

From Olympian to brand director, Adidas SA's Kate Woods

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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As a former pro athlete and three-time Olympian, Adidas South Africa's senior brand director Kate Woods has triumphed on the hockey field and in the boardroom.



Kate Woods, senior brand director, Adidas South Africa

After an illustrious professional hockey career that saw her playing more than 150 matches for the SA national women's hockey team, Woods kickstarted her journey with Adidas SA in 2007.

In 2016 Woods relocated with her family to the Adidas offices in Dubai where she worked as the director of the running business unit for emerging markets, and the next year moved to the Adidas World Headquarters in Herzogenaurach, Germany, where she occupied the role of senior director of the running business unit for Western Europe.

Now settled back in Cape Town, Woods reflects on her whirlwind career journey and the lessons for life and business that she's gained from her experience.

 ***Kate, tell us a bit about yourself and what's important to you.***

I am a mom, wife, daughter, friend, businesswoman and three-time Olympian. I am mad about all sport and therefore love working in the sporting industry at Adidas. My biggest blessings are my four men: my husband and three sons. I am truly passionate about what I do, and I draw my energy from people, travelling and adventuring.

I miss being out on the hockey field but carry the incredible memories from my career with me and have transferred all lessons and experiences into my professional career.

■ ***As senior brand director at Adidas South Africa, what does your role involve?***

I have the pleasure of looking after the Adidas brand in South Africa. My team is responsible for ranging all products that we bring into the country across all categories. We then bring to life all brand and product campaigns across all channels, in store and online.

We manage social handles and digital platforms and my team is also in charge of all partnerships – be it teams, athletes and influencers – as well as all PR roles and responsibilities. It's quite simply the best job!



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■ ***How do you feel your past experience as a professional athlete has equipped you for your career with Adidas?***

It's been the best 'leadership course' I could ever have attended. Playing sport at the highest level has helped me to handle big pressure situations, identify my role within the team, and learn how best to play to my strengths. It's taught me to handle critical feedback, adjust to external situations, and to analyse the competition while staying focused on what's within my control.

Playing in a team environment has shown me how to bring out the best in each team member, and to recognise how important each position is to the overall performance of the team.

■ ***Impressively, you represented South Africa at three Olympic games with the national women's hockey team. What are some of your most memorable moments from these experiences?***

My first Olympic Games was Athens in 2004, and it was such a special location since it was home to the very first Olympic Games. It was my first ever Olympic Village experience and I will never forget the first time I rubbed shoulders with my sporting heroes – the thought that I was competing at the same tournament as them, was quite surreal. A highlight was when our 4 x 100m Freestyle Relay swim team won Gold in Athens; the celebrations and pride for our country was amazing and inspiring.

In 2008, I participated in the Beijing Olympic Games and was awed by the splendour of the stadiums in Beijing. A highlight was watching Usain Bolt win Gold in the 100m and 200m from the Bird's Nest with my husband. And then in 2012, I participated in the London Olympics, with my 20-month-old son cheering me on from the stadium.

Looking back at all three Olympic Games, a few highlights were beating Gold medallists Germany 3-0 in Athens, and beating the USA 7-0 in London. Both were remarkable sporting moments that will be etched in my heart forever.



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▣ ***What are your key lessons learned having worked for Adidas in three very different regions; namely SA, Dubai and Germany?***

- It takes courage to step out of your comfort zone far from all that is familiar, but when you do, this is where real growth happens and where you learn to fly.
- Be curious about the different cultures and countries – it was such an enriching experience to dive into the local culture and way of living.
- It's important to remain 'authentically you' – you do not have to change values or leadership styles just to fit in.
- It was important for me to find my voice and speak up when needed. This helped build my confidence as a new leader in the various regions.
- No matter how diverse my teams were, one thing remained true – in the words of Maya Angelou: "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

▣ ***As a working mom in a position of leadership, how do you destress and centre yourself?***

Exercise is important to me. Any kind of sport helps me to rebalance and refresh my mind and body. I am grumpy without it and so it's important to carve out time for exercise.

I have also learnt to say 'No' a lot more than I used to. I have realised the value of rest and chill time.

Friends and family remain a source of positive energy for me and I cherish special time with them to destress from my work.



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▣ ***What advice do you have for young professional women hoping to climb the career ladder in your field?***

First and foremost, you are good enough! It's so vital to believe in yourself. Know your strengths, play to them and celebrate them. Don't let anyone doubt the unique qualities you bring to the table.

Be authentic always. There is no need to conform, you are successful because you are you.

You show strength when you are vulnerable; it is ok to ask for help.

Make sure you bring your team with you. It can be a lonely journey if you do not surround yourself with people you can trust, that have your back and want to be a part of the team.

▣ ***To close off, what would you like your professional legacy to be?***

Someone who inspires positive change, uplifts her team and provides a platform for others to grow. Someone who dares

greatly for what she believes in. Whatever she does, she does with great heart.

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