SUNSPORT GETS THE BIG INTERVIEWS

I get told off if we lose.. by my mum

By IAN McGARRY

MICHAEL ESSIEN has revealed the tough upbringing which is driving him to win the Champions League.

Chelsea's midfield powerhouse wants to shake off the tag of Euro nearly man and beat Liverpool to the Moscow final.

And in a frank interview, Essien explained what has made him one of the most feared footballers in England.

He reveals:

- How growing up without his father made him more determined to become a top player.
- That being bullied by his **FOUR SISTERS** helped him become one of football's hardmen.
- How he used to play street football in Ghana for tips from strangers to make money.
- That his mum still tells him off when Chelsea lose a game.

The Blues meet Liverpool in 11 days' time in a Champions League semi-final which will reignite their fierce rivalry.

Essien is gutted he will miss the match at Anfield through suspension but, after losing two quarter-finals with Lyon and one semi at Chelsea, he is hell-bent on victory over the two games.

He said: "I was annoyed when I got booked against Fenerbahce but now I think maybe it helps a little bit because imagine if I was booked in the second leg of the semi and I missed the final.

"I would rather play in Moscow. So maybe it is worth it, though I love playing at Anfield.

"It's a very special place to play but I will just have to wait to play in the home leg."

Lucky

Essien was part of the Blues side eliminated by Liverpool in a penalty shootout in last season's semi-final.

And he reckons the pain he and his team-mates still feel will help them go one better this time.

He admitted: "It hurt a lot. To lose at the last match before what could be the biggest game of your career — a Champions League final — is very, very painful."

The Ghana international has won every domestic honour in English and French football.

But it was the experience of his poor upbringing in a house ruled by his mother Abu and four sisters that has shaped his life and career.

Essien laughs when he remembers what it was like growing up in a house full of women but believes it has helped make him the man he is.

He said: "My mum is my everything.

"I grew up with my mum and four sisters. She's always been there for me.

"Yeah, I was always fighting with my sisters when I was young but they love me and I love them as well.

"It all helped me when I was growing up.

"All I can say is that maybe I'm a lucky guy. Growing up around girls is not easy but I didn't do anything at home.

"They do all the stuff for me. All I had to do is go out and play my football and not worry about anything."

That included going into the streets and playing in games with kids twice his age and size. It did not bother him then, just as it does not now.

He recalled: "Sometimes it was very competitive in the streets where I grew up.

"We had all the time, we just played until we got tired.

"It was really good and we had people watching us.

"When someone did well, the people came along after the game and gave you a little bit of money, and said 'You've done well'.

"I can't remember how much I made but I saved some money to buy boots.

"All I wanted to be was a professional footballer."

Essien is so quietly spoken that he comes across as painfully shy. It is a million miles from his on-pitch persona of a marauding lion.

For him, though, the switch is an easy one to make because he has never forgotten where he comes from or what it took to get him to the top.

He said: "I have always been like that ever since I was a kid.

"Up the pitch, I don't talk much. But once I'm on the pitch, everything changes.

"I mean, because on the pitch, it's my office.

"I forget about the struggles and just do my job.

"It just clicks in the dressing room I just feel around with my team-mates, share jokes and stuff. But once I get on to the pitch, it all changes. I have a more streak. On the pitch, I am a very different person but, if you see me off the pitch, I am very shy.

"On the pitch, it's a big difference. On the pitch, some times I go crazy."

Energy

Losing makes him angry and it is hardly surprising when he admits that whatever switching the team gets from the manager he will always get it on the car from his mum.

He added: "I live to win every game. That's what motivated me to win, my mum and the my job on the pitch.

"My mum gave me a row if we lose because she's just not happy. She's a winner: she wants to win as well. When we win, she is happy but when we lose, she is not happy."

Now Essien is focusing all his energy on winning the Premier League and getting to the Champions League final.

● Michael Essien wears Nike's new Total 90 Laser II. Working with the stable of world-class players including Wayne Rooney, Fernando Torres and Ron Vlaar, Nike has developed the T90 Laser II to increase accuracy across the pitch. Whether shooting or passing the T90 Laser II offers the world's best players takes their game to the next level.

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