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# Playing in the dark: the story of Banyana Banyana's success

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Research project for Wits Masters Journalism and Media Studies programme

“Playing in the Dark:The story of Banyana Banyana’s success”

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**“Playing in the Dark:The story of Banyana Banyana’s success”**

**Vive la France**
**The country’s most successful female coach**
**U-curves, catastrophes and mice**
**An ecosystem where the bravest thrive**
**Born to be wild**
**The soccer-loving musician**
**Gaining the hours**
**Rising star**

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PART 1 METHOD

I INTRODUCTION

This research seeks to examine theories related to success and failure in sport through the South African national women's football team known as Banyana Banyana, which is isiZulu for "The Girls". These theories will be explored through interviews with various stakeholders in the team, and written into a long-form narrative article. The long form narrative will use literary devices to engage the reader in the story of success and failure in South African women's football.

Late in 2018, the national team qualified for the 2019 Fifa Women's World Cup when they reached the final of the continental championships in Ghana. It was a significant milestone for Banyana Banyana as South Africa had never been represented at this competition, which is considered to be the ultimate stage in the game. The reaction and support for the team was unlike anything they had experienced before.

Banyana reportedly received a R1 million bonus after qualifying for the 2016 Olympic Games, half of which came from the team's sponsors, with the remaining R500 000 being given by the South African Football Association (Safa) (Mothowagae, D. 2015). However, after qualifying for the Fifa Women's World Cup, the team were given a bonus of R2.4 million from the national federation, Safa, with the support of their sponsors (sport24. 2018). The South African national women's team were held up as an example of national football excellence, with the South African senior national men's team, nicknamed Bafana Bafana or " The Boys" last qualifying for the men's equivalent of the tournament when the Fifa World Cup was held in Korea and Japan in 2002. (Bafana Bafana earned their spot in the 2010 event by virtue of being hosts). Before the Fifa Women's World Cup kicked off, captain of the side Janine van Wyk, said: "For us to be the lead story on the back pages of some Johannesburg newspapers this week is fantastic," (AFP. 2019). However, after qualification to the Women's World Cup, the team failed to win any of their next 13 matches.

Success and failure on the sports field, in it's most literal meaning, is clear because you either win or lose a match. But when it comes to women playing football, part of the success of the team is just being able to play the game. Like the rest of the world, where

inequality exists between genders in sport, men and women are not yet equal in South Africa, and this can be seen in the resources available to the team, among other factors.

The title “Playing in the Dark” is a play on words because exactly what causes a successful team to fail or lose momentum is a mystery. When someone is being kept in the dark they are not being told something that could be of interest to them. The title also alludes to performing sans attention and acknowledgement, which is relevant to Banyana as they move between success and failure with less attention than many other South African national sports teams.

“We say to girls - ‘You can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful, But not too successful’ “ - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

The quote above, part of which was made popular in a Beyoncé song, by Nigerian author Adichie, is an illustration of the different social expectations according to gender and how those biases hinders equity. This quote further highlights the prejudice that exists before women even get onto the field of play. The discussion of moving between success and failure is therefore different when speaking about women’s sport compared to men’s sport. Globally and historically, men have had more freedom to participate in and excel in sport. In a 2012 paper looking at the history of participation of women in the Olympic movement, the founder of the modern Olympic Games, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, said: “A female Olympics would be inconvenient, uninteresting, un-aesthetic and not correct. The true Olympic hero is, in my opinion, the individual male adult.” (Ferez, S. 2012). To date, parity between genders has not existed at the Summer Olympic Games; the last edition was historic on this front as the Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, set a new record of participation for women, with 45% of the total number of athletes being female (olympic.org).

In the United States, a look at the inclusion of women at selected national sport federations showed that nearly a third excluded women when they were founded, while the tennis association is reported to have justified it’s delay in the inclusion of women by saying prior to the 1800s it was “not considered proper or ladylike for women to play tennis” (Fiddler,M. 1973).

In football, it was not uncommon for women to be banned from playing the game or go unrecognised by the national federation. In Germany, whose national women's football team have won two World Cups and an Olympic gold medal, women were banned by the German Football Association in 1955. The ban was lifted in 1970 (Fifa.com).

As sport is an activity where women remain to be the exception, those who have chosen to be involved are often held up as torchbearers for equality in society as well.

Beyond the societal and stereotypical disparities between male and female sport participation, men's football as a system is more mature than that of women's football. This is evident from professional opportunities that exist worldwide to global competitions, as illustrated in the fact that the first men's Fifa World Cup was in 1930 while the first women's Fifa World Cup was held in 1991.

Equity is important in a discussion around success and failure because the two need to be viewed from the same social lens through which women's sport operates in. We are in the process of normalising equality in society and therefore in sport too between genders.

A discussion of women's sporting success and failure can highlight achievements that are often overlooked because of the male establishment in football and the corresponding measure of success that it enjoys.

## II AIM

The aim of this long-form narrative project is to give the reader a sense of Banyana's success and failure using a style, employed by Canadian author Malcolm Gladwell and others, of illustrating different academic concepts, in this case those related to success and failure, through different Banyana characters and their stories. The aim of the paper is not to offer a solution to the many challenges facing women's football, or how success can be assured or failure averted. The aim of the long-form narrative is to understand Banyana's achievements by contrasting the highs and lows with various examples of sport psychology and academic writing on performance.

The project proposes to tell the reader about the team in light of four theories around sport success. These include the "cusp catastrophe model of anxiety and performance" (Hardy,

L & Fazey, J. 1987); the idea that what's perceived as "innate talent" is actually the result of years of practice (Ericsson et al. 1993); different psychosocial competencies and environmental conditions that have been identified to lead to soccer success (Holt, N & Dunn, J.G.H. 2004); and different forms of motivation, both inter- and intrapersonal, and the impact of the fear of failure in a football context (Sagar et al. 2010)

The long form article will investigate

- What factors led to Banyana Banyana qualifying for the Fifa Women's World Cup for the first time? The paper aims to give a voice to the people who are involved in the game and better understand and illustrate the environment in which the national women's football team operates.
- Theories of success that can be evidenced by Banyana Banyana's progress. What sports scientists say is the key to success in women's sport, which of these factors are present in the South African women's football team and which are missing.

The long-form piece will address the issues above by using a literary non-fiction approach. Gladwell, like others whose writing is found in the *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic,* is known for taking different findings from academic studies and applying them in real-life situations. These journalists use narrative devices to draw the reader along and illustrate a concept that may initially have been difficult to understand, offering a different perspective in the findings' application.

This project was inspired by Gladwell's application of the Yerkes-Dodson law in *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits and the Art of Battling Giants,* where the author makes the case that perceived disadvantages can be advantageous (Gladwell, M. 2014). This "law" became known as the inverted U-curve, which says moderate pressure is key for best performance and too little or too much pressure can have a negative effect.

The Yerkes-Dodson law was born from a paper published in 1908 by two psychologists, Robert M. Yerkes and John D. Dodson, who applied varying strengths of electric stimulation and levels of difficulty to determine the rate of learning and habit formation in mice (Yerkes, R.M & Dodson, J.D.1908). The initial study looked at stimulation or punishment to the rate of learning. Through the years the findings have been shown they can be applied to different sets of factors.

This study has been cited thousands of times in areas ranging from the behavioural sciences to medicine, dentistry, nursing and allied health, economics, education, engineering and technology, computer science, sports and leisure, the humanities, as well as bioscience and social science.

This varied application has been written about succinctly in “Yerkes-Dodson: A law for all seasons” (Teigen, K.H. 1994). Teigen questions whether the ambiguity of the law creates an environment where certain sets of observations can be attributed to the law when they are unwarranted.

There have been many critics of the attribution of the 1908 study to a variety of situations because the original study to determine how quickly mice could learn morphed into understanding how an increase in motivation and drive affects performance (Teigen, K.H. 1994).

Teigen’s title seems appropriate in a world driven by instant gratification and wanting immediate concrete answers. It is not the job of the long-form piece to add to the voices of support or criticism of this well-worn psychological term. Rather, the paper intends to use curvilinear observation to explore how anxiety, motivation, drive and pressure all have an effect on performance that is beneficial at first but then, when sustained or increased beyond a point, it begins to have a negative impact on performance.

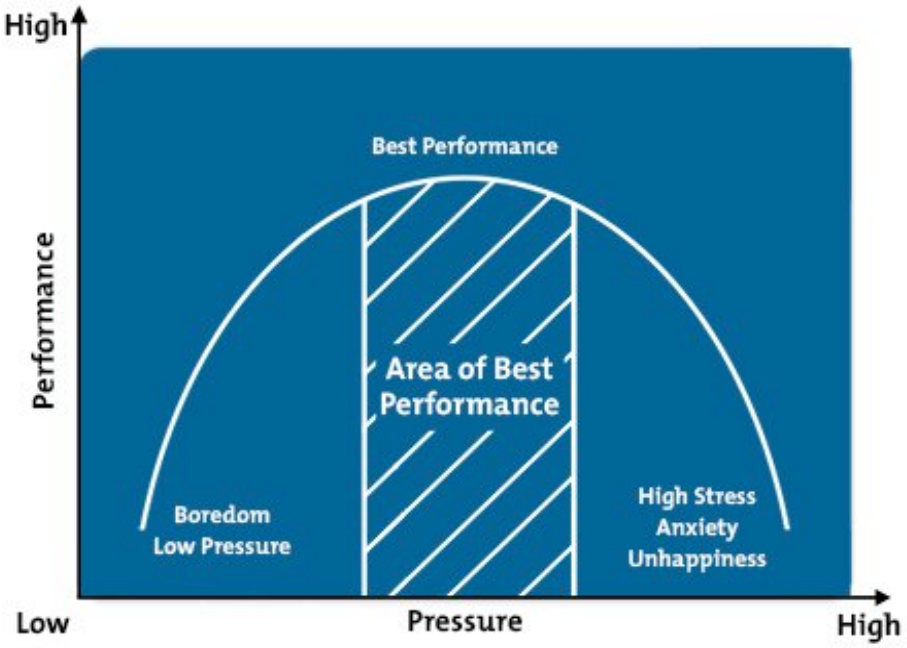



*Image courtesy of mindtools.com*

The research focus will be on the factors that contributed to the team's success, and where they found the middle of the inverted U-curve (illustrated above), which in sport performance, would be the proverbial sweet spot. That sweet spot for Banyana (qualifying for the Fifa Women's World Cup) was followed by the failure of not qualifying for a third consecutive Olympics. Attempting to understand the factors that cause an otherwise successful run to go in the opposite direction is one of the aims of this long-form narrative. The effectiveness in applying the inverted U-curve in sport has been challenged since the late 1980s, most notably by Lew Hardy, who proposed a new model to understand the relationship between anxiety and performance in sport (Fazey,J & Hardy,L.1988). Fazey and Hardy propose two catastrophe models, one built upon the other to clarify the relationship between cognitive anxiety, physiological arousal and motor performance.

Other research which will also be probed through interviews with Banyana players is what is known as "deliberate practice" or as it has been popularised, the "10 000-hour rule" (Ericsson et al.1993). This can be seen among the veteran players in the Fifa Women's World Cup team for South Africa. There were eight players in the 23-player squad who had over 50 caps. A "cap" is awarded every time a player plays for their country. There were four players in the squad that competed in France who had over 100 caps.

Another paper that the long-form narrative considers, concerns the four key attributes needed by players to attain success in football. These are personality traits and soft skills such as discipline, resilience, commitment and social support (Holt, N. & Dunn, J.G.H. 2004). The last factor has an interesting application in the Banyana context because much of the existing material about Banyana and players in Africa has highlighted their marginalisation in the game. This social context cannot be underestimated because the greatest resistance to women in all positions and at all levels in the game has come from society.

Beyond the environment that hinders or aids develop in a sport, it has to start with the individual player and their midset in order to be successful. How victories and losses are viewed by the athlete is an important pivot for coaches. In a South African manual on coaching, author of *The Sport Coach: The psychology behind coaching,* Jannie Putter, sums it up with this winner's mindset poem:

I am a born champion, therefore I always win

When I do not win the match — I win experience

This experience is essential for me to eventually become a true master...

I need to understand what winning truly is

I need to learn to value opportunity

I need to grab every opportunity

This is my life and my adventure

This is my journey in becoming a true master

I have been born a champion

Therefore I know that I always win (Putter, J. 2016)

The poem above relates to framing and mindset, two key drivers in success in sport. A specific mindset can fuel or quell the fear that impacts on athlete's ability to succeed at a task. Fear of failure can have both inter- and intrapersonal effects on football players; for example, the fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment upon failure is common among athletes across ages and sports (Sagar et al. 2010). Could this have been the collective case, once Banyana qualified for the World Cup when they made the final of the Women's Africa Cup of Nations tournament in Ghana? What happened to the motivation of the team after qualification because what followed was a 13-game winless streak and failure to qualify for the Olympic Games?

This project employs desktop research to better understand the concepts listed above that impact performance and provide the framework for interviews that will be conducted. The long-form narrative will explore the identified psychological factors that impact performance through different interviews. Among the interviewees will be a sport science professor, a sport psychologist, and various past and present players as well as football administrators.

## III BACKGROUND

"We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller" – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Since it's formation, the national women's football team has been marginalised, fought over and there have been sexual harassment claims. It has been discriminated against on gender and sexual orientation, suffered crime, injustice and the legacy of apartheid, and generally gone unnoticed until they qualified for the Fifa Women's World Cup ( Pelak, C.F. 2010 & Groenmeyer, S. 2010).

The first accounts of formalised women's football in South Africa are dated to the 1970s. A national body called the South African Women's Football Association (Sawfa) hosted an annual interprovincial tournament, which started in 1975. This association also selected a team of white and coloured players, who went to Italy on a three-week tour in 1989 and 1991. As the country was barred at the time from competing internationally because of apartheid, it was considered a rebel tour.

In 1991, the first Fifa Women's World Cup was held in China, with only Nigeria representing the African continent. In the same year another organisation, called the South African Women's Soccer Association (Sawsa) was formed "for black women" and a power struggle for the women's game ensued between Sawfa and Sawsa (Ndimande-Hlongwa, N. 2016). Sawsa joined Sawfa who became an affiliate member of SAFA between 1992 and 1993.

