

Bankole Thompson Says World Cup Has Become The Biggest Global Stage for Black Excellence

Nationally acclaimed journalist, former SCLC national board member says tournament is demonstrating the power of Black achievement and unifying force of sport

DETROIT, MI, UNITED STATES, July 11, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Bankole Thompson, the nationally acclaimed Detroit journalist, author and public intellectual known for his writings on democracy, economic justice and the moral responsibilities of leadership, today declared that the World Cup has become the biggest global stage for Black excellence.

Thompson said the commanding presence of Black athletes representing some of the world's most powerful soccer nations is not merely a sporting story. It is a profound cultural statement about representation and the enduring influence of the global Black diaspora.

"The World Cup is presenting the world with an undeniable truth: Black excellence is not peripheral to the global story. It is helping to define the global story," Thompson said. "On the largest sporting stage on earth, Black athletes are not standing in the



French soccer star Kylian Mbappé



Spain soccer star Lamine Yamal

shadows. They are carrying nations, shaping history and commanding the imagination of millions.”

Thompson pointed to French superstar Kylian Mbappé, Spain’s young phenomenon Lamine Yamal and United States striker Folarin Balogun as prominent examples of athletes whose backgrounds reflect the breadth and power of the Black diaspora.

Mbappé has become one of the most recognizable athletes in the world. Yamal represents a new generation of global talent. Balogun embodies the increasingly interconnected nature of national identity.

“Mbappé, Yamal and Balogun are not simply exceptional soccer players,” Thompson said. “Their journeys tell a much larger story about sacrifice and belonging. They remind us that nations are often strengthened by the very people who are too often susceptible to marginalization.”

Thompson said their visibility is especially consequential for young Black people throughout the United States, Africa, Europe, the Caribbean and the wider diaspora.

“When a Black child in Detroit, Canada, Dakar, Ghana, Paris, London or Norway sees an athlete who reflects something of his or her own story competing before the entire world, possibility is enlarged,” Thompson said. “Representation is not cosmetic. It is one of the ways in which young people begin to imagine themselves beyond the boundaries that society has assigned to them.”

Thompson is the author and editor of six books, including his latest, HOPE: On The Mountain Of Fear, a collection of essays examining economic justice, healthcare, homelessness, veterans care, education, democracy and the moral necessity of hope. His previous book, Fiery Conscience, chronicled his work confronting political power, institutional indifference and the unfinished



US soccer star Folarin Balogun



Cape Verde goalkeeper Vozinha

demands of justice.

A twice-week opinion columnist for The Detroit News, Thompson is widely known as “Detroit’s Columnist of Conscience.” His public commentary has consistently examined the intersection of race, poverty, democracy and institutional leadership.

Thompson was also the first journalist in American history to serve on the National Board of Directors of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the civil rights organization founded by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr who served as its first president. He was nominated to the National Board by his longtime mentor, the late Rev. Dr. Bernard LaFayette Jr., one of the leading strategists of the Civil Rights Movement, and a close associate of Dr. King.

“My years of learning from Dr. LaFayette reinforced a central truth: visibility must be connected to human dignity,” Thompson said. “The question is never merely whether Black people are present. The deeper question is whether their presence expands the world’s understanding of Black humanity, Black achievement and Black possibility.”

Thompson said the World Cup is accomplishing precisely that by allowing Black athletes from different nations to be seen not solely through the traditional narratives of suffering, deprivation or conflict, but through the lenses of discipline, intellect, creativity, leadership and excellence.

“The Black experience cannot be reduced to oppression,” Thompson said. “Oppression is part of the history, but it is not the sum of the history. The world must also reckon with Black brilliance, Black courage, Black innovation and Black achievement. The World Cup is making that reckoning unavoidable.”

Thompson said the performance of Cape Verde against Argentina offered one of the tournament’s most compelling moral lessons.

Cape Verde, a small African island nation with a population far smaller than many major American cities, suddenly captured the attention of the world through the courage and determination of its national team.

“Many people across the United States may not have even realized that Cape Verde existed before its remarkable appearance against Argentina,” Thompson said. “Yet within the span of one match, a small island nation stepped out of obscurity and into the consciousness of the world.”

“That is the democratizing power of sport,” Thompson continued. “It allows nations that possess neither military power nor economic dominance to command global respect through preparation, discipline and courage.”

Thompson said Cape Verde’s performance demonstrated that greatness cannot be measured by

population, geography, wealth or political influence.

“Cape Verde reminded the world that history does not belong only to large nations,” Thompson said. “A small nation can still possess an enormous spirit. A people who have often been overlooked can still walk onto the biggest stage and demand to be seen.”

Thompson, who is chairman of The PuLSE Institute, a national anti-poverty think tank, said the tournament also carries broader lessons about the unifying potential of sport during a period of political polarization, racial tension and global uncertainty.

“The world is fractured by ideology, racism, religion and economic inequality,” Thompson said. “Yet the World Cup demonstrates that people separated by language, geography and history can still gather around a shared recognition of human excellence.”

He cautioned that sport does not erase injustice and should never be used as a substitute for confronting systemic inequity.

“Sport cannot repair every broken institution or cure every social wound,” Thompson said. “But it can open the human imagination. It can build bridges where politics has constructed walls. It can remind people that admiration, respect and solidarity are still possible across the boundaries that divide us.”

Thompson said the presence of Black athletes representing France, Spain, the United States, England, Morocco, Senegal, Ghana and other nations should compel societies to confront the contradiction between celebrating Black talent on the field while often diminishing Black lives away from it.

“We cannot cheer Black excellence inside the stadium and ignore Black humanity outside of it,” Thompson said. “The moral test is whether the admiration expressed during the tournament is accompanied by a deeper commitment to dignity, justice and equal opportunity after the final whistle.”

“The world is witnessing more than a tournament,” Thompson concluded. “It is witnessing the global reach of Black excellence. It is witnessing small nations become visible. It is witnessing children discover new possibilities. And it is witnessing sport do what political rhetoric so often fails to accomplish: bring humanity into the same arena and ask us to recognize greatness wherever it appears.”

“The World Cup has become the biggest global stage for Black excellence because it is showing the world, in real time, that talent has no racial boundary, courage has no national limit and human possibility cannot be contained.”

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