

**‘WE DON’T WANT TO BE PUSHED BY OUTSIDERS’  
THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ATHLETICS FEDERATIONS’  
ATTEMPTS TO RE-ADMIT SOUTH AFRICA  
TO THE GLOBAL ATHLETICS STAGE**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Based on a historical analysis of IAAF Council/Congress minutes and previously unknown written correspondences between IAAF officials and South African sport administrators, this paper investigates the role of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) in the process of South Africa’s re-entrance into international sport at the beginning of the 1990s. Specific attention is paid to the roles of individuals, such as IAAF President at the time, Primo Nebiolo, and IAAF Vice-President at the time, Lamine Diack, in order to elaborate whether they acted in the interest of South Africa’s needs or rather tried to exploit the South African case for their own interests. It is argued that the IAAF’s organisational readmission strategy went through three phases. Firstly, it followed the overall policies of the International Olympics Committee (IOC) by taking a careful approach guided by African IAAF Council members; then it pushed South Africa towards participation in the 1991 Athletics World Championships; and finally Nebiolo exploited the IOC’s desire to see South Africa at the 1992 Olympic Games for his own interest to become an IOC member.*

**Keywords:** IAAF; South Africa; Apartheid; Primo Nebiolo; IOC.

**INTRODUCTION**

April 23, 1992, was a significant day for the President of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), Dr. Primo Nebiolo (Italy). Nelson Mandela, then President of the African National Congress (ANC), welcomed the IAAF President at his headquarters in Johannesburg, South Africa. Nebiolo had been in South Africa on occasion of the African Unity Athletics Meetings, an event that marked the re-entrance of South Africa into the sport of athletics on the continental level. Nelson Mandela acknowledged Primo Nebiolo’s “great deal of encouragement and support which he had given to pave the way for the readmission of a new South Africa to world sport” (IAAF, 1992a:1) during the meeting. Whilst such complimentary words can be partly categorised as political etiquette, it is remarkable that Nebiolo, who was one of the most controversial sport political leaders of the 1980s and 1990s, had received them from Nelson Mandela. In fact, Booth (1998) in his ground-breaking monograph on the history of sport and politics in South Africa argues, “...no individual better epitomizes naked ambition in sport than the president of the IAAF, Primo Nebiolo” (Booth,

1998:188). Booth links this to Nebiolo's involvement in South Africa's readmission process, suggesting that Nebiolo's efforts were largely based on his determination to profit personally from the IAAF's South Africa politics.

Against this background, it is important to investigate the role of the IAAF and its President in detail to evaluate whether Nelson Mandela was indeed correct to stress Nebiolo's role in the process of South Africa's re-entrance into international sport. Whilst research on other sport organisations, in particular the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch, as well as the (sport)-political processes within South Africa exist (Kidd, 1991; Macintosh *et al.*, 1993; Booth, 1998; Keech, 2000; Cornelissen, 2011), the role of the IAAF has not been subject to detailed analysis to-date. Therefore, this paper revisits the South Africa case, but explores the issue from an international perspective by focusing only on the IAAF. Specific attention is paid to individual interests of key agents within the international sport system in order to elaborate whether they acted in the interest of South Africa's needs.

The results of this study are based on a historical analysis of IAAF Council/Congress minutes and previously unknown written correspondences between IAAF officials and South African sport administrators. The documents were compiled from the IAAF Archives (Monaco) and the Carl und Liselott Diem-Archive of the German Sport University Cologne (Germany).

## **PROCESSES LEADING TO THE EXPULSION OF SOUTH AFRICA FROM THE IAAF**

Before investigating South Africa's readmission process at the beginning of the 1990s, it is necessary to detail its expulsion from the IAAF. The International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) was the first international sport federation to expel white South Africa in 1956. This was seven years before the IOC acted on the matter in 1963 and suspended South Africa from competing at the Olympic Games (Kidd, 1991).

The IAAF Congress first discussed the South Africa case in 1964 during the Olympic Games in Tokyo, for which the IOC had banned South Africa. In line with the IOC decision at the time to maintain IOC membership for South Africa, the IAAF decided not to disaffiliate the South African Amateur Athletic Union (SAAAU) yet, in order to improve the situation for non-white athletes in South Africa (IAAF, 1970:28). An explanation for this verdict can be found in the composition of the IAAF Council. The IAAF's leading executive body, like the IOC Executive Board, consisted predominantly of white European representatives and had only one African representative in Hasan Agabani (Sudan). This made it difficult for member states from Black Africa to enforce their critical views in the mid-1960s when political and public pressure was still somewhat limited. However, when the critics of the *Apartheid* regime had increased their efforts by the beginning of the 1970s and the IOC expelled South Africa in 1970, the IAAF was forced to act more vigorously as well. The 1970 IAAF Congress decided on the recommendation of the IAAF Council to suspend the SAAAU from all international and continental competitions but to maintain its IAAF membership (IAAF, 1970).

