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**Kyle Smith: Sammy, congratulations on your appointment as Free State Stars' new head coach. It's been almost two years since we last saw you in the dugout in the PSL...**

**Sammy Troughton:** Yes, it's good to be back. It's a great opportunity to be back in the PSL and it was a nice surprise when I was contacted. They were looking for someone to come in after making a few chops and changes, but, at the same time, I'm expected to do a good job.

**KS:** You have made a lot of changes, with 14 players leaving and another four arriving. Surely, that can't be good for the team in the short term...

**ST:** It's just something that happened and a lot of it happened before I arrived, because I think the club thought that a lot of the players weren't adding value. But I think the new players have settled in and my job, after recruiting players, is to make them settled and confident enough to do the job.

**KS:** There were a lot more players going out than coming in.

**ST:** It's just not a situation where the club can go out and just buy five or six players. It's just not going to happen. We are looking in the PSL, but we'll have to make do. Sometimes it's the challenge for the coach. He's got to change the tactics, make a few tweaks, do a lot of preparation. Day in, day out, you've got to make them work and play better. The players are very important. They have to be fine-tuned, be confident and they need to work well with the technical staff.

**KS:** You said some players weren't adding value, yet one of the players released, Thokozani Sekotlong, was one of the best in the team last season...

**ST:** Yeah, I know him well. He was involved in the Tuks academy. I was hoping that he would have gotten over the injury plagues that he's had over the years and I was looking forward to working with him again. I was impressed with him when I saw him with Tuks. It's unfortunate that the injuries prevented him from achieving things. The management of Free State Stars made the decision before I even came here. Unfortunately, there are all kinds of constraints on certain things and they felt it was right. I wasn't involved and it's a bit sad, but sometimes these things happen in the game.

**KS:** A potential replacement is Edward Mankole, who has played a few friendlies for you. But you've mentioned that you are unhappy with his fitness and he's had some issues with his weight in the past. Is he still an option?

**ST:** It's not that I'm unhappy with his weight or whatever. He's a good guy and it's simple... he just has to show commitment. I would love to see him get back to his form of four years ago, because he has had a rough time. If he gets his head right and his physical

# I have to accept that

**H**aving narrowly missed out on promotion with Stellenbosch FC, coach Sammy Troughton has made his return to the Absa Premiership, after being appointed as the new man to occupy the hot seat at Free State Stars. Soccer Laduma's Kyle Smith caught up with the former Mamelodi Sundowns midfielder to get the latest on the goings-on in Bethlehem.



condition right, the confidence will come. He's already lost four kilograms since he's been with our trainers and he needs to do that again over the next couple of weeks and, who knows? I love those stories about the comeback kids and hopefully we can do that with him.

**"I love those stories about the comeback kids."**

**KS:** So, do you intend to sign him then?  
**ST:** On my assessment, if he maintains his commitment, he's looking good, then from what I see on my side, there's a good chance that he would be signed. I told him he's still got a long way to go, that he can't relax and then we'll see what happens...

**KS:** On another part of the pitch, one of last season's best players, Thela Ngobeni has returned to Mamelodi Sundowns, but he looks set to go out on loan again. Are you hoping to have him back between the sticks next season?

**ST:** I don't think he'll go out again. The club were keen to get him back, as he did a good job here last season. But I don't think, from what I've seen at the club, that it's going to happen, unfortunately. He was one of the best players last season and he contributed towards the club's survival and I would have liked to work with him, but, if I'm honest, I don't think it's going to happen. Maybe things will change...

**KS:** Sammy, let's take a look at what the stats say. One of your major strengths at Stellenbosch last season was that you had the best away record in the NFD. Now you've come to a club that had the third-worst in the PSL in 2016/17. Ea Lla Koto only registered one win in 15 games, conceding the most goals on the road. How are you going to change that?

**ST:** Well, in one respect, you can't get much worse. To improve on it, I certainly feel that sometimes you have to have that bravery away from home. You don't want to go silly with all-out attack, but I'm not a believer of going away from home, sitting back and hoping you can handle the pressure for 90 minutes. Sometimes you have to be solid in defence, but you also need to be brave in attack and, perhaps, surprise teams who have an expectation of what they are facing.

**KS:** Free State Stars had the fifth most defensive record last season.

**SAMMY TROUGHTON FACT FILE**  
Full name: Samuel Edward Troughton  
Date of birth: 27 March 1964  
Place of birth: Lisburn, Northern Ireland  
Previously managed teams: Orlando Pirates, Arcaxia Shepherds, Mpumalanga Black Aces, Thanda Royal Zulu, Nathi Lions, University of Pretoria, Vasco da Gama, Stellenbosch FC  
Current team: Free State Stars  
Qualifications: CAF A licence & SAFA Level 2  
Preferred formation: 4-2-2-2  
Honours: 1996 Vodacom League Playoff champions (Arcaxia Shepherds)



the team and shooting with the third best accuracy...

