



'SALENG CAN RECLAIM BAFANA SPOT FOR WORLD CUP AT DOWNS'



JANUARY TRANSFER WRAP - WHO SIGNED MOST, WHO DIDN'T



SEVERAL CLUBS
AFTER FOSTER,
BIG-MONEY MOVE
LOOMING?



CHIEFS STAR IN
FINAL SIX MONTHS
OF HIS CONTRACT



BERG 'ATTACK' SHOWS
CLUBS & PSL NEED TO
DO MORE TO STOP FAN
VIOLENCE



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MONNAPULE SALENG
FEATURE



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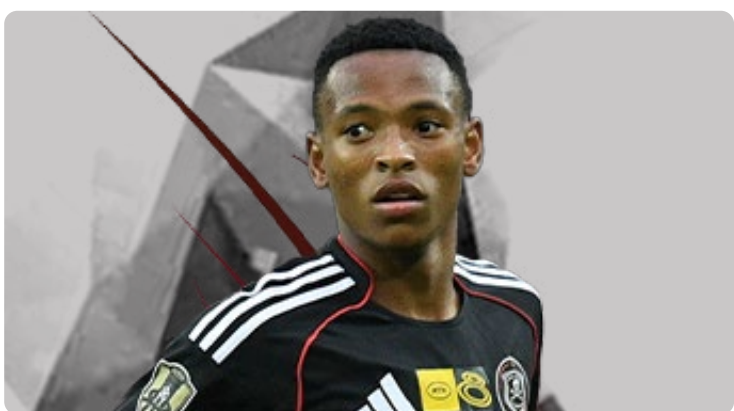
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KWINIKA INTO FINAL SIX MONTHS

Kaizer Chiefs vice-captain Zitha Kwinika is in the final six months of his contract with no agreement yet about his future. Chiefs recently exercised their option on goalkeeper Brandon Petersen, who was named club captain after the exit of Nasreddine Nabi. And Kwinika, who has been one of their standout players alongside Petersen in a defensively solid side, could also be rewarded for his impressive form. It's been a dramatic turnaround in fortunes for the player who seemed likely to be released heading towards the end of last season, but injury to Rushwin Dortley - who remains on the sidelines - opened the door for his revival at Amakhosi.



MOKWANA INJURY: A SETBACK?

Bafana Bafana winger Elias Mkwana has suffered a calf injury while on duty for Saudi Pro League side Al Hazem, an issue that could sideline him for more than a month.

The setback comes at an unfortunate time for the 26-year-old, following a disappointing AFCON campaign in Morocco, and may derail his hopes of using the March international window to impress head coach Hugo Broos as places in the FIFA World Cup squad remain up for grabs. Currently on loan from ES Tunis, Mkwana has earned 12 caps and scored two goals for Bafana Bafana.



REST IN PEACE JEANDRE GAFFOOR

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 Mangoshe 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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FOSTER SITUATION BEING MONITORED AT BURNLEY

Bafana Bafana striker Lyle Foster could once again be in demand at the end of the season if Burnley are relegated for a second time in three seasons.

Foster remained with the Clarets after their disappointing 2023/24 campaign, after a move to Ipswich Town failed upon their promotion during the same season.

A loan with an obligation to buy for around £25 million was mooted at the time, but Burnley will be holding out for somewhere closer to £40 million, with the club viewing him as a player with potential to become a consistent goal scorer in the Premier League.



It appeared a blessing in disguise as the two sides traded places in the top-flight this current season, where Foster has scored eight goals with four assists in 42 games overall.

The mid-season Africa Cup of Nations with Bafana Bafana saw him miss four league outings and lose his place in the starting XI.

However, sources have confirmed several clubs have been impressed with his technical and tactical level and view him as a player who could thrive in a different environment in a side who create more goal-scoring opportunities.

There’s notably been a clear lack of out-and-out strikers in recent times in England

and should Burnley suffer what appears to be another looming drop the Championship – Foster is likely to be one of the first players who secures a new move as he looks to kick start his career that’s been stop-start since arriving in Europe seven years ago, when he left Orlando Pirates for AS Monaco as a teenager.

Since then, he’s played in Belgium with Cercle Brugge on loan, Portugal with Vitória Guimarães, before his return to Belgium with KVC Westerlo sparked a run of form that earned him the move to England.

Foster will undoubtedly lead the line for the senior South Africa national team at the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup – with 10 goals and three assists in 20 starts since his debut in 2020.

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JUNIOR & TSO ON OLISA NDAH’S PIRATES EXIT

Last week, the January transfer window closed, and while there were a few late changes at Betway Premiership clubs, many were caught off guard when Orlando Pirates announced that they had mutually parted ways with Nigerian defender Olisa Ndah.

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.

‘They Are Making A Mistake By Letting Ndah Go’

Junior Khanye: “I think Orlando Pirates are making a big mistake.

“I thought Olisa Ndah would replace Mbekezeli Mbokazi, but now he is leaving.

How could you lose two great players in a single window?

“I think this decision could be the reason why Pirates lose the league to Mamelodi Sundowns.

“There are too many inexperienced defenders left at Pirates, and they are making a mistake by letting Ndah go.”

Tso Vilakazi: “I’m not surprised that Ndah is leaving.

“The player has been injured for a long time. I think he wanted to leave Pirates before, and maybe the frustration of not getting the move affected him.

“I think he might be going overseas. You never know. I also would not be surprised to see him join Mamelodi Sundowns or Kaizer Chiefs.

“If he joins Chiefs, he might have to change his style of play because he is a ball-playing defender.”

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ANOTHER PIRATE HEADS FOR THE SUN

By Matshelane Mamabolo

MONNAPULE SALENG has made the right move by joining Mamelodi Sundowns, and the former Orlando Pirates star could well have put himself in line for a return to the national team in time for the upcoming FIFA World Cup.

This is the view of a former player who



MOKOENA: “IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE WHERE THEY PLAY HIM. THE ADVANTAGE SALENG HAS IS THAT HE CAN ALSO PLAY AS A STRIKER AND A FALSE NINE, AND THAT COULD INFLUENCE THE WAY THEY USE HIM.”

has walked the same path that Saleng has embarked on.

Lebogang ‘Cheeseboy’ Mokoena is one of no less than nine players who have traded the famous black and white kit of the Buccaneers for the yellow and royal blue of the Brazilians. A winger just like Saleng, whose January transfer from Pirates to Sundowns was arguably the biggest sale of the window, Mokoena told iDiski magazine’s senior writer Matshelane Mamabolo that the move can only be good for the player.

“I think from an individual observation, it is good. Saleng has always said he wanted to play at a higher level with high quality teammates and he’s going to have that at Sundowns that has so many internationals,” Mokoena said. “I see this as an opportunity for him to even make it back to the national team in time for the World Cup [the 2026 tournament set for north and central America starting in June].”

Saleng had left Pirates in somewhat of a huff to go on loan to his former club, Orbit College, following a fall-out with management that saw him iced out of the team for a while towards the end of the previous campaign. He took a while to establish his star power at the rookies but was already showing glimpses of his best when Pirates reported his move to Sundowns.

Granted, Saleng’s unhappiness at Pirates was common knowledge, yet Mokoena could not help but see some similarities in the move to his own.

“It can only be normal that he was affected by his situation at Pirates, and it was evident in that he took some time to settle at Orbit. He lacked game-time and took a bit of time to let go of Pirates, so he was still adjusting to a new environment. But to me, he looked like he was slowly getting back to his true self before he got injured. And then boom, the move to Sundowns was announced. Hopefully, he was aware of it, unlike me,” the player who has represented South Africa at all levels (U-17, U-20, U-23 and senior) chuckles.

Mokoena says he had no idea he was going to join Sundowns when the move happened in the 2003/04 season.

“I grew up at Pirates, having got there as a 10-year-old and having to leave a club that took me in so young was very difficult. You must remember I was





a fan favourite, and I could tell that to those fans that loved me and supported me, my move from Pirates was like a stab in the back for them. But the reality is that I did not know I was being offered to Sundowns. It happened so quickly that it was like one day I was a Pirates player, and when I next opened my eyes, I was there at Chloorkop. I understood why the Pirates fans felt I had let them down. “

But as a professional, Mokoena knew he had to give his all to his new employers and to ensure the progress of his personal career and the realisation of his own ambitions.

“For me, it was all about thinking about my new bosses and for myself. The preparations for the [FIFA] Confederations Cup were already underway, and I’d not been playing regularly at Pirates. I had to change my mindset and knuckle down to ensure I got game-time at Sundowns. I was fortunate in that while I’d gone to a new club, most of the guys at Sundowns were my teammates at the national team [Bafana Bafana] – the likes of Vuyo [Mere], Lerato [Chabangu] and even [Sibusiso] Zuma. So I felt like I am at a familiar place with guys I’d played with, and it made my job of settling in and acclimatising easier.”

How does he foresee Saleng settling in at Sundowns once he’s over his injury?

“I believe he can make it,” Mokoena responds. “It will, of course, depend on the role that coach [Miguel] Cardoso will give him. Sundowns do not use wingers but rather play with full-backs, and that forces the wingers to come inside. It will be interesting to see where they play him. The advantage Saleng has is that he can also play as a striker and a false nine, and that could influence the way they use him.”

Mokoena worries a bit though, given that [Thapelo] ‘Maseko struggled a bit there’.

“We will see where they fit him in because there is a lot of quality at Sundowns, and you wonder which player will be sacrificed for Saleng. I’ve heard some people saying he might be a replacement for [Lucas] Ribeiro or he can compete with [Tashreeq] Matthews, but these are three completely different players. Also, Matthews has been getting his scoring touch and has raised his hand as a reliable player for coach Cardoso. Saleng has got his work cut out, but he is a quality player who has a lot to give, and once he is physically fit and his mind is right, he has the potential to make an even bigger name for himself with Sundowns.”

That much coach Cardoso seems to agree with, based on his comments about the player: “Saleng is an international player for South Africa, a qualified player. I don’t need to speak about his quality, you know the quality that he has. What is important to know is we wanted to sign a winger and a



MOKOENA: “I DID NOT KNOW I WAS BEING OFFERED TO SUNDOWNS. IT HAPPENED SO QUICKLY THAT IT WAS LIKE ONE DAY I WAS A PIRATES PLAYER, AND WHEN I NEXT OPENED MY EYES, I WAS THERE AT CHLOORKOP.”

quick, aggressive player, who can bring something different from what we had in our squad. It’s important that the coach has different tools to manage different opponents and characteristics of games. So the decision to bring Saleng was a sporting decision from the club that obviously I had a say in.”

