



MONYANE NOT GIVING UP ON HIS WORLD CUP DREAM



RADEBE ON BROOS, LORCH & IF BAFANA CAN LIFT AFCON



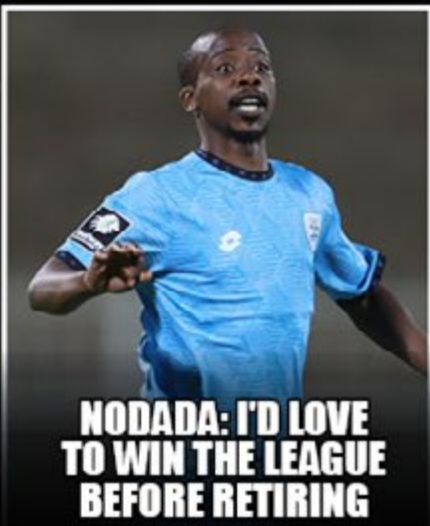
BAFANA DEFENDER ATTRACTING INTEREST IN EUROPE



TIME RUNNING OUT FOR ZWANE'S AFCON HOPES



KHUMALO ON HISTORIC YEAR WITH CHIEFS & AMAJIMBOS



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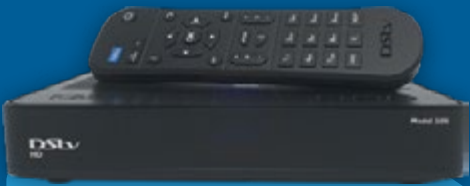
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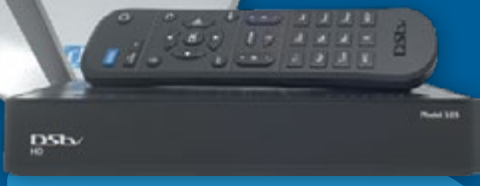
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MAKHANYA POISED FOR MAJOR MOVE AFTER STELLAR SEASON?

South African centre-back Olwethu Makhanya could be in line for a lucrative move after an incredible breakout season where he’s amongst the favourites for the MLS Defender of the Year award. The 21-year-old, under the management of former Bafana Bafana defender Bradley Carnell, has emerged as one of the leading performers in Major League Soccer, helping the Philadelphia Union win the Supporters Shield title this season. Sources have indicated that the MLS club are bracing themselves for several offers in the January window, with Makhanya, who joined from Stellenbosch FC in 2023, expected to take the next step in his career, potentially in Europe.



STELLIES CAST EYE ON MARUMO TALENT

Stellenbosch FC are keen on the services of Marumo Gallants defender Khumbulani Ncube, who has established himself as a consistent performer in the top-flight. The 24-year-old right-back has bagged four assists in 14 games across all competitions and has featured in every game towards their run to the Carling Knockout Cup final. Stellies were said to be in talks with Gallants for the player in the previous transfer window, and with the player continuing to impress, they may revisit their interest in January.



KABINI NOT EXPECTED FOR LONG-TERM MOLDE STAY

Bafana Bafana left-back Samukele Kabini is not expected to remain at Molde FK for the long term, with his performances already attracting several calls to his club and agency. The 21-year-old joined the Eliteserien from TS Galaxy in March, for a reported R15-million and has taken to life in Europe with aplomb as one of the breakout stars in the league. Signed on a three-year deal, he’s featured in 16 matches, with three assists and is in the top-ranked defenders with 3.8 tackles per 90 minutes, with 0.8 blocks per 90, making him one of the interesting defensive prospects in the Scandinavian market. His recent senior international debut has also raised his stock, with a major future in Europe touted for the former Orlando Pirates DStv Diski Challenge defender.



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An advertisement for Debonairs Pizza. It features a soccer ball and a large pizza on a table. The text "AMAZING IS..." is written in a glowing, stylized font, followed by "extra time, extra drama, and extra flava from the WINNING TEAM!". The Debonairs Pizza logo is in the top left corner. A button labeled "ORDER NOW" is in the bottom right corner.



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TIME TICKING FOR MSHISHI WITH AFCON LOOMING

It's the words no South African footballer lover wanted to hear – as Bafana Bafana head coach Hugo Broos stated, 'maybe we have to forget about Themba' when asked about Mamelodi Sundowns legend Themba Zwane's potential inclusion for the Africa Cup of Nations squad.

While Broos says he remains hopeful he can be fit in time – and even ready for the 2026 FIFA World Cup beyond the continental showpiece set to start on 21 December, it's touch-and-go for the iconic playmaker.

The footballer who Broos once stated was too old and to his own admission, was looking for a younger version, but was then forced to change his mind, as Zwane, in his role, has no peers currently, a generational talent that one wonders how he never reached the levels beyond the Premier Soccer League.

iDiski Times spoke to the Sundowns talisman last month, and he stated he'll be returning to the field of play in the coming weeks – and now he's got just potentially three games to prove himself, with St Eloi Lupopo, MC Alger and Siwelele, Sundowns' games before the AFCON break, after two league games were rescheduled to next year.

"Themba... I will see, he's injured at the moment again, I don't know if he will not play in the next two weeks – we have to forget him," Broos said about the 36-year-old.

"He didn't play all season, so I think for AFCON, it will be difficult for Themba, very difficult. But yeah – I still hope for next year – but we will see."



There's now been calls for Thembinkosi Lorch to be recalled to the squad as a potential replacement in the 10 role needed in Broos' system, which Sipho Mbule, Patrick Maswanganyi, and Sinxolo Kwayiba have played in of late. Mbule was superb in Bafana's 3-1 victory over Zambia on Saturday.

Oswin Appollis and Relebohile Mofokeng, albeit not natural 10s, have also been mooted, but what is clear, a fit Zwane is one of the first names on the team sheet, even at his advancing age.

Zwane has made just five appearances so far this season after featuring in all three of Sundowns' games at the FIFA Club World Cup and will be working around the clock to make sure the door is not closed for his international aspirations.

After scoring four goals with one assist in 28 caps for Bafana before Broos' arrival, Zwane sparked into a leading figure under the Belgian, with eight goals and two assists in 23 more caps – the last of which was in the AFCON qualifiers against Congo Brazzaville in October 2024.



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TSO VILAKAZI: LORCH DESERVES A SECOND CHANCE

It was an international week and Bafana Bafana picked up a good 3-1 victory over Zambia in a friendly game in Gqeberha on Saturday.

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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‘Foster Plays A Crucial Role’

“Well done to Bafana Bafana for beating Zambia.

“These friendly matches are important as we build up to the upcoming AFCON.

“I think the team is almost complete. It has good balance from all areas.

“I think Thembinkosi Lorch deserves a chance to play for the national team. He has been doing well for Wydad Casablanca in Morocco. He played at the Club World Cup. He should join Bafana Bafana and play with Sipho Mbule in midfield. He can possibly play wide as well.

“I don't think we should close the door on such a good player.

“Regarding the match, I think Bafana Bafana did well.

“I understand that people might look at Lyle Foster and think he is not contributing.

“Lyle Foster plays a crucial role in creating space for the goals. Look at the first two goals and how he created space for wide players.

“Foster is important for Bafana Bafana. His movement is like scoring goals.”

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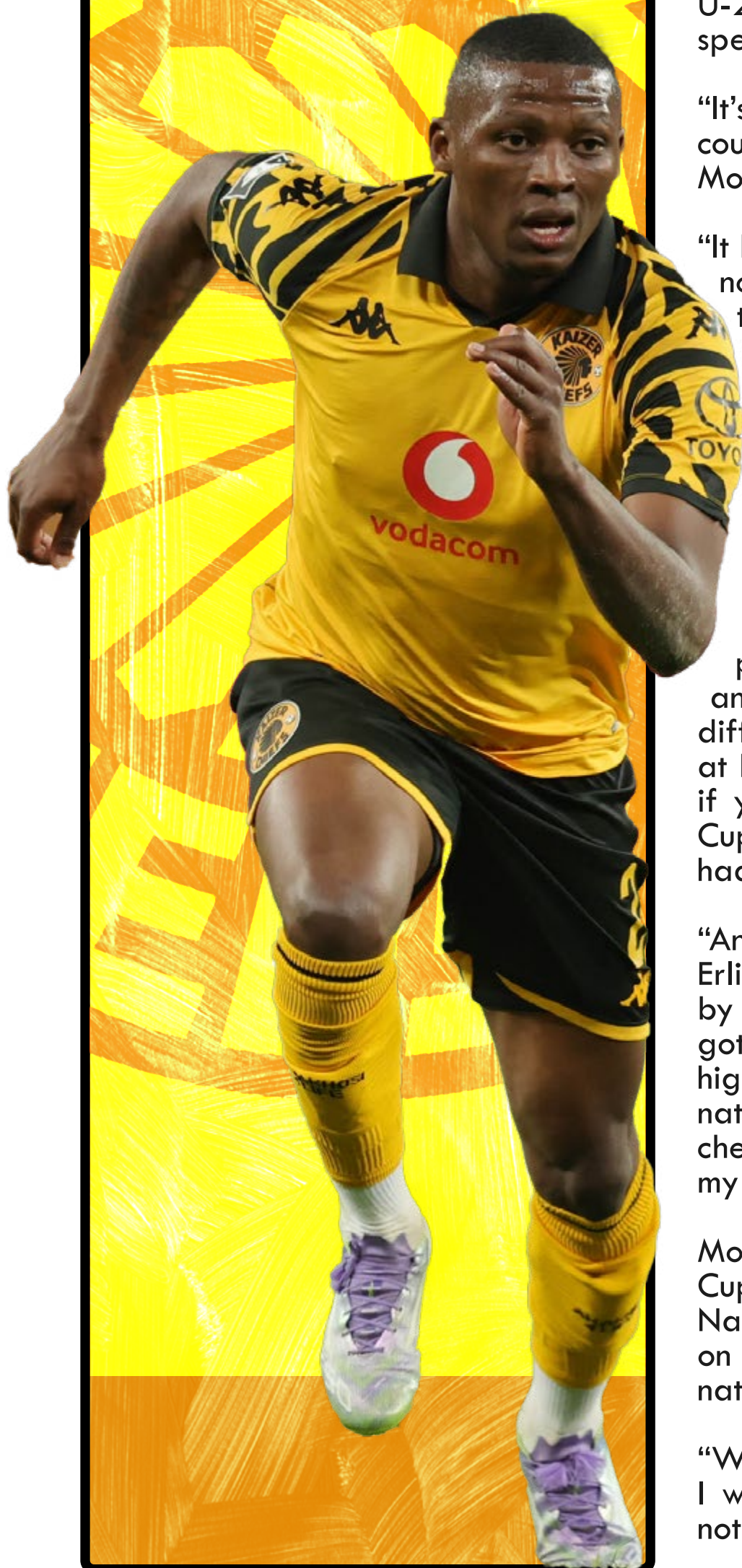


