

Haiti's Return to the FIFA World Cup After 52 Years: A Scholarly Reflective Analysis of Diasporic Belonging, Transnational Player Development, National Identity, and the Future of Haitian Football Governance

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ABSTRACT

The 2026 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup marked Haiti's return to the men's tournament after a 52-year absence. Haiti did not advance from the group stage, losing 1-0 to Scotland, 3-0 to Brazil, and 4-2 to Morocco. Yet an evaluation based only on wins and losses would overlook the tournament's broader historical, social, and institutional significance. This scholarly reflective essay compares Haiti's World Cup appearances in 1974 and 2026 through historical analysis, contemporary reporting, oral testimony, and the author's firsthand attendance at Haiti's final group-stage match against Morocco in Atlanta. Drawing on theories of nationalism, diaspora, and sport, the article examines football as a site of national identity, diasporic belonging, political memory, and institutional responsibility. It argues that Haiti's 2026 participation temporarily assembled a nation dispersed across geographic borders, challenged international representations of Haiti centered primarily on crisis, and demonstrated the value of athletes developed through transnational professional systems. At the same time, the campaign exposed persistent weaknesses in domestic football development, institutional capacity, player preparation, governance, and the relationship among the Haitian state, the Fédération Haïtienne de Football (FHF), and the diaspora. Haiti's return was therefore historically meaningful, competitively incomplete, and institutionally instructive. Its lasting value will depend on whether Haitian institutions convert symbolic achievement into transparent, sustained investment in players, youth development, domestic competitions, infrastructure, and long-term planning.

Keywords: Haiti World Cup 2026; Haitian national football team; Battle of Vertières; Les Grenadiers; FIFA World Cup; Haitian Diaspora; Diasporic Belonging; National Identity; Sport and Nationalism; Football and Politics; Caribbean Football; Concacaf; 1974 FIFA World Cup; FIFA Jersey Controversy; Youth Football Development; Sports Governance; Transnational Athletes.

1.0. Introduction

On June 13, 2026, as I prepared at home to watch Haiti's opening World Cup match, I experienced a moment that was both personal and scholarly. When the players entered the stadium and the announcer introduced the Haitian national anthem, I stood with my right hand on my chest and sang. I became emotional not only because Haiti had returned to the World Cup after 52 years, but also because many of the players proudly singing the anthem had limited opportunities to visit Haiti because of the country's current security and political conditions. Their presence on the world stage brought back memories of my own childhood in Haiti, when sports and public life were still part of ordinary community experience. It also reminded me that many children growing up in Haiti today do not have consistent access to safe recreation, organized sports, or stable educational and athletic opportunities.

My husband saw my emotional reaction and encouraged me to witness Haiti's next match in person. After speaking with a good friend, we purchased three tickets for Haiti's match against Morocco in Atlanta. On June 24, 2026, my husband and I drove more than four hours, while my son drove more than six hours, to attend the match. We sat in Section 119 with other supporters who had also traveled to witness Haiti's return. I entered the stadium as a Haitian-born scholar, author, supporter, and member of a global diaspora whose relationship with Haiti extends beyond residence or citizenship. My purpose was not simply to watch a football match. I wanted to witness a historic return, support the players representing Haiti, observe the public expression of Haitian identity, and

consider what the occasion meant for a country that had waited more than half a century to return to the men's World Cup.

Haiti lost 4-2 to Morocco after earlier defeats of 1-0 to Scotland and 3-0 to Brazil (Reuters, 2026b, 2026c, 2026e). Nevertheless, the Atlanta match should not be remembered only as another defeat. Haiti twice took the lead, scored twice in a World Cup match for the first time, and competed courageously against a Moroccan team that had reached the semifinals of the 2022 World Cup (Reuters, 2026e, 2026f). Haiti's first goal resulted from a Moroccan own goal; the second came from a powerful strike by Wilson Isidor. The emotional response in the stadium reflected more than excitement over a score. It expressed the meaning of seeing Haiti compete on football's largest international stage after more than half a century.

