

Health MEC pleads with good samaritans to make young tennis ace's American dream come true

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KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo is appealing to South Africans to open their hearts and wallets to help make a rising tennis star's dream of getting a scholarship in the US come true. At the age of just 19, Thembokwakhe Makhanya's CV already reads like that of a tennis hall of famer.

February 2017 Winner: KZN Mini 1 Men's Open Singles Durban; May 2017 Winner: KZN Mini 2 Men's Open Singles and Doubles Durban; July 2017 Runner-Up: KZN Coca Cola Grand Prix Tournament Men's Open; Singles. In July 2017, he also won the Men's Doubles; and was a runner-Up in the KZN Coca Cola Grand Prix Tournament Men's Open. Later, in December 2017, he was a quarter-finalist in the Growthpoint Super 8 Men's Open Singles, and also a semi-finalist in the Men's Doubles.

Adams Mission-born Makhanya says he was the first Black African tennis captain at Westville Boys' High School and has also captained the KZN and SA teams. His tennis expeditions have so far taken him to the USA – Washington DC, Malaysia and Wimbledon, Kenya, and Zimbabwe.

Now all that Makhanya - ranked 25th in the Open Men's age group in the country - yearns for is a scholarship to the US to take his tennis game to the next level and pursue his academic studies.

But there is a slight challenge: the bursaries that he has been offered by the Davenport and New Mexico universities in America can only cover part of the costs, and he needs to cough up an estimated R150 000 per year. It's a big ask for his mother Zamakhanya Makhanya, a single parent, and principal at the Josephine Makhanya Primary School of Sport Excellence, not far from the world-famous Adams College.

Ms Makhanya herself has national tennis colours and her brother Vama Makhanya and niece Nosipho Makhanya also play tennis. The family's love for tennis was inculcated in them by Thembokwakhe's grandfather, the late Mr Desmond Makhanya, who was a well-known tennis coach in the area.

Outlining his journey so far, the young man popularly known as "Thembo", who idolises Roger Federer, says: *"I attended East Coast Christian College through my Primary school level. I was privileged to receive a 100% five-year scholarship from Westville Boys' High School. I matriculated last year (2017), achieving a Bachelor's pass which qualifies me for entry to University degree courses.*

"My mother is a single parent as my father passed away when I was still a toddler. She had a great influence in my Tennis career, as she herself had dominated tennis at both junior and senior levels, she was a champion and role model for many in the black communities in the 80's.

As this happened during the dark days of apartheid she inspired and gave hope to many. This was made possible by our grandfather, who brought Tennis development to our community. He also played a major role in my life as he tried hard for his children to participate at a top level. I started playing Tennis at the age of 7, and I've had some of my greatest moments on the tennis court.



Thembo Makhanya with MEC Dhlomo at a run-down tennis court at Adams Mission



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I would like to get a scholarship at one of the American Colleges to further my tennis career and also to obtain a degree in Sports Science, also as my second option would be the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA). It is also my wish to continue playing tennis after college and try the professional circuit.

MEC Dhlomo, who was once coached by Thembo's grandfather, is moved by this story, and is calling upon South Africans to come to the young man's aid.

Being a member of the Prov Legislature in KZN, and residing at Mbumbulu area, we've always known as people who grew in this area, Adams an excellence. We used to do athletics, soccer, netball, and all other sports. When you come here to Adams fields, you knew that you'd have stiff competition. I have a dream and a wish to have those elementary sporting activities further in the far-flung part of Mbumbulu continuing and coming in to develop these areas at Adams area.

For Thembo to be at a level of representing a previously white school in tennis and topping young sportsmen in tennis in high school, as well as all the accolades that he has garnered is commendable. We are excited that there are indications that he is getting some support for a scholarship in tennis overseas. However, I am a bit worried to learn that the support that he is likely to get is half of what could actually cover him while he's there.

"Part of this is really to thank the South Africans whom I know are going to come forward and support his vision and his dream, and our legacy of Mbumbulu and Adams in the development of sport.

"Him going up there to advance his career in tennis and, of course, achieving academically is going to be a legacy for this area that is unparalleled. So, I really have a dream and a wish that we could take his vision and wishes to greater heights. Some of us who come from Mbumbulu will be encouraged by any success that comes through him because, in 10 years' time, we could have 10 more Thembos coming from this area," says MEC Dhlomo

Those who wish to assist Thembo may contact him via email on makhanyathembo@gmail.com , cell: 081 711 2841; or his mother on zamakhanya71@gmail.com or 078 101 6694.

<<>> Thembo Makhanya with MEC Dhlomo at a run-down tennis court at Adams Mission.

Photos: Mondli Mwandla/KZN Dept of Health To view a video of Thembokwakhe in action, you may click on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1s1ByB_ghs&feature=youtu.be