



CARDOSO GETS STATEMENT WIN VS RULANI, PIRATES NEXT?



PHIRI ON CHIEFS TALKS, FACING CR7 & SEKHUKHUNE TARGETS



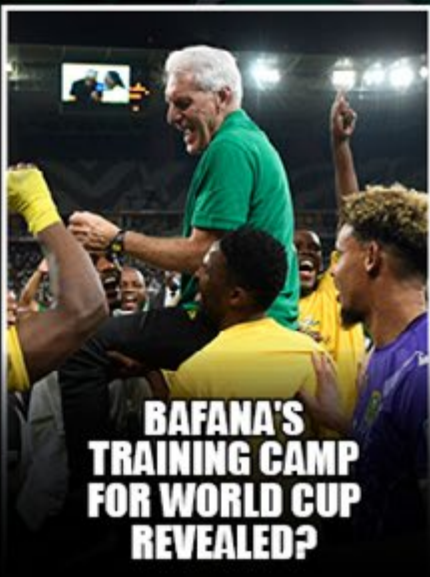
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STELLIES FORK OUT CLOSE TO R400K FOR ABRAHAMS RETURN

Stellenbosch FC have ended the controversial Faiz Abrahams saga with Hapoel Kfar Saba by paying out to terminate his loan that had six months remaining. The U20 Africa Cup of Nations winner is back in full training with the club after refusing to return to Israel after being granted a week's break before the January transfer window. It came as a surprise after the winger scored three goals with three assists in 11 games and was being courted by several of the elite clubs in Israel. The case was set to be taken to FIFA, but Stellies have now avoided a long contractual dispute and potential ban for the player by settling a termination fee with the Liga Leumit outfit, believed to be around \$25,000.



MARIKO BACK AT PIRATES AFTER CHIPPA LOAN

Abdoulaye Mariko has been spotted back training with Orlando Pirates after an ill-fated loan spell with Chippa United. The midfielder who joined alongside his namesake from Djoliba at the start of the season was immediately sent on loan for regular first-team minutes. But it didn't quite go to plan, and iDiski Times recently reported that he had grown frustrated by the situation. It now seems that he has been recalled by his parent club, who could use the foreign quota spot previously filled by Olisa Ndah.



PHILI REJECTS LUCRATIVE SWITCH TO LIBYA?

Stellenbosch winger Langelihle Phili was the subject of a major bid from Libyan giants Al Ahly Tripoli, but the move was seemingly not of interest to the player. Sources have confirmed the Libyan club submitted an offer of around R12-million for the player, which Stellenbosch were open to. However, after a reported club-to-club agreement, sources at the North African club state talks died down with no response from the player or representatives. The U20 Africa Cup of Nations winner has enjoyed a breakout season with Stellies, scoring seven goals in 23 games across all competitions.



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BAFANA TO SET UP BASE IN PACHUCA FOR WORLD CUP?

A Bafana Bafana delegation is set to travel to North America at the end of the month to finalise their base in the Mexican City, Pachuca, for the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup set to take place between June 11 and July 19.

The city has been suggested, located about 90 kilometres north of Mexico City, the nation’s capital, where the opening game will take place at the Estadio Azteca.

South Africa take on tournament hosts Mexico, in what is a repeat of the iconic 2010 opener at FNB Stadium – with the Latin American side one of three hosts alongside Canada and the United States of America in the first-ever 48-team edition.

In their second Group A fixture, South Africa face a European nation in Atlanta, USA, which will be confirmed after the final playoffs next month, before ending on June 24 back in Mexico, Monterrey against South Korea.

While it may have been seen initially as a favourable draw, it appears to be quite a tricky, unpredictable group for Bafana, who have scheduled two friendlies in Mzansi against Panama, ranked 33rd in the world as preparation for the global showpiece.

There’s likely to be some changes to the squad that represented the nation in Morocco for the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations and suffered a last-16 exit, with Hugo Broos admitting that perhaps they need to relook at the balance of the squad for a



tournament, which he concedes is a higher level than the Nations Cup.

With the logistics now seemingly confirmed, for fans who are seeking to travel in support of Bafana, a flight to Atlanta would take plus-minus three hours, while a flight to Monterrey is one and a half hours from the base, Pachuca.

Reports suggest the facilities of CF Pachuca, one of the most historic clubs in the country, will be used in what’s said to be favourable [cooler] weather conditions than the rest of North America, which drew major criticism during the FIFA Club World Cup in the USA.

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KHANYE REACTS TO KAIZER CHIEFS’ CONFED CUP EXIT

While Mamelodi Sundowns were able to book their place in the knockout stages of the CAF Champions League, it was the end of the road for South Africa’s CAF Confederation Cup participants as Stellenbosch and Kaizer Chiefs crashed out.

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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‘Kaizer Chiefs Ran Out Of Luck’

“What is constant about life is that luck runs out. Kaizer Chiefs ran out of luck.

“In the last match against Al Masry, Chiefs scored from a questionable penalty and

an offside goal. Those were the two goals that gave them the win.

“In the first round against Zamalek, Chiefs conceded a winning goal by Zamalek, and it was ruled out by the referees for no reason.

“That’s why I’m saying their luck ran out.

“As a South African, well done to Chiefs for getting themselves in a position to almost qualify for the Knockout stages, but the whole time they were unconvincing.

“I still think their interim coaches are an issue that needs to be addressed. I don’t think they should continue with these guys, to be honest.

“There is also an issue of the quality of players. I looked at Pule Mmodi, Glody Lilepo, and Flavio Silva! None of them could make something out of nothing for themselves.”



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CARDOSO GETS STATEMENT WIN VS RULANI, PIRATES NEXT?

By Matshelane Mamabolo

Basic continental mission accomplished, now for the domestic charge. You’ve got to give it to Mamelodi Sundowns. For a club apparently going through a crisis and performing at their worst under a coach seen by most as not good enough, the Brazilians continue to achieve big things.



“THERE’S A TRUTH IN FOOTBALL THAT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND - YOU CANNOT WIN WITHOUT TACTICS OR STRATEGY, BUT IT’S THE EMOTIONS THAT USUALLY MAKE THE DIFFERENCE.”

Saturday’s qualification for the CAF Champions League quarter-final was an accomplishment that confirmed the club’s standing as one of the top teams on the continent. Most importantly, though, it should surely now silence Cardoso’s detractors. For while he is yet to deliver on the shoe shine and piano that was promised by both club chairman Thlopie Motsepe and Sporting Director Flemming Berg when they unveiled him as Sundowns new coach last year, the Portuguese is delivering the goods, alright.

Granted, winning the domestic championship is standard at the club owned by mining magnate and now CAF president Patrice Motsepe. But Cardoso did that via breaking numerous records set by some of his predecessors. Of course, he did not win the Holy Grail of continental club knockout football, but in reaching the final last year, the former Esperance coach achieved the (joint) second-best performance by the club after the 2016 victory of Pitso Mosimane’s team.

This time around, a dark cloud hovered above Chloorkop as Cardoso’s men stuttered through the group stage, Sundowns dropping crucial points at home and then suffering their maiden defeat to an opponent – Al Hilal – they’d hitherto previously dominated. Not surprising then, they went into the final group match still chasing qualification for the knockout phase.

Prior to the weekend’s match, their former coach Rulani Mokwena, who returned to Loftus Versfeld with Algerian club MC Alger, threw subtle shade on his erstwhile employer before getting his ‘nose bloodied’ by Cardoso.

“And to arrive in the Match-day six of the group is something I’m a little bit unfamiliar with, you know,” Mokwena said during the pre-match media conference. “Because in the past with the Champions League, normally we were trying to navigate whether we favour finishing first or second.”

He said that because he’d qualified for the quarter-finals in every campaign with Sundowns and was confident he’d see them failing to do so for the first time since 2018 as his Algerian side needed just a draw. They did not get anywhere near that result, Cardoso giving a Masterclass to the young coach on how to handle ‘grudge matches’.



