover it, then they will know how to block it. At that moment there will be normal football on the field and the people who play well will win.'

The important thing to do for the other teams when they see one team winning a lot of matches is to find the right magic to counter the powerful magic of the winning team. For instance, we have seen that throwing a prepared coin in the goal is the counter magic of the artificial mountain.

Zé gave me a few examples of specific magic and its counter magic. There are, for instance, certain spirits of the ocean, locally known as *Mami Wata* or mermaids. To use the spirits one has to first make friends with them or, rather, they will become friends with you. 'Maybe you will go to the seaside at midnight,' he says. 'The beautiful lady of the sea sees you and falls in love with you. You are not the one to initiate it. They can see you and they like you.' Zé continues: 'There are many people who know how to evoke mermaids. You wake up

at midnight and go to the sea. There you will light incense and a candle and call their name and they will come. They will ask you: “What do you want?”

According to the spiritual adviser, a spirit such as the mermaid is similar to a slave. For one thing, they all have a type of scent they love. ‘Mermaids have their own scent. If you don’t know it, they cannot come. If I know it, I have to first put the perfume around the house and it has that scent. Then I can call them and I can tell them what to do. I will say: “Go to Olympique de Buea and protect their goal. Don’t allow any ball to pass.” They will come directly inside the goal and stand there. When the ball comes, they will take it outside. You will think the goalkeepers are doing well but the mermaids are there.’

I have heard of cases where the mermaid blocks the eyes of the goalkeeper so that he cannot see the ball coming towards the goalpost. Also, the mermaid can be ordered to hold down the arms of the goalkeeper to prevent him from catching a ball.

If one wants to counter the mermaids, then it would be wise to throw coconuts onto the field. Zé says that mermaids love coconuts and will start eating them right away, thereby forgetting all about their duties. There are also spirits from the forest who really like bananas. Indeed, several people told me that they witnessed how players threw bananas onto the field. It appears that the players understood the magic of the other team and countered it by distracting the spirits with the bananas.

Spirits such as mermaids can also be used for ball and jersey preparation. In this case, the ball or jerseys are sprinkled with an ointment that corresponds to the scent of the spirit. I already gave the example of how Kalla prepared the team jerseys at Olympique de Buea. In the near future, Buea Boys will play a match against Fovu de Baham in the quarter finals of the Cup of Cameroon. Fovu de Baham supposedly brought a prepared ball, which was controlled by the spiritual adviser who sat far away in his village and directed the spirits to do something with it. The Buea Boys players thought that they could neutralize Fovu’s ball by rolling it into the mud but it did not work. They could not find the right counter magic. According to Zé, one way of neutralizing a prepared ball is by rubbing a specific ointment on the boots of the players.

Club executives, supporters and players alike spend a lot of time trying to find out what the opposing team has in terms of magic. Essomba and Ashu called it *the search for the anti*, which is the magic that can neutralize the magic of the opponents (the counter magic). This search is actually a sort of ‘game’ within the overall game of football. Whenever a team starts winning a number of matches in a row, the other teams in the competition will increase their search to counter whatever this ‘strong’ team is using.



Kalla used to occupy himself with the search for the anti. As he is responsible for the team's 'well-being', he has to counter anything that may put the players' well-being in jeopardy. 'A player is like a chicken,' he says somewhat cryptically. 'You must take care of him before you have good results. If you allow him to run loose, the lion will devour him.' Finding the anti is taking care of the players.

'There's a certain powder around,' Kalla says. 'If I'm playing against you and I rub something on my hands and I hold your arm, you will be weak for 90 minutes. When we discovered that most teams were using it against us, I as the manager have to look for the anti. So I made sure that it was done. If Tonnerre de Yaoundé has to play Olympique de Buea and that team is destabilizing and weakening our players, I have to go out and look for strong native doctors who can give me the anti of what they have.'

How does a team find out about the magic of the opposing team? We know that it can be a club executive but usually it is the supporters who will spy for the team. Many teams have supporters all over the country. For instance, there are many Bamendas living in Buea. When PWD Bamenda plays Olympique de Buea in Buea, they will have contacted their supporters in Buea to get the latest information. According to Zé and Essomba, it is not difficult for a supporter in disguise to get the necessary information. 'You just sit with people and discuss football,' Essomba says. 'In the course of a discussion, you discover their magic and maybe also the anti. He didn't know that you are a spy.'

Team manager Kalla of Olympique de Buea has told me how he received information about the magic that Sable de Batie would use during the final of the Cup of Cameroon (2002). 'There's daily information. Supporters of Olympique de Buea are discussing some issues about football. We also have spies inside Sable. So we were aware of their old priest and their new one.'

In many cases, teams will tell each other what the other team is using as magic, just to get ahead in the competition by stopping a direct competitor. In this sense, there is a correlation between magic and corruption because in the latter instance teams bribe other teams to give them motivation to beat direct competitors. Essomba gives me the example of the match between Olympique de Buea and Coton Sport de Garoua. Coton Sport had so far managed to win six matches in a row and was leading the D1 competition. Therefore, the supporters of PWD Bamenda, Bamboutos de Mbouda and Canon de Yaoundé – the numbers four, three and two in the league respectively – really wanted Olympique de Buea to win the match. That's why they did everything to determine the Coton Sport magic and then give the anti to Olympique de Buea.

Most supporters of PWD, Canon and Bamboutos want us to beat Coton Sport because if we beat them they will go up in the league. So most of them are looking for something to disturb Coton Sport. The supporters of PWD Bamenda will be at the field. They are pushing us to go

ahead. Canon and Bamboutos are also pushing us to get ahead. They will come and tell our club executives what Coton is using and what we have to do to block it. They told us that Coton is using Hausa (ethnic group from Nigeria) perfume. Our coach said: “No problem! We will destroy what they have!”

If our coach did not have something, then he should be running up and down to look for the right thing to buy.

This particular match ended in a 0-0 draw. Everybody was convinced that both teams were equally good during the match which means that Olympique de Buea had used the right anti to counter Coton Sport’s magic. PWD Bamenda will probably use the same anti because in the next match the team also drew against Coton Sport (0-0).

## The functions of magic

Cultural anthropologists have tried to classify magic according to its function in real life. In this way, one could say that deviative weapons in the goal, the prepared jerseys of the players and the burial of names in the mouths of animals on the pitch each have different functions during a football match. With regard to sports magic in Burkina Faso, Royer (2002: 466) has created three distinct categories:

The first is the manipulation of objects by analogy, traditionally called by anthropologists sympathetic magic ... In order to paralyse a football team, eleven pieces of a broom, one for each player, are cut and tied together, or, to paralyse a goalkeeper, the legs of a frog are tied on its back.

The second type of *wak* [magic] is the use of ‘medicine’ for protective or aggressive purposes. Boxers are said to have their wrists slit in order to insert medicine which stops the adversary’s punches, as if he had become paralysed. Medicine used to harm others enters in the category of *korote* (poison). A spectator holds a needle smeared with a substance, recites some formulas and launches the needle at the best player in the opposing team, who will suffer from local infection or even paralysis ...

A third type of *wak* is the manipulation of special objects named here ‘power objects’ (often called fetishes) ... Their power derives from the rituals accompanying their fabrication and from their constitution (an assortment of natural and man-made materials).

As we know, the ‘bewitchment’ of Tonnerre de Yaoundé by the widow of the founding father was generally called ‘tie the team’. Thus there is a similarity between the tying together of eleven brooms or the legs of a frog and the problem of Tonnerre because the overall result is paralysis of specific players or the entire team.

The third type of magic, namely the ‘manipulation of special objects’, also occurs in football in Cameroon. Zé calls such specialists ‘fetish priests’ because they worship a certain item day and night. ‘In our tradition,’ he explains, ‘we have man-made gods, something like a statue. The priests evoke the spirits inside, ask things from them and they do it.’ The fetish priest is said to be

responsible for rainmaking which, in turn, can be used in match preparation. A well-known team in Cameroon that uses rainmaking magic is Dynamo de Douala. It is thought that whenever it starts to rain, this team can score goals and the other team cannot. Sometimes the rain is supposed to confuse the opposing team, so that they cannot stick to their system of play.

One Buea Boys player told me of a specific match where there was clearly rainmaking magic involved. At some point during the match, rain started to fall but 'only on our side of the field,' he explains. 'Have you ever seen such a thing? They scored instantly.'

Royer's second type of magic is the use of medicine for protective and aggressive purposes. A lot of spiritual advisers use medicine for match preparation. Burying a concoction in the field or using white powder to weaken the players of the opposing team are aggressive forms of magic. Rubbing an ointment on the players' boots to counter a prepared match ball is a form of protective magic. One can state that aggressive magic is the magic that a team would use to weaken its opponents, while protective magic is the anti-magic of the other team to counter the magic of the first team. However, the other team will also employ aggressive magic to weaken the first team, which in turn has to look for the anti (the protective magic). Teams, then, use both aggressive and protective magic for one and the same match.

The most important thing to realize is that magic does not make a team play any better football on the field. Players do not all of a sudden become 'super-men', nor does the match ball fly into the net by itself. Instead, the spiritual adviser prepares magic that only weakens the opponents. A concoction in the field will make the opponents feel weak, dizzy and sometimes even sick. Likewise, a deviative weapon decreases the opponents' ability to score goals. Thus a team wins matches through magic because the other team cannot play as well as they normally would.

The other function of magic is to counter the magic of the opponents. When talking about the Azande of southern Sudan, Evans-Pritchard (1976: 198) argues that '... we shall not understand Zande magic ... unless we realise that its main purpose is to combat other mystical powers rather than to produce chances favourable to man in the objective world'.

Kalla goes even further when he says that the spiritual advisers are only in combat with one another, not with the players on the field. 'The spiritual adviser calls upon the spirits to obstruct the other team's spiritual adviser. He doesn't make the players win the match. If the other adviser tries to block players from performing well and our own adviser is able to prevent this, then the players can play football on the field. The advisers are fighting their own war.' Thus when the two spiritual advisers are doing their job well by countering each other's

magic, they will give the players on the field the chance to play the match undisturbed by spiritual forces.

## The spiritual advisers have equal powers

What happens if the spiritual advisers of the two teams are of equal strength? Ashu told me an interesting story about a specific match between his team Buea Boys and Tiko United during the 2002 mini-interpools where the spiritual advisers seemed to have exactly the same power. This story also tells us that many spiritual advisers can be hired for one and the same match and that matches in the (mini-)interpools tend to be more prepared than regular matches.

We almost had to play that particular semi-final match against Tiko United four times. We first played in the stadium in Buea. They beat us 1-0. I was not playing. The supporters were screaming: "Why is Ashu not playing?" The coach did not let me play because the club executives thought that Tiko had prepared me. The people from Tiko knew me very well. I heard that a supporter came to our training ground and took my footprint which was used to weaken me and confuse me. But then I came into the field. I dribbled the ball and reached the goal of the opposing team. I shot but the ball refused to go into the goal! Everybody saw it! It was because I had been prepared. At the end of the match we were given a penalty. The match ended 1-1. We said to each other: "Those people were more powerful than our own spiritual adviser."

We were training for the return match in Limbe on Sunday. Before the match, the club executives said they had employed another spiritual adviser. They told us that he was not going to come to the field. He was going to stay at home in the village to prepare the match. He did give the club executives a bottle of water and said that we should wash our faces with it early in the morning. We were also supposed to sprinkle the water onto our jerseys just before the start of the match.

At midnight on the day of the match all the players stood up. We had to sing songs praising the Lord and asking Him to be with us. We asked Him to energize us in order to be forceful and win tomorrow's match. We prayed for almost an hour.

In the morning we had a warming-up session and at ten o'clock the club executives came to us with a herbalist. This man had herbs and powders with him. He also had a bottle of water. He washed our faces, hands and legs. He then gave us some herbs to eat. Then we had to rub an ointment onto our legs. One by one we had to place our leg on the ball. Then the herbalist squeezed something on our boots.

The herbalist called for our goalkeeper and did something. Then he called for the defenders and did something, specifically to the centre back, the number five. He gave him instructions. Then he called for the attackers. He gave us a stone and said that I should weaken the mountain. He also gave me something to eat and he put something on my boots. We believed that the attackers would get a lot of obstacles from the opponent's goalkeeper.

Now we were ready to go onto the field for the return match. We played until the end. It was still 0-0. We went into extra time but it was still 0-0. Then darkness came and we couldn't see anything any longer. They had to postpone the match. The match ended at exactly 6.30 pm. The supporters knew that if we had played on, nobody would have won the match, meaning that the magicians of both teams were of equal strength.

The club executives gave us Monday off. On Tuesday we resumed training. We worked hard and trained well. That night, just like other days, we said our prayers. At eight o'clock in the morning the first spiritualist started work. Then the club president sent the bottle from the

second spiritualist who was still in his village. Then we brought our own person, a pastor. The pastor came with a cross and he carried it above his head. We prayed for almost 30 minutes. He blessed us.

The supporters too brought their own spiritualist. They said: "Our boys should not suffer any longer. We have to enter this affair." One of the supporters took some water and a duck and sprayed perfume into the water. Then they led us into a room and placed the water in front of the door. Their spiritualist entered the room and started to undress. He was standing there naked while he was praying in wonderful languages. He was evoking the spirits. After that he said "amen" and he started bathing himself. Then he opened the door.

The club executives took us to another room. There were four spiritualists in the room. Three of them were guarding the door and we had to hold things. There was someone who was holding a stick and a plantain leaf, another had some elephant grass, and so on. One of the spiritualists had a fire burning in the room. We inhaled the smoke. It almost killed us.

Now it was only an hour before the start of the match. We got on the bus. That day, I can clearly remember, we were very late because we were still waiting for our jerseys. The club executives had taken the jerseys all the way to Bafoussam to have them prepared. We had to pay a fine because our jerseys came too late.

We had to drive to Limbe. At that time I cannot tell you what was on the players' minds. The ground was very full. The supporters had even climbed up trees and on top of houses. People had come from all over the country to watch the match.

So we went onto the field and started to play. We played for 90 minutes but nobody scored. We went into extra time but still there was no goal. I had a lot of chances. I was in front of the goal and the goalkeeper wasn't there. I kicked the ball from almost inside the goal but the ball didn't cross the line. The goalkeeper caught the ball. Serious magic!

At the end of the second half in extra time, the score was still 0-0. Then the fight started. You have to know that there was a big cross which was very visible to everybody. Those were the instructions of the priest. We had to keep the cross at the side of the field. Before the match started and then again during halftime, we had to pray in front of the cross. Then we had to remove the cross and take it to the other end of the field. So when the supporters saw us removing the cross, something hit them and they started to fight. They said: "If these people are using such a big cross, it means they must be more powerful than us."

The goalkeeper was holding on to our cross. The supporters started to throw stones at our goalkeeper. We also had a deviator in the goal. One of our players rushed into the goal, took the deviator and then he took the cross, and ran away. The supporters from Tiko were following our players. Now that is when our head coach started to defend his player. The supporters came and started to fight with him. Our coach was beaten up. He had to go to hospital. There was blood everywhere. When there is a general fight everybody is hurt. The security people were there, trying to do their best.

Now the player gave the cross to another player who walked out of the stadium. The supporters from Tiko were still looking for the cross but they couldn't find it.

The referee had to postpone the match. FECAFOOT penalised Buea Boys and Tiko United for crowd trouble. By this time the second match had been postponed because of approaching darkness and the third match was postponed because of the fight.

So we had to play the same match for the fourth time one week later. We just stayed on the camp side. We talked amusingly that it was no longer about the players but all about the magicians. But we never played the fourth match. FECAFOOT gave their judgement and said: "The players and supporters of Tiko United started the fight." FECAFOOT decided to award the match to us.

The priest who gave us this cross said that this match would never end. And he said that he had to cause confusion so that the match would be given to us. That's what he said.

After this rather long sequence of matches, Buea Boys qualified for the finals of the mini-interpools and also for the interpools because the two finalists both

qualified automatically. Ashu's story is a good example of how protective and aggressive kinds of magic occur during one and the same match. It also shows how teams employ several spiritual advisers for the same match and that everybody – club executives, coaches, supporters and players – is involved in the hiring of such spiritualists.

Of course, the ideal situation as described above, namely that the spiritual advisers have equal powers, does not apply during most matches. There is almost always one spiritual adviser who is thought to be the most powerful in a particular match. It does explain, though, why football matches sometimes end without a winner or a loser.

## Information is vital

Regarding magic, information is important in more ways than just finding out about the magic of the other team and then looking for the anti. For instance, several players explained to me that the opposing team will try and put (black) magic where the team is staying. This is what Essomba calls 'spoiling' a place with the help of magic. It is possible for spiritual advisers to spoil hotels, fields, buses, training grounds, dressing rooms and so on. 'We used to stay at a hotel,' Essomba tells me. 'Most clubs discovered that we always stayed at one hotel so they used to come and spoil the entrance of the hotel. We had to go to another hotel.'

Ashu told me that when Buea Boys was on tour during the 2002 interpools in Douala, another team tried to spoil their training field. So teams need up-to-date information about the plans of their opponents in order to respond quickly.

Zé told me a relevant story about a big match between Victoria United (Opopo) and PWD Bamenda in Limbe, a match I watched as well. As in Buea, there are many Bamendas living in Limbe, listening whenever they can.

