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CHIPPRA UNITED	VS	ORBIT COLLEGE	ORLANDO PIRATES
AMAZULU	VS	STELLENBOSCH	GALLANTS
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MKHALELE ON BROOS & FUTURE BAFANA PLANS

DOC REVEALS BIG MBULE WISH



TUNISIAN GIANTS SHOW INTEREST IN PIRATES STAR



NEW SUPPLIER KEEN ON BAFANA PARTNERSHIP



LEKGWATHI HAILS APPOLLIS & MBOKAZI AFTER MTN8 TRIUMPH



NDLONDLO ON PIRATES EXIT, CHAN WONDERGOAL & RETURNING 'HOME'

THE DRAWING BOARD WITH MORITZ KOSSMANN & ACE OF THE WEEK

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TEAM OF THE WEEK
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PIRATES AND MAKGOPA REJECT
ESPERANCE

Esperance Sportive de Tunis have seen their approach for Orlando Pirates striker Evidence Makgopa rejected. Esperance are looking to secure a replacement for Rodrigo Rodrigues, who has returned to Brazil with Cortiba. Makgopa has been a long-term target for the club, but neither Pirates nor the player were keen on the idea, with the striker keen on fighting for his place at the club. He’s netted 16 goals with seven assists in 77 appearances for the club since joining from Baroka in 2022.



FORMER CITY YOUTH PLAYER
SURFACES IN ARMENIA

Former Cape Town City youth player Aphelele Modolwana has been unveiled in Armenia at Ararat Yerevan Football Club. The 22-year-old who captained City’s U18 side a few seasons ago was announced by the European club this past weekend. The versatile Modolwana hails from the Strand and made his way to City via the Young Bafana academy. Last season, he was playing in the ABC Motsepe League with Hout Bay United, where former Mamelodi Sundowns assistant, Michael Loftman, was coach.



MACRON IN THE MIX AS NEXT
BAFANA KIT SPONSOR

Bafana Bafana’s kit partnership with LeCoq is set to end at the end of the calendar year, and Macron are among the manufacturers that have made a move. The likes of Puma, Kappa, and Adidas have been rumoured to have shown interest, and now the Italian brand is the latest to throw their name in the hat. The South African Football Association (SAFA) are now mulling over their options in a crucial period for Bafana, who are heading to the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations and potentially the 2026 FIFA World Cup.



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DURBAN CITY

VS

SIWELELE

16 SEPT
19:30

CHIPPA UNITED

VS

ORBIT COLLEGE

17 SEPT
19:30

AMAZULU

VS

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17 SEPT
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RICHARDS BAY

VS

TS GALAXY

17 SEPT
19:30

KAIZER CHIEFS

VS

SEKHUKHUNE UNITED

17 SEPT
19:30

ORLANDO PIRATES

VS

MAGESI

17 SEPT
19:30

GALLANTS

VS

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17 SEPT
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GALAXY ON MAJOR RECRUIT DRIVE AFTER FIFA BAN LIFTED

Several foreign players have been spotted training with TS Galaxy during their past FIFA international break as they look to bolster their squad with foreign recruits before the window shuts on 22 September.

The Rockets started the season with two consecutive defeats in the league to Durban City and Sekhukhune United, while also losing in the MTN8 to Babina Noko.

With only four to five players being named on the bench in that period because of their inability to register new players, things were looking gloomy for the Adnan Beganovic-led club this season. But things quickly turned around, with three consecutive wins, against Chippa United, Siwelele and Orbit College, propelling them into fourth place in the league with nine points.

With 10 official signings confirmed already, which include the likes of Junior Zindoga, Mory Keita, Onke Moletshe and Sedwyn George – among the more experienced players. Jeffrey Dlamini, Anslin Williams, Mpumelelo Ndaba, Ntandoyenkosi Nkosi and Siyabonga Nguessan are the exciting prospects the club believe could be the next rising talents.

Tim Sukazi’s club has shown the penchant to develop some of the finest talent in recent years, and selling off for major profits and his vision remains steadfast in their current transfer window.

Khulumani Ndamane is poised to be the latest big-money sale, as Mamelodi Sundowns came calling – but he’s likely to remain on loan until January, if not the entire season, while Kamogelo Sebelebele has been an instant hit at Orlando Pirates.

Lebone Seema was a curious case, as he was released, seeking more first-team opportunities, which he’s now taken at the Buccaneers...

However, the plus 10-man recruitment drive now continues, with Dutch winger Ezra van der Heiden, Brazilian centre-back Igor Salatiel and Algerian striker Mehdi Ouamri in advanced talks to join the club in the coming weeks.

The players are said to have impressed during their recent training period with the club, and it appears it’s a matter of time before they are snapped up to add further options to the squad.

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KHANYE: PIRATES DESERVED TO WIN THE MTN8 FINAL

Orlando Pirates made history when they won the MTN8 final against Stellenbosch, scoring three times in extra-time after a goalless 90 minutes at the Mbombela Stadium. It was the fourth successive MTN8 title for the Buccaneers.

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.

Make sure you subscribe for free on YouTube, and click the bell icon to get notified as soon as new videos are released.

‘The Coach Made The Right Substitutions’

“Congratulations to Orlando Pirates for winning yet another MTN8 title.

“This was a well-deserved victory for the Buccaneers. The game was won

clean and fair.

“Both sides were in the game for 90 minutes. It was a tactical chess game. There were no chances created in 90 minutes because both sides packed the midfield and cancelled each other out, to be honest.

“I think Stellenbosch coach Steve Barker will regret taking out Lehlogonolo Mojela because he was their most dynamic attacker upfront. Perhaps he should have also started the game with Langelihle Phili, because the boy became a threat when he came in.

“Pirates have a quality starting line-up and a quality bench, and that’s what ultimately won the game for them.

“The coach made the right substitutions and they lifted the game for Pirates.”

“Congratulations to Pirates for winning the MTN8.”



FROM MIDNIGHT EXPRESS TO MENTOR OF A NEW GENERATION

By Matshelane Mamabolo

Helman ‘Midnight Express’ Mkhalele’s voice carries a mix of pride and humility as he reflects on a football journey that has taken him from the dusty streets of Newcastle to the global stage.

Once a flying winger whose blistering runs lit up South African football in the 1990s, Mkhalele now sits on the bench as Bafana Bafana’s assistant coach – a role he views as both an honour and a responsibility.

“It means a lot to me to be an assistant,” he says. “I’ve had the privilege of playing for Bafana, and now I can bring both the lessons I learned as a player and what I’ve gained as a coach. It helps me relate to the players in a way they understand.”

For Mkhalele, the transition from player to coach has been a journey of discovery. While many assume that a decorated playing career is a natural precursor to coaching, he insists that the two worlds are vastly different.

“Playing and coaching are not the same,” he explains.

“When I was in Turkey towards the end of my playing days, a coach asked me to be his assistant. That moment planted the seed. When I came back home, I went straight into coaching courses, and that’s when I realised how much more there was to learn.”

Learning The Craft

The former Orlando Pirates star immersed himself in the technical side of the game, pursuing his badges and cutting his teeth as a scout and assistant with the junior national teams.

Working under Thabo Senong, he gained invaluable experience at the Africa U20 Cup of Nations in Zambia and at Youth World Cups.

“Coach Thabo gave me the opportunity to be his assistant,” Mkhalele recalls. “I learnt a lot from him, not only as a coach but also as a person. Those experiences shaped me. They taught me the importance of understanding the emotions of players and adapting my approach to bring out their best.”

World Cups – once stages he graced as a player – became learning laboratories as a coach. The exposure deepened his belief in the power of preparation and resilience.

Working Under Hugo Broos

When Belgian coach Hugo Broos was appointed to lead Bafana Bafana, scepticism was rife. A foreigner, a white man in a country with a complicated history, he was initially viewed with suspicion.

Mkhalele, however, had a front-row seat to the human side of the veteran coach.

“I don’t know how to count my blessings,” he says.

“Coach Broos has so much experience – he’s coached across Africa, played in a World Cup, and won the Africa Cup of Nations [with Cameroon]. But more than that, I’ve learnt from him as a person.



