

TWIF

Photographs
by Katie Kruse
& Leezelle C.

FOCUS ON 30TH TUG OF WAR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS IN MOSSEL BAY

The 30th Tug of War World Championships, held from 16–19 September 2026 in Mossel Bay, South Africa, delivered an unforgettable celebration of strength, sportsmanship and international unity.

With athletes from 15 countries competing, the Championships showcased the very best of our sport. World-class performances, fierce competition and outstanding team spirit demonstrated once again that Tug of War is far more than a contest of strength - it is a sport built on discipline, teamwork, respect and friendship.

For South Africa, the Championships were particularly special, with the home team securing eight medals, including four gold medals - our best achievement on the world stage ever. Yet the true success extended far beyond the medal table. Every athlete, team and official contributed to an event that brought the international Tug of War family together in the spirit of fair play and mutual respect. They were also elevated by the massive and unforgettable support of the crowd, whose enthusiasm, energy and encouragement created an extraordinary atmosphere and



ANTON BOTHA
President SA Tug-of-War

strengthened international friendships, inspired young athletes and demonstrated the potential of Tug of War to unite communities and grow the sport across the world. Our sincere thanks to every nation, athlete, official, partner and volunteer who made these Championships possible. We are immensely proud of all our athletes and of what the global Tug of War family achieved together!

inspired athletes throughout the competition. Their passionate support was felt across every match and will remain one of the defining memories of Mossel Bay 2026.

Hosted against the beautiful Garden Route backdrop, the Championships were the result of extensive planning, strong partnerships and the dedication of the South African Tug of War Federation, the Local Organising Committee, TWIF officials and an exceptional army of volunteers. The support of the Western Cape Government and Minister Ricardo Mackenzie was instrumental in bringing this international sporting spectacle to life.

The legacy of Mossel Bay 2026 is bigger than the competition itself. It has

strengthened international friendships, inspired young athletes and demonstrated the potential of Tug of War to unite communities and grow the sport across the world.

Our sincere thanks to every nation, athlete, official, partner and volunteer who made these Championships possible. We are immensely proud of all our athletes and of what the global Tug of War family achieved together!



The 2026 TWIF Athletes of the Year

... were selected through an exciting worldwide celebration of Tug of War, with each country first nominating one female and one male athlete.

From this incredible group of athletes, the nominees were narrowed down through votes from you, the fans, recognising the athletes who captured the support of the global Tug of War community.

Congratulations to our winners, **Kittie Terblanche** of South Africa and **Will Lee** of England, and a huge thank you to everyone who nominated, voted and shared throughout the campaign.

We look forward to continuing this exciting tradition and seeing who will be named our TWIF Athletes of the Year for the Indoor Edition!

KATIE KRUSE TWIF PR commission member

TWIF social media reached

2.2 million views

in one month surrounding the 2026 World Championships - 1 million more views than during The World Games 2025!

RESULTS OF OPEN CLUBS COMPETITION OUTDOOR MOSSEL BAY

Weight	Gold	Silver	Bronze
500W	Dai Shi Dai Jingmei (TPE)	Ladenburg (GER)	Jingmei Dai Shi Dai (TPE)
540W	Dai Shi Dai Jingmei (TPE)	Gaztedi A (BAS)	Jingmei Dai Shi Dai (TPE)
600M	TTV Veenseboys (NED)	Valsbaai B (RSA)	Team FIGeST (ITA)
560M	Simonswald (GER)	Gaztedi A (BAS)	Goiherri A (BAS)
640M	Valleitrekkers (NED)	Engelberg A (SWI)	Ebersecken (SWI)
680M	Valleitrekkers (NED)	Fam. Janssens (BEL)	Ebersecken (SWI)
580MX	Fam. Janssens (BEL)	Powerrangers (BEL)	Valleitrekkers (NED)
600MU23	Hartenbos (RSA)	Eschbachtal (GER)	Taiwan Sport Univ.(TPE)
500WU23	Goudini (RSA)	Ayrshire (SCO)	Melton Mowbray (ENG)
560 MXU23	Valsbaai A (RSA)	Gelderswoude (NED)	Eschbachtal (GER)
520 JMX	Roberson High (RSA)	Bedfordshire (ENG)	Martins Minions A (ENG)
560 JM	Drostdy A (RSA)	Siegelau (GER)	Sins (SWI)
480 JW	Jingmei Sanshing (TPE)	HS Swellendam (RSA)	Mertensmannen (BEL)

