

DITHEJANE ON MLS MOVE, TLB, LEWANDOWSKI & BAFANA AMBITIONS



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

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Abstract The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of a 12-week, 100% body weight (BW) resistance training program on the muscle strength and muscle mass of older women. Twenty-one women (mean age = 70.2 years) participated in the study. The subjects were randomly assigned to either a control group (CON) or a resistance training group (RT). The RT group performed a 12-week, 100% BW resistance training program. The subjects were assessed for muscle strength and muscle mass at baseline and after 12 weeks. The RT group showed a significant increase in muscle strength and muscle mass compared to the CON group. The results of this study suggest that a 12-week, 100% BW resistance training program is effective in increasing muscle strength and muscle mass in older women.

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SMITH SET FOR LOAN MOVE?

Queens Park Rangers defender Tylon Smith could be set for a loan move in the 2026/27 season, with regular first-team minutes essential in the upcoming months. Smith, 21, made four first-team appearances for the Championship team, who refused to entertain loan offers in his debut campaign as he formed part of the senior set-up. However, this season, things could change if guaranteed minutes are not forthcoming; there have been murmurs of remaining in England, but a move to a different country has not been ruled out. Stellies were linked with a surprise loan last season, but that quickly died out with the club and player keen to continue his progress in London.



SEKHUKHUNE STAR CONTINUES TO ATTRACT INTEREST

Sekhukhune United defender Vuyo Letlapa is believed to be still attracting interest from Austria, having been the subject of bids last season. The 22-year-old left-back was strongly linked with moves to Rapid Vienna and FK Austria Wien but saw offers rejected. However, it appears that initial interest has not completely died out after another impressive season in the South African top-flight. The marauding full-back has been on the periphery of the Bafana Bafana squad and will be aiming to break into the reckoning ahead of the upcoming 2027 Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers.



PIRATES LOOK TO MOKOBODI?

Orlando Pirates are said to be in talks with Stellenbosch over the services of rising talent Thapelo Mokobodi. Having joined the club from Marumo Gallants last season, the 23-year-old has shown versatility and potential to become one of the leading players in the country. He starred alongside Masindi Nemtajela during their time at Gallants under current Pirates head coach Abdeslam Ouaddou, making their recent interest no surprise. Current head of recruitment, Brendon Fourie, was also key to his arrival in the Cape Winelands.



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NDAMANE TO TAKE CENTRE STAGE WITH TLB IN DOUBT?

Mbekezeli Mbokazi's rise as one of South Africa's most promising young defenders has hit a painful setback, with the Chicago Fire confirming he will miss an extended stretch of the season — and likely Bafana Bafana's first 2027 Africa Cup of Nations qualifying window — after suffering a thigh tear in training.

Speaking to reporters following Saturday's match against New York City FC in the Bronx, head coach Gregg Berhalter fielded a question from iDiski Times on the injury, delivering the news with visible frustration.

"Mbokazi is a miss; we feel we have good centre backs there [playing] anyway, but Mbokazi is a top centre back so we have to get used to the new normal, it's not good, he's going to be out for a while — it's not good," Berhalter said.

Detailing how the injury occurred, he added: "He took a shot in training, hit the ground a little bit, scuffed the ground and ended up tearing his thigh; he won't be around for a good amount of time."

The Fire have placed Mbokazi on the MLS Injury List (IR), a roster mechanism that lets clubs shift a long-term injured player

off the active 20-man roster and off the salary-cap charge, freeing up space and budget to bring in short-term cover.

Clubs can use IR designations to sign a replacement — whether a domestic loan, a free agent, or an emergency addition — without breaching roster or cap rules. Chicago is expected to explore the market for defensive reinforcements while Mbokazi recovers.

Berhalter offered no firm public return date, but a source inside the club told iDiski Times, off the record, that the recovery could stretch beyond the six-week timeline typically associated with thigh tears — a blow that puts Mbokazi's AFCON 2027 qualifying availability squarely in doubt as Bafana Bafana continue building without one of their most important defenders.

Khulumani Ndamane will likely be the replacement, should Mbokazi not be fit in time for the opening round of qualifiers in September, while the forgotten man Rushwin Dortley, will be looking to get back into the frame for club and country after more than a season on the sidelines due to a serious knee injury.

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JUNIOR & TSO MAKE THEIR BETWAY PREMIERSHIP PREDICTIONS

The 2026/27 Betway Premiership season kicks off this week. Can Orlando Pirates defend their title? Will Mamelodi Sundowns reclaim the trophy after dominating the last decade until last season? Junior Khanye and Benedict ‘Tso’ Vilakazi let us know their opinions.

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

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‘Mamelodi Sundowns Will Win The League’

Third Place:

Junior Khanye: “I think AmaZulu and Arthur Zwane will take third place. The team is settled, and they know each other.”

Tso Vilakazi: “Gavin Hunt is cooking in the Western Cape. Stellenbosch will take third place. Gavin knows this game

inside.”

Second Place:

Junior Khanye: “Orlando Pirates will be runners-up. They have lost Relebohile Mofokeng. They will not be able to replace him. Mofokeng was extremely important when Orlando Pirates won the league.”

Tso Vilakazi: “Orlando Pirates will be second place. I don’t think the Buccaneers will be able to defend the title. I always back the Bucs. But this season will be difficult. There are too many competitions to play. I also think that the club needs a striker. Without a striker, Pirates won’t win the league.”

Champions:

Junior Khanye: “Mamelodi Sundowns will win the league. They have signed good players. Cassius Mailula is back. Sundowns will win it easily.”

Tso Vilakazi: “Mamelodi Sundowns will win the league. Last season, they had a bad start, but this season they will be Betway Premiership Champions.”





DITHEJANE ON MLS MOVE, TLB, LEWANDOWSKI & BAFANA AMBITIONS

He left South Africa with one dream burning brighter than any other — Europe. But before the big stage, PUSO DITHEJANE knew there was a first step to take. That step led him to Chicago Fire, a new culture, a new football philosophy, and a locker room shared with the likes of countryman Mbekezeli Mbokazi and Ivorian teammate Djé D’Avilla — plus, unexpectedly, a training pitch alongside Robert Lewandowski. In this candid sit-down, iDiski Times Senior Journalist LORENZ KÖHLER travelled to Chicago as Dithejane talks us through the culture shock of trading pap and wors for Chicago’s restaurant scene, the mentorship keeping him grounded as a young African abroad, the goal against Inter Miami that reignited his confidence, and why he believes his moment with Bafana Bafana is closer than ever.

Lorenz Kohler: Puso. Firstly, nice to see you again. I spoke to you shortly before you were leaving, and you always said it was your dream to play overseas. You said PSG was your ultimate dream, but you know Chicago Fire has been a great move for you. How have things been, firstly, coming to the U.S., and how have you settled into everything here?

Puso Dithejane: For me, moving from South Africa to the U.S. was a dream for me. I would not say I wanted to live my life here, but then there’s like the ultimate stage, I want to complete. I want to see myself play in Europe, but then my first step is the MLS. Yeah, and for me, settling in here - like I told myself that I’m in a different country, they play like different styles. I had to tell myself that I have to work hard. Don’t put pressure on myself. I just have to come and build my confidence, and that’s what I’m building now.

LK: As a human being, like what type of growth have you been through, being away from your friends and family, and you know, just going to the garage, buying a pie, you know, the usual things that we do as South Africans. Going to Shisanyama, eating pap and wors and whatever. Like, how have you grown as a human being in Chicago?

PD: I have now. I have like two teammates that I go out with a lot. Like maybe we go to a restaurant and taste new food in Chicago. I’d say that helped me a lot. The time Mbokazi was in the national camp. I had to see the places in the city and learn about it, like the city. So for me, I still miss the South African way, South African food, you know. But then, I have no choice. I have to adapt to Chicago.

LK: Yeah, yeah. You’re talking about Djé D’Avilla and Mbokazi, right? So, besides obviously being around TLB,

which I’ll get to, like, how much did it help having this, you know, African brother that’s from Ivory Coast? Like, what we saw were these viral videos of you guys hanging around, listening to Maskandi.

PD: Firstly, it is helpful to have someone from Africa. He always motivates me.



“FOR ME, MOVING FROM SOUTH AFRICA TO THE U.S. WAS A DREAM FOR ME.”



He always comes to me and tells me if I made a mistake. He tells me, ‘Hey, don’t stress much. We all make mistakes’. He’s that type of guy. He guides us to do the right things, and that’s helpful for us young players, you know. For sure. Yeah.

