



Designated Minister Vincent Meriton, who is also responsible for social affairs, community development and sports, community development and sports principal secretary Denis Rose, National Sports Council chief executive Alain Volcère were present along with Seychelles Football Federation (SFF) chairman Elvis Chetty to watch the high-profile match.

St Michel had promised to go on the offensive and in the bright sunshine and in front of a large crowd they nearly opened the scoring in the first minute as Malagasy Jean-Del'Or Tsaralaza collected a crossfield pass and fed the overlapping Alex Nibourette who tested Kenyan goalkeeper Boniface Otieno who just managed to turn the ball into corner.

The Kenyans responded in the fifth minute from the impressive Khalid Aucho's free-kick which David Ochieng met with a glancing header and it sailed narrowly wide.

The Kenyan champions were rather cautious in this half as they relied on set pieces to have a go at St Michel. In the seventh minute, Nelson Laurence conceded a needless free-kick as he hassled for a high ball with Jesse Jackson Were. Once again Aucho tried to beat goalkeeper Sopha with the dead ball but the St Michel custodian saved the danger.

St Michel were given a warning of the ability of the Kenyans in the 10th minute as Ismael Dunga exchanged passes with Were but he shot wide in a good scoring position.

In the 22nd minute, St Michel were thankful to goalkeeper Nelson Sopha who produced two outstanding saves in succession to keep the Kenyans at bay. It all started as Were got the better of Allen Larue who was playing in the centre of defence and had a poor game. Were tried to slip the ball under the outrushing goalkeeper Sopha who blocked it with his body. The ball rolled to the same Were whose fierce shot produced another brilliant block from the St Michel custodian to deny the Kenyans, much to the relief of the local fans. However, the Kenyans had to pull off Edwin Ombasa who was playing on the right through injury and Moses Arita replaced him.

St Michel opened the scoring in the 27th minute from captain Don Anacoura's floated free-kick which was half cleared. The ball dropped to Del'Or who rolled it into the path of Gervais Waye-Hive who blasted it into the roof of the net for a 1-0 lead much to the joy of the local supporters.

But St Michel's joy was short-lived as the Kenyans equalised on the half-hour mark. St Michel' Laurence was penalised by the Comorian official for a clumsy foul on Aucho.

Ochieng stepped up from 35 metres to curl in a low free-kick past the desperate dive of goalkeeper Sopha to level matters at 1-1 to silence the home crowd.

St Michel threatened to restore their lead two minutes later as Malagasy Hassan Aly, who was making his debut, picked up a pass and his shot on the turn was pushed into corner by the Kenyan goalkeeper Otieno.

In the 40th minute, Tusker's striker Were pounced on a slip by Larue to bore on goal but goalkeeper Sopha stopped his low shot. St Michel also had a decent chance a minute later from Aly's corner which sailed over the Kenyan defence especially their giant defender and captain Joseph Ebenzi. The ball fell invitingly to Del'Or but he could not direct his close range header on target.

The Kenyan champions were a different proposition in the second half as St Michel remained on the back foot and in the first minute of this second period Robert Omonuk latched onto Jimmy Radafison's error to link up with Were but his shot was charged down by a busy

goalkeeper Sopha.

A minute later, Were had an even better chance as Radafison failed to control a long ball which Were brought down but he hurried his shot to force a flying save out of goalkeeper Sopha.

St Michel's three-man defence was struggling to cope with the Tusker onslaught and in the 50th minute Aucho failed to beat goalkeeper Sopha with a diving header from Ismael Dunga's inch-perfect cross.

Three minutes later, Were outfoxed Radafison but he blazed a decent opportunity way off the mark.

Tusker were dominant as St Michel were over-run with their speed and movement in midfield as well as their physique.

Therefore it was no surprise when the Kenyans took the lead in the 71st minutes with a neat bit of skill by substitute Michael Olunga whose flick and thunderous shot from 35 metres out flew into the far corner to make it 2-1.

St Michel had to react and in the 79th minute, Wilnes Brutus, who was anonymous for most of the match, raced onto a through pass but he made a meal of the chance.

A minute later, Aly broke on the left to centre into the Tusker penalty area but the ball was half-cleared to Laurence whose half-volley sailed agonisingly wide.

St Michel fell further behind in the 83rd minute as Aucho picked out substitute Andrew Sekayombya who climbed all over Bonne and directed his header into the far corner with goalie Sopha stranded for a 3-1 advantage.

Two minutes later, Tusker added salt to injury as defender David Ochieng burst from his own half to ride a couple of half-hearted challenges before unleashing an unstoppable shot which crashed into the roof of the net for a humiliating 4-1 score as the small number of vociferous Kenyan supporters made their voices heard in the crowd as they waved their national flag.

The Kenyans could and should have added a fifth in the third minute of injury time as Robert Omonuk countered swiftly to send a teasing cross which fell to Olunga but he missed a gaping goal.

But it did not matter as the Kenyans had been far superior to St Michel and have almost guaranteed qualification with such an emphatic result and performance away from home.

However, Tusker head coach Robert Matano was rather diplomatic when he spoke to Sports Nation.

"The tie is still not over as there is one more game to be played. But this is a very good result for my team and one which we expected as we have been training away from home and performing well. In the first half though, we were rather cautious as we studied our opponents' game plan. We also conceded due to a defensive error. In the second half we changed our strategy and sent on more offensive players to get this result," said coach Matano.

As for St Michel's coach Ralph Jean-Louis, he felt the difference was the level of readiness of the two teams.

"We lost because we lacked match fitness though we managed to contain them in the first half but in the second we just ran out of steam. I am disappointed but we cannot do much as the test matches have not been enough to raise our fitness level. However, I remain confident for the second leg as it will be a different story," coach Jean-Louis said.

St Michel will play the return leg during the weekend of March 1-3 against Tusker in Kenya.

R. J-L.