



Robin ready for the Wits challenge

RODNEY REINERS

ROBYN JOHANNES is 31-years-old, but readily admits that, at this late stage of his career, he is playing the best football of his life.

The Cape Town City central defender anchors the side's backline when they face Bidvest Wits in a MTN8 first leg semi-final at the Cape Town Stadium this afternoon (3.30pm) – and he believes their perseverance and never-say-die spirit will again be crucial if they are to come away with a victory.

Originally from Strandfontein, Johannes left the Mother City at the age of 16 to seek his football fortune up north. After spending time as a junior with Parkhurst, Strandfontein FC, Wolverhampton FC, Hellenic and Rygersdal, he joined the youth academy at the University of Pretoria. From there he graduated to play professionally for Mamelodi Sundowns, Orlando Pirates, Golden Arrows, Maritzburg United and AmaZulu. Last year, he signed for new club City to have his first-ever spell with a top-flight club in the Cape.

"Coming back home was the best thing I could have done," said Johannes. "I'm in a good

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place, my mind is at ease, and I have friends and family around me. And, yes, I am currently probably playing the best football of my career."

Even so, Johannes is fully aware that City face a really tough task against Wits, who stormed to the PSL title last season. Not only that, the Clever Boys also defeated the Cape side in last season's Cup semi-finals.

"Wits are a difficult team to play against," said the defender. "They have strong attacking players and, with Gavin Hunt as coach, their style is to go wide and get the crosses in. In fact, you just have to look at their bench to see how strong their squad is. When we beat them in the league recently, we defended well, and we will have to do so again if we want to repeat that result."

"We have been working hard on our defence at training and we certainly have the players to keep clean sheets. There is still a long way to go

in the season – but we have the attitude that the more clean sheets we keep the more we can stay on top."

When Johannes was at Orlando Pirates (between 2010-2012), it coincided with head coach Benni McCarthy's return to the PSL after a stellar career in Europe. The former Bafana Bafana striker finished off with a stint at Pirates, where Johannes had the pleasure of being one of his teammates. Now, the 39-year-old McCarthy is his coach – and the defender has no doubt his former teammate will succeed.

"He's a great coach, he's played at the highest level and he's a winner," said Johannes. "I have nothing but respect and admiration for Benni, and I'm sure he will make the journey a successful one."

McCarthy, too, had nothing but praise for the manner in which Johannes is playing at the moment.

"Robyn is one of the most under-rated defenders in the PSL," said McCarthy. "He has been one of our stand-out players, a footballer who will die for the cause of the team. He is a coach's dream to have in the squad... As far as I am concerned, I cannot understand why he is not a member of the national team."



TEAM MAN TO THE CORE: Robyn Johannes is one of the most under-rated players in the PSL, says coach Benni McCarthy. BACKPAGEPIX