LK: This here at the back – Endeavour Health. This is obviously the centre. When I arrived here, it’s quite clear that this was a special training facility. No disrespect to TS Galaxy, the club you came from, but this is a different level...

PD: What impresses me is that here they want you to be a better player. They want you to be at your best, from your body, your physique, everything. They help you to improve a lot. And if you see me like this, I’ll be bigger. When time goes by, yeah. Like every guy in the team has their individual training and stuff to improve physically and to improve their certain areas where they have to look at, you know.

LK: From a physical perspective. I can see like TLB has obviously even gotten bigger than he was when he was at Pirates. But how far do you think you’re from reaching those physical targets? When you left South Africa, the PSL, you were the highest goal contributor in that first half of the season. So we know the talent is there and the ability, attacking ability is there. But intensity and your physical strength obviously needed to improve. How far do you think you’re off from that?

PD: I’d say I’m not that far from achieving that goal, and for me, it’s that I’ll have to keep on working hard and keep on the focus that I’m putting in the team. In training, I have to improve in certain areas that I like, but then I’d say the work that I have to put in is the thing that’s helping me.

LK: You just scored your first goal against Inter Miami. Must be a confidence booster...

PD: Um, for me, like before entering the field, I told myself I have to score. Yeah, in the World Cup break, I told myself that, ‘Hey, now this is the time to

“THIS SIDE, YOU CAN LEARN NEW THINGS THAT IS NOT IN SOUTH AFRICA, AND THE LEAGUE, IT’S ONE OF THE HIGHEST LEAGUES IN THE WORLD.”

show that you have improved in scoring goals’, and I’ve been scoring goals since the break. So I told myself, when you go into the pitch, just score goals and help the team to win the game. Yeah.

LK: Was it a little bit frustrating seeing how quickly your teammate might adapt? Compared to you...

PD: No, for me it wasn’t that difficult. You know, when the time is right, the court will show up. You know, I told myself that Mbokazi was like, he came here and outshined. You know, for me, I stayed calm. I didn’t want to rush anything. You know, yeah. Then when the time is right, I’ll shine too. You know.

LK: What type of things do you guys do together outside of the club that keeps you happy? Because obviously it’s a very important part of your journey of being two South Africans.

PD: For us, it’s like going out, you know. Yeah, after training, we decide to go to our places, then go to shops and buy some stuff. Yeah, that’s all.

LK: I can see he’s already speaking a lot more English. When I came, he greeted me, and he was speaking. But yeah, the coach Gregg Berhalter is obviously very highly regarded. He’s well respected in America. What’s it like being under him? What have you learned from him?

PD: I’ve learned a lot from him. He wants me to be better in everything I do in training; he tells me that I have to keep on going. I must not give up, and that’s what I’ve told myself. If the coaches believe in you, you can do it.





LK: There's a lot of, how can I say, talk about players coming to America after Cassius Mailula and you know when you guys came here people were like, 'Why are Puso and TLB going here?' What can you say about America and the MLS for fans or even other talented players in South Africa? What can you say to them about the country and about the league now that you've experienced?

PD: For me, I'd say America is a different country from South Africa. This side, you can learn new things that are not in South Africa, and the league, it's one of the highest leagues in the world. You know, I think it's in the top 10. Yeah, so I'd say for me coming here is not about money. It's not about anything. I want to build my brand, and I want to achieve something for my career. So I came here to start my career afresh and want to achieve my goal. You know, yeah.

LK: When you come here, you're sitting, you're doing training off-season, mid-season, and you go on your phone, and you see Robert Lewandowski is joining the club. What were your immediate thoughts? Were you chatting to your teammate or your friends? Like, what were your immediate thoughts about that? And now that you've trained with him and played with him, what is the level like?

PD: For me, I was shocked seeing that.

LK: You saw it on social media?

PD: Social media yes, I was shocked, but then the time when he came for first training, I was I was like oh, in Europe you have to have this, you have to be technically good to play in Europe and I'm learning something from him so when I put that in my playing, like my playing style, um I can go to Europe and play. For me, I haven't spoken to him about advice and stuff, but we have spoken,

“I’VE LEARNED A LOT FROM HIM. HE WANTS ME TO BE BETTER IN EVERYTHING I DO IN TRAINING; HE TELLS ME THAT I HAVE TO KEEP ON GOING.”

yeah. Different level of finishing.

LK: The last thing I wanted to say to you is obviously, Bafana just finished the World Cup campaign here in the U.S. I don't know if you got to watch any of the games, but once the World Cup is finished. It represents a new chapter in, you know, the national team and stuff. How much are you looking forward to that challenge of breaking into that team now? Especially given the fact that you're probably going to get more opportunities now over the next six months. There's an AFCON next year. Like how excited are you about that, and how confident are you that you can break into the national team?

PD: For me, I'd say I started a long time ago wanting to break into the national team, but then the coaches chose the players that represented us in the World Cup, and I'd say my opportunity is coming.

LK: You were close...

PD: Yeah, my opportunity is coming, and when it comes, I'm gonna grab it with both hands. Yeah.

LK: Thank you very much. It was nice seeing you.

PD: Thank you. Sure.



KAZE DISCUSSES SEKHUKHUNE MANDATE & TRANSFER PLANS

A new chapter starts for CEDRIC KAZE in the Betway Premiership as he will lead his new side, Sekhukhune United, as their head coach. Kaze was first introduced to South Africa as one of the assistant coaches under Nasreddine Nabi at Kaizer Chiefs, and he went on to be the side’s co-coach with Khalil Ben Youssef. He has helped Amakhosi win a trophy, was part of the technical team when they reached the group stage of the CAF Confederation Cup and finished in third position in the league last term. The Burundi national was signed by Babina Noko earlier this month and marked his arrival by winning the inaugural Mafori Pre-season Cup this past weekend. iDiski Times journalist LETHABO KGANYAGO caught up with the coach on the side of the four-team tournament to find out how he’s settled in at Sekhukhune, the importance of having a good pre-season, what he wants to achieve with the club in the new campaign and what his bosses want from him.

Lethabo Kganyago: Coach, thank you for your time, and just to start, let’s talk about the importance of having a good pre-season tournament to get off the jitters.

Cedric Kaze: You know it’s a great opportunity. It’s a great tournament with very good competition, and as I said, the timing is perfect, one week before we go into the league, which is going to allow us to have a real taste of what is waiting for us in the league. We played Polokwane [City], which is a very good opponent, and that’s going to give us clear indications of where we are and what we need to do more to get to where we want to be.

LK: Coach, you’ve spoken about how well you’ve been received at the club. In terms of your philosophy, are the players getting it?

CK: I believe that the players have responded very well, and now it’s only you need to see it when there is a pressure of results, when there is pressure of a game, when there is a pressure of the opponent and things like that. But training has been going well, and I’m very happy to have this opportunity as well to play a competitive game to see how far we are.

LK: Congratulations on winning the Cup. After the two games, what is your assessment?

CK: It was a very, very interesting day, and as well with a lot of lessons learned from the two games, and very good minutes from everyone. And now we have a little bit clearer idea of how we are going into the first game. It’s good to win a cup, but the most important thing is going to be the game on Saturday against Durban City. [A good pre-season] first of all, it gives the confidence to the players to know



“IT’S GOOD TO WIN A CUP, BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS GOING TO BE THE GAME OF SATURDAY AGAINST DURBAN CITY.”

that they can win trophies, and as well as coaches, we are winners; we want to win. And I’m pretty sure that there is no coach in the world that will be happy to lose a friendly game. They might say that they are happy, but we know that in their heart they are not. But the thing that we have to look at is not the cup; it’s the performance, it’s the way that we want to play. The two games that we played were very hard, two clean sheets, and you know all of those little things, little details, they’re going to help us as well to gain the experience that we need for the beginning of the league.

LK: This is one of the obvious questions in pre-season: what’s the mandate from club management to you?

CK: You know the club finished fifth last season, and the least you could do is to be in the bracket, and as well, you know, I am a winner. I’m a competitive person; I want to try as much as I can to bring something to this club that has invested a lot in the last few years with no silverware. But we want to do everything we can to get something out of those competitions that we will be taking part in.

LK: One of your players, Daniel Cardoso, has highlighted the fact that Sekhukhune is that club that always

just comes close, whether in cup competitions, whether in the league. When you look at it, and now from the inside, what has been a hindrance, and can you be able to address it for them?

CK: I believe it's a lot of factors, but probably with teams that have not won cups, it's maybe, you know, the anxiety of when you get there; you know, you get anxious. You want to do well, and you're not yourself anymore. And I think with the experience that we have with the players, with mine in different competitions in the past years, I want to bring them the calmness of playing and believing in the philosophy and stick to it.

