



NATIONAL FIRST DIVISION

Stellenbosch in good hands with Troughton and Barker

Marc Strydom

Sammy Troughton and Steve Barker, coaches who played a key role in Pretoria University FC's promotion to the Premier Soccer League (PSL) five years ago, are aiming to utilise that experience with ambitious Stellenbosch FC.

Stellenbosch reached the National First Division (NFD) promotion playoffs by beating Santos 1-0 on Saturday, though had to rely on AmaZulu losing 1-0 against relegation-threatened FC Cape Town.

The club – formed at the start of the season from the ashes of Vasco da Gama – might appear to be the underdogs in the playoffs against regular participants Black Leopards and a PSL team yet to be decided.

But the expertise of head coach Troughton and his assistant Barker – the technical director and coach of Tuks when they won the NFD in 2011-12 – can stand Stellenbosch in good stead.

Stellenbosch, owned by businessman Mario Ferreira, who is also the majority shareholder of Bongani Zungu's club Vitoria Guimaraes, are positioning themselves as a feeder



Going places: Stellenbosch FC coach Sammy Troughton, right, and his assistant, Steve Barker, plot their team's strategy ahead of the promotion playoffs. /BackpagePix

team to the club in Portugal's Primeira Liga.

"That is the idea of the partnership between the clubs – that we want to be bringing players into Stellenbosch and those that have the right qualities move them on to Portugal," Barker said. "This club saw themselves chasing promotion this season. Ferreira's been involved for three years now, two while it was still Vasco. He's invested a lot of money in it.

"The mandate was that they wanted to get promoted and

definitely, the ambition is there. And you can see from the calibre of players we signed in January that we really are serious about mounting a strong challenge for the PSL. Our philosophy is that if we want to be in the PSL, we have to do things better than PSL teams. And I believe our level of preparation and input into the club shows we want to be in the PSL."

Barker joined Troughton – coach from March of Vasco, who were sold by the Das Neves brothers Mario, Carlos and

Paulo to Ferreira in the off-season and relocated to Stellenbosch – in December.

With the club wallowing outside the playoff places, in January, the coaches brought in eight players – including David Booysen, Washington Arubi, Mame Niang, Manti Mekoa and Petrus Shitembe – to provide an experienced backbone.

"We had a nice, long break until the league started again in February to integrate the new players," Barker said.

"And then we showed good consistency in the second half to get 27 points from 15 matches. It's a tight league, where it's not easy to get points consecutively. We had occasions where we got back-to-back wins and then a draw or a loss.

"But we kept winning games when we needed to. Unfortunately, we lost the second-last game of the season against Milano United, which then put it out of our hands in the last game. But we knew it wouldn't be easy for AmaZulu to meet a team away who were fighting relegation. Hence, we knew we had to do our job against Santos. It's been a good journey and the club, I believe, deserve to be in the playoffs." / TMG Digital

