

Cricket sensation's path to glory

Lungi Ngidi credits mom, dad in success

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AS AN 8-year-old Kloof Junior Primary School pupil, cricket star Lungi Ngidi was so keen to get his dad out of bed to take him to weekend "dads and sons" cricket practices, he would pull off his blankets on Saturday mornings.

"If I said I was tired, he would then force my eyes open," proud Jerome Ngidi told *The Saturday Star* after watching his son's amazing bowling feats on his Proteas debut against India this week.

Young Lungi didn't have to drag his dad too far to the field. They lived on the school grounds. Jerome and his wife Bongzi still live there as they have ever since Lungi was 2.

That's when they took up jobs as part of the maintenance and housekeeping staff, positions once held by Bongzi's father and grandfather.

When they got their jobs they were worried about leaving little Lungi at their township home in Mariannhill, alone with only siblings. But Kloof Junior Primary was happy to have them.

"Before he started pre-school, he came into the classroom where I was holding a readiness programme and completed it, aged 2-and-a-half," said Grade 1 teacher Sharon Moffat. "That's the kind of kid he was, determined and pushing himself hard, all through self-motivation."

Music teacher Debbie Noakes and after care teachers "Granny Pat" Casten and Marlene Muir took turns being babysitters.

Bursar Jane Wilks organised



Lungi Ngidi's parents and primary school teachers.

PICTURE: DOCTOR NGCOBO

that Lungi go to nearby pre-primary school attended by her son and Lungi's friend, Christopher. After that Lungi, acquired bursary after bursary, scholarship after scholarship, as one institution after the next each picked up that he was exactly the kind of pupil they wanted.

Kloof Senior Primary followed Kloof Junior. Then came Highbury Preparatory and after that Hilton College and the University of Pretoria.

When Lungi started as a pupil at Kloof Junior Primary, he could hardly hold a ball, said former physical education teacher Robynne Thornton.

"How he grew from here. At that junior level I had to just instil a love for the game."

And how he got to love it, his parents recalled. "He would always say 'I want to be like Makhaya Ntini.'" They even called him Ntini.

When Highbury's former headmaster Richard Stanley asked him during his interview what he most wanted in life,



Lungi Ngidi

Lungi replied: "A brand new cricket bat."

"I saw in that a little boy who was hungry to show us what he had to offer," said Stanley.

"Even at age 9 I could see a tall, strong youngster. I could see he had potential.

"He had four lovely years at Highbury going from strength to strength. From the time he joined us he always demonstrated first and foremost that he was humble, but he was also aware he had a lot to offer."

Stanley, who is now headmaster at The Ridge School in Johannesburg, said Lungi moved on to his next scholarship school, Hilton College,

"with a full battery of colours and honours".

During his holidays, Lungi attended cricket training sessions at Highbury and while at home he had the Kloof Junior Primary School fields on which to practise.

His Hilton College days saw him selected for the South Africa Under 19 side while still in Grade 11, and in his final year he was head of Newnham House. "He was obviously the kind of boy we were after," said former headmaster Peter Ducas.

His parents credited former Zimbabwe international player and Hilton College coach Neil Johnson and Shane Gaffney, the former director of sport, for much of his high school cricket development.

"Lungi would say that even if it was raining he (Gaffney) would take him for training," said Bongzi.

Gaffney, now headmaster at St Dominic's College in Welkom, said Lungi was multi-talented, arriving at

Hilton having represented the province in swimming, cricket, rugby and athletics.

Part of his coaching involved advising the schoolboy what sport to pursue: "Cricket was the obvious one."

Gaffney said: "I don't think I've met anyone as humble and as modest, which is awesome."

Lungi's parents said Hilton College made sure it would be there to support him at many matches, both home and away.

"They would send a car to fetch us. Sometimes it would be a metro cab," said Bongzi.

His father, Jerome, played soccer while at school in rural Kranskop, and Bongzi a long distance runner at KwaKloof Primary School in KwaDabeka.

Pierre de Bruyn, director of cricket and head coach at the University of Pretoria, steered Lungi into the next chapter of his life, making a number of trips to KwaZulu-Natal to recruit him for the Titans.

"I explained the journey and the outcome of the journey that we could put together.

"At first he was reluctant. He wasn't really sure how to leave home, what it would be like to be away from his family, which I understood," said De Bruyn.

"But it was my duty to convince him that where I would take him would be comfortable and that he would be looked after. That's why I went back, sat with him again and asked him to trust me in this journey."

Lungi enrolled to study industrial sociology and labour studies and took a coaching job at Southdowns College in Centurion.

"At the Varsity Cup he announced himself on television and people started to see who this kid was and what kind of bowler he is," said De Bruyn.

"They say you can take someone to water but you can't make him drink. Lungi (as he called him) drank."

Lungi himself said his parents motivated him. "Yes, it's my Mom and Dad," he said.