



Silver Spark. Nakawala and Nangonzi (L) stand on the podium with the other medallists after battling to a well-earned silver in Lagos this year. PHOTO / COURTESY

Muwanga's first 120 glory days as UTTA boss

Swift Progress. The game is thriving under new UTTA boss Muwanga, whose first 120 days—marked by global medals, breakthrough qualifications and historic administrative gains—signal a bold new chapter.

BY ABDUL-NASSER SSEMUGABI

20

NOVEMBER: First Islamic Games Medal.

Muwanga first played at the inaugural Islamic Games in Mecca in 2005. Twenty years later, he returned to Saudi Arabia—this time in Riyadh as UTTA president—meeting ITTF leaders to shape the sport's future. Fittingly, Uganda finally broke its medal duck as Parvin Nangonzi and Jemimah Nakawala won bronze in the women's doubles. He now wants to turn bronze into gold.

When you set a terrific pace at the start of the race, you must maintain it, lest you lose. That is the story of Cyrus Muwanga, who was inaugurated as Uganda Table Tennis Association (UTTA) president on July 12, 2025. The teacher-cum-education entrepreneur is using his rich social and business network to foster change that might drive table tennis to unprecedented heights.

That aside, Muwanga's first 120 days in office have scored Uganda historic successes, especially internationally, picking from where his predecessor Robert Jjagwe left, signaling a seamless transition.

July: ITTF appointment

Barely two weeks in office, Muwanga was appointed to the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) advisory commission as head of the marketing committee. This followed the adoption of Proposition A-07, submitted by UTTA under Jjagwe which was approved by a two-thirds majority at the ITTF AGM in Doha in May.

The proposal highlighted "urgent need for a strategic and collaborative approach to financial growth within the sport, particularly by increasing development funding and elevating marketing efforts." Interestingly, in that AGM, Jjagwe backed Khalil Al-Mohannadi, of Qatar against incumbent ITTF

president Petra Sorling of Sweden, who edged it 104-102, amidst loud protestation. But Sorling recognised Jjagwe's contribution and trusted his successor Muwanga to lead the marketing arm.

At the 2025 Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, Muwanga called his assignment "a win-win for table tennis in Uganda, East Africa and Africa as a whole." Muwanga will also be guided by Thomas Kiggundu, an experienced ITTF member.

July: Golden Hopes

Precocious Joseph Sebatindira and Patience Anyango were the first to test action in Lagos, Nigeria where they both won gold at the 2025 World Hopes Week & Challenge in late July. Anyango, the 2024 U-12 Hopes champion, defended her crown ruthlessly, smashing all her four opponents from Zimbabwe, Guinea, Benin and Tunisia 3-0. Meanwhile, Sebatindira, a multiple U-11 world champion, had a point to prove having lost the 2024 final to Ghanaian Israel Akli. He did it seamlessly, dispatching opponents from Egypt, Namibia, Algeria and South Africa to clinch gold. These stellar displays earned the Ugandan gems coveted tickets to the 2025 World Hopes Week & Challenge in Sheffield, UK.

July/August: Lagos gold

Uganda's achievements at the 2025 ITTF African Youth Table Tennis Championships in Lagos, Nigeria from July 27 to August 3 transcended expectations as Uganda reaped gold, silver and three bronze medals in different categories.

Jemimah Nakawala, Anyango and her elder sister Patra Nasirumbi teamed up to win Under-15 girls' gold. En route to this historic feat, they beat South Africa 3-0, lost to Tunisia 3-2, then beat Namibia 3-0 to finish second in Group 2.

In the semis they upset Algeria 3-2 to book a revenge final against Tunisia. The North Africans started ruthlessly as Ela Said dispatched Anyango 3-0. Nakawala levelled matters with a 3-1 win over Mariam Brahimi but Nasirumbi lost for the first time, 3-1 against Nour Brahimi. Leading 2-1, Tunisia needed just one win to seal the grudge match. But Nakawala said: 'Hold on...!' beating Saidi 3-2 to level matters again. At 2-2, the shy 11-year-old Anyango returned to the table for the pulsating decider against Mariam Brahimi. Anyango won the first set 11-7, lost the second 6-11, won the third 11-9, lost the fourth 5-11, but finally clinched the fifth 11-9 to earn Uganda unprecedented gold.

