Sudanese heavyweights Al Hilal open their CAF Champions League group-stage campaign on Friday afternoon at Amahoro Stadium in Kigali, where they will host Algeria’s MC Alger in what promises to be an early examination of their continental ambitions.

Forced to play home fixtures in Rwanda due to the security situation in Sudan, Al Hilal have spent the past two weeks settling into Kigali and sharpening their rhythm with local opposition. They were held to a goalless draw by an Amavubi selection made up of home-based players, having earlier beaten AS Kigali 2–0 in their first friendly.

Head coach Laurențiu Reghecampf has welcomed back several key men from international duty, including winger Jean Claude Girumugisha (Burundi), goalkeeper Issa Fofana (Côte d’Ivoire) and midfielder Ahmed Salem (Mauritania). Their return, he says, has added balance to the squad at just the right moment.

“We are building up our game plan, and it is good to have strong teams in Rwanda pushing us before the start of the group matches,” Reghecampf told reporters after the final training session.

But while Al Hilal have been focused on adjusting to their temporary home, the visitors come with their own sense of purpose. MC Alger, one of Algeria’s most established sides, travel south intent on securing a result that could shape the complexion of Group C early on.

It is a group rich with pedigree: last season’s runners-up Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa and DR Congo’s St Éloi Lupopo join Al Hilal and MC Alger in a pool that offers little room for error. Al Hilal reached the quarter-finals last year and are targeting another deep run, but the presence of experienced North African opposition makes Friday’s fixture pivotal.

The Champions League group stage starts this weekend and will pause after two matchdays for the Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco, resuming in late January. The knockout rounds get underway in March 2026.

Champions will earn USD 4 million in prize money, with the runners-up taking home USD 2 million.

As Al Hilal prepare to walk out in Kigali, far from Omdurman but carrying the hopes

of Sudanese supporters, Friday’s encounter offers a chance to set the tone, and to show that even in exile, they remain a force on the continent.