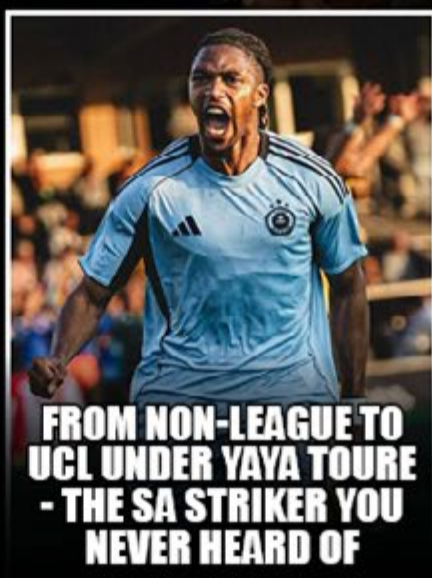


MAKHANYA OPENS UP ON RANGERS MOVE, BAFANA & EPL/LALIGA DREAM



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KAIZER CHIEFS
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DION LEFT FRUSTRATED
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ANDRIES ULDERINK
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TEAM OF THE WEEK
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Chippa United winger Azola Matrose could be in line for a surprise move to Europe. Matrose has been an ever-present figure for the Chilli Boys since returning to the club from Orlando Pirates, with 69 appearances overall, with six goals and two assists. His potential has caught the eye of Neftchi Baku, who have made an official approach, and a club-to-club agreement is close to being finalised. The 23-year-old was a notable absentee from the Chippa match-day squad in their Betway Premiership fixture against Pirates last Sunday.



Raja Athletic Club, led by Nasreddine Nabi, is reportedly keen on Sekhukhune United left-back Vuyo Letlapa. The 23-year-old who has been on the fringes of the Bafana Bafana squad looked poised for a move to Europe, with offers coming from Austria last season. However, those initial bids were rebuffed, and Raja have now said to have tested the resolve of Babina Noko over one of their most prized assets.



Kaizer Chiefs have suffered a major blow with utility-defender Reece Frosler suffering a torn hamstring. The experienced defender started the season in impressive form playing at left back, despite his natural position on the right. In pre-season, he was also fielded in a middle role, which pleased head coach Fernando da Cruz as a versatile player for his system. However, the South Africa international now faced an extended period on the sidelines with a torn hamstring.



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DION DISAPPOINTED AFTER BROKEN PROMISES



Golden Arrows star striker Sedé Junior Dion has been left frustrated as time ticks on for a potential lucrative transfer after starring with the club last season

Dion, 27, has been linked with several clubs since the end of last season after winning the Lesley Manyathela Golden Boot award.

The likes of Al Ahly, Pyramids, Raja, Al Masry have all been credited with interest in the player, while two approaches arrived from the Gulf to Arrows.

And while some of his teammates, Omar Comara, Isaac Cisse, and Siyanda Ndlovu earned moves away from the club to Young Africans, Royal Charleroi and Mamelodi Sundowns, respectively, Dion remains at Abafana Bes'thende with offers being rejected.

Sources within the club have confirmed it's affected the player mentally, with the squad losing key players and head coach

Manqoba Mngqithi – with whom he shared a close relationship – which has led to an indifferent start to the new campaign.

Dion remains hopeful that something could still materialise before the end of the window, having scored 15 goals, with two assists in 33 games in all competitions last season.

The latest bid rejected is believed to be in the region of R8 million, with the club said to be holding out for an offer beyond the R10-million mark for the striker.

Dion first arrived in the country five years ago with Marumo Gallants and went on to feature for AmaZulu before his move to Arrows.

Overall, he's netted 40 goals, with five assists in 130 games in South African football, marking him as one of the most in-form attackers in the country since his arrival.

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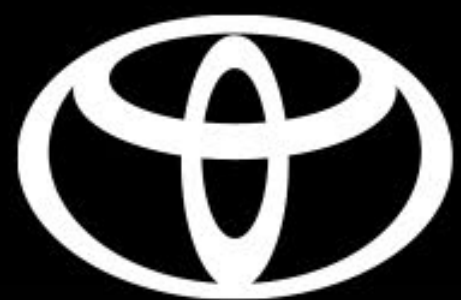
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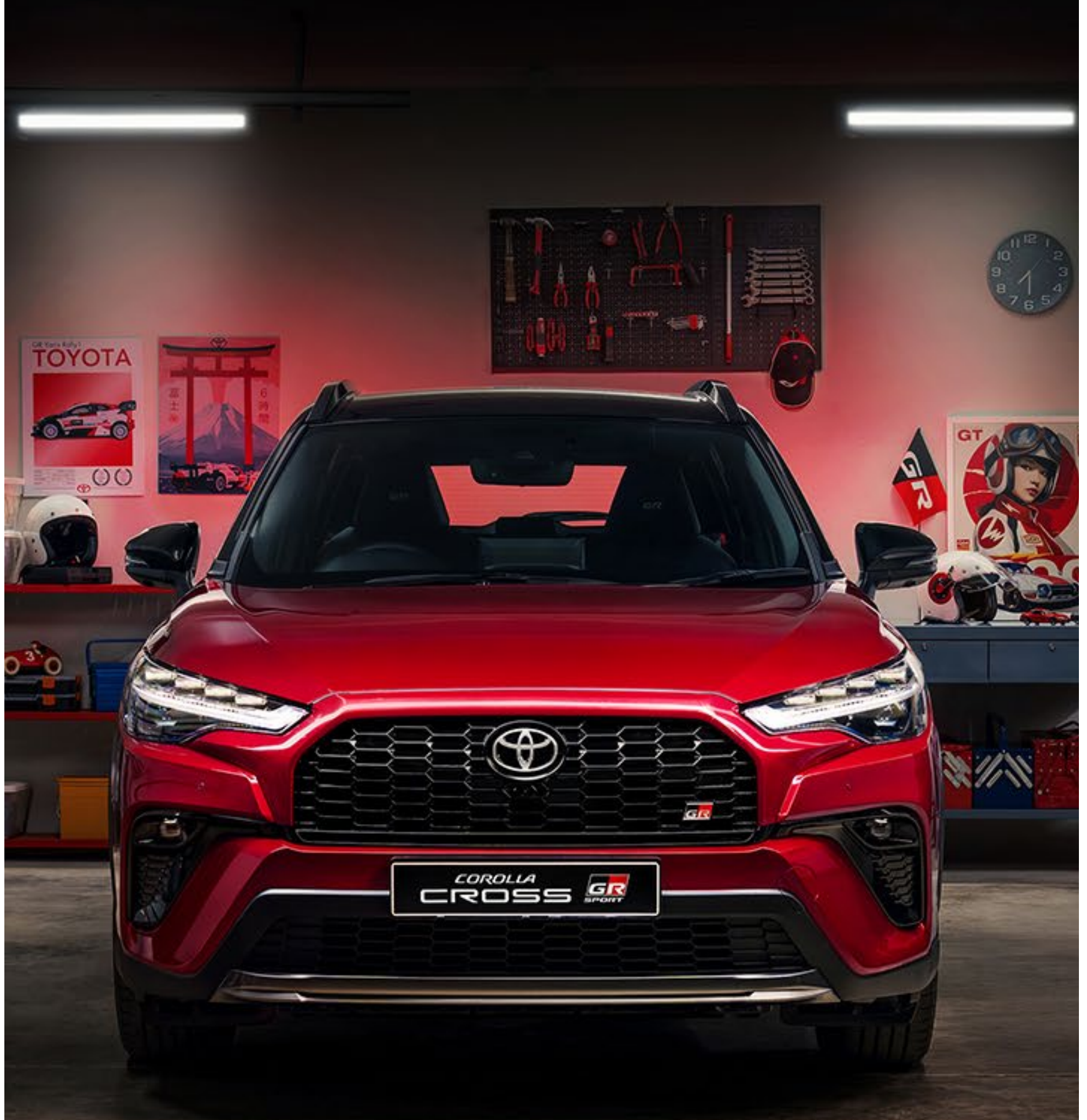
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KHANYE: CARDOSO SLOW STARTS COULD COST SUNDOWNS

It ended 1-1 in the highly anticipated Betway Premiership fixture between Kaizer Chiefs and Mamelodi Sundowns at the FNB Stadium last Saturday, with Cassius Mailula cancelling out Langelihle Philo's goal that had put Chiefs ahead.

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.

'Chiefs Gave Sundowns Too Much Respect'

"Miguel Cardoso had a poor start to the season last season for Mamelodi Sundowns.

"He has just won the CAF Champions

League, but again, he is having a slow start this season. He was lucky to win late against TS Galaxy.

"Kaizer Chiefs gave Sundowns too much respect in this game. They accepted that they are inferior to Sundowns and played without a striker.

"They defended with everyone behind the ball. The goal that Chiefs scored was not their own creation; it took a mistake from a Sundowns defender for Chiefs to capitalise.

"Sundowns are very slow in their build-up. They allow the opposition to recover. It took Chiefs scoring first before Sundowns woke up and played better.

"It was not a good game, but Sundowns kept their identity without hurting Chiefs.

"Chiefs gave Sundowns too much respect."





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26/27 MAMELODI SUNDOWNS HOME KIT



MAKHANYA OPENS UP ON RANGERS MOVE, BAFANA & EPL/LALIGA DREAM

Bafana Bafana and Rangers FC defender OLWETHU MAKHANYA is enjoying an exciting period in his career, having completed a move from Philadelphia Union in the MLS, where he spent three years, to Scottish giants Rangers last month. The 22-year-old has already made his debut in the league against Hibernian and also in the Europa League qualification against Jagiellonia, playing full matches. iDiski Times journalist LETHABO KGANYAGO caught up with the former Stellenbosch

player to speak about his dream move to Europe, how he's settling in at the club, lessons learned in the USA, as well as being part of the Bafana history-making side at the 2026 FIFA World Cup, among other matters.

