



# Wine is a contact sport

**M**uch has been written about the Springboks defending their Rugby World Cup title in Paris a few weeks ago. Some people call these Boks the greatest team ever, based on the large number of matches they had to win against top-tier nations over the course of this year's tournament. Whether or not you agree with this summary probably depends largely on your individual loyalties and vested interests.

From my perspective, most of the debate is somewhat moot. I prefer to focus on something else, something much bigger, and something which will hopefully have a longer lasting impact.

The day after the Boks were crowned once more, I saw a short video on social media of a crowd at Canal Walk watching the end of that match, followed by raucous scenes at

the final whistle. It's impossible for me to say how many people there were, gathered in an otherwise soulless shopping centre on the outskirts of Cape Town until nearly midnight on a weekend. My guess is there were no fewer than 10,000 fanatical Springbok supporters that evening; I may be underestimating the actual number by a large quantum.

I posted a link to the video, in which I described the scene as Siya's and Rassie's real victory. Within 24 hours, it had been reposted nearly 200 times, liked by more than 1,000 people and seen by well over 100,000 subscribers on X (or Twitter, as I still prefer calling it). Based on these numbers, this was one of my most "viral" posts ever in more than a decade on the platform.

## A toast to them

The subsequent victory tour around South Africa underscored my point. The real achievement was not on the rugby field; it related much more to nation-building and a vision of what the country might become once it manages to rise above petty politics, corruption and ineptitude.

If you want proof that the Siya-Rassie bromance is not the only story of hope and excellence in an environment which was blighted by apartheid as recently as 30 years ago, there is another feel-good story which I'd like to share.

Less than a week after the Rugby World Cup final, I was lucky enough to be invited to the UK launch of what is arguably South Africa's best ever wine. I say arguably, because beauty is in the eye (or in this particular case, the mouth) of the beholder, and the world of wine-tasting will always be a little more subjective than beating the All Blacks by a

single point in a game of rugby. With a score of 99 out of 100 awarded by master of wine Greg Sherwood, the MR de Compostella 2021 does, however, happen to be the most highly rated still wine ever produced in Bok country.

The abbreviation in the name of this Bordeaux-style blend stands for the two individuals involved in the making of it: Mzokhona Mvemve and Bruwer Raats. They met just over 20 years ago, when Mvemve originally joined Raats for a three-month practical assignment on his Polkadraai farm. They soon went their separate ways but have remained close friends. Perhaps even more important is that they've continued to share a dream of making the best possible wine together, every year since 2004. And needless to say, the two of them have been tremendously successful, as underlined by the accolades their wine now receives on an annual basis.

When I met Raats in London a couple of weeks ago, he took tremendous pride in sharing the journey with me, and rightly so. Like most success stories, it was not always easy. In the early years, he would travel from Stellenbosch to the US (by far the biggest retail market for wine) a few times per year to promote his and Mvemve's product, for example. Wine is a contact sport after all, in his own words.

I suggested to Raats that his cooperation with Mvemve had a number of obvious parallels with the tremendously successful partnership of Siya Kolisi and Rassie Erasmus over the past few years. Yes, and that's what is possible when you have singular focus on a common goal, was his simple reply.

As you read this, another South African sports team might just feature in a World Cup final. May Temba (and the other Rassie) make us equally proud. I will be enjoying some MR de Compostella as I watch them. ✕