Opopo received information from a reliable source. This person told them that the supporters of PWD Bamenda would come the day before the match to try and get into the stadium. They wanted to go to the field at night and bury something in the centre. They wanted to throw some medicine.

So Victoria United's club president paid people to guard the field at night. There were three groups. The first group received FCFA 30,000 (€ 45) from the president, the other group was given FCFA 20,000 (€ 30), and the last group, which was the youth, got FCFA 10,000 (€ 15). They made bonfires at the four corners of the stadium to scare people away and prevent them from coming into the field. They did that for the whole night since there are no other lights around the stadium.

So the supporters of PWD came to the field late at night. They said: "We don't have a place to stay, we want to sleep in the stadium." The Opopo supporters said: "No, we have locked the stadium. The stadium manager has the keys and we cannot allow you people to jump over the wall."

The police came in and made it clear that nobody was to go on the field that night. There were serious fights in front of the stadium.

This story could also be turned around when the visiting team wants to remove the magic put on the field by the home team. Many teams will hire a spiritual adviser to prepare their fields, so it is imperative to guard the field to prevent people from entering the stadium. Supporters everywhere in the country guard the pitches and stadiums in their respective areas.

The Molyko Stadium in Buea, too, is guarded the night before Olympique de Buea's home matches. There seems to be a specific group of supporters who is in charge of keeping an eye onto the stadium. Indeed, I have met the leader of that group on several occasions. He is not the kind of guy you want to meet on a dark night and he definitely takes his job very seriously. 'They will beat up everyone who comes near the stadium,' Essomba says, when I propose going and having a look around. 'You should not think that you will be immune to these supporters. They will also beat you up. It's very dangerous.'

Some of the information is, as we know, received from supporters that act as spies, but of course the club executives, coaches and players also play a role. Most information, however, comes from the spiritual adviser who is employed at that time. Many spiritual advisers are oracles in the sense that they have the means to foretell the future. A spiritual adviser can inform the club executives about the dangers of the upcoming match. For instance, the most common way of weakening the opposition is by burying something at the front gate of the stadium.

According to Zé, there are so-called herbalists who specialize in such practices. He says that there are thousands of herbs around and each of them has a distinct quality. 'When they tie certain leaves and herbs together and bury them somewhere, no animal will pass that place. If you bury certain herbs, a snake cannot pass that area. With other herbs an elephant cannot pass. You can use such herbs during the match. You can bury herbs inside the goalpost. Then no ball will cross the line. When you bury herbs near the entrance to the stadium, the players will feel weak.'

I have witnessed on several occasions how the players reacted to the alleged burial of magic in the stadium. Before the match between Victoria United and Unisport de Bafang, I saw how players of the latter team did not walk onto the field through the main entrance but jumped over the fence instead. It is the spiritual adviser who orders the team to do so. This is also the reason why some teams drive straight onto the field in a bus. Essomba: 'Haven't you noticed that sometimes when we have to play a match, they don't drop us outside the gate? Sometimes our bus will drive through the gate onto the field because we know that something is wrong.'

Also, just before the start of the third match against Tiko United in the 2002 mini-interpools, Buea Boys received 'instructions' from the spiritualist, as Ashu explains. 'He said that if we went through the main gate, we would be weakening our powers. We had to jump over the fence. We did it and we felt fine. We paid for that jumping over the fence because it's illegal. It's against FECAFOOT rules in Cameroon. The other team came and they jumped over the fence at the other corner of the field.' I reckon that the club would rather pay money to FECAFOOT than lose the match through magic.

Now let us return to the match between Victoria United and PWD Bamenda. Zé told me what happened the next morning. 'Some of the PWD Bamenda supporters entered the stadium early. They were wearing official team jerseys to distract the supporters of Victoria United. When these supporters, disguised as PWD players, went in through the gate, the supporters in the stadium were clapping. They didn't know that the PWD players were jumping over the fence at the other end of the field. PWD Bamenda had received information that Victoria United had buried something at the gate. So they preferred to jump over the fence.' I also heard of cases where supporters carried the players on their shoulders to avoid them coming into contact with the magic buried at the gate.

Some spiritual advisers are said to have ways of knowing the outcome of matches beforehand. This kind of future prediction therefore goes further than simply knowing if the other team has buried something or not. It is said that spiritual advisers sometimes know the final score of the match before it has even started. This information does not come from the spying supporters but from above, so to speak. This is the moment when the players and club executives receive instructions from the spiritual adviser. For instance, when Olympique de Buea went to Yaoundé to play the final of the Cup of Cameroon, their spiritual adviser told them that they would win the match by two goals to one. 'When the Cup final was about to go into extra time and it was still 1-1,' Kalla says, 'I called the spiritual adviser and said: "Things have fallen apart. We are not winning." He told me: "That's not true. You will not leave Yaoundé without the Cup." And it happened. We beat them 2-1.'

Zé explained how it works by giving a specific example of a match between Elec Sport and Victoria United (Opopo) several years ago. 'The spiritual adviser of Opopo told them that they would lose the match by four goals to two. He said that Opopo would cause problems and end the match when Opopo was still leading. The club president of Opopo said: "No, that's nonsense. You people continue the match." But it ended four against two. Elec Sport won the match like the spiritual adviser said. Elec Sport had gone to a superior prophet.'

But what kind of problems could Opopo have caused so that the referee would have ended the match? Zé says that the players should have 'spoiled the match'.



‘It’s very easy here in Cameroon. We just burst the balls. We don’t have many balls around. The players kick the ball to the spectators and somebody is ready with a nail to burst it.’ When the match is disrupted in this manner, it will have to be replayed some other day.

This method of bursting the ball is said to have been widespread until some years ago. These days FECAFOOT usually disqualifies the team that is trying to spoil the match. In any case, it is custom for both teams to bring their own match ball. Just before the start of the match, the referee examines both balls and chooses the one he thinks is the best.

Some teams might burst the ball to make sure that their own match ball will be used. The reason for a team wanting to use their own ball is related to ball preparation – and Bamboutos de Mbouda is said to be specialized in such practices. Zé tells us about a match between Bamboutos and Victoria United (Opopo). ‘The spiritual adviser told Bamboutos that they couldn’t win the match by using Opopo’s ball. He said that they should burst the ball. So when Opopo was leading, the players decided to burst the ball. They played the rest of the match with the Bamboutos ball. But unfortunately, Opopo used the Bamboutos ball to score against Bamboutos. This means that the spiritual adviser failed them.’

### Similarities between spiritual adviser and coach

When we take a closer look at the role of the spiritual adviser, it is clear that his job is similar to that of the team’s head coach. For one thing, both the spiritual adviser and the coach rely on their reputation if they want clubs to hire them. Reputation is based upon past achievements at other clubs. Many people in Buea told me that there are very few good coaches in Cameroon. Similarly, Zé claims that there are only three to five really good spiritual advisers in Cameroon, excluding the northern region. ‘I know because I’ve seen their work,’ he says. ‘We know that somebody is good when you see that the outcome is positive. I’m not talking about one time only because that can be a coincidence. But when you do it three times in a row, we know that you are good. Everybody in the South West Province will tell you that I am good because they know there are so many things I have done in terms of the ball.’

This brings us to the most significant similarity between the spiritual adviser and the coach: their primary job is to make sure that the team wins its matches in the competition. The opposite is also true, namely that both the coach and the adviser are easily fired when the team starts losing matches. Zé tells me that getting fired in football does not mean that one’s career is over. On the contrary, coaches and spiritual advisers will easily find employment at another club.

Both the coach and the spiritual adviser employ just about the same methods in trying to win matches. They are supposed to think of strategies and tactics to beat their opponents and they are also supposed to bring team unity. Whereas the tactics of the coach are based on systems of play, the tactics of the spiritual adviser are based on spiritism. However, the spiritual adviser's tactics are the same as the coach's in the sense that they are both partly based on the tactics of the opposing team. That is why the coach usually sends one of his assistant coaches to see a match of their upcoming opponents in the competition. The assistant coach will buy a ticket and watch the game of that particular team while, of course, keeping a low profile. The spiritual adviser is mostly his own informer, since he is an oracle himself – although in reality he has probably heard many things about the other team by keeping his eyes and ears open.

The coach is formally the main person responsible for the team but he usually takes orders from the spiritual adviser. In this sense, the spiritual adviser is superior to the coach. 'Most of the time the coach takes advice from the spiritual adviser,' Zé explains. 'It's the coach who usually passes the instructions of the spiritual adviser on to the players. When the game starts, the coach takes over but the spiritual adviser sometimes comes in again and gives extra instructions.'

Although the spiritual adviser does not sit on the reserves' bench and usually cannot even be found in the stadium, he is still involved in determining football tactics and sometimes he even tells the coach to leave a player out of the line-up. As we already know, spiritual advisers are generally aware of the opponent's magic and sometimes it is directed against specific players.

For instance, when Ashu played the interpools with Unisport de Bafang a few years ago in the town of Ebolowa, the spiritual adviser told the coach to leave him off the field during a specific match. 'When we finished the match and we were going back home,' he says, 'a motorcycle knocked me down and I was unconscious. They had to carry me to hospital.' In Ashu's view, the spiritual adviser already knew that he was in danger, probably because the opposing team had used his name to prepare magic.

The spiritual adviser can also insist that a certain player be put on the field. Again, Ashu can provide us with an example, which involved a match during the same interpools in Ebolowa. 'On the eve of each match in the interpools, we sat down and the spiritual adviser said some words and his prayers and gave each of us a banana. He said that we had to get up at five a.m., eat the banana and then go back to sleep. At seven a.m. we had to make a certain sign. And nobody was allowed to eat anything. We just had to drink a lot of water.' The spiritual adviser came with new instructions two hours before the match. 'He brought some seeds,' Ashu continues. 'He placed the seeds between our big toe and the smaller one. He did that with all the players. Then he started playing with a ball in our

midst. The only words that we heard were “ball” and “goal”. The ball rolled around and stopped before my feet. Then he went to talk to the coach. He said: “It’s Ashu who will score.””

Another Buea Boys player told me a similar story when he was playing for PWD Kumba. The players had gathered in a specific room on the night before the match. The spiritual adviser ordered the players to start chewing on some herbs. He also placed herbs on the foreheads of the players and asked them what they felt. Some players complained about a burning sensation, others said that they felt nothing. In the end, the spiritual adviser concluded that four specific players would decide the outcome of the match. According to the Buea Boys player, these players did indeed make the team win the match.

Another issue is that the orders from both spiritual adviser and coach need to be followed by the players. Of course, the team can lose the match if the coach’s tactics are ignored. Also, the magic of the spiritual adviser does not work if one or more players fail to observe the taboos that are associated with that particular magic. Apparently, there are do’s and don’ts involved in football magic. ‘It’s just like a hospital,’ Zé explains. ‘When they give you antibiotics, they tell you not to drink alcohol. Magic has certain rules that need to be followed.’ It is therefore necessary for all participants – spiritual advisers, players, club executives – to abide by the rules that are attached to specific kinds of magic. It is the spiritual adviser who will explain the rules.

Kalla gave me an example when the team went to play the final in the Cup of Cameroon. ‘Seven days before the match I travelled to the village to meet up with my adviser. Then I left the village and went straight to Yaoundé. I ordered some people to put certain things around the field. The adviser also told me to recite some words seven times. I didn’t understand them but I said them anyway. Then I came back to Buea. I spent three days in my house without eating in order to live up to the conditions that were given by the magician. So there’s condition upon condition to get through difficult matches.’

The players too have to abide by certain rules if magic is to be successful. One of the most common rules is to refrain from sexual intercourse for one or two days before the match. In fact, women and magic are said to be a disastrous mix in the sense that women spoil magic. The spiritual adviser told me that most spirits like clean and pure things (and women are not). So when a player has sex with a girl the night before the match, he will spoil the magic for the whole team. ‘When you call for the spirits,’ Zé explains, ‘they won’t come. They will say that you are not pure.’ With regard to protection against witchcraft and sorcery, some players are asked never to sleep with a girl while wearing a prepared item, such as the ring, or for the period of a month after receiving protection.

In short, when a team supposedly has powerful magic but loses the match anyway, the cause is sometimes sought in club executives or players breaking the rules.

All in all, there is bound to be a love-hate-relationship between the coach and the spiritual adviser. After all, the coach is supposed to share his team with the spiritual adviser, as Zé explains. 'There are coaches who don't like to hear anything about spiritual advisers. They know they exist but they want to leave it to the supporters and the executives. They don't want a spiritual adviser to come in and tell him or the players anything. He prefers to do it himself because that's how he signed his contract. But there are some coaches who go for a spiritual adviser themselves. Even though the club has its spiritual advisers, the coach also goes and employs a spiritual adviser himself.'

### Differences between spiritual adviser and coach

There is one major difference between the spiritual adviser and the coach. Whereas the coach is hired officially and put on the club's salary list, the spiritual adviser is hired unofficially and kept off the list. Kalla says the spiritual adviser is not on the payroll. In other words, the coach is always known by the public but the spiritual adviser is usually kept incognito. I can think of at least two reasons for keeping the name of the spiritual adviser a secret. First, the 'game within the game' demands the search for the anti. If the other team already knows the name of the spiritual adviser of its opponents, they will probably also know what kind of magic he is likely to employ. In this case, the search will be over before it has even started.

Second, if everybody knows the spiritual adviser, they can also try to stop him. One way of stopping the spiritual adviser is by 'neutralizing' his role in match preparation. On many occasions, Zé had to endure harassment from the supporters of the opposing team. 'When you are a well-known spiritualist like myself, you cannot come to a match without people looking at you, suspicious of what you are doing. They will always think you have done something with the match. So people came up to me and started smearing pork all over my face and hands. Sometimes they rubbed me with salt, sometimes they sprinkled seawater all over my body.' Why seawater? 'In their mind, anything that contains salt will spoil everything abnormal. That's why witchcraft doesn't make it to the kitchen because there's salt there. That's why some people who go to sleep take salt and put it around their beds. The sea is salty water.'

Salt is also used by Buea Boys when they play a match. The team manager will give the players a plastic bag of salt. Just before the start of the match, the players will throw the salt onto the field to destroy all possible magic. In the

literature on football magic, I read that it is not uncommon to see that ‘players urinated all over the field to neutralize the objects which they thought might have been buried by the host team’ (Royer 2002: 475). Urinating on the field appears to have the same effect as throwing salt but I have never witnessed players involving themselves in the former activity.

But why the pork? ‘They know that I am a Muslim,’ Zé says. ‘They know I don’t like pigs. It’s terrible when that happens but I don’t resist it. It’s their belief.’ He gives me another example of being ‘attacked’ because of his profession. ‘There was a time when I was working for Olympique de Buea. We had to play against Opopo. I slept the night in Limbe and woke up in the morning. Some people had cut pieces of fresh pork and had thrown them around my house. It was my wife who first saw them. I said: “Forget about it.” I swept it away, gave it to the dogs and they ate it. In the afternoon we went to the field and we beat Opopo.’ Apparently the supporters thought that they could spoil his magic with the pork. ‘It was a medicine man who gave them that,’ Zé explains. ‘It was their anti. Afterwards they started following the medicine man, saying that he was a thief. They said: “You make us to buy pork just because you want to eat a pig.”’

The other way of stopping the spiritual adviser is through bribery. Zé has the following story to tell. ‘When people know you are the spiritual adviser of some team, they sometimes buy you. They will come to you and ask: “How much have these people paid you for this particular match?” You say FCFA 100,000 or FCFA 200,000 (€ 152 to € 304). They say: “We will double the price and you let it go.” Your employer will think that you have worked but he doesn’t know that other people have paid you not to work. He doesn’t know that you have played a double game.’

Zé says that teams have to keep his employment a total secret. ‘One time the club president at Elec Sport called me and said that he had talked to some people and that they had directed him to me. He said: “I want you to work for me.” I told him: “That’s not the way. You have already told somebody that you are coming to see me. That’s wrong. It has to be between you and me and nobody else.”’

This last sentence explains how the executives of the club can avoid their spiritual adviser being bribed. In fact, Zé only likes to deal with club presidents in person and no one else. For instance, he has worked for the first-division teams Coton Sport de Garoua, Sable de Batie, Fovu de Baham, Victoria United and Olympique de Buea. It was only with the last club that he had contact with executives other than the club president. It is here that corruption comes in to spoil the relationship between the spiritual adviser and the club. ‘There was a time when Olympique de Buea stopped appreciating my services,’ he explains.

'The problem is that when money starts being passed between people, corruption creeps in. For instance, the club president may send me money through somebody. Maybe he'll send FCFA 50,000 but only FCFA 10,000 will reach me. This sort of thing is due to the absence of direct contact between the president and myself.'

This is the moment when a spiritual adviser will stop working for the club. For instance, it is said that PWD Bamenda's spiritual adviser stopped working after winning six matches in a row with the team because PWD did not pay him the money promised beforehand.

### Team versus magic

When the coach and the spiritual adviser both play such a major role in the team's ability to win or lose its matches, the question that arises would most likely be the following. Who is thought to have more influence in winning football matches, the spiritual adviser and his magic or the coach and his team?

