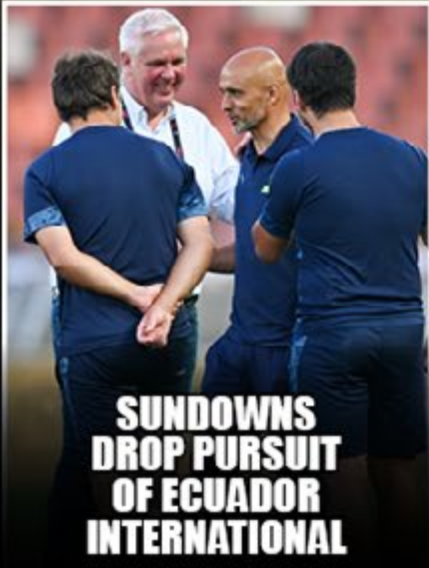




CAN DOWNS WIN THE CLASH OF THE CONTINENTS?



MOHAFAE ON GALLANTS EXIT, MABUZA'S BUCS MOVE & HIS DREAM FOR MATULUDI



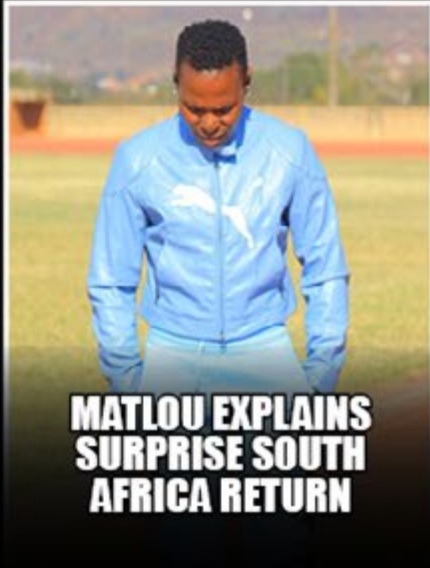
SUNDOWNS DROP PURSUIT OF ECUADOR INTERNATIONAL



10 'FOREIGN' BAFANA OPTIONS PITSO COULD LOOK AT



MTN8 IN NUMBERS: BUCS' STANDOUT DEFENCE VS DOWNS' FLOWING ATTACK



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Durban City are in talks with Cameroonian striker Jules Armand Kooh, as they look to add firepower to their attack. The 27-year-old, a two-time Golden Boot winner in Cameroon, was with Dynamo Douala last season and also had a stint in Tunisia with reigning league champions Club Africain. With Jean Lwamba and Tashreeq Morris the only recognised number nines at the club, City are seeking further reinforcements to balance out the squad that has CAF inter-club commitments this season.



Mamelodi Sundowns have ended their pursuit for Ecuador international midfielder Jhegson Méndez after being rebuffed in their interest by Independiente del Valle. The 29-year-old defensive midfielder has been capped 38 times by the Ecuador senior national team and is among the leading midfielders in South America. Reports linked Masandawana with Jordy Alcívar but it was in fact his teammate the club was pursuing before the recent signing of Thabo Cele as a free agent.



South Africa youth international Thato Sibiya has made quite the impression in his first weeks with LOSC Lille, as he trains and features for the club's reserve side. The 20-year-old joined the French giants from Mamelodi Sundowns on a season-long loan shortly after signing a new deal with the African champions. Sources indicate Lille have an option to make the deal permanent in January, and even one to terminate at the mid-season window if they see no long-term future for the left-back. But early indications are that Sibiya has already left an impression on the technical staff, despite his lack of match fitness on arrival – and there's positivity around his future.



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RICHARDS BAY TO PULL PLUG ON GABRIEL AFTER WINLESS START?



Richard Bay owner Jomo Biyela is reportedly in the market for a new head coach after a difficult opening to the 2026/27 season has left the Natal Rich Boyz searching for answers.

The KwaZulu-Natal outfit are currently without a win from their opening six matches, with Gabriel having initially taken charge alongside Papi Zothwane as co-head coaches following the departure of Brandon Truter. However, with results failing to improve, the club could now be considering another change on the technical bench.

It is understood that Biyela, who was just elected as a SAFA national executive committee member, has already sounded out several potential candidates as he weighs up a new direction for the club, with the upcoming FIFA international break potentially providing an opportunity to make a change without disrupting the season further.

Gabriel has been part of the club since 2021, having served in a number of different capacities after previously spending several years at Uthongathi, and his experience within the organisation made his elevation into the head coaching structure a logical one. However, the

difficult start has seemingly prompted Biyela to explore alternative options.

One name that has been linked with the position is former Marumo Gallants coach Phuti Mohafe, although at this stage it remains unclear whether he is under serious consideration. After making enquiries with the coach's camp, there appears to be little to suggest that discussions have progressed to an advanced stage, with the situation still very much in its early stages.

Mohafe's most recent spell at Gallants ended prematurely after another turbulent period at the club, which has developed a reputation for instability on and off the pitch. Gallants have since moved on, appointing Namibian coach Ronnie Kanalelo, who previously worked with African Stars, who are set to face Orlando Pirates in the second preliminary round of the CAF Champions League.

For now, Richard Bay appear to be assessing their options, with the next few weeks potentially providing a clearer indication of whether Gabriel will remain in charge or whether Biyela opts for a fresh voice in the dugout.

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‘SUNDOWNS MUST NOT CRY ABOUT THIS RESULT’

While Orlando Pirates were busy with continental football, Betway Premiership action continued, but both Mamelodi Sundowns and Kaizer Chiefs were held to draws by Chippa United and Polokwane City, respectively.

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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Tso on Chiefs Draw v Polokwane City

“Brandon Petersen should have done better.

“A player cannot score from a corner. Cover your first pole as a goalkeeper. Imagine, this is the same goalkeeper we were asking to play at Bafana Bafana.

“Polokwane City deserved a point from the game. Kaizer Chiefs scored first, and

they started defending their goal.

“They invited the pressure from the home team. Good goal from Lebohang Maboe for the opening goal of the match.”

Junior Khanye on Sundowns draw v Chippa

“Sundowns must not cry about this result because football is like this sometimes.

“The pitch conditions were challenging for both sides.

“The substitutions from Miguel Cardoso saved him from the loss.

“Good goal by Antonio Van Wyk. Sundowns would have been unlucky to lose this because they had chances.

“Chippa United did well at home. They always had 3v3s and 4v4s against Sundowns defenders. They needed quality in front of goal.

“They used the conditions to their advantage.”



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CLASH OF THE CONTINENTS

By Matshelane Mamabolo

“Grant Kekana makes a last-ditch sliding tackle to win the ball and leaves Ousmane Dembele frustrated at having a goal-scoring opportunity taken away from him. Shortly thereafter, the referee blew the final whistle as Mamelodi Sundowns beat

Paris Saint-Germain 1-0 thanks to the earlier goal scored by Teboho Mokoena from a first-half free-kick.”

It’s a dream result. Fantasy football stuff, really. But it could happen.

As African champions, the Brazilians are in with a chance of taking on the European champions later in the year for the FIFA Intercontinental Cup at a venue yet to be announced.

The short road to the dream match begins on Saturday when Miguel Cardoso and his men take on Al Ahli Saudi for the African-Asian-Pacific Cup at Loftus Versfeld on Saturday (September 19).

Be victorious on Saturday, and Sundowns will then contest for the FIFA Challenger Cup against the winners of a clash between CONCACAF champions Toluca of Mexico and a yet-to-be-determined champion of CONMEBOL (South America).

Success in that clash will then earn them that dream contest against the two-time European champions.

But we’re getting ahead of ourselves. Sundowns have to first negotiate their way over the tricky hurdle that is Al Ahli Saudi, a club that – like them – has been assembled via the help of billionaire owners. Perhaps most significantly though, this is a team whose rise to Asian domination – Al Ahli Saudi have won the Asian Champions League two seasons in succession – was sparked by former Sundowns coach Pitso Mosimane.

It was Jingles who resurrected Ahli after they were relegated from the elite division, the man who is now back in charge of Bafana Bafana, leading them to promotion.

He did not get to enjoy the fruit of his labour, though, as the club went all ‘galactico’ following their promotion by hiring a ‘big name’ coach and splashing out on superstar players.

Trott Moloto could well be the Ace in Sundowns’ cards ahead of Saturday’s African-Asian Cup tie against Saudi Arabian club Al Ahli.

Moloto is a long-serving member of the Brazilians’ technical team and continues to be a part of the club’s administration – never missing from their matches. As the African champions prepare to square off against the Asian champions at Loftus Versfeld, Moloto expressed his readiness to share insights that saw him win the equivalent of this clash – albeit at national team level – nearly three decades ago.

Of course, the game has changed a lot since Moloto’s Bafana Bafana beat Saudi Arabia in the Afro-Asian Cup over two legs. But ‘Trapattoni’ – as Moloto is affectionately known – believes he can be of use to the Brazilians.





