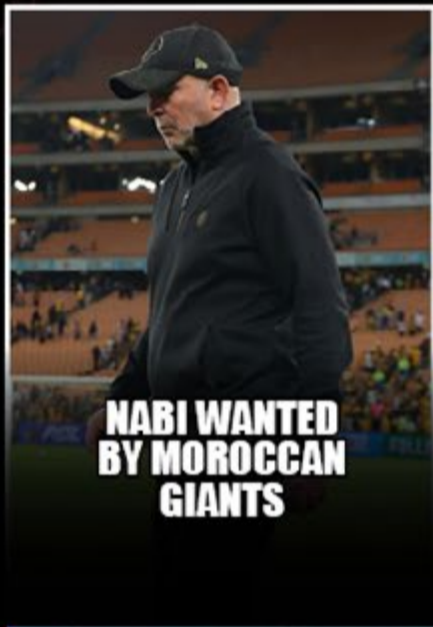




RELE TO GO FURTHER THAN LIKES OF MSHISHI, TEKO & CHEESEBOY?



APPOLLIS SETS STAGE ALIGHT IN BREAKTHROUGH YEAR



NABI WANTED BY MOROCCAN GIANTS



STELLIES TO FACE TOUGH COMPETITION TO HOLD ONTO MABASA



INSIDE THE CLUB THAT REWROTE GERMAN FOOTBALL & WHY SA IS NEXT



KEET, MASHEGO & MAARMAN ELATED WITH HISTORIC NBC TRIUMPH

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

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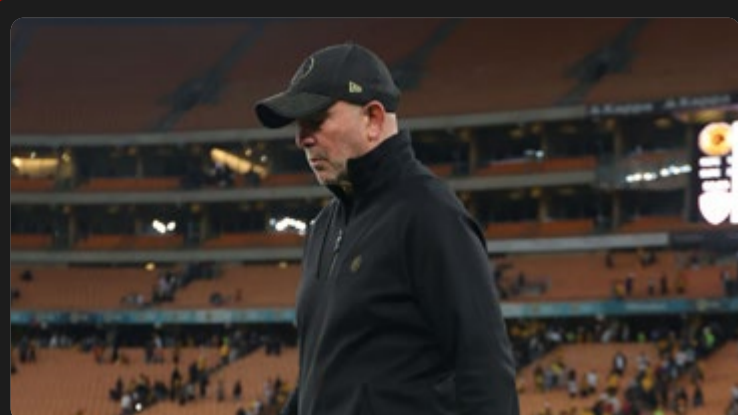
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FEATURE



DURBAN CITY TRIUMPH
INTERVIEWS



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TEAM OF THE WEEK
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SA & THE WORLD
STORIES FROM ABROAD

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WYDAD KEEN ON NABI AFTER CARTERON EXIT

Wydad Athletic Club have made contact with Nasreddine Nabi with the intent of luring him back to Morocco after the brief tenure of Patrice Carteron. The Frenchman lasted just five games in charge of the Botola Pro giants, with three defeats and two draws. And Nabi, who held talks with the club in the off-season, is now one of the priority targets due to the impressive spell he had in the country with ASFAR. However, the Tunisian is said to be against the idea of arriving in the current situation with a congested fixture schedule, an inflated squad, and in a poor run of form.



STELLENBOSCH SWEATING TO HOLD ONTO MABASA?

After spending the past few months on loan at Stellenbosch, there is a growing sense that the club would like to make Tshegofatso Mabasa's stay a permanent one. With his contract at Orlando Pirates set to expire at the end of June, his future appears to be heading away from the Buccaneers. Stellenbosch are keen to retain the 29-year-old striker, who has made a strong impression under Gavin Hunt, scoring five Betway Premiership goals since his arrival. However, securing his signature will be far from straightforward. Mabasa's form has not gone unnoticed, and there is significant interest in his services, both locally and abroad, as clubs position themselves ahead of the 2026/27 campaign.



GALAXY KEEN ON MOHAFE?

TS Galaxy are said to be considering approaching Polokwane City head coach Phuti Mohafe for their vacant role. Bernard Parker has been placed as interim head coach until the end of the season after the mutual termination of Adnan Beganovic. However, with Parker still in the process of acquiring his coaching badges, it's unlikely he will secure the permanent gig come end of the season. Mohafe, who is in his third full season with Rise and Shine and on course for another top eight qualification, has emerged as a potential target for the Rockets.



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WHAT THE CAF-UEFA MOU REALLY MEANS FOR AFRICAN FOOTBALL

Signed in Vancouver on the sidelines of a FIFA congress, the Memorandum of Understanding between Africa and Europe's governing bodies is being hailed as a turning point. But does the fine print match the fanfare?

Key points at a glance:

- MoU signed 29 April 2026 in Vancouver, valid until 30 June 2031
- Focus areas: youth & women's football, coach education, refereeing, governance
- CAF member associations to participate in selected CAF-UEFA youth competitions
- Exchange of best practices between coaching and officiating bodies
- Echoes the 1997 Lisbon accord that produced the Meridian Cup

In a room somewhere in Vancouver, two men sat down and signed a piece of paper that could, if the stars align, reshape the trajectory of African football. Dr Patrice Motsepe, CAF president and South African mining magnate turned football statesman, and Aleksander Čeferin, the Slovenian lawyer who has steered UEFA through a turbulent era, affixed their names to a Memorandum of Understanding on 29 April 2026. The setting was appropriately grand, the sidelines of a FIFA Congress, and the language, as these things go, was appropriately lofty.

But before we get carried away by the ceremonial glow, it is worth asking the question that iDiski Times readers have always deserved a straight answer to: what does this actually mean for the young midfielder sweating it out on a township pitch in Soweto,



or the schoolgirl goalkeeper training on a cracked concrete surface in Lusaka?

The bones of the deal

The MoU runs until 30 June 2031 - a five-year window that is long enough to plant seeds, but short enough to demand accountability. Its stated pillars are youth and women's football, coach education, referee development, and broader governance reform. Most concretely, CAF member associations will be invited to participate in selected CAF-UEFA youth competitions, giving young African players exposure to a higher competitive standard than many domestic leagues can currently provide.

There is also a provision for the exchange of technical expertise between coaching



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structures, which is where the real rubber meets the road. For decades, the persistent complaint from within African football has not been a lack of talent – anyone who watched Senegal lift the 2021 AFCON, or Morocco stun the world en route to the 2022 World Cup semi-finals, knows there is no shortage of that – but a lack of infrastructure around that talent. Coaching certification pathways, referee training academies, and the unglamorous machinery of football governance: these are the spaces where UEFA has real, exportable expertise.

History rhymes

This is not the first time the two confederations have tried this dance. Almost thirty years ago, in January 1997, CAF and UEFA signed an accord in Lisbon that led to the creation of the Meridian Cup — an intercontinental youth competition that, for a brief moment, gave African youth sides a genuine taste of European opposition. The tournament was eventually discontinued, a casualty of crowded football calendars and waning political will. The ghost of the Meridian Cup should hang, usefully, over every meeting of the joint review committee this MoU promises to establish.

The lesson of 1997 is not that cooperation between CAF and UEFA is doomed; it is that cooperation without sustained funding, clear governance, and genuine political commitment tends to dissolve when the photo opportunities dry up. The new agreement is notably aware of this – it commits both bodies to regular progress reviews, which is the bureaucratic equivalent of building in a conscience.

The women's game: a genuine opportunity

Perhaps the most exciting dimension of the MoU – and the one that deserves the most scrutiny from those of us who cover the game on this continent – is its focus on women's football. UEFA's investment in the women's game over the past decade has been transformational: the Women's Champions League is now a serious product, the EURO draws crowds that would have seemed implausible in 2010, and the technical standard across European women's football has risen steeply.

CAF's women's game, by contrast, remains underfunded and underexposed. The Women's Africa Cup of Nations is growing, but the gap between a handful of powerhouse nations and the broader continental field remains alarming. If the MoU translates into concrete investment – coaching clinics, referee exchanges, joint youth competitions – the women's game across Africa stands to benefit more substantially than any other area.

Čeferin framed it well when he spoke about “harnessing the power of the game to advance women's football and promote women's health and wellbeing”. Whether that language translates into rands and cedis on the ground is the real test.

The talent pipeline question nobody wants to ask

There is, of course, an elephant in the room the size of Didier Drogba. Critics of any CAF-UEFA cooperation framework have long argued that European football's interest in Africa is fundamentally extractive: find the talent early, move it north cheaply, and let the clubs and academies that developed it whistle for compensation. The MoU gestures towards addressing this by framing the partnership as being about development on the continent rather than development of players for export.



But the structural incentives have not changed. African players remain among the most sought-after commodities in European football, and the predatory agent culture that strips young players from their families before they are emotionally or physically ready is not going to be solved by a document signed in a Vancouver conference room.

What the MoU can do – and what advocates should push for in the implementation phase – is use the governance and integrity provisions to create cleaner, better-regulated player transfer pathways that protect minors and compensate the associations and clubs that actually do the developmental work.

What Motsepe's presidency needs this to be

For Dr Motsepe, this agreement is more than a policy instrument. It is a statement of intent at a moment when his CAF presidency needs to demonstrate tangible international credibility. His tenure has been marked by genuine ambition – the expanded AFCON format, increased prize money, the push to attract commercial partners to African football – but also by persistent questions about implementation and governance.

Landing a formal partnership with UEFA, the world's most commercially successful continental confederation, adds serious weight to his pitch that African football is ready to be treated as an equal rather than a development project.

