



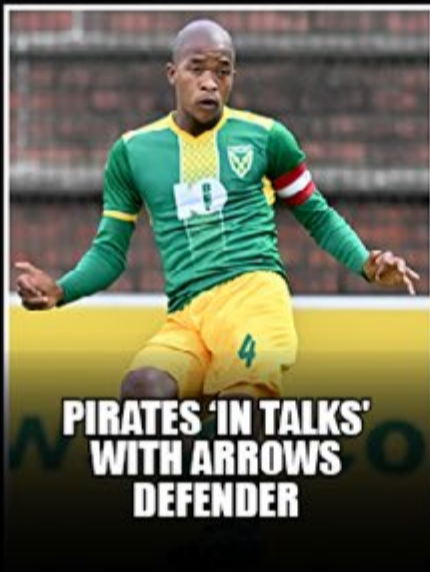
PITSO BACKS DOWNS TO WIN SECOND STAR



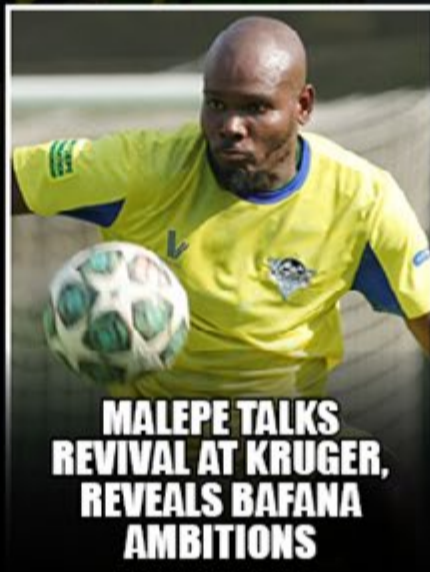
FADLU: DOWNS NEED A RESULT AT HOME BEFORE FACING HOSTILE CROWD



FUTURES OF TWO CHIEFS STARS IN LIMBO



PIRATES 'IN TALKS' WITH ARROWS DEFENDER



MALEPE TALKS REVIVAL AT KRUGER, REVEALS BAFANA AMBITIONS



MOMENTUM HAS SHIFTED - CAN PIRATES END DOWNS ERA?

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

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AMAZULU KEEPING TABS ON CITY STAR?

AmaZulu are reportedly keen on the services of Dženan Zajmović, who returned to South Africa in January with Cape Town City and has continued to impress, with four goals. The Belgian-born striker was one of the standout players at TS Galaxy, where he scored 11 goals before leaving the club for a short-lived stint in Iran. Arthur Zwane’s side are aiming to bolster their attacking options next season, looking to build on the foundations of the 2025/26 campaign, where fourth place is seemingly secured.



BAARTMAN, DU PREEZ FUTURES UNCERTAIN

Kaizer Chiefs attacking duo Luke Baartman and Ashley du Preez are currently unsettled at the club after a season with limited first-team opportunities. Sources within the camp have confirmed the players are keen to make a move away from the club should the current technical team remain in charge after falling out of favour. However, with weeks until the end of the 2025/26 campaign, there’s been no indication of the way forward as the co-coaches Cedric Kaze, Khalil Ben Youssef, goalkeeper coach Ilyes Mzoughi and fitness coach Majdi Safi are all out of contract. As of the time of printing, none have been informed whether they will be retained, leaving the way forward for players also in limbo.



ARROWS CAPTAIN LINKED WITH PIRATES SWITCH

Golden Arrows captain Ayanda Jiyane is the latest player to be linked with a potential move to Orlando Pirates in the off-season. Sources have confirmed initial talks have taken place over the 23-year-old centre-back, who has been a revelation since joining Arrows after the demise of Royal AM. He’s featured in 31 out of a possible 33 games for Arrows this season, forming an integral part of Manqoba Mngqithi’s new-look side. However, it could be a couple of months of rebuilding now with Jiyane, Isaac Cisse, Sede Junior Dion and Siyanda Ndlovu – all likely to earn lucrative moves in the upcoming transfer window.



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KRIELING LEADS PIRATES TO FIRST-EVER DISKI CHALLENGE TITLE



Orlando Pirates' decision to bring in former SuperSport United DStv Diski Challenge coach Roscoe Krieling has proved to be an inspired move, with the 42-year-old guiding the young Buccaneers to their first-ever Diski Challenge crown.

For years, the Pirates' reserve side had been regarded as one of the competition's richest talent factories, consistently producing exciting prospects capable of making the leap to senior football.

Yet despite that reputation, the title itself had remained frustratingly out of reach throughout the 12-year history of the competition. Twice, they came painfully close as runners-up, but the final step had always eluded them. This season, however, everything finally came together.

Under Krieling's guidance, Pirates combined flair with maturity, attacking quality with consistency, and youthful exuberance with a winning edge that had previously been missing. The former SuperSport mentor arrived with a proven track record in youth development and immediately brought structure and belief to the squad. His appointment was not simply about winning matches; it was about cultivating a culture capable of turning potential into silverware.

And silverware is exactly what followed. For Krieling himself, the triumph represents a second DStv Diski Challenge title, having previously lifted the trophy with SuperSport United during the 2022/23 campaign. That experience appeared invaluable in the

decisive moments of the season, particularly in managing the pressure of a tense title race against familiar heavyweights.

The defining statement arrived on Saturday, when Pirates defeated closest challengers Mamelodi Sundowns 2-0 in a fitting finale to the campaign. It was their 24th victory of the season, a remarkable tally that underlined just how dominant they had been across the year. The win saw the Buccaneers finish on 75 points, six clear of the young Brazilians in second place.

There was daylight, too, between the rest of the chasing pack. Siwelele F.C. secured third position, another six points adrift, while defending champions Kaizer Chiefs and Stellenbosch rounded out the top five, both ending the campaign on 49 points.

Even in defeat, Sundowns still had an individual shining light in the form of 18-year-old sensation Bennet Mokoena, who finished the season with an outstanding 22 goals to claim the Golden Boot award for the 2025/26 campaign. His exploits ensured the title race remained competitive deep into the season, even if Pirates ultimately proved too strong.

For the Buccaneers, though, this triumph feels about far more than a trophy. It is a signal that one of South African football's biggest clubs is once again building a genuine pipeline between youth development and first-team ambition. And after years of promise without ultimate reward, Pirates' young stars have finally etched their names into the history of the competition.

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‘I WOULD GIVE ABDESLAM OUADDOU COACH OF THE SEASON’

In a dramatic week, the Betway Premiership has swung into the path of Orlando Pirates, who, if they can win their remaining two fixtures, will be crowned champions, with their current goal difference superior to eight-time defending champions Mamelodi Sundowns.

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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‘I Still Back Mamelodi Sundowns To Win The League’

“Whatever happens this season, whoever wins the league, I think Abdeslam Ouaddou should be crowned

Coach of the Season.

“I know that you need to win the league to secure the award, but I would give it to him. He has given confidence to young players. He has never coached a big club before. He is one of the smartest coaches in the league.

“Well done to Orlando Pirates for beating Magesi. I'm surprised that they used a World Cup stadium as a home ground as opposed to using a smaller, Seshego Stadium, their normal home ground.

“I still back Mamelodi Sundowns to win the league because Pirates have to beat two teams to win the league. Sundowns showed their league intentions when they beat Siwelele 7-4.

“I know that goal difference still favours Pirates, but they need two more wins.”



MOSIMANE: SUNDOWNS WILL WIN, NO QUESTION ABOUT IT

Ahead of Mamelodi Sundowns' second successive appearance in the CAF Champions League final, iDiski Times' senior soccer writer, MATSHELANE MAMABOLO, spent time with PITSO MOSIMANE at Marks Park, where the revered coach's football club contested four age group matches against Wits University FC. The two looked ahead to the Brazilians' clash against Morocco's AS FAR Rabat, and the man who delivered Sundowns' solitary Champions League triumph is in no doubt his former club will

add the second star above their crest. Mosimane believes Miguel Cardoso's team is way stronger and better than his 'Class of 2016' and should be too powerful for the final rookies. Jingles also predicts that Sundowns will retain their Betway Premiership title despite Orlando Pirates' concerted effort to dethrone them. The former Bafana Bafana coach discloses that he is only really interested in a national team coaching job, but would take a club job that provides him the opportunity to win the CAF Champions League.

"I THINK THE COACH BELIEVES THAT IT'S HIS TIME - A THIRD TIME LUCKY KIND OF THING. AND I WANT SUNDOWNS TO WIN IT. IT'S BEEN TEN YEARS SINCE WE WON IT. WE SHOULD WIN IT AGAIN."

Matshelane Mamabolo: Let's talk about football, away from your Pitso Mosimane Soccer Schools. The CAF Champions League final is coming up – your former club, Mamelodi Sundowns, up against AS FAR Rabat. It's a space you've been, a space you've mastered. What's your expectation of the final?

Pitso Mosimane: Sundowns will win. No question about it.

MM: Why are you so confident of the result?

PM: They have the players to win, right? And the coach has gained confidence from those two finals. Now he believes that he can win. But why shouldn't they win it now? But if you don't win it now...