“I REPRESENT THE LEGENDS WHO CAME BEFORE ME - THE JOMO SONOS, THE KAIZER MOTAUNGS, THOSE WHO INSPIRED ME. I REPRESENT THE GENERATION I PLAYED WITH AND THOSE WHO DIDN’T GET THE CHANCE.”



People thought he was arrogant, but to me, he is humble, respectful, and a father figure.”

He recalls moments when Broos’ humility shone through, such as when he admitted he had made a mistake in overlooking certain players early in his tenure.

“In our culture, saying ‘I’m sorry’ doesn’t come easily. But he did. That humility made the players respect him even more.”

For Mkhalele, Broos’ approach – blending tactical discipline with freedom of expression – has brought a refreshing balance to the national team.

“We used to keep the ball for the sake of it,” he explains. “Now there is urgency, a plan to go forward, but still the freedom to use individual talent. That mix has been key to our progress.”

Representing More Than Himself

While Mkhalele relishes the technical aspects of coaching, he sees his role as carrying a deeper significance.

“When I sit on the bench, I don’t see myself as just Helman,” he says.

“I represent the legends who came before me – the Jomo Sonos, the Kaizer Motaungs, those who inspired me. I represent the generation I played with and those who didn’t get the chance. And I also represent the young players coming through, showing them there is life after football.”

His presence, he believes, is a signal to club owners and administrators to bring former players closer to the game, harnessing their experiences to build a stronger football ecosystem.

The Debate: Stay Or Go Abroad?

One of the most-hotly debated issues in South African football is whether players should stay home or seek opportunities abroad. Broos has often advocated

“COACH BROOS HAS SO MUCH EXPERIENCE - HE’S COACHED ACROSS AFRICA, PLAYED IN A WORLD CUP, AND WON THE AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS. BUT MORE THAN THAT, I’VE LEARNT FROM HIM AS A PERSON. PEOPLE THOUGHT HE WAS ARROGANT, BUT TO ME, HE IS HUMBLE, RESPECTFUL, AND A FATHER FIGURE.”

for players to test themselves overseas, and Mkhalele agrees.

“I fully agree with the coach,” he says.

“Technically, we are far ahead of many African countries. But we lack power. Nigerians, for example, are physically stronger. That’s why going abroad is important – to build that side of the game. If our players can add power to their technical skill, we will compete with the best.”

He candidly reflects on his own career.

“I always analyse myself. I went to Turkey, but I should have pushed further. I didn’t have the physical power to go beyond. That’s a lesson for the new generation.”

Inspiring A New Generation

Mkhalele is visibly energised when he speaks about the current Bafana squad.

“It excites me to see these young players,” he beams.

“They are saying, ‘It’s our turn. We want to inspire a new generation’. For too long, they’ve lived under the shadow of 1996. Now they want to create their own history.”





The run to the semi-finals of the Africa Cup of Nations has reignited belief across the country. For Mkhalele, it's about more than football.

“This is about mindset. It’s no longer about surpassing 1996. It’s about going further, even to the final, even winning it. That belief is powerful.”

Lessons From The Past, Eyes On The Future

Comparisons with the legendary Clive Barker, who led Bafana to AFCON glory in 1996, are inevitable. Mkhalele acknowledges the similarities between Barker and Broos in their fatherly approach.

“Clive was like a father, telling you straight what he wanted. Coach Broos is the same. He makes things clear, but he also allows players to express themselves within the team plan.”

As for his own ambitions, Mkhalele remains focused on the present.

“People ask if I’ll take over after coach Broos. For me, it’s a big no right now. I’m still young in coaching. My aspiration is to grow, to keep learning. One day, yes, I want to be a head coach. But for now, I am serving.”

Changing The Culture Of Football

Beyond tactics and results, Mkhalele is passionate about evolving the culture around South African football. He believes that too often the game has failed to adapt to changing times, leaving young players misunderstood and underprepared.

“We never evolved,” he admits.

“We expected today’s players to behave like us, but life has changed. Technology has changed. We need to change how we train them, how they eat, how they recover. Rest is part of training. Recovery is part of performance. These are things we didn’t emphasise before.”

“THEY ARE SAYING, ‘IT’S OUR TURN. WE WANT TO INSPIRE A NEW GENERATION.’ FOR TOO LONG, THEY’VE LIVED UNDER THE SHADOW OF 1996.”

He also stresses the importance of preserving football’s history and teaching it to the new generation.

“Players must know the legends who came before them. Clubs should make that history alive. It inspires and gives players something to aspire to.”

Serving The Nation

For all his personal achievements – league titles, both domestic and continental, with Pirates, a memorable 1996 AFCON triumph, and appearances at the World Cup – Mkhalele sees his role today in broader terms.

“It’s not about me,” he insists.

“It’s about serving the nation. Football gave me so much. Now it’s about giving back – through coaching, through mentorship, through representing the players of yesterday and today.”

As South Africa dreams again of qualifying for the World Cup, Mkhalele’s humility, experience, and quiet leadership provide a steady hand.

And perhaps that is the essence of the Midnight Express’s second act – not the solo runs down the wing that once defined him, but the collective journey he now steers from the bench.





‘I’M SO PROUD OF THE COACH FOR DEFENDING THIS TROPHY’

Orlando Pirates once again etched their name into South African football history, clinching a record-extending fourth straight MTN8 title after a pulsating extra-time victory over Stellenbosch FC last weekend. The triumph marked a statement moment for Abdeslam Ouaddou and his rejuvenated Buccaneers, proving that with the new man at the helm, the club’s winning DNA still runs deep. For former Pirates captain and MTN8 ambassador LUCKY LEKGWATHI, the latest success was more than just another trophy – it was validation of the club’s enduring culture of excellence. In an exclusive interview with iDiski Times journalist LETHABO KGANYAGO, Lekgwathi reflects on the Bucs’ golden cup run, showering praise on teenage sensation Mbekezeli Mbokazi, hailing the impact of new signing Oswin Appollis, and offering thoughtful words of guidance to rising star Relebohile Mofokeng. He also shares candid insights on what it takes to maintain success at a club of Pirates’ stature.

Lethabo Kganyago: Lucky we appreciate your time, and congratulations as the Last Legend Standing and an Orlando Pirates legend – your impressions on the final.

Lucky Lekgwathi: It was a good final that also had goals. As you know, football without goals is boring. So it was a good game because there were goals, and this is what I said before the game, that I know Stellies plays well and will be coming for revenge. But when you look at the sides’ last game at Orlando, yes, Pirates won 1-0, but Stellies created chances, but they didn’t convert them. And when a game goes into extra-time, all of us know what happens with Pirates because that’s where they pick up, and they did and managed to score three goals. And this was my prediction that



“AT LEAST SOME PRESSURE IS OFF HIM NOW, EVEN THOUGH THERE IS ALWAYS PRESSURE AT PIRATES.”

Pirates were going to win with two, if not three, goals, and it happened.

LK: How important is this for the coach, considering the rocky start he has endured?

LL: When the season started, he didn’t start well with back-to-back losses,



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which didn't sit well with the supporters. However, we have confidence in the coach because we know coaches play a role, but players play a bigger role. It's 90% from the players and 10% from the coach just to guide, because to play and take decisions on the field it's on the players. He realised the gambles he took in the semi-finals didn't really work, then he went back to a team that has experience of winning trophies and it worked. The coach's plan worked. The previous coach did well and left a mark and legacy of this cup, and I understand the new coach wanted to continue where his predecessor left off. I'm happy for him, first cup of the season he won it, and you know when you win the MTN8, it can open doors for other trophies, and at least some pressure is off him now, even though there is always pressure at Pirates. Now the focus is on the league to come back and catch up with other teams. I'm so proud of the coach for defending this trophy.

LK: The goals in the final came from the bench. Does this speak to the depth in the squad?

