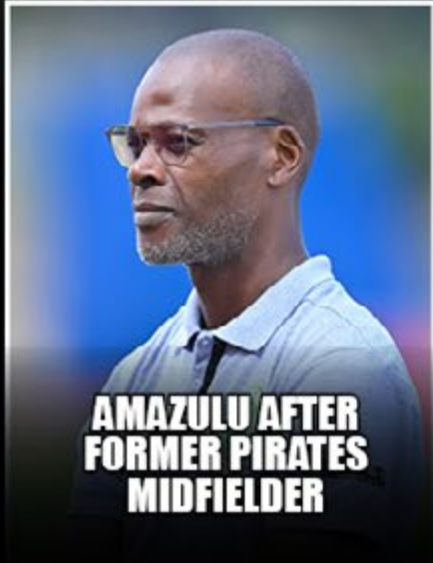




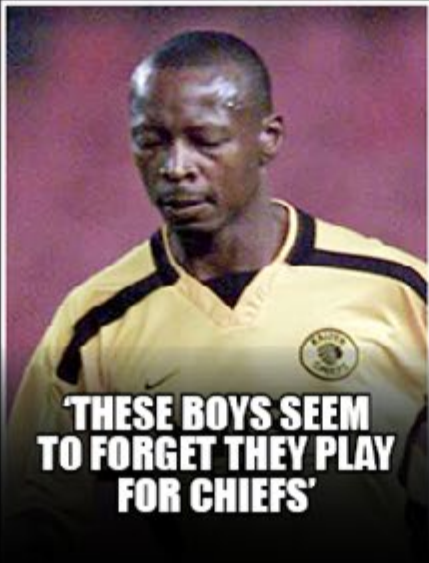
LESSONS FROM RULANI MOKWENA'S AFRICAN EXPLOITS



DE REUCK ON 'PROBLEMS' AT DOWNS, SIMBA MOVE & BAFANA DREAM



AMAZULU AFTER FORMER PIRATES MIDFIELDER



'THESE BOYS SEEM TO FORGET THEY PLAY FOR CHIEFS'



AMAJITA STAR IN LIMBO AFTER GOING AWOL



SAPULA: WOMEN'S CHAMPIONS LEAGUE EXIT WAS A TOUGH LESSON

THE DRAWING BOARD WITH MORITZ KOSSMANN & ACE OF THE WEEK

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RULANI MOKWENA
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



GARDNER SEALE
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



RUSHINE DE REUCK
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



AMAJITA STAR GOES AWOL
NEWS



GODFREY SAPULA
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MOKOENA'S PARTNER
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TEAM OF THE WEEK
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AL MASRY CHASING ARROWS
STAR DION

Egyptian Premier League club Al Masry are among several suitors for Golden Arrows striker Junior Dion. The 27-year-old has started the season with seven goals in 11 league games, leading the scoring charts for the club. Having arrived in the country in 2021 with Marumo Gallants, Dion has finally found his feet under Manqoba Mngqithi after a stint with AmaZulu too. Overall, Dion has scored 32 goals with four assists in 108 games across all competitions since arriving in Mzansi.



ZULU LINKED WITH SEKHUKHUNE

Sekhukhune United are mulling over a potential move for TS Galaxy defender Veluyeke Zulu. The 30-year-old only joined Galaxy in the off-season but has been mooted for a potential switch to Babina Noko. Eric Tinkler’s side are looking to shore up their defence in the mid-season window, and Zulu, who’s plied his trade for Maritzburg United, Royal Eagles, Golden Arrows, Richards Bay, Chippa United and AmaZulu, has been earmarked.



ZUNGU SET FOR SHOCK RETURN?

AmaZulu could look to former midfielder Nkanyiso Zungu as they aim to add experience and creativity to their midfield. Arthur Zwane’s side have been on the lookout for a January signing, and Zungu, who has slowly returned to form at Magesi, is being touted for a return to KZN. The 29-year-old playmaker started his career with Usuthu before stints at Jomo Cosmos and Stellenbosch, before his move to Orlando Pirates, where his career stalled. He’s since played for Richards Bay, Pretoria Callies and Platinum City Rovers before Magesi lured him back to the top-flight in the off-season.



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AMAJITA STAR IN LIMBO AFTER GOING AWOL

Faiz Abrahams, a member of South Africa's triumphant CAF U20 Africa Cup of Nations squad earlier this year, has suddenly found himself at the heart of a growing storm in Israel.

The 20-year-old attacker, on loan at Hapoel Kfar Saba from Stellenbosch, has reportedly gone AWOL, throwing both clubs into an unexpected tug-of-war over his future.

Abrahams arrived in Israel only a few months ago and wasted little time making an impact. His explosive performances in the Israeli second division quickly turned heads; a hat-trick in October earned him iDiski Times' Ace of the Week in Edition 228 and fuelled talk that top-flight clubs were circling with interest. As far as breakout seasons go, Abrahams appeared to be crafting something special.

But the narrative has taken a sharp turn.

During the recent FIFA international break, Kfar Saba granted Abrahams leave to fly back to South Africa. The expectation was simple: rest, recover, and return. Instead, he stayed put. Sources indicate the youngster has flat-

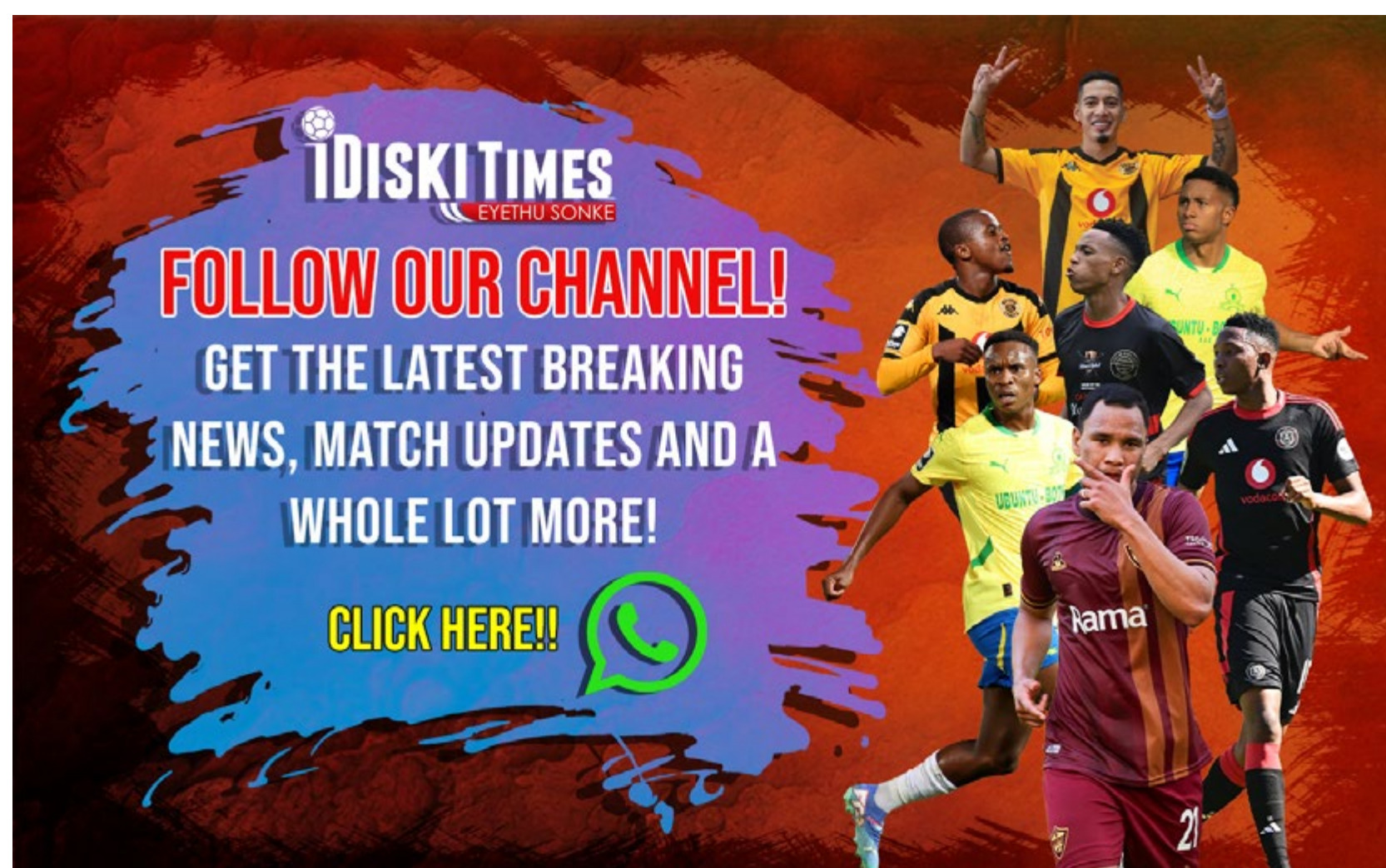
out refused to go back to Israel, even approaching Stellenbosch, his parent club, to allow him to train in the Cape Winelands.

Stellies, however, declined, reportedly urging him to honour his loan agreement and return to Kfar Saba.

Behind the scenes, tensions are simmering. Those close to the situation say the former Cape Town Spurs youth player is adamant: he does not want to return to Israel under any circumstances.

