



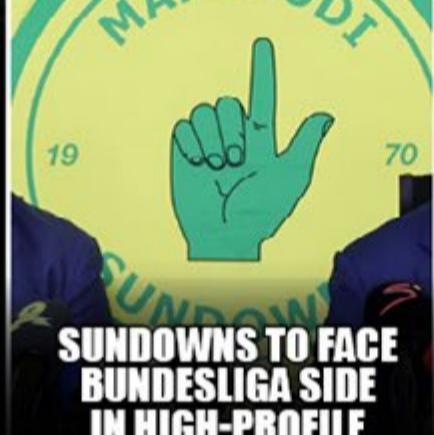
WIN OR BUST? CARDOSO'S DATE WITH DESTINY VS RULANI



BENNI ON NEW BOOK, MOURINHO & MAKING IT BIG IN EUROPE



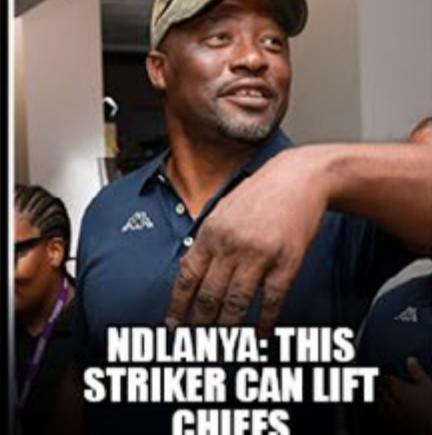
OX TALKS INJURY, CHIEFS COMPETITION & TROPHY AMBITIONS



SUNDOWNS TO FACE BUNDESLIGA SIDE IN HIGH-PROFILE FRIENDLY?



LE ROUX RACES AGAINST TIME TO MAKE WORLD CUP SQUAD



NDLANYA: THIS STRIKER CAN LIFT CHIEFS

SA & THE WORLD, IDISKI TOP 10, & ACE OF THE WEEK

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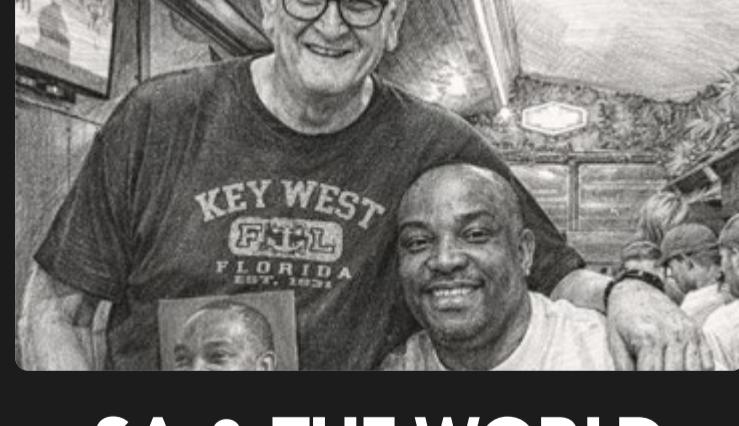
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QUESTION MARKS OVER MARIKO'S SITUATION

Orlando Pirates loanee Abdoulaye Mariko has not featured regularly for Chippa United since his arrival, and there are concerns about his situation. Mariko and his namesake joined Pirates from Djoliba in the off-season, with the 22-year-old, who was moved to the Chilli Boys, the more defensive of the two players. Comfortable as a six or as a box-to-box midfielder, he's featured only twice this season, and there have been suggestions that the player is growing frustrated about his situation. With no changes in the mid-season window, patience is now required before either returning for a chance in Pirates' pre-season, or a more fruitful loan elsewhere in the domestic top flight.



ANOTHER UBUNTU PLAYER HAS OVERSEAS OPTION

Ubuntu Football teenager Matthew Palmer is currently on trial at Croatian top-flight club Slaven Belupo. The promising talent who had a training stint in Norway with Lyn Oslo last year appears destined to become the latest academy product to move abroad. He was invited to the club where his former teammate, Losika Ratshukudu, has just signed after featuring at the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations with Botswana. Six Ubuntu products have made European moves over the last four years, further establishing themselves as one of the leading academies in South Africa.



SUNDOWNS LINING UP HIGH PROFILE FRIENDLY

Mamelodi Sundowns are believed to be in early discussions with German Bundesliga side Red Bull Leipzig over the possibility of staging a high-profile exhibition match later this year. While nothing has been finalised yet, talks between the two clubs are understood to be progressing as both parties explore the logistics and timing of what would be a marquee fixture on the local football calendar. Sundowns have a commercial partnership with Red Bull. RB Leipzig are currently sixth in the Bundesliga and have built a reputation as one of Europe's most exciting modern clubs. Known for their relentless, high-intensity pressing game, youthful energy and progressive football philosophy, Leipzig have also become a benchmark for elite player development and smart recruitment.

LODI SUNDOWNS



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LE ROUX IN RACE AGAINST TIME FOR WORLD CUP CHANCE

Portsmouth midfielder Luke Le Roux's chances of making the 2026 FIFA World Cup squad are not impossible, but a massive end to the 2025/26 season is required in England.

The 25-year-old joined the English Championship club on Deadline Day of the summer window in the United Kingdom and thus far has struggled for regular minutes.

While his performances and professionalism have not been in question, the South Africa international has been a victim of the current system of head coach John Mousinho.

The 39-year-old denied last month that Le Roux is not part of the long-term plans, stating he would not have started him against Arsenal in the FA Cup, had they not had belief in his ability and potential to succeed at Pompey.

“Luke has had a tough couple of months in a Pompey shirt, but he stood toe-to-toe with Arsenal and I didn’t look at that game and think about bringing him off early like we’ve done previously,” he said after the fixture against the Gunners.

“I thought he did pretty well. When you are talking about improvement, we want to see it on a consistent basis.”

Since then, he’s only featured in one out of five league games and after missing out on the Africa Cup of Nations squad, it appears a tall order to get into the squad where Hugo Broos notably prefers only four central midfield options.

Teboho Mokoena, Sphephelo Sithole, Bathusi Aubaas and Thalente Mbatha were the players in the role called up in Morocco



while Sipho Mbule, was selected as a 10 but capable of playing in a deeper role.

Orlando Pirates’ Sihle Nduli was a name being closely monitored for the national team but the player suffered a potentially season-ending injury with an achilles tendon rupture.

Le Roux’s last appearance for Bafana was the 2-0 win over Mozambique six months ago, where he featured 90 minutes alongside Polokwane City star Rodney Maphangule.

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‘BUCS TREBLE A REALISTIC POSSIBILITY’

It was Nedbank Cup week, and while Orlando Pirates and Mamelodi Sundowns booked their places in the Last 16, defending champions Kaizer Chiefs were knocked out by Stellenbosch. It was a good week for Pirates, who were also involved in the week’s only Betway Premiership game, where they moved top of the table after defeating AmaZulu.

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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‘I Think Winning All Four Domestic Trophies Will Be Difficult’

“Congratulations to Orlando Pirates for a good week. Earlier in the week, they

defeated Amazulu to claim the number one spot in South African football.

