

# Tearful bye to Okpomo's 'gifted' children

• Killed while  
replacing flat  
tyre

**I**F the dead could shed tears, the late former Nigeria Football Association (NFA) Secretary-General, Patrick Okpomo would most likely be wailing in his grave with the announcement of the gruesome death of two of his children, Onome and Ejiroghene, on the same day - August 26 - by a drunken female driver.

The late Okpomo was blessed with four kids (three girls and a boy). Ironically, the death of the last two coincided with the anniversary of the death of their father three years ago, after an unsuccessful pile operation at the St Nicholas Hospital in Lagos.

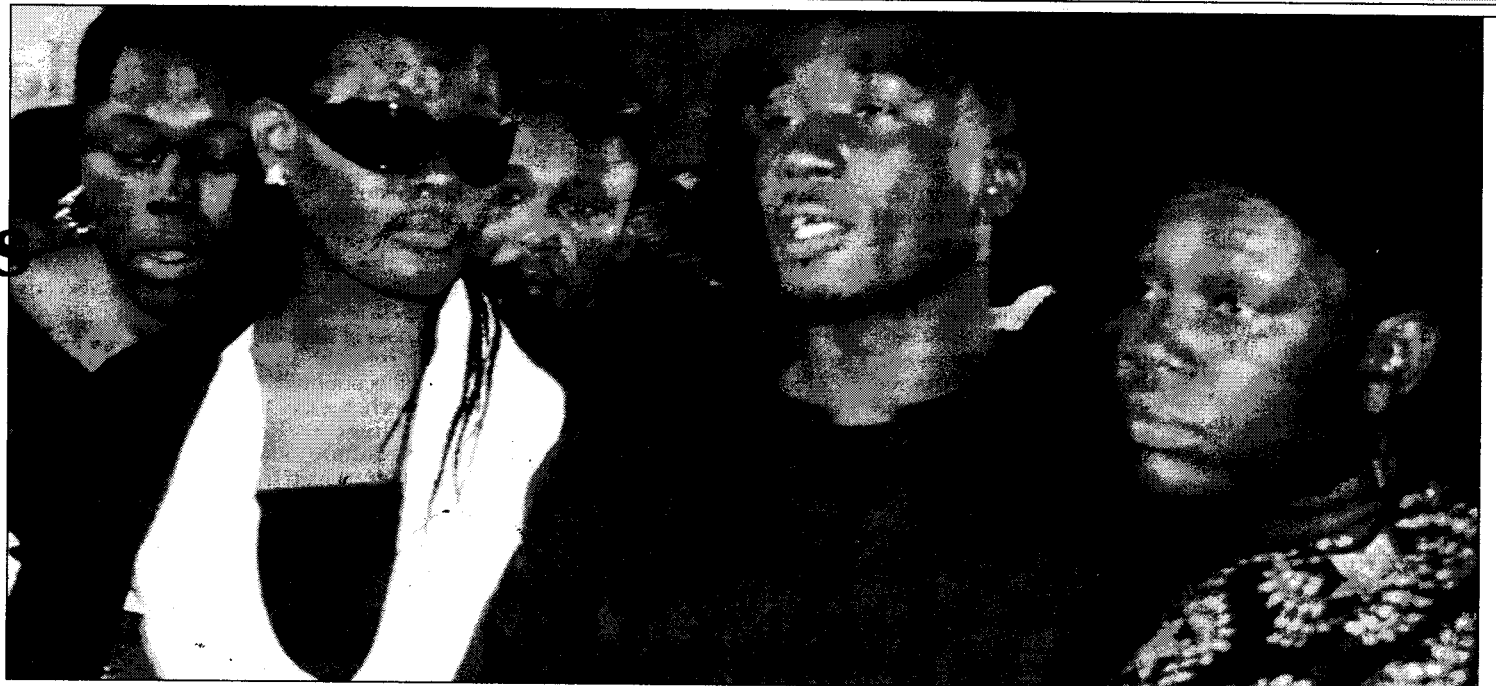
The children, one of them a final year student of the University of Lagos were knocked down on their way home from school (UNILAG), while trying to fix a flat tyre on the Lekki/Epe expressway.

It was indeed a pathetic scenario on August 30, four days after the death of Onome, aged 23 and Ejiro, 25, as sympathisers fought back tears at the Shepherd Hill Baptist Church, Obanikoro, Lagos where a funeral programme was held for them. By the time the Peugeot 504 Hearse car that brought their bodies drove into the premises of the Baptist Church, most sympathisers wept uncontrollably.

