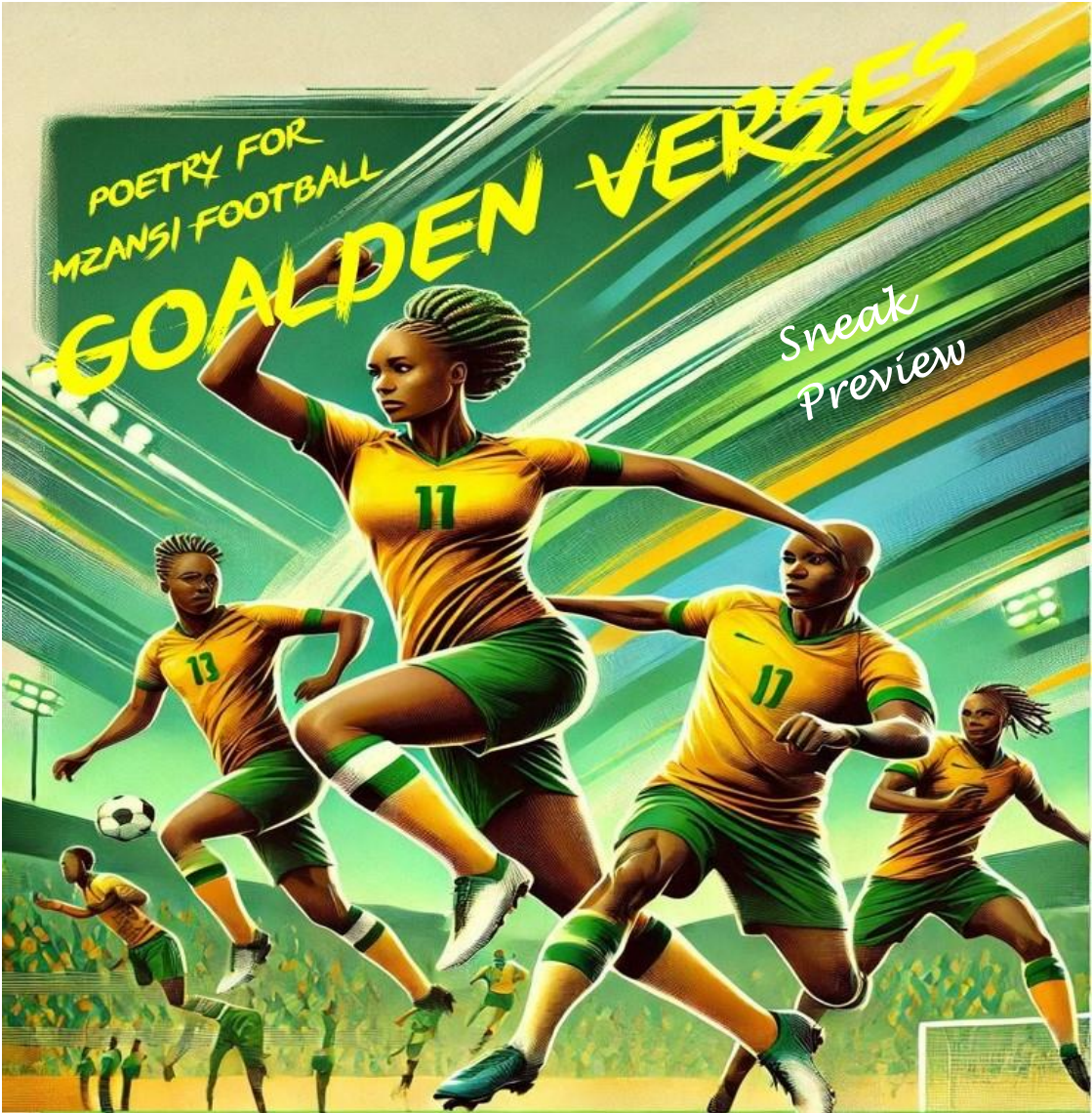


POETRY FOR
MZANSI FOOTBALL

GOALDEN VERSES

Sneak
Preview



DENNIS A. MUMBLE

Goalden Verses: Poetry for Mzansi Football

A Poetic Tribute to South African Football

Football is more than a game; it is the poetry of the human spirit — where every pass is a verse, every goal a crescendo, and every feat a solemn stanza in the ever-evolving story of hope, unity, and triumph.

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Golden Verses: The Poetry of Football.....

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Introduction

The porch of my modest apartment in Jersey City, New Jersey, became a theatre of imagination — a canvas where the world unfurled in these five-line mini poems called limericks, the delicate hues of evening light and the million breaths of fresh air I calmly inhaled after those rewarding days of nurturing the creative seeds in the minds of students each day. There, on the tree-lined Belmont Avenue, an island of peace between the bustling Bergen and Summit Avenues, and with the din of traffic barreling down Summit and the scent of a rain-soaked pavement lingering in the air, I would sit and scribble these magical limericks.

Simple, playful verses, their rhythm matched the cadence of my thoughts as I pondered the day helping previously disadvantaged students navigate their way through the daunting challenges that life in college hurled at them and after a tough workout in the gym with my ever-energetic training partner, the inimitable Captain Danny Farrell of the Newark Fire Department – the best gym partner ever!

Fast forward to 2022, as the historical echoes of the game that enthralled nations and transcended boundaries began to reverberate, I found myself reminiscing about the days of limerick writing and now contemplating how I can apply that to my football experience — the sport to which I had devoted the previous 25 years of my life, obsessing over its beauty and complexity.

Football, so universal yet profoundly personal, had always held a sacred corner of my heart. Through the hesitant initial few verses I scribbled while seated in my backyard in Johannesburg, I sought to distil the very essence of the game – its artistry, its triumphs, and its undeniable soul.

Those limericks, as modest as they may have been in their original form, were steeped in memories that reached back to my childhood in Schauder Township, Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha). My uncle Albert, the star goalkeeper for Hotspurs FC, became one of my earliest heroes. To this day, I think he was the best goalkeeper I have ever seen!