Kfar Saba, meanwhile, are growing increasingly frustrated, not only because they counted on him as a key player but also because he occupies a valuable foreign-player slot. With talks at a standstill, the matter now appears poised to escalate. The Israeli club is believed to be considering taking the case to FIFA, which would thrust the young South African into an international dispute far beyond anything he would have anticipated when he boarded that flight home.

What happens next remains unclear, but one thing is certain: the Faiz Abrahams saga is far from over.



GO TO IDISKITV



‘HE IS THE BEST DEFENDER WE HAVE SEEN IN SOUTH AFRICA IN DECADES’

On the weekend, hot transfer news got everyone talking as veteran broadcaster Mark Gleeson reported that Orlando Pirates and Bafana Bafana defender Mbekezeli Mbokazi is on the verge of signing for Chicago Fire for a reported \$3 million.

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

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

Mbokazi and Mabizela, Similar Players, Similar Journeys - Nkululeko Nkewu

“The first time I saw Mbekezeli Mbokazi play for Orlando Pirates, I thought of Mbulelo Mabizela.

“I could not help but think, ‘This kid reminds me of Old John’.

“Mbulelo was young when he played for Orlando Pirates, Mbokazi the same. Mbulelo was a ball-playing centre back, Mbokazi the same. Both donned the captain’s armband for a historic club at a young age.

“And now, just like Mabizela, Mbokazi is rumoured to be going overseas after a brief period of achievements at Pirates.

“I wish Mbokazi gets his move to the MLS and perhaps does much more than Mbulelo did at Tottenham Hotspur.

“Mbekezeli Mbokazi was ready the moment he stepped on the pitch in professional football.

“He is the best defender we have seen in South Africa in decades, and we wish him all the best. I look forward to seeing him at the AFCON and FIFA World Cup.

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LESSONS FROM RULANI MOKWENA'S AFRICAN EXPLOITS

By Matshelane Mamabolo

WHEN RULANI MOKWENA opens his mouth these days, it sounds less like a coach giving updates from abroad and more like a mirror being held up to South African football. His Algerian adventure is not just a career move; it is an indictment, a reminder, and a warning wrapped into

“NOT MANY TEAMS HAVE WON THE LEAGUE THREE, FOUR TIMES IN A ROW. SO THAT TELLS YOU ALREADY ABOUT THE COMPETITIVENESS OF THE LEAGUE.”



one. And for anyone listening closely to the interview, the message is impossible to ignore: South Africa must evolve, and quickly.

In his calm yet revealing tone, Mokwena describes the Algerian league as a place where “not many teams win the league three or four times in a row,” where margins are microscopic and every match is an emotional brawl.

“It’s a different terrain,” he tells members of the South African Football Journalists’ Association (SAFJA) during a Zoom interview.

“I think if you read up about and you do the research of the league, not many teams have won the league three, four times in a row. So that tells you already about the competitiveness of the league.”

The matches are generally close-fought affairs, he adds: “Normally, the average score line in the league is one-nil, you know. There’s only one goal difference between the teams, and from that type of perspective that informs you, not necessarily just only about the competitiveness, but the quality. The difference is very marginal between the teams.”

Contrast that with the Premier Soccer League (PSL), where unpredictability is the exception, not the norm. Where Sundowns have monopolised the championship for nearly a decade.. Where certain fixtures are predictable months in advance.... Where players and coaches often cite “lack of competition” as the league’s Achilles heel.... By merely describing Algeria, Mokwena is exposing South Africa.

Asked about the evolution of South African football, Mokwena does not aimlessly praise structures. Instead, he mourns.

“We need more street football... tighter spaces, problem-solving, pressure...” he says.

He tells the story of township kids who once faced cars, pedestrians, and territorial rivalries as part of the game. That chaos built skill. It built awareness. It built footballers.

“Maybe what I would like to see more is a bit more of street football returning, and a little bit more of professionalising Futsal and these types of game forms because – if you see some of the best countries in Africa this moment, the nations that produce very good players, it is not just from having very strong academies, but also the players play street football. The kids are still on the streets and they’re playing and exploring and problem



solving from a very, very young age. They learn all manipulation in tight areas with the car coming; with an old lady crossing the street and their sense of peripheral awareness is heightened.”

Mokwena remembers that this was the case when he was young.

“For me, it is something that I know. As a young boy I grew up in this, so it’s fundamentally something that I experienced myself. And I knew that every single day, particularly on school holidays, we would just play. But I don’t think we have this culture anymore. And I think maybe we can try to return to it to try and get better.”

Today’s children, he laments, choose malls, screens, and indoor comfort.

“Of course, it’s very difficult with technology and all the other infrastructures – the introduction of malls in the townships and also the competition from an entertainment perspective. Now there’s a lot more sources of entertainment for the current generation.”

In Algeria, Morocco, Egypt – they still have football on the streets.

South Africa?

We have five-a-side courts with R200 hourly rates.

Mokwena’s point is sharp: our talent pipeline is drying because our culture has changed.

Yet he also gives credit where it is due. He acknowledges the DStv Diski Challenge (DDC); the emergence of semi-professional structures, and the rise of amateurs being picked directly into the elite league.

He mentions how once, his work with Black Poison was mocked. Now? That same pipeline is feeding the league.

“PEOPLE IN MY OFFICE USED TO LAUGH AT ME FOR COACHING BLACK POISON. BUT I GOT AN OPPORTUNITY TO KNOW THERE’S A ZAKHELE LEPASA IN THE AMATEUR RANKS.”

“I think there’s been a lot of very good work being done. For example, there’s more trust in the youth. I think a lot of work in the South African fraternity needs to be recognised – especially the PSL [Premier Soccer League] that has done incredible work with the DDC [DStv Diski Challenge]. If you look at a lot of the players that have come through, they have been produced by smaller [amateur] clubs [to get into the elite league’s reserve sides]. To tell you the truth, people in my office used to laugh at me for coaching Black Poison. But I got an opportunity to know there’s a Zakhele Lepasa in the amateur ranks that I saw and said to myself, ‘this player has something, maybe to play for Black Poison and probably even better leagues’. And some of the players we’ve had at Black Poison have even gone into professional football. Tito Maswanganyi, for example, is a player that I remember watching in a tournament. There are many players also who come straight from amateur football directly into the pros and this was not happening 10 years ago, although it was happening many, many years ago.”

But even this praise comes with a warning:





Talent alone is not enough.
Street football bred resilience.
Academies refine technique.

But the PSL lacks the competitive ferocity of Algeria – the final ingredient needed to forge elite players.

Perhaps the most painful comparison comes when Mokwena reveals that in Algeria, every long passing sequence is greeted with chants of “olé, olé, olé”.

South African fans – often impatient, often demanding directness – never fully embraced Mokwena’s philosophy at Mamelodi Sundowns, where he was hugely successful or during his brief spell at Orlando Pirates.

Algeria?
They appreciate it.
They celebrate it.
They sing for it.
The irony is rich.

The coach criticised at home for being “too theoretical” is adored elsewhere for the exact same work.

“What also helps is that in Algeria, there is a bit more appreciation for possession-oriented football, in the sense that if you remember when we were here with Mamelodi Sundowns against Belouizdad, that at the end of the match, the CRB fans actually started supporting Sundowns because of the style of play. Now in our [MC Alger] games, if you listen to the crowd, every time we make a long sequence of passes, there’s an ‘Ole, Ole, Ole’ behind every single pass. And that helps a bit, you know, because that’s my type of outlook. My outlook is everything starts with the foot being on the ball. That’s why it’s called football, you know, and that means that the number of passes, a 1000 passes, the number of the ability to dominate the opposition and not just control the game, and the ability to create certain dynamics on the pitch that allow for certain aspects that you want to look for.

“And for me there’s this biggest and deeper sense of appreciation for the style of play in Algeria than before and I have a very deep appreciation for this, you know.”

When the conversation shifts to the CAF Champions League, Mokwena becomes brutally honest. He speaks about “heritage,” about how clubs need years of continental suffering before success arrives.

“I know people talk a lot about Sundowns and Al Hilal [as the potential top two in their group] – of course, and rightfully so. You know I speak about and I spoke about football heritage even while I was in South Africa. And that doesn’t change. You’ve got to be able to romanticise the Champions League for many, many, many years before she can eventually let you in. Pyramids [FC, the previous campaign’s champions] are a very good example. They won the Champions League, but that was not after many,



“IF YOU LISTEN TO THE CROWD, EVERY TIME WE MAKE A LONG SEQUENCE OF PASSES, THERE’S AN ‘OLE, OLE, OLE’ BEHIND EVERY SINGLE PASS. AND THAT HELPS A BIT, YOU KNOW, BECAUSE THAT’S MY TYPE OF OUTLOOK.”

many attempts playing with the same team; they’ve got the same very good players, and it’s the same team that we played against three years ago in the group stages. So, when they eventually start to win the Champions League, it is by no surprise, you know, and that’s the story of the Champions League. We’re going to be able to be there. And what we are grateful for is that we are there. We are in the competition. And we are just grateful that we are there, and we appreciate the opportunity to try to do better than we did last time, you know, to be in the quarter-finals for the club was a great achievement, and we want to try to do better this season. The club is very ambitious. The President is very ambitious, and that’s what we will try to do.”

This is where South African football has failed itself.