LL: He [the coach] won the game from the bench, and for me, we have depth in the team. If you look at the boys that came in as subs, they changed the complexion of the game. You look at Orlando Pirates now, there are players who are injured, the likes of [Nkosinathi] Sibisi and [Olisa] Ndah and others. Imagine when those players return, it's going to be a selection headache for the coach. What has impressed me is that most of our players are young, a good investment for the team and most of them have a bright future and have a chance to play long term in the

"ALWAYS WHEN I LOOK AT MBOKAZI, I'M LIKE YOH HE REMINDS ME OF OLD JOHN AND I DON'T WANT TO COMPARE BUT HE REMINDS ME OF MABIZELA."

team. Depth is there, but we must just pray that the players remain fit and avoid injuries. On Saturday, when I got on the field, I saw Rele [Relebohile Mofokeng] looking like he's injured. We don't need that. I'm really hoping there won't be injuries, so we see what the season has in store for us and we can't use injuries as an excuse.

LK: Oswin Appollis in that final, those world-class assists, do you think he is the best signing so far?

LL: To be honest with you, and I know that [Tshepang] Moremi was Man of the Match, but I think Appollis, the way he came on and changed the game, he was a contender for Man of the Match too. And it's good to rate the players that they both deserved the Man of the Match award. He [Appollis] came, he changed everything, he changed the complexion of attacking. After he came on, others started creating chances. The boy is strong, he is balanced, he can take players on, he can shoot, his vision, I think it's something else. I see why Kaizer Chiefs wanted the boy, and I'm happy the boy today is a Buccaneer and Oswin is playing a big, big role in the team and has adapted well; he is working very hard. I think he is an inspiration to other players to work just as hard, but he is something else, and he deserves to play for Orlando



Pirates and for Bafana Bafana. You can see his intelligence.

LK: And Moremi, in the first games, fans were a little bit harsh on him. How important is it that he stepped up in this final?

LL: I think he has improved since the fans came for him. Sometimes it's not easy coming from a small side to a big team, and I'm happy the boy didn't succumb under pressure from the supporters. He is working hard and improving with each game, and giving 100%. I was watching him on Saturday and thinking this boy is coming with something we didn't expect, even other legends who have followed him from AmaZulu, like [Lehlohonolo] Majoro, were saying, 'Lucky, you are still going to see the best of him'. I see that, I mean, coming on as a sub, scoring two goals in the final and being Man of the Match, that's how you make your name and leave a mark. When they talk about the MTN8 2025, the name Moremi will always be there. I'm impressed with the boy, and sometimes as a player, you need that wake-up call, that little shake-up that you haven't arrived yet, to push you to work harder, and that also pushes teammates in your position to not relax.

LK: Talking about Rele, this season he has been very low key, hasn't started certain games, not played some, but he stepped up in the final, contributing to the goals...

LL: You can call him a senior player because at his age, he has won how many titles? He is a senior player, and games like this, you need Rele, and he delivers when he is needed. I saw that pass to Moremi and I said 'Yoh!' He played really well, and for the coach to give him some rest to recharge, I'm happy with that even at Bafana Bafana. He was fresh in the final and played a big role. I think he was involved in two goals, which was what we wanted to see from Rele in a final. There are players who are just made for cup games, and Rele is one of those.

LK: The talks of him possibly leaving or not leaving, the club rejecting some offers, do you think that could have played in his mind a bit and was the final his way of showing his commitment to the club?

LL: Look for you to leave, obviously, you must perform. If you don't perform at club or international level at Bafana Bafana, there is no ways teams can see you are good. Even if a team wanted you before, they still want to see the best of you. So this is what the boy is trying to do and I'm happy that when we met, we spoke about it, 'That don't go yet, the right time will



“WHEN THE TIME IS NOT RIGHT, YOU DON'T HAVE TO FORCE THINGS. THE CHAIRMAN KNOWS WHEN HE WANTS HIM (MOFOKENG) TO LEAVE AND WHERE HE SHOULD GO.”

come. That if now is not the time for you leave, focus on Orlando Pirates and make sure that you do your best and help them to win'. And I think he is trying hard, he is young, and there is pressure that he must leave the team, and even I look at Rele when the team is not performing. I'm happy with how he is conducting himself, and I don't think it's got to his head that he has to go overseas. And when the time is not right, you don't have to force things. The chairman knows when he wants him to leave and where he should go. I think the chairman spoke with the boy. I'm talking from experience, he [the chairman] is like a father, when there is something, he will call you, talk to you, and as a player, you will understand. You see it in his performance that the boy is still happy at Orlando Pirates and wants to help the team, and he helped in the final. I'm saying the right time for him to leave will come, and his breakthrough is not going to be at just any team. He will find a good team. Imagine a player like him going to the so-called small countries. You want to see him playing in good leagues where we can watch him on TV, like Spain and England, like Lyle Foster.

LK: Finally, let’s talk about Mbokazi. At 19, he stepped up as captain when Sibisi was injured. He led the team out in the final, but gave Sibisi the honour to lift the trophy, though he came on late in the game...

LL: It’s good that he showed the captain of the team respect, especially when it came to lifting the trophy, even if he didn’t play much. It shows respect, and I’m happy with what he did; someone would have been selfish and said I’m the one who started and finished the game. And obviously everyone is talking about Mbokazi, and I’m so amazed to see a 19-year-old boy playing the way he does. The boy is so dedicated, and he is a hard worker. It’s good sometimes to reward and to give the boy confidence that he deserves to be captain, with senior players around to help him, because sometimes you don’t lead the team alone. All the players on the field and those on the bench are also captains. This boy is growing game by game, and he is a leader. He can talk to his teammates, organise, and he is going far. We just have to pray that he doesn’t change because fame sometimes changes players. His future is bright, and one day he will play abroad, and he is not only good for Orlando Pirates but also for Bafana Bafana. He has the potential to captain Bafana as well. He is something else. I played with [Mbulelo] Old John Mabizela, and always when I look at Mbokazi, I’m like, ‘Yoh, he reminds me of Old John’, and I don’t want to compare, but he reminds me of Mabizela. I remember Mabizela 2002/2003, he was the captain, he won the league, so he [Mbokazi] is the same. He [Mabizela] was quiet, but having senior players around him made his job easier. It’s good that Mbokazi was given an opportunity at a young age to be captain, it helps him to become a man, and he is a man. Some people say to me ‘Lekgwathi, Mbokazi is like you’, and I say ‘No, do not compare him with me, because he is better than me, far better than me’. He is just something



“I SEE WHY KAIZER CHIEFS WANTED APPOLLIS, AND I’M HAPPY THE BOY TODAY IS A BUCCANEER AND OSWIN IS PLAYING A BIG, BIG ROLE IN THE TEAM.”

else, he is a good investment for the club. We shouldn’t forget to also give credit to the development coaches like [Joseph] Duku-Duku Makhanya, as well; they gave us a gem.

LK: Thank you so much for speaking to us.



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DOC: HUGO BROOS HAS GROWN IN UNDERSTANDING OUR DNA

There hasn't been a more exciting period to be a South African football supporter than currently; cliché as it may sound, it is true. A third-place finish at the last Africa Cup of Nations tournament in the Ivory Coast has seen the senior national team, Bafana Bafana, continue growing under the guidance of coach Hugo Broos. The team has qualified for back-to-back continental showpieces to be held in Morocco later this year and are on the verge of qualifying for the 2026 FIFA World Cup to be hosted in the USA, Canada and Mexico. With two rounds of qualifiers left to play, South Africa currently tops qualifying Group C after collecting 17 points in eight matches, four of those points collected during the September FIFA window against Lesotho and Nigeria in Bloemfontein. iDiski Times writer LETHABO KGANYAGO travelled to the Free State for Bafana's 1-1 draw with the Super Eagles and along with other media colleagues, she caught up with Bafana legend DOCTOR KHUMALO at a 10Bet event to speak about the progress the team has made, the depth that Broos is enjoying, the role of key players like Teboho Mokoena in the team, Sipho Mbule's return to the national fold and his impressions of the youngsters that have staked a claim in the squad.

Lethabo Kganyago: Looking at the preliminary squad and the final squad for these qualifiers, the question on the depth of this team, Doc, has it been answered?

