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to



*Text: Vata Ngobeni, Chief sport writer for the Pretoria News*

The name Tuks is easily recognisable when talking about the higher echelons of rugby, athletics, swimming and hockey and it does take two glances and some rubbing of the eyes to believe that they also appear on the Absa Premier League table.

Yes, the PSL log has the infamous name of Tuks amongst the 16 teams that fight it out to be crowned champions of Africa's most lucrative football league and while it might come as a surprise to many it doesn't to those that dared to dream of making Tuks a formidable force in domestic football.

It is by no stroke of luck that the University of Pretoria's football team are now rubbing shoulders with the best football clubs in the country and after years of blood, sweat and tears they are reaping the rewards of a dream that began in 2002.

It has been a meteoric rise for the Tuks Football Academy from their humble beginning plying their trade in the SAFA Gauteng South Division to now becoming Tshwane's third PSL team alongside glamour clubs Mamelodi Sundowns and SuperSport United.

The Tuks Football Academy made a wise move in 2003 to buy the second division status of Pretoria City FC and they went on to win the Vodacom League play-offs and were promoted to the national First Division the following year.

While their decade long journey to the top was easier than most clubs blueprint into the PSL, there was also the disappointment of stumbling at the end to qualify for the PSL earlier when they failed to progress beyond

the Mvela Golden League play-offs in the past three seasons.

But the dream edged ever so closer to reality when Tuks were the surprise package of the 2009 Nedbank Cup, South Africa's version of England's FA Cup, as their fairytale took them all the way to the final where they lost 1-0 to Moroka Swallows but not after claiming the prized scalp of the most decorated cup team in South Africa Kaizer Chiefs.

It was their success and rise that almost threatened their demise in the last few years as many of their star players were poached by the big spending PSL clubs and some abroad with the likes of Andile Jali (Orlando Pirates), Robyn Johannes (Mamelodi Sundowns, Orlando Pirates and Golden Arrows), Bongani Khumalo (SuperSport United, Tottenham Hotspurs, PAOK), George Maluleka (SuperSport United, Ajax Cape Town) and Lungisani Ndlela (Moroka Swallows, SuperSport United, Mamelodi Sundowns) leaving before the dream was realized.

However, under the guidance of head coach Steve Barker and assistant coach Sammy Troughton Tuks finally managed to gain promotion into the PSL after being crowned champions of the NFD last year.

The question beckons though if Tuks' dream will end in a nightmare with them being relegated back to the NFD or will they continue to live the dream beyond the 10 years of their existence?

Tuks Football Academy manager Steve Coetzee believes that Tuks can and will stay at the top as long as their youth system and academy continues to produce players for the senior

team.

"Attaining the PSL status has been a tremendous boost to the club and the junior teams are part of this incredible feeling. The promotion affects everything and it will help us attract more youngsters and players for the future," Coetzee told the Medalist. With over 1500 players in the academy, youth development programme and various teams from under 6 to under -19 including the hostel league for both boys and girls, Tuks can easily boast of being one of the biggest clubs in the country.

It is this endless stream of talent that will ensure that Tuks doesn't only grow into a formidable force in South African football but will continue to develop and produce world class players that will ply their trade in overseas leagues according to Coetzee.

"We have no choice but to up our game. the big thing in football is the ever increasing price one has to pay for players. Therefore the future of a club like ours will have to be in our youth programmes which will have a huge part to play in producing future players. We have been fortunate that we are able to bring players through at national age group level and it will be important going forward that we continue to draw from the resources of all our teams in the various local leagues we play in," Coetzee said.