First of all, let me say that the answer depends on the person you are asking. If we were to put it in percentages, then spiritual adviser Zé would argue that winning a match is at least 70 per cent the result of the adviser's magic, which leaves 30 per cent for the coach and the players. 'The supporters and club executives believe in the spiritual adviser even more than in the playing body itself. He's the almighty. If he's not competent, they know the team is a failure. If they have a good spiritual adviser, they know they're going to succeed.' Kalla says it is probably 50:50: the spiritual adviser's magic and the coach and his players each play an equally important role in the match. Essomba and Ashu obviously do not agree with these views. They would say that the coach and the players have a 70-per-cent influence on the outcome of the match, while the spiritual adviser and his magic account for only 30 per cent.

There is, however, an easier way to tackle this issue. Players, coaches, team managers and the spiritual adviser alike have said that it would be foolish to think that one can do without either magic or, naturally, the players. Magic needs to be 'sound' and players need to be well trained. Magic then fulfils a complementary function in matches. So on the one hand, as Royer (2002: 474) points out on sports magic in Burkina Faso, '... actors and spectators alike readily admit that training and talent are important but say you cannot win without sorcery'. Ashu told me that 'you can train like hell but when the spiritualist says you will not score, then you will not score'. The team manager of Buea Boys said that 'if you don't use the five-franc coin, you can play for two days but you will not score'.

On the other hand, it is generally understood that throwing devices such as coins or stones are not enough to make a team win a match. ‘You have to show that you’re talented as a player,’ the Buea Boys team manager explains. ‘The coin is just a helping hand. You cannot just come onto the field and see the ball bounce into the net by itself. If you don’t kick the ball into the net, nothing happens. It’s the player who does it.’ Ashu has a similar story to tell regarding the match between Buea Boys and Tiko United when the executives brought in yet another traditional doctor. By this time, the players were angry that they were being submitted to another magical ritual before the match. ‘The fourth spiritualist came with new things,’ Ashu says. ‘He had all sorts of things – a bone of a lion, and so on. I said to him: “These things don’t play football. Take these things, put them on the field and see whether they can play football.”’

Evans-Pritchard (1976: 203) explains that magic among the Azande ‘... is seldom asked to produce a result by itself, but is associated with empirical action that does in fact produce it’. Malinowski (1984: 414) argues as follows: ‘The consecutive progress of work and of magic are inseparable, just because, according to native ideas, work needs magic, and magic has only meaning as an indispensable ingredient of work.’ As Leseth (1997: 170) argues with regard to Tanzanian football, the ‘... success and failure of a football team is invariably attributed to the skills of the *mganga* [spiritual adviser] as well as to the natural talent of the players’. So, ‘... there is no general agreement about whether *wak* [witchcraft, magic] alone can win. Whether *wak* rituals can precipitate victory or cause defeat cannot be distinguished as a variable independent of the game and the players’ (Royer 2002: 474).

If we see magic and players as complementary elements in a match, we can see that the coach and the players always need clever tactics and good training sessions. After all, one cannot rely on magic alone. The point is that Cameroonians will readily admit that a victory or a loss may well be the result of excellent or poor players on the field, no matter how powerful their spiritual adviser may be. For instance, Coton Sport de Garoua has been the best club in the last decade not only because of its impressive financial budget and its probably very expensive spiritual adviser(s) but mostly because, and this is what all the supporters in Buea say, the team has the best coach and players in the country.

On the other hand, clubs at the bottom end of the competition do not always suffer from fake spiritual advisers or ‘locks’ on the team, as in the case of Tonnerre de Yaoundé. Zé gives me the example of Union de Douala, which is occupying a position in the lower half of the D1 competition. Union is a really big team that normally ends up at the top of the table. ‘Union didn’t recruit well,’ he says. ‘They did their recruitment before they hired a coach. The new players

Table 4 The final results of the D1 competition in 2003

	Team	Points	Matches won	Matches drawn	Matches lost	Goal difference
1	Coton Sport de Garoua	62	18	08	04	+27
2	Canon de Yaoundé	51	15	06	09	+16
3	PWD Bamenda	51	14	09	07	+6
4	Bamboutos de Mbouda	50	14	08	08	+12
5	Olympique de Buea	49	14	07	09	+5
6	Unisport de Bafang	47	13	08	09	0
7	Union de Douala	42	11	09	10	+8
8	Fovu de Baham	41	11	08	11	-5
9	Victoria United	38	09	11	10	-1
10	Cintra Yaoundé	37	10	07	13	-16
11	Tonnerre de Yaoundé	35	08	11	11	+2
12	Renaissance de Ngoumou	34	08	10	12	-6
13	Sable de Batie	32	07	11	12	-7
14	Racing de Bafoussam	32	06	14	10	-4
15	Caiman de Douala*	28	08	04	18	-16
16	Stade Bandjoun*	21	04	09	17	-22

Source: [www.fecafootonline.com](http://www.fecafootonline.com)

\* Having played 30 matches, Caiman de Douala and Stade Bandjoun were relegated to Division Two.

were inferior to the ones who were already in the team. The coach decided to use the new players for the official matches. So the real players are not playing. That's why they're losing.'

Stade Bandjoun has also been struggling at the bottom of the competition so far. Surely there must be witchcraft, sorcery or black magic involved? Not at all, Zé says. The problems, as we already know, are related to the lack of a big man sponsoring the team. 'Stade Bandjoun has a financial crisis. They are struggling because there's no club president. The players don't have food, jerseys, match bonuses. When another team sees good players after the season, they take them. Last year Stade Bandjoun lost all its players. I'm sure they will drop to the second division unless a miracle happens.' Zé adds that no magic can save Stade Bandjoun. At the end of the season, no miracle had happened. Stade Bandjoun was indeed relegated to the second division.

Three teams at the bottom of the league table did, however, seem to suffer from witchcraft, sorcery and black magic: Tonnerre de Yaoundé, Sable de Batie and Racing de Bafoussam. Having played 27 matches, Tonnerre found itself in 14<sup>th</sup> place in the league table. However, Tonnerre was about to win its last three matches and as a result ended up in 11<sup>th</sup> place – and thus remained in the D1 competition. The general opinion is that the club must have found a solution to the problem in these final weeks.

Sable de Batie partly succeeded in solving their problem because in the second half of the competition the team won three matches in Bafoussam. Sable ended



up in 13<sup>th</sup> place after the final day of competition. The big surprise was that Racing ended up in 14<sup>th</sup> place, and thus just escaped relegation. I heard that when Racing supporters spoiled the field for Sable, they failed to understand that the field was spoiled in general. In the end, the magic turned out to be more disturbing for Racing itself than it was for Sable. Another explanation may be that the Racing supporters, as Essomba mentioned earlier, triggered a spiritual competition between themselves and Sable – a competition which they ultimately lost.

## The psychology of magic

Of course, the real question is: does magic work at all? This is a slightly ridiculous question because the answer, as any Cameroonian will readily tell you, is that it does work. It is more difficult to answer the question about how it works. Zé gave us a clue when he said that advisers call upon the spirits to do something ‘magical’ on the field. There are also powders and herbs that have a physical effect on the players on the field, either with or without the help of the spirits. The result, in the eyes of the public, is magic.

An interesting question is how magic affects the players of both teams when they are playing a match. Zé explains that magic affects them mostly at a psychological level. ‘Some people,’ he says, ‘can regard African magic as psychological motivation because at least 50 per cent of the magic is pure psychology.’ Zé, whose business card actually reads ‘Football consultancy: specialized in psychology’, is well aware of the psychological benefits of such spiritual forces in football.

A few years ago, Zé set up a brotherhood of football players from all over Cameroon but I became aware of it only at the end of my stay in Buea. It was a Buea Boys player who pointed out a white handkerchief on the arm of one of the Olympique de Buea attackers. ‘He’s one of your friend’s players,’ he said. ‘The handkerchief is the trademark of the brotherhood.’ All of a sudden, I saw the handkerchief on the arms of several players with Olympique de Buea, Victoria United, Fovu de Baham and even Coton Sport de Garoua. The brotherhood consists of dozens of players all over the country who are playing for first- and second-division teams. Zé owns a reasonably large compound where the players can hang out when they visit him in Limbe. I stayed there a few times as well.

The players in the brotherhood are personally selected by the spiritual adviser based on their attitude towards football and, of course, their individual talents. Not every player is eligible to become a member of the brotherhood because, as Zé says, they are not disciplined enough. The ones who are selected probably pay Zé a portion of their salary in exchange for his advice and spiritual powers. ‘They

are my players,' he says. 'They know I will do anything to help them succeed in football. I give each of the players a prepared handkerchief that will give them strength during the matches. When they wear it, they know they can do anything. It will give them confidence and trust.'

It seems that Zé is a sort of motivator for the players in the brotherhood. Indeed, he says that his job as a spiritual adviser can be compared to that of a mental coach or psychologist. 'In Europe there are many psychologists working with players,' he says. 'But Cameroon is a poor country. We don't have many psychologists. Here, that job is limited to spiritual advisers. Some of the spiritual advisers would give the players water, or paper, or boiled maize. They will tell them to eat the maize at a certain time. Psychologists don't give the players anything, they only work with words. But the end result is the same.'

The psychology of magic works in two different, yet related ways. Magic gives the players confidence and provides a feeling of unity. At the same time it frightens the players on the opposing team. For instance, throwing devices on the field or in the goal can have a positive psychological effect on the players. 'For players, it's very important to have a physical object to work with,' Zé explains. 'I used to give attackers a stone or seed for them to throw into the goal. When they do that, their brains are directed towards the goal. The stone will give them the idea that the goal is open and that goals can be scored. When they score, they will believe it worked because of the stone.'

Essomba gave me an example of an attacker with Kumbo Strikers in 2000 who was one of the most promising players in the country at the time. 'Our adviser gave him some medicine. He rubbed it into his face three times. He scored every time. He was the best scorer of the year with 24 goals. You can never stop him from scoring. Most of those things are beliefs. If you believe in it, then it will work. He used to believe in it and he always scored.' The medicine obviously gave him the confidence he needed to score goals.

Thus the trick with magic is to make the players believe in the rituals they have to perform. Sometimes a spiritual adviser fails in this. The team manager at Buea Boys told me that one of their spiritual advisers gave the players a small ball. 'They were supposed to put the ball in their mouths throughout the match,' he said with disbelief written across his face. 'A ball in your mouth for 90 minutes? Is that possible? No! The players refused to do it.'

However, if a spiritual adviser is strong and charismatic and enjoys the respect of the players, his magic could even work at a psychological level for the whole 100 per cent. Zé offers an example of a match he prepared one day. 'Just before the match I came onto the field. The players gathered around me in a circle. I made them offer collective prayers and I said: "I will stand next to the field for 90 minutes and you will be victorious."' The players went onto the field and they

knew that I was there assisting them throughout the match. It gave them confidence. They won the match but I didn't use any medicine. That's pure psychology. I conditioned their minds.'

Of course, magic can also make the players on the opposing team afraid. For instance, burying black magic at the front gate of the stadium will create unrest among the visiting team. Also, Olympique de Buea's opponents would surely have developed fears when Essomba and his team mates used to form a circle to throw a concoction near the corner flag. 'It sometimes happens that you as a player are standing on the field and you see other players throwing eggs,' Zé explains. 'You will think: Let me not break my legs! So psychologically you have already been defeated.'

However, when something happens to the magic of a team, it can work counterproductively for the team during a match. 'The players of Olympique de Buea believed in the concoction they buried near the corner flag. But when it was removed by the other team, their confidence started to decrease. The next match they started anxiously and with a lack of confidence because they believed that something had gone wrong. When the mind is fearful, the body cannot perform to expectations. It's not the medicine that makes them lose the match, it's all in their minds.'

## Magic is big business

Football is, as we know, the number one sport in Cameroon. There is prestige and honour involved in winning matches. Despite the fact that magic could be regarded as only complementary to the coach and the players, it is still thought by most Cameroonians to be one of the most important tools in winning matches. Zé told me that teams in Cameroon spend most of their money on match preparation. In Tanzanian football, Leseth (1997: 171) explains, the '... executive committees spend huge sums of the club's money in their endeavours to bring victory for their team. Hence, witchcraft in football is big business.'

Recall how team manager Kalla wrote down a calculation of the expenditures of a typical Olympique de Buea match in the D1 competition. He also added the amounts of money used to bribe officials. Now he adds the magic expenditures which are put in the accountants' books as well. Of course, the accountant will use a different name for it. 'The accountant calls it psychological preparation,' Kalla explains. He adds an amount of FCFA 50,000 to the FCFA 2,275,000 I mentioned earlier. Thus the overall costs are FCFA 2,325,000 (€ 3,544) for a typical away match in the first-division league.

The costs of match preparation, however, are far from fixed amounts of money. Just like the players' match bonuses or the bribes for officials, the price

of magic varies too, meaning that prices go up during big, important matches. Naturally, expenditure on magic also increases at the end of the season when teams try to win the national league or struggle to avoid relegation. This also applies to matches in the different stages of the Cup of Cameroon, as Kalla explains. 'When we played the matches in the Cup of Cameroon, the prices for magic went up to FCFA 75,000, FCFA 100,000 and FCFA 200,000 (€ 114, € 152 and € 304 respectively) for the quarter-finals, semi-finals and final.'

However, Zé told me that Kalla's price of FCFA 50,000 for a typical match must have been a very low estimate. He himself puts the average price of match preparation at FCFA 200,000 to FCFA 300,000. In any case, he too said that prices of magic are variable and they especially go up for derbies in the provinces. 'Last year Olympique de Buea beat Opopo at home and away, but this year Opopo beat Olympique de Buea at their ground. Now Olympique has done everything to beat Opopo in Buea. I know they prepared for their match very well. They were psychologically sound. Opopo came into it with some fears because they knew Olympique de Buea had gone far. When there's a match like this one, they will talk about tough areas they have gone to for medicine. The club president sent someone to a spiritual adviser in Cotonou in Benin. He paid FCFA two million (slightly over € 3,000) for the magic.' Olympique de Buea will play this match some weeks from now. The Lava Boys will beat Victoria United one goal to nil at the Molyko Stadium.

Since the prices of magic lie somewhere between FCFA 50,000 and a couple of million FCFA, it is safe to talk about a 'magic business'. The business of spiritual advice seems to be a very profitable business indeed. Zé spoke of colleagues who were 'very successful' in the sense that they were driving the latest convertible sports cars. Since everybody knows that there is money in magic, it is clear that it will attract a lot of people, good advisers as well as bad. In Tanzania, for instance, there are '...practitioners [who] are real experts in the business ... but there are others who supply cheap, false articles for the sake of gain' (Leseth 1997: 171).

The problem, of course, is that spiritual advisers will never show what they are actually doing. Since it is knowledge that mostly goes from generation to generation and since it is their profession, it makes sense that spiritual advisers want to keep their secrets to themselves. In this case, they can always say that they have powerful magic because nobody can prove otherwise. Another difficulty, Zé says, is that there is no official association so there are no rules and regulations and no sanctions within the business. This story also applies to traditional doctors who claim to know which player (or club executive) bewitched another, and who will bewitch those players (or club executives) in return.

From what I heard, it seems that Cameroon is full of bogus spiritual advisers who may not even be knowledgeable in the art of magic at all. (Recall Zé's remark that there are only three to five really good advisers in the whole country.) Zé told me that there are a few 'situations' in this year's (2003) D1 competition that really attract a lot of fake spiritual advisers.

First, the 'spell' on Tonnerre de Yaoundé, mentioned in the previous chapter, offers a perfect opportunity for people to knock on the club's door while claiming to have the solution to the problem. While some of them could really be good spiritual advisers, most are just there to profit from Tonnerre's problem. 'This is when my colleague magicians *eat*,' Zé says. 'That means, they might collect FCFA two million (more than € 3,000) from this team and say that they will do it. When the club president gives him the money, he just vanishes into thin air. After a while, the president will see that no work has been done. That's what's delaying the problem. It's not that Tonnerre is not trying to solve the problem but people are using the problem to eat their money.'

Second, everybody in Cameroon knows about the struggle between Sable de Batie and the Racing de Bafoussam supporters. No doubt the club executives will receive numerous invitations from spiritual advisers claiming to have the counter magic to whatever magic is being used to spoil the field at Bafoussam.

Another consequence of the money in magic is that it encourages corruption. Recall the spiritual adviser's story of the club executives at Olympique de Buea putting some of the president's money into their own pockets. As Leseth (1997: 171) observed with regard to Tanzanian football, some of the club executives '... have taken huge sums of the club's money claiming that it is required for witchcraft purposes, while in reality the money is pocketed for private use'. I have heard a similar story regarding the match between Buea Boys and PWD Bamenda in the 2002 interpools. Several Buea Boys players told me that each of the members of the Executive Board brought his own spiritual adviser. The executives supposedly paid them around FCFA 50,000 to do their job, while they handed over bills of FCFA 200,000 or FCFA 300,000 to the club president.