MM: But last year, a lot of us thought the same when they were playing Pyramids FC. They were the team that had the experience; they had been there before, the Egyptian team were new to the final. It's the same situation now...

PM: Yeah, but the team they're playing doesn't have the experience of winning the Champions League. It's not such a big team. Of course, it's an organised team. And that could be the problem also. You know, the Champions League is like that. When you have organisation, you're okay. But I'm saying... remember I won this thing with a team that does not compare to this current Sundowns one. I had Wayne Arendse, Tiyani Mabunda, and Asavela Mbekile. Let's be honest, those are the guys I took to the final. And then look at this current squad. Come on, man...

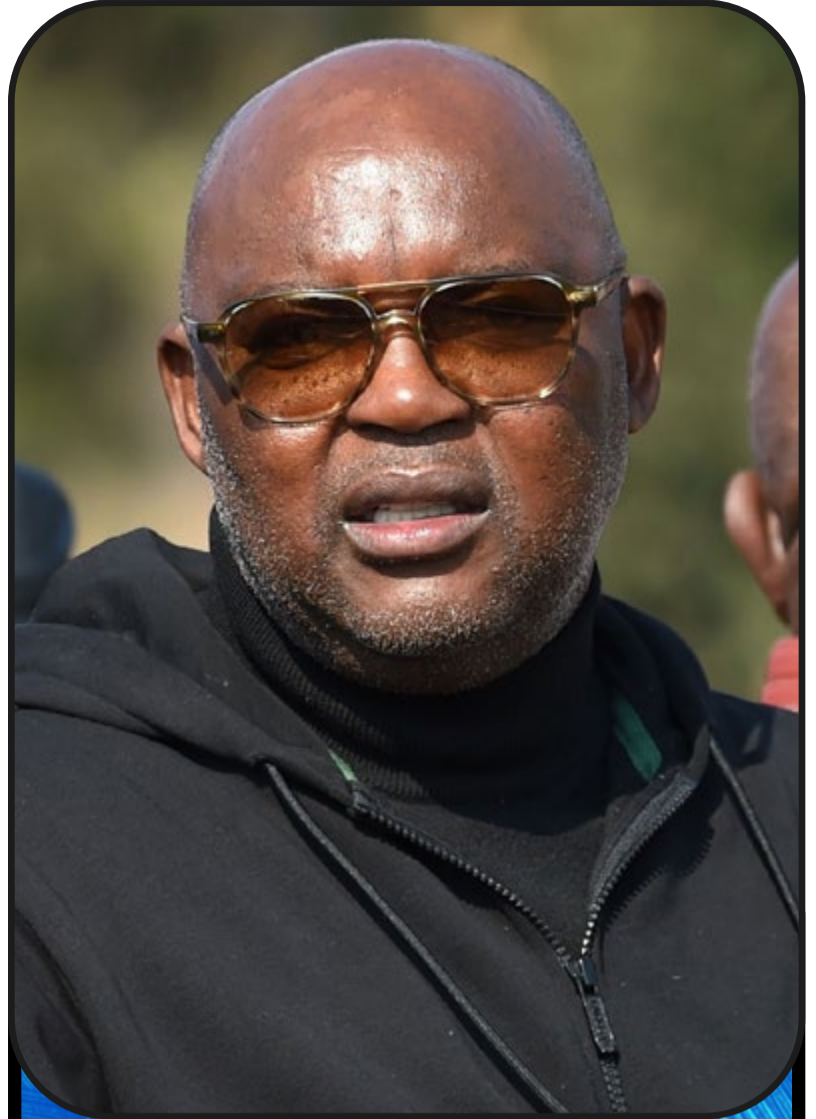
MM: I get you, Coach. Now, what space is Miguel Cardoso in? How does a coach feel having been to two finals and lost both as he now goes into his third successive one?

PM: Look, even in the Champions League, I won it twice with Al Ahly and went to the third final but lost to Walid Regragui, the coach of the Morocco national team now. It's all about...

Look, it's... It's a difficult one, because it's about organisation. What I know is that Sundowns are able to score away. Okay, they are not big scorers away, and sometimes they concede – look at the quarter-finals (Sundowns lost 2-0 away to Stade Malien). But at home, they are powerful. So, I think the coach believes that it's his time – a third time lucky kind of thing. And I want Sundowns to win it. It's been 10 years since we won it. We should win it again. We should win it because if you look at the last eight years, the Champions League – and even the Confederation Cup – 95 or 98% of it has been won by the Arabs, for a good eight years. No, we must change the status quo. And Sundowns are alone because [TP] Mazembe is no longer there; Enyimba is no longer there. Yanga and Simba are not there yet. So, who else must win it if we don't?

MM: I've checked previous finals and have noted that Sundowns have always played the first leg at home. How do you tackle that? Do you try to kill the match off at home first like you did in 2016?

PM: I was watching PSG in the semi-finals of the European Champions League. The biggest thing that has ever happened, which is good for football, is what Europe has done – getting rid of the away goal rule. Now you have 5-4, 4-3, 3-2 scores because no one sits back. The one thing I would say is that we [Africa] need to get rid of that [away goal rule], then we can have open games. So, if it's 2-2 in the first leg at my home, I'm still in



“MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE OF MY AMBITIONS THAT I GOT DERAILED (FROM GOING AFTER A FOURTH TITLE). BUT IF I WANTED TO WIN THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE MANY TIMES, I WOULD HAVE STAYED IN AFRICA.”



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[with a chance] because they still have to play for a goal. You know what I'm saying? So, I think the away goal rule is what really creates challenges for us. Listen, Bra Jakes, there's no chance they [Sundowns] can't win it. Al Ahly is out, Pyramids is out. Wydad is not there. Esperance is not there. Come on. Hey, even Raja is not there.

MM: They've played this team (AS FAR Rabat) before. Remember, last season, both ties ended in draws in the group stage. What can we read into that to predict what's coming?

PM: You see, Moroccan teams are always organised, and these ones don't even have a star player. So, you never know.

MM: Does that make it difficult then for you as a coach to play against and plan for a team like that?

PM: Yeah, it means it's a combined team. Everyone can be dangerous, so you have to be alert. And the stadium will be full there, right? I don't know if we can fill the stadium here. It's important, but... Morocco's got a vibe.

MM: When you look at the players that Cardoso has, there's a couple you won the Champions League with. How influential can they be?

PM: Ja, but no, I don't think there's any player left, hey. Maybe Denis Onyango, right? Remember, it's been 10 years. Oh, and Mshishi [Themba Zwane]. That's all. Their experience should come in handy somehow.

MM: But you watch Sundowns from a distance, as you say. Do you believe they have what it takes to bring it home?

PM: Teboho [Mokoena] is a top player. Sailor [Khuliso Mudau] at the right-back is solid. This young boy [Khulumani] Ndamane is good. And they've got a player who's not playing all the time [Bathusi] Aubaas – he's a top player in the midfield. [Marcelo] Allende moves around. They have a striker of one chance, one goal [Brayan Leon]. [Aubrey] Modiba delivers the ball into the box.

“I ALWAYS SAY THAT... IF YOU WANT THE DOMESTIC TITLE, YOU HAVE TO WIN NINE, TEN GAMES IN A ROW. YOU'RE COMPETING WITH SUNDOWNS, WHO KNOW HOW TO DO THAT.”

So they have to win.

MM: Coach, are you not missing the Champions League space? There's that record of Manuel José (five Champions League trophies) that you are not too far off from. Do you look at it and want to go for it?

PM: Look... I don't know what to say. To win the Champions League a lot, many times, it's not easy. Manuel José won it. Maybe it's because of my ambitions that I got derailed [from going after a fourth title]. But if I wanted to win the Champions League many times, I would have stayed in Africa. But I decided to leave. I went to three successive finals, and I left. I decided to leave because I'm that guy who's ambitious. I wanted to know what's happening on the other side, in the Gulf and all that. So, I don't know if... I don't have that ego, to say 'oh, I am the one who has won the Champions League many times'. It's not that important for me. I've done my part.

MM: Do you still want to coach? I mean, the PMSS is your baby. This is the future. This is legacy stuff. But, do you miss the daily grind of top-level football?

PM: Coaching again? If you ask me, a national team, yes. Look, you should never say never because I might go back to club coaching. But, there must be... You know, there must be something that really makes me want to go. So, it depends. I have teams calling me still. [Al] Ittihad, the one Rulani [Mokwena] went to – they've come to me. But if I take on a club, I want to win the Champions



League if I'm in it. I don't know if they have a team to win the Champions League. So, then what is it [that would get me to coach at club level]? Then it's money. For me, it's not about money. I need to get what makes me happy. So, I'm in a position where I do what makes me happy. And this is it here [working with the coaches and clubs at the PMSS].

MM: Away from the Champions League, domestically, Sundowns are being tested, and we are having an exciting league title race for the first time in a very long time.

PM: Yeah, but I always say that... if you want the domestic title, you have to win nine, 10 games in a row. You're competing with Sundowns, who know how to do that. So, Orlando Pirates must win nine or 10 in a row. Pirates had their chances when Sundowns drew twice, but they are still there [on top].

MM: So you think the title will stay with Sundowns?

