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JULY 2025 NEWSLETTER







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Q & A WITH JABULILE MGABHI: ESWATINI'S OWN FEMALE REFEREE

CATCH UP: BUILD IT U-13 FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Eswatini's U20 National Teams Gain Valuable Experience at AUSC Region 5 | COSAFA Youth Championships

The AUSC Region 5 Youth Games | COSAFA Youth Championships 2025 held in Namibia, proved to be a tough but valuable learning experience for Eswatini's U20 Boys and U20 Girls National Teams. Both teams unfortunately bowed out of the tournament at the group stages. Despite the results, the focus for both squads, was on exposure, growth, and development, which are key elements in Eswatini's long-term football vision.







For the U20 boys' national team, the final group match against Zambia ended in a 3-0 loss, with all goals coming in the first half. Eswatini showed more character in the second half, creating some chances and holding firm defensively, but could not find the back of the net. Similarly, the U20 Women's National Team faced South Africa and suffered the same 3-0 scoreline. All three goals were also scored in the first half, but a more disciplined and defensive approach in the second half saw the Eswatini girls contain further damage and hold their ground.









Throughout the tournament, it became clear that the Eswatini players most of whom were making their maiden appearance in a major international competition gained significant insight into the high demands of international football. The matches, in as much as they were challenging, offered priceless experience that will help accelerate the football development of the players.

The EFA's leadership have emphasized the significance of such experiences, as it immensely contributes towards football development in the country.





While the scoreboard may not reflect success, the exposure to international competition improved the tactical awareness, and strengthened team spirit which will surely serve these young players well in their future football development pathway. As the teams returned home, the EFA remains committed in supporting their development, ensuring that this early exit becomes a stepping stone rather than a setback in their football development alleyway.









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Empowering Referees: FIFA MA Youth Refereeing Course



The Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) in collaboration with the Eswatini Football Association (FIFA), successfully hosted the FIFA MA Youth Refereeing Course from 7th to 11th July 2025. The intensive five-day training program brought together 19 young referees; both males and females, from across the country, all of whom showed remarkable dedication in learning the craft of refereeing.

Led by highly experienced FIFA Referee Instructors Paulo Marques (from South Africa) and Maroua Hannachi (from Tunisia); the course focused on arming the participants with essential theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and modern officiating techniques. From daily fitness drills to match situation simulations, the participants were immersed in a dynamic learning environment aimed at shaping the next generation of elite referees in Eswatini that can be ready to do a splendid job even on the international arena.





The instructors were warmly received by the EFA President, Mr. Peter Simelane, whose vision for youth empowerment through football continues to pave the way for growth in the local game. During the closing ceremony, the President was represented by EFA Vice President, Mr. Polycarp Dlamini, who delivered a heartfelt address to the participants.





In his remarks, Mr. Polycarp Dlamini congratulated the participants for completing the course and choosing a path in refereeing. He encouraged them to pursue this profession with integrity, emphasizing that refereeing is a calling that demands honesty and accountability. “Choose this path out of passion, not profit,” he advised. “Referees must always remain above reproach and uphold the values of the game.”





The Vice President who is also the Chairperson of the Premier League of Eswatini, extended appreciation to the FIFA instructors and local Refereeing Educators whose tireless efforts made the course a resounding success. He assured the participants that the EFA is committed in providing continued - support through real match training opportunities, allowing them to apply what they have learned in practical settings. He further hinted at future VAR (Video Assistant Referee) training initiatives, as Eswatini begins exploring advanced officiating technology for its domestic competitions.



FIFA Instructor Paulo Marques praised the group's progress and discipline throughout the course. "The first days were tough," he admitted, "but by the end of the week, we saw a complete transformation. These young referees have immense potential. Now it's up to them to keep learning, stay committed, and seek every opportunity to officiate, because that's how great referees are made."

Speaking on behalf of the participants was Wethu Nkambule, who acknowledged the FIFA and EFA for the learning opportunity. He expressed the group's enthusiasm to take their new knowledge into action, stating that they feel confident and ready to officiate in the upcoming football season.