A huge vote of confidence that can only spur the player on to wanting to get physically fit so he can make his contribution. Not that the club is rushing him, far from it.

“We have expectations for the future, but we also have patience. Unfortunately, he’s injured and not ready to give his services to the club. It will take some time. We have to have patience to bring him to his best level. He needs to recover from the injury, but he will recover naturally. Signing him in this condition is also a word of trust on the boy, our medical department and the work we’re going to do together.”

Saleng joins an illustrious list of top players who have moved from Pirates to Sundowns, and below we look at them and how they fared upon making the switch.

GODFREY SAPULA

‘The Godfather’ traded the black and white jersey for the yellow and royal blue in 2002 and had a stellar career with the Brazilians. A midfield workhorse, he was influential in Sundowns’ back-to-back championship success of the 2005/06 and 2006/07 campaigns. Though he left the club to complete his playing career at Platinum Stars, such





was his impact at Sundowns that he was brought back as a coach and is now in charge of the dominant Ladies team.

TYREN ARENDSE

A fantastic scorer with Santos, it was not surprising that Arendse was lured to the Buccaneers, where he shone for a season-and-a-half, scoring nine goals in 32 appearances. The lure of Motsepe’s millions held sway, but it was a bad move that yielded a measly 14 appearances in a season-and-a-half before the player once described by Shakes Mashaba as being ‘as good as David Beckham’ made the trek back home to Santos to wind up his career.

GIFT LEREMI

“Gone too soon,” many keep saying of this super talented player who died in a car accident in 2007. A product of the Buccaneers’ development, he only played two matches for Sundowns, having joined them from Pirates, where he’d played for a good five seasons and making a massive impression alongside the likes of Benedict Vilakazi, Joseph Makhanya and Lebogang Mokoena. Much was expected of him at Chloorkop, but he perished in an early morning car accident.

LEBOGANG MOKOENA

‘Cheeseboy’ will always be remembered as a Buccaneer, having started his pro career there and enjoyed a six-year spell that yielded close on 100 appearances. He did, however, also have an influential stay at Sundowns from 2009 to 2012 under Pitso Mosimane before the wheels on his stellar career fell off in the next four seasons, when he hardly got game-time. Frustrated, he ended up playing for Ajax Cape Town, before a period in the wilderness. He returned with Maccabi FC, who became Swallows FC, but their demise meant the end of Mokoena’s professional career.

INNOCENT MDLEDLE

The ‘flying’ left-back was superb for the Buccaneers for a good four seasons, and unsurprisingly, Sundowns came calling. He proved a good acquisition as he continued with his great form in the yellow and royal blue, Mdledle becoming a key member of the Brazilians for the three seasons he was at Chloorkop before

CARDOSO: “SALENG IS AN INTERNATIONAL PLAYER FOR SOUTH AFRICA, A QUALIFIED PLAYER. I DON'T NEED TO SPEAK ABOUT HIS QUALITY, YOU KNOW THE QUALITY THAT HE HAS.”

switching to cross-town rivals SuperSport United in 2012.

TEKO MODISE

‘The General’ was already a national superstar when he made a shock move from Pirates to Sundowns – a move that got Bucs’ chairman Irvin Khoza hot under the collar. Dona had been the country’s Footballer of the Year and a darling of The Ghost, even though silverware with Pirates remained elusive. All that changed with the move to Sundowns as Modise went on to scale even greater heights at Sundowns under the tutelage of Pitso Mosimane. League championships were won under his influence. And Sundowns even became champions of Africa thanks to his immense contribution.

OUPA MANYISA

His switch from Pirates to Sundowns has to be arguably the worst career move of the lot. A superstar and crowd favourite at the Buccaneers, where he was a regular starter, ‘Ace’ hardly made an impact at the Brazilians. His case was not helped by recurring injuries, which curtailed his chances of game-time, and in the end, he played just 30 times over a period of nearly four years at the club. Talk of a career-ending move.

THEMBINKOSI LORCH

Nyoso joined Sundowns shortly after he was embroiled in some gender based violence controversy, and many felt the Buccaneers were ridding themselves of ‘a bad boy’. A former Player of the Year award winner with Pirates, it was thought he’d reached his sell-by date when he went to Chloorkop, but he showed glimpses of the star quality that had made him a Pirates fan favourite. His time at Sundowns was short-lived as he headed out to Wydad Casablanca to join coach Rulani Mokwena, where he made a huge impact in a short time. He has since made a lucrative move to Libya’s Al-Ittihad.





‘WE SHOULD LOOK BACK AT THAT DAY WITH PRIDE’

By Matshelane Mamabolo

THREE DECADES IS a very long time. Yet ask any aged South African where they were on this day 30 years ago, and the majority will have vivid memories of that day. And almost to a man, they are likely to tell you they were watching the 1996 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) final between Bafana Bafana and Tunisia.

That the memory lingers is because the country’s senior men’s national football team has not scaled better heights than that victory in the continent’s biennial tournament. Many see that as a sad indictment on the local game that no other Bafana team has gone on to win Africa’s premier competition since Mark Williams came off the bench and became a nation builder with a brace that put the Carthage Eagles of Tunisia to the sword.

The striker himself has expressed disappointment at Bafana Bafana’s inability to rule the continent yet again. Speaking prior to Hugo Broos and his team leaving for the recently completed AFCON in Morocco, Williams encouraged the team to ‘replace us as heroes and role models’ by winning the tournament.

Ronwen Williams and Co did not do that, Bafana being knocked out in the Round of 16 by Cameroon, and thus leaving us to wait at least yet another year before we can hear the last of the Class of ‘96.

The reality, however, is that even if another group of Bafana were to be crowned African champions, the legacy of the Class of 96 will remain an indelible part of South African football. There is already a documentary of that triumph being shown on Netflix to ensure that the great victory is never forgotten.

“TODAY (3 FEBRUARY) MARKS EXACTLY 30 YEARS SINCE THAT GLORIOUS SATURDAY AFTERNOON WHEN A PACKED FNB STADIUM WITNESSED NEIL TOVEY RECEIVING THE TROPHY FROM NELSON MANDELA.”

Today (3 February) marks exactly 30 years since that glorious Saturday afternoon when a packed FNB Stadium witnessed Neil Tovey receiving the trophy from Nelson Mandela to cheers of delight from the crowd and the rest of the country watching on TV.

Coming as it did a year after the national rugby team – the Springboks – won the IRB World Cup, Bafana’s triumph helped cement the country’s newfound democracy, many believed.

And Tovey spoiled that iconic moment by receiving the trophy wearing a Tunisian jersey, having swapped his with an opposition player.

In an interview I had with him and Clive Barker for my YouTube channel ShootOnline years ago, Tovey blamed the then-team manager Glyn Binkin for “not making sure I wore the right shirt’.

Like he had done the year before when he was resplendent in Francois Pienaar’s number 6 jersey, Mandela wore Tovey’s number 9 jersey, but Mokoko clearly did not get the memo.

The fact that the 1996 AFCON triumph remains our biggest since readmission into international football has led to many suggesting the country has not done well.



But a man who was directly involved in that tournament at the highest level and has been at the helm of the local game for a long time begs to differ.

“Yes, it has been 30 years since we tasted AFCON glory, but in between there have been other successes,” Molefi Oliphant, the former SAFA president who was vice-president in 1996, argues.

“Those who know mathematics will tell you that a curve reaches its peak and then goes down. It is normal. And this kind of thing has happened with many other countries. They say England are the originators of football, but they’ve only ever won the World Cup once, way back in 1966, but we can’t say they are a failed football nation because they’ve participated in many other tournaments after that. They might not have won, but they’ve been competitive, and their football has grown.”

Oliphant believes the same rings true for South Africa.

“After the 1996 success, there was a lot of growth for our game here in South Africa. We qualified for the 1998 World Cup in France, and many of our players became household names the world over and got to go and play in some of the big leagues around the world.”

He understands that South Africans set high standards for their teams and nothing less than success will do.

“But let’s not be too harsh on ourselves. I know us South Africans tend to be too hard on ourselves and forget how far we’ve come and where we come from.”

When he reflects on the 1996 triumph, Oliphant says the achievement – successfully hosting the tournament and then going on to win it – was nothing short of a miracle.

OLIPHANT: “LET’S NOT BE TOO HARSH ON OURSELVES. I KNOW US SOUTH AFRICANS TEND TO BE TOO HARD ON OURSELVES AND FORGET HOW FAR WE’VE COME AND WHERE WE COME FROM.”

“We came in as nobodies from nowhere. Remember we had only been readmitted to international football in 1991 and we then substituted Kenya as hosts not long before the tournament. You see, the thing with us South Africans is that we are by nature adventurous people. We go into something and we do it to the best of our abilities no matter the conditions or circumstances we are faced with.

And that’s exactly what happened in 1996. Bra Sticks [the late former SAFA president Solomon Morewa] said to us ‘gentlemen let’s go for it [hosting AFCON], and fortunately we had the backing of our government with President Mandela behind us all the way.”

The organising part sorted, the question of winning the tournament was never really on many’s minds, except the late Bafana coach Clive Barker who, according to Doctor Khumalo in the Netflix documentary, had told his team shortly after taking over that he wanted to be champion of Africa.

Barker had actually said that much upon his appointment, ‘The Dog’ declaring himself ready to make Bafana Bafana the best football nation on the continent.

And 30 years ago on this day, he did exactly that, his decision to introduce Mark Williams late in the match proving a technical masterstroke as

the Capetonian scored a brace to ensure the trophy stayed home.

“God being on our side, we managed to win the Africa Cup of Nations, and a number of our players were then in a position to play overseas because for the first time South Africa was on the map on the continent and also in the world. That AFCON was a stepping stone for us,” Oliphant explains.

He believes the successive participation at the 1998 and 2002 World Cup as well as our age-group national team playing at the 2000 Olympic Games, were spinoffs from that successful AFCON 30 years ago.

“I think if we did not participate in the 96 AFCON, our players would not have been as known as they became, and they would not have achieved what they did.”

The benefits of AFCON ‘96 for South Africa were not only on the pitch, Oliphant reasons.

