

ASTRO WIZARD

South African women's hockey striker Toni Marks has a big future in the game. By **Jonathan Cook**



Tell us about your childhood in Port Elizabeth and how you got into sport.

A lot of my childhood was spent around a hockey field as I would always go and watch my dad play – he got me into the sport. I attended Collegiate Girls' High School, where I played hockey and took part in karate. I made the SA U16 and U18 squads for hockey, and I was part of the South African karate team.

Are you studying further?

I'm doing a BA at Wits. I do miss PE; it gets tough being away from family for long periods of time. And I don't enjoy doing my own laundry!

What is the standard of hockey like in Johannesburg compared to Port Elizabeth?

The league in Joburg is tougher than the one in PE, every weekend is a difficult game so it forces me to work harder. Our Wits University team is a lot of fun; they're a great bunch of girls and I'm excited to see what the season has in store! In PE I played for Gelvandale Hockey club for about nine years so they became my hockey family.

Your coach at Wits is SA hockey legend Pietie Coetzee. What's it like working with her?

She was also a striker like me, so I'd say she is the best coach I could've asked for. She pays



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attention to me and always gives me tips during and after games on how to handle situations better. The fact that she is a legend and the top Test goal-scorer in women's hockey history means she has a wealth of experience to share.

Who else has played a big role in your career?

Definitely [former SA women's coach] Giles Bonnet. He gave me the opportunity to be trained by awesome coaches during my time in Holland and gave me the opportunity to be a part of the national set-up at a young age.

What went through your mind when you found out you had been picked for the SA senior women's team?

I remember having breakfast at the Tuks Sport HPC in Pretoria when Giles asked to speak to me and told me I'd be playing that afternoon. I was extremely excited and might have shed a tear or two.

Tell us about your debut.

The match was played in Pretoria, against Scotland. I was only 18 but I was lucky enough to get a goal. It's a game I will never forget.

How many Test match goals have you scored and in how many Tests?

I'm on eight goals in 14 games.

You also played for SA U21 at the Junior World Cup in 2013. What was that experience like?

It was in Monchengladbach, Germany, and

TONI'S FAVOURITES

FOOD: Lamb chops

ACTOR: Kevin Hart

TV SHOW: *Catfish*, *Ridiculousness* and *Keeping up with the Kardashians*

HOLIDAY DESTINATION: Amsterdam

BREAKFAST: Bacon

BOARD GAME: 30 seconds

CAR: Nissan GTR Skyline

SPORT OUTSIDE HOCKEY: Motorsport

one of the best tours I've been on. The team vibe was great on and off the field and we ended up doing quite well! I was also able to see the level the other countries are at and how much harder we need to train to compete internationally.

Do you have any hockey heroes?

First choice would definitely be former SA legend Marsha Cox, but outside South Africa it is Soledad Garcia of Argentina. She was an extremely skilful and ruthless striker and I looked up to her a lot.

What are your long-term goals as a player?

To maintain my spot in the national team and to help Wits achieve the goal of a top-four position at USSA [the annual SA Varsitys tournament]. Eventually, I'd love to attend an Olympic Games. I would also love to go back to Amsterdam, by far the best city in the world for me! I love the hockey culture there — it's just a different level.

Do you see yourself as a role model?

Coming from PE there are very few female national players for younger players to look up to and I enjoy the responsibility of being one of them.

What qualities do you hope may inspire those girls?

Hard work, loads and loads of it.

What influence have your mom and dad had on you?

They taught me that nothing worth having comes easy; you need to work really hard to get what you want. Also, respect and good manners. I hope the umpires agree with me on this one! ■