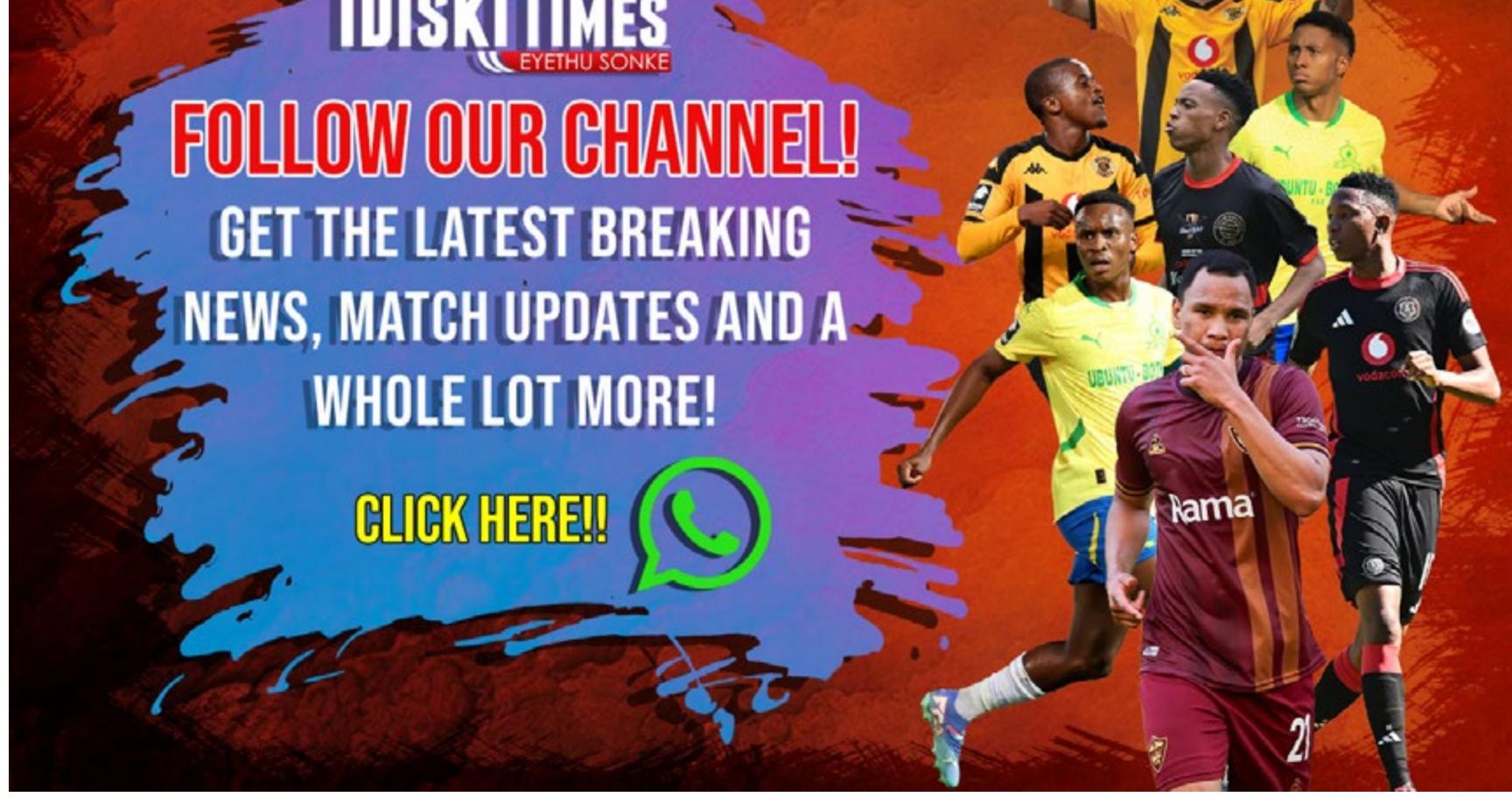
“On the weekend, they easily defeated Tshakhuma Tsha Madzivhandila in the Nedbank Cup to move to the Last 16 of the FA Cup.

“As it stands, the Buccaneers stand a chance to win a historic quadruple. Four trophies in a single season. That would be an incredible achievement!

“I think winning all four domestic trophies will be difficult, but the Ghost are halfway there, with the MTN8 and Carling Knockout already in the Cabinet.

“I think a treble is realistic. The league is open. Mamelodi Sundowns are having a poor season compared to their past.

“Pirates already lead the league with three clear points. I would love to see Pirates win the treble, especially if it includes the league title.”



CARDOSO'S CAFCL SHOWDOWN WITH RULANI

By Matshelane Mamabolo

The Premier Soccer League's (PSL) 'most qualified coach' is staring down the barrel of a fully loaded gun, and the man set to pull the trigger is a predecessor whose departure did not go down well with the club's fans and, seemingly, with some within the club.

It would be stretching it a bit to say we could well be in for football's own St Valentine's Massacre. But coming as it does on that special day, Saturday's clash between Mamelodi Sundowns and MC Alger has the makings of a classic. And Miguel Cardoso's life as the coach of the Brazilians could well come to an end should he not ensure his team's victory over Rulani Mokwena's Algerian outfit.

CARDOSO: "WE JUST DIDN'T WIN THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE, BUT WE MADE THE BEST SEASON EVER IN THE HISTORY OF THE CLUB IN THE PSL."



Positioned precariously in third place in the CAF Champions League's Group C, Sundowns are at risk of missing out on the knockout phase of the continent's premier club competition for the first time since 2018. At a club where standards are pretty high, that would be tantamount to treason, and the man in charge will surely be 'sent to the gallows'.

As it is, the majority of Masandawana – the club's fans – would rather Cardoso was long gone, disappointed as they are by what they believe is below-par play by their club under the Portuguese. Their angry reaction to the 2-2 draw with Al Hilal in the previous home match told the story of a crowd so 'gatvol' they'd rather former Coach Pitso Mosimane returned.

Despite having had to run the gauntlet of the angry fans after that match, which was followed by defeat away to the Sundanese club in Rwanda, Cardoso has remained defiant, quick to point out that he has achieved big things for the club he joined in the previous campaign.

"Since I arrived in the club last season, the team started to fly and flew in all competitions. We just didn't win the Champions League, but we made the best season ever in the history of the club in the PSL because we broke all records. The team flew through the competition, no discussion. We made the second-best campaign in the Champions League, the second-best ever. It was another final after the one they won, and we are wearing the star from it. And we made a fantastic (FIFA Club) World Cup. South Africa did not understand the level we took to the World Cup, but the world did (because), the team flew."

Cardoso, under pressure given the club's recent unimpressive results – the draw and defeat to Al Hilal plus the hard-fought 2-1 Nedbank Cup victory over lower division side Gomora United had the fans up in arms – burst upon being asked what was missing at Sundowns this time around.

"There's nothing missing, absolutely nothing missing. You expect Sundowns to win the championship with 20 points every year."

He feels there is a lot of mistrust where he is concerned.

"People need to trust. Our opponents have gotten stronger. But clearly what's missing is trust. But there is a lot of quality in the coach, quality at Sundowns – lots of quality in the players; lots of quality in the coaching staff, and lots of quality on the coach. I don't see any coach with the curriculum (CV) that I have."

That could well be, but it will all count for nothing should he not get the better of Mokwena on Saturday.

Beat MC Alger, though and Cardoso will have the last laugh. He will silence the detractors. And you can bet he will be confident of victory after holding the North Africans goalless in their own backyard back in November.

The question is perhaps just how Cardoso and Sundowns will deal with the pressure of a must-win final group match, particularly given the club's recent unimpressive showings that have got their supporters up in arms.

Can Cardoso shut out the noise from the outside and inspire his team back to performing as best as they can be? When he took them to the final last season, the former Esperance coach had gone the pragmatic route and ignored the calls for Sundowns to play their normal shoe-shine and piano way.

Former Orlando Pirates striker Andries Sebola now works as an analyst for Thobela FM and says Cardoso will have to ditch his pragmatic way and unleash Sundowns' big guns if he is to save his job.

"I think Cardoso has to go all out. His starting line-up must be made up of the regulars who know how to play in Africa. This is not the match for him to do what he has been doing and use youngsters. Themba Zwane must start the game, and if he is smart, he has to use most of the players who played under Rulani because they will want to put one over their former coach."

Sebola shares the generally held notion that Sundowns are not themselves under the Portuguese.

"According to me, he has killed the style of Sundowns, and most of the time when I watch, he does not seem to have a plan to create holes in the opposition defence. That's why you don't see Sundowns scoring a lot of goals, because the supply to the strikers is just no longer there like in the past. The old Sundowns of Pitso and Rulani would have hammered Gomora."

This shortfall is going to be costly against MC Alger, Sebola believes, hence he



SEBOLA ON CARDOSO:
"I THINK CARDOSO HAS TO GO ALL OUT. HIS STARTING LINE-UP MUST BE MADE UP OF THE REGULARS WHO KNOW HOW TO PLAY IN AFRICA."

calls on Cardoso to start with Mshishi as well as stalwart strikers Peter Shalulile and Iqraam Rayners.

"We all know how this trio has performed for Sundowns in the past. This is a must-win game, and Cardoso will win it if he puts out his best possible line-up. Some of the new guys that Sundowns have signed are very good, but they don't have the CAF experience that's going to be needed this weekend."

With the visitors needing just a point, Sebola is convinced Mokwena will play defensively and wait to pounce on the counter.

