

The State of Sport Historiography and Information in South Africa

FLORIS J. G. VAN DER MERWE

University of Stellenbosch, South Africa

The South African Human Sciences Research Council undertook a thorough investigation into SA Sport. About 200 researchers and about 50 administrative staff took two and a half years to compile 20 volumes, which cover 16 fields of study on sport.

This paper covers chapter two of report nr 15, entitled: "Sport historiography and documentation" (401 pp.). In the research undertaken, it was found that up to 1980 only eight doctoral dissertations and 16 masters theses were written on the history of sport and physical education. Only six of the eight doctoral studies and two of the 16 masters' studies dealt with the history of sport exclusively.

The writing of sport history in South Africa has been presented mainly in popular form by sport journalists and the works, valuable as they are, seldom compare favourably with scientific sport historiography. In general, a lack of systematic documentation of South Africa's sporting past is a conspicuous shortcoming which became apparent in this investigation.

Many factors are responsible for this phenomenon, such as (1) the sports bodies lack of initiative in promoting sport historiography; (2) the lack of a national sport bibliography; (3) lack of recognition of the history of sport as a main subject at Departments of Physical Education; (4) and the unsatisfactory state of affairs as far as the storage of sport information is concerned.

PROBLEM AREAS IN SPORT HISTORIOGRAPHY AND INFORMATION

1. Sports bodies lack of initiative in promoting sport historiography . . . as shown in the national sports bibliography, although not completed at the time of writing.

2. Lack of a national sports bibliography. Research has been hampered by the absence of such a bibliography.

3. Lack of recognition of the history of sport as a main subject at Departments of Physical Education. Only two out of seven Universities that offer Physical Education make this subject compulsory at post-graduate level. Only three Departments employed staff with any experience in sport historiography.

4. Unsatisfactory state of affairs as far as the storage of sport information is concerned.

4.1 Sports Bodies

The general tendency in storing minutes, reports, results, programmes, correspondence, etc. is that storage decrease from national to club level. The majority of sports bodies store information in private places like homes, even garages. The lack of staff and funds also prove to be of the main factors hampering the storage of sport information.

4.2 Local authorities

Very few keep records of the sporting achievements of their citizens. Reasons given were lack of staff (43,9%); not interested (16,6%) and "other reasons" (36,7%).

4.3 Schools

The questionnaires showed that Secondary Schools (standards 6-10) are more likely to store sport information than Primary Schools.

4.4 Universities, Colleges and Technikons

Although 13 out of 14 Universities store sport information in central archives, only five out of 45 (11,11%) of the above named institutions do have publications on their sports history. This clearly indicates a desperate need for sport historiography.

4.6 Armed Forces

As storage of sport information is concerned, the sports bodies of the Defence Force achieve a great deal of central headquarters, while the Police Force let their sports bodies undertake the majority of the storage with very little done at headquarters. In the Prison Force individual sports bodies do all the storage. A central storage bank would ensure maximum storage, co-ordination and stimulation as far as sport historiography is concerned.

4.6 Private Institutions

A total of 120 big private institutions somehow involved with sports were questioned. An average of only 45% do store sport information. This shows a loss of valuable information resulting in neglected sport historiography.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Various recommendations were put forward in this report. Those the most relevant to this paper are

(i) that the existing unsatisfactory state of sport historiography and research be brought to the attention of the universities, sports institutes, the Human Sciences Research Council, and the South African Association for Sport Science, Physical Education and Recreation, and that a remedy should be sought;

(ii) that the national sports bibliography should continue;

(iii) that a national sports documentation and information centre should be established for the collection, preservation, systematizing, development, processing and publication of sports information in the Republic of South Africa.



Mary Lou Lecompte John Findling