Spiritual advisers are very powerful people in football. They are even in full control of the magic business because they can do one thing that coaches and players cannot do: they can blackmail the club. 'The magicians have the cake and the knife,' Zé says, meaning that they have knowledge to make the team win matches but they also have the knowledge to make the team lose. For instance, they can block the team if the club president is not paying them enough money or if they are fired. An example is Canon de Yaoundé that employed a particular spiritual adviser last year (2002) and with whom they won the D1 competition. 'This season,' Zé says, 'Canon has found a more superior adviser. The old adviser said: "If you use him, you will not win your matches." And Canon lost the

first three matches of the season. The club executives had to pay the adviser a sum of money. They made peace with him and brought him back to the team. Everything was fine afterwards.'

Money, then, can restore any broken relationship. 'There's nothing money cannot do,' Zé argues. 'When somebody is angry, you come and greet him. You will buy him two bottles of beer and then give him FCFA 100,000. Everything is solved.'

## The pork and the pepper

Essomba and I are still sitting in the hotel's dining room. I am wondering what kinds of magic Olympique de Buea used after that fateful day in Limbe when the supporters of Victoria United fought with the Olympique de Buea players to get the bottle of Tangui. It seems that the team was divided and confused during the following three matches. Now, Olympique de Buea had lost four matches in a row. The team had to travel to Bafang for a match against Unisport. According to Essomba, Olympique de Buea brought in a new spiritual adviser for the match against Unisport de Bafang who turned out to be a completely bogus person.

Before the big match against PWD Bamenda we had to go to Bafang to play against Unisport. The coach brought in a native doctor. Minutes before the match he smeared the players with rotten pork and pepper. It was very painful and it smelled awful. We were scratching all over our bodies.

When we were in the line-up just before the start of the match, the Unisport players put their hands in front of their noses. "You guys really smell," they said. Even the referee asked: "Which team is smelling so bad, Unisport or Olympique?" During the match one of the players came up to me. "You guys are really dangerous," he said. "If I come too close, I have to vomit."

We lost the match 2-0. Some players didn't wash after the match before they sat down in the bus. Then the other players realized that we had been smelling extremely bad. I asked the native doctor why he had done this. He said he expected us to run faster with all that pepper.

Kalla said that 'the players jumped in the air to head the ball and immediately afterwards they had to scratch'. When Kalla and Essomba told me this story, they were laughing so hard that Essomba literally fell off the couch.

By the time Olympique de Buea had to play against PWD Bamenda, they had lost five matches in a row. According to Essomba, it is under these circumstances that extraordinary measures are taken to guarantee a victory on the field. Not only did Olympique de Buea have to beat one of their main rivals but they also wanted to end the downward spiral of losing all those matches in a row. Just as in the case of the mini-interpool match between Buea Boys and Tiko United, as told by Ashu, this time too there were at least five, six or seven spiritual advisers preparing the same match.

Kalla told me about the match that took place last Sunday, the day before this story began. 'There was a mix-up amongst us,' he said. 'First, the Olympique de Buea players prepared themselves individually. Then the management did a lot of preparation too. All the coaches said they had prepared the match. The club president said he had prepared the match. I had also prepared the match. But now we were coming onto the field with so many different spirits. If we won the match, which adviser were we supposed to thank? We brought all this magic into the team but the magic turned against us. And PWD Bamenda already knew our secrets because most of our native doctors came from the North West Province.'

So the match ended in a 0-1 victory for the team from Bamenda. Zé told me that the spirits caused confusion amongst each other which, apparently, is not an uncommon phenomenon. 'With African magic, there are things people do that don't correspond with other people and the things they do,' he said. 'Let's assume that Opopo calls me. They will also call another person and that person doesn't know that they have also invited me. Now he's performing there while I'm performing here. There are certain things that I will do that do not correspond to his spirits, so we set the spirits into battle. While they are supposed to be there to help the team they will instead be fighting against each other.'

Apparently this is also what happened when Victoria United (Opopo) had to play against Coton Sport de Garoua. 'Opopo hired more than four advisers only because they wanted to defeat Coton Sport,' Zé explains. 'In the end, Opopo lost 1-0. Those club executives think that when you have hired many magicians, the power increases. But when you have many spiritualists, there can be competition and misunderstanding amongst the spirits.'

Now we have many reasons why Olympique de Buea lost six matches in a row and why the coach was fired after the match against PWD Bamenda. Maybe it proves that losing a match can have a variety of 'spiritual causes' that work simultaneously for or against a team during a specific match.

We also know that Olympique de Buea's luck will turn for the better some weeks from now, when the current head coach will be dismissed. The new coach will hire a spiritual adviser from his own village who, as you may recall, prepared magic that demanded the coach stand up for the 90 minutes of official playing time. Essomba said that this kind of magic was difficult to beat since nobody could see it. It did seem to work for Olympique de Buea. For a while.

I have come into the bedroom where the team doctor is already asleep. Very quietly I get into the other side of the bed and fall asleep instantly.

## Sunday

A strange noise wakes me up very early in the morning. The doctor is praying on his carpet in a corner of the bedroom. Then, after a few minutes, he informs me that the bus is about to leave for a brief training session in the stadium. Most players are already sitting in the bus with their football jerseys on when I arrive on the scene. Not long after seven o'clock, when it is still very cold outside, the driver stops the bus in front of the stadium. The vice-captain, who will be the team captain today, leads the teams in a couple of simple exercises. The fog makes it difficult to see the entire field. The training session, which is solely meant as a warming-up session, lasts for only half an hour. The players are discussing the upcoming match on the way back to the hotel.

While the players are taking a shower, I relax in the doctor's room. The doctor is preparing drinks for the players. First he squeezes maybe thirty lemons on the top of a plastic bottle of cola. It takes time, effort and patience to fill the entire bottle with the juice from the tiny lemons. Then the doctor adds a significant amount of salt. 'This is power for the players,' he says. I am not sure if the drink is natural, medical or magical.

### The technical meeting

At 10.30 in the morning it is time for the technical meeting. This meeting will take place in room 218, which is the doctor's second room. The players come into the room one by one carrying chairs from the dining room. The atmosphere is getting tense. The coach is about to give the line-up for today's match. He has written all the matches on a school board. First, there is the derby between Canon and Tonnerre de Yaoundé which, Essomba tells me, will totally fill the stadium



in the capital. Second, PWD Bamenda is playing the big team Coton Sport de Garoua. This is an important match between two teams in the current top five. Finally, our own match is added to the list: Bamboutos de Mbouda versus Olympique de Buea.

The coach explains that the outcome of these matches can significantly alter the top of the league table. For Olympique de Buea, it is imperative to beat Bamboutos in order to climb the ladder and get closer to the top five. After all, right now the team does not even appear in the top ten. The coach then gives us the system of play and the position of each player on the field. The system of play is 3-5-2, meaning that there are three defenders, five midfielders and two attackers. I heard that Olympique de Buea usually employs these tactics.

One of the assistant coaches gets the chance to speak his mind about the match. The assistant coach is the only one who speaks English during the meeting and I know that some players will not be able to understand him. He stresses the importance of the Rasta player and the vice-captain in the midfield, especially now that the team captain is in Japan. These two players are supposed to build up the attack and make sure that Olympique de Buea keeps possession of the ball for as long as possible. 'You two are the brains of this match,' he concludes.

The vice-president takes over by congratulating the new coach on accomplishing team discipline in such a short time. He says that the disastrous row of six lost matches has to come to an end. The team must avoid losing this match at all costs! He continues by saying that winning the D1 competition is probably no longer an option for Olympique de Buea because the distance between them and Canon de Yaoundé and Coton Sport de Garoua is already too great. The club president, however, did tell him that a spot in the top three is the most important goal for the team. The reason is that Olympique de Buea could then still play international matches in one of the three continental competitions, which will generate money and prestige for the team and its president.

The three continental competitions are the CAF Champions League (since 1964), the Cup Winners Cup (since 1975) and the CAF Cup (since 1992). In Cameroon, the Ministry of Youth and Sports and FECAFOOT give money to the teams that are involved in these international competitions. For instance, Olympique de Buea, which is currently active in the Cup Winners Cup, received a few million CFA francs before flying to Ghana to play against Asante Kotoko in Kumasi a few weeks ago. President Biya is apparently said to have called the president of Olympique personally to tell him that the nation was watching and was depending on the team to succeed. For the national government, prestige in football mostly depends on international achievements. Also, the CAF offers

teams significant amounts of money for reaching the quarter-finals, the semi-finals and the finals of the continental competitions.

The clock strikes 11. The players, club executives and I are served bread with coffee (for the executives) or warm milk (for the players) for breakfast. Since there is no time for lunch later on, we are having it right now. Eighteen large plates of spaghetti, rice and fish are put down in front of the players on the long table, and seven plates are put on the executives' table. The doctor's bottle of lemon juice goes from hand to hand. Judging by the players' faces, it does not seem to be a very pleasant drink. Most players consume their lunch silently and very fast. Within minutes, most of them have already returned to their rooms to get some rest. Some players visit the doctor to receive a final massage, medicine or a bandage.

It is 1:30 in the afternoon. We have checked out of the hotel and are now driving on a road that will take us to Bafoussam. The players are already wearing their team jerseys. I can see numbers on the back of the jerseys but there are no names. The coach is reading the sports pages. On the radio, a reporter is informing us about the upcoming matches. A player on the backseat of the bus has a cassette with music from Douala. He is singing along and everybody is clapping.

It does not take us very long to reach Bafoussam, a large urban area built on several hills. People are staring at the bus because it is obvious that there is a first-division team passing through town. There is an interesting story about the stadium in Bafoussam. A number of years ago the government gave its permission to build a new stadium which would become one of the biggest football temples in the country. However, it is said that the funding dried up several years ago. Now the inhabitants of the capital of the West Province only have a half-built football stadium. Although I have not seen the stadium myself, it is said to be a funny and sad sight at the same time.

Supporters in Buea think that President Biya and his government are responsible for not completing the stadium. Apparently, President Biya has never really been involved in developing football in Cameroon. The major stadiums in Yaoundé, Douala and Garoua were constructed more than twenty years ago during the time of President Ahidjo. It is said that the current president only spends money on the national team.

## Ticket revenues and advertising

So why does the club president of Racing de Bafoussam not decide to finish the stadium? The answer is that he is not allowed to do so because the stadiums are owned by the government. First, the stadiums are under the control of the local urban council which, in turn, is led by a government delegate. Second, the

government appoints so-called stadium directors from Yaoundé to manage the revenues of the larger stadiums.

A day before a match, the Ministry sends out representatives to all parts of the country with the tickets. Supporters pay the fixed prices of FCFA 500 (€ 0.7) for a standing spot in the sun and FCFA 1,000 (€ 1.5) for a place in the stand. In most stadiums there are also tickets for FCFA 2,000 (€ 3), which are usually purchased by prominent people who want a more 'luxurious seat' in the stand. (These are usually plastic garden chairs.)

As average first-division matches are watched by 2,000 to 5,000 spectators, revenues can easily turn out to be between FCFA 1 million to 2.5 million (even if one only charges FCFA 500 for all the tickets). This is between € 1,520 and € 3,800. A former stadium director in Limbe gave me calculations for the big match between Victoria United and PWD Bamenda. Taking the crowded stadium into consideration, revenues should have been around FCFA six million (€ 9,145), 'maybe even seven or ten million francs' (€ 10,600 to € 15,244). This particular match, however, turned out to generate only FCFA 3.2 million (€ 4,878).

Apparently, a huge problem arises when one considers the role of tribalism and corruption in football. First, some people told me that corruption among government representatives, such as the stadium directors, is very common. 'Maybe a stadium director is poor at the time they appoint him,' Zé says, before continuing in a cynical way: 'But when he has been the director for at least two or three months, you will see him riding round in a car. You have to call him and ask: "How come you have a car when you have not taken out a car loan? Are you a magician or something?"'

Second, I know from my own experience that many people go into the stadium without paying for a ticket. I have even done it myself a number of times. People either jump over the wall or they know the people who guard the entrance to the field. In an article on the BBC website I read that such cases of corruption and tribalism also occur in other African countries. In Congo, for example, the football authorities started hiring deaf and dumb ticket sellers at the gate. 'The directors of the league say the deaf and dumb officials will prove incorruptible and that ticket receipts have already gone up.'

A first-division referee offered another reason for lower ticket revenues, saying that 'somebody will build his house on a hill across the stadium and you will see about 20 people watching the match from up there for free'. This is not possible in Buea but the hills around the stadium in Limbe are a perfect excuse for not buying a ticket.

The money from ticket sales has to be divided between several parties. First, the officials are paid on the spot out of any available revenue. Some say that the

referee, the two linesmen and the match delegate always receive a fixed amount of money; others claim that it depends on the officials' travel and accommodation expenses. In principle, however, the officials receive more money when there are a lot of spectators at the ground and less if nobody shows up. If there is no money, the officials will receive an IOY (I Owe You) with the promise that money will be paid out as soon as possible. It would therefore be logical to assume that referees are keen to handle big matches because then they are more likely to be well paid for their duties. Second, security personnel also have to be paid out of ticket revenues. The former stadium director said that matches in Limbe are being protected by about twenty policemen and ten soldiers. Really important matches usually demand a truckload of soldiers who spread out along the side of the field.

When the referees and the security staff have been paid out of the ticket revenues, 40 per cent of the remaining revenue goes to the two competing teams, 40 per cent goes to FECAFOOT, 19 per cent to (what I heard to be) the National Football Commission and 1 per cent to the local council. In the case of the big match between Victoria United and PWD Bamenda, the former stadium director told me that each of the two clubs took away about FCFA 600,000 (€ 914) from this particular match. The local urban council received 30,000 francs (€ 45).

The two competing teams therefore do not really get much money from ticket sales. They also do not receive much money from advertisements in the stadiums or from shirt sponsorship. There are a few companies actively involved in football sponsorship in Cameroon, of which the beer breweries and soda companies are the best-known examples. As Armstrong & Giulianotti (2004: 12) observe, '... the most prominent sponsors of African football clubs are often beer and cigarette corporations'. In Cameroon, these companies are sponsoring football tournaments such as the Top Cup and have set up football schools ('Brasseries') throughout the country but they do not sponsor specific football clubs.

There is hardly any sponsorship in Cameroonian football at all. 'People here don't believe in advertisements,' Zé told me. 'An exception is Fovu de Baham. The players are advertising milk through the logo on their jerseys. The club president owns a dairy company called B&B and he uses his team to advertise his products. Somebody asked me: "What is B&B?" He had never heard of it. I told him it was milk. I said: "You will test it!" You see, they already have one customer. If they don't do that, how will the club grow?'

Fovu de Baham notwithstanding, the lack of team sponsorship and advertising in the stadiums is, some say, the cause of the semi-professionalism in Cameroonian football. 'If there's no sponsorship,' Zé says, 'they should rent out the stadium to the club. Then the club will have to advertise to mobilize the people to come and watch their matches. They have to arrange publicity to get money and

make a profit. This is not the law, it's only my suggestion. If they run it well, everybody will be interested in putting money into the club. In this way, the club can afford good players. And then the supporters will give more money to watch them play football.'

There are others reasons for the D1 competition being only a semi-professional league. First, clubs do not sell food and drink during matches. Groundnuts, soya, chewing gum, fruit, cans of soda and bottles of water, among other things, are sold by children who do not seem to have any relationship with the clubs. Second, clubs in Cameroon do not sell football jerseys of specific players or any other items related to the club. In short, there is a lack of club marketing and merchandizing. 'Take a look at Real Madrid,' Zé told me. 'They bought Ronaldo. Ronaldo's shirt alone is equal to the money they used to buy him. That's what we call business. So when this is done, the club will grow.'

In addition, since there are no cameras present at most matches, including the match here in Mbouda, clubs do not receive money from television deals. Indeed Giulianotti (1999) argues that most money in European football comes straight from such TV deals. Since the money generated by ticket sales is not enough to cover all their expenditures, it is difficult for most Cameroonian clubs to earn money from football and re-invest it in the club.

## Driving straight onto the field

Our driver has taken us out of Bafoussam and is driving to Mbouda. It is raining softly. The bus slowly climbs the hills and speeds up when going down into the valley. Listening to the horribly loud noises and shaky movements, my fear is that the bus is about to collapse. Nothing happens though and the road leads us into the village of Mbouda only thirty minutes later. One of the players is singing out loud again as the music from the cassette blasts out of the speakers.

Suddenly a loud bang fills the air and we all bounce forward and backward again. A taxi just crashed into the back of the bus, although it seems to be an accident. The Rasta player starts screaming at the taxi driver. 'What is this, you crazy man? Are you blind?' The technical director gets off the bus, only to conclude that no damage has been done. The director takes the opportunity to call over a few players and they disappear into a supermarket by the side of the road. Shortly afterwards, they return with a pack of 24 bottles of water.

The driver continues our journey very slowly. He cannot speed up because the main road is filled with supporters walking towards the stadium. Around three o'clock, we are approaching the main entrance to the stadium. On both sides of the entrance hundreds of supporters flock together, trying to get a ticket for the match. Several soldiers are ruthlessly beating the supporters back from the main

entrance. Our driver grabs the opportunity and takes the bus straight through the opening in the wall. The intense roar of the engine and the smoke at the back of the bus scare away many Bamboutos supporters.

