

KICK-START YOUR DREAMS

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Soccer may be seen as a male-dominated world, but for Nomvano Mbathiso, getting the youth off the street to play the beautiful game was an initiative she is now turning into a business. *Indwe* spoke to her to find out more.





What is your background?

I was born in Butterworth in the Eastern Cape. After finishing matric in 1994 and a computer course in 1998, I worked as a fish wholesaler and supermarket cashier before finding myself unemployed in 2013.

What inspired you to start the Ayatshisa Mateki (“Try Again”) Football Club?

In our area, unemployment, especially among the youth, is increasing. There are so many children on the street without any formal education and young adults without any jobs. My husband and I felt a need to offer these young people a safe haven and a purpose in life to try and keep them from turning to drugs, alcohol, and crime.

Why did you choose the name?

The name reflects my understanding that in soccer, as in life, there are both ups and downs and that one should never give up trying to succeed.

What was it like when you started?

We wanted to do everything on our own and didn't have much of a plan in place. When we decided to get involved in tournaments, we realised just how unfit our players were and we lost all the games. Since then we have come up with a structure and proper training programme, and we have been winning every game. And the higher up we move in the league, the better our chances of being paid for these games by the organisers.

How is it going right now?

There are currently 52 active members and the club has four divisions, including a senior team and under-13,

under-15, and under-17 teams. Thanks to sponsorships we have basic equipment, and currently we are using the open space near the R300 in Mitchells Plain for practice and matches. We gather players from surrounding areas and have joined a local league association called the Mandalay league.

What impact has the academy had on the youth?

Our coach, Ndiko Hardson Mavata, was previously affiliated with the Khayelitsha Football Association, and we can definitely see the improvement in our players since he started coaching the teams. We want to win this league, play in the Castle division, and then go on to play in the Vodacom National First Division (NFD), at which point our players will earn a salary.

What challenges have you faced over the years?

We've struggled with the transportation of players, accessing training facilities, joining the league in terms of registration fees, and registering players to the South African Football Association. We won some tournaments and now have some cash, although my husband and I had to pay the rest out of our pockets. Being unemployed, it's challenging, as I don't have much money to put back into the club. So I know what it is like to have nothing and to struggle to survive.

How have you overcome these difficulties?

At first, we never thought of charging the players, which created a massive problem for us in terms of funds. But we now have a plan in place that the University of

Stellenbosch Business School assisted us with. Players pay a membership fee as well as a monthly subscription fee to assist with the transport. Supporters also pay an entry fee to watch the games.

How did the intensive nine-month Small Business Academy course help you?

The University of Stellenbosch Business School helped me a lot in terms of turning the soccer club into a business and also giving me the relevant skills to grow. Financial planning and budgeting were new to me. I didn't even think about planning in advance and coming up with ideas on how to make money. Now I have the skills to plan, to project the required capital we need (and the ways in which to raise it), to understand the importance of marketing, and to see the opportunities available to us. More importantly, I have the confidence to know that I can run a successful business. They have made me think differently about the club.

What are your goals for the future of the soccer club?

Our goals are to reduce crime, alcohol, and drug abuse by keeping our youth busy in sport. We also want to create employment through soccer and play in the Premier Soccer League in five years.

What advice would you give to other entrepreneurs?

Don't be afraid. Just do it and never give up.

The Small Business Academy (SBA) at the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB) aims to advance the sustainability of small businesses operating in townships by fuelling their growth and potential for job creation.