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THE AURORA CRICKET CLUB AND SOUTH AFRICAN CRICKET SINCE ISOLATION.

by Mike Hickson

By way of an introduction to the organizational structure of South African sport, one can distinguish generally between three types of associations that exist in the different sporting codes. There are firstly the "white" organisations which, for a variety of reasons, appear to dominate the local scene. These associations have historically enjoyed the best facilities and recognition by the international controlling bodies of the various codes of sport. In addition they have received the bulk of total sporting sponsorship, and a disproportionate share of the sporting coverage of the local media. Secondly, there are the black "ethnic" associations, membership of which is restricted to a particular ethnic group. These have often affiliated to the "white" bodies – generally under conditions ensuring white control and the playing of racially separate leagues.

Opposed to the above two are the "non-racial" organisations which, although Coloured and Indian dominated, have always been open to all races and have attracted significant African (and, lately, some white) membership. The non-racial bodies have consistently refused to affiliate with the white bodies as this would involve continuing to play in racially separate leagues. The policies of the non-racial bodies are founded on the playing of integrated sport from club level upwards, and they criticise the white and African bodies on grounds that they co-operate with the Government's 'multi-national' sports policy. The latter is seen as being a ploy to have South Africa re-admitted to international competition without abandoning the principle of Apartheid.

The various non-racial bodies have since the mid 50's formed umbrella sporting bodies in order to co-ordinate their activities, and to further the cause of non-racialism in South African sport. The South African Sports Association was formed in 1958, and this body in turn gave rise to the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee in 1962. As these organizations campaigned consistently for the exclusion of 'whites only' sports bodies from international competition, they were subjected to a series of raids and

bannings by the South African authorities in the 1960's. Formed in the early 1970's, the South African Council of Sport (SACOS) is a member of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa, and has the support of all the domestic non-racial sports associations despite a sustained campaign of harassment by the authorities (and, more recently, shotgun blasts directed at the homes of two officials in Durban).

Prior to 1973, membership of "white" sporting associations was **exclusively** white – no blacks had been admitted to play in any white sporting league in the country. When challenged by 'non-racial' administrators as to why this was the case, white administrators tended to argue that they were not to blame for the segregation in South African sport; that it was the Government that would not allow them to introduce mixed sport. To this the 'non-racial' administrators replied that white sporting bodies were hiding behind the skirts of the Government, and that – provided certain conditions were met – mixed sport was not illegal in South Africa. Legal opinions had been put forward at that stage to the effect that mixed sport was legal if games were played on private property, no spectators were present and no buildings (i.e. change rooms) were used. However, these opinions had never been properly tested in the courts.

With regard to cricket, there was certainly ample reason to suspect that the (white) South African Cricket Association (SACA) was at least as much to blame for the segregated nature of the game in this country as was the Government. The events of the year following the international isolation of South African cricket (the cancellation of the 1970 tour to England) are an indication that this was indeed the case. In April 1971 the country's top white cricketers walked off the field at Newlands in protest against the Government's segregationist sports policy. The Minister of Sport immediately reacted by inviting SACA officials to approach him with proposals for multi-racial cricket at club level, which he was prepared to take to the Cabinet. Shortly after, the Vice President of the SACA was quoted in a newspaper

as appealing to the Government to allow mixed trials for a Springbok team "pending the time when it will be suitable to the SACA to approach the Minister on the question of multiracial cricket at all levels".

The suggestion that white administrators were not in favour of mixed cricket at club level was confirmed later the same year when the (white) Transvaal Cricket Union was faced with an application by a black cricket club (College Old Boys) to play in one of its leagues. Two days after the President of SACA, Mr Jack Cheetham, had stated at the Association's Annual General Meeting that there was "no opportunity within the law for multi-racial cricket", the TCU refused College Old Boys' application for affiliation. In response, the Star commented in an editorial that Mr Cheetham was advising cricketers to respect a law which did not exist. It was in order to clarify this situation that the Aurora Cricket Club was formed early in 1973. A group of black and white cricketers held a series of meetings wherein it was decided to form a multi-racial club and to apply for affiliation to the (white) Maritzburg Cricket Union. This would hopefully settle the questions of the attitudes of white administrators towards mixed club cricket, and the legality of the playing of mixed sport, once and for all. Such was the distrust of white officials that two white members of the club held a detailed discussion with an MCU official on the procedures to be followed in applying for affiliation **before** informing him that the club had a number of black members. This would ensure that the application could not be refused on some technicality.

The club took great pains to play down the political aspects of the situation and to behave just as a 'normal' (i.e. all white) club seeking affiliation would have done. Legal opinions as to the conditions under which mixed sport was within the law were furnished to the MCU, and the club demonstrated that these conditions **could** in fact be met. As a result, the terms within which the MCU would have to make its decision were narrowed down to the purely sporting. Were it to refuse Aurora's application, the MCU would reveal itself as supporting racism in sport. Very early on, the club decided (contrary to the wishes of the MCU) to leak the story of Aurora's application to the press. It was thought that the MCU's having to make its decision in the full glare of publicity would, firstly, elicit public support for the club's wish to affiliate and, secondly, publicly involve higher levels of the white cricket establishment in the decision.

