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TEAM OF THE WEEK
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ANOTHER DJOLIBA TALENT
HEADING TO CITY

Durban City are closing in on the signing of Djoliba left-back Alou Doumbia ahead of their debut season in the top-flight. The 23-year-old Mali youth international had an impressive season for the club, where they reached the group stages of the CAF Champions League. And he's set to join his former teammates Abdoulaye S. Mariko and Abdoulaye D. Mariko, who have both signed for Orlando Pirates, in South Africa. City, who appointed Gavin Hunt as head coach, have already finalised moves for Darren Keet, Lorenzo Gordinho and Nigerian centre-back Denis Nya.



SUNDOWNS MOVE ON FROM
BASADIEN INTEREST?

Mamelodi Sundowns are said to have informed Stellenbosch that they are not interested in making a move for Fawaaz Basadien due to his current asking price. Basadien, 28, has been the subject of interest from the big three but has thus far been priced out of a transfer from the Cape Winelands side. Sources within Stellies have confirmed Sundowns have ended their interest, for now, as they are more likely to strengthen their squad in other areas for the upcoming season.



BROOKS SET FOR SIWELELE MOVE
AFTER AMAZULU EXIT?

Former AmaZulu and TS Galaxy midfielder Ethan Brooks looks likely to make a move to Siwelele FC as a potential replacement for Siphesihle Ndlovu. Brooks, 24, is currently a free agent after leaving Usuthu, after refusing a wage cut at the club, alongside the likes of Rowan Human. And he looks poised to return to Gauteng, where Siwelele will likely be based for the 2025/26 season, who are in search of a new midfielder after Ndlovu's sale to Kaizer Chiefs.



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NKOTA, HUMAN, MAART LEAD RESURGENCE IN PSL EXPORTS

It's been a while since we've been able to look at the Premier Soccer League transfer window and see more than one or two exports outside the country, but it appears the winds of the sails are turning as we head into the 2025/26 season. Mohau Nkota heading to Saudi Arabia, Yusuf Maart to Austria, Tylon Smith to England – and Rowan Human appears poised to return to Israel in the coming weeks.

Nkota, 20, was confirmed to be joining Saudi Pro League side Al-Ettifaq on Sunday afternoon, in a deal that was, quite frankly, a huge surprise to many, as the player had been in Spain on pre-season with Orlando Pirates.

His absence in their opening two games raised a few questions, but to say many predicted that the newly capped Bafana Bafana winger, and one of last season's breakout stars, who is in contention for the Betway Premiership Young Player of the Season, would be heading to the oil rich country holding global superstars like Cristiano Ronaldo, would be far fetched.

As he embarks on a new journey to the Gulf, whether it's a good or bad career choice for an emerging talent, where the demands are to adapt, hit the ground running, or leave is a debate for another day. But it does beg the question – is this the start of the conveyor belt returning? The Saudi Pro League has the potential for generational wealth for many footballers, and this is for a player who started last season in the DStv Diski Challenge.

A few decades ago, players desired to leave the PSL, the desire was for life-changing contracts, but the commercialisation and investment in the league brought a comfort zone, and fewer of the prized talents made the moves expected, from your Teko Modise's, Itumeleng Khune – the stars of the 2010 era in the country.

Is the hunger returning? Or is the success of South Africa on the international stage bringing new sets of eyes and even perceptions of the talent Mzansi has to offer? From bronze at the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations, the U20 AFCON triumph, the U17's qualifying for the FIFA World Cup, Mamelodi Sundowns and Pirates reaching the latter stages of the CAF Champions League, and Masandawana also impressing at the FIFA Club World Cup...

South Africa is slowly, but surely, regaining its respect, and transfers are usually what follows when the markets yield talent that impresses on the big stage, be it international or continental areas.

Maart, one week shy of his 30th birthday, is currently in Austria, where his new season in the Bundesliga begins against RB Salzburg. Smith arrived in London this weekend to



start his new campaign at Queens Park Rangers. Ime Okon, in Germany, has signed with Hannover 96.

And Human is set to return to Israel, where he starred, albeit in the second tier on loan with Beitar Jerusalem, after parting ways with AmaZulu. While it may not be the Golden Arrows to Fulham transfers we looked upon back in 2009, when Kagiso Dikgacoi became the last PSL-to-Premier League move we witnessed. It's the start of something. When one player moves on, it provides an opportunity for another to shine.

The conveyor belt is required to develop a bigger talent pool for the national team, increase revenue for local clubs, and provide space for more talent to gain vital minutes to realise their potential. The lack of exports has plagued our game for more than a decade.

Even continentally, we have seen movements, as Rulani Mokwena returns to North Africa with MC Alger – and likely, as he did with Wydad AC, looks to South Africa for potential recruitments, having signed Cassius Mailula (FC Toronto) and Thembinkosi Lorch from Sundowns, both on loan.

Rushine de Reuck is another player on the radar of one of the giants in African football – and one to keep an eye on in the coming weeks... But this just shows the start of something potentially exciting on our domestic front.

Vuyo Letlapa from Sekhukhune United, who made his senior international debut alongside Nkota recently, has been the subject of interest of Austria Vienna, but whether that materialises into something, only time will tell.

For now, we just wait, observe, and enjoy – what could be the wheel, finally turning back to SA becoming a regular exporter of its finest talent, for the benefit of the nation's football and national team at large.

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JUNIOR: SALENG LOAN EXAMPLE OF PLAYERS NOT HAVING ENOUGH POWER

There was plenty of transfer news last week, but perhaps one of the biggest talking points was the decision of Orlando Pirates to loan Monnapule Saleng to his former team, Orbit College, who were only just promoted to the Betway Premiership.

Don't forget to catch match reaction moments after the final whistle, and more from Junior Khanye, Tso Vilakazi, Machaka, Lindo Pep, Nkululeko Nkewu and others on iDiskiTV.

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I Feel Sorry For Saleng - Junior Khanye

“This is an example of players not having enough power in our football.

“The powerful have the power to dictate our careers, whether we like it or not.

If Orlando Pirates were not satisfied with Monnapule Saleng, why did they extend his contract in the middle of their dispute with the player? They extended for two years, so why is he going out on loan?

“I think moving to Orbit College is going to completely demoralise Saleng.

“Orbit is not Pirates. Orbit will fight for their status, while Pirates fight for trophies.

“There will be a change of province. There is no glamour or fans where he is going. I feel really bad for Saleng.

“Let me ask another question. If Saleng has an alleged behaviour problem, why did Pirates sign Sipho Mbule? I’m just asking.

“I feel sorry for Saleng. He should have signed for a big team, or his agents should have found him a club overseas.”





CAN THE BUCS SHED THE BRIDESMAIDS' TAG?

