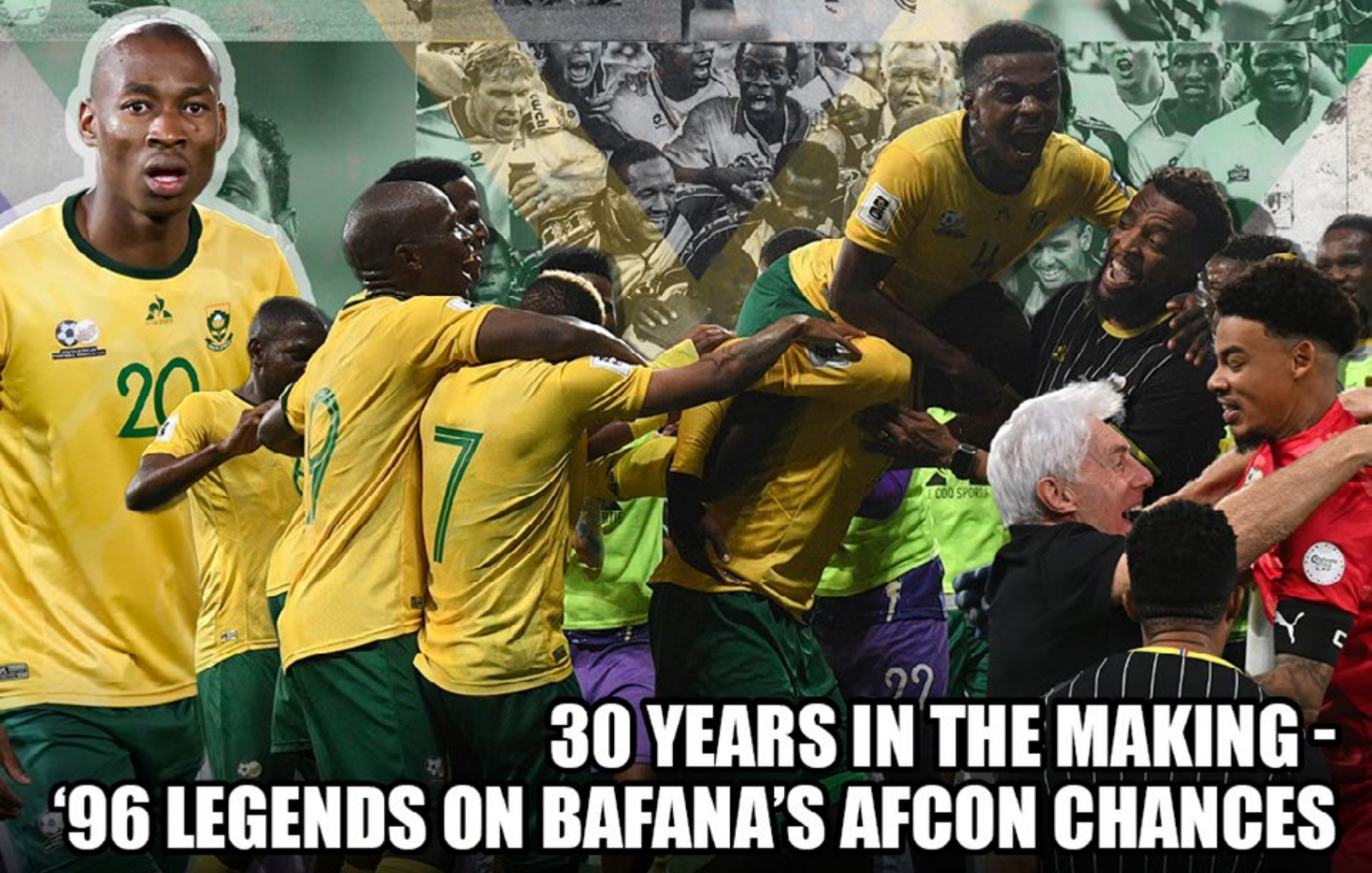




AFCON SPECIAL EDITION

KABINI ON DREAM YEAR, MBOKAZI & AFCON HOPES



VAN WYK
WANTED AT
HOME & ABROAD



MARINICA ON
ZIM'S CHANCES, &
BILLIAT/MUNETSI
ABSENCES



STELLIES ON
THE HUNT AFTER
BARKER EXIT



WHO DID IT BEST IN
2025! THE YEAR IN
REVIEW

THE DRAWING BOARD WITH MORITZ KOSSMANN & ACE OF THE WEEK

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SAMUKELE KABINI
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TEAM OF THE WEEK
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DURBAN CITY EYEING MZIMELA

Durban City are understood to be keen on securing the permanent services of AmaZulu goalkeeper Olwethu Mzimela, following his loan spell with the club last season. The 24-year-old was part of the squad that successfully helped the team achieve promotion to the Betway Premiership in 2024/25. This season, he has been serving as the second-choice goalkeeper at AmaZulu, behind Darren Johnson. Mzimela has made three appearances so far.



VAN WYK SPARKS INTEREST ABROAD & AT HOME

Antonio van Wyk has enjoyed a sparkling first half of the 2025/26 season, emerging as one of the standout performers for newly promoted SV Ried as they head into the year-end break sitting an impressive sixth in the Austrian Bundesliga. The 23-year-old former Stellenbosch player, has looked completely at home at the higher level and his performances have not gone unnoticed either. Word from Europe suggests several bigger clubs have already begun monitoring his progress, impressed by how quickly he has adapted to top-flight football. Closer to home, there is also growing talk that Mamelodi Sundowns could be weighing up a move to bring the talented playmaker back to South Africa. For now, however, Ried hold the cards, and with Van Wyk central to their early success, it remains to be seen whether they would be willing to cash in midway through the season or insist on keeping their rising star for the full campaign.



AMAZULU ASSESSING CAPE WINGER

As the Betway Premiership prepares to spring back into life in 2026, AmaZulu are quietly casting their net wider in the search for attacking reinforcements, with information reaching iDiski Times that the Durban-based club is having a look at Tashreeq Manuel, a left-sided winger out of Cape Town. The left winger has been plying his trade in the ABC Motsepe League, turning out for clubs like Diadora FC and Cape Town Spurs. The 22-year-old has been a standout player in the regional third tier, scoring regularly, and will hope to impress Arthur Zwane and the powers that be at Usuthu.



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BARKER’S SHOCK EXIT LEAVES STELLIES IN UNCHARTED TERRITORY

When Tanzanian heavyweights Simba SC confirmed the appointment of Steve Barker last Friday, it sent ripples across South African football, and nowhere was the aftershock felt more keenly than in the Cape Winelands.

After nearly a decade at the helm, Barker’s departure brings an end to an era at Stellenbosch FC, a club he helped mould from hopeful upstarts into one of the Betway Premiership’s most competitive outfits.

Although Stellies have endured a tricky start to the 2025/26 season, Barker’s position was widely believed to be secure when he opted to take up the Simba challenge. His exit now presents the first major test for CEO Rob Benadie and the current management team, all of whom arrived after Barker. Until last week, Barker was the league’s longest-serving coach.

iDiski has it on good authority that Barker beat out several top candidates for the Simba job, including a few of his own countrymen. His impressive run in last season’s CAF Confederation Cup may have been a deciding factor in appointing Barker. This will be just his fourth head coach position, having also had a long spell at AmaTuks, before a short spell at AmaZulu.

Attention now turns to who will occupy one of the league’s most intriguing vacancies. An internal solution could have very much been on the table. Long-time assistant Wesley Sergel has often been



viewed as the natural successor, while double-winning DStv Diski Challenge coach Evangelos Vellios, who has served as second assistant, is another strong candidate.

However, uncertainty remains over whether either, or both, might follow Barker to Tanzania, or if Barker’s exit was too premature for their ascension.

Gavin Hunt, after his exit from Durban City, has become the frontrunner for the position, and he is set to be in the Western Cape this week for final discussions.

The 61-year-old is a Western Cape native, however, has spent the last two and half decades coaching outside the province.

While several other names such as Muhsin Ertugral and Sead Ramovic have been bandied about, it looks like Benadie will turn to the four-time Premiership-winning coach to steer the ship.

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NKEWU: AFCON TROPHY TO STAY IN NORTH AFRICA?

All focus to the CAF Africa Cup of Nations this week, after the tournament kicked off in Morocco over the weekend.

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.

'I Wish Bafana Bafana Can Have A Decent Tournament'

"Since the 2002 FIFA World Cup, I have had a soft spot for Senegal. I love them and support them as one of my teams in Africa.

"My heart wishes that they could lift the

African Cup of Nations. They have good players: Sadio Mane, Ismaila Sarr and Iliman Ndiaye.

"My head thinks, though, that the AFCON will stay in North Africa.

"Morocco, the hosts, have an excellent team and a highly rated coach, Walid Regragui.

"Achraf Hakimi, Hamza Igamane, and the rest of the crew will want to make their home fans happy.

"Egypt and Algeria will have good teams who will realistically think they have a chance to win.

"I wish Bafana Bafana can have a decent tournament. Quarterfinals will be a true reflection of where they are.

