

## Creepy crawlies, portapools and the dam(n)s of swimming transformation

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Conscious activity is a human characteristic...in swimming in the ocean of struggle, [we] must not flounder, but make sure of reaching the opposite shore with measured strokes. Strategy and tactics, as the laws for directing struggle, constitute the art of swimming in the ocean of struggle. (Mao Tse-Tung 1963)

SWIMMING, MORE THAN ANY other Olympic sport, has enjoyed tremendous success since the country's reintegration into international competition. Swimmers such as Penny Heyns, Ryk Neethling and Roland Schoeman have become household names whose feats in the swimming pool have been immortalised in the record books – hot commodities in an increasingly corporatising discipline (as the attempts by the Olympic hopeful, Qatar, at luring Schoeman and Neethling into their squad illustrate). As many national squads are struggling to chalk up even the most modest accolades in international competition, South African swimming continues to go from strength to strength. However, and in spite of a long history of 'black swimming'<sup>1</sup> in South Africa, the highest levels of the sport remain dominated by white swimmers, and the infrastructure and levels of

organisation necessary for participation remain concentrated in residential and recreational areas that were reserved, in terms of apartheid legislation, for whites only, and continue to have a predominantly white population. This is likely to be the case for some time to come.

In 1965 Karen Muir became the youngest person in the world to break a world record in any sport, and that record still stands today. At the British Championships in Blackpool, she broke the world record for the women's 110 yards backstroke at the age of 12, and between 1965 and 1970 she went on to break 15 world records in the 110 and 220 yards backstroke as well as the 100 and 200 metres backstroke. In 1966 Ann Fairlie broke three world records, two in the women's 110 yards backstroke and one in the women's 100 m backstroke. In 1976 Jonty Skinner broke the world record for the men's 100 m freestyle and in 1988 Peter Williams broke the world record in the men's 50 m freestyle. However, by 1976 South Africa was not a member of the Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur (FINA), and Skinner's and Williams' records were not officially recognised.<sup>2</sup>

How could it be otherwise? Competitive swimming has always been a sport associated with leisure and privilege. Private swimming pools were ubiquitous in white South Africa and substantial resources were put into the building of world-class facilities. It is not surprising that, in searching for a global niche market in manufacturing exports for post-apartheid South Africa, one economist focused on swimming pool filtration systems, otherwise known as 'creepy crawlies', a technology in which South Africa has long been an acknowledged leader (Kaplinsky, cited in Bond 2005: 65–66).

The lifestyles of leisure and privilege reliant on expensive facilities are alien to the reality of the vast majority of South Africans. In a context where even the most basic facilities for recreational swimming are massively inadequate, or simply don't exist, the likelihood of the next Ryk Neethling being nurtured in one of South Africa's impoverished townships in the near future is slim.

There was a time in the early 1970s, though, when black swimming was growing in strength. Brian Hermanus, swimming in Kimberley, was ranked 25th in the world in the 100 m breaststroke in 1973, and Drexler Kyzer

was also highly ranked in the 100 m freestyle. In 1972 the recently formed national non-racial swimming organisation, the South African Amateur Swimming Federation (SAASWIF; see further discussion below), sent their top five swimmers (Brian Hermanus, Sharief Abass, Seelan Nair, Anita Vlotman and Denver Hendricks) on a coaching camp facilitated by Sam Ramsamy in the UK. But in many senses this was a high-water mark for black swimming. The lack of resources, the political imperative of not seeking any funding from white swimming and political authorities, and the boycott of international competition all conspired to elevate swimming administrators into some of the leading figures in the local and international struggle against apartheid, while simultaneously hurting the actual swimming performance in the pool.

The present chapter sifts through this history, tracing developments from the early days of non-racial swimming, through the various phases of sporting unity, into the present period when swimming has become a highly technical and specialised modern sport. This is not meant to be a comprehensive history of the sport; rather, it is an attempt to chart the forces that have come to shape its political and competitive contexts, specifically approaches to the transformation debate and the strategies of various actors in this regard. Finally, the chapter will offer a preliminary assessment of the success of swimming in meaningfully resolving the contradictions that have plagued the sport, and our society more generally.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on the political history of the sport under apartheid; the second centres on the unity process, and the manner in which this process has influenced the contexts of transformation. In the third section we take a critical look at how different approaches and strategies have shaped the modern face of the sport, and the extent to which they meaningfully address the racial and class imbalances that characterise swimming in South Africa today. The final section presents some recommendations for strategies that could take transformation of the sport beyond the levels already attained.

## The birth of black swimming

### Sport in an apartheid society

In the early 1960s, as international condemnation of apartheid was beginning to gather momentum, the South African government anticipated the impact this would have on its economy if European markets were closed as a result of its race policies, and began to look east. In November 1961, a delegation of Japanese businessmen came to South Africa to conclude a trade agreement. and the South African government announced that Japanese people, who had been classified as 'Asian' within the apartheid racial schema, would henceforth be given the status of 'honorary whites' in South Africa. However, early in 1972 this policy was tested when the Pretoria City Council refused to grant permission for the touring Japanese swimming team to use its pool. Fearful that the incident would disrupt South Africa's ambitions on the economic front, the government was forced to intervene and voice its disapproval, while the city council moved to rescind the ban (Lapchick 1975: 42).

The Japanese incident highlights important elements of the relationship between apartheid and sport. If anything, it demonstrates the state's whimsical approach to the official policy environment for sport. But perhaps more importantly, it speaks to a deeply pathological commitment to racialised sport – in particular when it came to swimming – that went far beyond the legal frameworks of apartheid. As Robert Archer and Antoine Bouillon point out in *The South African Game*:

[A]t the heart of white social life swimming is subject more than any other leisure activity to...pitiless, indeed pathological segregation. For unlike tennis or golf, swimmers are in direct physical contact with each other, through the medium of water; far from separating swimmers of different races (or sex) water dissolves the physical barriers between them. Innumerable stories describe the 'pollution' which white South Africans fear will result from mixed bathing, and the outrage they feel when it occurs. (Archer & Bouillon 1982: 105)

It is therefore not surprising that, even before the introduction of formal apartheid sports policies after the National Party came to power in 1948, segregation was maintained within the local institutional structures of the sport; it was also present to varying degrees in other sports, specifically in the various governing bodies of the different sports codes. This is clearly illustrated in the struggle of weightlifters to gain international recognition. In 1946, T. Rangasamy, a leader of local black weightlifters, petitioned the British Amateur Weightlifters Association for formal recognition of black South African athletes. The Association's response speaks to the challenges faced by black athletes in all codes of sport:

We cannot bring any pressure on the South African weightlifting federation to force them to recognise you. Their rules, as with all national sporting associations in South Africa, will not permit of mixed contests between white and coloured athletes. This is also a condition of the South African Olympic Council... (cited in Lapchick 1975: 21)