At the 1974 IAAF Congress, SAAAU President Hannes Botha outlined the changes that had been made in South African athletics since 1970 (IAAF, 1974). Based on these changes the still Western-dominated IAAF Council under leadership of IAAF President David Burghley recommended a relaxation of the suspension to the Congress. However, the proposal this time encountered considerable resistance in the IAAF Congress from the growing number of African and USSR-affiliated member federations at this time. The African representatives under the apparent leadership of Lamine Diack (Senegal) argued that Botha's report had not been conclusive and *apartheid* politics contravened IAAF principles. According to the African member federations, the developments in South African athletics were positive, but a consequence of the IAAF's pressure. Such statements were supported by USSR representative Leonid Khomenkov (IAAF, 1974). One can categorise the USSR position as a strategic one. The country had continuously aimed to increase its influence in the whole of Africa and for that matter promoted its international policies of equality and anti-colonialism (Krieger, 2017). This Soviet strategy also existed in the IOC (Nauright, 2010). It appears that most federations backed the African/USSR position, as eventually, the majority of the IAAF Congress voted against a relaxation of the rules and therewith overruled the Council's recommendation (IAAF, 1974).

The same developments preceded the IAAF's decision to expel the SAAAU from IAAF membership in 1976. Against the IAAF Council's recommendation, (IAAF, 1976a), the Congress voted for a complete expulsion of the SAAAU (IAAF, 1976b). Again, the discussions reveal that Western IAAF members saw most benefit in keeping South Africa within the federation, whereas the African member federations rejected such stance. For example, Diack's position in 1976 is recorded as follows:

If, in accordance with our own rules, South Africa was excluded, Mr Diack was convinced this would achieve the desired result very rapidly and bring about the total integration of all athletes. Then, international athletics would again see athletes from South Africa participating. (IAAF, 1974:13)

Diack undoubtedly occupied a key role within these processes. He appeared as spokesperson of the African federations and the strong support for his stance provides evidence for his influence. His commitment to the case also brought him the election to Vice-President of the IAAF at the very same Congress (IAAF, 1974).

The subsequent period of South Africa's ban from the IAAF fell into a key transformation period of the sport. This is important to consider when analysing South Africa's readmission to international athletics. From the end of the 1970s onwards, the IAAF adapted to the zeitgeist of sport's increasing commercialisation. In 1983, the IAAF staged its first World Athletics Championships in Helsinki (Finland). Nebiolo, who became IAAF President in 1981, initiated and promoted these processes as they allowed him to transform the IAAF into a federation that created substantial income from sponsorship and television rights (Krieger, 2016). As a result, the IAAF became an increasingly independent federation, which was less reliant on the television income of the Olympic Games. This context is important when analysing the role of the IAAF and its leading figures in South Africa's readmission. Whilst political arguments certainly still prevailed, the commercial perspective of athletics during the end of the 1980s must be considered. By the beginning of the 1990s, Nebiolo regarded the IAAF as the leading international federation in the Olympic Movement (IAAF, 1991a).

## ACTUAL PHASES OF NEGOTIATIONS AND EVENTUAL RE-ADMITTANCE

### **First Phase: Initial processes and attempts for readmission into international athletics**

The IAAF Council briefly discussed the issue of a potential re-admittance of South Africa to international athletics during its meeting in January 1990, shortly after Fékrou Kidane (President of the International Campaign Against Apartheid Sport), Sam Ramsamy and representatives of the banned South African National Olympic Committee (SANOC) met to discuss the requirements for potential considerations of the international sporting community (SANOC, 1990). However, the discussions in the IAAF were only of informative nature and based on second-hand information. Diack, then President of the African Amateur Athletics Confederation (AAAC), therefore advised the IAAF Council to wait before concrete steps should be undertaken (IAAF, 1990a). Others, such as Arne Ljungqvist (Sweden) wanted to wait for other international reactions first and pointed to the International Conference on Apartheid in Sport, which was to be held in September 1990 in Stockholm. It evolves that the IAAF considered the IOC Commission Olympism and Apartheid, which had been founded already in 1988, the responsible body to deal with all aspects on South Africa at the time. On the IOC Commission's recommendation, the IOC made clear that international federations seeking Olympic competition should expel South Africa and its respective national sport federation (Kidd, 1991:39).

However, developments in Africa caused the IAAF to deal directly with the matter earlier than anticipated. At the end of January 1990, the Namibian Athletics Association (NAA) officially applied for IAAF membership following plans for official recognition of Namibia's independence from South Africa. In the dealings with Namibia's application, the IAAF revealed two characteristics that would become defining in its early handling of the South Africa question. First, the IAAF Council members passed on the evaluation of the situation to their African colleagues in the IAAF Council. These were at the time, Diack, Agabani and Charles Mukora (Kenya). A written correspondence between IAAF General Secretary John Holt and Nebiolo reveals that they obtained final confirmation from the three about the political status of Namibia and its "100% independence from South Africa" before acting on the issue (Holt, 1990). This appears to be evidence for the needed regional expertise but also mirrors the behaviour of Juan Antonio Samaranch at the end of the 1980s (Booth, 1998). Second, the IAAF aimed to make fast decisions in order to profit financially and to allow many nations to participate at IAAF events as Namibia was allowed to send athletes to the 1990 World Cross Country Championships. This decision was taken before the IOC even started considering how to support Namibia in participating in future sporting events (Mbaye, 1995). Understandably, non-African IAAF Council members had voiced concerns over this fast process but it was argued that the participation had been allowed "as a special concession" (IAAF, 1990b:12). In light of potentially losing one member federation due to developments in reunified Germany, the IAAF felt it necessary to add Namibia as compensation (IAAF, 1990b). This drive for universality of the international athletics movement coined the IAAF under Nebiolo's leadership.