"He will adopt a defensive strategy, but he will also not allow Sundowns to build from the back like he did in the first round match. He knows that the Sundowns defence does not have pace, and he will have a plan to exploit it. Of course, he only needs a draw, but you can bet he is going to come for a win. It is natural, when you face your former team, you always want to win, and it is not different with coaches."

Sebola fancies Sundowns to win, but only if Cardoso employs an attack-minded team of the players who have previously done a great job for the Brazilians on the continent.

Will Cardoso heed that advice or stick to his guns? He has the equivalent of a Thompson machine gun to contend with, a weapon ready to create football's version of St Valentine's Massacre. Will he dodge the bullet and silence his detractors while re-endearing himself to the Sundowns fans who were delighted when he got their club into the final last year?

Or will he fail and be returning home to Portugal on the first flight out of OR Tambo?



OX TALKS INJURY, CHIEFS COMPETITION & TROPHY AMBITIONS

By Lethabo Kganyago

Sibongiseni 'Ox' Mthethwa is counting down the days until he can put on his boots on again and get back into the trenches. Known for his relentless engine, crunching tackles and no-nonsense approach, the Kaizer Chiefs midfielder has been sidelined since the end of last year, stuck in that frustrating space footballers know too well, and he's working tirelessly behind the scenes, pushing his body and waiting for the green light to return.

He's also started training with the team, as seen in Polokwane ahead of the crucial CAF Confederation Cup Group D clash against Al-Masry this past week.

Two days before the match, Chiefs, along with its partners and players, including Ox, donated food parcels to the Mphagani community outside Giyani in Limpopo. The community was highly affected by the devastating floods last month. Such disasters are a thing the Chiefs midfielder can relate to and sympathise with, coming from KwaZulu-Natal, a province that has in the past endured such fates.

"As a person who comes from the rural areas, you can experience something like this any time," said Mthethwa.

"So this event is very important to me. If I had more to give, I'd give to anyone. It's important to help other people, to give back."

Meanwhile, the injury setback came at the worst possible time for the former Black Leopards and Stellenbosch enforcer. Just before the injury, Mthethwa had battled his way back into contention at Naturena and was starting to look like a trusted lieutenant in the plans of Cedric Kaze and Khalil Ben Youssef. After a stop-start spell at the club, the 31-year-old was rediscovering his rhythm, stamping his authority in games and giving Chiefs

"I'M APPROACHING A DIFFICULT TIME BECAUSE I STILL HAVE TO PROVE MYSELF AGAIN. I STILL HAVE TO PERFORM FROM THE PERFORMANCES THAT I WAS PERFORMING."

a steel and balance in midfield they had often lacked.

"It's been good," answered Mthethwa when asked by the media how it's been playing under the two co-coaches.

"I won't lie, it's been good playing under them. They've been supportive from the first time they came to South Africa. I didn't get enough chances, but now I was playing well, then the injury happened. Now I'm approaching a difficult time because I still have to prove myself again. I still have to perform from the performances that I was performing at."

A late bloomer by any measure, Mthethwa's journey to Soweto was never a straight line. Black Leopards first took a chance on him after he had been plying his trade in the lower ranks of KwaZulu-Natal, before Steve Barker's Stellenbosch brought him into the top flight. It was there that 'Ox' truly announced himself. His work rate, bite and tactical discipline caught the eye of Hugo Broos and, also of course, the Chiefs hierarchy.

Since arriving at Amakhosi in 2023, it has not always been smooth sailing. The club endured a turbulent period, results were inconsistent, and Mthethwa himself slipped down the pecking order in the national team setup. But perseverance has always been his calling card, and 2025 finally felt like a turning point.



Chiefs ended their decade-long trophy drought by lifting the Nedbank Cup, a moment that felt like a collective exhale at Naturena. While the departure of head coach Nasreddine Nabi dominated the headlines, the feared implosion never arrived. Instead, Chiefs have remained competitive, their Betway Premiership form encouraging, and they are still firmly in the title conversation.

That momentum suffered a blow this week when Mthethwa's former club Stellenbosch – now coached by ex-Chiefs mentor Gavin Hunt – eliminated Amakhosi in the Nedbank Cup Round of 32. It was a painful exit, but for Mthethwa, there is no time for self-pity. With the league and the CAF Confederation Cup still very much alive, the focus has quickly shifted forward.

“First of all, you see, we got knocked out from the Nedbank Cup. So our main focus now is the league and the CAF Confed. That’s the confidence, and that’s the only thing that is pushing us now. We have to fight for it.

“The only thing I can say, the reason why we are playing is because we want to win the cups. So we are there. If you get a chance, you have to grab it.”

Chiefs could be on the verge of reaching the CAFCC knockout stages after their 2-1 home victory over Al Masry, sitting top of Group D, and they currently sit third in the Premiership standings, five points behind leaders Orlando Pirates. Before his injury, Mthethwa featured 11 times in the league, and he'll be itching to add to that number as soon as his body allows and knows there is tough

“WHOEVER IS GIVEN A CHANCE, HE MUST USE IT PROPERLY BECAUSE THE COMPETITION, IT’S NOT LIKE IT’S AN UNHEALTHY COMPETITION, THAT’S WHAT I CAN SAY.”

competition in the Chiefs' midfield, while explaining how hard it's been on the sidelines.

“Competition will always be there, but we are different,” he added.

“So whoever is given a chance, he must use it properly because the competition, it’s not like it’s an unhealthy competition, that’s what I can say. It also encourages me to work hard.

“It’s been hard, but I’m getting better. Hopefully, soon I’ll be back. I won’t say how soon because I’m not sure. It’s my first time getting an injury, but then the support from the team is there, from the doctors, the physios and even my teammates; they are helping me a lot.”

Crucial fixtures loom large still in February too – a league meeting with Stellenbosch and the always-explosive Soweto derby against Pirates among them. If ‘Ox’ can make his return in time, Chiefs will be hoping his experience, bite and relentless energy can provide exactly the edge they need when the pressure is at its highest.



BENNI ON NEW BOOK, MOURINHO & MAKING IT BIG IN EUROPE

Last week saw the release of one of the most eagerly-awaited sporting biographies in recent memory, as BENNI landed on bookshelves around the world. And yes, as every South African already knows, it tells the remarkable story of BENNI MCCARTHY, with the former Bafana Bafana talisman teaming up with MARK GLEESON to bring his journey to life. A true icon of South African sport, McCarthy still stands alone as the only South African to have lifted the UEFA Champions League, a feat achieved under the watchful eye of the legendary José Mourinho, who fittingly pens the foreword to the book. It is a sweeping football journey across continents, a classic rags-to-riches tale that charts McCarthy's rise from the streets of Hanover Park to the grandest stages in world football. Along the way, it lays bare the sacrifices, setbacks, egos and relentless grind that define life as a professional footballer. Honest, reflective and deeply human, the book offers inspiration for dreamers, lessons for aspiring players, and insight for anyone curious about what it truly takes to make it at the very top. iDiski Times Editor ROB DELPORT spoke to Benni about the book.

Rob Delport: Benni, the book is out! Congratulations, man, just what did it feel like when the big man (Gleeson) handed you that physical copy?

Benni McCarthy: I think probably the biggest part of me was more like when you see your face on a cover of a magazine, or like you see your face on the cover — on a book — I just for the life of me, I was like, 'Oh my God, I finally did it'. And then, wow, I think my heart started pounding, I don't know what for, what I was so scared of, because it's all done. I've done it. I've written the book, and it's all there now on paper, so no more turning back. So I think I just got little butterflies fluttering everywhere. So, yeah, now, it was amazing. And I don't know, it just made me so proud, for the first time again, you know, wow.

RD: I think pride is a big part of the book. As someone who has known you for so

long, I was proud to read your story, proud of what you overcame, and not just because of what we already know about you, but also because of what we didn't know. I mean, this was before social media, and I forgot just how much you did, how many goals you scored in Europe, all over, and in the book, you're so nonchalant about some of those achievements.

BM: True. Honestly, Rob, what you just said there, for me, I talk about it like it's nothing. Because back then, social media was nothing like it is now, I think maybe people would have made a big deal, a big fuss about it...

RD: Well, now we sometimes get excited when a player just gets on the pitch in Europe...

