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COSAFA U20 CHAMPIONSHIP KICKS OFF IN MOZAMBIQUE

By Enock Phiri



The 2026 COSAFA Under-20 Championship gets underway in Mozambique this afternoon, with Zambia opening their campaign against Malawi in a Group C clash at Zimpeto Stadium in Maputo.

The Junior Chipolopolo face the Junior Flames at 15:00 CAT, with Zambia coach Perry Mutapa calling for a strong start as the team begins its pursuit of a 13th regional title and, more importantly, qualification for the CAF U20 Africa Cup of Nations.

Mutapa says getting the opening match right will be crucial in setting the tone for the tournament.

“It’s good that we are here and it’s very important that we start very well and do well because we want to set the tone for the tournament as a team,” Mutapa said during his pre-match press conference.

The coach expects a tough test from Malawi, pointing to the history between the two nations at youth level.

“Malawi is a good team, so we know it’s a stronger side. It being our first game, we have to be at our best to make sure we don’t disappoint in our first game,” he said.

Although Zambia are targeting a record 13th COSAFA U20 title, Mutapa says the team’s ambitions extend beyond regional success.

“Yes, it’s a COSAFA tournament, but the ultimate goal is to qualify for the AFCON U20,” he said.

Mutapa explained that reaching the continental tournament would provide Zambia with another opportunity to pursue qualification for the FIFA U20 World Cup.

“So for us, it’s not about the record to win the 13th title. Most importantly, it’s to qualify to the Africa Cup because when we qualify to the Africa Cup again, there is an opportunity to qualify for the World Cup,” he said.

Zambia head into the tournament after completing their preparations with a final warm-up match against Lusaka side Lonsangels, where they scored five goals.

Mutapa said the match provided valuable work for the team’s finishing, with several strikers finding the net.

“We scored five goals, which is very good, and most of our strikers scored. It’s about how they have been taking the training sessions, more especially in terms of finishing. These are the things we identified before coming here,” he said.

Malawi, however, are equally confident ahead of the opening encounter.

Junior Flames coach Enos Chatama believes his side has the quality and experience to compete with Zambia, with several players having previously featured together in Malawi’s junior national teams, including at Under-17 level.

“We have what it takes to face Zambia because we have met them before in COSAFA. The boys have improved, the morale is sky-high in camp and we have a strong team,” Chatama said.

Chatama also highlighted the influence of foreign-based players Yusuf Natunga, Mwisho Mhango and Eli Rundles, whose experience outside Malawi has added another dimension to the squad.

The Junior Flames enter the tournament determined to navigate Group C and push for a place at the CAF U20 Africa Cup of Nations.

For Zambia, today’s encounter is the first step towards achieving the same objective.

Mutapa has also appealed for patience and support for what he described as a new youth team.

“The message is clear. FAZ wants us to qualify. This is a youth team and it’s new, so they have to support the team, not destroy it. We are doing every possible thing to make our people happy back at home,” he said.

Zambia and Malawi are joined by Comoros and Botswana in Group C.

FRIDAY’S COSAFA U20 FIXTURES
12:00 CAT — Mauritius vs Namibia
15:00 CAT — Zambia vs Malawi
18:00 CAT — Mozambique vs Seychelles

ZANACO LADIES SIGN PROLIFIC MAYLAN MULENGA

By Lucky Chama



Zanaco Ladies Football Club have strengthened their attack with the signing of prolific Green Buffaloes Women striker Maylan Mulenga ahead of the 2026 transition season.

Mulenga joins Zanaco Ladies on a season-long loan from Green Buffaloes Women, having scored in double digits in each of the last three seasons.

The striker’s consistent goalscoring record adds firepower to Zanaco’s attack as the club prepares for the transition season.

Zanaco have also completed the signings of midfielder Precious Phiri and attacking midfielder Rudrah Longa.

Phiri joins from Luyando Foundation on a two-year contract, while Longa has signed a two-year deal after moving from Lusaka Sky Sports FC.

The club confirmed the arrivals as part of its preparations for the 2026 transition season, with the three players expected to add quality and depth to the squad.

Mulenga’s arrival will be closely watched given her recent goalscoring consistency, while Phiri and Longa provide additional options in midfield and attack.

Zanaco Ladies said they were thrilled to welcome the three new signings

MALAMBO: RESERVE LEAGUES CAN BRIDGE AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT GAP

By Lucky Chama



Football strategy and development expert Franklyn Malambo says structured and competitive reserve leagues could provide the missing link between youth and senior football in Africa.

