

SPORT

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HOW ARSENAL
WON THE LEAGUE

CHASING FUTURE STARS

By Olivia Nakate

Uganda's future athletics success may depend less on its current stars and more on the thousands of children competing on dusty primary school tracks across the country. As some elite athletes transition from track competition to road running and others gradually step away from the sport altogether, Uganda's athletics landscape is entering a critical period of change that will require a new generation of talent to rise and fill the gap.

For Uganda to maintain its status as one of Africa's athletics giants, continuity must become a deliberate process rather than a matter of chance. Experts believe that sustainable success can only be achieved through strong grassroots structures, early talent identification and consistent athlete development programs. One of the key platforms now attracting attention is primary schools athletics.

This year's national primary school athletics championship, held in Tororo district later this month, drew more than 4,000 pupils from 173 schools across the country, highlighting the growing interest in athletics at the grassroots level. The Uganda Primary Schools Sports Association (UPSSA) organised the competition.

According to UPSSA president William Bwambale, the championship has become an important foundation for nurturing future national athletes.

Bwambale explained that if Uganda Athletics wants to secure the country's future in athletics, then primary school competitions must remain central to its long-term plans. "We designed a follow-up system for our pupils. It helps us monitor them while they are still in primary school and



UPSSA boss Bwambale backs primary athletics development



Young athletes compete during the national primary schools athletics championships in Tororo

GRASSROOTS ATHLETICS HOLDS KEY TO UGANDA'S FUTURE SUCCESS



even when they transition to secondary school," Bwambale said.

"It is a good system for tracking the progress of athletes and ensuring that promising talent is not lost along the way."

The system is intended to create continuity in athlete development, especially during the vulnerable transition period between primary and secondary education where many talented youngsters often disappear from competitive sport due to lack of support. Uganda Athletics president Dominic Otucet acknowledged the critical

role primary athletics plays in shaping the future of the sport in Uganda.

"We currently have a gentleman's agreement with UPSSA where we provide technical services because we understand that good athletes begin with well-organised competitions," Otucet said.

"To have a good event, you must have competent technical officials. Going forward, we want to sign a memorandum of understanding with UPSSA to strengthen how we work together."

The collaboration between the two bodies has already seen Uganda Athletics intentionally identify promising pupils and recommend them to secondary schools capable of supporting both their education and sporting careers.

Sports administrators

believe this partnership could become one of the country's strongest pipelines for future



A pupil in action

athletics stars if it is properly funded and monitored.

"We still need more funding to organise better events because we want to increase the number of competitions available for young athletes. I believe the results of these efforts will soon become visible," Bwambale said. Besides identifying talent, the competitions expose children to organised sport at an early age while instilling discipline, teamwork and competitive experience.

To further strengthen the championships, the government introduced a central feeding system where meals are prepared for all participants instead of individual schools cooking their own food.

According to organisers, the arrangement helps athletes maintain their

energy levels throughout the competition and ensures that children complete events stronger and healthier.

Officials also believe the shared feeding system promotes unity and interaction among pupils from different regions and schools, creating a stronger sense of togetherness during the national games.

Primary athletics is increasingly being viewed as the nursery bed for Uganda's future champions. Without close monitoring and sustained investment at this level, officials fear that many talented children could slip through the cracks before their abilities are fully developed.

As Uganda's current generation of elite athletes evolves, the country's future success may ultimately depend on how seriously stakeholders invest in nurturing talent from the classroom playground to the international stage.