

**SKONK**  
NICHOLSON



**2023**



# MESSAGE FROM **THE HEADMASTER**

It is a great pleasure for Maritzburg College to host the Skonk Nicholson Rugby Festival and to welcome 20 teams and their supporters to our campus.

We sincerely hope that all who participate or spectate will enjoy all that is great in schoolboy sport, viz. the camaraderie, team-spirit, passion, commitment and sportsmanship. These were all noble ideals fostered in his rugby teams over 35 seasons by the late Mr Nicholson himself – ones of which we today need to be more mindful than ever.

A special word of thanks to the following: Director of Rugby Mr H Marnitz, the master-in-charge of rugby Mr S Stopford, the tournament director Mr L Smorfitt, our events manager Ms S Paterson, Granny Macs Catering, Mrs S Upfold and the Maritzburg College Marketing Team, the school's Estates team, and all the first aiders and other helpers, for all their hard work in making this festival a reality.

Of course, a special welcome to the home of the Red-Black-White goes to all the players, coaches, managers and parents – we hope you have an enjoyable stay in Maritzburg.

I trust that you will all enjoy the few days' rugby, and wish you safe travels back home.

Yours sincerely

**C J LUMAN**  
**HEADMASTER**



# PROFILE OF SKONK: THE GREAT 'SKONKWAAN'

James Mervyn Nicholson (the Skonk came later) was born in Underberg, Natal, on 6 February 1917, and grew up on the family farm in that district. In due course, he was sent to the Durban Preparatory High School, from whence he proceeded to the Durban High School (DHS). His father was a great friend of the legendary DHS Head Master, Mr AS 'Madevu' Langley, and so young Mervyn was sent to DHS, rather than to Maritzburg College, which was also a family school. He enjoyed a remarkably successful stint at DHS, and matriculated in 1935 in a blaze of glory: he was Head Prefect, captain of the First XV, the First XI and the athletics team, captain of the Natal Schools' XV, and Senior Cadet Officer. It was as a young standard six (grade 8) boarder at DHS that he earned his famous nickname of 'Skonk': the then Head Prefect, M Bennett, recognised young Nicholson's spirited nature, referring to him as 'Skonkwaan', which was the name of a bull on the Bennett farm in Mooi River, meaning 'tent-peg'. This was in due course shortened to 'Skonk', and so it has remained ever since.

Having completed his studies cum laude at the erstwhile Natal University College (NUC) in Pietermaritzburg, Skonk started out his academic teaching career at his alma mater, DHS, immediately before the Second World War broke out. During the war, he served as an instructor (sergeant-major), before being demobilised out of the SA Army in 1944 due to injury. Much to the disappointment of the redoubtable Head Master of DHS, Col 'Betsy' Martin MC (himself an Old Collegian), Skonk was in that year sent by the Natal Education authorities to Maritzburg College, where he for the next two generations taught Geography and coached the First XV (1948-1982). Indeed, in 1944 the youthful Skonk found himself the subject of a heated dispute between Col Martin and the equally pugnacious Headmaster of College, the famous Mr JW 'John-Willie' Hudson, who also wanted to enjoy the services of the talented young master. "Boy!" the redoubtable John-Willie boomed at the youthful schoolmaster, "you are staying at College." And so it was.

Under Skonk's leadership, College came to be one of the rugby powerhouses in SA, producing 14 unbeaten First XV's and countless Natal and SA Schools' players during his 35 seasons at the helm. Over the passage of years, Skonk coached many players who played provincial and international rugby, including at least 10 Natal flyhalves alone! These players include Keith Oxlee, Brian Irvine (captain of the Junior Springboks), Ormie Taylor and Andy van der Watt, and, after his formal retirement, Joel Stransky, Jeremy Thomson, Pieter Dixon and Butch James. Nearby to the Kent Pavilion at College, overlooking the school's main rugby field, Goldstone's, stands the Nicholson Arch, which was erected in 1982, the year of Skonk's retirement. It is a cherished tradition for each First XV player, as he steams onto the pitch, to reach up and touch the apex of the arch, in mute tribute to College's own 'Mr Rugby'.

Skonk garnered many awards and tributes in the course of a long and distinguished career as a teacher and a sports coach, including the Gold Medal of the SA Geographical Society - for his outstanding contribution to geography - and civic honours by the Pietermaritzburg City Council - for "Long and Outstanding Service to Education and Sport".