BM: Exactly. So, like in my time, you don't get all the news across that much. So people didn't really know what I actually did, you know. But now that this comes out, and when I speak about it, and you see all the things — 'Oh, my god, I can't believe Benni'. For example, I look at Lyle Foster now, he's playing in the Premier League, and when he scored against Spurs, and then he got his eighth Premier League goal. And I'm thinking, 'Wow, what a thing'. (pauses) But I did that, on a regular basis, and there wasn't really much fuss about it, because, yeah, social media was nothing like it is now, you know. And I just think to myself, what I actually did was incredible. Like, you don't come from Hanover Park and do that kind of sh*t on the world stage.

RD: But not just in England, I mean in Holland, Spain, Portugal, I think sometimes playing outside of England at that time, really meant out of sight. We might've known you were doing well, but not really the details. I mean, South Africa remains EPL-obsessed.

BM: It's a culture the way we idolise and obsess with the Premier League, like



"YOU SEE YOUR FACE ON THE COVER — ON A BOOK — I JUST FOR THE LIFE OF ME, I WAS LIKE, 'OH MY GOD, I FINALLY DID IT. AND THEN, WOW, I THINK MY HEART STARTED POUNDING."

Liverpool, Man U, Arsenal, over there it is, literally, it's like the Bible, you know, football. So when you are in it, the way people embrace you, and if you have a little bit of success, 'Oh my God,' you literally can't walk around the streets, like there's a mob and stuff, you get overwhelmed. And I lived all that. And people never even knew that I was from Hanover Park, dude, from Hanover Park! We all know what Hanover Park is like. I walk in Portugal, people, they don't even 'Benni' me, they'd rather sing my song, you know? And it's like, just, wow, dude, I did all that by just being who I was, and the talent that I was gifted with, you know, that I'm able to change people's lives like that, it was just fascinating.

RD: The book also delves a lot into your

mindset, this need to win, to score goals, to compete. And it's something I still see in you, and how those who don't have it frustrate you. I remember seeing you frustrated as a coach after your team went out like nothing was wrong after a defeat...

BM: Yes, no, of course. Because I lived it, and I wanted these players to also experience what I have, because, there's nothing greater than that, you know. So that's why it used to frustrate the life out of me — when people want to celebrate mediocrity.

RD: I think it's why winners found you. Fantastic that Jose Mourinho wrote the foreword too, and it's clearly a relationship of mutual respect and love there. Obviously, that Champions League season with Porto was so special, but the relationship lives on.

BM: Man, just what he said about me as well. You know, I think a lot of people's views will change when they hear, you know, what he actually said, and how I was more than just a football player, you know, I was a humanitarian as well, and the way I conducted myself. You know that I've earned the respect from people, that people didn't just respect me because I'm a goal scorer, but I was a complete player. I was a team player as well. For example,

in the Champions League final, if I were an asshole, I would have just said, like, 'No, I want to play. I've got the team to where I was,' but if I had to be sacrificed, I'd take it, you know, I wasn't bigger than the team. I wasn't bigger than anybody. If the manager feels that that's probably the best thing to do, and then, yeah, I take it, you know, not happy, but I take it because it's in the best interest of the team, and I think that's what was respected more than anything else when it comes to that. And I think that's why he will always speak very highly of me, because I wasn't a selfish player. I didn't make it about me.

RD: And that's one of the things I really enjoyed about the book. I know it's called Benni, but I felt like this was a football journey; it was about you and the relationship with the game. I am sure there are so many stories, off the field, away from the game, you could've told...

BM: I could actually write another book just based on my experiences, the life that I've lived, that football has given me, you know, the places that I visited, the people that I've met, all that was intriguing. But I think for me, it's more just about not bragging about, yeah, what I've achieved off the field. But what brought me there was football, so I wanted to make it strictly about football and nothing else, you know.

RD: And I think that football journey is also such an intriguing glimpse into life then, and how much has changed. I mean, I think about you arriving in Amsterdam, and being looked in the eyes for the first time by a white girl in a 'normal way'...

BM: (Laughs) back then, it was like, wow, I know, obviously, the way the country was when I was growing up, that was almost like not a normal thing, you know? So when it does happen, you kind of first look around if you speak to a white girl, like, 'Ooh, is the cops going to come and arrest you?' and stuff like that. (Laughs) But there it was just such a normal, common thing, you know, they looked at you as kind



ON MOURINHO'S FOREWORD: "MAN, JUST WHAT HE SAID ABOUT ME AS WELL. I THINK A LOT OF PEOPLE'S VIEWS WILL CHANGE WHEN THEY HEAR, WHAT HE ACTUALLY SAID."

of an equal, instead of like, 'Oh, you've gone through apartheid and you're not supposed to mingle with white people'. So, all that is, it's within itself. It's a hell of an achievement, yeah.

RD: I found all of that fascinating. A kid who grows up in apartheid South Africa, and then you go overseas and almost represent this new South Africa, but ironically, an ambassador of a country you don't get to really live in anymore.

BM: I know it's crazy, man. Honestly, I'm super proud of what I've achieved, and it took me a while. It took me a really, really long time to actually come to grips with it – like I should be proud of what I've achieved and what I've done, you know. And I think the book is just a small portion of how proud I am of my achievements and everything else, man.

RD: You and Gleeson have been working on this for some time...

BM: Yeah, like, I think it's over five years in the making, because when I was at Cape Town City, that's when we actually started, and this is the finished product now.

RD: I'm really hoping a lot of the new generation, who may not know everything, go and grab a copy and read this.

BM: Most definitely, yeah, I would definitely say, even if you're not a reader like myself, yeah, I won't dedicate myself to pick up a book and start reading it, you know, but I think it's worth it. It's worth it because there's something in the book for everybody, you know, whether you're established, whether you've achieved or whether you want to achieve, you can take something from that. Because for me, it was really coming from humble beginnings, from a really tough upbringing, a different background, like the mentality, the mindset that you have to have. And when you have a dream, and you follow it, and you really go for it, yeah, of course, not everybody's gonna open the door for you, some periods in your life you

gotta knock a few doors down as well to make an opening for yourself to enter in. And when you are inside, and that's when you got to grab it, you know? And I think people from disadvantaged areas, they can, they can have a read from it and say, 'Okay, so this is how he achieved his dream, and this is how he was able to change his life around, for himself, for his family, for the people that he loves, and for the community. And maybe that can work for me as well'. So I think it's genuinely worth it. People pick up a copy, and reading through it and then taking some of those stuff and then apply it to their own lives. And you can change your life around just like that. Where you are originally from doesn't define who you are, you know? Like, through hard work, dedication and sacrifice, anything's possible, the sky's the limit.

RD: I think you can inspire a lot of people, everybody, not just South Africans. I think it's a great story. I was very lucky to have an early read, and I'm gonna read it again, because there are some parts I want to read again. It's also funny, you've lived a wonderful and entertaining life as a footballer, and I hope that this next one as a coach continues to be as entertaining.

BM: Thank you, man, thank you. I appreciate your kindness, Rob. Your good words, your motivation, and also just being part of my life, man, because you were there from the beginning as well, the early stages. You saw the struggles. You saw me moving up in the world. And you saw when I was really at the peak of my prowess. So, I'm glad that I had people like yourself and Mark Gleeson in my life, on my journey to experience it all, and now able to tell people about it as well. So, yeah, man, thank you for you as well.

RD: It's a pleasure always, Benni.

YOU CAN READ AN EXTRACT FROM THE 'BENNI' BOOK IN THIS EDITION ON PAGE 21.



NDLANYA: THIS STRIKER CAN LIFT CHIEFS

Last month, on the 19th of January 2026, former Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates striker POLLEN NDLANYA, in partnership with MC Letoka Foundation, donated over 300 pairs of school shoes and stationery to underprivileged kids at four schools in the Mokopane area in Limpopo's Waterberg District. Mangwedi Primary School, Kgomoshiakwena Primary School, Matopa High School and Seshoatlha High School were beneficiaries of the initiative of the Foundation's annual community development and humanitarian efforts. iDiski Times writer LETHABO KGANYAGO caught up with the former Bafana Bafana international to speak about this drive, which is close to his heart, as he's passionate about kids staying in school and balancing their sports interests with educational backing. In this interview, Ndlanya also shares his views on his former sides' good start to the current campaign, the league title race and Bafana as they will start preparations for the upcoming FIFA World Cup in America.

Lethabo Kganyago: Pollen, thank you so much. Firstly, please tell us about this initiative with Letoka Foundation and how it started.

