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Reconciliation and Rugby in Post-Apartheid South Africa.

Evaluating Previous Scholarship.

Over the course of the twentieth century, a number of sports gained mass spectatorships and were incorporated into popular national and international cultures. Sports consequently gained a new political significance and were used to advance the political agendas of governments and the international community, most conspicuously in the Olympics. From 1970 until 1992 South African athletes were banned from competing in the Olympic games, a clear international condemnation of the apartheid state.¹ Many other international sports bodies quickly followed the Olympic committee's lead. The democratic movement in South Africa, and its supporters in the international community, campaigned against allowing South Africa to compete in international sports under the slogan, "No normal sport in an abnormal society."² South African rugby teams, however, continued to play internationally until 1981. Rugby was the most important sport of the white ascendancy in South Africa. White South Africans understood the significance of exclusion from international sports, but it was only after South Africa's exclusion from sanctioned international rugby that white South Africans began to consider the international sports boycott a significant reason to change.³

¹ Keim, Marion: *Nation Building at Play: Sport as a tool for social integration in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Oxford: Meyer & Meyer Sport: 2003. Page 32.

² Ibid, Page 35.

³ Ibid, Page 34.

South Africa's national rugby team, the Springboks, were once characterized as the embodiment of the brutal apartheid state; now they are presented by the African National Congress [ANC] government as a symbol of a new, integrated South Africa.⁴ Rugby in South Africa during the apartheid era was the sport of the white Afrikaner ascendancy. Black and Coloured South Africans generally participated in the game only by cheering for visiting teams against the Springboks or in segregated competition, which was poorly funded and completely ignored by the rugby establishment. For Afrikaners, one of the worst results of the international outcry against apartheid was the suspension of their beloved Springboks from sanctioned, international rugby competition between 1981 and 1992.⁵ Following the fall of the apartheid state in South Africa in 1994, the nation stood on the brink of civil war. Both Afrikaner and black African militants sought to undermine the message of forgiveness and unification advanced by Nelson Mandela and the ANC. Mandela needed a tool with which to unite the nation, and he found that tool in the 1995 Rugby World Cup, which South Africa was to host.⁶ Throughout the World Cup Mandela encouraged all South Africans to support the Springboks, and he even donned the once hated green and gold Springbok jersey during the finals. The Springbok players also promoted unity by singing the new South African National anthem in Zulu, with gusto, before their matches, and by declaring to the press that they were playing for "ALL South Africans." As underdogs, the Springboks defeated the New Zealand All-Blacks in the final match to the apparent delight of all South Africans, black and white, who united under the slogan, "One-Team, One-Nation".

⁴ Carlin, John. *Playing the Enemy: Nelson Mandela and the game that made a nation*. New York: Penguin Press: 2008. Page 42.

⁵ Carlin, John. *Playing the Enemy: Nelson Mandela and the game that made a nation*. New York: Penguin Press: 2008. Page 66.

⁶ *Ibid*, Page 163.

Images of multiracial celebrations in the streets under the new South African flag flooded the world's press, and a photo of Mandela handing over the Webb Ellis trophy to the Springbok captain and archetypal Afrikaner, Francois Pienaar, has become one of modern sports most enduring images. Mandela's gamble, investing in the sport of the old enemy, had paid off. Rugby alone did not spare South Africa from bloodshed, but the 1995 World Cup is now held up as a moment of transition and reconciliation for the South African nation and its sports culture.

Fourteen years later we must ask, what is the nature of this transition and reconciliation? Now the once dominant Afrikaners struggle to understand their place as an insecure minority in the new South Africa. As Afrikaner nationalists have had to abandon many of their racist ideologies, rugby remains one of the few cultural activities in which they can still take pride in a national heritage not intrinsically linked to the shame of apartheid.⁷ John Nauright and David Black explain, “[Rugby’s] social significance may be largely confined to providing a haven of comfort, familiarity, escape- in short, nostalgia- for white, male South Africans as they attempt to adapt culturally to the dizzying changes in the socio-political order, and retain a sense of their own distinctive place therein.”⁸ Nauright and Black go on to explain that the Springbok is such a strong symbol of white national and Afrikaner pride that “surveys of white South Africans in the early 1990’s showed that many were willing to give up the flag and the anthem, but very few would relinquish the Springbok.”⁹ Non-playing black South

⁷ Goodwin, June. *Heart of Whiteness: Afrikaners face Black rule in the New South Africa*. New York: Scribner: 1995, Page 177

⁸ Nauright, John. Chandler, Timothy. *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*. London: F.Cass: 1996. Page 222.

⁹ Nauright, John. Chandler, Timothy. *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*. London: F.Cass: 1996. Page 238.

Africans remain largely indifferent to Springbok rugby; the team still appears in the green and gold jersey, and one must wonder whether the black and coloured majority of South Africa really feel this symbol has been transformed. Black players in South Africa's domestic rugby unions are often subject to the racist attitudes of white team selectors, players, and match officials, and complaints to the white controlled rugby unions go largely ignored.¹⁰ Black and coloured players are still primarily represented on the rugby field in positions in which athleticism is key, but tactical knowledge and leadership are not.¹¹ Black and coloured players are now well represented in the ranks of South Africa's five professional Super XIV sides and eight Currie Cup first division sides, and a small number have proudly worn the Springbok jersey. However, the presence of black and coloured players on the national team resulted from pressure by the national sports ministry to include the maximum number of non-white players, leaving black and coloured players open to constant characterization by the rugby press and public as affirmative action picks. Despite the support of the sports ministry, predominantly black and coloured clubs claim that their players do not get a fair chance at national selection.¹²

Desmond Tutu stated, "Sport does have a meaningful and powerful role to play in the social transformation of South African society if care is taken to provide the necessary conditions for success."¹³ Has rugby been an effective tool for social integration in post-apartheid South Africa? In order to answer this question we must

¹⁰ South African Daily Mail, September 11th 2009 "Racism & Rage in Rugby", Vernon Wessels.

¹¹ Daily Telegraph [U.K.], May 30th 2009 "A Nation United by a love of rugby", Mark Keohane

¹² South African Daily Mail, February 8th 2008. "DeVilliers: Show me Overlooked Black Talent." Lucky Sindane.