LK: Sekhukhune has competed in a CAF competition before; do you think they still have that potential to qualify again, or even make the CAF Champions League?

CK: They do have the quality, and as well, they have demonstrated their quality. Even last season, they were quite close to qualify. As I said before, I believe that the quality is there; we need to work all of us together to bring out the best from everyone.

LK: A lot of experience has left the club; you've got a lot of new players coming in. How much will you be relying on senior players left in the squad in terms of integrating the new players to get to a top division level?

CK: Yeah, it's true that we have lost a couple of players that were very important to the team and that have contributed a lot to the team. And it's up to us now to find new solutions and new options for the team, and the players that have experience are very important to integrate and to make the younger ones settle in well, and I'm hopeful that the transition is going to take as little time as it can.

LK: You've been an assistant coach and a co-coach in South Africa; now you stand independently as a head coach. Is this the time to see who Coach Kaze is?

CK: I'm not a person trying to put the projectors or the lights on me. I think that the important thing is not me being a head coach because I have a coaching staff that I'm working with; Coach Paulus [Masehe], Coach Papi Zothwane, with our conditioning coach H, and Mvu. I have Mayoyo with the goalkeeping coach. And we are a technical staff, and we want to do well. We are trying to build a team that is competitive, a team that is not afraid to compete, and a team that has its own identity. That's what we are focused on, and we hope that we're going to have a very good season.

LK: Coach, are you done signing? Your team's communication department almost every week is announcing a new arrival or a departure?

CK: I believe that our squad is almost



“I AM A WINNER. I’M A COMPETITIVE PERSON; I WANT TO TRY AS MUCH AS I CAN TO BRING SOMETHING TO THIS CLUB.”

complete, but probably with the next couple of weeks that are left, we are looking to strengthen certain positions. But probably not more than two players to strengthen some key positions for the next season.

LK: Which positions are those?

CK: We want to balance the team, and I'm pretty sure that you will know in due course.

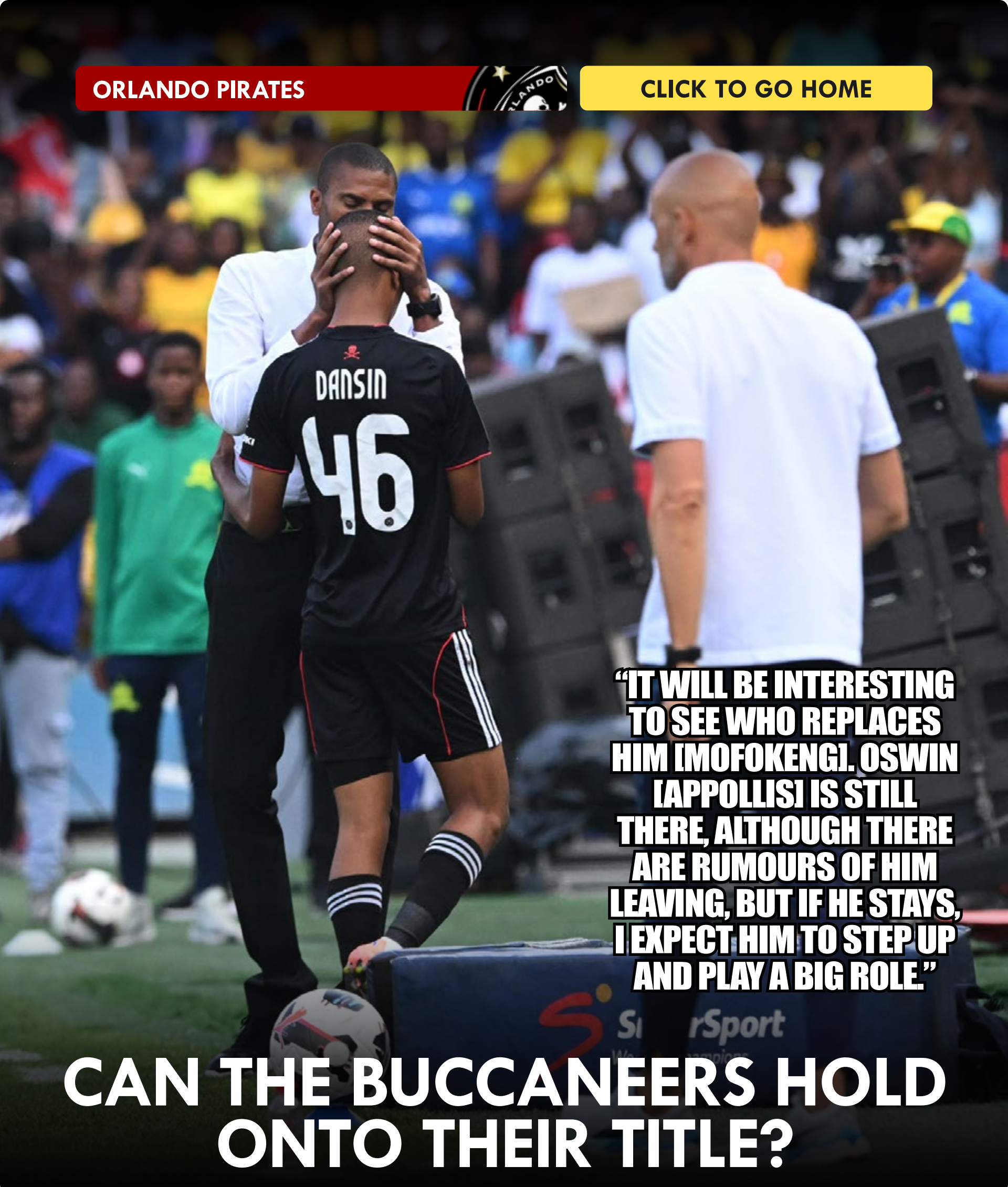
LK: Are you able to speak about your targets for at least the five opening matches?

CK: I don't like to set myself goals in a few games, but I want first to play the first game, and to have a good performance because I know that as you go, it's how you do, and the beginning determines not the rest of the season, but the couple of weeks and months. And you buy yourself time as well from everyone to work on your principles. We need first to focus on the first game of the league, and as well the first game of the MTN 8 because that's going to be a knockout. Then those two games are very important for the beginning.

LK: Lastly, coach, does Danny get to keep the armband?

CK: We will see with that, but I don't see any reason why he will not keep it. But we will sit down with the senior players and as well as with the whole team to discuss that. But as well, I don't think that to wear the armband is a sign of leadership. Leadership is a natural thing, and I'm pretty sure that Daniel, even if he doesn't wear the armband, he's a natural leader to his teammates.

LK: Thank you, Coach, and all the best for the season.



CAN THE BUCCANEERS HOLD ONTO THEIR TITLE?

By Matshelane Mamabolo

This week the Premier Soccer League and the league sponsors Betway are going to host a media conference at which they will reveal what they describe as ‘new and exciting plans’ for the 30th edition of the Premiership.

Innovation has always been the name of the game since the advent of the Premiership era, and there can be no denying that the status quo will remain. All the razzmatazz notwithstanding, the bottom line for the fans and the main question everyone asks at the start of each new season is ‘who will be crowned champions?’

With Orlando Pirates having ended Mamelodi Sundowns’ domination in the previous season, perhaps the most relevant question for the 2026/27 season is whether the Buccaneers can hold on to their title. After all, don’t they always say it is easy getting to the top; the hardest part is staying there.

In the three decades of the PSL era, only four clubs have retained the league title – Sundowns, SuperSport United, Kaizer Chiefs and Pirates.

Can this generation of the Buccaneers emulate their predecessors who reigned supreme in the 2010/2011 and the 2011/2012 seasons? It will take some doing, what with Sundowns sure to be smarting from being stopped just short of

their quest for decade-long domination of the domestic championship?

Revenge, the Brazilians will say, might be a dish best served cold, but they would love nothing more than to serve it hot by reclaiming the championship.

It makes for a fascinating championship contest, with Pirates also set to want to do well on the continent, encouraged as they are sure to be by Sundowns having added a second CAF Champions League title to their cabinet.

The inaugural Southern African winners of America’s premier knockout competition, Pirates would have loved to continue leading the way on the continent. Will they be able to balance chasing after that continental desire with being competitive enough on the domestic front to hold on to their title?

What is perhaps great is the fact that both Pirates and Sundowns will remain hugely unchanged from last season – the two teams retaining their coaches Abdeslam Ouaddou and Miguel Cardoso and not making too many changes to their playing personnel. Of course, the departure for Belgium of Pirates’ talismanic youngster Relebohile Mofokeng cannot be underestimated. But they have quality depth to go on without the President Yama2000.

