

Prof Bismark lauds Springboks as Newsmaker of the Year

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The World Cup winning Springboks were named the 2023 Newsmaker of the Year by the National Press Club on Wednesday 17 April. The event is sponsored by the North-West University (NWU) and was held at the Pretoria National Botanical Gardens. Prof Bismark Tyobeka, principal and vice-chancellor of the NWU, lauded the Springboks for their immense achievements and their contributions to nation building, whilst also highlighting the integral role the press plays in working democracy.



Prof Bismark Tyobeka NWU Principal and Vice

Prof Tyobeka on journalism in the country:

“Our media landscape has been changing at an almost exponential rate over the past few years. Traditional media like I knew growing up are struggling, and we have migrated to digital platforms. Our youth considers TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube as reputable news sources and we scroll through X – formerly known as Twitter – to find a headline that grabs our attention. Online it takes a few seconds for us to click on a link and scan through an article. The world that our journalists find themselves in has grown beyond belief, but their audience has shrunk to a disappointingly small number. Still, they soldier on, but do we ever consider the immense amount of time and dedication that goes into providing us with relevant, reputable news?”

Their commitment is both commendable and inexhaustible.

One of the aims of the media is to encourage informed citizenship, although it seems to me that a lot of effort is being made by external role players to erect barriers that discourage informed citizenship. And still, our journalists soldier on.

Journalists and a free press are integral parts of a working democracy. Journalism is a profession that protects our well-being by holding those with influence and power accountable for their actions. It makes them toe the line, because they know our watchdogs in the media have their eyes on them. That the media are protecting us. That they are always there for us.

That they are brave and that they are selfless. That they will keep soldiering on. For that, we applaud them.”

Prof Tyobeka on the Springboks:

“A lot has been said about what the Springboks accomplished in 2023. Their inspirational role as nation builders has been widely lauded, and with good reason.

The Springboks may have hogged headlines and devoured column space in 2023, but they have been trailblazers since 2018, when Rassie Erasmus took over a struggling national side. In 2019 they won the Rugby Championship as well as the Rugby World Cup. Rassie then gave over the reins of head coach to Jacques Nienaber, and as director of rugby oversaw a series win against the British and Irish Lions in 2021 and our World Cup win in 2023. On 2 May the NWU will bestow an honorary doctorate on Rassie in recognition of his innovative and exceptional management of the Springboks, his significant standing in the international rugby coaching arena, his strong drive and focus on diversity and inclusion, and his commitment to social responsibility.

Beyond what has already been said, tonight I would like to highlight some other reasons why I think the Springboks are deserving winners of the Newsmaker of the Year award.

- They chase lost causes: During last year’s quarter-final against the host nation, France, the Springboks were given little chance of winning. Remember, the Springboks lost against Ireland in the group stages, and France were the firm favourites. Many argue what followed was the greatest game of rugby ever played. Who can forget Cheslin Kolbe chasing down the French fullback’s conversion attempt? It was something few of us have ever seen, and we won the game by a single point. Afterwards captain Siya Kolisi said the Springboks are a team that chases lost causes, that they never give up. What a grand lesson is that not for us as South Africans? How many times have we not faced situations that we think are insurmountable, thinking that the cause is lost. That did not deter the Springboks, and it should not deter us. Just imagine if some of our parastatals had that same mindset.
- They are honest: The Springboks are their own harshest critics. Jacques Nienaber and Rassie Erasmus never minced their words when assessing the team’s performance. Neither did the team’s leadership group. We have all seen the clips of some of the team talks in the dressing room. Harsh words are spoken, but also true words. There is a reason why the Springboks do not shy away from showing us their inner workings. None of us like criticism, but whereas others take criticism as personal affronts and attacks, the Springboks use it as motivation to be better. They take criticism to heart and learn from it. They take responsibility. That is how you beat England in a World Cup semi-final after having played the skin off your bones the week before.
- They are innovative: In 2019 we had the rugby world’s tongues wagging about our innovative Bomb Squad. In 2023, the Springboks took it one step further when they first used a 6-2 bench split and then caused hysteria with their 7-1 bench split. To the consternation of the rugby world – and especially twice against the All Blacks in 2023 – it worked like a charm. That call took guts. Manie Libbok’s no-look kick against Scotland in our opening game was a thing of innovative beauty. They could have rested on their laurels, but they did not. Not this group. Success can only be replicated through innovation.

- They are a motley, tenacious, audacious lot: Whether it is Bongsi Mbonambi being a terrier, Eben Etzebeth looking positively possessed when expressing his displeasure, Ox Nché tormenting his opposition props, or Kurt-Lee Arendse playing like he is two metres taller than he is and weighs ten times more than he does, our Springboks showed their grit, tenacity and audacity. They took the hits on their chins and kept going forward. This does not mean that they have to be, well, mean. It is about backing yourself and having the backs of your teammates, no matter the odds or circumstances. I think most of us as South Africans have a bit of that in us, but we can always have more. The more tenacious we are, the better our chances are of getting over the advantage line. That is true for life as well. It is that spirit that will take us as South Africans go forward.”

To read the full article in English, follow the link here: <https://news.nwu.ac.za/prof-bismark-lauds-springboks-newsmaker-year>

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