



NFD in for one tricky season!

By MTHOKOZISI MKHONZA

IT'S been three months since Roger Sikhakhane won the National First Division (NFD) promotion with Thanda Royal Zulu in the historic 2016/17 season.

Sikhakhane will be starting from scratch with new club Richards Bay FC.

Last season he made history when he led Thanda to 15 matches without a defeat in the league. But this year could be a totally different story.

The NFD season, which could be the most competitive and entertaining, kicks off this Friday with a Cape Town derby between new kids on the block Ubuntu FC and Stellenbosch FC.

Some of the NFD coaches have predicted that this will be a tough, long and dramatic season.

University of Pretoria coach Shaun Bartlett said they want to improve from their disappointing 11th finish last season.

Said Sikhakhane: "It's always tough in this league but our plan is to improve. It will be a tricky season, there's a lot of unknown quality in the five new teams. But we're looking forward to it."

Despite losing some key players, which include Khayelihle Shoji, Sphelele Mkhulise and Mumuni Abubakar, who were instrumental in Black Leopards' midfield when they finish second in the log, the Limpopo-based club are expected to be among the title contenders this year under the watchful eye of Belgian mentor, Jean Luscutto.

On his arrival last year November, Luscutto took Lidoda Duvha from position 11 to second in a space of five months.

He admitted that his task was to ensure that the club gained automatic promotion after failing to sneak into the top flight via play-offs four times.

"All the teams have one goal of winning the league, we're going to give it our best shot.

"We're not going to change much. We will continue where we left off last season. We have some injuries that could lead to a slowly start," said Luscutto.

Royal Eagles mentor Allan Freese will be starting his first season as Eagles coach after joining them towards the end of the season last year.

Freese will want to prove a point to his former employers, Highlands Park, who sacked him after he promoted the club to the Premier Soccer League via play-offs at the end of the 2015/16 season.

