



The so-called 'Awesome Foursome' of TuksRowing at the London Olympics in 2012. From left are Matthew Brittain, James Thompson, Lawrence Ndlovu and John Smith.  
 Photo: BackpagePix

## 'Awesome Foursome' rowing team is honoured

One of the biggest highlights in South African Olympic history was arguably the lightweight fours rowing team winning a gold medal at the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

At the time it was described as the greatest rowing finish the Olympics has ever seen. It was certainly a victory against all odds.

This proved to every South African athlete that with the right mind set anything is possible.

Not surprisingly James Thompson, Matthew Brittain, John Smith and Lawrence Ndlovu got dubbed as the "Awesome Foursome".

The Tuks/HPC rower's heroics have certainly not been forgotten. Last week they received The Order of Ikhamanga in Silver from President Jacob Zuma, the Grand Patron of the National Orders.

The National Orders are the highest awards that South Africa bestows, through the President of the Republic upon citizens

and members of the international community who have contributed meaningfully towards making the country a free democratic and successful nation, united in its diversity.

The "Awesome Foursome" certainly proved in their build-up to the 2012 Games that when the going got tough, the tough got going.

Over the four years they trained daily, except maybe for a handful of Sundays. Even on Christmas they were on the water.

"Each one of us believed that dedicated training wins races. Therefore we made sure that we arrived at a training session with the same hunger that we would need on the day of the Olympic final," is how Brittain remembers it thinking back.

"It takes an incredible commitment to push yourself to continue in spite of pain, and to give your best with every stroke even when your body is begging you to stop. But if you want it badly enough you find out that your body is capable of performing feats of unreal excellence even under the most inhu-

mane conditions," said Brittain, who retired in 2013 due to a persistent back injury.

When Thompson says he does not believe in giving up he means it. Many people might not know about the obstacles he had to overcome as a child to be able to achieve what he did. He was diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), dyslexia, reading disorders, spelling disorders, as well as motor skills disorders.

His participation in sports, especially rowing, has helped him to cope with his disabilities.

"But at times my disabilities helped me to cope with my sporting challenges. That is why I often speak about the lessons I have learned through the process of winning and losing," said Thompson who has qualified to receive a degree in Sport Sciences from the University of Pretoria.

Smith's motto was and still is: "Rest and nobody will remember your name."

Not one to rest on his laurels, Smith is

already priming himself for the next challenge. He has decided to move up a weight category as part of his preparation for the 2020 Games in Tokyo, Japan.

Smith knows he is in for a tough challenge. Not only will he have to gain 20kg, he also needs to become much stronger.

Smith has already gained 12kg. His goal is to weigh 90kg becoming stronger and moving closer to his goal for the 2020 games.

Ndlovu, otherwise known as "Seize" became the first black African male rower to win Olympic gold as a rower, overcoming injury and illness to become one of Africa's best rowers.

Since winning the Olympic Gold, the Tuks/HPC-rower has received many accolades. In February 2013 he was named Athlete of the Month by World Rowing.

His teammates and he won the Sports Team of the Year Award at the 2012 South African Sports Awards and 2012 World Rowing Crew of the Year Award.