

# Hockey star living the dream

Former Carter High pupil sets sights on representing SA in the Olympics

**VUYELWA MTOLO**

FORMER Carter High pupil Phumelela Mbande has set her sights on representing South Africa in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

The South African Women's Hockey player is currently in London for the 2018 Women's Hockey World Cup which runs from July 21 until August 5.

Mbande, who is also pursuing her chartered accounting dream at the University of Pretoria, said she only played the goalkeeper position because she was scared of the ball and knew everybody would protect her.

"I didn't know anything about hockey until I was in Grade 5 and the more I played the sport, the more I loved it. I was in Grade 10 when I made the SA U16 squad and I was fortunate to make the SA squad every year after that.

"I first made the national team in 2013, which was also the year I got my first cap," she said.

The 25-year-old said the most pleasant part of her experience has been the fact that a lot of opportunities she has had in life have come as a result of hockey and the great support structure she has.

She added: "My support system outside of my hockey spaces come from my brothers and my mother. My brothers have told me countless times that they look up to me; it's easy to get up and get the job done when you know you have people looking up to you.

"I am most proud of being a big sister. My family was never always able to be there at hockey games, but when a chance did come up, they would come and watch," she said.

Mbande said the toughest challenge she has had to face was balancing hockey



Former Carter High pupil Phumelela Mbande (25) hopes to represent South Africa in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics after the 2018 Women's Hockey World Cup in London from July 21 to August 5. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

and her studies. "I don't know how many times my mom had to call me a week so that I could cry, and that helped a lot," she said.

Speaking about the opportunity to

represent her country once again, Mbande said being selected for the women's team was a dream come true.

"I am dumbfounded all the time. When we were on a plane for the Com-

monwealth Games, I cried because I realised I was actually living my dream. Who would've thought I would be going to the Commonwealth Games and would be living out her accounting dream," she said.

Mbande said she had had many opportunities to represent South Africa, but still could not explain the feeling of representing her country at the highest level.

"I don't come from a wealthy family so if it wasn't for hockey, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to travel to all these countries. All was achieved through hard work and determination," she said.

With regards to the build-up to the World Cup, Mbande said she felt this was a great time to train together as a team.

"We often all train in our different clubs, and it is actually nicer to train together. We can only gain positives out of these experiences as a team."

She also said when she looked at her achievements, her top three have always been to make the squad that played at the Commonwealth Games, at the World Cup and the Olympic Games.

"I can now finally scratch out the Commonwealth Games and the World Cup and focus on the third final ultimate dream which is the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games," she concluded.

South Africa will take part in Group C facing off against Germany (ranked sixth in the world) on July 21, Spain (11th) on July 26 and Argentina (third) on July 28.

Teams that finish first will progress straight to the quarter-finals, teams finishing second or third will move to the play-offs while the fourth-placed team will be eliminated.

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