

SPORTS DEVELOPMENT: OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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It is essential to understand sports as an institution and an element of culture. Sports plays a vital role in human life. It is vital in many forms. For example, sports keeps the human body fit and healthy, promotes human relations among communities. To others, sports is a career from which they make a living.

Blanchard and Cheska (1985: 14) define sports as a game-like activity having a set of rules, a competitive element, and requiring some form of physical exertion.

Becker (1974: 227) gives a definition of a township sport which goes thus, "It is township food for thought and body, but most of all it's part of the townsman's way of life, and if gets hooked on it like junkies get hooked on drugs".

Throughout the world people spend their leisure time in various sports activities. The whole idea of being involved in sports is to have fun and relax. There are those who are involved in sports as professionals and to them, sports is work and business.

The focus of this paper is on amateur as well as big time sports. Big time sports has its roots in the amateur ranks in South African townships, rural areas and well established urban areas. The crucial element is how sports development programmes have been implemented prior to, and after South African 1994 elections.

Sports development is important because it creates opportunities for individuals. For example, some individuals began practising sports at a tender age and ended up becoming professionals, earning a living from it. Sports also keeps the youth out the streets, particularly from deviant behaviour such as drug consumption and delinquency.

Hilde (1993: 27) mentioned that sports development is important in the social development of youths. Youths benefit from sports in many ways. For example, moral development, identity formation and competence.

The research methodology used is the Malinowskian participant observation, interviews, including secondary information from texts, print and electronic media. I also relied on personal experience because I have been previously and recently directly involved in a number of amateur sports activities, namely: soccer, golf, athletics, tennis and chess. I have been following sports and its development for more than ten years.

There are crucial issues which for a long time, have delayed the development of sports in South Africa. South Africa was isolated from international sports because of its "apartheid policy". South African sportpersons did not have the chance to exhibit their talents in international competitions. Isolation made it difficult for the South African sportpersons to test their strength at local, national and international levels, as a result, talents were suppressed, and some of the great talents went down the drain.

The unequal distribution of recreational facilities such as playing fields contributed negatively to sports development. The planning of South African townships does not allow or have space for recreational facilities. In many South African townships there are no sports fields. Many schools in the townships and rural areas do not have sports facilities, unlike in South African suburbs where every school has several sports facilities some of which are not being use.

Hilde (1993: 8) mentioned that Walmer Township is far removed from resources in the wider Port Elizabeth community. It was thus difficult for the children of Walmer Township to be transported to the beach for volleyball or to the athletics tracks in Port Elizabeth town.

The inhabitants of Gqebera township near Port Elizabeth are poor, and their income very low. Almost 70 percent of the household earns less than R1000 per month, consequently, spending on sports is very low (UPE Sport World, October 1998: 11).

Most of Health Racket Clubs in South Africa are situated in towns and membership fees are high. Disadvantaged people do not have access to the above-mentioned clubs because they cannot afford the membership fee, and it is difficult to travel to these clubs. Swimming pools are also scarce or few in the townships.

Representation in some of the sporting disciplines is a problem. It is as if certain cultural groups have inherent qualities for playing a certain game. This is the case with disciplines such as rugby, cricket and golf.

The cricket president argued that, "There should always be players of colour, but there are sometimes reasons why the team will be all white in certain matches (Mail & Guardian, 3 December 1998: 27).

A parliamentary report on sports in South Africa has criticised rugby, cricket, golf, tennis, cycling motor sports, and gymnastic federations. According to the report, the federations were still struggling to get to grips with the realities on the ground. The federations management structures are still reflecting the old order; Africans are still sidelined from decision-making positions at management level as well as in national teams (Eastern Cape Herald, 17 September 1998: 8).

Besides cricket, most sporting disciplines played by Whites are mainly practised got their roots in township areas; for example, tennis, golf, rugby and badminton (Becker, 1974: 227).