If you are reading this and feeling that I am suggesting there are just two teams

“I AM ANTICIPATING A TWO-HORSE RACE FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP – ANOTHER CONTEST BETWEEN SUNDOWNS AND PIRATES.”

in the running for the championship, don't be dismayed. That is exactly how I see it. Of course, the likes of Kaizer Chiefs and Stellenbosch FC will disagree. But such is the gap in quality that Pirates and Sundowns enjoy compared to the rest that it is going to take a few more seasons before any other teams threaten the duo for the league title. And this is not a view I hold alone. A multiple championship winner agrees, and in this article he shares his views regarding what he expects the upcoming season to look like.

DAINE KLATE is one of the most decorated players in the country, the former winger having won six Premiership titles with three different clubs. Klate was a key member of Gavin Hunt's all-conquering SuperSport United that won the league in three successive seasons – from 2008 to 2010. Along with Hunt, Klate also helped deliver the championship to the now-defunct Bidvest Wits in 2017.

Prior to that unlikely Wits success, the man from Gqeberha had been highly influential as Pirates won the title back-to-back in 2011 and 2012. This is his outlook for the upcoming season.

On His Expectations:

DK: I am anticipating a two-horse race for the championship – another contest between Sundowns and Pirates. The two will also be involved in the Champions League, and I think the pressure will be on Pirates to chase that second star after Sundowns won it. That could have a huge influence on the way the Betway Premiership goes.

Are you saying the rest of the other teams won't get a look-in, Daine?

DK: Personally, I don't see any team close to either Pirates or Sundowns. Even the signings they are making and

how they operate, it looks like they are just happy being in the top eight. Yes, Chiefs traditionally strive to be in the top three and win things, and I expect they will be there and thereabouts fighting for it. Of course, Coach Gavin Hunt at Stellenbosch has the experience, and it looks like Stellies are organised, and if they give him the support he needs, they can be a surprise package.

Can Pirates retain their league title?

DK: I think they can. The thing about winning the league is that once you get the experience – after winning the first one – defending it becomes almost second nature. That experience of winning the first one gives you the confidence that you can do it again. I did it with SuperSport and then with Pirates, and the reason we were able to hold on was because of the belief we gained from winning the first one. Knowing how you did it the first time, the second time becomes, I wouldn't say easier, but rather more convenient because you have this feeling of knowing the moments in matches. You are able to turn what should be losses into draws and the draws into victories. I anticipate Pirates would have that going into this upcoming campaign.

Does the fact that they will have some continuity help?

DK: Yes, it is a good thing that they are keeping the same coach because it means there is continuity. Not much is gonna change in terms of style of play and coaching. Of course, losing Rele [Mofokeng, who went to Belgium], who was an integral part of their winning the league, will be a factor. It will be interesting to see who replaces him. Oswin [Appollis] is still there, although there are rumours of him leaving, but if he stays, I expect him to step up and play a big role in Pirates' quest to hold

“YES, CHIEFS TRADITIONALLY STRIVE TO BE IN THE TOP THREE AND WIN THINGS, AND I EXPECT THEY WILL BE THERE AND THEREABOUTS FIGHTING FOR IT.”

on to the title. The entire squad has not changed much, so Pirates will again be highly competitive as they were last season due to the continuity. They have the personnel and the squad size, and I am thinking that Sundowns could be a bit fatigued given that the majority of their squad have been at it for many years. That has to take its toll on the players’ minds somewhat and could be in Pirates’ favour. Pirates should also be inspired to emulate Sundowns by not only winning back-to-back championships but go for that second star and go to participate at the Club World Cup.

How will the continental campaign affect Pirates?

DK: It is always tough competing on both fronts. But Pirates are a big club, and you will remember that our team went all the way to the final while doing well on the domestic front. Sundowns have shown that it can be done, although you must remember that it took them many years of getting to the semi-finals and even losing in the final before they got that second star. I think playing in Africa will not be a distraction for Pirates in the Betway Premiership. Sundowns have shown how to get the balance right, and with all the analysts they have and their understanding of periodisation, I believe Pirates will cope. They know when to rest and load the players, and so long as they get it right when it comes to travelling on the continent, the Champions League should not distract them from retaining the domestic title.

What kind of lashing back do you expect from Sundowns?

DK: I definitely expect them to do all they can to win their title back. I think it was good for the league that

Pirates dethroned Sundowns because the monopoly was becoming a bit too much. And to some extent, it is good for Sundowns because losing would have rid them of the complacency. They’d won the title eight times, and I think they were beginning to think success was guaranteed; now they know they still have to work to win it. They will look to get back to winning the league again so they can go into the Champions League as champions of their country. So, I expect Sundowns to come guns blazing; it will make for an exciting championship race.

Lastly, what do you foresee happening at the bottom of the table? Who is going to get relegated?

DK: People are not wrong to always put the newcomers as relegation candidates because, worldwide, the most difficult season for any club is just after they’d been promoted. There is a huge difference in terms of the elite league and the one below it. The mentality shift is important, and that’s why we often see clubs leaving the players who helped them gain promotion behind. Sure, it seems cruel, but you have to be realistic as a club to understand that you need a different mentality in the top league and some players are just not cut out for it. I see that Milford FC have opted to go for continuity and it looks good, but you have to get new players who can help you in the PSL. Loyalty and sentimental value have to make way for football logic; you have to use your football brain more than your emotions once you get promoted. You are not going to make everyone happy, but you have to do what it takes to ensure you survive. So, yes, the new teams, Milford and Kruger, are going to have it tough, but there are others who will have to pull up their socks.



PIRATES CHAMPIONS, CHIEFS FIFTH? BRA JAKES PREDICTS 26/27 LEAGUE CAMPAIGN



By *Matshelane Mamabolo*

TITLE CONTENDERS

ORLANDO PIRATES

A 90th anniversary motivation: There are 90 reasons why Pirates will stop at nothing to win the championship. The club is celebrating their 90th anniversary in 2027, and that is sure to be the motivation and driving force behind their holding on to their title.

Coach's pedigree: Abdeslam Ouaddou impressed in his maiden season in charge of Pirates despite having had many doubters among The Ghost, with many feeling last season's success was on the back of a solid foundation laid by his predecessor Jose Riveiro. Defending the title will silence the dissenters.

Key Player: Oswin Appollis, should he stay on, could well be the man to carry on the mantle from the departed Relebohile Mofokeng. But there are many others who can step up to the plate.

Previous five seasons: 1st, 2nd, 2nd, 2nd, 6th

Prediction: Champions.

MAMELODI SUNDOWNS

A team that has done it all: One wonders just what it is that will drive Sundowns this time around. After all, this generation has achieved it all, has it not? The CAF Champions League dream that has been the fuel has been achieved. Will Ronwen Williams and Co still be hungry for the domestic title they've won so many times?

Coach's pedigree: Miguel Cardoso is an African champion and has won the domestic league. He should, however, be keen to win the Betway Premiership proper given that his triumph came on the back of a season started by Manqoba Mngqithi.

Key Player: Goalkeeper and captain Ronwen Williams remains the leader, but without Themba Zwane you can bet on Teboho Mokoena being highly influential yet again.

Previous five seasons: 2nd, 1st, 1st, 1st, 1st,

Prediction: Runners-up.

DARK HORSES

AMAZULU

An ambitious president: Sandile Zungu's quest to take over the leadership of the South African Football Association (SAFA) could well end up in tears as it has done for many who've previously dared to take on Danny Jordan. Yet that bold move is part of the reason AmaZulu have been on the rise since Zungu took over.

Coach's pedigree: Arthur Zwane has been growing in leaps and bounds as a coach and he has clearly found a home at Usuthu, as evidenced by his decision to turn down a chance to return to Chiefs as an assistant to Fernando Da Cruz.

Key Player: Athini Maqokola had a stellar campaign last season and was duly a big winner at the club's awards. A lot is going to be expected of him again, but with such quality new signings around him, he can only shine even brighter.

Previous five seasons: 4th, 6th, 11th, 12th, 7th

Prediction: 3rd

STELLENBOSCH FC

It can only get better, right? Following an uncharacteristically poor season in which they changed coaches mid-campaign, Stellies finished outside the top eight for the first time in five seasons. Surely, they are due a much better campaign.

Coach's pedigree: Gavin Hunt's championship-winning record should be common knowledge by now. But there are those who believe he is way past it. Huntie argues to the contrary and this season presents him a chance to silence the detractors.

Key player: Terrence Mashego has joined from Sundowns, having had a brilliant season on loan to Durban City the previous campaign. He should continue with the good form under Hunt.