Apartheid, rather than introducing segregation in sport, worked to codify and institutionalise these relations. As Grant Jarvie has pointed out:

By the time the National Party came to power in 1948 and the apartheid policy emerged, a degree of segregation and inequality of opportunity between white and non-white athletes had evolved already in South African sport. There was little need, therefore, to impose a policy of apartheid upon specific sporting relations since social differentiation already existed. Furthermore, the general laws of apartheid rule rendered multiracial sport impossible in that it was illegal for black and white athletes to mix openly in competition, as it was for black and white people to mix socially in society. (Jarvie 1985: 48)

Notably, government pronouncements on sport often followed from explicit political challenges to racially discriminatory practices in sport. By 1956 resistance to apartheid sport had arisen, as a result of international

recognition being fought for and granted to the Non-Racial Table Tennis Board; this served as a catalyst for a growing demand by black sporting federations for international recognition. Such resistance resulted in the announcement by the Minister of the Interior, Eben Dönges, of South Africa's first official sports policy. The thrust of the 1956 policy, apart from making explicit the state's commitment to the separate organisation of sports, was to insist that black federations seeking international recognition would be forced to do so through the existing white organisations in South Africa, and that athletes who attempted to travel overseas to engage in activities 'designed to change South Africa's traditional racial divisions' would not be issued with passports (Draper 1963: 6). The broad application of the latter measure effectively banned any black sportsperson from competing in international competition without the explicit support of the state. Although the state's policy would be variously amended in order to navigate the bumpy terrain created by an increasingly powerful campaign to ensure white South Africa's exclusion from international competition, state policy continued to reflect a deep commitment to the basic tenets of the 1956 policy:

The government does not favour inter-racial team competitions within the borders of the Union and will discourage such competition from taking place as being contrary to the traditional policy of the Union – as accepted by all races in the union...The policy of separate development is in accordance with the traditional South African custom that whites and non-whites should organise their sporting activities separately. The inclusion of different races in the same team would therefore be contrary to established norm and custom. (Minister of the Interior Naudé, cited in Lapchick 1975: 35)

However, the determination of the state to impose its apartheid vision on sport did not go unchallenged within the country. The formation of the South African Non-racial Olympic Committee (SANROC) in the early 1960s was an important turning point in black South African sport. SANROC set out to establish itself as the official Olympic representative body, effectively

calling for white South Africa's exclusion from the Olympics. In its assertion of the autonomy of black sporting organisations, this marked a radical departure from previous strategies of resistance in the domain of sport. The formation of SANROC also marked the hardening of relations between black and white sporting federations in South Africa.

These developments ran parallel to a growing militancy in black nationalist politics that increasingly provoked repressive responses from the state. SANROC was not left untouched. Leaders like Dennis Brutus were imprisoned as the state worked to systematically weaken the leadership of the young organisation. In 1965 SANROC suspended its activities, and it re-emerged in exile in 1966. By the 1970s international opinion over apartheid sports policy had shifted firmly in favour of the movement. White sports organisations, desperate to return to international competition, were forced to open talks with their black counterparts in the hope of bettering their case. Such overtures were, however, more often than not insincere, with white organisations reneging on agreements soon after they were made. Faced with the reality of well-endowed white sports bodies backed by an assertive apartheid state, sports activists sought out a more radical approach. The South African Council on Sport (sacos) was formed to meet this challenge, and would represent the interests of the non-racial sporting movement in South Africa until the period of unity talks in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Increasing resistance, both internally and externally, to apartheid sport led to Prime Minister B.J. Vorster reiterating the government's commitment to separate development in sport in a second policy statement on the subject in 1967. However, by the 1970s international pressures had forced the apartheid government into trying to represent its policies in a more palatable way to the international community. The year 1970 was a turning point. In that year South Africa was expelled from the Olympic movement, the first expulsion of any country in the history of the movement; it also became known as 'the year of the boycott' as anti-apartheid groups in Britain, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand staged massive demonstrations

against the South African government's sports policies. In addition, it was in 1970 that the United Nations, the Commonwealth and the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa condemned apartheid and apartheid sport; South Africa was banned from competing in nine international events and suspended from a number of international sporting federations (Jarvie 1985: 54).

In 1971, the South African government under B.J. Vorster began drafting a new sports policy that would be adopted in its final format in 1976, under the tutelage of Minister of Sport Piet Koornhof. In terms of this 'new' framework, black athletes would be allowed to compete in a few events called 'multinational' or 'open international' events. This permitted different racial groups to compete with each other as 'four nations' outside the country; however, locally no mixed sport was to be allowed (although cricket made a short-lived attempt to stretch the boundaries and field mixed teams). According to Jarvie, 'while the shift in policy was being portrayed internationally as a radical change in policy, in practice the logic of apartheid was preserved in that each racial group was allowed to develop its own separate sporting relations with the proviso that the white administered sporting bodies remained in overall control' (Jarvie 1985: 54).

In fact, this 'multinational' sports policy would provide the framework for inequalities to be entrenched under apartheid, with differential allocation of resources to the separate racial groups written into the policy. In the case of swimming, such resource gaps had a profoundly negative effect on the organic growth of the sport in the massively under-developed and poverty-stricken townships. According to the London *Times*, in the early 1970s just five per cent of the national budget was allocated to spending on physical infrastructure for the African majority (Archer & Bouillon 1982: 167). Such spending disparities had significant effects on the provision of sporting resources to black communities. Where white sport in South Africa was funded primarily through public finance, only seven per cent of the budget for African sport came from this source, while the rest was drawn from the South African Bantu Trust (a special fund created to purchase land for the bantustans and finance official development programmes for Africans).

Additional money for the construction and upkeep of township facilities was drawn from profits secured through the sale of liquor at township outlets (which fell under the control of the local authorities). The starkness of the resultant inequality is demonstrated by the fact that, in the period 1973–1974, the state spent one hundred times less money on black sport than it did on white sport (Archer & Bouillon 1982: 167).

Whereas white athletes could benefit from the infrastructure and facilities of sports centres and private clubs, this was not the case for their black counterparts, whose communities generally lacked the economic resources to develop equivalent private sector facilities. In addition, Africans in particular were prohibited from owning and managing sport facilities. This meant that, whereas Indian and coloured athletes could enjoy degrees of autonomy where privately owned facilities were available, African athletes were entirely dependent on the white organisations and authorities.

Statistics derived from the 1977 *Official Yearbook* demonstrate the massive shortfall in adequate infrastructure for participation in swimming (South Africa 1979). For the black population as a whole, there was a ratio of 1 public pool to every 569 441 people. In such a context it was clearly impossible for swimming to become a mass sport in black communities, let alone one in which black swimmers could excel at competitive levels. By 1977 not a single public Olympic-size pool was open to African swimmers.

