



CHIEFS & PIRATES LEGENDS EXPECT FIREWORKS IN SOWETO DERBY



DOWNES CLOSE IN ON 2ND STAR, AS CARDOSO MATCHES PITSO FEAT



CHIEFS TO BATTLE AL AHLY & EUROPEAN SIDES FOR STANDOUT MIDFIELDER



EX-PIRATES COACH SET TO JOIN GHANA'S TECHNICAL TEAM



LEKGWATHI SHARES BOLD DERBY PREDICTION



A RELEGATION BATTLE DESTINED FOR LATE DRAMA IS LOOMING

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

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NWABALI ON SEKHUKHUNE'S RADAR

Sekhukhune United are reportedly monitoring Super Eagles goalkeeper Stanley Nwabali as they look to bolster their shot-stopping options ahead of next season. The Babina Noko hierarchy is believed to be an admirer of the former Chippa United custodian, who has been one of the standout goalkeepers in the Betway Premiership over the past few seasons. Sources suggest the Limpopo-based outfit could make a formal approach in the off-season transfer window. Nwabali, whose stock has risen significantly following his heroics at AFCON 2023, is said to have no shortage of suitors both locally and abroad.



CISSE ATTRACTING HEAVYWEIGHT INTEREST AS EUROPEAN & AFRICAN GIANTS CIRCLE

Golden Arrows midfielder Isaac Cisse is attracting serious interest from some of the continent's biggest clubs, with Al Ahly, Kaizer Chiefs, Belgian Pro League sides Charleroi and Club Brugge all said to be monitoring the industrious midfielder ahead of the upcoming transfer window. The Ivorian has been one of the standout performers in the Betway Premiership this season, with his energy, vision and box-to-box ability catching the eye of scouts from across Africa and Europe. Kaizer Chiefs are believed to see Cisse as a midfield reinforcement that could add dynamism to their engine room, while Al Ahly view him as a profile capable of competing at the highest level on the continent. Club Brugge and Charleroi are meanwhile reported to be weighing up formal approaches that could lure the Golden Arrows star to Belgian football ahead of next season.



MOFOKENG'S FUTURE UNCERTAIN AS MAGESI FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL

Magesi FC defender Diteboho Mofokeng has become one of the most talked-about names in transfer circles, with several Betway Premiership clubs reported to have already made informal contact with the player's representatives ahead of the next transfer window. The commanding defender has been a revelation for the Limpopo side this season, his composure, reading of the game and ability to win duels drawing admiring glances from clubs with an eye on the future. Should Magesi fail to beat the drop, Mofokeng would almost certainly be available, and sources suggest there will be no shortage of suitors ready to pounce the moment the window reopens. Several PSL clubs are believed to be positioning themselves early, confident that relegation trouble could force Magesi's hand and make the defender available at a fraction of his true market value.



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DE SA SET FOR ANOTHER WORLD CUP

Roger de Sa is on course for yet another journey to the global stage, with a FIFA World Cup return looming following the appointment of Carlos Queiroz as head coach of the Ghanaian national football team.

Few partnerships in international football are as enduring as that between De Sa and Queiroz, both of whom were born in Mozambique. Having first worked together when the Portuguese mentor was in charge of Bafana Bafana in the early 2000s, he was also part of Portugal's technical team at the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

In recent years, the South African has been Queiroz's trusted lieutenant, working side by side across multiple continents, from stints with Egypt and Iran to spells in Qatar and, most recently, Oman. Wherever Queiroz has gone, De Sa has followed, forming a coaching alliance built on experience, discipline and deep tactical understanding.

Now, that journey takes them to one of

Africa's most storied footballing nations. De Sa is expected to link up with Queiroz and his new technical team in the coming weeks as they begin preparations with the Black Stars, who made a late and dramatic change in the dugout by parting ways with Otto Addo just 72 days before the tournament kicks off.

With the World Cup set to unfold across Mexico, the United States and Canada, the timing leaves little room for adjustment, but if history is anything to go by, Queiroz and De Sa thrive in exactly these high-pressure scenarios.

For De Sa, it marks another chapter in a remarkably well-travelled coaching career, one that has taken him from the PSL touchlines at several clubs, most notably Bidvest Wits, Orlando Pirates and Ajax Cape Town, to the very pinnacle of the international game.

Another World Cup beckons, and with it, another opportunity to leave a mark on football's grandest stage.

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KHANYE: I THINK SUNDOWNS WILL GET A SECOND STAR

Mamelodi Sundowns will play AS FAR in the CAF Champions League final in May, their second consecutive final, after beating Esperance 2-0 on aggregate in the semi-final, while AS FAR won 2-1 on aggregate against fellow Moroccan club RS Berkane.

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 Coach Miguel Cardoso'

"I think Mamelodi Sundowns will win the CAF Champions League. They

have played and defeated the harder opponents.

"People might say it was easy to play against Esperance, but Sundowns made it look easy. This was a final before the final. They will beat AS Far in the final.

"Well done to coach Miguel Cardoso. The match was a masterclass in tactics. Sundowns deprived Esperance of any space out wide. They cut the supply. Esperance did not have many opportunities to score.

"It was not a classic, exciting game, but Sundowns played a typical Champions League match. Marcelo Allende is getting better and better, taking shots at goal and helping Sundowns control football matches.

"I think Sundowns will get a second star."





LEGENDS EXPECTING FIREWORKS IN SOWETO DERBY

By Matshelane Mamabolo

KUBHEKA:
“CHIEFS WILL APPROACH THIS ONE DIFFERENTLY GIVEN WHAT HAPPENED IN THE FIRST ROUND AND I EXPECT THEM TO GO FOR AN ALL-OUT ATTACK.”



You have to go way back to late October 2017 to find a Soweto Derby league match that ended goalless. That means it has been almost a decade since a match between Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates failed to produce a goal.

Since then, the country's biggest fixture has delivered 41 net-bulging moments in 16 matches to entertain the capacity crowds that packed the FNB Stadium, with the results see-sawing between the two arch rivals.

That's an impressive 2.5 goals a match, and as we prepare for yet another instalment of the derby coming up on Sunday, there is good reason to believe that the goals are going to flow yet again. And you wouldn't be too far off betting on the two clubs producing more than a handful of goals. After all, such has been the two teams' performance going into the match that we can expect nothing less than an attacking game, as both sides are on a roll.

Granted, the runaway Chiefs train that was fast threatening to close the gap on their adversaries and the defending champions, Mamelodi Sundowns at the top of the table, were stopped in their tracks at the old Peter Mokaba Stadium at the weekend. Chiefs drew 0-0 with Polokwane City, thus failing to extend their victories to six on the trot.

But that should not take away from their confidence as they seek to gain sweet revenge – a dish they'll serve a bit lukewarm and not cold, as it is best, following the 3-0 first round hammering they suffered at the end of February.

Amakhosi have made a superb turnaround since that defeat, which was followed by a loss at Richards Bay, only for them to win the next five before Phuti Mohafe's men stalled them on Saturday.

Pirates, on the other hand, are enjoying a fantastic season that sees them top of the table, albeit after they'd played two matches more than Sundowns. It makes for a fascinating encounter, but what are the key factors that will be at play as the Buccaneers welcome Amakhosi to the Calabash?

BOTH SIDES KNOW HOW TO FIND THE NET

My prediction that we are in for

MAHLANGU:
“I EXPECT FIREWORKS BECAUSE PIRATES WANT TO WIN THE LEAGUE, AND CHIEFS WANT TO GO AND FINISH AS HIGH AS THEY WANT TO.”





a high-scoring match is not mere wishful thinking but an educated forecast. After all, the attacking prowess of both sides is undeniable, evidenced as it is by the free-scoring form they are both enjoying. In their last six league matches, Pirates and Chiefs have scored an impressive 19 and 12 goals, respectively. That is three goals a match for the Buccaneers and two for Amakhosi. Of course, they are both sure to exercise some caution on Sunday, but here are two sides who know they have it in them to punish the opposition, and you can expect the technical teams will unleash their attacks. Interestingly, neither side is reliant on a single source of goals, but they all have numerous players who know how to find the opposition's net. Chiefs' 12 goals in their last matches have come from six players, while Pirates' 19 were scored by eight different players. Pirates' ability to smash the opposition hard will be a concern for Chiefs, who themselves were handed a 3-0 thrashing in the first round. Of course, the Glamour Boys will believe they are better than both TS Galaxy and Golden Arrows, who were hammered 6-0 and 5-0, respectively, by Pirates. And they too can give it, as proven by their recent form.