The distinction between losing a match and failing as a nation is essential. Competitive sport produces measurable outcomes, but those outcomes cannot fully explain the social, cultural, and political meaning of participation. Haiti did not advance from its group. Yet the team reached a stage from which the country had been absent since 1974, reunited Haitians across borders, elevated Haitian symbols before a global audience, and offered an alternative representation of a nation frequently portrayed internationally through political instability, poverty, natural disasters, displacement, and humanitarian emergency (Calixte-Hallworth, 2021).

This article asks three central questions. First, what did Haiti's return to the World Cup mean beyond the official results? Second, how did the political and institutional circumstances surrounding the 2026 team differ from those experienced by the 1974 generation? Third, what lessons should Haitian sporting authorities, government leaders, private institutions, and diaspora communities draw from the campaign?

I argue that Haiti's 2026 World Cup appearance functioned as a transnational expression of Haitian nationhood. It demonstrated how football can connect people who are geographically dispersed but culturally and emotionally linked. However, symbolism alone cannot build a sustainable national football program. Celebration must be followed by domestic investment, transparent administration, player welfare, youth development, and long-term institutional planning.

1.1. Study Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- Examine the historical and symbolic meaning of Haiti's return to the FIFA World Cup after a 52-year absence.
- Compare Haiti's 1974 and 2026 World Cup appearances in relation to national identity, political context, and institutional conditions.
- Analyze how the Haitian diaspora participated as supporters, cultural witnesses, and contributors to the national team's player pool.
- Assess how the transnational composition of the 2026 squad reveals both global Haitian belonging and weaknesses in domestic football development.

- Reflect on the author's firsthand observation of the Haiti-Morocco match in Atlanta as an example of diasporic spectatorship and national belonging.
- Identify institutional lessons and future recommendations for Haitian football governance, youth development, player welfare, and diaspora engagement.

2.0. Literature Review

2.1. Football and the Construction of National Belonging

Anderson's (2006) concept of the nation as an imagined community provides a useful framework for understanding Haiti's World Cup experience. Members of a nation will never personally meet most of the people with whom they share a national identity. Nevertheless, they imagine themselves as belonging to a common community through symbols, language, history, institutions, memories, and collective experiences.

International football makes this imagined community visible. The political meaning of national symbols became especially clear before the tournament, when FIFA required the FHF and its sportswear manufacturer, Saeta, to modify the team's original World Cup jerseys. The initial design included silhouettes inspired by the Battle of Vertières and the Haitian Revolution, imagery intended to honor Haiti's struggle for independence and the pride and resilience of the Haitian people. Although the players wore the original jerseys during pre-tournament friendly matches, FIFA determined that the historical imagery could be interpreted as political under its equipment regulations, and the design was removed from the uniforms worn during official World Cup matches.

The uniform controversy illustrates a central tension in international sport. Governing organizations often claim political neutrality, yet their decisions about which historical symbols may appear on national uniforms influence how countries, particularly postcolonial nations, are permitted to present their histories on the global stage. Haiti's revolutionary legacy has often been minimized or separated from its broader international significance, even though the Haitian Revolution profoundly influenced political developments beyond the country's borders (Calixte-Hallworth, 2024, 2025; Charles, 2026; Rueter, 2026).

A flag, national anthem, team uniform, goal, chant, or shared disappointment can temporarily connect people separated by geography, social class, language, migration status, or political disagreement. During a World Cup, the national team becomes a symbolic representative of millions of people who are not physically present on the field. Scholars of sport have long emphasized that athletic competition can intensify national identification while also revealing the effects of globalization and transnational movement (Bairner, 2001; and Giulianotti, 1999).

For Haiti, this function is especially significant because the Haitian nation extends well beyond the country's territorial boundaries. Large Haitian communities live in the United States, Canada, France, and elsewhere. Some members of the diaspora were born in Haiti, while others inherited Haitian identity through parents, grandparents, language, food, religious traditions, family memory, and community life.

