

Sport heroes: Growing sport for a better society

Some of South Africa's top sports stars are also worthy role models as builders of a better future for all. They are repaying their fans and growing sport by offering coaching and facilities to youngsters who would not have had the opportunity to play... often offering a healthy alternative to gangs and drugs, reports FANIE HEYNS

Bruce Fordyce, Elana Meyer, Amanda Coetzer, Ernie Els, Morné du Plessis and Martin Dreyer have not only earned bragging rights in South Africa as decorated sport icons, but also deserve brownie points for their determined efforts to give something back to the Class of 2010 and beyond.

Sport elevated them to star status with huge public followings — now they are returning the favour by changing society for good by cultivating a new generation of responsible sport lovers, especially amongst young people from disadvantaged and high risk crime areas.

Whatever sport helped them to achieve, they are now paying back, with interest — often without their fans being aware of their worthy contribution to society.

Elana Meyer vs drugs

Elana Meyer, a decorated Olympian and 21km world record holder, was one of the driving forces behind the inception of the JAG Sports and Education Foundation, which focuses on sport development at grass roots level in high risk communities.

"We use sport as a tool to equip these kids to achieve their dreams," says Meyer, who is CEO of the Foundation. "We use sport and the values attached to it, to empower the youth. We want to offer alternatives to drugs and crime."

Asked why she got involved, Meyer says: "I got so much out of sport. It changed my life and I know sport can do the same for others. I was blessed and want to pass it



KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Sport and Recreation Amichband Rajbanji congratulates Martin Dreyer and Michael Mbanjwa on their 2008 Dusi Canoe Marathon win.

on to others."

The Foundation's signature programme is Mighty Metres, a physical education programme for primary school learners that encourages the fit and unfit to cultivate a daily habit of running to promote health and well-being.

The programme is endorsed by the Department of Education. The Foundation's intention is to implement the programme in the 21 Western Cape areas the department defined as "high risk" in terms of drug use, crime and poor performance.

The Mighty Metres programme is currently active in 37 schools in the Western Cape, involving 22 900 children. An additional 4 600 children have joined the programme in the Eastern Cape.

In June this year the Foundation launched the Pro Nutro JAG Runners programme, to be implemented in eight communities. The intention is to implement this community-based running

programme throughout South Africa. It focuses on training coaches to motivate and train students — from primary to high school — to improve their fitness on a recreational level by participating in running programmes.

Asked about the goals for 2009, Meyer says: "With 30 000 kids on Mighty Metres, about 500 kids on the after school program — Pro Nutro JAG Runners — we want to consolidate, secure funding and bring passionate people and like-minded companies on board that share the vision of a better South Africa."

Martin Dreyer's paddling

Martin Dreyer is a superstar amongst the South African adventure racers. He won the Millennium Big Five Challenge and was on the winner's podium seven times in the Dusi Kayak Marathon and the non-



Elana Meyer, from the JAG Foundation for Sport and Education, running with children from the Khayamandi community outside Stellenbosch.

stop Dusi Canoe Marathon.

But he recently set himself another challenge. He is the godfather and founder of the Computershare 'change a life' Trust and the goal of his program is to push ten black development paddlers into the top fifty of the Dusi Canoe marathon. Dreyer therefore trains daily with the paddlers at Nagle Dam, or on the Dusi-river.

"I was inspired to take on this project after winning the 2008 Dusi Canoe Marathon with Michael Mbanjwa (first black person to ever win the Dusi). Michael lives on the banks of the Dusi, and his friends joined us for training every day," recalls Dreyer.

"They ran barefoot and paddled in old leaking boats. Not once did they ask me for anything — shoes, T-shirts, etc. I was humbled to see how happy they were, having so little.

"I went away from that Dusi, thinking how good these guys could be if they had the same opportunities as I had.

"So I put a proposal together and approached some companies for funding. Computershare 'change a life' Trust gave me the green light and now the 'change a life' academy is in full swing. I did a local race today where six of my guys made the top ten.