“I’m sure Steve Komphela (the Sundowns assistant coach) knows that I’ve previously beaten Saudi Arabia and I am sure he will make the technical team aware of that. And should they need me to share, I will definitely do so.”

He admits that the cosmopolitan nature of Al Ahli means the country’s football will be slightly different from what he remembers of them from that time he coached Bafana. Still, the fact that he beat them should help give Sundowns some confidence, knowing they have a man in their side who has conquered the Saudis before.

Moloto recalls that Saudi Arabia were a solid and organised team and credited his success over them in that 1999 Afro-Asian Cup to not only having a bunch of determined players but also the insights he’d gained the year before.

A year prior at the FIFA 1998 World Cup in France, Moloto sat on the bench as one of Philippe Troussier’s assistants as Bafana drew their final group match 1-1 against the Saudis courtesy of a Shaun Bartlett goal.

“I had a great working relationship, and I really learnt a lot from him, and yes, there were things from that draw that I learnt about the Saudis which helped us to beat them in that intercontinental cup.”

Moloto says all at Sundowns are looking forward to showing just why they are African champions by beating their Asian counterparts.

“There’s a lot of motivation for this match because the players know this kind of match can elevate their standing in world football and even provide some of them with opportunities to move on to bigger things. We are going out there prepared to put not only the club and the country on the map but also to represent the continent. So, there is a lot at stake, and

DAVIDS: “I BACK SUNDOWNS, REALLY, TO GIVE THEM A HARD TIME. IN THE END, I THINK WHAT MIGHT MAKE THE DIFFERENCE IS INDIVIDUAL QUALITY, INDIVIDUAL MOMENTS, MOMENTS OF BRILLIANCE, REALLY, THAT COULD INFLUENCE THE GAME.”

we are ready to give it our best.”

Ahead of the match, iDiski Senior Writer Matshelane Mamabolo spoke to Saudi-based Maahier Davids, the South African coach who was Mosimane’s assistant at the Saudi club, to get the lowdown on what Sundowns can expect. Davids is currently an assistant at Al-Fateh.

MM: Maahier, thanks for making time for us. Brother, Sundowns are playing against your former club, Al Ahli Saudi. What can you tell me about them?

MD: A lot has changed in the last couple of years with the PIF coming, taking control of the club and really investing quite a lot. Over the last two years, they’ve signed some really good players, the likes of Ivan Toney, Riyad Mahrez and Roberto Firmino in the past as well. They’ve got [Mehri] Demiral, Roger Ibanez, Galeno, all really, really top international players. And, of course, winning the Champions League back-to-back, it’s really, really showcasing their quality and their ability. The big club that they are, they’re finally backing it up with big trophies.

MM: They’re not really firing on all cylinders currently, though, are they?

MD: Yeah, at the moment, I must say, they’ve had a very challenging start. And from the outside, it’s quite clear that



part of the challenge is that the coach [Germany’s Matthias Jaissle] just left for Newcastle United, having started the pre-season with them. And it’s not easy to change coaches just before the start of the new season. You had one plan and then all of a sudden you had to make a change. So that is a challenge, something that they have to overcome.

MM: And their losses were not limited to just the coach.

MD: Of course, they also lost two really, really key players, in Franck Kessie, who was the heart of the team, a really inspiring leader and influential player. And, of course, this star man, Riyad Mahrez, who had a fantastic time here in Saudi. They, of course, replaced him with [Francisco] Trinchao, the Portuguese international. But, of course, it is not easy coming from Europe and all of a sudden coming into the Saudi League – especially this time of the year, with the weather quite hot. It takes some time to acclimatise and adapt to the new environment. And let’s not forget Ivan Toney, a superstar really, coming from the English Premier League. He’s been fantastic since he’s arrived in Saudi. So he continues with Trinchao and Galeno as one of the front three players who is really, really influential. And another one we know, the Senegalese goalkeeper and former Chelsea player Edouard Mendy, is really, really important for them. Within the team as well, they’ve got some good local players, Ziyad Al-Johani, very key in terms of playing in the midfield, Saudi international. So they’ve got a good mix, a good blend in terms of local and international players.

MM: How do they play the game? What’s their style?

MD: That’s a little bit changing now with the new coach coming in. But their style is very attacking. It’s very much using the wing play, very much using the target man, Ivan Toney dropping in between, staying up front, a focal point, and using

DAVIDS: “WINNING THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE BACK-TO-BACK, IT’S REALLY, REALLY SHOWCASING THEIR QUALITY AND THEIR ABILITY. THE BIG CLUB THAT THEY ARE, THEY’RE FINALLY BACKING IT UP WITH BIG TROPHIES.”

the midfielders, Al-Johani and [France’s Valentin] Atangana, to play through the lines. So they’re still adapting to the new way of playing, but definitely through the wings and up front it’s very influential; the wings and full-backs attacking up and down.

MM: What do you expect of their match against Sundowns? Do Sundowns stand a chance of beating them?

MD: Coming up against Sundowns, I think going to Loftus, going to South Africa and playing at altitude will not be easy for them. I think it will be a challenge for them. And we have to respect Sundowns as well. At this stage, Sundowns is an international brand. They showed it in the [Club] World Cup and, of course, by winning the African Champions League again. And they’ve got fantastic players. So you ask me, do they stand a chance? Of course, I back Sundowns, really, to give them a hard time. In the end, I think what might make the difference is individual quality, individual moments, moments of brilliance, really, that could influence the game. What you find a lot in Saudi, with this type of profile of players, games are decided in moments. And I think it might come down to that as well. But if Sundowns play their football, which I know they will, and I’m confident they will put on a good show, I think they stand a good chance of not only competing, but winning the game.



MTN8 IN NUMBERS: BUCS' STANDOUT DEFENCE VS DOWNS' FLOWING ATTACK



The stage is set for another heavyweight collision in South African football, with Orlando Pirates and Mamelodi Sundowns preparing to meet in the MTN8 Final on October 10, following the extended international break, although the venue is yet to be confirmed, and with history hanging over the occasion as the Buccaneers chase something no club has managed before: a record fifth consecutive MTN8 crown.

It is a fitting final for a competition that has produced plenty of drama along the way, because when the two most dominant forces in South African football over the past few seasons meet with silverware on the line, there is always a little more at stake than simply the trophy itself.

Pirates have become the undisputed kings of the MTN8 in recent years, winning the last FOUR editions, while Sundowns remain the club that set the benchmark for sustained domestic dominance for almost a decade, and this final therefore brings together two clubs who have spent the better part of the

modern era setting the pace, collecting trophies and, increasingly, measuring themselves against one another.

The last two finals have belonged emphatically to Pirates, who beat Stellenbosch 3-0 in 2025 and 3-1 in 2024, while the 2023 showpiece provided another chapter in the rivalry with Sundowns, as the Buccaneers prevailed on penalties following a goalless draw. In 2022, AmaZulu were the runners-up as Pirates edged the final 1-0, meaning that the Buccaneers have been present in each of the last four finals and have walked away with the trophy every single time.

The last team other than Pirates to lift the MTN8 trophy was Sundowns, who defeated Cape Town City on penalties after a 1-1 draw in the 2021 final, and while that may now feel like a different era in the competition, the Brazilians have another opportunity to reclaim the trophy.

Pirates' current MTN8 dynasty began in 2020, when Joe Zinnbauer ended a





trophy drought at the club and, in doing so, seemingly broke the dam wall.

What followed has been an extraordinary period of silverware for the Buccaneers, who, since the beginning of the 2022/23 season, have collected eight domestic trophies: five under Jose Riveiro, and three already under Abdeslam Ouaddou, including last season's Betway Premiership title, finally bringing an end to Sundowns' almost decade-long reign at the top of South African league football.

Sundowns, of course, have hardly been standing still. They have won five trophies since 2022/23, including four of their eight consecutive domestic league titles, and while they missed out on the league last season, they became African champions again after winning the 2025/26 CAF Champions League, underlining the remarkable consistency of a club that has dominated South Africa while also establishing itself as a force on the continental stage.

Only four other clubs have managed to interrupt the Pirates-Sundowns monopoly on silverware during that period, with Stellenbosch and Magesi winning the Carling Knockout, while Kaizer Chiefs and Durban City have each lifted the Nedbank Cup. The numbers therefore tell their own story: this MTN8 final is not merely a meeting between two big clubs, but another installment in the battle between the two sides that have defined the country's trophy landscape in recent years.

Goals Galore

If the MTN8 has provided anything so far this season, it has been entertainment.

Across the eight matches played in the competition, the four quarter-finals and both legs of the two semi-finals, there have been 26 goals, producing an average of 3.25 goals per game, a figure that reflects just how little interest there has been in easing into the tournament.

Sixteen of those goals came in the quarter-finals alone, with Sekhukhune United and AmaZulu producing the most spectacular shootout of goals as Sekhukhune edged a seven-goal thriller 4-3. Sundowns also had to work for their place in the Last Four, overcoming Polokwane City 3-2, while Pirates defeated Durban City 2-1 and Golden

Arrows edged Kaizer Chiefs 1-0.