When I get off the bus, I see that there is already a match going on. A large crowd is watching Fovu de Baham – the team without a decent field in their village – playing a home match against Union de Douala. A few Olympique de Buea players join me on the side of the field to get a glimpse of the match. Other players are warming up in the parking lot. The referee blows his whistle. Union de Douala beat Fovu de Baham by 3 goals to 2. I guess the inhabitants of Mbouda are very lucky to see two first-division matches for the price of one.

The stadium, again, looks exactly like the ones in Buea and Bandjoun. Here, too, the field is red gravel. There is only one stand on the right-hand side of the field and it is full of supporters. Also, the old fence around the field is surrounded by hundreds, maybe a few thousand, spectators. A small hut is located across from the stand, providing room for a couple of radio reporters who will give short updates on the match every ten to fifteen minute. In this case, radio listeners will hear reports on all the first-division matches without having to switch channels. While a group of musicians is entertaining the crowd, the players of both Bamboutos de Mbouda and Olympique de Buea are warming up.

Against a backdrop of hills, the players from both teams are now lining up for a pre-match formality. The referee and the Bamboutos captain are checking the football IDs of the Olympique de Buea players. Then, the referee and the Olympique de Buea captain do the same with the IDs of the Bamboutos players. These IDs are issued by the highest football authorities and are meant to ensure that only the official players in each team actually play the match. In the case of inconsistencies, the opposing team can file a complaint with the match delegate, after which the matter will be investigated further.

The football IDs show the names as well as the dates and places of birth of the players, among other things. I heard that there are two kinds of ‘ages’: real ages and football ages, and the latter is always lower. For instance, when a player is 27 years old, his football age will be around 22, or maybe even younger. The reason is not only that players have more chances this way to sign club contracts in Cameroon or abroad but also that they are still eligible to play in one of the junior national teams. Essomba and Ashu too only told me their football ages and were very vague about their real ages.

There are many official rules in the Cameroonian football leagues and it is the match delegate who is responsible for upholding these rules. First of all, teams can file a complaint or protest to the match delegate in the case of a dubiously given penalty or any other irregularity that may occur during the match. I occa-

sionally witnessed how the club executives practically attacked the match delegate and each time he had to be protected by soldiers.

Then there are some general rules for official matches. First, heavy rainfall can make the referee and the match delegate decide to postpone a match. For instance, I was watching a Cup of Cameroon match between Fovu de Baham and a second-division team from Douala where rain began to fall heavily. After twenty minutes, a funny match developed as players skidded and fell into puddles of water and the ball kept dropping dead. The match had to be postponed. Only a few fields – such as the one in Buea – have drainage systems but these do not really work properly.

Second, teams are obligated to show up for every official match and are sanctioned if they fail to do so. The penalties include a fine of a particular sum and losing the match by forfeit. There are many teams that lack the necessary finances to pay for away matches and therefore it is not uncommon for a team to just stay at home. For instance, Buea Boys had to play a match against a team from the South West Province earlier this year (2003). Rumours ran high about the other team having financial difficulties and so Ashu already – and rightfully – predicted that the team would not show up in Buea. I heard that some teams will send somebody to the stadium to inform the match delegate about a breakdown of the bus. If the match delegate does not find out what really happened, the visiting team will be entitled to a replay.

Third, spectator violence is a reason for the referee or match delegate to decide to penalize a team and award the match to the other team. Ashu gave an example when he told us about the match between Buea Boys and Tiko United. I will get into the issue of spectator violence later on.

## Christians and muslims

It is around four o'clock and 22 players and three officials have lined up on the field in front of the stand. Matches normally begin at three o'clock or three-thirty but the two teams had to wait until the other match had finished. The players are all standing on the centre circle and waving at the crowd. While the Bamboutos players group together to lock the goal, the Olympique players form a circle and offer their final prayers.

Prayers are the most common way of asking for spiritual assistance on the field and the players also say them after most training sessions. As Cameroon is divided between the 'Muslim North' and the 'Christian South', it is normal for a football team to pray or call for a priest before the match. Muslim teams may call for a *marabout*, Christian teams prefer a priest. Players can pray individually or collectively with the whole team. Individually, players use the power of God for

protection and for good luck on the field. Ashu will always bring his carpet and his rosary when going for an away match. The rosary, a chain with 99 beads representing the many names of Allah, can even protect him against witchcraft, sorcery and magic. Essomba always prays before going to training sessions and official matches.

Collectively, teams are visited by priests before the start of the match. The club president of Olympique de Buea usually sends a priest to the Sporting Center on the morning of the match to bless the players and say collective prayers. 'He calls each of us,' Essomba explains. 'He will hold the leg of the player and pray: "May God bless you and forgive all your sins, and take maximum care of you, and make you stronger and stronger. Amen."' The priest blesses the legs and feet of the players and the hands of the goalkeepers using holy water and a broom. Within Buea Boys too, priests are hired to offer collective prayers before important matches.

In Cameroon, as elsewhere in Africa, beliefs in Christianity and Islam go hand in hand with beliefs in witchcraft, sorcery, magic and other spiritual powers. In the case of the players, it is not so much a question of whether they believe in witchcraft, sorcery and magic or in God and the Bible or Koran. They clearly believe in all of them and the 'Western' religions have even created '... dualistic thinking surrounding the powers of God and the Devil ...' (Moore & Sanders 2001: 5). In general, the powers of the priest and the *marabout* are said to be the highest in ranking. In other words, asking the help of God is thought to supersede and overrule all other supernatural powers that may have been called upon during the match. In fact, the dualistic ideas are evident in the sense that all occult forces (witchcraft and sorcery) are called satanic powers and God is the ultimate force who can neutralize these powers. However, this does not mean that magic and its anti do not have to be sought after and used during the match.

So what kind of magic is Olympique de Buea using for the match against Bamboutos de Mbouda? Essomba told me yesterday that there have not been any collective rituals this week. The players told the club executives that, after Sunday's overkill in spiritual assistance, they no longer wished to participate in collective magic anymore. They said that magic will distract them and they feel that collective prayers are sufficient to ensure victory on the field. The players also said that they do not object if the coach or another club executive employs a spiritual adviser, as long as the man does not bother them.

Ashu told me earlier that there are always players who do not like the spiritual adviser to come near them and do something with herbs and lotions. Nevertheless, players will usually do what is custom within the team and the club and they will obey the executives' orders. 'If you are in Rome, you have to do what the Romans do,' Essomba said. In other words, if it is custom within a club to per-



form magical rites, you as a player have to participate in them. 'I have to do what the club president tells me to do,' Ashu says, 'because I'm a player in the team. You see, whether you are a Christian or a Muslim, you must do it. It's a problem of collective preparation. If you don't do it, you are betraying the whole team.'

In this case, though, the club executives at Olympique de Buea have decided to comply with the wishes of the players. But I am sure that somebody hired somebody.

## Bamboutos de Mbouda – Olympique de Buea

The referee has chosen one of the two match balls and places it in the middle of the field. Olympique de Buea just won the toss and its two attackers will start the match, but not before the ritual of hand shaking has been taken care of. Now I see how many players on both sides actually refuse to shake hands for well-known reasons. The crowd cheers as the attacker from Buea Town passes the ball to his team mate for the first 45 minutes of play.

The reserves' benches of Bamboutos de Mbouda and Olympique de Buea are on the sideline just in front of the stand. The reserves and the coaches are barely able to sit on the short wooden bench and, after a while, some of the players sit on the ground to watch the match. The vice-president has a chair in the stand, while the technical director is standing among the supporters just behind the reserves' bench.

It has stopped raining. At the moment, the field looks relatively okay; it is not too wet and the sun does not reflect much onto the red gravel. Umbrellas have been put down and everybody is concentrating on the match. The first twenty minutes of play are relatively boring. Neither of the two teams dares to attack and, instead, are mostly defending their goal areas. Essomba told me that Cameroonians really like a mix between the Italian and German styles of play, meaning a very rough, defensive and counter-attacking kind of football. This could be either just a personal view or a recent development in *local* football, because '... Cameroon has an essentially French style dating back to at least the 1960s ...' (Armstrong & Giulianotti 2004: 15).

The rough play of the players on the field seems to catch the admiration of the crowd. 'Strong player,' is a statement I hear occasionally. One of the Bamboutos players lobs the ball over his direct opponent and sprints forward. The supporters cheer him on. 'He's measuring your height,' a supporter shouts at the unfortunate Olympique de Buea player.

Then, after about thirty minutes of play, a Bamboutos attacker manages to reach the Olympique goal area and scores the first goal. The stadium erupts. Everybody is cheering, laughing and making fun of the opponents. The attacker

who scored the goal removes his shirt and runs to the side of the field. He is surrounded by his team mates as they celebrate the goal. The referee places the match ball in the centre field to resume play. For the second time in the first half of the match, the Olympique de Buea attackers perform the ritual of passing the ball to each other. Now Olympique de Buea faces the difficult task of scoring the equalizer while the entire crowd cheers for the home team. One of the Olympique players shoots the ball towards the goal but the goalkeeper catches it very well. 'International keeper!' The supporters like to stress the fact that this particular goalkeeper is one of only two players in the D1 competition who have been selected for the national team (the other one being an attacker with Canon de Yaoundé).

I am looking at the scoreboard at the end of the field which looks similar to the one in Buea. It is basically just a large wooden board held up by two iron poles. Here in Mbouda, and in Buea as well, a guy sitting in a giant chair adjusts the scoreboard by sticking pieces of cardboard with numbers on behind the name of the respective club. Aside from the fact that there are no electronic scoreboards – the ones in Yaoundé and Douala have been 'out of order' for ages – there are also no working spotlights in most stadiums. Recall Ashu's story of the matches between Buea Boys and Tiko United, where the second match ended in 1-1 due to the approaching darkness. Indeed, football matches can only be played during the day and before sunset which is at six or six-thirty. Finally, many supporters synchronize their watches with the playing time on the field because of the absence of a clock in the stadium.

After forty minutes play, two players crash into each other and both fall over. The referee blows his whistle, runs over towards the players and then gestures that he wants a stretcher. Four older people dressed in white medical coats rush onto the field carrying what is supposed to be a stretcher. Such personnel are present at all first-division matches but they do not treat the players medically. That is the job of the club's doctor and Olympique de Buea's doctor rushes over to the players with a bag and a bottle of water. In Cameroon, the FIFA rules, stating that players have to be treated off the field, also apply and so both players are carried behind one of the goals for further treatment. After a minute or so, the players are ready to come onto the field again. They have to walk towards the middle circle and wait for a signal from the referee before they can resume play. Moments later, the referee whistles for halftime.

I notice that home matches truly are an advantage for the home team and vice versa. They put the visiting team at a disadvantage. For one thing, I have never seen visiting teams changing in the changing rooms. The main reason is that the players fear that the home team has 'spoiled' the front or inside of the dressing room. That is why the PWD Bamenda players, when they were playing against

Olympique de Buea in Molyko Stadium last Sunday, had to endure the burning sun for at least an hour until the match started.

Another thing is that the visiting team usually does not train on the home team's field and so they cannot get used to its peculiarities in advance. For instance, when Olympique de Buea goes to Yaoundé to play Canon in the near future, they will train on a small secondary-school field because they either did not get permission to train in the impressive stadium or because they did not want to.

A third disadvantage is, of course, the spectators in the stadium. I do not think that there are supporters of Olympique de Buea present in Mbouda because it is too expensive to travel all the way to the far outposts of West Province. The entire crowd therefore supports Bamboutos and this gives the home team an advantage that cannot be underestimated.

## Chiefs, traditional fields and ancestors

There is another aspect related to the fields that can influence the outcome of matches. Recall the difference between traditional teams and non-traditional teams, as explained on Wednesday. Traditional teams consist of a club president, executives and supporters who come from the ethnic group that resides in the area where the team is located. The home matches of these teams are played on *traditional fields*. When speaking of fields in Cameroon, one actually talks about the ground or land on which the stadium is built. Traditional fields are located on the ethnic group's land and, thus, have a close connection with the ancestors of the land. 'People here believe in ancestral powers or the powers of the dead,' Zé told me. We have seen a couple of examples when Ashu and Essomba explained the workings of traditional benediction and the ancestral cup in order to protect them from occult forces.

In African cosmology, the world is divided in two: the world of the living and the world of the dead. These worlds are not completely separate but are interconnected and interdependent. When a person dies, he or she will become part of the world of the dead – and hence become an ancestor. Ancestors are dead tribesmen who can still influence the world of the living. The most important person for the ancestors is the traditional ruler. The chief or *fon* fulfils an intermediary role between the two worlds. He is said to be able to communicate with the world of the dead and, therefore, with the ancestors.

At the beginning of the football season, the chief will perform specific rites on the traditional field to honour the ancestors. The spiritual adviser told me that the club president will pay the chief who then uses some of the money to make his people buy certain animals and foodstuffs. Some time before the start of the new

season and thus also before the first home match, the chief and his followers visit the football field.

‘The ancestors are people who died so many years ago,’ Zé explains. ‘But they still exist in one way or another. They have part ownership of the land. So that’s why the chief will come to the field at night to sprinkle food and drinks on the field. Maybe the ancestors were angry because they thought they were being neglected. The food and drinks will make them happy and now football can be played on the field.’ According to Essomba, the chief also sacrifices an animal such as a chicken or a goat and then the blood is poured onto the field. This story is similar to Scotch’s (1961) findings on football among urban Zulu in South Africa. ‘Before the season even opens, the team slaughters a goat “to open the doors to luck” and the season’s end is marked by another slaughter’ (Ibid.: 488).

Although I did not hear anything about post-season ritual slaughters, some teams will pay the chief halfway through the competition to perform the traditional rites again. This, however, only happens when the team is not performing well and in such cases, Essomba told me, the club president will start contemplating what is going on. Is it the fault of the players or the coach? Is it the fault of the spiritual adviser? If not, the club president may think that perhaps the ancestors are angry. Only then does someone call for the chief to perform the traditional rites *twice* a year. The ancestors cannot make a team win matches but if they are angry, they can start making life very difficult.

In Cameroon, all the teams from West Province as well as PWD Bamenda, Kumbo Strikers, Victoria United, Canon de Yaoundé and Dynamo de Douala are so-called traditional teams and their team executives can decide to pay the chief to please the ancestors. There is one major exception to the rule of traditional teams and fields, namely Olympique de Buea. We know that the (Bamileke) club president is not indigenous to the Buea area. However, someone advised him to pay the local (Bakweri) chief anyway and that is exactly what he has been doing for the last few years. Essomba told me that the traditional rites have not been performed this year (2003) and there are rumours that the president has refused to pay the chief. There is also the story that the president gave money to one of his executives but that the latter had said he was unable to meet the chief in time which, as the people from Buea would say, means that he collected the money for himself.

It is also custom for teams to visit the chief’s palace before going to a really important match. For instance, Olympique de Buea went to see chief Endeley of Buea before playing the Cup of Cameroon final in Yaoundé last year (2002). There are palaces all over the country but some say that the most powerful ones can be found in the North West and West Provinces. The palace in Foumban is said to be the biggest and most powerful of all. Both Essomba and Ashu have

shown a deep respect for the palaces. Essomba told me that the palace is full of medicine and witches cannot enter. Individual magic is not allowed inside the palace. When Olympique de Buea received the chief's blessings, he noticed that many players had brought individual magic from their villages and he told them to leave it behind because it was disturbing team unity.

When visiting the chief at the palace, Essomba explained to me, the club president, vice-president, team manager and the players all have to drink from the ancestral cup, beginning with the club president. Buea Boys, too, went to see the chief of Buea before going to the interpools last year. Ashu told me the following story. 'Before we entered the palace, the top of the mountain was covered in cloud. We all stood in a circle – the players, coaches, everybody. The chief took the cup from the ancestors and gave it to us. You can only drink from it when he gives it to you. Then the chief grabbed a broom and splashed the water from the cup over the players and staff. He said: "Go, my children, you will not be sick, you will not break a leg, come back safely. You are guided by your ancestors." We looked up and saw that the clouds on the mountain were clearing. The sky was bright, the sun was shining. It meant that the ancestors had accepted us.'

Apparently, Kumbo Strikers also went to see the chief before going to play the Cup of Cameroon final in 2000 and Victoria United visited the chief before going to the interpools a few years ago.

There is something else connected with the chief and football teams. I became aware of it when Kalla described the big match between Victoria United and Olympique de Buea in Limbe. 'The people from Limbe use the sea to confuse players,' he said, 'so it's very difficult to beat them at home. They use water from the sea to prepare the match. That is, they use the spirits that are in the water. We in Buea use the spirits of the mountain. We believe that the mountain is taller than the sea so we feel that we are above them.' Of course, we already know that there are spirits of the ocean – called Mami Wata – that can be used for match preparation. But this is something different.

Zé told me that there are natural phenomena around most villages and towns. For instance, there is a mountain near Buea, an ocean near Limbe, a waterfall near Menchum, a rock near Bafoussam and so on. The chief and the football team can go to these places and derive powers from them. Only the local ethnic group can make use of these powers, Zé says. 'It's the same thing with your passport. It belongs to you. If I use it, it would be illegal. That's how the mountain stands. The Bakwerians are the people who own it. So anybody who wants to use the God of the mountain has to consult the Bakwerians.'

