

THE NOSC AND THE NON-RACIAL SPORTS MOVEMENT: TOWARDS POST-APARTHEID SPORT IN SOUTH AFRICA.

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“We believe in a mass-based, united, non-racial and democratic sports movement. Sport is the right of every South African, yet there is an appalling lack of facilities for the majority of players.

As sportspersons we must fight for these facilities alongside our comrades in the factories, mines, schools and communities who are striving for a non-racial, democratic South Africa.

We seek to unite all sportspersons who share this vision. In preparing for a post-apartheid South Africa, we must form single non-racial controlling bodies.”

“The NSC vision”, *NSC News*, Vol 2 (1): 6, July, 1990.

This paper seeks to understand the recent emergence of the National Olympic and Sports Congress (NOSC) in South Africa. The NOSC is a grassroots movement in sport dedicated to the removal of apartheid. It has been able to develop widespread support for a so called non-racial view of sport, and attain international prestige by becoming the main conduit of IOC policy requiring the racial integration of South African sports organizations as a prerequisite for the reincorporation of South Africa into the international sports world. An understanding of the NOSC is necessary to make sense out of the current developments in the sports scene in South Africa, developments which appear to be part of monumental social changes in this country. The current integration of the racially based sports organizations in South Africa reflect, or rather epitomize, more general changes in that society. Indeed, leaders of the NSOC feel that they are using sport to change society. Just what do they mean by this? How can sport, often perceived by critical theorists to be a conservative social force, be used in such a revolutionary manner? Furthermore, how can this be done through the negation of race as a variable in South African society? The philosophy of racial differences as a basic tenet of “population classification” has been the root of the apartheid system. How realistic is it to declare that race is no longer important when the legacy of that system is felt so profoundly within sport and every other social institution in South Africa?

This paper combines a professional and a personal concern with the proactive (as opposed to reactive) use of sport as a vehicle for social change in South Africa. The personal interest is based upon my experiences in South Africa during the summer of 1991 when I was a guest of EDUMOVE, a progressive womens organization within South African physical education, which organized a series of conferences or “forums” on the theme of “Sociological Perspectives of Movement Activity” (Katzenellenbogen and Potgeiter, 1991). The goal of these forums was to encourage communication between the different social groups in South African society and, during the month of August, myself and two other “international guests”

formed the basis of a “roving conference” which visited Durban, Bisho in the Ciskei, Stellenbosch in the Western Cape, and Johannesburg. At each site we made presentations followed by workshops in which small racially-mixed groups of delegates discussed issues in sport and physical education raised in the presentations. These workshops were to facilitate interracial interaction in an informal setting (something virtually nonexistent in South African society as far as I could see). In addition to these forums I made presentations to faculty and students in physical education departments at eight different universities, and visited schools in white, black, Indian and “colored” communities.¹

In seeking to understand the changes in South African sport and the non-racial movement behind these changes I will first review events leading to the creation of the NOSC, discuss its international legitimation as part of the international pressure on South Africa to integrate its sports organizations, and then address the issue of non-racial sports in South Africa and the problems of implementing such a policy. In particular I will deal with the idea of race as an “invention tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) to make legitimate white rule, and how the institution of sport has contributed to this tradition. What new traditions need to be invented to make legitimate this non-racial view of sport? Specifically, I will discuss the problem of how to redress the unequal distribution of resources in sport which is the great legacy of the apartheid system. In other words, how is the NOSC’s program of non-racial sport going to be sponsored? Finally, I want to discuss how tensions between the different sports organizations in South Africa, specifically between the NOSC and SACOS, are effecting sport reform in South Africa, particularly the unification process.

The Rise of the National Olympic and Sports Congress

An understanding of current developments in South African sport, including the rise of the NOSC, must be located within the context of the struggle against the apartheid system (see Jarvie, 1991 for a review of this history). Because of its salience for the community (in particular white South Africans) and its worldwide networks of interaction (e.g. Olympic Games, World Cup, international cricket and rugby), sport has been a particularly important symbolic force used by proponents and opponents of the apartheid system. For example, the government of South Africa has applied the apartheid system to the sports organizations of the country. Typically, different organizations for the different racial groups have existed for each sport. This policy has helped to divide non-white groups so that the white organizations can maintain control. It has also reinforced the idea that South African society is based on different population groups.