Reacting on the issue of representation, the Minister of Sports gave the Boxing Transformation Team up till 23 December 1998 to come up with a final report on transformation in Boxing. The Minister further argued that, "Sports leaders should not think that they are doing participants a favour by serving them, and should not treat their organizations as their own individual fiefdoms" Sunday Tribune Sports, 20 December 1998:5).

On 12 January 1999, the Minister of Sports strongly urged sport federations to speed up transformation, affirmative action and development. He challenged the federations to "break artificial barriers" that had hampered development and transformation in the past (Sowetan, 13 January 1999:40).

Racism and tribalism are major obstacles in the development of sports in South Africa. For example, it is an open secret that in the Rugby National team there is only one African player and in the Cricket National team the same applies. This is also the case with other sporting disciplines though statistics are not available for the general public to know.

On Saturday 31 October 1998, there were two major sporting events in South Africa. There was a big soccer match at Soccer City and a big rugby match 60 kilometres away. At the rugby match, the crowd was largely an all-white affair while at the soccer it was an all-black affair (City Press, 1 November 1998:1).

The newly-appointed Rugby President who is from a Xhosa background, was booed in front of visitors by white spectators when he was handing over the Tri-Nations trophy to the Springbok captain (City Press, 6 September 1998: 6).

Most teams are formed on the basis of principles. Several rugby teams are associated with particular groups. For example, the Bush Bucks with Gcaleka from the Transkei (Pauw, 1963: 173).

In an interview, one of the workers at a tertiary institution argued that, he decided to quit rugby because "apartheid" in rugby at his institution is still rife. He really did not like leaving because he really liked rugby but he had other choice.

Some sports disciplines were, and are still known to be played by certain ethnic groups. For example, rugby and cricket are known to be played by people with the Afrikaans and Xhosa backgrounds. I have experienced this that during my involvement in sports at a tertiary institution. Rugby players from my institution and from other institutions which we used to host and visit were from the Eastern and Western Cape with either a Xhosa or an Afrikaans background. Again, chess and softball players were from Gauteng, North-West, Orange Free State and the Northern provinces with a Sotho background. The former Rugby President was from the Afrikaans background and the present Rugby President is from a Xhosa background.

Adding to that, the first Minister of Sports and Recreation in the South African new dispensation, that is the period between 1994 and 1999, was from a Xhosa background and his successor is also from the same background.

Sexism is another thorny issue in the development of sports in South Africa. Women are still perceived as unequal partners in sports. One of the best hockey players in South Africa was quoted saying: "South African sportswomen are getting a raw deal". She expressed concern about the treatment of women in sports. She argued that female sports does not benefit from proper sponsorship, let alone proper coverage from both the print and electronic media..."So many times we play and nobody in South Africa even knows we're playing". She further mentioned that her team had had three days to prepare for an international game to match the flair New Zealand displayed. According to her it was a pipe dream to think that they could beat other countries at the Commonwealth Games in 1998 in Malaysia (The Sunday Times, 20 September 1998: 25).

The South African Women Soccer National Team took part in the World Cup qualifying games in Nigeria, and there was no coverage from the electronic media. The coverage was in the print media, and even then it was reported in small print in the middle of the sports pages.

One of the players from the South African Women squad was dismissed from the team on her way back from Nigeria. The top soccer officials, acting on her behalf, negotiated with her employers to re-instate her (Sowetan, 19 November 1998: 33).

An African golf player was fired because of he attended a golf tournament in Bloemfontein. The player argued that his supervisor was a kareteka and regularly took time off and the company did not object, so why was he being treated differently? (City Press, 10 January 1999:6).

Talbot (1981: 30) reminds us that women have traditionally been excluded from club houses, golf courses and other fields because these sporting disciplines were previously considered male preserves.

Women are still marginalised in sports by men who still think that women should stay at home and do the household chores. Big companies where sponsorships are decided by men still do not want to invest in women sports. The media which is controlled by men also marginalises women sports. They do not give it live coverage on television, for example.

