



PLAYERS WHO COULD STILL FORCE THEIR WAY INTO BROOS' WORLD CUP PLANS



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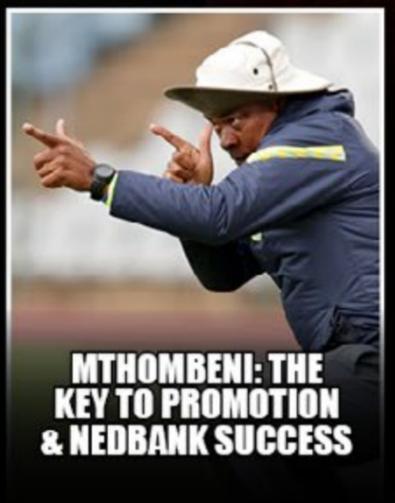
FRENCH GIANTS APPROACH BUCS OVER MOFOKENG



PIRATES CLOSE IN ON ARROWS DUO



BROOKS OPENS UP ON SURPRISE MOVE TO EUROPE & BAFANA DREAM



MTHOMBENI: THE KEY TO PROMOTION & NEDBANK SUCCESS

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2

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BAFANA BAFANA
FEATURE



JOSEPH MTHOMBENI
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



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MONACO MAKE FIRST STEPS?
NEWS



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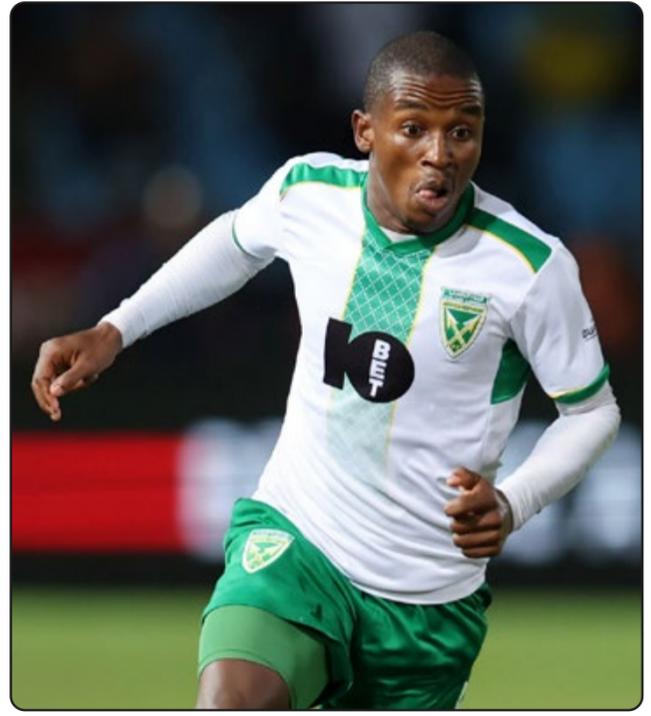
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ORLANDO PIRATES CLOSE IN ON ARROWS DUO

Golden Arrows star performers Siyanda Ndlovu and Ayabulela Maxwele have agreed to join Orlando Pirates in principle ahead of the 2026/27 season. Sources close to Arrows have confirmed that both players have indicated their willingness to join the Buccaneers, despite interest from elsewhere in the Premier Soccer League. Mamelodi Sundowns have been admirers of Ndlovu in particular, while there's also been recent interest from Belgium and Major League Soccer (MLS), but Pirates have acted swiftly to engage Arrows over two of their most prized assets, who have been key under Manqoba Mngqithi this campaign.



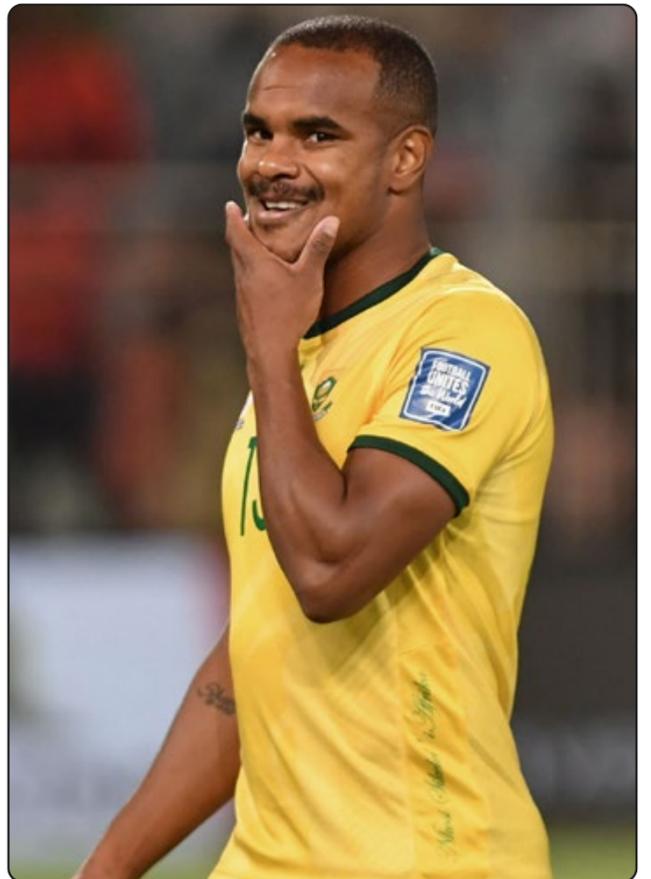
CHARLEROI MAKES APPROACH FOR CISSE

Royal Charleroi Sporting Club have made an approach to Golden Arrows over the potential signing of Isaac Cisse. The Ivory Coast U23 captain has been a revelation since his arrival at the club, as one of the most consistent midfielders in the league. The 19-year-old box-to-box midfielder has scored three goals in 18 games, but it remains to be seen whether the two clubs can reach an agreement after an opening bid was rejected.



RAYNERS JOINS FOREIGN AGENCY AHEAD OF NEXT WINDOW

Mamelodi Sundowns striker Iqraam Rayners has made a notable career move by joining Swedish agency BHM Sports to handle his potential next career move. While Rayners is held in high regard as a key member of the Sundowns squad, his decision to leave MSc Sports, with whom he held a long-term relationship, raises a few eyebrows. The agency led by founder Blash Hosseini holds key focus on markets in Italy, Spain, England, Türkiye, USA, France, Poland and Japan, sparking speculation that Rayners is potentially seeking a move abroad in the peak of his career. Since joining Sundowns from Stellenbosch in a reported R16-million transfer, Rayners has scored 38 goals, with 12 assists in 72 games across all competitions.



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MONACO MAKES FIRST STEPS FOR MOFOKENG?

French heavyweights AS Monaco have reportedly made a decisive move in the race for Relebohile Mofokeng, approaching Orlando Pirates ahead of the 2026/27 season.

According to reliable sources, the Ligue 1 side have positioned themselves at the front of the queue, signalling serious intent to secure one of South Africa's brightest young talents.

Mofokeng's rise has been nothing short of electric. At 21, he is hitting a rich vein of form at precisely the right time, with the build-up to the 2026 FIFA World Cup adding further weight to his performances.

His influence has grown both at club level and on the international stage, where Hugo Broos has already earmarked him as a key creative force for Bafana Bafana.

Domestically, his impact has been undeniable. Back-to-back Player of the Month accolades underline a player operating at a consistently high level, while his growing authority in the final third has placed him firmly among the leading contenders for the Footballer of the Season award.

Unsurprisingly, Monaco are not alone in their admiration. As previously reported by iDiski Times, clubs in Spain have been monitoring his progress closely, while previous interest from Major League Soccer, the Saudi Pro League, and Israel speak to the breadth of his appeal. But it is Monaco who have taken the most concrete step, tabling what is understood to be a substantial offer.

There is also history between the two clubs. Monaco previously dipped into Mayfair to sign Lyle Foster, a move that has only strengthened the pathway between the Buccaneers and the Ligue 1 side. That precedent adds a layer of credibility to the current negotiations.

While no deal has been finalised, indications are that discussions are advancing steadily, with Monaco edging closer to meeting Pirates' valuation. For Mofokeng, the trajectory feels clear: a breakout domestic campaign, growing international responsibility, and now, the very real prospect of a move to one of Europe's most respected development clubs.

iDiski Times will continue to monitor developments closely as this story unfolds.

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‘MOFOKENG MUST TAKE OVER FROM MSHISHI’

Bafana Bafana have been in action this week in pre-World Cup international friendlies against Panama, and there has not only been a lot of talk about who should be on the plane to North America, but also who should be starting for Hugo Broos. Bafana drew 1-1 in Durban on Friday night, and play Panama again in Cape Town on Tuesday, 31 March.*

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

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‘I Don't Understand Why Hugo Broos Is Benching Relebohile Mofokeng’

“Themba Zwane is a brilliant player. He has had a fine career.

“However, he has been injured and has not been playing at Mamelodi Sundowns due to the injury.

“I don't understand why Hugo Broos is benching Relebohile Mofokeng when Mshishi is obviously struggling and not fit. Mofokeng needs to start playing for the national team regularly.

“I think Bafana Bafana should have won the game against Panama. They created the most chances. Clearly, Hugo Broos has put his faith in Lyle Foster instead of Iqraam Rayners. Lyle Foster missed too many chances to win the game for Bafana Bafana.

“Panama did not offer much. They were more interested in defending. They will play Ghana, an African, at the FIFA World Cup; that's why they played South Africa.

“They might play differently on Tuesday, but on Friday, they were more interested in defending and keeping their shape.”





IS THERE STILL A WAY INTO BROOS' WORLD CUP PLANS?

By Rob Delpert

Having had the opportunity to cast our eyes over what Bafana Bafana brought to the table against Panama in this month's international friendlies, the conversation now inevitably shifts to something far more pressing and far more unforgiving.

With the FIFA World Cup looming on the

"IF I HAVE TO ENCOURAGE THE PLAYERS TO BE SELECTED FOR THE WORLD CUP, THEN THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG WITH THE PLAYERS."

horizon, set to unfold across Canada, Mexico and the United States, the question is no longer about potential, but about certainty: does Hugo Broos still have room, or indeed the luxury, to look beyond his trusted core?

