

# After School Sport Coaching Excellence Award Finalist

## Thembekile Bulu

Thembekile Bulu fell in love with Ballroom and Latin American dance when he was nine years old and attending Nobantu Afterschool Care in Mfuleni, Cape Town. After completing Grade 12, Bulu was selected as a coach at the same aftercare centre he once attended. Now a South African National Championship dancer, Thembekile is full-time staff member of Nobantu Afterschool Care, sharing his passion for dance with the 80 kids he coaches.



In many ways, Thembekile's story is the story of Nobantu Afterschool Care. Established in 1999, this centre aims to empower learners and provide skills development, especially the skills focused on conflict resolution and peace building. Nobantu is a successful Partial After Care Centre registered with the Department of Social Development and has a consistent core of learners attending regularly. The centre caters to a largely underprivileged community, offering a variety of sport and recreation activities, including ballroom and Latin American dance, chess, soccer, music and drama. Skills offered include basic computer training and gardening, while learners are assisted with reading and homework supervision.

In 2004, the then 9-year-old Thembekile was drawn to the centre by soccer. "But I changed my mind immediately after watching dance sport practice," Thembekile said, adding that his passion and love for the sport meant that he learnt the syllabus and techniques very quickly. He began entering competitions, routinely winning first place.

By 2013, Thembekile was dancing at pre-championship level with partner Akhona Mangco. That year, he won the title of best Latin American dancer in the Western Cape out of the dancers

representing the 20 registered dance schools in the province. In 2014, Thembekile was invited by a local radio station to address young people as a motivational speaker.

After matriculating in 2015, Thembekile joined Nobantu Afterschool Care as a full-time staff member. In addition to his dance sport coaching duties, he assists the centre's 139 learners with reading, computer training and homework. He coordinates gym sessions, soccer, as well as theory and practical lessons for all the programmes offered at Nobantu Afterschool Care. Thembekile attends skills training and workshops outside of the centre and regularly meets with stakeholders in the area, such as schools, non-profit organisations and attends police forum meetings.

It is clear that Thembekile is an asset to the centre and to his community. However, it is as dance sport coach that he most shines. Currently, 80 Nobantu ballroom and Latin American dancers take part in 10 local competitions – one a month throughout the year. In 2016, two of Thembekile's students were selected to represent the Western Cape in the World Trials dance competition held in Johannesburg. This couple, Sinethemba Masindwa and Yamkela Tofu, clinched second place in the competition and were then selected to star in Xcellerate, a new series that aired on SABC3. This year, Sinethemba and Yamkela – junior South African national champions in the 12-15 year category – were again selected to take part in the World Trials. They were accompanied to Secunda, Gauteng by their coach, Thembekile.

“Many parents are coming in their numbers to register their kids,” said Ms Nonkolelo Nonambane, Principal of Nobantu Afterschool Care. The centre credits Thembekile for this success, clarifying that ballroom and Latin American dance is the most popular activity at Nobantu by far. Thembekile is seen as a role model – a success story as a dancer in his own right and as someone inspiring young people in Mfuleni to achieve their dreams via dance.

So, when Ms Nonambane first heard that the Western Cape After School Game Changer and the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport were looking for nominees for the inaugural After School Sport Coaching Excellence Award, Thembekile was

a natural choice. As a coach working with school-going learners in the after school space and with learners drawn from low-fee or no-fee schools in the area, Thembekile meets all the criteria for the award.

What made him stand out for the judges of the Coaching Excellence Award was the popularity of his classes, the successes his students enjoy and the fact that his classes are well supported by parents, community and other stakeholders.

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After careful consideration by the evaluation panel, Thembekile was announced as a top three finalist for the Coaching Excellence Award 2017. The adjudication panel for the award reflected that “both Principal Nonambane and Thembekile himself speak about his passion and motivation to inspire and motivate young people, particularly how the programme opens up new futures and possibilities for learners who otherwise would not have an opportunity to experience life outside of Mfuleni. This young man really is a role model for the youth in his area and we look forward to seeing his career progress.”

Thembekile has many plans for his future. “He is working hard to be promoted from Adult Championship to Professional level and also looking forward to becoming a Dance Federation adjudicator in the future,” said Principal Nonambane. “We are motivating and supporting him to reach his goals.”

Thembekile is an inspiring example of a community working together to uplift its youth. He believes in showing his dance students a world beyond Mfuleni, yet he is very much part of the area. No matter how far he goes in his dancing career, Thembekile is committed to Nobantu Afterschool Care and to sharing his success with a new generation at the very same centre where he found his feet – and footwork.