Such statistics, however, speak only to shortages at the level of physical infrastructure for the development of swimming. To this should be added the lack of resources for coaching, and poor organisational infrastructure. And if all this was not enough to discourage black swimmers, there were always institutionally reinforced pseudo-scientific reasons offered for why blacks could not swim. Frank Braun, a former president of the South African National Olympic Committee, provided one popular example: '[S]ome sports, the African is not suited for. In swimming, the water closes their pores so they cannot get rid of carbon dioxide and they tire quickly...but they are great boxers and cyclers and runners' (cited in Lapchick 1975: 92). Nonetheless, and in the face of these enormous obstacles, swimming did

develop into a popular sport among black people, one that boasted high levels of organisation and performance.

## Black swimmers begin to organise

The formation of SAASWIF

Without any state support or adequate infrastructure, pockets of black swimmers began coming together to form clubs and to test their skills in competition. While these first clubs were, in the main, grouped in Indian and coloured areas, they formed the basis of what would become a non-racial swimming movement. Although competitions had been held as early as the 1930s, it was not until the mid-1960s that the imagination and capacity necessary for the formation of a national non-racial swimming federation culminated in the creation of SAASWIF.

In January 1965, at the Swain household in Wynberg, Cape Town, 13 people representing different provincial swimming organisations came together to discuss the formation of an alternative national controlling body for swimming. The meeting itself was something of a triumph, having taken some 15 months to organise (with Western Cape administrators travelling the length and breadth of the country, transported by 'Dickie' Herbert, an erstwhile swimming administrator; stories of 'Herbert's Transport' became folklore in the black swimming fraternity) (Davey interview). At this first 'national' meeting the Natal Indian Amateur Swimming Association, Griqualand West Amateur Swimming Union, Eastern Cape Amateur Swimming Association and Western Cape Amateur Swimming Association were present. Not surprisingly, the question of race in sport was discussed. Significantly, even in these first meetings 'racism in society in general and sport in particular was rejected with venom that was to be built and given precise direction in the decades that followed'.<sup>3</sup>

A small national swimming meet and two more meetings of the founding group would follow before, in 1966, at the David Landau Community Centre in Asherville, Durban, SAASWIF was formed, and

W.A. Paulse was elected as the first president of the organisation. This historic meeting was followed by the federation's first 'official' national tournament hosted by the Natal Indian Amateur Swimming Association. In the tournament Natal asserted its strength, winning all but one of the competitions. Notably this tournament also marked the last time the category 'Indian' featured in the name of this provincial association. In 1969 SAASWIF's headquarters shifted from Cape Town to Durban when Morgan Naidoo became president of the organisation.

Under his leadership, SAASWIF would continue to organise national tournaments and coordinate activities among the various provincial affiliates. At the same time SAASWIF was one of the prime movers behind a heightened campaign to ban South Africa from international sport. Most famously, SAASWIF spearheaded the campaign to suspend the South African Amateur Swimming Union (SAASU) – the controlling body for white swimming – from FINA.

In 1973 a delegation from FINA arrived in South Africa to evaluate the state of swimming in the country. SAASWIF met with the delegation and presented a detailed memorandum to its members. The memorandum was something of a triumph, and was the most complete account of the state's systematic exclusion of the black community from participation in swimming.<sup>4</sup>

The report, as well as the excellent campaigning work of people such as Morgan Naidoo and Sam Ramsamy, resulted in FINA suspending the white swimming union at a meeting in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. This happened in spite of the fact that SAASU had been a founding member of FINA. Morgan Naidoo, then president of SAASWIF, was denied a passport to travel to the Yugoslavia meeting and in October 1973 was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act (No. 44 of 1950), clearly a reaction by the state to his pivotal role in isolating 'white' swimming.

In 1976 FINA formally expelled SAASU from international swimming. The expulsion represented a major victory for non-racial swimming under the banner of SAASWIF.

However, in spite of SAASWIF's tremendous success, both at the level of its political engagement and in the development of non-racial swimming, it remained predominantly an organisation located in Indian and coloured communities. This is not surprising, as Indian and coloured sport was able to develop with greater levels of autonomy, and Indian and coloured people also benefited from better resources and higher standards of living, compared to African people.

### The emergence of SANASA

The 1970s saw the emergence of organised African swimming, beginning with the formation of the Western Transvaal Amateur Swimming Association in 1974, later known as the Amateur Swimming Association of Western Transvaal (ASAWT). In the course of 1975 other provincial associations were formed, eventually culminating in the formation of the South African National Amateur Swimming Association (SANASA).

The various affiliates of SANASA had largely grown out of initiatives developed by local municipal administrative 'boards' under white government control. According to Thabo Seotsanyana (the second president of SANASA), their stated intention was 'to organise swimming and later hand over the reins to the community'.<sup>5</sup> Initially the boards were extremely helpful, making transport available to convey swimmers to galas. SAASU, keen to see the emergence of an alternative voice to SAASWIF as the voice of black swimming, supported SANASA with coaching manuals and small amounts of funding to run swimming clinics. As SANASA began to assert its autonomy, however, SAASU attempted to regain control of the organisation. According to Seotsanyana:

...it later became evident that SAASU's financial and material involvement had ulterior motives. After the staging of SANASA's first and second national championships, an attempt was made to 'hijack' SANASA by SAASU. To get out of this situation, SANASA decided to become less dependent on SAASU and began to organise its own fundraising campaigns. When SAASU realised that their relationship

with SANASA was turning sour, they tried to co-opt the president of SANASA, in his absence, to the position of honorary vice-president of SAASU. This pathetically patronising attitude was met with anger and bitterness by SANASA. Subsequent meetings between SAASU and SANASA proved fruitless and the two organisations parted company.<sup>6</sup>

Its fallout with SAASU would, however, exact a price. Previously SANASA affiliates had received small amounts of money and support from various municipal boards. These were summarily terminated, and attempts were made, by the West Rand Board in particular, to divide organisers. While the latter attempts were unsuccessful, in other parts of the country administration boards succeeded in destroying the organisation by threatening organisers with dismissal from government jobs if they did not cooperate with the authorities. In Seotsanyana's view, '[s]wimming, as a result, suffered a severe and crippling blow in those areas.'<sup>7</sup>

#### ASASA: taking swimming into the township

As its relationship with SAASU crumbled, SANASA grew closer to SAASWIF, and in March 1982 the two organisations merged to form the Amateur Swimming Association of South Africa (ASASA). An ASASA publication recalls the event:

Whilst both organisations were firm believers in the credo of non-racial sport, because of the artificial barriers which exist in our society their constituency was in the case of [SAASWIF] predominantly so-called coloured and Indian and [in the case of SANASA], African... The most important reason why the two bodies merged was first and foremost, their unshakable belief in the principle of non-racial sport.<sup>8</sup>

Like its predecessor, SAASWIF, the political character of ASASA was explicit from its inception, and the organisation placed itself firmly within the ranks of the struggle against apartheid. In the 1980s, in regard to sport, this was the terrain of SACOS. Growing out of the political traditions of

SAASWIF and SANASA, ASASA entered the SACOS fold of organisations with a long history of struggle and boasting a highly skilled and competent set of administrators.

