



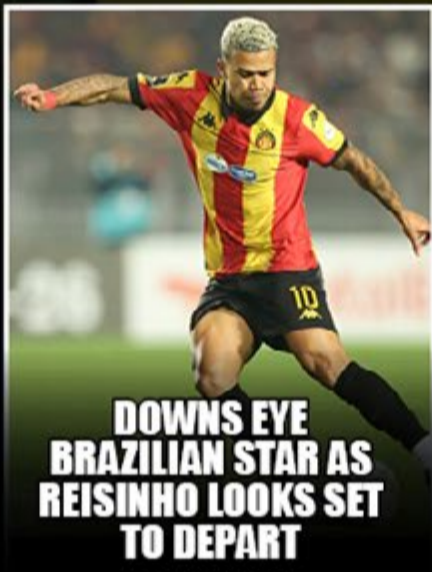
# CLASS OF 2026 HAS SHAPED NEW SA HEROES



## KOMPHELA: I TOLD MUDAU HE'S AT THE LEVEL OF HAKIMI



AL AHLY KEEN ON PIRATES STAR



DOWNS EYE BRAZILIAN STAR AS REISINHO LOOKS SET TO DEPART



ALLENDE WANTED BY CLUB IN SOUTH AMERICA



MAMMILA REVEALS HE'S SET FOR NEW PSL CLUB, TALKS DISCOVERING BAFANA WC STAR

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

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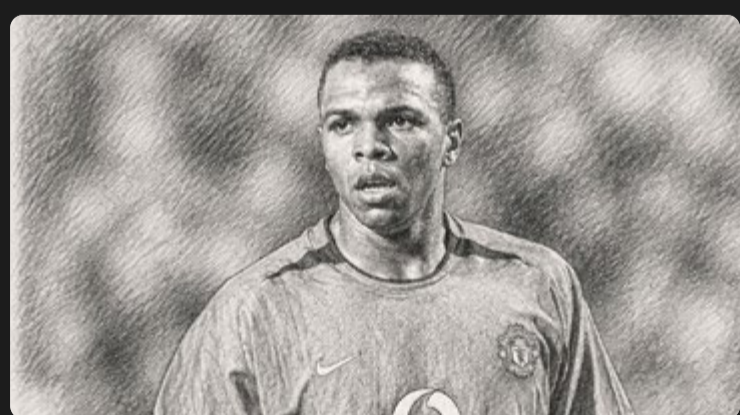
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**CUPIDO SET FOR OVERSEAS LOAN MOVE?**

Stellenbosch FC striker Ashley Cupido looks set for a loan move abroad in the 2026/27 season as he aims for a fresh start for his career. The 24-year-old joined the club in a lucrative transfer from Cape Town Spurs but has fallen out of favour since the arrival of Gavin Hunt. There's been talk of a loan move brewing before the start of pre-season as he looks for regular first-team football that he had when he broke into the senior national team set-up in 2025.



**AL AHLY KEEN ON APPOLLIS**

Al Ahly are said to have made contact with Orlando Pirates over the potential signing of Oswin Appollis. The Bafana Bafana winger has become a key figure for club and country over the past 18 months, and it comes as no surprise to see the Red Devils take interest. However, it's unlikely that the interest will be entertained with the club and player only interested in a move to Europe, should he leave the 2025/26 league title winners.



**SOUTH AMERICAN INTEREST IN ALLENDE?**

Club Atlético Peñarol in Uruguay are said to be showing interest in luring Marcelo Allende to the club next season. The 52-time Primera División would have intimate knowledge of the player who Sundowns signed from domestic rivals Montevideo City Torque and have been impressed with his performances as a key figure at Sundowns. However, it's unclear whether an official bid has been made for the Chile international - who is deemed as an indispensable part of the Masandawana set-up.



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## SUNDOWNS EYE SASSE AS REISINHO'S CHLOORKOP FUTURE DIMS

*Mamelodi Sundowns are reportedly considering a move for Espérance Sportive de Tunis winger Yan Sasse as they look to reshape their midfield options ahead of the 2026/27 campaign, with Portuguese midfielder Miguel Reisinho increasingly likely to depart.*

Reisinho joined the Chloorkop-based side at the start of the previous campaign with high expectations, arriving alongside compatriot Nuno Santos.

While Santos managed to settle and make an impact, Reisinho found opportunities hard to come by. His minutes were limited to only 14 games, which is less than a third of the matches played by the club through the 2025/26 season.

The midfielder is currently in talks over terminating his contract, and with that foreign slot potentially opening up, attention has turned to the Brazilian winger who tormented Sundowns on the continental stage.

Sasse is available for free with his contract at Espérance now at an end, and the connection runs deeper than just transfer opportunism.

Miguel Cardoso previously managed Espérance, where Sasse was a key figure; the Portuguese coach witnessed first-hand the Brazilian's quality and match-winning ability during that stint in Tunis.

That tenure saw Cardoso mastermind a famous victory over Sundowns in the 2024 semi-finals before he eventually crossed to the South African side's dugout.

Now, with Cardoso in charge at Chloorkop, the opportunity to finally land a player he knows intimately is ripe. Sasse has made 30 appearances in the CAF Champions League for Espérance, registering seven goals and one assist.

Even in the recent semi-final defeat to Sundowns, Sasse remained a persistent danger, bursting down the flank and delivering threatening crosses.

For the Brazilians, landing a proven continental performer on what could be a free transfer would represent exactly the kind of shrewd business that has defined their recruitment strategy - and Cardoso, having watched Sasse up close for years, may finally get his man.

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## 'UNLUCKY FOR BAFANA BAFANA'

***Bafana Bafana made history by reaching the Last 32 of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, sadly falling to a stoppage-time 1-0 defeat to Canada in that game as they made history by reaching the knockout stages for the first time.***

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.

Make sure you subscribe for free on YouTube, and click the bell icon to get notified as soon as new videos are released.

### **Mbokazi Performance Exceptional - Junior Khanye**

"Unlucky for Bafana Bafana for losing to Canada. I think the better team won the game."

"Bafana Bafana tried; they did well to get to this stage of the World Cup."

"Mbekezeli Mbokazi was exceptional for us. Without him, we would have lost the game by a bigger margin. He showed he belongs to this stage and at this level. He was brilliant."

"We threw the game away when Hugo Broos took out Relebohile Mofokeng and added another defensive midfielder. Also, he left Yaya Sithole too long in the game, which I never understood. He loves Yaya Sithole too long."

"Ronwen Williams kept us in the game with his saves. We needed him in this game."

"There are levels in this game. The level of quality is high in other countries."

"Canada deserves the win."



# PROUD SUPPORTER OF SOUTH AFRICAN FOOTBALL

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# JOURNEY ENDS FOR BAFANA'S HISTORY MAKERS

By Matshelane Mamabolo

25-02-2026. 63. 1-0. 32.

*THESE numbers might mean nothing to the uninitiated. To the discerning, they are historic. They are numbers that will forever remain etched in South African football folklore. And for many years to come, they are sure to be the answers that could earn you a prize at a sports quiz.*

So, do REMEMBER THE DAY. Thursday, June 25th of 2026.

REMEMBER THE TIME. The 63rd minute of the last FIFA World Cup A match

between Bafana Bafana and South Korea.

REMEMBER THE SCORELINE. 1-0 to South Africa.

And don't you dare forget to REMEMBER THE SIGNIFICANCE of the result. It saw South Africa progress past the group stages of the global showpiece for the first time at the fourth attempt, Bafana Bafana reaching the Round of 32 courtesy of that win.

Others might even add 12 to those numbers, that being the jersey number worn by the man of the moment, Thapelo Maseko – scorer of the monumental goal out at the Monterey Stadium in Guadalupe, Mexico, that saw many South Africans brave that cold Thursday morning to go out into the streets to celebrate – most of them still in their sleepwear.

Maseko and his teammates – the Class of 2026 – have now become a new group of South African football heroes, somewhat moving to depose the Class of 1996 that won the Africa Cup of Nations.

For three decades, South Africa searched for new heroes in vain. It was, after all, that same group of players who were crowned continental champions that earned the country its first qualification for the World Cup. Participation at the France 98 showpiece was a massive achievement in and of itself, and the first-round elimination was par for the course.

When we went to the next tournament co-hosted by South Korea and Japan four years later, expectations were that we would reach the knockout stages. But Jomo Sono and his team finished in third place with four points, just as Philippe Trousier's squad had done at the

previous edition. Sure, Siyabonga Nomvethe became somewhat of a hero by bumping the ball into the net for that maiden Bafana win – a 1-0 over Slovenia – at the World Cup. Still, the result was not enough to create new heroes, the fact that the team returned home from Asia to a rousing reception at former president, the now dearly departed, Nelson Mandela's

**“WHAT THESE BOYS ACHIEVED IS FANTASTIC, AND WE SHOULD BE PROUD OF THEM AND CELEBRATE THEM.”**





home notwithstanding.

The 2010 tournament that was played on home soil will forever be remembered as a failure on the pitch, South Africa earning the ignominy of becoming the first host country to get knocked out in the first round. And so the search for new Bafana heroes continued. So rare were the pickings that we gleefully celebrated Bafana's third-place finish at the 2024 Africa Cup of Nations as though the boys had captured the trophy itself. Unsurprisingly, then, when Hugo Broos earned us qualification to the World Cup, the silver-haired Belgian became South Africa's favourite malume. And with good reason, too, given that we'd missed out on the three editions since we hosted in 2010.

Yet, South Africa still needed new heroes. Granted, Ronwen Williams and Co were feted for their amazing feat of topping a qualifying group that also included Nigeria's Super Eagles. But to be remembered forever, to depose the likes of Doctor Khumalo and his AFCON-winning teammates of 1996, this lot needed to do something special at the showpiece hosted by Canada, Mexico

**"I BELIEVE IT WAS WRITTEN IN THE STARS THAT THIS GENERATION WILL BE THE ONE THAT EARNS US QUALIFICATION FOR THE KNOCKOUT STAGES."**

and the United States of America.

And they did just that, albeit after having given the nation heart palpitations with a start so dour that the usual South African reaction of calling for the coach's head duly followed after that 2-0 defeat by co-hosts Mexico at the legendary Azteca Stadium.

But Bafana turned things around, staging an impressive comeback after going down early against Czechia to draw 1-1 and give themselves a fighting chance going into the final match. Not many gave them a chance against the South

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Koreans. After all, a lot of us contended, the Asians are much faster and fitter than our boys. That both Orlando Pirates and Mamelodi Sundowns had previously come a cropper against clubs from that country added to our pessimism.

Yet, under the amiable Septuagenarian, Bafana and giving up have become like the parallel lines of the railway – destined never to meet. And on a generally freezing morning, most South Africans got up to watch the match – more in hope than actual belief that the boys will deliver. But deliver they did, alright.

Now, that the heavy round robin failure's monkey is off our backs, this generation will live in memory forever.

The irony will, however, not be lost on the discerning Bafana follower that it took the same points (four) as those earned by the Classes of 2002 and 2010 to send this generation into the knockout stage. Why then can they be said to be better than their predecessors when they achieved the same results?

Macbeth Sibaya played at both the Korea/Japan and South Africa World Cups and says nothing should be taken away from Williams and Co, not even after they meekly capitulated to Canada in the Round of 32 on Sunday night.

