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AMAZULU TO LURE PROMISING TALENT TO DURBAN?

AmaZulu are said to be in talks with teenage goalkeeping talent Tsepo Mahauza who is currently on the books of Sekhukhune United. Usuthu are looking to shore up their ranks with promising talent, while bolstering their DStv Diski Challenge squad at the same time. The 2007-born stopper was one of the stars of the Khabba Cup, where he was then snapped up by Babina Noko and has since been part of their DDC set-up.



STEENBOK SPOTTED AT SIWELELE TRAINING GROUND

The former Technical Director of the South African Football Association (SAFA), Walter Steenbok, looks set for a sensational return to football in the Premier Soccer League. Steenbok, who has been linked with Sekhukhune United and Chippa United in recent months, was spotted at Siwelele this past week, fuelling speculation of his imminent move. With the Technical Director role mooted as an essential part of the new club's restructuring as they now move away from the SuperSport United foundations, Steenbok is likely to take charge of developing their new academy system and coaching structures.



GALAXY SECURE PROMISING TEENAGER

TS Galaxy have lured teenage midfielder Blessing Bulane to the club from Stars of Africa Academy. The 17-year-old has turned heads in Gauteng in recent months and was the subject of interest from several Premier Soccer League clubs. However, the Rockets have landed his services to bolster their DStv Diski Challenge squad with a view of fast-tracking the playmaker into the senior set-up.



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CHIEFS FAVOURITES TO LAND MOLOISANE

Kaizer Chiefs are understood to have reached an agreement in principle with Thabo Moloisane, with the move set to come into effect ahead of next season.

The 27-year-old South African international finds himself in the final six months of his contract with Stellenbosch FC, a position that has naturally attracted interest. As it stands, he is free to engage in pre-contract discussions, and Chiefs appear to have moved decisively to position themselves at the front of the queue.

Stellenbosch confirmed just last week that negotiations over a renewal had reached an impasse, all but signalling the end of Moloisane's time in the Winelands. Yet, in typical fashion, head coach Gavin Hunt struck a pragmatic tone, making it clear that, departure looming or not, Moloisane remains central to the club's ambitions for the remainder of the campaign.

And that importance cannot be overstated.

Since arriving from Maritzburg United three seasons ago, having come through the development structures at Mamelodi Sundowns, Moloisane has grown into a commanding, authoritative presence at the heart of Stellenbosch's defence. Consistent, composed, and increasingly influential, he has been one of the pillars of the club's defence.

His potential arrival at Naturena could signal the beginning of a defensive reshuffle for Amakhosi. With both Aden McCarthy and Zitha Kwinika yet to commit their futures to the club, Chiefs may be laying the groundwork for a new-look backline, one built around reliability and long-term planning.

There is also a growing sense of familiarity in this transfer narrative. Stellenbosch have, in recent seasons, become something of a talent reservoir for Chiefs, with the likes of Ashley Du Preez, Sibongiseni Mthethwa and Kwinika all making the same journey from the Cape to Gauteng. Moloisane could well be the next chapter in that increasingly well-trodden path.

For now, though, the focus remains on the present. With the season entering its decisive stretch, both player and club have unfinished business, while Chiefs, watching closely from a distance, continue their push to secure a top-three finish and lay the foundations for what comes next.



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TSO VILAKAZI: CHIEFS MUST AIM FOR AFRICA

After a tough few weeks, Kaizer Chiefs bounced back with two victories before the international break. A hard-fought 1-0 win over Durban City was followed up by a good 2-0 win over Magesi to keep them in the top four in the Betway Premiership.

They are still 15 points behind leaders Orlando Pirates, who hammered TS Galaxy 6-0, and 14 behind Mamelodi Sundowns, who weren't in action, as they were in Mali where they qualified for the CAF Champions League semi-finals, despite a 2-0 defeat to Stade Malien on Sunday, going through 3-2 on aggregate.

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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"Well done to Kaizer Chiefs for the win against Magesi.

"Chiefs were dominant in the first half; unfortunately, like they have done in other matches, they failed to maintain the intensity and allowed Magesi back in the game.

"A good win for Chiefs.

"Kaizer Chiefs is a big team. They need to strive for CAF competitions.

"They need to put together a good number of wins and aim for the Confederations Cup spot. Two wins in a row after a difficult period of poor results is a good thing for Chiefs.

"I have always said that Glody Lilepo is a striker. Last week he scored, and today he assisted. He must play in the opposition penalty area, and he will score more.

"Well done to Mfundo Vilakazi as well for getting on the scoreboard.

'A good win for Chiefs'

"He needed that goal for his confidence."





CAN BROOS REDISCOVER BAFANA DNA VS PANAMA?

South Africa's national football team, Bafana Bafana, will face the Central American nation Panama national football team this week in two international friendlies, first in Durban on 27 March, before a second encounter in Cape Town on 31 March.

When the fixtures were announced, there were a few raised eyebrows and even some jeers from local supporters. For

many, Panama did not sound like the most glamorous opponent. Yet in fairness, much of that reaction appeared to stem from unfamiliarity rather than genuine analysis.

Quite a few critics seemed unaware that Panama will also be competing at the upcoming FIFA World Cup later this year.

In fact, Panama faces a daunting challenge at the tournament, having been drawn in Group L alongside Ghana, Croatia and England. South Africa, meanwhile, will line up in Group A against Mexico, South Korea and the winner of the UEFA D play-off — a pathway that includes Denmark, North Macedonia, Ireland and the Czech Republic.

Panama arrive with respectable credentials. The CONCACAF side are currently ranked 33rd in the world and earlier this year faced Mexico in a friendly, narrowly losing 1–0, a useful point of reference given that Mexico will be Bafana's opening opponent at the World Cup.

For South Africa, the matches offer something slightly unusual: opposition from outside the African continent. Under coach Hugo Broos, Bafana have rarely tested themselves against teams from other regions. In fact, Broos has only overseen two such matches in his tenure.

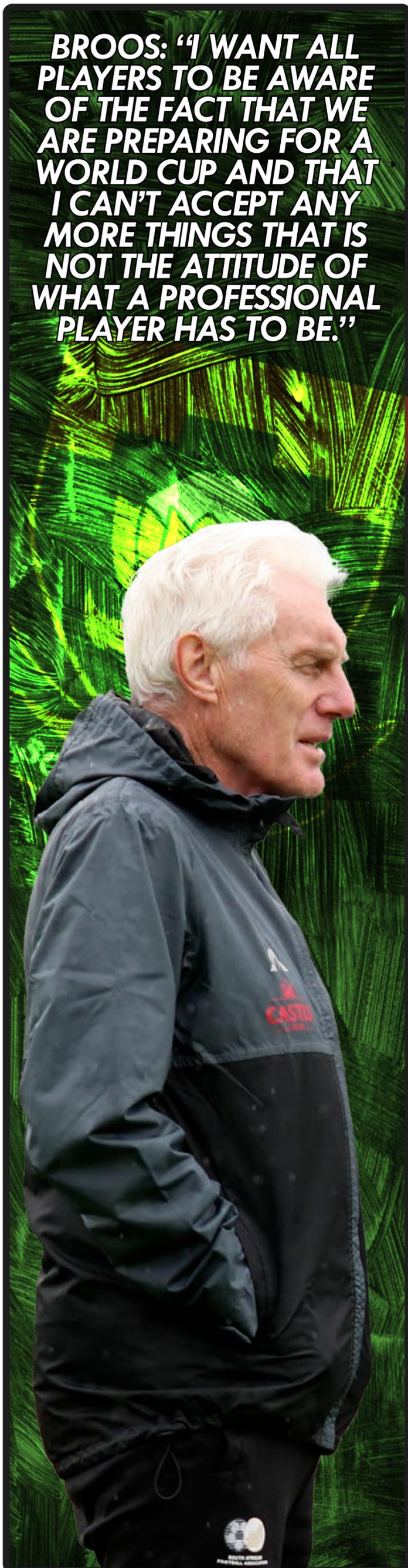
The first came four years ago this month, when South Africa were emphatically beaten 5–0 by France in Lille. That match came at an awkward moment. France were in irresistible form, having won seven consecutive matches, and Broos' young and relatively inexperienced Bafana side were ruthlessly exposed.

The second meeting came much later, in March 2024, when South Africa drew 1–1 with Andorra during the experimental FIFA Series. That encounter was hardly memorable either. Broos fielded what was essentially a second-string side, and Bafana nearly suffered an embarrassing defeat after conceding early before eventually scraping back into the game.

Friendlies are often dismissed as low-stakes occasions, but these upcoming matches carry a little more weight than usual. With the World Cup approaching, places in the squad remain up for grabs. This may be Broos' final meaningful opportunity to assess his options before naming the players who will travel to the global showpiece in the United States, Mexico and Canada. For some individuals, it will be a chance to secure a ticket to the tournament. For others, it may confirm that their journey ends just short of the plane.