Nepotism is another obstacle. Players in various national teams are selected on the basis of skin color. This is the case with cricket and rugby teams where players are still selected based on their race. Other players are selected out of favouritism. There are players in the above-mentioned sporting codes who are playing at national level but who do not deserve the place.

Also some of the soccer players who were selected in the national team were not competent. The athletes who were selected to represent South Africa in Commonwealth Games in Malaysia performed very poorly, their standard being below par. The injection of foreign players and coaches particularly in soccer created a lot of problems. Many professional soccer teams have three to five foreign players who play in key positions. These are generally goal-keepers and strikers, and these players in the long run overshadow the local players.

The whole idea of employing foreign players particularly from African countries is based on the fact that these players accept lower salaries which is advantageous to the soccer team owners.

At the same time the export of players also dragged down the level of local talent. Many of the best South African soccer players are plying their trade in foreign countries. The South African national soccer team performed badly in the 1998 World Cup because of a number of blunders. Firstly, they employed a French coach who could not communicate properly with the players. The same coach used European based players. He also used European soccer tactics and failed to collaborate with his technical team. Lastly, he fought with the media.

Corruption in sports is another stumbling block. A lot of money went missing because of the mismanagement and dishonesty of sports

administrators in the different sporting disciplines. Many big companies in the country pumped in a lot of money to develop sports and the money was used for personal and sectarian interests. Sports administrators travel unnecessarily from one place to the other in the country.

Township sports needs money, and sponsorship is the greatest worry of every sports manager in townships. One of the netball administrators complained about the lack of money for the development of sports (City Press, 13 September, 1998: 7).

A sum estimated at R10 million, went missing from the soccer coffers between 1995 and 1996. According to investigations, the chairperson of the South African Football Association deposited a huge amount of money collected from sponsors into his personal bank account. The Minister of Sport set up a commission of inquiry which estimated the amount missing as that mentioned above. The chairperson was sacked and a new chairperson appointed, but the situation has not changed.

In 1998, two big cellular phone companies pumped in a lot of money into sports but there has been little improvement in terms developing sports infrastructure such as sports complexes in townships.

The issue of a national emblem for sports is another obstacle. A series of forums took place during which it was agreed that the national emblem would be a protea. All sportsmen and women including people who are genuinely interest in developing sports task part. The only exeption was the rugby team which alone still use a "springbok" and the majority of people in the country are unhappy about it. The President of the country supported rugby and gave it the go-ahead to use the "springbok" emblem.

The old South African flag keeps on appearing in some of the rugby and cricket matches. At one point, the flag appeared in front of the President of the country during a cricket match.

In my view, displaying the old South African flag and using a "springbok" emblem constitutes a serious problem which must be resolved otherwise this will hamper the development of sports.

The South African Minister of Health is creating other problems by decreeing that cigarette companies should stop sponsoring sports because cigarettes, according to the minister, are considered as a drug. The Health Minister seems to be inconsistent in the sense that she does not ban liquor companies from sponsoring sports. In my view, liquor is also a drug because people get drunk after consuming it.

Recently there was a row over the logo on the National Rugby jersey. The rift was between the rugby management and the senior players. Some players felt that the liquor sponsorship had compromised their religious principles. One former rugby player was upset and mentioned that this would make the late rugby president "turned in his grave" (The Eastern Cape Herald, 17 August 2000: 1-2)

My focus will now be on the solutions and positive measures previously taken by big companies in South Africa to develop sports at the grassroots level. Several companies in South Africa pumped in a lot of money into various sporting disciplines. More than R40 million was pumped into sports in the last five years though the money was misused by sports administrators. For the past five years women have started to be taken seriously. For example, the Women South African National team was given a chance.