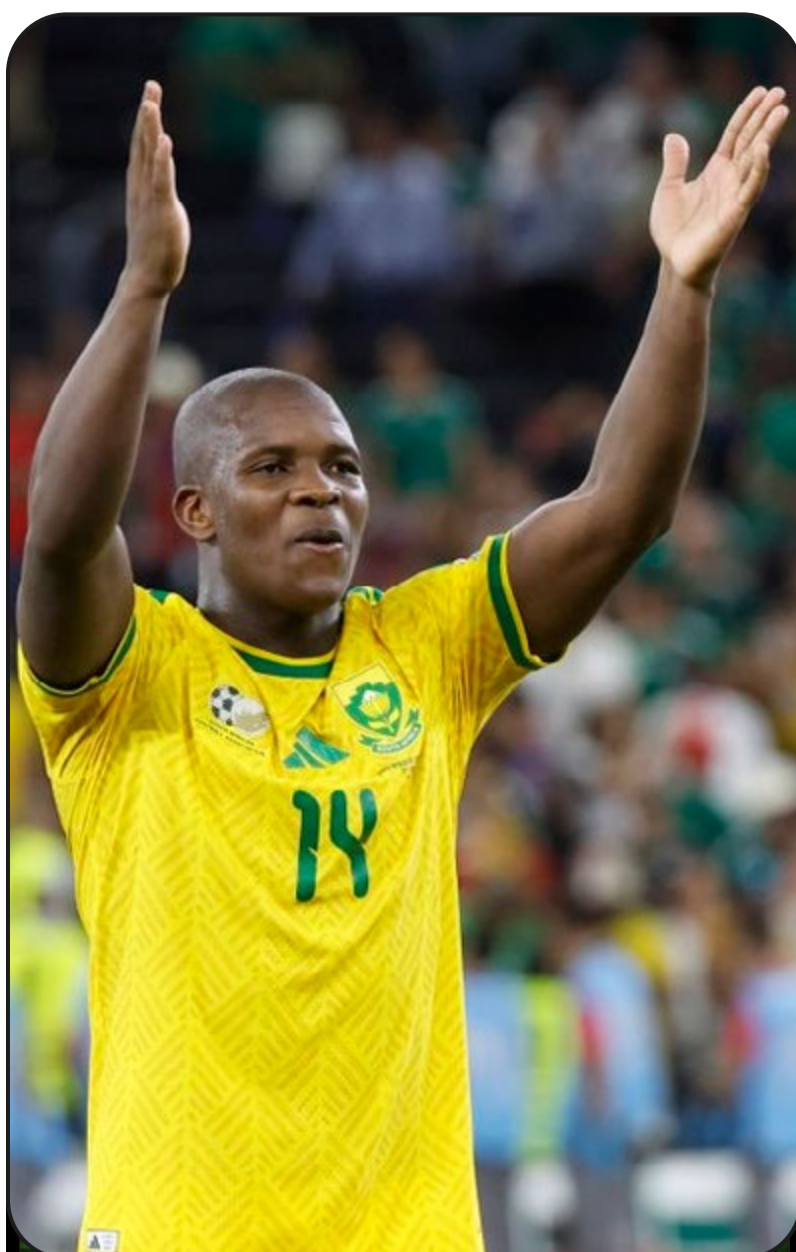
“What these boys achieved is fantastic and we should be proud of them and celebrate them,” said the former Jomo Cosmos player who had a successful time playing in Russia for Rubin Kazan.

“Yes the points might have been the same in all three editions of the World Cup, and we did not go through while they did, but for me it simply just was not our season, and I believe it was written in the stars that this generation will be the one that earns us qualification for the knockout stages.”

Contrary to the generally held notion that the extended 48-country World Cup made it easier for teams to reach the knockout stages, Sibaya contends that it was tougher this time than in the past.

“No, no, this World Cup is more difficult than the previous ones. I've watched a few matches and saw that even the so-called small countries are putting so much detail into theirs, and it is being done so much better than in the previous World Cups. The level of concentration is amazing, and it is much more difficult to break the backlines because they are essentially parking the bus. Yes, I know they are now using fancy terms like the low block after they realised that phrase ‘reinforced defence’ did not sound nice. In essence, though it is parking the bus and that is hard to beat, unlike in our time when teams came out to play.”

Unlike most, Sibaya says he understood why Hugo Broos went with the ultra-defensive approach he did in that opening match against Mexico.



**“I’VE WATCHED A FEW MATCHES AND SAW THAT EVEN THE SO-CALLED SMALL COUNTRIES ARE PUTTING SO MUCH DETAIL INTO THEIRS, AND IT IS BEING DONE SO MUCH BETTER THAN IN THE PREVIOUS WORLD CUPS.”**

“There was nothing wrong with the system we adopted that day for Mexico. The only challenge was that it was new to the boys. But it was clear that Hugo Broos calculated and did the analysis. And if you've been observant, you'd have realised that most national teams played five at the back because that is the strategy of this World Cup, based on the fact that you could qualify [for the knockouts] with four points and even with three as the third best. So, if you don't concede a lot, there is a chance of progression. Now, we were playing against the host nation in the opening match, and any coach worth his salt would have understood the kind of atmosphere and magnitude and level of the game his team would be up against. And the best way would be to approach the game cautiously, as Broos did. A pity things did not work out.”

In the end, that failing against Mexico was but a small aberration on the road to a historic achievement that was not even undone by the last-minute 1-0 defeat Bafana suffered to Canada on Sunday night. In reaching the knockout stage, this group of players got to uncharted territory and made an entire





nation proud.

Of particular delight to Sibaya about Bafana making the knockout phase is the fact that the feat was achieved with a largely local squad.

“Almost all the players in the squad play in the domestic league. That is something we should be happy about because it says we are doing something brilliant here at home. Remember, in the previous World Cups, our squads had lots of overseas-based players. So for these boys to get to the knockout stages, it says there is great work being done in the domestic league.”

Even with that view, the man who earned 62 caps for Bafana expects a few of the players to be scouted by overseas clubs.

“The positive thing about reaching the Round of 32 is that the boys have put themselves in the shop window for the clubs in the big leagues in Europe. I expect that a few of them will be approached by clubs from abroad, and that can only augur well for the future.”

No doubt Mbekezeli Mbokazi is set for a move away from the American MLS to a top league in Europe, such was the young defender’s imperious performances in all the matches. Even in the defeat against Canada on Sunday, TLB was colossal as he won tackles, made a superb interception, had great recoveries, and some telling passes to get Bafana out of defensive situations.

The comment by SABC analyst Linda Mntambo perfectly summed up the youngster’s tournament.

“Mbokazi was a standout performer. I think he’s been exceptional in this World Cup. He has shown that age is just a number. He can compete with the best in the world. He has really proven himself. He’s played extremely well, and he’s got all the qualities to be one of the best defenders, not in the country but in the

**“THE POSITIVE THING ABOUT REACHING THE ROUND OF 32 IS THAT THE BOYS HAVE PUT THEMSELVES IN THE SHOP WINDOW FOR THE CLUBS IN THE BIG LEAGUES IN EUROPE.”**

world.”

Khuliso Mudau also impressed with workmanlike performances throughout the tournament, and Maseko must surely have caught some scout’s eye with his busy-bee showings, and surely they will overlook his lack of a right foot to ensure he does not return to Sundowns.

Young Relebohile Mofokeng showed glimpses of promise, and the discerning scouts would have seen the potential in the young man to consider signing him up to a top club with the belief that he will mature into a superb player. Ime Okon combined superbly with Mbokazi in the heart of defence, and given their young age, these two will definitely be a formidable centre-back pairing for Bafana for years to come.

Intriguingly, the reality of Bafana’s World Cup campaign is that the team did not perform to its utmost best. And for them to achieve the milestone of reaching the knockouts with the likes of Oswin Appollis, Aubrey Modiba, Teboho Mokoena and Yaya Sithole having played in patches talks volumes of the potential South Africa has.

Sibaya had hoped Bafana would beat Canada and was duly disappointed as he termed the performance ‘bad, really bad’.





“It was not our night. The speed of play from the build-up ran short; the recovered ball was played backwards towards the goalkeeper and defence. We did not play quickly vertically or diagonally after winning the ball at the back or to play quickly forward,” Sibaya said, acknowledging the opposition’s contribution to making it a tough match for Bafana. “The power, aggression and speed of the opponents was over the top. Canada was more resilient this time around.”

But Sibaya was quick to shower the squad with praise.

“Anyway, great performance. It was a fantastic journey. I am proud of the Boys.”

It’s a sentiment that will no doubt be shared by many South Africans. After all, the boys achieved what had hitherto never been realised by a Bafana squad before them – a spot in the knockouts of the FIFA World Cup.

It was what Hugo Broos promised to deliver, and he did.

South Africa can only build up from this newest milestone of its senior national football team. While it was disappointing that the team did not make it past the Round of 32, the reality was that they were always up against it.

This, after all, was a team ranked lowest among their three opponents in the Group phase. This was a team that had not won a single match this year going into the tournament; a team bereft of any well-known player, the rest of the opponents would at least be afraid of. Granted, some would have been aware of Lyle Foster given that he played in the English Premier League, but the Burnley striker is no great shaker and the fact he was used sparingly told the story.

When a truly honest post-mortem

**“ALMOST ALL THE PLAYERS IN THE SQUAD PLAY IN THE DOMESTIC LEAGUE. THAT IS SOMETHING WE SHOULD BE HAPPY ABOUT BECAUSE IT SAYS WE ARE DOING SOMETHING BRILLIANT HERE AT HOME.”**

of Bafana’s World Cup campaign is conducted, South African football should realise that while it has birthed new heroes, the lack of proper strikers was the team’s downfall. Without a prolific finisher, winning matches will always be difficult. And this much was evident even before the World Cup as Bafana huffed and puffed against weak opposition, failing to register wins in clashes with Panama, Nicaragua and Jamaica. That they only found the opposition net twice in four matches was thus not surprising.

Let it not be forgotten, though, that those strikes helped see South Africa progress past the group stages for the first time in four attempts. The 1-0 victory over South Korea, courtesy of Thapelo Maseko’s 63rd-minute goal in the early hours of Thursday, June 25, will henceforth be mentioned in the same breath as Mark Williams’ brace in the Africa Cup of Nations final and the late Phil Masinga’s thunderbolt against Congo on August 16 of 1997.

Remember the name. Remember the place. Remember the moment. Remember the significance. The Bafana Class of 2026 have carved their name in South African football history.



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## ‘I WAS DEEPLY HURT BY THE RELEGATIONS OF BAROKA & BLACK LEOPARDS’

Former Chippa United coach **MORGAN MAMMILA** says he's enjoyed a break from the game, having finished the last seven months of his contract at the Gqeberha-based outfit, working from home. He tells *iDiski Times* journalist **LETHABO KGANYAGO** in this edition about a big project that he is going to lead at one of the clubs. In this interview, Mammila also talks about how he feels he fared in his third stint at Chippa, the heartbreak of watching Limpopo sides Baroka FC, Black Leopards and Magesi FC get relegated from their respective leagues last season. Mammila also speaks about the pride of watching a player he identified at grassroots football make history with Bafana Bafana at the ongoing FIFA World Cup, while also naming his pick for the 2025/26 Betway Premiership Player of the Season.