Hotspurs, our venerated local club, held many of its meetings in what I once believed to be our vast living room at 58 Phyllis Street. In truth, the space was no more than 12 square meters, but to a wide-eyed child watching the patriarchs of Northern Areas football — the charismatic Doc Moses and the fleet-footed George Hannie — strategize and dream, that room felt expansive, filled as it was with the magic of the game.

I remember how Mr. Hannie seemed to defy gravity, those bandy legs a blur as he danced across the field, the ball appearing as though magnetized to his feet. I marvelled at these men who turned the ordinary into the extraordinary, and in their shadow, my own love for the sport took root. Our lives revolved around the Moore Dyke fields, where my uncle Vivian “Gubby” Botha was the caretaker. Those fields were more than just grass and soil; they were arenas of joy, battle, and dreams.

One of my most cherished memories is tied to those fields — a black-and-white photograph, the only one of me as a child on my “trike”, taken against the backdrop of Paterson High School. My father, with his creative hands, later coloured the image in shades of green and other hues to bring the moment to life, immortalizing a snapshot of my youth intertwined with football. Even as I write this, I am transported back to those days of innocence and wonder, where the game was not just played but lived and breathed.

I began to look at the future of football. The game is ever-evolving, shaped by technological innovations, changing tactics, and new generations of players. My lines had speculated on what the future might hold, but poetry allowed me to dream boldly. I imagined a future where football continues to inspire, innovate, and unite. After writing a series of books, some about the dysfunction of football governance, I wanted to preserve the innocent motivations of that child at the Moore Dyke fields, mesmerised by the artistry of the George Hannies and Doc Moses' and Albert Jafthas of our beloved Schauder, the incubator of so many dreams, some achieved; others not.

But, I digress – as nostalgia often does; wandering like a ball passed from player to player, each touch revealing a new angle, a new story. It was this rich tapestry of experiences and emotions that inspired me to turn those limericks into the full-fledged poems you now hold in your hands. With a little impish assistance from ChatGPT, I sought to capture not only my own journey but the collective soul of football itself. This book is as much a tribute to the game as it is a reflection of the dreams, desires, and hopes that it has stirred in countless hearts across generations.

As the poems took shape, they began to explore the many dimensions of football that make it the global phenomenon it is. The beauty of the game came alive in verses celebrating the artistry and grace that players bring to the pitch. Football, at its core, is a dance of precision and elegance, a symphony of skill and movement that captivates millions. The legends and heroes who defined the sport also found their place in this collection, from local icons to global superstars whose stories inspire generations.

Rivalries and derbies added another layer of intensity and passion, their fiery clashes capturing the essence of what makes football so

compelling. And what is football without its fans and culture? The vibrancy of the game's supporters, their chants, traditions, and unwavering dedication, became a central theme, paying homage to those who live and breathe the sport.

The emotional spectrum of triumph and defeat also runs through this collection. From championship victories that unite a nation to the heartbreak of near-misses, these poems reflect the highs and lows that define football's drama. This is intertwined with national pride, exploring how football cultivates identity and unity, particularly in South Africa, where the game has been an enduring source of hope and resilience.

The global game is celebrated too, from grassroots programmes to the grand stage of the World Cup, showing football's unparalleled reach and ability to connect people across cultures and borders. Yet, the book does not shy away from the sport's shadows. Controversies and scandals are addressed, from governance failures to ethical challenges, offering a candid look at the imperfections that accompany football's glory.

Football's diversity and inclusion take centre stage in several poems, celebrating its power to break barriers and bring people together. And finally, the future of football is imagined, with verses dreaming of innovations, evolving tactics, and the next generation of players who will carry the sport forward.

Each poem in this collection is a heartfelt expression of love, born from nearly three years of start-stop-restart writing. I don't claim to be a poet — far from it! This collection of rhymes has a deeper purpose: showcasing the captivating sport of football. Through these verses, I

hope to have captured the essence of the game — its beauty, its passion, its triumphs, and its struggles.

This is more than just a book of poems; it is a tribute to the game that has brought joy to millions and transformed lives around the world. It is also a deeply personal testament to my own perseverance, a celebration of my journey through more than two decades in football, overcoming countless challenges along the way.

As I sit in front of my computer now, pounding on the faded keyboard, and with the harsh, resonant "haa-haa-haa-de-dah" of those noisy hadedas that scared Floyd Mayweather early in the morning, in my ears, I am filled with gratitude. Gratitude for the game that has given me so much, for the limericks that sparked this journey, and for the technology that helped bring these poems to life.

And so, this eclectic book of poetry was born. I could not choose just one theme but found myself drawn to those subjects that evoked some sentimental connection in the moment in which they were conceived: People I was honoured to meet; events I was fortunate to be part of; thoughts that I had mulled over in my mind for long. All of these form part of this tribute.

No offense meant to other legends I've met
The players, officials I'll never forget
There's no rhyme or reason, no grand design
For the chosen subjects within these verses of mine

Inspired by moments, a spark, a thought
By limericks penned or feelings caught
Whatever stirred me, in heart or in hand
Found its way to this book, unplanned

This book is as much about the poetry, the game, as well as the stories that encapsulate the singular experience of a lifelong immersion in the sport; the backdrop to a poetic canvass, alive with the spirit that engulfs all who partake in it. And so, each chapter tells a story that inspired a limerick, which in turn cascaded into an inspirational poem. Enjoy the read!

1. Football – A Funky Delight

This poem is an ode to the entertainment value and cultural significance of football, capturing the joyous and light-hearted essence of the game. At its heart, the poem celebrates football as more than just a sport; it is a dynamic performance, a vibrant spectacle that fuses athleticism, artistry, and rhythm in a way that resonates with fans and players alike. The poem draws on the energy of the game to illustrate how football's funky rhythms mirror those found in popular culture, particularly in the performing arts and on the dance floor. It uses football's movements — dribbles, passes, goals, and celebrations — as metaphors for dance, highlighting how the beautiful game can captivate, entertain, and inspire, much like a well-choreographed performance.