The extensive press coverage that ensued achieved the first objective, but the provincial and national white cricket associations timidly declined to instruct the MCU on the question of Aurora's application. When the MCU passed the question of Aurora's application up to the Natal Cricket Association for consideration, the NCA bounced the ball straight back into the MCU's court, saying that it was a purely domestic matter. The SACA steadfastly refused to make an unequivocal policy statement on whether it was in favour of Aurora's playing in one of its sub-unions or not. The MCU had, therefore to make the decision on whether to buck government policy on the question of mixed club sport without the support of the national association to which it was affiliated.

This decision was made more difficult by the fact that the government became involved very shortly after the news of Aurora's application was made public. The Minister of Sport made a number of statements to the effect that government policy was that sport in South Africa should be played separately at club, provincial and national levels. In addition, he warned that "should the club not . . . co-operate in the interests of cricket, the Government will not hesitate to take such steps as it deems necessary to ensure that its policy . . . is carried out." The MCU however stood firm and on 11 September 1973 admitted Aurora to its second division cricket league. The MCU not

only became the first white sporting body to act in defiance of Government policy, it in addition accepted the opinion of its legal advisor that mixed sport could be played on **public** as well as private grounds. The next day Dr Koornhof told the Transvaal Congress of the National Party that the Aurora Club had been working towards a confrontation with the Government for months. "They have got the Government now", he continued. "The Government is taking the necessary steps to put it beyond any doubt that these people will be stopped and will not be able to go on with such mixed cricket."

In the weeks that followed, Aurora played two pre-season friendly matches without intervention by the authorities. However it became apparent that the Government's main concern was to prevent the club from setting a precedent by playing in an organized league. Four days before the start of Aurora's league schedule, three members of the club's committee were flown to Pretoria for discussions with Dr Koornhof. These 'discussions' turned out to be a last minute attempt to persuade the club to withdraw its application to play in the league. The three committee members had no mandate to make a decision, however, and returned to report back to club members. A general meeting was held, and the decision made unanimously to inform Dr Koornhof that a club team would take the field two days later on Saturday October 6th.

Accordingly, the Government Gazette of Friday 5th October contained Proclamation R228 of 1973 which altered the provisions of the Group Areas act to "apply also to any person who is at any time present in or upon any land or premises in the controlled area or in a group area **for a substantial period of time.**" (own emphasis) Dr Koornhof confirmed that afternoon that the proclamation was aimed at preventing Aurora from playing the next day. However, legal advice received by Aurora and the MCU intimated that the Proclamation did **not** in fact have the effect of rendering multi-racial sport illegal. As a result, it was decided to go ahead and play, and to test the Proclamation in the courts should the players be prosecuted.

Ironically, by the Saturday afternoon more powerful forces had intervened, and a rain-soaked pitch caused the start of the game to be postponed by a week. When the match was finally played, plainclothes policemen mingled with the crowd or hid behind trees for three hours before moving in and taking the names of the players and some spectators. In the days that followed the police prepared a docket which was forwarded to the Attorney General for possible prosecutions under the Group Areas Act. No prosecution was forthcoming however. Although the reasons for this were never made clear, there is no doubt that a court case would have gained wide publicity and would have provided potent ammunition for overseas organisations attempting to have South Africa isolated from international sport.

Thus the precedent had been set, and it was clear that the playing of multi-racial sport at club level was not illegal. However, cricket in South Africa continued to be played along essentially racial lines for the next three years. A handful of the white clubs affiliated to the SACA opened their doors to black cricketers, while it is possible that one or two whites played in leagues organised by the (non-racial) South African Cricket Board of Control. White cricketers and administrators continued to make statements supporting the principle of multi-racial cricket, but it was not until 1976 that they made concerted moves towards getting cricket played on a multi-racial basis throughout the country.

In August 1974 Mr Hassan Howa resigned as President of SACBOC and was replaced by Mr Rashid Varachia, who was also head of SACBOC's member body, the Transvaal Cricket Federation. Soon after this Mr Varachia entered

into discussions with white and African cricket officials which culminated in an agreement being made in January 1976 to organise the playing of cricket on a multi-racial basis as from the next season. 'Motivating committees', made up of representatives of the respective bodies, were set up at national, provincial and local levels to oversee the transition to what became known as 'normal' cricket.

'Normal' cricket, when it materialised in the 1976/77 season, turned out to be little more than an awkward combination of the three previously separate leagues. It was multi-racial in that black and white clubs were now competing in the same leagues, but there were probably less than ten clubs in the whole of South Africa that contained both black and white members. There was a certain amount of distrust between the 'non-racial' and 'white' camps both in the motivating committees and on the field, and a series of incidents on and off the field led finally to the collapse of 'normal' cricket before its first season had run its course.