The symbolism of signing in Vancouver – at the heart of a FIFA Congress being held in the same city as the upcoming World Cup – is not accidental. Motsepe wants African football visible at the game's highest tables, and this MoU puts a CAF flag on one of them.

The verdict

The CAF-UEFA MoU is a genuinely positive development, and those who reflexively dismiss these sorts of agreements as empty pageantry are being too cynical. The five-year timeframe is real, the focus areas are sensible, and the institutional commitment to joint review gives it more accountability than most such documents. But it is a framework, not a program.

The hard work, the coach education clinics actually running in Kinshasa, the referee exchange bringing African officials to UEFA developmental tournaments, the women's league investment reaching clubs outside Lagos and Johannesburg – still lies ahead.

African football has produced more than its share of moments of brilliance that the world eventually noticed. It deserves an infrastructure that stops requiring that brilliance to emigrate in order to flourish. If this MoU accelerates that, it will have been worth every word of the ceremonial language. If it gathers dust, it will join the Meridian Cup in the archives of what might have been.

 GO TO IDISKITV


'SEVEN MILLION RAND FOR THE WINNERS AND AFRICAN FOOTBALL NEXT SEASON'

Durban City are the 2025/26 Nedbank Cup champions after they beat TS Galaxy 2-1 in the final at the Peter Mokaba Stadium on Saturday evening.

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

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"Congratulations to Durban City for winning the Nedbank Cup.

"It was an interesting game of football. TS Galaxy scored first in the opening

half. Their team talk at half-time must have been an instruction to defend. That was their fatal error.

"Their defensive posture in the second half invited Durban City. City scored twice in the second half to effectively wrap up the game.

"Well done to Congolese striker Jean Lwamba for redeeming himself, scoring an own goal and then scoring the winning goal.

"Seven million Rand for the winners and African football next season.

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WHY RELE MOFOKENG CAN GO ON TO BE SA'S GREATEST PLAYER

By Matshelane Mamabolo

Football is the world's most popular professional sport – 'the game of the people'. It is renowned for being a team sport, a sport where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. But once ever so often, a player comes along and rises above the rest to defy the generally held notion that individuals don't make teams.

In South African football in the last couple of years, that player has been Relebohile

MOLOI: "HE HAS DONE WAY BETTER THAN ALL OF US. I BELIEVE THE LOCAL GAME IS FORTUNATE THAT RELE WAS DISCOVERED AND BROUGHT INTO PROPER STRUCTURES THAT HAVE HELPED ELEVATE HIM."



Mofokeng. The Orlando Pirates youngster is arguably the most exciting player in the country at the moment, having broken into the professional ranks three seasons ago as a teenager to shine like the northern star.

Of course, that was nothing new for South African football has long produced such youngsters who take the elite league by storm to show that age is but just a number. Many of those went on to become household names, their stars shining bright for so many seasons that they continue to be celebrated long after they've hung up their boots. The name Doctor Khumalo – a legend that turned professional at 17 years of age – immediately springs to mind.

And for Mofokeng to have his name mentioned alongside that of the legendary former Kaizer Chiefs and Bafana Bafana midfielder, he is going to have to sustain the performances that have him yet again being among the front runners for the Betway Premiership's Footballer of the Year accolade. Such have been his displays in the current campaign that he has been pivotal to the Buccaneers being so close to ending Mamelodi Sundowns' monopoly of the league championship that has run eight seasons in a row now.

Most successful youngster in the Premiership era

Yet when looking at the lad from Sharpeville's current statistics, there is everything to suggest he is the most successful youngster the local game has seen in the Premiership era. And the exciting part is that, unlike others, Rele is steadily outgrowing expectations – blossoming with time when others fall under the weight.

He only turns 22-years old later in the year (October), but the School of Excellence graduate has already chalked up 120 appearances with the Pirates senior team. And in those matches, he has notched up 29 goals while providing 30 assists.

Those numbers, taken at face value, are impressive enough. And so, naturally, the comparisons begin.

Arguably, the greatest player of this generation is Sundowns' Themba Zwane. Yet, for all his elegance and key role for both Sundowns and Bafana, Mshishi was nowhere near Mofokeng at 21. Zwane only made his professional debut at an age older than Mofokeng is now, which makes any direct comparison premature. If anything, it highlights just how early Mofokeng has embedded himself at the highest level.

Former Sundowns striker Percy Tau, who at one stage looked set to dethrone Benni McCarthy as Bafana's leading striker, has a similar story. Granted, he broke through as a teenager in the 2013/14 season, but his early years were slow-burning. Across two-and-a-half campaigns, he managed





just three league starts before a loan spell at Witbank Spurs became the turning point. Only after that did his career ignite into something special. Crucially, that breakthrough came at an age beyond where Mofokeng finds himself today, again underlining the accelerated curve of his development.

Years before Zwane and Tau, a teenage prodigy in the form of Steve Motsiri (later Lekoelea) burst onto the scene as a 15-year-old with Moroka Swallows – a massive head start not many players could match. By 21, his goal tally hovered around the low twenties, respectable, but not extraordinary. Over time, he would go on to score more than 40 goals in all competitions for Pirates, while also establishing himself as a master of the dead ball and a creative force. Much like Mofokeng, he was as much a provider as a scorer, though assist records from that era remain incomplete. Interestingly, Mofokeng has already surpassed Lekoelea in international exposure, with more caps for Bafana, while Lekoelea’s tally stopped at 10.

Pirates appear to lead the way in unleashing the players young because Lebohang Mokoena was another of their prodigies who burst onto the scene at a similarly young age. “Cheeseboy” dazzled early on, but by 21, he had yet to reach the 20-goal mark. His career would go on to be solid and decorated, featuring league titles with Sundowns, but it was also interrupted by injuries that blunted his momentum during his peak years.

He is in awe of the phenomenon that is Mofokeng and projects a stellar career for the young lad: “I think Rele is just pure talent, although development has also played a key role in the player he is. It shows that he played at the School of Excellence and that he was involved in competitive tournaments in the Vaal. That helped his game along so that when he got to the main thing, it became a little easier for him.

“But don’t forget that in South Africa, we say 21 is young. But remember, there are players who broke through at 16 years, like Steve Lekoelea, Mkhanyiseli Siwahla and others. But also when we talk about accolades, yes, he has won cups, but Rele still has to win the league, and if we talk

MOKOENA: “I ALSO BELIEVE IT IS TIME FOR HIM TO GO OVERSEAS. HE HAS HAD A GOOD SEASON THUS FAR, AND OF COURSE, NOT TO PUT TOO MUCH PRESSURE ON HIM, BUT THERE ARE CERTAIN ASPECTS OF HIS GAME HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE ON.”

of youngsters, there are a few who have won the league. But for his generation, he stands out among the peers at 20-21.

“I also believe it is time for him to go overseas. He has had a good season thus far, and of course, not to put too much pressure on him, but there are certain aspects of his game he needs to improve on, especially his physicality with the World Cup coming. He is a raw South African talent, and I hope he can win the Footballer of the Year and the league so that he can cement his place among the best talents this country has ever produced.”

Statistically, perhaps the closest parallel to Mofokeng’s rise would be that of Jabu Mahlangu (previously Pule). When he was 21, Shuffle had scored 26 goals for Chiefs and was thus one of the brightest attacking talents of his generation. He could have gone on to achieve way more, but disciplinary issues and an off-the-field lifestyle not befitting a professional soccer player derailed what once seemed a limitless career. Sure, he was capped 20 times at Bafana and scored two goals, but his international career came to a sad, screeching halt at just 24 years old.

Emotional comparisons with the dearly departed

Some comparisons carry a heavier emotional weight.

There can be no denying Gift Leremi was a player of immense promise, whose life and career were tragically cut short just shy of his 23rd birthday. While he began his professional journey at a similar age to Mofokeng, he never reached the 20-goal





milestone before that deadly car accident on the early morning of September 3, 2007.

The one player who outscored Mofokeng at a comparable stage was Lesely Manyathela, who, like Leremi, died in a car accident. Yet, it has to be remembered that he was an out-and-out striker, a role that naturally lends itself to higher goal returns.

Thulani Serero, meanwhile, impressed in his formative years at Ajax Cape Town, yet never reached the 20-goal mark and later transitioned into a deeper, more defensive midfield role during his time in Europe.

The country has had other players who enjoyed strong careers – think Keagan Dolly and Kermit Erasmus – but they did not do as well as Mofokeng’s current trajectory in their early statistical output.

To add Benni McCarthy to the equation would be scoffed at by many, given that the man almost transcends comparison. After all, he had already moved to Europe at the age Rele is at, winning titles with Ajax and making a profound impact on the international stage across U20, U23, and senior levels. Still, McCarthy’s early numbers in South African club football were not as striking as those of the President of Ama2000.

Now, let’s get back to Mofokeng.

What makes his rise so compelling is not just the numbers, but the context around them. He is producing consistently, influencing games, and doing so at an age where many before him were still finding their footing. Yet history offers both encouragement and warning. For every player who fulfilled early promise, there are others whose paths were disrupted by injury, by circumstance, or by choices off the field.

Mofokeng, for now, stands at that delicate intersection between potential and legacy. His story is still being written, his ceiling not yet defined. But if his current trajectory is anything to go by, he is not merely keeping pace with the great young talents who came before him; he is, quietly but unmistakably, beginning to outstrip them.

