



■ TENNIS

# Disabled star's plea for support

*First black South African to qualify for all four grand slam tournaments*

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SOUTH Africa's wheelchair tennis ace Kgothatso "KG" Montjane has pleaded with authorities to give more support to disability sport.

Montjane, South Africa's highest-ranked female wheelchair tennis player, was in London this week, competing at Wimbledon.

"Supporting disability sport is seen as charity, but the fact is, that it's not," Montjane told the Saturday Star. "We are professional, dedicated athletes who are here to compete because we are good at our respective sports. We are differently abled and there is no need to feel sorry for us. We are here to play and to win."

The 32-year-old, who became the first black South African to qualify for all four tennis majors, wants more support to be given to disabled athletes in South Africa so they can thrive.

"I'm not there yet with all the backing and support, but I do have some behind me. It's better than not having anything at all. There is always room for improvement, to grow and drive more support for the sport, so hopefully, with wheelchair tennis now being part of Tennis SA, there is an opportunity to support me and the other wheelchair tennis players more."

Montjane, who is ranked seventh in the world, also believes that not enough attention is being paid to wheelchair tennis players in particular.

"Disability sport is a minority sport, so I guess that's why it doesn't get that much attention. Across the world, there are always competitions, but one will hardly hear about or see them anywhere in South Africa."

"In my case, all the major wheelchair tennis tournaments are played overseas, so it's even more difficult for us athletes to participate and improve ourselves."

"We need to travel long distances, which costs money, and there are not always funds available for us to participate in these international competitions or tournaments."

"It's a sad state of affairs because there are really great athletes out there and it's only realised when we win lots of medals at the Paralympics, but people don't know the struggle we go through to get there."

Montjane was the only African woman participating at this year's Wimbledon tournament.

She made her second appearance at Wimbledon, taking on Germany's Sabine Ellerbrock in the quarter-finals of the draw on Thursday afternoon. Montjane defeated Ellerbrock to progress to the semi-final, where she faced off against top seed Diede de Groot.

Montjane has spoken of her pride in playing at a second consecutive Wimbledon tournament.

"It's a really prestigious tournament to be part of and being the only African woman participating makes me feel extremely proud."



KGOTATHSO Montjane wants more assistance and support provided to disabled sports codes | SUPPLIED

Montjane said she felt much more prepared compared to last year's appearance.

"I feel better prepared this time around because I tried to make preparations on a similar surface. In SA, there aren't any grass courts available so I had to do my preparations at Tuks HPC Hockey fields, initially to try to get a similar surface but luckily at Irene Country Club they drew a tennis court on a cricket field and I was able to train there."

"This resulted in much better grass to practise on."

"It is hard to push a wheelchair on grass, so in my preparation, we focused more on resistance and strength training. But it's important for the mind to get used to uncomfortable situations."

But I was satisfied with the preparation.

"I am also grateful that since the beginning of this year, I have been able to participate in some of the top-level tournaments like the Australian Open, the Japan Open and Roland Garros, which have all provided me with important lessons on how to improve myself each time."

She said the preparation was different on grass, but each tournament helped her improve physically and mentally.

"Together with my coach, we made sure I received the best training for this type of tournament."

Having played in several major competitions, Montjane felt she had evolved as a tennis player over the

past year.

"I think I have improved quite a lot and I can still get better as I get to understand more of the game."

"This year I have a new coach who prepares me for each and every match, so that has also helped a lot, from analysing my opponents, to the proper physical preparation. Knowing that I have enough funds to participate in each tournament this year has also alleviated a lot of stress."

"I still have a lot in me and I am learning more and more about myself, my capabilities, my strength, my weaknesses with each match and each tournament I participate in so I can definitely say I have evolved and I am a better player than I was last year."

■ MYTHOLOGISING

