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## Kenya chess: Male player dons disguise to compete as woman

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CHESS KENYA

Stanley Omondi disguised himself as a woman so he could play in the 2023 Kenya Open's female category

**By Celestine Karoney**

BBC Sport Africa, Nairobi

**It was a bold gambit by the 25-year-old Kenyan chess player to disguise himself as a woman to compete in his country's female open chess tournament.**

Dressed head to toe in a burka and wearing spectacles, Stanley Omondi had registered himself as Millicent Awour.

But Omondi's daring move was exposed as the organisers got suspicious by the unknown player's success.

In his defence, he later wrote in an apologetic letter seen by the BBC that he had "financial needs".

He also said that he was "ready to accept all consequences". Omondi did not respond to the BBC's request for comment.

Chess Kenya president Bernard Wanjala said that while he was likely to get a ban of "several years", he would not be excluded from chess for ever.

"We didn't have any suspicion at first, because wearing a hijab is normal," Wanjala told BBC Sport Africa.

"But along the way, we noticed he won against very strong players... and it will be unlikely to have a new person who has never played a tournament [being very strong]."

His footwear and the fact that Omondi did not speak added to concerns.

"One of the red flags we also noticed [was] the shoes, he was wearing more masculine shoes, than feminine," Wanjala said.

"We also noticed he was not talking, even when he came to collect his tag, he couldn't speak, ordinarily, when you are playing, you speak to your opponent... because playing a chess game is not war its friendship."

Despite their reservations, officials allowed him to continue, afraid they might be accused of profiling because of the religious attire and only ejected him in the fourth round.

"When he advanced, after he won a very strong match and we called him, he was not surprised," according to Wanjala.

"He acknowledged that indeed he is a man. He regrets what happened, apologised and said he was only doing that because he had financial difficulties and thought winning the title will help him overcome."



| Chess Kenya say Stanley Omondi's case is the first of its kind in the country

The Kenya Open, which was held last week, is an annual competition based in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi.

This year's edition attracted over 400 players from 22 countries. Ninety-nine were registered in the women's category where the winner would take home over \$3,000 (£2,400).

Omondi is a known chess player, but Wanjala believes he thought his odds would be better in the women's category given the higher standard of play in the men's part of the tournament.

While Kenya's chess federation has dealt with cases of age cheating before, this type of fraud is a first of its kind.

The case has been referred to the body's disciplinary committee which is expected to give a ruling in the next couple of days.

"It is an extreme case, the verdict may include a ban. I rule out a life ban, but he may be given several years' ban from playing chess," Wanjala explained.

The case will also be referred to the international federal, he added.

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