The PSL’s lack of competitiveness means clubs enter Africa unprepared for brutality.

The league’s financial comfort means players lack the survival instincts found in North Africa or West Africa.

Our football avoids pain - but CAF does not.

Mokwena has learnt this the hard way And he is telling us, indirectly but clearly: If South Africa wants continental dominance, the PSL must toughen up. Mokwena explains a fascinating neuroscience principle: under pressure, players revert to old habits because the brain cannot process new learning.

“And then the hardest part, of course, is that when there is a lot of pressure – and this is just from a neuro-scientific perspective, and you understand this even as human beings – logic or new learning actually is erased. I don’t want to get deep into that, but the medulla oblongata is something that really doesn’t function very well under stress and pressure. And so the players tend to forget some of the new things that the coach teaches them, and this is not deliberate, but it’s because under pressure, players tend to fall back into old habits.”

This is perhaps the most important thing he says in the entire interview.

- It explains:
- Why South African teams crumble in hostile CAF atmospheres.
 - Why game plans fall apart under duress.
 - Why good technique collapses the moment the stakes rise.

Algeria has exposed these truths to Mokwena more clearly than the PSL ever could.

Despite all the comparisons, Mokwena remains deeply connected to South Africa. He acknowledges the talent, the

“YOU’VE GOT TO BE ABLE TO ROMANTICISE THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FOR MANY, MANY, MANY YEARS BEFORE SHE CAN EVENTUALLY LET YOU IN. PYRAMIDS ARE A VERY GOOD EXAMPLE.”

structures, the DDC improvements, and the rising coaching philosophies.

He is not criticising the PSL. He is revealing its blind spots. He is showing us what is missing.

His journey is not a rejection of home - it is an education South African football desperately needs.

In the end, Mokwena’s Algerian experience is not just about being a coach abroad. It is a syllabus for the South African game:

- We need more competitive intensity.
- We need the return of street football.
- We need patience for possession football.
- We need pathways that value both talent and struggle.
- We need to prepare players for pressure, not comfort.

Mokwena went to Algeria searching for growth.

He found it. But in finding it, he has shown South Africa the gaps we must urgently close.

His journey is a reminder that sometimes, to understand home, you must leave it.





SEALE: THIS KAIZER CHIEFS TEAM CAN BEAT ZAMALEK

After losing their first group game in Egypt 2-1 against Al Masry, KAIZER CHIEFS are set to renew rivalries with Egyptian giants Zamalek on Matchday 2 of their CAF Confederation Cup Group campaign when they host the White Knights at the New Peter Mokaba Stadium in Polokwane on Saturday. The older, discerning Amakhosi fan will remember that way back in 1993 when South Africa were first readmitted to continental club football, Chiefs had their Champions Cup dreams curtailed by Zamalek. Though the tie ended 2-2, Zamalek progressed by virtue of the away goal rule, having lost 2-1 in Johannesburg and won 1-0 in Cairo. One of the players who played in those matches is left-back RUDOLPH GARDNER SEALE, who believes the current Chiefs team is talented enough to get the better of the 2024 champions and even go all the way. But he warns that the players will need to improve their mentality and attitude because talent alone is never enough to bring success. Seale spoke to senior soccer writer MATSHELANE MAMABOLO.

Matshelane Mamabolo: Ola Bra Gardner, it's been a while since we spoke. How are you doing, my bra?

Gardner Seale: I am good, thanks, Matshelane.

MM: So, your club is back in continental football after about four years since they reached the Champions League final in 2021. That must be exciting for all of you associated with Amakhosi?

GS: Listen, it was very good when Chiefs reached that Champions League final because it is not a milestone achieved by everyone. Even though they lost [to Pitso Mosimane's Al Ahly], it was not a heads-down kind of a thing. Reaching a continental final is a big deal, something to be celebrated. And now that they are back on the continent and in the group stage, anything is possible; nothing should stop this generation from believing they can get to the final too. They just need to be hungrier than the other teams.

MM: This is a fairly young team, coached by young coaches as well. What would you say a realistic expectation of them in the Confederation Cup should be?

GS: You are right, it is a pretty young team. The game has changed so much that the teams are now dominated by junior players. Now, it is the younger ones who take over. Back in our time, at 27 you were seen as young; now the 27-year-olds are the seniors and more experienced players. They might be young and inexperienced in continental football, but underestimate



them at your own peril. We've seen how they won their first trophy in 10 years by beating a very hot Pirates, and I believe they have it in them to pull off a surprise on the continent as well. Of course, winning it would be a big bonus but I think they can go a long way in this competition.

MM: So you are not in agreement with the generally held notion that the top two favourites to progress are Zamalek and their Egyptian compatriots, El Masry?

GS: Of course, the Egyptians will be the favourites. We know that the Arabs, the North Africans, are old campaigners with lots of experience. But it's not a given that they will progress. Chiefs have just as much the same chance as those two to go through. They just need to believe in themselves.

MM: You guys played Zamalek way back in 1993 when South Africa first returned to continental club football. Most of the current players were not born back then. What would you tell them about the Egyptian giants and that tie you lost on the away goals rule?

GS: (Chuckles) we were clueless about the away goal, hey. We were new to continental football, and we naively thought we were going to have it easy. And against Zamalek, we were all over them at the FNB Stadium in the first leg. We felt they were there for the taking, and I remember us thinking after that match, this Africa thing is overrated. We thought it was easy."

MM: And then you learnt the hard way...

GS: Goodness, we did Matshelane. Of course, we were not helped by the fact that Shane [McGregor] got injured after the first leg and missed





the second one. And also, we had a change of coach because we played the first leg under Jeff Butler, and then we were coached by Geoff Hudson when we went to Cairo. No, I am not making an excuse for us being knocked out. I am just letting you understand the circumstances then. That change had a negative effect on us, while they had stability because of the continuity. We got to Cairo, and on match day, I totally understood the importance of the 12th man. Unlike the stories you've had of bad treatment on the continent, they treated us very well at the hotel, and training was okay. But then we got to the stadium and it was all white. The entire crowd was dressed in white, and when they scored, everyone bowed down in Islamic prayer style. It was something else I tell you. As a player, you have to be lifted up by having such support, and as an opponent, you can only be intimidated.

MM: They beat you on the away goals rule after a 2-2 aggregate draw. Was the score line a true reflection of those two matches?

GS: It really was because we dominated them here at home and won 2-1. And then they beat us 1-0 in Cairo. They were smarter than us. They were the old timers of the competition, and we were the babies. We were beaten fair and square. We'd had a scary experience earlier in the competition when we went to play in Rwanda because I had soldiers pointing rifles at me for daring to challenge the referee who'd given an unfair penalty against us. And because of that experience, Bra K [Kaizer Motaung] felt it was not worth going into continental competition, and we never got the chance to play there.

MM: Things have since changed because Chiefs later won the Cup Winners' Cup in 2001 and then reached the Champions League final in 2021. Now, they are facing a Zamalek side still smarting from that shock defeat to Stellenbosch FC last year. Should Chiefs be worried about facing a wounded animal of sorts?

GS: I'd tell them not to think of what happened last year. Remember, Zamalek were previously the big ones from Egypt, but in recent years they've had a fall, and Al Ahly and even lately Pyramids are the top dogs from there. I believe they are there for the taking, as Stellenbosch showed. But Chiefs should not be concerning themselves about last year. Just focus on doing the job at hand.

MM: When you think of your team back then and you look at this current Chiefs squad, what comparisons can you make? Are there any similarities?

GS: That's a difficult one because everybody is good in his own right. We had the likes of [Albert] Bwalya,



“IT WAS VERY GOOD WHEN CHIEFS REACHED THAT CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL BECAUSE IT IS NOT A MILESTONE ACHIEVED BY EVERYONE.”

Shane, and [Eric] September in our team, and we'd just conquered the NSL by winning the league and cup double the previous season. Now, we have these boys who are being conquered, and the team is not really stable domestically. But we don't write them off internationally.

MM: What would you say are the strengths of this current team, and how should they use that to their advantage?

GS: I look at this team, and everyone is good, but it does not mean they are conquerors. Their talent should be secondary to hard work. I played with Doctor [Khumalo] and Shoes [the late John Moshoeu] – highly talented players – but they worked hard. What I see lacking in these current boys is that they seem to forget they are playing for Chiefs. They have the advantage of talent, but they have no character – they are inconsistent. As a player, you must self-analyse. When you've drawn the previous match, look at it to see where you can improve so you win the next one. When we lost, people were so hard on us. Of course, I could wear a beanie and sunglasses to go to the shebeen and still have fun after a defeat, but it never came to my mind. I stayed at home and mourned the defeat personally because it was not just Chiefs which had lost, I had





lost too. I took the result personally.

MM: Are there any players in the Chiefs team that you believe will be key to their campaign in the continent – perhaps in terms of their experience or just overall quality?

GS: All of them. As I said, they are all very talented. I look at the team, and it is like they have five Doctors and six Shoes. This kid, Kaizer Junior [Motaung, the sporting director], has done a remarkable job in putting the team together. He has provided these boys a stage on which to sing. Not everyone gets the kind of stage they have because it is not everyone who gets to play for Chiefs. They have the jersey, and the part is there for them to shine. And there are few better places to shine than on the continental stage against the giants of the African game like Zamalek.

