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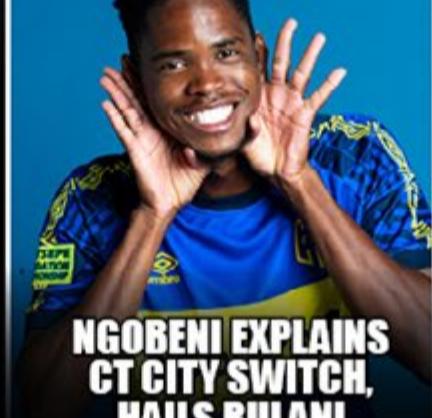
DR IRVIN KHOZA - WHO IS THE MAN BEHIND THE 'IRON DUKE' LABEL?



PSL STAR TO JOIN LORCH IN LIBYA?



BAFANA DEFENDER WANTED BY BUNDESLIGA SIDE



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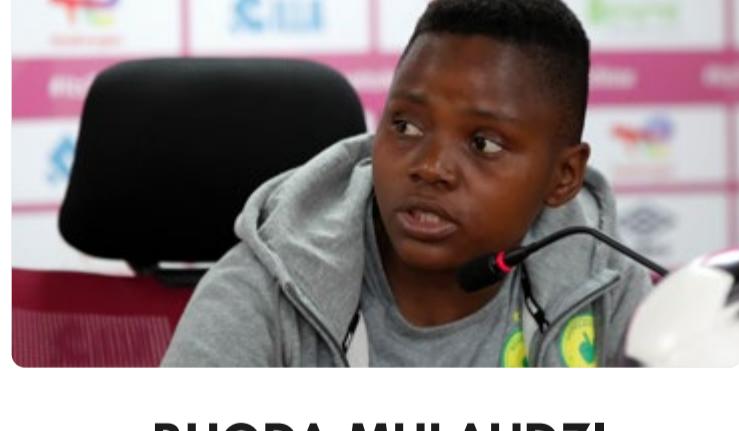
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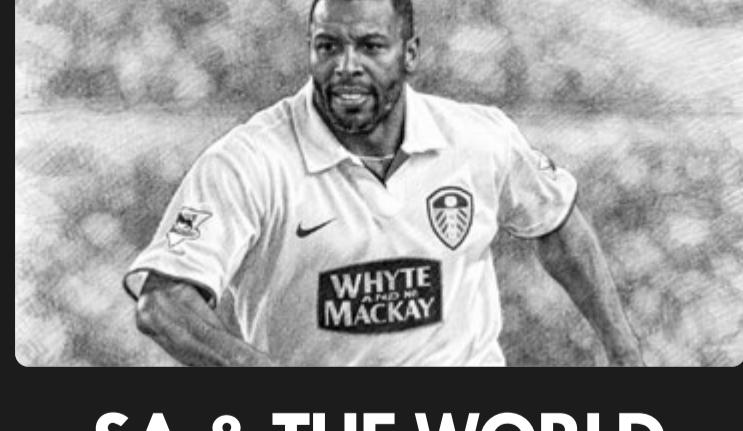
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PSL STAR COULD JOIN LORCH IN LIBYA?

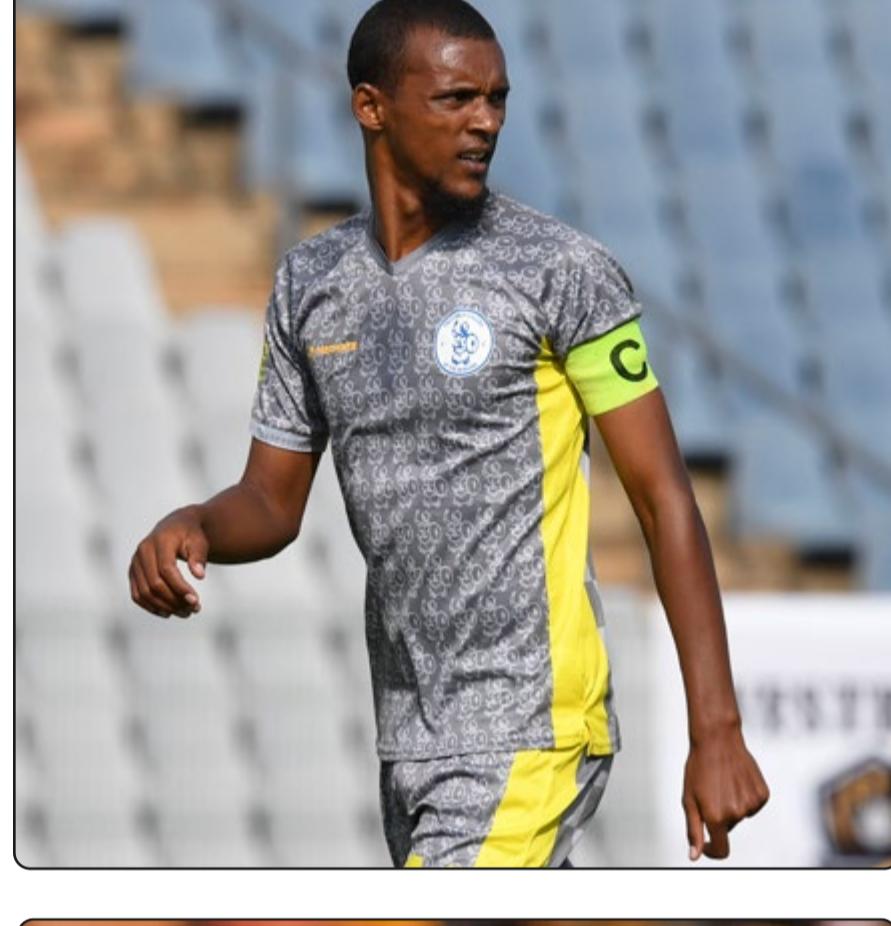
The current Betway Premiership Golden Boot leader Junior Sede Dion could be set for a lucrative switch to Libya with Al Ittihad SC. The 27-year-old forward has been in fine form with Golden Arrows, scoring seven league goals in 13 appearances this season. Those performances naturally attracted several suitors, but the ambitious Tripoli-based outfit who has secured Stephane Aziz Ki and Thembinkosi Lorch is believed to be the front runner to land the robust forward.

FORMER AMAJITA DEFENDER JOINS MFC SIDE

Former Amajita defender Riyaaaz Ismail has surfaced at the University of Pretoria after several months without a club. The 28-year-old former SuperSport United and Maritzburg United defender had spent the past two seasons in Tshwane, playing for Pretoria Callies, who were sold at the end of last season to Lerumo Lions. He will now continue his career in the capital, hoping to impress Kwanele Kopo and get his career back on track.

ARROWS TEENAGER TURNS HEADS AT CHIEFS

Promising Golden Arrows midfielder Isaac Cissé is said to have caught the attention of Kaizer Chiefs. The Ivory Coast U23 captain proved a major coup for Arrows ahead of the new season and his high reputation before his arrival has translated into impressive displays. In his first 11 games, he's netted three goals from his midfield role, in which head coach Manqoba Mngqithi stated he's comfortable as a six and an eight. While there's already been clubs in Europe who have monitored the player before his arrival in South Africa - it appears a matter of when rather than if, he joins a bigger club.



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MOLDE NOT BUDGING AS BUNDESLIGA INTEREST ARRIVES

SK Molde are not interested in entertaining talks over Bafana Bafana left-back Samukile Kabini, who has received an offer from a major European league, the German Bundesliga.

The 21-year-old has been a consistent figure for the Eliteserien side since his arrival from TS Galaxy in a reported R15-million transfer back in March 2025.

His performances have earned him high praise as well as a place in Hugo Broos' senior national team, where he's made four appearances, including being a member of the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations squad that reached the Round of 16 in Morocco.

He ranked within the top 30 players based in the league in the latest data metrics, with one goal, three assists, 36.5 passes

completed per 90 minutes, 3.6 successful tackles per 90 (3rd best in league), 2.5 clearances, 1 interception and 0.8 blocks per 90 minutes, based on the 21 games he's played.

This has attracted interest from several clubs, but sources have confirmed to iDiski Times that a concrete approach arrived from a Bundesliga club this month, which has been rebuffed.

Molde are looking to hold onto Kabini for at least another season, with the player becoming a key figure within their starting line-up.

The club recently sold Norwegian-South African midfielder Alwande Roaldsøy to historic Eredivisie side Sparta Rotterdam.

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LEADERSHIP NEEDED AT SUNDOWNS

After Mamelodi Sundowns were held to a 2-2 draw by Al-Hilal Omdurman in the CAF Champions League on Friday, supporters were not happy, showing their ire after the game in the stands and outside the stadium.