Pollen Ndlanya: Look, this is a good initiative which I always dreamed about since I was playing football. It's sort of a payback to the community and to the disadvantaged areas like Mokopane and the children that are in need. I met Letoka Foundation through a guy called Doctor [Maphale]. He introduced me to him, and he had the vision of helping the community. I said to him I also do these things, helping the community more especially in December time, whereby I'll be making children play netball, soccer. After that I would donate something to the community. So I said this is huge, and he said, look, 'Let's do something in Mokopane', where he was born and I said I don't have a problem with that. I would love to be part of it. Ja, that's how it happened.

LK: I can imagine this is putting together the importance of education and helping children remain in school. Does it speak to you personally as well

in those terms?

PN: Definitely. Look, as much as you love sports, you have to have something that you can dwell on, like education. Education is very important in a sense that you have to empower yourself, and again, you have to understand certain things. For example, when you get a huge contract, you must understand what is happening there in that contract, as a footballer or in another sporting code. I think education is very important. So what we are doing, it's huge, sports and education, it's hand in glove. So I think it's very important for the kids to be educated and at the same time they have to play sport, because sport is healthy and also it keeps them away from the streets.

LK: I'm glad you touched on your festive tournament, because I wanted to ask about it, if you are still hosting it. How is it going, and are you seeing growth?

PN: Definitely, I'm seeing growth. You know, when I started this tournament, I was concentrating on the elders. But now I had to divert this thing, I said, let me concentrate on development. I'm in partnership with Build It, where we are concentrating on the U13s, the youth U10 in netball and soccer. So it's growing. And recently, in December, we had about 300 kids, who were playing, which was so amazing for me. It's growing each and every year, and I'm so happy. And now Mr Letoka's Foundation is doing the same tournament, probably this Easter, we'll be supporting that, and we're taking my mind, I'm taking everything, and we're scouting. We're going to Mokopane to do a similar thing with the foundation. Kids love playing, they love sports. And like I was saying, we had 300 kids, even if they are not that good, we give them the chance. We don't want to discourage them, and the coaches are so helpful. They listen to the kids. They try to give advice to the kids, and seeing parents supporting the kids is good. It was so amazing when you see black parents supporting their kids. That thing we normally see it in white communities. Now they're coming, getting involved, and we



urge more black parents to come and support their kids.

LK: Recently, it was your former club Kaizer Chiefs' 56th birthday. What's your birthday message to the club in such a season where they have also started well after winning a trophy and breaking that 10-year drought?

PN: Look, this is a big team and I do have a soft spot for that team because when I started my career, they are the ones who mentored me and made sure my talent was recognised. There are a lot of supporters that love that team. So I'm wishing well to whoever is in the management, and what they can do, they should just focus and make sure the team is in its position where? On top of the league, if not maybe in Africa. They must keep on doing well, and I know it's hard. It's hard for them, and hopefully things will come right for them this year. They must keep on praying, we also pray for them and all the supporters. I know they do pray for the team. They want to see the team in their position, which is number one in the league.

LK: I'm sure you were happy last season when they won the Nedbank Cup and the good start to the league this season.

PN: Ja, it's always good, and when we win something, it creates that confidence in the players and the management. And this year, they will start with a high note. But with confidence and belief in themselves, each and every player, I think, they are going to do well this season. It's all about focus and having confidence, and having that will to win.

LK: Having not finished in the top eight in the last two seasons must be a driving force to say that can't happen for three successive seasons...

PN: For a big team like Kaizer Chiefs, it's not healthy to not finish in the top eight. But it happens, you know, sometimes luck is not on your side, it happens, but that thing, it's water under the bridge. So they have to focus for this season and make sure that they win each and every game because I've noticed that what is lacking in their performance is consistency. You need to be consistent. The graph, when you go up, you must go up, up, maybe a little bit down because the road won't be smooth all the time, you must keep on going up, climb the mountain, that is consistency.

"FOR A BIG TEAM LIKE KAIZER CHIEFS, IT'S NOT HEALTHY TO NOT FINISH IN THE TOP EIGHT. BUT IT HAPPENS, YOU KNOW, SOMETIMES THE LUCK IS NOT ON YOUR SIDE, IT HAPPENS, BUT THAT THING, IT'S WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE."

LK: And what do you think of their Confederation Cup start? We know that the last time they were in a CAF competition, they went as far as the final, which was the Champions League. Now is the Confederations Cup.

PN: Hence, I said consistency. You need to be consistent. The club is going up and down, which is not healthy. Look, nothing is impossible if they can focus and apply their mind. With a positive mind and everything well for them mentally, I think they can go far. Yes, they're struggling, I understand. You mentioned that they even went so far as to play the final against an Egyptian club. That's a sign of saying that they can do it. Nothing is impossible, so they have to take it from there and go forward.

LK: And what do you make of their strikers and attackers overall this season, the likes of [Glody] Lilepo, Flavio [Silva], with the help of the likes [Wandile] Duba and [Mduduzi] Shabalala upfront.

PN: That's a very important department, the striking force. You know, when you can't score goals, you cannot win. So you do need to score goals. You mentioned Flavio, at least Flavio is coming with something different, and by scoring, he will give the confidence to other players. When I was playing, I used to score goals, and automatically I'd give these other players like [Thabang] Banda Lebese, Tsiki-Tsiki [Thabo Mooki] to come more and want to score goals. So, Flavio, I think he is coming with that mentality and that dimension, and also the likes of Mdu, they will come and support

Flavio and maybe get that chance and score. It's all about scoring. I think the striking force, they will do well; they'll pick up and make sure that they score more goals, because without scoring, we don't win any game. Not forgetting the defence, you need to close that door at some point. They need to score and defend very well. They do have some good defenders. I hope that the coach will concentrate on defence and make sure that the defence is so solid.

LK: And your other former team, Orlando Pirates, have done well, two cups so far this season, and they're looking strong in the league too. What do you feel their chances of actually challenging for the league title this season are?

PN: That's the only team that is showing interest in winning the league. Even last season, when you check, they bought some very good players; it's just that luck was not on their side. But even this year, you can see that they've shown the signs of winning the league; they want to compete with Sundowns. Hopefully, it will be their year. Without taking nothing away from [Mamelodi] Sundowns, this year, Sundowns are going to have it very tough. Why I am saying this is because teams have prepared themselves well. So I think Pirates is a team that will be competing for the league.

LK: Do you think the upcoming derby could be one for the books, especially seeing that the Soweto teams have started well?

PN: Soweto derby will always be on top. It's like Spanish El Classico. Even if one of the teams is not playing well, when it is Soweto derby, everything stands still. They always want to prove a point. You know, there's a lot of things that happen in a Soweto derby. The sponsors would love for the team to win, and also the supporters. You know, the management, they'll promise you so much. So all the players that will be playing in the Soweto derby want to prove a point, and they want to play well for themselves. Remember, when you play well in a derby, you stand a chance of being selected in the national team, and maybe the scouts coming from overseas, they'll be watching too, and maybe you'll be lucky and have a chance of playing overseas. But at the same time, if you don't play well in a Soweto derby, that thing can kill your career. That's how important the derby is.

LK: Speaking about the national team, the last few years we've seen such a consistent rise in the squad. But obviously, there was disappointment with this year's AFCON. Do you feel it's heavy, considering that last time the team actually got a medal?

PN: Look, the national team started very well. I must say Hugo Broos did very well, and we started to see that flair, although a lot of supporters were questioning why they selected a lot of players of Sundowns. That happens everywhere. It happens everywhere, like in Spain, where the team will be full of [Real] Madrid players and Barcelona players. Besides that, they are doing well. We



“WITHOUT TAKING NOTHING AWAY FROM [MAMELODI] SUNDOWNS, THIS YEAR, SUNDOWNS ARE GOING TO HAVE IT VERY TOUGH. WHY I AM SAYING THIS IS BECAUSE TEAMS HAVE PREPARED THEMSELVES WELL. SO I THINK PIRATES IS A TEAM THAT WILL BE COMPETING FOR THE LEAGUE.”

qualified for AFCON, and now we have qualified for the World Cup. I must say, in this AFCON, we didn't play well, I must be honest. I don't know whether the players had stage fright or what, but also I always talk about consistency and the question again, I don't know, and I should respect Broos' selection. But the selection, it was not convincing for me. It was not convincing, looking at the players, like [Thembinkosi] Lorch. You know Lorch has been in his peak, doing well for his team, and also [Iqraam] Rayners has been doing well for Sundowns. Those are the players that we needed, and I'm talking on behalf of the strikers now. I personally needed Lorch and Rayners, but I have to, at the same time, respect Hugo Broos' decisions.