On 30 May 1993, a national South African women's football team, nicknamed Banyana Banyana, comprising black, white and coloured players, played the first international game for South Africa against Swaziland, now called eSwatini, which saw South Africa win 14-0. In 1995, Banyana Banyana finished as runners-up in the Confederation of African Football (CAF) women's championships and the growth of the women's game was given extra momentum when, in 1996, women's football made its Olympic debut. In South Africa at this time infighting continued in the affiliate body looking after women's football in the country between former members of Sawfa and Sawsa (Hilton-Smith, F, personal communication, 5 July 2019).

The infighting and subsequent letters to the sports ministry resulted in the issue of 'who controls women's football' being placed on the agenda of the Justice Pickard commission of Enquiry of 1996/1997. This commission was appointed to investigate footballing matters by then minister of Sport and Recreation, Steve Tshwete. Arising from the findings, two women's soccer indabas were held in 1997 and 1999. "Indaba" is a South African term for

a conference or discussion that generally involves all interested parties meeting and discussing an issue in a democratic manner. This would be the first step in the national body, Safa, taking control of the women's game in the country. A resolution from the 1999 Indaba was the formation of a women's football sub-committee under the auspices of Safa, and by 2000 the national football association had gained full control over the women's game (Pelak,C.F.2010).

In 2000, South Africa hosted the CAF women's championships in Gauteng. The tournament was also the Olympic qualifying event, with the winner earning the right to represent the continent at the Games in Sydney. The final saw South Africa face Nigeria, but the match was marred by fan violence and had to be called off in the 70th minute with the visitors leading 2-0. This resulted in Nigeria being declared the winners and earning the right to represent the country at the Olympics in Australia (SABC. 2000).

Despite the crowd violence in Gauteng, women's football in South Africa had gained enough momentum to attract sponsors such as Sanlam, which from 2001 sponsored regional women's football leagues, called the Halala leagues, for three seasons. Thereafter, Vodacom came on board as a sponsor supporting the women's game, but by the 2007/2008 season, they no longer supported the league (Pelak, C.F. 2010).

On a personal note, the story of women's football in South Africa is close to my heart because in 2005, I began presenting a women's sport show for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), and women's football was often covered. Through this I met and interviewed many of the team's players and technical staff. The players I met were confident and strong which was hugely inspiring but most of the people I spoke to away from the team had not heard of the players or knew very little about the national women's team despite the fact that these were women represented the country.

Women's football continued to get coverage on SABC platforms and among their achievements in that decade was an individual award in 2008. Banyana Banyana striker Noko Matlou won the most prestigious individual award on the continent, the CAF 'Women's Player of the Year' — the first South African player, male or female, to win the honour. Corporate South Africa was hard to attract to the game but in 2009, Absa and Sasol came on board, but by 2020 only Sasol remained as a league and national team sponsor. In 2010, Banyana was considered to be in their best position to qualify for the

World Cup but it took another eight years before South Africa's women's football team did qualify for the global showpiece (Mills, L. & Engh, M.H. 2010). Erratic sponsorship is not uncommon among other major tournament qualifiers from the continent. Nigeria, who have represented the continent at every Women's World Cup since 1991 and three out of a possible five Olympic Games, got a sponsor for their league (Aiteo Group) only in 2017. Ghana is the next best African team, having made three appearances at the Fifa Women's World Cup. That country began a national league in 2012 and reportedly had a sponsor in 2018. Following that season, however, the league has not resumed.

While sponsorship and financial support is an element of sport success, this long-form narrative does not seek to investigate this aspect within Banyana Banyana, but rather to engage with some of the people involved in the game to understand the mindset of those involved in the team's success and failure.

In 2012, the promise of Banyana Banyana expressed in 2010 was realised, with Joseph Mkhonza as coach, when South Africa qualified for their first Olympic Games. The team lost two and drew one match in their group at the Games but failed to progress to the knockout stage. Striker Portia Modise, who holds the national record for the most goals scored for the country in football, scored the team's only goal of the Olympics. To date, it remains the only one next to the country's participation at the Summer Olympiad. The team did participate at the next edition of the Olympics in 2016, this time with Vera Pauw, from the Netherlands, as head coach. The former international was named Mkhonza's replacement and she saw the team qualify for and compete at the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro but resigned after the event. From September 2016 to February 2018, former Banyana captain Desiree Ellis was caretaker coach until her appointment full time in the role as head coach. Ellis had served under Pauw as her assistant but had to wait 18 months before being named the head coach. In that time, as caretaker coach, Ellis became the first person to captain and coach a Cosafa Cup (Southern African regional competition) winning team and she was also in charge when the team were awarded the CAF Women's Team of the Year award. Ellis guided South Africa to World Cup qualification after making the final of the CAF Women's Championships (renamed the Africa Women's Cup of Nations) in November 2018. Banyana lost the final match to Nigeria on penalties and were awarded silver at the continental championships for a fifth time. Women's football was now noticed by more South Africans than ever before and this was further justified when Ellis won the Coach of the Year award and striker Thembi

Kgatlana won Women's Player of the Year and Goal of the Year at the following annual CAF awards ceremony.

South Africa made their first appearance at the Fifa Women's World Cup in France in June/July 2019, and there was much excitement about the achievement. The team's apparel sponsor, Nike, hosted a pre-tournament support event filled with sports stars and local celebrities a month before the team departed (Gabonamong, 2019). The South African department of Sport and Recreation hosted a lunch for three national teams, including Banyana, who would compete at World Cup events (Gabonamong, 2019). Long-time team sponsors, Sasol, also hosted a send-off celebration at their head-quarters in Sandton hours before the team left for France where Safa president Danny Jordaan made the announcement that for the first time, the women's team would receive the same bonuses for progression in the tournament as the Bafana Bafana players, who were set to compete at the Afcon tournament in the same June/July period (Mphahlele, 2019).

Banyana lost all three of their pool matches to Spain, China and Germany at the 2019 Fifa Women's World Cup. Kgatlana scored the country's one and only goal of the tournament against Spain in their opening match. At the end of August, Safa announced and launched the Women's League, which is the highest tier of women's football in the country however, the league did not have a sponsor.

The Sasol women's league, which is a lower tier interprovincial competition, awarded the finalists at the national play-offs a spot in the second season of the Safa league and the a winners cheque of R200 000.

In September 2019, Banyana lost to Botswana 3-2 on penalties after both of their matches in the Olympic qualifying tie ended goalless. This was the first time in eight years they had failed to qualify for the Olympic Games having been present at the 2012 London and 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games. This did not stop CAF from awarding coach Ellis the continental award for the Women's Coach of the Year for the second consecutive time.

This background is important to better understand the team, their success and failure, and my personal interest in the topic.

IV RATIONALE

“Feminist: the person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes” – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Sportswomen have been at the forefront of fighting for a more equal society by virtue of pursuing an interest in sport, they have had to accept they are in a male environment. In South Africa, football is viewed as a game for men, and it remains a flagship masculine sport that serves to maintain and support masculine domination (Pelak, 2005). As society evolves, so does sport and therefore stories need to mature. Telling the story of women’s football in this long-form narrative offers a new evolving perspective on success in the women’s game.

The title of the piece is “Playing in the dark” because women playing football remains a mystery for many in the country. The societal norm is that girls play netball and swim or run, they don’t play football. The narrative hopes to help demystify the women’s game in South Africa, where it’s been accepted that there are games suitable for women, and football is not one of them. The fact that it was not a popular choice for women, could be a reason that women’s football was more racially integrated than many other sport codes during apartheid (Engh, M.H. 2010).

The rationale of this paper is based on the following: there is a need for more to be written in the area of women’s football in South Africa and to understand the impact of various psychological elements in achieving success or causing failure.

The research aim I hope to achieve in this long-form narrative is to present Banyana Banyana’s success and failure through some of the role players. I hope this paper will present a new angle to the Banyana Banyana story.

A story of Banyana Banyana, built around characters both past and present and weaving in the most commonly used sport psychology theories is novel and unique. Using academic and sports psychology literature will frame the understanding of the success and failure of this women’s sports team in a new way, potentially aiding in understanding these role models and trailblazers. If stereotyping around women’s sport is to change, the language used needs to be carefully considered and the characters need to be presented in a different way. Women’s sport needs memorable stories about players and heroic

moments because there are “so many tedious stories repeated in the justification of unequal pay”, there are many stories about too few spectators, lack of consumer interest and lack of media coverage (Woodward, K. 2019).

There is a fundamental challenge that must be noted when speaking about women’s sport and that is by virtue of the female sex competing, it confronts the very nature of sport. American philosopher, Jan Boxill, states :“Sports were for the development of men, not women” (Boxill, J. 2006).

Renowned Australian sociologist in the field of masculinities, Raewyn Connell, coined the term “hegemonic masculinities”, which was conceptually revisited in 2005, and is “understood as the pattern of practice that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue” (Connell, R.W. & Messerschmidt, J.W. 2005).

This concept has been applied to many sectors, including sport, and has been highlighted as the framework that entrenches the subordination of women. Even when media want to mask this, they actually play a part in “the reconstitution of dominant meanings and practices” (Theberge, N. 1991).

Sport management professor, Vicki Krane, has encouraged women to break free from the hegemonic framework by forming new ways of perceiving the female body “rather than focus on how to mould them into some semblance of the feminine ideal female body”. This is important as sportswomen are said to walk a tightrope of being athletic but also feminine to protect the “image” of women’s sport (Krane, V. 2001).

The hegemony of football in South Africa can be challenged through different media coverage being offered on women’s sport focusing on achievements. Women need role models in the sport who speak about and challenge accepted norms (Clark, C. 2011; Meier, M. 2015).

One of the aims of this project is to use a narrative style to profile the team and their success and show that women’s football and it’s people are complex and interesting. Understanding the characters I intend to interview, will make them more than just relatable to football but to theories of success that have a broader application. The narrative will provide material in a space where it is lacking, especially regarding the African continent. The UK’s National Football Museum in Manchester is going to increase the amount of women’s football history available to 50 percent in an effort to redress the current situation, where “a history of sport is a history of men” (Williams, J. 2019).

There is little concrete history available on women's football in Africa (Saavedra, M. 2003). Saavedra says that there is a good database at Safa, but "the web is ephemeral". Testament to that is that the link provided in her bibliography is no longer available and neither are any resources of women's football from 1993 to 2016 on the national federation's website. The items available on women's' football on the Safa website is limited to press releases, with the first of these titled "Vera Pauw named as new Banyana coach" from 2016 (status as of 1 August 2019).

As stated in the introduction, how we view success must be appreciated within the society we operate in, where gender parity has not yet been achieved. This research is important because gender equity is important. Equal access to sport is important (Meier, M. 2015).

In 2015, the chairperson of the Fifa Task Force for Women's football made a submission to the head of the reform committee, Francois Carrard, on why reform in the organisation needed to specify inclusion and investment. She stated that the problem is "football today is overwhelmingly male – not because women and girls are inherently disinterested or incapable but rather due to decades of institutional and social barriers that prevent them from playing". (Dodd,M. 2015)

On the surface it appears that women's football is important for government because the sport in South Africa and it's accompanying federation have been identified as a priority code by the Department of Sport & Recreation for the past seven years (SRSA. 2018). The federation receives money from government for its women-specific programmes (SRSA. 2018) but it is unclear exactly how those funds have been distributed.

The department does give an indication of the range of programmes it will support in it's mission statement: "To transform the delivery of sport and recreation by ensuring equitable access, development and excellence at all levels of participation and to harness the socio-economic contributions that can create a better life for all South Africans" (SRSA. n.d). The department writes about making an "impact" on the country by creating "an active and winning nation" which underpins the belief that sport success can be inspiring and create positive role models.

Another subsidiary reason for undertaking this long-form narrative is because sport and successful sporting teams are healthy for the nation. In South Africa, sport's ability to unify

a divided country makes it a beacon of hope. This is summed up in former president Nelson Mandela's much-used quote that "sport has the power to change the world" (Mandela, N. 2000). The movie *Invictus* showed how, in 1995, Mandela used the national rugby team to bridge differences between the newly elected governing party, the ANC, and the white Afrikaner population in the country.

The former president, known to be a heavyweight boxer as a young man, also loved football. Hours after his inauguration he went to watch the men's national football team (Bafana Bafana) play Zambia at Ellis Park (sahistory. n.d). It's believed that his support of all the country's sports teams and sports people helped to unite South Africa. This legacy of government support for sport has continued in the country.

Before the national sports department and the department of arts and culture were merged, National Treasury gave the sports department R1066.6 billion, of which 99.4 % was spent (SRSA. 2018). According to the treasury's estimate of national expenditure, this is more than the amount allocated to seven other departments, one of them being public service and administration (National Treasury. 2018). Following President Cyril Ramaphosa's cabinet reshuffle, where he merged the sport department with arts and culture (BusinessTech. 2019), the two departments stand to collectively, using the previous budget figures, get more than the Department of Tourism; Mineral Resources; and Telecommunications & Postal Services (National Treasury. 2018).

## V LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature that has been reviewed for this project falls into three main bodies: 1) Academic papers on Banyana Banyana and women's football; 2) Theories of success, including the 'law' around performance emanating from the Yerkes-Dodson experiment; and 3) Literary works that were inspiring for the style of the long-form narrative.

1) Academic papers on Banyana Banyana and women's football

    1. Football origins in South Africa

Football or soccer was brought to South Africa centuries ago, and it thrived "where Africa had its larger settler populations: the North and South" (Hawkey, I. 2009). While the first

permanent Dutch settlement was established at Table Bay in the Western Cape in 1652, “The township of Port Elizabeth was laid out in 1815, but was not developed until 1820 when some 5000 British settlers arrived in the Eastern Cape” (sahistory. n.d). It was in this settlement that a football match was recorded in 1862, a year before the rules of the game as we know them today were formalised in England (Fifa. n.d). Further evidence of the settlers bringing the game of football to South Africa are in the records of a Pietermaritzburg group who wanted to form a club in 1879 (Hawkey, I. 2009).