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

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'Don't Allow The Situation To Degenerate Further'

"This past weekend, reports alleged that Mamelodi Sundowns' Sporting Director Flemming Berg was attacked by a few fans.

"Water or some liquid was thrown at him after Sundowns drew against Al Hilal.

"Previously, Miguel Cardoso was under attack from fans as a result of poor form and poor performances.

"There is also the lingering rumour around former coach Pitso Mosimane and a potential return to Sundowns.

"I think Mamelodi Sundowns need their leadership now more than ever. If you want to reunite with Pitso Mosimane, do it now!

"Don't allow the situation with Cardoso and Flemming Berg to degenerate further. Every match is turning into a farce, especially when Sundowns does not win.

"As the management, it's either you are happy with Berg and Cardoso, or you are not. Be decisive.

"Make a formal statement that you are staying with them or fire them if that's what you want to do.

"Sundowns need their Chairman to be decisive!"

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[< CLICK TO GO BACK](#)

7

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'CHIEFS NEED TEMPLATE FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS'

By Matshelane Mamabolo

TWO WINS IN TWO matches since the long Africa Cup of Nations-induced (AFCON) break. Kaizer Chiefs are doing alright, yes? It's a 100% return, something any club would be proud of.

The victories, at home to Golden Arrows in the Betway Premiership and away at Zambia's

KHAN: "CHIEFS NEED TO DECIDE ON A PLAYING PHILOSOPHY AND GAME MODEL. IN RECENT TIMES, ALL THEY'VE BEEN DOING IS MAKING IMPULSIVE SIGNINGS IN THE ABSENCE OF A PLAYING PHILOSOPHY AND GAME MODEL."



ZESCO United in the CAF Confederation Cup, no doubt have the powers that be at Naturena feeling justified for a decision that has got most of the soccer fraternity baffled.

Chiefs have strangely remained inactive in a rather frenetic January transfer window that has seen their adversaries adding to their already strong squads. Defending league champions Mamelodi Sundowns have yet again bought big – the Brazilians bringing in Colombian Brayan Leon, who has already made his mark with a goal against Orbit College. Add to that the fact they've also signed Bafana Bafana defender Khulumani Ndamane and secured former Orlando Pirates winger Monnapule Saleng, and you know Sundowns aren't about to let go of their reign that easily.

Pirates, on the other hand, showed they mean business with some serious transfer window activity, which saw them adding the highly-rated Andre de Jong from Stellenbosch FC and also signing Zimbabwean international Daniel Msandami from Marumo Gallants, along with his teammate Mpho Chabatsane.

Even Sekhukhune United, themselves in the championship race mix, added to their squad – Eric Tinkler's team bringing in Ivorian winger Tidiane Diomande, the highly-rated Bradley Mojela and former Bafana Bafana midfielder Lebo Phiri.

Not so Amakhosi, the club that's celebrating its 56th anniversary, merely looking out the window but doing no shopping. A sign they are content? Word out of Taung Village is exactly that.

"Of course, we can never say no should a special player come along. When that happens, we will obviously have a look. But we are happy with the depth of our squad," Football Manager Bobby Motaung told iDiski Senior Writer Matshelane Mamabolo, explaining that injuries had been their undoing in the initial stage of the campaign.

"Those players are now coming back. Also, we made a good number of signings at the start of the season, and some of those players are yet to play. You must realise that joining Chiefs is not an easy thing, and some players will take a long time to settle so they just need to adapt and gel into

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< CLICK TO GO BACK

8

CLICK TO GO NEXT >

the squad, and we will be good. So we don't want to fiddle with the squad."

It is a pretty big squad of over 35 players, a good number of them pretty seasoned campaigners with championship and continental pedigree, while the younger ones are seriously promising talents.

When they announced their signings at the beginning of the season, it was roundly agreed that Chiefs have assembled a squad capable of taking them back to the glory days.

A squad boasting of internationals such as Miguel Inacio and Glody Lilepo was bolstered by the arrival of seasoned campaigners such as Lebogang Maboe and Thabiso Monyane both of whom had played at the highest level with top clubs Sundowns and Pirates, while Thabo Cele's arrival from Europe as well as that of Ethan Chislett signalled Chiefs' intent.

Flavio Silva may have been somewhat of an unknown, but his numbers albeit from the obscure Indonesian league suggested Amakhosi had landed a goal scoring machine.

The likes of Siphesihle Ndlovu, Etiosa Ighodaro and Khanyisa Mayo were meant to add steel to the side, and highly sought-after youngsters Luke Baartman and Asanele Velebaya added to the youthful excitement the Amakhosi faithful got from Mduduzi Shabalala and Mfundo Vilakazi.

On the face of it, Chiefs have a good squad, a group of players who individually appear to be worthy of the famous gold and black jersey.

Why then was there an expectation that they would be active during the January transfer window? After all, they went into the break in the top four of the 16-team standings with just four points behind the log leaders.

Chiefs, a few of their former employees believe, are a club in need of more than just new signings but a complete overhaul of strategy. Renowned television analyst and revered developmental coach Farouk Khan says, "Chiefs don't have a balanced squad."

The man who has previously worked at Amakhosi, running their development academy and also as an assistant coach with the senior team, argues that until Chiefs decide on who they truly are, things will continue to go pear-shaped.

"To create a balanced squad, Chiefs need to



KHAN: "CHIEFS ARE AN INSTITUTION OF SOUTH AFRICAN FOOTBALL, AND FOR THEM IT SHOULD NOT BE JUST ABOUT WINNING NOW TO PLEASE THE FANS."

decide on a playing philosophy and game model. In recent times, all they've been doing is making impulsive signings in the absence of a playing philosophy and game model. By simply signing players for the sake of it is just prolonging the crisis. For example, for some time now, they have been signing players for different positions, but there is still no synergy in their play, and this has led to the inconsistency in performance which we've been seeing."

Khan's views are contrary to the club's belief that they have a squad strong enough to help bring back the glory days, and Motaung has said that much – BobSteak telling iDiski Times in a previous interview that they are intent on holding on to their Nedbank Cup title, challenge for the league title and also strive for continental glory.

Khan agrees that Chiefs 'can definitely win those things'. He argues, though, that the successes will be nothing more than short-term appeasement.

"Chiefs are an institution of South African football, and for them it should not be just about winning now to please the fans. What Chiefs need is to create a template for long-term success, such as what Sundowns have



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< CLICK TO GO BACK

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done and what Pirates are clearly trying to emulate. That's what should be important for Chiefs. Personally, I would like to see Chiefs develop a template that will ensure that they bring the glory days in the next five years so they can be as dominant a force of the local game like they used to be. And that won't happen with just buying players."

Khan should know, given that he'd worked at Amakhosi as a development coach during the era when the academy churned out numerous players who went on to become big stars with the senior teams. The likes of Jabu Pule, Nhlanhla Kubheka, Isaac Mabotsa, Nhlanhla Mathebula, the late Moffat Mafoko and Rene Richards came from the Chiefs/RAU Academy and went on to shine in the senior team that delivered trophies for the club over a long period.

"If they focus only on the short-term, like the excitement the club had at winning the Nedbank Cup last season after a 10-year drought, that is not sustainable. In any case, that victory was not all convincing. If I were Chiefs, I would count my blessings and say 'what do we need to do to ensure that our model is able to sustain itself, both from the developmental side to the first team'. They have to ensure that players who go through to the senior team from the academy are going to be consistent performers because that consistency is what will bring the results."

Former Chiefs left-back David Kannemeyer is at a loss for words to describe what's happening at the club he served with distinction.

"What is there to say about Chiefs? There is no long-term planning there, and so until then, they will struggle to be a powerhouse again."

Legendary former goalkeeper Brian Baloyi concurs and says the lack of activity during the transfer window period is symptomatic of a much bigger challenge.

"When the season started, Chiefs signed good players although they needed to have bolstered the squad with one or two players who would help make a change," Baloyi said during a Hollywoodbets Africa Cup of Nations match viewing in Durban. "For me, the Chiefs' problem is a leadership problem not only on the coaches' side. Even in the playing personnel, there are not enough leaders in that team. And then you look at the coaches, those coaches can be good coaches somewhere else. The same way we say players are not Chiefs material, I am



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saying those two coaches are not Chiefs coach material."

Khan concurs with Baloyi: "No, they are not the right coaches for Chiefs with all due respect. Chiefs need a coach who matches the ambition of this big club, a coach who has pedigree, a good track record, someone who has had the tools to produce long-term success. And the club can't be having coaches for a year or two. They need to identify a coach who will carry this team into the next stage of the success we expect from them. Chiefs need an astute coach with a great track record."