MONYANE NOT GIVING UP ON HIS WORLD CUP DREAM

By Matshelane Mamabolo

THABISO MONYANE knows all about setbacks. The Kaizer Chiefs right-back has been through the highs of representing his country at every age-group level – and the lows of injuries that stalled what many saw as a destined rise to stardom.

“I’M A VERY OPTIMISTIC YOUNG MAN. EVERY TIME I GET A CHANCE TO PLAY, I RAISE MY HAND. I GIVE IT MY ALL. YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN.”



Yet, as he speaks, his tone carries neither regret nor bitterness, only the calm conviction of a man who believes his story is far from over.

“I’m a very optimistic young man,” he says with the certainty of someone who’s faced adversity and learnt to outlast it.

“Every time I get a chance to play, I raise my hand. I give it my all. You never know what might happen – impossible is nothing.”

It is that anything-is-possible attitude that has defined Monyane’s journey – from the dusty grounds of Tembisa through the development pitches of Orlando Pirates to the green turf of international stadiums. It’s also what fuels his dream of returning to the Bafana Bafana squad for both the upcoming Africa Cup of Nations and, eventually, the FIFA World Cup next year.

Born and raised in Tembisa, Monyane’s football path began early. He broke through the national youth system, pulling on the South African jersey for the U-17s, U-20s, and U-23s – a rare feat that speaks to his talent and consistency.

“It’s been quite good representing the country at all junior national team levels,” Monyane said.

“It has shaped me to who I am because now I’ve got a grasp and feeling of how to play African football and European football. It has prepared me well, as I am using those lessons in the CAF competitions. That experience has really helped me a lot, and as you know, African football moulds you as a footballer.

“Going on the continent has given me exposure and a taste of how it is to play in the heat; in different countries, and the physicality of the opponents is different from what we are used to here at home. It has really shaped me. And, if you recall, at the [Under 20] World Cup, we played against Portugal, who had the likes of Rafael Leão.

“And it was at that tournament where Erling Haaland made a name for himself by scoring nine goals in one game. I got great exposure to the game at the highest level through the age group national teams that I am using, and I will cherish those experiences for the rest of my life.”

Monyane played at the FIFA U-20 World Cup in 2019, the U-23 Africa Cup of Nations, and now has his eyes firmly set on completing the circle with the senior national team.

“Whenever I’ve worn the Bafana jersey, I wore it with pride,” he says. “You’re not just representing yourself – you’re



representing millions of South Africans out there.”

Monyane has already built a reputation for reliability on the right flank – energetic, quick, and disciplined. But injuries have been a cruel opponent. Periods on the sideline, first at Orlando Pirates and later at Chiefs, have tested his patience and faith.

Still, he refuses to dwell on what could have been. “Injuries are part of the game,” he shrugs. “The important thing is to take care of yourself, your body, and keep improving.”

Faith, Focus, and F50s

Throughout his career, one constant has been the three stripes of Adidas. The German sportswear giant has stood by Monyane since his earliest development days, a partnership built on trust and shared belief.

“It’s been nothing but an absolute pleasure,” he beams when I ask him about his relationship with Adidas.

“They believed in me from the beginning. They saw a young man with potential, and they’ve been there through every stage of my journey.”

His loyalty to the brand is more than symbolic. He vividly remembers his first pair of boots – the lime green Adidas F50s with black stripes – and still swears by the model today. “They’re light, perfect for me as a speedy player. I love them to bits,” he says with a smile.

Adidas, in turn, has supported him through the tougher moments. When a podiatrist recently advised him to use custom inner soles to balance the strain between his legs, the company stepped up.

“I KNOW THE COMPETITION IS TIGHT, BUT AS LONG AS I KNOW I CAN IMPROVE AND I BELIEVE IN MYSELF, I KNOW THAT EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE.”

“I spoke to Adidas, and they helped organise the inner soles,” he reveals. “That’s family – they take care of their athletes.”

‘I’ve Got This’

That simple phrase – I’ve got this – has become Monyane’s personal mantra. It’s a line he repeats often, a verbal anchor for his self-belief. It’s also the attitude that caught the attention of Bafana coach Hugo Broos.

“Coach Broos is a man of his word,” Monyane says. “He wants to see how you work and how you can fit in the system. The biggest lesson I got from him is not to be one-dimensional – to always be ready to adapt.”

Adaptation, indeed, has been the key to his evolution. Initially a striker, Monyane was converted into a right-back by then-Pirates coach Rulani Mokwena, who famously told him, ‘You are Maicon’ and the comparison to the legendary Brazilian full-back ignited something in him.

“At first, I didn’t know who Maicon was,” he laughs, “but I went home, watched





the videos, and said to myself, ‘That’s who I want to be’.”

Eyes on AFCON and Beyond

Statistically, Monyane has been consistent when fit, averaging over 2.5 successful tackles and 1.7 key passes per game in the Premier Soccer League (PSL), with a 75% pass completion rate in the final third. But numbers alone don’t capture his influence. His presence brings balance to the defence and energy to the attack, traits that could prove valuable for Bafana in the demanding conditions of the Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco.

While injuries kept him out of the most recent squad, his optimism remains unshaken.

“I’m still hopeful,” he insists. “I know what I can bring to the team. I’ll keep working, keep pushing – because you never know.”

“There will always be competition, especially looking at our league, which is one of the biggest in Africa,” he continues.

“I look at myself and say I am competing with the best, and to be seen as one of the best right-backs in the country is a blessing. And I know the competition is tight, but as long as I know I can improve and I believe in myself, I know that everything is possible.

“The Bafana opportunity is there; it is up to me to grab it. I know who I am competing against, and I am working hard towards getting there. And that’s just how it is.”

Perhaps what keeps Monyane grounded is the shared journey with his peers – Lyle Foster, for instance, with whom he came through the youth ranks and even shared a home during their early days.

“My brother Lyle Foster – I call him my brother now because we’ve been together for so long, since I was 12, and it has been nothing but a great blessing to be with him.

“What led to me living with his family was because my parents had moved to Cape Town, and at that time, the club I was with, Orlando Pirates, had moved me and Lyle to Parktown Boys High.

“And his family took me in and adopted me as their child until my parents came back, so I lived with the Foster family, and we did everything together, training together.

“Lyle has been nothing but a brother, but most importantly, he is someone that’s been there to elevate me because I remember he went to the first team before me, and that pushed me to work



“COACH BROOS IS A MAN OF HIS WORD. HE WANTS TO SEE HOW YOU WORK AND HOW YOU CAN FIT IN THE SYSTEM. THE BIGGEST LESSON I GOT FROM HIM IS NOT TO BE ONE-DIMENSIONAL - TO ALWAYS BE READY TO ADAPT.”

hard and try to get there too. And eventually I got to the first team, but when I got there, he moved to Monaco, and that inspired me to say it is possible; that I must work hard to get there myself. “What we have is a brother bond; he is my brother, man. He is family to me, as well as the Foster family.”

And he admits that Foster’s success continues to motivate him.

“Seeing Lyle’s success pushes me,” he admits.

“And that just goes to show that, you know, you actually need to work hard





and actually push because you never stop learning in football. So to me, it's been absolutely inspirational and so good for me and my group from the junior ranks."

And it's not just Foster who inspires Monyane; many of his former junior international teammates, like Oswin Appollis, are also coming to the fore.

"It's really heartwarming to see the likes of Lyle being in Europe; it is evidence that he worked hard, and there's also Appollis and many more," Monyane adds.

"We were all aspiring to be professional footballers, to play in Europe too. And now Luke Le Roux is out there and pushing, and there's Gift Links as well. That group was a special group because 80 percent of us are playing pro football, and I am glad we are all doing well.

"At Chiefs, I am playing with the likes of [Nkosingiphile] Ngcobo and [Thabo] Cele – it's so nice. Realising that we actually come way back together is heartwarming, and I am happy for the lads, and I know there are many others who are pushing in the NFD because every footballer's journey is different."

