

One big carnival

Many winners. There were no finish-line obsessions here. No stopwatch pressure. Just people, lots of them, running for something bigger. From elite athletes tackling the 21km half marathon to families to first-timers in the 5km mass run.

BY GEORGE KATONGOLE

Venue: Lubiri, Mengo

Theme: Men for Good Health to Save the Girl Child and Fight to End HIV/Aids by 2030

Kit price: Shs25,000

Total kits sold: 130,000

Numbers: 130,000+ runners

Categories: Half marathon, 10km race, 5km mass participation run

Last edition: Shs2.9 billion raised

Focus areas: HIV testing, counselling, sensitisation and awareness campaigns

The Kabaka Birthday Run once again proved it is more than just a race, it is a movement with a heart-beat.

All 130,000 kits for the 13th edition were snapped up ahead of Sunday's event, turning Lubiri, Mengo into a rolling wave of red, music and purpose.

By 6:00am, the Mengo-Lubiri grounds were already alive. Runners danced, stretched and soaked in the moment, building up to the arrival of the Kabaka. In a rare twist, the usually rain-soaked morning stayed dry, adding to the sense

that this would be a special edition.

When His Majesty Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II finally arrived at 7:40am, about 40 minutes later than expected, the wait melted into a roar. He waved to his subjects before lifting the double-sided Buganda and Uganda flag, sending thousands onto the streets at exactly 8:00am. From that moment, Mengo Hill was in motion.

No medals

"Those who aren't infected, please take care. For the young people, always know that there are better things ahead. Stop the practices that put your lives at risk. I would like to thank everyone who supports Buganda Kingdom's programs," the Katikiro Charles Peter Mayiga told the media.

There were no finish-line obsessions here. No stopwatch pressure. Just people, lots of them, running for something bigger.

From elite athletes tackling the 21km half marathon to families and first-timers in the 5km mass run, the event blurred the lines between sport and social cause. And it is growing.

The run spilled into Buganda's 18 counties and across borders,

with Ugandans in the diaspora joining in. The routes carved through the city's main arteries, Kabaka Anjagala, Bombo Road, Kira Road and John Babiha Avenue, before looping back to a finish that felt more like a celebration than a conclusion.

Behind the sea of runners was a powerful symbol — the kit. Airtel Uganda, the official kit provider, confirmed that all 130,000 kits were sold out, underlining the event's growing pull.

"The sell-out is a strong signal that Ugandans are not just showing up, they are buying into the message. This platform allows us to take the conversation on HIV/Aids beyond boardrooms and into communities. It challenges men to take responsibility, especially in protecting the girl child, and encourages everyone to test, to know their status and to act," said Airtel Uganda Public Relations Manager David Birungi.

The kits, priced at Shs25,000 this year, moved



Jovial.
NMG boss
Susan Nsibirwa
(L) speaks
to Katikiro
Mayiga.

faster than ever, proof that the cause continues to resonate. Last year's edition raised about Shs2.9 billion, funds that have since supported HIV/Aids sensitisation, testing and community outreach programmes across Buganda.

Community power

If the runners brought the energy, corporate companies added the muscle.

Companies turned up in coordinated groups and rhythm to the already vibrant grounds. I&M Bank Uganda led from the front, with Chief Executive Officer Robin Bairstow praising the run's ability to shift mindsets. "Initiatives like this bring people together around a shared responsibility. That is how real change begins," he said.

Head of Marketing Annette Nakiyaga noted that the growing numbers reflect rising awareness. "This is more than participation — it is commitment to a cause that affects us all," she said.

Uganda Baati, returning for the fourth straight year, echoed the same message. "It's about awareness and action. A healthy society is the foundation of development," said Jackie Tuhakanizibwa, head of external and corporate affairs at Uganda Baati.

Crossing the finish line was only half the story. As runners filtered back into Mengo, the event shifted gears. Music took over. Local artistes lit up the stage as the run morphed into a full-blown festival. Politicians and business leaders, many of whom had bought kits in bulk for their communities, mingled freely with ordinary participants. For a few hours, Mengo was not just a venue. It was a celebration.



FOOTBALL

SC Villa win to set up clash of titans this week

With just eight match-days left, Vipers still command the summit with 51 points, closely trailed by Kitara on 47. KCCA follow on 45 while SC Villa have 44 to start a big week. [Page 46](#)

GOLF

Nsereko/ Mugisha eject Entebbe title holders

The Entebbe Match-Play Golf Challenge by Stanbic Bank is into the quarterfinal stage with only three ladies left in the clubhouse knockout competition at Entebbe Club. [Page 45](#)