The government has also attempted to use international sport to make apartheid legitimate. Having white athletes represent South Africa in international competition symbolically increased the legitimacy of the South African government and also reinforced the perception of the physical domination of blacks by whites in sport. Sending teams to countries which historically have had friendly ties with white South Africa (e.g. the Springboks rugby tour of the USA in the 1970’s), and, more recently, attempting to bring international athletes and sports teams (“rebel” tours) to South Africa by offering athletes large financial incentives (e.g. the Gatting tour) also helps to support the status quo, and makes apartheid appear a legitimate system of government.

Prior to the development of the NOSC, leadership of the internal protest against apartheid sport was primarily in the hands of the South African Council on Sport (SACOS). This organization was formed in 1973 to protest the government policy of separate sports which

banned non-African teams from playing in the townships, and African teams from playing in areas designated as “all-white” (Gerwel, 1989).² Since its inception SACOS has taken a hard-line policy against apartheid under the slogan “No normal sport in an abnormal society”, although it is now more supportive of a non-racial approach to sport. It still advocates no interaction with the whites until apartheid is totally eradicated and sweeping reforms such as universal suffrage are passed. This internal moratorium is currently still in effect in most sports (*The Star*, Johannesburg, 1991, Sept. 3). On the international front the opposition to apartheid sport has been led by the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC) with the backing of various international anti-apartheid sports bodies and the United Nations Special Commission Apartheid Sport. This alliance has been very successful in isolating South African sport internationally and convincing the IOC to uphold the ban on South Africa’s involvement in the Olympic Games.

Over recent years mass protest against apartheid by the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) has led to important changes and the dismantling of the apartheid laws, specifically, the Group Areas and Lands Act (1/90), the Separate Amenities Act (10/90), and the Population and Registration Act (6/91). Although the repeal of these laws has made little immediate difference to the lives of the disadvantaged majority (Seager, 1991), it does symbolize government acceptance that apartheid is no longer a realistic alternative in South Africa. These changes have led to the feeling that the anti-apartheid movement in sport should enter a new phase; one in which the gradual return of South Africa to international sport could be used as a carrot to encourage the eradication of apartheid in sport and in other social institutions (Kidd, 1991).

The NOCS grew out of a response to that need. It began as the National Sports Congress, a body created by the ANC in 1988 out of the MDM to develop unified sports bodies within South Africa. To accomplish this it has been able to fuse black independent sports bodies with non-racial sports bodies by taking advantage of dissatisfaction by some black groups with the SACOS boycott. The SACOS blanket boycott of apartheid sport includes all South African athletes. Even blacks who were of international caliber were rejected by SACOS if they used the establishment sports organization to get national and/or international recognition rather than sacrifice their sports careers. In this way the SACOS policy caused tension with some black sports groups, whose members saw themselves as doubly victimized (Kidd, 1991, Mashishi, 1991).

By providing a forum for unity within South African sport, the NOCS could counter the tendency for the government to use black sport for publicity purposes. For example, in 1988 some well-known soccer clubs within the National Soccer league were contacted by the homeland leaders to play exhibition games as part of the so called “independence” celebrations for the “homelands”.³ After consultation with the MDM these clubs refused to add legitimacy to these celebrations by taking part in them, but the threat that even black sport could provide for the anti-apartheid movement became apparent. After consultation with the ANC the four controlling soccer bodies in South Africa have agreed to unify under the principle of non-racialism (Towards a single Soccer body...NSC News, 1989). This development was significant in that it illustrated the importance of NOCS relative to SACOS, in the struggle to represent non-white sportspersons (Gerwel, 1989).

The official launch of the NSC occurred at a conference in Johannesburg in July 1989, at which delegates from sports organizations, trade unions, and civic, church, education and community groups pledged to the following aims for the NSC:

1. to establish a single, unified, non-racial, democratic sports movement as part of the MDM.
2. to encourage codes of sports to establish single national bodies.
3. to investigate and assist the various communities to create sufficient facilities to enable every sportsperson to develop his or her talents fully.
4. to cooperate with the MDM in working towards an apartheid-free society. (National Sports Congress Press Release, 1989).