¹³ Keim, Marion: Nation Building at Play: Sport as a tool for social integration in Post-Apartheid South Africa. Oxford: Meyer & Meyer Sport: 2003. Page10.

understand the origins and nature of white Afrikaner identity and nationalism and how rugby came to flourish in South Africa, the significance and special character of Afrikaner rugby, the often ignored history of black and coloured rugby in South Africa, and the history of rugby during Apartheid and in the seventeen years since South Africa's first multiracial, democratic elections in 1994.

The immigrant forefathers of the Afrikaners were primarily Dutch, French and German. They came to South Africa in order to escape persecution of their Calvinist Christianity and to seek opportunity. Afrikaner identity evolved out of a mythologized struggle that pitted "civilized" families against the African wilderness.¹⁴ It is the struggle of a white tribe to establish an island of permanent identity and security in a sea of black nations. Afrikaners identify as a white African tribe; they have their own language, old testament Calvinism, and a group consciousness based on attachment to the land of South Africa and an idealized volk.¹⁵ Afrikaner racism evolved out of a three-century struggle to survive on Africa's southern tip amid a mass of strong black tribal nations, and it was informed by scriptural support and pseudo-science. According to Mark De Villiers, Afrikaners subscribe to a providential "*Volksgees*, the quasi-mystical belief that the tribe was there for a larger purpose than its own existence."¹⁶ A connection between the land of South Africa and the Afrikaner nation is a fundamental aspect of Afrikaner nationalism.¹⁷ Attempting to explain the meaning of the word volk, one Afrikaner observes "The English translate it as 'people, but it carries an emotional value that is

¹⁴ Goodwin, June. *Heart of Whiteness: Afrikaners face Black rule in the New South Africa*. New York: Scribner: 1995. Page 47.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Page 50.

¹⁶ De Villiers, Mark. *White Tribe Dreaming: Apartheid's bitter roots as witnessed by eight generations of an Afrikaner family*. New York: Viking: 1988. Page 100.

¹⁷ De Villiers, Mark. *White Tribe Dreaming: Apartheid's bitter roots as witnessed by eight generations of an Afrikaner family*. New York: Viking: 1988. Page 216.

untranslatable.”¹⁸ Afrikaner identity was cemented by an anti-imperialist struggle, fighting British economic, military and cultural domination beginning, with the first boer war in 1880.¹⁹

Afrikaners traditionally identified with the Israelites of the old testament, and as a result a common theme of Afrikaner history has been treks out into the wilderness, ostensibly towards Canaan and away from the metaphorical pharaohs of black African tribes and British imperialism. These movements were justified by “the notion that boers and their descendants were by natural right entitled to as much land as they wanted and needed.”²⁰ Surrounded by black African tribes and under the thumb of the British empire, Afrikaners developed a siege mentality which made survival of the nation and its unique culture, by any means, the top priority. This siege mentality encouraged the development of a distinctly masculine culture. Robert Morrell describes it as “a picture of masculinity which included physical superiority, courage, a special ability to ‘rough it’, self-confidence, resourcefulness, initiative and adaptability.”²¹ All values which translated well to the rugby field.

Rugby was introduced into South Africa by the British through the port of Natal in the 1870’s. The British gentry of colonial Natal pushed their sons toward rugby because it was not played by blacks or lower-class whites and served as a symbolic connection to the middle and upper classes of the imperial motherland.²² Sports at this

¹⁸ Goodwin, June. *Heart of Whiteness: Afrikaners face Black rule in the New South Africa*. New York: Scribner: 1995. Page 258.

¹⁹ De Villiers, Mark. *White Tribe Dreaming: Apartheid’s bitter roots as witnessed by eight generations of an Afrikaner family*. New York: Viking: 1988. Page 175.

²⁰ *Ibid.* Page 62.

²¹ Nauright, John. Chandler, Timothy. *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*. London: F.Cass: 1996. Page 106.

²² Nauright, John. Chandler, Timothy. *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*. London: F.Cass: 1996. Page 101.

time were not seen as an equalizing force, as they are often perceived now, but rather as a tool to unify the upper and middle classes and to establish standards of social hierarchy.²³

Afrikaners did not play rugby because most Afrikaners lived in rural areas where there was not a concentration of people large enough to support team sports.²⁴ Rugby did not

come to be fully embraced by Afrikaners until it began to be played at the largely

Afrikaner University of Stellenbosch in the 1880s.²⁵ Rugby quickly became incorporated into Afrikaner nationalist culture as an embodiment of the values of Afrikanerdom.

Moreover, rugby tours served as a means to connect the distant enclaves of Afrikaners to Stellenbosch and thus evolve a sense of national unity. Afrikaners had distinctive ideas about the significance of rugby. According to Morrell, “Whereas the British might have projected the game as a training ground for the inculcation and encouragement of values such as sportsmanship, gentlemanly conduct, and fair mindedness, Afrikaners placed less emphasis on these and more on the game as an opportunity to demonstrate presumed Afrikaner qualities, such as ruggedness, endurance, forcefulness and determination.”²⁶

Rugby was also incorporated into Afrikaners’ anti-imperialism. “While the British regarded rugby as part of the imperial sporting ethos, Afrikaners viewed the game in explicitly nationalistic and ethnic terms. Whereas rugby in Australia and New Zealand expressed some sense of “imperial kinship”, among Afrikaners “Springbok rugby carried a thinly disguised anti-imperialistic message.”²⁷ Explains Douglas Booth. Following the growth of rugby amongst Afrikaners, matches between British and Afrikaner schools,

²³ Nauright, John. Chandler, Timothy. *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*. London: F.Cass: 1996. Page 91.

²⁴ Ibid. Page 103

²⁵ Ibid. Page 181

²⁶ Ibid. Page 187.

