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## Ikechi Anya: Living the dream with Sevilla two years after Wycombe rejection



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**Rejection, it's part and parcel of a young footballer's career.**

Some are too small, others have the wrong attitude, some are purely unlucky, but what happens to these players after they are denounced from the heights of the professional game? This is the tale of one chap from Castlemilk. Unwanted at Wycombe, he is on the road to becoming a success story at Sevilla.

The first chapter of Ikechi Anya's journey starts and ends with Wycombe Wanderers. In September 2004, aged 16, he made his first-team debut, and made history as the club's youngest ever player. Before the match, he was handed his debut shirt by then manager, Tony Adams. Anya was living the dream.

However, in the summer of 2007, Anya was crushed by the news that every aspiring footballer dreads. "Obviously like any player who gets told that they're not wanted any more, your confidence goes a bit but the manager gave me his reasons and I look back now and realise that he was probably right. Luckily for me I've landed on my feet," recalls Anya.

Not only did he land on his feet, he hit the ground running. Not interested by the notion of drifting into the background, the 19-year-old decided to give himself a second chance. Anya searched for a club and signed for non-league Oxford City.

Training part-time, the tenacious teenager used his own initiative to develop his talent. Using his own football in a local park, he focused on securing a future in the game. "I was only training twice a week and I didn't think that was enough, so I'd train on my own and with my friends when they were free."

His efforts were rewarded when he received a call from his former coach, John Gorman. Gorman was involved in the creation of the Glenn Hoddle Academy, a football academy which focuses on rebuilding the careers of young players. Anya seemed like the perfect candidate. The 19-year-old attended a trial at Chelsea's Cobham training ground and was selected after the first session.

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Ikechi Anya

"After being out of the game for a while my confidence was low and obviously having someone like Tony Adams and now Glenn Hoddle saying that I've got something, it was a good confidence booster."

Anya's next chapter began last summer. He joined a select group of players who had similar experiences of rejection from professional football. Located on an exclusive resort near Jerez in southern Spain, the group were given a chance to find a route back into the game.

"You could be forgiven for getting too comfortable at the academy but players like myself and some others decided to grasp the opportunity," says Anya. "Luckily some teams took interest in us and it gave us a chance to try and start to rebuild our careers."

During his time at the academy, Anya received coaching twice a day from a world-class coaching team including Graham Rix, Nigel Spackman, John Gorman and Glenn Hoddle. "If you're training twice a day with those coaches, I think any player is going to improve," he says.

Although playing games on a weekly basis against teams in Spain, Anya wasn't involved in a cut-throat competitive atmosphere, he was maturing in an environment where winning didn't matter. "It's not based on results there, it's purely based on player development, we had games every week but it was more based on improvement than winning."

During his nine months with the academy, Hoddle advised the winger to switch positions to a role as a striker. "When we first had Ikechi with us he was a pacy winger, with very good control and excellent crossing ability," said Hoddle.

"I saw something else in him though and we managed to switch him from the wing to centre forward, a position in which he excelled, causing problems for every defence he faced."

Anya believes this positional switch, along with a mental toughness he adopted while in Spain, have acted as a springboard to his recent successes in the game. "Pace has been my main asset and I think it's more effective if you're playing up-front rather than on the wing. Once I switched positions, both my game and my confidence improved so it worked out as a good decision."

The most recent chapter in Anya's career began back in July of this year, when he secured a two-year deal with Sevilla Atletico, Sevilla's reserve team. "We played against them twice and I was quite happy with my performances and when I was told that they wanted me to come back for a trial game, I was over the moon. Luckily for me I played well in that game too and they decided to pursue their interest in me."

Anya admits his goal for this season is to showcase his talents playing for Sevilla Atletico, while pushing for a position in the full side who are currently level on points for second place in La Liga.

Thousands of miles from the local park where he was honing his skills with his friends only two years ago, the striker is now sharing training facilities with messrs Fabiano and Kanoute at a club which is striving for Champions League success.

Anya says he has been lucky, some would say that you find your own fortune.