"A North African country will win the AFCON."

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BAFANA LOOKING TO WIN AFCON 30 YEARS ON

By Matshelane Mamabolo

We are days away from it being three decades since South Africa won their only continental title. The 1996 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) triumph remains the country’s most glorious moment in the game, so much so that when the football fraternity speaks of legends and heroes, it is mainly in reference to that group



that was coached by the dearly departed Clive Barker.

Bafana Bafana, the country’s senior national team, has since failed to scale those dizzy heights that sent the country into delirium on that glorious February 3 Saturday at the old FNB Stadium when Mark Williams came off the bench to score the two goals that broke Tunisia’s resistance.

But why has that been the case? Why is it that it has been downhill since then? Why have Bafana failed to win yet another continental title? After all, is it not generally agreed that we have one of the best leagues on the continent? Don’t all African countries envy us for the great football infrastructure we have?

The answers to those questions depend on who you ask, with the suits that run the game often claiming, ridiculously so, that we have done very well on the pitch and that failure to win the continental title a second time does not necessarily mean Bafana have failed.

Yet history suggests otherwise. We were champions in 1996, runners-up in 1998, bronze medalists in 2000; quarterfinalists in 2002; first round casualties in 2004; 2006 (when we failed to score a single goal and returned home pointless) and in 2008. And then we failed to qualify for the tournaments in 2010 and 2012 - the latter being arguably one of the lowest points in Bafana’s history when the players celebrated what they thought was qualification through a dance following a goalless draw against Sierra Leone in Mbombela. But Itumeleng Khune and his teammates, plus their technical team, had assumed goal difference was the tie-breaker in case of teams finishing on equal points. Only it was not, the Confederation of African Football (CAF) went first with the head-to-head results, and Bafana thus missed out on qualification, leading to coach Pitso Mosimane being fired shortly thereafter

There’s a glimmer of hope, though, that those bad old memories can finally be erased. As the continent readies for its biennial showpiece to be hosted by Morocco





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this time around, there is a sense of belief and confidence that the current Bafana Bafana can well add a second star above the crest on the national team jersey.

Even the legends that brought us glory three decades ago believe their days as national heroes are numbered. And they are excited by the prospect of ceasing to be the standard by which all teams and players are measured by. The reason for the confidence is simple, really. Hugo Broos. Since taking over as coach of Bafana, the silver-haired Belgian has restored belief in the squad. He has rebuilt Bafana into a continental force.

The bronze-medal finish from the previous tournament, which was hosted by the Ivory Coast two years ago, has got just about every South African anticipating the boys to ‘bring it home’ early in January. Among those who believe we can be champions yet again are a few members of the Class of 1996.

Here’s what they told Senior Soccer Writer Matshelane Mamabolo during a Castle Lager event meant as a send-off to Bafana for Morocco.

ANDRE ARENDSE: Goalkeeper

MM: Why do you believe this current generation can win the AFCON?

AA: When I saw that we are in a group that is almost similar to the one we had [in 1996 Bafana were in Group A alongside Cameroon, Angola and Egypt. They are

ANDRE ARENDSE: “NEXT YEAR, WE’RE GOING TO BE CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF THE TRIUMPH OF ‘96. CAN WE PLEASE DO IT IN CONJUNCTION WITH LIFTING ANOTHER AFCON TROPHY...”

now with the latter two plus Zimbabwe in Group B], I went ‘it has to be written in the stars’. Just one different team, that’s a sign. I know it’s a different time. The teams are different, and the levels are different. But there’s a big chance. Back in the day, when you spoke of powerhouses, you referred to the likes of Nigeria, but for me now, the word superpower is us. We have built ourselves that reputation. Of course, I don’t want to put pressure on the team, but we hear that everyone wants to beat Bafana. That’s because they’ve built the reputation back to where it should be. That says teams are wary of us, and we can exploit that. We’ve got the chance; we have an opportunity to rewrite history. When I look at the squad make-up and the quality we had in 1996, I realise that Clive Barker went about selecting a squad that had two quality players in every position. I look at the current squad, and I think we have something close to that. Broos has built competition for places, and that increases the level of performance. I think we are very close; we are there.

MM: Why have we not won the AFCON



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since 1996?

AA: It was very hard during those times when we were not doing well. From the beginning, it was tough because we won a few games but got beaten heavily. It was a learning curve, a hard one. But then we got settled, and in 1995 and 1996 to 1997 we'd built a solid squad. Then we took a massive dip after 2002 when we faded away from representation in major tournaments. I think we must take part of the blame as the Class of '96 because Clive built that squad with players who did not come from development. And as a nation, we did not think we must invest in development, understandably so, because it seemed like we had players who could go straight and deliver. We took our foot off the developmental pedal, and that was critical; that came to haunt us. But now, what Hugo has done was rebuild. When he came in, he went straight for youth. He targeted the young players, and the development happened.

MM: How grand will it be for us to win this edition of the AFCON?

AA: Is it written in the stars? It certainly seems so. Next year, we're going to be celebrating 30 years of the triumph of '96. Can we please do it in conjunction with lifting another AFCON trophy... That's what the dream is. You know, I love it when people come to me and talk about '96 and say I am their hero, that the team is their heroes. That will always be there, but for me, it's time we have new heroes, and I believe these guys can be our heroes.

MARK WILLIAMS - STRIKER

MM: What do you think was wrong during that period when Bafana Bafana went through a slump and what is it that we've done right to now be among the contenders?

MW: Well, from '96 remember, everybody was high after we won the AFCON Cup, and then we played in a World Cup. The players then understood that it's not easy. The mistake we made thereafter was that we took out a lot of experienced players without giving them enough time to bring these youngsters up and give the baton over to them. It was just chop and change. Now, if you make a 360, don't expect miracles, because as a top national team, everyone is going to want to hammer you. You are a national team that has won the African Cup and played at the World Cup, but you had



MARK WILLIAMS: “THE DIFFERENCE WITH HUGO BROOS IS THAT HE HAS BEEN HERE FOR FOUR YEARS, HE’S GOT THE EXPERIENCE, HE KNOWS THE PLAYERS, AND HE’S GETTING THE BEST OUT OF THEM.”

players that haven't got enough experience to compete, and that was the difference, the reason we slumped. Now, the difference with Hugo Broos is that he has been here for four years, he's got the experience, he knows the players, and he's getting the best out of them. So I think they are in the right place, where they are. They just need to believe. Like I said, like I said, 'Keep dreaming.'

MM: We are in a group with Angola, Egypt and Zimbabwe, almost similar to what you guys had. How do you rate our chances in Morocco?

MW: It wasn't easy because I think the first game we played was against Cameroon, and they'd just come from the World Cup. I remember we beat them three-one, and I excitedly celebrated my goal. And then we played against Angola, and I also scored. I am looking at our team. I'm wondering - can our players take the pressure? Because physically, Angola is going to come at us, and can we compete? If we can, then we will qualify. There are no easy games. People



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are going to expect Bafana to get where they were last time around [semi-finals]. The only thing is for them to give us 100% and I always say goals win games. People must know what their jobs are, from the coaches and the technical team, give the players the information; tell them who the opposition players are, so that when you give them an opportunity, they will take it. The thing with the 1996 team was that every player knew their jobs. The ones who were sitting on the bench, they knew if they came on, this was their job. And that is what I'd like to see, it must not be like bringing in players with hope.

MM: Can we win this Nations Cup?

MW: It's there for the taking. I'm not saying we can win it, but, you know, getting out of the group stage is very important, because when you play Angola, it's going to be a very physical match. Then you got Egypt. Egypt is a household name. They always qualify. But once you go through those two and make the knockout stage, anything is possible. You know, I think that because now people know how we play, they are planning. So, I hope Bafana have got Plan B because then it's easy. Then, I believe, they can come back with a cup.

A Brief History Of South Africa & The Cup of Nations

South Africa's relationship with the CAF Africa Cup of Nations stretches back nearly seven decades, though it began under a long shadow. A founding member of the competition 69 years ago, due to apartheid the nation was disqualified from the inaugural 1957 edition and would vanish from the international stage for decades.

Only in the early 1990s did Bafana Bafana finally step back into the light of African football.

Their return was stalled when they failed to qualify for the 1994 finals, meaning South Africa did not take part in the first 19 editions of AFCON.

But destiny waited at home. In 1996, as hosts, South Africa's football renaissance burst into full colour. Under the late Clive Barker, Bafana surged to their first continental crown, with Mark Williams' famous brace against Tunisia forever etched in gold in local football folklore. Ironically, the team had been on track to qualify on merit before taking over hosting rights from Kenya, but



MARK WILLIAMS: "THE THING WITH THE 1996 TEAM WAS THAT EVERY PLAYER KNEW THEIR JOBS. THE ONES WHO WERE SITTING ON THE BENCH, THEY KNEW IF THEY CAME ON, THIS WAS THEIR JOB."

fate had its own script to write.