The recent good results achieved by both teams have been due to superb teamwork. But even then, there have been some standout individuals for each of the two.

TROUBLESOME BUCS TRIO – APPOLLIS, MOFOKENG, MOREMI

Just the other day, following their 3-0 win over AmaZulu, Relebohile Mofokeng suggested that his teammate Oswin Appollis is the best player in the league with a post on Instagram. This, coming from a player believed by many to be the star of the current campaign, spoke volumes of just how high the bar the Buccaneers have set this season. Pirates owe their serious challenge for the championship to the incredible performances dished out by the duo that has often alternated positions on the wings, to the opposition's confusion during matches. They've both shown an insatiable appetite for goals, and they

MAHLANGU: "MY FORMER CLUB, THE KEY PLAYERS HAVE TO BE MOFOKENG AND APPOLLIS. NOW THOSE TWO ARE GREAT PLAYERS."

have duly delivered; Mofokeng among the contenders for the golden boot with his 10 strikes in the league and Appollis not too far off with eight. The former has been particularly impressive in recent matches after being moved to the number 10 position and is sure to yet again be a thorn in the flesh of the Chiefs' rearguard on Sunday. Add Tshepang Moremi to the equation, and you have an attacking trio that can tear any opposition apart. The former AmaZulu man has grown into a superstar at Pirates and has had a stellar season that has seen him force his way into the national team reckoning. Few will bet against him making the World Cup squad, and he would definitely be keen to cement his place with a brilliant showing in the country's biggest match of them all at the weekend. He has five league goals to his name, and his pace, ability to get into scoring positions and finishing prowess are always a threat to the opposition.

AMAKHOSI HAVE THEIR MARKSMEN TOO

Lest you think it is just the Buccaneers who go into the match with a potent attack, rest assured Chiefs are just as well armed. Flavio da Silva came into the country highly recommended, albeit from the obscure Indonesian Super League, and while he took a while to settle in, he is fast showing just why Amakhosi signed him up. Prior to the weekend's clash at Polokwane City, he had scored in successive matches against TS Galaxy and Magesi, no doubt his confidence enhanced by the recent call-up he'd received from the Guinea-Bissau national team. Chiefs' top scorer in the league with seven goals is Silva. He poses a threat to Pirates and his combination with Glody





Lilepo, the big DR Congo striker who has found the net four times and is always dangerous on set-pieces. Youngsters Mduduzi Shabalala and Wandile Duba know how to find the net too – they have five and three strikes respectively – and they’ve been buzzing of late, just in time to shine in the Soweto Derby. Khanyisa Mayo finally scored his second Chiefs goal in that win over Magesi and will be full of confidence, having broken his duck since that memorable goal on debut against Marumo Gallants back in September.

“You know the derby lately is very unpredictable because now the two teams are high up on the table, and come derby time, it will be a different story,” former Orlando Pirates striker Bashin Mahangu told iDiski Times.

“Sometimes it would seem as though you are watching a copy of the teams, and you are left wondering what happened with the teams that have been playing great football. But this time around, I expect fireworks because Pirates want to win the league, and Chiefs want to go and finish as high as they want to.

“We won’t have as one-sided a derby as we had in the first round. When it comes to the players that will be important, this tiny boy, Mdu [Shabalala], is the one player who knows how to use the ball effectively, and I think he will be key. And then there’s that striker [Glody] Lilepo, who tends to be on and off form, but once he gets the chance, he is very good at finding the net, and Pirates have to be careful of him.

“My former club, the key players have to be Mofokeng and Appollis. Now those two are great players, and sometimes I wonder just why the coach would replace Appollis, that’s not a player you take off – him and Mofokeng.

“These are the kind of players who can look off throughout the match, but in a split second, they’re the kind who can make a difference with just a goal or an

KUBHEKA: “I AM VERY IMPRESSED WITH CHIEFS RECENT LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE AND I BELIEVE THEY GO INTO THE MATCH WITH A HIGH LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE.”

assist.”

“We have a very interesting derby coming up this weekend because the two teams are in great form,” former Chiefs star Nhlhla Kubheka told iDiski Times.

“Chiefs will approach this one differently given what happened in the first round and I expect them to go for an all-out attack. Hopefully the coaches will be cognisant of the fact that in the first round they had kept their creative players – Mfundo Vilakazi and Mdu Shabalala – out because these are the kind of players they need for this match.

“I am very impressed with Chiefs recent level of performance and I believe they go into the match with a high level of confidence. They are chasing a spot in the CAF Confederation Cup, as they are looking to go back into the continent, and this generation of players are eager to show they can be successful in Africa.

“Of course it is going to be a difficult match because Pirates are looking to win the championship so they will be out to showcase and send a message to Chiefs that they can do to them what they did in the first round.

“I believe the two youngsters I’ve mentioned will be the key players for Chiefs if the coaches start with them and also Lebogang Maboe will be crucial, especially if he stamps his authority in the midfield like he’s been doing in recent matches.





“Chiefs have to be compact and make sure that they don’t allow Relebohile Mofokeng time and space on the ball to turn and face them because he is a dangerman. Also, they have to ensure that they keep a close watch on Tshepang Moremi and Oswin Apollis as well as Yanele Mbuthuma who for me is an unsung hero of Pirates’ great run of form.”

GOALKEEPERS ON BAFANA ‘RE-AUDITION’

While everything appears to point to a goal feast, the men between the goalposts are just not going to let the attackers have it their way. Not with their childhood dreams hanging by a thread. Both Siphso Chaine and Brandon Petersen were seemingly shoe-ins for selection into the Bafana Bafana squad for the upcoming FIFA World Cup. Recently dropped from the squad that played in the friendly internationals against Panama, the two men have a great chance to get Hugo Broos rethinking as he prepares to finalise his selection for the global showpiece. The Chiefs goalkeeper Petersen has just come back from a longish operation-induced layoff and is now having to show the silver-haired Belgian that he is still among the top three goalkeepers in the land. And so far, he has proven he has not lost any of his agility and command of his box. At the weekend against Polokwane City, the 31-year-old was particularly crucial to Chiefs getting that point as he pulled off two fantastic saves – one in each half – to illustrate that he has fully healed from the operation and still possesses the sharpness that impressed the septuagenarian coach in the first place. With Broos – or his assistant Helman Mkhalele – certain to be in attendance at the FNB Stadium, the Soweto Derby is a superb opportunity for Petersen to stake his claim as one of the three goalkeepers who will make the trip to Mexico and the USA in June. His opposite number, Chaine, was also dropped for the clashes with Panama, apparently for disciplinary matters. His abilities cannot be denied, and

‘NOT IN A LONG TIME HAS THE SOWETO DERBY BEEN A MATCH OF SUCH CONSEQUENCE, AS PIRATES SEEK TO STAY IN THE HUNT FOR LEAGUE GLORY, WHILE CHIEFS LOOK TO ENSURE THEY REMAIN IN CONTENTION FOR A RETURN TO CONTINENTAL FOOTBALL.’

with Renaldo Learner – the man who replaced him – having had a nightmare at the weekend, a fantastic display in the derby could well see Chaine back in the reckoning. He has been in solid form lately, as Pirates worked their way to the top of the table, although those two goals he conceded in the draw at Richards Bay would have stung a little and perhaps even convinced Broos that taking the younger Learner as deputy to Ronwen Williams is the way to go.

“I am expecting great fireworks in this match,” Mahlangu concluded. “This is not those derbies when one team is somewhere down on the table, and the other one is high up. This time they are both at the top, and I expect fireworks, but honestly I can’t predict what the score will be.”

“Prediction?” Kubheka adds. “Jeez, that’s a difficult one, but I will always go with Chiefs because I trust that the team will make us proud this time around.”

Not in a long time has the Soweto Derby been a match of such consequence, as Orlando Pirates seek to stay in the hunt for championship glory, while Chiefs look to ensure they remain in contention for a return to continental football via a third-place finish.

There are sure to be goals scored on Sunday, lots of them. History suggests it. The two clubs’ forms dictate that it will be so.