The light-hearted tone of the poem is a reflection of the joy that football brings, both to those who play it and to those who watch it. Just as a dancer glides and spins to the beat of a funky rhythm, so too do the players on the pitch, their footwork an intricate choreography that combines athleticism with grace. The poem draws this parallel, illustrating that football, like dance, has a rhythm and flow all its own. The ball becomes the star of the show, the players its crew, each one contributing to a symphony of skill that creates a spectacle of movement, energy, and passion. Through playful language and vibrant imagery, the poem transports us into the heart of the game, where football is as much about the fun and flair as it is about competition.

Football's cultural significance is not just limited to its physicality but also to the emotions it stirs in fans and communities around the world. The poem emphasizes the sense of togetherness and unity that football cultivates, with the rhythm of the game mirrored in the rhythmic pounding of the fans' chants and cheers. In this way, the football pitch becomes a dancefloor, where the crowd and the players are

participants in an interconnected performance. The collective energy and enthusiasm of the spectators add a layer of excitement, transforming a mere match into a shared cultural experience. The interplay between the players' movements and the crowd's reactions creates a living, breathing event — one that is both a celebration of sport and of human connection.

The poem positions football as a universal language, one that transcends borders and speaks to the heart of everyone who watches it. The reference to “idiski”, evokes a vibrant South African cultural rhythm, highlights the fusion of football with local and global artistic expressions. Just as a dancer expresses emotions through movement, football players convey passion and spirit through their play. Whether it's the finesse of a step-over, the excitement of a long shot, or the exuberance of a celebration, football resonates with the same energy that fuels music and dance. It becomes a performance, a show where every move is an act of artistry, and every goal is a moment of magic.

In its essence, this poem reminds us that football, like the performing arts, is an entertainment experience. It captivates and delights, drawing people in with its rhythms, its flair, and its infectious energy. It is a game that brings joy, unity, and excitement — an experience that transcends the ordinary, much like a great musical performance or a lively dance on the floor. Through its funky rhythms and playful spirit, this poem celebrates football as a cultural phenomenon, one that is as much about entertainment and connection as it is about sport.

Football – A Funky Delight

The beauty of football does shine
Its rhythm and groove so divine
With footwork so fair
And skill beyond compare
It's a dance on the pitch every time

The ball is the star, the players its crew
They glide and they spin, with moves so true
The slick passes, the acrobatic kicks
It's a symphony of skill, a show that sticks

The pitch is the dancefloor, alive with sound
As fans cheer and chant, in a rhythmic pound
The players, like maestros, conducting the show
With dazzling displays, from head to toe

The artistry of football, a visual delight
With step-overs, shibobos, and goals so bright
The precision, the power of the long shot
A dribble and dazzle, that just hits the spot

It's not just the fitness, or the skill
It's the togetherness, the team's collective will
The unity in purpose, and the chase for fame
As they play with heart, for the love of the game

So let's celebrate the beautiful game
With funky flair, and our rhythmic flame
For in the world of idiski, there's magic in the air
A captivating symphony, beyond compare

2. Rivalries and Derbies

This poem was inspired by the rich, vibrant history and the undying passion surrounding South Africa's most storied football rivalries. At the heart of it is the enduring feud between Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates, a rivalry that transcends mere competition and encapsulates the pride, identity, and sense of community that these clubs bring to millions of fans. This iconic clash represents more than just football; it is a cultural phenomenon that reflects the struggles, triumphs, and evolution of South African society.

The rivalry dates back to 1970 when Kaizer Motaung broke away from Orlando Pirates to establish Kaizer Chiefs, creating deep divisions and fierce animosity between the two clubs. Matches between the Soweto giants became emotionally charged affairs, epitomizing a battle for supremacy that often divided neighbourhoods, families, and communities. Fans lived and breathed the intensity of these derbies, with their emotions rising and falling with each whistle blown on the pitch. At times, the fervour spilled over, leading to tragedy, like the tragic Ellis Park stampede of 2001, which claimed 43 lives. Yet, even in the face of such sorrow, this rivalry continued to unite millions in a shared love for the game, creating a narrative of resilience and hope.

Irvin Khoza and Kaizer Motaung, two towering figures in South African football, played a pivotal role in transforming this rivalry from a divisive clash into a symbol of unity and mutual respect. By the mid-90s, the two elder statesmen recognized that the future of South African football depended on collaboration and a shared vision. This realization culminated in the formation of the Premier Soccer League (PSL) in 1996, an event that reshaped the culture of the sport. They traded hostility for a more constructive rivalry, one that celebrated competition without undermining the collective goal of developing football in South Africa. Their leadership demonstrated how even the fiercest of opponents could work together for the greater good.

The arrival of Mamelodi Sundowns added another dimension to South Africa's football narrative. Known for their attractive, flair-filled style of play, Sundowns rose to prominence as a challenger to the dominance of the Soweto giants. Their emergence brought a new competitive edge to the league and raised the stakes, adding to the spectacle and history of South African football. These rivalries – Chiefs versus Pirates, Pirates versus Sundowns, and Chiefs versus Sundowns – created unforgettable moments of joy, heartbreak, and drama, showcasing the best and worst of football's passions.

The motivation for this poem lies in the profound influence these rivalries have had on South African football and society. It reflects on the emotional highs and lows experienced by fans, the historical and cultural significance of these clubs, and the way football provides a stage for both individual and collective expression. Through moments of greatness and adversity, rivalries like Chiefs and Pirates have come to define the very soul of the sport, instilling pride and passion across generations. This poem is a tribute to the legacy of these teams, their rivalries, and the indelible mark they have left on the South African football landscape.

