

Why Chiefs beat Bafana every time

National team get more viewers per game than the glamour club, but Amakhosi are the more popular brand in SA soccer

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WE LIVE in a country where football is a great spectator sport, with 10 million enthusiasts and up to two million players. The mass support focuses on two teams: the top-branded Kaizer Chiefs, followed by Orlando Pirates.

A debate about whether Bafana Bafana or Kaizer Chiefs are the bigger brand is bound to spark a controversy tantamount to the club-versus-country struggle which players always face when called for national duty.

But in classical marketing parlance, Chiefs are the enviable — perhaps bigger — brand, admired by marketers, supporters and administrations.

As Kaizer Nyatumba, head of corporate marketing at Anglo American, put it: “If a brand valuation of both Bafana Bafana and Kaizer Chiefs were to be concluded, Chiefs would emerge with a superior value. It is a brand that has been well managed over the years and one with which you can associate your brand without fear of negative association or repercussions.”

Nomsa Chabeli, marketing director of the 2010 World Cup Bid, agrees that in terms of sound brand-management principles, Kaizer Chiefs are by far the superior brand, with a track record underscored by consistency of ownership, players and performance.

Kaizer Chiefs sold 40% of their stake to Primedia for R40-million in 1999 in what many leading analysts viewed as an understatement of the value of the brand, and a bargain for William Kirsch’s company.

When Kaizer Chiefs were added to the group’s stable of leading brands including Radio 702 and Ster-Kinekor, Kirsch commented: “We have always invested in strong brands, and Kaizer Chiefs fit that profile.”

But is it fair to compare Bafana Bafana, a team brought together to serve the nation, with Kaizer Chiefs? Although Chiefs are famous, they are essentially a partisan team.

The consumers — the supporters — think it’s a fair comparison. In this year’s Markinor/Sunday Times Top Brands Survey, Kaizer Chiefs (35.5%) are ranked ahead of Orlando Pirates (24%) and Bafana Bafana (22.1%).

A brand, simply put, is a promise made and kept. The promise of Chiefs, as captured in their vision (to become an African football brand that all Africans can identify with) demonstrates their ambition to be more than a partisan club.

Bafana Bafana’s aim can be inferred from the SA Football Association’s mission statement: “To become a leading footballing nation.” That sets the stage for the brand’s competition for the hearts and minds of the nation.

A 25-year study by Interbrand on the future of brands found that the hallmarks of

enduring brands are focus, clarity and consistency.

There is no doubting the business of both Bafana Bafana and Kaizer Chiefs. Their missions are clear. But how they have delivered on their promises sets them apart and is the basis for the disparate perceptions.

Selwyn Nathan, CEO of SAIL, which handles more than three-quarters of South African football, plus R100-million in annual sponsorship income, says it's unfair to compare the 34-year-old Kaizer Chiefs with Bafana, who were readmitted to the international fold only in 1992. But he concedes: "It's amazing what performance does to the perception of the brands."

Both Nathan and James Monteith of BMI Sport Info, through their association with Vodacom, have done empirical studies of Chiefs versus Bafana. They established that Bafana generate higher viewerships (ARs) than Chiefs, except during the Vodacom Cup and the legendary Chiefs vs Pirates derby. However, on the strength of on-field performance alone, Chiefs, who have won more than 50 awards, including African Club of the Year in 2001 and the 2001 African Cup, have set the standard for consistent performance in Africa.

Bafana have won only the African Cup of Nations in 1996, four years after re-admittance. In that same period Chiefs won more than 15 trophies, including the 2003/04 coveted league championship they've been chasing for more than a decade.

But is performance on the field enough on which to judge a brand? The difference between the brands is how they have been managed.

Professor Keller Land Keller of Dartmouth College in the US, the world's leading authority on brand management, says a brand's architecture is anchored in awareness and associations.

By definition, Bafana Bafana can never compete with a club team such as Kaizer Chiefs on the number of "contact points" — the number of games it can play to raise its profile. While Bafana have just over 10 opportunities (other than in tournament years) to play matches, Chiefs have more than 40 opportunities annually to "build relationship with their base".

As Victor Dlamini of Dlamini Weil & Associates put it: "Bafana Bafana, like all national teams, will always fight for survival and top of mind, except during the times of highest national duty such as World Cup and Test matches.

"The on-going club versus country disputes are more about emotional value than logistics. Fans view meaningless national games as a distraction and disruption of the commitment they have week in and week out with their clubs."

And for the fans (the game's consumers, locally and nationally) the lasting impression is that in the comparative history of the national team and Kaizer Chiefs, Chiefs have consistently delivered on the promise of building a team with a record that inspires envy and builds associative esteem.

"With Bafana," says Chabeli, "from one match to the other, you never know what you are going to get from a player, coaching or performance perspective. Kaizer Chiefs are newsworthy, and unlike Bafana Bafana, their news is never around the coaching controversy, but around the core product they sell, the game of football and positive performance. And everyone wants to play for them."

The secret, says Emy Casalletti-Page, who is now with SAIL and was the team's brand manager for more than 10 years, is that "with Kaizer Chiefs, in everything we did for the team, we understood the impact it could have on the brand. Everything was planned to deliver a consistent and aspirational brand. And that's why Kaizer Chiefs remained successful and was perceived to be a winning brand, even though in the past 10 years, the team didn't win as much."

Sergio Zyman, the former chief marketing officer of the Coca-Cola Company, says the job of marketers is to make sure that "you get more people to want more of your product more often for more money".

Despite the escalation in the cost of living, Kaizer Chiefs continue to attract more fans, and fill their and competitors' stadiums — win or lose.

On the other hand, the emotions and support for Bafana Bafana depend on their last match.

When it comes to Kaizer Chiefs fans, as team manager Bobby Motaung puts it: "This team is more than a religion — it's a culture. And nothing can derail the passion of its fans. They love it, they live it and they identity with it."

The whole organisation of the Naturena outfit, the structure from marketing to operations management, is marketing-oriented.

The highest accolade a brand can aspire to is for its consumers to identity with it. The team's self-declared Number One fan is Saddam Maake, whose whole life seems to be defined by only two colours, the gold and black of Chiefs.

Throughout their history, Kaizer Chiefs, established by Kaizer Motaung in 1970 when he returned from playing in the North American Soccer League, have become the standard by which all other African football brands measure themselves.

The brand's promise is clear, and it has delivered on it with an enviable record of consistent performance, stable management and a legion of mercurial performers including Teenage Dladla, Ace Ntsoelengoe, Scara Thindwa, Ace Khuze, Doctor Khumalo, Thabo Mooki and Jabu Pule.

The same cannot be said about Bafana. Consumers (fans) have voted Kaizer Chiefs the Number One football brand, ahead of Bafana Bafana, and Chiefs legend Doctor Khumalo is the only footballer ranked among the most-admired personalities.