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● When Lungisani Ngidi meandered onto the SuperSport Park playing surface to face Ishant Sharma on a steaming day two of his test debut, Kwesta's hit song *Spirit*, featuring Nigerian-American hip-hop sensation Wale, boomed from the PA system. It is a song that resonates with Ngidi in many, many ways.

It represents the youthful vigour and the ingrained spirit of a fresh-faced Durbanite who had to fill Dale Steyn's boots in a make-or-break test in familiar surroundings.

Ngidi is accustomed to making his international bows at his home ground. His T20 international debut against Sri Lanka last year was there, but this was the pinnacle, the grand old lady of a game that somehow has furrowed a 141-year existence despite constantly changing times.

Then again, Ngidi has to be one of the few players who has made his first-class, List A, T20 International and test debut at the same ground.

"That's my song. It does tie in with the way I play, and spirit is definitely one of the things I have as a quality – and as a cricketer – so it did kind of tie in with how the test match played out. I feel that, at this moment, it's one of my top five greatest moments and I rank it alongside my T20 debut. That was really special and it does go down as one of the best," Ngidi said.

"You never really believe until you see and that's how I operate in life. I've been able to see that if you put in hard work, the results will follow. I'm also a spiritual person. I do



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Lungisani Ngidi  
Fast bowler

pray and that's something my mom has instilled in me. Every time I step onto the field, I thank God for the opportunity and that's also a massive driving force in my cricket. My mom is Anglican, she's very spiritual and she prays a lot.

"She always reminds me to thank the Lord for the opportunities I've received. I know it's tough to attend church as a sportsman, but I know you don't always have to be at church to praise God, or to know you have faith. Then again, there are guys in the team who are very spiritual and attend church and they do motivate you to go."

The son of Bongi and Jerome, who goes by the clan name of Hlomuka, has always been a cricket man.

His domestic worker parents have been the wind beneath his wings throughout his career and have kept him grounded and spiritually sated.

The fact that his first act in test cricket was to wield the willow is in stark contrast to the first time he came across the game.

It was in a dad's and lad's game at Kloof Junior Primary School that literally got the ball rolling for Ngidi.

"The batting didn't look that interesting and the kids kept on missing the ball and most of the time they were out. I just thought that bowling was going to do me fine and that's what I decided to do. I just decided this is what I want to do and that's where it all began for me. I excelled in most sports and I did athletics, but it was in grade-nine year at Hilton College where I got my bursary that things changed," Ngidi said.

"Shane Gaffney [cricket coach at Hilton] told me in grade nine that I have the potential of playing for South Africa. He told me to trust him and take a leap of faith in terms of going down the cricket path, instead of rug-

by. That's when the real path began – and words aren't enough to thank Shane because he made me focus on my cricket. He got me noticed by someone like Pierre de Bruyn who came to KwaZulu-Natal and brought me to Tuks to further my cricket. And here I am."

De Bruyn's tenure with struggling English County Championship side Leicestershire may have blotted his budding copybook, but the former Titans and Dolphins all-rounder left a keen impression on Ngidi.

It was rather fitting that Ngidi cricked to have downtime at the immaculate Tuks Oval, which is overlooked by Cricket SA's High Performance Centre.

It was at Tuks that he made a name for

himself after injury ruled him out of the 2014 Under-19 Cricket World Cup that South Africa won through the efforts of Aiden Markram and Kagiso Rabada.

They are now his test teammates, but the national team has De Bruyn to thank for ensuring Ngidi moved to the capital city.

"I think he was coming down to KZN to scout at other schools for players that he believed had potential to go forward. A lot of my friends were asked to join me. I think that's one of the things that helped me in terms of making my choice. But, in all, they ended up not coming and I was the only one who took the leap and decided to trust Pierre de Bruyn. He was very persistent in terms of the way he kept coming to Hilton College to

# I want to be destructive

Don't let the smile fool you. This 21-year-old assassin's sensational debut in Centurion against India has put the cricket world at large on notice of a modest superstar in the making



Picture: Reuters

**The son of Bongi and Jerome, his domestic-worker parents have been the wind beneath his wings throughout his career and have kept him grounded and spiritually sated**

ask me whether I'd think of the decision to move up-country.

"When I think of it now, his persistence has paid off and it's benefited me. He was true to his word and made sure I was in good hands when he left," Ngidi said.

"He said he saw raw talent in me as a fast bowler and he believed he could nurture that in some sort of way that could produce a cricketer that one day could play for South Africa. His method does work and I can vouch for that. I'm starting to see a little bit of the potential Shane that Pierre saw in me and every time I play a game or perform, I reflect on the things that were said to me and they flood me with emotions."

If there's someone who has more belief in

Ngidi than the youngster does in himself, it's the SA national team coach Ottis Gibson.

The Barbadian's eye for fast-bowling talent and his ability to foster it can't be understated. England's best fast-bowling pair of James Anderson and Stuart Broad started to make their international presence felt under Gibson's tutelage in 2008.

Gibson himself may be fortunate to have landed himself a paceman who learns as quickly as he delivers his thunderbolts. Ngidi's test debut was his 10th first-class fixture since his first appearance for North-erns against Border two years ago. If Ngidi conceded three runs less, his second innings bowling return would have been his all-time best so far.

The last time Ngidi featured in whites before the test, he dismantled the Highveld Lions at the Wanderers three months ago after recovering from a back injury. It is an ominous sign ahead of Wednesday's third test against India at the same ground.

Paired with Rabada, it would be easy to say they are the Destruction Boys as per the meme that's doing the rounds in social media.

Ngidi has a different view, but also knows they have a gem of a mentor in Gibson, who made sure Ngidi felt at home.

"I saw the meme and I thought it was very funny. I sent it to KG and he called us the African Cartel. We're looking to be as destructive as we can and I feel we thrive off each other's energy and motivate each other. We enjoy bowling quick, intimidating teams and putting them under pressure. If I can keep my body right, we can be a destructive pair," Ngidi said.

"I've only had one test match and two practice sessions with Gibson, but he's made it clear that fast bowlers are a key component within a unit. He's let us know that we carry a lot on our shoulders – but knowing that it's for the betterment of the team. He has a lot of knowledge and I can see that already. Ottis made it clear to me that I was replacing Dale Steyn, but he also told me I'm not Dale Steyn. I'm Lungi Ngidi and I must be the best Lungi Ngidi I can be. That made so much sense to me and that gave me the freedom to be the bowler that I am."



**1/78**

**V BORDER**  
Ngidi's first-class debut match figures

**6/37**

**V LIONS**  
His current-best first-class innings return

**9/82**

**V LIONS**  
His best first-class match figures

**6/39**

**V INDIA**  
The stat that's got everyone talking