Rivalries and Derbies

From Phefeni, Orlando, and Mamelodi
Where the sun burns bright and the streets are so gritty
A game that unites all
Black, white, yellow, big, and small
As Chiefs, Pirates, and 'Downs battle with no pity

Chiefs, Pirates, long the kings of the game
A rivalry, a fire that burns with an eternal flame
With histories as rich and deep as the land
Fighting for a title with feet and a nimble 'keeper's hand

From humble beginnings, Pirates were born
The brainchild of a man with a vision, a dream torn
From the ravages of apartheid's grip
His team would rise, their spirit never to slip

Chiefs also has a story to tell
A team of rebels who refused to dwell
On the limitations their society imposed
They fought for the game, their passion exposed

For decades these two titans battled on
The highs and lows, the victories and the dawn
Of a new era in South African football lore
As 'Downs arrived, knocking on the door

'Downs brought with them a different style
Their dominance undeniable, their game with a smile
The team to beat, their players a sight to behold
Their fans rejoicing as the championships unfold

Chiefs and Pirates still fight the good fight
Their fans unwavering, their passion a bright light
But 'Downs have taken the top spot
Their reign of glory, seemingly impossible to stop

So the rivalry continues, a fierce and fiery clash
Chiefs and Pirates still fighting with heart and lash
But 'Downs' star burns bright, their greatness on display
A new chapter in South African football, ready to play.

3. On Integrity

Integrity is the soul of football — a virtue so central to the sport that without it, the beautiful game would lose its essence, purpose, and meaning. It is the invisible thread that binds players, officials, coaches, and fans to a common moral ground, transcending mere rules to embody fairness, respect, and justice. At every level of the sport — on the field, in the boardroom, or even in the stands — integrity is what elevates football beyond mere entertainment into a powerful force for unity, hope, and inspiration. It ensures that the game remains a celebration of human potential, untouched by the stains of dishonesty, greed, and corruption.

The concept of integrity is not a lofty ideal; it is a necessary reality for football to thrive as a global phenomenon that inspires billions. The integrity of an official deciding on a crucial penalty, the fairness of a coach in selecting players based on merit, the transparency of administrators managing football resources — these moments define the character of the sport. They reveal whether football is truly reflective of humanity's better nature or a victim of its darker tendencies.

At its heart, integrity is about honesty and accountability. It is the official who resists the temptation to manipulate the outcome of a match, even when offered riches that could change their life. It is the administrator who prioritizes the development of grassroots football over personal gain, ensuring that resources reach young players in underserved communities. It is the coach who selects a starting eleven based on skill and form rather than favouritism, nepotism, or bribes. These are the everyday acts of integrity that keep the game alive, ensuring its legacy as a source of joy, pride, and unity.

Yet, integrity is not just the absence of wrongdoing; it is the presence of courage. It is the moral fortitude to stand firm in the face of adversity and temptation, to make decisions that may not be popular but are undoubtedly right. It is the whistle-blower who exposes corruption within football's governing bodies, even at great personal cost. It is the player who admits to a handball that the referee missed, forfeiting a potential goal in the name of fairness. It is the fan who condemns unsportsmanlike behaviour, even when it benefits their team. These examples demonstrate that integrity is not passive; it is an active, deliberate commitment to preserving the purity of the sport. Integrity is at the heart of the FIFA Fair Play Code.

The necessity of integrity becomes even more profound in the realm of football governance. Officials at the highest levels hold immense power — the power to shape the direction of leagues, allocate resources, and influence the future of the sport. Without integrity, this power becomes a weapon of exploitation rather than a tool for progress. History has shown how corruption in football governance leads to scandals that tarnish the sport's reputation, disenfranchise players and fans, and divert resources away from development. It is only through the steadfast commitment to ethical principles that football's leaders can ensure that the game remains a source of inspiration rather than disillusionment.

Ethically, integrity aligns with the principles of justice, fairness, and respect for others. Morally, it reflects the highest ideals of humanity — a commitment to truth, a rejection of greed, and a willingness to sacrifice personal gain for the greater good. Philosophers and ethicists from Aristotle to Kant have emphasized the importance of integrity as the cornerstone of a virtuous life, a principle that applies as much to football as it does to any other sphere of human endeavour. Football officials, players, and fans are stewards of the game, entrusted with its legacy. To

betray that trust through dishonesty or selfishness is to betray the very spirit of football.

Integrity in football also has a profound societal impact. The sport has the power to influence millions of people, shaping attitudes and behaviours both on and off the pitch. When football is played and managed with integrity, it becomes a model for society, demonstrating the values of fairness, teamwork, and respect. It teaches young players that success is not just about skill but also about character. It shows fans that greatness is achieved through hard work and ethical behaviour, not shortcuts or deceit. In this way, integrity in football contributes to a broader culture of honesty and accountability, extending its influence far beyond the confines of the stadium.

However, the preservation of integrity requires vigilance. The world of football is not immune to the pressures of greed, power, and ambition. Corruption scandals, match-fixing, and favouritism have all threatened the sport's moral foundation. It is therefore the responsibility of every stakeholder — players, officials, administrators, and fans — to guard against these threats. This means creating systems of accountability, promoting transparency in decision-making, and instilling a culture that values ethical behaviour over personal gain.

At its best, football is a microcosm of life — a stage where human virtues and vices are put on full display. Integrity ensures that this stage remains a platform for the celebration of humanity's better nature. It is the guiding principle that allows the game to fulfil its potential as a force for good in the world. Without it, football would be reduced to a spectacle devoid of meaning, a hollow pastime where victory is tainted, and achievement is robbed of its true value.

This poem on integrity seeks to capture the profound importance of this virtue in football. It is a call to action for all who love the game to honour its soul by upholding the principles of honesty, fairness, and accountability. It is a reminder that football, at its core, is more than just a game — it is a reflection of humanity's greatest potential, a celebration of what we can achieve when we play with integrity. The poem is a tribute to the unseen heroes of the sport, those who prioritize what is right over what is easy, and a reflection on the sacrifices and rewards of living and playing with integrity.

