



THE NUMBERS BEHIND BAFANA'S 26-MAN WORLD CUP SQUAD



KEKANA ON CAFCL SUCCESS, WORLD CUP SQUAD SNUB & BOUNCING BACK



CAMPBELL CLOSE TO MOVE IN EUROPE



NEW-LOOK CHIEFS DEFENCE IN 26/27 AS STAR WANTED OVERSEAS?



THE ACCIDENTAL COACH WHO BEAT 'DAN DANCE' & JOMO SONO



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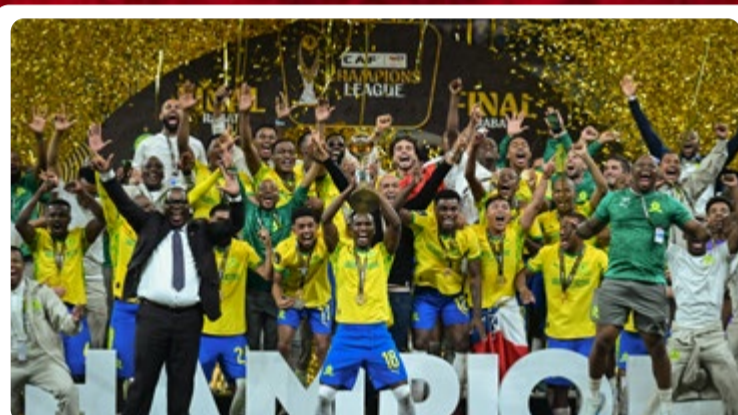
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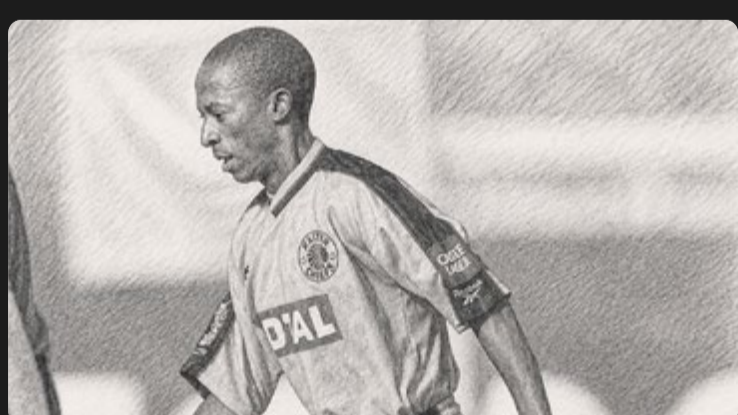
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CAMPBELL CLOSE TO POTENTIAL MOVE?

South African playmaker Shandre Campbell is reportedly in discussions with Kortrijk over a potential move from Club Brugge as he looks to secure more regular first-team football. Campbell, who turns 21 next month, enjoyed a memorable debut season with Brugge, helping the club lift the league title after starring for Club NXT, the club's reserve side, during the previous campaign. However, opportunities in the senior team were limited, with the talented midfielder largely deployed from the bench. Despite making an impact when called upon, he managed one goal across the season, and a move to Kortrijk could provide the platform for more consistent game-time and further development.



ANOTHER LOAN FOR GOSS?

Mamelodi Sundowns goalkeeper Ricardo Goss has spent the last four seasons away from Chloorkop on loan, and there is a strong possibility that streak could extend into a fifth campaign, with the Bafana Bafana shot-stopper linked with a return to Siwelele for the 2026/27 season. Goss has already hinted that he would be open to going back to the club, although he is expected to first report back to Sundowns for preseason before a final decision is made on his future. The 32-year-old's situation appears fairly straightforward, however. Having worked his way into the national team picture, regular first-team football has become increasingly important if he wants to maintain his place in the Bafana set-up.



GALAXY YOUNGSTER ATTRACTING INTEREST

TS Galaxy have earned a growing reputation for identifying and preparing exciting young talent, with players such as Kamogelo Sebelebele, Samukelo Kabini, Puso Dithejane and Khulumani Ndamane all securing high-profile moves in recent seasons. Now, another Rockets prospect appears poised to follow in their footsteps. Interest is reportedly mounting in 20-year-old defender Lentswe Motaung after an impressive breakthrough campaign during the 2025/26 season. The right-back, who was promoted to the senior squad at the start of the campaign, featured 22 times in his debut season and quickly established himself as one of the club's brightest young talents. With scouts taking notice of his performances, Motaung could be the next Galaxy starlet set for a lucrative transfer.



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‘NEW’ DEFENCE FOR NEW CHIEFS COACH?

While Kaizer Chiefs can look back on the 2025/26 season with a greater sense of optimism after securing a third-place finish, changes are still expected at Naturena once the club’s new, yet-to-be-announced head coach officially takes charge.

Following the exits of interim co-coaches, Cedric Kaze and Khaleel Ben Youssef, Chiefs have been linked with several names, including Frenchman Fernando Da Cruz, the frontrunner who was at the club briefly as an assistant in 2024, as well as Belgian Sven Vandenbroeck, AS FAR’s Portuguese coach, Alexandre Santos, and local options like Pitso Mosimane, Benni McCarthy and Manqoba Mngqithi.

One department that could undergo significant surgery is the central defence. Chiefs relied on Ignacio Miguel, Aden McCarthy, Zitha Kwinika, Given Msimango, and occasionally Bradley Cross throughout the campaign, but the composition of that backline could look very different when the new season gets underway.

Although the club has not yet officially announced the deal, Thabo Moloisane appears destined for Naturena after departing Stellenbosch FC at the end of his contract. The Bafana Bafana defender is understood to have agreed

to a pre-contract with Amakhosi several months ago and is expected to bolster the club’s defensive options.

There is also encouraging news regarding Rushwin Dortley. The defender has endured a lengthy spell on the sidelines, missing the entirety of the 2025/26 campaign after being ruled out for more than a year. However, indications are that he will be fit and available when Chiefs begin preparations for the new season ahead of the August kickoff.

The situations involving Miguel and McCarthy, meanwhile, remain far less certain. The Angolan international is believed to be among the players who could depart the club during the off-season, while McCarthy’s impressive breakthrough season has reportedly attracted attention from abroad, with the latest being that he is set to join Sabah FK in Azerbaijan.

Having made just a single appearance before the start of the 2025/26 campaign, the 22-year-old centre-back established himself as a key figure in the side, featuring in 23 league matches and showcasing the maturity and composure that have made him one of the club’s most promising academy graduates.

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JUNIORS KHANYE ON BAFANA BAFANA WORLD CUP SQUAD

It's almost time for the FIFA World Cup, and Hugo Broos named his 26-man Bafana Bafana squad last week that heads to Mexico, the USA and Canada.

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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'Are Bafana Bafana ready for the World Cup?'

"The World Cup squad announced by Hugo Broos is missing a few players I would have loved to see.

"Grant Kekana has played well for Mamelodi Sundowns. He is an African Champion. I was surprised not to see him there as an experienced player.

"Brandon Petersen, although I'm not a big fan, but he has done well for Kaizer Chiefs in big matches against Sundowns and Pirates. He stood out for Chiefs. He would have been my third choice over Ricardo Goss, who has dropped form.

"Whatever Thembinkosi Lorch has done in the past, he has served his sentence; he should have been recalled back by now. He is experienced.

"Tito Maswanganyi is another name I would have loved to see in the squad as well.

"Are Bafana Bafana ready for the World Cup? Judging by the friendly games against Panama and Nicaragua, I don't think we are ready for the World Cup. Our performance doesn't suggest we are.

"Our only hopes are the Pirates players who won the treble at home and the Sundowns players who won the CAF Champions League. We will rely heavily on those players."



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KEKANA ON CAFCL SUCCESS, WORLD CUP SQUAD SNUB & BOUNCING BACK

GRANT KEKANA may have had a season he'd rather forget, with injuries and loss of form ensuring he had uncharacteristically limited game-time. He missed out on the Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco, and then, as if that was not bad enough, he did not make the final Bafana Bafana squad that will be representing South Africa at the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Yet, the Mamelodi Sundowns defender was in high spirits this week – delighted as he was at having been a part of the Brazilians team that brought home the continent's ultimate

club football prize, the CAF Champions League, the fact that he also did not play in the final notwithstanding. **iDiski** senior writer **MATHELANE MAMABOLO** caught up with Kekana in Sandton for a reflection on the season during a Puma-hosted event that was part of the RB Leipzig tour, during which the Sundowns juniors played against the Stars of Africa.