Monyane, now 25, has matured into a mentor figure for younger players at Chiefs, preaching patience, discipline, and self-belief.

"Where I come from, I was shown love and patience," he says of his time at the Buccaneers, where he was mentored by players such as former skipper Happy

“TO PLAY AT THE WORLD CUP, WEARING THE BAFANA JERSEY WITH THE ADIDAS LOGO, KITTED IN MY F50S - THAT WOULD BE THE ULTIMATE HONOUR.”

Jele, the indefatigable Deon Hotto, plus Alfred Ndengane.

"I now tell the young ones: your hard work, resilience, and humility will take you far."

Ask him about the ultimate dream, and he doesn't hesitate: "To play at the World Cup, wearing the Bafana jersey with the Adidas logo, kitted in my F50s – that would be the ultimate honour."

It's the kind of dream that once felt out of reach for a young boy watching Siphwe Tshabalala's thunderbolt at Soccer City in 2010. Now, Monyane stands on the brink of writing his own chapter in that story.

Because for Thabiso Monyane, impossible is nothing – and he's still raising his hand.



KHUMALO ON HISTORIC YEAR WITH CHIEFS & AMAJIMBOS

The 2025 U17 FIFA World Cup in Qatar was a historic outing for South Africa's Amajimbos. VELA KHUMALO's charges won one match at the tournament and also got out of the group, reaching the Last 32 round of the tournament in the new format of 54 teams. The win and progression is a first for a South African side in this category. Unfortunately, the team lost 3-0 to a strong Japan team in the Last 32 round and headed home. But just before this decisive encounter, iDiski Times journalist LETHABO KGANYAGO caught up with Khumalo to look at how his side performed in the group stage where the coach touched on the not-so ideal preparations the team had for the tournament, how individual brilliance came through for his side, the pride he has in his team's performance and the year he has enjoyed as a coach at club and international level, among other things.

Lethabo Kganyago: Coach, firstly, congratulations to you and the team for reaching the Last 32 round. I mean, it's already a historic outing, not only winning matches in the group but also reaching the knockout phase. How did you feel?

Vela Khumalo: I'm ecstatic. I'm happy, and I think everyone in camp is happy, and the mood was high in the camp. We are all happy, and we hope that we made the country very happy.

LK: We all know you didn't have the best of preparations for this tournament, and in the first game you get a red card in the first half, but you go on to reach the knockout phase. You've got to be proud of the team after everything that happened.

VK: You are spot on. I think as much as you have indicated, we didn't have an ideal preparation and to top it up with getting a red card in the early stages of the game, but immediately we scored goals. Honestly speaking the boys showed character. They wanted this because we spoke about it and the fact that we started this project two years ago in Randburg, where we had 40 players. We then cut them down to 28, and in our minds and our talks, in our very first camp, we were saying we need to take this team to the World Cup. And that was the main, main thing that we were hoping to do and here we are today, we are saying we are out of the group in the World Cup. So this is the proudest moment, a big achievement for all of us and for the boys. It is a boost in their career.



LK: In the matches where you got results, you have had to come from behind. Is that the strength of this team, to be able to not give up, and do you think it's something other teams have also realised?

VK: Again, you are spot on, and it's not an ideal thing, but it just happened that we always come from behind. I think with the Bolivia game, the setback was the red card, but with Qatar, it was all that also and the same thing happened with Italy. But it is not an ideal start. You have to start like that where you put yourself under pressure, but as it may be, it has been perceived that way, it's okay because it's a reality, but we don't want it to be like that. We actually want to be on the front foot.

LK: Did the boys gel as the tournament continued because most of them hadn't played together before you assembled the squad?

VK: Honestly, they did. They are getting used to each other because if you look at it, it's 50% of the boys that started here that took the team to the World Cup that are here, and the others are just new. And as I have been saying in my interviews, only talent is going to help us, and the talent is helping us. South Africa is blessed with talent. And when the technical aspect of the players is being improved, mine is to bring the tactical aspect, wherein we say this is how we want to approach the game, this is how we want to play. And they adapt and take it as quick as possible.

LK: Speaking of talent, Coach, we can't ignore Emile Witbooi's contributions, Neo Bohloko, the captain Kamohelo Mareletse, too. Do you think the time they spent playing international football at COSAFA and the AFCON has also assisted them in knowing how to use their individual brilliance?

VK: It is very evident that if you prepare thoroughly, like you indicated, those boys have been with the team for quite some time; their preparation was thorough, and they have the experience. But importantly, all of them and others, they are really talented, and those ones have topped it up with experience of playing these international games. And it's not so difficult for them to help others to gel well with the team.

LK: Tournaments like these obviously come with a lot of attention and eyes. Were you worried that perhaps the boys could be so fixated on the issue of international scouts there, or had you talked to the boys about the importance of focusing on the games?

VK: It's human that they will think that, even when they play, it's all about wanting to impress so that they can go out and be seen and be recognised outside the country and even in the country by other teams. But we keep them grounded, and we talk about these things, and we even outline what needs to happen through stages. So we keep them grounded and we are monitoring, but importantly because you work as father with them, as a teacher with them and you work as a coach so a combination of all that, you say at the end of the day you know why you are here and for you to be recognised even further you have to put in a good shift, be disciplined and do the good work that's needs to be done. And that will help everybody go where they want to go.

LK: Coach, two Man of the Match awards for Emile, and I'm sure other teams targeted him. I saw against Italy how much of a tough time they gave him. Have we seen the best of him at this tournament?

VK: I think the talent, anyone, any coach and any scout can see it immediately within a minute or so when the player has the ball. But he has done so, so well, and they are all aware that he is a talented young man and because this is a World Cup, everyone watching can see this is a talented player. And yes, we will see more of it when he gets even further. It's not only him. Most of them are really talented, but he is a shoulder above others.

LK: And what have you made of the other African teams at this World Cup?

VK: You know the fact of the matter is that for this World Cup, 10 teams came from Africa and only one went home after the group stage. I know that we were one of the few to finish the group in position two, but that nine got out of the group is a stat that will remain to say African standards are improving, and we are closing the gap between us and Europe.

LK: You have been part of the national junior teams for a long time. I just want to ask how exciting this period



ON CHIEFS: "TO BE FAIR AND HONEST WITH YOU, I'D LOVE TO GO SEE MY BOYS GOING TO MANCHESTER FOR THE GAMES."

is where we are witnessing U17s and the U20s at the World Cup and being able to get out of the groups. I mean, some of the U20s have played under you at U17 level?

VK: It's like a dream that is coming true, ausi, and we are in a space where South Africa is doing well in football and in sports at large. So I think one cannot stop thinking and pinching himself that it's really happening. Is it that dream that we've been talking about bearing fruit that we wanted all along? And when you mentioned that most of the players [in U20], even the ones that are in Bafana Bafana, there are players that I coached, and there are players who have gone through all the ranks of our age groups, and now they are with Bafana. One cannot stop to say if we can really, really put our heads together, this thing can work out, the same way, for the rest of our lives. If we can start doing things right because it is there for us to speed up. The little that we do put all our teams here. So it's for all of us to say let's pull in one direction and do it right. I'm happy, I'm really happy, and I think the dream is getting better and better.

LK: Coach, I know you don't like speaking about yourself, but on a personal front, how do you look at this year, I mean, winning the DDC with Kaizer Chiefs, getting the U17s to the



World Cup and out of the group.

VK: (Chuckles) you are right, I don't really like talking about me. I'm a man who says, 'Let me be quiet and the work will talk for me'. And this year, when you look at the trophies, it's been Kaizer Chiefs champions of DDC, being runners up with Bafana Bafana at COSAFA, and you win U20 Zone 5 with U17 boys, you win COSAFA championship and qualify the team to the World Cup in one year. This is crazy. This is something else, and you then say I can only be proud and say if I can do it, everybody can do it. I'm happy, and my family supports me, and the school that I'm coming from, and I don't always mention them, but my teachers have been behind me, supporting me. The Department of Education supports me. The reason I'm saying this is that you will remember that I'm a principal at school and they have given me this opportunity to do what I love on both fronts, and all of this is not because I'm clever but the grace of God. It is the grace that has helped me to do all of this. Even the kids at school, the parents, everybody at my school, saying go for it, do it, I can only say thank you to each and every one without forgetting my team, Kaizer Chiefs, who give me the opportunity when the national team call-up comes. They allow me to go and help the national team.

LK: What is the name of your school, coach? I think it deserves a mention for their patriotism in allowing you to go and help the national team.

VK: The name of my school is Nooitgedacht Laerskool, Nooities in short. It is based next to Lanseria Airport. It's a public school. I have 1700 kids there, it's a very big school.

LK: Shout out to Nooities, coach. And how are you coping with the exams there in camp? Is it easier for you to switch roles for boys there?

VK: Like I said, when you are a teacher, you are a teacher forever, and in this case we have a sister/ teacher, Mbali. She is here to help our team in monitoring exams and all of that, but I'm also here helping her out, as I have the background of school. Invigilation is happening inside my room here. Immediately after training, immediately after a game,

“SOUTH AFRICA IS BLESSED WITH TALENT. AND WHEN THE TECHNICAL ASPECT OF THE PLAYERS IS BEING IMPROVED, MINE IS TO BRING THE TACTICAL ASPECT.”

they come here, we do the school work because there is no way I will have them in football at their age, and they don't go to school. So even though they are from different schools, they are studying, there are question papers, they write their exams, and then they go back. So Mbali is a teacher who travelled with us, a tutor who is helping us, and I'm also helping her. We are helping the kids. It's working well, we are doing it both ways, football and the school way. They need to fall back on something when days are dark on the football side.