**Skonk Nicholson sadly passed away in 2011 and will always be fondly remembered, by all who knew him.**



# ABOUT MARITZBURG COLLEGE: THE HOME OF THE #RedBlackWhite

On 2 March 1863, the first headmaster of the Pietermaritzburg High School (as the school was then called), Mr W Calder, opened the doors of the school to “a group of thirty colonial ruffians”, in a humble carpenter’s shop in Longmarket Street. The said headmaster was later most memorably described as “a punishing ogre who lurked ominously in the Upper Schoolroom”, which certainly did not augur well for the fledgling school! However, since those humble beginnings, the old High School – which was renamed Maritzburg College by ‘The Father of College’, third headmaster Mr RD Clark in 1888 – has weathered storms, wars, rinderpests, depressions and famines, and has grown and blossomed over the last 147 years. Indeed, as a leading KZN school with a long history, it should come as no surprise that College has produced an enviable number of Old Boys who have distinguished themselves in almost every field of human endeavour. Amongst its most illustrious former scholars it can count 11 senators, 6 generals, two admirals, a Commissioner of Police, 11 Officers Commanding of the Natal Carbineers alone, arguably South Africa’s pre-eminent English author, 24 Rhodes Scholars, a Chief Justice, 9 judges and 3 Attorneys-General. But it is the prowess of its numerous sporting teams that perhaps gives the school and Old Collegians the greatest pride, and its tally of 210 international sportsmen to date – including 14 Springboks, 28 captains of international sporting teams and an Olympic gold medallist – makes for impressive reading.

## **AMONGST THE SCHOOL’S 324 INTERNATIONAL SPORTSMEN AND OFFICIALS AT ALL CODES, THE FOLLOWING 17 OLD COLLEGIANS HAVE REPRESENTED, OR FORMALLY BEEN SELECTED FOR, SOUTH AFRICA AT 15-MAN RUGBY:**

Ernest “Baby” Shum (1912)	Andrew van der Watt (1969-1970)
Walter Clarkson (1921-1924)	Joel Stransky (1993-1996)
Cecil “Bill” Payn (1924)	Jeremy Thomson (1996)
Bertram “Beevee” Vanderplank (1924)	Pieter Dixon (2000)
Philip Nel (1928-1937) (captain)	Andrew “Butch” James (2001-2008)
George van Reenen (1937)	Peter “Bash” Grant (2007)
Keith Oxlee (1960-1965)	Craig Burden (2012)
Ormond Taylor (1962)	Jessie Kriel (2015- )
	Ntuthuko Mchunu (2022- )

## **IN ADDITION, 14 OLD COLLEGIANS HAVE REPRESENTED OTHER COUNTRIES:**

**FOR ENGLAND:** Hubert Freakes (1938-1939), Geoff Appleford (2002), Don Armand (2018)  
**FOR THE USA:** Juan Grobler (1997-2001), Chad Erskine (2005-2007), Matthew Hawkins (2010)  
**FOR ITALY:** Wim Visser 1999  
**FOR GERMANY:** Frank Goedeke (2000-2001), Marcel Coetzee (2016-2019), Andrew Reintges (2023- )  
**FOR ZIMBABWE:** Brenton Catterall 1991  
**FOR CYPRUS:** Andrew Binikos (2009)  
**FOR SPAIN:** Andrew Norton (2019)  
**FOR SINGAPORE:** Warren Ansell (2016)

## **A FURTHER EIGHT OLD COLLEGIANS HAVE EARNED SELECTION FOR INTERNATIONAL TEAMS IN THE POPULAR SEVEN-MAN VERSION OF THE GAME:**

Frank Goedeke (Germany 1999)  
Wayne Munn (SA 1999)  
Geoff Appleford (England 2001)  
Justin Hundley (USA 2007)  
Grant Rees (SA 2007)  
Matthew Hawkins (USA captain 2008)  
Andrew Binikos (Cyprus 2010)  
Marcel Coetzee (Germany 2016)



# U14 FIXTURES FOR SNRF 2023:

Day 1

9:00	EG Jansen	vs	Michaelhouse
10:15	Kearsney	vs	Garsfontein
11:30	Zwartkop	vs	Maritzburg College
12:30-13:30	LUNCH		
13:30	Sasolburg	vs	St Charles
14:45	Westville	vs	Pretoria Boy's High

Day 2

9:00	Zwartkop	vs	Westville
10:15	Sasolburg	vs	Michaelhouse
11:30	Kearsney	vs	EG Jansen
12:30-13:30	LUNCH		
13:30	St Charles	vs	Pretoria Boy's High
14:45	Garsfontein	vs	Maritzburg College