Matshelane Mamabolo: Grant, how are you, son? I know you are walking on air as an African champion, but before we get to that, let's talk domestic. You guys did not win the domestic championship as you had wanted. How hard was it to lose it the way you guys did?

Grant Kekana: It was obviously difficult. We were trying everything in our power to win it again. It just didn't work out. But we were able to accept that and put everything and all our energy in the CAF Champions League, which we were able to take in the end.

MM: That must have made up for the loss of the championship....

GK: Yeah, definitely. Considering even how we just started the season, I think it's not the way we would have loved to start the season. We went through a lot of obstacles, challenges, and at one point, it felt like everything was against us. But credit to everyone in the Sundowns family. We never stopped believing; we kept believing. And it finally worked in our favour in the end.

MM: You've come so close to winning the Champions League over the years with development. Together, what does it mean for you and the team?

GK: I think at this current time, we all haven't really grasped what it actually means. But we understand that it's a big thing, it's a big deal. So maybe in years to come, we'll be able to reflect and say, 'you know what, this is the legacy that we left at Mamelodi Sundowns'. But for us to continuously be knocking on the door, there was going to come a point when the door opens. And we're fortunate enough that it opened for us this season. And we're just very happy to have entered into a place where it's just us in South Africa [with the two Champions League victories].

MM: You lost the final last year. How did you guys overcome that to be able to then go again the next year? Because too often a team can go: 'oh, this is not meant for us' when they come as close as you guys have previously.

GK: I think it only served as motivation because all the years before last year, it was semi-finals, semi-finals, and

"WE WERE TRYING EVERYTHING IN OUR POWER TO WIN IT AGAIN. IT JUST DIDN'T WORK OUT. BUT WE WERE ABLE TO ACCEPT THAT AND PUT EVERYTHING AND ALL OUR ENERGY IN THE CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE."





then we reached the final. So even when we lost it, yes, we were disappointed. But it gave us motivation to say, yes, we reached the final. The next step is to win the final. So even from last year, from the FIFA Club World Cup, I think that's where we got our confidence from to say, 'hey, look at how we are holding our own here at the Club World Cup. When we come back to Africa, let's show them what we're about'. And that's the mentality we had this whole season.

MM: For you personally, when you look back at your season, how do you sum it up?

GK: Obviously, a difficult one for me. Here and there, there was a loss of form, and loss of confidence here and there. But we soldier on. I also had hiccups, slight niggles and injuries. But we soldier on. You know, you dust yourself up. And at the end, there's no sweeter feeling than lifting the Champions League. So despite the challenges that I faced personally for my season, I topped it off with a Champions League winners' medal. And I'm very proud. And I think that overshadows everything else.

MM: The national team, you were part of it quite a while. But then, when it comes to the big moments, you miss out. How does that feel?

GK: I think it's every player's dream to represent their country first. And it's every player's dream to go to the World Cup with their country. So I was disappointed. Even when I missed out on the AFCON, I was disappointed. Yes, but we accepted [it]. There are players who have been doing well in my position. And to their credit, they keep being consistent. So, we can only encourage and wish them well.

MM: That's a very sober way to accept the disappointment. Now Grant, what

“I THINK THAT'S WHERE WE GOT OUR CONFIDENCE FROM TO SAY, 'HEY, LOOK AT HOW WE ARE HOLDING OUR OWN HERE AT THE CLUB WORLD CUP. WHEN WE COME BACK TO AFRICA, LET'S SHOW THEM WHAT WE'RE ABOUT'.”

drives you so much? You've achieved so much with Sundowns. And now winning the Champions League is the ultimate. You've been to the Club World Cup. What makes you want to go out there again and do things?

GK: I never lost touch with my dream. Ever since I was young, all I wanted to do was become a professional player and win trophies. You can never have won enough trophies. So as long as my body allows, my legs allow, and my mind allows, I'll do everything in my power to contribute to the team's success of winning trophies. That's my biggest motivation. It's not letting go of the dreams I had when I was a young child.

MM: Like I said, you've achieved most of that. How do you keep wanting more?

GK: I think it's an addiction. You can never have enough trophies, enough wins. You just want to continuously do it. I'm a person that doesn't want to live with any regrets. I don't want to find myself saying 'maybe I should have gone another year'. So, I don't want to have that at the back of my mind after I've retired. That's why I say, as long as my body allows, my mind allows, I'm going



to do everything in my power to achieve as much as I can, for as long as I can.

MM: You've been with the national squad. We've seen the squad that's announced. Do you believe we can go to the next round? When you look at it, is it something we can do?

GK: Yes, definitely. There's enough quality in us. There's enough heart and fire in the boys' bellies. It's just for us as a nation to rally behind them. When the coach makes his mind up, he's made his mind up. It's final. There's no point in us giving the national team negative energy. I think this is the time they need us the most, for us to know that when they get there, they know the people have their backs, other South Africans. That's what I'll be doing. Obviously, I have a lot of relationships with a lot of players there, personal relationships. I also want to see them do well and market themselves, because they'll be competing against the best of the best. It's just about us as a nation rallying behind them, being positive. I think we have a chance of going into the next round.

MM: Where will you be watching the World Cup? Are you going?

GK: I think I'll be around for the first game. I'm not sure, but I think I'll be away for the last game of the group stages.

MM: Away, does it mean to go to the World Cup?

GK: No, I want to travel, and experience, and relax. It's been a tough season. It's been a tough two years for me, actually. I need some time out, also to just forget about football for a bit, so that I come back even hungrier next season.

MM: How do you get through that? The tough seasons you guys have had. How influential is your family in terms of your career, because – like you say – you've gone through a rough patch. How supportive is your mum and the

“IT'S EVERY PLAYER'S DREAM TO GO TO THE WORLD CUP WITH THEIR COUNTRY. SO I WAS DISAPPOINTED. EVEN WHEN I MISSED OUT OF THE AFCON, I WAS DISAPPOINTED, YES, BUT WE ACCEPTED.”

family?

GK: Extremely supportive. My mum's had my back from day one. She believed in my dream from day one. And she always has the right things to say. She reminds me of what to do when things aren't going bad. She is a very important person in my life. But so is my son also. Kgosi, he loves it when daddy's always in a happy mood, jolly mood. And he's the first to tell me, 'Dad, I don't think you had a good game. You should have tackled there or passed that ball' (chuckles). But I understand it comes from a place of love. So even he tries to improve me. And I'm just very fortunate to have those types of people around me.

MM: How old is your son?

GK: Nine years old. But I told him he can't be a defender. And now his role model is Teboho Mokoena. He calls him 'Uncle Tebza' and so we're grooming him to become the next 'Uncle Tebza'.

MM: That's fantastic. Grant, thank you so much and congratulations once more on the Champions League success.

GK: Thank you so much.



THE ACCIDENTAL COACH WHO BEAT LEGENDS AND FOUND HIS CALLING



By Matshelane Mamabolo

There are football stories that follow a predictable arc: boy meets ball, boy dreams big, boy becomes star. And then there is the story of Phuti Mohafe, a man who did not so much choose coaching as he was quietly pushed into it by circumstance, disappointment and, as he puts it himself, “a refusal to let my journey end in failure”.

Today, Mohafe is the coach of Polokwane City and one of the most quietly respected tacticians in South African football. But rewind the tape far enough, and you find a man on the verge of walking away from the game altogether.

“I was done with football,” he says, almost casually, as if it were just another decision one makes on a Tuesday afternoon. “I had reached a point where I thought maybe this was not for me anymore.”

He had every reason to feel that way. His playing career had drifted through the lower divisions, across clubs such as Mighty FC, Ria Stars, City Sharks, Tembisa Classic, Masters, Winners Park and others. There were glimpses of promise, brief moments where destiny seemed to flirt with him, but never enough to fully commit.

And then came the moment that would quietly reshape his entire life.

At Witbank Spurs, a club that would become both his sanctuary and laboratory, Mohafe was no longer just a player. He was slowly becoming something else. The chairman, Themba Mafu, saw leadership where others saw a journeyman midfielder. He saw potential where Mohafe himself saw exhaustion.

“He said to me, ‘I see something in you. I want you to start learning coaching’,” Mohafe recalls.

At first, he resisted.

“I KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO NOT MAKE IT; THAT IS WHY I UNDERSTAND MY PLAYERS.”

“I told him, ‘No, I don’t want to be a coach. I want to be done with football’.”

But the chairman insisted. Courses were paid for. Opportunities were created. And slowly, almost without Mohafe fully realising it, the door into coaching opened.

