

Tawanda

Tawanda, a Zimbabwean man with a strong Christian faith and great love of football is dying from cancer. He lives with his wife Chibuzo.

Look at this. Chibuzo has found my shirt so that I can wear it when the boys come around later for the big game. When you're in this much pain it's important to have moments to look forward to. Number 5; 'The Chief'. My nickname; borrowed from Lucas Radebe, the great South African defender. A gift from the team when I had to stop playing. And of course she will help me put it on; reaching up with her little arms to pull it over my great big head. I'm a lucky man.

So many people are on our side that it's humbling. And there are times when I feel responsible. When Chibuzo tells me how much they're praying for us at our church, then I feel it's even more important that I don't succumb. And God is with me and provides me with the strength to carry on. And strength for my wife Chibuzo too. I've started to call her 'boss' because she's as much my trainer as my wife now. She knows when my energy is low and when it's a little better. When my mood is dark and when I'm able to smile and need some help to do so. She's better than any doctor.

But she is worried. It started when she overheard a nurse at the hospital saying that if I was being sent home it was only a matter of time. I've told her that a nurse is not a doctor. That we must remain positive. 'With the right approach we can navigate a way through this; let's see how things progress over the next few weeks before we start to worry Tawanda'. These are the things my doctor says. He's like a good manager shouting advice from the side-lines.

There was one time when I really didn't feel too good, and I wanted to talk to him about what might happen if things were not to go so well. But I could see that he wanted to focus on the positive, so I didn't. I think about that sometimes, if I should have stuck to my guns and said what I'd planned to. But the most important thing is that everyone must believe and fight together. That's the way you win. Through teamwork.

Nobody could get past us those three seasons when we won just about every game. Which is why I was so confused and angry that it was my partner in central defence that said those things to Chibuzo. That it looked like I was getting weaker. That maybe somebody should talk to the doctor about what they could do to make things easier for both of us if it seemed unlikely that things would improve.

Chibuzo cried for days after that. And I rang Darren and told him that if he wanted to say anything, he should have spoken to me. It's the doctor who will decide when it's the right time to talk about such things. That if you go into a game fearing defeat it's the start of a slippery slope. He should know that. He was letting me down. I told him that I wasn't stupid. That I didn't expect to play

football again, although maybe God will decree that I can. But I want to go back and stand on the side-lines. There are new cures all the time and the doctor has not contacted me for a while, which must be a good sign.

But since then I've been thinking. Not just about my funeral but about what happens before then too, if ... you know. I've written it down to give to Chibuzo when the time is right. And I feel better for doing this, a little lighter somehow. I'm going to thank Darren when he comes around and tell him that it was good that somebody finally had the courage to say something.

And anyway today is going to be one of those good days. I'm going to put on my shirt, summon up my strength and enjoy my friends' company. I just hope the match won't go into extra time.