A Poem About Integrity

Integrity in football, a trait so grand
A virtue that we all understand
It's the game's solid base
Without it, we face
A sport that won't firmly stand

From the pitch to the boardroom
Integrity must grow, in full bloom
To ensure the game is played in fairness
And maintain the globe's awareness

From referees to players, to administration
Integrity must prevent their machination
To uphold the values of the game
And keep it pure, without any shame

It's not just about following the rules
But doing what's right, and not what fools
To stand up against corruption and deceit
And keep the game honest, with no retreat

For without integrity, the game is lost
A trophy with no value, at an impossible cost
It's a promise we make to the fans
To keep the game clean, without any bans

4. Ethics in Football

Ethics, like integrity, is an indispensable pillar of good governance in football, providing the moral compass that guides decisions, actions, and policies at every level of the sport. It is not merely about adherence to rules and regulations but about embodying the spirit of fair play, respect, accountability, and the pursuit of justice. Ethics transcends the written codes; it is the unwritten, enduring foundation of trust that unites players, coaches, officials, and fans in their shared love of the game. It ensures that football remains more than just a sport — it is a model of humanity's capacity for fairness, unity, and excellence.

Ethics in football governance is multidimensional, encompassing personal values, organizational conduct, and societal expectations. Ethical decision-making requires a firm commitment to doing what is right, even when faced with challenges, temptations, or conflicting interests. In this context, ethics intersects with integrity, as the two virtues form a dynamic partnership that underpins good governance. While integrity focuses on the steadfast adherence to moral principles, ethics explores the broader framework of values and norms that shape those principles, drawing on philosophy, culture, and universal human ideals.

It helps to understand how to govern football with the highest degree of morality and fairness. We can gain deeper insight into the ethical challenges and solutions that arise in football governance:

In my previous work, *Managing Football Part One* (p153) I devote a full chapter to the intersection of ethics, morality and integrity in football, focusing on the different schools of ethics, which bears repeating here in brief:

The deontological school of ethics (duty-based ethics), championed by Immanuel Kant, emphasizes the importance of adhering to moral duties and principles, regardless of the consequences. In football governance, deontological ethics underscores the necessity of following rules and regulations with unwavering consistency. For example, applying financial fair play regulations equally to all clubs, regardless of their influence or resources, reflects a deontological commitment to justice. It ensures that football remains a level playing field, free from favouritism or corruption.

In turn, the Consequentialism (utilitarian ethics), as articulated by philosophers like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, focuses on maximizing overall happiness or well-being. In football, this approach emphasizes decisions that benefit the greatest number of stakeholders. For instance, prioritizing grassroots development programmes over lavish executive perks ensures that resources are directed toward developing and nurturing young talent and promoting inclusivity, benefiting entire communities. SAFA's 47-member executive committee, the largest in the world, is an extreme example of this approach. Similarly, ethical governance informed by consequentialism might lead to decisions that enhance the sport's accessibility to underprivileged regions, thereby promoting social equity.

Virtue Ethics is rooted in the teachings of Aristotle. It prioritizes the cultivation of moral character and virtues such as honesty, courage, and empathy. In football governance, this school of thought calls for leaders who embody these virtues, setting an example for others to follow. A virtuous football administrator demonstrates transparency in financial dealings, fairness in resolving disputes, and compassion in addressing the needs of players, coaches, referees and fans. With virtue at its core, governance becomes not just a matter of rules but a reflection of humanity's highest ideals.

Ethics of care, emerges from feminist philosophy and emphasizes relationships, empathy, and the importance of nurturing the well-being of others. In football, this perspective is particularly relevant in areas such as player welfare, fan engagement, and community outreach. Ethical governance informed by the ethics of care might focus on protecting players from exploitation, addressing mental health challenges, and ensuring safe working conditions for those involved in the sport. It also involves promoting an inclusive environment where diversity is celebrated, and everyone — regardless of gender, race, or background — feels valued.

Social Contract Theory was inspired by thinkers like Rousseau and Locke. It emphasizes the importance of agreements that promote the common good. In football, this translates to upholding the implicit contract between all stakeholders: fans, players, officials, and governing bodies. Ethical governance ensures that decisions reflect the shared values and expectations of this collective, promoting trust and cooperation. For instance, ensuring that match-fixing or corruption scandals are swiftly and transparently addressed maintains the social contract that binds fans to the game.

Ethical governance in football is not an abstract ideal but a tangible reality that manifests in decision-making, leadership, and policies. Football has long promoted ethics in governance through the following policies:

- Financial fair play regulations, although not without controversy, represent an effort to uphold financial integrity in football, ensuring that clubs operate within their means. By addressing the issue of financial doping, the regulations aim to create a fairer and more sustainable environment for all stakeholders.
- Grassroots development prioritizes investment in grassroots programmes, recognizing that football's future depends on nurturing young talent. Initiatives that provide access to quality

coaching, facilities, and opportunities for underprivileged youth exemplify the ethical commitment to inclusivity and social equity.

- Ethical governance ensures that player safety and well-being are prioritized over commercial interests. Player welfare policies, from addressing the risks of concussion to supporting mental health, policies that limit the number of games players can participate in within a season reflect a commitment to their long-term health.
- Anti-Discrimination initiatives such as FIFA's "Say No to Racism" campaign and the Premier League's support for LGBTQ+ inclusion demonstrate how ethical leadership can challenge societal injustices. These efforts remind us that football has the power to promote equality and challenge prejudice on a global scale.
- Ethical leadership demands transparency in decision-making and financial dealings. Ensuring that governing bodies operate with openness and accountability ensures trust and confidence among stakeholders, from fans to sponsors.

Ethics, integrity, and morality are deeply interconnected in football governance. Integrity is the unwavering commitment to ethical principles, while morality provides the foundation for determining what is right and wrong. Together, they form the cornerstone of ethical governance, ensuring that football remains a force for good in society. They remind us that success achieved at the expense of fairness, honesty, or respect is not true success at all.

Through this poem, the countless individuals who embody ethics in their actions are recognised: players who reject unsportsmanlike behaviour; coaches who prioritize their players' well-being; and administrators who place the greater good above personal gain. It is a celebration of the enduring power of ethics to elevate football beyond a sport into a symbol of humanity's highest ideals. Ethics, like the game itself, inspires us to dream, to strive, and to believe in the possibility of a virtuous sport.