CARDOSO 3 MOKWENA 0 (with one stalemate)

Saturday’s 2-0 defeat of MC Alger was the third time Miguel Cardoso won a CAF Champions League match over Rulani Mokwena in four meetings. The two teams played to a goalless stalemate in the first round out in Algeria back in November. Before this season’s campaign, the two men had squared up in the semi-final of the 2024 edition, Cardoso’s Esperance beating Mokwena’s Sundowns 1-0 home and away. Those were the results that led to the powers that be at Chloorkop luring the bald-headed Portuguese to taking over at Sundowns after Mokwena departed abruptly in spite of his having led the club to a near-perfect league season in which he only lost once on final match day with the championship already sewn up.

But why is it that the beleaguered Portuguese was able to outsmart the beloved ‘son of the soil’ who received so much love at Loftus at the weekend?

CARDOSO’S SINGLE-MINDEDNESS WINS THE DAY

Amidst reports of Mokwena receiving insider tactical information from a member of the Sundowns technical team – analyst Mario Marsha was even suspended by the club pending further investigation of his WhatsApp communication with his former boss – Cardoso’s ability to remain nonchalant about it all was highly impressive. Under tremendous pressure given the club’s relatively poor Champions League form as Sundowns went into Saturday’s tie on the back of just one victory from way back on Match-day one in five matches, many coaches would have panicked. Not so the 53-year-old tactician who worked hard to keep his team focused on the job at hand and block out the outside noise. Unlike Mokwena, who involved his players in the ‘leaks’ scandal and even got one of them to attest to his character in the pre-match conference, Cardoso

“TODAY WE WERE VERY, VERY STRONG AS A COLLECTIVE ON MANAGING, ON BRINGING THE RIGHT EMOTIONS INSIDE THE PITCH.”

ensured his players were cold as ice on Match-day, focused solely as they were on winning the match and channelling the right emotions into it.

“There’s a truth in football that is very important to understand – you cannot win without tactics or strategy, but it’s the emotions that usually make the difference. Today we were very, very strong as a collective on managing, on bringing the right emotions inside the pitch; on staying focused on the right emotions throughout the match; on reminding each other what kind of emotions we have to have towards the end of the game. And that came from a strong mindset that was developed throughout the week.”

And what a week it was, Sundowns having to deal with the leaks and Cardoso needing to ensure that his players remain grounded on the face of the return to Loftus of a coach they remain close to. He passed that with flying colours.

SUNDOWNS’ CONTINENTAL EXPERIENCE SHINES THROUGH

Having played Champions League knockout football every season since 2019, Mamelodi Sundowns are veterans of the continental game. And while their squad has been changing with the addition of new players each campaign thereafter, there are always players with experience in the team who do a great job of passing it on to the newcomers. This much was evident on Saturday with all of goalkeeper and captain Ronwen Williams, Khuliso Mudau, Aubrey Modiba, Teboho Mokoena, Thapelo



Morena and Grant Kekana playing a crucial role in ensuring cool heads on the pitch for a victory that was achieved without Sundowns really getting out of third gear. There was a special moment after the break, before the second half started, when Kekana put his arm around Khulumani Ndamane inside the box and spoke to him for a good minute and a bit. The young defender, who is playing in his maiden Champions League campaign had had a wonky first half, and Kekana clearly saw it fit to help calm his nerves and pass on valuable advice.

THE BRAZILIANS' QUALITY & STRENGTH IN DEPTH IS KEY

Brayan Leon's brace of goals won the day, the Colombian showing finishing prowess that is sure to stand Sundowns in good stead going into the knockout phase, where they are due to come against quality opposition. Both his goals were an illustration of his predatory instincts and brilliant positioning – Leon first pouncing on a loose ball after the goalkeeper had parried an Arthur Sales' shot and then sneaking in front of a defender to steer the ball in at the near post. Jayden Adams was imperious in midfield, returning as he is to form after a lengthy time out in the cold which saw him miss out on the Africa Cup of Nations. The fact that Cardoso could call on Marcello Allende and Peter Shalulile from the bench was an illustration of the great depth of talent he has available to him, and the Brazilians can look forward to the knockout stage with confidence, irrespective of whom they get drawn against on Tuesday. Further testament to Sundowns' strength in depth and their knowledge of how to handle these sorts of matches was the introduction of the veteran Themba Zwane late in the match to bring the proverbial Loftus Versfeld roof down was testament to Sundowns. MC Alger stood no chance.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THEIR DOMESTIC LEAGUE CHARGE

Sundowns are in unfamiliar territory,

STAT: SATURDAY'S 2-0 DEFEAT OF MC ALGER WAS THE THIRD TIME MIGUEL CARDOSO WON A CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE MATCH AGAINST RULANI MOKWENA IN FOUR MEETINGS.

having to chase table-topping Orlando Pirates who believe this is their title to lose. But their progress to the CAF Champions League quarter-final will imbue them with great confidence that they will usurp the Buccaneers and win a record-extending nine successive titles. It is great that the two teams are meeting on Wednesday, immediately after Sundowns' loud statement of intent with that 2-0 victory over MC Alger. The result of this top-of-the-table match will not decide the destination of the championship, but it will go a long way towards making a couple of factors clear. For one, a Sundowns victory will put paid to doubts over Cardoso's suitability for the job – no matter the manner of its achievement. While he has silenced some with the win over Mokwena, beating the high-flying Abdeslam Ouaddou will be a feather in the cap for the Portuguese. Narrowing the gap of Pirates' lead to just three points with a game in hand will transfer the pressure back to the Buccaneers and thus seriously test their championship mettle. And with Pirates facing a Kaizer Chiefs side that now only have the local league title to play for, Sundowns could well snuff out the Buccaneers' championship hopes by winning tomorrow in the hope Amakhosi will do the same in the Soweto Derby. It will make for an intriguing final stretch in the championship race, and Sundowns will fancy themselves to win given their experience.

The domestic season has just got spicy, thanks to Sundowns' progression into the CAF Champions League quarter-final.





PHIRI ON CHIEFS TALKS, FACING CR7 & SEKHUKHUNE TARGETS

For many, returning from overseas to play at home is not a really planned or thought-out situation, but circumstantial. However, for new Sekhukhune United midfielder LEBOGANG PHIRI, he had planned to play overseas for a decade and return home, but he pushed it to 13 years. The 31-year-old left home as a 19-year-old and had spells in Denmark, France and Turkey. He has returned to South Africa and found a home with Babina Noko after being club-less for six months. Phiri speaks to iDiski Times journalist LETHABO KGANYAGO in this edition about his decision to return home, getting fit and back to his level best, as that is what his club deserves, and to be able to contribute to the side's targets, among other matters.

Lethabo Kganyago: Lebogang, we really appreciate your time. I just want to start by asking how you are feeling after the games that you have played so far.

Lebogang Phiri: Regarding how I've been feeling since joining Sekhukhune, nothing but blessings. You know, I got welcomed very well by the team. My teammates are quite welcoming. The hospitality has been great. The staff has been great.

LK: I think everyone who follows Sekhukhune can share your sentiments. But also having not played for so long and then getting into this team and immediately being named on the bench and actually playing, how much did that mean to you?

LP: It really meant a lot. It really meant a lot that, of course, the coaching staff and the chairman, everybody in the club, has belief in my qualities and believes that even if I'm not at the level that is needed to be a part of the team, they still trust my abilities to help, even if it's coming off from the bench. You know, help with the team, the squad. Help with the young players as well, to get them focused, to be able to perform when they're required. And so for me, it's quite a morale booster to be able to come into a club like that.

LK: Coach Eric has spoken about your quality, and he agrees that you're not

at the level that you should be at, but he believes that your quality is always going to show through. The relationship that you have with him, I think, is well documented, but he has so much belief that he can actually help you get back to your best...

LP: And that, to be honest, as players, that's all we need. The coaching staff that we have, we just need them to have belief in our abilities because I believe that all the professional players that get to the level that they are at, it's not by luck. It's about dedication, hard work throughout their whole careers and when given the chance and opportunities by coaches and the confidence, it'll bring out the best out of the players. And I think that's what we're getting out of our coach.

LK: We've obviously read that you were without a club for six months. The decision to come home, how did you arrive at that?

