

MY FAVOURITE SPRINGBOKS



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to "My Favourite Springboks," an e-book dedicated to celebrating the remarkable careers and stories of the players who have earned a special place in my heart as a rugby enthusiast. Throughout these pages, we'll embark on a journey through the annals of South African rugby history, revisiting the moments of triumph, witnessing the displays of extraordinary talent, and paying homage to the heroes who have worn the iconic Springbok jersey.

In the world of rugby, there exists a special group of athletes who transcend the boundaries of sport to become legends. They are the warriors, the leaders, and the inspirations who have proudly donned the green and gold of the Springboks. These are the players who have captured our hearts, thrilled us with their skills, and left an indelible mark on the rugby landscape.

The Springboks are a special brand. No national sports team has contributed to social cohesion and national happiness as much as the Springboks. It is true that there have been moments that have possibly surpassed what the Boks have done. Bafana Bafana winning the 1996 Africa Cup of Nations, Ernie Els, Retief Goosen, Trevor Immelman, Charl Schwartzel and Louis Oosthuizen winning a golf Major or the likes of Penny Heyns, Josia Thugwane, Ryk Neethling, Cameron Van Der Burgh, Chad Le Clos, Caster Semenya and Wayde Van Niekerk winning a gold medal at the Olympic Games always brings incredible joy but on a consistent basis nothing compares to what the Springboks have given our country – four Rugby World Cup triumphs.

We all have our favourite players, usually from different eras. Often there will be a childhood hero who we hero-worship and aim to emulate. That is the player whose autograph we most want, or these days attempt to get a selfie with! After a while that player retires and then it is time to find a new favourite. Thankfully this wonderful country of ours has been blessed with some outstanding rugby players. South Africa really is like a conveyor belt when it comes to producing superb rugby players.

Os Du Randt retires and Tendai "Beast" Mtawarira takes over. Victor Matfield and Bakkies Botha call it a day and Eben Etzebeth and Lood De Jager fill the gap seamlessly. The loose trio is possibly the area where we have the greatest abundance in riches. Good luck selecting an all-time Dream Team between the likes of Schalk Burger, Rassie Erasmus, Heinrich Brüssow, Corné Krige, Pieter-Steph Du Toit, Ruben Kruger, André Venter, Siya Kolisi, Tiaan Strauss, Bobby Skinstad and Duane Vermuelen. For context Gary Teichmann, Francois Pienaar, Francois Louw and Marcell Coetzee were not mentioned in that initial grouping. I am confident there are several other great names that I have not included there. It is an impossible task as you can see.

How about the other positions? Joost Van Der Westhuizen retires and in comes Fourie Du Preez! On the wing we have had Bryan Habana, Chester Williams, Makazole Mapimpi, Cheslin Kolbe, JP Pietersen and James Small just to name a few. At one stage Pieter Muller and Danie Gerber were in the centres, Muller then partnered with Andre Snyman, Robbie Fleck came in before Jean De Villiers and Jaque Fourie occupied those positions. Again, so many great names not mentioned because if I did, this book would never have an ending.

And how about fullback? Andre Joubert, Percy Montgomery, Willie Le Roux, Francois Steyn – I invite you to tell me with certainty who is the best.

It would be worth telling you now that I do not believe in comparing eras. Each era has its own challenges and circumstances. Conditions change, equipment improves and so does training methods, diets, recovery techniques and so on. Moreover, you cannot compare an amateur with a professional.

Now with all of that being said let me tell you a little bit more about myself. I fell in love with rugby as a nine-year-old boy. I did not really know much about the world around me but the Springboks were returning to international rugby. The reasons why were beyond my understanding at the time but the one thing I have always liked about my journey with South African sport is that it has largely felt like we started when I started watching. The first match was South Africa versus New Zealand at Ellis Park. Yeah, I know we ended up losing that day before taking a hiding the following week against Australia but it did not matter. A little boy was hooked as I am sure many others in and around my age were too, not to mention the plethora of adults who had waited years, if not decades for this.