LK: Absolutely, coach, and this is a lot of work making sure they do well in the classroom and on the field. I think the country is indebted to you and the staff. Last question, coach, the Chiefs DDC team is England-bound this month. How's that playing in your head right now?

VK: (Laughs) I'm caught in between here and to be fair and honest with you, I'd love to go see my boys going to Manchester for the games. But at the same time, I have really been away from school for a longer time, and the chances of going even further this side were there. So you then say whatever happens, if I don't go that side, it means I'll have to work very hard so that we win again in DDC, so that I can be part of the team going there. If I go, it will be a bonus; if I don't, again, honestly speaking, I know it is going to be a good thing, but if it doesn't happen, the boys will go with Coach Sheppy [Dillon Sheppard]. He is there, and we have been doing this together, so Coach Sheppy can still lead the team when I'm not there.

LK: Coach, thank you so much.

RADEBE ON BROOS, LORCH & IF BAFANA CAN LIFT AFCON

FORMER BAFANA BAFANA captain LUCAS RADEBE was in Dube, Soweto, to welcome the **TOTAL Energies Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON)** trophy during its whistle stop tour to South Africa, and like most of those present at the local filling station that hosted the event, Rhoo believes the trophy will be back in the country late in January next year. He told senior writer **MATSHELANE MAMABOLO** that he believes Hugo Broos' Bafana Bafana have what it takes to emulate the Class of 1996, which he played for, by becoming continental champions at the tournament to be hosted by Morocco from next month.

Matshelane Mamabolo: Ola Rhoo, the trophy is here in your home township, Soweto, and there's excitement all round. Do you see it returning in January? Do you think we can win the AFCON?

Lucas Radebe: I think the way the team has been performing, being stable and with the consistency they've shown in doing well, plus given that the group of players that we have who have been together for a while now – for me that's a winning team. And I think it brings hope and confidence to the fans that there's a possibility [to win it]. I mean, after Ivory Coast [where Bafana Bafana finished third at the previous AFCON], that raised our hopes and we now expect them to do even better, even [to the extent of] winning it. And I mean, you can feel the vibe and the atmosphere with the national team playing and performing. It's absolutely amazing. The glory days are back in our country.

MM: How does this build up, the vibe that you are talking about, compared to when you guys were building up to the 1996 tournament, which you went

on to win?

LR: You know it is hard to compare because it was different times. That time, we were just coming out of the Apartheid era, the first big competition at home. To be honest, to compare is gonna be difficult. Because football has evolved, it's become better and younger. That's what we see in our team – we see a young team, we see consistency, we see pace, which is great. And I think with the passion and the love, is coming back now into the team. And yes, the build-up to the tournament is nice. I think for me, there's not as much expectation, but I think as we progress, as the AFCON gets closer, you can hear people talking about it. The kids are getting excited about certain individual players, and that is great. And surely, yes, I think it will get to a point where everyone goes and watches the AFCON when we play in Morocco. I do believe they can bring it back.

MM: A lot has been said about Thembinkosi Lorch's exclusion from the squad in spite of his good form for Wydad Casablanca in Morocco and the fact that he is one of the most experienced players who has been to an AFCON in North Africa. Are we shooting ourselves in the foot by not including him?

LR: No, to be honest, I think we've got quality in the team. Obviously, we need the best to represent the country just to give us a chance to win it. But obviously it's a decision of the coach whom he chooses because he's the one who knows the future, where he's heading and the structure that he has in the national team. Whether he picks him or he doesn't pick him, the good thing is that we know



we’ve got depth in the players that we can bring in, players that can compete. Yes, as an individual, Lorch has done well, especially with the criticism that he has suffered when he was changing clubs. It’s very difficult for a player when you’re facing those challenges, but he’s managed, and he showed character, and that gives us hope, and that’s what we need when it comes to big competitions. But to be honest, it’s up to the coach whether he brings him in or doesn’t bring him in. He’s the one who is in charge, and it’s not just Lorch, but there are other players playing in the smaller European countries that have the same quality. But maybe they’ll be called up in the future.

MM: We have been placed in a group with Egypt, Angola and Zimbabwe....

LR: Tough, a very tough group. I think for us, we look at it and think – do we have the quality? Yes, we have the quality. Can we compete? Yes, we can compete. We know Egypt, but they are not the same team anymore. They pose a different challenge, but I think we have the players who can actually stand up to them and can compete at that level. Yes, for the tournament games, you need depth because there are injuries and challenges that we’re going to face, but I believe that with the team that Hugo Broos has built, we should believe in them. Along with Helman [Mkhalele] and the entire technical team, coach Broos has built a good team. It’s not the team that’s just been assembled now, but this is a team that has been growing and developing all these years to reach this level. And once you reach this level, expectations get a bit higher, but the consistency must be seen as well. And I believe that we will do well to possibly win it.

MM: Speaking of Helman, Coach Broos has spoken about him as someone who can possibly replace him when he leaves the position after the World Cup next year. Are you of the same sentiments that he should be one of

“THE WAY THE TEAM HAS BEEN PERFORMING, BEING STABLE AND WITH THE CONSISTENCY THEY’VE SHOWN IN DOING WELL, PLUS GIVEN THAT THE GROUP OF PLAYERS THAT WE HAVE WHO HAVE BEEN TOGETHER FOR A WHILE NOW – FOR ME THAT’S A WINNING TEAM.”

the people considered for the position?

LR: You know, over the years, we’ve been saying we need our own coaches. But it’s learning from people like Hugo Broos, people who have been there before, who coached big countries. But also, the structure of our football has to allow those coaches to succeed. So, for me, I think, yes, possibly Helman has learnt from a great coach who has done absolute wonders for this country. So I don’t see why not, because as one of the former players who should take over. He has been there and done that, he’s got the players, and surely he now plays a massive role in making sure that those players play together and understand what is needed to win those matches.

MM: Rhoo, we are going to this Nations Cup on the back of the excitement of having qualified for the World Cup. Historically, you will remember that the coaches who qualified us for the World Cup got fired after a bad showing at tournaments preceding the global showpiece. How should we react to whatever happens at the AFCON in relation to the World Cup?



LR: I think for me it's all about consistency. As I said earlier on, why should we change and destabilise the team? You know, whatever happens, I believe we are on the right track, not just now, but from when Hugo Broos took over. We could see the team coming together under him. So, let him take it all the way to the World Cup. And then thereafter, we can sit back and say this is how we've progressed. This is what we've produced. Now what's the next step? I think for me, that's very important, that we should take those steps and make sure that we don't, we don't really hit a dip but hit the right trajectory, moving up the ladder and making sure our football develops even further than we have now.

MM: Lastly, Rhoo, the excitement of our junior teams on the global stage. I mean, we had our under-20s making the knockout stages of their World Cup, and the under-17s also did the same at their World Cup. Surely that is exciting news for the future of the game in this country?

LR: I think it says a lot about our football in this country. It speaks to the quality of the coaches that we have, and what they're doing in the game is positive. Development of football is key – especially when we see these young guys doing well and producing results. This is what football is all about. When we talk of success, we don't want the success to

“IT'S UP TO THE COACH WHETHER HE BRINGS HIM [LORCH] IN OR DOESN'T BRING HIM IN. HE'S THE ONE WHO IS IN CHARGE, AND IT'S NOT JUST LORCH, BUT THERE ARE OTHER PLAYERS PLAYING IN THE SMALLER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES THAT HAVE THE SAME QUALITY.”

just be only at the Africa Nations Cup level and then we hit a dip. It has to be at the global level as well, and these results are encouraging. Now we've got to be careful that we don't force or push these young players too fast. Their growth has to be gradual; they've got to go through the stages, you know, to get to the level where they will appreciate where they are coming from. I think we are in the right direction, given what's happening in our football in the country.

MM: Thanks, my bra. Let's hope Bafana brings it home in January.

LR: They have it in them to bring it back.



NODADA: I'D LOVE TO WIN THE LEAGUE BEFORE RETIRING

THABO NODADA recently made a return to his home province, KwaZulu-Natal, joining newly-promoted side, Durban City. Having departed the province at the formative age of 13 to pursue his football aspirations, his journey has now circled back. In a candid interview with *iDiski Times* journalist **SINETHEMBA SITHOLE**, Nodada delves deep into his career, providing particular insight into his impactful tenure at Cape Town City and the motivations behind his decision to sign with Durban City. Furthermore, he openly shares his unfulfilled career ambitions and reveals the specific timeframe he has set for eventually retiring and hanging up his boots.

Sinethemba Sithole: Thabo, thanks for the opportunity you've given us to speak to you. You're back in KZN, a new club, how does it feel?