According to statistics, more than 125 000 players at primary, high school and senior level have attended rugby training camps in both Boland and Western Cape. The Western Province Rugby Union Academy conducted 390 training camps for primary school players, 298 for high schools and 193 for senior players. Furthermore, Boland has trained 210 rugby administrators, 890 referees, 310 first aid officials, 210 level one coaches, 85 level two coaches and 77 selectors (Sowetan, 16 September, 1998: 33).

Sponsors contributed considerably towards the development of sports in Walmer township in Port Elizabeth. A Bottling Company for soft-drinks offered some drinks, and local food companies offered refreshments. Most of the local sporting bodies helped with equipment (Hilde, 1993: 51).

The death of "apartheid" opened up opportunities for sport women and men in South Africa. South Africa started to compete internationally, the Rugby World Tournament and won the title. It hosted an African Cup of Nation finals and also won the title. South African sportspersons participated in the Olympic games and some came back with medals.

To conclude, it is imperative that we look at solutions and strategies that can be implemented to uplift the standard of sports in South Africa. Firstly, government needs to build and equip recreational facilities in rural areas as well as in the townships, such as swimming pools, gymnasiums, golf courses, rugby fields, cricket fields, tennis courts, and stadiums. It could start by first building sports fields in schools and then move to the townships.

The children and youths in South Africa should be encouraged to participate in sports. South African sports professionals should collaborate with amateurs. They must make themselves available by conducting coaching sessions at grass-roots level. They should be committed to developing sports in rural areas as well as in townships.

In the mid 1980's, youth clubs played an important role in keeping the youths away from drinking and hooliganism. These clubs emphasized the promotion of sports and community oriented activities (Seekings, 1993: 23).

The South African's mentality should also be corrected. There is a tendency to believe in foreign players and in foreign coaches. This suppresses local talent in terms of both coaching and playing. There is a general tendency in South African soccer players to believe that playing overseas is the best option.

All sports federations should be audited every six month. Financial statements, transformation processes and all other aspects that affect sports should be examined. Players representing South Africa in international events should be monitored constantly to avoid things like match-fixing. Match-fixing, which once involved a former South African cricket captain, send bad signals to international communities, and South African sports should guard against such bad practises in future.

The South African National Soccer Team would have done better in the World Cup if they had employed a local coach and also used more of the locally based players. In future, we will need a local

coach and maybe some foreign technical staff to add their experience and knowledge.

The National Rugby Team won the World Rugby Tournament only with locally based players. The Rugby team proved that there is great potential in South African players. I am not saying that South African players should not test their strength overseas, rather, I am saying, that priority be given more to players at home. In order to develop sports, South African sportspersons should believe in local talent and promote it.

Only locally based players should be selected in all sporting events. Local coaches should have priority when national coaches are being appointed. In that sense there will be coherence largely because both local players and coaches will easily understand each other and the style of play which is South African in nature.

I am not against international relations. I personally believe that sports can improve international relations during competitions with sportspersons from foreign countries. I also firmly believe that adding foreign talent and experience can improve the standard of sports in South Africa. The only problem is when foreign coaches and players dominate in South African sports.

One of the essential uses of sports in international relations is in the area of diplomacy. For example, in 1971 the republic of China and United States of America were engaged in a tennis tournament. This was a major break-through for China towards recognition by other countries (Blanchard & Cheska, 1985: 265).

Finally, campaigns like sports-against-crime, aids awareness through sport and education through sports should be encouraged since they can help keep children and youth in sport fields.

Rural areas in South Africa should be given the opportunity to host big sporting events. Politics should not dominate sports, as was the case when Africa as a continent was denied an opportunity to host the 2006 World Soccer Cup finals.

Companies should sponsor disadvantaged communities. Government must take the initiative to rid sports of racism in the country. The involvement of the government in sports must be fair and honest, excluding any political gain at the expense of the whole nation. Recreational facilities must be built and Universities as well as sports

centres should make their sports facilities accessible to disadvantaged communities.

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