In each chapter, we will delve into the lives and careers of my favourite Springbok players, exploring the reasons why they hold a cherished spot in my rugby-loving soul. From the dazzling tries to the bone-crushing tackles, from the moments of defeat to those of jubilant victory, this e-book will offer a heartfelt tribute to the men who have made the Springboks a source of pride and inspiration for fans around the world.

Get ready to dive in ... and I hope you'll enjoy this read as much as I have enjoyed writing it for you.

FAVOURITE PLAYER #1: DANIE GERBER



As mentioned earlier South Africa returned to international rugby in 1992. The first match was against New Zealand at Ellis Park and I was very excited. I did not really know what to expect and I remember my parents trying to explain to me the significance of this match but let's be honest, a nine-year-old can only understand so much. My love of sport had actually been ignited about a month earlier. I remember cheering for Goran Ivanisevic in the Wimbledon final against Andre Agassi. It was only just to go against my mother, an Agassi fan, to be honest but soon after that came the Barcelona Olympic Games and I thought that was the most incredible thing I had ever seen. I was hooked for life, even if these days the Olympics are not really near the top of my favourite sporting events.

While watching that Springboks v All Blacks Test there was one player who caught my attention. Now you'll excuse my lack of knowledge of the game at that stage. I was of course new to the sport but armed with an aggressive zeal to learn as much as quickly as possible. That one player that stood out for me was the one and only Danie Gerber. I thought he was a magician. I loved the way he ran, his pace, his sidestep, his dummy and the fact that he scored two tries that day helped too. I had my first favourite rugby player!

Danie's power was also impressive and if you have visited [my YouTube channel, Front Row Rugby](#), you will have seen [an interview with England's World Cup-winning captain Martin Johnson](#). Before we began the interview Martin told me that he first saw Danie playing for the Barbarians in the early 1980s and remarked that he had never seen a player like that before. High praise indeed.

As a youngster I was a keen collector of any memorabilia and paraphernalia I could get my hands on. If you are of a certain age you will recall that player cards were a popular collectible. The cards had an action picture of the player on the front and on the back there were some details about the player, usually the provincial team he represented, his position, height, weight and maybe a few interesting facts or statistics. I cannot remember how many cards were in a pack (at least three but there could have been as many as five or six cards) but I bought as many of these packs as I could until I got my hands on a Danie Gerber card.

Gerber represented his country 24 times in Test matches scoring 19 tries. At the time of his retirement that was the Springbok try-scoring record. No one will ever convince me that Danie Gerber is anything but a rugby legend.

But sadly at the end of 1992 Danie retired from international rugby. There was a void. I needed a new favourite rugby player. Who was it going to be? The answer, interestingly enough, would again present itself at Ellis Park.

FAVOURITE PLAYER #2: JAMES SMALL



It was 3 July 1993 when South Africa hosted France in the second Test in Johannesburg. The first Test in Durban a week prior had ended in a draw. Interestingly enough, at the time, the Springboks had never beaten the French at Ellis Park. Granted they had only played each other at the Joburg venue twice anyway so it was not exactly the greatest statistic around. In 1958 Les Bleus beat our boys 9-5 and then in 1967 they triumphed 19-14. 26 years later they would again defeat the hosts. This time the score could not have been any closer, 18-17.

The late [Ian McIntosh appeared on Front Row Rugby](#), and I believe it was the last interview he recorded before his passing in April 2023. Mac told me that the Boks were outplayed in Durban and should have lost but they drew, and then in Joburg they were the better team but ended on the wrong side of the scoreline.

Nevertheless, South Africa scored the only try of the match and it came courtesy of James Small, a right wing who scored in the lefthand corner from a backline move. SuperSport's guest commentator for the match Bill McLaren was at pains to point out that Small was on the wrong wing. Did it matter? Not to a certain boy less than 10 days away from his 10th birthday!