Hall (1990) argues that diasporic identity should not be understood as a fixed essence. It is continuously shaped through history, culture, displacement, memory, and difference. Haiti's 2026 team embodied this understanding.

Many players were born, raised, or professionally developed outside Haiti, yet voluntarily chose to represent the ancestral nation. Their Haitian identity was not invalidated by foreign birth, residence, accents, or professional training abroad. Instead, their participation demonstrated that national belonging can be expressed through heritage, commitment, family, culture, and chosen representation.

The transnational composition of the team should not be interpreted as evidence that it was insufficiently Haitian. It reflected contemporary Haiti: a nation dispersed across borders but connected through history and identity. At the same time, the team's dependence on players trained abroad raised a difficult institutional question. The diaspora strengthened the national team, but what opportunities remain available to talented young people living inside Haiti?

2.2. The Historical Weight of Haiti's 1974 World Cup Appearance

Haiti's first men's World Cup appearance occurred in West Germany in 1974. The team entered a difficult group with Italy, Poland, and Argentina. Haiti lost all three matches: 3-1 to Italy, 7-0 to Poland, and 4-1 to Argentina (FIFA, n.d.). Those results, however, do not fully capture the historical importance of Haiti's participation.

Against Italy in Munich, Emmanuel "Manno" Sanon received a pass from Philippe Vorbe, broke through the Italian defense, moved around goalkeeper Dino Zoff, and scored. The goal ended Zoff's celebrated international scoreless streak and became one of the most enduring moments in Haitian sporting history (Burnton, 2014; Reuters, 2026a). Sanon scored again against Argentina, accounting for Haiti's two goals in the 1974 tournament.

For generations of Haitians, Sanon's performance represented courage and excellence in the face of powerful opponents. Haiti did not win a match, but Sanon and his teammates established a place in World Cup history. Their legacy illustrates why participation cannot be understood only through a final table. A single goal can acquire historical meaning when it challenges assumptions about who is entitled to excellence on the global stage.

The campaign must also be interpreted within Haiti's political environment. Jean-Claude Duvalier became president for life in April 1971 after the death of his father, François Duvalier. Haiti's World Cup debut therefore occurred under an authoritarian political order in which state power extended deeply into civic life.

In his 2025 interview, Soukar described political interference, unfulfilled financial promises, psychological pressure, and inappropriate treatment of Haitian players during the qualifying campaigns of 1969 and 1973-1974. According to his account, athletes were promised employment, houses, cars, financial rewards, and other forms of support, while political actors sought to control sporting spaces and use the team's success as an instrument of state prestige (Soukar, 2025). These claims require further documentary verification. Nevertheless, they raise an important analytical question: How freely can athletes perform when national representation is connected to political coercion or fear?

Other published accounts of the 1974 tournament also describe a disturbing relationship between the team and the Duvalier regime, particularly following the expulsion of Ernst Jean-Joseph after a positive drug test (Burnton, 2014). The broader lesson is not that public institutions should be absent from national sport. National teams require

public cooperation, security, infrastructure, and investment. The lesson is that political involvement must protect athletes rather than intimidate them, and institutional promises must be transparent, realistic, and honored.

The 1974 players carried national expectations along with the pressures of authoritarian rule. Their experience demonstrates that patriotic symbolism can honor athletes, but it can also be used to control them. The state may celebrate players when they produce prestige while abandoning, blaming, or punishing them when they fail to meet unrealistic expectations.

3.0. Methodology

This study uses a scholarly reflective methodology informed by autoethnographic observation, historical analysis, oral testimony, and secondary-source review. My positionality affects both the questions I ask and the meaning I assign to the experience. I am not a politically or emotionally detached observer. I was born in Haiti, remain engaged with Haitian social and educational issues, and interpret the country's World Cup participation through both scholarly analysis and cultural belonging.

Acknowledging this position does not weaken the analysis. Rather, it clarifies the perspective from which the analysis is produced. Reflexive scholarship requires researchers to explain how identity, personal history, and proximity to a subject influence observation and interpretation.