Day 3

8:00	Pretoria Boy's High	vs	Kearsney
9:15	St Charles		Zwartkop
10:30	EG Jansen	vs	Westville
11:45	Maritzburg College	vs	Sasolburg
	NO BREAK		
13:00	Garsfontein	vs	Michaelhouse

SNOW'S  
SNOW'S



# U16 FIXTURES FOR SNRF 2023:

Day 1

9:00	Sasolburg	vs	HTS Middelburg
10:15	EG Jansen	vs	Michaelhouse
11:30	Kearsney	vs	Garsfontein
<b>12:30-13:30</b>	<b>LUNCH</b>		
13:30	St Charles		Brandwag
14:45	Zwartkop	vs	Maritzburg College

Day 2

9:00	Sasolburg	vs	Michaelhouse
10:15	Zwartkop	vs	St Charles
11:30	EG Jansen	vs	HTS Middelburg
<b>12:30-13:30</b>	<b>LUNCH</b>		
13:30	Garsfontein	vs	Maritzburg College
14:45	Kearsney	vs	Brandwag

Day 3

8:00	Zwartkop	vs	Sasolburg
9:15	EG Jansen	vs	Kearsney
10:30	St Charles	vs	HTS Middelburg
	<b>NO BREAK</b>		
11:45	Garsfontein	vs	Michaelhouse
13:00	Maritzburg College	vs	Brandwag

**GOLDSTONIE'S**  
GOLDSTONIE'S



# HISTORY OF RUGBY

## Early Years

Founded in 1863, Maritzburg College played its first rugby match in 1870, against Hermannsburg. Playing on the old Market Square in the centre of town under Winchester Rules, College won by two goals to nil, in the first recorded rugby match played in the old Colony of Natal (let alone the whole of Africa – but that’s another story altogether).

Rugby quickly became the game of choice at College and, apart from a short period of time in the 1880s and 1890s, when football enjoyed a considerable following, has remained the most popular winter sport at College.



The 1900 College First XV, captained by AS “Madevu” Langley, with its prized silver-ware – the Murray Cup. The dapper figure on the right is the headmaster, Mr RD Clark (MA) (Oxon).

Three Old Collegians appeared in the 1924 Springbok team to take on the touring British Lions: Bertram Vanderplank (front row, second right), Walter Clarkson (middle row, far left) and Bill Payn (middle of the middle row). The much-loved, versatile Payn represented what is today KZN at five sports, and famously ran the 1922 Comrades Marathon in his rugby boots.



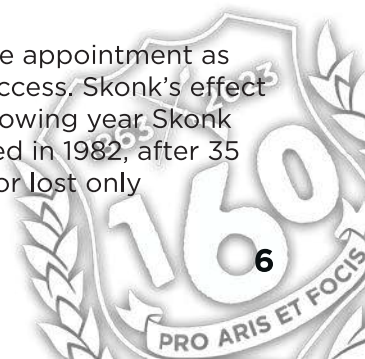
A stand-out player in the early years was strapping farm boy, Philip Nel, who was the First XV captain and all-powerful head prefect of the school in 1921. Nel captained the Springbok team on its all-conquering tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1937. It remains the only Springbok team in history to have defeated the All Blacks in New Zealand. Such was the quality of the play of his imperious team that it was given the tongue-in-cheek accolade of being “the greatest team to leave New Zealand’s shores”. On the ship returning home, Nel formally announced his retirement from Springbok rugby by throwing his trusty old rugger boots into the sea. Like Alexander the Great, he had no more worlds to conquer.



The captain of the 1937 Springboks to New Zealand, Philip Nel (OC 1921) (far right), introduces a local dignitary to his team, during his team’s triumphant tour of Australasia. The future rugby boss, Dr Danie Craven, appears second from the left.

## Enter the Skonkwaan

Although rugby enjoyed great prestige in the first few decades of the 20th Century, the appointment as First XV coach in 1948 of Mr JM “Skonk” Nicholson was the great catalyst for future success. Skonk’s effect was immediate: his 1948 side lost only to old rivals, Durban High School, and in the following year Skonk (himself a former head prefect of “School”) produced his first unbeaten team. He retired in 1982, after 35 seasons as the coach of the First XV. During that time, 22 of his teams were unbeaten or lost only one match.





