KHC victims of their own success, ambitions

Creating a culture. For three straight years now, KHC has met the humongous logistical challenges of participating at such a tournament with flying colours. The African Hockey Federation (AfHF) does not make things any easier with late communication about dates and venues.

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AFRICA CUP FOR CLUB CHAMPIONS

Men's 36th Edition

School of Excellence 3-2 KHC
Kampala 1-4 USIU Kenya
Kampala 1-2 Sharkia (Egypt)
Kampala 2-7 Portfouad (Egypt)

Something must kill a man! And the leadership of Kampala Hockey Club (KHC) has chosen competing at the continental stage as their poison.

It is easy to see why. The Africa Cup for Club Champions (ACCC) is the premier club competition on the continent.

Also, a club will have so many players on the national team. So, a chance to expose players in their clubs to top class competition is a no brainer.

But with territory (going to ACCC) comes responsibility (top performance). And the KHC leadership cannot be left to think ahead on its own. The players, technical staff, and supporters must be sold on "Project ACCC."

For three straight years now, KHC has met the humongous logistical challenges of participating at such a tournament with flying colours.

The African Hockey Federation (AfHF) does not make things any easier with late communication about dates and venues. But with sport in general struggling to find hosts for events across the world, due to logistical burdens, it is understandable.

KHC men braved the 2023 journey to and fro Malawi by bus. In 2025, their women's side Swans flew to Egypt albeit late enough to miss two games after National Council of Sports (NCS) bailed them out with air tickets.

This year, the men managed to convince NCS in time to secure air tickets and arrived two days ahead of the 36th edition of the tournament played at St. John's College Astroturf in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Right step

The club sees that as gradual improvement in the right direction even though they later ended up not winning any of their group games - as they fell 3-2 to Namibia's School of Excellence (SoEHC), 4-1 to United States International University (USIU) Kenya, and 2-1 and 7-2 to Egyptian sides Sharkia (28 time champions) and Portfouad (eventual champions) respectively. "The scorelines didn't go our way, but the journey told a deeper story," a club statement shared by media officer John Phillip Mugabi read.

"We leave the tournament without a win, but not without hope - carrying lessons, character, and confidence back home." Ahead of the journey, NCS assistant general secretary (technical) Milton Chebet had encouraged KHC to "die a little" as good performances would further justify more funding for the club and sport. Questions will rightly be asked about the performances both in Egypt, where the ladies also lost both of their matches on the field of play, and Zimbabwe. KHC's spirited performances were not enough to secure wins but they were able to show the gaps that need filling.

Inspiration

KHC were not devoid of inspiration. They won bronze in Malawi and wanted to go a step further this time. But this tournament attracts sides that are already inspired. There must be a bigger 'pain' for you to sit at the table of men and KHC must search deeper than exposure and pride.

Granted Ugandan hockey was a closed house for decades and only started having a positive look outwards again in 2021 with national team trips. KHC are trying to change that for their players but there must be a burning desire to compete with other top clubs in Africa.

Portfouad had deposed Sharkia as champions of Egypt earlier in 2025 and wanted to do the same at continental level. In fact they proved their ambition by acquiring some of the top guns that previously represented Sharkia like eventual tournament MVP (most valuable player) Mahmoud Mamdouh.

Women's champions Lakers, from Kenya, were driven in part by revenge and an opportunity to show they belong at the top. They were good enough to play the final in 2023 in Malawi against Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) but were disqualified on the final day after Blazers, another Kenyan club, reported them for using ineligible players. The Lakers proved their worth by beating GRA in penalties last weekend.

Technical abilities

KHC were no pushovers despite results. Against SoEHC, they came back twice from behind to level the score. Against USIU, KHC were the better team in the second half and limited Sharkia's goals to just two penalty strokes in the first 10 minutes of the game. They were just 3-1 down against Portfouad at halftime.

KHC showed tactical versatility but they needed more consistency in their actions. The eventual collapse to Portfouad was down to mental fatigue as the effects of facing the best two teams within 24 hours took its toll on them. But you cannot help but think that KHC also missed physical tests from Zimbabwe's Hippo, which lost just 3-2 to Sharkia in the semis, and GRA men, who lost just 2-1 to Portfouad in the semis.

A closer look at most of the goals conceded by KHC shows betrayals in technical abilities. A failed pass here, a poor trap there, ball watching, a late tackle leading to a penalty corner or stroke.

The same frailties and inconsistency in actions came to the fore during the search for goals. The side consistently won penalty corners in each game but only scored one - a deflection by Brian Bayuule off Richard Ssemwogerere's push in the match against SoEHC - in the entire tournament.

Before that, Aaron Mutenyo had improvised with a Tomahawk from a narrow angle on the left to the keeper's lower bottom right corner.

Samuel Wakhisi scored from a strong hit against USIU for the consolation and showed he still has ice in his veins when he scored against Portfouad to make it 1-3 way before Stewart Kavuma's cheeky penalty stroke to make it 2-7.

Ian Baguma, 19, had a strong backhand finish against Sharkia...

NOT ENOUGH PREP

Going by Gladwell's theory, a player in a club like KHC which trains thrice a week for two hours per session, would need 1,667 sessions to achieve this mastery. Those sessions can ideally be acquired in 238 weeks - a period of 4.5 years if one fully dedicates themselves to the cause. Easier said than done.

No club on the continental stage will be waiting for KHC to make these improvements in the fundamentals of the game but a lot can be done through deliberate and dedicated training sessions.