While the case of Namibia was comparably easy to handle for the IAAF, the processes in South Africa remained much more complex. In February 1990, Gert Le Roux, Director of the banned SAAAU, approached the IAAF directly for discussions (Le Roux, 1990a). His letter came

shortly after South Africa's new President Frederick Willem de Klerk (in the following: F.W. de Klerk) had announced to work toward a new political dispensation in South Africa and had released Nelson Mandela on 11 February 1990 (Keech, 2000). At the time, the IAAF rejected Le Roux's proposal, referring to the IOC Commission that had argued that *Apartheid* had not yet been eradicated (IOC, 1990).

Nevertheless, the IAAF began to consider a quick readmission for South Africa. This was in contrast to the general opinion to lift the overall ban on South Africa only once *Apartheid* had been completely abolished in South African society as voiced continuously by Association of National Olympic Committees of Africa (ANOCA) President Jean-Claude Ganga (Booth, 1998). Thereby, Nebiolo continued to follow the strategy of strong integration of African IAAF Council members, too. In March 1990, Nebiolo, Diack, Agabani and Mukora met with Kidane, member of the IOC Commission Olympism and Apartheid, and the IAAF announced that a meeting between a non-racial<sup>1</sup> South African Athletics delegation and the AAAC was planned to take place in the near future (IAAF, 1990c). Significantly, the IAAF acted prematurely in the eyes of the IOC, which only foresaw "studying the possibility" to support less privileged South African sportsmen and sportswoman (IOC, 1990). Furthermore, the IAAF's plans had not been communicated to the South African federations. On the contrary, having read the IAAF announcement, Le Roux continuously enquired about this possibility in letters to the IAAF in the following months because the SAAAU desired a return to the international athletics scene as soon as possible (Le Roux, 1990b).

Curiously, the IAAF did not reply to Le Roux's letters. Instead, Nebiolo reversed the facts in the following IAAF Council meeting at the beginning of June 1990, arguing that the SAAAU had proposed the meeting (IAAF, 1990b). This provided him with a strong argument for action as according to Nebiolo the initiative had come from within South Africa. It also appears that the IAAF began to envisage at this time a potential South African participation in the 1991 World Athletics Championships in Tokyo (IAAF, 1990b). The IAAF Council was aware that the Olympics would only take place in 1992 and therewith the IAAF had the grand opportunity to invite South Africa onto the global stage as the first leading international sports federation.

Arranging the meeting with South African athletics representatives proved to be difficult for two reasons. First, the regional situation concerning athletics in South Africa was much more complex than the IAAF had anticipated. Besides the establishment-aligned SAAAU, two other federations claimed to represent the sport of athletics in South Africa, the South African Amateur Athletics Board (SAAAB) aligned to the non-racial South African Council on Sport

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<sup>1</sup> In the 1970s, the South African government introduced a 'multinational' sport policy that allowed sporting competitions between teams that consisted of one population group only. However, the concept did not have any effect on the composition of teams and did not allow for racially mixed teams. In response, the South African Council on Sport (SACOS), founded in 1970, introduced the principle of 'non-racialism' that did not refer to race but to the participation in sports competitions. SACOS recognised the Olympic Charter but it did not apply for IOC membership as it argued the *apartheid* laws did not allow for the practice of "normal" sport (Keim, 2003:35ff). In the following years, SACOS acted as umbrella organisation to represent non-racial voices throughout the *apartheid* era (Keech, 2000).

(SACOS)<sup>2</sup> and the South African Amateur Athletics Congress (SAAAC), the affiliate of ANC-aligned National Sports Congress (NSC).<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the SAAAU, the SACOS-aligned SAAAB and the ANC-aligned SAAAC opposed a return to international athletics citing, *inter alia*, the lack of political and administrative unity and the absence of facilities and development programmes in the townships. Therefore, they delayed their acceptance to attend SAAAU-initiated meetings of all three national federations with the aim to form a single national federation representing all of South African athletics. This was an IAAF requirement for recognition. Despite the opposing positions, Nebiolo urged for a solution via Diack, emphasising that the IAAF would provide the financial framework for the meetings to take place (IAAF, 1990d).

IOC resistance to the IAAF posed a second difficulty for getting different groups together. The IOC asked the IAAF to refrain from staging its own meeting with the different South African athletics bodies in order to avoid any signs of dissent within the Olympic movement (Mbaye, 1995). However, the IAAF only partly complied with this request as it did not stage any own meetings, but spoke with the SACOS-aligned SAAAB, the establishment SAAAU and the ANC-aligned SAACON on the very same day as the IOC in Harare on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1990. These first official talks on a possible readmission of South Africa to international athletics were chaired by Diack on the instruction of Nebiolo. Diack's dual role as IAAF Vice-President *and* President of the AAAC allowed Nebiolo on the one hand to continue with his strategy to delegate the South Africa matter to African representatives on the IAAF Council. On the other hand, it also enabled the IAAF to control the talks. This is a significant difference to the general Harare talks at which no IOC representative participated. It appears that Diack had the task to speed up unity talks, but due to the discrepancies between the individual national federations, this was not possible. Consequently, Diack reported about slow and problematic discussions to the next IAAF Council in January 1991. Nevertheless, Diack also showed awareness that once unity was achieved, the IAAF had the opportunity to act swiftly. This is the only explanation as to why he had already asked in January 1991 for allowance from the IAAF Council to visit South Africa if necessary (IAAF, 1991a). Such intentions were also contrary to the recommendations made by the Harare conference that foresaw maintaining the ban in order to keep up the (sport)-political pressure.