LP: To be honest, that decision is something that's been lingering around for quite some time. You know, when I left in 2013, I had a goal and objective that I'd set up for myself, which was play abroad for 10 years, come back and finish off your career. And well, last year, end of the season, was my 13th year abroad. So for the past three years, I've been riding it out, and I felt like this is the moment. This is the time for me to come back home and be able to showcase my talents on local grounds, give back to South Africa the opportunity that they gave me when I was young, to be able to go abroad. It's something that's always been there. So for the past six months, of course, it's been talks with numerous teams back home, and finally Sekhukhune came to the table with an offer and wanted my services, and I was available.

LK: I want to talk about those offers that you got. What is it that made Sekhukhune stand out for you?

LP: In all honesty, I'm one person who's been transparent regarding transfers and all of that. So the first club that I came to with a proposal was Kaizer



Chiefs because they've been monitoring me throughout my last years of my career abroad. And I'd given the chairman my word that the first minute that I decide to come back home, I'd be knocking on your door, which I did. We didn't come to terms with our contract negotiations, and that's a part of football. So Sekhukhune have also been wanting my services. Of course, I wasn't available based on the fact that I was still negotiating with Kaizer Chiefs, and once that was out of the way, of course, I spoke to them and got given the opportunity to play 45 minutes against Tuks [University of Pretoria]. And the coaching staff was happy, the chairman was happy, and the rest is history. I'm a part of the Babina Noko family. I'm hoping to achieve great things with the club.

LK: For you to have gone abroad so young and the time you've spent there, you had given yourself 10 years, you did more than that, any regrets?

LP: No, nothing whatsoever. I think I had a fruitful spell abroad. I've gotten to play amongst great names in football. I've played amongst and against household names, for instance, Neymar, and I've played against Cristiano Ronaldo. When I was still here, I played against big names, so I think I've achieved my personal goal to be able to compete amongst the best in the world for so long. And any regrets, none whatsoever. That's why I come back home with an open heart, open-minded with a smile on my face, because I feel like I represented my country with great distinction. And most of all, I gave my family all the years that I had promised to give them abroad. And now I think it's time for Lebogang to play for Lebogang and showcase my talents on local soil.

LK: I know it's been just less than a handful of games you have played. How are you finding the local game?

LP: It's a bit intense, to be honest. It's very, very open. I feel like it's not based on so many other aspects of the game, but physicality, because you need to have the lungs to be able to run so much in a game. A lot of talented players that I've come across, which looking from the outside, you may feel like, 'Nah, okay, they are okay.' But then you come across them on the pitch, and you say, 'Okay,

"THE FIRST CLUB THAT I CAME TO WITH A PROPOSAL WAS KAIZER CHIEFS BECAUSE THEY'VE BEEN MONITORING ME THROUGHOUT MY LAST YEARS OF MY CAREER ABROAD."

now I understand.' So we have a lot of talent in South African football, which I've known for a long time, as I'm South African. But being able to come across them in that highest level of football in South Africa is something special and something that I appreciate, and I want to be a part of and continue being able to showcase my talents amongst them. Hopefully, of course, that I can help everybody else around me and people that play against me as well and also help me grow playing against all these talents and experienced players that have been doing it for so many years here at home.

LK: Your coach is an ambitious man and very open about his ambitions, top three, and to go back to the continent and play in CAF competitions. You look at your squad, do you feel like, as players, you have it in you to dig deep for that top three spot?

LP: Yeah, definitely. I think with the amount of personnel that we have in the team, with the three games that went past and the way that we played, it's disappointing. I feel like we have a squad that can compete in the PSL. I'm not saying that we have a team that can win the league, but we have a team that can push those that are in front of us to say, listen, we need to get maximum points for us to win this league. It's not going to be smooth sailing or an easy way for us to win this league. We have so much experience, so much talented players and players that have been around as well in the PSL that know the league. So I don't see why we should downplay who we are. We have a squad that, for me, can compete and should compete and should always focus on that.

LK: Is there anyone you feel like I wish I could have played with or against, even if they're not playing anymore?

LP: To be honest, I've never had that type of mindset. I've always appreciated the people that I've played with because I feel like I've grown to be the person that I am now. So wishful thinking as to I wish I played with so and so, I feel like I haven't reached my fullest potentials of, which I haven't yet. So I've always appreciated what everybody has done before us, what everybody's doing now and what everybody's going to do after us. I have always raved about the Teko Modises that have played, the [Lebogang] 'Cheeseboy' Mokoenas that have played, the late Gift Moremi that has played, Kagisho Dikgacoi, the midfielders that played before us. I've always appreciated them, but amongst my peers as well and those that I've managed to be a part of in terms of the national team, the Kamohelo Mokotjos, Bongani Zungus, the Oupa Manyisas, the Andile Jalis, at the time, I've appreciated, and I've respected and cherished what they have done for South African football and themselves as well. So for me, it's always about who I've been able to set foot on the pitch with or against, appreciate what they have done and grow from that.

LK: That's a refreshing angle, and you mentioned Bafana. What do you make of our team right now?

LP: You know, it's refreshing to be honest for us to be a team in African football that a lot of countries are scared to play against because they know that if they come across South Africa in any tournament whatsoever, they'll be running after the ball the whole time. You know it's refreshing that we have so many young players doing so well, the likes of [Oswin] Appollis, the likes of Rele Mofokeng. The more experienced players, such as Teboho Mokoena, who are showing up at all these prestigious tournaments, it's quite refreshing. And now we have players who are playing in bigger leagues, such as Lyle Foster, playing in the Premier League. There's a Shandre [Campbell] who's playing in Club Brugge that plays Champions League [UEFA]. For me, it's a plus. The motivation for the rest of the players who are doing really well, that you know, if you perform on a consistent level, you can be able to even be given a chance at national level to showcase your talents and perform. And it's not like we're just going to tournaments just to play; we go there to win. Of course, unfortunately, with this AFCON that we just experienced, we didn't have the greatest of runs, but I felt like the boys gave it their all.

LK: Do you feel you gave it your all when you wore green and gold?

LP: Always. I always gave it my all. For me, the national team is the highest form of achievement that you can get or receive as a football player. And to the opportunities that I got, I feel like I used them to the fullest of my potential. The last game that I played was against Sudan in a qualifier, in which I scored the only goal of the game that we won 1-0. And I felt like I was on top of the



"I WAS ALWAYS GRATEFUL TO BE GIVEN THE CHANCE OR THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE A PART OF THE NATIONAL TEAM."

world. Unfortunately, injuries came and became a part of the game, of course, I lost my spot in the setup, but I was always grateful to be given the chance or the opportunity to be a part of the national team, and I was happy for everybody else that gets the call-ups and makes it.

LK: And lastly, your most realistic personal goals, something you feel like when this season ends, you'll feel like this is a good comeback home for you?

LP: First of all, I need to get fit because I feel like this whole six months away from consistent football has taken a bit of a toll on me. So the first goal that I have to set for myself is getting fit because the team actually needs a fit Lebo irrespective of the calibre of player that they know on paper. They need a Lebo that is fit because then I can perform to the best of my ability to also help the team go towards the goal that we have set for ourselves. But other than that, I feel like it's more about the team because I found it in a state whereby they were doing really well, just to keep that level of form and hopefully contest for that top three, top four spot by the end of the season, so we can go to, as you said, continental tournaments the upcoming season. So until then, my personal goals are some things that I put aside in high hopes of helping the team to get to where they need to be.

LK: Thank you so much, and all the best Lebo.



SIKHOSANA: BROOS SHOULD LOOK AT SA STAR WHO MARKED MESSI

Former Bafana Bafana striker Jerry Sikhosana believes South African national team head coach Hugo Broos should set aside any negative perceptions he may have about certain leagues, such as the USA's Major League Soccer (MLS), and broaden his scope when selecting players. Sikhosana feels Broos should closely monitor and consider quality South African players plying their trade abroad, especially those who can add value to the national team as Bafana Bafana prepare for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. The tournament is scheduled to take place in the United States, Mexico and Canada from 11 June to 19 July this year.

Although Broos may not be impressed with Major League Soccer (MLS) and possibly other leagues such as the Swedish Allsvenskan, where Gift Links currently plays, Sikhosana believes that there are still players who deserve an opportunity. He points to the example of centre-back Olwethu Makhanya, whom he feels should be given a chance and could potentially make a positive contribution to Bafana Bafana, despite playing in a league that Broos does not particularly admire.

