The definitive Springbok business XV

FOCUS The departure of four Big Men complicates selection of SA’s best in business.

In rugby, speed, strength, skill, courage and perseverance are the factors that count. In business the same qualities are vital. Greats, such as Donny Gordon and Sol Kerzner, had the same eye for the gap as the legendary Gysie Pienaar.

The final measure of any candidate for the Bok business team is what they do for shareholders. There are two classes of players in my Bok business team — those, like Anton Rupert, Bill Venter and Raymond Ackerman, who start with nothing and build something formidable.

And those, like Jacko Maree, who start with something good and make it great.

Nick Dennis, for example, took the helm of Tiger and, in eight years, reshaped the company. In the process he lifted the value of Tiger from R3bn to R75bn. Unfortunately, like Percy Montgomery, he’s a sad recent loss to the team.

The Boks recently lost Os du Randt. The Business Bois are about to lose its front row as the FirstRand trio of GT Ferreira, Laurie Dippenaar and Paul Harris contemplate retirement.


Here are four names that could complete the first XV: Patrice Motsepe of ARM, Markus Jooste of Steinhoff, Iannie Mouton of PSG, Sizwe Nxasana of FirstRand, who added billions at Telkom, and is a great: hope for FirstRand.

In any Bok side there are today’s form players and others there for former glories. Global recession casts a dark shadow over the selections of Ivan Clark and Gary Bell.

Like Peter de Villiers, I face the problem of too much talent for the team. Merely to warm the bench would be an honour in this company.

Sports talent runs in families and so, it appears, does talent for business. That makes Johann Rupert and Robbie Venter compelling selections. I am sure there would be a bowl of protest at the first woman to wear Springbok rugby colours. In business, however, gender doesn’t matter, so we have three female candidates: Gail Kelly; Gill Marcus and Maria Ramos.

“Gail who?”, you ask. Kelly, once a seller at Nedbank, is today CEO of Westpac Bank in Australia. She is the highest paid exec in Australia; added billions to the Westpac market cap and ranked 11th in Fortune magazine’s rating of the world’s most powerful women.

As CEO of Transnet, Maria was also in that list. As Reserve Bank governor, Marcus would be excellent backup for the front row depleted by the impending departure of the FirstRand front rankers.

Pieter de Villiers avoids selection from among our many good players abroad but I would consider several very effective: business players among the diaspora:

* Kerr Neilson, who is doing a Donny Gordon with his Platinum Investment Group down under,
* Marius Kloppers, CEO of BHP Billiton,
* Elon Musk, who made his first fortune developing PayPal’s software, went on to found SpaceX, a challenger in the private sector space race. He is now CEO of the Tesla sports car venture in California. Tesla, “the next General Motors”, says Fortune, is exciting its Hollywood customers and has attracted big investment from Daimler.

We should list the Frik du Preez of SA business. The all-time greats not mentioned would be: Cecil John Rhodes; Ernest and Harry Oppenheimer; Barney Barnato, PK van der Bijl; Wim de Villiers; Raymond Ackerman; Sol Kerzner; Donald Gordon; Anton Rupert; IG van der Horst; Bill Venter; Derek Keys; Bill Lynch; Ted Scales and Andreas Wassenaar.

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