Two years later, in Burkina Faso in 1998 and now guided by Jomo Sono after Barker's unexpected departure, Bafana returned to the final. This time, they fell short against Egypt, settling for silver. Yet the tournament belonged to a young, hungry Benni McCarthy, whose four-goal blitz against Namibia launched him to stardom and joint top-scorer status. Later that year, South Africa made its long-awaited World Cup debut.

The momentum continued into 2000. Under Trott Moloto, Bafana again impressed, reaching the semi-finals of the Ghana/Nigeria co-hosted tournament. They were able to beat one host in Ghana in the last eight, but in the semis, Nigeria halted their progress. Victory over Tunisia in the third-place play-off confirmed South Africa's growing continental authority.

In 2002, Carlos Queiroz's side looked sharp in Mali but were outmuscled by the hosts in the quarter-finals, a defeat that indirectly triggered the premature end of



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the Queiroz chapter. He would miss out on leading Bafana to the World Cup later that same year.

Then came the turbulence. The coaching carousel spun once more, landing briefly on the late Styles Phumo for AFCON 2004. Drawn into a brutal group featuring Morocco and Nigeria, Bafana exited early, a 4–0 humbling by the Super Eagles providing the decisive blow.

If 2004 was tough, 2006 in Egypt proved worse. Ted Dumitru stepped in amid more reshuffling, and Bafana crashed out without a single goal or point, losing to Guinea, Tunisia and Zambia in a tournament best forgotten.

In 2008, Carlos Alberto Parreira, the World Cup-winning Brazilian coach, brought expectations but only marginal improvement. A pair of draws with Angola and Senegal offered hope, but a heavy defeat to Tunisia sealed yet another group-stage exit.

The 2010 cycle delivered one of the strangest chapters. Despite South Africa hosting the FIFA World Cup, they still had to qualify for AFCON — and failed. Nigeria swept the qualification group with a perfect record, eliminating Joel Santana’s Bafana from attending the continental showpiece.

Heartbreak followed in 2012 with the now-infamous Mbombela debacle, when Pitso Mosimane’s team celebrated qualification only to later learn that head-to-head rules favoured Niger instead. South Africa stayed home once more.

Relief came in 2013 when Bafana stepped in as emergency hosts in place of Libya. Under Gordon Igesund, they battled their way to the quarter-finals before bowing out on penalties to Mali, yet showed signs of renewed resilience.

Shakes Mashaba finally got his AFCON chance in 2015, but once qualified, his team struggled, losing to Algeria and Ghana and failing to win a group match.

Things went no better in the next cycle also under Mashaba: Bafana failed to qualify for 2017, finishing behind Hugo Broos’ Cameroon, who went on to the finals and to lift the trophy.

Stuart Baxter returned for a second stint and a bit of redemption by leading Bafana to the 2019 tournament. There, South Africa



ANDRE ARENDSE: “WE TOOK OUR FOOT OFF THE DEVELOPMENTAL PEDAL, AND THAT WAS CRITICAL; THAT CAME TO HAUNT US. BUT NOW, WHAT HUGO HAS DONE WAS REBUILD.”

produced one of their strongest displays in years, capped by a dramatic upset of Egypt, before falling to Nigeria in the quarter-finals.

But qualification heartbreak struck once more in 2021, when Molefi Ntseki’s side fell at the final hurdle against Sudan.

Then came Hugo Broos, and with him, a revival. At AFCON 2023, Bafana rediscovered their bite. Despite losing their opening match to old nemesis Mali, they battled their way to the semi-finals, eventually bowing out to Nigeria on penalties before defeating DR Congo to claim third place, their best finish in 21 years.

Now AFCON 2025 looms, and for the first time in history, South Africa enters a tournament with the same coach who led them through the previous edition, Broos’ second AFCON with Bafana, and his third overall. Confidence is high, buoyed by an undefeated run and qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

For the first time in a generation, Bafana arrive not just hoping, but believing.



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MARINICA ON ZIM'S CHANCES, & BILLIAT/MUNETSI ABSENCES

MARIAN ‘MARIO’ MARINICA is not a man scared of a challenge and knows the job demands. Having been appointed the Zimbabwe senior men’s national team coach just less than three months to the start of the 2025 Africa Cup Of Nations (AFCON) in Morocco, the Romanian had the tough task of selecting the final squad heading to the North with only two international friendlies under his belt since taking over from Michael Nees. Zimbabwe are in Group B at the tournament with neighbours Angola, South Africa and Egypt. The task didn’t come without challenges as the Warriors suffered several injuries including that of key midfielder Marshall Munetsi much to the dismay of most fans as the former Baroka FC and Orlando Pirates man didn’t make the final squad. iDiski Times journalist LETHABO KGANYAGO sat down with the coach at the team’s base just outside Harare for a frank conversation about the squad, the absence of the influential players including Khama Billiat, the importance of the presence of veteran striker Knowledge Musona, the team’s ambitions in Morocco, the support he has enjoyed from authorities and the public among other matters.

Lethabo Kganyago: Coach, we really appreciate your time. Just to start, how has camp gone especially after the announcement of the final squad?

Marian Marinica: The boys are doing okay. It’s not exactly what we wanted, we had several injuries, actually a few injuries probably about seven or eight that actually prevented us from getting all the players we wanted but those that are now here it is what it is. We are not as fortunate as South Africa and probably as Egypt to have many local players. We wanted to have a number of several foreign based players and they couldn’t come because unfortunately FIFA did a U-turn and we couldn’t get players until after the 15th. So therefore we are going to get them only in Morocco and we are going to have only one training session with them.

LK: I know there’s several coaches who have spoken out about the U-turn, how does it make you feel?

MM: Well as a coach you want to have as much time as possible with players but at the end of the day the rules are the rules and we have to play by the rules.

LK: But it must suck a little bit that the tournament is maybe not being taken seriously by the powers that be....

MM: You know at the end of the day people are elected for a reason and they make a decision and we have to get on with the decision.

LK: And how tough was it to pick the final squad?

MM: It was extremely tough because I came into the party or let’s say I came into the team with only about 45 days left before the AFCON started. And that time already the squad was picked. I’m talking about the squad of the players that I was having the fortune to coach in two friendlies in



“IT WAS EXTREMELY TOUGH BECAUSE I CAME INTO THE PARTY OR LET’S SAY I CAME INTO THE TEAM WITH ONLY ABOUT 45 DAYS LEFT BEFORE THE AFCON STARTED.”

Saudi Arabia against Algeria and in Qatar against Qatar. So at least I had a chance to look at some foreign based players and some local players. At least I had a little bit of platform but otherwise it was very difficult because even though working with Malawi or Liberia I knew quite a lot about Zimbabwe. I even met them in the 2021 AFCON. I had a good insight but obviously it’s not up to date, so I didn’t know exactly what was happening in their local football. At least I had a chance to see a couple of matches and some of my personnel to look at some other matches. I saw a little bit of footage but it’s not like in South Africa where all the teams are really well exposed to media and you have matches and you can find and scout and things like that. So it was extremely tough. What we have actually done we were relying on local coaches, all the coaches from the PSL, nothing unique. All the coaches, we asked them to propose some players with a certain criteria and then we narrowed them to 36 plus what we saw there. We were able to pick the 54 players, but after we had already had something like about seven injuries.

LK: What did you see in that first camp in Asia? I mean were you happy with the state of the team or did you find out you still had a lot of work to do?

MM: Well let’s put it this way, something was good because that’s the reason they drew with South Africa. But also some other things were not good because if you were





to look statistically they lost to Lesotho which was a smaller team.

LK: Unexpected?

MM: Maybe unexpected but on the other hand if you were to look it's unfortunate the team hadn't scored a goal in the last four matches previously and in the last 15 matches they scored only five goals. So, obviously I was not really happy from that aspect but it is what it is and we have to go forward.

LK: A lot of Zimbabwean fans weren't happy about the exclusion of Marshall Munetsi from the final AFCON squad. For you to have gotten to a point where you were unable to pick him you must have made an assessment...

MM: Well, Marshall it was crystal clear unfortunately. Whatever other people tried to make it to us it was an absolute no brainer. It was crystal clear because the player walked off from the pitch injured, f****d. Then a few days later, actually on the 8th of December, Wolverhampton coach [Rob] Edwards came out and said the player needs a minimum six weeks to recover. We also had correspondence with the club stating a clear six to eight weeks to recover. I also had personal correspondence with the player and also through our CEO had correspondence with the club asking them two things. Number one to say is he fit and can he play in two weeks? And secondly would they be prepared to waive the legal rights in case the player is coming in and recur the injury. So the message from them was clear: the player needs a minimum of four weeks so we won't be able to use him for the first three matches. However, I spoke to the player and said we'll prepare if his injury goes okay to re-pick him after we pass the group stages if obviously he is okay. But unfortunately now it is what it is, the player is clearly injured. From whatever the club is saying we cannot go over the club also there are FIFA rules, CAF rules that you cannot pick a player you know very well is injured. CAF actually monitors and vets every single player before they are registered for AFCON. So we were in position to pick a player.

LK: Is it a big blow to not have him and do you have cover in his position?

