

21 Icons celebrates Lucas Sithole

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Triple amputee Lucas Sithole has turned his childhood brush with death into a winning streak, and 21 Icons pays tribute to our champ

Paralympian and triple amputee, 28-year-old Lucas Sithole is one of the world's top wheelchair tennis players. Lucas has faced enough challenges to have honed a steel core of determination.

This is something immediately apparent in his newly released 21 Icons portrait. The image – by photographer Gary van Wyk – captures this fierce competitor on the court, with his racquet in hand, and an expression that many hopeful challengers have had to face down over the years.

At the age of 12 Lucas was hit by a train in his hometown in KwaZulu-Natal, ultimately losing both legs and an arm from just below the elbow. Despite enduring this awful experience, he emerged an inspiring fighter and advocate for disabled sports, and for disabled people in general.

In 2013 Lucas claimed both the US Open singles title and the British Open singles title, making him Africa's first title holder for both a super series and grand slam titles. He is South Africa's top wheelchair tennis player, and one of the best in the world, holding the 4th spot in international rankings.

Lucas represented South Africa at the London 2012 Paralympics, and hopes to again in Rio in 2016. Along with many 'sportsman of the year' awards to his name, the *Mail & Guardian* included him in their '200 Young South Africans' list in 2011.

Lucas also represents the Wheelchair Tennis South Africa organisation. 21 Icons holds him up as an example that 'people can make the best of their situation if they are able to surpass adversity and strive to be the best version of themselves'. Lucas concurs, adding: 'Everything is possible as long as you put your mind to it and you are ready to work hard for it.'

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– Lucas Sithole

'I think if I wasn't disabled, and if God didn't give me this chair I wouldn't be a motivator to the youth and to other kids living with disability...I give them hope that there is a life in a wheelchair,' he said in the 21 Icons statement announcing his inclusion.

The third season of 21 Icons – a documentary and photographic project celebrating local heroes – has turned its gaze on our young, bright leadership in the country. All of the newly featured icons are under the age of 35, and present a picture of hope for SA's future.

About 21 Icons

This article is the latest in our series on the 21 Icons project and its inspiring South African portrait subjects. For more coverage, check out our stories:

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