²⁷ Booth, Douglas. *The Race Game: sport and politics in South Africa*. London: F.Cass, 1998. Page 35.

and British and Afrikaner provincial sides, became battlegrounds for cultural supremacy and affirmations of national character. Sport is a venue in which extreme nationalism is acceptable, yet supporters who cheer emphatically and viscerally for their nation's teams may not be associated in any way with nationalism in the political arena. South African rugby is different in this respect. As Albert Grundlingh explains, "Support for the Springboks was much more closely aligned to the overall Afrikaner nationalist enterprise in its various cultural and political manifestations."²⁸ South Africa gained independence from the British Empire in 1961. Thereafter South African rugby fields no longer functioned as battlegrounds of national identity, but rather as training grounds where potential Springboks prepared to demonstrate to the world the "existence and toughness of the Afrikaner people... Special in their circumstances but also special in their mission."²⁹ Springbok rugby was a fundamental tool with which Afrikaners conveyed the characteristics of their unique nation and demonstrated their strength to the rest of the world. Because of the important role rugby played for Afrikaners, suspension from officially sanctioned international rugby competitions between 1985 and 1992 was a crippling blow to the national psyche. As Frank Keating commented after the Springbok return to competition in 1992 "Rugby is the mother's milk, the lifeblood, the elixir that fuels...[Afrikaner] arrogance. And clothed in their vestments of green and gold, the Springboks are religious icons and totems to the faith."³⁰

Black and coloured people play rugby in South Africa. There are currently, in fact,

²⁸ Nauright, John. Chandler, Timothy. *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*. London: F.Cass: 1996. Page 187.

²⁹ *Ibid.* Page 188.

³⁰ Nauright, John. Chandler, Timothy. *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*. London: F.Cass: 1996. Page 185.

more black than white rugby players in South Africa.³¹ Yet black and coloured players have not been incorporated into the history of the Springboks, as they were not eligible for selection under apartheid law, or pre-apartheid social conventions.³² Blacks and coloureds have competed in their own competitions for over a century and have competed against international sides, but they have been almost completely excluded from the narrative of South African rugby. Andre Odendaal, in his essay “The Thing that is not Round”, navigates this marginal history of the proud tradition of black and coloured rugby in South Africa. The first coloured rugby union was the Western Province Coloured Rugby Union, formed in 1886. Initially Rugby was popular with the Malay Muslim community.³³ The game was then adopted by sons of black tribal kings in the Western Province and Eastern Cape as part of their efforts to reap the benefits of partially assimilating into the dominant British culture. Rugby was adopted by blacks with the same mindset that they adopted Christianity and western education.³⁴ Black and coloured rugby did not benefit from any of the resources of white rugby, but it occasionally received paternalistic support from white rugby enthusiasts, most notably Cecil Rhodes who donated the trophy for the most significant coloured rugby tournament, the Cecil Rhodes Tournament, an event which continued to be held until 1969. Though Afrikaner rugby in South Africa is represented as the embodiment of Afrikaner hardiness, the story of black rugby involves equal if not greater sacrifice and commitment. Black rugby player Mono Badela explains, “There is another side to South African rugby- the game

³¹ Daily Telegraph [UK]. October 20th 2007. “Black and White reality of South African rugby” Berger, Sebastien.

³² Keim, Marion: Nation Building at Play: Sport as a tool for social integration in Post-Apartheid South Africa. Oxford: Meyer & Meyer Sport: 2003. Page 27.

³³ Ibid. Page 27.

³⁴ Grundlingh, Albert. Odendall, Andre. Spied, Burrige. Beyond the Tryline: Rugby and South African Society. Johannesburg: Ravan Press: 1995. Page 32.

played in the dusty eastern cape townships of New Brighton, Mdantasane, Kwazakhele and Zwide. There, the images are of dilapidated stadiums which look more like cross country courses than playing fields. Scenes of African and coloured working class people, scrumming down on a dusty stony surface, car headlights illuminating a cold winter's night."³⁵ Odendaal elaborates, "Most fields were without grass, and many were riven by ditches, located on slopes or acting as public thoroughfares. Boots were considered a luxury and each team had at most a single set of jerseys. Such circumstances bred dedication and selflessness: sacrificing one's wages to buy the team colours, walking all night to be at a match the following day. It also bred dependence on local whites. So much was so far beyond the reach of the average man."³⁶

Blacks and coloureds had separate governing bodies for rugby, though there were integrated teams, and often competitions between the two unions. In 1938 the South African Coloured Rugby Board [SACRB] selected its first national side.³⁷ In 1950 a series of test matches were held between black and coloured national sides in an attempt by the South African Bantu Rugby Board [SABRB] to bring black players closer together.³⁸ In 1959, reflecting a shift of national identification, the SABRB changed its name to the South African African Rugby Board [SAARB], rejecting the apartheid designation Bantu. This marked the beginning of black rugby involvement in the struggle for a democratic South Africa.³⁹

³⁵ Booth, Douglas. *The Race Game: sport and politics in South Africa*. London: F.Cass, 1998. Page 69.

³⁶ Grundlingh, Albert. Odendall, Andre. Spied, Burrige. *Beyond the Tryline: Rugby and South African Society*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press: 1995. Page 40.

³⁷ *Ibid.* Page 43.

³⁸ Grundlingh, Albert. Odendall, Andre. Spied, Burrige. *Beyond the Tryline: Rugby and South African Society*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press: 1995. Page 52.

³⁹ *Ibid.* Page 53.

Black and coloured test matches were a popular spectator event, Odendaal recounts, “In 1960 the eastern province Africans beat the western province coloureds 9-6 before 12,000 spectators in Cape Town in a match which was meant to determine the champion [non-white] provincial team in South Africa.”⁴⁰ In 1969 the South African Coloured Rugby Board [SACRB], founded in 1896, changed its name to the South African Rugby Union [SARU] and openly aligned itself with the democratic movement.⁴¹ A clear split subsequently developed, in which the South African Coloured Rugby Federation and their national side the Proteas, the South African African Rugby Board and their national side the Leopards, and the South African Rugby Football Board and their national side the Springboks, combined under the umbrella South African Rugby Board [SARB] and aligned itself in support of the apartheid state’s sports policy.⁴² The conflict between the SARB and the SARU would continue until the SARB was absorbed by the SARU after fall of the Apartheid government in 1994.

Despite being excluded from South Africa’s national rugby narrative, black and coloured rugby players were involved in international competition on three recorded occasions. First, the 1974 touring British Lions side faced both a Bantu Leopards team and a coloured Proteas team.⁴³ White South Africans were shocked when black winger Charles Mgweba scored the first try against the Lions of the entire tour.⁴⁴ In 1975 two coloured and one black player were included in an Invitation XV, which faced the French

⁴⁰ Ibid. Page 55.

