



FEATURE BANTWANA BANTWANA

Uruguay here we



Back row (l-r): Cynthia Makete, Fikile Magama, Manaki Makhana, Thambolinye Mzoneli, Micaela Nunes, Sibulele Holweni,
Front row: Refiloe Jane (Banyana Banyana player), Khunjulwa Mali, Yolanda Nduli, Zethembiso Vilakazi, Oratile Mokwena,





come!

After beating Morocco 6-1 on aggregate, South Africa's Under-17 Women's team qualified for the Fifa World Cup to be played in Uruguay in November. Bantwana coach Simphiwe Dladla talks to Zola Doda about her team's plans ahead of the sixth edition of the prestigious international tournament. ▶



Lonathemba Mhlongo, Leigh Brophy, Sphumelele Shamase, Jessica Wade, Yenzokuhle Ngubane, Kaydee Windvogel
Kaylyn Jordan, Miche Minnies, Thubelihle Shamase, Nicole Michaels, Janine van Wyk (Banyana Banyana player)

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APRIL 2018 **KICKOFF** 63



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FEATURE **BANTWANA BANTWANA**

With Bafana Bafana failing to qualify for the 2018 Fifa World Cup in Russia, the South African Under-17 Women's team will be carrying the country's hopes on the international stage this year after their qualification for the U-17 Women's World Cup.

Bantwana, alongside Cameroon and Ghana, will be one of three African representatives at the sixth edition of the Fifa Under-17 Women's World Cup, to be held in Uruguay in November this year. Coach Simphiwe Dlodlu's team qualified for the tournament after beating Morocco 6-1 on aggregate – the first leg played at Dobsonville Stadium ended in a 5-1 win and the return leg played at Stade Boubker Ammar in Sale, Morocco, ended 1-0 in favour of the visitors.

The Bantwana coach also made history by becoming the first former Banyana Banyana player to lead the national team to a World Cup as a player.

"It feels great, but it's not all my hard work or my victory – it's our victory, from the technical team to the support staff," says an excited Dlodlu. "This is not my record; all the people involved in making sure we get the best out of the players are the ones who must celebrate this qualification with me. Not just me, but also the clubs that are producing, nurturing and coaching these players – it's their victory too. Thanks to them for making sure we have many players to select from. It's really exciting for all of us."

Bantwana, captained by Kaylin Jordaan, kicked off their qualifying campaign with a 5-2 win against Botswana before wrapping up the tie with a 6-4 victory at home. But the team is well aware that dispatching minnows Botswana and Morocco in the qualifiers is different to competing against the top guns in the actual tournament.

In 2010, coached by Solly Luvhengo, Bantwana qualified for the World Cup in Trinidad and Tobago, but the team was knocked out following three successive defeats in all three of their group stage matches, conceding 17 goals. They lost the first match 3-1 to South Korea, which was followed by a 10-1 humiliation at the hands of Germany before a 4-0 defeat to Mexico ended their disappointing tournament. And Dlodlu does not want to see a repeat of that this time around.

"We are not going to be naïve and think just because we beat Morocco and qualified for the World Cup, we are one of the best teams in the world," says Dlodlu, who will only learn her team's opponents following a draw which will be held at the Fifa

headquarters in May. "We have to acknowledge that in order to be one of the best in the world, we have to work hard. We can't go there naïve and think we will go there and conquer all, no. Preparations will play a critical role in making sure we are able to give our best and we will work hard in achieving those goals. We have things we need to achieve. Football results for us are not just about the final score, it's about the game growing in women's football, to be able to help each other on the field and to be able to understand that a lot is required from the players at that level. And how to

Preparations, preparations, preparations

With all the Bantwana players still studying, the most difficult challenge for Safa and their coach is to schedule time for the team's preparations ahead of the tournament. But Dlodlu says preparations are already underway to get the team ready.

"Between now and the tournament, we

"WE ARE READY TO SHOW THE WORLD THAT SOUTH AFRICA IS NOT GOING TO THE WORLD CUP TO TICK A BOX; WE ARE GOING THERE TO HAVE AN IMPACT."



will have a schedule drawn up stating when we will be coming to camp, but we will definitely be going to Spain and see if we can play a lot of international teams that are good out there," adds Dlodlu. "Development in Europe, United States and Asia is a lot bigger. Our aim is to prepare the team as much as we can from home and then travel overseas and expose the girls to that higher level before we go to the World Cup.

"We are happy with the pool of players we have, but we are still looking to strengthen in different positions to make sure we have a balanced team. I feel there is always talent to

GETTING TO KNOW SIMPHIWE DLODLU

YOUR FOOTBALL PHILOSOPHY...

I'm a coach who believes in discipline; whether you are attacking or defending, there must be discipline. The reason the rest of the world is doing so much better is because they understand those aspects of football. I'm a coach who believes in structure and letting players express themselves.

