

SPORTS TEST FOR SOUTH AFRICA

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SOUTH AFRICA, it is generally admitted, is sport mad. The extensive daily press and radio coverage, the interminable arguments in bus and bar, and the thousands who flock to the sportsgrounds all testify to this. There are some who say that this is just an escape for the masses from the pressing problems of a multi-racial society, that the electorate can play, because the professional politicians get on with the dirty work. Certainly, South Africa has succeeded very well in expelling the race-problem from sport—up to now. But there are ominous signs that all this is changing, and leading sports officials are suffering “big match jitters”. The news that the International Olympic Committee is to discuss South Africa’s colour-bar in sport has only added to the unease they previously felt.

For sport in South Africa means ‘white sport’, something peculiar to the country and vastly different to the meaning given to the term elsewhere. Selection on merit—the fundamental of sport—is meaningless in South Africa, except in relation to the 3 million White South Africans. No one of the 12 million non-Whites is ever considered for a national team, no matter what his ability or how clearly he merits selection. And so our sport is a fraud, and our international reputation for sportsmanship acquired by deceit.

The rest of the world is not unaware of this, and the South African violation of the principles of the Olympic Games, as embodied in their fundamental article—“No discrimination is permitted on grounds of race, religion or politics”—has already been challenged. But the big test lies ahead.

For almost every South African national sporting body which admits only White South Africans, and which is recognized by the international bodies, there exists a parallel non-White body, generally with a non-racial constitution, which is doomed to play its matches in the locations and denied all chance of ever providing national representatives. Some 200,000 non-Whites participate in sport every week, but not all of them are still content to be excluded from sport as they are excluded from other spheres of civilised living. And some sharp clashes have taken place in various branches of sport.

The most notable, since it resulted in a victory for the non-White body—on the grounds that its constitution is open to all South Africans—was that in Table Tennis. After some six years of negotiation, the non-racial Table Tennis Board was granted membership of the International Table Tennis Federation, and the Europeans-Only Table Tennis Union was expelled. In 1957, for the first time, a team took part in a World Championships (at Stockholm) which did not represent White South Africans alone.

For four years the non-racial Soccer Federation, with a membership of 50,000 members, has challenged the recognition granted the White body by the international association. Thus far the White body (20,000 members) has retained its seat in F.I.F.A., mainly because of strong support from Britain, but its position is becoming increasingly precarious.

The national non-racial bodies for Athletics, Boxing, Cycling, Lawn Tennis, Netball, Softball, Baseball and Weightlifting, all have the same aspirations to be recognized as national sporting bodies, or at least be enabled to provide candidates for national teams. All of them encounter the same frustrations. And so last year a super body was set up, the South African Sports Association, to co-ordinate their work, both internally and externally, and with special reference to international recognition. It was this body—now supported by eight national bodies and with a still-growing membership of about 70,000—which influenced the International Olympic Committee to investigate the colour-bar in South African sport, and which cabled the President of Brazil to stop a segregated soccer match between a bleached Brazilian team and an all-White South African one.

Apart from these internal pressures, there has also been some overseas interest. At the time of the Commonwealth Games at Cardiff last year, a protest was organized by Mrs Gladys Griffiths of Penarth, and more than a thousand signatories protested at the exclusion of non-Whites from the South African team. The Campaign Against Racial Discrimination in Sport, a permanent body headed by Fenner Brockway, organized a letter of protest to the London "*Times*" which was signed by 20 leading British sportsmen, and the Movement for Colonial Freedom held a meeting in Cardiff on the eve of the Games. Through the valiant efforts of Welsh sportsmen, the matter was placed on the agenda at the meeting of the Federation, but London officials suppressed it in "the interests of harmony",

and the absence of representatives of four-fifths of the South African population was ignored at this meeting of the "great family of nations."

Recently there were statements by Mr Reg. Honey and Commandant-General Klopper, Chairman and President respectively of the South African Olympic and Commonwealth Games Association, that non-Whites would be allowed to represent South Africa if they were fit, but that there had been none capable enough in the past. Yet Ron. Eland, a Coloured weightlifter who was clearly the best in the country and was unable to find a place in his country's team, qualified to represent Great Britain at the 1948 Olympics and Empire Games and did well in his events. More significantly, in the S.A. team to the Melbourne Olympics in 1956, there were non-Whites who made the team by "passing for White". This has been admitted by a leading Nationalist paper, which added that when their origins were discovered, they were persuaded to go into "voluntary retirement". This apart from our non-White soccer players who are winning laurels in Holland, Britain, and Portugal, and the many fine boxers—Jake Tuli was never able to challenge the White South African champion, but succeeded in winning a British Empire title.