Lethabo Kganyago: Olwethu, as always, we appreciate speaking to you. So much has happened since the last time we spoke to you towards the end of last year. How are you doing? How's Scotland?

Olwethu Makhanya: Thank you for asking. I'm actually doing really good. I'm in a good space, mentally, physically, just, yeah, everything is fine.

LK: How have you settled after making your debut the other day?

OM: I mean, of course, it's always a great achievement to make your debut after joining a team, especially, you know, after making such a big move for me, which has always been a part of the dream. It has been really great for me. Like I said, I'm in a really good space, and I'm also settling in very well with the team, so yeah, so far so good.

LK: How are you feeling to have finally made it to Europe, because you've always maintained that the goal is to get there with everything that you have gone through in America?

OM: It actually means everything to me. Like you just said, now it's always been part of the dream. You know, to actually put in the work and work towards something and see it come true, I feel like it's everything that a person needs. So for me, now that I'm here, I'm currently living the dream. You know, it gives me more reasons to just keep on going because I feel like the harder you work, the more things you achieve. So I feel like now that I'm here, at the same time it's like a huge step. But also at the same time, it's just like, you know, the beginning of other things.

LK: Obviously, not a dream debut for you because the team lost. But does that also speak to how well you've settled in, and for you to have gotten the monkey off your back of the first game as well?

OM: Yeah, of course I joined the team a few weeks ago. I wasn't able to join them for pre-season. To be able to come in right at the start of the season and be able to make my debut this soon, it actually helps me a lot in terms of my confidence and everything, like settling in. So yeah, I'm really happy with the debut even though it wasn't the result we were hoping for. But just to be part of the team and make my debut in front of the fans at home, it's all positive.

LK: Was it difficult leaving America, or, like we read, you really wanted a move, and you were not going to

"WHEN I LOOK AT THE MLS, I FEEL LIKE IT WAS A VERY CRUCIAL STAGE OF MY LIFE TO GROW AS A PLAYER AND AS A PERSON, YOU KNOW, MENTALLY, ON AND OFF THE FIELD."





have it any other way?

OM: I wouldn't say it was difficult. The only difficult thing was just making the team understand that it's always been part of the dream to go to Europe. And it wasn't easy leaving them because I felt like it was just the worst moment for me to leave the club. I felt like they really needed me, and I kind of felt guilty as I was leaving. But you know some opportunities only come once, and if you are given an opportunity, you have to try by all means to grab it.

LK: You won a Cup with them, finished the last season in a good position as well, and you were really growing on the team as well. But what are the lessons from your time in the MLS?

OM: When I look at the MLS, I feel like it was a very crucial stage of my life to grow as a player and as a person, you know, mentally, on and off the field. When I got there, I was struggling, but I never stopped working hard. The biggest lesson that I've taken from that whole experience, I would say that you're going to go through hard times; everything is mental. If you just keep on going, eventually, at the end, you're going to be blessed, and sometimes the hard times are not there to break you. They're just there to make you a better player. I feel like if it wasn't for those hard moments in Philly, I don't think I'd be the player I am today. But I had to go through all that to become a better player, and I feel like it also has prepared me for whatever the future holds. I feel like I'm grown enough mentally to face anything and also know that it's just there to make me better, and I can always just learn from all the difficult situations.

LK: And tell me about the moment you got the news. Who called you and your reaction...

OM: (Chuckles) I was really excited. Another thing is that we've been talking to Rangers. It was one of the clubs that we've been talking to over the past months, since, like, the last two transfer windows, you know, trying to push for a move. But when I finally got the call that I have to fly to the UK and do the medicals and do the paperwork and everything,

“THEY CALLED ME AT NIGHT, AND THEY WERE ASKING ME, ‘WHEN DO YOU WANT TO COME?’ I WAS LIKE, NO, BOOK A FLIGHT FOR TOMORROW.”

yeah, it was like... I can't even explain the feeling. I was really excited. After I heard that, I just decided because they asked me when do I want to fly in, and I was like, I want to fly in the next day.

LK: The next day?

OM: Yeah (laugh). And the funny thing is that they called me at night, and they were asking me, 'When do you want to come?' I was like, 'No, book a flight for tomorrow. Tomorrow morning, I'm flying that side'. Man, I literally didn't pack anything. I just packed a small suitcase, toiletries, took the flight the next morning and did my medicals. I couldn't wait to join the team because I also understood that I missed pre-season. So join the team as soon as possible.

LK: So tell me on the flight or on the way to the airport, what's on your playlist?

OM: (Chuckles) I was listening to Friday; it's Hip-hop music. Just music to hype me up, you know, just to remind me of the hard times and all that.

LK: Then there's also the prospect of playing in the Champions League. How excited are you about that?

OM: Yeah, that's one thing that really excites me, and that's one competition that I cannot wait to make my debut in. You know, I understand how big it is and the exposure that comes with it, and just everything. I'm excited and eager.

LK: As you should be. How was the reaction at home when you told them that you were leaving America and going to Scotland? How did they





receive the news?

OM: My mom, my mom was really happy because she's one person that I share a lot of things with. She doesn't really understand football that much, but she knew exactly that this has always been a dream for me. So for her to see everything come true, she was really happy. I call her every morning when I wake up. She's like always excited, you know, asking me how things are going and how's everyone. Also, my siblings are really excited now because of the time zone. We can talk throughout the day, and they can also watch my games, and we can talk after the game. So everyone is really happy; I won't lie.

LK: So you can safely say to anyone who possibly wants to look down on the MLS that it is a good stepping stone to feathering the bigger dream of playing the biggest leagues in Europe...

OM: Yeah, that's true, especially for people coming from South Africa. I feel like MLS is one of the biggest platforms that can give you the exposure that you need to be seen by European teams and countries like that. So MLS has done more than enough.

LK: I was looking at the history of Rangers players in reference to South African players with my editor. The most recent names include Dean Furman, who played his development football there, and then Bongani Zungu's loan stint. When you arrived at the club, were you given a history of how well South Africans have done there?

OM: Yeah, yeah, I did. You know, like the most recent one is Bongani Zungu, like you said. A lot of people still talk about him because he's the most recent. They are always asking me if I know him and stuff like that. They were also just like taking me through how long it took

“TO BE PART OF THE NATIONAL TEAM WAS A REALLY BIG HONOUR FOR ME, AND IT WAS SOMETHING THAT I’VE BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO.”

for them to adapt and how they did in the league. They still speak about those people.

LK: And for you, how do you respond to that, or does it just say to you that there's a history to continue at the club as far as South African players are concerned?

OM: I mean, it is like that. You know, I do understand the club has history with South African players, and there may be a perspective or an idea of what South African players are like. So I'm just trying to maybe take the standards a little higher.

LK: We can't not speak about the World Cup; the last time we were talking, you had just been snubbed from one of the preliminary lists, leading to the World Cup. Then you were a surprise inclusion in the final team. How was that?

OM: Yeah, that's another thing. You know, to be part of the national team was a really big honour for me, and it was something that I've been looking forward to. To be part of the guys and actually go to the World Cup was a really great experience. It was fun. I would say the biggest thing for me was before every game, when we just stepped on the field and just looking around, and the stadiums were always sold out. You know, fans are like really crazy, like very passionate,



and just realising that the amount of people that are here to watch you and the amount of people that are here to support you, and just understanding that you're not doing it for yourself or your family anymore, but now you're doing it for the whole country. That's a feeling that I wouldn't even be able to put into words. But it was really great.

LK: And going to Monterey, and the team makes history. How was that day for you guys in camp? Did you get any sleep?

OM: Yeah, it was a great day, and I don't think anyone slept that night at the hotel because we were just up and down the hotel celebrating. Everyone was happy. We were happy because the team made history, and to be in those books, you know, with all those memories, it was really huge. Because even going into the tournament, everyone was talking about it, like no one has ever taken it that far. So if we do, you know, we'd be the first ones. And like I said, to actually work towards something, be able to achieve it, that's just really good. It was amazing.

LK: South African players mostly got some great reviews. Obviously, Rele [Relebohile Mofokeng] and TLB [Mbekezeli Mbokazi] leading the charge, how were you guys able to handle all of that? I mean, to see that people are actually starting to see South Africa for the talent it has.

OM: It's always good to get recognition because when I joined the national team, when I got there, everyone was confident. Everyone was really confident in the talent that we had, and then everyone believed that the South African league is a top league. So everyone had that attitude that we're going to go there and we're going to compete. So, going there, everyone had already believed that they can play at that level. For them, it was just like getting the recognition because they already believed that they're good enough for that level. So it wasn't that big of a thing, but just recognition for them. And I feel like that's why everyone did really well.

LK: Coach Hugo has left us with a great legacy. Do you have any words that you can describe the kind of coach he was to you?

OM: For me, I would say he's a really good human, like he's someone that you're able to have a conversation with. You can come to him even with your own personal issues, which makes it easier to work with. He was a great coach, and I'm really grateful because he was the first coach to give me my first senior call-up. So yeah, he's a great person.

LK: Do you feel like now it is kind of like you're going to have to start over with the national team, or that just applies with everyone with a new coach coming in, or this move will keep you in contention to be called up to the senior team again?

OM: Honestly, I see myself as part of the national team already, but you never know with all the changes and everything. But yeah, I see myself as part of the



“HONESTLY, I SEE MYSELF AS PART OF THE NATIONAL TEAM ALREADY, BUT YOU NEVER KNOW WITH ALL THE CHANGES.”

national team. I also understand that we have to get game-time and perform to be part of the team.

