Rwanda’s hopes of securing a spot in the 2024 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) face a challenge today as Amavubi take on Libya at Amahoro National Stadium, but without key defender Niyigena Clement.

The 26-year-old is sidelined due to suspension, having picked up two yellow cards in the October qualifiers against Benin. His absence leaves a gap in the defense, but the team has quickly moved to fill it.

Phanuel Kavita, the captain of US-based Birmingham Legion, has been handed his first call-up to the national team. Born to a Rwandan mother and a Congolese father, Kavita brings leadership experience and a physical presence to the squad. He has impressed Head Coach Frank Spittler Torsten, who highlighted his readiness ahead of the crucial match.

“It’s a great opportunity for us,” Spittler said of Kavita’s inclusion. “He’s physically fit, a leader on his team, and a player with strong character. We believe he can make a significant impact for us moving forward.”

There’s also concern over the fitness of defender Rwatubyaye Abdul, who plays in North Macedonia. Rwatubyaye, who missed the Benin clash, sustained a slight knock in training on Wednesday and may also be unavailable for today’s match.

However, Manzi Thierry, who was absent for the Benin match, will make his return to the national team.

With Rwanda sitting second from the bottom in Group D with 5 points, today’s game is a must-win if Amavubi are to keep their AFCON qualification dreams alive. A 1-1 draw in the first leg against Libya leaves the team with no room for error as they head into this pivotal fixture.

Rwanda is coming off a hard-fought 2-1 win over Benin and will be looking to build on that momentum. Libya, meanwhile, were handed a heavy 3-0 defeat by Nigeria, and will be desperate for a result to stay in contention for qualification.

“We’re ready to give everything we’ve got to win on Thursday,” said team captain Djihad Bizimana. “The team is motivated, and we know how important this game is. We’re determined to bring the victory home and move closer to our AFCON dream.”

As the tension builds, both teams know the significance of securing all three points in this crucial encounter. Rwanda will be aiming to bounce back from their draw and

inch closer to a return to Africa’s premier football competition.