

Rare Ambition. At just 14, Shiloh Kamukama Ayebare is attempting a path few Ugandan athletes have dared to take – pursuing qualification for the Youth Olympic Games in two different sports, with fencing offering a direct route and archery providing a parallel wildcard chance

Ayebare chases Youth Olympic Games ticket in archery and fencing

BY GEORGE KATONGOLE

AYEBARE'S MISSION

Event: World Cup

Championships & Youth High-Performance Training Camp

Dates: Jan 25 – Feb 1, 2026

Venue: Cairo, Egypt

Athlete: Shiloh Kamukama

Ayebare

Country: Uganda (sole representative)

Focus Weapon: Épée

Objective: To prepare for qualification to the Dakar 2026 Youth Olympic Games through intensive training and competitive assessment.

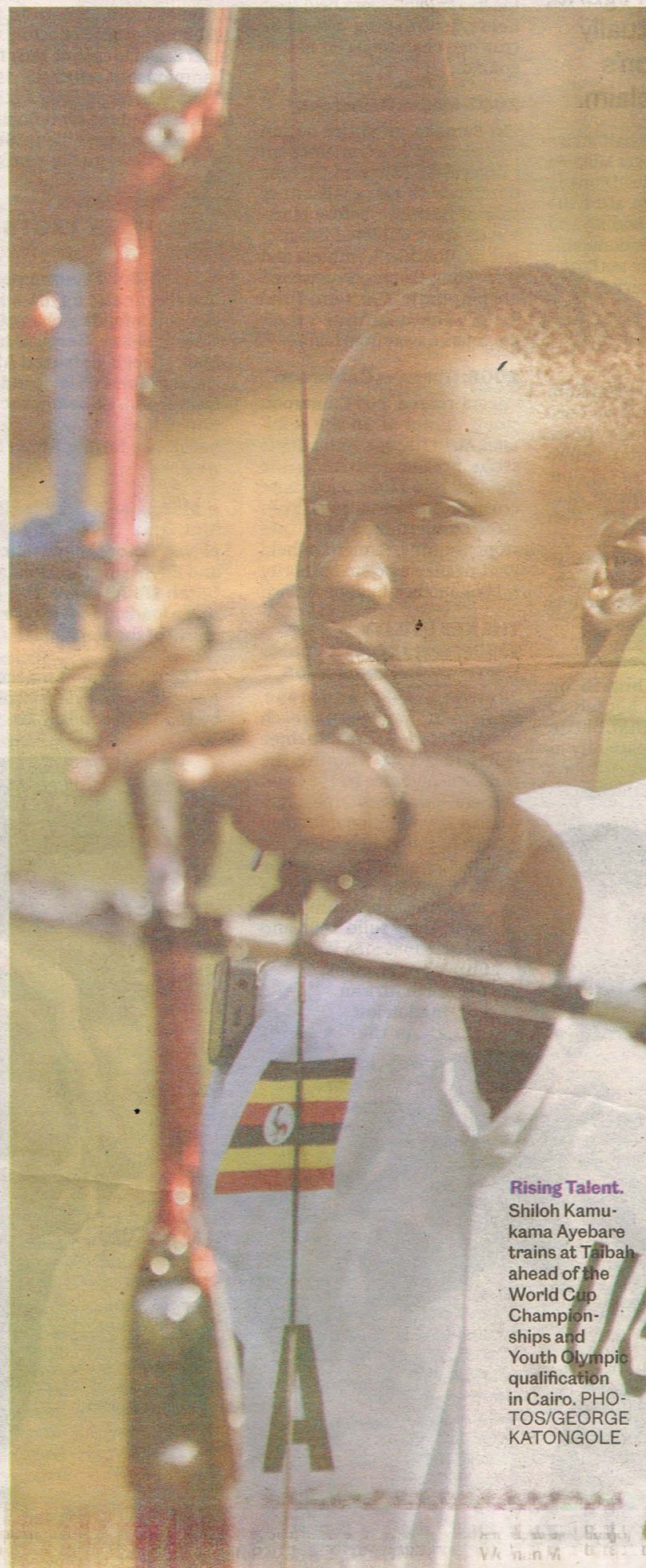
On most afternoons, when school bags are dropped and the city begins to slow, Shiloh Kamukama Ayebare tightens his grip, steadies his breath and returns to the demanding rhythm that now defines his young life. At just 14, Ayebare is daring to chase what few Ugandan athletes have attempted: qualification for the Youth Olympic Games, and remarkably, in two different sports.

Ayebare's clearest pathway currently runs through fencing, where he is positioning himself for qualification to the Dakar 2026 Youth Olympic Games, scheduled for October 31 to November 13, 2026, in Senegal, the first Olympic event ever staged on African soil. He also remains in contention for a wildcard invitation in archery.

