

By Jeje Muhinde;

The Rwandan football federation (FERWAFU) was formed in 1976, in its 45 years of existence; the body has seen 12 presidents.

Unchallenged, Olivier Nizeyimana the decorated businessman from Nyanza and President of Mukura Victory Sports club is now the 12th FERWAFU chief having replaced Brigadier General Jean-Damascene Sekamana who resigned in April.

As the new boss, Olivier has four years in office with a possibility to serve for another term if he wins the next elections. So it's really a long period to influence one's agenda for football.

In my view, he has a long term ahead of him, given the prevailing situation. He has many tasks that include the financial health as well as restoring confidence in Ferwafu.

Surrounded by his loyal lieutenants, it fair to say Olivier inherited an entangled FERWAFU, a body facing issues on a whole other level especially at a time of the coronavirus pandemic.

Well, the new FA boss has achieved success in personal business; he is also a well-known football enthusiast, always in the football circles, not far from the Ferwafu corridors.

Being a successful businessman, that background is very important; on the other hand it means expectations are quite high given, in my opinion, at least he will not depend on his position at FERWAFU to become wealthy, just like what we have witnessed in the past.

He is highly respected for his work in changing Mukura VS however running a personal business is a completely different ball game.

A few red faces in the corners are now watching with keen interest and ambivalence asking whether the businessman can lift the FA body from its current shambolic state of affairs.

Which brings me to the key question, can he transform and take Rwandan football to another level. Secondly, will his personal business provide him with enough time to focus on Rwandan football?

There's a lot to like in Olivier's agenda, I like the point of transforming grassroots football, but then again the reality is that there is nothing in there that is new.

The only thing that he did was to understand the current problems of FERWAFa and Rwandan football and designed a plan to rectify those problems.

Perhaps, the national side Amavubi returning to the AFCON would be a good start. The last time was in 2004 when they played the competition organized in Tunisia.

When Sekamana took charge; the national team Amavubi was ranked 123rd in the world, and he left when it was in the 137th position.

Today, the other biggest concerns that should be acknowledged in our local football is leadership; the local beautiful game ought to have inspiring, and charismatic management, people with nationalist spirits not self-interests if the sport is to develop in Rwanda.

Allow me to say that we're lacking dynamic and resourceful leadership committed to excellence.

The other point that I like in his agenda is that he promised to work closely with the federation's members to build a football brand that brings enough resources to sustain their demands.

He said, "The plan is to turn Rwandan football into a commercial brand. Local football is struggling for success because of its failed development policy. We want to build a product that we can sell"

I doubt that this can be achieved in his four-year term, but it is a genuine reason to start, at least rather than leading a body whose members are divided.

Yes, some observers believe that Olivier is left to pick up Sekamana's mess. The former's biggest misperception was how to reform local football.

To address these issues, they (analysts) think he should right the wrongs done by the previous administration, for instance where member clubs have a say in decision making especially when it comes to sharing of FIFA funds.

Women football.

I am not sure that this is an easy fix for anyone, in my view I think that the FA boss should consult experts because women's football still has a long way to go.

For instance, the national women league is overlooked, the national women teams seems not to exit the fact that it does not compete in the continental competitions.

Television sponsorship

When Sekamana was elected, the FA had a lucrative sponsorship and broadcasting deal with AZAM signed.

Tanzania digital TV was the official sponsor of the Rwanda Premier League since 2015 with an investment of \$2.5m (Rwf 2.2bn).

However months into his new job, Sekamana grieved thinking the deal was unfair hence going on to renegotiate new terms. He's promise of action came to light but not for long.

AZAM was forced to agree, giving more control of match revenues to FERWAFa and clubs, from US\$350,000 in the first 3 seasons to US\$500,000.

Things however fell apart, when the multichannel TV announced it is pulling the plug, by terminating the 5-year contract.

The 2019-20 national league seasons, ended without a sponsor.

With pressure mounting from the clubs, fans, media and critics, the Rtd Brig. General then turned to Rwanda Broadcasting Agency (RBA) and concocted a deal (whose worth is still not disclosed).

Last season, the TV was scrambling to broadcast several matches on a single match day.

Analysts believe that, if there is anything that FERWAFa is wary of now, it's the budget which has dipped at a time when the sports in general is affected by the outbreak of the pandemic.

A month before tendering his resignation, Sekamana signed a 4-year sponsorship contract with local brewer Bralirwa.

Worth Rwf 640 million for each season, FERWAFa will be receiving Rwf 160 million each season. That amount is Rwf 192million less than what AZAM paid.

This is the third time the brewer has become the title sponsor of the top division league, having previously done so in 2004 and, from 2009 and 2012 when both sides parted ways.

Well, the new boss has opened doors to welcome other sponsors the issue is can he restore their confidence?

FERWAFa Hotel

I'm still wondering how he is going to fix this problem. Around 2013, world football governing body FIFA offered to fund construction of an 88-room sports hotel for local body FERWAFa. It was to cost Rwf 4 billion.

Barely before the structure was raised, the project was already involved in transgression procurement and corruption accusations.

Former FA president Vincent 'De Gaulle' Nzamwita, the secretary general and another businessman were charged over the project.

Nzamwita was acquitted of favouritism, one of the other two accused went to jail for three years, another served six months.

While in office, Sekamana failed to come up with any plan to commence construction, inside sources reveal the FA has paid huge fines to the Chinese construction firm.

Already Ferwafa lost Rwf 200m and is said to have a debt of over Rwf million owed to the Chinese construction firm.

Separate FERWAFa from National Premier League

From the organization point of view, analysts have called for the separation, where FERWAFa should remain the governing body of football in Rwanda, tasked with the organization, putting in play the rules from FIFA, developing amateur and youth levels of the game.

It is believed that, having the Rwanda Premier league (RPL) as an independent

commercial body running the top flight would be better to run things.

The RPL would effectively remain a commercial entity which runs the league, makes decisions as far as handling sponsorships of the league is concerned, how TV rights will be sold and how much money clubs will receive when promoted and relegated.

Having two separate entities would also imply that Ferwafa does not run the day-to-day operations of the national league, still it has veto powers over the appointment of the league chairman and chief executive as well as any other changes to league rules.

To ensure that both sides are satisfied-balancing act, the Premier League would have a member present on the board of the FERWAFA in order to have some power remaining with the FA when decisions of FA affect the commercial interests of the Premier League.

It is also believed that the two bodies would interact when it comes to the national team competitions or friendly international in that matches would not be scheduled on certain days to enable the Amavubi players to represent the country.

With such a format of running the beautiful game of football, there is reason to hope for better days ahead for local football.

The other concerns that need to be addressed include youth development and grassroots development which is a Catch-22 and Ferwafa financial transparency and accountability.