South Africa has been integral to the game on the continent. A delegation from the country was part of the formation of the African body known as CAF along with Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan following a 1956 Fifa congress. The nation however did not take part in the first men’s continental tournament as the government would not permit a multi-racial team to compete (Hawkey, I. 2009).

## 2. Women’s football history

Versions of what has today become known as football were recorded among women well before the men’s game came to African shores. A reverend in Scotland in 1795 recorded Shrove Tuesday matches between married and unmarried women. The first women’s match to be played using Football Association rules took place at Easter Road in Edinburgh on 7 May 1881 (historyextra. 2019). In 1984, the first formal international women’s football tournament was held in Europe. The first Fifa Women’s World Cup was held in 1991, but South Africa qualified for the tournament for the first time in 2018 and attended the 2019 edition in France.

The earliest account of women’s football in South Africa can be found in 1962 as there are accounts of women playing the game namely teams known as Orlando Pirates Women's Football Club and the Mother City Girls (Muller, A. 2019 & Saavedra, M. 2003). As noted above, the early 1970s saw the formation of the women’s federation Sawfa, which was open to white and coloured people, but controlled by white women (Saavedra, M. 2003).

While society was divided along racial lines by apartheid laws, American sociology professor, Cynthia Pelak, argues that material inequalities between races hampered the development of the game among different races rather than the government at the time as the women’s game was small and went largely unnoticed. “Given women’s outsider

position in soccer and the limited size of women's soccer during these developmental years, there was only the one national governing body for the sport. In many ways the Sawfa was both an establishment and non-racial organization" (Pelak, C.F. 2009). Race and economic status in society were determining factors to accessibility and participation in the early years of the game (Josephs, K. 2012).

It has been contested that Sawfa was the only structure for organised women's football during the 'tripartite years' of the 1970s and 1980s (Engh, M. 2010) although there exists little evidence to back this assertion. The women's soccer association, Sawsa, was reported to have been formed by black African women in 1991 and joined Sawfa in running women's football in the country (Josephs, K. 2012). This paved the way for a representative team to be selected for the country's first official international match against Swaziland, which saw the birth of Banyana Banyana (Muller, A. 2019 & Saavedra, M. 2003).

Thereafter, infighting in Sawfa, which was an affiliate member of Safa, for control of women's football put the game on the Pickard Commission agenda (Pelak, C.F. 2009). While the bulk of the commission's work dealt with corruption and mismanagement of top-flight men's soccer, chapter 9 dealt with women's football. Judge Benjamin Pickard advised that the game be administered only by women and assisted by Safa expertise. Pickard further advised the national body to take more of an interest in the women's game and said "a proper meeting should be held for issues within the women's game to be ironed out" (Pickard Commission Report.1997).

In 2000, Safa took control of women's football in the country. While this move was progressive, it ignored all the other challenges facing gender equality in sport including poverty, accessibility, and domestic violence and sexism (Josephs, K. 2012).
The institutionalisation period is characterised by the women's game being formally run by and acknowledged by the national federation (Safa) and the continental body (CAF), with tournaments and structures for age group levels (Pelak, C.F. 2009).

The growth of the women's game not only had challenges with who would administer it, but also with the social perceptions around football being played by women.

2. The challenges

The women's game is not as mature as the men's game and throughout the development of women's football, there have been a number of challenges, which will be explored below, that impact it's growth. Women continue to fight for parity in football and among the most significant areas is the fact that the game was developed for the male body, the language that is used in football is intrinsically masculine and resources are not evenly distributed between the sexes in South Africa.

### 1.2.1 Women playing a man's game

The challenge of being marginalised is a global problem for women's football, not just a South African one. Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff highlights what a women's World Cup means to the general perceptions of a country when she quotes the vice president of the French Football Federation (FFF) who said, after the French team ended fourth at the 2011 Fifa Women's World Cup, "People discovered that women's football does exist in France and it was a great surprise to us." It was fortunate that the men's team had disgraced themselves in 2010, so the FFF chose to go on a drive to "feminise football", which ultimately led to them hosting the 2019 Fifa Women's World Cup (Krasnoff, L. 2019).

Football is highly gendered leaving women players with an added responsibility on the field of play to contest gender and sex politics as well as play the game (Joseph, K. 2012). The achievements of Banyana are often compared to that of the men's side although this has been welcomed in a South African context where the women's team has outshone the men in the past 10 years. Former Banyana striker and goal-scoring record holder, Portia Modise, says women are happy to be the beacons of excellence where the men have failed on many occasions in the past (Naidoo, P. & Muholi, Z. 2010).

The South African Constitution and the Bill of Rights provide the framework for equality and non-discrimination based on gender across all sectors, including sport, but this is not the reality for women in football because there remains a "failure to acknowledge the various ways in which women have been able to play the game successfully, in spite of the dominant constructions of them as outsiders to the game" (Naidoo, P. & Muholi, Z. 2010). Black female players face "triple exclusion" from the game, as they have had to deal with apartheid and its exclusionary laws, gender discrimination, and Safa practices which have excluded them (Ndimande-Hlongwa, N. 2016). Women's access to football has been the outcome of "liberal feminism and racial liberation struggle" (Pelak, C.F. 2009). The potential value of women's football has long been overlooked and the country has ignored this "sports resource" (Mills, L. & Engh, M.H. 2010).

South Africa is signatory to a number of international agreements that promote women's access to and participation in sport. These include the national sports department's interpretation of the Reconstruction and Development Programme; the United Nations standard that sport is a human right, and the fact that the country is a signatory to the UN's Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (Groenmeyer, S. 2010). Still, gender discrimination exists and calls have been made to make it a public issue (Ndimande-Hlongwa, N. 2016).

Support for women's football is limited and conditional and this can be seen in the fact that the African championships in October 2010 was not held at any of the World Cup venues (Engh, M.H. 2010).

The excitement and promise of the 2010 Fifa World Cup, held in South Africa, was that the game for both boys and girls would grow in the country. However, the main World Cup stadiums built and upgraded to the tune of R15.9 billion (SRSA. 2013) was not used for Banyana Banyana matches (Engh, M.H. 2010).

During the 2010 Fifa World Cup there was a "perpetuation of the dominant hegemonic masculinity within football internationally and within South Africa" (Clark, C. 2011).

One of the challenges women face, is the expectation to conform to a heteronormative gender order, where "the inclusion of women in the game of football is based, firstly, on the successful performance of femininity and secondly, on proficiency and skill demonstrated on the field" (Engh, M.H. 2010). Even some within the game try to ensure women do not come across as too masculine. Ria Ledwaba, who was then the chairperson of the women's committee of Safa said in 2005: "We don't want our girls to look, act and dress like men just because they play soccer" (Engh, M.H. 2010).

### 1.2.2 Language

The choice of words used to describe women in football and in sport generally has been identified as a challenge to normalising and accepting women in sport. The fact that we use the qualifier "women" presents the male version of the game as the ungendered, neutral norm "and women's participation in such is the irregularity" (Josephs, K. 2012).

Men still dominate football lingo, media coverage and participation rates, despite the recent achievements of the women's national team (Engh, M.H. 2010).

The time-worn wisdom: "one must watch one's words" because of their lasting and extensive impact is best summed up in the famous quote attributed to Mahatma Gandhi:

"Your beliefs become your thoughts,
Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,
Your actions become your habits,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny."

How we speak about football and the game for women in the country is important. Often women who play are marginalised because of the language used in media.
There are instances where women in the game are acknowledged before their gender. For example, Cassandra Clark notes an article quoting Green Point Stadium venue manager Teral Cullen during the 2010 Fifa World Cup. Cullen was the only female stadium manager for the tournament. Together with an article on the only female Fifa tournament ambassador, Desiree Ellis, they are examples where their work and achievements come before their gender. These, Clark notes, are positive moves for challenging the hegemony in football because the language that is used is ungendered. Clark says this is the standard to follow to reshape the game at all levels to make it gender neutral (Clark, C. 2011).

Even when women are in positions where it's assumed they can drive the narrative, these are only perceived positions of power and they are reduced to mere figureheads (Meier, M. 2015).

The other challenge of language in women's football is the stories that are shared most often about the women's game focus on the sexuality of the players. The case of the rise and fall of the Soweto Ladies team saw "mainstream media" focus on the team's sexuality and accounts of sexual harassment (Naidoo, P & Muholi, Z. 2010).

### 1.2.3 Resources

Resources include sponsorship, access to facilities, expertise, quality coaching and consistent, high-level competition. These are found in South Africa, thanks in part, to the country hosting the 2010 Fifa World Cup. It is presumed that South African football teams should dominate on the continent because of the resources available to teams and from a women's football perspective, equality, regardless of race and gender is enshrined in the constitution. In light of these favourable conditions, why hasn't Banyana Banyana been the most successful team on the continent? One researcher writes it down to the country's political history: "The fact that South Africa are not dominating could be down to the fact that football was isolated during apartheid but all other factors in the country look from, the outside, as if South Africa should dominate" (Saavedra, M. 2003).

"Sponsorship and skilled players is one of the many missing pieces of the puzzle. There is also a need for political will to facilitate women's soccer in terms of equity, representivity and redress" (Groenmeyer, S. 2010). A 2010 Mail and Guardian article speaks about a product "well worth watching, cheering and sponsoring" which was being ignored (Mills, L & Engh, M.H. 2010).

The inequality between men's and women's football can be seen in the financial rewards of playing for your country. A 2006 City Press article states that only after public pressure, the national women's team's bonuses were upped to R5000 for a win and R2500 for a draw, and they would receive a R500 daily allowance. Safa had been under pressure after it was revealed that Banyana were receiving R2000 for a win while the men's team received R40 000 for a win (Naidoo, P. & Muholi, Z. 2010).

According to Maurizio Valenti, highly specialised coaching has a significant and positive impact on international success in women's football. A country's "economic development, talent pool climate and men's football legacy are significant predictors of its women's football performance level" (Valenti, M et al. 2019).

The support by the national federation has through the years been limited and there is little action from Safa. Willpower from those in charge to tackle women's football issues, to assist with school development and sponsorship are areas of apathy when it comes to the women's game (Pelak, C.F. 2009).

From the literature above, which outlines challenges such as history, social perceptions, language and resources, it is clear that there is much that hinders the development and therefore the success of women's football.

## 2) Theories relating to sport performance

The theories and academic readings that I will be drawing on relating to performance in sport fall into four categories: 1) The catastrophe model of Fazey and Hardy; 2) Psychosocial competencies such as support and discipline; 3) Deliberate practice; and 4) Motivation.

### 2.1 The catastrophe model of Fazey and Hardy

To be successful, you need to learn new skills, manage stress and adapt your skill set in a given environment. Failure to manage various factors in performance, including pressure and anxiety, will lead to failure in a set task. This has been a key area of study in psychology because understanding what factors lead to a change in performance can better help people be successful. It is also relevant for this paper because it can provide one explanation regarding the ebb and flow of success. One of the foundational studies in habit formation in different conditions is the 1908 Harvard study by Robert M. Yerkes and John D. Dodson, which gave rise to what is commonly known as the Yerkes-Dodson law.
The 'law', later refined to the inverted U-curve, stemmed from an experiment that was developed to measure the relation of strength stimulus to rapidity of habit formation in mice. The two psychologists were trying to measure how a strong a stimulus needed to be for mice to learn discrimination between a black and white door and what strength is most favourable to form the discrimination habit quickly.

Light in the experiment area was also altered to test how rapidly habits were formed in easy, medium and difficult conditions. The experiment found that in easy conditions, a habit was formed rapidly with strong shocks but in more challenging conditions, medium-strength stimuli were best to create the habit quickly (Yerkes, R.M. & Dodson, J.D. 1908).

On a simple graph depicting the rate of learning on the horizontal line and the strength of stimulus on the vertical arm, the findings reflect a U or V shape for the experiments done in medium to difficult conditions.  This is where the experiment gave rise to the inverted U

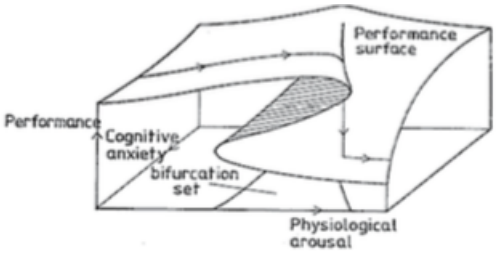
or curvilinear theories. All these terms refer to the same phenomenon, that too much of a certain stimulation/condition/environment will stop having a beneficial effect at a certain point and performance will drop off.

This experiment and it's conclusions moved from ethology to psychology when Dodson defined his findings in a different paper in broad terms: "Strength of rewards as well as strength of punishments is curvilinearly related to rapidity of learning" (Teigen, K.H. 1994). Due to the nature of its origins, there is disagreement between psychologists as to what the Yerkes-Dodson law actually says. All applications of this law do however agree on a curvilinear relationship between factors. The "plasticity of the law" has seen it live on in modern psychology (Teigen, K.H. 1994). There has been a lot of support for the Yerkes-Dodson law as "few studies have been as generative of psychological insights as Yerkes-Dodson's' 1908 paper" (Bulbulia, J et al. 2019).

The inverted U hypothesis has been the primary model to describe the arousal-performance relationship in sport (Arent, S.M. & Lander, D.M. 2003). The relationship of pressure/stimulus/motivation to performance/outcome and habit formation is important in the discussion of success. Sport coach and author Jannie Putter uses this inverted U-curve to illustrate the "zone" coaches strive to keep their athletes in (Putter, J. 2016).

Malcolm Gladwell explains that the inverted U has three parts, "the left side, where doing more or having more makes things better. There's a flat middle where doing more doesn't make much of a difference. And there's the right side, where doing more or having more makes things worse" (Gladwell, M. 2014).

John Fazey and Lew Hardy challenged the application of the model in evaluating stress and sport performance because the decrease in performance is often not gradual as suggested in the inverted U-curve model, instead it is large and catastrophic, with cognitive anxiety (worry and concern) the determining factor. To this end, Fazey and Hardy proposed two catastrophe models: 1) the cusp catastrophe model; and 2) the butterfly catastrophe model. The first model concludes that if cognitive anxiety stays low and the physical effects of anxiety increase, then performance will follow the inverted U shape, but if cognitive anxiety is intermediate or high, then a catastrophic drop in performance will occur, with increased physiological arousal.



