



Can Ajax silence the noisy upstarts CT City in the PSL?

RODNEY REINERS

THE tingle of the anticipation for the start of the new PSL season has settled into a warm glow of readiness. It's finally here...

For the Mother City's two PSL clubs – Cape Town City and Ajax Cape Town – there are challenges aplenty. From a purely parochial perspective, City's incursion into the hurly-burly of top-flight football has energised the Cape. The buzz they created last season has grown into a booming, boisterous cacophony. They're a big hit on social media, they are continuing to capture the imagination of the football fans across the country, and the arrival of Benni McCarthy as coach has exponentially increased interest in the club.

In fact, if there's a game to look forward to in the PSL, it's the Cape derby between City and Ajax. There's a genuine rivalry, a notable conflict and a palpable niggles between the two clubs – and this has definitely elevated the appeal of the clash. The derby has long been in the doldrums in the Mother City, but has been awakened by the formation of City. Scheduled for next month, rest assured, Cape fans have already pencilled this in as a fixture not to be missed.

Before that, though, there's still lots to be done and much football to be played. City get the league season under way when they are in Johannesburg this evening to take on champions Wits (8pm), while Ajax are home to Golden Arrows at the Cape Town Stadium tomorrow night (8.15pm).

For City, after finishing third last season, both the squad and new coach McCarthy have a great deal to live up to. Can they maintain the momentum of what was a sensational debut campaign last season?

For McCarthy, there'll be extra motivation when he comes up against his former mentor Gavin Hunt tonight. Unfortunately (or is that fortunately for McCarthy?), Wits coach Hunt won't be on the bench, after being sent off in last week's Cup win over Arrows. The new City coach, though, knows that Hunt's absence won't make the challenge any easier – McCarthy, by his own admission, believes Hunt is the best coach in the country; he is also fully aware that Wits have a strong squad capable of retaining the title this season.

As for Ajax, after a few years of misery and struggle, it's improve or bust this season. Now that City are around, there's competition not only on the field, but off it as well. Bums on seats is a big issue in Cape football, which means there are supporters up for grabs. And, if Ajax don't get their act together on the field, and quickly too, they run the risk of Capetonians throwing in their lot with new kids City.

It is with this in mind that Ajax have considerably beefed up their squad, with players such as central defender Isaac



NEW LIFE: Cape Town City coach Benni McCarthy has helped liven up the local soccer scene.

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Nhlapo (from Platinum Stars), Nigeria international Ejike Uzoenyi (previously with Wits and Mamelodi Sundowns), Matroosfontein central defender Junaid Sait (he captained Stellenbosch FC in the NFD last season), speedy winger Innocent Nemukondeni (from Tuks) and striker Sedwyn George (top scorer in the NFD last season with Royal Eagles).

Nemukondeni is certainly looking forward to his stint at new club Ajax. Now 25, he's already accustomed to success, in that he knows what it takes to achieve on the big stage. More than a decade ago, he was in the SA U12 side that won the won the

Danone Nations Cup in France, beating Belgium in the final. He has also had a spell at Gent in Belgium – in short, he's a player who wants to achieve and he believes that he can make a contribution to getting Ajax back to where they belong among the elite clubs in the PSL.

"All I want to do is win, I hate losing," said Nemukondeni, who is nicknamed "Drogba". "I came to Ajax because I want to win trophies and I want to help them get it. Coming to Ajax was easy because Thabo Mosadi is here (they were teammates at Tuks). I asked him what it was like and he told me to come, that Ajax are a good club."

PSL FIXTURES

Today: Wits v Cape Town City (Bidvest Stadium, 8pm)

Tomorrow: SuperSport United v Mamelodi Sundowns; Polokwane City v Baroka FC; AmaZulu v Free State Stars; Orlando Pirates v Chippa United; Ajax Cape Town v Golden Arrows (Cape Town Stadium, 8.15pm);

Sunday: Bloemfontein Celtic v Kaizer Chiefs; Platinum Stars v Maritzburg United

