



Samukelo Njani of Bophelo/Impilo Private School FC poses with Engen Knockout Challenge Gauteng ambassador Daine Klate (right) in Parktown this week, while Kopano Thuntsane (inset) is confident Orlando Pirates will successfully defend their title.

Photos by Themba Makofane

ROAD TO THE FINALS!

16 teams vying for Champ of Champions berth

By **MATHEWS MPETE**

SOUTH Africa's most successful football player by far, Daine Klate, has assured players taking part in the annual Engen Knockout Challenge that the majority of them will be snatched up by PSL scouts soon.

Klate, who has won six PSL titles and can boast gold medals for almost every cup competition in the PSL, said the Engen Knockout was a gateway for promising players to launch their professional careers.

He was speaking at the draw of the Gauteng edition of the tournament at Sunnyside Park hotel on Tuesday, where he addressed the captains of all the participating clubs.

The pocket-sized Bidvest Wits winger stressed the importance of gaining life skills, telling the youngsters that these skills were crucial knowledge for any football player to have.

"Many talented players graduate to professional football if they are disciplined enough," said Klate. "But the minute they start making money and get all the attention that comes with being a football player, they get ahead of themselves.

"It is so important to invest in your education, like many others before me will have advised – please go to school, don't make football your only career.

"I have seen where players end up when they take a wrong turn. School is very important for

a football player and for life in general."

He warned that there would be many temptations and said it was so important to stay focused.

"I have seen many PSL scouts at Engen tournaments, they are always on the lookout for talented players," said Klate, who stays far away from any controversy – unlike many fellow-footballers.

"This year will be no different. It is always awesome to see Engen Knockout unearthing new talent. The journey starts here."

Captain of the defending Knockout Gauteng champions, Orlando Pirates' Kopano Thuntsane, says Klate's message was an important one.

"He said it all – we must take what he said into consideration. I plan to pass on the message to those who missed out on hearing this," said the 17-year-old from White City, Jabavu.

"Pirates are under pressure here," he admitted. "Everyone wants to dethrone us and claim the glory of being champions. But we will not sit back and allow them to dictate terms. Pirates are a big brand and we hope to retain our title."

Thuntsane, who also features in the *Buccaneers*' MultiChoice Diski Challenge team, said he hoped to make it into the senior team currently under the tutelage of Kjell Jonevret.

Bucs have been drawn in Group 2 along with Bophelo/Impilo FC, Highlands Park and SuperSport United.

Bophelo/Impilo skipper Samukelo Njani, said they "are here to win."

"We can make it because we believe in ourselves and we don't fear any of our opponents," said the 18-year-old Grade 12 pupil of Bophelo/Impilo Private School in Mayfair East.

"We don't have much resources at our club but I believe we have enough talent to cause an upset. This is a big tournament and we take inspiration from top players such as Daine Klate.

"We will show the others how football is played, trust me. This is our platform to shine and we will use it."

The winners of this leg at Marks Park Sport Complex from 4-6 August qualify for the Champ of Champions finals at Pretoria's High Performance Centre from 6-8 October.

The tournament first heads to Bloemfontein's Grey College this weekend, running from Friday until Sunday.

GROUP 1

1. Wits Juniors
2. Southern LFA
3. Bidvest Wits
4. Platinum Stars

GROUP 2

1. Highlands Park
2. Orlando Pirates
3. SuperSport United
4. Bophelo FC

GROUP 3

1. Kaizer Chiefs
2. Soweto All Stars FC
3. Mamelodi Sundowns
4. Polokwane City Rovers

GROUP 4

1. Tloka
2. Panorama FC
3. Stars of Africa
4. School of Excellence