Sikhosana argues that a player's quality and readiness to perform at an international level should take precedence over perceptions of the league in which they compete, as talent can be found in various football environments across the world. He also recalled an occasion where Makhanya managed to contain Lionel


Messi during an MLS match, which he believes serves as evidence that he has the ability and experience to perform at the highest level.

The Orlando Pirates legend also feels that Broos needs to be given more time to properly prepare the team for major competitions such as AFCON and the World Cup, including during international friendly matches, where he is still experimenting with combinations and tactics. This follows Broos' concerns about players who arrive late to national team camps, particularly those playing in Major League Soccer (MLS).

At the time, Broos specifically mentioned then-midfielder Njabulo Blom [when he was playing for St Louis City], stating that the late arrivals make it difficult for him to even consider calling such players up, as they miss crucial preparation time. However, it is not only MLS-based players who face these challenges. Several other foreign-based players, including Sphephelo Sithole, Lyle Foster, and Shandre Campbell, have also arrived late to camp due to their respective clubs abroad not releasing them early.

“Remember, there was a time when we had the FIFA window when we played friendlies. I think we were supposed to play two friendlies. He opted for one because he wanted the whole week to prepare the team. So, this is a coach with a vision, if I may call it. It's a coach with a vision. So, for me



A close-up, profile view of Jerry Sikhosana, a Black man with a mustache, wearing a black baseball cap and a black quilted jacket. He is looking off to the side with a serious expression.

“WE’VE GOT A LOT OF THESE YOUNGSTERS THAT ARE PLAYING IN THE USA, AND THIS IS THE COUNTRY WHERE THE COACH WAS NOT HAPPY TO SAY MBOKAZI DOESN’T DESERVE TO GO TO AND PLAY THERE, BUT MOST OF THE PLAYERS ARE THERE.”

maybe now in the next five months if he can be given the liberty to say, ‘I need these players earlier than what the FIFA gives to countries to prepare’, get them early because now we’ve got an influx of players, now you’ve got the young [Puso] Dithejane, who’s following [Mbekezeli] Mbokazi to Chicago Fire.

“We’ve got a lot of these youngsters that are playing in the USA, and this is the country where the coach was not happy to say Mbokazi doesn’t deserve to go to and play there, but most of the players are there. So, I think on that element, he needs to take the pride, maybe something that he’s not happy with, in terms of USA, because these are the players that are going to be needed. So, use them, there is an influx of players that, personally, I didn’t know about them but I think there is like [a defender] if I’m not mistaken, a defender where I had the opportunity in the spotify when you watch all these games in the USA he was man-marking Messi, he’s a South African, [Olwethu] Makhanya. So, you can understand when there is a good South African doing a good job, but unfortunately, he’s in a country the coach doesn’t like. That’s the only advice I can give [to Broos] to say, take a look at these boys, because we really need to prepare. As much as now people are criticising him of which I don’t feel and believe we really need to do that because we still need the man to take us to the World Cup.”

Reflecting on Bafana’s AFCON campaign, Sikhosana believes the

team performed fairly well overall, despite falling short of expectations. He noted that expectations were understandably high following the previous edition of the tournament, where South Africa impressed by winning the bronze medal. As a result, the early exit in the recent edition came as a disappointment to many supporters.

‘The Legs of Thunder’ has urged South Africans to continue backing head coach Hugo Broos as the team turns its focus to the upcoming World Cup. He reminded critics that the Belgian tactician was widely praised after successfully guiding the nation to qualification for both the AFCON and the World Cup. According to Sikhosana, that achievement should not be forgotten so quickly. He added that one disappointing AFCON campaign should not trigger excessive criticism or calls for Broos to be sacked. Instead, he believes patience and support are needed, allowing the coach and the team to build on the progress already made as they prepare for future competitions.

“So, we cannot attend to the coaches’ problems because we always sit outside, and then we only see the inside when the team is in that exposure platform where they are playing, but we don’t know the inner part where they are preparing. So, for me, we still have a good coach. I mean, he did well.

“Look at all the youngsters, look at all the boys that are getting contracts overseas. It’s because of the way he’s



“MAYBE IT WAS MORE LIKE A LEARNING CURVE TO THE COACH, AND WE CANNOT FAULT HIM BECAUSE WE DON’T KNOW WHAT HE’S GOT FOR THE WORLD CUP.”

putting the team [together]. So let’s not... because we didn’t do well, we bowed out in the Last 16, and now we put criticism on him. When he put us to the World Cup, when he put us to the AFCON, we were praising him. So now I don’t think maybe it is a fair judgement.”

Broos’ side fell to the Indomitable Lions of Cameroon in the Round of 16, bringing their continental campaign to an end. Many believed the SA coach set his team up too defensively in a 3-4-3 formation, and despite conceding, he didn’t adjust his approach to spark a comeback. Sikhosana admits that the approach taken was largely experimental, even though it came during a major and highly competitive tournament. He explained that the coaching staff were testing certain ideas, combinations, and tactical approaches in preparation for the World Cup. While acknowledging that AFCON is a serious competition where results matter, Sikhosana believes the experimentation was aimed at building a stronger and more balanced squad for future challenges.

“Where it comes to the Last 16 [of AFCON], because even the system was totally, totally different. So, for me, I can say maybe the coaches were trying to look at some maybe, playing issues or playing measures to say maybe this is a platform [AFCON] where I need to look at these boys and try them. Yes, it was more in a serious competition, but for me it was more of a learning curve. Maybe something that is going to show us going forward into the World Cup,

because if you look at other countries, the starting lineup is more consistent, but we had a lot of changes. There was no game that comes after another with the same starting line-up. So, on those things, maybe it was more like a learning curve to the coach, and we cannot fault him because we don’t know what he’s got for the World Cup.”

Sikhosana says SAFA mustn’t do a repeat of 1998, where they changed the coach, sacking Clive Barker and appointing Philippe Troussier ahead of the World Cup, where Bafana didn’t do well, thereafter.

“Where you say the coach was like maybe experimenting, yes, we know it doesn’t have to be in a serious competition, you know, especially the AFCON, because we want to be part of that to win it. It was going to be great to say we did qualify for the semi-final like the last edition, but for me, let’s give credit, let’s give the coach some elements, because if we want to do what happened in 1998 [changing coach ahead of World Cup], we’re gonna fault ourselves.

“We had the late Clive Barker doing well with Bafana Bafana in 1997 [World Cup] qualifiers. In 1998, later on, when we go to the World Cup and then Philippe Troussier comes with a different dimension, different approach and that faulted everything. So, for me now let’s hold on, let’s keep the same coach because we don’t want to see this thing happening as a chop and change in terms of the technical stuff.”





BANYANA’S ROAD TO BRAZIL 2027

By Lethabo Kganyago

The road to the 2027 FIFA Women’s World Cup in Brazil has started in earnest for Banyana Banyana who are looking to make it a hat-trick of appearances at the biggest stage. The South African senior women’s team first qualified for the global showpiece in 2019 in France and made history in Australia and New Zealand in the 2023 edition, where they got out of the group, being the first South African side – men or women – to achieve this feat. For Banyana to qualify for Brazil, they’ll have to reach the semi-finals at this year’s Women’s Africa Cup of Nations (WAFCON) in Morocco, starting mid-March. Head coach Dr Desiree Ellis has already announced a strong 38-member preliminary squad headlined by Thembi Kgatlana, who missed the last edition due to personal reasons and the return of Gabriela Salgado, who suffered a horrible injury at the last WAFCON. The coach knows just how big this upcoming edition is going to be.

“As we say, pressure is a privilege,” Ellis told iDiski Times.