‘I Realised Maybe This Thing Is Actually For Me’

The real turning point, however, came on the pitch.

With the head coach unavailable, Mohafe was handed responsibility for a match. No ceremony. No preparation for grandeur. Just responsibility.

His first test? Garankuwa United, coached at the time by the experienced and respected Dan ‘Dance’ Malesela.

“We won 1–0,” he says. “And later, after the match, the chairman revealed to me that he was in the stadium and he liked what he saw. He never came into the dressing room. He just watched from the stands.”

The second match was even more defining. Jomo Cosmos, led by none other than the legendary Jomo Sono himself.

“We beat them, too. 1–0.”

Two matches. Against two giants of South African football. Two wins.

And just like that, the reluctant coach began to believe.

“That is where my confidence started,” Mohafe says. “I realised maybe this thing is actually for me.”



But those victories did not come from nowhere. They were sharpened by struggle, particularly his time at Dolphins in the ABC Motsepe League.

It was there, in the grind of semi-professional football, that Mohafe learned the most important lesson of his coaching life.

“At Dolphins, I learned coaching,” he says without hesitation. “You find players who cannot even trap a ball properly. You must teach everything. That is where I was sharpened.”

It was raw football education. No glamour, no shortcuts, only repetition, patience and problem-solving. It was also where Mohafe developed his trademark coaching identity: simplicity, structure, and relentless honesty.

“I became very clear with the players,” he explains. “If you don’t do what I need, I’ll sit you down and show you. No confusion.”

That clarity, he believes, is what still defines him today.

From those humble beginnings, Mohafe’s coaching journey has been a steady climb: Tshakhuma, Royal Eagles, Polokwane City’s first spell, a return to ABC Motsepe football, and eventually back to the PSL, where he now sits firmly at the helm.

But the irony of his story is hard to miss.

The man who once wanted out of football altogether is now the one tasked with solving its toughest problems. And perhaps most remarkable of all, it began with two wins over legends.

“I will never forget that,” he says softly. “It made me believe I belong here.”

And he has proven that he really belongs, Mohafe leading and helping a City outfit often considered relegation material into becoming regulars in the top eight.

The Coach Who Was Not Good Enough As A Player

As he reflects on his success at the highest level, he does not shy away from talking about failure. In fact, he embraces it so openly that it almost feels like a core philosophy rather than a painful memory.

“I know what it means to not make it,” he says. “That is why I understand my players.”

Today, he is credited as one of the most effective talent developers in South African football, particularly for players coming from rural and under-resourced backgrounds. At Polokwane City, names such as Thabang Matuludi, Mokibelo Ramabu, Ndamulelo Mapangule, Tlou Nkwe and Puleng Marema have flourished under his guidance.

But Mohafe insists this is not coincidence. It is identity.

“I was one of them,” he says simply.



“HE SAID TO ME, ‘I SEE SOMETHING IN YOU. I WANT YOU TO START LEARNING COACHING. I TOLD HIM, NO, I DON’T WANT TO BE A COACH. I WANT TO BE DONE WITH FOOTBALL.’”

His playing career, though extensive, never reached the heights he once dreamed of. There were moments, trials with Moroka Swallows, spells in the First Division, stints in the PSL without kicking a ball, but the breakthrough never truly arrived.

“I was a raw player,” he admits. “I had talent, yes, but I also had low self-esteem. That cost me a PSL career.”

The admission is not bitterness. It is a diagnosis.

He recalls a particularly defining moment, a trial period at Swallows where he trained alongside some of the era’s most established names.

“I was not familiar with playing on grass at that level,” he says candidly. “It was a disadvantage for me.”

Yet even there, encouragement came from unexpected places. Coaches such as Yster Khomane and the late Eddie Lewis saw something in him.

“They told me I had potential,” he says. “And I tried.”

He was close, so close, to signing for the club. But fate intervened. The club’s ownership changed abruptly



after internal turmoil, and Mohafa's opportunity disappeared overnight. "I went to the office, and they told me they didn't know me," he recalls. "But I was told by the coaches to come sign."

A Player Needs To Have An Agent, Or They Will Disappear

It was his first real lesson in football's harsh unpredictability and the importance of representation.

"I realised then you need an agent. Otherwise, you can disappear."

From there, his career became a journey through football's margins: relegations, short-term contracts, loan moves, and survival football. Eventually, he reached a breaking point.

"I called it quits," he says.

But football, as it often does, called him back – this time through Witbank Spurs, where he rediscovered stability, leadership, and eventually coaching.

And it is here that the second transformation happened.

As captain of the club, Mohafa was encouraged by the chairman to take coaching courses. He resisted at first, still clinging to the identity of a player.

But eventually, he gave in.

That decision would shape everything that followed.

You must make them feel they belong

Because what Mohafa discovered, slowly and painfully, was that his failure as a player was not a limitation. It was a bridge.

Today, his coaching philosophy is built almost entirely around that lived experience.

"I understand players from rural areas," he says. "Because I was one of them."

He describes players who arrive at professional setups not just under-skilled, but under-confident.

"They don't fail because they don't want to succeed," he explains. "It is the environment. The pressure. The self-doubt."

So he builds differently.

At Polokwane City, many of his trusted players come from the ABC Motsepe League or even deeper grassroots systems. He does not simply recruit them; he reconstructs their belief.

"You must make them feel they belong," he says. "That is the most important thing."

It is this emotional intelligence that has defined his success. Players who once doubted themselves now perform with conviction. And Mohafa takes pride in that transformation more than any tactical victory.



"AT DOLPHINS, I LEARNED COACHING. YOU FIND PLAYERS WHO CANNOT EVEN TRAP A BALL PROPERLY. YOU MUST TEACH EVERYTHING. THAT IS WHERE I WAS SHARPENED."

"I know what it feels like to think you are not good enough," he says. "So I make sure they never feel that here."

His journey through clubs such as Dolphins – where he describes learning coaching in its rawest form – further strengthened this philosophy. There, he had to teach the basics most coaches take for granted.

"It was there I learned everything," he says. "You cannot assume anything."

That grounding now informs his approach at PSL level, where he has quietly built one of the most stable mid-table teams in the country.

Three consecutive top-eight challenges later, Mohafa remains humble about the credit.

"It is not only me," he insists. "It is the chairman, the staff, the players. We do this together."

But beneath the humility lies a clear truth: his impact is undeniable.

And perhaps that is the final irony of his story.

The man who once did not make it as a player is now the reason many others do.

"I failed," he says, "but that failure taught me how to succeed for others."

MKHALELE: 'WE PROMISE YOU THAT AT THE WORLD CUP AGAINST MEXICO, CZECH REPUBLIC AND SOUTH KOREA, WE WILL MAKE YOU PROUD.'

A BUMPY BON VOYAGE FOR BAFANA

By Lorenz Köhler

South Africa's journey to the 2026 FIFA World Cup was always going to be historic. But in true Bafana Bafana fashion, the road to the tournament has been anything but straightforward. From squad selection controversy to visa headaches, the nation's beloved football team has had anything but a smooth send-off ahead of what promises to be the most significant chapter in South African football history.

Last Tuesday evening, head coach Hugo Broos named his final 26-man squad at a high-profile event held at the Presidential Guest House in Pretoria. The announcement, which should have been a moment of pure celebration, was instead met with a mixture of joy and controversy.

The decision to omit the likes of Lebogang Maboe and Brandon Petersen sparked immediate debate among supporters and pundits alike, with Broos finding himself on the defensive, publicly justifying the exclusion of certain players at the event itself. The Belgian tactician, never one to shy away from straight talk, stood by his decisions with characteristic conviction – but the omissions left a sting that lingered well beyond Tuesday night.

For the six players who received the devastating news that they had not made the cut, the blow was delivered in an era-defining way. Rather than being informed through the usual private channels, the six, Petersen, Maboe, Patrick Maswanganyi, Thapelo Morena, Brooklyn Poggenpoel and Thabiso Monyane, found out with the rest of us. While only a select few media were invited to what was a political takeover of a squad announcement.

It was an unconventional method that added another layer of drama to an already turbulent selection process with the late announcement of the preliminary squad, and one that will no doubt fuel debate long after the tournament kicks off. While one can argue that Broos should be trusted, there were some questions around the decision to call up 11 defenders in the 26-man squad.

'The Unconvincing Friendly'

On the pitch, South Africa played their final World Cup warm-up fixture on home soil on Friday, a 0-0 draw against Central American minnows Nicaragua at 60% capacity sold stadium. While a clean sheet is always welcome, the goalless stalemate did little to inspire confidence ahead of a daunting Group A campaign.

