

KICKOFF



28 YEARS OF SOCCER AT ITS BEST

BROOKS:
WE CAN BEAT
THE DROP

KERR:
MY PLAYERS
ARE LIKE
MY CHILDREN

MORIRI:
WHY MOTSEPE
TOLD ME TO
COME BACK

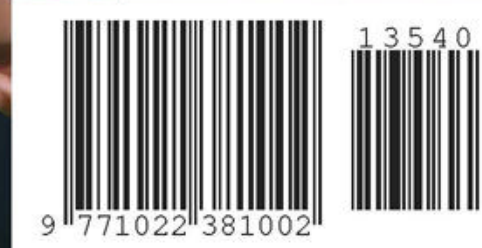
**CAN NCIKAZI &
DAVIDS SURVIVE
THE AXE?**

BAFANA-FRANCE:
LE BLEUS SEEKS
2010 REVENGE

WHAT CAN STOP DOWNS

**WHY
CHIEFS' NGCOBO
IS IN LIMBO**

JOAO FELIX
PULLOUT
POSTER



ALSO:

ISAACS

NEYMAR

MBULU

EVA NGA

GET YOUR DIGITAL COPY



BY LOGGING ON TO...



WWW.MAGZTER.COM

CLICK THE SEARCH BUTTON AND TYPE 'SOCCER'

DIRECT LINK: WWW.MAGZTER.COM/ZA/MEDIA24/KICKOFF/SPORTS/

5 Letters

You have your say over the game's most contentious issues.

6 The Month That Was

Looking back at the month's most memorable moments.

8 Financial Fair Play

Will the rest of the PSL forever be in the shadow of Mamelodi Sundowns if they can't compete financially?

12 Orlando Pirates

Is the decision to have co-coaches in Mandla Ncikazi and Fadlu Davids working out at Pirates?

16 Njabulo Ngcobo

The Kaizer Chiefs defender/midfielder has had a tough time establishing himself at Naturena. Should he stick to one position?

20 Ethan Brooks

The TS Galaxy and Bafana Bafana midfielder has had a remarkable rise in the last 12 months.

24 Richard Mbulu

The Baroka FC striker is a military man and hoping to go all guns blazing for the rest of the season.

28 Surprise Moriri

One of the most gifted players of the PSL era shares his story.

32 Poster Power

A pull-out poster of Atletico Madrid and Portugal star Joao Felix.



8



12



16



20



60

34 Dream Team

Former Kaizer Chiefs defender Dominic Isaacs selects his best-ever XI from past teammates.

36 Bienvenu Eva Nga

The Chippa United forward is hoping to fire his side to safety this season.

40 Dan Malesela

The Marumo Gallants coach has steadied the ship at the club, but this is just the beginning.

44 Dylan Kerr

Can the English coach perform another relegation rescue act, this time with Swallows FC.

48 Mamelodi Sundowns

Part 2 of our look at Mamelodi Sundowns' coaches over the years.

52 Shaun Morgan

The Stellenbosch FC youngster who has a remarkable tale to tell.

56 Bafana Bafana

Bafana Bafana will take on world champions France in a prestige friendly in Lille.

60 Matthew Pattison

The former Mamelodi Sundowns midfielder on why he left the PSL at an early age to play non-league football in England.

63 Neymar

Some amazing facts on the Paris Saint-Germain forward.

64 Secret Footballer

This month's Secret Footballer says Andile Jali could still do a job for Bafana Bafana.





KICKOFF

Despite a poor performance in the EPL, Manchester United managed to reach the knockout stages of the UEFA Champions League, where they played Atletico Madrid in the last 16.

EDITORIAL TEAM:

Zola Doda (Editor)
Nick Said (Sub-editor)
Daniel Mendes
Lovemore Moyo
Mark Gleeson
Liam Bekker
Baden Gillion
Ernest Fakude
Sipho Mlotha
Lukhanyo Mtuta
Kyle Lewis

PRODUCTION & DESIGN

Brent Smith

SOCIAL MEDIA

Shaistah Kader

DISTRIBUTION QUERIES

Nozuko Mkonwana

PHOTOGRAPHY

Gallo Images, Backpagepix

GENERAL MANAGER

Clint Roper

FINANCE AND ACCOUNTS

Andries Venter, Joanne Wheal

ADVERTISING

Michele Vorster (Head of Sales)
Ads24 Johannesburg: 011 259 1700
Ads24 Cape Town: 021 406 2644
Ads24 Durban: 031 533 7717

CIRCULATION & SUBSCRIPTIONS

CIRCULATION MANAGER:

Gustav Conradie 021 503 7088

SUBSCRIPTIONS MANAGER:

Jenny Marinus (jenny.marinus@media24.com)

ENQUIRIES AND RENEWALS: 087 740 1045

Our operating hours are:
08:00 to 16:30 from Monday to Friday
Email: kickoff_subs@media24.com
Website: www.mysubs.co.za

PRINTING Novus Print

DISTRIBUTION

On The Dot, 2 Nereide Street, Paardeneiland, 7405



Copyright © Media24 (Pty) Ltd. All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored
in a retrieval system or be transmitted in any form or
by any means, electronic or mechanical, without prior
permission.

Give Royal AM their flowers



Every time one of the so-called Big Three – Kaizer Chiefs, Orlando Pirates and Mamelodi Sundowns – dominate the league, a normal thing to do is to ask what went wrong with the other two.

In the last five years, everything has all always been about how Sundowns has conquered the domestic league. And without any surprise, The Brazilians' success has come with heavy criticism directed towards Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates.

Of course, Pirates and Chiefs have not covered themselves in glory with both clubs winning just one trophy between them in the last five seasons. But while this criticism is well deserved, on the flip side of the coin it overshadows how well other PSL teams are doing.

In 2018, Free State Stars did the unthinkable by winning the Nedbank Cup and instead of getting praise, media attention was given to anger vented towards then Kaizer Chiefs coach Steve Komphela, who had failed to win a trophy in three seasons in Naturena.

Last season, AmaZulu, under the ownership of Sandile Zungu, had a new coach in Benni McCarthy and defied the odds by finishing the season number two on the log, just behind champions Sundowns.

The second-place finish gave them a passage to the CAF Champions League – a historic achievement for one of the oldest clubs in South African football. But instead of receiving their well-deserved credit from the public, supporters and the media directed their criticism towards Pirates and Chiefs, who have failed to achieve success.

Marumo Gallants' success in the Nedbank Cup also went without much fanfare.

This season, new-comers Royal AM, who bought the status of Bloemfontein Celtic

after failing to win GladAfrica Championship promotion, have performed above expectations. At the time of going to print, John Maduka's team were number two on the log behind leaders Sundowns and one-point ahead of third-placed Kaizer Chiefs, who had a game in hand.

Club forward Victor Letsoalo has also been one of the best performing players in the league. And regardless of where they finish this season, the truth is that Royal AM has done very well and deserve their flowers.



Royal AM players celebrate a goal.

It wasn't just about results, it's also about how the team played and their 4-1 victory against Chiefs at FNB stadium will go down as one of the club's best matches in their history.

Of course, there has been some embarrassing moments along the way, including the incident where club chairman, Andile Mpisane, walked inside the field with a pile of cash to pay his players bonuses after a KZN derby win.

But Royal AM has, in a unique way, brought a level of excitement to the PSL that needs to be appreciated.

**The Editor,
Zola Doda**

COVER PRICE INCREASE

From the May edition (on sale Friday, 22 April), KICK OFF cover price will increase to R27. This was a difficult decision to make, but due to rising print and petrol prices, we had no choice. However we've done our best to limit the impact to you, our reader. As in the last 28 years, we will continue to offer you Soccer at its Best. And don't forget to check who made the shortlist for the KICK OFF Footballer of the Season!

LETTERS

to the *editor*

KICKOFF

To air your views, email your letters to
forum@kickoff.com

The views expressed in the letters published do not reflect the views of KICK OFF magazine, its editor or publisher. The editor reserves the right to edit and shorten letters.

Letters shorter than 200 words will be given preference.
Please note there are no prizes for star letters at this time.

Up The Brazilians

Congratulations to Mamelodi Sundowns for managing to outplay the Red Devils in their very own background.

That is a very good achievement looking at the standard of football that Al Ahly is playing, they're a good side and a tough opponent to every team they come across. For Sundowns to walk away with three points away from home in such a big continental competition is not just awesome, but a very big achievement. Remember, that was the game which the whole of Africa was looking forward to seeing.

Ever since Pitso Mosimane left Sundowns to join Al Ahly, the two teams' rivalry started. Every time they meet, Africa stands on its feet to see who comes out victorious.

It is one of the biggest games in Africa, it is actually an African derby.

I'm a Kaizer Chiefs fan and obviously Sundowns is not one of my favourite teams but playing in Africa they represent me as well and I'm very happy for their success. For the fact that this win might put Pitso's job on the line, that should be an issue for another day. In Sundowns, the country is well represented and so am I as the citizen of this Republic.

I'm not just following football for the sake of following it, but I am a football fanatic. Congratulations once again to the technical team and their troops for the victory.

By Letladi wa Ga-Mphahlele, Maralaleng

Coaches need emotional intelligence

It is disheartening how football matches often deteriorate because of the coaches failure to get their emotions in check. I concede that coaches are emotional beings and that the beautiful game is results oriented.

However, I feel that more can be done to preserve values such as discipline, respect and sportsmanship in our game. The coaches heated exchanges on the touchline have become a common and disturbing feature on supporters and players alike during games.

Roger de Sa received a four-match ban while on duty for Egypt at Afcon 2022 and Rhulani

Give Baxter more time

I would like to encourage Kaizer Chiefs to give coach Stuart Baxter more time to find his footing. There's a call from some Amakhosi supporters and club administrators to release coach Baxter now, before the end of the season.

All those making the call are in favour of Baxter's assistant, Arthur Zwane, to succeed the Englishman. Coaches need time to gel the players and create a working philosophy. In 2012, former Mamelodi Sundowns coach Pitso Mosimane had to be escorted by the police out of the stadium after his side were held to a 2-2 draw. The Brazilians were

hovering at the tail end of the PSL table and the supporters were looking for an overnight solution. But Downs president Dr Patrice Motsepe had a vision with Mosimane at the helm and believed in him.

After surviving relegation, the Brazilians under the same Mosimane have gone on to dominate the domestic league, winning all the available trophies. They also won the CAF Champions League and CAF Super League.

Zwane is still learning the ropes from the highly-



Stuart Baxter

experienced and well-travelled Baxter, who himself has won several trophies with the same AmaKhosi in the past.

He returned to Amakhosi for a second spell in July last year to take over from Gavin Hunt, who himself was released prematurely by the club. Both Hunt and Ernst Middendorp, were fired by Chiefs before their contracts expired. Coaches need to be afforded time, support and the resources to do their job. Senegal kept Aliou Cisse, their former captain and

national squad coach for eight years, despite a trophy drought and calls to fire him. The Senegalese nation was rewarded this with an Africa Cup of Nations victory over Cameroon.

Today, the Senegalese nation is proud of their former captain who had brought the first Nations Cup trophy in the history of the country. Just like Cisse and Mosimane, Baxter deserves time and should be judged at the end of next season.

By Moeti Molelekoa, Welkom

Mokwena was recently red-carded for his outbursts during a CAF encounter against Al Ahly.

Who can forget AmaZulu's Benni McCarthy and SuperSport United's Kaitano Tembo and their altercation during their teams' DStv Premiership game? One may argue that the coaches' actions are precipitated by referees' sub-standard officiating, but is it the only

factor at play or have coaches become too 'personal' for their own good?

In the end, we want a game that promotes friendship and inclusivity without compromising the element of competitiveness. Coaches need to be patient with one another for the good of the game.

By Hlolizwe Hlophe, Orange Farm

THE MONTH THAT WAS



GOOD MONTH FOR ...

LEBO MOTHIBA

After two years on the sidelines with serious knee and hamstring problems, Bafana Bafana striker Lebo Mothiba has returned to the pitch and scored his first goal for Troyes in Ligue 1, where he is on loan for the rest of the season from Strasbourg.



BAD MONTH FOR ...

BONGANI ZUNGU

The Bafana Bafana international is slammed by both Amiens' head coach and chairperson after picking up an "abnormal" red card during his side's defeat to Pau. Amiens were leading when Zungu, playing at centre-back, was yellow-carded twice in a matter of seconds. They lost 2-1.



ALSO LAST MONTH...

- Bongokuhle Hlongwane makes his debut for Major League Soccer side Minnesota United in a 1-1 draw with Philadelphia Union.
- Golden Arrows are handed a reprimand by the PSL for fielding an ineligible player, Simo Mbhele, and told to pay the costs of the DC. The club say they will appeal the decision.

- Mamelodi Sundowns claim a first ever victory over Al Ahly in Egypt with a 1-0 success in the CAF Champions League group stages.
- TS Galaxy goalkeeper Melusi Buthelezi is discharged from hospital after being stabbed in an attempted hijacking.
- SuperSport United announce the signing of versatile attacker Aubrey

- Ngoma for the remainder of the 2021/22 campaign.
- Banyana Banyana seal their ticket to the Africa Women Cup of Nations following a 1-1 draw against Algeria in the second leg of their qualifier. They win the tie 3-1 on aggregate.
- Kaizer Chiefs extend their sponsorship with Toyota, which has been described



WORDS:

"I'm just crying. Even when I drive the car from the training ground, I can just cry from nothing. It's everything in my head. Imagine the place where you were born, where you were growing up and there is just empty ground. I can show you one million pictures and videos of every city in my country which they destroyed. I'll be honest, if not for my daughter, my family, I would be there." -

Manchester City defender Oleksandr Zinchenko reveals that only his family has stopped him from travelling to fight in Ukraine after the invasion by Russia.

LEFT: Bernard Parker jumps on the back of goalscorer Erick Mathoho as they celebrate the winning goal in the Soweto Derby against Orlando Pirates with Keagan Dolly. It was the latter's corner that was headed home by Mathoho in Kaizer Chiefs' 2-1 win.

by the AmaKhosi was a "multi-million Rand deal".

- Former Bafana Bafana captain Lucas Radebe returned to the pitch as a team of African legends went head-to-head with Senegal's legends for the opening of the Abdoulaye Wade Stadium.
- Cape Town City secure the long-term

future of star midfielder Thato Mokeke as he commits his future to the club until the end of the 2023/24 season.

- Former Bloemfontein Celtic tactician Veselin Jelusic is named as the new coach of the Lesotho national team.
- Fagrie Lakay hits the ground running in Egypt after delivering a match-winning performance with two goals for

Pyramids in the CAF Confederation Cup.

- Former Orlando Pirates and Cape Town City forward Justin Shonga ends a 455-day league goal drought when he scores for Sekhukhune United against Baroka FC.
- Former BidVest Wits player and coach Charles Yohane is killed in a hijacking incident.

Financial Fair Play



The emergence of Mamelodi Sundowns as a dominant force, not only on the pitch but also in the transfer market, has turned the DStv Premiership into a one-horse race. Year after year, The Brazilians, bankrolled by mining magnate billionaire owner Patrice Motsepe, have continued to open the gap between them and the rest of the clubs in the PSL. But what does this say about the competition in the League? KICK OFF's Hosea Ramphekwa investigates.

While Mamelodi Sundowns supporters have been on cloud nine with The Brazilians picking up regular honours, those backing the clubs from Soweto have lamented the state of affairs.

In every transfer window, it is Sundowns, and not traditional powerhouses Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates, who parade the cream of the crop.

During the recent January window this year, Sundowns landed two of the best players in the country and a highly-rated midfielder from South America. While pictures of Surprise Ralani, Tebogo Mokoena and Erwin Saavedra adorned Sundowns'

social media pages and trended, Chiefs and Pirates didn't do any business in the market.

Their inability to challenge Sundowns financially has raised concerns among their followers.

Every Sundowns win is a rubbing salt into the wounds and a reminder of the downward slippery slope the Soweto giants have been on.

Is it time for Financial Fair play?

Owing to their financial superiority, Sundowns' base Chloorkop has been a destination of choice for some of the best

players in the country.

There has been a long-standing criticism that The Brazilians, who have over 35 players on their books at the moment, have been weakening competition and stalling careers of some players by buying them and freezing them out.

There has been the suggestion of the introduction of measures to regulate the spending of Sundowns to stop their dominance in the transfer market, where the rest of the PSL clubs seem to be struggling.

Some feel that it's time for the local game to have financial fair play regulations to ensure a balanced market and the ability of teams to compete on and off the pitch.



"Financial fair play is really a good concept, but we need to sit and really look into what can and cannot be done," says South African Football Players Union (SAFPU) president Thulaganyo Gaoshubelwe. What is applicable in the context of South Africa.

"Equally, what happens when a club gets liquidated? What happens when players are not really paid what they ought to be paid? It has to be a holistic approach, in our view.

"The market, as we know it now, it's around what Sundowns does. Sundowns determines what needs to happen. That is why it is very important that we need to look at this thing to say what is the value of a PSL status? What is the value of a transfer? Are these players not undervalued? Or are they overpriced?

"We look into all those particular issues but we also know that people who are pushing these things are agents. The market to a larger point, I don't think it's a very honest reflection of what the players are worth but it's a reflection of what Downs can afford."

Though Sundowns seem to be enjoying an advantage over others, indications are there's no foul play in their dealings in the market.

"Financial fair play has to do with whether what you are buying, you can afford or not. It checks the sustainability of the business," says SAFA CEO Tebogo Motlanthe. "That's why Barcelona could not sign [Lionel] Messi. It was because they were saying their books are not speaking to what Messi was demanding.

"But you go to PSG and they signed all these players and they are paying them a lot of money. Financial fair play is that are you going to sustain paying players because it's not just a matter of saying we are selling X for R2, and Sundowns comes and says we will give you R500.

"Financial fair play deals with the sustainability of the business model and currently Sundowns is not breaching any regulations."



'I don't think there should be a cap'

Since Motsepe's arrival some 18 years ago, Sundowns have a reputation of excessive expenditure in the market. Every transfer window DStv Premiership champions buy players to continue their dominance domestically, while also vying for continental glory.

Former Bafana Bafana and Sundowns defender Matthew Booth is of the view that putting restrictions on Downs could negatively affect the local market.

"I don't think there should be a cap on yearly spend because, let's be honest, there are many clubs in the PSL and NFD [National First Division] who need that money. It can be a virtuous cycle," Booth says.

"At SuperSport United, for example, I don't know if the price was true or not, but the word is Mokoena went for R25 million. If that is true, SuperSport can do a lot of good with that money. Likewise, for other clubs, it is a virtuous cycle and I don't think there should be a cap in that regard," reasons Booth.

His view is supported by former agent and club owner Walter Mokoena, who feels a number of clubs would suffer should Sundowns' financial wings be clipped.

"In life, someone will always be faster than you, stronger than you, taller than you, and more explosive than you. It is nature's design. Unfortunately, that's how life is. We must celebrate the fact that this guy [Motsepe] is using his own family's money to invest in football because football needs investors.

"AS RECENT AS THE EARLY 90S, WHEN IRVIN KHOZA CAME BACK TO THE CLUB, PIRATES HAD THE BIGGEST BUDGET."

"We don't want to discourage people. That story has always been there for years and there's always going to be someone who comes along and invests big money. Chiefs were once owned 40% by Primedia and there was money flowing in there," said Mokoena, who previously managed Happy Jele, Mandla Masango and Dino Ndlovu.

"If Sundowns cannot pay a R10-million transfer fee, it means that Maritzburg United will close shop because that is what finances their operation.

"If they cannot spend R8-million to buy Gift Motupa or Evidence Makgopa, it means Baroka FC, can't have that money to balance



their books."

Though Sundowns appear to be largely in charge of the market, Chiefs and Pirates have also been busy before. Statistics of the last 10 years suggest that the big three clubs have been competing fiercely for players. From the 2012/13 season to the current campaign, Pirates signed 118 players, Sundowns lured 94 players and Chiefs

acquired 86 players. During the same period, Sundowns won a whopping 13 trophies. Chiefs and Pirates managed four and two trophies respectively.

Is Sundowns challenging the establishment?

