



CAN SUNDOWNS END SA'S NIGERIAN CURSE?



BAFANA MUST LEARN FROM MISTAKES AHEAD OF AFCON



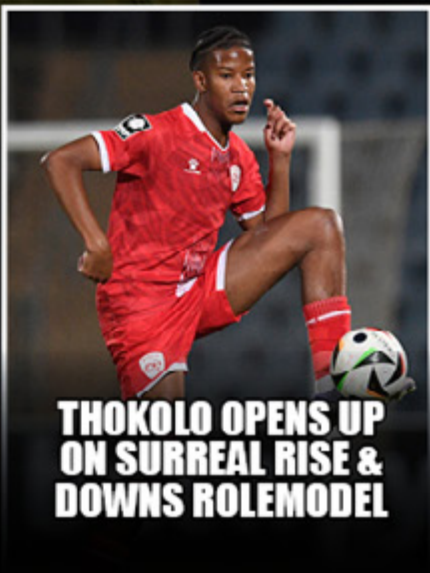
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THE DRAWING BOARD WITH MORITZ KOSSMANN & ACE OF THE WEEK

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MPHAHLELE RESURFACES AT ORBIT

Former AmaZulu and Kaizer Chiefs defender Ramahlwe Mphahlele has resurfaced at Orbit College, where he looks set to join as a free agent. The veteran defender was part of the South Africa squad at the recent 2025 Africa Nations Championship and has expressed his desire to continue playing at the elite level in Mzansi. Several clubs were linked with the 35-year-old, who has been spotted training with Orbit during the FIFA international break.



MASUTHA TO LEAVE STRUGGLING LIDODA DUVHA?

Black Leopards head coach Joel Masutha’s future is hanging by a thread after a winless start to the 2025/26 Motsepe Foundation Championship campaign. The struggling Thohoyandou side have failed to register a victory in their first five matches, a run worsened by registration issues linked to a FIFA transfer ban. Now in his third stint at the club he once played for, the 53-year-old Masutha has faced an uphill battle from day one. Despite his deep ties to Lidoda Duvha, sources suggest they may be preparing for a change as they look to spark a revival from the bottom of the table.



MOBARA LINKED WITH SIWELELE SWITCH

Former Orlando Pirates and AmaZulu defender Abbubaker Mobara has been linked with a potential move to Siwelele. The 31-year-old, who was widely regarded as one of the finest prospects when he broke through the ranks at Ikamva at Ajax over a decade ago, finds himself as a free agent for the first time in his career. With over 250 professional games in the top-flight and a full senior international, he provides an interesting profile for potential suitors, as a right-back, centre-back or defensive midfielder.



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CHIEFS LOOK TOWARDS BOOST OF NEW TRIO FOR SIMBA CLASH

Kaizer Chiefs are set to have a major boost in their second preliminary CAF Confederation Cup qualifier against AS Simba from DR Congo, with three new signings set to be cleared and registered for the game.

The signings of Etiosa Ighodaro, Lebogang Maboe and Khanyisa Mayo were all made late in the window, which saw them miss the deadline for the first preliminary round qualifiers against Angolan side Kabuscorp, in which Chiefs progressed on penalties last month.

Mayo has been the only player who has made his official debut for the club so far in the league, while Ighodaro and Maboe – both arriving as free agents after their contracts at Mamelodi Sundowns expired – have been working on returning to fitness.

While the timing of their signings meant they missed the first CAF registration, a second registration window for the second preliminary round was open until the end of September, while this month clubs who progress to the group stages are allowed to further register players.

Sources have indicated, both Maboe and Ighodaro are nearing closer to their debuts, having played some internal friendly fixtures and integrating well with the squad in first team training, with Ighodaro overcoming the knock he suffered shortly after his signing was announced.

Several of the new additions have not been up to speed; the likes of Nkanyiso

Shinga and Ethan Chislett have yet to make their debuts, and will slowly be integrated as they look to get closer to the fitness levels of the current starters.

With potentially CAF Confederation Cup group stage games seen as the perfect platform, which will also likely be the first sight of former Cape Town Spurs duo Asanele Velebaya and Luke Baartman.

In terms of the squad make-up, Rushwin Dortley remains sidelined with an injury, and has yet to return to full training since his surgery on his knee at the end of last season – but there are hopes that he could feature again before the turn of the year.

Meanwhile, sources close to the camp of goalkeeper Fiacre Ntwari have painted a bleak picture of the future of the Rwanda international goalkeeper, who was notably put up for sale in the off-season.

It's been suggested his recent antics in the Carling Knockout Cup will come with severe repercussions, further casting doubt on his future at the club, which was already questioned after an indifferent debut season at the Soweto giants.

The towering keeper was pictured refusing to be substituted before the penalty shoot-out against Stellenbosch.

Amakhosi travel to DRC this weekend to face Simba at the Stade TP Mazembe, before the return leg at FNB Stadium, seven days later.



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‘WHERE IS BRADLEY GROBLER?’

South African fans were frustrated at the Moses Mabhida Stadium last Friday as Zimbabwe held Bafana Bafana in their FIFA World Cup qualifying fixture.

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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‘Zimbabwe Did Well In Stopping South Africa’

“Where was Bradley Grobler and Keletso Makgalwa?

“Yaya Sithole has not played for Bafana Bafana for a long time, and he was sent straight into the line-up. Why would you not pick a striker who is scoring goals?

“Why pick strikers who are not scoring goals in their domestic leagues? This is pure favouritism.

“Bafana Bafana were unlucky to not score because Lyle Foster could have easily scored twice, and Zimbabwe also hit the post with their only chance.

“What I did not like from Hugo Broos was how he approached the game. He was always looking for long balls and crosses, and that minimised the number of chances we could create.

“Zimbabwe did well in stopping South Africa. They had a good spine in Marshall Munetsi and Washington Arubi, among others.

“When they got the red card, they put every man behind the ball. They were also very motivated to play against South Africa.”

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CAN SUNDOWNS BREAK THE NIGERIAN CURSE?

By Matshelane Mamabolo

THE BAD NEWS for Mamelodi Sundowns as they prepare to kick-start their 2025/26 CAF Champions League campaign is that they are doing so in a country where they’ve never won.

Three times in the past, the Brazilians were drawn against Nigerian opposition in the continent’s premier club competition – and in all those ties, Sundowns have not won in the West African country. What

are the chances of Ronwen Williams and co changing the status quo when they take on Remo Stars in the first leg of their second round tie, then?