PM: Look, I don't know if Pirates can win many games in a row. But Sundowns can win games. And they don't have to win much. They'll score, even one, but they'll end up winning. Sometimes Pirates draws – unnecessary draws, you know. And that creates a little bit of a problem.

MM: Coach, the PMSS is clearly growing; you now even have a club in the GDL. The question I am asking myself is, Pitso Mosimane could probably have bought an NFD status or even in the Premiership. Why did you go this route?

PM: I don't know how to put it. Some people want the status of first division or the Premier League, you know. I just don't like that. In my opinion, I feel you

“YOU ASK ME, WOULD I WANT TO HAVE A TEAM IN THE PREMIER LEAGUE? NOT NOW. UNTIL I HAVE THE FOUNDATION THAT IS SOLID TO ENSURE THAT, WHETHER THE TEAM GETS PROMOTED OR RELEGATED, WE STILL HAVE A TEAM.”

are shortcutting. You want quick success. And I've seen so many people come into football, buy teams which quickly collapse. Teams in South Africa collapse because there's no foundation. Look at an English club such as Ipswich [Town], they still have their youth teams. Wimbledon, such as Ipswich and Wimbledon might not be in the elite league, but they still have their youth teams. When somebody has money and comes to support the team and buy a few players, that's when the team rises up. But you have a foundation. Here at home, you hear that Pretoria Callies is very good – I am just making an example – but where is it now? Do they have under-15s? No. So this, for me, is like the ecosystem. I like the conveyor belt system. Buying a status is all about ego; you want to be seen in football. But what people do is they are doing good in business, and they are in the tender business, but most of them fall off. You ask me, would I want to have a team in the Premier [Soccer] League? Not now. Until I have the foundation that is solid to ensure that, whether the team gets promoted or relegated, we still have a team.

MM: Thanks, Coach



ORLANDO PIRATES ON THE VERGE OF ENDING AN ERA?



Two months ago, in Edition 247, iDiski Times examined the potential twists still lurking within the Betway Premiership title race, highlighting the intriguing possibility that Kaizer Chiefs could ultimately play the role of kingmakers. And, in many ways, that prediction has already begun to unfold.

Last week, Amakhosi delivered a potentially season-defining blow when they held defending champions Mamelodi Sundowns to a 1-1 draw, a result that suddenly shifted the emotional momentum of the title race firmly towards their Soweto rivals, Orlando Pirates.

Ironically, only a week or so earlier, Chiefs had seemed to do the opposite. Their draw against Pirates in the Soweto Derby at the end of April felt, at the time, like a crushing setback for the Buccaneers' fading ambitions. Sundowns appeared to be marching inexorably toward an unprecedented ninth successive league crown, their dominance once again looking inevitable.

The gap felt too large, the finish line too close. But football, as it so often does, refused to follow the script. Suddenly, the door has swung back open.

Miguel Cardoso's Sundowns side may understandably have had divided attention in recent weeks, with the looming continental showdown against AS FAR occupying minds and energy alike. Yet when they reflect on this closing stretch of the campaign, there may well be a sense of regret about opportunities missed.

Before the draw with Chiefs, they had already stumbled against Richards Bay on 29 April, dropping valuable points in another frustrating stalemate. Those slips have transformed what once looked like a procession into a genuine late-season drama.

OUADDOU: "A LOT OF PEOPLE WERE SPEAKING ABOUT THE FACT THAT WE LOST THE TITLE. BUT AS LONG AS MATHEMATICALLY YOU CAN REACH THIS TARGET, YOU JUST HAVE TO PLAY."

"Important win and three points, three points away from finishing the league, with one match," Cardoso said after beating Siwelele 7-4 in a record high-scoring game on the weekend.

"Let's win the (final) match and see what comes from there."

Sundowns now head into their last league fixture against Galaxy at the Mbombela Stadium on Tuesday, knowing victory would at least place temporary pressure back on Pirates, opening a six-point gap at the summit. Yet even that might not be enough to secure peace of mind.

Abdeslam Ouaddou's Pirates still hold two games in hand, while also boasting the superior goal difference (seven at the time of print), a potentially decisive factor should the race tighten even further.

"We are focusing on ourselves," Ouaddou stated after their victory over Magesi on Saturday.

"Our destiny is between our feet. We just focus on how we want to play, how we want to be organised. You can see a strong Pirates, we don't concede goals, we score goals.

"I just told the boys to focus on how we



want to play. We are not expecting anything from anybody; we are focusing on our team, and we are really confident of what we want to achieve.

“We feel strong, and we are going to prepare for the next game with a lot of focus, and we will give everything.”

It has been an eventful first season in charge at Pirates for the former Moroccan captain, who had an illustrious playing career in Europe, but was not a well-known figure in South African football before his stint with Marumo Gallants last season.

“A lot of people were speaking about the fact that we lost the title. But as long as mathematically you can reach this target, you just have to play. It’s what I try to explain to the people and to my players. My players, they understand me.

“It’s what we did since the beginning of the season. When people started to be doubtful about us, we just kept quiet and kept working.

“We hid in the work. We still have two games; everything is possible. Everything is possible in football.”

The timing only adds to the tension.

Just one day before the first leg of Sundowns’ continental final, Pirates will face Durban City in a fixture that could pull them to within three points of the champions.

Then, in an extraordinary twist of scheduling, Pirates could potentially clinch the Premiership title against Orbit College in Rustenburg a day before Sundowns contest the second

CARDOSO: “LET’S WIN THE (FINAL) MATCH AND SEE WHAT COMES FROM THERE.”

leg in Morocco, a scenario that would create a surreal contrast between domestic heartbreak and possible continental glory for the Brazilians.

Of course, there are still countless variables in play. Pirates must still do their part and win both remaining fixtures if they are to fully capitalise. Any stumble would immediately swing the advantage back to Sundowns. Equally, Sundowns themselves cannot afford another misstep against Galaxy, because failure to win could dramatically lower the points threshold Pirates need to cross the line.

What once appeared settled has become tantalisingly unstable. For Pirates, the stakes stretch beyond a single trophy. The Buccaneers last lifted the league title back in the 2011/12 campaign.

Since then, South African football’s domestic landscape has largely belonged to Sundowns, who have claimed the championship 10 times in that period, including an extraordinary run of eight consecutive titles.

Now, the possibility of a changing of the guard flickers once more on the horizon...

“OUR CLUB IS UNIQUE IN A WAY - A LITTLE BIT LIKE SUNDOWNS – IN THAT IF YOU DON’T PLAY A CERTAIN BRAND OF FOOTBALL, THEY CALL IT A SHOESHINE, AND HERE THEY SAY TIKI-TAKA, YOU’RE NOT FIT TO BE A RAJA COACH.”



‘DOWNS NEED A RESULT AT HOME BEFORE FACING HOSTILE CROWD’

Ahead of the weekend’s first leg CAF Champions League final clash between Mamelodi Sundowns and Morocco’s AS FAR Rabat, iDiski senior soccer writer MATSHELANE MAMABOLO spoke to Coach FADLU DAVIDS of Moroccan outfit Raja Club Athletic to canvass his views on what he anticipates the continent’s premier match will be like. Davids, arguably one of South Africa and the continent’s brightest coaching prospects, also opened up about his club’s rise to the summit of the Botola Pro League and shared his views on former club Orlando Pirates’ rise to serious Betway Premiership title contender status.

Matshelane Mamabolo: Coach Fadlu, good afternoon, my brother, and thank you so much for making time to speak to me. Congratulations on your climb to the top of the table. It must be fulfilling to be number one. [Ed’s note: Raja lost on the weekend and dropped to third place.]

Fadlu Davids: Lovely to speak to you again, brother. Listen, it is not easy, but we are trying our best to push for glory.

MM: But how has the return to Morocco been for you after your time in Tanzania? How long has it taken you, do you feel, to settle in and to even be now at the top of the table?

FD: Just so you know, we played our first match just four days after joining. I think the biggest thing was to analyse the squad and immediately try to, you know, keep results going while installing playing style. Our club is unique in a way – a little bit like Sundowns – in that if you don’t play a certain brand of football, they call it a shoeshine, and here they say tiki-taka, you’re not fit to be a Raja coach. So they had kind of lost their way a little bit the previous season. And also results were poor; they

finished number five last season. So, two games into the new season, they made a change, and we came in. We had to sort of hit the ground running. We had to instil the playing style and at the same time get results. So, it was quite a tricky situation. But we played our first five matches; then we had the break for the AFCON. Over those five matches, we won three and drew two. So, we had a bit of breathing space to work on the team and do recruitment. We then signed seven players and released seven others in January. You don’t get the best recruitment that you possibly can in such a short space of time because most of them weren’t playing at their clubs. One player wasn’t playing for six months. The other player was playing in Bahrain League, where the level is not high. The other in the Jordan League, the level is not high there too. And we signed them just before the window closed, and the matches were coming again. So we had to settle everything and to still try and be in the title race; to formulate the squad, to get them fit the way you want to play, it took a lot. But I think now, finally, we have settled, and we’re in this period now where it’s like matches every three days to try to catch up and finish the league in time. But we 100% will not finish before the World Cup starts, although I think we’ve got permission to play during the World Cup. So, I think we will finish by the end of June because we [Morocco] have to give our CAF representatives, if I’m not mistaken. Yeah, so that’s the pressure. And we also still have the Throne Cup.