According to Kidd (1991) the NOSC has been in the forefront of every major development in South African sport. By leading demonstrations against the 1989 rugby tour and the 1990 cricket tour it has shown the sports establishment that the path to international competition leads through negotiations with the NOSC. It also provided assistance in the democratic movement's mass trespass against segregated beaches which culminated in the government decision to open them to all races.

This proactive strategy, of using sport to assist in the dismantling of apartheid rather than waiting for apartheid to go and then reacting to that situation (the original SACOS policy), has led to the NOSC receiving international as well as domestic support. At the 4th International Conference Against Apartheid In Sport held in Stockholm, Sweden in September, 1990 the NOSC was acknowledged as the major anti-apartheid movement in South Africa (Report on 4th International Conference Against Apartheid In Sport held in Stockholm). It has also been recognized by the African Olympic community, and has played a major part in the IOC sponsored meetings with the Association of African National Olympic Committees (ANOCA) in Harare in November, 1990. At this meeting ANOCA President Jean-Claude Ganga noted the eradication of multisport organizations and the development of uniraical sports federations as essential conditions which the South Africa sports bodies must meet if they are to be recognized by the international sports community. NOSC membership was included in the so called "Committee of 8" comprising South African sports leaders responsible for implementing ANOCA policy. (Final Communique ..., 1990; see also Kidd, 1991). Subsequently, ANOCA has given its support to the newly formed (March 11, 1991) National Olympic Committee of South Africa which is also supported by the NOSC. This organization will process the applications of the newly created non-racial sports bodies for Olympic status (Miller, 1991), and consequently controls the future of any South African sports body wishing to return to the Olympics.

The NOSC then, has been able to create (or to capitalize on) a mood for change in South African sport symbolic of the widespread assault on the apartheid system taking place in most South African institutions. It has seized the initiative in the non-racial unification process. For example, in March, 1991, an amalgamated football (soccer) federation, the SA Football Association (SAFA) was created out of three separate bodies, one of which had previously been affiliated to SACOS. Mluleki George, the president of the NOSC is also the President of the newly constituted SAFA (Miller, 1991). Given that the destruction of apartheid as a system of government in South Africa seems inevitable, the non-racial sports movement appears to be the future for South African sport. However, the idea of a non-racial movement as a unifying principle in a country built on the perpetuation of racial differences is an interesting paradox. It is discussed in the next section.

Race and sport in South Africa and abroad

All aspects of life in South Africa, political, economic and social have been effected, in the past determined, by race. The apartheid system has been built on a race paradigm, that is, the assumption that the South African population consists of a number of discreet and unassimilable groups, that these groups are characterized by physical differences grounded in race, and that these racial differences have cultural and mental implications. According to Boonzaier (1988) historian George M. Theal identified four discrete and unassimilable races in South Africa; “Bushman”, “Hottentots”, “Bantu”, and “European” each with its own distinctive physical, cultural and mental characteristics. Although Theal was wrong, this type of thinking was common in Europe and North America at the time, and was supported by the “scientific” findings of craniology which showed the white man’s brain to be larger, and therefore innately more developed, than the brain of women, or men of other races (see Gould, 1981).

There are many problems with this racial or rather racist paradigm. The first is the erroneous idea that race can incorporate discreet physical characteristic in the first place. Are there any such things as “pure” races? Race fails as a purely physical concept upon which to base a classification system. This failure is confounded when such characteristics as personality, intelligence, and culture are also included under the rubric of race. The apartheid government has encountered many difficulties in trying to use this classification system to designate who is “white”, “black”, and “coloured” in South Africa. According to the Population Registration Act of 1950 a white person is “a person who (a) in appearance obviously is a White person, and who is not generally accepted as a Coloured person; or (b) is generally accepted as a White person and is not in appearance obviously not a White person”. On the other hand, a black is “a person who is, or is generally accepted as, a member of any aboriginal race or tribe of Africa”. A “Coloured” person is “a person who is not a White person or a Black” (West, 1988, p. 101-102).