For a longer time, the race for success in South African football always featured the trio. Two of the last four decades saw Chiefs and Pirates as the flagships of the country's football with generations of top players.

The two teams, backed by the majority of domestic fans, amassed great success

courtesy of their financial muscles. They would enjoy the spoils for years until Motsepe landed on the scene to propel Sundowns to a competitive level.

"Obviously in the 1980s and 90s, the big brands of Chiefs and Pirates, which are major benefactors now of sponsorship money and have big fan bases, were well on top. That's how they could get all the best players," Mokoena says.

"They had the big players and big coaches by virtue of being the biggest brands. If you think as recent as the early 90s, when Irvin Khoza came back to the club, Pirates had the biggest budget.

"They were buying all the players, Mark Fish, Helman Mkhalele, Marks Maponyane and others. All of these players, that they were now buying and paying good salaries, helped Pirates to continue growing.

"Chiefs were also the big club selling players overseas, getting the money, building the village and buying all the top players. Chiefs and Pirates did not grow these brands because they were poor. They were spending money and paying big salaries."

Since the establishment of the PSL, the big three have largely exchanged the PSL trophy among themselves. To this day, Chiefs and Pirates still enjoy the lion's share of the country's football following.

"When the big teams are dominating and



LEFT: Mamelodi Sundowns owner Patrice Motsepe celebrates another victory with the players.



RIGHT: SAFA CEO Tebogo Motlanthe

they are spending all the millions, nobody is talking about fair play, but when a team that is challenging the establishment and is starting now to put a dent, the big boys don't like it," Mokoena says.

"We have seen it in England when Liverpool and Manchester United were the duopoly of English football. It was fine when they were spending all the money but once Roman Abramovich came into the picture and Chelsea started to pay big transfer fees and big salaries, then it's a problem.

"Manchester City comes in and then it's a problem. Basically fair play is there to keep those who are small, brand-wise, to remain like that."

Courtesy of Motsepe's deep pockets, Sundowns has emerged as a competitive club not only locally but also on the continent where they are mixing it with the likes of Al Ahly, Raja Casablanca, Zamalek, Wydad Casablanca, and TP Mazembe.

With Sundowns getting the cream, Chiefs and Pirates are miles behind. Booth says the Soweto giants have no choice but to up their game if they are to match the Tshwane outfit.

"Clubs like Chiefs and Pirates, I think they could do a lot better with regards keeping up with Sundowns by doing it in a different manner because obviously they can't compete financially.

"They can do so by putting more money

behind their development and their systems when it comes to scouting, taking youth development seriously and bringing through young players.

"I feel if they put a lot of emphasis on those aspects of scouting and youth development, they can still compete on the player front with Sundowns," suggests the man who captained South Africa at the Sydney Olympics in 2000.

"I think fans should put pressure on their clubs to do the right thing and to put money into youth development and scouting systems. A lot of technical directors around the country actually don't know who the next young bright talent is. Even in their own clubs I feel that more emphasis should be put on his youth development to counter that.

"To say that sometimes Sundowns has an unfair advantage, it's just unlucky for the rest of the teams, but there are ways of competing if done properly. There is lots of talent to be unearthed in this country and

have to get a car that is fit for purpose. The team that plays locally, their budget will obviously be for local. Sundowns need to sign players because they're going to be with Al Ahly, Esperance and Wydad Casablanca."

During Pitso Mosimane's era, besides the lure of money, winning trophies and playing in CAF was the bait used to attract players. However, competition for places is fierce at Chloorkop. Sundowns is a place where some players' careers are taken to greater summits, while others nosedive.

"Surely I'm not going to blame players for jumping to the next available best opportunity," says Gaoshubelwe on the influx of players at Chloorkop. "When they see the best opportunity, they will go like, 'oh my word, this is what I've been waiting for'.

"We know as players that it is a bit tight there but I know I can fight my way in, I can be able to get my name there and in the starting line-up, but in the interim, I've got so many things that I really need to look into so that

"WHEN THE BIG TEAMS ARE DOMINATING AND THEY ARE SPENDING ALL THE MILLIONS, NOBODY IS TALKING ABOUT FAIR PLAY."

Sundowns cannot buy every single one of them. It is impossible. For fans, there's no point in just complaining. Put pressure on your clubs to do the right thing."

Keep spending

The crowning moment for Sundowns was in 2016 when they won the CAF Champions League. Since then, they have battled to conquer the continent again. With their desire to make the grade in CAF, the end is nowhere near for the Brazilians' astronomic spending in the market.

"What must Sundowns do? They are playing in the Champions League. They are competing with Al Ahly. They can't just buy players for the local league. They have to buy players for their needs," Mokoena says.

"If you have to travel along a journey you

I can secure my future beyond the playing career."

By paying competitive salaries, Sundowns have changed the game, to the benefit of all players to a certain extent. Other PSL clubs have also had to up their game as far as their wage bill is concerned.

"From a player's point of view, remember when Patrice first came on the scene, our players generally were not earning what they deserve. But when he arrived the salaries of players increased dramatically," Booth says.

"Not only the Sundowns players but also Chiefs, Pirates, SuperSport, they were forced to up their salaries. He did great justice for the players in that regard. It's a balance. If nobody can compete with him in the transfer market, then you have to apply your mind to other ways of competing." **KO**

So much has been asked about what informed Orlando Pirates' decision to opt for a co-coaching arrangement in Mandla Ncikazi and Fadlu Davids following the expected departure of Josef Zinnbauer. Was it a case of copying what Mamelodi Sundowns did? And what will happen at the end of the season considering some of the same struggles remain? KICK OFF's Lovemore Moyo seeks the answers.

Do Pirates need co-coach



The Orlando Pirates coaching pair of Mandla Ncikazi and Fadlu Davids has continued dividing opinion as the club meanders on a path thin on consistency, raising questions about what really informed The Bucs decision-makers to take this route.

There have been suggestions that with Mamelodi Sundowns succeeding with a co-coaching arrangement which has Manqoba Mngqithi, Rhulani Mokwena and Steve Komphela, Pirates felt they could follow suit.

For Sundowns, they already had a solid foundation having dominated the domestic scene under Pitso Mosimane his departure to Al Ahly.

Yet at Pirates, Ncikazi and Davids' reality was that this is a completely different club run on principles not aligned to what is done at Chloorkop.

With Pirates having built a culture of trial and error, the functionality and sustainability of the two interim coaches was always going to have questions hanging.

season? Pirates is really a confusing club for the supporters who want their team to get results, but when the results come the coaches are changed," says Sebola, adding that a new coach is needed.

"There's nothing happening in terms of progress at Pirates, so I think they just need to get a coach who knows that 'this is Pirates'. I'm not saying us as former players should be walking into jobs at the club, but I believe it would be better to have former players within the structures.

"Mandla's name is not at stake because he never played for Pirates and never won any trophy as a player. So, everything at Pirates is just a new experience for him. Pirates is being used as a learning ground when it is not supposed to. I thought a guy like Dan Malesela would have been given a chance by now.

"If Cameroon and Senegal are bringing in their former players whose names in Rigobert Song and Aliou Cisse, why can't we do the same? At Pirates they must bring back the former players.

"HOW DO YOU EVEN BUILD WHEN YOU ARE ALWAYS CHOPPING AND CHANGING?"

"I think in appointing these two guys, Pirates were taking chances," says former Buccaneers player Andries Sebola.

"Firstly, what criteria was used in letting go of [Josef] Zinnbauer? How do you let go of a coach who won you a trophy? The players were responding to his methods, so I fail to understand how they would let him go and replace him with people who have never won anything. I don't think we respect this game enough with some of the decisions that we make.

"Even in years gone by we have had coaches like [Gordon] Igesund, [Roy] Barreto and [Ruud] Krol being sacked for winning the league, so I don't know what method they are using.

"My issue with Pirates is the lack of consistency. Right now, you can't even tell which direction the team is taking. At Pirates we need results instantly and not to be always building.

"How do you even build when you are always chopping and changing by signing players from small teams every

"I hope Pirates will listen one day because we cannot keep on with Sundowns dominating this way. Yes, Sundowns have the money, but they also bring in the right people.

"Pitso Mosimane was a former player, and they now have former national team captain Steve Komphela within the structures," adds Sebola.

'It is not working for Pirates'

As debate rages on about finding solutions at Pirates, this year will mark a decade since the club last won a league and nothing suggests they will be ready to dethrone Mamelodi Sundowns anytime soon.

In the last decade, only Vladmir Vermezovic and Zinnbauer have won trophies for the club, but they rank as unpopular figures.

"With Pirates, they are on and off, so it is easy to start questioning if the arrangement of co-coaches



is working with them. For me it is not working for Pirates," notes retired player Alton Meiring.

Ncikazi was brought to Pirates having served only one full season as a head at Lamontville Golden Arrows, with plenty of his previous work having been done as second in charge.

Davids, though younger, had been in charge as a head coach for longer at Maritzburg United before being brought to Pirates as an assistant three years ago.

"At Sundowns there is freedom for the coaches, while at Pirates it is no secret that there is a lot of interference from influential people within the club. At Sundowns the set-up is different because Steve has been around for years, while Manqoba won a final 6-0 with Golden Arrows before coming to Sundowns.

"These guys have been head coaches before and are joined by a young mind

they need to be protected, though the environment that they are in might not [give them time].

"They need to be supported so that they gain experience, and the Pirates fans need to be patient with them as well. I think Pirates need to reach a final and then finish in the top three because right now they can't win the league as Sundowns is the best team by a country mile.

"Sundowns have shown us what continuity brings so Pirates might as well follow suit with local guys. There is no need to be bringing in coaches from overseas who will end up being referred to as plumbers," says Meiring.

Is it about co-coaches?

On the evidence of form, based on numbers and not sentiments, Ncikazi and Davids will not surpass what was achieved under Zinnbauer's only full season last term.

"AT PIRATES IT IS NO SECRET THAT THERE IS A LOT OF INTERFERENCE FROM INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE WITHIN THE CLUB."

in Rhulani. In that arrangement, you only hope that there are no egos involved.

"Co-coaches exist overseas but they are not given that title. I once went on trials in Russia where there was a coach for defenders, another for midfielders and one for strikers, plus the head coach and a goalkeeper coach. It's just that here we associate the co-coach with conflict," he says.

Meiring stresses that the two must be supported for the sake of promoting local coaches, especially at clubs with resources like Pirates. Of the big three this season, only Stuart Baxter is a non-local.

"We have to give Mandla and Fadlu the benefit of doubt because they are locals and deserve the support. We must empower them. There is no need to compare them to the German guy [Zinnbauer] who was there before them.

"They are less experienced so need to be supported and it is encouraging that Pirates have a very good squad so that gives Mandla and Fadlu a positive to work on.

"For them being locals, I don't want to criticise to say they are bad coaches or not good enough for Pirates because I feel

Under the German, Pirates ended a six-year wait for silverware by lifting the MTN8 and finished third on 50 points.

They also reached the quarterfinals of both the CAF Confederation Cup and Nedbank Cup. Such results were still not convincing enough to satisfy The Bucs.

This season the continental campaign remains alive, just like the Nedbank Cup, but reaching 50 points is unlikely considering the rate at which The Bucs have been going with more drawn matches than those that have been won.

"I feel those two guys at Pirates deserve to be given the chance along with support so that they work freely knowing that this is not a trap set up for them to fail," says former Bafana Bafana international Bennett Mnguni, basing his argument on the fact that as locals they should be given a longer opportunity.

"Let us give them a chance because we desperately need a lot more of our own coaches in the influential clubs. Let us not rush to judge our local coaches when they are rarely given the chance at the clubs with bigger budgets and ambitions. Our local



THE HOTTEST SEAT IN THE BUSINESS

Orlando Pirates have lived up to the billing that the club's coaching job is the most volatile in the country considering the number of changes that have been made through the years.

It has remained a mystery what it takes to keep the job at Pirates considering that coaches who won the league, like Gordon Igesund, Roy Barreto and Ruud Krol, all found themselves pushed out. Igesund felt the wrath of influential people at the club, who orchestrated his way out by using fans to intimidate him, the same way Barreto was also pushed into walking out.

Krol brought a seven-year wait for silverware to end by winning the treble in his last season in charge but that was not enough to earn him a new deal.

Those that have won trophies while in charge at the club, like Vladimir Vermezovic, Josef Zinnbauer and Julio Leal, have found themselves not enjoying the same praise as those that left without landing silverware like Kosta Papic, Milutin Sredojevic, Roger de Sa, Eric Tinkler and Ted Dumitru.



“LET US NOT RUSH TO JUDGE OUR LOCAL COACHES WHEN THEY ARE RARELY GIVEN THE CHANCE.”

coaches understand our space better, so we need to push for them to stay longer in jobs.

“I would wish for Mandla and Fadlu to grow by staying longer in that job. They played in this league so why not allow them to also coach in this league?” he argues.

According to Mnguni the matter of having joint coaches is less important.

“This kind of arrangement has been in existence since way back, but it is just that the terminology used has not been the same. Some coaches work as co-coaches with their assistants. I think Pirates went this way because they understood that Mandla and Fadlu have worked together before.

“As long as they share the same common philosophy towards the game as coaches then the team is good to go. It is a matter of being willing to listen to each other, learn from each other and have trust towards each other.

“I feel when Micho [Sredojevic] worked with Rhulani they were co-coaches considering how they seemed to understand each other in what they were doing and looked harmonious, which is what matters,” says Mnguni.

The Gabadinho Mhango saga

While Pirates will be looking in the mirror to make sense of their technical team come end of the season, Sundowns will be reaping the fruits with co-coaches again.

In lifting the 2005/06 title, Neil Tovey was a joint-head coach with Miguel Gamondi after they took over from Angel Cappa just before Christmas.

So, the 1996 AFCON winning captain has first-hand experience of this kind of set-up. “At Pirates, it is Mandla who is the head

coach from what I have seen. Simple as that,” he declares.

“But then that is not the most important thing. What matters is that the players know what is needed of them. With us it was never a case of, ‘Neil wants this and Miguel wants that’.

“There was a mutual understanding of what we wanted and how we wanted to play. It wasn’t a case of having egos with one of us wanting to be the head coach,” says Tovey, while insisting that Pirates need to ditch the joint coaches arrangement and have a clear-cut head and assistant to avoid conflict.

“The way to go [at Pirates]] is a coach and his assistant. In a situation like Sundowns, Manqoba is the head figure with Rulani and Steve providing the support.

“Ultimately the last decision is with Manqoba but they all have areas of strength to offer expertise. There will be disagreements along the way because not everybody thinks and acts the same way. But they have to discuss it away from the players. After the thought process between the coaches is agreed, the players must get one message.

“For Sundowns, it is also working because they have very good players who carry them through, though it doesn’t make it easier because having a bunch of good players means they all want to play.”

With Pirates still mired in finding solutions to improve their situation, Ncikazi has not won himself admirers in his line of duty.

His argument about why Gabadinho Mhango was being ignored after his fine showing at the AFCON finals was baffling.

With results not as forthcoming as desired, the former Golden Arrows coach has left himself with regular explanations.

“I acknowledge that we haven’t scored as much as we want but scoring depends on a lot of factors,” he says.

“With the number of matches that we have dominated, I think our results should have been better. The process of creating chances is not a big worry. It only becomes a big problem if we don’t enter the final third.

“But when you play against a low block and create the kind of chances that we created it is encouraging. We must work frequently on such situations and repetitions of such so that the players can get the confidence of scoring.

“It is not a big problem from the look because we are not scoring but I think it is manageable,” says Ncikazi. **KO**

'Ngcobo is a centre-back'

Such has been Njabulo Ngcobo's first season at Kaizer Chiefs that he has found himself having to adjust not only to the demands of being at the club, but also dealing with the strain of not playing in his preferred central defender position. Ngcobo was, after all, the best defender in this league last season while playing for Swallows FC. KICK OFF's Lovemore analyses the 27-year-old's situation at Naturena.

When the dust, generated by the excitement which greeted the arrival of Njabulo Ngcobo at Kaizer Chiefs from Swallows FC, died down, reality set in almost immediately.

Ngcobo had to find a way to break the trusted partnership between Mulomowandau Mathoho and Daniel Cardoso at centre-back to get minutes playing at the club.

The fact that he had been the best defender in the league last season didn't matter a bit for coach Stuart Baxter.

He wasn't going to bow to public demands in changing his principles. The Chiefs coach then stirred a hornet's nest by suggesting that Ngcobo will have to prove himself as he is not the best defender at the club.

Deflating to hear for a player who walked in at Naturena with a spring in his step.

"Even though he wants to play at centre-back, he will play at centre-back if he is the best centre-back we have," Baxter commented upon being quizzed on Ngcobo.

"If he's not the best centre-back we have and I put him in the centre of midfield, I would

think he wants to play wherever selected, which is the indication he's given to me. I'm sure his preference is centre-back but he has got to prove to us that he is the best centre-back for that job.

"He's had a few injuries and he's been up and down, so it's not been easy for him, and it's his first season at a club like Kaizer Chiefs, so I'm not rushing him. I'm going to try and evaluate him over a longer period."

Why the sudden change of position?

Based on face value, it is fair to assume that his signing wasn't motivated by Baxter but rather imposed by management.

Therefore, it is rather baffling that Ngcobo has been converted into a central midfielder for him to get minutes.

"This thing of changing positions, it might work for the coach in terms of his philosophy but work against the player," argues the club's former defender Rodney Thobejane. "So, as a player it depends on whether I adjust



fast to that position. What I have seen most of the times is that it destroys the players because if you are not mentally strong, you may think that I'm not good enough to play where I feel comfortable the most, which is as a defender and not a midfielder.

"You will be thinking, 'they signed me having seen me playing in that position so why are they now playing me in another position? Why have they changed me from the position that I'm comfortable playing?'. I know Baxter's philosophy is that if we don't score then they must not score, which is why he is sticking with the more experienced ones at the back.

"Again, maybe he brought Ngcobo to that position because he saw potential as a central midfielder, rather than keeping him on the bench," says Thobejane

It would appear Ngcobo is a victim of his own versatility as he is comfortable on the ball. Yet for all these qualities, the coach under whom he had his best days in the PSL insists he should be play as a central defender.

'Owners have their opinions'

Brandon Truter knew Ngcobo from his time at AmaZulu and brought him in at Richards Bay before again doing the same at Swallows.

"Njabulo reminded so much of OJ [Mbulelo Mabizela] and Nasief Morris in that he was comfortable on the ball, a great reader of the game and could play out from the back. But in football, the owners and other people always have their own opinions about how the game should be played. They don't see the quality in Njabulo because they believe in the old-fashioned defenders who will tackle and just give the ball to the midfielders and not initiate moves from the back.

"I think his ease on the ball is the reason why he is being played in midfield, though I feel he is being exposed there. He is best suited to play at the back because he doesn't have to observe what is happening behind him, but manage the spaces," adds Truter, who was initially questioned about his decision to stick it with Ngcobo from the word go at the beginning of last season.

"I would have him as a centre-back in any team and wouldn't dare play him as a



"NJABULO REMINDED SO MUCH OF OJ [MBULELO MABIZELA] AND NASIEF MORRIS."

midfielder. In central midfield, Njabulo will be exposed because his awareness must be 360 degrees so if the ball travels quicker, Njabulo does get lost.

"Yet when playing as a central defender, everything is in front of him and all you must do is manage the space behind you and have a vision of 180 degrees.

"The difference is that in midfield he will get caught but with his comfort on the ball. People now think he can go and play in midfield, which is different. The boy will struggle in midfield.

"His qualities are such that with some coaches who don't like builders from the back, they will prefer him in midfield because they want their defenders to get the ball into the midfield as fast as possible instead of creating the attack from the back.

"I think Njabulo is a modern central

defender and that is his position where he should be playing. But then at the same time, moving him to central midfield is still in the spine and unlike expecting a carpenter to be an electrician. I feel as a coach you need to get the best available person in that position always. Maybe the challenge is that the other centre-backs at the back have played longer together in the PSL, which is why he must play in midfield.

"But when you watch closely, he does get lost playing in midfield because he must come deep to fetch the ball from defence," details Truter.