Malambo argues that many players become too advanced for youth football but are not yet ready to take leading roles in senior teams, leaving some to disappear from the game.

He says reserve leagues can provide an important development pathway from youth football to senior football.

"A reserve league gives clubs an environment where emerging players can compete regularly, make mistakes, develop and gradually prepare for senior football," Malambo said.

He believes the pressure on first-team coaches to win can sometimes limit opportunities for player development, making reserve competitions important for clubs seeking to develop talent without compromising first-team results.

Malambo also says competitive reserve football can help clubs use data to assess player development and make better decisions about loans.

"Development should not only be based on what a coach sees in training. Competitive football gives clubs an opportunity to collect meaningful performance data and objectively assess whether a player is progressing and ready for the next level," he said.

According to Malambo, reserve leagues could also strengthen national-team player pools by ensuring emerging players are regularly exposed to meaningful competitive football before being called up.

"Players become more visible, more traceable and more accustomed to competitive football before they are called into national teams," he said.

There are also economic benefits for clubs, Malambo says, as developing players internally could reduce transfer costs while creating potential income from future transfers.

However, he cautions that reserve competitions must remain focused on development rather than simply providing additional matches for senior players who are not making the first team.

"A reserve league cannot simply become another competition for 25 senior players who cannot make the first team, it must be about development," Malambo said.

He proposes measures such as age limits, restrictions on over-age and first-team players, minimum participation requirements for eligible development players and clear registration links between reserve and senior teams.

Malambo acknowledges that financial constraints could make a reserve league difficult for many African clubs but says the competition does not have to begin as an expensive national league.

He suggests regionalising competitions, using existing infrastructure, staging reserve matches as curtain-raisers to senior fixtures and having football federations support costs such as referees, administration and basic equipment through existing development funding mechanisms.

"This does not have to start as another expensive 30-match national league. It can start small, prove its value and grow," he said.

Malambo points to South Africa's Diski Challenge and various European development models as examples of reserve football, while stressing that Africa does not need to copy Europe.

"The lesson is not that Africa should copy Europe but that a player development pathway needs competitive football at every important transition point," he said.

Malambo believes action is necessary despite the challenges.

"Trying something does not guarantee success but not trying guarantees that the gap remains," he said.



BANDA TARGETS MORE TROPHIES AT ORLANDO PRIDE AFTER CONTRACT RENEWAL

By Lucky Chama



Zambian international forward Barbra Banda is targeting more trophies with Orlando Pride after signing a new long-term contract that will keep her at the club through the 2029 NWSL season.

The Pride announced the contract renewal on Monday, securing the services of the Copper Queens captain as she continues to build a successful career in Orlando.

Banda said she felt at home at the club and was excited to continue her journey with the Pride.

"I'm so excited because I feel at home when I'm here, and I feel like I've made this place my second home," Banda told Orlando-Pride.com.

The Zambian forward has enjoyed a highly successful spell in Orlando since joining the club in 2024.

In her first season, Banda scored 13 goals and provided six assists, earned an NWSL Best XI First Team selection and was named BBC Women's Footballer of the Year.

She also helped Orlando win its first NWSL Shield and NWSL Championship in the same season, scoring the winning goal in the championship match and being named Championship MVP.

Reflecting on that campaign, Banda said the teamwork and spirit within the squad were key to their success.

"Honestly, I came in, I knew it was a tough league and a lot of expectations. But I think when I go back to 2024, we really did well, and the teamwork that we had, the spirit we played with," she said.

"I believe we still have a great team, and we still want to win more trophies together."

Banda has since established herself among the league's prolific forwards, scoring 41 goals in 62 appearances across all competitions over her time at the club.

After missing half of the 2025 season, she has returned strongly in 2026, scoring 16 goals in 20 matches and surpassing the club's previous single-season record of 13 goals.

Her current scoring form has also placed her in contention for the NWSL Golden Boot.

Banda credited her teammates and coaching staff for helping her develop while competing in what she described as one of the world's best leagues.

"I've learned a lot from this league. I would say it's one of the best leagues in the world because the teams are so competitive, and you never go into a game relaxed," she said.

"You need to up your game each and every time. You need to be mentally fit, physically fit. It's a battle you need to win."

The Copper Queens captain also praised the support she receives from Orlando's fans, saying their presence provides motivation for the team.

"It means a lot because I think they give us so much motivation," Banda said. "We are playing at our home and with our fans, it gives us the courage to keep on and to fight for them."

