

SPEECH BY GRLU PRESIDENT KEVIN DE KLERK FOR PRESS LAUNCH



Welcome Ladies and Gentlemen, with a special word of welcome to Robert Gumede and Ivor Ichikowitz and their staff – Welcome to Dr Mathews Phosa, all dignitaries, my staff, coaches and players as well as members of my Exco, Board and Trust.

A warm welcome to all members of the media, local and international, it is a privilege and an honour to have you all here with us today.

A year ago I delivered an address at a year end function that encompassed much of what is taking place here at the Lions at this time.

Much of the vision we had for the Lions – the passion – the winning culture and engaging of leaders of industry to help build the cause was the vision I put out there at that time.

In my talk to you today I will be referring to and making reference to some of those salient points I had alluded to in that speech.

Eric Ichikowitz has in fact remembered some of that speech and requested me to raise them here.

I am again deeply proud and privileged to stand before you this morning as President of the Golden Lions Rugby Union.

I believe in this game, I believe in my management and I trust my players.

We are building a winning culture here at the Lions.

A powerhouse of rugby, a centre of excellence that will epitomise the game so loved by the people in this country for many years to come.

As South Africans we don't fear change.

We are of the great innovative peoples who negotiated our country out of a revolution.

Change is in the blood and bones of all South Africans.

We are by our nature and tradition innovators, adventurers, pioneers!

As the great poet John Milton said:

“We are a nation not slow or dull, but of quick ingenious and piercing spirit, capable of reaching the highest point that human capacity can soar to”.

South Africa today is an exciting place to be. Every day South Africans lead the field as medical pioneers, in business and as humanitarians.

And it can be so much more!

If we face the challenge of a world around us that has its finger on the fast forward button, where every part of the picture of our life is changing.

CHANGING EVERY DAY!

So today I say to you

The chains of mediocrity have been broken here at the Lions

The days of fear are behind us

We are free to excel once more

Free to build this model 21st century rugby union

To become a beacon, a winning culture, not only to South Africa, but to the world.

As part of our process of seeking an equity partner here at the Lions we had embarked on a programme amongst others to engage leaders in industry and influential people as well as people who could help grow our business.

Most people who have similar type passions about the Lions – rugby and its place in the broader society and mostly who share the vision of making the Lions a leading brand in rugby again.

A brand that will take the game to the people, broaden our fan base and make this great game of rugby for ALL sectors of our society.

Upon meeting Rob and Ivor for the first time, I had one of those instinctive gut feelings that one sometimes gets in life and this was one of “These are certainly people that we can identify with:.

Rob Gumede is a great man with massive achievements and is a leading figure in our country.

Ivor Ichikowitz is the consummate business man.

I had immediately warmed to them from the very first meeting we had, but had to walk their bid through a very comprehensive bidding process with my Exco Board and Trust at the Lions.

Needless to say their bid was preferred in that process, but greater than all of this myself and Rob have developed a great rapport and understanding in a very short space in time.

Rob shares our vision for the Lions and we have full trust in him and his team to provide us with the great support only they can.

Apart from an excellent bid, Robert and Ivor's passions and enthusiasm was overpowering from the outset.

I must also share with everyone that they did not arrive on our doorstep when things started to turn around and look better.

This was in fact at the time when we were at probably one of our lowest ebbs and it was at the time that we went down 32-0 to Western Province a while back.

Way back then they had already identified with our cause and our vision.

The investment by Robert Gumede and Ivor Ichikowitz that we announce here today is a great stride forward in the direction of our true ambitions.

The investment catapults the Golden Lions into an entirely new era. It also demonstrates the reality that rugby is not just a highly professional sport but indeed a serious business. We share the belief with Robert and Ivor that transformation should catapult us all into a higher sphere of performance. Transformation means the best of everyone for the good of us all.

We now have serious businessmen to help take care of the business performance of the Lions franchise and dedicated rugby people to take care of the rugby performance.

We look forward to working with our new partners in the months and years ahead and celebrating the awaking of our pride.