'I've never seen a player so good'

The beauty of football is that it divides opinion. This is why for Ngcobo to eventually end up at Swallows and then



“IT IS NORMALLY EASIER TO MOVE FROM MIDFIELD TO THE BACK BECAUSE YOU ARE USED TO PLAYING IN CONGESTED SPACES.”

It was at Uthongathi that Ngcobo landed after being released by Richards Bay in January 2019.

“We got Njabulo after he had been released at Richards Bay and every time I have asked [Richards Bay chairman Sifiso] Biyela why they let him go. I have never understood it but such is the nature of the game.

“Truter was the coach at Richards Bay when Njabulo was released yet he was the same coach who signed him for Swallows. The same week he arrived he started a game and never looked back.

“We had him for 18 months and I have never seen a player who can be so good and be so respectful at the same time.

“He never sat on the bench and we had to split the centre-back pairing that we already had so that he plays. The good thing about him is that you can play him with anyone at the back and he will deliver.

“He gave us so much stability playing at the back so he is an asset in that position,” says Mojapelo, scratching his head about why there is even a debate about where he should now play at Chiefs.

“I see that from being the defender of the season he is now being asked to play in midfield at Chiefs. It is a challenge because from being used to playing in an isolated position where he wins the ball and makes decisions without pressure, he must now play in a congested space with a lot of people around you.

“It is normally easier to move from midfield to the back because you are used to playing in congested spaces. However, when it is the opposite, it is a different story. I prefer him as a centre back even though he is not doing that bad where Baxter is playing him in midfield.

“I don’t know the reasons for playing him in midfield. Could it be that they just want to accommodate him in the team since they don’t want to break the partnership of Mathoho and Cardoso at the back?” he says.

Former Chiefs wingback Robert Nauseb has also observed Ngcobo’s situation with interest.

“I don’t know what the coach is seeing that we don’t. The coach needs to be given the benefit of doubt as the man working with the player every day. We don’t understand the dynamics. It is only the coach and his technical team who understand this matter better.

“Maybe Ngcobo’s versatility is the reason why he was signed. To move him into the midfield is a bit rough and tough on the boy because he is not a natural midfielder. On the positive, maybe the coach is building the boy to play as a holding midfielder in the future.

“Nowadays as a central defender you need to be able to play the ball and then when the coach notices that you are comfortable, he moves you into midfield.

“So, maybe since he has been played there, he must accept it and start learning how to play there. I don’t think Chiefs have had a proper replacement for Willard Katsande who used to play in front of the defenders. Maybe Baxter feels he would rather build this boy to take over there because he notices that he has the ability.

“If he didn’t see a future for the boy in that position, he shouldn’t have never tried him there. The coach and his technical team are the only ones who will know what they are gunning for.

“Time will tell and let us hope the boy will make it there and move on to become a great defensive midfielder for Bafana Bafana. You’ll never know,” says Nauseb. **KO**

Chiefs, he was first offloaded at both AmaZulu and Richards Bay.

He never gave up, even through the times when he worked at KFC to supplement his earnings before his break to the PSL ultimately came at 26.

“Imagine getting a player like Njabulo walking the streets without a club? People should have already been fighting for him the same way that Chiefs had to pay money to get him,” states Jackson Mojapelo, the Uthongathi team manager.

NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR USUTHU

Kaizer Chiefs is the fifth club that Njabulo Ngcobo has played for since breaking into the professional ranks at AmaZulu during the 2016/17 season. Though he gave a good account of himself through that season, he found himself unwanted at the end of the campaign when the club bought a PSL status.

He was considered inexperienced and so found himself moving to Richards Bay. There he spent 18 months showing the qualities of being a steady defender but found himself stranded midway through his second season. It was at that point that fellow First Division club Uthongathi

snapped him up. He also spent 18 months at the club. Then when Swallows won promotion to the PSL they came calling for his services. In The Birds’ nest, he didn’t disappoint and was the best defender in the PSL at the end of the one season he spent with the club before moving to Chiefs.

KICK OFF: Have the tears of failing to qualify for the 2022 FIFA World Cup Play-Offs at the hands of Ghana dried up now and how have you digested all of that now?

Ethan Brooks: It was very emotional for me in terms of what happened, yet at the same it was a really good experience for me at my age. The whole experience was something different for me in a good way. I feel like I have learnt a lot from that. When every kid starts playing sports, they have dreams that they want to achieve and mine was qualifying for the World Cup. When it didn't go our way, it was difficult. It was sad in the sense that we were not able to qualify, but I was happy to have experienced what I did throughout the qualifiers.

The World Cup would have been massive ...

I never realised this dream would be this close so soon. However, coming that close was an eye-opener that made me aware that it can really happen if you do believe in the dreams that you want to achieve.

What do you make of everything that happened in Ghana now that you have had time to reflect soberly?

From the moment we got there, it was all new for me because it was my first time in Ghana. Everyone was excited to get to play there and at the same time, we knew that we had a job to go and accomplish. In terms of the game atmosphere, there was a massive crowd and that already ignited everyone in the team. We got to play, and it wasn't going our way, but this is football and it happens. I feel like we did show that we wanted it, but in the end it didn't happen.

Your international career has taken off quicker than you would have imagined with your caps count already in double figures before your 21st birthday ...

I remember just how much I have absorbed through the lessons since my first call up to the national Under-20, but I feel this is a journey and I can never stop learning because there is still so much more to learn as well. I need this to be the start of something better. If I get to rub shoulders playing against some guys that I watch playing in the English Premiership, it shows that I'm also not too far away from what I would like to achieve. It is exciting for me to think that I can also play against them. I have also kept memories from the first call-up that I got. It happened while we were travelling from playing against Kaizer Chiefs in the last game of

'We can beat the drop'

TS Galaxy midfielder Ethan Brooks needed just 12 appearances in the PSL to earn his first call-up for Bafana Bafana. Though regarded as a youngster, he has already found himself dealing with the challenges and strain of being a professional as he continues to rise shine despite speculation he could be playing elsewhere next season. He spoke to KICK OFF's Lovemore Moyo.



the season when the manager told me about the email, and I remember then calling my parents while in tears. The tears went down because I felt my work is being recognised. I never imagined the call-up would come so fast even though I always hoped that it would happen at some time. In my first camp, the coach [Hugo Broos] was not there, but in the second he was and he told me that I should continue doing what I have been doing at my club and make sure that I remain calm and play my football.

Broos has shown faith in the younger players ...

It is encouraging that the coach has belief in the younger players like me. The only way to repay him is by showing him that we can play with the same confidence that we have always been playing with, and with that show that the confidence that he is giving us, we will give it back to him considering that there I still so much to play for ahead of us.

Do you realise that you are the envy of many a kid growing up who loves football and has dreams of playing professionally?

Though I have always been playing football from when I was a kid, it was in Grade 11 that I realised that I can make a career out of it. At the school [Parktown Boys] that I attended, you had to pick a sport each term and at Grade 10 I chose football. I was also an all-rounder in cricket, while in rugby I was a scrumhalf. But the next year I settled for football, which I also played in my Matric year. I was the kid who wanted to change the perception of the school being associated with water polo and all these other sports. I was helped by my Mom to keep the balance right with my studies, while making sure that my school work remained the priority, which is why I still have plans to study this year. Though TS Galaxy recruited me while I was in Matric, I only played for them full-time after I was done with school.

Have you been to trials along the way in your career?

I went for trials at BidVest Wits Under-17 through my coach at school but there were 100s of kids there, so I wasn't selected and just told myself that I don't need to put myself through that again. I went to SuperSport United on invitation and got to play tournaments with them under different coaches, which was good for me but their training ground in Pretoria was way too far for me staying in the south



of Johannesburg, so I stopped. I trained for one day at Orlando Pirates after being invited but I just didn't like it there as it didn't suit me, so I stayed on at Panorama where I feel I was fortunate to have a coach like Michael Michael, who gave lots of life and football lessons. While at Panorama we went to Portugal on tour, which also helped shape my career.

What resonates through your mind now when you hear about career growth?

I'm reminded of where I started at the age of four up to now in my 21st birthday. It is a journey that I have learnt so much from. Right now, I'm taking it day-by-day, week-by-week, and month-by-month, because God has a purpose for all of us and it is not always what we have in mind. I can attest to that because the national team call came earlier than I had thought it would.

So, when your career is blossoming the way it is, you are constantly going to get reminded about keeping your feet on the ground and not allowing fame to go to your head ...

I'm grateful for the family that I have because the values that they taught me remain applicable up to now. Those principles have kept me level-headed and humble, which is something that I never want to take for granted. I know of new friends wanting to come close when times are good but I have kept my childhood



friends. It is good to have friends like that in my circle and it shows who they are and what they are to me.

How are you dealing with the relegation battle that you now have in your hands at TS Galaxy this season?

It is a blessing in disguise for me to experience this so early in my career. It is important that the mentality is right going into every single game and everyone at

training is working right, because we all know the position we are in. We need to remain calm even when there is a storm. I'm confident, and I feel my teammates are also confident, that we can survive.

In your short time in the PSL you have also gotten to have a feel of playing under different coaches in Dan Malesela, Owen da Gama and now Sead Ramovic. How are you dealing with adjusting to the demands?

Each coach will come with his own style, and you have to adjust to what they demand of you as a player. As one leaves you need to adjust and find a way to deliver what they need of you. With my current coach, I feel like I'm getting there. We didn't really start off on a very good note, but we had the break with him and I feel with that break I'm getting to where he wants me to be.

What do you make of the contribution that you have made this season considering you don't have goals and assists in your game? Does this concern you?

Personally, I feel I have done well though there are some games where I have made mistakes. However, I have learnt from each one, which is why I say I have done well. Since the second round started, I did tell myself that I must try and score and assist. I feel like I was close in the Nedbank Cup against Kaizer Chiefs and then in the league against Swallows, and since then I feel like when I'm in the box I needed to be calm. I feel like it is coming. Goals and assists are something I need in my game.

The reality with football is that when you have entered the PSL ranks via a club like TS Galaxy and got to play in the national team, the question about career ambition will always be pertinent ...

To be honest, I just want to focus on my current team and play football. If anything is to happen at the end of the season, then it will happen, but for now, I want to focus on where I am and let the future unfold when it does. Ultimately, I want to be in Europe. Where in Europe, I'm not particular because I'm being open-minded about it since I don't know where the opportunity will come from. **KO**

LEARNING FROM THE BEST

Last season Ethan Brooks shared a dressing room with veteran midfielder Reneilwe 'Yeye' Letsholonyane, who had a wealth of experience to share considering he was 19 years older! The TS Galaxy player says he is still in awe to this day.

"The first time I met him [Yeye], I was shocked and went up to talk to him at training," Brooks tells KICK OFF. "It was an honour for me to see someone like him train the way he does at his age.

"It was something that blew me away but then I absorbed a lot of what he

had to give at training and off the field as well. It was just an honour and privilege to be in his presence.

"I'm very different to most players because I tend to watch a player do what he does in certain situations and then absorb what he did and only later go and ask about it. So, I wouldn't bombard him with questions.

"I know it is something that people would always want you to go and do but for me watching, learning and trying it myself before I go and ask. That is how it was with me," adds Brooks.






FUTURE Z

DRIVE THEM
CRAZY

Military precision

A soldier by DNA and striker by design, Baroka FC star Richard Mbulu is hitting his targets in more ways than one. The 28-year-old once laid claim to being Malawi's most prolific goalscorer and is now hoping to emulate those heights in the DStv Premiership where he has become a fan-favourite with Bakgakga in recent times. KICK OFF's Liam Bekker caught up with the former Costa do Sol sharpshooter to discuss his footballing journey so far, which includes a history-making campaign with the Flames at the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations and his peculiar fondness for scoring against Denis Onyango and the reigning PSL champions, Mamelodi Sundowns.



Born in Mangochi, Malawi, Baroka FC striker Richard Mbulu holds the unique position of being both a soldier and a professional footballer, following in his father's footsteps in both fields of occupation.

The Malawi international always dreamed of taking up the sport and found the platform to achieve that with the country's national defence force, who provided him with the opportunity to showcase his skills at the Malawi Armed Forces College, or MAFCO.

"It's not like I learned from somewhere how to play or went to an academy or anything like that," Mbulu reflects. "I just wanted to be a footballer. I liked playing football from a young age, playing in the village, and sometimes I would even run away from school just to play. In the end, that's how I became a footballer."

"You know, I even joined the military because of football. When I finished school, the army team saw me and took me in from another team. I had played just one season with the other team before I joined MAFCO. Me and my father are both in the army, so it was really good. Like father, like son."

It was during his time with the Soldiers, who play in the Super League of Malawi, that Mbulu announced himself as one of the country's most promising players and prolific goalscorers. In 2014, MAFCO won the Presidential Cup for the first time in the club's history before ending as runners-up in the league the following season, but it was in 2016 that the striker's true goalscoring prowess came to the fore.

While accurate statistics are not readily available, it was widely reported that Mbulu broke the record for the most goals in the Cup with a return of no fewer

"I SCORED EIGHT GOALS IN ONE GAME."

than 15 goals for the campaign, including a remarkable eight-goal haul against minnows Masendesende.

"It's true, I scored eight goals in one game," he confirms. "I can't remember the name of the team, but it was a small team who I think was playing in the second division at the time. The same season I won the Golden Boot in the league."

Indeed, the then-23-year-old walked away with the coveted Golden Boot



WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

the biggest Internet portal,
providing you various content:
brand new books, trending movies,
fresh magazines, hot games,
recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price

Cheap constant access to piping hot media

Protect your downloadings from Big brother

Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages

Brand new content

One site



AVXLIVE ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open <https://avxlive.icu>

award after top-scoring in the league with 19 goals for the campaign, three strikes clear of former Orlando Pirates and Golden Arrows striker Chiukepo Msowoya, who was playing for Nyasa Big Bullets.

“Before that season I even said to myself I wanted to be the top goalscorer. The day we started the league, I saw that things were going my way, that I was scoring goals, and I ended up being the leading goalscorer and that’s also how I ended up going from Malawi to Mozambique to play the following year.”

Mbulu’s form in front of goal caught the attention of a host of clubs across the African continent, but it was Mozambiquan giants Costa do Sol who ultimately won the race for his signature, in the process ending his link with the Malawian military – at least for the time being.

“I am still a soldier. It’s not like I am retired. When I one day finish football, I will go back and continue being a soldier, and some of the things that I learned in the military I still apply in football. Never give up. Work hard and you will get what you want.”



“I ALWAYS WISHED THAT I WOULD ONE DAY ALSO BE IN SOUTH AFRICA PLAYING IN THE PSL.”

Pit stop in Portugal before achieving PSL dream

In December 2016, following the conclusion of the domestic campaign in Malawi, Mbulu was signed by Mozambican Football Championship side Costa do Sol. He helped the club win the domestic cup competition in his debut season and less than a year later his performances had caught the attention of Portuguese team, Sanjoanense, who shared an affiliation with the Canarinhos.

He completed the move to Europe in June 2018 when he joined the lower league side on a season-long loan, although that deal ended after just six months and with Mbulu having made only four league appearances.

Despite the brevity of his stay, he regards the opportunity to play in Europe as an incredible experience and still harbours

hopes to one day return to the continent.

“You know, it was my first time in Europe, and it was good,” Mbulu says. “I went there on a six-month loan because the owner of the team wanted to take me there to play. I went there, got some experience, but I wish that I could play in Europe again because I learned a lot. It was my first time playing there but now I wish I can go back because I know what I need to do to perform that side.”

Mbulu returned to his parent club in January 2019 and penned a year-long extension to his contract, although he would only remain in Mozambique for six more months before finding himself on the move again.

Ahead of the 2019/20 DStv Premiership season, the striker completed a transfer



to South Africa after he was acquired by Baroka FC on a three-year deal, with Bakgaka’s coach Wedson Nyirenda looking to the Malawian star to bolster his attacking options.

“I was doing well in Mozambique and then Nyirenda, that coach from Zambia, he came there and said, ‘I want this boy to come with me to Baroka’, and that’s why I am at the club today,” Mbulu explains.

“I was quite interested to play in South Africa. Most of the games I used to watch

when I was growing up were PSL games and I always wished that I would one day also be in South Africa playing in the PSL."

However, he did not enjoy the most auspicious start to life in the PSL after completing his first campaign without a single goal to his name, blanking in 26 league appearances and recording just two assists.

The club retained faith in their gun-striker for the following campaign though and were rewarded in October 2020 when he finally broke his drought, netting the opening goal in a 2-1 win over Maritzburg United.

"THE ONE I SCORED IN FEBRUARY IS ONE OF THE BEST GOALS OF MY CAREER."

He then netted twice in his very next match against Black Leopards, before going on to end the campaign as the club's second highest goalscorer, behind Bafana Bafana's Evidence Makgopa, with six goals in 21 appearances.

"It's football. Sometimes you face good challenges, and sometimes you face bad challenges, so you just have to accept it," he says, reflecting on overcoming that difficult period in his career. "Sometimes you battle so what you have to do as a player is just to work hard and focus, head up, so that you are able to do well in the future."

At the time of publication, the 28-year-old has added two more league goals to his tally this season, with both coming against reigning DStv Premiership champions Mamelodi Sundowns.

The first of those were scored in Baroka's 2-1 defeat in December while the latter took the form of a remarkable 95th-minute equaliser that is a sure contender for the PSL Goal of the Season award.

With time ticking down on the clock, Mbulu latched onto a second ball from Denwin Farmer to volley home an unstoppable effort from outside of the box.

He laughs when asked about his knack for scoring against Masandawana, "It's just the way it happens. It's always when I'm playing Sundowns, and not just Sundowns, but [Sundowns' goalkeeper] Denis Onyango too, I've scored against him three

times in the last year – once with the national team, then in first round in the league and again in the second round.

"I just feel like I'm going to score, and you know that goalkeeper is one of the best in the PSL, so for me it feels really good. I'm sure the one I scored in February is one of the best goals of my career. It was a good goal.

"In my head, I saw the goalkeeper was standing to the left, and he was a little bit near-sided, so when I took the shot I thought, let me put it far post and it will go in, and then I saw that the ball was in the back of the net."

Firing Malawi to the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations

While Mbulu continues to strive to return to his best at club level, the Malawian striker has also enjoyed a productive 12 months with the national team. In March last year, he famously scored in back-to-back Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers against South Sudan and Uganda to help the Flames reach the competition for the first

time since 2010, and for only the third time in the country's history.

"I am proud because I can say that we went to AFCON because of that goal [in the final Group B qualifier against Uganda]," he says. "But it was not only because that goal. We reached the tournament because of the way we worked hard from the first game of qualifying. Everyone worked hard and wanted to achieve it, and in the end, we managed to do it."

His exploits during the qualification stage of the competition were regarded with such importance back in his native country that he was promoted from the rank of corporal to that of sergeant by the Malawi Defence Force.

He and his teammates were not satisfied with merely making up the numbers in Cameroon though, and despite boasting one of the youngest squads at the tournament, ultimately went on to achieve the nation's best-ever finishing at an Africa Cup of Nations after reaching the Round of 16, where they were narrowly defeated by North African giants, Morocco.

"When we were heading to the tournament, we didn't expect to reach the Round of 16 but after we played one game then we said, 'Ah guys, we can make. It's not too difficult. We must just fight for each other'.

"Everyone worked hard and we were one family in the team. We were one of the youngest teams too, so it was really good because we fought for each other. For us, we made history by reaching the Round of 16 and I am sure that we are going to repeat that at the next AFCON.

"Morocco is a big team, a good team with players playing at big clubs in Europe, so I'm sure we will be able to use that experience to go far at the next AFCON."

The qualifiers for the 2023 edition of the Africa Cup of Nations are set to get underway later this year but for now, Mbulu is hoping to use what he learned in Cameroon as ammunition to fire Baroka back up the DStv Premiership standings.

"The experience was good, and I learned a lot of things. You know, in football, when you qualify for those tournaments, they give players a lot of experience and I am sure that I have personally gained a lot of experience that I can bring back to the league. **KO**



KICK OFF: What do you miss the most about football since you retired?