**Lethabo Kganyago:** Morgan, we always appreciate your time. What have you been up to?

**Morgan Mammila:** To be honest, I had a good break in my life because I've been actively involved in football for so many years without a break. So when the opportunity came from Chippa United that I can work from home from December up until June 30, the end of my contract, I accepted that with both hands. And for me, being home, I had to sit back, reflect on where I've done right, where I've done wrong, and I had an opportunity also to look at the teams, all the teams, not focusing on one team, all the teams. And by that time, I was enjoying, I was learning, and I was recharging. I think I'm coming back in football as a better person. And what makes it sweeter is watching a World Cup. When you are watching a World Cup, I feel like I'm part of the World Cup, you know, after identifying one player from where I come from in a rural area of Ga-Mampa in Evidence Makgopa, playing 90 minutes and playing a part of making history by taking Bafana Bafana into the Last 32 round. For me, this is an achievement, and as far as I've recharged, the plan is to go out and get more Evidences of this world.

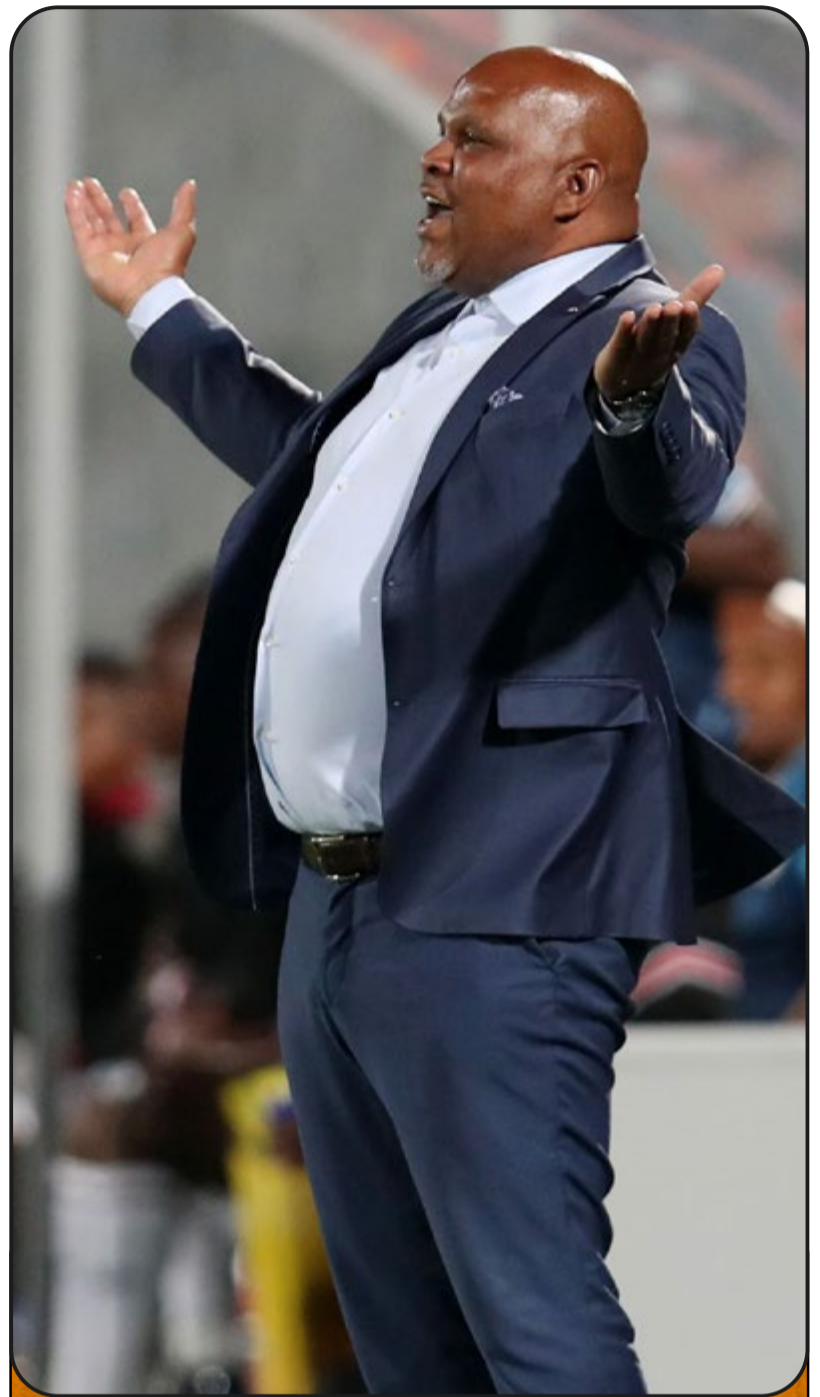
**LK:** So, when you say you're coming back into football, what do you mean? Is there a project you're working on, the rumours about you joining Magesi?

**MM:** All I can say, there is a big project that I'm going to lead, and I'm happy. I'm looking forward to it, and it's a big one. It's a big one, and I look back where I come from, and I see that oh, it's similar, but this one is huge. It's big. I've recharged, I think I'm ready to take football to the next level.

**LK:** Sounds like you don't want to say much about this project, but can you give us an idea when can we expect to hear the news?

**MM:** Surely it's going to happen in the transfer window. I think the club that I'm busy with, I'm engaged with, they will do the announcement. So I think I'm leaving it to the club so that they can do how they do things. But it is a big project, and I'm looking forward to it.

**LK:** I'm trying to get a bit more here, so are you going to be a head coach, technical director? What's the magnitude of the thing that you're going to be doing?



**“I WAS DEEPLY HURT, AND IT'S LIKE I HAD THIS DEEP CUT WOUND WHEN BAROKA AND BLACK LEOPARDS WERE RELEGATED.”**

**MM:** One thing for sure, I'm not going to be the head coach, I'm going to be in charge of running that club.

**LK:** Okay, sounds very important. When you look at where you left Chippa and them having avoided relegation, when it almost looked like they could get dragged into that, are you happy, or could things have gone a little bit differently?

**MM:** One thing for sure, you look back as a person, where you found the club, where did you leave the club? When I was actually in charge of Chippa, those seasons that I was in charge, the team never fought relegation. And looking back now, I can't say what's happening. You know, our job is simple. If I'm tasked to run the club, it's easy; you must do better than the previous person. If you don't achieve what the previous person has achieved, it means you are a failure. You failed. That's how you measure yourself when it comes to football. It's like a coach. If a coach accumulates 40 points in a team, and they hired you, the target is very simple: you have to achieve more than 40, then you'll become a better coach than the previous one. But if you achieve less, it means you have failed. It's easy. It's very easy, it doesn't even need a rocket scientist to judge yourself in football.

**LK:** And according to you, have you done well?

**MM:** I think I've done well. Even when I





was a coach, I still have a record there at Chippa, nobody has matched my record of winning four games in a row. Since Chippa was in the PSL, no coach has ever achieved that. I'm holding that record.

**LK: Do you feel that the position they finished in is a fair one, or was that a really testing season for them?**

**MM:** To be honest, I think it was a testing season for them. Even if you look at the points, they've achieved less points than the previous two seasons.

**LK: I also want to just go back to something you mentioned at the beginning of the interview, the pride that you speak of when speaking about Makgopa and watching him at the World Cup. Have you had an opportunity to touch base with him?**

**MM:** You know, after the squad was announced, I think I only spoke to him once, and even before I phoned him, I said, 'You know what, keep on working hard, I know if you do well, you'll go to the World Cup'. And after the squad was announced, I phoned him and congratulated him. I only spoke to him once, and since then I haven't spoken to him. I'm waiting for him to come back and just give him that one call to say thank you. That's all I want to do. Normally, what I do, the players that I've identified, I don't normally phone them regularly. To me, it's like once I've identified a player, he is in the professional ranks; my job is done. I don't need to be in contact with that player, unless if there's something that he's doing. Normally, I speak to them once, I show them the bigger picture before. Once they're in the PSL, I look from a distance as a supporter. My job is to go and look for another one, so that I can give him an opportunity. I think my job is to help those in need to come to professional football. That's all I want to do.

**LK: It must be a proud moment, not only for you. I can imagine the club where you got him from in Ga-Mampa the coaches there, his parents, the community that he comes from, must feel very proud.**

**MM:** To be honest, we're very proud as a community seeing one of our own, playing especially 90 minutes in a World Cup, and especially a game that's making history of qualifying to their first ever Last 32 round. I can tell you this is a lifetime achievement for us. To be honest, I'm not surprised where we are as a national team now. The competitiveness of the Betway Premiership has determined that we're going to have a good tournament. You look at the competition, especially the top three, it shows that there's much more improvement, because seeing a team that has been occupying number two for most of the time, winning the league, a treble, Sundowns winning CAF Champions League, it means they are the best team on the continent. It shows that we are in the right direction. So I'm proud of the football people in South Africa, from SAFA to PSL.

**LK: As someone who was in the league last season, who have been some of the players that have impressed you enough to say these are my candidates for Player of the Season.**

**MM:** To be honest, I'll say [Relebohile] Mofokeng deserves it, deserves to be the Player of the Season. I think he has proven, especially when there were talks



**"I'M NOT SURPRISED WHERE WE ARE AS A NATIONAL TEAM, NOW. THE COMPETITIVENESS OF THE BETWAY PREMIERSHIP HAS DETERMINED THAT WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A GOOD TOURNAMENT."**

of him moving, and that did not distract him. He was focused on the game; he was not starting most of the matches. He came and finished stronger. To be honest, as a young boy, I give it to him that he has come out on top out of them all.

**LK: What were your highlights from the last season?**

**MM:** I'll say that the competition was on another level. Hence, I'm saying it was easy for Sundowns to win the Champions League. It was easy for the top three teams to compete for number one position, unlike those years where the league was won in match number 24 or 25. This season, we had to wait for the last day, so it shows that football in South Africa is on another level. Hence, you see the results are also shown there in the FIFA World Cup, because we're also making history now. And who knows what will be in the top 16? I don't see us losing a match so easily. I don't see that.

**LK: You talk about the competitiveness in the local game. For you amongst the coaches as a colleague, who do you feel stood out?**

**MM:** In my opinion, I'll say the coach of Sundowns. Yes, he won the Champions League, because of the quality that he has. It's a given he had to do it. Coach of Pirates, the quality that he has, yes, he had to do it. But give it to Richards Bay's coaches playing with the youngest team. I'm sure it's the youngest team in the country and not fighting relegation. Give it to those young guys because I think they've managed to give the top



three teams a run for their money. Give it to those gentlemen because they were playing with players that are under the age of 23, maybe six, seven at a go. So, give it to those guys.

**LK: We're talking about Makgopa being at the World Cup, and also seeing Khuliso Mudau there too, boys who came up from Limpopo clubs Baroka FC and Black Leopards that gave them the opportunity at the professional level. There are contrasting situations back at home with the said clubs having dropped out of the professional ranks. What does this mean?**

**MM:** To be honest, I was hurt, and I was deeply hurt, and it's like I had this deep cut wound when Baroka and Black Leopards were relegated. To be honest, I felt like us as Limpopo, we have failed the way that the relegation cut me so deep. I didn't even know what to say, because these are the teams that give opportunity mostly to us Limpopo people. And the players that we're talking about, they're from these clubs, and each and every national team call-up, you'd always find a player from Baroka, from Black Leopards, all the time. So that's why I'm saying this relegation, for me, I'm still hurt. I'm still hurt. I'm still trying to digest what's happening. Looking at Baroka village, it's just pain and tears for me, but I hope and pray that Baroka come back, same as Black Leopards, they need to. I feel for the loving supporters of Black Leopards that fill up that stadium. They didn't even care whether it's against Golden Arrows, it's AmaZulu, or if it's Chippa, they're always full. So I think we have robbed them of their football. I'm praying that the two teams come back quicker and come back even tomorrow.