But, where SAASWIF's political history was rooted in the sports politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s (SAASWIF being a founding member of SACOS), ASASA was far more a creature of the 1980s. For SAASWIF, the major fronts of the struggle had been the campaign for recognition of black athletes, and white South Africa's exclusion from international sport. In the 1980s, however – with the proliferation of autonomous black organisations antagonistic to the state across all sectors of society – the emphasis shifted to ways of organising sport, guided by the practice of non-racialism. For ASASA this meant 'delivering swimming on a non-racial basis' (Davey interview). And in spite of incredible obstacles, ASASA managed to cover all the major codes of aquatic sport (the umbrella term covering swimming, water polo, diving, synchronised swimming and open-water swimming) with the exception of diving (since virtually no pools available to black swimmers were equipped with diving boards).

According to Mike Davey, a former official of ASASA, their strategy focused on taking the sport into the townships, and despite the political and logistical challenges this presented, the organisation consciously located its national tournaments within townships. This often meant swimming in pools whose sizes were considered obsolete by competitive standards:

We had a national tournament in Orlando West swimming pool [in Soweto] under terrible conditions. It was the first time that something like that happened. We had to supply our own generators so that we could swim at night. We had to supply lanes' ropes and starting blocks. The original lanes' ropes were fixed with meat hooks in a swimming pool. A youngster taking a wrong turn could have impaled himself. But still, we ran for a week and at that time we had so-called coloured and Indian, fair blue-eyed girls, living in the heart of the township...and those children were as happy as anything...the event went off without incident except for the rottenness of the city

council...And in that political climate we were given no airplay or mileage. (Davey interview)

But ASASA's biggest challenge was to present itself outside the pool. As the political landscape of the 1980s began to shift, and a path was cleared towards negotiations and national reconciliation, black swimming was forced to confront the question of unity in sport.

### (Dis)unity in sport

While much has been written about the 'ease' with which reconciliation has happened since the first democratic government was inaugurated in 1994, with a lot of attention being paid to the symbolic gestures made by figures such as Nelson Mandela, little is said of the major differences that existed amongst black sports organisations immediately after 1990 with regard to the process of unity and reconciliation. In the debates arising from these different positions, the prioritisation of reconciliation over redress was questioned by many who saw prioritising redress, as a means to attain equality, as a precondition for unity and reconciliation. Much of the history of the unity process in sport has yet to be written. More importantly, we have yet to understand how these political processes shaped the present competitive contexts and priorities of the different codes of sport. For swimming – where 'full' unity was achieved only in 1999 – it is without question that the current complexion of the sport is directly linked to the fractious process that led to the establishment of a single controlling body.

### SACOS and the contexts of unity

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the formation of SACOS, and the increasingly confrontational character of black organisations, also coincided with the state's quest to control all facets of life. In the decade that followed its establishment, SACOS would grow into a formidable force in South African sports politics, and an important node of the anti-apartheid movement.

However, SACOS's relationship to the Congress movement<sup>9</sup> was always ambiguous. Since its inception, the membership of the organisation had been drawn from across the spectrum of black politics in South Africa. But, in the political vision of the Congress movement – which became increasingly hegemonic over the anti-apartheid movement in the course of the 1980s – SACOS remained outside the fold. This perception was reinforced as debates within the organisation over its non-collaborationist stance (expressed, for instance, in the double standards policy that forbade members of any of its affiliates from taking part in sporting events outside its control, and the 'no normal sport in an abnormal society' position, which involved a general refusal to engage with the 'organs of apartheid' – which for SACOS included white sport) began increasingly to reflect the divisions between the different political traditions within the broad liberation movement. Such SACOS positions sat uncomfortably with many from the Congress tradition and, as a result, increasingly came to be viewed as too far to the left. But, as Jace Naidoo, the president of SWIMSA, notes, the organisation was anything but uniform and nurtured a strong culture of debate:

I know that there were those accusations [of ultra-leftism]. But, I think if you sat in some of those SACOS meetings, there was debate on the widest political level, and I don't think any other political structures in the country were operating on that level of democratic debate...While there might have been those accusations, I think SACOS was one of the few structures that allowed for political debate... (Naidoo interview 1)

However, in the late 1980s the Congress movement also began its push to unite the anti-apartheid movement under the 'Harare Declaration' and to formulate its programme to bring about a negotiated end to apartheid.<sup>10</sup> Guided by the 'radical' rhetoric of the 'National Democratic Revolution' (NDR), this programme prioritised asserting the hegemony of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) (made up of ostensibly independent structures

steeped in Congress tradition) over all aspects of civil society, including the organisation of sport. With respect to the latter, this meant providing political leadership for, and control over, a process that would lead to the unification of the governing bodies of black and white sport. SACOS's steadfast commitment to the principle of 'no normal sport in an abnormal society' would prove a difficult obstacle to overcome, and presented a defiant challenge to the Congress agenda of negotiation with existing white organisations on all fronts.

In 1988, the National Sports Congress (NSC) was launched as the sports arm of the Congress movement. While the language of the NSC did not initially set it in competition with SACOS, a clear line had been drawn and the deep differences between the two organisations would soon become apparent. Initial engagements between them crumbled under the weight of strategic differences – specifically the respective organisations' approach to unity with white sport – and a split loomed. As Gideon Sam, a past president of SWIMSAs, explains, for cadres inside SACOS a choice had to be made:

There was this feeling that if I am NSC it's because the NSC aligned itself to the ANC and that SACOS aligned itself more with Black Consciousness. So, it became a question of ideology, and there was a split along those lines. (Sam interview)

As the lines were being drawn, ASASA declared its allegiance to SACOS. As Jace Naidoo explains, 'ASASA was a strong SACOS affiliate. It was very clear – we were a SACOS affiliate and we would have nothing to do with the NSC' (Naidoo interview 1). But as these debates raged between SACOS and the NSC, ASASA was experiencing other problems which, although not directly linked to the question of unity, would come to dramatically reconfigure this terrain. Historically, SAASWIF coaches and administrators had worked on a purely voluntary basis. However, as the sport grew more popular in the late 1970s, a few coaches had begun charging fees. This contradicted the amateur status of the organisation and the sport generally, both nationally and internationally, and eventually led to the breakaway

of two clubs after the 'professional' coaches were refused entry onto the pool deck at the National Championships in Cape Town. They formed a new body called the South African Amateur Swimming Board of Control, under the leadership of Eddie Meth and Easlyn Fredericks. The organisation subsequently disbanded and rejoined the folds of non-racial swimming after the formation of ASASA.