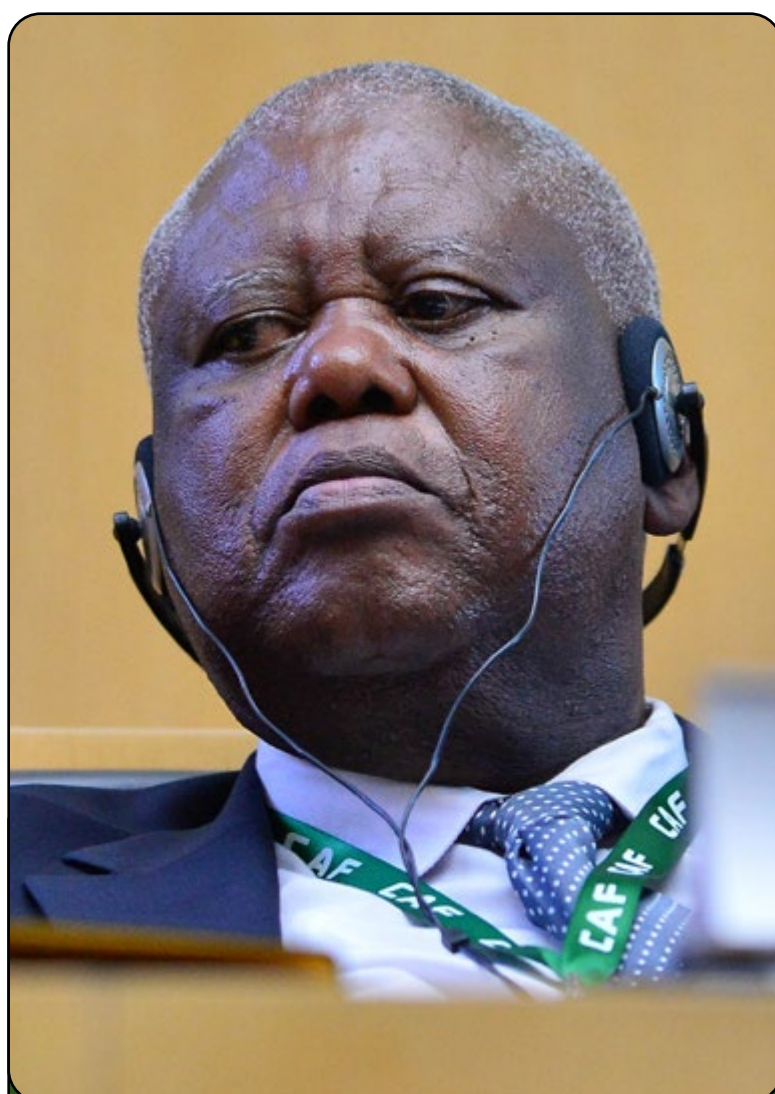
“When I look back, I realise that being the 1996 AFCON hosts set us up for the bigger event years later. We had the basics of hosting major events, and when we got the 2010 FIFA World Cup hosting rights, as a country, we could refer back to some of the organisation’s know-how from that.

“And also, you must remember that after 1996 AFCON, some of us at SAFA were roped in to serve on the CAF organising committee, and that experience was invaluable. We got to develop properly as administrators, and that was thanks to us having hosted the tournament in 1996.”

As today marks 30 years of that glorious day and the nation reflects on a momentous event yet to be eclipsed, Oliphant will awake to some bitter-sweet memories.

“On a personal level, the day is one of mixed emotions. I could not attend that final because we were burying my mother on February 3, 1996.

“But I still have great memories of

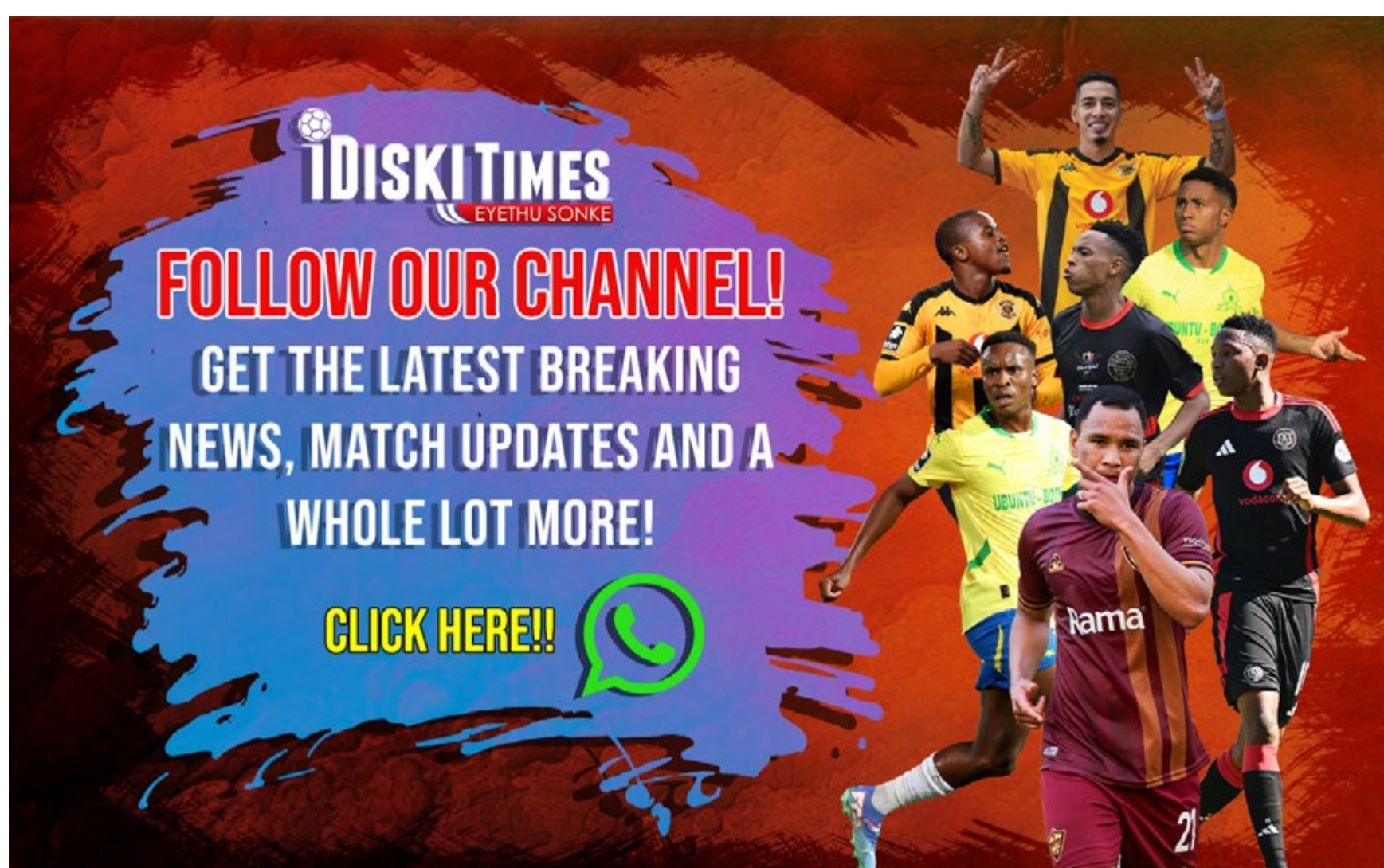


OLIPHANT: “YES, IT HAS BEEN 30 YEARS SINCE WE TASTED AFCON GLORY, BUT IN BETWEEN THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER SUCCESSES.”

the tournament, and I particularly remember our path to the final as we beat a strong Algeria and then had that great performance against Ghana in the semi-final and then the victory over Tunisia.

“There we were, new kids on the block hosting this big event with no experience at all, but we put on a successful tournament, and our players went on and did the country proud by beating some big guns like Algeria, Ghana and Tunisia to keep the trophy at home.

“Yes, some people might feel we have regressed, but that monumental achievement served as a stepping stone to what came thereafter, and we should look back at that day with pride.”





A BUSY WINDOW FOR SOME...

The January transfer window in South Africa is often a fairly restrained affair, more about careful tweaks than headline-grabbing splurges. But 2026 has bucked that trend. This time around, the Betway Premiership has delivered a window full of intrigue — with a handful of clubs rolling the dice, others making statement signings, and a few choosing to sit on their hands and watch the chaos unfold.

There have been eye-catching moves abroad, clever bits of business, and the occasional surprise, as teams look to fine-tune their squads for the second half of the campaign.

Some are clearly pushing for silverware or continental qualification, while others are scrambling to arrest worrying form or get their seasons back on track.

Below is a club-by-club breakdown of the transfer activity involving all 16 top-flight sides, based on deals that have filtered through the newsfeeds during the January window:

Mamelodi Sundowns

The defending Betway Premiership champions didn't just dip their toes into the market; they made waves. A few high-profile arrivals bolstered an already stacked squad, but it's impossible to look past the deal that nobody saw coming: Monnapule Saleng. It was the kind of move that broke WhatsApp groups and left everyone squinting at their screens in disbelief. How it plays out is anyone's guess, but it instantly became the headline act of the window. On the exit side, Sundowns trimmed a bit of fat rather than cutting muscle. Several departures came via loan, mostly involving players on the fringes of first-team plans. The one absence that will sting is Mosa Lebusa, a long-serving figure who had been part of the furniture since 2018 and brought leadership as much as defensive steel.

IN: Brayan Leon (Independiente Medellin); Monnapule Saleng (Orlando Pirates); Khulumani Ndamane (TS Galaxy), Jody Ah Shene (Cape Town City)

OUT: Mosa Lebusa (Stellenbosch); Kobamelo Kodisang (Stellenbosch-loan), Thapelo Maseko (AEL Limassol-loan), Jody Ah Shene (AmaTuks-loan)

Orlando Pirates

Three solid arrivals strengthened the squad, but the list of departures was long and, in places, unexpected. Mbekezeli Mbokazi's exit had been well documented, but Olisa Ndah's departure raised eyebrows, while Sinoxolo Kwayiba's brief stay in Mayfair came and went almost before it had begun. Even Tshegofatso Mabasa's loan move felt slightly left-field, despite the rumours. And then there was Saleng. His switch to Sundowns was the plot twist nobody saw coming.

