

AIPS Awards expose widening gap in global sports journalism

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Cult hero. Napoli fans in the stands hold up a sign of Diego Maradona in the stands before a match. Photography and its presentation has become a key tenet of story telling. PHOTO/REUTERS

BY GEORGE KATONGOLE

The latest AIPS Sport Media Awards in Lausanne, Switzerland once again showcased the highest standards of global sports journalism, while also exposing a widening gap between well-resourced media systems and those operating under significant structural constraints.

Although the ceremony celebrated outstanding storytelling from across continents, it also reinforced a familiar reality: African journalists remain largely absent from the final podium positions—and Ugandan journalists have yet to secure any recognition at the AIPS Sport Media Awards. This year's edition attracted 1,987

entries from 130 countries, progressing through five rigorous rounds of judging before winners were selected across writing, photography, audio and video categories. The awards highlighted the global reach and creative depth of sports storytelling. But when final results were announced, Africa's representation at the highest level remained limited.

A familiar pattern

African journalists featured in early judging phases and select recognition tiers, with Kenya and Gambia among those acknowledged in supporting categories.

However, the final podium positions continued to be dominated by journalists working within

stronger production ecosystems where teams, funding, and editorial support systems are more established. AIPS president Gianni Merlo summed up the spirit of the competition: "You are all winners, and with the high quality of our work, you've shown the way for the new generation."

Yet within AIPS itself, there is a growing recognition that global excellence is not shaped by talent alone, but by unequal access to tools, training, and production capacity. Across its awards framework and training programmes, AIPS increasingly frames the global media landscape as one defined by structural imbalance rather than lack of ability. "We report results, not meaning"

For former Uganda Sports Press Association (USPA) executive member Leon Ssenyange, now working with CGTN, the gap begins long before the awards stage. He organized the last media awards for USPA about four years ago.

He argues that much of African sports journalism remains stuck in event-driven reporting, rather than story-driven journalism.

"Award-winning stories start from pitching. The question is whether the stories are purpose-driven. We report results, but we don't go beyond them. That is where stories lose depth," he says.

For Ssenyange, this limits global competitiveness. "We are driven by results and rarely interrogate what lies beyond the scoreline."

Limited quality control

Ssenyange also points to structural weaknesses in newsroom processes, particularly in sports desks where editorial review is often limited. "For most stories, there is no one questioning them before publication. Much as it depends on the writer's competence, there must be quality control. Too often, stories go out with only one reference," he says. Without stronger editorial systems, he argues, even strong journalism struggles to mature into globally competitive work.

"I don't think we can improve under systems that do not interrogate their own work," he says.

Freelance journalism

Ssenyange highlights a deeper transformation reshaping African sports journalism—the rise of freelance reporting. While freelancing has expanded opportunity and increased output, it has also created

AIPS SPORT MEDIA AWARDS 2025

Category winners

Video - Short feature: Henrique Arcoverde (Brazil) - Galeguinho - The Backwards Runner (TV Globo)

Video - Athlete profile: Guillaume Priou & Laurie Delhostal (France) - Laure! Laure! Laure! (Canal+)

Video - documentary: Fabien Douillard (France) - Crash - Peloton Under Pressure (L'Equipe)

Sport action photo: Ray Giubilo (Italy) - It's not Halloween

Photography - portfolio: Loïc Venance (France) - Tour de France 2025

Audio category: Farzad Sabouri & Seyedeh Nahid Saadati (Iran) - The Snowy Galaxy

YOUNG REPORTERS

Writing: Salma Niazi (Afghanistan) - You Will Not Grow Up in Silence

Audio/video: Charlie Courrent (France) - Alexandre Müller: Rage in the Belly

Photography: Eric Wu (Australia) - In Sync

Investigative reporting: Baboucarr Fallaboweh (Gambia) - Gambia grass-roots football investigation.

Africa - special mentions

Freedom of press: Mohamed Osman Adam (Sudan) - Journalist mistreatment in war zones

Climate change & sustainable sport: Abiodun Adewale (Nigeria) - Sports vs Plastic pollution

Fight Against Doping: Geoffrey Anene (Kenya) - Anti-doping culture challenges

a fragmented ecosystem defined by instability and individualised production. As noted in an ACME Mwalimu analysis titled "Passion: the industry's excuse for keeping journalists broke and busy?", journalism is often framed as a calling where sacrifice is expected.