



Chris Massyn, Tuks Rugby captain. Photo: Stefan Slander.

Chris Massyn's Varsity Cup aspirations

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UP has enjoyed a favourable campaign thus far in the 2017 season of Varsity Cup rugby, winning seven out of eight matches with six bonus points, and a massive aggregate of 225 points. Apart from the solitary loss to the University of Johannesburg in round 4, UP has looked like the most menacing side in this year's Varsity Cup. UP recently beat the North-West University (NWU Pukke) in round 8 of the tournament to ensure a home semi-final, and quite possibly set up a home final on 17 April should things go according to plan. *Perdeby* got in touch with Chris Massyn, TuksRugby's captain, to get his thoughts and projections for the remainder of the season.

UP has found it difficult to beat NWU Pukke in recent years. Did you feel a lot of pressure playing against them away from home, especially with the potential implications of a loss? How important was it for UP to win the match against Pukke?

Yes, I think it's been five years since we last beat Pukke, so I think it was important for everyone going in to turn that [losing] streak around and prove that we are determined to bring the trophy back this year. I think the win was a good stepping stone heading into the semi-finals.

You have a home semi-final against the University of the Free State (UFS Shimlas), whom you convincingly beat earlier this season. Are you feeling confident about repeating the feat when you play them again on 3 April?

Yes, I think the boys are looking forward to the game. But the thing about Varsity Cup is that there's never a sure win, and with Shimlas getting back a lot of their injured players, they will be stronger and more determined.

As the captain, how are you coping with the pressures of leading the team at this crucial stage of the tournament?

I can honestly say that over the years [with] all the teams I've captained, this is the easiest as all the "oaks" [rugby players] are determined and always willing to go the extra mile and put the team first. So my role is just making sure that everything runs as smoothly as it can and that the players will remain calm and that we play our game.

As a team, what was the lowest point of the season, and how did you manage to bounce back?

I would say the loss against UI, which spoiled what we had hoped [for], to [have] an undefeated status heading into the semi-finals. I think even though the loss was hard, I feel it was a good wake-up call for us to keep us focused and to appreciate the fact that winning this competition will not be easy, but that it will be worth it.

UP has played in the last two Varsity Cup semi-finals and lost. Having been in a similar position, what are you looking to do differently this year to ensure a home final?

I think going into the semi-finals this year we are looking a lot stronger than previous years. Our focus will be to play our game and execute our structure and game plan effectively.

A home semi-final usually sets the platform for a home final. How do you rate your chances of winning the tournament?

Yes, a home semi-final is a great opportunity for the boys to play in front of our supporters, which always helps with that extra bit of motivation. As far as winning the tournament goes, at the beginning of the season, we promised ourselves that this is our year and that it is time for Tuks to bring it home again. That being said, we will be completely focused on the semi-final as that is, at this time, our most important task.