The primary firsthand component of this article comes from my attendance at the Haiti-Morocco match in Atlanta on June 24, 2026. The article also draws on historical accounts of Haiti's 1974 World Cup campaign, contemporary reporting on qualification and the 2026 tournament, scholarship on nationalism and diaspora, and a December 2025 interview with Haitian historian Michel Soukar.

Soukar's statements are treated as oral testimony. His account provides insight into historical memories of political interference, broken promises, psychological pressure, and player treatment surrounding earlier Haitian teams. However, politically sensitive allegations attributed to him should not be treated as established historical fact without additional corroboration from federation documents, contemporary newspapers, player testimony, government records, or archival research. This distinction is important because oral history preserves valuable memory while also requiring contextual and evidentiary evaluation.

The article is not intended as a technical assessment of formations, player ratings, or match tactics. Its focus is the relationship among football, national identity, diaspora, political history, and institutional development.

4.0. Results and Discussions

4.1. A National Team Built Away From Home

Haiti's qualification for the 2026 World Cup occurred under a different but equally severe national crisis. Political instability, gang violence, and security concerns prevented the men's national team from playing its qualifying matches in Haiti. The team hosted its designated home matches at neutral venues, primarily in Curaçao, and had not played a senior international match on Haitian soil since 2021 (Reuters, 2026a, 2026d). Haiti secured qualification

in November 2025 by defeating Nicaragua 2-0 and finishing first in its final Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (Concacaf) qualifying group (Reuters, 2025).

This absence from home created a profound contradiction. The team represented Haiti while being unable to compete safely before Haitian supporters in Haiti. Players could not benefit from a genuine home-field advantage, prepare consistently inside the country, or develop a sustained physical relationship with the population through home-based training camps and matches. Haitian supporters living in the country were also denied the opportunity to witness the qualification campaign in person.

The team's displacement extended to its leadership. Sébastien Migné, appointed head coach in 2024, led Haiti to the World Cup without being able to visit the country because of security conditions (Reuters, 2026a, 2026d). He and his staff therefore had to recruit, evaluate, and unite players scattered across different countries and professional systems.

The composition of the final squad revealed both the reach of Haitian identity and the fragility of domestic football. Most players were attached to clubs outside Haiti, and Woodensky Pierre was the only member of the 26-player World Cup squad playing for a Haitian club at the time of the tournament (Reuters, 2026d). The team benefited from players exposed to professional academies, regular competition, sports medicine, strength and conditioning, tactical instruction, nutrition programs, international travel, and large stadium environments.

This transnational development was an advantage. It also exposed a structural weakness. Haiti relied heavily on players developed through foreign systems because insecurity and institutional disruption had limited comparable opportunities within the country. Diaspora recruitment should remain an important part of Haiti's national-team strategy, but it cannot substitute for safe fields, youth academies, trained coaches, functioning domestic competitions, education, nutrition, medical support, and credible scouting inside Haiti.

A sustainable national program must do both: welcome eligible players developed abroad and create legitimate pathways for children and young athletes living in Haiti. Table 1 illustrates the squad's transnational composition and shows why the question of domestic development must remain central to any long-term plan.

Table 1. Transnational Composition of Haiti's 2026 FIFA World Cup Squad by Birthplace, Football Development Pathway, Club Affiliation, and Club Country.

Player	Position	Birthplace	Country of Upbringing or Football Development	2026 Club	Club Country
Johny Placide	Goalkeeper	Montfermeil, France	France; developed through Le Havre's academy	SC Bastia	France
Alexandre Pierre	Goalkeeper	Aubervilliers, France	France; Laval, Angers, and Strasbourg systems	FC Sochaux-Montbéliard	France
Josué Duverger	Goalkeeper	Montreal, Quebec, Canada	Primarily Portugal; Belenenses, Sporting CP, and Vitória Setúbal	FC Cosmos Koblenz	Germany
Carlens Arcus	Defender/ right-back	Port-au-Prince, Haiti	Haiti, Brazil, and France; early period with Olé Brasil, Haitian clubs, then Troyes	Angers SCO	France
Wilguens Pagain	Defender/ right-back	Thomazeau, Haiti	France; AS Nomexy Vincey, Épinal, and Nancy academies	SV Zulte Waregem	Belgium