West (1988) asserts that there are few, if any, pieces of legislation in South Africa which are phrased so imprecisely, and in which such a range of problematic criteria is used. In fact, the Act was often amended before it’s repeal in 1991 and various groups were reclassified (for example, the Japanese were given “honorary white” status in the 1960’s). The reason for these changes have been to protect white power, privilege and control over access to political rights and economic resources. Race is a culturally created category rather than an objective or natural phenomenon. The concepts of race, ethnic group, tribe and more recently the “first world/third world” euphemism have been “invented’ to protect white interests and has little objective classification (Sharp, 1988).⁴ It is perhaps this understanding of the political use of the term race in the history of apartheid which has motivated the ANC to support attempts to remove it as a realistic force in South African society.

The leaders of the non-racial sports movement are aware of that race is an issue in international sport and that the South African government has used sport to make legitimate it’s racist policies. “Success on the sport field confirms to whites their world view of the master race, their heroic image of themselves and justifies to themselves the position of superiority they claim to hold” (“Towards affirmative action...”). Given that the foundations of the modern Olympics can be traced to elitist ideas of amateurism prevalent among white European males, there is some justification for concern.⁵ At the same time the strong anti-apartheid stance of the current IOC should reduce such fears.

The NOSC has been particularly suspicious of rugby as a symbol of white supremacy in South Africa and has been most critical of attempts by establishment rugby under the guidance of the South African Rugby Union to bring in international tours (“Rugby bodies start moving closer” NSC News, 1990). The NOSC is seeking to avoid the situation that has occurred in other African nations such as Zimbabwe and Namibia where the historic pattern of inequality means that, even after independence, the representative teams are predominately white (Kidd, 1991). In a speech at the “Five Freedoms Forum Conference” in Johannesburg, August 24 -25, 1990, Mr. Ebrahim Patel, President of the South African Rugby Union and Vice-President of the NOSC said that the international sports moratorium was necessary to ensure “establishment” sport did not return to the international arena under the banner of non-racialism (Five Freedoms Forum Conference, Report on Sports Commission, p. 2). The powerful symbols of South African sport; the Springbok jersey, the Springbok emblem, and the South African flag are all symbols of “white” South Africa and evoke great pride in the white community, even though these symbols may not associated with race, at least by white South Africans- It is significant that Mr. Sam Ramsamy, Chairman of the NOCSA, has stated that the Springbok should no longer be the national sporting emblem of South Africa. It was not used on the recent South African cricket tour of India (Sunday Times, Johannesburg, 1991, December 22).⁶

That the institution of sport can be linked to stereotypic views of race is not-unique to South Africa. References to supposedly genetically based racial differences between blacks and whites in sport is common in the United States, and, I would argue, functions in much the same way as the myth of race in South Africa, as a means to make legitimate white power and control. Until recently blacks were thought of as inferior to whites and consequently less able in sports. For example, 25 years ago the NCAA basketball final was won by the University of Texas El Paso (now called Texas Western University) in a swirl of controversy. This was caused by the fact that the starting five players for Texas El Paso were black, the first time this had happened in college basketball. Many people (including Adolph Rupp, the Head Coach of the University of Kentucky, the team Texas El Paso beat in the final), held what many now consider to be racist views about blacks and did not believe they had the ability to win against whites because of inferior psychological characteristics that were genetically based (Newark Star-Ledger, 1991, April 1). Given the current domination by blacks of basketball these views seem rather silly today, but racial myths still exist in sport. For example, blacks are still “stacked” in non-leadership positions in football and baseball,⁷ and new genetically based myths have been developed to explain black success. The latest of these is the idea that blacks dominate certain sports because they have some genetically based advantage, for example jumping ability in basketball (but not in the high jump), while white success is based on hard work and effort. There seems to be a great interest in this idea in the media, with an NBC prime time program about black and white differences in sport in April, 1989 which tended to support a genetic explanation of black and white differences (see Davis, 1990), and, more recently, a series of articles in USA Today (December 16 - 20, 1991) which presented a more balanced approach. Africa does not escape this stereotyping process when black American athletes are being discussed. In the USA Today series a professor of African-American studies was quoted as follows, “When you see Michael Jordan going to the hoop, you’re seeing ...the African-American approach to things. Some may call it a ‘natural’ phenomenon, based in rhythm. It’s what these athletes grow up with. From the moment they’re carried into the room as babies, they’re immersed in an environment of rhythm that’s rooted in traditional culture.” (Myers, 1991).