It is a dilemma that sits right at the heart of international football at this stage of the cycle. On the one hand, fresh legs and inspired form can change the complexion of a squad overnight. On the other hand, the clock is merciless. With less than 72 days separating South Africa from their opening fixture against Mexico, this is no longer a laboratory. Every name inked onto that squad list must be ready, not to learn, but to perform.

While Broos has a 23-man squad currently against Panama, he can select 26 players for the World Cup, so it might not necessarily be dropping players, but rather adding to those already in the mix.

Goalkeepers

There is a sense that Broos has already done much of his thinking between the posts, quietly sketching out his hierarchy ahead of departure. Ronwen Williams is the undisputed number one, and Ricardo Goss has been a constant throughout Broos' tenure. Yet, the omission of Sipho Chaine from these friendlies subtly reopens a door that appeared all but shut. It suggests that while the first two choices may be locked in, the third spot remains up for grabs, with Renaldo Leaner getting his opportunity during this camp.

Should Brandon Petersen force his way back into the Kaizer Chiefs starting XI after his recent medical setback, and rediscover the assured form he showed earlier in the campaign, he could yet script a late, compelling case for inclusion. Tournament squads are often shaped by such late surges, and Petersen's profile fits the mould of a player capable of capitalising on that narrow window.

Right-Back

Here, clarity reigns.

Khuliso Mudau has not only made the position his own but has elevated it, establishing himself as arguably one of the finest right-backs on the continent. Alongside him, Thabang Matuludi has emerged as one of the standout performers in the Betway Premiership this season, consistent, energetic, and increasingly influential.

Barring injury, this is a pairing that feels settled, balanced, and dependable. Two tickets, it would seem, already stamped.

And there's always Thapelo Morena or Kamogelo Sebelebele. While absent from these friendlies,





both utility players could very well force their way into the final World Cup squad, considering their versatility and history with the team, and would provide extra backup.

Left-Back

If the right side offers certainty, the left continues to pose questions.

Aubrey Modiba remains the undisputed first choice, his consistency over several years making him one of Broos' most trusted lieutenants. Yet behind him, the picture becomes less convincing. Fawaaz Basadien and, before him, Terrence Mashego once appeared poised to challenge, only to see their national momentum stall following moves to Mamelodi Sundowns, where competition for places is relentless.

Samukelo Kabini represents promise rather than proof at this stage, a player with clear potential, but still searching for a defining statement at international level. Vuyo Letlapa was in the provisional squad, but he too is unproven at this level.

And then there is Gift Links, perhaps the most intriguing omission. Thriving as a wing-back in Denmark, his profile offers both defensive discipline and attacking thrust. Broos has, thus far, resisted that call, but with time running out, one wonders whether pragmatism might yet prevail. After all, tournaments have a way of rewarding those willing to embrace an unexpected solution.

“IT’S IMPORTANT THAT YOU ARE DISCIPLINED, THAT YOU HAVE A GOOD MENTALITY, THAT YOU HAVE QUALITY, AND ALSO THAT YOU HAVE A GOOD ATTITUDE.”

Centre-Backs

In central defence, the outlines of the World Cup unit are beginning to take firm shape, with Mbekezeli Mbokazi, Khulumani Ndamane, Nkosinathi Sibisi, and now Ime Okon impressing.

Much could hinge on the fitness of Siyabonga Ngezana. The FCSB defender's injury concerns had cast doubt over his availability, but should he recover in time, his experience and composure make him a near-automatic inclusion.

Beyond him, the sense is that Broos has already identified his core group. Tylon Smith, for all his promise, appears to be a project for the future, still fighting for minutes at QPR.

Meanwhile, there are familiar names attempting to force their way into the conversation. Rushine De Reuck, once a staple under Broos, is reportedly rebuilding his case in Tanzania.





Central Midfielders

This is perhaps the other most settled department in the squad, offering a blend of reliability, balance, and tactical understanding.

Teboho Mokoena remains the heartbeat of the team, a player whose influence extends far beyond statistics. Around him, Broos has leaned on a trusted group. Yaya Sithole, while occasionally inconsistent, has delivered often enough to retain the coach's faith. Jayden Adams appears to have rediscovered his spark, making himself increasingly difficult to overlook, while Thabane Mkhonto continues to be a dependable option when called upon.

If there is to be a late addition, it would likely come from familiar territory. Bathusi Aubaas fits the profile, while Grant Margeman, once part of Broos' plans before injuries disrupted his trajectory, remains a distant but intriguing possibility. And Broos also had Luke Le Roux, Rodney Maphangule and Mthetheleli Mthiyane in his provisional squad, but barring any injuries there's not likely to be any surprises here.

Attacking Midfielders

Creativity, flair, and game-breaking moments, this is where Bafana's personality truly emerges. Oswin Appollis, a fit Themba Zwane, and Relebohile Mofokeng feel like selections already written in permanent ink.

Tshepang Moremi appears next in line, edging closer to securing his place, while Bongokuhle Hlongwane and Thapelo Maseko have already been within the fold. Mohau Nkota, despite missing out this time, remains firmly on the radar.

Patrick Maswanganyi and Siphon Mbule could still force Broos' hand with good

“AND THAT WAS SOMETHING THAT WE LOST IN AFCON. DISCIPLINE, MENTALITY, ATTITUDE AND QUALITY WERE NOT THERE LIKE IT WAS BEFORE.”

performances at Pirates, while Sinxolo Kwayiba, since his return to Chippa United, has been reminding us why Broos selected him two years ago.

Theminkosi Lorch's name still surfaces in conversations, but realistically, that chapter appears closed under Broos. In contrast, Mhlabani Mayambela could yet find a way back into contention, while Siyanda Ndlovu represents the true wildcard, a breakout talent with the kind of momentum that can sometimes force a late rethink.

Strikers

And then, inevitably, we arrive at the most debated area of all.

Lyle Foster and Evidence Makgopa have been Broos' preferred strikers, yet they exist under constant scrutiny. The criticism is often immediate when goals do not come, and yet, their roles within the system extend beyond pure finishing. They press, they link play, they create space. Statistically, Foster's international return is notably sharper than his club record, 10 goals in 29 appearances, compared to 30 in 192 at club level. Foster has been Bafana's top scorer under Broos, with all of his goals coming under the Belgian





mentor. Makgopa, too, holds his own, with a marginally better strike rate for the national team than in domestic competition.

The real concern, however, lies not in their inclusion but in the scarcity of alternatives.

Iqraam Rayners stands out as the most compelling case. Prolific at club level, with over a century of goals to his name in pro football, his international return, five goals in 19 caps, tells a different story. He failed to score in four games last year, with his last Bafana goal coming against South Sudan in 2024. Form, medical setbacks, and missed opportunities have all played a part. Yet, given his resurgence with Mamelodi Sundowns, his absence from the Panama friendlies raised more than a few eyebrows.

Beyond him, the options remain speculative rather than undeniable. Yanela Mbuthuma, who with Rayners was in the provisional squad, is untested.

Fagrie Lakay continues to deliver consistently in Egypt, while in Belgium, a trio of emerging prospects — Shandre Campbell, Siviwe Magidigidi, and Cassius Mailula — are fighting to build their cases. Should any of them find rhythm, minutes, and goals in the coming weeks, they could yet force their way into a conversation that, for now, remains frustratingly unresolved.

Ultimately, Broos finds himself walking a tightrope familiar to every international coach on the eve of a major tournament. Trust has brought him this far, but football has a way of rewarding boldness at precisely the moment when caution feels safest.

“You know, if I have to encourage the players to be selected for the World Cup, then there is something wrong with the players.

“So I don’t speak about this and that, and if you do this, then I will drop you, but they all know, and we showed it [against Panama], what they have to do.

“And that has something to do with mentality, that has something to do with discipline, something to do in the first place, with quality and with attitude, and those things are really observed from close.

“And if some players don’t have those, let’s say, qualities, then I drop them, because I know it’s important that you are disciplined, that you have a good mentality, that you have quality, and also that you have a good attitude. When you don’t have it, you can’t have results.

“And the boys showed it [against Panama]. What it means when you have all this in your team, and with all the players, I have one focus, that is the team is doing. And that was something that we lost in AFCON. Discipline, mentality, attitude and quality were not there like it was before. So we put everything again in order, and players received the message, and they showed, if that is okay, that we have a very good team.”

The next two months will not just shape a squad. They will define a World Cup story waiting to be written.



“SO I DON’T SPEAK ABOUT THIS AND THAT, AND IF YOU DO THIS, THEN I WILL DROP YOU, BUT THEY ALL KNOW, AND WE SHOWED IT [AGAINST PANAMA], WHAT THEY HAVE TO DO.”

TOP TEN GOAL-SCORERS FOR BAFANA BAFANA UNDER HUGO BROOS (2021-2026)

- 1) **Lyle Foster**
10 goals in 23 games*
- 2) **Oswin Appollis**
8 goals in 24 games*
- 3) **Themba Zwane**
8 goals in 24 games*
- 4) **Teboho Mokoena**
8 goals in 44 games*
- 5) **Evidence Makgopa**
6 goals in 24 games*
- 6) **Iqraam Rayners**
4 goals in 14 games
- 7) **Bongokuhle Hlongwane**
4 goals in 18 games*
- 8) **Percy Tau**
4 goals in 25 games
- 9) **Thalente Mbatha**
3 goals in 14 games*
- 10) **Thapelo Morena**
3 goals in 15 games

* in the current squad against Panama, caps and goals as of 30 March 2026.





MTHOMBENI: THE KEY TO PROMOTION & NEDBANK SUCCESS

The most fascinating aspect of this year's Nedbank Cup semi-final line-up is that two of the clubs contesting the penultimate stage of the country's premier club knockout competition are coached by owners. Motsepe Foundation Championship sides Casric Stars and Milford FC are taking on Betway Premiership clubs Durban City and TS Galaxy, respectively, this weekend, with the lower division outfits being technically led by men who are also directors. It is a phenomenon made popular in this country by JOMO SONO, who coached his club Jomo Cosmos. iDiski Senior Writer MATSHELANE MAMABOLO spoke to Casric Stars' el supremo JOSEPH 'BUCS' MTHOMBENI to understand how he juggles the two positions as he seeks to not only get the club to the final but to lead them into the elite league as well.