This FIFA MA Youth Refereeing Course marked a significant step in the development of officiating in Eswatini. With continued investment in youth and technical support, the country is well on its way to producing more referees capable of officiating at both local and global levels.

THE FIFA COACH MENTORING PROGRAMME COURSE WELL EXECUTED

The FIFA Coach Mentoring Programme which also duplicated to be the EFA Basic Coaching Course Phase 1 was fruitfully concluded on Friday, 18 July 2025, after five days of rigorous training that started on the 14th July 2025. A total of 25 coaches participated in the program, which was officiated by the FIFA Mentor Mr. Francis Mogasio.







In his remarks, Mr. Mogasio praised the EFA's Technical Director Mr. Bhekisisa Mkhonta, calling him "one of the best and a mobile library."

He highlighted the importance of such courses in strengthening grassroots football, saying, "There's no player without a coach."



EFA President Mr. Peter Simelane thanked Mr Mogasio and the local instructors for their efforts. He encouraged the coaches to remain humble, work hard, and strive for excellence, assuring them more support through upcoming training programs. The EFA Coach Instructors through Anthony Mdluli, express gratitude to EFA for the support; noting that their mentorship in Zambia and South Africa aided in shaping the course content delivered to the participants of the EFA Basic Coaching Course.









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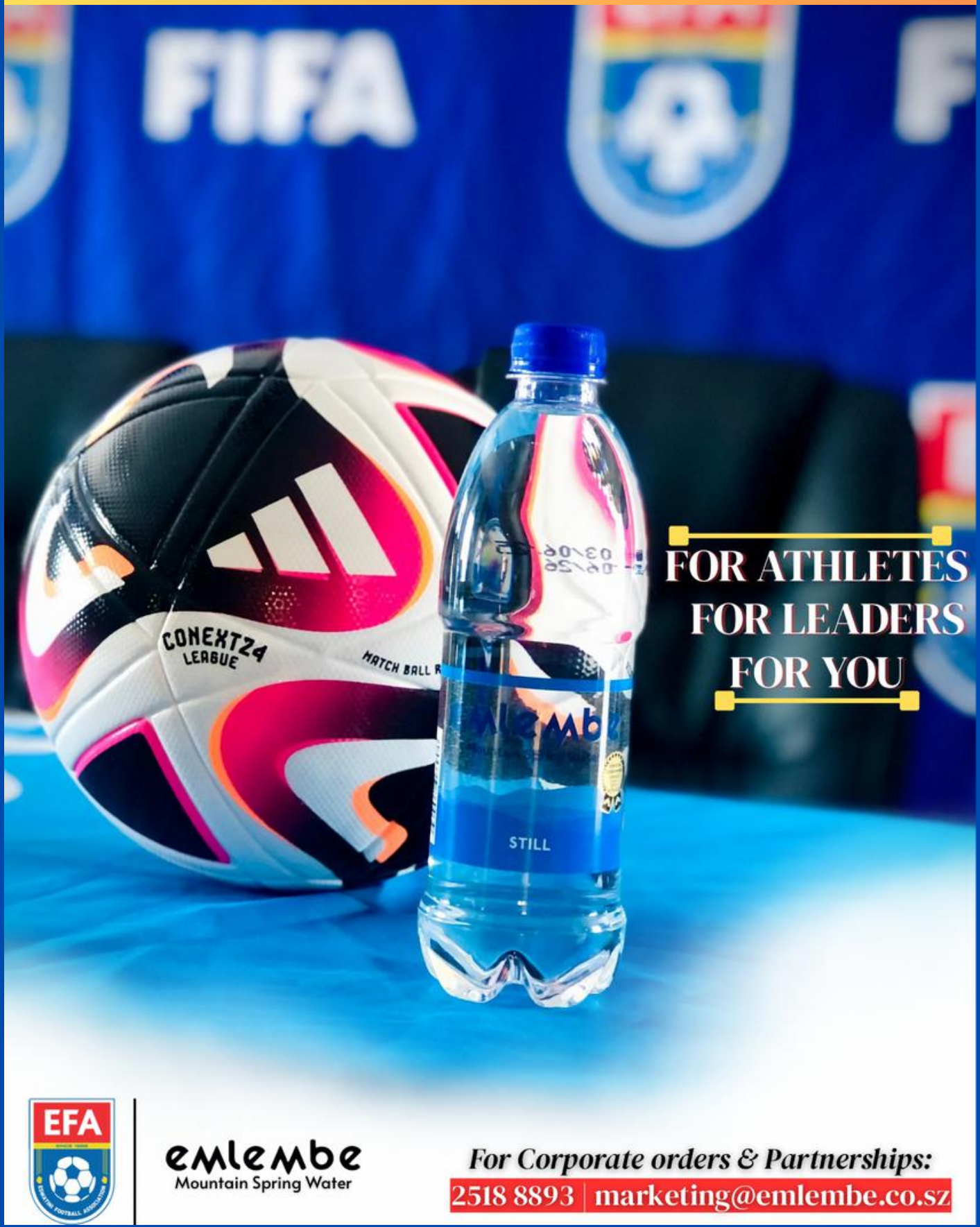