Thus, one can conclude for the first phase that the IAAF was proactive in its attempts to readmit South Africa. In line with the IOC, the IAAF Council considered the case an African issue, which resulted in Diack occupying a key role from the very beginning. Whilst Diack urged for a careful and slow approach, it is clear that the IAAF wanted to control negotiations in South

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<sup>2</sup> SACOS was founded in 1970, rejected the multinational sport policy and acted as umbrella organisation to represent non-racial voices throughout the apartheid era (Keech, 2000:59). Whilst SACOS recognised the Olympic Charter, it did not apply for IOC membership as it argued the apartheid laws did not allow for the practice of "normal" sport (Keim, 2003:35).

<sup>3</sup> As the initiatives of SACOS made only little progress, the NSC was founded in 1989. The NSC represented all four "population groups" in South Africa and claimed to be fully representative (Keim: 2003:39.) The NSC increasingly took over the role of SACOS as the NSC was more willing to align politically (Booth, 1998:188).

Africa. Nevertheless, in the first phase the IAAF was still caught between its own interests and the overall processes of ANOCA and the IOC Commission Olympism and Apartheid.

### **Second Phase: Anticipated South African participation in the 1991 World Athletics Championships**

Whilst the IAAF showed early intentions for a speedy inclusion of South Africa until the end of 1990, but also obeyed the IOC's policies, there is no doubt that the federation under increasing personal involvement by President Nebiolo followed a clear agenda from early 1991. It pushed for a participation of South Africa at the 1991 World Athletics Championships.

National developments that were followed by positive IOC reactions preceded the IAAF's strategy. In spring 1991, F.W. de Klerk announced that he would repeal the key legislative pillars of *Apartheid* (MacIntosh *et al.*, 1993). The IOC Commission Olympism and Apartheid welcomed this move when it met with Nelson Mandela, F.W. de Klerk and the leaders of national sport organisations in South Africa in March 1991. Following this visit, the IOC Commission formulated five conditions under which the IOC would provisionally grant recognition to the newly formed Interim National Olympic Committee of South Africa (INOCSA) (IOC, 1991a). One condition was the recognition of five South African national member federations by their respective international sport federations (MacIntosh *et al.*, 1993). Such a condition provided the IAAF with the possibility to take action again, especially as it left the federation several months to negotiate a readmission prior to its 1991 Athletics World Championships in August 1991. The introduced criteria also prompted Jean-Claude Ganga to reverse ANOCA's earlier stance that the *Apartheid* had to be removed from the entire society before a readmission to international sport became possible (Booth, 1998).

In line with its previous strategy, the IAAF started preparing for a delegation to visit South Africa after the IOC announced its support for INOCSA. However, the IAAF's case was not helped by the fact that the conflicts between the three national athletics associations continued even though they decided to establish an interim committee called the South African Athletics Forum (SAAF) in April 1991 (SAAAU, 1991). Hence, the second IAAF delegation met officially with the SAAF rather than the individual bodies during its visit to South Africa in May 1991. The IAAF team consisted again of the African Council members Diack, Agabani and Mukora. Following meetings with governmental representatives, the delegation agreed that once a permanent, united athletics association was founded, the IAAF would recognise it, providing *Apartheid* had indeed been abolished and a new non-racial constitution approved (IAAF, 1991b).

However, a week later during an extraordinary meeting of the AAAC Council, presided by Diack, it again became apparent that the views of the three different national athletic bodies regarding a return to the international scene differed considerably (AAAC, 1991). Whilst the establishment-aligned SAAAU supported an immediate return, the ANC-aligned SAAAC proposed a 15-month trial period without any international competition to focus on the development of athletics. The SACOS-aligned SAAAB rejected outright a return to international competition. Diack's report summarised the situation:

In conclusion the readmission of South Africa in the Athletic Family is going in the right direction but it will require particular attention from our Council. It cannot be linked to the participation of the best athletes in the Tokyo World Championships; otherwise we are facing an unsettled Congress and World Championships in August 1991. (IAAF, 1991b:6)

This conclusion is highly significant. Even though the AAAC granted a potential new athletics body provisional affiliation to the AAAC (IAAF, 1991b), Diack clearly recommended that the IAAF refrain from inviting South Africa to the 1991 Athletics World Championships. He repeated this opinion at the IAAF Council meeting at the end of May 1991 (Kirsch, 1991) and therewith opposed the views of those in the IAAF Council that primarily regarded South Africa's readmission from the federation's perspective. In contrast to this, it appears that Diack did – again – consider the challenging national situation in South Africa.

In this regard, it is important to highlight that Nebiolo had sent a personal letter to F.W. de Klerk at the end of April 1991. In contrast to Diack's conclusion, the IAAF President emphasised the 1991 Athletics World Championships and argued that the event would be viewed by television viewers in over 140 countries, and will be attended by over 4,000 journalists (Nebiolo, 1991a). He signalled to F.W. de Klerk the opportunity to present changes in South Africa and use the event as a public relations event. Indeed, F.W. de Klerk in his reply highlighted the 1991 Athletics World Championships and his desire to seize the opportunity of a possible South African participation, stating:

The possibility of South African athletes competing in the International Amateur Athletic Federation's Third World Championships in Tokyo would indeed afford many South African athletes, irrespective of race, colour or creed, an opportunity which has long been in the waiting and which is well deserved. (De Klerk, 1991a:1)

Clearly, Nebiolo was aware that the F.W. de Klerk administration favoured ending the international isolation and the IAAF President wanted to exploit this attitude for his strategy.