MM: Coach it must be exciting to be top of the table. How do you stay there until the end of the season?

FD: It will take a lot because there’s still a long way to go. I think we had a bit of a blessing in disguise in that after the AFCON break, we played

“ASFAR ARE A WELL-STRUCTURED TEAM. IT’S NOT GOING TO BE EASY FOR SUNDOWNS JUST TO WALK OVER THEM. BUT I THINK AWAY FROM HOME, SUNDOWNS WILL JUST HAVE TO MANAGE THE RESULTS.”

eight matches and got to the halfway mark, to 15 matches. And then there were seven weeks without a game. So, we could really work on the team, you know, to get them really, to understand how I want to play and get the new players fit and to understand how we play it. So we just have to take it game by game. We might be top of the log, but there are still so many matches to play. We’ve won nothing yet. We’re just on a good run in the last six matches, five wins and one loss (now two losses). So, it’s just where we are. We’re in a good moment. So we have just got into the second round, and in our first seven matches, we are playing against the number one to number six. So that’s all the big guns we are playing with. That’s going to be tough. In the next two matches, we’ve got Wydad [Athletic Club, Raja lost 1-0], and then we’ve got RS Berkane. So if we get through this period, you know, we have played all the top teams. We have a unique league where five teams are fighting for the league title. It’s not normal where any of the five can win it. Everybody stands a chance. It’s competitive. We’re a new team. We are with a new staff and, you know, we’re still not where we need to be. But of course, that’s the difference between us and a team like Rabat. They’ve been together for so many years, you know, since [Nasreddine] Nabi (the former Kaizer Chiefs coach) was here with them. They still have the same players and the same squad. They have a little bit of that understanding, of being together for many years, you know, going through a lot of big matches together. That’s what makes them a strong outfit.

MM: Before we go deeper into them, as they will be facing Mamelodi Sundowns in the CAF Champions League final, what are management’s expectations of you? I know in North Africa, it’s win or bust, but what have

they said to you in terms of what they want?

FD: Look, there’s no need for them to spell it out. As a coach, if you come into a club like Raja, you know you have to win the league. They can’t say we ended number five last time around, and now if you end number three or number four, it’s a good season. No. You have to win the league; you have to – at a minimum – get into the Champions League. Getting into the Champions League, ending number two would be a bit of a failure. But, you know, that’s the minimum. At a club like Raja, you can’t be under no illusions – you have to fight for the title. You have to fight for the Throne Cup. You have to try to win the double. As a coach, you might want to say, ‘No, I did well’ – better than last season, because they were five and now I’m in four. But it’s not the mentality at a club like this. You have to take the pressure. You have to know if you go on a bad run of three games, you can be out. But that’s just the nature of the beast.

MM: Yeah, but you are up to that. You’ve been around clubs like those, where you understand that pressure. And I guess as somebody ambitious, that’s the drive. I mean, why be in this business if you’re not going to?

FD: Yeah, you don’t come to a club like this if you don’t know what’s expected. So, you take it, and you run with it. The good thing is that we’ve managed to instil the playing style with the highest possession team in the league. So we’re playing a brand of football that the fans enjoy. And now we just have to be consistent with the result, and not only the good football, but also the short passes and the tiki-taka that the fans want. They’re enjoying the type of football we’re playing, but we’ve got to keep the results going. We’ve got to

“SUNDOWNS ARE FOR SURE THE FAVOURITE. SUNDOWNS ARE WELL RESPECTED IN MOROCCO. THEY ARE ALSO FEARED TO A CERTAIN EXTENT. EVERYTHING IS IN SUNDOWNS’ FAVOUR, BUT IT ALL DEPENDS. IN FINALS, ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN.”

just take it game by game.

MM: Speaking of AS FAR, they are playing Sundowns in the Champions League final. You’ve seen them now, and even previously when you were there with coach Josef Zinnbauer. Just tell me about them a little because I pick up here at home, there’s this sense that Sundowns will win because they are facing a club that many are not very familiar with. They are not Wydad, and they are not Raja. But you clearly know them.

FD: I think they are an experienced team that has played together for a long time. Yes, their coach joined them only at the beginning of last season, I think, but the players were together before that. We competed with them for the league when we won the double [two seasons ago]. They were on top of the log the whole season, and we came to win it – we went on top with two matches left. That was the season when Nabi was the coach. They’ve had that same team last season, and they’ve got the same team this season. They’ve made even some better signings to add on top. They are a well-structured team. It’s not going to be easy for Sundowns just to walk over them. But I think away from home, Sundowns will just have to manage the results. The first leg is in Pretoria, so Sundowns have to take the advantage because playing here in front of their fans is very intimidating. They can be loud. They can make it a very hostile situation. Sundowns have to get a very good result before they come to Morocco because playing in their home ground, in front of their fans, can be extremely hostile, extremely intimidating for the players. They have to get a good result in Pretoria to be able to win this trophy.

MM: Tell me about their team. Who are their key players?

FD: They’ve got a few players. Their captain is now one of the only local

players in the Moroccan national team, [Mohamed Rabie] Hrimat. He is one of the best midfielders in the league. He plays deep in midfield, starts the build-up phase and makes late runs into the box. He’s kind of a driving force of the whole club. He’s been with them for a long time. He’s in the Moroccan national team, which is a team full of Europe-based stars. He’s the only local player that’s in the starting line-up. And they’ve got this striker, [Youssef El] Fahli. He’s a new signing who joined at the beginning of the season. He’s formerly a winger, but so smart in his movements. He’s a false nine running it behind. He’s extremely smart to be able to unlock opposition defences with his clever movements. Those are the two main players. The other players are in a really clear structure in terms of the coach’s plan. They know each other, the movements. They’re a compact team that is very pragmatic. They’re not a team that is going to try to dominate possession, but they’re very pragmatic. They know how to take their chances when it does come. Sundowns will probably have the ball in the first leg in Pretoria. They will sit compact and try to hit Sundowns on the break. At home, it will be a different game where they will really try to go for it, if there’s still something left in the tie by the second leg.

MM: Coach, you say Sundowns should get a good result. From your assessment, what would that be?

FD: It has to be a minimum 2-0 to come to Morocco. A 1-0 is probably not going to be enough. It’s a good result, but probably not enough to come to Morocco and manage the game, because their fans are quite hostile, like I said. The way this new stadium is built for the final at AFCON, we played there last weekend. It feels like the fans are on top of you. They’re quite loud and intimidating. Yes, the South Africans won’t understand the chants – my players really felt it because they

“IT'S BY NO ACCIDENT THAT PIRATES ARE WHERE THEY ARE JUST WITH NKOSANA KHOZA AND MPUMI KHOZA, THEY ARE REALLY MOULDING THIS CLUB INTO A FORCE”

understood, but it's quite intimidating still. I say Sundowns should try to get a 2-0 minimum to be comfortable to come and secure the win. Sundowns are for sure the favourite. Sundowns are well-respected in Morocco. They are also feared to a certain extent. Everything is in Sundowns' favour, but it all depends. In finals, anything can happen. Sundowns should try to take a positive result in Pretoria to be able to come to the second leg with some confidence.

MM: Have you seen Sundowns lately? This season. What have you made of them?

FD: Yes, I have. After a period of pressure, I think they were being knocked out of the cups. And there was a bit of pressure, which is normal at a club like Sundowns, but they then went on an unbelievable run. Managing the league every two days and playing often was quite tough. I didn't see the match against Chiefs, which they drew, but I think they've got enough in their arsenal to be able to secure it. They're also quite pragmatic when they have to be. I think the coach structures Sundowns well defensively, which is good for Champions League, especially away from home. I think all is in Sundowns' hands. Also, we talk about AS FAR, who have been playing together for a while, but I think Sundowns have got the edge in relation to that since the Pitso [Mosimane] days. They've been in the Champions League quarter-final, semi-final, quarter-final, semi-final for many years now. The players know how to manage big matches like this. Sundowns are for sure the favourites.

MM: Coach, last night's result – Sundowns' 1-1 draw with Chiefs – here at home just essentially tilted the title race in Orlando Pirates' favour because all they have to do now is to win all their remaining matches and they'll then win it on goal difference. Have you seen Pirates this year? You worked there, you know them. Just

the improvement they've made to be able to push Sundowns as far as they have. Have you seen them? What have you made of their improvement this season?

FD: You know, Pirates are run by two brain trusts of the sons of Mr Khoza. I was there and experienced them in terms of their foresight, their thinking, their visionary work behind the scenes. They were very good in ensuring they are not following the trend by buying players that were having the budget of Sundowns but always trying to get the edge in terms of analysis, in terms of data, in terms of forward thinking. They've been building the squad since that time when I was there – moulding the squad, moulding the mindset of the club. It's by no accident that Pirates are where they are. Just with Nkosana Khoza and Mpumi Khoza, they are really moulding this club into a force. If you look at the stats, Pirates are highest in XG, the highest chance creators. They have the most goals, and they have the better goal difference. The stats are all in their favour. They've got a young, dynamic team. It's like chalk and cheese if you compare the two teams. Sundowns are a team of possession, slower, patient build-ups, and Pirates are just a high-intensity machine, high-energetic, and can play from one end to the next. Young players that go full throttle in every match. Yes, it was a blessing in disguise that they got knocked out of the Champions League. It's one game a week, and they can go full throttle [every week] with Sundowns, managing fatigue at probably the right moment. It's no surprise that Pirates are where they are with the work that's going on behind the scenes by the management of the club.