⁴¹ Ibid. Page 57.

⁴² Ibid. Page 58.

⁴³ Grundlingh, Albert. Odendaal, Andre. Spied, Burr ridge. Beyond the Tryline: Rugby and South African Society. Johannesburg: Ravan Press: 1995. Page 58.

⁴⁴ Daily Telegraph [U.K] May 30th 2009 “The Day Black Players ‘ruled’ in the Apartheid era.” Brendan Gallagher.

national team on tour.⁴⁵ Odendaal presents a tapestry of black rugby that had been completely excluded from the modern South African rugby narrative. Black rugby is often portrayed in the South African press as a recent phenomenon; the reality is that black and coloured South Africans have been playing substantial, competitive rugby for over a century and that the story of black and coloured rugby during apartheid is closely tied to the story of the democratic struggle.

The sports boycott was an important aspect of the international condemnation and isolation that led to the fall of apartheid. The history of South African Springbok international rugby competition reveals a great deal about evolving international attitudes toward rugby and can also be used to trace the evolution of apartheid ideas and policy. South Africa was suspended from the Olympics from 1970 to 1991, but continued to be involved in sanctioned international rugby competition until 1981. International rugby played in South Africa during this time was played on South Africa's terms. The South African government went so far as to dictate to sides touring the nation who could be selected. The most notable example was the exclusion by All-Black (New Zealand) sides touring South Africa of all Maoris from the 1920's through the 1960's at South Africa's request.⁴⁶ As early as 1971 a Springbok tour of Australia sparked mass protest; a state of emergency was declared in Queensland before a test match as the protesters turned to rioting. Rugby relations with the Wallabies were essentially severed. The All-Blacks, however, toured South Africa in 1970, 1976, and 1981, they only cancelled a tour in 1985 after extensive domestic protests. After 1981 the International Rugby Board [IRB]

⁴⁵ Booth, Douglas. *The Race Game: sport and politics in South Africa*. London: F.Cass, 1998. Page 103.

⁴⁶ Booth, Douglas. *The Race Game: sport and politics in South Africa*. London: F.Cass, 1998. Page 86.

condemned the apartheid system and its beneficiaries, white South Africans, by denying them the high-caliber international rugby they craved.

South Africa responded by organizing a series of 'rebel tours' not officially sanctioned by national or international rugby bodies. These tours included many top-class players who were paid large sums when rugby was still officially an amateur sport. Former South African prime minister F. W. De Klerk discussing his time as sports minister from 1979 to 1980 explained "As the sporting net closed more tightly around us, all we could do was to provide financial aid to help sport organizations to continue their struggle and, sometimes, even to arrange rebel tours."⁴⁷ This demonstrates that a large portion of the global rugby community opposed apartheid officially, but were practically indifferent. These rebel tours included a South American side, the Jaguars, largely composed of Argentine Pumas, which toured South Africa in 1980, 1982, and 1984.⁴⁸ After the All-Blacks 1985 tour was cancelled, a team called the New Zealand Cavaliers was organized to tour which included 28 of the 30 players originally selected for the All Blacks tour.⁴⁹ In 1987 a Pacific Island team called the South Sea Barbarians toured South Africa, and in 1989 a World XV tour was organized with the help of the IRB as negotiations were beginning with the ANC.⁵⁰ South Africa was still able to play a great deal of international rugby despite official exclusion, but these rebel matches did not give Afrikaners the satisfaction of official rugby dominance or acceptance by the global community

⁴⁷ De Klerk, F.W. *The Last Trek- A New Beginning: The Autobiography*. London: St. Martin's Press: 1999. Page 72

⁴⁸ Booth, Douglas. *The Race Game: sport and politics in South Africa*. London: F.Cass, 1998. Page 173.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Page 173.

⁵⁰ Booth, Douglas. *The Race Game: sport and politics in South Africa*. London: F.Cass, 1998. Page 174.

South Africa was only able to return to international rugby during negotiations between Prime Minister F.W De Klerk and representatives of the ANC, when the ANC expressed its approval of readmission to the IRB. F.W. De Klerk during his time as sports minister made sports organizations autonomous from the state in an attempt to allow the international community to re-embrace South African athletes without having to feel they were supporting apartheid. Ten years later, he was in the process of abandoning Apartheid, partially so the Springboks could return to international rugby.⁵¹

The first test in South Africa since 1981, against the All-Blacks, occurred on August 15, 1992 with a few specific stipulations, including that the South African national anthem, *Die Stem*, not be played and that a moment of silence be held for victims of violence in South Africa's democratic struggle. However, as Grundlingh points out, "There was a vast gulf between seemingly rational boardroom decisions, and the behavior of exuberant, if not inflamed, rugby supporters, convinced that the decisions were taken to humiliate them as a community."⁵² The South African flag, not previously featured heavily at rugby matches, was displayed by fans everywhere around the stadium. Grundlingh comments, "To discern the political message was not difficult as some inebriated fans waved their flags and chanted in unison: "f*** die anc, f*** die anc." Inside the stadium notes were being passed around, urging the crowd to sing *Die Stem*, come what may."⁵³ As soon as the moment of silence was called for, the crowd burst into the old anthem. As one journalist observed "It seemed like a besieged tribe had gathered

⁵¹ De Klerk, F.W. *The Last Trek- A New Beginning: The Autobiography*. London: St. Martin's Press: 1999. Page 71.

⁵² Grundlingh, Albert. Odendall, Andre. Spied, Burrige. *Beyond the Tryline: Rugby and South African Society*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press: 1995. Page 11.

⁵³ Grundlingh, Albert. Odendall, Andre. Spied, Burrige. *Beyond the Tryline: Rugby and South African Society*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press: 1995. Page 11.

to take strength in their numbers and to send a message of defiance to their perceived persecutors.”⁵⁴

The anthem was played over the loud speakers in direct violation of the terms on which the ANC had permitted the match to occur. The South African rugby establishment seemed to have completely rejected the terms of their agreement with the ANC. It appeared that rugby and the green and gold jersey would surely remain a symbol of Afrikaner ascendancy, but only three years later another Springbok/ All-Black test, in the world cup final, became the venue for perhaps the most symbolically unifying event in South Africa’s post-apartheid history, and one of the most politically significant moments in all the history of modern sports

Clearly rugby has a complex and varied role in South Africa. But to what extent has the promise of the rainbow nation been fulfilled on the rugby pitch? Is rugby an integrative force in South Africa? Do black South Africans claim the springboks as their own? This summer the Springboks debuted a new jersey, after a long debate, which features both the Springbok and the Protea, once the symbol of the Coloured Rugby Union and now the symbol of the national sports ministry. But have the Springbok and the Protea learned to co-exist in South African rugby, or can they only live together on opposite sides of a green and gold jersey?