LEKGWATHI: TITLE RACE IS NOT OVER UNTIL IT IS OVER

The second Betway Premiership Soweto Derby between Orlando Pirates and Kaizer Chiefs is looming this weekend with high stakes for both sides. The sold-out sign already went up months ago despite Chiefs losing the first encounter 3-0 in February. The sides' respective forms also make for an enticing anticipation with the hosts Pirates currently in pole position on the standings with 58 points and five matches left to play, two points from second-placed Mamelodi Sundowns, who have two games in hand. Amakhosi are placed third with 46 points from 24 outings, with their sights set on finishing in CAF inter-club competition qualifying spots. In this edition, iDiski Times journalist LETHABO KGANYAGO speaks to two-time treble winning former Pirates captain LUCKY LEKGWATHI about his expectations for arguably the biggest match on the South African football calendar, the players he feels will make a big impact, those who can make a case to be nominated for the end of the season PSL Awards and be considered for the World Cup bound Bafana Bafana, why he believes the title race is not over and his bold prediction of the result.

Lethabo Kganyago: We always appreciate your time, Lucky. The first question I want to ask is with both teams on form right now, and both having so much at stake, what are your expectations for this derby?

Lucky Lekgwathi: The expectation of a derby is always high. With this one, the other one [Chiefs], there's still a chance to finish number two, and the other one [Pirates] wants to challenge for the league. And again, don't forget what happened in the first round and obvious Chiefs, they're coming for revenge after losing to Pirates 3-0. So this time around, obviously, they want to come for revenge, but for Pirates, they want to challenge for the league. It's not over until it's over. You know, winning a derby, it will be nice for fans. It's like winning the league, even if you don't win the league. Beating Chiefs twice in a season is going to be nice for fans. Like last season, we didn't win the league, but we won the derby twice. I'm talking from experience of playing in a derby, it's like playing a cup final. So this one expectation I'm telling you is very high, everyone is looking forward, and I know mentally players are ready to make supporters happy and still challenge for the league, that's why I said it's not over until it's over.

LK: Do you really believe it's not over? I mean Pirates, if they win all their matches, they'll finish on 73 points and Sundowns, if they win theirs, they are looking at 77 points. One may even argue that the race is reliant on Sundowns dropping points.

LL: To tell you something, it's not about relying on other teams to drop points. This league is entertaining, even these so-called small teams. Look at Polokwane [City], everyone was saying Chiefs are going to win their sixth game in a row, and I thought, yoh, against Polokwane? Now, you look at the games Sundowns are



“DON'T FORGET WHAT HAPPENED IN THE FIRST ROUND AND OBVIOUS CHIEFS, THEY'RE COMING FOR REVENGE AFTER LOSING TO PIRATES 3-0.”

still going to play, obviously, it won't be a walkover for those teams. They will sweat for those points, because those teams also want to have some record over Sundowns and say we beat them. You saw the game against Durban City. They came like no one expected them to come play that way. But I think, for Pirates, it's not just not to focus on Sundowns. They must focus on themselves and the points we'll see at the end, where they are placed. There's still a chance now, every point counts. So, it's not going to be easy, even for Sundowns, to win all the remaining games. It is going to be difficult for all the teams. I think even yesterday, we saw Chiefs against Polokwane, they gave them a hard time. Even Pirates against AmaZulu, not to say that it was not an easy game, it just happened that Pirates used their chances, they are showing that they know they have to collect points, and they'll see everything at the end. Game in hand, you haven't collected the points, you are still going to fight for those points. So it's going to be tough. The team that is going to win the league is going to work hard, but for us supporters, it would be nice to see a league helicopter going to Pretoria or wherever Sundowns will be. We used to see that, a helicopter just going around on the final day when there is more than one team challenging. It's my wish for the league to end like that.



LK: Let's speak about the goalkeepers. Obviously, Siphon Chaine has done well, and now Brandon Petersen, who's done well for Chiefs, is back after missing the first derby. How much of a role do you think the goalkeepers are going to play on Sunday?

LL: You know what, they always play a big role in the derby. Like you said, Petersen missed the first derby, and for him, it's going to be a good experience playing in the second derby after they lost the first one. We know most goalkeepers in the derby; they make sure they play a big role because if you don't play your role, you are going to concede a lot of goals. And it's not good to concede a lot in the derby because it can even kill your confidence. Look at [Bruce] Bvuma after the first derby. What happened to him? His confidence went down. Goalkeepers make sure that they play their part, and the part is making sure that they don't concede. I'm happy because both goalkeepers are senior players; one is in the setup of Bafana Bafana, the other is still fighting to be in the setup of Bafana Bafana. And this is a great opportunity for them, for Chaine to go back to Bafana Bafana, and for Petersen to get a call-up. Games like this are important.

LK: Let's speak about the goal scorers. Both teams have been scoring a lot of goals. Relebohile Mofokeng and Oswin Appollis have been clinical for Pirates, and Rele is now three goals behind the current top goal scorer. However, there have been cries about the strikers not getting as many goals. Do you see the mentioned players taking their form to this derby?

LL: For me, let me tell you something. We can say strikers don't score goals, but I'm looking at [Yanela] Mbuthuma the way he's playing. The boy is working very hard. I think he deserves credit for the goals because he always creates space for them, works for them. You look at the goals that they score, Mbuthuma will make sure that he creates space, takes the defenders away. And for Appollis, Rele and [Tshepang] Moremi, it's easy for them to score goals because of the mobile defender, the way the boy [Mbuthuma] works. So for me, I think you look at their form, they've been scoring all these previous games, and I think nothing can stop them to continue scoring, as long as they work hard like they are now. The boys work hard, they defend, they attack, and I think there's something that motivates them. With the league going to an end, those boys, they deserve awards. I think even for them, they are working for that. They are close to getting awards like Player of the Season and others. I think both of them are going to get nominated, and they are working hard for that and playing against Kaizer Chiefs, winning Man of the Match and scoring goals is going to give them that opportunity, to win The Footballer of the Season [award]. I think there's a motivation behind all that, even Bafana Bafana and the World Cup coming.

LK: That's a big motivation...

LL: It is a motivation to maintain their standard. This derby is going to be a



“WE USED TO SEE THAT, A HELICOPTER JUST GOING AROUND ON THE FINAL DAY WHEN THERE IS MORE THAN ONE TEAM CHALLENGING. IT'S MY WISH FOR THE LEAGUE TO END LIKE THAT.”

motivation for most of the players there. Most of them want to go to the World Cup, like Petersen. He also wants to go to Bafana. Even Chaine wants to go back after being dropped in the last window. I mean, you can't just lose an opportunity a month or two months before going to the World Cup. But for me, I think those boys are capable of scoring goals, and their combination is so amazing. But credit must also go to their strikers that they are able to score. One thing I like about them is that they don't get jealous of each other. Whenever someone is free, they make sure that they pass to him. And that's what we want, not only at Pirates but generally for players to not be jealous of each other but help each other to shine.

LK: Yeah, and let's talk about your area, the defence, they did well to help the team not concede in the first derby. Are you seeing them upping their game this weekend?

LL: For me, I think the combination of the back-four has been good. You look at the experience of [Deon] Hotto, [Nkosinathi] Sibisi, [Lebone] Seema and [Kamogelo] Sebelebele coming to the party the way they work hard. So since he's playing right-back Sebelebele,





he's doing very well and, you know, the defence is all about complementing each other, communication, hard work. And I think they are doing that. You look at when supporters were not happy with our defence, and Sibisi, after that, they made sure that they don't make those silly or lousy mistakes. All the goals that Pirates conceded were from their own mistakes, that's why supporters were fighting. They were not fighting that they are not good defenders. No, they are giving away goals. Sometimes, as a defender, you don't have to risk, I think, like now, the way they are playing, look at their combination, it's working very well. Seema is also knocking at the national team, and he deserves to be in the national team because of how hard he works. I know there are other defenders, and he must have patience; his opportunity will come, and when it comes, he must just grab it with both hands. He must just continue working hard. He's a good defender. He's doing very well for the team. He came in and fitted like a glove.

LK: Where can Pirates expect the danger to come from against Chiefs? With what we have seen from Chiefs, who can be the dangerous players that can create problems for them?

LL: For me, I think they are not a one-man team, Kaizer Chiefs, they play as a team. The coach is making changes, and everyone who comes to the team wants to grab that position. But they have a good team. It's just to get that winning combination. Yes, like in the past five games, he got those combinations and obviously changed here and there. But I don't want to single out a player that this is the one, because for me, I think they are playing as a team. Look at [Glody] Lilepo he's on form, [Mduduzi] Shabalala is on form, [Wandile] Duba came back, and we know what he can do. We saw even what happened after the Nedbank Cup final, even if people hate him for what he did to [Makhehleri] Makhaula and [Mbekezeli] Mbokazi. Sometimes it's all about the emotions of the game. They do have a good team, and you can't judge players based on certain games because players can be different in the derby. Players like [Flavio] Silva, who is scoring, you may see a different Silva in the derby. But I do

“WITH THE LEAGUE GOING TO AN END, THOSE BOYS, THEY DESERVE AWARDS.”

think they have a good team, the only thing might be the understanding because of the changes.

