South Sudan’s national team, the Bright Stars, claimed a thrilling 3-2 victory over Rwanda’s Amavubi in the first leg of the 2024 Africa Nations Championship (CHAN) qualifiers, a tournament for players who compete in their home countries.

The match took place on Sunday, December 22, 2024, at the Juba Stadium in South Sudan.

From the start, South Sudan played with great energy and aggression as the home side. In the 13th minute, a long ball into the Rwandan box led to an unfortunate mistake. Aimable Nsabimana attempted to head the ball back to his goalkeeper, but it sailed over his head and into the net, giving S. Sudan an early 1-0 lead with an own goal.

The Bright Stars didn’t stop there. They earned a corner kick shortly after, and when the ball was crossed in, the Rwandan defense failed to clear it. Malian Mandela made the most of the opportunity, striking a powerful shot from outside the penalty area into the back of the net to double the lead at 2-0 in the 20th minute.

For the next 30 minutes, the game settled into a midfield battle. Rwanda pressed forward but struggled to convert the chances they created, as their attacks fizzled out when they reached the final third. The first half ended with S. Sudan firmly in control, leading 2-0.

Rwanda came out with renewed determination in the second half. Just three minutes after the restart, Gilbert Mugisha made a brilliant pass to Kevin Muhire, who sprinted forward and calmly slotted the ball past the goalkeeper to score Rwanda’s first goal, making it 2-1 in the 48th minute.

The Sudanese responded swiftly in the 53rd minute. Benjamin Laku delivered a precise cross into the penalty area, and Ebon Malish Wajo rose high to head the ball home, restoring the home side’s two-goal advantage at 3-1.

The intensity of the match increased as both teams launched attacks. Rwanda, now in control of possession, continued to push for another goal. In the 69th minute, Roger Kanamugire picked out Didier Mugisha, who surged forward and fired a clinical shot to make it 3-2, bringing Rwanda back into the game.

With 15 minutes remaining, Rwanda pressed hard for an equalizer, but they squandered several key opportunities. Despite efforts from Muhire, Mugisha, and

Claude Niyomugabo, the Amavubi couldn’t find the back of the net.

The match ended with S. Sudan securing a 3-2 victory, giving them the advantage heading into the return leg. Rwanda, with a strong history in regional competitions, will be determined to fight for a spot in the next round. The return leg, set to take place on Sunday, December 28, 2024, at 18:00 at Amahoro Stadium in Kigali, promises to be an exciting clash as both teams battle for a place in the next stage of the qualifiers.