Doctor Khumalo: I think South African players have actually raised their hands, because there is so much depth in terms of selection when it comes to the national team. And it was evident when Hugo Broos had footballing problems, when Tito [Patrick Maswanganyi] got

injured, and [Nyiko] Mobbie. And it was not difficult for him to call [Sipho] Mbule and [Thabiso] Monyane. Clearly, he knows and he understands the kind of players that he wanted for this Nigeria game. But I must give credit to the boys and say well done, we can do better. This is the beginning of good things to come because here's a coach that understands you guys, so you just have to probably work a little bit better in terms of you guys to be part of the national team, because we still have AFCON that is coming in December, and next year again it's the World Cup finals in Mexico and the USA.

Q: Does this speak to the strength of the coach as understanding the players? How important is that?

DK: Guys, we need to go back to when Hugo started. You remember the player, Ethan Brooks, who was thrown in the deep end when we played Ghana, and this is when I realised to say we might have misinterpreted his intentions. Yes, of course, he wanted young, energetic players, but he actually grew in terms of understanding our DNA in South Africa. And look, he struggled to replace Themba [Zwane], but the boys were unbelievable in the past games to qualify for AFCON. So clearly, he is doing very, very well now.

Q: Doc, when you look at someone like Sipho Mbule, he comes in to replace Tito, who Hugo Broos says is a long-term replacement for Zwane. When you look at Sipho's qualities, do you think that he's the kind of player that could fit in those shoes when Themba retires?

DK: I don't think it's about the quality, but in a coaching language, we know



that there are seven factors that influence performance, and the one that I spoke about, the social factor, in terms of players, understanding, and believing. And Sipho, having played for [Mamelodi] Sundowns, it's easy for him to relate with [Teboho] Mokoena. And he's at Pirates, almost 60% of players of Pirates are there, Sundowns are there. So Sipho, I don't think he will struggle, and it was evident when he played against Likuena, he did very well. So I think when he called him, he didn't just struggle to get him to the squad.

LK: Do you feel that he's also raising his hand to be considered for AFCON later in the year?

DK: Yeah. Mbule, definitely he is. Yes, I think it's a work in progress for him at Orlando Pirates. We need to give him time to settle. But I was so impressed to see what he can offer at Orlando Pirates. And believe it or not, if he can do that at Orlando with 60,000 people and being a novice at Orlando Pirates, I strongly believe that he will be capable to give us what we want as a country in Morocco, because he's an experienced player and a very gifted young boy. I always talk about him to Hlompho Kekana. And I just hope and wish that whatever distracts him can be swept away and he can focus because what a talented young boy, and I'm his fan, you know. I would really love to see him taking this country to another level, and his football to another level, so without any doubt or fear, Mbule can be able to deliver for us as a nation.

Q: I'm just going to take you a little bit back. One of the biggest mistakes that Clive Barker said in one of our interviews with him, he said my biggest regret in football was not losing matches, but was substituting

“IF YOU LOOK AT MBOKAZI, HE HAS NEVER BEEN ON THE FIELD WITH A WEAK MIND, WITH A WEAK HEART. HE WILL ALWAYS STRIVE TO BE THE WINNER, AND THAT KIND OF A PLAYER IS VERY RARE TO FIND.”

Doc. I remember that match quite well, even the opponents were clapping for you to be out of the game. Looking at the squad that we have today, do we have a player who is a Doctor Khumalo, sort of?

DK: Again, based on my experience, and while I was playing, I didn't understand the narrative in terms of the coach wanting not to have a particular player on the field. But after going through coaching courses, then I understood. But now, in the current crop, it's not about player capacity or capability. I think it's about having that individual that will carry the team. At the moment, I'm looking at a player like Teboho Mokoena. You have Teboho Mokoena; you have the core of the national team. I'm not saying he's the only best player, but he's the instrumental player in terms of directing traffic. He's that kind of a player when we build up, he's always there when we go forward, he's there. So Teboho, at the moment, I would like to believe that he is the core in terms of the Bafana Bafana set-up.

Q: You talk about Teboho Mokoena should we try him at some point at 10, I mean, you look at the technique he has, he can strike the ball well.

DK: No, Teboho, remember, he has to be



given the role that he does at Sundowns. You can't distract his position because he's a reference in terms of build-up and attacking. So also he controls the pace. So you wouldn't compare him to the likes of Ace Khuse, Ace Ntsoelengoe, Jomo Sono, and Bra Webster Lichaba. But because the game has evolved, Teboho, he has that kind of capacity in terms of dictating the tempo of the match, and also, even if he gets into the final third, he's got those from Hlompho Kekana telling shots. He's got the experience in terms of taking the penalties. He can shoot from 35 to 45 yards. He's an all-round player. So you can't afford not to have Teboho on the field.

Q: Doc, just still going back to the AFCON. Do you think that this year we now have what it takes to bring it home, having finished third in the last one?

DK: I think, from Ivory Coast, we had an edge in terms of going to the finals, but unfortunately, we lost in the semi-finals, through a penalty shootout. So the boys raised their hands in Ivory Coast. This is where I realised that now our boys have actually managed to find their rhythm. They managed to find themselves who they are, and if any given time or chance, yes, they can bring it at home. They have played against the best of the best in Africa that play in Europe, and they didn't give a damn. They didn't give a damn if you're playing for Chelsea, you play for Man United, or whatever. 'I'm playing for Sekhukhune, I'm playing for Chiefs, for Pirates, but I'll show you who we are', and I support them. I think they can.

LK: Doc, the influx of young players, especially at the back, the Khulumani Ndamanes, the Mbekezeli Mbokazis, what do you make of that?

DK: It's about time, as South Africa to come out of our shell in terms of thinking that this is a young boy, this is whatever. It's good for Hugo, it's good for teams like Pirates and other teams, Stellenbosch. We've seen they've introduced so many

“THE SUCCESSION PLAN DOESN'T START WHEN THERE'S A PROBLEM, BUT IT STARTS WHEN EVERYTHING IS STILL INTACT.”

youngsters, so we don't have to wait for a situation to arise in order for us to be able to bring them in. Whenever there's a need or a chance, let's give them the opportunity. Let's throw them into the deep end and look what he has done now. [Mduduzi] Shabalala is in the team, but I don't think he brought him to use him, but just for him to have a feel of what the national team is all about, and this is how you groom these youngsters. So the succession plan doesn't start when there's a problem, but it starts when everything is still intact. So Hugo is on the right track in terms of making sure that he's gelling experience and younger players. And who has ever thought that [Relebohile] Mofokeng will be where he is today? I mean, he was given a chance in terms of being with the setup of the national team, but now he's a regular.

Q: Talking about the issue of the centre-back, young, inexperienced playing against Nigeria. I mean, look at the AFCON we had Grant Kekana, Mothobi Mvala, who are now injured, but you go to this crucial game against Nigeria, because I think that's my area of concern, that defensively, we are a little bit inexperienced playing against Nigeria in a crucial game like this.

DK: It's a very good question. You look at [Mbekezeli] Mbokazi, and obviously, he hasn't featured much in the national set-up. He's only played in the [CAF] Champions League or probably



Orlando Pirates, and he’s going to be facing very experienced players from Europe. But at the end of the day, it’s about who has it more. And if you look at Mbokazi, he has never been on the field with a weak mind, with a weak heart. He will always strive to be the winner, and that kind of a player is very rare to find. Mbokazi is not just an ordinary player, but what he brings on the day is hard work, and this is what makes him to become one of the best central defenders we have. Yes, I understand experienced players, we’re playing against them, but what I like about him, the composure and being bold enough to challenge. I mean, he’s played better strikers in the PSL, and he silenced them. So why can’t he do it? So when are we going to realise that he can do it if you don’t throw him into the deep end, hence I’m saying, let’s not shy away from giving them the platform, these young boys. And for them to be able to see whether they are progressing or not, because remember, the game is the teacher. So if we keep on talking like this, not seeing them doing it on the field, we can’t learn anything from them.

