

APARTHEID ON THE RUN: THE SOUTH AFRICAN SPORTS BOYCOTT

Rob Nixon

For the people of England, 1970 nearly became the year of the locust. Early that spring, a London anti-apartheid activist, David Wilton-Godberford, made it known that he planned to wage biological warfare against the all-white South African team that was shortly to arrive for a cricket series against England. Wilton-Godberford had imported desert locusts from Africa and was using them to seed a clandestine anti-apartheid breeding program at a series of undisclosed sites in north Wales. Seventy thousand hoppers, he calculated, would ordinarily consume 112 pounds of grass in twelve minutes; seventy thousand ravenous hoppers would eat more. Warning that “the crack of a solid army of locusts feeding will sound like flames,” Wilton-Godberford issued his ultimatum: if the Springbok tour went ahead, he would starve his insect troops for twenty-four hours and unleash them—half a million strong—on the playing fields of England.

Wilton-Godberford’s expertise lay in entomology, not theology or semiotics. For all that, the symbolic crafting of his

operation was superb. The Exodus account of divine election—replete with desert plagues—has been integral to Afrikaans nationalist mythology, at times bracing arguments for white rule. There was something apposite, too, about the tone of Wilton-Godberford’s threat, with its subliminal echoes of the militarism, biologism, and transcendentalism that permeate the arenas of world sport.

Operation Locust was just one facet of the Stop the Seventy Tour, arguably the most successful mass action in post-World War II British history. A brilliant ensemble of political protests orchestrated by Peter Hain, Dennis Brutus, and the Young Liberals, it forced the 1969 Springbok rugby team to retreat behind barbed wire barricades and massed ranks of British police, and insured the cancellation of the Springboks’ 1970 cricket tour of England the following year. These actions became benchmark events in the international campaign to have apartheid’s ersatz “national” teams barred from world competition.

As Wilton-Godberford’s strategy suggests, the power of the sports boycott



Having bombarded the field with bags of flour and smoke bombs to protest apartheid, an airplane passes over an Auckland stadium during a 1981 rugby match between New Zealand and South Africa.

AP/Wide World Photos

stemmed largely from its ability to grip the media by generating spectacle. It gave the liberation movement access to the passionate commitments of sports fans, a vast swath of society largely indifferent to international politics or ignorant of the issues at stake. This allowed sport a distinctive role in the matrix of international actions—the military, nuclear, and oil bans, the divestment movement, the freezing of bank loans, and the moratoria on sporting, cultural, and academic contacts—that drew non-South Africans into the anti-apartheid front. Thus the boycott's role went well beyond publicizing discrimination in South African sport: it became an indispensable mechanism for training the media spotlight on apartheid *per se*.

From its organized beginnings in the late 1950s, the sports ban registered some of the earliest and most sustained successes in popularizing the anti-apartheid cause abroad. In countries where the premier sports overlapped with those of South Africa—Britain, most of Africa, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Anglophone Caribbean, France, Ireland, Australia, Sri Lanka, Italy, and Argentina—outrage over competition against white South African teams gave vital impetus to local anti-apartheid movements. The absence of any major, nationalistic team sports common to South Africa and the United States, however, deprived the American anti-apartheid movement of a powerful populist focus for its actions. This was a particularly unfortunate historical accident, given the visibility of African-American sporting celebrities who would surely otherwise have become a driving force in the American campaign against apartheid.

To assess the impulse behind the sports boycott is to engage with the broader political ramifications of international sport, above all, in the spheres of nationalism, race, and gender. The sports boycott amounted, after all, to the most prominent, extended antiracist campaign in the history of world sports. Arguably not since Jesse Owens ascended the Berlin Olympic podium four times against a backcloth of Nazi triumphalism has an intervention through sport had such broad political repercussions. From its inauspicious advent over thirty years ago, the boycott acquired a high profile at the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity, in the Commonwealth and the Nonaligned Movement, as well as at a host of international sporting bodies. Showdowns between upholders and breakers of the boycott produced incidents of national political consequence in a succession of countries—Barbados, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, England, India, Trinidad, Guyana, Australia, India, Ireland, Antigua, Wales, and France.

The ban threw into relief the preeminence of sporting agons as occasions for forging and flaunting national loyalties. Because South African “national” teams were racially exclusive, their presence on the international stage raised profound questions about the representation of nationhood. What precisely does it mean for sports teams, especially male ones, to be construed as national representatives? Why has sport become such an emotive site for the engendering—and gendering—of nationalism? And to what extent do sporting events not just synecdotally “reflect” the nation but serve as a terrain on which rival versions of the nation are constructed and contested?



The controversy around apartheid in sport erupted with unusual force because it stoked one of the most ferocious controversies in the sporting world—namely, the degree to which sport should be implicated in political advocacy and political punishment. In addition, the contentious bonds between sport, race, nationalism, and gender helped the boycotters gain international leverage from what might otherwise have remained a concern local to South Africans. Activists strengthened the internationalism of the ban by linking the challenge to apartheid to the colonial legacy of racist nationalism in the white majority nations—Britain, New Zealand, Australia, France, and Ireland—that served as white South Africa's principal sporting rivals. Thus, for example, campaigns for Aborigine and Maori land

rights gained impetus from organized resistance to Springbok tours. In Britain, the Zola Budd scandal exposed the racial double standard at the heart of national immigration policy, when in 1984 the Home Office gave the Afrikaans, long distance wunderkind an inside track to British citizenship. British reporters visited Budd's Orange Free State home and cited her consumption of roast beef and Yorkshire pud for Sunday lunch as cultural evidence of her organic Britishness. In circumstances where applicants ordinarily waited twenty-one months, Budd was naturalized in ten days. Here again, the campaign against apartheid embraced other campaigns against racist definitions of national identity.