LK: As we wrap up, what are some of the things that you look at your vision board as things remaining to tick off this year?

OM: Well, obviously the biggest thing to take right now is moving to Europe because I always felt like a move to Europe would open a lot of doors. And I'll be closer to the top five leagues in Europe. So now that I'm here, the most important thing is obviously cementing my place in the team and then being a regular. From there, I know that I have more opportunities and like I said, I still believe this is just the beginning of bigger things. So I'm really looking forward to one day maybe playing in the EPL or maybe LaLiga. So that's where I am mentally right now.

LK: Bet you can smell the EPL. I mean, what's the distance from Scotland to England in South African terms?

OM: (Laughs) It's just like flying from Jo'burg to Cape Town or something like that.

LK: Just two hours, see what I mean. Thank you for speaking to us, and all the best at Rangers.

MNTAMBO: WHY SEKHUKHUNE HAVE A CHANCE TO UPSET BUCS IN MTN8



For former professional player **LINDA MNTAMBO**, his retirement wasn't forced or abrupt but carefully planned and obviously with other factors involved. Mntambo hung up his boots in June this year after a career that's seen him represent clubs such as Roses United, Jomo Cosmos, Chippa United, Orlando Pirates and Sekhukhune United. The 37-year-old former midfielder opens up to **iDiski Times** journalist **LETHABO KGANYAGO** about how he wasn't scared to call time on his career, and the other contributing factors. Mntambo also candidly speaks about players and teams he has tormented and vice versa while also looking ahead to this season's **MTN8** semi-finals, where two of his former sides are still in it.

Lethabo Kganyago: Linda, thank you for your time. You have been a busy man; have you even had time to just settle down since you announced your retirement?

Linda Mntambo: No, certainly not, and I don't think that when people retire, it's a stop for them; it's not a stop to life in general. So for me, I think God has blessed me so much that a day after retirement, I immediately embarked on a new journey, which was in broadcasting. I got an opportunity to be part of the SABC family through analysis for the World Cup and also a lifestyle show that we had on SABC 3. So it was just that, and I can only be grateful for those opportunities that came by.

LK: In terms of your decision to retire, how long had you sat on it leading up to the announcement?

“WHILE COACHES ARE STILL LOOKING FOR THEIR BEST 11, POUNCE, GET THE RESULTS, GET R10M AND A TROPHY.”

LM: It took me a while. Obviously, people don't know, but you know when I actually left Pirates, I've always looked up to players like Zinedine Zidane, and seeing them retire around the age of 34. And when I started my personal branding, I looked at players like David Beckman and, locally, players like Teko Modise; you see how they also left the game they left on their own terms – they decided that they wanted to retire. Since 2022, I was privileged to be part of the PSL transition course that was hosted by MultiChoice, the PSL, and GIBBS Institute of Business Studies. Through that course, we were taught so much, and I think my vision was broadened through because I understood that I'm more than just a footballer. I think from then onwards, I knew that cometh the day I should have gained enough knowledge that will equip me for life after football, because that course initially was about it. It was a transition course to make it smooth for footballers, and when you look at the current players that were there, Itumeleng Khune, Sibusiso Vilakazi, Vincent Pule and when you look at what they are doing with their personal lives as well, they are doing quite well. So you wouldn't be surprised when they announce their retirement. So I obviously won't want to take credit alone, but Dr Irvin Khoza's vision for that and just





thank you for giving us the opportunity. And I knew, I think, two years ago, I've always wanted to retire. But my team, Sekhukhune, were like, 'no man, we still need you'. I've been contemplating the decision to the point where, at the start of last season, I sent a letter to the team to say, come the end of the season, I'm hanging up my boots.

LK: So, it wasn't really influenced by the injuries because, you know, I think a lot of us assumed you suffered a lot of injuries even before last season...

LM: Look, those are other factors as well. I can't only say that it was just planned, but even injuries took a toll. I got injured so many times that even when I thought I'm regaining my form, I got an injury again. The painful thing about my injuries is that no one ever kicked me; you'd just twist. Even that was mentally getting to me because it was now too much. And also seeing my kids grow up without me being around was also a contributing factor to my retirement, but also considering that I was turning 37 at that time. I was not young, and I had to obviously start preparing for life after football, and some opportunities were already presenting themselves, like the SABC gig. So it was not just one thing; there were so many other contributing factors to my retirement.

LK: In terms of teammates throughout your career, who was your best teammate?

LM: It has to be Thabang Monare. One thing I think about me and him is we started off on a bad note. When I was at Roses United, he was at Cosmos, and me being an attacking midfielder, and at Cosmos I think he was more of a defensive midfielder. We fought so many times, and then we happened to be teammates at Cosmos. I remember the first camp, me and him were roommates when I got there, and I played with him at Cosmos for so many seasons, played with him at Pirates, and then later he also joined me at Sekhukhune. So him and I have always shared this brotherhood, and then we are age mates and have so many things in common. I always joke with Dash that maybe my dad got up to no good (laughs) because he's from Mpumalanga. He's one of the most humorous teammates I've ever had. Fashion sense, me and him complement each other, and then we were born in the same year. Quite a lot that me and him share, so I think one of the best teammates I ever had.

LK: Which was the team that you were always your best when you played against?

LM: AmaZulu Football Club. If you look at my record or my stats against AmaZulu, if I don't score, I assist. When I made my debut for Chippa [United], we played against them; I scored a brace and won Man of the Match. When I was at Sekhukhune, I scored away in KZN; it was the first time we beat AmaZulu. When they came to Limpopo, I scored a brace coming on from the bench. When I was at Cosmos, we beat AmaZulu so many times, even when they had the legend Siyabonga Nomvethé. And to a point where I almost signed for AmaZulu before leaving Orlando Pirates; that's how much I've always had the better of that team. And you know how teams are; they always sign a player that troubles them a lot. I have their number; it's on speed dial (laughs).

LK: Who was your worst nightmare in terms of teams?

LM: If there's one team that haunted me or always gave me problems TS Galaxy. Yoh! One thing about TS Galaxy, I think we



"SEKHUKHUNE, I THINK THEY HAVE A HUGE HURDLE IN FRONT OF THEM, AND THAT'S DETHRONING ONE OF THE BEST TEAMS OF THE TOURNAMENT."

started getting the better of them when I was at Sekhukhune because we played a similar type of football: transition football, no build-up, just going at each other. But TS Galaxy has always been problematic; I think even from the days of Highlands Park, they actually never changed how they played. I think after buying Highlands Park, they kept the majority of the players and continued from how Highlands Park used to play. They've always been that team that, when we play against them, the night before, I make sure that I'm ready, get well hydrated, have a perfect meal, not too much, not too little.

LK: Who's the opponent you liked tormenting the most?

LM: It's also got to be a player from TS Galaxy, Mlungisi Mbunjana. You see the competitiveness that guy has, and we are around the same age. From the days in the NFD, when he played for a team in Cape Town, he always wanted to be physical. He's got that physicality in him. So every time, he likes to bulldoze. I always knew the best way for me to get the better of Mlungisi is to dribble him, and after every match we played against TS Galaxy, or wherever he is, I would post the clip where I dribble him just to make fun of him because he is that one player I enjoyed winning against and tickling.

LK: (Laughs) I suppose he's happy you are retired and doesn't have to endure your post-match clips. And some of your best games are highlights...

LM: Look, I think I do have a game for every team that I play for. Roses, it was my debut, but for Jomo Cosmos it was winning promotion through the promotion/relegation playoffs. We won our last game against Moroka Swallows at Dobsonville Stadium in Soweto, where I come from. It was the third of June, on my birthday, so I had my entire family in the stands. So that one is just one of the special games for me at Jomo Cosmos. But when we go to Chippa United, it has to be the debut I made against AmaZulu out in Durban. I scored a brace in that game. I got a head collision. I got a cut on my head. The doctors actually said no, he cannot continue. I remember coach Tebogo Moloi saying 'no,



let him sit outside for two minutes so he can come back to his senses’. At that moment, the score was still 0-0. So when I went back on the field, that’s when I got the brace.

LK: Let’s talk about the MTN8. You have drawn Babina Noko as your Last Team Standing. After that meeting against AmaZulu, do you feel that this should be the season that they lift the trophy?

LM: I randomly chose AmaZulu and Sekhukhune. Remember, there are only four legends in the Last Legend Standing in the MTN8 [this season], so each legend had to randomly draw two teams. So Sekhukhune I think they have a huge hurdle in front of them, and that’s dethroning one of the best teams of the tournament, Orlando Pirates who have won it four times in a row. They will have their work cut out. But it’s good to see them, especially in that game against AmaZulu, they have a comeback in them. Even when they were trailing, they still managed to come back into the game, and it can only speak to the cohesion amongst the players. I think Coach Cedric [Kaze] has probably assembled a good team, but no matter how many talented players and big names you have in your team, if there’s no chemistry, no cohesion, and the team spirit is not there you are not going to win. And I’m glad that there are glimpses from Sekhukhune that show that boys are getting to work together. They are getting to know each other. That for me is a plus factor and they know what it takes to play against Orlando Pirates. And Pirates know that they haven’t had it easy when they travel to Polokwane. The good thing about this fixture is that it’s a two-legged semi-final. So Sekhukhune need to make sure if they want to give themselves a chance that they don’t give Pirates anything away in Polokwane in the first leg. And when they come to Orlando, they can hope for a better result, and that could obviously put them in the final.

LK: Based on last season because they also reached this stage, what do they need to avoid this time?