The Integration of Modern South African Rugby.

Since 1992 the South African sports ministry has actively encouraged the integration of rugby through a number of initiatives collectively known as

⁵⁴ Ibid. Page 11.

‘Transformation’. The aim of transformation is to encourage the development of black and coloured rugby and pressure professional and national teams to select promising black and coloured players with the ultimate goal of national and professional sides more accurately representing the ethnic make-up of South Africa. Since 1995, and especially since 1999, rugby has become dramatically more racially integrated. The black and coloured rugby community now has access to resources and coaching unavailable to them previously, and it is becoming integrated into the high-performance development institutes such as the Sharks Academy in Durban. Initially ‘Transformation pick’ had all the negative connotations that ‘affirmative action hire’ does in the United States, because ethnic African and coloured players were selected not on merit but to force integration. These picks created resentment between fans, players, coaches, union administrators and the South African Rugby Union, but ultimately broke down barriers. This facilitated the large number of more than qualified black and coloured players now in the starting lineups of South Africa’s professional and national rugby sides.

Black and coloured players are still subject to more scrutiny than their white counterparts, a new player of colour who performs poorly is immediately held up as a transformation pick, and often quickly axed from the team, while a new white player’s poor performance is chalked up to nerves or inexperience. As current Springbok coach Peter De Villiers put it when defending the performance of coloured scrumhalf Ricky Januarie, “What I have learnt in South Africa is that if you take your car to a garage and the owner is a black man and they mess up, you never go back to that garage again, if the owner is a white man you say they made a mistake and you go back again. And that is how we live our lives in this country, some people.”⁵⁵ Players of Colour are handicapped

⁵⁵ The Daily Telegraph [UK]. June 30th 2009 “Ground Breaker who is Dogged by

by the assumption that they are transformation selections. When discussing a suggested transformation change to one of his sides, former Springbok coach Jake White recalls, “I’d picked Foruie du Preez [White] to start at scrumhalf, and when Van Rooyen [South African Rugby executive] saw that, he insisted I start with Bolla Conradie [Black]. I argued that I’d already told both players that Fourie was going to start the match, and that it wouldn’t be good for the squad to make such a blatant politically motivated change.”⁵⁶ Players of colour, who are now selected mostly on merit, still suffer from this stigma. Andre Volstedt of the Sharks Academy states, “Players want to belong there, knowing they are good enough and the best-- ask The Beast and Brian Habana. Players don’t want to play in a team if they don’t know they are good enough. Colour of the skin makes no difference.”⁵⁷

The number of players of colour in the highest echelons of South African rugby has increased dramatically; this year the top 5 Currie Cup sides have a total of 229 contracted players, 43 of whom are players of colour. However, these players of colour are very rarely in decision making or leadership positions on the field. There are no black captains in South Africa’s top division, and only a scattering of Scrumhalves, Flyhalves and Fullbacks. Black and coloured players are far more likely to be found in positions where athleticism and speed are key, such as strike runners on the wing or in the centres, or forwards. Of those 43 players of colour, 24 are in strike running positions 6 are in decision-making positions and the remainder are forwards. Sharks wing Luzuko Vulindlu is one black player who was moved out of the centres to the wings when he made the

Controversy.” Gaivn Mairs.

⁵⁶ Ray, Craig. White, Jake. In *Black and White: The Jake White Story*. Cape Town: Zebra Press: 2007. Page 115.

⁵⁷ Andre Volstedt Questionnaire received August 4th 2009.

transition to the professional game. “I played all my school and U21 career at centre, so wing is new to me,”⁵⁸ he explains. His coach John Plumtree observes “He’s a natural No 13 [centre], he’s played there most of his life, but he’s learning a lot by playing on the wing and it was his willingness to try out the position that enabled him to get to play Super 14 so early in his rugby career.”⁵⁹ Plumtree clearly states that Vulindlu is a natural center and gives no clear reason why he had to be shifted to the wing in order to enter the professional game. In a recent article anticipating the British & Irish Lions tour, former Welsh player Stephen Jones expressed pleasure in recalling “Last November, again at Twickenham, there was a truly delightful sight. After some substitutions, South Africa’s victorious team ended the match with three black players in the front row- Beast Mtawarira, Chiliboy Ralepelle, and Brian Mujati. In the early transformation years, the non-whites would always be wingers and the idea that the system is now producing strong young forwards is quite, quite marvelous.”⁶⁰ South Africa’s completion of this match with three black forwards is a symbolic reflection on the success of transformation. South Africa was once most regarded for its burly, tough Afrikaner front rows, some of whom had now been supplanted by superior players of colour who were able to excel because of the resources transformation policy has provided for developing players of colour in South Africa.

The story of former Springbok coach Jake White is illustrative of the pros and cons of Transformation Policy. White recalls of his interview for the position, “I was questioned on the five key areas of the job: transformation, media, selection, tactics and

⁵⁸ Rich, Gavin. “Gold Mine: The Sharks are finally tapping into Kwazulu-Natal’s Black Rugby Talent.” SA Rugby. June 2009. Page 92.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Page 92.

