



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemarkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

23 June 2025

Another UCT rugby star signs pro deal after Varsity Cup glory



UCT rugby star Thomas Nel has realised his dream of signing for a professional club after he was signed by Suzuki Griquas. Photo: Varsity Cup

Another University of Cape Town (UCT) rugby sensation, Thomas Nel, has signed with professional outfit Suzuki Griquas, following a stellar season in which he played a pivotal role in the UCT Ikey Tigers' Varsity Cup victory this year.

This follows Ntokozo Makhaza being snapped up by the Toyota Cheetahs, and receiving his Springbok call-up before he could even play in the professional ranks.

Nel has also played for the university's Young Guns and has represented the Western Province at under-19, under-20 and under-21 levels.

For the 23-year-old centre, rugby has always been more than a game – it's a lifelong passion shaped by family, forged in schoolyards and sharpened through perseverance.

"I was very happy and excited about their offer. It's something I've been working toward since leaving school," Nel said, who is pursuing his second qualification at UCT. "To finally sign a professional contract and now get this chance is a dream come true."

His journey began in Johannesburg, where he grew up with three brothers in a household where sport was part of everyday life. "We were always playing something – cricket, rugby, you name it," he said. "My dad made sure sport was a big part of our lives. I loved the contact and physicality of rugby from the start. I was five when I broke my collarbone playing contact rugby with my brothers and their friends. They were older than me, but I thought I was stronger and tough."

Start of rugby career

After attending The Ridge and then Michaelhouse, a full-boarding school in KwaZulu-Natal, Nel's rugby career began taking shape with the Tigers while completing his BCom in Finance at UCT.

"I finished my degree in 2024 and decided to stay at UCT, where I'm now doing online studies in sports management," he said. "UCT has been such a big part of my development – not just as a player but as a person."

His standout performances during the Varsity Cup campaign quickly attracted the Griquas' attention, and they reached out shortly after the tournament ended. "They brought me in on a one-month contract to be a centre cover for the SA Cup 2025," he said. "Then there was an injury in the squad, and I ended up playing semifinals and the final, and soon after the SA Cup, they offered me a full contract."

The move to Kimberley, while an exciting career step, came with challenges. "It was a little bit daunting. Everyone in Kimberly speaks Afrikaans, and I can't speak Afrikaans. I was far away from Cape Town and didn't know anyone. I was a bit nervous before arriving and after arriving. But as soon as I arrived, I realised it was a place focused on development. There are no egos in the Griqua team. Everyone is very welcoming and accommodating. Everyone's there to work hard and grow. It is such a great place to just focus on rugby and make sure you develop properly as a player," he said.

Launch pad

For Nel, joining the Griquas is not just a milestone, but a launchpad.

"It's the right first step. At a smaller union, it's a better chance of game time and to develop properly. My goal is to keep improving and hopefully assist the club to win more trophies and move on to a bigger union or even overseas."

Despite stepping into the professional arena, he remains deeply grateful for his time at UCT. "UCT's rugby club isn't just about the game; it's about relationships," he noted. "From training with the under-20s in my first year to playing for the first team and winning Varsity Cup in my final year ... it's been an incredible journey. For players who didn't get contracts straight out of school, I think my story shows that if you work hard and stay committed, the opportunities will come."

As Nel dons the Griquas jersey for the first time, he embraces not only his personal dreams but also the pride of the university and club that helped shape him. "To anyone at UCT thinking about joining the rugby club, do it," he said. "Whether you're in the leagues, Varsity Cup, or just helping out, being part of that club will be one of the best decisions you'll make."

Story by Myolisi Gophe, UCT News

ENDS

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Ridovhona Mbulaheni

Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Tel: (021) 650 2333
Cell: (064) 905 3807
Email: ridovhona.mbulaheni@uct.ac.za
Website: www.uct.ac.za