



By MTHOKOZISI MKHONZA

IT IS crunch time in the National First Division (NFD) as some clubs are in a race to secure the last promotion play-offs berth while others are running from the dreaded axe.

The final NFD matches for the 2016-17 season are scheduled for Sunday and all clubs will be playing at the same time.

Thanda Royal Zulu, who got automatic promotion by winning the NFD title with

Relegation and play-offs dogfight hits the ring

each, only separated by goal difference.

■ The PSL confirmed midweek

three matches to spare, will officially receive their trophy after their game against Real Kings FC at Durban's Sugar Ray Xulu Stadium this weekend.

Even Santos' fate has already been decided – they will drop down to the ABC Motsepe league following the poor season they've had.

The mystery now is which other NFD team will join Black Leopards who have already qualified for the play-offs with 50 points.

Three teams, AmaZulu (47 points), Stellenbosch FC (46) and Royal Eagles (45), are still in with a chance of grabbing that remaining spot in the play-offs, where they will be joined by the team that finishes 15th in the PSL.

Usuthu, Stellenbosch and Eagles are lying third, fourth, and fifth respectively in the NFD league table.

Stellenbosch will be up against relegated Santos at Athlone Stadium (3pm).

Stellenbosch coach Sammy Troughton said: "We wasted a golden opportunity to secure the play-offs spot on Wednesday. We were disappointed by that result.

"But we are still alive. We need to win our game and hope AmaZulu will drop points."

In the bottom half it's also an interesting affair as any of three clubs, Capetoni-ans Milano United and FC Cape Town, and Limpopo's Magesi, could be the team to join Santos in the ABC Motsepe league, as one of them will go down.

Magesi coach Shepherd Murape said they would not go down without a fight: "It's no longer in our hands, we are depending on other results. We will fight until the final whistle is blown and see what happens."

Magesi and FC Cape Town are in 14th and 15th place respectively with 31 points

the dates for the promotion play-offs, which will be contested by three teams – the two NFD clubs that finish second and third and the 15th team in the PSL.

The dates are 31 May, 3 June, 7 June, 10 June, 14 June and 17 June.

■ The draw for the play-offs will be conducted on Tuesday.

PERMUTATIONS FOR THE PLAY-OFF SPOT.

■ AmaZulu need to defeat FC Cape Town to ensure a play-off spot. If they get maximum points on that game, the other results of Stellenbosch and Eagles won't change anything.

■ If Stellenbosch and Eagles win their respective matches and AmaZulu lose or draw, that will mean Stellenbosch will join Leopards in the play-offs.

■ Defeat for AmaZulu, draw or loss for Stellenbosch and victory for Eagles will see Eagles qualify for the play-offs.

FIXTURES:

Black Leopards v Mthatha Bucks (Thohoyandou Stadium)

Jomo Cosmos v University of Pretoria (Tsakane Stadium)

Witbank Spurs v Royal Eagles (Puma Rugby Stadium)

FC Cape Town v AmaZulu (Nkomo Rugby Stadium)

Stellenbosch FC v Santos (Athlone Stadium)

Cape Town All Stars v Milano United AFC (Farrow Park)

Mbombela United v Magesi FC (Kanyamazane Stadium)

Real Kings FC v Thanda Royal Zulu (Sugar Ray Xulu Stadium)

■ KICK-OFF: 3pm

NATIONAL FIRST DIVISION

| Pos | Team | Pld | W | D | L | GF | GA | GD | Pts |
|-----|------------------------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|
| 1 | Thanda Royal Zulu FC | 29 | 16 | 11 | 2 | 50 | 23 | 27 | 59 |
| 2 | Black Leopards | 29 | 14 | 8 | 7 | 44 | 34 | 10 | 50 |
| 3 | AmaZulu | 29 | 14 | 5 | 10 | 52 | 38 | 18 | 47 |
| 4 | Stellenbosch FC | 29 | 13 | 7 | 9 | 38 | 29 | 9 | 46 |
| 5 | Royal Eagles | 29 | 12 | 9 | 8 | 43 | 38 | 5 | 45 |
| 6 | Witbank Spurs | 29 | 12 | 8 | 9 | 39 | 38 | 1 | 44 |
| 7 | Mbombela United | 29 | 11 | 8 | 10 | 40 | 30 | 10 | 41 |
| 8 | Mthatha Bucks | 29 | 8 | 13 | 7 | 38 | 36 | 2 | 40 |
| 9 | Real Kings FC | 29 | 9 | 11 | 9 | 39 | 33 | 6 | 36 |
| 10 | University of Pretoria | 29 | 10 | 6 | 13 | 32 | 39 | -7 | 36 |
| 11 | Cape Town All Stars | 29 | 8 | 11 | 10 | 23 | 27 | -4 | 35 |
| 12 | Jomo Cosmos | 29 | 9 | 8 | 12 | 30 | 38 | -8 | 35 |
| 13 | Milano United AFC | 29 | 10 | 2 | 17 | 34 | 25 | 9 | 32 |
| 14 | Magesi FC | 29 | 8 | 7 | 14 | 34 | 43 | -9 | 31 |
| 15 | FC Cape Town | 29 | 7 | 10 | 12 | 24 | 49 | -25 | 31 |
| 16 | Santos | 29 | 4 | 10 | 15 | 16 | 35 | -19 | 22 |

