

Death in a hail of hot leads

Duku Joel in Damaturu writes on how dare devil armed robbers aborted the dreams of Esther Mari, 300-level student of the University of Maiduguri and a Hockey player with the Yobe State Council.

SHE had mapped out her plans for life and was following them meticulously until that Black Friday, February 15 when her dreams were cut short.

On that fateful day at about 4.00pm, the vehicle Esther was travelling in was stopped by armed robbers who unleashed terror on the commuters near Beneshiek, Kaga Local Government area of Borno state along Maiduguri / Damasturu road. In the process, Esther was shot in the head. But she did not die immediately.

According to an eyewitness, the robbers had stopped the vehicle Esther was in before they attacked. They equally shot and killed another person at the spot. Esther was shot in the head and was taken to the General Sani Abacha Specialist Hospital in Damaturu. From there, she was referred to the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital (UMTH) for more serious medical attention where she later died in the early hours of Wednesday.

Narrating Esther's last moment, Alh. Sani Fema Chairman of the state's sports council said he and the hockey team captain, Lucy and the Coach, Fateh Jubril were together with Esther at the hospital.

He explained that the girl was taken to the hospital in a state of coma. "But the authorities of UMTH had assured that an operation would be done on her on Monday. I later left for Damaturu to make all necessary arrangements for the operation, only to get a call later that Esther had died."

Esther, an indigene of Akwa



• Esther ... the hockey player

Ibom state was 30 years old before her untimely murder by the robbers. She had served as a player with the Yobe State sports council for the past four years. She began her career as a judo player before switching to become a hockey player.

Esther had traveled to Maiduguri to secure accommodation for herself at the University of Maiduguri where she is currently a 300-level undergraduate student of Physical Education in the Faculty of Education.

"You know she is a student of Physical Education at University of Maiduguri. When she heard that the accommodation list had been released, she had to rush to Maiduguri to pay for her accommodation. That was what took her to Maiduguri only for her to meet her death on her way back to Damaturu," narrated Lucy, the skipper of the team and Esther's closest friend.

Lucy, also told *The Nation* that Esther and her fiancé, an Air Force officer who stays at Jaji, had concluded plans to

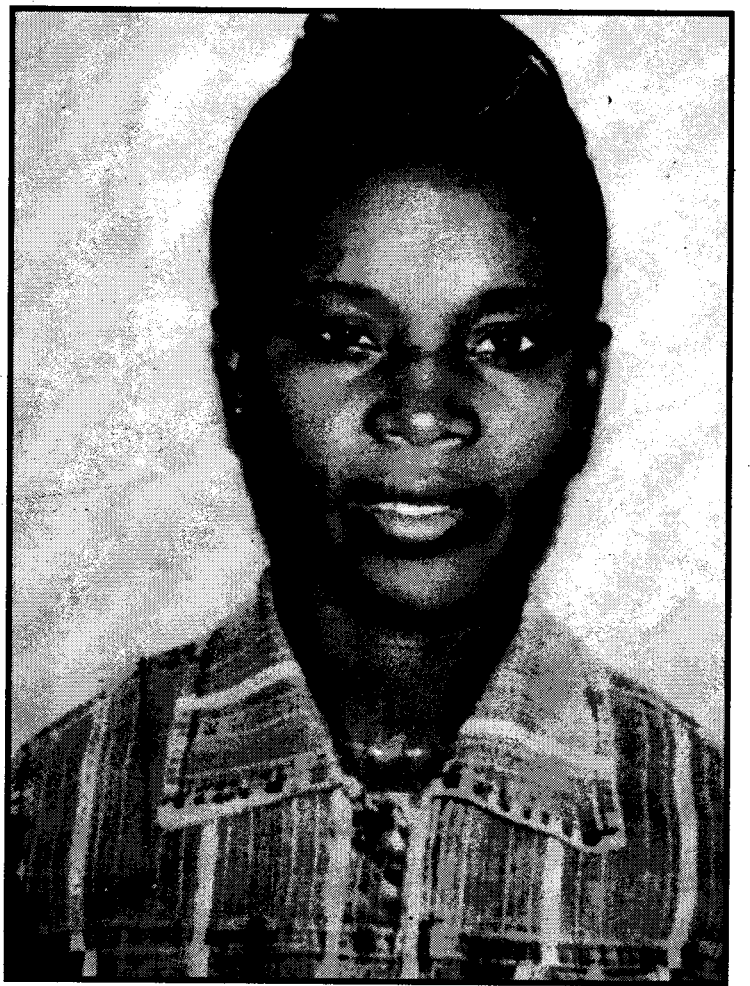
get married after her graduation next year, "but all that is finished now", Lucy informed as she tried to hold back tears.

"She used to tell me that after her graduation from the university, she would get married to her fiancé whom she told me is an air force officer living in Jaji, Kaduna. She said they made the decision to get married during one of her visits last year," Lucy recalled.

According to Lucy, staying with Esther will never give you a dull moment as she was a jolly good fellow. She remembers how good Esther spent her life time both as a player and friend stressing that the hockey team will miss Esther so much especially now that they are preparing for a competition.

Asura Garba, one of her team mates, told *The Nation* that the death of Esther is not just a loss to Yobe State but to the entire nation.

"Esther was among the team that won the Bronze Medal for Nigeria at the African Cup for



• Esther Mari

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Club Champions in 2004. She also represented Nigeria at the 8th All African Games that took place in Abuja. Her death is not just a loss to Yobe state but the entire Nigeria", Garba informed.

Esther's career, it was gathered, began as a judoka before switching to becoming a hockey player. While a judoka, she played at national and international competitions within and outside the country.

The coach of the Yobe Hockey Team Jubril said he has lost a valuable player in the team.

Alhaji Sani Fema told *The Nation* in Damaturu that his council would miss dearly the services rendered by Esther. Her death, the chairman said is a huge loss to the state and her family.

"This girl Esther is one of the best behaved girls that we have at the sports council. In her team, she is the backbone of the team. Since the incident, I have never rested. Esther and every member of the sports council is like my own personal family. I

feel I have lost a sister. Her death is really a shock to me," Fema disclosed.

The remains of Esther have since been buried in her home town Uyo in Akwa Ibom State.

Meanwhile, the entire games village, the official residents of athletes in the state is still in a mourning mood when *The Nation* visited.

Momu Sani, a handball player with the state revealed that "Esther had some hidden qualities in her that are quite appreciated by everyone that came across her."

"She was such a nice fellow who took everybody's problem as hers", said Momu.

Esther was the third born in her family but the breadwinner as well. Most of her earnings, a source said, were invested in self development and her family's up keep.

Esther had taken her younger brother to Damaturu where she had paid for his training before death came calling. The distraught boy was still traumatised to speak with our correspondent.