**LK: What do you feel could have been the contributions to the downfalls of these two teams?**

**MM:** To be honest, I don't want to speculate because I wasn't closer to both teams. I was focusing on where I was. I was just seeing everything from a distance. So I wouldn't say it was because of one, two, three, or four. It happens in football, where a team gets relegated. Unfortunately, it was the team from our province that got relegated, and that hurt us big time, because this is a job creation. Football is job creation for our people in Limpopo. So we're saying now those people who were getting employment because of the two clubs, now where are they going to get those opportunities? The list of players they have produced is endless.

**LK: What would be your advice or your suggestions that can help to fasten the process for them to coming back to the professional ranks?**

**MM:** I think with Baroka it's going to be an easy one because he has done it before. He went through the same process of coming from ABC Motsepe to PSL. He has done it before; he can still do it. One thing about football, promotion has got eyes. Once a person knows how to promote, he can do it over and over and over again. I can tell you the coaches that have promoted the teams so many times. [Shaun] Bartlett has promoted Cape Town Spurs, has promoted Golden Arrows, Brakkies [Brandon Truter] has promoted Swallows and others. It's got eyes, it's got its own people. So even Baroka's chairman is like the chairman of Richards Bay, he promoted the team that was sold to AmaZulu, then Richards Bay was formed, and the same chairman promoted the team to the PSL again.



***"I FEEL LIKE I'M PART OF THE WORLD CUP, YOU KNOW, AFTER IDENTIFYING ONE PLAYER FROM WHERE I COME FROM IN A RURAL AREA OF GA-MAMPA IN EVIDENCE MAKGOPA PLAYING 90 MINUTES AND PLAYING A PART OF MAKING HISTORY BY TAKING BAFANA BAFANA INTO THE LAST 32 ROUND."***

That's why I'm saying promotion has got its own people, it's got its own eyes. So the chairman of Baroka can do it again and come back.

**LK: In terms of the Premier division in the same province, Magesi went down, bringing the number of clubs from Limpopo now to two in Polokwane City and Sekhukhune United. Is that a disadvantage to only have two teams in the top flight?**

**MM:** I think we are talking about two professional teams; they do the right things every day, and I think it was just unfortunate for Magesi to get relegated. But also, as I'm saying, the chairman knows how it's done. He has promoted the team from ABC Motsepe to Motsepe Championship, and also to Betway Premiership. As I said, this promotion has got its own people, he can still do it again, come 2026/2027, Magesi back to Betway Premiership because that's where they belong. The relegations will have an impact, especially for people who have been benefiting from the matches, the security, the hotels, and many others. But one thing for sure, this is the time when, as Limpopo, we need to stand up and support all our teams to come back. We need to support Baroka to come back to Motsepe Foundation Championship, same as Black Leopards, also rally behind Magesi to come back to PSL, because that's where they belong.

**LK: Thank you so much, Morgan, and I hope we will be amongst the first to know when your big project goes live.**



# 'SAILOR IS THE BEST RIGHT BACK SOUTH AFRICA HAS HAD'

*The plaudits for South Africa's maiden progress into the knockout phase of the FIFA World Cup went to Thapelo Maseko as they should have. After all, the attacker who plays his club football out in Cyprus scored the solitary goal that saw Bafana Bafana beat South Korea to finish second in Group A on four points behind co-hosts Mexico, who completed the round robin phase with a perfect nine. Not surprisingly, then, he was even given the Man of the Match award.*

Yet, in a tight match that could have gone either way, there were many other players who did a sterling job as Ronwen Williams and Co entered their names into South African football folklore as history makers. Among those was right-back Khuliso Mudau, who was even singled out for praise by some Korean fans while South African followers were waxing lyrical about the Mamelodi Sundowns player's contribution.

Sailor was his usual solid self, bossing the right side so much that Korea moved to attack on the other side as they found little joy where Mudau was playing. The standout moment of his performance came late in the first half when he brilliantly dispossessed an opponent of the ball at the corner flag and initiated a Bafana attack to great applause from the crowd. That a clip of that move was all over social media was not surprising. He was again in fine form as South Africa lost 1-0 to Canada in the Round of 32, as Bafana put in a great defensive shift only to concede in stoppage time.

This, though, is what South African fans have come to expect from the 31-year-old defender, whom many have described as the best right-back on the continent. There are even those who venture to term him one of the best in the world, with coaches who have worked with him saying he is in the mould of Morocco's Ashraf Hakimi.

Hailing out of Musina in Limpopo, Mudau has gone through the proper development and was among the lucky few players who enjoyed great support from his family. Yet his career almost never took off, with a former administrator of a club he played for early on telling a tale of how members

of the technical team wanted to discard him because they thought of him as being slow and even doubted his sexuality.

"When we were at Magesi FC (in the lower division), the then coach Shepherd Murape and his technical team felt Khuliso was too slow. They even started saying he was gay because he ran with his arms flailing to the sides," administrator Tshifiwa Thidiela recalls

"But I could see the boy was good, and when they were deciding to get rid of him, I spoke to my dad [David Thidiela] at Black Leopards to say there's a good player that they should sign. Proof that Khuliso was that good came when Jomo Cosmos tried to get him, and Leopards had to fight them off. And as they say, the rest is history now, because we all know just how great a player he has gone on to become."

In this article, iDiski senior soccer writer MATSHELANE MAMABOLO chronicles Mudau's rise while delving into the man he is by speaking to coaches who have played a role in the right-back's career.

## A PRODUCT OF SOLID DEVELOPMENT

One of the greatest failings of South African football is the proper development of young players. Mudau is not one of those. Like most players, Sailor began playing on the dusty streets of his home township of Musina, turning out for Dunzi Young Stars, where his winning mentality was immediately evident. His neighbour and later coach at Benny's Care Academy, Mbishi Mokwena, has vivid memories of a young Mudau lambasting his teammates following defeats.

"He has always loved winning, and even when he played on the streets and at Young Stars, he gave it his all to win matches. So the winning mindset that you see now at Sundowns and Bafana has always been there."

From Young Stars, Mudau went to the Swallows Academy as a 14-year-old but did not stay there for long and moved to the then-popular and highly successful Benny's Care Academy in Thohoyandou.

**THIDIELA: “PROOF THAT KHULISO WAS THAT GOOD CAME WHEN JOMO COSMO TRIED TO GET HIM, AND LEOPARDS HAD TO FIGHT THEM OFF, AND AS THEY SAY, THE REST IS HISTORY NOW.”**



Mokwena was the coach there and recalls Sailor – a nickname he was given at Young Stars, as most likened him to Daniel Sailor Tshabalala, who turned out for Silver Stars and Orlando Pirates, always being a cut above the rest.

“He was always destined for success. Even way back then, he was far better than his peers. In terms of talent, performance and commitment, he was very good. Of course, boys will always be boys, but even then, I cannot recall him getting into trouble for any disciplinary issues. He was always focused and stubborn in a positive way. He was a fighter on the pitch and would not accept to be beaten by an opponent. He used to fight with teammates when they were not pushing hard. Sailor did not accept defeat easily.”

The sight of Mudau marauding up the line into opposition territory or of him winning the ball from an opponent with a trademark tackle fills Mokwena and everyone else at Benny’s Academy with immense pride.

“It is fulfilling to see him shining the way he does at international level for both club and country. For us to know that we have played a small role in his development as a player makes us feel honoured and proud. What we love about his success is that it helps to inspire the junior boys and puts our school on the map. When they see that a player who comes from where they are is doing so well, they too get to believe that they can also make it. It gives them hope and makes them realise that it is not about where you come from, that you can be successful so long as you are talented but most importantly you work hard and listen to your coaches because Sailor was an obedient player.”

The two years he spent at Benny’s Academy were clearly foundational for Mudau to become the superb player he now is.

Spells with JDR Stars and Magesi FC followed afterwards before Thidiela got him to Black Leopards, where most of the country properly got to know of Khuliso ‘Sailor’ Mudau.

### **A LEOPARD DOESN’T CHANGE ITS SPOTS**

Joel Masutha coached Mudau at Black Leopards, and the excitement in his voice is unmistakable as he recalls the time he

worked with the player.

“I never doubted he was going to be a big star. For me, Sailor is the best multifunctional player I’ve ever worked with. He can play any position. I’ve played him at right-back and even left-back when we were in crisis, and he was solid. I’ve played him in midfield, and he did a great job for us. He was even a winger, a position I played him more in than the others. And he used to score goals for Black Leopards under me. So, I’ve got no doubt that he is one of the best players in the world. He is an arrogant player. But arrogant in a way to say ‘the opposition or the opponent cannot go past me. No one can go past me. And when I’m in possession, no one can take the ball away from me’. That’s how he was when he was with us. Of course, he has really improved at Sundowns. But even back then, he showed the potential of going on to be a top-class player. So, I am not surprised to see him being regarded as the best right-back on the continent and one of the best in the world.”

That tackle he made against South Korea has become Mudau’s trademark, a clean sliding tackle that sees them leaving his opponents stunned as to how they lost out on possession.

“He’s also one of the cleanest, cleanest defenders there are out there. Out of 10 tackles, he’s going to win nine if not 10. And that makes him so special. And from there, the acceleration, the energy that he’s got to run from line to line, it’s really unbelievable. People rave about the likes of Ashraf Hakimi and I believe they are only being talked about because of where they play. But you look at the qualities, there’s no difference and I think maybe Mudau’s got more energy. So, it’s just unfortunate that people don’t really watch our league that much. But I really believe he is at a global level.”

Another aspect of Mudau’s game that Masutha waxed lyrical about was his reading of the game, the coach sharing an anecdote from a play-offs match against Platinum Stars, they drew thanks to a suggestion by the right-back that he holds off making a change he [Masutha] wanted to make to support this point.

In that match, Meshack Maphangule, one of our best midfielders, got a yellow card, and I could see those Platinum Stars

**MOKWENA: "HE HAS ALWAYS LOVED WINNING, AND EVEN WHEN HE PLAYED ON THE STREETS AND AT YOUNG STARS, HE GAVE IT HIS ALL TO WIN MATCHES."**

players were trying to get him sent off by diving whenever he challenged them. I decided to take him off, but Khuliso, who was on the bench having come off, urged me not to, explaining that Maphangule was influential and suggesting who I should take off instead. I listened to him and guess what, Mapangule provided the assist for the equaliser in a 2-2 draw."

Masutha continues to see that in Mudau: "Even now at Sundowns, I've seen him running to the bench talking to the coaches and making suggestions on how the team should play, and I know that those things he is not starting them now. That shows the understanding of the game he has."

Masutha says Mudau owes a huge part of his success as a player to his supportive parents: "Every match, they were there to support. They would even call, trying to find out how he was doing and how far his progress was. They'd even ask if there was anything they could do to help. So, yeah, I could see he came from a well-grounded family, and that support was really influential in his growth as a player."

Steve Komphela concurs with the notion that Mudau is on par with the Hakimis of this world.

"I've told him he is at the level of Ashraf Hakimi. He is a player of unbelievable defensive capacities. Sailor is amazing in one-on-ones; he's a monster in those situations and no doubt one of the best on the continent. For me, he easily ranks in the top five [right-backs] in the world. He has great pride in duels. I am yet to see him struggle with a winger. He's got such physical capacity you will never outpace him and such is his confidence in his pace that he sometimes deliberately gives a winger a yard or two so he can open a stride to recover."

### SAILOR THE WINNER

For Komphela, Mudau's drive sets him apart from most of his peers.

"He is very competitive and a winner. Sailor loves winning. I remember the Champions League final last year, when we lost against Pyramids FC. He was so distraught. He was lying on the floor,

shattered, and I went to lift him up, but he refused. He was inconsolable, and I understood and allowed him his moment. It's part of how he wanted to deal with that defeat because he could not stand that we'd lost."