Thabo Nodada: It's been three months. It's been a lot, because I left KZN when I was 13. I've never ever played professionally or worked professionally and been able to go home after a training session or after a game. Home is not that close, I mean, it's 120km away, but finishing training and going home, you can imagine what that feeling is. It comes at 30 years of age, where I've accumulated the most amount of experience in my football career, so I know how things work. And to come to a club that was... funny, when I signed, I told the chairman, and I said, 'Chairman, you were the first club that showed me professional football'. I was 12, 13 years old, and Maritzburg United came to Xopo to conduct training clinics for kids. 'I should have never had to go to Cape Town. You should have signed me long ago'. So being here now, playing under that brand, it's been amazing. The fact that I relate so much with the brand, I relate so much with the province, I relate so much with the players, also. I understand a lot about their backgrounds. I understand the responsibilities that are on their

shoulders. And I feel like that always bonds the team much better when there's a deep understanding amongst the players. So overall, I've been happy with my time.

SS: Outside the fact that this is your home province, was there anything else that attracted you to the club, perhaps the coach or something that became a factor?

TN: The coach called me directly. And to date, he's the only coach that called me directly since I left Cape Town. The coach didn't just start calling me now. The coach has been calling me for the past four or five years. It's just that obviously before I couldn't [join him] because I was contracted and everything. But this time around, he called me, and I was free to move, and he said he's here. It made perfect sense, and I came. I was assessed over three, four days and the fifth day, I signed. Beyond that, also the chairman. Like I said, the chairman has been involved in grassroots football in KZN and particularly in Xopo for a very long time. So it was a very easy decision to make.

SS: I think Haashim Domingo, Darren Keet, Taahir Goedeman, you all came from Cape Town City. Does that make it easy for all of you to adapt?

TN: Yeah, it definitely makes it easier. Also, we have to understand that we each understand each other's pain. We understand how, for a period of 364 days, we came knocking, trying to open a door, and the door didn't open until the last day. So with us around each other in a new environment, we are able to translate a message to the players about knocking on that very same door, and it's not just me who's saying it. There's three, four of us who can share that message across, but also I think we bring a level of professionalism that maybe some guys might have not experienced before. I remember when



I was young and I was new in the PSL, it would take me almost 20 minutes to get over the crowd. The game is on, I'm still fantasising about the crowd, but because now we've got people who've taken on even bigger crowds, we are able to get the team ticking much closer. Yeah, I think it's positive that we're here together. It's actually a blessing because they are from Cape Town. I was the one that was working in Cape Town. Now they get to see my province and they get to give love to my province, like how I gave to theirs. I like it.

SS: From what we see outside, the club means business about a lot of things. How are you feeling about all that?

TN: I think what you see on the outside is the reflection of what you see on the inside. Especially, you need to understand that if you go hire a coach like Gavin Hunt, you are committing to making sure that certain things are done correctly. He has quite a lot of experience across the board. You cannot sign him and then not make him happy; it's not going to work. With the direction the club is taking, from my experience, the direction is emphasised by the players. The players take their jobs seriously; they bring the results. The results attract people, they attract eyes, and attract investment. I think everything that you are seeing here in terms of the sponsors, you speak about the Super Tech, Johnson Workwear, Southern Sun, it matches perfectly with how we started the season. No one expected that, and neither did we. But this is the way things have to go. It's testimony to the chairman. How many people have gone down and come back? And come back with this much vigour, he is pumping. And our job is just to thank him, thank him through performances, thank people who back him through performances, thank our fans. It's actually crazy. That vibe that was in Athlone Stadium [previous season's last match]. They had that in the NFD, and teams from PSL don't get that type of atmosphere. So, there is something really beautiful brewing. It gives me, as a player, a great responsibility to be able to know that I carry a brand that takes itself seriously, that wants to

"I LEFT KZN WHEN I WAS 13. I'VE NEVER EVER PLAYED PROFESSIONALLY OR WORKED PROFESSIONALLY AND BEEN ABLE TO GO HOME AFTER A TRAINING SESSION OR AFTER A GAME."

do better, that promotes better. I think that's the important thing.

SS: The club brought several seasoned campaigners. Did the club indicate that they want to achieve big things?

TN: First things first, you've got to maintain and keep the status. It's new, everything is new. Don't get ahead of yourself in the targets that are going to strain you guys and actually take away joy that you guys should be having because of this experience. So the first thing that I received when I arrived here was let's get results that keep us in the league, and then from there we can see where we go. That's the conversation that the chairman had with me when we signed. We need to stay competitive. We need to allow whatever improvements we are making now to mature. And the only way we allow them to do that is if we are in this league again next season.

SS: You were one of the few CT City players who were there from the first day when they bought Mpumalanga Black Aces. What can you say about that long stint?

TN: It was exactly where I needed to be. And if I were to be anywhere else, then it should've happened because I got to win trophies there. I got to compete for the league there, I got to be in the national team there, I got to do a lot of things there, whereas a lot of players that were in my academy and then we got promoted together, a lot of players had to leave those clubs and join bigger clubs to achieve the things I achieved there. It happened



exactly the way it was supposed to happen. It's crazy, you go from finishing fifth the previous season to all the way relegated the next season. It's the same players. It's lessons, but then again, I am not part of the executive. The executive took the lessons, and I hope they implement them going forward, so something like that never happens again. But with my experience at the club, they grew me. I got a chance to be settled in one area, make mistakes and improve.

SS: Go on.

TN: Some people left, moved to new environments. I think Terrence [Mashego] spoke about it. He made a big move to Sundowns, and then there was [lack of] game-time; he was frustrated, I was lucky. I have a lot of minutes under my bag. So when you speak about match minutes, you speak about experience, you speak about scenarios. I've been in a lot of scenarios on the pitch, which is a positive for me, which is something that happened through Cape Town City. And coming here now, to be honest, why I play football now? It's to give the game back to the feet. The game needs to come back to the feet. And to stop being in the mouth and on cameras and on Instagram and on Twitter. We're moving away from the people that actually do the job. Now, we've been subjected to watch, I'm sorry, I have to say, the midfielders who can't make a 40-metre pass. Come on! You know what I mean? What are the roles and responsibilities of a position, and who is doing them well? That should be the best player. Now we worry about who's got a nice cut. This one's got tape in his hands. So when City got relegated, I knew I wanted to come back home to KZN. I knew that if I did sign, I don't think I'd leave again. But one thing I knew for sure was irrespective of what happens. Monday to Friday, I'm going to go out and I'm going to give a brand of football that respects the roles and responsibilities of a midfielder. And that'll do the talking. Whether I get on the field at the end of the week or not, it's got nothing to do with me. What I guarantee you is that Monday to Friday, if you look at the midfielders on that pitch and you say, who did one, two, three? I'm in your top three, and

“THE COACH CALLED ME DIRECTLY. AND TO DATE, HE'S THE ONLY COACH THAT CALLED ME DIRECTLY SINCE I LEFT CAPE TOWN.”

that is all I hold myself to. Football has moved so far away from the people doing the job on the field. And that is where I'm trying to bring it to. So I don't have any social media anymore, I don't have anything of that nature. If you want to see me [come to the field].

SS: What does it take to find success with a club that's not the big three, who are always labelled as favourites for almost all competitions?

TN: First, I think it's the competition internally. What you were finding in that club that you speak about, City, is that the goalkeeper wants to be in his national team. I'm speaking about the foreigners, maybe. The striker wants to be in his national team. Then you have the South Africans, two or three are in the national team. That competition that was brewing in there, raised the level for the rest of the group. What has just happened now, [Fezile] Gcaba has been called up into the Bafana Bafana preliminary squad [for Zambia international friendly in November]. Joslin Kamatuka is a regular in Namibia. Something is coming; eventually, one of these under-20 and under-23 boys are going to get called up. That internal competition that is also allowed by the club. Everything boils down with returning football to the feet. Stop this thing of meddling business. 'This one is a good sale prospect'. No, you know what I mean! It was that, that got us winning, that drive, that if I am the one that pushes and works hard, chances are I am the one that's on the field. That's what it takes for me. If everybody is competing, the team average increases.



SS: You're still 30, looking like you can still go for some more years in the game. What is it that a Thabo Nodada has not achieved and wants to?

TN: I'd really love to win the league, my brother. To be honest with you, that is the trophy, for me. I see all the other trophies I've won, but the league. There's just something about it. Like I said, knocking on the door for 30 days or 30 games and then on the 30th, it just opens. It's a reward for your work, tirelessly. I'd really like to win the league. The rest of the stuff, it comes as it comes. Look, there's football, I believe I play, and when I play it, no one can stand it, no midfielder can stand it. And that's what I work towards, every Monday to Friday, the rest of the stuff will come as a result of whether people are seeing the football I'm playing or not. But that I cannot control. I've gone all the way to being nominated; I remember one year I was nominated top three midfielders. And the other two, in the same category, were Lebohang Manyama and Themba Zwane. You know what I mean? To all of a sudden, the very next year, you are the same player, but your minutes have decreased. You are working much, much, much harder. That's football for you. I control what I can, and what I can is what I do on Monday to Friday and how best I mentally prepare myself. And then beyond that, let football be. I think in growing in the game...at my earlier years, it's whereby you're complaining about minutes, right? You want more minutes, you want more minutes. But as time goes by, a minute is literally one moment, because you realise that you can change the whole aspect of the game by just one action. It's not even 90 minutes anymore. So, for the past three, four years, I've been playing on what I get. If you're going to give me five minutes, in that five minutes, I might give you something you haven't seen the whole game. That's my attitude. Return the ball back to the feet, up to the mouth, and then let the football speak.

SS: So how much longer can you go?

