

Lifa Hlongwa

Bio

In High School, I discovered rugby and immediately fell in love with the game. Training, playing, and watching quickly became part of my lifestyle. I lived and breathed it. Following a path that involved playing rugby was my plan A.

In June 2017, it seemed faith had a different plan for me when I played my last tackle in a Premiership Club game. I was involved in a ferocious tackle that left me completely paralysed from the chest downwards. I was immediately rushed into hospital, when doctors had discovered that I had suffered a dislocation and fracture of my spine at the base of my neck at the 6th and 7th vertebrae. I was told to prepare for the very real possibility that I would never walk again.

After hearing this, I knew that not only was possibility of ever playing rugby again completely erased, but I also feared that my future of living a normal abled-bodied human life was also severely threatened. It took some time for me to process this, but I soon realised that living a normal life was never something I was destined to do. I knew I could be more – even though I couldn't walk, or do the most basic of tasks, I knew I had a unique destiny.

It was a special combination of medical assistance, ranging from doctors, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, biokinetics and psychologist, that I managed to regain my fine motor skills in my hands and the ability to walk. To think this all started out as a small toe wiggle after my spinal surgery and progressed to me being able to move my legs and feet. Now I am currently a final year student at the University of Johannesburg and part of the South African rowing team.