

ELEVEN YEARS. A LIFETIME OF GRATITUDE.

by Siya Kolisi

So, the time has come to turn the page on one of my greatest chapters. And wow, where do I start?

When I arrived at DHL Newlands in 2012, I arrived as a boy. Today, I depart as a man.

The DHL Stormers and Western Province welcomed me in with open arms and have wrapped them tightly around me and my loved ones ever since. You have continued to fight for me and the things I have learnt during my time here stretch far beyond the rugby field. The man you see today, with the values I hold dearly, is a product of this team, our faithful fanbase, my coaches and my teammates, past and present.

From being signed by Rassie, to being coached by Allistair Coetzee, Robbie Fleck and then by Dobbo – each one of you took me under your wing and guided me through to the highest level, showing me what it meant to be a leader on, and off, the field.

I am forever indebted to you for offering me the opportunity to live out my dream.

You have allowed little boys and girls across South Africa who look just like me to believe that they too, can be anything they put their mind to. The power in this thinking is endless, and you have provided that hope.

De Villiers, Burger, Habana, Bekker, De Jongh, Aplon...all Western Province legends in their own right. It fills me with pride knowing I was able to share the field with such huge names in the game. I was just a Grade 8 student when I was pictured asking Schalk for an autograph, today I stand humbled knowing that I got to call him my teammate. A dream that could have only been achieved through the DHL Stormers family.

And to the fans, feeling your energy week-in-week-out, there has been no better place in the world to play than DHL Newlands. Through all the challenges, you have held me high. I will miss the butterflies I felt as we approached the stadium in the bus, seeing you all on the corner cheering us on. The atmosphere has truly been second-to-none. It feels like only yesterday that I played my first Currie Cup match and felt the roar on scoring my first try. To the guys who sit behind the bench at Newlands, you have made my experience. Your non-stop cheering, your positive chirps and uplifting tone was always appreciated and, at times, carried us through the 80 minutes. My biggest regret is only that I was not able to bring you the silverware that this fanbase truly deserves.

For your kindness and compassion towards me and my loved ones, I am thankful.

To the Union, who took a chance on me 11 years ago, to be part of your history has been my greatest privilege.

To DHL, BrightRock and all commercial partners involved with the club and union, thank you for your contribution to guaranteeing I could play consistently at the highest level.

Thank you to the media for the support and for sharing this journey with the rest of South Africa.

Cape Town is, and will always be, my home. Your beauty never ceases to amaze me and raising my children here has been a joy.

But for the young boy from the township, now is the time to spread my wings. Now is the time to seize opportunities and experience this beautiful country we get to call home to its fullest.

So, DHL Stormers, Western Province, and the great people of Cape Town, this is not a goodbye, this is only a 'see you soon'.

Thank-you for everything.

Siya Kolisi