MM: Chiefs are taking this match to Polokwane. How do you see that working in their favour?

GS: That’s a tough one for me to say. Look, the reality is they have about 700 supporters at the FNB and then when they go to Polokwane, they get 25,000. There will be those players who come and say there was no 12th man in Jozi, but in Pietersburg – oh, Polokwane – there is a crowd, and

“I LOOK AT THIS TEAM, AND EVERYONE IS GOOD, BUT IT DOES NOT MEAN THEY ARE CONQUERORS. THEIR TALENT SHOULD BE SECONDARY TO HARD WORK. I PLAYED WITH DOCTOR [KHUMALO] AND SHOES [THE LATE JOHN MOSHOEU] – HIGHLY TALENTED PLAYERS – BUT THEY WORKED HARD.”

that’s what drives me. But for me, a fully-fledged professional should never give that lame excuse. You play to the best of your ability, no matter the crowd. In any case, with Chiefs, we used to enjoy the lion’s share of the crowd no matter where we played.

MM: So, Bra Gardner, you believe Chiefs can beat Zamalek at the weekend?

GS: Yes, they can.

MM: Thank you for your insights.

GS: My pleasure.





DE REUCK NOT GIVING UP ON BAFANA DREAM AS SIMBA JOURNEY BEGINS

Back in 2022, RUSHINE DE REUCK had the world at his feet. The PSL Defender of the Season made the high-profile move to Mamelodi Sundowns, one of the first names on the team sheet for Hugo Broos' new-look Bafana Bafana, with only one defeat in his 17 senior international appearances, that fateful 2022 FIFA World Cup qualifier against Ghana. Fast forward three years, and as he enters the prime of his career, it's been exactly three years since he last donned the national team colours, and he is now starting a brave new journey at East African giants Simba SC, after terminating his contract at Mamelodi Sundowns, where, by his own admission, he felt hard done by. iDiski Times Senior Journalist, LORENZ KÖHLER, reached out to the talented defender to find out about his journey to Nguvu Moja, being lured to Tanzania by his former head coach, Fadlu Davids, his Sundowns exit and if there's perhaps some unfinished business in Broos' set-up, which has now sealed tickets to the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations and the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Lorenz Köhler: How are you doing first and foremost – it was an off-season of uncertainty, but you now find yourself in a new country, starting a new life with new surroundings?

Rushine De Reuck: Hey man, no, I have been doing well, thank God – for the first time in a long time, I'm in a good space in my football, I have a good feeling about it. I can only really thank God for that because it's been a while. So yeah – just trying to embrace this new journey I'm on. It's a new environment for me and a lot different compared to South Africa. But fully embracing it, enjoying it and happy to have made the decision to come here.

LK: What was the biggest factor in agreeing to join Simba, when there were

tempting offers you could have taken?

RD: Look, I was in talks with Sundowns, obviously, even before I left to Israel... long before that, I wanted to move on, you know. But it was very difficult at the time because they saw me as someone who could contribute and help the team. But it's just that how they saw me and how I saw myself didn't align. And it was important for me to find myself in a different space. So once we negotiated, when I came back from Israel, to try and get a termination, there were a few teams that were interested, which I didn't entertain much because it was no use to speak to clubs and nothing materialised [with Sundowns], you know. But immediately after I got my termination letter, Coach Fadlu called me, and he's someone I worked with in the past at Maritzburg United; we have a good relationship; he understands me, and if there's anyone who could get the best out of me, it's him. I won't say it was a no-brainer, but I knew if I wanted to get to the level that I want to, that could definitely help me. He's very firm, and he's an honest coach, and he will push you, tell you when you're slacking, that's what I needed, you know. So he was a big reason for me to come here, and obviously, being able to compete in the Champions League. I think that was also a big factor for me. Ok, we needed to qualify, and we did that, so very happy we've been able to do that. I was a big part of it, playing all four games, and we only conceded one goal, through a penalty, so I'm very excited to see how this season unfolds. Uhm... and in the league as well, I've been doing quite well, three from three, so yeah, very happy with the start so far!

LK: Neo Maema, your former Mamelodi Sundowns teammate, is with you – how much has that helped, and what's been





the reception like from your teammates and fans in Tanzania?

RD: Yeah, it’s so nice to have someone like Neo around. He’s helped me a lot to settle in, and I hope he can say the same about me. It’s so difficult, I know from past experiences, going to a different country and not know anyone and then adapt fully to a different culture. But having someone now from the same country as you, and you know us, spending time together at Sundowns. So we have a good understanding, and we’re there for each other, as brothers. But we’re also holding each other accountable. I know what he can do as a player, and he knows what I can do as a player. So after matches or training, we will go to each other and he will say, ‘Rush, this is not good enough,’ or vice versa. And it’s not personal, you know, we both played at Sundowns, so you know the level and what is expected from us. So we brought that same mentality to Simba now. So it’s important to continue in that way and not to relax. Not to feel like you have arrived or anything like that. It’s one thing I appreciate about him, he holds me accountable, and the same with him. Sometimes we have fights in the game, haha... but that’s normal, nothing personal, we spend a lot of time off the field, going for supper or lunch. We live in the same complex, so that’s also important, you know. Also, the players, everyone who’s here, has welcomed us well and tried to help us as best they could on and off the pitch. If there’s anything we need, so there are a lot of good people here. We appreciate them a lot.

LK: Let’s take it back a bit, you were in the Bafana squad, regular at Sundowns, but what happened, if you can talk about it, and how did it feel in that last period at the club, going through different coaching transitions, fans asking where you are, etc.

RD: Look... I think that was definitely the best time of my career, being part of the national team, that has always been my biggest achievement. Also playing for Sundowns, one of the biggest clubs in the country and also winning trophies, it’s nice. But the national team is just different. It’s the best of the best – so that’s what

ON SUNDOWNS: “AT SUNDOWNS, I HAD INJURIES, AND IT KEPT ME OUT A BIT. BUT FOR THE MOST PART OF IT, I WAS AVAILABLE FOR SELECTION; IT’S JUST THINGS HAPPENED AT THE CLUB, AND I DON’T REALLY LIKE TO GO INTO DETAIL.”

I always wanted for myself, and I was able to achieve it. I would have obviously have loved the journey to have been a bit longer. I think if I had continued to play at Sundowns, the way I did in the first two-and-a-half years or so, then definitely I would have still been part of the national team – in the mix, you know. But that wasn’t the case... at Sundowns, I had injuries and it kept me out a bit. But for the most part of it, I was available for selection; it’s just things happened at the club, and I don’t really like to go into detail. I’m still playing. I don’t want to think about those moments too much. It’s just me as a player that’s now a bit older... at the time, I know who I am as a person, the things I can accept, and just that whole situation affected me, you know. And once I was in a position like that, it was better for me to stand up for myself than ‘buy face’ because I want to play. At the end of the day, that’s not who I am. I will never change who I am as a person, for you now to like me. We’re all grown-ups who believe in certain things, and once you put me in a position where I feel like you don’t respect me or anything like that. Then yes, it becomes a big problem, because I can’t be in an environment like that, but... that’s in the past, I don’t want to dwell too much on it. I am just happy where I am now, and you know, I’m someone who doesn’t have problems with anyone. You can ask any player or coach who I have worked with. I don’t have problems with



anyone. But sometimes people don't get along; that's life, you have to accept it, but in a professional environment, the players who deserve to play are the ones who work hard in training and play well in matches. But once it's a situation where you don't like someone, then you don't play them, then ya, you can't be in that situation. At the end of the day, that's who I am as a person; my dignity is more important for me than playing football games in such situations.

LK: Then you get a call from Coach Fadlu Davids, I assume – whom you worked with before and won Defender of the Season with in the PSL – how did you feel about his early exit?

RD: With Coach Fadlu leaving, it wasn't easy for myself and Neo just coming into the team – we were hoping that we would spend more time with him, but it wasn't the case. But that's football; these types of things happen. He was someone who had a good relationship with all the players, not only myself and Neo, but everyone felt it. But it's football – it happens, it's just important for me and all the players to remain professional and give the new coach the same respect, understand his ideas, and I think it's been good. Simba is a big club and we have a big responsibility – no matter who the head coach is. To perform and do our best and make our fans proud as we're doing in this moment.

LK: Tanzanian football has been on the rise. What do you make of the quality of the squad at Simba, Yanga and the rest of the league?

RD: Yeah, I think the players we have, if you look at them individually, position to position, we have a team that can definitely compete, but it's now just for us to come together as a team, collectively, try and understand each other a bit more, understand the game more. But it will come with maturity, playing in big games – but I think we have a good team and there's a lot of good players here as well, like I mentioned. So a lot of individual brilliance, but the way we're heading, how we're playing, I think we're on a good path,

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and we will only get better with time. The coach also, he's someone who wants to play football, that aligns with the way we want to play, the way we see football. So it's not a difficulty to try to understand, I'm happy to be in a space where you are still growing, still learning and definitely improving as a team, 100%. The league? It's very competitive, we've only played three games now, the last game was against JKT, we played away and it was a lot of physicality, aggression – you can see that four teams qualified for CAF, two in the Champions League, two in the Confed Cup, so that must mean something, you know. So the league is on the rise and they have shown that the level is high. Hopefully, all four teams can do well in the CAF competitions; that is what I hope for.