The result reverberated far beyond South Africa's borders. In Mexico — Bafana's opening opponents at the World Cup — the draw was picked up by the media with a sharp, cynical edge. Mexican journalists and football commentators have since openly questioned whether South Africa possesses the attacking quality and cutting edge to pose a genuine threat when the two nations meet in the tournament opener on 11 June 2026. It is the kind of bulletin board material that a savvy coach like Broos will no doubt use to his advantage inside the dressing room.

'The Heartfelt Sendoff'

Despite the noise around the squad announcement and the subdued performance against Nicaragua, the mood among supporters remained electric heading into the weekend. On Saturday, thousands of passionate



APPOLLIS: "IT'S A BIG TOURNAMENT, AND WE'RE EXCITED TO HAVE SEEN THE FANS COMING OUT IN THEIR NUMBERS TO GIVE US A SEND-OFF, WE APPRECIATE THEM."

Bafana Bafana fans gathered for an official send-off event in partnership with long-standing national team sponsor Castle Lager.

Players were present, feeding off the energy of a crowd that had shown up in full voice and full colour to wish their heroes well ahead of the journey to the United States. It was a moment of genuine warmth and unity – a reminder of just how deeply this nation has invested its hopes and dreams in this squad.

Assistant coach Helman Mkhalele soaked in the atmosphere and delivered a heartfelt message to the supporters gathered. "I'd like to express my gratitude for the support, the love that you given to us, and in the very same spirit, the energy you are showing here today, we are going to take it to the World Cup," Mkhalele said. "We promise you that at the World Cup against Mexico, Czech Republic and South Korea, we will make you proud — that's what we want to do as Bafana Bafana."

Winger Oswin Appollis, one of Bafana's most exciting attacking talents and a player who will be expected to make a major impact in America, echoed his coach's sentiments.

"It's a big tournament and we're excited to have seen the fans coming out in their numbers to give us a send-off, we appreciate them," Appollis said. "I know they will support us from South Africa, all the way to America – so we just want to say thank you to them."

The Orlando Pirates speedster was equally bullish about South Africa's prospects when asked about the challenge that lies ahead.

"Everyone in the team wants to do their best, and it's what we're going to do — we have enough quality to overcome anything and the boys will put in everything they can for the country," he said. "It's going to be an entertaining game against Mexico. It's not an easy game, but we will be well prepared."

'A Shock At The 11th Hour'

But just as the send-off was building to a crescendo of national pride, fresh drama unfolded. Hours after the Saturday event, it was confirmed that visa complications had emerged, throwing the travel plans of the squad into disarray.

The news landed like a cold bucket of water on what had been a warm and optimistic afternoon, and once again cast South Africa's preparations in an anxious light. Questions began to swirl about whether the squad would be able to depart on schedule and how the disruption might affect their preparation time ahead of a warm-up match against Jamaica before the World Cup begins in earnest.

It was Minister of Sports, Arts and Culture Gayton McKenzie who finally brought clarity to the situation. On Sunday, 31 May, McKenzie confirmed that all player visas had been successfully resolved and that the charter flight would depart on Monday. The announcement brought





DIKGACOI: "I HAVE NO DOUBT THESE GUYS CAN PULL THROUGH. ALL THEY NEED NOW IS OUR SUPPORT, AND I BELIEVE THE ATMOSPHERE IS FANTASTIC IN THE GROUP."

an audible sigh of relief from a nation that had already endured more than its fair share of off-field anxiety in the build-up to the tournament. After all the turbulence of the week, Bafana Bafana would be heading to America on time.

The visa drama, the squad controversy, the underwhelming friendly result — none of it has dampened the belief that this group of players carries something genuinely special. South Africa's football community has waited 16 years since the nation hosted the 2010 FIFA World Cup to see Bafana Bafana compete on the world's biggest stage. Now, they are back. And for many who were part of that 2010 journey, the parallels are clear.

'KG Rallies SA To Support Bafana'

Kagiso Dikgacoi, the former Bafana Bafana midfielder who was part of the squad that played in front of the world when South Africa hosted the tournament in 2010, is among those who believe this generation can achieve what none before them has managed — progression beyond the group stage. Dikgacoi, who witnessed first-hand the pressure and privilege of representing South Africa at a World Cup, has not a shred of doubt about this team's ability to rise to the occasion.

"Our boys are going to be tested, but I have faith in them," Dikgacoi said.

"I've seen them, how they played in the Africa Cup of Nations, against some of the best players in Africa, the best countries — troubling the likes of Morocco, who have superstars like [Achraf] Hakimi at PSG. I have no doubt these guys can pull through. All they need now is our support, and I believe the atmosphere is fantastic

in the group, and it will be a huge morale booster for our players."

Dikgacoi's words carry weight. He knows what it takes to walk out in a Bafana shirt when the stakes are at their highest, and his faith in this squad is both grounded and infectious.

South Africa's path through Group A will not be easy.

Mexico, the co-hosts and one of CONCACAF's most storied footballing nations, await in that opener on 11 June. The Czech Republic and South Korea complete a group that, on paper, represents the sternest examination Bafana Bafana could face.

Yet history has a habit of being written by those bold enough to ignore the odds.

Before any of that, there is the small matter of a final warm-up fixture against Jamaica, a match that will give Broos one last opportunity to sharpen his combinations, settle his best eleven, and ensure that the noise of the past week is well and truly behind them by the time they step onto that World Cup stage.

South Africa left for America on Monday, visas stamped, bags packed, and a nation's hopes firmly on their shoulders. The bon voyage was bumpy, no question. But Bafana Bafana have never done things the easy way. And if the fire shown by the fans at Saturday's send-off is anything to go by, this journey — however rocky the start — is one that could end in the kind of glory that a generation of South African football supporters has dreamed of.

The World Cup is here. Bafana Bafana are ready. South Africa, are you?



COACHES

HEAD COACH:

Hugo Broos (Belgium)
 10 April 1952 - 74 years old
 24 caps (Belgium)
 [57 games in charge of Bafana]

This will be Hugo Broos' fourth major international tournament as a coach, following three appearances at the CAF Africa Cup of Nations. The experienced Belgian famously lifted the AFCON trophy with Cameroon in 2017, before later guiding Bafana Bafana to back-to-back continental tournaments. Under his leadership, South Africa finished third at AFCON before suffering a Last-16 exit to Cameroon earlier this year. While this will be his first appearance at a FIFA World Cup as a coach, it is not his first experience of football's grandest stage. Broos previously travelled to the World Cup as a player with Belgium at the 1986 tournament in Mexico, where the Belgians enjoyed a memorable run to the semi-finals before eventually finishing fourth. Now four decades later, the veteran coach returns to the World Cup in a very different role, no longer as a defender on the pitch, but as the experienced figure leading an entire nation from the touchline. At 74, this is likely Broos' final opportunity to experience the World Cup, and there is something rather fitting about the possibility of him closing the final chapter of his long football journey at the biggest tournament the sport has to offer.

ASSISTANT COACH:

Helman Mkhalele (South Africa)
 20 October 1969 - 56 years old
 66 caps, 8 goals

Having been part of the historic Bafana Bafana squad that qualified for and competed at South Africa's first-ever FIFA World Cup in 1998, Helman Mkhalele will now return to football's grandest stage in 2026 as Hugo Broos' assistant coach. There is a certain poetic symmetry to Mkhalele's return. Midnight Express painfully missed out on being part of South Africa's 2002 World Cup squad despite playing a role in qualification, featuring in three of the victories that helped Bafana secure their place in South Korea and Japan, with his international career effectively cut short a year earlier. Now, more than two decades later, Mkhalele finally gets another World Cup journey, this time from the touchline rather than the wing. As Bafana prepare for Mexico, the United States and Canada, he carries with him not only his own unfinished story, but also the memory and legacy of the generation that first placed South Africa on the global football map, linking that pioneering era with this new one chasing history of its own.



