

Robyn is back with the coach who gave him his first cap 12 years ago

Rodney Reiners

ROBYN JOHANNES has discovered, to his joy and advantage, that the old idiom “east or west, home is best” contains more than a kernel of truth. The Cape Town City captain and central defender’s superb form over the past year has coincided with his move back to the Mother City, and he was justly rewarded with a Bafana Bafana call-up on Monday.

In the words of Stuart Baxter, the head coach of the SA national team: “Robyn has been in important part of the Cape Town City team this season and even as far back as last season. People have to believe that if you do well in the PSL you will be rewarded.”

Johannes’ opportunity came on the back of Baxter losing both first-choice centre-backs, Eric Mathoho (suspended) and captain Thulani Hlatshwayo (injured). Bafana are scheduled to take on Burkina Faso in a 2018 World Cup qualifier at the FNB Stadium in Johannesburg on Saturday afternoon (3pm).

The last time Johannes was in the Bafana squad was in 2008 – and, now, nine years later, back home, back in form, he’s back at the top again, and back for Bafana.

Originally from Strandfontein, the talented Johannes was a junior with Parkhurst in Mitchell’s Plain, Wolves in Wynberg and in the youth academies of Hellenic and Old Mutual before he left the Mother City to join the University of Pretoria youth set-up



ROBYN JOHANNES:
‘In a good space’

at the tender age of 15. As a professional footballer, he went on to play for Mamelodi Sundowns, Orlando Pirates, Golden Arrows, Maritzburg United and AmaZulu.

But it was on his return to the Mother City to link up with new Cape PSL club, City, last year that the 31-year-old Johannes finally realised his full potential. There’s just something about home that brings out the best.

“I’m happy off the field, all my family and friends are in Cape Town,” said Johannes. “Most importantly, I’ve been in a good space and I guess that shows on the field.”

“I’m really excited about the Bafana call, it has been years since I was involved. Every player wants to play for his country, and I’m no different. I’m sure it will be different with Bafana this time; there are different players and it’s a different environment.”

Ironically, when Johannes was first called up by Bafana in 2005, it was the very same Baxter who was the coach.

“Baxter is a top quality

coach,” said Johannes. “He has proved it over and over again. He gave me my first cap 12 years ago in the Cosafa Cup in Mauritius. I think he is a coach who you can learn from every day and that’s what you want as a player.”

But, after back-to-back defeats to Cape Verde last month, Bafana’s hopes of qualifying for the 2018 World Cup in Russia are looking rather shaky. Despite this, Johannes remains optimistic.

“Those who have been called up to represent the country are all here to contribute to the success of the national team, collectively,” said the City captain. “It’s not about any individual, it’s all about making sure we qualify.”

“We’ve proved how strong we are and that we can beat anyone, so we must believe that we can qualify. We have to focus on the controllable and make sure that we win our remaining games; we have to give it our all.”

As for Burkina Faso, the opposition on Saturday, Bafana are fully aware that victory is paramount. As it stands, the Burkina top the qualifying group with six points, followed by Cape Verde (six), Senegal (five) and South Africa (one point).

“Burkina Faso have a strong team, they are very physical,” said Johannes. “But we need to play to our strengths, which is good attacking football. We have speed and pace in this Bafana team and, if we use that, I don’t think they can match us.”