The semi-finals then produced contrasting stories.

Pirates were ruthless against Sekhukhune, winning the first leg 1-0 away from home before turning the second leg into a statement at Orlando Stadium, where they powered to a 3-0 victory to secure their place in yet another MTN8 final.

Sundowns and Golden Arrows, meanwhile, produced perhaps the more intriguing tie, with Arrows stunning the Brazilians by winning 1-0 in the first leg in Tshwane before Sundowns responded in KwaZulu-Natal, winning 3-2 to level the aggregate score and ultimately progress on the away-goal rule.

Remarkably, five of the eight matches played so far have been won by the away team, while the goals have been split perfectly down the middle, with 13 scored by home sides and 13 by visitors.

There has been plenty of bite alongside the attacking football, however, with officials showing a whopping 33 yellow cards across the eight matches, an average of 4.13 per game, evidence of just how fiercely contested the competition has been. There has been only one red card, with Durban City's Brooklyn Poggenpoel receiving his marching orders during their quarter-final defeat to Pirates.

With the final still to come, the numbers suggest there is little reason to expect the goals or intensity to disappear now.

Who's Been Scoring?

The race for the MTN8 Top Scorer has already produced a cluster of contenders, with five players having scored twice so far.

Thandolwenkosi Ngwenya struck a brace for AmaZulu in their quarter-final defeat to Sekhukhune United, while Sede Dion found the net in both legs of Golden Arrows' semi-final against Sundowns, but neither player will have the opportunity to add to their tally in the final.

That leaves three other goal scorers on two each, who could still write themselves into the competition's history, with Gamphani Lungu making



an immediate impression after signing for Pirates, and so have both Cassius Mailula and Antonio Van Wyk after they joined Sundowns.

Lungu has already made a habit of producing important moments for Pirates this season, while Van Wyk and prodigal son Mailula have both demonstrated their ability to find the net during Sundowns' run to the final, setting up an intriguing individual subplot to a match already loaded with bigger narratives.

There are also several players sitting just one goal behind the leaders who could leapfrog them with a strike in the final. Sundowns' Marcelo Allende and Teboho Mokoena have both scored once, as have the Pirates trio of Kamogelo Sebelebele, Deon Hotto and Thapelo Mokobodi.

Patrick Maswanganyi also has a goal to his name in this year's competition, although his departure from Pirates means he will not be able to add to that tally in the final.

Meanwhile, Pirates striker Yanela Mbuthuma currently stands alone at the top of the assist charts, having provided two assists so far.

19 other players have registered one assist each, although only a handful will have the opportunity to turn that single contribution into something more in the final. Among those still alive are Sundowns' Themba Zwane, Iqraam Rayners, Van Wyk and Allende, as well as Pirates' Lungu, meaning that there are several players capable of influencing the final not only in front of goal but in the moments that create goals.

Defences To The Fore

While the attacking numbers have understandably grabbed much of the attention, the road to the final has also highlighted the importance of keeping the door firmly shut at the other end.

Pirates goalkeeper Sipho Chaine has arguably been the standout goalkeeper of the tournament so far, keeping two clean sheets across the semi-final against Sekhukhune United and helping the Buccaneers reach the final, having conceded just once in three matches.

That defensive record is particularly

striking given the attacking numbers elsewhere in the competition, with Pirates having allowed just a single goal across their three games.

Lebone Seema has also emerged as an important figure in that defensive record, helping provide the structure and solidity that has allowed Pirates to continue their remarkable run in the competition.

Golden Arrows' Edward Maova can also technically claim two clean sheets, although there is an unfortunate caveat attached to the second, as he was forced off injured after only 18 minutes of the second semi-final leg.

For Sundowns, the story has been rather different.

The Brazilians have scored their way into the final but have yet to keep a clean sheet in any of their three matches, conceding five goals along the way. They have nevertheless found a way through each challenge, beating Polokwane City 3-2 in the quarter-final before overturning the first-leg deficit against Arrows and eventually progressing on away goals.

And perhaps that contrast is what makes the final so intriguing.

Pirates arrive with the stronger defensive numbers and an extraordinary recent relationship with this particular trophy, while Sundowns arrive as the continental champions and the club that spent almost a decade setting the standard in domestic football. Pirates have scored their way through some difficult moments and now stand one victory away from a fifth straight MTN8 title, while Sundowns have already demonstrated in the semi-finals that they can absorb a setback and find a way back into a tie.

The numbers may tell us who has scored, who has conceded, who has kept clean sheets and who has collected the cards, but they cannot quite capture what makes this particular final so compelling: two clubs that have spent recent years competing for almost everything, now meeting once again with another piece of silverware on the line, and with the MTN8 trophy waiting to see whether it will remain in black and white for another year or make its way back to Chloorkop for the first time since 2021.



MTN8

BY THE NUMBERS

GOALS | ASSISTS | GOALS CONCEDED



MTN8 TOP GOAL-SCORERS

2

Thandolwenkosi Ngwenya (**AmaZulu**), Sede Dion (**Arrows**),
Cassius Mailula (**Sundowns**), Antonio Van Wyk (**Sundowns**),
Gamphani Lungu (**Pirates**)

1

Deon Hotto (**Pirates**), Kamogelo Sebelebele (**Pirates**), Thapelo Mokobodi (**Pirates**),
Marcelo Allende (**Sundowns**), Teboho Mokoena (**Sundowns**), Jean Lwamba (**Durban City**),
Taariq Fielies (**AmaZulu**), Bonginkosi Dlamini (**Polokwane City**), Tidimalo Molokwane (**Polokwane City**),
Givemore Khupe (**Sekhukhune**), Vuyo Letlapa (**Sekhukhune**), Tshepo Mokoane (**Sekhukhune**),
Ellis Rammala (**Sekhukhune**), Philani Khumalo (**Arrows**), Khulekani Shezi (**Arrows**)



MTN8 TOP ASSISTS

2

Yanela Mbuthuma (**Pirates**)

1

Antonio Van Wyk (**Sundowns**), Marcelo Allende (**Sundowns**), Themba Zwane (**Sundowns**),
Iqraam Rayners (**Sundowns**), Gamphani Lungu (**Pirates**), Sbangani Zulu (**Pirates**),
Ronaldo Van Neel (**Arrows**), Sabelo Sithole (**Arrows**), Philani Khumalo (**Arrows**),
Khulekani Shezi (**Arrows**), Givemore Khupe (**Sekhukhune**), Bright Ndlovu (**Sekhukhune**),
Mcedi Vandala (**Sekhukhune**), Ellis Rammala (**Sekhukhune**), Athini Maqokolo (**AmaZulu**),
Nkosikhona Radebe (**AmaZulu**), Keegan Allan (**AmaZulu**), Gaston Sirino (**Durban City**),
Lebohang Nkaki (**Polokwane City**)



MTN8 TOP GOALKEEPERS

(GOALS CONCEDED - MATCHES PLAYED)

0

Edward Maova (**Arrows**) - 2*

1

Sipho Chaine (**Pirates**) - 3, Brandon Petersen (**Chiefs**) - 1,
Ricardo Goss (**Sundowns**) - 1, Ayanda Ngwenya (**Polokwane City**) - 1

2

Frederick Asare (**Durban City**) - 1, Lindokuhle Mathebula (**Polokwane City**) - 1