Right now we are all creative, compassionate and increasingly confident of our place in the rugby world.

And when people say "Sorry that can't be done, that's too ambitious"

I say this is not a sorry Union

We are not sorry people

It can be done and if we have the will the courage and the determination, it WILL be done.

And that will bring change to the way we treat each other as members of this community

A decent society is not based on it's rights

It is based on it's duty – our duty to each other!

To ALL should be given the opportunity and will be through these new processes and visions

From ALL responsibility will be demanded

It is our duty to show respect and tolerance to others

I make NO apology

I back ZERO tolerance on mediocrity

I back ZERO tolerance on greed

I back ZERO tolerance on racism

Ours is a Union of strength, of values, of passion and patriotism

We have shown how in the face of crisis or challenge we pull together, strengthened by unity

It says nothing about our past

It speaks VOLUMES about our character and future with Robert and Ivor on board

Today I issue a challenge to you

Help us make the Golden Lions great again!

If you truly believe in rugby as much as I believe in you

Then together we will be UNBEATABLE!

This is the vision I offer you

This is the winning culture that together can be ours

Our strategy is to change negative perceptions to reflect our new reality

To build a winning culture

A centre of excellence

This will require a continual calculation, an instinctive exercise in foresight.

Let me start by asking you

Have you seen our new Vision?

Our Vision reflects our brand and our brand is our promise

It is our expression of our beliefs – tangible and intangible

It is also our internal and external expression of our values

Our brand is a relationship between you and the lovers of this sport

Our brand makes a promise and now will deliver

Ultimately our brand is the things people say about us when we're not there

We will lead the field in the attributes our stakeholders associate us with

Such as exceptional talent

A Management team committed to creating a winning culture

A home where players' needs are taken care of at every level

It's not just about your pay packer!

It's about who you really are!

When you have built an institution with values and a purpose beyond just making money

When you have built a culture that makes a distinctive contribution while delivering exceptional results

You will NOT surrender to the forces of mediocrity and succumb to irrelevance!

We are extremely grateful to the industry leaders who had the courage to do the right thing right and here I think of Robert and Ivor. Also our gracious sponsors who have stuck with us through thick and thin and have not given up.

The GREATEST success stories were created by people who recognised a problem and turned it into an OPPORTUNITY just as Robert and Ivor will also be doing in this instance.

And these people I see before me today.

I have witnessed your courage, experienced your resilience and at times have stood in awe of your fighting spirit and undaunting attitude to NEVER accept defeat over success. One only has to look at Robert's success story as well as Ivor.

And year, you're right, you are absolutely right

It is in OUR hands

It is up to US to do something about it!

And there IS cause for optimism!

We are resilient and tough – as people in sport and united in resolve.

A great deal REMAINS to be done

I believe that PASSION for our people and our game and faith in our future success, stems from a belief, a love, for this AMAZINGLY resilient country.

The season ahead will be tough

However, we have had it tough before and we survived, but the BEST is yet to come. I know and believe that to be.

We have a great support team, that is DEDICATED, SKILLED and KNOWLEDGEABLE and we are also greatly enhanced by the inclusion of John Mitchell here with us at the Lions. John has introduced a dynamism that is not paralleled in South African rugby today.

We have come to know John and value him greatly and we have immense respect for him. His joining our team can only mean wonderful things ahead for us at the Lions.

At the Golden Lions we will confront our challenges as we believe that we have one freedom inside us that nobody can take away.

The freedom of reaction/attitude in ANY given circumstances.

I see ENABLERS before me today.

Not those who break or bend at the first sign of adversity

You are the creators of our success

You will set the trends in our centre of excellence

You have the passion for the game!

My heart like yours is in this business

It is the life I chose in making a difference for you

It is through endurance that we conquer

But ultimately it is our winning culture that plays for keeps.

In closing just a quote from Robert Gumede after the game on Saturday

“AMANDLA! – We lost with honour – Fought gallantly.

Remember, new day awakening our pride. We shall

rule the jungle. WELL DONE!

I thank you very much.