MATSHELANE MAMABOLO: Bra Bucs, congratulations on reaching the Nedbank semis and all the best for your match against Durban City this weekend. Now, to get straight into it, please tell me how easy or how hard the dynamic of being club boss and a coach at the same time is?

Bucs Mthombeni: Thanks for the well wishes, my brother. First of all, I'm not alone in this club. We are two. To clarify this matter, I own this club with Mr Caswell Mukansi.

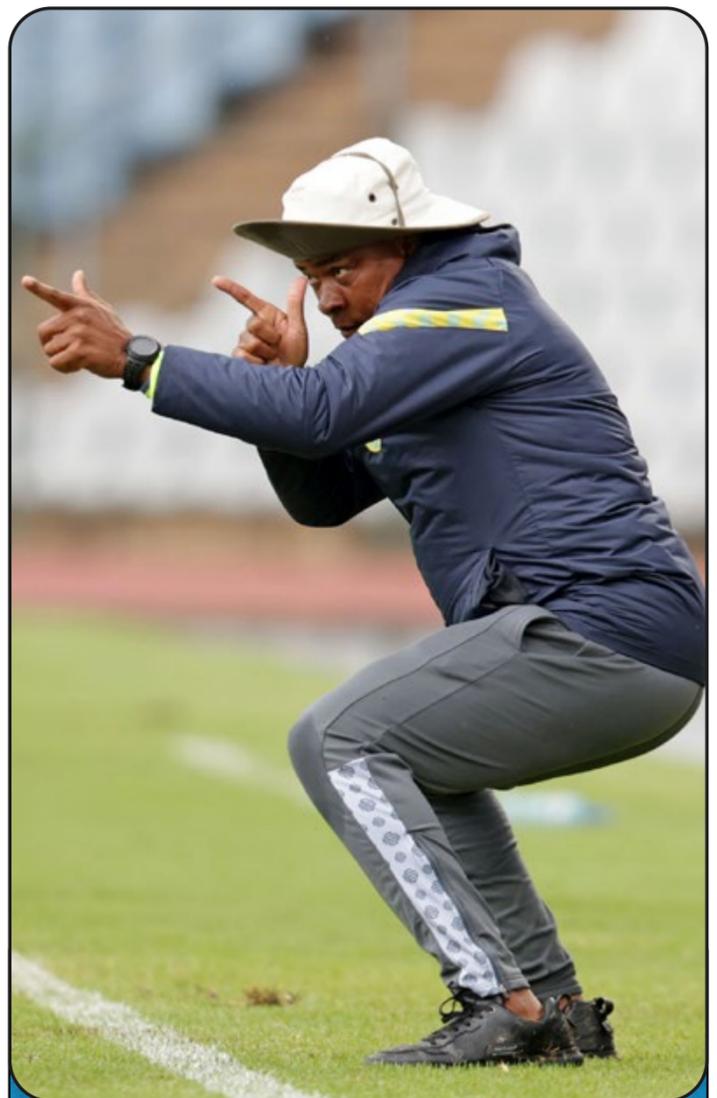
MM: But I mean, you are at the forefront. We see you as the face of the club as you perform dual roles of coach and owner. Just tell me about the dynamics of that.

BM: To clarify this, he is the chairman, and I am the coach. But we are partners.

MM: Okay. But how is it with you being a director and also the coach?

BM: It's not difficult because I've got my partner [Mukansi] who is dealing with all the other work that was supposed to stress me. Now, specifically, I was given the role of coaching the club due to what I've achieved and due to the experience that I've gained over the years. I've been coaching from the amateur level, going to the ABC [Motsepe League] in the North West and then to the ABC in Gauteng. And then after that, we purchased the status of Free State Stars [in the Motsepe Foundation Championship]. Then we looked at what I'd done, and because of what I achieved, we decided – as directors – that I must take the coaching.

MM: This coaching role, how have you enjoyed it? I mean, you guys are on the verge of getting into a final of the country's biggest competition, the Nedbank Cup. And you could get promoted into the Betway Premiership if all goes well. It must be satisfying when you look back at the journey, having started from down there, as you say, and moving from different ABC Leagues into the first division. What would you say has been the key to your success?



MTHOMBENI: "TO CLARIFY THIS MATTER, I OWN THIS CLUB WITH MR CASWELL MUKANSI. TO CLARIFY THIS, HE IS THE CHAIRMAN, AND I AM THE COACH. BUT WE ARE PARTNERS."

BM: Yeah, my brother, you know, success is when you are putting your hands on the trophy. When you meet your objective, you must not forget we are in a promotional league. From numbers 1 to 16, anyone can get promoted. That one we've already seen. There are teams that get promoted in the first season. There are teams that stay there for longer. There are teams that come from relegation and get promoted immediately and go back [to the elite league]. It depends on how you run the race. But look at the history of the team. We played for four seasons under North West ABC. The first season, the coach was by then Coach Ashwin Kurt under the Technical Director of the late Ian Palmer. I was the sole owner by then in 2011/2012. We achieved position 5 in the Northwest. Then, in the second season, we worked with Coach Stephen Haupt, and we obtained position three. I took over next, and we were third. Thereafter, I worked with Timothy 'RDP' Nkosi and Joseph Sibiya as my assistants, and you won't believe this, we finished third again. In the fourth one, we were number one and made it to the play-offs. We got to the semis without conceding a goal, but then lost with 20 seconds of added time left.

MM: That must have been heartbreaking.

BM: It was my brother. And after that disappointment of coming so close, I took



a break from football for two years.

MM: When you take that break, what do you do with the club?

BM: We sold the status in the North West and then came back in the 2020/21 season.

MM: But why do you come back? I mean, you've had those near-misses, so close to getting to the highest level but disappointed at the end. And also, during that break, do you watch football? Do you miss it? And what is it that makes you come back?

BM: I was not actively involved, but I went to study how the NFD works. By then, TS Galaxy had bought the status of All-Stars, and they were playing here in Kameelrivier. So I monitored them to see how they did things. You get my point? Remember, I'd hit the wall for more than four years. Now, I decided to come back to ABC Gauteng by getting the status of Maholosiane and got into the ABC Motsepe League in Gauteng. Initially, we didn't achieve what we wanted because we finished in eighth place. I then took over as coach thereafter, and we finished fifth with just eight points between us and number one, La Masia, whom we got four points from.

MM: And then you took the shortest route to the professional ranks.

BM: The opportunity came up about when Free State Stars was put on sale. We had been hitting the wall with regard to getting promotion, and we decided as directors that we go for the Stars status. First season it went to the wire and we lost promotion on the last day. Cape Town Spurs and ourselves were tied on top going into the final day, but we both drew our matches, and Polokwane City who were third won theirs and got promoted. Had we won we would have been promoted, but we drew 2-2 and finished third. We went into the play-offs and lost with a technical team of coaches Thabo Nthethe, [Innocent] Mayoyo and Paulos Masehe. In the second season, I took a break from coaching to become the CEO but after seven games under Ashwin Sutton, the board members decided to release him, and Coach Sundra Govender took charge, and we obtained position seven with 43 points. Midway through the next season, the board said to me 'Mthombeni, take charge', and I took the team to the play-offs. I missed out on promotion by an inch because Orbit [College] got promoted. And now here we are, chasing promotion yet again.

MM: So close, yet so far. It seems like you are the nearly-man of South African football. Given just how hard you've worked yet always missed out, where's your head at this time around, given how things have usually gone for you?

BM: What I've learnt through all the near-misses is that towards the end of the season, man-management is very important. The players need to know that these are critical moments, and they must not be frustrated by the news and agents who usually call around this time. Previously, the players lost focus because



MTHOMBENI: "I'M ALWAYS THE UNDERDOG. I PLAY ALL MY NEDBANK CUP GAMES AWAY. THIS WILL BE OUR FIFTH GAME AWAY. I NEVER HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PLAY HOME, NOT A SINGLE GAME AT HOME."

of the news written about the potential of us getting promoted and also being told that this team wants them, and some even signing pre-contracts. This time, I am speaking to the players individually and telling them to take care of what they can control, what's in their hands and not to look outside. Yes, it's great to look for bigger things, but I am telling them, let's focus and finish the race. There are eight [league] matches remaining, plus the semi-final of the Nedbank Cup. Let's focus on those – nothing else.

MM: Tell me, though, given that you've coached, how did you handle that period when you were a CEO and not coaching? I mean, in local football, we hear a lot about club bosses interfering, and I can imagine a man like you, being a technical guy, just could not stay away from getting involved. Were you able to hold yourself back and not get involved in the coaching during the time when you were the CEO?

BM: Definitely, my brother. I can stand and raise my hand here and say I did not interfere. Actually, it was the coach who invited me to their training sessions and often asked me to walk with the team onto the field for matches. They would even ask me to come to the dressing rooms, and when I told them, 'I want to give you space', and they'd tell me that, 'but the boys love you'. I had a good relationship





with each and every coach because I did not interfere in anything – not in team selection or substitutes. I gave the coaches space.

MM: So now, as you are the coach, how is the relationship with your co-director, your chairman?

BM: I love his input, a lot. I communicate with him, and I invite him to my sessions and even to the friendly games. I invite him to my technical meeting. You know why? You cannot be the owner of a house and not have the right to walk inside it. You cannot invest so much and then be denied the opportunity to enjoy what you put your money into. Even when I do, after the selection, I send it to him to see what his comments can be. Because then we got a good, powerful partnership and relationship. As coaches, we need to learn to be open. I am open with my assistant coach; I give him my suggestion. If he suggests something, I'm always willing to change if his one makes better sense. Even if it's a substitute, I consult my assistant coach and goalkeeper coach. And to be honest, they have really made a positive contribution to how well we've done and the stability we are enjoying.

MM: Let's speak about the semi-final. You're going to Durban City. What's your thinking? I know that the football fraternity is excited about your role as giant killers. And there are those who like the idea of a Mpumalanga final between yourselves and TS Galaxy or even an all Motsepe Foundation Championship final with you against Milford FC.