GOAL KEEPERS

Ronwen Williams (Mamelodi Sundowns)
 21 January 1992 - 34 years old
 63 caps



There was a time when Bafana Bafana seemed to be searching endlessly for a true leader, a player capable of carrying both responsibility and expectation on his shoulders. In Ronwen Williams, they found exactly that. The Mamelodi Sundowns has become the heartbeat of the national side, the calm voice in chaos, the figure teammates look toward when pressure tightens. Since making his debut against Brazil in 2014, Williams has grown into one of the most important players of his generation, amassing 63 caps, conceding 66 goals, and keeping 23 clean sheets in national colours. His overall record of 30 wins, 16 draws and 17 defeats tells the story of a goalkeeper who has seen Bafana through rebuilding years into a new era of competitiveness. Interestingly, despite his longevity, Williams never featured in either the COSAFA Cup or CHAN structures. He essentially stepped directly into senior international football. His leadership at AFCON and during South Africa's road back to the FIFA World Cup elevated him from an excellent goalkeeper to a genuine national icon.

Ricardo Goss (Sivelele)
 13 July 1994 - 31 years old
 6 caps



Sometimes footballers build reputations through noise and spectacle. Ricardo Goss has built his through quiet reliability. Now on loan at Sivelele FC, Goss remains one of the more understated figures in the Bafana setup, but his record is remarkable in its own way. In six caps for South Africa, he has never experienced defeat: one victory, five draws and three clean sheets. Whenever he has stepped in, Bafana have remained steady. The Sundowns goalkeeper has spent much of his career patiently waiting behind more established names, his last four seasons out on loan, but Bafana's technical team continue to trust him because of his composure, positioning and calmness under pressure.

Sipho Chaine (Orlando Pirates)
 14 December 1996 - 29 years old
 4 caps



Few players enter the national setup with momentum quite like Sipho Chaine currently carries. The Orlando Pirates goalkeeper arrives after a sensational domestic campaign in which he shattered the PSL clean-sheet record. Internationally, Chaine has four caps, two clean sheets and three victories and a draw in four appearances. He has yet to taste defeat in a Bafana shirt. Agile, brave, and increasingly commanding in his area, the former Bloemfontein Celtic youth player represents the new generation of South African goalkeepers comfortable both as shot-stoppers and distributors.

DEFENDERS



Aubrey Modiba (Mamelodi Sundowns)
22 July 1995 - 30 years old
47 caps 3 goals

Aubrey Modiba has spent almost a decade proving that versatility can be an art form. Since debuting against Lesotho in 2016, the Sundowns star has collected 47 caps and scored three goals, while Bafana have recorded 24 wins, 16 draws and only seven defeats in matches he has featured. Whether deployed at left-back, wing-back, midfield or further forward, Modiba's intelligence and technical quality consistently shine through.



Khuliso Mudau (Mamelodi Sundowns)
26 April 1995 - 31 years old
33 caps 1 goal.

Initially overlooked by Hugo Broos, the Mamelodi Sundowns right-back eventually forced his way into the national setup through sheer consistency and excellence. Since debuting against Guinea in 2022, Mudau has amassed 33 caps, scoring once – a memorable strike against Benin in 2023 – while helping Bafana record 17 wins, eight draws and eight defeats during his appearances. He has become one of the first names on Broos' teamsheet, and arguably the best right-back in Africa right now.



Nkosinathi Sibisi (Orlando Pirates)
22 September 1995 - 30 years old
21 caps

Reliable professionals are often overlooked until they disappear. The Orlando Pirates defender has earned 21 caps, recording 10 wins, seven draws and just four defeats during his appearances. Since debuting against Uganda in 2021, every single one of the former Golden Arrows defender's caps has come under Hugo Broos, highlighting the Belgian's trust in his leadership and discipline.



Mbekezeli Mbokazi (Chicago Fire - USA)
19 September 2005 - 20 years old
10 caps, 1 goal

Mbekezeli Mbokazi's rise has been rapid and dramatic. After debuting against Mozambique in June 2025, the former Orlando Pirates defender quickly established himself in the Bafana setup and now has 10 caps and one international goal – his first, scored against Panama in 2026. Following his move to Chicago Fire FC, Mbokazi continues to look like one of South Africa's most exciting defensive exports. He is the youngest member of the squad.



Kamogelo Sebelebele (Orlando Pirates)
21 July 2002 - 23 years old
9 caps, 1 goal

Versatility has become Sebelebele's greatest strength. The Orlando Pirates wide player has earned nine caps and scored once for South Africa, with five appearances coming in COSAFA Cup football and one in CHAN competition. Whether as a winger, wing-back or wide midfielder, his speed, energy and directness constantly trouble defenders.



Ime Okon (Hannover 96 - Germany)
20 February 2004 - 22 years old
8 caps, 1 goal

Germany-based defender Ime Okon announced himself emphatically in South African colours. Now at Hannover 96, Okon already has eight caps and one international goal. Five of those appearances came in COSAFA Cup football, where he impressed with maturity and composure beyond his years.



Khulumani Ndamane (Mamelodi Sundowns)
14 October 2003 - 22 years old
5 caps

Still early in his international story, Khulumani Ndamane has quietly built an unbeaten start to life with Bafana. The Sundowns defender, who joined from TS Galaxy in January, has earned five caps so far, with South Africa recording three wins and two draws during those matches. Strong in duels and physically imposing, Ndamane looks perfectly suited to Broos' preference for athletic defenders.



Thabang Matuludi (Polokwane City)
14 January 1999 - 27 years old
6 caps

One of the breakout stars of the domestic season, Matuludi has transformed himself into one of the most sought-after defenders in the Betway Premiership. The Polokwane City defender has six caps for Bafana after debuting during the 2024 COSAFA Cup, where he made three appearances. Fearless in attack and relentless defensively, Matuludi's rise has been rapid but fully deserved.



Samukelo Kabini (Molde FK - Norway)
15 March 2004 - 22 years old
6 caps

Powerful and commanding, Samukelo Kabini is another defender from South Africa's growing European contingent. Now with Molde FK, Kabini has already earned six caps since debuting against Mozambique in June 2025. His physical presence and attributes have immediately stood out.



Olwethu Makhanya (Philadelphia Union - USA)
30 April 2004 - 22 years old
1 cap

Tall, composed and mature beyond his years, Olwethu Makhanya represents the next wave of South African defenders attempting to establish themselves abroad. Now with Philadelphia Union in the United States, the former Stellenbosch youngster entered the squad uncapped but carrying enormous potential. He won his first cap versus Nicaragua on 29 May.



Bradley Cross (Kaizer Chiefs)
30 January 2001 - 25 years old
1 cap

Bradley Cross arrives with one of the more fascinating developmental journeys in the squad. He also won his first cap on 29 May against Nicaragua. The Kaizer Chiefs defender spent time in the youth systems of both FC Schalke 04 and Newcastle United, experiences that shaped his tactical awareness and technical polish. Comfortable at left-back and capable of moving centrally when needed, Cross brings European schooling blended with South African athleticism.

MIDFIELDERS



Teboho Mokoena (Mamelodi Sundowns)
24 January 1997 - 29 years old
56 caps, 9 goals

Teboho Mokoena has become the complete modern midfielder. Powerful, elegant and endlessly intelligent, the Sundowns star controls matches with remarkable authority. Since debuting against Botswana in 2017, Mokoena has amassed 56 caps and scored nine goals for Bafana. His first international strike came against Seychelles in 2018, but since then, his reputation has soared far beyond goals alone. He is the rhythm-setter, the defensive shield and often the emotional heartbeat of the midfield.

Sphephelo Sithole (CD Tondela - Portugal)
21 June 1999 - 26 years old
28 caps, 1 goal

Known affectionately as "Yaya", Sithole brings steel and aggression to the midfield battle. Now playing in Portugal with CD Tondela, Sithole has earned 28 caps and scored once since debuting against Morocco in 2022. Physical, combative and tactically disciplined, he has become one of Broos' most trusted midfield enforcers.



Thalete Mbatha (Orlando Pirates)
25 April 2000 - 26 years old
16 caps, 3 goals

Dynamic, emotional and fearless, Thalete Mbatha announced himself to Bafana supporters in style. The Orlando Pirates midfielder scored on debut against Uganda in 2024 and already has 16 caps and three goals to his name. One of those strikes came in the famous 3-0 victory over Rwanda, the night South Africa officially qualified for the FIFA World Cup.

Jayden Adams (Mamelodi Sundowns)
5 May 2001 - 25 years old
10 caps, 1 goal

Jayden Adams plays football with the freedom and confidence rare for someone still early in his international career. The Sundowns midfielder has 10 caps and one official goal for South Africa, though another strike against Lesotho was wiped from the records after the result was overturned. Adams first appeared for Bafana during the 2022 COSAFA Cup and has steadily evolved into one of the country's brightest midfield creators.