We know that there are coastal Bakwerians (in and around Limbe) and inland Bakwerians (in and around Buea) who rule over the ocean and the mountain respectively. We also saw on Wednesday that there is a God of the Mountain

(Efasa-Moto) and a Goddess of the Ocean (Liengu la Mwanja). 'You have to look at the historical background of these places,' Zé says. 'There wasn't any football during pre-colonial times. There were only intertribal wars. When people were going to war, they went to these places to collect powers. They believed that they could defeat their enemies by using these powers. These days there are no more wars. The only war we have now is football.'

We already know that a football player can receive supernatural powers when going to the mountain with a native doctor. Apparently, this is equally possible for a whole football team. I heard that the powers of mountains and oceans are not called upon only for football purposes, but they are also used during other competitions, such as the canoe races in Limbe or the Race of Hope in Buea.

One may get the idea that teams who have such natural phenomena in their areas enjoy a certain advantage over teams that do not because they appear to derive a lot of powers from these areas. However, I have never heard of a victory being attributed to powers related to chiefs or ancestors. Instead, the chief and the ancestors merely fulfil a complementary role at important matches.

## Spectator violence

It is half-time. The Olympique de Buea players are sitting on the ground behind the reserves' bench. They are drinking and listening to the coach and the vice-president. The vice-president truly acts as a substitute for the club president. He is making tactical comments and is worried about a specific player's injury. Essomba's voice is louder than all the others. It is clear that he is not happy with his team-mates' performances.

I am feeling somewhat ill at ease at the side of the field. Just before the start of the match, I heard disturbing news about last year's match between Bamboutos and Olympique de Buea here in Mbouda, which ended in a 1-2 victory for the away team. Bamboutos did not only lose that particular match but also their chances of winning the D1 competition that year. The Bamboutos supporters became so angry and frustrated that they walked onto the field with a wooden bench and used it to hit the referee several times on the head. The referee died a few days later in hospital.

Today, the club executives and players of Olympique de Buea have expressed fears that the supporters may become violent again. The driver even suggested parking the bus in front of the police station so that the team could seek protection in case of unrest. The vice-president refused to do so.

Football is a spectator sport, Essomba told me, and of course he is right. 'There's no point in playing matches if nobody's watching us,' he said. Supporters can encourage the players to give outstanding performances, but they can

also obstruct the match through violence. In Europe, spectator violence – popularly referred to as hooliganism – is one of the major problems surrounding football. In Cameroon, I have witnessed only a few instances of spectator violence in the first-division league. One was at last Sunday's match between Olympique de Buea and PWD Bamenda when some of the supporters started throwing rocks at other supporters. We heard the story on Monday. Another case of violence took place in the stadium in Bafoussam, after which FECAFOOT did not allow the field to be used for several weeks.

In Cameroon, the level of spectator violence differs in each of the three official competitions and also according to the importance of the match. The tendency is for more violence during important matches and the (mini-)interpools. The level of violence also tends to be greater within the second and third divisions than in the D1 competition. In this respect, Cameroonians make a distinction between *town matches* and *village matches*. Town matches are usually matches between the bigger clubs in the D1 competition and are relatively peaceful; and village matches are between the smaller clubs in the lower divisions and can be relatively violent.

The different structure of the three football divisions is one of the reasons why violence is more widespread in the lower divisions. The teams in the first division play 30 matches in a season and one individual match is therefore not particularly important. In the second and third divisions, however, the teams from the province and division respectively, are divided into pools with six to eight teams, depending on the numbers of teams in the area. These teams do not play as many matches as their counterparts in the D1 competition and only the teams that end up in first place in their respective pools will continue to play matches. For many second- and third-division teams, the football season is over after only a few months. This indicates that each and every match is important, especially in the first months of the season, and supporters thus tend to support their teams more fiercely.

The teams that make it through the pools then face another difficult competition: the mini-interpools. However, there is more security available at the mini-interpools and the interpools.

Village matches are said to be synonymous with bad pitches, lousy stadiums and plenty of violence. To begin with the first statement, most fields in Cameroon are far from flat, even the ones in Buea, Limbe and here in Mbouda. Sometimes when watching matches, I got the feeling that winning a game here is a lottery and depends on whether the field is 'cooperating' with a team or not. Ashu told me that the fields in the villages are the worst of all. Buea Boys played three village matches this season (2003) – one in Ekondo Titi, one in Idenao and one in Bakwa Supper. In the second game, 'the pitch was too stony. If the ball

happens to fall, it bounces and changes direction. It was an inferior place.’ In the third case, ‘it was a very nice field but it did not have the dimensions of an official field. It was really small.’ Players rarely slide deliberately on Cameroonian fields, the obvious reason being that the fields are too hard and players will certainly get injured if they do.

The fields in the villages typically belong to primary or secondary-schools and are not really up to the standard required for official matches. One should therefore not be surprised that the field is not surrounded by a fence, a brick wall or anything that would classify the whole structure as a stadium. In Buea it would not be very difficult for a supporter to walk onto the field during a match but in the villages it would be easy to do so.

Cameroonians even have a term for animals or spectators who cross the field while teams are playing a match. Since no one is allowed on the field but the 22 players, animals such as chickens, goats and cows or even human beings that appear on the field are called *foreign bodies*. The official rule is that the referee has to stop the match for as long as the foreign body is on the pitch. In the case of animals, it can hardly be said that they are trying to influence the match. In the case of supporters though, this becomes a different story. I heard cases of village matches where supporters ran onto the field to stop the ball. A second-division player told me about a match where rainfall had turned the pitch into a muddy pool of water. When one attacker shot the ball at the goal, it dropped dead in a puddle of water just in front of the goal line. A supporter from the opposing team rushed onto the field and kicked the ball away. The referee awarded neither a goal nor a penalty.

The lack of fences and brick walls in the villages is made worse by a lack of security personnel. While there are maybe up to thirty policemen or soldiers present at first-division matches, the level of security in the second and third divisions can be classified as ‘minimal’ to ‘completely absent’. We already know that the security personnel are paid for out of ticket revenues. Village matches certainly attract impressive numbers of spectators but the fact remains that the stadiums in the larger towns are capable of hosting far more spectators. It would, therefore, be logical to assume that there is simply not enough money to cover the costs of having many policemen and soldiers to oversee village matches.

In summary, spectators can influence the match in several ways. First, supporters sometimes go onto the field during official game time and influence the match by obstructing players of the opposing team or by kicking the match ball away. I cannot say that I have witnessed any of this happening during first-division matches. Second, supporters can spoil the match by bursting the match balls. Third, supporters can (threaten to) beat up the visiting team, so the players go onto the field with trepidation. The visiting team knows that if they win the



match, they are likely to be molested by the crowd. If they lose the match, they will probably be left alone. Ashu told me that some of the Buea Boys players had even asked the coach to be left out of the line-up during their three village matches. In short, supporters can influence the outcome of a match – sometimes doing so through the use of latent or real violence.

## Beating up the referee

Supporters can also threaten to beat up the referee so that the latter will favour that particular team. This is yet another way in which spectators can influence the outcome of a match. Ashu explained to me what happened during the village match between the visiting team Buea Boys and the home team Bakwa Supper.

We went onto the field early. Supporters were burning torches at the side of the field. Bakwa Supper came with players who didn't have official licences, so I had to file a protest. Then we played the match. They scored against us in the first few minutes but I equalized. One of our players scored three goals in the first half but the referee was afraid of being beaten up. He refused to allow those three goals. We ended the first half 1-1.

In the second half I scored another goal. Then the vice-captain scored the third goal. We were leading 3-1. Then we scored again but the referee disallowed the goal for no good reason. Then I got the ball. I wanted to shoot but they kicked me and I fell over in the penalty area. The referee blew his whistle and gave us a penalty. The spectators ran onto the field and beat up the referee. When the scene was over and things had calmed down, the referee didn't put the ball on the penalty spot. He changed the penalty into a free kick.

The next goal that I scored was not allowed by the referee. The goalkeeper kicked the ball but it didn't get far. I rushed and shot the ball into the net behind the goalkeeper. But the referee refused to allow the goal.

I did not see the match so I cannot tell whether the referee was right or wrong in denying the goals scored by Buea Boys but it does not seem too far-fetched to conclude that the supporters of the opposing team influenced the referee through violence.

Finally, a second-division player gave me an extreme example of spectators influencing the referee. At half-time in a certain village match, some of the spectators were walking up and down the field with a coffin on their shoulders. The statement was clear enough: if our team does not win the match, you will end up inside this coffin!

A first-division referee told me that he and his colleagues are in the dubious position of being the most likely subjects to be beaten up by spectators. 'Sometimes the spectators realize that their team is weak,' he said. 'They know that their team deserved defeat and they will not fight. But sometimes they feel that their team was beaten as a result of the referee being too partial. That's when they will want to punch him.'

The problem with officiating a match is that – while the rules and regulations of the game apply to matches all over the world – these rules are nonetheless reasonably flexible. In other words, the rules can be interpreted differently by referees during matches. ‘I think being a referee is one of the most difficult professions that a person can find himself in,’ a first-division referee explained. ‘It takes less than a second to make a decision. A magistrate can go home, read his law books, come back to court the following day and make a decision. A referee’s decision is made right there on the field with hundreds or thousands of people watching him. He cannot say: “Wait, let me consult my books.” Sometimes the spectators don’t understand the decision and you’re accused of being partial. Sometimes the referee’s incompetent, sometimes he’s having a bad day. We’re all human beings.’

Every referee is selected and trained by a local, regional or national branch of FECAFOOT, depending on whether he is working in the third, second or first division respectively. Just like the football clubs, a referee too has to start his career in the lowest (third) division. To be promoted to a higher level, referees undergo a medical, physical and written test every year. A first-division referee told me that he spent two years in the third division and six years in the second division before he was promoted to the D1 competition. He is now even accepted as an international referee. Going from the third to the first division, then, is a sort of rite of passage. ‘You will find out that first-division referees are more mature,’ the first-division referee explained. ‘They are more experienced than the ones in the second division.’

Sometimes referees end up in a higher division because of bribery. A suspended senior referee in Cameroon has argued that there is corruption involved in the selection and promotion of referees. He told a BBC reporter that referees pay money to get promoted to a higher level.

Another difference between first-division referees and second- or third-division referees is that the latter do not get paid much. ‘Being a referee is a hobby,’ the first-division referee told me. ‘You don’t consider it as something that can sustain you. It’s a voluntary kind of activity. So you must have a good job or business as well. When you are appointed to handle a match, you must be there. You need money for transport and accommodation.’ Although this statement may be true for referees in the third division, I think that referees in the first division do make reasonable amounts of money. After all, why would they go through so much trouble and hardship if they were not even compensated for it? It seems that the referee will earn more money every time he is promoted to a higher division. This is especially true when one takes into consideration the levels of bribery explained on Thursday.

A picture emerges of first-division matches being led by more experienced and better-paid referees who work in relative security and are less bothered by violence than their colleagues in the lower football leagues. One is also inclined to think that there is less 'fair play' in second- and third-division matches than in first-division matches, meaning that there are more outside influences on the players and officials the lower one goes in the league. And since second- and third-division referees are young and inexperienced and do not get paid much, they are more likely to accept bribes. Corruption may be more widespread (or at least less hidden) in the lower divisions but it increases in value in the D1 competition. For instance, I do not think that clubs in the third division are able to give a referee the FCFA one million that the Olympique de Buea team manager mentioned earlier.

Spectator violence and bribing the referee are similar in the sense that in both cases fair play is no longer guaranteed. But bribery can also lead to spectator violence. For instance, the referee has to be very careful in awarding penalties. We know that supporters will try to beat up the referee when they *think* that one team is being favoured. Of course, we can never tell whether the penalty was awarded as a result of bribery or not. Nevertheless, the referee faces a similar dilemma as the coach who accepts money from a (coach) player. Whereas the coach may place his reason for winning the match in jeopardy, the referee may put his life in danger.

FECAFOOT is trying different methods to increase the level of fair play or at least the *idea* of fair play. First, the performances of referees are being observed and checked by FECAFOOT officials, particularly the match delegate. 'The match delegate always gives the referee a grade for his performance,' the first-division referee explained. 'He will send the results to FECAFOOT. Sometimes they appoint a hidden match commissioner. You don't know him, you don't see him. He comes in as a spy. He takes a confidential record to the match commission in Yaoundé.'

Indeed the appointment of 'undercover match inspectors' is a quite recent phenomenon that is directly related to accusations of corruption among referees. According to FECAFOOT, the reports by the secret inspectors 'will focus on the quality of officiating and the conduct of the home fans' (BBC website). Also, the football magazine *Global Football* gives unofficial 'grades' to referees and linesmen. Although this implies that the press functions as a sort of watchdog, the lack of cameras during matches severely limits this role.

Second, the referee cannot personally select the matches he wishes to officiate at. Instead, as a first-division referee explained to me, this is done by a commission in Yaoundé. 'The commission will publish the names of the referees in the media,' the first division referees said. 'Sometimes you'll find your name in the

sports pages, sometimes you'll hear it on the radio.' When selecting the officials for upcoming matches, it would be wise to look at the ethnic or regional background of the referee. The first-division referee said that, as an Anglophone, he will never be appointed to officiate at PWD Bamenda, Victoria United or Olympique de Buea matches. 'I will never handle their matches. It's not really written anywhere but they feel that if I officiated at one of these matches, the supporters might link the result of the match to the area I'm from. They try to keep you out of such problems.'

In the end, the referee and the match delegate have the authority to postpone a match if there is too much spectator violence. The first-division referee told me that he hardly ever uses this option. 'If you cancel the match, it means that the two clubs have to prepare again for that match. This means double expenditure and they just don't have the money for it.' Another reason may be that the supporters will not allow the referee to stop the match, meaning that the latter has to continue the match or be beaten up by the crowd.

The first-division referee's concluding remark is simple yet very true. 'You just have to manage the situation and be a brave man.'

## Into the second half of play

It is shortly after five o'clock. The fifteen-minute break has come to an end and the players are walking onto the field for the second half. The Olympique de Buea players offer collective prayers in a closed circle. Usually the opposing team and its supporters are watching this ritual carefully because this is the moment when a player in the circle can easily drop a concoction onto the field. We already know from some of the stories in the previous chapter that magic can lead to violence in the field. In fact, during my stay in Cameroon I found out that many fights broke out because of alleged magical practices.

Two players with Bamboutos are ready to start the last 45 minutes of play. A man who is dressed up as a woman is blocking my view by dancing in front of me. Then he is acting as though he wants to give me a kiss. The onlookers are screaming 'sara, sara' (white man, white man). I am supposed to put some money inside his basket. With a tip in the basket, he lifts up his dress and walks away.

These public figures can always be found around a football field. In Buea, there are two guys who are synonymous with Olympique de Buea, the Molyko Stadium and football in general. They stir up the crowd and create the necessary enthusiastic atmosphere during a match. One of them is always walking right next to the sideline, catching the ball when it goes out and shooting it way back

onto the field. Not all the players are fond of him but he seems to entertain the supporters nonetheless.

My neighbour's stopwatch indicates that the match is in the 55<sup>th</sup> minute. The attacker from Buea Town reaches the goal and, to the horror of all the supporters in Mbouda, manages to score the equalizer. The reserves' bench of Olympique de Buea is immediately deserted as the reserves and coaches run onto the field to celebrate. The radio reporter signals the recent developments to his superiors at the station and then broadcasts the latest score to the rest of Cameroon. Numerous supporters in the stadium are holding tiny transistor radios to their ears to keep up-to-date with all the action in today's matches.

The match resumes. The coaches from both teams are substituting one of their attackers for a defender, thus implying that they are happy with the result. The tension of the match is slowly decreasing. It looks as if Bamboutos no longer wants the full three points and is trying just to hold onto the current score. Olympique de Buea, too, does not seem to mind a draw. The referee blows his whistle three times. The end of the match. The score is 1-1. In no time at all, the field is covered with hundreds of supporters. Some of them are trying to talk to the players; most are heading towards the exit.

The Olympique de Buea players are returning to the bus and everybody seems to be pleased with the final score. There are several reasons why today's result, which will only put the team ahead by one point, is being celebrated as a victory. Olympique de Buea did not lose the match and has therefore ended its negative run of lost matches. Also, Bamboutos de Mbouda is a big team in the top five of the competition. A draw is thus a very respectable result.

The results of other matches are coming in. The matches between Canon and Tonnerre de Yaoundé and between PWD Bamenda and Coton Sport de Garoua both ended in draws. Nothing has changed in the top of the league table. Olympique de Buea has not got any closer to the other teams but has not dropped down the table either.

Meanwhile, the attacker from Buea Boys is showered with compliments from his team mates and the coaches. The vice-president is on the phone to the club president who is passing on his congratulations to the team. Essomba is visibly happy to see that several girls are slowly walking towards the bus. He and some team mates are exchanging phone numbers with the girls. Other players are having conversations with their Bamboutos counterparts. In Cameroon, all the players seem to know each other.

The team's vice-captain has a thigh injury. One of the knobs on an opponent's boot has cut his skin but he does not seem particularly bothered by his wound. Also, one of the midfielders collided with a player on the opposing team when

they were both trying to head the ball. The bump on his forehead is literally growing by the minute.

