

# Queen Cranes plot to run at Zambia

BY M. MUZIRANSA

**KAMPALA.** This weekend, Uganda will continue its quest to the September 5-27 Fifa U-20 Women's World Cup (WWC) in Poland.

The Queen Cranes turn their focus to Zambia in the third round of the Caf U-20 WWC Qualifiers due this Saturday at Fufa Stadium Kadi-ba.

Coach Sheryl Botes' side defeated Namibia 5-0 on aggregate in the previous round and must now overcome Zambia in two legs - the second due on February 14 in Zambia.

"We have to run at Zambia," Botes told the media as she declared her intentions to throw the kitchen sink at the Young Copper Queens.

"We are leaving no small details. Of course we are still teaching football but the mentality we are planting in the girls is that we have to do everything to beat Zambia," Botes added.

## Hoodoo

This U-20 battle to the World Cup always feels like an unfulfilled story for the Queen Cranes. In 2013, after beating South Sudan 22-0 on aggregate in the preliminary qualification round and earning a first round walk over against Egypt, Uganda pulled out of the qualifiers "to develop its women's football" at the final stage with a match against Ghana in offing. Ghana beat Equatorial Guinea then to make it to their third 2014 U-20 World Cup. Uganda returned three editions later in 2020 under the guidance of coach and national team legend Oliver Mbekeka but were eliminated 4-2 by Tanzania in the preliminary qualification phase.

In the 2022 qualifiers, Uganda, then under coach Ayub Khalifa, earned a first round bye then beat Kenya 10-3 on aggregate in the second round. They narrowly defeated South Africa 1-0 in the third round but fell 7-1 to Ghana in the penultimate qualification round.

In 2024, Uganda got another first round bye, then destroyed Mozambique 8-0 on aggregate in the second round. But coach Ayub Khalifa's side fell 2-1 to Senegal in the third round of qualifiers.

Botes is tasked with getting Uganda over the line in the biannual tournament and in Zambia lies a familiar foe.