And for Khan, that is Pitso Mosimane. That is easier said than done, though.

After all, the club has said they are standing by Cedric Kaze and Khalil Ben Youssef, at

least until the end of the season. And the

duo, Kaze in particular, has promised to

serve large helpings of humble pie to his

detractors come the end of the season with

the very same squad that most believe Chiefs

should have strengthened during the January

transfer window period that is coming to an

end in a few days.

The 1-0 wins in their opening two matches

may not have been convincing to some, but

they were wins, alright. And don't they say

there's no room for comment in the results

column?



OLD MUTUAL

DO GREAT THINGS EVERY DAY

NO REGRETS AS NGOBENI REBOOTS HIS CAREER IN CAPE TOWN

SIFISO NGOBENI is enjoying life in Cape Town. But it's not the beaches or the mountain that have put the spring in his step. It's not the city's beautiful people or its nightlife either. What has Ngobeni smiling again is far simpler — and far more important. He's playing football. Regularly. And as he tells ROB DELPORT, he's doing it with purpose, as part of Cape Town City's push to return to the Betway Premiership at the first attempt.

The 28-year-old arrived in the Mother City at the start of the 2025/26 campaign, stepping into unfamiliar territory as City began life in the Motsepe Foundation Championship after their shock relegation.

For a club used to stability and top-flight comfort, it was a jolt. For Ngobeni, it was an opportunity, and one he knew he had to take.

Since joining Jan Vreman's side, Ngobeni has featured in all 14 Championship matches in 2025, making this his most active and consistent season since his first two breakout campaigns at Bloemfontein Celtic. For a player whose career has often been interrupted by competition, loans and rotation, that regularity has been priceless.

While I didn't know Ngobeni personally when he arrived at the start of the campaign, I had admired him as a player from afar for some time. What I didn't expect was just how disarmingly likeable he would be. From our first encounter, he came across as a charming, upbeat young man, the kind who carries himself with quiet confidence and genuine warmth. Every time our paths crossed, at training or on matchdays, he greeted me with an easy smile and a familiar nod, as if we'd known each other for years. It's a small thing, perhaps, but in football, those little human touches often say as much about a player as anything they do on the pitch.

"For me, coming here, that was one of the reasons for me to come in," Ngobeni told me as we sat in the players' clubhouse at City's training facility in Hartleyvale on a hot January morning.

"To know that I must come here, and play! Because for the past two, three seasons, I haven't been playing football regularly, you know."

"So that's why I'm saying this was very important for me — to come to Cape Town City, to play and to enjoy football again."

City's season start was understandably uneven. Relegation leaves scars, and rebuilding under a new coach takes time. But by the end of 2025, the Citizens had found their rhythm, climbing the table and finishing the year in strong form. They now sit fourth, very much in the promotion conversation.



"THAT'S WHY I'M SAYING THIS WAS VERY IMPORTANT FOR ME – TO COME TO CAPE TOWN CITY, TO PLAY AND TO ENJOY FOOTBALL AGAIN."

"The first part of the season, it was very difficult," Ngobeni admitted.

"Because each and every one in the team were still getting used to being in the NFD. So everyone was still shocked. The bosses were still shocked. 'Like, how did it happen?' People were blaming each other, blaming this and this and this."

"But I think things change, you know. Like now, favour is on our side. And we're also working, each and every day we work. The friendlies that we play, the training sessions, the games, everyone is investing in going back to the PSL, and I have a good, good, good feeling that we are going to be back in the PSL."

The recent arrivals of Miguel Timm and Dženan Zajmović have only strengthened the belief around the squad. On paper, City look well-balanced, with a blend of experience and youth that not only makes them strong promotion candidates, but also suggests they could hold their own in the top flight with minimal recruitment should they bounce straight back. It's some of the young players like Gabriel Amato, Cayden Fortune, Dhakier Lee, Shakeel April, Jody Ah Shene and Emile Witbooi who have really impressed Ngobeni.

"You know, here in Cape Town there's a lot of young players," Ngobeni stressed.



"And a lot of young, good players, even in our youth structure, there's a lot. Yoh, Cape Town has a lot of talent!"

"I don't know what was happening with the teams this side or the talents?"

A talented youngster himself when he made his professional debut back in 2019, Ngobeni's journey to this point has been anything but straightforward.

When he burst onto the scene at Bloemfontein Celtic, he immediately caught the eye. As a leftie, I've always had a soft spot for left-backs, and Ngobeni's introduction to the Premiership was an elegant one. Tall, wiry and composed, he glided down the flank with a natural ease, equally comfortable defending his channel or offering width going forward.

But Bloemfontein was not the beginning. Far from it. Born in Tshwane, Ngobeni came through the youth ranks at SuperSport United.

"Everyone says I came from Wits, but that is not true," Ngobeni laughs.

"I came from SuperSport. I was with SuperSport under-17, coached by Coach Kwanele Kopo. Then I went to the under-19. I was coached by Coach Kaitano [Tembo]."

Then, at a crucial moment – his final year of school – football took a back seat. His parents insisted he prioritise his education, and Ngobeni stepped away from the game entirely.

"After that, I left football because my parents said I must just focus on school," he continued.

"Then I didn't play football for like a year so that I can finish school and focus on my matric. Then after that, then that's when I went to Wits."

After a year out, he returned, signing for Bidvest Wits. But he never broke into the team before moving on to

"SUNDOWNS – I FEEL LIKE WHAT YOU'RE SEEING ON TV IS NOT WHAT YOU ARE SEEING IN TRAINING. LIKE THE THINGS THAT YOU COULD SEE IN TRAINING (LAUGHS), THAT'S SOMETHING ELSE!"

Celtic, where his career finally took flight.

"I was really young, and I was still raw, because I was coming from high school," Ngobeni recalls.

"After high school, I just signed with Wits, a first-team contract, but things didn't work out.

"Then I just moved to Bloemfontein, just to try something. Then things just started there in Bloemfontein.

"I really enjoyed Bloemfontein. Even now, sometimes when it's off season, I go there just to bring myself back, to see where I started, and to continue going forward."

And Bloemfontein enjoyed having him! Two impressive seasons made him a fan favourite, and he was also gaining other admirers, which led to a move back to Tshwane when champions Mamelodi Sundowns came calling. It was the kind of opportunity few players turn down.

There were international honours too. Ngobeni earned his only five Bafana Bafana caps during the 2021 COSAFA Cup, lifting the trophy under Moremi Ramoreboli during the COVID-19 era.

But as many left-backs have discovered at Chloorkop, game-time is never guaranteed.

Aubrey Modiba has been the club's first-choice left-back for much of the past five years, while competition has been relentless. Divine Lunga, Terrence Mashego, Ngobeni, Asekho Tiwani and Fawaaz Basadien have all arrived. Mosa Lebusa filled in there, too, and academy prospects, most recently Thato Sibiya, are constantly pushing.

Just six months in, Ngobeni was loaned to SuperSport, the club where it had all started for him, for the remainder of the season.

Still, there were highs at the Brazilians. He played his part the following season in Sundowns' league title-winning campaign, featuring in 11 league matches, and remains proud of his experience, and says he has no regrets.

"I think for me, like at Sundowns, I won't say I regret going there or anything," Ngobeni reflected.

"But in my life, I don't have regrets. Everything that I do, I do because I wanted to do it.

"So for me, I don't have this thing of 'Hey, regrets, regrets.' No, I don't do that.

"Sundowns – I feel like what you're seeing on TV is not what you are seeing in training. Like the things that you could see in training (laughs), that's something else! Like, even now, if you can just go for one day and go to Sundowns for training, like it's 11 v 11, all the best.

"Like the training, it's something else, like some of the things that we were doing at training, on TV, you couldn't see them, like the likes of [Gaston] Sirino, the things that they're doing, Sipho [Mbule], you know, yoh, Themba [Zwane], so a lot of players, yoh.

"So for me, like I learned from Coach Rulani [Mokwena], when he was there a lot, you know, each and every day, training. Like with him, training is very important. The game – a game for him, it's nothing. But training, the way you train, the way you eat, everything for him, it's very important. So for me, like I said, I've learned a lot when I was there. So, ja, I wouldn't say I have regrets or anything. I don't have regrets."

He has special praise for Mokwena and enjoyed working with the current MC Alger head coach.

"For me, he's one of the best coaches in SA currently," Ngobeni enthused.

