



FEATURE NEDBANK CUP



Baroka FC still remain the aristocrats of the greatest modern day fairy-tale in the Nedbank Cup after overcoming both Moroka Swallows and Kaizer Chiefs in 2011 as they reached the semi-finals while still a mere third-tier club. But which other clubs provided noteworthy shocks in the tournament to progress as underdogs? Lovemore Moyo digs deep down into the Nedbank Cup memory bank.

Giant killers



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24 April 2011 will forever be etched into the history books of Baroka FC, marking the day the third-tier club from rural Limpopo famously booted Soweto giants Kaizer Chiefs out of the Nedbank Cup to reach the semi-finals of the competition.

Two years later, ABC Motsepe League club Maluti FET College humiliated Orlando Pirates 4-1 in the first round of the same competition to cause one of the biggest upsets of 2013.

Both examples depict the beauty of knockout competition football, which provides the amateurs a rare chance to weigh themselves against the professionals in matches which often prove that what actually matters is the size of the fight in the dog, not the size of the dog in the fight.

The biblically-connected David versus Goliath warfare has been aplenty in the Nedbank Cup over the years, with many contests resulting in giant-killing acts for the minnows as they turn the appalcart to surprise their more-fancied opponents, to the delight of their partisan supporters and enthusiastic neutrals.

Going as far back as the very first year the national cup was played, there have been a fair dosage of humiliations, shocks, surprises or whatever term you want to label them by. Over four decades ago, lower division club Pimville Champions embarrassed Lamontville Golden Arrows in the 1971 Life Challenge Cup quarter-final. The original contest had ended in a 1-1 draw after extra-time, but both teams opted for a replay instead of deciding the outcome via penalties.

Arrows, one of the founding members of the NPSL, ended up on the receiving end of a heavy defeat in the replayed match, suffering a 6-2 drubbing which remains a record loss for a top-tier club against lower division opposition.

Seven years later, Alexandria Blackpool overcame Arcadia Shepherds 4-3 in the last eight of the Mainstay Cup, with Johannes Simelane smashing a hat-trick for the underdogs.

At that time, Alex Blackpool became the first club from the lower leagues to reach the semi-finals of a major cup competition in the multi-racial era.

That's where their dream run would end,



however, as they came unstuck in the last four at the hands of Kaizer Chiefs, who ultimately lost 3-2 to Wits University in the final.

Then in 1980, Highlands Park – then a force in domestic football – was bundled out of the Mainstay Cup by Mamelodi United, going down 3-2 to exit the tournament.

More surprises

In the years to come, surprise results became fewer and far between, and it was only in 1991 that Zola Real Young Stars shocked Orlando Pirates 5-3 on penalties after the two teams couldn't be separated in normal play with the scores tied at 3-3.

That was a Bob Save Super Bowl contest that left the country stunned, with the Bucs having fielded Johnny Masegela, Bernard Lushozi, Aubrey Lekwane, Lawrence Maake and Ian Palmer in that match.

Young Stars was a team coached by the late Chris Mazibuko – who once played for Pirates – and had the late Zinto Dube in their team on that day.

"When you are a lower division team and get a rare opportunity to play a PSL club, it automatically triggers the motivation to up your game," says Palmer, who is now a well-travelled coach.

"The trouble for you as a PSL team is that you don't know anything about your opponents and it becomes a shock playing against them. You also can't plan against a team that uses no tactics, but relies on energy and kicking you to hell and back as they seek to make a name



TOP AND PREVIOUS PAGE: Baroka's Sam Ndlovu scores against Kaizer Chiefs in the 2011 Nedbank Cup.

ABOVE: Seven Stars reached the semi-finals in 1998.

BELOW: In 2003 Silver Stars caused an upset when they beat Orlando Pirates 2-0.

RIGHT: Mpumalanga Black Aces' Kabamba Musasa (l) beats Nathi Lions' Mlungiseni Masinga to the ball in a Nedbank Cup clash in 2008.



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for themselves. Luckily, nowadays the advantage for PSL teams is that they have the resources in their technical teams to watch the lower division teams in action prior to matches as draws are done two weeks in advance. You can even send spies to their training sessions,” he reasons.

In the 1996/97 season, Hellenic was elbowed out of the competition at home, losing 1-0 to less-fancied Park United in the first round. The result was surprising as the Greek Gods had finished fifth in the top league the previous season, yet again crashed out in the first round of the cup the following year, this time to another amateur club Manenberg Dolphins, who succumbed to Seven Stars in the next round.