MEDAL TABLE

No	Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze
1	South Africa	5	2	0
2	Netherlands	3	1	1
3	Chinese Taipei	3	0	3
4	Belgium	1	3	1
5	Germany	1	2	1
6	Basque Country	0	2	1
7	Switzerland	0	1	3
8	England	0	1	2
9	Scotland	0	1	0
10	Italy	0	0	1



VALLEITREKKERS (Netherlands) won gold in the Senior Men 680 kg.



SIMONSWALD (Germany) won gold in the Senior Men 560 kg.



HARTENBOS (South Africa) won gold in the Under 23 Men 600 kg.

RESULTS OF WORLD OUTDOOR CHAMPIONSHIPS MOSSEL BAY

Weight	Gold	Silver	Bronze
500W	Chinese Taipei	Germany	England
540W	Chinese Taipei	Sweden	Basque Country
560M	Germany	Basque Country	Chinese Taipei
600M	South Africa	Switzerland	Chinese Taipei
640M	Switzerland	England	Netherlands
680M	Netherlands	Switzerland	South Africa
580MX	Belgium	South Africa	Germany
560JM	South Africa	Germany	Switzerland
560MXU23	South Africa	England	Switzerland
600MU23	South Africa	Chinese Taipei	Netherlands
520JMX	Switzerland	Chinese Taipei	Belgium
480JW	Chinese Taipei	South Africa	Switzerland
500WU23	Chinese Taipei	Basque Country	South Africa

MEDAL TABLE

No	Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze
1	South Africa	4	2	2
1	Chinese Taipei	4	2	2
3	Switzerland	2	2	3
4	Germany	1	2	1
5	Netherlands	1	0	2
6	Belgium	1	0	1
7	England	0	2	1
7	Basque Country	0	2	1
9	Sweden	0	1	0
10	China	0	0	0
11	Ireland	0	0	0
12	Italy	0	0	0
13	Zimbabwe	0	0	0
14	Scotland	0	0	0
15	Lithuania	0	0	0



DID YOU KNOW
... that 1049 pullers weighed in for the World Outdoor Championships in Mossel Bay?

Left: Scotland U23 Mix 560 kg

Below left: Zimbabwe Women 540 kg

Below: Belgium won gold in the Senior Mix 580 kg





Ray Fray Smith from England started as a TWIF judge in 2008.



Aivars Brakmanis from Latvia started as a TWIF judge in 1998.



Dzintars Polna from Latvia started as a TWIF judge in 1998.

We have new TWIF judges and new TWIF recorders

who all passed their exams in Mossel Bay during the World Championships. New judges: **Paulus Jordaen** and **Johannes Koen** from South Africa; **Chiu Tsz Fai** and **Shum Lap Chi** from Hong Kong; **Herman Brinks** and **Martin Stofbergen** from the Netherlands; and **Jürg Tinner** and **Joel Bayard** from Switzerland. The new recorders: **Esme Bester** from South Africa; **Josh Larson** from USA; and **Marije Wentink** from the Netherlands.



35 years ago - 1991 ... was the first time TWIF began to use accreditations for their Championships

... then in 2001 the accreditation was extended to include tent and food entrance as well. During the World Outdoor Championships 2006 (20 years ago), we started using the TWIF competition programme that we still use. **Laurens Martini** from the Dutch Livestream team has been 'building' a new TWIF competition programme and this has now been tested in the Mossel Bay Championships.



Bruce Schuman, left, who did all the IT work, competition programme, results books and website for TWIF for many years, has retired in Mossel Bay. He started working for TWIF in 2007 during the European Championships in Minehead - 20 years of full dedication. During these Championships every question or request we asked him, was answered and/or done fast.

Although retired, he is not yet done, as he will still work on the TWIF website until further notice and will be available to help out **Francois Bezuidenhout**, our IT official, who has been around since the World Indoor Championships in 2023.

