

Bayelsa: How Thomas was brutally killed

killed over football match loss

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Thomas

From Femi Folaranmi, Yenagoa

Tragedy struck in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa on Saturday, June 14, when a football game, a usual pastime for young men and a form of entertainment for many, ended on a tragic note with the killing of one man, Thomas Ogbianawei, by players of the team that lost a football game.

Nothing on that fateful day suggested that gloom was going to engulf the peaceful atmosphere. As part of activities to bond, football clubs in Eniwari, Foinbiri, and Opuama, which shared borders, always engage in football matches.



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On the day of the tragedy, the match was between Opuama and Eniwari, which was played in Eniwari. The friendly nature of the match and players was such that even the goalkeeper of Eniwari, who is from Opuama, is a resident of Eniwari.

In the course of the match, Eniwari scored a goal, and efforts by Opuama to equalise were futile. The centre referee blew the whistle to bring the match to an end.

However, Opuama players protested and attacked the referee, accusing him of ending the match before time. Eventually, the situation was resolved, and the teams agreed to play a second leg on another date to be decided.

On their way back to Opuama, the sulking players saw Ogbianawei at the construction site in Foinbiri. Immediately, they recognised that the deceased was from Eniwari, and in a twinkling of an eye, he was alleged to have been attacked. His explanations that he was not a football fan fell on deaf ears, and he was beaten to death, while his assailants fled the scene.

As soon as the words got to Eniwari that an Eniwari youth had been killed because of the football match, a mob from Eniwari marched to the house of John, the goalkeeper who had played for Eniwari earlier in the game. He was harassed and beaten. His pleas that, though he is from Opuama, he has been living in Eniwari for years and has become a member of their community also fell on deaf ears. They threatened that they would kill him in retaliation for the death of Ogbianawei.

It, however, took the intervention of the Chairman of Southern Ijaw Local Government Area, Hon Target Segibo, and security agencies to intervene and secure

the release of the victim into the protective custody of the police with a proviso that the alleged killers of Ogbianawei would be apprehended.

Investigation by Saturday Sun indicated that to immediately douse the tension in the area, the Council Chairman, Hon Segibo, convened a security meeting and appealed to leaders and residents of the two communities to exercise restraint and avoid actions capable of escalating the situation.

Segibo, in a press statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Mr Ayibatari Easterday, while expressing sadness over the incident, extended condolences to the family of the deceased and the people of Eniwari.

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He implored community leaders, youth groups, and stakeholders to caution their followers against reprisals and allow the security agencies to investigate the death of Ogbianawei.

Seigibo stated that the security agencies were on top of the situation and working to identify and apprehend those responsible for the murder of the deceased.

He maintained that the leadership of the council would not tolerate any form of lawlessness or breakdown of law and order or any action capable of aggravating the tense situation.

“The security agencies are on top of the situation, and the government will ensure that all those involved in the dastardly act are brought to justice. We appeal to all residents to remain calm and cooperate with security personnel as investigations continue,” he said.

Mr Alagoa Morris, an environmentalist and human rights advocate, has condemned in very strong terms the alleged killing of Ogbianawei.

Morris, who expressed worry over the tragic incident, called for the arrest of all those involved to ensure justice for the deceased.

“The alleged killing of the young man from Eniwari is of serious concern. I don’t know the deceased, nor am I from Eniwari. This could have happened to anybody, and herein lies the seriousness of this matter. Sport is usually associated with bringing people together, uniting people as a vehicle of friendship and peaceful coexistence. Having disagreements in the field of play is not strange globally. We have had our own share of such experiences. And some communities are known to always go violent, whether the wrestling or football matches are hosted by them or they are playing away. This is unhealthy. Be that as it may, I wish to join my voice in calling on the authorities, especially the Police, to follow up and ensure those identified as perpetrators get what they bargained for: prosecution.”

The Bayelsa State Command, through the Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Musa Muhammed, disclosed that 24-year-old Jacob Deninah is the only suspect arrested so far.

The family of the deceased and the people of Eniwari, while lamenting the unprovoked killing of their son, said they would be waiting to see how the case would be handled by the government and the police before deciding what their next step would be.