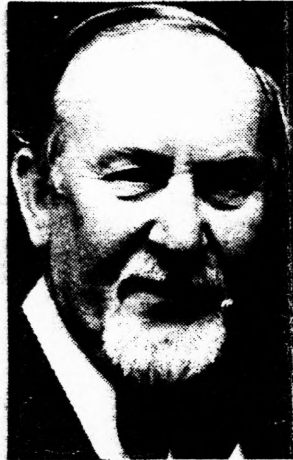


Lifestyle

GREYVENSTEIN



... ON SPORT

Rugby great turns 90 but words are not forgotten

GEORGE DANEEL, who celebrated his 90th birthday this week as the oldest rugby Springbok, was one of the finest loose forwards in history. Ironically, however, he is probably best remembered for an instruction he issued during a particularly dirty game in Wales more than 60 years ago.

The Springboks were playing Cardiff in 1931 and it soon developed into more of a brawl than a match. Daneel, a theology student and a committed Christian, was leader of the forwards and was appalled at the way things were going.

He finally felt obliged to do something about the general mess.

"Boys," he said. "Punch if you must. Kick if you must. But for heaven's sake, please stop swearing!"

Banned

Calvinia-born George Murray Daneel (his uncle Henry was a Springbok in 1906) played as a scrumhalf at UCT but was switched to eighth man and flank when he went to Stellenbosch University to study for a Dutch Reformed Church ministry.

In 1924 his love for rugby so overshadowed his academic results that his father pulled the plug on his sporting activities and he was not allowed to play for a full year. In fact, the Maties year book of the time, according to his

great friend the late Dr Danie Craven, quite bluntly stated that Daneel was at Stellenbosch University to play rugby and to study in his spare time.

He nevertheless continued to attend practices and in his final year

began playing seriously again and in no time was captaining Maties and gaining selection for Western Province. In 1928 he played brilliantly for the Springboks in all four tests against the All Blacks.

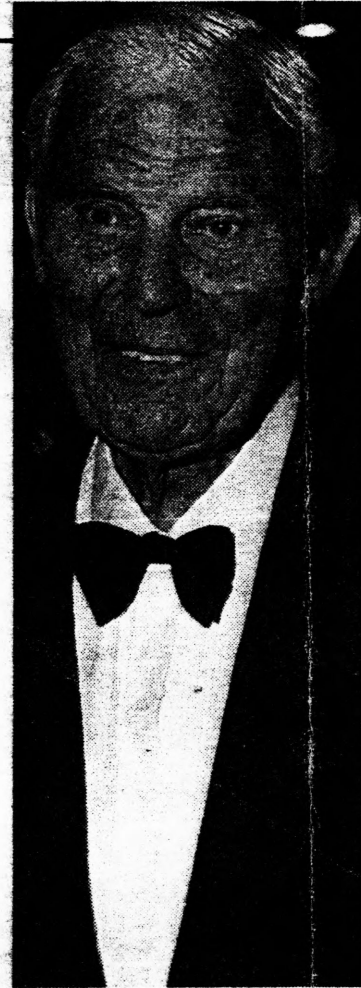
It was in 1929, however, that Daneel became a member of the Moral Rearmament Movement, known as the Oxford Group, and virtually retired from the game to devote all his time to religious affairs.

Devastating tackle

He played a few games for Pretoria University but was so out of form that only the typical autocratic interference of the legendary Matie coach A F Markotter got him an invitation to attend the trials for selection for Bennie Osler's team to tour the UK in 1931.

He gave some of the finest performances of loose-forward play on this highly successful tour, saving the Springboks with a winning try against Wales and producing a devastating tackle when England had the South African line at their mercy.

During the tour he frequently made guest appearances as a preacher and was so popular that, with his usual modesty, he made a point of requesting his audiences



OLDEST LEGEND: George Daneel, now 90 years old, twice saved the Springboks more than 60 years ago.

not to break into applause.

To all intents and purposes he retired from rugby after the tour although while an army chaplain during World War II he did play a

few games for Western Transvaal. He has retained his interest in the sport that made him famous, however, and until recently regularly attended provincial matches at Loftus Versfeld and, despite residence in Pretoria, has remained a life-long Western Province supporter.

During the recent tour of Argentina, Daneel and J C van der Westhuizen, an octogenarian Springbok, sent much appreciated faxes of encouragement to the South African team and were chuffed to receive autographed team pictures in return.

Abiding passion

Through the Moral Rearmament connection, a grandson of Mahatma Gandhi visited him recently with an offbeat request. While in a South African prison for political activism many years ago, Gandhi, consistent with his pacifist philosophy of being kind to your enemies, made a pair of sandals for General J C Smuts, the man who had imprisoned him. The grandson wanted to know if these sandals still existed. Daneel managed to trace them to the Smuts museum at Irene, near Pretoria.

Apart from rugby and religion, Daneel's other abiding passion has been tennis, finding games like bowls and golf not "active" enough. He played tennis until well into his 80s — only giving up when he felt that he had slowed up too much and was beginning to spoil matches for his partners. Even now, at the age of 90, he still has regular games with his grandsons.