The record – and not only Sundowns’ one – would suggest slim and none. Generally, South African teams do not fare well in Nigeria.

Since our return to continental club football in 1993, there have been eight ties between the two rival countries and only once did a South African team register an away victory. That was way back in 1996 when defending champions Orlando Pirates beat Shooting Stars 1-0. But the Buccaneers were also beaten by the same score line in their own backyard and went on to be eliminated via the shoot-out from the penalty spot when they lost 3-4.

Granted, Nigerian club football has fallen on hard times since then, and Sundowns are way too accomplished a Champions League side to be worried about losing to Stars. Yet you can bet the Nigerians will be chomping at the bit, their confidence coming from a history that seems to favour them for at least the first leg encounter.

Way back in 2001, when they reached the final for the first time, Sundowns were drawn into the same group as Julius Berger. They were beaten 2-0 in Nigeria in the first leg tie but rallied to win 1-0 at home to end up finishing second on seven points, with Berger two points behind in third place.

When they won the competition under Pitso Mosimane in 2016, Sundowns were again in the same group as a Nigerian outfit, then Enyimba. They won the first leg tie 2-1 and were already assured of progression to the knockout phase when they travelled for the second leg. Mosimane rested his key players for the dead rubber tie of a group that was reduced to three teams after ES Setif were kicked out following riots in their opening match against Sundowns. Enyimba won that inconsequential match 3-1.

Later in the 2018/19 campaign, Sundowns were again drawn to play against a team from Nigeria – Lobi Stars. They met on Match Day 1, and with Mosimane adopting the approach of ‘winning our home matches’, a 2-1 defeat after they’d taken the lead via Anthony Laffor was no train smash. Sundowns reached the semi-final that season.

This will be the first time they take on a Nigerian outfit in the preliminary stage, and their former captain, Hlompho Kekana, says the South African champions can chalk up that first win.





“Sundowns can beat Remo Stars; the history of us never winning a match in Nigeria should not be something they think too much about. We have a strong team, and we need to send a message to the rest of the other teams in the competition that we mean business. Winning in Nigeria will go a long way towards doing that.”

The former skipper acknowledges, though, that the Brazilians are in for a challenging trip.

“Playing in Nigeria is never easy because they are still old school in that they do their best to create a very difficult environment for us South African teams. You feel it the moment you arrive at the airport because they try all kinds of tricks just to unsettle you – the old way of making you uncomfortable.”

Kekana has vivid memories of his two trips to Nigeria with Sundowns.

“None of our trips there were easy. Against Enyimba, the match was played on a waterlogged pitch, and it was very difficult to play. Luckily, we had already done the job, so coach Pitso [Mosimane] made so many changes in the starting line-up. It was very good because that match really helped prepare some of the youngsters for Champions League football. One of those was the late Motjeka Madisha, who told me after the match that he loved the atmosphere and got very excited about Champions League football.”

Years later, when they went to Lobi Stars, Sundowns were already accustomed to the shenanigans of the Nigerians.

“That was a struggle, and I remember us sharing food during lunch because we spent a longish time there. And on Match Day, there was the typical harassment from their fans as we went to the stadium and when we got there.

“PLAYING IN NIGERIA IS NEVER EASY BECAUSE THEY ARE STILL OLD SCHOOL IN THAT THEY DO THEIR BEST TO CREATE A VERY DIFFICULT ENVIRONMENT FOR US SOUTH AFRICAN TEAMS.”

But that team, we were already used to that space because we lived in that space – so nothing they did came as a shock to us. We already knew about it, and we embraced the challenges and just kept our focus on the match. We lost, but it was early in the competition and we knew we would be able to progress, and we did.”

Kekana says Ronwen Williams and Co can expect to be roughed up at the weekend.

“The South Africa versus Nigeria rivalry has been intensified by the World Cup qualifiers, so this match between Sundowns and Remo Stars is going to have a lot of needle. Stars are going to do all they can to make things difficult for us. They will have a lot of their people backing them, and the key will be not to allow the outside noise to impact on how we play. Unlike in the past, this is a knockout match, so we must try not to concede early in this fixture.

“I’ve learnt from experience that in Champions League football, the longer you keep the host team from scoring, the more frustrated they get, and often their game plan goes out the window. And sometimes their own crowd turns against them. So if we keep a clean sheet, we give ourselves a chance of coming home and wrapping it up. The



challenge now is that Remo is a team we are not really familiar with; those ones can be difficult.”

Apart from avoiding conceding a goal, Kekana preached to the converted really, when he advised that Sundowns get the away goal.

“We should also try to score a goal away. We were in the final last year, and we need to remind ourselves of just how good we are in that space – and the best way is to beat this team, score away, so that the new guys in the team get that winning feeling at Champions League level. You want to start the campaign on a high, so that when the difficult matches come along, you have confidence.

“It is always nice when you put yourself in a position where the rest of the opposition are somewhat scared of you because of your previous results. A good start against Remo Stars will make everyone know that Sundowns are again the team to beat, and I believe they have what it takes to do that.”

Sundowns’ abilities and pedigree in Champions League football cannot be doubted. History in Nigeria, however, tells a different story. But as they say, statistics are nothing more than numbers on a piece of paper with no impact on the result of matches, right?

The Brazilians are looking to add a second star above their club’s crest, having narrowly missed out on doing so last year when they lost to Pyramids FC in the final. They go into the second round tie against Remo Stars as favourites. But the fact they’ve never won in Nigeria, the fact that South African clubs generally don’t do well in Nigeria, looms large as a warning that nothing can and should be taken for granted.



“THE SOUTH AFRICA VERSUS NIGERIA RIVALRY HAS BEEN INTENSIFIED BY THE WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS, SO THIS MATCH BETWEEN SUNDOWNS AND REMO STARS IS GOING TO HAVE A LOT OF NEEDLE.”

SA TEAMS VS NIGERIAN OPPOSITION IN THE CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1995 - SECOND ROUND



2 - 1



The first-leg away ended 1-1 and Bucs won 1-0 at home in the second-leg.

1996 - QUARTER-FINALS



1 - 1



Orlando Pirates lost 3-4 on penalties. Pirates won 1-0 at home and lost 1-0 away.

