

TEAM TALK



KGOMOTSO MOKOENA

Wanted: National team who believe honour is more important than cash

BY THE time you read this, the insatiable and spoil-rotten Bafana players will already be back home, pockets fat and already blowing their hard-earned R150 000 while the humiliated nation continues to seethe with anger, still trying to figure out what really went wrong.

No sane person can deny that South African football is swimming in a quagmire. If I was dreaming I would not have wanted to wake up to such menacing reality.

Before the African Cup of Nations kicked off, the players, represented by

senior players Mbulelo Mabizela, Aaron Mokoena and André Arendse, put on brave faces and on national television tried to justify that they were worthy of R50 000 per match in the Finals in Tunisia.

I was certainly was not convinced by their case — such demands warranted huge expectations.

They even promised the nation they would reach the semifinals. Safa, with a gun held to their heads and desperate to avoid another controversy, bowed to the players' astronomical demands. The national association played their part,

but South Africa's cash-driven players failed to deliver and went on to embarrass the nation.

We can blame Shakes Mashaba, or even the overseas-based players, but the fact is the current crop of Bafana Bafana players lack panache and flair. They are a far cry from the championship-winning class of 1996, a class that boasted colourful characters such as Doctor "16V" Khumalo, Sizwe Motaung, a then-mobile John "Shoes" Moshoeu, Mark Williams, Phil "Chippa" Masinga and Lucas "Rho" Radebe, who strutted around the pitch like peacocks.

The contribution from "Shoes" in this tournament was not inspiring; his exploits in the Bafana Bafana jersey should now be restricted to video tape.

You have served the nation with great aplomb. Thank you, "Shoes".

The guileless players read too much into their easy victory against a weak Benin side who posed no threat.

And they watched in awe as the Nigerian team, playing at half-speed, outmanoeuvred them and dumped them out of the tournament.

Automatic selections also killed the competitive spirit within the squad.

Wingers Sibusiso Zuma and Delron Buckley should have been given the opportunity to fight for their positions. Not a single decent cross came from the wings against Nigeria. It had become customary for them to walk into the team for years, but this can longer be justified.

Hungry players ought to be introduced into the national team; players with determination who will get stuck in and not leave the pitch without falling to the turf exhausted.

South Africa need players who understand the frustrations and the

expectations of millions of fanatics back home. Cameroon, Mali and Senegal have such players and their football is improving in leaps and bounds.

In a recent television interview, not once did Cameroon ace striker Patrick Mboma mention money.

When asked what motivated him, Mboma responded: "I wear a green, red, and yellow uniform. That is the biggest support I carry in me, and with great honour."

My heart will do a somersault the day I hear such sentiments from a South African player.

'Iron Duke' ducks out of firing line

Impenetrable Khoza may have made a public show of walking away, but he cannot be blind to the crisis in SA football



This week's soccer buzz

Scribes are left baffled as Irvin Khoza jumps ship

IRVIN Khoza left soccer scribes shaking their heads in disbelief this week when he announced his resignation from Safa and then refused to answer questions.

In the absence of a word from the Iron Duke, the hacks were left with little more to do than speculate.

But only Khoza, who recently said: "I should get a Nobel Prize for what I did for football," knows why he conveniently chose to jump ship only a day before Bafana bombed out of the African Cup of Nations.

● Someone has to tell some mediocre Bafana players that their retirement from international football would do us more good than bad. Who cares about Nkosinathi Nhleko quitting Bafana when he has performed so badly in a number of matches he's played?

If it was Sibabonga Nomvete, then we could talk.

● One wonders whether the second round of the Castle Premiership will be as hot as expected, with the exodus of PSL players to overseas clubs gaining momentum this week.

Russia and Greece are some of the destinations confirmed for the likes of Jomo Cosmos's Lovers Mholala and Sam Magalala and rock-solid Moroka Swallows defender George Hummel, to mention just a few.

Let's hope there's some magic still left in the legs of Jabu Pule, Benedict Vilakazi and Steve Lekolela to keep us entertained.

● The new owners of the Benoni-based Hellenic must be applauded for their extraordinary antics.

How do you chuck in R5-million for a club that's placed low down the table midway through the season and hope to resurrect it with players who lack experience at the highest level?

The glamour associated with having a PSL club must have been overwhelming!