LK: Head on the block, what's your score prediction?

LL: I know we won 3-0 in the first round, but now I see 2-0 to Orlando Pirates. Why, because I said these boys they still want to challenge the league. It's not over until it's over, and even if we are losing the league, but beating Kaizer Chiefs is nice. Yes, we want them to win the league, but beating Chiefs twice. I don't know why the derby is such a special game because people might not remember Lucky won the league in 2002, no, they will talk about the derby. And to put my head on the block, Pirates is going to win 2-0.

LK: Lastly, I don't know if you've checked the fight at the bottom. It's also looking very tough, and it's not clear who's going to go down directly right now. I was at the Magesi FC and Durban City match, Magesi won 5-2. Do you also feel like this battle will also go down to the wire?

LL: Look, it's going to go down to the wire. One thing I like about our league, it's always like that at the bottom. And I want to see the same even there at the top, for it to go down to the wire. When you are in that situation, even the chairmen come to the party with bonuses. It's so entertaining down there. Magesi did well after losing to Kaizer Chiefs, and Durban City is one of the clubs that were on top at some point. Now they are losing to the likes of Magesi, which shows you that it's tough. I saw Orbit [College] lost at home, and everyone is trying to collect points and survive relegation, others want to be in the Top 8.

LK: Lucky, thank you so much for speaking to us.





“WHEN LUCAS RIBEIRO COSTA LEFT SUNDOWNS UNDER A CLOUD TO GO PLY HIS TRADE IN SPAIN, THE BIG QUESTION WAS WHO WOULD FILL IN THE BRAZILIAN’S BIG BOOTS.”

DOWNNS CLOSE IN ON 2ND STAR, AS CARDOSO MATCHES PITSO FEAT

THERE IS a particularly exotic feel about Mamelodi Sundowns’ qualification for the CAF Champions League final for the second year running. The Brazilians will yet again contest for the continent’s premier club knockout title, having failed to win it last year when they fell to Egypt’s Pyramids FC. This time around, the South African champions will lock horns with Moroccan side AS Far Rabat over two legs on May 15 and May 24, thanks largely to a significant contribution from their foreign brigade.

Sundowns’ march to the ultimate stage of the competition will be seen by most as having been pretty easy compared to the previous years, as they avoided many of the continent’s giants. With due respect to the rest of the teams they played, the semi-final clash with Esperance was arguably their only tie against a bona fide potential winner.

That, however, should not be allowed to take away from Sundowns being deserved finalists. And while they got to the final courtesy of a concerted team effort which saw just about every one of their players putting their shoulder to the wheel, the contribution of their South American and Portuguese contingent cannot be underestimated.

Coach Miguel Cardoso has led by example, as he qualified for a third successive final to join the club’s former coach Pitso Mosimane on three appearances at the ultimate stage – both men having done it with two different clubs.

Cardoso’s Portuguese compatriot, Nuno Santos, has contributed three goals in his maiden CAF Champions League campaign, as has Portuguese-speaking Brazilian Artur Sales. It is the immediate impact made by Brayan Leon, though, that stands out, the Colombian who only joined the club in January, having scored five goals in the CAF Champions League – two of those responsible for

Esperance’s demise at the penultimate stage.

In this article, senior writer MATSHELANE MAMABOLO takes a reflective look at Sundowns route to the final and highlights the foreigners’ contribution, while also pointing out the other key contributors to Sundowns being in line to attempt winning that second title in what would be their fourth appearance at the ultimate stage of the Holy Grail of African club football.

THE PREDATOR THAT IS BRAYAN LEON

It is often said that players who come into Africa from either Europe or South America need time to adjust to the league, and that much has previously been proven true, as many took a while to get into their rhythm despite having come highly recommended. Not so Leon, who joined Sundowns in January and hit the proverbial ground running by scoring on debut against Orbit College. In the Champions League, Leon has been prolific, scoring five times to find himself one less than the leading scorers, Nkeng of Stade Malien and Al Ahly’s Trezeguet. He could well end up as the competition’s top scorer should he find the net in both legs of the final, as he did in the semi-final – his strikes away to and home against Esperance sending Sundowns to the final. Leon’s proven himself a prolific striker who is able to score varying types of goals from tap-ins (his second goal against MC Alger at Loftus) through powerful headers (in the first leg at Esperance) to powerful opportunistic strikes (the opener against MC Alger) and the follow-up from his saved penalty at the weekend. He is a very hard striker to mark, given his mobility and the wily way he drifts in and out of the box. Continue in his current vein, which has also seen him scoring five goals in the Betway Premiership, and Leon could well be the man to deliver the second



“IN THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE, LEON HAS BEEN PROLIFIC, SCORING FIVE TIMES TO FIND HIMSELF ONE LESS THAN THE LEADING SCORERS.”



star for the Brazilians.

A TRIO OF GOALS, EACH FROM SALES AND SANTOS

When Lucas Ribeiro Costa left Sundowns under a cloud to go ply his trade in Spain, the big question was who would fill in the Brazilian's big boots, Costa having shone brightest in the domestic league and on the continent as well as at the FIFA Club World Cup. Many felt his compatriot Artur Sales would be the one, although Coach Miguel Cardoso strove hard to stop the comparisons, feeling as he did that such would weigh heavily on the lanky young striker. But Sales has raised his hand and proven himself very useful to Sundowns' cause. He was among the scorers as the SA champions sent a message to their competitors that they mean business with that 5-1 drubbing of Remo Stars, Sales coming on as a sub and making a quick impression. He then scored in both legs against Al Hilal, Sales delivering the opener in the 2-2 draw at Loftus before grabbing the consolation goal in that 2-1 defeat in Rwanda. The Portuguese newcomer Nuno Santos has also been influential as his goals helped Sundowns to victories over Remo Stars and Lupopo. When Sundowns beat the Nigerian outfit 2-0 at Loftus, Santos was on the score-sheet, and he found the net twice in the 3-1 victory over the Congolese, as Chilean Marcelo Allende added the exotic feel to that victory with his only goal of the campaign so far. Lest it be forgotten, Portuguese Miguel Reinho also scored in the 5-1 demolition of Remo Stars.

DEAD-EYE MIGUEL CARDOSO CAN'T BE DISTRACTED

Despite winning the championship and taking Sundowns to the final, Miguel Cardoso continues to live under the shadow of his predecessor, Rulani Mokwena, with many of Masandawana supporters continuing to hanker for the 'brilliant football' their club played under the young South African coach. But the bald-headed Portuguese tactician silenced many of his detractors with a key victory over Mokwena in a do-or-die final group match thick with controversy. The spectre of Mokwena

having received inside information on Sundowns from a member of the Brazilians' technical team hung over that second round tie like a dark cloud. Mokwena typically 'sweated the small stuff' and focused on rubbishing those accusations, while striving to prove he respected the institution that is Sundowns to the extent of involving his team in the issue. Cardoso, on the other hand, kept his eye on the ball and ensured his players did the same. The result was a commanding victory for Cardoso's men as they dished out a masterclass of professionalism against an opponent high on emotions. The Portuguese eliminated Mokwena for the second time in the competition, having previously done so at the semi-final stage two seasons ago when he was still coaching Esperance. He was at it again in the Last-Four this year, Cardoso once again putting emotions aside when he faced the Tunisian side he'd previously served with distinction to win both legs 1-0 to reach yet another final and must surely be hoping it is going to be a case of third-time lucky after he lost the previous two.

“I'm a person who is thankful in life for everything that happens, rather than looking at what didn't happen,” Cardoso said after the final.

“I always told you, what will speak for my career is in 10 years when I look back and I can look... I think in the history of African football there are three coaches who have made three finals, Manuel Jose from Portugal with Ahly, Pitso did with Ahly and Sundowns, and myself.

“So when you enter a group of coaches, that are three, you just need to enjoy [the moment] because you are in such a level, just enjoy... wanting more? Everyone wants more. But I'm very thankful for life and what it's given me.

“Life gave us an opportunity to exist, to wake up everyday with energy, to be in a club that is so big in terms of its demands and it helped me so much in establishing the mindset that allows us to be systematically on this point.”