I had my new favourite: James Small. Imagine my delight when he dotted down twice a few weeks later when the Springboks completed a famous 19-12 away win in Sydney against the-then world

champion Wallabies. Small was quickly turning into a try-scoring machine. The speedy winger added another against Australia in the third Test before scoring a brace in both Tests against Argentina to take his tally to eight for the year and nine in total, after his first Test try a year earlier in Lyon against France in a winning effort.

He was never again that prolific, scoring just five more in the next three seasons. By 1997 other talented players had emerged on the scene but Small was still the Springboks' incumbent right wing. By the time the Boks embarked on their end-of-year tour to Europe James was on 15 tries for his country, four short of Danie Gerber's record with time running out. He would score twice against Italy and once against France, again in Lyon, to move up to 18. Tests against England and Scotland remained. He did not score against the English at Twickenham but did cross the line twice against the Scots at Murrayfield to firstly equal Danie's record, before setting a new Bok record for tries by an individual. As it turned out that was also Small's final Test for his country. What a way to go out!

On a more personal note, I am a Western Province/Stormers supporter and you can just imagine my delight when at the start of 1997 it was announced that Small was joining my beloved *Streeptruie*. James would help Province win the Currie Cup that year. I could not have been any happier.

Small also played a key role in helping South Africa win the 1995 Rugby World Cup on home soil. Even though he did not score a try, his work in assisting his teammates as well as his defensive abilities proved vital. He did an outstanding job marking the irrepressible Jonah Lomu in the final that year as the Springboks completed a famous victory.

Off the field James had something of a bad boy reputation. There were night club incidents and he also drew attention when he began dating the glamorous model Christina Storm. The former did not bother me one bit and the latter, well let's just say it was not exactly a case of me needing another reason to admire the great man.

But with Small's career coming to an end I would need a new favourite player. Hitherto my favourites had been the try-scoring machines. The man who would overtake James' record would be one Joost Van Der Westhuizen – you may have heard of him.

But instead of Joost, my next favourite player would be the guy that regularly received the ball first from the famous scrumhalf.

FAVOURITE PLAYER #3: HENRY HONIBALL



Now when Van Der Westhuizen first burst on to the scene for South Africa, Henry Honiball was part of the setup but after Ian McIntosh was replaced as Springbok coach by Kitch Christie, Joel Stransky was the incumbent flyhalf. Hennie Le Roux also spent time in the number 10 jersey. Stransky was more of a kicking flyhalf and Le Roux a running flyhalf. Traditionally the South Africans would play with a kicking flyhalf, think Naas Botha, but every so often there might be an experiment with a running pivot.

Now I will admit when Henry made his debut in 1993 against Australia, 10-year-old me took an immediate liking to him simply because I thought he had the coolest name I had heard up until that moment in my life – Honey Ball! The other contender for coolest name I had ever heard was “Czechoslovakia” but since that was no longer a country by the time I discovered it, the prize would have to go to Henry.

Honiball could kick but he could also run. He was a maestro but for whatever reason he was not a regular part of the Bok setup until 1996 when he became the team’s flyhalf of choice under Andre Markgraaff. Early in 1997 Markgraaff was out and Carel Du Plessis opted to use Honiball as an inside centre, a position Henry could play astutely but I always thought he was a better flyhalf. Perhaps his

running and ferocious tackling ability is what had Du Plessis fancy him at 12 instead. That physical prowess as a tackler earned him the nickname *Lem* – Afrikaans for “blade”, because when he tackled you, he virtually sliced you in half.

Henry Honiball was in my eyes the perfect flyhalf and certainly the best 10 the Springboks have had. We have never replaced him. Many might bring up the name of Naas Botha but you must remember I am too young to have seen Naas in his prime. I did see him in those five 1992 Test matches but other than that I have only ever seen highlights of Botha’s best moments. Honiball is the man I grew up watching and admiring and I thought he was wonderful. If I had to single out a negative then perhaps his goalkicking was not always the most accurate but when he was part of the Springboks’ historic 17-match unbeaten run in 1997/98 Percy Montgomery was the team’s kicker and Honiball was allowed to unleash his flair on the opposition.