Previous five seasons: 9th, 3rd, 3rd, 6th, 4th

Prediction: 4th

KAIZER CHIEFS

Third place has raised hopes: Their showing last season has got Amakhosi believing that the glory is just around





the corner. And their finally winning the Toyota Cup at the weekend [they beat Zimbabwe’s Scotland FC 1-0] would have imbued them with immense hope for a great season.

Coach’s pedigree: New man Fernando Da Cruz talks a good game and the fact he won the Botola Pro League in Morocco with AS FAR Rabat a few years ago suggests Amakhosi have got themselves a man capable of delivering the championship glory they’ve been hankering for.

Key player: For a couple of years now, Mfundo Vilakazi was described as the next great Chiefs star. That is yet to happen, but some former Amakhosi superstars believe all the youngster needs is game-time. His goal in the Toyota Cup could well give him the confidence to finally step up.

Previous five seasons: 3rd, 9th, 10th, 5th, 5th

Prediction: 5th

TOP EIGHT

SEKHUKHUNE UNITED

Return to Africa on the cards? There was a time when Sekhukhune United enjoyed back-to-back participation in the CAF Confederation Cup but that is long gone. The club is now under a new coach who knows what it is to qualify for Africa having done so twice in the past two seasons. Can he take them back?

Coach’s pedigree: Cedric Kaze is a highly qualified coach who worked at the famed La Masia academy of FC Barcelona. His work with Chiefs, albeit as a co-coach, gave a glimpse into his abilities and the victory in the pre-season Mafori Cup could well be the start of something great with Sekhukhune.

Key player: Nyiko Mobbie returns to the club and could be a main player given his vast experience at club and international level – particularly as the club has let go of numerous senior players such as Keletso Makgalwa, Thabang Monare and Bradley Grobler.

Previous five seasons: 5th, 4th, 4th, 7th, 11th

Prediction: 6th

GOLDEN ARROWS

A new era for Bafana bes’thende: It is almost a case of starting all over again for the club owned by the PSL’s long-acting CEO Mato Madlala following the departure of Coach Manqoba Mngqithi

along with his lieutenants in the form of Musa Bilankulu and Kagiso Dikgacoi, who were star players of the club in their days.

Coach’s pedigree: Pitso Dladla takes over at Arrows on the back of a stellar season with Durban City, whom he led to a top eight finish in their maiden elite league season as well as winning them the Nedbank Cup.

Key Player: Junior Dion has been a subject of interest by clubs both locally and internationally, but should Arrows hold on to the Golden Boot winner goals from the previous campaign, they can seriously challenge for a finish better than last season’s sixth.

Previous five seasons: 6th, 12th,, 9th, 9th, 9th

Prediction: 7th

POLOKWANE CITY

Time to Rise and Shine: The club hailing from the Limpopo capital was a solid top eight certainty under the guidance of up-and-coming coach Phuti Mohafe, who has since left them for Marumo Gallants. It is going to take some doing for them to navigate the league without him.

Coach’s pedigree: Willy Moloto returns to the club where he previously served as an assistant having also led the DDC team. He was an assistant to Kwanele Kopo at Tuks in the Mosepe Foundation Championship the previous campaign. This is his first appointment as head coach at the elite level.

Key player: Thabang Matuludi has once again not made the big move away from City as is always speculated at the beginning of each season. The Bafana Bafana player will thus continue to be an influential figure for the Polokwane outfit.

Previous five seasons: 7th, 7th,, 8th, NFD, NFD

Prediction: 8th

ALSO RANS

TS GALAXY

A quest to return to the top eight: Following what appeared to be an aberration, Tim Sukazi has pulled out all the stops to help get his club back into the top eight by making no less than 14 signings. But with their marquee signing a graduate from the Chiefs development, you wonder just how serious The Rockets are about doing much better this time around.



Coach’s pedigree: Bernard Parker struggled in his role as caretaker of The Rockets but still earned Sukazi’s confidence for the lead role on a full-time basis. It is a big climb and Die Hond would no doubt be keen to bite just as much as he did as a player from the bench. He would have gained confidence from the Nedbank Cup final run, no doubt.

Key Player: Seluleko Mahlambi has developed into such star status at Galaxy that talks were rife that Chiefs are interested in his services. He is staying put though and has set his eyes on scoring at least 15 goals in the upcoming campaign. That would be more than double the six he scored last season.

Previous five seasons: 12th, 5th, 6th, 10th, 13th

Prediction: 9th

MARUMO GALLANTS

Adios relegation woes: Gallants were panicky going into the last matches of the previous campaign having changed coaches, but that should not be the case this season. The management seem to have learnt their lessons and have hired a solid coach in Phuti Mohafe.

Coach’s pedigree: Phuti Mohafe has earned his spurs with some consistent top eight performances in charge of Polokwane City and has proven to be adept at working with no-name players and getting them to deliver solid results. He will make a massive improvement to Gallants’ fortunes,

Key Player: Ndabayithethwa Ndlondlo’s energy and ability to run on almost every blade of grass on the pitch, complemented by his knack for goals, often key ones, makes him the standout player for Gallants, and he is sure to continue to be their talisman this season.

Previous five seasons: 14th, 10thth, NFD, 16th, 10th

Prediction: 10th

RICHARDS BAY

Natal Rich Boyz going nowhere: Having long cemented their status in the elite league, bet on Richards Bay to continue ruffling feathers by getting the scalps of some of the top sides while unearthing exciting talent that will move on to bigger clubs.

Coach’s pedigree: Ronnie Gabriel has quietly gone about his job in charge of Richards Bay, quietly helping the coastal side retain their elite league status without much fanfare. One of the local league’s up-and-coming coaches with a bright future.

Key player: Gabadinho Mhango’s vast experience will continue to be of great help to the Natal Ruch Boyz, even though the Malawian international gets used sparingly. His eye for goal and the relentless pressure he puts on opposition defenders make him dangerous.

Previous five seasons: 11th, 8th,, 15th, 13th, NFD

Prediction: 11th

DURBAN CITY

Second season syndrome: It is common for clubs to have a stellar rookie season only to flop in their second one. This is likely to be the case for City, who could suffer from the distraction brought about by continental participation. But they’ve bought some seasoned players to help them cope.

Coach’s pedigree: Ben Youssef Khalil faces a maiden test of his credentials as he takes sole charge of a club. Having previously been an assistant and co-coach, he is in for a rough run and a rude awakening at a club whose boss is renowned for being trigger happy.

Key Player: Gaston Sirino might seem to be way past his sell-by date, but he brings star quality and massive experience to a club that has also signed the workaholic John Mokone from relegated Magesi FC.

Previous season: 8th, NFD, NFD, 15th, 12th

Prediction: 12th

RELEGATION CANDIDATES

CHIPPA UNITED

Another close shave with the axe: It wouldn’t be the true Premiership without Chippa United battling against relegation, would it? Just how the Chilli Boys have not been relegated in recent years beggars belief, as the outfit from the Eastern Cape often seem to contrive against themselves to get the chop.



Coach's Pedigree: Brandon Trutter is one of the league's most experienced coaches and has it in him to take Chippa to a better position, if only club boss Chippa Mpengesi rids himself of his trigger-happiness and stops panicking when results are not forthcoming and allows his coach time to build.

Key player: Stanley Nwabali has returned to the club and given his colossal status in goals, the Nigerian is sure to play an influential role as the Chilli Boys seek to avoid dying with relegation as they did last season.

Previous five seasons: 13th, 11th, 12th, 14th, 14th

Prediction: 13th

SIWELELE FC

Not 'Siwelele' enough: The plan to win over the former fans of the defunct Bloemfontein Celtic has not really worked well for the new owners, and unless Siwelele fully move to the City of Roses – as in train there and have their offices there – they will remain Siwelele 'light'.

Coach's Pedigree: Lehlohonolo Seema is a fairly experienced coach who has done pretty well with Limpopo sides Polokwane City and Sekhukhune United in particular. But he is yet to inspire confidence that he is the man who can see Siwelele emulating the SuperSport United whose status they bought.

Key player: Vincent Pule does not wear jersey number 10 at Siwelele for the wrong reasons. He is the club's star player, and having played for Orlando Pirates, he knows just what it takes to handle pressure, and Seema will once again rely on him to lead the club to victories.

Previous five seasons: 10th, (as SuperSport) 14th, 7th, 3rd, 8th
Prediction: 14th

KRUGER UNITED

In the top league for the long haul: Kruger United's meteoric rise to the elite league talks to the concerted effort and thorough planning by the club's ownership, who attracted renowned players while still in the lower league. The Mpumalanga outfit has wasted no time beefing up their technical team by appointing the experienced Joel Masutha as their assistant coach.