CARDOSO: "I THINK IN THE HISTORY OF AFRICAN FOOTBALL THERE ARE THREE COACHES WHO HAVE MADE THREE FINALS, MANUEL JOSE FROM PORTUGAL WITH AHLY, PITSO DID WITH AHLY AND SUNDOWNS, AND MYSELF."

NOT ALL EXOTIC AS SUNDOWNS SHOW THEY CAN DEFEND TOO

Perhaps what has been uncharacteristic of Sundowns in this campaign is their impressive defensive play. Twice they went to North Africa and kept clean sheets there – drawing goalless at MC Alger in the group phase and then beating Esperance 1-0 in their own backyard. Not many would have ever witnessed Sundowns players putting their bodies on the line like they did that night in Rades. Grant Kekana even ended up seeing red, such was his commitment to protecting Ronwen Williams' goals. With Esperance throwing everything bar the proverbial kitchen sink at them, Sundowns stood their ground. Divine Lunga tackled like a man possessed, the Zimbabwean stretching his long legs to block either man or ball from posing danger. Keanu Cupido was not afraid to put his body where it hurt as he helped render the dangerous French striker Florian Danho ineffective. Khuliso Mudau was his usual workaholic self, and Thapelo Morena provided that glorious cross from which Leon scored that precious away goal. It was, however, the fact that they did not concede a goal at Esperance that saw Sundowns go into the second leg at the weekend full of confidence. And they duly wrapped the tie to reach yet another final, which should surely deliver the goods this time around.

"I think it's one of the medals that has been haunting, for the team as well, because it's been quite a long time since we won the Champions League, yet we've been doing very well," Thapelo Morena, who joined Sundowns in 2016, but too late to be part of the squad who won the CAFCL that year.

"This time we've been doing well. We know what we've been working towards, and we can see that from our players.

"I think the most important thing is to grind the way we've been doing. We know that away games are a bit difficult, but the good thing is that we've been getting good results both away and at home.

"We are going to try to minimise conceding, something we've actually been doing well in recent weeks.

"It's mixed emotions knowing that we are going to have to work very hard. Getting here was a very good mission. We've done our level best to grind on the pitch and give it all to the supporters."

JAYDEN ADAMS' LATE STRIKE AT LUPOPO SAVES THE DAY

Late in the group stages, when anything was still possible, and Sundowns' progress into the knockout phase hung in the balance, the trip to the DR Congo posed serious danger. Lose there, and the South African champions were going to find it very hard to get out of the group stage. As it was, they still ended up needing to win their final round robin match against MC Alger. But looking back, that goal by Jayden Adams was pure gold, giving Sundowns a point that ensured they were still in the hunt to qualify for the knockouts, yet again having done so every year since 2019. Adams had been somewhat of a forgotten man, struggling for game-time at club level to the extent that there had been suggestions he would be let go and even having lost his spot in the national team. But he came good at a crucial time for the Brazilians as he headed in the equaliser from an Aubrey Modiba free-kick to silence the partisan home crowd while giving his team a sniff at a victory that never came. In the end, that point at Lupopo was crucial to Sundowns' progression into the knockout phase and ultimately to the final.

And with scorers such as Brayan Leon, Arthur Sales, Nuno Santos, Miguel Reinho, and Marcelo Allende in their team, there is good reason to bet on Sundowns winning the CAF Champions League title a second time to emulate Pitso Mosimane's Class of 2016. Remember too that the likes of Peter Shalulile and Teboho Mokoena have gotten their names on the scoresheet too, meaning Cardoso has just about the entire squad to bank on for goals.





A RELEGATION BATTLE DESTINED FOR LATE DRAMA IS LOOMING

The curtain is beginning to fall on the Betway Premiership season, and as the title race captures the imagination at the top, a far grittier, more unforgiving drama is unfolding at the bottom — where survival, not silverware, is the prize.

With just five matches remaining, the margins for error have all but disappeared. One team will be cast adrift into the second tier, while another will be dragged into the uncertainty of the promotion/relegation playoffs against the hungry challengers from the Motsepe Foundation Championship.

At this stage of the season, every point feels heavier, every mistake more costly, and for some, time may already be slipping away.

Magesi's Great Escape?

Until Sunday afternoon, Magesi looked destined for the drop. Rooted to the bottom for months, their campaign had been one long struggle. But football, in all its unpredictability, delivered a twist.

A stunning 5-2 demolition of Durban City FC, just their fourth win of the season, catapulted them out of last place and into 14th. It was a performance that felt like a release, a statement, and perhaps even the spark of a great escape.

This is, after all, a club still writing its top-flight story. Only a season removed from their fairytale Carling Knockout triumph under Clinton Larsen, Magesi have found life in the Premiership far less forgiving. A mid-season change saw veteran coach Allan Freese take over from John Maduka, but Sunday's win was only his second in charge, a reminder of how deep the challenges run.

While the experienced Freese knows their troubles are far from over, one can only imagine the relief that victory must have brought, with the club out of the

relegation spot for the first time since he took charge.

"The result, very good," Freese said after the match.

"Whether it was 1-0, 2-0 and a win, we would have taken it. Even if we had scored one goal and won, we would have taken it. I'm happy for the boys; we scored more than one, very, very happy, because we've been struggling in front of the goals now for a little while, but I don't want to get ahead of myself. We still have got other games to play.

"The mindset must change to say we can also win. That's what is important. Can we win? We proved it [against Durban City] that we can win. Can we defend properly? Maybe, but we conceded two, so that is still where we must work, to shut the back door when you score, shut the back door.

"So that is what we must learn. But I'm very, very happy with the result.

"It gives us good hope that we are going in the right direction. Very, very good hope that we are going in the right direction. So we should continue working the way we are working."

But Magesi's road ahead offers little respite. Fixtures against TS Galaxy, Orbit College and title-chasing Orlando Pirates loom large, alongside clashes with Siwelele FC and Richards Bay. Survival is far from secured, but belief has been reignited.

Orbit College: A Dream Season Under Threat

For Orbit College FC, the romance of a debut top-flight season is in danger of turning into a nightmare finale.

After losing to Golden Arrows on the weekend, they are now sitting 16th, and Pogiso Makhoye's side arguably





face the most daunting run-in of all.

Trips to Durban City and Magesi are followed by clashes against AmaZulu, Stellenbosch and Orlando Pirates, a brutal sequence for a team already low on confidence.

With just five wins all season, and only one in 2026, their form is a growing concern. Time is running out to rediscover the resilience that once defined their campaign.

Marumo Gallants Search for Stability

Hovering just above the drop, now in 15th, on goal difference are Marumo Gallants, another side desperately trying to steady a season that has never quite settled.

A coaching change saw Jamil Benouahi step in following the departure of Alexandre Lafitte, but the challenge is immense. With only four wins all season, Gallants have struggled to find consistency or momentum.

They've drawn their last two matches, and their run-in offers a mix of opportunity and peril: clashes against Sekhukhune United, TS Galaxy, Richards Bay, Polokwane City and Stellenbosch. There are points to be won, but only if they can find a level they have rarely sustained.

Chippa United Not Safe Yet

Just above the chaos sit Chippa United in 13th, but their position is far from secure.

A four-point cushion offers some breathing room, yet the fixtures ahead threaten to erode that quickly. Under Vusumuzi Vilakazi, Chippa must navigate a difficult schedule that includes AmaZulu, Sekhukhune United, TS Galaxy, Golden Arrows and Kaizer Chiefs.

It's been a turbulent season in the Eastern Cape, with just five wins overall, though four of those have come in 2026, hinting at some late improvement. They're on a run of two games unbeaten, and whether that momentum is enough to carry them

FREESE: "WE ARE GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. SO WE SHOULD CONTINUE WORKING THE WAY WE ARE WORKING."

to safety remains to be seen.

TS Galaxy's Tale of Two Campaigns

For TS Galaxy, the season has split into two contrasting narratives.

On one hand, they are preparing for a Nedbank Cup Final appearance, a chance at silverware and glory. On the other hand, their league form has collapsed at the worst possible time.

Winless in their last 10 matches, dating back to January, Galaxy now find themselves nervously glancing over their shoulders. Their loss to Richards Bay on Sunday was their fourth straight league defeat. Sitting on 25 points, they are not yet in the relegation zone, but they are dangerously close to being pulled into it.

Their next three fixtures could define their season: Magesi, Marumo Gallants and Chippa United.

Win those, and safety is within reach. Fail, and the final stretch, featuring Golden Arrows and champions-elect Mamelodi Sundowns, could become a desperate scramble for survival.

