





**“IT’S THE GREATEST FEELING EVER WEARING THE IRISH JERSEY...
IN FACT IT’S A DREAM COME TRUE. IT’S LIKE AN ADOPTIVE FAMILY THAT
HAVE WELCOMED ME INTO THEIR HOME.”**

IMEKA

Emeka Omwubiko plays football for the Republic of Ireland Under 17s football team. Born in Igboland, South East Nigeria, he is proud of his rich Igbo culture and language. Emeka describes his lifestyle in Ireland as quiet, disciplined and independent as his mother taught him from a young age how to defend and take care of himself. These characteristics have stood by him on his journey to play football for the Republic of Ireland.

Emeka was twelve years old when he came to Ireland from Nigeria. His level of English was above average and this helped him to settle into his new lifestyle with ease. When his father first explained to him he would be leaving Nigeria, Emeka felt excited at the prospect of experiencing another country and culture, but deep down he had one important motivation in mind – football. Emeka imagined that his chances of pursuing a career in football were greater in Europe so he decided to join his mother and sisters in Dublin.

"When I landed in Dublin I couldn't believe the cold", he recalls. "I thought I would never warm up. At first it was quite amazing, all the strange white faces, but once I found recognisable faces, I felt more at ease."

Emeka sees Ireland as his new home, a place to bring up his children one day and to come back to if he manages to play for an international club. On a day-to-day basis, his focus is on participating in Irish society by

representing his new home to the very best of his ability on the playing field. He considers himself really lucky to have good friends who respect his lifestyle choices and the fact that he doesn't want to go 'too crazy' at weekends.

"My favourite place in Dublin is River Valley", he says. "All the lads hang around here or Abbey Lee, playing football and just taking it easy. There is something really friendly and special about this place."

Emeka started playing football for his school team in Sallynoggin when he first arrived to Ireland. Later the family moved to Swords, where he joined a new school and started playing for Saint Kevin's. He recalls how welcoming team members and the coaches were to him.

"My coaches have been really good to me and they managed to get me a trial with the Irish Football Team. Vincent Butler was the manager at the time and he really pushed me as a player and encouraged my dream to play for Ireland. In 2005 I represented Ireland in every match. This gave me the faith that I have what it takes to be a professional player."

Last year Emeka was scouted by Manchester City at a tournament where he scored twelve goals in six matches and was awarded Player of the Tournament. He was asked to travel to Manchester City for a proposed professional contract but had to turn down the opportunity as he couldn't travel without an Irish passport.

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To add to his frustration, he has also missed the first leg of the European Championship qualifiers in Kiev. His managers have supported him in his efforts to get Irish citizenship and are especially keen for him to represent the country abroad. He has been a member of the team for the past three years and feels he has earned his position.

"The second leg is in March and it will be really difficult if I have to stay at home after all the slog and dedication I have invested in this", Emeka says. "I thought my chances to play at international club level were over but then West Brom called me for trials a few months ago. They have offered me a year's contract but again, only if I get an Irish passport. I think Ireland is just getting used to different people from different places and cultures. It's simple for me, I just want to get my passport and get on with my career."



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Now in his final year in secondary school, he admits that the temptation to focus on football and not his studies is great yet he understands the importance of sitting the Leaving Certificate and having a qualification.

“My mates keep me in school and I realise how important it is to get my Leaving Cert to fall back on.”