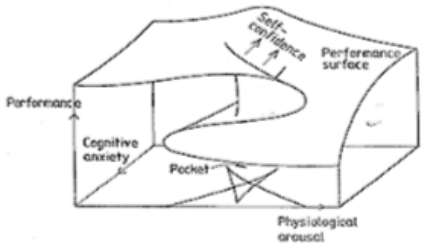




*Image courtesy* www.ocr.org.uk/psychology

The second model proposed by Fazey and Hardy is the butterfly catastrophe model, which considers the effect of self-confidence and task difficulty on performance and the sudden, catastrophic change in performance when cognitive anxiety is high. The predictions of this model project that self-confidence can act as a buffer against a catastrophic drop in performance but only when physiological anxiety is low.

### 2.2 Psychosocial competencies

Pressure and arousal are noted above as factors that need to be delicately managed in yourself or for your athlete if you are a coach. There are other factors that impact the ability of a person or team to succeed which are internal and external. One of the internal and personal factors in determining success is psychosocial competence.

Psychosocial competence is an individual's "ability to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life and maintain a state of mental well-being while interacting with others and his/her culture and environment" (Manjunatha, N. & Saddichha, S. 2011).

Psychosocial competencies and environmental conditions were measured for success among adolescent male football players in Canada (Holt, N. & Dunn, J. 2004). These players were still amateurs, which is relevant for this project because the game for women in South Africa is not yet professional.

Factors identified in the study on success in young football players in Canada hoping to land contracts were:

1) Discipline, including deliberate practice, and sacrifices in social and family life.

2) Commitment, which is the motivation of players to remain dedicated to practice as well as set and attain goals.
3) Resilience, which is the ability to overcome adversity by employing the correct coping strategies such as “positive responses” and “confidence to thrive on pressure”.
4) Social support in the form of emotional, informational and tangible support.

### 2.3 Deliberate practice

There is evidence that one of the factors listed above, done correctly, is enough to ensure success. It’s believed that expertise in a field is not reliant on genetics or “giftedness” but rather on deliberate practice, sustained motivation and perseverance.

An often-quoted Ericsson et al paper, which set out to study expert performers and account for their talent “in terms of the laws and principles of general psychology”, found that while there are innate qualities like height that can predispose you to be an expert, it is deliberate practice that separates the experts from the rest (Ericsson, K et al. 1993).

The authors conclude: “We view elite performance as the product of a decade or more of maximal efforts to improve performance in a domain through an optimal distribution of deliberate practice” (Ericsson, K et al. 1993). This is relevant for this research as a number of Banyana players who were integral in enabling the team to qualify for the Fifa Women’s World Cup have been involved with the side for many years.

This study gained widespread popularity in Gladwell’s book, *Outliers,* where he coined the “10 000-hour rule”, which states that 10000 hours of deliberate practice will lead to expertise in any area or skill. However, Gladwell’s interpretation and application of the study’s findings and even the study itself has been disputed. Macnamara et al state that “Ericsson and colleagues' view that individual differences in expertise can largely be accounted for by accumulated deliberate practice is not supported by the available empirical evidence. Extending earlier work, we found that deliberate practice accounted for a sizeable amount of variance in sports performance (18%), but it left a much larger amount unexplained” (Macnamara, B. N.; Hambrick, D. Z. & Moreau, D. 2016).

While the level of expertise and time taken is questioned, deliberate practice is certainly a factor in achieving success. For this reason, it will be considered as one of the factors influencing the success of Banyana Banyana and it's players.

### 2.4 Motivation

Motivation is an intangible asset for any person desiring success and falls under the psychosocial competency of ‘commitment’ mentioned above.

The Polgar sisters from the chess world are said to be evidence of deliberate practice. Their father, Laszlo, told the Washington Post, “A genius is not born but is educated and trained. When a child is born healthy, it is a potential genius" (Maass, P. 1992). Polgar proved his theory with his own children, who have made history. The oldest, Susan, was women’s world champion for three years. Second-born Sofia is an international master and women grandmaster and the youngest sibling, Judit, is considered the strongest female chess player of all time. Judit, who was women’s world number one for over two decades, at 15 years old broke the record for being the youngest grandmaster. In a 2005 interview, Susan explained that she was passionate about the game: “Blindfolded speed chess was the sisters' idea of fun. And while they had a few friends in the neighbourhood, the girls were perfectly content to pass their days training with elderly male grandmasters. ‘I had an inner drive,’ recalls Susan.” (Flora, C. 2005). In order for deliberate practice to work, a person requires the motivation to practice.

Inner drive is synonymous with motivation and mindset, these factors are interrogated when it comes to sport, with two identified types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation concerns being driven for reasons such as knowledge, accomplishment and stimulation while extrinsic factors include reasons such as receiving praise or avoiding punishment (Vallarand, R. & Losier, G. 1999). A sequence has been proposed to integrate intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in sport by combining the following factors: “Social Factors + Psychological Mediators + Motivation + Consequences” (Vallarand, R. & Losier, G. 1999).

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation affect both an individual and a team’s success in sport. One motive identified in football players is being driven to succeed “to avoid failure” and avoid the anticipatory shame associated with failure. A healthy perception of failure is vital because success and failure is not as simple as winning and losing and to be motivated

only by wanting to avoid failure “is likely to be a self-perpetuating process” (Sagar, S.S. et al. 2010). The positive consequences of success are identified as “receiving recognition from others, pleasing others, enhanced perception of self, enhanced social status and interaction”. This heightens the negative consequences of failure such as “emotional cost, diminished perception of self, reduced social status and interaction, punitive behaviour from others, an uncertain future and letting others down” (Sagar, S.S. et al. 2010) .

If the motivation to succeed is too centrally focused, it too can have a negative impact. Joachim Stoeber and Claudia Becker conclude that women soccer players who strive for “perfection” can become “maladaptive”. They advise, “athletes may well strive for perfection, but should not be overly dissatisfied, angry or frustrated when things don’t work out perfectly” (Stoeber, J. & Becker, C. 2008).

A team like Banyana is made up of individuals, but it remains the group that must perform to achieve successful results. There needs to be a certain level of shared motivation between the team members: a team that is cohesive is a team that is successful, and “coaches and sport psychologists would do well to develop effective team-building strategies in an attempt to influence cohesiveness directly” (Carron, A.V. et al. 2002)

3) Literary works that have served as inspiration for the style of the long form narrative:

    1. *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants* by Malcolm Gladwell

    This book is broken up into three parts: 1. The advantages of disadvantages (and the disadvantages of advantages) 2. The theory of desirable difficulty 3. The limits of power.

    Each introduces a different social or psychological trend that has been identified in an academic study and matches it to real-life examples using different people as the “case studies” for each of the different conclusions drawn from academic literature. In typical Gladwell style, the author weaves together a variety of ideas, with quotes from the academic theory, expert opinion, and an anecdote or two, to highlight the case he is making in applying an academic theory to a real-life situation. Gladwell keeps readers attention by asking questions that are unexpected and require some thought such as this example from the book “Would you wish dyslexia on your child?”

The cliff hanger leads the reader to the next chapter that introduces a completely new idea, which is eventually woven into the full understanding of his chosen “case study” to make sense of what was a radical idea or counter intuitive observation at the outset.

In Part 1 of this book, Gladwell introduces the Yerkes-Dodson law to make his point that the “powerful and strong are not always what they seem”. Then he takes a number of people and a variety of stories to illustrate and justify his initial claim. It is Gladwell’s ability to “apply” academic thinking with real-life people and situations that is the reason why this book is a resource for my long-form narrative. In *David and Goliath* Gladwell revisits and introduces interesting academic thinking including a study on desirable difficulty; the Yerkes-Dodson Law; respected opinion on dealing with civil unrest and the “principle of legitimacy” and then applies it in an unconventional way through the characters he interviews.

This is relevant for my paper as I too will use this curvilinear theory when describing some of the trends that have surfaced around Banyana Banyana but also from the perspective that all the stories return to a central point, his initial claim.

2. The New Journalism by Tom Wolfe

Tom Wolfe’s conversational style helped to inspire and illustrate the beauty of a new form of journalism. This piece is one that takes the reader into the newsroom and then into the “competition” of writing between feature writers and the evolution of their craft within the literary space of the time. The voice is frank and direct, it gives the reader the impression of the authority Wolfe has with this subject because this is his no-holds-barred view of how new journalism became the top form of literature in the USA.

My own conversational voice is what I want to emulate throughout the piece. The voice must be sure and direct but honest to highlight the “mystery” or unexplained trends around the team.

1.3 Bounce by Matthew Syed

The author quotes the Ericsson study, which concluded that the major difference between good and great violin players was the number of hours practised and “purposeful practice is the only thing that distinguishes the best from the rest”. Syed makes the case using examples across sport, academia and music to further highlight the point of the famous study that, “It’s the quality and quantity of practice that is driving progress, not genes.” The book starts with a personal story about being Britain’s number one table tennis player for many years and competing at two Olympic Games. He sets out his achievements followed by one version of his tale of glory and then tells the same story including different factors that he says worked to ensure he was successful. This book is written using the same style that Gladwell uses by offering the application of different academic theories to real-life stories and this, like my long-form narrative, focuses on the science of success.

The three literary influences described above will be used to make the piece readable and exciting, helping it move along between ideas that are from the field of sports psychology.

## VI LONG-FORM METHOD

The style of the narrative will be conversational driven by a curious and opinionated narrator. It will weave the sport psychology theories and models through the interactions with various interviewees using narrative devices such as scene creation and character development.

The academic literature above, that will form part of the long-form narrative, focus on psychological and social factors impacting sport performance, so the characters of the story will be the pillars that hold the long-form narrative together. I would argue that success and failure depend on how different personalities interact with the world and circumstances around them, which is why the academic literature for the long-form narrative focuses on mindset and the interaction of personalities with different environments and within a certain context. To depict the success and failure of the team is to bring the people in and around the team to life for the reader.

## VII ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical questions that may arise are sensitive issues that the interviewees may share who are currently in the game and would not like their name attached to.

I value the time and insight that each interviewee will give and will ensure that each is well informed about the aim and destination of the narrative long-form essay.

I have been involved in covering the team with the national broadcaster for a number of years and appreciate the access that this has given me to different players and administrators. I will be sensitive to the bias I have as a white English-speaking South African who grew up in a middle-class home.

PART 2
PLAYING IN THE DARK:THE STORY OF BANYANA BANYANA'S SUCCESS

*You heard the tapping, boot on leather ball*

*But didn't see the play*

*You may have heard the panting of sprinting, down the sideline*

*But didn't understand the effort*

*You may have heard quiet celebrations*

*But you never knew their name*

*Beyond your field of focus were lovers of the beautiful game*

*Too often, by society, only commented on for their beauty*

*Unheard, unseen, unnoticed, under - cover*

*But never undeterred*

*Through the light and dark, success and failure*

*As resilience, grit and strength grew*

*So did our group*

*While we were playing in the dark*

*Our eyesight suffered but never our vision*

*Sincerely*

*Women's football*

**Vive la France!**

It was on 8 June 2019, at the French coastal town of Le Havre's premier stadium, that football players in the distinct yellow and green of South Africa walked out in bright sunshine alongside the Spanish national team. I had a front-row seat — watching on television.

Accompanying the visuals was the voice of veteran British commentator Jonathan Pearce."What a day for South African women's football. They're just delighted to be at their first taste of a Women's World Cup." At 25 minutes into the match, in Spain's half, South Africa's Linda Motlhalo finally managed to get the ball away from an approaching defender to teammate Thembi Kgatlana, who was positioned top left of the penalty box. Kgatlana, unmissable with green hair the colour of the pristine pitch, first moved right, avoiding Marta Torrejon. With Virginia Torrecilla approaching behind, Torrejon reset on the left. Irene Paredes was closing in from the right when Kgatlana drew back her right leg before following through and connecting with the ball. Her leg swung like a lever with such force she bent at her hips to 90 degrees. The Spanish keeper, Sandra Panos dived the correct way, only to feel the tailwind of the ball pass over her head.

Pearce had till this point remained calm. He was saying, "…they recycle the ball…" as Motlhalo passed to Kgatlana, but then his voice broke in a tone of disbelief: "They score! Bahn Yahnah Bahn Yahnah!" Pearce had to breathe before continuing. "South Africa, the rank outsiders, have scored. This was not in the script." A new chapter had begun in the story of South African women's football on the grandest stage in the world, and the dreams of so many in the game were finally realised.

Despite Banyana's previous successes, for some, qualification for France was news, "The country has a women's football team!" Women's affairs in South Africa are generally not of value until they are too gruesome to turn from, or it's close to national Women's Day, when examples of empowered women are paraded for the day. As the side representing the country in French sunshine grabbed the spotlight, so did everything else that got them to the tournament.

The difference between winning and losing in sport can be as close as milliseconds in a race. It can be a referee's penalty call in a football match, or a drop goal in the last minute of a rugby game. Numbers and stats can provide the framework, but the building can only be appreciated and seen by understanding the people and seeing their world.

This story tries to understand the blueprint of the South African women's football team by understanding both success and failure. The side known as Banyana Banyana appeared at their first Fifa Women's World Cup in France in June 2019. Research has isolated different elements of success in different areas, from the correct pressure required for optimal performance to the hours needed to reach a level of expertise. And then there's the motivation underlying it all. But how relevant and applicable are these theories to a women's sport that has largely pioneered its own path? This story explores the question by looking at the recent successes and failures of the team. While their biggest achievement to date was qualifying for the World Cup, once they achieved this at the end of 2018, they didn't manage to win another game, from the build-up to the World Cup till they returned from the event.

If sport reflects society, then, like in a patriarchal world, sport has been the domain of men - a place where young men are encouraged to aspire to professionalism and have the platform that can make this a reality. Sport is an environment where leadership is revealed, developed and revered. It is only now, in the 21st century, that it's becoming a place for women to do the same.

