

# Thanda return to top flight, while Santos seem doomed

**Kamlesh Gosai**

DURBAN: Big-time football will reach Richards Bay for the first time next season after Thanda Royal Zulu confirmed their promotion to the Absa Premiership with a 2-1 home victory over Stellenbosch FC at the Umhlathuze Sports Complex yesterday.

Goals from Khotso Malope and Michael Gumede took Thanda out of reach of second-placed Black Leopards in the standings.

With three rounds left to play, Amabhubesi are 13 points clear and cannot be overhauled by the Limpopo outfit.

Cape side Stellenbosch dropped to third after Leopards drew 0-0 away to Royal Eagles in Pietermaritzburg.

Stellenbosch's loss ended their chance of competing for the solitary automatic promotion spot.

Thanda's 15th win of the season, in which they've lost just once thus far, returned them to the PSL following an eight-year absence.

It's a significant turnaround for the coastal unit, who were almost relegated to the third tier of South African football last season.

However the management kept faith with coach Roger Sikhakhane, who oversaw an unbeaten run of 16 games, until their defeat at University of Pretoria earlier this year.

Before their 2008/9 relegation Thanda were based in Durban and occasionally played out of Hammarsdale.



Since their demotion they switched to the north coast, which means top-flight action for the Zululand region next season.

It brings back to three the number of KwaZulu-Natal

clubs in the PSL.

In the past two seasons the province had only Golden Arrows and Maritzburg United in the big league, after AmaZulu's relegation two years ago.

All going well, it could be four KZN teams in the top flight, if AmaZulu or Royal Eagles, or even both teams, qualify for the play-offs.

Teams that finish second and third enter a three-way play-off with the side that finishes second-bottom in the PSL. The winner of that mini competition earns the right to play in the top league.

However Durban giants AmaZulu and Pietermaritzburg-based Eagles will need Stellenbosch and Leopards to drop further points in order

to overtake them over the remaining three rounds.

Others in the race for the play-offs are Witbank Spurs, who drew 1-1 at Real Kings in Clermont, and Mbombela United who blasted FC Cape Town 3-1 in Mpumalanga.

That drubbing cost FCCT big time, as they they dropped to second-bottom, and swapped positions with Magesi, who beat Cape Town All Stars 1-0.

At the foot of the standings Santos seem doomed to slip to the amateur ranks, after they drew 1-1 with Jomo Cosmos in the Mother City. They must win all three of their remaining games, and hope FCCT and Magesi lose all theirs.

In the eastern Cape Mthatha Bucks and University of Pretoria drew goalless.