

By some stroke of fortune...



THE EDITOR'S COLUMN

Granted, the beautiful game of football is one that is more than just life and death, as described by the legendary Bill Shankly (ex-Liverpool manager), but it is also a game that can build players up only to easily spit them out, depending on which side of the fortune stakes they are on.

This not only applies to players though. Coaches, club officials and even referees are not exempt from the 'good luck, bad luck' wheel that seems to be turning at a frequent pace in this game. In the past, we have seen players who were at the peak of their game and seemed destined for greater heights, only for their careers to nosedive in an instant. It's quite a scary phenomenon. On the other side of the coin, there have been players who were relegated to the scrapheap of football, only to redeem themselves and charm their way back into the hearts of South African football fans. For one, let us look at the curious case of Paulus Masehe, the veteran Free State Stars midfielder. Having earned his stripes at Ea Lela Koto, where he had graduated from the junior ranks, it was no surprise when Mamelodi Sundowns came calling for his services more than a decade ago. Back then playing as a striker, he did not have the best of times at Chloookop and later joined Orlando Pirates. For all his promise, he flattered to deceive. Like so many other players, the bright lights of Johannesburg hindered his Bucs career. Such was the impact of his off-field troubles, that a former teammate once shared on Still In Touch that Masehe came to training one Monday morning and started vomiting!

Fast forward to today, and you wouldn't think this is the same Masehe we are talking about, especially when looking at his inspiring performances for his team. His display in their recent 1-0 loss to Mamelodi Sundowns earned him the praise of the hard-to-please Pitso Mosimane. This is what 'Jingles' had to say about 'The Horse' in his post-match interview, "I have big respect for Paulus Masehe. At that age, and (to) be able to be fighting with Khama (Billiat).

Khama outprints many people and he did his best. At that age, to be able to play at that intensity, with that maturity and everything. He gives everything for the club, you know. I take my hat off." Indeed, that at his age, Masehe is able to compete against young, energetic players like Billiat and Percy Tau week in and week out shows just how much he has matured on and off the field as a professional footballer, and should serve as an inspiration to youngsters not only at Free State Stars but right across Mzansi. Respect the game and it will reward you tenfold.

Talking of Tau... what more can one say, really? Just two years ago, he was seen by many as one of those youngsters who either sign or get promoted from the junior ranks at a big club, only to be deprived of game-time, before being loaned out or released. The odds were stacked against him, especially considering the wealth of talent that has long been at Downs' disposal. But all it took was a loan spell at Witbank Spurs. Down in the National First Division determination, hard work and focus prevailed, and the rest is recorded as history. Amazing what can happen in a footballer's career in the space of just a year or two! Big ups, young Tau.

Aubrey Ngoma, who continues to mesmerise opposition defences, game after game, is another case in point. He never featured much for Orlando Pirates, who had signed him from University of Pretoria, and when he did play, he looked average. He was later released. The nippy winger somehow found it in himself to dust himself off from that disappointment and, now on the books of red-hot Cape Town City, he is one of the most exciting players to watch in the league.

For me, though, the one player whose story and remarkable rise to stardom is the stuff of legend is none other than Lebogang Manyama. His has been a journey of rising from the ashes to prove your detractors wrong. And detractors he had in abundance, but we'll come back to that shortly. During his

time with Ajax Cape Town, he formed an 'easy on the eye' combination with the likes of Thulani Serero, Sameehg Doutie and George Maluleka, and it was no surprise when he earned a move to SuperSport United, who beat Kaizer Chiefs to his signature. He revealed that the reason he snubbed Amakhosi was that he felt he had better prospects of moving to Europe from Matsatsantsa a Pitori. This, of course, did not go down too well with some of the Chiefs fans, and when he hit a rough patch, they would be quick to remind him of his words. For a considerable period, he struggled to get his mojo and allegations of partying it up off the field did not help matters either. His SuperSport departure, this time to Mpumalanga Black Aces, seemed the start of great things for him, and he is now the talk of the town. No, let me rephrase that: Lebogang Manyama is the PSL Footballer of the Season-elect.

Footballers go through ups and downs. This game is a roller-coaster of emotions and the fans would do well to give players enough chance before deeming them average, or heaping unwarranted praise for that matter. For example, when Thembinkosi Lorch returned to Pirates from his loan spell at Chippa United, he had a few average performances, obviously still acclimatising to a new style of play. The fans were unconvinced. Enter the Soweto Derby. Lorch scores the equalising goal and suddenly he becomes the darling of the Black and White side of Soweto.

On the coaching front, who would have thought Dan Malesela would be on the brink of losing his job at Chippa, as he appears to be now? We are talking here about a man who has been building a legacy at the Port Elizabeth-based side, and it is hard to imagine a Chippa side without him on the bench. Football's a game of fortunes indeed.

Catch y'all on the rebound!
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