CELEBRATING OUR YOUTH AT THE REGION 5 COSAFA GAMES



Ahead of the 2025 Region 5 COSAFA Youth Games in Namibia, we proudly announced Jabulile Mgabhi's appointment as one of the match officials,a major milestone for her, Eswatini Refereeing, and the Football Association.

In this issue, we catch up with Jabulile to hear about her experience, lessons learnt, and her journey as a young female referee.

We also feature Andiswa Malaza, captain of the U20 Boys' Team, who made his second appearance at the games. He shares his growth, leadership journey, and reflections from representing Eswatini once again.

QUESTION 1. (Q1.) : Congratulations on officiating at the AUSC Region 5 Youth Games | COSAFA U20 Girls Tournament. How did it feel stepping onto that stage and representing Eswatini?

Jabulile Mgabhi (J.M) : It was an honor and a dream come true to represent Eswatini on the international stage. I felt proud and determined to make a positive impact on the tournament.

Q.2. : Take us back when and how did your refereeing journey begin? What inspired you to pursue this path?

J.M : My refereeing journey started when I was a player when I was still schooling, and I realized I had a passion for the game beyond playing. I was inspired by local referees and decided to take the refereeing course to contribute to football in a different way where Technical Instructor Thulane Nkonyane and Referee's Manager, Sifiso Zondo played a major role in the beginning of my refereeing career.

Q.3. : What does being a young female referee in Eswatini mean to you personally, and what challenges have you overcome along the way?

J.M : Being a young female referee in Eswatini means breaking barriers and paving the way for others. I've faced challenges like skepticism and limited opportunities, but I've overcome them through hard work, dedication, and support from my family, Former Senior Referee, Mbongeni Shongwe and Active Senior Referee Zamani Simelane ,and the Eswatini Football Association at large.

Q.4. : Tell us about your experience at the AUSC Region 5 Youth Games | COSAFA U20 Girls Tournament, maybe your highlights as you were conducting your refereeing duties

J.M : The tournament was an incredible experience. Highlights included officiating in high-pressure matches, learning from other referees, since we were mixed with FIFA referees and seeing the talent and passion of young players. It was a privilege to be part of this event.



Q.5. : What role has the Eswatini Football Association played in your growth as a referee to be where you are now?

J.M : The Eswatini Football Association has been instrumental in my growth as a referee. They provided training, mentorship, and opportunities to officiate in local, including the women Ingwenyama Cup finals and international matches, including friendly international games. Their support has been invaluable.

Q.6. : How do you prepare yourself mentally and physically before big tournaments matches which often come with so much pressure?

J.M : I prepare myself through physical training, studying the laws of the game, and mental preparation techniques like visualization and positive self-talk. I also focus on getting enough rest and staying focused.