"There was a lot of banter amongst the canoeists afterwards about "where did these guys come from," says an elated Dreyer.

Bruce Fordyce's charity

Bruce Fordyce, the legendary ultra-marathon runner, became famous for winning the Comrades nine times, of which eight were in succession. The first of his nine triumphs drew attention from the crowd

as Fordyce displayed a black armband to demonstrate his vehement opposition to the apartheid policy of the former NP government. The crowd showed their contempt and disgust for his views by throwing rotten tomatoes at the slightly built Wits-student, and also shouting abuse.

But, his grit and determination eventually won the admiration of the crowds and today even non-Comrades followers will recognise his name as one of the Comrades greats — if not the greatest.

Nowadays, Fordyce is still participating in endurance events like the Comrades and the 120km Dusi Canoe Marathon, but instead of trying to add to his medal tally, he is now participating to raise money for charity.

He has also used his profile as a sporting hero to give something back to South African sport in his role as the former CEO of The Sports Trust.

It is an independent body with a vision to develop sporting talent in disadvantaged communities. Since the organisation was established in September 1995, it has completed more than 100 projects countrywide, valued at almost R30-m. They range from providing multimillion-rand outdoor and indoor sport centres, the laying of courts, to the provision of sports equipment and kit.

The funding criteria strongly emphasises the impact the project will have on local communities, and the number of people who will benefit from it.

Apart from providing equipment and facilities to disadvantaged communities, The Sports Trust promotes South African sport as a benefactor of major international events like the Comrades Marathon, the Dusi Canoe Marathon and the Nedbank Golf Challenge.

With the support of Coca Cola, Harmony



Bruce Fordyce seemingly effortlessly won eight Comrades marathon titles.

Gold, Impala Platinum, Nedbank, South African Breweries, Sun International and SuperSport — who are all on the Board of Trustees — The Sports Trust is enabled to go from strength to strength and continues to fulfil a vital need in the South African sports landscape.

Fordyce was CEO of the Sports Trust from 1997 to 2004, and currently acts as an ambassador for the Trust. Recently, he became involved in organising a sponsorship for the former Harmony Athletic Clubs with Nedbank.

Asked about the importance of former players getting involved in sport in some way after retirement, Fordyce says: "I don't think it is essential that former greats should put anything back into sport, but they should use their platform to make a contribution in some way or other.

"In some instances the structures of their sport makes it very difficult for former players to contribute, because jobs and positions are jealously guarded and many former greats are seen as threats because of their popularity and high profile."

Morné du Plessis offers hope

Morné du Plessis is one of South Africa's finest-ever rugby captains. The Springboks were hugely successful under the inspirational leadership of this athletic eighth man. He represented the Green and Gold in 22 Tests and captained South Africa in 15 of them.

As chairman of the Laureus Foun- →

ation, including the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, in South Africa, Du Plessis spearheads an impressive drive to change the social fabric of South African society.

"Johann Rupert masterminded Laureus. His whole philosophy was that sport can play an influential role in the world. The vehicle for the Laureus philosophy that sport can change the world, is the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation. It is the soul of the movement", adds Du Plessis.

South Africa currently boasts eleven projects, a healthy portion of the 61 projects worldwide.

One of the application criteria for the Laureus for Good Foundation is that every project must be driven by a strong champion, somebody who is passionate about the projects, like the John Moeti's of the world, says Du Plessis.

"If you don't have the passion, you won't last, because doing the work amongst the poorest of the poor in rural areas is not always fashionable.

"I recalled spending one day in Mumbai on the Magic Bus-project where children in slums — who had never experienced one day outside the slums — were taken to a piece of grass to play. It was the most overwhelming, uplifting day of my life," says Du Plessis.

One of the challenges of the projects is that you must persist once you have invested in it, even through tough economic times, he believes. Currently, all the projects are struggling, but once you start funding, you must continue your commitments, even if other good projects come along. It is like sending somebody to school on a bursary. You must persist with him, says Du Plessis.