That winning nature was evident prior to this year's final of the continent's premier club competition against AS FAR Rabat of Morocco.

"In the week leading up to the CAF Champions League, we were entangled in a mirage of emotions as we were campaigning in the domestic league and the results were not coming. The mood collapsed in the camp, and he came to me after one training session and asked me to make the rest of the squad aware of what was at stake. He asked me, 'I don't know if you made these guys aware of the significance of the match we are going to play, it is a 100 million rand match'. He sees things at the elite level in terms of what has to be achieved; he's got a different vision to most players."

Just as Masutha said and even observed, Komphela confirms that Mudau is more than just a player.

"He sees the game like a coach, even from the pitch. There have been moments when he opens up and gives us the insights of what they are experiencing on the field, and if you are a good listener, there is so much you can pick up."

### THE BEST RIGHT-BACK SA HAS EVER HAD?

Naturally, comparisons will abound, as is always the case in the beautiful game. So how does Mudau rate against some of the best exponents of the traditional number two position, both at Sundowns and the national team? Interestingly, some of the best right-backs South Africa has produced have played for Sundowns. The late Samuel Ewie Kambule who was a key member of the Sundowns team which popularised the Shoe Shine and Piano style under the late Stanley Screamer Tshabalala, was part of the initial Bafana squad under the self same Tshabalala. Granted, they were the continent's whipping boys, but there can



**KOMPHELA - "I'VE TOLD HIM HE IS AT THE LEVEL OF ASHRAF HAKIMI. HE IS A PLAYER OF UNBELIEVABLE DEFENSIVE CAPACITIES."**

be no denying Kambule was a superstar. After him, another dearly departed star in Sizwe Motaung shone just as bright in Sundowns and Bafana colours. Komphela believes Mudau is worthy of being mentioned in the same breath as those legends.

"I look at Sailor, and I see him on par if not better than the likes of Ewie and Sizwe. You think Pa Gaxa, Jimmy Tau and Lucky Lekgwathi as some of the best exponents of the position we've had in this country yet, in my opinion and with utmost respect to these players, Sailor is the best right-back South Africa has had."

#### **ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT, LESS USE OF FLAILING ARMS**

As fantastic a player as he believes Mudau to be, Komphela says he can be even better.

"Like any other footballer, he has massive room for improvement, but he's at an age where his improvement is minimal."

Perhaps an area he could improve on is the use of his arms, which has often seen him conceding unnecessary set-pieces to the detriment of his teams.

Masutha has seen this criticism of Mudau's game, but says it should not be allowed to take away from the fantastic player he is.

"Obviously, this is an area which he needs to work on and stop because it diminishes everything good that he has been doing. People end up talking more about that. But for me, that is like a drop in the ocean because the work that he does overshadows everything. So, yeah, he just has to cut that one out, and I believe he has learned from that after the penalty he conceded and also threatening set-pieces in other instances."

Masutha does feel that the officials need to be a bit more lenient, given that Mudau means no harm.

"I don't think he will be doing that maliciously to slap an opponent in the face or whatever. For me, maybe it's just to

try and feel where the opposition is. And also maybe trying to block the opposition from getting the ball away from him. But otherwise, yeah, that is the minor thing that I feel if he can cut it out from his game, then you have a very fantastic player. And remember, he is used to playing on stages where aggression had to be applied, especially in the Champions League, where the game is very physical."

#### **A MOVE ABROAD**

With the World Cup a big shop window to the top leagues the world over, chances of Mudau having caught the eyes of some scouts are higher. But at his age, it is unlikely there will be clubs that bite. Komphela says that should not be a big issue.

"Sundowns is a highly competitive environment and highly rewarding as well, so a Sundowns player is not going to be easily tempted to move to change the environment for economic reasons. Their economic situation is competent, so for him to move would depend on the issue of luck; the opportunity of the player transfer is about the opportunity to go and the club's willingness to let go of such a player. In Sailor's case, when coach Rulani [Mokwena] left, Sailor could have gone, but such opportunities are dependent also on who handles your affairs. You need a George Mendes-type agent who can open massive opportunities for you as a player, but as I said, if you are a Sundowns player, the move is not something you are necessarily chasing, given the great environment they are in."

Yet with his stellar performances at the World Cup, it will not be surprising if Mudau gets offers from overseas. And with the general belief that he is in the mould of Ashraf Hakimi, surely he should go and prove himself in some of the world's highly-rated leagues.

The impact that could have on youngsters looking up to Sailor as a role model would be the kind that will see South Africa producing many more right-backs who will dominate the continent.

# BROOS' FORGOTTEN BOYS...



*While all eyes were fixed on the 26 players who were representing Bafana Bafana at the 2026 FIFA World Cup, there were undoubtedly others watching from afar, left to ponder the fine margins that can define an international career.*

We're not talking about those fan favourites who Hugo Broos never warmed to, but rather the several who, at one stage or another, looked destined to be there too.

Over the course of Broos's five-year reign, several footballers emerged in his plans. Some were regular starters. Others were among the first names called up whenever a squad was announced. For a period, they appeared to form part of the foundation.

Yet football moves quickly. Form rises and falls. Injuries interrupt momentum. Transfers that promise new opportunities can sometimes have the opposite effect.

Each case is different. Some simply lost their place through a dip in performances. Others struggled to replicate previous levels after changing clubs. A few were overtaken by the emergence of a new generation eager to seize its opportunity. In certain instances, circumstances beyond their control played a role.

Whatever the reason, the road to the World Cup ultimately moved on without them.

That is perhaps the cruellest reality of international football. One month, you are a key figure in the national team setup; the next, you are watching from the stands, your place occupied by someone else.

As South Africa reflects on the Broos era and Bafana's historical return to football's biggest stage, it is also worth remembering those players who helped lay the foundations along the way.

Here, we take a look back at the players who, at one point, were fixtures in Hugo Broos's plans, only to gradually fade from the picture as his Bafana Bafana project evolved over five fascinating years.

## **Goalkeeper: Veli Mothwa (10 caps)**

If Ronwen Williams was Hugo Broos' undisputed number one, then for a significant portion of the Belgian's reign, Veli Mothwa was the trusted deputy standing right behind him. The former AmaZulu goalkeeper may never have

been the headline act, but he was one of the most important supporting characters in the Broos story. Mothwa became a fixture in Bafana squads and was often the first option whenever Williams was unavailable. His finest moment perhaps came without even stepping onto the pitch. During South Africa's remarkable run to a bronze medal at the 2023 AFCON, Mothwa was among the team's biggest personalities behind the scenes. Whether celebrating goals, encouraging teammates from the bench or helping maintain the positive atmosphere that became a hallmark of Broos's squad, he embodied the spirit of togetherness that drove the team forward. Unfortunately, as he began to lose his place at AmaZulu, the ripple effect was felt internationally. A move to AmaTuks offered a fresh start, but by then the national team had moved on. New goalkeepers emerged, opportunities became fewer, and the door gradually closed. Looking back, Mothwa may have been a bigger loss than many realised. Goalkeepers are often judged by saves and clean sheets, but every successful squad also needs personalities that help bind the group together. During Bafana's most successful period under Broos, Mothwa was one of those figures.

## **Left-back: Terrence Mashego (13 caps)**

For much of Broos' tenure, the left-back position has belonged to Aubrey Modiba. Yet there was a period when it seemed Terrence Mashego might eventually make that role his own. The former Cape Town City defender arrived in the national setup at a time when his stock was rising rapidly. Mashego impressed whenever called upon and looked capable of becoming a long-term solution on the left flank. He was rewarded with a place in the team and was still in the squad when Bafana secured bronze at the 2023 AFCON, another sign that Broos viewed him as an important member of the national team picture. Joining Mamelodi Sundowns is often viewed as the pinnacle of domestic football. For Mashego, however, the move brought new challenges. Competition for places at Chloorkop is relentless, and ironically, one of the players standing in his way was the very man occupying the left-back position for Bafana: Aubrey Modiba. As his club minutes became increasingly limited, his place in the national team began to fade, too. Others, such as Lyle Lakay and Fawaaz Basadien, also briefly threatened to establish themselves, but none managed to truly convince Broos that they should permanently dislodge Modiba.



### Right-back: Nyiko Mobbie (29 caps)

Few players divided opinion during the Broos era quite like Nyiko Mobbie. From the very beginning of the Belgian coach's tenure, Mobbie found himself trusted far more by the national team coaching staff than by the wider football public. Every squad announcement seemed to reignite the same debate. Supporters questioned his inclusion, pundits argued there were better options available, and many wondered what exactly Broos saw in him. Yet the one opinion that mattered most never changed. Broos trusted him. The Belgian repeatedly defended Mobbie, insisting that whenever he called upon the versatile defender, he delivered exactly what was asked of him. He offered reliability, discipline and a willingness to carry out instructions without complaint. In many ways, Mobbie became one of the symbols of Broos' philosophy. The coach often valued consistency and tactical understanding over popularity, and few players embodied that more than the former Mamelodi Sundowns defender. The challenge for Mobbie, however, was that while he continued to perform steadily, another right-back was steadily building an irresistible case. Khuliso Mudau. For a period, calls for Mudau's inclusion became impossible to ignore. Week after week, the Sundowns defender excelled domestically and on the continent, while questions persisted over why he remained outside the national team picture. Broos relented, and when Mudau got his opportunity, he grabbed it with both hands and quickly established himself as Bafana Bafana's first-choice right-back. To Mobbie's credit, he never disappeared completely. He remained part of the broader squad structure and continued to earn call-ups. Broos clearly valued the qualities that made him a useful option across several positions whenever injuries or suspensions struck. For much of the period between 2021 and 2025, Mobbie remained one of those players who could quietly be relied upon whenever needed. His World Cup hopes ultimately faded not because of a dramatic loss of form, but because football rarely stands still. An injury setback last year disrupted his momentum at precisely the wrong time. While he was recovering, new contenders emerged, fresh options were assessed, and the competition for places intensified. By the time he returned, the pecking order had shifted.

Ironically, another experienced

campaigner who may have featured on this list was Thapelo Morena. However, Broos himself admitted that recurring injury concerns played a significant role in keeping the versatile Sundowns star out of his final World Cup plans.

As for Mobbie, his story in the Broos era remains an interesting one. He may never have been the crowd favourite, and he may never have fully convinced every supporter, but for several years, he was one of the coach's most trusted soldiers. In a national team setup where reliability was prized above all else, that counted for a great deal.

### Centre-backs: Rushine De Reuck (17 caps) & Siyanda Xulu (31 caps)

Few positions experienced as much turnover during the Broos years as centre-back. While it looks like the coach found his answer now in Mbekezeli Mbokazi and Ime Okon, for much of the time, partnerships emerged and disappeared. Before recent names such as once sure-thing Siyabonga Ngezana or injuries ruled out players like Mthobi Mvala or Rushwin Dortley, two defenders appeared destined to become pillars of Broos' project: Rushine De Reuck and Siyanda Xulu.

De Reuck looked like a cornerstone of the future and quickly became a regular during Broos' early years in charge. At one stage, it seemed impossible to imagine a Bafana squad without him. Yet club football once again proved decisive. As his opportunities at Sundowns became increasingly limited, so too did his appearances for the national team. Broos repeatedly stressed the importance of regular game-time, and De Reuck became another casualty of that philosophy. Ironically, his career has enjoyed something of a renaissance since moving to Simba SC in Tanzania. But by then, Broos had largely moved in another direction, leaving De Reuck's international career seemingly frozen in place.