Surprise Moriri: I'm still involved in the game. The difference is that I'm now coaching and no longer actively playing. What I miss is the competitive part of the game. When you are involved in training; in preparations; planning; plotting; the adrenalin on the eve of a crucial game; the adulation when you enter the pitch. Here and there I play for the over-35s in social matches, but the competitive part of the game is one thing I can say I miss most. But I've made peace with the fact that I've hung up my boots.

Have you altered your lifestyle from that of a sportsman now that you are retired?

Obviously when playing you are always thinking about the next game. But when coaching, you still have to plan for the next game before you go to training. You have to add the administrative part of the game as part of your duties. Your focus changes because now you are working with youngsters and that comes with its own demands and responsibilities. You know boys will be boys and part of your job entails ensuring that they do not bunk school in preference of football. You must demonstrate to them that education is equally important, and they must find a way to balance the two.

When did you decide it was time to retire?

It was during my last season at Sundowns when I went to Highlands Park. I started doing CAF License coaching certificates in preparation for life after football. It was clear during my time at Highlands that my days were numbered and so I decided to retire rather than overstay my welcome. I didn't want to find myself in a situation where the fans are insulting me or yelling for me to be withdrawn.

There were no issues at Sundowns when you returned from Highlands?

Not at all. When I was done with playing, I called the President [Patrice Motsepe] after he told me to come back if things did not work out when he released me. He asked me what I wanted to do and I told him coaching. He spoke to management. I was notified that I would assist David Notoane, who was in charge of the Multichoice Diski Challenge side. He was assisted by Shawn Bishop and both coaches accepted me with open arms and showed me the ropes, assisting me to settle down in my new environment.

Surprise Moriri was blessed with the most exquisite first touch imaginable and enjoyed a remarkable career with Mamelodi Sundowns, who he led to numerous league and cup trophies. Few have forgotten how he brilliantly smashed a sensational volley past legendary Barcelona goalkeeper Victor Valdez at Loftus against a team that included Dani Alves, Ronaldinho, Deco and Samuel Eto'o. In this interview with KICK OFF's Thomas Kwenaithe, he reveals why he retired when he could have gone on for an additional two years, as well as the pressure members of Bafana Bafana experienced prior to the 2010 FIFA World Cup.



'Parreira on another



was er level'

“I DECIDED TO RETIRE RATHER THAN OVERSTAY MY WELCOME.”

Let us talk about mental health and depression among players who sometimes end up resorting to substance abuse when they retire from football.

This is a very sensitive topic but we have to be brutally honest about it because it's an emotional subject. Most of us discover that when we get into football, we have been playing for fun at the lower level. But now football becomes a fulltime job and you get paid for it. But imagine coming from Matibidi [his home town in Mpumalanga] where you grew up struggling to get R20 in a month. Suddenly you are paid R20,000 a month and thrust into the limelight with an obscene amount of money in your bank account. It becomes difficult because now you have to adjust.

But the pay comes with the territory?

Your overnight fame requires that you live up to expectations. Yet you never received financial advice previously. Now on an almost daily basis you are appearing in newspapers, magazine and on television. You are at a different level and even when going to training, as soon as training ends, you are rushing off to the nearest mall to purchase the latest designer clothes and be seen cruising in the hottest German sedan. We are in the fast lane but nobody bothers to tell you that a footballer's career has a relatively short span. Truth is we need financial education. Without pointing fingers, the PSL, SAFA, Player's Union and Club owners need to come together and address this issue.

Is it why you drove a small Japanese car for almost a decade?

It doesn't mean that when you retire, you are no longer obliged to pay your mortgage, vehicle, insurance, school fees rates and taxes. You are still responsible for those bills but the difference is that now there is no longer a salary you receive every month. I had priorities but in reality, we need help. We can earn lots of money but, without financial literacy, we won't get anywhere. You find people winning a lottery that pays out more than R50-million. But within six months he has blown it all away. I have been



fortunate to secure a job immediately when I stopped playing.

What has been the most rewarding experience of your career?

I would say winning cup competitions is the highlight. But it has also been a privilege to have shared dressingrooms with some of the finest footballers of my generation. That has been the most fulfilling thing because you get to know people from different places, their characters and you learn something everlasting in terms of building relationships. And it is only now that you start to appreciate the value of true friendship forged through football. Football will give you something that you might not get when working on a normal job. I made lots of friends, some have contributed to my life and to my growth as a person and I hope I've also contributed to theirs.

Where did you learn your incredible first touch?

It had to do with growing up and playing on dusty township streets. We used to play on uneven gravel grounds and all the time you quickly learn to anticipate that difficult bounce of the ball. Sometimes the ball might bounce off a rock and so you must be ready to anticipate that sudden change of direction. I cannot say I practiced perfecting my first touch but it certainly emanated from those situations.

How did you develop your skills in Wattville when you hailed from Matibidi in Mpumalanga?

My father worked in Benoni and lived in Wattville. After matriculating, I came to stay with him to further my studies. That's when I joined Watford Brothers, playing in the ABC Motsepe League, where I was coached by Bra Chesa Nkambule, a very passionate and the most kind-hearted soul you can ever come across. He produced a lot of talented players from that team and at one stage worked for SAFA as caretaker of the National Under-23 team.

How did you join Silver Stars in Limpopo?

There is a certain guy who assembled the best players from kasi to take part in social tournaments. This guy was impressed by me and organised trials with Silver Stars after

"TALENT ALONE WILL NOT TAKE YOU ANYWHERE. BUT CHARACTER AND ATTITUDE ARE THE KEYS TO SUCCESS."

speaking to Owen da Gama, who was then coach. I trained for six weeks and one day Owen told me that he would not be signing me as he had similar players. The guy took me back and told Owen that he is taking me to another club. However, before doing that, he wanted to give Owen a last chance to have another look at me. They arranged a friendly with their reserve side and I scored three goals and assisted in the fourth in a 4-0 victory.

And how did you manage to stay a decade at Sundowns?

I won countless cup competitions with them and was even voted Player of the Season and Player's Player of the Year. I'm not playing down winning the league and cup competitions but the friendship we forged while there remains memorable. Traveling to Korea to take part in the FIFA Club World Cup was another milestone. I played with very talented players during my time. I was very fortunate to play with those exceptionally gifted players that's why even now as a coach I advise the youngsters that your talent alone will not take you anywhere. But character and attitude are the keys to success.

You scored certainly one of the fastest goals against formidable Barcelona back during 2011.

I still remember it like it was yesterday. Vuyo Mere crossed the ball into the penalty area and Josta Dladla feigned a kick but instead jumped over the ball, completely fooling the Barca defense. It landed on the feet of Brent Carelse who controlled, but it appeared to have gone behind him. Carelse laid it on perfectly for me and I struck the shot. It sailed sweetly past Valdez and it was the most heart-warming moment of my life.

How much did you all learn from that game?

The game afforded us an opportunity to measure ourselves against certainly one of the best clubs in the world. I know those kinds of games are not a true measure, but you must consider the fact that Barcelona had a reputation and a brand to uphold and I guess losing to an African club was something they did not fancy. You could see in the second half that they had stepped up a gear and they really put us to the sword. It's like they were saying: "We are Barcelona!" They are always competitive, and their quality came out loud and clear.

When you look back, who has been your toughest opponent?

There were some difficult opponents, but I think Tinashe Nengomasha comes to mind. He was a tough cookie, smart and very



difficult to shake off. I also played against Kenyan Musa Otieno. Now imagine that man is a giant and I was so small, but tall as he was, I was supposed to find my way past him and it was never easy. There are a couple of other players that would make life difficult for me, Fabian McCarthy and Clement Mazibuko also come to mind.

Share with us your memories of the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

It was a tournament everyone was looking forward to. The world had been waiting in anticipation of the first ever tournament in Africa and previews had been sometimes downright negative. But as a player, I felt fortunate and honored to have made the cut. Yet, we were all mindful of the fact that making the cut for the final squad also came with the responsibility of representing the country as well as the entire continent. It was a great atmosphere and I would like to believe that as a country we put up a real show and as players, we tried our best but things just did not work out the way we wished.

How much pressure was there against Mexico in the opening match?

It was when we realised the enormity of the event and that the entire world was watching that opening game that we felt the pressure. When Shabba [Siphiwe Tshabalala] scored that stunning goal, they really came at us and eventually scored. Had we won that match,

“PITSO WAS SOMETHING ELSE. PEOPLE ALWAYS GET THE WRONG IMPRESSION ABOUT HIM.”

we would have qualified for the knockout stage. Then Itu Khune received a red card in the next game [against Uruguay] that we all believed we would win and although we defeated France in the third game, it was not enough.

As a player and now as a coach, how much did you learn from Carlos Alberto Parreira?

A lot actually. Remember, he was a World Cup winning coach. He brought with him valuable experience and the minute we assembled in camp, you could see that he was at a different level. He was simply top class and he really got us playing to our strength. But family matters forced him to leave and by the time he returned after Joel



Moriri was part of the Bafana Bafana 2010 World Cup squad.

Santana, I think we had missed a couple of crucial months in our preparations.

And how was it like working with a coach like Pitso Mosimane?

Pitso was something else. People always get the wrong impression about him. Truth is he loves the game deeply and anyone that has worked with him will attest to the fact that he is not just a student of the game, he lives the game. He stressed that to succeed one had to sacrifice. He works hard and

we snatch the baton from his hands and continue with his legacy. He has literally opened doors for us younger coaches to step in and we must deliver.

You once kept goals for Sundowns against Kaizer Chiefs ...

I used to play goalkeeper, fullback, center-back, midfielder and striker when I was growing up in Matibidi. In those days, if the coach felt that the goalkeeper was not good enough, he would simply instruct you to go in goals and do better or throw you in defense. This prepared us for professionalism because you would play in any position and thus became versatile. In those days, we played the game non-stop, trying different positions but today, you hardly see youngsters engaged in a game of football, even in the remotest of villages.

Tell us about your stomach celebrations.

Orlando Pirates fans often ask me about it and I always tell them it's not personal. You know we play football for fun, and for supporters it's also fun as they like to mock the opposition and each other. I remember one team failed to honour a fixture because it was alleged they suffered from stomach cramps. I was chatting to Brian Baloyi prior to the game against Pirates and he jokingly asked: "Are these [Pirates] guys going to honor the fixture or not?" So, we decided that we would do a stomach cramp celebration should we score. There was certainly no malice intended, we were just poking fun and I think they took it on the chin like sportsmen! **KO**

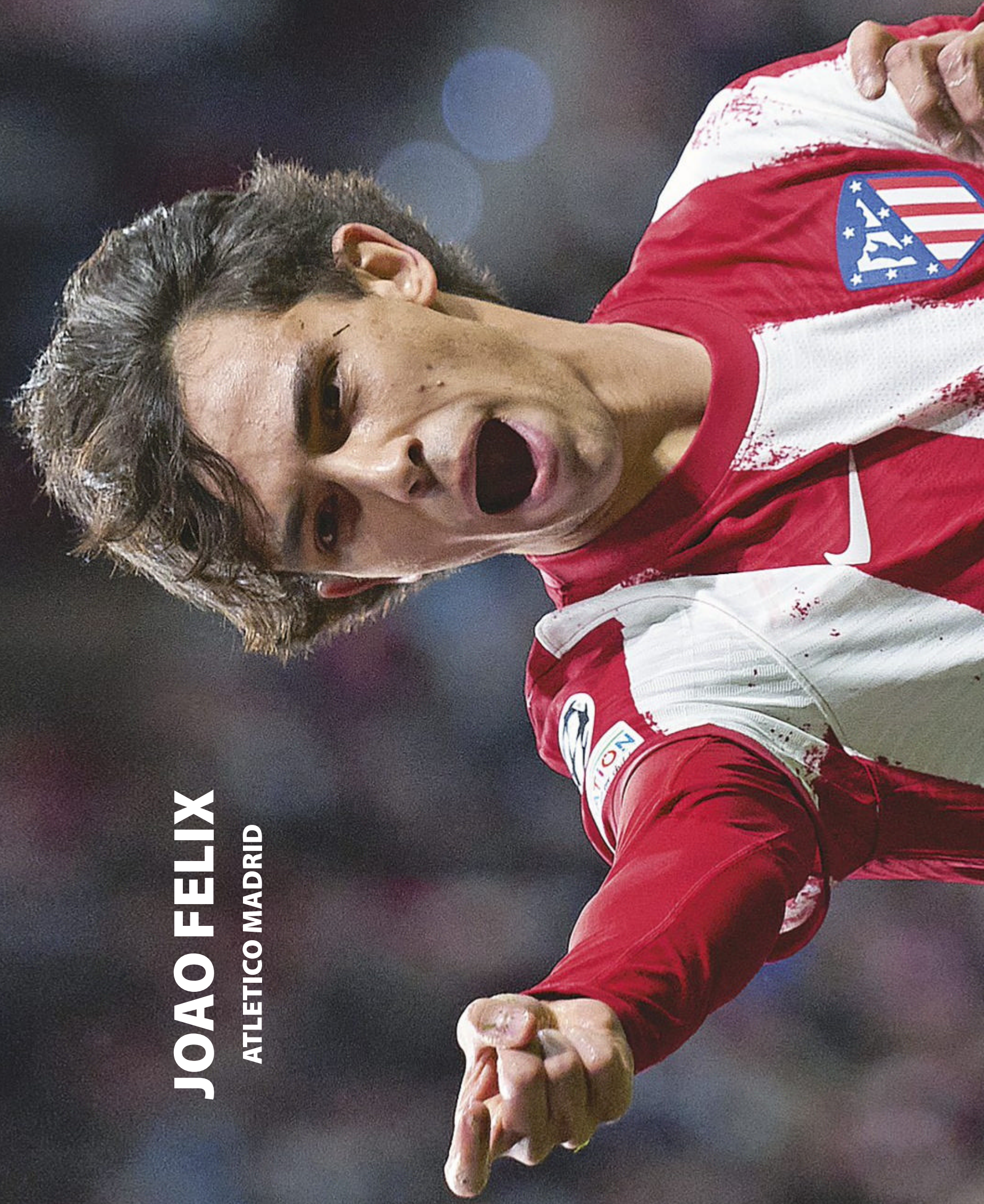
demands 110% from the grounds-man, physiotherapist, kit-man, in fact, the entire staff. He would call you in the middle of the night and ask you where you are. You will tell him you are home and he would say a particular match is playing on television and: "watch this or that player, and we will discuss the match and that player tomorrow."

It shows in the results he has achieved with every club that he has coached ...

Wherever he goes, his work ethic shines through. He throws himself in his job with his every fiber of his soul. I know he is representing us younger coaches and influencing club owners to invest in younger coaches. The only thing we can do to honour him is to make sure that going forward,

JOAO FELIX

ATLETICO MADRID





Dominic Isaacs

My Dream Team



From starting his career at the School of Excellence to the national youth teams and a professional career with Ajax Cape Town, Kaizer Chiefs and Bloemfontein Celtic, Dominic Isaacs was always a no-nonsense defender that took no prisoners. In this edition of My Dream Team, he picks the best of his past teammates.



1 Goalkeeper Hans Vonk

I played with Vonk at Ajax Cape Town and he was one of the most experienced guys in the team. His knowledge and communication skills helped defenders like myself a lot. He thinks in advance and sees a problem before it arrives, and this helps him prepare.

2 Right-back Ashley Opperman

Before we played together at Ajax Cape Town, we used to play against each other at youth level. I was a defender and he was an attacking midfielder. He was comfortable on the ball, could dribble his way out of trouble, and in one-on-one situations he was a technically sound player.

3 Left-back Brett Evans

Brett is one of the guys I played with for

a very long time and he was good in the air, could cross and could easily convert into a wing back. He was good in one-on-one situations and a dead ball specialist. I enjoyed playing with Brett at Ajax Cape Town.

4 Center-back Mbulelo 'OJ' Mabizela

I've known OJ for a very long time. He was part of Mamelodi Sundowns youth academy in 1998 and we played together at international youth level. OJ was quality and everyone knew what he could bring to the team. He made the team tick, not only by talking but with the way he used to play. To this day I have so much respect for OJ.

5 Center-back Thabo Nthethe

I played with Thabo at Bloemfontein Celtic for one season. He is a very good person and someone you can easily

talk to off the field. He was cool, calm and collected under pressure, and very comfortable in terms of playing under pressure.

6 Central midfield Eyong Enoh

I played with Eyong for two seasons at Ajax Cape Town and I could see even then that this guy was destined for greater things in his career. He was a machine and our attacking midfielders had nothing to worry about because Eyong was always protecting them. He covered a lot of ground and was like a lion in midfield. It was also difficult to play against him at training.

7 Right-wing Steven Pienaar

I've also known 'Schillo' for a very long time having played with him at the School of Excellence before Ajax Cape Town and national team. He was two steps ahead of



everybody in terms of his positioning and technique. He is a serial winner and would dribble the entire team from the halfway line before scoring. He scored a lot of goals like that. He had everything, you can see that with the fact he played so many years in England, where it's a very difficult league.

8 Playmaker Reneilwe Letsholonyane

I played with Yeye at Chiefs and despite being a good player, he is also a great human being. He is always laughing and dancing. But he is a machine at training and on match days, sometimes he would leave everyone behind when we were running. He was naturally fit and didn't lose the ball.

9 Forward Knowledge Musona

Musona is my former Chiefs teammate. He didn't make too many chances himself

because all he wanted to do was to score goals. When we played together he was still 19 years old but even then I could see the great talent he has.

10 Playmaker Brent Carelse

I also played with Brent at Ajax and he had a unique style of play – you would think that he was slow but his mind was very sharp. He used to catch many defenders off guard. He could kick with both feet and played multiple positions, and had football intelligence of the highest quality.

11 Left-wing Thando Mngomeni

When Thando came onto the scene, he was tall, strong, could dribble and hold up the ball. He was good on the ball and it's seldom that you find tall players who are technically good. I played with him at the Under-20 COSAFA Cup. **KO**

Substitutes

Itumeleng Khune

'Itu' will always be himself and people don't realise how much work he puts in at training. The way he plays is the way he trains. If a player asks him to stay behind for extra training, he will never complain, he is always keen to put in the hard work.

Andile Sixaba

'Bangladesh' took me under his wing when I joined Ajax Cape Town at the age of 17 – he helped me a lot and told me everything I needed to work on. His guidance played a big role in my career. As a footballer he was also talented and could play multiple positions.

Benedict Vilakazi

I played with Tso at Under-20 national team and he was another very intelligent player. He was comfortable on the ball and could score, and was a very brave player as well. Wherever he played he added value.

Joseph Makhanya

'Duku' was my national Under-20 teammate. He was a dynamite and could play, he could dribble, shoot and cross the ball very well.

Lesley Manyathela

The late Lesley was something different and we always knew that if he gets the ball in the right area, he would score goals. He could get into great positions and when you think a game was finished, he would pop up and score.

Coach: Cavin Johnson

I was 11 years old when I met Cavin at the School of Excellence and I have a lot to be grateful for in terms of what he did for my career. He is still a friend and contributed a lot in my career – he knows me in and out and that is why he is the best coach I ever worked with.





The heart of a

Cameroon striker Bienvenu Eva Nga has had to move mountains to craft a career that has now landed him at Chippa United following an arduous journey that left him stranded in Mozambique. He is among those chasing Peter Shalulile in the PSL scoring charts and is grateful for the fact that he is now on TV and earning a salary. KICK OFF's Lovemore Moyo spoke to the bustling forward.

Football normally dictates that those who score goals tend to be easily identifiable and usually end up bestowed with the honour of being the best players.

For most of this season, half of the goals scored by Chippa United have been supplied by Bienvenu Eva Nga, the Cameroon forward who joined in the last campaign from BidVest Wits.

Eva Nga has held the torch high up since then, so much so that by the time the league went into the midseason break, he had already improved on his scoring numbers from the previous campaign.

"This is definitely my best season to date here in South Africa, but I have had better years when I played in Mozambique and Portugal," he says.

He scored 26 goals for Costa do Sol in his last year playing in the Mocambola league in 2018, which proved the catalyst to moving across the eastern border and into South Africa.

He had four goals in his debut season at Wits and in his first campaign at Chippa, went up to six, a number that he had surpassed before Christmas this term.

