

Harmony Sports Academy



The Harmony Sports Academy was first called the Virginia Sports Academy when it opened its doors in 2003. Virginia has a remote connection with Queen Elizabeth I of England! Very remote. Elizabeth I was known as the Virgin Queen, more because she was unmarried than necessarily from any virtuous celibacy. When the state in the USA was founded during her reign, the settlers called it Virginia in her honour. In 1890 two railway engineers from Virginia were working in the Northern Free State and etched the name Virginia on a rock, and that became the name of the siding nearby. Then came the gold discoveries of the 1950s and Virginia grew from a siding into a prosperous mining town on the banks of the Sand River with the world's deepest pipe-mine into the earth.

The Harmony Gold Mining Company owns the harmony mine in Virginia and got involved in sponsoring the sports academy. That explains the name!

The government had identified the Goldfields as a place in need of social development, and that development would include sport. Harmony Gold was involved in the development of the sports academy whose aim was to develop sport in the area.

In January 2003 it opened its doors to 40 rugby and soccer players (24 rugby, 16 soccer), the result of co-operation between Harmony and the Sports Trust. Harmony have provided the accommodation and sports facilities. The boys attend local schools for their academic needs — Hentie Cilliers for those whose home language is Afrikaans, Harmony High for those whose home language is English, and Nobilis for those who have special needs.

The students live in hostels (one for rugby and one for soccer) where they enjoy three balanced meals a day. The boys have been identified and recruited from various parts of South Africa. Sports training happens a minimum of three times a week and the Academy functions as a team of its own. They have done well from the start.

In 2003 Virginia Sports Academy's rugby side played 15 matches, winning 14 and losing just one. Twelve of the boys were chosen for the Griffons teams for Craven Week or Grant Khomo Week. Four were chosen for special SARU development in the Green Squad — Yusaf Abrahams, Romano Sebja, Jackson Silo and Dabeon Dragoender. In 2004 the number of rugby players grew from 24 to 36 and the Virginia Sports Academy was admitted into the Northern Free State Schools League, reaching the semi-final in a year in which it played 15 matches and lost two. In 2004 nine boys were selected for the Griffons side at the Grant Khomo Week and seven for the Craven Week side. In 2005 there were 29 students and this time, name changed, the Harmony Sports Academy won the Northern Free State Schools League, beating Kroonstad's Rooiskool in the final. Eight players went to Craven Week, six to the Academy Week and three to the Grant Khomo Week. Dabeon Dragoender was chosen for the South African Under-19 team.

In 2006, eight students went to Craven Week and another eight to the Academy Week. Six went to the Grant Khomo Week and two to the Special Schools Week. In addition, five played for the Griffons Under-19 team.

The star has been Cecil Afrika, whose home is in Port Elizabeth. He played for the Emerging Springbok Sevens in Kenya and was named man of the tournament. He was also chosen for the South African Schools side. He was an obvious star at the 2006 Craven Week in Johannesburg. Boela Abrahams was chosen for the SA Schools B team and Rowayne Maurice for the SA Special Schools team. The Academy has been performing excellently in the Northern Free State league and has some big wins to its credit.

When Chris Coetzee was the CEO of the Griffons he was very much the driving force behind the establishment of the Academy. He is now its manager. The former Northern Transvaal captain Jan Oberholzer was the first rugby coach. The present coach is Jacques Juries, the former provincial player of South Western Districts origin. He is also the hostel father of the rugby hostel. A great deal has been achieved in a short time.