⁶⁰ Jones Stephen. “Badge of Honour” Rugby World. August 2009. Page 78/

my role as coach.... Makhaya Jack, the man tasked with transformation, actually had no questions for me. When Petersen asked him if he wanted to quiz me, he declined, saying I'd answered all his questions. That told me that I'd nailed the presentation."⁶¹ This suggests that not only was transformation an important factor in White's application but that it was actually the most important. White put a lot of effort into transformation, giving opportunities to a number of young players of colour despite the constant pressure to win. He recalls "While the Media hyped the Grand Slam tour, I saw it slightly differently, wanting to create some opportunities for a few new players. As Bok coach, I was under pressure to select black players, which was something I'd fully bought into when I took the job.... The touring party included 11 black players in the 34-man squad. And, while a player such as Boland wing Jongi Nokwe was chosen ahead of more established and possibly deserving players the idea of the tour was to give promising non-white players a chance to experience the culture of Springbok Rugby."⁶² The difficulty of pleasing South African rugby administrators, succeeding on the field, and transforming the national side makes coaching the Springboks one of the most difficult jobs in sport. White recalls a particularly difficult period after a springbok roster was released: "Most of the media made a huge fuss about the racial make-up of the team, which was understandable with South Africa's history. But what I didn't enjoy was some sectors of the press insinuating that I'd decided to throw the match because of my selections. I guess their logic was that no Springbok team with nine black players could possibly beat Australia. If there weren't enough black players in a given team I was criticized, yet

⁶¹ Ray, Craig. White, Jake. In *Black and White: The Jake White Story*. Cape Town: Zebra Press: 2007. Page 99

⁶² Ray, Craig. White, Jake. In *Black and White: The Jake White Story*. Cape Town: Zebra Press: 2007. Page 117.

when I selected nine black players, the conservative elements of the press started questioning my intentions, and even my integrity. It was laughable, but also frustrating.”

⁶³ This situation reveals the reality of a lot of transformation policy, White South African rugby administrators and supporters see players of colours as a resource. They want athletic wings, but they do not want a majority black Springbok side. The passion with which much of white South Africa pursues its rugby, and maintains its racial assumptions, is revealed in the ludicrous accusation that White intended to throw the game.

While he understood the importance of transformation, White was frustrated throughout his tenure as Springbok coach, because he felt South African Rugby Union executives manipulated him under the pretense of pursuing transformation. “It also irritated me that, for 17 months or so, I’d exceeded the board’s expectations at all levels, including transformation.” White states “Suddenly it wasn’t a case of transformation, but about picking the black players *they* wanted *when* they wanted them.”⁶⁴ This perception, that Transformation Policy is manipulated by the sports ministry is echoed by many players and coaches, Andre Volstedt of the Sharks academy, when asked his opinion on the sports ministry, explicitly replied, “Not good. The ministry have hidden agendas. Everything is about egos and money and who controls what.”⁶⁵ Jake White would ultimately resign as Springbok coach the day after capturing the 2007 Rugby World Cup, unwilling to continue to deal with the South African sports ministry. Jake White’s difficulties handling integration during his tenure as Springbok coach illustrate the

⁶³ Ibid. Page 136.

⁶⁴ Ray, Craig. White, Jake. In *Black and White: The Jake White Story*. Cape Town: Zebra Press: 2007. Page 129

⁶⁵ Andre Volstedt Questionnaire received August 4th 2009.

character of the forced early stage of transformation. Transformation in its early stages cultivated resentment and bitterness, but has, only five years on, made a big difference in the ethnic character of South African Rugby. White's replacement, Peter De Villiers, who is coloured, has also been dogged by the difficulties of transformation policy. He is not respected by the South African rugby community, and his continued success is attributed to the foundation laid by Jake White. The characterization of De Villiers as a transformation hire has discredited him to the point that South African Rugby Union executive Oregan Hoskins admitted "Race had been a deciding factor in him beating meyer [another candidate] to the post."⁶⁶ The controversy of De Villiers as a transformation hire despite his success has escalated to the point that many white South African rugby supporters now subscribe to a conspiracy theory that a few of the senior players put in place by Jake White are now running the team; John Smit, Pierre Spies, Bakkies Botha and Victor Matfield are all classic, white, Afrikaner Springboks.

Transformation is helping to numerically integrate high-level rugby in South Africa, but power and ownership still remains in the hands of White South Africans. White South Africans are willing to accept superficial changes, such as the skin colour of a few players, but react strongly to shifts in the location of power, such as skin colour of coaches and administrators. Hence, the strong reaction to Jake White selecting a mostly black and coloured team, and the widespread criticism of Peter De Villiers. Yet long-term positive effects of transformation are being resulting from investing resources into youth black and coloured rugby. As South African rugby becomes numerically integrated, and the focus of selections returns to merit, the next generation of South African rugby

⁶⁶ The Daily Telegraph [UK]. June 30th 2009 "Ground Breaker who is Dogged by Controversy." Gaijn Mairs.

players will excel through integrated merit-based development structures.

The integration of professional and international South African rugby sides is not just the product of transformation policy encouraging the selection of players of colour. Black and coloured athletes in South Africa are playing rugby in increasing numbers, and they are enjoying more access to the resources they need to reach the top echelons of the game. Conscious efforts are made by professional sides, academies, schools, varsity colleges and even the Springboks to encourage the development of black and coloured players. This has resulted, especially since 1999 in an upsurge in black and coloured rugby at the grassroots level.

The effectiveness of the model of the Natal Sharks, a side that made a concerted effort to encourage the development of black and coloured players in their province, is a good example of how Rugby is being fostered in non-white communities. Gavin Rich explains “When Ian McIntosh [Director of Rugby] was driving the first Natal Rugby Union push into the townships around Durban, there was a lot of talk about the latent talent of the black players that were just waiting to be discovered by the union’s development initiative. At the time it sounded like wishful thinking, and while the Sharks post-1995 became known as the South African union that not only invented professionalism, but also perfected it, the prospect of the game appealing to the broader Kwazulu-natal population remained a pipe-dream.”⁶⁷ When looking to acquire black or coloured players or to help in their development the Sharks either integrate them into the Academy training structure or ensure they get a place at good local rugby schools. Sharks Academy coach and former Springbok Ettienne Fynn explains, “A lot of the black

⁶⁷ Rich, Gavin. “Gold Mine: The Sharks are finally tapping into Kwazulu-Natal’s Black Rugby Talent.” SA Rugby. June 2009. Page 91.

players you see playing in the Sharks team were educated at the big, established local rugby schools, but most of them only went there after being spotted and identified by the guys who have worked on our development initiatives.”⁶⁸ To ensure that economic factors do not interfere with the ability of young players of colour to excel, the Sharks Academy gives out bursaries to about 40 boys a year to ensure that they can afford to train properly and eat healthily. These development efforts are doing a great deal to integrate South African rugby by ensuring that talented black and coloured players get a chance to train at the highest level possible. However, black and coloured players are still not considered to be equal with white players. South African rugby administrators and coaches see black and coloured players as a resource in improving their teams but not as equal partners invested in the teams development. Ettienne Fynn continues, “I don’t think people actually realize the gold mine we are sitting on in this region in terms of the latent and so far mostly untapped talent that is available.”⁶⁹ Young players of colour who fail to break into the professional game are integrated into the Sharks structure as trainers, coaches and physios for the next crop of recruits. This encourages integration not just on the actual field but in the entire structure of South African rugby. Though there are few professional black coaches now, in the next 20 years that will change as these young coaches rise through the ranks.

