“When APR FC and Rayon Sports meet, Kigali becomes a cauldron of passion, color, and noise. This isn’t just football; it’s a clash that splits the city in two, leaving it holding its breath.”

This Saturday, APR FC will welcome their oldest rivals, Rayon Sports, with kick-off set for 3:00 PM. Abderrahim Talib’s side will step onto the pitch knowing they aren’t just facing Rayon, they’ll be confronting questions about form, confidence, and pride.

Rayon, meanwhile, arrive at the derby with their own set of challenges. The club is grappling with internal management issues at a crtical moment, with fans officially urging President Twagirayezu Thaddée to convene a General Assembly. Pressure is already mounting off the pitch, yet for supporters, none of that matters when the teams meet on Saturday. In a derby like this, passion, pride, and history always take centre stage.

For many, the APR-Rayon match is the fixture they circle as soon as the season’s calendar is released. It has produced some of the most iconic moments in the Rwandan Premier League and remains the benchmark for intensity and drama.

Neutrals might argue that the Army side, backed by institutional resources and a strong squad, have the upper hand. Rayon, by contrast, has struggled financially in recent months, even delaying players’ wages. But derbies are rarely about logic, they are about emotion and belief.

Rayon supporters know the sting of past defeats. APR has dominated much of the rivalry’s recent history, including a 2-0 victory in the Peace Cup finals under former Serbian head coach Darko Novi.

The army side themselves are not immune to pressure. The most decorated team in the country, APR sits eighth this season, a position far below their usual standards. Rayon, meanwhile, is in second place, riding a wave of confidence and fan belief that “this could be their year.”

Recent form adds spice to the encounter. APR have managed two wins and two draws in their opening four games, while Rayon boast four wins and just one loss. But in a derby of this magnitude, form often counts for very little. History, pride, and the roar of the fans will play a far bigger role when these two giants meet on Saturday.

Officiating Concerns

APR FC arrive at the derby with more than just on-pitch questions. The club has been vocal about officiating in recent weeks, lodging complaints with the Rwandan Football Federation (FERWAFA) that, so far, remain unanswered. Kayitare David is set to officiate the derby.

APR FC Chairman, Brig. Gen. Deo Rusanganwa, has dismissed claims that the club is at odds with FERWAFA. Speaking after APR's 1-1 draw with Rutsiro FC last Saturday,

Rusanganwa expressed frustration over what he saw as poor officiating, including a controversial penalty awarded to Rutsiro. He told reporters that while journalists have suggested APR is "clashing" with FERWAFA, these claims are exaggerated.

"I am a soldier, not a politician; I have no interest in confronting FERWAFA or running it," he said, emphasizing that the club's concerns are strictly about refereeing standards.

Kayitare David is set to officiate the derby

Coaches and Tactics

On the touchline, both coaches carry their own stories into this clash. Signed in June, Moroccan tactician Abderrahim Talib brings a wealth of experience to APR, having taken over from Thierry Froger Dokiv with a mandate to restore discipline and consistency to the defending champions.

Across the dugout stands Haruna Ferouz, a familiar figure within the Rayon ranks. Initially appointed as first assistant, he now leads the team in an interim capacity following the suspension of Tunisian coach Afhamia Lotfi over poor performance.

Ferouz, at least for now, finds himself in a period of calm. The early signs are encouraging: three matches, three wins, and a rejuvenated team spirit. Victories over Amagaju, Rutsiro, and Marines have lifted the Blues up the table and restored belief among their passionate supporters. Coaching Rayon, however, comes with pressure that rarely stays quiet for long. Win, and Ferouz strengthens his claim for the permanent role; lose, and whispers of discontent from both the terraces and

dressing room will inevitably grow louder.

Across the barracks, Talib faces a very different reality. Despite his experience, the Moroccan has come under increasing scrutiny following a mixed run of results. Ahead of their draw with Kiyovu SC, unverified reports suggested club officials reminded him of the need for improved performances. The message is clear: results alone are no longer enough; the team's identity on the pitch must also convince.

Tactical Playbook

APR's nine wins, five draws, and seven defeats paint a picture of a side still seeking balance between attack and defence. With 30 goals scored and 23 conceded, they can dominate possession and create chances but have struggled for consistency. Sharper finishing and tighter defending will be key if they are to reclaim their place at the top.

APR under Talib typically plays a 4-2-3-1 formation, occasionally switching to a 4-3-3, focusing on possession and building attacks through midfield and wide areas. They have attacking creativity, but vulnerabilities remain, particularly on counters or when the high line is exposed.

Since taking charge, Ferouz has transformed Rayon into a more structured and dynamic unit. The team shows a clear approach built on quick transitions, disciplined defensive lines, and effective use of the flanks. They rely on a compact midfield to regain possession quickly and launch attacks, while wingers stretch opposition defences, creating space and momentum as they climb the league table.

Key Players to Watch

Rayon lost seven players from their last starting lineup against APR, including Serumgo Ali, Omari Nyigi, Yusi Ndiyanye, Ndayishimiye Rashid, Azize Basena, Hagi Iraguha, and Bugingo Hakimu (both have switched to APR). This leaves Rayon with a restructured squad. The responsibility now falls on the remaining players, particularly in midfield and attack, to maintain creativity and stability. How this new combination performs will be crucial if Rayon hopes to challenge APR's dominance.

APR, meanwhile, have retained much of their core strength. Pierre Ishimwe will marshal the defence from goal, with Gilbert Byiringiro, Claude Niyomugabo, and Niyigena Clement forming a solid backline. In midfield and attack, Yunus Ruboneka,

Mugisha Gilbert, Denis Omedi, Fibrillation Watah, and Lami BA provide creativity, pace, and goal-scoring threat. This depth and experience allow APR to control the game and exploit gaps in Rayon's restructured side.

Rayon's confidence under Ferouz has translated into fluid attacking play, while APR's discipline and military-style organisation remain their greatest assets.

Expect a game that tests more than skill. It will test patience and nerve. For Rayon, victory could tighten their grip near the top of the table. For APR, it's about reclaiming authority and silencing critics questioning their title defence. The takeaway: whether it ends in a draw or a decisive win, this match will offer a glimpse of who truly holds the power in Rwanda football.

