



TODAY'S THE DAY!

Highlands could be declared champs without kicking a ball

By MTHOKOZISI MKHONZA

HIGHLANDS Park could be declared the 2017-18 National First Division (NFD) champions today without even kicking a ball – with a massive five matches to spare.

Their Absa Premiership seat is just about ready for occupation, they just need one draw to put it beyond any doubt.

Real Kings FC are the team de-

claring Highlands' celebrations and the popping of champagne corks across Tembisa and neighbouring townships, where they will be jumping for joy once they are able to welcome their club back to the PSL.

Highlands dominate proceedings in the NFD and have opened up a gap of 15 points with five games to go. And today is the day Kings visit stubborn Ubuntu Cape Town at Athlone Stadium (3pm), where defeat or a draw for the Durbanites could see Highlands declared champions with an unassailable 56 points. Not even victory might be enough for Kings, currently on 38 points, to catch up with the high-riding Tembisa side, marshalled by Owen Da Gama.

It would take a complete collapse by Highlands, who would have to lose all five their matches to lose out on straight promotion. This can be regarded as an impossible scenario, as the Tembisa side has scored 51 goals in 25 matches.

And Kings would have to win all six matches, today's game included, by six goals without

conceding to equal them on points and gain promotion due to goal difference.

Even if Highlands fail to add another point to their tally, the best nearest rivals Black Leopards can do – should *Lidoda Duwa* win all five their remaining games – is to equal them on points. Third-placed Jomo Cosmos don't stand a chance of dethroning Sinky Mnisi's club.

Following their 4-0 thrashing of Tshakhuma Tsha Madzivhandila at the weekend, Da Gama continued playing down the notion of winning automatic promotion.

"No, we are not thinking about the PSL," he said, even though the writing is on the wall. "Our next game is against *AmaTuks* (University of Pretoria). It's an important match we are totally focused.

"We are grounded, anything can happen, things can turn upside down at any time. There's nothing special about us. We are working hard and that is what's keeping us going. We are not worried about who is following us."

Meanwhile, after being eliminated from the Nedbank Cup on Saturday, Ubuntu vowed to apply their cup form in the league to save them from drowning.

Ubuntu gave great displays in Ke Yona, eliminating two Absa Premiership sides in Polokwane City and AmaZulu on debut, before being knocked out by FS Stars 4-2 on penalties after a 1-1 draw.

Now they face harsh reality in the NFD with the dreaded axe hovering over their heads.

Ubuntu are 15th in the NFD standings with 24 points and will hope to save their souls against Real Kings.

Coach Casey Prince said they would fight for their lives by surprising promotion hopefuls Kings today: "Our survival is in our hands. We know what we need to do."

Sinky Mnisi and his Highlands Park side see their return to the top of the league as a back to the future.
 Photo by Gallo Images



LOGS

Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
1	Highlands Park	25	17	5	3	51	10	41	56
2	Black Leopards	25	11	8	6	33	17	16	41
3	Jomo Cosmos	25	11	6	8	37	29	8	39
4	Real Kings	24	10	8	6	29	21	8	38
5	Witbank Spurs	25	8	12	5	29	26	3	36
6	Tshakhuma Tsha Madzivhandila	25	10	6	9	27	36	-9	36
7	Cape Town All Stars	25	8	11	6	22	18	4	35
8	Pretoria University	25	8	8	9	27	33	-6	32
9	Mbombela United	25	10	5	10	28	35	-7	32
10	Stellenbosch	25	7	9	9	20	28	-8	30
11	Royal Eagles	25	6	9	10	36	39	-3	27
12	Uthongathi FC	25	5	12	8	17	21	-4	27
13	Richards Bay	25	6	9	10	21	31	-10	27
14	Super Eagles	25	6	9	10	21	32	-11	27
15	Ubuntu Cape Town	24	5	9	10	23	33	-10	24
16	Mthatha Bucks	25	4	8	13	24	36	-12	20