Another challenge is that the projects need adequate management — some champions are so focused on the playing field that they forget that even a charity needs good governance. The Laureus for Good management spend a lot of time assisting them, adds Du Plessis.

They support the following South African programmes:

- The Indingo Skateboarding Movement, situated in The Valley of a Thousand Hills, provides skateboarding for young people, while improving their life skills, spoken English skills and teaching them about tourism.
- The Makomba-Ndlela Youth Movement in Limpopo province offers counselling in addition to sport and the performing arts to combat serious social and health issues, such as sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancy, HIV/Aids, crime and substance abuse.
- 66 young footballers are involved in the



Above: Morné du Plessis chairs the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation that uses sport to improve life in eleven South African projects.

Buffalo City Soccer School project — and in the 2006 season, one of the teams had won the U12-league.

- There is a growing demand from children in the community who want to join the 120 boys and 30 girls at the Alexandra Football Academy, but this will require additional coaches and financial resources are limited.
- Starfish Sport is a partnership project between the Starfish Greathearts Foundation and Sport For All, set up in Kattlehong, one of the poorest areas in Gauteng, that provides holistic care to orphans in the community. More than 500 children living in child-headed households, with grandparents, or with terminally ill parents, have been identified.
- Playing for Peace has provided basketball coaching to more than 10 000 children aged 10-12 since it opened in December 2000. It is breaking down racial barriers, training young adults to be mentors, and educating children about AIDS and other critical health issues.
- Children aged 3-7 are encouraged, through their local pre-schools, to participate in the Little Champs non-competitive physical activity courses in Alexandra and Duzuza to promote eye-hand coordination, eye-foot coordination, balance, agility, spatial awareness and speed.
- The Future Champs Youth Program was established in Khayelitsha to help combat the problems of the area and provide alternative opportunities for youngsters who might otherwise be drawn into a world of crime and drug abuse.
- Football legend John Moeti and his wife, Tshidi Moeti, are the inspiration behind the Free the Youth project in the Zevenfontein informal settlement. It combines life skills and sport as a tool to educate and encourage young people, aged 12-15. The program teaches sex education, public speaking, how to handle

peer pressure, as well as encouraging healthy living through sport involvement.

- Fight with Insight is a boxing project based in the southern suburbs of Johannesburg for young offenders who have completed their diversion programme, an element of the South African youth justice system. Following the 12-week long diversion programme, it is compulsory for young people to attend a follow-on programme, as an alternative to community service.

Amanda Coetzer's tennis

Amanda Coetzer was known as the Little Assassin during her playing career, because she killed the hopes of so many during the ten years she was ranked in the top 20 of women's tennis. She earned a career-high ranking of number three in the world in 1997.

While she might have destroyed the title hopes of some of her opponents, she has given many young South Africans a new lease of life with her Learn Tennis/Love Tennis-project.

She started the project thirteen years ago while still playing the international circuit. The project sponsors two school events, the Amanda Coetzer High School Challenge and the Amanda Coetzer Primary School Challenge, both contested at her former Alma Mater, Oranje Meisieshoër in Bloemfontein.

Coetzer also partners Jeff Coetzee in a tennis development project in his home town, Okiep, in the Northern Cape and has assisted the tennis-loving community of Adams Mission in the KwaZulu Natal South Coast with equipment and tennis court maintenance.

She has also helped junior players to



travel abroad to play in tournaments in the US and attend top tennis academies there.

"When I was playing the game, I sat with my personal assistant, Bruce Davidson, and we came up with the idea that if someone loved something they did, they would enjoy learning about it and ending up being successful in it," says Coetzer.

"A friend and top tournament director from Cape Town, Lorna Kirsten, had coined the "Learn Tennis, Love Tennis" name, and allowed me to adopt it for the foundation I run.

