

Namibia Today Sport

Mannetti: Legendary 'General' in middle of the park

WINDHOEK - RICARDO GIOVANNI MANNETTI, cognomen Bucksy was one of the most celebrated midfielders Namibia has ever produced. He has only played for Civics Football Club, one of Namibia's Premier League giants, and never changed teams like many contemporary players are doing. Mannetti played various teams in the ABSA Premiership (South African) as his profile will reveal. He has his roots in Italy. His grandfather Isaaskar Mannetti came from Italy to help build the railways in Namibia where he met Ricardo's grandmother and a generation later Namibia's midfield sensation was born. Bucksy is still single but has a 13 year-old daughter Caneesha, whom he says adores very much.

KAYELE M. KAMBOMBO of *Namibia Today* spoke to Mannetti in one-on-one dialogue to compile his enriching football career profile.

Brief Football Career History:

Ricardo Giovanni Mannetti's talent was already noticeable at an early age. At the tender age of 15 years he has started playing for the Brave Warriors in his debut against Zambia in 1994. According to Mannetti this was his best moment in soccer even though they lost 4-0.

Since 1994 he became a regular in the senior national team. He moved from Civics (the team he played for in Namibia) to South African Premier League club Light body Santos and was signed on the basis of his authoritative performances in the midfield position in 1997.

During his stint with Civics he scored his best goal against the Windhoek-based Orlando Pirates after picking up the ball on the half-way line and beat three men before scoring. The match ended 4-0 in favour of Civics.

Mannetti has a quality of his own of passing from short to long range. He can flick or spin the ball in his own arrogant style, which make the opponents shatter and shiver on the pitch. He is a real midfield maestro. In 1998 at the CAF/African Cup of Nations in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, Mannetti scored his first international goal for Namibia in the Group C mini-league match against Ivory Coast that ended 4-3 in favour of the Ivorians, after trailing 3-0 before half time. Mannetti added solidity to the midfield and



Ricardo Giovanni Mannetti

has proved that true class never dies.

His enthusiasm, intelligence and composure are always calming the engine room. He can destabilize opponents and cause them damage with his body swerves and unpredictability. In a nutshell, he is very cultured on the ball. Mannetti gained his 50th international cap for the Warriors during the Cosafa Cup game against Swaziland in Windhoek, which ended in a 1-1 draw after regulation time, but Namibia went on to win 4-2 on penalties. Mannetti was in control of the midfield. To many critics, it was one of his best matches with the Brave Warriors. His performance was simply great, displayed ferocious tackling and excellent distribution and was always dangerous on the attack.

He was voted Namibia's "Junior Player of the Year" in 1995 and a "Player of the Match" in the Castle Premier League with his former South African-based club Santos.

Mannetti went through a lean spell with Santos and was eventually sidelined for close to two years - literally out of competitive soccer - before he joined the Cape Town based First Division team Avondale Athletic in December 2000, after being loaned by Santos for a year, because they have five foreigners in their squad, which makes it more difficult for Mannetti to play for them. He has one goal to his credit for Avondale Athletic.

Mannetti fell out of favour with the Santos management only a year after an impressive run in the South

African PSL. That was compounded by another fall out with the NFA that decided on a blanket ban of all players - including him - who demanded more money ahead of a Cosafa Cup first leg final match against Angola in 1999.

When Ted Dumitru took over as head coach of the Brave Warriors, he brought Mannetti back to the team to man the midfield as a playmaker from lock position he was used to play with the previous coaches. Mannetti dictates terms in his new position and the fans of the national team including the soccer pundits just love his style of play.

Nothing was more pleasing for Mannetti than to go back to Santos. Mannetti was recalled to rejoin Santos at the beginning of the soccer season in August 2001.

Mannetti was an undeniably football star in his native country's national squad as well as in his South African clubs where he a stint with the like of Bush Bucks, Avondale Athletic and Santos. He is currently the head coach of Civics, where he started his career.

His prevalent influential person on his football career is Brian Isaacs, who coached Civics by then. His ambition was to go overseas and play in Spain or Italy but his wishes did not turnout the way he would have wanted to be.

As fate has it, he retired from active football and ventured into other initiatives such as becoming a coach of Civics, the very team he started playing competitive soccer. Mannetti leads by example. He organized the first

but memorable testimonial match in the history of soccer in Namibia to give appreciation to his fans.

At the tender age of 15 years Ricardo Mannetti, cognomen Bucksy, started playing organized football. At the age of 16 he donned the Brave Warriors jersey

On the brink of the New Year - 2007, Mannetti ended his football career after one and a half decade of playing. This was indeed the most exciting and well-deserved bonus for thousands of Namibian football fanatics.

At 31 Mannetti cognomens Bucksy, officially called it quit with his football career, both for the national team and professionally on 30 December 2006 at the Independence Stadium. Dressed in bloody red outfit - just the right colour for the occasion that signified the festive season, one may say. Mannetti and his entourage that consisted mainly of the old guards of the 1998 Brave Warriors squad took to the pitch, as their names were beamed through a thunderous voice of a Namibian popular comedian, Neville Basson (Director of Ceremonies for the day).

Mannetti's name was the last to be announced. As he was entering the field of play, accompanied by his father and his daughter, he got a standing ovation from spectators. The occasion was phenomenal, the first of its kind in Namibia. The 1998 squad played against the current crop de la crème of the Brave Warriors under the tutelage of Brian Isaacs, standing in for coach Ben Bamfuchile who was on his annual vacation leave.

