

# NextGen players seek early season statement in Nairobi

**Early Signal.** Uganda's highly rated junior tennis prospects have launched their 2026 season with a stern regional test in Nairobi for the ITF/CAT Eastern African Junior Individual and Team Championships; seeking silverware, qualification spots and early momentum under the watchful eye of experienced coaches.

BY INNOCENT NDAWULA

## NUMBERS GAME

- 12 - Participating countries
- 12 - Ugandan players selected
- 2 - Age categories (14 & Under, 16 & Under)
- 1 - Automatic qualification slot per category
- 2024 - Year Uganda won Boys 14 & Under title

Uganda's next generation of tennis talent landed in Nairobi earlier this week with a clear mission: to compete, contend and confirm their growing reputation on the Eastern African stage.

The national junior boys' and girls' teams will represent the country at the International Tennis Federation (ITF)/Confederation of African



**Go Flag High.** NCS and Uganda Tennis Association officials (R) hand over the national flag to Team Uganda captain Samuel Okello ahead of their trip to Nairobi earlier this week. PHOTO/INNOCENT NDAWULA

Tennis (CAT) Eastern African Junior Individual and Team Championships running from January 14-22, with qualification to the African Junior Teams' Championships firmly in sight.

Twelve countries are taking part in the tournament organised by the CAT in conjunction with the ITF and Tennis Kenya, making the Nairobi stop a crucial barometer of Uganda's junior progress.

## Familiar names

Uganda's challenge will be led by a

## THE EARLY BIRDS

### Momentum Matters.

Beyond medals, the Nairobi championships represent a tone-setter for Uganda's tennis season, where early success could sharpen confidence, validate development structures and inspire a new wave of juniors aiming to transition from promise to podium finishes.

blend of emerging stars and recognisable names, including the ambidextrous, double-backhanded Samuel Okello in the 16-and-under boys' category and Cillian Asante Ndilima, the son of former Uganda tennis ace and late Uganda Tennis Association (UTA) chairman Cedric Babu Ndilima.

Their presence adds pedigree and expectation to a squad shaped through the Junior Tennis Initiative (JTI), a long-term development pathway designed to nurture talent from grassroots to elite junior com-

## TEAM UGANDA

**16 & Under Boys:** Samuel Okello, Sebbi Muzamil Rajab, Cillian Asante Ndilima

**14 & Under Boys:** Abbey Damba, Faraje Ali, Daniel Ogen

**16 & Under Girls:** Lilian Ayee, Faith Florence Aber, Mary Tendo

**14 & Under Girls:** Michelle Amito, Florence Nabulime, Anena Angel

**Technical Staff:** Edward Odockcen (*Head Coach*), Patience Athieno (*Assistant Coach*), Nabatanzi Victoria (*Team Manager*)

petition.

## Female firepower

The girls' teams carry equal promise, with Faith Florence Aber and Mary Tendo expected to spearhead Uganda's push in the 16-and-under category, alongside Lilian Ayee. In the 14-and-under bracket, Michelle Amito, Florence Nabulime and Anena Angel complete a youthful but competitive lineup.

Their performances will be closely watched as Uganda continues to strengthen female participation and competitiveness on the continental junior circuit.

## Defending honour

Uganda arrived in Nairobi carrying added responsibility as defending champions in the Boys' 14-and-under category, a title they lifted at the 2024 Zone Championships. That success has raised expectations but also belief that the country's junior programme is capable of sustained excellence.

Only one team per age group and gender earns automatic qualification to the African Junior Teams' Championships later in the year, making every match critical.