However the rapidly changing political environment in the late 1980s was to cause another split.

At ASASA's 1991 national tournament, athletes were asked to read a pledge supporting SACOS and the principles for which it stood. This resulted in a split in the organisation:

...this issue was about the political one in terms of SACOS – the acknowledgement of SACOS, acknowledgement of the struggle in terms of issues about racism. [The group led by] Easlyn Fredericks was fairly actively involved in the Labour Party and actively campaigning for them.<sup>11</sup> I remember the first breakdown came when each team had to pledge allegiance to SACOS. And they refused to do that. And they pulled out a club in Cape Town, East London (later), and a club in Johannesburg. (Naidoo interview 1)

#### Unification: round one

The split in ASASA would prove convenient for the NSC. While it was clear that ASASA was unlikely to change its approach to unity, the breakaway group now presented the NSC with a possible ally in swimming. Shortly after the split, the South African Amateur Swimming Congress (SAASCO) was formed and almost immediately entered into unity talks with the white SAASU. ASASA had at that stage already initiated talks with SAASU; this was a tactical move in response to the growing power of the NSC. The NSC began taking a keen interest in the process. Although SAASCO had the benefit of competent and experienced swimming administrators like Eddie Meth and Easlyn Fredericks, the new organisation lacked the type of organisational culture and political experience that could have prepared them for the

task ahead. The nsc, whose deep investment in the success of the process would not allow them to see talks fail, 'deployed' Gideon Sam – a seasoned sports administrator – to lead the saasco delegation until Sam Ramsamy returned to country.

As Gideon Sam explains, the new organisation had something of an ad hoc character; its energies were directed at the task of forging ahead with the nsc agenda for unity:

[When] we sat in an nsc meeting, we would look around and we would say 'who can we send into that federation?'...We were actually asking people to go to various federations – okay, Mackerdhuj was there in cricket, Patel was there in rugby – so all the other little ones, like swimming, we would ask among ourselves, who knows how to tackle these whiteys in swimming...And then, they'd say 'Ja, Gideon, you come from Somerset West, you can swim, you go... and meet the people'...There was a splinter group from Durban with Eddie Meth, there was a splinter group from Cape Town, someone from Kimberley, and then we had a Border faction. We didn't have anything in Gauteng. So those splinter groups formed a congress.  
(Sam interview)

As negotiations unfolded, asasa insisted that saasco with their four clubs could not be considered a representative organisation. The talks deadlocked. However, saasu and saasco continued with talks and formed a new organisation.

By the time Sam Ramsamy returned to South Africa talks were already under way, and he immediately took over from Gideon Sam as the chief negotiator for saasco. In terms of the unity agreement there would be a fifty-fifty split of the executive, and after two years an open election would be held. The resultant body that was formed was the South Africa Amateur Swimming Association (saasa). Sam Ramsamy was the first president, and Issy Kramer (a former National Party representative in government) and Gideon Sam shared the vice-presidency.

## FINA and the second round of unification

Through the first round of the unity process, ASASA stuck firmly to the SACOS position on unity. Numerically ASASA had the upper hand. While the new body had significantly greater resources, ASASA organised the vast majority of black swimmers. Because of this, ASASA believed that without their participation, there would always be a question mark over the process and over the new body's claim to being representative of black swimming in South Africa. In this they were wrong.

In 1992, the question of which organisation could claim the status of being the official controlling body for swimming was put firmly on the table when SAASA applied to join FINA. While ASASA was allowed to put its case to the international body, it had under-estimated the influence of Sam Ramsamy in the international arena. For years Ramsamy had been the accepted representative of swimming at all international meetings, with ASASA's own voice in these forums often mediated by him. Not surprisingly then, FINA went with the new unified body:

I think also the reality was that we didn't realise the extent of Sam's influence...the moment we came up against Sam we lost the battle because when Mike Davey went to the FINA meeting to address them, they only gave him a few minutes...that decision was made a long time ago, and the way those international federations work, an outsider is not going to come in and change their minds. It wasn't how good the case was. The organisational structure, not so much in terms of swimming organisations, but Sam, and his interaction at a political level and his influence in terms of the African swimming structures where he was completely influential, meant there was no way we were going to win that fight. We were painted as people who were anti-ANC. And so that fight was lost. (Naidoo interview 1)

While FINA acknowledged ASASA's historical role in the struggle, recognition was given to the new body as the official representative of South African swimming.

However, beyond the influence of Ramsamy, this decision was also in part a consequence of the international community's firm support for South Africa's 'unfolding miracle'. Internally as well, the language of non-participation was coming to seem increasingly out of step with national developments. After the FINA decision, ASASA was forced to reconsider its approach to the new organisation. However, emboldened by the international body's decision, the terms of a merger offered by the new 'unified' body, SAASA, were nothing like those of the previous process. ASASA was offered just three seats on the executive, with an open election following in less than a year. ASASA, which boasted a few thousand swimmers and a modest bank balance, declined the offer. Over the next seven years the organisation remained outside the official 'unified' structure and continued to host its own national tournaments.

#### Unity, finally

If ASASA showed every sign of good health at the outset of the unification process, by 1999 it was in deep trouble:

We were on our last legs. Because by then children on the other side were going overseas...they had the financial muscle while we were haemorrhaging. We still managed to have national tournaments worthy of the name in 1999 but were in bad shape. (Naidoo interview 1)

Cash-strapped and unable to offer its swimmers anything other than localised competition, something needed to change for ASASA. Ironically, the final phase of unification was catalysed by the success of an ASASA swimmer who was given the opportunity to travel to Australia to train and compete. However, this proved complicated because ASASA was not a member of FINA and the new body objected to the swimmer's participation in Australia. As a result, ASASA approached the South African government for assistance. Although the government informed ASASA that it could not interfere in the affairs of an individual sporting authority, it also put pressure on the FINA-recognised SAASA to resolve this matter.

In 1999, SAASA changed its name to Swimming South Africa (SWIMSA). ASASA had entered discussions with SWIMSA hoping for nothing more than a programme for the development of black swimming in the country. However, Gideon Sam, who was the president of SWIMSA at the time, agreed to begin formal talks with ASASA. This created an opening for discussions on cooperation between the two organisations and ultimately for unification. The terms of the merger also proved to be far less disadvantageous this time around. While this could have been seen as a magnanimous gesture on the part of the internationally recognised structure, the latter was also searching for mechanisms to achieve its ‘transformation agenda’ and stood to benefit from a merger. It had not been able to produce any new black administrators, technical officials or coaches of note, and the numbers of such persons that had entered the organisation at the time of unification were small. ASASA presented SWIMSA with a substantial number of established, technically competent administrators and coaches who were well versed in sports politics and who, theoretically, could advance the agenda for change within an organisation that was predominately white. And so, in 1999, ASASA finally merged with SWIMSA.