Coach's Pedigree: Abram Mongoya might be new to the Premiership as a head coach, but he has served an apprenticeship under some renowned coaches and is using those lessons well. Mongoya was at Pirates and drank from the technical well of no less a coach than championship-winner Ruud Krol as well as Augusto Palacios. He also had experience at Sekhukhune United under MacDonald Makhubedu. Those lessons are going to come in handy

Key player: George Maluleka needs no introduction, and while he might have seen many years – his experience is going to come in handy for the Mpumalanga club as they navigate their way in the top league. Whether he plays or is on the bench, the former Chiefs and Sundowns player's presence in the squad will lend some serious confidence and stability.

Previous five seasons: NFD champions

Prediction: 15th

MILFORD FC

Elite league a different kettle of fish: Milford FC have gone the sentimental and loyal route by keeping faith with the majority of the players who helped them earn promotion via the play-offs. It is commendable, after all they have had some practice playing against teams from the elite league in the Nedbank Cup over the years. But the KZN club will soon find out that the move up to the Premiership is a pretty steep one that requires a good measure of experience to survive.

Coach's pedigree: Jomo Sono has previously praised Dr Xanti Puphuma, the Milford owner who also doubles up as a coach, for being brave and being on the bench. Bra J argued that after all 'all club chairmen do coach'. That might be, but the good doctor is quickly going to find out that the elite league is much more demanding and that he will have to make a choice between the roles. Better still, he should hire a seasoned coach.

Key player: Siphosethu Ndlabi announced himself with that memorable goal against TS Galaxy in the Nedbank Cup and has shown himself to be a fearless attacker. They are going to rely heavily on him in their debut season.

Previous five seasons: NFD runners-up

Prediction: 16th





THE IDISKI TOP 10... YOUNG STARS ABROAD

This week, iDiski Times turns its attention to the next generation, highlighting ten young South African footballers abroad who look ready to make significant strides during the upcoming season.

It is an exciting period for South African football, perhaps one of the most encouraging in recent memory, with a growing number of homegrown talents choosing to test themselves overseas before the age of 23. Rather than waiting until they are fully established domestically, these players are embracing the challenge of developing in some of Europe's most competitive environments, as well as in North America, where the demands of elite football are accelerating both their technical and tactical growth.

The list below focuses exclusively on South Africans who began their football journeys at home before earning opportunities abroad at a young age, giving themselves valuable time to adapt, mature and fulfil their enormous potential. Some are already regulars at senior level, others are only beginning to knock on the first-team door,

but all possess the ability to take another significant step forward over the next 12 months. Whether their futures lie at their current clubs or eventually among Europe's elite, these are 10 players whose progress should be followed closely, because they could well form the backbone of Bafana Bafana for years to come.

The Top 10:

10 Fletcher Smythe-Lowe
Estoril Praia (Portugal)
19 years old

Every generation eventually begins searching for the goalkeeper who will inherit the gloves, and Fletcher Smythe-Lowe is rapidly emerging as one of South Africa's brightest long-term prospects. After several years developing within Estoril Praia's academy, the former Fish Hoek and Ubuntu shot-stopper is finally set to take the next step into senior football, where his talent will be tested at a far higher level. He has already earned plenty of admirers with his performances for Amajita, playing a key role in their U20 AFCON and COSAFA Cup triumphs before helping South Africa reach the knockout stages of the FIFA U20 World Cup. While Ronwen Williams remains Bafana Bafana's undisputed No. 1, succession planning has already begun, and Smythe-Lowe's name features prominently in that conversation. This may not be the season he becomes a household name, but it could well be the one that launches his journey towards becoming South Africa's next great goalkeeper.

9 Aden McCarthy
Sabah (Azerbaijan)
22 years old

There was something refreshingly assured about Aden McCarthy's emergence at Kaizer Chiefs. Young defenders often need time to settle into senior football, but McCarthy looked comfortable almost immediately, displaying composure, positional intelligence and a maturity that made the step up appear surprisingly natural. His move abroad now offers the perfect opportunity to continue that development away from the relentless scrutiny of South African football. At Sabah, the challenge will be different, requiring him to adapt to a new culture, new teammates and a different tactical philosophy, but everything about his personality suggests he is equipped to embrace it. Continue progressing at his current rate, and it may not be long before Bafana Bafana come calling.



8 Jaedin Rhodes
SV Ried (Austria)
23 years old

Cape Town City’s relegation forced many difficult decisions, but Jaedin Rhodes chose patience over panic, and that decision may prove one of the smartest of his career. Rather than chasing the first available move, he remained with City, continued producing consistently strong performances and ultimately earned a transfer to Austrian outfit SV Ried, where he replaces Antonio Van Wyk following his move to Mamelodi Sundowns. Ried has quietly become one of South African football’s newest European homes, with Yusuf Maart already an established first-team player, exciting teenager Lazola Maku trying his luck at the club and on the verge of signing, and former Ubuntu and Cape Town City coach Moritz Kossmann also part of the coaching structure. That familiar environment should ease Rhodes’ transition, but ultimately his progress will depend on the qualities that earned him the move in the first place. With his energy, versatility and intelligence, he has every chance of becoming another South African success story in Austria.

7 Mohau Nkota
Al-Ettifaq (Saudi Arabia)
21 years old

Mohau Nkota’s absence from the 2026 FIFA World Cup was one of the more unfortunate stories surrounding Bafana Bafana’s campaign, with injury striking at precisely the wrong moment and denying the exciting young forward the opportunity to showcase his talent on football’s biggest stage. It was a cruel setback for a player whose rise at Orlando Pirates had captured the imagination of supporters, but at just 21, time remains firmly on his side, and there is every reason to believe his best football still lies ahead. Blessed with pace, directness and an eye for goal, Nkota possesses the qualities capable of unsettling defenders at the highest level, while his fearless approach makes him one of the country’s most exciting attacking prospects. As he works his way back to full fitness, many South African fans will be eagerly anticipating his return, hoping he can quickly rediscover the form that placed him firmly in the national team conversation and continue developing into a regular Bafana Bafana attacking threat for years to come.

6 Samukelo Kabini
Molde FK (Norway)
22 years old

Few South Africans have adapted to European football as quickly as Samukelo Kabini. Since arriving at Molde from TS Galaxy, the left-back has settled seamlessly into life in Norway, producing a string of assured performances that have already attracted interest from clubs in some of Europe’s bigger leagues. Molde, however, have made their intentions clear by placing a hefty price tag on the 22-year-old, underlining just how highly they value one of their newest stars. The former Orlando Pirates DDC graduate has added athleticism, composure and balance to Molde’s defence, and the club will be hoping he plays a key role in pushing them further up the Eliteserien table after last season’s 10th-place finish. Currently sitting inside the top five, European qualification is firmly within reach, and Kabini’s continued development could prove crucial. Whether

he remains in Norway beyond this season or earns a bigger move, this is a young Bafana Bafana defender whose progress deserves close attention.

5 Ime Okon
Hannover 96 (Germany)
22 years old

Football can change quickly, and few players experienced that emotional swing more dramatically than Ime Okon. Hannover 96 came agonisingly close to securing promotion to the Bundesliga before falling short on the final day, a disappointment that would have lingered for weeks. Fortunately, the young former Randburg and SuperSport United defender had little time to dwell on it, because the FIFA World Cup arrived, and suddenly he found himself announcing his talent on football’s grandest stage. Calm in possession, dominant in the air and remarkably composed under immense pressure, Okon emerged from North America with his reputation significantly enhanced. He returns to Germany not only as one of Hannover’s most important players, but as a footballer many clubs will now be monitoring closely. Should Hannover miss out on promotion again, holding onto the towering South African may become increasingly difficult.

4 Olwethu Makhanya
Philadelphia Union (USA)
22 years old

Although World Cup supporters never got the opportunity to watch Olwethu Makhanya in action, those following Major League Soccer know exactly why his name continues to gather momentum. The commanding central defender has developed impressively with



Philadelphia Union, combining imposing physical attributes with growing maturity on the ball and a calmness that belies his age. European scouts have increasingly become familiar faces whenever Union play, recognising a defender who appears capable of making the jump across the Atlantic before too long. Whether that move arrives this season or next, Makhanya's trajectory points firmly upwards, and Bafana supporters should be equally excited because South Africa suddenly appears blessed with an emerging generation of outstanding centre-backs capable of serving the national team for the next decade.

