



Maritzburg College



FOUNDED: 1863
MOTTO: PRO ARIS ET FOCIS
(FOR HEARTH AND HOME)
ADDRESS: COLLEGE ROAD,
PIETERMARITZBURG
WWW.MARITZBURGCOLLEGE.CO.ZA



School History

Maritzburg College was founded as Pietermaritzburg High School in an old carpenter shop in Longmarket Street in 1863.

The school was involved in the British and Zulu Langalibalele skirmish in the Drakensberg where the first Old Collegian, RH Erskine, was killed in action in 1873. In the huge British defeat at Isandlwana in 1879, seven Old Collegians died on that grim battlefield. Three other Old Collegians lost their lives at different places during the 1879 uprising. It was at this time that Natal ran red with blood that the College colours of red, black and white were introduced. It was maintained that the black was for the Zulus, the white was for the British, and the red was for the blood which was shed. The College badge also speaks of those suffering times and has an assegai and a crossed rifle as an emblem. The school was heavily involved in the South African War (British versus Boers) of 1899 to 1902. There were seven Old Collegians who lost their lives in this war. The war came close to the school on 2 November 1899 when the Imperial authorities commandeered the entire College building, including the newly constructed Victoria Hall as a Military Hospital.

Today, Maritzburg College is a multicultural school where all racial and language groups are represented.





Rugby at College

College played the first recorded inter-school match in Natal (under Winchester rules) against Hermannsburg on 11 October 1870. Rugby was the only game played in Natal until about 1885, when a cup was donated for the development of soccer. After this the school, so as to get sufficient games in winter began to play both codes against clubs such as British Regiments and St Charles College. With the arrival of AS Langley (nicknamed Madevu because of his moustache) at Maritzburg College in 1897, soccer was banned. It was told that he came back to school after a ride in the park and found some boys kicking a soccer ball around. He got off his horse, opened his pocket knife and punctured the ball. A round, inflated ball was not seen at Maritzburg College for many years and only reappeared once water polo was introduced. Rugby became the main winter game and soon became a prominent rugby school. When Langley went down to DHS as headmaster, soccer was the only winter game and he saw to it that it was banished. From then on DHS boys played rugby. The great Bill Payn was another College man who had an impact on rugby at DHS. An Old Boy of College, he taught and coached rugby at DHS and he was chairman of the Natal School's Rugby Association. He was the mastermind behind the selection of a Natal School's rugby team in 1933 — the first schoolboy provincial side to be selected in South Africa.

Thereafter a Natal School's side was selected every year. An early 1906 reminiscence of Payn's was, as a young College boy, tediously removing worm casts that had hardened on the rugby field for the coming Michaelhouse game. Falling upon these hard sizeable casts was a particularly painful experience for any player. However, as he patiently removed the casts, a rasping voice behind him said, "Don't throw them all away, you silly buffer. Leave some for the visitors!" The voice came from a senior boy, the son of a Midlands farmer. His inhospitable plan seemed illogical to Payn, but he followed his instructions and left "mine-fields" in strategic positions. Payn recalls the story, probably, largely in admiration of the toughness of the College boys. DHS repaid the compliment of receiving Payn onto its staff, when James Mervyn (Skonk) Nicholson, a DHS Old Boy was posted to the staff of Maritzburg College in 1944. Rugby at College has never done as well as it did under Nicholson, who is one of the great men of school's rugby in South Africa. "Skonk" coached the First Team from 1948 to 1982, and still remains involved in the school. College struggled somewhat in the '20s and '30s preceding Nicholson's arrival. Despite an unbeaten '32 team, more games were lost in this period.

COACH FOCUS

Skonk Nicholson

'Skonk' Nicholson re-established College's dominance, coaching numerous unbeaten sides. He knew how to get the best from his players and teams, and had the ability to analyse opposing teams' strengths and weaknesses.

Skonk introduced scientific coaching to the First XV. In addition to demanding total fitness, he concentrated on the basics, unit skills and individual skills. His influence ensured that this emphasis was adopted by all the coaches at College, to the lasting benefit of College rugby.

"I got the boys to believe in themselves," he said, "but to believe in themselves, they had to have the basics first. I got the players to visualise themselves succeeding. Over and over, till success was ingrained in them. They had to run straight. We would pass the ball from an imaginary scrum to the wing and they had to do it within three seconds. We had to have an aggressive pack who went forward all the time. Team spirit was vital." Little wonder then that he is admired and regarded by South Africa's most successful coaches. Ian MacIntosh described him as the 'Doc Craven of Natal Rugby'.

College played 504 matches with Skonk as coach, winning 403, drawing 49 and losing 52. It is a huge record. Fifteen of his teams were unbeaten in Natal, ten were unbeaten in all fixtures (1949, 1954, 1955, 1959, 1962, 1963, 1974, 1978, 1981, 1982) and 12 of his other sides lost only one fixture. Of his boys, Keith Oxlee, Ormie Taylor and Andy van der Watt played for South Africa. He no doubt had an influence upon his other First Team players who became coaches at College, such as David Dell, Dave Anderson, Colin Heard and "Beans" Bateman, who produced players such as Joel Stransky, Jeremy Thomson, Butch James and Peter Grant. Over 60 players who went through Skonk's hands played for Natal and nearly 200 played for Natal Schools. It was during "Skonk" Nicholson's coaching reign that Goldstones, the main field (named after a New Zealander who came out during the South African War and coached the College first team, on and off, from 1910 to 1928) became a "graveyard" for visiting sides. When DHS beat College in 1980, it was only the seventh time since 1948 that College had ever lost at home. In more than 200 home matches, only seven had been lost.



I started refereeing as a schoolboy at Maritzburg College, where rugby is a religion, and spent the first 4 years of my refereeing career refereeing only schoolboy rugby. Maritzburg College was extremely good to me in this regard and through my years there, I progressed from refereeing the u13 E's and F's to refereeing the high profile Sat afternoon games on "Goldstones" before large crowds. The intensity of schoolboy rugby is fierce and the passion is not dissimilar to that seen in Test Matches! Certainly at Maritzburg College the honour of playing on Goldstones at 15h40 on a Saturday afternoon is a special achievement and the tradition of running through "Nicholson's Arch" (named after Skonk Nicholson) is reserved only for players of the First XV as they take the field. Large crowds gather to watch the traditional derbies and this provides as intimidating a cauldron as ever to referee.

— Craig Joubert (international Test referee)





Internationals

South Africa:

EH "Baby" Shum, Wally Clarkson, Bill Payn, Beevee Vanderplank, Phil Nel (who captained the famous 1937 Springboks), George van Reenen, Keith Oxlee, Ormie Taylor, Andy van der Watt, Joel Stransky, Jeremy Thomson, Pieter Dixon, Butch James, Peter Grant

England:

HD Freakes, Geoff Appleford

Italy:

Wim Visser

USA:

Juan Grobler, Chad Erskine

Zimbabwe:

Brenton Catterall



"There were many traditions at College, like dying your boots completely black, sleeping with your jersey under your pillow the night before we played, putting your jersey on last when getting changed... and of course 'the flick'."

— Butch James (1997)