After twenty minutes or so, the vice-president and the coach urge everybody to get back onto the bus. The driver has barely led us outside the stadium when one of the defenders jumps out of a window. He has seen an ex-girlfriend and wants to talk to her. A couple of minutes later, he is back inside the bus. The driver takes us back to Bandjoun at high speed. The bus goes down the valley and up the hill again. It feels as if we are in a roller coaster. In Bandjoun, everybody is resting and relaxing until seven o'clock. The sun sets behind the hills of West Province as we are driving home. Then, about halfway between Mbouda and Buea, the bus halts in the middle of a small town. This is the coach's stop. Two hours later, one of the assistant coaches is dropped off at the major roundabout near Tiko. He has parked his car there and will drive to Douala.

We have reached the Mile 17 Motor Park and make a right turn. Three players and I are getting off at Malingo Junction before the bus goes on to Buea Town and its final destination – the Sporting Centre near Muea. Essomba is seeing me off at the front gate of my compound which is something he always does. He is very tired. 'There's no training session tomorrow,' he says. The coach told the players that they deserved a day off. Training will resume on Tuesday afternoon.

It is almost midnight. We have been knocking on the gate several times now but the guard is not there and nobody seems to be awake. Essomba helps me over the brick wall. 'You have to get some rest!' he says. 'Next week will be very tough. We're playing Union de Douala next Sunday. A very important match.' I realize that it is still a long way until the end of the season.

Anything can happen.

## Conclusion

At the end of the first half of the 2003 football season, I travelled with Olympique de Buea to the capital Yaoundé for a match against Canon. I was sitting somewhere in the Ahmadou Ahidjo Stadium and, as it turned out, only a couple of seats away from Roger Milla, the president of Tonnerre de Yaoundé. Back in Buea, a Buea Boys player had given me a photocopy of an advertisement in which Roger Milla and Theophile Abega, the club president of Canon, were standing side by side, both dressed in flashy late-1970s suits.

While Milla was discussing things with people around him, Canon and Olympique were struggling to win the match far away on the field. A couple of thousand supporters were sitting at the other end of the stadium, clapping and singing their hearts out. All of a sudden, I realized that I was doing research in a small Cameroonian town somewhere in the back of beyond. But this was Cameroon's capital and this was a real football stadium.

As we were driving towards the capital, I noticed how the Olympique de Buea players became quieter as we approached the city. Of course, Essomba and the Rasta player had lived here for years but many of the other players looked as though they were impressed by the sight of Yaoundé's green and yellow hills.

If only Olympique de Buea had a stadium like this one I thought as I watched the two teams play, or at least a similar football pitch. When Canon had beaten Olympique by two goals to one, and Milla had disappeared before I could give him the photocopy (requested by the Buea Boys player), I saw Canon de Yaoundé's official bus outside in the parking lot. It was a coach, no doubt with air conditioning, and there was a television screen inside as well. 'Now you see how big these teams like Canon and Tonnerre are,' Essomba said. 'Look at our bus

and look at Canon's bus. Our bus is a joke. These guys really have professional clubs.'

As we headed back to the South West Province and speed up the main road, most players were silently staring out into the dark evening. Perhaps they were sad because they had lost, perhaps they were dreaming of playing for a big club like Canon de Yaoundé. But it was there and then that I understood why clubs like Canon and Tonnerre de Yaoundé and their counterparts in Douala had always been so dominant in football.

Yaoundé and Douala are massive urban areas full of economic and political activity. This is where the big men can be found, some of whom are willing to sponsor the city's proud clubs. We should also not forget the huge populations in these areas, most of whom are loyal supporters of their respective football clubs. Above all, the ethnic groups in these areas, such as the Beti, the Bassa and the Duala, have money and political power. And tribalism and nepotism make sure that they maintain and strengthen their positions of power. The history of football truly reflects these processes: for 30 years the clubs and the related ethnic groups from Douala and Yaoundé have completely dominated the country.

It is actually amazing if one thinks about how the club president of Olympique de Buea managed to create a reasonably successful football team in a very short period of time. Olympique is a well-funded team full of good players who even took the Cup of Cameroon trophy to Buea in 2002. Most people in the South, East, Adamawa, and Extreme North Provinces can only dream of having teams like that. These four provinces are mostly absent from the list of winners in the D1 competition and the Cup of Cameroon.

But the club president of Olympique de Buea has one major advantage. He is a Bamileke. He and many other members of this colonially created ethnic group have not only become economically and politically powerful people, they have also engaged wholeheartedly in sponsoring football teams. Teams from the West Province have come in towards the top of football's national league, thereby successfully challenging the supremacy of clubs from Douala and Yaoundé.

In the introduction, I quoted journalist Simon Kuper who said that the spread of wealth in Africa closely matches the spread of footballing success. While he was referring to the African national teams, his statement is also true in Cameroon itself, particularly when you look at the clubs from the Littoral, Centre and West Provinces. In this respect, the locations of the country's most successful clubs coincide with the economically prosperous regions and the politically powerful ethnic groups who live there.

If one wants to beat the teams from these areas, one really needs a lot of money. That is precisely how Coton Sport de Garoua has become the new dominant force in Cameroonian football, and to some extent even on a continental



stage. According to the Olympique de Buea players, the financial capabilities of the team from the North Province are almost unlimited. Coton Sport de Garoua is known as a Muslim team in an area where there are many Muslim big men, one of whom is the club's president and general manager of the Sodecoton Company. Over the last ten years, even a big club like Canon de Yaoundé has not been able to truly compete with Coton Sport de Garoua.

But, of course, we should not forget the teams from the Anglophone zone. Both the South West and North West Provinces have produced some of the bigger clubs in the country. The South West Province is a relatively rich region due to its many natural resources and the major companies found there. The North West Province may be a lot less wealthy, or even poor, but here one will find the Bamenda – an ethnic group that is known to be the most prominent force of opposition to the president and his ethnic group.

There is actually a lot of politics in football at work here – or at least that is what the Anglophones would say. Big teams such as Prisons Buea, Victoria United, Kumbo Strikers, and most of all PWD Bamenda have never won the national D1 competition and the Anglophones think it is the result of a deliberate attempt by the Francophones to keep them under control. However, another reason may be that these Anglophone teams lack the long-term funding that the teams from the Littoral, Centre, Western and North Provinces enjoy, which is reflected in the Anglophone teams continuously being promoted to and dropping out of the D1 competition.

But as I already mentioned in the introduction, the fact remains that the players from the Bamileke region and those from the Anglophone zone are underrepresented in the national team. Anglophones would say that they are being dominated by the Francophones in life – and that this dominance is simply extended to football as well. As far as the Bamileke are concerned, team manager Kalla told me that the other ethnic groups (the Beti and Bassa) are afraid that the Bamileke will take over the national team in the same way that they have taken over business in the country. So they are trying to keep Bamileke players out of the national team.

It is evident that football is closely linked to both economics and politics. At both local and national levels, tribalism is working full force: football is an arena in which the country's different ethnic groups are struggling to gain power and dominance in a relatively non-violent manner.

I said before that President Biya always tries to take advantage of the successes of national teams, whether it is the Indomitable Lions or the junior Olympic team. The president also sees African continental competitions as a way in which he can profit from the success of Cameroonian clubs. In 2003, Olympique de Buea and Canon de Yaoundé received money from FECAFOOT and the

Ministry of Youth and Sports to participate in the Cup Winners Cup and Champions League, respectively. The authorities even appointed a well-known Cameroonian national coach to assist Olympique de Buea's head coach.

The sad result of the president's interest in the national teams is that he seems to be neglecting the local leagues completely. One can see this by looking at the poor state of the stadiums in the country or when one hears that the clubs in the D1 competition decided to go on a strike (in 2004) because they just did not get any money from FECAFOOT. One can also see it on all sides of the field in the stadiums or on the shirts of the players. Or rather, one will see it because it cannot be seen. There is no sponsorship in Cameroonian football, although lately there has been some interest by the telecommunications company MTN.

And this is where we can safely return to the importance of powerful ethnic groups and their big men. The lack of sponsorship and financial aid from the government, combined with the fact that revenues from ticket sales are usually minimal, leads to the conclusion that these big men are essential to the very existence and success of football clubs in Cameroon. However, having a big man behind one's public team may be a blessing but it poses some problems as well.

Canon de Yaoundé, Tonnerre de Yaoundé and Coton Sport de Garoua are all known as rich and well-managed clubs. Even Olympique de Buea is thought to be a big and well-organized club. After all, the club president is a rich man who can afford to send his players to away matches and pay them high signing fees, salaries and even match bonuses. Since many teams in Cameroon are struggling financially, Olympique de Buea already enjoys the advantages of the other richer teams from the Littoral, Centre, Western, and North Provinces.

Also, the club president has employed a vice-president, a technical director, a team doctor, a team manager, three coaches and a lot of ground staff to perform various tasks. The club executives all have their own role within the overall organization of Olympique de Buea, which on paper sounds like a (semi-)professional football club. In this sense, one angle of my research question – how do teams in Cameroon (try to) win football matches? – can be answered as follows. The basis of a successful football team depends on the financial resources and organizational structure of the club in general.

But as we have been 'behind the scenes' at Olympique de Buea, we know that reality is a little different. Essomba, among others, has said that his club is not a professional club at all; in fact he called it an amateur club. Of course, he was referring to his signature premium of FCFA 2.5 million that still had not been deposited in his bank account. And he was also quite angry because the match bonuses and training allowances had not been paid yet either.

Apart from the fact that the club president does not appear to be consistent and aware of timing when it comes to handing out money (and we know that this

applies to many other local and national teams in Africa as well), there are more structural 'problems' in Olympique de Buea. There is tribalism, corruption and witchcraft and sorcery going on within the club's organization.

First of all, it seems as though the club executives are interfering in each other's jobs. It is the job of the technical director and the coach to recruit the players, but the club president, vice-president, team manager and assistant coaches are all bringing players into the team as well. Many of these players are selected because of tribalism: they are ethnically affiliated to the people who have selected them. This means that not all the players at Olympique de Buea are selected because of their football skills and the quality of the team is therefore not as good as it could or should be.

Also, the club president is the club's sole sponsor and, as such, he has complete decision-making powers. He sometimes uses those powers to tell the coach which players he should be playing and which should be substituted during a match. In fact, it is the coach who has to endure the most outside interference and this means that he is unable to perform his job properly. When everybody is interfering with the line-up and the coach's other tasks, it is increasingly difficult to see Olympique de Buea as a professional club.

Second, it seems that not all the club executives are chosen as carefully as they should be. For one thing, the technical director is thought to be using club money for his own purposes. We have seen this happening during the recruitment process when he allegedly signed players while at the same time taking half of their signing fees. He is also thought to keep money for match bonuses and training allowances for himself, thus reducing the motivation of the players to do their best during matches. The same thing can be said of money that was intended for the spiritual adviser but that ended up in a club executive's pocket. Sometimes a spiritual adviser is so angry that he puts a spell on the team and makes a team lose matches.

I have understood that the issues discussed above occur in other first- and second-division teams as well. These issues are related to people who do not put the interests of the club first but who are trying to realize their own individual goals in life.

This is definitely also the case with the third 'problem' at Olympique de Buea, namely the fact that some people within the club's organization seem to use witchcraft and sorcery against one another. We heard the example of the former technical director bewitching the team (and a similar case is Tonnerre de Yaoundé's bewitchment by its founder's widow). There are many cases of club executives obstructing each other through spiritual forces because of jealousy, anger and even hatred.

This is especially true among the coaches of teams in Cameroon. Within Olympique de Buea, we saw that at some point in the year 2003 the assistant coach is said to have bewitched the head coach. When the team started performing badly in the competition, the club president fired the head coach in favour of the assistant coach. The assistant coach was angry because he had been officially trained as a football coach while the head coach had never finished his coaching course and obviously did not have as much experience.

Spiritual adviser Zé told us how Cameroonian assistant coaches obstructed the white head coaches at Fovu de Baham through witchcraft and sorcery. This is actually part of a broader issue in football, namely that many Africans do not like to see white people taking jobs that could be filled by Africans themselves. One will always hear complaints about this during the African Cup of Nations tournament because it is here that one will notice that the majority of national teams are led by white coaches. Here, too, jealousy and anger lead to the bewitchment of others.

In the end, it does not matter whether these occult forces actually work or not; they are signals of a struggle within the club and are causing unrest among executives and players alike, which will have some sort of (psychological) impact on the outcome of matches.

The things happening inside the club's organization naturally influence the team itself. This is best explained by an incident that occurred a couple of hours after we had left Yaoundé by bus to go back to Buea when the vice-president of Olympique de Buea decided to make a short stop in Douala. Most players had been extremely quiet during the trip up until that point, and probably rightly so because there is nothing to be enthusiastic about when you have just lost a match.

There was one exception. The team captain had been very noisy and when the driver parked in front of a shop in Douala, he ran inside to buy sandwiches, soda and liquor. He then mixed the soda and the liquor in a plastic bottle under the eyes of the vice-president and the head coach, who were obviously not amused but did not say anything. Once back on the road, the team captain was drinking heavily from the plastic bottle, got drunk in no time and started to sing loudly while sticking his head out of a window. Most players were embarrassed by his behaviour and seemed to be waiting for either the vice-president or the head coach to do something. But both of them, and the players as well, knew that the team captain was in effect an 'untouchable' because the club president regarded him as his own son. The team captain can go to a nightclub on Saturday night and miss several training sessions every week and he is still always on the coach's list for Sunday's match.

As Zé explained, godfathers can make sure that the rules do not apply to 'their' players and so these players receive favourable treatment. The outside

influences of godfathers, but also the principle of the coach's player, can lead to discrimination in a team. And, as Zé said, where there is discrimination, there can never be team unity. The point is that if all the players know that the 11 players on the field truly are the best players, they will probably be OK with the whole situation, stay on the bench without complaining and train hard and wait for the coach to select them. But if they realize that there are players on the field because of the influence of a godfather or because these players have paid the coach a sum of money, they will become jealous and angry.

Many players really seem to dislike the team captain because of his status in the team. Particularly the Francophone players are having problems with the Anglophone team captain because they feel that he does not represent the whole team when he discusses team affairs with the club executives. Tribalism based on language or ethnic group is leading to struggles within the team, mostly because either the Anglophones or the Francophones or the players from certain tribal backgrounds are being favourably treated.

It is here that the coach should step in and deal with matters by enforcing rules and regulations. But since he is completely under the influences of the club executives and other people, and, as Zé explained, often poor and ill-disciplined himself, the coach is hardly able to discipline players and create stability in the team. If he accepts money from a player, he just contributes to the disunity in the team.

Many players in Buea told me that the issue of godfathers and coach's players can easily be extended to the Cameroonian national team. They say that all the national team players need to have someone powerful to get them into the team. In this respect, a lecturer at the University of Buea called these powerful people 'Baobabs'. It is also said that most players pay the right people lots of money to become one of the Indomitable Lions. These comments are merely based on speculation, though, and cannot be proven.

However, it is evident that the coach of the national team also has to withstand strong influences from outside. I said in the introduction that Jorge and Haan resigned as coaches partly because of pressure from the Minister of Youth and Sports at the time. This man, Philippe Mbarga Mboa, personally kept Pierre Wome out of the national squad after the unfortunate player missed a crucial penalty against Ivory Coast – an error that caused Cameroon to miss out on the World Cup in 2006.

Within Olympique de Buea, the situation is more complicated. Recall how the technical director was very enthusiastic in attracting new players to, as people claim, collect money for himself. In the 2003 season, the coach had more than 40 players at his disposal, most of whom were respected players in the country. The alleged corruption of the technical director has led to a team in which there are

two excellent goalkeepers and several excellent attackers. All of these players are struggling to be the number one in their specific position on the field and one way of dealing with this situation is by using witchcraft and sorcery.

Just as the Anglophone team captain has to endure witchcraft attacks from his Francophone team mates (and we have seen examples at Buea Boys), the 11 players on the field too are under constant attack from their colleagues on the bench or in the stands. Attackers bewitching attackers, goalkeeper bewitching goalkeepers – these things occur on a regular basis and destabilize team unity.

In this respect, I have to emphasize that witchcraft and sorcery are considered to be both evil and beneficial. These forces are evil because they make players feel sick or get injured but at the same time they are beneficial for the players who use them to bewitch team mates. After all, witchcraft and sorcery are means by which these players can achieve their goals in life; in this case ‘eliminating’ a team mate and taking his position on the field.

This is especially true for players who collect supernatural powers in order to be better players. With the aid of a traditional doctor, they obtain such supernatural powers in the hope of getting a lucrative contract at a European club. We know that some players bewitch team mates who are selected to go for a trial match because they are jealous of those players and want to obstruct their future.

In all cases, witchcraft and sorcery attacks are caused by jealousy, anger and hatred for different reasons. Thus players should protect themselves against these spiritual attacks by getting talismans from traditional doctors. I heard that talismans are used by African players all over the world, even in the European leagues. If a player does not share his wealth with the people around him, he runs the risk of being bewitched by them. It is not uncommon for family members to obstruct players just because they are unhappy with them. Many players in Buea told me that witchcraft and sorcery surpass boundaries, meaning that African players in Europe can easily be bewitched by traditional doctors in Africa.