"You know, he's good! Coach Rulani is on another level. Like, I think, yoh, Coach Rulani eats football. He sleeps football. He doesn't even sleep! There's sometimes where you could see that he's tired, but he's there, like yoh. He loves football with all his heart.

"And I think that's why God now is rewarding him, even in Algeria, you can see, you know. So it's good that



"I REALLY ENJOYED BLOEMFONTEIN. EVEN NOW, SOMETIMES WHEN IT'S OFF SEASON, I GO THERE JUST TO BRING MYSELF BACK, TO SEE WHERE I STARTED, AND TO CONTINUE GOING FORWARD."

people from outside are appreciating him more than people from SA. But he's a good coach. Good, good, good, good coach."

Another loan followed, this time to AmaZulu, and he returned to Usuthu last season and was constantly in match-day squads. But he found himself playing second fiddle to Namibian international Riaan Hanamub, one of the league's most dependable left-backs.

"You know, being a loan player, it's very difficult," Ngobeni added.

"Because you go to a team where there are their players, and you get there, you think maybe you're gonna get a chance, but sometimes things, they don't work out."

By then, the pattern was clear. If Ngobeni wanted to rediscover his rhythm and reassert himself, he needed regular football. Joining Cape Town City was not a step down; it was a calculated decision.

"Before coming here, I had doubts, but I came here for a week. After coming here, I left again because I had offers and everything, but I went home just to make the right decision," he explains.

"You know, at the end of the day, it was about me now. It was not about anyone telling me what to do now. Now it was about me."

"So I think, also coming here, a lot of different things changed. The players, the coaches, people who I knew, from Cape Town City, were no longer here. But ja, for me making this decision, it was about Sifiso, not about anyone

telling me what to do."

South Africa has always produced quality left-backs. David Nyathi remains my personal favourite, but the list is long and varied: Gardner Seale, Jacob Lekgetho, Edward Motale, Bradley Carnell, Lucas Twala, Tsepo Masilela, Dillon Sheppard, David Kannemeyer, Thabo Matlaba, among others. What's always stood out is how different they've been from one another. No single mould. No carbon copies.

Ngobeni's own role model was Tebogo Langerman, a key figure in Sundowns' dominance of the 2010s.

"For me, I've always said this. For me, it was Langerman, Tebogo Langerman," he told me, as we discussed some of these legends.

"He was the one I was always looking up to.

"And also Jimmy Tau. Those two are the people that I always looked up to, even now."

When Ngobeni first emerged, left-back was a position of concern at national level, with Modiba carrying much of the responsibility. Ngobeni looked like a possible long-term solution.

Fast forward to 2026, and the picture has changed. Modiba continues to perform at a high level, while competition has flourished. Samukelo Kabini, Basadien and Vuyo Letlapa have been in recent Bafana squads. Young talents like Neo Rapoo, Asekho Tiwani and Sibiya are lining up for the future. Mashego and Ngobeni are mounting comebacks, and Gift Links has reinvented himself as a flying left wing-back, lighting up Denmark.

But those thoughts aren't on Ngobeni's mind now; he's fully focused on the present, and that present is playing for City and enjoying his football again.

"Coming here, it was all about playing football again, enjoying football," mused Ngobeni.

"Being happy again, you know. Because



"THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS THAT HAPPEN IN FOOTBALL, AND YOU CAN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT, AND IT'S NOT LIKE YOU WERE ILL-DISCIPLINED OR ANYTHING."

there are certain things that happen in football, and you can't do anything about it, and it's not like you were ill-disciplined or anything.

"So for me, right now, it's all about enjoying football, and helping the young guys to make the right decisions.

"Because, as I said, Cape Town has a lot of talented players right now. They just have to make the right moves."

For Sifiso Ngobeni, the path back starts with minutes, momentum and consistency. In Cape Town, he has all three. And sometimes, that's exactly what a career needs to be rebooted.



LOCAL FOOTBALL'S MOST INFLUENTIAL MAN

DR IRVIN KHOZA turns 78 today. It is a milestone most would celebrate with gusto. Many would throw a massive party with family, friends and acquaintances. Not so the Iron Duke. The Chairman, as the el-supremo of South Africa's professional football has come to be known, does not believe in parties.

"The thing with parties is that you buy people food and booze, and when they are drunk, they swear at you," he once said.

Not that he'd throw one if the revellers were to behave themselves. Far from it, for Khoza is not one to be the centre of attention. The Premier Soccer League (PSL) Chairman, whose primary role is the big boss of Orlando Pirates, is one of those servant leaders who just get on with their jobs without needing the plaudits. Hardly one to speak about himself, the man from Alexandra is arguably the most misunderstood leader of our time.

Just about everyone has an opinion about him. But few get him.

As chairman of the league, he has been vilified as a mafia, a bully who has held on to power and control of the professional game for way too long. The reality of it, as told by those who work with him and have been privileged to engage with him properly, is that he is anything but. The informed will tell you that the local game is all the better for his leadership; that we have a professional league as financially stable as we do thanks to his business savvy and incredible ability to make club owners see the same vision for the game.

Such is the public nature of positions held by Khoza, though that just about everyone will have their views on those who occupy them. But behind the Chairman, behind the Iron Duke; behind the ruthless 'Godfather', he's sometimes been made out to be a kind-hearted man, a loving father, a doting granddad and a man big on loyalty.

"He is not the Iron Duke as far as family and respect for people is concerned," says Raymond Hack. "I've been friends with him and his lawyer for more than 25 years, and I can tell you he is the softest person I know. He cares about everybody, especially his family. He's being made out to be a dictator of sorts, but the reality is that he does not talk, he listens to everybody, and once he has listened, he will give his opinion but still allow people to make up their minds."

Hack has worked with Khoza for years in football administration and says there's no truth to the generally held notion that the Iron Duke has remained Chairman for so long because people are afraid of him.

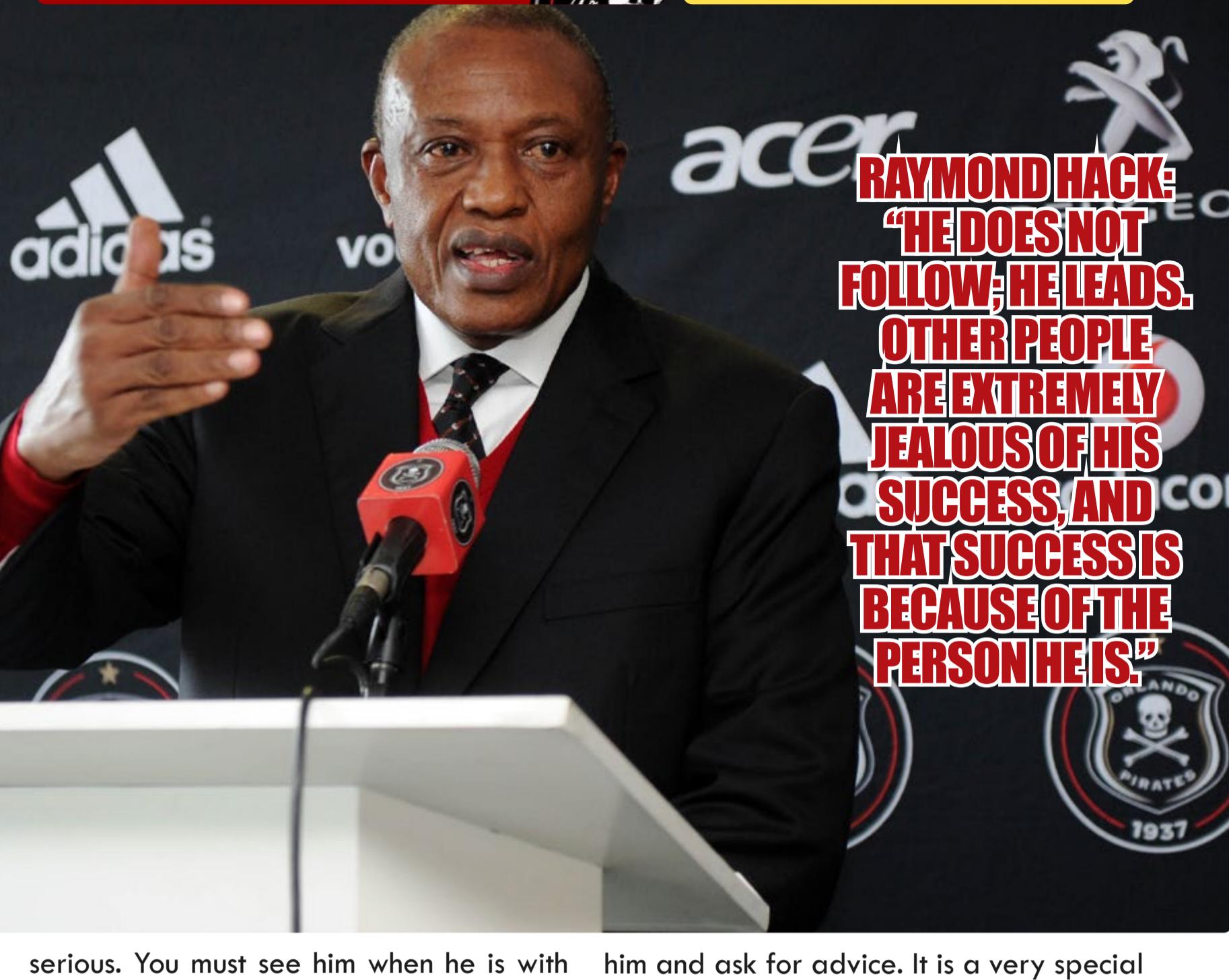
"He will never impose his will or his position. He tells you how he sees it. Sure, he might be the Iron Duke as far as football is concerned, but what he does, he does it for others and the good of the game. He does not look for glory. He does not tell people what he has done. He does not look for thank yous. I can tell you, there's no one in football he has not helped personally, but he does not tell anyone."