"My fortunes in South Africa have improved because now I know how the coaches here want me to play with regards to movement and I know what defenders don't like. When I arrived it was very difficult and confusing for me because of the systems, and I ended up not knowing what to do.

"It gets even more difficult here at Chippa, where we can even have four or five coaches in one season. Football becomes easier for you when you have a coach who you understand how he wants you to play, like Kurt [Lentjies], because that way you have more confidence in what you are doing. I played with him, so he knows what I need to prosper.

"I came here having already been to Europe, where it was all tactical and my responsibility was to stay in the box without coming into the middle to collect balls. The coach there didn't want me coming deep and preferred that I stay upfront.

"Then when I got here it was different because I had to move to the left and right, which was different to me and within 10 minutes, I would be tired ▶

"I KNOW I CAN SCORE THESE 15 GOALS."

lion





AFCON PAIN

Bienvenu Eva Nga admits that he was left in pain by Cameroon's failure to lift the Africa Cup of Nations on home soil after being bundled out in the semi-finals and having to settle for bronze. "If Cameroon won the cup, it would have rubbed positively on many things. I was hurt that the players were not putting in all the effort," Eva Nga says. "What was even worse for me that the stadium where

Cameroon played is around the area where I grew up in Yaounde and in the squad there was Moumi Ngamaleu [of Swiss club Young Boys], who I went to the same academy with. "I was hurt that we couldn't win the cup and my hope is that one day I will get my chance because there is only one striker, Vincent Aboubakar, scoring goals for us. If I keep scoring goals, they will eventually call me up because

Samuel Eto'o [Cameroon Football Association president] is always here in South Africa and will get wind that there is a Cameroonian scoring goals. "We have a World Cup qualifier at the end of March and you never know, I might be called. Playing for the Indomitable Lions remains a big dream for me which I want to make possible for the sake of my father."

instead of reserving my energy for use in the right areas.

"After games, I would be so tired I couldn't even eat. I knew that playing in that system I wouldn't score goals until Gavin [Hunt] told me to be patient in the box for goals to come," says Eva Nga.

"This is a team sport, so I'm feeling great that I have a role to play. It is through my teammates that I can also become a success on the field. They trust me the same way that I trust them. My goals are coming because of my teammates so I cannot be the only one taking credit."

up from there. I'm sure God will guide me towards getting there. When you believe, everything can fall into place.

"I need to believe in my abilities and show the same trust in my teammates because they are the ones feeding me. I know I can score these 15 goals, but it will be about working hard, maintaining focus, and having luck swing my way.

"I think I can create a great story here at Chippa that will help me grow my career the same way I did while in Mozambique. While I say this, what must be known is that I'm playing for the team."

enough to be where Shalulile is, then so be it."

Without being asked, Eva Nga also clarifies why PSL strikers struggle to consistently reach double figures.

"It depends on the team that you are playing for and how they are feeding you with passes and how you are communicating with them. Is the team playing for you? It is important to play collective football.

"A striker's success is determined by the relationship he enjoys with his teammates. If you only play for yourself then your teammates will be hesitant in playing for you.

"Shalulile is a success because he plays for the team first before the team plays for him. The trouble always starts when you want to play for yourself instead of the team. This is what Kurt always tells me and I know the benefits because once your teammates appreciate your efforts for the team, then they play for you.

"I'm a big fan of Romelu Lukaku because he hustles and bustles for the team and I appreciate that, which is why I'm also nicknamed 'Lukaku'. He makes defenders suffer and go crazy," he explains.

'It is difficult for players to manage all of this'

As he racks up the minutes and goals at Chippa, the 29-year-old has also had to deal with the challenge of playing under coaches who change in the blink of an eye at the club.

Since arriving last season he has had Lehlohonolo Seema, Dan Malesela, Siyabulela Gwambi, Luc Eymael, Vladislav Heric, Gavin Hunt and Lentjies.

"A STRIKER'S SUCCESS IS DETERMINED BY THE RELATIONSHIP HE ENJOYS WITH HIS TEAMMATES."

Third on the goalscoring charts

The job description of a striker demands that they score goals and so there is a count attached. Eva Nga is no different.

He has been third on the scoring charts for most of this season behind Peter Shalulile and Victor Letsoalo, so he has kept his interests alive in the race to determine who scores the most at the end of the season.

"I'm thinking of about 15 or 16 goals, but this will all depend on how I work and the issue of avoiding injuries," he responds when asked about his targets for the season.

"The immediate priority is getting into double figures and then working my way

Without hesitation, he also raises his hand for the top scorer award.

"I do have a chance, but truth is that I can't compare myself with Shalulile because he is playing in a great team with players who know how to give him the ball. It is easier for him to score because of the kind of team that he is playing for.

"Here at Chippa, we must work harder to create opportunities. I will not compare myself with Shalulile but will rather focus on my work because for me my mission is to score goals that help my team win matches.

"The gap between me and him is not huge and remember I can score three goals in one match. Still, Shalulile is not in my head because my focus is here where I must score goals that win us matches. If I score



“I WANT TO MAKE SURE THAT I DELIVER IN THE LAST SEASON OF MY CONTRACT AND EARN A BETTER FUTURE.”

This means always having to earn the confidence of a new coach.

“The truth is that every coach brings his own system and at times it is difficult for players to manage all of this, but you have to maintain your focus and know that you will always have a job to do regardless of who the coach is.

“It is never automatic to get going with the systems of any coach that comes and at times it can take a month or two and during that time you might be losing games.

“Luckily, we have gotten used to Kurt and I want to make sure that I deliver in the last season of my contract and earn a better future. My intention is to be able to attract clubs by doing a good job here at Chippa.

“I don’t want to be always with a team that is related to relegation like what happened last season. I want to earn a better future through what I do here at Chippa, so the thought of who is in charge is not my concern. I worry about doing my job instead of who is coaching the team.”

With his contract up at the end of the season, the reality is that there will be interest if he keeps scoring goals. His mind is on Europe, though his hope is that it is not Portugal, where he has played before.

What he is more grateful for is that his career has progressed from Cameroon to Gabon and Portugal, then to the PSL, during which he has had moves to Malaysia, Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania all flop, while dealing with the heartbreak of failing trials with eight clubs in Mozambique.

“I’m a university drop out who walked four hours to train in Mozambique while eating bread with water mixed with sugar. I have felt the pain of being unwanted and now is the time to enjoy the space of being at a club.

“It is like I’m dreaming that I’m now on television when I play. As recently as four years ago, I was struggling and asking myself too many questions about my life and thinking that I should have continued with my studies so that I could get a good job.

“Whenever we have a TV game and I get back home to watch myself, at times it feels like I’m dreaming and I keep telling my wife about this. I don’t have a lot of money but what I know is that if I prove myself, I can go on to bigger things in Europe.

“I know that Chippa is not the biggest team around but I’m happy they gave me a chance. If someone said back when I was struggling that I would be in professional football, I would have dismissed them but I’m now able to send money home and even bought a plane ticket for my brother so that he goes to Germany.” **KO**

KICK OFF: Coach, from the time you took over the reins at Marumo Gallants, what do you make of your progress so far?

Dan Malesela: There's a huge improvement in terms of playing. I will be selfish if I don't say that I am satisfied with the response of the players. They are responding very well. I think people may see a very different approach from us going forward.

It's fascinating how you always stick to your beliefs in terms of playing style and philosophy. That can't be easy for you, given that people often criticise you for playing positive football even though results are not forthcoming. Do you feel people don't understand you?

People don't understand that sometimes you when are doing these things, whatever you are implementing might be bigger than the players or it might suit the players. It also depends on resources because I am implementing these things that are very deep. To play for a team that I coach is not easy when you are a player because I don't like mistakes. I believe that if you are a professional and you can't pass, then I have a serious problem. If you can't control the ball, I have a serious problem. If we call ourselves professionals, we must be able to do what professionals do. I want to watch a team and be proud that this is a team that has been well coached. There must be a structure. Players miss goals and sometimes it is because the mental aspect that is not there.

Please continue ...

The biggest thing holding back our players is fear. The fear of being shouted at, fear of being criticised and fear of playing the game with a relaxed mind. To remove fear is the biggest thing that you can have as a coach. It's something that we are trying to address at the club. Players get worried when the other team is pressing. The team is playing on a high press and the defenders panic. They kick the ball anywhere but where does it end up? It ends up coming to you. There's quite a number of things that you can address here. That's why I have removed myself and said I'm not going to speak to the players in a coaching course language. We are busy talking about transitions and counter-pressing, inverted fullbacks and all these other terms. These players don't understand. They don't know

'Some people think they know better'



“YOU HAVE A TEAM THIS SEASON AND THE NEXT SEASON THE MAJORITY OF PLAYERS ARE GONE.”

what you are talking about. Truth be told, most of our players at home have not had the opportunity to go to school at the highest level and be able to understand certain things. Some players, a big number of them, have not gone to school and they don't care about school. And here we are, and we address them as if they are big intellectuals and people who will just grasp things easily. I am trying to move away from that to try and simplify the game so that they understand.

In your first stint at Chippa, with the calibre of players that you had, don't you think you could have achieved something had the team not lost a number of players?

It's always been the story of my life and people think that I can make miracles every time. When I was a coach at Ga-Rankua United, I had a team one year, and the following season, the majority of the players were gone. It was the same thing at Chippa. You have a team this season and the next season the majority of players are gone. When I speak of the majority, I am referring to people who are most likely to be in the starting 11. They are all gone, and you are expected to start again the following season with different players. That's why I'm saying the one part that I've been most unfortunate about in football is to have clubs that do not have resources. There cannot be stability and continuity.

Some years ago, Pitso Mosimane, though impressed by your style of play, asked if you had the personnel to carry out the plan you had. What do you make of that?

It's true. I didn't have the personnel. I didn't have a lot of resources that are necessary in football. There were a lot of times where one improvises on



During his playing days as a defender for Orlando Pirates and Mamelodi Sundowns, Dan Malesela did not shy away from tackles. Following his playing days, there's evidence that he has maintained this trait as a coach. In this candid interview with KICK OFF'S Hosea Ramphekwa, the coach of Marumo Gallants is in his element, tackling a variety of issues, including how foreign influence is holding the country back and why he will never coach Chippa United again.

things that should be the basic standard in football. I am one person, you know I've just learnt this thing that, maybe it has gotten into my head, I shouldn't complain when God has put me in a particular place. Maybe I'm just there to empower other people and he will take care of me [laughs] ... because in my course of coaching, a lot of players have been empowered. A lot of players have been recognised and they became household names in the country. Maybe that's why, maybe my time is coming, and maybe it's now.

Talking about players, recently Ethan Brooks broke into the Bafana Bafana team and you are credited with unearthing him for the PSL ...

With Ethan, I thought he will be a boy that will just grow in this game. Maybe

15-year-olds running and the soccer balls are just sitting there. People don't understand that there's never a time where you will play a match and there's no soccer ball. It will never happen so why do we take the soccer balls and hide them and give them to the players late. Some of the coaches actually get furious with soccer players when they get on the field and they juggle the ball or they pass each other. For me, the ball must attract you. I don't think there is a football person where they will kick the ball in your direction and you look at it and ignore it. You will run to it. If we don't teach our kids to be friendly with the ball, then they will fear the ball. It will be foreign to them. A lot of our players struggle to control the ball because it's not something that is in their norm. We get players that want to push and shove

“IF WE DON'T TEACH OUR KIDS TO BE FRIENDLY WITH THE BALL, THEN THEY WILL FEAR THE BALL. IT WILL BE FOREIGN TO THEM.”

Ethan will be angry with me but I am not sure about Bafana Bafana, and I am not sure about his progress now. For me he seems to have been stuck watching the matches that he has played. My recommendation about Ethan was, very slowly and carefully, because you don't want to destroy talent, play him from time to time. Select matches for him so that he grows and he understands the game. Unfortunately, for now there's pressure at his club and results are demanded. That situation may take away his growth, but it depends on Ethan. It depends on his mental toughness. If he can think things through and just be himself, I think he will do better. I don't know where to place him at the moment. With Bafana Bafana and all these things, I don't think it was the right time. I doubt it. I may be wrong.

In our development structures, do you feel we are doing the right things to ensure that our players become better in terms of technical ability?

I doubt if that is the case. Sometimes I sneak around kasi to watch kids play and to see how the coaches are doing. I hide and I see these kids are running around the cones. You look at 12-year-olds and

because we are substituting playing ability with strength, and strength we don't have too much.

Do you think the mix of coaching ideologies and philosophies that we have in South Africa have an impact on the progress of our players?

The problem is that we want to adopt. Everything that we have here we want to adopt. We want to take things from Europe, Brazil or wherever. Where is our identity? I think we are very intelligent but there are a lot of things in this country that are just done wrong because we want to copy. This is a beautiful country. It just needs care and for its people to be cared for.

After you left TS Galaxy, there were rumours linking you to Orlando Pirates and Al Ahly for assistant coach position, can you please give us some clarity on that?

I never got anything. There was nothing. There was no communication from anybody.

Going back to Chippa, you went there, back and forth. Why was that?

I kept on hoping that things would





“I WAS JUST HOPING THAT MAYBE SOMETHING WILL CHANGE. SOME SANITY WILL PREVAIL. IT WAS JUST HOPE.”

change for the better. I kept on hoping that things will be better this time around. I was just hoping that maybe something will change. Some sanity will prevail. It was just hope. When you start, you make sense. It makes sense when they want you to come down, sign and coach the club. As soon as things turn around and become sour, it's a completely different thing so I have closed that chapter. I don't think it will ever happen in my life again. I don't want to. Even if I were to be very desperate, I doubt that will ever happen...

You mean going back to Chipipa?

Yes. I was just living on hope and that was not going to work. That wasn't going to happen, that things will be different and people will be thinking. Sometimes, as people who have been in football and have experience in football, we succumb

to certain things just because somebody is owning a club and the sad thing is that people start knowing football better than us. We are supposed to be the experts of this game, but people think they know things better than us. That's one of the things that makes us not succeed in this country. There are people who know better than you who must play and who must not play. You spend time with these boys everyday but come the day of the game, they know better and that's why we fail to progress in this country. That's why other clubs don't win anything because you are acting like Jesus, you can see tomorrow.

Wow ...

People will tell you, and I've experienced this in my life, this player is a good player. You start respecting people and thinking that they are. Sometimes they talk to you

and think that they know and when I look back and I am thinking, 'khanti, who was I talking to?'. These guys don't know anything about this thing. They don't. A lot of them don't. You know the business that people should take care of is not taken care of. When you have a club, you must trust that these guys know what they are doing. Ask questions where you don't understand because most of the time you really don't know. You see, with my coaching experience, education and knowledge, if I were to own a club tomorrow and I don't go to training, I would never impose anything on the coach. I will ask him questions, 'why is this one not playing', and once he explains it to me, I will understand. But I cannot tell him, 'this one, I know him'. Somebody was telling me at some club, 'I know this boy from the days of when, when and when he is facing the goals, he can score'. And then you spend eight games and the boy doesn't score. And not even get close to scoring and I tell you this man is not really a player that is ready for the PSL at this time. And he says, 'no, no, you don't know, I know this boy. I have seen him, bo bani bani were struggling against him. Ayi, sometimes e a bora this thing. Leave these things to people who know.

And please talk to us, just a reflection on your time at TS Galaxy and how you left the club?

Eish Galaxy, a ke nyake go borega [I don't want to be bored]. The story of Galaxy is another story. I played eight matches at Galaxy and that's it. Ja, it's just one of those things. I don't know. Ya Galaxy ya mbora. A ke nyake go bolela ka yona [I don't want to talk about it].

You can talk about Marumo Gallants, what do you want to achieve by the end of this season?

I think we are building something. You know, where we will finish will be determined by us. Obviously now that we are sitting on the bridge, on the side of the relegation and the top eight. I think we have built the team so well that anything is achievable. We are not erasing or underestimating the fact that other teams are fighting too. We are treading carefully that we shouldn't get too ahead of ourselves. We have been performing very well and I hope that the boys stick to that. If we do that then probably, it will stand to count. **KO**

KICK OFF: You have built a reputation, in South Africa at least, as a coach to rescue teams from relegation trouble – Black Leopards, Baroka FC and TTM just last season. Swallows are in a similar predicament, but is it fair to say that the opportunity to achieve more than that is greater with The Birds if you are given time?

Dylan Kerr: This is a massive job, it absolutely is. If I nail this, and no disrespect to the other three teams I have coached, but if I nail it, I would see myself being in South Africa forever. When I came to the club, they were bottom, they'd scored three goals. They had eight points. We then played six games in 17 days, which was horrendous. I've never heard of a fixture list as bad as that. We should have won at least five of those six games. But because the players didn't know me, they didn't know what I was all about, and I didn't know them, I was relying on information from other coaches. Plus, I spent five of those games up in the stands [waiting for a work permit]. If I was on the bench I would have been able to get the message across to possibly win the games.

You seem to have introduced a more attacking style into the team, which brought some early dividends?

If we try and continue to play that way, then I think there'll be a bright future, a rewriting of another historical Swallows legacy. That's what I want to do. But being at three clubs before, and for whatever reason it never progressed past a season ... I don't want that to happen Swallows. I want to start a pre-season at the club. And I want to start challenging Mamelodi Sundowns. I believe that Swallows can be in the top four. But my players have to do this. I have to pick the team, but my players have to win the game.

When you came in, what immediately struck you as the areas that needed urgent attention?

Morale! Bringing back smiles on the faces and getting the belief back into the players, getting the trust back into



m

Coach Dylan Kerr has started yet another rescue act at Swallows FC after previous successes with Black Leopards, Baroka FC and TTM, including winning the Nedbank Cup with the latter.

He believes there is much potential within The Birds and that in time he can get them fighting at the right end of the table. Kerr tells KICK OFF's Nick

Said about turning the Dobsonville Stadium into a fortress, how he was told he would never be a success as a footballer and his friendship with Jose Mourinho, who did something special for his victorious Warriors side in the DStv Compact Cup.

'My players are like my children'

"I KNEW WE WOULD WIN. WITHOUT EVEN SAYING ANYTHING TO THE PLAYERS."

them. What I found out, and this is no disrespect to [his predecessor] Brandon Truter, but the players were saying that he alienated quite a lot of the squad. I don't do that and it's what I want my players to see. But the biggest thing was the energy and the enthusiasm. It wasn't there, and the first thing you need to do when you enter a dressing room is to make them laugh. Make them want to come to work because they know that they're going to not only enjoy training and work hard, but also learn something to take into the next game.

Was the long mid-season break for Christmas and Africa Cup of Nations a blessing in disguise for you in terms of it gave you a chance to work with the players in training?

I think I had three training sessions within those 17 days I spoke about earlier because of recovery and, and making sure the players will be fit to play the next game. You can't chop and change teams because you have to keep the players that are working hard and are doing the right things both on and off the field. We did things [during the break] that I should have done in December.

You seem to have a good thing going at the Dobsonville Stadium ...

Dobsonville is our home. It's our fortress. And I always say to my teams, imagine somebody coming into your house and stealing your TV? You wouldn't let them. So why should they come into your stadium and steal three points? Or steal a cup win? I've issued a stark warning to the players that all our remaining league games are like cup finals. My chairman has invested a lot of money into this club. They've made mistakes, and we know that you do have to make mistakes to learn from them. Then you build a better future, a brighter

future. And that's something I want to do, not only at Swallows but in South African football.

Can you expand on that?

It's important that we start qualifying for the Africa Cup of Nations and the World Cup. We need to find the solution and fix the problem. But solution will only happen if we're all singing from the same hymn sheet about development, the player pathway, and the coach education. There is no coach education. I need to get my CAF Pro Licence. But in South Africa you can't even get a CAF D License. It's shocking. There's just no programmes. There's nothing. I spoke to [FIFA Instructor] Steve Coetzee. There is nothing coming up this year [2022]. I don't know if there's going to be anything next year. The last Pro License was in Morocco [starting in 2019]. I can't do the Scottish FA or English FA one because it means I'll be taking time away from my job [at Swallows].

than picking up that trophy and telling your children and grandchildren that you won it.

When did you know you would win the final?