MM: Coach Fadlu, thank you once again for your insightful analysis for us. I wish you all the best for the rest of the season, my brother. Go win the Botola.

FD: Thank you, my brother.



‘KRUGER GOT THE RIGHT PLAYERS AT THE RIGHT TIME’

When TERCIOUS MALEPE joined Kruger United in the Motsepe Foundation Championship in November last year, he hadn't been playing competitively for four months. Six months later, he has helped the Mpumalanga-based outfit gain automatic promotion to the Betway Premiership with two matches to spare. The 29-year-old had a short stint at FC Balzan in Malta, from where he had to return because of paperwork issues, a situation he tells iDiski Times writer LETHABO KGANYGAO was a blessing in disguise. Malepe, a product of Orlando Pirates development ranks, also featured for the now-defunct Ajax Cape Town, Moroka Swallows, Chippa United, AmaZulu and Richards Bay. In this wide-ranging interview, he presents a measured reflection of Kruger's success this season, his journey in the game and involvement with the South African national teams.

Lethabo Kganyago: Tercious, thank you so much for speaking to us. So, how has the last week been for you, personally and your team after securing promotion?

Tercious Malepe: For me, it's been a very exciting week with emotions, of course, because we needed a point and against teams that were fighting for their lives. It's always difficult to play the bottom teams, especially in the second round. We did well; we managed to secure the wins. We are very happy we managed to promote a team from Mpumalanga, and for the people of Mpumalanga. I'm just happy to be part of it.

LK: And also, just how big is this, because it's a new team in the professional setups?

TM: I think that congratulations can also go to the chairman and management because they made sure that they called the right players, ex-PSL players with experience. The likes of Neverdie Makhubela, they've been around. They know the dynamics of the game, especially the games like Cape Town City. Congrats to him, the President, and also the coaches as well, the recruiters and everyone involved. They made sure they brought in the right people with the right mentality to finish the project.

LK: When you speak about winning against the bottom teams, some of them, big names like Baroka, I feel like

there wasn't a lot of focus on Kruger, especially in the first round. There were a lot of names mentioned, former PSL teams, and even the teams that did well in the Nedbank Cup. Did this allow you guys to be able to do your job without the extra attention?

TM: Yes, but you know in football you can't hide who is part of the team. I mean, come on, look at the squad of Kruger, look at the personnel. The core of our team, and for me, if they didn't see us coming, they were negligent because they have coaches and analysts. Kruger, and I'll say this again, they got the right players at the right time.

LK: When you came back home to join them, was that one of the things that attracted you to the make-up of the squad?

TM: Of course, that one is important in every team that I go to. I remember when Richards Bay were in the very same situation and fighting for playoffs. I looked at the squad, there was the likes of Jackson Mabokgwane, then Neverdie came and joined. So it's not the first time to be in this position. Remember, even with the Ajax one, I was also part of the squad with the late [Tendai] Ndoro saga. So I was part of that, and I know how to handle pressure on these kinds of stages. So for me, when I saw the squad, I was like, 'okay, the project is doable because of the personnel'. I mean, you can't do it alone. Neverdie came and joined me. We promoted Richards Bay, they were in trouble, and we brought in numbers, in their worst position on the log, and we managed to help them secure the status. Sometimes things don't go according to plan, but you just have to do what you have to do. But yeah, the right players at the right time, and it's a time for mixed emotions because of promotion and relegation, other players will be looking for jobs, and I wish them good luck. It is the nature of the job we chose.

LK: I recently read about your reasons for returning from overseas, that it was issues of paperwork, essentially. When you look at it now, was it a blessing in disguise?

TM: Exactly. And hence I say football





needs a strong heart. Overall, people talk; some will talk bad about you. You will find out somebody's talking about your behaviour, not even knowing the kind of person you are. It's the nature of the game that I understand very well, not everyone will like you, not every coach will like you, not every management will like you. So it's part of the game, but what I can control is to put a good performance on the field of play.

LK: When that happened, and you returned home, did you think that I'm going to sort out my things and be able to quickly return, and is the door closed for you to return overseas?

TM: No one can close the door because of the experience I've earned. No one can close the door; only God can do that. So the doors are always open; it's a matter of trying, getting the right people, and it's doable. There are still opportunities for me to return. Even before I returned, I think Kruger had been trying to call me several times. I kept telling them I'm still looking for the kind move I might have. And I was reasonable even when I came to say thank you for giving me time and showing interest in having me in the club, and were able to wait, and what I was looking for didn't materialise, so I can come and finish the season with you stronger. Look what God did.

LK: I'm sure now the chairman must be a bit worried that he will lose you. Obviously, the season is yet to wrap up. Do you want to stay home, or where are you mentally?

TM: I'll see with the opportunities because I still have to discuss with the family in terms of making movements and everything. But overall, I find Mpumalanga interesting. It's a nice place, good people. It's a good place for me, I don't have a problem, but you never know what will be on the table in terms of opportunities that might come when the window is open – internationally and locally. You never know who is looking, but I'll cross that bridge when I get to it.

LK: Is it the same for the club that they'll cross the bridge when they get to it, or do they want to start talks with you?

TM: I don't know. At this point in time, I'm just focusing on finishing the season because we still have important games. I think we are six games unbeaten, straight wins, so you leave the team on top,

"IF I WAS SCARED OF NEW CHALLENGES, I'D STILL BE AN ORLANDO PIRATES PLAYER NOW BECAUSE I'M A NATIONAL TEAM ASSET, BUT WOULD I HAVE THE PLAYING EXPERIENCE I DO [HAVE] NOW OR THE EXPERIENCE OF PLAYING IN EUROPE?"

whereby you set the bar in terms of a winning mentality. For me, winning eight games in a row, it's not that easy to do. So it's something that I'm thinking about at the moment, and the rest I'll leave to the management and how they are planning for the new division which is PSL. We're just going to wait to hear from them in terms of the way forward.

LK: You speak with so much maturity and humility. You know, I remember meeting you in coach Thabo Senong's U20 World Cup as captain. Does the game force you to grow up mentally especially?

TM: Maybe I'm the lucky one as well. To be surrounded and to be coached by so many top coaches, different characters and played with so many profiled players that I can mention. So I think I was blessed as much as whatever happened throughout my career at Pirates. I had a lot of experiences at Pirates, being in the change room with such great players, it opens your mind to start to understand the game is moving this direction. Even to share the change room with the likes of Dikgang Mabalane, the likes of Josta Dladla, to have them around to ask them questions. I think for me, what is important is information. You need to seek information from the people that have been there. So I think I was good at that in terms of reading between the lines, asking questions to a lot of senior players. To be part of the national teams for so long also helped. Since I entered the national team, there's no head coach who hasn't called me to the national team because the head coach is still Hugo Broos. 2018 World Cup qualifiers, I was part of the squad in Accra. Hence, I say sometimes things happen for a reason. You just have to focus on your lane, even if you don't have a team, you still have to wake up, do everything and honour yourself. You owe that to yourself because once you get fat,





it's not easy to lose fat, it's stressful, and I don't even want to imagine. You can be out for months, the coach can say he knows what you are capable of, but if the body says no and you are not ready, then you will be in trouble. So it's something that I always encourage the guys, especially those without teams and looking to keep busy and be fit, because you never know when the door will open. When I came to Kruger, I hadn't played for four months. I was training every three days, then coach Abram put me in the team. I remember we were playing against Casric [Stars] and I was like what's happening? Things were totally different because it had been a decade since I played in the NFD. Physically, I wasn't there. I managed to push for 90 minutes because the endurance was there, but certain elements weren't there.

LK: You look at your career, how it started, and where you are right now, what was the biggest lesson that got you here?

TM: I mentioned that I learned a lot of things at Pirates. I was young before I went to Moroka Swallows. You check the midfield, there's Oupa Manyisa, the competition, you can't even think twice about it, the likes of [Siyabonga] Sangweni, the legend, Rooi Mahamutsa, [Patrick] Phungwayo at left-back, because I'm a multi-positional player, hence I mention these players. There was [Thabo] Matlaba, who was a national team asset playing right-back and left-back. You have to sit down and be honest with yourself and say I'm competing with these senior players, where's the bar at the moment. You even see the quality when you are training with them. You know you have to pull up your socks, be patient, and wait for your turn. And when opportunities to go to Chippa United and Ajax came, I was like, 'thank God, now I'm going to have to face them and challenge myself'. I think that's the only thing that I was eager to have to say, let me put myself in an uncomfortable zone, because, yes, I can stay at Pirates. A lot of people don't know that before Happy Jele left, it was only me, Happy Jele and [Siyabonga] Mpontshane that were left as senior players. I remember Happy saying to me why are you leaving and I said, 'My brother, I want to play and enjoy,' because sometimes you tend to find happiness out there without pressure. Yes, you want pressure to grow, but I feel like my loan moves, and the willingness to not be afraid to go to challenging provinces

"I DON'T EVEN HAVE A DOUBT, WITH THE TALENT AND POTENTIAL THE YOUNGSTERS ARE SHOWING IN THE NEXT TWO, THREE SEASONS, WE'LL HAVE PLENTY OF PLAYERS BACK TO EUROPE AND COMPETING IN AFRICA AND DOMINATING."

and countries is one of the things that helped my career to be where it is. If I was scared of new challenges, I'd still be an Orlando Pirates player now because I'm a national team asset, but would I have the playing experience I do [have] now or the experience of playing in Europe? I don't think so.

