

*By Jerry Muhamudu*

Going into the 15th La Tropicale Amissa Bongo cycling race which ended this week, Team Rwanda was targeting a strong start besides to win the top prize Yellow jersey.

However, that did not turn out as planned, coach Felix Sempoma and his six-man selection team could not comprehend what they witnessed.

The onslaught began on an opening day with a slow start from Bitam to Ebolowa when the Rwandan riders covered 149km.

Rnus Byiza Uhiriwe finished far in 25th position, then day two saw the results plummeting for Team Rwanda.

As Eritrean Natnael Tesfatsion was celebrating for having finished as the best after Stage two, his first success in the pros, Team Rwanda riders was fighting for life.

Didier Munyaneza tried to come in the best finishing 10th. Both Moise Mugisha and Byiza came in 20 and 21 positions respectively, a cruel fate for a team that was selected among the best.

Stage two was the worst for the Joseph Areruya the 2017 Tour du Rwanda, winner who remained 43rd in the General Classification from Bitam to Oyem (107km).

The last stage of the race left the riders bruised, with Munyaneza, Mugisha and Jean Claude Nzafashwanayo failing to complete this stage.

At the final General Classification of the whole 2.1 competition, only three out of six riders completed the last stage that is: Byiza, Mugisha, and Areruya the rest did not finish as per the results.

Now Team Rwanda, led by star-studded line-up rider and 2018 Tour of Rwanda champion Mugisha are back in Kigali, to start preparations for the 2020 Tour of Rwanda.

Team Rwanda might have finished as the best team among the 15 teams but their performance was not convincing.

Last year, Rwanda came 4th in the General Classification, Munyaneza was ranked

among the top eight riders going on to win the best youth competition jersey while his colleague Mugisha finished third.

At the end of this year's Tropicale Amissa Bongo, two questions ran through my head, was Team Rwanda unlucky or where they simply not good enough for the competition.

For the third attempt, Coach Sempoma and his riders have tried to win the famous Gabonese race but did not. One way to find out is by starting from the preparations to find out whether the team was really fit or wobbly to race in the competition.

It might be inevitable to look beyond results but that is what makes sports interesting.

Taking into consideration the sprint results of the Tropicale Amissa Bongo , Sempoma's selection was not up to the speed set by the other riders.

Obviously, Team Rwanda was not going to win the 15th edition of the Gabonese race, given the fact that Teams like Eritrea, Cofidis, Solutions Credits, and Team Total Direct Energie were determined to maintain their grip on the Yellow jersey.

To be fair, Areruya was not at his best, neither was the team supposed to be that bad if the coach's words prior to the departure had anything to go by.

Taking into consideration, a 2.1 classified race seems not to be easy given the level of competitiveness from other teams. a) with few remaining weeks to the start of the popular home Tour of Rwanda, fixes need to be made soon.

Otherwise, if the yellow jersey is to be retained in Kigali, and whatever home advantage it might give, winning the Tour of Rwanda needs to be at their best other than that, it will be tricky on tough roads and steep mountain stages of 2020 if the Team Rwanda is not aggressive no offense.

B) most importantly will be fierce competition from the pro teams, which can't be ruled off, indeed riders like Merhawi Kudus who championed the race last year will be eager to defend the title.