“I think when you go to a WAFCON, and there’s no World Cup involved, you go there with a single aim to get out of the group to try and win the WAFCON. For us, our biggest thing will be to qualify for the World Cup first. We’re not looking beyond that because if you look beyond that, you lose focus of what is first at hand and first at hand is getting out of the group, winning your quarter-final match, qualifying for the World Cup. It’s only then that you look on how you can get further in the tournament. If you look at the last WAFCON, so many countries stepped up. I mean, we played Senegal a year before the WAFCON, and they came back a different team. And the same will happen this year, and this year, being a World Cup qualifier, I can guarantee that it’s going to be a very tough WAFCON. But we’ve been there before, we know what it takes, we got to go there super fit, of course. I don’t think we were in the same shape we were last year and in 2022, so we got to go there with that mindset and make sure that we

get a good start.”

Before jetting off to North Africa, Banyana have the regional tournament COSAFA Women’s Championship [CWC] hosted in Polokwane from 18 February to 1 March 2026. They are in Group A with Angola, Lesotho and Malawi, who have also qualified for the WAFCON for the first time. The squad announced by the coach in what has been termed an alignment camp will have the locally-based players travel to Limpopo, while the overseas-based players will be in the country from the 25th of this month. For the four-time CAF Women’s Coach of the Year, the regional tournament is welcomed, especially as the local league hasn’t started.

“Look, we’re calling it an ‘alignment camp’ for a reason, because it’s using COSAFA as preparation for the WAFCON, using COSAFA as selection for the WAFCON as well,” explained the coach.

“The international players will not be part of the COSAFA because it starts on the 18th, but they’ll be in camp working together with everyone else to get ready for WAFCON. Our season hasn’t started yet, so it [CWC] can help us in a way, but we also have to make sure that we manage the loads because of where we are in the season. You know, last year, if a COSAFA was in June, it would have been very well welcomed, because the season had started, because we would have just kicked on. I think for many countries coming, if their squad is not full of international players, and also with some leagues not active at the moment, even abroad. So it’s a challenge for everyone. But I think this will really help us to give us that kick start in preparation as well. But we’re going to really have to make sure that we manage the loads really well, and the well-being of the players is going to be very important.”

At the 2026 WAFCON, Banyana were drawn in Group B with West African sides Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast and also Tanzania from CECAFA. The coach feels that some of the teams the 2022 African champions are going to face in

Polokwane have some similarities with what they will face in Morocco.

“Malawi is going to bring a lot of physicality,” stated Ellis.

“We know that the teams in our group we’re going to face at WAFCON have a lot of that physicality. If the Angola that I know comes, I mean, in 2021, when we came from the Aisha Buhari Cup, Angola was physical, fit and strong. So those will be challenges that we’re going to face in the tournament. So that’s a good thing to be able to play up against opposition that might be similar to what we’re going to face at WAFCON. So that’s a big help because it’s all about selection, it’s all about testing, it’s all about getting things right to get ready for WAFCON. So it’s a big plus in that way.”

Selecting a squad for any tournament is stressful for any coach with many players raising their hands to be recognised, especially those playing in the Hollywoodbets Super League. Ellis knows that she cannot be able to please everyone with her selections. There was no place in the squad for the best-performing player in the league last season, TS Galaxy Queens’ Leandra Smeda. Smeda won the 2025 Golden Boot after scoring 22 goals for the Rockets, who finished the term in third position with 69 points. The 36-year-old winger also won the Player of the Season at the league’s end of season Award ceremony last month. The Banyana centurion has previously expressed her wish for one last rodeo with the team. Ellis explained what goes into her selections, saying she knows there might be other players feeling hard done by not making the current squad.

“As a coach, I’m sure you know, and everybody knows I’ve made mistakes, there is nobody that doesn’t make mistakes,” admitted the former Banyana captain.

“But in my years of experience, one of the things I’ve learned in the selections is it’s not always about skill. It’s about mindset, work rate, teamwork, and when I make that decision, that selection, I think of all of those things, and which players will fit in the best to make the team the best. And this is not aimed at one individual for not making the squad. This is aimed at everyone who doesn’t make the squad because I’m sure there’s other players, for example, [Precious] Seshweni and Boitumelo [Rasehlo] must be thinking as well ‘I was nominated for Defender of the season, nominated Midfielder of the season, so what about me?’ So this is not aimed at one individual, but it’s aimed at everybody who doesn’t make the squad because we have to get that right. We have to get all of those things right to make sure that we are ready for the next step.”

Experience and international exposure are always a good thing for any side heading into a major tournament, and this will not be any different for Banyana. In the preliminary squad, there are seven players plying their trade overseas, and the coach naturally keeps in touch with them and checks their progress in different leagues. Some of the players,



“IT’S ABOUT MINDSET, WORK RATE, TEAMWORK AND WHEN I MAKE THAT DECISION, THAT SELECTION, I THINK OF ALL OF THOSE THINGS, AND WHICH PLAYERS WILL FIT IN THE BEST TO MAKE THE TEAM THE BEST. AND THIS IS NOT AIMED AT ONE INDIVIDUAL FOR NOT MAKING THE SQUAD.”

like the ‘Breadwinner’ [Hilda Magaia], have moved to new teams. Ellis is confident of a good contribution from the overseas contingent in the national team, as well as Salgado, who has also started training with her side, JVW FC, here at home.

“Hilda is doing really well. She has been training since December. Thembi and Amo’s [Amogelang Motau] season started at the beginning of January. Bongeka [Gamede] and Linda [Motlhalo] have been in season. Jessica Wade has gone to a new club, played a couple of friendlies, but her season hasn’t started yet. So when you look at everyone else, I think it’s the same for a lot of teams. The teams that have included international players at the COSAFA, is because they’re in season to have a look at them and also to get them to a certain level. She’s [Salgado] recovered very really well. We’ve had regular updates on her recovery. When the pre-season of JVW started on the 19th of January, she was part of it, full training, so that’s a big plus, not just for us, but for her.”

Banyana are the record winners of the COSAFA Cup with seven titles; however, the last time they lifted the trophy was in 2020. Though she’d like to win the tournament this time around, that’s not the biggest priority for the coach as she wants to make sure her charges get as many match minutes in their legs as possible before the WAFCON.



THE IDISKI TOP 10... TRANSFER TARGETS

This week, iDiski Times turns the spotlight onto the Top 10 Transfer Targets — the players lighting up the Betway Premiership in the 2025/26 season and quietly (or not so quietly) attracting serious attention behind the scenes.

These are the names circulating in scouting reports, dominating performance data dashboards and sparking conversations in boardrooms. Some are breakout stars enjoying career-best campaigns; others are established performers whose consistency has made them too valuable to ignore. What unites them is momentum and the sense that a move could be just around the corner.

Our rankings are shaped by a combination of overall market interest and on-field performance, supported by statistics and ratings drawn from leading football analytics platforms. This isn't just about hype — it's about measurable impact, influence and upward trajectory.

To qualify, a player must have featured in at least 60% of their club's fixtures. In short, these are not cameo-makers or short-term sensations; they are key figures driving their teams forward and, in the process, pushing themselves firmly into the transfer conversation.

(*statistics as of 16 February 2025)

The Top 10:

10. Athini Maqokola
(AmaZulu)
23 years old

It's been a statement season from Athini Maqokola. The AmaZulu right winger has quietly gone about building an impressive attacking resume in the league, contributing three goals and two assists in just 12 Betway Premiership appearances, while also finding the net in the Carling Knockout against Magesi. Direct, fearless and always looking to take on his marker, Maqokola has added end product to his natural flair.

KwaZulu-Natal has long been a fertile recruitment ground for the traditional big three, and the former FC Ravens and JDR Stars attacker fits the mould of a player ready for the next leap.

Still only 23, he is entering that sweet spot where potential meets productivity, and don't be surprised if his name is already scribbled on a few scouting reports in Gauteng.

9 Neo Rapoo
(Siwelele)
20 years old

AFCON-winning Amajita captain Neo Rapoo has long been viewed as one of South Africa's brightest prospects, and this season he has begun translating that promise into



consistent senior performances. Comfortable at left-back but equally effective further forward, Rapoo embodies the modern wide defender: athletic, composed in possession and tactically intelligent.

Now playing regular first-team football, he looks increasingly ready for a bigger stage. With Siwelele’s future and relocation plans still a talking point, it would be no shock to see Rapoo move before the dust settles. Whether that next step is abroad or with one of the domestic heavyweights, the trajectory is clear: if he maintains this upward curve, a major transfer feels inevitable.

