

Elwin Smith, senior manager of group sponsorships at Nedbank



By [Aa-isha Hassiem](#)

23 Apr 2024

This week we pick the mind of Elwin Smith, the senior manager of group sponsorships at Nedbank.



▣ Describe your career so far.

My career started in youth entertainment and evolved into sports sponsorship.

I started out as a promoter. Today, I work on one of the biggest sponsorship portfolios in South Africa.

The work I do has always been driven by my passion for showcasing world-class marketing strategies ignited through the passion points of people.

In my current role as senior manager for group sponsorship at Nedbank, I have the gift of practising all of this while doing good for communities and society.

▣ What drew you to this line of work?

I had no idea what line of work I wanted to go into until grade 12.

I grew up dreaming about working with organisations within the sports and entertainment space, but I attended a maths and science high school, which left me confused and unsure. I needed to find a way to align my passion and skills, so I opted for an aptitude test at the University of Johannesburg, and that led me to marketing.

I believe that the game-changer has been my ability to align passion-led work with commercial value and this has given me dream-come-true opportunities at organisations like MTV and Nedbank.

▣ ***What are you currently streaming/reading/listening to?***

- Streaming - I think my MBA is taking up most of my screen time.
- Reading - *The Four Agreements* by Miguel Ruiz.
- Listening to - Anything with Zee Nxumalo or Kelvin Momo right now!

▣ ***Who inspires you?***

My inspiration often has themes, and in this chapter, I am inspired by people who showcase adaptability and the ability to reinvent themselves.

I'm inspired by people like Pharrell Williams, who showcase purpose in their careers and show up differently and authentically in every season.

I want to build my career to resemble this kind of trajectory and use each opportunity I get to impact the lives around me.

▣ ***What's something about your industry that most people are unaware of?***

In our industry, one aspect that often goes unnoticed by many is the impact that sports sponsorship has.

While sponsorship is commonly viewed as a means to increase brand visibility and engagement, it goes much further in fostering meaningful connections with communities and creating lasting impressions.

For example, our latest campaign is focused on the Nedbank Cup, coined *Ke Yona Ya Rona*. The campaign transcends the boundaries of sport or football, embodying a spirit of inclusivity and empowerment.

What sets it apart is our commitment to not only supporting football but also to using various ways to connect with different communities and bring them closer to the product – which is football - through initiatives like 'Ya Rona House'.



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The Ya Rona House, which can be deemed as a physical house, serves as more than just a venue for fan experiences; it's a hub of cultural exchange and celebration, where fans from all walks of life come together to experience the magic of the game.

By investing in sports sponsorship, we not only showcase our brand, but also contribute to the fabric of society, fostering unity, pride, and leaving a legacy.

▣ ***What do you hope to have achieved over your career?***

My goal is to ensure that I always align my passion with making a real impact in people's lives.

Our country is filled with so much talent and I want to use every opportunity I get to move the needle forward for the generations to come.

■ ***Could you name three crucial factors that can help ensure the success of sponsorship marketing in South African communities?***

- Cultural relevance: Harnessing cultural resonance throughout campaigns such as the Nedbank Cup, with the use of relevant content creators and football ambassadors, such as Siphiwe Tshabalala, and TikTok sensation, Primo Baloyi.
- Social impact: Driving positive change to empower South African communities. In line with Nedbank's commitment to making a difference, The Nedbank Cup provides an opportunity for many younger and semi-professional footballers to compete against their role models and create the groundwork for a potentially profitable football career.
- Community engagement: Fostering belonging and active participation in Nedbank Cup initiatives, such as the weekly fan competitions, which allows our fans a chance to win R5m cash at the end of the tournament, while building stronger connections across communities by inviting them to our fan experiences at Ya Rona House.

■ ***Any advice for those who are just getting started in the industry?***

- Be curious and ask questions.
- Find people and brands you admire and follow them.
- Your background is where you come from but not where you're going, so take a chance – it might change the game!

ABOUT AA-ISHA HASSIEM

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