Player	Position	Birthplace	Country of Upbringing or Football Development	2026 Club	Club Country
Markhus "Duke" Lacroix	Defender/ full-back	New Egypt, New Jersey, United States	United States; New Jersey youth soccer, Lawrenceville School, and University of Pennsylvania	Colorado Springs Switchbacks FC	United States
Martin Expérience	Defender/ left-back	Châteaubriant, France	France and Spain; Xerez youth experience followed by development in French football	AS Nancy-Lorraine	France
Jean-Kévin Duverne	Defender	Paris, France	France; AF Épinay and RC Lens academy	KAA Gent, on loan from FC Nantes	Belgium
Ricardo Adé	Defender/ centre-back	Saint-Marc, Haiti	Haiti; Baltimore SC and Don Bosco before moving abroad	LDU Quito	Ecuador
Hannes Delcroix	Defender/ centre-back	Petite Rivière de l'Artibonite, Haiti	Belgium; moved there as a child and developed through Anderlecht	FC Lugano	Switzerland
Keeto Thermoncy	Defender/ centre-back	Fribourg, Switzerland	Switzerland; FC Fribourg, Team AFF-FFV, and Young Boys	BSC Young Boys	Switzerland
Garven-Michée Metusala	Defender/ centre-back	Terrebonne, Quebec, Canada	Canada; Étoiles de L'Est, Montreal Impact Academy, Quebec football, and Canadian collegiate soccer	Colorado Springs Switchbacks FC	United States
Carl Fred Sainté	Midfielder	Grand-Goâve, Haiti	Haiti; AGE-Foot, ASGG, and Violette AC before moving to the United States	El Paso Locomotive FC	United States
Danley Jean Jacques	Midfielder	Petit-Goâve, Haiti	Haiti and Brazil; trained with Pérolas Negras in Brazil and played for Don Bosco in Haiti	Philadelphia Union	United States
Jean-Ricner Bellegarde	Midfielder	Colombes, France	France; Villetaneuse, Le Mans, and RC Lens	Wolverhampton Wanderers	England
Woodensky Pierre	Defensive midfielder	Haiti; reported as being from Cité Soleil	Haiti; locally developed and identified through Haiti's youth and domestic football system	Violette AC	Haiti
Simon Dominique	Midfielder	Not independently verified	Not independently verified; publicly listed with FC Tatran Prešov	FC Tatran Prešov	Slovakia
Don Deedson Loucius	Forward/ winger	Tabarre, Haiti	Haiti and United States; Haitian academies, Kalonji Soccer Academy, and a period with Atlanta United	FC Dallas	United States
Ruben Providence	Forward/ winger	Lagny-sur-Marne, France	France and Italy; Torcy, Paris Saint-Germain, and AS Roma	Almere City FC	Netherlands
Josué Casimir	Forward/ winger	Baie-Mahault, Guadeloupe	Guadeloupe and metropolitan France; Guadeloupe clubs followed by Le Havre	AJ Auxerre	France
Derrick Etienne Jr.	Forward/ winger	Richmond, Virginia, United States	United States; New York Red Bulls academy and University of Virginia	Toronto FC	Canada
Wilson Isidor	Forward/ striker	Rennes, France	France; Le Rheu, Stade Rennais, and AS Monaco	Sunderland AFC	England
Duckens Nazon	Forward/ striker	Châtenay-Malabry, France	France; Vannes and Lorient youth systems	Esteghlal FC	Iran
Frantzdy Pierrot	Forward/ striker	Cap-Haïtien, Haiti	Primarily United States; moved to the Boston area at approximately age 12 and developed through American school, university, and amateur soccer	Çaykur Rizespor, on loan from AEK Athens	Turkey
Yassin Fortuné	Forward	Aubervilliers, France	France and England; Stains, Red Star, RC Lens, and Arsenal academies	FC Vizela	Portugal
Lenny Joseph	Forward	Paris, France	France; Le Puy, Boulogne, and FC Metz	Ferencváros	Hungary

4.2. Witnessing Haiti in Atlanta

Attending the Haiti-Morocco match allowed me to experience the World Cup not merely as a televised competition but as a public performance of national identity.

