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Playing football is also for Siluma a way to deal with a tragic personal loss. Photo: Reg Caldecott

Football is about more

There will always be more to football for Khumbulani Siluma than just winning or losing.

Don't get him wrong whenever he takes to the field to play he gives a 100 percent.

It is important to him that he and his UP-Tuks teammates get a result that will make the fans and the university proud. It means he will again be in the thick of things when his team takes on NWU this week.

With such an attitude, it is no surprise that Siluma received the 2015 USSA Football Player of the Tournament Award and was recently selected to represent the South African Team at the World Student Games in Taipei.

Playing football is also for Siluma a way to deal with a tragic personal loss.

In 2015, his dad, Senzo Siluma, was murdered and his house set alight.

His dad was at the time a single parent to the UP-Tuks player and his siblings.

According to Siluma, a day hardly goes by without him thinking about his dad.

"I am still struggling to deal with his death. Luckily my dad raised a 'soldier' that has helped me to move on somehow. Completing my degree in political science and doing a post graduate degree in Integrating Reporting is my way to thank him for everything he has done for me.

"Every game I play for UP-Tuks is to honour his memory. My dad instilled the love for football in me. I remember when I was still young how he would wake us up to watch Orlando Pirates play. He was a big fan," Siluma explained.

Not playing football was never an option

for Siluma. Chasing a ball and trying to outfox rivals with fleet-footed skills is just a continuance of a proud family tradition started by his grandfather.

Growing up in Piet Retief where there is no football academy meant that Siluma had to work his way through the ranks before he got to play for UP-Tuks. This led to him appreciating the moment when he got to pull the coveted striped jersey over his shoulders for the very first time.

"I am truly blessed to be playing for UP-Tuks," is how he expressed himself.

"What makes it special to play for UP-Tuks is that we are not just a group of players playing for a team. We are a true band of brothers.

"Quite a few of us stay together at the 'Sports House' which helped us to get to know each other better. It makes a big difference because when we are on the field we play for each other. No one wants to disappoint anyone, and we have the same goal, and that is to make Tuks proud."

One cannot help to wonder about Siluma's nickname – "Cheese".

"When I got to Pretoria I went to stay in Soshanguve. I didn't know the language they spoke as all townships have their unique way of communicating. So I spoke English when I had to be part of a conversation. The people took it awkwardly and said I was a cheese boy who did not know the 'Kasi taal'.

"That led to me being called 'Cheese'. That is apart from my suave movements and charm on and off the field."