Hack believes the negative narrative that sometimes flies about regarding Khoza stems from envy.

"He does not follow; he leads. Other people are extremely jealous of his success, and that success is because of the person he is. What I can tell you is that if you ever wanted a friend or someone reliable in your corner, he is that someone."

Loyalty is something Khoza is big on, and his close relationship with the late Stanley 'Screamer' Tshabalala was a good example of this, the men having been tight buddies from way back when Khoza spotted Tshabalala's playing talents and recruited him to a club in Alexandra.

The Chairman's late daughter Zodwa Khoza, once told me, "You think the Chairman does not laugh or he is too



**RAYMOND HACK:
“HE DOES NOT FOLLOW; HE LEADS.
OTHER PEOPLE ARE EXTREMELY JEALOUS OF HIS SUCCESS, AND THAT SUCCESS IS BECAUSE OF THE PERSON HE IS.”**

serious. You must see him when he is with Screamer, they are like two young boys,” she chuckled.

I once witnessed first-hand the two men’s closeness when they attended a boxing event at Carnival City dressed in the same red Pringle jerseys, resembling twins and clearly enjoying each other’s company away from their football world.

Stories of former Pirates players being done wrong by Khoza abound, but all through the grapevine, with few really proven.

Yet, that Khoza values loyalty has been evidenced by the way he has gotten hurt when players he loved left Pirates.

Teko Modise’s departure to Mamelodi Sundowns, for example, did not sit well with him, and he shared this much with an older former Buccaneer who had accompanied Modise to the chairman’s office to apologise.

Benedict ‘Tso’ Vilakazi speaks fondly of the chairman and calls him ‘Timer’ – slang for dad.

“Everybody calls him Chairman, but I call him Timer because he came to my home to ask my father if he could have me play for his team, and from that moment, he treated me like his son. He really took care of me. As a kid, you make mistakes, and he knew how to deal with me – when to be strict and when to turn a blind eye. He helped me to bury my father when he died in 2007 and was there to fully support me, organise everything with the funeral. That’s why I call him father, and how he guided me throughout. As a parent, he never gave up on me, and because of that, he will always be a special person in my life.”

Unlike Modise, Vilakazi says he got the Chairman’s blessing to move to Sundowns when he returned from his spell in Denmark: “People don’t know that he gave me his blessings to join Sundowns, he said I should go and explore and learn. And even during my time at Sundowns, I was able to call

him and ask for advice. It is a very special relationship that I have with him, and may the Lord bless him with many more years. The players that are at Pirates now, I can tell them that they are lucky to have him for a chairman.”

This much has been echoed by many former Pirates players who have shared how the old man continued to care about their well-being long after they’d left the club and even when they had since retired.

A story is told of how Khoza has taken care of the family of the deceased Pirates stalwart, Samuel ‘Baboon Shepherd’ Shabangu, no doubt in reverence of the latter’s contribution to the formation of the club he now owns.

But such was his upbringing in tough Alexandra that Khoza learnt not to toot his own horn. After all, doesn’t the good book say do not let your left hand know what your right is doing?

“My mother taught me never to speak about myself,” he told me during an interview.

That silence on his good deeds has ensured the narrative of him as an Iron Duke held sway. But he is not bothered because those who know, they know.

And there are many who say that South Africa’s professional football is as highly revered as it is because of Khoza’s leadership. In any case, was it not he, along with the likes of Kaizer Motaung, who dared to break away from the amateur stranglehold of George Thabe and them to form the National Soccer League, which has evolved into the multi-billion industry it is now?

Love him or hate him. There can be no denying that the colossal figure that is Irvin - ‘The Iron Duke’, Chairman, Dr Khoza, is local football’s most influential man.

He turns 78 today. But the day is likely to go without much fanfare. Because that’s just who he is, a simple, hard-working man who likes to make an impact silently.



MULAUDZI MAKING WAVES AS COACH IN DOWNS LADIES RANKS

Former Banyana Banyana and Mamelodi Sundowns Ladies striker **RHODA MULAUDZI** has enjoyed a good 2025 on the other side of the touch-line, as a coach for the Sundowns Girls Academy side. In the same period, she also got a taste of coaching at an international level, being coach Ntombifuthi Khumalo's assistant at the national U17 side and U20 teams, while also winning her first trophy with the Sundowns Ladies' first team, the Hollywoodbets Super League title as a second assistant coach. Mulaudzi's (36) achievements with the Brazilians junior teams in the last year count to six trophies, including a CAF title as well. In this edition, she chats to iDiski Times writer **LETHABO KGANYAGO** about the journey of becoming a coach, the importance of acquiring coaching badges, the successes of the previous year and gratitude to her mentors, including Godfrey Sapula, among other matters.

Lethabo Kganyago: Coach, we appreciate your time. The last time I saw you in Harare, you were with the U17 Sundowns team, and you were also busy with your B License. How did that exam go?

Rhoda Mulaudzi: The exam went well, thank you for asking. But next month we're going for phase three, which is the last phase. Hopefully, I will also do my best to get that B License, because CAF has like from now on, in international games, if you don't have a B License, or A, you won't be allowed to sit on the bench. I think it's starting from next year, if I'm not mistaken. So I need to make sure that I acquire both my B and my A Licenses, which hopefully by next year, I'll be doing my A License.

LK: Besides this being a compliance measure with CAF, how important has it been to be in the classroom and learning?

RM: I think it's very important for me as a coach to understand the theoretical part of football, as much as experience-wise

as a player, I know, and I understand. I believe in balance. I need to balance, because some way, somehow, we also need to understand the dynamic of football, especially when you're dealing with the development side of it.

LK: Let's reflect on last year. You were there as a coach, winning cups with the development team at Sundowns, also being on the bench with the first team, and also working with the junior national teams. How do you reflect on last year?

RM: I can say from my side, last year was one of my best as a coach, if I may put it that way. As much as I know I retired last year, it was a difficult decision to make. I asked myself if the decision that I made was right, like withdrawal symptoms, where I feel like I could just go back again and play. But of course, it comes with being sure of the decision that you make as an individual, because I believe football is something that I knew from a young age. It's not something that I can say I started in my early 20s. But being appointed as the second assistant of the senior ladies' team, I believe it was one of the best highlights of my coaching career. And also being the U17 national team assistant coach, and also at some stage I was part of the U20s the COSAFA tournament that happened around July in Namibia. I can say I've achieved a lot last year, being the head coach of the Sasol team, our U20 Sasol team, winning the Gauteng Sasol League. We know Gauteng is one of the best provinces in terms of women's football. The league this side is very challenging, and also winning the Pirates Cup with the very same team, the U20s, and from there with the U17 winning the GDWL [Gauteng Development Women's League] three times in a row since the establishment of the league, it's been us. We've been winning that league and also winning the VW tournament with the same U17 team, which this year we are travelling to the UK as part of the prize for winning the VW. So it was both

the girls and the boys from the club. And also winning the CAF GIFT Cup in Zimbabwe with the U17 again, and also winning the Hollywoodbets League with the first team as a second assistant, for the first time as a coach, even though we were very disappointed with not qualifying for CAF Champions League. But I believe it's something that we have learnt from.

LK: That's six trophies when we count the Hollywoodbets trophy. That's a really good year, and what would you attribute most of that success to?