MOLOI: “I AM GLAD HIS FATHER IS A FORMER PLAYER WHO IS CLEARLY GUIDING HIM WELL – HE CAN EASILY GO ON TO BE ONE OF THE GREATEST PLAYERS THIS COUNTRY HAS EVER PRODUCED.”

A Pirates legend who was himself a child prodigy at the Buccaneers believes Mofokeng has actually already surpassed them and says that should the youngster be allowed to flourish, he is sure to have his name among the greats of not only the PSL era but of South African football period.

Teboho Moloi made his Pirates debut as a 19-year-old way back in 1987 and spent a decade at the club, scoring 33 times in 159 appearances – numbers Mofokeng should easily eclipse if he remained a Buccaneer for that long.

Mofokeng is way better than all of us, my dad and Kaizer included – Teboho Moloi

“He has done way better than all of us. I believe the local game is fortunate that Rele was discovered and brought into proper structures that have helped elevate him. The School of Excellence-background he has cannot be underestimated. And after that, he went into the DDC team, where he set the scene alight – where we all saw his potential, and he could then come into the senior team with his confidence sky high to supplement his immense talent.”

Moloi goes on to even suggest that what Mofokeng is doing is far better than what Pirates legends of the ilk of his late father, Percy Chippa Moloi, and the often incomparable Kaizer Motaung did for the Buccaneers, both of them having also debuted in their teens way back.

“The last time Pirates had something like this was with Kaizer and my dad, who arrived as youngsters and set the scene so alight they got nicknamed the terrible twins. Rele





does not have a twin but I believe he is just as good as those two if not better and he is worthy of all the praises he is getting and anyone who says it is too early to praise him is simply jealous. I don't think we should hold the young man back; he has to be allowed the space to shine – even on the world stage, just like Brazil did with Pelé when he was just 17. “

While not taking away from Mofokeng's incredible statistics and evident talent and abilities, Moloji believes the youngster was lucky to come into a team where he was needed – a team not teeming with great talent.

“Rele arrived at Pirates at the right time, and the blessing was that he had a place in a team that was not really blessed with someone of his immense talent. He came in and complimented the others.”

The man who played his football brings up the name of China Masondo, who could have done wonders just like Rele had he arrived at Pirates at a different time.

“We had a China Masondo who was also signed from the School of Excellence, and that boy was something special. Like Rele, he was from the Vaal and was similarly small in stature. But that's where the similarities end because while Rele got to Pirates at the right time, China came into a team of big star players. He came in as a 17-year-old and found it hard to break in despite his immense talent. And how could he when there were stalwarts such as Innocent Mncwango, Botsotso Makhanya, Vincent Sokhela, Aubrey Lekwane, John Moeti and myself in the midfield. On the wings we had the likes of Helman Mkhalele, Brandon Silent and Joseph Ngake. Also, remember that, unlike now, back then, body structure was a big consideration of the coaches; small players hardly made it. But I believe had China gotten a chance, he could have done the kind of things Rele is doing.”

Moloji also wonders just how much of an impact Teko Modise would have made had he made the professional ranks much earlier than he did.

“Yet, I ask myself, what would have Teko Modise done had he been given

MOLOI: “THE LAST TIME PIRATES HAD SOMETHING LIKE THIS WAS WITH KAIZER AND MY DAD, WHO ARRIVED AS YOUNGSTERS AND SET THE SCENE SO ALIGHT THEY GOT NICKNAMED THE TERRIBLE TWINS.”

the opportunity at the highest level as a teenager. I mean, the stories you hear of the player he was in the lower divisions tell you the boy was something else. And we saw it when he made the pro ranks. Late as it was, and that's why I am glad that Rele has been afforded this opportunity with no coach saying he is too young.”

Rele can go on to be SA's greatest player

What pleases Moloji about Mofokeng and has him anticipating a bright future that would not see the youngster being derailed is the support structure Rele enjoys.

“I am glad his father is a former player who is clearly guiding him well – he can easily go on to be one of the greatest players this country has ever produced. I'm thinking that if a player like Steve [Lekoelea] had the kind of support structure that Rele is enjoying, he probably would have gone very far. Rele has his head screwed properly on his shoulders, and that's what's going to help him go places. And believe me, the club – Pirates – have his interest at heart, and while everyone is calling for him to go overseas, I know that the Chairman will not stand in his way, but he is also not just going to let him go for the sake of it. This boy is a national asset, and when he goes, it is going to be at the right time to the right club where his career will only flourish.”

Meantime, you can bet on Mofokeng continuing to raise the bar and piling up statistics and performances hitherto unseen in the local game and ones that are likely to be surpassed in the near future.



KEET, MASHEGO & MAARMAN ELATED WITH HISTORIC NBC TRIUMPH

A lot was said about the 'low-keyness' of the 2026 Nedbank Cup final between newly crowned champions Durban City and TS Galaxy, especially given that it came on the back of last season's undeniable, attractive Soweto derby. Both sides, despite playing in the Betway Premiership, do not enjoy big support and had to make a trip to the far North of the country to fight for the Ke Yona Cup under the guidance of interim coaches Pitso Dladla and Bernard Parker. For City, who came from a goal down to win 2-1, they travelled just over 800 km and with the help of the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government, they had the backing of their home fans, who were ferried to Polokwane via buses. What was not low-key is how this is their first season in the top flight after gaining promotion from the Motsepe Foundation Championship in May last year. For most of the players assembled, to an extent, they were labelled 'has-beens' or 'rejects from elsewhere'. Not only did they help the club win their first Nedbank Cup, but they've also qualified for the CAF Confederation Cup for next season, while they are in a good position to finish inside the top eight in the league this campaign. Goalkeeper **DARREN KEET** has been the stalwart for the club, especially in the Cup run, having come from the relegated Cape Town City. Defender **TERRENCE MASHEGO** was signed on loan from Mamelodi Sundowns after struggling for game-time at his club, and winger **RONALDO MAARMAN** was also signed on a season-long loan deal from Sekhukhune United after spending just six months with Babina Noko. *iDiski Times* writer **LETHABO KGANYAGO** attended the final at the Peter Mokaba Stadium and spoke to the trio alongside other industry colleagues.

For Mashego, the sentiment is that he made a good decision to ask his parent club to go elsewhere.

Terrence Mashego: It's been a great time at Durban City because I managed to play all the games. The only games that I missed were when I was injured, and the other ones are obviously, I can't play against Sundowns. So for me as a player, it has been a great experience, I won't lie. I think I was the one who initiated the move, because I had a conversation with the sporting director of Sundowns, Mr Flemming Berg, and I told him about my situation and also what I want as a player. I know sometimes if you're not playing, it's very difficult. So we had a conversation, and then he told me that Durban City is interested, and I said, for me, I don't mind, as long as I know that I'm going to play, I wouldn't mind where I am.

Lethabo Kganyago: Do you feel vindicated about that decision you made? You won a Cup now and qualified for the CAF Confederation Cup as well.

TM: Yeah, I think it was a great decision because, you know, as a player, if you're not playing, it's frustrating sometimes. So for me to get game-time and also



MASHEGO: "WHAT WE DID WAS THAT WE MADE SURE THAT WE SAID, 'GUYS, WHAT HAPPENED AT CAPE TOWN CITY HAPPENED, BUT NOW WE ARE AT DURBAN CITY, WE JUST NEED TO REVIVE OURSELVES, WE JUST NEED TO REDEEM OURSELVES.'"

to meet great people like Darren Keet, it was very important. What I did was that when the chairman called me, he told me about the squad, he told me about his goals, and then I saw they have great players, especially the players that I played with at Cape Town City. So I thought it was an opportunity, and I believe it was a great moment.

How do you guys shake off that tag with players that came out of a team that was relegated, now with a team that's in the top eight?

TM: I think that was a motivation, because, you know, sometimes it's very difficult as a player, you come from relegation if you've relegated the team. So now you want to make sure that you do well. What we did was that we made sure that we said guys what happened at Cape Town City happened, but now we are at Durban City, we just need to revive ourselves, we just need to redeem ourselves. So it was important for us, especially because Darren Keet, Thabo Nodada and myself, we are the senior players in the team. So we had to lead the team.

LK: Coach Pitso is a very chilled guy who doesn't show emotions a lot. Do you guys get to see that side of him in the changing room, especially on a day like this?

TM: Coach Pitso is a great human being. I won't lie, he is a very nice coach, he's an easy person. It's easy to talk to him. He deserves this moment. Normally, he'll

tell us that he is still growing as a coach, so we need to at least make sure that we grow with him. So, it was important; this win was important for him.

Former Bafana Bafana goalkeeper Keet's family travelled to Limpopo to witness his side's success, and it was also an opportunity to announce his impending retirement from the game.

Your parents and family being here, what did it mean?

Darren Keet: Obviously, it's special. My parents have been there, obviously throughout my whole career; my dad's never really been one to be involved. So it's nice for him to enjoy these moments, for them to enjoy my last trophy. I'm hoping they enjoyed it. My dad cried a bit. I haven't cried yet, but when I saw some of the players crying, then you feel like crying also. But it's happy tears at the moment and happy smiles at the moment. But very special for me to have my family and my parents and my wife and my kids, just awesome, awesome experience overall.

Why haven't you cried?

DK: Not at the moment, no. I don't usually cry happy tears. I still get into trouble for not crying at my wedding. I'm actually happy. What makes me even more excited is seeing the players happy, seeing what they've achieved because, you know, goalkeepers, we are generally just in the background, and we're trying to push the team and the players to do better. And they showed up today, and I think it's fantastic for the team. It's fantastic for the boys, and I think that makes me happy.

