

The following is an extract from South African Sport by HP Swaffer, written in 1914

## Swimming

By SC Dowsett, President of the South African Amateur Swimming Union and Ben Jenkins, ex-Champion of South Africa

The history of swimming in South Africa is virtually the history of the Currie Cup Tournament. The cup was presented by the late Sir Donald Currie in 1899, "for annual competition among the swimming clubs of South Africa" for water-polo. It was first won by the Suburban Amateur Swimming Club of Cape Town, the competition being held under the auspices of the Western Province Amateur Swimming Association. On the 20<sup>th</sup> October, 1899, delegates from the Western Province ASA and the Eastern Province ASA met at Port Elizabeth, and with Mr. William Fiddian-Green and Mr. P. Jenkins as the first president and hon. secretary, respectively, formally inaugurated the South African Amateur Swimming Union, in order to: (1) Promote and encourage the art of swimming and the game of water-polo; (2) promote and control amateur championships."

At this meeting, the Western Province ASA handed over the Currie Cup to the newly formed Union, which then decided that the trophy should be a perpetual one for competition amongst teams representing the various associations affiliated to the Union.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> January 1900, the first Currie Cup tournament proper was held at Port Elizabeth, the contestants being the Eastern and Western Provinces, the latter winning the two matches and thus becoming the first holders of the Currie Cup. Under the new conditions. For eight years, the Western Province Association retained possession of the cup. In 1901 there was no contest as, although the Eastern Province was already in Cape Town, the Union resolved, two days before the date appointed for the opening of the tournament, that "owing to the death of Her Majesty Queen Victoria the Currie Cup tournament and championship meeting is abandoned, and that no further meeting is held for the present season." In the year 1903, the Eastern province challenged, but at the last moment were unable to send a team to Cape Town; but in 1904, three teams competed for the first time, the Transvaal, who had just affiliated to the Union, joining issue with the Eastern and Western provinces. It can hardly be said that the first appearance of the Transvaal in the tournament was successful, the Western Province team piling up the record score of 20 goals to nil against them. The Eastern Province also decisively defeated them, and the sporting journalists of Cape Town good-humouredly presented the Transvaal captain with a large wooden spoon inscribed "Better days will dawn". This same spoon has done duty from season to

season, its presentation always providing an opportunity for considerable banter and chaff.

At the end of 1904, the Union received a very considerable accession in strength by the affiliation of the Natal ASA and East London ASA, the latter now being known as the Border. Natal forthwith sent a team to the 1905 tourney, and succeeded in escaping the wooden spoon, which invidious distinction was retained by the Transvaal. The following year, however, when the tournament was held in Pretoria, the Transvaal were runners-up to the still-unbeaten Western Province team, the Eastern Province and Natal also competing, the latter with a team weakened by the absence of some good men on active service in connection with the native rebellion in Zululand. The year 1908 put an end to the run of success by the Western Province; they were unable to send a team to Port Elizabeth, leaving the tournament to be fought between Eastern Province, Transvaal, Natal and the Border, who were making their first appearance. The Transvaal won the cup, only to lose it the following year to Natal. Strangely enough, these two centres have alternately held the cup ever since. Each year the teams have been evenly matched, and in 1912 the deciding factor in favour of the Transvaal being only their superior goal average.

Undoubtedly the presentation of Sir Donald Currie's cup gave to swimming in general, and water-polo in particular, just the incentive that was necessary, drawing together year by year swimmers from all parts of South Africa in friendly though keen rivalry. The educational value of such meetings is incalculable. Whether successful or defeated, each team, each man, learns something from the observation of other men and other methods. Stagnation, which without intercolonial contest would be almost inevitable, is prevented, and progress is assured.