3 Shandre Campbell
KV Kortrijk (Belgium)
21 years old

Few young South Africans possess the explosive attacking potential of Shandre Campbell, and this season could finally be the one where everything clicks into place. His final campaign with SuperSport United showcased a fearless, direct forward capable of terrifying defenders with pace, confidence and unpredictability, qualities that earned him a deserved move to Belgian giants Club Brugge. While his performances for Club NXT continued to underline his enormous promise, regular first-team opportunities remained frustratingly limited, leaving the youngster understandably eager for a fresh challenge. His move to KV Kortrijk may prove exactly what his career needed: regular senior football, responsibility and the freedom to express himself every weekend. If Campbell finds rhythm and confidence, South African supporters may soon be watching one of the country's brightest attacking talents finally fulfil his immense potential.

2 Relebohile Mofokeng
Union Saint-Gilloise (Belgium)
21 years old

Some footballers simply possess that rare quality which makes supporters lean forward every time they receive the ball, and Relebohile Mofokeng belongs firmly in that category. His move to Union Saint-Gilloise was one of the defining transfers of the South African window, marking the beginning of a chapter many have anticipated since his breakthrough at Orlando Pirates. Blessed with dazzling feet, exceptional vision and the confidence to attempt what others would not even imagine, Mofokeng has become one of the country's most beloved footballers, admired not only for his ability but for the infectious joy with which he plays the game. Belgium now provides the perfect stage to showcase those gifts to a much wider audience. Expectations are understandably enormous, but so too is his talent, and if he settles quickly, Europe may soon discover what South Africans have been fortunate enough to witness for several years.

1 Mbekezeli Mbokazi
Chicago Fire (USA)
20 years old

No South African footballer currently captures the imagination quite like Mbekezeli Mbokazi. Since making his professional debut in March 2025, his rise has bordered on extraordinary, with each passing month bringing another performance that leaves supporters wondering just how high his ceiling truly is. His remarkable displays at the FIFA World Cup only reinforced what many already believed: that South Africa has uncovered a genuinely special defender capable of competing with the very best. His move to Chicago Fire initially surprised some observers, yet it has proven inspired. The United States allowed him to settle before the World Cup, gave him regular football, embraced him as one of the faces of the league and elevated his profile to remarkable heights. From earning a place in the MLS All-Star team with a record number of fan votes to becoming one of the league's most recognisable young stars, Mbokazi has used America as the perfect launching pad. Unfortunately a thigh injury will mean he will miss the All-Star game. Whether he remains in Chicago for one more season or soon takes the next step to one of Europe's elite leagues almost feels secondary, because every indication suggests that the next great South African football export is already well on his way.

And there's more...

Perhaps the most encouraging aspect of this list is that it represents only the tip of the iceberg.

Members of the triumphant Amajita generation continue to rise, with Tylon Smith looking to establish himself at Queens Park Rangers, Maku beginning an exciting chapter in Europe, Siviwe Magidigidi with Belgian outfit Beerschot, and Kgomotso Madiba at Brazilian giants Fluminense.

Add to that the presence of Puso Dithejane, who only just turned 22 and already impressing alongside Mbokazi at Chicago Fire, and it becomes increasingly clear that South Africa's talent pipeline stretches far beyond just ten names.



2025/26 PSL AWARD WINNERS

The players, coaches and officials recognised for excellence during the 2025/26 season.

MAJOR AWARDS

- ▶ PSL Footballer of the Season: Relebohile Mofokeng Orlando Pirates
- ▶ Betway Premiership Players' Player of the Season: Relebohile Mofokeng Orlando Pirates
- ▶ Betway Premiership Coach of the Season: Abdeslam Ouaddou Orlando Pirates
- ▶ Betway Premiership Goal of the Season: Cemran Dansin Orlando Pirates

BETWAY PREMIERSHIP

- ▶ Goalkeeper of the Season: Sipho Chaine Orlando Pirates
- ▶ Defender of the Season: Lebone Seema Orlando Pirates
- ▶ Midfielder of the Season: Oswin Appollis Orlando Pirates
- ▶ Young Player of the Season: Relebohile Mofokeng Orlando Pirates
- ▶ Top Goalscorer: Sede Junior Dion Lamontville Golden Arrows

CUP COMPETITIONS

- ▶ MTN8 Last Man Standing: Tshepang Moremi Orlando Pirates
- ▶ Carling Knockout Player of the Tournament: Mbekezeli Mbokazi Orlando Pirates
- ▶ Nedbank Cup Player of the Tournament: Darren Keet Durban City
- ▶ Nedbank Cup Most Promising Player of the Tournament: Seluleko Mahlambi TS Galaxy

CHAMPIONSHIP & DDC

- ▶ Motsepe Foundation Championship Players' Player of the Season: Emile Witbooi Cape Town City
- ▶ Motsepe Foundation Championship Young Player of the Season: Gabriel Amato Cape Town City
- ▶ Motsepe Foundation Championship Goalkeeper of the Season: Mickey Van Der Hart Cape Town City
- ▶ Motsepe Foundation Championship Top Goalscorer: Ntuthuko Mlotshwa Lerumo Lions
Ronaldo Van Neel Hungry Lions
- ▶ DStv Diski Challenge Player of the Season: Bennet Mokoena Mamelodi Sundowns
- ▶ DStv Diski Challenge Top Goalscorer: Bennet Mokoena Mamelodi Sundowns

MATCH OFFICIALS

- ▶ PSL Assistant Referee of the Season: Nandipha Menze
- ▶ PSL Referee of the Season: Eugene Mdluli

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

- ▶ Chairman's Award: Jayden Adams

ORLANDO PIRATES DOMINATED THE EVENING WITH 10 INDIVIDUAL AWARDS.



ACE OF THE WEEK: PUSO DITHEJANE

This week's iDiski Times Ace of the Week is Chicago Fire midfielder Puso Dithejane, after the 22-year-old celebrated a memorable milestone by scoring his first-ever Major League Soccer goal just two days before his birthday. While fellow South African Mbekezeli Mbokazi has understandably grabbed many of the headlines since arriving in Chicago, Dithejane is quietly proving that he too has the talent to make a significant impact in the United States. The former School of Excellence, Kaizer Chiefs and TS Galaxy midfielder came off the bench against David Beckham's Inter Miami last Wednesday and immediately injected energy and purpose into his side's performance, capping an impressive display with a well-taken goal in a thrilling 3-2 defeat. It was a performance full of confidence and promise, earning Dithejane the recognition as this week's deserved iDiski Times Ace of the Week.



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.

LANCE DAVIDS - FORGED BY FOOTBALL

By Rob Delpont

There was a time when South African football believed Lance Davids would become one of its biggest exports. Blessed with exceptional technique, versatility, a huge heart and a football intelligence that belied his age, Davids seemed destined for the very highest level almost from the moment he first kicked a ball. While many youngsters dream of Europe, his journey there began before most teenagers had even finished high school, and for a while, it appeared that the quiet youngster from Mitchells Plain would follow in the footsteps of some of South Africa's greatest footballing pioneers.

Born in Cape Town on 11 April 1985, Davids grew up on the Cape Flats, an area that has produced countless gifted footballers despite the many social challenges faced by its communities.

Football was woven into everyday life, and at Parkhurst Ambassadors in Mitchell's Plain, it quickly became apparent that Davids possessed something special.

His youthful days were all about the enjoyment of the game. He'd play at his club, and then rush home to play with lifelong friends, Clemen Mashonga and the Johannes brothers, Robyn and Courtney.

"When I was young, it was all about enjoyment, right? It was really just enjoyment. We used to play at Parkhurst Ambassadors. I was close with Robyn Johannes and Courtney Johannes, literally. So, after those types of games, we used to go to someone else's parents' house and go play football again, or we used to play another match afterwards, and just spend time with them. We used to play a lot after the games, it was just enjoyable. At that time, there was no PlayStation; we weren't indoors; we just wanted to be outdoors."

Small in stature but wonderfully composed on the ball, Davids seemed to glide across the pitch with an effortless elegance, combining technical quality with an understanding of the game that coaches rarely encounter in players so young. His talent was recognised early by Hellenic, one of Cape Town and South Africa's most respected development institutions at the time.

"After I moved to Hellenic – that time it was not the academy – I still used to play matches there and come home and go to Courtney and Robyn's house and play there again, staying over at night. It was all about enjoying, and then, of course, Marvin Abrahams also went with me from Parkhurst to Hellenic, and we followed each other, we literally went together."

So advanced was his football education that he found himself thrust into senior football by coach Gavin Hunt while he was still barely a teenager, competing against grown men before most players his age had even left school.