In August 1992, Zola Pieterse (nee Budd) joined ranks with 120 other South African athletes to compete in the

Police clashing with anti-apartheid demonstrators outside a 1969 rugby match between Swansea and the South African Springboks.

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twenty-fifth Olympiad. South Africa had been barred from the Olympics since 1960, and the conspicuous presence of the country's first ever nonracial squad became a ceremonial marker of the boycott's termination. The ban had been lifted, amid frenzied debate over the strategic wisdom of doing so. Some have lauded the ANC-endorsed repeal as a shrewdly timed gesture; others have challenged the decision, arguing that a trump card has been squandered at a time of inadequate guarantees. However, across the spectrum of debate, the perception lingers that sports will remain an inextricably political resource.

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International sporting contests serve as a form of national recreation in more than one sense of the phrase. They are exhibitionist events imbued with the authority to recreate or simulate the nation, offering a vigorous display of a proxy body politic. This applies, above all, to male team sports which, unlike more solitary pastimes like angling or golf, are structured to provide spectacles of cooperative discipline that stage the suppression of self-interest for the collective good. Players qualify for the national side only by virtue of birth or through naturalization, that peculiar word which makes the latent biologism of national teams explicit. Unlike professional, regional, and club teams, national sides may not freely exchange players: no combination of money and talent can substitute for the fact that to represent the nation—as the etymology insists—is an expression of a birthright. The only way players can transfer their allegiances from one nation

to another is by undergoing the protracted labor of naturalization—little other than a ritual rebirthing through the channels of the INS, the Home Office, or some comparable national “body.”

Sporting internationals serve as occasions for national legitimation and self-scrutiny. Not for nothing are rugby, cricket, and field hockey internationals called “tests.” The composition and performance of the national side readily becomes a focus for anxieties about national (or ethnic national) provenance and destiny. For if international sporting clashes raise tormenting questions about birthrights, they are equally prone to raise anxieties about the nation's prospects. National representatives—diplo- mats, parliamentarians, senators, military officers—typically gain authority with age, but national sporting heroes enter decline by their mid-thirties. Indeed, sport is the only significant sphere of national representation where the young reign supreme. The performance of the national side is thus commonly used as a style of clairvoyance, seeming to portend the nation's future. For it is, as Benedict Anderson reminds us, “the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny.”

In South Africa, a host of factors colluded to render sport a crucial arena of white self-esteem. The halcyon climate and the ubiquity of black domestic workers in white homes guaranteed expanses of outdoor leisure time. Like New Zealanders and Australians, white South Africans have also harbored a special colonial animus toward British sporting teams. Afrikaners were particularly prone to view their prowess at the British game of rugby as sweet revenge

for their imperial subjection at British hands.

Most national or ethnic nationalist groups feel economically, politically, and geographically peripheral to the centers of world power. Such nations ordinarily enjoy scant control over their destinies and are seldom afforded visibility on the world stage. Sport often offers the only arena in which nations redress feelings of marginality and bask, however fleetingly, in the sensation of being a global force. Cameroon's triumphs over more illustrious nations in the 1990 World Cup Football (what Americans call soccer) typified sport's ability to bestow this surrogate sense of national power. White South Africans' paranoid obsession with the sports boycott was rooted in an ethnic nationalist exasperation at being denied just such opportunities to compensate for the smallness of their population, their geographical marginality, and their political ostracism.

In racial terms, the South African regime's insistence on segregated sports teams and leagues became symptomatic of white pathologies about the body. These surfaced in extremes around high contact sports like rugby and in swimming pool racism, with its baroque anxieties over the mingling of fluids. Colonial machismo has been exacerbated among white South African men by the militarized conditions of male bonding: for the past quarter century, all white male school leavers have been summoned for national conscription, a brutal rite of passage into "manliness."

White vulnerability to a sports boycott was rooted not just in the conditions of apartheid but in the character of male team sports. White sport under apartheid

readily acquired a hysterical racial dimension, as segregated events became crucial sites for the forging and consolidation of white blood brotherhoods. The structure, symbolic freight, and social status of such sports generate atavistic occasions through which men enact territorial disputes in an atmosphere of homosocial panic, to borrow Eve Sedgwick's phrase. Particularly in repressed North European, Anglo-Saxon, and related settler communities, sport provides men with the one public arena where they can flaunt their bodies while indulging, without fear of social disgrace, in same-sex bodily contact. They can touch, embrace, kiss, fondle, cradle, and mount each other, smear each other with bodily fluids, and simulate copulation, whether with teammates, Mother Earth, or the corner flag. All this is sanctioned within a carefully zoned space that has been symbolically liberated from suspicion of same-sex desire.

Typically, the nation-state, national sporting authorities, and the media prevent female sports teams from becoming significant bearers of national prestige, despite their potential for doing so. It is symptomatic of this tendency that, while the anti-apartheid boycott encompassed female sports teams, they were involved in none of the decisive controversies. In short, sport is the arena in white South African society where national exhibitionism has converged most explicitly with the intimacies of same-sex and same-race solidarities.

In the settler-colonial conditions of apartheid, male sport's territorial agon acquired a special urgency, for they embodied the consummate struggle between colonizers and colonized, the

contest over the occupation, dispossession, and reclamation of land. Male team sports are, after all, little more than a series of boundary disputes staged under conditions of sanctioned violence. Under apartheid, these homosocial boundary disputes have been waged in an intensely militarized atmosphere. Because they have occurred in conditions where an unelected regime fielded an unrepresentative “national” side during a climate of foreign hostility and internal insurrection, the results of such contests have often developed a keenly political edge.