TN: I will be happy retiring at 35,

“FOOTBALL HAS MOVED SO FAR AWAY FROM THE PEOPLE DOING THE JOB ON THE FIELD. AND THAT IS WHERE I'M TRYING TO BRING IT TO.”

because that's where I want to call it. Yeah, 35, if I have given you the best football I can, irrespective of what I won, if you looked at me as a midfielder, and when you look at the rules and responsibilities of a midfielder, I performed seven out of 10 on those. Then yeah.

SS: You've got Gavin Hunt here as head coach – if you say you still want to win the league, surely he's the perfect person to share how to win the league.

TN: Four times, I think there's no other coach who has won it that much in the league currently. He won it with clubs that are gone now. He's the perfect guy. But beyond just winning the league, do you understand how much experience the guy has? In the most simplest of terms, a team playing wide or forcing you wide has to come back inside to score. So, with Gavin's experience and how many times he's seen these scenarios play out. In giving you an instruction, he'll be like, 'Where are you going? They're going to come back in here'. And because I've gathered the experience I've gathered, I'm able to understand that information much better, whereas before that, you'd have to sit me down in a video and explain this and that. So, I am enjoying working with him, I am not going to lie, because it's frank. You know what needs to happen.

SS: Thabo, thanks for your time and wishing you all the best with City this season.

TN: Thanks, my brother.



THE BOYS SHINING AT THE BACK

With the countdown ticking — around a month to the start of the CAF Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco, and just over 200 days until the FIFA World Cup in the USA, Mexico, and Canada — the excitement around Bafana Bafana is building fast. As preparations ramp up, iDiski Times will be diving deep into each position on the pitch, analysing the frontrunners, the fringe players, and the rising stars, hoping to catch Hugo Broos' eye for these two monumental tournaments.

It's time to turn our attention to the centre-backs, a position that has seen one of the most fascinating transformations during Hugo Broos' tenure as Bafana Bafana coach. Not too long ago, the heart of the defence was considered one of the team's biggest headaches, with concerns over depth, consistency, and leadership. But that narrative has changed dramatically over the past year. What was once seen as a weak

spot has become one of Bafana's most competitive areas, filled with emerging stars and rejuvenated veterans eager to make their mark.

At the centre of this evolution stands Mbekezeli Mbokazi, the dynamic defender whose rapid rise has captured the imagination of South African fans. Despite having just four international caps, Mbokazi has already shown the composure, physicality, and football intelligence of a seasoned international. His performances have been so assured that the long-standing anxiety about the position has quickly faded.

Yet Mbokazi is not alone. A new generation of international rookies is stepping up with confidence and maturity, bringing energy and versatility to the national setup. Alongside them, a few experienced campaigners have rediscovered their form, adding balance and stability.

For Broos, who once might have had sleepless nights over his defensive options, the situation now looks far brighter. The competition for places is fierce, the talent pool is growing, and South Africa's centre-back department suddenly looks ready for the challenges that lie ahead, from the AFCON to the World Cup and beyond.

The Men In Possession:

**Mbekezeli Mbokazi
(Orlando Pirates)**

The 20-year-old Mbekezeli Mbokazi has been nothing short of a revelation in 2025, the kind of fairytale story that reminds us why we love football.

Barely 250 days have passed since he made his professional debut, yet his rise has been meteoric. Just a year earlier, he was a skinny teenager kicking a ball around dusty pitches in KwaZulu-Natal, playing amateur football with



big dreams but little fanfare. Now, he’s not just holding his own among seasoned professionals; he’s dominating, and doing it with poise beyond his years.

Physically, Mbokazi has transformed his wiry frame into a strong, athletic build that allows him to mix it with the best. But it’s his football intelligence and adaptability that have truly set him apart. No matter the stage or the opposition, he reads the game like a veteran, making smart decisions, stepping into challenges with confidence, and leading with quiet authority.

For someone so young, his maturity is astonishing. Coaches talk about his work ethic, teammates about his composure, and fans about the aura he carries, the sense that you’re watching a future great in the making. He’s a leader by example, a player who lifts those around him and whose hunger never fades.

Mbokazi’s story feels like it’s only just beginning, and the beauty of it is that no one knows where this journey will end. For now, South African football can sit back, watch, and enjoy as this remarkable young man continues to rise, one fearless performance at a time.

**Nkosinathi Sibisi
(Orlando Pirates)**

Having first caught Broos’ eye during his days at Golden Arrows, Sibisi has quietly become one of the Belgian coach’s most trusted lieutenants, the kind of player who may not always dominate headlines, but whose influence is felt in every camp. Over the course of Broos’ tenure, Sibisi has been part of the Bafana backbone, called upon in key qualifiers and tough away fixtures, where composure and intelligence are worth more than flair.

At 30 years old, Sibisi has evolved into a model of consistency and leadership. He may not be the tallest or most physically imposing centre-back, but he more than compensates with his superb reading of the game, excellent timing in the tackle, and calmness under pressure. His positional awareness allows him to snuff out danger before it develops, a quality that Broos values deeply in his system.

While he may not always be Broos’ first-choice starter, especially with the emergence of exciting new talents, Sibisi’s value lies in his reliability, discipline, and professionalism. He’s the kind of player every successful national team needs: steady, selfless, and ready whenever called upon.

**Siyabonga Ngezana
(FCSB)**

For years, Ngezana was seen as a player with raw potential, strong, athletic, and fearless, yet somehow just short of fulfilling the promise that flickered during his early days at Chiefs. Thrust into a struggling team, every misplaced pass and mistimed tackle was magnified under the glare of expectation. For a young defender trying to find his rhythm,

it was a harsh environment to grow in. But football, as always, offers redemption. When Ngezana made the bold leap to Europe, joining FCSB in Romania, it felt like a gamble, yet it turned into the making of him. Away from the noise and pressure, he rediscovered his confidence, and the player that emerged on the other side was a transformed version of the young man we once knew.

At FCSB, Ngezana thrived. The fans took to him, the critics applauded him, and soon his name was being mentioned among the best defenders in the Romanian league.

Now, with maturity, experience, and European pedigree, Ngezana stands as one of South Africa’s most dependable centre-backs.

For Broos, he’s become the kind of player a coach can trust, and with AFCON on the horizon and the World Cup less than a year away, it’s hard to imagine a Bafana Bafana squad without Ngezana’s name pencilled in.

**Khulumani Ndamane
(TS Galaxy)**



While his path hasn't mirrored Ngezana's European adventure, Ndamane's story carries its own kind of triumph. Also a product of the Chiefs academy, Ndamane was one of many talented youngsters who found the step up to the first team just out of reach. Rather, he chose to chart his own course, leaving the comfort of Naturena to pursue regular football elsewhere.

That decision has paid off spectacularly. Since joining TS Galaxy, the 21-year-old defender has been nothing short of a revelation. Composed on the ball, aggressive in the challenge, and mature beyond his years, Ndamane has quietly established himself as one of the country's brightest young defensive prospects. His performances have not only impressed fans and pundits but also caught the eye of Broos, earning him a call-up to the Bafana setup.

And he hasn't looked out of place for a second. Like Mbokazi, Ndamane may only have a handful of caps to his name, but the potential is unmistakable. He carries himself with the calm assurance of a player who belongs on the international

stage, one who could anchor South Africa's defence for the next decade.

For Broos, it must be deeply satisfying to see this new generation emerge. Young, hungry, fearless players who weren't even professionals when he first took the Bafana job back in 2021. Now, they are stepping into the spotlight, reshaping the national team's future.

The Back-Ups:

Thabo Moloisane (Stellenbosch)

Moloisane's journey is a testament to patience and perseverance. A product of the Mamelodi Sundowns academy, he didn't follow the usual fast track to the top. Instead, he spent several seasons honing his craft in the second tier with All Stars, followed by a stint at Maritzburg United, battling relegation, and building resilience along the way.

It wasn't until his move to Stellenbosch that Moloisane truly began to catch the eye. Seizing his chance with determination, he impressed week after week, earning a reputation as a reliable and versatile performer. His breakthrough didn't go unnoticed, and this year, he has already featured in a few of Hugo Broos' Bafana Bafana squads, hinting that his best days on the international stage may still lie ahead.

Ime Okon (Hannover 96)

Having finally put to rest the question of whether the talented Okon would represent Bafana Bafana or Nigeria, 2025 looked set to be a breakthrough year for the promising former Randburg defender. Since making his professional debut for SuperSport United, Okon has been turning heads with his composure, defensive intelligence, and physicality.

After earning five caps at COSAFA, it seemed only a matter of time before he would make his full debut for Hugo Broos' squad, especially after being named in provisional squads. However, fate intervened. A frustrating injury not only ruled him out of Bafana action but also stalled his strong start in Germany with Hannover 96, putting a temporary pause on what could have been a defining year for the young defender.

But Okon made his return last week, a goal-scoring return too, and while AFCON might be too soon, who knows what 2026 holds for the 21-year-old.

Malibongwe Khoza (Mamelodi Sundowns)

The youngest of the four Sundowns defenders featured on our list, Mali Khoza, is only just beginning to write his international story.

At just 20, the main challenge ahead of him is securing regular minutes at club level, but Khoza is already showing he has what it takes to make an impact. A



ball-playing defender with composure beyond his years, he has the kind of technical skill and tactical awareness that could see him become a dark horse in Hugo Broos' squad selections.

Versatile and intelligent, Khoza has even been deployed further up the pitch, featuring as a midfielder at the CHAN finals, highlighting his adaptability and hinting at a bright future with Bafana Bafana.

