

## NEWS RELEASE

### Serving dreams: UP doctor and volleyball star sets sights on 2028 Olympics



*Danilo von Ludwiger at the 2025 UP autumn graduation ceremonies.*

PRETORIA - Dr Danilo von Ludwiger, a recent graduate from the University of Pretoria (UP), has managed to juggle two demanding passions: medicine and volleyball. Earning his [MBChB](#) while representing South Africa in volleyball is a remarkable achievement, and his journey is one of resilience, discipline and balance.

Von Ludwiger's interest in medicine stemmed from his love for biology, science, and connecting with people. "I'm a social butterfly, and I wanted a job where I could interact with people all the time," he explains. His uncle, a GP, was a key influence. "Once I saw my uncle practising, I knew this was the path for me." His medical studies not only equipped him with essential skills but also shaped his values. "It's not an easy degree, especially while trying to live a normal life, but it taught me empathy, kindness and how to make a real difference."

His sporting journey began with ice hockey, a sport he played so well that he represented South Africa at the [International Ice Hockey Federation World Championships](#). However, due to the high costs of pursuing ice hockey he switched to volleyball. He was also inspired by his older brother, who played volleyball for UP's [TuksSport](#) and

for his province, Gauteng. “Volleyball was more affordable, and I found an amazing community,” he says.

He quickly made his mark: he won two [University Sports South Africa \(USSA\)](#) Beach Volleyball titles with his [TuksVolleyball](#) team, was part of the Tuks team that won UP its first USSA male indoor volleyball title, and represented South Africa at the 2022 [International University Sports Federation \(FISU\)](#) World University Games in Brazil.

Competing internationally was an honour but came with challenges. “The level of play abroad is incredibly high, and the pressure is intense,” Von Ludwiger says. His participation in many events had to be self-funded due to limitations within the South African Volleyball Federation. Despite this, he stayed committed to his Olympic dream, juggling nine volleyball sessions a week alongside his final year of medical studies. “It was tough but humbling,” he says. “International players train full-time – I had to manage training around clinical rotations and exams.”

His time management skills became his biggest asset. “Procrastination is the biggest thief of time. If you can eliminate it, you’ll achieve so much more,” he advises. He credits his early education, which resembled homeschooling, for teaching him how to work independently. This experience helped him keep his academic, sport, and extracurricular activities in balance at UP – while volleyball served as an outlet for stress management. “It kept me mentally and physically healthy. A happy mind really does boost academic performance.”

There were times he had to choose between academics and volleyball. During Olympic qualifiers, he missed exams and tournaments, but he survived academically by maintaining open communication with lecturers. “Honesty and a willingness to work extra hours made all the difference.”

His experience as an athlete has deeply influenced his approach to medicine. “Sport teaches you discipline, resilience, and how to work in a team – all vital in a hospital setting. Whether you’re working with doctors, nurses, or allied health professionals, being a good team player is non-negotiable.”

Now a qualified doctor, he plans to complete his internship while remaining active in volleyball. He aims to qualify for the 2025 [International Volleyball Federation \(FIVB\) Beach Volleyball](#) World Championships in Australia and hopes to compete at the 2028 LA Olympics. Long term, he’s considering specialising in sports medicine or orthopaedics to combine his passions. “I want to stay involved in both fields. I’ve learnt how to balance them, and I love both.”

To current student-athletes, his advice is clear: “Live life fully and don’t be scared to make mistakes. Commit to your goals but don’t let medicine consume you. You worked hard to get here, but balance is key. A healthy body and mind lead to success in both academics and sport.”

Looking back, Dr Von Ludwiger is most proud of the relationships he’s built. “The friendships, the network, and the legacy we’ve created at TuksVolleyball – that’s what means the most. I hope it continues to grow and inspire others in South African volleyball.”

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## ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the [Gordon Institute of Business Science](#) (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a [Faculty of Veterinary Science](#), which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2025 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of [Accounting](#) and [Finance](#); [Architecture](#); [Electrical and Electronic Engineering](#); Law; Sport Science; and Veterinary Science. UP's Faculty of Law has been ranked as the top law school in Africa for a remarkable eighth consecutive year.

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their [2024 World University Rankings \(WUR\)](#). UP was the only South African university featured in the [2023 World University Rankings for Innovation \(WURI\)](#), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to [www.up.ac.za](http://www.up.ac.za)