By Matshelane Mamabolo

MAMELODI SUNDOWNS beware! Orlando Pirates are intent on shedding the bridesmaid's tag they've worn for the past three seasons. The Buccaneers' shopping spree for the upcoming campaign was a bold statement that they are tired of playing second fiddle to the Brazilians.

But can they dethrone the marauding Sundowns who have made the Premiership title their property for the past eight seasons? Will they depose the team that will go into the 2025/26

Betway Premiership campaign cock-a-hoop following their FIFA Club World Cup experience, which must surely have only served to make them all the more hungry for success?

A Pirates legend who also had a one-year stint at Sundowns at the beginning of his career says he cannot wait for the season to begin – such is his excitement at the Buccaneers' squad make-up for the upcoming campaign.

Albert Bashin Mahlangu, the former Pirates striker renowned for his scoring prowess via thunderous shots in the late 1980s until the mid-90s, believes the Soweto giants have made fantastic signings which should see them being competitive enough to seriously threaten Sundowns' stranglehold on the domestic championship.

"I am very excited," Mahlangu told iDiski Times.

"If I had it my way, the season should be starting now because I think Pirates are going to sizzle. Looking at the team from last season, they did a great job – we reached the semi-final of the CAF Champions League, finished not too far behind Sundowns in the league here and reached two domestic finals. To me, that

**BASHIN MAHLANGU:
"IF I HAD IT MY WAY,
THE SEASON SHOULD
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PIRATES ARE GOING TO
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IMAGE: ORLANDO PIRATES





**BRUCE RAMOKGADI:
“HOW ARE THEY GOING
TO PLAY WITH ALL THESE
CENTRAL MIDFIELDERS?
ONE OF THEM IS GOING
TO HAVE TO SIT OUT.”**

speaks to the fact that all we need to do is fix a few things, and we are going to be untouchable.”

And that fixing, Mahlangu believes, has been addressed with the off-season recruitment of players who were top performers at their previous clubs. All of Siphso Mbule, Oswin Appollis, Yanela Mbuthuma, Masindi Nemptajela, Tshepang Moremi, Sinoxolo Kwayiba, Nkosikhona Ndaba, Tshepo Mashiloane and announced on Monday, Kamogelo Sebelebele, will be donning the famous black and white jersey in the upcoming campaign.

Mahlangu was part of the club’s legends who welcomed the players into the fold prior to their departure to Spain for their pre-season, where they’ve already played two matches – against Bolton Wanderers (0-2) and Pafos FC (1-1) – and shared his pearls of wisdom with them.

“I spoke to them and I made them aware that ‘from outside it looks easy, but when you get inside Orlando Pirates it is hard’. So, they are all going to have to double up on their work rate. Can you imagine just how tough it will be for them to break into the team from last season? But they are top players whose presence is only going to help lift Pirates’ standard.”

Like most, Mahlangu points to Mbule and Appollis as the marquee signings: “Appollis and Mbule are bringing a different dimension to the team. Last year, the one player who held

the midfield for us was [Makhehlani] Makhaula because Tito [Maswanganyi] and [Thalente] Mbatha were on and off. I think if Siphso behaves and proves to all of us that he is the talented player we believe him to be, he will play a highly influential role. For me, this is his last chance for him and if he wastes it, then his time in football will be finished.

“At some stage before they announced he would be signed by Pirates, I needed a one-on-one with this boy because he did not seem to realise that he had something special that we were seeing, and he was clearly not. But I hope he heard me from the little that I was able to tell him.”

How will the new players fit in, though?

“That’s the question I am asking myself. I don’t know what system the coach is going to use. But now the pressure is going to be less on Rele [Relebohile Mofokeng], who carried the team last season because he will play with some freedom. You now have Appollis on the wing to help reduce the pressure on the young man.”

This much is already clear – Appollis created the goal that Mofokeng scored in the 1-1 draw with Pafos at the weekend.

“I’ve been impressed by Pirates in their two matches so far because even the new guys look to be fitting in well,” Mahlangu said.

The departure at the weekend of Mohau Nkota, Mahlangu says, is a move that should be celebrated instead of Pirates fans feeling they have lost out on a top player.

“It’s about time, let’s release them young. Nkota is going to open doors for other young stars – especially into that Saudi league, and be paid more money. I am happy for him and it’s good for him and Mzansi.”

According to Mahlangu, new coach Abdeslam Ouaddou is the right man to lead the team into the future following the three fairly good seasons under Jose Riveiro.

“I like the new coach we’ve found, he struck me as someone who did his research about Pirates and the players. I am imagining that if he could work with the material he had at Marumo Gallants, who had less resources, he would surely do very well at Pirates.”

The man they fondly referred to as aya chisa amateki during his playing days says the coach should ensure there’s competition for starting places.

“If this coach has to bring in competition – there must not be that feeling of ‘I know I am in the starting line-up’; each one must fight for his position. It must be that you are there because you will deliver. If we can have the competition,





the team will definitely perform better. What I really like is that these boys are of a younger age, so we can give this coach time to build. But he arrives on a huge, solid foundation that has been set. He must build on it.”

Mahlangu says Ouaddou has struck him as a ‘strict coach who is big on discipline’ – something he felt Pirates lacked a little bit of.

“Pirates have super talent, from the back all the way forward to attack. What I felt Pirates lacked was discipline, that thing that they can manage the game. Look at the Pyramids game – we scored two goals away, you should not lose a match from that position. Coaches are human and can make mistakes, yes, but as players, you need to do something on the pitch. At worst, we could have held that match 2-2, and we were into the final. When I met the players, I said to them they have to be the first South African team to add a second star on the jersey.”

Ahead of the season, Mahlangu says Pirates have put together a team strong enough to seriously challenge Sundowns. They just need to be confident to take charge on the pitch.

**BRUCE RAMOKGADI:
“I FEEL PIRATES NEEDED
A TOP INTERNATIONAL
PLAYER LIKE LUCAS
RIBEIRO AT SUNDOWNS,
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GOOD SITUATION OUT
OF NOTHING.”**

“In our generation, we were coaches ourselves. We were able to make decisions without instructions from the coach. If they can have that kind of attitude, the ability to change things on their own when things are not going as per the coach’s instruction, they will be on another level.”

He says the Buccaneers can be champions.

“For me, given the strength of this squad, Pirates is the only team that can beat Pirates. Yes, Sundowns are on another level, but they can be beaten. The boys that Pirates have added to the squad are very good players, and they are joining a team that is already good.”

While Mahlangu is excited about Pirates, another former Buccaneer has some reservations. Bruce Ramokgadi, who was part of the 1995 team that won the Africa Champions Cup, is excited by the potential combination of Mofokeng and Appollis.

“Oswin is the most important signing,” he says, adding that he foresees Mbule bringing some creativity to the heart of midfield.

