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## **UCT rugby sensation inspired by historic Springbok call-up**



Ntokozo Makhaza

Photo: Lerato Maduna

University of Cape Town (UCT) student and rugby sensation Ntokozo Makhaza has been selected for the Springboks' latest alignment camp, marking a landmark achievement for both the 23-year-old and university rugby in South Africa.

The call-up places Makhaza among the country's top 54 players considered for national selection – an extraordinary recognition for a player who has not yet signed to a professional franchise and is still completing his degree at UCT.

"I actually thought they were just reaching out to congratulate me on the Varsity Cup season. It didn't sink in until I saw the official announcement on the Springboks' social media page," said Makhaza.

"I was very surprised that I'm part of the camp. A bit nervous, but excited. I'm just happy and motivated to see that people are watching and monitoring varsity rugby. It inspired me to believe more that the dreams I have are possible."

The Springbok invitation is the latest milestone in what has already been a standout year for Makhaza. He dominated the 2025 Varsity Cup, guiding the UCT Ikey Tigers to victory and earning both Player of the Year and Backline Player of the Year honours – for the second consecutive year.

Born in Harrismith in the Free State, Makhaza grew up playing soccer, but switched to rugby in primary school, quickly falling in love with the sport. Inspired by smaller, strategic players like Patrick Lambie, he found his place on the field as a fast, intelligent backline player.

He said he is focused on absorbing everything he can during the Springbok alignment camp.

"If anyone would say I would be part of the Springbok aligning camp a few years back or even at the beginning of this year I would have looked at them and laughed. To me it's an honour and I'm privileged and humbled. I think it's been created by the coaches and players because of the opportunity and platform they gave me. I'm humbled and excited for the opportunity.

"To be in the camp is an awesome opportunity of learning for me. The main goal is to learn and absorb as much as I can so that when I join the Cheetahs I'm better than when I was here at UCT. I'm always looking to improve and get better, and I know the camp will provide me with a lot of detail and I will find a lot of growth there."

Off the field, Makhaza has pursued a degree in psychology and social development at UCT. He credits the university's support structures and inclusive culture for helping him grow as both an athlete and a student.

"UCT fosters excellence and talent, not just in academics, but across everything. And being the best university in the southern hemisphere is testimony to that. There's a winning culture at UCT. And the fact the university is so diverse contributes to our success. Because we represent all cultural groups, meaning they understand where each student is coming from, and they try their best to accommodate everyone, which helps each person to do his best."

That winning culture came to fruition when Makhaza scored 32 points in the Varsity Cup final against Stellenbosch University, leading UCT to the championship and finishing the season with 155 points.

In July 2025, Makhaza will take the next step in his career by joining the Free State Cheetahs for the upcoming Currie Cup season – a move he sees as both a professional opportunity and a return home.

"They're giving youngsters a chance, and I want to make the most of that," he says. "It's about learning, growing and giving my best."

Mark Bashe, manager of UCT Sport and Recreation, described Makhaza's selection as "a historic moment for UCT and for university sport in South Africa."

"This achievement proves that when a student athlete performs at an exceptional level, they are not only recognised by our own coaches and provincial selectors but also by national coaches. It's virtually unheard of for a player to be invited to a Springbok alignment camp without first playing for a professional team," Bashe said.

"In this case, Makhaza has gone directly from being a university player to being signed by the Cheetahs, and even before playing his first professional match, he's already caught the eye of Springbok head coach Rassie Erasmus. We are absolutely thrilled and incredibly proud. This shows that UCT Rugby is developing top-tier talent capable of competing on the national stage."

Makhaza, now just one course short of completing his degree, is on track to graduate early next year – a shining example of both athletic and academic excellence.

His message to others is clear and powerful: "Work hard. Believe in yourself. The sky is not the limit – it's just the start."

- [Download high-resolution pictures.](#)
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*Story by: Myolisi Gophe, UCT News.*

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