



# Tovey pleads for SA football

**It's back to the drawing board for South African soccer after the national team failed to secure a qualifying spot in the World Cup in Germany.**

There was a time when the South African soccer team was the darling of not only the South African fans, but of the continent at large. Players like Doctor Khumalo, Phil Masinga, Lucas Radebe and John "Shoes" Moshoeu stood head and shoulders above the rest in the continent. But the national team now has been in a sorry state since their triumph in 1996, sometimes playing in empty stadiums at home. Oh, how the mighty have fallen.

Former Bafana Bafana captain and 1996 Africa Nations Cup winner, Neil Tovey, calls for the introduction of new blood into the senior South African national soccer team. Tovey made the call after Bafana Bafana lost 3-1 to Burkina Faso in the World Cup qualifier in Ouagadougou at the beginning of September. "The sensible thing to do now, since our failure to qualify for the World Cup in Germany next year, is to groom the under-23 side and let them play in the Nations Cup in Egypt next January, provided that we qualify for the event," says Tovey.



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The former Kaizer Chiefs stalwart defender feels that the only way to again make South Africa a dominant force in the continent, is to introduce young and hungry players who will have a chance to gel as a winning combination even after the finals in Egypt. “If these boys are given the chance and support, it will put us in good position when we hold the World Cup in 2010. We shouldn't put them under pressure to perform in Egypt though, but acknowledge that we need to build a strong team for the future that will take us beyond Egypt,” Neil Tovey reasons.

The national soccer team has experienced a steady decline since winning the continental prize on its first attempt. One of the reasons for the poor performances is the continued chopping and changing of national coaches. South Africa has seen eleven national coaches come and go since the country's re-admission back to Fifa in 1992.

The other problem is to balance the team of local players and those who play for their European clubs. When one takes into consideration the number of games a country has to play in one year, it becomes impossible to get the international players to represent their country. This has led to some of the players, such as Benni McCarthy, retiring from the national team.

“Players should put their country first. I understand that it is difficult, but the players are also not trying hard to come and play for Bafana, while they stand to make better money in their clubs. Again I didn't have a chance to play abroad. Maybe my judgement is not 100 % correct on this one. However, I can see that some of them are not really fired up to represent their country even if it is an important tournament such as a World Cup qualifier,” says Tovey. **UM**