LK: Last trophy, are you hinting at something, Darren?

DK: I'm not hinting at anything. I'm calling it quits at the end of this season. So the Nedbank Cup was my first, and the Nedbank Cup is my last [trophy].

LK: Going back to 2010, you guys opened the stadium, you look at that kid and this man...

DK: (Laughs) I was about five to 10 kilos lighter. I don't want to give anything away. But obviously still very young. I posted a picture the other day. It was 16 years ago, but yeah, the memories remain the same. There's no picture of me running around with a trophy here today, but I think at FNB, when we opened the stadium, it was absolutely awesome. I was on the bench for that game, but that didn't stop me. I was just as part of the team as everyone else, and it's the same today. We had some boys who obviously had to be there to get told they weren't in the squad for today, but I think everyone's part of the team, and we're all going to celebrate this together.

LK: A lot of people, including Andile Jali, have been saying you are their pick for Player of the Tournament. Would that be the cherry on top if it happened?

DK: It's a difficult one, and I've said it in all the interviews, I'm just happy we won the trophy, and that's the most important to me. I won't say it's a cherry on top. I'm not too worried about that, because individual things, it's not my thing. When



KEET: "I'M CALLING IT QUITS AT THE END OF THIS SEASON. SO THE NEDBANK CUP WAS MY FIRST, AND THE NEDBANK CUP IS MY LAST."

you get the trophy, you'll be happy. I'm telling you, I would be happy. But at the moment, I'm not worried about it. I want to go have a beer with the boys. Have some champagne with my wife and my family, and that's it.

LK: The team is going to Africa, so now you're saying that you are retiring, which means they'll go without you...

DK: Yeah, they will. There are good young keepers here. We've got Asare [Fredrick], we've got Aden Dreyer, and they've got a job to do, and I'm pretty confident, and I'm sure the club is confident, and Coach Rowen [Fernandez] is confident that they'll be able to do the job. I want to start with my coaching career. I want to get my coaching career started, and yeah, there's no better time than to do it now, end off on a high. I'm not going to wait till my career starts to fizzle out and then call it a day; I'll do so while I'm on top.

LK: Was that the motivation to come and perform this season after what happened last season?

DK: No, not at all. I decided this around October after my wife told me she's sick of living in Cape Town, and I'm on my own, and she has to look after the kids. I get to have a free time, go to

training. I do play golf, and I go home every day. My wife did tell me that she's not doing this year again. And that's when I decided, okay, cool. I started putting my fingers out to kind of get a coaching job, and yeah, all of those things are in place at the moment and we made a decision. I would say, in about November, October, December, somewhere around that time. I'm not 100% sure, but that's when I made the decision. But I wanted to focus on this club achieving its goals first before I decided to say anything.

LK: We saw when one of the subs was made, we saw you going there, to share a message and the role that you are playing in this team...

DK: There are two things. Obviously, I just wanted to give Thabo [Nodada] a boost. He was initially in the starting line-up. He got taken out for Trevor Mokwena. It was a last-minute decision. You know, boys are boys. The team was taken aback because we also only found out, and that's why I always speak about the resilience of this team. And I just wanted to give him a boost to say, let's go and then the other message was for him to let Samkelo [Maseko] know that he must be patient on the side, because our chance will come. In the second half, he wasn't getting a lot of the ball because we found spaces on the left side, so he had to stay patient. And that was just a message, more just encouragement, stay ready, be patient, and our chances will come.

LK: The boy, Lumphumlo Sifumba comes at half-time, he creates two assists, and for the better part of this season he's not been playing. What can you say about Kaka?

DK: Look, it's a difficult one because he's very good, technically he's good, he's still young, he shows his qualities a lot, but he wants to show it too much sometimes. So again, he was one of the players I told, just relax, take your time on the ball. Don't try to do anything, it will come, it will happen. The more you keep it simple, the more it happens. And I think again, my message to him, if he ever sees this, is just to keep football simple, because your technical ability will take over eventually. The more simple you keep the game, the better it will look, and you won't end up losing too many balls, and you end up helping the team a lot more.

Maarman, 26, embodied the champion spirit, wearing sunglasses indoors and his gold medal hanging on his neck. There was also humility about what he and teammates have achieved, calling the season the best so far for the club.

LK: Ronaldo, please take us through this success. What does it mean for Durban City?

Ronaldo Maarman: It means a lot. You know there's been a lot of ups and downs, and we've been pushing, and we've been together as a team, as a unit and as a club. This means a lot to us as Durban City. This is our first year in topflight, and it's a very successful one so far, and it means a lot for us.



MAARMAN: "NOW WE CAN GO ON OUR BUCKET LIST AND TICK THINGS OFF LIKE PLAYING IN THE CONFEDERATION CUP, FLYING ABROAD AND REPRESENTING SOUTH AFRICA."

LK: And you have also qualified for the CAF Confederation Cup...

RM: Even better. You know now we can go on our bucket list and tick things off like playing in the Confederation Cup, flying abroad and representing South Africa. It feels amazing, and it feels like we want more of this. We are very good, and we are very happy, and we are very proud of one another. It means a lot for us.

LK: What is it about this team, I mean, you guys have come through penalties, gruelling semis coming from a goal down today, through all those challenges, not giving up?

RM: Like I said in the quarter-final draw, we have a very talented group of players, and talented people solve problems on the pitch regardless of what's happening and outside. On the pitch, talent will always find a solution and will always find a way to win at the end of the day. Like one famous coach said, 'Finals are not played, they are won'.

LK: Chairman Farouk Kadodia has bled and done so much for this club. What does it mean to you guys to be able to give him this trophy?

RM: You know it means a lot with him backing us, and you know it gives us a lot of confidence and freedom on the pitch. When you have a boss that is so open with all his players, and you can go to him, and you can talk to him, you know it gives us a lot of confidence. And it's a good relationship where when he asks something, we deliver, and we do our best, and when we ask something, it's a healthy relationship between us and the chairman.

LK: Congratulations.

“PIRATES ARE A SPECIAL TEAM, AND I LOVE IT HERE”



APPOLLIS SETS STAGE ALIGHT IN BREAKTHROUGH YEAR

By Rob Delpont

It has already been quite a year for Oswin Appollis, and somehow, it still feels like the Bafana Bafana star's story is only just beginning.

Rewind the clock twelve months, and the 24-year-old Capetonian was still turning out for Polokwane City, playing what would ultimately be his final chapters in the colours of Rise and Shine.

There was no grand stage then, no roaring expectation, but within a matter of months, the script would flip dramatically, as a move to Orlando Pirates beckoned.

But back in April 2025, fate had a sense of irony; Appollis was not yet a Buccaneer; he was preparing to face them. And truth be told, that period was anything but smooth. They lost to Pirates as form deserted Polokwane. Between April and August 2025, victory became a rare and fleeting companion, the only glimpse of joy arriving for Oswin in the green and gold of Bafana Bafana, in a friendly triumph over Mozambique. But even with Bafana, there were worries, especially after their World Cup qualification chances took a knock after a three-point deduction. For a player who had spent years hinting at something special, it might have felt like the rhythm had been broken.

Yet, if Appollis' journey has taught us anything, it is that his story has never been linear. It has always been one of flickers before flame.

Rewind the clock even further back, and the signs were always there. From the 15-year-old with quick feet and quicker ideas that I first saw at Ajax Cape Town almost a decade ago; to the teen who would go on to sweep up individual

youth accolades; to a standout in the SuperSport United Diski Challenge side; to his contributions with Amajita, the spark never disappeared. Even during his loan spell at the University of Pretoria, there were flashes, moments where you could see something trying to break through.

There were concerns, briefly. His premature departure from SuperSport after a spat with the coach, a few months spent without a club; periods where careers can drift into obscurity. But fortunately, he was still young and learned his lessons quickly. He got his second chance at Pretoria Callies, under the familiar guidance of Kwanele Kopo, and the ember began to glow again.

“I knew Coach Kopo from SuperSport time, and I'm grateful to him for reaching out and giving me another opportunity,” Appollis told me after joining Callies.

“We spoke, and every day I learn something new off the field and on the field from him.

“About Coach Kaitano Tembo (at SuperSport), I learned a lot of good stuff when I was working with him. The off-the-field stuff came from me. He was never the problem. I messed up, and I take full responsibility for what happened to me in that few months. I put myself in that mess.”

Owning his mistakes became the turning point in Appollis's revival, a moment where accountability gave way to renewal. Those around him couldn't miss the transformation: a sharper mindset, a steely resolve, and a visible hunger to rise again, as he channelled setbacks into fuel for his comeback.

“Yeah, amazing, it shows the type of person he is, and the character,” Bafana

**RONWEN WILLIAMS:
“HE’S THE PLAYER HE IS,
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captain Ronwen Williams said about Appollis during April’s Bafana camp.

“I think three years ago, he was without a team, and he was going through it. I had a lot of chats with Oswin because we shared so much, you know, our backgrounds, the communities where we come from, and obviously, I was his captain at SuperSport United as well. And to see where he is now, amazing.

“You know, you can just praise him. You can’t praise him enough for what he’s done over the last few years, because it’s not easy in today’s world. It is very difficult to be a professional and a professional who shows up every week, who shows his level. He’s been consistent, I think, for the last two, three years, for the national team as well. So it speaks volumes of the type of person.

“He’s the player he is, and I’m just happy to see that he isn’t one of the negative stories that in South Africa that we have so many of. He’s one of the positive ones, and one that we need to use as a perfect example.”

