



FINDING THE NET

Males can learn from Banyana brains

The SA women's national football team players have been hoisted on the shoulders and deservedly celebrated by the country's soccer lovers since they qualified for the World Cup for the first time last November.

Years of heartbreak were erased after star player Thembi Kgatlana scored to seal Banyana's place in the final of the 2018 African Women's Championship with a 2-0 semifinal win over Mali.

The win also ensured qualification for the 2019 global showpiece in France.

The accolades kept coming at the Caf awards in January, with Kgatlana winning goal of the year and player of the year awards.

Coach Desiree Ellis won the women's national team coach gong.

It's no exaggeration to suggest that the past few weeks have been a fairytale, with Banyana's success pushing women's football to the top of the national sports agenda.

And the national women's team players are savouring the ride.

It being election season, it has been fascinating to see politicians muscle their way to the front of the queue as fans clamour for selfies with Ellis and her team.

However, in the hysteria surrounding their qualification for the World Cup, the Banyana players' greatest achievements have been largely overlooked.

Few are aware that the players are highly qualified academically and most of them possess diplomas or degrees, or are in the process of earning them.

From a squad list of 32 players who took part in a pre-Awcon training camp at the University of Pretoria High Performance Centre in 2018, 12 have degrees and five diplomas. A further 10 are studying for degrees and three diplomas.

Rhoda Mulaudzi has a diploma in sports management and a bachelor of technology degree in business management.

Simphive Dlodlu has a bachelor's degree in sports science, her Caf A and B coaching licences and a Uefa B licence.

Refiloe Jane has a BTech degree in sports management

**MNINAWA NTLOKO**

from Tshwane University of Technology, where she is studying towards her masters in marketing.

Leandra Smeda has a BTech degree in food technology and is studying for a post-grad diploma in sport development.

Thembi Kgatlana is studying towards a degree in tourism at the University of the Western Cape.

Kaylin Swart has a business degree in sports management from Menlo College in the US.

Jermaine Seoposenwe has a bachelor of science degree in business administration from Samford University in the US.

Banyana's impressive academic achievements put their male counterparts in the shade, given the disinterest the men sometimes show towards education.

How many times have we heard former players bemoaning their failure to make better use of their time during the days of fame and fortune?

The fast cars and expensive lifestyles are often a distraction. And when their careers come to an end they inevitably go in search of sympathetic ears, looking for anyone willing to listen to their woes.

Such cases are a dime a dozen in the domestic game and some players have no shame pointing an accusing finger at clubs, the Premier Soccer League and the SA Football Association when asked why they never bothered to further their education.

But if they were honest with themselves, the source of their predicament would be staring back at them if they summoned the courage to take a peak at their bathroom mirrors.

The Banyana players should be applauded for putting education first and inspiring a generation of boys and girls who now look up to them.

It's not everyday that athletes dedicate so much time and effort to education.

The bottom line is their academic qualifications will remain with them long after the fame has faded.