LK: Doc, you spoke about Mdu obviously coming into the team to get a feel, and we know Coach Broos has spoken about why he hasn’t called a lot of Chiefs players as yet. But with

“I THINK IT’S ABOUT HAVING THAT INDIVIDUAL THAT WILL CARRY THE TEAM. AT THE MOMENT, I’M LOOKING AT A PLAYER LIKE TEBOHO MOKOENA. YOU HAVE TEBOHO MOKOENA; YOU HAVE THE CORE OF THE NATIONAL TEAM.”

the kind of start they have had to this season, do you feel that also this would be motivation?

DK: Yeah, I think, for Mduduzi Shabalala to be in the squad, I’m happy for the boy. He has tried so much. In some instances, I would feel bad in terms of, I mean, like, this boy is trying. But for Hugo to call Mdu I think it’s the same thing that he has done to Mofokeng, you know, to bring him in and for these two games he didn’t feature, but just for him to be part of the set-up. But then again, the question lies with Shabba, ‘they called you, what are you going to do about it’, because they can give you the platform, but you pave your own path.

LK: Thanks, Doc.



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NDLONDLO: IT WAS A GREAT STINT FOR ME AT PIRATES

After three seasons at Orlando Pirates, PHILLIP NDLONDLO has headed back to Marumo Gallants, but a lot has changed since his time at the now-Bloemfontein-based club. iDiski Times’ latest recruit, SINETHEMBA SITHOLE, caught up with the diminutive midfielder to find out more about his time with the Buccaneers, playing at the CHAN final for Bafana Bafana, and what the 30-year-old is aiming for now.

Sinethemba Sithole: Phillip, thank you for allowing me time to speak to you. Tell me, what do they usually call you, because I’ve heard some tripping over Ndabayithethwa?

Phillip Ndondlo: Obviously, in football it’s Ndondlo or Phillip, but most people that know me from a young age call me Phillip.

SS: How do you feel about your return to Marumo Gallants? This is the club where you made your name, particularly during Tshakhuma Tsha Madzivhandila days before they rebranded to Marumo.

PN: To be honest, I feel great because it’s like I’m continuing where I left off before I was the Phillip Ndondlo that everyone knows. So, I think it’s a good thing that I’ve come back home cause it’s like I’m going back to where I started, thanking the people who gave me a platform to be where I am today. So, with the little experience I got where I was [at Orlando Pirates], I think it’s going to play a big role in helping the guys that are looking forward to make their names and brands as well, grow in football and getting to experience things.

SS: What did they tell you when you came in terms of the targets that the team wants you to help them achieve this season?

PN: The first thing is coming back to the team with the experience I have, obviously, I have to share it and pass it on to the guys. I must help the team compete because at the end of the

day, that’s the name of the business. We are in the business of football. We need to keep the team afloat by winning. When you do that, a lot of recognition comes to the team because as much as we want to see ourselves winning and competing, we’re also helping these other talented guys that are in the team that want to go places to get exposure. We believe we would be creating that platform for them to showcase their talents and fulfil their dreams and goals that they have.

SS: I’m sure it’s your first time playing for a Bloemfontein-based club where there’s so much support. How will that help you? And also considering that your mother is from this town, how are you connecting with the city and its people?

PN: I think with the big crowds that we will have in each and every game that we will play, it’s going to be a great motivation for the team, for us to want to see them happy all the time. Obviously, we have to win and play good football and compete so they can enjoy coming to the stadium to support us. We are one of the most fortunate small teams to have a gold medal [2021 Nedbank Cup champion] of the big trophies in the country and domestic league. I think we should continue with that momentum and bring more of that as well because it’s so nice to play the cup finals, man. It brings the best out of the team because some of the guys have played for so long in the league but they don’t have gold medals and haven’t played cup finals. So, we have to compete in such a way that we want to see ourselves in each and every cup final of the competitions we play. It will also be a thanks-giving to our supporters who come in numbers in each and every home game we play.

SS: You’ve played two games under coach Alexandre Lafitte, who’s 28 years old. How are you finding it under his leadership?

PN: To be honest, I haven’t been



finding it easy because it's my first time working with him but I'm getting used to the tactics that he's bringing to the team...but some of them I'm familiar with because it's most of the similar things that I was exposed to under coach [Jose] Riveiro [at Orlando Pirates]. So, football this time around is a thing that's shared around among a lot of people, whereby the same things are being repeated. So, I think over time, I'm getting used to the club and how they play and the culture because it's not the same as when I left. A lot of things have changed for the better, which is a good thing. So, I think [Lafitte] is a good coach and is going to produce wonders just like he has started; he will take this team to the top. And a lot of things are going to show by the good things that he does.

SS: In 2021, at Free State Stadium, now your home venue with Gallants, you scored a winning goal for TTM in the Nedbank Cup final. Surely that memory came back when you returned to the club.

PN: Of course, it did, because for myself to come to the stadium where I won my first trophy as a professional, it will always be one of my greatest memories I will always cherish. And also, it's my mom's home town, where she's from and where she's resting as well. It brings so many good things and memories that I had. It's gonna come as a motivation to me and also to the guys, whereby we will have a leg to stand on because we know what is at stake and what is it that we have achieved. Some of the guys that are here were there when we won the Nedbank, so they know the stadium. Whenever we play there, good memories come.

SS: Tell me about your Bafana Bafana experience at the CHAN tournament, and the feeling of scoring that wonder goal against Uganda.

PN: From the welcome we got there, going into the hotels, the buses, facilities, training fields, the stadiums, the atmosphere and the people, it was a great experience in which we were also shocked that, 'Oh okay, this is how big the tournament is'. So, from then on, we were like, we want to compete from the first game that we played. The platform that we were given there, we were so grateful, we grabbed it with both hands. We used it to our fullest potential and were just unfortunate not to go through to the knockout stages because of some other things that are beyond our control. We did all we could, even though in some games we felt we could have done better and won the games. With what I did [scoring the goal], it was not about me; it was about the team. Playing with guys that most of them I had never played with was a good thing. It also brought back my confidence because things haven't been easy for me in my last days at Pirates. When I got there, I felt like I was given a second chance to show what I'm capable of and what I can still offer. So, I think the tournament itself gave that side of me that I can still do it, irrespective of the circumstances.



"I THINK IT'S A GOOD THING THAT I'VE COME BACK HOME CAUSE IT'S LIKE I'M GOING BACK TO WHERE I STARTED, THANKING THE PEOPLE WHO GAVE ME A PLATFORM TO BE WHERE I AM TODAY."

So, that was it.

SS: More than half of the squad members were free agents. Would you say it was an opportunity for you guys to market yourselves to the teams?

PN: I think the message was very clear from the onset. We didn't want to make that tournament about us individually, but about us as a group. What is it that we could offer? For us to be free agents but still be selected to represent the national team, we got criticism, we needed to make it worth it. We used that as a platform to bring the best out of us to redeem ourselves. We must also thank the coach because it's hard to find a coach that believes in players that don't have clubs and give them the opportunity to play. Credit must be given to coach Molefi [Ntseki] and his technical team. Most of the guys I spent time with there were also grateful, as I am.

SS: Sometimes, we take ourselves for granted as a country when it comes to continental football. How big is the respect for South Africa or Bafana?

PN: I think the respect is there, but the thing is, they couldn't see the names that they are familiar with in the Bafana team. But when we entered the field of play and showed them what we can do, that's where we got the recognition. And from then on, it brought this thing that it's not only the familiar names that they know, but South Africa as a whole has quality players that can showcase talent at

any given time.

SS: If you play CHAN or COSAFA for Bafana, it has proven that you can be considered for Hugo Broos’ first team when you look at the likes of Mduduzi Shabalala and Kamogelo Sebelebele, who played COSAFA. For you, is playing for Bafana’s first team something you’re still hoping for?

PN: I’m gonna be honest, what I’ve realised is that once you get recognised in the national team, you’ve opened yourself that door of getting called up again with the good performance that you display. I think if coach Hugo [Broos] recognises, they do a follow-up and you’re given a chance if you’re continuing to perform, irrespective of what tournament you played, whether it’s CHAN or COSAFA. Some of the guys that are in the current squad are players who played in the COSAFA, they are there. So, that platform is there for everyone who gets selected for the national team. So, it’s only a matter of time that you get selected [for the first team] and you go and represent the national team.