2001 - GROUP STAGES



1 - 2



Mamelodi Sundowns beat Julius Berger 1-0 at home and lost 2-0 away.

2005 - GROUP STAGES



1 - 3



Ajax drew 1-1 with Enyimba before going on to lose 2-0 away.

2006 - GROUP STAGES



2 - 1



Pirates drew 1-1 away to Enyimba before winning 1-0 at home.

2010 - SECOND ROUND



2 - 4



SuperSport United drew 1-1 at home to Heartland FC before losing 3-1 away.

2016/17 - GROUP STAGES



3 - 4



Sundowns beat Enyimba FC 2-1 at home before losing 3-1 away.

2018/19 - GROUP STAGES



4 - 2



Sundowns won 3-0 at home before losing 2-1 away to Lobi Stars



FRUSTRATING DRAW AGAINST ZIM ADDS INTRIGUE TO AFCON CLASH

Friday night's goalless draw against Zimbabwe in the FIFA World Cup qualifiers was another frustrating chapter for Hugo Broos and his Bafana Bafana side. Coming on the back of FIFA's decision to dock South Africa three points last month for fielding an ineligible player, this stalemate felt like a double blow to the nation's hopes of booking a place at the 2026 World Cup in Canada, Mexico, and the USA.*

The clash, hosted in a not-so-neutral Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban, had all the makings of a must-win encounter, but it quickly turned into a gritty battle of attrition. Zimbabwe, coached by German Michael Nees, a former SAFA employee, arrived determined not to be bullied, and they left with a point they celebrated as if it were three. Bafana, meanwhile, were left to rue their missed chances — Mohau Nkota and Lyle Foster both rattled the woodwork, while Foster saw another effort heroically cleared off the line.

"We knew that the match would be tough and difficult, but I think we had chances to score; we had the luck not with us today," Broos reflected after the game.

"Certainly not the second half with the ball on the line and another one on the post. So we could have scored that, and I'm sure we should have won the game.

"We played against a very motivated team who fight for every metre, every

BROOS: "THAT SHOWS AGAIN THAT THE RELATION BETWEEN THOSE TWO TEAMS ARE TENSE, CERTAINLY WHEN THEY PLAY AGAINST EACH OTHER."

ball. A little bit strange, but okay, that can happen, and that shows again that the relation between those two teams are tense, certainly when they play against each other."

Tensions simmered throughout the contest, and a red card apiece reflected the intensity of the derby. By the final whistle, the Warriors' jubilant celebrations underscored the psychological edge they might now carry, particularly with another meeting looming 80 days later at the CAF Africa Cup of Nations finals in Morocco.

"It was a real fair contest," a pleased Nees said.

"We showed what we said, we don't want to be, how can you say, we want to be fair sportsmen.

"We give everything because it's also for us, important for the AFCON and for many other reasons. And I think we showed that we are a team, a real



team, [that] stick together. I was very impressed, especially after the red card, how we were fighting really to the limit, and with a little bit luck, we would have almost won the game.

“But we must also admit South Africa also played very strong and had also chances so I think between neighbours, I think it’s a good draw.”

That Group B encounter at the AFCON, set for 29 December, could yet prove decisive in a pool that also features Egypt and Angola. Bafana begin their continental campaign against Angola on the 22nd, while Zimbabwe will face Egypt. The second round of fixtures on Boxing Day will see South Africa square off with Egypt, a clash dripping with narrative and pressure, before the regional rivals meet again to close the group.

The December 29th showdown will mark the 20th meeting between the two Southern African neighbours, a rivalry that has stretched across 34 years.

Statistically, Bafana hold the edge with eight wins to Zimbabwe’s seven and four draws, but the numbers only tell part of the story. Three of Zimbabwe’s victories came in the COSAFA Cup and another three in friendlies, leaving just one competitive “A” win, a 4-1 triumph in their very first meeting in a 1992 AFCON qualifier.

Yet when it comes to World Cup qualifying, the Warriors have become something of a bogey team for Broos. Two of the four draws between the nations have come under Broos in this very competition, the first back in 2021, when South Africa’s failure to collect maximum points ultimately opened the door for Ghana to advance to Qatar,

NEES: “WE GIVE EVERYTHING BECAUSE IT’S ALSO FOR US, IMPORTANT FOR THE AFCON AND FOR MANY OTHER REASONS.”

and now again, with Friday’s draw adding a sense of déjà vu to Bafana’s campaign.

While Zimbabwe are bottom of the World Cup qualifying group, AFCON qualification was more successful and they will be making their sixth AFCON appearance, but have never progressed beyond the group stage.

Bafana Bafana will be competing in their 12th continental finals, a record that includes one title, one runners-up finish, and two third-place medals, the most recent coming at Côte d’Ivoire last year.

For Broos, the challenge now will be to reignite belief, both within his squad and among supporters, that this team still has what it takes to rise above adversity. The performances have shown promise, but at this level, fine margins decide destinies, and Bafana can ill afford to let more slip away. This AFCON, thirty years after that famous 1996 triumph could just be the opportunity.

**To qualify for the World Cup, South Africa needed victory over Rwanda in their final WCQ fixture on 14 October 2025, and for Nigeria to get a result against Benin OR a win over Rwanda by at least two goals, while Nigeria and Benin draw.*



THOKOLO OPENS UP ON SURREAL RISE & DOWNS ROLEMODEL

It has become rare and refreshing to speak one-on-one with a young, talented, unassuming, innocent and confident player as football clubs have become very guarded of their youth. Of course, they have reasons. On the occasion, Sekhukhune United made available 23-year-old MEDUPI THOKOLO. iDiski Times writer LETHABO KGANYAGO got to sit down with the young talent who spent the previous season in the Motsepe Foundation Championship, where he helped Casric Stars finish in third position, but unfortunately stumbled at the promotion playoffs, which were won by ORBIT College. Thokolo speaks like a kid in a candy store about his time with Babina Noko in the Betway Premiership so far. He is enjoying an impressive start to his top-flight career, where he's played 11 matches across all competitions. In this interview, Thokolo also talks about keeping his feet grounded and his role models.

Lethabo Kganyago: Medupi, thank you for your time. You've hit the ground running in the Betway Premiership. How are you feeling about your time so far at Sekhukhune, and did you even expect that you'd play immediately?