At the World Cup in France, Banyana played three matches, all against teams ranked higher than them in the world and each of those sides came from countries where the national women's leagues are professional. Against Spain, South Africa lost 3-1 and even with only 27% possession, the stats show South Africa had two blocked shots. Against

China they lost by a single goal (1-0) but South Africa's ball possession was far superior than in their first game (48%) and they didn't have a single shot blocked. In the last World Cup encounter for South Africa on their World Cup debut they lost to two-time World Cup winners and 10-time European champions, Germany (4-0) in which the Banyana stats read 40% possession, two blocked shots. (Statistics from footballcritic.com)

Which would you say was the team's most successful match at the tournament? The one everyone raved about and caused fans to notice the World Cup debutantes, was their first match against Spain, with experts saying the score was not a true reflection of what happened. The stats only tell part of the story.

South Africa selected their first national women's team in 1993 and due to the popularity of the nickname given to the men's team, Bafana Bafana (Boys, Boys), the women were creatively called, Banyana Banyana (Girls, Girls). They won their first match against Swaziland 14-0, and women's football at the time was in a unique position. Unlike many other sports that had been unable to compete internationally because of sport boycotts against the apartheid regime, the global game for the women was just getting going. Fifa only presented the first Women's World Cup in 1991. The national-level players in the early 1990s in South Africa were among the best produced by the country, but it would take another 27 years before 'the girls' qualified for the global showpiece. They managed to do it in emphatic fashion in 2018, beating long-time rivals Nigeria along the way. It does however take more than one breakthrough to undo the habits of years of playing in the dark. To start this journey, it is best to begun with the only woman to have won the Confederation of Southern African Football Association (Cosafa) Women's Championship as a player and as a coach, Desiree Ellis.

**South Africa's most successful female coach**

The coach who qualified the team for the 2019 Fifa Women's World Cup is former Banyana captain Desiree Ellis.

The Cape Town-born Ellis, now based in Gauteng, was born in 1963. When I meet her in her office at Safa House, south of Johannesburg, there are brown boxes of kit to the left. Through the window behind her desk, a section of the famous FNB stadium, known as the Calabash, peeps in. Ellis has a hair-band around her wrist (for any player who may need it at training) and beads supporting a children's charity. Her thick black curls are pulled tightly

back, different from her playing days when they would either flow freely behind her or be peroxided and cut short.

“I started playing football when I was six years old, not for a team though. I played with the boys at school.” Then she teamed up with the teachers to play against the school team, “which was boys”.

At one such game, playing with her educators, Ellis was introduced to the women’s game. “One of those guys came up to me, the owner at the time of Athlone Celtic — Edward Daniels — and he asked me if I didn’t wanna come join his team. Back then, like now, people wonder if there is women’s football. I used to say, ‘women’s football — I’ve never seen any girls playing.’ ” Ellis was flat-chested and 15 years old at the time.

She played as an attacking midfielder and was confused for a boy when she first went to see what Daniel’s girls team was all about. The same thing happened when she made her debut for the side. Starting on the bench in her first match for Athlone Celtic, she proudly sat, wearing tight blue shorts and a white cotton shirt with red lapels and blue sleeves. Their opponents kitted in maroon had royally kept the scoreline goalless until half time.

Ellis’s dad was the only spectator beyond the fence on that sunny Cape day.
After the match, her new teammates asked if he could be at every game, such was his vocal enthusiasm and sidelines encouragement — helped in no small part by the fact that his daughter debuted from the bench and scored the winning goal.

The opposing team was not happy with Celtics' freshest find. They thought she was a boy and they wanted to check, "because they said girls can’t play football like that. My dad said ‘show them you’re a girl!’ So then all I did was I just pulled down my pants and that was it, because I was wearing panties … Where must I hide my stuff? It wasn’t a big thing like I went into a special room or anything, I just pulled down my pants and said ‘I am a girl.’"

Globally, in the 1980s, the game was amateur and remains so in South Africa. It was only in 2003 that Veronica Phewa, Portia Modise, Mpumi Nyandeni and Tanya Carelse made headlines for being the first Banyana Banyana players to get a chance to trial at England’s Arsenal Ladies FC. By 2020, 25 national-level players from South Africa were on the roster of international teams or at American universities.

Just as a democratic society was a dream when Ellis played, so too was the possibility of making a career out of the game. Undeterred, she remained committed, eventually making her debut for the national team at the age of 30. For Banyana Banyana's first outing in 1993 against Swaziland in Johannesburg, Terry Paine was the coach, and "really used to make the team run!" The memory of that first outing is significant for another reason for Ellis: the mini bus carrying her and five others from the Western Province broke down on the trip home. The emergency lane delay was longer than anticipated and she lost her job for being late.

To this day, Banyana players don't get appearance fees and will only receive a financial reward if they win or draw a match. Former Bafana Bafana striker Delron Buckley told the *On the Whistle* podcast that, after the 1998 Fifa World Cup, the appearance fee the team received was R50 000. But then things started to change: "If the national team won you would get R40 000, if you drew you would get R20 000. And if you lose you get nothing." Granted, he also said the players would wait up to two years for the money, but the inflation-adjusted amount for a win would be over R120 000. By contrast, in 2019, Banyana got R5000 for a win.

For the love of the game, Ellis played 32 times for Banyana and scored six goals. A rib injury sidelined her at the turn of the century and, during her recovery, she completed an introductory coaching course. After 10 years with Spurs Women's FC she became the national assistant coach in 2014. Ellis, who was the only female Fifa ambassador for the 2010 Fifa World Cup, has been part of the Banyana technical team for the Olympics and of course for the Fifa Women's World Cup in France. Ellis won CAF Women's Coach of the Year twice and has an enviable record with South African presidents. "Met Nelson for lunch, Thabo with the presidential awards and Jacob, where he was subbed in as part of a charity match for the Special Olympics, and was mentioned to the nation by Cyril in his SONA [State of the Nation address]."

For all the memories football has given Ellis, it's not been easy day to day. She misses her family, so a visit to Cape Town was the first detour she made after returning from France. In Johannesburg, where she's based for her role as national head coach, she lives on her own, navigating a fair share of criticism in spite of the history, accolades and recognition. Ellis says: "I had a very good youth. I was allowed to do what I wanted. I could do

whatever sport I wanted to do and I had the support of my parents, especially my father, who was my biggest critic and motivator. I become emotional talking about family because of all the sacrifices you make.” A watery glaze draws over her brown eyes as she concludes: “It comes with the love and your passion.”

Passion, like curiosity, is enigmatic. Sometimes it is the only reason you can give for why you do something at all. In the modern-day, ever-present search for ‘purpose,' to be satisfied with love and passion is powerful. It was the power behind creating a determination that required those in the game to continue playing, even when it didn’t make sense.

Ellis’s phone has been pinging throughout our interview. Some of the messages are about a recently published story on a player who said the coach lacked professionalism and was the national federation’s ‘last resort.’ Ellis says she won’t be drawn on the allegations. Add resilience to the list of what it takes to go far, along with dogged determination and a winning mentality. If success was an assured result of acting a certain way, then it would be simple. It is not. Even for the best, winning and losing, ebbs and flows. In sport psychology, light was shed on this trend by understanding the inverted U-curve.

**U-curves, catastrophes and mice**

The experiment that first depicted the relationship between pressure and performance as a curve was the 1908 Yerkes-Dodson experiment conducted on mice. The two psychologists were testing whether stimulus, aided learning and what the ideal stimulus was for such habit formation under conditions that ranged in difficulty. Yerkes and Dodson found that in easy conditions, for example in bright light, a habit was formed rapidly in response to a strong stimulus, but in more challenging conditions, like less light aiding the ability to discriminate the neutrals (which was the habit being learned), a medium-strength stimulus was best suited to create the habit quickly. The findings turned the idea that, “more pressure or punishment gets results" on it’s head. Even more significant was that increased levels of arousal caused a decrease in performance in medium and difficult conditions.

This study formed the basis of understanding the nature of pressure on performance and has become known as the inverted U-curve. Sport psyhchologists have long used the

middle of the inverted U to illustrate “the zone”, which is the period where an athlete is performing at their best under pressure. In the last three decades, this reliance on a two-dimensional approach to understanding pressure and performance has been challenged. A multi-layered approach to understanding why performance drops off has been modelled. Fazey and Hardy’s catastrophe models, depict the effects of cognitive and physiological anxiety on performance. Instead of the gradual decline of performance after an optimal balance is reached for best performance, there is a catastrophic drop. Furthermore factors such as task difficulty and an athlete’s self-confidence can aid or restrict the onset of the drop in performance.

Dealing with increased attention can act as a form of pressure, depending on the individual. According to Greyling Viljoen, a clinical psychologist specialising in sport psychology, for some sportspeople, more attention can make them more self-aware. This is counter-productive as the more self-aware an athlete becomes, the harder they try to control things, even skills that have become habits. An intensified focus on self sees athletes start to unpick skills that had become natural in their chosen sport. This constant focus on self has another negative effect: it takes up space in the mind that would otherwise be used for problem-solving in the moment, instead the attention is now on skills and habits that the brain has come to rely on as being stable.

You could say that, for Banyana, less spotlight on the team through the years had created conditions that meant pressure up to the point of qualification for the World Cup resulted in success but then, more pressure from an increase in attention saw a decrease in winning results. Before the Fifa Women’s World Cup kicked off, captain of the side, Janine van Wyk was quoted in the media saying "For us to be the lead story on the back pages of some Johannesburg newspapers this week is fantastic.” This was a new level of awareness for the team and the women’s game. Banyana went almost a year without a win after they achieved Women’s World Cup qualification in Ghana at the African Women’s Championship where they finished as runners-up. Coach Desiree Ellis does not believe that the spotlight was too bright, she puts it down to playing better opposition after qualification rather than the glare and pressure of attention.

Following the 2018 African Women’s Championship, South Africa remained winless in five international friendlies, against Netherlands, Sweden, Jamaica, the USA and Norway and in four matches at the international Cyprus Cup (against Finland, Korea DPR, Czech

Republic and Finland) before the World Cup. All their opponents were ranked higher than South Africa in the Fifa World Rankings and Banyana drew one-all with Jamaica (ranked 53rd in the world), a side who were most evenly matched in rankings to South Africa (ranked 49th in the world). Ellis's assessment of the lack of victories after qualification makes sense. Here are the World rankings of the teams that South Africa played in the build-up to the World Cup and during the World Cup at the time that the countries played one another: Netherlands (7); Sweden (9); Finland (28); Czech Republic (31); Korea DPR(11); USA (1); Norway (12); China PR (16); Spain (12); Germany (2). Most models in football developed to predict outcomes look at previous results between teams or recent form, all of those would not favour Banyana. There is no model that I have found that predicts outcomes based on world rankings: perhaps it got lost in all the criticism about the reliability of the rankings system. So, without alternative evidence, the coach is correct, the superior opponents created an environment where physiological anxiety became too high for the team over the period of 90 minutes and they experienced a sharp drop in performance. Equally without such evidence, we cannot say that their nine goals for and 32 goals scored against in that period was a failure either. Perhaps the increased spotlight was just the pressure they needed to perform at their best: it certainly was the case for seven players (Lebo Ramalepe, Noko Matlou, Refiloe Jane, Janine van Wyk, Bambanani Mbane, Kholosa Biyana and Rhoda Mulaudzi) who all got signed for new international teams following their appearance at the World Cup.

As seen earlier, numbers are only one part of the story. In Fazey and Hardy's butterfly catastrophe model, self-belief can extend the smooth level of performance before a catastrophic drop even if cognitive anxiety (worry and concern) is high but there is low physiological anxiety (the physical effects of stress, such as sweating).

With a solid self-belief to match her talent and work ethic, international forward Thembi Kgatlana says the string of poor results after World Cup qualification was down to the players' mindset. "It was time to step up. You needed players to step up. I think most of the time we look at the opponents to step up. You get players that train twice a week, and others who train every day, so we would encourage the other players to do better." For the World Cup scorer, there was no doubt in her mind that the team could compete with the sides they were going up against. She explained that there was also tension in the squad at that time: "The team needed to be on the same level. Other players feel like they work too much and then others feel like they don't get support from other players, others want to

be in the World Cup team but don't want to work hard for it." Not knowing who was part of the World Cup squad added to the tension: "Only later you could see that the players were coming to the party, closer to when the team was going to be announced. The rotation of players in tournaments in the build-up like the Cyprus Cup was frustrating for the players."

In all but one of the matches following the 2018 African Women's Championship Final and before the World Cup, the team were not defeated by more than three goals. Until their final warm up match against Norway. Here's Kgatlana again: "The 7-2 defeat to Norway was an eye opener. The team wanted to avoid big defeats like that on the global stage."

After the World Cup, Banyana's next outing was the Cosafa Women's Championship, which is a regional Southern African competition. South Africa walloped the Comoros 17-0 (a new team record) on their way to winning the trophy for a sixth time. The indication was that a new flow in the direction of victory and attaining peak performance was beginning again, until South Africa played neighbour Botswana in the Olympic Games qualification tournament. After 180 minutes, penalties decided that Botswana, ranked 103 places below South Africa, would progress on the 3 September to the next round. Ultimately, the continent would be represented by Zambia at the 2020 Olympic Games. Having competed at the 2012 and 2016 Olympiad, the defeat hit Banyana Banyana hard. Coach Ellis called it the team's "lowest low". If self-belief can mitigate the effects of a catastrophic drop in performance, then a shared team belief would do the same, especially when playing a team ranked much lower than you. The World Cup squad consisted of 23 players. Including support staff, a team of around 30 individuals need a culture of belief to fit into the catastrophe model suggested by Fazey and Hardy where self belief will extend smooth performance in the face of high cognitive anxiety and limited physiological anxiety.

Kgatlana already shared the disjoint in mindset that could have hampered the team's preparation up to the World Cup and offered another reason why players could have been "slacking" leading up to the event. "What are you training for if your league is only starting in August?" she was referring to the players waiting for the long promised Safa National Women's League to get underway. A culture of belief within the team is one thing, but having those around you and those who you need to provide support for you, believing in you, is what creates a healthy ecosystem which supports success.

As history shows, even when an environment changes, the effects are not seen immediately and Safa did launch their women's league, at the end of August 2019, after the World Cup.

