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Monare loves the competition

NJABULO NGIDI

THE rain that hit Mbombela Stadium in the MTN8 final last year masked Thabang Monare's tears of joy and sadness after finally becoming a champion in the Premier Division.

The Bidvest Wits midfielder from Embalenhle in Nelspruit was happy he lifted his first trophy in his hometown. But he was sad that it reminded him of how little time he spent with his late grandfather as Wits won the MTN8 exactly 20 years after he passed away on October 1, 1996.

That emotional attachment to this trophy drives the 27-year-old to help the Clever Boys retain it. The Milpark-based side host Golden Arrows at Bidvest Stadium tonight in the opening round of the tournament.

"It was nice to get my first trophy in my home turf," Monare said. "It meant a lot, especially also coming on a day that has been associated with sadness in our family. But the reality is our success from last season is gone now."

Monare continued, "It's a new season with the same goals, if not more. I want to achieve as much as I can before the end of my career. For me to do that, I have to always look



forward to what's coming next and forget what I have won and done in the past. That's how you stay at the top."

Another reason why Monare doesn't like to dwell much on the past is that it wasn't kind to him before he won the MTN8 and the Premiership with Wits.

A season before that success he was relegated with Jomo Cosmos. The Ezenkosi chapter is a happy one, compared to what happened before it, he was after all playing in the

professional set-up and was getting paid then. Before Monare joined Ezenkosi he was with FC AK and didn't earn anything. He joined FC AK after being released by University of Pretoria in 2011. While his career was stagnant, his friends, Andile Jali and Aubrey Ngoma, were flourishing. Now he is making up for lost time.

"To be honest with you, I never saw myself as anything else in life besides being a footballer," Monare said. "I

was so obsessed with being a footballer that there was no room for me to even think about quitting. That's what kept me going. I knew it wouldn't be easy. I am not done yet. I have to continue working hard. I want to make my family proud. They were used to watching other people on TV and now the next thing they're watching me. It's unreal to see people around me being happy at what I have achieved."

A year ago, Kola Mlambo and Monare joined a Wits team which had a formidable central midfield pairing in Phumlani Ntshangase and Ben Motshwari. Mlambo and Monare managed to replace the two and guide Wits to the MTN8 trophy.

Monare is now looking to ensure Steven Pienaar and Daylon Claasen don't do what he and Mlambo did to Ntshangase and Motshwari.

"Their presence (Pienaar and Claasen) is good, looking at where they played ... in Europe," Monare said. "We can learn a lot from them. We (Mlambo and I) came to a strong midfield last year and the competition was good, it made us as individuals want to improve and get better. The team benefited by that and it will benefit again with this arrival."