Ethics in Football

Ethics in football, a shining light
A guide that keeps the game upright
It's more than the rules
But wisdom for fools
To choose what is just and what's right

From the pitch to the boardroom halls
Ethics must echo within these walls
To treat each rival with respect profound
And keep the sport on a firm moral ground

It's about playing with honour and grace
Ensuring fairness has its place
Not chasing glory by means unjust
But earning triumph through acts of trust

For ethics in football reaches far and wide
It's the spirit that guides, the soul and pride
Inspiring youth with values so clear
Of courage, respect, and hearts sincere

From grassroots clubs to the global stage
Ethics must drive this sporting age
Building a culture of trust and care
And ensuring the game is always fair

So let us stand for ethics as our creed
In every choice, in every deed
For in the end, it's more than the score
It's the values we honour, forevermore

5. A Tribute to the Legends

The motivation for recognizing the legends of football, or any sport, lies in the profound connection they create between the past, present, and future of the game. Honouring those who have built the sport to its current glory is not merely an act of nostalgia — it is a vital acknowledgment of the sacrifices, triumphs, and contributions that shaped the sport into what it is today. These legends are more than individuals; they are symbols of resilience, dedication, and excellence, whose stories serve as a source of inspiration for generations to come.

Football, like all sports, thrives on a narrative that is bigger than the present moment. Legends are the custodians of this narrative, bridging eras and preserving the essence of the game. Their achievements on the field and their influence off it remind us that greatness is not achieved in isolation but is built on the foundation of those who came before. Recognizing their contributions honours the very spirit of the sport, emphasizing its continuity and evolution. These individuals not only carried the dreams of their teams but also became cultural icons, embodying the aspirations of their communities and nations.

There is a profound psychological and social value in celebrating legends. For current and future generations, these icons are beacons of possibility. Their stories of triumph over adversity, their discipline, and their passion show what is achievable through hard work and determination. They serve as role models, encouraging young players to dream bigger, work harder, and aspire to greatness. In recognizing legends, the sport sets a standard of excellence and instils a sense of accountability and ambition in those who seek to follow in their footsteps.

Honouring legends also creates a deeper emotional connection between the sport and its fans. When their stories are preserved and celebrated, the game maintains its cultural significance and strengthens its bond with the

community. It becomes a reminder that football is not just about the goals scored or the trophies won but about the people who shaped its soul. This recognition instils a sense of pride and belonging among fans, who see their own values and aspirations reflected in the achievements of the legends.

Additionally, acknowledging the contributions of legends ensures that their legacy remains a living part of the sport. It becomes a source of inspiration not only for players but also for administrators, coaches, and fans to uphold the principles of fair play, integrity, and dedication. Legends teach us that greatness is not just about skill but about character, leadership, and the ability to unite people through the love of the game.

In honouring those who have helped build the sport, football pays tribute to its own history while paving the way for its future. It reminds us that the game's glory is a shared achievement, a tapestry woven by countless individuals who gave their all for the sport. By keeping their stories alive, the game ensures that its legacy continues to inspire, challenge, and uplift, creating a bridge between past triumphs and future possibilities, whilst balancing the present. This acknowledgment is not only a celebration of the legends but also a promise to preserve and elevate the game they helped shape for generations to come.

A Tribute to the Legends

The legends of Mzansi stand tall
Their names in the annals we call
From Jomo to Kaizer
Their legacy's wiser
Their impact unites us all

With Ace's skill and finesse
And Tovey's leadership, nothing less
Rhoo's determination and heart
And Shoes' artistry, a work of art

Moeti's toughness and agility
And Fish's power and ability
Thabang Lebese's precision and aim
And Steve Khompela's passion, always aflame

And Spiderman's heroics, a sight to behold
As he defends the goal, brave and bold
These legends gave their blood, sweat, and tears
On the field of play, for Mzansi's cheers

Their legacy, a testament to the game
Their triumphs and struggles, forever to remain
For they held the country's name up high
Achieving greatness, with every try

So let's pay tribute to these legends of old
Whose stories of greatness, forever to be told
Their impact on the game, forever enshrined
For they inspired a nation, and forever shined

6. An Ode to Desiree Ellis

Desiree Ellis' journey is a remarkable testament to resilience, dedication, and the transformative power of sport. Born and raised in Salt River, Cape Town, her love for football defied the societal norms of the time. In an era when football was largely seen as a male domain, Ellis's determination to carve a path in the sport showed a fierce passion that could not be dimmed. Her early days of sneaking out to play the game reflected the drive and ambition that would later define her career.

As a player, she was a tenacious and skilful midfielder, whose intelligence on the field made her a pivotal figure in Banyana Banyana's formative years. Her leadership shone brightly as she captained the team and earned 32 caps, leading South Africa to victories that united and inspired a nation. Her accomplishments as a player laid a strong foundation, but it was her transition to coaching that truly solidified her legacy.

Ellis' humility and hunger for learning saw her take every opportunity to grow in her new role as a coach. With dedication, she pursued advanced coaching qualifications and sought out knowledge from global coaching programmes, blending her on-field experience with cutting-edge techniques. Her rise to the position of Head Coach of Banyana Banyana was not just logical but inevitable. She carried the trust of her predecessor, Vera Pauw, and the admiration of her peers, and she proved herself time and again with her ability to inspire and lead.

Under her guidance, Banyana Banyana achieved historic milestones, including their first Women's Africa Cup of Nations victory and their progression beyond the group stages of the FIFA Women's World Cup. These accomplishments are not just wins for the team but breakthroughs for South African football as a whole, bringing pride and hope to millions. Ellis embodies the principles of perseverance, humility, and passion —

qualities that have made her a trailblazer and a role model for future generations.

Her story is about more than football; it's about breaking barriers, uplifting communities, and showing the world what is possible when dedication meets opportunity. Her journey inspires young girls and boys alike to dream beyond societal constraints and strive for excellence. The poem that follows is a celebration of Desiree Ellis's extraordinary life, her contributions to the sport, and the legacy she continues to build for South Africa and the world.