Whilst F.W. de Klerk apparently shared the vision of a South African participation at the 1991 Athletics World Championships, Nebiolo's plan already seemed to fall at the first hurdle: because of dis-unity amongst the national athletics bodies. When the provisional SAAA met on 23 June 1991 with the intention to discuss a potential constitution, the differing opinions on participation in international competition emerged again. The SACOS-aligned SAAAB and the ANC-aligned SAAAC criticised the establishment-aligned SAAAU's close ideological relationship with the IAAF and their urgency to secure South Africa's participation in Tokyo (Le Roux, 1991a). The perceived exploitation of South Africa is best captured in a speech in 1991 by Mike Winn, President of South African Road Runners Association (SARRA)<sup>4</sup>:

(...) let us not delude ourselves about the IAAF and more particularly about Africa. They want us back for only one reason and that is because they want what we have. A strong infrastructure, facilities beyond anything the rest of Africa every dreamed of and money. African athletics wants to exploit our resources and the IAAF quite obviously relieved of the financial burden of Africa. South Africa is a gold mine. But our own needs must come first. (SARRA, 1991:2)

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<sup>4</sup> SARRA was affiliated to the SAAAU but had a strong Black leadership.



Under these conditions, the foundation of a permanent united national athletics association remained a utopia for the time being.

Consequently, the second visit of the IAAF delegation at the beginning of July was ill-fated from the very beginning. In fact, Le Roux even tried to postpone the IAAF's visit (Le Roux, 1991b) but with less than two months before the 1991 Athletics World Championships, Nebiolo pushed ahead (Nebiolo, 1991b). Significantly, the IAAF delegation was supported by the IAAF Managing Director of Competition, Jon Wigley, during its second stay in South Africa. His inclusion meant that the three African IAAF Council members did not act entirely independent anymore and the official report was compiled by Wigley rather than Diack. The delegation also met with representatives of the South African Broadcasting Cooperation (SABC) to discuss the sales of television rights to the 1991 Athletics World Championships (IAAF, 1991c).

This further confirms the IAAF's goal of readmitting South Africa for financial reasons. Hence, it appears obvious that the IAAF delegation accepted the application for full membership of the SAAA even though SAAAB president Harry Hendricks refused to sign the document. He argued: "We don't want to be pushed by outsiders. We do not belong to the IAAF, and this is a South African problem (...) There is a clamour for Tokyo, not unity." (IAAF, 1991c:12). However, this time, Diack disregarded the national discrepancies and stated that the delegation "could not wait for a unanimous decision, and would accept a majority decision" (IAAF, 1991c:18).

These developments confirm Keech's assumption that the IAAF delegation had arrived to South Africa with a pre-determined agenda (Keech, 2000). However, it is difficult to attribute this agenda only to Diack considering his more careful approach during earlier stages of the process. Rather, it appears that the decisions were made according to Nebiolo's instructions (Nebiolo, 1991b). Nevertheless, it was Samaranch, who first announced "the outright recognition of the National Olympic Committee of South Africa" before the IAAF took action a week later (IOC, 1991b).

The IOC recognition encouraged Nebiolo to get South Africa to the 1991 Athletics World Championships. On 18 July 1991, Nebiolo officially blessed the visit of an IAAF delegation to South Africa to meet with representatives of the SAAA, despite the absence of the SACOS-aligned SAAAB (IAAF, 1991d). It was decided to grant the SAAA provisional membership (IAAF, 1991e). In terms of the World Championship participation, Nebiolo adopted a twofold strategy. On the one hand, he highlighted that in 'this extraordinary case' no athlete was allowed to compete outside Africa until the IAAF Congress had ratified South Africa's official membership (IAAF, 1991d). On the other hand, he officially invited South Africa to participate at the 1991 Athletics World Championships (IAAF, 1991e). This approach allowed him to increase the pressure on the South African athletics bodies to make a quick decision. At the same time, Nebiolo's approach was in line with the IAAF rules to respect the IAAF Congress as the final decision-making body.

When the SAAA at a preliminary meeting on 27 July 1991 voted 9-5 against participation but also asked for another week to make the final decision, Nebiolo piled on the pressure. The IAAF published a press release in which it detailed 'touching personal appeals for help' by South African athletes to Nebiolo personally (IAAF, 1991f). The IAAF statement ends with

the threat: “The IAAF is convinced that any position to the contrary inevitably risk prolonging the punishment of young South African athletes, thus distancing their return to international sports competitions *for a very long time* [emphasis added]” (IAAF, 1991f:1).

