



## Press Release 8

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### **NORMAN MAPEZA Q&A / Metropolitan COSAFA Under-20 Youth Championships**

Zimbabwe senior national team coach Norman Mapeza is reaping the benefits of a strong Under-20 side as a number of young players graduate from that age-group into the full national side.

He tells us of the importance of the Metropolitan COSAFA Under-20 Youth Championships and how they have helped his country build for the future.

#### **As senior team national coach, are you happy with the youth structures in Zimbabwe?**

I think there is a lot more that could be done. We have a superb academy like the Aces one which has produced the likes of Knoweldge Musona [Hoffenheim, Germany] and Khama Billiat [Ajax Cape Town] recently and I think there is more to come from there as well. They are doing a fantastic job, scouring the country for talent and we are very grateful to them for it. But if you look beyond that then there is not that much else coming out of the other academies.

#### **So what would you say needs to be done?**

Well, if you look back at what was happening during the 1980s, when we had sponsors for the academies, we started to produce some excellent players and that was certainly a boost for the national side. That is not happening now and I suppose that is where we need to start. But we also must try and set up proper junior leagues for Under-14, Under-16 and Under-18. We need to give our best youngsters exposure at that level.

#### **So presumably competitions like the Metropolitan COSAFA Under-20 Youth Championships are important for you in gauging the quality of the talent that is coming through?**

Most definitely! We are very grateful to COSAFA for what they are doing in the region and there is no doubt that the Under-20 championships are crucial to us in developing football, not just in Zimbabwe, but all over the region. Players like Musona have come through the COSAFA Under-20 Youth Championships and I am

sure he would have learned a lot from playing against the best players in his age-group in the region.

**Will you be watching the tournament in Botswana this year?**

We will be keeping a keen eye on it because it is not only good for us to see the youngsters that are coming through in Zimbabwe football, but South Africa too, Zambia, Botswana and so on. I think it will be a fascinating tournament and a very good one quality-wise if the event last year is anything to go by.

**Are you hopeful of Zimbabwe claiming the trophy?**

I think they stand a very good chance. As I said, we have enormous talent in this country and I believe they can match any side. We are the holders of the COSAFA Senior Challenge of course after we won in 2009 and it would be so good for our football if we could hold the Under-20 title at the same time.

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