

Francois Pienaar

Former Captain of the South African Rugby Team

François Pienaar, with twenty-nine international caps to his name, reached the highest peak in rugby union: he captained his country South Africa, to World Cup victory in 1995 on home turf and was presented the Webb Ellis Trophy by President Nelson Mandela.

In winning rugby's ultimate prize, François not only helped put South Africa back on the sporting map but also, having been named 'Newsmaker of the Year', he is his country's most celebrated icon after Nelson Mandela. Indeed, the two men forged a friendship during the World Cup when Mandela appeared on the presentation rostrum wearing a Springbok jersey with François' number on the back.

François was appointed captain on his first international appearance, against France in 1993, and is now the most capped South African captain and arguably the world's most popular one. Alongside François' playing talents, his debt management skills, charisma, and leadership abilities have enabled him to achieve God-like status in a country where rugby is a religion. He has proved himself an inspirational leader and is one of the few men on earth who can genuinely claim to have united South Africa behind a common cause.

François' skills in diplomacy were a clear feature in South Africa's passage from isolation to acclamation on the world rugby stage. A trained lawyer, François is an eloquent and articulate spokesman who is often quoted on a wide range of issues from rugby to business and from journalism to politics.

Having played a vital role for both his province and his country, François became player-coach of the struggling north London club Saracens. With him at the helm, Saracens' form underwent a dramatic transformation.

Pienaar eventually retired as a player and took over as Saracens CEO in 2000. The club ended the 2000/2001 Premiership season in fifth place, but the following year was less successful and with Saracens facing relegation François stepped down as coach and CEO, sensing that the club would benefit from a fresh perspective.

Away from rugby, Pienaar published an autobiography, *Rainbow Warrior* (1999), and regularly speaks on leadership, motivation and teamwork.

He has also been consistently involved in charity work with organizations such as Sargent Cancer Care for Children at the Royal Marsden Hospital, CHOC (The Children's Haematology and Oncology Clinic) and the Reach for a Dream Foundation. In November 2000, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Hertfordshire.

In 2002, he returned to South Africa and he currently lives in Cape Town with his wife and two sons, one of whom has Nelson Mandela for a godfather.

Worldwide, he continues to reinforce his reputation as the face of South African rugby. His charisma, leadership, and strength of character place him much in demand to speak about the game he loves with a passion all over the world.

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