FORWARDS



Themba Zwane (Mamelodi Sundowns)
3 August 1989 - 36 years old
52 caps, 12 goals

Graceful, elegant and endlessly creative, Themba Zwane remains one of the defining footballers of his generation. The Sundowns legend has earned 52 caps and scored 12 goals for South Africa since debuting against Australia in 2014. Remarkably, 26 of those caps and eight of those goals have come under Hugo Broos since 2022, highlighting the extraordinary international resurgence Mshishi has enjoyed later in his career. As the only player born in the eighties, he is the oldest player in the squad.

Lyle Foster (Burnley - England)
3 September 2000 - 25 years old
31 caps, 10 goals

Lyle Foster carries the responsibility of being South Africa's leading striker abroad and arguably the highest-profile player in the squad. Now at Burnley, Foster has 31 caps and 10 goals for Bafana since debuting in the 2018 COSAFA Cup. Interestingly, his first international goal only arrived in his ninth appearance, against Morocco in 2022 under Broos. Since then, however, his scoring rate has accelerated dramatically, with the 10 goals coming in just 22 games.



Evidence Makgopa (Orlando Pirates)
5 June 2000 - 25/6 years old
26 caps, 6 goals

Evidence Makgopa's Bafana career began in explosive fashion. The towering striker scored a brace on debut against Uganda in 2021 and has since grown into one of Hugo Broos' trusted centre-forwards. With 26 caps and six goals, Makgopa offers physicality, pressing intensity and aerial strength that few South African strikers possess. He also scored in the 3-0 victory over Rwanda that confirmed Bafana's World Cup ticket.

Oswin Appollis (Orlando Pirates)
25 August 2001 - 24 years old
26 caps, 8 goals

Few players have exploded into the Bafana spotlight quite like Oswin Appollis. Since debuting against Rwanda in 2023 after shining for Polokwane City, the now-Orlando Pirates winger has become one of the national team's most devastating attacking weapons, producing eight goals and eight assists in just 26 caps. Remarkably, six of those goals have arrived in the last year alone.



Iqraam Rayners (Mamelodi Sundowns)
19 December 1995 - 30 years old
20 caps, 5 goals

A relentless goalscorer domestically, Iqraam Rayners has forced his way back into the national conversation through consistency and sheer persistence. The Sundowns striker has 20 caps and five goals for South Africa, including five COSAFA Cup appearances and one goal in that competition. He makes a return after missing out on national selections for the last eight months, including the Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco.

Relebohile Mofokeng (Orlando Pirates)
23 October 2004 - 21 years old
14 caps

21 years old, yet already one of the most electrifying talents in South African football. Mofokeng has earned 14 caps for Bafana and technically remains without an official international goal, though he did score against Lesotho before that result was later overturned. The Orlando Pirates star plays with swagger, creativity and fearlessness rarely seen in players his age. While his international career has yet to take off, it seems like we are just waiting for the inevitable.



Tshepang Moremi (Orlando Pirates)
2 October 2000 - 25 years old
11 caps, 1 goal

Quick, fearless and technically sharp, Tshepang Moremi continues to grow in importance for both club and country. The Orlando Pirates attacker has earned 11 caps and scored once for South Africa. He was first capped during the 2024 COSAFA Cup before earning a senior Broos call-up in June 2025.

Thapelo Maseko (AEL Limassol - Cyprus)
11 November 2003 - 22 years old
9 caps, 1 goal

Still only at the beginning of his journey, Thapelo Maseko represents the fearless new generation of South African attackers. Now playing in Cyprus on loan from Sundowns at AEL Limassol, Maseko has already earned eight caps and scored once since debuting during the 2022 COSAFA Cup. Quick, direct and fearless in one-on-one situations, he remains one of Bafana's most exciting long-term prospects.





THE IDISKI TOP 10.. **IRON-MEN**

This week, iDiski Times takes a closer look at the 10 players who logged the most minutes in the Betway Premiership during the 2025/26 season, the ever-present figures who became the heartbeat of their teams across a demanding and unforgiving campaign.

Our rankings are based not only on total minutes played but also on overall performance levels throughout the season, using statistics, ratings, and analytical data gathered from various football analytics companies.

Football conversations often focus heavily on starts and appearances, but true durability is measured by time spent on the pitch. Week after week,

these players carried the physical and mental burden of the season, becoming trusted lieutenants for their coaches in high-pressure moments, tense title races, relegation scraps, and cup distractions.

To feature on this list, each player had to surpass the remarkable milestone of 2,500 league minutes, a reflection not only of consistency and fitness but also of importance. In an era of squad rotation, tactical adjustments, and congested schedules, remaining a constant presence is no small achievement.

Some names on the list are established veterans whose experience made them indispensable, while others are emerging stars who barely left the team sheet all season.

From commanding defenders and tireless midfield engines to influential playmakers and ever-reliable goalkeepers, these are the men who rarely got the luxury of a breather.

The 2025/26 campaign was one filled with intensity, fine margins, and relentless football, and these ten players stood tall through it all, proving that endurance, reliability, and consistency remain some of the most valuable currencies in the modern game.

*(*statistics as of 23 May 2026, and do not include playoff fixtures)*

The Top 10:

**10 Mfanafuthi Mkhize
Durban City
2509 minutes**

28 games and starts, 7.05 rating, 1 goal, 1 assist

One of Durban City's most dependable figures throughout the campaign, Mfanafuthi Mkhize quietly pieced together an outstanding season built on consistency and discipline. While others grabbed headlines with flashy



moments, Mkhize became the type of player every successful side needs: reliable, hard-working, and constantly available. Starting all 28 of his appearances, the defender showed remarkable endurance over the course of the season and played a crucial role as Durban City battled through a demanding campaign in their return to top-flight football. His contributions going forward may appear modest on paper with one goal and one assist, but his real value lay in his defensive solidity and composure under pressure. A 7.05 average rating underlines just how steady his performances were from start to finish.

9 Elvis Chipezeze
Magesi
2520 minutes

28 games and starts, 6.74 rating - 6 clean sheets

Veteran goalkeeper Elvis Chipezeze once again proved why experience remains priceless in South African football. The Zimbabwean shot-stopper was an almost permanent presence between the sticks for Magesi, playing all but two league matches and offering leadership during what was often a testing campaign. While Magesi endured difficult spells defensively at times, Chipezeze's presence frequently kept them competitive. His reflexes, command of the penalty area, and calmness under pressure remained vital, particularly for a side often forced to absorb pressure from bigger opponents. His six clean sheets may not tell the full story of how influential he was. In numerous matches, Chipezeze's saves prevented heavier defeats and earned valuable points, and he'll be adding more time this season during the on-going playoffs.

8 Lebone Seema
Orlando Pirates
2520 minutes

28 games and starts, 7.04 rating, 2 goals

Few players enjoyed a breakthrough season quite like Lebone Seema. After arriving at Orlando Pirates with plenty of expectation but little certainty over how quickly he would adapt, the Alexandra-born defender exploded into one of the club's most trusted figures during a historic campaign. Starting all 28 of his league appearances, Seema became a pillar of consistency in a Pirates side that ended a 14-year wait for the Betway Premiership title. Composed defensively and fearless in big matches, Seema looked completely at home under pressure. His two goals added further value to an already impressive season, but it was his maturity and reliability that truly stood out. In a treble-winning campaign that also delivered MTN8 and Carling Knockout success, Seema established himself as one of the league's rising stars.

7 Riaan Hanamub

AmaZulu
2520 minutes

28 games and starts, 7.05 rating, 1 goal, 2 assists

Namibian international Riaan Hanamub delivered one of the strongest campaigns of his PSL career this season, proving once again an indispensable figure for AmaZulu. Dynamic down the flank and relentless in his work rate, Hanamub provided balance between attack and defence throughout the season. His athleticism allowed him to constantly shuttle up and down the touchline, while his composure in possession helped AmaZulu build attacks from deeper areas.

With one goal and two assists, Hanamub also contributed offensively, but perhaps his biggest strength was availability. Starting every game he featured in, he became one of Usuthu's most dependable performers and one of the most consistent full-backs in the division.

6 Ira Tapé
TS Galaxy
2520 minutes

28 games and starts, 7.10 rating - 6 clean sheets



TS Galaxy goalkeeper Ira Tapé enjoyed another quietly excellent campaign, once again showcasing why he has become one of the most respected shot-stoppers in the league.

