



Words: Wilhelm de Swardt | Photos: Reg Caldecott

THE TUKS HIGH PERFORMANCE CENTRE (HPC) – SA'S TOP SPORTING CAREER AND ACADEMIC TRAINING CENTRE

The Tuks High Performance Centre (hpc) is the place where sporting dreams do come true.

At last year's Commonwealth Games, the World Rowing Championships, the World Sprint Canoeing Championships, the African Athletics Championships and the Continental Athletics Cup, hpc athletes won a total of no less than eleven gold medals, three silver medals and four bronze medals. The hpc golfers and triathletes also notched up some good results.

These achievements prove that the hpc's holistic approach of supporting the athletes with a multi-disciplined team of sports scientists and medical personnel is certainly paying off.

The prediction made by Toby Sutcliffe, CEO of hpc, that the hpc sponsored athletes could win seven medals at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio, might even prove to be not far off the mark.

But Sutcliffe and his team of experts are not in the habit of taking anything for granted.

"I attended a Board Meeting of the Association of Sport Performance Centres before last year's Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. It was attended by representatives of most of the larger sporting countries.



"One of the main themes was the importance of being proactive in the management of the build-up of athletes for the 2016 Olympic Games.

"Proactive management not only involves an analysis of the athlete's lifestyle, his mental state and eating habits. It also involves the help of psychologists, if necessary, as well as regular blood tests to check for possible iron and other deficiencies.

"Watching the Commonwealth Games I noticed that some of our athletes who finished in 4th or 5th positions lacked the ability to step up to the next level. If the athletes, coaches and agents would buy into the expertise offered at hpc, we could rectify this by being proactive."

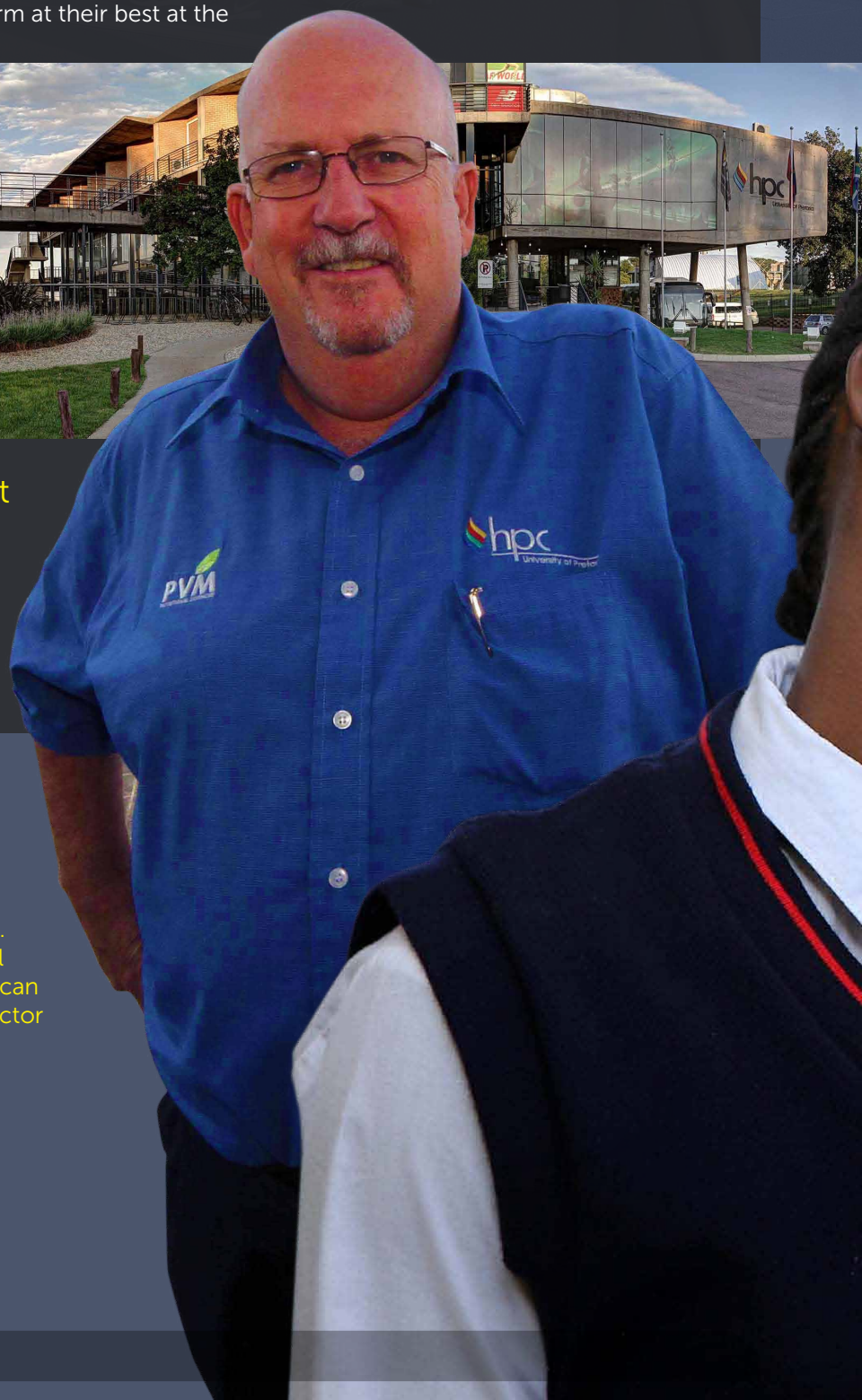
However, the sole drive or goal of hpc's 'think tank' is not merely to ensure that athletes perform at their best at the

