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UCT's Makhaza sprints from Ikey Tigers to the Boks



Ntokozo Makhaza

Photo: Lerato Maduna

The spectacular rise of University of Cape Town (UCT) rugby star Ntokozo Makhaza reached a thrilling new high this week with his first official call-up to the Springbok squad – remarkably, before even making his senior Currie Cup debut.

Makhaza, a standout performer for the UCT Ikey Tigers and a student pursuing a degree in psychology and social development, was on Thursday, 6 June 2025 named in Rassie Erasmus' first Springbok squad of the 2025 season. He joins the 54-man squad as one of nine uncapped players, with the reigning back-to-back Rugby World Cup champions set to open their season against the Barbarians at Cape Town Stadium on 28 June.

The news came as a complete surprise for the fleet-footed winger, who will soon join the Toyota Cheetahs.

"To be honest, I found out through social media," he said. "Someone tagged me and said congratulations, and at first, I wasn't even sure what it was about. Then I saw a post on a rugby page and checked for myself – there was my name."

A pivotal figure in UCT's Varsity Cup triumph this year and back-to-back Varsity Cup Player of the Year, Makhaza described the moment as surreal.

"I didn't come through the traditional ranks. I wasn't a standout in a professional setup. But someone believed in me, and that means a lot."

Makhaza caught the eye of national coaches during last month's Springbok alignment camp, where he impressed among some of the sport's biggest names, such as Siya Kolisi, Damien Willemse, Bongsi Mbonambi, Lukhanyo Am and others.

"It was surreal to be surrounded by people who are the best, the two-time world champions," he said. "I didn't feel left out as they're very welcoming, friendly and always willing to help. It's an amazing environment that I want to be part of."

"I tried to remain as calm as I could. But obviously inside I was filled with joy. I was in disbelief. I'm still in a bit of disbelief. But that disbelief isn't necessarily me doubting my ability. To me, is this happening right now? Everything happening now is humbling. It just makes me so excited, and I don't know how to react."

For Makhaza, this milestone means more than personal achievement – it's a beacon of hope for others. "It reassures me that maybe, one day, I'll officially wear the green-and-gold jersey in a match. Beyond just rugby, it inspires me that hard work eventually pays off in life. It's testament that if you keep going, keep working hard, you will be rewarded. I'm not saying I deserve it, it's just a privilege to be part of this."

"To the rugby club as a whole and to people within the university environment, it gives them hope. People are watching and your dreams are valid and achievable. A lot of people have looked at my journey and thought, 'This guy wasn't ranked among the top. He didn't come through a professional system.' But someone believed in me, and now that belief is starting to pay off. It's inspiring to other people as much as it is inspiring to me."

UCT Sport and Recreation manager Mark Bashe praised Makhaza's selection as a historic and inspiring moment for the university. "His selection to the Springbok squad is a testament to the structures we've built to support and develop student-athletes," said Bashe.

"He's gone straight from Varsity Cup rugby to the national team, and that speaks volumes about his talent, determination and the exceptional support from the Ikey Tigers coaching staff, sports science team and the wider UCT community."

"When he was first invited to the Springbok alignment camp, we were hopeful. But we also knew it would be up to him to prove himself. And he did – he competed, he impressed and he earned his spot. This is a win for him, for UCT, and for every young player who dares to dream."

Story by: Myolisi Gophe, UCT News.

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