An Ode to Desiree Ellis

In Salt River's arms, a girl dreamed away
Of fields where the boys would skilfully play
With a ball at her feet
And a rhythm so sweet
She imagined dazzling the Mother City every single day

Sneaking from school to join the game's play
Defying the norms that stood in her way
A midfielder's heart, both tenacious and skilled
In the face of adversity, her spirit was steeled

At thirty, she donned her nation's crest
Leading with passion, among Africa's best
COSAFA triumph, a victory grand
Her legacy etched in South Africa's land

Retirement came, but her journey anew
To coaching she turned, with horizons to pursue
From badges of CAF to FIFA's great halls
She answered the sport's most demanding calls

Mentor and guide, with knowledge amassed
Honouring the legends and lessons of the past
Under her watch, Banyana's ascent
To continental glory, their talents were lent

A World Cup milestone, history made
Through challenges faced and fears allayed

An honorary doctorate, accolades earned
For a path of passion, where her spirit burned

Desiree Ellis, a name that inspires
A beacon to all with dreams and desires
From Salt River's streets to the world's grandest stage
Her story's a triumph, a luminous page

7. An Ode to Doctor Khumalo

This poem celebrates the life and legacy of Doctor Khumalo, one of South Africa's most iconic football figures. Known for his unmatched skill, tactical intelligence, and charisma, Khumalo remains a beacon of inspiration in the history of South African football. His story exemplifies not only the beauty of the game but also the transformative power of dedication, passion, and leadership.

As a player, Doctor Khumalo was a magician on the pitch. His ability to read the game, execute visionary passes, and mesmerize opponents with his dribbling made him a standout talent. Whether wearing the colours of Kaizer Chiefs or representing South Africa on the international stage, Khumalo carried the hopes of the nation, particularly during the early days of post-apartheid football. His contributions to Bafana Bafana's historic 1996 Africa Cup of Nations triumph remain etched in the hearts of South Africans as a moment of pride and unity.

However, Khumalo's impact extended far beyond his playing days. After retiring from professional football, he transitioned into coaching and mentorship, dedicating himself to nurturing the next generation of players. His ability to inspire and guide young talent has left an indelible mark on South African football, ensuring that his influence continues to shape the game for years to come. Khumalo's journey from a player to a mentor underscores the importance of passing on knowledge and promoting growth within the sport.

The poem also highlights Khumalo's charisma and humanity. Off the field, he was as beloved as he was on it, captivating fans with his humility and charm. His role as a cultural icon transcended football, making him a symbol of hope and possibility for countless South Africans. Khumalo's story is a testament to how sport can unite and inspire, breaking barriers and creating lasting legacies.

In honouring Doctor Khumalo, this poem captures the essence of a man who devoted his life to the beautiful game. It celebrates his artistry on the pitch, his dedication to mentorship, and his enduring influence on South African football. More than a tribute, it is a reminder of the power of talent, passion, and humility to leave an everlasting impact on a sport and a nation.

An Ode to Doctor Khumalo

On fields of gold, where dreams took flight
A figure emerged, shining so bright
Doctor Khumalo, a star
A maestro by far
His brilliance a dazzling light

With the ball at his feet, he wove his art
Dribbling past defenders, tearing them apart
His passes were poetry, his vision profound
A genius on the pitch, where magic was found

The crowd would roar, the nation would rise
To witness his flair under South African skies
A talisman for Chiefs, a legend for Bafana
He carried the hopes of Mzansi with honour

Off the field, his charisma would shine
A man of the people, with a heart divine
Humble and grounded, yet larger than life
An icon who transcended the game's strife

As his playing days faded, his passion endured
A mentor, a teacher, his purpose assured
Nurturing talent, shaping the game
Passing the torch, building his name

For Doctor, it's more than a sport
It's a legacy of dreams, where hearts are caught
A legend forever, in football's embrace
His spirit immortal, no time can erase

8. An Ode to Stanley “Screamer” Tshabalala

Stanley “Screamer” Tshabalala was more than just a football coach; he was a cultural force, a storyteller, and a symbol of South Africa's enduring passion for the beautiful game. This poem is an attempt to capture the essence of a man whose contributions to football extended far beyond the touchline. From inventing the “shoeshine and piano” style of play—an approach that celebrated skill, nimbleness, and artistry—to becoming one of the first coaches of South Africa's national team, Bafana Bafana, Screamer embodied the spirit of football as an art form and a unifying force.

The inspiration for this poem arose from the many dimensions of his character and life. Screamer was a man of contrasts that complemented one another perfectly: humorous yet deeply respectful, humble yet larger-than-life, a family man who was equally devoted to his friends and the broader football community. His legacy is woven into the fabric of South African football, not just because of his tactical genius, but also because of his immense heart and charisma. Screamer's ability to connect with people, whether through his impassioned storytelling or his profound respect for everyone he met, left an indelible mark on those fortunate enough to know him.

This poem seeks to reflect the many facets of Screamer's life and legacy. It celebrates the magic he created on the pitch through his shoeshine and piano philosophy, a style of play that prioritized beauty, rhythm, and flair—qualities that define football at its most enchanting. It pays homage to his deep respect for relationships, especially the brotherly bond he shared with Dr. Irvin Khoza, and his unwavering dedication to his family and friends. Through imagery and verse, the poem captures Screamer's unique ability to captivate audiences, whether they were gathered around him in person or listening to him on television. His swaying legs and radiant smile as he

recounted the history of South African football became iconic, embodying his role as a keeper of the game's soul.

But the poem also carries an emotional weight, as it reflects on the profound loss caused by his tragic and unjust passing. The stanza added to commemorate the cruel and heartless act that took his life serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of greatness in a world that often fails to cherish its most luminous figures. It mourns the senseless loss while reaffirming that the legacy of a man like Screamer cannot be diminished by any act of violence. His spirit continues to inspire, and his contributions to the game remain a treasure for generations to come.

Ultimately, this poem is a celebration of Stanley "Screamer" Tshabalala's life—a life dedicated to the artistry of football, the power of storytelling, and the beauty of human connection. It is a tribute to the man who inspired so many, a man whose laughter, passion, and wisdom will echo in the halls of South African football forever. By immortalizing his story in verse, this poem aims to ensure that Screamer's light continues to shine brightly, even in the face of loss, and that his name remains synonymous with the beauty of the game he loved so deeply.