For Broos and his squad, Panama represents something of an unknown quantity. Known as Los Canaleros, they will be making their second appearance at a World Cup after debuting at the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia. On that occasion, they endured a difficult introduction to football's biggest stage, losing all three of their group matches. This time, they will hope to be far

BROOS: "I WANT ALL PLAYERS TO BE AWARE OF THE FACT THAT WE ARE PREPARING FOR A WORLD CUP AND THAT I CAN'T ACCEPT ANY MORE THINGS THAT IS NOT THE ATTITUDE OF WHAT A PROFESSIONAL PLAYER HAS TO BE."





more competitive.

The team is coached by Thomas Christiansen, a former Spanish international striker. The Danish-born 53-year-old enjoyed a notable playing career, even finishing as the Bundesliga's top scorer in the 2002/03 season with Bochum, where he was a teammate of Delron Buckley. He and the former Bafana international played over 50 games together for the German club.

Since taking charge of Panama in 2020, Christiansen has shaped the team into a technically organised side, favouring possession-based football influenced by his coaching experiences in Cyprus, England and Belgium. Under his guidance, Panama have produced impressive campaigns in the CONCACAF Nations League and the Gold Cup.

"The goal is to play against an African team," Christiansen said, as per the Panamanian FA.

"There are constant similarities with Ghana to what we will find with South Africa, and that was the objective.

"By playing two games against them, we can also change our ideas, positions, and players, and that's what we want.

"It also gives us the possibility of rotating a bit and giving minutes to others who perhaps haven't seen any playing time with the national team."

Several players stand out within the squad. Ismael Díaz provides attacking firepower, having delivered consistent goal-scoring spells in MLS, Panama and now Mexico. In midfield, Adalberto 'Coco' Carrasquilla, also based in Mexico, offers energy and creativity, having been named the best player at the 2023 Gold Cup and establishing himself as one of Panama's most influential performers. At the back, Amir Murillo brings considerable experience at right-back after stints in MLS, Belgium, France and now Turkey, where he currently represents Beşiktaş. The only player in the squad based in Panama is captain Eric Davis.

It is in direct contrast to Broos's final squad, which is dominated by players who are

BROOS: "WE WILL TRY AND LET ALL THE PLAYERS PLAY. SOME OF THEM MORE THAN OTHERS, BUT YES, IT SHOULDN'T BE GOOD TO LET THE SAME TEAM PLAY IN THE TWO GAMES."

locally based, with just seven players based abroad in the selection. Themba Zwane, Jayden Adams, Bongokuhle Hlongwane and Thapelo Maseko return to the squad after missing the CAF Africa Cup of Nations. At the same time, Broos will also have a closer look at Ime Okon and Renaldo Leaner.

South Africa and Panama do share one small piece of history. The two sides have met once before, in Houston, Texas, during the 2005 CONCACAF Gold Cup.

On that occasion, Panama narrowly defeated Stuart Baxter's makeshift Bafana in the quarter-finals. They emerged victorious with a 5–3 penalty shootout win after captain-on-the-day Ricardo Katza's attempt was saved. It ended in a 1–1 draw after 120 minutes, with Lungisani Ndlela on the score sheet.

Nearly two decades later, the teams meet again, this time with both looking ahead to the world's biggest football stage.

For Bafana, it is an opportunity to measure themselves against unfamiliar opposition. For Panama, it is another step in their preparation for the challenges that lie ahead, as they play their first-ever match on the African continent.





And for Bafana supporters, it might prove a far more interesting test than the initial reaction suggested.

BROOS spoke to the media last week as he announced his final squad, and **LORENZ KÖHLER** was amongst those gathered to speak to the coach.

Lorenz Köhler: Coach, would you say that you have your 2026 FIFA World Cup squad now?

Hugo Broos: I don't like to say 80%, 90% or 60%, it all depends what will happen in the next two weeks in the two games against Panama, [but] the majority will be there in the World Cup, I'm talking about players like Ronwen, Teboho because they have always been there and the rest I will see, again... I want all players to be aware of the fact that we are preparing for a World Cup and that I can't accept any more things that is not the attitude of what a professional player has to be.

Media: Were there any players you found really hard to leave out this current team?

HB: Maybe you don't believe, but every time I have to drop a player, it's difficult. Sometimes it's about details that you have to make a choice, sometimes when I said already, I never judge or choose, or let my heart speak, it's difficult at times. Sometimes I like the player as a human being, but okay, there are some things that make me decide not to take him with the team. You see, we had a preliminary squad of 30-odd players, and then coming to 23, it means you have to drop 15 players, which is never easy.

LK: What are you expecting from Ime Okon, who comes in for the injured Siyabonga Ngezana?

HB: Ime was... or should have been with us in September, but he was injured, and then a month later he was injured again. So let's hope that nothing happens in his last game with Hannover [before camp], and then okay it's up to him. He gets his chance, what I always say to players who come for

CHRISTIANSEN:
“THERE ARE CONSTANT SIMILARITIES WITH GHANA TO WHAT WE WILL FIND WITH SOUTH AFRICA, AND THAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE.”

the first time with the team - I give you the chance, and it's up to you to grab it with both hands, let's see what it will give us.

Media: Can you shed light on the players who have returned, like Thapelo Maseko, Bongokuhle Hlongwane - how important is it to make an impression for the World Cup?

HB: You know those players have already given us satisfaction, but for various reasons, we couldn't take them anymore with the national team. So we know the qualities of the guys, we know the mentalities of the guys. So it's nothing new we can learn, but it's up to them to take the chances, they're getting another chance, and let's see what they give us in the next weeks.

LK: Will you make use of the entire squad in the two games against Panama?

HB: Yes, we will try and let all the players play. Some of them more than others, but yes, it shouldn't be good to let the same team play in the two games. That is not what I want; I want to see some things from the new players.

Media: How hard was it to leave Iqraam Rayners from the squad? He's been in good goal-scoring form.

HB: These are choices, and I don't want to go into detail. This is not a place to tell you exactly why. There are some choices that are very difficult to make, it's made on





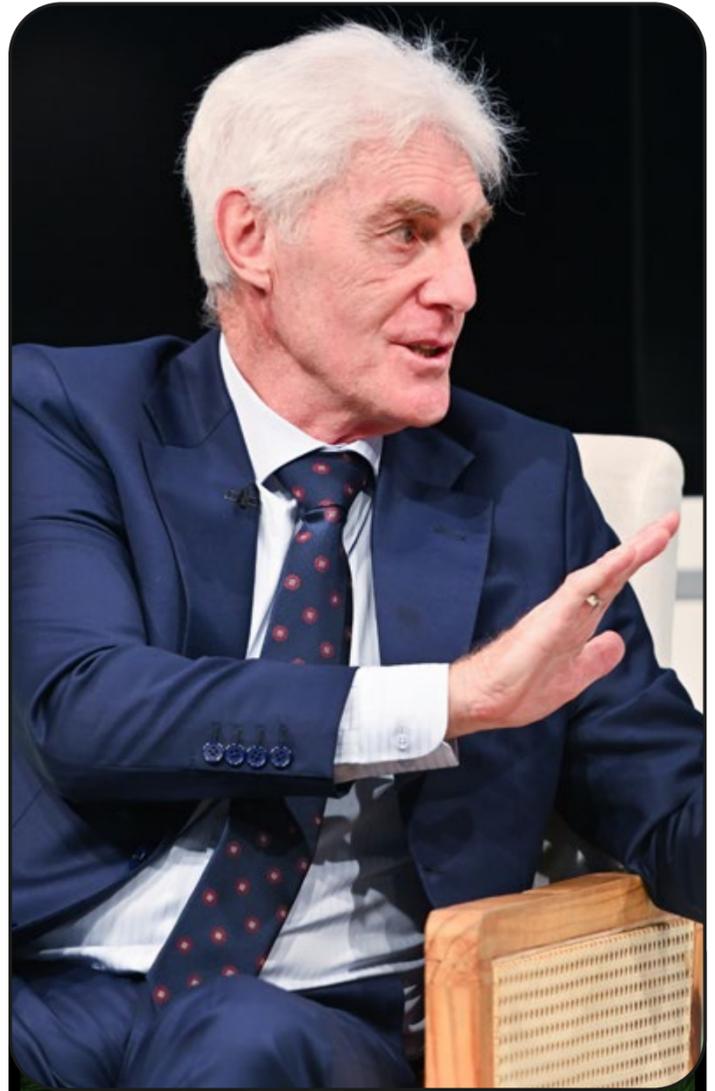
some small details...

LK: The return of Themba Zwane?

HB: I always hoped that Themba would come back, but it wasn't possible before AFCON, as he was injured again. He's fit now. Okay, the playing time isn't that much, but I see he's fit, and therefore it's very important to see what he will do now when he gets a chance to play a full game or one hour. Can he still give us what we expect from him? What I expect also. Because Themba is a very good player, and when that happens, we have someone in the 10 that we have been looking for since his injury.

