



PLAY IT FORWARD

IN A GAME WHERE BRAVERY, PASSION AND RESOLVE ARE PRIZED, POLOAFRICA AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLO ASSOCIATION OFFER THOSE LESSONS, OPPORTUNITIES AND SPIRIT OF THE SPORT TO THE WIDER COMMUNITY. THE RESULT IS A DISPLAY OF POLO'S REAL RICHES

The home of the Poloafrika development programme is Uitgedacht Farm, a beautiful, rural retreat for polo players and non-polo players alike, set in the foothills of the spectacular Maluti Mountains in the Eastern Free State. Catherine Cairns, owner of the farm, is the founder and primary sponsor of the Poloafrika Development Trust, which is endorsed and supported by the South African Polo Association (SAPA). Poloafrika is proud to have become a Laureus Sport for Good Foundation project last year, a great accolade for the effort.

The Poloafrika Development Trust, in conjunction with SAPA, has three objectives. The first of these is to give an opportunity to talented underprivileged adults to do well in the sport. The programme enables them to play the game in a serious manner and gives them the opportunity

to flourish as well-respected polo professionals, whether through pony care, farrier work, schooling ponies or coaching other players in the sport. The senior Poloafrika team is now at a level where they can compete competently in tournaments across the country and their various successes, combined with their sportsmanlike behaviour on the field, has earned them well-deserved praise from the polo community. SAPA has helped the Poloafrika players spread their wings this year through a substantial contribution to pony transport costs for tournaments.

The second objective is to use polo and ponies as a lever to encourage children from underprivileged back-

grounds to work hard both academically and vocationally. The Poloafrika scholars are permitted to receive coaching and play polo as long as, and only as long as, they try hard at school and in the life skills classes given on the farm, and

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continue to demonstrate discipline and enthusiasm for the ponies and the sport. There are over 20 children and young adults in the programme at present (ranging in age from nine to 20), most of whom receive financial support for school attendance. This year, SAPA is

generously providing the majority of the academic scholarships for the PoloAfrica children. Without this funding, it would be difficult for many of these children to stay in school. The life skills classes for the scholars have become an important feature of the programme over the last year, thanks to support from Laureus. The scholars are given extra Maths and English coaching, self-expression

training, as well as a variety of practical life skills classes, such as carpentry, sewing, computer skills and bee-keeping.

PoloAfrica and SAPA's third objective is to make the sport in South Africa more accessible to non-white players. The mission is to change both the perception and reality of the sport in this country, in order to allow it to flourish and grow. It is important for wealthy black South

Africans to see black players compete and win, in order to encourage their inclusion in the sport.

There are two PoloAfrica teams playing in the curtain raiser to the BMW International, an interesting line-up of the Teen Team against the Little Birds. PoloAfrica's two strongest players and coaches, Tshidiso Meshake and Zompie Tsotetsi, are managing the teams instead of playing this year, in order to give more junior players a chance to show what they can do.

Thapelo Mothijoa (-1 goal), aged 19, is the captain of the Teen Team. Thapelo is attending the Laureus Youth Empowerment through Sport leadership programme and we hope to see evidence of these skills in his captainship. He is supported at number 3 by Montoeli Ntoleng, aged 16, and at the back by his brother, Tinto Mothijoa, aged 17, both -2 goal players. Thapelo, Montoeli and Tinto have all had recent opportunity to play in major tournaments and their polo has improved accordingly, which may be reflected in handicap changes for them this year. Mosaku Lephatsi, aged 14, a strong -2 goal player, is the fourth member of the Teen Team. The reserve is Nunutsana Selialia, aged 14, still with an S handicap, but who has recently started playing field chukkas at pace.

Naledi Nkopane (0 goal), who is in charge of pony welfare for PoloAfrica, is the Captain of the Little Birds. His number 3 is Thabo Mofokeng, also a 0 goal player, who particularly enjoys teaching the youngest PoloAfrica scholars to ride. Mamaseko Sithole wears the number 2, shirt for the Little Birds. A -2 goal player, her polo has recently benefited considerably from Gavin Chaplin's coaching at the Ladies Clinic held at Uitgedacht. In the number 1 position and in reserve, are two boys whose handicap has just gone up from S to -2. Tumelo Molapo (aged 14) will play for the Little Birds at Shongweni and Molefi Ralebenya (aged 15) at Waterfall. Here's to their and the game's great futures. 🐾

S'BU DUMA

S'bu Duma was born on a farm in the Dargle area of the KZN midlands 25 years ago. His father was head groom for Dave Kimber, a well-known polo player. When S'bu was 12, Dave began coaching the enthusiastic and talented youngster. The SA Polo Association (SAPA) awarded S'bu a bursary to assist with his education and this continued until he matriculated. Furthermore, the bursary allowed him to attend polo clinics and cover the cost of transporting his horses to various tournaments. S'bu showed increasing talent for the game and at 18 was chosen to represent South Africa as part of the schoolboys' team that played in the UK. At this point the Rowe-Setz family picked up S'bu as a protégée. Dieter Rowe-Setz, an enthusiastic amateur polo player and then captain of Lions River Polo Club, took S'bu under his wing. The Family Trust sent S'bu to qualify in horsemanship, stable management and stud management at school in Johannesburg, while arranging for him to continue to play at the East Rand Polo club where his ponies were provided. This was followed by sponsorships from Macsteel & The Maybach Foundation, again organised through the Rowe-Setz family.

S'bu took full advantage of all the opportunities presented to him and his polo skills grew exponentially as he travelled to Argentina, England, Kenya, Nigeria and Spain, winning MVP (Most Valued Player) prizes at several tournaments. S'bu's first major break came as a member of the PoloAfrica team that was victorious at the Inanda Africa Cup in 2008, to massive applause on the part of a highly emotional crowd – it was the first time in history a black African team had ever won a tournament in SA, let alone this cup. More recently he spent time at Kurland, assisting Dougie Lund with his string, before taking up the biggest challenge of all and seeing his dream come true: to train at Cowdray and earn his English Handicap. He had dreamt of this all his life.

Sadly it was not to be. S'bu's life was cruelly and senselessly ended when he was stabbed to death on a dirt road in the middle of the day, on the way to play some pool with friends in his home village of Lidgetton. S'bu represented an African dream, but more than that, he demonstrated that with hard work, talent, courtesy and humanity, anything is possible. Tributes have poured in from all over the world and the sense of loss the entire global polo community feels over his death cannot be overstated.

