
Lukas Nmecha / VfL Wolfsburg

You were born and raised in Hamburg and then you and your family moved to England in 2007. How difficult was it for a 9-year-old kid to leave his friends behind?

“I don’t remember it being overly difficult. I think when you’re that age, you adapt really quickly. There were some friends of course that you leave behind, but I found new friends really quickly and I settled in quite quickly.”

Did you have trouble getting used to your new environment and language in the beginning?

“My parents spoke English in the house. I couldn’t understand it, but I think it was learning through that way a little bit and with football and everything – I got to know people really quickly and it was actually quite an easy transition.”

You were scouted by Manchester City and joined their football youth setup – how exciting was that and what went through your mind at that time?

“Yeah, definitely. It was a fun time. It wasn’t as big of a club than it is now. They didn’t have as much money and things like that. But they had all the facilities that you needed at that age and for me it was a really good experience.”

In the summer of 2019 you joined VfL Wolfsburg but returned to England again in January 2020. Why didn’t your first stint with this club work out?

“I think as a young player you always want to play. The manager at the time didn’t play me or trust me as much as I wanted him to. But it was really nothing personal, it was just more of a decision where I knew that at that age I needed to play, and I wasn’t doing that here, so I had to leave.”

Were you surprised when Wolfsburg contacted you again this summer?

“Yeah, definitely. But I always got on well with the team here, and the Sports Director, Marcel Schäfer. I got on really well with them. It was again a business decision to come here. I think this is the best platform I could have come to, to show my ability and as of now, I am starting to play more than I did and I think that’s a good thing.”

Your contract here runs until 2025. After playing on loan for several teams, are you now happy to have found a real home for a few years?

“Yeah, definitely. I think moving clubs almost every year is a difficult thing to deal with. To adjust to the team and the team to adjust to you. But now I have some time to stay with the club and really settle in. And even in the short time that I’ve been here, I think I’m slowly improving, the players are starting to get to know how I play, and I think it’s showing in my performances.”

Why did you choose to sign for Wolfsburg?

“I’ve been here before, I know the quality of the players. I know my own quality and I just felt like if I’m to play at my best, that I would be able to play here. We have Champions League football, great facilities. I think the club has a high ambition of getting to European football and that’s another good thing.”

What’s your take on the season and your performance so far?

“I think the thing that I’m maybe not so happy with is that I would like to score more. I always like to score more. I scored my first Champions League goal which I was really happy about. But it’s about playing and improving game by game. And like I said, this is still a new team for me with a lot of new players. We just need to have some time to mould together. And there’s no doubting the quality in this team.”

What are your qualities and skills – what is it that you can bring to the game?

“I’m a versatile striker. I like to think I can do a bit of everything. I like to hold the ball and I also like to try to create my own chances. The main thing is that when I do get in front of goal, I fancy myself every time.”

Your teammate Wout Weghorst is also true number nine, what can you learn from him?

“I think there is a lot to learn from him – he’s a poacher. He positions himself well and yeah, if I can pick up some of them little tricks that he does to score the goals, then that’ll bring me to another level again. Because there’s things that I can do that are a little bit more difficult for players like that.”

You scored your first Champions League goal against Salzburg. Even though Wolfsburg lost that match, how special was that moment for you personally?

“It was definitely a very special moment. I feel like I’m far from my best at the moment. I’m still getting there. I’m feeling like at that stage I’m able to compete, I’m able to perform. Over time, with all the experience, that can only get better and better.”

Everything is still possible in your group. What does it mean to you and your development to be competing at the highest level in Europe?

“Yeah, I think the group is still open. You can play against some teams and think ‘we really didn’t have a chance here’. But the Sevilla game shows they’re one of the stronger teams in the group I’d say. And we played really well with a bad decision at the end. We could be going away with three points. It’s one of those where we need to not purely focus on the results and put our heads down, but think about how those games really went. And if one or two things change then we can come out of those games with three points.”

You won the European Championship with the German U21 team last summer, what are your memories of that fantastic tournament and winning the title?

“When you talk about team chemistry and sticking together, that group was a real example of that. We all had the same goals and we wanted to show everyone. We weren’t the favourites in that tournament, and we wanted to show everyone that German players are just as good as every other nation – even better! And I think we did that really well. I remember the penalty shootout against Denmark clearly, which was a tense game. And then of course the final which was amazing.”

You could have chosen to play for England too – what and who convinced you to play for Germany?

“I was born here; I just have more of a connection with the German national team. Also at the time, the coach Stefan Kuntz really convinced me and showed me that there is a path for me. I think that has really come to show. You see players like Adeyemi and guys like that, who are managing to get into that first team squad. And doing well at that level. I’ve played with those guys, and I know where I stand in terms of quality compared to those players.”

Stefan Kuntz, at that time the U21 coach, came over to England for two days to see you and your family and convince you to opt for Germany. He claimed that your dad makes one of the best scrambled eggs he has ever had. Is that story true and what’s your dad’s secret behind his recipe?