Olympic Games or World Championships. It is equally important for Sutcliffe and his team to get involved with the athletes at grassroots level. To take care of this aspect, TuksSport High School and the various hpc academies (athletics, golf, swimming, judo, rowing, canoeing, triathlon, cricket, tennis and soccer) have been established.

"For us at the hpc it is important to ensure that the youngsters find the right balance between training and competing in sport on the one hand and their studies on the other."

According to Sutcliffe, any talented young athlete is welcome to apply for hpc support.

"Applicants will be tested and if the results prove to be promising, we will start working with them to help them realise their dreams. We understand that not every youngster will eventually become 'a jewel in the South African sports crown' but if we achieve a success factor of 3% to 4%, we have done a very good job.





"As far as funding is concerned, we like to assist wherever we can but unfortunately we don't have a bottomless pit of money. The challenge is, therefore, to get more businesses involved through the Forever Heroes Trust.

"We want to give bursaries to kids who are talented but financially challenged but at the same time we want the parents to understand that, seeing that they have to pay school fees at any other school, they also have to make a contribution at TuksSport. We have found that if everything is free, there is no commitment from the parents. We expect parents to be committed to take care of their kids and not consider the hpc as some kind of 'warehouse' where they can store their kids.

"Our future aim is to build on what we have already achieved and to consolidate our position in the South African sports arena."

According to Sutcliffe, the hpc has intentionally decided not to become involved with any team sport, other than soccer and cricket.

"The goal with our soccer academy is to help young players (boys as well as girls) to master the basics of soccer and to ingrain a positive work ethic in each player. It is important that the players understand from a young age, that the only way to guarantee success, is through hard work and dedication. The soccer academy is basically a feeder system to help players get into the Premier League and to play for the various national sides.

"We have got the same goal as far as cricket is concerned."

The hpc must certainly be doing something right as far as soccer is concerned, because Tuks has won the Varsity Cup Soccer Tournament for the past two years.

Sutcliffe is concerned about the state of South African swimming.





"A sport that has gone backwards lately is swimming. If you take the performances by Chad le Clos, Cameron van der Burgh and a few other swimmers out of the equation, there is really nothing to get excited about. This applies especially to women's swimming. We, at the hpc, want to change this around so that there will be a bigger pool of talented swimmers from which national squads can be chosen."

If there is one thing that Llewellyn van Leeuwen (technical director and head coach at TuksGolf) and Emile Steinmann (senior coach at TuksGolf) do not like to hear, it is South African golfers singing the praises of their rivals during tournaments. According to him, it has become obvious that the golfing skills of our national players are no longer on par with international players.

"The reason for this is that in other countries, the young players are exposed to holistic coaching from a young age. It means that, apart from good coaching, they also have access to sports scientists, dieticians, biokineticists and psychologists."

"At TuksGolf we realise that we can no longer afford not to help our young players. Our coaches, actually the whole hpc team, have the expertise to make a difference for the better. We would love to identify promising young players, aged between 10 and 12, and coach them. The benefit will be that we will be able to work with them for a much longer period. Our main challenge will be to ensure that the players will have mastered all the basic techniques of golf at the age of 16. Every player will be assisted by a team of experts from the hpc."

"We invite the parents of talented young players to contact us. It stands to reason that there will have to be a selection process, because we will not be able to accept everybody."



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SIDEBAR

IF YOU HAVE A TALENTED SON OR DAUGHTER THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE CONSIDERED FOR ENTRY INTO THE hpc YOU CAN FIND OUT MORE ABOUT US AT:

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