Medupi Thokolo: I didn't expect any of this. To me, it's just like a dream come true. It's like everything that I've ever hoped for as a child is now happening. So even coming here, I

didn't expect to hit the ground so fast. I just expected that you can see, okay, he's got something, but it's just a little bit shaky, that's what I was expecting. But then for me, I know I'm a very calm, confident person. So when I played, I just tried to play my game at all times. So I guess that helped, and yeah, now we're here, and I'm happy to be here.

LK: When you won back-to-back MOTM awards in the league, your coach spoke about guarding against having all this going to your head. How do you stay grounded?

MT: For me, it's like things that come and they go. I just always focus on what's next, what's to come. I don't really focus on the now, I mostly focus on the future. Because it's like, if I dwell too much on now and the present, I'll get lost because now everything that's happening is what I'll be fixated on, and that's not what I want. I want bigger things for myself. So then I always think about the future and make sure every game to perform at the best of my ability.

LK: And let's talk about your childhood dreams. What did you want to be? Did you always want to be a professional player?

MT: So growing up, I watched a lot of European football, South African football, not really, but then my dad is a big Sundowns fan. I guess I used to go



to a lot of Sundowns games when I was younger, and I basically tried to model my game around what I was seeing. But then, now, currently growing up, I started to model my game around Virgil Van Dijk, because I feel like we share a lot of similarities and characteristics. What he does, I try and replicate to a certain extent, so yeah, he’s my role model.

LK: So no one at Sundowns since you watched them a lot more than anyone in the domestic game...

MT: I guess there are people. But then, for me, the person who had stood out from Sundowns, I guess, is a player of now, which is Mothobi Mvala, compared to all the Sundowns. You also have Thabo Nthethe. I also used to look up to him a lot. Then I just fell in love with how Mvala just manages the game and bosses the defence.

LK: Coming to Sekhukhune from the first division, were they the only team interested in you? Why did you choose them?

MT: I guess what was discussed between my agent and I about all the teams and the style of play of all the teams as well is like I came to a conclusion myself, because a lot of teams, I feel like they have – well not a lot of – but then I felt like the quality of centre-backs here, and I could look up to and relate to and learn a lot from them. So then coming here, I also wanted to give myself some sort of competition because where I come from in the Motsepe Foundation [Championship], there were three, four centre-backs. So it was like the competition wasn’t really that much. Coming out to make sure that I can

“I JUST FELL IN LOVE WITH HOW MVALA JUST MANAGES THE GAME AND BOSSES THE DEFENCE.”

compete with others and show people that, okay, I’m here to stay, I’m here to compete, I’m not just someone coming from NFD who thinks this is going to be simple.

LK: And playing alongside Daniel Cardoso, how does that feel for you?

MT: It feels surreal. It’s like...2018, I was still doing Grade 8, you see. So it’s just like I’m seeing these people on TV. So it’s like I never imagined being better and playing alongside Cardoso or any other centre-back in South Africa. Yeah, all of this just feels surreal.

LK: Do you think you guys can push this momentum you are on in the league longer?

MT: Yes, I think we can. I think we can go all the way. I am very confident that as long as we, the guys, stay motivated, it’s going to happen. I hope that it does happen

LK: Thank you so much, and all the best.





WHY YEYE CROSSED THE LIMPOPO RIVER

By Matshelane Mamabolo

THE MONKEY IS OFF his back. Reneilwe Letsholonyane can now breathe a little easily. Appointed amidst much fanfare as the new coach of Botswana Premier League side Matebele FC, the impression was that the former Kaizer Chiefs and Bafana Bafana star was going to fire the team up.

But the man fondly referred to as Yeye had a slow start to his maiden senior coaching job, losing all of his first three matches with a club made up of no less than 15 new signings – the majority of whom are rookies in the elite league.

South Africans looking from a distance feared for the dreadlocked former midfielder, accustomed as we are to club bosses being quick to pull the trigger on non-delivering coaches. They are a bit different across the Limpopo River, though and not once during those initial stages of Yeye’s reign did the management of the club wonder if they’d made a big mistake in appointing him.

The 2-2 draw with Mochudi Centre Chiefs in their last fixture was Yeye’s first point for the club and could well be the beginning of the good project the management is hoping for.

Yet, even before that match, the club’s Technical Director, Arnold Mukani, told iDiski Times that they have faith in Yeye and that they will be backing him to the hilt.

“We are a club going through a transition period. We understand where we are, and we are realistic to acknowledge that he did not have a pre-season with us, so it was always

going to take a while for him to settle. We are seeing what he is doing in training, so even though we were losing matches, we knew why and we could see what he was working on. We are in sync with him, and we are patient. We believe the turnaround will come.”

Mukani says they know that success does not come overnight.

“We trust in the process. Football is a game of results, yes, but there are factors that affect them, and we are not just going to be directed by the results into acting hastily. We have goals, and we are going to support our coach in helping us realise those. The target for this season is to stay up in the league and push for a top-eight finish. In the Orange Cup, we would love to get to the final because we have been to the semis twice before.”

That’s short-term. In the long term, Matebele FC have loftier goals.

“Going into the next season we want to really push for top four. As the club management, we want to improve our structures and give Yeye all the support he needs to take us to the top four.”

For a young coach in his maiden professional club gig, it is comforting for Yeye to be working for a club as sober-minded as Matebele FC comes across as being.

“They are very welcoming and nice people. The support is overwhelming to be honest, because even when we were losing those early matches, the management was encouraging us,” Letsholonyane said of his bosses.

“There were a lot of positives in the



early matches and we could see that things were coming together. So, it was great to finally get my first point and the two goals as we drew with Mochudi Centre Chiefs in a derby. So everything is going well.”

New to club head-coaching, Letsholonyane could not have asked for a hotter baptism of fire: “I had four big and difficult games to kick start my tenure with the team and in all the games we dominated even though we ended up losing the initial three and got a point in the fourth.

“But the positive is that the team is improving every game we play, and we will get the maximum points that we need soon.”

Their first match was against Black Lions, and they lost 1-0 on the road. Things did not improve when they hosted Tafic as they got hammered 3-0 before losing 1-0 at Orapa. And then they drew 2-2 with Chiefs.

“The next game will be against one of the big teams in Botswana, Gunners, who have a huge following. We are hoping that we will get the maximum points we need.”

Letsholonyane’s decision to kick-start his club coaching career in Botswana would have taken some by surprise, given that often coaches cut their teeth in their domestic league and then get lured away after having proven themselves.