**An ecosystem where the bravest thrive**

After years of promising a professional women’s league, Safa started the Safa National Women’s League on 24 August 2019 in Soweto. A league provides players with a platform to play regularly, the opportunity to be competitive beyond school and university and, ultimately, once sponsors come on board, the chance to make some money playing. Seen differently, it is the chance to remain motivated and hungry for success.

The opening day of the league was not to be missed. If Cape Town has Table Mountain, Soweto has the Orlando Towers, the cooling towers of a coal-fired power station that was shut down in 1998. These days, they rise up offering vibrant colour against a sepia backdrop to help orientate visitors. They are located to the right of Chris Hani Road, one of Soweto’s main arterials. The taxis, equal in number to the private vehicles, stand out. They are blinking in the sunlight, far from the *skorro skorros* that taxis are elsewhere in the country.

Further down Chris Hani Road, enlarged insect eyes peer from four corners over a pitch that belongs to the Nike football training centre. It is appropriate that the first day of the Safa Women’s League should be in Soweto because of the part the township has played in the women’s game, from being the home of one of the first ladies' team ever formed to striker Portia Modise to the latest international star to come from the area, Refiloe Jane, who signed with top Italian club AC Milan in September 2019.

The first match of the day is the University of the Western Cape and Bloem Celtic ladies. Safa president Danny Jordaan is present. The federation says they are using R10 million rand from the 2010 World Cup Legacy Trust to finance the league. This trust was set up when the country hosted the global showpiece after a $100-million donation from Fifa. Jordaan is in a navy blue suit with the Fifa logo on the left breast pocket complete with a pink and white striped collared shirt. Jordaan led the successful 2010 World Cup bid and has spent 36 years in the game since 1983. Also watching, is coach of the national women’s football academy, Sheryl Botes, and Banyana head coach Ellis.

The most noticeable group in the stands are three fans wearing the green and white zebra crossing insignia of Bloem Celtic FC, a club steeped in history and pride. The trio of two women and a man are shouting between the hollow thud of boot on ball: “Number leven, c’mon number leven!”

The vocal fans are throwing their arms toward a player who is so tall her head reaches above those of her opponents. She has a lightning bolt shaved into the left side of her hair. The Celtic 11 is wearing a number associated with players such as Neymar, Ryan Giggs and Didier Drogba. As she loses possession, the baritone of the trio shouts, “Ah, Mabena, disappoint me again, Mabena!”

The Nguni surname “Mabena” became associated with disappointment in South Africa when a video of national soldier training went viral. The video showed a recruit, involved in a running and wall climbing drill, stop after running at the wall while his peers ran and bounded over the storey-high barrier. The soldier tries a number of times to clear the wall, with his most successful attempt, a one-foot tap at the top of the wall before sliding straight back down in a puff of red dust. The drill sergeant is heard in the background saying, “Mabena, please disappoint me again, I knew it, Maaabbbeeennna!” South Africa’s social media humour quickly saw the Nguni surname Mabena trend and it became the adjective describing failures from bedroom to Bafana Bafana.

“Mabena” didn’t score in the opening match of the Safa National Women’s League. In fact, no one did. Trying to keep them out will be striker-turned-defender Noko Matlou, who’s also here. Matlou was the first South African to win an individual player accolade at the CAF annual awards. In 2008, she was named African Woman Player of the Year. Matlou is only playing the next day with First Touch Academy from Polokwane, but it is a historic day for the women’s game and no one wants to miss out.

The second game of the day sees Durban City Ladies play the Tsunami Queens from the Free State. For the first season of the league, the winners of all the nine provinces were selected together with the Varsity Cup winners — University of Johannesburg and the two established women’s football teams attached to men’s premiership outfits - Bloem Celtic and Mamelodi Sundowns Ladies.

Durban City Ladies from KwaZulu-Natal is Mary Jane Sokhela's side. Sokhela is sitting on a two slat wooden bench under the shade of the Nike Centre building, her hair plaited and pulled back high, dressed in a long denim frock. There is not much Sokhela, known as MJ, has not been witness to in the women's game. She organised players, teams and matches before democracy and is observing the field with an aura of dignity. MJ is part of South Africa's "legacy" in the women's game and "legacy" is one of the pillars of a structure of sport success, according to renowned sport scientist, Professor Ross Tucker.

Tucker explains that what makes rugby so successful in South Africa, like in New Zealand, is "culture", which determines things like support; infrastructure; academies; formalisation and importantly, legacy. Ross says, "Culture means legacy, generational memory, and it drives institutional wisdom so from one generation to the next going back 90 years there is an evolution of knowledge that makes the next generation slightly better off than the previous one. One of the barriers to becoming a sporting super power is culture because it will take many generations to create the institutional wisdom that facilitates elite performance and I suspect that it's the same when it comes to women's sport in general. You get growth as a consequence of time and investment and culture grows from that." Culture rests on an ecosystem, the infrastructure that aids development.

The ecosystem that has supported women's football in the country has consistently outperformed itself. The sport is not offered countrywide at primary and high school level, in spite of it being the most popular sport in South Africa. The main feeder into the national team, Banyana Banyana, which is crucial for players to be seen for international contracts when playing internationally, is the high-performance centre (HPC) programme run from the University of Pretoria.

Of the Banyana squad of 23 selected for the Fifa Women's World Cup, 10 spent time at the HPC. The programme used to take 25 players every year but from 2019, the HPC programme has not taken in new players. The group has dwindled to just 13 girls. Long-serving house mother, Josina "Granny" Tellie, left in 2019 and her replacement didn't last long — she was let go of at the beginning of 2020. Jordaan told the public broadcaster in August 2020 that the programme is not being stopped and laid the responsibility of no new intake on scouts.

In spite of the uncertain future for the programme, Safa are happy with what they have achieved in the women's game. It acts as a shield to any criticism the federation may get about the lack of proper school structures and an often bumbling mens national team. Safa reported in August 2020 that there are 270 trained women referees, 400 000 players nationwide, and 44 Sasol women's football league teams from all the provinces in South Africa.

Four hundred thousand players nationwide is an impressive figure, and one that feels questionable. The biggest schools' league currently in the country, the JvW schools league in Gauteng has just under 4000 girls from both primary and high schools taking part. The other notable competition for schools where women's football is available is the national winter sport schools competition, where under-15 and under-17 teams, that have been victorious in their province, come to participate. The national sports department hosts the event in collaboration with the Department of Basic Education, but were unable to explain how the girls in the teams are chosen or how teams are sleeted to compete in the provincial qualfiers.

Since 2012, the national department of sport's Eminent Persons Group (EPG) has assessed transformation in the South African sports landscape with annual audits. Accessibility, female participation and the demographics of national teams is codified and quantified to see how well each sport code is transforming. The value of school sport was emphasised in the seventh and latest EPG report, which said: "It is the ultimate platform from which to transform SA Sport from a dominant minority representation to a majority inclusive reality." In this report, football, which is accepted to be the number one sport in the country, has no data about how many schools are playing the game, let alone girls being afforded the chance to play.

A healthy sport ecosystem results in success. It is a system of many parts, including schools, clubs, supportive parents and figures like Mary Jane Sokhela and Sheryl Botes.

When the second match gets underway in Soweto, I am alongside Botes, once a player but now one of the most sought after technical minds in the women's game. Botes has been head coach of both junior national teams, Bantwana (under 17) and Basetsana (under 20), and is now a CAF instructor in the Cosafa region. After years of wearing cornrows and braids, she now sports short, curly hair. Botes has a way of talking about the

women’s game with such fervour you always feel you are learning something new. As I hang onto her every word and strain to hear what she has to say above the noise of studs on concrete approaching, a voice full of emotion stops Botes. “Coach,” says a player in sweaty yellow University of the Western Cape (UWC) kit. The player has long grey and black braids.

Botes with a warm smile, replies: “Nelly.”

Nelly throws her arms around Botes who is not any taller than the player and continues, “Coach, I am so happy to see you. I have got the chance to play with UWC but am looking at going back.” Nelly pours out, her face and voice full of sincerity. “ I am so happy to see you! Thank you for all that you did for me.”

Nelly Mamabolo studied at Oral Roberts University in Oklahoma, USA, thanks to her football, and was one of Botes’ players at national junior level. She was credited with helping another former junior national player, Amogelang Motau, to get the chance to study at the same institution. For some players, their lives have changed because of the game. It is bravery from not just the players but the women sitting in the shade of the Nike Centre too, watching the start of the women’s national league. The achievements of the team are better understood when you understand what is lacking.

Banyana Banyana’s leading all-time scorer, Portia Modise, is known for speaking her mind. On numerous occasions she has spoken about the lack of proper support provided by the national federation. In the build-up to the Women’s World Cup, Modise reportedly had national coach, Ellis, in tears when she praised the team for qualifying for the World Cup. "I played with five generations, including the coach [Desiree Ellis], and we couldn't achieve what you've done, girls. You must be proud of what you did. We always wanted to be in this position to change the way we are treated as women in football.” It is a reminder that one can only achieve as much as the environment is willing to allow you.

In 2010, researchers, Nicholas Holt and John Dunn, identified a number of competencies needed by hopeful players that are central to further success. The researchers accept that success in the game is not either nature or nurture but a combination of both. Success in the game depends on four factors (known as psychosocial competencies): discipline, commitment, resilience and social support.

The study interviewed and analysed 22 Canadian players from the national under-17 and under-20 teams, 14 English players and six coaches from four academies. It found that within the four factors were several sub-categories. These included two sub-categories under discipline: 1. Confirming dedication which is abiding by what is expected of a player within a system, and 2. A willingness to sacrifice time with family and friends.

Commitment is distilled into two categories, namely motives and career-planning goals. Motives include the intrinsic desire found in sports people to be better in a certain activity; a determination to succeed; perceived social status and money. The researchers further divided up career-planning goals from international and professional goals.

Resilience requires overcoming potential obstacles and the ability to employ coping strategies, including positively responding to mistakes and having the confidence to thrive under pressure.

The psychosocial competencies of discipline, commitment and resilience are evident in the players and people involved in the women's game. Social support, however, requires others to reinforce the passion shown by these women. That has not been forthcoming. Social support as a factor includes emotional support from parents, informational support from fathers, and tangible support from parents. The researchers conclude that the blend of these factors gives a person in an academy environment the best chance to become a professional in the sport.

Interestingly, some players I interviewed found that football itself was their social support structure, like the first captain of Banyana, Anthea Childs.

**Born to be wild**

Anthea Childs was known as one of the hardest players. Ellis has been on many teams with Childs and says: "Anthea was a very aggressive player. Stood her ground. One of those strong players who wouldn't pull out of a tackle." It's been years since Childs last tackled and she's invited me to her home to chat about her history with the women's national team and show me the newspaper and magazine clippings she has kept pristine in a plastic sleeve folder.

It’s an icy start to a spring day in Melkbosstrand and the smartphone navigates me to a caravan, distinct for the image of a wolf with ice-blue eyes and the words “Wild Child” on the side.

There is a toilet, now holding plants, that marks the start of the path to the front yard which is beautifully kept. Being watched by the wolf, I see the words on the ceramic pot plant: ‘Shit happens’. Childs is short, with blonde hair cut into a military style — classic short back and sides. Square-frame spectacles shield her light-blue eyes.

She smiles broadly and says, “Glad you made it, welcome!”

A 40-year-old bonsai has pride of place at the entrance, another artefact of the three decades that Childs spent in horticulture. A river flows 10m from the living area that you enter, which has been built to the side of the caravan. Beyond the bonsai is an embalmed sugar bird which belonged to her mom, who passed away from colon cancer in November 2016.

It has been 25 years since Childs wore Banyana kit, but she has a soccer ball at her feet throughout our interview. The game has been an ever-present part of her life, from the time she began playing as a teenager.

“It started in 1981,” she says. “I went to Wynberg Sports Club, when my father was playing darts, and then wandered outside and saw some girls playing soccer. I was 13. A gentleman by the name of Patrick Brooker said, why don’t you come and play? I had never ever played.”

A week later, Childs was training with the team and she never looked back. “I started at the end of the ’81 season; ’82 I made provincial, ’83 Springbok colours. Short periods of time but it was amazing. I didn’t have boots, didn’t know what the game was about. Doug McCreedie, an ex-Springbok player and founder of the girl’s team at Wynberg Sports Club [he was also a provincial selector], taught me a lot about what I know about soccer and the position I play.”

Unlike the family support of other players, over 16 years Childs' family came to watch her just once.

She explains what drove her desire to play. "I did it for a lot of reasons: get out of home, don't have to do chores, and a bit of an escape. Then it became a seven-day thing. Monday and Wednesday, you train with your indoor team; Tuesday and Thursday with the outdoor team. Friday you play indoor, Saturday, go watch juniors and Sunday you play outdoor."

Childs was a natural sportsperson, listing tennis and table tennis colours among her sport achievements but football was more than just a game. "I already knew from primary school that I was gay. I was different from the other kids. Being involved in soccer, I was part of a family that understands you. People didn't understand that when I was young."

Childs had found a place of belonging, that, was motivation enough for her.
To make money to go on tour with the team, get a provincial blazer and boots, she would push trolleys at shopping centres for tips and ask for donations. "Life for me was being at the soccer field. My parents didn't support it because it wasn't a 'normal' sport."

From the 1970s, provincial teams were selected at the time under Sawfa. The federation was able to have players of different races competing and largely flew under the noses of the apartheid authorities at the time, who subscribed to Childs' parents view that football was not a 'normal sport' for women.

Sawfa organised an annual interprovincial tournament (IPT), which was a highlight for Childs and her teammates."The IPT was well attended by family and friends. If you had 60-70 people, it was a lot. Durban was always big and that was well supported, say 250 people." Her first IPT was in Durban and she says they drove up in a HiAce. "With a lot of pit stops along the way because we had some teammates that liked to drink. We were a bunch of rebels that loved soccer."

She cherishes her football memories and has three scrapbooks full of pictures and press clippings. Ellis is in a number of the team pictures and Childs relives her first memory of the now most successful female South African coach. "This little person, running around scoring goals. We actually became really good friends. Then I became friends with the

whole family. Her mommy used to make me jeans. They smuggled me into Hanover Park one night in the boot with a blanket over and then smuggled me into the house. All we did over the weekend was watch football. They had taped matches of overseas teams and that's how we learnt. Des is two years older than me. I was about 15 years old when I went to the family home.  There was no way my parents were going to take me in there."