"There is so much that can be done for tennis in South Africa, it's impossible to do everything. My foundation mainly looks after girls who play the game at school. I have supported junior girls in their travels abroad, and within South Africa."

Reflecting on the legacy of the Learn Tennis/Love Tennis project and the Amanda Coetzer Challenge tournaments, she adds: "The tournament has inspired more top tennis schools to host similar events.

"Former (sporting) greats should use their platform to make a contribution in some way or other" — Fordyce

Left: Amanda Coetzer's foundation gives girls from all walks of life a chance to play tennis.

Below left: Ernie Els' Foundation teaches leadership and lifeskills as well as golf.

Top juniors, the future stars of tomorrow, are currently attending school. We therefore need to create a professional environment within the school tennis structure whereby these players have the opportunity as a team to play at the highest level.

"Tennis is such an individual sport that for the girls to play as a team does wonders for their overall development. I am real proud of the tournament my Alma Mater put together — so professional and they give such unconditional support to me and the project."

Ernie Els: golf leaders

Ernie Els is synonymous with an effortless golf-swing and sustained brilliance. He spent 733 successive weeks amongst the top-ten players in the world, more than any other golfer in history. The winner of three Grand Slam-titles, the Big Easy is adamant about giving something back to his adoring fans and to young South Africans.

He co-founded The Ernie Els & Fancourt Foundation in 1999, with the purpose of identifying and assisting young individuals from families of limited resources, who show promise in the game of golf.

It gives these youngsters educational opportunities — while offering them assistance and opportunities to play — and thus creates an environment where not only their playing ability can be developed to its full potential, but they are encouraged to become successful young leaders

Hannes van Niekerk, CEO of the Ernie Els & Fancourt Foundation, says the programme is based on three pillars — golf, education and life skills.

"We have endeavoured to communicate the importance of discipline at school to young members at the academy. We emphasize the need to excel academically.

"There is some danger, especially with the successes of Trevor Immelman, Rory Sabbatini, Ernie Els and Retief Goosen, that young pretenders might think that academic prowess is not that important if you perform on the golf course.

"But we are adamant that if students do not pass, they cannot stay at the acad-

emy. This is a classic academy and members get normal schooling at South Cape College, PW Botha College, Glenwood House and Tembalethu High.

"We have a full-time head coach in George Harvey and two mentors in Betty Mokoena and Heinrich Bruiners. As a unit, they provide some of the best coaching in South Africa."

Life skills are shared continuously and impromptu with the 24 members of the academy.

Generally, the children play tournament-golf once or twice a month.

Louis Oosthuizen and James Kamte, who have played on the European Tour, are two of the success stories of the Foundation. But the Foundation prides itself in being a greenhouse for future South African leaders, instead of serving merely as a production line for new golfing champions.

"The members of the Ernie Els & Fancourt Foundation are handpicked and talented, but even so, it might not work out on the golf course for arguably 95% of them. In that case, we want them to become successful leaders in other departments of the golfing industry and contribute to the future of South Africa," adds Van Niekerk.

Caitlin Beckwith, Michael Mgodeli, Calvin Coelho and André Haasbroek are only a few ambassadors of the Foundation who have excelled post-matric at tertiary institutions, while Tumelo Wesi and Tumo Motang are currently studying for their golf-directorship at Damelin in Centurion. **YS**

Resources:

- JAG Foundation. 021 702 7892. www.jagfoundation.com
- Computershare. 011 370 5000. www-uk.computershare.com
- The Sports Trust. 011 802 1818. www.thesportstrust.co.za
- Laureus Sport for Good Foundation. Lesley-Ann Erasmus. PR. lesley-ann@lapr.co.za
- Amanda Coetzer Foundation. www.tr3.co.za/newsroom/default.aspx?ID=cea9fca7-270f-415b-85f6-e40b7d37a9a8
- Ernie Els & Fancourt Foundation. hannes.vanniekerk@ernieels.com. www.ernieels.com/foundation