The story of Siyanda Xulu is perhaps even more dramatic. There was a time when Xulu was not merely a squad member but was often among the first names selected and even served as vice-captain. Then, almost everything changed. Xulu gradually disappeared from the national setup, and shortly thereafter from professional football itself. Clubless for almost two years, his absence has been one of the more surprising developments involving

a player who once appeared central to Bafana's future.

**Central midfielders: Ethan Brooks (16 caps) & Yusuf Maart (9 caps)**

For much of the Broos era, one midfield position felt permanently occupied. Teboho Mokoena was the constant. The real debate was always about who would line up alongside him, including early candidates like Ethan Brooks and Yusuf Maart.

Brooks represented one of Broos' earliest attempts to make a statement. The Belgian arrived promising opportunities for young players, and Brooks became one of the first beneficiaries. At TS Galaxy, Brooks showed flashes of quality that justified the excitement. He looked like a player who could develop into a modern midfield conductor one day. Yet international football can arrive quickly. Perhaps too quickly. There were moments that hinted at his future, but there were also signs that the learning curve was steep. As other options emerged, Brooks drifted out of favour. His career, however, never stalled. A move to AmaZulu brought greater maturity to his game, while his subsequent move to Panserraikos in Greece exposed him to a different footballing environment.

Maart's story is different. After helping Sekhukhune United gain promotion and impressing at COSAFA Cup level, the former Orlando Pirates prospect earned Broos's attention through consistency and determination. Then came the move to Kaizer Chiefs. While the transfer represented a major career milestone, it coincided with one of the most turbulent periods in the club's modern history. Chiefs struggled for consistency, endured coaching changes and became the focus of constant scrutiny. Maart often found himself carrying criticism that extended beyond his own performances. In many respects, he became a victim of circumstance. Despite this, he captained Chiefs to their first piece of silverware in a decade, a feat that should not be underestimated. His subsequent move to Austria revitalised his career further. At SV Ried, he enjoyed an outstanding debut season, producing arguably the best football of his career.

**Attacking Midfielders: Percy Tau (50 caps) & Mhlabi Mayambela (16 caps) & Bongokuhle Hlongwane (20 caps)**

No omission carries more weight than Percy Tau. Or perhaps more sadness. For years, Tau was supposed to be the face of South African football's return to the world stage. For much of Broos's reign, Tau remained the focal point of the attack. When people thought about Bafana, they thought about Tau. Then came the criticism. A dip in form became a talking point. Every performance was scrutinised. Every missed chance became a national debate. Broos often defended him publicly, understanding both his quality and his importance. Yet even the coach's protection could not halt the gradual decline of Tau's standing within the squad. His club career became increasingly unsettled as he moved between teams and leagues. In the end, South Africa arrived at the World Cup without the player many had once expected to lead them there.

Mhlabi Mayambela's absence is another reminder of how quickly football evolves. For the first three years of Broos's tenure, Mayambela was one of the coach's trusted soldiers. Even while performing consistently



in Cyprus, however, circumstances changed. New attacking players emerged. Oswin Appollis announced himself. Other options presented different qualities. Gradually, Mayambela found himself further down the pecking order. His performances never dramatically declined. Instead, the squad simply evolved around him.

Bongokuhle Hlongwane perhaps came closest to experiencing the frustration of being perpetually on the edge. The Minnesota United forward was a regular presence in early squads without ever fully cementing himself as a guaranteed starter. Broos repeatedly returned to him, attracted by his pace, work rate and versatility. Yet major tournaments always seemed to arrive at the wrong moment, especially due to the calendar in the USA. He missed both AFCON campaigns and eventually the World Cup, too. Given that the tournament was staged in North America, where Hlongwane has built his club career, the disappointment must have been particularly painful.

**Striker: Zakhele Lepasa (20 caps)**

Few players symbolise the unpredictability of football more than Zakhele Lepasa. Broos trusted him. He earned 16 caps under the Belgian and became a regular feature in the squad during the coach's first three years. He also played his part in the squad that secured bronze at the 2023 AFCON. The ingredients appeared to be there, yet club football once again intervened. Lepasa's biggest obstacle was never talent. It was opportunity. At Orlando Pirates, game-time proved difficult to secure consistently. As his appearances decreased at club level, so too did his chances with Bafana. By the time Broos was finalising plans for the World Cup, Lepasa had drifted out of contention. His departure from Pirates offered fresh hope, but last season, he managed only three appearances for Siwelele FC, making an international return increasingly difficult.

And perhaps that is the common thread connecting all of these names. At one point, each looked like they belonged. Each contributed something to the Broos project. Some helped qualify South Africa for tournaments. Others played key roles in rebuilding the culture and competitiveness of the national team. Yet when the plane departed for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, they were left behind.

Not forgotten, but overtaken by football's relentless march forward.



## THE IDISKI TOP 10... GOAL SCORERS

*This week, iDiski Times looks back at the league's deadliest finishers, ranking the top ten goal scorers of the 2025/26 Betway Premiership season.*

*Our list is ordered primarily by goals scored, with overall performance serving as the tiebreaker, drawing on statistics and ratings from a range of leading football analytics providers. Beyond simply finding the back of the net, we have considered consistency, influence, efficiency and the overall impact each player had on their team's campaign.*

Goals were not always easy to come by this season. Across the league's 240 matches, just 494 goals were scored, underlining the competitive and often tightly contested nature of the campaign. Yet while goals may have been at a premium, a select group of forwards and attacking players consistently found a way to deliver when it mattered most.

Collectively, the 10 players on this list accounted for 94 of those 494 goals, nearly one in every five scored in the entire division. These were the men who carried attacking hopes, settled matches and lit up the Betway Premiership with their finishing prowess.

(\*statistics as of 1 June 2026)

### The Top 10:

**10 Langelihle Phili**  
Stellenbosch  
**7 Goals**

At just 21 years old, the Amajita star emerged as Stellenbosch's attacking star, finishing as the club's top scorer in a season that often demanded resilience rather than flair. When Stellenbosch struggled for rhythm during the opening months of the campaign, Phili frequently provided the spark. Whether arriving late in the box, finding pockets of space between defenders or producing moments of calm when opportunities presented themselves, he carried an attacking burden that few expected him to shoulder so early in his career. Seven goals may not place him among the league's elite marksmen just yet, but context matters. Many of those strikes arrived at crucial moments and often when his side needed inspiration. More importantly, there remains a sense that this is merely the beginning. Phili's season felt less like a finished product and more like the first chapter of a promising story. If this campaign was his breakthrough, the next one could be his arrival.

**9 Bradley Grobler**  
Sekhukhune United  
**8 Goals (1 penalty)**

Time eventually catches everyone. Bradley Grobler, however, continues to make a compelling case that it may take a little longer to catch him. Now 38, the veteran striker remains one of the sharpest penalty-box predators South African football has produced in the modern era. After making the move to Sekhukhune United, it initially looked as though another prolific campaign was



on the cards. The goals flowed early, the movement remained razor sharp, and defenders were once again discovering that giving Grobler even half a chance is often a costly mistake. Injuries ultimately interrupted his momentum, restricting him to just 20 appearances, while Sekhukhune's own dip in form inevitably affected his output. Yet eight goals still represented a respectable return for a player entering the twilight years of a remarkable career. Even as the years advance, the old sniper still knows exactly where the target is.

**8 Tashreeq Matthews**  
Mamelodi Sundowns  
**8 Goals**

Few players divided opinion quite like Tashreeq Matthews this season. At times, he was criticised by supporters expecting more end product, more consistency or more moments of magic. Yet when the numbers were counted and the season reached its conclusion, Matthews had quietly assembled one of the strongest attacking campaigns in the league. Eight goals and four assists tell the story of a player who consistently influenced matches, while his appearance record underlines the trust placed in him by Miguel Cardoso. No Sundowns player

featured more often throughout the campaign. Matthews has always been an unconventional footballer. He is unpredictable, capable of drifting infield, attacking from wide areas or appearing in unexpected pockets of space. That unpredictability can occasionally frustrate supporters, but it also makes him difficult to contain. In a squad overflowing with international stars and established match-winners, Matthews often became the connective tissue between midfield and attack. His contribution may not always have been celebrated as loudly as others, but it was undeniably significant.

**7 Patrick Maswanganyi**  
Orlando Pirates  
**8 Goals**

For long stretches of the season, Patrick Maswanganyi appeared to be searching for his best form. The effortless brilliance that had illuminated previous campaigns occasionally flickered rather than burned. Yet the mark of top players is their ability to influence outcomes even when not operating at their peak. That is precisely what "Tito" did. As the season gathered pace and the title race intensified, Maswanganyi began to rediscover his rhythm. Six of his eight goals arrived during the latter stages of the campaign, many of them carrying genuine significance in Orlando Pirates' march towards league glory. Maswanganyi remains one of the most entertaining footballers in South Africa. There is artistry in his game, a willingness to attempt the unexpected and a confidence that allows him to play with freedom even under pressure. When he receives possession, something always feels possible. His season may not have reached the heights many expected, but even a slightly subdued Maswanganyi remains one of the division's most dangerous attacking talents.

**6 Flávio Silva**  
Kaizer Chiefs  
**8 Goals**

When Kaizer Chiefs brought Flávio Silva to Naturena, the brief was simple: score goals. By the end of the season, he had delivered more than any other Chiefs player. Eight goals may not seem an extraordinary tally for a club of Chiefs' stature, and both the striker and supporters will undoubtedly feel there were more goals left on the table. Yet Silva's campaign should also be viewed through the broader lens of a side that often struggled for attacking cohesion. Strikers live and die by service, and there were periods when opportunities arrived sparingly. Despite that, Silva continued to battle, occupying defenders, creating space for teammates and remaining a constant threat inside the penalty area. There is an old-fashioned quality to his game. He relishes physical duels and thrives on crosses into dangerous areas. While Chiefs continue searching for greater attacking fluency, Silva at least provided evidence that he possesses the qualities needed to lead the line. The challenge now is turning a respectable return into a truly prolific one.



**5 Oswin Appollis**  
*Orlando Pirates*  
**9 Goals (1 penalty)**

Some signings arrive with hype. Others arrive with expectation. Oswin Appollis arrived with both, and somehow still managed to exceed them. Having already established himself as one of the Betway Premiership's most exciting attacking talents during his time at Polokwane City, the Bafana Bafana winger made the step up to Pirates and immediately looked at home on a far bigger stage. If anything, the added pressure seemed to elevate him. Appollis brought goals, creativity, directness and an infectious sense of adventure to Pirates' attack. His nine goals only tell part of the story. Time and again, he stretched defences, created openings where none appeared to exist and gave opponents sleepless nights with his pace and unpredictability. There were moments during the season when Appollis looked almost impossible to contain. Whether driving inside from wide positions, attacking defenders one-on-one or arriving in the box at precisely the right moment, he constantly found ways to influence matches. Most importantly, he delivered when the stakes were highest. In a title-winning side packed with talent, Appollis was not merely a contributor. He was one of the driving forces behind Pirates' return to the summit, and a leading contender for the league's highest individual honours.