BM: Let me be honest. I'm always the underdog. I play all my Nedbank Cup games away. This will be our fifth game away. I never have the opportunity to play home, not a single game at home. But our run was so good because out of all those, we only conceded one goal [against AmaZulu]. It's going to be tough, my brother. Durban City, as much as we want, they want it too. But we're going to give it a fight. We look like favourites to the people. But it is not going to be easy because Durban City are in position five in the Betway Premiership and are doing very well under Pitso Dladla. They are playing at home and they are not an easy team to play at home. They are a stubborn team. And then they've got very good players like [Samkelo] Masako, [Saziso] Magawana, [Joslin] Kamatuka. And they have [Trevor] Mokwena, the striker. It's not going to be easy. They are good on 1v1. And then they can overload the wingers, and we're working on that. But after our game against Kruger United [which they won], I think the boys are more motivated. It's now not in my hands. I think the boys now need to fight on the day. The good thing is that the match is during the day. I was worried that it would be a night game because, remember, we don't have the luxury of playing a night game. It's going to be tough, my brother. But one foot into the final, and we cannot let it go.

MM: The one thing that strikes everyone about Casric Stars is that you are openly a praying club. Are you a praying person yourself? Where does this culture come from? Your nickname is The Believers. Tell me about that.



MTHOMBENI: "I'M A FATHER TO THESE BOYS. I'M NOT JUST THEIR COACH. AND I GIVE THEM FREEDOM TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES ON THE FIELD. I JUST GIVE THEM THE GUIDANCE THAT, DON'T FORGET THAT GOD GAVE YOU TALENTS."

BM: I brought that myself because each and every thing in the world is from God. It was made by God. It was created by God. He created the world. Now I said, each and every thing was created by God. Let me pray, and then God will give everything. And if you believe in God, God will deliver. That's why we sing and pray the way we do.

MM: You've got a team, a club actually, and in there you've got people from different backgrounds. How did you manage to get everybody buying into your belief?

BM: There are some people who, when we pray, they don't close their eyes. I don't dispute that. Okay. There are people who, when they pray, they will talk. I don't dispute that. But I said to them, we are all coming from the Lord. We serve different Lords, but we all pray. And I proved it to them that even those who believe in ancestors or traditional doctors pray. In the beginning, there was God and in the end, there was God. That's why we pray. When you pray, the results are there, but you must be patient. That is why I'm praying when we get to and get off the bus. We get to the change room, I pray. We go to the field, we pray. Half the time we pray. End of the game, we pray. When we get to the bus, we pray. Seven times my brother. We are the Believers.

MM: So your patience, given how long you've been striving for the promotion,





comes from your belief?

BM: My brother, we know that there are seven years of drought and seven years of plenty. Now, I said to the Lord, if this one is the seventh one, God will deliver. I don't panic. I know our results in the league are good. I wanted to tell you this, my brother. We missed three penalties in three games - against Cape Town Spurs, against Hungry Lions and against Leruma United. But I went there and protected the boy, [Mlungisi] Zwane. And Zwane came against Kruger United and did so well. It is because I'm a father to these boys. I'm not just their coach. And I give them freedom to express themselves on the field. I just give them the guidance that, don't forget that God gave you talents. Don't do things and overdo it. If you want to go and win football, discipline is in you. I can't even phone one boy and say, where are you? I leave the discipline to them. They must know that God gave them talents.

MM: That's a good relationship. Because then they know, whatever happens, I've got my coaches backing. And then there's this dynamic, your kids being there. How exciting or how easy? How is that, to work with your kid, goalkeeper Wandile Mthombeni?

BM: It's nice now, although in the beginning, I was afraid to give him the opportunity because if he made a mistake, the whole world would look at me. But I realised, 'No, it's like I'm suppressing the boy. Let me give him a chance to prove himself, to show what he can do'. And the boy has definitely grabbed the opportunity. If you can check, he has tried to do well. I cannot say he has done well, but rather that he has tried to do well. Now with nine games to go, I was even saying to him, 'Boy, we need to make sure there are more clean sheets that will make your stats stand out and build you a better future. And it may give you a chance to be known. I also like that he has the same interest that I have because he said in an interview that he can be so happy to see his father achieving something. And he motivates the other players. He's a coach on the field.

MM: That must make you proud, just as the entire team must have by getting to the semi-final.

BM: It does and I would like to thank Mr Mukansi, my Chairman. I'd like to thank the office. I'd like to thank the technical staff for working with me as well as we do. I'd like to thank the players too because it's a time, now or never. When we pray, after Amen we say 'Up the Believers; it's now or never. What does that mean? I say to the players, we need to focus. We're almost there. We must not look back. But we'll take one game at a time.

MM: My brother, thank you so much. All the best and God bless you.

BM: Thanks, brother.

JOMO SONO ON OWNERS & CHAIRMEN WHO COACH:

You know, to be honest, Matshelane, I don't want to sound controversial, but I must give them credit for being brave enough to stand there on the bench. You know (chuckles), the reality is that 80%



JOMO: "I DON'T WANT TO SOUND CONTROVERSIAL, BUT I MUST GIVE THEM CREDIT FOR BEING BRAVE ENOUGH TO STAND THERE ON THE BENCH. YOU KNOW (CHUCKLES), THE REALITY IS THAT 80% OF THE CLUBS IN THE PSL, THEY ARE BEING COACHED BY THE CHAIRMAN."

of the clubs in the PSL, they are being coached by the Chairman. It's not the coaches who are coaching you, even see with the phone calls we once saw on TV (reference to Polokwane City coach Phuti Mohafe being spotted taking a phone call on the bench during a match against Mamelodi Sundowns) a coach, it's not a coach. It's the chairman telling the coach who to take off and who to put on. At least us and them, we're brave enough to stand there, to face the consequences of success and failure at the same time.

You know, and when you're handling it, and it's yours, you don't have favouritism because sometimes with coaches there's favouritism. There's also an allegation that some of the coaches are taking money from players (so they can make it into the team). But as an owner, I can't do that. So, I'm giving them, you know, the green light because guys are doing a good job. They are both in the semi-final, that's great. And if you look at [Jomo] Cosmos in their history, they won six trophies with the Chairman as the coach. And I've been a semi-finalist in Africa (Cup Winners Cup 1993).

I wish them the best of luck, and they must not stop because our people, when you are doing well, keep quiet as though they are not seeing it. Yet when you start losing, they are quick to say or the Chairman is costing the club. You know, so they've done well. They must carry on. I mean, they're also playing good football at both these clubs. And football needs both of them. So I'm giving them the green light. I say, go ahead, guys. Don't worry about people talking. Talks will always be there. Whether you are Jesus, God's child, people will talk. You know, whether you win or lose, people talk. People won't stop talking. If you believe they are good enough for your team, to coach your team, go ahead.





BARKER ON SIMBA MISSION & WHY BROOS SHOULDN'T OVERLOOK DE REUCK

By Rob Delpert

It felt almost poetic sitting down with Steve Barker at a coffee shop in Stellenbosch last week, just a hundred metres from the offices of his former club. After all, that stretch of the Cape Winelands was more than just a workplace; it's where Barker's most defining chapter was written, laying foundations, shaping identity, and steadily building a club that would grow into one of the most respected projects in South African football.

But this time, the context was different.

Barker wasn't there as the man in charge, preparing for the next fixture or overseeing another training session. He was simply visiting. Home for a brief spell, reconnecting with family, and revisiting familiar ground.

His departure from Stellenbosch in December 2025, after nine years at the helm, had caught many off guard. Few expected him to walk away from a project so closely tied to his name. But the call from Simba SC was one that ultimately proved too compelling to ignore, a leap into one of African football's most demanding and high-profile environments.

Four months into the role, the scale of that shift is already evident.

Fellow journalist Mark Gleeson and I made the familiar journey from Cape Town to sit down with Barker on a warm, easygoing afternoon last Thursday. I had reached out a week or two earlier, struck by a quiet realisation: this was the longest stretch in over a decade that Barker and I had gone without crossing paths. In the ever-shifting landscape of Western Cape football, where coaches rotate, projects reset, and clubs drift in and out of cycles, Barker had been the constant. Through it all, he was always there. Reliable. Present. A fixed point in a game that seldom stands still.

And suddenly, he wasn't.

"Ja, I wouldn't say I felt [our time] was up, but now that I've left, I think in hindsight, it sort of re-energised me, a new challenge, different environment," Barker said, reflecting on his decision to leave.

"And ja, it became more and more every season, losing your best players, you just felt you want to actually challenge to win things, but just looking at the way it was happening, it was never really going to be possible.

"Now that I've left, I feel it was good, I think, for both, for me and for the club, I think we were mutually beneficial for each other for a long period. The one regret is obviously with the new [development] plans with Van Der Stel, but who knows, maybe years to come, I may come back here."

His absence has been subtle, but unmistakable. The rhythms feel different without him. It's only when that kind of presence disappears that you fully appreciate how much it shaped the environment.

