

After School Sport Coaching Excellence Award Winner

Danritch Booysen

Players from Maskam Primary School in Vandrhyndorp, an isolated West Coast town with approximately 4000 residents, are dominating table tennis in the region and beyond. This is all thanks to Danritch Booysen, a young man who's worked his way up from a volunteer to Centre Manager of the school's after school programme.



Located 300km north of Cape Town along the N7, Vandrhyndorp is perhaps best known for its wild flowers. Here, during spring each year, tourists swell to the quaint Victorian-style town to see the more than 6000 plant species that turn the otherwise dry vista into a mass of colour.

These days, however, Vandrhyndorp has begun to gain a reputation for something else: the sporting excellence of its young learners in the field of table tennis. Over successive years, players coached by Danritch Booysen have distinguished themselves at district, provincial and national levels. Others excel at chess, cricket and even gumboot dancing. These are some of the sporting arts and culture activities coached by Danritch – who is affectionately known as “Coach Dennis” or simply “Coach” by the kids he mentors and indeed, by all the townspeople.

So, when the Western Cape Government After School Game Changer along with the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport put out the call to recognise sport coaching excellence in after school programmes, Danritch was an obvious choice.

According to Ms Danieliah Zimri, a teacher in the sport and cultural section of Maskam Primary and who nominated him for the award, “Danritch does work of good quality; he is very passionate, willing and active in our school events. He helps the kids prepare for major sports, arts and culture events. Our school has been

very successful in table tennis events at district and provincial level. The number of kids who want to play table tennis at our school keeps growing. From last year the number of arts and culture entries keep growing with the help of Danritsch and his team.”

Danritsch began working with kids in 2011 as a LoveLife groundbreaker. In 2013, he began volunteering at Maskam Primary in the after school programme. Then, in 2014, he joined MADA (Matzikama Alkohol en Dwelms Aksie), as a facilitator working at farm schools in the broader Matzikama region, educating learners on the hazards of alcohol and drug abuse. A club level cricketer and table tennis player in his own right, Danritsch returned to Maskam Primary in 2015, starting as a coach and working his way up to his current position of centre manager of their MOD Centre – the Mass participation, Opportunity and access, Development and Growth (MOD) programmes run by the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport at selected school premises which offer a range of after school activities to learners.

Given his abilities and passion for the sport, not to mention the excellent results he’s helped to achieve, Danritsch remains the school’s table tennis coach, and the results really are impressive! In 2016, 12 Maskam players – four girls and eight boys – were represented in the West Coast district team. Of these, three players, one girl and two boys made it onto the Western Cape Table Tennis team that year. In 2017, 11 players (seven boys and four girls) competed in the West Coast District Table Tennis Team. One of the girls has progressed to the Western Cape School Team. Several of Danritsch’s former players have progressed to high school, and are now playing at club level.

In searching for the coach of the year, earlier this year, the Western Cape Government After School Game Changer along with the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport sent out a call for nominations in search of an exceptional sports coach working in an accredited after school programme in the Province. In order to be considered, nominees therefore had to be working as a sports coach serving school-going learners in the Western Cape. Moreover, they had to work in a no-fee or low-fee school or with learners attending these schools.

Maskam is a low-fee school. According to Ms Zimri, many of the school’s learners come out of difficult financial circumstances. “Danritsch, together with his colleagues, always take the initiative to have small functions such as talent shows and sales to raise funds. These funds are used to support the

leaners involved in the MOD Centre after school programme.” She explained that funds are used to buy more stock and help to subsidise the cost of travelling to competitions.

Ms Zimri commended the way that Danritsch manages his MOD centre: “Danritsch is also very active in doing the administration tasks of the MOD Centre; this can be seen in the way he uses his free time when he uses the school’s computer room to complete the admin work. He also has very good communication skills because he always makes time to communicate with the school principal, sharing plans and ideas. Danritsch always makes an effort to work with school staff.”

Praising his attitude and involvement with learners and the school body, as well as the excellent way he empowers learners with games, sport skills and teambuilding, Ms Zimri added, “Learners and parents in the community always look up to Danritsch with respect.”

“I love working with kids, I love creating opportunities or platforms for them”

Given the isolation of Vanrhynsdorp, the fact that Danritsch has provided so many of his learners with the opportunity to master table tennis over successive years at district, provincial and national levels is inspiring – especially considering the trajectory of his career.

Tasked with deciding the award winners, the adjudication panel for the award remarked on how Mr Booysen has “worked to integrate the school management team and the MOD Centre with his good communication and stakeholder skills. It sets a benchmark for best practice in MOD Centres”.

But for Danritsch, success is all about his learners. “I love working with kids,” he said. “I love creating opportunities or platforms for them – where they can experience and see different places, build confidence, challenge themselves, do positive things outside their comfort zones, be energetic, make positive, healthy choices, be open-minded and never let their current situation like poverty, substance abuse and other negative things stand in the way of reaching their goals in life.”

In addition to a trophy to add to his collection, Danritsch received a prize to go towards strengthening Maskam Primary School’s MOD Centre and after school programme.