In November last year, he tested himself against the continent's best at the African Archery Championships in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, where he finished ninth overall in the Under-18 recurve category. Competing at the demanding 70-metre distance, Ayebare impressed by dispatching Nigeria's Harry-Erin Alexander 6-0 in the elimination rounds before bowing out in the quarter-finals to eventual silver medallist Yao Kouassi Chadrac of Ivory Coast. Later this month, Ayebare will take a bold step forward when he travels to Cairo, Egypt, as Uganda's sole representative to the World Cup Championships and a high-performance youth training camp, from January 25 to February 1, 2026.

Cairo test

The Cairo engagement is more than international exposure. It is part of an Olympic Solidarity-supported youth programme, delivered through the International Fencing Federation (FIE) and specifically designed to prepare elite cadet athletes for Youth Olympic qualification.



Rising Talent. Shiloh Kamukama Ayebare trains at Taibah ahead of the World Cup Championships and Youth Olympic qualification in Cairo. PHOTO/GEORGE KATONGOLE

At the camp, athletes will undergo intensive technical training before competing for limited qualification opportunities.

In épée, the weapon Uganda has strategically selected for Ayebare, only nine athletes will emerge with qualification positions from the competition phase, making Cairo a high-stakes proving ground.

"Mentally, physically and spiritually, I am ready. I have trained consistently for over one and a half months, even this month, and I feel ready to represent Uganda and let people know who we are," Ayebare said.

Why épée?

Fencing is a sport of detail, technology and tactical choice. Uganda's technical team, led by fencing Master Cuthbert Onyango, who is certified across foil, sabre and épée, opted to concentrate Ayebare's preparation on épée after careful assessment.

"Preparing an athlete in more than one weapon would stretch both the system and the athlete. Épée gives us the best chance technically, physically and logistically," said Uganda Fencing Federation president Kenneth Oringo.

The focus also aligns with the federation's recent acquisition of electric scoring equipment, allowing Ayebare to train under competition-standard conditions, a crucial factor in a sport decided by fractions of seconds and millimetres.

Timely boost

Ayebare's international push coincides with a significant milestone for the Uganda Fencing Federation. This week, the federation unveiled a donation of competition-standard fencing equipment from the International Fencing Federation valued at nearly Shs60m.

The consignment, including jackets, masks, electric weapons and scoring systems, represents elite competition gear sourced mainly from Germany and China, equipment rarely accessible on the African continent. In a further boost, FIE also covered taxes worth approximately Shs25m, easing a financial barrier that often delays or derails sports development.

"Dressing just one athlete for competition costs not less than Shs2m. Now imagine preparing hundreds across Uganda. Without international federation support, it becomes almost impossible," Oringo said.

Building from the grassroots

Registered in 2015, the Uganda Fencing Federation has steadily expanded its footprint. Today, the sport is active in 51 districts with registered clubs, while the wider database includes more than 160 clubs nationwide. Equipment shortages mean competition gear is rotated across regions, while training equipment is shared through structured programmes.

New Gear. Kamukama and officials show off new fencing competition equipment.

"Where we identify talent, we make sure it does not die because of lack of equipment. We leave basic kits in schools and clubs with potential, even if it is just a mask, jacket and one weapon," Oringo explained.

The model has already produced results. "We have seen it work before," Oringo added, referencing a Ugandan cadet who previously won silver at an international competition in Kazan. "That success confirmed that our youth pathway can deliver."

Beyond fencing

What sets Ayebare apart is the breadth of his ambition. Alongside fencing, he remains under consideration for a Youth Olympic wildcard in archery, a sport that will feature recurve events at Dakar 2026, with qualification guided by performance standards and universality principles aimed at wider continental representation.

Balancing two sports requires careful coordination, different coaches, training cycles and recovery demands, but officials insist athlete welfare remains central. "We coordinate timetables carefully. The objective is progression, not burnout," Onyango said. When Ayebare returns from Cairo in early February, preparations will intensify. More competitions, additional camps and further monitoring lie ahead as Uganda sharpens its Youth Olympic push toward Dakar 2026, where about 2,700 athletes across 25 sports will compete on the global stage.

For Ugandan fencing, a high-tech, high-cost sport still carving its space, optimism is cautious but genuine.

"We are growing. Despite the challenges, we believe we can propel fencing in Uganda to greater heights," Oringo said.

THE GAMES EXPLAINER

Cross Challenge. At the Youth Olympics, the emphasis is usually on one sport per athlete, but mixed events can combine athletes from different countries across sports for team events, especially in disciplines like fencing or speed skating at the Winter Youth Olympics. In contrast to senior Olympic history, records of Youth athletes competing in more than one sport in the same edition are limited – partly because the Youth Games emphasise early specialisation and structured development pathways. However, if a young athlete meets qualification standards in two sports, it is technically possible to compete in both. For Ayebare, pursuing archery and fencing simultaneously is unusual but not impossible.