He, however, says he has always known that he would go outside of South Africa.

“The situation at home is that the opportunities are very slim, so I knew early on after I chose to go into coaching that I stood a better chance of getting a job outside,” said the man who has previously worked as a juniors coach at AmaZulu as well as having been an assistant at the ‘B’ team of Bafana Bafana in the COSAFA CUP and the CHAN.

To that effect, Letsholonyane even went and did his CAF coaching badges in the same Botswana as well as Zambia, something that made him very attractive to Matebele FC.

“We had parted ways with our coach, who moved to a bigger club. In our hunt for a new coach, we heard that Yeye might be available. His CV excited us,” Mukani explains.

“The fact that he did his CAF licences in both Zambia and here in Botswana said to us, this is a man who has some knowledge of the game in the region. But most importantly, we realised that he was a self-starter, a man who did not just wait for the courses to come to his country but one who saw it fit to go



LETS HOLONYANE: “THE SITUATION AT HOME IS THAT THE OPPORTUNITIES ARE VERY SLIM, SO I KNEW EARLY ON AFTER I CHOSE TO GO INTO COACHING THAT I STOOD A BETTER CHANCE OF GETTING A JOB OUTSIDE.”

out and empower himself.

“We made contact, he came back to us immediately, and we chatted. We loved him from that moment on because we picked up that he is an ambitious person, and he also loved the project we are building. He is a fairly young coach with drive, and we are a young club that’s very ambitious, so there’s a good fit there.

“We are a club in transition, focusing on younger players. He coached the juniors at AmaZulu, and he was with the second-tier Bafana squad that was at the CHAN and that also played COSAFA matches. He fitted the profile of the coach we were looking for.”

The coach himself also finds Matebele FC to be a perfect fit: “They are a young club who are looking to grow, just like I am – starting out in coaching. We will grow together. I am very ambitious; I want to win things.

“As a player, I was a winner, and I want to do that as a coach. So, yes, the club has goals, and they are realistic. But we are going to try and win things. They’ve done well in the Orange Cup before, and the goal is to improve on that and do better than in the previous seasons.”

And with the support he enjoys from his management, there is nothing that should really stop the man who was highly decorated as a player to win accolades as a coach.



WHO IS THAT GUY?

In what has been an action-packed and unpredictable start to the 2025/26 Betway Premiership campaign, fans have been treated to late drama, breakout stars, and some truly eye-catching performances. Amid all the familiar names and big-money transfers, though, a new wave of South African talent has quietly been making its mark.

This week, iDiski Times shines the spotlight on seven local players who, just a few months ago, were virtual unknowns to most fans, and are now turning heads with their fearless displays in the top flight. From unheralded signings to promotion success stories, these players are proof that opportunity and hunger can still write the best football tales. And who knows, if the remainder of their seasons are as good as their starts, there may be a few more thrilling chapters in their careers to follow.

Seluleko Mahlambi (TS Galaxy)

It's amazing what a bit of time, maturity, and the right environment can do for a player's career. While Seluleko Mahlambi technically made his top-flight debut last season, a single cameo for TS Galaxy in May, this campaign feels like his true arrival.

The 21-year-old has looked like a player reborn, brimming with confidence and purpose, as if determined to write his own story rather than live in the shadow of his famous surname.

The younger brother of former Bafana Bafana star Phakamani Mahlambi, Seluleko's path hasn't been smooth. He passed through the academies of AmaZulu and Cape Town City, showing flashes of promise but never quite convincing those around him that he could make the jump to senior football.

The comparisons to his brother didn't help either, a heavy weight for any young player to carry, especially when his own journey was still unfolding.

But football loves a comeback, and this season, Seluleko has delivered one with flair. At TS Galaxy, he's



thrived in an attacking role that seems tailor-made for his sharp instincts and tireless energy.

With four goals and two assists in just eight league appearances, Mahlambi has been one of the brightest young sparks in the Premiership, direct, fearless, and constantly looking to make something happen.

It may have taken him a few detours to find his footing, but now that he's arrived, Seluleko Mahlambi looks intent on proving that his talent deserves to be spoken about on its own terms, not as a comparison, but as a revelation.

Mthetheleli Mthiyane (Stellenbosch)

In just his third professional season, Mthetheleli Mthiyane has wasted

little time making his presence felt in the top flight. The 24-year-old joined Stellenbosch FC from Milford at the end of last season, and despite stepping into new surroundings and the higher pace of Premiership football, he's adapted with remarkable composure. In fact, he's quietly become one of Stellies' most consistent and dependable performers in what has already been an encouraging start to his career.

Through seven matches, Mthiyane has shown why the club's scouts were so eager to secure his signature. He's averaged 1.4 tackles and 1.0 interceptions per game, recovering possession 5.3 times on average — statistics that highlight both his reading of the game and his work rate in midfield. His 56% duel success and 77% passing accuracy paint the picture of a player who not only breaks up play but keeps the team ticking over once the ball is won.

While he's yet to open his account in league play, Mthiyane has already found the net in cup competition, scoring an important goal during Stellenbosch's run to the MTN8 final.

For Steve Barker, his addition looks like another piece of smart, forward-thinking recruitment, the kind of signing that has become a hallmark of Stellies' steady rise in recent years. And for Mthiyane, who made just 15 appearances for Milford last season, it's been a rapid ascent that suggests his ceiling is far higher than many imagined. Calm, industrious, and quietly influential, he's fast becoming a name that fits seamlessly into the Stellenbosch blueprint: hard-working, intelligent, and hungry to grow.

Bright Ndlovu (Sekhukhune United)

Bright Ndlovu's story is one of quiet persistence and reinvention. The 25-year-old, who made the leap from the Motsepe Foundation Championship to Sekhukhune United, has already become a regular feature under Eric Tinkler, making eight appearances this season.

His versatility has proven invaluable, capable of slotting in almost anywhere across the pitch, Ndlovu has begun to establish himself as a reliable presence in defence, even though his football journey began at the opposite end of the field.

It wasn't too long ago that the great Jomo Sono was hailing him as a promising young forward during his early days at Jomo Cosmos. But after experiencing the heartbreak of relegation in the 2021/22 season, Ndlovu's path to stability looked uncertain. Yet, like so many determined talents who refuse to fade away, he clawed his way back into the professional scene with Kruger United, where his resilience and adaptability caught the eye of Babina Noko's scouts.



