

■ RUGBY

'We owe a lot to Chester'

Family, peers pay homage to Springbok 'trailblazer'

LUKE FOLB AND BULELWA PAYI

AS THOUSANDS of mourners gathered at Newlands Stadium to pay their respects to rugby legend Chester Williams, it was the hard-hitting farewell by another Springbok that spoke volumes about what he had achieved in a racially divided sport.

Williams, 49, died on September 6 from a suspected heart attack.

Ashwin Willemse was one of the speakers at Williams' official funeral yesterday and described Williams as a "trailblazer" who had paved the way for other black players in the country.

"Today I am reminded that all I am and will ever be is rooted and built on the foundation laid through the sacrifices of players like Williams and so many others that came before him," Willemse said.

Paying homage to the first black Springbok player in our democracy, Willemse lamented that the matter of race had been almost omnipresent in his career.

Williams, the only Springbok player of colour selected for the victorious 1995 Rugby World Cup squad, was outspoken about the barrage of racism he had experienced during his career during which he was often labelled a "quota player".

Willemse famously shone a spotlight on the continuing tensions within SA rugby ranks both on and off the field when he walked off the SuperSport set in May last year after alleging racism and discrimination against fellow analysts Nick Mallett and Naas Botha.

The pundit said the incident was something he had managed to live with, and would "engage on the details when the opportunity presents itself".

Willemse added rugby had served as a catalyst for change.

"We are talking about a game that's been played on separate fields, a game that was an enabler of the division within our society.

"Rugby will have to go through its own transformation to enact a unification.

"Race can either be used to unite or



CHESTER Williams' wife Maria, twins Matthew and Chloe and stepson Ryan Robson attend the funeral service for the Springbok legend at Newlands Stadium yesterday. | PHANDO JIKELO African News Agency (ANA)



THE coffin draped in the SA flag.

divide us.

"We need to empower people, to truly live out the ideals of the Rainbow Nation – the same way the will of the people liberated a nation, is the same

way the will of the leadership can truly develop the latent potential of all South Africans."

Williams was showered with praise from his fans and his bereaved family.

It was a sombre moment when his coffin arrived – a final trip for the player to the stadium where he had moments of glory.

In a poignant tribute to her husband, Maria said she had used the week since his death to recollect her life with him and how she would raise their three children in his absence.

"I've had time to reflect on my life with a man I adored, loved, respected and admired and will cherish our love forever.

"He was and always will be the best father.

"I will continue to do what you and I spoke about in our lives and will continue to bring up Ryan, Matthew and Chloe to the best of my ability as a single



AMONG those at the funeral service for Springboks legend Chester Williams were Zelda la Grange, Bryan Habana and Ashwin Willemse.

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