After a good campaign for Callies, he

was snapped up by Polokwane, who had just been promoted to the Premiership, and that glow became unmistakable, the first real signs of fire. It was impossible to ignore. It was enough to convince Hugo Broos, and Appollis earned his first call-ups to the national team towards the end of 2023, and was a member of the bronze-winning squad at the AFCON in the Ivory Coast. And in 2024, he became a regular on the international stage, and the fire spread.

Now, becoming a Buccaneer demanded something more. It demanded flames at once. And Appollis delivered almost immediately.

A match-winning performance on debut against his former team in the MTN8 did not just announce his arrival; it ignited it. A month later, in the final, two assists helped secure silverware, his first major trophy, and a statement that this was no fleeting moment, but the beginning of something sustained.

From there, the rhythm returned, and with it, the numbers.

Goals against Lesotho and Rwanda,

OSWIN: "IN A WAY, LOOKING AT THE STATS, I COULD'VE DONE MORE... BETTER."

coupled with creative brilliance, helped steer Bafana toward qualification for the FIFA World Cup.

At club level, he became central to Pirates' surge, driving them to Carling Knockout glory and powering them to the summit of the Betway Premiership as 2025 drew to a close.

"Pirates are a special team, and I love it here," Appollis told me.

"And amazing to win two trophies (so quickly).

"It was very important playing and working hard when I came to Pirates, and the club, players, background staff, everyone helped me, and I'm grateful."

Even in disappointment, he found a way to leave his mark. Bafana's Last-16 exit at the CAF Africa Cup of Nations stung, but Appollis still struck twice in the tournament (against Angola and Zimbabwe), small reminders that even when the collective falters, individuals can still shine.

And the momentum has not slowed in 2026. Since the turn of the year, he has continued to stack contributions. Goals, assists, decisive moments, including another strike for Bafana against Panama just last month. The numbers tell one story. The confidence, the swagger, the sense of inevitability in his play tell another. There's a good reason he's been in conversations for the Footballer of the Season.

"In a way, looking at the stats, I could've done more... better," Oswin says.

"And I want to reach more of it with assists and goals for the team, and working hard for the team."

Now, the horizon stretches even wider. His immediate task is clear: to help keep Orlando Pirates firmly in the title race. Four games to go, and while the title race is now firmly in Mamelodi Sundowns' hands, should Pirates find a way to edge past the defending champions, it would be a fitting crescendo to a remarkable rise, a season that began in uncertainty but still hums with possibility.

"Our job now is just to focus on one game at a time," Appollis says.

"And we will see what happens and if we work hard, but with one game at a time!"

But even that may only be a chapter. Because barring the unexpected, Appollis is no longer knocking on the door of the World Cup; he is walking towards it. A place in Hugo Broos' squad for Mexico, the USA and Canada feels less like a hope and more like an inevitability.

"It was special for everyone in South Africa, all of the people are happy that we qualified for the World Cup," Appollis says, but he's not taking his place in the squad for granted.

"But my focus is on the club football now, and to work hard for the national team coach to choose me."

What began as a year of questions has become a year of answers. A spark has become a flame, and that flame is threatening to become something far more enduring.

It has already been quite a year for Oswin Appollis. And yet, the feeling lingers; the biggest moments could still be coming.



INSIDE THE CLUB THAT REWROTE GERMAN FOOTBALL & WHY SOUTH AFRICA IS NEXT

By Lorenz Köhler

A black Volkswagen Transporter Kombi was waiting at Leipzig Airport – a quiet, deliberate arrangement that set the tone for everything that followed. RB Leipzig had been expecting me, and they wanted me to know it.

The one-week tour started with a drive to the training centre on Cottaweg, which takes you through a city that wears its history quietly. Leipzig is old in the way that only Central European cities can be – layers of it compressed into the architecture, the broad avenues that once carried GDR traffic and now carry cyclists and trams. And then the complex comes into view: a gleaming, angular structure of folded aluminium panels that catches what little light the Saxon morning offers and throws it back at you. It looks less like a football training facility and more like the European headquarters of a technology company. Which, in a very real sense, is exactly what it is. Christian Geidus, the club's International Media Officer, was waiting at the entrance of the training centre as I walked in – warm, organised, immediately making clear that we were in good hands. What followed was a week in which RB Leipzig took care of everything, from start to finish. Lunch inside the vast facility on that first day. Dinner in the evening. Time to explore the city properly – including a boat ride along Leipzig's scenic river network, the kind of unhurried afternoon that lets a place reveal itself on its own terms. All of it building deliberately towards the main event: a Bundesliga fixture at the Red Bull Arena on the Friday evening, with Champions League qualification on the line.

This is a club that did not exist 16 years ago. A club that was mocked, protested against, and dismissed as a soulless corporate gimmick. A club that is now a fixture in the UEFA Champions League and one of the most analytically advanced football organisations on the planet. The story of how that happened is one of the most fascinating in modern football – and it starts, improbably, in a small town 13 kilometres west of Leipzig.

Lawn Ball Sports and Other Beautiful Lies

The German Football Association, the DFB, is among the most protective governing bodies in European football. Its 50+1 rule prevents any single investor from acquiring a controlling majority stake in a German club – a system built on tradition and the deeply held belief that football belongs to its communities, not to shareholders. It is a rule that has shaped German football culture profoundly, producing fan ownership, standing terraces, affordable tickets, and some of the most passionate supporter culture on the continent.

Red Bull GmbH saw the rules clearly, and then read them very carefully indeed.

Rather than attempting to acquire a top-division club – which would have triggered immediate legal challenges, they purchased the playing licence of a fifth-tier side that existed entirely outside the DFB's licensing structure. The club they found was SSV Markranstädt, a modest amateur outfit from a quiet town on the western outskirts of Leipzig, founded in 1912 and known to almost nobody outside Saxony. Five weeks of negotiations later, SSV Markranstädt had agreed to sell its Oberliga licence to Red Bull GmbH for a reported compensation of €350,000. RasenBallSport Leipzig e.V. was officially founded on 19 May 2009.

The name itself is a masterpiece of creative circumvention. The DFB had successfully prevented the club from being officially named Red Bull, so the owners invented an entirely new word, RasenBallSport, loosely translating as “sports played with a ball on a lawn” – ensuring that when abbreviated, the club would be known as RB Leipzig. A thinly veiled reference, universally understood, and entirely within the letter of the law. Red Bull had found their way in.

German football fans were not amused. The first time Leipzig visited Union Berlin, the page in the match programme dedicated to the visiting club's history was replaced with instructions on how to breed bulls. Banners were unfurled at grounds across the country. A team from Fortuna Düsseldorf updated their club statutes specifically to avoid playing friendlies against them. Rival supporters, custodians of tradition, saw in RB Leipzig



an existential threat to everything they believed football should be. But Leipzig had not come to make friends. They had come to win.

The City That Invented German Football

To understand why Red Bull chose Leipzig, you need to understand what the city means to German football – and what it had lost.

The DFB was founded in Leipzig in 1900. VfB Leipzig were the first-ever German national champions. The city has football in its bloodstream.

But it also carries a complicated past shaped by the Second World War, communist rule under the GDR, and the upheaval of reunification. FC Lokomotiv Leipzig had reached the European Cup Winners' Cup final as recently as 1987. By the mid-1990s, Leipzig's top-flight representation had all but vanished, the clubs hollowed out by structural chaos.

When Red Bull arrived, they were not entering a thriving scene. They were entering a void – and they brought a plan to fill it with €50 million, a new identity, a 40k+ capacity stadium, and a world-class training facility.

The Red Bull Arena is remarkable not merely because it is modern, but because of what lies beneath it — and around it. Built inside the shell of the former Zentralstadion – constructed in 1950 from World War II rubble, once the largest stadium in Germany — the new arena was essentially erected within the bones of the old one.

The silhouette of the original structure remains intact from the outside, meaning you approach what looks like a historic GDR-era ground and step inside to find a gleaming, modern 47,800-seat arena. More striking still: the original seats of the old Zentralstadion were retained and are still part of the new structure. Standing in the concourse during the stadium tour, looking at those seats — weathered, historic, belonging to a different era entirely – embedded within a venue that now hosts Champions League football, is one of those moments that stops you in your tracks. It is, in miniature, the entire story of Leipzig: old and new, history and ambition, occupying exactly the same space.

“THIS IS A CLUB THAT DID NOT EXIST 16 YEARS AGO. A CLUB THAT WAS MOCKED, PROTESTED AGAINST, AND DISMISSED AS A SOULLESS CORPORATE GIMMICK. A CLUB THAT IS NOW A FIXTURE IN THE UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE.”

The Factory

The real foundations of Leipzig's success were laid in the summer of 2012, when Ralf Rangnick — previously coach at Schalke, Hoffenheim, and later briefly Manchester United – arrived as sporting director while the club was still competing in the fourth tier.

Rangnick brought with him a fully formed football philosophy: high-intensity pressing, rapid transitions, structured attacking play, and above all, a relentless commitment to developing young talent. It was a system that demanded not just good players, but the right environment to produce and refine them.

That environment is the 18,800 square-metre training centre I was now being guided through. Completed in 2015 at a cost of €30 million, it is a boarding school, a performance centre and an education facility rolled into one striking architectural statement.

Recovery pools, sports science labs, tactical meeting rooms with floor-to-ceiling screens, natural and artificial pitches, and a sprinting hill. The club's own management calls it one of the most dynamic performance centres in Germany. Walking through it, that claim requires no leap of faith.

