

Player archive

Taiwo Leo Atieno (USA)

Puerto Rico Islanders · USL First Division · Forward



Portrait: Supplied by the player — Walsall FC

Career appearances	Career goals	Kenya caps
208	44	5

Estimated peak value

\$246,000 / KSh 21m (2012). Estimated, not a transfer fee — his €200,000 peak valuation across the 2011-13 seasons in England, his best run of first-team football, at \$1.23 to the euro and KSh 84 to the dollar.

Profile

England — signed at fifteen

A forward who signed for Walsall FC in 2001 at the age of fifteen, when the club was in the second tier — Division One, renamed the Championship in 2004 — becoming the first Kenyan to sign for an English professional club and, on his breakthrough, the first to appear in the English Football League. Loan spells took him to Rochdale, Chester City under Ian Rush, Kidderminster Harriers and Darlington. His first taste of the FA Cup came with Tamworth in 2006-07, when he came off the bench in the third-round tie against Norwich City on 6 January 2007, the season he scored twelve league goals.

North America — Puerto Rico and Rochester

In 2007 he became the first Kenyan to play in the USL, joining the Puerto Rico Islanders, taking the Commissioner's Cup as regular-season champions in 2008 and playing in the CONCACAF Champions League. The Rochester Rhinos followed.

Back to England — Luton, Stevenage, Torquay

At Luton Town he scored his first FA Cup goals: a brace in the first-round replay against Corby Town on 17 November 2010, won 4-2, which sent Luton on to Charlton Athletic in the second round. Stevenage came after it.

Torquay United, 2011-12

During the 2011-12 season, Taiwo helped Torquay United challenge for automatic promotion, reaching second place in League Two before qualifying for the play-offs. He made 43 league appearances, recorded six league goals and 19 assists, and scored another goal in the play-off semi-final against Cheltenham Town.

Walking away from the contract, at 29

Torquay United opened extension discussions after that season. He turned them down. At twenty-nine, with a playing contract on the table, he chose instead to go and learn the law that governs how football is actually run — fiduciary duties, agency law, and directors' duties under companies law. The judicial review he later brought against the Registrar of Companies, and the commercial and governance work he does now, come directly out of that decision to stop playing and start studying.

Kenya

Those performances earned him a recall to Harambee Stars, and he represented Kenya in its 2-1 Africa Cup of Nations qualifying victory over Togo in February 2012. He finished at Barnet with 208 senior appearances, 44 goals and roughly 100 assists, and five Kenya caps.

Cup and continental record

His first FA Cup appearance came off the bench for Tamworth against Norwich City on 6 January 2007; his first FA Cup goals were a brace for Luton Town against Corby Town in the first-round replay of 17 November 2010, a 4-2 win that set up a tie with Charlton Athletic. In North America — the USL First Division, not MLS — he made 49 league appearances for the Puerto Rico Islanders and the Rochester Rhinos for 11 goals and four assists, and added nine post-season appearances and three goals. He

took the Commissioner's Cup as regular-season champions with the Islanders in 2008, went to the play-off final, reached the CONCACAF Champions League semi-finals — beating Cruz Azul of Mexico 2-0 in the first leg — and finished third in the CFU Club Championship. He also reached the League Two play-off semi-final with Torquay United and scored in it.

Managers he played under

He came through at Walsall under Paul Merson, the England and Arsenal midfielder who was player-manager there from 2004 to 2006, and was loaned to Chester City under Ian Rush, Liverpool and Wales' record goalscorer. At Barnet he played under Edgar Davids, the Ajax, Juventus, Milan, Barcelona and Netherlands midfielder who was head coach there from 2012. Colin Clarke managed him at the Puerto Rico Islanders, Martin Ling at Torquay United and Graham Westley at Stevenage.

Firsts and milestones

- He is the first Kenyan to sign for an English professional club and the first to make an appearance in the English Football League, breaking through at Walsall from 2001.
- He is the first player from the Kenyan diaspora — and the first Kenyan not born in Kenya — to represent the Harambee Stars, debuting in a World Cup qualifier against Mozambique in June 2009 and winning five caps through to 2012.
- That selection needed a special designation, secured with the intervention of Prime Minister, Raila Odinga and Deputy Prime Minister, William Ruto, because Kenyan law did not yet allow dual nationality. It made him one of the first Kenyans cleared to hold dual citizenship lawfully, anticipating the provisions ratified in the 2010 Constitution and the Kenya Citizenship and Immigration Act of 2011 — and it opened the door for every diaspora player who has followed.
- He is the first Kenyan to play in the USL, joining the Puerto Rico Islanders in 2007.
- He won the USL First Division title with Puerto Rico Islanders in 2008 and went on to represent them in the CONCACAF Champions League, the first Kenyan to appear in that competition.
- His permanent clubs were Walsall, Tamworth, Puerto Rico Islanders, Rochester Rhinos, Luton Town, Stevenage, Torquay United and Barnet. His other stops were loan spells: Rochdale in League Two as an 18-year-old, Chester City in League Two under manager Ian Rush, the former Liverpool and Wales legend, plus Kidderminster Harriers and Darlington in League Two.
- Across that career he registered roughly 100 assists in 208 senior appearances, close to one every other game, alongside his 44 goals.

Career record

208 senior appearances and 44 goals, with roughly 100 assists — close to one every other game. His permanent clubs were Walsall, Tamworth, Puerto Rico Islanders, Rochester Rhinos, Luton Town, Stevenage, Torquay United and Barnet. As an 18-year-old he went out on loan to Rochdale in League Two, Chester City in League Two under Ian Rush, the former Liverpool and Wales legend, and later Kidderminster Harriers and Darlington. In 2007 he became the first Kenyan to play in the USL, signing for the Puerto Rico Islanders. Five Kenya caps between 2009 and 2012. Later Commercial Director of the Kenyan Premier League and founder of KickStartKenyaFootball.

Career appearances and goals reconciled against published club and league records