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EULOGY DELIVERED BY THE PREMIER OF THE NORTH WEST, PROF TEBOGO JOB MOKGORO, AT THE SPECIAL PROVINCIAL OFFICIAL FUNERAL OF THE LATE PHILEMON MASINGA HELD AT THE KHUMA STADIUM, KHUMA ON THURSDAY, 24 JANUARY 2019

I stand before you tasked with delivering a eulogy to honour one of our best footballing exports to have ever left our shores to grace European soccer fields in the post-apartheid sporting history of our country.

A lot has been said and written since the passing away of Philemon “Chippa” Masinga, a day after the launch of Election Manifesto of the governing party, but allow me to pay our last respects to one of the gentlemen of the game of billions.

He began his professional career at the famed football university of yesteryear known as Jomo Cosmos Football Club under the watchful eye of Roy Matthews and Jomo Sono – and he went to mesmerise many a defender with the late insanely gifted teenage Thomas “Chincha” Madigage and the maverick Augustine Makalalakane, just mention but a few of the stars that made up the Cosmos of the early 1990s.

Theirs was a formidable, feared and respected outfit that contributed immensely to the early Bafana Bafana set up following readmission into the international stage as well as contributing the bulk of its squad to the all-conquering Orlando Pirates team of the mid 1990s that went on to be crowned African Champions in 1995.

Such was the talent that was Chippa and his peers at Cosmos that most of them went to become household names locally as well as among the top European football leagues; from England, Spain and Switzerland to Turkey.

By the time he and Lucas Radebe settled into the Leeds Football Club's first team, he quickly won over the hearts of the Eland Road faithful that they gave him the monicker "Waltzing Masinga" – after the popular Australian folksong by Banjo Paterson called "Waltzing Matilda".

Though Lucas Radebe became a more prominent household name and eventually captained Leeds United in the English Premiership, it is important to highlight that his move to the club was that he only joined the club as part of a package to sign Chippa from Mamelodi Sundowns – a deal that was facilitated by his agent Marcelo Houseman in the English summer of 1994.

Such was his prowess as a striker that when Leeds United need firepower upfront for the new season and for the Champions League, he was on top of their shopping list.

Chippa and Lucas became the first post-apartheid signing in the English Premier League and pioneered the exodus of local players to the foreign top leagues.

From 1994 to 1996, Chippa continued to endear himself to the hearts of the people of Yorkshire where he continued scoring goals while flying the South African flag high and with pride.

When he left St Gallen in Switzerland following a short stint there, he joined a Serie B side Salernitana; where he was such a prolific goal scorer that Serie A side, Bari, moved swiftly for his signature.

This then is the most distinct feature in his career, in that he played in the Italian top tier league, the Serie A, at a time when it was considered the best league in the world – it was during an era when only the best of the best, the cream of the crop could ply their trade week-in, week-out in that league.

Chippa belonged to that crop and the fact that he played there for close to five seasons in Italy is testimony to the immense talent that he was.

But who can forget that scorcher of a goal at the FNB Stadium against a stubborn Congo-Brazzaville team that sent us to the 1998 FIFA World Cup? That single moment of sheer brilliance remains etched in the echelons of South African football folklore forever.

His achievements on the pitch puts him amongst one of the best forwards to have ever come out the streets of South Africa's township; at a time when structured football development was unheard of in this country except in major cities like Johannesburg and Cape Town.

That his career was cut short by injuries at the age of 32 has never made his disappear from our hearts and minds; that is why the 2010 World Cup Bid Committee named him as one of our 2010 Ambassadors in 2003 and he was in the company the late President Nelson Mandela and others when we were awarded the right to host the 2010 FIFA World Cup on 15 May 2004.

In addition to that, we as the North West Provincial Government and in particular; the Department of Education and Sport Development, recognised the fact it is important to bring him on board their programmes as a living legend in this country – programmes such as the Maize Cup; which is a pre-season four team tournament hosted by the Provincial Government and features three PSL teams and a local team.

He had become one of our sport and brand ambassadors in the province and his humility came through every time we called upon him to participate in our initiatives. Chippa was one of the true gentlemen of the game indeed.

On Thursday morning, before his passing on, I had an opportunity to quietly visit him at the Wits Donald Gordon Hospital in Johannesburg and unbeknown to me, it was going to be the last time I ever saw him alive – I was still hoping to see him walk out of the hospital with his tall frame, smiling and continuing to be part of our social cohesion programmes as government. Indeed, death be not proud.

However, we are humbled and consoled by the fact that he is at peace with his departed Class of '96 teammates – the likes of Sizwe Motaung and Lesiba Shoes Moshoeu – as well as other great footballers who have since passed away.

Chippa, please pass our regards to Sizwe and Shoes as well as the likes of Thomas Madigage, Gift Leremi, Senzo Meyiwa, Lesley Manyathela, Richard Henyekane, Clifford Moleko and many others who had brought us joy and happiness with their dazzling skills on the soccer field.

To Chippa's wife and children, ke a re lalang ka ntho madi a tshologe; you have lost a husband and a father but to us as a nation, we have lost an icon and a symbol of national pride and patriotism.

To his friends and teammates, he is irreplaceable but keep his memory alive in whatever good deeds you partake in at all times.

May his soul rest in eternal peace.

Ke a leboga.