Moreover, Nebiolo continued to attempt to gain political support level following the rumours of an adverse decision. On 31 July 1991, he wrote to Nelson Mandela, now President of the ANC, and urged him to override SAAA’s decision. In his letter, the IAAF President detailed the federation’s activities, urged Nelson Mandela to support South Africa’s participation, and invited him personally to Tokyo (Nebiolo, 1991c). Nebiolo also outlined the initiative to install a development programme worth 2 million Rand, supported by Nedbank (Nedbank, 1991). However, the letter reached Steve Tshwete, a member of the ANC’s Executive Committee and spokesperson on sport. Tshwete met with the SAAA and advised the organisation that he did not support participation because of the lack of unity amongst the national federations. In a final effort, Nebiolo wrote to F.W. de Klerk asking him for ‘high intervention together with Mr. Mandela’ and arguing that Nelson Mandela was not aware of the IAAF’s efforts (Nebiolo, 1991d). F.W. de Klerk supported the IAAF’s initiatives in his reply and expressed his disappointment on the SAAA’s stance (De Klerk, 1991b). Nevertheless, the SAAA rejected a participation in the 1991 Athletics World Championships with the SACOS-aligned SAAAB and the ANC-aligned SAAAC voting against the IAAF’s invitation. Significantly, Nelson Mandela and the NSC supported this view, continuing to insist on international pressure for change before accepting South Africa back onto the global stage (IAAF, 1990d).

The detailed developments provide evidence for the IAAF’s but also Nebiolo’s unprecedented efforts to impose personal and organisational interests on South Africa’s national affairs. Nebiolo tried vehemently to enable the participation of South Africa at the 1991 Athletics World Championships. The reasons for his actions are manifold. Booth suspects that Nebiolo wanted to upstage Samaranch and the IOC in order to push for his personal IOC membership (Booth, 1998). The archival material does not provide any concrete evidence for this assumption during this second phase of the readmission process. In contrast, anticipated financial benefits played a major role in Nebiolo’s initiatives. By mid-1991, the IAAF had a shortfall of around US\$1.25 million from anticipated revenue through American television broadcasters and it wanted additional income generated by South Africa’s participation (IAAF, 1990d). This was estimated to be around US\$20 million (McKeever, 1991a). Such conclusions are also supported by the fact that following the SAAA’s decline of the World Championship invitation, Nebiolo changed his attitude and supported the withdrawal of the full provisional membership of South Africa (IAAF, 1991g). He even argued that this provisional status had not been granted in the first place, a statement that Diack had to correct (IAAF, 1991g). In complete contrast to its earlier initiative, Nebiolo now argued that *Apartheid* still remained in force and that South Africa could not become an IAAF member. South Africa was only a means to an end for the IAAF during this phase.

### **Third Phase: Role of the IAAF in the African Unity Games**

Whilst the decline of the 1991 Athletics World Championships invitation led to the cancellation of SAAA’s membership, the IAAF continued its attempts to exploit the situation in South

Africa financially. Evidence for this purpose of the IAAF's commercially driven handling with the South Africa situation is the proposal of staging African Unity Games.

The idea to stage the African Unity Games goes back to the IAAF's marketing consultants International Sport and Leisure (ISL). With the beginning of Nebiolo's presidency, the marketing firm had pushed for an expansion of the international athletics competition calendar, aiming to increase revenues for the IAAF (Krieger, 2016). In line with this strategy, ISL marketing manager, Peter Sprogis, proposed in March 1991 that the IAAF organise an African Unity Games (Sprogis, 1991a). Sprogis' suggestion went unheeded at the time, as the IAAF considered a South African participation at the 1991 Athletics World Championships a more lucrative possibility. However, once the SAAA voted against the IAAF's invitation, Nebiolo personally produced ISL's proposal again. In a pre-prepared press release that Nebiolo had only conversed with Diack, the IAAF president recommended the organisation of African Unity Games in order to seek a "positive solution to the problem of South Africa's isolation from the international athletics scene" (IAAF, 1991g:7). The proposal foresaw one event in Dakar and one in Johannesburg in October 1991, as originally suggested by ISL. During his speech, Nebiolo already emphasised the role of ISL in the organisation of the event.

Significantly, Nebiolo had only requested information on the African Unity Games idea a mere five days ahead of the IAAF Council meeting. In ISL's response, the marketing firm highlighted the importance of controlling athletics in Africa so that the 'wrong people' could not become involved (Sprogis & Weber, 1991). Moreover, ISL made its own intentions very clear to Nebiolo, arguing that ISL should become the official marketing agents of the SAAA to serve the IAAF's purposes. As ISL projected the gross income at around five to six million US\$, the proposal was also financially lucrative for the IAAF. These processes also fell into the period when the IAAF decided, following the suggestion by ISL, to stage its World Championships every two years from 1993 onwards in order to increase the Federation's income (Kirsch, 1991).

The link between ISL and the IAAF on the matter of the African Unity Games also becomes evident when considering another proposal for a unifying athletics event, the African Friendship Games. This idea had been proposed to the IAAF by Tony McKeever, owner of the Cape Town marketing firm, Sports Mark Ltd, in June 1991 (McKeever, 1991b). His concept foresaw a slower introduction of South Africa to international athletics 'through the door of Africa' by participating only with African athletes first (McKeever, 1991b). However, similar to ISL's first proposal, the IAAF did not consider the suggestion. Consequently, McKeever heavily criticised the Federation and its hidden agenda to aim for South Africa's participation in the 1991 Athletics World Championships (Holt, 1991). When the IAAF eventually announced it plans for the African Unity Games, McKeever accused the IAAF and ISL of 'hijacking' the African Friendship Games concept and simply renaming it African Unity Games. He argued that he was "most concerned that South Africa's reintroduction to international athletics is treated in such haste to the detriment of the entire unity process" (McKeever, 1991b:3).