LK: I look at that U20 World Cup team, there are so many of you that have survived and have long careers. Tebza [Teboho Mokoena], Thabo Cele, KK [Kobamelo Kodisang], Siphon Mbule...

TM: Thendo Mukumela, Luther Singh and the Master Chef were in that team. The guys are still active, and that's what we love. As much as we are playing for different teams, obviously, our success won't be the same. Our journeys won't be the same, but to see them active is what is important to me. I see even Keletso [Makgalwa] had some rough patches, and I see the boy, he's come back and is even getting some attention from the national team. One thing about the national team is that once you put on that jersey, you'll always be part of that pool. But having contributed doesn't mean you are entitled to being selected again. You must be proud to have been part of the pool that started the journey for us to qualify for World Cups.

LK: You must be proud to see how far the junior national teams have come, regularly competing at AFCONs and recently World Cups and some of the youngsters like Tylon Smith moving abroad?

TM: I believe it started when we qualified, our generation with Thendo, Nelson Maluleke, who's unfortunately not playing anymore because of injury. He was the U17 captain. I took over the leadership from him. I think it started there, because the last time we had qualified for the World





Cup was with the generation of Ramahlwe Mphahlele. Our generation came in, and I think that's where we started qualifying. And the following generation qualified as well, similar to 2016 Rio, and we had 2020 back-to-back. That's when we started being proactive as a nation. We have to be proud of that. Going forward, I don't even have a doubt, with the talent and potential the youngsters are showing in the next two, three seasons, we'll have plenty of players back in Europe and competing in Africa and dominating. Those days are coming.

LK: When you say that you can always come back from anything, as someone who has played at every category of the national teams and even under the current coach, are you counting yourself out on a return to Bafana?

TM: There is no soldier that can say no to protect their own nation. I think I answered you (chuckles).

LK: Obviously, the World Cup squad could be a reach, but do you honestly see that chance of returning?

TM: I'm not yet finished. Football is always about showing what you are doing in the field of play. There's no doubt that Hugo Broos is doing very well. I mean, who would have thought [Thabang] Matuludi would be part of the team? From Polokwane City? Matuludi and Meshack Maphangule's younger brother [Ndamulelo]. In the past, it was very rare to find Polokwane City players in the team. The best thing the coach is doing is following these games. So you have to do well in the field of play, and the rest will take care of itself.

LK: Especially also when you see that there have been players that have been with him and then out, but now back. The coach is a man who knows how to change his mind...

TM: In my opinion, that's also one of the best things about him. I'm very proud because lots of players got a chance at the national team because of this. If you play well, you will be given a chance.

LK: Are there people that have backed you, even to this day, you feel indebted to after your achievement with Kruger?

TM: All of them, they know themselves and know I'm an appreciative person. I have been lucky to be coached by top coaches. I can even go back and say



"IF THEY DIDN'T SEE US COMING, THEY WERE NEGLIGENT."

thank you to coach Gordon Igesund, Ian Gorowa. There's also Muhsin Ertugral. When I got to Ajax, he was very obsessed with details. I think he's the only coach that under him I played as a winger, as a number 10, as a six, as a left-back, as a centre-back. He used to say that 'if you respect the automatism interchange of position, you can play anywhere in the field of play'. He was showing us how it's done. But nevertheless, all the coaches have helped my game. Abram Mongoya is the one who was there when Thabo Senong was coming to fetch me for my first camp and handed me the armband, not knowing we were going to change the curse of 10 years without qualifying for the World Cup. Today I'm celebrating a gold medal with him. Hence, I'm saying in this journey of football, you have to focus on your lane and respect people.

LK: Congratulations once again, Tercious.



THE IDISKI TOP 10.. CREATORS

This week, iDiski Times turns the spotlight onto the league's most influential creators, counting down the top ten goal providers lighting up the Betway Premiership during the 2025/26 campaign.

In a game often defined by the final touch, this list celebrates those who supply it: the architects behind the goals, the players who see passes others don't, and who consistently unlock defences with precision and imagination.

The rankings are carefully compiled using a blend of statistical output and performance metrics, drawing

on data and ratings from leading football analytics companies. Rather than focusing solely on raw assist numbers, we've taken a broader view, factoring in chances created, overall influence in the final third, and consistency across the season.

To ensure a fair comparison, only players who have featured in at least 60% of their club's fixtures have been considered. From seasoned campaigners to emerging stars, this is a reflection of the league's most reliable and creative forces, those shaping games week in and week out.

(*statistics as of 10 May 2026)

The Top 10:

10 Tshepang Moremi
Orlando Pirates

4 assists, 6.89 average rating

In what has been his maiden campaign in Buccaneers colours, Moremi has steadily carved out a reputation as a persistent thorn down the flank. With nine goal contributions across 26 appearances, the winger has offered both industry and invention, constantly probing, stretching defences, and asking difficult questions. Four assists from nine big chances created hint at a player still refining his final delivery, but the raw ingredients are undeniable. It's been a promising first chapter, one that suggests there's more to come.

9 Tashreeq Matthews
Mamelodi Sundowns

4 assists, 6.98 average rating

Matthews has quietly stitched together a well-rounded season within Sundowns' star-studded setup. Featuring in 29 matches, he contributed to 12 goals, eight scored, four created, offering a blend of directness and subtlety in the final third. While he may not always dominate headlines, his ability to influence moments has made him



a valuable piece in a finely tuned attacking machine.

8 Saziso Magawana
Durban City

5 assists, 6.83 average rating

Magawana has emerged as one of Durban City's most potent attacking outlets this season. With three goals, five assists, and one additional pass-to-assist in 27 outings, his contribution has been both varied and vital. Whether driving forward himself or unlocking defences with clever distribution, he has played the role of creator-in-chief for a side that has relied heavily on his spark.

7 Keletso Makgalwa
Sekhukhune United

5 assists, 6.84 average rating

For a player of Makgalwa's ambition and proven quality, this campaign may feel like one that slipped just below expectation. Five assists in 25 games is a respectable return, but not quite in line with the standards he has set for himself. With seven big chances created, the intent has been there, but the final execution has occasionally lacked its usual sharpness. A season of frustration, perhaps, but one that still carried glimpses of his undeniable ability.

6 Arthur Sales
Mamelodi Sundowns

5 assists, 6.92 average rating

The Brazilian has brought a touch of flair and finesse to Sundowns' attacking play. In 22 appearances, Sales has contributed five assists and three goals, underlining his versatility in the final third. With eight big chances created and an additional pass-to-assist, he has proven to be more than just a finisher, capable of crafting opportunities as well as converting them.

5 Devin Titus
Stellenbosch

6 assists, 6.89 average rating

Titus' season has mirrored that of his team, slow to ignite, but increasingly effective as the campaign progressed. After a subdued start, he found his rhythm in the new year, becoming a key creative force for Stellenbosch. Six assists and a goal in 28 appearances tell the story of a player who grew into his role, offering energy, width, and a more consistent end product as the months wore on.

4 Oswin Appollis
Orlando Pirates

6 assists, 7.16 average rating

Few signings have had the kind of impact Appollis has delivered this season. A dynamic presence in attack, he has combined creativity with clinical edge, six assists complemented by nine goals, making him one of the

most complete attacking threats in the league. With 12 big chances created and an additional pass-to-assist, his influence has been both broad and decisive, marking him out as one of the standout performers of the campaign.

3 Siyanda Ndlovu
Golden Arrows

6 assists, 7.22 average rating

Ndlovu has been a beacon of creativity for Arrows, a player entrusted with unlocking defences and setting the tempo in attacking phases. While his form has dipped slightly in 2026, his overall contribution remains significant — six assists, four goals, and nine big chances created. For much of the season, he has been the central figure in Mamelodi Sundowns' attacking blueprint.

2 Deon Hotto
Orlando Pirates

8 assists, 7.12 average rating

Hotto, the seasoned Namibian, has redefined what it means to influence a game from deep, topping the assist charts from his left-back role. With eight assists, a goal, and nine big chances created, his contribution has



been both consistent and crucial. In a team brimming with attacking talent, it is the veteran who has quietly and effectively pulled the strings, proof that vision and intelligence can be just as decisive as pace and flair.

1 Relebohile Mofokeng Orlando Pirates

8 assists, 7.60 average rating

At the summit sits Captain Yama2000. At just 21, Mofokeng is not waiting for the future; he is defining the present. Eight assists and 10 goals paint the picture of a player already operating at an elite level, blending vision with execution in a way few can match. Add 14 big chances created and a pass-to-assist, and it becomes clear: this is not potential, this is production. He is not just participating in games—he is dictating them.

