

Revolving
Column

It's where the problem lies

On Stars of Africa winning the Engen Knockout Challenge

I think what was key was getting our players to understand that they were playing against formidable opponents such as Bidvest Wits, Mamelodi Sundowns, Kaizer Chiefs, SuperSport United and all those teams with very strong academies and the necessary funding. That is what is required in the modern game, to have the best players. Wits have some of the top-quality coaches that can easily help the players to move from development into the first team. That's what I see when I watch Marcus Rashford from Manchester United - coach and scouting is what you see. It's because their emphasis is on scouting some of the best talent in the UK and that is complemented by some highly qualified, highly experienced coaches. I think we underestimate the quality of coaches and what they do. That was the challenge for us because we don't have those coaches. That's why we've had a number of quality players like Luther Singh and all these other players moving to different clubs. We were left with a bit of a void, so we had to promote a couple of boys from the U14s into the senior team, and we're playing in the Castle League, but the great thing about that was that we got to promote a couple of boys into the first team. There was no expectation on our side to actually win the tournament and I was just happy to compete with these big teams and gain the necessary experience going forward. Our preparation was spot on in that we took these boys away for a week to Sun City, just to get their



This week, we hear from Farouk Khan - Stars of Africa Football Academy Director of Coaching

minds sorted. We also worked with a lot of individual players on their efficiency and stuff, in the different departments - defensively and offensively. It seems to have paid dividends in that the players were able to do the basics very well and go on to win this tournament. My only concern is that a lot of teams had some boys that didn't look the right age. I can't blame the clubs because I know that they have the due processes, but somehow these boys find a way of getting through. I don't want to mention names, but there's a boy playing for one of the biggest clubs in the country, who's been promoted to the first team and he's... he's not the right age. But it's not something I want to discuss. That was the downside, but there were plenty of positives as well.

On the previous win in 2006

That was the time we won it with May Mahlangu and all of those boys... But, to be fair to us, back then, these bigger teams were not there. We played Tuks in the final. Back then, development wasn't as good as it is now. In club football now, the PSL has done an excellent job with the MDC and clubs are really upping their

game in terms of development.

On past and future stars

If you look at it now, there's a lot of hype around Luther Singh because of the fact that he did so well at U20 level. There's Thibang Phete, who's been starting to look really good. There's a player by the name of Junaid Saif - he's now also gone to Portugal for a trial. Hopefully he'll be one of the players that are next in line to follow in the footsteps of Steven Pienaar and Keagan Dolly and all of them. Then, obviously, the other thing is that there's a player called Pule Maraisane, who's been trialling overseas but is looking for a club now. There's also a boy who plays for Polokwane City, (Tshepo) 'Jomo' (Matsemela)... he's also back. I think these are the players that will follow in the footsteps of May, Tokelo Rantie, Tefu Mashamaite, Sibusiso Kumalo and all those boys that started in the academy some years ago. What really excites me is these 14-year-old boys that are coming through. We have this left back... I started him because our normal left back was injured. He was a winger and we converted him, but I think it was a good experience for him and it will help for him to develop as a footballer. Then we had another boy from Port Elizabeth who was also doing a phenomenal job on the left. He's also 15, turning 16. So, overall, there are about seven or eight 16-year-olds playing in the academy team, and those are the ones I'm really excited about. But, at the same time, I have to start making the training more complex and more intense.



Stars of Africa celebrate their Engen Knockout Challenge win over Tuks

On the complexity of development structures

Once players get to a certain level they relax. To get them out of that comfort zone, I have to increase the intensity and the complexity of our work. That's why I speak to the coaches and say, from the age of 10, you need to start getting these boys out of their comfort zone. We have to do a lot of tactical work and, by the time they're 14, we have to see that. People think it's complicated, but it's not. It's just movement off the ball, wing play, defensive organisation and stuff like that. Those are the things I'm talking about and if you look around the world - at Barcelona and in England - you get these 16- or 17-year-old youngsters. They're so matured and it's because of the work that's been done with them in the early part of their careers. As long as you respect the principles of growth and don't injure the player by doing strenuous work, I think you can do more good than bad. There's so little physical training at school level and this is where the problem lies. But

then you have to consider the quality of their education and, therefore, as a youth coach, it's a very difficult job because I think we can all agree that, physiologically, our players can't even compete with the best in the world.

On the upcoming Engen Champs of Champs

We went to the Knockout Challenge and I think the players came out on top because they were coachable and followed instructions and they were matured. I think this tournament has helped us a lot to reach maturity and the players are so confident that they could probably take on just about anybody. I also think we'll be even better prepared, even though there's less than two months of preparation. The team spirit is very high. There's a lot of work to do, but from a maturity perspective, I think we might play much better than we did.

Farouk Khan,
Stars of Africa Academy
Director of Coaching