3

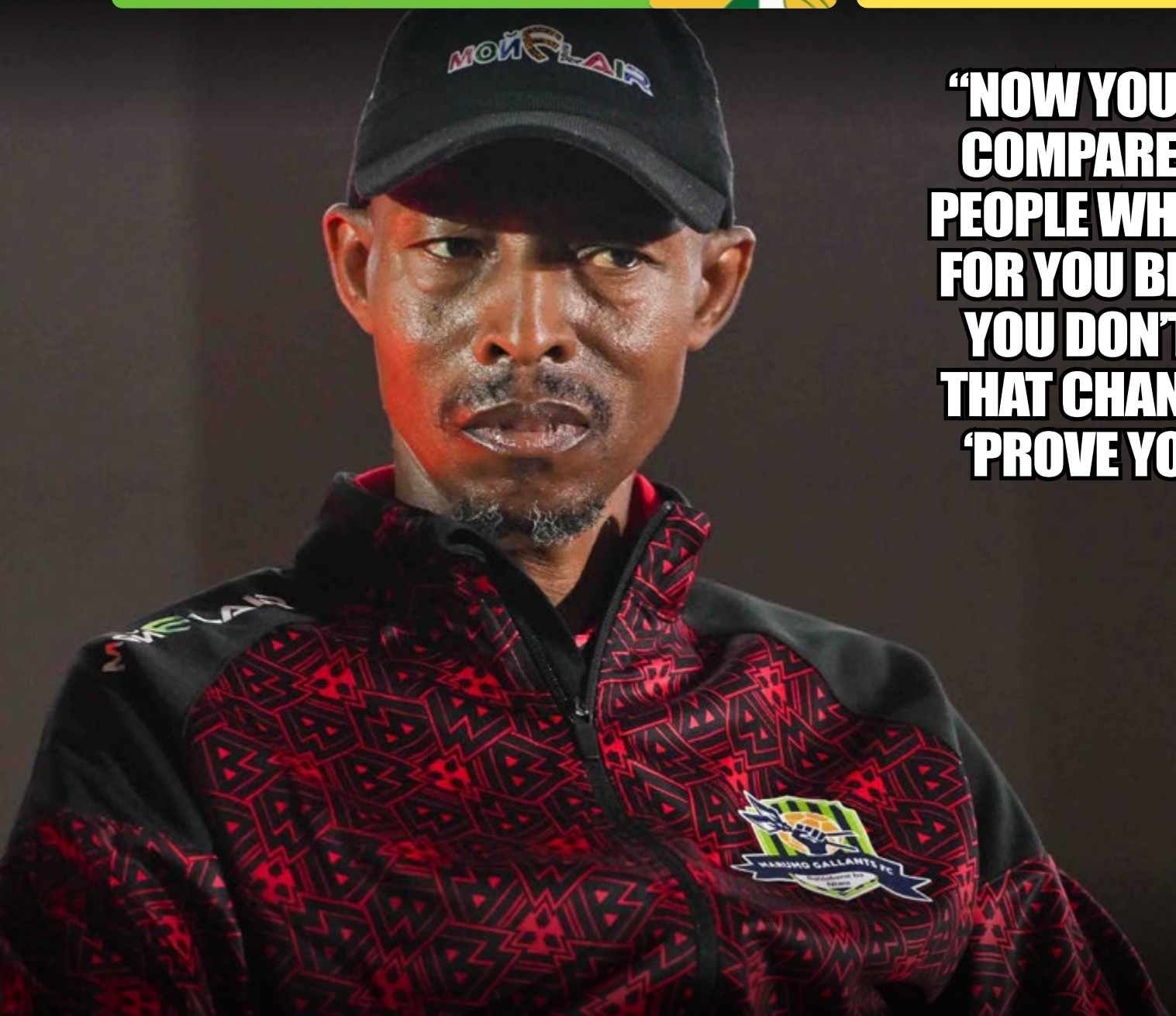
Thakasani Mbanjwa (**Arrows**) - 2*, Toaster Nsabata (**Sekhukhune**) - 1

4

Ronwen Williams (**Sundowns**) - 2, Melusi Buthelezi (**Sekhukhune**) - 2,
Faveur Kouassi (**AmaZulu**) - 1

*Partial games played due to substitutions





“NOW YOU START TO COMPARE ME WITH PEOPLE WHO WORKED FOR YOU BEFORE, BUT YOU DON'T GIVE ME THAT CHANCE TO SAY, ‘PROVE YOURSELF.’”

MOHAFE ON GALLANTS EXIT, MABUZA'S PIRATES MOVE & HIS DREAM FOR MATULUDI

Less than three months after his appointment as head coach of Marumo Gallants, PHUTI MOHAFE finds himself back in his home province of Limpopo, having been shown the door by the club alongside his former assistant Musa Bilankulu. Mohafe was only in charge of five Betway Premiership games, registered just two draws and left the side in the relegation zone. IDiski Times journalist LETHABO KGANYAGO caught up with the former Polokwane City mentor to reflect on his short stint with Bahlabane Ba Ntwa, where he revealed how he didn't expect the quick exit, areas he felt he didn't receive support on from his former bosses, and the good he thinks he did at the club. Mohafe also touches on the transfer of Bheki Mabuza to Orlando Pirates, calling him a potential replacement for Themba Zwane in the senior national team and that of Thabang Matuludi from City to Mamelodi Sundowns.

Lethabo Kganyago: Coach, thank you for speaking to us. How do you describe the past week?

Phuti Mohafe: I don't know how to put it, but I can say it was a hectic week for me. And with whatever that has transpired last week, I wasn't that... How can I say this? I didn't expect that news because of the timing of the season and the matches that we played. But I couldn't complain more because I couldn't control what the board came up with in terms of the decision they made.

LK: If you're saying that you didn't see it coming, with the season starting, and you could see that you're not getting results, was there a word to say you have support, you still have a bit of time? Is that where it's coming from to say you really expected it?

PM: I can say there were words of courage and words of support, but the moment that happened, you could see that this wasn't planned. In fact, I can say based on the performance of the team, I couldn't see it

coming because, yes, we didn't play that well on the first, the second, and the third match, but the team started to pick up on the third match. It was so unfortunate that when we picked up on the third match, we played against Sundowns. So the strategy that I used didn't suit the playing style of the team. But going forward on the fourth match, that is where you could see a lot of positives in what we have been implementing into the team, and the integration was starting to show because you could see how Marumo used to play and how the coach wants to play. It was a mixture of a good transition play and a mixture of good ball rotation possession play. So those things, they helped us a lot because we even scored two goals for the first time in a match, and we also scored two goals in another match. So scoring four goals in two matches, that was a lot of improvement from the club and the performance itself, in how the players were playing on the day. That shows that there is a lot of improvement.

LK: You were there working, and it sounds like you were supported; you did not even have any idea that your job was in danger. As media, we started reporting weeks before the confirmation that you could be replaced. What was your reaction when the message was delivered eventually?

PM: You know, when that happened, on the day I had a lengthy, lengthy discussion with the chairman. I even asked him myself: how does he see the team going forward? How does he see the team since I took over? So he himself admitted that he sees a lot of improvement, but the main stumbling block was the fact that the team is not getting results, and he was happy with the improvement of the team. It's just that the team was not getting results, so that is what forced the board and the chairman to pull the plug. But I think we have improved. I have improved that team massively, and I was also surprised to see them playing how they played against

**“NOW I CAN SAY I WASN'T
100% SUPPORTED IN
TERMS OF THE PLAYER
RECRUITMENT.”**

AmaZulu. And I said it's one of those things that are unexpected, so I just said it's fine; let me just pack my bags and leave.

LK: Everybody knows the nature of the job is results-based. Do you feel that maybe there was an element of impatience with what you're saying that you were going to turn the corner? You had less than 10 games; did you feel like you could have had a bit more time?

PM: There is never early in football because the more you stay down there and the more you don't get the results, you start to panic. And I think what inspired the chairman to pull the plug was also based on the previous results from last season, saying that we were in this position for this long, and now I felt like there is an element of comparison. Now you start to compare me with people who worked for you before, but you don't give me that chance to say, 'Prove yourself,' that wherever that you come from, you have been doing this. And I also gave one of my examples by saying, when I took over at Polokwane, it wasn't a rosy road. But there was a little bit of patience for me to build the team according to how I want them to play. In that limited time that I got, I improved Polokwane, and we started to play well, and we started to win matches. With the help of the former chairman, he brought in Coach Duncan [Lechesa] to help hand in hand. When I took over also from Coach [Lehlohonolo] Seema, I lost two matches in a row, the first two matches. So I won the third match, and on the fourth match it was a draw, and the fifth match it was a loss. So it was a matter of how I started, and when I took that and put it into perspective, I thought that, okay, I had a slow start when I took over. I had a slow start in the second season, meaning that this is the repetition of the previous seasons that I started with at Polokwane City. But not forgetting that Marumo themselves, the season before last, they started very slow. It's only last season that they won in the first two matches, but what happened after that, you could see that after that two wins, it was downward performances and results capturing.

LK: At Gallants you started with two draws and three defeats...

PM: You've got a new coach, you've got new players, you've got the old players, and you want to cut the habits of the old

players; you want to bring change into the team, and some of the players don't want to accept change. And you need to force that change into them to realise that this team we don't want it to be there. Change the mentality of the players. Let them come closer to where you are so that they know that this coach is a coach who wants hard work at all times. So those things, I think, starting from the third match, that is where we started to see those signs that now the team is improving. They're improving in terms of going forward. They are improving in terms of creativity. They are improving in terms of goal scoring. They are improving in terms of performance itself. The only thing that halted us was the way we conceded, because how we conceded was always individual mistakes. All our goals it was all individual mistakes. So this week you correct this; next week is another thing. But what I'm happy about myself at Marumo is I have improved Marumo in terms of creativity, in terms of how the team was starting to show. In terms of the creation, because I think even Marumo was the first time they scored two goals in two matches consecutively. But I said no, this is the cruelty of our industry, and I said it's okay. I take it on the chin, and I moved on.

LK: Coach, with the kind of targets they gave you, were you given the resources to help you? I mean, did you have the kind of players you wanted? Because I remember the interview we had where you said that you were worried about the defence.