LK: You're back in the Champions League, Simba and Yanga are always seen as dark horses in the competition, but you're in a really tough group. What do you make of it?

RD: Look, we're in a very tough group, but I believe that we have the capacity to be able to qualify for the knockout stages. We have the players, we have everything

to give us the best possibilities to be able to do that. It's just now for us to take things one game at a time, make sure our home games, we don't drop any points. If we're able to win the home games and get draws away, there's a big possibility to qualify. But we have to make sure our home games, we put a lot of stress on our opponents, make it very uncomfortable for them. We have a big fan base as well, so they have to play their part as well, like they have since I've arrived. So I'm confident we'll be able to do that, but it's easier said than done. We still have to go on the pitch and work hard as a group – very confident that we will get through to the knockout stages. But it won't be easy. Esperance have the maturity and experience, they will be the favourites [in the group] for sure, then Petro, I've played against them in CAF – they are a team that can surprise people. They have a lot of good players, then it's Stade Malien from Mali... I don't know much about them, but they have shown in the Confed that they are a good team, so it could be tricky. We just need to stay focused and make sure we don't drop points at home.

LK: How motivated are you to put in a good showing this season, knowing it can put your hand up for a potential return to the national team?

RD: Being part of the national team will always be at the back of my mind, I'm not going to lie. Obviously, I have not been playing for the past two, three years, not part of the national team. So it will take a lot for me to break back into the national team again. That is something I am very aware of. At this moment, I'm just being very realistic that it will be very difficult; there are other players who have been playing and doing quite well, and they fully deserve to be there. They have worked hard to put themselves in the position to qualify for the AFCON and the World Cup as well. So yeah, they deserve it and coach Hugo [Broos] should continue with them, because it wouldn't be nice, for myself, I wouldn't wanna go into a tournament knowing I have not contributed anything, you know – so there's not much they should change at the moment. But I know myself, and I know I have the capacity to play for the national team, 100% – but that is not my decision to make. But I'm here, ready, if ever they need someone to come play. I'm still supporting the boys, whoever is playing.

LK: You were one of the regulars in the squad. When have you last been in contact with the technical staff, etc?

RD: I have not been in contact with any technical team members. I only met coach Hugo once at Chloorkop, and he obviously told me I need to work hard, try and play again and then there might be a possibility. But even that time, he didn't understand the situation that I was in, so it was very difficult for me – I don't want to reach out to anyone, my performances must speak for me, I like to do my talking on the field. I don't want to go there and say I'm available, look at me, you know. I'm not that type of guy, I want to put the



ON FADLU DAVIDS:
“HE WAS A BIG REASON FOR ME TO COME HERE, AND OBVIOUSLY, BEING ABLE TO COMPETE IN THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE. I THINK THAT WAS ALSO A BIG FACTOR FOR ME.”

work on the field, and if you like, you like. If you don't like, you don't like, there's not much I can do, really. It's important for me to just put my best foot forward, and right now I'm in a good space, like I said. I started all the games so far this season, so hopefully it can continue like this, and if there's an opportunity, I will be 100% [ready] but like I said, I'm realistic and I don't want to get my hopes up too high.

LK: Lastly – 17 caps, 12 wins, 4 draws, 1 loss; the only defeat being against Ghana in 2022, do you consider this unfinished business?

RD: It definitely feels like unfinished business, you know, if you look at my age at the time, I was 25, 26 – and I already had 17 caps, imagine if I was playing regularly [at club level], it would have looked a lot different. But yeah, things happened, some people had their own agendas. So yeah – there's not much really you can do about that. But right now, I'm playing, and that's the most important thing. If it's in God's plan, I can play in the national team again, I will be very happy, but if it's not, then it's not, you know. So now I'm fully focused where I'm at in Simba and I'm going to do my best - let's see what happens...

LK: Dankie, all the best for the rest of the season!



‘I KNEW WHAT WAS EXPECTED FROM ME AT SUNDOWNS’

In only his first season as Mamelodi Sundowns Ladies head coach, GODFREY SAPULA has technically clinched the Hollywoodbets Super League title. This is the sixth one in as many straight seasons for the Brazilians and they have done it in style with two matches to spare, recording 24 wins, two draws and two losses thus far. This has also not gone without drama as Sundowns could have secured the title last week, on Wednesday; however, their opponent City Lads were a no-show, leaving the match to be decided in the boardroom. In this edition, iDiski Times journalist LETHABO KGANYAGO speaks to Sapula about his debut season with the women’s side, the players he signed and promoted this season who have added value to the team, the disappointment of missing out on the CAF Women’s Champions League this season and his disappointments on how the league is falling behind administratively.

Lethabo Kganyago: Coach, thank you for your time. You couldn’t go on with your game against City Lads, which could have sealed the title for Sundowns. How did that make you feel?

Godfrey Sapula: Yeah, it’s very disappointing to be honest in terms of some of the things, how the league is run. I really think there’s a big room for improvement because we have to take this as serious. I mean, when we talk about the women’s game, I think this is the top league when it comes to the women’s game. I think a lot of things can be done better because we are talking about this game, but it’s not the first one. It happened with other teams. Two weeks ago, we went to Ezemvelo, something similar happened. We did not play, though we were there to honour the fixture. I’m just saying lessons can be taken from this, and maybe try to improve the admin side of things on how the league is being run.

LK: I hear you, coach. I mean, six

years later, and certain things are still like this. And does this also take away the pride and satisfaction of winning the league thoroughly on the pitch, over getting points awarded in a boardroom?

GS: It does 100% because we have different reasons of what we use these games for. For us, we are trying to also tap into our Academy, our development side. Some of the games we are planning to develop these players, to give some of these players minutes, so that come next season or so, they are getting better and developing. This is actually depriving us, but also over and above that there’s a lot of things that we want to improve within our game. So these games would actually give us those possibilities to say we have seen this and that in the last game, and we are working on improving certain details of our game. So by not playing, points that you did not play for do not come with that and for lack of a better word, satisfaction of not being on the field playing. For us, it really is disappointing. And it’s not only about us and that team [City Lads], but it affects a lot of other teams, it affects the positions of other teams. For example, if you check the log standings at the top there, you can imagine other teams are playing and trying to challenge for the league or come second and somewhere else someone is getting points for free. It’s not doing any good to everybody else that’s putting in a good effort and energy into improving their teams, and it affects everybody’s targets, not just relegation and the title, but even top eight spots. This is something that needs serious attention.

LK: Essentially or technically, you are a champion. Is this how you would have imagined your first season to have gone?

GS: You know, in a team like Sundowns, I knew what was expected from me. This



is a big club, and I have been involved with this big institution, though yes, it's my first season as a coach in the ladies' team. I have been with the academy, I have been with the reserve team, I have been in coaching for 14 years and in this club. So I understand what it takes to be in this club in terms of the expectations of coaching at any level, and I knew what was expected from me, and I knew that we had a big chance, a big possibility to continue the success that the club has enjoyed in the past. But I knew there were certain things that could be a bit challenging for me. It's like that in the game of football, when a new coach comes in. I also have my own playing philosophy, my own playing style, my own playing system. For me, a few months were more of an induction into women's football. Football is football, but women's football also has its own dynamics and challenges. The adaptation process had to take place, possibly it's still taking place, but I'm pleased with the run we had because if you check to date, we have lost only one game in the league against JVW, we played two draws, and we won about 24 games, then the two games that we have not played. That's actually a very good record. It could have been better in certain instances, but football will always give a coach something to think about in terms of room to improve the team. But in a nutshell, I am pleased we are where we are at this point in time, but obviously, with the disappointment for the last three weeks of the games that have not taken place.

LK: The disappointments of not going to the CAF Women's Champions League put a dent on the season...

GS: 100% is a big disappointment, but I think certain things maybe they happen for a reason in terms of making you see where the team is, what is it that we still have to factor. The women's game is on the rise; you can see there are new teams emerging. You could even see during the Champions League teams like Asec Mimosas that women's football is on the rise. A lot of teams are also investing in the women's game; there's better coaching, there's better analysis, there's a bigger pool of players coming. So it's going to be

“WE STILL HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO PREPARE AND PUSH TO BE IN THAT BIG STAGE, WHICH IS THE CLUB WORLD CUP.”

more challenging. We will not win and stay on top because of who we are. It says to us there's a lot of things that we need to really review, and with the evolution of football where are we and what is it that we still need to work on and improve so that we can maintain this type of consistency. We are very disappointed that we did not qualify, but also, if you look at the last Champions League, we got knocked out in the group stage. Obviously, that was actually telling us that maybe there was something that we needed to look at, maybe as a sign that maybe a phase we needed to go through, so that we could really tap into what is needed, because a big club like Sundowns, we belong on those stages, we have to be there. We are disappointed, and for us, honestly already we are already planning on what it is that we need to do better come next season so that we reclaim this type of expectation and not only from everybody else but from ourselves. We have high targets, we have set high goals for ourselves, a club with big ambitions, we should always be competing on that international stage.

LK: Fix things, especially after FIFA spoke about the Women's Club World Cup being imminent...

GS: Sometimes winning is a good habit, and we are associated with that at the club. But sometimes a disappointment comes with better lessons, and we have learned those lessons. Sometimes setbacks ground us to look deep, and we know what we did not do right that we need to fix so that we actually redeem ourselves. For us, it's good that we still have enough time to prepare



and push to be in that big stage, which is the Club World Cup.

