



THE SPEEDSTER THAT BOUNCED BACK

Fast bowler Lungi Ngidi overcame adversity to become one of the brightest prospects for South African cricket.

BY FRANK SARR

In a summer of cricket that produced many exciting new discoveries, the one with perhaps the most long-term potential is that of fast bowler Lungi Ngidi, who has overcome tough times to take his place in the country's Test side.

Ngidi is potentially the long-term successor to Morne Morkel, who announced his retirement from the international game in February, and is likely to form a fearsome attacking duo with Kagiso Rabada in the coming years – both are able to clock speeds of 150 kilometers per hour.

The 22-year-old is part of a new wave of black cricketers earning their stripes in South Africa's national side, with the sport finally able to tap into a segment of the population that had been excluded from the game for so long.

Aside from Rabada and Ngidi, Temba Bavuma and Andile Phehlukwayo have played Test cricket in the last year, while Khayelible Zondo recently made his debut in the One Day International

format, and Junior Dala and Aaron Phangiso played as well in the Twenty20 games against India in February.

It is a radical change from the days when Makhaya Ntini furrowed almost a lone career as South Africa's only international black cricketer, joined ever so briefly in the national team by the likes of Monde Zondeki, Mfuneko Ngam and Thami Tsolekile.

Much needed transformation within the sport has had some role to play, but few would argue that all the recent recruits to the national side have not deserved their elevation and most grabbed the opportunity with both hands.

Ngidi, perhaps more than anyone, took advantage after he became an injury replacement for Dale Steyn in the second Test against India in Pretoria in January.

On a wicket more suited to spin bowling, he returned excellent match figures of 7/90, including the prized wicket of the best batsman in the world,





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SPORT - LUNGI NGIDI

Virat Kohli, with a vicious in-swing that trapped the Indian captain leg before wicket.

It was not Ngidi's first appearance in the national team; his promise was spotted 12 months earlier when he was selected for three Twenty20 clashes against touring Sri Lanka.

And he excelled there too, taking 4/19 in second match as the bounce extracted from his tall frame

the prestigious Hilton College, a school known for producing international sportsmen in all codes.

"From a young age he was a natural talent, not just a cricketer, but a very talented rugby player and a swimmer," Hilton College Executive House Master Sean Carlisle told FORBES AFRICA.

Aside from Carlisle, Ngidi was also under the tutelage of former Zimbabwe international all-rounder Neil Johnson, who had many years as a top professional.

"There was obviously lots of raw potential there at school level. He was probably a bit frustrated then as at school he suffered a lot of injuries, but the natural ability and the massive potential was clear for everybody to see," says Carlisle.

"What was evident too is that he stood up in pressure situations. When things were tight in match situations, he came to the fore and that gave you an indication that he could handle bigger pressures later in life."

Carlisle believes that it is Ngidi's calm and grounded personality that will see him successful. He is not prone to flights of fancy or the belief that he does not have to work hard to achieve his goals.

"That is probably one of his greatest assets, that he is humble and down to earth. Right from the start, he was very grounded and really was one of those all-round, well-mannered and well-groomed guys. You could say he was, and is, a real good guy."

Carlisle is rightly proud of his former pupil, even if he himself admits he is a little bit surprised at how well Ngidi has taken to international cricket.

"We have been following him and seeing how well he has done at Tuks [the University of Pretoria], and then in the Twenty20s. But to be honest, all of us are slightly taken aback at how quickly and how well he took to Test cricket."

"He is just an incredibly rounded, humble man and we could not be prouder. The cricket side is fantastic, but for me it is the human element that will make him special."

With Morkel out of the picture and the future of Steyn in serious doubt, Ngidi has the opportunity to lead South Africa's pace attack with Rabada for the next decade or more if he can stay fit.

"I'm so proud of him, he's already a role model for millions of South Africans," Ngidi said of Rabada, just a year his senior. "I'd love to emulate his achievements one day but, for now, I'm just happy to be chasing him." 🏏



NOW I REALIZE THAT I AM ACTUALLY STRONGER THAN I THOUGHT.

and good pace left the visitors hopping around the crease.

But a back injury immediately after that kept him out of the game for six months, and took him from an incredible high to a desperate low.

It was during that time that he struggled to keep his fitness levels at the required level, leading to some tough words at his franchise team, the Pretoria-based Titans.

"It was very difficult but it was worth it in the long run and a lot of credit must also go to the trainer and physiotherapist at the Titans for the work they did with me," Ngidi told reporters.

"And the coach [Mark Boucher] as well – we had some hard but honest chats behind closed doors and that also helped me much in the long run. "That was probably one of the biggest challenges of my career... coming from a high to a low in a short space of time. Being selected to play for South Africa and then getting injured, it was tough."

"I thought I was doing all the right things but it was not going my way. During my time away from the game I got a lot of time to reflect and now I realize that I am actually stronger than I thought."

Ngidi has his roots in Durban – his mother Bongani was a domestic worker and his father Jerome a caretaker at a local school. His life changed when he was selected for a scholarship to