Now, at Sekhukhune, he's showing that his game has evolved beyond raw potential. Averaging 1.4 tackles and 4.0 clearances per match while winning 65% of his duels, Ndlovu is proving to be as solid as he is versatile, a modern defender with the instincts of a forward and the work rate of a seasoned pro. His rise serves as a reminder that in football, setbacks can often be the spark that reignites a career, and Bright Ndlovu's light looks set to shine even stronger as the season unfolds.

Bheki Mabuza (Marumo Gallants)

A few years ago, Bheki Mabuza was likely dreaming of hearing his name echo around Orlando Stadium in black and white colours, imagining the moment he'd step out as an Orlando Pirates first-team player. It

didn't quite work out that way for the former DDC player; at least not yet. Instead, his professional journey began far from the glitz and cameras of Soweto, with a more modest start at Leruma United in the Motsepe Foundation Championship.

When Leruma suffered relegation, many might have seen it as a setback. But for Mabuza, it was another twist in a story still being written. The 22-year-old winger dusted himself off and took his next chance, signing for Marumo Gallants, where he's quickly proving his worth. Confident on the ball, fearless in his forward play, and growing with every appearance, he's been one of the bright sparks for Alexandre Lafitte's side this season.

In nine games so far, Mabuza has scored two goals and provided one assist, showcasing both his composure and creativity in the final third. More importantly, he's been playing with a hunger that suggests he's still chasing that childhood dream, only now, he's got the professional miles and maturity to make it a reality.

Who knows? If he keeps performing like this, maybe that long-awaited chance for a club like Pirates isn't so far away after all.

Mfanafuthi Mkhize (Durban City)

"If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." Few players embody that old saying quite like Mfanafuthi Mkhize, whose football journey has been one of persistence, patience, and quiet belief.

Now 27, the Durban City full-back has had to wait far longer than most to taste Betway Premiership football. He's been on the books of both Golden Arrows and AmaZulu, but in neither stint did the opportunity come.

Many players might have folded, but Mkhize took a different path. He rolled up his sleeves and went to work in the Motsepe Foundation Championship, where he built a solid reputation as one of the league's most reliable full-backs.

He was a key figure at the now-defunct Uthongathi FC, and after it didn't work out at Usuthu, he carried that same fighting spirit to Durban City, helping them earn promotion last season.

And now, finally, Mkhize is making his top-flight dream count. In his nine appearances so far, he's been a model of consistency, energetic up and down the flank, solid in defence, and fearless going forward.

He even marked his long-awaited debut season with a memorable goal in his very first game, a fitting reward for a player who never stopped believing that his time would come.

Atisang Batsi



(Orbit College)

While most footballers are well into retirement by the time they hit 40, and already reminiscing about the “good old days,” Atisang Batsi was doing the opposite. At an age when many would be swapping boots for the bench, the Orbit College captain was lacing up for his first-ever professional season.

Having been the heartbeat of the team that earned Orbit their historic promotion to the professional ranks two years ago, Batsi finally got his reward in August when he made his Premiership debut. It was a moment more than two decades in the making, the culmination of persistence, passion, and a refusal to let time dictate his dream.

Now 43, Batsi continues to defy convention with performances that put younger legs to shame. Operating at the base of midfield, he reads the game with the wisdom of experience and the sharpness of a player who still lives for the grind.

His numbers tell a remarkable story: 1.9 interceptions, 1.5 tackles, 5.4 ball recoveries and 1.5 clearances per game, plus an 84% passing success rate — impressive by any measure, extraordinary for a man in his forties.

But it’s not just the stats that stand out. It’s the way he carries himself. For a newly promoted side still finding their feet in the Betway Premiership, Batsi’s presence has been a steadying force in the chaos. In an era obsessed with youth and potential, Atisang Batsi is a reminder that football’s greatest currency is heart, and his, clearly, still beats for the game.

**Medupi Thokolo
(Sekhukhune United)**

Hailing from the quiet village of Thalahane in Limpopo, 23-year-old Medupi Thokolo has quickly turned heads in his debut Betway Premiership campaign, proving that small beginnings can lead to big moments. Signed from Casric Stars at the close of the 2024/25 season, the energetic defender has slotted seamlessly into Eric Tinkler’s setup, and in a team praised for its experience and structure, Thokolo’s youthful drive has provided the perfect spark.