SS: Tell me about the Orlando Pirates stint, obviously there’s a lot you experienced there, briefly, how was it? How much have you grown while there?

PN: Obviously, I’ve grown to the person that I am today with the experience that I got from the club. I feel that it was a great stint for me at Pirates. I served my time well. When my brother asks me how I feel about leaving Pirates, I tell him that I feel like I played my part. For me to spend three years there without getting loaned out, I feel that I served my time well, giving my all and representing the club well. With the opportunity that I got, I grabbed it with both hands. It was unfortunate that in the last year of my time there, I didn’t play as much as I did when I got there. But I understood the dynamics of football, that’s how they are. Obviously, there were new players in the team and they were also getting their chances to play. But the most important thing is the good attitude you have towards the club, whether things are going well or bad for you, because that takes you a long way. You mustn’t think everything is going to be good at all times; you must bear in mind that there are times where things won’t go well. The most important thing is how you pick yourself up, how you treat yourself and other people. So, I think for me, I enjoyed my time at Pirates, I had a great time there, playing five cup finals, which is something great that I will always cherish. I played semi-finals of the [CAF] Champions League, which is great. I have so much experience from that tournament as well; we were unfortunate not to go to the final. With everything that I experienced at Pirates, I’m so grateful about the opportunity, and I’ll forever be grateful for that opportunity.

SS: Speaking about great times you had there, you won several trophies with the club. How big is that for



“I FEEL THAT IT WAS A GREAT STINT FOR ME AT PIRATES. I SERVED MY TIME WELL. WHEN MY BROTHER ASKS ME HOW I FEEL ABOUT LEAVING PIRATES, I TELL HIM THAT I FEEL LIKE I PLAYED MY PART.”

your career in general?

PN: I think it’s huge because it will go a long way in enhancing my CV, because in football, they look at what you’ve achieved. It helps in opening other doors, and it’s something amazing to win five trophies with Orlando Pirates. It’s a great feeling, the greatest moment, that a footballer would wish that it happens every time.

SS: Your view on coach Jose Riveiro, bringing back the happy days to Pirates. What kind of coach was he to you personally?

PN: Coach was good to me, but not to me only but everyone. He’s a good human being, good father, brother and coach. And he knows how to bring the best out of players and human beings because before we are football players, we are human beings as well. So, if you can find someone who can bring the best out of you as a person and as a footballer, you’ve truly found a guardian angel because he helps you in seeing the positive in every hardship you go through. I think I learnt a few things from that guy because he doesn’t even speak too much, not loud. He is a quiet person, but he does his work quietly so and his job is the one that speaks volumes and makes noise for him. What he did to the club was amazing. You’d never find a single person that would say coach Riveiro this or that; the guys know the truth, he was an honest person as well.

SS: Thanks, Phillip.



BAFANA’S METAMORPHOSIS

South Africa stands on the very edge of history, just a heartbeat away from sealing their return to the FIFA World Cup Finals in the USA, Canada and Mexico next year. With only two group matches left, against Zimbabwe and Rwanda in October, two positive results will all but punch Bafana Bafana’s ticket to the greatest show on earth.

It’s been a long and testing road. After eight gruelling qualifiers spread across nearly two years, Hugo Broos’ men sit proudly atop Group C with 17 points; three ahead of Benin and six clear of Nigeria and Rwanda. They’ve done it the hard way, brushing aside injuries, suspensions, and a few storms both literal and figurative.

There was the calamitous defeat on a rain-soaked, water-logged artificial pitch in Rwanda that many believed should never have been played; the administrative blunder involving midfield maestro Teboho Mokoena that still lingers; and, most recently, the infuriating handball controversy that denied Bafana a crucial win over Nigeria in Bloemfontein. Yet, each time they’ve stumbled, they’ve stood up taller, hardened by the challenge.



Perhaps the most remarkable part of the story is how Broos has reinvented the team almost in real time. When Bafana faced Nigeria last Tuesday, only two players, Mokoena and captain Ronwen Williams, remained from the starting XI that beat Benin in the first qualifier back in November

2023. In less than two years, the Belgian has rebuilt the side without blinking, creating a squad that is more youthful, hungrier, and brimming with belief, as he used 37 players on the pitch across the eight games thus far. Over the past 20 months, Broos’ evolving team has also picked up a bronze medal at the 2024 AFCON, qualification for the next edition in December 2025, and is now on the verge of a World Cup return. Under his leadership, Bafana have gone from a team in transition to a team with a plan, a unit capable of battling Africa’s best and dreaming beyond the continent.

Should they finish the job in October, it will not only be a triumph of talent but of resilience, proving that South Africa is back and can once again compete at football’s highest level and rekindle the Bafana magic for a new generation of fans.

Currently on a run of 22 undefeated matches in open play, here’s how Bafana transformed during these World Cup qualifiers:

GOALKEEPER:

There has been little reason to tinker between the posts, as Ronwen Williams continues to go from strength to strength. Bafana Bafana’s inspirational skipper is not just the first name on Hugo Broos’ team sheet when it comes to goalkeepers; he’s the only name. Throughout this demanding qualification campaign, Williams has been the one constant, the heartbeat, delivering calm authority and world-class saves in equal measure. Of course, his importance also carries a note of concern. South Africa felt the sting of his absence during last year’s AFCON qualifiers, and should injury or fatigue strike in future, the drop-off would be significant. Yet for now, the nation can savour the Williams era: a captain at the peak of his powers, marshalling his

defence with quiet intensity, setting the standard for professionalism, and embodying the new resilience of Bafana Bafana. Long may it continue, because as long as Williams is in goal, South Africa's dreams feel that much more secure.

Williams' back-ups have, however, slightly changed. While Ricardo Goss is still around from that first squad in 2023, Veli Mothwa, who had been number two for most of Broos' reign, is not, with Sipho Chaine chosen for the last four internationals. Others like Sage Stephens, were part of the AFCON qualifiers, but did not feature at all during the World Cup campaign.

LEFT-BACK:

Having established himself as the first-choice left-back by 2023, Aubrey Modiba still stands as the frontrunner for the role in Hugo Broos' evolving Bafana Bafana set-up. The Mamelodi Sundowns man has been part of every squad through this qualification cycle and featured five times, including a starting berth against Lesotho earlier this month. Yet Broos has shown a willingness to experiment on the flank, rotating three different players over the course of the campaign.

New Sundowns recruit Fawaaz Basadien, in fine form then for Stellenbosch, was trusted to start both fixtures in March, while exciting youngster Samukelo Kabini was preferred ahead of Modiba for the most recent qualifier — a sign of healthy competition and perhaps a glimpse of succession planning. Even so, Modiba's experience, positional sense and composure under pressure still make him the benchmark at left-back. With two critical fixtures remaining, Broos will be weighing up whether to lean on Modiba's proven qualities or continue blending youth and experience in one of Bafana's most hotly contested positions.

RIGHT-BACK:

Although he missed the most recent fixtures, Khuliso Mudau remains the player most people consider the first-choice in this position. His consistency and high-level experience with Mamelodi Sundowns have made him Broos' first choice, but his absence since the Club World Cup forced the national coach to reshuffle. With regular alternatives like Thapelo Morena and Deano van Rooyen also unavailable, Broos had little choice but to experiment against Lesotho and Nigeria.

What initially looked like a crisis began to reveal unexpected depth. Nyiko Mobbie, Broos' trusted deputy, had to be stretchered off against Lesotho, only for Zuko Mdunyelwa to step up superbly. Unfortunately, injury struck Mdunyelwa against Nigeria, but late call-up Thabiso Monyane took over and impressed.

While Broos will be eager to have

Mudau, Morena and the rest of his senior options fit and firing again, he can take real encouragement from how seamlessly the replacements adapted. In the long run, this mini-revolving door at right-back may even broaden Bafana Bafana's options and strengthen competition for places heading into the decisive stage of World Cup qualification.

