

Tribute to Prof Wilbur Kraak

By Prof Heinrich Grobbelaar, Associate Professor in the Division of Sport Science

At the time of his sudden passing, Professor Wilbur Julio Kraak was a professor of Sports Science at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). He was head of Division of the Sports Science at Stellenbosch University (SU) until July 2023, after which he was appointed to UWC. He was still a part-time lecturer for SU third-year students specialising in coaching, and also held an extraordinary appointment at the University of the Free State (UFS). He has supervised numerous students and currently oversaw two PhD and four MSc students in Sports Science at SU.

Wilbur grew up in the Western Cape town of Mamre. He was a gifted rugby player, but did not have a matric exemption, and therefore studied a diploma in Coaching at the North-West University (NWU), while he played for the NWU-PUK Rugby Institute. He was a proud resident of Over de Voor (Overs) men's residence, and later served on their house committee and the NWU Student Council.

He later completed the BA programme in Human Movement Science, as well as the Honors and MSc programs in Sports Science at the NWU. In time, he traded his rugby boots for a referee's whistle, and very quickly made progress as a referee. However, refereeing was too lonely for this "people person" and he then started coaching his residence team (with great success).

Coaching and the training of coaches was finally the area in which he could fully express himself, among other things as World Rugby Educator, BOKSmart facilitator, and presenter of SU's annual Sport Coaching Summit. He also took the lead at the Commonwealth Games' GAPS initiative, for para-athletes and coaches from 13 African countries, and can be seen on TV, as a panellist on e.tv's rugby talk show Bôll & Ôll.

In 2010 he was appointed as a junior lecturer in the then Department of Sports Science at SU. Over the years, he has presented the modules in coaching specialisation, performance analysis, peak performance, sports management and practical rugby. He obtained his PhD in 2015 under the supervision of professors Ranel Venter (US) and Derik Coetzee (UFS), with the title "The effect of law changes on the match profile of international and national rugby union between 2007 and 2013."

In 2020, he was promoted to associate professor in Sports Science. He has taught dozens of postgraduate students and his research has focused on sports performance analysis, injury risk reduction in team sports and coach training. Many of his students said

that he coached them, rather than guided them as a researcher, and that they were able to express themselves freely.

After the restructuring of the Department of Sports Science and the establishment of the Department of Exercise, Sports and Lifestyle Medicine, he fulfilled the role as Head of Division of Sports Science (2022-2023).

His colleagues will long remember his people-oriented approach and jokes. He also completed two terms as Resident Head of Majuba Men's Hostel, and was respected by his students, colleagues and athletes. He leaves a big gap behind, as a person, educator, scientist and friend. The Sports Science Division extends its deepest condolences to Wilbur's wife Mirinthea, and children Wilrick and Zhea.