**4 Brayan León**  
*Mamelodi Sundowns*  
**10 Goals (1 penalty)**

If South African football needed an introduction to Brayan León, it received one at full volume. The Colombian striker arrived midway through the season and immediately began leaving destruction in his wake. Four goals in his first three appearances announced his arrival, while a memorable brace against Orlando Pirates served notice that Sundowns had acquired a striker capable of changing the complexion of a title race. León's impact was remarkable not only because of the goals, but because of the speed with which they arrived. Settling into a new country, a new league and a new team often takes months. León needed only weeks. There is a ruthless simplicity to his game. He attacks space aggressively, makes intelligent runs and possesses the kind of penalty-box instincts that cannot be coached. Give him an opportunity and he rarely requires a second invitation. His campaign ended exactly as it began, with a flood of goals. Back-to-back braces against Sivelele and TS Galaxy ensured he reached double figures despite only featuring for half a season. For opposition defenders, that should be a worrying thought. If this were merely a six-month preview, the full feature could be frightening.

**3 Relebohile Mofokeng**  
*Orlando Pirates*  
**10 Goals**

Some players produce statistics. Others produce moments. Relebohile Mofokeng delivered both. At just 21 years old, the Orlando Pirates sensation continues to

play with a confidence and imagination that belies his age. Already one of the faces of South African football, he elevated his game even further during a campaign that firmly established him among the country's elite performers. His 10 goals made him Pirates' leading scorer, but numbers alone cannot fully explain his influence. Several of those strikes were moments of genuine brilliance, goals that shifted momentum, lifted supporters from their seats and altered the course of important matches. Combined with eight assists, his attacking output was extraordinary. Yet perhaps most impressive was the way he embraced responsibility. In a championship-winning side packed with experienced professionals, Mofokeng often looked like the player willing to seize the biggest moments. He plays with joy, creativity and fearlessness. Every touch feels purposeful. Every dribble feels dangerous. Every appearance carries the possibility of something memorable. It is little surprise that he has emerged as the frontrunner for Player of the Season. Few players shaped the story of the campaign more profoundly.

**2 Iqraam Rayners**  
*Mamelodi Sundowns*  
**12 Goals (2 penalties)**

By the standards of most strikers, a 12-





goal league season would represent an outstanding campaign. By the standards Iqraam Rayners has set for himself, it somehow felt slightly underwhelming. That perception speaks volumes about the remarkable consistency the Sundowns and Bafana Bafana forward has produced in recent years. The campaign was not straightforward. Injury concerns and health setbacks disrupted his rhythm early on, while

fierce competition for places limited his starts throughout the season. Despite appearing in 26 matches, he averaged only 55 minutes per game and started just 16 times. Yet Rayners continued to do what elite goal scorers do: find the net. His movement remains among the best in South African football. Constantly probing defensive lines, exploiting tiny pockets of space and anticipating situations before defenders react, he remains one of the most difficult forwards to mark. There were periods when his season appeared in danger of stalling, but he repeatedly found a way back to relevance. Twelve goals and a runner-up finish in the Golden Boot race underline the quality of a striker who has made excellence seem routine. When a dozen goals feels like a quiet season, you know expectations have reached a very high level indeed.



**1 Sédé Dion**  
Golden Arrows  
**14 Goals (1 penalty)**

The Golden Boot belongs to Sédé Dion. The Ivorian's journey through South African football has been a long and winding one. Since arriving in the country five years ago, he has represented multiple clubs, experienced moments of promise and periods of frustration, and often found himself operating outside the spotlight occupied by the league's biggest names. This season changed everything. At 32 years old, Dion enjoyed the most prolific campaign of his career, producing 14 league goals and carrying Golden Arrows' attacking ambitions on his shoulders. Week after week, he delivered. Some goals were scrappy, others spectacular, but all carried the same value for a side that relied heavily on his finishing ability. What made Dion's achievement even more impressive was the context. Unlike some of the players around him in this list, he was not surrounded by an army of international stars or supplied by one of the league's dominant teams. Opportunities often had to be created rather than simply finished. There is a resilience to Dion's story that makes his triumph particularly satisfying. Having scored just 16 Premiership goals across his previous four seasons in South Africa, he almost matched that tally in a single campaign. For years, Dion was a useful striker. In 2025/26, he became the league's most prolific one.

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### ACES OF THE WEEK: BAFANA BAFANA

This week's iDiskiTimes Aces of the Week are, fittingly, the entire Bafana Bafana squad following their memorable run at the 2026 FIFA World Cup. While South Africans dared to believe, few beyond our borders gave Hugo Broos'

side much chance of progressing when they faced South Korea in their decisive final Group A clash. The 25th-ranked Asian nation were widely tipped to secure second place and a Last-32 meeting with Canada in Los Angeles. Bafana, however, had other plans. A disciplined, courageous display, capped by Thapelo Maseko's superbly taken winner, earned a famous 1-0 victory and a place in the knockout stages. Though their journey ended heartbreakingly against co-hosts Canada, who snatched a 1-0 victory with a stoppage-time goal, Bafana leave North America with their heads held high and the nation immensely proud.





## 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.*

## A FABLE OF FORTUNE

By Rob Delpont

*There are South African footballers who achieve success abroad, and then there are those whose lives become woven into the fabric of the global game, like Quinton Fortune.*

Although born and raised in Kewtown, Athlone, the former Bafana Bafana and Manchester United star has spent almost three-quarters of his life abroad. Yet for all the countries he has lived in, all the clubs he has represented, and all the dressing rooms he has called home, Fortune has never truly left the Cape Flats behind.

To understand Quinton Fortune, you first have to understand the family that shaped him.

Long before he was playing in front of packed stadiums in Europe, the Fortune name already carried enormous weight in Cape Town football circles. The Fortune brothers — Deon, Peter, Colin, Desmond and Quinton — were renowned local athletes whose names were spoken with admiration and, by opponents, often a degree of fear.

Family remains one of the cornerstones of Fortune's life. He has often reflected on the sacrifices made by those closest to him.

“My Dad was a big influence in my life spiritually. Making sure we go to church on Sunday morning and Wednesday night. He was a deacon of the New Apostle church. He led by example.

“My dad took me to the cinema for the first time in my life. I was 5. The movie we watched was called *Escape to Victory*. This changed my life. This was the first time I saw Pelé. Ever since I wanted to be like Pele. My dad also mentioned to me another name. George Best.”

His mother, who worked multiple jobs to provide stability and protection for her children during a period when life on the Cape Flats could be unforgiving. While football would eventually become Quinton's escape route, it was the strength of his family that first laid the foundations for everything that followed.

“My mother, Hilda Rose Fortune, was the warrior in our family. And I was the fortunate one in the family, because I was also raised by my grandmother, Nora Adams.”

Interestingly, Fortune has often downplayed his own ability when speaking about his childhood, insisting that some of his older brothers were even more naturally gifted than he was. Perhaps, though, that is simply the perspective of a younger brother looking up to his heroes.

“I was so fortunate. We were 11 in a two-bedroom flat in the ‘Blokke’ opposite the stadium. My cousins stayed with us. So the house was always busy.

“Q-town was amazing, because everyone played football. It was the best football education I experienced growing up.

“My brother Peter was a 100m sprinter and an 800m runner. Peter, like Deon, had a big influence on my life. I was always watching them and felt so proud that they were my brothers. Colin and Desmond,

I also watched playing Sunday league football. They all played a big part in my life.”

But by all accounts, Quinton Fortune was an extraordinary talent.

As a teenager, he was physically imposing in a way that few players his age could match. While most youngsters were still growing into their bodies, Fortune already looked and played like a seasoned athlete. Across the M7 in Hanover Park, another future South African icon was emerging at exactly the same time. Benni McCarthy would later recall how intimidating Fortune appeared as a 13-year-old, describing a youngster whose strength and athleticism already set him apart from everyone around him.

It remains one of the great South African football stories that these two boys, raised in neighbouring communities scarred by gang violence and social hardship, would eventually meet on one of football's grandest stages in the UEFA Champions League.

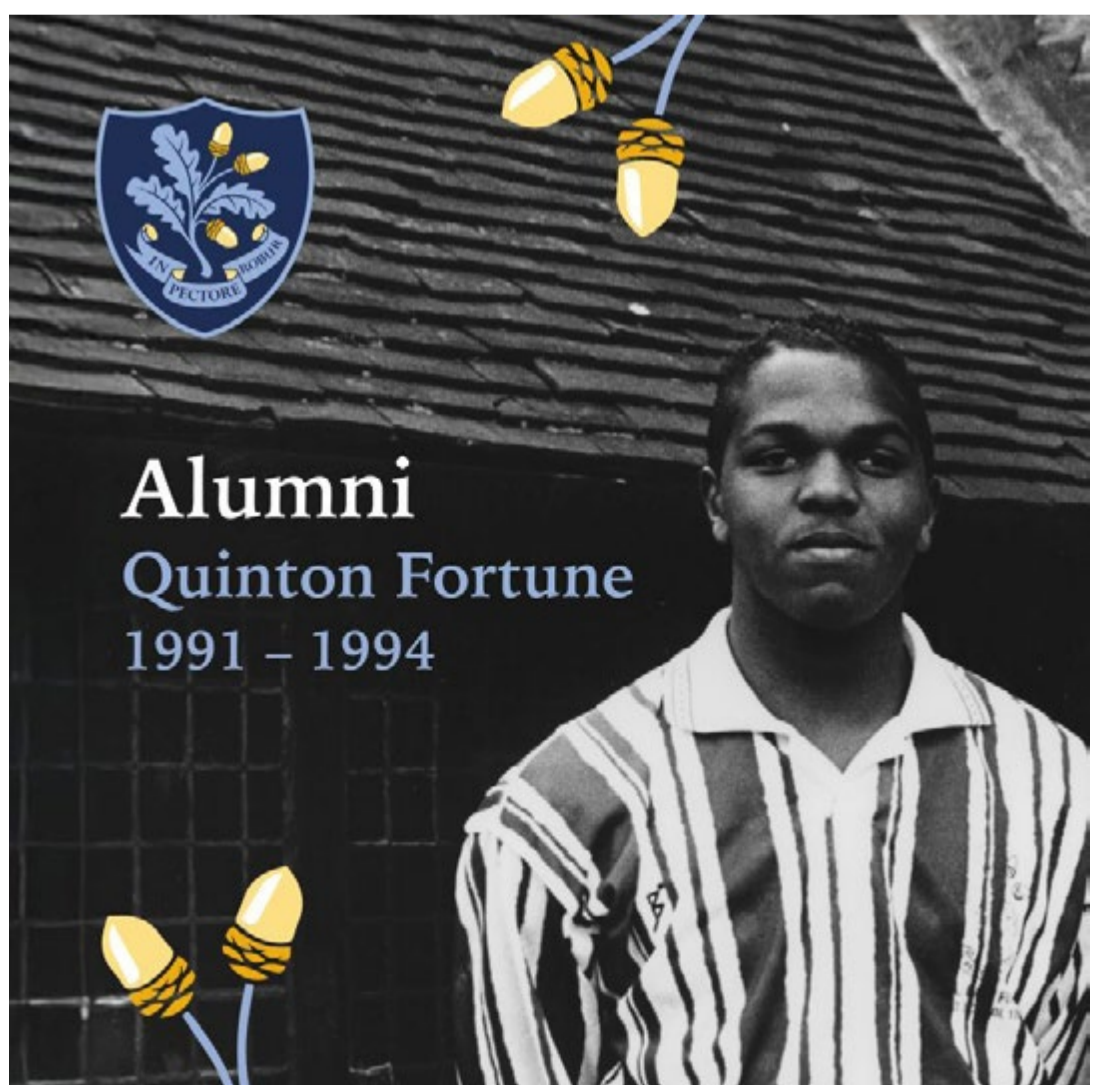
Fortune immersed himself completely in the game, playing wherever and whenever opportunities presented themselves. If there was a match happening somewhere, chances were he wanted to be involved. The football field became both a playground and sanctuary. In communities where many young people were exposed daily to drugs, violence and criminal influences, football offered structure, purpose and hope.