Q.7 : What's the most important lesson you've learned since becoming a referee that you'd want every aspiring referee of any gender to know?

J.M : The most important lesson I've learned is to stay calm and focused under pressure. Consistency and fairness are key to successful refereeing. On top of that, I've learned that fitness is the first crucial key in refereeing.

Q.8. : Who are your refereeing role models locally or internationally, and why?

J.M : My role model in my refereeing career local and international is Letticia Viana, who opened doors for us as young referees, if it wasn't her, I have no doubt, our county wouldn't have the opportunity to groom another young female referees. She worked very hard not only for us but for the country as a whole I admire her professionalism, decision-making, fitness levels, and committement. My aim is to follow her steps.



Q.9. : In what ways do you think refereeing exposure like COSAFA tournaments impacts your career and Eswatini's refereeing standards as a whole?

J.M : International exposure helps me gain experience, learn from others, and develop my skills. It also raises the profile of Eswatini refereeing and encourages growth and development in the sport.

Q.10. : What are your future ambitions in refereeing? Any big goals you're working towards?

J.M : My goal is to officiate in major international tournaments like FIFA world cup one of the good days and continue to develop my skills. I aim to inspire young referees in Eswatini and contribute to the growth of football in my country.

Q.11. : What message would you like to send to the football community, your supporters, and the EFA for their role in your journey so far?

J.M : I'd like to thank the football community, my supporters, and the Eswatini Football Association for their unwavering support. Your encouragement and guidance have been crucial to my success, and I look forward to continuing to make you proud.

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ANDISWA MALAZA

Question 1 (Q.1.) : Andiswa, this was your second appearance at the AUSC Region 5 Youth Games | COSAFA Youth Championship, how did it make you feel to represent Eswatini at that level once again?



Andiswa Malaza (A.M) : Representing Eswatini for the second time at the AUSC Region 5 Youth Games was a truly humbling and exciting experience. It gave me a deeper sense of responsibility and pride, knowing that I was playing not just for myself, but for my entire country. Being part of such a high-level competition has helped me grow both mentally and physically as a player, and it made me even more determined to keep improving and making my nation proud.

Q.2. : Your talent was discovered in the build it under-13 Football Development Programme and you are one of the beneficiaries of the E 10 000 Player of the Tournament Educational Bursary, how important was that platform in shaping the player and person you are today?

A.M : Being discovered through the Build It U13 Football Development Programme was truly life-changing. The opportunity to receive the E10,000 Player of the Tournament Educational Bursary has not only supported my academic journey but also pushed me to take football more seriously. That platform helped shape my discipline, confidence, and passion for the game. It laid the foundation for both the player and the person I am becoming.

Q.3. : What do you treasure the most about the Build It U13 Football Development Programme? Did you ever imagine it will be your pathway towards wearing the national team jersey and represent the country in international Arena at this level?

A.M : What I treasure most about the Build It U13 programme is how it gave me exposure and a real chance to be seen and supported. It built my belief that football could open doors to greater things. At the time, I never imagined it would lead me to wear the national jersey and represent Eswatini internationally, but now I know that dreams are valid when matched with effort and the right opportunities.

Q.4. : Although the team didn't secure any points in the group stages this year, I'm sure there were key lessons you learnt and what were those?

A.M : Although we didn't secure points in the group stages, I learned the value of resilience and teamwork. Every match taught us how important it is to stay mentally strong, communicate effectively, and never give up, even when things don't go our way.

Q.5. What areas of your game do you feel have improved since your first AUSC Region 5 Youth Games | COSAFA Youth Championship appearance, and what do you think helped that growth the most?

A.M : Since my first appearance, I've seen major improvement in my speed, positioning, and tactical awareness. Consistent training, feedback from my coaches, and watching professional games have helped me develop and sharpen these areas.



Q.6. : As someone who has experienced both local grassroots and international youth football, what advice would you give to young boys playing in tournaments like Build It today?

A.M : My advice to young boys is to always believe in themselves and stay disciplined. Talent alone is not enough, you must work hard, stay focused, and take every opportunity seriously. Never stop learning and trust the process.