Tragically an injury ruled him out for the majority of the 1999 Rugby World Cup where the Springboks were beaten in the semi-finals. Many believe that had Nick Mallett not dropped Gary Teichmann as the team’s captain on the eve of the tournament, the Boks would have gone on and won the competition. I would not argue that contention, but for me if we had had a fully fit Henry Honiball, I believe we would have won that tournament and I say that with the utmost respect to the man who held the jersey at the time, Jannie De Beer, who memorably kicked a world record five drop goals to help beat England in the quarter-finals, and a memorable event I detailed in [this YouTube video with then-assistant coach Heyneke Meyer](#).

With Honiball calling it quits, it was once again time for me to find myself a new favourite Springbok and for the first time in my young life I would be moving from the backs to the forwards.

FAVOURITE PLAYER #4: BOBBY SKINSTAD



Bobby Skinstad first caught my attention as an exciting, all-action, multi-skilled loose forward for Western Province during the successful Currie Cup-winning season in 1997. Skinstad would make his Springbok debut later that year against England at Twickenham but it was the following year where he really announced himself on the international stage. Bok boss Nick Mallett used Bobby off the bench as an impact player. This strategy was being used for the first time in rugby as previously in the amateur era substitutions were only allowed for injuries but now the players on the bench were used strategically. Skinstad and Ollie Le Roux were probably the first two examples of impact players.

Bobby impressed but his stock was raised through the roof after a beautiful Tri-Nations try against Australia at Ellis Park. The flank was standing in the backline and upon receiving the ball near the Wallabies' try line played a beautiful dummy Danie Gerber would have been proud of before taking the gap to cross the line and turning left to dive under the posts to ensure an easy conversion. Bobby's tongue-out celebration became the stuff of legend. A famous jeweller signed him up in what was possibly his first big endorsement deal and it could be argued Skinstad popularised the late 90s/early 00s tongue ring fad.

On the end-of-year tour Mallett made the mistake of dropping his starting flank André Venter; a true colossus of a man to make room for Skinstad in the starting XV. That error caused Mallett to lose the trust of the players, who were on a 15-match winning streak at that stage. It was of course not the youngster's fault but two Tests later the hot streak ended.

Bobby played a starring role in 1999 for the Stormers at eighthman before a car accident stopped him in his tracks. Nevertheless, I had already taken a liking to this maverick loose forward and so when Honiball retired after the 1999 Rugby World Cup it was an easy decision to pick Skinstad as my new favourite.

Oddly enough he did not actually play a Test in 2000 so it's a bit of an odd one that my favourite Springbok was not playing for the Springboks at that stage but in 2001 Bok coach Harry Viljoen appointed Bobby Skinstad as the team's new captain replacing the incumbent André Vos. Skinstad led the team well. Some of the highlights included a win at Loftus over the world champion Australians, in which he scored the match's only try, and a very good draw against the same opponent in Perth. The team was unlucky not to win the Tri-Nations that year but such is life. The end of year tour was not as successful with comfortable losses to France and England and early in 02 new Springbok coach Rudolf Straeuli replaced Bobby as the team's leader with Corné Krige.

It was Bobby's magic that I was captivated by. He had good pace for a loose forward but he had the flair and skills of a backline player. He was also very charismatic so what was not to like?

It was the flash of the man that I so enjoyed but with him out of the picture my next favourite Springbok, ironically, was a man more renowned for doing the dirty work.

FAVOURITE PLAYER #5: CORNÉ KRIGE



Similar to Bobby, Corné Krige was a leader and a loose forward but that is probably where the similarities end. Yes, it is true Krige was also an all-action player, his version of this style was carrying the ball into a collision rather than popping up in the backline and making something unexpected happen.