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The international embattlement of white South Africans was amplified by their minority status within their own borders. Sport matches provided constant, vocal reminders of the “enemy within,” with the black side of the stadium routinely cheering the Springboks’ opponents. Evidently, patriotism was expected even from the disenfranchised. “Unpatriotic” crowd behavior prompted one city, Bloemfontein, to ban all black spectators. Once the boycott took hold and “rebel” overseas teams were paid handsomely to break the boycott, such surrogate internationals became magnets for political mobilization and symptomatic of a nation at war with itself.

In many team sports, the form and idiom of the game are redolent of war, the playing field becoming a projection

of an imaginary map of adjacent, hostile national territories. The talk is of crossing borders and boundary lines, of opposing forces beating a retreat, mounting an assault, gaining or surrendering ground, launching rearguard actions, aerial assaults, and counterattacks, piercing the opposition’s defenses, and driving deep into its territory. When South Africa’s white sporting establishment imported surrogate international teams during the 1980s in an effort to bust the boycott, the sportsmen were condemned through military metaphors—as “mercenaries” or “blood players” who participated in “rebel” or “pirate” tours.

At times, the analogies between military and sporting prowess become flagrant. In 1981, a Springbok rugby victory over arch rival New Zealand coincided with a massive South African military assault on Angola. The South African Broadcasting Corporation’s propagandists did not hesitate to bracket these triumphs: “Just as, over the weekend, South Africans rejoiced at the splendid victory of the Springboks in New Zealand, others of the country’s representatives were returning from the battlefield in Angola. Their mission, too, was splendidly accomplished.” Yet such analogies are not a South African peculiarity. In 1982, immediately after Britain’s victory in the Falklands/Malvinas War, the English tabloids exhorted the national football team to victory in that year’s World Cup on the grounds that two such virile triumphs would make a “perfect pair.” So, too, when the U.S. basketball team “massacred” Cuba by 79 points in the playoffs for this year’s Olympics, one television commentator observed: “Those of you who loved Grenada will love this.”

If the design and argot of sport give weight to George Orwell's aphoristic depiction of it as "war minus the shooting," sport may on occasion become war plus the shooting. This was notoriously borne out by *la guerra futbol*—the conflagration sparked by the 1969 World Cup playoffs between Honduras and El Salvador. On each leg of the contest, home supporters subjected the visiting side to relentless harassment and psychological warfare, on the correct assumption (as the score verifies) that a sleepless, mentally shattered side is more readily defeated. Amid reciprocal cries of foul play, the two nations determined to transfer their unresolved differences from the playing field to the battlefield. Six thousand people died and twelve thousand were wounded in the ensuing football war.

The convergent expressions of nationalism in sporting and military agons contradict that still powerful tradition which insists on sport's sovereignty as a realm paradoxically both beneath and above politics. In this view, sport is a mere pastime, but a pastime of transcendent import. Indeed, sporting idiom is shot through with a religious register: fanatical fans adore their sporting idols or gods, and the crowd mood builds toward a state of rapture, ecstasy, or frenzy. It is a tabloid cliché that a venerated stadium, like London's Wembley, is nothing other than a football shrine where sublime players tread the hallowed ground, later to be immortalized in the pantheon of the great.

White South Africans were vulnerable to a boycott not because sport transcends politics, but because sport's quasi-theological rites are wholly integral to the politics of nationalism. Great victo-

ries achieve a redemptive quality, allowing the nation to pass into messianic time, in Benjamin's sense of a state that instantaneously fulfills past and future.

For a citizen in a secularized or religiously eclectic society, devotion to the national side offers an alternative outlet for transcendental impulses, while simultaneously deepening his or her identification with a projected national com-

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munity. On the other hand, in communities where a single religion dominates—as in Catholic Brazil or Calvinist Afrikanerdom—the national side's triumphs and defeats may readily be ascribed to divine intervention. In South Africa, rugby—the religious home of the far Right—has been unusually prone to such interpretations. When, in 1969, the British rugby team conquered the Springboks on the field and anti-apartheid protestors mortified them off the field, one commentator explained the double humiliation in these terms: "To us in South Africa, rugby is really our god with a small letter, and to be defeated like that—the mishaps, the players who were injured—it was abnormal. God spoke to us."

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consequences of apartheid—a melancholy statistic, but an index, nonetheless, of how deep the boycott cut. Had black South Africans been polled, it is improbable that the loss of international sport would have ranked among their top hundred grievances. However, the quite different issue of apartheid's disastrous impact on sport would have ranked highly. These discrepant perspectives are encapsulated by the slogans to which opposing forces gravitated during the boycott era: "Keep Politics Out of Sport" for most whites and "No Normal Sport in an Abnormal Society" for the majority of blacks.

If white South Africans generally adhered to the conviction that sport should be quarantined from politics, the conditions in which black South African sportsmen and women played precluded such a perspective. Weather-ravaged, overextended, underequipped, underfunded, and understaffed facilities in black townships meant that sporting events promised not a flight from politics but full immersion in it.

Ever since 1894, when Krom Hendricks, a talented Malay bowler, was excluded from the South African national cricket team, a stream of top black sportsmen and women have been denied South African colors. Yet for the predominantly black organizations that advocated nonracial sport, matters could not be resolved simply through more equitable representation at the highly visible, celebrity level of international sport. Indeed, they contended that changes on that level alone would prove counterproductive, distracting from the need to transform the institutional conditions of sport from the grass roots up.

Thus, from early in the campaign, opponents of apartheid sports policy insisted that racism in sport could only be redressed by rescinding the whole matrix of apartheid laws—the Population Registration Act, Group Areas Act, Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, Liquor Act, Bantu Education Act—that governed the daily conditions in which sport was played.