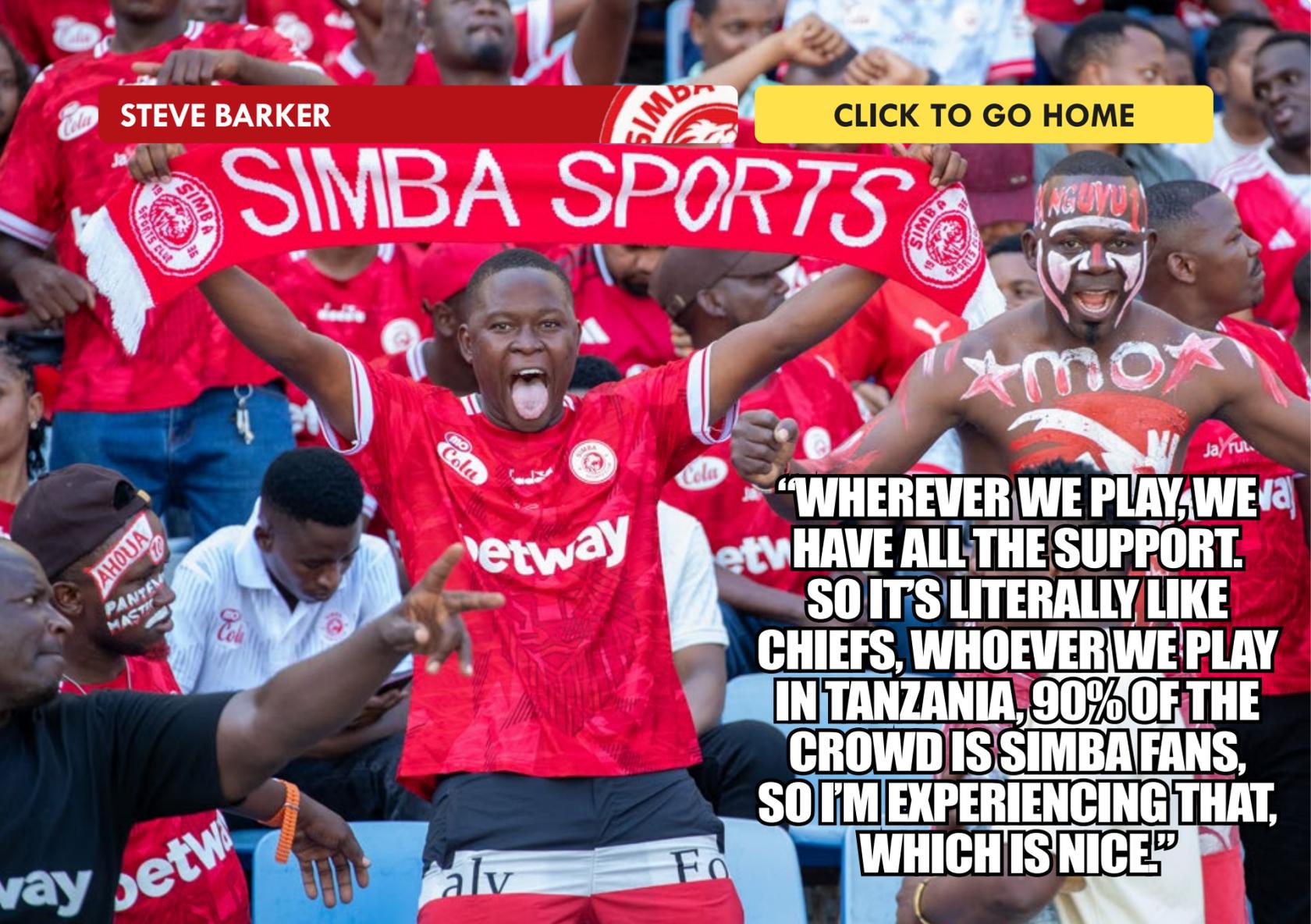
That, perhaps more than anything, is what defines Barker: consistency.

Long before his years at Stellies, he had already built a reputation for patience and process. As a player, he turned out for Wits University and SuperSport United, operating in midfield with the same understated reliability. But it was on the sidelines where his identity truly took shape.

At AmaTuks, Barker cut his teeth and, more importantly, stayed the course. A decade in Tshwane developing players, refining ideas, and building something that outlasted the usual churn of results-driven decisions.

His next move, to AmaZulu, was of a different nature altogether. For just over





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a year, he tried to steady a club searching for direction, bringing structure and calm to a turbulent period.

Then came the chapter that would define him most.

Initially arriving at Stellenbosch as an assistant to Sammy Troughton, Barker stepped into the head coach role at a pivotal moment, just as the Stellenbosch Academy of Sport took ownership and began reshaping the club’s future. It was not a ready-made project. It required vision, patience, and, above all, belief. Barker provided all three.

Over the years that followed, he became synonymous with the club’s rise, guiding it from uncertain beginnings to a model of stability and progression. Players came and went, squads evolved, expectations grew, but Barker remained, the thread that tied it all together.

Which is why, sitting across from him now, in a setting so close to where that journey unfolded, carried a certain weight. Because for the first time in a long time, he was no longer part of the landscape, but just passing through it.

“I think in both situations, it was almost like eight, nine years,” Barker said, comparing his two almost-decade-long stints at Tuks and Stellies.

“And then it was more like, just the football club’s ambitions, you outgrow it eventually, like wanting to go to AmaZulu at the time. I wanted to go to a football club, not an institution that happened to have a football club. I always wanted to drive in a gate where, from the guy opening the gate to those cutting the grass, work for the football club.

“In both situations, it’s been more institutions. So, going to Simba, I just felt like it was a challenge that I felt I needed, and I felt ready for the move.

“Five years ago, I would have probably not felt confident to take on this challenge. But I think doing well in the continent, and having made back-to-back third positions, and won a trophy, I feel I’m ready.”

Now 58, Barker finds himself navigating

a vastly different landscape. At Simba, the expectations are immediate and unrelenting. Matches are played in front of packed stadiums, the noise constant, the scrutiny intense. This is a club backed by millions, where ambition is not a long-term vision but a weekly demand.

“I was joking the other day, I said, I always hated the fact that you could play Chiefs, your home game, and they had more support,” Barker laughed.

“Now I’m experiencing the same thing. So wherever we play, we have all the support. So it’s literally like Chiefs, whoever we play in Tanzania, 90% of the crowd is Simba fans, so I’m experiencing that, which is nice. It’s exciting to bring smiles to people’s faces and see the amount of support that they have for the team.”

For years, Barker had watched the continent’s elite from a distance, perhaps quietly imagining what it might be like to test himself on that stage. The bright lights of African club football, the intensity, the travel, the weight of expectation, it all existed just beyond reach, something to aspire to rather than experience.

That changed last season. Guiding Stellenbosch into their first-ever CAF campaign, Barker didn’t just dip a toe into continental waters; he led them on a remarkable run. Week by week, they grew, not just in results, but in stature, until they found themselves among the final four of the CAF Confederation Cup. It was a statement, not just for the club, but for Barker’s work over the years.

And then came an ironic twist. Their run would ultimately be halted by Simba, the very club Barker now calls home. In that moment, there was both heartbreak and, perhaps unknowingly, a sense of foreshadowing. The opponent that ended his continental dream would soon become the next chapter of his career.

“It was an eye-opener,” Barker said, reminiscing about that campaign and the opponents they came up against.

“Especially RS Berkane, because we had the opportunity to go visit their training facilities, and it was just a different level. The stadium they had, and then the training

“FOR ME, RUSHINE, LOOKING AT THE BAFANA CENTRE BACKS, PLAYERS I’VE WORKED WITH, RUSHINE IS PROBABLY ONE OF THE BEST CENTRE BACKS I’VE COACHED.”

facilities, like the one field was undercover, they had a turf pitch, they had an astro pitch, under 12 size pitches, they had a whole school, whole gym, medical centre, and then you realise where the level is, and the reasons that they are doing as well as they are. Like they had 400 people in their academy, all schooling, and then 200 local kids come in four times a week. So 600 kids that they’re developing.

“And then when you go to Simba, and you see the support they get and the passion they have, you just realise Stellenbosch, small fish in a bigger pond, and so that opened my eyes. And even Zamalek, the way they support the team and that, and the passion when you get to the town and the city, I think that’s what was lacking. Stellenbosch has never embraced [the club], like the town still, half the time, doesn’t know when they’re playing or not playing.”

His brief return home during the international break offered a momentary pause, a chance to reset before diving back into a relentless run of fixtures. April alone will see Simba play seven matches, a schedule that leaves little room for reflection once the action resumes.

On the continental stage, Barker arrived just too late to alter Simba’s trajectory in the CAF Champions League, with the team exiting at the group stage. Still, they signed off with a morale-boosting victory over Stade Malien, a small but meaningful note in an otherwise frustrating campaign.

Domestically, however, the real test lies ahead.

“Nice to be at a club that’s got ambitions to win, like everything they do is to be winning a league title domestically and cups, and then they want to be a force on the continent,” he says.

“In that part. I think it’s enjoyable to be at a club where you can feel that you can win leagues. And I think as coaches, ultimately, that’s what you want to be doing.”

Simba are chasing down the dominance of Young Africans, their fiercest rivals and the benchmark in Tanzanian football in recent seasons, having won the last four

league titles. The derby between the two is more than just a match; it’s an event, a cultural moment that captures the attention of an entire nation. Barker has already had a taste of it, guiding Simba to a goalless draw in March, significant not for the result alone, but because it halted a run of five consecutive derby victories for Yanga.

The next chapter of that rivalry will unfold in early May, and it promises to be defining.

“Ja, it was interesting,” Barker recalls.

“The build-up to it is not too dissimilar to a Chiefs Pirates derby. Ten days before the game, there’s a lead-up, and you can feel the energy across the whole country. I also got to the stadium, we didn’t even change in our own change room, because there were thoughts that the opposition had tampered with it. So there were all those types of derby things, and there’s quite a big, I would say, hatred for each other. So you could feel that it’s a derby. I think the fact that we didn’t play at the main stadium and we played in Zanzibar, took away from the capacity, but ja, a full-on derby.

“It was a great experience, and we’d lost six derbies in a row, so just the fact that we didn’t lose, fans of Simba were appreciative. We were the better team; throughout the game, we were dominant, better. We scored a goal, which was given offside; it was marginal, but he wasn’t offside.

“And I think that gave a lot of belief to the management and the fans that we’re on the right track, and subsequently, it felt like Young Africans, since that game, have lost their belief and confidence, because since then, they’ve drawn three out of their last four. I think they’ve only scored one goal in four. Before that, they were winning comfortably. So ja, the derby was special. Looking forward to the big one at the stadium.”

Within the squad, there are familiar South African connections. Neo Maema and Rushine De Reuck were already at the club when Barker arrived, having joined during Fadlu Davids’ tenure.

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Barker has been particularly effusive in his praise of De Reuck, describing him as one of the finest defenders he has worked with and suggesting he still has plenty to offer the South African national football team.

“For me, Rushine, looking at the Bafana centre-backs, players I’ve worked with, Rushine is probably one of the best centre-backs I’ve coached,” Barker says.

“For me, he’s on par with anyone. He’s been fit and playing, so a Rushine playing and fit is as good as any centre-back. I think it’s been good for him. He’s now extended his contract.

“Neo has been a little bit in and out, but obviously playing more minutes than he would have at Sundowns. So I think it’s been good for both.”

There is also a mini-Stellenbosch imprint in his rebuild. Barker has reunited with former players Anicet Oura and Olivier Touré, while assembling a technical team that carries a distinctly Southern African flavour. Among them is Davies Phiri, a trusted ally from his time at AmaZulu.

“Anicet was a good player when he was [at Stellenbosch], but he’s even better than when he was here,” he says.