Transformation Policy and grassroots development initiatives account for a lot of the progress toward integration in South African rugby. Ultimately the strongest integrative force since 1995 has been professionalism. To ardent international rugby supporters the profesionalization of rugby union was actually a bigger shift than the racial

⁶⁸ Ibid. Page 91.

⁶⁹ Rich, Gavin. “Gold Mine: The Sharks are finally tapping into Kwazulu-Natal’s Black Rugby Talent.” SA Rugby. June 2009. Page 91.

integration of South African rugby. The upper-class orientation of rugby union kept it an amateur game when all other international sports of similar popularity had long been professional. Professionalism means teams and coaches are trying to win at all costs and that they are willing to sacrifice local tradition and social structures for success. Coaches and players who place winning as a top priority will disregard racial prejudices and make selections on merit. This is why the negative reactions to early transformation picks were so virulent, because they flaunted both professionalism and racial structures in the teams they were imposed on. Now however many black and coloured players merit inclusion in professional and national sides. Some black and coloured players have become heroes of modern South African rugby and truly embraced by the largely white Springbok fanbase, most notably, Prop Tendai 'Beast' Mtiwarira.

Beast trained at the Sharks Academy. Spotted as a talent from Zimbabwe, he quickly rose as a front row into the Sharks first team, and then was within a year selected for the Springboks. Since then he has excelled in the front row, and most recently hemanhandled England's stalwart, world cup winning prop Phil Vickery on the Summer 2009 British & Irish Lions tour. South African supporters' reaction to the Beast's dominance of Vickery in the scrums is significant because Beast was claimed by South Africans as their own, and enormous pride was taken in his dominant scrummaging, an area where England is usually superior. In this way, the Beast was integrated into the anti-imperialist tradition of Springbok rugby in a defeat of the old enemy. The passionate support South African fans display for the Beast [a massive cry of "BEAST!" goes up every time he touches the ball or makes a tackle] is also relevant because he is so successful in a position which once embodied white Afrikaner rugby, the big bully boys

of the front row. Beast is also passionately embraced by white rugby supporters because he is known to be a devout Christian, as many in the South African rugby community are. This popularity could be contrasted with players such as Thando Manana, who became unpopular after famously refusing to be initiated as a Springbok on tour with the justification that he had already undergone initiation as a Xhosa man.

The three forces of grassroots development, professionalism, and transformation policy are effectively integrating all levels of South African rugby. However, black and coloured players are still considered a resource to be utilized by South African rugby, the ownership and control of which still rests with the white majority. Coaches and decision making players are still largely white. Players of colour are tapped for their athleticism, or, if considered equally skilled to a white player, for the colour of their skin. The success of coloured coach Peter De Villiers is attributed to his predecessor, Jake White, and the Springboks stalwarts he put in place. The next step, in the ongoing process of integrating rugby, will be the development of a group of talented young black and coloured coaches, and current white coaches trusting their black and coloured players to make decisions on the field.

Conclusion.

Scholars writing on South African rugby between 1992 and 1999 painted a bleak picture, with the brief but powerful exception of the 1995 World Cup. Rugby was portrayed as a sport still dominated by the white Afrikaner population, and the springboks were held up as a symbol of Apartheid surviving in the new rainbow nation. However,

during this time, the South African sports Ministry and South African Rugby Union were implementing a policy of transformation and beginning the difficult process of racially integrating and symbolically shifting rugby. This policy at first proved difficult to implement and created more resentment than progress. Yet the players who were picked to fulfill transformation quotas broke down barriers, and the investment in developing coloured and black youth rugby and professional structures has facilitated a genuine shift in the racial make up of professional rugby, as well as the racial attitudes of white rugby fans, coaches, administrators and players. Some whites accept the equality of black and coloured players but insist that they do not approach rugby or the springboks with the passion of the white population.

As rugby is becoming more integrated, the South African Rugby Union is actively seeking to shift the narrative of the integration of rugby. This is clear in a new book published by the South African Rugby Union, The Badge: A Centenary of the Springbok Emblem. This work details the history of the white springboks, but also the history of black, coloured and integrated teams under Apartheid. It suggests that these teams were on an equal footing, and it even represents black national teams as black Springboks when they were not known by that name. The work suggests that rugby administrators in South Africa were subject to the laws of Apartheid but were not actively trying to preserve rugby as the domain of whites. These assertions are incorrect and the effort by the South African Sports Ministry and Rugby Union fits the pattern of the African National Congress' effort to configure the history of Apartheid South Africa into a narrative of gradual integration, giving support to the feasibility of a modern rainbow nation.

The forward of The Badge was written by Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu, a towering figure in the anti-apartheid struggle. Tutu states, “As a contribution to the process of reconciliation in our country, and as an example of the magnanimity of the victors in the fight against Apartheid, we should not rub peoples noses in the dust. We should take very seriously what they regarded as their symbols and badges, or whatever is important to them, in the spirit of nation-building.”⁷⁰ Tutu clearly understands the Springbok as a white symbol and the purpose of the work to be reconciliatory, hoping that shedding light on the nuanced meaning of the Springbok for the white population will help blacks understand why they should no longer see it as a symbol of Apartheid.