One of Corné's strengths was his role as a fetcher. These days he would be referred to as a jackaller but that term wasn't used in the late 90s and early 00s. His relentless determination was also an admirable quality. Krige actually captained the Springboks on debut – a very rare honour, and on that occasion he led the Boks to a 101-0 win over Italy in Durban. Not a bad start.

Unfortunately, Corné suffered two devastating knee injuries but thankfully he was able to recover from those and captained his country at the 2003 Rugby World Cup. Krige's time in charge of the Springboks was mired in controversy. Rudolf Straeuli had become the new Bok coach and while the initial performances were encouraging, things soon turned south. A largely inexperienced side were embarrassingly beaten 30-10 by France, 21-6 by Scotland and annihilated 53-3 by England at Twickenham on the end-of-year tour. The latter result particularly controversial for some brutal acts on the part of the Boks, including the captain himself.

The following year the Boks ambled their way through the June Tests and Tri-Nations before disappointingly bowing out of the World Cup in the quarter-finals. In the aftermath Straeuli was sacked and revelations emerged of a pre-tournament military-style team building camp, Kamp Staaldraad where players were humiliated at times.

I've been fortunate enough to have [Corné as a guest on Front Row Rugby](#) where he spoke candidly about the events of 2003 and his international retirement shortly thereafter at the age of 28. Krige believed new Springbok coach Jake White would never have selected him for national duty anyway on the grounds that he was too small and the fact White saw no value in a fetcher, unless that man was fetching him a beer out the fridge.

It is all a real shame and in the words of Corné Krige's autobiography, he really was the right man at the wrong time.

That said he did lead Western Province to two consecutive Currie Cup titles in 2000 and 2001 and that most certainly brought a lot of joy to the Newlands Faithful!

FAVOURITE PLAYER #6: SCHALK BURGER



It seems that once I had hit my late teens I was fixated with loose forwards. Skinstad, Krige and then Schalk Burger: The Incredible Schalk!

Krige's all-action physical manner of carrying the ball into collisions was something I strongly admired when I first chose him as my favourite. I think it's fair to say that Burger did that and probably took it up a notch. Schalk's enthusiasm and love of crashing into collisions but also the rucks and the mauls were just magnificent in my opinion. He also possessed pretty good ball skills and ultimately would score 16 tries for the Springboks in Tests, including a hat-trick against Namibia on the eve of the 2007 Rugby World Cup.

Some say Schalk suffered from ill-discipline – he was shown six yellow cards during his Test career. I of course think all six were completely unjustified. Others will point to an eye-gouging incident against the British & Irish Lions in the second Test in Pretoria in 2009. I am certain that what really happened was the Lions player, Luke Fitzgerald manoeuvred his face into a position where his eyes made contact with Burger's fingers.

All jokes aside Burger really was everywhere on the field, especially in his earlier days. Once upon a time I discovered the word “ubiquitous”. I thought it was a really cool-sounding word – right up there with Honiball and Czechoslovakia – but while looking up the word’s meaning in the dictionary I realised something else. Schalk Burger was ubiquitous! Yes, on the rugby field he was everywhere, he was omnipresent. You could not keep him out of the action. I really should have written to the good people at Collins and urged them to replace the description next to the word with a photo of this Springbok hero instead.

But perhaps Schalk’s greatest attribute is his courage. In 2006 he broke his neck. I was always under the impression that a broken neck meant you were paralysed but thankfully not so. Perhaps I should have attended a better school ... or at least paid attention in class.

Burger made a miraculous recovery to take his place in the 2007 Rugby World Cup-winning team in France. It’s worth mentioning that coach Jake White actually told the media shortly after that neck injury that there was a chance the great flank might not play again.

And forget playing again, there were genuine fears that he might not continue living when he contracted a hospital bug in 2013 while being treated for a spinal injury.