There is two-fold evidence that McKeever had a point regarding the rushed processes. First, Nebiolo only informed SAAA Co-President, Joe Stutzen, officially at the beginning of September about the African Unity Games and enquired whether the SAAA was in favour of

the event (Nebiolo, 1991e). Hence, the South African position had not been considered at all. Rather, the political agenda again outshined the efforts to contribute to athletics in South Africa with Nebiolo asking F.W. de Klerk to offer a banquet for VIPs (Nebiolo, 1991e). Second, it seems that a month prior to the planned event, no information on costs, sponsors, organisation, accommodation and travel plans was available (Nebiolo, 1991f). Nebiolo also appeared concerned about a potential boycott of Kenya, which he considered ‘a very important problem’ (Nebiolo, 1991f). Such fears were confirmed as other African states, the NSC and the ANC voiced their disapproval of the event. Eventually, the African Unity Games were cancelled on 11 September 1991 (Sprogis, 1991b).

#### **Fourth Phase: IOC decision and push for Barcelona**

During the last phase of the readmission processes Nebiolo’s personal ambition to become an IOC member influenced his policy towards South Africa. In a turnaround of developments ahead of the 1992 Olympic Games, the previously more reserved IOC increasingly pushed for a solution of the IAAF case. Once NOCSA had accepted the IOC’s invitation to participate in Barcelona in October 1991, the IOC had a big financial and symbolical interest in a participation of South African athletes in the Olympic core event of athletics. As a result, Nebiolo took advantage by exploiting again the situation in South Africa. This time, the IAAF President reversed his previous stance and dismissed recognition of a unified South African athletics body, Athletics South Africa (ASA) that was supported by the establishment-aligned SAAAU and the ANC-aligned SAAAC (Le Roux, 1992). In contrast to these progressive developments, Nebiolo responded negatively to the changes because the SACOS-aligned SAAAB did not support ASA. In a U-turn to his policies, he stated that the IAAF was ‘very disappointed’ about the lack of unity. The IAAF’s changed policy and the personal link to Nebiolo’s agenda became evident at the first IAAF Council meeting in 1992 at which the IAAF President announced:

The IAAF received information that the governing bodies of athletics in South Africa have potentially achieved unity. (...) The IAAF feels obliged to point out that only two of the existing three federations in South Africa appeared to be part of the agreement (...). The IAAF Council regrets that with such an apparent lack of unity, it is impossible to recognise a South African Athletics Federation at this time. (Nebiolo, 1992a:2)

In July 1991, the IAAF delegation had recognised the SAAA. But at the beginning of 1992, Nebiolo declared this was no longer possible. Moreover, in return for the IAAF’s recognition of South Africa that allowed participation at the 1992 Olympic Games, Nebiolo desired to be rewarded by the IOC and Samaranch. It is no coincidence that IOC member, Mario Vazquez Rana (Mexico), President of the *Association of National Olympic Committees* (ANOC), proposed the IAAF president for IOC membership on the very same meeting. Vazquez Rana highlighted the significance of the IAAF as the biggest federation of the Olympic Movement in his welcoming speech and argued, “the President of the IAAF should be a member of the IOC” (IAAF, 1992b:5).

Significantly, the less cooperative approach also reversed actions on the political level. A week following Nebiolo’s announcement, F.W. de Klerk wrote to the IAAF President. In his letter, F.W. de Klerk (1992:1) argued, “now that serious negotiations on the constitutional future have

got underway, a greater sense of realism prevails” and therefore he invited yet another IAAF delegation, including Nebiolo personally, to South Africa (De Klerk, 1992). Thus, Nebiolo’s changed strategy clearly paid off as rather than him seeking political support, F.W. de Klerk now turned to him in the hope for a fast solution. Such an approach must have confirmed Nebiolo’s changed stance and reaffirmed the strong position he now occupied in the politics of South Africa and the IOC’s quest for participation at the Olympic Games.

Aware of his Federation’s key role, Nebiolo sent a third IAAF delegation to South Africa to demonstrate his willingness to find a solution at the beginning of March 1992. However, as in the previous two visits, Nebiolo did not travel personally but rather reached out again to Diack and Agabani.<sup>5</sup> As Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk had more interest in a solution this time, the IAAF delegation was able to meet with both South African political leaders to hold talks. The politicians and the sport officials lobbied the IAAF delegation heavily in their attempt to reach for international readmission in the sport of athletics (IAAF, 1992c). By this time, all political parties in South Africa desired such development. In fact, the ANC even officially thanked the IAAF for its decisive support against apartheid and the promotion of South Africa’s international sporting boycott (IAAF, 1992c). Based on their talks and experiences in South Africa, Diack and Agabani eventually recommended proposing provisional membership for the ASA to the IAAF Council in Toronto in May 1992. In addition, they produced the suggestion of staging an African athletics event again – African Unity Athletics Meetings in Dakar and Johannesburg, presided by F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela in April 1992 (IAAF, 1992d). This event allowed the IAAF and ISL to eventually profit from South Africa’s readmission. Nevertheless, whilst such intentions have to be addressed critically in light of the preceding details, one has to consider that the political developments in South Africa were much more advanced at the time.