The superiority of non-White table tennis players was demonstrated when a match was arranged during the visit of the Egyptian Judge, Abou Heif, Vice-President of the International Table Tennis body. When the best of the non-racial and White bodies met, the result was a resounding defeat for the practitioners of apartheid.

The White bodies can, of course, use all the resources of a society designed to protect their interests and to preclude non-White development. Dissident non-White soccerites were promptly awarded control of a location stadium by the Johannesburg City Council (perhaps as a reward), and this may lead to other soccer bodies hiving off and accepting control by White officials. An exclusively Bantu Athletic Association, which is prepared to accept affiliation to the White body under "conditions of trusteeship" effectively able to keep their aspirations in check—their representatives, for instance, must be White, and the body is itself directly under the control of the Chamber of Mines,—has been offered many facilities, including free accommodation for 600 from the Durban Municipality during its championships. Perhaps the most revealing instance has been

in weightlifting. For more than 10 years the non-racial federation has sought recognition for its lifters, only to meet up with a blank wall from the two White bodies. Recently the secretary of a small non-racial union, piqued at criticism, resigned. He applied to the White body for the affiliation of a society yet to be formed, which would accept the colour-bar. Needless to say, he was given immediate consideration, and the frustrated federation was told that it would not be possible to consider its affiliation until this matter was cleared up.

The sports bodies can also rely on the resources of the State, and have made good use of them. Most of the White-controlled press, including papers with a largely non-White circulation, are unsympathetic to non-White aspirations in sport. The Government press has a stock response: these demands are the work of "political agitators". Apparently it is unthinkable that any outstanding sportsman should aspire to represent his country, if he is a non-White. But then it is rarely conceded that the country also belongs to the non-Whites: they are at best awkward aliens who must be rapidly transported to some Bantustan outside the civilised territories. White politicians, even when in opposition to the Government, are solidly united on this question: they all agree that sport must be kept White, and that the Black must be kept in his place. And all remain blissfully unconscious of the nonsense which their political hysteria makes of the whole concept of sport.

The thirty standing trial for High Treason and the Congress movement startlingly erupted onto the sports field on the recent issue of a tour of South Africa by a team of West Indian cricketers, vigorously opposing it. This tour, under conditions of apartheid, has received the blessing of the Government "because it is in conformity with the policy of the country", but has been strenuously opposed by sportsmen, including cricketers, led by the South African Sports Association. The West Indian Board of Control has recently decided that it is also opposed to the tour because of the conditions of racial discrimination required.

When the White soccer body was challenged at the World Federation, it was able to produce a letter from the Government stating that it was opposed to any mixed sport in South Africa. The Government also refused passports for non-White spokesmen, both in 1956 and 1958, which may explain why, though superior in the field, they were outplayed in the conference

room. The most blatant example of State interference in sport occurred in March of this year. On the eve of their departure for the World Championships, the Table Tennis team of non-Whites had their passports seized. This may yet prove to be a fatal blunder. The International Olympic Committee is severe on government interference (Peron had hurriedly to dismiss his State-appointed Olympic Council on the eve of the 1956 Games or face exclusion from the Olympics), and this clear evidence of interference may yet lead to South Africa's being ordered off the international sports field.

The resolution of the West Indies Cricket Board not to accept invitations to South Africa as long as there is racial discrimination in sport here is a lead that might well be followed. And the President of Brazil is to be congratulated on ordering a Brazilian soccer team to take no part in segregated sport in South Africa. But while Australia, England and New Zealand tour South Africa, they are conniving at the imposition of apartheid in cricket. Worse, in inviting racially exclusive teams, they are condoning the export of apartheid to their own countries. And the countries which compete with South Africa at international events, knowing well that no non-White South African, however worthy of selection, can become a member of the team, are accepting a particularly distasteful form of racial prejudice.

White South Africa must, of course, do everything in its power to seal up this small crack in the grim edifice of apartheid. Once this fissure grows, the entire indivisible structure of racial rule is threatened by collapse. For once White South Africans can be influenced in their judgments by merit, they will certainly come to think seriously of White and Black sportsmen alike. And in a country which eats, drinks, lives and sleeps sport, the entire mental climate of the country could be changed.

Sport dramatizes their dilemma and exposes the anachronism of apartheid as few other things do: White South Africans must not only succeed in imposing their racial lunacy on the entire population of the country, they must also succeed in selling it to the entire world at international sporting events. The sporting world is, in conscience, bound to reject it eventually, and apartheid may well face its severest test then. For South Africa's sport-mad White population will either have to conform to the principles of international sport or be doomed to dispirited games of jukskei in its own backyards.