Familiar duo Nakawala and Parvin Nangonzi were smelling gold after ejecting Egyptians Younes Mariam and Elbasoumy Habiba 3-1 in U-19 girls' doubles semifinal. But another Egyptian pair Malak Abdelshakour and Nour Zaki stopped them 3-0 in the final. Silver was not bad either.

Preteen brothers Sebatindira and Sharif Nsereko got bronze after surrendering the U-15 boys' doubles semifinal to Egyptians Sameh Asser and Abdelhalim Mohammed 3-1.

Meanwhile, Nsereko, the only Ugandan in the boys' singles semifinal, fell to Algerian Bilel Zouitene 3-1 and settled for bronze. In the under 15 mixed doubles, Nakawala and Sebatin-

UGANDA OPEN RETURNS

Of course Muwanga is lucky to have inherited a class of national team players who are used to winning. But he deserves the flowers for anchoring a smooth and fruitful transition, so far.

There's, however, an urgent need to elevate the boys' team to match the girls' standards. Yet the girls too are still a work in progress. Muwanga believes that the magic bullet is establishing a vibrant local presence, engaging a larger player pool from across the country.

Hence, the UTTA's revival of the Uganda Open, which has not been played in years. The inaugural edition will be hosted at Kabojja International School in Bugiza due December 6-8.



Winning Code.

Muwanga wants Ugandan players to match world standards.
PHOTO/ABDUL-N SSEMUGABI

dira lost at the quarterfinals against Algerians Aylan Goudjil and Tania Morice 3-0, but Nsereko and Anyango got bronze after a narrow 3-2 semifinal loss to Nigerian duo Tobi Adibakin And Aishat Rabinu.

In the ITTF Africa Youth Cup, which followed the Championship at the Sir Molade Okoya Thomas Indoor Sports Hall, Uganda also picked some medals. Nakawala got silver after losing the U15 girls' singles finals to Algerian Morice Tania 3-1.

But in the boys' final, silver and gold belonged to Uganda as Sebatindira defeated Nsereko 3-0.

October: London here we come
With Nakasero Club teammate Anyango away in Sheffield at the 2025 ITTF Africa Senior Championships in Tunis, Nangonzi and Nakawala had to adjust to playing with Judith Mirembe from Table Tennis Kids-Uganda, a club from the remote district of Iganga in Eastern Uganda.

Despite failing in the singles, Mirembe would prove the unsung hero in team events, notching vital victories, especially that 3-0 win over Laila Edwards which restored Uganda's lead against South Africa before Nakawala sealed the Round of 16 tie 3-1. By reaching the quarterfinals, the teenage trio had already hit the main goal of qualifying for the 2026 World Team Championships in London, the first time in Uganda's history. But the girls, guided by 1996 Olympian Paul Mutambuze, went three more steps ahead, including a 3-2 win over hosts Tunisia in the quarterfinals, and beating favourites Nigeria 3-1 in the semis.

Losing the final 3-0 to Egypt was no heartbreak after all silver—Uganda's first at this level—superseded the bronze they got in Addis Ababa in 2024. Yet that silver came days after Nakawala and Nangonzi's historic bronze in the doubles after defeating an overly experienced South African duo in the quarterfinals.

Little wonder, Nakawala was voted the most improved player on the continent following a perfect display.

October: Sheffield gold

The same week Nangonzi and Nakawala shone in Tunis, their younger 'siblings' were rewriting history at the World U12 Hopes Challenge in Sheffield. Anyango, the two-time U12 girls' champion, missed the podium, finishing eighth among 18. But Sebatindira, once more tormented his four opponents and won yet another global gold. This was a huge upgrade to his performance at the 2024 edition in Asuncion, Paraguay.

October: Sebatindira Dubai

From Sheffield, Anyango, Sebatindira and their coaches Mary Tendo Balyewunya and Alvin Katumba jetted to the United Arab Emirates for the World Table Tennis Youth Contender Dubai 2025 from October 21-24. In Group 1, Sebatindira beat Saudi Arabia's Abdulaziz Abbas and UAE's Fahed Almehrzi 3-0.

In the quarterfinals, he defeated Egyptian Saif Metawea 3-0. In the semis, he eliminated Iranian Mohammadmehdi Sabzevari 3-1, before defeating another Iranian Nikan Shirvani 3-0 in the final to win another U-11 world title.

Anyango's journey started at the quarterfinal where she defeated Kuwait's Aljoood Alsinawi 3-0, the same score she got against Canadian Tiffany Zhan in the semis. She was not as lucky in the final, falling 3-2 to Olesia Iliina in the final—settling for silver.