Skonk Nicholson poses with some of the senior members of his unbeaten 1963 Centenary XV, which included a record 10 Natal Schools' players, was unbeaten in a 17-match season, and set many records. The players are (from left to right) Andre Bruyns (future provincial cricketer), Anthony Egner (future Natal flyhalf), Colin Marsh (future MD of Shell SA), Andrew van der Watt (future Springbok winger) and David Anderson (captain).

## Last 50 years

Outstanding teams in the last five decades include the 1972 First XV, which supplied 10 Craven Week players and conceded only one try in 19 matches; the 1978 First XV, which won all of its matches; the record-breaking 1985 team, which won all of its 18 matches, including a 44-0 triumph over Bishops and a 10-4 win over a Grey College side brimming with five SA Schools caps; the 1987 side that included SA Schools' captain Brenton Catterall and three other SA Schools' players; and the 1988 First XV, which won all 15 of its fixtures.

Despite the retirement of the much-loved Mr Nicholson in 1982, that decade was a period of almost unbroken triumph for Maritzburg College rugby, and from 1981-1990 losses were suffered only against Glenwood (twice), Hilton and DHS (once each) among KZN schools.

This rugby success continued into the 1990s, with the 1994 team delivering an unbeaten season against all South African teams, losing only to Gisborne BHS in the final of the World Schools' Tournament in Bowral, Australia. Another highlight of the decade was the unbeaten 1995 side, which enjoyed wins over Ermelo, Selborne, Grey High and Paul Roos Gymnasium, and big wins over Glenwood (61-13), Westville (62-6) and Kearsney (43-3). Skipped by Zane Aszalos, the 1995 XV contained two SA Schools' captains - Pieter Dixon (1995) and Richard Kelly (1996).

By 2022, the explosion of professional rugby around the world meant that the number of Old Collegians playing the sport on the international stage had increased dramatically, and Maritzburg College alumni have in the last 30 years won caps for the Springboks (including Joel Stransky, Butch James, Peter Grant, Jesse Kriel and Ntuthuko Mchunu), England, USA, Italy, Germany, Cyprus and Spain.

For decades, the school's redoubtable Chief Induna, Zablon Kwelha, was a loyal supporter of the First XV. He travelled widely by bus with the Maritzburg College boys to watch them play, often taking bets on their success with his contemporaries at DHS and Glenwood. An unofficial adviser to his great friend, Mr Nicholson, he fervently held the view that each College First XV should contain at least one red-headed player - "For extra fire!"





# CONTACT DETAILS

*Tournament Director:*

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*First Aid:*

**Robyn Brunzlafr**

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## FIELD CO-ORDINATORS

*Goldstone's*

**Stewart Stopford**

*Snow's*

**Claude Pitout**

## MEAL INFORMATION

**Breakfast** 07:00-08:00

**Lunch** 11:30-13:30

**Supper** 17:30-18:30

*Players*

All players' meals are in the Keith Guise-Brown Dining Hall

*Coaches:*

All coach and manager meals are in the Victoria Hall.



# #PROARISETFOCIS

2018 First XV captain and 2022 Springbok prop vs Wales, Ntuthuko Mchunu, gallops across Goldstone's, during a 70m dash towards the Michaelhouse try-line. On 9 July 2022, he came off the bench to represent the Springboks in the 2nd test vs Wales - in doing so, becoming Maritzburg College's 320th international cap.



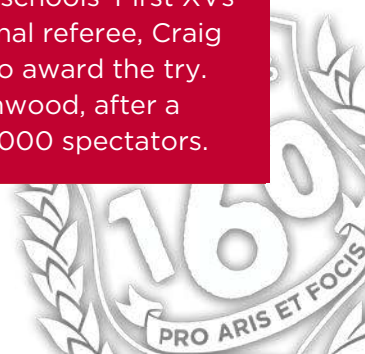
It's a College try, and the bashers fly high on Basher Ridge!

# #COLLEGEFIRE

The College skipper, AJ Knoetze, prepares to direct the next movement, during his team's 28-5 win over PBHS on Goldstone's earlier in the season. He led his team to a 50-26 win over the same opponents two weeks ago and to a hard-fought, 34-30 win over KES last Saturday.



Current 1st XV coach, Mr K Elder (OC 2013), lunges to score - much to the jubilation of some supporters - in the pulsating clash between the schools' First XV's on Reunion Day 2013. 2011 RWC Final referee, Craig Jounert (OC 1995), is well-placed to award the try. The match was won 40-44 by Glenwood, after a titanic struggle in front of about 8 000 spectators.



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