

Coach Okhuti: USSSA football title race remains wide open

Open Chase. The USSSA Boys Football Championship has entered its knockout phase with no clear favourite emerging, as traditional giants are increasingly being matched by rising schools across the nation

BY GEORGE KATONGOLE

Defending champions Buddo's 2-0 win over Teso College Aloet in Lira did little to settle early-season expectations, instead reinforcing a growing reality in the Uganda Secondary Schools Sports Association (USSSA) Boys Football Championship — the title race is more open than ever.

With established powerhouses still asserting themselves and emerging sides refusing to fade, the gap between favourites and challengers continues to shrink.

Unbeaten Ssinga SS have emerged as early surprises, progressing into the knockout stage without defeat, while several traditional contenders have already been tested earlier than expected.

Schools such as St Mary's Kitende, Amus College, Jinja Progressive Academy and Buddo SS remain strong, but observers say the tournament is increasingly defined by fine margins rather than reputation.

Okhuti: Coaching raising standards

Mvara SS coach Caesar Okhuti says improved coaching standards have driven the rising competitiveness.

"There is so much improvement in how teams play. Most coaches have improved. I thank FIFA for setting minimum coaching re-



Sharp Finish. Jimmy Wabwire delivered a sensational performance as Jipra defeated Kigumba 2-0 to book their place in the Round of 32. PHOTO/GEORGE KATONGOLE

COACHES SHAPING TITLE RACE

- Hakim Ssenkumba – Kyaddondo SS
- Hassan Zungu – St Mary's Kitende
- Richard Malinga – Buddo
- Ronald Ssali – Bukedea
- Caesar Okhuti – Mvara SS
- Emuron Rebecca – Kibuli
- Michael Ssebagala – JIPRA
- Shafiq Mudholo – Mukono Kings

quirements. The game will continue to grow," he said. He noted that regional teams are now more competitive despite uneven development structures.

"West Nile, Busoga and Bunyoro are key scouting zones. Many teams are now matching traditional schools. We have talent, but development still needs work," he added.

Malinga: Knockouts are unforgiving

Buddo SS coach Richard Malinga, whose side beat Mukono Kings 4-1, says knockout football leaves no room for error.

"Our target is to improve on last year, but in knockouts every opponent fights," he said.

He highlighted the rise of academy-linked schools raising standards across the competition, including Kyaddondo (KCCA), Mukono

Kings (Police), JIPRA (BUL) and Kitende (Vipers). "You are competing against structured systems that know exactly what they are doing," he noted.

Anyau: Fine margins deciding games

Veteran coach Frank Anyau says modern school football is now decided by tactical details rather than dominance.

"Players are almost at the same level. The difference is organisation, and Amus does that well," he said. As the tournament moves into the quarterfinals, early results have already produced surprises and dominant displays.

The 2026 edition is shaping up as one of the most unpredictable in recent years, where reputation alone is no longer enough to guarantee survival.