RM: Firstly, the support we have from the management of the club, including our HOD, Christa Kgampe-Jane, has been phenomenal. And I believe most people, they don't know I have been with the development team since 2022, if not 2021. Some people think I just arrived now last year, I've been with the junior teams since the establishment of the Academy, myself and coach Andy [Andisiwe Mgcoyi]. We were honoured, given that opportunity to coach the team. At that time, it was the U15s, not the U20s. Then we grew with those kids, coaching them. Coach Andy was coaching the U15s I was coaching the U13s. So the very same U13 team from 2020 to winning the GDL until last year, is the very same players. We haven't changed anything, same as the U20, it's still the same players that we won the VW or the 2022 tournament, where in 2023 we went to Portugal with the very same team. So it's the players. They are players that I know from an early age; it's not a new team.

LK: When you work with the kids, you do so well. When you have to go to the first team and the national teams, what's different?

RM: The pressure and the experience are not the same. With the national team, also it has its own challenges, but under the guidance of Coach [Ntombifuthi] Khumalo, we tried to assemble the best players we can to go and represent the country. I remember our first game, and also me personally, my first game being an assistant coach for the national team U17 under the guidance of coach Khumalo, we played against Gabon. I remember the first leg, I think we won 12-0 if I'm not mistaken. In the first leg, I think on aggregate, we won 20-something zero. So it was a good record for us, even though in the second round, we didn't make it through. We lost to Nigeria, 3-1 at home, and then away, we lost I think, 2-1. From that, I believe I've grown as a coach, the experience that I got, and also having people who are guiding me. Coming to the club level, combining the experience from the national team, the experience of being an international player, just combining the two, and also the course itself, it's coming in handy in terms of understanding some of the things that I didn't understand. Because at first I thought I know it all, but guess what, in football you learn every day, you just have to give it some time and learn more. Also, being under the guidance of Coach Godfrey Sapula helps because he understands development more. He coached the



“BEING APPOINTED AS THE SECOND ASSISTANT OF THE SENIOR LADIES’ TEAM, I BELIEVE IT WAS ONE OF THE BEST HIGHLIGHTS OF MY COACHING CAREER.”

Sundowns boys' development, I think, for more than 10 years. So being under his guidance also, it makes it easier to understand the development part of it. He is preparing us, myself included, to be one of the best coaches. So also personally, from being a player at a club like Sundowns, where it's all about winning, that mentality of winning, I believe, helps the kids to understand that, as much as it's development, they also need to win.

LK: I did an interview with him recently, and he had great things to say about you and your progress as a coach. I want to ask about the role you played in also helping some of the girls in the U17 side to get promoted to the first team, and when they got there, they didn't disappoint.

RM: Ja, they didn't disappoint, it's three of them. I was focusing more on the U17s and along the way, I was helping with the U20s and it wasn't a new team; it's the players that I coached since 2021. It was during the time where I was injured, and remember that time I was a player-coach. So most of the time I was there, travelling with the team, coaching them, so I know them better. It's players that I know, and I understand, and we understand each other better. Seeing them being promoted to the first team for me, it was an achievement – one of the players, I even gave her my previous jersey number.

LK: Coach Godfrey also had a lot to

say about the talent that Munashe Mugwara is. Speaking from a South African perspective, Kat [Katlego Malebana] who last year even got called to one of the senior team's camps, would you say these two are the ones to look out for in the future?

RM: Yeah, of course, not only the two of them anyway. Jabu [Jabulile Mbatha], also, it's just that she's still finding her feet. In 2024, when we won the Engen tournament with the U20, she was the Player of the Tournament. Most national team coaches were impressed with her performance. So we must also understand that players are not the same, especially development players. They take their own time. They don't just shine at the same time, if I may put it that way. So Jabu she's one for the future, which I believe soon, when she gets enough game-time and showcase her talent, I believe we'll soon see her in the national team, same as Kat also. Last year, she was called up for the Banyana camp and also being the captain of the U17 national team, being part of the U20 World Cup qualifiers. And also Munashe, she's also one for the future. I believe there's a lot of talent in the team, especially on the Academy side.

LK: Missing out on the Champions League this season with the first team, and now with the Club World Cup also happening this year, how much did you want to be there as a coach, and does it fuel you to say you need to push the team harder this year to qualify and go to the final?

RM: Yeah, I believe the team, the coaches, the technical staff, the players, I believe this year they are up for it. They are ready for the challenge. That's one of the things that we need to do as a club to qualify for CAF. After last year not qualifying, it was so heartbreaking when you see players crying, every time at training, they were always talking about it. So you can see that this year I don't see any team maybe stopping us from qualifying. So it's something that comes within the players and the technical team also. I think that's the goal that we are working towards to make sure that this year we will qualify for CAF.

LK: There's also the U17 Morocco World Cup as well this year. How big would it be for SA to try and qualify, because if I remember well, the last time our U17s qualified for the World Cup was around 2017/18?

RM: We thank CAF for intervening in terms of trying to have those continental tournaments within our national teams and clubs. So it's also helping players to have the experience, to know how it feels playing internationally. Because I remember telling my players that you see now the level is different. So I believe this year, it's the right year. We just need to work hard as a country, get those players who will put us on the map and make sure that we qualify for both U20 and U17. I believe if we can get that support, we can make sure that we qualify, because it has been years of us not qualifying for the U17 World Cup. It also boosts the senior national



“OUR MAIN GOAL AS A CLUB FOR THE ACADEMY IS TO HAVE ENOUGH OR AS MANY PLAYERS AS WE CAN HAVE IN THE JUNIOR NATIONAL TEAMS, AND ALSO BANYANA.”

team. If the juniors are qualifying for these international tournaments, it also boosts Banyana, so it becomes easier knowing that we still have a pool of players for the next coming generation for Banyana. So I think it's something that we need to put in our mind and say, when we qualify, we're not only doing it for the players who would have qualified.

LK: That's something that Coach Godfrey also touched on, that when Sundowns doesn't do well, the national team also suffers, seeing that it's that club that always has a lot of representation in the squad. The WAFCON is also coming up this year, which makes it a big year for women's football.

RM: It is big because if you look, it's the U17, they need to qualify for the World Cup, U20s also, and then we have Banyana, who we believe they also need to be in the top four for them to qualify for the World Cup. We are also hoping for them to win it [WAFCON] because them winning it, it's good for women's football in South Africa, just to get maybe sponsors coming on board. So I think this year, it's going to be a tough year for women's football in Africa, if I put it that way.

LK: Coach, thank you so much.



THE IDISKI TOP 10... **RIGHT WINGERS**

This week, iDiski Times turns its focus to one of the most exciting roles on a football pitch, ranking the top 10 right-sided attacking wingers currently plying their trade in the Betway Premiership, based on performances across the 2025/26 season.

It is a fiercely competitive position and one steeped in local history. South African football has long produced wide men blessed with pace, flair and daring. Players unafraid to hug the touchline, take on defenders, and tilt games in a moment. From old-school chalk-on-the-boots wingers to modern inverted attackers cutting inside to hurt opponents, the right flank has always been a stage for expression.

This list is not simply about goals and assists, though those naturally matter. Instead, the rankings are built on overall performance, drawing on data and ratings from several leading football analytics platforms. Work rate, chance creation, ball progression, duels, decision-making and consistency all play their part in shaping the final order.

To ensure a fair comparison, players had to meet a minimum threshold to qualify. Each winger on the list has featured in more than 60% of their club's league fixtures this season and has spent the majority of their minutes operating in the right-sided attacking role.

(*statistics as of 23 Jan 2025)

The Top Ten:

10 - Simon Ramabu
(Polokwane City)
6.75 average rating

Ramabu has been knocking on the door for a while now, and another solid campaign sees him sneak into the top 10. The Polokwane City winger has found the net twice in his 14 appearances, but his influence hasn't quite been as steady as it was earlier in the calendar year. Part of that may be down to the reshaping of Rise and Shine's attack. Polokwane have had to adjust after losing Oswin Appolis, and Ramabu perhaps felt the absence of the Bafana Bafana midfielder he combined so fluently with. Even so, his direct running and willingness to take responsibility continue to make him a key outlet on the flank.

9 - Devin Titus
(Stellenbosch)
6.76 average rating

By his own admission, this hasn't been Titus' most productive season, and Stellenbosch's uneven first half hasn't helped. Goals have eluded him so far in 15 league appearances, but effort has not. Few players in the league work harder without the ball. Titus has chipped in with three assists and remains one of Stellies' most



reliable performers. Despite more than 20 shots, none were clear-cut chances, underlining how much of his contribution comes from graft, pressing and intelligent movement. Winning 50% of his duels, the 25-year-old continues to set the tone, even when the end product doesn't follow.