## The transformation of aquatic sport

### Two ‘transformations’

It has been posited that the characterisation of South Africa as a country with two economies (Mbeki 2003; see also Chapter 1 of this volume), necessitating two separate and parallel strategies for transformation, has, rather than allowing for redress, democracy, reconciliation and cooperative governance to facilitate the progressive erosion of inequality, instead made it possible for inequality to persist, and in fact to remain entrenched in society. This finds an echo in the state of swimming in South Africa today, with a separation between transformation efforts aimed at developing a pool of ‘elite athletes’ to represent South Africa (‘non-racially’) in international events

(Transformation 2 – reformative), and those efforts aimed at developing mass participation in swimming (Transformation 1 – transformative).

Transformation 2 has most often been evident in the state’s need to make all institutions of society, including civil society formations such as sports federations, reflect the country’s racial demographics. This has resulted in many institutions and individuals approaching transformation purely as a matter of replacing white faces in structures with black faces, or ensuring the presence of a token number of black swimmers in teams. In the words of Jace Naidoo:

[M]ost federations have seen transformation almost exclusively as a ‘numbers’ or ‘quotas’ issue. To a large extent this has been driven by the state’s philosophy of transformation – society and organs of civil society, such as sports federations, being reflective of the country’s demographics. This race-based philosophy has contributed to the need to define racial groupings in sport, and has served to entrench ideologies of race, rather than moving toward a philosophy of non-racial and mass-based sport. (Naidoo interview 1)

Proponents of Transformation 1 have argued that the state could have played a much more useful role by prioritising redress in its approach to transformation, i.e. understanding transformation as the need to correct the imbalances created by apartheid through proactively dedicating resources to increasing access for the previously disadvantaged to swimming. With such an understanding, increasing the majority of people’s access to the resources, facilities and institutions necessary to realise their full potential as swimmers would become the focus. In sport, this would have meant placing a substantial emphasis on ensuring mass participation in sport at all levels, from the urban townships through to the rural farmlands and marginalised areas, as opposed to the constant emphasis on ensuring adequate numbers of African participants in national teams. According to Jace Naidoo:

[P]rogrammes aimed at mass participation in sport, if initiated at the turn of democracy in South Africa, would have ensured that South

African sport, 12–14 years down the road of sporting unification, would have been reflective of the demographics of South Africa – more so than the current racial interpretation of demographics. South African sport at all levels would have seen representation by the rural poor, the unemployed township youth, participants from working class communities – all of whom had been historically denied access, and currently have few opportunities for accessing either recreational or competitive sport. (Naidoo interview 1)

Instead of taking this approach to transformation, the prioritisation by the state of an approach of ‘two transformations’, within a socio-economic situation that has remained largely unchanged for the poor, black majority since the end of apartheid, has meant that the realisation of true potential is still limited to those few South Africans who continue to enjoy inherited apartheid privileges or who have been able to gain access to the necessary resources through their participation in the first economy, i.e. white and black middle class South Africans.

Transformation 2, while limited in this sense, has however also entailed important struggles to change the racial composition of various sporting federations, where successful engagement has resulted in the changing of conservative (generally white) leadership at national and provincial levels. This process has, though, had little or no effect at the level of clubs which, through their historical access to resources (being based in middle and upper-middle class communities), continue to play a dominant yet conservative role in sports transformation. With a prioritisation of Transformation 1, such struggles would not have reaped benefits only for an elite few.

SWIMSA’s current transformation programme attempts to bring together these two approaches. However, tensions run through this strategy. Pressure to speedily produce black international stars sits uneasily alongside a project that seeks to build mass participation in swimming at all levels, in all communities.

## The state of transformation in aquatic sport today

First-time travellers flying in to any major South African city often remark on the little blue swimming pool shapes that dot the green gardens of the suburbs, as well as on the dry and barren squatter camps that either sprawl next to these suburbs or climb up the nearby hillsides and dump sites. They are a telling reminder of apartheid's legacy – entrenched inequalities that confront even the best attempts at transformation.

The state of aquatic sport in South Africa today reflects this legacy, with white and middle class people continuing to enjoy representative advantage at both competitive and recreational levels over black and working class people. This has been the result of the consistent development of strong white aquatic sporting organisations since the turn of the last century. The unification process that started at the beginning of the 1990s was also characterised by an adoption of the existing infrastructure of the dominant partners in the process, i.e. white organisations.

In time, too, the unified structures assumed the organisational culture and practices of these organisations. Instead of allowing for a new organisational culture to emerge from the merger process, it was assumed that the culture of the dominant partners was best suited to the new context. In the main, this culture was characterised by 'the rapid development of the individual and the creation of a super-elite, ultra-competitive grouping of athletes with the ability to bring international glory' (Naidoo interview 1). The type of organisation celebrated by this culture was one in which leadership, decision-making and responsibility were highly centralised, and membership was elitist. This kind of organisation is not conducive to the building of mass participation, through the implementation of transparent processes which engender accountability, democracy and collective responsibility and leadership. In this context the development of a mass-based recreational aquatic sporting organisation remained the vision of the minority. According to Jace Naidoo, the bringing together of such different cultures in one organisation resulted in:

...the inability to either transform the organisation or properly institute grassroots development programmes in disadvantaged communities. An organisation committed to mass-based aquatic recreational activities requires structures within the organisation which can cater for this need. In the short term, a centrally driven structure may prove essential to direct the organisation to the goal of mass participation. However, in the medium to long term, an organisational structure which is transparent, democratic and accountable to its smallest unit, i.e. clubs and their membership, is crucial. All attempts must be made to resist the temptation to create more bureaucratic structures (often under the guise of better management) that result in greater alienation of the basic units of the organisation. While democracy cannot be legislated, it must be encouraged to remain a dynamic activity within aquatic sport in the country. (Naidoo interview 1)

While the current state of aquatic sport in South Africa has made it difficult to redress apartheid's legacy, and in many senses organised swimming remains bound by the limitations of the political and economic transition, SWIMSA's commitment to 'the numbers game' seems to be paying off, at a competitive level. According to Jace Naidoo, 'The profile of our entry level national competition (level 1) has been completely transformed, with only a small number of historically advantaged competitors or team officials' (Naidoo interview 1). A slow but discernible increase in the percentage of black participants has been noted at the higher levels of national competition, through to the national team. But this transformation at a competitive level is not mirrored at either a team management or technical official level. In recent years, in an effort to increase participation and strengthen clubs, the national federation has decided that the lower levels of national competition should be club-based, rather than provincial meets. This has resulted in a reversal of the 'demographic profile' seen previously at level 1. But this strategy reveals the reality that it is going to take many years for even the narrow goal of making elite teams racially representative to be achieved.

