

Flashback: Grace Galabuzi, case of unfulfilled potential

Sports

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KCC starting XI before a 1980 Caf Cup Winners Cup match against Somalia's Marine FC in Mogadishu. L-R David Kamoga, Peter Mazinga, Galabuzi, Peter Wandyyette, Sam Musenze and Steven Mpagi. Front row: Moses Nsereko, Rashid Mudin, Ibrahim Magala, Godfrey Kateregga and Sam Mugambe

A highly-touted lad from his teenage days, Galabuzi was destined for greatness when he won over KCC fans. But he exited the game as fast as he scaled the heights to become the club's number 1. There was a nostalgic feeling last Tuesday when I joined several football stars of the past in the stands as KCC FC opened its new stadium at Lugogo.

From the 70s and 80s era of Tom Lwanga, Peter Wandyyette, Fred Musisi Kiyangi to the 90s generation of Godfrey Mugisha, Mujib Kasule and Hussein Ssali, it was a jovial afternoon as KCC and URA FC shared the spoils in the league match.

Discussions ranged from reminiscing KCC's good old days to what lies in the future but as the game wore on, cagy goalkeeping – particularly from KCC's Godfrey Wakabu – became the major topic. And when he failed to tame URA strikers in one-on-one situations – one of which would have been a legitimate winner for URA in injury time – many felt nerves had got the better of Wakabu.

But those very incidents only served to evoke memories of Grace Edward Galabuzi, the KCC goalie from the late 70s, whose biggest attribute was one-on-one situations. Galabuzi was an exceptionally talented young goalkeeper, signed by Bidandi Ssali in 1978 as a long-term replacement for the ageing George Mukasa.

Tall and athletic, Galabuzi quickly progressed through the club ranks to become the club's first choice goalie at just 20. However, on his way to the summit, a promising career was cut short in 1981 by the prevailing insecurity in the country at the time and he fled to Canada, where he has settled to this day.

All-rounder

In his formative years, Galabuzi took up sports enthusiastically and was a jack of trades. He participated in football, athletics, cricket, volleyball, and rugby. However, it was in cricket that he made giant strides and got selected to the national team in 1976.

At that time, he also continued with football and was part of the Central Province junior side that entertained Brazil football legend Pele when he visited Uganda in 1976. Thereafter, he joined Coffee FC as a trainee before moving to NIC FC in 1977. While there, he remained on the fringes of the first team as Robert Kiwanuka's understudy.

Galabuzi heroics

Jack Ibaale, the KCC chairman, had strong links in cricket and that helped him persuade the youngster to join KCC FC. The excited late Ibaale quipped then: “We have secured a goalkeeper who is going to give Jamil Kasirye stiff competition.”

Despite his young age and relative inexperience, Galabuzi was highly-regarded and when second-choice goalie Hussein Matovu left the club in 1979, Galabuzi became Kasirye’s vice. His delayed league debut came in a 2-1 win over Maroons that season. It was not a special KCC performance but Galabuzi’s reflexes gave fans something to cheer about. KCC would go on to win the 1979 Uganda Cup but as the league season approached the finish line, Kasirye’s poor performances prompted Nsereko to elevate Galabuzi, a Makerere University student at the time.

Galabuzi didn’t let down his boss and posted good performances against Somalia’s Marines FC and TP Mazembe of DR Congo in the Caf Cup Winners Cup games. He never looked back since. Then in 1980, Galabuzi became the centre of attraction prior to the KCC face-off with Nakivubo Villa (later renamed SC Villa). Many cited his inexperience as the KCC weak link. Come D-day, KCC took an early lead but Villa won a stoppage-time penalty for a handball on the goal line by skipper Sam Musenze.

Galabuzi had the unenviable task of stopping Moses Ndaula, who at the time was one of the country’s best penalty takers. Early celebrations by Villa fans – even before the kick was taken – came to haunt them when Galabuzi dived at full length to grab the ball confidently.

Galabuzi had a month earlier stopped Ndaula’s spot-kick in the Idi Cup. KCC ended that season in third behind Nile and Nytil but this match gave them a psychological advantage of finishing above arch-rivals Express and Villa.

A week later, Galabuzi inspired KCC to retain the Uganda Cup title with a 2-0 win over Maroons in the final. The yellows leapt with joy when he parried away Edward Semwanga’s scorcher of a free-kick and with time running out, he tamed Evans Abwooli in a one-on-one situation.



### Life in diaspora

In 1981, he was summoned to the national team preparing for a friendly game against Mauritius. However, the game was called off at the last minute, denying him a Cranes cap. Galabuzi put the disappointment behind him and had impressive displays for KCC—but just eight games into the 1981 league season, his career took a turn for the worst.

As the general secretary of the student guild at Makerere, Galabuzi was part of a group of students that held a rally at the campus to decry instability in the country. The state, however, had deemed it unlawful and the military police besieged the campus to arrest the ring leaders.

Fearing for his life, Galabuzi managed to sneak out of Makerere undetected and later escaped to Kenya. His departure caused a goalkeeping crisis at KCC as the club was preparing for the Africa Cup Winners Cup tie against Algeria’s Setif Sportive. Coupled with Kasirye earlier move SC Villa, 19-year-old John Tebusweke took over Galabuzi’s position.

In 1982, Galabuzi left Kenya and settled in Toronto, Canada. While there, he briefly reignited his football career and featured for Hamilton Steelers as a defensive midfielder. Two years later, however, Galabuzi hung up the boots and crossed into politics and academics. He currently works at Ryerson University as an Associate professor.

Looking back, one can only shudder to imagine how great he would have been had his football career not taken such a sudden turn.

### Galabuzi factfile

Born in 1960 to Barnabas Sesanga and Margaret Namakula of Najjanankumbi. He went to Mengo Primary School, Kings College Budo. He holds a Ph.D in Political Science and is an associate professor at Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada.

- He played for Coffee FC, NIC FC, KCC FC and Canadian team Hamilton Steelers.
- His father is one of the founders of KCC FC.

### Galabuzi as looks like today

- Galabuzi is brother to ex-internationals Jimmy Sekandi and Godfrey Serunyigo.
- Currently living in Toronto, he is married to Shelina and the couple has two children, Makula and Sanyu.

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