LM: This time around, I think it’ll depend on the senior players that are there because you look at the make-up of the squad. There’s a whole lot of new guys that haven’t also played this tournament. So I think the onus is upon the likes of Vusi Mncube, Daniel Cardoso, Victor Ohizu, Ellis Rammala, who have been in the team, to give the young ones or the new ones confidence that it’s possible. You know how big games are. When you are playing games of this magnitude for the first time, at times you want to play the occasion instead of playing the match because the stadium is definitely going to be packed. So I think it’s just following the game plan,



“I THINK IT WILL BE A NARROW 2-1 WIN TO SEKHUKHUNE, AND THEN FOR ARROWS VS MAMELODI SUNDOWNS, I’M GIVING THAT ONE TO SUNDOWNS.”

the approach from the coach, to do the best they can to reach the finals of the MTN8.

LK: You look at Pirates; they were not so convincing in the opening games of the season. Is this a perfect time to catch them out, for lack of a better phrase?

LM: Yeah. I think that’s why this tournament is certainly unpredictable, because if you do your job well in the pre-season, then you get a chance. If you remember, [Golden] Arrows once won the competition when they beat Ajax Cape Town. So it does give you a chance of getting silverware as early as possible in the season. So now it’s a better time. And you look at when Pirates played to a draw against AmaZulu. So that should also tell you, because I don’t think the coach already has his starting line-up. [Oswin] Appollis came on from the bench; we saw changes. So it means the coach is still trying to find his best 11. So this is an opportunity. While coaches are still looking for their best 11, pounce, get the results, get R10m and a trophy.

LK: Lastly, head on the block your score prediction for the first leg encounters...

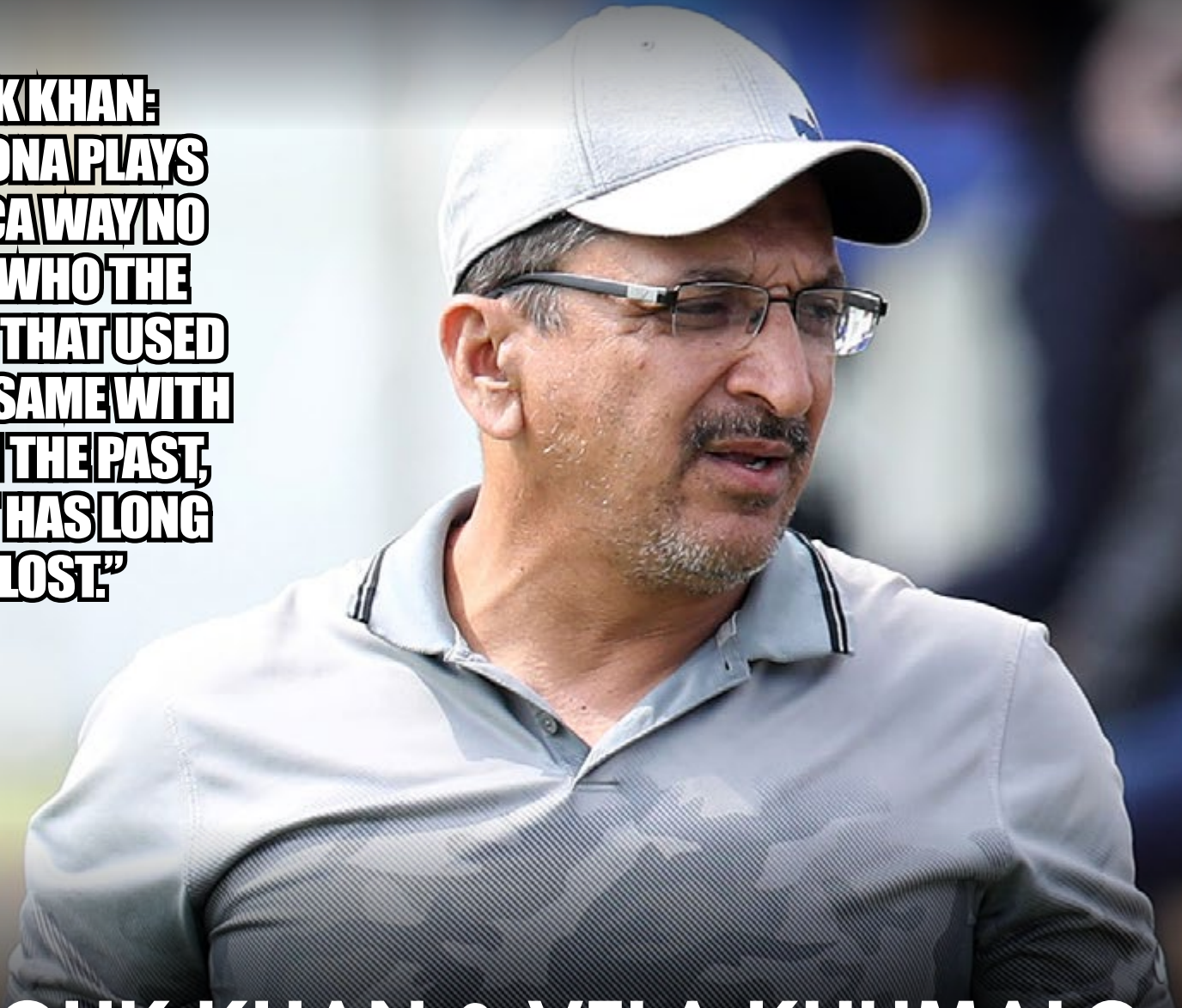
LM: I think it will be a narrow 2-1 win to Sekhukhune, and then for Arrows vs Mamelodi Sundowns, I’m giving that one to Sundowns.

LK: Thank you, Linda.





**FAROUK KHAN:
“BARCELONA PLAYS
THE BARCA WAY NO
MATTER WHO THE
COACH IS. THAT USED
TO BE THE SAME WITH
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FAROUK KHAN & VELA KHUMALO DISCUSS CHIEFS’ DEVELOPMENT PIPELINE

By Matshelane Mamabolo

For years, Kaizer Chiefs’ academy has represented one of the club’s greatest sources of pride – a conveyor belt of young talent capable of carrying the weight of the famous gold-and-black jersey. There was Doctor Khumalo in the late 80s. Thabo Mooki and his generation followed in the 90s before Jabu Pule and Co lit up the scene... Now, as Amakhosi search for a way back to the summit of South African football, a new generation of graduates is beginning to take centre stage. The names are increasingly familiar: Zitha Kwinika, Mduduzi Shabalala, Nkosingiphile Ngcobo, Wandile Duba and Mfundo Vilakazi.

Different in age, personality and position, they share something significant – their football education is rooted in the Amakhosi development system. And increasingly, they are becoming more than promising products of the academy. They are becoming part of the club’s heartbeat.

That matters at a club where expectations are enormous. Chiefs are not simply judged by whether they finish near the top of the table. The standard is measured against an illustrious past: domestic domination, league titles, cup triumphs, and generations of players who understood what it meant to represent one of Africa’s biggest clubs.

The challenge now is to reconnect that past with the future.

Kwinika represents one side of that bridge. A product of the Chiefs system who left the club before eventually returning, the defender brings experience and an understanding of the demands attached to the badge. His journey is a reminder that academy development is rarely a straight line. Some players leave, mature elsewhere and return with a different perspective on what it means to play for Chiefs.

Shabalala, meanwhile, embodies the excitement that comes with a player who has grown up in the Chiefs environment and possesses the ability to change a game. His emergence has carried with it the expectations that inevitably accompany young talent at the Phefeni Glamour Boys,

but also the possibility that Chiefs can build a team in which homegrown players are not merely supporting characters.

Ngcobo is another important piece of that picture. Technically gifted and comfortable in possession, he represents the type of footballer academies are supposed to produce: a player familiar with the club’s culture and capable of expressing himself at the highest level.

Duba is a natural striker with an eye for goal and was prolific in development until he was promoted and converted by former coach Nasreddine Nabi to the wing, a position the player described as ‘a difficult role’ at the time. But he has grown into it, aware that at the elite level versatility is an asset. And he has scored goals coming from the flank and could well be an influential figure this campaign under coach Fernando Da Cruz, who believes in youthful players.

Then there is Vilakazi, whose emergence has added another layer to the story. Still at the beginning of his senior career, he represents the next wave – a reminder that the academy’s importance is not something that belongs to Chiefs’ past. It remains central to the club’s future.

What makes this generation particularly intriguing is the possibility of a collective identity. A club can spend heavily on established players, and Chiefs will always need experienced footballers capable of handling pressure. But there is something different about players who understand the institution from the inside. They know the significance of Naturena. They have grown up around the stories of Chiefs legends. They have watched the club’s supporters demand excellence. They understand, perhaps more instinctively than outsiders, that playing for Amakhosi is about more than 90 minutes.

That does not mean academy graduates should be burdened with the responsibility of restoring Chiefs to their glory days by themselves. Quite the opposite. Young players need experienced teammates, good coaching and the freedom to develop without being asked to solve every problem. But if Chiefs can surround their academy products with the right





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experience and tactical structure, the rewards could be significant.

One man who knows the Chiefs culture more than most is **FAROUK KHAN** – a consummate football technician and tactician who grew up watching Amakhosi before he got deeply involved as an academy head, before he worked as an assistant coach of the senior team during two highly successful spells.

He recalls how Chiefs have always been identified for their brand of football that was ‘entertaining and produced results’.

“That’s always been the Chiefs way,” Khan says. “From when Kaizer [Motaung, the owner] broke away from Orlando Pirates to form Kaizer XI – the club always set the standards with excitingly talented players such as Ace Ntsoelengoe and Teenage Dladla. After them, you had your Doctors [Khumalo], Shoes Moshoeu, Thabo Mooki, Jabu Pule and Scara Ngobese – players who could influence the game. When they put their foot on the ball, you knew something positive could happen.”

The Chiefs way, Khan adds, is the one where even the defenders are able to play, and the strikers are prolific scorers.