Race stereotyping, like all stereotyping (e.g. gender), is a cultural invention to make

legitimate the political and economic power of the group doing the stereotyping. Sport as an institution of world proportions is a theatre in which these stereotypes get acted out. If the issue of race is salient to sport on the world scene how much more important is it in South Africa where it has been used as the basis of society? Any visitor to South Africa cannot escape the vast differences in living standards between the different communities. For example, I saw schools for predominantly white and Indian children in the Durban area that were equal to the best in America (one Indian elementary school even had its own swimming pool). Yet I also saw schools in the "colored" areas of Johannesburg which very had little equipment. One elementary school I visited in Soweto had no books and no electricity. The non-racial movement in sport may be successful in unifying the sports organizations, and, through this reorganization returning South Africa to the international sports scene. Members of the movement may also be successful in convincing many South Africans that race should not be a factor in sport. But the issue of redressing the unequal social opportunities for blacks in sport and in other areas of South African life is enormous. How will the non-racial movement finance programs designed to redress the legacy of apartheid, especially since most of the wealth of South Africa is in the hands of the whites?

Paying for the legacy of apartheid

The leaders of the the non-racial sports movement are aware that the unequal development of sport among blacks and whites is a consequence of segregation and apartheid rather than racial differences in physiology and character ("Towards affirmative action..). Lack of sports facilities for non-whites is part of widespread discrimination in all aspects of life; according to SACOS statistics, in housing (an estimated 5.5 million blacks are homeless), income (per capita income places white South Africans among the six richest nations in the world while 22.5% of the black population are below the poverty line), health (60% of black school children suffer from chronic malnutrition) and education (56% of non-white children leave school early and are illiterate by accepted educational criteria). Whites have 17 times more athletic tracks per person than blacks, 72 times more golf courses, 32 times more cricket fields, 160 times more squash courts, 25 times more badminton courts, 29 times more rugby fields 2.3 times more soccer fields and 32 times more swimming pools.⁸ A similar discriminatory pattern for sports exists in the schools ('Towards affirmative action..).

Such inequality of sporting opportunity makes it extremely difficult for every sportsperson to develop his or her talents fully, one of the aims of the NOSC. The question of how the non-racial sports movement can improve the opportunities for sport among the non-white majority is extremely important. The NOSC has addressed this problem in a preliminary manner at the national and international level. First, on the domestic front it has sought to convince white South African business of the need to embrace the non-racial sports movement and to continue to channel money into domestic sport through the so called "social responsibility" programs. In an address during the July 1989 National Sports Congress meetings, South African Breweries sponsorship manager, Gary May, estimated that sponsorship by private business accounts for about R150-million a year for South African sport. South African business receives a 65% tax rebate for this donation. In the past this money has gone towards the sponsorship of rebel tours which have been encouraged by the government to legitimize racial sports and undermine the non-racial sports movement. In effect the South African tax payer has been paying for the rebel tours. May urged the NOSC to engage the business community and explain how the sponsorship of rebel tours actually impedes political change and perpetuates apartheid. If sponsors are really interested in social responsibility their priority should be to begin to redress the imbalance between black and

white sports and channel more money into black sports (“The politics of sponsorship..” NSC News, 1989).

The issue of donations from international sporting bodies has also been raised by the NOSC as it has worked to convince the international community that the philosophy of non-racial sports should be a prerequisite for the return of South African teams to international competition. The request for assistance, in the training of technical and administrative officials, providing foreign coaches, and financing development programs (particularly for black athletes) was received favorably at the Harare meeting, and the issue of assistance was suggested as one of the subjects for discussion by the “Committee of 8” (Final Communique ..., 1990).

International sporting events such as the Olympic Games, and the World Cup of soccer and more recently rugby attract a world audience. To some extent these events transcend nations and provide a “world language” that members of many different cultures can understand. For example, the 1990 World Cup attracted an average of 513 million viewers per game, and the final set the record for the largest television draw ever, slightly more than 8 billion viewers around the world (Newark Star-Ledger, 1991, April 3). These sporting events generate large sums of money, some of which could be used to increase opportunities for non-white athletes in South Africa and elsewhere. For example, former Irish and British Lions rugby player Tony O’Reilly, now president of H. J. Heinz, recently announced that Heinz intends to begin sponsorship programs in “third-world” countries (Bills, 1991). As the preeminent sports organization in South Africa, the NOSC is in a position to dictate how to spend whatever funds domestic and international organizations see fit to donate to South African sport.