“I think the stint he had playing in Europe [helped], but he’s always been a top professional, pace, power. Now he sort of doesn’t lose the ball, maybe as much as he did in South Africa, and he’s been very effective. He’s difficult to play against, and then Touré, he’s a winner, and that’s the most important part.”

Alongside him in the dugout is Kris Bergman, his assistant and a former Santos, Chippa United, Ubuntu, and Stellenbosch defender. Bergman, who played under Barker in Stellenbosch’s first season in the Premiership, transitioned into coaching, honing his craft at Ubuntu before Sundowns approached him at the start of 2025. Earlier this year, he followed Barker to Tanzania, another piece in a growing support structure built on familiarity and shared philosophy.

“Ja, I think in a volatile environment, you need people that can just be calm and just overlook and actually see what needs to be done and not like get [caught up] too much around the noise. And that is just like, where are we needing to improve, where can we be better. Just focusing on the day-to-day improvement of the team and the squad. So ja, Kris is calm and collected.”

Through it all, Barker’s defining trait may yet prove to be his greatest asset. In a club that has cycled through coaches in recent years, his measured, composed approach offers something different, a sense of stability in a high-pressure environment.

“I think [I bring] calmness, like to focus on the bigger picture,” Barker explains.

“And I think they’re very reactive every time something goes wrong, it’s like, ‘We’ve got to change this. We’ve got to change that.’ And I bring, like, ‘Listen, we’re on the right track’. Every six months, we have good windows. Let’s lay foundations for sustainable success.

“So they’re chasing immediate success, which you understand why, because they haven’t won in a while, but it’s just bringing that mentality that it is going to happen, we’ve got to just believe in what we’re doing, what the club’s doing, what we’re doing as coaches.

“And I think I brought that togetherness, just bringing all the parts together and working in one direction. As you get a lot of the time, where not everyone’s aligned. So, just trying to align the thinking on more professionalism, more focus, less shenanigans – let’s focus on the job at hand, and we will get the success we deserve.”

And perhaps that is what makes this moment feel so poetic.

From the quiet streets of Stellenbosch to the roaring cauldrons of Dar es Salaam, Barker’s journey is taking him across vastly different footballing worlds. Yet, in both, the essence remains the same: building, calmly guiding, and adapting, one challenge at a time.



BROOKS NOT GIVING UP ON BAFANA DREAM

ETHAN BROOKS was one of the notable faces of the Bafana Bafana rebuild when Hugo Broos' tenure began five years ago, where they narrowly missed out on the 2022 FIFA World Cup in controversial circumstances. A promising young talent then at TS Galaxy and thriving in the senior national team set-up, with the world at his feet. But it's been four years since his last cap, and only Ronwen Williams and Teboho Mokoena are survivors of that squad who faced the Black Stars. *iDiski Times Senior Journalist LORENZ KÖHLER* caught up with Brooks, now playing his football in the Greek Super League, to discuss his surprise move to Panserraikos, and equally surprising exit at AmaZulu, where he was a regular feature at the club before exiting at the end of his contract, aged only 23.

Lorenz Köhler: Hi Ethan, how are you? How are things going in Greece?

Ethan Brooks: Ah, I'm okay, just missing home, you know!

LK: How did all this come about? You were seemingly on your way to the United States of America, and then all of a sudden, you're at Panserraikos. How did it happen?

EB: Yeah, man... when I came back, I was at home for a while and watching football. But during that time, I got a phone call, and I heard this team wanted me. I've always wanted to go to Europe, so when they came in, I didn't hesitate because it was an opportunity to go abroad and play. It wasn't long, but a while after coming back from America in August and then three weeks later I got the call and heard about the interest. I said, 'Okay, let me explore a different side of the world'.

LK: How's the adaptation been in terms of the culture and language

barriers?

EB: It's okay, it's become easier now, going into my sixth month. I've started to pick up on some of the Greek; my father came to visit me around the December, January period, so that also made it a bit easier to adjust to my new surroundings and everything.

LK: Look it's a historic club formed in the '60s, but they haven't done particularly well in the last few years, but now back in the top-flight. So what are the expectations of the club since you joined? What were the targets?

EB: When I got here, they had already played some cup games, and they played Olympiakos. They didn't start too well, but from then until now, it's about staying in the Super League. When I got here, that was the discussion, you know. And I spoke to the coaches when I got here, he said it's just unlucky they started off with the bigger teams first. The objective was to get a good start and do well in the league.

LK: The level? You're fresh from playing against Olympiakos, one of the biggest clubs, and you played Panathinaikos, AEK Athens, and PAOK. What's it been like compared to your experiences with Bafana Bafana and the PSL?

EB: It's honestly different facing each national team, back home, here, every team is different in areas and aspects. What I can tell you from Olympiakos, you can see the quality of players in the team. They're playing Champions League football games, and when you play the teams from the mid-table, it's more physical than back home. You get a few clubs that's physical, and at home we like to play and be on the ball. In the national team, it varies; you





get similar teams to us and those who are physical and direct. But there's a difference here in Greece, I can say that. I like to set goals and objectives, and being around guys here, who played in other top leagues, it's something I'd like to do; some of them played in the Europa League. I want to try and get as much knowledge from them, even at training and observing them. One of my teammates played for Panathinaikos. He's a bit older now, but I can see by the way he trains, how he plays, that he's a different level. Moussa Wagué, he also played at FC Barcelona as well.

LK: What do you feel are the chances of survival? When you take a look at the squad, it's not a bad team at all.

EB: I've seen how hard the squad is working so that at the end of the season, we can honestly say we tried everything. We lost to Olympiacos 2-1, and you can see from that game, the guys are willing to fight to the end; it's the mentality the guys have now going into the last few games. And hopefully come end of the season, we're in a position where it benefits us, even though we're heading to play-offs and stuff.

LK: Let's take it back, when it was confirmed you were leaving AmaZulu, it was a surprise to many at your age... and secondly, were there any offers to remain in the PSL?

EB: Look, there was [interest], but I wanted to play abroad, come to Europe. There was no bad blood at AmaZulu, but I needed to take this step of playing outside of the country; that's all I can say. Look it was quiet for a while, it was a little bit surprising but everything happens for a reason.

LK: It's now been four years since you last played for Bafana against Guinea; it feels like yesterday, I'm sure it feels the same to you.

EB: Like I said, thinking about it, there are days I think it was four years ago, and I'm only 25, it's still a shocker to

"I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO GO TO EUROPE, SO WHEN THEY CAME IN, I DIDN'T HESITATE BECAUSE IT WAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO GO ABROAD."

me. Things happened really fast for me, but the motivation for me to say, you have been there, and you can get back. Not making the squad is not the end of the world. And when we did play that game in Guinea, it was in Belgium, for me it was an eye-opener, it was that moment to say you can get here [to Europe]. I'd love to wear the shirt again and represent the country, but everything is God's timing.

LK: What happened in the camp? Look, nobody expected to beat the world champions, France... they won 5-0. What happened that all of a sudden, there was a massive change in squad selection?

EB: I have no answer. I have no answer to you.

LK: There was a clear shift. Here are some of the names: Lyle Lakay, Bandile Shandu, Keagan Dolly, Terrence Mashego, Rushine de Reuck, Athenkosi Mcaba, who was a younger player getting a chance, Bongokuhle Hlongwane is back. Many of them have not seen the national team since then.

EB: I wish I could answer you, I don't know. You would need to ask the guys in the national team.

LK: What was the feeling over the





reaction of the public? I remember Thabang Monare talking about the incredible gulf in class after that game in France, where he said there's a completely different level of football out there.

EB: I feel if you play the game and understand, like he said, the level of the game, you see it differently. I didn't play, but I sat there and watched, and you can see the difference. Even now like being here, playing with guys who played at a high level. There's a difference in how they play.

LK: What's the difference? Like seeing N'Golo Kante live in the game.

EB: For us, we like to be on the ball, and with them, they are more tactically disciplined, staying in the plan on the day. There's a job you do in your position. At home, it's similar, but we like to play with more freedom. So there's more emphasis on off-the-ball running; what you do off the ball is very important. Sitting there at my age, seeing Kante, watching what he does on and off the ball, the small things. As a footballer, you watch games differently than a fan. So what he was doing [against Bafana], but Griezmann stood out for me on that day. We all learnt from that. And I tried to implement the learnings into my game.

LK: You were part of the squad that narrowly missed out on the World Cup, losing that game against Ghana – have you emotionally recovered from that? Or something you no longer think of anymore.

EB: Um, I think I have grown, but emotionally it's always there. I think about it some days; it was so close. But at that time, I was 20, 21, so it's motivation to me knowing I was that close, knowing I can get there again. It's the nice thing about football, there's another chance to push harder and make it happen again, it's my mindset

“IT'S THE NICE THING ABOUT FOOTBALL, THERE'S ANOTHER CHANCE TO PUSH HARDER AND MAKE IT [RETURN TO BAFANA] HAPPEN AGAIN, IT'S MY MINDSET TO LEARN FROM THOSE EXPERIENCES.”

to learn from those experiences.

LK: Ronwen Williams and Teboho Mokoena are the only survivors from that game against Ghana, but you must be happy they qualified for the 2026 edition?

EB: Sitting and watching them, I am happy because it's the country that is doing well; they are representing South Africa very well. I'm really happy, and it allows others that would like to be part of the group to show they'd like to go. There's extra motivation for players to trying to be part of the national team now.

LK: You signed a two-year deal. What do you want to achieve with your club and beyond?

EB: When I signed here, my objective and goals was controlling what I can do and if by the end of the season, if I have done that, I will be happy with that. To know I have done what I could to help the team, even if it means going to playoffs. I want to be remembered for what I did on and off the field. Hopefully, in the near future, I see myself carrying on playing in Europe and breaking into the national team again.





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

This week, iDiski Times turns its attention from history to the present, counting down the 10 most-capped players currently eligible to represent Bafana Bafana.



It follows on from last week's deep dive into the all-time list, a roll call of enduring names and milestones, and, after a flood of requests, the focus now shifts to those still active.

These are the players carrying the modern cap tally forward, the ones still within reach of those historic benchmarks. For some, the journey is ongoing, with chapters still being written in green and gold. For others, the story may already have reached its natural conclusion, even if the door has never been formally closed.