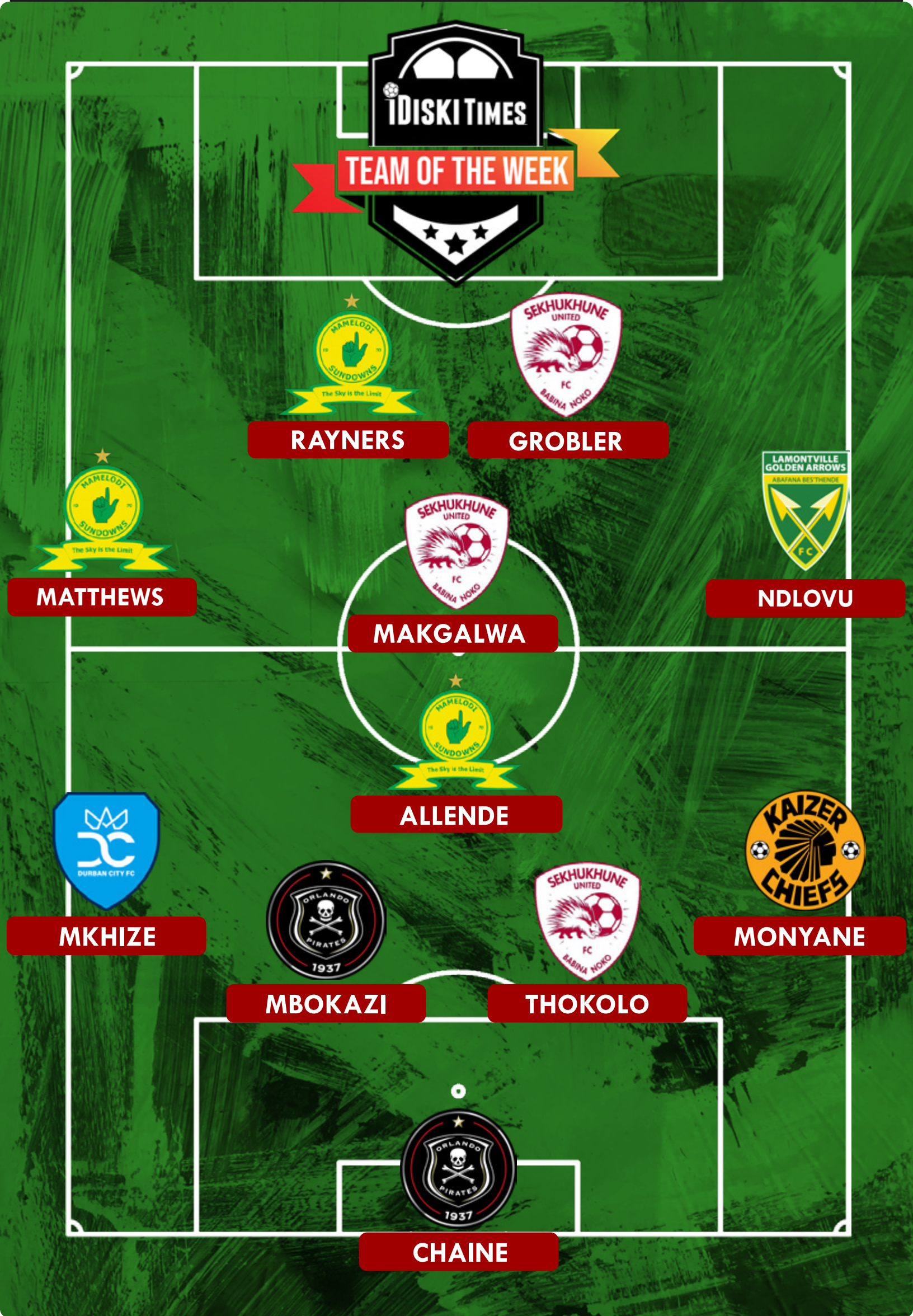
While many have highlighted the role of seasoned campaigners in helping City rise to the summit of the Premiership table, Thokolo’s contribution has been impossible to ignore. His tireless running, ability to read the game, and maturity beyond his years have brought balance and bite to the defence. Already a two-time Man of the Match recipient, he’s played a vital part in four clean sheets from the seven matches he’s started — an impressive statistic for someone still finding his feet at the highest level.

What makes his rise even more remarkable is how swiftly he has adapted to life in the top flight. Just three seasons ago, Thokolo was taking his first steps in professional football with Casric Stars. By the end of last season, he was a key figure in their promotion push, and has now featured in more than 50 matches across all competitions. That experience, the grind of the Motsepe Foundation Championship and the pressure of playoff football, has clearly shaped a player who now looks completely at home among the elite.

For Tinkler, Thokolo has become more than just a promising newcomer; he’s a symbol of Babina Noko’s smart recruitment and belief in homegrown talent. And for Thokolo, this feels like just the beginning of a story that could stretch far beyond the borders of Thalahane Village.



IDISKI BEST XI OF THE SEASON SO FAR



ACE OF THE WEEK:
AMAJITA

Despite their exit in the Last 16 from the FIFA U20 World Cup, Amajita are our iDiski Times Aces of the Week! While they lost 3-1 to Colombia, we want to celebrate this current era's players as most make their final U20 appearances. They are not only the first-ever African champions generation after winning the U20 AFCON, but they also made history at the World Cup, becoming the first South African team to win two games, and scored a national record of nine goals in Chile. While they couldn't become the first U20 team to reach the quarter-finals, Raymond Mdaka and his squads have set the bar higher for the future of Amajita.



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.

Dribbling Game 6v6+6

This week, we continue with our recent work of introducing different training practices that have been tried and tested in my recent work. These practices obviously implicitly carry some direct and indirect reference towards the work we do at my current employer. Nevertheless, the reason for sharing them on this platform is because I believe they may carry some relevance to the work of others outside of our context because of the broadness and general relevance of concepts that these practices aim to focus on. Last week, we introduced a counterattacking game that goes from a 2v3 situation into a 6v4. In this practice, a relatively small amount of players play in a large playing area. In this context, players have to adjust their timing and speed to suit this type of setup, within which they often experience situations where a lot of space is covered at a high tempo in a short time. Longer passes are played, longer runs are made, and generally, more depth is available to utilise. This is an important type of practice independent of context. Players need to learn to manage these situations at a very high level, similar to how we expect them to play in smaller situations where a relatively large amount of players is playing with and against each other in a small space.

What I have found in working across different football contexts is that, typically, due to football culture or environmental constraints, certain situations are sometimes over-represented in certain places. This is natural to some degree and might not be entirely preventable or even desirable to be prevented, but for us as coaches, it is important that we are aware of this. In South Africa, for example, teams and players are often limited in terms of availability of space for training and or goals/balls, etc. Plus, there is still a strong street football culture in the townships. Therefore, I would associate South African football culture very strongly with players being comfortable on the ball, in tight spaces, with a lot of pressure. But oftentimes they need to practice in situations to goal where more space is available, and this space needs to be utilised effectively. This can be flipped on its head in some European contexts, like Austria. Here, players are often very strong to goal and are very good at shooting, but they, in turn, may not always be as comfortable in the tighter situations. Rene Maric defined 4 different scenarios in some of his highly recommended work. That is many players in big spaces, many players in little space, few players in big spaces



and finally few players in little space. For us as coaches, it is important to understand where our players have their strengths and where they may need work when looking at them in these 4 different scenarios.

6v6+6 dribbling game

This week, we are looking at a practice where we have many players in a small space. These players will constantly face a lot of pressure when they are on the ball. Simply because the small size of the field does some of the work for the pressing team, as they always have small distances to cover in order to put a lot of pressure on the ball. One of the key qualities in order to competently manage this pressure from an offensive point of view, which we have dedicated some work to on this platform before, is the idea of ball-contact frequency. The idea is that every game situation changes slightly with each touch of the ball of the ball-carrying player. Of course, the game situation changes in other ways too, but this is an obvious and clear possibility. If the situation is changed very frequently by the ball-carrier, an overload is placed on the defensive team. They may thus be more likely to make mistakes and expose holes that the attacking side can expose.

