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**KWAZULU NATAL PREMIER THAMSANQA NTULI’S REMARKS ON THE 2024 PREMIER’S CUP TOURNAMENT LAUNCH**

MEC for Sport, Arts and Culture, Mr Mntomuhle Khawula

Head of Department - Dr Thobile Sifunda

President of KwaZulu-Natal Sport Confederation, Mr Thami Mchunu

Chairperson of KwaZulu-Natal Football Association, Mr Kwenza Ngwenya

Representatives of Clubs

Members of the media, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good afternoon.

Let me take this opportunity to thank you for your presence and continued support.

Today marks a critical moment for both our domestic and top tier football calendar as we launch and conduct the draw for the 2024 KZN Premier’s. This is a uniquely KwaZulu-Natal pre-season football tournament.

This year’s tournament is of significance as it is the first to be hosted under the auspices of the Government of Provincial Unity, which came into being as a result of the electoral outcomes of the May 29 National and Provincial elections.

The hosting of this tournament could not have come at the best time to promote tolerance, unity and social cohesion, which are the key values that underpin the very existence of the Premier’s Cup. This tournament is one of the vehicles that we use to promote social cohesion is sport in general and football.

The KZN Premier’s Cup tournament is the pedigree of pre-season soccer extravaganza that has stood the test of time. It provides much needed football feast for the beautiful game lovers across the length and breadth of our majestic province.

Local teams from the Premier Soccer League and those competing in the National First Division battle for the coveted title of KZN Premier’s Cup Champions.

This year’s tournament scheduled for the 27th and 28th of July at Prince Mangosuthu Regional Sports Complex in Ulundi, promises to be even bigger and better. We expect the matches to be played before capacity crowds and the presence of professional players will serve as an inspiration for young boys and girls to pursue sport as part of their overall development.

We are also thankful for the partnership and collaborative efforts that permeate this tournament. There is no prize money, but the teams receive participation fees that go towards their preparations and logistical requirements.

In that regard I would like to thank the Office of the Premier, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Sport, Arts and Culture for making the resources available even in the constrained environment. This is part of government’s effort to assist our teams to finalise and shape their combinations before the start of the new season so that they compete strongly and effectively in their respective leagues.

My gratitude also goes to all six local soccer teams, namely the AmaZulu FC, Lamontville Golden Arrows, Maritzburg United, Royal AM, Richards Bay FC and Milford for partaking in this Proudly KwaZulu-Natal Tournament.

Now in its thirteenth year, the Premier’s Cup has seen more clubs fine tuning their prowess during the pre-season period. This does not only give local fans a chance to enjoy football, but it has far reaching economic returns for the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Whenever our local clubs participating in the PSL host home games, the influx of fans from other provinces such as Gauteng and the Western Cape boosts our tourism sector as accommodation facilities are often booked to capacity. These are some of the benefits that we can’t ignore.

Ladies and gentlemen

This year we have taken a decision that the 2024 KZN Premier’s Cup be hosted outside of the traditional big cities of Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Richards Bay.

The move to take this event **to Ulundi will ensure** that people from rural areas are able to watch their favourite teams playing competitive football right at their doorstep, without having to travel long distances. In addition, this move also seek to ensure that the economic benefits of hosting such events are also enjoyed by people in these areas.

We are confident that the Prince Mangosuthu Regional Stadium, will be able to host a successful tournament, as seen over the past few years when the Prince Mangosuthu Legacy Cup was hosted there.

Having top tear teams playing in this venue will also serve as a catalyst for us to fast-track the provision and upgrading of sport facilities in other towns that are capable of hosting major sporting and arts events.

As we prepare to witness the draw for the tournament being conducted, let me take this opportunity to challenge you to utilise this tournament fully to finalise your preparations for the upcoming season. With AmaZulu FC defending their title I am positive that all participants will display a high level of competitive edge.

As Premier of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal it is my wish to see one of our teams winning the PSL in the coming season and all our teams in the Premiership finishing in the top eight of the log table.

My message to Maritzburg United and Milford is that we want to see at least one of you gaining promotion to the Premiership division. We want to see the number of teams in the PSL returning to five, because KwaZulu-Natal is indeed the home of football.

I want to assure you that the KwaZulu-Natal Government, through the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, as ably led by MEC Khawula, will always strive to strengthen partnerships with football structures and professional clubs in order to unearth, develop and progress the abundance talent in our province.

In conclusion, let me take this opportunity to wish you all the best in the 2024 KZN Premier’s Cup. Obviously, there could only be one winner on the field of play, but the biggest winner is the province of KwaZulu-Natal which is hard at work producing players and teams of a global standard. Creating winners remains our shared vision.

I thank you.