



**Peter Raath:** Before we talk about Highlands Park's chances of making a quick return to the PSL, why do you think there's such a shortage of goals in our top-flight compared to your era?

**Les Grobler:** It's because teams play negatively. People are so scared to lose that they're forgetting how to win. I went to watch the ABC Motsepe League Play-Offs, where the sides went out not to lose, and that's what the PSL clubs also do. If your opponent scores one, you need two goals. Last season, Highlands conceded almost two goals a game, therefore scoring one wasn't enough. Overseas sides are beginning to realise that you can't defend that much anymore. Everything is about the need for scoring goals. Teams might concede but, by the same token, it's obviously important to score more than you let in. They're all going that route but, in SA, with so much more money involved, it dictates the way teams play, whereas about 30 years ago, there were about five players each scoring over 20 goals per season.

**PR:** That's correct. The 1987 records show Noel Cousins (Arcadia Shepherds) scored 27, Marks Mponyane (Kaizer Chiefs) 25, Shane McGregor (Grinaker Rangers) 23, Warren Jack (Leeds) 22 and Troy Sails (Bloemfontein Celtic) 21.

**LG:** Put it this way... when I was at Rangers playing in the midfield - not even as a striker - I scored more than the Top Goalscorers are doing now. That in itself is madness. Not one guy gets close to 20. It's just weird, but things were a lot easier in my day. For example, Chiefs could play a little bit for their brand and also for the spectators to come into the ground. But that's all changed. As I've said, I know why. In England, things are different. When the bottom team plays a side from the top, they're in a better position. Why? Because they have a go to see what happens. If a side loses by six or seven goals, they don't care. However, if the score is 1-1, at least they've got something out of the game. You need to play attacking football.



# NATIONAL FIRST DIVISION FOCUS

## That in itself is madness!



*Highlands Park's assistant coach, Les Grobler, opens up to Soccer Laduma's Peter Raath about the lack of PSL goals. He also talks about new players, his technical team and son, Bradley Grobler.*

**PR:** The Lions of the North got off to a flying start by overpowering fellow title contenders Jomo Cosmos and Royal Eagles, before a 2-1 loss to University of Pretoria.

**LG:** We were very comfortable against Cosmos. Most of their efforts were long range. Nothing was clear-cut. The best opportunity they had was late in the match, just outside the box when one of our youngsters ac-

tually gave the ball to Cosmos. That's when our keeper, Tapuwa Kapini, pulled off a great save. But Jomo Sono's got a good team, don't take anything away from him. We dealt with all their crosses. It was the same with Eagles. Their striker, Cleopas Dube, is a big boy, who's bound to win a header or two every now and again. However, we really, really played well. For 70 minutes, they

weren't in the game at all. Against AmaTuks, we created chance after chance. At the end of the day, they didn't beat us - we beat ourselves by doing everything right but not scoring goals.

**PR:** You've only signed a handful of new players such as Mbuyiselo Thethani (Free State Stars), Siph-elele Luthuli (University of Pretoria),

Tumisang Mashele (Jomo Cosmos), Petrus Ngebo (Mthatha Bucks) and Phoka Mofokeng (Magesi).

**LG:** Thethani's a decent right-sided midfielder and Mashele came in as an U23 option. Highlands also brought in a few youngsters from our MDC team, while we signed Jerry Msane, 19, from Bidvest Wits' SAB League side. He's a big strong, very, very accomplished defender, who will definitely be a long-term investment. Another new signing is Suhayi Allie from SantosWe've been meticulous about what we want. The idea of keeping the majority of the squad is that we felt they could play in the PSL. So if we do get promoted, there'll be no need to go out and buy another 20-odd players like the club did last season. The entire technical staff is working incredibly well together.

The harmony is there. We mix and match the training sessions between myself, Thierry Mulonzo and Stavros Tschilas. Our knowledge is good. We all have different strong points. It's our job to keep the players focused and make sure that they're ready to play every time. Our new physio-therapist is Evan Speechly, a former Wits University player. He's excellent and knows exactly what he's talking about, having been with the Spring-boks rugby team. When I played at Moroka Swallows, Evan was our physio.

**PR:** Despite Bafana Bafana twice losing to Cape Verde, you must be happy that your son, Bradley, is back in the team.

**LG:** Yes, I'm thrilled. He's deserved it. When Bradley was there the last time before getting injured, he was doing very, very well and would have stayed in the set-up.

**PR:** Thanks, Les, and good luck.

**LG:** My pleasure, Peter. I'm incredibly disappointed about losing 2-1 to Tshakhuma Tsha Madzivhandila. It was probably our worst performance by miles. A couple of players never came to the party. But it's something we as coaches need to address for the next game. □

### THE LATEST NFD NEWS

- Ubuntu Cape Town FC co-director, Michael Jenkins, has confirmed that midfielder Tsepo Diadla 28, striker Glen Hahn and defender Xolisa Sifunda are no longer on his club's books. Meanwhile, Tsepho Mosiatlhaga, who recently signed from University of Pretoria, has fractured a bone in his right leg. "I was just running during a friendly when it happened. There was no contact with anyone else," he said. Sometime back, the winger had the misfortune of suffering a similar fracture to his left leg.
- Stellenbosch FC goalkeeper coach, Andre Bronkhorst, who

recently celebrated his 50th birthday, has revealed that his nephew, also named Andre, plays for the club's feeder team, Ikapa Sporting. "His mother called him after me. Andre was also a junior at Ajax Cape Town," Bronkhorst told SoccerLaduma.

- Mthatha Bucks striker, Mpho Erasmus, who netted three goals in his club's opening two games, is very upbeat about the possibility of promotion. "I can't wait to play in the PSL. Our head coach, Ian Palmer, has top-flight experience. It's easy for him, as he knows what's expected. We're all ready for the challenge ahead," said

Erasmus.

- Uthongathi head coach, Ron Gabriel, was thrilled following their win over Black Leopards. "I'm ecstatic and proud of the type of football the group displayed. This victory will bring the squad more self-belief and confidence going into future fixtures. Also, in terms of our mini-targets, we're well on track," he said.
- After Tshakhuma Tsha Madzivhandila grabbed their first three-point haul by overpowering Jomo Cosmos, coach Sello Chokoe was more cautious. "We're a work in progress and taking it only one game at a time," he said.