Around the stadium, Haitian colors, flags, clothing, conversations, and expressions of anticipation transformed individual supporters into a visible community. People who may never have met recognized one another through shared symbols. Children wore Haitian colors; some supporters wrapped themselves in flags. I wore a headband in the colors of the Haitian flag, decorated with the national palm. My husband repeatedly remarked that he had never heard so much Haitian Creole spoken in one place outside Haiti.

Supporters sang, "Ayiti, Ayiti, Grenadye, alaso! Viv Ayiti!" The chant moved through the crowd as both encouragement and declaration. In that environment, supporting the national team became an assertion of belonging. The stadium was located in the United States, but Haitian voices, symbols, language, and collective emotion temporarily made it a Haitian national space.

As the teams entered the field, I felt the historical distance between 1974 and 2026 collapse. The players before us were not the same men who had faced Italy, Poland, and Argentina, but they carried the memory of that generation. The supporters in Atlanta were also connected to generations that had waited, remembered, and hoped.

The match became especially meaningful because Haiti did not play as though elimination had removed all purpose. The team twice took the lead. Each attack created the possibility that the final match could produce Haiti's first World Cup point or victory. When Haiti scored, I stood, shouted, embraced my husband and son, and exchanged high-fives with people around me. After Wilson Isidor's goal, supporters shouted, "Isidor! Isidor!"

Morocco eventually won 4-2, but the score does not erase what occurred. Haiti scored twice in a World Cup match, challenged an internationally respected opponent, and created moments of pride for supporters who had invested time, money, travel, emotion, and identity in the occasion. At the end of the match, the players walked around the field to applaud the supporters. That reciprocal acknowledgment mattered. The team had represented the people, and the people had made their support visible.

The experience reminded me that spectatorship is not passive. Many Haitian supporters were not attending only an entertainment event. They were affirming that Haiti deserved to be seen on the world's largest sporting stage.

4.3. Beyond the Scoreline

Haiti's three defeats cannot be ignored. A scholarly assessment should not romanticize participation or suggest that national pride makes competitive performance irrelevant. Elite competition includes winning, advancing, learning, and improving.

Yet sporting evaluation must distinguish among results, performance, institutional capacity, and social meaning. In results, Haiti lost all three matches. In performance, the team demonstrated periods of competitiveness, especially during its final match against Morocco. In institutional capacity, Haiti qualified and competed despite lacking a genuine home-field advantage and despite the severe weakening of domestic football. In social meaning, the team created a rare moment of national visibility and diasporic unity.

The phrase "at least we participated" can become dangerous when it is used to excuse poor preparation, inadequate governance, or low expectations. Haiti should not approach future tournaments satisfied merely to appear. Qualification should establish a higher standard rather than complete the national project.

At the same time, dismissing the entire campaign as a failure because Haiti did not advance would reproduce an excessively narrow definition of achievement. Qualification after 52 years, accomplished while playing away from home, was itself a major organizational and athletic accomplishment. The appropriate conclusion is therefore neither uncritical celebration nor total condemnation. Haiti's return was historically meaningful, competitively incomplete, and institutionally instructive.

Some supporters expressed frustration with officiating, player selection, and coaching decisions during the tournament. Those reactions are part of the public meaning of the event, but they should be handled carefully in scholarly analysis unless supported by systematic evidence. The more durable institutional question is not whether individual moments were judged correctly, but whether Haiti's football system is prepared to build on this return in a transparent and sustainable way.

4.4. The Diaspora as Supporter and Sporting Resource

The Haitian diaspora played multiple roles during the 2026 World Cup. It provided visible stadium support, created audiences in host cities, amplified the team through traditional and social media, and supplied much of the national team's player pool. Contemporary reporting also documented how Haitian supporters used flags, chants, language, and collective celebration to transform World Cup spaces into sites of diasporic belonging (Reuters, 2026f).