“Chiefs play an entertaining, attacking brand of football. All the silverware they won over the years was a testament to that – easy on the eye football with players who could play from the back. I remember they used to have the central defensive pairing of Lucas Radebe and Neil Tovey, who could knock the ball around before Patrick Mabedi and Fabian McCarthy followed after them. And in attack, Chiefs had great scorers – from the likes of Scara Thindwa, Samora Khulu and Collins Mbesuma. It was the standard that Chiefs set.

Khan remembers coaching in a development match that Chiefs were losing and having Kaizer Motaung coming to him and telling him to allow the players to keep the ball and control the game, because that was the Chiefs way.

“We won that match 4-2 having trailed 2-0.”

As he looks at the current team, Khan is not fully convinced that the squad is good enough to embrace the Chiefs culture but he believes there’s hope.

“Defensively, the players they have are

good ball winners, but they just need to improve on their abilities to play from the back. It is still early in the season to make a pronouncement on what they can do, but I see potential.”

Khan would love to see Chiefs taking the game to the opposition much better than they did when they drew 1-1 with Mamelodi Sundowns using a defensive 5-3-2 formation.

“That’s not the Chiefs way. Chiefs dominate. They press the opposition high and take the game to them. But to do that, you need to have the players for that kind of game, and I am not sure that is the case with this squad. They are still lacking a little bit of creativity because what made Chiefs tick were the Ace Ntsoelengoes and Ace Khuses, the Doctor Khumalos and Thabo Mookis or Jabu Pules who could keep the ball and link the defence with the attack.”

While he believes the likes of Shabalala and Vilakazi have the potential, and he is actually disappointed that Chiefs let go of Samkelo Zwane, Khan feels these development products have not been given enough opportunities since their promotion to settle into the team and show what they can do.

He is hopeful that things will be different this campaign, although he worries that a move away from their game model over recent seasons has meant that coaches coming in just don’t have something solid to build on.

“FC Barcelona plays the Barca way no matter who the coach is. That used to be the same with Chiefs in the past, but that has long been lost. Once Chiefs are able to cast down in stone how they play, in a way that every coach who comes in follows the Chiefs way, the club will be back to its glory days.”

In the meantime, the Amakhosi faithful must continue living in hope that the club’s fortunes will turn. The hope that the development products can become the heartbeat of the team springs eternal.

There is also a broader strategic argument. South African football is full of talented young players, and Chiefs have historically been at their best when their own development system has been producing footballers capable of stepping into the first team. Developing talent gives a club continuity. It creates players who can potentially stay for years rather than





VELA KHUMALO: “THE MOMENT WE PROMOTE YOU, YOU ARE NO LONGER A YOUNGSTER. YOU GO OUT THERE AND REPRESENT THE DEVELOPMENT BECAUSE YOU KNOW THE CULTURE, YOU KNOW HOW WE’VE BEEN DOING THINGS THIS SIDE”



seasons. And, perhaps most importantly, it gives supporters someone with whom they can identify.

The emotional connection between club and player can be powerful when supporters have watched that player grow from an academy prospect into a first-team regular.

For Chiefs, that connection could become increasingly important as the club attempts to construct a new era.

The glory days cannot simply be recreated. Football changes, opponents evolve, and every generation has to establish its identity. The next great Chiefs side will not be a replica of the teams that came before it. It will have to be its own team.

And perhaps that team will be built around players who know exactly what the gold-and-black jersey means.

Kwinika, Shabalala, Ngcobo, Duba and Vilakazi offer different versions of the same possibility: that the road back to the top may not only run through expensive signings or established stars, but also through the corridors of Naturena.

The academy has spent years producing talent. The question now is whether those graduates can become the foundation of something bigger. If they can, Chiefs may discover that the heartbeat of their revival has been there all along – being developed, waiting for its opportunity, and learning what it means to be Amakhosi.

Kaizer Chiefs’ development coach **VELA KHUMALO** believes they can.

Khumalo worked with most of those players who are now members of the senior team, and the 2024/25 DStv Diski Challenge-winning coach took time to share his views with Matshelane. Khumalo, who also doubles up as South Africa’s national under-17 coach, admitted that while these graduates have taken a bit longer to make their mark at the elite level, he believes that they can achieve.

Matshelane Mamabolo: Coach, you’ve been at Kaizer Chiefs for a while now, and you know the development structures very well. When you look at players such as Mduduzi, Mfundo, Wandile and Nkosingiphile, what role do you see them playing in helping the club return to its glory days?

Vela Khumalo: I honestly believe they can play a big role because they were winners with us. During their time with us, we instilled in them a winning mentality and taught them a lot during their development. That is why they were promoted. I think everyone knows that our development is one of the best at the moment, and it has been like that for a long time. We have always been winning things, developing players thoroughly and promoting them. So they need to take that winning mentality from development into the first team. If you look at it now, we have just won the league (two seasons ago) with the DDC and the Top 8 Shield with the DDC. Even at other age groups, under-19, under-17 and so forth, we have been winning, so this culture of winning starts down there. So, these boys really need to translate that into the first team. For me, that is the main thing: bringing the winning mentality back to the senior team.

MM: You look at these players, and while Zitha Kwinika left and later came back, the others have been there, and a lot is expected of them, even though some argue that they are still young players trying to find their way. How have you seen their integration into the senior team over the past few years?

VK: To be frank and honest with you, I think we are doing well. We have aligned things in such a way that you see those players going up. For instance, lately you saw Matlaba [Kabelo Nkgwesa] playing his first game against Sekhukhune. You have also seen players like Aden [McCarthy] coming through and leaving, while others such as [Siyabonga] Ngezana have gone overseas. That tells you that we are doing something right. But the bigger thing is integration. When they get there, I think the situation with players like Mduduzi and Duba was different from what happened with Relebohile Mofokeng at Orlando Pirates, where the older players were taking care of him and protecting him. With us, we had players like Mduduzi, Obi [Mfundo Vilakazi] and Duba coming in, but the pressure was on them to deliver. They were coming from development, and all of a sudden we wanted them to carry the team upon their shoulders. Maybe that is one thing we could have dealt with better with the coaches at the time. I hope that with the current coach who believes in youth and knows how to manage young players, things will be different. He has





VELA KHUMALO: “WE HAD PLAYERS LIKE MDUDUZI, OBI (MFUNDO VILAKAZI) AND DUBA COMING IN, BUT THE PRESSURE WAS ON THEM TO DELIVER. THEY WERE COMING FROM DEVELOPMENT, AND ALL OF A SUDDEN WE WANTED THEM TO CARRY THE TEAM UPON THEIR SHOULDERS.”



been working with youth for quite some time and understands how to integrate them without putting too much pressure on them.

MM: What have you made of the others’ progress in the senior team though?

VK: I thought that by this time some of them would be further along. The way they were developing and then going to the first team, they should have been further by now. I’m really happy that they are playing, but I still think there is a big room for improvement. They can do better because I know their potential, like Mduduzi doing well one week and not being on form the next week – that’s worrying. For instance, we went to play in Lesotho recently, and we had him with us, and we reminded him of the things we want to see from him. That is why we saw the best of him in Lesotho. I know that in the first team you don’t have time for all of that.

MM: Do you see this season being the kind where those graduates from development become the heartbeat of Chiefs? Do you think we will get to a stage where the spine of the Chiefs starting XI is made up of players who were developed at the club?

VK: I think if you go back a little bit to last season, there was a time when I was super excited because we had seven players starting a match. And then there was a time when three of them were on the score sheet in one match. I thought then, “Wow, this is now taking shape.” And we all started saying: “No, now that we have about seven, let’s have the whole team.” Our target became 10. So, I think it is long overdue. It was supposed to have happened perhaps last season or the season before, but it is not too late. Although, of course, things such as injuries and social factors you simply cannot control. But it is long overdue; we have our players dominating. I remember at one stage we had Takalani [Mazhamba], Aden, Samkelo [Zwane], and Kwinika, among others. We had seven in there at one stage, and I thought, “No, we are there.” But along the way, injuries cost us, and other things happened. Then we were back to having three or four. Yet, our target was to get to 10 and see how it works. Maybe that will bring back the glory days. I remember one game where three of them – Duba, Obi and Mduduzi - scored, and I was super happy. I thought,

“Hey, it’s getting there.” I think people could see the work we had been doing.

MM: Indeed, coach, because this is Kaizer Chiefs, a club that for years has been known for producing its own players through their development structures to become big stars in the senior team. The reality, though, is that when you look at Mduduzi and the others, they aren’t really young anymore. In South Africa, we sometimes get stuck with the idea that a player is always young. For example, Nkosingiphile is about 27 now. When you speak to them, do you make them realise that they’re no longer youngsters and that it is time to deliver?

VK: We do speak to them, yes, and the moment they leave the development structure, they know they are no longer youngsters. The moment we promote you, you are no longer a youngster. You go out there and represent the development because you know the culture, you know how we’ve been doing things this side – winning things, so you need to get to the senior side and win things. That is why you don’t see them coming here and staying in their shells. They want to be out there. They grew up playing in front of crowds. We go to DDC games and always have big crowds following us. We go to under-19 games and so forth, and there are always large numbers of fans when Chiefs are playing. So we then say to them: “Guys, now you are at the last part of it. Now it is make-or-break. You go out there, and you are no longer a youngster.” Mduduzi will not behave like a youngster. Obi will not behave like a youngster. Duba will not behave like a youngster.

The other thing is that they see what happens to the players who have gone before them. Where is Aden? He’s overseas. So this is our yardstick that we give them to measure themselves by. Where is Ngezana? He’s overseas. Is he still a youngster? No. But he is regarded as a youngster just because he comes from our development. But as soon as he is promoted, that changes. When they come from development to the senior team, they are no longer young stars. They need to behave like senior players who understand that the responsibility is on them and that they need to perform.

