

# HOW SSEBATINDIRA BALANCES SCHOOL AND TABLE TENNIS

PHOTO BY MICHAEL NSUBUGA

By Hope Ampurire

At just 11 years old, Joseph Ssebatindira is living a life of sharp contrasts.

One week, he is at Nakasero Primary School tackling complex P.6 notes, the next, he is in a high-pressure final in Europe or Asia representing his country.

Coming off a historic 2025, where he was crowned World Number One in the U-12 category after winning the ITTF World Hopes Challenge in England and sweeping the Jinja Open, Ssebatindira is now preparing for the WTT Youth Star Contender in Doha, Qatar later this month.

"I am living two different lives," Ssebatindira admits with a maturity beyond his years.

"I have many tournaments, but even during those long trips, I must study. I do my school work in the nights to keep up with the rest of the class," he shared with Vision Sports.

Despite the global spotlight, he remains remarkably composed and focused.

"People often ask if all this fame puts me under pressure, but it does not. It feels normal to me now."

"My family encourages me every day, they do not



Joseph Ssebatindira in action during the Uganda Tennis Open

put me under pressure to make it, they just want me to do my best," The P.6 Pupil mentioned.

Ssebatindira's 2026 calendar is packed, requiring a difficult transition from the U-12 dominance to the more physical U-15 and senior ranks.

"I will be training in top countries like France to better my game because 2026 is a very busy year," he explained.

"My biggest dream this year is winning a medal at the Youth Olympics in Dakar," he reveals.

When the technical demands of the game get tough, Ssebatindira turns to a close ally.

"When I struggle during a match, I talk to my brother about it. We talk a lot."

Behind this world-class athlete is Bernitah Nakanwagi, a mother navigating the financial and emotional costs of raising

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a prodigy in a country where sports are often seen as a distraction.

"As a mother, I encourage him to play and train harder. I must be there to talk to him, listen to the coach, and keep his interest in the sport alive," she says.

Nakanwagi has developed a system to ensure the Student-Athlete model does not fail.

"When he misses school for tournaments, we contact teachers for the syllabus and textbooks so he goes with them,"

"We even hire someone to teach him online while he is away," Nakanwagi stated. For Nakanwagi, the stakes are more than just trophies.

"Our family is not doing okay financially, so I want him to make it in life. If an opportunity comes from Europe or abroad, I would let him go and support him," She added, "When he loses, he gets annoyed, but I call him to ask if he knows what the problem was. I tell him to work on that so that next time, he can do better." With Ssebatindira's strong foundation leading to what he has achieved at his young age, the world is at his feet.