History Made on Home Soil

SOUTH AFRICA WINS HISTORIC GOLD IN THE 600kg SENIOR MEN'S DIVISION

Hartenbos, South Africa – September 2026

The 2026 Outdoor Tug of War World Championships were a particularly special occasion for South Africa, as the country had the privilege of hosting the world's best Tug of War teams!

For South Africa's 600kg Senior Men's team, the championships became more than just an opportunity to compete on home soil. They became the setting for a historic achievement: **South Africa's first-ever gold medal in a senior outdoor weight category at the Tug of War World Championships.**

The 600kg category is one of the newer weight divisions in international tug of war, having been introduced in 2025. In only its second year, South Africa rose to the top, defeating some of the world's strongest teams to claim the world championship title in front of a home crowd.

"It took a lot of work for our team to get where we are. Late nights of training, fitness, teamwork, as well as weight loss to qualify for the 600kg weight category," said team anchor Rico Thiart.

The Road to the World Championships

The journey to becoming world champions began long before the team stepped onto the competition field in Hartenbos. Months of preparation, demanding training sessions, physical conditioning and individual sacrifices were required to bring the team together and ensure that they could compete within the strict 600kg weight limit.

The official weigh-in was the first major hurdle the team had to overcome. Every kilogram mattered, and the athletes had to balance their weight requirements with the strength and endurance needed to compete at the highest international level.

Before the closed national competition began, six of the eight national team members also represented Valsbaai A in the Open Club Competition, held on 16–17 September.

Competing against strong international club teams, Valsbaai A finished second in their group but unfortunately did not progress beyond the knockout stages.

Although the club competition did not end as the team had hoped, it provided valuable competitive experience ahead of the main event.

Facing the World's Best

The Closed Competition took place on 18–19 September, with the 600kg Senior Men's division among the first categories to compete on Friday. With the pressure of representing their country on home soil, the South African team knew that every pull would count.

"I think we were all quite nervous, but we were also very excited for the day's competition. The evening before, we got together as a team at a restaurant and went through the next day's draw. We



Back: Willem de Wet, Rico Thiart, Piet Lourens, Matthys Lourens, Adriaan Rix
Front: Kershin Cloete, Eben Matthee, Kurt Cloete, Micheal Phillips, Johannes Theart and Donald Hayes.

also tried to regain the last bit of weight we could," Thiar recalled. "The team consists of men who have previously performed well at a World Championship, regardless of whether it was in the Under-23s, so there is a winning mentality among the guys. As individuals, we made a collective decision that no matter what happens, we are going out there to enjoy it. I believe that home-ground advantage also played a role," Johnny explained.

The team identified Switzerland and the Basque Country as two of their biggest competitors. However, the draw presented an immediate challenge, with Switzerland scheduled to be their first opponent.

South Africa rose to the occasion, winning both pulls against the Swiss team. The victories gave the team an important confidence boost and confirmed that they had the strength and determination to compete for the world title.

With momentum on their side, the South Africans progressed through the competition, knowing that the road to the final would demand everything they had trained for.

Gold on Home Soil

The final against Switzerland was the culmination of months of preparation, sacrifice and teamwork. With the South African crowd behind them, the team stepped onto the field knowing that they were just two pulls away from making history. For the athletes, the atmosphere was unlike anything they had experienced before. "The feeling of being the only team on the field while the crowd watches and supports you is something I will never forget. With every step you took, all you could hear were people shouting with excitement."

The noise and encouragement from the home crowd created an unforgettable atmosphere as South Africa battled for the world title. When the final whistle blew and the victory was confirmed, the significance of what the team had accomplished became clear.

"When the final whistle blew and we knew we had won, our eyes filled with tears because we knew we had made history as a team." South Africa had done it. The 600kg Senior Men's team were world champions.

The gold medal represented far more than a victory on the day. It was the reward for countless hours of training, the sacrifices made to meet the weight requirements, the

commitment of every athlete and the trust the team had built in one another.

Most importantly, it marked a historic milestone for South African senior outdoor Tug of War, as the country claimed its first-ever world championship gold medal in an outdoor senior weight category. Winning the title on home soil, in front of family, friends and fellow South Africans, made the achievement even more meaningful.

Looking Towards Italy 2027 and the World Games 2029

Although the celebrations following their historic victory will remain a treasured memory, the team is already looking towards the future. Their immediate goal is to continue improving, train harder and defend their world championship title at the next World Outdoor Tug of War Championships in Italy in 2027.