IN: Andre De Jong (Stellenbosch); Daniel Msendami (Marumo Gallants); Mpho Chabatsane (Marumo Gallants)

OUT: Olisa Ndah (free); Mbekezeli Mbokazi (Chicago Fire); Sinoxolo Kwayiba (Chippa United); Monnapule Saleng (Mamelodi Sundowns); Tshegofatso Mabasa (Stellenbosch-loan); Sifiso Luthuli (Magesi-loan), Siyabonga Ndlozi (Magesi-loan), Sonwabo Khumalo (Midlands Wanderers-loan), Lungelo Dondolo (Midlands Wanderers-loan)

Kaizer Chiefs

While rivals were busy unveiling signings and feeding the rumour mill, Chiefs made headlines for doing... absolutely nothing. No marquee arrivals. No late-night surprises. Just silence. The only incoming deal was a loan signing earmarked for the DStv Diski Challenge side, while a string of exits — all loans — thinned out the squad depth without really touching the first team. It's a bold approach in a league



where momentum matters, and whether this restraint proves wise or reckless will only become clear in the months ahead. For now, Naturena remains calm. Perhaps too calm.

IN: Xhosa Manyana (Cape Town City-loan)

OUT: Bontle Molefe (Leicesterford City-loan); Sfiso Timba (Gomora United-loan); Vicky Mkhawana (Kruger United-loan); Ofentse Kgosana (Casric Stars -loan); Manqoba Ozoemena (Casric Stars -loan); Nkosana Mbuthu (Leicesterford City -loan); Bobo Sima (Mochudi Centre Chiefs-loan)

AmaZulu

AmaZulu kept things tidy and purposeful. No fireworks, no drama, just a handful of sensible additions aimed at adding depth and balance to the squad. It’s the kind of window that doesn’t dominate headlines but could quietly pay dividends as the season wears on.

IN: Langelihle Mhlongo (Richards Bay), Luyolo Slatsha (Cape Town City), Mason Mushore (Highlanders); Gustavo Lopes (Ferroviario Beira)

OUT: ?

Sekhukhune United

A fascinating window for Eric Tinkler’s side, who were among the busier clubs. Several new faces arrived, including a notable Stellenbosch influx, but the biggest storyline might be the return of Lebogang Phiri. After spending nearly 15 years in Europe since leaving South Africa as a teenager, Phiri’s homecoming adds intrigue, experience and leadership to an already ambitious squad.

IN: Lehlohonolo Mojela (Stellenbosch); Tidiane Diomandé (Stade d’Abidjan); Lebogang Phiri (free); Andy Boyeli (Young Africans-loan return); Thato Khiba (Stellenbosch); Lesiba Nku (Stellenbosch)

OUT: Miguel Timm (Cape Town City); Ronaldo Maarman (Durban City-loan); Sphiwe Mahlangu (Durban City-loan); Wonderboy Makhubu (Stellenbosch); Katlego Mohamme (Chippa United-loan); Samkele Sihlali (Gomora United-loan)

Durban City

Durban City were relatively quiet, opting for continuity rather than upheaval. Two loan signings and one permanent addition suggest a club backing the foundation laid in the first half of the season. With a new coach at the helm, the focus now shifts to whether these subtle tweaks are enough to maintain their upward trajectory.

IN: Emmanuel Jalai (Dynamos FC); Ronaldo Maarman (Sekhukhune United-loan); Sphiwe Mahlangu (Sekhukhune United-loan)

OUT: (n/a)

TS Galaxy

Galaxy’s hands were tied. Despite losing key figures in Puso Dithejane and Khulumani Ndamane, the club was unable to recruit due to a FIFA transfer ban. That means internal solutions, squad depth and tactical flexibility will be crucial as they navigate the second half of the season.

IN: [FIFA BAN]

OUT: Puso Dithejane (Chicago Fire); KhulumaniNdamane(MamelodiSundowns); Qobolwakhe Sibande (Petrojet)

Polokwane City

A quiet window in Limpopo. Polokwane City let a couple of players go but didn’t bring in any reinforcements, signalling confidence in the group already at their disposal — or perhaps a gamble on stability.

IN: n/a

OUT: Nyakala Raphadu (Magesi); Levy Mashiane (Magesi)

Richards Bay

Richards Bay didn’t sign many players, but the deals they did complete look smart on paper. The standout is the return of Sanele Barns, who was such a key figure for the Natal Rich Boys before his move to Stellenbosch. If he recaptures that form, this window could age very well.

IN: Thembela Sikhakhane (free); Baggio Tuli-Ngenovali Nashixwa (African Stars); Joel Madondo (Nsingizini Hotspurs); Sanele Barns (Stellenbosch)

OUT: Benson Mangolo (Mochudi Centre



Chiefs-loan); Langelihle Mhlongo (AmaZulu), Mbulelo Nombengula (Midlands Wanderers-loan), Mfundo Thikazi (released); Lindokuhle Mtshali (released)

Golden Arrows

A month of enforced quiet for Golden Arrows, who were unable to register new players due to a FIFA ban.

IN: [FIFA BAN]

OUT: n/a

Siwelele FC

Their business was efficient and impactful. Kgaogelo Sekgota wasted no time announcing himself, while the sale of Siviwe Magidigidi to Beerschot in Belgium stood out as one of the bigger moves of the window. Now the focus turns to how the new pieces settle into life at Siwelele.

IN: Kgaogelo Sekgota (free); Mahlatse Makudubela (free); Thato Letshedi (Polokwane City); Maloisane Mokhele (free)

OUT: Siviwe Magidigidi (Beerschot VA); Thabang Mahlangu (Orbit College-loan)

Stellenbosch

Arguably the most intriguing window of them all. Since Gavin Hunt’s arrival, Stellenbosch have reshaped their squad aggressively — seven new arrivals and six departures, including a trio heading to Sekhukhune. It feels like a clear shift in direction in the Cape Winelands.

IN: Wayde Jooste (free); Mosa Lebusa (Mamelodi Sundowns); Tshegofatso Mabasa (Orlando Pirates-loan); Kobamelo Kodisang (Mamelodi Sundowns-loan); Asekho Tiwani (Mamelodi Sundowns-loan); Shakeel April (Cape Town City); Wonderboy Makhubu (Sekhukhune United)

OUT: Andre De Jong (Orlando Pirates); Bradley Mojela (Sekhukhune United); Turan Manfoc (FK Gabala-loan); Sanele Barns (Richards Bay); Lesiba Nku (Sekhukhune United); Thato Khiba (Sekhukhune United)

Marumo Gallants

Not overly busy, but purposeful. Losing Daniel Msendami and Mpho Chabatsane to Pirates was a blow, but Gallants moved quickly to plug the gaps with a few fresh

faces.

IN: Romaric Dognimin Ouattara (Olympique Akbou); Emmanuel Mwiinde (free); Msindisi Ndlovu (free)

OUT: Daniel Msendami (Orlando Pirates); Mpho Chabatsane (Orlando Pirates)

Chippa United

Despite their struggles, Chippa resisted the urge to panic. The signings made suggest measured thinking rather than firefighting, with experience added and a welcome return for Sinoxolo Kwayiba, who impressed last season, and has hit the ground running on his return.

IN: Sinoxolo Kwayiba (Orlando Pirates); Abubaker Mobara (free); Katlego Mohamme (Sekhukhune United-loan)

OUT: Nathan Fasika (Al Ahly Benghazi); Ruzaigh Gamildien (Hope FC); Thulani Mini (Midlands Wanderers)

Orbit College

A mixed but intriguing window. Orbit lost Monnapule Saleng, which will hurt, but the arrivals are interesting, none more so than Surprise Ralani, whose return to top-flight football raised more than a few eyebrows after reports of his retirement. Desperate times, creative solutions.

IN: Ben Motshwari (free); Surprise Ralani (free), Cyril Chibwe (Zesco United), Thabang Mahlangu (Siwelele-loan); Katlego Cwinyane (free)

OUT: Monnapule Saleng (Orlando Pirates-loan ended)

Magesi

With a relegation scrap looming, Magesi went shopping. Losing Wonderboy Makhubu was a setback, but John Maduka’s side responded by bringing in numbers and variety in an effort to bolster the squad for a tough run-in.

IN: Ephraim Mothibedi (Gomora United); Levy Mashiane (Polokwane City); Nyakala Raphadu (Polokwane City); Tshegofatso Nyama (Cape Town City); Sifiso Luthuli (Orlando Pirates-loan), Siyabonga Ndlozi (Orlando Pirates-loan)

OUT: Wonderboy Makhubu (Sekhukhune United-loan ended)



FANS BEHAVING BADLY

By Matshelane Mamabolo

The Beautiful Game! That is what football is usually referred to as. But in South Africa, the fans who should be contributing to confirming the moniker often contrive to keep the uninitiated away from the sport.

That there are three possible results in football – win, lose and draw – is a fact seemingly lost on the supporters of many clubs. Defeats are often met with a barbaric reaction which sees them pelting an assortment of missiles onto the pitch – sometimes directed at the match officials whose decisions they are against, but often at the club coaches whom they blame for the outcome. And the trend continues unabated, thanks to lenient sanctions for such behaviour, which punishes the clubs and hardly ever the perpetrators.

Not surprising then that Mamelodi Sundowns, following the latest disgraceful scenes at their match which saw Sporting Director Flemming Berg being splashed with water and Coach Miguel Cardoso needing to be sneaked out of Lotus Versfeld, have threatened legal action against those responsible.

“Mamelodi Sundowns condemns the behaviour and conduct of the few ill-disciplined supporters who were disrupting members of the Sundowns Technical Team as they were leaving the stadium after the Sundowns and Al Hilal match. Appropriate legal or disciplinary proceedings will be initiated against those whose conduct is found to be illegal or contrary to the policies or rules of the Sundowns supporters”

It is a long shot, highly unlikely to happen, actually, because even if they were to identify the guilty parties, the chances of the legal case sticking are slim and none.

The fact that for years the league’s disciplinary committee has never seen it fit to punish the supporters but instead always finds the clubs suggests the fans are untouchable. And they seem to know,

given that their bad behaviour keeps rearing its ugly head over and over, particularly at Sundowns, where many coaches have had to run the gauntlet of incensed fans baying for their blood.

Berg and Cardoso are joining a long list of Sundowns technical leadership who’ve had to fear for their lives, needing police protection to leave the stadium as angry fans called for their sacking. The very Pitso Mosimane, whose return the current fans are calling for, has been attacked. Europeans Hristo Stoichkov, Antonio Habas and Johan Neeskens have been on the receiving end of attacks by Masandawana as the Premier Soccer League era’s most successful team took over from the country’s traditional big three, Kaizer Chiefs, Orlando Pirates, and the now-defunct Moroka Swallows, as the club with the worst-behaved fans.

