

Matheus Bettim trained, ate and stayed with Men's national volleyball team as it prepared for the African Championship, scheduled to take place in Tunis, Tunisia.

But when Coach Frédéric Guérin named his final 14-man squad for the tournament in Tunisia, the Brazil-born player was not on the list.

Rwanda Dispatch understands that Bettim was left out because questions surrounding his Rwandan nationality and eligibility to represent the country had not been resolved.

Bettim had returned from holiday and joined the national-team camp after being called up to replace Merci Gisubizo. He trained with the rest of the squad and stayed at the team hotel, according to people familiar with the camp.

He was treated like any other player summoned for national-team duty.

That is now raising questions about the cost of his stay.

Who paid for Bettim's accommodation, meals, transport and other expenses while he was not cleared to play for Rwanda?

And why was a player whose eligibility had not been settled allowed to benefit from the same national-team arrangements as players who were eligible to represent the country?

Those questions have become more significant because Rwanda has previously faced a major controversy over the eligibility of foreign-born players.

In 2021, Rwanda's women's national team was disqualified from the African Championship after protests over the participation of Brazilian-born players whose eligibility was challenged.

The controversy brought the tournament to a halt and resulted in Rwanda being removed from the competition after an investigation found that the required procedures had not been followed.

The episode remains one of the most serious eligibility controversies in Rwandan volleyball.

Five years later, Bettim's case is different. There is no allegation that he submitted

false documents or committed any wrongdoing.

But the circumstances raise a question for the Rwanda National Volleyball Federation: what checks were completed before he was allowed into the national-team camp?

A search of the specialist volleyball database Volleybox currently lists Bettim as holding both Brazilian and Rwandan nationality.

But that listing is not proof that he is not legally a Rwandan citizen, nor does it establish that he had been cleared to represent Rwanda in an official international competition.

The authority responsible for nationality matters is Rwanda's Directorate General of Immigration and Emigration.

Its official information lists several grounds for acquiring Rwandan nationality, including national interest and special skills or talent.

For a foreigner applying on the basis of special skills or talent, Rwanda's nationality regulations require supporting documentation as part of the application process.

There is also a separate sporting question.

FIVB regulations govern who can represent a national federation and include rules concerning a player's Federation of Origin. The international governing body has tightened the rules around players changing their Federation of Origin, including requirements linked to nationality and residence.

FIVB also maintains formal procedures for applications to change Federation of Origin.

That means having a name appear in a volleyball database is not enough.

For a player to represent Rwanda in an official competition, the relevant nationality and FIVB eligibility requirements must be satisfied.

That appears to be where Bettim's case ran into trouble.

The biggest unanswered question is not why Guérin eventually left Bettim out.

It is why he was brought into camp in the first place.

If his eligibility was still being resolved, who authorized his inclusion?

Did the FRVB check his nationality documents before he joined?

Did it seek confirmation from CAVB or FIVB that he could represent Rwanda?

And did officials know that he could not play before spending public resources on his participation in the camp?

National-team camps involve accommodation, food, transport and other expenses. When those costs are supported by public resources, there is a legitimate public-interest question about whether those resources were properly used.

Efforts to contact the player where not possible, before this article was published.

The FRVB has also not publicly explained why Bettim was allowed to train and stay with the national team before his eligibility was settled.

Bettim will therefore not be part of Rwanda's final squad for the 2026 CAVB Men's African Nations Championship, which runs from September 13 to 26 in Tunisia.

Alex Rwanyonga, Alain Irakoze and Nalon Enzo Ganza have also been left out. The men's national team is expected to travel to Tunisia on Saturday, September 12, for the 25th edition of the continental championship.

The final squad is:

Crispin Ntanteteri, Sylvestre Ndayisaba, Yves Mutabazi, Samuel Niyoshima, Eric Kwizera, Munyinya Mugisha, Simon Rwigema, Jean Santere Mugisha, Wicklif Dusenge, Kenny Ntawiha, Emmy Twagirayezu, Prince Kanamugire, John Nkurunziza and Frank Shyaka.

Sixteen nations will compete in Tunisia, with the top three teams earning direct qualification for the 2027 FIVB Volleyball World Championship.

For Bettim, the tournament will be watched from outside the squad.

For Rwanda volleyball, however, his case leaves a more uncomfortable question

behind: after the lessons of 2021, why was a player's eligibility still unresolved when he was already being accommodated and trained as part of the national team?