

If you were to give him the choice of having his leg back again today – he would think twice. Twenty-three-year old Matie Arnú Fourie speaks with the wisdom of someone who has literally been through the mill of life. The road of bitterness that he walked when, as a talented rugby player and matriculant, he lost his leg in a boating accident is now an enlightened road of success and conquest.

by Marli van Wyngaard

**a**rnú is one of the Matie athletes who contributed at the Paralympic Games in Beijing this year to the performance that inspired the entire South Africa. And the knowledge that - despite his leg amputation - he could be part of such a powerful display of ability is enough to make him accept his lot with gratitude.

With their 13 gold medals, 2 silver and 1 bronze, the members of the Maties-Helderberg Sports Club for Athletes with Disabilities was responsible for the lion's share in South Africa's sixth place in the medals list.

"Without the Matie medals, South Africa would have ended sixteenth," Prof Liz Bressan, researcher at the Stellenbosch University (SU) Department of Sport Science, says.

Arnú Fourie, Ilse Hayes, Fanie van der Merwe and Hilton Langenhoven (athletics), Roxy Burns, Riaan Nel and Janos Plekker (cycling), Ernst van Dyk (hand cycling), and Achmat Hassiem and Natalie du Toit

(swimming) and Suzanne

Ferreira - coach at the Stellenbosch University

Sport Performance Institute (SUSPI) - are

all members

of the



Maties achieve

# Paralympic success

Maties-Helderberg Sports Club for Athletes with Disabilities who participated in the Paralympic Games.

### How the Paralympic heroes were shown the road to victory

Since the SUSPI and - shortly thereafter - the Maties-Helderberg Sports Club for Athletes with Disabilities were established in 2006, the Paralympic athletes at these institutions have been on the road to victory.

Ms Corné Rossouw, also at the Department of Sport Science and already specialising in the coaching of people with disabilities since the 1980s, manages the Club as chairperson. She is assisted by, inter alia, Prof Bressan, one of the world's top researchers in sport for people with disabilities (and an American who has made Stellenbosch her home since the early 1990s and has dedicated her life to the development of sports people with disabilities) and Suzanne Ferreira, deemed one of the best coaches in this field.

They attribute the athletes' success to a team effort among all at the Club, at the SUSPI and at the Department of Sport Science.

"As Paralympic sport in South Africa began to grow, so government also began to grow its funding research. I had the opportunity of sharing my research with Corné and Suzanne, who could implement it practically," Prof Bressan tells.

Due to the world-class coaching and scientific expertise offered here, SU can provide sportswomen and men with the full package.

"Our aim is to become one of the leading training destinations for Paralympic teams from right around the world," says Prof Bressan, who serves on the International Paralympic Committee work group for sport scientists.

### International networks

SU has also been invited to become one of the founder members of the International Network for Applied Sports Science. Together with Australia, Brazil, Sweden and Belgium, SU is now undertaking projects to promote Paralympic sport.

"We share our knowledge with one another and we want to help other countries in Africa in particular to develop their Paralympic sport," Prof Bressan explains.

The athletes themselves are unanimous in that they cannot praise the management of their Club, the SUSPI, the Department of Sport Science, and particularly their coach, Suzanne Ferreira, enough for their support, motivation and help.

Neither are they diffident in saying from where they believe their strength comes.

"During the Paralympic Games, our group gathered to hold a small service and pray every day," says honours sport-science student Ilse Hayes, who is visually disabled. "I believe I'm able to do anything through the Lord. It's He who gives me strength and it's this that helps me to stay motivated and positive," she continues.

Third-year sport-science student Fanie van der Merwe (22), a cerebrally disabled athlete, tells how he nearly lost his balance while aiming for a gold medal in the 200 m, when he felt God "pick him up".

"It was towards the end of the Games, so I was already quite stiff. I was very quick off the mark and so placed a lot of pressure on my leg. When I went round the bend, this had a spastic effect on my leg and I thought I was going to fall. I looked to see where the other athletes were and suddenly I could lift my leg again - it felt like strength from the Lord," he continues.

### Challenges

According to their team-mate and three times gold-medal winner Hilton Langenhoven, it is wonderful to hear that their performance in Beijing meant something to the people of South Africa. "Now we must just focus on keeping up our standards and building on them for 2012," says Hilton, who, together with Ilse, as SU Sportswoman of the Year, was selected SU Sportsman of the Year.

He says that one of the biggest challenges in Paralympic Sport is to be professional athletes without sponsorship. "Government does allocate some funds but we do actually need sponsorship from companies or institutions to be able to train full time and reach our full potential."

Corné Rossouw adds that the Maties-Helderberg Sports Club for Athletes with Disabilities is also struggling with a lack of aids. "For example, we urgently need a vehicle in which we can transport wheelchair athletes together with their wheelchairs. Any sponsorship to help this very successful club to produce even better athletes would be greatly appreciated!" she concludes. [m](#)

• **Contact Corné Rossouw at 021 808 4733.**



*Photo, top: Fanie van der Merwe (Photo: Gallo Images)*

*Photo, bottom: Ilse Hayes (Photo: Gallo Images)*

*Main photo: Ilse Hayes is in the front, and Fanie van der Merwe, Roxy Burns, Suzanne Ferreira and Hilton Langenhoven are in the second row. Right at the back are Ernst van Dyk, Janos Plekker and Arnu Fourie.*

*(Photo: Anton Jordaan, SCPS)*

## Maties-Helderberg Sports Club excels in Beijing

Ten athletes from the Maties-Helderberg Sports Club for Athletes with Disabilities participated in the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing from 6 to 17 September.

Here are the Club's top achievers:

- **Hilton Langenhoven** (visually disabled) won gold medals in all three his items: the pentathlon, long jump and 200 m. He also improved on the world record in the pentathlon and on the Paralympic record in the long jump.
- **Fanie van der Merwe** (cerebrally disabled) also obtained two out of two by winning both the 100 m and the 200 m. In the 100 m, he set a Paralympic record and, in the 200 m, he set a world record.
- **Ilse Hayes** (visually disabled) won gold in the long jump, silver in the 100 m and fifth place in the 200 m.

- **Arnu Fourie** (leg amputee), the other Maties track athlete, improved on his personal best time of the season in these, his first Paralympic Games, by coming fourth in the 100 m. In the 200-m final, he came sixth.
- **Natalie du Toit** (leg amputee) reaped five gold medals in the pool. This includes three world records and two Paralympic records. She also received the Whang Youn Dai Performance award - the highest possible honour.
- **Ernst van Dyk** (wheelchair) upheld his reputation as sports legend by winning gold in the hand-cycling race and bronze in the marathon.
- Matie cyclists **Riaan Nel, Roxy Burns and Janos Plekker** also performed well. Riaan won silver in the mixed individual road races, while Roxy and Janos both improved on their personal best times.