The IAAF Council eventually took the critical initial steps toward readmitting South Africa at an extra-ordinary meeting on 7 March 1992. For the first time in the IAAF’s history, the assembly took place at the IOC headquarters in Lausanne on invitation by Samaranch. The location of the meeting provides further evidence for the interlinked processes and the willingness of Samaranch to serve Nebiolo’s interests. Moreover, the IOC President announced at the meeting for the first time that he would propose for Nebiolo to become an IOC member (IAAF, 1992d). This was possible through a change in the Olympic Charter that gave the IOC President the power to designate members without distinction of their nationality or domicile, but by their function. Therewith, Nebiolo had reached his objective. Eventually, the IAAF Council decided to accept the IAAF delegation’s report, approve the organisation of the African Unity Athletics Meetings and make a final decision on the ASA’s provisional membership at its meeting in Toronto in May 1992. Following Nebiolo’s appointment as IOC member, there was no doubt as to whether the IAAF Council would come to a positive decision. When on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1992, the ANC called officially for an end of the international sporting boycott, a positive outcome was assured.

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<sup>5</sup> Nebiolo also foresaw that Mukora would be part of the IAAF delegation as had been the case for the two previous visits. However, Mukora had been in Adelaide on assignment of the Commonwealth Games Federation.

The developments surrounding the staging of the African Unity Athletics Meetings in April 1992 summarised Nebiolo's dealings of the South Africa affair. The IAAF President travelled to South Africa for the first time and ensured that the staging of the event turned out to be successful. For that matter, Nebiolo demanded that the organisers chase African athletes all over the world in order to encourage them to compete at the events (Nebiolo, 1992b). He approved a budget of \$400,000 (Dakar event) and \$450,000 (Johannesburg event) for the payment of participating athletes and agreed to pay the travel costs for all presidents of African federations and all members of the ANC (Nebiolo, 1992b). It appears from press articles, and from Nebiolo's statements, that he portrayed the imminent readmission as his personal success. For example, he proclaimed himself as the 'God of Athletics' (*The Weekly Mail*, 1992). Thereby, the IAAF President did also not tire to emphasise the importance of his Federation within the world of sport. This became particularly evident in his speech to F.W. de Klerk:

I officially confirm, Mr. President, that it will be my pleasure and my honour, at the end of May, to make a proposal to the Council of the World Athletics Federation to readmit South Africa to the biggest sport federation of the world: the International Athletics Federation. (Nebiolo, 1992c:1)

It is against this background that Nelson Mandela praised Nebiolo. But the details leave little doubt that the ANC President had been blinded by Nebiolo in the final stages of South Africa's readmission. Within this context, it is not surprising that granting the ASA provisional membership during the IAAF Council meeting in Toronto at the end of May 1992 went without major discussion (IAAF, 1992e). This decision eventually marked the return of South Africa to international athletics, but more importantly for the (sport) political level, it allowed the country to compete at the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona.

## CONCLUSIONS

The IAAF's organisational readmission strategy went through three very distinctive phases that are closely linked to the Federation's standing in the world of sport under the presidency of Nebiolo. Generally, the entire process of readmission was purposefully driven fast by the IAAF. In the first period, which lasted during the entire year of 1990, the IAAF was proactive in its attempts to readmit South Africa as a member federation. It followed the overall policies of the IOC and the IOC Commission Olympism and Apartheid that laid the foundation for any developments on the sporting level. Such an approach appeared to be understandable - the IAAF could neither establish the prerequisites for a readmission by itself nor did the slow political developments allow for solo efforts. Nevertheless, the appointment of their own delegates, all from the African continent, to observe and evaluate the situation in South Africa shows that the IAAF considered itself as a responsible organisation to deal with the case.

The IAAF's early involvement and arrangements laid the foundations for pushing South Africa towards participation in the 1991 Athletics World Championships in the second phase until August 1991. Thereby, the IAAF delegation under the leadership of Diack pointed towards the discrepancies on the national level and recommended a slow integration of South Africa. In contrast, IAAF President Nebiolo considered the participation of South Africa as financially lucrative for the Federation and appeared to disregard the experts' advice. This strategy is,

again, in line with the IAAF's overall development in the 1980s and 1990s, in which it became financially independent from the IOC.

Once the South African national federations dismissed the IAAF invitation to the 1991 Athletics World Championships, a third phase of strategy under Nebiolo's influence began. He exploited the IOC's desire to see South Africa at the 1992 Olympic Games for his own ends. Thereby, the IAAF President highlighted that all significant international sport political decisions had to be approved by his Federation. Moreover, it is important to highlight that the IAAF's ambitious plans for South Africa did not stop with its readmission to the international federation; already in August 1992, Nebiolo announced Johannesburg as potential host for the 1999 Athletics World Championships (Kirsch, 1992).

This paper essentially confirms and provides further evidence for Booth's (1998) argument that Nebiolo used South Africa as a means to an end. Such behaviour resulted in opposing the recommendations of the delegations he had personally appointed for expert opinion and making personal statements on behalf of the entire IAAF Council. Diack's role also evolved as a particularly interesting one. In the 1970s, he had been the main advocate of South Africa's expulsion from the IAAF; at the time, representing solely African interests. Significantly, Diack benefited personally from this responsibility as he was voted IAAF Vice-President, backed heavily by the African representatives. When Nebiolo understandably turned to him to act as main commissioner for the IAAF Council and asked him to lead the IAAF delegations to South Africa, Diack fulfilled a double role. He continued to represent the African members, now as President of the AAAC, but also acted on behalf of Nebiolo.

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