

Today, 21 Icons season two features its fifth icon, Francois Pienaar, the former Springbok captain who led his team to victory in the 1995 rugby World Cup

# The nation's *captain*

**T**he 21 Icons portrait of the former Springbok rugby captain provides a glimpse into the mind of Francois Pienaar, who led South Africa to glory in the 1995 rugby World Cup.

He is depicted as the consummate family man, standing in a kitchen, surrounded by the markings of domesticity: dirty coffee cups, dish cloths and a basket of laundry. The camera captures him looking up at a blackboard featuring a lengthy "to-do" list. Some of the items are the everyday chores a typical suburban family man has to take care of: fetching the dogs, for example, or arranging a lift for the kids to get to rugby practice.

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 South Africa's World Cup triumph had on the country. He explains: "I think it was only after the tournament that I realised 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."

He recalls witnessing the beginning of a groundswell. "When we got to the final, obviously I knew 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 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.

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 and 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 Foundation. Focusing on



**FAMILY FOCUSED** Francois Pienaar poses during the portrait shoot for 21 Icons in Kenilworth, Cape Town

PHOTO: DAMON HYLAND / THE GINKGO AGENCY

***The leaders of tomorrow need our leadership today. South Africa needs leaders to stand up and follow in the footsteps of Mandela***

## FRANCOIS PIENAAR

disadvantaged children, the organisation aims to give children from financially disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to fulfil their potential and become the leaders of tomorrow.

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.

Pienaar maintains there are indeed icons who will lead our country into

the future - they simply need their time to come. But it's important they step forward. He laments the fact that so many leaders speak about Madiba and his magic, but don't live it for themselves. He insists this is what the country needs, particularly if we are to fulfil our potential.

As he chats, Pienaar's conversation is peppered with 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



**BEHIND THE SCENES** Francois Pienaar behind the scenes with Adrian Steirn during the 21 Icons photoshoot. Below is an image of the poster for this week

PHOTO: GARY VAN WYK

UNITE A NATION



admits it's one of his priorities going forward.

"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."

● Watch the Francois Pienaar documentary tonight on SABC3 at 8.27pm

● For more information, visit 21icons.com

● Watch the trailer and more on your phone by downloading Zappar from your app store and scanning the thunderbolt icon on this page

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