Q.7. : Who supports or inspires you the most in your football career, any coaches, family members, or role models that you look up to?

A.M : My biggest inspiration is my parents, they always supported me emotionally and pushed me to keep going. On the field, I look up to players like kylian mbappe because of his hard work, skill, and leadership.

Q.8. : What are your short and long term dreams in football? Where do you see yourself in the next few years?

A.M : In the short term, I want to earn a spot in the senior national team. Long term, I hope to play professionally overseas and use my platform to inspire young soccer players in Eswatini to chase their dreams too.



Q.9. : How do you balance football with school or other responsibilities as a young player?

A.M : Balancing school and football is not easy, but I manage my time carefully. I prioritize schoolwork during the day and train after classes. I've also learned to stay organized and use every minute wisely.



Q.10. : What message do you have for organizations like Build It, the Eswatini Football Association, and others who invest in grassroots football and youth development?

A.M : My message to organizations like Build It, the Eswatini Football Association, and others investing in grassroots football and youth empowerment is one of deep gratitude and encouragement. Your support is changing lives. You are not only developing talented players but also shaping future leaders. Please continue providing platforms, resources, and mentorship ,because for many of us, your belief in our potential is the reason we keep striving. Your work truly makes a difference.

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CATCH UP : BUILD IT U13 FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME



SITEKI BUILD IT

The EFA's KaLanga Technical Centre came alive on Saturday 5th of July 2025, as the Lubombo Region as it hosted the first Build It Under-13 Tournament for 2025.



The atmosphere was electric, with eight youth teams battling it out in a one-day football spectacle. After an action-packed day, it was Koria FC who emerged as champions, defeating Mkhutjana FC 3-1 in a high intense final.





Mkhutjana FC had dominated the group stages and semi- finals with a perfect record and were favorites heading into the final. Koria F.C., drew one match against Raising Stars F.C. in the group stages showed immense composure and tactical brilliance in the final to be crowned champions of the 2025 Build It U13 Siteki Tournament. In addition to gold medals and the prestigious trophy, the champions were also awarded branded Build it bags, a proud moment for the young boys' success.



A standout moment of the tournament was the performance of a young girl by the name of Asemahle from Mkhutjana FC. She was the only girl child who played in the tournament. She scored two goals across three group matches, underlining the growing importance of women's participation in grassroots football.

Her contribution was celebrated as a significant step forward for women's football in the Lubombo Region, reflecting commitment of the Lubombo Regional Football Association who are one of the members of the EFA to gender inclusivity in football.





Fisokuhle Tsabedze from Koria FC was named player of the tournament. Playing as a midfielder, Tsabedze impressed everyone who was at the stadium with his mature decision making, exceptional ball control, and vision beyond his years. Among the dignitaries present were the EFA's Executive Member and Lubombo Regional Football Association Chairperson Nicodemus Mashwama, EFA's CEO Frederick Mngomezulu, and EFA's Technical Director Bhekisisa Mkhonta, amongst others.

In his remarks during the prize giving ceremony, the EFA's CEO expressed the football association's gratitude to Build it for its continued support to football development. He further extended a heartfelt appreciation to the coaches and teams who prepared the players so well for the competition. Also, in attendance was Build it Siteki Store Manager Thabile Mamba, who commended all the teams for their discipline and passion; promising continued collaboration in developing football at grassroots level in the Lubombo Region.