“But how are they going to play because they have Mbatha and Makhaula and also that boy Nemtajela and yet another one. How are they going to play with all these central midfielders? One of them is going to have to sit out.”

Ramokgadi is of the view that the Pirates squad is not really complete.

“I think they really need a solid right-back. Yes, they’ve got [Deano] Van Rooyen, but he did not do well in the past season. Maybe he was still adjusting. They really need a right-back. I am also not sure about their left-back position now that [Paseka] Mako has left. I’ve heard that they are looking at signing [Fawaaz] Basadien. He would be a great addition.”

The soccer fraternity generally believes

Kwayiba and Mbuthuma are fantastic additions to the Pirates squad, but Ramokgadi is not convinced.

“For me, they don’t have that stature. I feel Pirates needed a top international player like Lucas Ribeiro at Sundowns, who can create a good situation out of nothing. Maybe they should have considered going into the African market for a quality international.”

The former national under-23 player also wonders about what the change of coach will do for Pirates.

“Continuity is very important. I suspect the club is going to struggle at the beginning because there are new players and a new coach who have to get used to each other. Maybe once they get used to him, they will deliver. The challenge is that the teams – especially the big ones like Pirates — are result-driven and we don’t know how long they will be patient with him.

“I don’t know what criteria they used to sign all these new players. But the thing with local clubs is that we don’t let the coaches sign the players they want – it is the club that signs the players, and sometimes that’s the problem.”





‘THE DAY I LOSE THAT PASSION IS THE DAY I STOP’

GAVIN HUNT has returned to the game following a frustrating two-month hiatus that came about after he was fired by SuperSport United. He is now in charge of newly-promoted Durban City, and the four-time Premiership title winner exuded the energy of a young coach starting out, eager to impress during a training match against Richards Bay at the SJ Smith Stadium right on the edge of Lamont in Durban. It was his 61st birthday, but Hunt was fully present – living every move his team made – typically cajoling the players, lamenting a bad move by flailing his arms about in the air or cupping his hands over his head in frustration. During the half-time break, he addressed a few players individually – animatedly showing them what they should have done in a particular move and sometimes putting his arm around one and gently advising them as a father would. At the end of the match they won 1-0, Hunt engaged in a lengthy discussion with Technical Director Ernst Middendorp before they were joined by club owner Farouk Kadodia who’d watched from the stands with a sizeable crowd of the men who live in the nearby hostel as well as a group of young kids who excitedly rushed to greet the players. He made time to speak to iDiski Times senior writer MATSHELANE MAMABOLO about his rebirth in a city and province he has never worked in as he continues to add more chapters to an illustrious career as the country’s longest-serving elite league coach.

MATSHELANE MAMABOLO: You’ve coached across South Africa, from Cape Town to Venda, Port Elizabeth and in Gauteng – now you’re in Durban for the first time. How’s it going?

GAVIN HUNT: Yes, it’s my first time coaching in Durban. The weather’s beautiful, though the facilities are lacking. I’ve only been here a few days, I didn’t know the players or the team well, but I watched the game [practice match against Richards Bay FC at the SJ Smith Stadium] and I was impressed.

MM: You were out of football for a short while. How was the experience of that period?

GH: That was the first time I was out for two months – and it was killing me. At



“IT’S MY FIRST TIME COACHING IN DURBAN. THE WEATHER’S BEAUTIFUL, THOUGH THE FACILITIES ARE LACKING.”

SuperSport [United], there were five or six games to go, but the change was made. We can argue the facts [of the team’s poor performances all day], but they did what they did [firing me], and I was disappointed because I thought, you know, I knew we could get out of it [relegation quagmire]. I believed we could’ve made the top eight. Behind the scenes, there were talks about the club being sold; many players were out of contract... You could see that the players were affected. It was tough. But the players gave me their all.

MM: You’ve coached many teams that have ceased to exist – Seven Stars, Hellenic, Moroka Swallows, Wits and now SuperSport. How do you reflect on your journey?

GH: Honestly, moving around isn’t my style. Wits getting sold changed everything. I probably would’ve stayed for seven/eight years. Then SuperSport again – and it got sold. The Chiefs job came at the wrong time, but I wanted to build something there. I also had an emergency stint at Chippa.

MM: How did this opportunity in Durban come about?

GH: Out of the blue, really. I don’t know what happened with the previous coaches, but I made the decision to come.





MM: Was it an easy decision to accept the role?

GH: I knew the pitfalls – this is a newly promoted side. So, there's the need to find your way a little bit, even though the club has been in the PSL before [as Maritzburg United]. You could start well because of all the excitement, but then it eventually levels [off]. It happened to me at Seven Stars, we'd gone 78 games unbeaten in the lower divisions, and then we got into the PSL, won the first few games, and we were top of the league. Then we went 12 games without a win. The PSL is a step up. Quality, pitches, opposition – it's all different. You have to adapt fast. And I've made them aware.

MM: You're used to working alone. What's the arrangement with Ernst Middendorp as the Technical Director?

GH: They told me Ernst would handle youth structures and help identify players. And he's said, he doesn't want to get involved with the Saturday results. He would like to do Monday to Friday: set up the youth development, the Diski side, set up the coaching structures, we need a proper training ground, and he will do that for us. And he'll help look for players. He's got a good network of people he knows, and that's important. We're both older and experienced, and we will get along just fine.

MM: What do you plan to achieve with this team?

GH: I want a competitive side that brings joy to the Chatsworth community, which will be our home ground. Most importantly, I want to build a stable club – in how we play, how we coach. That's the key.

MM: Your technical team includes familiar names. How's that coming together?

GH: Rowan Fernandes [the goalkeeper coach] is already here, and we're waiting on Kaitano Tembo [the assistant

“BEHIND THE SCENES, THERE WERE TALKS ABOUT THE CLUB [SUPERSPORT] BEING SOLD; MANY PLAYERS WERE OUT OF CONTRACT... YOU COULD SEE THAT THE PLAYERS WERE AFFECTED.”

coach].

MM: The chairman, Farouk Kadodia, has been in football for a long time. How do you foresee the working relationship with him?

GH: He's been great so far. He understands football and sticks to the budget. We don't want to overpay for underperformers. We're trying to build the best possible team within our means.

MM: How are you settling into life in Durban?

GH: It's still early days. I've been visiting Durban since the 80s as a player, but living here is new. Finding my way around has been a mission – thank goodness for GPS! Getting settled off the pitch is important for any coach or player.

MM: Though you are 61 now, your passion for the game is clearly still there. What keeps you going?

GH: The day I lose that passion is the day I stop. Those two months off were hard. People told me to take a break – I told them, when I take a break, it'll be permanent. I still love training, the day-to-day. I'm not ready to just sit and watch yet.

MM: What did you get up to during your time off?