Finally, there is a correlation between tribalism, corruption, and witchcraft and sorcery because these are all ways in which players can get themselves into the squad of 18 (or even selected during the recruitment period). In fact, tribalism and corruption can be the cause of witchcraft and sorcery attacks within the club and team. After all, a player who is on the field as a result of corruption and tribalism can easily become the victim of a witchcraft attack by a jealous team mate.

Moreover, tribalism, corruption, and witchcraft and sorcery in the club and team are factors that result in the team starting to lose matches because the best players have not been chosen for a match. Some players are there thanks to the powers of their godfathers, some are there because of a financial deal between

them and the coach, and yet other players are there because the original players are sitting at home with a serious injury brought on by witchcraft.

We have seen that the basis of a successful football team lies in a club's financial resources and organization. But we have also seen that even the richer teams in Cameroon do not always win their matches because of internal struggles between club executives and players. Smooth club organization and unity in the team are hampered by tribalism, corruption, and witchcraft and sorcery. But although corruption and witchcraft, sorcery and magic are sometimes the cause of a team losing its matches, these are also methods by which teams in Cameroon try to win their matches. The supporters of both teams play a role during the match too when they use violence to achieve certain goals.

There are many similarities between corruption and magic – and sometimes even between these issues and spectator violence. First of all, corruption, magic and violence are all 'illegal' methods by which teams try to win matches. Club executives are not supposed to bribe the referee, supporters should not run onto the field and beat up the referee, and – although this point is more difficult to say with absolute certainty – FECAFOOT does not appear to officially allow the hiring of spiritual advisers.

Recall Ashu saying that when he and his team mates at Buea Boys jumped over the fence to avoid the black magic buried on the path to the field, FECAFOOT fined the club. We have also seen how FECAFOOT is trying to curb corruption and violence in football by keeping a close watch on the actions of the referee and by penalizing teams whose supporters behave inappropriately. Throughout Africa, people are trying to stop bribery, black magic and spectator violence in football but in Cameroon they do not seem to be very successful at it.

Second, since these methods are not allowed by the football authorities, the teams mostly do it out of sight. In short, corruption and magic are, to some extent, secret, hidden activities in football. Granted, sometimes one will see players, club executives or supporters openly offer the referee money during a match. Or one will witness how a couple of players throw a concoction onto the field. But that is probably all that will be visible. The case of violence is different because here one will see supporters becoming physically aggressive towards the referee.

But most cases of corruption and magic take place long before the match starts. Sometimes the club executives meet with the club executives of another team to 'buy' a match, sometimes the referee will come to town early to receive money from an executive at a certain club. A spiritual adviser, too, will most likely already have prepared the match before the players step onto the field. In other words, the uninitiated spectator who is standing on the side of the field will be unaware of any of these things happening in football.

But what is clear from my research, and this is the third similarity, is that corruption and magic are common and widespread methods used by teams to win football matches. For instance, team manager Kalla has said that everybody involved in Cameroonian football is corrupt ‘from the president of FECAFOOT to the last player in the league’, and in this sense referees will always be bribed during matches. He also said that all the football teams in Cameroon hire spiritual advisers, meaning that ‘there isn’t a single football match going on that hasn’t been prepared by someone’. If you do not hire a spiritual adviser for match preparation, he continued, it means that you do not take football seriously. ‘Then you just don’t want to win the match.’

I am inclined to conclude that most matches in Cameroon involve bribery and that all matches involve match preparation. In this sense, teams are stuck in some sort of vicious circle of corruption and magic. After all, they know that the other team has probably bribed the referee and most definitely hired a spiritual adviser. If a team does not bribe the referee and hire someone to prepare magic as well, it is clear that the team will start the match at a huge disadvantage. So even if club executives, coaches and players do not want anything to do with these practices, they are in one way or another obliged to go along with them.

A fourth similarity between corruption and magic, and to a lesser extent also spectator violence, is that these methods tend to be irregular in the sense that their scale and intensity are related to the importance of the match. We have seen how important matches – matches in the different stages of the Cup of Cameroon, matches in the (mini-)interpools and matches at the end of the season – demand higher amounts of bribery and multiple spiritual advisers to prepare strong magic.

For instance, when Olympique de Buea went to the national interpools in 2000, the club president spent FCFA 95 million in two weeks. Team manager Kalla said that a match during the national interpools costs at least four or five times as much as a normal match in the D1 competition. This means that the referee will receive four or five times as much as he would normally receive. Olympique de Buea will also hire more spiritual advisers and pay them more for their services. Ashu also told us how matches during the mini-interpools will lead club executives, coaches, players and supporters to hire many spiritual advisers. Sometimes one and the same match is prepared by as many as six or seven different spiritual advisers.

There is a strong relationship between corruption, magic and violence on the one hand, and tribalism on the other. Derbies between teams from the same town, province or region call for drastic measures in terms of corruption and magic and supporters tend to back their teams even more fiercely. We have seen how the club president at Olympique de Buea paid FCFA two million for magic in order



to beat local rivals Victoria United. Derbies are visible struggles between different ethnic groups in football, and these groups will do everything to win the match.

The scale of corruption and magic also differs with each level of play. In the lowest third division in Cameroon, teams cannot afford to pay the referee or a spiritual adviser a lot of money. In the first-division league, however, matches are 'bought' for at least FCFA one million and spiritual advisers receive about FCFA 200,000 to prepare magic. It would, therefore, be logical to assume that corruption and magic increase during tournaments such as the African Cup of Nations or the World Cup. This is mere speculation though.

Strangely enough, violence seems to be more widespread in the third division than in the first division but this could be because the level of security tends to lower.

A fifth similarity between corruption and magic is that neither method is by any means a guarantee of winning a match. The club executives of one team may have bribed the referee and hired a spiritual adviser and may therefore be under the impression that they will definitely win the match. But, of course, the club executives of the other team will have done exactly the same. Thus winning a match through corruption or magic mostly depends on which of the two teams has paid the referee more money and hired a stronger and more experienced spiritual adviser. There are other reasons why a team does not win a match even though bribery and magic is involved. A referee who has been bribed may still prefer one team to win the match simply because he is being threatened by the supporters of that particular team.

In the case of magic, things become more complicated. A team that has hired a spiritual adviser may still lose a match because the spiritual adviser is a fake and/or a cheat or because the other team has thoroughly countered the adviser's magic. Another reason may be that the club executives, coaches, players or supporters did not abide by the rules of the magic and hence it did not work. In fact, there are many explanations as to why magic does not ensure that a team wins a match, even if that magic is thought to be very powerful and effective. We can understand why Africans do not all of a sudden stop believing in magic when they see that a team has hired a spiritual adviser and still loses a match.

All in all, corruption, magic and spectator violence are outside influences on a football match. Normally, a win or loss is determined by the 22 players on the field and no one else, except perhaps the referee. In Cameroon, it seems that the players play only a limited part in the team's victory and that corruption and magic are more important ingredients in a match. The uses of corruption and magic imply that club executives, coaches and supporters do not have full confidence in their players.

We have tried to tackle this issue by asking ourselves who is thought to have more influence in a match: the coach and his players or the spiritual adviser and his magic? The conclusion was that magic only plays a complementary part in a match and that one cannot do without either players or magic. Yet I am still inclined to think that many people would say that spiritual advisers are more important than anything else, especially when one realizes that he is usually the one who tells the coach what to do. He is, in other words, often in a more influential position than the coach.

There is actually only one situation in which the 22 players can be the determining factor in a match. This is when the referee has been bribed by both teams with the same amount of money and when the spiritual advisers are of equal strength. Ashu told us an elaborate story of a match between Buea Boys and Tiko United where the magic of the two teams was effectively countered. It is only then that, as team manager Kalla and Essomba said, 'football can be played on the field'.

All that is left for me to say is that there are not only similarities between corruption, magic and spectator violence but that these methods also tend to cause or reinforce one another. First of all, there is a lot of bribery going on in the magic business. Club executives, for example, seem to withhold money that was intended for the spiritual adviser. What is more important though is the fact that bribery and magic are either causing spectator violence or are leading to an increase in violence. We have seen cases in which supporters become aggressive when they think that a referee is corrupt or when they witness how the other team is using magic. Players too can become violent when they see players on the other team throw a concoction onto the field.

In the end, the answer as to how teams (try to) win football matches is not an easy one. We have seen that there may be a variety of reasons why a team loses or wins a particular match or why one team becomes the D1 champions and why another is relegated to the second division. Even if one owns a rich club with professional executives, has a united team with lots of excellent players and bribes the referee, hires several spiritual advisers and the supporters threaten the referee, there are still many explanations as to why the team may lose a match. Sometimes the team which one least expects to win a match will beat the favourites. It happens in football all the time. We saw it in 1990 when the Indomitable Lions reached the World Cup quarter finals. I cannot really say with absolute certainty how they did it. But after reading this book one can at least make a few guesses.



## Epilogue

It has been four years since I finished my research project on football and left Cameroon to go home. That is a long time in football and a lot of things have happened.

The D1 competition in 2003 ended in a way that could not have surprised many Cameroonian football fans. Coton Sport de Garoua not only won the national championships that year with 62 points, they also beat Sable de Batie 2-1 in the final of the Cup of Cameroon, thus bringing home the 'double'. Canon de Yaoundé were the runners-up with 51 points. PWD Bamenda, in third place, also had 51 points after 30 matches but had a bigger goal deficit than Canon. Bamboutos de Mbouda ended in fourth place and Olympique de Buea, again, in fifth place.

In that same year, the second-division team Buea Boys managed to reach the national interpools, which were held in Douala and Garoua. Buea Boys had to play four matches against reasonably strong opponents, managed to win three matches and draw one, and ended up top of the table with 10 points. Buea Boys proudly went to the D1 competition for the first time in their history.

The 2004 D1 competition had no fewer than four teams from the Anglophone zone, three of which were from the South West Province. All of a sudden, Buea Boys and Olympique de Buea became each other's biggest rivals. However, FECAFOOT decided to change the structure of the D1 competition in 2004 by splitting up the national league into two pools. Olympique de Buea found itself in Pool A, while Buea Boys, Victoria United and PWD Bamenda were in Pool B.

The Anglophone derbies were not very successful for Buea Boys. They drew 0-0 against Victoria United in Limbe but lost 1-2 at home. They beat PWD Bamenda 4-2 in Buea but lost 2-1 in Bamenda. After the group phase, the four best teams of each pool went on to the so-called Super National League where they battled it out for the national championship. The four Anglophone teams and four other teams ended up in the National League where the only prize to be won was not to be relegated. Unfortunately, both Victoria United and Buea Boys went down to the second division.

Ashu is no longer the captain of Buea Boys. The assistant coach with whom he had a bad relationship became the head coach in 2004. The new head coach

made the vice-captain – the one Ashu suspected of bewitching him – the new team captain. Ashu is probably no longer playing for Buea Boys.

Meanwhile, the first-division clubs were so unhappy with the new structure of the D1 competition that FECAFOOT decided to switch back to the old structure in 2005. At the end of 2005, the big Anglophone team PWD Bamenda went down to the second division. In 2006 and 2007, Olympique de Buea has been the only Anglophone team in the D1 competition, most likely to the dismay of many Anglophones.

There is some astonishing news regarding Racing de Bafoussam and Tonnerre de Yaoundé.

We know that the Racing de Bafoussam supporters were far from happy with Sable de Batie (and Fovu de Baham) playing their matches in Bafoussam. The supporters destroyed the field to the extent that Sable was unable to win any of its home matches. At the end of the 2003 season, however, it appeared that the supporters had also spoiled the field for Racing because the old team of the West Province ended up in 14<sup>th</sup> place, one below Sable. Some say the Sable de Batie supporters had been obstructing Racing's matches as well by using black magic.

In 2004, Racing de Bafoussam and Sable de Batie both made it to the Super League where Racing ended up as the better team. In 2005, Sable de Batie ended up in a higher place than Racing de Bafoussam. In 2006, Racing de Bafoussam had an absolutely disastrous season and the winner of four national league titles dropped out of the D1 competition. Sable de Batie is still active in the national league, as is Fovu de Baham.

We also know that Tonnerre de Yaoundé was bewitched by the widow of its founding father. She locked the team and threatened that it would be relegated to the second division. Of course, nobody believed her because Tonnerre is one of the oldest and most successful clubs in the country. At the end of the 2003 season, the season in which the widow had made her threats, Tonnerre ended up in 14<sup>th</sup> place in the league table, just escaping relegation. In 2004, the team from the capital made it to the Super League.

At the end of the 2005 season, however, the club that had won so many national championships and Cups of Cameroon had one of its worst years ever. Tonnerre ended up in 16<sup>th</sup> place in the league table and the famous club was officially relegated to the second division. In 2007, Tonnerre de Yaoundé returned to the first division.

Olympique de Buea had a tumultuous period between 2005 and early 2007. At the end of 2005, the team almost went down to the second division. Olympique ended up in 14<sup>th</sup> position in the league and, as a result, had to play the national

interpools in order to stay in the D1 competition. There is a bit of confusion over the last day of play. Olympique de Buea had already qualified after four matches and was officially back in the first-division league. The score in Pool A was as follows. Olympique de Buea had 10 points, Fédéral de Noun 7 points and Kumba Lakers 6 points. Kumba Lakers subsequently won its match against Yong Sports Academy Bamenda and expected Olympique de Buea to win its match against Fédéral de Noun as well. But Fédéral de Noun beat Olympique de Buea and both clubs went on to play in the D1 competition in 2006. Afterwards, there were rumours that Olympique de Buea had sold the match. Kumba Lakers filed a complaint.

At the end of 2006, after Olympique de Buea had had a bad season, things turned ugly for the team from Buea. They had to play their last match against Racing de Bafoussam on 3 September. Winning the match meant staying in the D1 competition, losing meant relegation to the second division. For Racing de Bafoussam it did not matter if they won or lost, they were already relegated.

In January 2007, the FECAFOOT Disciplinary Committee found evidence of foul play during that particular match. The Committee accused Olympique de Buea of buying the match (which the Lava Boys won 1-0) and Racing de Bafoussam of selling it. Two players at Racing de Bafoussam were banned for five years from the football stage and two club executives received a ten-year ban. The vice-president of Olympique de Buea, too, was banned for the next 10 years. On top of it all, Olympique de Buea was instantly relegated from the first to the third division.

It was a surprising judgment from FECAFOOT but the real surprise came six days later. The members of the FECAFOOT Appeals Committee ruled that there was no proof of the allegation that the vice-president of Olympique de Buea, among others, had bribed the players and club executives of Racing de Bafoussam in a hotel in Bandjoun. Olympique de Buea was, therefore, immediately reinstated in the D1 competition. The vice-president of Olympique de Buea, who had earlier claimed that the judgment of the Disciplinary Committee was based on a piece of paper from 'one individual', was very happy. 'The decision was the right one,' he said, 'because the Ethics Commission proved to be unethical.'

Although the vice-president of Olympique de Buea claimed to have been the victim of defamation, a football analyst in Cameroon said that he had been involved in matters of bribery before, not only referring to the 2005 interpool scandal as mentioned above but also to a period some time after 2000. Apparently, Olympique de Buea and Racing de Bafoussam had conspired before, with the aim then of getting Kumbo Strikers relegated from the D1 competition. It had worked.

The 2007 season consisted of 18 clubs, of which only eight had also been active in the 2003 season. And another familiar name was about to disappear from the D1 competition. With only five rounds of matches to go, and occupying a dangerous position in the relegation zone, Bamboutos de Mbouda really had to win its away match against Fédéral de Noun on 16 September. Things went reasonably well and after a while Bamboutos was leading 2-1. However, sometime in the second half Fédéral de Noun scored the equalizer (to make it 2-2) and Bamboutos feared its opponents would score again. A 1,000-strong crowd, including the match officials, then witnessed the Bamboutos de Mbouda captain faked an injury.

As the team captain lay on the pitch, the Bamboutos medical assistant handed him an envelope full of cash. The team captain stood up, walked to the Fédéral de Noun captain and gave him the envelope. He, in turn, was subsequently the cause of an incident which led Bamboutos to score the third and decisive goal. FECAFOOT banned the coach, the medical assistant and the captain of Bamboutos as well as Fédéral de Noun's captain for several years. And Bamboutos de Mbouda was instantly relegated to the third division. This was later confirmed by the FECAFOOT Appeals Committee.

On 25 February 2007, the Bamileke club president made a shocking announcement to the players of Olympique de Buea and its supporters in Buea. He resigned as club president. The reason, he said, was that he wanted the club to become popular among the people of Buea. He also wanted the population to become involved in the management of the club. These things never happened. The interim management of Olympique de Buea has calculated the team's financial costs for the 2007 season at a total of FCFA 80 million (€ 122,000). On 21 April 2007, the local population donated FCFA two million (€ 3,000) to the club at a public congress.

The latest news (October 2007), however, is that the club president is still partially involved in the financial and organizational matters of Olympique de Buea. This could be due to the fact that Olympique de Buea has been performing exceptionally well in the 2007 season. At the end of the season, the club from the South West Province will end up in third place, after runner-up Union de Douala and Coton Sport de Garoua, the club that has now won the national league five times in a row.

Essomba is still playing for Olympique de Buea.

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