By the mid-fifties, anti-apartheid forces had begun to pinpoint sport as the Achilles heel of white national morale. Black journalists on the Johannesburg magazine *Drum* were the first to give the issue public exposure, with an intrepid special issue in 1955 that asked, "Why shouldn't our blacks be allowed in the SA team?" The following year, Trevor Huddleston anticipated that white South African teams would find themselves wholly isolated. He wagered that "because the Union is so good at sport, such isolation would shake its self-assurance very severely. Fantastic though it may sound, it might be an extraordinarily effective blow to the racialism which has brought it into being." Shortly after this prediction, a nonracial sports organization was founded and began to campaign for merit selection of national teams.

As the base of the nonracial sports movement expanded, so too did the range of its demands. The 1960 Sharpeville massacre proved a watershed event. In the wake of the killings, the regime imposed a state of emergency and launched a draconian clampdown on activists, including "subversives" in the sporting arena. The ANC and PAC were banned, went underground, and called for armed struggle. These conditions hastened the radicalization of the resis-

tance, not least among the leading advocates of nonracial sport.

The Sharpeville massacre also provoked the first international outcries against apartheid sports teams: at the 1960 Olympic Games and, that same year, against New Zealand rugby players departing for South Africa and South African cricketers arriving in England. These intimations of foreign support for a sports ban combined with the new-found militancy of the liberation movement to insure that when the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC) was formed in 1962 its demands were suitably more radical than those of its predecessors. SANROC targeted international sport as a locus of activism, but was insistent that merit selection of national teams was an untrustworthy index of the deracialization of South African sport. From then on, the racial composition of the national side was treated as subsidiary to the paramount concern with overturning apartheid laws in education, health, housing, voting, residential, and land rights, and in access to amenities, all of which prevented blacks from competing with whites on remotely equitable terms. SANROC and its successor organizations insisted that leverage gained from pressure at the most illustrious and conspicuous level of sport be used to transform the invisible grass roots of the games. Merit had to come into play not just at the moment of selection but in the distribution of opportunities.

SANROC scored its first major triumph with the expulsion of South Africa from the 1964 Olympics. The regime struck back at once, outlawing the organization. By the middle of 1964,

SANROC's leaders were in prison, under house arrest, in exile, or underground—all in the name of a government policy of “keeping politics out of sport.”

Yet SANROC surfaced phoenixlike in London two years later. By driving it into exile, the regime had inadvertently aided the organization's cause. Turning adversity into advantage, SANROC enjoyed improved visibility and leverage, found itself better placed to lobby international sporting federations, and could lie in wait for visiting South African teams who became the targets of anti-apartheid mass actions. The passage into exile of South African sports activists like Dennis Brutus, Sam Ramsamy, Reg Hlongwane, Chris de Broglie, and Peter Hain proved indispensable for converting the sports boycott from a local fantasy into an international movement.

Brutus became a decisive figure, particularly during those early years. From the mid-forties onwards, he had challenged the exclusion from South Africa's Olympic side of black athletes who were clocking record performances. In 1961 the state had issued him a banning order that forbade him to write. This was followed, in 1963, with a second ban prohibiting him from belonging to any organization, teaching, or attending any gathering of more than two people, including any sports event. Later that year, he was charged with “the crime of attending a sports meeting” and released on bail. Determined to testify at Baden-Baden, where the International Olympic Committee was preparing to debate South Africa's participation in the 1964 Olympics, Brutus escaped to Mozambique, where the Portuguese colonial police captured him and handed him

over to the South Africans. On attempting a second escape, Brutus was shot in the stomach by the Security Police, who left him bleeding on the pavement. Brutus served eighteen months on Robben Island before leaving South Africa on an exit visa that barred him from ever returning.

SANROC was refounded in 1966, soon after Brutus's arrival in London. The boycott movement received a further boost that year with the inauguration of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa. Ten years earlier, the Supreme Council would have possessed negligible clout in the arenas of world sport. Indeed, prior to Abebe Bikila's triumph in the 1960 Olympic marathon, no African athlete had ever won gold. But in the sixties, athletes like Bikila, Mohammed Gammoudi, Kip Keino, Amos Biwott, Mamo Wolde, and Naftali Temu began to reel off victories in the long distance events. The Supreme Council found itself in a position to convert athletic feats into political muscle: along with SANROC, it persuaded thirty-two African and eight other countries to pledge a boycott of the 1968 Mexico Olympics if South Africa participated. The tactic worked: South Africa was ousted from the games and, two years later, expelled from the Olympic movement.

These were central victories in their own right. But they also set a strategic precedent which was to be invoked effectively in the coming decades. From the 1968 Olympics on, African, Asian, and Caribbean nations extended the reach of the sports ban by producing a "knock-on" or domino effect, refusing to play not just against apartheid teams but against nations who maintained ties

with white South African sport. Ultimatums of this nature repeatedly jeopardized the Commonwealth Games, while the presence of a New Zealand squad at the 1976 Montreal Olympics—shortly after a New Zealand rugby tour of South Africa—led to a mass boycott by African nations. In the ultimate expression of this knock-on pressure, in 1977 all Commonwealth governments signed the Gleneagles Agreement, which committed them to discouraging their sporting nationals from having any contact with South Africa.

The events of 1967 and 1968 vindicated years of anti-apartheid backroom labor, as white South Africans suffered successive political defeats in the sporting arenas in which they had the deepest ethnic nationalist investment: the Olympics, rugby, and cricket. In 1967 the New Zealand rugby team canceled their South African tour when the regime refused to admit Maori players. Smarting from this blow, Prime Minister Vorster hinted that in future Maoris might be "acceptable"—although he refused to relax any of the strictures against non-racial sport among South Africans. But this minuscule theoretical concession brought Vorster's far Right regime under pressure from the doubly far Right, who were so outraged at the prospect of a smattering of "mixed" sport—even against foreign sportsmen—that they seceded to form the *Herstigte Nasionale Party*. This is surely the only instance of a "deviation" in sporting policy being cited as grounds for the creation of a secessionist political party.

