

## Pass It On®...

### **Out of the Village and On to Break Records.**

*The incredible story of Makazole Mapimpi, the first South African to score in a Rugby World Cup Final. Against almost impossible personal odds, Makazole succeeded, a triumph of the human spirit.*

Rugby is a fluid, creative game that begins with strict training and structure but moves according to players' wits. There are collisions and tackles, deft maneuvers and hard falls. But at the core of the game is cooperation. No player acts alone. Every breakaway is accompanied by supporting players, exchanging the ball and the lead position. It is this lack of hierarchy in the system and focus on teamwork that makes the game so much fun to watch and bonds the players so deeply to each other.

The South African rugby team has overcome more than its share of turmoil. Political, social and socioeconomic strife have sometimes threatened to tear the country apart, and the end of apartheid shocked the nation awake. While the citizens writhed amid growing pains, entities like the Springboks national rugby team brought an example of unity to their fans and families. It wasn't an easy time, but the Springboks were determined. By 2019, having been left out of the World Cup twice because of boycotts, they were unwavering in their mission to show well.

For 24 years, the country had waited for at least a try in the finals. Now, the Springboks were here. They led by two kicks but had not scored a try. Then, with only a six-point lead, they had the ball again. A short run yielded a few meters. The English team piled on the ruck, hoping to stop the momentum. The ball was finessed out, and the scrumhalf fired a quick pass to Mapimpi, who kicked it forward to be picked up by Lukhanyo Am, with only one defender to beat. Mapimpi rushed forward to support his teammate, who drew the defender to him. Then, at the last moment, Am off-loaded a pass to Mapimpi, who had a clear run for the score. When he succeeded, the record was his.

That try was a long time coming. Mapimpi's path was strikingly lonely. He didn't grow up in the elite youth rugby leagues but instead made his own way, unsponsored and unnoticed until his late teens. His run to greatness began in the small rural

village of Twecu, where barefoot boys play rugby on hard-packed dirt with a soda bottle for a ball. They kick dust and scrawl the numbers of their favorite players on the back of faded T-shirts. Mapimpi's father left when he was just a boy. His mother died when he was young, as did his brother.

After making the Springboks team, Mapimpi was made aware of a team tradition: putting photos of family members on uniform numbers to remind players who they play for. Mapimpi had no photos. An emotional Rassie Erasmus, South Africa's director of rugby, couldn't hide his emotions as he related the story. "He didn't have anyone else. You know his brother died, his mother died, he doesn't have a photo. He doesn't play for one thing; he just has a massive heart."

Makazole Mapimpi now has something much bigger to play for — a whole nation of brothers and sisters, and a rugby family big enough to match his talent and heart.

**Heart...[PassItOn.com](https://www.passiton.com)**

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