

Everton manager David Moyes said, far from a smooth one.

Arsenal manager

Pirates in driving seat as Sharks smell blood in second leg

RUGBY PREMIERSHIP

Saturday at 4pm

Heathens vs. Victoria, 2pm

Black Pirates vs. Walukuba

Kobs vs. Impis

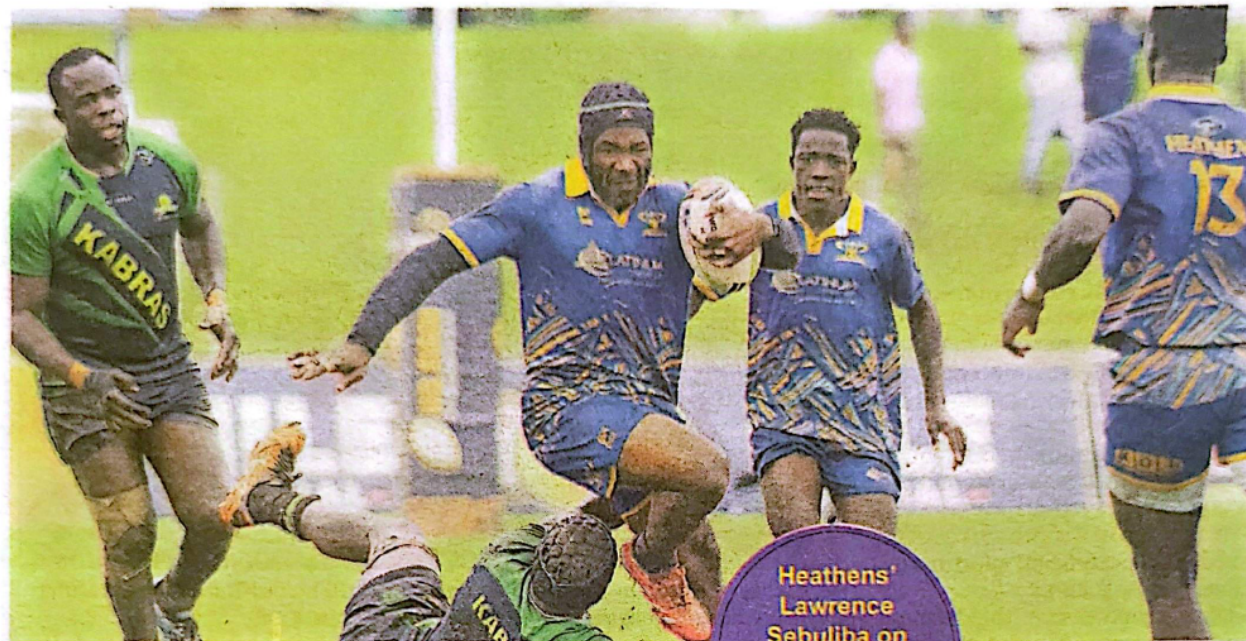
Buffaloes vs. Mongers

BY FRED MWAMBU

KAMPALA. There's no fixture in the 2026 Uganda Rugby Premiership in the ongoing quarterfinal fixtures that carries the narrative weight of Victoria Sharks versus Heathens. Barely a year old as a serious competitive outfit, Sharks have used their Kyadondo neighbors as the ultimate yardstick of their growth.

In five games including the first leg narrow 6-0 defeat, they have lost four times and drawn once coming in the 10-10 second leg of their quarterfinal last year, but the stats just don't tell the whole story.

The first chapter was a tight 15-13 debut defeat in the premiership in March last year. Then came a 51-36 aggregate hiding in last season's quarterfinal. Though context is essential in this as a significant number of Sharks players were Heathens loanees, and rugby eligi-



Heathens' Lawrence Sebuliba on the charge. PHOTO/JOHN BATANUDE

bility rules barred them from featuring against their parent club. Sharks were effectively fielding a depleted side.

This season they rebuilt entirely on their own terms. A 30-5 premiership defeat to Heathens in the premiership earlier on looked damning on paper but the Sharks were still finding their

shape. Fast forward to last Saturday at Kyambogo, and that shape was unmistakable. The pairing was billed as the pick of the quarterfinal round and indeed the first leg delivered every bit of that promise. Sharks squandered kickable

opportunities through Israel Makokha and Humphrey Asiligwa and those misses proved costly. Heathens were more composed from the tee later on as Malcom Okello slotted two second-half penalties to bank a 6-0 lead. The game's de-

fining moment came with the clock in red as Sharks, inexplicably, opted for a scrum rather than a regulation penalty attempt at goal in which they fumbled.

Ready to rumble

Sharks return to Kyadondo this Saturday knowing that every single opportunity can change everything. Central to their rebuild and challenge is standout acquisition Allan Olango, who crossed from Rhinos and has been among the league's top performers all season with six tries in nine regular season appearances, and a man of the match from the first leg.

"We have very experienced players and very hungry young players who want to win," Olango said. "We weren't clinical enough in the first leg but we did better in the line breaks. We earned a last-play penalty but made a poor decision and we'll work on that."

Elsewhere in this weekend's second legs, Kobs carry a 23-12 lead over Impis at Kampala Rugby Club as Buffaloes take a 22-18 advantage to Kyadondo against Mongers.

However, the most pressing subplot of the day surrounds Walukuba Barbarians' trip to Bweyogerere to face holders Pirates, who lead 48-6 from the first leg. Walukuba had threatened to boycott their home fixture last weekend over finances.