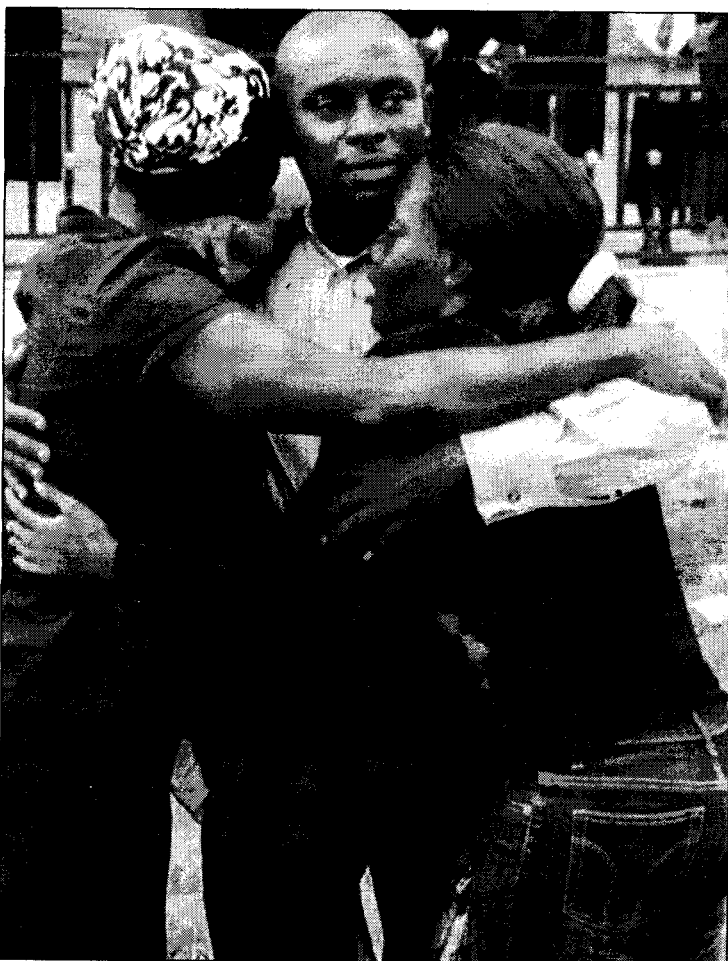
If Okpomo's widow had the premonition that her last two kids would be crushed to death, she probably would have told them to stay back in school. In fact, she was the last to speak to the kids before their death.

The only son, Patrick (Jnr) had called their mother, Mary, to tell her that they would come home late, because they had a flat tyre - and probably to stay up late for them. The two older girls, Esi and Igbo had even laughed off their younger siblings' display of emotions.

Igbo, the first child of Okpomo works with telecommunication company, Celtel Nigeria Ltd. while Esi, who is the second, graduated last year. Certainly, the loss of her children was unbearable for Mary who after the death of her husband, had turned to God for comfort. As a deaconess of the Baptist Church, she stared ahead while sympathisers visited her, at home. The two children were finally laid to rest at the Vaults and Gardens Cemetery, Ikoyi.



• UNILAG colleagues of the deceased at the funeral



• A man consoling two students at the funeral PHOTOS: JOHN EBHOTA

By Stella Bamawo

Meanwhile, members of the NFA who were expected to come out en masse to console one of their own were not there. One should ask why they failed to register their presence during the Okpomos' most trying moment.

The only sports administrator at the event was former chairman of the Nigeria Referee Association Chukwudifu - and the Sports Writers Association of Nigeria (SWAN) represented by the National President, Olu Amadasun. The Lagos SWAN chapter was also not left out with its chairman, Emeka Enechi in attendance.

If tears could bring back the two kids, the multitude which comprised friends, classmates and relatives would have revived

Onome and Patrick. In a chat with the *The Nation*, most of the sympathisers were short of words. If the grief could be captured in words, the pages of the newspapers would not have accommodated all the bitter feelings.

Some asked God why he had to pick on the family of Okpomo. But it would not be right to say the family was destined to experience misfortune.

Onome, until his death, was a part-four student of UNILAG. His sister, Ejiroghene, was a student of the same institution. Their mother, according to tradition, could not attend the funeral rites which the family members claimed was a taboo.

Speaking after the funeral, Enechi regretted that the



• The late Patrick Okpomo Jr.



• The late Ejiroghene Okpomo

programme for the late sports administrator and his late children.

"I would like you to cast your mind back to the late Samuel Okwaraji, who died while playing for Nigeria at the National Stadium, Lagos. Not many people remembered he was one of the football legends that played for Nigeria.

"But thank God, some of us still do and that is because some of his friends have deemed it fit and necessary to ensure that the late footballer does not fade in the minds of so many, by organising a memorial programme in his honour. But for Okpomo, nothing in the form of remembrance has been done except by the family. And unfortunately for them, this year has been terrible and will not be forgotten in a hurry, as the third anniversary of the late administrator was celebrated four days before the death of his two kids."

One of the cousins of the Okpomos, who would like to remain anonymous, has, however, called on the government to bring to book the unidentified driver just like many of the sympathisers at the burial have demanded that the Police apprehend the run-away driver.

His children were buried August 30, while the remains of the late Okpomo (Snr) were interred on November 18, 2004.

Before joining CAF and FIFA, Okpomo served as the Secretary-General of the NFA from 1984 to 1987, 1989 to 1990 and in 2002. He also played a significant role as the Director of Organisation when Nigeria staged the FIFA World Youth Championship in 1999.

Given his experience in football administration, he was to be recalled to restructure the FA years after he had left the place by late Sports Minister Ishaya Mark Aku. He was appointed a resource person in the restructuring effort by the Minister, Col. Musa Mohammed. He died at 57.

And just like their father, the two children were described by their friends and classmates as very brilliant, and as gifted as their late father who was described by colleagues, as "talented" and "respected."

constituency which the late Okpomo served diligently was not represented by the NFA members.

He said: "I am not sure that they (NFA and NFL) were fully represented at the funeral held at the Shepherd Hill Baptist Church, Obanikoro, Lagos and the final burial rites at the Cemetery in Ikoyi. I disapprove of what the NFA and the Nigeria Football League (NFL) did. For a man that gave his all for Nigeria, I believe some people should have been able to stand up for him so that he (the late Okpomo), will be happy in his grave and smile that he was still a force to reckon with even in death with the honour given to his children in death."

Elechi advised that the NFA should institute a memorial