

Now that the curtains have fallen on the 2025/26 National Football League season, Bugesera Football Club finds itself in a place that feels less like a finish line and more like the quiet stretch after a long, bumpy road finally begins to level out.

A 10th-place finish with 41 points may not raise many eyebrows on paper, but for this club, it feels like the first steady heartbeat after years of uncertainty and rebuilding.

Just two seasons ago, Bugesera FC was fighting to remain in Rwanda's top flight. Every weekend carried survival weight. Results were unpredictable, pressure was constant, and the relegation zone never felt far away.



The 2023/24 season laid bare the extent of the club's problems. Bugesera finished 13th with 32 points from 30 matches, seven wins, 11 draws and 12 defeats. It was a campaign that exposed weaknesses both on the pitch and within the club's wider structure.

For supporters, it was exhausting. For the club, it was a warning.

As results deteriorated, former head coach Francis Halimagingo stepped down despite having seven months remaining on his contract. Around the same period, the squad also began to unravel. Striker Umar Abba, the league's leading scorer in 2025, left for Polokwane City FC in South Africa at the end of the season.

Behind the scenes, tensions were rising further. Sources close to the club indicated that Bugesera FC spent at least Rwf 35 million in the final three matches of that campaign in a desperate attempt to avoid relegation.

In the end, survival felt less like relief and more like postponing the inevitable.



The escape that changed little

Bugesera's survival that season was sealed on the final day with a 3-0 victory over Etoile de l'Est in Ngoma District. It was a decisive result, and, in hindsight, a temporary escape.

Sports journalist Didace Ukulikiyindi believes that period was defining, but not transformative.

“What we’ve witnessed this season is not just an uptick in performances,” he said. “It is the painstaking reconstruction of Bugesera FC thanks to head coach Camarade, almost from the floorboards up.”

At the time, however, the underlying issues remained unresolved.

“When things started falling apart, the coach became the easiest target,” Didace said. “That is football’s oldest script; blame the manager, sack him, and avoid confronting the real issues higher up.”

He argues the deeper problem lies within the club’s administration.

“The bigger problem was a management committee that hesitated to invest when the club needed support the most,” he said. “That kind of financial caution cripples many clubs in this league, not just Bugesera.”

According to Didace, Bugesera FC’s struggles reflect a wider pattern in domestic football.



“They only react when the danger becomes impossible to ignore at the trapdoor,” he said. “Once relegation is staring them in the face, that’s when spending suddenly becomes urgent.”

That urgency defined their escape in 2024, but it did not prevent a repeat of instability the following season.

A threadbare squad, delayed wages, and limited player support created a fragile environment.

“Footballers respond to stability and trust,” Didace said. “When players are not being paid on time and the club cannot provide the basics needed to compete, confidence disappears very quickly.”

The turning point

What followed was less dramatic, but more significant: continuity.

Rather than overhaul the squad, new head coach Camarade Issa Bwanamwana, who took over from Francis, chose stability. He retained much of the core group, recalled Abba, and leaned on experienced players including goalkeeper Jean De Dieu Nsabimana, Vincent Adams, Ishimwe Saleh, Seth Nkurunziza, Brian Muhinda, Moise Nyarugabo and Reuben Bala.

Alongside experience came renewal. Young players were gradually introduced, including Moise Nyarugabo, one of the league's emerging talents in recent seasons.

"I am for one reason: to keep Bugesera FC in the top division. Finishing 10th was important, but the battle continues. We have the squad, the administration, and the hunger to win. From here on out." Coach Camarade, who awaits a contract renewal, said.

The approach marked a shift away from short-term survival thinking.

This time, the focus was on structure.

In Bugesera District, football is more than a sport. It is a constant presence in daily life, a source of pride and frustration in equal measure.

Yannick Mugabo, a passionate fan from Nyamata town, said, "In Bugesera District, football is more than a sport. It is a constant presence in daily life, a source of pride. Finishing 10th this season is far better than before. Our team performed well this season."

The club's results are debated widely, and emotions run high, joy in victory, disappointment in defeat. But beyond that emotional cycle, Bugesera FC also plays a broader role as a social and economic anchor, bringing top-flight football into the heart of the district.

That closeness comes with responsibility and cost.

Mayor Richard Mutabazi of Bugesera District says local government funds around 90% of the club's operational budget.

"Running a team at this level is incredibly expensive," the Mayor said. "We have hospitals, roads and schools, among other things that must be built and

maintained.”

“Funding the club at 100% is an institutional impossibility. It is not because we lack ambition, or because we do not dream of seeing Bugesera at the summit of the league. It is a matter of basic arithmetic and civic duty.”

The financial reality behind ambition

The mayor says the district must balance sporting ambition with public responsibility.

“We have to keep balance in the budget; just enough to ensure the squad remains competitive and safely away from the relegation zone.”

At present, the district is seeking private investors and corporate partners to strengthen the club’s financial base.

“With the right private backing, we can build a stronger budget that allows us not just to survive domestically, but to genuinely compete with other league heavyweights like Al Hilal, Al Merrikh or APR,” he said.

Stability at last; but questions remain

On the pitch, the signs of progress are visible. Bugesera finished the 2025/26 season safely in mid-table, mixing strong results, including a 2–0 win over AS Kigali, a 3–0 victory against Etincelles, and a 1–0 win over Police FC, with setbacks such as a 2–0 defeat to Al Hilal.

It is not a breakthrough season. But it is no longer a survival fight either.

For a club that once measured success in avoiding collapse, that shift matters.

The lessons of recent years, financial strain, managerial turnover, and squad instability, have been costly. But they have also reshaped the club’s approach.

For the first time in a long time, Bugesera FC looks less like a team reacting to crisis, and more like one attempting to build beyond it.