The Mannetti squad consisted of most players who he played with at the 1998 African Cup of Nation in Burkina Faso, playing against Bafana Bafana players who won the 1996 African Cup of Nations held in Mzansi, South Africa, consisting of Doctor Khumalo, Phil Masinga, to name but a few. The Independence Stadium in Windhoek was packed to its capacity to watch the players of talents - football think tanks.

The teams played to a seven-all draw - a goal galore to remember. Mannetti scored the third goal for his side. His goal could not have come at a better time. This entertaining game was a mesmerizing display with deft footwork, dexterity and excellently handling and ball control from both sides. Amazing talent in football!

A South African - born Ruben Cloete, who played with Mannetti at Santos FC in South Africa, added an international touch of solidarity with his former colleague. That was international proletarian's gesture at its best, to say the least.

Just to take you down memory lane. The former Brave Warriors squad dubbed the 1998 squad is the team that transformed the Brave Warriors from toddler to warrior. It was the same squad that was changed to what it became in 1998 by mentors such as Peter 'Corporal' Ueberjahn (Technical Director) and Rusten 'Sukhile' Mogane (coach) from the so-called whipping boys of African football to the team respected by the entire continent.

This team beat Bafana Bafana twice in a row in Windhoek in 1998 and 1999 with Mannetti controlling

the engine room of the Warriors in both occasions. Again, Mannetti was in control in the middle of the park in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso against the Elephants of Ivory Coast, Black Impalas of Angola and Bafana Bafana of South Africa.

The most exciting and memorable encounter at the 1998 African Cup of Nations, Namibia's maiden participation' was the match between the Warriors and Elephants.

The Ivorian raced into a three-goal lead before Namibians hitting back with three goals to level matters after the second stanza through Elifas Shivute's brace (46th and 78th minutes) with Mannetti's audacious point-blank goal in the 73rd minute at the goalmouth of the Ivorians. This was his first international goal for the Land of the Brave (as Namibia is affectionately known). However, due to inexperience and lack of concentration the Ivorians snatched a late winner to make it 4-3 on the electronic scoreboard.

By then, Namibia had only three international players in the name of Shivute playing his trade in Scotland with Motherwell Football Club, Ronnie Kanalelo (Mamelodi Sundowns, South Africa), as compared to other participating countries who had abundance of professional players.

The Warriors made a name for themselves and were nicknamed 'the Architects of the Great Comebacks' by a Canal France International (CFI) sports journalist. Others were literally thinking 'GOD was a Namibian'. Another journalist described the game as "one of the most exciting matches in the 41 years history of the tournament".

Back to the Independence Stadium, at Mannetti's testimonial match, one of his fans enthused: "Mannetti is good a footballer to retire at his age. He is still an asset for the Brave Warriors". The proceeds from this match went to some identified charity organizations in Katutura and Khomasdal, through the initiative of Mannetti, the philanthropist.

Former Brave Warriors midfield dynamo Mannetti has decided to plough back his wealth into the game by calling into life a football academy for the young the Under-13, Under-15 and Under-17 age groups with the intrinsic reason to teach the youngsters the

fundamental basics of the game.

FACTS FILE

Name: Ricardo Giovanni Mannetti

Nickname: Bucksy

Birth Date: 24 April 1975

Age: 34

Birth Place: Windhoek, Namibia

Nationality: Namibian

Height: 1.69cm

Weight: 78kg

Previous Clubs: Civics (Namibia)

Avondale Athletic (South Africa) (1 Goal) on loan from Santos (2000-2001)

Santos (South Africa) 1997/1998 (1 Goal) and 2001/2005 seasons (3 Goals)

Bush Bucks (South Africa) 2005-2006

Current Club: Retired but coaches Civics FC (Namibia)

Brave Warriors Debut: 1994 against Zambia

International Caps: 55

Goals: 1 against Ivory Coast in Burkina Faso 1998 AFCON

Position: Midfielder

Santos Debut: 1997

Goals: 2

Honours:

Namibian international (1994)

1995: Junior Sport Man of the Year

Player of the Match in the Castle Premier League with Santos

1997: Cosafa Castle Cup runners-up (against Zambia)

1998: Cosafa Castle Cup runners-up (against Angola);

Man of the Match with Santos

Played for the Brave Warrior at the 1998 African Cup of Nations in Burkina Faso and scored one goal

1999: Gained his 50th international cap - Cosafa: Namibia (1) 4 Swaziland (1) 2 (on penalties)

2001-2002 Won League with Santos

2002-2003 Won BP Top 8 with Santos

2003-2004 Won ABSA Cup with Santos

2006 Officially retired from active football with a historic testimonial match leading the Brave Warriors of 1998 against the 1996 African Cup of Nations winner (Bafana Bafana) led by Doctor Khumalo

2008 Coach Civics FC (Namibia)

2009 Established the Ricardo Mannetti Soccer Academy (RMSA) in February in Windhoek



THE FAMILY AFFAIR: Ricardo Bucksy Mannetti is with his 13 year-old daughter Caneesha (centre) and his father (extreme right) both the daughter and father gave him unflinching support during his professional football career in South Africa. Their support is interminable as they continue giving their shoulders for Ricardo to lean on as coach of Civics.



THE LEGIONNAIRS: Mannetti and his Brave Warriors teammate Ruben "Pushy" van Wyk.