● There is great competition for cult status between Egypt's Mido, Nigeria's Jay Jay Okocha and Cameroon's Patrick Mboma, who have all set the African Cup of Nations alight.

A recent poll conducted in Tunisia shows that Okocha and Mboma are followed everywhere by scoop-hungry journalists, while the handsome Mido has been subjected to harassment from the cute local girls.

Mido is said to be enjoying demi-god status in his native country, similar to that of David Beckham in England.

● In a move that left Portsmouth coach Harry Redknapp tearing his hair out in frustration, Nigeria have recalled their three players sent home for poor discipline last Friday.

After Nigeria qualified for the quarterfinal stage with victory over Benin on Wednesday, coach Christian Chukwu recalled Yakubu Aiyegbeni, Celestine Babayaro and Victor Agali. "The players made mistakes. They asked the country to forgive them and the country has forgiven them. If they want to come back, they can," said the bewildered Portsmouth boss who was hoping to field Aiyegbeni: "This news has come completely out of the blue."

● The two-year ban imposed on Kaizer Chiefs winger Arthur Zwane for taking a banned substance will not only cause harm to the players' career, but will hit his pocket just as hard.

As soon as the sentence was delivered by Safa on Tuesday, it was learnt that Zwane had not received his R14 000 salary since November. This has left him devastated as he has just bought a house and has a child on the way within weeks.

Amid a week of turmoil in SA soccer, LUKE ALFRED analyses Irvin Khoza's decision to step down from the SA Football Association this week

AT a press conference on Tuesday, Irvin Khoza, the South African Football Association's (Safa) vice-president, announced his resignation. He then forbade any questions and left the gathering wearing a smile less enigmatic than it was self-satisfied.

The media's response to the news was frighteningly predictable. Early morning posters on Wednesday set in motion a logic that gave way to front page news stories and think-pieces inside.

Not once did the reporters see fit to ask if perhaps the frenzy was in some important way disproportionate to the newsworthiness of the announcement. After all, there was something spectacularly irrelevant to Khoza announcing his resignation.

Safa are an organisation with a CEO, Albert Mokoena, and a president, Molefi Oliphant, and while it is moot to argue about quite how effective either man is, the fact of the matter is that both are in place and, theoretically at least, occupy positions of singularly more importance than Khoza.

Were genial Robbie Kurz, who occupies the United Cricket Board (UCB) vice-presidency, to resign, he would probably not call a press conference for fear that it would attract nothing so much as rows of empty seats. Better, in his case, to issue a press release.

But Khoza is different. He not only calls press conferences, but establishes the parameters in which they are conducted. During such conferences he says that he is sick and tired of being a scapegoat, but can also hint tantalisingly that what he is saying is a prelude to further revelations. His final move, in the days that follow, is to fail to clear his full cellphone mailbox and to remain uncontactable through his personal assistant.

A task well completed, he can then sit back and watch the speculation multiply.

Deeply sensitive to media opinion, Khoza doesn't so much massage the media as toy with it. He plays with the media as a puppy would paw at a Parktown Prawn. As for their part, the media are drawn irresistibly to him, to his secrets, his power and the secrets of that power. This, then, would account for the froth that followed his announcement.

It was not what he was saying but the status he carries. In the context of a man who remains chairman of the Premier Soccer League (PSL), owner of one of the best football brands on the continent in Orlando Pirates, as well as being the chairman of the 2010 Bid Committee, the Safa vice-presidency is neither here nor there.

The caveat to this is that Khoza, sensitive to the swirls of public opinion, wanted to scuttle out of the firing line before Bafana Bafana returned from Tunisia. He didn't want to give the impression he was hedging his bets and so didn't wait for the result of Wednesday night's 1-1 draw against Morocco before announcing his resignation. Calling a press conference for Thursday would have left him vulnerable to accusations that he had jumped ship when not only he, but everyone else, knew it was sinking. So, not a day too late, not a moment too soon, Khoza, like a canny striker beating the offside trap, timed his run to perfection.

Yet it is worth examining his use of the word scapegoat, a term that tells us that he has been stung by criticism that it was he who crow-barred the obdurate "Shakes" Mashaba out of the Bafana Bafana coaching job.

One PSL insider believed that increasingly Khoza has become sick and tired of stepping up to the plate on Safa's behalf, of fielding questions, having to make sense of the seemingly senseless, of navigating a plausible route through an increasingly murky radar screen.

