

No more injury treatment worries for KZN rising sport stars - new expanded healthcare plan is a much-needed stop-gap, says MEC Dhlomo

19 February 2019

Young up-and-coming sports stars from Black African townships will no longer have to worry about access to good and quick healthcare if they get injured - thanks to a new expanded plan from the KZN Department of Health that is tailor-made for them.

In terms of the plan, which was launched in Durban yesterday, the young players will receive priority healthcare at hospitals such as Prince Mshiyeni Memorial; King Edward VIII; Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central and many others. This is regarded as an attempt to put them on par with their counterparts from affluent homes, who are covered by their parents' medical aid.

MEC Dhlomo says he decided to come up with the plan after the plight of players from poor homes was brought to his attention by Proteas national convenor of selectors, Mr Linda Zondi.

"Being a country with a sad and painful history such as ours, you will know that the best medical service is provided at hospitals where you need medical aid, which is something that Government is addressing through the National Health Insurance – to provide a service to anybody who needs it, regardless of whether they have medical aid or not."

"Mr Linda Zondi, in his development of township cricket and encouraging youngsters to get on board, has unearthed many talents that had been hidden."

"Some of those learners got taken up by some of the best schools in the country, which were offering them scholarships because of their sports performance – including schools which are represented here. We learnt that when these students get injured, because some of their parents are domestic workers, gardeners and are engaged in other forms of lowly-paid manual work – or they are even unemployed – there were problems."

"So, this was placing them at a huge disadvantage. Therefore Mr Zondi approached the Department and requested support, and we responded. There are many potential Proteas players, and players involved in other sporting codes, but if they get injured right now, their parents will not afford to give them the best optimal care that they need. And yet that is so critical for them to be back and remain in that league of rising stars, of whom so much is still expected."

"We are therefore here to announce an extension of that support, to these stars. We are saying that while they're still in high school and not yet contracted by any of these professional bodies, our services at these three hospitals – and at other facilities that might be called upon – are open and available to them"



“We will take care of them until they become professionals who are covered by their respective professional bodies or clubs. It is only right for Government to come in and prioritise their health needs and give them the best medical care possible because they’re already potential national assets for our country.”

The MEC also commended the principals of schools such as Northlands Primary, Glenwood Prep, Glenwood High School, Durban High School and many others who are identifying athletically gifted learners from poor homes and offering them scholarships.

“We encourage you as school principals to continue. When people ask you to show evidence of your contribution to a non-racial, and non-sexist and democratic SA, this is part of it.”

Proteas all-rounder Andile Phehlukwayo (22), who flew in from Johannesburg to attend the launch of the programme, described it as *“amazing.”* He thanked MEC Dhlomo and Mr Zondi for coming to the rescue of players from poor backgrounds through the programme.

“I’m a prodigy of this initiative,” said Phehlukwayo. *“The programme is very important in terms of empowering kids to understand that they can play freely without having to stress about what will happen if they get injured, and that they may not get medical help quickly. It will help those who do get injured to ensure that they recover quickly enough. Especially if it’s an elite athlete with a huge future, it’s really important that this initiative is brought up. If you get injured and you get good medical attention quickly, instead of being out injured for 9 months, you can be ready to*

play again in just two. You don't have to lose your spot or your opportunity to make yourself shine, or become a world star."

Principal of Durban High School Tony Pinheiro said: *"This is a wonderful initiative. Our schools do get these talented boys from disadvantaged communities, and we are able to look after so many aspects of their lives. Obviously their education, their psychological requirements, their transport and boarding and their sporting requirements as well... But the one thing that we cannot deal with is their medical requirements. So, when a boy gets injured, his treatment and recovery are obviously very important to action as quickly as possible. If a player like Andile Phehlukwayo had been injured while he was young and didn't have the support that he had, he might have been lost to as a talented sportsman representing his country. Just to think about how many talented sportsmen we've lost in the country just because they didn't have medical aid. So, this is just a wonderful initiative from the Department of Health and Linda Zondi in making sure that we don't lose our national assets and getting our youngsters excited about becoming the next generation of top sportsmen and women."*