MM: Coach, thank you so much. I really appreciate your time, and all the best.



CT CITY COACH TARGETS PSL PROMOTION



Dutch coach **ANDRIES ULDERINK** is back in charge of a South African club, six years after resigning from Ajax Cape Town while the team were sitting at the top of the table and looking well placed to secure promotion back to the top flight. Now, he has returned with Cape Town City, having initially joined the club as Technical Director late in 2025, with the objective once again being promotion to the Betway Premiership. City finished second in the Motsepe Foundation Championship under fellow Dutchman Jan Vreman last season, but fell short in the promotion playoffs, leaving Ulderink with the task of finishing the job. Since his first spell in South Africa, the 57-year-old has built an impressive résumé as an assistant coach at FC Twente, Rangers, Bayer Leverkusen and Royal Antwerp, where he also took charge as interim manager last year. Ahead of the start of the 2026/27 campaign where City begin away against Real Native FC (formerly Casric Stars), **ROB DELPORT** caught up with Ulderink to discuss his return, his experiences abroad and the challenge of leading City back to the top flight.

Rob Delport: First of all, I obviously have done it casually, but it's a welcome return to the dugout in South Africa. I think it was about six years, beginning of 2020...

Andries Ulderink: Yeah, it could be...

RD: I know that you come back to the same league where you were with Ajax Cape Town, but so much has changed.

AU: Yes, no, that's true. That's true. Also for the club, eh? In those six or seven years, a lot changed, and you see as well that, last season, of course, the last six or seven months of the league, I followed it, and you see that the general level is much higher than six, seven years ago. Players are fitter, coaches have more tactical understanding, the teams are more, how do you say, more up to each other. So yes, and that's good for South African football because a lot of

“THE GENERAL LEVEL IS MUCH HIGHER THAN SIX, SEVEN YEARS AGO. PLAYERS ARE FITTER, COACHES HAVE MORE TACTICAL UNDERSTANDING, THE TEAMS ARE MORE, HOW DO YOU SAY, MORE UP TO EACH OTHER.”

youngsters are playing in this league. So yes, now there's a big step made.

RD: You mentioned coming back; you were Technical Director for six months, getting an idea of what the team is like. Did that help with recruitment and preparation?

AU: Yes, for sure. No, look, we spoke a lot the last half year about the squad, what kind of football we want to play how we can win the games, and of course, get promoted to the PSL because look, that's obvious the goal from us, and so we recruited I think the players we wanted, and now it's up to me and the rest of the staff and the players to make it a winning team.

RD: And how have the new guys fitted in? It's not like you've made wholesale changes, but you brought in quite a few really strong players to strengthen the team.

AU: Yes, yes, look, it's always difficult for players coming in from different kinds of areas, clubs, countries, to get adapted. But so far, I'm quite happy about how players are adapting, the players as a group. Look, players can have a bad day as well, especially in pre-season where you train harder and you push them a little bit more. So it's good to have those moments as well in pre-season.

RD: Pre-season is a bit longer than

maybe you would have preferred. But obviously, those first few games — you start away, then a couple of home games in a row — are you already being prepared for those?

AU: Yes, yes, it's what you're saying. Now, more or less, you get a little bit of feeling. 'Okay, let's get started. Let's get started', and because at the end you will get the last final details about how a group is doing under the pressure of playing those league games. So no, I've got the feeling we're almost ready for it.

RD: Last season, we got to see, I want to say, like eight, nine really good young players get opportunities that perhaps they wouldn't have got had the team been in the Premiership. But now those guys have this time under their belts, so they go from being these bright-eyed youngsters to players you're expecting things from?

AU: Yes, no, but that's true. Coach Lebo [Manyama] mentioned it in the beginning of this pre-season as well. That in the beginning of last season they were discussing maybe putting two or three of these youngsters on loan to other clubs. And most of them played a lot of games, so they take that with them, and you can see that in this pre-season that there's more maturity in the squad, although they're young. But you see more maturity in it. They recognise things better, so that's a good thing for us. That's a good thing for us, and also a good thing for them, because I think, as a youngster, one of the most important things is that you need to play games in senior football.

RD: What about yourself? I mean, when I think about it, you had quite an adventure since leaving Ajax Cape Town.

AU: Yes.

RD: A couple of countries you went and worked in. But is it good to be back? And what was that like?

AU: Yes, yes, yes. No, look, a really great time in Belgium, where with Mark van Bommel, we won the league, we won the Super Cup, we won the cup. So we played Champions League. So that was a very great experience, and great results. And from let's say Leverkusen, where we just started, and Erik ten Hag got sacked. And then I knew, of course, that I would leave as well. So the highs and the lows are big. But, look, in football, that is what it is, and you have to deal with that. But look, the experience working in different competitions, the cultures, that's great, and it's also great to be back. It's also great to be back, and yeah, and try to get as good as much results with Cape Town City this season. That's my big challenge.

RD: When you were at Ajax Cape Town, obviously there was very much a Dutch style at that club. Here it's slightly different. What is that type of football that you are hoping to play



“YOU CAN SEE THAT IN THIS PRE-SEASON THAT THERE'S MORE MATURITY IN THE SQUAD, ALTHOUGH THEY'RE YOUNG. BUT YOU SEE MORE MATURITY IN IT. THEY RECOGNISE THINGS BETTER, SO THAT'S A GOOD THING FOR US.”

this season?

AU: Yes. No, look, when John [Comitis], the owner, phoned me a while ago, before I went to Leverkusen, he was talking to me about that football, that he wanted to have a certain football which he liked, and so he demanded from me, 'I want to have that football, are you up for that?' So straight away he got my attention because in some situations I miss a little bit of a certain football because that's where my motivation is, in a certain football. It starts with winning games, but you want to win also most of the games in a certain way, and then that's where it started. Then you start looking. Now we've got one Dutch assistant coach [Ischa Immers]. A little bit by coincidence, he lived already over here; we've got two Dutch players that can help, of course, a lot, but it's also in the recruitment from other South African players that I think we managed well to find the right players to try to fit in that type of playing. So it's, yeah, interesting.

RD: We always say football is the universal language, but how much did it actually help that you were here before to deal with South African players?

AU: No, it's interesting that still, I watch, of course, Bafana Bafana as well in the World Cup, and you see a little bit through South African football, a little bit the same, that you see quite the potential, you see a lot of things, but



“THAT AMBITION TO GET PROMOTED, I THINK, IS CLEAR, AND I THINK WITH US, MAYBE FIVE, SIX OTHER CLUBS HAVE THE SAME.”

in the final third, it struggles a lot. So there you miss a certain development from youth, playing in the streets, in the townships, and there you see that the game stops a lot, calm for a final pass, picking the right cross, staying calm, inside foot finishes, and that’s interesting to see if a country like South Africa can develop that in the youth academies, continuity in the training, developing players, then I think South Africa can become a very big football country in in in the world. But now we have to be honest as well that the situation in a football country, South Africa... look, Stellenbosch has to play their home games away. In Athlone, the whole month there’s rugby, and so we need to play our first home game after there’s been a month of rugby played in that stadium, and that’s where football is now. Look, and that’s a bad thing. That’s a bad thing because for developing football, you need to have a certain quality of facilities. Doesn’t have to be five-star facilities, like for instance at Leverkusen or at Rangers. No, that’s not necessary. But to have a certain level of quality of pitches and all kind of things, that would help a lot in developing football.

RD: We’ve spoken about the NFD many times before, the way things change, and I was looking at your schedule, and I know it’s just a name change with Casric to Real Native. But the first three clubs or four clubs that you play, I think none of them were around when you were Ajax coach, and actually I think 80% of the clubs have changed. Is that something that, from a South African point for development, you need clubs to stay around to be able to develop players...

AU: Yeh, I agree 100%. And look, for me, I’m not in a position to criticise things that happened in the top of South African football, but I think the environment where we can develop football is the best against the best. What I said: facilities, good leagues, continuity in youth academies. So we got relegated, and you’re not allowed anymore to play in the Diski. Just for a simple example, young players who go to the first team are not allowed anymore to play in the SAB. So young players sometimes don’t play league games for six, seven months. So there are a lot of things. Again, I’m not in that position to criticise too much on that. But if we can get that in this country, I think would help continuity a

lot.

RD: Yeah, I actually was just saying, this generation of players did so well in Diski, but my concern is do they have natural successors because there’s no Diski. City has a very young team playing SAB, and if you get promoted, they’ll most probably be able to play Diski. But there’s a generation now that’s kind of skipped.

AU: Yes. But that’s what I meant with continuity. If you want to have continuity, it must be also affordable for clubs to keep on going and investing in the youth academies. And now you got relegated, and then you see straight away that you need no Diski team anymore. Instead of three teams, two teams. So we wanted to expand to five. But in spite of developing, you have to cut. So the next generation, it becomes more difficult and more difficult. So that’s a worry. Not only for Cape Town, but for South African football. If you see how many kids have potential to play football and get to a certain level, I think it’s enormous. But it’s not possible that clubs by themselves are only developing that. It has to come from above, and from there on, you need to get the right people to make certain decisions.

RD: My final one, back to the Championship. Obviously, the target is promotion, but I mean, it’s going to be a big job because there are four or five other teams who are also thinking exactly the same thing, and it’s probably four or five other teams who want to stop you guys.

AU: Yes, no, no, no. Look, that ambition to get promoted, I think, is clear, and I think with us, maybe five, six other clubs have the same [ambition] what you said as well. A lot of changes also always in clubs with players, so it’s very difficult for this moment to see the quality of the teams, but there’s not a bit in my body that will underestimate any team or this league because I’ve seen how strong it is and how difficult it is to beat teams. Some are strong in set-pieces, some are strong in the transitions, and some can press really well. And look, the more and more teams are trying to play a certain football as well, so it’s going to be an interesting and challenging league.

