

RODNEY REINERS

IT HAS been a long, hard slog for Maritzburg United and Free State Stars to get to the prestigious Nedbank Cup final. But, finally it is here – and, tomorrow at the Cape Town Stadium (kick-off 7pm), they'd better be ready for the game of their lives.

While many may be of the opinion that two lesser-known names have made it to the climax of this competition, the two assistant coaches believe the final involves the country's most rapidly improving sides, and they are confident of producing an attractive, entertaining clash for fans to savour.

With Maritzburg head coach Fadlu Davids and his Stars counterpart, Belgian Luc Eymael, hard at work in preparing the teams for tomorrow's final, the two assistants – Maritzburg's Maahier Davids and the Free State club's Selaotse "Sly" Mosala – fronted up to the media at a press conference at the Water-

It's raw talent versus wise heads

front yesterday.

"It has been an interesting journey for us to get to this final," said Davids, who is the younger brother of the head coach. "If there's a highlight, then it's probably the semi-final win over Mamelodi Sundowns. We went a goal down, but we were at home – the supporters got behind us and we managed to get the win. Right at the beginning of the season, it was always one of our targets to make it to one cup final – and we are here now."

As for Stars, Mosala agreed that they've had a punishing route to get to the final.

"I think we had probably the roughest route, because we had to face lower division teams and they are always looking to prove a point," said the Free Staters' assistant. "We had a Free State

derby against Super Eagles, where we went a goal down, and needed extra-time to win. And then we had a really tough game against Ubuntu Cape Town, and we needed penalties to get through that. But, for the semi-finals, when Kaizer Chiefs decided to take the game to Durban, we knew we could get to the final. Chiefs have never beaten us in Durban, and we went on to beat them 2-0."

Davids cut his coaching teeth in the youth structures of Ajax Cape Town, where he had great success. But, while his older brother Fadlu may be the head coach at Maritzburg, he stresses that the family relationship is

secondary. "In football, our relationship is a professional one," he said. "As coaches, we were on two different paths. When I left Ajax, it was to join Ernst Middendorp as his assistant at Free State Stars."

"When Ernst joined Maritzburg, he took me along, and I found my brother there. So, I guess it was a natural fit. But, while we may have an existing relationship as brothers, we had Ernst to act as our mentor. It developed into a professional relationship and ran from there."

Davids insists that both he and his brother won't be putting too much pressure on their players. "We've come a long way," said the

Maritzburg assistant-coach. "Two seasons ago, we just managed to avoid relegation, now we are in a cup final."

"We just want the team to go out and enjoy the occasion, and channel their energy in the right direction. Just making it to this final is a victory in itself."

"At the end of the day, this is a final and each team has a 50 percent chance of winning. We know Stars have a good record in the Cape – they've come here and beaten Ajax in the past. We've got a few Cape Town boys in the squad, so we'll do our best – and that's all we are asking of the players."

For Mosala, who has previously worked in the coaching structures of the University of Pretoria, Polokwane City and Black Leopards, the critical ad-

vantage that Stars have is the experience in their squad – and he stressed that they have to make full use of it.

"One thing is for sure, the occasion won't be too big for us," he said. "We have players, like Rooi Mahamutsa and a few others, who have been in cup finals before. They have the experience. Maritzburg are a young team and we have to make sure that our experience comes through, and we use it to win this final."

"Everybody in the squad knows the importance of this game."

"The experienced guys have this week been helping to motivate the youngsters, to keep them calm ahead of the final."

"This is a good group of players we have, but I can assure you that this is going to be a cracking match. Maritzburg and Stars are the two teams that have improved the most in the PSL; both like to use the ball and I'm sure there will be plenty of scoring chances."

