



Stellenbosch FC coach Steve Barker shakes hands with his Black Leopards counterpart, Jean Losciuto, at the promotion/relegation play-offs draw.

Photo by Trevor Kunene

# FAMILIAR GROUND FOR STELLIES DUO!

By **MTHOKOZISI MKHONZA**

**STELLENBOSCH FC** are hot favourites to win promotion when the National First Division (NFD) promotion/relegation play-offs kick off on 31 May.

They will open their play-offs account against the still unknown team that finishes 15th in the Absa Premiership on 31 May and then face Black Leopards on 3 June. The next match is the second leg against the PSL team on 10 June and they complete the play-offs against Leopards on 14 June.

The *Stellies*, as Stellenbosch are popularly known, are led by experienced ex-University of Pretoria coaches, Steve Barker and Sammy Troughton, who have played and won the play-offs before.

This is not the case with their competitors, Black Leopards. Their mentor, Jean Losciuto, will be playing in the mini-league for the first time.

Barker and Troughton will be ready to dominate the play-offs and follow Thanda Royal Zulu to the Absa Premiership. Thanda secured their PSL berth by winning the 2016-17 NFD title.

The *Stellies* duo lost their first play-offs to AmaZulu in the 2006-07 season while still together at *AmaTuks*.

Troughton went on a solo run when he helped MP Black Aces gain PSL status

in the 2008-09 season.

Then the duo teamed up again at *AmaTuks*, where they got the university outfit promoted to the Premiership in the 2011-12 season.

Now they are on the verge of repeating the feat with the Cape Town club.

The play-offs draw was conducted at the PSL offices yesterday and the two teams will be playing their first matches at home.

Barker says they know what it takes to win the play-offs: "It is never easy in the play-offs, we have to start well, take advantage of home ground. There's no room for error. We only have four matches and consistency will be key.

"It will take a monumental effort and belief in our destiny."

Losciuto said: "We deserve to be where we are now but the job is not done yet. I want the story to continue. I know Stellenbosch well, it's now or never. We only have four games to make it."

## DRAW

- 31 May: Stellenbosch v PSL's 15th team
- 3 June: Black Leopards v Stellenbosch
- 7 June: PSL team v Black Leopards
- 10 June: PSL team v Stellenbosch
- 14 June: Stellenbosch v Leopards
- 17 June: Leopards v PSL team