That same year, in Britain, a single incident catapulted the sports boycott out of obscurity, pitching the anti-

apartheid cause with unprecedented force and regularity onto both the front and back pages of Britain's national press. This event was the D'Oliveira affair. Basil D'Oliveira was a mercurial mixed-race cricketer whose frustration with his blunted prospects led him to emigrate from Cape Town to England in 1960. Within six years, he had established himself as a full member of the English cricket team. During the runup to the selection of the English side due to tour South Africa in 1968, the prospect of D'Oliveira's inclusion so perturbed the Vorster regime that it sent an agent to try to buy him off with a sumptuous ten-year coaching contract, a house, and a car on condition that he declare himself unavailable for England. D'Oliveira refused. The chance of flaunting his talents on the very playing fields from which he had been banished offered the priceless, sweet promise of revenge—the return of the oppressed.

Despite a blistering burst of form, D'Oliveira was excluded from the England team. In an act of blatant complicity, the English cricket authorities had contrived to drop D'Oliveira in the hopes of averting an "international incident." The alliance between politics and sport was exposed for all to see. The D'Oliveira affair enraged citizens on whose mental maps apartheid had barely registered, helping ratchet the British anti-apartheid movement into a cause with populist dimension. The English selectors were so roundly shamed that when an injured player withdrew from the team, D'Oliveira was reinstated. Vorster, however, promptly declared that D'Oliveira had been reduced to a "political football." Any team that in-

cluded him "was not the team of the MCC, but the team of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the team of SANROC" and was therefore unacceptable. The English cricket selectors declined to budge and the tour collapsed.

Over the next eighteen months, the boycott movement gathered breadth and momentum: by 1970, the ruling bodies of over twenty sports had expelled South Africa. Riled by these successes, the regime bore down heavily on internal advocates of nonracial sport, people like Morgan Naidoo, the president of the nonracial swimming union, who was served with a five-year banning order in retaliation for the expulsion of the white swimming union from international competition.

By the 1980s, apartheid sport was becoming as sealed off as a faulty nuclear reactor encased in a concrete sarcophagus. The Springboks could no longer play abroad, and virtually the only teams entering South Africa were the rebel sides who received exorbitant sums to compete in pseudointernationals. This was sport's version of the Sun City principle—an attempt to rupture the boycott by offering top prices for the consciences of celebrity players. But no less than at Sun City, the ruse failed. Few stars came. The West Indian, Australian, Sri Lankan, English, and New Zealand players who accepted such "blood money" were mostly embarrassingly mediocre performers who were subsequently banished from international sport and often socially ostracized. In the Caribbean, so great was the stigma of playing with apartheid that several West Indian cricket "rebels" were forced to emigrate.

The scale of funds lavished on the “rebels” demonstrated that the problems in South African sport resulted not from a shortage of cash but from a shortage of political will. Players’ fees alone for the West Indian travesty came to 1.8 million dollars. The regime awarded tax breaks covering 180 percent of expenses to white businesses sponsoring rebel tours, and in 1982, one corporation alone, South African Breweries, expended 2 million dollars on such ventures. This was at a time when whites—15 percent of the population—owned 73 percent of all athletic tracks, 82 percent of rugby fields, and 83 percent of public pools. It has been estimated that the regime was spending, during this period, between nine and twenty-three times more per capita on white than on black sports.

There was yet another side to the rebel tours—the harassment, detentions, and state-commissioned assaults on sports figures who spoke up for non-racialism and against such gross prodigality. Among these were the Watson

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brothers, who rocked the white rugby establishment by joining a hitherto all-black club. Cheeky Watson, the most adroit of the trio, committed the cardinal affront of declining to play for the white “national” side in preference for non-racial club rugby. This simple act of principle, unheard of among white players at the time, was amply rewarded by Port Elizabeth’s black community. When a

black consumer boycott paralyzed the city’s white businesses during the mid-eighties, the Watsons’ clothing store was granted sole exemption—indeed, thrived as a result. The Civil Co-operation Bureau, which launched hit squads against “enemies of the state,” responded otherwise. A CCB arsonist razed the Watsons’ home and a paid assassin broke into the hotel room of one brother, opening fire on him before being overpowered.

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Sport’s prime-time profile renders it a particularly seductive sphere for the staging of interventionist spectacle. In seeking to catalyze opposition abroad and reach outside the ranks of the predictably progressive, the boycotters turned the special relation that has arisen between sport and television to their advantage. Indeed, the successful conversion of the sports boycott into a populist cause offers a salient lesson in the politics of spectacle.

The increasing refraction of identities through television suggests that the old styles of activism need to accommodate the politics of spectacle more fully. No social movement can rest its case on purely moral grounds: we have to take politics seriously enough to convert it into telegenic theater. International sport is distinguished from other programs that draw high ratings—say soaps or game shows—by its ability to concentrate a vast, anonymous community around an event devised to arouse nationalist passions. While viewers place themselves differently in relation to the image of the national team, there are nonetheless considerable political kudos

for any cause that can locate itself at the crossroads where people's loyalties to the rites of the box, to a specific sport, and to a particular nation converge.