8 - Glody Lilepo
(Kaizer Chiefs)
6.78 average rating

Lilepo's numbers don't quite match the eye test this season. With just one goal in 12 appearances, his output has dipped compared to last year, but it's certainly not for a lack of intent. The Congolese winger has unleashed a remarkable 50 shots at goal, averaging over four attempts per game, with only four classified as big misses.

Strong in the air and competitive on the ground, winning 76% of his aerial duels and 53% of his ground battles, Lilepo remains a constant threat — one whose persistence suggests more rewards may still come.

7 - Monnapule Saleng
(Orbit College*)
6.84 average rating

Despite claims in some quarters that Saleng was having a poor season, the numbers tell a different story, especially when context is applied. Playing in a struggling Orbit College side, Saleng still managed two goals, three assists and four big chances created in 11 appearances. His role was less rigid, often requiring him to drop deep and cover ground, which showcased a strong work ethic alongside his natural flair. Those performances hint at why Mamelodi Sundowns saw enough to invest, and once fully fit, he could yet remind many of his true quality.

6 - Tebogo Potsane
(Siwelele FC)
6.88 average rating

Potsane's short stint with Siwelele was one of the brighter stories of their campaign. With two goals and two assists in just 10 appearances, the 32-year-old rolled back the years with several match-defining displays. Clinical and efficient, he converted two of just five chances, while also contributing defensively as a reliable first presser. It may not have worked out at Kaizer Chiefs, but Potsane proved there is still plenty of craft and intelligence in his game.

5 - Vusimuzi Mncube
(Sekhukhune United)
6.89 average rating

The Sekhukhune United veteran isn't necessarily a natural winger, but he's played on the right when needed and has been a steady creative presence, contributing three goals and two assists in 14 matches. At times brilliant, at times quieter, Mncube has mirrored Babina Noko's season: flashes of quality mixed with inconsistency. When he's on song, he knits play beautifully and brings others into the game. If Sekhukhune find greater rhythm in the second half, Mncube will almost

certainly be central to it.

4 - Athini Maqokola
(AmaZulu)
6.91 average rating

Limited minutes haven't stopped Maqokola from making an impact. In just nine appearances, the 23-year-old has scored three times and shown a knack for rising in big moments. His brace against Siwelele and a goal, plus a won penalty against Chippa United, highlighted his potential. Consistency and fitness are the next hurdles, but the raw tools are clearly there.

3 - Oswin Appollis
(Orlando Pirates)
6.92 average rating

Appollis' versatility sees him potentially appear on several positional lists, but much of his league work has come from the right. In 12 Betway Premiership outings, he's delivered two goals and three assists, while also shining in cup competitions. Integral to Pirates' attacking play, he does, however, leave some numbers on the table: three big misses from 18 attempts. Even so, his influence, intelligence and work rate have made him one of the Buccaneers' most dependable performers this season, and it feels like he is still only getting used to being at the club.



2 - Puso Dithejane
(TS Galaxy*)
7.15 average rating

Dithejane's first half of the campaign was so electric that it quickly became impossible to ignore. His performances didn't just turn heads locally; they earned him a move to Chicago Fire and firmly placed his name into national conversation. The former School of Excellence and Kaizer Chiefs youth product lit up the league with fearless, inventive football, playing with a freedom that made him one of the most talked-about young players in the country. At just 21, Dithejane was central to everything his side did going forward. In 12 appearances, he delivered four goals and four assists, numbers that only tell part of the story. Equally impressive was his versatility: equally comfortable hugging the right touchline, drifting in from the left, or popping up between the lines to hurt opponents through the middle. He created seven big chances and, on another day, could easily have added more goals to his tally, having registered five big misses.

1 - Siyanda Ndlovu
(Golden Arrows)
7.23 average rating

What a season it has been so far for the 22-year-old formerly known as Siyanda Mthanti. Week after week, he has emerged as one of the Betway Premiership's most industrious and eye-catching performers, a player whose influence goes far beyond the raw numbers. Even so, the statistics tell a healthy story: three goals, four assists in 15 appearances, and a penalty won; all delivered from a role that demands both invention and discipline. Unfortunately for him, Golden Arrows have struggled to find consistency as a collective, and that has inevitably capped his output. It is hard not to wonder just how impressive his numbers might look in a side firing on all cylinders, with runners consistently finishing off the chances he creates. What stands out most is his blend of work rate and flair. At 22, this feels very much like a breakout campaign, and possibly a farewell tour. Whether it is a move north to Gauteng or an opportunity abroad, the sense is growing that his days in KwaZulu-Natal may be numbered. If this season is a statement, it is a loud one.

What the Top 10 tells us:

There has been a noticeable lack of uniformity in this role when assessing its influence across the league. Some of that inconsistency is situational rather than individual, shaped by tactical setups, fluctuating form, and, in many cases, the growing strength and athleticism of opposition

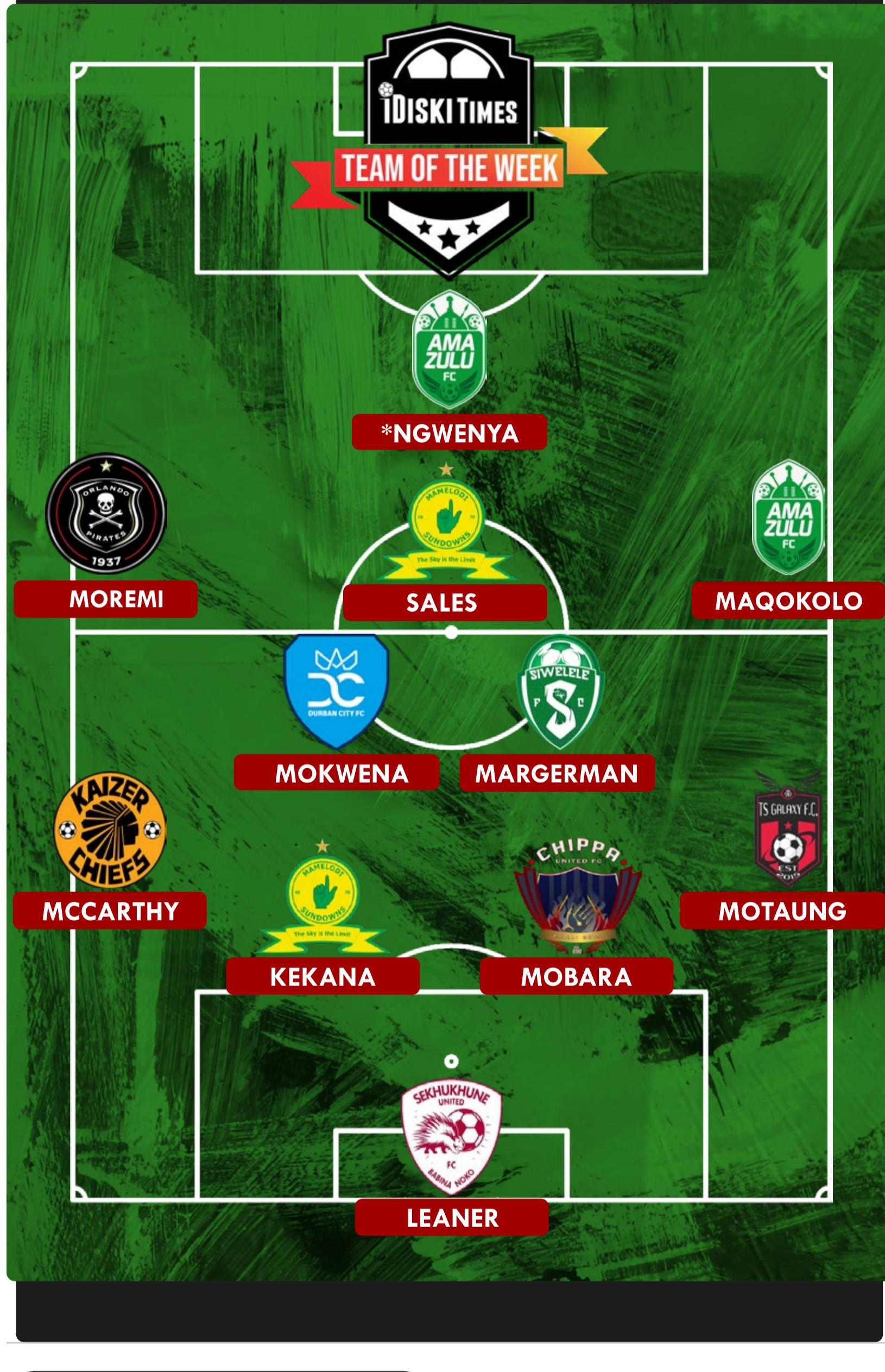
defences, particularly at left-back, where battles have often been fierce and unforgiving.