The ranking itself is grounded in strict criteria. Only official international caps have been considered, with records compiled through verified databases and cross-referenced against leading football analytics sources. Crucially, only matches recognised by FIFA are included, ensuring a clean, standardised benchmark that allows for fair comparison across eras.

In a landscape where international football can be fragmented by friendlies, unofficial fixtures, and varying record-keeping standards, that consistency matters. It sharpens the picture and gives proper weight to those who have not only represented their country, but done so time and again.

*(*statistics as of 30 March 2026, therefore not including the second international v Panama)*

The Top 10:

10. Lyle Foster

03-09-2000 Orlando Pirates, AS Monaco, Cercle Brugge, Vitoria Guimaraes, KVC Westerlo, Burley
*29 caps 10 goals

Foster is very much the modern centre-forward. He's mobile, adaptable and increasingly complete. His journey through Europe has added layers to his game, and he now operates with greater tactical awareness, capable of leading the line, drifting wide, or linking play between midfield and attack. He has never been a prolific scorer but his goal return reflects a striker still evolving, one with

clear upward momentum, especially considering his first goal only came in his ninth cap. At 25, Foster is entering his prime years, and if his development continues, he could become a central figure in South Africa's attacking future. Having missed games, including the AFCON in the Ivory Coast, while dealing with mental health issues, his record could really be better already. He only just sneaked into this list by playing against Panama, usurping Nyiko Mobbie, who, until 2025, had been a constant figure under Hugo Broos.

9. Bongani Zungu
09-10-1992 *Dynamos, AmaTuks, Mamelodi Sundowns, Vitoria Guimaraes, Amiens, Glasgow Rangers, AmaZulu*

30 caps 5 goals

Zungu is notably the only player on this list not to win a cap under Hugo Broos, last playing for Bafana back in 2020. While he is still an active player, it certainly seems his international career came to an end when he was still in his late twenties. Which is sad, because he is a midfielder built on control and composure. Comfortable in possession and tactically disciplined, he offers balance, often doing the work that allows others to shine. At one point, it looked like Zungu had the world at his feet, but things did not quite pan out in the latter part of his European adventure, and he returned to South Africa. At his best, he brought calm authority, acting as a connector between defence and attack.

8. Siyanda Xulu

30-12-1991 *Mamelodi Sundowns, FK Rostov, Kaizer Chiefs, Maritzburg United, Hapoel Tel Aviv, Turan Tovuz, SuperSport United*
31 caps 1 goal

Xulu is a traditional centre-back in many respects: physical, aerially strong and committed in the tackle. His game is built on defensive fundamentals, prioritising organisation and resilience over risk. Having played across different leagues and environments, he developed a level of experience that showed in his reading of the game. At one point, Xulu was one of the team's vice captains, but just in 2024, Xulu lost his place in Broos' squad. He also struggled to find a club, though he has been linked to several. Other defenders have since emerged, and it is likely if we were to do this list at the end of 2026, he will have dropped out of the top 10.

7. Khuliso Mudau

26-04-1995 *JDR Stars, Magesi, Black Leopards, Mamelodi Sundowns*
**32 caps 1 goal*

Despite being a relatively late bloomer, Mudau has developed into arguably the continent's best modern full-back, combining defensive awareness with attacking support. His game is defined by consistency and good timing, making the right decisions, maintaining positional discipline, and contributing steadily on both ends of the pitch. After a move from winger to defence, he made his mark at Sundowns, proving to be a shrewd purchase from the second tier. Mudau offers balance on the flank, capable of supporting attacks without neglecting his defensive duties. He only made his debut in Broos' eighth game in charge of Bafana, but once he'd convinced the coach, he's been the first choice since. In a role that demands both energy and intelligence, he has become perhaps the second or third name on Broos' team-sheet after Ronwen Williams and Teboho Mokoena.

6. Thapelo Morena

06-08-1993 *SuperSport United, Mamelodi Sundowns*
37 caps 3 goals



Thapelo Morena brings versatility and athleticism to the team. Equally comfortable as a full-back or in more advanced wide roles, his game is built on pace, stamina and direct running. Morena thrives in transition, often covering large areas of the pitch and contributing to both defensive recovery and attacking phases. While not always the most refined technically, his physical attributes and work rate make him a valuable tactical asset. He is the kind of player who stretches opposition structures, providing width and energy across multiple phases of play. And he chips in with important goals. Someone who really should have twice as many caps at his age.

5. Aubrey Modiba

22-07-1995 MP Black Aces, Cape Town City, SuperSport United, Mamelodi Sundowns
*46 caps 3 goals

'The Postman' is one of the more technically refined wide players in the squad. Comfortable in multiple roles, he combines skill, balance and a natural attacking instinct. Whether operating as a winger or full-back, he offers creativity in tight spaces and the ability to unlock defences with subtle touches and movement. Modiba's versatility is one of his greatest strengths and has allowed him to adapt to different systems and tactical demands. At his best, he brings a sense of fluency to the left side, blending control with attacking intent. Another who should have more caps, considering his talent.

4. Percy Tau

13-05-1994 Mamelodi Sundowns, Witbank Spurs, Brighton, Union Saint-Gilloise, Club Brugge, Anderlecht, Al Ahly, Qatar SC, Nam Dinh
50 caps 16 goals

Tau, now almost the forgotten Bafana star, has always been a forward defined by intelligence, movement and unpredictability. Rather than relying purely on pace or power, he thrives in finding pockets of space, linking play and disrupting defensive structures, and his influence extends beyond goals, contributing to build-up play and creating opportunities for others. At his peak, he was a fluid, elusive attacker, capable of turning tight situations into moments of attacking promise. But somewhere along the line, Tau and Bafana had a disconnect, and in the last two years, he has only played twice. At one point, Tau was the face of Bafana, the country's most high-profile player, but it seemed expectations got too high, and Broos repeatedly left him out to 'protect' him, and after he left Egypt, he eventually stopped calling him up. Like Xulu, he was once a vice-captain.

3. Themba Zwane

03-08-1989 M Tigers, The Vardos, Mamelodi Sundowns, MP Black Aces
*50 caps 12 goals

Mshishi plays with a natural rhythm

that sets him apart. Effortless on the ball, he combines close control with vision, often dictating attacking play without appearing hurried. Zwane's strength lies in his awareness, knowing when to slow the game down, when to accelerate, and where to position himself to influence play. He is not defined by physical dominance, but by intelligence and technique. As he has matured, his role has evolved into that of a creative leader, guiding attacking movements with subtle authority. In an ideal world, Zwane would be approaching his 150th cap for Bafana, not celebrating a 50th. While he made his debut 12 years ago, it took a while for him to be a regular, and then he had to restart again after initially being ignored by Broos. And then there have also been injuries, which is why he was an



absentee at the AFCON in Morocco.

2. Teboho Mokoena
24-01-1997 SuperSport United,
Mamelodi Sundowns
*55 caps 9 goals

Mokoena is a midfielder who blends physical presence with technical quality, and many would say he's the best player currently in the Betway Premiership. Renowned for his powerful striking ability, he is equally effective in dictating play from deeper areas. His game is built on energy, range of passing and a willingness to take responsibility in key moments. Mokoena covers ground efficiently, contributing defensively while also driving attacks forward. As he has matured, he has developed into a more complete midfielder and

represents the modern box-to-box profile, capable of influencing multiple phases of the game. It is a little crazy to think that Mokoena is 30-years-old next year, with many still believing he should've been abroad ages back to take his game to the next level.

1. Ronwen Williams
21-01-1992 SuperSport United,
Mamelodi Sundowns
*62 caps

Ronza has become the cornerstone of the current national team setup. A goalkeeper who combines sharp reflexes with leadership, he has evolved into both a last line of defence and an organiser from the back. His distribution and composure under pressure reflect the demands of the modern game, while his consistency sets him apart. Williams commands his area with authority, often setting the tone for the team's defensive structure. As captain, his influence extends beyond his position, making him one of the most important figures in the current generation.

What The List Tells Us:

A striking pattern emerges when you trace the caps back to their source: nine of the top 10 have accumulated the bulk of their international experience under Hugo Broos.

The only outlier is Bongani Zungu, who, despite his pedigree, has not featured at all during the Belgian's tenure.

At their peak, this group formed the spine of Broos' South Africa national football team, a core built on continuity and trust. Within that structure, leadership responsibilities were shared and reshaped over time, with players like Tau and Xulu even wearing the vice-captain's armband at different stages. Though both have since drifted out of regular selection, their influence during that cycle remains significant.

Among the list, Khuliso Mudau stands apart as the only player to have begun his international journey under Broos.