Sport's basic tenet rests on the myth that only those with the correct work ethic and talent will "make it". While these two factors are essential ingredients in the recipe for success, a system needs to exist for the passionate to reach their full potential, like a stage where the motivation can be in the spotlight. Just ask sponsors, nothing motivates more than being associated with excellence and success. This is where an enabling ecosystem is essential which comes from a successful culture. Professor Ross Tucker points to this as being a key to making a nation successful in a given sport code. The other important element in creating a winning culture, is successful high performance programmes.

Tucker has a recipe that would ensure Banyana go to many more World Cups in the future: "If I was to distil high performance into one basic concept, it's this: in 2031, who is going to represent South Africa at the Women's World Cup? That's in 12 years' time, so it's someone that is 14 years old today. The questions you have to ask are:
-Where is that 14 year old right now?
-Are they playing the sport?
-Have they got a good coach?
-Are they part of a good team?
-Do they have access to good facilities?
If you can't answer those questions then you hope for luck."

A system that supports identification and development is the reason Tucker says you have someone like Siya Kolisi, who led the Springboks to Rugby World Cup victory in 2019. "Here is a youngster who is taken from his disadvantaged background and when he gets placed in Grey [high school] he becomes 'hyper-advantaged' because of his expression of talent. Now, I am not saying that to diminish his achievements, but what that shows is that the rugby system was geared to find him and the question I would ask is whether there is a soccer system that's geared to find the same thing. I am not sure there is."

Was it just plain luck that South Africa qualified for the 2019 Fifa Women's World Cup? American founding father Thomas Jefferson is credited with saying it and golfer Gary Player paraphrased it, but as the famous quote goes, "I'm a great believer in luck and I find the harder I work, the more I have of it." The person who would say loudest that Banyana Banyana was far from lucky is the walking encyclopaedia of the women's game in the country, Fran Hilton-Smith.

**The soccer loving musician**

If you want to know anything about women's football in South Africa, most people you ask will direct you to Fran Hilton-Smith.

Ellis says, "Fran is very passionate … She has been around from the beginning and has a lot more information about women's football. Fran has been instrumental in pushing courses for women."

National captain Janine van Wyk says Hilton-Smith remains highly influential in women's football, while Safa NEC member and the administrator who started the Safa national women's league, Ria Ledwaba says, "If I should be honest, Fran was the person, the only person, who was instrumental and made sure women's football was alive. Fran's life was women's football. If we look at women's football today, the person that must be celebrated is Fran."

It's July 2019 and the Women's World Cup final is still to be played in France, but Banyana Banyana have already arrived home. The former general manager of women's football at Safa and once assistant technical director to Neil Tovey, Hilton-Smith, is also home. Two months before the World Cup, she was told her contract would not be renewed. After 21 consecutive years with Safa, she would not be with her "baby" for their greatest achievement.

The federation asked her to leave as she was six years past the official retirement age of 60 and said they needed to cut costs. "But isn't the president, Danny Jordaan, 68 years old?" I ask. Hilton-Smith shrugs and reminds me that it is an elected position.

In the entrance of her home is a picture over a metre high of a smiling Nelson Mandela and Hilton-Smith, side by side. When I ask to take a picture, she picks up her old green Springbok blazer for women's football and stands below the framed image, her smile mirroring the print. Hilton-Smith did not only meet Mandela through football, but also played music for him as part of the Basadi Women of Jazz band, where she was a member for five years.

Hilton-Smith got involved in the game around 1968 when a team was formed as part of the men's club at Germiston Callies. By the 1970s, the football-loving school teacher was involved in organising the game with Sawfa. Hilton-Smith was a biology and physics teacher at Edenvale High for 20 years but says she ended up teaching everything from accountancy to typing. She still receives messages of thanks from some of her pupils as they became computer company owners. Her organisational skills led her from player to administrator and then into coaching. By 1989 Hilton-Smith was the chairperson of the Eastern Transvaal Women's Football Association. By the time Banyana were formed, she was the Sawfa chairperson and became South Africa's first team manager. If the battle for international competition was finally over, there was a new battle to fight-over who 'owned' the women's game. In the first Banyana Banyana squad, five players who would form the backbone of the early team hailed from the Soweto ladies, a team organised by Themba Matwasa.

Hilton-Smith remembers Matwasa heading a group called the "crisis committee" that she explains "had the ear of the national federation at the time and wanted to take control of the women's game". But Sawfa, as Hilton-Smith states, "were the affiliate member to the national body."

Matwasa says he founded a group called the South African Women's Soccer Association (Sawsa) that had "around 50 teams, from around the country." Unlike Sawfa, there are no programmes or evidence of events held by the organisation. His assertion is that Sawsa had the larger number of teams but they didn't have an organised league at the time.

The fighting between the two groups led to the issue of managing women's football being put onto the Pickard Commission agenda in 1997.

The commission had been set up to deal with corruption and mismanagement of top-flight men's football, but chapter 9 was dedicated to women's football. Judge Pickard advised that the game be administered by women only and assisted by Safa expertise.
Pickard further suggested that Safa needed to take more of an interest in the women's game and advised that a proper meeting be held for the issues to be ironed out.

Sawfa dissolved after the commission. Bruised but not broken, Hilton-Smith says, "I began working out of the boot of my car, going to teaching colleges, training newbie teachers to coach soccer, in the hope that when they went to schools around the country and were asked to take an extracurricular activity, the teachers would choose soccer." All this as the national federation, Safa, took control of the women's game.

Women's football had become desirable for the national federation after the mother body, Fifa, hosted the first Women's World Cup in 1991, and there would be additional funding available for the national federations with active women's football programmes. After the huge success of the France World Cup in 2019, Fifa will be granting each of their member nations $1 million a year for women's football activities.

Hilton-Smith believes that Sawfa should have remained an affiliate of Safa, saying, "We would have been much further with woman's football if we were left alone to our own devices at the time." Just over a year after the commission, the national federation got her back into the fold to push the women's game. She was the national coach and the under-19 coach for two years, then became the manager for the junior team. She continued in women's football management until her last day with Safa.

Hilton-Smith has short blonde hair, the same today as it was in the image with Mandela 20 years ago. Her smile is a serious one below square eyebrows with a crease of wisdom running vertically between her light eyes. Her tone is matter of fact. You know her feeling on subjects not through varying inflections in her speech but because she tells you. Hilton-Smith's authority on the women's game is not understood through what people say about her alone but also through the pitch of her speech. It's a frequency that one can only master through experience.

Years with Sawfa taught her many things such as the pitfalls of male coaches. She remembers an incident at one of the annual interprovincial soccer tournaments: "I was

sitting in reception one night in a hotel where the teams were staying and I saw a guy call down a young girl from his team and then she went with the manager or coach of another team. The whole scenario to me was very clear, this was not kosher. After that first incident and some of the players approaching me I made a rule that the manager must be a woman if the coach is a man. But then the manager and coach were having a fight at the one tournament because the manager also happened to be the girlfriend of the coach and he had approached one of the players and now she was jealous, so all of my thinking was kind of justified. I thought the one thing to do is improve the standard of managers and coaches."

From training teachers, Hilton-Smith was brought back into the federation and began training coaches. She says that will be her legacy, along with the HPC programme, which she helped to initiate. "Now we have in South Africa 27 CAF A-licensed woman coaches, which is more than the rest of Africa put together. All our national coaches are women. So that's been a major step forward and yes they need more experience and more help, but at least we made a stand on that. For me it solves a lot of problems," she says.

"I've changed the lives of thousands of women regarding coaching and I think the thing that has also changed people's lives is the HPC that I started 14 years ago." A total of 17 players to date have gone on to obtain university or college qualifications after matriculating from the programme. That is worth gold in a sport that is yet to be fully professional. Playing for Banyana is bankable only if you manage to land a contract with a professional outfit overseas. Players get R5000 if they win an official match. They don't see anything if they lose and they receive a daily allowance when the players are on official team duties. In the World Cup year, Banyana played 20 official matches. They drew three (with a draw being worth R2000) and won five, for an annual return of R31 000, not enough to be taxable in South Africa.

These amounts are hardly enough for anyone to make the kind of sacrifices required to play women's football at national level, which is why a deep motivation has driven players who have stayed in the game long enough to reach the national team. Many are not willing to sacrifice what is required, meaning that those who do and get the opportunity, gain the hours to make them irreplaceable.

**Gaining the hours**

Sport prides itself on being the purest form of meritocracy: the most capable and talented rise to the top. This simplistic equation doesn't take into account the good fortune that one may have by being born in the right area or at the right time to take advantage of all that surrounds them. Dissecting success, genius, expertise and talent is ambitious but worthwhile, if not to find the blueprint, then to console ourselves for falling short.

The adage "practice makes perfect" took on renewed vigour when Malcolm Gladwell proposed the 10-thousand-hour rule in his best seller, *Outliers.*
It was coined from the findings of a now famous study about the deliberate practice of talented musicians by K.Anders Ericsson, Ralf Krampe and Clemens Tesch-Romer. They found that those characteristics often labelled "innate talent" are in fact "the result of intense practice extended for a minimum of 10 years".

Dr Anders Ericsson, currently a Professor at Florida State University, wrote an update on the seminal study of deliberate practice saying that mere long-term experience is not the determining factor of expertise and achievement, a person must actively seek out skill-enhancing experiences. Furthermore, Ericsson explained that, through experience, experts have acquired long-term memory patterns but unlike less accomplished colleagues, experts select relevant information and store it in a way that the brain makes it easier to work with.

Following the Gladwell book, Ericsson criticised the generalisation of his "rule" and the fact that deliberate practice was not sufficiently emphasised. Be that as it may, no doubt there is enough research to generalise that proficiency in any task, has roots in practice. The quality may differ but experience makes a difference. In South African women's football, you cannot gain the experience without being given the chance and then you have to keep working hard to stay in.

Janine van Wyk is the most capped national player, male or female, having walked out for the country on 170 occasions. Peroxided hair cut into a mohawk is her distinguishing feature. Deep-set eyes and a strong jawline belie her warm and honest nature. The player began a club focused on school teams in 2012 and it now provides the best supported girl's football school league in Gauteng. The senior team of the club, JvW, won the Sasol

women’s league national title in 2019. In doing so they gained promotion to compete in the second season of the first semi-professional women’s league put together by Safa.

An avid Manchester United fan, van Wyk began playing at five years old and there is no part of her life that is not touched by football. Only a week separates her and her cousin, Kyle. She was by his side whenever her uncle would take them to the local football club on the East Rand of Johannesburg. Her uncle’s friendship with the coach softened his stance on letting a girl play with the boys, but she quickly found out she had to do much more work than the others to fit in. When the boys would take off their shirts, she would too. When the coach didn’t have bibs and needed to split the group into shirts and skins (players distinguished as wearing tops or not) to play a practice match, Van Wyk always wanted to be on the skins team. She didn’t see a difference between herself and the boys but she felt a difference when they finally accepted her. She says, “At about nine, when I made the district team for the boys was when the boys started to respect me because I had played so long in the league. I was then made vice-captain of the district team.“

The outstanding feature reading Ericsson et al’s 1993 paper on deliberate practice is motivation. Without it, a person would not be able to accumulate the hours of deliberate practice. The paper explains that in order for practice to be considered deliberate, it has to be inherently unpleasant. It is also necessary to improve so there needs to be the drive to practice and improve performance. The crux in the conclusion of the paper is that “the commitment to deliberate practice distinguishes the expert performer from the vast majority”. Could this be the innate talent that the professor and his team proved in the paper? Anyone having struggled with a dip in motivation or the desolate light of introspection know how important “being motivated” is, and the aura of superhero prowess those with it, have.

To dispel the myth of innate talent, the researchers tried to single out characteristics that would not change over time or through practice, but they couldn’t find a thing because even with deliberate practice, your motivation increases. It’s a causality dilemma: one needs motivation to practice but in most instances, to increase motivation you need to practice.

Without deep desire, a white Afrikaans girl would not have stayed in the game long enough to reach her goal of representing the country. Van Wyk attended an Afrikaans school —

her father is Afrikaans and her mother English. There, she was made fun of for playing the game. Had it not been for her family encouraging her to stay, if she enjoyed it, South Africa would not have known about the defender. The power of family was considered by the 1993 paper in two ways: genes will give someone a height advantage if the sport requires that and family support also leads to early access to resources, quality instruction and practice.

Van Wyk's grandfather played the game, all her uncles played and they also happened to play in a team with former Banyana coach Joseph Mkhonza. That made Van Wyk's journey easier when she needed to find a girls' team because Mkhonza had a women's squad in Springs that Van Wyk joined when she was 14 years old. Springs Home Sweepers played out of KwaThema, a township on Gauteng's East Rand. Van Wyk says, "When I first started playing with the girls, I had to go into the townships. It was very strange for me because I was never exposed to such environments where I came from, in the suburbs. Being the only white person on the field was also a bit strange. Maybe the first year with the team was difficult."

Van Wyk was the only white player in Banyana at the Women's World Cup and has been for many years, along with Roxanne Barker before Barker's early national retirement in January 2019. Van Wyk is aware of how racial prejudice continues but is being challenged through the game, she says. "Now, I have been in the game for so many years, that people know who I am. It's become a lot easier and I have gained a lot of respect, being willing to go into different communities — some white people would say risking my life, but I have never been threatened once going into those communities. If anything, people made me feel part of their community. People would recognise me and it would feel like home to me. I used to sleep over at Nomathemba's [Ntsibande] house and it was completely normal. My parents raised me right. My parents took me into those communities to train and play. My mom would take me into those communities on her own. I gained a lot of respect for that."

Unequal distribution of resources in South Africa persist as one of the sordid traces of apartheid, with the best facilities still more readily accessible in suburbs, but when it comes to the best human capital in football, that lies in townships around the country.