Broken neck? Near-death? Nothing can stop Schalk Burger. He not only recovered but resumed his Springbok career and represented his country at the 2015 Rugby World Cup; his fourth tournament for the Boks. Laureus appropriately awarded him their Comeback of the Year accolade that year at the World Sports Awards. But long before that in 2004 he was named the IRB’s World Player of the Year.

What a superb player. A true star and my favourite Springbok. Not favourite from 2004-2015. My outright favourite.

When he retired it left a void and I did not know which way to turn.

A LULL PERIOD



Burger was my favourite Springbok from 2004 – 2015 and when someone has been your favourite for that long it can be difficult to have an affection towards someone else, certainly during that period. Similarly, Jacques Kallis was my favourite cricketer for nearly 20 years and I did not know what to do when he retired. The same story is true of my favourite international cricketer, Sachin Tendulkar, and my favourite tennis player Rafael Nadal. Because they play such an important role in your life, at least in terms of sporting joy, it can be difficult to even start to like someone else, especially soon after they leave the limelight.

I found myself in that position when Schalk Burger retired. New Springbok coach Allister Coetzee named his first Springbok squad for the three-Test series against Ireland and I looked around to try and identify who my new favourite player was going to be. Alas, there was no one who stood out for me.

It would be disingenuous of me to say that there was no one I admired. There were many players I liked. Patrick Lambie, Tendai Mtawarira, Eben Etzebeth, Siya Kolisi and Duane Vermeulen were all players I liked, but I cannot say I loved any of them. If pushed I would probably say at that stage Vermeulen was the guy I liked the most out of that group but as I say I cannot say that I loved him the way I loved all the others that came before him.

In 2017 I took a liking to Malcolm Marx, especially after his superhuman performance against New Zealand in the Cape Town Test which we narrowly lost 25-24. Marx was magnificent in that match and his all-action, physical style reminded me of Lukas Van Biljon who put in a similar effort against the same opponent in 2001, also in a losing effort on that very same ground.

But as I say I did not actually have an out-and-out favourite. I even toyed with the idea of Warren Whiteley as my favourite. He was the captain in 2017 after all and why not have the skipper as a favourite? He was a pretty good player as it was and that's a decent starting point. But Warren was also soon sidelined through injury that year. Interestingly the answer to my question had already presented itself. I had been looking in the right places, without seeing the obvious.

FAVOURITE PLAYER #7: SIYA KOLISI



Ah yes, another loosie. Another loosie from Western Province/Stormers. I had always liked Siya without being to say that I loved him. I thought he was a good, solid player but not particularly flashy. A man who was really good at what he did and most of what he was doing was the engine room stuff. Hard tackling, breakdown disturbance, really good defensive setups and the like. But that changed in 2018, not Siya's skills, but my attitude towards him.

The Springboks were at their lowest ebb, lower than in the aftermath of the 2003 Rugby World Cup disaster I think although it is contestable. In the year or so before the quarter-final exit in 2003 we had suffered record defeats to England and New Zealand, shipping 50 points in the process and losing badly in France, Australia and Scotland along the way.

How does that compare with a record 57-0 defeat to the All Blacks? A record 57-15 home loss to the same opponents? A record 38-3 loss to Ireland? A first-ever defeat to Italy?

Whichever you think is worse, it is not a pretty picture either way. Coach Rassie Erasmus took over at the start of the 2018 season and he installed Kolisi as the new Springbok captain. Now given that I was keen on Whiteley simply because he was the skipper, I was happy to hop on board the Siya bandwagon in this instance.

I must be honest as much as I liked Kolisi he is the first favourite of mine that I picked not because I actually loved what he was doing on the field, but because I felt something special might be brewing and I wanted to be part of it. You might say I picked him as a favourite on potential rather than ability if that makes sense.