The team also has its sights set on the 2029 World Games in Germany, with the ambition of competing together on another major international stage.

For the athletes, the journey does not end with one gold medal. Instead, their victory has set a new standard for what South African Tug of War can achieve.

A Heartfelt Thank You

A huge thank you to our two coaches, **Kurt Cloete** and **Piet Lourens**, for all the support, guidance and advice you have given us throughout this journey. Your dedication and commitment have played an important role in helping us reach this achievement.

To our families and friends, thank you for standing by us through the tough times, supporting us when things were difficult, and believing in us every step of the way. Your support means more than words can express. And finally, to my teammates, thank you for all the hard work, sacrifices and dedication each of you has put into this journey. From the long training sessions to the challenges we faced along the way, we worked together, supported one another and never gave up on our goal.

This gold medal belongs to every one of us. It is the result of teamwork, trust, perseverance and a shared dream.

I am incredibly proud to have been part of this team and to have made history together on home soil. **RICO THIART**

Thank you all for being part of this unforgettable journey!

LOOKING BACK

THE LEGACY OF MOSSEL BAY 2026

ZOUNICA VAN DER MERWE

TWIF PR commission member

As the ropes were coiled and the final medals were handed out, the athletes packing their bags left with more than just physical exhaustion and calloused hands. They left with memories of an unforgettable chapter hosted on African soil.

For the veterans, it was another milestone in a lifelong obsession with the ultimate team sport. For the rookies, it was a baptism by fire that turned them into lifers. Ultimately, the 2026 World Championships proved once again that Tug of War is far more than a childhood playground game - it is a supreme test of human unity,

proving that when people pull together, they can move mountains. Beyond the medals and the scoreboard, the true spirit of Mossel Bay 2026 lives in the personal stories of those who stepped onto the turf.

Here is how three competitors from different corners of the globe experienced the championships:



MADDIE HEMPELL

(England / Army Ladies Tug of War):

"Attending the World Championships in South Africa was an unforgettable experience and something I feel incredibly lucky to have been a part of. From the moment we arrived, we were made to feel so welcome, and the organisation of the entire event was fantastic. Pulling on the England shirt and having the opportunity to represent my country on

the world stage was a very special moment and one I'll always be proud of. Competing alongside teams from all over the world was incredible, but what stood out just as much was the camaraderie and shared love for the sport throughout the Championships. My time in South Africa gave me memories and friendships that will stay with me forever."

PETR POPELKA

(Czech Republic / TOW Rakovník & Oudtshoorn Toutrek):

"The championship was absolutely fantastic! It was my fourth World Championship in a row, and I have to say that in terms of organization, facilities for the athletes, including the excellent food, and the incredible atmosphere created by the local fans, this was by far the best championship I've ever had the opportunity to experience! Even though neither our national team nor our club was able to travel to South Africa this year, two of my teammates and I had the honour of competing for the local club Oudtshoorn Toutrek. We enjoyed every single moment of it! After the championship, we also had the opportunity to watch local youth training sessions, which was another amazing experience. It was our first time in South Africa, but I'm already absolutely sure it definitely won't be our last!"



ELNA FOURIE (South Africa):

"For me as an athlete, Tug of War is an enjoyable sport. In preparation for the world championships, I did running, cycling, skipping, gym work, and drumming.

On weekends, we had training camps as a national group. I put myself on a low-calorie meal plan for 8 weeks before the championships, where I still had enough energy to train twice a day and lose 8 kg. Because it was in South Africa this year, everyone was more motivated knowing there would be a home crowd. We knew the field and air pressure because we had already held SAs at Hartenbos.



As an athlete, I think everything was well organised and everything went excellently. Our SA teams did very well. Tug of War is a team sport that requires preparation, discipline, and endurance."

For the athletes who journeyed to the Western Cape, Mossel Bay 2026 proved that Tug of War is much more than a test of physical limits - it is a powerful international language. Whether it was international visitors seamlessly integrating into local club squads, military competitors trading salutes for shared camaraderie, or home athletes rising to the roar of a passionate local crowd, the championships showcased a sport defined by rare mutual respect.