



NATIONAL FIRST DIVISION FOCUS

There are now structures in place

Soccer Laduma's Peter Raath catches up with University of Pretoria's striker, Ritchi Sebastiao, who talks about a range of topics, including his goals, Shaun Bartlett and experienced campaigners in the team.

Peter Raath: You scored on debut during University of Pretoria's 3-1 win over Richards Bay and then grabbed a late winner following an error by Jomo Cosmos goalkeeper, Kgosietsile Ndlovu.

Ritchi Sebastiao: My opening goal for AmaTuks was all to do with the preparation. I was hyped up for the whole week after being told on the Monday that I'd be playing on the weekend. I was ready to score. I even prepared the celebration beforehand (laughing). It was the same dance that you saw on television after the Cosmos goal, which I couldn't be more grateful for (more laughter). No striker would say no to such a gift. I was actually facing Ndlovu when, luckily enough, he sent the ball straight to me as we were about to pressurise him. One of my teammates was coming from the side, while I'd begun closing down one of their centre-backs. Prior to that mistake, he'd played quite well by saving a few of our opportunities. Afterwards I told him, "You were unlucky, it's part of the game." I didn't play in the first round when we were hammered 5-0 by Cosmos, but it was sweet revenge to win 1-0.

PR: Between those two victories, your team picked up only four points out of a possible 21. What went wrong?

RS: Unfortunately, we've been going through a bad spell. Most of the goals



RITCHI SEBASTIAO

that the team conceded happened to be just prior to half time or immediately after the restart. Players made mistakes through lapses in concentration. That's something we've been struggling with all season. We get punished for letting our guard down. As far as scoring goals is concerned, the team's creating every opportunity it possible can – however, I guess we're lacking a bit of luck. Normally at training, we score but in games, that doesn't happen. During that period, we twice lost 2-1 to Tshakhuma Tsha Madzivhandila FC. They're doing well, but I wouldn't say we were outplayed. Collecting too many yellow cards has also been our downfall, as most NFD clubs score from set pieces.

PR: With four strikers, including yourself, Tebogo Reed, Henrico Botes and Chemon Petersen, how does the team selection process work?

RS: We all have to train hard in order to get a game. I'd say it's the player who performs the best at training that gets to start because coach Shaun Bartlett gives everyone an equal opportunity. I believe that Petersen is going to find his form, having returned from injury. That'll be good for competition. It's really nice to see the older players like Ngobeni, 30, and Botes, 38, still running around. It's also incredible that Botes, together with

Thabo Moseki, 29, have hardly missed a match. Those guys and Shane Poggenpoel, 33, never tell us their secrets to a long career as most players would wish to follow suit (laughing). Before my uncle spoke to Bartlett about a trial, I had a two-month spell with Alexandra Black Aces in the Gauteng ABC Motsepe League, where Clifford Ngobeni was my teammate. For me to work under Shaun, one of the greatest strikers we've had in SA, is so important. Hopefully, I can one day make it to the same level as him or be the hero that he is. Looking up to the ex-Bafana Bafana player and getting some of his input into my career has helped. There were a few complications for me at Mbombela United, so I left them in January 2017. We just terminated on mutual consent, as they wanted to send me out on loan but wouldn't allow me to choose the club.

PR: After two successive away losses to lowly Ubuntu Cape Town and Richards Bay, AmaTuks face a difficult run-in with further fixtures in KZN against Royal Eagles, Real Kings and Uthongathi FC, while log leaders Highlands Park are also beckoning. Is a play-off spot still possible?

RS: Our original goal was automatic promotion, but that's not possible now.

However, the guys are determined to reach the play-offs. We all look up to each other and began the season sharing the same goal of getting back into the PSL. In fact, the club has even come up with some new arrangements to return to the top three. That began with 10 games to go. It's nothing to do with bonuses but there're now structures in place, whereby certain points requirements must be met. We're doing games' management, working towards a specific goal per game. It was disappointing to give away a very late equaliser in the 1-1 draw against Mthatha Bucks and lose to Ubuntu. Every player must pull up his socks. We really need to focus. Nobody's giving up. Whoever does give up, the next player's there to pick him up and carry him as well.

PR: Thanks, Ritchi. Good luck.
RS: Thanks. ☐

THE LATEST NFD NEWS

- The Dolphins, who top the Limpopo ABC Motsepe League by seven points following 2-0 wins over Magesi FC and Madridtas respectively, look favourites to reach the play-offs, with six matches remaining. After 24 games, they'd recorded 17 wins, netted 44 goals and accumulated 55 points, seven more than

- Boyne Tigers FC.
- Ubuntu Cape Town's top scorer, Ranga Chivaviro, is set for a period on the sidelines. "I injured my ankle after being tackled from behind during our 3-1 win over University of Pretoria. This is my first career injury, but I'm positive that I'll return before the season is over," he told Soccer

- Laduma.
- After hosting two PSL and two NFD games in just five days, the Athlone Stadium is again showing signs of wear and tear despite being resurfaced not long ago. "An official from the stadium wanted Ubuntu to reschedule their match with Mthatha Bucks from Saturday to Monday, but

- that wasn't possible," said a source.
- Less than 10 minutes after coming on as a second half substitute, veteran striker Gregory Roelf scored Richards Bay FC's winner against University of Pretoria. "It's probably the sweetest goal of my career, but besides that, the three points were so important

- because they lifted us out of the relegation zone. We still have seven cup finals to play," he said.
- Former Milano United centre-back, Mohammed Faez Khan, has parted ways with Tshakhuma Tsha Madzivhandila FC after 16 games. "He went to play in China," confirmed TTM coach, Malose 'Sello' Chokoe.

