

EX CEO OUTLINES BAFANA PROBLEMS!

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2013-2018

Bafana Bafana's failure to qualify for the 2021 African Cup of Nations Cameroon has created the perfect storm for the South African Football Association (SAFA). SAFA's legendary poor governance structure and a sycophantic leadership core who has decimated its technical structures, has left it adrift in the proverbial rough seas of world football.

Faced with an overwhelming chorus of criticism for its failures, the leadership has once again buried itself underground and sent a hapless Technical Committee chair and a visibly reluctant CEO to announce the firing of the Head Coach – only to withdraw the termination a week later! The coach was fired in cloak and dagger style, with the SAFA President initiating a clandestine 'meeting' (aka a round-robin resolution) at 10 o'clock at night, where only certain members of the NEC were invited to participate in a vote without a debate properly informed by a Technical Committee report. This move came after a meeting between the coach and the SAFA President where the coach refused to tender his resignation.

Unsurprisingly, SAFA's leadership has pulled the trigger on the coach even faster than a hurricane can travel on the open ocean and long before the SAFA Technical Committee could render an informed assessment of the true nature of the problems facing the team.

SAFA is adrift in a tempestuous ocean of non-performance. It was inevitable that it would result in a hurricane of failure.

The football technical system has failed:

Firstly: The leadership has forgotten that SAFA has a well-thought out development plan that it has practically disavowed as of late. It is grounded in the development of a football philosophy, the creation of a talent pipeline, creation of a meaningful competitions structure, development of a strong coach education system, working with government to create the infrastructure for the sport, an understanding of how to deploy technology throughout the sport's value chain and a robust science and medical programme to ensure sustained success on the field of play. Applied correctly, these form the ingredients of a successful football culture anywhere in the world. Clearly, the leadership has not applied these principles correctly in recent years. Two hundred of the country's best football brains converged on SAFA House in June 2012 and applied a hermeneutical approach to the vexing question of the state of the country's football model. The result was a Technical Master Plan (TMP) that charted a path out of the storm, not with a nuclear bomb, but with a set of practical, measurable solutions to the underlying value system and causal factors that inhibited our international success.*

* Just 18 months later, the Technical Master Plan was later vainly rebranded as 'Vision 2022' in a masterful performance of intellectual misappropriation in furtherance of a narcissistic ideal to credit a single individual with a solution crafted by the country's collective technical minds – the coaches! This was done by adding



other non-technical elements to the plan (finance, administration, women's football, positive imaging, international affairs, commercial affairs and governance).

The axiological approach used by these coaches identified the principles and values that underpin the South African game and was meant to inform the SAFA leadership on the best way to extract value from the South African football condition.

The SAFA Technical Department then created a 3-legged football philosophy that brings together three uniquely African concepts: Ubuntu emphasizes a team-based approach to the game; Tsamaya recognizes the unique skill set of South African players, the flair and joyful expression that characterizes our local game, combined with Phakathi which sets a premium on scoring goals to win a game.

The Technical Department fused these three universal elements into a football philosophy that encompass 11 areas of detail that football educators must teach: Defensive Play, Offensive Play, Fast Transition, Defining Player Attributes, Technical/Tactical approaches, Physical Attributes of players, Understanding Social/Cultural Influences, Continuous Assessment of Trends & Challenges, Best Practice Implementation Mechanisms, a Sensible Coach Education Programme and a vibrant Talent Identification System are the 11 components that would fuse the 3 elements into a coherent football philosophy.

With support from the coaching fraternity, the SAFA Technical Department integrated the philosophy into the coaching curriculum, hired 18 Provincial Technical Directors (9 male and 9 female) to strengthen the talent ID programme for all genders, accelerated coach education (later significantly retarded by CAF's woeful inability to finalize its coaching curriculum) and otherwise set out to implement the TMP.

We must remember that Vision 2022's goal was to be consistently among the top 3 on the African continent and among the top 20 in the world! This has not happened!

Secondly: The leadership recently fired all 18 of its highly-trained Provincial Technical Officers responsible for coordinating its technical programs in the nine provinces.

Talent identification, coach education, provincial academies and provincial competitions structures have no meaningful coordination. Yet, one of the lasting lessons we learned over the years from the German example of their Euro 2000 failure was that these

academies were vital to the growth and development of the German game that turned them into World Cup winners within a 12-year period.

SAFA's financial problems are well-known:

But, SAFA fell victim to a catastrophic reputational crisis as far back as 2013 when PUMA exited for reputational reasons. It never recovered from the 2010 friendly match fixing scandal that precipitated PUMA's departure. Later, ABSA also floated away from the national team. This reputational crisis was further compounded by the in-fighting in the SAFA Presidency, the debilitating rape allegations against the President and a bruising election campaign in 2018. It drove the Association deeper into the reputational abyss.