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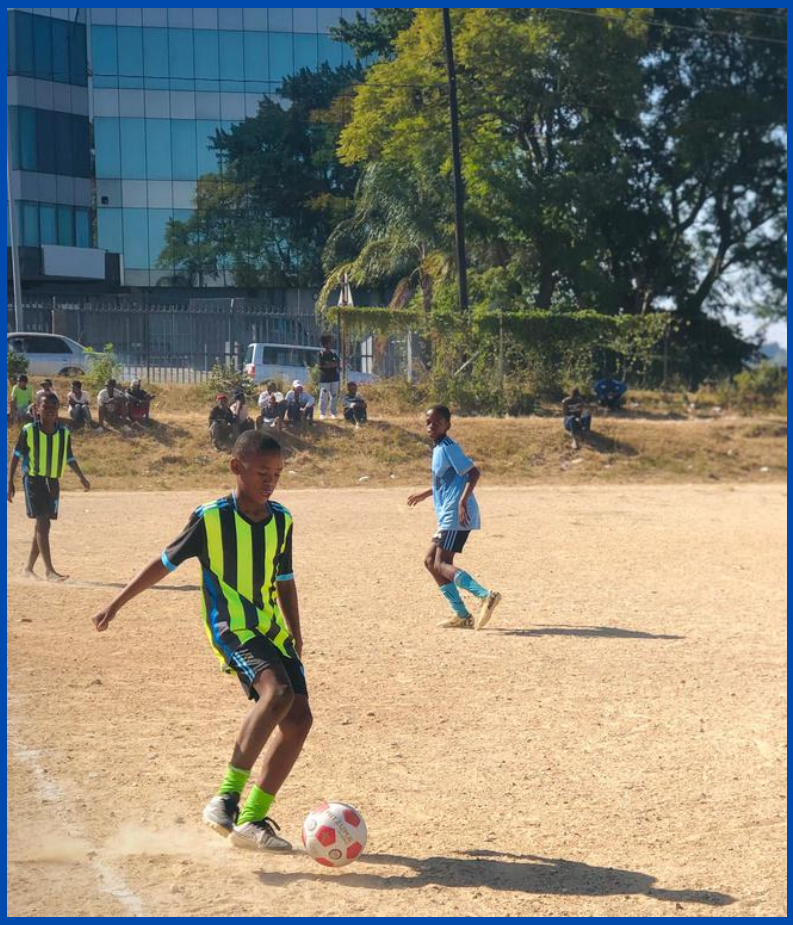
MANZINI BUILD IT

The second installment of the 2025 Build It Under-13 Tournaments took place at the Zakhele Sport Ground on the 12th of July 2025, under the banner of Build It Manzini.



From the first to the last whistle, the players showcased exceptional teamwork, technical ability, and maturity. It was clear that the players and their coaches had prepared rigorously, with matches demonstrating strong defense, quick passing, and powerful shots on goal. Out of the 12 group stage matches, only one produced more than two goals which is a testament to the level of competition and defensive discipline on display. Several matches ended in goalless draws, highlighting just how evenly matched the teams were.











The final saw a tense clash between Manzini Wanderers F.C. and Royal Leopard F.C., who had already played to a 0 - 0 draw in the group stage. This time, Manzini Wanderers F.C. edged out their rivals 1 - 0 to clinch the title, capping off an intense day of action.

A standout performer throughout the tournament was Junior Sibandze, the captain of Manzini Wanderers F.C. Leading by example, Sibandze not only scored a memorable hat-trick in one of the matches but also displayed excellent leadership and coordination on the pitch. He was deservingly named Player of the Tournament and shared the Top Goal scorer award with Mnotfo Simelane from School of Excellence, both of whom displayed immense attacking prowess. When Junior was interviewed, he said his dream is to end up playing in Spain and locally he would love to play for Nsingizini Hotspurs F.C.

Importantly, this tournament was not only a platform for young players and coaches; it was also a milestone for Eswatini's new generation of referees. The matches were officiated by youth referees fresh from the recent implemented FIFA MA Youth Refereeing Course, offering them valuable hands-on experience in high-stakes, competitive matches.



SIPHOFANENI BUILD IT

The Siphofaneni Build It Under-13 tournament, held on Saturday 19 July 2025, at the Siphofaneni Sport Ground, proved to be an exciting showcase of young football talent. Despite a chilly and rainy start, the weather soon cleared, and the tournament kicked off with a vibrant morning parade from the Siphofaneni Build It Store.