His educational journey was also shaped by his love for the game. Growing up in an Afrikaans-speaking environment, he attended a school where rugby dominated the sporting landscape. It quickly became apparent that rugby was not his calling. After an early experience left him injured and disinterested, his mother intervened, moving him to a different school where football was prioritised.

The next breakthrough came through provincial football.

At a time when school and representative football structures functioned effectively, Fortune's talent earned him selection for Western Province. Even now, decades later, he still speaks proudly of receiving that first provincial tracksuit. For many young players, it might seem like a small detail, but for him it symbolised possibility. It was tangible proof that bigger opportunities existed beyond the boundaries of Athlone.

That provincial team also exposed him to



a rapidly changing South Africa. Fortune has often reflected on how it was the first truly multi-racial football environment he experienced. What stood out to him wasn't division but how natural it all felt. Young players from different backgrounds simply came together to play football, forming friendships and eventually winning a national tournament together.

It was during this period that destiny arrived in the form of coach Colin Gie. Recognising the teenager's exceptional potential, Gie approached Fortune with an opportunity that seemed almost unimaginable: a chance to go to England.

For a young boy growing up amid the harsh realities of the Cape Flats, England represented more than football. It represented the possibility of a different future. Fortune's parents entrusted Gie with that dream. Before leaving South Africa, the coach essentially became a mentor and guardian, putting the youngster through months of intensive preparation. For months, Fortune trained relentlessly, often multiple times a day, building the physical and mental foundations required for the challenges that awaited him overseas.

Those months would become one of the defining periods of his life. The motivation was simple and powerful. Having witnessed violence, shootings, fighting and the darker realities of life around him, Fortune became determined never to return to that existence. The fear of going backwards became fuel. It drove him through difficult training sessions, homesickness and the uncertainty that comes with leaving everything familiar behind.

When he eventually arrived in England, the experience felt surreal. Through Gie's connection with Terry Venables, Fortune found himself at Tottenham Hotspur while still only a teenager. Suddenly, he was sharing training facilities with household names such as Paul Gascoigne and Gary Lineker.

For a boy from Athlone, it felt as though he had stepped into another universe. England exceeded even his wildest dreams. He was so highly regarded that British newspapers ran sensational stories about him, labelling him a potential million-pound wonderkid. Yet beneath the headlines was a teenager simply trying to adapt to a new country while chasing a dream he had nurtured since childhood.

But it was not just football that changed for him. Life in general was different. For the next few years, he attended London's Forest School and began to adapt to life outside the country.

His determination only intensified. But while it looked like he would sign a first-team deal at Spurs, his agent had other ideas and decided it was time for Fortune to leave London.

He'd return to South Africa and train by himself for a few months, but soon Fortune's football education continued in Spain with Atletico Madrid, though he first had a short loan spell at Mallorca. It was while in Spain that South African football supporters began taking serious notice of the gifted left-footer making waves abroad. He won his Atletico first team debut against the mighty Barcelona, and things were starting to look up.

Still a teenager, he made his senior Bafana Bafana debut against Kenya in 1996. He was also part of the celebrated South African Under-23 side that famously defeated Brazil at the Sydney Olympics, one of the greatest results in the country's football history.

Yet the move that would define his career

arrived when Sir Alex Ferguson came calling. Manchester United, fresh from conquering Europe, recruited Fortune into one of the most formidable squads football has ever seen.

While he may not always have been among the first names on the teamsheet, his value to Ferguson's squad extended far beyond appearances. His versatility, professionalism, work ethic and unwavering commitment made him an indispensable member of the dressing room. Teammates respected him. Coaches trusted him.

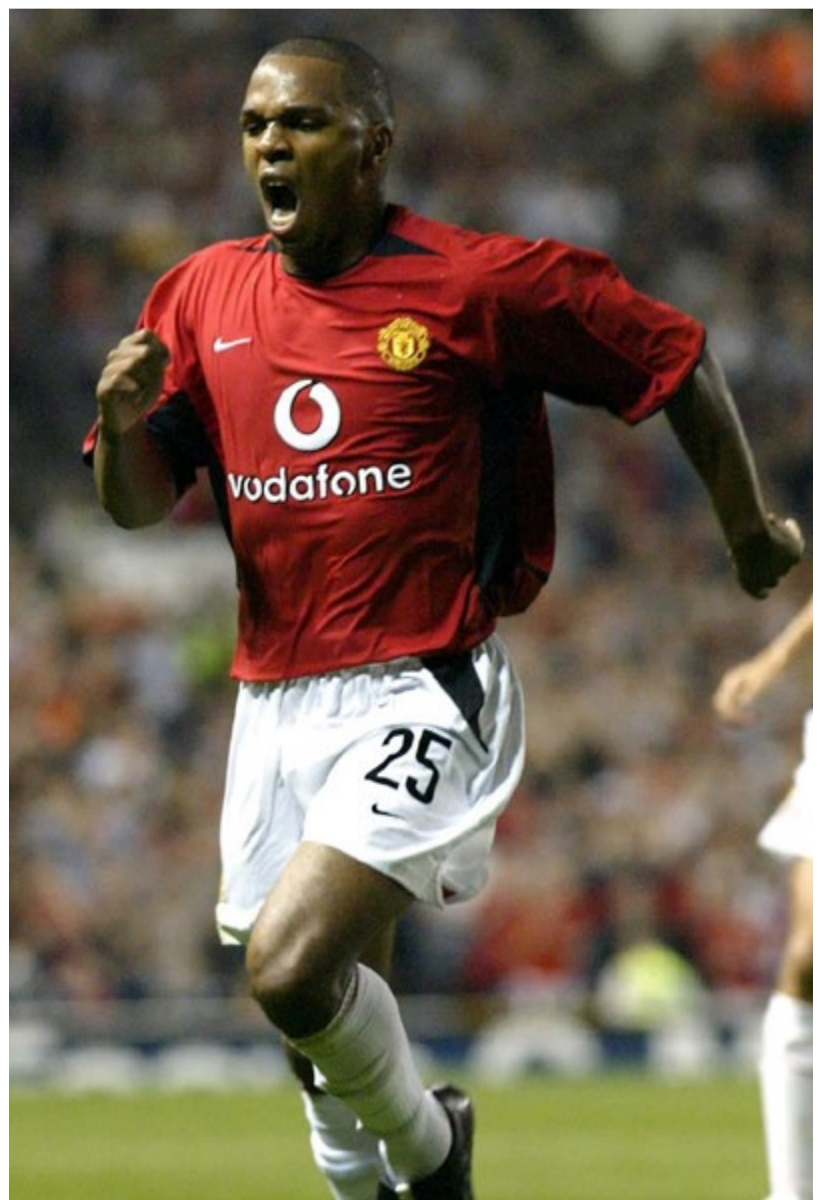
Fortune became part of a golden era that delivered multiple Premier League titles and countless unforgettable moments. Ironically, despite contributing during three title-winning campaigns, he initially fell short of the appearance requirements needed to automatically receive a winner's medal. Recognition eventually arrived in 2003 when the Premier League awarded him a medal through special dispensation, a fitting acknowledgement of his contribution.

While forging a successful career abroad, he never lost sight of home. Determined to invest in the next generation of South African footballers, he helped establish FC Fortune, a club that would grow from humble beginnings into one capable of competing in South Africa's second tier.

More importantly, FC Fortune became far more than just another football club. It became a breeding ground for talent. Over the years, it produced several future stars, among them the late Anele Ngcongca, whose remarkable journey to Bafana Bafana and European football began within its ranks, as we explored in an earlier edition of this column. Sadly, the fairytale was not destined to last, but it could never erase the lasting legacy FC Fortune left behind.

Behind the scenes, tensions began to emerge, culminating in a bitter dispute between Fortune and his former mentor, Gie, who was co-owner and coach at FC Fortune. Allegations surrounding financial management, and contract disputes eventually spilt into the courts, bringing an unhappy end to their working relationship.

Fortune's international career flourished alongside his club success. Fortune represented South Africa at both the 1998 and 2002 FIFA World Cups and appeared at three Africa Cup of Nations tournaments, helping Bafana



Bafana secure silver and bronze medals during one of the national team's strongest eras.

Yet his relationship with the South African public was not always straightforward.

There were occasions when some questioned his commitment to the national team, particularly during disputes involving player releases. The reality was often far more complex. Like many players competing at Europe's elite clubs, Fortune occasionally found himself caught between club obligations and international commitments. Manchester United, like many top clubs, sometimes refused permission for players to participate in non-FIFA-sanctioned friendlies.

The most notable controversy came when South Africa scheduled a friendly in the Caribbean that clashed with a crucial UEFA Champions League fixture. Ferguson refused to release Fortune, who was also managing a minor injury. Public perception framed the situation as a player choosing club over country, but those close to the circumstances understood it was far more nuanced than that.

A separate administrative debacle surrounding a friendly against England would cause further heartbreak. After initially being overlooked for selection despite working hard to regain fitness, Fortune found himself unavailable when subsequent changes were made to the squad when then-coach Shakes Mashaba was replaced for the game. Communication failures and organisational chaos ultimately robbed him of the opportunity.

In today's social media age, where information travels instantly and scrutiny is constant, such incidents may have been viewed differently. At the time, however, players often bore the brunt of criticism for situations largely outside their control.

Injuries eventually began to take their toll. By the mid-2000s, the physical demands of elite football were becoming increasingly difficult to overcome. Fortune won his final Bafana Bafana cap in 2005, while his Manchester United career came to an end two years later.

Short spells followed with Bolton Wanderers, Brescia, Tubize and Doncaster Rovers, but the injuries that had shadowed his later years refused to loosen their grip. Eventually, he made the difficult decision to retire, heartbreakingly just before South Africa hosted the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Retirement, however, never meant leaving football behind. Instead, it marked the beginning of a new chapter.

Fortune steadily built his coaching credentials, working within youth structures at Manchester United and Cardiff City while earning his UEFA Pro Licence. Along the way, he continued serving as a respected ambassador for Manchester United, strengthening ties with one of football's biggest institutions.

His coaching journey later took him back to South Africa briefly as part of Stuart Baxter's Bafana Bafana staff, although administrative complications prevented that role from becoming a long-term project.

The next phase would see him build a close coaching partnership with former teammate Veljko Paunović.

Together they worked at Reading, later moving to Mexico with CD Guadalajara and Tigres UANL before taking on a major challenge at Real Oviedo in Spain. Their efforts culminated in promotion to LaLiga, another significant achievement in a career already filled with remarkable milestones.

When Paunović was appointed Serbia national team coach in 2025, Fortune naturally followed as his assistant, further cementing his reputation as one of South Africa's most accomplished football exports.

For all his travels, trophies and achievements, though, perhaps the most remarkable thing about Quinton Fortune is how firmly rooted he remains in his identity.

Some have questioned his connection to South Africa over the years, usually from a distance and without knowing the man behind the public image. Those fortunate enough to know him personally tell a very different story.

Behind the Manchester United career, behind the coaching roles across Europe and the Americas, behind the global football journey, remains a proud son of Athlone who has never forgotten where he came from. Fortune has spent decades serving as an unofficial ambassador for South African football and South Africa itself, carrying a piece of home with him wherever the game has taken him.

Many know the footballer. Many know the coach. But those who know Quinton Fortune best understand that no matter how far he has travelled, his heart has never really left South Africa.



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