

# SPORTS BOYCOTT by Christopher Merrett

## 1 PLAYING THE GAME: some non-racial viewpoints on sport in South Africa

ON AUGUST 27, 1982, in the course of the presentation of State President's sports awards at Ellis Park, Johannesburg, the Minister of National Education, Dr Gerrit Viljoen, attacked the South African Council on Sport (SACOS) as one of South Africa's 'most violent sport enemies', run by 'fanatical politicians rather than sports administrators'. The Nationalist government of South Africa claims to have 'normalized' sport in this country; and many people who would describe themselves as liberal or progressive assert that sufficient changes have occurred on our sports fields in the past decade to merit inclusion once more in international competition. From all sides non-racial sportsmen and women affiliated to SACOS are villified as unpatriotic and extremist. It is not hard to see why the Nationalist party responds in this way; for people of other persuasions it could be because non-racial sport poses too many embarrassing questions about the fundamental nature of our society.

The decade of the 1970s was marked by Pretoria's attempts to salvage South Africa's position in international competition, lost by the rigid application of apartheid. A certain amount of pragmatic tinkering with the law, for example the Group Areas and Liquor Acts (although the Separate Amenities Act remains intact), has allowed a gradual relaxation of segregation on the sports field and in the clubhouse.

Sport in South Africa is desegregated and 'normal', proclaims the soft propaganda released overseas, and this view is readily accepted by the news agencies and media in general. Sport administrators from the more conservative sports such as cricket and rugby have hastily swallowed the bait, sugared as it is by enormous financial inducements

(provided by unofficial and semi-official bodies), to send teams to South Africa. It would be unwise to minimize the success pro-Government bodies have achieved in keeping sporting links open and harassing opponents of apartheid overseas — witness the financial backing for the prosecution of Peter Hain in 1972.

The sporting boycott has been of immense importance. Lack of international competition, or the threat of its loss, has been the one area where the average white South African has suffered visibly from apartheid policy. The government, in a bid to retain electoral support, has thus pursued a policy of sporting liberalization in order to achieve international acceptability.

Why does a significant proportion of South Africa's sporting fraternity reject these government moves as irrelevant? The non-racial attitude is encapsulated in the slogan 'no normal sport in an abnormal society'. Basically what SACOS is arguing is that sport cannot be compartmentalized and isolated from the socio-political conditions in which it is played. It cannot be denied that South African society is founded on a fraudulent system of social engineering, in the context of which no sporting activity can be 'normal'.

It is hypocritical to argue that society is being liberalized because members of all so-called race groups can play on the same sports ground; when out-

side its walls they cannot live in the same residential area, travel in the same train compartment, make love to or marry certain other South Africans, send their children to the same state school, or vote together for the institutions which control their lives. Non-racial sportsmen reject 'normal' sport as defined by the government as morally indefensible and seek to play sport in a spirit worthy of the South Africa of the future.

Such a non-racial South Africa was summed up ably by Krish Mackerdhuj, Vice President of the South African Cricket Board (SACB), a few days after Viljoen's vitriolic attack, as one in which '... free interaction of all human beings in all activities of society on the basis of total equality and opportunity and without regard to the race or racial group to which one may belong would be fundamental. In this sense, in the search for societal morality, non-racial sport has a political aim and expresses solidarity with groups like the non-racial trade unions and the Black Sash in their struggle for a free and democratic South Africa.

Hassan Howa, past President of SACOS and President of the SACB clarified the non-racial viewpoint when he said, 'Anything less than total integration is a concession and we are not interested in concessions — only in our rights as citizens and sportsmen. This belief is inalienable human rights causes non-racialists to reject the application for, or granting of, any permit to play or socialize together. The official sports bodies which do so are simply conniving with the established political and social system for their own selfish and narrow ends. It does not impress non-racial sportsmen that they can drink a beer in an approved clubhouse,

**The non-racial attitude is encapsulated in the slogan 'no normal sport in an abnormal society.'**



or a so-called 'international' hotel, after a match. The morality of any society where permission is necessary in the first place is highly questionable.