However, there is concern over a white backlash reaction to the NOSC⁹ Because of its alignment with the ANC, the NOSC has incorporated a quasi-socialist philosophy. In his address to the delegates at the launch of the NSC, Professor Jakes Gerwel laid the blame for the problems of South Africa squarely at the feet of capitalism. “This inextricable linkage between capitalist exploitation of the natural wealth and people and the national oppression of the majority persists to this day” (Gerwel,1989, p. 3). He suggested that the non-racial sports movement, following the MDM ethos of collective decision making, would have to challenge the competitive capitalist ethos of sport in which competition and individual excellence is encouraged. In a similar vein the NSC News of July, 1990 published an article praising Cuban sport under socialism. That Cuba attained 4th place in the medals rankings in the 1980 Olympics [at which many nations did not attend because of the US boycott] compared to 8th in 1976, 23rd in 1972, and 53rd in 1960 was claimed as a triumph for socialism. “Such is the triumph of socialist-managed sport over capitalist sport that surely post-revolutionary states should rather take their cue from socialist sport and emphasize sport for all.” (“Socialist Cuba provides sport for all, NSC News, 1990, p. 8). Statements such as these may not help the NOSC to get international capitalism to pay for the legacy of apartheid, but there are signs that the ANC has recently toned down its attacks on big business (Saeger, 1991, p. 35). Similarly, the NOSC may follow a more conciliatory line in the future.

The SACOS Factor

Although NSOC leaders have publically recognized SACOS as pioneering the concept of non-racial sport (Gerwel,1989; Tshwete,1990), they have been critical of what they see as the inability of this organization to adapt to the changing political scene in South Africa.

According to the NOSC their organization was not intended to compete with SACOS, nor did they encourage SACOS affiliates to join the NOSC. Rather, NOSC was to provide an alternative for black sporting groups particularly in the townships where SACOS “was viewed with suspicion as a political body” (“The SACOS Factor”, *NSC News*, November, 1989, p.7). They have also accused the SACOS executive of being unwilling to enter into the unity process, in effect retarding that process, and failing to keep their members informed about unity talks (NSC *News*, November, 1989; Tshwete, 1990). In response SACOS has argued that they are non-aligned, and have accused the NSOC of trying to destroy them. Indeed, SACOS may well accuse the NOSC of being a political body because of its alignment with the ANC. SACOS on the other hand is often perceived as aligned with the Pan African Congress (PAC). That each of these bodies would accuse the other of being “political” is interesting. Are not all sports organizations “political”, in South Africa or anywhere else? Is the tactic of downplaying political alignments a tactic by each sports organization to maintain a “keep sport out of politics” front?

Having two separate, and seemingly competing bodies advocating non-racial sport in South Africa tends to retard the unity process. Some sports, for example athletics (track and field) have instituted unification talks without SACOS members (Miller, 1991), while others are negotiating with SACOS. For example, the South African Womens Hockey Association (SAWHA) has been negotiating with the South African Womens Hockey Board (SAWHB), a SACOS affiliate, with a view to unification. These bodies have agreed to a schedule of unification which requires SACOS to lift the current moratorium against its members aligning with white sport (the internal moratorium). However, SAWHA leaders are concerned that their SACOS colleagues will not be able to hold to the schedule because of SACOS’s political problems. If SACOS is losing power to the NOSC it will be very concerned about the 8,000 or so members of SAWHB being “swallowed up” by the 50,000 white members of the SAWHA (Personal interview, January 14, 1992).

Examples such as these make it difficult to accurately assess the current progress of South African sport towards internal unity and international acceptance, especially since the status of different sports is constantly changing. All sports are, however, supposed to be following the same general process. First the different organizations within a particular sport have to negotiate their own unity, form one sporting body, and develop a constitution under the principle of non-racialism. Each sport must also design a development plan which indicates how funds are to be assigned to disadvantaged (invariably non-white) groups. With these documents in place each sport can apply to NOCSA or to the appropriate International Federation. However, international acceptance does not mean that the internal moratorium is lifted or vice versa. For example, cricket has been readmitted to the International Cricket Council, but, as of September 1991, was still subject to an internal moratorium. The internal moratorium has been lifted for boxing but the application of the South African National Amateur Boxing Association for admittance to the International Amateur Boxing Association has been rejected (*The Star*, Johannesburg, Sept. 3, 1991).