8 Langelihle Phili

(Stellenbosch)

21 years old

Another Amajita graduate making serious waves, Langelihle ‘Major’ Phili has lit up the Betway Premiership with his unpredictability and eye for goal. The former AmaZulu youth product has already struck six times in all competitions this season, underlining his ability to deliver in decisive moments.

Phili is the type of winger defenders dread. He’s quick over the first few metres, confident in one-on-one situations and capable of producing something out of nothing.

There have already been murmurs of overseas interest, but equally, one of the big Gauteng clubs could test Stellenbosch’s resolve. At 21, he feels like a player on the brink of something significant.

7 Seluleko Mahlambi

(TS Galaxy)

21 years old

Seluleko Mahlambi’s rise has been one of the stories of the 2025/26 campaign. Thrust into the TS Galaxy starting XI during a challenging period, partly due to the club’s FIFA transfer restrictions, the younger brother of Phakamani didn’t just fill a gap; he seized the spotlight.

Five goals, three assists and a string of mature performances have silenced doubters who questioned whether he could step up. Strong, intelligent in his movement and clinical when chances fall his way, Mahlambi has quickly become one of Galaxy’s most valuable assets.

Given the club’s reputation for developing and selling talent, he may well be the next headline departure if he sustains this level.

6 Mthetheleli Mthiyane

(Stellenbosch)

25 years old

Mthetheleli Mthiyane’s transition from Milford to Stellenbosch has been seamless. The industrious midfielder wasted no time adapting to top-flight football, quickly establishing himself as a dependable and dynamic presence in the heart of the park.

His impact was particularly evident during Stellenbosch’s run to the MTN8 final, where he scored his only goal of the season, a strike that highlighted his knack for arriving at the right place at the right time.

At 25, he is entering his prime, and if a substantial offer arrives, Stellies may face a difficult decision about how long they can hold onto him.

5 Isaac Cisse

(Golden Arrows)

19 years old

Golden Arrows may have pulled off one of the shrewdest signings in recent memory when they secured Ivorian teenager Isaac Cisse. The defensive midfielder, still only 19, has made a thunderous introduction to South African football.

In just nine appearances, he has already scored twice, not bad for a player whose primary job is to shield the back four. Powerful, athletic



and composed beyond his years, Cisse covers ground effortlessly and relishes physical battles. European clubs may have hesitated before, but they won't for long. And now, it's not only overseas teams watching, but the domestic giants have taken notice too.

4 Renaldo Leaner
(Sekhukhune United)
28 years old

The only goalkeeper on the list, Renaldo Leaner, has enjoyed a breakout year. His commanding presence between the sticks, sharp reflexes and improved distribution have made him one of the league's standout shot-stoppers.

Sekhukhune are fully aware of his growing stock value and have reportedly placed a hefty price-tag on the former Ajax Cape Town youth product.

Fresh off celebrating his birthday, Leaner is not just thinking about club football, national team recognition has entered the conversation. With the World Cup on the horizon, he'll be eager to turn interest into opportunity.

3 Grant Margeman
(Siwelele)
27 years old

Grant Margeman may be slightly more established than some names here, but he remains a player of considerable intrigue. Once tipped for stardom at Mamelodi Sundowns, circumstances and injuries slowed his ascent. Now fully fit, he looks revitalised.

Technically gifted, relentless in his pressing and capable of dictating tempo, Margeman has reminded observers of his quality this season.

His future is a fascinating subplot. Does he commit long-term, seek a return to a traditional powerhouse, or explore something abroad? With his experience and maturity, even a late Bafana call-up isn't beyond the realm of possibility.

2 Thabang Matuludi
(Polokwane City)
27 years old

Thabang Matuludi has been circling the radar of bigger clubs in recent years. The towering right-back combines physical dominance with surprising technical ability, making him a rare blend in South African football.

Injuries curtailed much of his 2025, yet his return was emphatic enough to earn inclusion in the Bafana Bafana squad for AFCON in Morocco.

Polokwane City are famously reluctant sellers, but contracts eventually expire, and when they do, expect a queue to form. Matuludi feels like a move waiting to happen.

1 Siyanda Ndlovu
(Golden Arrows)
23 years old

Formerly known as Siyanda Mthanti, Ndlovu has evolved into one of the most exciting attacking talents in KwaZulu-Natal.

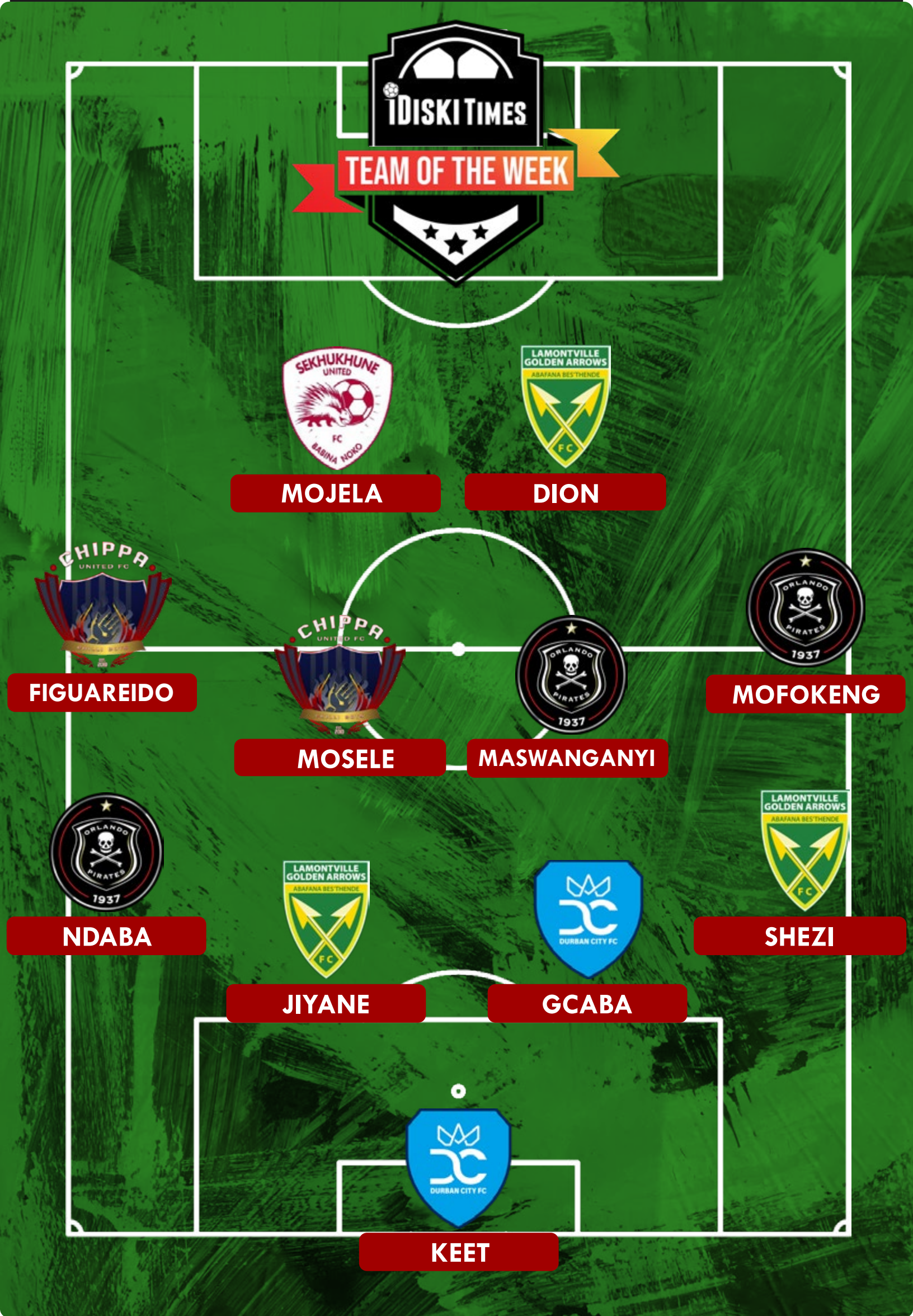
Since graduating from the Arrows DStv Diski Challenge side, he has steadily grown in influence, but 2025 was the year he truly exploded.