In last week’s statement, Sundowns claimed they have platforms for their supporters to raise grievances as a way to avoid them reacting like they did after the Al Hilal home match.

“Sundowns has always encouraged supporter participation and engagement, which must always be done with respect and courtesy. Mamelodi Sundowns will not tolerate any threats, illegal behaviour or intimidation by any of its supporters or fans at any of its matches.”

One of the club’s fans, called Kabi, disagrees: “The club has not created the channels for us to voice our displeasures. They say we are stakeholders, but what channels have they provided for us to voice our frustrations? I will be the first to say we cannot condone violence because that is never a solution, it is wrong. But I get their frustration because I am feeling it too.”

Besides the results they are not happy with, Kabi says they are frustrated by the club’s inconsistent treatment of coaches.

“It just looks like there is some manipulation of standards. Why was



Manqoba [Mngqithi] let go as quickly as he was, but this guy gets to stay? We still don't understand why they let Rulani [Mokwena] go. And this guy [Cardoso] is not going to win the league this season, just compare the stats [with previous seasons]. He is going around dropping points, and there is frustration which clearly boiled over the other day [of the attack on Berg]."

The reality is that the fans crossed the line, something that happens regularly in the domestic game without much consequence for them.

It is a culture that the clubs themselves have somewhat aided over the years, the phrase 'we can't guarantee your safety' having been previously used by club owners to their beleaguered coaches. It has been said that clubs got into cahoots with their fans to force a coach they no longer needed to resign for fear of being attacked by an angry mob. A coach resigning mid-contract means the club is not obliged to pay him out, whereas if they fired him, they would be liable to compensate him.

Years ago, Brazilian Walter da Silva was forced to rush to the airport and leave the country after a group of Moroka Swallows fans threatened him at his home.

The multiple championship-winning Gordon Igesund was once attacked by a group of men at a training session when he was in charge of Pirates in 2001, but he stayed on after the incident, which saw him threatened with a pistol.

"They put a gun to my head. They put a gun into my mouth," Igesund told a popular podcast about a year ago when he spoke of the incident for the first time.

It was never established if the group who arrived at the training ground were Pirates fans or opposition ones intent on destabilising the Buccaneers, who were top of the table at the time.

But Pirates fans – previously notorious for their bad behaviour, which once saw them burning the chairs at the old FNB Stadium – did attack Bibey Mutombo after a match at the Johannesburg Stadium. The Congolese coach needed a police truck to come to his rescue as the angry fans demanded his sacking from the club.

Many coaches who sat on the Amakhosi bench have had it rough – the most recent ones being Molefi Ntseki, who was attacked by the fans following a 1-0 defeat to TS Galaxy. Back then, Ntseki, who was eventually sacked, expressed his disappointment at the fans' behaviour.



**SUNDOWNS FAN, KABI:
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"We need to understand that when you are not happy and when you are disappointed, actions of violence are not what this club is all about. It is about keeping peace. We are that type of team. Yes, these things have happened in the past, but the club has addressed this. We can always do things differently instead of what we have done. The club has spoken."

And perhaps therein lies the problem. South African football speaks too much and acts less against what is termed "hooliganism" in Europe, where fans who misbehave are profiled and banned from attending matches.

It is the route we should consider taking. Granted, it will be a little difficult for Sundowns, for example, to identify the fans who 'attacked' Berg, given the incident happened after the match with the television cameras off. But there have been many instances of fans crossing the line seen live on television, such as that time when the fans at Loftus destroyed broadcast equipment. In those instances, surely it makes sense for the PSL to identify the culprits and ensure they are declared persona non grata at our match venues. Such a punishment is bound to serve as a deterrent for would-be violence instigators at matches.

Given how we have modelled our league on the English Premier League, it would perhaps do the local PSL the world of good to copy some of the





ways that they deal with crowd violence in England, where there is a ‘zero tolerance’ approach.

Below is a summary of how the Premier League deals with crowd violence.

Automatic Minimum Bans: Fans identified carrying or activating pyrotechnics/ smoke bombs, or entering the pitch without permission, receive an automatic club ban with a minimum term of one year.

Strengthened Policing and Surveillance: Increased use of CCTV, drones, and undercover “spotters” to identify offenders inside stadiums.

Targeting Parents/Guardians: Bans can be extended to parents or guardians of children who engage in illegal behaviour, such as invading the pitch.

Enhanced Security Searches: Clubs have improved search regimes, including the increased use of sniffer dogs to detect pyrotechnics and drugs.

And these are some of the punishments for bad crowd behaviour

Minimum One-Year Ban: For pitch invasion, pyrotechnics, or throwing objects.

Lifetime/Long-Term Bans: For severe, repeat, or criminal offences.

Football Banning Orders: Court-issued orders that can prohibit individuals from attending any regulated football match in the UK for years, alongside potential imprisonment.

Criminal Records: Offences such as assaulting players/staff or carrying weapons result in police involvement, which can impact employment and travel.

Club Punishments: The FA can fine clubs, force them to play in empty stadiums, or implement strict, monitored “action plans” for repeat offences.

Most of the above are measures that can work here at home, and nothing

SUNDOWNS FAN, KABI: “I CAN’T THINK OF ANY OTHER WAY TO PROTEST. YES, WE CAN STOP GOING TO GAMES, BUT WE WANT THE TEAM TO WIN, AND IT STILL HURTS WHETHER YOU ARE AT THE STADIUM OR NOT.”

stops the PSL from considering going the same route, especially if they are serious about combating the kind of behaviour as that which was seen at Loftus last weekend.

Of course, the fans invest their emotions in their clubs, and they are bound to get frustrated and angry when they see things not going the way they’d love them to.

I put it to Kabi – the Sundowns fan – that supporters are more than welcome to stay away from their club’s matches if they feel management, in particular, is letting them down, rather than to go the violent route.

He agreed but said that they are way too invested in their club that they will still feel the pain even though they are away.

“I can’t think of any other way to protest. Yes, we can stop going to games, but we want the team to win, and it still hurts whether you are at the stadium or not.”

Hurt or not, there is no condoning violent behaviour, and the Sundowns fans and those of the other clubs need to know this. The league, on the other hand, need to put in much stricter measures that will ensure there are no attacks such as that which happened to Berg – the fans’ views on his contribution to the club notwithstanding.

Anyone who gives football a bad name should have no place in the sport.



THE IDISKI TOP 10... LEFT WINGERS

This week, iDiski Times turns its attention to one of the most expressive and influential roles in modern football, the left-sided attacking winger, as we rank the top 10 performers in the Betway Premiership based on their output during the 2025/26 season.

It's another position steeped in local history, where flair, invention and end product often collide, and where some of South African football's most memorable match-winners have made their names.

The rankings are determined by overall performance, drawing on data, ratings

and advanced metrics from multiple football analytics companies to ensure a balanced and objective assessment that goes beyond goals and assists alone.

To be eligible, a player must have featured in at least 60% of their club's league fixtures and have spent the majority of their minutes operating from the left flank, ensuring consistency, relevance and fair comparison across the list.

With the criteria set, here are the left-sided attackers who have stood tallest so far this season.

(*statistics as of 31 January 2025)

The Top 10:

10. Daniel Msendami
(Gallants/Orlando Pirates)
6.66 average rating

Daniel Msendami makes the list after a solid, if slightly frustrating, first half of the season at Marumo Gallants. The 25-year-old Zimbabwean scored once in 14 appearances before sealing a January move to Orlando Pirates. Comfortable on either flank, Msendami registered 23 goal attempts, with four big misses: numbers that suggest he often found himself in promising areas but lacked support. At Pirates, where he'll likely play in a more dominant, attacking side, he'll be hoping those chances turn into tangible returns.

9. Junior Zindoga
(TS Galaxy)
6.72 average rating

Junior Zindoga took time to find his rhythm this season, but his recent form suggests he's well and truly up to speed. The 27-year-old Zimbabwean has one goal and two assists in 14 appearances, created two big chances, and even won a penalty for TS Galaxy. With his pace, physicality and direct running, Zindoga is a constant threat on the counter. Averaging 1.3 successful dribbles per game, he's the kind of winger who can turn defence into attack in seconds.



8. Vincent Pule

(Siwelele FC)

6.75 average rating

At 33, Vincent Pule remains a valuable attacking asset, particularly for a Siwelele side in need of experience and guile. He's scored twice in 15 appearances and has been deployed across multiple roles, but it's from the left where he remains most dangerous. Pule has taken 21 shots at goal, missing three big chances, but his contribution extends beyond end product. With a 56% dribble success rate and winning over half of his ground duels, Pule continues to beat defenders and bring others into play, proof that class doesn't fade overnight.

7. Siyabulela Mabele

(Orbit College)

6.78 average rating

Orbit College's fairytale rise has had several heroes, and Siyabulela Mabele is firmly among them. The 22-year-old Ladysmith-born attacker has transitioned seamlessly into top-flight football, contributing a goal and an assist in 11 appearances. Mabele's journey with Orbit runs deep; he helped them climb into the professional ranks, earned a move to Orlando Pirates, and now finds himself shining on the biggest stage. He's missed no big chances from 14 attempts, averages 1.8 successful dribbles per game, and wins 59% of his ground duels. Fearless, direct and technically sharp, he looks right at home.

6. Mduduzi Shabalala

(Kaizer Chiefs)

6.79 average rating

Still just 22, Mduduzi Shabalala continues to grow into his role at Kaizer Chiefs. With three goals and two assists from 15 appearances, he's had flashes of real quality, even if consistency remains the next step. His shooting volume is high — 27 attempts — but notably none of his misses were classified as big chances. Shabalala's passing accuracy (83%) and ability to operate in the opposition half have also stood out, while his three big chances created underline his creative upside.

5. Keletso Makgalwa

(Sekhukhune United)

6.88 average rating

Keletso Makgalwa continues to do what he's always done best: create. The former Sundowns player has four assists in 16 games and has been Sekhukhune's chief source of invention out wide. Goals have eluded him so far, with two big chances missed, but finishing has never been the defining feature of his game. Makgalwa has created five big chances this season, constantly asking questions of defenders with his movement and delivery. In a Sekhukhune side that thrives on width and transitions, his value remains undeniable.