LK: Let’s talk about some of the players you brought in this season, like Ronnel Donnelly, Isabella Ludwig, Nox, and the promotion of the young players like Mbatha. Did they add value to the team?

GS: They 100% did because we did a proper assessment, profiling and analysis. We did not just say that we are promoting. We looked at the type of players that we needed. For me, I was really excited when I saw a 15-year-old Munashe Mugwara. People said she’s too young, but I said it helps to have a development background because I coached U17 at Sundowns for a lot of years. And I coached the reserve team M Tigers, where we promoted a lot of players that are playing in the senior team and other PSL clubs like Malibongwe Khoza, Cassius Mailula and all those types of players. So with a development background, I’m able to see potential, and for me it did not take me a lot of time to say Munashe Mugwara at 15 she will develop to be a good player, a Katlego Malebana, Jabulile Mbatha. It also says we are one thing now with the Academy, like the programme of the women’s team, the senior team, the SASOL team, we are one programme. It’s also important for us to give hope to these young ones to say they have a realistic opportunity to play for the senior team. It gives a lot of positive stimulation to all the players who are young and playing in our Academy. We also looked at Isabella Ludwig, we looked at Noxolo Cesane and Khutso Pila coming back from loan. All these players have done exceptionally well. We are really pleased that, actually, we were spot on in terms of our signings. I mean, the numbers can tell you, Isabella has 10 goals, Cesane, I think five, six goals, and now she’s also a regular in the national team, Banyana, and you see her contribution in the team. Mugwara, we had a game against Copperbelt Ladies where we were struggling to score. She came in, and she was a revelation, creating a chance for us

“I KNEW THAT WE HAD A BIG CHANCE, A BIG POSSIBILITY TO CONTINUE THE SUCCESS THAT THE CLUB HAS ENJOYED IN THE PAST.”

to score. We are really pleased with the players that we brought in. You also look at their ages, so you can see we planned properly to say they are going to carry us through for the next couple of years.

LK: We also can’t overlook the experience in your team, I mean the evergreen [Lebo] Ramalepe, [Refilwe] Tholakele’s return from injury, and just banging in goals...

GS: Those players you have mentioned, they are experienced, and we also thought they have capacity to be even better. We thought we can challenge them more, we can also unlock some potential from them to say there are certain things they can still do better. One of the things we have with the experienced players, their training attitude, their discipline, their commitment, the culture, they help us to prepare, actually, the future players without us saying to them, ‘You need to do one, two, three.’ We say look at Ramalepe, and by looking at her, you already understand that she is punctual, so is Bambanani [Mbane] and Andile Dlamini, and they come with a good training attitude. All these rub off on the young players and the new players we bring in from other teams. They learn the culture



and what’s needed to perform in this type of a club with huge expectations. Talking about Tholakele we are very excited, but we also give credit to our medical team because it was not easy for Tholakele to come back from the type of injury she had. At some stage, she was eager, wanting to come back early, and I said, ‘Hang on, let’s do this, return to play protocols properly’. Rehab stages have to be followed to the letter; it’s very important, hence the player was able to come back this strong. But also a player who is very committed, if you watched Tholakele at training, you wouldn’t be surprised why she plays like this and scores game in game out.

LK: You have spoken about tapping into the academy and the system in the women’s teams aligning, and I see some former players like Rhoda Mulaudzi have stepped up into coaching in the development ranks at the club and in the national team...

GS: We are pleased because from within our club and our structures, we are always big on developing. And development, we are not only talking about players, but we are talking about coaches as well. She has contributed so much to the club with her performances and scoring goals and now she comes in to impart what she has learned, and she’s open to learning. That’s one thing about her that’s making her to be successful because she wants to grow. With the contributions from our HOD, Miss Christa[Kgampe-Jane], we created synergy within all the teams. Now, coach Rhoda is a second assistant to the first team, but she’s also a head coach at the lower division team, which is SASOL. To create that understanding, that working relationship means she can take what she learns from the first team to the SASOL team, and it makes the pathway easier for players moving from the SASOL team to the first team. It’s good for us that she’s also with the junior national team. She’s a passionate coach who is willing to learn, and we are pleased the club is giving such opportunities to deserving coaches.

LK: Lastly, coach, if we look at this

“WHEN SUNDOWNS IS DOING WELL, WE HAVE A BETTER BANYANA, AND WHEN SUNDOWNS DOES NOT DO WELL, BANYANA ALSO DO NOT DO WELL.”

year, it hasn’t been one of the best for the women’s game in South Africa, no Champions League football and the national team returning from the WAFCON empty-handed. We are heading into another WAFCON year, which is also a World Cup qualifier. How much impact is this going to have on the club, especially at the start of the upcoming season?

GS: It’s so important because for us, we are also thinking about it. We take responsibility to help Banyana because we know we are the team with most players who have the experience at international stage, at the club level and Banyana. It’s actually a true reflection of how Sundowns is doing when you watch Banyana. You know, when Sundowns is doing well, we have a better Banyana, and when Sundowns does not do well, Banyana also do not do well. So it’s very important that we make sure that we prepare as best as possible and get our team and our players at that level, knowing that if we are able to do that, it means we can send players to Banyana that are ready to contribute and help the nation. We hold that responsibility to ourselves, and already we are having those discussions, we are checking what it is that we need to do better, checking the physical levels because that also plays a big part. We are also looking at getting a bigger pool and help to develop more players to give the coaches more options.

LK: Thank you so much, coach.



FINDING MOKOENA'S PERFECT MATCH IS KEY

With the countdown ticking — less than a month to the start of the CAF Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco, and just less than 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.

This week, we turn our attention to the engine room of Bafana Bafana —

the central midfield — a department that has offered stability and structure throughout Broos' tenure. With the coach naming the provisional squad for the AFCON this week, he is not expected to deviate too much with his selection

Unlike some other positions that have seen frequent rotation, the midfield core has remained largely untouched, and much of that consistency can be credited to Teboho Mokoena, the heartbeat of Broos' setup. With an impressive 41 caps under the Belgian coach, Mokoena has become almost undroppable, dictating the tempo and balance of play with calm authority.

So, when Tebza is fit and available, the question is seldom if he'll start but rather who will stand beside him. Even in that regard, Broos has leaned toward continuity, building partnerships that balance with Mokoena's tactical intelligence. It's a midfield that has evolved into one of the team's most dependable foundations.

The Men In Possession:

***Teboho Mokoena
(Mamelodi Sundowns)**

There's no debate that Teboho Mokoena is the heartbeat of Bafana Bafana's midfield. Calm under pressure, intelligent in possession, and deadly from range, he is arguably the most complete footballer in South Africa today.

Many still wonder how different his career path might have been if not for the COVID-19 pandemic, which derailed his long-anticipated move to Europe. The 2020 Olympics



postponement changed everything. Instead of heading abroad after the tournament as initially planned, Mokoena made the switch from SuperSport United to Mamelodi Sundowns.

Since then, he has refined his game even further, adding consistency, leadership, and maturity. Now nearing his peak at 29, Mokoena is set to be the central pillar of Broos' midfield heading into both the AFCON in Morocco and the 2026 World Cup in North America; a player at the height of his powers and perhaps still with unfinished business on the global stage.

***Thalente Mbatha
(Orlando Pirates)**

Few players have risen as rapidly as Thalente Mbatha. Barely a year into his international career, he has already become one of the most exciting midfield prospects in South African football.

Known for his energy, composure, and knack for scoring crucial goals, Mbatha has often been Broos' secret weapon off the bench, though his performances suggest he's ready for a starting role. His goal in Bafana's final World Cup qualifier underlined his growing influence. It's remarkable to think that only two seasons ago, he was struggling for minutes at SuperSport United.

His loan to Pirates raised eyebrows at the time, but the move has proven inspired. At 24, Mbatha is blossoming into a complete modern midfielder: dynamic, creative, and unafraid of the big moment.

***Sphephelo "Yaya" Sithole
(CD Tondela, Portugal)**

If Mokoena is the conductor, Yaya Sithole is the enforcer, the player who gives South Africa bite and balance in midfield. Every one of his 21 caps has come under Hugo Broos, a sign of just how highly the coach rates him.

His physicality, ball-winning ability, and tactical discipline make him a perfect foil for Mokoena's more expansive game. Before his injury, Sithole had become Broos' go-to man for tough battles, especially against physically imposing African opponents.

A long-term setback interrupted his momentum, but his return to the fold in October was a welcome sight for Bafana fans. Now fully fit, Sithole will be determined to re-establish himself as a cornerstone of the national setup.

***Bathusi Aubaas
(Mamelodi Sundowns)**

When Hugo Broos first called up Bathusi Aubaas, there were plenty of raised eyebrows. At the time, many viewed it as a bold or even surprising selection. But Broos saw what others

hadn't.

The Belgian coach wanted a physical, combative midfielder capable of doing the dirty work, breaking up play, and giving the team structure and bite. Aubaas fit that brief perfectly. Just a month after making his Bafana debut in a memorable win over Morocco, he sealed a dream move to Sundowns, where he has since grown into one of the most trusted members of their all-star squad.

His transition from TS Galaxy to Chloorkop could've been overwhelming, but Aubaas has handled it with quiet professionalism and trademark steel. He may not always grab headlines, but he's become one of Broos' most dependable soldiers, the kind of player who gives others the platform to shine.