The Ivorian's consistency was central to Galaxy's competitiveness this season. Agile and commanding, Tapé rarely looked rattled even under sustained pressure. His 7.10 average rating ranks among the strongest on this list and reflects the number of important interventions he made throughout the campaign. Recording six clean sheets while starting every match he played, Tapé's influence stretched far beyond statistics. He provided calmness to Galaxy's backline and repeatedly rescued his side in difficult moments.

5 Taariq Fielies
Amazulu
2531 minutes

29 games, 28 starts, 6.96 rating, 1 goal

Experienced centre-back Taariq Fielies once again demonstrated the value of leadership and resilience. At 32, the Amazulu defender remained one of the most durable players in the division, anchoring Usuthu's defence with authority and experience. Strong in the air and aggressive in duels, Fielies brought stability to a team that often

relied heavily on his organisational qualities at the back. The former Cape Town City defender also chipped in with a goal and rarely looked out of place despite the physical demands of another long campaign. His willingness to battle through difficult matches and remain available week after week epitomised the mentality needed to feature on this list.

4 Sage Stephens
Stellenbosch
2610 minutes

29 games and starts, 6.83 rating - 8 clean sheets

Stellenbosch goalkeeper Sage Stephens continued to establish himself as one of the most dependable custodians in South African football.

Almost an ever-present figure for the Winelands team, Stephens started all but one league match and played a huge role in a tough campaign for Stellies. While he may not always attract the same attention as some of the league's bigger-name goalkeepers, his consistency has become impossible to ignore. With eight clean sheets, Stephens repeatedly produced important saves in tight encounters and remained composed behind one of the league's more organised defensive units. His reliability has become one of Stellenbosch's greatest assets.

3 Ricardo Goss
Sivelele
2610 minutes

29 games and starts, 7.13 rating - 14 clean sheets

World Cup-bound Ricardo Goss enjoyed arguably the finest league season of his career. The Sivelele goalkeeper was at his best throughout the campaign, finishing with a remarkable 14 clean sheets and one of the highest average ratings in the division. Calm, agile, and commanding in the air, Goss emerged as one of the league's elite performers and a major reason behind his side's competitiveness. What made his campaign especially impressive was the consistency. Whether called upon to make spectacular reflex saves or simply organise his defence effectively, he constantly delivered. His performances this season firmly reignited conversations about him being among the top goalkeepers in South African football.

2 Ronwen Williams
Mamelodi Sundowns
2610 minutes

29 games and starts, 7.15 rating - 13 clean sheets

By his own lofty standards, Ronwen Williams may not have had as exceptional a season in the league as in the past, but it also wasn't that bad either. The Mamelodi Sundowns captain remains the benchmark for goalkeeping excellence in South Africa, and throughout the 2025/26 campaign, he once again demonstrated why he is



regarded as one of the continent's finest. His 13 clean sheets only tell part of the story. Williams' leadership, distribution, reflexes, and ability to produce decisive saves in key moments were crucial for Sundowns throughout the title race. In many ways, he has become the complete modern goalkeeper, equally comfortable launching attacks as he is making world-class saves. Week after week, Williams provided assurance to one of the league's strongest sides and maintained an extraordinary level of consistency. Let's not forget they may not be domestic champions this season, but they are the African champions!

1 Siphon Chaine
Orlando Pirates
2700 minutes

30 games and starts, 7.03 rating - 21 clean sheets

At the very top sits Siphon Chaine, the only outfield or goalkeeper ever-present across all 30 league matches this season. The Pirates goalkeeper delivered a phenomenal campaign, recording an astonishing 21 clean sheets while playing every single minute available to him in the league. In a season where squad rotation became increasingly common, Chaine stood apart through sheer reliability and endurance. His performances combined sharp reflexes with growing maturity and authority, as he consistently rose to the occasion in high-pressure encounters. The clean-sheet tally alone underlines just how influential he was during Pirates' title-winning campaign, providing the defensive foundation upon which their success was built. To play 2,700 minutes in a single Premiership season is a remarkable feat in itself. To do so while maintaining one of the league's best defensive records elevates Chaine into a category of his own this season.

More information:

Perhaps unsurprisingly, goalkeepers dominate the list. The top four positions are occupied by shot-stoppers, while six of the overall top 10 are goalkeepers. In an era where outfield players are increasingly rotated to manage fatigue, tactical demands, and injuries, goalkeepers remain the ultimate ever-presents.

At the very summit sits Siphon Chaine, who separated himself from the rest through a truly remarkable campaign. The Orlando Pirates goalkeeper is the only player in the entire top 10 to feature in all 30 league matches for his side this season, while also playing every available minute.

Interestingly, while Chaine is the only player in the top 10 to feature in all 30 league matches, he is not the only player in the division to appear in every single game this season.

However, only one other player managed to start all 30 matches: Stellenbosch forward Devin Titus. The energetic attacking player may sit only 13th overall

on the minutes-played list with 2,450 minutes, but his achievement remains hugely significant. To make this statistic even more remarkable, Titus has missed just ONE match in the last four seasons, featuring in 117 of the club's last 118 league games!

Three other players also featured in every possible league fixture this season, even if they did not start them all: Orlando Pirates winger Oswin Appollis, Mamelodi Sundowns attacker Tashreeq Matthews, and Polokwane City midfielder Bonginkosi Dlamini.

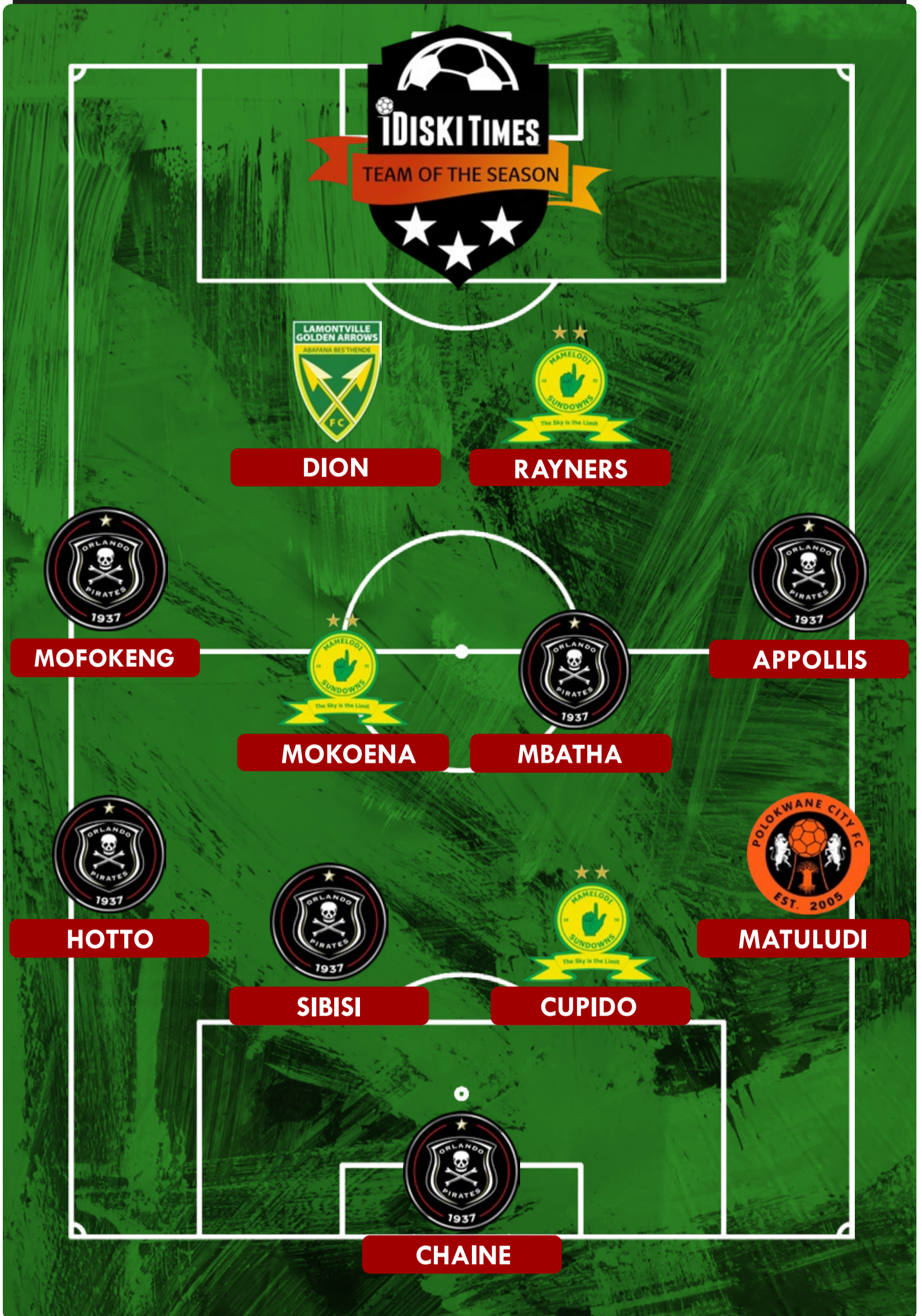
Dlamini, ranked 19th overall for minutes played with 2,337, started 24 matches and contributed three goals and three assists.