LK: Heading into the World Cup, do you feel like maybe those players could have been selected?

PN: Why not? Everyone stands a chance of making it to the World Cup; it depends on individual performance. You see, if they do well, the likes of Lorch performing in their clubs, very good, I don't think Hugo Broos will ignore them. Every player, whether playing for AmaZulu or playing for Stellenbosch, if they perform well, people are looking, we are looking, everyone is looking, if you perform well, why not? I think the players want to go to the World Cup, and I think Hugo Broos he's got the room for every player to come and play.

LK: Pollen, thank you so much.



THE IDISKI TOP 10... SA STRIKERS

This week, iDiski Times turns the spotlight on the top 10 strikers in the history of the South African national team, charting the journey from our readmission to international football 34 years ago to the present day.

Over the decades, *Bafana Bafana* have been blessed with an array of forwards who thrilled supporters, carried the nation's hopes on their shoulders, and delivered unforgettable moments in green and gold. From trailblazers who helped announce South Africa's return to the world stage, to modern-era marksmen tasked with flying the flag in an increasingly competitive global game, each era has produced its own heroes.

With the recent release of Benni McCarthy's biography, the timing felt perfect to revisit that rich attacking lineage. It's a chance to celebrate the goals, the grit and the personalities that shaped Bafana's identity, and to honour the strikers whose impact went far beyond the scoresheet, leaving a lasting mark on South African football history.

This is not an overall list of the all-time top scorers but just those recognised as strikers in the majority of their appearances. Several wingers and midfielders like Percy Tau (16), Sibusiso Zuma (13), Themba Zwane and Siphiwe Tshabalala (12), Teko Modise and Delron Buckley (10), Doctor Khumalo and Tebogo Mokoena (9), Helman Mkhalele and Shoes Moshoeu (8), Oswin Appollis (7) and others, are amongst the national goalscoring records.

(*statistics as of 10 February 2025)

The Top 10:

10 - Evidence Makgopa
24 caps, 6 goals

There will inevitably be a few raised eyebrows at seeing Evidence Makgopa's name, but numbers and moments matter, and Makgopa has delivered both, his sixth goal. In an era where goals have been hard to come by, the 25-year-old has stepped up when it counted, none more so than his crucial strike in the win that helped secure *Bafana Bafana*'s qualification for the upcoming FIFA World Cup. He may not yet carry the aura of some names on this list, but with his best years still ahead of him, don't be surprised if Makgopa, the only player on the list who hasn't played abroad (as of yet),

climbs steadily up this list in the years to come.

9 - Mark Williams
23 caps 8 goals

Mark Williams' international career was brief, but his legacy is permanent. The hero of the 1996 AFCON final, his two goals against Tunisia at a rocking FNB Stadium are etched into South African sporting folklore. A larger-than-life character both on and off the pitch, Williams was already 30



when he reached the pinnacle with Bafana, and his international journey ended just a year later in 1997. He may not have had longevity, but few players in South African history have had moments as iconic as his.

8 - Lyle Foster

28 caps, 10 goals

Still very much a work in progress, Lyle Foster is already knocking on the door of elite Bafana company. One of two active players on this list, the 25-year-old boasts an impressive scoring ratio in national colours – in fact, it outstrips his club return, where his all-round contribution is often more valued than raw goals. While he remains a lightning rod for criticism, Foster's numbers speak for themselves. With Bafana's renewed confidence and structure, he has every chance of becoming one of the greats if he continues on this trajectory.

7 - Tokelo Rantie

40 caps, 12 goals

Perhaps the most heartbreaking story on this list. Tokelo Rantie looked destined for greatness, a striker with pace, power and an eye for goal who scored regularly for Bafana in his early twenties. Yet personal struggles saw his career unravel far too soon. Remarkably, he still found the net twice in his final three international appearances, including a memorable goal away in Nigeria, before his Bafana journey ended at just 27. Despite several attempted comebacks, Rantie faded from the professional game, leaving behind a lingering sense of what might have been.

6 - Siyabonga Nomvethé

82 caps, 16 goals

Nomvethé's story is one of versatility and longevity. While sometimes deployed on the wing, it was upfront where he made his most telling contributions for Bafana. He may not have been the most prolific scorer on this list, but his blistering pace, movement and ability to create space made him invaluable. Active for Bafana between 1999 and 2012, Nomvethé's influence extended far beyond goals, and his role in facilitating others' success is an underrated part of Bafana's modern history.

5 - Phil Masinga

58 caps, 19 goals

The late Phil Masinga remains one of the most important figures in South African football history. A pioneer abroad and a powerful presence up front, he often endured unfair criticism from the stands despite delivering on the biggest stages. Of course, he will forever be remembered for the goal that sealed South Africa's first-ever FIFA World Cup qualification. A true gentleman and a world-class striker, Masinga paved the way for future generations and left an indelible mark on the game, both at home and overseas.

4 - Bernard Parker

70 caps, 21 goals

For a long stretch, Bernard Parker looked like the natural heir to Benni McCarthy and Shaun Bartlett. Playing during a turbulent period for Bafana, he still managed to score vital goals, though his career is often unfairly reduced to one infamous own goal against Ethiopia. By 2015, his international chapter had closed, even as he continued playing at the highest level for years afterwards, transitioning into a deeper, more creative role at club level. His contribution in a challenging era deserves greater appreciation. Parker also scored two goals in games that were officially FIFA-sanctioned.

3 - Katlego Mphela

53 caps, 23 goals

At his peak, Katlego "Killer" Mphela was simply unstoppable. For around five years, he was the most feared striker in South African football, scoring freely for both club and country. His breakout moment came with goals against Spain at the Confederations Cup, launching him firmly into the Bafana spotlight. Once tipped as a future all-time top scorer, injuries and a sudden loss of form cut his international career short after 2013. Even so, his goal return places him firmly among the elite.



2 - Shaun Bartlett

74 caps, 29 goals

Before Benni McCarthy rewrote the record books, Shaun Bartlett was the benchmark. Tireless, intelligent and fiercely committed, Bartlett was a striker who worked as hard without the ball as he did with it. A trailblazer abroad, his journey took him from South Africa to the USA, Switzerland and England, all while remaining a key figure for Bafana. A cornerstone of the Class of '96, many forget that his best years came in his mid to late twenties, when he was at the peak of his powers.

1 - Benni McCarthy

80 caps, 31 goals

The gold standard. Benni McCarthy remains Bafana Bafana's all-time leading goalscorer, and it may be a long time before his record is seriously threatened. His international career was often disrupted by off-field politics, meaning his tally could, and arguably should, have been even higher. Yet his legacy is secure: four goals in a single match against Namibia, AFCON top scorer in Burkina Faso, and the first South African to score at a FIFA World Cup, in France in 1998. Records may fall, but McCarthy's place in Bafana history is untouchable.

What the Top 10 tells us:

It really is a wonderfully rich list, but it also tells a far more sobering story about South African football over the last three decades. For all the talent we've produced, genuinely consistent goal-scorers at national level have been few and far between.

For the generation of the 1990s, timing was cruel. When South Africa finally returned to international football, it was already too late for some excellent forwards like Shane McGregor, Fani Madida or Marks Maponyane to truly build long Bafana careers. They arrived at the party just as the doors were opening, with little time to make the most of it.

That first era belonged to Masinga, Williams and Bartlett. Their consistency inevitably squeezed opportunities for others. Players such as Pitso Mosimane, Jerry Sikhosana, Daniel Mudau, George Dearnaley, and a few others all had moments, but never the sustained run needed to build imposing scoring records.

When McCarthy emerged in the wake of AFCON '96, many of those names quietly faded from the picture. Pollen Ndlanya, to his credit, became a useful option, though even he might look back and feel he left goals on the table, finishing with just five in 29 appearances.

Nomvetho followed soon after, while Sibusiso Zuma was occasionally pushed into a central role around the turn of the century. There was no shortage of promise, but consistency remained elusive. George Koumantarakis, Bradley August, Nkosinathi Nhleko, Glen Salmon – all showed flashes. Patrick Mayo

scored six in 18 caps, but became a defender. And then there was Lesley Manyathela, whose tragic passing cut short a career that felt destined for much more.

The 2000s brought even more faces, helped by expanded competitions like COSAFA Cup and later CHAN, where experimental squads became the norm. Caps became easier to earn, goals far less so.