PM: No, I don't think I was given fair support on that one because I spoke about the goalkeepers. I can't work with only two goalkeepers. We had two goalkeepers. Going forward, we are lacking at the back. We need centre-backs. I signed two young boys, but I couldn't use them, and I have to use one of them in the fifth match because I could see now, when we played Polokwane City, that we need a change at the back. And I needed a number six, a CDM. I needed a quality striker. But after getting a striker, I said, okay, things are coming all right. Now the striker is not coming to training. Then what? No stress. So now I can say I wasn't 100% supported in terms of the player recruitment because some of the positions that I wanted, I didn't get. You can imagine getting [Abdoulaye] Mariko. Mariko was signed on the day that I'm leaving; you can imagine

**“SEEING HIM
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LK: Daniel Msendami too...

PM: You can imagine Msendami coming in, and when you look back, you say, but this Msendami is the name that I have proposed when I first joined that club. You see, so now, how is it possible that I leave and he comes? But I said it's fair and fine, no stress, let it be, just move on, my boy.

LK: Yeah, I suppose it can be tough to take. And coach, you said you wanted to challenge yourself when you joined the club. Do you have any regrets that you made this move? Because also, a lot was made about it; some people thought you shouldn't have left Polokwane City?

PM: I don't regret anything about the decision I made going to Marumo because I took a risk, and I thought the risk that I take will work in my favour, but it wasn't to be. And on the risk that I took, I learned a lot. I learned a lot in terms of doing things differently from how I was doing them at Polokwane City. Yes, performance-wise, result-wise, I couldn't get the results. But I have learned in terms of the personality. I have learned in terms of the motivation, the courage, and I'm saying I don't regret, because where I come from now, the integration between what I wanted and what that club wanted, it took time to combine. It took time to click, and while it was taking time to click, the results were not forthcoming. So that is where we came short. Hence, I'm saying, have we had another two or three games, I think we should have turned the corner.

LK: I want to ask you about two players. When you started at Marumo, you felt that Bheki Mabuza was national team material. Were you surprised by his move, and when you see him at Pirates, does it put him in a good state to compete to be in the national team? Secondly, what would you say to Thabang Matuludi, who's now joined Mamelodi Sundowns?

PM: For Bheki Mabuza, it's something like what happened to Oswin Appollis. When Oswin came to Polokwane City, I was the first person to say I don't want to work with him because of the lazy character that he had. But working with him, I realised another part of him that I didn't know, and then I encouraged the part that I didn't know. That is when he started to rise to the occasion. So with Bheki Mabuza, when I arrived at Marumo, I said, no man, this player, this boy, I think he was not used properly in his position. Then I wanted to

change him from a winger to a number eight. Then I spoke with Coach Musa, and even Coach Musa agreed with me. He said, 'Coach, this boy is not a winger, he's a number eight and a number 10'. Then I said, okay. We agreed on that one, and I saw him as a national team player. I saw a player who's going to replace Themba Zwane in the national team. The way he's moving, he's packing a good shot. The way he's passing, his aggression, the understanding of manipulating the pockets, the understanding of receiving in the pockets. So I just saw a complete player when I saw Bheki Mabuza there, and that is why I said he is national team material. Seeing him going to Pirates, I still brace myself and say, you have done a splendid job... Going to Matuludi, I've always said about him that he's a good player, and at one stage I said I want him to play outside of the country. And seeing him going to Sundowns, I can only congratulate him and say, for him, maybe it's a dream come true. But I would have loved to see him play outside of the continent.

LK: That's still a possibility for him. I mean, at Sundowns there's Champions League football, and he's also part of the national team. My last question, coach: what do you do now? Are you staying home to recuperate? Are you sending out your CV? Is a return to Polokwane City something you would entertain?

PM: Honestly speaking, right now I'm with my family. I've just relaxed with my family, and it's been a long time that I didn't see my family. So I think staying at home and being with my family is what I need in the present moment to release the pressure that came with the Marumo job. I think also that my guys, they have to deal with what is coming; the agency has to deal with whatever that is coming my way. But for now, I'm relaxed at home. And you ask about the possibility of going back to Polokwane City; I think nothing is impossible. So it's up to the management of Polokwane on how they took how I left, and there is a phrase that goes let bygones be bygones, but you will never know. You will never know, but if that happens, okay; if it doesn't happen, then it's still okay.

LK: Did you leave on good terms?

PM: Yes. I don't think we have ever fought with the chairman.

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



MATLOU EXPLAINS SURPRISE SOUTH AFRICA RETURN

Veteran defender NOKO MATLOU is back home playing in the Hollywoodbets Super League after her contract at Cacereno Women's side in Spain ended earlier in the year. She has joined new side Ramatlaohle Ladies, who are in the Super Rise stream. Matlou, who retired from the senior national team last year, spent six years in Spain, where she also played for Eibar. She speaks to iDiski Times journalist LETHABO KGANYAGO in this edition about her reasons for coming back home and her reasons for choosing a low-key side. The 40-year-old also shares her opinion on why Banyana Banyana struggled at the recent Women's Africa Cup of Nations (WAFCON) tournament in Morocco and the new format of the domestic league.

Lethabo Kganyago: Noko, we always appreciate talking to you. What have you been up to since returning home?

Noko Matlou: I came back home, rested for a month in May, then I've been analysing Banyana's WAFCON games and attending awards ceremonies like the SA Sports Awards, which was an honour. But towards the end of June, I decided to get busy and joined a team from Mokopane, Ramatlaohle Ladies. That's where I'm at right now.

LK: What inspired the move to Ramatlaohle? I mean, it's a low-key team?

NM: When I came home, I had a lot of approaches from different teams. I had an approach from TS Galaxy, I had an offer from Diepkloof Ladies, the University of Fort Hare, then Ramatlaohle was also in the picture. Coming to the decision, I realised that it is a new team in the league. They have young kids in the team, so it was an opportunity to help them to learn from me. That's why I'm pushing them so that we can be in a better position. I think position four, just before the WAFCON started it's a good position for a new team just promoted to the Hollywoodbets.

LK: Why would you turn down a move to TS Galaxy because the assumption is that from the teams you mentioned they'd have a better pull?

NM: The reason why I didn't go to TS Galaxy is that they have a lot of players from Banyana Banyana. You can also look at a team like Mamelodi Sundowns; they also have a lot of players from Banyana. And when you look at Ramatlaohle, they have a lot of unknown players; that's my biggest reason to try and help to raise the profile of the team. And this is important for me because the team is unknown, and with me here, hopefully more high-profile players can also come.

LK: And is this a permanent return?

NM: The situation is that my contract with my last team ended, but I did have offers from a few teams [abroad]. But because my mom was not feeling well, I decided to be home for at least six



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months until January; then I'll decide what happens. Even the teams that wanted me, they wanted me to join in July for pre-season, which would have been short notice. With this opportunity, I can be home and monitor my mom.

LK: Makes sense, and I'm sure she also appreciates this time because you've been overseas for six years...

NM: That's a long time being away from home, and she also missed me. Being that far away from home is not easy, especially because all my sisters are around. And she's much better now.

LK: Your return might have been a bit worrisome, but thanks for explaining it, because recently South Africa hasn't been exporting as many players abroad. What do you think has been a challenge in that regard?

NM: For me, I can say the league in South Africa; most players prefer to play home than Europe because, if you see now, we only have three or four players, like Thembi [Kgatlana], Linda [Motlhalo], Amogelang [Motau]. And when you look at the team that played in the 2023 World Cup we had more



players overseas. That's why Banyana Banyana performed well in the World Cup after winning the WAFCON, which was the most important thing. But if you look now, only a few players abroad is not enough because the national team needs players who are playing regularly in other leagues, because we can't compare Hollywoodbets with other leagues; it's very different. The standard and the intensity is different, because when you talk about the national team, you talk about intensity. We have that intensity in the league here and there. I think it's very important for the players to get the opportunity to play abroad so they can help the national team.

LK: Speaking about the national team, a disappointing outing at WAFCON 2026. Were you surprised that we couldn't qualify for the semis, essentially not qualifying for the World Cup automatically?

NM: I'm not surprised because when you look at how we performed, we didn't perform according to our standards. The reason is maybe because we didn't play enough friendlies towards the tournament, which was something that lacked for the players to do well. But if we played two or three important friendlies before the tournament, it was going to be very important. Not taking the opportunity to qualify for the World Cup automatically is going to be really tough for Banyana at the continental playoffs.

LK: You have seen the teams and the draw for the playoffs now, with the league in full swing, do you think the team will still need some friendlies before the playoffs?

NM: It's going to be very important for the league. I think if we look at how the league runs or is structured from now until the playoffs, it's going to be crucial. You have one stream playing one weekend and another the following weekend; it's going to be a bit better. But it's also going to affect other players because we need to play every week. So if we play and stop, it's also affecting players. Or maybe the players could have a month-long camp before the playoffs; that could help.

LK: Did any of this put Sundowns under pressure to qualify for the CAF Women's Champions League?