“I don’t really know what the secret is. I just know that he does make good scrambled eggs. It was a really good time. It just showed me how much he really wanted me in this team. And credit to him, it worked out really well, I was able to perform well and help the team to win. I think that’s a big credit to him.”

You were top goal scorer and the game winner in the finals against Portugal. Could you please talk us through that moment and the emotions that you went through after the match was over?

“I think in those situations I’m not immediately going crazy, but it just slowly sets in. It was amazing, it was a great feeling to see how happy everyone was about the win and how we managed to do it. I just really enjoyed being part of a team that sticks together and wins. It was a really nice experience.”

How much of a breakthrough was that tournament for you as a player and person?

“Yeah, I would say it was a good milestone. But I think Under 21s football and first team football is a completely different thing. I am looking to win things in first team football and hopefully go to the next stage with the national team there. We’ll see what happens.”

How big is your desire now to play for Hansi Flick's team with the 2022 World Cup in Qatar in the back of your mind?

"It's definitely something that every player wants to be part of. And I think if there is a chance, you can only go 100% for it. And that's what I want to do. So, like I said, I'm just concentrated on game by game and hopefully that will lead me there."

If you look back on the last couple of months, what are your thoughts on the success you've experienced?

"For me personally it's a thing of not making too big a deal out of it. I try to keep quite level-headed about most things. I've had two years where I've not been able to perform well. Now I've had a season in Belgium where I had a really good year and the Euros also. But I try to keep my emotions quite level – never too sad and never too happy. Of course, you have to enjoy the happy moments, but I try to stay quite present and just take it day by day."

Back to Wolfsburg – your brother Felix also plays for VFL, how special is that?

"Yeah, definitely. I grew up with him and I can see his qualities. Most people probably know him as my brother but he's going to show people that he's much more than that. He's a really talented player and I think this season and next season, people will start to see a really good player in him."

For the first time ever, you both appeared on the pitch at the same time against Union Berlin – what did you tell your younger brother after the game?

"Yeah, but this is also the first time he's really started playing first team football. If you come on for ten minutes, I know how it is. You try to do your best but you're not going to destroy every team in ten minutes. You have to be patient and focus in training and just wait for your chance. And that's sort of what I'm preaching to him. Of course he wants to play, play, play. I'm sure he'll get his chance but he just has to be patient now."

When it comes to style of play, where are the differences between the two of you?

"I think I'm a bit more direct than him. He's really good at passing. But I would say he's a bit more of a flair player. He has a lot of tricks and stuff like that. Whereas I'm a bit more direct and maybe a bit more physical. But

as you can see, he's 1.90 now, he's starting to fill out – I think he's got a really good future ahead of him."

How would you describe your relationship with your brother, how close are you?

"We are very close, mainly because a lot of the things he's going through how I've already been through. So I give him a lot of advice on that kind of thing. The first time when I was here, I would say it wasn't a good time for me at all, I didn't play a great deal and there wasn't much to do around here. Now I have somebody here who I'm close to and can talk to about everything and same for him. So it's really nice."

How much time do you spend together and what do you guys get up to?

"We have two split apartments, we're right next to each other. If I've had enough of him, then he can go in his apartment and then if we want to do some things together, then we just do that. But it's hard to find things to entertain us sometimes around here. But we get to eat together, we walk the dog together, we go and see friends together. On a day off maybe we'll go to Berlin or Hamburg or somewhere nearby. Just normal day to day things."

And who tends to win when you play PlayStation?

"We play different games actually. He's more of a FIFA player and I play a lot more basketball games."

Why basketball? Is that a passion of yours?

"Yeah, I'm really into it. I don't know why but it's just something that I enjoy playing and watching also. I like quite a lot of the American sports in general. I would say I follow the NBA and American football mostly."

Your mother was born in Germany and your father in Nigeria. Do you have a connection to Nigeria?

"Yeah, my dad has got a lot of family out there. It's been a really long time since I've been there. I think I was seven years old the last time I went. But it's definitely a thing on the bucket list when I do get a good amount of time off. That'll definitely be somewhere I'll be going soon."

What are your memories of that trip?

“I don’t remember too much, I remember a lot of sand dunes. I remember just going out and around with my dad. I think the first time I went I was four, and I got this scar on my head. So that’ll always remind me in a sort of way. But I remember it being really nice, obviously really hot. Definitely want to go there again soon.”

What did your father tell you about his background and growing up there?

“He was born and raised there. And I think he was raised by his mum from the age of four because his dad passed away. He’s just done really well for himself. He met my mum in Hamburg after he moved there. Even after that, he moved us all to England. His plan has worked out really well for all of us.”

Back to football, do you have any personal objectives?

“I would say yes and no. I do have season targets, which I don’t tell anyone about until the end of the season. Apart from that, trying to get into the national team. But I don’t try to set targets that are out of my control. There’s a lot of things in football where you can never really say what’s going to happen next. I just like to be in the moment and enjoy where I am. If I can do well in the here and now, that will lead to better things.”