Summary: “Inventing” the traditions of non-racial sport

In his recent article on South African sport Grant Jarvie (1991, p. 178) observed that the “real politics of sport revolves around the capacity to define what sport is and should be within South Africa”. I agree with him that the rise to national and international prominence of the NOSC is one of the most significant developments in South African sport, and in this paper I have discussed how NOSC has attempted to define what sport in South Africa should

be like. Jarvie is critical of commentary revolving totally around race and racism, thereby missing the complex interaction between the broader power relations of class, gender and nationalism, within what he calls a nationalist-socialist strategy (1991, p. 182). My contention is that, although the NOSC leadership has defined the root of South Africa's problems in terms that Jarvie would accept (see in particular Gerwel, 1989), the racial legacy of apartheid is not so easy to dismiss.¹⁰ NOSC leaders still see one of the goals of their organization as helping to redress the imbalance in sport by concentrating on black athletes who have been the real victims of apartheid sport. White sports organizations may view the NOSC as a "black" organization because of its alignment with the ANC. Both "white establishment" and NOSC sports organizations may mistrust SACOS because of perceived associations with the PAC and black nationalism rather than non-racialism.

It has been the contention of this paper that the concept of race was invented to make legitimate white power and social control, and that, in the context of South Africa, sport has been used to support this tradition." For example, the government has used sport as part of its "separate but equal" policy, and attempted to gain status from white sports teams representing South Africa on the international scene. Non-racial sports leaders have a similar vision for non-establishment sport. For example, Solomon Morewa, secretary of the newly formed SAFA was quoted in the London Times as follows:

"We in sport see ourselves as transforming society: we are what society is. Soccer in South Africa has over one million affiliated players and is the most cross-cultural activity in the country, embracing everybody including Zulus and Xhosas." (Miller, 1991).

If this dream is to become reality then the process of inventing traditions for non-racial sport seems to be needed, especially in light of the preeminence of race in the history of South African society. Given the attachment of the whites to the traditional emblems of South African sport the creation of new traditions will not be easy. If athletes from all the different groups in South Africa were represented on national sports teams it would send a symbolic message reinforcing non-racial society, but given the legacy of apartheid this will take a long time. Perhaps there needs to be another dimension to sports in South Africa, some sort of internal sports festival symbolizing non-racial interaction (Rees, 1991). During my stay in South Africa I was struck by the total lack of unifying symbols for the "new South Africa". The NSOC may be able to encourage the development of these symbols for sport but they also need to be generated in other cultural, social and economic spheres.

It is unrealistic to think that non-racial sport alone can provide the traditions for transition to a non-racial society, and break down the years of racial hatred and mistrust. Youth soccer in Soweto did not stop black youth "necklacing" each other in the Zim-zim versus Wararas wars even though they played on the same teams.¹² Although the ANC supports the NOSC initiative to develop non-racial sport as a unifying sports code in South Africa, other more basic problems such as housing and unemployment have a higher preference (Summary of speech by Mr. Krish Naidoo, Five Freedoms Conference Report, p. 6-7).

Nevertheless sport is a very powerful force in South African society both domestically and on the international scene. This paper has described the development of the non-racial sports movement in South Africa and the attempts by the NSOC to use this movement proactively to bring about change specifically in South African sport and more generally in South African society. The idea of a non-racial movement as a change agent in a country which has been obsessed by race is, to say the least, an interesting paradox. However, South Africa seems

to me a country of great paradoxes and problems. One image especially stands out from the varied experiences I encountered during my stay in South Africa. On the road from Bisho in the Ciskei (where we held one of the forums) to the University of Fort Hare (where I was to address students and faculty) I was shown a “cricket pitch”¹³ carved out of the veld. It was just a bare patch of ground on a wind-swept plane. Beside it was a rickety pair of rugby posts and a few big rocks, in stark contrast to the “white” facilities 20 minutes down the road in King Williamstown. My host explained that this pitch was the result of a coaching program that had been developed to teach cricket to the township children. As part of the program he had been able to provide the children with bats and balls. Sure enough on the way back from Fort Hare to Bisho that evening black kids were playing cricket on that bare patch of ground in the middle of the veld. They played with the enjoyment and intensity of children everywhere, bowling one ball from each end to save time rather than using the usual “overs” routine. The incident epitomized the overriding problem for South Africa, how to release the potential of the disadvantaged majority in the face of the seemingly insurmountable legacy of apartheid. Perhaps a non-racial movement is the best hope of fulfilling this dream in the context of South African sport.