Across a succession of "demo-tours" between 1969 and 1990, anti-apartheid demonstrators proved remarkably creative in their production of disruptive spectacle. These resulted in the cancellation of a number of tours in advance and, failing that, of individual matches once a tour was underway. Prior to matches, buckets of glass and thousands of tacks and fishhooks were sometimes strewn across the rugby field; "commando squads" were sent to infiltrate the Springboks' hotels; Operation Wide Awake kept up a nighttime racket insuring sleepless nights. Cricket grounds proved especially vulnerable to preemptive strikes. Boycotters could infiltrate the grounds at night to dig up the cricket pitch—the sensitive, meticulously prepared grass strip at the heart of the field—or saturate it with oil. On the 1981 Springbok rugby tour of New Zealand, a World War II pilot forced the cancellation of one match by stealing a four-seater Cessna and threatening to dive kamikaze style into the packed grandstand. On the same tour, arsonists gutted the clubhouses of teams that had agreed to play the Springboks. (Nor was this the first time that the disenfranchised and their supporters had used fire against discrimination in sport: in 1913 British suffragette arsonists attacked sports clubs whose patterns of exclusion mirrored those that barred women from voting). If a match went ahead, demonstrators drew on backup tactics to insure that playing conditions were unendurable. They fired off smoke bombs, paint

bombs, and flashed mirrors in players' eyes. Scores of whistle-blowing activists infiltrated the stands, causing pandemonium on the field and giving a whole new meaning to the idea of a whistle-stop tour.

Such measures turned sport against Springbok teams into an economic and symbolic liability. The policing costs became prohibitive, contributing to the cancellation of some series altogether, financial pressure succeeding where moral pressure had failed. On the symbolic front, the boycotters proved particularly adept at converting international sport into a law-and-order issue. They exploited sport's reliance on the maintenance of an equilibrium between the expression of violence on the one hand and, on the other, its containment by rules, group discipline, and the inviolable authority of the referee's whistle or the umpire's adjudications. Having carried the apartheid issue into a sphere ordinarily considered peripheral to politics, the boycotters tilted the balance of the game toward lawlessness, so that on- and off-field violence began to blur. Instead of serving as a carefully monitored, socially sanctioned outlet for unruly impulses, sporting contests became emblematic of a violence that burst uncontrollably from the space-and-time frame of the game. In the middle of the Springboks' 1981 tour, the leader of New Zealand's opposition party warned that rugby was driving his entire country to "the threshold of carnage."

The perception of Springbok teams as conduits for social mayhem vexed the regime and white sports administrators. Dr. Danie Craven, the excitable president of the South African rugby board,

raged: "We can't go abroad without causing chaos. It's not pleasant to feel as if we're suffering from a disease. . . . We live in a world of sick people, weaklings, so-called leaders, who are intimidated by boycotts." But from an anti-apartheid perspective, the export trade in chaos drew invaluable media coverage. It recreated the spectacle and atmosphere of a police state in countries unaccustomed to such levels of public violence, providing a symbolic sample of "the South African way of life." In England, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland, Wales, France, and Australia, the sight of police massing behind barbed wire and armed with shields, batons, and snarling dogs made a mockery of claims that they were simply there to separate politics from sport. In a manner redolent of the Latin American dictatorial practice of converting sports stadiums into detention camps, the arrival of the Springboks turned what had hitherto been leisure facilities into fortresses. The consequences of entertaining the Barbed Wire Boks, as they were dubbed, helped solidify the association between apartheid, militarization, and the absence of democracy, as happened strikingly in Australia in 1971. Such was the scale of the protest against the rugby tourists that the governor of Queensland declared a state of emergency, suspended democratic process, and guaranteed the Springboks' safety by escorting them in army planes complete with military guards.

At their most intense, the confrontations between protestors and police assumed apocalyptic dimensions: they did not merely simulate the atmosphere of a police state but, on occasion, enacted its

overthrow. The match at Hamilton, New Zealand, in 1981 offered just such an inspiring augury, as thousands of demonstrators overran the barricades and overwhelmed the police.

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In 1991, in a dramatic move, the ANC gave its imprimatur to the lifting of the sports moratorium. Sports organizations that met express conditions—unification, adherence to nonracialism, and the implementation of township development programs—began to gain admission into international competition. This process was sealed by South Africa's presence at the 1992 Cricket World Cup and at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, and by the announcement that the country was to host the next Rugby World Cup. These were, after all, the three sports that activists had targeted to greatest effect.

The repeal was bound to be controversial. Some saw it as a defeat for the principle of "No normal sport in an abnormal society," while the ANC vindicated its decision as a preemptive strike that would express its determination to redistribute opportunity by transforming existing institutions along nonracial lines. Sport was, after all, one of the few arenas where the ANC, in its jockeying for power with the National Party, was incontestably in control.

Since the summer of 1990, when Mike Gatting's rebel cricket tour had foundered on the twin reefs of a well-organized resistance movement and the unbanning of the ANC, establishment sporting bodies had begun to sue for

peace. They had agreed to a moratorium on the divisive, squanderous rebel tours and, in some sports, had begun to cooperate in setting up sports development programs in the townships. The ANC judged that it could convert these promising developments to political gain by taking command of the pace and conditions of South Africa's admission into international sport.

The campaign to broker sporting unity in advance of political reconciliation involved a delicate wager with uncertain returns. But the two figures who emerged as the principal spokesmen for this position—Steve Tshwete and Sam Ramsamy—were well acquainted with risk. Tshwete won a name for himself as a rugby player and a saboteur of telephone pylons. During his fifteen years on Robben Island for guerilla action, he ran the Island Rugby Board, a keenly disputed league of ten teams. Tshwete went on to help found the United Democratic Front and, in 1990, helped orchestrate resistance to the infamous Gatting tour. Over the course of three decades, Ramsamy emerged alongside Dennis Brutus as a cardinal figure in the international drive to isolate apartheid teams. He was probably the sports administrator most reviled by the white establishment, which now finds itself dependent on his mediations while it persists in trying to marginalize him.

In sport, as elsewhere in South African society, there is a pressing need for the swift democratization of institutions, rendering them answerable to the requirements and values of the oppressed. The ANC's gamble of revoking the boycott was a response to this recognition.