For non-racial sportsmen the visits of financially oiled rugby, cricket and soccer teams to South Africa is an affront to the oppressed majority. While white South Africa luxuriates in, say, the Dirty Dozen performing at enormous cost at Newlands, millions of South Africa's black citizens are condemned to loss of citizenship, to rural slums and forced resettlement, to inferior education and job opportunities — and above all to denial of all human dignity. (The South African Breweries workers' strike during the 1982 cricket tour and the black boycott of the rebel soccer tour, showed the feelings of the majority of South Africans towards foreign sporting visitors). Scores of those who stood up effectively for the dispossessed have been detained without trial, condemned to solitary confinement, banned or exiled. Non-racial sportsmen reject those sports bodies which accept government concessions and turn a Nelsonian blind eye to the evils of the system.

For years 'official' sporting bodies have been trying to entice non-racial organisations under their wing. Where this succeeded, for example with the South African Cricket Union (SACU) in 1976-7, the experience was one of paternalism on the part of the white administrators, and specific instances of racialism, which soon led to a further split. Rapprochement lasted until 1982 in the Transvaal with Lenasia teams playing under the auspices of the Transvaal Cricket Council (TCC). The inevitable conclusions of cricketers' questions about the quality of their children's education and the fate of the Pageview residents, was to withdraw to the non-racial fold of the Transvaal Cricket Board (TCB).

Non-racial rejection or collaboration with the apartheid system is enshrined in the double standards resolution. SACOS affiliates reject contact with any

bodies which practise, perpetuate or condone racialism, separatism, multinationalism or any other euphemism for the undemocratic organization of South African society. This includes 'official' sporting bodies, and all government agencies designed to entrench the classification of people, such as the Coloured African Indian Council, Local

**Anything less than total integration is a concession and we are not interested in concessions — only in our rights as citizens and sportsmen.**

**— Hassan Howa**

Affairs Committees and Community Councils, which foster discrimination. For this reason non-racial cricketers and rugby players, for example, boycott the Currie Cup. Whatever concessions are made at Newlands or Kingsmead, these are islands of liberalization in an undemocratic society. In recent years 'official' sporting bodies have attached themselves to the non-racial label, subverting its meaning to their own ends of accepting benefits from a repressive regime while ignoring wider and fundamental social issues.

There is no doubt that non-racial sports people make sacrifices in the course of their stand. The inequalities are legion although they are of course minor compared with those that separate white and black education. Nevertheless, an example well known to the writer serves to illustrate the point. It goes without saying that the non-racial philosophy is anathema to the government; equally it does not find favour with the white elites who run local government. Even where these groups can be described as liberal or progressive they are remarkably myopic where the position of sport in society is concerned.

Loyalty to the old school or club tie is undoubtedly a factor; a desire to see encouraging, even if fictional, change another.

In Pietermaritzburg cricketers are divided between the Maritzburg Cricket Union (MCU) and the non-racial Maritzburg District Cricket Union (MDCU). For the 1982/3 season the latter has 20 competing teams from 15 clubs, about 300 registered players in all. The municipal facilities provided constitute one ageing, although adequate, ground with a good grass pitch and a pavilion (Tatham Memorial Ground); and three other matting pitches on two grounds (Chatterton Road and Brookside). One of the latter is a former municipal dump and scheduled for hypermarket development; and the other is zoned as a bus terminus. Neither of these grounds has facilities, or indeed any shade, and all three are situated in the industrial area. By comparison, the numerically smaller and gradually declining MCU has the use of the lavishly provided Jan Smuts Stadium, whose floodlights were reputedly installed by the municipality at a cost of R27 000, and the beautiful Alexandra Oval, as well as two other grounds.