Well Siya delivered in every possible way. Firstly, he is a great player and because he does a lot of the engine room stuff, people do not always notice. He is more of a Corné Krige than a Schalk Burger or Bobby Skinstad for instance. He is also an inspirational leader. In his second year as captain he was injured for the home Test against Australia. Many other skippers would have happily sat in the stands or maybe the bench cheering the boys on. Not Siya. He put on a bib and acted as a water carrier for his teammates, encouraging them every time he ran on to the field to offer them water. That is servant leadership: “How can I help you?” rather than “Do what I tell you.” Is that not wonderful?

Siya is also the only Springbok captain who has made me cry. After we won the 2019 Rugby World Cup in Japan, Kolisi mentioned in his post-match interview how our country has many difficulties but if we all work together, we can overcome them. The Springboks were nowhere just 18 months earlier, but they worked together and conquered the world in a short space of time. It helped that I was already close to tears after we won the Webb Ellis Cup, but Siya just pushed me over the edge.

There are only two other times I've cried because of the Springboks. The first came in the immediate aftermath of Joel Stransky's drop goal against the All Blacks in the 1995 Rugby World Cup final. We had not actually won the match yet but somehow I just knew that was the winning moment.

The second was the morning after our latest triumph in France. I came across a picture of Bongki Mbonambi who was carrying his daughter post-match. You might say she was on his right-side, or *regte kant*. His daughter had the Webb Ellis Cup in her hands. I just began to imagine that being me and my three-year-old girl and succumbed to tears.

Now I had zero talent but if the young Miss Stemmet inherits some sporting genes from my wife's side of the family, we might have a little future champion on our hands. Watch this space!

And one more note on the topic of leadership. At the 2023 Rugby World Cup, coach Jacques Nienaber was quizzed on the merits of Manie Libbok's place in the team. Libbok's inconsistent goalkicking had become a hot button topic. After Nienaber answered, Siya spoke up. Kolisi not only defended Libbok but in a forthright, yet courteous manner explained to the press that in the Springbok team everyone makes mistakes and every player has every other player's back. If one player commits an error then someone else will step in and fill the gap. It was an amazing speech by the Springbok skipper and I have no doubt that Libbok, who likely might not have been feeling too confident at that stage, would have been stirred by his captain's words.

Honestly, what is not to like, no, love about Siya Kolisi? Oh captain, my captain!

FAVOURITE PLAYER #8: LUKHANYO AM



Okay this is actually more of a prediction than anything else. In the aftermath of the 2023 Rugby World Cup I am anticipating Siya Kolisi's retirement from international rugby. So that means it is time to find a new favourite.

Now unlike 2016/17 the Springboks are playing at a very high level and there are many players who stand out. The reality is that since 2000 my favourite Springbok has been a Western Province/Stormers loose forward but I think that is about to change. Do not get me wrong, I could easily tell you that Hacjivah Dayimani or Evan Roos is going to be my next favourite player. I really like them both and cannot quite tell which one of the two I like more, but if pushed it is probably Roos at this stage.

However, having said all of that I see myself going full circle and if we go back to the beginning my first favourite player was an unreal outside centre. I believe in Lukhanyo Am the Springboks possess an out-of-this world 13.

Am is truly exceptional in my opinion. Yes, he helps organise our brilliant backline defence but have you seen this man's running and passing abilities? It is next level as the kids like to say. He has good pace, passes not only well but also does the odd flick and trick when offloading which is a joy to watch; think *that* pass against the All Blacks in Mbombela in 2022. He scores tries, creates tries and even delivers tries to teammates like Makazole Mapimpi in the 2019 Rugby World Cup final when in all

honesty Am could have almost certainly scored that try himself. Bear in mind it was our first try in a Rugby World Cup final so no one would have blamed Likhanyo for going it alone. And then who could forget the icy cool manner in which he stared straight ahead, not even seeing the moment Mapimpi dotted down, before finally turning to his teammate to celebrate. Coolness personified.

