

Nigeria on the internet

I AM writing this on January 30, this year's Super Bowl Sunday in the United States. The Super Bowl is the annual match to determine the champion of the National Football League (NFL), the paramount American football league in the world. The Super Bowl is the most watched single sporting event annually in the United States. Because it attracts such a huge television audience, it costs a company \$2,000,000 for a 30 second advertisement during the numerous commercial breaks in the game!

For most Americans, then, especially on a day like this, the 2000 African Nations Cup is a distant and largely unknown event. Although growing, soccer does not yet draw a huge television audience in the United States. International and club matches from Europe and South America are becoming increasingly common on American television, but not games from Africa.

Thus, while fans of American football get an overload of coverage for their premier event, fans of African football are starved of coverage for theirs'. As recently as the 1994 Nations Cup, the only way to get prompt news from matches or any other events back home was through expensive telephone calls. Now, the internet is changing all that, as it has already changed so much else.

When the Super Eagles played Congo on Friday, January 28, I realized along with thousands of fans of African soccer across the United States that it would be almost impossible to watch the match live on television. I also knew, however, that even though I would not be able to actually watch the match, through the internet I would be able to keep up with what was happening, even while the game was still in progress.

All I had to do was log on to www.cybereagles.com and through the chat room attached to that website, I could read updates to the game as it progressed. Obviously it was a far cry from actually watching the match and being with friends back home cheering the Super Eagles on, but it was better than nothing.

And, www.cybereagles.com is not the only place one can keep up with the Super Eagles and the Nations Cup.

There is also www.ghananigeria2000.com, the official website of the

tournament, and www.nfaonline.net, the official website of the Nigerian Football Association. Or, one could search www.sportserver.com or www.soccernet.com or www.nigerian-soccer.com. As you can see, there is no shortage of places one can look on the web to keep up with Nigerian soccer.

Obviously, Nigerians abroad are interested in more news from Nigeria than just that which concerns soccer. To keep current with more general Nigerian news, they can check out a number of Nigerian daily newspapers which are now online. These include the Guardian at www.nguardiannews.com, Post Express at www.postexpresswired.com, or the Vanguard at www.afbis.com/vanguard. Another good site to keep up with Nigerian and African news generally is www.africanews.org.

For Nigerians scattered around the world, sometimes far away from other Nigerians, news from home is not enough to prevent homesickness. With the wonders of the internet, they can now simulate conversations of every topic imaginable concerning the home they left



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Perspective of a Nigerian-American



with other Nigerians all over the world.

One of the pioneer Nigeria-related internet lists which allowed this was Naijanet, a net which, although only text on a computer screen, could make one think they were actually having a real life conversation, argument, discussion, or yab session with other Nigerians nearby. The truth was that those chatting were scattered all over the world, and were simply being allowed an opportunity to taste a little bit of home through cyberspace.

Nigerians all over the world also realized the potential of the internet for bringing like minded Nigerians scattered around the globe together without the expense of actual traveling. One of the results of such an idea was the Association of Nigerians Abroad (ANA), one of many organizations made up of Nigerians abroad who wish to do something for their coun-

try. The difference from other such organizations is that the ANA is made up of people who have for the most part never physically met each other.

Through the internet, Nigerians in an organization like the ANA are able to pool resources - financial and intellectual - to make valuable contributions to causes back home that smaller Nigerian communities would not be able to. Even in the non-intimate setting of interaction over the internet, members of such organizations can still create bonds and attachments which are often solidified when members meet at conferences or when traveling in different parts of the world.

Sites related to Nigeria have multiplied greatly over the last years, and some are now very sophisticated. Two of the most comprehensive are www.odili.net and www.nigeria.com. On these sites, anyone with an internet

connection can catch up on Nigerian news, read a lot about the country, get in touch with other Nigerians, find information about business in Nigeria, buy Nigerian products, and a whole lot more. Numerous other Nigeria-related sites are more focused, such as www.nigeriansinamerica.com, which, as you might have guessed, provides advice and contact information for Nigerians living in the United States.

Other more surprising sites range from www.londonnigerians.free-online.co.uk, a site dedicated to the London Nigerians Cricket Club to www.abekuta.webpage.net, a site designed to inform about the city of Abeokuta. There are also more service oriented sites. For example, one can now secure visa or passport renewal forms from the Nigerian Consulate at www.nigeria-consulate-ny.org or purchase Nigerian stocks and treasury bills at www.expdisc.com.

The sites I have introduced you to are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Nigeria-related web pages on the internet. Nigerians abroad have used the

internet in many positive ways to promote their country and to keep in touch with other Nigerians and with what is happening back home. Unfortunately, within Nigeria itself, the internet has not yet had a great impact. A growing number of people in the country are using the internet for various purposes, but because of the underdeveloped communications networks, internet connections are often slow and inefficient.

If properly developed, the internet could provide much needed services for Nigerians such as quicker avenues for business communications, access to books and research materials for university students, information on how various democracies around the world function on a day to day basis, and so on. Just as the internet was effectively used by pro-democracy groups to keep the world informed of what was happening in Nigeria during Abacha's rule, there is now the opportunity for it to be used to advertise Nigeria and everything it has to offer worldwide quickly and effectively. I hope that plans to do this and so much more with the internet in Nigeria are already under way.