In that period, only Parker and Mphela truly carried the scoring burden with any regularity. Others – Katlego Mashego, Terror Fanteni, Sthembiso Ngcobo – were given chances, but couldn't turn them into lasting returns.

Over the last decade, the pattern largely continued. Plenty of strikers, plenty of debuts, but very few goal tallies that grew, with Thamsanqa Gabuza's six goals in 16 caps the best output until the emergence of Foster and Makgopa.

**Please note that while Magkopa, Mayo and Gabuza all have six goals, Makgopa is ranked higher because three of Mayo's goals were scored in the COSAFA Cup, while Gabuza scored once in CHAN preliminary rounds.*



IDISKI'S NEDBANK CUP TEAM OF THE WEEK (4-8 FEBRUARY 26)

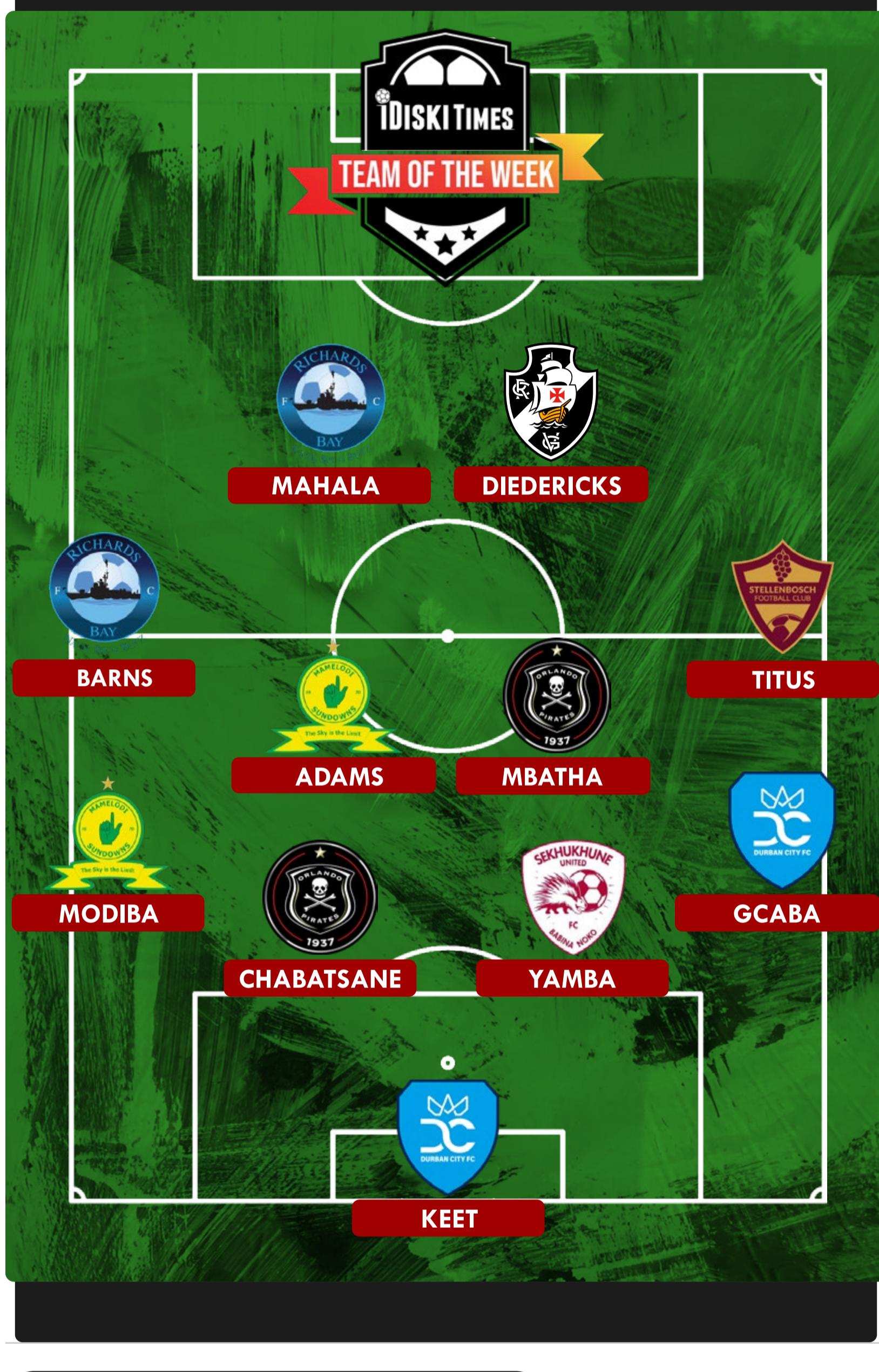
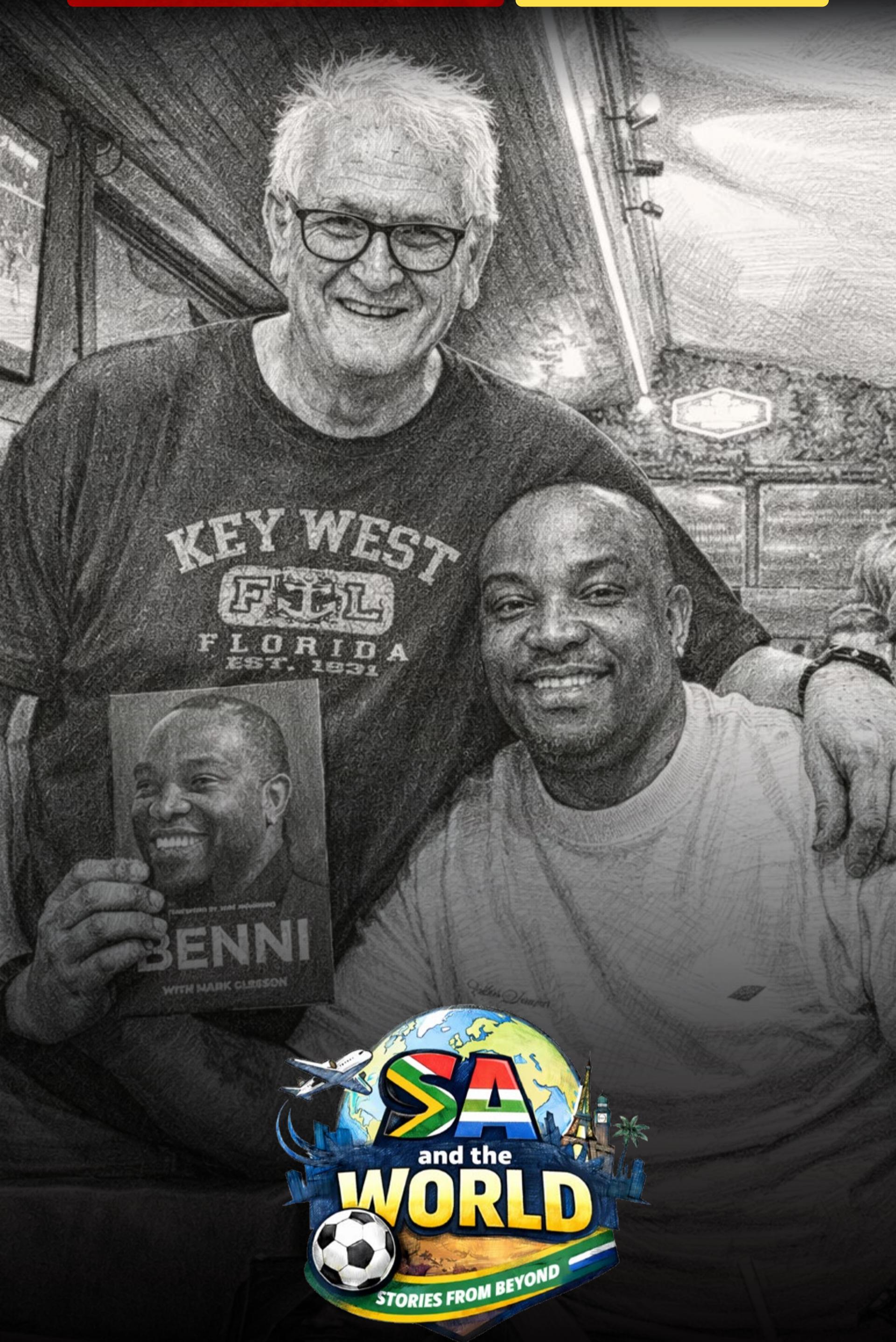


Photo: ceramicacclub

ACE OF THE WEEK:
FAGRIE LAKAY

Our iDiski Times' Ace of the Week is South African forward Fagrie Lakay after his match-winning performance for Ceramica Cleopatra in Egypt last week. Lakay was named Man of the Match in the 3-2 victory over Ghazl El Mahalla, with the 28-year-old grabbing two goals in the game that saw Cleopatra move seven points clear at the top of the Egyptian Premier League. It's been a great start to the campaign for Lakay and his team, with the former SuperSport United and Cape Town City forward having contributed four goals and three assists thus far.