Media: What are you looking to achieve from the Panama games and on Jayden Adams? Talk us through the attitude of the players and the importance of it. You spoke of this before dropping him.

HB: You know you have the quality, if it's not there, then okay... but if the mentality or attitude or discipline is not there... You can be the best player, but he will never help you. He's looking at himself, not thinking about the team. Those things are very important, and it happened in AFCON two years ago, and in the qualifiers for the World Cup and in the AFCON in Morocco. Then suddenly we didn't find it anymore. We know the reasons, and don't ask me about these reasons, because I will not tell you. But I said before, the DNA of Bafana was not there anymore. It needs to be reinstalled now because it was the basis of our good performances, winning the bronze medal and so on.



BROOS: "I ALWAYS HOPED THAT THEMBA WOULD COME BACK, BUT IT WASN'T POSSIBLE BEFORE AFCON, AS HE WAS INJURED AGAIN."

BAFANA SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS

- Ronwen Williams - Mamelodi Sundowns
- Ricardo Goss - Siwelele FC
- Renaldo Leaner - Sekhukhune United

DEFENDERS

- Khuliso Mudau - Mamelodi Sundowns
- Thabang Matuludi - Polokwane City
- Aubrey Modiba - Mamelodi Sundowns
- Samukelo Kabini - Molde FK (NOR)
- Nkosinathi Sibisi - Orlando Pirates
- Khulumani Ndamane - Mamelodi Sundowns
- Mbekezeli Mbokazi - Chicago Fire (USA)
- Ime Okon - Hannover 96 (GER)

MIDFIELDERS

- Teboho Mokoena - Mamelodi Sundowns
- Jayden Adams - Mamelodi Sundowns
- Thalente Mbatha - Orlando Pirates
- Sphephelo Sithole - CD Tondela (POR)

FORWARDS

- Oswin Appollis - Orlando Pirates
- Tshepang Moremi - Orlando Pirates
- Relebohile Mofokeng - Orlando Pirates
- Themba Zwane - Mamelodi Sundowns
- Thapelo Maseko - AEL Limassol (CYP)
- Bongokuhle Hlongwane - Minnesota United (USA)
- Evidence Makgopa - Orlando Pirates
- Lyle Foster - Burnley (ENG)

PANAMA SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS

- Orlando Mosquera - Al-Fahya FC (KSA)
- Luis Mejía - Nacional (URU)
- César Samudio - Marathón (HON)

DEFENDERS

- César Blackman - Slovan Bratislava (SVK)
- Jorge Gutiérrez - Dep La Guaira (VEN)
- Amir Murillo - Beşiktaş (TUR)
- Andrés Andrade - LASK Linz (AUT)
- Martín Krug - Levante (ESP)
- José Córdoba - Norwich City (ENG)
- Eric Davis - CD Plaza Amador (PAN)
- Jiovany Ramos - Puerto Cabello Academy (VEN)
- Roderick Miller - PFC Turan Tovuz (AZE)

MIDFIELDERS

- Aníbal Godoy - San Diego FC (USA)
- Adalberto Carrasquilla - Pumas (MEX)
- Carlos Harvey - Minnesota United (USA)
- Cristian Martínez - Kiryat Shmona (ISR)
- José Luis Rodríguez - FC Juárez (MEX)
- César Yanis - CD Cobresal (CHI)
- Yoel Bárcenas - Mazatlán FC (MEX)

FORWARDS

- Ismael Díaz - León (MEX)
- Cecilio Waterman - University of Concepción (CHI)
- José Fajardo - Catholic University (ECU)
- Kadir Barría - Botafogo (BRA)





KHUNE REVEALS HOW HE WANTS TO RESHAPE SA GOALKEEPING

By Matshelane Mamabolo

At Kaizer Chiefs, the 'number 1' jersey is not issued. It is inherited. When Amakhosi recruit a goalkeeper, the club does more than sign a contract; it introduces a player to a lineage.

Names echo through the corridors: Banks Setlhodi, Peta Bala'c, Gary Bailey, Brian Baloyi.... Each represents an era, a style, a memory etched into supporter folklore.

For Itumeleng Khune, stepping into that tradition was both a privilege and pressure. He understood immediately that he was not replacing a man; he was continuing a story.

"Every goalkeeper that has travelled this path before us has left a mark in the club's history. So every goalkeeper that also comes in needs to know who has travelled that path before him."

Khune rejects the idea that Chiefs' goalkeeping excellence is accidental. He believes it is cultural architecture – a shared understanding of responsibility passed from generation to generation.

Scouts, he argues, recognise that the club's identity demands a certain personality in goal: composure, authority and an appetite for big moments. Every newcomer is measured not only against current competitors but against 'ghosts'.

"The people who scout the talent understand what the brand is all about," he says.

The chairman's pre-season addresses reinforce the message. Players are reminded of those who guarded the posts before them, of the cups lifted and standards set. It is an oral tradition disguised as motivation. By the time the season begins, the goalkeeper knows he is representing a continuum.

"You just have to continue where others have left off."

"EVERY GOALKEEPER THAT HAS TRAVELLED THIS PATH BEFORE US HAS LEFT A MARK IN THE CLUB'S HISTORY. SO EVERY GOALKEEPER THAT ALSO COMES IN NEEDS TO KNOW WHO HAS TRAVELLED THAT PATH BEFORE HIM."

In that sentence lies the club's philosophy. Excellence is assumed. Innovation is encouraged, but never at the expense of responsibility.

Having watched Botende Eshole a bit before, and others cemented his belief that greatness was not distant mythology; it was observable and therefore reachable. Khune idolised Brian Baloyi, studying him with the hunger of a successor in waiting.

But admiration did not breed imitation. Khune's ambition was expansion. Football evolves, he insists, and goalkeepers must evolve with it. His adoption of advanced distribution was not rebellion against tradition; it was an attempt to push the lineage forward.

"It has always been my goal to take goalkeeping to a whole different level. Remember, generations are different, and even football, the way it evolves, you have to always look around the world, what's trending. And I think I started watching a goalkeeper by the name of Roberto Abbondanzieri, who played at the 2006 World Cup for Argentina. They were playing in Germany, and I watched his games, and I later Googled him and watched his videos while he was still playing for Boca Juniors. He is the one who introduced me to the distribution of the ball," the glint in his eye as he says



this, telling the story of the impact the Argentine had on him.

You have to have been living in Mars to not be aware of the impact and evolution Khune brought to goalkeeping with his distribution abilities – the man who self-titled himself Mzansi’s Number 1 firmly entrenching his name on that legendary list of former Chiefs goalkeepers.

That balance of reverence without stagnation defines Chiefs’ goalkeeper factory. Each custodian honours the past while negotiating the future. Khune succeeded because he internalised both obligations.

Still not officially retired, though inactive since he left Chiefs, Khune watches the Premier Soccer League with concern. He believes the standard of goalkeeping has dipped, and he traces the decline to structural gaps: too few recognised goalkeeper coaches, limited pathways and shrinking opportunities for local talent.

His critique is not nostalgia. It is a diagnosis.

“The standard of goalkeeping has dropped,” he says bluntly, linking the issue to development systems that no longer produce depth. Where South Africa once overflowed with options, the pipeline feels thin. For a country that historically prided itself on producing charismatic keepers, the shift is alarming.

“That’s because we have a lack of goalkeeper coaches in the country. So that’s why I said, ‘What can I do differently to help?’”

Khune’s response has been practical rather than rhetorical. He founded a goalkeeping academy to rebuild fundamentals, hoping to create platforms for overlooked coaches and aspiring players. His mission is restorative, to widen the base so excellence can re-emerge organically.

“Obviously, we want to open more doors for goalkeeper coaches that are not recognised out there. And hopefully, when someone hears that this goalkeeper is working with Itu at the Distribution 101 Goalkeeping Academy, it will open doors so that those goalkeepers can improve the standard of our goalkeeping in the

“THE PEOPLE WHO SCOUT THE TALENT UNDERSTAND WHAT THE BRAND IS ALL ABOUT.”

country.”

His most controversial stance concerns foreign goalkeepers. Khune admires their professionalism and acknowledges the competition they bring, yet he worries about unintended consequences. He points to Egypt’s model, a league prioritising domestic keepers, as a blueprint worth studying.

He is careful to avoid xenophobic undertones. His argument is developmental, not nationalistic. When clubs rely heavily on imported goalkeepers, he contends, local prospects stagnate on benches. Match experience evaporates, and the national team inherits the deficit.

The ripple effect extends beyond players. Foreign goalkeeper coaches often arrive with trusted networks, recommending compatriots and unintentionally narrowing opportunities for South African mentors. The ecosystem thus contracts.

Khune imagines a recalibration rather than a ban: policies that incentivise clubs to invest in local goalkeepers, mentorship programmes linking retired professionals with academies, and stronger certification pathways for coaches. In his view, protecting domestic growth ultimately strengthens competition.