MM: Obviously, Marshall is a big player. He played so many matches and also he is dedicated to the national team but unfortunately it is what it is. I'd say it's very difficult to cover any player that is actually in the starting 11 regularly. So, it is difficult but we have to see what we actually do. We had to scratch our heads to see how we were going to be able to cover. We tried to find a solution. I think we found a solution and we look forward to it. Life goes on.

LK: And Khama Billiat why did he even not make the 54 preliminary squad?

MM: Well Khama Billiat was the same, it was very clear. From my information Khama Billiat withdrew from the national team. I never had any conversation or anything from Khama you know to say coach I'm ready to be picked, the same with Alec Mudimi. Alec Mudimu previously said that he is done with the national team however



“SOUTH AFRICA AND EGYPT THEY HAVE MASSIVE, MASSIVE ADVANTAGE BECAUSE THEY ARE USING PLAYERS FROM THEIR LOCAL CLUBS, MASSIVE CLUBS AND THAT'S AN ADVANTAGE.”

he contacted me to say, 'Coach please look at my stats if you think that it's okay, I'm prepared to come to the local camp.' Actually he came to the local camp from the 1st of December. He arranged with the club, he came, and we saw him, same thing with [Macauley] Bonne. He decided he is actually ready to be picked. He contacted us, gave him a chance, assessed him like any other player not because they are playing in England. We assessed him, we saw that he is doing okay. Maybe the same thing could have happened with Khama but we never had anything clear, myself, no contact from Khama to say coach I want to be picked for the national team, consider me.

LK: So, all these big absentees makes the presence of Knowledge Musona important for the team with his experience and leadership qualities...

MM: Obviously yeah. We picked all the players that could be picked. So we try to do with what we have.

LK: Do you think this is one of his last major tournaments?

MM: Well it depends. If you look at Cristiano Ronaldo he's going on 41 and also I think in the past it was Sir Alfred that actually played up to 50. So you never know, who knows. It's on his back, only he knows and only God knows what can happen but I hope he can continue because he is a very, very good player.





LK: Coach you have been given a 12 month contract, there’s the AFCON, what’s ZIFA’s mandate to you in Morocco?

MM: To be honest you know I don’t care about that and coaches shouldn’t care about that because coaches know that always their contract is only three matches. So if they are not doing well in three matches the writing is on the wall, you pack your bags and obviously may come with part of compensational things. But you know what you are signing up for before actually signing.

LK: But what do they want you to achieve at this AFCON?

MM: I don’t care what they want to achieve. It’s what I want to achieve. I came here to actually qualify us to get out of the group stages. That’s my aim. So I presume that’s everyone’s aim and somehow we’ll come together that this is the common aim and that’s what the country also wants, what the fans want. We want to go there and fight, put on a good performance and why not win all three matches.

LK: In your group there’s South Africa, Angola and Egypt, who do you think is the toughest opponent?

MM: Well I don’t believe in toughest or weakest because you see all the teams normally should look at it like this, we are there because we won the rights to be there. So when you go there you should go there to win. It doesn’t matter who you are, the same thing with Zambia years back, they went there and won it. So everything is possible. Everyone has to believe in their own chances and they have to fight for their chances. Sometimes the so-called good teams stumble and sometimes small teams put surprises. As they say, even though it’s not really right, it’s 50/50 because when the ball is rolling it’s still nil, nil.

LK: Is it a blessing to have two teams from COSAFA in that group?

MM: No it’s not, because the opponent could also say they know us. So it’s a two-way traffic. On the other hand if you look at South Africa and Egypt they have massive, massive advantages because they are using players from their local clubs, massive clubs and that’s an advantage for the coach in everything and everyone because he has the chance to watch players all the time. And if you look again at South Africa the coach has been there for longer.

“FROM MY INFORMATION KHAMA BILLIAT WITHDREW FROM THE NATIONAL TEAM.”

LK: Obviously, Egypt is one of the powerhouses on the continent, do you feel you also have a chance against them?

MM: Let me put it this way, if you don’t have a chance what’s the point of going to participate. You better stay home and cry and say I don’t have a chance. Of course we do know we have a chance, anyone has a chance. It’s up to you to take it.

LK: I attended your team’s farewell dinner last week and it looks like you have a lot of support and I want to ask you your message to the Warriors fans?

MM: First of all, we want to thank them for the support and at the same time I want to thank not only the fans but also the Sport Minister and the whole government who support us. The staff here at the hotel has also been good and supported us even some local teams have supported us big time for example Scotland with the bus and things like that and Dynamos with the stadium. So everyone seems to be behind us from the authorities to the fans. Some fans of course because of one or two debates some of them may think my player or my favourite is not there. But I’d like them to put everything behind and support the national team because we are going there to play my philosophy first. I’m very fast and we tried to know parts of the philosophy to think fast, act fast, move fast, be prepared and organised and to surprise people. So we want them to be part of that surprise cheering us all the way and after that.

LK: Is that where your nickname the Fast and the Furious comes from?

MM: (Laughs) probably.

LK: (Laughs) thank you very much coach and we wish you all the best at the AFCON.

MM: So, you’d like us to win against Bafana Bafana? (laughs).

LK: (Laughs).

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KABINI ON DREAM YEAR, MBOKAZI & AFCON HOPES

Perhaps one of the most rewarding aspects of Hugo Broos' Bafana Bafana rebuild has been the quiet but consistent way youth has been woven into the senior setup. It hasn't been a reckless overhaul, but a measured transition, one where talent is trusted, exposed and allowed to grow. While much of the spotlight has rightly fallen on the current Amajita crop, with names like Mbekezeli Mbokazi, Shandre Campbell and Tylon Smith earning AFCON call-ups, there is another exciting layer to this story. In Morocco, four players who are barely a year older than that U20 group are also part of the journey: Relebohile Mofokeng, Khulumani Ndamane, Mohau Nkota and SAMUKELE KABINI. Each represents a different pathway, but all share the same momentum. Kabini's rise, in particular, has been remarkable. The 21-year-old former Orlando Pirates Diski Challenge standout found fresh oxygen after leaving Mayfair, landing at TS Galaxy and immediately announcing himself at senior level. His performances caught international eyes quickly, and earlier this year, he earned a move to Norwegian giants Molde FK. He hasn't needed long to adapt in the Eliteserien either, settling in with maturity beyond his years and already drawing interest from bigger European clubs. LORENZ KÖHLER caught up with Kabini ahead of the AFCON start.

Lorenz Köhler: Another who has had an unbelievable 2025, how crazy has this year been for you, from signing for Molde, to qualifying for a World Cup, to heading to an AFCON.

Samukele Kabini: For me, what I would say is that I will never forget this year; it's been a blessing for me, one of the best

years of my life. Mr Lorenz, I'm happy and feeling great. I'm happy to be here with this squad; we have seen the crowds supporting us everywhere. After the World Cup qualification, it wasn't just us as players happy, the whole of South Africa was too. We're looking forward to the future. I just want to say thank you to our supporters, the coaches and the technical team for all their efforts.

LK: How nervy was that week before the World Cup qualification in Mbombela Stadium, the place you called home for a while?

SK: It was nervy. I was nervous, really, really nervous after that game against Zimbabwe because we dropped points in that game, so the Rwanda game, you can't lie, there was nerves. But at some point, I told myself there's hope, and there's belief, and all of our results came right for us.

LK: How have things been in Europe? There was no real time to 'settle' in either; you hit the ground running at the club?

SK: For me, what I would say is that I will never forget this year, it's been a blessing for me, one of the best years of my life. I'm really excited about the next few months of my life, but what do I need to do? I need to keep pushing until the World Cup in 2026 comes, and I find myself in that squad. I'm thankful to God and everyone.

LK: How different is the football? What challenges have you faced?

SK: The ball moves faster that side than here at home, but levels are more or less the same. But the quality, it's better that side, and the challenge I've faced is that I was not used to the weather, so I was struggling a lot at first. And also the fastness of ball movement!

LK: Being part of the Bafana squad, what has been the most exciting part so far?

SK: Making my first ever cap, my Bafana Bafana debut! And for that, I'm grateful and thankful to the coaches; it was like a dream. To tell you the truth, I thought I'd maybe play for Bafana in the next coming seven to eight years... [when I was in the DDC]. But you know God does things the way things are done. Now I'm in an AFCON, going to a World Cup. I just need to keep pushing to remain in the squad.

LK: So many youngsters, a lot of people talking about the 2005s cos of Amajita's success, but you're 2004, and so are a few others. Kind of the same generation.

SK: Yeah, true, it's a good feeling to be part of this Bafana squad at such an early age, and surely with the Amajita's success there's still gonna be more youngsters to come in the camp, but there's still a lot of time, no one must rush anything, only time will tell...

LK: People obviously first saw you come to the fore at TS Galaxy, but you were at Pirates before that. Where did it all start for you?

SK: It all started at AmaTuks, so I went to Pirates because I was scouted by coach Mandla Qhogi, and played two seasons and went to TS Galaxy... and most [media and fans] started following my journey from there.

LK: Can 2026 be a bigger year for you than 2025? Any personal goals?

