

Venoms feted in Kitende carnival

Swipe. Vipers' president Lawrence Mulindwa urged Ugandans to back domestic teams instead of supporting European teams during a party organised for his side after clinching the league title.

BY DENIS BBOSA

PREMIER LEAGUE

Results

Kitara	2-2	Police
Calvary	2-0	Nec
KCCA	4-1	Mbarara City
Lugazi	0-1	Maroons
UPPC	4-0	Bul
SC Villa	2-1	UPDF
Vipers	2-0	Express
URA	3-0	Buhimba United

Long after the final whistle pierced through the cool Kitende evening sky, the party was still only gathering pace.

Beneath the fading sunset, amid the pounding music and a sea of jubilant red shirts, Vipers looked less like a side satisfied with another Uganda Premier League crown and more like a machine only beginning to whet its appetite for further conquest. For an eight-time champion, complacency often creeps in.

But Saturday's coronation ceremony at St Mary's Stadium painted a different picture altogether. Ivan Minnaert's men still carry the rav-

ing of relentless hunger that explains why retaining their crown next season already appears a frighteningly realistic possibility.

The carnival atmosphere that welcomed thousands of fans into Kitende set the tone long before kick-off. Food and drinks were served freely upon arrival, music blared from midday and by the time the teams emerged from the tunnel, the stadium had transformed into a footballing festival worthy of champions-elect.

Deserved finish

Inside the cauldron, Vipers did what they have mastered over the years - dispatching Express with cold efficiency. Karim Watamba calmly converted from the penalty spot before Gusto Mulongo wrapped up a routine 2-0 victory against an Express side the Venoms increasingly appear capable of beating at will. The victory capped a remarkable campaign in which Vipers amassed 67 points from 30 matches, winning 19 games, drawing 10 and losing just once all season (a boardroom decision).

Their staggering goal difference of +38, after scoring 55 and conceding only 17, underlined their dominance. Second-placed KCCA attempted to spoil the narrative with a commanding 4-1 demolition of Mbarara City at Lugogo.

Ivan Ahimbisibwe, who sealed the league's Golden Boot with 14 goals, found the net again as Ashraf Mugume orchestrated proceedings for the Kasasiro Boys. Yet even that emphatic victory only reduced the gap to 10 points, with KCCA finishing



Not Flawless. Vipers coach Ivan Jacky Minnaert hoists the league trophy he delivered in his first season. PHOTO/JOHN BATANUDDE

on 62. SC Villa completed the podium on 61 points after edging UPDF 2-1, while Kitara's entertaining 2-2 draw against Police left them fourth on 56 points. The numbers told the full story of Vipers' superi-

ority: more wins than Villa and Kitara, fewer defeats than every side in the division and a defensive record that turned title races into processions. Saturday also carried an emotional undertone as Vipers

bade farewell to striker Dan 'Mzee' Sserunkuma. Once the spearhead who guided the Venoms to glory, the veteran forward has endured two difficult seasons on the fringes.

Introduced in the 80th minute, Sserunkuma played his final 10 minutes in Vipers colours before transitioning into coaching, receiving warm applause from supporters who still treasure his contribution to the club's rise. At the other end of the table, Calvary's spirited 2-0 win over Nec could not rescue them from relegation after finishing 15th on 21 points.

Buhimba United Saints joined them in the drop after a miserable campaign yielded only 12 points and 23 defeats, their fate already sealed following Friday's 3-0 loss to URA. Curiously, for the first time in a while, Fufa president Moses Mago was absent from the medal ceremony. But his no-show mattered little to the ecstatic Venoms faithful, who had waited patiently for Minnaert's side to cross the finish line.

Outside the stadium, celebration spilled deep into the night on the outer pitch where various musicians performed to frenzied supporters. And as fireworks lit the Kitende skies, one unmistakable message echoed through the chants and dancing - these Venoms are nowhere near done hunting.

Without being biased towards his own team, Mulindwa showed gratitude to all Ugandans supporting their domestic clubs. "To all Ugandans, who have given us support backing our Ugandans clubs to ensure they keep afloat, I am grateful he started.

"I respect whoever is here and donning a Vipers' jersey," he went on amidst cheers from the already excited crowd. The former Fufa President took a jibe at fans who shouted Arsenal reminding them that nobody knows them at Arsenal.