

THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTINGENT

Once broad jumper Neville Price and swimmer Graham Johnston established a pipeline to the University of Oklahoma from their native South Africa, a small wave of South Africans took advantage by coming to Norman in the early 1950s. By 1954, seven members of the Sooners' swimming and diving squad hailed from South Africa. Here is a quick glance at the lives of those seven, plus Price:

Graham Johnston

At 74, Johnston says he is in better condition now than he was when he twice qualified for the South African Olympic team in 1952 and '56. The freestyler from Bloemfontein currently holds 15 world records in the masters division. A three-time All-American at OU, Johnston graduated with a business degree in 1956. He was inducted into the International Swimming Hall of Fame in 1998, two years before he retired from the construction business in Houston. He has been married to the former Janis Thompson for 49 years; they have five children and eight grandchildren.

Lin Meiring

After a 33-year career as a prominent ear, nose and throat surgeon in Oklahoma City, Meiring retired in July 2003. The 71-year-old native of Natal province was a member of the South African Olympic squad in the 1952 Helsinki Games. Meiring was a backstroke specialist who earned All-America honors three times. He initially earned a business degree and went on to graduate from OU medical school in 1965. He has four children and three stepchildren and nine grandchildren.

Peter Duncan

Another three-time All-American during his time at OU, Peter Duncan was also a member of the 1952 South African Olympic team. Like Johnston, he was a freestyler. Today the 70-year-old former Sooner spends his time traveling the world in search of exotic fabrics for his Oklahoma City import/export fabric business, the Fabric Factory. A native of Pretoria, South Africa, Duncan has three children.

Melvyn van Helsdingen

The backstroke and individual medley were Mel van Helsdingen's specialties during a successful collegiate swim-

ming career. En route to helping the Sooners to three Big Seven titles, van Helsdingen earned All-America honors in 1955 and graduated with a geology degree. The 72-year-old Pretoria product continues to work as a full-time geologist in Oklahoma City. He married his college sweetheart, Jeanine Harrison, and the couple has one daughter.

Gerry DeJong

One of five Sooners hailing from Pretoria, Gerry DeJong is the senior member of OU's South African connection. At 76, DeJong continues to live an active lifestyle that has included several successful business ventures. He is a real estate developer for a multi-million dollar project, called Sakabula Estates, in Kwa-Zulu Natal province. DeJong not only owns the golf course that is the centerpiece of Sakabula Estates, he designed it. As a Sooner, DeJong was a top-notch sprinter. He is the proud father of five children.

Ernst DeJong

The younger brother of Gerry DeJong, Ernst was a member of the OU diving squad. Like Johnston, he has gone on to great success at the masters level of his sport. Besides diving, the 69-year-old DeJong is a champion sharp shooter and equestrian. Aside from his hobbies, he is a highly successful artist and commercial designer, whose work includes the current design that appears on the official South African bank notes. He has two children.

Julian Dyason

An All-American in 1957, Dyason was a member of four straight OU squads that captured Big Seven swimming titles. The son of a Pretoria pool manager, Dyason was a breaststroke champion at several levels, including winning the NCAA breaststroke gold medal as a senior. He married his college sweetheart, Linda Fowler, and graduated with a geology degree. The couple had three children and six grandchildren. A safety engineer with his own business in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Dyason died of a brain tumor in April 1979 at age 44.

Neville Price

The first South African awarded an athletic scholarship by the University of Oklahoma, Neville Price led the way to OU for the rest of his compatriots. Longtime track and field coach John Jacobs brought Price to OU after his son Bill had competed with the South African at a meet in 1951. Price went on to earn Big Seven broad jump titles in '52, '53 and '54, before eventually returning home, where he competed for South Africa in the '56 Olympics. Later, he managed The Wanderers Golf Club, an exclusive resort in Johannesburg. Price died of a heart attack in 1975.