SK: I would know, but I don't think so for now. I appreciate this year and everything with it, with my personal goal I would not want to disclose that I'm sorry... but I will let you know if I've managed to reach them or not.

LK: There's already some talk that bigger clubs in Europe are looking at you for the January window - do you think it's something you are potentially ready for?

SK: I don't know about that, so I wouldn't want to comment too much on it cos I'm still at Molde and happy to be there.

LK: That moment with you and Mbokazi vs Nigeria was a viral moment. What did you guys say to each other then and after the game?



“WHAT I WOULD SAY IS THAT I WILL NEVER FORGET THIS YEAR; IT'S BEEN A BLESSING FOR ME, ONE OF THE BEST YEARS OF MY LIFE.”

SL: No, I won't lie to you, that was just a message from my teammates pushing me to be stronger in duels cos maybe at some point he saw I was not strong enough, but it was nothing hectic, he was trying to help cos in that game I won't lie, I was nervous the whole game. I don't know why... but me and Mbokazi, we are close, always laughing together, making fun of each other, nothing bad, so what he was doing, it was just trying to push me.

LK: What is the goal for Bafana and yourself at AFCON?

SK: The goal is to make the SA country happy and fight with my, or our, hearts all out to try and win the competition.

LK: Thank you, my brother.

SK: Thank you, Mr Lorenz.

STRAIGHT INTO THE FIRE: BAFANA MEET ANGOLA

As South Africa prepares for their opening match of the 2025 TotalEnergies CAF Africa Cup of Nations, they now have full clarity on the team that will greet them in Marrakesh.

Angola head coach Patrice Beaumelle has revealed his final 28-man squad, a group Bafana Bafana will need to treat with the utmost respect when the two sides meet on 22 December at the Marrakesh Stadium.

From a South African point of view, the announcement offers both familiar threats and new puzzles. Beaumelle, best remembered as the former assistant of Hervé Renard, only took charge in September, but has not been afraid to make bold decisions, leaving out several long-standing figures in the Angolan setup. Bastos, Orlando Pirates loanee Gilberto and Andrade are all absent. Their omissions suggest a deliberate shift: Angola are turning to a fresher, more dynamic core as they attempt to evolve beyond the team South Africa faced in previous tournaments.

For Bafana, that means preparing for an opponent that may look different on paper, but remains dangerous in all the ways that matter.

Between the posts, Beaumelle has named Neblú, Dominique and Hugo Marques, a goalkeeper familiar to South African football fans from his time at Cape Town City. Marques’ experience in the PSL adds an intriguing subtext; if he starts against Bafana, he will know some of the South Africans intimately.

Defensively, Angola’s selections should not be underestimated. Clinton Mata, David Carmo, Núrio Fortuna, Gaspar and Buatu form a seasoned back five, capable of absorbing pressure and punishing mistakes in transition. South Africa’s pace and aggression will test them, but this is a unit with calm heads and European experience, the kind who thrive in tight, tactical matches.

It is in midfield, however, where the heart of Angola’s threat lies. Show, Fredy, Maestro and Beni Mukendi bring a balance of muscle, control and guile. They can slow matches down, speed them up, or collapse space in an instant, the exact kind of midfield profile that tends to frustrate opponents. For Hugo Broos, winning the midfield battle on opening night will be non-negotiable.

Further forward is where Angola truly comes to life, and where Bafana’s defensive line must be at its sharpest. Gelson Dala, Zito Luvumbo, Mbala Nzola, Mabululu, and Randy Nteka comprise one of the most experienced and explosive attacking units at AFCON 2025. They are quick, powerful, direct and capable of scoring from almost nothing. South Africa have faced several of them before, but as a collective, this group might be the strongest Angola have taken to a major tournament in years.

Angola’s preparations have been deliberate and well-structured. A 10-day camp in Portugal, including warm-up matches against DR Congo and Mozambique, is



designed to sharpen their combinations ahead of their trip to Morocco. Their recent quarter-final appearance in Côte d’Ivoire has added a layer of confidence and belief, and Beaumelle’s refreshed squad only deepens that sense of momentum.

For Bafana Bafana, this opening match will be far from a gentle introduction. Angola may not have the AFCON pedigree of Egypt or the recent competitive familiarity of Zimbabwe, but they arrive with ambition and continuity, led by a coach who is already reshaping their identity.

South Africa will know all too well that the Palancas Negras have never progressed beyond the last eight. But they will also know that this squad, fast, physical, tactically disciplined, genuinely believes that barrier can be smashed. And they will be intent on making that statement against Bafana in Marrakesh.

Angola’s AFCON squad:

Goalkeepers:
Neblú (Primeiro De Agosto), Hugo Marques (Petro De Luanda), Dominique (Etoile-Carouge)

Defenders:
Rui Modesto (Udinese), Eddie Afonso (Petro De Luanda), Tô Carneiro (FAR Rabat), Núrio Fortuna (Volos), Pedro Bondo (Famalicao), David Carmo (Real Oviedo), Jonathan Buatu (Gil Vicente), Kialonda Gaspar (Lecce), Clinton Mata (OL)

Midfielders:
Beni Mukendi (Guimaraes), Show (Kocaelispor), Fredy (Bodrumspor), Maestro (Alanyaspor), Kelliano (Akhmat Grozny), Mário Balbúrdia (Boluspor)

Forwards:
Zito Luvumbo (Cagliari), Manuel Benson (Swansea), Milson (Etoile Rouge De Belgrade), Chico Banza (Zamalek), Gelson Dala (Al Wakrah), Randy Nteka (Rayo Vallecano), Ary Papel (Al Akhdar),

Mabululu (Al Ahli Tripoli), Mbala Nzola (Pisa), Zine Salvador (AEK Athenes)

Salah Still The Main Man For Egypt

As South Africa cast their eyes toward their second Group B showdown at the 2025 TotalEnergies Africa Cup of Nations, they now have complete clarity on the challenge awaiting them: Hossam Hassan’s final 28-man Egypt squad, a group built with one mission in mind — reclaiming their place as kings of Africa.

For Bafana, this match is expected to be one of the defining moments of the group stage. Egypt may no longer carry the same invincible aura they once wielded, but their squad list is a stark reminder that they remain one of the most dangerous and historically ruthless sides at AFCON.

Hassan, the fiery former striker turned national legend, has put together a squad that blends old scars with fresh ambition. It is a group heavy with experience yet energised by younger legs — an unmistakable signal that Egypt are determined to restore the shine to their seven continental titles.

And, as always, the conversation begins with Mohamed Salah, who has been the at the centre of much controversy in the lead-up following his comments about Liverpool

But Salah remains the nucleus of the Pharaohs. He is the heartbeat, the reference point, and the player South Africa must contain if they hope to tilt the balance their way. Even after years of carrying his nation, Salah arrives in Morocco as sharp as ever and surrounded by attacking support that will demand Bafana’s full attention.

Hassan has spoken openly about seeking “harmony between experience and youth,” and his selections reflect exactly that.

At the back, Egypt remain as stubborn as ever. Mohamed Hany, Ramy Rabia, Yasser Ibrahim and Ahmed Fatouh bring battle-tested experience in high-pressure matches, especially those involving cagey, tactical football — the kind likely to unfold when they face South Africa. Hossam Abdel-Maguid and Khaled Sobhi inject youth and physicality, adding pace that can quickly close spaces when opponents try to transition.

The midfield, traditionally Egypt’s stabilising force, is packed with profiles Bafana know well: Marwan Attia, Hamdi Fathi, Mohannad Lasheen and Emam Ashour. This is a group capable of turning matches into tight arm-wrestles, controlling rhythm with patient possession or breaking structure with sudden switches of play. Add the creativity of Ahmed Sayed Zizo and Mahmoud Trezeguet — both capable of decisive moments from nowhere — and Bafana will need to bring their sharpest tactical discipline.

Egypt’s hybrid system sees Salah listed among the midfielders, reflecting Hassan’s intent to use him in drifting, unpredictable roles. Alongside Marmoush, Ibrahim Adel, and Mostafa Fathi, the Pharaohs



will aim to overload half-spaces, pull South Africa’s shape apart, and create openings for their attackers to exploit.

Leading the line is Mostafa Mohamed, in the form of his life and increasingly regarded as one of the continent’s most complete modern forwards. He is supported by Salah Mohsen and Osama Faisal, giving Egypt both a poacher’s instinct and aerial presence.

Before meeting Bafana on 26 December, Egypt open their tournament against Zimbabwe. Results in that match may shape how Egypt approach the encounter with South Africa — whether it becomes a strategic duel, a survival match, or a chance for Hassan’s side to stamp early authority on the group.

Egypt began their AFCON training camp on 3 December and departed for Morocco on 17 December, carrying the weight of expectation from a nation that demands nothing less than excellence.

For Bafana Bafana, the task is clear: Egypt will be their sternest test in Group B, a team dripping with pedigree, experience and firepower. If South Africa wants to truly announce themselves at AFCON 2025, they will have to do it against the continent’s most decorated giants.

