

Nurturing SA's future stars

While 15 July will be widely remembered as the day France secured a historic second World Cup title following their 4-2 final victory over Croatia in Moscow, it was an equally memorable day for former Mamelodi Sundowns coach Gordon Igesund, who proudly launched his Hamilton Football Academy in Cape Town.

Situated at the Western Province Cricket Club in the Cape suburb of Rondebosch, Hamilton Football Academy is the brainchild of Igesund and his business partner Bryn Ressel. The duo first discussed the idea in early 2017, as 18 months of planning and organisation finally came to fruition in July.

Hamilton Academy is made up of players falling into four different age groups, namely Under-9, Under-11, Under-13 and Under-15. The teams train five days a week, with Wednesday and Friday reserved for specialised training in a well-equipped gym. Igesund takes charge of most training sessions with assistance from the academy's head of development, Waleed Abrahams.

Igesund, who played an integral role in kick-starting the careers of Sean Dundee and Delron Buckley who went on to star in the German Bundesliga, tells KICK OFF that his wish is to produce world class players who will help take South African football to the next level.

"The idea of this academy is not something I thought of last minute," he says. "I've been coaching at the highest level in South Africa for over 30 years, starting in 1986 with Witbank Black Aces. I have won six league championships, two in the First Division and four in the Premier League, as well as many other trophies.

"I also coached the senior men's international team to success against Spain, while they were the world and European champions, fielding the likes of Ramos, Busquets, Iniesta, and Alonso. I then asked myself, 'Having so much to offer, what



After a successful coaching career which saw him win four league titles with four different PSL clubs, Gordon Igesund has now decided it's time to give back to the game. The former Bafana Bafana coach recently opened a brand new academy in Cape Town as KICK OFF paid the decorated coach a visit.

BY ZOLA DODA

Hamiltons are proud and privileged to have Coca-Cola Peninsula Beverages as our partner.

can I do to give back to the game that has given me so much?"
 "And that's what has led me to create this academy."

Ineffective development

Since South Africa's re-admission to international football in 1992, having a football academy been seen as fashionable in the local game. The Transnet School of Excellence was one of the first academies to be launched in the early 1990s, helping produce players such as Steven Pienaar, Dillon Sheppard, Lucky Maselesele and Zitha "Ninja" Mofokeng.

"Ajax Cape Town is another great example of the way development should be done," Igesund says. "They consistently promote three or four players each year from their youth teams into the first team set-up. In recent times a number of other credible academies have been established across the country, yet I still feel we could be doing so much more."

"One of the problems I've identified in South African football is that players are being developed too late. Players should be making their professional debut when they are 19 or 20, not 25 or 26. Look at the likes of Kylian Mbappe from France: he is 19 years old and already a superstar, having helped his country win the World Cup."

Igesund believes the future of South

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HOLISTIC APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

Despite the fact that the main focus of the Hamilton Academy is to produce footballers, a holistic approach to each player's development is being instilled, with a lot of emphasis on education. The long term aim, according to founder Gordon Igesund, is to assist players in obtaining scholarships.

"We also help our players with schooling," Igesund explains. "We had to put everything in place before we launched the academy, from a functional curriculum to making sure we secured a home base that was a safe place for the kids to train. We have also included a computer management system where every player's development progress is on a database. This means that with a click of a button, we are able to monitor how the players are progressing."

"We are also very proud to have partnered with Coca-Cola Peninsula Beverages. With all this in place, if we as an academy can make a positive impact in just one child's life, it will all be worth it."

"We are not just stuck in our community – we help others from equipment and kits to the up-skilling of community coaches. We recently worked



ABOVE: Igesund with partner and academy co-owner, Bryn Ressel.
 BELOW: With academy player Taisheer Lawrence.



in Khayelitsha on a community project at the 'Soccer School of Hope' with whom we did a 10-week coaching programme. That is what our academy is about. Our plan is to develop and give football and

educational opportunities to players and coaches alike. "Taisheer Lawrence is our first academy player to receive a full scholarship with Wynberg Boys. We aim to do this for more of our academy players in future."

CHAIRMEN'S SUPPORT

Gordon Igesund is well-known for his exploits in winning four PSL titles with four different clubs – namely Manning Rangers, Orlando Pirates, Santos and Mamelodi Sundowns – but he also had his own share of ups and downs with club chairmen.

"I think the biggest problem in South Africa is player power," he says. "Here, players phone the chairmen whenever they are not happy with something. They don't understand that the coach is the boss and they

must trust the process. It upsets me because these things are never said. One minute a coach is on top and the next minute he is useless because he lost two matches."

"Gavin Hunt won the league and was the Coach of the Season, doing a fantastic job, but the next minute you read in the newspapers that he has lost the dressing room. What nonsense is that? This is because all this is allowed."

Igesund worked with Rangers chairman Kaycee Reddy where he won his first league title 21 years ago,

and stresses that it takes more than a coach to win the championship.

"The most important thing to win the league is for the club to be fully behind the coach," he says. "At all my championship-winning clubs it was like that – the buck stopped with me. My chairmen and I had a great relationship. If I told the chairman that a player was not working hard, was killing the spirit of the team and was no longer in my plans, he would be supportive."

"I've done that with my best players. Go back to Orlando Pirates: there

"THE BIGGEST PROBLEM IS THAT PEOPLE LIKE TO SAY THEY ARE DOING DEVELOPMENT HERE AND DEVELOPMENT THERE, BUT WHAT ARE THEY ACTUALLY DOING?"

African football lies in positioning schools as soccer hubs for young and aspiring footballers.

"Unfortunately very few, if any, of our schools are equipped to deliver a structured and holistic development coaching programme," he says. "If implemented correctly, this will ensure footballers are given the best opportunities and professional coaching to enable them to succeed at the highest level."

"This is the gap Hamiltons Football Academy is bridging outside of the traditional academy club structure, as we have a responsibility and willingness to develop young talent."

Pathway to stardom

Igesund says the academy has applied to be registered with the CTTFA Local Football Association in Cape Town, to help pave the players' journey to the top.

"Our aim at Hamiltons Football Academy is to install the foundations within our players to become future stars," he says.

"Football intelligence is lacking in our local game. That is not because a player is not intelligent, it's because he has never been taught correctly, so these are some of the issues we are looking to combat."

In 2014 the PSL launched the MultiChoice Diski Challenge with the aim of bridging the gap between youth teams and the professional

ranks. While a handful of youngsters have been promoted to the PSL, most failed to break into the senior ranks following their exploits in the reserve league.

"We don't see a lot of players who are in the MDC in the PSL and that is because there is so much pressure on the PSL coaches these days. It's difficult for most coaches to take the risk and throw a player into the deep end when he can see he is not quite ready yet," Igesund adds. "For me this illustrates the point I made earlier with Mbappe, as many of our young talents, once promoted, still need a further three to four years before they are ready to command a place in the first team."

Time will tell whether the Hamilton Academy will be a success story or not. But for now, the focus is on getting the players ready to launch their careers in football. Thereafter, Igesund is determined to help pave the way for his youngsters to test themselves at the highest level.

"I can tell you this, in this country we have some of the most talented players in the world," he states. "All they need is to be more effectively prepared for the challenge that lies ahead."

Igesund reiterates that this is what Hamilton Football Academy is all about – wanting to educate players, not only in football, but also giving them the tools to forge a successful career after football. **KO**

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