



Unelle Snyman in action on the judo mat. Photo: Reg Caldecott

Snyman has sights set on world medal

“Somewhat of an overachiever” is how Tuks judoka (judo practitioner) Unelle Snyman describes herself.

It is not as if she is a braggart. No, it has more to do with her thinking like a champion.

Snyman will soon compete at the World Judo Open Championships in Marrakesh.

She makes no secret of the fact that she wants to win a medal.

“I am not saying that I am going to win a medal, but I am going to do my best to do so,” said the Tuks sports psychology student.

Snyman’s judo CV is indeed impressive.

As a youngster, she won gold and silver medals at the African championships.

In 2014 she represented South Africa at the Youth Olympic Games in Nanjing where she just missed out on winning a bronze medal.

Judo has been part of her life from when she was five years old.

Her brother, Ruan-Tobie, won a silver medal at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

Snyman’s talents are not just restricted to grappling with opponents on a judo mat.

She is also a talented netball player.

It was in fact her netball skills that led to her getting a bursary to study at Tuks.

She played Varsity netball and provincial netball representing the Fireballs in the Brutal Fruit series.

Oscar Knoester, her former judo coach, got Snyman thinking when he said that if she had stuck with judo, she might represent South Africa at the Olympic games.

“I had a heart-to-heart talk with Jenny van Dyk (UP Tuks netball coach) asking her for advice as to the way forward.

“Jenny praised my abilities as a netball player, but was honest in her assessment, saying that if I wanted to play for the Proteas, it is going to take a lot of hard work.

“She even suggested that I should take up judo again to ensure that I don’t have any regrets later on,” Snyman explained.

The versatile star is in for a tough challenge in Marrakesh as it is an open championship, which means there are no weight divisions.

She could, for example, fight someone who is 20 kilograms heavier than she is.

She usually competes in the u.78kg category.

“I don’t foresee it being a problem.

“I am fast enough to hold my own,” she said.

The fact that Snyman mostly trains against men at UP-Tuks Judo might stand her in good stead at the World Championships.

She is also full of praise for how Nikola Filipov, the head coach at TuksJudo, has helped her to become a more competitive judoka.

“When I was younger, I won most of my fights using brute strength, but I can’t afford to do that anymore,” she said.

“My my rivals are now capable of matching my power which means I have to think before I do.

“Nikola is a brilliant strategist,” Snyman concluded.