NM: It's very important that Mamelodi Sundowns qualified for the Champions League because the core players of the national team come from Mamelodi Sundowns. It will make things a bit easy when they go to the tournament; they will play the whole week, which means we won't talk about fitness levels because they will be fit, and when we talk about intensity, they will bring that to the national team.

LK: Can Sundowns be stopped in the league though?

NM: (Chuckles) It's very difficult to stop Sundowns because if you look at the players that they have, half of their line-up are national team material, and some of them are from outside the



"I'M NOT SURPRISED BECAUSE WHEN YOU LOOK AT HOW WE PERFORMED, WE DIDN'T PERFORM ACCORDING TO OUR STANDARDS."

country. That is the reason why Mamelodi Sundowns are on top of the league, and their performance says it all. They have facilities; they have everything, and if you have those things, you only get better. It's going to be tough to beat Sundowns. I don't know what it will take to beat them in the league because they are performing in all departments. I don't even think JVW will push them to a limit.

LK: The last time you played in the domestic league, it looked different with a 30-game system; now it's divided into streams. What did you make of it?

NM: For me, I think it's not creating that competition that we need because, if you look, one stream is tougher than the other. I think if we played the normal way, it would be more competitive because you know you are going to face Mamelodi Sundowns, you know you are going to face TS Galaxy, University of Pretoria. So, having one stream with less intensity, I think it's taking us back one step, a bit back.

LK: I hear you. Let's speak about your club, Ramatlaohle, not a bad start, as you mentioned earlier. How do you think the team will continue to perform to try to make the playoffs for the championship?

NM: For me, it's going to be very crucial, especially for the younger players in the team, but senior players are there to help them. I think the WAFCON break gave us an opportunity to work on our strengths to work on some basics.

LK: Noko, thank you so much, and all the best.



THE IDISKI TOP 10... FOREIGN BAFANA OPTIONS

Last week, we looked at players who have represented Bafana Bafana despite having links to other nations, exploring the different paths that can lead a footballer to the green and gold even when their footballing upbringing, birthplace or family background might have pointed elsewhere.

This week, we turn the story around and look at 10 players who are currently eligible to represent South Africa, but who have yet to make that choice, leaving the door open to a potentially intriguing group of footballers developing across Europe, the Middle East and North America.

This list is by no means an endorsement of these players, nor does it suggest that every one of them would necessarily want to represent South Africa, or that they are all immediately ready to step into the Bafana Bafana setup.

Rather, it is a look at players currently performing at respectable levels in professional football who, through their family connections or birthplace, have the right to represent South Africa, and who could potentially enter the conversation as the national team’s talent pool continues to expand.

With Pitso Mosimane now back at the helm, that conversation becomes particularly interesting, given his history of looking beyond the obvious when selecting players. During his first spell as Bafana coach, a decade and a half ago, Mosimane was willing to explore different avenues and give opportunities to players with unusual routes into the national team, including Davide Somma, who featured in last week’s list.

Perhaps, then, some of these names could eventually find their way onto his radar, although for now, they remain possibilities rather than predictions...

The Top 10:

10 Carter Pinnington
West Bromwich Albion
England, 19 years old

Carter Pinnington is a young defender whose South African connection could become increasingly interesting. Born in the United Kingdom, the former Liverpool defender has acknowledged that he is eligible to represent South Africa through his father, who was born here, giving Bafana a potential route into the career of a player who is still only 19 and therefore has an enormous amount of development ahead of him. Pinnington’s time at Liverpool placed him within one of England’s most prestigious footballing environments, and his move to West Bromwich Albion has given him

another platform from which to establish himself in the English Championship. At his age, it would be far too early to predict where his career will ultimately lead, particularly when young defenders can take several years to fully develop, but his height, physical presence and potential make him a player worth keeping on the radar. The South African national team would also have to weigh up the long-term picture rather than simply asking whether Pinnington is ready for Bafana today. He may not be, but that is precisely why early engagement can matter, because international football can move quickly once a young player establishes himself at senior level.

9 Dante Polvara
St Louis City



United States, 26 years old

Dante Polvara was born in New York and has developed his footballing career primarily within the American system. Both of his parents are South African, with Italian heritage, meaning that while the United States is naturally part of his footballing identity, South Africa is not a distant connection but a country deeply rooted in his family. Polvara emerged through the American college system, where he attended Georgetown University and enjoyed an outstanding career, ultimately receiving the Hermann Trophy, awarded to the best college soccer player in the United States. That recognition helped propel him towards professional football, and he subsequently spent five seasons with Scottish club Aberdeen, not just gaining valuable experience in European football but also being involved in 13 goals (scoring six and setting up seven more). At the beginning of 2026, Polvara moved back across the Atlantic to join St Louis City in MLS, the club previously coached by South African-born Bradley Carnell, giving him another opportunity to establish himself in the American professional game. At 26, he is now at an interesting point in his career, no longer a prospect simply waiting to see where football takes him, but an established professional with experience in several different environments. If the national team were looking to widen the pool beyond players developed domestically, Polvara would certainly be one of the names worth investigating.

8 Ayanda Sishuba
Stade Rennais
Belgium, 21 years old



Born in Tournai, Belgium, Ayanda Sishuba has spent virtually his entire life within European football, but his South African connection is impossible to overlook, with his father, former professional footballer Asanda Sishuba, having spent the majority of his own playing career in Belgium. That family history has left the door open to Bafana, even though Ayanda himself has progressed through the Belgian system and represented the country throughout the youth ranks. Sishuba has been regarded as a promising talent for some time, and at various stages there have been questions over whether South Africa might eventually tempt him into choosing the green and gold, particularly if his pathway towards the Belgian senior team begins to narrow. He has developed predominantly in France, and after a loan spell with Montpellier, he has returned to Stade Rennais, where the next challenge is to establish himself consistently at senior level. At 21, there is still an enormous amount of time for that to happen, and it would be premature to suggest that Belgium has closed its door to him, but international football is often about timing as much as talent. If Sishuba reaches a point where the Belgian senior pathway becomes increasingly difficult, Bafana could potentially offer another route for a player with considerable technical ability and attacking imagination. For South Africa, it is precisely these situations that make dual-eligible players so interesting: the objective is not simply to convince every player with a South African connection to switch allegiance, but to make sure the relationship exists before the decision is made for them.

7 Max Conway
Bolton Wanderers
England, 23 years old

Max Conway was born in Manchester, and if you heard him speak, there would be little doubt about where his upbringing took place, but beneath the very English exterior lies a South African connection through his grandmother, who is from Pretoria, making the Bolton Wanderers full-back eligible to represent Bafana. At 23, Conway has already accumulated a considerable amount of professional experience, having spent most of his career with Bolton while also enduring the familiar developmental cycle of loans during his formative years. Those temporary spells away from his parent club provided valuable senior exposure, but it was last season that really demonstrated his growing importance, as he made 41 league appearances for Bolton. The South African opportunity, however, may be complicated by the position he plays. Left-back is hardly an area where Bafana are desperately short of options, with several established players competing locally and several South Africans developing abroad, meaning Conway would potentially face a difficult battle to establish himself even if he were interested in switching his international allegiance.

6 Lucas Jetten
SC Cambuur
Netherlands, 19 years old

Lucas Jetten’s connection to South Africa

is perhaps one of the more personal stories on this list, having been adopted as a baby and subsequently raised in the Netherlands, while making an effort throughout his childhood to remain connected to the country where he was born. He returned regularly while growing up, meaning South Africa was never simply an abstract part of his background, even as his footballing education and professional ambitions developed almost entirely in the Netherlands. Jetten came through the famed Ajax Amsterdam system and represented the Netherlands at almost every junior international level, at one stage appearing to be on a trajectory towards the senior Oranje. Yet football careers rarely go as planned, and despite his development within one of Europe’s great academies, he was unable to make the breakthrough into Ajax’s first team. His departure from Amsterdam has therefore become an important moment in his development, with SC Cambuur providing him with the opportunity to finally make his senior debut and begin building a professional career away from the enormous expectations that accompany the Ajax badge. It has not been the easiest start, with his new club enduring a difficult run of results, but at his age there remains plenty of time for Jetten to establish himself. For Bafana, his case is one worth monitoring rather than rushing, particularly because of the depth of his Dutch youth international experience and the question of whether his senior international future will ultimately materialise in the Netherlands.

5 Alwande Roaldsøy
Sparta Rotterdam
Norway, 22 years old

There is already a strong South African thread running through Alwande Roaldsøy’s story, even though it is Norway that has so far occupied the centre of his footballing journey. Born in Norway, Roaldsøy spent a significant portion of his childhood in KwaZulu-Natal, where his mother is from, giving him a genuine connection to South Africa rather than one that exists only on a passport or through distant ancestry. Football, however, has largely pulled him towards his father’s homeland, with Roaldsøy representing Norway at youth level and beginning his club career at Drøbak-Frogn before earning a move to Italy, where he spent three seasons with Atalanta. That experience in one of Europe’s great footballing countries was followed by a return to Norway and a move to Molde FK, before loan spells with Sandnes Ulf and Hamarkameratene provided him with the regular senior football needed to turn potential into experience. In January this year, another chapter began when he moved to Sparta Rotterdam in the Netherlands, giving him the opportunity to continue his development in one of Europe’s most technically respected footballing environments. For South Africa, Roaldsøy is an especially interesting case because there is already a childhood connection to the country, and if his career continues to develop in the Netherlands, the conversation around his international future could become increasingly relevant.