Against Egypt, every moment must be earned — and every mistake will be punished.

This is the clash that could define Bafana’s ambitions.

Egypt’s AFCON squad:

Goalkeepers:
Mohamed El Shenawy (Al Ahly), Ahmed El Shenawy (Pyramids), Mostafa Shobeir (Al Ahly), Mohamed Sobhi (Zamalek)

Defenders:
Mohamed Hany (Al Ahly), Ahmed Eid (Al Masry), Ramy Rabia (Al Ain), Khaled Sobhi (Al Masry), Yasser Ibrahim (Al Ahly), Mohamed Ismail (Zamalek), Hossam Abdel-Maguid (Zamalek), Mohamed Hamdy (Pyramids), Ahmed Fatouh (Zamalek)

Midfielders:

Marwan Attia (Al Ahly), Hamdi Fathi (Al Wakrah, Qatar), Mohannad Lasheen (Pyramids), Mahmoud Saber (Zed), Mohamed Shehata (Zamalek), Emam Ashour (Al Ahly), Ahmed Mostafa Zizo (Al Ahly), Mahmoud Hassan Trezeguet (Al Ahly), Ibrahim Adel (Al Jazira, UAE), Mostafa Fathi (Pyramids), Omar Marmoush (Manchester City), Mohamed Salah (Liverpool)

Forwards:

Mostafa Mohamed (Nantes), Salah Mohsen (Al Masry), Osama Faisal (Al Ahly Bank)

No Billiat or Munetsi, But Warriors Shouldn't Be Underestimated

As Bafana Bafana round off their Group B journey, they will do so against a team South Africa know only too well, neighbours and long-time sparring partners, Zimbabwe.

The meeting in Morocco will come barely two months after our last encounter, a frustrating night in which Hugo Broos' men were held to a 0–0 stalemate in a World Cup qualifier many expected South Africa to win. That draw still lingers, a reminder that the Warriors, no matter their form, remain a tricky, stubborn opponent capable of upsetting rhythm and expectations.

Zimbabwe arrive at AFCON with a new voice in the dugout. Romanian coach Marian 'Mario' Marinica, a UEFA Pro Licence holder with more than 25 years of experience across four continents, has replaced Michael Nees after the German's contract expired. Marinica is no stranger to African football. He famously led Malawi to their best-ever AFCON finish (a round-of-16 appearance in 2021/22) and later helped propel Liberia to one of the biggest climbs in the FIFA Rankings in 2024. He brings structure, discipline and a sharp tactical eye, qualities that could make Zimbabwe far more organised than the team Bafana faced in June.

Still, this Warriors side has changed. Familiar faces are missing, starting with a South African fan favourite, Khama Billiat, who was again reportedly unavailable for selection.

The biggest loss, however, is undeniably Marshall Munetsi. The Wolves midfielder and former Orlando Pirates star suffered an untimely injury in England just days before the squad announcement. His absence removes Zimbabwe's heartbeat in midfield, a player capable of dictating tempo, breaking lines and carrying the team in transitions. He's joined on the sidelines by another major absentee, Jordan Zemura, Udinese's dynamic left-back and one of the Warriors' most exciting talents.

Despite those losses, Bafana will still recognise much of the core. The Warriors bring five South African-based players, and another five who have past PSL experience, giving the fixture a familiar, almost derby-like feel.

There is also a call up for 16-year-old Tadiwanashe Chakuchichi, who will be



one of the youngest players at this year's AFCON.

For South Africa, it will be a final group game loaded with context: recent history, regional rivalry and the knowledge that Zimbabwe, reshaped but still dangerous, will be desperate to spoil Bafana's campaign, and possibly make their own history.

Zimbabwe's AFCON squad:

Goalkeepers:

Washington Arubi (Marumo Gallants), Elvis Chipezeze (Magesi), Martin Mapisa (MWOS FC)

Defenders:

Godknows Murwira (Scotland FC), Emmanuel Jalai (Dynamos FC), Sean Fusire (Sheffield Wednesday FC), Munashe Garananga (FC Copenhagen), Gerald Takwara (Al Ittihad Misurata SC Libya), Isheanesu Mauchi (Simba Bhora FC), Brandon Galloway (Plymouth Argyle FC), Teenage Hadebe (FC Cincinnati), Alec Mudimu (Flint Town United), Divine Lunga (Mamelodi Sundowns FC)

Midfielders:

Marvelous Nakamba (Luton Town FC), Jonah Fabisch (FC Erzgebirg Aue), Andrew Rinomhota (Reading FC), Prosper Padera (SJK Seinä Joki), Tawanda Chirewa (Wolverhampton Wanderers FC), Knowledge Musona (Scotland FC)

Forwards:

Bill Antonio (KV Mechelen FC), Ishmael Wadi (CAPS United FC), Tawanda Maswanhise (Motherwell FC), Daniel Msendami (Marumo Gallants FC), Prince Dube (Young Africans SC), Washington Navaya (TelOne FC), Macauley Bonne (Maldon & Tiptree FC), Junior Zindoga (TS Galaxy FC), Tadiwanashe Chakuchichi (Scotland FC)



2025 IN REVIEW

To bring the curtain down on 2025, Rob Delpont has taken a step back to reflect on a year that will be remembered as one of the most uplifting chapters in South African football in recent memory. Across all levels of the game, there were moments of progress, pride and genuine optimism about what lies ahead.

The headline achievement, of course, was Bafana Bafana sealing qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, a milestone that felt like the reward for years of rebuilding under Hugo Broos. It was a defining moment, but far from the only one. The future of the game shone just as brightly, with both the U20 and U17 national teams reaching their respective World Cups, and Amajita going one step further by lifting the U20 AFCON title for the first time in the country's history.

Domestically, the balance of power also told an interesting story. For the first time in more than two decades, the so-called "big three" are simultaneously sitting on silverware. Mamelodi Sundowns remain the benchmark as Betway Premiership champions, Kaizer Chiefs are the reigning Nedbank Cup holders, and Orlando Pirates have stocked their trophy cabinet with both the MTN8 and Carling Knockout.

2025 also saw Sundowns reach their first CAF Champions League

final since 2016, while Pirates went all the way to the semi-finals, both losing out to eventual champions, Egypt's Pyramids FC.

It all adds up to a year that felt significant, not just for what was won, but for the belief it restored in South African football.

Calendar-Year Premiership: The Numbers That Defined 2025

1 Mamelodi Sundowns

Once again, Mamelodi Sundowns set the standard. For an incredible 11th consecutive year, the Brazilians finished top of the calendar-year league table, underlining their sustained dominance of South African football. In 2025, Sundowns played 31 league matches, winning 22, losing just three, and amassing 72 points. Their superiority was most evident in the numbers: a staggering 65 goals scored and only 17 conceded, figures that reflect both



attacking ruthlessness and defensive control. While the gap at the top has narrowed slightly, Sundowns remain the team everyone is chasing — though 2026 may finally bring their sternest test yet.

2 Orlando Pirates

Orlando Pirates quietly put together a strong and encouraging calendar year. The Buccaneers played 29 league matches, winning 19 and losing five, finishing on 62 points. They scored 39 goals and conceded 20, and while they end the year 10 points behind Sundowns, they did so having played two fewer games. Perhaps more telling is that Pirates currently sit at the summit of the 2025/26 Betway Premiership table, suggesting that momentum is firmly on their side. If they can maintain that consistency, Pirates look well placed to mount a genuine challenge to Sundowns’ long-standing league supremacy.

3 Sekhukhune United

Rounding out the top three once again are Sekhukhune United, a model of consistency in recent seasons. Babina Noko collected 52 points from 32 matches, winning 14 and losing eight, while scoring 45 goals and conceding 31. This marks the third successive calendar year in which Sekhukhune have finished as the league’s third-best side, a remarkable achievement that highlights their steady growth and smart recruitment. While the gap to the top two remains, Sekhukhune have firmly established themselves as one of the Premiership’s most reliable and competitive outfits.

The rest: AmaZulu (4th, 50 pts), TS Galaxy (5th, 46 pts), Stellenbosch (6th, 44 pts), Richards Bay (7th, 43 pts), Kaizer Chiefs (8th, 42 pts), Polokwane City (9th, 39 pts), Marumo Gallants (10th, 37 pts), Magesi (11th, 37 pts), Golden Arrows (12th, 36 pts), Chippa United (13th, 26 pts), *Durban City (14th, 22 pts), *Cape Town City (15th, 17 pts), *Siwelele (16th, 16 pts), *Orbit College (17th, 13 pts), *SuperSport United (18th,

12 pts)
- all ranked for half a year due to promotion/relegation/franchise sale.

Team of 2025: AMAJITA

While there are strong arguments for handing the Team of 2025 accolade to Bafana, Sundowns or Pirates, my unanimous choice goes elsewhere: to Raymond Mdaka’s South Africa U20 side, a team that didn’t just impress, but rewrote the history books.