At a time when De Klerk was doing most of the political running, sport was one circuit where the ANC found itself ideally placed to take the lead. By manipulating the white obsession with international participation, the liberation movement and its allies could begin to restructure sport from the grass roots up. In so doing, this alliance refused to use the racial composition of the national teams as the primary barometer of change. To have imposed the principle of racial "balance" on teams would have been to perpetuate race as a criterion for selection. It would have seemed disturbingly redolent of the kind of nominal, celebrity multiracialism advanced by the Nationalist regime since the early seventies, in its efforts to distract attention from the profound segregation of sport at the local level.

If most whites salivated at the prospect of international "return," for most blacks the loss of international competition has always been indissociable from a far wider sense of deprivation. Thus the "restitution" of international ties could not be treated as the overriding objective. Where one camp viewed sport pre-eminently as an international matter, the other tended to see it as a local concern where substantial progress would require changes in the whole fabric of the apartheid legacy—in education, health, transport, and housing.

Yet, as an interim measure, sporting unity might serve as a catalyst and harbinger of change. It might work, in the words of the leading football administrator, Styx Morewa, as an "emotional unifier." In lifting the boycott, Ramsamy, Tshwete, Morewa, Thabo Mbeki, and

others in the ANC camp wagered that, in the altered conditions of the interregnum, the ban had more value as carrot than stick. Progressive sports administrators have sought to capitalize on white self-interest in order to begin institutionalizing nonracialism in at least one sphere of society. It is more productive, they argue, to have pro-ANC figures strategically placed during the run-up to elections than to persist with an obstructionist policy whose expiry date—in the light of changes in international perceptions of apartheid—was in any case beginning to show.

During the 1990s, the challenge facing progressive forces with a demonstrable genius for opposing, negating, obstructing, resisting, and subverting is how to construct creative and persuasive new policies. The National and Olympic Sports Congress (NOSC) was launched in June 1990 to answer these altered needs. Its brief was to unite black sports people and to admit those sectors of the white sporting establishment that embraced nonracialism and were prepared to work for its implementation at a local level. Now South Africa's largest and most politically forceful sporting organization, NOSC has devised an alternative course to the once effective but superannuated policy of noncooperation while simultaneously rejecting the assumption prevalent in some white quarters that black sportmen and women should simply be subsumed under existing white structures. While resolving "to propose rather than perpetually oppose," NOSC has been leery of mere assimilation, which it recognizes as a hindrance to radical transformation.

The Tshwete-Ramsamy wager cannot therefore easily be dismissed as a gesture of defeatist expediency. By insisting on the terms for South Africa's participation in international sport, the ANC-allied forces have begun to redirect the flow of funds—above all, corporate funds—away from pseudointernationals and into a combination of official internationals and township development programs. No undertaking in South African sports is more urgent or more daunting than the redistribution of resources, for under apartheid 90 percent of all sponsorship was lavished on white events.

While the ban has been conditionally lifted, sport's role in giving form to national identity remains as ferociously contested as ever. Stormy exchanges over the destiny of the Springbok emblem have revealed the persistent volatility of the issue of national representation. The ANC aligned forces determined unilaterally that the prancing antelope should be summarily dispatched. For the great majority of South Africans the issue was clear-cut: the buck stops here. A quest was announced for a substitute in which the conscientiously nonracial zebra emerged as an early frontrunner, with the kudu, the rose, the rhino, the protea, and the fish eagle bringing up the rear.

For De Klerk, self-styled prototype of the New South African, this was pushing novelty to extremes. In one of his most bitter attacks on the ANC, he accused them of desecrating tradition and urged that the Springbok be preserved as national emblem. Despite the pitch of his protests, when a South African team of

cricketers traveled to India and engaged in international competition for the first time in twenty-two years, they were expressly not called the Springboks. There was something half apt yet utterly bizarre about the scenario that unfolded. India had been the first country to break off all ties—including sporting connections—when apartheid was officially adopted in 1948. Nearly half a century later, Hindu extremists had pledged to burn down the Bombay cricket stadium if a scheduled tour by Pakistan went ahead. The secretary of the Indian Cricket Board decreed that the Pakistanis' safety could not be guaranteed, canceled the series, and invited the South Africans as less controversial replacements. Thus a dazed set of cricketers arrived at very short notice to make their debut before a crowd of 100,000 jammed into Calcutta's Eden Gardens in a Marxist-ruled state. Garlanded in the streets, the South Africans were called upon to deliver syrupy speeches beneath banners flaunting hammers and sickles and the visages of Marx and Lenin. The only dissident noises seemed to come from West Bengal's Revolutionary Youth League, who mounted a modest protest, and President De Klerk, who mounted a rather more vocal one over the dumping of the national emblem.

In July 1992, the South African Olympic squad traveled to Barcelona with all its insignia in suspension—as befits a nation in abeyance. Again, the name Springboks was dropped and a doctored Olympic flag was substituted for the South African one. Moreover, it was determined that should any team member strike gold, the Olympic band

would respond with neither that old neo-Nazi marching tune, "Die Stem," nor the ANC's "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika," but with Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." This melody, it was later realized, would render a South African victory indistinguishable from a Commonwealth of Independent States one, the ex-Soviets having arrived at an identical solution to their transitional condition.

The De Klerk regime wanted South Africa to participate at Barcelona but had hoped to dictate the terms. As a result of the ructions over iconography and its distaste at seeing an old adversary like Ramsamy command the proceedings, the regime refused to give a penny to the National Olympic Committee of South Africa. While this made Ramsamy's task of funding the team's trip immeasurably more difficult, it did, usefully, drive a wedge between the regime and its traditional allies, sport's corporate sponsors, who were keen to cash in on the Olympic connection.

But De Klerk has always had an eye for the main chance, as they say in South Africa. His uncooperative stance toward the Olympics did not prevent him from recognizing the mileage to be gained from sporting spectacle. With the opportunism that has characterized his political performance, De Klerk temporarily commandeered the boycott issue as an electoral weapon, wielding it against the extreme Right, to whom he dealt a sport-aided trouncing in the all-white elections last March.