An Ode to Stanley “Screamer” Tshabalala

Oh, Screamer, a name carved in football gold
A master of his art, his example will never grow old
With nimble feet and a sharp, wise mind
He dazzled the crowd, his skills supremely defined
A legend of the game, his story forever to be told

A style of play, sublime and divine
Skilful and swift, like poetry in rhyme
The shoeshine’s sparkle, the piano’s grace
A symphony of football in time and space

The humour you carried, a gift to all
Your laughter could lift, your spirit enthrall
A library of stories, a keeper of lore
South Africa’s history in your heart you bore

Oh, humble man, with a respectful soul
A family’s pillar, a heart so whole
A brotherly bond with The Duke you shared
A friendship enduring, deeply cared

First among coaches, you led with pride
Bafana Bafana, your beacon, your guide
You taught with passion, you led with heart
A teacher, a father, a maestro of art

Loved by many, adored by all
Your heart was immense, your spirit stood tall
A listener so keen, a storyteller supreme
We hung on your words, your vision, your dream

When you got in your groove, oh, what a sight
Those legs swayed gently, left to right
With each story told, you brought us near
Captivating minds, spreading cheer

You spoke of the game with fire and love
A voice that soared, like a cooing dove
On television or in a circle of friends
Your tales of football knew no ends

A humble giant, a legend, a star
Screamer, you shone from afar
Your legacy lingers, your spirit will stay
A treasure to cherish, come what may

For you were the heartbeat, the song, the flame
A man who gave life to the beautiful game
We honour you now, with words so true
For no one will ever shine quite like you

But oh, how cruel the hands that tore
A life so cherished, loved evermore
Heartless beasts, with no regard
Took from us a soul unmarred

Their actions dark, their hearts so cold
A story of grief now bitterly told
Yet they can never erase the flame
Of Screamer's light, his hallowed name

In our hearts, his legacy will rise
Beyond the pain, beyond the cries
For Stanley "Screamer" still stands tall
A giant, beloved, by us all

9. An Ode to Football Supporters

The motivation for this poem stems not only from the achievements of Banyana Banyana but also from the unwavering dedication and passion of South Africa's football fans — those whose energy and commitment breathe life into the sport. Football in South Africa is not just a game; it is an experience, a vibrant, electric celebration of community, identity, and hope. The true spirit of the game comes alive in the stands, in the streets, and in the hearts of the fans. It is in this fervour, this collective energy, that football becomes a cultural phenomenon, and no one embodies this spirit more than South Africa's superfans, individuals like Botha Msila, Gladys Gailey, Machaka, Mzion, Mguyo, and Goodenough "Five Skippas" Sithole, among many others, past and present.

I have been told by many of the country's most accomplished players that they perform at a different level when the stadium is packed to the rafters, fans shouting their support and encouragement. They profess to an infusion of adrenalin unlike when they play to a humdrum crowd or when the stadium is empty, as is often the case with many teams even in the Premiere Division.

These superfans are not merely spectators; they are the lifeblood of the sport, giving the game meaning far beyond what can be captured on the pitch. Their presence and support are a testament to the power of football to unite people across the nation. Whether it's through singing, dancing, or the chants that reverberate in every corner of the stadium, these fans create an atmosphere that is uniquely South African — electric, passionate, and unwavering. Their devotion is evident in the sacrifices they make to follow their teams, whether it is enduring long travel times, hitchhiking all over the country – and the continent, like Botha Msila did when he hitchhiked to the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations in Egypt, spending hours to attend matches, or standing by their team through the highs and the lows.

Superfans like Botha, whose vocal support has become synonymous with the game itself, and Gladys Gailey, whose presence has been felt in stadiums across the country, represent the enduring bond between the fans and their teams. These individuals are not just supporters — they are living symbols of South Africa’s love for football. Their chants and songs reverberate long after the final whistle, reminding players and fellow fans alike of the significance of every match and the pride that comes with representing their country.

The sacrifices of these fans, their travel to distant stadiums, and their steadfast belief in the sport transcend the ordinary experience of following a game. Their love for football is rooted in something far greater than wins and losses — it is about the shared joy of belonging, the camaraderie of fans united by a common cause, and the pride in witnessing history being made. Whether Banyana Banyana’s victory or their defeat, these fans give their unwavering support, always showing up, always believing.

This poem honours not just the players but also these loyal supporters, whose enthusiasm and commitment fuel the energy that makes football matches come alive. It is a heartfelt tribute to the fans, from the superfans to the everyday supporters, who keep the spirit of the game alive. They are the heartbeat of South African football, their chants and cheers infusing every match with a sense of pride, a sense of community, and a reminder that the love of football is about far more than the game itself. It is a celebration of life, of sacrifice, of unity, and of a nation’s deep-rooted passion for a sport that brings everyone together. Their role in creating an electric atmosphere is vital, and this poem is a testament to their influence in making football an integral part of South Africa’s culture.

An Ode to Football Supporters

In the heart of ekasi, a flame so bright
Football ignited a fiery light
With hearts on their sleeve
It's not hard to conceive
Their devotion, a powerful sight

From the dusty townships, to the urban streets
The love for football, in Mzansi never retreats
The game is part of the culture, it's a really big show
The fans of Mzansi, will never let it go

Traveling far and wide, to watch their team play
Sacrificing everything, to be there every game day
The passion and the spirit, truly a sight to behold
The supporters of Mzansi, never lose their hold

They sing and they dance, with each goal and each win
Their love for the game, is truly over the brim
They bleed the colours, of their team and their flag
The supporters of Mzansi, their loyalty will never lag

For their unwavering support, give them due respect
The supporters of Mzansi, are a true football prospect
We salute them for their passion, love and heart
The supporters of Mzansi, are truly a work of art.

GOALDEN VERSES

POETRY FOR MZANSI FOOTBALL



DENNIS A. MUMBLE