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Wrestling star off to the USA to learn more

One of South Africa's most promising young wrestlers is heading to America, where he will study while also getting the opportunity to advance his wrestling career.

Junior African wrestling champion, Edrich Nortje from TuskWrestling, is going to study and train in the USA later this year with the aim of just maybe 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.

According to Nortjé the reality is that wrestling in South Africa is a small sport. There are about five big tournaments a year, and he mostly competes against the same guys all the time.

"Most of my local opponents already know my strengths and weaknesses very well, just as I know theirs. 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 wilier

campaigner on the mats," the Tuks wrestler explained.

Heinrich Barnes, who represented South Africa at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, also studied and trained at Hastings College.

Nortjé has an 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.

Unfortunately, shortly afterwards he 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.

"I will never forget him. From now on every time I compete, I will be doing so to honour his memory," said Nortjé.

The young star's first goal for the season is to win another gold medal

at the African Championships in March in Tunisia.

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

The Tuks wrestler has moved up one weight category. He 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 decision. I might possibly decide to compete as a junior. During South African tournaments I regularly place in the top three when fighting as a senior. However, the reality is that I get outwitted at crucial times.

"I need to gain some more experience to become more competitive," Nortjé concluded.



In America Edrich Nortje will get the opportunity to compete nearly every week against different opponents. Photo: Reg Caldecott