In a Golden Arrows team that has blown hot and cold, Ndlovu's performances have been consistently electric. Goals, assists, relentless energy and fearless creativity, he has become the heartbeat of Manqoba Mngqithi's attack.

Interest in his services has already materialised, and a move to Gauteng feels less like speculation and more like an inevitability.



IDISKI'S NEDBANK CUP TEAM OF THE WEEK (13-15 FEBRUARY 26)



ACE OF THE WEEK:
MAMELODI SUNDOWNS

Our iDiski Times Aces of the Week are Mamelodi Sundowns, who once again underlined their continental pedigree by sealing a place in the CAF Champions

League quarter-finals. Heading into their decisive Group C clash against Rulani Mokwena's MC Alger, the equation was simple but unforgiving: win or exit. But Miguel Cardoso's men delivered with authority. Brayan Leon rose to the occasion, striking twice in a composed 2-0 victory that sent the Brazilians through in second place behind Al Hilal. It marks the eighth successive season Sundowns have reached the knockout stages, a remarkable run of consistency at Africa's highest level. After falling agonisingly short as losing finalists last term, this latest qualification feels less like relief and more like another statement of intent.





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 Early Pioneers

Football arrived in Southern Africa in the mid-1800s, brought by British settlers who introduced leather balls, stiff collars, and a deep-seated conviction that they were exceptionally skilled at everything. As was the South African way, locals watched, learned, adapted, and then quietly got very good at it themselves.

By the 1890s, Black football was thriving. There were clubs, competitions, rivalries, and no shortage of flair. Crowds gathered. Tournaments popped up. The game moved fast; faster, in fact, than the people in charge were comfortable with.

In 1897, the famous English amateur side Corinthians toured through South Africa, playing white-only teams and generally confirming what the British already believed: that football, like tea and the empire, belonged to them. What they didn't know, and probably wouldn't have believed, was that just two years later, a team of Black South African footballers would head in the opposite direction, all the way to England, to show them how the game looked from the other side of the world.

And whether anyone was ready for it or not, the 'Orange Free Bantu FC' team were about to make football history.

A Wild Idea

In 1899, the idea of a football tour was still fairly novel. This was before pre-season trips to Dubai, before shirt launches in Bangkok, before players complaining about jet lag on Instagram. Travelling abroad to play football was still something of a curiosity.

Now imagine adding this extra detail: the team is entirely Black. From South Africa. And they're going to England, the self-declared home of football, to play nearly 50 matches.

Even by 20th-century standards, this was a lot.

The squad consisted entirely Black South

African players. The only white men attached to the tour were administrators and football officials from the Orange Free State. The players themselves were local footballers, amateurs, picked for their ability and love of the game. There are few records of their full names, and even those reported are inconsistent - lists like Adolph, Abel, Thomas, Davids, Bothloko, Daniels, Appollis, Solomon, Broffit, Kortie, Lakay, Brown, Martin, Stephen, Nicholas, JHC Kennedy and their captain, Joseph Twayi is all we could find.

Unfortunately, the newspapers had other priorities. British journalists spent far less time analysing formations or tactics, and far more time obsessing over skin colour. Researching this subject, we realised that historians had replaced the K-word in much of its retelling, but that's what this team and its players were called throughout. One paper wondered aloud what kind of football "these dark beauties" might play, which sounds more flattering until you remember it was 1899 and nobody meant anything nicely.

Still, there was curiosity. Plenty of it. English papers described the players as physically impressive, powerful, and fast.

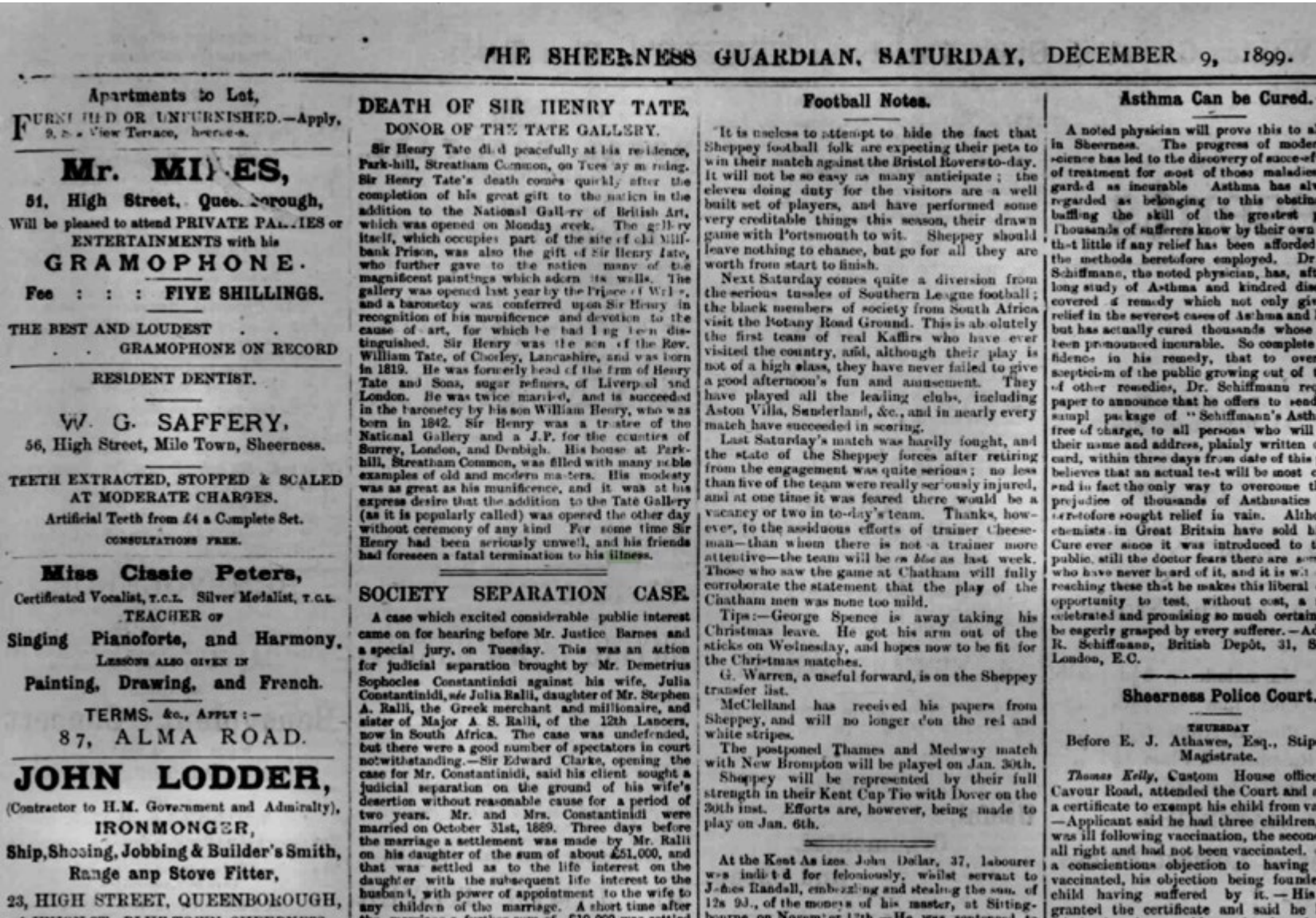
South African reactions, meanwhile, were... mixed. In the Orange Free State, there was cautious pride. In the Cape, however, the knives were already out. Some newspapers dismissed the tour as ridiculous, unsporting, or outright embarrassing. One publication practically clutched its pearls, insisting that races were "best socially apart". In other words: very on brand.

Before the team had even kicked a ball in England, the debate was raging. And that was exactly why the tour mattered.

Welcome to England

When they set out for England, interest was sky-high. Crowds were curious. Papers were buzzing. Everyone wanted to see what these Africans could do.

Their opening match was meant to be against Aston Villa, the reigning English



champions. The British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, was even scheduled to kick off the game, which tells you everything you need to know about how symbolic this tour had become.

Politics, football, empire — all rolled into one. Except, as tends to happen, nothing went to plan.