With her future now secured, Banda has set her sights on adding more silverware to her Orlando career.

"The future is bright," she said. "I still want to win more trophies and more things to come to this team, and I'm ready to fight for this club and everyone."

MUSHIPI APPOINTED ZAMBIA ATHLETICS INTERIM NATIONAL HEAD COACH

By Enock Phiri



Zambia Athletics has appointed Sydney Ackim Mushipi as Interim National Head Coach as the federation moves to strengthen the coordination of the country's national technical programme.

The decision was reached by the Zambia Athletics Executive Committee at its meeting on 12 September 2026, with experienced coach Douglas Molo appointed Interim National Deputy Head Coach.

Mushipi brings extensive national, continental and international coaching experience, particularly in sprints and hurdles.

His previous roles include National Head Sprints and Hurdles Coach, High Performance Coach, Zambia Athletics National Lecturer, Confederation of African Athletics (CAA) Lecturer, World Athletics Lecturer and Coach Developer.

He has also occupied senior coaching positions at major multi-sport and youth competitions, including the Africa Youth Games, Youth Olympic Games, Youth Commonwealth Games and Africa Games.

At the World Junior Championships in Eugene, USA, Mushipi served as Chief Coach and Team Leader, adding further international experience to his coaching profile.

The coach holds advanced World Athletics qualifications, including Level 3 certification and a World Athletics Coaching Diploma, as well as a Diploma in Sports Science and Coaching from Mainz University in Germany.

Molo also brings considerable coaching and technical experience, with Zambia Athletics expressing confidence that the combined expertise of the two coaches will contribute to the development of athletes and coaches.

Under the new structure, Mushipi will be responsible for coordinating the national technical programme and putting the national technical team in place.

Coaches currently working with individual professional athletes will retain their existing arrangements with those athletes and their representatives.

However, when dealing with the national team and Zambia Athletics' national programme, all coaches and technical officials will work under and report to Mushipi.

The federation has called on coaches and technical officials to provide the necessary support and cooperation as the interim head coach takes up his responsibilities.

Zambia Athletics has also confirmed that all other existing appointments within the technical and coaching structures remain unchanged.

Female coaches are expected to be added to the national technical team at a later stage following further consultations.

The federation said the strengthened structure is intended to improve coordination within the national programme while continuing to support Zambia's athletes and coaches.

Zambia Athletics also acknowledged the continued support of the Government, Ministry of Youth, Sport and Arts, National Sports Council of Zambia, partners, sponsors and other stakeholders towards the development of athletics.

Mushipi and Molo now take charge of the national technical structure with the task of coordinating Zambia's athletics programme and supporting the country's athletes on the national and international stage.

ZAMBIA FACE ZIMBABWE IN HANDBALL SEMI-FINAL

By Lucky Chama

Zambia have booked their place in the semi-finals of the IHF Nations Trophy after completing a perfect group-stage campaign with a commanding 40–10 victory over Namibia.

The Copper Queens of handball led 18–8 at half-time before pulling further away in the second half to secure their third consecutive group-stage victory.

The result sees Zambia advance to the last four, where they will face Zimbabwe in the semi-final.

Jane Mwanza was named Player of the Match following another impressive performance from the Zambian side.

Zambia maintained their focus and dominance throughout the encounter, completing the group stage with three wins and now turning their attention to the semi-final against Zimbabwe.

In the other semi-final, South Africa, who finished second in Group A, will face Mozambique.

The semi-finals will determine the teams that advance to the final of the inaugural IHF Nations Trophy.



NALUMANGO CLEARED TO PLAY FOR SOUTH AFRICA

By Lucky Chama



Former Zambia Under-17 and Under-20 defender Milimo Nalumango has been named in South Africa's final 23-member squad for the CAF Under-20 Africa Cup of Nations COSAFA Qualifier starting Friday in Mozambique.

South Africa U20 head coach Raymond Mdaka confirmed that Nalumango has been cleared by FIFA and the Football Association of Zambia (FAZ) to represent Amajita at the tournament.

Nalumango, who previously featured for Zambia at the Under-20 Africa Cup of Nations, is set to face his former country's neighbours after earning a place in South Africa's squad.

Mdaka said he was initially surprised when Nalumango joined the team because of his previous involvement with Zambia, but the coaching staff followed the required procedures after the player and his parents expressed an interest in him representing South Africa.

"I was shocked the day he came to the session. I felt it's not here [not on list] because he played for Zambia," Mdaka said.

He said Nalumango had already spent considerable time in South Africa and had established relationships with several players in the squad.