The Back-Ups:

***Luke Le Roux
(Portsmouth, England)**

Luke Le Roux is a technically gifted midfielder with an old-school engine and a modern mindset. Since making his Bafana debut in 2022, Le Roux has featured nine times under Broos, often as one of the few foreign-based midfielders trusted to bring calm and



control in the middle of the park.

His path hasn't been without bumps: after a promising spell in Sweden with Varbergs BoIS, a short and frustrating stint at Dutch side FC Volendam stalled his progress. But Le Roux rebuilt himself back in Scandinavia with IFK Värnamo and caught the eye of English scouts. Now plying his trade at Portsmouth, he's challenging himself in one of football's most competitive environments.

***Masindi Nemtajela
(Orlando Pirates)**

There's a quiet confidence about Masindi Nemtajela, a player whose rise over the past year has been nothing short of impressive.

The midfielder first caught attention at Marumo Gallants, where his tireless work rate, neat passing, creativity and composure under pressure made him a standout performer. His displays didn't just earn him a move to Orlando Pirates; he was also rewarded with a call-up for the COSAFA Cup. Now settling into life with the Buccaneers, Nemtajela looks every bit the clever signing Pirates hoped he'd be, and for Broos, he offers something different that could make him a long-term option

in Bafana's evolving midfield.

***Rodney Maphangule
(Polokwane City)**

Sometimes opportunity comes when you least expect it. Maphangule's Bafana nod came as a surprise to many, but not to those who've watched him closely.

The powerful Polokwane City midfielder first came onto Broos' radar during scouting trips to monitor Oswin Appollis, and it didn't take long for the coach to be impressed by Maphangule's physicality, composure, and presence: a robust, old-school midfielder unafraid to mix it up.

While his single appearance so far came in a friendly, his repeated inclusion in preliminary squads shows Broos sees potential in him. If he keeps performing for City, Maphangule could force his way into more competitive line-ups.

***Siphesihle Mkhize
(Sekhukhune United)**

For Siphesihle Mkhize, patience has paid off. Once a bright prospect in the Mamelodi Sundowns academy, the 26-year-old had to take the long road to top-flight recognition. After learning his trade on loan at Ajax Cape Town and Chippa United, Mkhize has blossomed into a key figure for Sekhukhune United, anchoring their midfield with a blend of energy, intelligence, and bite.

He's been instrumental in Babina Noko's strong start to the season, earning praise for his consistency and leadership. Though he's yet to play for Broos, Mkhize's rise has not gone unnoticed. If he continues on this trajectory, his name might soon be in Broos' final squad lists rather than just the extended ones.

***Siphesihle Maduna
(TS Galaxy)**

Maduna was once considered one of the brightest young prospects in South African football when he burst onto the scene at AmaZulu. Blessed with natural creativity, he looked destined for a long stay in the spotlight. But a run of injuries halted his momentum, chipping away at both his confidence and his opportunities. Eventually, he left Usuthu for Cape Town Spurs, hoping for a reset, yet the spark never fully ignited there either.

Then came the move to TS Galaxy, and with it, a chance to rewrite the narrative and Maduna has started to look like his old self again: sharper in possession, braver in tight spaces, and more influential in Galaxy's attacking transitions. There's a renewed energy in his play, a sense that he is finally stepping out from the shadow of those lost years.



Now, as he approaches his 26th birthday in December, an age where many midfielders truly come into their prime, Maduna seems to have caught the attention of Hugo Broos. If he continues on this upward curve, what once felt like stalled potential could yet become a resurgence worthy of a national team recall.

***Mthetheleli Mthiyane
(Stellenbosch)**

Mthiyane has been one of the revelations of the season for Stellenbosch, making an immediate impact in what is remarkably his first campaign in the Betway Premiership. The dynamic, hard-working midfielder arrived in the Cape Winelands at the start of the season after catching the eye at Milford, where his performances in the Motsepe Foundation Championship marked him as a player on the rise.

At Stellies, he has taken that momentum and elevated it. Mthiyane has shown a maturity and hunger that belies his relatively late arrival in top-flight football. His engine seems endless, his attitude uncompromising, and his confidence growing with every outing. If he continues to rise at this pace, polishing his decision-making, sharpening his influence in the final third, and maintaining his

consistency, it may not be long before his performances catch the attention of the national selectors. For a player who has climbed the divisions step by step, the prospect of an international call-up could soon become more than just a distant dream for the 24-year-old.

The Contenders:

**Sibongiseni Mthethwa
(Kaizer Chiefs)**

It's been a rollercoaster 18 months for Sibongiseni "Ox" Mthethwa. Not long ago, he was one of Broos' midfield regulars. Then came his big move to Kaizer Chiefs, which, at first, didn't quite go to script. Struggling for rhythm in a new environment, Ox slipped out of the national team picture.

But football is about resilience, and recently Mthethwa has begun rediscovering the form that made him one of the league's top midfielders. His recent resurgence has been noticeable, and if he keeps this momentum, especially with Chiefs finally finding some fluency, it wouldn't be a shock to see Broos give him another call.

**Jayden Adams
(Mamelodi Sundowns)**

Time might not be on Adams' side, but talent certainly is. Once one of Broos' most regular squad selections, Adams now finds himself in a race to reclaim his place in the Bafana setup. His fall from favour wasn't so much about footballing ability as it was about discipline, a moment of poor judgement when he arrived late to a national team camp saw him dropped and publicly reprimanded by Broos. To his credit, he took it on the chin, returned to the fold, and even featured again for Bafana.

But since his high-profile move from Stellenbosch to Sundowns, opportunities have been limited. At Stellies, Adams was the heartbeat of the team, dictating the tempo, and he made the Bafana squad for AFCON 2023. While he only made two sub appearances on the way to Bafana's bronze, he started getting more time after the AFCON. But since signing at Sundowns, surrounded by stars and depth in every position, he's had to fight for minutes. Still, his class on the ball, eye for a pass, and tireless energy remain undeniable.

At 24, Adams has time to turn things around. A few strong performances, either in domestic competition or on the continent, could quickly remind Broos why he once saw him as a key part of Bafana's midfield future. If he rediscovers the spark that made him one of 2024's standout local talents, there's no reason he can't force his way back, perhaps even in time for the 2026 World Cup.



Yusuf Maart
(SV Ried)

Maart was part of Broos' early Bafana Bafana squads but never quite cemented a place during his time at Kaizer Chiefs, largely because the club was battling inconsistency and Broos looked in other directions. For many supporters, Maart became a symbol of Chiefs' struggles, and the idea of him returning to the national setup may have seemed far-fetched. But football has a way of rewriting narratives.

Since swapping Naturena for Austria earlier this year, Maart has gone from a player fighting for form to one flourishing on foreign soil. At SV Ried, he's become one of the first names on the teamsheet, showing maturity and a tactical awareness that has impressed both coaches and fans. He's even taken on a slightly different midfield role, one that's required him to be more disciplined, more dynamic, and more decisive, and he has adapted with surprising ease. Some doubted whether Maart, moving abroad later than most, would cope with European football, but the Atlantis-born midfielder has silenced those doubts with composed performances and a work ethic that has made him a key player for Ried.

Jamie Webber
(FC Tulsa)

Still very much on the fringes of the Bafana conversation, Webber has forced his name back into the discussion through sheer persistence and quality. After a frustrating spell at Sekhukhune United, where he spent almost an entire season on the sidelines, many expected his career to stall. Instead, Webber used the opportunity with the CHAN squad to remind everyone of his talent, playing a key role in helping South Africa qualify for the finals.

He never made that trip to East Africa, though. Before the tournament kicked off, FC Tulsa in the United States



swooped in, offering him a fresh start. Webber has settled quickly, delivering several standout performances and rediscovering his swagger. His sharp delivery from set pieces, growing confidence, and ability to influence games from midfield make him a genuine “left-field” option for Broos, one of those surprise selections that, on form, would hardly be surprising at all.

