

Basic to harness. A small-bodied athlete with a big brain, Mbaho describes his style as quick, direct, and creative, thriving as a winger or central attacking midfielder.

Canada-born JJ Mbaho chasing U-17 Afcon glory

BY GEORGE KATONGOLE

At just 14 years old, Jahan Jacob Arjun Ruhinda “JJ” Mbaho has emerged as one of Uganda’s most exciting attacking talents, a diminutive but intelligent winger pushing for a spot in the Uganda U-17 Men’s National Team ahead of the 2026 Africa U-17 Cup of Nations (Afcon) in Morocco, scheduled for April 25–May 15, 2026. Uganda secured qualification with a convincing 3–0 semifinal win over Ethiopia in the CECAFA qualifiers.

Born and raised in Canada, Mbaho’s football journey began in Surrey, British Columbia, where he honed his skills in local youth setups and school competitions. He made headlines last season with 16 goals and 6 assists in 12 games, leading his school team to the Surrey High School championship. Video highlights from his youth days show a player with sharp instincts, fearless dribbling and a willingness to challenge defenders.

Adapting to national-team intensity At the Fufa Technical Centre in Njeru, where the Uganda U-17 camp is in full swing under head coach Laryea Kingston, Mbaho is embracing the higher intensity of national-level football.

“It felt amazing, surreal. It was a dream come true and an honour to represent Uganda,” he said of his first call-up.

The camp has emphasised fitness and muscle activation to prepare players for the fast pace of tournament football.

“It’s helped me feel stronger and sharper on the ball. The biggest adjustment has been the intensity

— you have to think and play faster,” Mbaho said.

Small but smart

A small-bodied athlete with a big brain, Mbaho describes his style as quick, direct, and creative, thriving as a winger or central attacking midfielder.

“These positions allow me to create, run at defenders, and unlock tight defenses,” he says.

He credits his development in Canada’s structured youth football system for instilling discipline and confidence on the ball.

“It helped me develop discipline and speed of play... gain confidence with the many reps,” he explains.

Mbaho studies global stars to refine his game. “I really look up to Kevin De Bruyne for vision — the way he sees passes nobody else can — and Vinicius Junior for his confidence and creativity on the ball. I try to take something from both into my own style.”

Despite wearing the national jersey at such a young age, Mbaho sees pressure as motivation rather than



fear.

“There’s always pressure with the national team, but it pushes me to improve. I see it as a chance to prove myself and make Uganda proud.”

Balancing act

Off the pitch, Mbaho balances academics and football through strict discipline.

“It’s all about staying organised; school in the mornings, football in the afternoons, making sure I’m sharp in both,” he says.

Looking ahead, his ambitions are clear and grounded.

“I want to help the team succeed in Morocco, develop my skills every day, and eventually play at the highest level, maybe even in Europe one day. This is just the start of my journey, and I’m ready for every challenge.”

At 14, JJ Mbaho is already turning heads and Uganda may have just found their next big name.

QUICK FACTS: JJ MBAHO

Full Name: Jahan Jacob Arjun

Ruhinda Mbaho

Age: 14

Position: Winger/midfielder

Current team: U-17

Youth: Canada (Surrey High School), Villarreal Academy

2025/26 season stats: 16

Goals, 6 Assists in 12 Games

Strengths: Quick, creative, direct, intelligent on the ball

Inspirations: Kevin De Bruyne, Vinicius Junior

SWING

At the Fufa Technical Centre in Njeru, where the Uganda U-17 camp is in full swing under head coach Laryea Kingston, Mbaho is embracing the higher intensity of national-level football. “It felt amazing, surreal. It was a dream come true and an honour to represent Uganda,” he said of his first call-up. The camp has emphasised fitness and muscle activation to prepare players.

Future Star.

At 14, Mbaho is already making an impression in the national camp, honing his speed and vision on the ball. PHOTO/GEORGE KATONGOLE