"The boy has been here for some time. It's just that he has played for Zambia. He has been with most of the boys that are here," he said.

Mdaka said the South African technical team then formally engaged the relevant authorities to ensure the player's eligibility was properly addressed.

"But what we did, so that we are not caught on the wrong side, immediately the boy came and showed an interest, and the parents showed an interest, we decided to go professionally," he said.

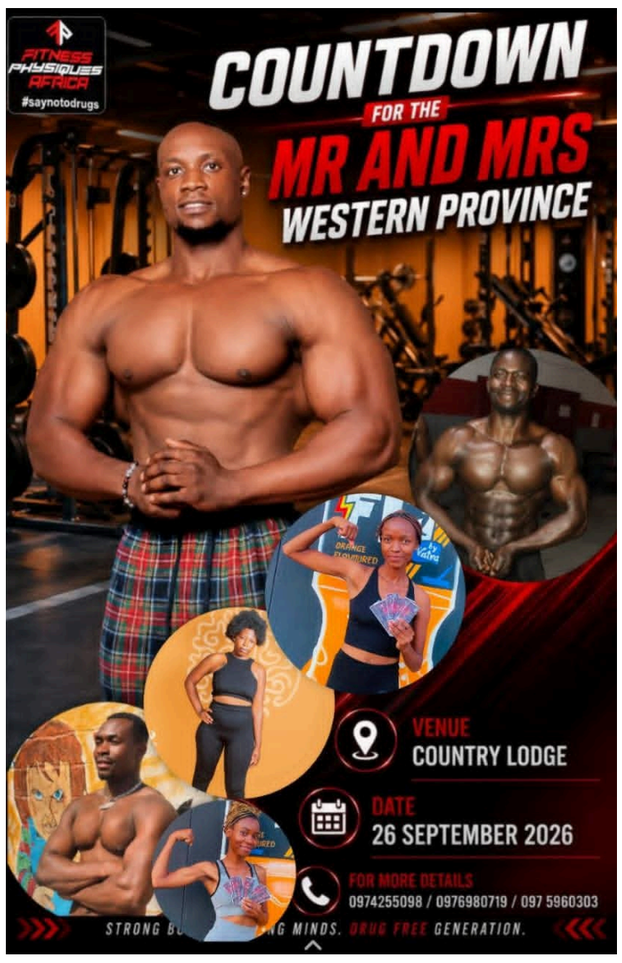
"So we went to the office to indicate that there is this situation. There is this boy, we want to do this. And we engaged with FIFA. They told us the processes. We followed the processes."

According to Mdaka, FIFA subsequently engaged FAZ before the necessary clearance was granted.

"They engaged with Zambia until at long last they were able to allow us and at least the boy to be able to play for South Africa," he said.

South Africa depart for Mozambique on Thursday ahead of the tournament, where they have been drawn against Lesotho, Angola and Eswatini in the group stages.

The tournament gets underway on Friday and will bring together 12 teams competing for regional honours and qualification opportunities under the CAF Under-20 AFCON/COSAFA competition.



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NSCZ POSTPONES REGIONAL WALK FOR LIFE AND GOLF TOURNAMENT

By Lucky Chama



The National Sports Council of Zambia (NSCZ) has postponed the 2026 Regional Walk for Life and Golf Tournament, with the event now set to be held as a national event.

The event, initially scheduled for September 26 and 27, will now take place on October 3 and 4, 2026.

The venues remain unchanged, with the Walk for Life scheduled for Maramba Stadium and the Golf Tournament at Livingstone Royal Golf Club.

NSCZ Director/Chief Executive Officer Sombwa Musunsa said the decision to postpone the event had been necessitated by circumstances beyond the council's control.

Musunsa said this year's edition would be hosted as a "National" event instead of the "Regional" event used in previous editions.

"Due to circumstances beyond our control, this year's edition will be hosted as a 'National' event and not a 'Regional' event as it has been the case in previous editions," Musunsa said.

He urged participants, sponsors, partners and other stakeholders to take note of the change and plan accordingly.

The NSCZ said it regretted any inconvenience caused by the postponement and remained committed to delivering a successful, safe and impactful event.

Further updates, including programme information, will be communicated through the NSCZ's official Facebook page.

ZAMBIA TO BE REPRESENTED BY TWO ATHLETES AT IMMAF WORLD CUP

By Lucky Chama



Zambia will be represented by two athletes at the 2026 International Mixed Martial Arts Federation (IMMAF) Angola Dipanda Open World Cup, after Mixed Martial Arts Zambia (MMA Zambia) failed to facilitate travel for the full 10-member national team.