4 Timo Muzie
Beitar Jerusalem

Israel, 25 years old

Born in Tel Aviv, Timothy “Timo” Muzie has a particularly interesting international background, with a South African mother and Congolese father giving him connections to several footballing nations, while his upbringing in Israel has made that country the home of his footballing education. He came through the Maccabi Haifa academy, one of Israel’s most established development systems, and progressed far enough to represent Israel at Under-21 level, meaning that South Africa would not be introducing itself to a player who has never considered international football, but rather potentially asking him to reconsider which national identity he wants to carry into senior football. Now 25, Muzie has spent the past three seasons with Beitar Jerusalem, establishing himself as a regular at senior level and accumulating more than 100 appearances for the club while scoring 16 goals. His development has therefore been built on the foundations of Israeli football, but the South African connection remains a significant part of his eligibility. For Bafana, players with genuine professional experience abroad are always worth monitoring, particularly when they operate in positions where international competition for places can be fierce, and Muzie’s combination of experience, age and eligibility makes him an intriguing name should the national team ever decide to explore the possibility.

3 Manasse Kianga
Slavan Bratislava
DRC/England, 24 years old

Manasse Kianga may have a distinctly



Congolese name and Congolese parents, but his footballing passport contains an important South African chapter because he was born in South Africa and spent his formative years here before leaving the country as a teenager. Today, he is one of the more intriguing names on this list, particularly after emerging as one of the breakout players of this season's UEFA Champions League qualifying rounds. Kianga has been scoring regularly for Slovan Bratislava, the Slovakian club coached by former Manchester City and Barcelona midfielder Yaya Touré, and his performances have suddenly placed his name in a much brighter European spotlight. Yet his route to this point was far from straightforward. A product of the Black Aces academy, Kianga moved to England as a teenager hoping to continue his development in one of Europe's most competitive football environments, but his progress was complicated by his status as a South African passport holder, making opportunities within English academies considerably more difficult to secure. He headed towards Slovakia, where he eventually found the platform that England had not provided. Now, with European football watching his progress, Kianga represents an especially interesting case for South Africa. He was born here, he developed here before moving abroad, and he is now beginning to make a name for himself in European competition, meaning that what once appeared to be a disadvantage in his career could ultimately become an important part of his international story.

2 Christopher Olivier

Brøndby

Austria, 20 years old



The Austrian-born full-back is one of those intriguing cases where South Africa can perhaps look at a player developing overseas and wonder whether there might still be a route to the green and gold, particularly because Olivier is only 20 and is already operating at a level that suggests his career could develop considerably further. He has represented Austria throughout the youth ranks, so the door to the 23-in-the-world-ranked senior Austrian national team is naturally one he may have his sights firmly set on, but international football can change quickly, and a persuasive approach from South Africa could at least make him consider another path. Olivier is not restricted to the full-back position either, with the ability to operate in midfield adding another dimension to his profile, and earlier this year he made an important move in his development by joining Danish giants Brøndby after spending four years within the VfB Stuttgart system in Germany. That combination of German academy development and a move into Scandinavian football makes him an interesting prospect, particularly if he continues to progress at his current rate. For Bafana, the attraction is obvious: here is a young, versatile defender with a European upbringing, strong developmental experience and potentially many of his best years still ahead of him, while his South African eligibility comes through his father, giving the national team a legitimate connection to a player who has so far worn Austria's colours.

1 Tristan Van Gilst

Heracles

Netherlands, 23 years old

Born in Amsterdam and raised within the Dutch football system, Tristan Van Gilst represents another fascinating possibility for Bafana, with his eligibility coming through his South African mother and his footballing education having taken place almost entirely in the Netherlands. At 23, Van Gilst is entering an important stage of his career, and his current form for Heracles has certainly made him a player worth keeping an eye on, particularly after a spectacular start to the campaign in which he scored six goals in his first five games. The Netherlands is, of course, blessed with attacking talent, and breaking into the senior Oranje setup is an entirely different proposition from excelling at club level, which is where South Africa's potential opportunity lies. Van Gilst may find himself competing against an enormous pool of Dutch attacking players for a limited number of international places, whereas Bafana could potentially offer him a far more direct route to senior international football. The winger already has considerable experience in Dutch football, having previously represented PEC Zwolle and De Graafschap, and with almost 100 appearances in the country's professional game and 24 goals to his name, he is no longer simply an academy prospect waiting for his opportunity. The question, should South Africa come calling, would be whether the Dutch-born attacker could see himself embracing the country of his mother and adding another dimension to a career that is already beginning to gather momentum.

IDISKI'S BETWAY PREMIERSHIP

TEAM OF THE WEEK

11-13 SEP 2026

LW



ZIKAYOKO

ST



NDLABA

RW



KHUMALO

CM



MKHIZE

CM



MABOE

CM



MATLOU

LB



SEEDAT

CB



NDAMANE

CB



FIELIES

RB



RADEBE

GK



NWABALI

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
PRELIMINARY ROUND 2

FULL TIME

2-0

'15 LAWRENCE DOESB
'55 LIAM APRIL



ACE OF THE WEEK:
LIAM APRIL

Liam April is our iDiski Times Ace of the Week, and if you're asking, "Who?", the 21-year-old midfielder may soon give you a very good reason to remember his name. Now playing for African Stars in Namibia, April struck the decisive goal in their CAF Champions League first preliminary round second leg against AS Mangasport, securing a 2-0 victory at Lucas Moripe Stadium and sending Stars through on the away-goal rule after a thrilling 3-3 aggregate draw. Their reward is a mouth-watering clash with Orlando Pirates for a place in the group stages, giving April the chance to return to South Africa and introduce himself to local football fans. The former Hope FC midfielder, who also played for FN Rangers and Stellenbosch's youth setup, will certainly have a stage on which to do so.



The World & South Africa

We continue our series that dives deep into South African footballers and their often complicated relationship with playing abroad. It's a story that stretches back more than 126 years: rich, layered and shaped by far more than just football...

This is a history marked by politics, isolation, rebellion, opportunity, heartbreak and adventure. A history where careers were redirected by world events, borders, passports and perceptions as much as by talent. Where some doors opened unexpectedly, others slammed shut, and a

few were never meant to open at all.

There are stories many fans have never heard, and others that time, discomfort or convenience have quietly pushed aside. But they are football stories nonetheless, human stories, and they matter.

Together, they help explain the often paradoxical relationship South African football has long shared with the outside world, and why going abroad has never been a simple journey from A to B, but a winding road shaped by who we were, who we became, and how the world chose to see us.

THE COURAGEOUS JOURNEY OF DAYLON CLAASEN

By Rob Delpont

Daylon Claasen may not have become the superstar that some imagined when he first emerged as one of South Africa’s most exciting young footballers, but to judge his career through the narrow prism of whether he fulfilled the promise of becoming the “next Steven Pienaar” would be to miss the far more interesting story of a footballer who built an impressive professional life across South Africa and Europe, playing in some of the continent’s most respected leagues and experiencing a journey that eventually took him from the streets of Klerksdorp to Amsterdam, Belgium, Poland, Germany and Egypt.

There was a period when Claasen’s name carried a particular weight in South African football, when his age, technical ability and diminutive frame invited comparisons with Pienaar, another small, clever and technically gifted South African who had made his way from the local game into Europe and eventually to the highest levels of English football. There were physical similarities, certainly, but the two were very different footballers, and perhaps the expectations created by the comparison ultimately became something of a burden for Claasen, because a career does not have to mirror that of another player to be considered a success.

Claasen’s own journey began in Klerksdorp, where he started out at local club, ‘Leicester City’, before making his way to Cape Town and joining Vasco da Gama in Parow, and it was there that the foundations were laid for a footballing adventure that would soon take him far beyond the familiar surroundings of South African football.

His emergence was rapid, and by the 2002/03 season, the highly-rated youngster had moved to Ajax Cape Town, where the relationship between the South African club and Dutch giants Ajax Amsterdam provided a particularly intriguing pathway for young players with European ambitions.

Benni McCarthy and Pienaar had already made the move to Holland and done very well and so there was an expectation that more would follow. Claasen was already beginning to attract serious attention, having represented South Africa at youth level, while his performances were helping

establish him as one of the country’s more promising young prospects.