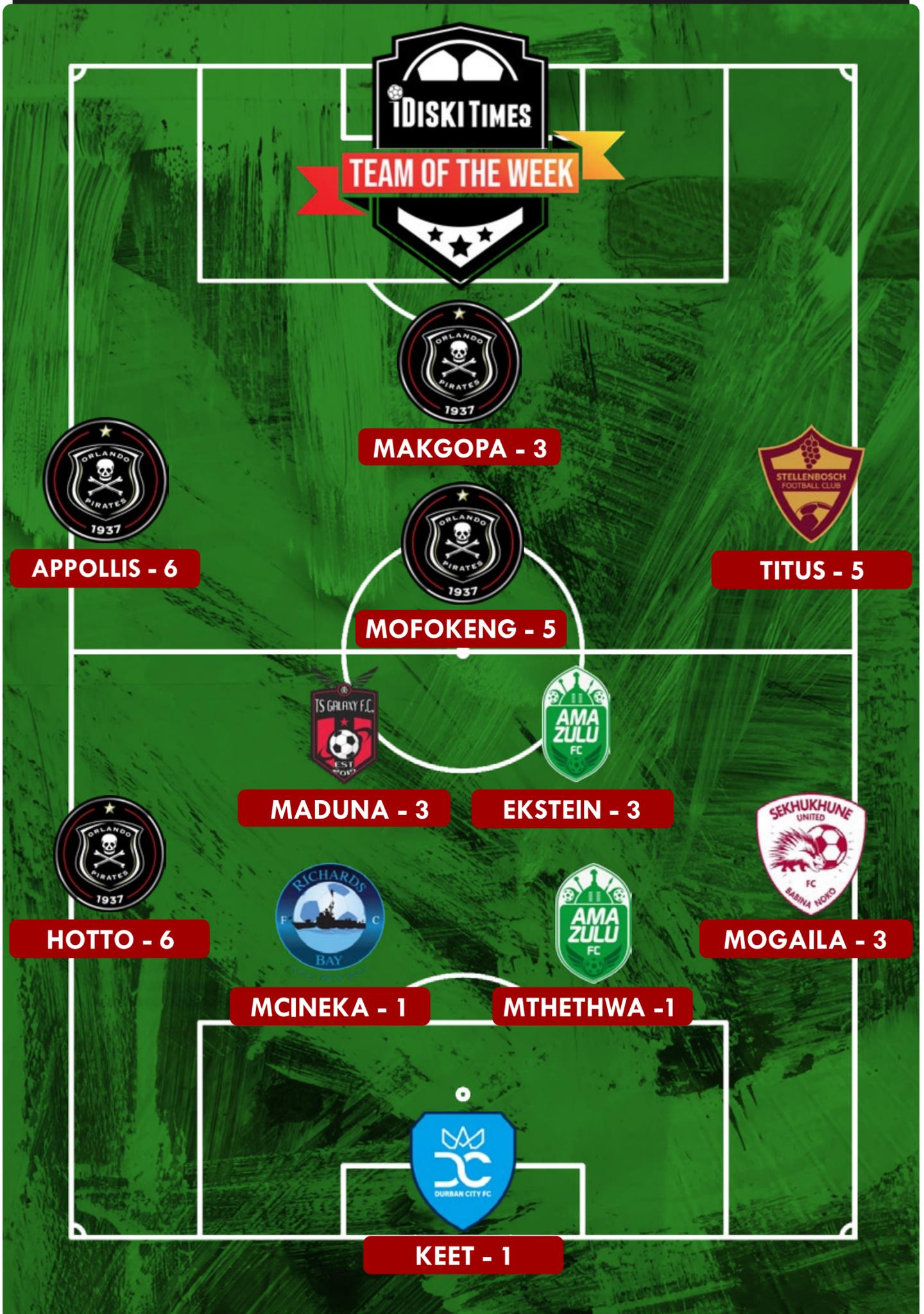
At the other end of the spectrum, Lyle Foster is the lone representative of a new generation, born after 2000, yet already firmly embedded in the senior setup.

Beyond the top 10, there is a chasing pack steadily building their own international portfolios. Nyiko Mobbie (29 caps), Mothobi Mvala (27), *Sphephelo Sithole (26), Evidence Makgopa (25), *Oswin Appollis (24), Victor Letsoalo (22), Nkosinathi Sibisi (20) and Zakhele Lepasa (20) have all crossed the 20-cap mark, underlining both their importance in recent cycles and their potential to climb further up the all-time standings.

Taken together, it paints a picture of a national team shaped heavily by one managerial era, where consistency in selection has allowed a core group to accumulate caps at a notable rate, while a new wave begins to gather momentum just beneath them.



IDISKI'S ASSISTS XI TEAM OF THE 2025/26 (MOST ASSISTS BY POSITION)



**Bench: Siyanda Ndlovu, Philani Khumalo (5), Puso Dithajane, Arthur Sales, Tashreeq Matthews, Tebogo Potsane, Saziso Magawana, Keletso Makgalwa, Monnapule Saleng (4)*



**ACE OF THE WEEK:
OSWIN APPOLLIS**

The iDiski Times Ace of the Week belongs to Oswin Appollis, who once again delivered on the international stage. On a lively Friday evening at Moses Mabhida Stadium, the first friendly against Panama did not initially go to script. Despite enjoying the better of the early exchanges, Bafana were caught out by a defensive lapse, allowing the visitors to snatch the lead against the run of play. But early in the second half, with Bafana Bafana probing, the move that led to the equaliser carried both patience and precision. And when the moment arrived, Appollis did what he has increasingly made a habit of doing, arriving in the right space, at the right time, and applying a clinical finish to bring Bafana level. The match would finish 1–1. The strike marked his eighth goal in national colours, a return built across 24 official appearances.



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.

Lekgetho - The Lokomotiv Legend

By Rob Delpont

Last week, we revisited the story of David Nyathi, a player who didn't merely represent Bafana Bafana but elevated himself onto the global stage, twice earning selection for a FIFA World XI. For many, myself included, Nyathi remains South Africa's greatest-ever left-back.

And perhaps the most compelling measure of his brilliance is the talent that he kept out of the Bafana team. One of those was Jacob Lekgetho, a player who spent much of his career on the fringes of the national team.

Because make no mistake, Lekgetho was no ordinary player.

The Lekgetho name carried weight long before the professional game came calling. In the streets of Moletsane, Jacob and his brother George were already legends in the making, their reputations forged on the streets where flair met fearlessness. They shared those early proving grounds with a generation of gifted footballers, names like Tebogo Maphaleng, Aaron Ngwena, Tshepo Molatedi, and, of course, Thabo Mooki, each one pushing the other, each one sharpening their edge in the unforgiving theatre of township football.

While Mooki would go on to carve out a storied legacy with Kaizer Chiefs, the Lekgetho brothers made their name with Moroka Swallows.

By the mid-to-late 1990s, Jacob, affectionately known as 'Bobo', had emerged as one of the most exhilarating talents in the domestic game. He was ahead of his time: a left-sided player with the engine of a midfielder, the instincts of a defender, and the vision of a playmaker. A modern wing-back before the role had even entered the mainstream conversation. At the Dube Birds, he wasn't just effective, he was electric.

But beyond the touchline, there was another side to him.

Lekgetho is remembered as a character in the truest sense, full of life, endlessly playful, and deeply loved within the dressing room. He was the one cracking jokes, lifting moods, keeping things loose when the pressure tightened. Off the pitch, he carried the aura of a young man living

the dream, admired, recognised, and enjoying the spoils that came with his rising status in the game.

Yet, as he lit up the local scene, the timing of his ascent placed him in the shadow of a golden generation.

Fresh off their triumph at the 1996 Africa Cup of Nations, Bafana Bafana surged up the global rankings, reaching as high as 16th in the world. It was a team brimming with quality, particularly on the left flank, where Nyathi, and later Bradley Carnell and Quinton Fortune, offered elite-level competition. Breaking into that setup demanded more than just ability; it required timing, opportunity, and a slice of fortune.

Lekgetho had the talent in abundance. The opportunity took longer.

His Bafana debut finally arrived in 2000, in a narrow 1–0 victory over Malta, an understated introduction for a player whose journey had been anything but. But by then, his ambitions had already stretched beyond South Africa's borders.

In 2001, Europe called, and Lekgetho answered, signing for FC Lokomotiv Moscow in a move that would define his career. It was a leap into the unknown: a new language, a new culture, a vastly different footballing environment. But it was also an opportunity, and one he seized.

Under the guidance of long-serving coach Yuri Syomin, Lekgetho quickly established himself as the first-choice left-back in a 5–3–2 system. It was a role that demanded everything: discipline, intelligence, and endurance, and he embraced it fully. Despite the team's structured, often conservative approach, full-backs were encouraged to push forward, and Lekgetho, always a little cavalier in going forward, thrived in that dual responsibility, blending defence with attacking intent.

Alongside seasoned internationals like Dmitri Sennikov and Vadim Yevseyev, he became a cornerstone of a side that would go on to win the Russian Premier League title in 2002. On the European stage, he featured in over 20 UEFA Champions League matches, even contributing goals in the qualifying rounds, a testament to his all-round impact.

After helping the club secure their first league title in 67 years, his influence was



Photo: fclm.ru

undeniable.

Russian sports daily Sport-Express went as far as to describe him as being “more Russian than most”.

“I think he’s won the highest praise a Russian can give a foreigner,” Sport-Express editor Vladimir Geskin told the BBC.

He was also voted the best foreign player by league coaches and experts.

“It’s my first home now because I really love this country, its people and its culture, as I begin to understand them better,” he said.

“I had no idea about Russia when I first came here two years ago.

“At first, my main problem here was the language barrier. But after six months, I was able to hold my own.”

For a time, he was joined at Lokomotiv by fellow South African Bennett Mnguni, though Mnguni struggled for regular minutes. Lekgetho, by contrast, became indispensable.

What makes his story even more compelling is the context in which it unfolded.

Russian football in the early 2000s was not always a welcoming space for foreign players, particularly Africans. Racial hostility was a reality many had to confront, and settling into that environment required more than just footballing ability. Lekgetho, too, faced those challenges, but through consistency, humility, and sheer force of character, he won people over.

“Of course, the Russian mentality is very different, so I tried to analyse Russian people in order to understand them. But I also have to be humble,” he said.

“I’ve been fighting against the odds since childhood, but I have also learnt to set goals for myself and achieve them.”

By the time Lokomotiv lifted that title in 2002, Lekgetho was not just accepted, he was embraced.

One image, in particular, endures: ‘Bobo’ climbing onto the roof of the club’s base, trophy in hand, celebrating with unfiltered joy. It’s a moment that still lives vividly in the memory of Lokomotiv supporters, a symbol of a player who had travelled far and conquered even further.

But after three years, during Russia’s summer break, Lekgetho made the unexpected decision to suspend his contract and return home, citing family reasons. He would play again for Swallows, but something had shifted. By 2007, he had stepped away from the game, closing the chapter on a journey that had taken him from the dusty streets of Soweto to the grand arenas of European football

His Bafana career, though shorter than it perhaps should have been, still carried significance. He was part of the squad

at the 2002 FIFA World Cup, stepping in after the unfortunate injury to Matthew Booth, who, in turn, had replaced the injured Mark Fish. Lekgetho himself missed out on an AFCON due to injury. In total, he earned 25 caps for Bafana Bafana, a number that, in a different era, might have been far greater. His final appearance came in 2004 in a World Cup qualifier against Ghana.

What few realised at the time was that a far more serious battle was unfolding away from the pitch.

In September 2008, Jacob Lekgetho passed away after a period of illness. He was just 34. The news was met with disbelief, compounded by the fact that a year earlier, false reports of his death in a car accident had circulated widely, even reaching Russian media. Many hoped, desperately, that this too was a mistake.

It wasn’t.

‘Bobo’ was gone.

Jacob Lekgetho’s story is one of brilliance, resilience, and timing, both kind and cruel.

A player who may not always receive the recognition his talent deserved, but one whose impact remains unforgettable.



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