GH: I played golf, went to the beach, got coffee... watched a lot of football. I even went overseas for a quick refresher of my A licence. But I missed the action – I'm happy to be back.

MM: Well, all the best, Coach and happy birthday once again.

‘WHEN ONE DOOR CLOSES...’

After spending months training players and not competing competitively, former Royal AM head coach JOHN MADUKA has found a new home. Maduka was announced as the new coach of Limpopo Betway Premiership outfit Magesi FC, replacing Owen Da Gama, who led the side to a 13th-place finish in their first season in the top flight. The details of the coach's contract have been kept under wraps, something that Maduka told iDiski Times writer LETHABO KGANYAGO at his unveiling, doesn't bother him. The Malawi-born mentor also speaks about the side's ambitious character as something that drew him to the club while also reflecting on the second half of the previous campaign, where AM didn't play a single match, which led to the KwaZulu-Natal side being expelled from the league for bringing it into disrepute.

Lethabo Kganyago: Coach, thank you for your time. Just to start, have you already seen the boys? Have you seen the facilities where you're going to train?

John Maduka: Yeah, I've seen where the team is training. I've seen the boys, but I haven't seen them in action. We are training tomorrow, but yes, I have seen where the team will be preparing for this coming season. There are so many programs that we're going to put into place, preparing for the season. So it's just the beginning, because the team has just been, I think, four days or so at training. There hasn't been much to do. So, yeah, there's still much work to do.

LK: What do you make of the squad?

JM: Look, like I said, I haven't seen the team playing. We have to check how the team is. Yes, we know some of the players already, and if needs be, that we have to reinforce the team here and there, we'll have to do that because, remember, the league itself, it's going to be very, very difficult. It's going to be very difficult because last season,

most of the teams did not do well, but also, at the end of the day, they don't take Magesi as a small team anymore; they take Magesi as a strong team. So that alone will make the league very, very difficult. So you need to have enough players. You must have depth in the team that if you're playing back-to-back games, you can be able to change the team anytime, and whoever goes and plays must still be able to do what the other player that has been playing was doing. So in other words, you want to form a team whereby, even if it's back-to-back games, anyone can play without people not seeing that the team is missing someone.

LK: Your employers don't want to talk much about contractual matters. Is that okay with you, or do you also know the agreements and what you have to do here?

JM: I mean it's not. I don't think it's important for me to speak about the contract. What I know is the team has brought me in to try and help the team, moving forward, take it to another level. I don't think, for me, it's necessary. It should be the manager that should be able to do that because I don't think it's necessary for me to say how long. I know I'm an ambitious coach, like I said, I want to do well. I want to do well, and I can't do well alone. I need the people on board, be part of me so that together, we'll be able to take this team forward. So, a very ambitious coach all the time will go to the game wanting to win. This one is no different.

LK: Obviously, the team won a trophy last season. Are there expectations to really compete in other competitions?

JM: In football, there will always be expectations. Like I said, it is a team that won a trophy last season. It's very important that this season the team to do well. What we want is to see the team doing well and make sure that we put the team on the map. You know,

people must respect this team, and you can be very respected. You can't just play good football without winning things. You must win things, and that's the most important thing. So yeah, a very challenging season but looking forward to it, and hope everything goes according to the plan.

LK: And personally, how are you because you haven't coached competitively for the majority of the last season, how are you, and how was that period?

JM: Not good because our job is to coach. So you stay a month without coaching sometimes, yes, you need that just to take away the mind of football, so that you refresh again. So it has got an advantage and a disadvantage, but it's very important as a human being, to rest a month or so, do something that's totally different. And when you come, you come fresh with a fresh mind, ideas and all good things.

LK: How would you describe your year so far, looking at all the challenges that you faced at your former club and to be able to be sitting here today? Is that why you also said this appointment is a special moment?

JM: It tells you that when one door closes, there's another one that always opens. So this opportunity means people have seen the good work that I've put together from the team that I'm coming from. So it's an honour and I'm very thankful to the chairman and his family for trusting in me. This is a millions project. You have to take it very, very seriously. So for somebody to think about me, he knows what I'm capable of. I'm not new to the game, so he knows what I can do, and I'm very thankful, once again, to the chairman and his family.

LK: Coach, can you describe how that period was, and even for the players?

JM: Oh, very, very difficult. Let me be honest with you, very difficult. You know you don't want anything like that to happen to any soccer player, coach, supporters or the management, because, as a coach now, you're training the team, but you're still not going to play the games. You don't know what's going to happen next. So, very difficult, because you don't know how to motivate them, where do you start? How do you start? You know, there's uncertainty, you're not sure what's going to happen. It's a very, very, very difficult thing. I don't think I can wish for any team to go through that, because players went through difficult times, the technical team went through difficult times. Management as well went through difficult times; the supporters, you know, everyone that was around the team went through very, very difficult times. I don't think it's something that you can wish for anyone to ever go through.

LK: In terms of transfers, your GM



"I DON'T THINK I CAN WISH FOR ANY TEAM TO GO THROUGH THAT, BECAUSE PLAYERS WENT THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES, THE TECHNICAL TEAM WENT THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES."

spoke about obviously you having an input, do you already have an idea of what you want the squad to look like?

JM: Yes, it's very important. Like I said, I'm starting training with the team to check what we have, and where do we need to re-inforce. So it's just a matter of bringing people, like I said, it's the same thing with the technical team to say as much as you want to change, you've got the technical team that has done well, you give people a chance. But if need be that you want to reinforce those particular areas, then you must be able to do that. I'm still saying we'll take the team that we have, if needs be, to reinforce the team, we'll do that.

LK: Lastly, Coach, you have been able to find a job, and some of your former players have also found clubs. Does this speak to what you said about continuing to train even when you weren't playing?

JM: You're absolutely right. You know, it tells a lot that those players, they were not playing for that team Royal AM just by fluke or something. They are good players, that's why, even before everything ended up, teams started already snatching players and all those. You could see that most of them they've joined different teams, and I wish them all the best. And for those that haven't found home yet, I strongly believe that sooner or later, they will find a home because they are very good players, just the same as technical members and the technical staff as well.

LK: Thank you, Coach, and all the best.

KHAYA’S CROSSROADS: FROM PROMISE TO PURPOSE

By Sinethemba Makonco & Rob Delpoort

The year 2025 signals a fresh chapter – and perhaps long-overdue recognition – for KHAYA MFEKANE, as he embarks on the next phase of his footballing journey. After more than a decade of loyalty to one club, the dynamic midfielder has made the move to Gqeberha, where he will don the colours of Sinethemba Badela’s revitalised Chippa United in the upcoming Betway Premiership season.

Football runs in the family – he’s the younger brother of Sonwabile Mfecane, another once highly-rated talent whose career was unfortunately curtailed by persistent injuries. Khaya, in many ways, has carried that legacy forward, though often under the radar.

