



ANTOINE TEMPE FOR TAR

THE UMPIRE'S STAKE

A traditional wrestling referee in Palmarin, Senegal, Sidi Diokh lost two friends in an illegal crossing to Spain, but he still dreams of finding a way to a better life

Before I became a traditional wrestling referee, in 2012, I was a wrestler myself. I started when I was eight years old, on the beach. I used to dream about being the next big wrestler, the king of the arena. I did it professionally until I was 26 but didn't win many fights. If you go one year without winning your family doesn't eat, so I decided to give it up.

I love the music and atmosphere of the wrestling competitions, but sometimes we do have problems with the wrestlers, who can be undisciplined. If they fall and you give the other the victory they can hit you. But I love it when the wrestlers dance and when they fight well and don't cause trouble. Wrestling is our culture here in Palmarin. All the children you see here in the street wrestle, that is our sport.

My family are not happy that I am a referee. There are a lot of people who say that referees are bad people [and] talk about me behind my back. But I say that it's what I do to earn money for my family and I have to keep doing it. I would have loved to have had an education. I've been trying to earn money for such a long time, and there are kids in the village who have had an

education and now, five years after leaving school, they have managed to build a house.

In 2010, I had saved 300,000 CFA francs (\$511) and I decided to go illegally to the Canary Islands in a fishing boat. I told my mother I was leaving and she said I had to wait, that it is God who decides and if He says I can go, then I can go. I said OK, and stayed. After I decided not to go in the boat, two of my friends left and after 15 days we heard they had died at sea. It broke my heart. They went without having had children, without a wife, and now they have left nothing behind. Before they went, I told them that they should not go, that it wouldn't work. They said, "Oh it's nothing, we can go."

A DREAM DEFERRED

I have three friends illegally working in Spain and Germany now. They say it's very good there, and they have sent money to their mothers and built houses in the village too. But there are also people who say that life is too hard in Spain. At night sometimes I dream I am walking on the beach and I find monkfish washed up and sell them for a lot of money. Before my friends died going to Spain, I used to dream about that too, but once I dreamed that the police caught us and beat us really hard.

I am happy I didn't go to Spain, that I stayed here to work. I would never do it now, it's not safe. The money I saved has all gone now. But if I had gone to Spain, I would not have my family, and [they] make me very happy. I want to stay here until God gives me a little something so that I can get my papers together, go to the airport, and go over there to work. ● Interview by **Rose Skelton**