

Big guns drop like flies

 By Nick Said

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First it was France and now the Italians have made an early exit from the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the 'Curse of the 2006 Final' bearing down on both.



Both sides have probably paid the price for hanging onto past glories, as well as players from the World Cup decider in Berlin four years ago. They have the same coaches and play the same way, failing to recognise that in international football you can be found out very quickly, and unless you have top match-winners in your side, even minnow teams will work out a game-plan to counter you.

But I think the struggles of the so-called 'big-guns' in world football at this tournament signify that the gap between the traditional powers and the smaller footballing nations is

growing ever narrower.

The reason for this, I believe, is the proliferation of players from smaller countries into the structured leagues of Europe, where they play at a higher level than back home, which can only improve their game.



Gaining experience is vital

Not since the heyday of the great Czechoslovakian sides of the 1960s and 1970s has football in Slovakia looked so bright. Why? Because just two of their 23 man squad at the World Cup play in the Slovakian League (and they are fringe players Kamil Kopúnek and Kornel Saláta as well).

The rest play in the English Premiership, Italian Serie A, German Bundesliga, amongst others, which has further strengthened the national team.

This is why it is so important that Bafana Bafana players are picked up by European clubs after this World Cup, because the level of coaching they get in the PSL, compared to the three leagues mentioned previously, or even Holland, Belgium, Greece or France, is well below standard.

Run your eye over Bafana Bafana's Top 10 greatest players, the likes of Lucas Radebe, Doctor Khumalo, Shaun Bartlett, Shoes Moshoeu, Benni McCarthy, Steven Pienaar, Quinton Fortune, Aaron Mokoena, Macbeth Sibaya ... they all spent a large portion of their career overseas.



It was All White on the night

This does not wholly explain the French and Italian failings though. It was also down to poor execution by the players, with the French also lucky not to face the guillotine for their ridiculous, childish and unprofessional behaviour at the tournament.

The Italians were unusually naïve, and lacked a genuine playmaker against the Paraguayans and New Zealanders to really break those teams down.

Finally, a note of congratulations for the All Whites from New Zealand (not a very 'PC' name in Mzansi is it?), who most people, including myself, thought would be whipping boys in the pool.

To have come away unbeaten in the group and finish above Italy is a remarkable achievement and hopefully one that kick-starts football in a country that does not even have a professional league.

Images sourced from www.fifa.com

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