

# Mental health issues take a toll in Ugandan sport

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Despite the severity of the issue, little structural investment has been made to address it. Questions linger: How many federations allocate resources to mental health awareness? How many employ professional counsellors or organize regular psychological support sessions?

Officials within the football fraternity acknowledge the challenge. FUFA spokesperson Ahmed Hussein admits that stigma remains a major barrier.

"Many athletes and coaches are afraid to open up during mental breakdowns," Hussein explains. "However, we have an insurance policy that covers national team players



and coaches. At the club level, every club is expected to have a medical team, including counsellors responsible for mental well-being."

Dr. Christopher Mbowa, a sports medicine physician with years of experience, points to deeper systemic issues fuelling the crisis. According to him, lack of career guidance is a major factor. "Athletes are rarely guided on what to expect or how to prepare for life beyond sport," Mbowa says. "When things don't go as planned, they are left disappointed and

confused."

Mbowa also highlights exploitation within the system. He notes that some athletes face financial, physical, and even sexual abuse, often without formal contracts to protect them.

"Many athletes generate wealth for institutions but receive nothing in return. They retire with no savings, no support, and end up mentally broken," he adds.

Coaches, often perceived as more secure, are not spared either. Mbowa explains that they frequently withstand the worst of poor performance, facing criticism and dismissal from management.

"In many cases, athletes are rewarded for success, but coaches are forgotten," he says.

"Yet coaches build these athletes. When recognition and financial rewards bypass them, it creates frustration and emotional strain."

The imbalance leaves many coaches feeling undervalued and expendable fertile ground for mental health struggles.

Experts warn that without urgent intervention, the situation could worsen. The solution, Mbowa suggests, begins with deliberate action from sports federations.

"There must be structured mental health programs, awareness campaigns, and professional counselling services for athletes and coaches," he advises.

Beyond the victories and records, coaches and athletes are human and their silent battles deserve to be heard.