Stars, then a First Division club coached by a young Gavin Hunt, followed up that victory by booting out Umtata Bush Bucks 3-1 in the quarter-finals at a packed Nyanga Stadium. The tiny stadium had double its capacity of 2000 on that famous April 18 Saturday in 1998.

Unfortunately for Stars, they couldn't get past the last four after being squeezed out on penalties by eventual winners Mamelodi Sundowns.

Tigers roar

In the 1998/99 season, Bloemfontein Young Tigers was chasing promotion from the First Division Inland Stream, yet were simultaneously enjoying the thrills of progressing further and further in the cup competition.

A resounding 5-1 massacre of Durban Bush Bucks in the Last 32 was then followed by a 2-1 extra time victory over Madidi Cosmos, both lower division teams.

In the quarter-finals, Tigers travelled to Cape Town where they shocked then PSL club Santos 2-0 in a match in which The People's Team was harassed by the late Abram "Fire" Raselemane, who they then signed the next season.

Tigers' impressive run was eventually stopped by Chiefs in the semi-finals at Rand Stadium, yet by then had become just the second lower-league club to reach the last four of the competition in the PSL era.

In that Tigers team was Duncan Lechesa, Cecil Oerson, Khumbulani Konco and Jimmy Augousti, who were coached by

David Vilakazi.

Khoarai "British" Khoarai, who was already the owner of the club at that time, still has vivid memories from that year.

"I had a young team made up mostly of schoolboys that year," he recalls.

"I happened to be in charge of the Southern Free State schools Under-19 team and after the success we had, I decided to take almost all the boys to Young Tigers, a team that had traditionally been home to big names in the amateur ranks. Vilakazi was a school teacher and became a player-coach of the team. Our young team was well-oiled and I am glad that we have remained relevant through the years," says Khoarai.

Tigers is still functional today, playing in the ABC Motsepe League, and qualified for the Nedbank Cup Last 32 again this year, yet were humbled 5-0 by National First Division club Richards Bay.

Next to cause an upset was a group of



hard workers turning out for Silver Stars in the 2002/03 season. In their ranks were the likes of Daniel "Sailor" Tshabalala, Surprise Moriri, Oscar Ntwagae, Michael Khaile, Koketso Mmotong and Johannes Diale.

A Last 32 meeting on April 5, 2003 against Orlando Pirates became their biggest fixture since Joseph Mapfulagasha bought the franchise of Khakhu Fast XI five years earlier.

That day, Moriri announced his arrival on the big stage with a brace that left The Ghost in shock, as the dreadlocked Tshabalala directed operations from midfield with such impressive fluidity that The Buccs snapped him up the following season.

Stars were then stopped by Cosmos in the last eight, but still ended that campaign smiling after winning promotion to the PSL.

Aces make history

In the very first year – 2008 – that current sponsors Nedbank took over, Mpumalanga Black Aces benefitted from the luck of the draw as they made their way to the final.

Still a mere First Division club at the time who went on to finish fifth in the eight-team inland stream, Aces punched well above their weight under the guidance of Kenny Ndhlazi.

Their first PSL victims were Thanda Royal Zulu in the Last 32, after which they negotiated their way past fellow First Division clubs FC AK and Nathi Lions in the next two rounds.

In the semi-finals they encountered another PSL opponent in Free State Stars, who they downed courtesy of a Kabamba Musasa goal, setting up a dream final against Mamelodi Sundowns which was played at Johannesburg Stadium.

Despite falling short at the last hurdle, AmaZayoni walked away proud after becoming the first lower league club to reach the final of this competition.

"The experience factor played a key role for us because we were a team full of ex-PSL players," says Michel Babale, who was part of that Aces squad.

Eddie Dinha, Jacky Ledwaba, Isaac Mabotsa, Jacob Machaka, Kabamba Musasa, Felix Mwamba Musasa, Siphon Nunens, Lucas Tlhomelang, Thabang Rooi and Mandla Zwane had all already played in the PSL at the time.

"We didn't feel like we were a team from the First Division throughout the tournament. We were not afraid of

any team and to lose that final was a surprise for us because we thought we were going to win. What made it more painful was that we conceded so late in that game. However, the reality of being a team from the lower division is that you have nothing to lose," he notes.

The following year, University of Pretoria – a First Division club like Aces the year before them – also reached the final, with their path to the decider including a stunning win over Chiefs which made them the first lower league club to down the Soweto giants in a cup game since Seshego Stonebreakers in the late 1970s.

Tsiki further accounted for Bloemfontein Celtic and Ajax Cape Town in the quarter-finals and semi-finals respectively, before coming unstuck in the final against Moroka Swallows at Rand Stadium.



