

Dludlu lauds team's attitude

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THE NATIONAL women's Under-17 team coach Simphiwe Dludlu praised the players' mental resolve, which saw them thump Botswana in their own backyard without a competitive match to prepare as a unit.

Bantwana shone on Friday despite not playing a competitive friendly, moving a step closer to qualifying for the Under-17 World Cup that will be staged in Uruguay next year.

Bantwana's 5-2 win over Botswana at the Lobatse Sports Complex puts the team in the driving seat going into the second leg at Dobsonville Stadium on December 16. The winners of the two-legged tie will face Morocco in the last round of qualifiers after Equatorial Guinea withdrew.

"The one thing that we are not going to do in the second leg is be complacent," Dludlu said. "This Botswana team came back from losing 5-2 in the first leg to Zambia to qualify for this stage. They ended up winning the tie 6-5.

"The positive for us is that we did this away from home. Botswana lost to Zambia in Zambia and they turned things around in their own backyard. We scored five goals in their own backyard. One thing that I need to mention about these girls is that they are mentally superior, if I may put it that way.

"They are superior because they brushed aside every challenge they faced, from the preparations to the camp, the trip we took to Botswana and even travelling to the stadium, which took us an hour. They got there and delivered. It hasn't been easy. But their mindset and attitude has been positive."

It wasn't just the core of the Bantwana squad which was making their international debut against Botswana. Dludlu was also making her debut as a coach in the international scene. Dludlu, a holder of a Uefa B License, has previously coached the University of Pretoria Varsity Cup team and a Sasol League team. The former Banyana Banyana captain is currently managing the High Performance Centre side in Pretoria.

"It was nerve wrecking," Dludlu said of her international debut as head coach. "I've played so many games for the country and I was always the bravest because I knew what I would bring on the field. Now I had to trust my players to carry out my vision, dream and plan. The one thing that kept me calm was the look on the players' faces. They were confident."

"But it was an honour to lead my country now as a coach and not a player. It proved that dreams don't end when you hang up your boots because this is something that I am passionate about. I will continue working hard and sacrificing all that I can to make sure I add value to women's football in South Africa, especially on the development side."