**ST:** Ja I think it's something you work on and, obviously, we have looked at that. We looked at goals conceded last year. We have to tighten up, but I've got players that are capable and we've just got to restore their confidence and get them fitter than they were last season. We have to change these negative stats. The first thing is to tighten and then work on our game moving forward. It's a big area to work on going forward.

**KS:** The team had the joint highest percentage of passes in the final third, plus you took the most shots per game. But the shot and goal conversion rates were the worst in the league. You've been linked with a striker, Didier Lebri, from Bloemfontein Celtic...

**ST:** Yeah, he came to train with us for a couple of days, but it wasn't going to be possible to bring him in, although he is a decent player. We are looking and I have some staff that are always looking at a few players. But, as you say, there are some positives that came out of the team and it's better than not creating anything. We have that movement and have options in and around the box. We are looking at guys that have the confidence to finish, but things are terrible. There is potential and we just need to polish it.

**KS:** The big story of this transfer window will be Sinelemba Jantjie's next move, with all of the Big Three said to be interested in his services.

**ST:** Yeah, I'd love to keep him at the club. At the end of the day, business is business. Sometimes coaches just can't... it's a business thing and the business side is up to management. They might have to sell him to make sure the club is in a financially healthy position. I have to accept that, but I can't say what will happen. I think he can help us big time. Over the years,

Free State Stars have sold players and have managed to keep the team from getting relegated. I would have a word with management, but Free State Stars...

**KS:** Is typically a 'selling club'?  
**ST:** You know, it's an internal thing that's there. They will listen to what I have to say. But if they have to do it, you have to do what you have to do, but let's see. I'm hoping that we'll keep him. If a big offer comes in, it will have to be considered seriously. Then we'll just have to find a replacement if he goes.

**KS:** Talking about a replacement, the club has a renowned scouting system and, at Tuks, you oversaw the development of some of South Africa's finest players, like Aubrey Neoma, Thabo Mnyamane and Bongani Zungu. Have any 'rough diamonds' caught your eye yet?

**ST:** Yeah, I think there have been. When I first came down, I wasn't totally aware of what I was coming to, in terms of players, and I was nicely surprised. I do think there are some rough diamonds here. They just need to be given a chance to play. They've got to earn that chance though. We need to make use of that because, unlike the other big clubs who have the money to open up their chequebooks, we have to focus on development.

**KS:** Let's discuss what happened at Stellenbosch FC. The club did very well to make the promotion play-offs, considering that it was their maiden season under their current identity.

**ST:** Yeah, exactly. I was there for 18 months, coming in while the club was still Vasco (da Gama) and they were in a bit of a relegation scrap. We were in a tough situation and my assistants and I got stuck in. I was given the chance to hire and fire as I pleased because the management said that I can do whatever's necessary to survive. I kept most of the people around because they were good enough to help us. We managed to escape relegation in the end.

**KS:** How difficult did the relocation and name change affect the team?

**ST:** Well, I think it's a challenge, but we were given a service from the Stellenbosch sports academy for strength and conditioning and the gym work. We had to work on things and it took time, but it was something that we worked out. Then there was an overhaul of players and we got a lot of fresh blood in January. It was a challenge to get them integrated. But, in that respect, I thought we did well to get to the play-offs, although maybe we weren't good enough for that situation. To achieve that is a big thing, but some people didn't see it that way.

**KS:** Yes, after you left the club, you said, "Sometimes people smell success as failure."

**ST:** Yeah, that's it, and it's all about opinions and I thought Cape Town needed another professionally run, organised team, and I thought we were heading in that direction. But there are different opinions and I can only wish Stellenbosch the best. Overall, the management were good to me and you have to accept it and move on.

**KS:** Sammy, thanks so much for your time and all the best.

**ST:** My pleasure, Kyle. Thanks a lot. ☐

**"We have to change these negative stats."**

**Supporters Club Member Question**  
ANBOB  
**Letofas asks Sammy Troughton:**  
Coach, I'm not sure... tell us, which players have joined Stars and which department you want to strengthen.  
**Sammy Troughton:** You've got to understand that I came late to the team and they had already started training. We signed two goalkeepers, one from Beards (Kwesi Kwena) and another from the Ivory Coast (Bada Al Sangaris). We've got a few youngsters from development and there are a couple of players that we're looking at, at the moment. One of them is Sinelemba Jantjie, and the other is Edward Mankole. One of our weak areas is at centre-back, and we're still looking for one. Then we'll see how Mankole and Mhembu do. Let's see if they can help us and we can help them. That we'll decide after the league gets underway.  
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