He cites clubs carrying multiple foreign goalkeepers while young South Africans wait in the shadows. For Khune, this is not an abstract policy debate; it is a lived frustration. Each sidelined prospect represents a stalled career and a lost national asset.

Development requires repetition under pressure. Training alone cannot simulate the psychological furnace of match day. Without exposure, talent calcifies.



His academy attempts to counter that reality by emphasising game intelligence, distribution and modern tactical awareness – the very qualities that defined his own career. He wants graduates capable of competing globally, not merely surviving locally.

Khune's entry into a post-playing life reveals how deeply he feels tethered to the jersey he once wore. He is no longer protecting Chiefs' goal, but he is guarding something broader: the identity of South African goalkeeping.

He speaks like a custodian of tradition, determined that the next generation inherit a position richer than the one he received. His frustration stems from love. He has seen what the country can produce and refuses to accept decline as destiny.

The lineage that shaped him now shapes his activism.

In a sense, he is still chasing that training-ground mis-kick which birthed the distribution he became renowned for – searching for overlooked moments that can be transformed into progress. If innovation built his career, innovation must rescue the system.

And so the boy who once studied foreign footage to reinvent himself now studies domestic structures to reinvent a culture. The gloves may be hung up one day, but the work continues.

For Khune, the story of South African goalkeeping is unfinished, and he intends to help write its next chapter.



“WE HAVE A LACK OF GOALKEEPER COACHES IN THE COUNTRY. SO THAT'S WHY I SAID, ‘WHAT CAN I DO DIFFERENTLY TO HELP?’”



Muhsin Ertugral: Itu was special from a young age. When we made that decision to invest in youth at the time, it was structural and had to be done. As you know, I brought in a specialist goalkeeper coach, Rainer Dinkelacker.

We wanted to modernise the way the team has to play, and obviously, the goalkeeper had to evolve first. Tactically, we were raising our defensive line. That changes all for a goalkeeper. You need a footballer who can defend the space, and understands the transitions early and play from the back under pressure.

Itu had that all. He was extremely quick off his line. His acceleration over short distances was outstanding, and he could control the space behind the defence. But what was really outstanding was his comfort on the ball. He was not afraid to receive it under pressure. And Rainer worked hours upon hours after the sessions on his distribution, both short and long.

That's what made him great. It was not that difficult for me to take that responsibility to give him his opportunities. And, as they say, the rest is history.



RELE JOINS ILLUSTRIOUS LIST OF PIRATES' HAT-TRICK HEROES

By Matshelane Mamabolo

Relebohile Mofokeng is from Sharpeville, and he seems to like to shine brightest around Sharpeville Day - March 21, the day now referred to as Human Rights Day.

The Orlando Pirates youngster was in his element on Sunday, the day after Sharpeville Day, as he scored his maiden senior hat-trick to help the Buccaneers to a 6-0 'massacre' of TS Galaxy in Mbombela. The victory saw Pirates move to the top of the Betway Premiership table – a point ahead of champions Mamelodi Sundowns, who have a game in hand.

The discerning Mofokeng follower will vividly remember that last year, on March 21, the young lad also had a match to remember as he got his first start for Bafana Bafana at the Peter Mokaba Stadium in a World Cup qualifier against Lesotho.

Granted that match was eventually rendered null and void following the blunder that saw Teboho Mokoena playing despite being on two yellow cards. Still, who can forget how Rele justified the loud calls for him to be given a start with the national team as he helped himself to a goal and overall shone bright for Bafana to walk away with the Man-of-the-Match award in a 2-0 win?

He was also Man-of-the-Match on Sunday as he added his name to a list of players to have scored hat-tricks for the Buccaneers. It was a superb showing by the 21-year-old, who opened the scoring with a splendid free-kick that he had earned after being hacked down by Oupa Motaung, who saw red.

Early in the second half, with Pirates

enjoying a 3-0 lead from the first stanza and the match essentially over as a contest, he added salt to Galaxy's injury with a second goal after receiving a pass from Oswin Appollis.

The third one was a thing of beauty, although Ira Tape should have done better than to let it slip through his gloves. But take nothing away from the youngster who twisted and turned as he carved the Galaxy defence open before taking a shot high into the net through the Ivorian's hands.

"It's very special. I have been waiting for this moment," an evidently delighted Mofokeng said in a post-match television interview. "I have not been scoring or getting such moments, so I think the hat-trick helps me in my steps. These are the moments that I have been playing for. I think this hat-trick will help in boosting my confidence so that I can continue pushing and going forward."

Already a Buccaneers' crowd favourite with some even affording him legendary status, this hat-trick will see Mofokeng's stocks rise even further.

After all, he is now sure to have his name being mentioned alongside that of Jerry Sikhosana, who is remembered for the hat-trick he scored against Kaizer Chiefs in the BobSave Super Bowl. Players such as Jimmy Kauleza and Zakhele Lepasa have also scored hat-tricks for the Buccaneers in cup matches, with Kermit Erasmus having found the net three times in continental competition.

In the league, since the advent of the Premier Soccer League (PSL) era in 1996, Mofokeng becomes the eighth Pirates player to score a hat-trick, with Tshegofatso Mabaso holding the distinct record of two such in one calendar year.



OTHER ORLANDO PIRATES HAT-TRICK SCORERS IN LEAGUE MATCHES

POLLEN NDLANYA

2002 April 21 – Castle Premiership
Pirates 4 AmaZulu 0

Trompies remains the highest hat-trick scorer since the advent of the Premier Soccer League (PSL) in 1996 with six. The one he scored for the Buccaneers was pretty special, coming as it did in Usuthu’s backyard at Kings Park Soccer Stadium. While he scored the opening goal as early as the second minute, finishing off a pass from Josep Ngake, it was not until late in the match that Ndlanya ensured the Bucs a convincing victory. His second goal came on 70 minutes, a good header connecting a cross from Gerald Raphahlela. But he then completed his hat-trick just two minutes thereafter, his low pass beating Pelewe Delamogo. Philani Kubheka made it 4-0 as Pirates added to AmaZulu’s relegation woes, which became a reality at the end of the 2001/2002 campaign, while Pirates ended up third.

BENEDICT VILAKAZI

2004 February 9 - Castle Premiership
Pirates 5 Dynamos 0

A legend of the club, the Buccaneers’ all-time top scorer had to be among those who have scored three in a single match, right? He scored his hat-trick against Dynamos in a 5-0 thumping that the Buccaneers handed to the Limpopo outfit. At the time, South Africa’s senior national team had just returned from a disappointing Africa Cup of Nations in Tunisia, where they were eliminated at the first hurdle, with many fans lamenting that the ‘Little Napoleon’ had been left behind. Vilakazi justified their views with a trio of goals that saw him go top of the scorers’ charts with nine goals in a season that saw him scoring

19 goals in all competitions. His coach, then Augusto Palacios, waxed lyrical about not only the goals but his overall contribution to the team’s play.

THULASIZWE MBUYANE

2009 August 29 – Absa Premiership
Pirates 4 Jomo Cosmos 0

With the first World Cup on African soil looming, the desire to impress was huge, and Thulasizwe Mbuyane must have thought he was tugging at Carlos Alberto Parreira’s heartstrings when he scored the 2009/10 campaign’s first hat-trick. As it was, he could well have scored four at Orlando Stadium that late August day, but he incredibly failed to tap home the ball after it bounced off the upright as early as the second minute. All was quickly forgiven, though, as the striker headed in a corner kick by Katlego Mashego before the quarter-hour mark. Unlike in the first half, Mbuyane managed to score the loose ball after Avril Phali had failed to hold on to Mashego’s shot six minutes after the break. Mbuyane completed his hat-trick before Terror Fanteni scored his maiden Bucs goal to make it 4-0.

TENDAI NDORO

2016 August 24 – Absa Premiership
Pirates 3 Golden Arrows 1

They called him ‘Fire’ and boy did the late Tendai Ndoro set the 2016/17 Absa Premiership alight on Matchday One. In new coach Muhsin Ertugral’s first match, the Zimbabwean put Golden Arrows to the sword with compellingly clinical finishing as he scored all the goals within half an hour in a 3-1 victory at Orlando Stadium. After a somewhat dull first half that produced no goals, the match came alive shortly after the break with Ndoro at the forefront. He opened the scoring four minutes in, profiting from a Thabo Rakhale assist. He then headed in his second from an Mpho Makola delivery on 67 minutes





before earning himself the right to take home the match-ball 15 minutes before the end, this time profiting from a pass by Thabiso Kutumela.

