When it comes to Rwandan football history, Mukura Victory Sports known popularly as Mukura has seen it all. The oldest football club has seen bad and good times and its future is highly unpredictable.

For the fans, 2018 will always be etched into folklore for the Huye-based side – Mukura VS. It was an unforgettable year for many fans, a time of bittersweet moments and palpable emotions.

After 26 years, the Huye-based club clinched the Peace Cup title, and represented Rwanda at the CAF Confederation Cup. Since winning the trophy in 1992, Mukura had struggled and muddled through hard times. In its fans' eyes, the club became an example of hubris and self-harm. They won titles in 1978, 1986, 1990 and 1992.



The genesis

Known by then as ' Loisires', the club is said to have been founded in the 1930's during the colonial era by two Belgians; Father Litjens who was the head of Butare (now Huye) diocese and Sir Reisidorif who was the Administrator of Astrida territory.

The club changed its name to Victoria FC, when the national league was initiated in the 1940s. However, the name didn't last long and in 1959 it went into obscurity.

After independence, the club was revived when Commune Mukura was formed, the administration rechristened it Mukura Victory Sports.

Following the birth of other clubs like Rayon Sports, and Rwanda Motor FC in the 1970's, Mukura debuted in first division football.

At that time, it rose to prominence by being the first club to recruit foreign players into its squad, mostly Burundians. Etienne Nakabwa, Sudi Sakata and Gatama were some of the Burundian footballers.

Home turf

Under the guidance of Father Gratien Vanneste, a Civil Rngineer, the Huye Stadium was built in 1974 with the support of Butare Diocese. The construction of the stadium gave the club a home ground and prominence.

Today, the stadium has been upgraded to an international multi-purpose facility, the 2nd biggest in Rwanda with a 20,000-seat capacity.

However, when the club had started gaining ground competitively the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi hit the club, it remains the worst part in the history of Mukura VS when it lost over 25 members including staff.

Redemption period

Following the Genocide against the Tutsi, Mukura's road to recovery was surprising thanks to Jean-Damascene Gasarabwe, other surviving members as well as its Huye fan base.

For the fans, the club's dominance in Rwanda continues to be significant, however on the pitch, things have remained turbulent both locally and internationally.

The once-great shakers of Butare stumbled. At one point falling so far from grace that even the grass where they lay down wasn't green anymore.

In the last season the club finished in sixth position with 45 points from 13 wins and 11 defeats. On its last continental championship, they were knocked out in the first round by Ethiopia's Awassa City in 2000.

Once again, the years that followed were depressing for the fans, the club was weighed down by financial restraints.

They operated at a loss, maintained a below average wage budget and rarely spent without selling first. Today, the club's biggest budget contribution comes from Huye District.

But, under Olivier Mugabo Nizeyimana's leadership, the club rose up, won its Peace Cup, and featured in the CAF Confederation Cup. Nizeyimana had took up the club when it was flattering and brought it back to life.

He recruited talented players, a top coach from Burundi, Francis Haringingo now at Rayon Sports and attracted a sponsorship deal from Hyundai Motor Company.

Felix Romario Gakuka, an experienced sports journalist, believes the club needs transformation. "Mukura must fix issues if they wish to return to the fold."

Way forward

When Nizeyimana’s tenure in office ended, the challenges continued. The big question remains, can Mukura VS rise up again, now that they have Yves Nyirigira as the new president?

That is yet to be seen, but already the man holding the broom is ushering in changes to bring fresh life to the club. He has made his first central pledge, to ensure the club returns to where it belongs. Firstly, to boost the club’s financial performance.

Talking to Rwanda Dispatch, Nyirigira said he wants to drive the club down the fan-owned route. In that way, he believes that the huge and lively fan base in Huye should be encouraged to support the club financially.

Bringing together small and large businesses from Huye to financially support the club each season, Nyirigira says it will strengthen the club. Will this be successful or not? Let’s wait and see.