Grant Kekana (Mamelodi Sundowns)

Kekana is one of those players whose international story is tinged with a hint of misfortune. A steady, reliable presence whenever called upon, he has done very little wrong in Bafana colours, showcasing composure, intelligence, and leadership at the back. Yet, despite his quality, the narrative around him has often been about timing, perhaps a touch "too old" in a squad increasingly defined by youth and emerging talent.

Over the years, Kekana has stepped in as a dependable backup, rising to the occasion more times than most remember.

But as younger stars have burst onto the scene, he has found his call-ups becoming fewer, perhaps because of the inevitable evolution of the national team.

The Contenders:

Mothobi Mvala (Mamelodi Sundowns)

It's been a difficult couple of years for Mvala, a player whose grit and presence at the back once made him one of Broos' most regular call-ups. At his best, Mvala is everything a coach could want in a modern defender: powerful in the air, fearless in the tackle, and a leader by example. But football, as ever, can be cruel, and for much of the past two seasons, the 31-year-old has found himself battling injuries rather than opponents.

His last appearance in national colours came over a year ago, and since then, he's managed fewer than 10 club matches, a statistic that underlines just how stop-start this period has been.

When fit, there's no question that Mvala's name featured prominently in Broos' plans. But the clock is ticking. With the Africa Cup of Nations all but out of reach, the focus now turns to regaining full fitness and finding form in time for the World Cup in North America. If he can overcome this rough spell and rediscover his rhythm, there's still time for a comeback story.

Rushwin Dortley (Kaizer Chiefs)

Just over a year ago, Dortley's career seemed to be unfolding like a dream. The young defender was rising fast, captaining Bafana Bafana at the COSAFA Cup, earning a high-profile move to Chiefs, and breaking into Broos' senior setup, where he played a key role in helping South Africa secure qualification for the upcoming AFCON.

Everything pointed towards a breakthrough year, but football can be cruel, and fate intervened. A serious injury in March halted his momentum just as his star was shining brightest. Surgery followed, and months on the sidelines became a frustrating test of patience and character. For a player known for his composure and leadership on the pitch, watching from the stands has been a different kind of challenge.

Now, as Dortley nears the end of his recovery, there's a quiet determination about him, the same steel that once saw him marshal Bafana's backline with authority beyond his years. While AFCON 2026 may have come too soon, the World Cup still looms large on the horizon, and Dortley has time on his side. At just 23, he has already shown enough class and maturity to suggest that this setback is only a detour, not a derailment.

Olwethu Makhanya (Philadelphia Union)



It's been a remarkable year for Makhanya, the former Stellenbosch prodigy who once had Bafana fans buzzing about his potential as a teenager. After swapping the Winelands for the bright lights of the United States, Makhanya's journey has been one of patience, persistence, and eventual payoff.

For a long time, it seemed like his Major League Soccer debut might never come, but when it finally did this past season, he made sure it was worth the wait.

The timing couldn't have been better. With fellow South African Bradley Carnell taking the reins at Philadelphia Union, Makhanya seized his opportunity and quickly established himself as a key figure in the team's defence. His composure on the ball, athleticism, and tactical intelligence saw him go from a fringe player to a first-choice starter, helping the Union march all the way to the MLS Supporters Shield title.

For a player still only in his early 20s, it's been a breakthrough year, one that has reignited conversations about his future in the national team setup. While he might still be considered an outside bet for a place in Broos' World Cup squad, his growing maturity and first-hand experience in North American conditions could make him an intriguing option.

Keanu Cupido (Mamelodi Sundowns)

There seems to be an odd disconnect between Broos and Cupido, a mystery that continues to puzzle many football followers. In domestic football Cupido has showcased exactly why he's considered one of the country's most complete defenders, calm under pressure, commanding in the air, and blessed with the kind of passing range that fits perfectly into the modern game.

After his high-profile switch to Sundowns in January, it took a few months for him to bounce back from injury and find his rhythm and earn the trust of the technical team, but once he did, at the FIFA Club World Cup, he quickly established himself as the heartbeat of the champions' defence.

But Broos has remained reluctant to give him a run in national colours. Whether it's a question of style, personality, or simple preference, no one outside the Bafana camp can quite put their finger on it. What's clear, though, is that Cupido has done everything in his power to make his case impossible to ignore.

Rushine De Reuck (Simba SC, Tanzania)

Once a trusted figure in Broos' early Bafana squads, De Reuck has quietly drifted out of the national-team picture in recent years. His absence coincided with a new wave of young, dynamic centre-backs emerging, making the road back to the green-and-gold a challenging

one. Yet it's worth remembering just how solid De Reuck was when he did feature: he built an impressive record for Bafana, tasting defeat only once in all his appearances.

What ultimately stalled his momentum was the lack of regular football at Sundowns. But football careers have second winds, and De Reuck's recent move to Tanzania may just offer him the platform he needs to reboot his trajectory. Should he rediscover his rhythm and regain consistent minutes, Broos might find himself reconsidering a defender who, at his best, was calm, composed and reliable.

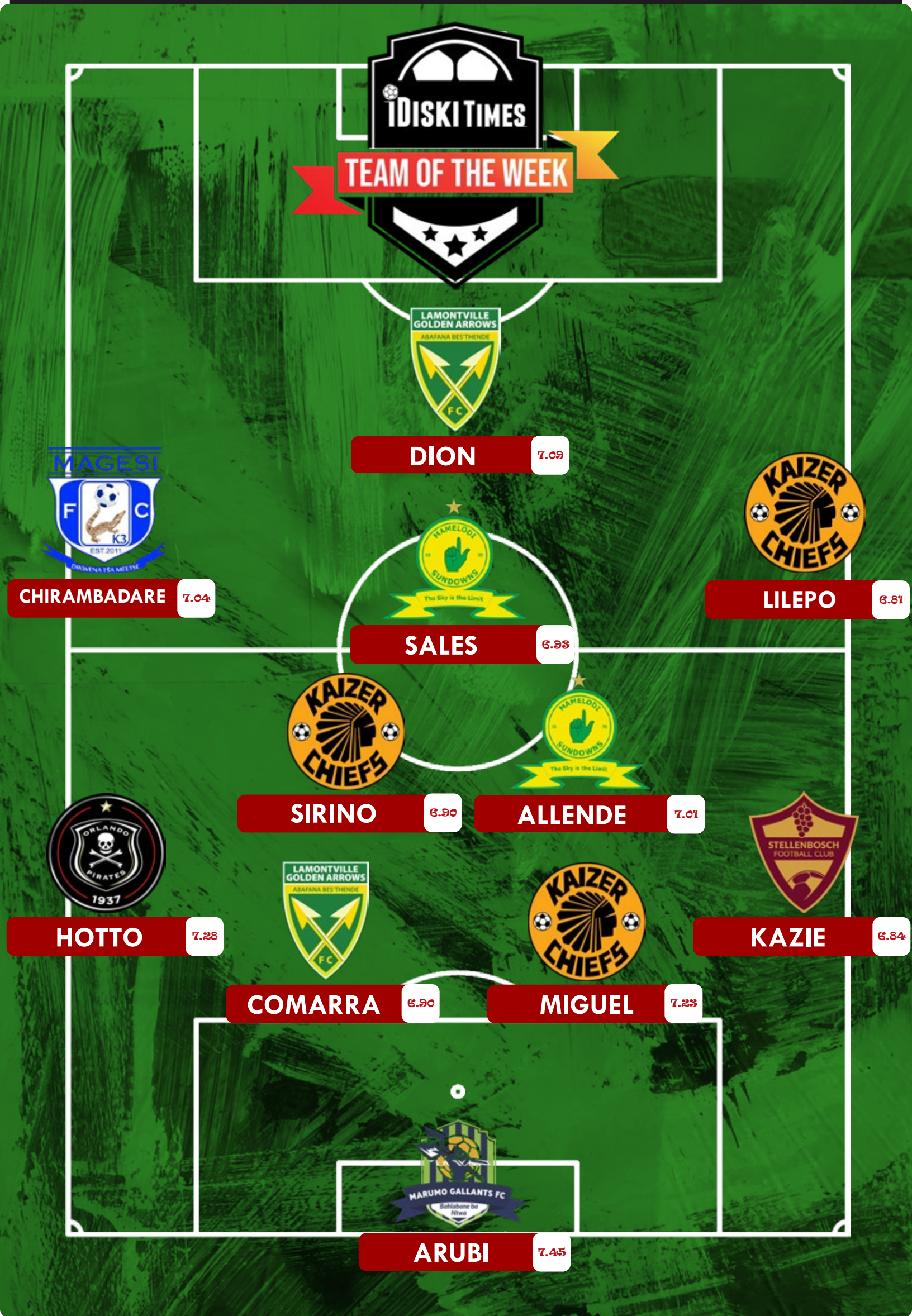
Taariq Fielies (AmaZulu)

It's been more than three and a half years since Fielies last pulled on the Bafana jersey, but the experienced AmaZulu defender has recently reminded everyone that class and composure don't fade with time. Now 33, Fielies has quietly gone about his business in Durban, stringing together a series of strong, commanding performances that have caught the eye.

The last time he featured for Hugo Broos' side was back in a 2-1 defeat to Morocco in 2022. Since then, younger options have emerged, and Broos has leaned toward building for the future.



