



# Motlhalo delighted with dream move

Tshepo Ntsoelengoe

As a young girl growing up in Brandvlei on the outskirts of Randfontein, where there was no women's football team and the opportunities were limited, the thought of Basetsana captain Linda Motlhalo becoming a professional footballer seemed far-fetched, even though the talent was there.

Like many female footballers, Motlhalo grew up playing with the boys and was the only girl most of the time. But that did not stop her from doing what she loved with all her heart.

The story begins with the midfielder playing for an amateur boys team called Mighty Bucks FC, before the team had a girls soccer team. Motlhalo was so talented, that the coaches even put her in the boys' game sometimes.

"Football has been part of my life for a very long time, I can't really remember when I started falling in love with the game, but I know I was very young," Motlhalo spoke of her football journey.

"I used to play with the boys most of the time, it was really fun and I enjoyed each and every moment (so much) that I decided to join a boy's team until we finally had a girls team. We played a lot of games, but the thought of playing professional football was never on my mind because there were not so many opportunities."

The rise to stardom began when she moved to Pretoria to attend TuksSport High School, the same school that has given opportunities to the likes of Thembi Kgatlana and Amogelang Motau.

Since then, Motlhalo's career has grown immensely, playing for the nation-

al Under-17 side, the Under-20s and the senior women's team. And this month came the news that she has signed a one-year professional contract with US club Houston Dash in the National Women's Soccer League.

The 19-year-old describes her new journey as the best thing that has ever happened, and is looking forward to making her name for herself in the US and to try to open doors for many young girls like her.

"I have been to the Olympics (2016, Rio) and I have played so many matches that I cherish, but this has to be the best thing ever to happen to me. I couldn't believe this is me signing a professional contract with such a big club. I am humbled and I have to ensure I work so hard that I open more doors for other aspiring female footballers," she continued.

"It is seriously a dream come true for me and is a big step for my career. It is not every day one gets such an opportunity to play overseas, that is why I have told myself that I am going to work extra hard to make sure I impress."

Motlhalo will be coached by former Banyana coach Vera Pauw. The Dutchwoman believes Motlhalo has proven herself as one of the most talented players in South Africa and says she will add a lot of value to the club's attack.

"Linda is one of the most promising talents of women's football at this moment. Her qualities complement the talent we have on our books. She will bring variety to our attack and that will bring the best out of the other players. She can balance our team," Pauw was quoted as saying by the club's official website.

"This move will ensure South African players start to get recognised. Linda deserves this next step in her career. She has proven herself at the Olympics in Rio on a global stage. This contract opens doors for the world of women's football to get to know her."

The former JVW FC player leaves for the US in March, where she will link up with Banyana skipper Janine van Wyk.



### Personal Info

<b>Name:</b>	Linda Motlhalo
<b>Date of birth:</b>	January 7, 1998
<b>Age:</b>	19
<b>Place of birth:</b>	Brandvlei
<b>Club:</b>	Houston Dash
<b>Nickname:</b>	Mimi

### 3 things you might not know about Motlhalo

- ▶ She made her debut for Banyana at 17, scoring a goal in the 2-2 draw with Cameroon back in 2016.
- ▶ She played for the same team former Orlando Pirates and Santos FC striker Tebogo Masaole played for – Mighty Bucks FC.
- ▶ The first time she was called up for Banyana was to replace friend and team-mate Thembi Kgatlana who was injured in 2015.

