



Richards Bay's Thanda Royal Zulu football club are jubilant after clinching an automatic promotion to the Absa Premiership with a 2-1 win over Stellenbosch FC, while Royal Eagles kept alive their slim hopes of securing the playoffs after playing to a pulsating but goalless draw with Leopards. PHOTO: GALLO IMAGES

Premier players all

Packed Umhlathuze stadium rejoice at Thanda Royal Zulu's convincing win

NONDUMISO ZAKWE

ROGER Skhakhane's Thanda Royal Zulu will be playing Absa Premiership football next season after guaranteeing promotion from the National First Division with a convincing 2-1 victory over Stellenbosch FC at a packed Umhlathuze Sports Complex yesterday afternoon.

Khotoso Malope and Michael Gumede powered the KZN side to their first promotion since suffering relegation from the PSL at the end of the 2008/09 season.

Amabhubesi, currently placed at the top of the log standings with 56 points and three matches to spare, have been impressive all season — recording 14 wins, 11 draws and just one defeat.

The Richards Bay outfit have 44 league goals in total this season, including striker Mhlengi Cele's 16 from 23

league appearances.

Speaking to the media after the win, the elated 41-year-old mentor, who was shown the exit door by Chippa United last season, assured club supporters that despite speculation that he might be tempted to return to his old club, he intends to remain in Umhlathuze.

"No, no no! I will never go back there. I helped Chippa when I could by signing the right players and ensuring we had a successful pre-season, but I don't know what went wrong this season.

"They look like they are struggling, but it's not my business anymore and I don't care what happens to them from here on."

Of the promotion he said: "This is good for the community of Mhlathuze and everyone.

"They'll be happy to have their own PSL team again and it's all good motiva-



Stand-in coach Allan Freese hopes Royal Eagles can still get a top three finish. PHOTO: DAILY SUN

tion to the youth."

Thanda now have an unassailable lead at the top of the table, and would actually have gone up regardless of their result, as Black Leopards were held to a goalless draw in a pulsating game at home to Royal Eagles.

The stalemate at Harry Gwala Stadium yesterday afternoon means the race for the two playoff spots is still wide open for all the sides, including AmaZulu and Witbank Spurs, who are sitting joint fourth with the Midlands side.

Despite the setback, experienced stand-in coach Allan Freese was disappointed with the result and the performance, but maintained his troops will not take their foot off the pedal, adding that he believes Eagles can still push for a top-three finish, with just three games remaining, away to Jomo Cosmos, Mbombela United and Witbank Spurs

respectively. Speaking to *The Witness* yesterday, the 60-year-old coach, who was visibly dejected, said: "I'm a little bit disappointed that we didn't come right today.

"But we'll go back and work on the mistakes, at least there's still three matches left. We won't throw in the towel. We're going to go there and fight.

"I've only been here for a few days so I'm not panicking. We've got to get the results in those games!"

Freese took up the interim coaching role in the absence of Kosta Papić, who is recovering from surgery, and will see the team through to the end of the season.

. nondumiso.zakwe@witness.co.za

YESTERDAY'S NFD RESULTS

Real Kings 1-1 Witbank Spurs
Mthatha Bucks 0-0 AmaTulks
Magesi 1-0 All Stars