GABADINHO MHANGO

2020 January 7 – Absa Premiership
Pirates 4 Polokwane City 1

The Malawian striker extended his goal haul to 10 with this hat-trick, thus moving to the top of the scorer’s chart as he helped the Buccaneers move up to fifth place on the league table. It was a compellingly clinical first half showing as Mhango scored all three goals before the break to ensure there would be no fight-back from the opposition. His first goal came as early as the fifth minute, and he made it 2-0 just before the quarter-hour mark before he completed his haul 10 minutes before half-time. That feat saw him matching the legendary Bhele Nomvethé’s best scoring sequences of eight goals in five matches and Mhango went on to finish joint top scorer on 16 goals with Highlands Park’s Peter Shalulile.

MONNAPULE SALENG

2022 January 14 – DSTV Premiership
Pirates 4 Swallows FC 1

It is with good reason that many Pirates fans were not chuffed as Saleng controversially left the club mid-last season, for the attacker was an asset for the Buccaneers. Among his many memorable showings for the club was this one against the old Soweto enemy – the Dube Birds in Dobsonville. He scored his first with a deft back-heel and followed that up with a simple tap-in from close range. The third goal illustrated not only his ability to get into spaces to receive passes but his composure under pressure as two defenders closed in on him and his clinical finishing as he easily beat the advancing goalkeeper to become only the third Pirates player, alongside Ndlanya and Mhango, to

score a league hat-trick away from home.

TSHEGOFATSO MABASA

2024 April 6 – DSTV Premiership
Pirates 7 Golden Arrows 1

There is every reason to believe that Mabasa would have been the Buccaneers’ all-time leading scorer had he not been ‘iced out’ of the team before being shuttled to Stellenbosch FC. That he trails Benedict Vilakazi by just eight goals, having also once left the club on loan, speaks volumes of his scoring prowess. Ask Arrows, and they will attest to that, Mabasa being at the forefront of a humiliation of Abafana Bes’thende with a trio of goals. His predatory instincts shone through as he latched onto a loose ball, which the goalkeeper failed to hold on to for his opener just 11 minutes in. His mental strength was also to the fore, Mabasa missing a penalty kick only to come back and score two more goals – both of which were illustrative of his incredible ability to get into spaces to meet crosses and score even with defenders closing in on him.

TSHEGOFATSO MABASA

2024 December 24, Betway Premiership
Pirates 8 Marumo Gallants 1

Christmas gifts did not come as big as the one Pirates gave to their fans on the eve of the big day, and Mabasa helped himself to a special one as he took home the match-ball following his hat-trick, the second in the year. A powerful runner, he demonstrated his ability to rush into spaces to receive the ball on all three occasions, his initial goal seeing him connect with a Deano Van Rooyen cross from the right. He again slotted in the second from inside the box, having made a brilliant run on the opposition defenders’ blindside as Pirates ventured forward. His third was a powerful header.



BENNI ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KENYA & SA, KEEN ON CLUB RETURN

BENNI MCCARTHY was in the country on a whirlwind tour in the past week to promote his self-titled autobiography – **BENNI** – yet what came out of it was his desire to take over at struggling Kaizer Chiefs. South Africa's all-time leading scorer did not hide his desire to coach the team he supported as a child growing up in Hanover Park in Cape Town, and you can bet many Amakhosi fans would love to have him at Naturena. This, after all, is a man who made a success out of the likes of AmaZulu and Cape Town City, clubs much less resourced than Chiefs are. He is, however, still attached – Benni being in charge of Kenya's senior national team, and while he dreams of wearing the gold and black tracksuit someday, Benni remains committed to the Harambee Stars. He leads them in the FIFA Series against Estonia and either Rwanda or Grenada next weekend in Kigali. During his time here, Benni opened up to *iDiski* Senior Writer **MATSHELANE MAMABOLO** about his longing for club football and his commitment to the Kenya project.

Matshelane Mamabolo: Thanks for making time, Benni. Congratulations on your book. Now, you are currently coaching Kenya. But I am wondering, do you not miss the grind, the daily grind of club football? I mean, you are a young coach, and often we associate national teams with much more mature coaches. Where's your head at?

Benni McCarthy: Thanks, Bra Jakes. Listen, Kenya has been amazing. Coaching Kenya, 'Oh my God,' I like the country. They're trying to revive football in East Africa, and they really want to be a giant of East African football. They want to be able to compete against your South Africa, the West Africans and the North Africans. So, they're changing a lot of the infrastructure. They're giving you the support. The government, the president of the country, is even getting involved in the national team – supporting us and giving us what we need to bring young players through

and to get success, which is incredible. But yeah, I'm an everyday coach and I miss that a lot. It is hard for me that I can't get the opportunity to work every day because with the national team, it's like every two, three months that I get to interact during international break.

MM: How is the standard of their game, though?

BM: Their local league is okay. It's nothing special like PSL or other powerful leagues in Africa. So, you see some of the talents and the fitness that they have. You can turn them into machines only if you could have them on a daily basis. But when you get them for a week, what do they do at their clubs? Their work is completely different. Some coaches, they don't have the technical ability to make a player better. So, what they do at their clubs is moderate. And then you come to the national team, you want to take it to this [high] level, and you've only got a week to do that, or sometimes five, four days. So, it is frustrating. It's frustrating that you get such limited time with them. So for sure, the next opportunity for me will definitely, definitely not be another national team. I want to go back to managing or to coaching a club.

MM: I've read about the criticism that you faced in Kenya. People say, 'we're paying a lot of money. Why is he here? Is he capable? Can he do something with the Kenya national team?' How are you dealing with that criticism?

BM: Since I've taken over, people say this and that. Since I've gone there, it's the most they've ever exported Kenyan players going abroad from just working with them since I joined the national team. So, yeah, I think you're always going to have people criticising or have something to say. And I think if they don't, then I'll be worried. If people don't talk about me when they don't criticise, that's when I'm worried. Because then you're definitely doing something wrong,





because if everybody's just saying, 'oh, I'm good, good, good', something's probably not right. But you respect people's opinion, but they don't know what you're facing and what you have. Because if their league was as strong as the PSL, and you have these kinds of players to select from, then yeah. But they are limited. So, what do you do when you have a team for a week? And for the CHAN, I was able to work with the players for a month. So, I had them in camp for a month, and then we played the CHAN tournament. And look, I think the national team was above average. We were in the toughest group of the tournament, and we went to a quarter-final where they'd never, ever been before. And that was just because we were able to get three, four weeks of training sessions. We could instil tactical discipline, and we were able to do a lot of things, and that's why we were able to have some success during the CHAN. And then, of course, you're hoping that you're going to have the same ability to have players for longer periods. And have longer camps so that you can organise a structure; a way of play and a style. But okay, the way we play, that's definitely like Coach Benni's style. Because that is what he likes to do and that. But if you don't have opportunities to work on that, how are you going to improve?

MM: How are you going to improve them, though?

BM: That's the challenge I have. The players play at their clubs, and a lot of them are mediocre. But then you're the one who has to face the music when you come to the national team. And you've got only that [limited pool] to pick from. So, what I've done now is I've gone to Europe a lot because we're finding out in the database that there are a lot of Kenya-born players playing in Germany. There are a few players we found in Germany who can play for Kenya. Also in England, in the lower leagues – the Championship, League One and League Two there are a few Kenya-born players there. So, I've been going to visit and speak to these players and see if they are keen

“THEY’RE TRYING TO REVIVE FOOTBALL IN EAST AFRICA, AND THEY REALLY WANT TO BE A GIANT OF EAST AFRICAN FOOTBALL. THEY WANT TO BE ABLE TO COMPETE AGAINST YOUR SOUTH AFRICA, THE WEST AFRICANS AND THE NORTH AFRICANS.”

because they have two nationalities. They can play for England, they can play for Germany but they have a Kenyan father or mother, so they can play for us as well. So, I've been trying to go and convince the players, because yeah, I think the more players I have playing at that level, it gives us a little bit of a chance because they are coached and they play in the European Leagues. So, I think they understand the tactical abilities of the game. So, when you're trying to implement or explain, it's much easier and much quicker for them to adapt than when locally. So, the league isn't... the league is... honestly, I don't even know what to compare the Kenyan League to what league. Yeah, so the level isn't really there, but the talent is undoubtedly good.

MM: Are they not complaining that you are not there most of the time? As in, do they not want you to be there to watch their local league?

BM: Yeah, but we do that, although I'm not going to do that for nine months of the year. Like, no chance in hell. So, of course, like, you do as much as you can. So we will be there for like a month and a half, and we just go and watch as much local football as we can. And then when we leave, we leave for three weeks, four weeks at a time. So the coaches that we have here, they will scout. They will check out the Kenyan players playing here in SA – at Richards Bay and at Polokwane City. So they will check up on them and see





how they do. And then I go and watch some European teams. There are a couple of players playing in Scotland and in England. So I go and just try and keep up with the players that we have closer. I'm flying from here to Kenya. From Kenya to Germany, because like I said, there's a boy at Bayern Munich's U21s, who is also training with the first team. There's one at FC Cologne and another at Hoffenheim. And then there's another one playing in Bundesliga Two. So yeah, we've got some top boys – about five – that if we can get and add to the team, things will improve. That's high-quality players, decent standard. So yeah, the better team that you can recruit, the more chances we have to succeed.

