

■ WRESTLING

UP-Tuks junior wrestling champion heads to the US

TUKS' junior African wrestling champion Edrich Nortje is going to study and train in the United States later this year with the aim of qualifying for next year's Olympic Games in Tokyo.

The 18-year-old, who matriculated last year, knows he is in for a tough challenge but he would have it no other way.

He believes success and sacrifices go hand in hand.

"The reality is that wrestling in South Africa is a small sport. There are about five big tournaments in a year, and you mostly compete against the same guys all the time. Most of my opponents know what I am about when wrestling and I know their weaknesses," Nortje, pictured, said.

"At Hastings College in Nebraska where I am going to be based there is an opportunity to compete nearly every week against different opponents. I am sure it will help me to become

a more wily campaigner on the mats."

Nortje has got extra incentive to become a true champion. Through wrestling, he became close friends with Kleinjan Combrinck who finished fifth at last year's Gold Coast Commonwealth Games. Sadly, shortly afterwards Combrinck died in a car accident.

"Kleinjan was not only a friend, but a mentor to me also. We had so much in common.

"It is really tragic that he died at such a young age because I think



he had the makings of becoming a champion. From now on every time I compete, I will be doing so to honour his memory," Nortje said.

Nortje's first goal for the season is to win another gold medal at the African Championships which will take place in Tunisia in March.

However, he might have a big decision to make after the South African trials in February.

The UP-Tuks wrestler has moved up one weight category and is now competing in the Under-65kg category. During the trials in Middelburg, he will compete as a junior as well as a senior.

If he wins both competitions, he might have a dilemma as at the African Championships you are either a senior or junior wrestler.

"I first want to see what happens before I make any final decisions. I might possibly decide to compete as a junior," Nortje said. | ANA