To head off the far Right threat and to consolidate his bargaining power at the negotiating table, De Klerk called a snap whites-only referendum on the future of

reform. He announced the referendum just after South Africa, admitted into the World Cricket Cup for the first time, had scored an upset victory over the world champions, Australia. Capitalizing on the buoyant mood among South African whites, De Klerk leveled the threat of the sport boycott's return against his Conservative adversaries. Indeed, the success

The scale of ideological cross-dressing in contemporary South Africa defies belief

of his campaign depended centrally on his manipulation of two powerful white populist anxieties: that a no to reform would result in the restitution of punitive sporting and economic sanctions.

Sports grounds in Australia were plastered with billboards urging VOTE YES—surely the first time ever that exhortations addressed to the electorate of one country have littered a second country halfway around the globe. As South Africa's cricket captain later remarked, "We were crucial to the National Party strategy." In South Africa, a chorus of sportsmen and women were dragooned into advertisements urging a yes vote, backed by slogans like "Give South Africa a Sporting Chance." Even Danie Craven, the most powerful figure in white rugby and an unconscionable racist if ever there was one, did his incoherent best to prove that he, too, was a New South African. "Any sportsman or woman voting no," he warned, "will be raping his or her own conscience."

The scale of ideological cross-dressing in contemporary South Africa

defies belief. But even those accustomed to such mutations were astonished by the sight of the National Party—for some thirty years the aggrieved target of boycotts—adapting one of the liberation movement's most effective strategies by wielding the threat of sports and economic bans. De Klerk's commandeering of left-wing tactics evinces both the potential to be gained from interventions in the emotionally charged, spectacular rituals of international sport and the political contestation over sport, even in the postboycott era.

The ANC still maintained more sway over South Africa's sporting future than the Nationalists could ever hope to achieve. However, in his showdown against the ultraright Conservatives, De Klerk adapted the liberation movement's boycott strategy so adroitly that when the Conservative leader, Andries Treurnicht, comes to pen his autobiography, we can expect echoes of Harold Wilson's lament at his sport-induced defeat. It was Wilson, one recalls, who contended that he lost the 1970 British election because of a steep downswing in the nation's mood following England's loss to Germany in the finals of football's World Cup.

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"South Africa cannot have both a Boipatong and a Barcelona." Desmond Tutu's words rang out in the aftermath of the Boipatong massacres. Within a few days of the carnage, the ANC's shadow minister of sport, Steve Tshwete, announced: "The country is in a state of mourning. We will ask sporting bodies to reimpose the moratorium until the

political situation is normalized.” The good faith wager of negotiations—let alone the prospect of sport serving as an emotional unifier—had faltered disastrously. Barcelona was to have offered a presentiment of political unity; from the depth of bloody machinations, it threatened to do no more than travesty such hopes.

Many South Africans made an emotional link between the carnage at Boipatong and the massacre, some thirty years earlier, at nearby Sharpeville. The Sharpeville killings had sparked the first international protest against apartheid sports teams at the Rome Olympics, and, for a time, it seemed as if Boipatong would cause South Africa’s withdrawal from Barcelona. De Klerk’s perfidious failure to rein in his security forces and bring Inkatha murderers to dock left a deeper rift between the Nationalists and the ANC than at any time since Mandela’s release.

Yet the threatened reimposition of the boycott proved short-lived once the ANC realized how unpopular that decision would be. Sports administrators like Ramsamy, Mluleki George, and Styx Morewa expressed concern that a renewed ban would erode ANC support by undermining the morale of athletes and their supporters. Ensuing events vindicated their fears. A couple of weeks after Boipatong, the Cameroon football team was due to arrive in Johannesburg for a series of internationals that would mark South Africa’s return to world football. When the ANC canceled the Cameroon tour in protest over the killings, black fans jammed the organization’s switchboards demanding to know why the preeminent black sport was be-

ing forced to atone for the crimes of others. Hadn’t football, to a greater degree than any other sport, been played, administered, and watched along nonracial lines? Didn’t football fans deserve some compensation for decades of compliance with the boycott while other, white-dominated sports, had been mounting rebel tours?

Mandela traveled to the Cameroon and had the series swiftly reinstated. On arrival in South Africa, the Cameroonians toured Boipatong in a massive, high-profile expression of solidarity for that wracked community. The ANC resolved that outrage over the massacres would be expressed through channels other than sport: through the suspension of negotiations, a national strike, and related mass action.

The South African Olympic team ventured to Barcelona more as a wager of hope than a reflection of any existing, or even imminent, national unity. Its historic presence at the Olympics was a mark of the ANC’s continuing leverage over South Africa’s acceptance in the arenas of world sport; it was a mark, too, of the International Olympic Committee’s determination to stage—after all the boycotts and banishments that had marred every Games since World War II—a healing Olympics, an event which they could bill as the most universal Games ever. Juan Antonio Samaranch, president of the IOC, wished to unveil an Olympics that would be immortalized not just as the first post-cold war Games but as the Games that finally drove politics out of sport.

Yet Catalanian, no less than South African, history warned against equating the absence of boycotts with the redemp-

tion of sports from politics. Didn't the line into the Olympic stadium pass La Fossa de la Pedrera, the vast graveyard for those fallen in the civil war? And hadn't Samaranch himself once served as Franco's minister of sports? Yet Barcelona can also offer a less dispiriting memory of sport's implication in politics. In 1936, four hundred athletes pledged to mount an alternative, Peo-

ple's Olympiad in protest against the Führer's determination to stage-manage an orgy of Olympic Aryanism in Berlin. Barcelona was to be their chosen city. The Civil War erupted before a race could be run, but the athletes' antifascist defiance nonetheless anticipated the possibilities, best embodied by the South African boycott, of reclaiming sport for the furtherance of social justice.