Yet, taken as a whole, the position remains a genuine source of goals and game-changing moments. Whether deployed as classic touchline-hugging wingers, inverted forwards cutting inside, roaming wide playmakers, or hybrid attackers drifting between lines, players in this role continue to find ways to hurt opponents and tilt matches.

Perhaps most telling is how fluid the modern interpretation of the position has become. South African clubs are clearly less rigid than before, embracing movement and adaptability over fixed roles. Almost every player on this list has spent time switching flanks, drifting centrally, or popping up in unexpected areas, blurring traditional positional boundaries and reflecting a broader evolution in the local game, one that values versatility, intelligence and freedom as much as chalk-on-the-boots width.



IDISKI'S PREMIERSHIP TEAM OF THE WEEK (19-25 JAN 2026)

ACE OF THE WEEK:
LYLE FOSTER

This week's iDiski Times Ace of the Week award goes to Burnley and Bafana Bafana striker Lyle Foster, who netted his third English Premier League goal of the season in Saturday's clash against Tottenham Hotspur. With the score locked at 1–1, Foster was introduced just over 20 minutes from time and made an immediate impact, injecting energy and intent into Burnley's attack. Ten minutes later, his persistence paid off. His first effort was well saved by the goalkeeper, but the South African reacted quickest, showing sharp instincts to bury the rebound and put Burnley ahead. It proved to be a decisive contribution, even if the result didn't fully reflect it, with Spurs snatching a late equaliser just before full-time to ensure the points were shared.



The World & South Africa

Over the coming weeks, we'll be rolling out a series that dives deep into South African footballers and their often complicated relationship with playing abroad. It's a story that stretches back more than 126 years: rich, layered and shaped by far more than just football...

This is a history marked by politics, isolation, rebellion, opportunity, heartbreak and adventure. A history where careers were redirected by world events, borders, passports and perceptions as much as by talent. Where some doors opened

unexpectedly, others slammed shut, and a few were never meant to open at all.

There are stories many fans have never heard, and others that time, discomfort or convenience have quietly pushed aside. But they are football stories nonetheless, human stories, and they matter. Together, they help explain the often paradoxical relationship South African football has long shared with the outside world, and why going abroad has never been a simple journey from A to B, but a winding road shaped by who we were, who we became, and how the world chose to see us.

Michael Owen: We Want More SA Players in EPL

By Sinethemba Sithole

MICHAEL OWEN, a veteran of the world's most elite dressing rooms, including those at Anfield of Liverpool, the Bernabéu of Real Madrid, and Old Trafford of Manchester United, believes there is untapped South African talent capable of playing in the Premier League.

Yet the current reality tells a different story. Aside from Lyle Foster, who is currently fighting the drop with Burnley, South African representation in the world's most-watched league has dwindled to a trickle. For a nation that once exported household names to the UK, the fact that only a handful of players can now be recalled by the average fan highlights a worrying trend.

Lucas Radebe, Steven Pienaar, Benni McCarthy, Aaron Mokoena, Quinton Fortune and Shaun Bartlett remain the most notable South African names in the EPL, while others, such as Mbulelo Mabizela, Bongani Khumalo, Kagisho Dikgacoi, Tokelo Rantie and Percy Tau, had short stints.

South Africa has struggled to export Premier League talent in recent years, with Owen saying he hasn't seen enough of the country's pathways, facilities or opportunities to judge.

"Well, it's very hard for me to say exactly, obviously I've not experienced enough in this country to see the pathway, to see the structure, to see the facilities, the opportunities," said Owen.

"There may be some fantastic players that just don't get seen, I don't know."

Owen said the African continent has consistently supplied the Premier League with some of its best players across every generation. He added that African footballers are admired by both the league and its supporters for the major role they have played in shaping the EPL's global success.

"What we do know is Africa, in general, does provide very good players. We've seen so many of them in England over the years, the Drogba, the Essiens, the Toures, the Mo Salahs, great players come from Africa. And of course, in every country there is improvement, whether that is facilities, whether that is opportunity, or better coaching, or whatever it might be, but one thing is for sure, the Premier League loves having African players.

"They've been a huge part of the success story of the Premier League, and we want more, that's the whole beauty of Premier League football, it's about the world coming together and the best players in the world, and then we have international football where now it's us against you, and that's the beauty of it, we're doing rugby and cricket and football, that's the beauty of international football and domestic football."

The 46-year-old pointed to the likes of Quinton Fortune as proof of the quality South Africa has produced for the EPL, adding that more such players should be developed and exported, but stressed that development must begin early – around the ages of six to eight – to prepare talent for the highest level.

"So, hopefully in time you'll produce more, you've mentioned a couple, Quinton Fortune, there's other players, you've got one at the moment at Burnley, Lyle [Foster] plays at Burnley, but we want more of course, and I'm sure you want more, and that starts young, you can't just get a 16-year-old and then coach them, to be a footballer you need to start at 6, 7, 8, learning the basics, understanding, developing yourself, so it really is a long process."

Establishing a lasting career in European football is notoriously difficult for any foreign footballer. For South African players, the hurdle is often more psychological and cultural than physical. Beyond the high-intensity demands of the Premier League and other elite European divisions, players face a gruelling adjustment to life away from the pitch. The transition is frequently undermined by harsh weather, unfamiliar cuisine, and a profound sense of isolation. Being thousands of miles away from family support systems creates a void that many find impossible to fill.

Historically, South Africa has seen many of its brightest talents return home prematurely.

While players like Keagan Dolly, Jabu Mahlangu, Mbulelo Mabizela, Kermit Erasmus, and Bongani Zungu were widely expected to remain in Europe for a decade or more, they eventually sought the familiarity of home.

As Owen noted, the "European dream" requires a level of personal sacrifice that isn't always visible from the outside. It isn't just a test of talent; it is a test of endurance against the loneliness and cultural friction that comes with living abroad.



"Well, it can take anything, some people just adapt easily, some people embrace it, some people don't like the culture or the food or the weather or whatever it might be, some people love it, some people just naturally can go from one country to the next," he answered when asked by iDiski Times.

"I think football in general, since I started, if I played in a different country when I was 15, 16, it felt like a different sport, it felt so different, people were playing with sweeper systems and everybody seemed to play really different, but by the time I ended my career, it was such a multicultural, multinational game, that the game is quite similar wherever you play now, everybody is playing similar systems, similar formations.

"So, in theory, you should be able to go from one country to the next, but there's more to it than just playing. I went to Real Madrid as a very young boy really, I had a one-year-old child, we didn't have a house, it was a last-minute decision, 'Oh my word, Real Madrid have come in, shall I go, shall I not, I'm going to have to, I might regret this'. So, I turned up, I had no phone, no car, no house, and that time of settling in, by the time one month, two months, and everything settled, your wife is unhappy, your child wants to go home, and that can be a problem as well.

"So, there's so many things, so many things, and it's not just football, it's any walk of life, you guys [journalists] could move over to Europe and really flourish. And sometimes you think, 'You know what, I'm better at home, I've got more contacts,' it can be

anything, very difficult to say one thing, but it's possible, of course it's possible, because lots of people have done it."

While in South Africa this past week, Michael Owen was officially unveiled as the new brand ambassador for Hollywoodbets. The legendary forward visited Durban's Hollywoodbets Kings Park – the very pitch where he faced Bafana Bafana in a 2003 international friendly, which the Three Lions won 2-1. During his visit, Owen praised the significant growth in the country's sports infrastructure over the last twenty years. He noted that the legacy of hosting the 2010 FIFA World Cup played a pivotal role in elevating South Africa's facilities to the world-class standard seen today.

"It was really special, yeah, coming over here at the time, we met Nelson Mandela prior to the game, it was just a special time," Owen recalled.

"Obviously, you know, your infrastructure, your stadiums, hosting the World Cup obviously helped, and yeah, coming back, I mean, it's such a long way.

"But we have so many similarities, the language obviously helps, your weather helps, but the time difference, everything about it, I mean, I've already been on the phone to my wife saying, 'Come on, we're going on holiday down to South Africa'. I've been to Johannesburg a few times, I've been to Durban a couple of times, but I've never been to Cape Town, yeah, to the place everybody tells me, which is Cape Town as well, so I'd like to explore a lot more."



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