

# BNP Paribas good preparation for Paralympics

**Northside** — Although all eyes were on the Men's Team in the BNP Paribas, South Africa had three other teams competing in this event.

The SA junior team of Gift Lekhanyane, Mabel Mankgele and Mariska Venter also achieved a first for SA.

The juniors had a good start to the tournament, beating Argentina 3-0 on the first day and then duplicating their 3-0 win on the second day against Israel.

These two victories had them positioned to compete with Great Britain, The Netherlands and the USA as the top four nations in the world.

Although defeated by Great Britain and the Netherlands, they achieved another first for SA – a place in the top four nations in the world and an automatic entry on merit for the 2013 event. This is a vast improvement since the 2011 event, where they only defeated one nation and finished seventh.

The green and gold Quads team of Lucas Sithole, Steven Kekai and Bongani Dlamini also improved their standing and achieved a first for Team SA. Although competing in a very tough division, where few teams have players ranked outside the top 16 in the world, they were not going to go unnoticed.

The team members, which have between one and six years' experience, finished in position six, and secured themselves a place on merit as one of the top six teams in the world and an automatic entry to the 2013 event.

The SA women's team of Kgothatso Montjane, Celia du Toit and Rose van der Meer competed in the Open Women's Division, where they finished



**Kgothatso Montjane in action. Picture submitted**

12th. Although the team lacked the depth needed to win the ties and finish in a higher-placed team position, it must be noted that the number one player, and SA's golden girl Kgothatso Montjane was once again undefeated in the singles. All eyes

will be on her performance in the upcoming Paralympics.

She is in good form, and has recently defeated the World number two, Annick van Koort.

These inspirational sport stars arrived back in South Africa on Wednesday 29 May.

Sydwell and Evans, however, will return on 16 June, after they have competed in three events in Korea. These events are high-grade international events, and form part of their preparation for the Paralympics later in the year.

"It is always such an honour for the players to represent their country. Tennis as an individual sport has limited opportunities for the players to play for their country. You can see the difference – they play with more pride, passion and commitment, knowing they are not only playing for themselves, but for a team, and a country," says Wheelchair Tennis South Africa's director and coach Holger Losch.

He added, "The BNP World Team Cup is the premier event on the Wheelchair Tennis calendar, and it is fantastic to see that our team's hard work is paying off. Year on year our standings are improving. We are no longer viewed as a developing nation, but are becoming one of the top wheelchair tennis nations in the World".

Participation in local and international tournaments is made possible by a generous sponsorship by Airports Company South Africa, the official sponsor of the sport.

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# Next stop Paralympics

**Northside** — The prestigious BNP Paribas World Team Cup is the wheelchair tennis equivalent of the Davis Cup and Fed Cup, but it is played once a year and has four divisions (Open Men, Open Women, Quads and Juniors) competing on the same site annually.

Last year South Africa (SA) hosted the World Team Cup for the first time. This year the 28th edition of the competition took place in Asia for the first time.

At this year's event in Seoul (South Korea), 158 participants from 52 teams competed from 21 to 27 May.

In the Open Men's division it was Evans Maripa, Sydwell Mathonsi and Marshall Marsh together with coach Gerald Stoffberg who claimed a silver medal for South Africa in the World Group II Division.

SA was teamed up with Greece and Canada in the Round Robin section. Team SA started off with a bang, comfortably securing a 3-0 win over Greece, and following it up with a well-contested match against Canada, where Evans and Sydwell both won their singles to secure the tie.

SA progressed to a play-off for places 1 to 4 in World Group II. The players faced Sri Lanka, where the number-one singles match was closely contested, but Team SA was victorious.

Evans (SA) defeated Upali Rajakaruna (SRI) 7-6(8), 5-7, 6-0 and Sydwell (SA) defeated Disanayake Gamini (SRI) 6-3, 6-1.

The doubles match was also won by Evans and Sydwell, giving the SA men's team a 3-0 win over Sri Lanka.

It was a proud and very excited SA team that progressed to their first final at the BNP World Team Cup where they were to take on Thailand for the title.

In the singles Sydwell lost to Suthi Khlongruea 4-6, 0-6, while Evans came agonisingly close to forcing a deciding doubles rubber against Suwithchai Merngprom, but two tiebreaks proved to be the difference as Merngprom secured a thrilling 7-6(4), 3-6, 7-6(5) victory to claim the World Group 2 title.

Winning silver in Group II was not the only reason for the SA men's team to celebrate, but they had won a chance of progressing to World Group I and joining the top 16 Open Men's wheelchair tennis nations in the world.

Team SA therefore took on Belgium. Win or lose this match, Team SA would come home with a silver medal for World Group II, and have secured an automatic entry on merit for next year's event.

Team SA, however, showed they had more game and more to prove.

They played with pride, passion and absolute commitment, gaining another first for SA as they defeated Belgium, and clinched a place in the top tier of 12 nations in the men's World Group for the



The men's team did extremely well and are ready for the Paralympics. *Picture submitted.*



Professionals at their game on wheels. *Picture submitted.*

first time for the 2013 BNP Paribas World Team Cup.

Sydwell gave South Africa the best possible start after easing to a 6-0, 6-1 victory over Kristof Michils, but Belgian number one Joachim Gerard was the stronger player in the second singles rubber and beat Evans 6-3, 6-1.

With promotion and relegation at stake, a tense deciding doubles rubber saw Evans and Sydwell

seal a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Roland de Meersman and Gerard to ensure South Africa's promotion alongside World Group II winners Thailand.

After finishing 16th in the men's World Group II on their World Team Cup debut in 2005 and reaching the semifinals for the first time in 2011 and the final for the first time this year, South Africa continues to progress as a wheelchair tennis nation.