CENTRAL DEFENCE:

Central defence has been one of Bafana Bafana's most fluid departments during this qualifying campaign. Hugo Broos has already rolled out six different centre-back pairings, and the chopping and changing won't stop just yet.

Siyabonga Ngezana, who had emerged as the rock at the heart of the backline, will miss the Zimbabwe clash through suspension. Former stalwart Siyanda Xulu hasn't featured in more than a year as he remains without a club, while Mothobi Mvala, once a key cog, has been hampered by injuries. Mvala, almost a forgotten man, is on the mend and could come into contention again.

Nkosinathi Sibisi, who partnered Ngezana twice, has also been sidelined, but his absence



opened the door for one of the stories of the campaign: the rise of Orlando Pirates teenager Mbekezeli Mbokazi. His fearless, composed displays in the September internationals were hailed as “world-class” and have quickly made him a fan favourite.

Broos, meanwhile, continues to dip into his growing pool of defensive prospects, using Thabo Moloisane and Khulumani Ndamane against Lesotho and keeping an eye on Rushwin Dortley, who shone during AFCON qualification but is also recovering from injury, and did not feature in any World Cup qualifier so far.

This ongoing churn has been disruptive at times, but it has also given Bafana a deeper, more versatile set of options at the back, something that could be invaluable.

CENTRAL MIDFIELD:

At the start of the qualifying journey, it seemed as though Teboho Mokoena and Yaya Sithole would form the heartbeat of Bafana Bafana’s midfield for years to come.

But football seldom follows the script, and Sithole’s untimely injury in 2024 forced Hugo Broos into an early reshuffle.

To his credit, the Belgian coach found not just stop-gaps but genuine options: Thabente Mbatha stepped up with assured performances, Bathusi Aubaas offered steel and energy, and Jayden Adams added a touch of dynamism when called upon.

Now, as Bafana edge closer to their World Cup dream, there’s a welcome selection dilemma brewing. Sithole, steadily regaining fitness in Europe, is nearing a return to action and could be available for the decisive fixtures. That prospect leaves Broos with an enviable problem, a deeper, more competitive midfield than he might have imagined when this campaign began.

ATTACKING MIDFIELD:

If fit and firing, Themba Zwane remains Hugo Broos’ go-to man in that advanced midfield role, his experience and guile still unmatched in the current Bafana Bafana set-up. But Zwane’s injury last year forced Broos to broaden his horizons and test his depth chart, and with Mshishi’s ongoing struggles, he’s had to keep trying. Patrick Maswanganyi, so influential during the AFCON qualifiers, offered one option but curiously hasn’t featured at all during the World Cup campaign, with injury also meaning he missed out in September.

Yet out of that uncertainty came an intriguing development. Sipho Mbule, handed a chance against Lesotho and Nigeria, delivered two composed, intelligent performances that caught the eye. With his talent never in doubt, Mbule may well have positioned himself as another candidate to be the long-term heir to Zwane’s creative throne, or at the very least given Broos another potent option as South Africa’s World Cup charge gathers momentum.

WINGS:

Perhaps nowhere has Hugo Broos’ rebuild been more dramatic than out on the flanks. When the World Cup qualifiers kicked off back in 2023, the wide berths were dominated by familiar names like Bongokuhle Hlongwane, Mhlabi Mayambela and Percy Tau. But as the campaign rolled on, injuries and dips in form forced a rethink. Tau, for instance, still played in half the games but never quite recaptured his sparkle on the international stage, adding to the selection puzzle. From 2024 onwards, though, a new wave of wide men began to redefine Bafana’s attacking identity. Oswin Appollis emerged as a talisman in both World Cup and AFCON qualifiers, combining relentless running with end-product. He wasn’t alone. Elias Mokwana’s stock rose sharply with his speed and eye for goal. Relebohile Mofokeng added



excitement, youthful flair and intelligence, and this September saw Mohau Nkota seize the spotlight with a goal, while Kamogelo Sebelebele’s arrival injected even more pace and unpredictability. What once looked like a thin area of the squad has become one of Bafana’s richest sources of energy and creativity — a stable of wingers capable of stretching defences, interchanging fluidly and, crucially, chipping in with goals at decisive moments.

STRIKER:

Back when Hugo Broos named his first squad of this qualifying campaign in 2023, it was Evidence Makgopa and Zakhele Lepasa who were selected against Benin and Rwanda. Fast forward to today, and the picture up front has shifted noticeably. Lyle Foster and Iqraam Rayners have emerged as Broos’ preferred options in the central striker role.

Foster has already struck twice in this campaign, while Rayners has chipped in with one, and both players have not only slotted seamlessly into the system but also built an understanding with the midfield creators around them.

Foster’s return to the Bafana fold was never seriously in doubt; it was only a matter of when. After stepping away from the game to address his mental health and missing a full 10 months of international duty, including the AFCON finals, the talented striker is back and seemingly refreshed. His reappearance has added both quality and emotional weight to Hugo Broos’ attack, reminding supporters how much they’d missed his blend of physicality, link-up play and cool finishing.

At the same time, Rayners’ rise has been one of the most consistent success stories in South African football over the past two seasons. His relentless scoring at club level forced Broos to take notice in 2024, and since then, he has grown into one of Bafana’s most reliable frontmen.

Broos suddenly has a powerful one-

two punch up front, a combination of attributes that could be decisive with qualifiers looming against Zimbabwe and Rwanda. The duo will be eager to increase their tallies, cement their status as Broos’ go-to men, and perhaps fire Bafana Bafana over the line to the World Cup.



STATISTICS:

Most WCQ Appearances:

Ronwen Williams

Most WCQ Goals:

Lyle Foster, Jayden Adams, Thapelo Morena

Most WCQ Assists:

Oswin Appollis, Yaya Sithole

Most WCQ Goal Contributions:

Lyle Foster, Oswin Appollis

Most WCQ Clean Sheets:

Ronwen Williams

Accurate long balls per 90:

Siyabonga Ngezana

Accurate passes per 90:

Nkosinathi Sibisi

Big chances created:

Oswin Appollis

Big chances missed:

Relebohile Mofokeng

Chances created:

Percy Tau

Possession won in final 3rd per 90:

Oswin Appollis

Blocks per 90:

Siyabonga Ngezana

Interceptions per 90:

Yaya Sithole, Bathusi Aubaas

Clearances per 90 min:

Siyabonga Ngezana

Fouls committed per 90:

Thalente Mbatha

Successful tackles per 90:

Thalente Mbatha

Shots on target per 90:

Iqraam Rayners

Shots per 90:

Iqraam Rayners

Successful dribbles per 90:

Thapelo Morena

Other Bafana
WCQ Stats:

MTN8 - TEAM OF THE FINAL



* Substitute. Based on FotMob ratings



ACE OF THE WEEK:
ABDESLAM OUADDOU

Our iDiski Times Ace of the Week is Orlando Pirates head coach Abdeslam Ouaddou, who etched his name into the club records by steering the Buccaneers to a historic fourth consecutive MTN8 crown. For the Moroccan tactician, it was his first major trophy on South African soil, and fitting reward after a challenging start both on and off the pitch. Having steadied the ship following a sluggish opening to the league campaign, Ouaddou has also shown remarkable personal resilience, returning to the dugout after a serious traffic accident that sidelined several members of his technical team. Taking over from Jose Riveiro was never going to be easy, but the 46-year-old former Moroccan captain is proving he has the character and composure to write his own legacy at Pirates.



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.

Set Piece Game

This week, we continue with our series on training practices. Generally speaking, what we introduce here is always with opposition pressure, as we want to train football through situations where players have to communicate with each other and make decisions based on this communication (with opposition as well as teammates). Most major parts of the modern game are well covered through competitive practices; one aspect that is less well covered but that has come to a lot of attention in recent years is set pieces. The reality is that set pieces (offensively and defensively) can time and again be the key difference between winning and losing games. They, without doubt, give you a major competitive edge if you are good at them. There are teams, perhaps most famously FC Midtjylland in the Danish Superliga, that build their collective identity very much around set pieces.