He was part of the Ajax Cape Town side that won the prestigious Bayhill Premier Cup, a tournament that has long served as one of the great showcases for emerging talent, and his reputation was growing quickly enough for the young midfielder to be invited to spend three weeks at Real Madrid earlier that year. The Spanish giants were followed by opportunities to train and trial with Espanyol and PSV Eindhoven, giving Claasen a taste of the possibilities that existed beyond South Africa and confirming that the footballing world had begun to take notice of the teenager.

The connection with Ajax Amsterdam would eventually prove decisive. As part of Ajax Cape Town’s commitment to its partnership with the Dutch club, Claasen became the third player, and the final player, transferred without a fee, owed to Ajax Amsterdam since the establishment of the arrangement in 2000. He remained in Cape Town for another six months on loan before finally making the move to the Netherlands, leaving behind the South African game and stepping into one of European football’s most famous development systems.

For a young South African footballer, it was an extraordinary opportunity, and Claasen spent the next two years making significant strides in Amsterdam, learning his trade in an environment where technical ability, tactical intelligence and ball retention were valued almost as much as physical qualities. With Jong Ajax, he became a standout performer, gaining experience and establishing himself as a player capable of operating within the demanding culture of one of Europe’s most famous football institutions.

Yet the final step proved to be the most difficult. For all his performances with the reserve side, Claasen could not quite force his way into the Ajax first team, and when his contract expired in 2010, the club decided not to renew it. It was a frustrating moment, because he had travelled so far and come so close to the summit of one of football’s great academies, but it also represented another fork in a career that would repeatedly require him to find a new route forward.

Fortunately, there was already interest elsewhere. Belgian club Lierse had been following the now 20-year-old midfielder



and moved to secure his services, giving Claasen the chance to begin again in a new country, a new league and a different footballing culture. Rather than retreating from the European adventure, he simply changed direction, and Belgium would become the next significant chapter of his career.

At Lierse, Claasen quickly demonstrated that the promise that had carried him to Ajax had not disappeared simply because he had been unable to break into the Amsterdam club's first team. He became an important part of the squad, combining his technical qualities with the experience he had gained in the Netherlands, and over his first two seasons he established himself as a regular presence, scoring 11 goals in 69 appearances.

His third season proved more difficult, however, as his opportunities diminished, and by April 2013 his time in Belgium had come to an end.

England then appeared on the horizon. Having already missed out when QPR were chasing him a year earlier, Claasen went on trial with Premier League club Everton after his Lierse exit, before another opportunity emerged with newly promoted Hull City in July, and his route into the club became the stuff of football folklore when he initially appeared under the pseudonym "James Armstrong" during a match against Winterton Rangers. He scored during the game, and only two days later was his real identity revealed, adding an almost cinematic twist to what was already an unusual attempt to find his way into English football.

Neither move ultimately materialised, and once again Claasen found himself standing at a crossroads, with another European destination eventually providing the answer.

This time, it was Poland. Lech Poznań offered him another chance to continue his career at a respected European club, and Claasen made an impression during his solitary league campaign, scoring three goals and continuing a journey that was becoming increasingly difficult to predict but equally difficult to dismiss. He had gone from Ajax to Belgium, nearly reached the Premier League and now found himself playing in Poland, each move adding another layer to a career that was quietly becoming far more extensive than his early "next Pienaar" billing suggested.

In 2014 came perhaps one of the most significant moves of his European career, when Claasen joined 1860 München in Germany's Bundesliga 2.

Germany offered another demanding footballing environment, and Claasen spent three seasons with the Munich club, accumulating more than 50 appearances across all competitions while attempting to help them achieve promotion to the Bundesliga. It was another substantial chapter in a career that had now taken him through several different footballing cultures, and while promotion remained beyond his reach, Claasen was establishing himself as something increasingly valuable: a seasoned European professional.

By this stage, the teenager who had

once been compared with Pienaar was no longer simply a promising youngster carrying the weight of expectation. He was an experienced midfielder who had spent years abroad, had learned different styles of football and had played in some of the most competitive environments available to a South African player.

In 2017, however, Claasen decided it was time to come home. He returned to South Africa to join Bidvest Wits, arriving at a club that had just won the league title under Gavin Hunt and which was operating at the very highest level of the domestic game. His first season saw him feature regularly, but his opportunities became more limited during his second campaign, prompting another move and another chapter.

Maritzburg United became the next destination, and it was with the Team of Choice that Claasen perhaps reminded South African football most clearly of the qualities that had made him such an exciting prospect all those years earlier.

Over three seasons in KwaZulu-Natal, he became a remarkably dependable member of the squad, missing just one game during that entire period, a statistic that underlined another side of his career that could easily be overlooked amid the stories of European trials and international moves. Claasen was not simply a technically gifted player who had travelled the world; he was a professional who had developed the durability, discipline and consistency required to remain useful to different coaches and different teams over a long career.

And yet, remarkably, this was still not the final destination of his footballing journey.

In a move that might have seemed unlikely even a few years earlier, Claasen headed north again, this time to Egypt, joining ambitious second-tier club Wadi Degla al-Qāhira as they pursued promotion. It was another unexpected adventure for a player whose career had already taken him through the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland and Germany, and in North Africa he once again became an important figure, producing the kind of performances that had long been a recurring feature of his career.



Wadi Degla were chasing promotion, and Claasen became one of their standout players, but football can be cruel even to those who perform well, and despite their ambitions, the club fell short of promotion in both seasons that he spent in Egypt.

For many players, that might have represented the final chapter, but Claasen eventually returned to the place where his professional story had first begun.

In 2024, he joined Cape Town Spurs, the club that had once been Ajax Cape Town, creating a remarkable full-circle moment in a career that had taken him away from Cape Town as a teenager and eventually brought him back decades later. By then, the Ajax partnership that had helped open the door to Europe had long since ended, and the club had returned to the Cape Town Spurs identity, but for Claasen there was something poetic about stepping back onto familiar ground.

The boy who had once left Cape Town for Amsterdam had returned as a vastly more experienced footballer, carrying with him the memories of Dutch football, Belgian football, Poland, Germany and Egypt, along with the scars and lessons that come from a professional career spent constantly adapting to new surroundings.

Unfortunately, his final chapter with Spurs was blighted by injury, restricting his appearances at a time when the club desperately needed experience and quality, and he was unable to make the kind of impact he would have hoped for as the team battled against relegation. The campaign ultimately ended with Cape Town Spurs dropping out of professional football, leaving Claasen's return home tinged with the disappointment of a club fighting for survival rather than celebrating the reunion that his story deserved.

Yet it would be unfair to allow that final chapter to define him. Claasen's career was never the straightforward rise that people once imagined when they compared him with Pienaar, and perhaps that is precisely why it is worth remembering. He did not become the next Pienaar, because he was never really supposed to become anybody else. He became Daylon Claasen, the Klerksdorp youngster who travelled to Cape Town, the Ajax Cape Town prodigy who visited Real Madrid, the teenager who entered the Ajax Amsterdam system, the Jong Ajax standout who could not quite make the final leap into the first team, the young midfielder who rebuilt his career in Belgium, the player who nearly found a route into the Premier League, the European professional who represented Lech Poznań and 1860 München, the experienced footballer who returned home to play for Bidvest Wits and Maritzburg United, and eventually the veteran who added an unexpected Egyptian chapter before coming full circle in Cape Town.

There is a tendency in football to measure careers against the promise of youth, particularly when a player emerges with a reputation that seems to suggest a glittering future, but the reality is that professional football is filled with detours, near-misses, changes of country, injuries, coaches who believe in you and coaches who do not, clubs that open doors and others that close them, and players who must repeatedly

reinvent themselves simply to remain on the road.

Claasen's journey was exactly that. It was not the career that many imagined when he was a teenage star, but it was a career that carried him further than most young footballers ever travel, across continents and cultures, through some of Europe's most respected leagues and into the national team, where he collected 11 Bafana Bafana caps between 2010 and 2015.

His international career, much like his club journey, never quite settled into the long-running story that his early promise might have suggested, but some moments will remain part of his footballing legacy, including his memorable involvement in South Africa's 1-0 victory over Spain. Nine of his 11 appearances came in friendly internationals.

Perhaps, ultimately, Claasen's story is not one of what he didn't become, but of how much he actually achieved.

He left South Africa as a teenager with enormous expectations on his shoulders and spent much of the next decade and a half proving that he belonged in professional football, by repeatedly finding another path whenever one closed in front of him. From Ajax to Lierse, from Poland to Munich, from Wits to Maritzburg, to Egypt, before returning to the city where the dream had begun, his career became a long, winding footballing map.

And perhaps there is something beautiful in that. Not every great professional story ends with Premier League fame, Champions League medals or hundreds of international caps. Sometimes greatness is found in the longevity of the journey itself, in the courage to keep moving, the ability to adapt and the willingness to start again, and by that measure Daylon Claasen's career deserves to be remembered not as the story of the player who failed to become the next Steven Pienaar, but as the story of a South African footballer who saw the world through football and left his own footprints across it.