MM: What would be a success in the AFCON that you guys will be co-hosting?

BM: Getting out of the group stages, first of all, that's the biggest worry. You know, you don't want to be the host, and then you collapse in the group stages. So that's disastrous for the tournament, especially because then you get less fans wanting to come to the game because their nation is out. But if the nation is still in the tournament, then even if you don't have tickets to go to your nation, you would want to go and see other teams. But if you're not there, then I don't want to go and watch. So for me, I think success would be getting out of the group stages, and then you take it game by game and see where you can get to. Because when you watched AFCON, the latest AFCON in Morocco, the standard was incredible. The standard was high. The quality of pitches also allowed the football to go up a level as well. So yeah, that's a tough task for us to do. But we'll do the best we can and most definitely target getting out of the group stages.

MM: And if you were to face Bafana Bafana?

BM: Oh my goodness. It will be tough. It will be really hard because for me, my

“I'M AN EVERYDAY COACH AND I MISS THAT A LOT. IT IS HARD FOR ME THAT I CAN'T GET THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK EVERY DAY BECAUSE WITH THE NATIONAL TEAM, IT'S LIKE EVERY TWO, THREE MONTHS THAT I GET TO INTERACT.”

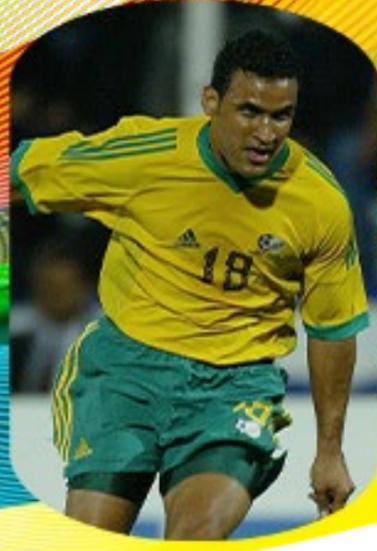
heart is with Bafana. But of course, as a coach, you want to do the job for the country that you work for. Yeah, I want to do well, but I know it will be almost impossible for us because the level, the standard, with South Africa is a much higher standard than Kenya. But like I said, sometimes it's not about how high your standards are. It's the willing power and how good and how well-organised your teams are. And I think my team is pretty organised and they will give everything. We definitely won't lose 8-0 like we did against Senegal.

MM: And how are you finding it in Kenya generally?

BM: It's a developing country, and Nairobi is a very, very quickly developed city. And honestly, the people are so friendly. They're amazing. I love it. And it will really affect me and make me super sad the day I leave there because they've accepted us. So, we're four South Africans there with my technical team, and they treat us like we're Kenyans, like we're part of them. And they make themselves available. And they try to give us the best that they can. So, yeah, I'm absolutely in love with that country and its people. And, yeah, hopefully we'll be able to do an unbelievable job for them. To restore some pride in that national football.

MM: Thanks, Benni, all the best.





THE IDISKI TOP 10... **MOST-CAPPED BAFANA STARS**

This week, iDiski Times turns its attention to endurance, consistency and legacy, by counting down the 10 most-capped players in the history of the South African national football team, those who have worn the national colours more often than anyone else since the country's return to international football.

It is a list that tells a deeper story than numbers alone. Caps are not just appearances; they are markers of trust, longevity and relevance across different eras, coaches and tactical shifts.

To remain part of the national setup long enough to climb into this elite group requires more than talent; it demands resilience, adaptability and sustained excellence.

The ranking itself is based strictly on

official international caps, compiled with reference to verified records and cross-checked with leading football analytics sources. Only official matches recognised by FIFA have been included, ensuring a clean and consistent benchmark across generations.

What stands out immediately is how difficult it is to break into this company. No current player features among the ten.

This is a roll call of players who defined eras. Individuals who did not just pass through the national team, but became part of its foundation.

(*statistics as of 24 March 2026)

The Top 10:

10 Bernard Parker

(16-03-1986) Benoni Premier Utd, Thanda Royal Zulu, Red Star Belgrade, FC Twente, Panserraikos, Kaizer Chiefs, TS Galaxy
70 caps 21 goals

Parker was a footballer defined by intelligence rather than raw explosiveness. Comfortable across the front line, he combined clever movement with a strong understanding of space, often arriving in the right areas at the right time. His time in Europe refined his tactical awareness, while his domestic career highlighted his consistency and professionalism. For Bafana, Parker offered versatility and was capable of linking play, finishing chances, and adapting to different roles depending on the system. He was never about spectacle, but about efficiency, quietly building a respectable international return through discipline and footballing intelligence.

9 Lucas Radebe

(12-04-1969) Kaizer Chiefs, Leeds United
70 caps 2 goals

Radebe was more than a defender. Rhoo was a leader in the truest sense. Calm, authoritative and tactically astute, he anchored the defence with a presence that extended beyond his own performances. His reading of the game allowed him to neutralise threats before they developed, while his composure



set the tone for those around him. At club level, he became an icon abroad, but internationally, he symbolised stability during a transformative period. Radebe's legacy is built not only on ability but on the respect he commanded across the football world.

8 Delron Buckley

(07-12-1977) *Bochum, Arminia Bielefeld, Borussia Dortmund, FC Basel, Mainz 05, Anorthosis, Karlsruher, Maritzburg United*
72 caps 10 goals

Buckley brought directness and unpredictability to the wing. At his best, he was an explosive player who could stretch defences, beat opponents one-on-one and deliver decisive moments in transition. His years in Germany shaped a footballer comfortable with the physical and tactical demands of European football, while also sharpening his attacking instincts. Buckley was not always consistent, but he was often dangerous, capable of changing games with a single run or strike. For Bafana, he provided width, pace and a constant outlet, offering something few others in his generation could replicate.

7 John Moshoeu

(18-12-1965) *Giant Blackpool, Kaizer Chiefs, Gençlerbirliği, Kocaelispor, Fenerbahçe, Bursaspor, AmaZulu, Alexandra United*
73 caps 8 goals

The late Shoes Moshoeu was a football artist. Shoes was a playmaker who saw passes that others did not. Graceful on the ball and unhurried in possession, he dictated rhythm with intelligence rather than speed. Moshoeu's game was built on awareness, technique and subtle control, allowing him to operate effectively even as the game evolved around him. His longevity at international level spoke to his adaptability and footballing mind. He was not about spectacle for its own sake, but about influence, quietly shaping matches through vision and timing.

6 Shaun Bartlett

(31-10-1972) *Cape Town Spurs, AmaZulu, Colorado Rapids, NY MetroStars, FC Zurich, Charlton, Kaizer Chiefs, Bloemfontein Celtic*
74 caps 29 goals

Shaun Bartlett was a striker of precision and composure, combining aerial strength with intelligent movement inside the box. Whether finishing with his head or feet, he carried a calmness in front of goal that made him one of South Africa's most reliable scorers. His international record reflects that consistency, while his career abroad added a level of discipline and tactical awareness to his game. Bartlett was not a flamboyant forward, but he was an effective player who understood timing, positioning and responsibility, and who delivered regularly when the opportunity presented itself.

5 Benni McCarthy

(12-11-1977) *Seven Stars, Cape Town Spurs, Ajax Amsterdam, Celta Vigo, Porto, Blackburn Rovers, West Ham,*

Orlando Pirates
80 caps 31 goals

South Africa's all-time leading scorer, McCarthy, was a forward defined by instinct and confidence. Equally capable of scoring from range or inside the box, he combined technical quality with a striker's ruthless edge. His career in Europe, highlighted by success at the highest level, shaped a player comfortable on the biggest stages. McCarthy thrived on responsibility, often carrying the attacking burden for club and country. His 31 international goals reflect a consistent ability to deliver. He remains the benchmark for South African forwards.

4 Siyabonga Nomvetho

(12-04-1969) *Africa Wanderers, Kaizer Chiefs, Udinese, Salernitana, Empoli, Djurgardens, Orlando Pirates, Aalborg, Moroka Swallows, AmaZulu, Uthongathi*
82 caps 16 goals

Nomvetho's career defied the usual limits of time. A forward built on movement, instinct and tireless energy, he remained effective across multiple decades, adapting his game as his body evolved. Early on, his pace and sharp finishing made him a constant threat, while later years revealed a more measured striker, relying on positioning and experience. His journey across Europe and South Africa added layers to his game, but it was his longevity



that truly set him apart. Few forwards have maintained relevance for as long, making him one of Bafana's most enduring attacking figures.

3 Sphiwe Tshabalala

(25-09-1984) *Alexandra United, Free State Stars, Kaizer Chiefs, Erzurumspor, AmaZulu*
88 caps 12 goals

Tshabalala played with flair and a sense of occasion. A naturally expressive footballer, Shabba thrived in attacking areas where he could influence games with creativity and long-range shooting. His left foot was both a weapon and a source of unpredictability, capable of moments that lifted entire stadiums. Beyond the highlights, Tshabalala offered consistency in wide and central roles, adapting to different tactical demands. He remains a symbol of attacking freedom in South African football, a player who embraced the spotlight of scoring the opening goal of the 2010 World Cup, and often delivered when it mattered most.