I was not the only visitor taking it all in. Alongside me on the tour was Surprise Moriri, Hlompho Kekana, and fellow media colleagues and content creators – but speaking to the Mamelodi Sundowns club legend, former Bafana Bafana midfielder, and a man who has spent his career in and around elite football environments, his reaction was immediate and unambiguous.

“When you look at how they develop their players, you see we're not far apart,” Moriri said.



“Same concept, different age groups. And in terms of coaches as well, up-skilling of coaches. If you want to produce better players, you need to up-skill your coaches, which is very critical.”

What struck Moriri most was not the scale of the complex but the intentionality embedded in every single design decision. The RBL Football Academy, located next to the Red Bull Arena, serves age groups from the under-13s through to the under-19s — all of them training at Cottaweg alongside the first team. That proximity is entirely deliberate. Young players see the senior squad every day: in the cafeteria, the lounge, the gym, on the training pitch. The message, delivered without a single word being spoken, is constant — this is where you are going.

“The layout of the training centre and how they can see the seniors — just to raise those aspirations,” Moriri observed. “From the under-12s, the dressing room gets bigger at each age group until the senior team. You are always looking forward to the next step. The vision is clear from the moment you start, the dream is kept alive, and there are small details inside the academy that remind players of where they want to be.”

Those details are everywhere. In the tunnel leading to the home dressing room at the Red Bull Arena, the walls are lined with charging bulls. But Moriri noticed something that many visitors miss entirely.

“In the home side, the bull runs with you,” he said. “Crazy attention to detail in everything they do. The investment they made in these facilities — you see serious business. The technology they have to develop players with technical skills and sports science. Amazing.”

The names that have passed through this system are now familiar to every serious football supporter: Joshua Kimmich, Timo Werner, Naby Keïta, Dayot Upamecano, Dominik Szoboszlai, Dani Olmo.

Since Red Bull’s acquisition of Salzburg in 2005 and Leipzig in 2009, the two clubs have sold an estimated £800 million worth of talent between them. Head of Sport Marcel Schäfer is entirely unapologetic about the model.

“It’s part of our DNA,” he told me. “Our best players left our club — but if you

MORIRI: “WHEN YOU LOOK AT HOW THEY DEVELOP THEIR PLAYERS, YOU SEE WE’RE NOT FAR APART.”

have a clear philosophy to develop young, hungry, high-potential players, you write successful stories. That brings you to the focus of other top talents in the world. Leipzig is famous for these win-win situations. Players were never blocked here. Never. We know that Real Madrid is Real Madrid, Barcelona is Barcelona. We accept that players have dreams of going to those five or 10 top clubs in the world. We respect that. But we are a club who can help players achieve their dreams on the way there — and that is why we are so successful in signing them.”

It is a philosophy that requires constant emotional discipline. When asked about the title aspirations, Schäfer was honest but un-deflated.

“If Bayern struggles, we will do everything to compete for the championship. But the first step is to be in the Champions League every season. We want to compete for trophies — we have won trophies. It is not impossible when you have big dreams and the willingness to work and invest.”

A Friday Night in Leipzig

Few people in that ground have witnessed the full arc of this club’s rise quite like goalkeeper Péter Gulácsi. Hungarian, quietly spoken, and in his eleventh season at Leipzig, he carries in him the institutional memory of everything that has been built — the doubts, the promotions, the European nights, and the growing conviction that this is a club that belongs at the top table.

“The journey we made together has been fantastic,” he said. “When I signed, we had a vision of promoting the club to the Bundesliga, to eventually play a role internationally. But everything happened a lot quicker than everyone expected. It took us two years to go from the second division to qualifying for the UEFA Champions League.” He paused. “If someone had told me 12 years ago — Pete, you will come here, and in two years you will play in the Champions League — I would probably not have believed that person. But we had the right people at the club, and since then, we’ve had the right people bringing this vision further and





further. That has made me very proud.”

On an icy Friday evening, I arrived, entering via the VIP entrance, escorted to dinner before noting members of the club, notably youthful, doing stadium tours, with several groups of people, families, which is said to cost around R600 per ticket and done on each and every match day. From the parking lot to the dressing rooms, press areas and even on the pitch. But shortly after that, I was pitch-side, with Bully the Mascot. Soaking in the atmosphere. Alongside the players warming up with the noise extraordinary — that particular sound of a compact modern bowl where the roof traps the crowd and amplifies it back at you.

A win would confirm Champions League qualification for another season. The players knew it. The fans knew it. For 90 minutes, Leipzig played like a team that understood exactly what was at stake – pressing relentlessly, transitioning with precision, defending with discipline. A 3-1 victory, fully deserved. When the final whistle blew, the stadium erupted with the particular joy of a club still young enough to celebrate milestones rather than take them for granted.

Coming to South Africa

But let’s take it back to the previous morning, over coffee with club officials in the gleaming headquarters, the conversation turned to South Africa – and to why I had really been invited. Marcel Schäfer’s connection to the country runs deeper than you might expect from a German football executive.

“One of my teammates in my youth times was Lance Davids, a former South Africa national team player,” he said. “And I have been several times with my family for vacations in South Africa. We really love the country, the culture, the people, the kindness – how they welcome us. It is heartwarming. For us, it is a privilege to come to South Africa, to make connections with people, to learn more about the culture and the country, because we highly appreciate their passion for football. It is something that brings people globally together. And that is why we are coming.”

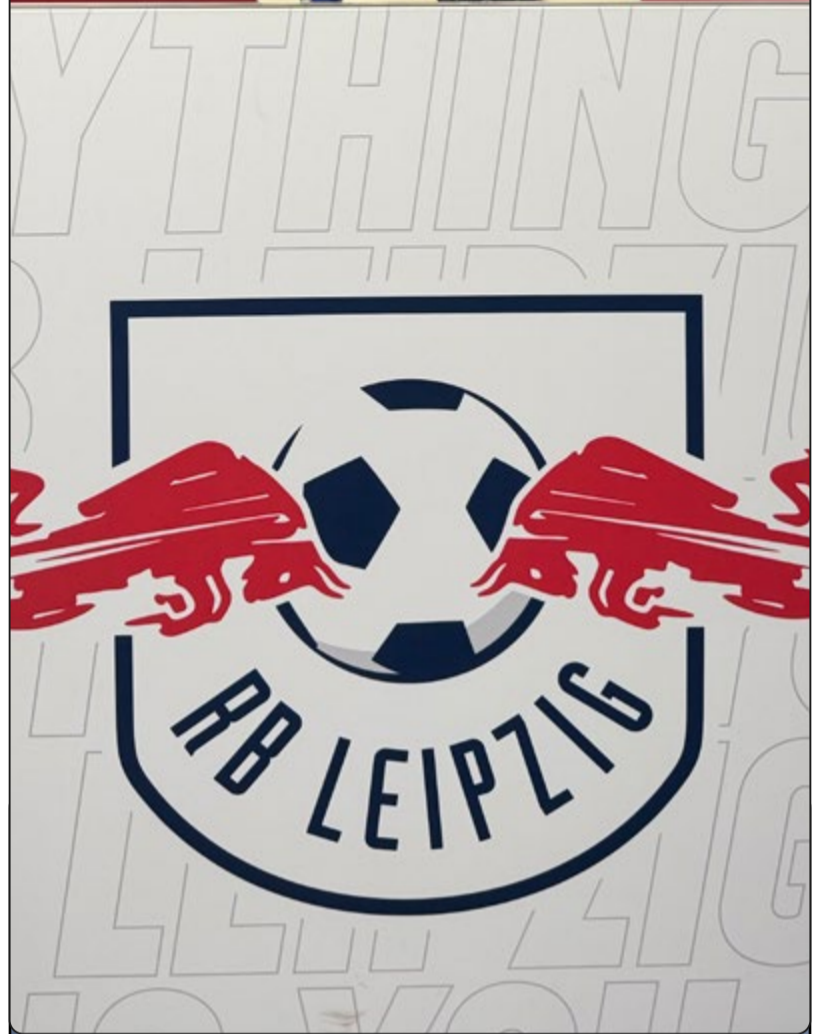
As part of the ‘RE KAOFELA’ tour – a Sotho phrase meaning ‘All Together’ – RB Leipzig will be based in Johannesburg from 26 to 30 May 2026, with the centrepiece being a friendly against Mamelodi Sundowns at the historic Lucas Moripe Stadium in Pretoria on 29 May, kicking off at 20:00.

The match will be broadcast live on SABC 3. It is Leipzig’s third major international post-season tour in as many years, following trips to the United States in 2024 and Brazil in 2025 – a deliberate, systematic effort to build a global footprint that matches their European ambitions.

The idea was born directly from Sundowns’ appearance at the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup, which introduced the Pretoria club to a new generation of European observers, whilst also being backed by Red Bull and PUMA.

For South African supporters, the significance is hard to overstate. Sundowns previously hosted FC Barcelona in 2018. Now another elite European club is making the journey – and this time, the invitation came because of what Sundowns have become on the world stage.

Former Sundowns captain and club



GULÁCSI: “IT TOOK US TWO YEARS TO GO FROM THE SECOND DIVISION TO QUALIFYING FOR THE UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE.”

ambassador Hlompho Kekana captured the spirit of the occasion perfectly: “Having captained Mamelodi Sundowns against Barcelona in 2018, I personally know the players will be competitive. We cannot wait to display our style of play – shoe shine and piano – to the world, once again.”