This involvement raises an important question: Who constitutes the Haitian nation? A strictly territorial definition would limit the nation to those residing within Haiti. A cultural and transnational definition recognizes that diaspora communities maintain political, economic, familial, religious, linguistic, and emotional relationships with the country.

The World Cup illustrated the second understanding. Haitian supporters traveled from different parts of the United States, Canada, and elsewhere. Some had left Haiti recently; others had lived abroad for decades; some were children of immigrants. Their relationships with Haiti were not identical, but football created a shared public space in which those differences could coexist.

The diaspora should not, however, be valued only when it purchases tickets, sends remittances, or produces professional athletes. Haitian institutions should develop formal and transparent mechanisms for diaspora participation in sporting development. These mechanisms could include accountable fundraising structures, coaching partnerships, youth exchanges, scholarships, sports-medicine collaborations, facility investment, and independent oversight.

Diaspora engagement must also avoid reproducing inequalities between athletes raised abroad and those living in Haiti. Young people inside Haiti should not receive the message that meaningful national-team consideration is possible only after migration. Domestic talent requires access to safe fields, trained coaches, functioning competitions, education, nutrition, and legitimate scouting systems.

4.5. Comparing Haiti's 1974 and 2026 World Cup Generations

The comparison between Haiti's two World Cup generations reveals both progress and continuity.

The 1974 team was shaped largely within Haitian football. Domestic clubs, schools, and local competitions were central to national-team development. Players operated, however, under an authoritarian political system and had limited access to the professional support structures available to elite athletes today.

The 2026 team benefited from international academies, foreign professional leagues, improved sports science, advanced medical support, tactical preparation, and players accustomed to multicultural and high-pressure sporting environments. Because many players lived and worked abroad, they were less directly dependent on the Haitian state for their professional survival.

At the same time, the 2026 team represented a country whose domestic football institutions had been deeply disrupted. The earlier generation could train and compete in Haiti, although under political pressure. The contemporary generation possessed greater individual professional preparation but could not play qualifying matches at home.

The comparison, therefore, does not present a simple narrative of progress. Each generation possessed advantages that the other lacked. The 1974 generation emerged from a stronger domestic football culture but faced coercive politics and limited professional resources. The 2026 generation entered with broader international experience but represented a national system weakened by insecurity and dependent on foreign-based development.

Both generations also carried the burden of representing far more than a team. They were expected to embody the hopes, frustrations, dignity, and international image of an entire nation. That symbolic responsibility can inspire athletes, but it must not become an excuse for institutions to neglect their material needs.

4.6. Institutional Lessons for Haitian Football

The first lesson from the 2026 campaign is that qualification must produce a long-term development plan. Haiti should begin preparing for future World Cup cycles immediately rather than waiting until the next qualifying competition approaches.

Second, player welfare must be treated as a nonnegotiable institutional obligation. This includes timely compensation, safe accommodations, medical care, nutrition, insurance, psychological support, travel planning, and clear communication. Historical accounts of broken promises and political pressure should serve as warnings against using athletes symbolically while failing them materially.

Third, Haiti needs a functioning domestic development system. Youth football cannot depend exclusively on informal discovery, migration, or foreign academies. Partnerships should be established among schools, clubs, communities, universities, private institutions, the diaspora, and international football organizations.

Fourth, Haitian football governance must be transparent. Funding, sponsorship agreements, player compensation, coaching appointments, travel arrangements, and development expenditures should be subject to credible oversight. National enthusiasm should strengthen rather than suspend public accountability.

Fifth, Haiti should create a formal system for integrating diaspora players without neglecting home-based athletes. Recruitment should be based on ability, commitment, team compatibility, and transparent selection standards. Diaspora athletes and Haiti-based athletes should not be presented as competing definitions of Haitian identity.