Despite having the nation's most widely supported national team according to objective statistics, the Association has been unable to fully leverage that popularity to secure greater revenue, either through broadcast or sponsorship funding commensurate with the popularity of the team.

SAFA's funding shortfalls precipitated a perpetual underfunding of some of its most vital assets, the TMP / Vision 2022 included.

The football governance system has failed:

Thirdly: There is abundant evidence of Jordaan's governance failures. He tolerates no dissent in SAFA. There has not been an ordinary NEC meeting since September 2019. Decisions are made through extraordinary meetings convened for a narrowly defined purpose. 'Democracy' is practiced through Jordaan taking decisions and a compliant NEC ratifying it post facto, or through round-robin resolutions and midnight caucuses that exclude nearly half of the NEC. No serious discussion, no debate on important matters. Criticisms of this vacuous leadership style are routinely framed as attacks on the organization itself, evidence that the Presidential personality has become indistinguishable from that of the organization. Any criticism is routinely followed by name-calling and character assassination of critics. Moreover, every SAFA Vice-President elected since 2013 has been driven out of football or is in the process of being disciplined. Jordaan installed one Vice-President who made the most noise in defending his failures. He has been trying to expel another VP for almost a year and grudgingly accepted a third VP because it is a constitutional requirement. Two Members of the NEC stand suspended because

they dared to challenge his autocratic style. The SAFA constitution has been denuded to remove any semblance of good corporate governance. Political support, rather than technical competence, remains the key driver for a dysfunctional governance structure.

The pattern of denial is all too familiar: Bafana Bafana fails; the leadership blame the coach, who gets fired; they call a meeting that produces a mirepoix to give old solutions a new flavour; they give the newly flavoured broth a new name.

However, what has not changed is the system that gives rise to these repeated failures. Football talent is not our problem. Management of our football talent is our problem. The news pages are filled with horror stories of poor leadership, corporate governance failures, vehement denial of culpability and recrimination against those who dare to point out the veritable poison pills being fed to traumatized football supporters as a cure for the malady. SAFA's leaders have faced this seasonal hurricane by once more entrenching its handoff culture and firing the coach, then the leadership goes underground in the hope that the hurricane loses its steam when the ocean current cools down. The team's failure has relegated it to the ignominious position of occupying 25th place among African football nations with players from what is arguably the continent's best professional football league and a coterie of players from a variety of European leagues.

The haphazard firing of the coach symbolizes the SAFA leadership's failure to understand its own technical solutions. It manages an overly politicized governance system piloted by a leadership who is preoccupied with self-preservation and who has forgotten what fresh coffee (new ideas) smells like. Its antediluvian thinking is marked by its leader's comment last year that "We must go back to the basics. Kids must play small-sided football". Yet, SAFA's structures have been using the small-sided game for over two decades now and included this in its coaching curricula.

Talk about being out of touch and being clueless on how to deal with the problem!

Among the cacophony of voices calling for the coach's head, some familiar sounds have been heard calling for a complete reassessment of the technical orientation of South African football from grassroots to the professional level. What is the South African football philosophy, they ask. Why are coaches not trained to produce higher performing players that can compete with the best in the world?

The national team does not have a

full-time, experienced Team Manager – arguably the second most important position on a national team. It does not have a full medical and sport performance support team and relies on a brilliant, but overworked, Team Doctor and part-time physiotherapists. It has no permanent Sports Psychologist, a global scouting team or many of the other trappings common in other successful national teams. Funding does not permit these 'niceties'. And so the story goes!

The toxic cocktail of poor funding, poor corporate governance and poor technical decisions and team management creates its own vicious cycle of underperformance that will not be solved by merely firing the coach!

To make matters worse, even technical expertise within its own ranks is habitually ignored. One of the best technical minds in South Africa, Kaizer Motaung, is kept at arm's length because of an archaic, unwritten rule that the PSL's representation must be limited only to certain functions in SAFA. **The Technical Committee is still structured to represent geographical rather than technical diversity. Political structures beget political solutions.**

Given the funding shortfalls, reputational handicaps, technical incompetence, an overly politicized governance system and a narcissistic leadership, it is time for things to change at SAFA. Competent football and business practitioners must be put in place to steer an increasingly wobbly structure out of the path of the hurricane.

The solution will take some time to implement

Some remedies are short-term (give the national team proper support) and others are systemic and long-term (implement the Technical Master Plan with sincerity).

Placing SAFA's training system in the country's educational institutions where proper pedagogical techniques can be employed is now overdue.

This will render SAFA as the master licensor for the game similar to the legal profession. Training takes place in universities, but licensing is done by the Bar.

Suffice it to say that the stifling leadership style at SAFA is not conducive to implementing the things we already know should be done. Throw away the drawing board and build the vehicle already!!!