“It also comes down to parents being willing to drive into black communities,” Van Wyk says. “We have a Randburg team that are affiliated with JvW and they play in the regional league. They go into deep rural areas where they play, not on grass but, on red sand and gravel. The parents would say, either you put my daughter somewhere else or we are pulling out. I have to sit down with the player and parents and tell them if you want to go far with your football, these are the struggles. The challenges you have to face. Nothing is going to come easy for you. We’re not privileged enough to have nice facilities everywhere. If you want to play on nice fields, you’re going to have to stay in your district, where it won’t get you anywhere. If you want to get far, you’re going to have to travel into communities where the football is more competitive but facilities are not that great. If you’re willing to go through that, you will be a better player. I haven’t had anyone pull out but it takes a lot for them to understand that they have to go through that, to get far in their football.”

“Deliberate practice” as explained by the researchers requires full attention and must be sufficiently intense. In the case of sport, this translates to playing against players that are better than you, which leads to better ability. Banyana Banyana often play practice matches against quality male youth teams and all of the players who play for Banyana started by playing with boys as children.

Van Wyk played two seasons in the USA with Houston Dash under former Banyana coach Vera Pauw before returning home for a year in 2019. She then signed a year’s contract with Danish team Fortuna Hjorring, but never played a game as she was recovering from a grade 2 medial collateral ligament (MCL) tear in her left knee. Six months into the contract, the two parties agreed to terminate the deal.

Ten thousand hours over 10 years equates to just under three hours a day of "deliberate practice”.  These are activities done with the intention to improve performance in a specific domain not just for fun and enjoyment. Van Wyk played the game for 14 years before playing Nigeria in 2006 at the All Africa Games and 20 years before her most memorable moment as she scored against Nigeria leading to victory over their arch rivals in Equatorial Guinea. It was the first time South Africa had beaten Nigeria since Banyana was formed. You cannot quantify how many of those hours would be considered “deliberate practice” but in order for practice to be considered “deliberate”, it has to be beyond just doing the activity for fun. This requires what is known as intrinsic motivation.

**Rising star**

The phone declares triumphantly “Arrived”. I have driven on a dirt road illegally to dodge ditches and, looking around, I don’t have the same triumphant feeling that my map application does.
On the left is a construction site and a group of men working hard, on scaffolding, mixing cement and throwing bricks. Christmas was just two days ago. On the way into Mohlakeng township in Randfontein, west of Johannesburg, litter is strewn for metres beside the road and a wall has a hand-painted advertisement for a funeral service company.
On the right of where I am parked in the middle of the dust road is a newly built plastered home with freshly laid Tuscan roof tiles. It resembles a home in suburban estates.
One of the builders walks to get more sand from the pile outside the site.
“Hi there, I am looking for Thembi, the soccer player,” I say.

Without a word, he points to the home I’d just been admiring. Within two minutes of knocking on the black steel gate, Thembi Kgatlana is standing there and her broad smile greets me. Kgatlana is under 1.56 m, with a slight frame that belies her deadly ability to strike the ball from outside the six-yard box. It was one such goal that she scored against Nigeria that won her the CAF Goal of the Year.  Kgatlana scored in every match of the 2018 African Women’s championship bar the final. That run ensured South Africa a place at the 2019 Fifa Women’s World Cup.

Her hair is shaved on either side, reaching to a V at the nape of her neck. Some length in the middle creates a short Mohawk, dyed orange.

“Welcome to my home,” she says with a wide smile.

After greeting, I say, “This place is lovely.”

Kgatlana explains, “I built it for my parents after the World Cup for their 17th wedding anniversary, while I was in China. We’ve been staying here for a month and a half. Please come inside.”

Football highlights are playing on the television as we sit at the dining room table. The lounge wall has two of Kgatlana's framed shirts between an embroidered African cloth with a picture of her face. "That is when I made the national team in 2014, during the friendly international against Namibia, and that one," she says, pointing to the right, "is my shirt from UWC [the University of the Western Cape]. I was there before going to Houston, studying tourism."

Kgatlana started playing for a boys' team at her school ground, a dusty field of red earth at AB Phokompe Secondary.

Drugs, drinking and nyoape are a problem in the area. Kgatlana points out the house across the road from her grandmother's home, where she spent much of her time growing up. "One night they had a beautiful fence, next morning it was gone. Nyaope boys." At the end of the road is the shadow of a recreation facility where all friendliness is faded. The basketball and tennis courts are protected by a mangled and rusted wire fence. Kgatlana says it's why they built an outhouse at her first pitch alongside her high school — to protect the two steel grandstands, tennis court fence and goalposts.

Mohlakeng has been home to a number of famous South African players, such as Patrick 'Ace' Ntsoelengoe (after whom the stadium in the area is named); Edward Manqele; Ben Motshwari and Oupa Manyisa. Even Thapelo Morena spent some time living in the area. Another national women's player, Linda Motlhalo, imagined and worked towards a life beyond the spartan facilities they grew up around. She now plays in Sweden.

Kgatlana started playing competitively at the age of eight with a boys' team called Napoli FC in Randfontein. Her most vivid memories of her soccer beginnings were the people around her. "As a professional female player, the stadiums are not full like when I first started playing soccer, where a lot of guys were there to watch the boys play," she says.

Among the variety of applications of the Yerkes-Dodson law, the empirical relationship between performance and pressure, was a study by Alan Welford on how varying levels of stress affect different types of personalities. Welford found maximum tolerable levels of stress differ from one individual to the next, and introverts "are self-driving" so do not need as much pressure as extroverts. Banyana's leading young player, now with top European club Benfica, says she is an introvert and prefers time alone or in nature. On her first

professional contract in the USA, she took teammate Janine van Wyk to the zoo “three times in a year”. Having a “self-driving” nature has been crucial for many South African women football players as many around you can’t initially see what you can — like Kgatlana’s mother who needed some convincing about her daughter pursuing a future in the game .

Kgatlana’s first introduction to a female team was with Parma Ladies FC. This is where she met the next important dose of motivation required to go onto representing the country.

Parma played in the Absa Women’s League, the top women’s football competition at the time. There Kgatlana met Portia Modise, the highest goal scorer for a national player on the continent. She says, “Every time I went to training I would see what Portia is doing and try to imitate her to get better.” Kgatlana looked up to Portia. “Back then, we didn’t see much women’s football on TV and here there was this girl scoring six or seven goals. I think everyone wanted to be like that girl. I used to measure myself against Portia.”

Modise landed a professional two-year contract in 2007 with Danish top flight side, Fortuna Hjorring. Kgatlana was 12 at the time. She says she lost interest when Modise left, but thanks to the coaches knocking on her front door and personally asking her to come and train, she continued to play.

In August 2014, she was promoted to make her senior national debut at Dobsonville stadium in an international friendly against Namibia.

Vera Pauw was the national coach at the time. It was not what Kgatlana expected — from being a regular starter, she was on the bench. It was not supposed to feel like this. Even her mother called after the match and asked, “Why is Vera playing you ten minutes?” Her mom’s sentiments captured her mixed emotions. “I didn’t understand that I needed to be groomed and I was too ambitious,” Kgatlana says. In hindsight, she says it inspired her to ask herself, “The person they’re selecting instead of me, what are they doing that I can’t do?”

On her debut, Kgatlana was subbed in the place of Portia Modise. This may have been the single biggest motivation that the young player needed. She thought, “If they are putting me in the place of Portia, if she has to retire, I will have to step up.”

The desire to beat the best player in the country gave Kgatlana the motivation she needed to leave home at 16, finish school in Pretoria, move to Cape Town, and then spend a year in the USA before moving onto China for the next season.

Understanding motivation has been at the forefront of psychological studies for centuries. In 1999, Robert Vallerand and Gaetan Losier wrote a paper for the Journal of Applied Sport Psychology that proposed a sequence for motivation in sport. It focused on different types of motivation, namely intrinsic, extrinsic or no motivation at all, which psychologists call “a-motivation”. A debate remains about whether, extrinsic or intrinsic motivation, is more valuable to sporting performance. Extrinsic motivation is created by a desire for external factors like fear (of punishment or failure) or the promise of social reward. Intrinsic motivation describes the internal desire to get better at an activity for personal enjoyment. Research has shown intrinsic motivation is ideal for an athlete because their drive is drawn from within. But both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation operate on a continuum where only the two extremes are noticeably different, and one can lead to the other. Losier and Vallerand proposed a chain of the different types of motivation which results in the by-products of motivation such as satisfaction, conceptual learning and persistence.

The research shows that motivation often begins with social factors such as “success/ failure”, “competition/cooperation” and “coaches’ behaviour” to psychological mediators. A mediator is a sense of sorts, identified as perceptions of “competence”; “autonomy” and “relatedness”. So essentially, it is social factors seen through a personal lens that leads to different levels of motivation. The researchers list the consequences as “satisfaction”; “conceptual learning” and “persistence”, among others - all characteristics needed to be proficient and successful in football.

According to researchers Vallerand and Losier, “The social environment can have potent effects on one’s motivation.” How people behave toward an individual has an impact on their thoughts, feelings and behaviours. In Kgatlana’s case, her brother Mpho, who is a year older, has a great influence on her. He’d protect her when she wanted to play football

with him and his friends. The Napoli FC coach, too, used to stick up for her when the boys in the team wouldn't accept her, saying, "She is better and faster than you." Kgatlana says it was the coaches at Parma who "let me be the player I was". These are powerful seeds for the growth of motivation, but coaches' behaviour, success in an activity, and cooperation are all moderated by someone's ability to feel competent, having a sense of autonomy and of being connected to others.

Kgatlana found her sense of relatedness when she was scouted to join the High Performance Centre (HPC) national programme in Pretoria. At 15 years old, she was seen by Safa's Anna Monate at the West Rand trials for the South African under-17 team. Thereafter she was offered and accepted the spot on the HPC programme in 2012 at 16 years old. She completed her Grade 10 to matric years in Pretoria. Kgatlana says, "If there was no HPC, I would still be stuck here, looking for opportunities which I think are really low. The High Performance Centre only takes players who are 16, and just 25 players a year."

The coaches in the national set-up and within the HPC structure, together with her coaches in Mohlakeng, sat with Kgatlana and her family to explain the opportunity fully because there were reservations in leaving the safety of her home, her parents and the community she knew. However, her desire to  at least try was bigger than her fears. "Remembering how many girls were at the trials and I was chosen, I think that really motivated me to say, go give it a try because a lot of girls want to be where you are." Kgatlana says that she may have had a plate of food every night but she knew more than enough girls who would travel 5km's to training and return home to where there was nothing to eat. Giving her best to the national team is similarly motivated: "I had to work hard for the opportunity and I am not only representing myself but I'm representing my peers, who also wanted the chance I got."

Just as there is not one category of extrinsic motivation, there are three kinds of intrinsic motivation: toward knowledge; toward accomplishment and toward experiencing stimulation. Kgatlana is driven by these, but extrinsic factors, especially remuneration, are not lost on the forward.

From Banyana Banyana coach Vera Pauw, Kgatlana got her break not only in the senior team but also in the USA with her first professional contract at Houston Dash worth $2000 a month. After her national debut in 2014, she was still in contention with Modise for a starting place, including for the 2016 Olympics. She was not selected for the original squad of 18, but was instead one of four travelling reserves. During the first match, against Sweden, South Africa's Shiwe Nogwanya was injured and Kgatlana filled the gap.

Pauw did not return to South Africa after the Games in Rio and six months later was announced as the head coach of Houston Dash. Kgatlana hoped Pauw would remember her. She did. In January 2017, the Dutchwoman texted Kgatlana. "Hi Thembi, how are you? I don't know if you know, I was appointed the head coach of Houston Dash. How far are you with your studies? Are you willing to come play for us?"

Kgatlana sat in disbelief. Wondered whether it was a joke. Then called Zanele Dumako, her training partner. "Where are you? I need you urgently!"

For the next two hours, they discussed the message. It took Kgatlana a further two weeks to pluck up the courage to approach her parents, who had earlier in her career, not wanted her to pursue the game, until she received the HPC scholarship. When she sat her parents down years later, her mom asked, "What if Vera takes you and plays you those 10 minutes?" remembering her daughter's senior debut.

Kgatlana replied, "Mom, if those 10 minutes are worth it, let me go. I will be getting a salary and I can help you guys, sustain your lives back at home."

Kgatlana played in 16 matches for the Dash, starting only twice and scoring two goals. She then landed a contract with long-time friend and teammate Motlhalo in Beijing with Phoenix FC. Another move, another foreign country and this time a foreign language. Kgatlana's intrinsic motivation toward knowledge, accomplishment and stimulation is noteworthy. "I am an open-minded person," she explains. "A lot of players have asked: 'what's it like to play in China? I also want to play there.' But in the back of my mind I ask: Would you be able to sacrifice what I have sacrificed? Everyone wants to be like that but how much of the heat, the thorns will they take to have it? People don't know what you go through, especially in America. I was passionate, I wanted to play and I get to America and face the same challenges with Vera. I get there, she doesn't play me, she plays me the 10

minutes.” That forced Kgatlana to become an impact player. She accepted that it didn’t matter whether you played five, 10 or the whole 90 minutes, the result is the only thing that counted.

Social acknowledgement is one of the biggest extrinsic motivators and what led to the only goal South Africa scored at the World Cup. People had criticised Kgatlana for always wanting to score easy goals. So she vowed to herself that when she got into a good position she was going to hit it whether it goes in or not.

Kgatlana dreams of playing Uefa (the Union of European Football Associations) Champions League football “because that’s how you get nominated for the Fifa World Player of the Year“. She now has the chance: she has signed with Benfica for 2020, contenders for a spot in the premier European club competition.

Kgatlana has an easy smile but exudes a confidence that lets you know she believes what she is saying and so should you. She explains, “It took me 15 years to be where I am, but I hoped and knew and believed that I would get a chance. If it was someone else, they would have given up along the way.” It’s this intrinsic motivation that leads to success.

Many set out with noble intentions, characteristic of intrinsic motivation, but sadly many don’t reach the levels they are capable of because extrinsic motivators are also important to maintain interest. This is where an environment conducive to high performance is necessary, an environment where solid development structures and a culture and passion for the sport exist. As women’s football in South Africa builds these to continue the success they have enjoyed and learn from the failures, the interviews show the importance of those who have selflessly given to the game, and why they need to be apart of the blueprint that is evolving with the rest of the world to remain playing in their own recognised spotlight.

PART 3
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