Appollis, meanwhile, featured in every league game but started only 24 matches, accumulating 2,170 minutes in total, placing him 31st overall. He averaged an outstanding 7.16 rating, among the strongest figures in the league, while contributing nine goals and six assists during Pirates' title-winning campaign.

Matthews featured in all 30 of Sundowns' league matches, though he started 23 of them, accumulating 2,010 minutes overall, ranking him 53rd on the list. He scored eight goals and added four assists while averaging 6.95.



IDISKI'S BETWAY PREMIERSHIP TEAM OF THE SEASON



ACE OF THE WEEK: BENNET MOKOENA

This week's iDiski Times Ace of the Week goes to 18-year-old Mamelodi Sundowns sensation Bennet Mokoena after his fantastic strike against Bundesliga outfit RB Leipzig on Friday evening in their international club friendly game. Leipzig took the lead in the first half, but Sundowns bounced back in the second half as substitute Brayan Leon's brace turned the score around before the teenager's strike from just outside the box in stoppage time confirmed a 3-1 victory for Miguel Cardoso's CAF Champions League-winning team over their German opposition to be crowned inaugural RedBull Diski Last Namba champions.



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.

AN ACE IN ANKARA

By Rob Delpont

Donald Khuse's adventure abroad arrived relatively late in his career, which perhaps turned out to be a blessing for South African football supporters. By the time he eventually packed his bags for Turkey, local fans had already spent years watching him at the peak of his powers, gliding across midfield with effortless elegance, dictating matches with intelligence and composure, and cementing himself as one of the finest footballers of his generation.

To many supporters, though, 'Donald' hardly existed. He was simply Ace.

It was a nickname that perfectly captured both the swagger and quality of the man. Smooth on the ball, calm under pressure, and blessed with superb vision, Khuse carried himself with the effortless confidence of a player who always seemed one step ahead of everyone else on the pitch.

Born in Mohlakeng in September 1963, Khuse emerged from the vibrant football culture of the West Rand, where township football produced tough, skilful players hardened by competitive street and school matches. His talent was impossible to ignore, and in 1983, he made his professional debut for Orlando Pirates.

It was there, draped in the famous black and white, that the legend of Ace truly began to grow.

Khuse quickly established himself as one of the most technically gifted midfielders in South African football. He could slow a game down or speed it up at will, drift past defenders with deceptive ease, and deliver passes that opened defences apart. Supporters admired not only his ability but also the style with which he played. Ace never looked rushed. Football appeared natural to him.

After impressing at Pirates, Khuse moved to Mamelodi Sundowns, where his reputation continued to soar. Yet football careers are rarely straightforward, and after a fallout with then-coach Mario Tuani, tensions at the club created an opportunity that Kaizer Chiefs chairman Kaizer Motaung was more than happy to exploit.

In 1989, Motaung personally persuaded Khuse to join Amakhosi.

Ironically, despite debuting professionally for Pirates, Chiefs had always been the club closest to Khuse's heart. Years earlier, the legendary Ace

Ntsoelengoe had recommended the talented youngster from AB Phokompe Secondary School to Chiefs. Khuse even trained with the Glamour Boys and seemed destined to sign for them before Pirates swooped in dramatically at the last moment. According to football folklore, his school principal, a devoted Buccaneers supporter, played a decisive role in convincing him to choose Pirates instead.

But destiny eventually circled back.

Motaung's admiration for Khuse became immediately clear when he handed him the number 24 shirt, a number previously worn by Motaung himself. Later, after Ntsoelengoe's retirement, Khuse inherited the famous number 12 jersey that would become forever associated with him at Naturena.

Khuse flourished at Chiefs, becoming the heartbeat of a golden generation side. In his very first season, he helped Amakhosi lift the league title, famously scoring a crucial goal against Moroka Swallows on the final day of the campaign. It capped a remarkable season in which Chiefs also claimed the JPS Knockout, Ohlsson's Challenge Cup, and BP Top 8.

The trophies kept coming. Before leaving, Khuse would help Chiefs secure two more league championships in 1991 and 1992, alongside several cup triumphs. More importantly, he established himself as one of the defining figures of South African football's transition into a new era.

This was also the dawn of international football for a newly readmitted South Africa.

When Bafana Bafana played their historic first official match against Cameroon in 1992, Khuse was there. Elegant, experienced, and technically supreme, he became an important figure during those formative years of the national team. Between 1992 and 1995, he earned 16 caps for South Africa, representing the country during a hugely symbolic and emotional period.

And then came the adventure that would add an entirely new dimension to his career.

In 1993, at the age of 30, Khuse moved to Turkey alongside fellow South African icon John 'Shoes' Moshoeu, joining Gençlerbirliği Ankara. At the time, moves abroad for South African players were still relatively uncommon, particularly for black South African footballers who



had spent much of their early careers isolated from global football due to apartheid-era sanctions.

Turkey represented both opportunity and uncertainty. The Turkish league in the 1990s was fiercely competitive, intensely passionate, and physically demanding. Stadiums were intimidating cauldrons of noise, supporters lived football with near-religious devotion, and foreign players were expected to perform immediately. Yet despite arriving at 30 years old, an age when many players were beginning to slow down, Khuse adapted remarkably well.

If anything, Turkey seemed to appreciate the very qualities that made Ace special. At Gençlerbirliği, Khuse and Moshoeu quickly became fan favourites. Turkish supporters admired flair and technical sophistication, and Khuse offered both in abundance. His calmness in midfield contrasted beautifully with the intensity of the league around him. While opponents pressed aggressively and matches became frantic battles, Ace remained composed, almost graceful amid the chaos.

His football intelligence allowed him to thrive even without relying on pace. He read matches superbly, controlled possession, and brought balance to the team. Turkish football at the time was evolving tactically, and players with Khuse's technical ability and experience were highly valued. For South African fans following from afar, it was a source of immense pride.

Here were local stars proving themselves in Europe and earning respect in one of the continent's most passionate football cultures. They were pioneers in many ways, helping open doors and challenge perceptions about South African footballers abroad.

Khuse became a regular fixture in the Gençlerbirliği first team, making 82 appearances across three seasons. Though he only scored twice, goals were never the true measure of his influence. His value lay in his leadership, intelligence, passing range, and ability to control the rhythm of matches. He became one of the experienced foreign professionals the club leaned on heavily.

Life in Ankara also exposed Khuse to a dramatically different football

environment from South Africa. The pace of the game was different, the tactical demands more rigid, and the scrutiny from fans and media relentless. Winters were harsher, the culture unfamiliar, and expectations immense. Yet Khuse embraced the challenge and quietly built a respected reputation far from home.

In 1996, he earned another move within Turkey when Antalyaspor signed him. Even at 33 years old, his quality remained evident. He played 29 matches and scored once, continuing to show remarkable professionalism and consistency in one of Europe's more demanding leagues.

By the time he returned to South Africa in 1997, Khuse was 34 years old and had achieved something few South African footballers of his era managed, a genuinely successful and sustained overseas career.

He rejoined Chiefs, bringing with him valuable international experience and an even deeper understanding of the game. Though his playing days were winding down, his influence within football was far from over.

After hanging up his boots, Khuse transitioned naturally into coaching and development. He served as assistant coach under Muhsin Ertugral and even briefly co-coached Chiefs alongside longtime teammate Doctor Khumalo. Later, he shifted further behind the scenes, dedicating himself to development structures and scouting, helping identify and nurture future talent for the club he had always dreamed of representing.

Today, Ace Khuse remains one of the most stylish and intelligent footballers South Africa has produced, a player equally admired for his grace on the ball and his pioneering journey abroad.

And while many remember him for the trophies, the iconic number 12 jersey, and the elegance he brought to local football, his years in Turkey stand as an important chapter in South African football history: proof that long before Europe became a common destination for local stars, Ace had already shown that South African talent could flourish on foreign soil.

Picture credit: genclerbirligi.org.tr



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