What this list tells us:

Perhaps the most striking feature of this list is the unmistakable imprint of Orlando Pirates. Four Buccaneers feature in the top 10, a clear reflection of how the Soweto giants have functioned this season, not as a side reliant on one standout creator, but as a well-oiled collective where invention

is shared, layered, and relentless. It speaks to a team that doesn't simply chase the title, but shapes matches through a network of contributors, each one capable of unlocking a defence on any given day. And with so many contributing, no wonder Pirates are the league's top scorers.

Defending champions Mamelodi Sundowns may only have two names in the top 10, but that statistic alone doesn't quite tell the full story. Dig a little deeper, and you find four Sundowns players sitting comfortably within the top 15, underlining the depth and versatility that has long defined their dominance. Their creative burden is spread wide, often subtly, across a squad built to overwhelm rather than rely.

More broadly, this has been a season where goals have come at a premium, and that scarcity has elevated the value of those who can provide the final pass.

Interestingly, no other club dominates the upper reaches of the assist charts. Instead, there is a spread, nine different clubs represented in the top 15, painting a picture of a league where creativity is dispersed rather than concentrated, and where match-winners can emerge from almost anywhere.

There are, too, a few notable absentees whose impact perhaps isn't fully captured by the criteria.

Philani Khumalo, for instance, has quietly amassed five assists for Golden Arrows, but falls short of qualification due to limited appearances. A similar story surrounds Puso Dithejane, who registered four assists for TS Galaxy before making his move abroad, his season effectively split before it could fully mature statistically.

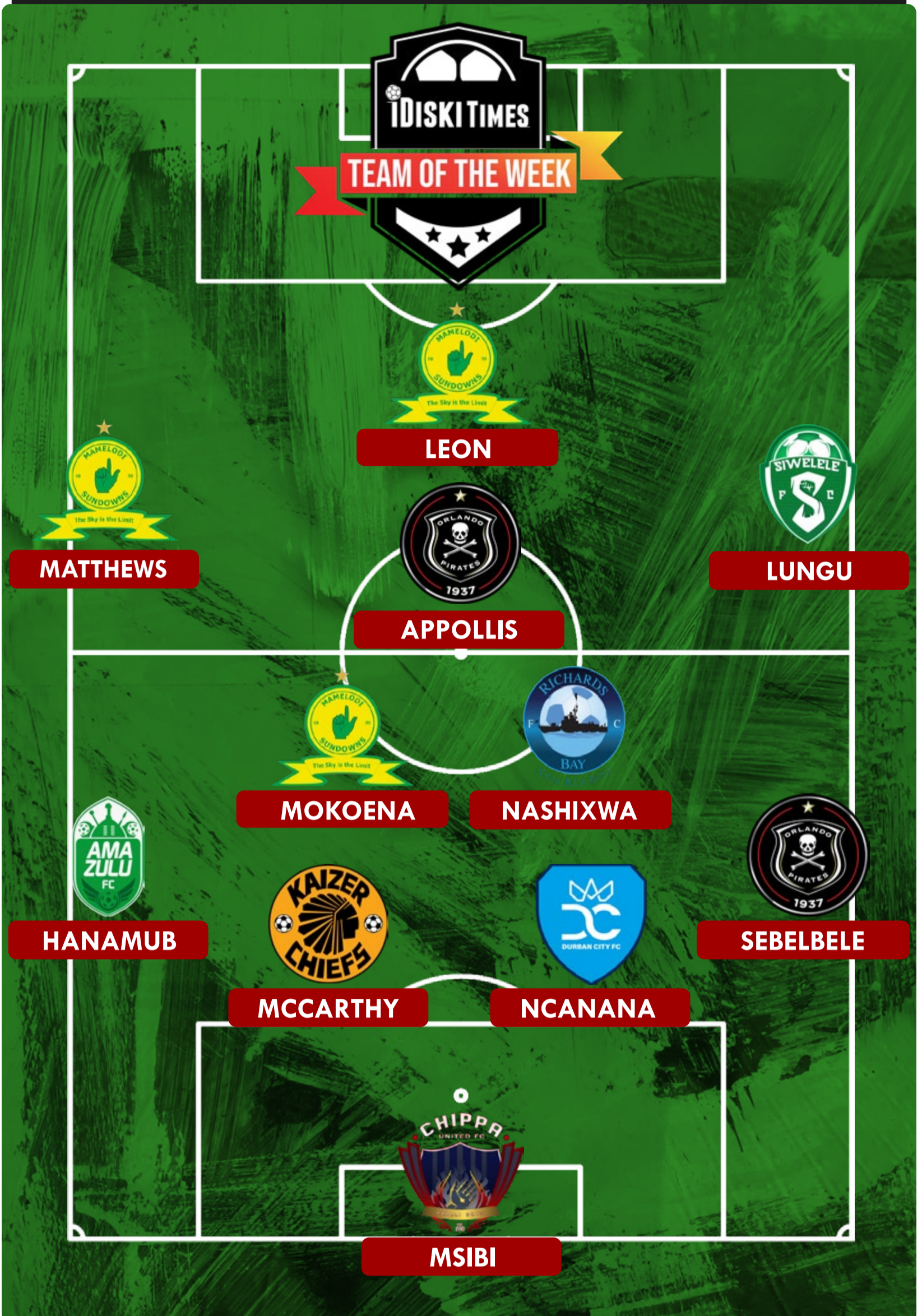
Elsewhere, players like Pirates striker Evidence Makgopa, Puleng Marema of Polokwane City, Tebogo Potsane of Siwelele, Magesi's Mcedi Vandala, Chippa United's Justice Figureido, Kaizer Chiefs' Glody Lilepo and Mduzuzi Shabalala, and the Sundowns pair of Nuno Santos and Monnapule Saleng have matched the assist numbers of peers such as Moremi and Matthews, though with fewer goals to complement their creative output.

And then there's the international flavour, subtle but significant. Only two players on the list hail from beyond South Africa's borders, Hotto and Sales, adding a touch of continental and global texture to what is otherwise a deeply local contest of ingenuity.

All told, the list doesn't just highlight individual brilliance; it tells a broader story about the rhythm of the league this season, one defined by shared responsibility, tactical nuance, and the quiet art of creating something out of nothing.



IDISKI'S PREMIERSHIP TEAM OF THE WEEK (8-10 MAY 2026)



**ACE OF THE WEEK:
BRAYAN LEON**

Our iDiski Times Ace of the Week is Brayan León of Mamelodi Sundowns, after the Colombian forward produced a dazzling performance in the unforgettable 7–4 victory over Sivelele. The extraordinary encounter shattered records, becoming the highest-scoring match in the Premier Soccer League era. While Gampani Lungu also delivered a remarkable display for Sivelele with a hat-trick of his own, it is León who edges this week’s honour thanks to the complete nature of his contribution. Not only did he score three times, but he also added an assist, playing a decisive role in ensuring Sundowns emerged victorious. It was the kind of performance that underlined exactly why Sundowns moved for the Colombian striker in January. The hat-trick also took his tally to 14 goals in all competitions since arriving at Chloorkop earlier this year, an impressive return that suggests he has settled into South African football with increasing confidence and authority.



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.

THE STEINS IN SOUTH AFRICA'S HISTORY

By Rob Delpont

Some South African footballers left home in search of opportunity, chasing the promise of brighter stages and bigger crowds. For others, the journey was not a choice at all, but a consequence, shaped by forces far beyond the touchline.

When Isaiah Stein gathered his family and boarded a ship bound for Southampton in the late 1960s, football would have been the last thing occupying his thoughts. This was not a voyage of ambition, but of necessity.

Born in Durban in 1931 into a Coloured family, his early life was marked by upheaval. Orphaned as a teenager, he moved to District Six in Cape Town, a place alive with culture but increasingly under threat.

There, he carved out an identity in the boxing ring, and it was also there that he first collided, quite literally, with the brutal absurdities of apartheid, arrested for the act of fighting a white opponent.

His life took another turn when he found work with a Jewish family, the Steins, who would later adopt him. With their name came new opportunities. He stepped into property development and began to build something resembling stability, even as the ground beneath him remained politically unstable. He married Lillian Jacobs in the late 1950s, but the tightening grip of apartheid laws would soon shatter any sense of permanence.

Under the Group Areas Act, Stein was forcibly removed from District Six to Athlone, one of many families uprooted in the regime's ruthless spatial engineering. Yet even displacement could not quiet him. If anything, it sharpened his resolve. He rebuilt... homes, livelihoods, and a base for activism and became increasingly involved in the struggle against apartheid.

By the early 1960s, Stein had emerged as a leading organiser within the Coloured People's Congress, aligned with the ANC. The authorities took notice. What followed was brutal. In 1964, he and his wife were dragged from their home, stripped, and tortured. Lillian was detained, and only a desperate hunger strike forced her release. The scars Stein carried from that ordeal were not just physical; they were etched into the fabric of his family's story.

He became one of the first political figures placed under constant house arrest, his movements monitored, his influence feared. With Nelson Mandela imprisoned and the noose tightening around activists across the country, the path forward in South Africa grew ever darker.

And so, exile. When the Steins fled to England, they left behind more than a country; they left behind a life under siege. In London, they were welcomed by allies in the anti-apartheid movement, including church figures who helped them find their footing. Stein took up work with the publishing house Heinemann, helping distribute African literature, continuing his fight in quieter but no less meaningful ways.