Why did Oliphant, for instance, a man who has done precious little to impose himself on his job in the time of his presidency, not take more responsibility, field more flak?

And what of the R4-million loan Safa obtained from the PSL at short notice to fund the national team's trip to Tunisia? The ease with which the loan was procured seems to suggest that the organisations are perhaps closer than they should be.

Another school of thought — let's put it in the conspiracy school for argument's sake — has it that Khoza's resignation wasn't in the slightest way an act of nobility because, given the reach of his power, he has given up nothing.

What autocrat, the conspiracy theorists ask, voluntarily surrenders influence and reach without their being a corresponding trade-off?



COOL HAND DUKE: Irvin Khoza will make a point and then be hard to pin down for further questions

Such questions seem to contain a better psychological sense of the enigma that is Khoza. Here is a man, after all, who has faced unproven allegations of links to the drug trade and only recently emerged from a bruising encounter with the South African Revenue Service (Sars).

A public figure who never steps fully into the light, Khoza inspires fascination not only because he intrigues both the powerful and the powerless, but because he is feared — and desperately so.

The problem with Khoza's personality is that every so often someone, or some organisation, will challenge him. (This, certainly, is one way to make sense of the manner in which Sars appeared, quite self-consciously, to track him down.) In similar fashion, ordinary folk, the government and the media at large are increasingly going to see the Byzantine workings and manifold inefficiencies of Safa as a

challenge. Khoza might have sidestepped the accusing thrust of fingers.

But this is a dangerous time and the mood is for heads to roll. Indeed, Khoza's jump is possibly nothing more than that of a clever man sniffing the wind and plotting his move accordingly.

While we all accept that South African football is either a maze or a hall of mirrors (take your pick) whether Khoza is there or not, one cannot help but reach the feeling that he is implicated in a culture that cannot continue to function in the way it has.

It is a culture in which a few men and women are wearing so many hats that they are tumbling off their heads. It is a culture that is closed, Masonic, impenetrable. And it is a culture that fails to communicate effectively with either the national players or the outside world. This is best illustrated by a story. Once upon a time, someone associated with the

national team who shall remain nameless, wanted to communicate with Benni McCarthy, who was then playing for a Spanish club called Celta Vigo. "Dear Mr Celta Vigo", began the fax sent from the Safa offices...

Man that he is, Khoza cannot be blind to the crisis of confidence that permeates South African football. The events of the past months have confirmed, time and time again, that Safa are not working.

Such a state of affairs can probably continue indefinitely. But the stakes are high. The right to host the 2010 World Cup is decided in May and 2006 World Cup qualifiers beckon later in the year. There are important people looking at SA football and the way in which it is organised.

Should South Africa again lose the right to host the World Cup it will be a disaster. People will then feel justified in asking awkward questions.

Inside Edge

A BROTHEL called "Club Nymph" has upset local authorities by sponsoring Galician lower league Spanish side Deportivo Carballo. The council withdrew funding after seeing the club's "sordid" emblem on the team's shirts. Brothel owner Aquilino Gonzalez defended his business. "We give a lot of trade to the region. Our ladies use the local butchers and the hairdressers. I don't want to do any harm, I give to the community."

A REFEREE caused uproar during a football match when he pulled out a pair of red knickers instead of his red card. Carlos Jose Figueira Ferro was attempting to send off a player during a game in Brazil when he made the faux pas. Even worse, Ferro's wife was at the game — and didn't recognise the lacy lingerie. The embarrassed official ended the game 20 minutes early and afterwards insisted he didn't know where the knickers had come from.

A CRICKETER standing in the outfield at a park in New Zealand's geo-thermal city of Rotorua slipped into a hot water spring when the ground collapsed beneath him last week. The unnamed player was taken to hospital and treated for burns to the leg, the Dominion Post reported. It quoted a council inspector for the city, which is in the centre of New Zealand's volcanic region, as saying the water was about seven degrees Celsius. "The poor bugger would have got a hell of a shock," he said.

PAT Symcox's comments are sometimes wider than anything he delivers as an international bowler. In Sunday's one-day match, he said the West Indies hadn't been in a winning position since "they left the Caribbean". On the contrary, the Windies were victorious when they played in Zimbabwe just before heading here — winning the limited overs series 3-2 and the Test series 1-0.

