

Maritzburg College Sport and Cultural Awards 2025
Address by the Guest Speaker, Mr Sandi Dlangalala

Good evening to the College staff, the boys and to parents and guests. I cannot express how much of an honour it is to be back at this exceptional school, a school where I took my first steps into becoming a man. I have not been able to be back since Reunion Day 2015. So it fair to say that this reunion is long overdue.

When Mr Barbour messaged me asking if I would be interested in being this year's guest speaker at the Sports and Cultural Awards, I was hit with a wave of emotions for a myriad of reasons. One being that as an Old Boy, the feeling of wanting to be of service to College never really leaves you. When College calls, you answer. Another reason being: Mr Barbour played integral role in my time at College. He was my drama teacher during my time here and also directed me in two College productions. If it wasn't for him, I don't think I would have had the courage to pursue my dream in performance. So I guess when Mr Barbour calls, you answer. The last reason being: During my time here I was heavily involved in cultural activities. College choir, the gospel choir under Ms Hartley, and even part of the first Midlands Youth Choir. I was also involved in sport. I captained the College athletics team under the guidance and of our often hardcore leader, Juffrou Greyling. I was house captain for Oxlands and proud captain of the 5th team rugby, proudly known as the Bushpigs. I was also the shouting captain of 2009, alongside Travis Hardnick and Travis Houghting. As a theatre actor who has been lucky enough to work with some of the country's most renowned artists and directors, I always carry myself as an ambassador for College. So when I got asked to be the guest speaker this year, I thought: it's about damn time. In all seriousness, I reiterate, it is such an honour to be back home.

When I started preparing my speech, I thought oh gosh, what do I say to a hall full of 1400 young men? As this situation, although similar, is actually very different to what I do for a living. In my line of work, being in front of this many people I am always someone else, usually in an elaborate costume. However, now I am me. And let me just say, I forgot how big Alan Paton Hall was. So I think a good place to start is to tell you a little bit about myself, so you know who exactly is this guy standing in front of you all.

I grew up in the small town of Ladysmith where I attended Egerton Primary. I was brought up in a loving home with two extremely hardworking parents and 3 wonderful older sisters. I arrived at College in 2005 and I quickly realised that there is no messing about here. That this is a school where one is challenged to prove themselves and to reach their full potential, however being given the tools and support to do so. Within the first week, it is full steam ahead. Learning everything about College like the privileges, the nicknames and of course, team testing. I couldn't believe that we had to learn our prefects, past headmasters, captains, the 1st XI of cricket, the 1st XI of hockey, the 1st XV rugby...just to name a few, off by heart. I was thinking, I have made a terrible mistake coming here. Like what is this place? However, within that first week or two, that bond and sense of brotherhood that you will hear every oldboy talk about, had started to form and strengthen. Quite quickly I knew I was where I needed to be. Even in 2nd form I knew there was a demand for excellence here, a demand for giving 110% in everything you do, and applying yourself with the College core values: Honesty, Integrity, Courage, Self Discipline, Commitment and Respect. These are values I still try live by in my life.

At first I was an Anderson Boarder. Anderson Borders were a group of boys who stayed at Mr Anderson's small boarding house while they waited for space to open up in the BE. Mr Anderson is a legendary old boy, former 1st XV Captain and former staff member who was affectionately known as 'Big D'. He drove a vintage green VW kombi that you could hear coming from at least 3km away. That kombi, just like Mr Anderson, was part of College lore, part of the fabric of this school. It even had a name: The Green Machine. I stayed there for 6 months and at the start of the 3rd term, I was given a place in Nathan House. Being a boarder felt like I was starting 2nd form again. From having so many duties, to having a far more strict team testing. In my first week of being a boarder I had one of the most daunting duties to do as a 2nd former. Phones duties, at College House. At the time, one of the senior boys said something so simple, but it resonated with me so much that it stuck with me, not only for the rest of my time at College, but for the rest of my life. He said, "But this school also demands greatness hey. Because here, what you put in is what you get out." And I said..."yes please".

He was so right. That simple notion, really applies to your time at College, but more importantly when you reach adulthood...it applies to every aspect of your life. Family, friendships, relationships, career etc. It's not a groundbreaking notion at all, it's just fact. Trust me when I say this: IT IS NOT CRINGE TO APLY YOURSELF PASSIONATELY TOWARDS SOMETHING. You will reap the rewards of your tenacity and drive.

I am going to sound very cliché but out of the many things I learned here and one of the most important lessons I learned, was to never give up. To keep fighting. To keep getting up. Even when there are insurmountable obstacles in front of you.

For example, as you all now know, I am a theatre actor and performer. In the last 4 or so years, my career really took a positive turn. I have been getting more lead roles, I have been nominated for 3 awards and won 2 and now I am working with people I look up to and respect. To put it simply, I have been getting more work. In my industry, that is a huge blessing, as it is a very unpredictable career path. This was not always the case. You see, for the first 6 years of my career, I was hardly working. Not for lack of trying. Oh I tried. I was going to every audition I could. TV, theatre, musical theatre, adverts anything. Every now and then I would get a gig, but a lot of the time it was never something that excited me, or something that made feel like I was growing as an artist. Obviously not having consistent work came with financial struggles. The anxiety that comes with that struggle is multiplied when you also the father of a small child.

I was mostly doing children's theatre, which is great, and is a very difficult form of theatre. But then for while I was only doing children's theatre so it started to feel monotonous and not challenging. I was severely uninspired, and the drive and tenacity that I had at College and as drama student at Rhodes University, was completely gone. I contemplated a complete career change more than once, and even the thought of that would have me sobbing into my pillow at night. Because it's my dream we're talking about. It is what I have worked so hard for. But I thought to myself wow, I think I have admit defeat here. I am clearly not as good or talented as I thought I was, because clearly the industry doesn't think so. With all of that, comes the feelings of being a failure.

However, the more I thought about it... the thought of giving up on my dream sounded more and more ridiculous. There was this inexplicable and undeniable force within me that would just not let me do it. So I pushed on. I had told myself to simply just keep trying, and to simply not entertain those thoughts of giving up. Then, things started to change.

After getting a lead role in a major production, I promised myself never again will I not at least try, and that I will keep trying. Not only in my career, but in other areas in my life. Because every obstacle and challenge waters the seed of perseverance within you. Everything I have said to you this evening is nothing new. I'm sure you have heard it before...but we need to be reminded of these things. We need to be reminded that you are not alone in trying to achieve a dream and that you are not alone in facing challenges that comes with pursuit of greatness.

When I look out in front of me right now, looking at these young men in red, black and white...I see limitless potential. I see future game changers and men of honour. I see men who will be the example of the kind of man that this country is so desperate for. Men who care. Men who protect rather than harm. Men who are allies. Men who see that there is strength in vulnerability.

To the prize winners of this evening, I wholeheartedly congratulate you. You are the example of what you put in is what you get out. Your hard work and excellence is being celebrated and rightly so. But don't let it stop here, let that hard work and tenacity carry you in to the future, especially to the 6th formers who are about to enter the next phase of their lives. This is only the beginning. Greatness starts here.