

# GABRIEL AJALA: BRINGING AFRICAN SPORT TO THE WORLD'S ATTENTION

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**Gabriel Ajala worked as a paralegal for Herbert Smith Freehills for two short periods of time. As he says, he put the knowledge gained from his time with the firm to very good use.**

For Gabriel Ajala, there was a choice to be made. Should he qualify as a lawyer, or should he take a master's in sports business, his preferred area of interest - indeed his passion? Yet, his degree was in economics and law. He could not afford to do both. It was a tough decision, but he decided to go with the master's, which he completed in 2015. As it turned out, he has been able to develop significant knowledge of the law, through a series of paralegal jobs and secondments.

Why the interest in sports? The answer lies in the fact that Gabriel was, and is, a talented footballer. As a schoolboy, he played for England School Boys and, but for a lack of support and a recommendation that he continue his studies, he could have gone to have played football professionally.

While doing his master's Gabriel realised that there was a dearth of good information not just about football in Africa but also about sport in general. That didn't make sense to him. Here was a continent passionate about sport, appealing to a worldwide audience, yet it was difficult to get a clear picture of how strong sport was and is.

As Gabriel expresses it, "I realised that there was no place for the diaspora to read up on sports business news affecting Africa. It was just difficult to find credible information about the African sports market. I wanted to fill this gap by creating a content curation hub where sports business topics affecting the continent can be freely and widely discussed."

It then occurred to Gabriel that such a content hub would open up commercial possibilities, to bring together with those playing sport and those engaged in the sports business with consumers and those who might want to invest in or otherwise participate in African sport.

Accordingly, over the next year or, Gabriel gave thought to how he should go about solving this problem. The end result is an organisation he formed called Africa Sports United, or ASU. Gabriel has big ambitions – for ASU to be the sports business hub for all African-related sports, providing a community for those who wish to help build a sustainable sports economy and portray a true reflection of the growing sports market in Africa.

Gabriel has notched up several interesting paralegal jobs, among them for law firms Olswang, Osborne Clarke, CMS and telecoms company BT. He also worked for a while at the Discovery Channel, specifically working for Eurosports, when the 2018 Winter Olympics were taking place. “That was a fantastic experience ,” he says. “I was drafting agreements, liaising with clients in different territories. Then when the Olympics started, I was on hand to make sure the rights owners were happy.”

Gabriel also did two stints as a paralegal with Herbert Smith Freehills in 2015. He had just finished his master’s and came into contact with the firm through an agency. The work was, as might be expected, not that thrilling – looking through many documents as part of due diligence exercises – but nevertheless, Gabriel enjoyed the experience, made some friends, and learned a lot from watching how things were done at the firm.

He reflects on the value of the paralegal roles: “These jobs gave me a legal foundation which has been incredibly useful as I have developed my business. What I learned from Herbert Smith Freehills was attention to detail, how to read through contracts and to see the wider picture beyond the legal technicalities.” He has been assiduous in developing his network, which he maintains on an extensive spreadsheet of contacts.

Gabriel has also maintained his interest in football. He was involved in Street Soccer International, a sports agency that encourages the development of fancy football skills. There, he was business development manager, liaising with partners and overseeing market research.

He obviously hopes that ASU will be a success and make money for him. However, his main motivation is not money, it is his love of sport and his desire to see Africa put on the sports world map to a greater extent than it has ever been. At the same time, he wants to benefit from the business. “I have been helped a great deal by others as I have developed my career, and I want in turn to be able to help others if and how I can.”

He also has one other very important memory from his time at Herbert Smith Freehills – enjoying relaxing in Exchange Square. He even used that spot to propose to his wife. “Happy wife, happy life!”, he laughs.

*If you wish to connect with Gabriel, contact him at: [gabriel@asunified.com](mailto:gabriel@asunified.com)*

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