I knew in the pre-match team meeting that we would win. When the captain Lehlohonolo Nonyane spoke from the heart. He was 36-years old, probably his last chance to win a trophy, and the sentiment and the passion that he showed ... I knew we would win. Without even saying anything to the players.

Did you hesitate to leave Gor Mahia, where you had so much success, and join Black Leopards in 2018, or was the lure of South Africa too strong?

I actually should have come here six months earlier with Polokwane City. But I owed it to my Gor Mahia chairman, Ambrose Rachier, because he took me there. I had just won back-to-back league

“I LOVE THIS COUNTRY. I WANT TO HELP ITS FOOTBALL. I WANT TO HELP THE GAME GROW.”

You spent the second half of last season at TTM, helping them avoid the drop and winning the Nedbank Cup ...

I never intended to join them really, I just went to watch a football game. When they played SuperSport I was invited by the new chairman [Abram Sello] to go and watch the game. And I was bored because it was lockdown and we couldn't go anyway. I wasn't interested in the job. Joel Masutha was in charge, and I would never go behind Joel's back. I'm not that type of person. But when the chairman later came to me and said that he wanted to make a change, he asked if I'd be interested. I told him I would be, but only if the job became available. I just saw something in the team that suggested to me they could go far. I said to the players, 'Look, with all the problems you've got, with all the money and contract issues, forget about that'. I told them they could get into the annals of South African football history by winning the Nedbank Cup, and that they had 7-million reasons to win [the prize-money is R7-million]. But not one of them is more important than that medal. Not one of them is more important

titles and I felt that I still got a job to do for him. But when the Black Leopards call came, I'd done enough for Gor Mahia. I wanted to return South Africa, I'd been back in 2009 and I left in 2011. I'd always felt that I've got an unfinished plan here. I love this country. I want to help its football. I want to help the game grow. You know, I've been in the most rural areas of Limpopo and the amount of promising footballers that don't get an opportunity ... they don't get a chance to showcase their talent. I hate it when I get messages [for help] on my social media and I have to say, 'sorry, there's nothing I can do. Keep going, keep believing. Don't let go of your dream'. Because that's what I had as a player. I never let go of my dream. And I was told I'd never be a footballer in a million years. But I wanted to prove them wrong.

So what would you say you have learnt in your four years in South African football?

I've learned a lot. I've grown because of the situations I've been in. I loved my time at Black Leopards, the first time. I had a plan





“I DON’T THINK ANYBODY IN AFRICAN FOOTBALL COULD IMAGINE WHAT I HAD TO DO TO GET THEM TO WIN THAT TROPHY.”

with Baroka, but unfortunately ... that was another story. I wasn’t looking to go to TTM. I was asked, I accepted. But the troubles I had there ... I don’t think anybody in African football could imagine what I had to do to get them to win that trophy. And I grew, I developed and I learned. I do the talking, but I let the players do the work. Let me just encourage them, let me be their mentor help them to be better than they think they are. And give inspiration to other clubs and other teams, whether it’s professional or semi-professional, amateur or just recreational, to go out and enjoy playing football. That’s what I’d done as a player. That’s what I’ve grown up to be as a coach. But I love this game. You

know, my players are my children. I want my children to grow and become better people. Because at the end of the day, I haven’t got children of my own. So the only people who are going to remember me are football people. My medals are going to die with me. They’re going to be buried with me

And wining means the chance for another tattoo!

Yes, but it’s never about the tattoos. It’s about being proud of winning. Any kid that wants to be a footballer, or wants to be a professional at any sport, if they want to know about somebody that’s been told, ‘You’re never going to be a footballer,

you’re not good enough. You’ll never make it at a professional level. You’ll never win anything. You’ll never be a coach’. Tell them to give me a call. So I am proud of my achievements and the tattoos reflect that.

Your Warriors players that won the DStv Compact Cup got a personal message from Jose Mourinho. How did that come about?

Yes, I played them a message from Jose ahead of the Compact Cup final. They loved it. I messaged Jose after the game to say we had won and he replied, ‘I wouldn’t have expected anything else’. But that is Jose. We were partners when we did our UEFA A License together. I failed mine because I deserve to fail, I wasn’t ready for it. After we separated, we kept in touch through emails, but I lost contact with him for about 10 years. But through players and staff I knew at Chelsea, I got in contact with him again. And we speak every quarter [three months] or so. I’ve got so much respect for him. **KO**

1997-98

Ted Dumitru

P98 W57 D28 L12 GF171 GA 79

The veteran Romanian coach had bounced around in his first decade of working in South Africa without much success but at Sundowns he finally clicked with players and was able to lead the club to league success in the second season of the new Premier Soccer League. He began with a place in the Rothmans Cup final where they lost to Chiefs on post-match penalties and ended the season by doing the double in the BobSave Super Bowl, although that shootout victory over Orlando Pirates was completed only after the 1998 World Cup finals in France, actually at the start of the new 1998-99 season. But they bombed out early in the 1998 African Cup Winners' Cup to Zambia's Nkana Red Devils. The likes of Raphael Chukwu, Roger Feutmba and Daniel Mudau helped the club to retain their title on goal difference from Chiefs in 1999. AmaKhosi again won on penalties in the 1998 Rothmans Cup and Sundowns' African adventures in the Champions League ended in an embarrassing loss to Saint Louisienne from Reunion.

1999-00

Peter Koutroulis

P1 W1 D0 LO GF3 GA2

Koutroulis was the brother-in-law of Sundowns' directors Angelo and Anastasia Tsichlas and served as Sundowns' team manager. He stood in for the opening game of the season, in which Daniel Mudau scored a hatrick against Tembisa Classic

Neil Tovey

P1 W1 D0 LO GF2 GA0

Former Bafana captain Tovey was appointed as assistant to new coach Paul Dolezar, who had left Chiefs in a huff. Tovey himself had been hoping to stay at Chiefs after his long playing career but felt the club wanted him out despite the fact he played every match of the previous league season. While Dolezar was still making the transition, Tovey took charge of the second game of the season against Umtata Bush Bucks.

Paul Dolezar

P48 W33 D8 L7 GF92 GA43

Born in Serbia in the country's Hungarian minority, Dolezar came to South Africa via

Mamelodi Sundowns have always had a history of bringing in flamboyant coaches as they tried to establish themselves as worthy contenders alongside Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates in the 1980s and early 90s. In Part 2 of our look back at the records of their former tacticians from the start of the National Soccer League in 1985, KICK OFF's Mark Gleeson runs the rule over their coaches from just after the start of the Premier Soccer League to the present day.



Chloorko coaches

France and Gabon, first at Chiefs where he won two Rothmans Cup titles. He made it three in a row within months of taking over at The Brazilians, as they beat Free State Stars in the final at Rustenburg and took the team to an unprecedented third successive league title as they romped to an 11-point advantage over second placed Orlando Pirates. But they missed out on the double as Chiefs beat them in the Super Bowl final. Dolezar then quit on 'medical grounds' saying a leg injury dictated lengthy rest and he went back to Paris.

2000-01

Clemens Westerhof

P20 W9 D2 L9 GF33 GA30

The smooth-talking Hollander returned for a second stint at the club after working in Zimbabwe as their national coach. He had taken Nigeria to the Cup of Nations title in 1994 and a first ever World Cup qualification at the tournament in the U.S in 1994. Formerly on the staff at Feyenoord, but largely ignored in his own country, he also worked at Ismailia in Egypt following his first stint at Sundowns in 1995. He lasted only four months and was sacked after Sundowns suffered a humiliating 6-1 loss at Africa Sports of the Ivory Coast in their first ever Champions League group appearance. Sundowns used as a pretext the fact he was involved in a lawsuit with SAFA over a Bafana job offer that was made to him, but then withdrawn.

Neil Tovey

P8 W5 D1 L2 GF18 GA6

Tovey stood in again as caretaker coach, seeing the side to some handsome wins amid a toxic atmosphere at the club between players and management. He had to kick out team manager Koutroulis from training for interfering and banned him to his car on the side of the training pitch.

Paul Dolezar

P13 W7 D4 L2 GF20 GA9

'Rubberface' returned to try and help Sundowns out of a fix but did not prove the answer, failing to restore the side to any semblance of the triple-winning championship team he left the previous season. It led many to suggest he had only won the title the previous season on the back of what Dumitru had done in the 1997-98 and 1998-99 seasons. He departed suddenly, with

the Tschilas management claiming he was ill but with Dolezar insisting he was fed up with all the interference, including an insistence he could not play Alain Amougou but had to field Carlo Scott.

Neil Tovey

P15 W8 D4 L3 GF24 GA14

Tovey completed the season as caretaker coach, still intent on going off to do his coaching badges. He got the club to the Bob Save Super Bowl final but they lost to Santos in the decider while finishing the season in third place, although they could have snatched the title had they beaten Chiefs and Pirates in two of their last three games. They also qualified for the group stage of the Champions League for a second successive season.

2001-02

Ted Dumitru

P45 W20 D13 L12 GF52 GA40

Dumitru did not last the entire season, having been enticed back to the club from his job as Namibia coach, but he did take the team to the Top Eight final, where Chiefs won on post-match penalties, and the African Champions League decider, where they played some stunning possession football and yet got thrashed by Al Ahli in a display of tactical naivety. He walked out on the team without telling them ahead of a game with Chiefs, blaming management for treating players badly and creating a poisoned atmosphere.

Shane MacGregor

P5 W2 D3 L0 GF9 GA4

Dumitru's assistant MacGregor was thrown into the deep end when the coach did not pitch for the game against Chiefs and finished the season unbeaten. Sundowns were in the end fifth in the league campaign, eight points off the new champions Santos.

2002-03

Viktor Bondarenko

P11 W6 D1 L4 GF14 GA11

Having already worked at Pirates and Moroka Swallows, Bondarenko got a chance to coach at Sundowns, promising a change of style to a pacey attack. But the only thing speedy about his tenure was how quickly he was out of the door. Sundowns reached

the Top Eight Cup final, where he lost to Santos, but went out in the first round of the Coca-Cola Cup and soon after so did Bondas.

Djalma Cavalcante

P14 W6 D1 L7 GF14 GA13

In his white linen suit, Calvacante looked more like a plantation owner than a coach but the 60-year-old Brazilian arrived with a formidable CV from his home country, plus had been coach of Luanda's Petro Atletico and the Angola national team. But he did not last long either as Sundowns suffered an unprecedented five league losses in a row in January 2003.

Roger Feutmba

P16 W5 D4 L7 GF18 GA18

A member of Cameroon's World Cup squad in 1990, where they reached the quarter-finals, he came to play late in career for Sundowns and was still able to dazzle with an educated left foot. He took over as a caretaker coach for the rest of the season but won one of nine league games and also saw the club crash out in the CAF Cup in Cameroon.

2003-04

Luis-Oscar Fullone

P8 W1 D4 L3 GF6 GA10

A two-time African Champions League winner, Fullone was the first in a long cast of overseas coaches brought in by enthusiastic new owner Patrice Motsepe, who had much more money than astute coach identification skills. The Argentine was the first of three coaches in a season, which has since gone down as one of the worst ever in club history. Sundowns did not win in their first five league games and Fullone's time was soon up. He had been successful at ASEC Abidjan and Raja Casablanca, but the PSL proved a whole different kettle of fish.

Khabo Zondo

P8 W1 D4 L3 GF8 GA9

Moving across from Lamontville Golden Arrows, taking over at Sundowns was an opportunity for a young local coach. But it proved beyond Zondo's ability to galvanise a Sundowns side in a slump. He won his first game in charge, against Zulu Royals, but then never won another and left with half the season completed. Zondo had made his name at Classic and was later to coach at



Paul Dolezar

Bloemfontein Celtic, but this failure turned out to be a crossroads in his career.

Paul Dolezar

P31 W13 D9 L9 GF43 GA30

A third stint at the club, and a second as an emergency replacement for the big-talking Hungarian, did little to alleviate the plight of the Brazilians. They ended the season in 10th place with a paltry haul of 23 points but Dolezar stayed on into the 2004-05 season as Motsepe warned he wanted to see results as a return on investment. But when there is still not much improvement by Christmas 2004, Dolezar was gone with criticism of a stilted style of play ringing in his ears.

2004-05

Angel Cappa

P41 W22 D11 L8 GF70 GA35

Another Argentine coach, recommended by Fullone, who continued to play an advisory role at the club. Cappa had been an assistant coach to Luis Menotti at Barcelona, also worked at Real Madrid and was a respected pundit on Spanish TV. His brief time in South Africa is still fondly remembered by those who worked with him as an innovative and exciting coach. Sundowns had a much-improved campaign and finished third but still there was no silverware for Motsepe, now two seasons into owning the club and spending plenty of money with no return. Cappa left Sundowns midway through the 2005-06 season with the club at the top of the table.

2005-06

Miguel Gamondi & Neil Tovey

P28 W16 D7 L5 GF43 GA17

Gamondi was the senior partner in this coaching duo who went onto win the title and put Sundowns back at the top as they edged Pirates by three points to take the 2005-06 title. Gamondi started out as Fullone's assistant but then worked on his own at Wydad Casablanca and ASEC Abidjan before joining Sundowns. The title was an impressive achievement but dampened by another Champions League flop as the club went out on the away goals rule to minor opposition from Madagascar. They lasted only five games into the new 2006-07 campaign, both flabbergasted when they were fired.

Gordon Igesund

P73 W38 D17 L18 GF112 GA74

Three titles already with Manning Rangers, Orlando Pirates and Santos meant Igesund had the winning CV that Motsepe wanted and so it proved as they won a second successive title, this time romping away from the pack with a 10-point advantage at the end of the campaign. They had the chance to complete the double but were beaten in the ABSA Cup final in Durban by Ajax Cape Town. They also qualified for the group phase of the Confederation Cup after Al Ahly dumped them out of the Champions League. It unraveled in the 2007-08 season and with 12 games to go Igesund was shown the door as the team dropped to 12th spot after a loss at Wits University. Igesund said it was "par for the course in the exacting profession I have chosen".

2007-08

Trott Moloto

P37 W23 D6 L8 GF51 GA30

Former Bafana Bafana coach, and perennial caretaker Moloto, put together a late charge as Sundowns came bounding up the table on the back of seven successive league wins to finished in fourth place, seven points behind their successor SuperSport United. He also delivered the new-style Nedbank Cup with a last gasp winner from Lerato Chabangu against second division Mpumalanga Black Aces in the final at the Johannesburg Stadium. But a place in the Champions League group phase eluded them again. Moloto stayed on through the start of the new campaign but

was shoved aside when Henri Michel was appointed. He did get the club to the MTN8 final where Chiefs again edged them on post-match spot-kicks.

Henri Michel

P21 W10 D3 L8 GF24 GA17

The former captain and coach of France had taken his country to Olympic gold in Los Angeles in 1984 and the World Cup in Mexico in 1986, but in later years moved around the African circuit, where he had more of a reputation for being thirsty than as a one-time great of the French game. Michel could speak no English and never really looked to have any enthusiasm for the job. The fans didn't take to him either and his final act with the club was to leave Atteridgeville's Super Stadium in a police armoured vehicle when supporters bayed for his blood as they lost 4-1 at home to SuperSport United.

Ted Dumitru

P8 W1 D3 L4 GF8 GA8

Dumitru had been advising Motsepe for many months before taking over, sitting beside him at games, and by all accounts proving a disruptive influence. It was poetic justice therefore that when he took over for the last bit of the season his side did not score a single goal in the final five league matches he was in charge and his stats were only helped by a home tie against a team from Mauritius in the Champions League, which Sundowns won 6-1. It was to be Dumitru's last run out as a club coach.



Johan Neeskens

2009-2010

Hristo Stoichkov

P30 W16 D8 L6 GF43 GA24

Motsepe had gotten friendly with Johan Cruyff, the Dutch master who was to sell him a few dud oil paintings. One was Stoichkov, former European Footballer of the Year and Barcelona great but who had little coaching experience and spent most of his time fighting with referees. But he did see Sundowns to the runners-up berth, behind SuperSport United by one point, in a season completed early because of the World Cup. He wanted a new contract, but Sundowns did not want him back.

Trott Moloto

P6 W4 D1 L1 GF12 GA7

Moloto took over for the two cup competitions at the end of the 2009-10 season, going out to Chiefs in the quarter-final of the Telkom Knockout and then making it all the way to the Nedbank Cup semi-final, only to lose to former coach Tovey's AmaZulu on post-match penalties.

2010-11

Antonio Lopez

P21 W12 D3 L6 GF29 GA15

The Spaniard had been Stoichkov's assistant before being offered the job full-time and got off to a roaring start with six wins in his first seven league games. But he lasted only six months, quitting because supporter pressure became too hard to bear. He claimed he had received death threats. Lopez was a former national team coach of Bolivia and also had brief spell in charge of LaLiga clubs Valencia and Celta Vigo.

Ian Gorowa

P13 W7 D2 L4 GF25 GA17

Gorowa has been appointed assistant in September 2010 to Lopez and by February was put in charge for the rest of the 2010-11 season. He had coached at Moroka Swallows and Free State Stars, but this was a massive step up for the former Zimbabwe international striker, who ended the season in fourth place only two points off champions Orlando Pirates. When he was not kept on, Gorowa was bitterly disappointed.

2011-12

Johan Neeskens

P58 W25 D16 L17 GF98 GA52

Neeskens came on five-year contract but despite a glittering career as a player, with both Ajax Amsterdam and Barcelona, had not had much experience as a coach. His only previous topflight job was in the Netherlands with NEC Nijmegen. As with most Dutch coaches he proved stubborn and hardheaded, and made some strange tactical decisions, like playing inexperienced attacker Walter Maponyane as a fullback. But he did make an effort to know the South African league and studied opponents thoroughly. Sundowns finished fourth in his first season in charge and got to the Nedbank Cup final, winning 24-0 in the first round over Powerlines from Kimberley. In his second season they plunged into the relegation zone and he got fired after they were beaten in the Telkom Knockout final by Bloemfontein Celtic.

Pitso Mosimane

P351 W199 D82 L70 GF547 GA274

Mosimane did not immediately impact on Sundowns as they finished 10th in his first season but after that never looked back: five league titles, two Nedbank Cups and two Telkom Knockouts on the domestic front but more importantly the Africa Champions League in 2016. Mosimane might have had all the resources he wanted but he still needed to work at winning and made such a name for himself that he was lured away by Al Ahly of Egypt. His seven-and-a-half seasons at Sundowns made him the most successful coach in the history of the game in South Africa.

Manqoba Mngqithi & Rhulani Mokwena

P45 W28 D13 L4 GF76 GA26

***Stats at the start of the 2021-22 season**

A surprise that Motsepe promoted up Mosimane's two assistants but they did not disappoint by winning league in their first season, although lost to Mosimane and his new Egyptian club in the Champions League quarter-finals. Mngqithi had cut his teeth with the likes of Golden Arrows, Chippa United and AmaZulu, while Mokwena had struggled as a head coach in short stint with Pirates and Chippa. Sometimes it is not the easiest of relationships but the pair have made it work, with experienced 'senior coach' Steve Komphela also in the mix. **KO**

The road less travelled

The story of new Stellenbosch FC teenager Shaun Morgan is an almost unique one of a player who had never previously featured for a club before going on to sign for a Premier Soccer League team. But it is also a cautionary tale of how talent has the potential to slip through the net in South Africa. Had it not been for former Bafana Bafana defender Ricardo Katza and his perseverance to create an opportunity for Morgan, the youngster might never have got his shot at the big time. KICK OFF's Nick Said reveals the story of the talented attacking midfielder.

Promising teenage playmaker Shaun Morgan has taken a path very rarely travelled after signing for Stellenbosch FC in January without ever previously playing for a club.

The talent of the 18-year-old was spotted by former SuperSport United and Bafana Bafana defender Ricardo Katza, and after trials at Matsatsantsa, where logistics scuppered a move, he has been snapped up by ambitious Stellenbosch FC.

His story is an inspiring one, but also speaks to the dearth of football development in the country where so much potential talent slips through the net.

Had Morgan not been spotted by the expert eye of Katza at his school in Bloemfontein, it is likely he would never have made it to a professional club and his life would be very different.