Jarvie may be right in claiming that it is too simple to see sport in South Africa merely in the context of race. However, at the present time, it would be difficult to convince most people in South Africa that race is no longer a major factor in their lives. If the non-racial sports movement can use sport proactively and help to create an environment in which the salience of race is reduced it will make a historic contribution to the development of South African society. It could also provide a model for our own society where the resurgence of racial tension exemplified by David Duke’s gubernatorial campaign in Louisiana, the “Public Enemy” video on Arizona, and the general rise in “bias” crimes, indicates that race still acts as a major social divider.

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Notes

1. Even though the dismantling of the apartheid laws has reduced the official importance of race as a system of classification, any discussion of South African society must make reference to so called "population groups" for descriptive purposes. Many people classified as "colored" reject such classification. I share this view and disassociate myself from the racist basis of such classification.
2. I am grateful to John Baxter, Head of Sports Administration at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, for this and other documents cited in the paper.
3. The "homelands", "national states" or "Bantustans" are rather like the reservation system

in America. They were created by the South African government as part of the Promotion of Black Self-Government Act in 1959. This identified a number of “pseudo-ethnic” groupings for black people each of which were designated as a “national state”. Blacks were then required to be citizens of these states as well as South Africa: In time this policy changed. As these states such as Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei were declared independent, South African citizenship was revoked for these groups and millions of people living outside the territories, but inside South Africa, became instant foreigners. Independence for the “homelands” was hardly a cause for celebration among blacks in South Africa (see West, 1988).

4. This issue can be placed in a wider debate over the degree to which racist beliefs and practices are a nineteenth and twentieth century European phenomenon or more basic to human development. Scholars differ on these views, and various positions are developed in Rex & Mason (1986).

5. Writing in the *Fortnightly Review* of 1909 on “Why I revived the Olympic Games”, Baron de Coubertin saw the Games as a means “of bringing to perfection the strong and hopeful youth of our white race, thus again helping towards the perfection of human society” (cited in Young, 1984, p. 57).

6. In one lecture to white undergraduate students I mentioned that the symbolism of South African sport is often offensive to black South Africans, and would have to be changed if South Africa returned to international competition. As an alternative symbol to the Springbok I suggested the ostrich (to symbolize the policy of apartheid over the previous decades), or the zebra since the black and white colors could symbolize the the new balance of power. These suggestions set off a storm of protest and comment and elicited a much more animated discussion than anything else I said.

7. Maguire (1988) has found support for the stacking phenomenon in professional soccer in Britain.

8. There is often discrepancy between the figures released by different organizations describing the relative deprivation of non-white groups in South Africa. No matter which set of figures is used these differences are profound, and are yet to be effected by the scraping of the apartheid laws, For example, the abolition of the Separate Amenities Act means that access to public facilities is no longer restricted by race. In reality, most sporting facilities are still in the hands of white municipalities, and are effectively out of reach of most non-whites because of their distance from the townships where most black people live.

9. The Confederation of South African Sports (COSAS), a white-oriented amalgamation of more than 100 sports governing bodies withdrew from the newly formed NOCSA in March, 1991 (Miller, 1991).

10. Mason (1986) notes that the race/class debate has been one of the most enduring to be found in the sociological literature on race. For a rejection of the opposition between race and class see Wolpe (1986).

11. Sport has played an important part in the “invention” of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). For example, the ancient Greek “amateur” athlete was invented by Victorian gentlemen to make legitimate their own view of what sport ought to be (Rees, 1990; Young,

1984).

12. These were disputes between AZAPO supporters, followers of Steve Biko and the UDF, supporters of Mandela. For a moving account of these and other examples of racial hatred in South Africa see Malan (1990).

13. In British terminology a “pitch” is a “field” or playing area. The term would be equivalent to a “baseball diamond” in American sport.