The Final Stretch

Five games. Countless permutations. One unforgiving outcome. At this stage of the season, form, belief and nerve matter as much as quality. For some, redemption is still possible. For others, the damage may already be done.

But if there's one certainty, it's this: the fight for survival in the Betway Premiership is far from over, and the final weeks promise drama, tension, and moments that could define careers and clubs alike.





THE IDISKI TOP 10... SA CONTINENTAL FINALISTS

This week, iDiski Times turns its attention to the grandest stages African club football has to offer: revisiting the 10 most memorable occasions when South African sides battled their way to a continental final.

When Mamelodi Sundowns qualified for this season's CAF Champions League final on the weekend, beating Esperance 2-0 on aggregate, it was the 11th time a South African side reached a CAF final (6 CAFCL, 1 Cup of Champions, 1 Cup Winner's Cup and 3 CAF Confederation Cup).

From the electric highs of lifting silverware to the heartbreak of falling just short, these campaigns represent some of the defining chapters in the country's footballing story.

They are journeys shaped by resilience, tactical brilliance, individual moments of magic, and, at times, controversy, all unfolding under the intense pressure of the African stage.

The ranking itself has been carefully considered, taking into account overall performance across each campaign. That includes progression through the rounds, strength of opposition, statistical output and match ratings, drawing on data from leading football analytics platforms to provide a balanced and informed perspective.

What follows is more than just a list; it is a timeline of South African clubs testing themselves against the very best the continent has to offer. A collection of unforgettable nights and campaigns that have helped shape the nation's reputation in African football.





Here, then, are the 10 previous occasions when South African clubs reached continental finals, a story rich with glory, grit, near-misses and moments that will live long in the memory.

The Top 10:

10 SuperSport United – 2017 (CAF Confederation Cup runners-up)

For Eric Tinkler, 2017 brought a sense of déjà vu. Having led Orlando Pirates to the final two years earlier, he returned with SuperSport United, hoping to go one step further. But TP Mazembe stood in the way. A 2-1 defeat in Lubumbashi in the first leg left SuperSport chasing the tie, but a goalless draw back home meant another near-miss for South African football.

9 Orlando Pirates – 2022 (CAF Confederation Cup runners-up)

Under co-coaches Fadlu Davids and Mandla Ncikazi, Pirates came agonisingly close to ending their continental drought. Facing RS Berkane in a one-off final in Nigeria, Pirates matched their opponents stride for stride. The match ended 1-1 after extra-time, Thembinkosi Lorch with a dramatic goal to level matters, but heartbreak followed in the penalty shootout, as Berkane held their nerve.

8 Orlando Pirates – 2015 (CAF Confederation Cup runners-up)

Two years after their Champions League run, Pirates were back on the continental stage, this time in the Confederation Cup. After impressive victories over Al Ahly in the semi-finals, Eric Tinkler's side reached the final against Étoile du Sahel. A 1-1 draw at home left everything to play for, but a narrow 1-0 defeat in

Sousse saw the trophy slip away.

7 Mamelodi Sundowns – 2001 (CAF Champions League runners-up)

A generation before their 2016 triumph, Sundowns had their first taste of a Champions League final under Ted Dumitru. A 1-1 draw in Pretoria gave them hope heading into Cairo, but the experience and power of Al Ahly proved decisive, as the Egyptians ran out 3-0 winners. It was a harsh lesson, but one that laid the groundwork for future success.

6 Kaizer Chiefs – 2021 (CAF Champions League runners-up)

Few expected Chiefs to reach the final in 2021, especially amid off-field challenges, including a FIFA transfer ban. Yet, against the odds, they surged forward. With Gavin Hunt guiding much of the campaign and Stuart Baxter taking charge in the final, Chiefs produced memorable wins over Simba SC and Wydad AC. The final, however, proved a step too far, as Pitso Mosimane's Al Ahly claimed a 3-0 victory. Still, it remains one of the club's most remarkable continental runs.

5 Orlando Pirates – 2013 (CAF Champions League runners-up)

Few runs have captured the imagination quite like Pirates' 2013 journey. From overcoming TP Mazembe to navigating a tricky group that included Al Ahly and Zamalek, the Buccaneers showed grit and belief. A dramatic semi-final triumph over Esperance set up a showdown with Al Ahly. A 1-1 draw in South Africa offered hope, but Cairo proved unforgiving, as the Egyptians secured a 2-0 win to deny Roger De Sa's Pirates glory.



4 Mamelodi Sundowns – 2025 (CAF Champions League runners-up)

So close, yet so cruel. Sundowns' 2025 campaign was a marathon of elite opposition, navigating a brutal group featuring Moroccan giants before eliminating both Al Ahly SC and Espérance de Tunis in the knockouts. In the final, they faced an ambitious Pyramids FC side. The first leg seemed destined for a Sundowns victory, until a stoppage-time equaliser shattered the script. A 2-1 defeat in Egypt in the return leg sealed their fate. It was heartbreak, but also a campaign that reaffirmed Sundowns' standing among Africa's elite.

3 Kaizer Chiefs – 2001 (African Cup Winners' Cup winners)

Under the astute leadership of Muhsin Ertugral, Chiefs produced a campaign defined by resilience and big-game mentality. Victories over heavyweights like Ismaily SC and Club Africain paved the way to the final against Interclube. After a hard-fought 1-1 draw in Luanda, Chiefs looked set to edge it on away goals. But they weren't content with that. In front of a roaring Ellis Park crowd, Patrick Mabedi stepped up in stoppage time to convert a dramatic penalty, sealing a 1-0 win and a triumphant night that remains etched in Amakhosi folklore.

2 Orlando Pirates – 1995 (African Cup of Champions Clubs winners)

Before the Champions League era, the African Cup of Champions Clubs was the ultimate prize, and Pirates rose to the occasion in iconic fashion. Led by heroes of the era, the

Buccaneers delivered one of South Africa's most romantic continental triumphs. After a 2-2 draw at the FNB Stadium, Pirates travelled to Abidjan to face ASEC Mimosas. There, Jerry Sikhosana wrote his name into history. His decisive goal secured a famous 1-0 victory on foreign soil, a moment of pure theatre that delivered South Africa's first continental club crown in the post-isolation era.

1 Mamelodi Sundowns – 2016 (CAF Champions League winners)

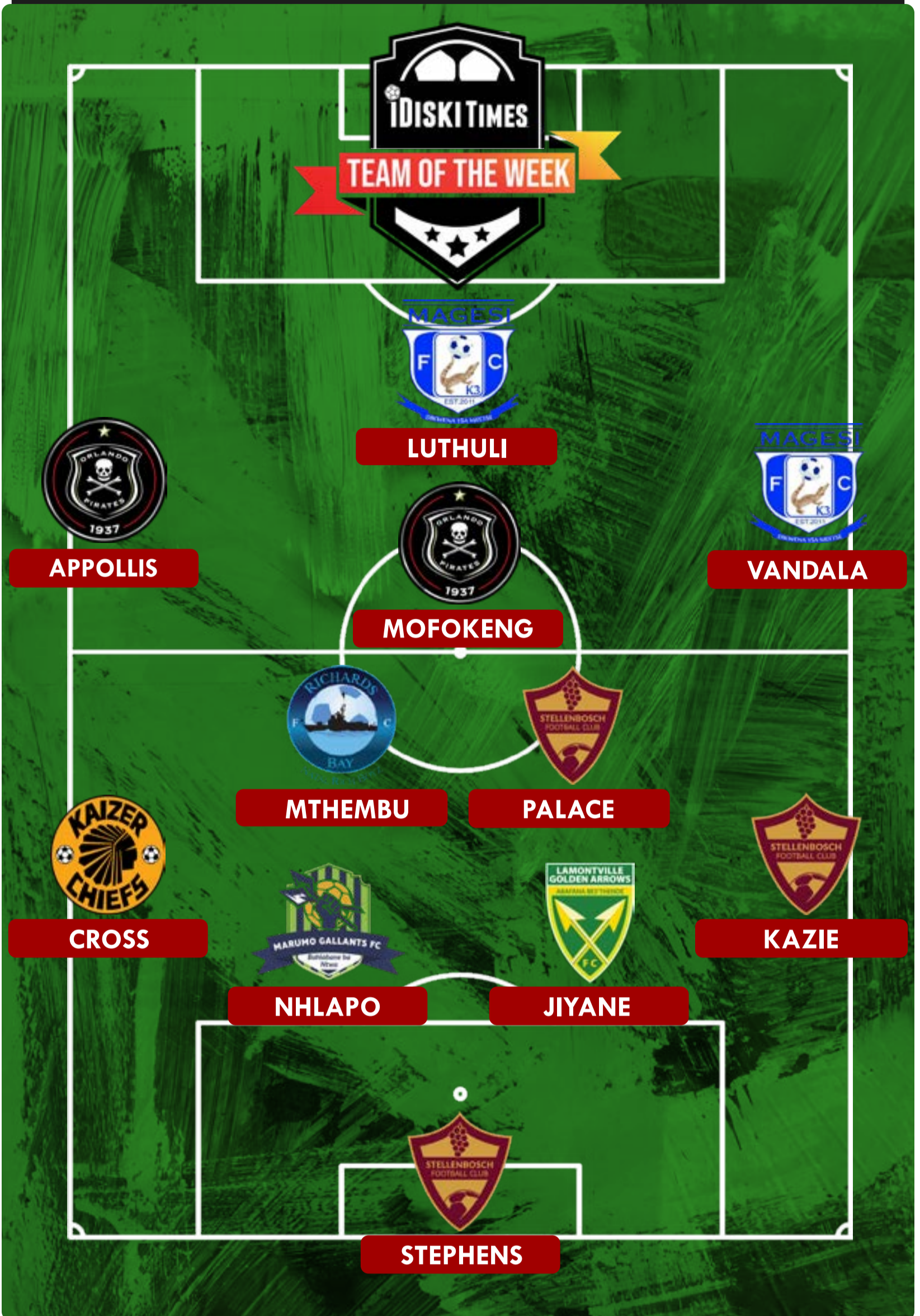
The gold standard. Under the guidance of Pitso Mosimane, Sundowns etched their name into African football folklore in 2016, announcing themselves as a true continental powerhouse. Their journey, however, was anything but straightforward. Eliminated early by AS Vita Club on away goals, Sundowns were handed an unlikely lifeline when their opponents were found guilty of fielding an ineligible player. Given a second chance, they seized it with both hands.

