

Drillers Sibiya makes his late father proud

Contributed by Joanne Ireland
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There was a death to grieve, regrets he had to cope with, but Sipho Sibiya also had a game to play on Friday night, a game he needed to play.

It was what his father would have wanted.

So instead of seeking solace in silence, Sibiya went out and scored four goals in the Edmonton Drillers 23-6 rout over the St. Louis Ambush.

"I had to play," he said after the game at Skyreach. "I needed to play."

Sibiya had learned two days earlier that his father, Soly, had passed away in South Africa. The two have been apart for years -- Sibiya was eight when he and his two younger brothers moved to Vancouver with their mom -- but that didn't make it any easier for the midfielder.

"That's one of the regrets I have," said Sibiya, "that I hadn't seen him for so long. And I wish he would have seen me play.

"But I had to be around these guys -- to be away from them would have been even tougher. These guys kept my spirits up. All I had to do was go out and play."

Kevin Holness was among those who saluted Sibiya after the game.

"It's tough to pick yourself up after hearing news like that," said Holness, "but he did. He was unbelievable out there."

Chris Clarke was quick to agree with the captain.

"This is a very close team and when something like this happens we all try to help out," he said. "I think a lot of guys felt for him and it showed because we went out there fighting tonight."

On any other night Clarke would have been the one in the spotlight. He rejoined the team a week ago -- following a stint in England and a turn with the Canadian Olympic team -- but had yet to play at Skyreach. He marked his return with three goals.

"You want to put on a good show," said Clarke, "but I also want to feel like I belong. I want to do as much as possible to help this team out.

"I think we're just going feed off this win."

The game was nine minutes old when Sibiya turned and fired a shot past St. Louis 'keeper Jamie Swanner. Then he took a pass from Paul Dailly and tucked another goal into the net.

Before the half was over and in front of a crowd of 5,763, he scored his third of the night.

After Sibiya had given the Drillers a six-point cushion, Clarke took over.

He tipped in a pass from Holness then danced around defender Matt Caution with his second goal of the game. In the third quarter, he notched another two points, a left-footer he punched past Swanner.

Before the Ambush could spell m-i-s-e-r-y, it was 14-4. Before the third quarter got under way it was 21-4.

The Drill need just one more win or a Detroit loss to advance to the playoffs.

"Once Sipho took off, I wanted to try and stay with him," said Clarke.

Sibiya, fittingly, scored the last goal of the night.

"He would have wanted me to play," said Sibiya, "and I wanted to play well. He got me started in soccer. At least I know he was with me tonight."

DRILL BITS

- **AMBUSHED:** The Drillers put the boots to St. Louis Friday, scoring a 23- 6 victory. The win gives Edmonton a 21-21 record but more importantly, cuts the magic number to one. The Drill can now lock up a playoff berth with a win or they could be heading to the post-season as early as today if Kansas City defeats the Detroit Rockers in Kemper Arena. The Ambush, with a record of 9-31, have been out of the race for several weeks.

- **POINT MEN:** Eric Munoz, Damir Jesic and Kevin Holness all chipped in two points. Nikola Vignjevic hit a three-pointer, extending his point streak to 21 games, and Chris Clarke scored a hat trick. But the man of the hour was Siphon Sibiya who left the field with four goals. On the other side of the ledger, Eloy Salgado scored twice for St. Louis and Joe Reiniger added the other two points.

- **AND THE NIGHTS GET LONGER:** The Ambush, hit by losses on and off the field, arrived in Edmonton with just 12 players -- certainly no match for the three lines the Drillers fielded.

Salgado popped his left shoulder in the second quarter, grit his teeth, and kept on playing.

And what of goalkeeper Jamie Swanner? Even if he wanted to call it a night he couldn't because there wasn't a backup on the bench.

- **REBOOT:** The two teams meet again Sunday at Skyreach. Kickoff is 2 p.m.