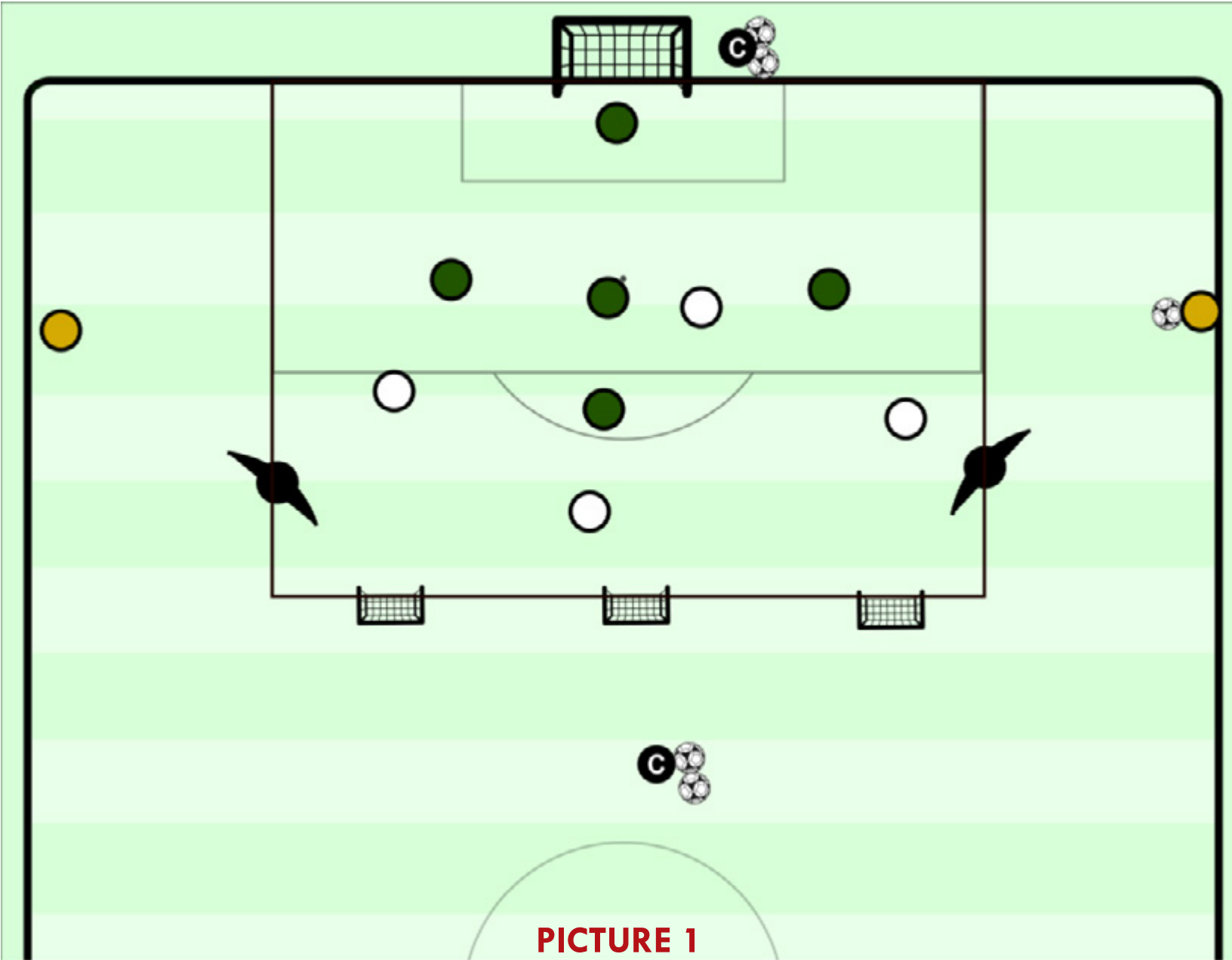
Even if we look at the English Premier League with teams such as Arsenal or Aston Villa and their very successful and innovative work in this department, it is clear what a key central role set pieces can play in successful team set-ups as opposed to a fringe role on the side, as they may have done previously. For our South African audience, we can deepen our understanding if we look at Rugby through the context of set pieces. In Rugby, the two most prominent set pieces are the line-out and the scrum. There are very few that would dispute how central these have been to the Springbok success over the last few years. Corner kicks, free kicks and throw-ins can do the same in the sport of football. An individual reality that goes along with this is that individual player proficiency at set pieces is very much a central scouting element these

days as well. Scouts actively look for good set-piece takers and targets, but even 2nd phase specialists and good blockers are actively searched for at the top level. So, how can we prepare our players for this, especially in their development phase? So that a part of the set piece game becomes a real weapon that they can later on use to market themselves on the professional stage. We, as coaches, time and again see young players struggle heavily with this part of the game when they make the transition to the first team. So, how can we help players counter this deficiency early on already?

4v4+2 taker tournament

One obvious step towards developing better set-piece players early on is to integrate this better (and more frequently) into training, even at youth level. However, most believe that doing this means we have to spend ages in isolated training where players learn boring routines and just get a lot of repetition of heading balls at goal. So a key step here would be to integrate set pieces into a more competitive setting where players can learn about this part of the game in the same way as other parts. In order to do this, we must design set-piece practices that give us adequate repetition, but in an enjoyable, competitive setting. My attempt at designing this is shown in picture 1.

In this practice, ideally, we have 2 fields that run concurrently. This enables us to run a tournament with 4 teams competing against each other. In this case, we have 4 teams of 4 (target) players each. On each field, we have a goalkeeper that remains on that field as well as 2 takers who deliver the ball for each team. On one field, we have two takers who deliver corners and indirect free kicks, while



on the other, we have 2 takers who deliver long throw-ins (if you have the ability to do so/want to utilise this as part of your attacking set-up) who then also deliver indirect free kicks.

In picture 1, the white team is attacking the big goal, which green is defending. The yellow set-piece taker delivers the ball into the box. The ball is alive as long as it doesn't leave the area demarcated by the solid lines. White looks to score the first or second ball on the big goal. Any goal in the big goal is worth 2 points. The green team looks to clear the ball out of the playing area or counter towards the 2 mini goals. Any goal into the mini goals is worth 1 point. As soon as the first ball from the first set piece taker is scored or cleared, the coach immediately plays them a second ball, which this taker is then meant to deliver into the box as a representation of the second phase of a set piece, which is something of critical importance when it comes to the area of set pieces. In the second phase ball, the defending team can send a player out to press the yellow player in order to speed up and press their process of delivering the second ball into the playing field. Once this ball leaves the area, the overall sequence of play stops and then restarts with the other set-piece taker from the other side.

In total, each team gets 4 sequences, where each sequence involves a first and second ball delivery as described above. After these 4 sequences, the roles of the two teams change. Again, each goal scored on the big goal is worth 2 points, whilst counter goals are worth 1 point each. In the playing

area where the ball is delivered, each set piece is played with normal offside rules. We can play this with the set-piece takers remaining on their fields of play, and as a round robin where each team plays each other once or twice in the process. A good idea with this game might be to play it without a points system, but rather with a system where at the end of it, the team that has the best goal difference wins.

Another rule that can have a fantastic effect comes from my friend and colleague Clemens Zullehner. Here, the defensive side has to choose one player from the attacking team whose goals (when attacking the big goal only) are worth double points. In other words, if they score, their team gets awarded 4 points (2 points x2). This can be a nice tool for teams to find strategies to involve their weaker set-piece players and for a greater effect of joy when that player then puts in extra effort and ultimately scores a goal. This rule can, of course, also be turned around, where the teams can choose a player themselves whose goals scored count double. Now the challenge would be to create little 4-man variations to set that player up. All good little tricks to encourage creative thinking in competitive set-piece situations. It would also be possible to play this game without neutral takers, but with each team having a fixed taker of their own. A nice idea here would be that they can then also choose which indirect 4 set pieces they want to run in their attacks. Finally, of course, this doesn't have to be a 4v4 either, but can be played with different numbers of players per team, depending on what you have available in your training session.





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