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That year's competition laid opened the PSL doors for Andile Jali, Aubrey Ngoma, Thokozani Sekotlang, Mthokozisi Yende, Warren Bishop, Mpho Matsi, Manti Moholo, Thabang Monare, Phenyi Mangala and Obert Mayo, all of whom were with the capital club that year.

"That was an opportunity which we made full use of, with the aid of luck," points out Bishop.

"Though we were a young team, we also had quality as proven by how players in that squad then progressed in their careers. As we continued riding our luck, the confidence and discipline factor came in as well. We had a lot of players playing for their future, so the desire was higher."

Also in 2009, ALS Puk Tawana – who were a mere feeder team to Sundowns and playing third-tier league football – pulled a shocker when they outsmarted their more-fancied provincial rivals Platinum Stars in the first round.

Writing their own fairytale script that same year was FC Cape Town, who became the second First Division club in a row to humiliate Chiefs in the same competition.

Strikes by teenage sensation Lyle Lakay and Cameroon defender Samuel Eboule Bille gave the African Beasts their most famous victory yet.

"When you draw Chiefs, you don't need any

"WHEN YOU DRAW CHIEFS, YOU DON'T NEED ANY MOTIVATION."

motivation," says Ashley Hartog, the star man for FC Cape Town through those years.

"That game was at a neutral venue and we had Celtic fans supporting us on the day which was very different for us. We knew about all the possibilities ahead as this is a cup that provides the window of opportunity that would give our careers a lift," he adds.

Madimir Vermezovic was left stunned while Josef Vukusic was dancing in his best moment in the country at the club that has since changed owners and name to become Ubuntu Cape Town – the only non-Absa Premiership club to qualify for the quarter-finals of this year's Nedbank Cup.

Chiefs shocked yet again

Amakhosi, the country's most successful and most popular club, was again the denominator in 2011 when they were embarrassed by Baroka – then a third-tier league club.



Baroka FC's Thobani Mncwango scored an injury-time winner in the 2011 Nedbank Cup win over Kaizer Chiefs.

Being a rural team based in Lebowakgomo, not many had even heard about them prior to the start of the competition, having been formed just four years earlier.

The Glamour Boys, affectionately known as the cup kings, were expected to run over these part-timers nicknamed Bakgaga, but by the time the game ended it was the unknowns celebrating after Thobani Mncwango struck an injury-time winner.

Maluti even missed a penalty which would've further humiliated their opponents, as they slammed four past Senzo Meyiwa in a Pirates team that included Thabo Matlaba, Happy Jele, Ayanda Gcaba, Oupa Manyisa, Sifiso Myeni, Collins Mbesuma and Onyekachi Okonkwo.

Luckyboy Mokoena struck twice as did Mashale Rantabane on what ranks as one of the darkest days in the history of Pirates.

"The Pirates win will always be the biggest achievement of my life," admits Morena Ramorebodi, who was in charge of Maluti.

"Every time I watch that match, it reminds me of the preparation and sacrifice we had to make before that game. The pep talk we had with the players meant that psychologically, they were ready. Stars were born from that match and I as the coach was given recognition in the country for doing so well against a big team."

Ramorebodi is now in charge of Lesotho Premier League giants Lioli FC.

Just last year, Acombush United had reason to walk with their heads high after downing high-flying Cape Town City at Kabokweni Stadium.

Based on their form which had seen them lift the Telkom Knockout Cup a few months earlier, the Citizens were expected to steamroll past their lower league opponents.

However, MacDonald Makhubedu had other plans as his masterful tactics sunk the Cape club.

They would then go on to narrowly lose 2-1 at home against Chiefs in the next round in a game in which Makhubedu memorably questioned the quality of what he had seen of the Soweto giants. **KO**

That was easily Baroka's greatest and sweetest victory in their history.

Sello Chokoe, famous for wearing just one glove on his left hand, even went as far as gracing the cover of KICK OFF Magazine at the time.

Amongst the players who went on to play in the PSL from that squad were Mncwango, Katlego Mashego, Olaleng Shaku, Sifiso Mbhele and Lantshene Phalane.

For all their troubles against lower division clubs, Chiefs will find comfort in the fact that their fierce Soweto rivals Pirates have also often fallen into the same trap.

In the 2013 Nedbank Cup first round, The Bucs were humiliated 4-1 by minnows Maluti FET College at Charles Mopeli Stadium.

To say Pirates was stunned is an understatement as they were whipped into submission with such ease, making them look like the third-tier club of the two sides on the field.

