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In this image we see Francois Pienaar, circa 1994, wearing his Springboks' uniform. Nelson Mandela, then President of South Africa, had summoned the 6' 4" Springboks' captain to assure him of the President's support for the country's rugby team.

Not long before President Mandela summoned [Francois Pienaar](#) for a talk about Rugby, Pienaar was made captain of the Springboks. He had always loved the sport:

*For Pienaar, rugby was just a game, his chief entertainment as a child along with fighting. His life, from a very early age, was violent, but it was never political or criminal in intent, as it was in the ungentle townships; it was violence for violence's sake. When Pienaar was seven, members of a rival gang hanged him from a tree. Had an adult not passed by he would have died. As it was, the rope left deep welts on his neck. (Carlin, [Playing the Enemy](#), page 67.)*

Francois was raised in Vereeniging. Growing up in the 70s and 80s, he was a typical Afrikaner:

*...you pictured a boy growing up to manhood in Vereeniging...and what you saw...was a faithful representation of 90 percent of the Afrikaner volk: a people conditioned by the particular time and place in which they happened to be born to be straightforward, uncomplicated, hardworking, tough, secretly sentimental, churchgoing rugby fanatics who to their superabundant black neighbors with a mixture of disdain, ignorance, and fear. (Carlin, pages 159-60.)*

Before Francois actually met Mandela, he had been touched by the man. Not long after his prison release, Mandela was interviewed on television. Pienaar later recalled:

*I felt sad that he had been in jail for so long and, although his face brimmed with pride, I felt that he had lost so much time. (Carlin, page 86.)*

Not just a rugby player - standing 6'4" and weighing 240 pounds - Francois was educated. With a B.A. in law, he would have a future after his professional rugby days were over.

Pienaar was twenty-seven years old on the 17th of June, 1994 - the day he was scheduled to talk with President Mandela (nearly fifty years his senior). He was more nervous, he told reporters, than he'd ever been for a rugby game.

The [two](#) got along really well. Although he did not explicitly state his objective, Mandela talked about the power of sports to unite people:

*He talked about the power that sport had to move people and how he had seen this not long after his release in the Barcelona Olympics, which he especially remembered for one particular moment when he said he stood up and he felt the whole stadium reverberating. (Carlin, quoting Pienaar, page 163.)*

For his part, Francois was "enveloped" by the President. He left the meeting, understanding this message:

*Get out there and win, wear that shirt with pride, certain of my support. (Carlin, pages 163-164.)*

One year later, Francois and the Springboks did that - and a lot more.

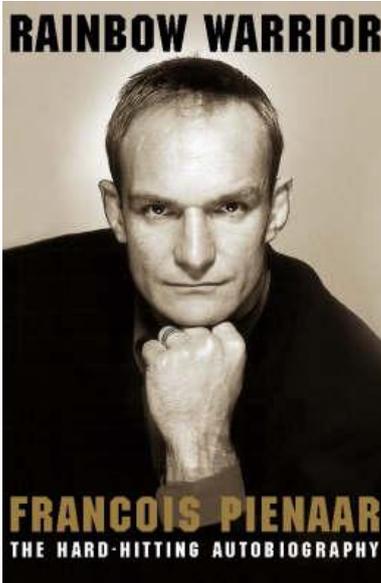
See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Francois-Pienaar-Invictus>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Francois-Pienaar-Invictus>

## Media Stream



### Fransois Pienaar

Photo online, courtesy Amazon.com.

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### FRANCOIS PIENAAR

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### Fransois Pienaar Discusses Nelson Mandela

Historical footage, Fransois Pienaar discussing his relationship with Nelson Mandela.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Francois-Pienaar-Discusses-Nelson-Mandela>