Amajita achieved what no South African youth team had managed before, lifting the CAF U20 Africa Cup of Nations for the first time in history and announcing themselves as continental champions. They didn’t stop there. At the FIFA U20 World Cup, this group broke new ground again, becoming the first South African football team at any World Cup level to win two matches, a milestone that underlined their maturity, belief and growing pedigree on the global stage.

South African football has often spoken of “golden generations”, but this group has given that phrase real meaning. Disciplined, fearless and tactically astute, they carried the nation’s hopes with a calmness beyond their years. And perhaps the most tantalising thought of all is the unanswered “what if” — had Mdaka been able to call on every first-choice player, just how good could they have been?

While other teams impressed, when we look back at our football history, 2025 will always be remembered for that first-ever U20 AFCON trophy.

Poacher of 2025: Iqraam Rayners (Mamelodi Sundowns)

While Iqraam Rayners ultimately missed out on a place in the final Bafana AFCON squad, remaining on standby should the need arise, 2025 has still been a standout year for the Mamelodi Sundowns forward.

On paper alone, his Sundowns numbers tell a compelling story: 28 goal contributions across all



competitions, made up of 18 goals and 10 assists, underlining his growing influence in the final third.

At the end of last season, Rayners formed a formidable partnership with Lucas Ribeiro as Sundowns powered their way to another Betway Premiership title and marched deep into the CAF Champions League, where they reached the final. On the global stage, he carried that form to the FIFA Club World Cup in the USA, finding the net twice and holding his own against elite opposition, further enhancing his reputation.

He began the new season in similarly sharp fashion, looking primed for an even bigger campaign. But momentum was stalled by medical issues that limited him to just five appearances in the final three months of the year, with his last goal arriving back in September. It slightly dulled what could have been a truly exceptional season, yet there's little doubt that a fully fit Rayners remains one of the most dangerous forwards in South African football.

Breakout Star of 2025: Mbekezeli Mbokazi (Orlando Pirates and Bafana Bafana)

There was never really any debate about 2025's Breakout Star. It could only be Mbokazi. Just nine months after making his first senior appearance at club level, the Chicago Fire-bound defender has surged from unknown prospect to commanding presence, bulldozing his way past expectations at every turn. From that very first cap, it was clear TLB belonged, and with each performance, he only grew in stature.

At Orlando Pirates, Mbokazi didn't just earn a place in the starting XI, he became one of the first names on the team sheet. Remarkably, at just 20 years old, he was also entrusted with the captain's armband, a clear signal of the authority, composure and leadership he brings to the pitch.

His rise didn't stop there. Called into Hugo Broos' Bafana Bafana setup, Mbokazi stepped onto the international stage and looked instantly comfortable, playing with

a calm assurance that belied his limited number of caps.

While some lamented his absence from the U20 AFCON and U20 World Cup, the truth is that Mbokazi had already outgrown age-group football. The moment he pulled on a senior jersey, his trajectory shifted, and by the end of 2025, he wasn't just a breakout star but one of the country's most exciting defensive talents heading into the future.

Player of 2025: Oswin Appollis (Polokwane City, Orlando Pirates and Bafana Bafana)

There were plenty of strong contenders for 2025, but when the dust settled, it became impossible to look past the all-round impact of Oswin Appollis. While I have my own personal biases having known Ossie since he was barely a teen, it is hard to argue that few players shaped South African football this year quite like him.. For Bafana Bafana, Appollis emerged as the leading goal contributor in the FIFA World Cup qualifiers, following on from doing the same in the AFCON qualifying campaign the year before, a decisive run that helped secure South Africa's place at the continental finals in Morocco.

At club level, his influence was just as profound. Appollis played a central role in guiding Polokwane City to the best league finish in their history, establishing himself as one of the most consistent performers in the Betway Premiership.

His mid-year move to Orlando Pirates proved to be another step forward. Under Abdeslam Ouaddou, he elevated his game again, adapting seamlessly to higher expectations and bigger occasions.

Appollis ended the year with silverware to show for it, winning both domestic finals he featured in, his first personal taste of cup success, playing key roles in Pirates' MTN8 and Carling Knockout triumphs.

Add to that his contributions to a league campaign that saw the Buccaneers finish 2025 at the



summit of the Premiership table, and Appollis’ case as the standout figure of the year becomes undeniable.

Coach of 2025: Abdeslam Ouaddou (Marumo Gallants and Orlando Pirates)

It may raise a few eyebrows, but judged purely on impact and results, it is difficult to look past Abdeslam Ouaddou as the standout Coach of 2025. While he faced stiff competition from Miguel Cardoso, Hugo Broos, or even Raymond Mdaka, it’s the Moroccan who got the nod.

Wherever he has gone in 2025, momentum has followed. His first major test came at Marumo Gallants, where he arrived in early March with the club staring nervously over their shoulders at relegation. In just three months, Ouaddou orchestrated a remarkable turnaround. Under his guidance, Gallants won five of his 12 matches, lost only three, and climbed from 14th to a far more comfortable 10th place, a shift that changed the mood and trajectory of their season entirely.

That work proved to be a springboard rather than a peak. Since taking charge at Orlando Pirates, Ouaddou has elevated his influence to an even bigger stage. In 24 matches at the helm, he has tasted defeat just three times, winning an impressive 19 games and immediately delivering silverware, lifting both the MTN8 and the Carling Knockout. More importantly, Pirates have developed a ruthlessness and consistency that has seen them end the year at the top of the Betway Premiership as they won nine of their twelve games thus far.

The only real blemish on an otherwise outstanding year was an exit in the CAF Champions League preliminary rounds, a disappointment by Pirates’ standards. Yet even that penalty shootout-defeat, after fighting back from a three-goal first leg deficit, feels more like a footnote than a defining moment. With a full season to prepare and a squad firmly shaped in his image, Ouaddou looks

well placed to mount a far stronger continental challenge next time around.

Best Day of 2025: 14 October 2025

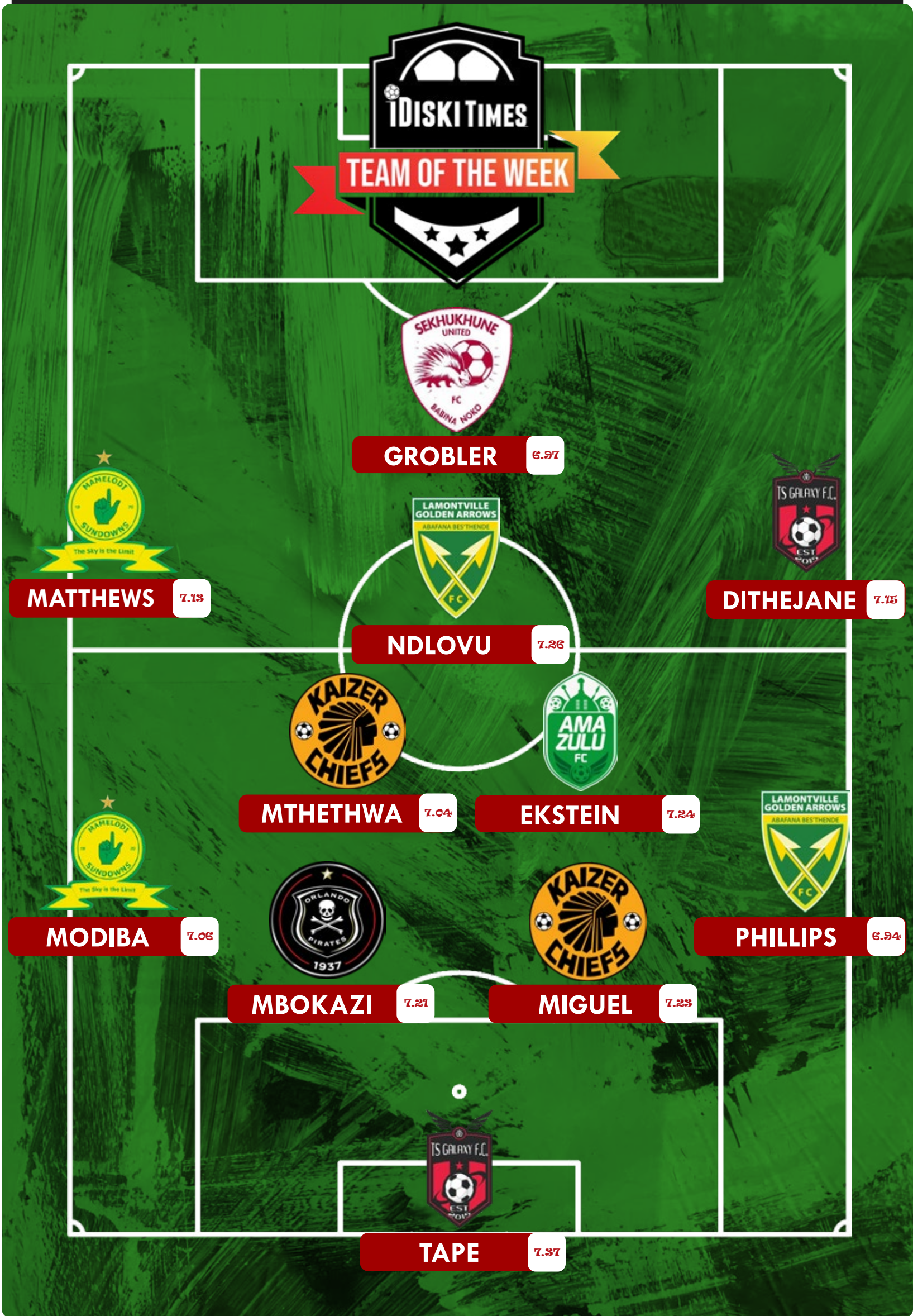
Thalente Mbatha, Oswin Appollis and Evidence Makgopa etched their names into South African football folklore on a night that will be remembered for generations, as Bafana Bafana swept past Rwanda 3–0 to book their place at the 2026 FIFA World Cup. More than 20 years had passed since South Africa last qualified for the global showpiece, and when the final whistle blew in Mbombela, the sense of relief and celebration was overwhelming.