RD: Thank you, Andries, and all the best.



THE IDISKI TOP 10... FOREIGN RECRUITS

This week, iDiski Times turns its attention beyond South Africa's borders to the top 10 foreign recruits to watch in the Betway Premiership during the 2026/27 season, a collection of players arriving with different stories, different footballing journeys and, perhaps most importantly, different expectations attached to their names.

The modern South African game has become an increasingly attractive destination for players from across the continent and beyond, with clubs looking abroad for the quality, experience and individuality that can sometimes make the difference between a good squad and a title-challenging one. Some of these newcomers arrive with extensive experience in foreign leagues, having travelled across Africa, Europe and

other parts of the footballing world, while others are taking their first major step into South African football and will have to adapt quickly to a league with its own unique demands.

Our ranking is based on expectations and overall performance, taking into account statistics and ratings from various football analytics companies, as well as the potential impact each player could have on his new team.

Of course, not every foreign recruit has arrived directly from another country, with some making moves between South African clubs after establishing themselves locally, but all 10 have been signed for the 2026/27 campaign and bring something different to their teams. These are those worth keeping a particularly close eye on as the season unfolds.

The Top Ten:

10 Stanley Nwabali
Chippa United
Nigeria

It feels almost unfair to include Stanley Nwabali on this list, considering the towering Nigerian goalkeeper is hardly an unknown quantity in the Betway Premiership, but technically this is a new beginning after he left Chippa United earlier in the year before returning to the club during the off-season. At 30, Nwabali is entering the prime years of a goalkeeper's career and arrives back at a club where he has already established himself as one of the most important figures, having become a cult hero with his performances for Chippa and Nigeria, particularly during the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations. His presence gives the Eastern Cape side experience, personality and security at the back, and with another campaign ahead, there is little reason to believe he will not once again be among Chippa's most influential performers.

9 Gastón Sirino
Durban City
Uruguay

Gastón Sirino may no longer be the lightning-heeled twenty-something who arrived in South Africa in 2017, but there is still plenty of magic left in those boots, and at 35, the Uruguayan has become one of the most experienced and technically gifted foreign players



of the modern Betway Premiership era. After years of dazzling supporters at Mamelodi Sundowns, followed by a spell at Kaizer Chiefs, Sirino now finds himself at Durban City under a coach who already understands precisely how to get the best from him. That familiarity could prove priceless, particularly because Sirino should find himself playing with less pressure than he has experienced at some of South Africa's biggest clubs, allowing the veteran playmaker to rediscover the freedom and improvisation that made him such a special talent when he first arrived from South America.

8 Daba Diakité
Chippa United
Mali

At just 22, Daba Diakité arrives at Chippa United with the promise of a player whose career abroad is only beginning, having spent the previous season with FC Sheriff Tiraspol in Moldova after developing his game in Mali. Born in Ségou, Diakité first came to prominence after moving to Djoliba AC in 2022, where he helped the club win the Malian championship and gained valuable exposure in CAF Champions League qualification. His journey has also included international experience at youth level with Mali, and his move to Sheriff represented an important first step into European football. Now South Africa offers a different challenge, and Chippa will be hoping the energetic midfielder can bring the technical quality and continental experience he has accumulated so far into a Premiership environment.

7 Alou Doumbia
Durban City
Mali

Alou Doumbia arrives at Durban City as an intriguing young full-back from one of Mali's most respected clubs, Djoliba AC, where he established himself as a highly-rated player and gained invaluable experience in continental competition. The 23-year-old has big boots to fill after Durban City were unable to retain loanee Terrence Mashego, who chose instead to join Stellenbosch FC, but Doumbia offers the club an opportunity to develop a player with both domestic and CAF experience. His arrival is particularly interesting because City are preparing for their first adventure into continental football in the CAF Confederation Cup.

6 Bethuel Muzeu
Sekhukhune United
Zimbabwe

For Bethel Muzeu, this move represents the reward for years of patience, persistence and goals scored in difficult circumstances, with the Zimbabwean finally earning his opportunity to test himself in the top flight after spending the past four seasons carrying much of the attacking responsibility at Black Leopards in the Motsepe Foundation Championship. The 26-year-old found the net 39 times during his spell in the second tier, impressive numbers considering Lidoda Duvha were so often battling at the wrong end of the table, and every transfer window seemed to bring another round of speculation about whether a Premiership club would finally take the plunge. It eventually took

relegation to open the door, but Muzeu now has the opportunity he has been waiting for, and Sekhukhune United will hope his hunger for goals follows him into the top division.

5 Adolf Mtasingwa
Kaizer Chiefs
Tanzania

Adolf Mtasingwa was one of the more intriguing additions to Kaizer Chiefs' squad, arriving from Tanzanian outfit Azam with a reputation as a talented player whose career has already taken him far beyond home. The 27-year-old spent time in the United States during his education before continuing his football development in Europe, with spells at Icelandic clubs KR Reykjavík and Völsungur providing an unusual but valuable route into professional football. Injuries have disrupted his progress and perhaps prevented him from building the momentum many expected, but Chiefs have clearly seen enough to believe there is something worth unlocking. Now, under the spotlight of Naturena and the enormous expectations that accompany the gold and black shirt, Mtasingwa has the stage to turn potential and experience into a sustained impact.



4 Faveur Kouassi

AmaZulu

Ivory Coast

Faveur Kouassi is another recruit whose career has already carried him across several football cultures before arriving in South Africa, and the Ivorian goalkeeper brings with him a fascinating mixture of domestic experience, European exposure and African continental football. He began his career with ASEC Mimosas, one of the most respected development clubs in Ivory Coast, before gaining experience with several other clubs in his homeland and later venturing abroad with spells in the United Arab Emirates and France. His journey eventually brought him to Malian giants Djoliba AC, where his performances earned him the opportunity to take another step into a new league with AmaZulu. At 29, Kouassi is no longer simply a prospect waiting to be discovered, but a goalkeeper entering his prime who could provide Usuthu with the composure and experience needed to navigate a demanding season.

3 Ghampani Lungu

Orlando Pirates

Zambia

Ghampani Lungu has spent so much of his career in South Africa that his move to



Orlando Pirates feels less like an arrival and more like the next chapter in a long-running Betway Premiership story, but there is still plenty of excitement around what the Zambian international can offer the champions. Lungu arrived from Power Dynamos in 2018 and quickly established himself at SuperSport United, where his energy, work rate and willingness to attack made him a favourite among supporters. He eventually accumulated 180 league appearances for the club, including during its transition into Siwelele FC, scoring 23 goals along the way. Now 27 and entering his prime, Lungu has traded consistency for expectation, moving to a club where every performance is scrutinised, and his early goals suggest he may be ready for the challenge.

2 Jonah Fabisch

Golden Arrows

Zimbabwe

Jonah Fabisch may have arrived at Golden Arrows with one of the most intriguing backstories of the transfer window, with the Zimbabwe international becoming the subject of widespread speculation after he was spotted at OR Tambo Airport and the football world was left guessing about his destination. The former Hamburger SV prospect eventually emerged as an Arrows signing, bringing with him an entire career shaped by German football, despite representing Zimbabwe at the international level. The son of renowned German coach Reinhard Fabisch, Jonah has spent virtually his entire footballing life in Germany, developing within a system renowned for its tactical discipline and technical education. His arrival in South Africa therefore represents a fascinating change of scenery, and with Arrows looking for a replacement for Isaac Cissé following his move to Royal Charleroi, Fabisch has an opportunity to bring something different to the Durban-based club.

1 Sebastian Pedersen

Orlando Pirates

Norway

There is perhaps no new foreign signing in the Betway Premiership carrying quite as much intrigue as Sebastian Pedersen, the Norwegian striker whose arrival at Orlando Pirates has sparked curiosity well beyond the Buccaneers’ supporters. European players rarely make the journey south to Africa, and a Norwegian footballer arriving at one of South Africa’s biggest clubs is unusual enough, but the timing has added another layer of fascination, with Norway enjoying a golden period on the international stage. Supporters have already dubbed Pedersen ‘Baby Haaland’, although amusingly he is actually a year older than Erling Haaland, and the nickname says more about the expectations surrounding his arrival than it does about their respective careers. The Bucs faithful have also adopted Norwegian fans’ famous Viking Row, seen during the recent FIFA World Cup. The former Sogndal Fotball striker has played for seven other Norwegian clubs and now faces an entirely new footballing culture, a new tactical environment and the immense expectations of the Pirates faithful, with everyone waiting to discover whether the Norwegian can turn the curiosity into goals.



ACE OF THE WEEK: QUWAN PLAATJIES

Stellenbosch forward Quwan Plaatjies is our iDiski Times Ace of the Week after producing one of the most extraordinary debuts in Betway Premiership history. The 20-year-old earned his promotion to the senior squad after catching the eye with the Stellies' DStv Diski Challenge side, but few could have predicted just how spectacularly he would announce himself on the big stage. Making his first-ever senior appearance for Gavin Hunt's side, Plaatjies needed just 55 minutes to etch his name into league and club history, scoring an astonishing hat-trick as Stellenbosch swept aside Marumo Gallants 3-1 at Athlone Stadium last Friday. Three goals on his senior debut, a first in PSL history, were the stuff of dreams. For a young player stepping into senior football for the first time, it was a remarkable statement of intent, and a performance worthy of our 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.

KIANGA'S EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEY TO SLOVAN BRATISLAVA

by Lorenz Köhler

There are football stories that begin in grand academies, under the watchful eyes of scouts and surrounded by the certainty that professional football is the destination. Manasse Kianga's story began very differently.