Dominant in the group stages, including two statement victories over Zamalek SC, Mosimane's men built unstoppable momentum. The final itself was a tale of two legs: a commanding 3-0 victory in Pretoria laid the foundation, before a tense 1-0 defeat in Cairo confirmed their coronation. It was not just a title; it was a coming-of-age moment for Sundowns on the African stage.

From historic triumphs to heartbreaking defeats, these campaigns form a rich tapestry of South Africa's journey on the continental stage, moments of brilliance, resilience and what might have been, all woven into the fabric of African football history.

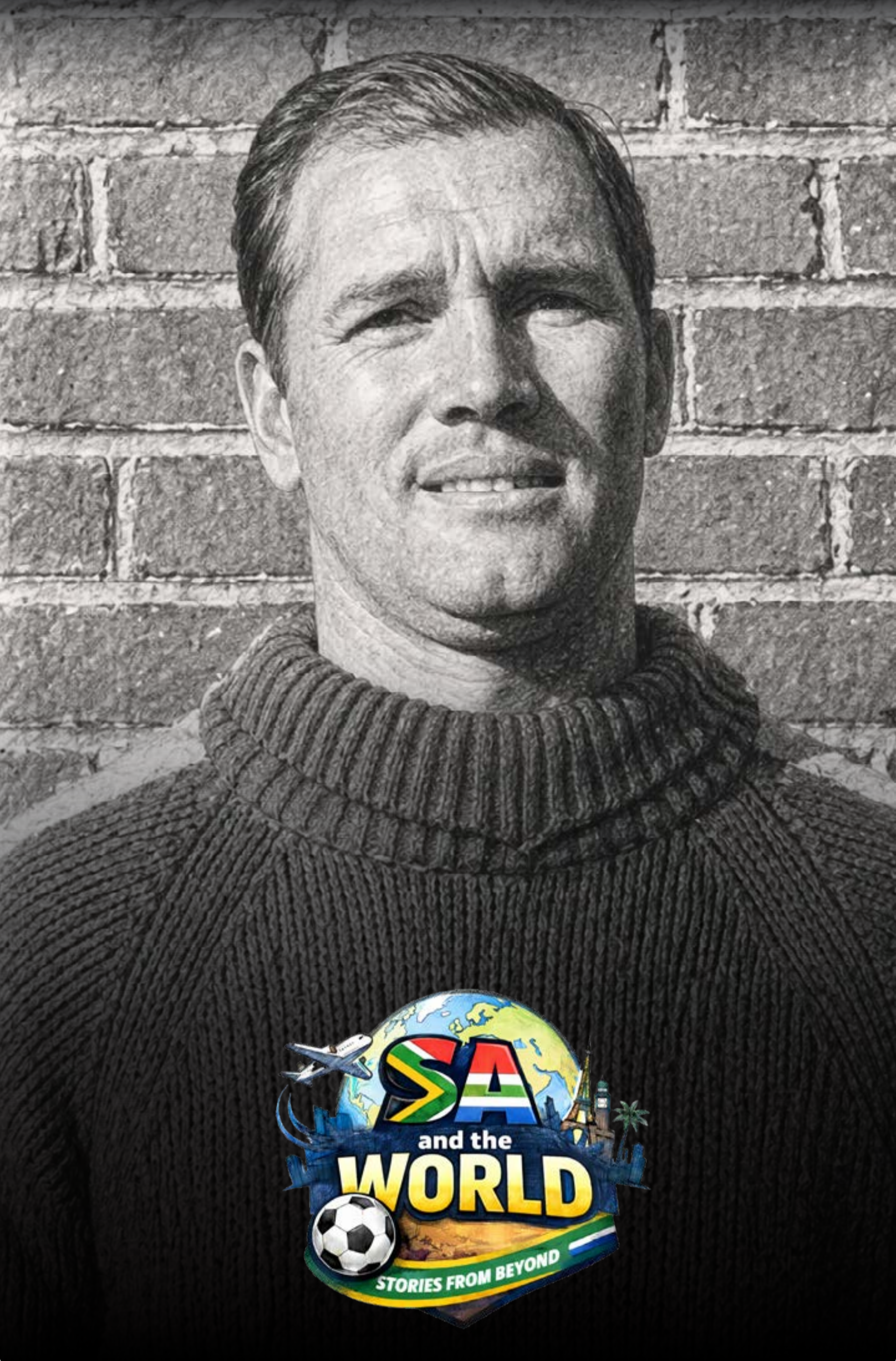


IDISKI'S PREMIERSHIP TEAM OF THE WEEK (17-19 APRIL 2026)



**ACES OF THE WEEK:
MAMELODI SUNDOWNS**

Mamelodi Sundowns make it back-to-back iDiski Times Aces of the Week, after powering their way into consecutive CAF Champions League finals with a display of control, composure and quiet authority. Having already struck a decisive blow with a 1-0 first-leg victory over Espérance de Tunis on foreign soil, Sundowns returned to Tshwane and finished the job with the same ruthless efficiency, another 1-0 triumph that sealed their place on the biggest stage in African club football. Once again, it was Brayan León who scored, etching his name into the history books, becoming the first player from a South African club to score in both legs of a CAFCL semi. For Masandawana as a whole, players, staff, and supporters alike, it is a moment to savour, with the promise of something even greater just over the horizon.



The World & South Africa

Over the coming weeks, we'll be rolling out a series that dives deep into South African footballers and their often complicated relationship with playing abroad. It's a story that stretches back more than 126 years: rich, layered and shaped by far more than just football...

This is a history marked by politics, isolation, rebellion, opportunity, heartbreak and adventure. A history where careers were redirected by world events, borders, passports and perceptions as much as by talent. Where some doors opened

unexpectedly, others slammed shut, and a few were never meant to open at all.

There are stories many fans have never heard, and others that time, discomfort or convenience have quietly pushed aside. But they are football stories nonetheless, human stories, and they matter. Together, they help explain the often paradoxical relationship South African football has long shared with the outside world, and why going abroad has never been a simple journey from A to B, but a winding road shaped by who we were, who we became, and how the world chose to see us.

THE LEGENDARY KEEPER WHO SCORED FROM HIS OWN PENALTY AREA!

By Rob Delpont

Sometimes, the best stories don't come from dusty archives or painstaking hours of research; they find you.

Digging into South African football history can often feel like chasing ghosts. The country's fractured past, coupled with the absence of comprehensive records from the pre-digital age, means so much of the game's rich tapestry exists only in fragments. The custodians of that history, the old journalists, clubmen, and storytellers, have, in many cases, passed on, taking with them countless tales that were never written down.

And then, every so often, something remarkable happens.

