



Royal Eagles 'somewhat safe' from being relegated

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WITH just five rounds of matches remaining before the curtain comes down on the 2017/18 National First Division (NFD) campaign, the battles at both ends of the table are heating up.

Mthatha Bucks seem to be a safe bet for relegation to the ABC Motsepe League, while at the other end Highlands Park look set for the title and the race for playoff spots could go down to the wire.

Mthatha are rock bottom with only 20 points from 25 matches, seven adrift of safety, and seem all but certain to go down. This leaves one more spot in the so-called drop zone and five clubs, positioned between 11th and 15th, are in danger.

Among them is local side Royal Eagles who are placed 11th on the log after Sunday's goalless draw against the University of Pretoria at Harry Gwala Stadium.

They face a tough run-in and should results not go their way, they will remain in trouble, but coach Roger Skhakhane insists that will not happen on his watch.

"At this stage of the league, every point counts. We have to keep focusing on the next game," he said.

The experienced tactician is certain that with a win in a 'six-pointer' game at Stellenbosch on Saturday his side would feel somewhat safe, if not totally out of the woods just yet.

He added: "We want to be above 30 points soon to make sure that the team is safe from relegation. The last five games are always the hardest, especially for teams who are in the play-off spots and relegation zone. But we know how to get ourselves out and it should not be a problem at all."

Skhakhane, who was brought in at the beginning of February, has overseen seven matches across all competitions, winning three, drawing two and losing two.

He has made several changes to the squad, with eight players sent home recently — David Zulu, Joshua Sauls, Sandile

Kubheka, Karabo Litabe, Sherwin Smith, Happy Mashau, Thabo Makgathu and goalkeeper Musawakhe Mncwango.

The club's general manager, James Dlamini, explained the mass player clear-out: "The coach felt there were too many players in the squad and it was difficult to manage all of them. He let them go for just the remainder of the season so he can focus on the smaller group to help us avoid relegation."

"We just want to get through these remaining games and then we will see what happens with them next season."

Eagles face tough away games against fellow strugglers Ubuntu Cape Town and Cape Town All Stars, while play-offs candidates Jomo Cosmos and Witbank Spurs are still due for visits to the Midlands.

Yesterday, Real Kings and Ubuntu played to a goalless draw in a rescheduled match in Cape Town.

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Former Kaizer Chiefs striker David Zulu is among eight players released by local First Division team Royal Eagles. PHOTO: GALLO

FIXTURES

Saturday

Real Kings v Mbombela United
Black Leopards v Uthongathi FC
Super Eagles v Ubuntu CT
Stellenbosch v Royal Eagles
Highlands Park v Pretoria University

Sunday

Jomo Cosmos v TTM
Mthatha Bucks v Richards Bay
CT All Stars v Witbank Spurs

HOW THEY STAND

Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Highlands	25	17	5	3	51	10	56
Leopards	25	11	8	6	33	17	41
Cosmos	25	11	6	8	37	29	39
Kings	25	10	9	6	29	21	39
Spurs	25	8	12	5	29	26	36
TTM	25	10	6	9	27	36	36
All Stars	25	8	11	6	22	18	35
Pretoria Univ.	25	8	8	9	27	33	32
Mbombela	25	10	5	10	28	25	32
Stellenbosch	25	7	9	9	20	28	30
Royal Eagles	25	6	9	10	36	29	27
Uthongathi	25	5	12	8	17	21	27
Richards Bay	25	6	9	10	21	31	27
Super Eagles	25	6	9	10	21	32	27
Ubuntu	25	5	10	10	23	33	25
Mthatha	25	4	8	13	24	36	20