The introduction goes on to make the claim that Springboks “are the standard bearers of the new, democratic South Africa, the rainbow nation.”⁷¹ This new reality is contrasted with a watered down explanation of the oppressive symbolism the Springbok held during apartheid for blacks and coloureds. They are even so bold as to claim, “For them [black & coloured people] stopping the pain of being non-entities in their beautiful land was more important. In a land awash with despair, many were secretly dreaming of a time when they would step out of the shadows and become real people in a democratic country. But, however, bizarrely blacks also saw the springbok as being intrinsically representative of South Africa, perhaps were even inspired by the success of the Springbok and defiantly incorporated it into their own national emblems. The springbok was hated and admired as it became the ultimate mark of excellence in South African rugby, and later other sports.”⁷² First, black and coloured South Africans were not

⁷⁰ Dobson, Paul. Mackaiser, Anthony. Qunta, Vuyisa. Retief, Dan. Van der Schyff, Piet. Wilson, Harold. Cruywagen, Dennis. *The Badge: A centenary of the Springbok emblem*. SA Rugby: Newlands: 2006. Forward.

⁷¹ Ibid. Page 8

⁷² Ibid. Page 9.

secretive about their desire to be “real people”. Second, though black and coloured rugby bodies did incorporate the Springbok into their own logos this was not because they were inspired by the success of the white Springboks. The Springbok was the mark of the highest level of achievement for a rugby player in South Africa, and black and coloured unions would often include the Springbok on the side or in the background of their badges, perhaps to remind spectators and players that they had achieved as far as they could under the laws of the Apartheid state, but not as a tacit gesture of support for the white Springboks. The Badge also attempts to depoliticize rugby, claiming “since the inauguration of the game in South Africa, white rugby, played within the compartments of the contemporary social and political order, allegedly, was free of politics.”⁷³ This is incorrect because of the nature of the ‘contemporary social and political order’ everything that occurred within these orders was political; hence the emphasis of the sports boycott on “no normal sport in an abnormal society.”

The work goes on to accurately detail the history of the white Springboks, and then begins to explain the efforts of some prominent white rugby officials, such as Danie Craven, to form integrated teams under Apartheid. The resistance to integration in rugby is always portrayed as coming from the Apartheid government, not from within South African rugby, which was not the case. Though a rare champion of integration in South African rugby, Craven himself when was discussing what the emblem would be for an integrated South African national side questioned “If we give the Springbok away what will be left for us whites?”⁷⁴ One could certainly ask what white South Africans feel they

⁷³ Dobson, Paul. Mackaiser, Anthony. Qunta, Vuyisa. Retief, Dan. Van der Schyff, Piet. Wilson, Harold. Cruywagen, Dennis. The Badge: A centenary of the Springbok emblem. SA Rugby: Newlands: 2006. Page 50.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* Page 95.

have left now.

In 1981, after the first mixed Springboks trials, Errol Tobias became the first coloured person ever to be selected for the Springboks. He was obviously a good player, but not exceptional his international career lasted only three test matches. *The Badge* certainly makes the most of them though “Perhaps the greatest moment came at Ellis Park when he raced some 25 metres down the right touch-line, handling off England’s John Palmer, for a try as the crowd rose to him in an excited wave. He scored and turned arms aloft in a great V to face his team-mates- a V for victory over racism.”⁷⁵ Needless to say, a single coloured rugby player representing a nation where he could not vote is not exactly a victory over racism. The signal, if it was intended to signify anything was a v for victory on the rugby field, which is the only motivation the white rugby ascendancy at this time had to undermine the racial hierarchy by selecting Tobias in the first place.

Perhaps the most interesting story in the entire history presented by *The Badge* is that of Owen Sibusio Nkumani, the first ethnic black African selected as a Springbok in 1999. His story is presented on the very last page of the book. He recalls, “When I became a bok it was the reaction of an aunt of mine that really drove home what an achievement it was. She said to me, ‘You’ve just done what every young white Afrikaner boy dreams of. You’ve done something people said would never happen in this country. You’ve been selected to wear the sign of the boer.’”⁷⁶ Though Nkumani’s aunt understands the change represented by his selection, she still characterizes the Springbok badge as the ‘sign of the Boer.’ It is the fundamental purpose of *The Badge* to undermine

⁷⁵ Dobson, Paul. Mackaiser, Anthony. Qunta, Vuyisa. Retief, Dan. Van der Schyff, Piet. Wilson, Harold. Cruywagen, Dennis. *The Badge: A centenary of the Springbok emblem.* SA Rugby: Newlands: 2006.. Page 96

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Page 216.

that characterization by shifting the narrative of the control and evolution of the Springbok to a story of gradual, inevitable integration.

In the seventeen years since the fall of the apartheid state, the meaning and composition of South African rugby has changed dramatically. The history of black and coloured rugby is recognized next to the white rugby tradition, and the Springboks are presented, somewhat justifiably, as a symbol of a new, integrated South Africa. In a numerical sense the professional and national south African sides are becoming increasingly integrated. Transformation policy was difficult and awkward to implement at first but has resulted in real change in the make-up of South African rugby. Professional development initiatives in academies and the allotment of coaching and training resources to the black and coloured rugby community, is resulting in real, merit based integration. Because of the professional nature of South African rugby, merit is now far and away the main criteria for selection.

If rugby is to truly represent the new South Africa, the next phase of this transformation must be in management, supporters, and symbolic significance. Rugby as a spectator sport is still supported primarily by the white Afrikaner population. At national matches the new integrated anthem is sung, but the Afrikaner portion which draws from the original anthem *Die Stem* is sung much louder and with more enthusiasm. Hopefully as black and coloured players continue to rise through the ranks of South African rugby on merit, and the stigma of transformation starts to wear away, the black and coloured population will become more interested in the game. Also, in the next ten years many more black and coloured professional coaches will emerge. Many of those black and coloured people who entered professional development initiatives through

transformation efforts, but did not succeed as players, stayed in the professional rugby world and focused on coaching and training. It can be expected that those who excel, because of the professional orientation of the modern game, will find themselves in high level coaching positions in the future. The symbolism of the Springbok will be very difficult to shift permanently. But the approach the South African Rugby Union is currently taking is incorrect. Attempting to transform the history of Rugby to portray a trend of gradual integration obscured the miracle that the integration currently occurring is. The history of South African rugby would be much better served by following the approach of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, encouraging honesty and recognizing the injustices of the past while seeking to develop solutions for the future. The power of the Springbok as a symbol now is one of transformation. As a symbol of the success of forced integration initiatives South Africans can look to rugby as evidence that such things if approached correctly can succeed.

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