



Dumisani Koyana: Ray, welcome back from the festive season break. What did you get up to during this period?

Raymond Monama: It was good, man. I spent it at home with my family, even though it wasn't long because we were only given a week off. The Christmas lunch with family cannot be replaced though, so yes, I had a wonderful festive season.

DK: You guys recently lost to Cape Town City at home. What went wrong in that game, in your opinion?

RM: I think it's because it was the first game after the festive break and a lot of us were still in festive mood. I think by the next game when we face Ajax Cape Town, we will be in a better mood, a working mood, so it shouldn't be difficult to win it. We are working very hard in preparing for that match.

DK: It must feel good to be back in the PSL, well done!

RM: Thanks, my brother. That means a lot to me. It feels good to be back and I'm enjoying life at Platinum Stars. Everyone has welcomed me so well - from the office to the technical team right through to the players. It feels like I have been here for a while, even though it has not been that long. It's been great. North West is chilled and there are not too many distractions.

DK: Has coach Roger de Sa explained what he is expecting from you?

RM: Not really, bro, but we all know what is expected of us as a team. There has been no one-on-one conversation with the coach yet. We just speak among ourselves as a team and, at the end of the day, we know what we want to achieve.

DK: You started out at Black Leopards, where you were a household name and people started taking notice of your talent.

RM: I had the time of my life at Black Leopards and they gave me the platform to show Mzansi what I could do. I will forever be grateful to them and... ja, I had a few good seasons with them. Then the move to Mamelodi Sundowns happened and there were also other teams that wanted my services. For me, being at Sundowns was a learning curve. Some people might say it was a wrong move, but for me, the time I spent there was worth it. The set-up of the two teams is totally different. At Sundowns, they have world-class infrastructure. I was working under a coach like Pitsso Mosisane, who would push you because he knows what you are capable of. He would give you that information to help you as a player. Sundowns helped me to grow as a player.

DK: So the time you spent at Sundowns was all about growth?

RM: At Leopards, I was comfortable. Sundowns then offered a challenge and I accepted it. There, I got to play with big players. The training methods that were implemented by the coaching staff were different to what I was used to. We also had physical trainers and that helped you as a player to learn more.

DK: Let's talk about coach Mosisane.

RM: It would take me the whole day to speak about that tactician. A very humble coach and I'm happy I had the opportunity to work with him. If I am honest, he is one of the most hardworking coaches that I know. He always had videos of you as a player and he would tell you what you needed to work on in order to improve and be a better player. He always made sure that his players improve so they could benefit the team.

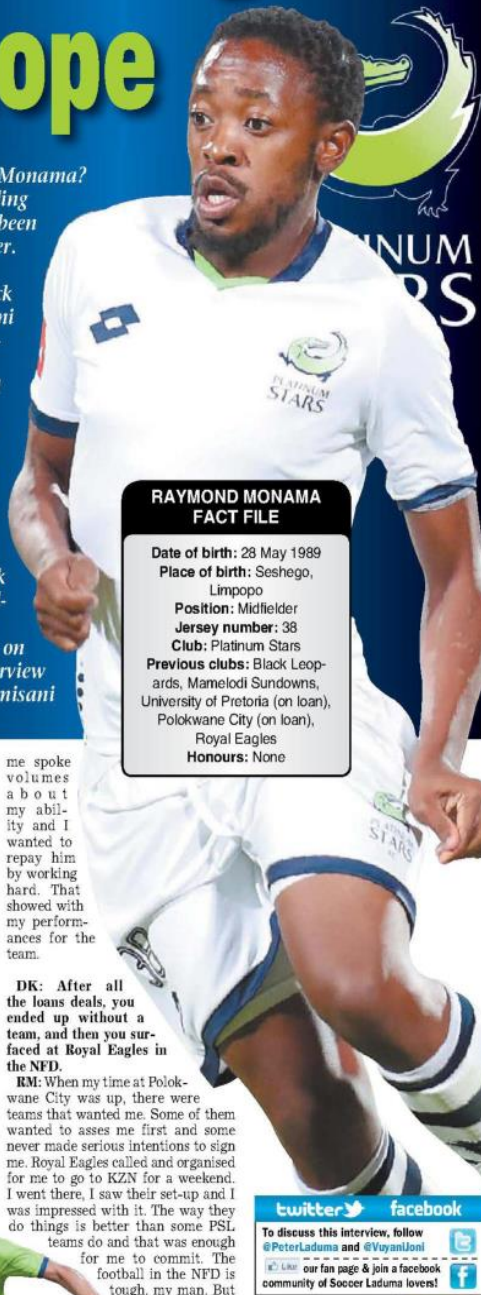
DK: You get to Sundowns, people expect you to hit the ground running and that doesn't happen. What goes through your mind?

Mabunda gives me hope

Remember Raymond Monama?

Yes, him. The dribbling wizard's career has been somewhat of a rollercoaster.

He signed for Mamelodi Sundowns along with Black Leopards teammates Tiyani Mabunda and Rodney Ramagalela ahead of the 2013/14 season, but failed to cement a place in the star-studded team. At one stage of his career, times were so tough that he had to resign himself to the reality of playing in the NFD, where he turned out for Royal Eagles. Now back in the elite league and calling Platinum Stars home, the 28-year-old looks back on the rough ride, in this interview with Soccer Laduma's Dumisani Koyana.



