



BNL Bulletin

THE PANTHERS' JOURNEY TO THE BNL CHAMPIONSHIP

The objective of every coach is to get his team to play to their full potential. Upon seeing the talent on the roster of the 2018 Soweto Panthers, I saw one word...Championship! Coaches are optimistic by nature, but my analysis of the squad I was tasked to make "winners" wasn't wishful thinking. We had ALL the "basketball pieces" necessary for a title.

As a lifelong basketball man, but a 1st year BNL Head Coach, I leaned on my varied experiences when instilling a system of play and a culture of expectations for my team. I have to tell

you...I was "spoiled for choice" when it came to pure ability! I had dominance on the inside, next level skill on the outside, and the athletes to implement any system I wished. Now, it was a matter of guiding individual parts into a cohesive unit with a common focus. Time to become a "TEAM".

Preseason is where champions are made. Preseason is where teammates meet their brothers. Preseason is when you concretely begin to set in form of what is to be your "team" for that campaign. Preseason is when a coach realizes if his championship ambitions were illusions or based on reality. Going into the regular season...I knew I wasn't imagining things. We were good!

No journey is without challenge. Throughout the regular season and into the playoffs, we encountered and overcame many challenges. But as the games remaining became fewer and the stakes got higher, I saw the trademark of champions emerge in the efforts and focus of my squad. I saw a "we won't be denied" mentality fuel the brand of basketball we exhibited.

Watching the Soweto Panthers in the semi-finals and finals of the 2018 BNL Playoffs was like poetry in motion for me. Aside from a few strategic mandates from myself and my staff, these guys were pretty much on auto-pilot. Destination? The "land of champions"! And that's how it culminated, with the Soweto Panthers being crown BNL Champions for 2018 in a resounding fashion.

It was a proud day in my basketball life. I was proud to take that journey with such fine young men. Some memories may fade. But championships are remembered in detail! Thanks for the memories, my team.

Coach S Butler - Head Coach Soweto Panther 2018



Being named captain of a team is always a childhood dream and for me that dream came true in the BNL in 2018 at the mere age of 27. I was a senior player in many teams but never a captain and I felt honored.

We had a team that had a lot of players that had national representation, the key was for me to get the team to gel even though a few of them were older than me.

We suffered many challenges during the season of 2018 but what's a good team without its own challenges.

If I'm not mistaken we never lost a game that season but what amazed me about the team was the way we got together and worked on our craft, players from Zimbabwe, players from Wits and players from Soweto.

Making semi finals going up against the Marlins was also going to be a challenge. For me as a player coming into the semis was always going to be a sensitive topic because the last time I passed this hurdle was in the first edition of the BNL in 2013 playing with the Mbombela Wildcats where we lost to the Tshwane Suns.

We jumped the hurdle in easing past the Marlins to face the Egoli Magic in the 2018 BNL Finals.

It was a momentous occasion as the finals of BNL was on the same day as the Rugby World Cup Final, I remember watching the bokke beat England and then showering and coming to play my final. I said to myself "I'm not going to let this pass me by like I did in 2013".



We started off with a bang; everything dropped, all cylinders firing and everything that could go right that day went right.

I hit my first BNL 3 pointer and once that happened, I knew it was done. Confidence level was up, teammates smiling and jumping up and down... We sealed the deal and broke the dead lock of Suns and Egoli winning title after title as the new champions were crowned and I won my first BNL title. - **Reece Prinsloo - Captain of the Soweto Panthers 2018**

The best way to sum it up would most probably be a great learning experience. It was one of the biggest learning experiences of my life outside of BWB and my stint overseas. The main lesson I took out of that year was that the team makes the franchise. Despite the hardships we faced as a team, we were a solid force from the starting 5 to the 3 stringers. I was extremely fortunate to play alongside the best talent in southern Africa and my now brothers, Neville Chivanganye, Tatenda Maturure, Dyvonne Pfachi, Vusi Sithole, Captain Reece Prinsloo and many other guys I'll always respect and have time for.



Not only were the seniors in the team exceptional but them and the management, Elvis, Rip, Gcina, Booba and Coach Butler taught me how to be a professional athlete. It was unfortunate that it all came to an end, but I will always be grateful for that group of guys (and lady) for taking me under their wing and showing me the way. - **Liam Reid**

2018 was a hallmark moment as a Panther. It was the year Soweto Panthers won, for the first time, the BNL Championship. The team that was put together, a combination of veteran and young players was one that had a zeal and passion to play the game with a winning mind set, "a brotherhood". Challenges were there, whether it was experience or chemistry but one thing about these challenges, it brings out the best in us. Championship mind set was something I personally had to realize that it transcended the bounds of the court. It was what you did outside the court. After being grilled and ran out at training by the coaches, it took a lot of discipline to wake up the next morning to go back on that court, outside of team training to put in the work, then have an accountability to drag your team mates to do so as well. I was blessed to be amongst a team that not only were hungry enough and talented to win but had the ability to forgo self and make it about the team. Greatest lesson in 2018 "a man's reach should exceed his grasp". - **Neville Chivanganye**