“Khaya ngu Qhinebe wase Dikweni, ndizalwa ngu Mfecane,” he tells Sinethemba Makonco.

“I was born and bred in Mfuleni, Cape Town, where I also started playing football.

“I come from a very athletic family. But for me, I think it’s because of my father’s involvement in community sports and my brother playing as well.”

While the curtain fell on Cape Town Spurs’ stint in professional football in their previous guise – and uncertainty loomed over the futures of many within the squad – Mfecane had already turned the page. With his contract having officially expired in June, the midfielder bid farewell to the Parow-based club that had been his footballing home for over a decade.

His move marks the end of a long and formative chapter at a club where he rose from academy hopeful to first-team regular. While several teammates face an uncertain off-season – waiting on contract renewals, potential moves, or clarity on the club’s restructuring – Mfecane will look to carve out a new legacy, armed with the experience, resilience, and maturity forged during his years as a product of their famed youth system that produced numerous professionals. He has been part of the Spurs set-up since boyhood, and his promotion to the first team six years ago marked him as one to watch.

For Mfecane, it’s more than just a transfer – it’s a symbolic shift. His footballing roots run deep at Ikamva, the long-time home of Spurs (formerly Ajax Cape Town), where he rose through the academy ranks with talent, quiet consistency and a strong work ethic.

A product of the famed youth system that produced numerous professionals, Khaya has been part of the Spurs setup since boyhood, and his promotion to the first team six years ago marked him as one to watch.



“PLAYING FOR AN ACADEMY IS A PRIVILEGE, LET ALONE ONE LIKE AJAX. I HAD GREAT YEARS AND MADE BROTHERS IN THE JOURNEY, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, I WAS BEING PREPARED FOR THE GAME AT A HIGH LEVEL.”

Even before kicking a ball in senior professional football, he had already begun turning heads – both in South Africa and on the international stage. His footballing potential was evident early on, and it came into sharp focus during Ajax Cape Town’s U19 tour of Europe in 2017, where he delivered a string of standout performances against elite youth opposition.

That tour proved to be a turning point in how Mfecane was viewed, not just as a promising academy player, but as a talent with the temperament and technical ability to compete beyond local shores. Against some of Europe’s best youth sides, he showed maturity, composure, and vision well beyond his years – traits that had scouts and coaches talking, and that sparked real interest from clubs abroad.

“Playing for an academy is a privilege, let alone one like Ajax,” Mfecane recalls.

“I had great years and made brothers in the journey, and most importantly, I was being prepared for the game at a high level, which is where I wanna be.”

His spell in the Spurs first team was marked by turbulence — not on a personal level, but in the broader fortunes of the club. His promotion to the senior side coincided with a particularly volatile period in the club’s history, one punctuated by persistent relegation battles, coaching changes, and the immense pressure that comes

with fighting for survival season after season.

“Obviously, as a player, you always want to be part of the coach’s plans and the team’s cause,” Mfecane has admitted – a sentiment that reflects not only the external challenges Spurs faced, but the internal battles he often had to endure.

Being in and out of the matchday squad, frequently on the fringes rather than at the heart of the action, took its toll. As a young player trying to establish himself, the lack of consistent opportunities at times made the journey more isolating than inspiring.

“When you’re not [selected], it’s a difficult space to be in. I learnt that everything you’re going through is preparing you for something better,” he has said, candidly acknowledging the mental toll of striving to contribute while not always being given the platform to do so.

And yet, despite the set-backs, he remained committed – showing up, training hard, staying ready. It was this quiet resilience that allowed him to weather the storms around him, emerging not bitter, but battle-hardened, and ready to embrace the next chapter with renewed purpose.

Fortunately, Mfecane had support off the field, from his family and his management team. Mfecane is especially grateful to Courtney Johannes (the brother of former Bafana Bafana international, Robyn), who helps manage his career.

“Courtney has really been there for me, off the field and taking care of the other side of business as well,” he explains.

Mfecane’s path to over 100 senior appearances for Spurs was anything but straightforward. Not always a regular in the starting line-up, at times, his exclusion had little to do with footballing merit. Selection inconsistencies, shifting tactical demands, and the ever-changing fortunes of the team often left him on the fringes – or deployed out of position.

Though a central midfielder by trade and instinct, Mfecane frequently found himself playing right-back, a role he accepted without complaint, even if it meant sacrificing the rhythm and influence he might have had in his natural role. His willingness to adapt reflected a deep-rooted commitment to the team, even when it came at a personal cost.

Throughout his tenure, there were also periods of speculation – murmurs of moves elsewhere, clubs showing interest, windows of opportunity briefly ajar – but none of it seemed to distract him.

“Being down there is really tough for any club and any group of players, but I knew I had a contract to honour and my focus was fully on that, and



“I JUST WANT TO FIND MY FEET AND SETTLE IN AT PSL LEVEL THIS SEASON. WITH MY DEDICATION AND A BIT OF LUCK, I SHOULD BE BACK IN NATIONAL COLOURS AFTER A FEW SEASONS.”

everything else, like the rumours, was just noise.”

But there were some great highlights too – two years ago, under Shaun Bartlett, Spurs were promoted to the Premiership, a memory that Mfecane will never forget.

“Getting the club [back] to the PSL had been a goal of mine,” he said.

“Yes, achieving that two seasons ago was a highlight to be added to my journey.”

Unfortunately, when Spurs were in the Premiership, Mfecane’s influence was reduced to that of a bit player, starting just three times as the club got relegated again.

Having already represented the country at junior level, right up to the U23 side, Mfecane said wearing South Africa’s colours at any level is something he is immensely proud of.

“Not every player gets the chance to represent their country in their careers,” he explains.

“So yeah, my family was ecstatic and happy for me. I’m grateful to have been able to don the national team colours, regardless of the level.”

Now, with this long-awaited move, there’s a sense of both renewal and reward. Chippa’s rebuild offers him a platform to not only prove his worth at the highest level but to step out from the shadows and establish himself. The winds of change are indeed blowing – and Mfecane seems ready to rise with them.

“I just want to find my feet and settle in at PSL level this season,” he admits.

“With my dedication and a bit of luck, I should be back in national colours after a few seasons.”



‘SAFA MUST FIX THINGS BEFORE TEAMS GO INTO A TOURNAMENT’

TS Galaxy midfielder LEANDRA SMEDA is back playing in South Africa and loving it, as she currently sits at the top goal scorer charts in the Hollywoodbets Super League with eight goals. Her side went into the long Women’s Africa Cup of Nations (WAFCON) break in second position on the log, just four points from log leaders and defending champions Mamelodi Sundowns Ladies, and with a game in hand. Smeda speaks to iDiski Times writer LETHABO KGANYAGO in this edition about Banyana’s opening matches at the ongoing WAFCON in Morocco, how tough the tournament has gotten, and the players that have impressed her in the national team. She clarifies that she hasn’t retired internationally but understands it’s time for young players to have an opportunity, among other matters.