The economic gulf between the two South Africas is graphic-

**Whatever concessions are made at Newlands or Kingsmead, these are islands of liberalisation in an undemocratic society, a fact which no doubt is cynically appreciated by the majority of spectators.**

ally illustrated, and this divide is also characterised by a fundamental difference of attitude towards the future.

Had the Nationalist government made its present concessions in the 1960s it could probably have persuaded the international community, and much



internal opinion, that real change had come about. It can only be a country so impervious to moral persuasion that could assume that world attitudes and standards do not evolve through time.

The question is often raised: but sport has changed, why now penalize sportsmen and women? The answers are suggested above: sport cannot be isolated from its parent society; and the Pretoria regime is making propaganda capital out of 'normal' sport in order to make its apartheid menu palatable to international bodies. SACOS is a beleaguered minority vulnerable to government repression and the blinkered reasoning of powerful capitalist vested interests. Its links with the Supreme Council of Sport for Africa and thereby to the OAU and the United Nations are vital; and the current rethink by the Commonwealth on

**Sport cannot be isolated from its parent society, and the Pretoria regime is making propaganda capital out of 'normal' sport in order to make its apartheid menu palatable to international bodies.**

the Gleneagles Agreement could be conclusive. The admission of Sri Lanka as a full member of the International Cricket Conference has closed the cricket door emphatically, leaving South Africa's allies isolated. Even on the domestic front sponsorship is now being made available to

non-racial sport by courageous firms such as United Tobacco (now threatened by a boycott by South African Defence Force personnel).

Countering these trends are conservative elements such as the British Freedom in Sport organization under Lord Chalfont and wealthy South African business interests. In a recent appeal, Joe Pamensky of the SACU even asked for government finance. It is not conceivable, however, that South Africa forever will be able to buy literally the best of the world's sportsmen. Commonwealth and United Nations action will gradually restrict the ability to bring rebel sports tours and persons to South Africa. There is little doubt that reviewed in historical perspective decades ahead, the tactics of SACOS will look realistic and its strategy morally defensible.

## **SPORTS BOYCOTT** by Jill Wentzel

### **2 A more agonized viewpoint**

**T**HE SLOGAN 'No normal sport in an abnormal society' explains the majority thinking behind the current sports boycott: but not everyone would agree that it 'encapsulates the non-racial attitude'.

Non-racialism and all-or-nothing tactics do not necessarily have anything to do with each other: indeed many people whose attitudes are non-racial are uneasy about tactics which do not reward creative dissidence within our society and which therefore might contribute more to racial polarisation than to the cause of non-racialism.

It might be that uncompromising boycott tactics, resulting in increasing isolation for white South Africa, will hasten the day when whites decide, or are compelled, to abandon apartheid and call a national convention, but this would only happen if boycott on every level, especially economic, was orchestrated with efficiency and complete international cohesion, which seems unlikely.

In the meantime, the all-or-nothing tactic governing current boycott policy has created a situation of stalemate, which classically drives people to seek strong-arm and unconstructive solutions — in this case, bribery of international sportsmen. The linking of sport to all the ills of our society has rendered sportsmen of all races powerless to make their own specific contribution to progress.

**The linking of sport to all the ills of our society has rendered sportsmen of all races powerless to make their own specific contribution to progress.**

So it is that the recent no-normal-sport-until-armageddon tactic has driven into the arms of the government significant numbers of sports administrators, sportsmen and businessmen who would have preferred to work for non-racialism through sport, and some of whom would have been prepared to use sport as a springboard to wider inroads into apartheid outside the field of sport.

The current situation is dead, providing victory to no-one, semi-defeat to everyone. It is, however, the result of an inexorable process and it is hard to think how one could find a way out of it.

The non-racial Liberal Party saw sports boycott as a vividly educative measure which could contribute to a process of change but which obviously was not in itself able to produce the basic changes necessary to create a normal society.

Believing that some degree of non-racialism in sport would be at least one effective weapon against granite apartheid its members co-operated