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.

This week, we are delighted to bring you an extract from Benni McCarthy's newly-released biography, BENNI, written with Mark Gleeson, and published by Pan MacMillan South Africa.

For context, McCarthy's team, Porto, were en route to winning the UEFA Champions League, led by the legendary Jose Mourinho. But standing in their way was Manchester United, the club Benni had supported since childhood, and also where Quinton Fortune, a friend since pre-teen days, was playing. The following edited extract has been shared by the publishers Pan MacMillan South Africa:

9

Champions League Success

Mourinho was buzzing throughout the fortnight between the first leg against Manchester United and the trip to England for the return leg. 'We are going there to teach them a lesson, to spank them. I don't care how powerful a club they are, or how famous their players are,' he would tell us.

'They are nothing compared to us because we've already proven that here,' he'd say, referring to our win at home in the first leg. He was so determined we would not lose.

I thought our 2–1 success was still a tenuous lead to take to Old Trafford, but I did back us to get an away goal at least, more so because of the Rio Ferdinand saga. So did the others in the squad and Porto was abuzz with excitement and confidence. The message from the guys was let's stick it to them because of the way they had disrespected us at the end of the first leg. We all felt that a club of the calibre of Man United might have congratulated us for the way we had exceeded expectation and beaten them in the first leg. But that was just a thought. The opposite proved to be the case in reality.

It was hostile from the start in Manchester, even in the tunnel as we all lined up before kick-off. They were already swearing at us and calling us 'cheating bastards'. We were also calling them every name under the sun in Portuguese! It was a duel that was destined to be a cracker.

Although I had been a massive Manchester United supporter growing up, I didn't let Old Trafford overawe me. I was concentrating on my own game and determined to play the best match of my life at the 'Theatre of Dreams'.

Revenge and progress in the Champions League were front and centre, but I must be honest and admit that in the back of my mind I thought that if I played the best game I had ever played, maybe Sir Alex Ferguson would see something in me. Maybe something that he didn't see in Louis Saha, Diego Forlán and Ruud van Nistelrooy, who were falling out of favour at that time.

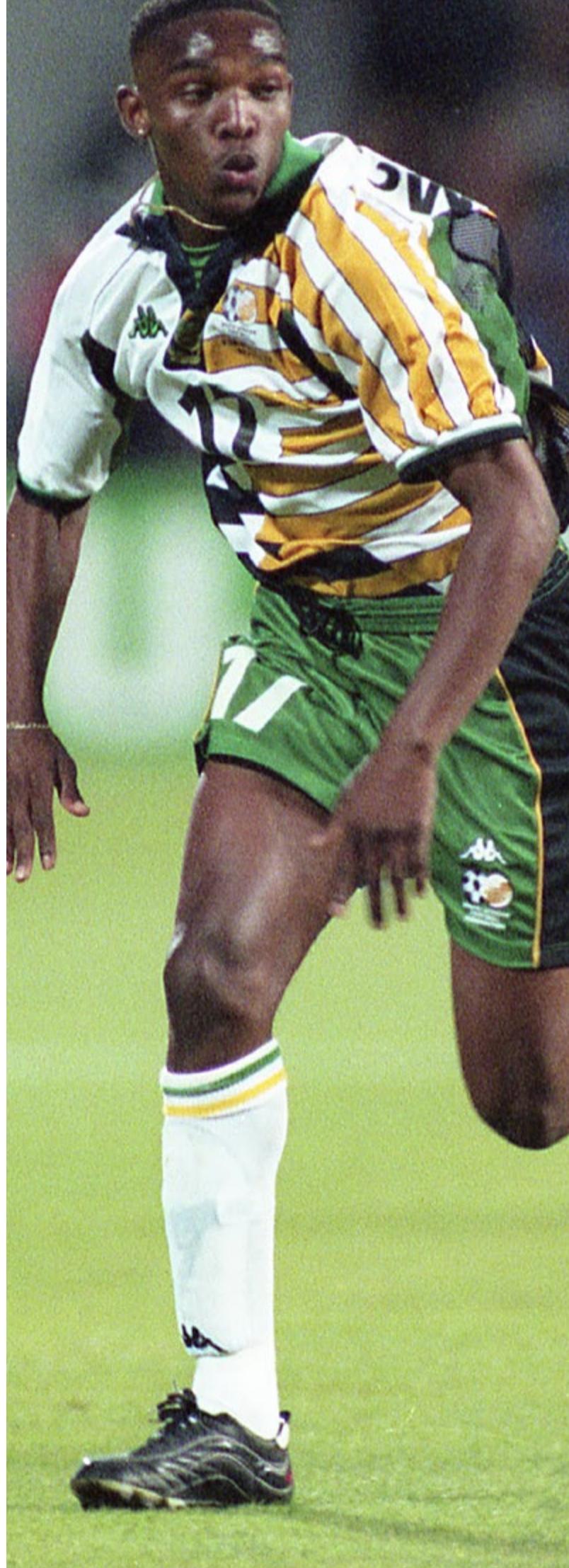
As much as I loved playing at Porto, I saw this as the perfect opportunity. It would be a dream come true to one day return

to the stadium that I had fantasised about playing at and follow in the footsteps of the great Red Devils players that I had idolised growing up.

But my overriding emotion was anger, the same as the rest of my teammates. We were determined, and losing was not an option. To be frank, with all that went on around that Champions League clash, I had lost a lot of respect for my favourite club. Some of the players I used to admire, indeed adore, turned out to be a real disappointment. When you put aside their talents, none of them turned out to be pleasant guys.

It made me reconsider my love for Man United. I ain't supporting them no more, I thought. The stakes were high, and there is a lot of pride that goes with playing at that level of the game, but I was still so taken aback by their bad behaviour. If you lose, you lose. If the other team is better than you over the two legs, you take it, you accept it, irrespective of how immature we might have been with the way we celebrated. They should surely have understood that a small club like Porto was not at their level.

So, I lost a lot of love for Manchester



United, and I even lost my close friendship with Quinton Fortune. We didn't speak after the first leg for about three or four years. When I went up to talk to him after the game, he waved me away, saying he couldn't speak to me. It left me bemused that someone I'd known since I was 10 didn't want to exchange pleasantries or have a little catch-up after the match. 'Oh well,' I thought to myself, 'if that's your attitude then so be it, life moves on.' But it did leave a sour taste.

We were on the back foot from the first minute of the second leg. They brought the fire to us, with a Premier League tempo. Old Trafford is often criticised for being more of an arena where people go to be entertained than a real hotbed for visiting teams, but that night you could feel the passion their fans had for the team and the way they got behind them. It was intense. Roy Keane might have complained in the past about the socialites eating prawn sandwiches in suites at the stadium, but we were served a dish of chilli-hot football by them.

The Portuguese league was good, a great standard with fantastic players, but the pace that we played at in our league was nothing compared to the

English way. Man United wanted to exhaust us and take us out of our comfort zone. It really felt that the game was being played at 100 miles an hour, but the minute we found our feet, we started putting a couple of passes together, kept them at bay, and slowly grew into the game.

Then came a sucker punch. Paul Scholes scored for them, and I felt that maybe the momentum would be with them and they would just run away with it. They were full speed ahead, like an unstoppable steam train. We were not used to defending with everyone behind the ball, but Mourinho had prepared us mentally for what we were going to be up against at Old Trafford. He predicted we might be on the back foot for 70 minutes, or even the full 90 minutes, but we should be able to maintain and control the situation. And we would get opportunities.

Again, losing was not an option. That had been our mantra from the first leg...

Go grab a copy of BENNI now, available at Exclusive Books, Reader's Warehouse, Wordsworth Books, Takealot, Loot and others.

