

Player archive

Taiwo Leo Atieno

Walsall Football Club · EFL Championship · 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.

Did you know

A season an AI analysis rated the second best in twenty years of North American club football

Atieno played 39 of the 48 competitive matches in Puerto Rico Islanders' 2008-09 campaign: USL First Division regular-season champions, beaten finalists in the play-offs, CONCACAF Champions League semi-finalists, and third in the CFU Club Championship. On the way they beat Alajuelense of Costa Rica, came out of a group with Santos Laguna, and beat Cruz Azul of Mexico 2-0 in the first leg of the semi-final before going out on penalties. An AI-assisted review of every standout MLS, USL and CONCACAF Champions League season between 2006 and 2026 placed it second overall — behind only Toronto FC's treble of 2017, and ahead of Inter Miami's record-breaking 2024 and LAFC's 2023 — and judged it the greatest combined domestic and continental season by a North American second-division club in that whole period. He did it in the year he lost his father, eight years after losing his mother.

39 / 48 Appearances in that campaign · 2nd Of every MLS, USL and CCL season, 2006-2026 · 23 Wins, at a 47.9% win rate · 2-0 First leg against Cruz Azul of Mexico

Source: The player's own AI-assisted analysis of the 2008-09 season, with USL and CONCACAF match records — <https://www.concacaf.com/champions-cup/>

Did you know

A meteorologist on one side, a professor of journalism on the other

Taiwo Leo Atieno is a direct descendant, through his mother Bridget Mary Glaisher, of James Glaisher, the English meteorologist and aeronaut. On 5 September 1862, Glaisher and Henry Coxwell took a hot-air balloon out of Wolverhampton and climbed to an estimated 37,000 feet — some accounts put it close to 40,000 — higher than any human being had ever been. Glaisher lost consciousness and Coxwell, hands frozen, pulled the valve cord with his teeth to bring them down. Glaisher was not chasing a record: he was taking temperature and humidity readings at altitude, and the data he brought back founded modern weather forecasting. On the other side of the family his father, Moussa Allan Awuonda, was a journalist at Nation Media Group in Kenya and went on to become a professor of journalism in Stockholm, Sweden. Five generations after Glaisher, their son became the first Kenyan to play professional football in England.

37,000 ft Higher than any human had been, 1862 · 1862 The record ascent out of Wolverhampton · 5 Generations between Glaisher and Atieno

Source: James Glaisher, meteorologist and aeronaut — Wikipedia — https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Glaisher

Did you know

The story his mother told him before every match

The Glaisher story was not family trivia: it was a ritual. Before each of his matches as a boy, his mother Bridget Mary Glaisher would tell him where he came from — the balloon over Wolverhampton, the readings taken at 37,000 feet, the ancestor who went higher than anyone had been because the work mattered more than the fear. She told it to arm him, because the touchline was not a kind place. Opposition parents screamed racial abuse at a child from the side of pitches across the country, and doubt about him was constant. The story was the answer to it: you are not here by accident, and none of that noise decides who you are. He was ten, playing the final of a youth tournament against a side that had won it four years in a row, and he scored twice before half time. The opposition parents came onto the pitch and refused to let it continue, convinced a boy that good had to be older than he claimed. The referee had to stop the match, asked him to point out his parent, and was walked over to his mother. He asked her whether she could prove his age. She went to her car and came back with his birth certificate. Born in August, with the school year starting in September, he turned out to be the youngest player on the pitch.

2 goals Before half time, in the final · 4 years The run the opposition had won it in a row · Youngest Of every player on the pitch, aged ten

Source: Taiwo Leo Atieno, first-hand account

Did you know

Offered a national team in 2008, and he said no

In 2008, in his season with the Puerto Rico Islanders, he was approached to represent Puerto Rico at international level. It was the straightforward route to a senior international career, and he turned it down. He was Kenyan, he intended to play for Kenya, and he was not going to be capped by anyone else. The same period took him home for reasons that had nothing to do with football: his father, Moussa Allan Awuonda, was ill with cancer, and he spent that time caring for him. He waited for the country he wanted, and he got there — five caps for the Harambee Stars, including the 2-1 Africa Cup of Nations qualifying win over Togo in February 2012.

2008 The year Puerto Rico approached him · Declined The offer of another country's shirt · 5 caps For Kenya, the shirt he waited for

Source: Taiwo Leo Atieno, first-hand account

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