RAVI Rampaul's excellent penultimate over at the Wanderers on Wednesday (one run and the wicket of Jacques Kallis) revived memories of what is possibly the best "at the death" bowling by a South African in ODIs. At the Colonial Stadium in Melbourne in 2000, Andrew Hall bowled overs 45, 47 and 49 for figures of 3-0-8-2. The penultimate over, with Australia on 213/6 and needing 14 to win, went: dot, wicket (Bevan ct Boucher), dot, dot, single, wicket (S Waugh bowled). Hall's spell comprised two wickets, nine dot balls, six singles and a two. Australia now needed 13 from 6. In a nail-biting final over bowled by Shaun Pollock, he added 9 from 3 before losing Gillespie to a run out, and they needed two to win off the last ball. Warne's powerful straight drive hit the stumps at the bowler's end and yielded only a single. Match tied.

SO keen was one Essex supporter to have England fast bowler Darren Gough in his country side that he offered him the use of a private helicopter to fly him to and from his home in Milton Keynes so that he could play in matches. Whether or not millionaire Bob Weston's offer will be taken up was not made clear when the former Yorkshire player signed for Essex last week.

FIRST there was the Barmy Army, now there's the Wavy Navy. They are a new group of England cricket supporters who got together in Sri Lanka this season. They reckon they drink more and make more noise than the fabled Army. With England due to tour next summer, South African supporters may need to pack their earplugs when they go to games.

THERE'S nothing quite like losing to bring out the worst in sportsmen. Members of the Guyana cricket team, who have lost all their three matches in the Carib Cup, shocked onlookers in Dominica when a fracas broke out on the team bus after Mahendra Nagamootoo, Guyana's vice-captain, who has played for the West Indies, allegedly demanded that another player give up his seat. Nagamootoo, his brother Vishal and Lennox Cush were involved in an altercation and according to a local newspaper report the Nagamootoo brothers were threatened with arrest. Mahendra Nagamootoo and Cush were dropped from the next game.

DINGAAN Thobela this week donated shoes to the needy, which prompted one charity worker to comment to The Sowetan: "The man may look tough but he's soft inwardly." Actually, if you've seen the flabby former world champion without his shirt on in the past six years or so, you'd notice that he's also soft outwardly. Never mind, Dingaana, that was a great gesture anyway.

QUOTE of the week: "I'm at a disadvantage as a boxing promoter. I have no record of lying, stealing and cheating." — Lou DiBella in the New York Daily News.

THE SA Rugby Football Union website is not — how shall we put this? — the most informative on the planet. The following continued to appear on the site this week: "This campaign is a manifestation of our intent to make rugby the game of choice for South Africans from all walks of life. Through the campaign we will emphasize the progress that has been made in recent years to spread the game to new areas... we want to show rugby is easy to play and fun to be part of." It was attributed to "Sartu president Sllas Nkanunu". Who said SA rugby was in a time warp?

Ten things you didn't know about Irvin Khoza

- 1 A successful businessman, Khoza's initial wealth was amassed through property bonds and construction. He owns Kiptown's Freedom Square, a shopping centre he bought for R42-million. At one stage he was a director of more than 20 companies.
- 2 Khoza was born on January 27, 1948 in Alexandra, north of Johannesburg. His mother was a cleaner at the local clinic, but little is known about his father.
- 3 He seldom visits the Orlando Pirates dressing room, but he always does so when his team plays against their

- 4 long-time archrivals, Kaizer Chiefs.
- 4 He is hardly ever seen in public with his wife of many years, Elsie Matina.
- 5 For the past two years Khoza has driven a flashy BMW, courtesy of the car giant's sponsorship of the 2010 Cup bid. The registration number is 2010 GP.
- 6 Former NSL chief and Pirates director Cyril Kobus is one of his closest friends.
- 7 He likes eating traditional food, with spinach and pap

- 8 being among his favourite dishes.
 - 8 He was expelled from Fort Hare University, reportedly for his opposition to apartheid.
 - 9 At 14, he became the secretary of the Alexandra Football Association.
 - 10 He began his education at the Roma Mission School in Alexandra before attending Orlando High in Soweto.
- Compiled by Sazi Hadebe and Mzikazi wa Afrika