The occasion carried even more emotional weight, given the turbulent weeks that preceded it. Just a fortnight earlier, Bafana had suffered what many described as the lowest moment of the year, when FIFA confirmed a three-point deduction after the ineligible selection of Teboho Mokoena in the March qualifier against Lesotho. Doubt and frustration briefly threatened to derail the campaign.

Instead, the response was emphatic. Under the floodlights in Mpumalanga, Mbatha set the tone, Appollis added his growing influence, and Makgopa delivered the decisive blows. It was a performance born of resilience and belief and a reminder that this Bafana side, forged through adversity, has learned how to rise when it matters most.



IDISKI'S PREMIERSHIP TEAM OF AUG-DEC 2025



(Based on Sofascore ratings per position; at least 10 appearances)



ACE OF THE WEEK:
SIPHO MBULE

Our Ace of the Week belongs to Siphso Mbule, who lit up Bafana Bafana’s final AFCON warm-up with a moment of pure class. In the training match against Ghana’s Black Galaxies, Mbule produced a delightful solo run before finishing with trademark composure in the second half to score the only goal of the contest. It was a strike of pure class, even if it won’t show up on the stat sheets. Nicknamed “Master Chef” for good reason, Mbule cooked up something special at Dobsonville Stadium, sparking celebrations as supporters came out in force to bid Hugo Broos’ squad farewell and wish them luck ahead of Morocco. While it may go down as just a training game, the goal felt special, a timely reminder of Mbule’s quality and the kind of confidence-boosting moment he and Bafana will hope to carry into the Africa Cup of Nations.



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.

2025: That's a wrap!

In the previous few weeks, we have been very lucky to have some very distinguished guests on here who are doing excellent work in the South African game. We had Dave Waters and Casey Prince share about the great work that Ubuntu Football Academy is doing in developing the next generation of talent on and off the field. We also had the godfather of the DSTV Diski Challenge, coach Evangelos Vellios, share about his fantastic work at Stellenbosch FC. What is as clear to me as ever is that there are some great people in South Africa who are working tremendously hard to appropriately develop the next generation of talent. And the fruits of this are beginning to show. South Africa has qualified for the FIFA men's World Cup for the first time in 24 years, and the U17s and U20s both managed to reach the knockout stages at their respective junior world championships. A particular highlight that I followed with a great deal of interest from afar was the U20s winning the AFCON for the first time ever, despite missing players like Shandre Campbell and Mbekezeli Mbokazi.

You may call me an idealist, but I believe that these are some of the fruits of the hard work that has been done in the South African game, particularly in the last 15 years after the 2010 World Cup. And if we keep going, this may only be the beginning. The generation of players born between 2001 and 2009 looks set to be a possible golden generation for South African football in the years to come. Let's not mess this up!

I'm going to share a bit of a review of my work-life across the year 2025 at SV Ried which was really an amazing one. Some of these reflections might be useful to some of the readers, but no doubt, this last column of 2025 will be a bit less 'technical' than usual.

At Ried, we started the year in a title race with Admira Wacker. A traditional powerhouse from Mödling/Vienna. Ried had come out publicly with a 2-year plan of attaining promotion after relegation from the Austrian Bundesliga at the end of the 2022/2023 season. And last season was the 2nd year of that said 2-year plan. The trouble in Austria is that the window from the 2nd to the 1st Bundesliga is very, very small. Only 1 team gains straight promotion with no additional playoff spots. So, we knew

from January onwards that we had to finish first to achieve our target, and nothing else would count. Admira started the year with a 2-point lead over us, and for the first few months of 2025 we were not able to get past them. We would win, they would win, they would drop points, we would catch up, but then drop some ourselves. We remained head-to-head with no one able to really pull away decisively. So things came down to the head-to-head matchup in early May. We had lost the first leg to Admira in November, after which our coaching team was under massive public scrutiny.

One of the aspects I enjoy the most about working with the team at SV Ried is their ability under pressure. This team has an enormous ability to perform well under pressure and when it counts the most. And we managed to do so when it mattered the most. For the first time since the previous October, we were able to push clear of Admira with a convincing 2:0 win as we held a 2-point lead with 3 matches to go. Things got even more dramatic in the next week. Admira managed to temporarily go past us with a home win against Voitsberg on the Friday. We in turn, played against Sturm Graz reserves at home and needed at least a point to retain our lead. Things mostly went to plan for that game as we seemed relatively comfortable with a 1:0 lead going into extra time. However, then we conceded an equaliser, which would have meant that we are still in the lead at the top of the table but on mere goal difference. With practically the last kick of the game, Fabian Wohlmuth managed to score a winner in front of our home fans. The whole team, as well as the staff, ran and celebrated in the corner in what seemed to have been a pretty decisive moment in this marathon of a title race. True to form, Admira lost the next game to FC Liefering (the reserve team of Red Bull Salzburg) and all of a sudden, we were champions with a 4:1 away win against Schwarz Weiss Bregenz. A fantastic achievement which we duly celebrated with a week to go in the league. When I reflect on this time, I take a lot of pride in the quality of work we were able to deliver under the leadership of our head coach, Maximilian Senft. We were able to perform under massive pressure for months on end, and in the end, outlasted our competition.

When examining European Football, a very evident factor is how often teams struggle



when they jump from the second to first tiers, and we certainly entered the pre-season in summer knowing that we were facing a massive challenge in the Austrian Bundesliga against some massive teams such as Red Bull Salzburg or Sturm Graz. There were some changes in the squad, of course, as there always are, and we worked hard on getting ready for the new challenge at the higher level. We started the season with a 5:0 win in the cup, followed by an opening round encounter against Red Bull Salzburg, a team that features every year in European continental competition. We were under serious pressure early on and duly went a goal down. However, we managed to claw our way back and were in the lead in extra time. However, Red Bull managed to equalise with practically the last kick of the game. All things considered, a good point for us and a fantastic experience in front of a full backdrop in our home ground.

After the first few rounds of the league, it became quite clear that we can be competitive at this level; however, we would have to learn very quickly as we went along. We managed to grab our first league win in the away derby against Blau Weiss Linz in the 4th round of the league. In that week, we had another derby against Union Gurten in the cup, which we also managed to win, before crowning the derby week with a 3rd win against LASK Linz. As we went along the most amazing and extremely gratifying thing was to see how quickly we learnt as a group of players and staff at the higher level. Our performances got better and more well-rounded throughout, and we finished the first half of the season in 6th place, which gives us a chance to make the higher playoffs. On top of that, we are still in the cup as well, with 2026 starting for us with a cup quarterfinal against Rapid Vienna. Overall, a fantastic year for us, which from a results point of view could not have gone any better at all. Throughout my biggest 3 reflections are the following.

The margins between massive success and crushing failure are much, much smaller at

the top, top-level professional than what is portrayed in the media. The reality is that we were perhaps one bad result away from not achieving our target in the second league, and we would be talking about a totally different game now. For me, that means when success is there, one should remain really humble. It is for sure not a permanent state to get used to or that one is entitled to by any degree of the imagination. At the same time, when things are not going well, you probably did a lot less wrong and are a lot less stupid than what you think or what may be portrayed. Overall, a consistent, balanced approach with a constant striving to get better is key for the long run.

The biggest differentiating factor is the speed at which you learn. If one puts success and failure into perspective, the door is much more open to consistently be working hard to get better. Football is a high-performance, highly competitive job with the game constantly evolving and people getting better. To survive, learning is key. Especially with the amount of information available these days. In our training centre, one of the biggest keys is the diligence with which we review every match from many different angles. This process, which requires a lot of work, is perhaps a key to where we are at now. But to reap the benefits of a good review process, a lot of work is necessary.

As much as this is a high-performance job, one must never lose sight of why we got into it in the first place. And that is an inherent enjoyment of the game of football. Football is a game, and even at the highest level, with a lot of money at stake, this game is PLAYED. And in order to perform at PLAYING a game, one needs to enjoy it. SO for me, as obvious as it sounds, this is something I never want to lose sight of.

So to all the readers and guest contributors of 2025, I want to thank you for your input, attention and lessons shared. Here's to a happy and safe festive season and a good start to 2026!





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