BEST PREMIERSHIP FOREIGN XI AUGUST-NOVEMBER 2025



ACE OF THE WEEK:
BAFANA BAFANA

Our iDiski Times Aces of the Week are undoubtedly Bafana Bafana,

following their impressive 3-1 victory over Zambia in Saturday's international friendly. Hugo Broos' side delivered a vibrant, confident performance in front of the enthusiastic Gqeberha crowd at the Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium. Goals from Oswin Appollis, Mohau Nkota and Yaya Sithole showcased Bafana's attacking depth, while Sipho Mbule pulled the strings in midfield, earning Man of the Match after providing two superb assists. Zambia grabbed a late consolation through Sabobo Banda, but it did little to dampen what was a commanding, morale-boosting display from South Africa. With the CAF Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco just weeks away, this victory was exactly the performance Broos would have hoped for.





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.

Varied Outcome Practices

I am currently in my 16th year of coaching. At 33, that is almost half of my life. Coaching is a highly complex job which never really seems to get boring. This has to do with the inherent complexity of working with human beings, who are obviously different from one another on so many levels. Another layer of particular interest in the coaching professions are all the sub-levels that one has to attempt to get good at. The first and perhaps most famous one is the tactician. Coaches are often seen as these grand masters of a human chess game that move the pieces around on the board. If one regularly follows this column, it might be obvious to you that I advocate for a very different approach to this side of the game, all whilst totally accepting the importance of it. Football tactics as a subject can obviously be broken down much, much further and can fill your days, and with some, even nights.

But there are also so many other areas. Building a playing style, periodisation of content, managing political situations in football clubs (which, as much as coaches moan about it, is also a critical skill for a coach), obviously, people management, which is closely connected with leadership but also very much with self-awareness. There are, however, also a great many areas that should be critical to this coaching profession that are perhaps under-appreciated. For example, a real understanding of how learning works in human beings from an academic point of view. One aspect that is obviously a key area in a coach's arsenal is that of training/situation design. This has always been an area that I'm drawn to and that I enjoy. I also really believe that this is an extremely central building block in the overall coaching process, and perhaps one that is undervalued currently at the top of the game. A lot of teams have very repetitive training weeks and sessions where the training itself becomes more of a necessity from a physical point of view rather than a learning process and journey where the outcome is not entirely pre-planned and scripted.

Once training becomes quite central to your coaching, this can have a great effect on your team of players by ultimately teaching them to become problem solvers in football situations and build implicit solutions unique to them within your cleverly designed overall set-up. There needs to be

an interconnectedness between the set-up and the players within it, ideally constantly making each other slightly better and thereby also continuously learning from one another. The key within this idea is that we need to train with teammates and opponents so that there is decision-making within practices for players. Once this key aspect is catered for, a lot of great desirables can happen from thereon in. Within practice design with teammates and opponents, there are a lot of underrated aspects that can be considered to make practices more varied and potential outcomes more diversified. For example, why do teams in training always need to be even-numbered? There is a lot of very untapped potential in playing with uneven-numbered teams with differences of 1 or more players. This is obviously a situation that can also oftentimes arise in the real game.

With injuries or red cards, but even in small microcosms of the big game. It is, for example, quite normal to have less attackers in the immediate vicinity of the ball than there are defenders. Yet we tend to train attacking without opposition pressure or in situations where the attacking team clearly outnumbers the defensive side. We are not here to say that isolated training is without value; there are many situations and scenarios where it can be a great solution. However, some of the advantages of isolated training can easily be replicated in settings with teammates and defenders if we manipulate some parameters. For example, because there is a lower degree of decision making involved in isolated practices,



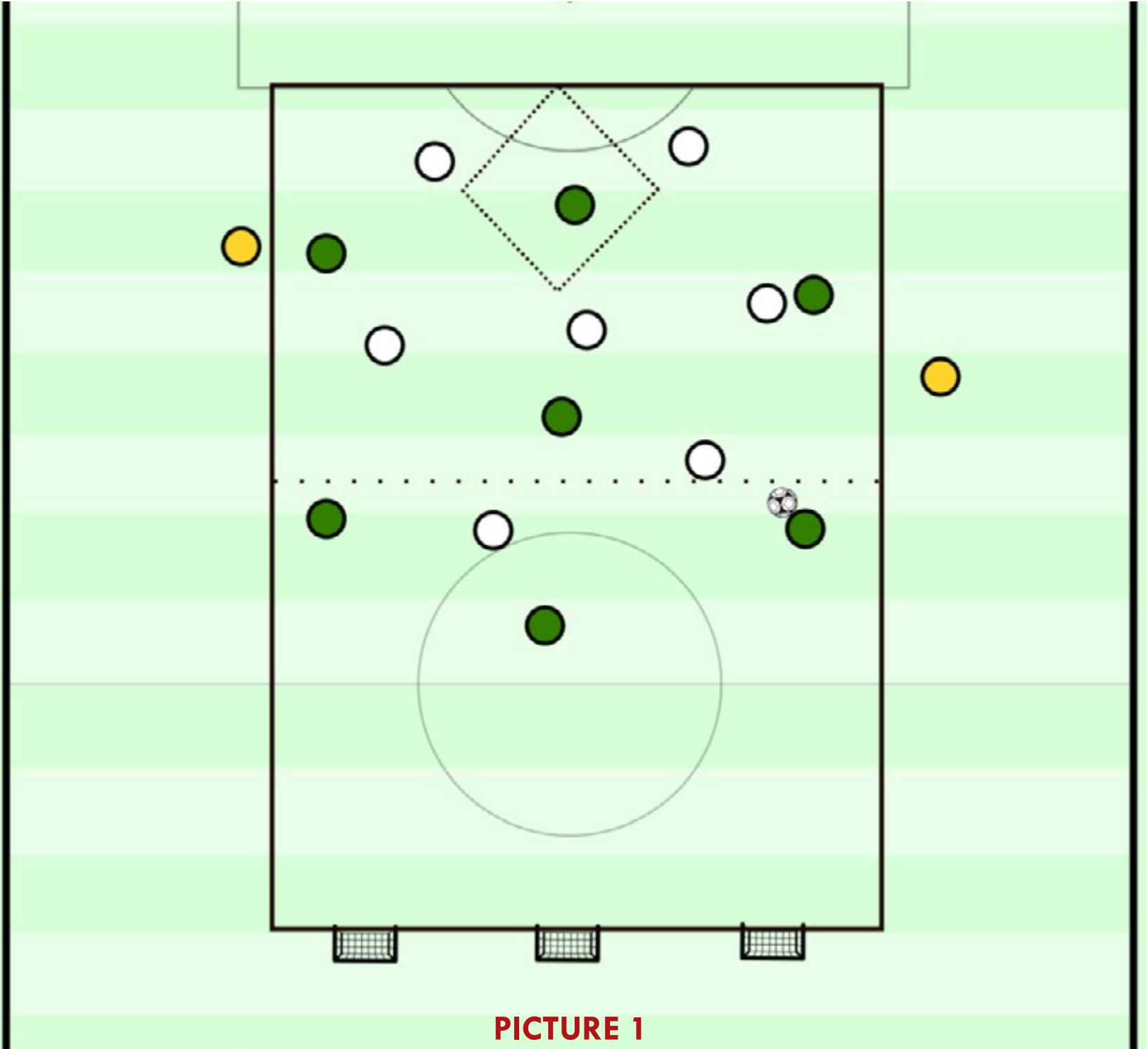
the types of actions made by players are quite pre-planned and therefore the training load from a physical point of view is very anticipatable. Another advantage is that we get a lot of repetition of certain situations for players in isolated exercises. So how can we make repetition as a singular factor more predictable in practices with opposition and teammates?

Split game 7v7+2

In this split practice, the two teams play against each other, however, unlike a normal game, they have different outcomes by having different scoring targets. The green team has two options to score points. They get awarded 1 point if they keep the ball in the opposition's half from 10 seconds or more without losing it. The other option is to play the ball through the central diamond in the top of the picture and complete at least 1 pass to a teammate afterwards. Thereby, they can keep the ball patiently or increase directness towards the diamond at the top of the picture when the situation presents itself to do so. If that team plays the ball back into their own half, the second counter stops, but continues as soon as it re-enters into the opposition half if you haven't lost it in the process.

The white team has a more vertical target. If they win the ball, they look to score in the mini-goals at the top of the picture on the counterattack. The offside law is applied in the direction

of the mini-goals, but not in the other half, where we have the diamond. Also, when both teams are supported by two wide neutral players who can be used to secure possession or to relieve pressure after having won the ball back, if you are the white team. When the ball goes out, it is always given to the green team regardless of who kicked it out. Thereby, we have the following scenario, green is working on possessing the ball against an opposition who starts from a low or medium block, their objective is to keep the ball and to look to work it upfield towards the diamond. They especially have to find the right moment to change tempo because the white team will open up more to press them as they get closer to achieving points by keeping the ball. This is the moment to play more directly towards the diamond. White works on accessing the ball from more of a medium block and counterattacking by playing towards the mini-goals. In the moment of counterattacking, green gets to work on their counter-pressing to regain the ball and stop white from counterattacking. Here we have tweaked the game in a way that obviously doesn't correspond with the normal game. However, like this, we get teams to work in-depth on different scenarios. It makes sense to switch tasks here after a few rounds. This can be a nice tool for repetition, but also for more in-depth learning. It can be especially useful to open the players up to new moments in the game where mistakes aren't always punished as harshly, and similar moments happen in close succession after each other.





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