It is clearly evident that the big winners since the early 1990s have been white swimmers. The lifting of the international boycott has given them the opportunity to garner international accolades, and access to well-endowed us universities. Unlike cricket with its Makhaya Ntinis, and rugby with its Bryan Habanas, swimming has not produced its post-apartheid standard-bearer. But the officials presently managing the national organisation seem determined to change the status quo and, as the latter part of this chapter will show, there is an emergent set of proposals with the potential to make for a productive race-redress programme.

However, any understanding of the processes of change needs to factor in the particular nature of the sport of swimming.

## Obstacles to the transformation of aquatic sport

The expense involved in becoming a swimmer is often a prohibitive factor in the lives of potential black competitors. Because of the resources necessary to participate in swimming (either recreationally or competitively), the transformation of participation in elite swimming competitions has remained restricted largely to whites and the emerging black middle class. At present, it is only those young people with access to these resources, i.e. attending private or semi-private schools, who are able to enter the arena of elite competitive swimming, as they generally have access to in-house experienced coaches, and high-standard swimming facilities.

The state has played a significant role in this regard, encouraging efforts and resources to be directed towards the development of individual stars, particularly through its 'knee-jerk' responses following the apparently poor performance of athletes at the Sydney Olympics in 2000, and their marginal improvement at the Athens games in 2004. Here an increased emphasis began to be placed on the production of elite athletes at a national level, particularly athletes of colour. The lack of success at the Beijing Olympics in 2008 only served to heighten to fever pitch the clamour for

more resources to be thrown into the production of elite athletes. The linking of federation funding to the success of these programmes has resulted in federations in a range of sports shifting their focus from investment in mass-based sport to the development of elite black athletes.<sup>12</sup>

Rather than focusing on the long-term development of mass sport, with the natural rising to the elite levels of those with potential, the state wanted 'quick fixes' to institutionalised problems. The state failed to recognise that countries such as Cuba and Kenya, with sports investment several orders of magnitude lower than South Africa, were generating medal winners, or that countries such as Australia and the United States were making investments per individual medal won beyond any imaginable budget among South African federations. (Naidoo interview 1)

Promotion of competitive aquatic sport is also dependent on increasing the numbers of youngsters entering the sport at an early age, i.e. six to seven years. This entry is facilitated either by parents enrolling children in clubs or through the involvement of schools. While former Model c and existing private or semi-private schools have the resources to promote the sport – and in many instances actually have major clubs based at the school pools – schools in townships do not have swimming pools or educators with the requisite skills to promote the sport using community resources. To a large extent, the development of swimming in historically disadvantaged schools over the last 10 years has been the responsibility of the national swimming federation. However, the United Schools Sports Association of South Africa (USSASA) has tended to focus on the organisation of events, drawing together schools that already have swimming programmes. USSASA has therefore had limited involvement with the development of the sport in schools that were traditionally outside the domain of organised aquatic sport, with the result that transformation has not included those who were most marginalised and excluded from the sport under apartheid.

The organisational factors impeding transformation are several. The human resource demands for transformation are substantial, particularly if the focus is on increasing mass participation. Large numbers of swimming teachers are needed to promote the sport at all levels. Although swimsa has trained several hundred such teachers, it has very little control over where these teachers practise their skills – generally in communities that can provide some remuneration for their services. Thus such teachers are rarely active in poor townships or at schools where they will receive no income. Apart from swimming teachers, other human resource needs relate to the voluntary activities associated with organised swimming, such as technical officiating, administration and management positions at club, provincial and national levels. While swimsa has conducted training for all of these categories of volunteers, the competitive demands of the sport are tremendous, with activities taking place on most weekends, particularly in the summer months, in competition venues located at a distance from the poorer communities. For unemployed volunteers from the townships, this represents a substantial financial investment – which is not sustainable either by the individuals themselves or by the organisation. Thus, these activities are undertaken by the better resourced members within the swimming fraternity – those with vehicles, time and professional expertise. And these, more often than not, happen to be white.

Facilities and related issues also pose a major threat to transformation. Since 2000 many municipalities throughout the country have made major investments in the upgrading of existing or the building of new aquatic facilities – many up to competitive standards – in communities in need. However, these initiatives have not been backed up by community participation through the establishment of clubs. While swimsa has often tried to provide as supportive an environment as possible, working class communities have lacked the necessary resources to establish clubs. In many cases, the promotion of use of the facilities and of aquatic activities has come to rely on the pool supervisor or the lifeguard, which has obvious limitations: ‘A single individual providing a limited amount of time to developing

competitive swimmers fails to provide the necessary infrastructure either to transform the grouping of youngsters into a competitive team or create a new generation of technical officials or administrators' (Naidoo interview 1). Other problems faced by established facilities include the lack of heating facilities, which means that pools go unused during the winter months in all provinces.

Faced with these sorts of organisational complexities, and the need to respond to state pressures to produce internationally competitive black swimmers, the tendency has been to identify potential black athletes and remove them to a facility within an advantaged community under an experienced coach. This comes about at the expense of investing resources in developing infrastructure within poorer communities, a strategy which, while not likely to produce a national champion immediately, is likely to result in the long-term development of the sport, particularly in terms of coaching skills and a much bigger talent pool of internationally competitive swimmers (Naidoo interview 1).

Another significant obstacle to transformation has been the persistence of conservative attitudes and practices by individuals in positions of power. Often, because of the legacy of apartheid, technical expertise and skills have continued to reside in white individuals who have conservative attitudes and are resistant to change. This has meant that processes of transformation have had to rely on individuals who have not bought into their intentions and ideals, often resulting in the processes being delayed or derailed through sabotage or a lack of will.

## The transformation processes adopted by SWIMSA

In 1999, following the integration of ASASA into SWIMSA, a national committee was established to develop a policy on transformation. The first step in determining appropriate intervention measures to address the identified problems in swimming would be the definition of a transformation vision for the organisation. This vision came to be understood as the need to transform

aquatic sport so that it catered for the needs of the majority of South Africans, and to redress inequity created by apartheid. In the short term, SWIMSA would strive to become more representative of the racial demography of the country in all its structures and activities, at club, provincial and national level. Its long-term objective would, however, be the transformation of SWIMSA's programmes to focus on the development of programmes for black children and adults, and the transformation of aquatic sport more generally to increase access for the disadvantaged.

This overall objective and vision was to be achieved through carefully designed projects, each with a set of clearly defined results to be attained through set activities. All of these were to be measured by specified indicators and timeframes, implemented by a responsible agency within the structures of SWIMSA. These projects included:

- 1 the democratisation of SWIMSA structures;
- 2 the development of black human resources;
- 3 greater grassroots development;
- 4 increasing black representivity of teams;
- 5 establishment of financial mechanisms for transformation.