The fixture brings together two clubs that share more than geography separates them. Both are built on high-tempo football, strong development pipelines and growing global ambition.

Sundowns’ dominance of the PSL and their sustained CAF Champions League campaigns speak to a club operating at a genuinely elite level on the continent.

Leipzig, for their part, represents something equally compelling — proof that with the right philosophy, the right infrastructure and the right people, a club can be built from nothing into a European force within a single generation.

For South African fans who have followed the Bundesliga from a distance, the match on 29 May offers something rare: a chance to see up close, in the flesh, exactly what all the fuss is about. And for RB Leipzig, it is another chapter in a story that continues to move faster than almost anyone thought possible.

Sixteen years ago, they did not exist. Now they are coming to South Africa. Some stories really do move that fast.





THE IDISKI TOP 10.. SUPER SUBS

This week, iDiski Times takes a look at the top 10 Super Subs currently performing in the Betway Premiership, based on statistics of the 2025/26 season.

Our list's order is based on overall performance, using statistics and ratings from various football analytics companies, with the order based on how many appearances off the bench were made.

Not every game is won by those who start it; sometimes, it's the players emerging from the bench, stepping into the fray at just the right moment, who tilt the balance. This list shines a light on some of those unsung contributors in the Betway Premiership.

To qualify, a player must have played in over 60% of their club's fixtures.

(*statistics as of 3 May 2026)

The Top 10:

10 Ayanda Lukhele ORBIT College

13 Substitute Appearances (19 games)

Ayanda Lukhele has been the most frequently deployed substitute for ORBIT College, registering 13 appearances from the bench. His return of two goals and a 6.60 average points to a player still finding his rhythm at this level, but one trusted to make a difference when introduced.

9 Mondli Mbanjwa Amazulu

13 Substitute Appearances (21 games)

Mondli Mbanjwa has had to make do with a cameo role for Amazulu, featuring 13 times as a substitute, adding a sharp edge in front of goal with three strikes and a 6.75 average rating.

8 Mory Keita TS Galaxy

13 Substitute Appearances (18 games)

Mory Keita, representing TS Galaxy, has brought an international flavour to the list. The Ivorian forward has stepped off the bench 13 times, producing three goals and an assist. With a 6.60 average rating, his contributions have been solid, if not spectacular, another example of a player capable of influencing matches without always dominating them.

7 Andiswa Sithole Amazulu

13 Substitute Appearances (16 games)

Like Mbanjwa, Andiswa Sithole has been cast firmly as an Usuthu impact player, starting just three matches but coming off the bench 13 times. His



two assists reflect a player who can influence games in short bursts, offering energy and intent when matches begin to open up.

6 Abbey Seseane Magesi

14 Substitute Appearances (16 games)

14 appearances belong to Abbey Seseane at Magesi, though his role has leaned more toward linking play than finishing it. With two assists and a 6.56 average, he's quietly contributed to his team's rhythm when called upon, even if the spotlight hasn't always followed.

5 Saziso Magawana Durban City

14 Substitute Appearances (26 games)

For Durban City, Saziso Magawana has proven to be one of the most effective impact players in the league. Fourteen times he's been introduced from the bench, and more often than not, he's delivered. Three goals and five assists, alongside a 6.84 average rating, tell the story of a player who thrives in the chaos of the latter stages, finding gaps, creating chances, and unsettling defences already stretched.

4 Jaisen Clifford Marumo Gallants

15 Substitute Appearances (19 games)

Jaisen Clifford, now with Marumo Gallants, has embraced the art of the cameo with greater success. Fifteen substitute appearances have yielded four goals, underlining his ability to make an impression even in limited minutes. With a 6.77 average rating, his return to South African football has been defined less by long runs in the starting XI and more by sharp, timely contributions.

3 Ashley Cupido Stellenbosch

16 Substitute Appearances (21 games)

Things have been more challenging for Ashley Cupido at Stellenbosch. The Bafana Bafana forward has been called upon 16 times from the bench, but the returns have been modest. A solitary assist and no league goals, paired with a 6.44 average rating, hint at a season where opportunities haven't quite translated into impact. Yet strikers are often judged in streaks, and Cupido remains the kind of player who can change a narrative with a single moment.

2 Puleng Marema Polokwane City

19 Substitute Appearances (20 games)

Puleng Marema, the club captain of Polokwane City, follows closely behind, redefining what it means to lead from the bench. Nineteen substitute

appearances in 20 matches might seem unusual for a skipper, but Marema has embraced the role with maturity and influence. Averaging 6.77, he's chipped in with a goal and four assists, often arriving at precisely the moment his side needs a steadying presence or a spark of creativity. For coach Phuti Mohafe, he's become a trusted second-half weapon, experienced, composed, and effective.

1 Tshepo Mokoane Sekhukhune United

21 Substitute Appearances (22 games)

At the top of the pile sits Tshepo Mokoane, a player who has practically made the bench his domain. In 22 matches, he's featured 21 times as a substitute, a remarkable statistic that speaks volumes about his role within the squad. At just 24, the midfielder has become a go-to option when legs tire and spaces open up. While many of his appearances have been fleeting cameos, he's also been trusted with extended minutes on occasion, even crossing the 45-minute mark three times. His return, two goals and an assist, with a 6.64 average rating, suggests a player still searching for consistency, but undeniably important to his team's tactical flexibility.



What this list tells us:

While there have been several eye-catching cameos from the bench this season, a closer look reveals something more nuanced beneath the surface. For some players, the role of substitute has not been an occasional assignment, but a defining feature of their campaign, shaped by circumstance, strategy, and sometimes simply the stage of their careers.

Take Puleng Marema at Polokwane, for instance. Here is a seasoned campaigner being carefully managed, his minutes rationed as he navigates the latter stretch of his playing days. His introductions are measured, deliberate, less about urgency, more about control, experience, and knowing exactly when a game needs calming or guiding.

Contrast that with Tshepo Mokoane at Sekhukhune, whose role has been almost entirely tactical. He has become the quintessential “super sub,” a player deployed to shift momentum, tweak shape, or inject fresh energy as matches evolve. In his case, the bench is not a limitation, but a tool, one his coaches have used repeatedly in search of marginal gains.

Across the league, the pattern becomes clear. Substitutions are often made with a single purpose: to chase a goal. Sometimes that gamble pays off. Players like Jaisen Clifford at Gallants or Saziso Magawana at Durban City have shown a knack for arriving late and making things happen, turning brief appearances into tangible returns. In other cases, the impact has been harder to find. Ashley Cupido at Stellenbosch, for example, has been given repeated opportunities from the bench but has struggled to convert those chances into goals, highlighting just how fine the margins can be in that role.

And then some sit just outside the top ten but demand attention nonetheless.

Mfundo Vilakazi of Kaizer Chiefs falls squarely into that category. With 12 substitute appearances and only five starts, he might not dominate the raw appearance charts, but his influence is unmistakable. An average rating of 6.98, the highest among this group, along with two goals and an assist, paints the picture of a player making every minute count. More than that, it suggests a young talent steadily building a case, quietly but convincingly, for a more permanent role in the starting XI.

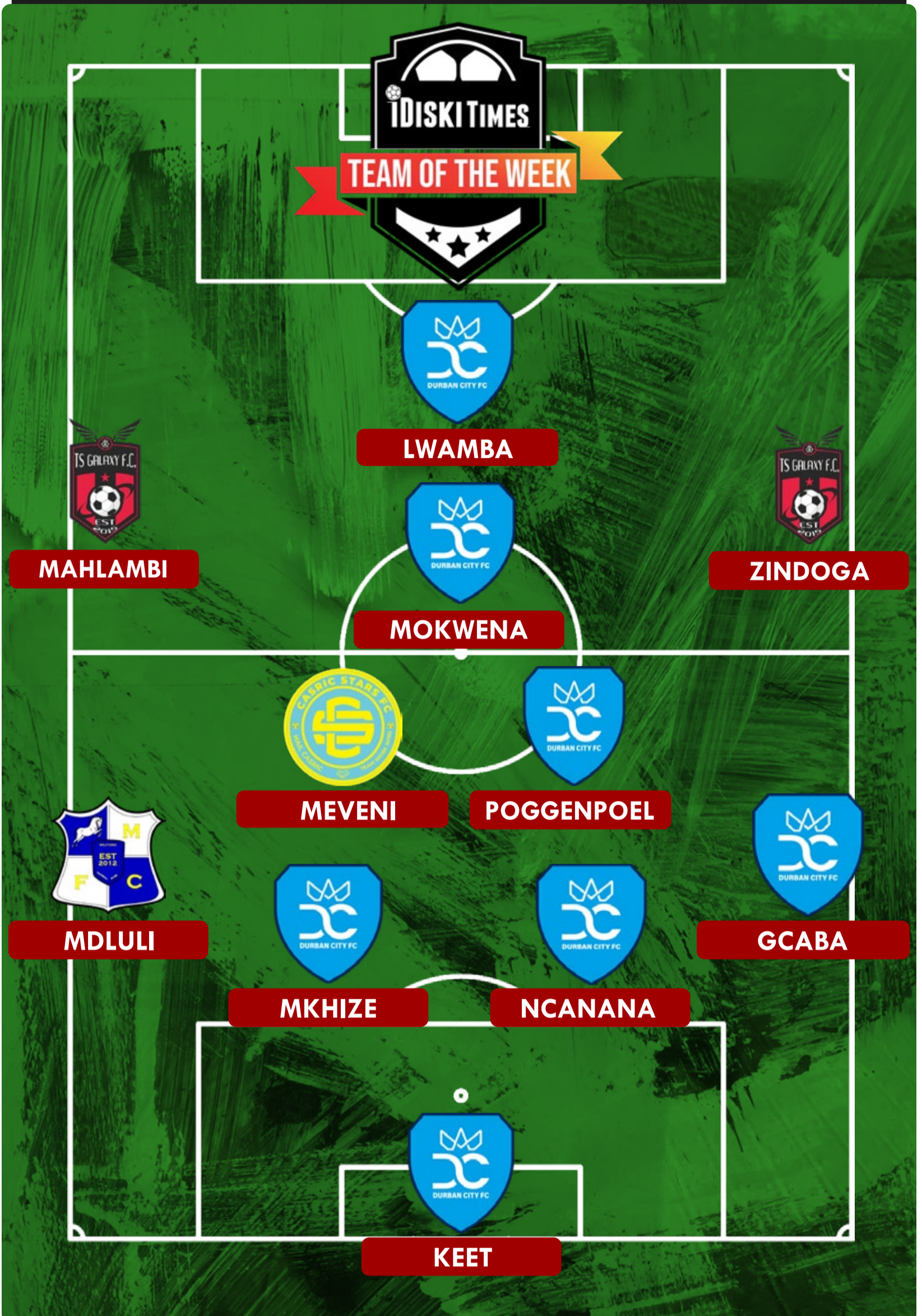
It is also worth bearing in mind that players introduced from the bench tend, more often than not, to post slightly lower analytical ratings, and that's not necessarily a reflection of poorer performance. Rather, it's a consequence of circumstance. With fewer minutes at their disposal, substitutes are asked to make an impression in condensed bursts of time, often entering matches that are already stretched, chaotic, or tactically unbalanced. Unlike starters, who have the luxury of settling into a rhythm and influencing the game across its full arc, those coming on late are judged within narrower windows, where a handful of touches, or the lack of them, can disproportionately shape their overall evaluation.