4. Edmore Chirambadare

(Magesi FC)

6.93 average rating

At 34, Edmore Chirambadare isn't here for highlight reels or inflated numbers; he's here for influence. The Zimbabwean veteran has been one of Magesi's most dependable performers, and while a single goal in 11 appearances won't turn heads, his impact runs much deeper.

Chirambadare averages over one key pass per game and provides calm, experience and structure in attacking phases. He links play intelligently, helps younger players around him, and often dictates the rhythm of Magesi's attacks. Sometimes consistency and intelligence matter more than raw output, and Chirambadare embodies that perfectly.

3. Tashreeq Matthews

(Mamelodi Sundowns)

7.01 average rating

Few players seem to divide opinion quite like Tashreeq Matthews, but strip away the noise and the numbers tell a compelling story. Before his most recent outing, the 25-year-old Capetonian sat top of this very list, and his return of four goals and four assists in 15 appearances underlines his importance to Miguel Cardoso's system. Yes, the fan's frustration is understandable with five big chances missed from 25 attempts, suggesting there was room



for more. But Matthews contributes far beyond the scoresheet. His work rate is relentless, he wins his duels both on the ground and in the air, and he tracks back willingly. Not always flashy, but often decisive, Matthews remains a vital cog in Sundowns' machine.

2. Langelihle Phili
(Stellenbosch FC)
7.03 average rating

In what was a stuttering start to the season for Stellenbosch, one young man carried the attacking torch almost on his own. Amajita winger Langelihle Phili was, for a stretch, quite literally Stellies' goal supply line, scoring every one of their goals at one point. His absence during the FIFA U20 World Cup was felt more keenly in the Cape Winelands than anywhere else. Despite starting just four matches, Phili made 12 appearances and found the net five times, an outstanding return for a 21-year-old still finding his feet at senior level. His efficiency is what really stands out: 13 attempts, a 38% conversion rate, and not a single big chance missed. Clinical and fearless, Phili has at times looked every inch a future star, and the next phase of his development will be fascinating to watch.



1. Relebohile Mofokeng
(Orlando Pirates)
7.18 average rating

Goals or no goals, Relebohile Mofokeng remains one of Orlando Pirates' most influential attacking figures. The fan favourite only just found the net in the league for the first time this past weekend, but his fingerprints are all over Pirates' attacking play. Three assists, five big chances created and 2.5 key passes per game tell the story of a player constantly pulling strings. His passing accuracy (81%) is excellent for a wide attacker, and while he's missed two big chances from 12 attempts, his overall contribution far outweighs those moments. Mofokeng is a talisman, the kind of player defenders worry about even when he's not scoring. His Man of the Match performance against Magesi saw him jump from fourth to first on this list.

What the Top Ten tells us:

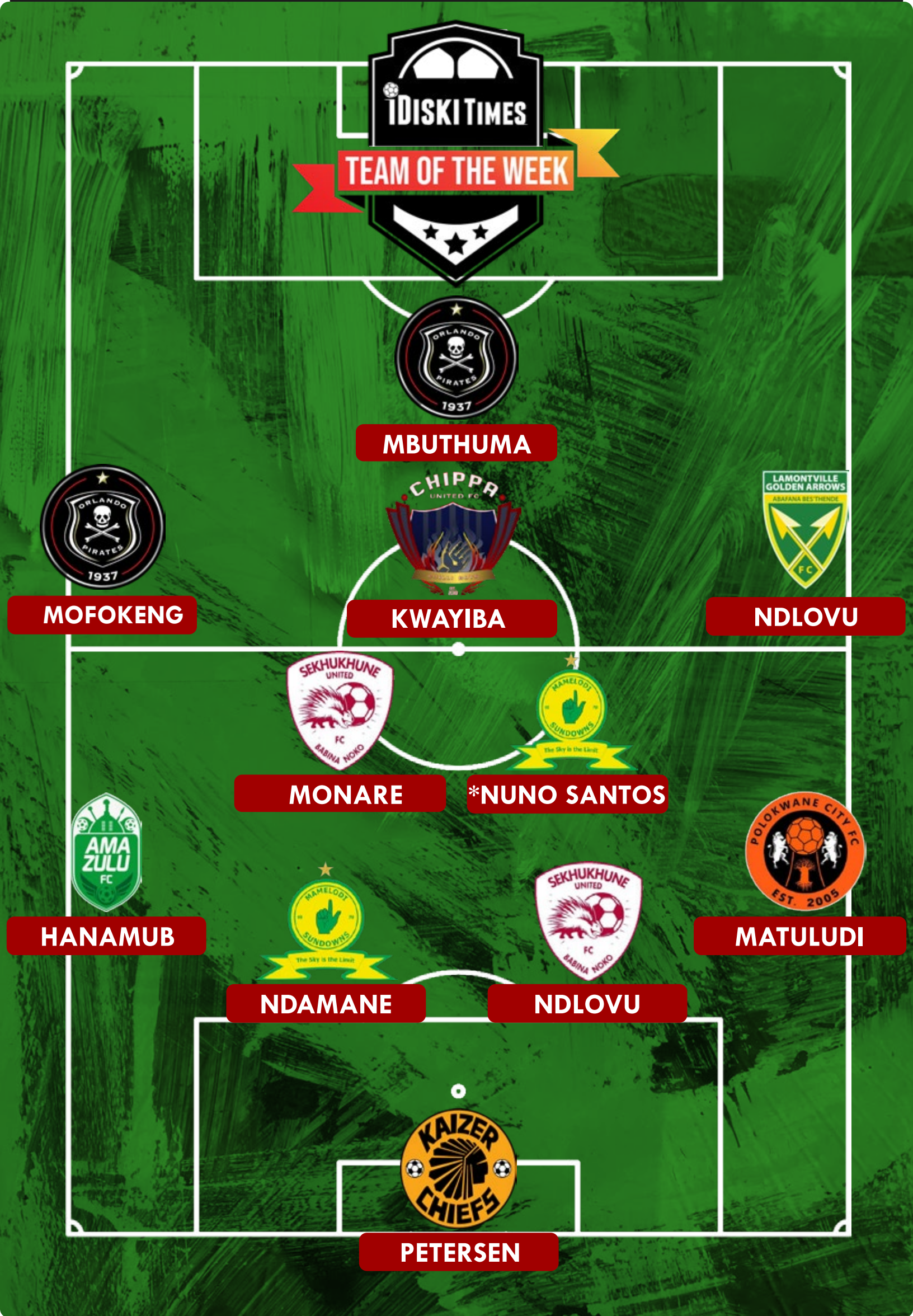
It's a fascinating list to unpack, because for all the profile and tradition attached to the position, the left flank hasn't quite delivered in volume this season; at least not beyond a handful of standout contributors. And that trend isn't isolated to the wingers alone. The first half of the 2025/26 Betway Premiership has, in general, produced fewer goals than we've become accustomed to in recent campaigns.

Tactical trends have played a significant role in that shift. Several sides have leaned towards using left wing-backs rather than high, touchline-hugging attackers, prioritising structure and defensive security over outright risk. As a result, many players nominally listed as left-wingers have found themselves operating deeper, wider, or with greater defensive responsibility, inevitably dulling their attacking numbers.

That context helps explain why only three players averaged a rating above seven, a mark that is typically regarded as the benchmark for sustained excellence. Relebohile Mofokeng missed a few games but has looked good to start 2026 and his performance against Magesi saw his overall rating shoot up; Langelihle Phili is there thanks to his decisive impact in limited minutes; while Tashreeq Matthews was arguably the most consistent performer across the campaign's first half, and played substantially more (982 minutes compared to Mofokeng's 710 and Phili's 590) and maintaining a high level throughout.

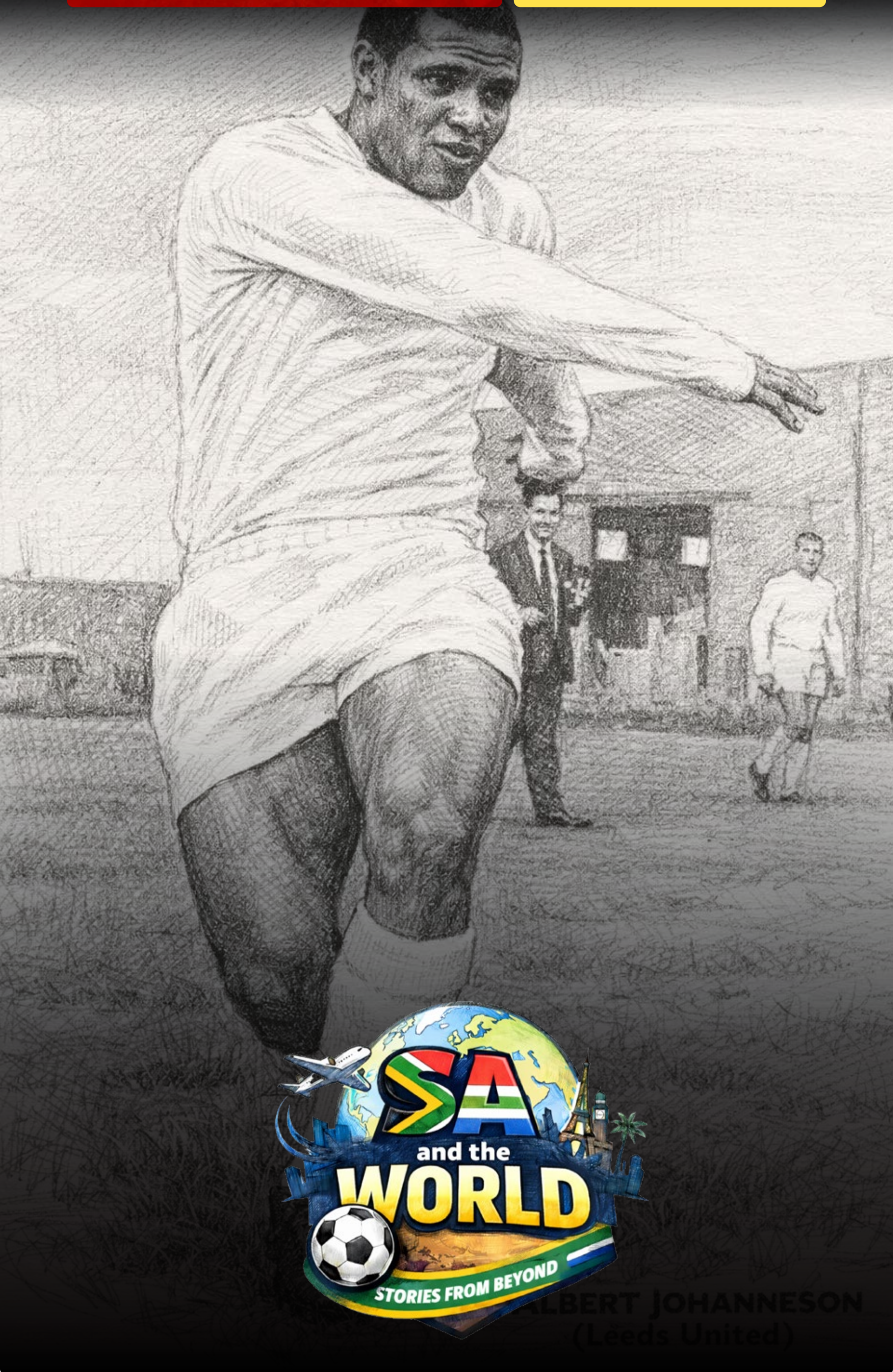
Dig a little further down the rankings, and beyond the top 10 altogether, and a recurring theme begins to emerge: inconsistency. Flashes of quality have been evident, often game-changing on their day, but sustained influence has been harder to come by. It leaves the sense that this is a position ripe for resurgence in the second half of the season, should teams once again loosen the reins and allow their left-sided attackers the freedom to express themselves.