****Named in the preliminary squad for AFCON finals.***



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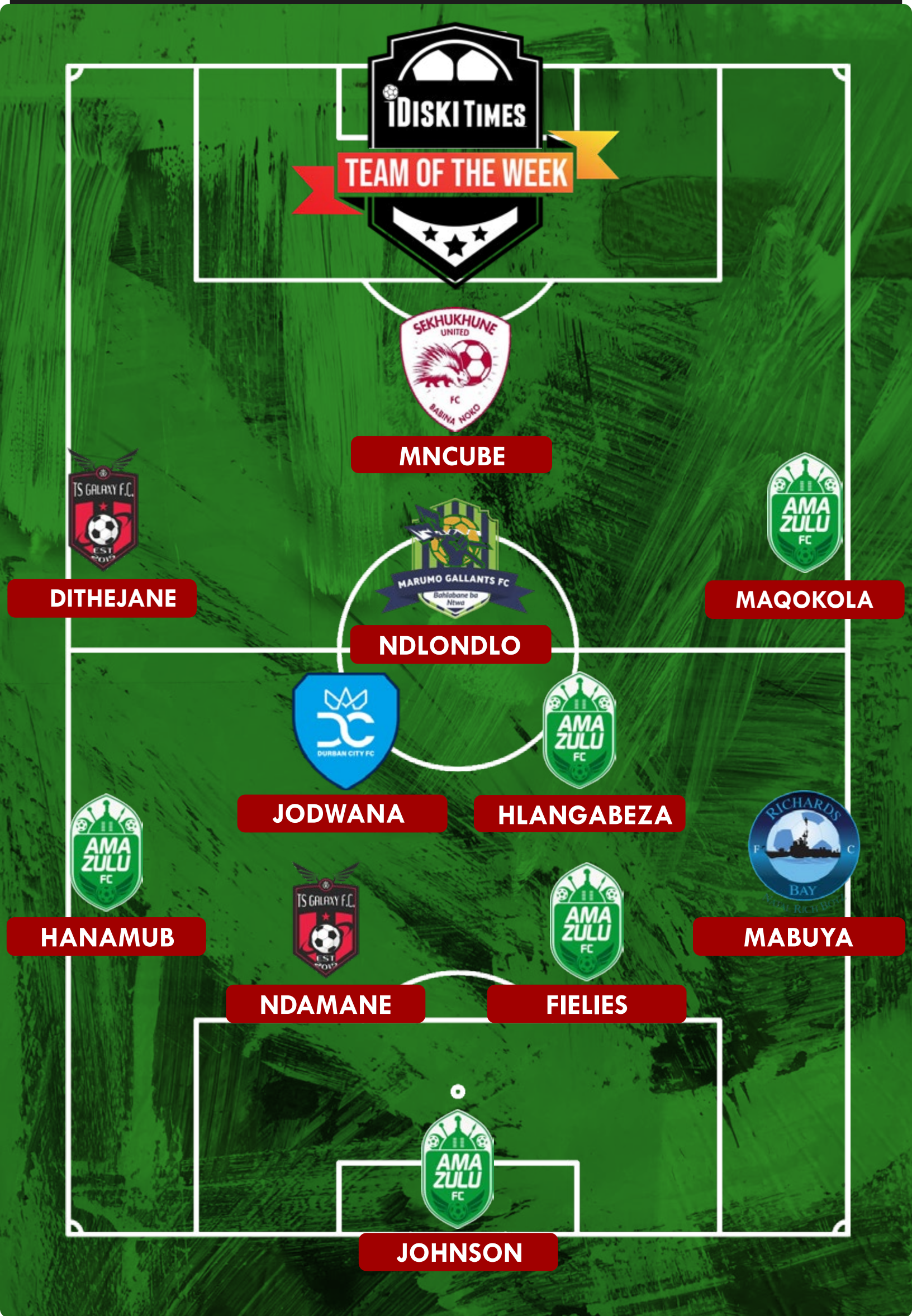
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IDISKI TEAM OF THE WEEK - PREMIERSHIP 22-23 NOVEMBER



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ACE OF THE WEEK:
ELIAS MOKWANA

Our iDiski Times Ace of the Week is Bafana Bafana winger Elias Mokwana after the former Sekhukhune United player opened his Saudi Pro League account in Al-Hazem's hard-fought 2-1 home win over Al-Kholood on Friday evening. It is his second goal contribution since joining the Saudi club on loan from Esperance, adding to an assist from before the FIFA break. Mokwana, who has scored two goals in his 10 national team appearances, has been absent from Bafana squads in recent months, last featuring in the World Cup qualifying victory over Lesotho in March.



THE DRAWING BOARD

The Drawing Board with Moritz Kossmann

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

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

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

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

This week we have the great pleasure of speaking to Dave Waters. Dave, originally from the UK, has been coaching in South Africa since 2006. After five years at ASD Cape Town, he joined Ubuntu Football Academy in 2015. Since then, he has worked predominantly in the junior phase, overseeing the younger programmes from U14 and below, where he's played a critical role in building a strong foundation for the academy's players. We talk to Dave about academy coaching and some of the other programmes that make Ubuntu Football Academy special.

Dave, thanks for speaking to us. For those who don't know you, please provide a brief background of yourself and share some of the biggest lessons you've learned over almost 20 years of coaching in South Africa.

DW: Thanks, Moritz, great to be connecting again — I've got so many fond memories of our time together at Ubuntu. Thanks for being a great colleague in those years and for helping be a part of such a positive learning environment for not just the players, but the coaches too.

So, I'm originally from the UK, where I studied Physical Education at university, worked a bit with Hull City, and got stuck into coaching and my first UEFA badges pretty young. I moved to South Africa in 2006 and got involved in some interesting projects, including setting up football academies in prisons—a unique experience, but surprisingly uplifting! Somewhere along the way I also found myself a beautiful South African wife, and now we've got two daughters with a funny semi-English accent who frustratingly insist on saying "soccer."

I had five great years at ASD Cape Town, working closely with Roald Paulsen and Dougie Williams. Then in 2014, I was really inspired by Ubuntu's vision. Even though the organisation was still in its early years, the clarity of why Ubuntu existed was all I needed to hear, so I joined in 2015.

One of the biggest lessons I've learned coaching in South Africa is that football cannot be a young person's entire identity. It can absolutely be a driving force, and yes, it demands commitment and sacrifice if they want any shot at the highest level. But if football is their only thing, it will come back to bite at some point — whether that's being released at 16, realising at 24 that the pro contract isn't coming, or being 35 with

PSL and Bafana caps but suddenly no club interested. If football is everything, then what's left when football is taken away?

I believe football provides incredible experiences and the kind of social and emotional development little else can match — and for a small few, a way to make money for a handful of years, and to fulfil that professional dream. But as coaches, we must ensure a child's self-worth isn't built on whether they "make it." It needs to be built on things of substance, things that last. Ironically, I think that a foundation with great depth and substance actually gives kids a better platform to get closer to their potential — in football or anything else they apply themselves to. After 20 years in the SA game, I feel the industry is heavily weighted toward the 0.1%, often at the expense of the many who once dreamed of joining them.

When looking at Ubuntu, one of the big things that stands out is the clear focus on the junior phase and providing youngsters with a strong foundation. From a football point of view, what are some of the biggest keys you apply at Ubuntu?

DW: From a recruitment perspective (which we do predominantly at the U9-U12 ages), we talk a lot about "super-strengths" — that one thing that makes a player special and that might be the very reason someone takes notice later on. A good example is Luke Hendricks (who recently played in the U17 World Cup). We came across him at age 10 with incredibly high levels of drive, self-



confidence and leadership. We knew those qualities would help him max out his talent and raise the level of those around him.

With others, it might be pace and fluidity in movement, or maybe it's an incredible level of vision, where the player is thinking one step ahead of everyone around them, or maybe they are a brilliant dribbler. If they can do that one thing well and have a base level of intelligence and physical potential, we believe we have the coaching to nurture and develop them.

The one thing we're quite consistent about from a football perspective at younger ages is having players who can win their 1v1 battles (both offensively and defensively). If that's in place, we believe we can add in other aspects on top of that. It's much harder the other way around. And ideally, they've learned that 1v1 edge through street football — it's such an important foundation in South African football.

Following up on that, what are some of the biggest mistakes coaches make with players under 15?

DW: I've spent a lot of years coaching 12–14-year-olds, and one of the things I love about these ages is how different they all are at these ages! Some are hitting massive growth spurts and starting to look like adults, whilst others still look like they physically belong with the U11s. Some have learned to generate real power in their ball striking, some haven't. Some are doing great as a striker, but years later, they end up as a centre-back. I'd say one of my biggest learnings over the years is not assuming the player you see today will look like and do similar things when they are older.

I had a U12 player 10 years ago who was my smallest, slowest and physically

weakest. But he had an amazing growth mindset, strong technical ability, great tactical insight and vision. He struggled at times, but we knew he had special qualities that would shine once his body caught up. Somehow, he still ended up my top goalscorer that year — which is rare at U12, where it's often the biggest or fastest player scoring a lot of the goals. Now, at 22, Kyle Jurgens is doing great things with Stellenbosch/Durban City in the PSL. Interestingly, height, speed and strength are not limitations to his game; if anything, his speed is a big asset. The point is: try to understand who a player might become, not just who they are today.

Ubuntu has been around for quite a while now. How has the academy evolved during your time there, and what do you see as the next steps?

DW: Ubuntu has grown a lot in our 15 years — our Umalusi-accredited school is doing well with a 100% matric pass rate over the last five years, we've got a great home environment for many of the boys, 25 players who've headed to the USA on scholarships, and a football programme that's produced 45 youth internationals, five senior internationals, and an U19 Bayhill title this year. We've also made a really strong start in our first two years in girls' football.

But even with all that growth, some things haven't changed. It might sound a bit cliché, but our vision, mission, and values genuinely keep us grounded and shape our decisions. At the heart of it, Ubuntu is about holistically developing elite footballers into citizens of significance. Right now, our football department is in a really exciting expansion phase. We're adding five full-time specialist coaches/support staff, and investing significantly in a full daily nutritional programme for all academy players. That will be tied to a more robust strength & conditioning program. A lot of this is simply closing the gap between what a top European academy can offer and what players in South Africa typically have access to.

And with South African football being as congested as it is — 63 million people, a football-mad nation, and only two professional leagues — we're also looking to further open up pathways for exceptional players to progress abroad with more strategic partnerships, more opportunities, and a clearer route into Europe for the boys who are ready to make that step. We want to see them reach their full potential, and we believe this is a key step.

We will continue Part Two with Dave next week.





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