Travel delays (there were no planes in those days, and the team had sailed from Cape Town to Southampton on the SS Gaika) meant the first game ended up being against Newcastle United instead. The OFS team took the field in front of 6000 fans, in orange shirts and black shorts, full of enthusiasm, energy, and belief.

Within minutes, reality arrived.

Newcastle were sharper, stronger, more organised, and, crucially, vastly more experienced. They won 6–3, and while the scoreline was respectable, the reviews were... less kind.

Not used to grass pitches, the team wore stud-less boots throughout the game.

“(It) was something of a farce with a vast difference in ability between the two sides,” wrote one journalist.

“Newcastle gave the opposition two goals in a 6-3 walkover.”

The Football News called the tourists “alleged footballers” while “the spectators in fact laughed more than they would do at the most successful comic opera”.

British papers described Bantu’s style as “peculiar”. One report complained that players shouted at each other while trying to kick the ball, often stealing it from teammates, and occasionally heading it straight to the opposition.

To be fair, this was a hastily assembled amateur side playing against some of the best teams in the world, teams that had been playing structured football

for decades. This wasn’t David versus Goliath. It was more like David being handed a ball and told to face Goliath’s entire family.

And yet, the South Africans kept going.

49 Matches, Zero Fear (But Also Zero Wins)

They went on to play 49 matches across England, Scotland and Ireland. They lost most of them. Some heavily. But here’s the thing: they scored in almost every game. They never stopped trying. They never packed it in.

They even scored four goals in a single match at one point, a reminder that ability was never the issue. Experience was.

English teams treated these matches like training sessions. The South Africans treated them like World Cup finals. And slowly, quietly, respect grew.

Even newspapers that criticised their technique couldn’t ignore their effort. The South Africans ran. Tackled. Attacked. Smiled. Played with joy.

And then, just to complicate matters further, war broke out.

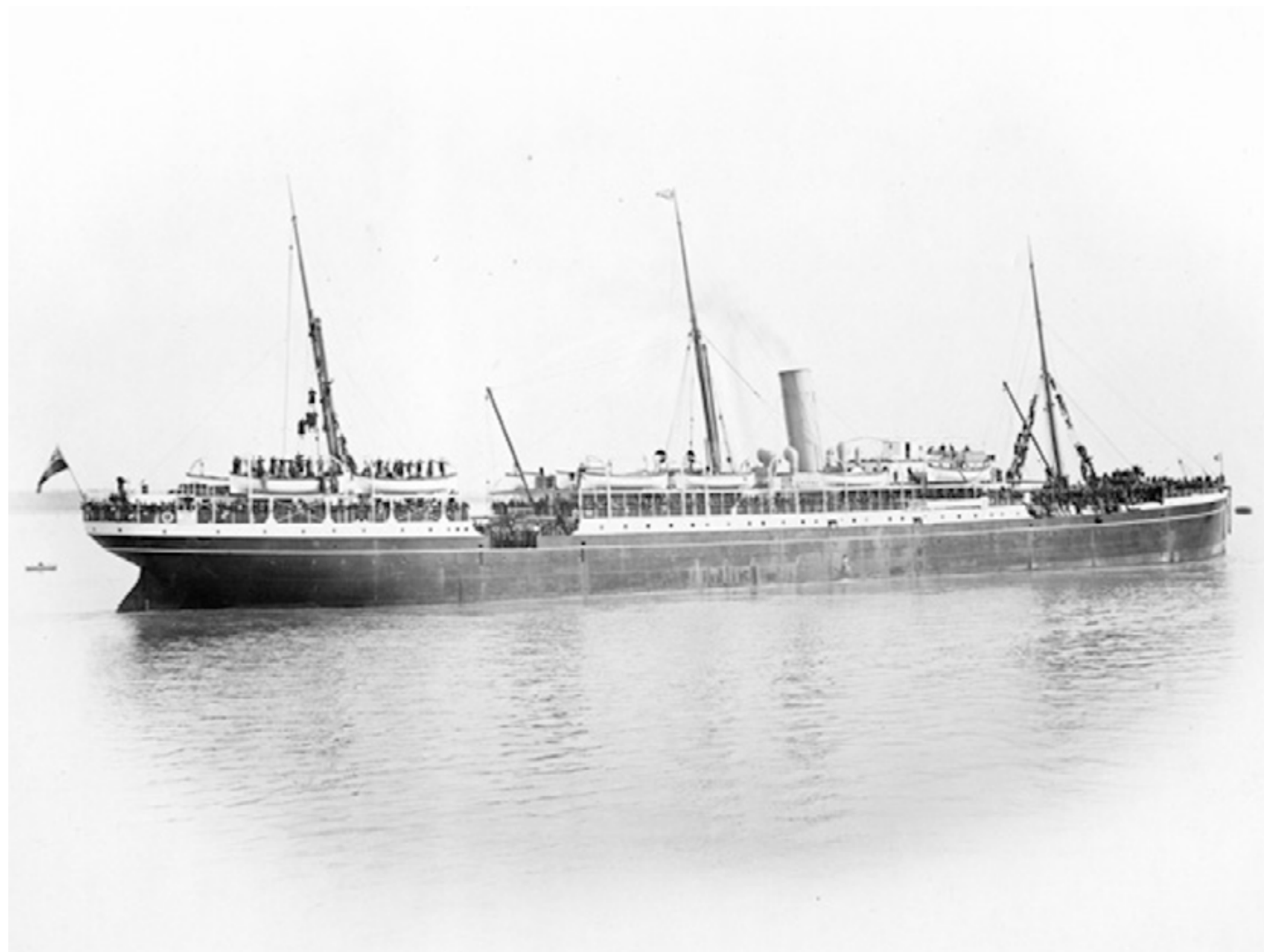
Football, War, and Picking Sides

In October 1899, the South African War (or Boer War) erupted between Britain and the Orange Free State and Transvaal. Awkward timing, given that this team were literally touring England at the time.

Suddenly, football wasn’t just football.

Some British papers joked nervously about “playing the enemy”. Others weren’t sure what to make of the situation. And then OFS Bantu captain Joseph Twayi stepped up and removed all doubt.

Twayi made it clear, publicly and repeatedly, that his team supported Britain.



Why? Because, as he explained, England represented freedom, something Black South Africans were denied at home. He spoke openly about inequality, discrimination, and the desire for dignity. He praised how well the team was treated in Britain. He even said that if Britain fought, they would fight too.

It was an extraordinary position that was politically risky, emotionally complex, and deeply revealing.

To underline their stance, they donated gate receipts from their Aston Villa match to British reservists. They wore red, white, and blue ribbons on their shirts. They publicly declared loyalty to Queen Victoria.

This wasn't naïveté. It was a strategy. Football was their platform, and they used it to speak, long before protest banners and raised fists became part of the game.

Fifteen years later, Twayi, the captain, and also a community leader and grocer, was made treasurer of the newly-founded South African Native National Congress, which was the forerunner of the ANC. He died in 1924, aged 51.

One Win, Right at the End

After months on the road, battered legs, bruised pride, and endless losses, the Free State side played a match in Roubaix, France, against Sporting Club Tourcoing.

And finally — finally — they won.

A 3–1 victory. Their first and only win of the tour. It came near the very end, almost as if football itself wanted to apologise.

When they returned home, the reaction was brutal. The tour had lost money.

They hadn't beaten an English team. They'd supported Britain in the war. Newspapers called it a failure.

By every short-term measure, it was. But history doesn't care much for short-term thinking.

Why This Still Matters

Looking back now, this tour looks very different. They were pioneers. The first Black South African footballers to tour abroad. The first to use football as a political voice. The first to show that black players belonged on the global stage, not as curiosities, but as competitors.

They played with dignity when the world expected chaos. They spoke about injustice when silence was safer. They showed, quite simply, that football could be more than a game.

Freedom didn't arrive quickly. Or easily. But over 125 years ago, this team took one step toward it, in orange shirts, thousands of kilometres from home, playing a game they loved.

And for that, they deserve far more than a forgotten footnote.

They deserve to be remembered as trailblazers — long before “transformation”, long before quotas, long before anyone asked whether football could change society.

They already knew the answer.

- Sources:
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