Lethabo Kganyago: Thank you for speaking to us, Leandra. How are you finding it in the Hollywoodbets Super League?

Leandra Smeda: It’s been fun so far for me personally. I think the league has gotten better over the years. There are some teams that are a bit more competitive now, but for me, it’s been good so far. Hopefully, things get better going forward, but we’ll have to wait and see.

LK: Did you expect that you would hit the ground running? I see you are the current top goal scorer.

LS: I didn’t think that I would score immediately because it took me a bit of time. I think there were two games where I came close to scoring, but then I didn’t. But it’s been fun so far to start

scoring goals again because now I’m playing as an attacker. For the past maybe four, five years, I’ve played more as a defensive player. So that changed to going back to an attacking player, and it’s been fun for me.

LK: Where have you been playing before returning home? I remember you were playing at UWC around 2021, and then you got a move abroad.

LS: When I left UWC, I went to Spain to Dux Logrono, and I spent a season with them, and then I left them at the end of that season. Then I signed two years with RCD Espanyol, they are based in Barcelona, and then I left them, and then I took a short-term deal with FC Masar, they are based in Egypt, to just play the CAF [Women’s Champions League] qualifiers for them. Initially, we didn’t qualify and then I think a week before the tournament kicked off, they informed the club that they’ve gotten a spot. But then the clause I had in the contract was that if we don’t qualify for the CAF Champions League, I automatically go out on loan to a Danish club FC Nordjaelland. It’s the team where Bongeka [Gamede] is playing now. Then I spent the remainder of my contract in Denmark and then from Denmark then I returned home.

LK: And the decision to return back home and to TS Galaxy – were there other offers?

LS: I was actually thinking of retiring when I came back home, but then some of my friends spoke to me, and then they were like, ‘no, just play one more year here at home’. That’s

when I decided to play. And then I signed with Galaxy, so now I'm just enjoying my last days of playing.

LK: Are you saying that you're going to be retiring soon?

LS: Maybe. It's possible. I will see how my body feels at the end of the season (chuckles).

LK: Well, we shall wait. How do you find TS Galaxy's chances of challenging for the league title this season?

LS: I think it's a good team. They have potential. There are a lot of good players, a lot of young players as well, and they've been consistent in the league over the years. And hopefully this season, we'd be able to challenge Sundowns because it was a bunch of us that joined Galaxy this season, and hopefully we can have a positive impact in that club, because we also have a lot of experienced players in the club. Besides me and Fifi [Refiloe Jane], there's Vivo and Busi [Ndimeni], and also Nomvula Kgoale and the likes of Nicole [Michael] as well, players who have been in the national team set up before. So I think the team stands a good chance of winning the league this season. But we take it to one game at a time.

LK: When you mentioned that Bongeka is playing for your former team, do you think she has an opportunity to make a success in Denmark?

LS: I think she will do really well. I think she arrived two weeks before I got there, and then I remember she was so happy that I'm here, because now she has someone to speak to. She's been adapting well because even when we were still training and integrating, I was telling her that I think she will play regularly in the team because of how they are set up in their style of play. I think she will do well there because even though the Danish League, compared to the Swedish League, is not that competitive compared to Sweden, but it's also a good league. And it's a good league also for her to start playing abroad. Hopefully, from there, she can move on to a better league, like the top five leagues. I think she will make a success of it.

LK: You went to Egypt, and we have Kgalebane Mohlakoana playing at TP Mazembe. Is this a route less explored by South African players, or other African leagues in terms of finding opportunities?



“I’M NOT SURPRISED ABOUT JERMAINE’S RETIREMENT BECAUSE IT’S SOMETHING THAT’S BEEN COMING.”

LS: Yeah, I do feel like it's less travelled, especially in the women's case, because you find there's, like, only a few players playing in other African countries at the moment, that are from South Africa. But then, if you look at someone wanting to play in SA, they'll go to Sundowns because then they know the chances of playing in the Champions League are higher. And then also, when you look at the other African countries, you can also target their top clubs. You go there, and then you go to the Champions League, and then you get more exposure, and then you can go outside to Europe. It is also another opportunity. Now, when you are just here in SA, you have to wait to get called up to the national team to participate in tournaments to be seen by Europe or the teams in the Mexican League and the Chinese League. So if there's an opportunity to go somewhere outside of SA but still in Africa, then I think a player should take it. When you go to an Egyptian club where I was at, they belong to the Right to Dream organisation. And then they have the Danish Club, which I went on loan to. It belongs to the Egyptian club. The owners also own an MLS team in the US, and they've just opened a Right to Dream Academy there. So there are all these opportunities that players don't know about, but then should be explored. So maybe, hopefully, soon, they have a women's team in the US, then who knows, Bongeka might go from Denmark to America because of the relationship through the Right to Dream organisation. So I think it's an area that could be explored more. It's just that people are not aware of it.

LK: Earlier, you were hinting at retirement. Are you retired internationally?

LS: No, no, I'm not. The last time I was with the national team was the World Cup year 2019. When we came back



from the World Cup, we went to play some game in Japan in November, that was the last time. The following year, there was COVID, and I ruptured my Achilles tendon. I remember I got called for camp, but then I ruptured my tendon and ever since then, I was just completely out.

LK: Do you have hope that you will return, having hinted about retiring?

LS: No, I feel like the door has been closed on me already. Now I'm just playing and enjoying football here at home, and hopefully I can help TS Galaxy win the league this season. But then, if the call from the national team comes, then I'll obviously honour the call, but I don't have that thing of hoping they will call me. It's just the thing of, if it happens, it happens. If it doesn't happen, it doesn't because I've played my part there as well. It's also time for the new ones to step up, because the generation of Jermaine [Seoposenwe] is now getting done as well. But I have not announced my retirement from international football. You know others got send-off games, so maybe I will also get one.

LK: Would you like one?

LS: Yeah, I would. Hopefully it comes since I'm scoring lots of goals now. Maybe it will come when they're playing qualifiers for the next WAFCON.

LK: Are you surprised by these recent retirements by Banyana players from the national team, including that of Jermaine, after the WAFCON?

LS: I'm not surprised about Jermaine's retirement because it's something that's been coming, also because we are friends, so we talk a lot. I think after Jermaine, there will be more announcements coming up from that generation. I think they feel like they've played their part because they've been to every major tournament already, maybe now it's just time for

“THE FIRST TWO GAMES I FEEL LIKE IT'S BEEN A BIT RUSTY FROM OUR SIDE.”

the next generation to come through and step up.

LK: You have watched this team and its progress over the years, do you think that there is enough depth to give the defence of the WAFCON title a real go?