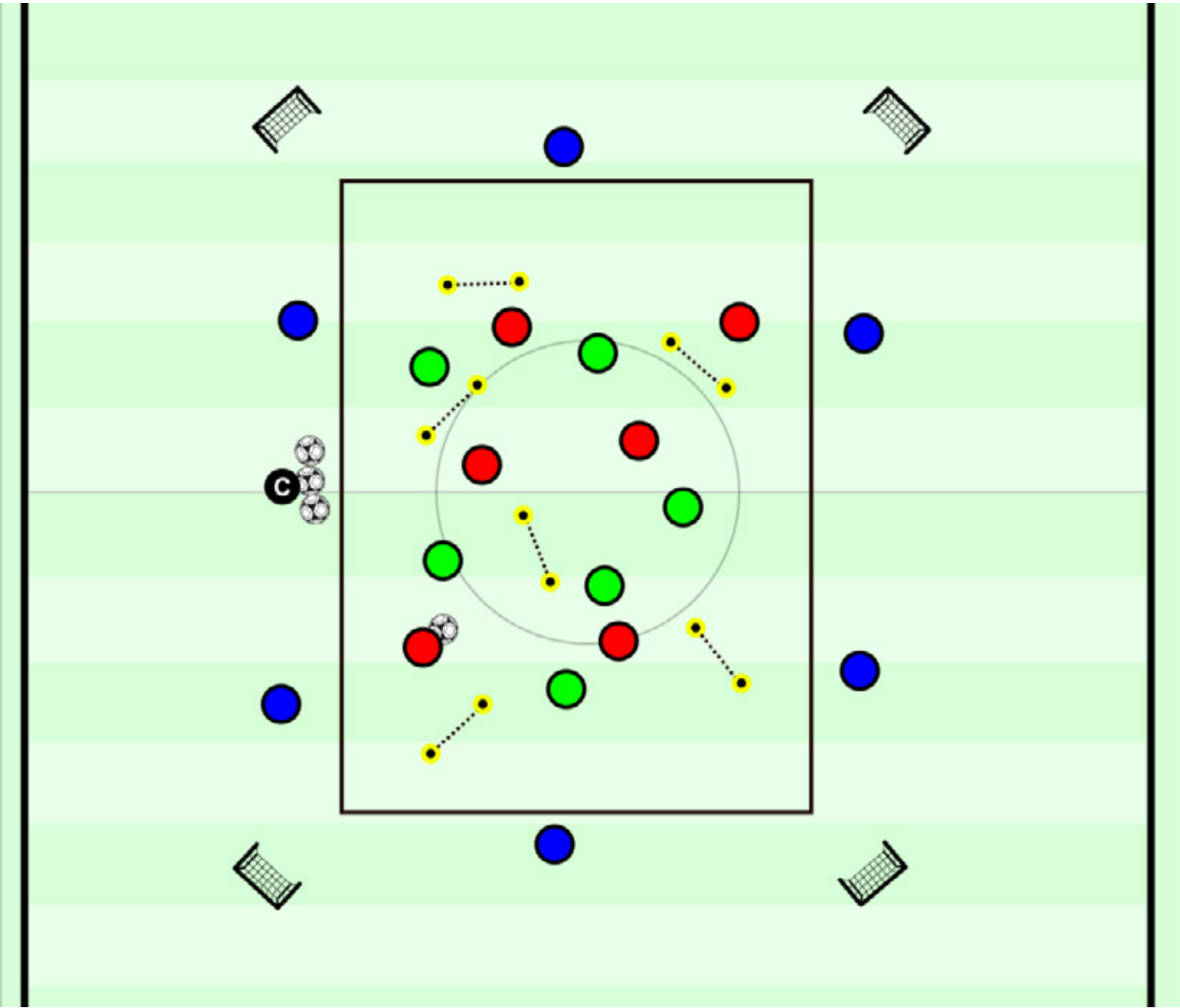
It is quite evident in recent years that footballers in general have become much more adept at playing with the ball under pressure. This particularly involves a higher ability across all positions of dribbling the ball, especially when no passing options are available for the player on the ball. This also includes a more consistent level of decision-making of when to pass the ball and when to

dribble and protect it. A by-product of working on playing under pressure in tight spaces is that defenders also get better at defending and pressing in smaller spaces, this includes a higher frequency of footwork, more small steps and therefore working on a football-specific type of agility.

In this practice, we have 3 teams of 6 players each, although this can obviously vary. Two teams play against each other on the inside of the field, while the other team supports play on the edges of the field. In this practice, the different teams fulfil different functions. In picture 1 above, red plays against green. The job of red is to score in the dribbling goals. In other words, to attain a point, a player of red needs to dribble through one of the goals and make a successful pass to a teammate. So if a player of red dribbles through a goal but loses the ball afterwards, no point is scored. The green team, which is playing against red on the inside, is pressing the ball. When the ball leaves the field, the coaches play the ball back into the red team, regardless of who caused the turnover. This method of fixed roles can be useful in order to attain repetitions within a game form in a highly focused way and vary the practices between rounds.

If green wins the ball, they can, of course, also score points; in their case, that would be with a pass into one of the diagonal mini goals on the outside. So, in other words, two teams play against each other with two different

scoring targets. The third team is the blue team on the outside. They support the team in possession, so in this case, red. Their players can also step into the field temporarily and dribble through the gates, in this case scoring points for the red team. If red loses the ball, the idea is for a strong counter-pressing net to close in on the green team from all sides. So blue in this case would support red to win the ball back from the green team. After a round is played, teams switch roles. Usually, due to the physical demands of this practice, it makes sense that the team that previously pressed now becomes the team on the outside. The team on the outside becomes the possession team, and the team that previously had possession of the ball becomes the pressing team. Like this, you can play a neat 3-way tournament where each team plays each of the other two teams twice, once as the pressing team and once as the possession team. In this practice, players get plenty of repetition working implicitly on a high touch frequency of the ball. There is also a strong emphasis on counter-pressing and transition moments. This can be further highlighted if you make the total field size slightly smaller, which is likely to create a higher amount of turnovers and therefore transition moments. An important detail to this practice is that there should always ideally be 1 more dribbling goal than there is pressing players. Thereby, we should always look for the free gate or freeing up a gate for a player to dribble through.



PICTURE 1



FIRST DEPOSIT MATCH

R20 000



BET WITH THE BEST

T&C's APPLY. Operator Licensed by the Gauteng Gambling and Racing Board. No person under the age of 18 permitted to gamble. National Responsible Gambling Program Toll Free Counselling Line 0800 006 008 or via Whatsapp HELP to 076 675 0710. Winners know when to stop.