In that sense, the numbers can sometimes obscure as much as they reveal. A substitute might change the tempo, create space, or shift momentum in subtle ways that don't always translate cleanly into ratings. Their role is often about immediacy rather than accumulation, impact over duration, and that makes their contributions harder to quantify, even if they are no less significant.

Ultimately, this season's substitute trends tell a broader story about the evolving nature of the game. The bench is no longer just a place for rotation or recovery; it is a tactical frontier, a space where matches can be reshaped, rescued, or even won. And for those who have embraced that role, whether by design or necessity, it has become a proving ground in its own right.



IDISKI'S TEAM OF THE NEDBANK CUP



ACES OF THE WEEK: KRUGER UNITED

This week, Kruger United take their place as iDiski Times' Aces of the Week after sealing the Motsepe Foundation Championship title and securing promotion to the Betway Premiership. It marks a truly extraordinary rise for the Mpumalanga outfit, a club only established in 2023 in the ABC Motsepe leagues. In the space of just a few short years, they have surged from the amateur ranks to the summit of the second tier, spending only two seasons in professional football before achieving this milestone. Credit goes to Abram Mongoya and his squad, who wrapped up the title in emphatic fashion on Saturday with a 3–1 victory over Black Leopards. The result opened up an unassailable lead at the top, with two matches still remaining, a fitting conclusion to a campaign defined by momentum, belief, and a relentless drive forward.



The World & South Africa

We continue our 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.

CHIPPA'S STORY: FORGED IN PRIDE AND PAIN

By Rob Delpont

The story of Phil Masinga cannot be measured in goals alone. It is a story that moves in waves, of hope and hardship, triumph and doubt, a deeply human journey shaped as much by circumstance as by talent. To many, he will always be Chippa, the towering striker with the soft-spoken voice and thunderous presence on the pitch. But behind that nickname lay a life far more layered than the highlights suggest.

He was born and raised in Khuma, a township on the outskirts of Klerksdorp in South Africa's North West Province, a place where opportunity, outside of the mines, rarely arrived. Football, for Masinga, was played in the dusty fields and mine leagues that dotted the region. It was there, among amateur players chasing pride more than fame, that fate intervened.

The legendary Jomo Sono had come to watch someone else. Instead, his attention drifted, drawn to a tall, skinny teenager whose raw ability stood out in a way that could not be ignored. Sono saw something others hadn't yet fully recognised, and he moved quickly. He tracked the boy down, visited his family, and brought him into the fold at Jomo Cosmos, not just as a player, but almost as a son, even opening his own home to him.

Masinga was quiet by nature, reserved, almost shy. But there was steel beneath that softness. Sono would later reflect on a young man who carried a hint of insecurity, shaped perhaps by the teasing he endured about his roots in the mines. Yet that vulnerability came paired with a fierce edge; he was not one to be pushed around for long. If anything, those early challenges hardened him, sharpening both his resolve and his sense of self.

On the field, he began to flourish. The young self-proclaimed Orlando Pirates supporter grew into a powerful, intelligent striker, making his name first at

Cosmos before attracting the attention of Mamelodi Sundowns, who used their financial strength to bring him to Pretoria.

Even as he moved on, the bond with Sono endured, evolving from coach and player into something closer to family, a relationship built on trust, respect, and shared belief.

Yet for all his progress at home, it was often beyond South Africa's borders where Masinga felt most appreciated. He was not always understood locally. There were moments when the "boo-boys" turned their attention toward him, when expectation curdled into criticism. But much like the taunts of his youth, it became fuel. It stung, certainly, but it also drove him forward. But we'll come back to that.

While there was reportedly interest from his beloved Pirates, Europe soon came calling. In the early 1990s, interest arrived from abroad, including a reported approach from Bobby Robson at Sporting in Portugal. Masinga chose a different path, heading instead to England to join Leeds United in a £250,000 deal. It was a move that would also famously bring Lucas Radebe to Elland Road, though contrary to popular myth, it was Masinga who arrived first, and, according to Chippa, it was he who recommended the defender when asked if he knew of talent back home.

Their journeys in England would diverge, and Masinga's was arguably one of the best recommendations that Leeds ever received.

While Radebe would go on to become a club legend, Masinga's path proved more uneven. The adjustment was steep... the biting cold, the relentless tempo, the cultural shift. And yet, within the dressing room, he earned admiration. Teammates recognised his spirit, his work ethic, his presence.

He had already been part of history, debuting for Bafana Bafana in their first match back in international football in 1992. Soon, he added another milestone, becoming the first black South African



to play in the English top flight in the modern era, in the early days of a new South Africa under Nelson Mandela.

There were glimpses of what he could be. Two pre-season hat-tricks hinted at a prolific future, and he scored just three minutes into a clash against Chelsea, dramatically announcing himself. But consistency proved elusive. His time at Leeds flickered rather than burned, shaped by moments rather than sustained runs.

Even so, there were nights to remember. His FA Cup hat-trick in extra-time against Walsall felt like a turning point... until the arrival of Tony Yeboah shifted the landscape. By 1996, after 31 appearances, his chapter in Yorkshire came to a close, even as Radebe's influence grew under George Graham.

If England tested him, Italy revived him. After a brief stop in Switzerland, Masinga found a home in Serie A, rediscovering his scoring touch with Salernitana in Serie B, before Bari snapped him up. In Italy, the goals flowed again — more than 30 across four seasons — and with them, a renewed sense of belonging.

And of course, then there was the moment that would define him forever. A goal against the Congo. One strike, one instant, that carried Bafana Bafana to their first-ever FIFA World Cup. It was the culmination of years of effort, a moment that transcended sport and became part of a nation's story.

Yet even that high was followed by a fall. In the next match, missed chances drew the ire of home supporters, and the noise became deafening. For a time, it pushed him to the brink, a reminder of how quickly adoration can turn. The line between love and hate, he learned, is

often razor-thin.

The latter years of his career brought more challenges. A move to reunite with Gordon Strachan at Coventry fell through due to work permit issues. Injuries crept in. A final stint in the United Arab Emirates preceded retirement, and with it, the uncertain terrain of life after football.

Back home, Masinga searched for purpose beyond the pitch. Coaching, administration, and youth development, he explored them all, driven by a desire to give back. Financial difficulties followed, as they do for many players navigating that transition. He spoke candidly about mistakes, about the lack of financial education, about learning the hard way.

And so, in a different kind of comeback, he returned to the classroom. In 2015, he enrolled in the FIFA/CIES Sport Management Programme through FIFA and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. It was a deliberate step, an effort to equip himself with the knowledge he felt many former players lacked, and to one day contribute to the game from a position of leadership.

I remember in conversation with him, he remained the same man he had always been, reserved at first, words measured, a slight stutter betraying a lingering shyness. But as he settled, his voice carried conviction. He spoke with clarity about the future, about the need for former players to step into administrative roles, about learning from figures like Irvin Khoza and Danny Jordaan, and about passing that knowledge on.

There was pride in that evolution. And a sense, too, that his journey, unique, imperfect, but rich in experience, still had more to give.



Tragically, that next chapter would be cut short. After being diagnosed with cancer in 2018, his health declined rapidly. By November, he had been admitted to hospital. In January 2019, at just 49 years old, Chippa Masinga passed away.

South African football lost more than a striker that day. It lost a pioneer, a bridge between eras, a man whose life mirrored the complexities of a country finding its identity on the global stage. And in losing the man he was striving to become, we also lost someone reaching across a divide that still remains uncrossed.

From Khuma to the grand arenas of Europe, his path was never straightforward. But it mattered.

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