2 Itumeleng Khune

20-06-1987 *Kaizer Chiefs*
90 caps

Khune brought flair and personality to goalkeeping. Known for his reflexes and distribution, he was as comfortable initiating attacks as he was preventing goals. His ability with the ball at his feet made him stand out, often acting as an additional playmaker from deep. Khune's career has also been defined by resilience, overcoming setbacks to remain a prominent figure for years. At his peak, he combined athleticism with confidence, becoming one of the most recognisable goalkeepers of his generation.

1 Aaron Mokoena

25-11-1980 *Jomo Cosmos, Bayer Leverkusen, Uerdingen 05, Ajax Amsterdam, Germinal Beerschot, KRC Genk, Blackburn Rovers, Portsmouth, Bidvest Wits*
107 caps 1 goal

Mbazo's record caps tell the story of durability, but his career was about far more than longevity. A versatile and combative player, he operated both in defence and midfield with equal commitment. His game was built on discipline, physicality and an unrelenting work ethic. As captain, he led

by example rather than flair, providing structure and accountability within the team. Mokoena's presence brought balance, often doing the unseen work that allowed others to thrive. Having made his debut as a teenager, his international career reflects consistency at a level few manage to sustain.

What The List Tells Us:

First of all, it is worth remembering that, after more than three decades back in the international fold, South Africa's national football team now has a history. It's a story that is still relatively young in global terms, but one that carries its own weight, its own scars, and its own moments of pride. It has not been a smooth journey. There have been peaks and valleys, golden moments and difficult rebuilding phases, and long stretches somewhere in between



where identity and consistency often felt just out of reach.

One of the more persistent challenges over the years has been continuity. In the decade leading up to Hugo Broos taking charge, Bafana struggled to settle on a consistent core. Selection often felt fluid, sometimes reactive, and as a result, very few players who debuted after 2010 were able to build long, uninterrupted international careers. In fact, every player on this list played at a FIFA World Cup finals, and considering Bafana last featured in 2010 makes for a telling story.

More recently, though, there has been a subtle but important shift. For the first time in a while, a recognisable core of players has begun to emerge. A group that plays together regularly, understands one another, and is slowly building the kind of cohesion that successful international teams rely on. And with that stability comes the possibility of longevity.

That is where this current generation, who have qualified for the upcoming World Cup, becomes particularly interesting.

Ronwen Williams, for example, has 61 caps, and is now amongst the top 20 most capped players. If he maintains his trajectory, it is not unthinkable that he climbs rapidly up the all-time appearances list. Still firmly established as Bafana's first-choice goalkeeper, he could remain in that role for several years yet.

In midfield, Teboho Mokoena, is on 54 caps, is another active player closing in on that upper tier. Beyond him, there are experienced names such as Themba

Zwane (49 caps), Aubrey Modiba (45 caps) and Thapelo Morena (37 caps), but all are now on the wrong side of 30, which naturally places a limit on how far they might climb. Percy Tau has reached the 50-cap mark, but at 31 and having been absent from recent squads, his upward movement appears less certain.

Which brings the focus to the next wave.

Players like Lyle Foster (25) and Oswin Appollis (24) may not yet be close to those appearance milestones, but time is very much on their side. If they remain consistent, available, and central to the national setup, they could well be the ones to break into those upper reaches in the next five years or so.

And perhaps just as importantly, they are not only chasing caps, they are chasing history. Both have shown a growing eye for goal, and in time, they may begin to close in on the benchmark set by Benni McCarthy, whose 31 international goals still stand as the national record. Foster, currently on 10, and Appollis, on seven, are still some distance away, but their trajectories suggest that, with patience and consistency, they could yet enter that conversation.

They will all be looking to add to their tallies against Panama this week, and also, of course, at the World Cup and beyond.

In many ways, this is what makes the current moment so intriguing. For a national team that has spent much of its recent past searching for stability, there is now the sense that a new chapter is being written.

FIXTURES
PRINCESS MAGOGO STADIUM

SATURDAY
28 MARCH 2026

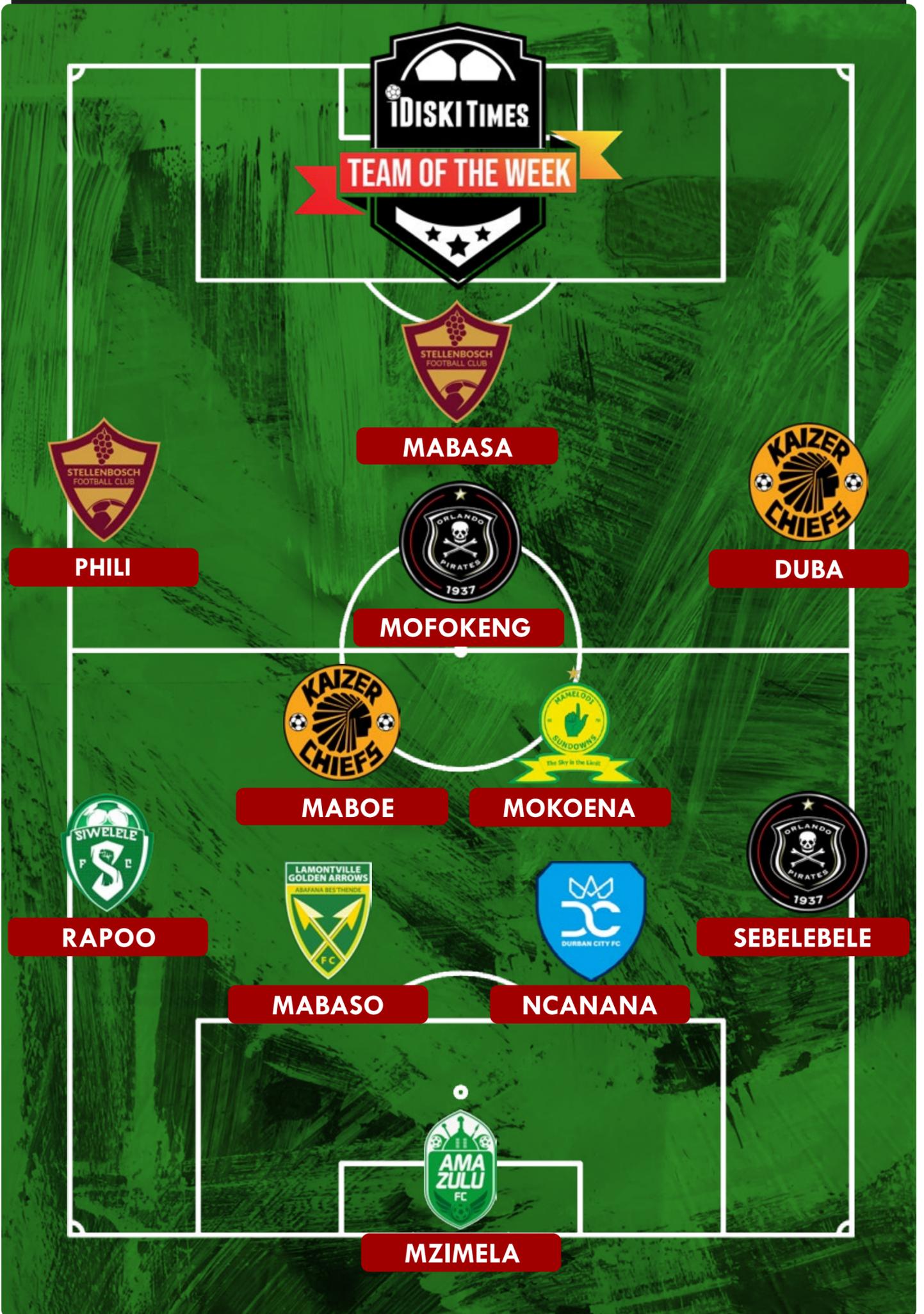
SUNDAY
29 MARCH 2026

	GOLDEN ARROWS VS TS GALAXY 10:00			CHIPPA UNITED VS RICHARDS BAY 10:00	
	AMAZULU FC VS ORBIT COLLEGE 12:30			ORLANDO PIRATES VS KAIZER CHIEFS 12:30	

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IDISKI'S PREMIERSHIP TEAM OF THE WEEK (17 - 22 MARCH 2026)



**ACE OF THE WEEK:
RELEBOHILE MOFOKENG**

After netting the first hat-trick of his professional career, the iDiski Times Ace of the Week can only be Relebohile Mofokeng. The Orlando Pirates star was in sublime form on Sunday, running riot against a 10-man TS Galaxy. “President Yama2K” delivered a ruthless masterclass in finishing and, on another day, could easily have walked away with more than the three goals he scored at Mbombela Stadium in a resounding 6–0 victory. Still only 21, Mofokeng has hit a rich vein of form in recent months, emerging as one of Pirates’ most decisive figures. If he maintains this trajectory, he is rapidly positioning himself as a leading contender for Player of the Season in the 2025/26 Betway Premiership campaign.



