

The inaugural Genocide Memorial Netball Tournament got underway in the Rwandan capital this weekend, serving as both a competitive regional showcase and a poignant platform for remembrance.

Part of the wider *Kwibuka* (Remembrance) sports commemoration, the tournament aims to use netball to foster regional friendships and unite young athletes from across East Africa. For the organizers and players alike, it is an event that carries a weight far beyond the lines of the court, championing reconciliation, unity, and hope.

The tournament's activities began on Saturday, June 20, with players, officials from the Rwanda Netball Federation (RNF), and tournament partners visiting the Kigali Genocide Memorial at Gisozi to pay their respects. On Sunday, before the first center pass, courtside action will pause for a moment of silence to honor the victims of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, reflecting on Rwanda's journey of resilience.

Three teams are contesting this year's silverware: local giants APR Netball Club, Kigali Net Club, and Uganda's Kampala University. While two teams from Kampala were initially invited, travel logistical challenges meant only the university side managed to make the journey to Kigali.

Jean Pierre Sebagare, the Secretary General of the RNF, emphasized that this time of year is vital for the netball community to remember the players, coaches, and administrators lost in 1994. The event is organized in collaboration with the Rwanda National Olympic and Sports Committee (RNOSC) and the Ministry of Sports (MINISPORTS).

Reflecting on Saturday's emotional memorial visit alongside the Ugandan visitors, Sebagare noted the profound impact the experience had on the young squad.

"We came together to begin this journey of remembrance by visiting the Gisozi Memorial Center this morning," Sebagare said. "The players saw firsthand the history of what happened in Rwanda. For many of these students from Kampala University, seeing this history up close was deeply moving. They are young, most were not even born when the genocide occurred. They had many questions about what they saw, which is completely understandable, but they also expressed gratitude for how the visit was organized because they felt it was essential for them to understand this truth."

The visit also paved the way for cross-border sports diplomacy. Following the memorial tour, RNF officials sat down with the Kampala University administration to discuss long-term collaboration.

“Inviting these teams to join us in remembrance is a significant step,” Sebagare explained. “During our discussions, we looked at how we can work together to develop netball in Rwanda. Kampala University has a highly developed netball program; in fact, their current roster includes four players who feature for the Ugandan senior national team.”



Representatives from the Rwanda Netball Federation and Uganda’s Kampala University pay their respects at the Kigali Genocide Memorial.

The resulting partnership promises to yield tangible benefits for Rwandan netball development.

“We agreed to a partnership where we can send aspiring Rwandan players to

Uganda to develop their talents,” said Sebagare. “Crucially, talented players from Rwanda will also have the opportunity to secure sports scholarships at Kampala University, allowing them to pursue higher education while playing at an elite level. It is a fantastic initiative that will truly uplift the standard of the game in Rwanda.”

Sunday’s Order of Play

The tournament shifts to the court on Sunday, June 21, from 09:00 local time, featuring a fast-paced round-robin format.

Time Matchup

09:00 Kigali Net Club vs. APR Netball Club

11:00 Kigali Net Club vs. Kampala University

14:00 APR Netball Club vs. Kampala University

The team with the most victories at the end of the day will lift the inaugural title, taking home the championship trophy and gold medals. The runners-up and third-placed teams will also receive trophies and medals, while an individual award will be presented to the tournament’s Most Valuable Player (MVP).

Looking ahead, Sebagare is confident this is just the beginning for the competition. While this marks the first time the tournament has featured international sides, the RNF plans to scale up the event next year. Kampala University management has already pledged to help rally more Ugandan clubs to make the trip in 2027, fulfilling a broader vision to expand the tournament into a premier showcase for team’s right across the East African region.



