
Francois Pienaar



Francois Pienaar is a former South African rugby player, playing for the Springboks in South Africa, followed by a career with the Saracens in England. Whilst playing for South Africa, he captained the side in his first match and in every one of his 29 appearances, culminating in the famous victory at the World Cup in 1995. He was acknowledged at that time as an inspiring leader, with an uncompromising approach to commitment.

Francois has won many accolades, which include:

- South African Rugby player of the year 1993
- International Rugby player of the year 1994
- International Rugby Captain of the year 1995
- Rugby personality of the year nominated by the top 20 rugby writers in Britain in 1996.
- Inducted into the International hall of fame in 2005

In 1996, Francois joined the Saracens Club in England and later became the first player/ coach in game and later the CEO at Saracens. He helped to transform Saracens from an amateur to a professional rugby club. Under Francois' leadership they won their first ever trophy in 127 years. He received an honorary doctorate on 23 November 2000 from the University of Hertfordshire at the age of 33.

Francois was chosen to be the ambassador for Guinness and Visa, the main sponsors during the 1999 and 2004 Rugby World Cups. He was also part of the ITV Rugby World Cup commentary team and was twice nominated by the Royal Television Society for an award as best sports pundit. He has been the only amateur to receive such a nomination. When he returned to live in South Africa, the First Rand Group approached Francois where he became head of sponsorships and strategic business development. In 2005, First National Bank as CEO seconded Francois for the 2011 Rugby World cup bid. Francois became Provincial Chairman of First National Bank in the Western Cape until 2009. In March 2009 Francois was approached by the Indian Premier League to spearhead their marketing campaign in South Africa.

He left First Rand Bank to follow his passion for sport, media and entertainment and started Advent Sport Entertainment and Media (Pty) Ltd in 2009 in which First Rand Bank became a shareholder. Francois is involved in numerous charities and was the founder of the Make A Difference (MAD) charitable organisation when he returned to SA.

Nelson Mandela said: "it was under his inspiring leadership that rugby became the pride of the entire county, his leadership extended beyond the field of rugby and he truly represents all South Africans. Under his inspiring leadership a nation was brought together."

In 2009 Warner Brothers under the direction of Clint Eastwood produced the Oscar nominated movie "Invictus" focusing on the 1995 Rugby World cup in South Africa and how a once divided nation became world champions, with Francois played by Matt Damon.