



Thanda Royal Zulu Players celebrate their promotion to the PSL after winning against Stellenbosch FC on Wednesday.
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Solid home base, defence secured Thanda's place

Now, will the club stick with its staff?

By **Sihle Ndebele**

Thanda Royal Zulu's National First Division triumph this week was headlined by numerous key factors, but Amabhubesi's unbeaten home record all season proved a catalyst to their successful campaign.

He may be four goals behind NFD's top scorer Sedwyn George of Royal Eagles, but Mhlengi Cele's 16 strikes were crucial in aiding the KwaZulu-Natal-based outfit to return to the PSL after eight years.

Cele joined Amabhubesi from Chippa United at the start of the season. His PSL experience and good relationship he enjoys with coach Roger

Sikhakhane, with whom he worked at the Chilli Boys, saw him settle well in Richards Bay.

Thanda went as far as 14 games without a defeat, breaking Lamontville Golden Ar-

row's 12-match unbeaten record of 2015. Sikhakhane's men have only lost one match, away to AmaTuks in February.

Sikhakhane is no stranger to shepherding a second-tier side into the top flight. In 2012, the 41-year-old tactician guided Chippa to the PSL.

Generally in football it is believed that goal-scorers win matches, but goalkeepers and defenders win titles. This line is fitting well with Thanda's solid defence.

Thanda have conceded the least number of goals (21) so far. The solid partnership of Ayabulela Konqobe and Michael Gumede was fundamental in Thanda's sensational season.

It remains to be seen if they will keep faith in their promotion-winning personnel because it has previously seemed hard for newly promoted clubs to stick with coaches who have

helped them gain promotion when the team is in the riches of the elite league. Shaun Bartlett, now with AmaTuks, was let go after promoting Arrows in 2015, while Allan Freese lasted only five games at Highlands Park this season.

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
1 Thanda	27	15	11	1	46	21	56
2 Leopards	27	12	8	7	39	33	44
3 Stellenbosch	27	12	7	8	36	28	43
4 Eagles	27	11	8	8	47	35	41
5 AmaZulu	27	12	5	10	44	35	41
6 Spurs	27	11	8	8	36	34	41
7 Mbombela	27	11	7	9	39	27	40
8 Bucks	27	8	13	6	35	35	37
9 Kings	27	9	9	9	35	30	36
10 Cosmos	26	9	8	9	28	26	35
11 AmaTuks	27	9	6	12	29	38	33
12 All Stars	26	6	11	9	19	26	29
13 Milano	27	9	2	16	33	52	29
14 Magesi	27	7	7	13	27	39	28
15 FC CPT	27	6	10	11	32	45	28
16 Santos	27	3	10	14	15	36	19

Fixtures (All at 3pm)

- **Tomorrow:**
 Leopards v Magesi, Thohoyandou Stadium; Spurs v Mbombela, Puma Rugby Stadium; FC CPT v Bucks, NNK Rugby Stadium; Stellenbosch v Kings, Athlone Stadium.
- **Sunday:**
 AmaTuks v Milano, Tuks Stadium; Cosmos v Eagles, Tsakane Stadium; AmaZulu v Santos, Princess Magogo Stadium; All Stars v Thanda, Parow Park Stadium.