FAVOURITE COACH...

I enjoy watching Pep Guardiola do his magic. He is fearless and works

on his team more than anything. As coaches, sometimes we worry a lot about what the next person is doing more than what is in front of you. My mentor Sheryl Botes is also one of my favourite coaches. She has coached the Under-17 and Under-20 teams, as well as Banyana Banyana. Right now, she is the head coach at the High Performance Centre in Pretoria. She is an amazing coach and woman. She coached me as a player and is now helping me become a better coach. I look up to

her so much. She encourages critical thinking, being able to identify talent, nurture it and help players become better and the best.

DESIREE ELLIS'S APPOINTMENT AS BANYANA COACH...

I'm really happy for her to be appointed as the Banyana Banyana head coach. For 18 months she was the interim coach and she did well. She has invested a lot into the team and understands the dynamics. She was an assistant coach to Vera

Pauw before and now she is the head coach. We need to support her as much as we can by producing players that she will be able to select from, that can then represent the national team and do their best.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COACHING AND PLAYING...

Coaching is difficult, but if you are passionate, you will be able to find solutions. As a coach, you are faced with many problems on the field, how the other team is





Bantwana's Thambolinye Mzoneli celebrates with teammates after scoring during their World Cup qualifier against Morocco at Dobsonville Stadium.

unearth somewhere. But talent alone is not the only thing we are looking at. We are looking at players who will be able to compete at the highest level, players that will be ready to work blood, sweat and tears. Being in the national team is not about how good, but how consistent you can be, and how you can handle pressure. But I will be going around the country to visit tournaments and schools, so that we can pick the best players and add to what we have in the team."

The future

With the women's senior team qualifying for the 2012 and 2016 Olympics in London and Brazil, and the U-17 team qualifying for two Fifa World Cups over the last eight years, there is no denying that South African women's football has come a long way.

While the country's Sasol Women's League, which was established in 2009, has 144 teams which compete across all nine provinces, other countries such as the USA,

England and Sweden have professional leagues in which women can ply their trade and grow the beautiful game. Currently all African countries, including South Africa, are ranked outside the top 30 in the Fifa rankings, but according to Safa technical committee member Nastasia Tsiclas, this could change as early as next year.

"First of all, we are thrilled about qualifying for the World Cup, it's a fantastic achievement," Tsiclas says. "It took a lot of work and determination, having gathered experts together to try and help the coach. It was team work."

"In other countries, women's football has womens' leagues and we are also ready for that. In 2019 we are going to have a women's league over and above the Sasol League. The president [Danny Jordaan] made an

"IN 2019 WE ARE GOING TO HAVE A WOMEN'S LEAGUE, OVER AND ABOVE THE SASOL LEAGUE."

announcement that it's going to be a 16-team league. Some of the PSL clubs like Mamelodi Sundowns and Bloemfontein Celtic already have teams, so they will be there. All nine regions will be represented, including each province and the High Performance Centre where we have all our development players, and we will have four spots for other clubs. Kaizer Chiefs want to have a women's team as well. That will help a lot with development because in the Sasol League, the winners don't look forward to playing somewhere else. Fifa is also busy in the process of organising a Champions League for women. The future of women's football is looking good."

Tsiclas, who was the acting chairperson of the 2012 Fifa Women's World Cup in Azerbaijan, believes the future of women's football in South Africa is bright.

"For many years, being on the Fifa Under-17 World Cup committee, I know how difficult it is to succeed and I also know what you need," she says. "But with all our knowledge, together we are going to try and help. It's a very serious business. When I look back, it took time to get to where we are, but in the last four years we have moved forward a great deal. We qualified for the Olympics. When we started we had nothing and look at where we are today. I'm very proud of that achievement!" **ND**

playing and how you counter in order to get results. I'm passionate about coaching and I have room for learning. It is important for me to understand the game and break it down. As a coach, you look at things differently, you look at the plan holistically, including nutrition. There is a whole lot that goes into getting the best out of the players.

FUTURE PLANS AFTER THE WORLD CUP

It's all about looking at next challenge

eagerly. I look at every challenge and try to reach a different milestone. The aim is to produce the best players from the country. I still want to work on myself and continue demanding more from myself to excel. Excelling is not about getting results, it's about putting in a lot of effort.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SA AND OTHER COUNTRIES...

In other countries the game has evolved and grown, and women football is at a higher level. That is

what we are striving for in South Africa, because our development needs to grow and become better. It is very important to know who we are. It will be naïve of us to say we are very skillful in the world. We have to understand that tactical discipline and technical superiority is important. All those factors will play a crucial role in helping us match the teams we will be playing against. But it's also important for us not to put pressure on the girls.