It started in Johannesburg, at the now-defunct Black Aces Academy, alongside players who would go on to represent some of South Africa's biggest clubs and earn opportunities abroad.

Kianga did not. For years, the dream appeared to be slipping further away.

A move from South Africa to England created one obstacle after another. His South African passport restricted his ability to progress through the English football pyramid. Trials came and went. Clubs showed interest, only for paperwork to intervene. COVID-19 arrived at precisely the wrong time. Eventually, the 24-year-old found himself playing amateur football in England.

Then came Slovakia.

And now, remarkably, Kianga is two games away from the UEFA Champions League league phase with Slovan Bratislava, working under African football royalty Yaya Touré.

It is a journey that sounds almost too improbable to be true. But for the Johannesburg-born forward, every setback has become part of the story.

"I left South Africa in 2017," Kianga tells iDiski Times.

"I was at Black Aces between the ages of 14 and 17. Samkelo Zwane from Kaizer Chiefs, we played in the same age group, same team. Bradley Cross was a year older than me, Bontle [Molefe], the goalkeeper, I played with him as well."

Black Aces was his only academy experience. The rest was football survival.

Born in Johannesburg to Congolese parents, Kianga was South African in upbringing, culture and football education. He attended Observatory East Primary before moving to Edenglen for high school. Johannesburg was home.

His mother's career eventually changed everything. An opportunity took the family to the United Kingdom, and what initially looked like the next chapter of Kianga's football journey quickly became an exercise in patience.

"I did two months of high school in England and I was basically done," he recalls.

The family moved between Brighton, London and Sheffield within months. Kianga and his older brother eventually joined a local Sunday League side simply to continue playing.

There was no academy structure. No clear pathway. No guarantee that football would become a profession.

But he kept playing. Wickersley FC followed. Then FC Rossington Main. Grantham Town. Workshop Town. Sheffield FC.

There was even a potential opportunity with Carlisle United in League Two after he was scouted, but lockdown arrived before the trial could take place.

Another door closed.

"I was also meant to go on trial after being scouted by Carlisle in League Two, but then lockdown happened," he says.

Kianga returned to Grantham for a few months, spent time at Workshop Town and then had a season with Sheffield FC before trialling at Bradford Park Avenue



in the National League North.

Again, he could not sign. Again, he returned to Rossington. At some point, the dream of professional football could easily have disappeared. Instead, it became personal.

At Rossington, Kianga transformed himself from a player trying to stay in the game into one who could no longer be ignored.

Playing primarily as a centre-forward but also from either wing, he used his ability on both feet to become a dangerous attacking player.

Over his time at the club, he scored 51 goals in 115 appearances and helped Rossington earn promotion in his first season.

For a player who had been unable to secure the necessary documentation to climb the English football pyramid, the numbers were extraordinary.

But they were not enough to change his immigration status.

“I was still at Rossington due to my documents,” he explains. “I couldn’t really go higher than that level of football. I couldn’t get a work permit to play, as a South African.”

That was the problem. Not ability. Not ambition. Not production. Paperwork. The solution would come from an unlikely connection.

Kianga met Milan Lalkovic, a former Chelsea player, who had links to the Professional Footballers’ Association in England. He explained his situation and, rather than allowing another talented player to become trapped in the lower reaches of the English game, Lalkovic helped identify another route.

Slovakia.

“I explained my situation to him,” Kianga says. “He was like, okay, you’re 22-years-old, you need a change.”

In August 2025, Kianga made the bold decision to leave England and move to Slovakia.

He joined Lokomotiva Kosice in the third tier. It was another leap into the unknown. But this time, the football itself would be allowed to speak.

He impressed. Half a season later, an agent approached him.

“I was contacted by an agent while playing there,” Kianga says. “He realised I was doing well, so he asked if I had an

agent, which I didn’t at the time.

“He told me he thinks I am ready for the step up.”

That step was Slovan Bratislava.

The plan was initially modest: join the club’s B team, competing in the second division, and work towards an opportunity with the senior side.

Kianga went on trial. One week later, he had a contract. From March to May, he scored three goals and provided two assists in nine league appearances for Slovan’s reserves.

The next target was obvious. The first team.

But football, as Kianga had learned by now, rarely follows a straight line. On June 13, Yaya Touré was appointed head coach of Slovan’s senior team. A few weeks later, Kianga received the message that could change his career forever.

“Literally two days before the season started for both the A and B team, I was called up to the first team.”

There had been no first-team pre-season, no extended period of integration, no months to settle into Touré’s system.

An injury to the striker and right winger opened a space, and Slovan decided to look internally rather than immediately entering the transfer market.

Kianga was the answer.

He remembers waking up to a WhatsApp message from his assistant coach.



“Congratulations, you have been promoted to the first team for training and maybe play on Sunday.”

He trained Friday, he trained Saturday, then came Sunday. Kianga expected a place on the bench and perhaps a late cameo. Instead, Touré named him in the starting XI.

“I was surprised,” he says. “It showed that I impressed the coach more than I thought.”

Two days with the senior squad, a starting place — and then, the moment.

Kianga scored on his league debut and added an assist as Slovan cruised to a 4-0 victory over Banská Bystrica.

He followed that with another assist in a 3-0 win over Podbrezová.

Suddenly, the player who had spent years battling to simply find a professional foothold was making an impact at one of Slovakia’s biggest clubs.

And then came Europe.

Touré had not yet seen enough of him to trust Kianga with a start in the Champions League qualifiers. The rest of the squad had completed a full pre-season together.

Kianga had barely been with them for two weeks. So against Swedish side Mjällby AIF, he started on the bench.

“I spoke to Yaya before the UCL game in Sweden,” he says. “He said I’m going to be on the bench because he’s not seen enough of me.”

There was no disappointment. Kianga understood. He had waited too long to allow impatience to dictate his response.

Then Touré called him.

“He told me I need to come on, make a difference and score a goal.”

The instruction was simple, the opportunity was enormous and in the 90th minute, Kianga delivered.

A Champions League goal. A winner.

For a player who had once been unable to obtain permission to play above the lower levels of English football, it was a surreal moment.

Touré’s reaction was equally significant.

“He came to me and said, ‘Well done, I knew that you would play an important role, even if it was just 10 or 15 minutes, but you did well and that’s what I like in players.’”

But the praise went beyond a post-match pat on the back. Touré had seen

something in Kianga that extended beyond the goal itself — a personality and versatility that could give Slovan another dimension.

“Manna was brilliant, that’s what I want from my players coming in, they changed the game and contributed a lot,” Touré said after Kianga’s goal in the third-round Champions League qualifier.

“I like players with personality. Since he’s been with us he’s always improving. He played number nine, I prefer him as a winger, but he gave me new ideas. He can play in this position, fantastic player.

“For his age, how cool he was when he got the ball. For me, I would do one touch, but he controlled, passed the defender and after that he finishes. Phew, top drawer.”

Those words carry particular weight given the circumstances of Kianga’s arrival.

Touré had barely worked with him for two weeks before sending him into a Champions League qualifier, yet the forward responded with the kind of composure his manager clearly values.

The goal was not simply about being in the right place at the right time. Kianga had to receive the ball, remain calm, take on his defender and then finish — precisely the sequence Touré singled out when explaining why the moment impressed him.

It was another indication that Kianga’s journey had brought him to this level not merely because of persistence, but because the ability had always been there.



Slovan won the tie and Kianga started the second leg, helping the club progress 4-1 on aggregate.

Now they face NK Celje in the final qualifying round.

Two games stand between Slovan Bratislava and the Champions League league phase.

For Kianga, the significance goes far beyond European football. It is vindication. Of Black Aces. Of Sunday League football. Of Rossington. Of the failed trials. Of Carlisle. Of Bradford Park Avenue. Of every time paperwork said no. Of the decision to leave England. Of the decision to trust Slovakia.

And of the belief that professional football was still possible when almost everything suggested otherwise.

“With everything that went on in England, leaving there to come to Slovakia, at that moment after the first game, it made me realise that I made a good decision for my life and career,” he says. “At my age, if it didn’t work, it was my last chance.”

That sentence perhaps explains the player better than any statistic.

Kianga knew what was at stake. He knew another opportunity might not come. So when it finally arrived, he took it.

Touré’s tactical guidance has also offered him another dimension. The former Manchester City and FC Barcelona midfielder quickly identified Kianga’s versatility and preference for operating with freedom.

The conversation between the two was simple. Touré asked for his preferred position.

Kianga explained that he enjoyed being mobile and could play either as a striker or winger.

Touré saw something else. The right wing.

“A player who likes getting on the ball a lot, dribble past my man and make things happen,” Kianga recalls of his manager’s assessment.

It is perhaps the perfect role for a player who has spent his career refusing to be confined to one position, one country or one definition.

He is 1.84m, 78kg, naturally versatile and both-footed.

He speaks English, French and Lingala, while still understanding Zulu from his years growing up in Johannesburg.

And despite having spent the bulk of his footballing life abroad, there is no mistaking where the story began.

Johannesburg. Black Aces.

The same footballing environment that produced players such as Zwane, Cross and Molefe.

The difference is that Kianga’s route took him much further away before bringing him to the brink of the biggest stage in European club football.

From the amateur fields of England to a Champions League winner under Yaya Touré, the journey has been anything but conventional.

But perhaps that is what makes it so compelling. Kianga was never the academy graduate with the easy road mapped out in front of him. He was the player who had to keep knocking. Eventually, someone opened the door. Then another. And another.

Now, with Slovan Bratislava two matches away from the Champions League league phase, Manasse Kianga is no longer waiting for his football story to begin.

It already has.

And after everything it took to get here, he intends to make sure it is only the beginning.