It is a sad reality that for every 'Shaun Morgan' that is signed, there are probably 100 other players across the country in mostly rural areas who never get the chance to fulfil their potential because there is simply no-one looking for them.

It robs the national teams at all levels of a larger pool of talent to select from.

Katza was previously head of football at Grey College in Bloemfontein and saw Morgan play a

few times for Navalsig High School. He identified him as a player of exceptional talent and made it his mission to

create an opportunity for the youngster.

"After I moved to Bloemfontein in 2018 and took up my role at Grey College, we started to play games against schools from the area," Katza says. "There were two boys that I identified as players of real talent and one was Shaun.

"He was 14 when I first saw him and I just fell in love with this player, you could see his raw talent and it was exciting to watch him on the field. I could see straight away he had enormous potential.

"Over the years I kept track of him and I would purposefully arrange games against his school, just to see how he was progressing. I must



Ricardo Katza

**"I WOULD PURPOSEFULLY
ARRANGE GAMES AGAINST HIS
SCHOOL, JUST TO SEE HOW HE
WAS PROGRESSING."**

Shaun Morgan with
Stellenbosch FC coach
Steve Barker.



commend his coaches Zeke and Zandi for the way they developed him, they did an outstanding job.

"So I was always in communication with him, and his Mom Emily, and the nice thing is that every time I saw him play he seemed to get better. So that said to me he was willing to learn and grow."

Katza says that by the start of 2021 he felt that Morgan was ready to trial at a professional club, but the COVID-19 restrictions in place across the country made that difficult and they had to bide their time.

An opportunity at SuperSport

At the end of last year, Katza returned to Johannesburg, where he took up a post looking after the football department at King's College in Bryanston.

He took that opportunity to engage with his former club SuperSport and arranged a trial for Morgan.

The youngster is currently being mentored by former BidVest Wits, Moroka Swallows and Jomo Cosmos midfielder Mark Haskins, who along with Katza is part of Matthew Moore's Centre Circle Consulting.

"He did really well at SuperSport, [coach] Kaitano Tembo was really impressed with him and had a lot of good things to say," Haskins says. "He is a shy boy, but when he gets onto the field, it is like a switch turns on. And then when he comes off it, that switch is turned off again."

"He has football intelligence and an ability to think on the ball. That is what stands out with him. Especially as a teenager coming into a professional set-up and training with players he was watching on TV."

"You would think he would freeze or be frantic on the ball, but he was very composed. As soon as he got into it, you could see the quality he has, and especially his ability to think about the game."

"One day at training, he scored an



'A FAIRYTALE STORY'

Matthew Moore, who is Managing Director of Centre Circle Consulting, says Shaun Morgan's story is one you rarely hear of in South African football these days.

"As a company we are really proud of these kinds of fairytale opportunities for young players," Moore tells KICK OFF. "We are an agency that manages players in the English Premier League and top leagues throughout Europe, as well as Bafana Bafana players such as Rowen Williams, Njabulo Blom and Abbubaker Mobara."

"But even with all of that, we love also being part of stories that are ones you don't hear often in football and we love equally being part of creating these kinds of opportunities for young players to get ahead in football."

"FROM WHEN I FIRST SAW HIM IN 2018 TO NOW, IT IS THE SAME PERSON. HE IS A NICE, STRONG YOUNG MAN, AND I BELIEVE IN HIM."

absolutely brilliant goal that even got Kaitano excited. When you see things like that you know he is a player that is for real.

"He can become a very special talent if he keeps working hard at his game. Everything is there to do so."

But SuperSport said after the week that as much as they would like to bring him on board, they did not have space in their academy to house another youngster and so the potential for him to join was lost.

"They really liked him, but the circumstances meant we had to look for another team," Katza says. "We decided to send him for a trial at Stellenbosch because of the excellent facilities they have there and the quality of their academy set-up."

"He had never even been on a plane before, but he took everything in his stride and within three days they said they wanted to sign him."

"We spoke to his Mom, we brought her down to see the facilities for herself, to see where he would be living and how he would be looked after. All those things are important for the player but also their families."

A versatile player

Katza believes Morgan has the potential to make it to the big-time, but he knows as well as anyone that it takes more than just talent alone to be a success.

"He is the first boy I have ever recommended, so I am very excited about him and his future career," the ex-defender says.

"He is left-footed, very versatile and can play as an 'eight', '10' or a number '11', which is on the left wing. At SuperSport they said that if this is his quality without any formal club training, then they would be excited to see how he can progress him to the next level."

"But having that ability is one thing. Shaun has to show every day in training what he can do. There are a lot of boys with raw ability but not everyone can make it as a professional because you need more

"HE CAN BECOME A VERY SPECIAL TALENT IF HE KEEPS WORKING HARD AT HIS GAME."



“I WAS THINKING ABOUT MY MOM, SHE ALWAYS TELLS ME I MUST WORK HARD AND FOCUS, AND REMEMBER WHERE I CAME FROM.”

honour him.

“But I didn’t want to play for a club, I was only interested in playing at school and that is all I have done up to now.”

Morgan reveals his memory of catching the eye of Katza, a moment that would change his life.

“We were playing a tournament in Bloemfontein and up against Ricardo’s Grey College. We beat his team 4-0 and he saw what I could do in that game. I am an attacking midfielder, so I like playing in a central role. Like a playmaker, a number 10.

“I think I did really well in that match and the others he watched, he could see I had something.

“I have pace and passing creativity. The seniors players tell me, if I play simple ball and a simple game, the coaches will love me. I just tried to do that and the coaches have told me I’m a good player and must keep on pushing.

“You have to work hard for what you want. I was thinking about my Mom, she always tells me I must work hard and focus, and remember where I came from,” he says, adding his elation when Stellies told him he would be given a contract.

“I wanted to cry that day. They told me after training and I went into my room and I thanked God for the opportunity he gave me.”

Morgan, who confesses to being a big fan of Manchester City midfielder Kevin De Bruyne and his Free State homeboy Sipho Mbule at SuperSport, says his short-term goals are to play in the DStv Premiership.

“You will be watching me in the first team one day, I will be there,” he promises.

For his mother Emily, the fact that he has not only managed to find a team, but one where players are so well looked after like Stellenbosch, eases her worries back in Bloemfontein.

“I am just happy there is something he can do. Because in the location it is hard to do the soccer thing and get the attention [scouted]. It will keep him off the streets, I am just happy for that,” Emily says,

before adding she started him early with a football.

“Shaun used to love the soccer ball when he was very little. I had to pay someone to play with a ball with him – from when he was 10 months old! Because he would cry for the ball.”

She says that as a parent, it is important she knows he will be safe and having her son stay at the apartments at the High Performance Centre in Stellenbosch provides some piece of mind.

“Because it was his second time going to trials, I was really happy because he finally got what he wanted,” she says. “He always played there with friends in the location, and I told him they are going to break your leg for nothing.

“I am nervous for him. He has been with me for 17 years, so it is not easy. The first two weeks he was in Joburg [at SuperSport] I cried so much. But I didn’t want to tell him. As a parent it is very hard. He is really shy.”

One of the future

Stellenbosch coach Steve Barker is admiring of the youngster’s talent, but stresses they will not be rushing the Morgan into the first team.

“We were very impressed with him in his trials and he looks to have a lot of ability,” Barker says. “He will go into our [DStv] Diski Challenge side and we will see how he develops there.

“We won’t rush him, he needs to improve certain aspects of his game and be physically stronger, which are all things we will work on. But he has a lot of potential.

“We have the right facilities here to take his game to the next level and that is what we will be working on over time.”

Stellenbosch are not afraid to use young talent – Barker has already named seven players aged 20 or younger in his match-day squads in the 2021/22 season, more than any other side in the DStv Premiership. **KO**

than that.

“Being at a club like Stellenbosch, that is also an institution where they focus on the education and mentality of the players. I believe Shaun has the right character, but he comes from a place where he was not exposed to a lot of things.

“But Emily did a tremendous job to bring him up. He is in the right environment and has the right people around him.

“From when I first saw him in 2018 to now, it is the same person. He is a nice, strong young man, and I believe in him.”

Ready to seize the day

Morgan knows the opportunity he has been given is a fortunate one, and is determined to make it work, having shunned playing club football in the past.

“I didn’t like soccer much when I was younger, but my grandfather always told me, ‘if you don’t play soccer, I won’t talk to you anymore!’” Morgan says. “When he passed away, I decided on that day that I would give the game everything I have to

A return to Europe

Bafana Bafana will face Guinea and world champions France in friendly matches at the end of March. The fixture against the French in Lille is a particularly intriguing one and a real acid test for coach Hugo Broos to see where his young side are in their development. KICK OFF's Mark Gleeson and Nick Said preview what is one of the toughest assignments in world football.



Bafana players line up ahead of a 2010 World Cup match against France.



It will not be the first time that Bafana Bafana go up against the reigning world champions but the match against France in Lille on March 29 has the potential to remind of the national team's demise rather than progress.

These are not the happiest of days for South Africa, a diminished force not only in the world game but also on the African continent, having not even participated at the Africa Cup of Nations finals in Cameroon at the start of the year.

It is a long time now since the halcyon days of qualifying for successive World Cups in 1998 and 2002 and readying to host the greatest show of them all in 2010.

But failure to get past the group stage of the African World Cup qualifiers, and into the two-legged playoffs, has provided one positive outcome – a prestige friendly of the kind Bafana has not played in years.

The demise of free dates on the international calendar, especially since the creation of the UEFA Nations League, means European counties now rarely play teams from outside their continent.

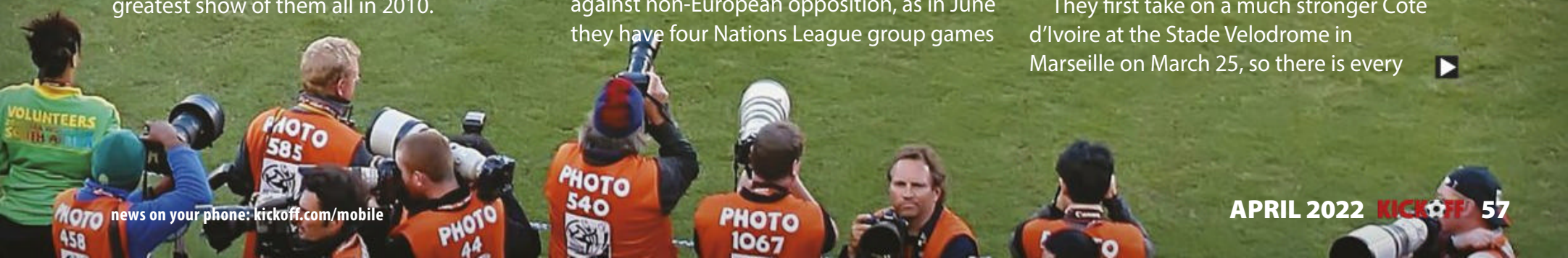
France are playing two African teams this month in anticipation of the World Cup in Qatar. It is their only opportunity to play against non-European opposition, as in June they have four Nations League group games

and then two more in September.

With the World Cup shifted to November, there will be no friendlies in the lead up to the tournament. In fact, the finalists have only a handful of days to assemble their players before they begin the tournament in Qatar.

The game against South Africa at Villeneuve d'Ascq – where last season's Ligue 1 winners Lille play their home games – will be the second game for the French in the space of four days.

They first take on a much stronger Cote d'Ivoire at the Stade Velodrome in Marseille on March 25, so there is every



BAFANA AGAINST LES BLEUS

Bafana Bafana have played France four times in the past, the first time some 25 years ago. That includes two meetings at the FIFA World Cup, which have yielded mixed success.

FRANCE 2 SOUTH AFRICA 1 October 11, 1997 – Lens

Nine months before the teams clashed at France 98, they met in a friendly and South Africa gave a good account of themselves.

In fact, Bafana took the lead through Shaun Bartlett against a French side containing all of their leading stars, including current coach Didier Deschamps, but were undone in the second half. Stéphane Guivarc'h early in the second half for what proved his only ever international goal, before substitute Ibrahim Bá scored a winner seven minutes from time as he had too much power and pace for Neil Tovey.

Willem Jackson and Isaac Shai made their Bafana debuts in this game.

FRANCE 3 SOUTH AFRICA 0 June 12, 1998 – Marseille

Bafana were competitive in the game nine months earlier, but thoroughly outplayed in this World Cup clash that set the tone for France's triumph on home soil.

Christophe Dugarry was an early sub for the injured Guivarc'h, and he headed in Zinedine Zidane's corner in the first half.

That was the way it stayed the 77th minute when Dugarry had a hand in the second as his shot was turned into his own net by Bafana's France-based defender Pierre Issa.

There a third just before the end when Thierry Henry's show was bundled over the line by Issa, who probably should have cleared it. A bad day in the office for Bafana.

SOUTH AFRICA 0 FRANCE 0 October 7, 2000 – Johannesburg

The teams met for the third time in three years in this Nelson Mandela Challenge fixture that finished 0-0 at Ellis Park, with world champions France again playing a near full-strength side in honour of the great man.

It was a determined performance from Bafana under Carlos Queiroz, though it was a game not without some controversy. Nicolas Anelka scored for Les Bleus, but Botswana referee Jelas Masole overruled his assistant and called it offside.

The Bafana side was captained by Bartlett with Lucas Radebe missing out due to injury.

SOUTH AFRICA 2 FRANCE 1 June 21, 2010 – Bloemfontein

France were in disarray going into this final World Cup group stage win having had bitter fights within the squad that soured the atmosphere in one of the more shameful displays from the notoriously tempestuous side.

Bafana took full advantage, knowing they needed a win to keep their hopes of a place in the knockout stages alive. They led 2-0 at halftime as goals from Bongani Khumalo, and header from a corner, and Katlego Mphela put them in charge. In between those two goals French midfielder Yoann Gourcuff was red carded for an elbow on MacBeth Sibiyi. Florent Malouda pulled a goal back for France with 20 minutes to go, but Bafana were able to hold on for one of their more famous wins. It was still not enough to advance though.

chance that France manager Didier Deschamps runs out his second choices against Bafana.

Hugo Broos will continue with an age, rather than performance, based policy and risk a rout unless he picks the right players. His insistence on trying to build for the future cost any chance of going to Qatar where if he picked the best players South Africa might be instead playing in the final round of African playoffs.

The gulf in class and quality is not only reflected in the FIFA rankings but also in recent achievement. France, ranked third, followed World Cup success with participation in the 2020 European Championship, played last year, where they were unfortunate to be eliminated at the last 16 stage, losing to Switzerland on post-match penalties. They then went to the Nations League finals in late October and beat Spain in the final. In November they secured World Cup qualification by beating Kazakhstan 8-0 and Finland 2-0 to finish top of their group by six points, ending the campaign unbeaten.

South Africa, who are way down in 68th place in the FIFA Rankings, have failed to qualify for the both the Cup of Nations and World Cup.

Facing teams from Europe

South Africa have not met a team from Europe since an away friendly in Poland in 2012, an astonishing

BAFANA'S RECORD AGAINST EUROPEAN OPPONENTS

OPPONENT	P	W	D	L	GF	GA
Germany	4	0	1	3	2	9
France	4	1	1	2	3	6
Spain	4	1	0	3	5	8
Iceland	3	0	1	2	2	6
Denmark	3	1	2	0	3	2
Norway	3	1	0	2	2	3
England	2	0	0	2	2	4
Sweden	2	1	0	1	1	3
Republic of Ireland	2	0	0	2	1	3
Italy	2	0	0	2	0	3
Scotland	2	1	0	1	2	1
Poland	2	1	0	1	1	1
Netherlands	1	0	0	1	0	2
Czech Republic	1	0	1	0	2	2
Malta	1	1	0	0	1	0
Georgia	1	0	0	1	1	4
Turkey	1	1	0	0	2	0
Slovenia	1	1	0	0	1	0
Portugal	1	0	0	1	0	2
Serbia	1	0	0	1	1	3
Bulgaria	1	0	1	0	1	1

decade-long wait for the chance.

In fact, they have not played an international outside of Africa since a two-game tour of Central America in 2015 where they played in Costa Rica and Honduras.

It is a far cry from the rip-roaring days of the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the national team was a big ticket item and top sides were queuing up to face Bafana, then amongst Africa's elite nations.

Bafana's first ever game against European opposition was a friendly

BAFANA V REIGNING WORLD CHAMPIONS

Bafana Bafana have taken on the reigning world champions in five matches since readmission and have a win to crow about! Here is a recap of those games.

24 April, 1996

v Brazil 2-3 (Masinga 25', Khumalo 42'; Flavio Conceicao 56', Rivaldo 68', Bebeto 86')
Friendly international
Soccer City, Johannesburg
Cautions: Radebe 11', P Masinga 34', Fish 64'
Ref: David Ellery (England)
Att: 75000

South Africa: Andre Arendse, Sizwe Motaung, Lucas Radebe,

Mark Fish, Neil Tovey capt., Eric Tinkler, John Moeti (Joel Masilela 73'), Doctor Khumalo (Thomas Madigage 66'), Helman Mkhalele, Phil Masinga, Shaun Bartlett (Gerald Stober 83').
Coach: Clive Barker.
Brazil: Dida, Ze Maria, Aldair, Alexandre Lopes, Andre Luis, Flavio Conceicao, Amaral, Jamelli (Ze Elias 46'), Rivaldo, Bebeto, Savio.
Coach: Zagallo.

7 December, 1997

v Brazil 1-2 (Mkhalele 77'; Romario 11', Bebeto 38')
Friendly international
Ellis Park, Johannesburg
Cautions: Moeti 46'; Aldair 66'
Ref: Alois Sesikwe (Botswana)
Att: 45000

South Africa: Andre Arendse, Sizwe Motaung, Neil Tovey, Lucas Radebe capt., Mark Fish, Willem Jackson (Helman



against Germany in December 1995, a match played at the unglamorous Johannesburg Stadium.

Germany brought a decent side that included Stefan Reuter, Andreas Möller, Jürgen Klinsmann and Fredi Bobic under coach Berti Vogts, and the game finished 0-0.

It would be another two years, and after their triumph at the 1996 Africa Cup of Nations, before Bafana would take on European opponents again, but then the games came in a rush.

They played England, Netherlands, France, Czech Republic and Germany, again, all in 1997 as their status as African champions and qualifiers for the 1998 FIFA World Cup helped elevate the profile of the team.

But it wasn't until they faced Sweden in the 1999 Nelson Mandela Challenge that they registered a first win against European opponents. Siyabonga Nomvethe scored an 88th minute winner at Loftus Stadium.

To be fair to the Swedes, the timing of the match meant they were forced to select a home-based team, with their players

scattered across the leagues of Europe not available. That being said, it was largely the same for Bafana, who were without some leading stars too.

South Africa have played European teams on 42 occasions and won 10 of those, to go with seven draws and 25 defeats.

They have never beaten a team from the continent more than once, but there are some notable scalps, not least France at the 2010 World Cup and then world champions Spain in a friendly in 2013. It was a pretty handy Spanish side too.

Other wins have come against Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Malta, Scotland, Turkey, Slovenia and Poland.

That Slovenian success, also via a Nomvethe goal, was Bafana's first victory at a World Cup finals in 2002.

Their least favourite opponents have been Spain and Germany, who have beaten Bafana three times before, while England, France, Iceland, Republic of Ireland, Italy and Norway have all also had multiple wins against them.

The European teams Bafana have met the most, all on four occasions, are Germany, Spain and France, though with this fixture in Lille, the latter will move to the top of that list outright.

Matches against Spain have perhaps been the most exciting. Apart from that famous win nine years ago, they have also lost 3-2 twice in cracking clashes – at the 2002 World Cup and the 2009 FIFA Confederations Cup.

Bafana have played 21 nations from Europe, though the last time they met new opponents was Bulgaria in a 2010 World Cup warm-up match.

A tough opponent in Guinea

Before they take on the French, Bafana will also face Guinea in Belgium on March 25.

It will certainly be a test – Guinea are one of only two out of 46 African sides Bafana have never scored against in their history, though the teams have only met twice before.

The other is Sierra Leone, who Bafana have an inexplicably poor record against with no goals in four meetings.