RAYMOND MONAMA FACT FILE

Date of birth: 28 May 1989
Place of birth: Seshego, Limpopo
Position: Midfielder
Jersey number: 38
Club: Platinum Stars
Previous clubs: Black Leopards, Mamelodi Sundowns, University of Pretoria (on loan), Polokwane City (on loan), Royal Eagles
Honours: None

"Sometimes you would think it's bad luck."

RM: When I got to Sundowns, I had a nagging knee injury and that derailed me a bit because I would be fine, train with the team and then I would be back to square one. Sometimes you would think it's bad luck because things are not going your way and, as a player, that moment takes a lot from you. At that time, I was young and the only thing that kept me focused was the fact that I had age on my side and I knew that one day I would be back to full fitness and play again.

DK: With things not happening for you at Sundowns, you went to University of Pretoria on loan.

RM: Yes, my man, and it was also a blessing to go there as they helped me rehabilitate my knee because they have top-class facilities there. Pity they were facing relegation. They also wanted to keep me for good, but I was still contracted to Sundowns and their budget couldn't allow for them to get me, even though coach Steve Barker wanted me to stay permanently. They couldn't get me for free.

DK: After that stint at Tuks, you went to Polokwane City...

RM: Coach Costa Papi called me and told me he wanted to work with me so I could help the team. For him to call

me spoke volumes about my ability and I wanted to repay him by working hard. That showed with my performances for the team.

DK: After all the loans deals, you ended up without a team, and then you surfaced at Royal Eagles in the NFD.

RM: When my time at Polokwane City was up, there were teams that wanted me. Some of them wanted to assess me first and some never made serious intentions to sign me. Royal Eagles called and organised for me to go to KZN for a weekend. I went there, I saw their set-up and I was impressed with it. The way they do things is better than some PSL teams do and that was enough for me to commit. The football in the NFD is tough, my man. But as a player, you have to adjust.

DK: Right.

RM: It was a difficult time in the season because the whole season we were on top and we could see that we can achieve it. I think what knocked us off is the fact that our coach had to go for an operation... that was a setback. Most of us felt that had we gone to the play-offs, we would have made it to the PSL based on the experience we had in the team because in the play-offs the U23 rule doesn't apply.



DK: As someone who's played in the NFD, what do you think of the U23?

RM: For me, it's a yes and a no. It's good for development, but when you are forced to play the U23 players, then it's a no for me. Now teams end up signing players that are not ready to compete because they have to obey the U23 rule. All I can say is that if the player is good let him play.

DK: Your former Leopards teammate Tiyani Mabunda has CAF honours and is also part of the Bafana Bafana set-up. Does that make you feel as an underachiever?

RM: Mabunda is a very close friend of mine and I am very happy for his achievements. He has been through a rough time as well and when I see him achieve what he has achieved now, it gives me hope. He had to go and play MDC for some time and he never gave up. Mabunda now is reaping the rewards of his hard work and winning, so I must just take that as motivation. When Mabunda wins, I also win because I learn. He has been a pillar for me when I look at what he has been through.

DK: Right.

RM: Just like him, I want to play as many games as I can and maybe get some silverware. I also want to make sure that the team gets a place in the top five. Platinum Stars is a big team that needs to compete up there and not to be at the bottom of the log. Lastly, as an attack-minded player, I want to score and create some goals for the team.

DK: How is coach Roger de Sa?

RM: We have a great coach and we all know what he has done in South African football. He is a very easy person to be around, even though it's been a few months with him. The only thing we need to do now is to get used to the way the coach wants us to play and once we get that we will be back to our winning ways. Platinum Stars is a big team and shouldn't be where it is. We must work hard and as a team so that we can achieve the ultimate goal.

SL: Platinum Stars have added to their books Letsie Koopeng amongst others, from Cape Town City. How's he adapting in the team?

RM: He is adjusting very well. He's fitted like a glove in hand. From his very first training with us you could tell that he has fitted in, hence he was in the team when we played Cape Town City. All he needs is match fitness because you'll remember he wasn't playing much in his previous team.

DK: Before we let you go, Raymond, there are rumours that the team could be sold. Does that unsettle you guys?

RM: That doesn't affect us because whatever is happening in the boardroom is not for us. Our only job is to play on the field of play and make sure we work hard. It's just a rumour about the team being sold and it doesn't affect us.

DK: Thanks for your time.

RM: The pleasure is mine. Thanks.

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Monama's Best XI of teammates

- GK: Denis Onyango** - A very strong keeper who commands the 18-yard area well.
- RB: Rama Alphahide** - He is a leader by birth. A flexible fullback with football brains.
- CD: Alje Schut** - A very dedicated player with loads of experience. A good leader too.
- CD: Philani Cele** - A young and talented central defender with a calm head.
- LB: Tebogo Langeman** - He flies up and down the left flank for the entire 90 minutes.
- RW: Elias Polembe** - A very tricky winger who always confuses defenders.
- CM: Tiyani Mabunda** - A very solid and reliable midfielder. A very good player with a big heart.

- CM: Tiko Modise** - Someone who makes things happen at any given day for the team. They don't call him 'The General' for nothing.
- LW: Lebhang Mokona** - Another tricky player who was difficult to mark for the defenders. Very skilful.
- AM: Khama Billiat** - Khama is one in a million. The runs that he makes confuses defenders. He's also pacy, skilful and also very unpredictable.
- ST: Sedwyn George** - It's just a matter of time before people see this boy's true potential. He's a prolific striker.

