

Stricken Muamba 'improving' after heart attack

After overcoming a troubled childhood in the Congo, Fabrice Muamba had become a promising and hugely well-liked footballer. Now he is fighting for his life after collapsing during a game.



PSHE
PHYSICAL EDUCATION

For just over 40 minutes, it was an ordinary, energetic and entertaining cup match. Then, without warning or apparent cause, Bolton's Fabrice Muamba collapsed faced down on the turf. Players from both teams approached the young midfielder in concern, and came away with their hands clasped to their faces in shock. It was clear that something had gone horribly wrong.

Muamba had suffered a cardiac arrest. Right on the pitch, with a live audience of 35,000 people, his heart had suddenly stopped beating. A hush descended on both sets of fans while paramedics and doctors did their best to resuscitate him. The match – by now an irrelevance – was called off, and Muamba was carried out of the stadium with the whole crowd chanting his name.

His condition is improving – he can now speak a little – but his family face a wait before the long-term prognosis is clear. In the meantime tributes have flooded in to a man who is, according to team-



Fabrice Muamba appears in perfect health just before his sudden collapse © Getty Images

mates, one of football's few genuine 'good guys'.

Muamba was born and raised in the troubled Democratic Republic of Congo. His father, assistant to a previous ruler, became a fugitive when government changed hands. Muamba was forced to hide at the home of his uncle until, aged 11, he fled his native land. The uncle was later killed.

England was safer, but not an easy place to live: Muamba spoke only five words of the language and encountered an unfamiliar way of life. But he worked extremely hard both in school and on the training ground. By the time he left Arsenal for Birmingham City in 2008 as a rising football talent, he had under his belt ten GCSEs, three A-levels and several caps for England Under-21s.

Almost uniquely among his peers, Muamba is enrolled in a degree at the Open University. He is working towards a doctorate in maths, and dreams of a return to the Congo to set up a charitable

foundation.

Many players do little to dispel the popular image of them as overpaid, materialistic, vain and unthinking. Muamba represented a better side of football culture.

A GOOD SPORT?

Unselfish, committed people like Muamba show that football's bad reputation is undeserved, say some. The sports media is dominated by ugly racism controversies and petty pay disputes over eye-popping salaries; meanwhile we ignore role models who have fought their way from difficult childhood to achieve success, and now use their influence to do good.

Fabrice Muamba seems like a good man, agree others – but he is the exception rather than the rule. His admirable story just throws into relief the bad character of some of his colleagues. Most footballers, critics say, appear to care about little else than money and celebrity status.

Q & A

Q Could such a sudden collapse happen to anybody?

A Sudden cardiac arrest is not unknown among footballers. In 2003, for instance, Manchester City's Marc-Vivien Foé collapsed and died while playing for Cameroon. Footballers subject their bodies to a lot of

physical stress – if they have an undetected heart condition, they are putting themselves at risk. But yes, it could happen to anyone: some apparently healthy people have genes that make their hearts weak through no fault of their own.

Q I thought exercise prevented heart attacks?

A A healthy lifestyle is the best defence: no smoking, a moderate and balanced

diet, plenty of exercise. It is important not to push yourself too hard too fast, as some athletes do; but within sensible limits, more exercise is almost always positive.

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

'Hardship in childhood is good for the character.'

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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WORD WATCH

Cardiac arrest – Literally ‘stopping of the heart,’ cardiac arrest happens when the heart stops contracting effectively. It is often caused by a heart attack (when blood supply to the heart is cut off). But the two things don’t mean the same, as is often assumed.

Prognosis – From the Greek word

meaning ‘foreseeing,’ prognosis is a judgement about long term consequences. It is most often used by doctors judging the ultimate outcome of an illness; but the word has also crept into usage outside medicine to mean an informed, unbiased prediction.

Open University – The Open University is the first institution of its kind: a university without

academic admissions qualifications, where students can study from anywhere in the world. It is one of the largest universities in the world, designed to reach people and places that others can’t: full-time workers, those with disabilities and people who live a long way from educational institutions. It is rated the top university in the UK for student satisfaction.

YOU DECIDE

1. Are footballers represented too harshly by the media?
2. Does the media focus too much on bad examples at the expense of positive ones?

ACTIVITIES

1. Cases like Fabrice Muamba’s show that nobody is completely safe from suddenly being struck down by a life-threatening illness. Write a short story about someone who decides to act as if they had only one more day to live.

2. Imagine you became a football superstar and had a million pounds to spend on helping the community where you grew up. What would you spend the money on? Write a paragraph describing your scheme.

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 **NOTES**