Bafana first met Guinea at the disastrous 2006 Africa Cup of Nations, where they would exit with no points and no goals in their three pool stage matches under coach Ted Dumitru.

The teams clashed at the Harras El-Hedoud Stadium in Alexandria in their Group C opener and the game remained goalless until Guinea scored twice late on for a 2-0 win.

The sides played again in a friendly international in September 2008 that was staged at the Lucas Moripe Stadium. This time the hapless Brazilian Joel Santana was in charge as Bafana fielded a largely second-string outfit and lost 1-0.

Guinea reached the second round of the recent Nations Cup in Cameroon but lost 1-0 to Gambia.

Their stand-out player is Liverpool midfielder Naby Keita, while they do also feature Roma midfielder Amadou Diawara and former Ajax Cape Town winger Seydouba Soumah, who most recently played for Kuwait SC but is now a free agent. **KO**

Mkhalele 52'), Eric Tinkler (Dumisa Ngobe 73'), John Moeti (Brendan Augustine 53'), Doctor Khumalo, John Moshoeu (Pollen Ndanya 85'), Phil Masinga. Coach: Clive Barker.

Brazil: Dida, Ze Maria, Aldair (Goncalves 76'), Junior Baiano, Cesar Sampaio, Ze Roberto, Dunga (Russo 89'), Rodrigo, Denilson, Romario, Bebeto (Doriva 81'). Coach: Zagallo.

7 October, 2000

v France 0-0
Friendly international
Ellis Park, Johannesburg

Ref: Jelas Masole (Botswana)
Att: 25 000

South Africa: Hans Vonk, Mark Fish, Frank Schoeman, Pierre Issa, Bradley Carnell, Benedict McCarthy (Godfrey Sapula 78'), Thabo Mngomeni, Dumisa Ngobe, Delron Buckley (Sibusiso Zuma 53'), Quinton Fortune, Shaun Bartlett capt. Coach: Carlos Queiroz.

France: Rame, Thuram (Guily 32'), Leboeuf (Christanval 60'), Desailly, Karembeu, Makelele, Viera, Djeto (Petit 75'), Robert, Anelka (Trezeguet 66'), Wiltord (Henry 46'). Coach: Lemerre.

17 October, 2007

v Italy 0-2 (Lucarelli 82', 89')
friendly international
Stadio Artemio Franchi, Siena
Ref: Michael Weiner (Germany)
Att: 7219

Italy: Amelia, Zaccardo (Mesto 81'), Gamberini (Dossena 62'), Bonera, Chiellini, Rossi (Palombo 58'), Montolivo (Nocerino 74'), Foggia (Gilardino 58'), Rosina (Semioli 86'), Mauri, Lucarelli. Coach: Donadoni.

South Africa: Rowen Fernandez, Cyril Nzama (Vuyo Mere 89'), Aaron Mokoena capt., Nasief Morris, Brett Evans, MacBeth

Sibaya, Delron Buckley (Siphiwe Tshabalala 72'), Steven Pienaar (Bamuza Sono 73'), Teko Modise, Siyabonga Nkosi (Siyabonga Nomvete 72'), Benni McCarthy (Theminkosi Fanteni 85'). Coach: Carlos Alberto Parreira.

19 November, 2013

v Spain 1-0 (Bernard Parker 56')
Friendly international
Soccer City, Soweto
Cautions: Tshabalala 86'
Ref: Osiase Koto (Lesotho)
Att: 36,000

South Africa: Itumeleng Khune capt, Anele Ngcongca, Bongani

Khumalo (Siyanda Xulu 46'), Thabo Nthethe, Thabo Matlaba, Oupa Manyisa (Bongani Zungu 63'), Andile Jali (Kamohelo Mokotjo 48'), Dean Furman, Daylon Claassen (Siphiwe Tshabalala 46'), Bernard Parker (Ayanda Patosi 90'), Tokelo Rantie.

Coach: Gordon Igesund
Spain: Casillas (Valdes 46') [Reina 81'], Ramos, Albiol, Monreal, Arbeloa, Iniesta (Koke 74'), Xabi Alonso (Mata 62'), Busquets, Villa (Negredo 57'), Llorente (Cazorla 46'), Pedro (Navas 62'). Coach: Del Bosque.

Matthew Pattison's introduction to South African fans was as a young substitute for Newcastle United in the English Premier League, making his debut off the bench against Everton in February 2006.

It took a while for many to make the connection to Mzansi, but the youngster's ties to the country were strong and would lead to five Bafana Bafana caps and a solid career in the Premier Soccer League.

"I was born in Sandton but I grew up in Alberton and from six years old, I played for Alberton juniors," Pattison says. "I still remember going to the club for the first time. My parents were from the UK, from Newcastle, so I was always going to get involved with football, probably more so than any other sport in South Africa.

"Obviously, my dad was a big, big Newcastle fan. It just seemed to be a natural thing for me to play football.

"My parents emigrated there when they were in their 20s. My Dad was a carpenter and worked for Wits University. My mother worked at the university as well. I was 10 years old when they moved back over to the UK."

Pattison admits it was no plain sailing on the family's return to the United Kingdom, and there was a period of adaptation.

"It's a completely different kettle of fish over in the UK to what it was in South Africa. I think we probably struggled as a family coming back here because South Africa is such an outdoor lifestyle.

"The whole social side of the football was brilliant. There were full days out playing tournaments and matches. When we came back to the UK, it wasn't like that. Obviously, the weather plays a big part, trying to get used to playing in the winter in this country's is unbelievable. So that took a bit of adjusting."

One thing that surprised him was the level of football was not that different to South Africa at the junior age-group level.

"I thought it being England that there were going to be some really, really quality players, and that the standard would be a lot better than South Africa. And that wasn't the case. I remember playing at Alberton with some with some really quality players.

"So I wasn't that impressed with the standard of football, and I did think there was definitely a chance to progress over here. So, playing initially in South Africa did me a lot of good."

Matty Pattison is one of just a handful of South Africans to have played in the English Premier League. Johannesburg-born, he went to England aged 10 and came through the academy ranks at Newcastle to debut in the toughest league in the world. Later he went to play in South Africa in the hope of bedding down a place at the World Cup finals in 2010 and stayed for an adventure at Mamelodi Sundowns, Santos and Bidvest Wits. Last year he announced that, at the age of 35, he was finally hanging up his boots after several seasons playing non-league football back in Britain. Here he reflects on his career with KICK OFF's Mark Gleeson and what he is up to now.

'I loved playing in the PSL'

Following in Gazza's footsteps

He signed up for a junior club in Newcastle and made good progress until a horrific injury for a youngster.

"I joined a boy's club in Newcastle, one where Paul Gascoigne had played as a junior. My Dad played there when he was younger. I spent a couple of years there before getting started for Newcastle.

"I went on a six-week trial at Newcastle and ended up doing really well, scoring in a couple of games. I think I would have been 13 when I signed and joined at under-14 level. So that that was it. I spent about eight seasons at Newcastle from youth all the way up to the first team.

"I played my first game for the first team we had a preseason friendly at Celtic Park when Bobby Robson was still the manager. I ended up coming on for the last half an hour the game.

"Literally a week later, I had a horrendous injury. I ruptured my ACL and then ended up doing it again, spending almost two years out."

Pattison admits to thinking his career might be over before it had started, and he believes things might have turned out differently for him had he not had the injury.

"Losing my Dad, and then having those injuries all happened within a two year time frame. Looking back, it was a really tough time. But you know, being young, I seemed to have taken it all in my stride.

"Obviously, I had a lot of support the club at the time, my mother, my brother, all of our family. That made it easier. But you realise, looking back on it, it would have played a big part and I don't know if maybe my career would have gone a little bit differently if that didn't happen. But all considering, I did pretty well to come back from that."

Pattison made his debut against Everton, but his first start was two months later in a 3-0 home win over West Bromwich Albion. It is a day he will never forget.

"When you play at St James' Park, full house, you don't forget," he says "[Manager] Glenn Roeder had really turned things around at the time and we were we were on a real good run of form. He had got a couple of us younger players involved.

"The game I've started against West Brom just ... I don't know whether we were that good on the day or whether West Brom was so bad but the whole thing just seemed to work out perfectly.

"One of them games where all your



touches are coming off, you're not giving the ball away, you're looking sharp and you create. A dream debut to be honest. It was a bit surreal at the time but obviously one of them things that I'll never forget. I've still got the DVD and my kids have a look at it every now and then."

A first Bafana call-up

Pattison got a first Bafana Bafana call-up for a clash against Australia in neutral London in 2008, but says contact with the South African Football Association started before that. By the time he did get into the squad he had moved to Norwich City.

"My first ever contact was when I was still at Newcastle. Actually, they had a game also in London. That was a couple of years prior to get called up while at Norwich, and

"It was just a very impulsive decision. At the time I was in Norwich, and Brian Gunn came in as manager and I didn't end up playing as many games. As a footballer you do make some rash decisions sometimes in life.

"We'd just settled in Norwich, bought a house and my wife was pregnant with our first our first child Molly. She was only five or six weeks old before I made the move. And that just came about through an agent in South Africa, putting a deal together to go to Sundowns.

"In the back of the back of my mind was that the World Cup was the next year. But after my first training session with Sundowns, before I signed the contract, I remembered ringing my wife and saying, 'I'm not too sure about this'.

"THEY HAD NO REAL INTENTION OF INCLUDING ANY OF US IN THE WORLD CUP SQUAD."

I remember I got injured just before the game so I couldn't go.

"The next time I got called up was for the Australia game. I think we trained at Queen's Park Rangers; Joel Santana was charge but I was just on the bench that day."

But the bug bit for Pattison and with the 2010 FIFA World Cup looming, he decided on a move to the PSL to try and stay in the eye of the national team coaching staff to win a place in the squad for the global showpiece event.

"I just wasn't sold on the idea. Back then, Sundowns weren't what they are now. It really improved a hell of a lot within probably a year to two years, the whole training ground. But then I wasn't too sure if I was going to do it. It was just something in the back of my mind that made me decide to stay.

"Funny enough, within a couple of months, Paul Lambert took over at Norwich and they ended up with back-to-back promotions from League One up into the Premier League. My contract at



Norwich would still have been running at the time.

"But having said that, once I did settle in South Africa, I really, really enjoyed it. And I probably wouldn't have come back to the UK if it wasn't for family reasons. My wife never really settled in South Africa and when she was pregnant with my second daughter, it just became a bit tougher to keep commuting, and come over to South Africa for a couple of months, with the kids starting school and stuff.

"Life just became pretty difficult and it started affecting my soul as well. But if I'd stayed in England, maybe things would have been different. But I think the whole lifestyle change by going overseas, reignited some sort of fire in my game.

"At Sundowns, I played a lot more in my natural position, which is in the middle of the park, whereas in the UK I played a hell of a lot of my games out wide. I was never the quickest player.

"I wasn't the type of player that was going to go past people and take them down the line and get crosses in. I was more technical and more creative. I prefer doing that in the middle of the park, trying to dictate games.

"I just found my feet a lot better in South Africa and really enjoyed that first season at Sundowns."

World Cup dream dashed

Pattison made the Bafana Bafana training camp in Durban ahead of the World Cup, but his dream of a place in the final squad did not come to fruition.

"In my opinion, I think that they had already made their mind up on players that were going to go to the World Cup; the noise came from the media about certain players that needed to be in the squad and were doing well in South Africa," he says.

"I think that camp was basically a counter to say, 'listen, we're having a look at them'. But they had no real intention of including any of us in the World Cup squad, that's my honest opinion. I don't think I was ever going to going to be involved, especially with [Carlos Alberto] Pereira in charge.

"I don't think he would have seen a hell of a



lot of my games to be honest. I was called up to the squad from the fact that I'd been doing really well in the PSL and media were asking questions.

"I never got a proper run with the national team. I would have liked to have had a few more games.

"I think the national team probably lacked my type of player as well. I know Dean [Furman] came in later and I think did really well. He and I are that similar type of player, just keep things ticking over, simple. I think that at the time I probably could have come in and done a good job but it never seemed to happen."

Pattison left Sundowns for BidVest Wits in 2012, having also had a loan spell at Santos, and then returned to the UK with local non-league side Gateshead in 2014, never to play professional football again. He admits that had it not been for the family issues, he would have stayed in the PSL.

"I think I would have still been there now, maybe starting to finish up! The lifestyle was brilliant out there, the weather plays a big part. And I really enjoyed the football side of it."

He admits he did have some regrets in his

career, particularly early on when he battled with the newfound fame and fortune.

"When you're a young player, you have a lot of distractions, going out on the town with your mates, going on the drink and obviously girls. You get a bit carried away, getting a lot of money at a young age and you don't know what to do with it, so you make a lot of stupid decisions financially as well," he says.

"These things obviously do catch up with you. But when I look back as a young player at Newcastle United, I should have really focused a lot more than I did you. There were times when I did play the big games in the Premier League where I wish I had have imposed myself a bit more.

"I had a really good game on my [starting] debut but to my mind that's the only game I can remember having a very good game.

"The other games I played it too safe. You know, just give it simple, you pass it back or you'd pass it sideways, instead of going and actually taking the game by the scruff of the neck and not having any fear of making mistakes. I think that's probably the one thing that I would regret."

What the future holds

The 35-year-old Pattison announced in November last year that he was hanging up his boots, ending his time with non-league Duntson UTC, who play in the eighth tier of football in England. He has now set his sights on coaching.

"It's just a case of, you know, obviously as you as you get older, you know you're playing in the UK, it's a lot colder, it takes a lot out your body. Pitches are heavy and I don't have that sort half a yard [of time] that I used to have, so that that makes it tougher as well.

"I've been coaching alongside playing over the last four years now. I've been doing the academy in Gateshead for the past three years, and then I've just moved on to a school in the Northeast where I run the academy programme. So that's my full-time job now. I'll have now got to kick on with obviously all the necessary qualifications.

"Football is obviously a massive game of who you know. Somewhere along the line, you might know somebody that's in there [a professional club] and willing to give you give you a chance.

"Especially when you've played the game, you tend to get jobs a lot easier over this side, which I suppose is like over in South Africa as well. It's just a case of just keeping doing what I'm doing. And then who knows what's around the corner?" **KO**

"WHEN I LOOK BACK AS A YOUNG PLAYER AT NEWCASTLE UNITED, I SHOULD HAVE REALLY FOCUSED A LOT MORE THAN I DID YOU."

DID YOU KNOW?

**NEYMAR
DA SILVA
SANTOS**

Date of birth: February 5, 1992

Current club: Paris Saint-Germain

Previous clubs: Santos, Barcelona

17

In March 2009, Neymar came on as a substitute with thirty minutes remaining against Oeste for his professional debut at the age of 17 playing for Santos.

The match ended 2-1 in favour of his side.

The Brazilian wonderkid scored his professional goal against Mogi Mirim the next week.

70

The forward has scored 70 international goals for Brazil senior national team in 116 matches since debuting at age 18 and this makes him the second highest national team goalscorer behind legendary Pele (77).

42

Neymar scored an impressive 42 goals in 60 appearances for Santos during the 2010 season.

He was twice named the South American Footballer of the Year, in 2011 and 2012, and soon relocated to Europe to join Barcelona.

100

On February 5, 2012, Neymar celebrated his 20th birthday in style when he scored his 100th professional goal against Palmeiras in the Campeonato Paulista.

20

The Brazilian forward ended the 2012 season with 20 goals and was voted as Player of the Year as Santos won the domestic championship.

543

The 30-year-old has made 543 appearances in all competitions at club level since making his professional debut. The player has played 14 seasons in professional football.

24

Neymar has won 24 club honours with eight league titles and 16 cups won from his time with Santos, Barcelona and PSG.

3

The forward has won three honours with Brazil: the 2011 South American Under-20 Youth Championship; 2016 Olympic Gold and the 2013 FIFA Confederation Cup, which was won on home soil.

333

As of the first week of March 2022, Neymar's goalscoring tally at club level stood at 333. He netted 136 with Brazilian side Santos, 105 with Barcelona and is currently on 91 goals with Paris Saint-Germain.





'Jali should be with Bafana'

A lot was expected from Andile Jali when he joined Mamelodi Sundowns from Belgium side KV Oostende. After a disappointing start in Chloorkop he was subsequently dropped from the national team. But this season the 31-year-old is playing his best football in a very long time and our Secret Footballer – Jali's former teammate – believes there is no stopping the Sundowns midfielder in his current form.

When I look at the PSL, I would say Mamelodi Sundowns players Peter Shalulile and Andile Jali have been the best performers in the PSL this season. Shalulile went through a draught for a few weeks where he was not performing or scoring goals, but once he regained his old form and started hitting his straps, nothing could stop him.

Those two have been playing well and are the reason why Sundowns will win the league for the fifth time in a row. I don't see anything that can stop them. Whether they are starting or coming off the bench, they are ready to roll up their sleeves and get on with work.

But out of the two, I want to talk about one player specifically and that is my former teammate Jali. When he returned to the PSL after playing in Europe he went through a spell where he was having issues off the field.

He did well under Pitso Mosimane but since Mangoba Mngqithi and Rhulani Mokwena took over, he has been excellent. This has been his best season since his return from Belgium.

Maybe how Mangoba and Rhulani are relating to Jali off the field is having an impact on how he is performing this season.

Jali wants to show the coaches that he appreciates what they are doing. When he came back, I used to spend a lot of time with him and I thought he looked heavy. He was not the old Jali that I knew.

He had off-the-field issues but now that those have been sorted out he is more

matured and is a senior player. You can see the confidence is there – when a player is confident it's easy for him to influence the team in a positive way.

The way he is playing now when is the way he was performing when he joined Orlando Pirates from University of Pretoria. The Jali that we see now is the old Jali we saw when he was at The Buccaneers.

Time at Pirates

When he came to Pirates he was arrogant on the field, and I was close to him, we enjoyed each other's company. His first day at training he came with Phenyong Mongala from AmaTuks, and he didn't take time to make his mark – he was kicking players from day one.

All the players were running away from him and when it was him against Michael Morton in midfield, you'd swear they were fighting at training. They were both not pulling out of tackles.

Teko Modise would run away from the midfield and play on the side. Lebogang Mothibantwa, the one guy we trusted when it comes to tackles, also ran away. Andile was not playing games, he was kicking – he had that confidence in him.

Ruud Krol used to tell him that: 'Jali, the midfield is yours' and that is the confidence Andile needed to show his talent. Krol used to talk to players one-on-one off the

field and that gave Jali the confidence he needed to perform.

Once he started playing with Oupa Manyisa in the middle of the park, nothing could stop them. Jali has been through a lot and I'm happy to see that he has bounced back and is doing well now. He did wonders for Pirates, he gave the team confidence and influenced results.

Searching for greener pastures overseas

Jali moved to Europe and we expected him to do well – in fact he did perform well in Belgium because the club that he was playing for wanted to keep him. But his family was in South Africa and he felt that he was

“WHEN HE CAME BACK, KAIZER CHIEFS WERE TRYING ALL THEY COULD TO SIGN HIM.”

too far from his children.

He came back from Europe to be closer to his family. When he came back, Kaizer Chiefs were trying all they could to sign him but at the end Jali settled on Sundowns.

He can still do more, even with the national team. I know the coach [Hugo Broos] is trying to bring in new players. Look at a player like Themba Zwane – he has also been doing well but not getting selected to the national team because the coach is changing the team.

I respect the position of the coach, but I still feel that Jali can still give us something at Bafana Bafana. **KO**



On sale every Wednesday

You can also get the digital version of Soccer Laduma on
www.magzter.com

Soccer LADUUUUUM!



TOYOTA

LEAD THE WAY

THE ALL-NEW TOYOTA **AGYA** IT'S A BIG DEAL FOR A SMALL CAR



MODEL SHOWN: AGYA MT

The all-new Toyota Agya is available in manual and automatic transmission and it comes standard with 14" alloy wheels, a push start ignition, LED projector headlamps and in-car Wi-Fi. With all those features, it's easy to see why it's a big deal for a small car.

BOOK A TEST DRIVE TODAY AT WWW.TOYOTA.CO.ZA

Toyota SA @ToyotaSA

AGYA