

United Petrotrin Captain rejoins Soca Warriors by Afiya Butler

As the final date approaches and preparations intensify for the 2006 World Cup playoffs in Germany, different generations are joining forces to ensure that the Trinidad and Tobago team, representing the smallest country ever to make it to this stage of the competition, would remain a force to be reckoned with straight down to the final round.

In addition to the advice and technical expertise offered by former national footballers including members of the 1974 and Strike Squad teams, some of our long-time favorites- Dwight Yorke, Russell Latapy and Anthony Rougier have returned to the national field for a final shot at the World Cup title. These three men, now in their 30s, are among 24 footballers selected to represent this country during the World Cup Playoffs.

Today, both Latapy and Yorke play professional football with foreign teams. Rougier Captains the United Petrotrin Football Team, which was re-established to join the national effort for the development of football at the highest level.

Now that he has been selected once again for national football, Rougier is ecstatic.

"I have trained really hard for this," he said. "I thank God for this opportunity. Now I just want to concentrate on staying healthy and fit and preparing for the Game."

While he steered clear of giving any forecast of the World Cup Finals, Rougier says he believes Trinidad and Tobago's chances at this stage are very good.

As Captain of the United Petrotrin Team, Rougier, who himself hails from Sobo Village, La Brea, believes he could share some of what he has learned on the field with other local footballers.

"I believe I have a wealth of experience and now is the time for me to give back to my country," he explained. "I think it would be a waste if I don't."

Now 34 years old, Rougier has been playing football at the national level ever since he was 16.

Following his earlier stint with the National Team in the '90s, Rougier moved on to play professional football in Europe, the United States of America and China. After playing overseas for 15 years, he has returned to home soil.

He now focuses on channeling all that he has learnt into the United Petrotrin Football Team.

"For me this is two-fold," he said. "United Petrotrin allows me to fulfill my desires- play football and do work in the community by helping with youth development."

And while he is now required to concentrate even harder on training with the National Team, Rougier has promised to continue to train with United Petrotrin for as long as the National team would allow him to do so.

"After all," he said. "We are going after the League title this year. I am not a gambling man, but if I am to speak of this team's chances in the Pro League, I would say I personally believe we would win."

He commended Petrotrin for having the vision to promote this program.

"I would like to give kudos to the authorities at Petrotrin for sponsoring this program," he said. "I myself have come from this program and look at what has happened to me. I hope the powers that be would continue to support this program in the long term without expecting immediate results. If they don't, they could be denying another youth the opportunity to excel in this field."

Rougier believes this long-term commitment is necessary for the revival of football on a large scale throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

"To get football to where it used to be and beyond, we must try to revive interest in it at all levels," he said. "As experienced footballers, we must be committed to working hard to produce other excellent players to take over when we leave the field. I think provisions should also be made to provide our professional players with the option to return home and give back to their country. For me, I intend to continue to play and share what I have learnt for as long as God and my family would allow me."