Am also seems to have time, like all the greats, and his decision-making is yet to let the Springboks down. Some say he is a generational talent. I say if he stays healthy, there is a good chance when he retires that we speak of him as the greatest Springbok outside centre there has been. Imagine being thought of as better than Danie Gerber and Jaque Fourie, never mind just being in the same bracket as those two legends.

He is a midfield maestro and we have already seen him captain the Sharks in the United Rugby Championship. Even though for now it seems as if Bongani Mbonambi is the front runner, or *aan die voorkant*, for the Springbok captaincy post-2023 Rugby World Cup. Still, what price Likhanyo Am becomes the new Bok skipper?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This e-book is for you – my loyal YouTube community member. Your support means everything to me. I launched the [channel](#) in August 2022 to coincide with South Africa's return to international rugby after decades of isolation. The channel has come a long way since then ... as indeed have the Springboks. There is a small but enthusiastic group of people who comment on almost every single video – you know who you are – and I want you to know that I not only appreciate you but I genuinely look forward to it and I just love the interaction.

It has also just dawned on me that it is possible you have received and read this ebook without ever having even heard of my channel. Well, [Front Row Rugby](#) is all about celebrating Springbok rugby. My aim is to have fun and interesting conversations with our Bok heroes from the past. I have included a few links already in this book where I have had interviews with some of these favourite players of mine. I would encourage you to start there and then search the library for more great interviews with former Springboks.

I also want to acknowledge my family for their never-ending support. My wife Ntando is always there for me. It might interest you to know that she is responsible for the current Front Row Rugby logo. Compare that to the first logo and you can say how she improves everything she touches. My daughter Hannah brings me so much joy. She is a tad too young right now but I shall make a passionate Springbok supporter out of her yet. Our new-born Eden is indeed a bundle of joy and I cannot wait to see her grow into a big Bok nut! And I cannot omit our pet pomeranian Zulu. Even though he does not actually encourage or offer any input, he is the ultimate supporter. When I am working on my videos, or while writing this e-book, my loyal pup was lying at my feet throughout.

Let me also thank the rest of my family from my parents and siblings to my uncles, aunts, cousins and even those who I have not seen in a decade or more. I love you all and wish we all lived closer to one another rather than scattered all over the world. My best estimate has us living in South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

Finally I want to thank each of the former Springboks who have kindly given of their time to appear on Front Row Rugby. The bottom line is that they do not have to do so. I invite them to the show and it is up to them whether or not to agree. I am delighted to say that at last count 86% of the ex-Boks I have invited to be on the show have said yes. They have added tremendous value and again, if they do not say yes, I do not have a channel. I am immensely grateful to each of them.

I also know you are now dying to know who the 14% are who have turned me down ... but that will be my secret. I remain hopeful that in the weeks, months or even years to come I might be able to encourage them sufficiently to change their mind.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I grew up in Cape Town and my love of sport was first ignited in 1992 as I discussed in the Introduction. I am equally passionate about politics and could just as easily have become a political reporter but the good thing with sport is that you are unlikely to have rubber bullets shot at you while covering a story. I began my broadcasting career in 2004 at a community radio station in Paarl, Radio KC. I loved my time there and still have many special memories. After four years in radio, where I also worked at Heart 104.9 among others, I entered the world of television. I was a sport reporter at eNCA and after switching channels and moving from reporting to presenting, I joined Al Jazeera in Doha, Qatar in late 2016.

YouTube is my passion project but I would love to see how much I can make it grow. It is a tremendous amount of fun and if you would like to help me make the channel all it can be then I would like to ask you to consider becoming a Patron. You can head over to my Patreon page and sign up. I will be adding exciting new features on a regular basis so do check back to see what the benefits will be for members.

If you'd like to support me you can do so here: <https://www.patreon.com/FrontRowRugby>

Finally thank you so much for taking the time to read this e-book and taking a fun trip down memory lane with me. I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I took pleasure in putting it together.