IDISKI'S PREMIERSHIP TEAM OF THE WEEK (27 JAN - 1 FEB 2026)



ACE OF THE WEEK:
RELEBOHILE
MOFOKENG

This week's iDiski Times Ace of the Week is Orlando Pirates winger Relebohile Mofokeng, after he delivered his performance of the season against Magesi. "Captain Yama-2000" was at the heart of everything Pirates did well, scoring his first Betway Premiership goal of the campaign before turning provider with a perfectly weighted assist for Yanela Mbuthuma. It was a sharp, confident display full of intent, energy and quality – the kind that reminded everyone just how influential he can be on his day.



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.

The Great ‘Hurry Hurry’ - Remembering Albert Johanneson

By Rob Delpont

Perhaps one of the great, lingering tragedies of South African football history is the story of ALBERT JOHANNESON. The first tragedy is how few South Africans know his name. The second is that, once you do, it is impossible to forget how heartbreaking his journey was.

It is a story that has held me in its grip from the moment I first encountered it. It belongs to an era long before I was born, yet it feels uncomfortably close, as though its echoes never quite faded.

Growing up, I heard plenty about figures like Basil D'Oliveira in cricket, names that crossed borders and entered our collective memory. But Albert Johanneson's story was different. Known as 'Hurry Hurry' or 'The Black Flash', his brilliance, his burden, and his heartbreak seemed largely confined to England, whispered through terraces and preserved in fading newspaper clippings.

That such a pioneering figure could remain so distant from South African consciousness only deepens the sadness of it all. Johanneson ran, dazzled, and suffered on foreign soil, carrying both the weight of expectation and the cruelty of isolation, yet his story never truly made the journey home.

While Steve 'Kalamazoo' Mokone is rightly celebrated as a pioneer, as the first black South African to play professional football in England when he joined Coventry City in 1955, Johanneson was arguably something even rarer in that era: England's first black superstar. Mokone moved on and went on to make his name across continental Europe, but in England, it was at Leeds United where Johanneson, affectionately nicknamed 'Hurry-Hurry', became a trailblazer in every sense.

For someone who seemed born to play the game, it is almost astonishing that Johanneson reportedly did not kick a football in earnest until he was 18. He would later claim that, growing up, the sport stirred little more than indifference in him, an irony that only deepens the sense of what was to come.

Once he did find his calling, however, his rise was swift. He quickly made a name for himself with Germiston Coloured School and Germiston Colliers, and a perceptive schoolteacher spotted something special and recommended him to Second Division Leeds United in the winter of 1960/61. The club offered Johanneson a three-month trial at Elland Road, an opportunity that would change his life.

Leeds appealed in part because Johanneson would not be completely alone. The club already had a black South African winger on their books: Gerry Francis, a 27-year-old from Johannesburg who had become Leeds' first black player. Francis had joined the club as an amateur before signing professionally in July 1957, although it was not until October 1959 that he made his first-team debut. He struggled to secure a permanent place, but an extended run during the 1960/61 season meant that when Johanneson arrived, there was at least one familiar presence in

what was otherwise an alien and intimidating world.

Francis' signing itself had been newsworthy in an era when black footballers in Britain were almost unheard of. British society was still shaped by deep-rooted discrimination. Acceptance, let alone celebration, was still a distant prospect when Francis arrived from Johannesburg in 1957.

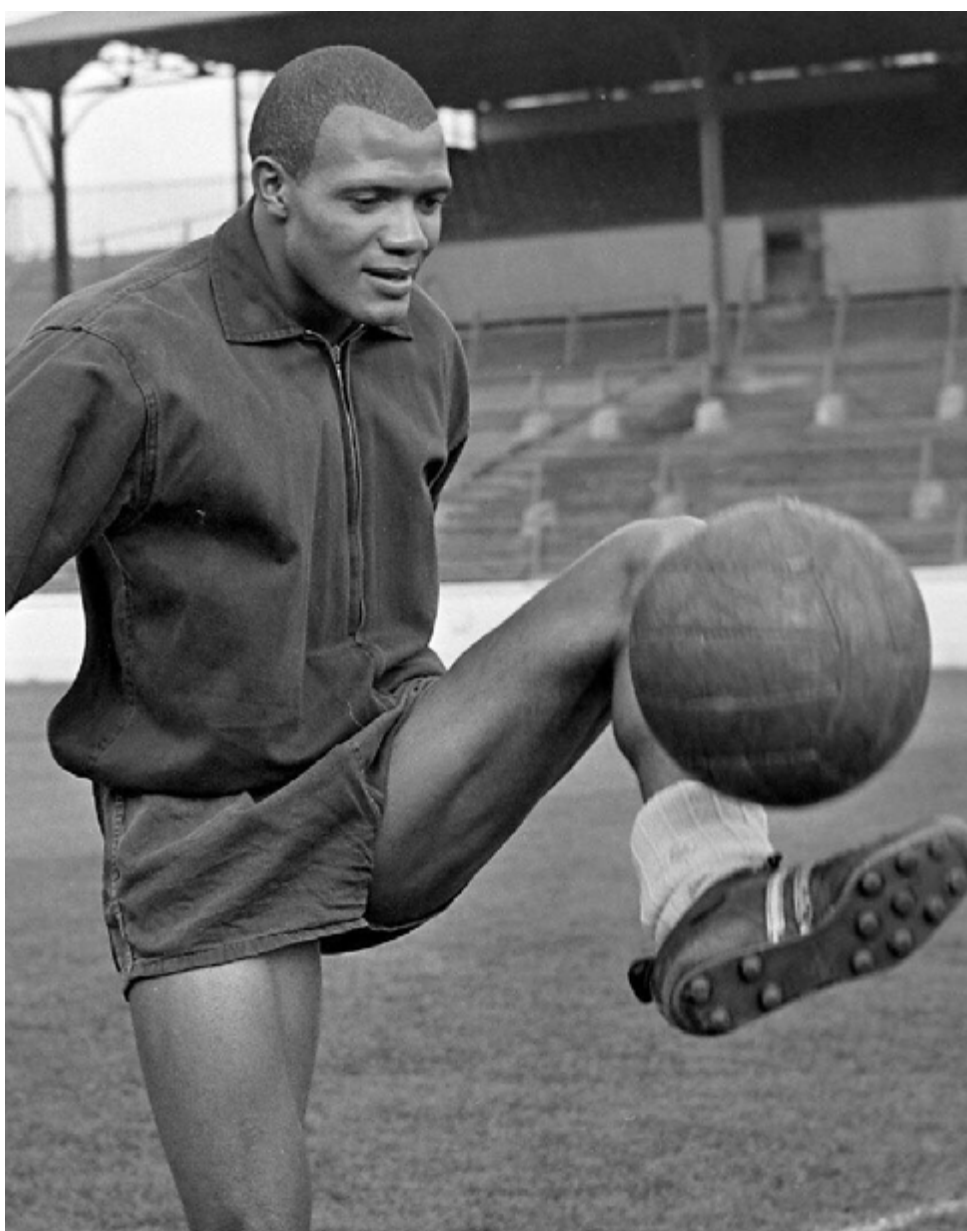
As Leeds United's first-ever black player, Francis's place in the club's social and cultural history is secure, even if his footballing legacy is less vivid. His time at Elland Road mirrored the club's wider struggles, as this was the period when they got relegated to the Second Division.

Born in Johannesburg in 1933, Francis was the second black South African to be signed by a British club, shortly after Steve Mokone. He played 50 games for Leeds over four seasons, scoring nine goals, before moving to Fourth Division York City in 1961, where he added four goals in 16 appearances. His Leeds debut against Everton on 10 October 1959 made him the first black South African to play in the First Division, and the first man of colour to represent the Elland Road club. After retirement, Francis became a postman before emigrating to Canada.

For Johanneson, Francis' presence eased his transition, but nothing could fully prepare him for the culture shock that awaited. Shy and lacking confidence, he nevertheless impressed Leeds' newly appointed manager, Don Revie. It took only a couple of training sessions for Revie to decide: Johanneson would be his first signing for the club.

The decision came despite Johanneson struggling badly with the unfamiliar cruelty of a Yorkshire winter. But there were deeper shocks, too. Raised under the rigid separations of apartheid, Johanneson was stunned by the expectation that he would share communal baths with white teammates. He was equally uneasy when a white apprentice was assigned to clean his boots, small moments that underscored just how far he had travelled, not only geographically, but culturally.

Revie's legendary Leeds side was being built piece by piece, and Johanneson, with



his blistering pace, clever movement and fearless directness, quickly became an essential component.

At Elland Road, he was adored. On the road, however, he was subjected to racial abuse from the stands, and from opponents, sometimes even from the shadows of the game itself. As one of the only black players in the league, Johanneson had no shield, no precedent, and no meaningful support structures. For the small number of black supporters who attended matches in that era, he was more than a winger; he was a symbol, an early role model in hostile territory.

He let his football do most of the talking. Johanneson scored goals regularly, and in the 1963/64 season, he was instrumental in Leeds’ return to the First Division, netting 14 league goals.

