



MICHAELHOUSE

ANNEXURE A JEAN VAN DER WESTHUYZEN

More than 13500 kilometers separate the millpond ripples of New Dam in Balgowan, folded away in the hills of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, and the crucible of an Olympic gold medal final at Forest Waterway in Tokyo. Much more.

For Michaelhouse Old Boy, Jean van der Westhuyzen, the journey involved more than one life-changing decision; hours and hours of cold, dark, and lonely mornings of training on the school's dam; and a watertight resolve to succeed.

Oldest of three brothers, all with proud paddling pedigrees, Jean's commitment to greatness was floated at an early age when he all but fomented a lock, stock, and barrel move for his whole family from the Franschoek Valley in the Western Cape to the Balgowan Valley in KwaZulu-Natal to pursue his canoeing ambitions at Michaelhouse, at the age of 13. That wasn't to be the last time he'd have to uproot and relocate as he followed the current of his dream to achieve canoeing greatness on the world stage.

In 2018 Jean packed for Australia where he knew his best chance of becoming a canoe sprint Olympian lay. The added bonus was no more lonesome mornings in the boat, with the prospect of training alongside his boyhood heroes being as big a drawcard.

Plenty of water passed under the bridge before this momentous decision though, with Jean first leading the Michaelhouse Canoe Club to two Schools' Duzi Canoe Marathon titles and becoming a World Marathon U18 K2 champion in his penultimate year at Michaelhouse.

Jean hit the water paddling in Australia and quickly started accumulating silverware in the shape of a gold medal from the back of the Australian boat in the K4 500m event at the U23 World Champs and a silver medal in the K2 1000m at the same event in 2020.

Thousands of kilometers and as many hours between Franschoek, Balgowan, and Queensland's Gold Coast simmered down to just 3.15.280 minutes in Tokyo, the time it took Jean van der Westhuyzen and his K2 partner to cover 1km, set an Olympic record, become the first Australian crew to win a gold medal in the event, and for Jean become the first Michaelhouse boy to win an Olympic title!

This morning, New Dam at Michaelhouse would have been the scene of a young paddler grafting away in the wake of an Olympian, shoulders high, head down, focused on the long road to glory.