"I always say that Mark Byrne was

fantastic; the late Mark Byrne was very good at developing. He knew the details, he knew everything when it came to a player, and how to make them. Yes, he used to shout, but he used to shout for the right reasons, and that is missing today in our football. So, if you look at Mark Byrne, and coaches like Teddy Cunningham, Nevin Payne, Puzzy Jansen, and Edgar Manuel, who was also very important for me. I used to do a lot of extra work too. At that time, Athlone was not like it is now. There used to be an astroturf next to Athlone, and I used to have extra sessions there with Puzzy Jansen, because Puzzy Jansen was the Western Province coach."

It did not take long before Europe came calling. In 1999, the legendary Budgie Byrne, whose eye for talent has shaped countless careers, arranged trials for the teenage Davids at two of the biggest clubs in world football, Arsenal and Manchester United. For many youngsters, simply walking through the gates of those clubs would have represented the fulfilment of a lifelong dream.

For Davids, however, another opportunity would ultimately shape his future. German side, TSV 1860 Munich, recognised his immense potential and moved swiftly to secure his signature. At just 15 years old, he packed his bags, and he and Abrahams left Cape Town behind and embarked on one of the boldest journeys imaginable for a South African teenager at the turn of the century.

It was a giant leap into the unknown. New language. New culture. New expectations. Yet, much like several of South Africa's finest exports before him, Davids embraced the challenge.

"I won't lie to you; it was not easy. I was lucky, and Marvin will say the same. I think we were lucky; we had each other, right? We moved in January. I remember it was snowing when we arrived, and it was cold, so we luckily had each other. We sacrificed. Back in Cape Town, people always said, 'Wow, I was the best young player there, I was the best 15-year-old,



I was the best 14-year-old,' but when we arrived in Germany, we were the worst. We had to build ourselves up and make ourselves as good as them. We had to work hard, extra hard, because we had to be better than them, because they had invested in us."

He officially joined the Bavarian club's youth structures in 2001, continuing his development in one of Europe's most respected football academies. Germany's emphasis on tactical discipline, technical precision and professionalism proved to be the perfect finishing school for a player already blessed with outstanding natural ability.

"You know the goal post challenge? I could kick on my right foot every second ball, and when I arrived in Germany, these guys were doing it with their left foot, and their right foot, it was normal, you know, and I said, 'Damn, Marvin, you know where we are? So they were literally ahead of us in everything, literally everything. I was not the guy with the juggling, I was not that type of guy, but I was faster than them. My mobility and coordination were far better than theirs, but when it came to technicality, vision, and just the mentality, they were streets ahead of us. But that's what helped us a lot. Every training session, everything that they did on the pitch, they wanted to win. It doesn't matter. Yes, it was fun, and that's the difference in Europe. They enjoy it, but they want to win. Doesn't matter what they do; they want to win."

The rewards soon followed. On 22 November 2003, Davids made his professional debut in one of the biggest fixtures German football has to offer, a derby against Bayern Munich. Although 1860 Munich fell to a narrow 1-0 defeat, simply stepping onto the field against the country's dominant force represented another important milestone in the young South African's remarkable journey.

"I could not imagine that it went that quickly. For me, to be honest, I actually skipped the second team to go straight from U19s straight to the first team. That's why I always tell these youngsters today: 'Don't worry that you want to play; you're not playing Diski, but they want to play you under 17 or under 18, so what? Do your best, kill it there, because maybe you don't need to play Diski.'"

The following season saw him establish himself further, making 21 appearances in the 2. Bundesliga as he continued to gain valuable experience in one of Europe's most physically demanding competitions.

His next destination would be Sweden. Ahead of the 2006 campaign, Davids joined Djurgårdens IF, one of Stockholm's traditional giants and one of the country's most successful clubs. Like so many players adapting to a new league, his first few months required patience. Breaking into the starting eleven proved difficult, but his professionalism and determination gradually won over the coaching staff.

As the season progressed, Davids became increasingly influential. By the following year, he had cemented

his place in the team, showcasing the remarkable versatility that would define much of his career. Whether deployed as a right midfielder or as a full-back, he displayed an exceptional understanding of both roles, combining defensive discipline with the confidence to surge forward whenever opportunities arose.

His performances did not go unnoticed. In both 2007 and 2008, Davids was voted the best right-back in the Swedish league, an outstanding achievement considering he had originally developed as a midfielder. Few South African players abroad have adapted so successfully to a positional change while simultaneously establishing themselves among the very best in their league.

Recognition inevitably followed. Towards the end of 2007, two English Premier League clubs came knocking once again. Blackburn Rovers and Newcastle United both invited Davids for trials, offering another opportunity to realise the childhood dream that had first presented itself years earlier through Arsenal and Manchester United. This time, however, the move never materialised.

Football often turns on the smallest of margins, and despite impressing, Davids remained in Sweden, where he continued to perform consistently before eventually deciding to return home, with the 2009 FIFA Confederation Cup and 2010 FIFA World Cup in the back of his mind.

Early in 2009, he signed a short-term contract with reigning South African champions SuperSport United. Returning to South Africa after almost a decade abroad, Davids brought with him invaluable European experience and immediately added quality to Gavin Hunt's title-winning side.

He made his debut in a convincing 3-0 victory over Bay United and played his part in another successful period for Matsatsantsa. But his stay would prove relatively brief.



After spending a season with Ajax Cape Town, another opportunity in Europe emerged. Belgian side Lierse SK, newly promoted to the country's top division, moved quickly to secure his services, announcing him as their first signing ahead of the 2010/11 campaign.

The timing could hardly have been more significant. Only weeks earlier, Davids had experienced the greatest honour available to any South African footballer. He had been selected for Bafana Bafana's squad for the 2010 FIFA World Cup on home soil.

It represented the culmination of years of dedication and sacrifice, from the dusty football grounds of Mitchells Plain to some of Europe's most respected leagues. Although he never took to the field during South Africa's three matches, simply being part of that historic squad ensured his name would forever be associated with one of the country's defining sporting moments.

Like every member of that group, he became part of South African football history.

Following the tournament, Davids arrived in Belgium carrying valuable international experience and immediately slotted into Lierse's plans. He made his debut against Sint-Truiden at the start of the season and went on to enjoy another spell competing in European football before eventually returning home once more.

In January 2013, Ajax Cape Town welcomed back one of their own. The move felt appropriate. Cape Town had launched his career, Europe had refined it, and now the Mother City offered him the opportunity to finish where it had all begun. He remained with Ajax until April 2015, making what would ultimately prove to be the final appearance of his professional career in a narrow defeat to Free State Stars.

Remarkably, he was only 30 years old. For many footballers, retirement at that age feels premature, particularly for someone whose game had always relied more on intelligence than physical power. Yet Davids had already experienced more than many players achieve across two careers, representing his country, playing in multiple European leagues and competing at a FIFA World Cup.

Internationally, his journey had begun long before South Africa hosted the global showpiece.

Still a teenager, he made his senior Bafana Bafana debut on 30 March 2004 against Australia in London, becoming one of the youngest players to wear the national jersey during that era. His final appearance came just weeks before the World Cup, helping South Africa to a convincing 4-0 victory over Thailand.

Although his international career ultimately produced relatively few caps, just 23, it coincided with a fiercely competitive period for South African football, where breaking into the national side was never a straightforward task.

Retirement, however, did not signal the end of his involvement in football. Having built a life in Belgium, Davids turned his attention towards another side of the game, becoming a players' manager and using his own experiences to guide the next generation through the complexities of professional football. Having navigated transfers, different cultures, varying leagues and the unique pressures of life abroad, he possessed knowledge that few South Africans could match.

Today, he continues to represent players while simultaneously preparing for the next chapter of his football journey.

Never content simply to rely on past achievements, Davids is currently studying to become a Sporting Director as part of a specialised development programme, equipping himself with the skills required to help shape clubs from the boardroom rather than the dressing room. It is a fitting continuation for someone whose career has always been built on learning, adapting and evolving. The two-year course sees Davids spending time at some of Europe's top clubs, learning the ropes combining academic knowledge with practical experience and focusing on the many aspects of a sporting director's role: from sporting policy and legal matters to strategy and leadership.

From Mitchells Plain to Munich. From Stockholm to Brussels. From the 2010 FIFA World Cup to helping guide tomorrow's footballers. Lance Davids may not always feature among the first names mentioned when South Africans reminisce about their greatest exports, but his journey remains one of the country's finest examples of what courage, adaptability and quiet excellence can achieve.

He was never the flashiest player on the pitch, nor the most flamboyant personality off it, but wherever football took him, one thing remained constant. He belonged.