The tournament is scheduled for Luanda, Angola, from September 17 to 20.

MMA Zambia had selected 10 athletes for the competition but said it was unable to facilitate the travel of the full team despite preparations and efforts by the federation.

The federation, however, confirmed that reigning female flyweight gold medallist Mutinta Mweene and men's bantamweight bronze medallist Perfecto Chanda will compete at the World Cup.

"Their participation has been made possible through the support of MMA stakeholders within Zambia, Angola and South Africa, who have facilitated their travel, accommodation and coaching in Angola," MMA Zambia said in a press release.

The federation thanked all those who contributed towards ensuring that Mweene and Chanda could represent Zambia at the international competition.

"MMA Zambia sincerely thanks everyone who has contributed towards ensuring that Mutinta and Perfecto have the opportunity to carry the Zambian flag at this World Cup," the federation said.

Mweene goes into the competition as the reigning female flyweight gold medallist, while Chanda won a bronze medal in the men's bantamweight category at the 2026 IMMAF Africa Championships.

Zambia will also have representation in officiating, with Malachy McAllister appointed as an official at the competition.

"We congratulate him on another international officiating appointment and wish him every success in Angola," MMA Zambia said.

The federation said it was proud to have the Zambian flag represented in both competition and officiating at the World Cup.

"On behalf of MMA Zambia and the wider Zambian MMA community, we wish Mutinta, Perfecto and Malachy the very best as they represent our country on the international stage," the statement said.

MULENGA CALLS FOR CONTINUOUS MONITORING OF YOUNG PLAYERS

By Lucky Chama



Former Zambia international winger Clifford Mulenga has called for continuous monitoring and development of young players to ensure talent is not lost between national youth teams.

Mulenga was speaking following the selection of Zambia's squad for the U20 COSAFA/CAF Africa Cup of Nations qualifying tournament, congratulating those selected while urging those left out to continue working towards their opportunities.

"These are once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. Embrace them, work hard, represent Zambia with pride and, most importantly, use this platform as a springboard to greater heights in your football careers," Mulenga said.

He said players who miss out on selection at one age group should not be allowed to disappear from the national development system.

"At U20 level, many talented young footballers disappear from the football pathway if they are not properly managed, monitored and given clear opportunities to progress," he said.

Mulenga said he expected to see a significant number of players from the U17 generation that made history by qualifying Zambia for the FIFA U-17 World Cup continuing into the U20 pathway.

He stressed, however, that this should not mean automatic selection.

"Football selection must always be based on current performance, positional requirements, tactical considerations, physical development and the needs of the team," Mulenga said.

"My concern is what happens after selection or non-selection. A player who does not make the U20 team should not simply disappear from the system."

Mulenga specifically named several players from the historic U17 generation whom he believes should continue to be monitored, including Nthasilwe Malupande, Felix Phiri, Vincent Mutondo, Mapalo Simute, Gabriel Phiri, Mike Mutale, Kelvin Mulenga Chipelu, Joseph Zulu, Robert Banda, James Sibene, Savior Mwansa, Steven Lungu, Bongani Ndhlovu, Rodgers Simumba, Wiseman Nyirenda and Emmanuel Mbuti.

He also said several other players within the Football Association of Zambia database should continue to be monitored and developed.

Mulenga further questioned the continuity of players identified during the FIFA talent identification process, saying he was surprised that none of the players from that U17 generation who impressed Arsène Wenger were included in the current U20 squad.

"That, in itself, should encourage us to ask an important question: How do we ensure that the talent identified at 15, 16 and 17 years old is still being developed when those players reach 18, 19 and 20?" he asked.

The former international called for a structured national player pathway linking the U15, U17 and U20 programmes, with players tracked beyond tournaments and assessed regularly.

He said players who fall outside a particular squad should be given opportunities to return to the system.

"If we are serious about building a competitive Zambia for the 2028 Olympics and the 2030 FIFA World Cup, our planning cannot begin when players reach senior international level," Mulenga said.

"It must begin much earlier."

Mulenga said the pathway should run from U15 → U17 → U20 → U23 → Senior National Team, supported by continuity, monitoring, competition, education and proper player management.

"We have talent. We have young footballers capable of making history. Our responsibility is to make sure that when one generation opens the door, we don't lose them before they have had the opportunity to walk through it," he said.

"Develop the player. Protect the pathway. Build the nation."