The Leeds side of that era – featuring names like Jack Charlton, Norman Hunter, Billy Bremner, Eddie Gray and Willie Bell – remains etched into English football folklore.

In their first season back among the elite, Leeds came agonisingly close to the league title, finishing just a point behind Chelsea. Johanneson scored a handy nine goals, and was involved in plenty more.

They also enjoyed a memorable FA Cup run, famously defeating Manchester United in the semi-final to reach the club’s first-ever final.

That final, played on 1 May 1965 against Liverpool at Wembley, should have been Johanneson’s crowning moment. Instead, it became a turning point.

Leeds lost 2–1 after extra-time, but history was still made. Johanneson became the first black footballer to play in an FA Cup final, arguably the most iconic club fixture in world football.

Yet the occasion weighed heavily on him. Carrying an ankle injury from earlier in the week, and burdened by the invisible scars of years of abuse, he struggled badly.

Johanneson was routinely targeted. Even Jack Charlton, no stranger to physical football himself, recalled tackles that crossed the line. In an era when two-footed lunges were tolerated and managers were largely indifferent to racial abuse, Johanneson was fighting battles few around him truly understood.

And football offers little mercy to those whose confidence fractures.

After Wembley, Johanneson was never quite the same. Injuries mounted and momentum deserted him. He still had flashes of brilliance: goals in Europe, hat-tricks in the Fairs Cup, moments that reminded fans why they loved him. He’s still the only Leeds player to have scored two hat-tricks in Europe! But consistency was gone, and eventually so was his place at Leeds.

By the late 1960s, he was drifting. Listed for transfer, turning down moves, eventually signing for York City, his career faded quietly. He retired barely in his thirties.

Away from football, he had married in England, had children, and tried

hard to fit into a life after the game.

But unfortunately, Johanneson struggled deeply with the loss of identity that so often haunts retired players. When playing, he at least had the team, but after hanging up his boots, he felt football abandoned him. Alcohol had become his refuge, then his ruin. His marriage collapsed, his family left, and despite attempts by loved ones to help, the bottle won, and over the years, his health deteriorated.

In what would be his final interview, conducted with Paul Harrison, Johanneson reflected back. Harrison is the author of Johanneson’s biography, “The Black Flash”, and he also wrote one about Leeds teammate Bremner.

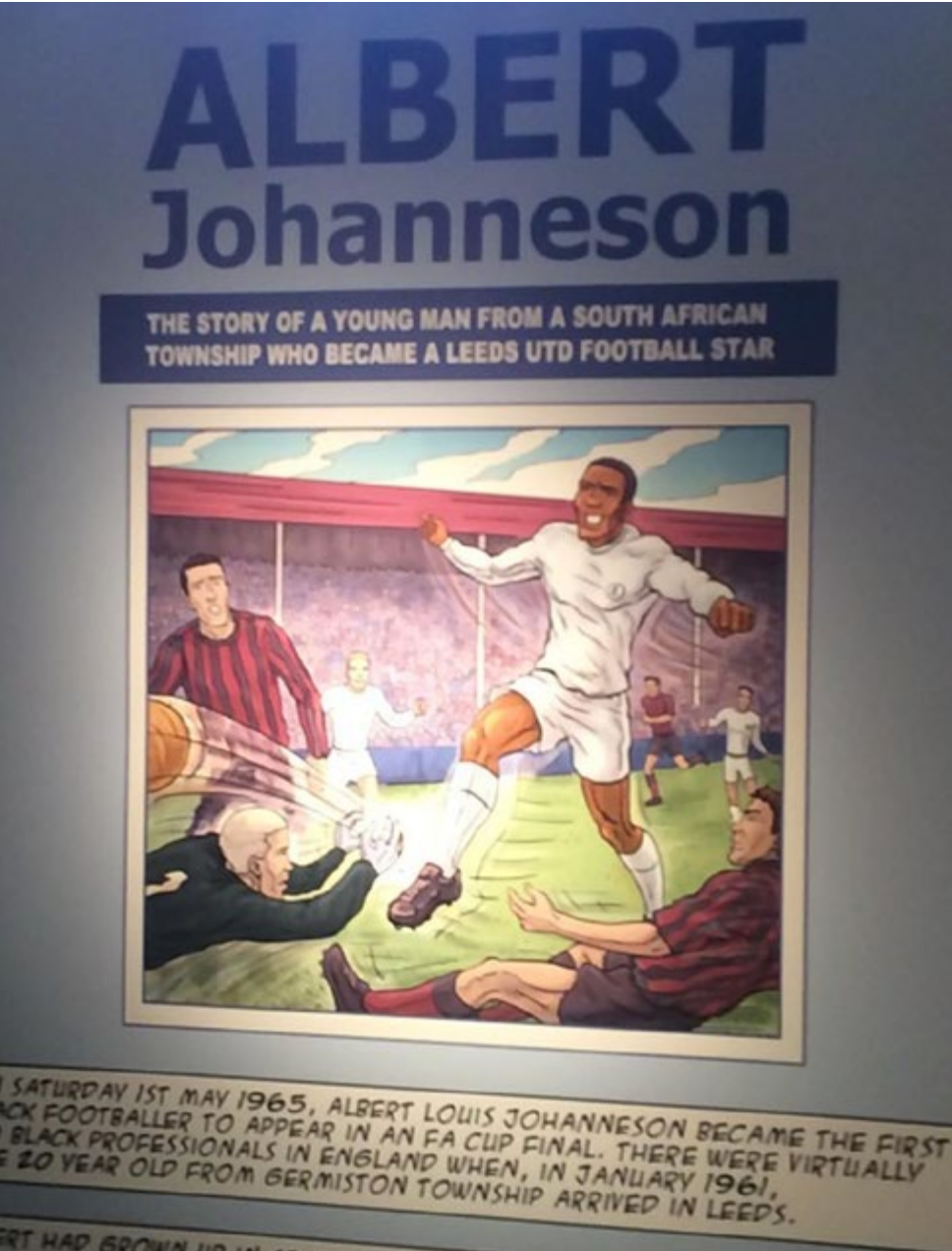
“When I first came here, I hoped things would be different from my life in the Rand,” a frail Johanneson told Harrison.

“There, apartheid kept people apart, ruined lives, destroyed families, it decimated entire communities and drove permanent social and political wedges between the white man and the black or coloured communities as they were then known. Life there could be a living hell if you allowed yourself to be consumed by it.

“I genuinely believed Britain would be better; in some ways, it was; it provided greater opportunities for me as a footballer, and I made new friends within the British African-Caribbean community, but it was awkward once I started to move in football social circles.

“I have attended football functions where I was all but ignored, because I was one black man in an all-white gathering. On the pitch, other players targeted me for racist abuse from the moment they clapped eyes on me, until the time we parted. There was nowhere for me to hide on the pitch. The referees didn’t want to know; the linesmen followed the guidance of the referee. My own colleagues were, in the main, supportive and good to me. Some looked after me, others deliberately shunned me when we were away from the game.

“The manager at Leeds, Don Revie, denied me a voice. I was told to sort my own problems out. One of the directors at the football club



told me that I should expect and put up with racist comments because I was black!

“Remember Brian Clough? I met with him when he was here (Leeds) as manager. He told me he was never an admirer; he said I was washed up as a footballer, then said he would give me ‘five bob’ if I would shine his shoes for him. That’s spiteful, yet it’s how people still see me, a lost cause that is to be pitied.

“It’s a perception many people have; they believe they are superior to blacks and, at the end of the day, we are there to do as we are told. I’m certain they don’t understand how much racist abuse hurts the victim, otherwise they surely wouldn’t do it.

“It’s wrong, and what makes it worse is that it is now 1995, and still that racist element exists in society; it’s like a cancer within football, it’s everywhere, in the clubs, on the pitch and on the terraces.

“The police and politicians claim it’s the hooligan groups who are racist, but that’s wrong; it’s present especially among players. I want people to listen, and people who can change it, to do that, to make a difference.”

In September 1995, Albert Johanneson was found dead, aged just 53.

A final tragedy was that just a year before his death, Leeds once again had signed two black South Africans when Lucas Radebe and Phil Masinga joined the club.

I spoke to Rhoo about Johanneson a few years ago, and he admitted that before going to England, he had never heard of Johanneson.

“When we got to Leeds, we never knew,” Radebe told me.

“I mean, before I left the country, I never knew that Albert Johannesson graced Leeds United.



Only when I got there, I got to learn briefly about the trailblazer Albert Johanneson and how highly they rated him.

“He made a huge impact. And he was still alive when we got there. It was unfortunate that he was in a bad state, and we couldn’t get to meet him before he passed on.

“We went to the funeral, but we would have loved to shake the man’s hand and thank him, to be honest.”

While there had been hopes that the pair would get a chance to meet Johanneson, it never happened. Johanneson never got to see a black South African captain at Leeds, or how football began to be more representative or tolerant.

“I mean, you think that he was a trailblazer for many to follow, and his family should be very proud of his achievements,” former Crystal Palace and Sheffield Wednesday player Mark Bright told me at the District Six Museum at an exhibition honouring Johanneson a decade ago.

Bright, whose father was Gambian, was born in England in 1962, a year after Johanneson came to the country. As a player of colour in England, Bright understood how important pioneers like him were.

“To come over when he did, you know, in the 60s, and being a black footballer to be playing in England, and to get abused everywhere he went because people were ignorant, and didn’t know any different then, and they thought it was okay.

“Then, to get to the FA Cup Final with Leeds United. I know in the end, he lost, but he still was the first black guy to play in an FA Cup Final. And there’s been plenty to follow him. And I think we all should be quite grateful to him for showing us the way, because now you see that about 28% of the Premier League would be made up of ethnic so, if he was looking down now, he’d be very proud.”

Today, Johanneson’s legacy deserves far more than a footnote. He was a pioneer, a superstar before the world knew how to protect one, and a man who paid a heavy personal price for being first. In remembering Albert Johanneson, South African football is reminded not only of what it gave the world, but of what it lost along the way.

Archive photos: @LUFC

Leeds United AFC - April 1961 - July 1970

Debut: (h) 8 April 1961 (Football League Division II) v Swansea Town (2-2)

Appearances /Goals

Football League - 172/48

F.A. Cup - 14/5

League Cup - 8/6

Europe - 5/18

Total - 199 games - 78 goals



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