

Bodybuilding 2016: Women hit stage as Byekwaso goes West

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KAMPALA. Sometimes there is little to talk about Ugandan bodybuilding in a calendar year, many times with hardly an event worthy of mention. 2016 was quite an eventful one, at least by Ugandan standards and below is a recap.

Ladies hit the stage

Bodybuilding in Uganda has always been a men's affair. From Isaac Nsamba through Ivan Byekwaso to Mubarak Kizito, and many more, the Ugandan audience has been treated to male muscle shows.

Although some bold girls have given a try, trained and put on some abs and biceps they have not been bold enough to hit the Ugandan stage. They just could not imagine themselves on stage under the beaming lights in those two-piece costumes, which leave nothing to the imagination. Some cross the border to try it in Kenya.

Well, that was before Irene Kasubo, Hafswa Nalumansi and Irene Nakimbugwe broke the barriers in August. These three audacious ladies hit the stage at Mt Zion Hotel during the Mr Kampala Championship, much to the surprise of many "unsuspecting" fans.

If we thought it was a one off, time proved us wrong. In November, the trio returned even bigger and better at the Mr Uganda Championship at the Freedom City auditorium. With top-drawer gymnastics, fitness and composure, packaged in free poses, the audience was left in awe. And when *Daily Monitor* asked the ladies' on the way forward, their chorus answer was "no turning back."

Byekwaso goes West

He hit interstellar heights when he won the INBA World Cup and Natural Universe crowns last year. With the crazy cash of his maverick sponsor Jack Pemba, Byekwaso enjoyed as much publicity as bigger sporting brands like the Uganda Cranes and eclipsed the likes of Moses Golola.

Deservedly, Byekwaso enjoyed hero's welcomes, his motorcades stalling Entebbe Road traffic and in Kampala City. He jumped from one victory party to another. Oh how times change!

By the dawn of 2016, all the pomp and good life had vanished when Pemba, the sponsor, and Byekwaso, the beneficiary, fell out.

Ahead of the 2016 INBA World Championships, Byekwaso trod his old path, passing the basket begging for sponsorship.

When he finally flew to Budapest, he was never to return. In November, Byekwaso represented Bavaria in Germany qualifiers for the 2017



The Mr Uganda and Mr Kampala crowns are held by Ssenoga. ALL PHOTOS BY JB SSENKUBUGE

IFBB European Championship. Competing in the Men's Class 2, the Munich-based Byekwaso finished fourth among 12 to book the ticket. If all goes as planned, he will feature for Germany effective next year.

Kizito wins silver

Mubarak Kizito had always craved sharing an international stage with Byekwaso. He finally got his wish at the 2016 World Championships in Budapest, Hungary—the first time two Ugandans entered the same international event. Both reached

the six-man final in the Short Men category; Byekwaso having won the middleweight category, Kizito triumphing in bantamweight.

Strangely, Byekwaso, who had become used to winning, finished a distant six.

He later told *Daily Monitor* that it was the announcer's error because according to the judges, he was the winner. We could not verify this, though. Meanwhile, Kizito who came second and won silver, his second international medal, after scooping gold as a novice in Dubai 2015.



Miss Uganda Fitness Irene Kasubo (left) and Irene Nakimbugwe



Mubarak Kizito with his 2016 INBA World Championship silver medal

Byekwaso had customised local bodybuilding tournaments, winning crown after crown. Since he excused himself from local arena, honours change hands almost every year.

After Mubarak Kizito won the 2015 Mr Kampala crown, Ben Lukwago scooped the 2015 Mr Uganda accolade (never mind it occurred January 2016).

As you read this, both crowns belong to Andrew Ssenoga. The 30-year-old heavyweight says he has been in the sport since 2009, but his first golden moment came in August

when his physique, height and exquisitely toned body made him the natural choice for the Mr Kampala prize.

In November, Ssenoga was not at his best, but eventually beat stiff competition from lightweight Lameck Muwanga and light heavy Isaac Mubikiriwa to win the Mr Uganda crown at Freedom City in Namasuba along Entebbe Road.

Between the two local gongs, Ssenoga won gold in the Germany-International Championship in September.