But this is not only his story. Among his 10 children were three boys who would, in time, make their names on football pitches far removed from the streets of Cape Town. On that journey north were Edwin, aged 12, Brian, aged 10, and baby Mark, barely a year old, three brothers whose paths would intertwine with the game in unexpected ways.

The older two had already discovered football in South Africa, and in England, that early spark found fuel. Mark, too young to remember the country they had left behind, would follow in their footsteps, shaped entirely by this new

world.

Years later, almost as if history had traced a perfect arc, Brian would step onto the international stage. His rise was swift and improbable, climbing from non-league obscurity to the brink of the highest level of the English game in just over six years.

Making their mark at lower-league Edgware Town, both he and Edwin caught the attention of scouts and made the leap to Luton Town in 1977, a move that would change the course of their careers.

Brian adapted quickly, reshaped tactically and sharpened under astute coaching. Edwin, restless for opportunity, moved on sooner, beginning a long and steady association with the non-league game while balancing life beyond football. He became a Barnet legend, leading his own bit of history.

For Brian, the ascent continued. His goals propelled Luton into the top flight, and he announced himself with authority, none more so than a dazzling performance at Liverpool's fortress, Anfield. There were setbacks too, injuries that threatened to stall momentum, but he returned each time, resilient.

One of his most iconic contributions came in a moment of pure drama, providing the decisive assist that ensured Luton's survival in the top division, ascension punctuated by his manager's exuberant celebration on the pitch. Through it all, his father's struggle remained a quiet counterpoint. While Isaiah continued to fight apartheid from afar, he urged his son to focus on football, to let excellence on the field speak in ways politics sometimes could not.

And yet, the connection between the two worlds never fully faded. As the anti-apartheid movement gained traction globally, Brian found himself part of a broader cultural shift, his presence in English football symbolising something larger than the game itself. His international recognition, including appearances for England's youth sides and a senior cap, carried a significance that extended beyond statistics; it was a subtle but powerful challenge to the racial barriers of the time.

"I mean, at that time and at that age, the situation was about trying to create a career, and because we knew how difficult it was going to be, we had to focus on that," Ed Stein recalled.

"And whilst we were playing, we obviously were made aware of what we were doing and achieving, by our parents. And it may be a good thing to go and share not just ideas, but just the opportunities that we've had. Our parents were



very rarely wrong in whatever they suggested. So it was almost a done thing.”

Meanwhile, younger brother Mark’s career began to gather momentum. At Luton, alongside Brian, he was part of a side that steadily climbed the ranks of English football. Their crowning moment arrived at Wembley in 1988, in the final of the Football League Cup Final 1988. Few gave Luton a chance against Arsenal, but football has always had a taste for the unexpected. On that day, with their father watching, Brian scored the winning goal, etched forever into the club’s history, while Mark played his part in the move that led to it. It was a moment where past and present seemed to collide: exile, struggle, perseverance, and triumph, all distilled into a single strike of the ball.

Mark would go on to carve out a career of his own, moving between clubs, finding form and recognition in different environments. His time at Stoke City proved especially fruitful, where his goalscoring exploits earned him admiration and a lasting nickname. A £1.5 million move to Chelsea brought him into the spotlight of the top tier, where he briefly set a scoring benchmark in the early days of the Premier League era.

Yet perhaps the most telling moment of his career came not from a goal, but from a decision. Late in his playing days, he walked away from a club in protest over alleged racist remarks, an echo, unmistakable and deliberate, of the values his father had lived by. The struggle had never truly left them; it had simply taken on different forms.

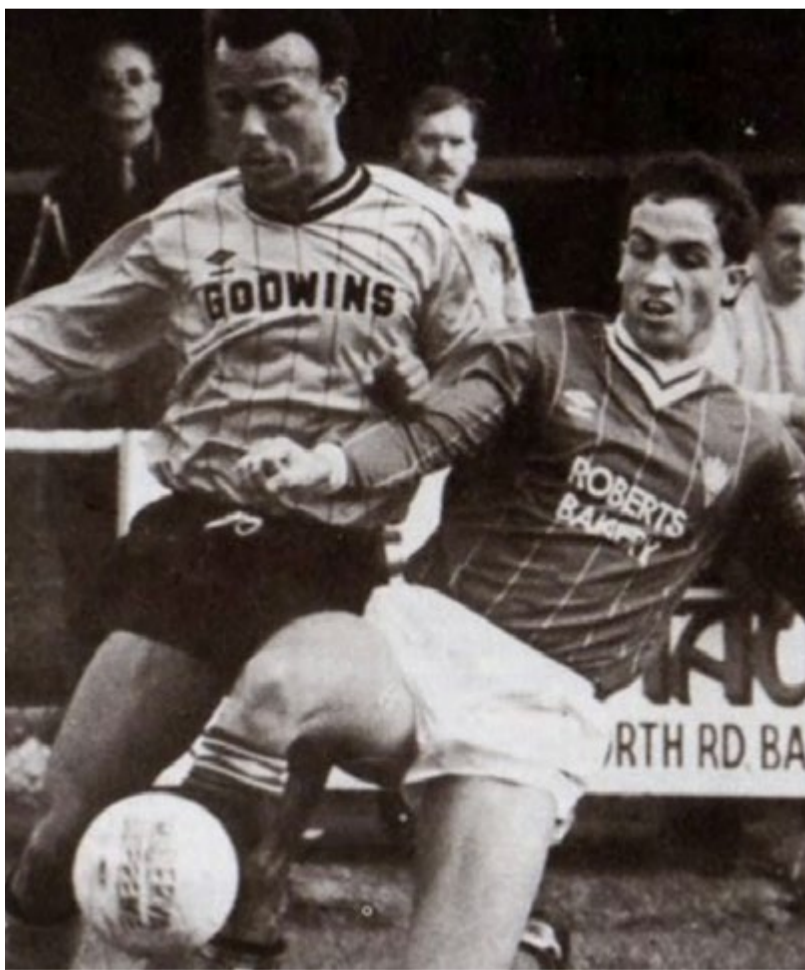
Mark would become a physiotherapist working at several clubs, while Ed became the first black manager of a professional club when he took charge at Barnet in 1992.

“I was the first black manager in the UK,” Edwin told me.

“I was the (Barnet) manager for six months. Then I had an opportunity to go to Southend United, and subsequent to that, I went to Birmingham City, and both were with the same manager (Barry Fry) that I previously worked with.

“I’ve had a fantastic career. No complaints at all. Definitely proud. My parents were very proud. The family were very proud that I became the first black manager. But you’ve got to move on, leave that as a legacy, part and parcel of the legacy of the Stein brothers.”

I had the rare privilege, some years ago, of spending time in the company of Ed and Brian



when on a visit to South Africa. It was one of those encounters that lingers long after the moment has passed, not because of spectacle, but because of the quiet weight of history sitting just beneath the surface.

One of the great honours of that time was introducing them to Benni McCarthy, a figure who, in many ways, represents the road they helped clear long before it was visible. There was something almost poetic in that meeting, threads from different generations of South African football briefly woven together. The Steins had pushed against barriers in an era when doors were firmly shut; McCarthy walked through some of those same doors years later and, in turn, held them open for those who followed. It was less a meeting of individuals and more a passing of something intangible, recognition, perhaps, or quiet understanding.

But beyond the symbolism, there was something far more personal unfolding. For Edwin and Brian, this was not simply a visit; it was a return to a life interrupted. Nearly half a century had passed since they had left these shores, and time has a way of softening some edges while sharpening others. They moved through familiar spaces that no longer felt entirely familiar, piecing together fragments of memory with what stood before them now.

There were reunions, of course, faces from the past, family ties that had stretched but not entirely broken, friendships that somehow endured despite the years and distance. Those moments carried warmth, laughter, and the kind of easy connection that defies time. Yet there was also an undercurrent of dislocation. For many they encountered, these men, once boys who had left under extraordinary circumstances, had become figures of a story, almost mythic in absence. And so, in a quietly poignant twist, they were both returning sons and, in some ways, strangers.

That duality hung in the air. They walked a land that had always remained close to their hearts, even as life had unfolded elsewhere. You could sense the pull of belonging, but also the reality of distance, of years lived, careers forged, identities shaped far from where it all began.

It was, above all, deeply moving. Not in a loud or dramatic way, but in the kind of slow, reflective manner that settles in over time. A homecoming, yes, but one layered with memory, loss, pride, and the faint, unspoken question of what might have been had history taken a different turn.

“You can take the man out of the country, but you can never take the country out of the man. That has always been our principle,” Edwin said to me.

“Because we knew where we’d come from,” Brian interjected.

“Probably our younger sister, who was born in England, didn’t realise that we were South African at first, but she’s come over to South Africa now every year because she loves it.”

In the end, the story of the Stein brothers is not just about football. It is about movement, across continents, across identities, across generations. It is about how history seeps into the lives of individuals, shaping paths in ways both subtle and profound.

And in the case of Edwin, Brian, and Mark, it is about how three boys who once left a troubled homeland behind grew into men who carried its story with them, wherever the game took them.



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