Recently, as I was heading out of my apartment, a long-time neighbour stopped me in passing. Knowing what I do, he casually mentioned that his grandfather had once played football. It's the kind of comment I hear all the time. Football, after all, lives in every family. There's always a son who's playing, a father who once dazzled, an uncle who could've been a star, or someone who insists they were a trial away from pulling on a Kaizer Chiefs jersey.

More often than not, these stories are told with love rather than accuracy, family folklore where ability is generously remembered and gently exaggerated. You learn to listen politely, to appreciate the sentiment as much as the substance.

But this time, it was different.

Because my neighbour, Andrew, wasn't talking about just anyone. His grandfather was Albert George Uytenbogaardt.

Now, for many of my generation, and certainly those who came after, Uytenbogaardt is not a household name. But he should be. In his time, he was not just a great footballer but a figure who carved his name into the game's history, both locally and abroad.

Born in Cape Town in 1930, Uytenbogaardt's journey began with the historic Tramway Football Club, an institution that, remarkably, still stands strong today. Its legacy continues through players like Amajita star Shakeel April, now at Stellenbosch FC, and former Cape Town Spurs youngster Reece Braithwaite, who has gone on to Orlando Pirates. It's a reminder that while history can fade, its influence often lingers in unexpected ways.

At just 18 years old, Uytenbogaardt made a bold decision that few South Africans of his era could even contemplate. He boarded a ship bound for England, chasing a football dream far from home. In 1948, he signed for Charlton Athletic in London, stepping into a world that was as daunting as it was promising.

For many in our generation, the mere mention of Charlton Athletic tends to conjure images of Shaun Bartlett thundering into the box or Mark Fish marshalling the backline with that unmistakable authority. They are, in many ways, our reference points, the modern markers of a South African footprint at The Valley.

But Charlton's connection to South Africa runs far deeper than that. Long before Bartlett's goals and Fish's steel, the club had already become something of an outpost for South African talent abroad. In fact, during Uytenbogaardt's time in London, there was a period when as many as seven South Africans were on Charlton's books at once, a quiet, almost forgotten pipeline between Cape Town and southeast London.

It speaks to an era that is often overlooked: a time when, despite the political and social barriers of the day, pockets of South African footballing talent were finding their way onto the English stage. Charlton became a hub for that movement, a place where players from our shores could test themselves, adapt, and, in their own way, leave a mark.



UYTENBOGAARDT during a training spell

That legacy may not always be front of mind today, but it lingers in the club's history, a reminder that the South African story at Charlton didn't begin in the Premier League era. It had already been written, decades earlier, by pioneers like Uytenbogaardt and those who travelled alongside him.

Breaking through, however, would not be simple. For five years, he served as understudy to the legendary Sam Bartram, learning his craft in the shadows at The Valley. It was a period that demanded patience and resilience, qualities that would define much of his career.

Yet, even from the periphery, Uytenbogaardt managed to achieve something extraordinary.

In 1950, during a reserve, or "A team", fixture against Folkestone, he produced a moment that would echo through football folklore. From inside his own penalty area, he struck a clearance that carried the length of the field and into the opposition's net, a goal of astonishing distance and improbable execution.

Recalling the moment years later, he said, "I kicked the heavy, wet ball and must have caught it correctly because it just flew. With the assistance of a slight side wind, it bounced once, went over the goalkeeper's head and went straight into the net.

"The funny thing was our forward [fellow South African Eddie Firmani] was running so fast to get to it that he couldn't stop. Once he followed it past the line, the only thing he could do was grab onto the net—and that's when the whole thing collapsed on him!"

It was the first goal ever scored by a Charlton goalkeeper, and for years it stood in the Guinness World Records as the longest-distance goal in football.

Uytenbogaardt would eventually return home, bringing with him the experience of English football.

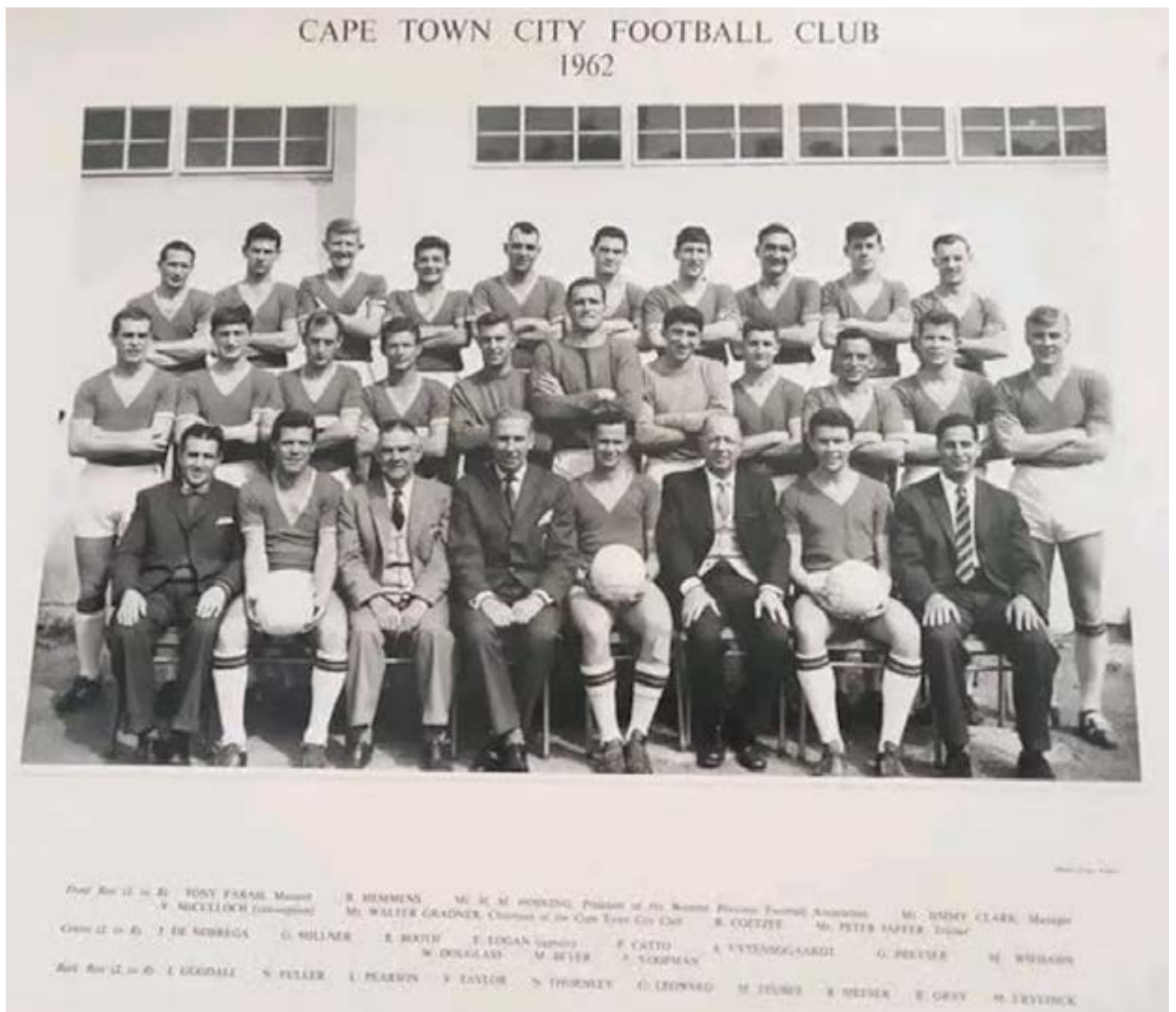
He turned out once more for Tramway, as well as Hellenic, and most notably the original Cape Town City, where the Uytenbogaardt name became synonymous with the club's identity.

On the international stage, he represented South Africa, then playing under the Springbok banner, between 1955 and 1957, before the country's isolation from global football. During a tour of Australia, the national side went unbeaten, winning all five Tests, with Uytenbogaardt featuring prominently, playing in 13 of their 15 matches.

Many historians and experts have since regarded the giant keeper as one of the 50 greatest South African footballers of all time. It was a career that spanned continents and eras, bridging a time when South African football was both deeply divided and quietly rich in talent.

For several years before he passed away, he was the oldest living former Charlton player. He died in 2024, aged 94, closing a chapter on a life that had stretched across nearly a century of the game.

His story didn't come to me through a library or an archive, but from a neighbour, in a passing comment, on an ordinary day. Sometimes stories are waiting right outside your door.



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