Eight teams competed fiercely through the group stages and semi-finals. One of the highlights came when Juventus F.C. and All Nasri F.C. played to a tense 0 – 0 draw, forcing penalties where All Nasri F.C. edged through with just one miss out of five. In the final, Rhinos FC dominated with a commanding 4 – 0 win over All Nasri F.C., earning them the championship trophy and other top prizes which included a goat. Sinokuhle Sibandze stood out and was named player of the tournament after a stellar performance and won himself a 750 litres tank worth E1 700 and a soccer ball.









Football Legends such as William “Cool Cat” Shongwe, Tony “TT” Tsabendze, Wonder “Samba” Nhleko, and current national team players Felix Badenhorst and Gift Gamedze graced the event, along with EFA Technical Director Bhekisisa Mkhonta. A crowd favorite team was Hlutsi FEA, a church-based team formed under the guidance of their pastor. Although they didn’t collect any points, their motivation and discipline captured hearts. Their coach praised the initiative, saying sports can be a powerful tool for youth development, even with faith communities.









MATSAPHA BUILD IT

The fourth leg of the 2025 Build It Under 13 Tournament took center stage on Saturday, 26 July, at the iconic Swazi National Sport Ground, hosted by Build It Matsapha. What unfolded was a thrilling spectacle that captured the true unpredictability and excitement of youth football.





Mahlanya Professionals, the dark horses of the tournament, defied all odds to clinch the championship in the most unexpected fashion. Their road to glory began with a stunning semi-final upset over Usuthu Stars, who had looked untouchable in the group stages, winning all three matches without conceding a goal. But Mahlanya stood tall, holding Usuthu to a goalless draw and then edging them out 3-2 in a dramatic penalty shootout.



Meanwhile, Super 16 also delivered a surprise blow in the other semi-final, eliminating another tournament favorite, Young Heroes, who had remained unbeaten throughout, with their worst result being a 1-1 draw.

In the finals, it was Mahlanya Professionals vs. Super 16, a clash no one saw coming. The boys from Mahlanya continued their fairytale run, showing grit and hunger to secure a 2-1 victory and lift the trophy on the day.



Shining brightest was Sibonelo Mayisela, the midfield maestro from Mahlanya Professionals. His commanding performances, creative flair, and unwavering determination earned him both the Best Midfielder award and the prestigious Player of the Tournament accolade, a testament to his vital role in Mahlanya's remarkable triumph.





The tournament once again showcased not only emerging talent but also the beautiful chaos that makes football so special.

GLAMOUR MEETS GLORY AT ESWATINI WOMEN'S LEAGUE SOCCER AWARDS

The Eswatini Women's League Soccer Awards were held on the evening of 24 July at Sigwaca House, bringing together players, officials, and dignitaries to celebrate the close of a successful women's football season. The venue was beautifully decorated, and players from various clubs arrived in stylish formal attire, adding a touch of glamour to the occasion.







In attendance were the EFA Vice President Polycarp Dlamini, EFA CEO, Inkhosikati Make LaMbikiza's representative Inkhosikati Make LaMabuza, the Women's Football Association Committee, and other football stakeholders. In his address, the Vice President congratulated the Women's Football Association for a well executed league, acknowledging the challenges faced , particularly around sponsorship, and assured that efforts were ongoing to secure funding that would elevate the women's league to the standard of the men's.

He expressed gratitude to Inkhosikati Make LaMbikiza for her consistent support throughout the season, particularly her initiative of awarding a monthly cash prize of E2,000 to outstanding players. Representing her, Inkhosikati Make LaMabuza reaffirmed continued support towards women's football development and generously presented all clubs with brand-new goalkeeper gloves, a gesture warmly welcomed by all in attendance.





The event concluded with the official awarding of league honours, with Young Buffaloes crowned champions, Nsingizini Hotspurs finishing as runners-up, and Manzini Wanderers taking third place. Individual accolades included six Player of the Month awards, the Player of the Tournament which went to Welile Ndwandwe of Young Buffaloes, and Goalkeeper of the Season awarded to Nompilo Dlamini of Nsingizini Hotspurs.







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