

Bodybuilding 2017: Is Mubikirwa the last man standing in the game?



The two giants. 2017 Mr Kampala, Isaac Mubikirwa (right), edged the 2016 winner Andrew Ssenoga. The latter has relocated to Germany. PHOTO BY JB SSENKUBUGE

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By Abdul-Nasser Ssemugabi

At the 2016 Mr Uganda final Isaac Mubikirwa finished third. His huge-but-not-well-toned torso and legs were not good enough to beat crowd favourite Lameck Muwanga or eventual champion Andrew Ssenoga. He needed to put in some work for future honours.

Six months later, at the 2017 Mr Kampala Championship, Mubikirwa looked a very improved athlete. He maintained his huge trunk, but most importantly worked for that clearly defined six-pack, and his legs were just perfect.

That is what you must have to stand any chance against Ssenoga, who is naturally that and more. Having won the light heavy and heavyweight categories respectively Mubikirwa and Ssenoga, met in a six-man.

It wasn't enough; the challenger and the champ tied. When they faced off in a tiebreaker, Mubikirwa, the audacious prince, edged the resolute king.

To the Hotel Grand Global crowds, who had fervently been singing Mubikirwa's name, the judges' choice was poetic justice.

Last man standing?

After the 2016 INBA World Championship, Ivan Byekwaso, the man who had customised Ugandan bodybuilding,

before conquering the world in 2015, defected to Germany.

Mubarak Kizito, who got silver at the aforementioned championship in Hungary, also abandoned local events and has camped in South Africa having been frustrated more than twice by failure to enter bigger tournaments in the US.

Ssenoga, who had appeared the man to dominate the local scene (like Byekwaso who won five Mr Uganda crowns in a row) has also relocated to Germany, with huge hopes of settling there.

With all those defections, Mubikirwa remained the man to beat at the 2017 Mr Uganda Championship. Gulu's Derrick Olara looked very good and could have caused an upset just like Anatolius Kato of Fit for Life Gym. But Mubikirwa bravely flexed his way to victory at Hotel Equatorial November 19.

However questions linger: Is Mubikirwa the last man standing? Shall he keep around to enhance his brand? What are his chances now that being Mr Uganda, he won't be allowed to defend his (lesser) Mr Kampala crown?

Shall he attempt to emulate his seniors by hitting the international stage or switching address?

Whatever he chooses the national federation must be concerned because the (unrewarding) sport needs a face, an icon.

Fitness queen dethroned her

If 2016 was the year of breaking the barriers, 2017 has been of competition among the ladies. Hafswa Nalumansi and Irene Nakimbugwe, who appeared at the Mr Kampala and Mr Uganda contests last year, did not return to stage. But that wasn't to leave Irene Kasuubo competing against herself.

Precedent had been set. At the 2017 Mr Kampala Championship, four ladies stormed the stage. Kasuubo proved again that she is still the fitness queen as she defended her Miss Kampala Fitness crown.

The competitors, especially runner-up Lydia Nannozi, were in some promising shape.

Sometimes it's a thin line between confidence and complacency.

But prior to the 2017 Mr Uganda Championship, defending champion Kasuubo vowed to retain her crown, no matter what competition would throw at her. "I'm ready for even greater things...bodybuilding is my passion," she said.

Come the day (or the night), Kasuubo could not believe what 'competition was throwing at her'. Nannozi was fit, posing well, and most importantly, won over the crowds, which boosted her confidence (and that's key in this sport).

Nannozi grabbed that crown off Kasuubo's head to become the new fitness queen, the 2017 Miss Uganda Fitness champ. 2018 will present the challenge to redo the heroics.

But Kasuubo has a reason to smile after securing sponsorship from Spear Motors. Her Facebook videos as she poses with the brand new Jeep Cherokees show it all.



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