LS: I feel this WAFCON is going to be more difficult for us because we have a lot of youngsters in the squad now in the group, even though the majority of the group that was at the 2022 WAFCON is still there. But I feel like this time around, it's going to be a bit more difficult as other nations have also stepped up or beefed up their squads. I think we will get out of the group stage, but I think going all the way it's going to be difficult. But the team has improved so much over the years when you look at the past two World Cups, and also leading up to winning WAFCON. I do believe the team will do well, but I think it's going to be a bit more difficult, especially also with missing Thembi [Kgatlana] in our attack, because a lot of the style of play, like how we approach games, is mainly centred around Thembi. We know when we launch a ball over the defence of the opposition, then Thembi is gone. We do have other attackers that can step up but hopefully we do well in this tournament, and some of the youngsters maybe also get time, just to expose them to the level of play.

LK: And are there any attackers in this current squad that you feel will stand out for South Africa at this tournament?

LS: I think obviously Jermaine and Hilda [Magaia], because of their experience, and we all know what they can offer and do on the pitch. And then from



the young ones that have impressed me, the player from UJ, Adrielle Mibe. I like her. I think when she does get the opportunity to play, she will also give us something in attack and for the future as well. But looking at Jermaine and Hilda, we do expect a lot from them in this tournament. There's also Gabby [Gabriela Salgado]. Gabby has played as an attacker before, I know now they brought her in as a wing-back. But then there's also the option of playing her as well. So those are the players that I'm looking at in attack to perform for us.

LK: What did you make of Banyana's opening two games at WAFCON?

LS: The first two games, I feel like it's been a bit rusty from our side. The game against Ghana, we saw a good first half and a poor second half and with Tanzania, I think I did say that Tanzania will give us problems in our group. In the match, we saw a poor first half and a better second half. We just need to win our next game and go from there.

LK: We have seen the side-shows every time the Banyana goes to a major tournament, even with this WAFCON. How much does this affect the team, especially when you are in camp?

LS: It affects the team a lot because now you are not just thinking about preparations for the games, you are also thinking about all these other stuff. It has to do with money, because you go into a tournament not knowing whether you're going to get any performance bonuses and all that. Sometimes when you are in the team, there's a lot of young, new players, so everything for them is the first time. They don't know these problems have been there. Now you have the senior players, and you have to accommodate them also. Sometimes they don't want to get

"I FEEL THIS WAFCON IS GOING TO BE MORE DIFFICULT FOR US BECAUSE WE HAVE A LOT OF YOUNGSTERS IN THE SQUAD NOW."

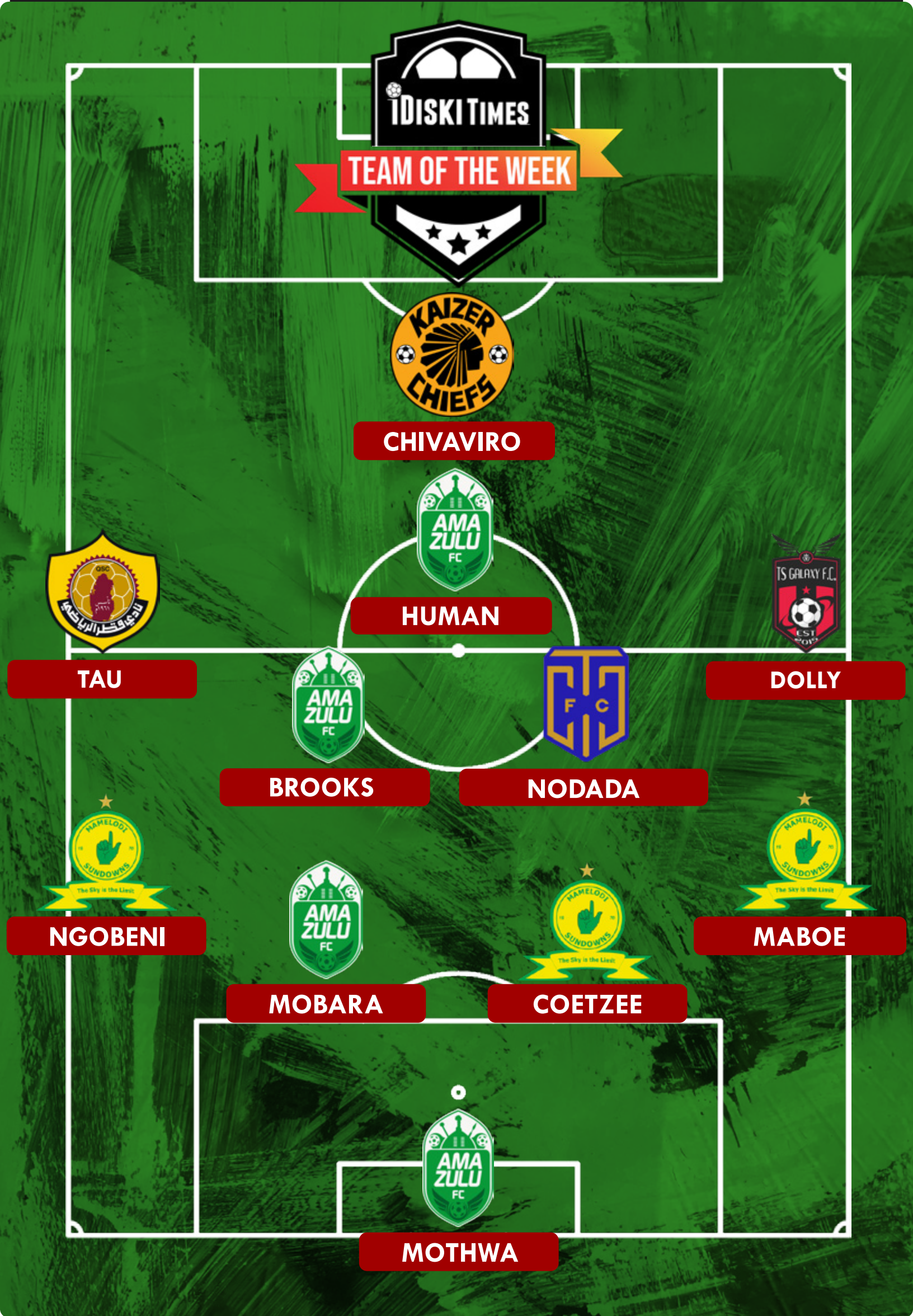
involved in all these things. So now it's like the senior players doing this thing, and the younger ones are not sure what to do. So it also affects them, especially the younger ones, because they don't know what's happening. You find the team maybe going on strike, and then they're missing two or three days of training, that affects the preparation as well, physically and mentally. I don't know, SAFA, they must fix things before teams go into a tournament. But I don't know when that will happen because it's been like this for years.