Sixth, former players should be included in planning. Members of earlier generations possess knowledge about preparation, institutional mistakes, international competition, political pressure, and player needs. Their experiences should be documented through oral histories before those memories are lost.

Finally, sporting success cannot be separated entirely from national conditions. Restoring safe stadiums, local competitions, transportation, public spaces, and youth programs requires broader improvements in governance and security. Football cannot solve Haiti's political crisis. It can, however, demonstrate what becomes possible when Haitian talent receives structure, protection, opportunity, and sustained investment.

4.7. Limitations

This article is based partly on the author's attendance at one World Cup match and therefore does not claim to represent the experiences of all Haitian supporters, players, coaches, or officials. The firsthand observations are interpretive rather than statistically generalizable.

The article also uses journalistic reporting and oral testimony alongside scholarly theories of nationalism and diaspora. Several historical allegations concerning political interference, promises to players, and athlete treatment require further archival verification. Future research should include interviews with surviving members of the 1974 team, 2026 players and coaches, Haitian Football Federation officials, supporters in Haiti and the diaspora, and individuals involved in youth development.

A larger study could also compare Haitian-language and international media coverage, analyze how foreign news organizations frame Haiti during major sporting events, and investigate how gender shapes national football narratives, particularly in relation to Haiti's women's national team and its 2023 World Cup participation.

5.0. Conclusion and Future Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

Haiti's 2026 World Cup journey ended at the group stage, but its meaning did not end with the final whistle in Atlanta.

The campaign connected two generations separated by 52 years. The 1974 team established Haiti's place in World Cup history through Emmanuel Sanon's goals and the courage of athletes competing under difficult political and institutional circumstances. The 2026 team returned under another form of national crisis, qualifying and competing while unable to play safely at home.

As I left the stadium after the Morocco match, I understood more clearly why Haiti's presence mattered. The players had not delivered the victory supporters desired, but they had made Haiti visible through athletic ambition rather than national tragedy. They had given Haitian families, supporters, and children an opportunity to see the flag carried onto the world's largest football stage.

Pride, however, must be followed by responsibility. The FHF, public authorities, private sector, diaspora, former players, educators, and community organizations must decide whether the 2026 appearance will remain an extraordinary isolated moment or become the foundation of a sustainable football future.

Haiti should not wait another 52 years. The lasting value of the 2026 World Cup will not be determined only by the goals scored, the matches lost, or the memories created. It will be determined by what Haitian institutions build after the celebration has ended.

5.2. Future Recommendations

- Develop a transparent national football development plan that begins immediately after the 2026 World Cup cycle and includes measurable goals for youth development, coaching, facilities, and player welfare.
- Create safe and accessible youth football pathways in Haiti through partnerships among schools, community organizations, clubs, universities, private sponsors, and international football bodies.
- Establish formal diaspora engagement mechanisms, including accountable fundraising, coaching exchanges, scholarships, sports-medicine partnerships, and player scouting networks.
- Strengthen governance within Haitian football by publishing clear information about sponsorships, development expenditures, travel support, player compensation, and selection standards.
- Document the experiences of former Haitian national-team players through oral history projects, archival research, and public education initiatives before those memories are lost.
- Support future research comparing Haiti's men's and women's national teams, Haitian-language and international media coverage, and the role of sport in shaping Haitian national identity during periods of crisis.

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Authors' Contributions

Marjorie Calixte-Hallworth is the sole author of this manuscript and was responsible for conceptualization, observation, analysis, writing, revision, and final approval.

Informed Consent

Not applicable. This article is a scholarly reflective essay based on personal observation, public sources, and cited secondary materials; no new human-subject interviews were conducted for this manuscript.

Availability of Data and Materials

Not applicable. No original dataset was generated. The article relies on firsthand observation and publicly available sources cited in the references.

Institutional Review Board Statement

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Ethical Approval

Not applicable.

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Declaration of Artificial Intelligence

The author used generative artificial intelligence tools for grammar editing, formatting assistance, and language polishing. The author reviewed, revised, and approved the final manuscript and remains fully responsible for its content, interpretations, citations, and conclusions.

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