



dalen mmako

ALWAYS ON THE BALL

DALEN MMAKO

Words by Philna van Veijeren, Photos by Bernard van Tonder

In 2012, Die Hoërskool Menlopark's Grade 9 cricket star decided to go to hockey try-outs. He decided on a whim, after a friend suggested it, and showed up ill prepared, wielding a pink hockey stick that he had borrowed at the last minute. That evening, he was sick from over-exerting himself. The next day, his name was on the Under-16 team list. This was the beginning of great things.

"Hockey is an instinct. You just pick up the stick and jol." Dalen Mmako believes his ability to play hockey is a God-given talent. His heaven-sent skills have earned him a spot in the Under-18 Northerns team. Mmako is also the co-captain of Menlopark's first hockey team in this, the second year he's played for Menlo's prestigious team.

Yet, at heart, Mmako will always be a cricket man. Success in cricket is the very reason he chose to attend Die Hoërskool Menlopark, after all. Mmako is a member of the Premiere League Cricket Club, and plays for the North Gauteng team, as well as for Menlopark's first cricket team. For him, cricket is more of a challenge than hockey.

"Cricket is a mental game. You can't play with your heart. And, for me, that's the biggest challenge." Despite being faced with this difficulty, Dalen Mmako thrives. He has big dreams for himself in the cricket world. He hopes to be a pro-cricketer and wear the sought-after green and gold – and he's very realistic about his chances. "Most of our black cricket players are bowlers. I, on the other hand, am predominantly a batsman.

Having a contract with CSA would be a dream come true," he tells Game On.

In the meantime, Mmako is working hard at school. He believes in the importance of matriculating well, and has aspirations of studying law at the University of Pretoria, while being a member of Sonop Koshuis. The hostel life seems to suit him, as he was a weekly boarder in Die Hoërskool Menlopark's hostel since Grade 8. Living away from home taught him to be self-reliant and to make sensible decisions, but his family is still very important to him. It's not easy for him that he doesn't see them often. They live far away in Siyabuswa, Mpumalanga.

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Despite his mind-blowing talents, he still believes in maximum input, and spends most of his week training. He plays hockey every day of the week, training two hours a day, as well as participating in matches on Wednesdays and Fridays. Mmako also coaches Laerskool Menlopark's girls' 1st hockey team and Under-12A cricket team, and is a hockey umpire.

As far as his cricket training goes, he has been 'taking it slow' so far this year. During the finals of the Northerns try-outs, he hurt his back, and has been recovering since. He now spends four hours hitting cricket balls twice a week, as well as doing fitness training every day with a conditioning coach. Come to think of it, 'taking it slow' might have a different definition in Mmako's dictionary than it does in the rest of the world's!

Playing both cricket and hockey so fervently and with so much success can sometimes take its toll. The back injury he's been struggling with is due to the combination of playing two demanding, but very divergent, sports.

Just when you think that it is not possible for Dalen Mmako to have any more talent, he pulls another few rabbits out of the hat. He is proud of having been the Gauteng Under-10 cross country champion, and he also won the title of "Meneer Boerie" at Laerskool Boerefort three times in a row! In Grade 9, Mmako's drama group won a dance competition overall in North Gauteng. He still has drama as a subject, to 'develop his cultural side'.

With such a busy schedule, it's a miracle that he gets any sleep at all. Luckily for the rest of the world, Dalen Mmako does not believe in hiding his abundant talents.

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