Space does not permit a detailed account here of the events which led to the majority of black cricketers pulling out of 'normal' cricket and regrouping as the South African Cricket Board under the wing of the South African Council of Sport. What is clear, however, is that black cricketers and administrators felt very strongly that the whites had dragged their heels in removing apartheid in various aspects of the game. (Two instances in Natal were the retention of separate seating and bar arrangements at a Currie Cup game at Kingsmead, and the unnecessary exclusion of black clubs from a sponsored league previously run by the NCA.)

So South African cricket quickly reverted to abnormal, with on the one hand the South African Cricket Union representing white and some black cricketers, and on the other the South African Cricket Board representing most of the black cricketers. The Aurora Cricket Club played another season under the SACU while the dust settled and its members started to assess their position in the light of the new alignments in the sport. During the course of the 1977/78 cricket season, many members began to doubt whether the club was still fulfilling its original purpose by continuing to play under the aegis of the essentially white-controlled SACU. It had been hoped that non-racial competition would snowball as white clubs opened their doors to all races after the legality of this had been established. It was by now abundantly clear that this would not occur. In Pietermaritzburg the message was unmistakable — after Aurora's fifth season, **one** white club affiliated to the MCU had admitted **one** black cricketer. Secondary causes of dissatisfaction included the fairly regular racist comments levelled at black club members by opposing players, and the suspicion of racial bias in the selection of the Maritzburg Second Division XI. (Aurora's black captain was never selected for the Maritzburg side although he had always performed outstandingly in the league. Eventually a white Aurora member withdrew from the Maritzburg team in protest, convinced that his club captain had been omitted as his presence would cause the team luncheon to be moved from the customary venue, a white Club licensed in terms of the Liquor Act.) At the same time, certain developments in the 'non-racial' camp made Aurora's reappraisal of its position all the more urgent. The South African Council of Sport had consolidated greatly its position as the body representing the 'non-racial' organizations in every code of sport in the country. In 1978 SACOS passed on for implementation by its affiliates the following resolution.

"No person, whether he is a player, an administrator or a spectator, committed to the non-racial principle in sport, shall participate in or be associated with any code of sport which practise, perpetuate or condone racialism or multi-nationalism. Players and/or administrators disregarding the essence of this principle shall be guilty of practising double standards, and cannot therefore be members of any organization affiliated to SACOS."

The implementation of the 'double standards' resolution would obviously reduce the numbers of blacks willing to associate with sports bodies not affiliated to SACOS. As a result, the playing of non-racial sport in South Africa could effectively only come about under the auspices of SACOS. This was reinforced by the fact that SACOS was by now a member of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa.

Thus the Aurora Cricket Club decided in June 1978 to leave the MCU, and to seek affiliation with the 'non-racial' Maritzburg and District Cricket Union. The application was duly accepted, and to date the club has completed one most enjoyable season. The most striking feature of playing in a league affiliated to the South African Cricket Board turned out to be the vastly inferior facilities — there were, for instance, no turf-wickets, toilets or change-rooms at the three grounds made available to Maritzburg's 'non-racial' cricketers. However this was more than counterbalanced by the friendliness with which Aurora was welcomed to the league, and the spirit in which the game is played.

So what of the future? Will South African cricket remain split along essentially racial lines into two camps, and thus continue to be isolated internationally? Alternatively, is the playing of truly non-racial cricket under a single national controlling body possible, so that South Africa can gain readmittance to international competition? Unpalatable as it may be to the white cricketing community, the second alternative is only possible at this stage through the agency of the South African Council of Sport. In the first place, it should be clear that there are unlikely to be any significant future defections of black cricketers from the SACB leagues into the SACU fold. The implementation of the 'double standards' resolution can only strengthen the resolve of SACB cricketers to hold out until whites are prepared to implement non-racialism in every facet of the sport. Black cricketers, after all, have lost nothing by South Africa's cricketing isolation.

Secondly, any hopes that the International Cricket Conference will re-admit the SACU as a member against the wishes of SACOS can only be described as wishful thinking. The delegates of the major cricketing countries are highly unlikely to risk the wrath of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa (of which SACOS is a member) by doing so. Memories of the boycott of the last Olympic Games by African (and other Third World) countries are too fresh to allow this. This suggests that the only way out of the current impasse is for the SACU to seek reapproachment with the South African Council of Sport. For this to occur it would be necessary for white cricketers to indicate that they are prepared to make significantly more concessions in the direction of non-racialism than they have so far done. However the hostility of the South African media, and more recently the Progressive Federal Party, towards SACOS suggest that this is highly unlikely. For this reason, there is much truth in Mr Hassan Howa's dictum that there is likely to be 'no normal sport in an abnormal society.' □