



21 ICONS
SEASON II
SOUTH AFRICA

Adrian Steirn



MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed until 31 August 2014 at 12h00 (SA)

Johannesburg –31 August 2014 - Francois Pienaar: “The power of sport is incredible. It cuts across all colours, all religions, all creeds, all people; it’s got an amazing effect on people.”

On 31 August 2014 at 20h27 on SABC 3, 21 ICONS provides a glimpse into the mind of Francois Pienaar, the former Springbok rugby captain who led South Africa to glory in the 1995 Rugby World Cup.

Now in its second season, 21 ICONS shines a spotlight on the country’s most outstanding citizens and masters of society. From renowned leaders to entrepreneurs, from struggle stalwarts to sporting heroes, their determination, humanity and dedication typify what makes this country great.

Adrian Steirn, one of the preeminent photographers and filmmakers in South Africa, has captured their spirits in a series that is as intimate as it is compelling. Steirn comments, “I’ve met many people whose stories are incredibly powerful – it’s a true privilege to discover more about the human spirit and share these individuals personal accounts, their positive character traits and their propensity to influence and shape perceptions and transform societal norms for the better, impacting the communities around them.”

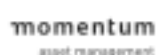
Each short film is accompanied by a striking black and white portrait of the participants in the series, which appears in a Sunday paper on the same day that the film is flighted. These portraits will be made available for sale at an auction later this year, with all proceeds going to charity. Francois Pienaar has selected the Make A Difference (MAD) Foundation as the recipient of funds generated through the sale of his portrait.

In this portrait, Pienaar is shown to be the consummate family man. He stands in a kitchen, surrounded by the detritus of domesticity: dirty coffee cups, dish cloths, a basket of ironing. The camera captures him looking up at a chalkboard featuring a lengthy ‘to do’ list. Some of the items are the everyday chores that every family man has to take care of: fetching the dogs, for example, or arranging a lift for the kids to get to rugby. In the midst of these mundane chores, two items – already crossed off – stand out: ‘win World Cup’ and ‘unite the nation’. The portrait ably depicts the two sides of Pienaar’s personality: a grounded father who cherishes his connection to his family, and a man who can claim an extraordinary, unparalleled accomplishment.

Pienaar seems slightly taken aback by the impact that South Africa’s World Cup triumph had on the country. He explains to Steirn: “I think it was only after the tournament that I realised that it was so much more than just another sporting event. Certainly during the tournament I had a very good sense that something special was happening in our country. It was amazing to be served breakfast in the hotel by a black lady who said, ‘You must eat enough because tomorrow you guys are playing Australia’. It struck me that, firstly, she knew who we were playing against and, secondly, she was genuinely concerned that I would have enough to eat and be ready to play.”

He recalls seeing a groundswell starting to happen. “When we got to the final, obviously I knew that it was huge for South Africa, but never in my wildest dreams did I ever think it would be so big.”

It was only after the event that Pienaar truly grasped the enormity of the process that the country had been through in just six weeks. “It actually healed the nation and made us proud to be together, to be one. We became world champions,” Pienaar reflects.





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This, he continues, is the unifying power of sport. “Whenever there’s a World Cup, whether it’s for soccer, rugby, cricket or the Olympic Games, when an athlete participates, he or she runs for every person in their country. That’s so powerful. It makes people proud, it makes them stand up and take notice of hard work and respect, dignity, selflessness, all those things that go into sport. It’s a very powerful vehicle.”

Since that day Pienaar has contributed to the country in other ways, most notably through his Make A Difference (MAD) Foundation. Focusing on disadvantaged children, the organisation aims to give children from financially disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to fulfil their potential and become the leaders of tomorrow. Pienaar is proud that, in the seven years since MAD was established, it has helped thousands of children and had some major breakthroughs. For example, one beneficiary, who hails from the Cape Flats, has been offered full scholarships by Yale, Harvard and Vanderbilt University.

For Pienaar, who sees education as a silver bullet capable of meeting South Africa’s challenges, this is a major accomplishment. “I have always maintained that the leaders of tomorrow need our leadership today. South Africa needs leaders to stand up and follow in the footsteps of Mandela,” he avers.

He maintains that there are, indeed, icons that will lead our country into the future – they simply need their time to come. It’s important, though, that they step forward. Pienaar laments the fact that so many leaders speak about Madiba and his magic, yet they don’t live it for themselves. This is what the country needs, he insists, particularly if we are to fulfil our potential.

Reflecting on his relationship with Nelson Mandela, he and his family were personally touched by Madiba a number of times: not only did Mandela phone him on the day of his youngest son, Jean’s birth and request to be his godfather; he also agreed to fill this role for Pienaar’s oldest son Stefan, after the boy plucked up the courage to ask him personally.

Pienaar’s conversation is peppered with many such anecdotes and references to his family. It’s clear that, his achievements on the field and through his foundation notwithstanding, he considers his sons to be his life’s work. His determination to share as much with them as possible is touching; he admits that it’s one of his priorities going forward.

What else would he still like to achieve? Apart from fulfilling a lengthy bucket list that includes being a spectator at some of the world’s most exciting sports events, he says that one of his greatest goals is simply to enjoy life. “South Africa’s going through a very interesting time; we live in a wonderful place, but we have to remember to do the small things well. You don’t have to go and do grandiose things to enjoy life; it’s about friends, it’s about family.”

Pienaar has fond memories of his coach and mentor, Kitch Christie: “He always used to remind me that life is in your hands. It’s what you do with it that counts.”

Season two of 21 ICONS South Africa is proudly sponsored by Mercedes-Benz South Africa, Momentum Asset Management, Nikon, Deloitte and the Department of Arts and Culture.

The 21 ICONS App features additional information about the icons, the project and its creators to provide a fully interactive experience. Download it from iTunes App Store: <http://tinyurl.com/lf3cfzm> or Google Play: <http://tinyurl.com/ovtcy45>

For more information, follow us on Twitter: @21 ICONS, Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/21ICONS>, Pinterest: <http://www.pinterest.com/21ICONS/> or visit www.21ICONS.com.





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PROGRAMME SYNOPSIS

Francois Pienaar, former Springbok rugby captain, talks to filmmaker Adrian Steirn about the unifying effect of sport and its importance to society; his relationship with Nelson Mandela, and how South Africa's triumph at the 1995 Rugby World Cup helped to heal a divided nation.

NOTE TO EDITORS

21 ICONS South Africa is an annual collection of photographs and short films of South Africans who have reached the pinnacle of achievement in their fields of endeavour. These men and women have been an inspiration through their extraordinary social contribution. It is not a definitive list and does not denote any ranking.

The short film-series documents the conversations between Steirn as the photographer and filmmaker and the icons. Each short film provides insight into both the subject and photographer's creative approach to the portrait.

On behalf of **21 ICONS South Africa**

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