

APR FC advanced to the next round of the CAF Champions League preliminary qualifiers on Friday night, beating Les Aigles du Congo 3-1 at Amahoro Stadium in Kigali to seal a 3-1 aggregate victory over the two legs.

Goals from an own-goal-inducing spell of pressure in the 33rd minute and a Christian free-kick in the 58th minute put APR two goals up before Quattara pulled one back from the penalty spot in the 75th minute for the visitors, who had arrived in Rwanda holding a 1-0 lead from the first leg.

APR go through to face the winner of Egypt's Zamalek and AS Port in the next round.

But the fixture had been shadowed for days by something far removed from the pitch: the state of relations between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which shaped almost every logistical decision around the tie.

Les Aigles du Congo touched down in Kigali on Friday morning, hours before kick-off, on a chartered plane carrying its own food and water for the squad. By the time the final whistle sounded, the delegation intended to be back in the air, headed home without spending a single night in Rwanda.

Aigles du Congo's advance party left Lubumbashi on Thursday only after club officials publicly denied reports that Rwanda had refused the delegation entry, with secretary general Olivier Pengongo saying the Rwandan football federation (FERWAFA) had written to its Congolese counterpart to confirm the team was expected.

Local media reported that landing clearance for the club's aircraft remained unresolved as late as two days before kick-off, with authorities citing health protocols linked to the Ebola outbreak in DR Congo as the reason for the additional checks.

The arrangement mirrored what APR FC had done in reverse for the first leg. The Rwandan side had flown out of Kigali early in the morning, brought its own meals and drinks, played the match in Lubumbashi in front of an empty stadium for security reasons, and flown home the same day under security escort.

Neither club, it seemed, was prepared to eat, drink or sleep on the other's soil for this tie, a level of caution rarely seen in a regional derby, but one that showed just

how far the political tension between the two capitals had bled into what should have been a routine continental fixture.

Aigles du Congo's coach, the Spaniard Alberto Samsó, had been unambiguous about his side's intentions since the first leg. "We will go to Kigali to win," he said after the match in Lubumbashi, adding that his side had travelled "with all the strength and all the humility in the world." A draw in Kigali would have been enough to send the Congolese side through; a goal of their own would have left APR chasing two.

APR arrived at Amahoro carrying the weight of expectation that comes with being Rwanda's most decorated club, fresh off a domestic treble last season, but they did so a goal down and without midfielder Ronald Ssekiganda, sent off in Lubumbashi and suspended for the return leg.

Kigali's Amahoro stadium, unlike Lubumbashi's, was full. Supporters of Rayon Sports, APR's fiercest domestic rivals, had been urged this week not to use the occasion to needle their old enemy by cheering for the visitors. Sources on social media said the message circulating among fans was blunt: settle scores with APR another day, against opponents closer to home, not by siding with a Congolese club. Whatever appetite existed for that particular rivalry, organisers and fans alike seemed keen to keep it out of the stands.

The match began with both sides playing cautiously, each probing the other's shape. APR kept searching for a way through, and in the 33rd minute the pressure they had been building told, as defensive errors from the Congolese side gifted them the opener.

The first half ended with APR ahead, having already clawed back the aggregate deficit from the first leg.

APR continued to press after the break, and in the 58th minute doubled their lead when Christian, playing on the left, curled a free kick into the Aigles du Congo net. Les Aigles du Congo tried to fight their way back into the tie, but in the 75th minute Quattara was fouled in the penalty area after receiving the ball from Dauda. The referee pointed to the spot, and Quattara converted, giving the Congolese side their only goal of the night.

Despite pushing for another goal, Les Aigles du Congo could not find a way back

into the match, and APR held on for the 3-1 win.

APR will face the winner of the tie between Egypt's Zamalek and AS Port in the next round; Zamalek were beaten 2-1 by AS Port in the first leg. By the time the final whistle had sounded in Kigali, Les Aigles du Congo's return flight was already waiting to take them back to Lubumbashi.