LK: My last question, what kind of tournament do you wish for Jermaine as she gears up to retire internationally?

LS: She joined the 100 club. I hope that she finishes the tournament off with a bang; hopefully, we win. It will be really nice for her to end her international career like that. I remember I first met her when we played in the SASOL league back in Cape Town; she was at Santos. Fast forward we both found ourselves at our first WACFON in 2010. We were very young and since then we've been in the national team set-up. I wish for her to have a really good tournament, injury free and for us to win it because that would be really nice for her.

LK: Leandra, thank you so much.

JULY 2025 SA FREE AGENTS XI



(Based on Transfermarkt valuations in each position)

ACE OF THE WEEK:
AMAJITA

This week's iDiski Times Aces of the Week are Amajita, or should we really say Amajimbos? Vela Khumalo's side,

preparing for November's FIFA U17 World Cup in Qatar, were crowned champions at the COSAFA U20 Youth Championship during the Region 5 Games after defeating Malawi 3-0 in Sunday's final. The young South Africans impressed by going unbeaten throughout the tournament, showcasing their readiness and growing confidence ahead of the global stage. Although the Region 5 Games are officially an U20 competition, South Africa has consistently chosen to send a younger squad to the biannual event – a strategy that seems to have paid off once again with this latest success.





THE DRAWING BOARD

The Drawing Board with Moritz Kossmann

This week, we continue The Drawing Board series with iDiski Times' coaching guru MORITZ KOSSMANN.

Born in Germany, but having spent most of his life in South Africa, he came to the fore while working at the Ubuntu Football Academy. Moritz was then the head coach of Cape Town City's DStv

Diski Challenge team for the 2023/24 campaign and also in charge of the club youth's department. In June 2024, Kossmann became part of the technical team at the Austrian club SV Ried.

His columns have proved increasingly popular, and have been republished (and translated) worldwide. He has also provided content for one of the world-leading tactics blogs - spielverlagerung.com.

Next steps in video analysis
(Part 2)

Last week, we discussed the next steps in video analysis on an individual level. We reasoned that, ultimately, football is an extremely complex game with a lot of inherent unpredictability; consequently, the players need to be flexible and adaptive within the team framework that we provide and evolve. If we want to support our players in becoming responsive and adaptive to fit the requirements of the game, then it only makes sense to not spoon-feed them in analysis sessions, but rather to make the process a cooperative one where we work together to improve the product on the pitch, but where we as coaches can learn a great deal in the process too. Last week we discussed some possibilities in cooperative individual analysis and will continue this week by trying to broaden this to the team and possibly groups in between, with a focus on how this can transfer to the training pitch. It is only logical that analysis and field sessions should share a common red thread, easily recognisable to all participating entities.

As we have alluded to frequently on this platform before, our goal as coaches should be to build towards a self-regulating team and self-regulating individuals within that. If that is the case, we should attempt to create an environment that actively looks to build independence within the framework and guidelines we have set. When we look at this steep target through the lens of team analysis sessions, the first possibility would be to attempt to have the players do their own analysis in work groups. This seems obvious, but there are some tricky considerations. Firstly, players aren't necessarily coaches or analysts, so attempting to do something like this will first be overwhelming. If we place players in groups, the likely

outcome is that a few senior members with more experience are more likely to take over the reins than perhaps younger members with less experience. This is not to say that those members' input is not valuable; on the contrary, it might very well provide a valuable differing point of view. So, a critical consideration as a coach is to try to create a subtle system within the work groups to ensure that all members contribute something and not just one dominant player becomes the new coach, so to speak. Of course, groups will frequently have some dominant members and less dominant members, and we don't want to interfere artificially as well. So, a subtle balance is key within such a work group.

Secondly, if we, as a hypothetical coaching staff, have joined a new club and immediately do such an analysis experiment with the players, we have the obvious challenge that we have not provided a framework at all in terms of how we want to play football as a group. Therefore, the analysis work by our players may go in certain directions that we don't necessarily want to go with the team. On the other hand, such an experiment may well be enlightening to find out more about the natural (footballing) preferences of our players. The ideal time to perform such an experiment may be slightly later in the process with the team. Perhaps after a few months or at least one season together. In this case, the boundaries within which we want to move with the football we want to play are explicitly and implicitly clear and will most likely act nicely as a guidance for the players when attempting to do the analysis.

The pre-season, where everyone is still slightly more relaxed than in the competitive phase of the season, is most likely the ideal time to perform such an experiment. Doing groups of players with some old and new ones put together would help to have a guideline in terms



of players that already know how we play and those that have freshly joined, still bringing in that outside perspective. Furthermore, analysing an entire game of football for someone who doesn't do it professionally can be quite overwhelming. Therefore, a good idea could be to give a working group of players clips of, for example, build-up situations in their own half, and analyse positive and negative aspects. Even here, we could give them a simple-to-use but clear analysis framework, such as the 5 W's (what, where, who, when, why) as well as the 4 space-time components (position, moment, direction and speed), which can guide and streamline the process. It is incredibly hard to start something that you haven't done before from nothing after all.

The ideal time to attempt doing this would most likely be in an off-season period after at least 6 months of working with the team. At the beginning of the process, we as the hypothetical coaching staff, need to set the boundaries and framework that we want to establish in terms of a playing style. This will require explicit coaching and introducing the players to the concepts that we feel are key for the group. Especially in terms of strategies. Do we want to man-mark or defend more ball-oriented? Do we want to have long spells of possession or play vertically very quickly? Of course, for most of these strategic topics, it will mostly be a mix, but what matters is the accentuation in a certain direction. In this early phase, many coaches will work in a very explicit fashion. After a while, the playing style will become more second nature to the players. Now is the moment to step more and more towards self-regulation, which is where

this experiment of letting the players do some of their own group analysis can be a helpful exercise.

Self-regulation means that, to a degree, we are aspiring for a system that multiplies and improves itself, where the players get to bring in their very own creative touches and ideas, within the boundaries that the team structure sets for them. This is only possible if the pre-condition is set that they feel a sense of ownership over how the team plays and that their opinions are not only heard but are included as well. However, for their opinions to qualify, they need to have graduated from understanding the parameters of how we want to play. That is step 1, the latter idea is step 2. Step 3 is the result of how the 2 interact, and the things we expected resulting from this interaction, as well as the ones we didn't expect at all. The reality is that in a complex game like football, we can never expect and anticipate it all. That is the same when we study the interaction of a group as a whole as well.

One of the best tricks in coaching is learning from your own players. Both in terms of actions that they perform, but also their opinions on certain concepts or even the training you introduce them to. They see this from a different perspective and have a different understanding of the details about the game than yourself. As a coach, this is truly one of the best tools at your disposal. And practising an exercise like the above analysis work is a really nice way to set the stage for a much more consciously interactive environment between you and your players.





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