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.

Going Up... To The Top

By Rob Delpont

In South African football circles, few nicknames carried as much personality, or accuracy, as 'Going Up.' It belonged to David Nyathi, and like all great footballing nicknames, it told you exactly what kind of player he was before you even watched him play.

Borrowed from a beloved 1980s sitcom, the name quickly became something more than a cultural reference. It became a description of his football. Because for Nyathi, the touchline was never a boundary. He was always going up. Overlapping. Surging forward. Turning defence into attack with a kind of fearless intent that set him apart.

At a time when most full-backs were defined by discipline and restraint, Nyathi played with ambition. A modern full-back, ahead of his time. He attacked space, drove his team up the pitch, and often finished moves he had no right to be part of. Those relentless runs became his signature, and over time, they built a reputation that travelled far beyond South Africa's borders.

Nyathi's journey began far from the glamour of packed stadiums and continental recognition, at the unassuming and memorably named Dangerous Darkies. It was there that he first made his mark. Promotion to the National Soccer League in 1991 was a breakthrough moment, both for the club and for a young defender beginning to find his place in the professional game.

Football, though, rarely offers a straight path. Relegation followed just a year later, and Dangerous Darkies slipped back into obscurity. Nyathi, however, did not.

His move to Orlando Pirates proved to be the moment his career truly took flight. There, his natural instincts were given room to breathe, and his fearless approach began to flourish. At the same time, the game itself was changing around him. When South Africa's national football team returned to international football in 1992 after decades of isolation, Nyathi was part of that first squad as a player

stepping onto the international stage at the exact moment his country was doing the same.

From there, the rise gathered momentum. At Cape Town Spurs, he became part of a golden era, helping the club to a famous league and cup double in 1995. A move to Kaizer Chiefs followed, and with it came greater visibility, greater expectation, and growing international attention, particularly in the wake of Bafana's 1996 continental triumph.

Europe soon called, and Nyathi answered. Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Turkey, and each destination added a new layer to his game, each challenge sharpening the instincts of a player already defined by courage and intelligence. By the time his journey abroad had run its course, many regarded him as the finest left-back South Africa had ever produced.

By 1999, when he played his final game for Bafana, Nyathi had lived through an entire era. He had been there at the rebirth, lifted continental silverware, and walked onto the global stage at the World Cup. His 45 caps told one story. His impact told another.

But this is not simply a story about a career, or even a legacy. This is a story about moments that risk being forgotten.

Because beyond the milestones, beyond the clubs and the accolades, there were nights – specific nights – when everything came together. Nights when "Going Up" wasn't just a nickname, but a statement.

Two dates stand out: 4 December 1997 and 16 December 1998.

Two nights in Europe. Two performances that showed just how high David Nyathi could go.

Marseille: among giants

On a December night in 1997, the floodlights burned over the Stade Vélodrome. The occasion was the celebrations around the draw for the 1998 FIFA World Cup, and FIFA had assembled a team that looked more like a fantasy than a squad list.

Up front were two of the most feared



strikers on the planet: Ronaldo and Gabriel Batistuta.

Around them stood stars from every corner of the globe – Hidetoshi Nakata, Hong Myung-bo, Noureddine Naybet.

And at left-back, quietly tying his boots, was David Nyathi.

If you had told the young boy kicking a ball on the dusty fields of Bushbuckridge that one day he would be in that dressing room, he might have laughed. Yet football has a strange way of writing its own stories.

Now he was here.

Their opponents that night were a European selection that included the imperious Zinedine Zidane and Patrick Kluivert.

But the FIFA XI stole the show, winning 5–2, with Ronaldo and Batistuta putting on a clinic display.

Nyathi's job was the less glamorous one – defending, covering space, keeping shape, but he belonged in that company. And as he looked around the pitch that night in Marseille, he must have felt the quiet satisfaction that the long road had brought him to a place where he could stand among the world's best without feeling out of place.

For Nyathi, though, the result was secondary.

The real story was the journey.

Rome: the encore

A year later, it happened again.

This time, the stage was the Stadio Olimpico, where the Italian Football Federation was celebrating its centenary.

If Marseille had been impressive, Rome felt almost surreal.

The FIFA XI dressing room read like the guest list at football's royal ball: George Weah, Rui Costa, Davor Šuker, Zinedine Zidane and once again Ronaldo and Gabriel Batistuta.

And among them, once more, was Nyathi.

By then, he had already tested himself in some of Europe's toughest leagues, and had just moved to Italy, where he further sharpened his defensive instincts. Italian football had a way of doing that, every run analysed, every mistake punished.

Opposing them that night was an Italian side stacked with icons: Paolo Maldini, Fabio Cannavaro, Alessandro Nesta and Francesco Totti.

Italy won 6–2, but in matches like these, the scoreline barely matters.

The real significance lay in the moment: a South African full-back sharing a pitch with some of the greatest players of the era, not as an outsider but as part of a team assembled from the world's elite.

The coach who would return

Watching it all from the technical area was the Brazilian tactician Carlos Alberto Parreira.

At the time, he was already a World Cup-winning coach, having guided Brazil to glory at the 1994 FIFA World Cup.

Years later, Parreira would arrive in South Africa to coach the South Africa national football team, guiding the country during one of the most significant chapters in its football history as it prepared to host the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Nyathi's own chapter had already been written. But nights like Marseille and Rome showed that South African players could stand confidently on the world stage.

From Bushbuckridge to the world

Those two exhibition matches might sit quietly in football's archives. They were celebratory games, evenings designed to entertain before ceremonies and anniversaries.

But for Nyathi, and so many South Africans, they meant something more.

They were proof that a boy from South



Africa could dream about lifting trophies, starring in Europe, and then walk into dressing rooms filled with legends and know he belonged there.

Not as a guest. As a peer.

And that, perhaps, is football's most powerful promise: that the journey from the humblest beginnings can lead all the way to the brightest stadium lights in the world...

IF you keep going up.

FIFA XI 5-2 European Team

Marseille, 04/12/1997 (1998 World Cup Final Draw)
Stade de Vélodrome - Ref.: Veissière (France)
Att.: 38.000

FIFA XI

- Jacques Songo'o [Cameroon] (Ruben Ruíz Diaz) [Paraguay]
- Hong Myung-Bo [South Korea]
- Javier Margas [Chile]
- Nourredine Naybet [Morocco]
- David Nyathi [South Africa]
- Marcelino Bernal [Mexico]
- Hidetoshi Nakata [Japan]
- Adel Sellimi [Tunisia]
- Anthony De Ávila [Colombia] (Eric Wynalda) [USA]
- Ronaldo [Brasil] (Deon Burton) [Jamaica]
- Gabriel Batistuta [Argentina] (Hussain Sulimani) [Saudi Arabia]

Coach: Carlos Alberto Parreira [Brazil]

Europe Team: Kopke (Grodas), Pfeifenberger, Costacurta, Hierro (Durie), Lemoine (Sorin Kolding) - Ince, Balakov, Lacatus, Zidane - Kluivert (Jokanovic),

Boksic.

Goals: Lacatus, De Ávila, Ronaldo, Batistuta (2), Ronaldo and Zidane

FIFA XI 2-6 Italy

Rome, 16/12/1998 (FIGC (Italian Football Association) Centenary)
Stadio Olimpico - Ref.: Remi Harrel (France)
Att.: 21.352

FIFA XI:

- Gianluca Pagliuca [Italy] (Ike Shorunmu) [Nigeria]
- Zé Maria [Brazil]
- David Nyathi [South Africa]
- Fernando Hierro [Spain] (Hidetoshi Nakata) [Japan]
- Dunga [Brazil] (João Pinto) [Portugal]
- Aron Winter [Netherlands] (Julen Guerrero) [Spain]
- George Weah [Liberia]
- Rui Costa [Portugal] (Luis Hernandez) [Mexico]
- Ronaldo [Brazil] (Davor Suker) [Croatia]
- Zinedine Zidane [France] (Oliver Bierhoff) [Germany]
- Gabriel Batistuta [Argentina] (Marcelo Salas) [Chile]

Coaches: Carlos Alberto Parreira [Brazil] and Jozef Venglos [Slovakia]

Italy: Peruzzi (Buffon), Panucci, Maldini (Pessotto), D. Baggio (Tommasi) - Nesta (Negro), Cannavaro (Torricelli), Fuser, Albertini (Cois), Inzaghi (Delvecchio) - Di Francesco (Bachini), Totti (Chiesa).

Goals: Inzaghi, Batistuta, Weah, Di Francesco, Fuser, Chiesa (3)





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