In 2000, SWIMSA established a Transformation Monitoring Committee whose role it was to monitor the results of these projects. By the end of 2004 it was obvious that the self-regulatory approach adopted by the national leadership – i.e. the expectation that the provinces and clubs would adopt the comprehensive policy and integrate this into their respective programmes – was not working, for a variety of reasons. In recognition of this, in 2005 the organisation adopted a revised policy document. The revised strategy was more focused, with the setting of targets for all entities within the organisation (i.e. provincial structures, national technical structures, disciplinary boards etc.), applicable to competitors, technical officials, coaches, team management and administration. These targets were accompanied by both incentives and punitive measures (Naidoo interview 1).

According to Jace Naidoo, there continue to be huge challenges that must be faced. The number of black swimmers at national level remains low, black swimmers in clubs in the main urban areas form less than 15 per cent of the membership, and the attraction and development of black administrators continues to be difficult. However, he hopes that a R24 million windfall received from the National Lottery Fund, spread over three years starting from 2009, will provide some impetus to their development plans. He is particularly hopeful that this will enhance the Learn to Swim Programme that was designed to broaden swimming into hitherto neglected areas, and in the longer term encourage a broader pool of competitive swimmers (Naidoo interview 2).

## Recommendations: policy strategies for aquatic sports transformation

The transformation of aquatic sport in South Africa is faced with challenges that are uniquely different from those facing other sporting disciplines. While the federation has risen to these challenges as far as it is able to, it is obvious that if aquatics is to be truly transformed it will require vastly increased financial resources, especially from the state, increased facilities with specialised resources, and the adoption of innovative approaches to ensure that the sport becomes mass-based. Overall, proper mobilisation of resources has to occur to provide the infrastructure and other material and human resources necessary to correct the inequalities entrenched by apartheid – inequalities based largely on race and class. A transformation that seeks only to create access for a few black and white elite athletes to top-level competitive swimming not only entrenches old inequalities, but produces new relations of exclusion and marginalisation that themselves do not allow for the production and development of new talent. As this chapter has demonstrated, policies implemented thus far have tended to prioritise Transformation 2 (elite-level competitive swimming) over Transformation 1 (mass-based involvement in the sport).

In order to give more space to Transformation 1, there are several policy approaches that must be considered. These relate to the following issues:

- 1 performance pathways from recreational to international sport (sport-specific strategies);
- 2 sport in schools;
- 3 community club development:
  - a. urban
  - b. rural;
- 4 coaches and other human resources;
- 5 facilities:
  - a. urban: competitive
  - b. rural;
- 6 centres of excellence (national and regional);
- 7 financial resources.

#### Performance pathways

The development of elite athletes has to follow a structured pathway from the first stage of introducing a child to the water to winning a medal at the Olympic Games. The current structures have produced breaks in these pathways, resulting in duplication of resources, as well as substantial potential being neglected, especially in the townships and rural areas.

Structured programmes to introduce children to swimming at schools (as a life skill, and in the form of basic competitive swimming) are critical to the development of nationally and internationally competitive swimmers.

This strategy must be driven by a single authority under the leadership of the national federation. Competitive programmes, coaching skills, team development and infrastructure development must adopt this strategy. This will ensure that the performance of the programme can be clearly evaluated.

## Promoting sport in schools

Swimming is recognised as a life skill, and the national Department of Education (DOE) has attempted to incorporate this skill into its curriculum – this provides an ideal opportunity to transform swimming into a mass-based sport. However, this policy intervention can only be promoted within a supportive and resourced environment. Currently the DOE adopts a non-enforced approach to the policy. The department needs to provide a mechanism by which learners can have adequate time *during* school hours to acquire the necessary skills, at least biweekly, rather than attempting to teach them after normal school hours. These programmes have to be targeted at primary schools in order to be effective, with much reduced resources at the secondary school level.

While the national DOE needs to provide the environment, the provincial DOEs must develop a coherent strategy to implement these programmes, commencing with the identification of the necessary facilities within defined school zones, and ensuring that during school hours these facilities are for the dedicated use of schools within that zone. For this to happen, the provincial DOEs have to work closely with local government Departments of Sport and Recreation (DSR). The DOE needs to provide the necessary infrastructure, such as transport required by the schools within the zone.

Competitive aquatic programmes must be clearly linked to the overall strategy of developing athletes. This includes the nature and content of competitive programmes, so that there is not a competitive relationship between the school and federation programmes. This will allow for the effective utilisation of scarce resources for coaching clinics and for travel to national and international competitions.

## Community club development

Although a comprehensive and successful school-based learn-to-swim programme is likely to result in a mass of aquatic participants, the ability to translate this into competitive success will be dependent on the establishment of proper functioning clubs within the historically

disadvantaged communities in both urban and rural areas. Among working class families, adult participation in sporting organisations is limited by the availability of time – and without a reduction in the length of the working week, this is not likely to change. Community clubs are currently dependent on volunteer administrators – usually unemployed youth, who, once they become employed, cannot commit to supporting the club. Creation by the national DSR of a ‘community aquatics organiser’, whose task would be to organise a competitive club within the community, would present a possibility to harness the potential generated by the schools’ programme. Crucially, the organiser needs to build a community club infrastructure, as opposed to being the single individual on whom the club is dependent.

The ‘community aquatics organiser’ must be linked to the federation so as to ensure that the programmes at local level are linked to the overall national performance pathway strategy. Mechanisms must be found for ensuring the sustainability of these clubs, and support – both financial and in terms of human resources – from local and provincial government will be essential. The programmes of these clubs must not be linked to purely competitive swimming but should adopt a holistic approach to the role that swimming can play in the development of health, the youth and job-creation opportunities.

#### Developing human resources

Promotion of the school aquatic sport policy is dependent on the development of the necessary human resources. The national DSR and DOE must commit to the creation of posts whose job description is to ensure that learners acquire swimming skills at the most basic level. This is likely to require a huge state investment, with several thousand such positions needing to be created. However, without such dedicated resources there is minimal likelihood of a school-based programme succeeding. The provincial DSR and DOE need to work closely with the national federation’s Learn to Swim programme for the training and certification of these trainers. During school holidays trainers can then take responsibility for the coaching of community-based clubs, reporting to the federation.

In addition, human resources will have to be developed for the management of the sport in terms of officiating and administration. Joint programmes with the DOE and the federation will be essential.

### Facilities development

The development and maintenance of facilities will be critical in the transformation of swimming throughout the country. Different innovative approaches will have to be implemented so that resources for facilities can be allocated to both urban and rural areas.

Local government needs to take more responsibility for the provision and maintenance of facilities. All facilities, particularly those at which a DOE aquatics trainer and community aquatics organiser are based, should ideally be open from 06h00–21h00 each day. Essential are adequate heated facilities, so that aquatics activities can continue for a full 12 months of the year. The latter is critical if serious competitive swimmers are to be developed who can hold their own in national and international competitions.

In rural areas two options should be investigated: firstly, the development of open-water facilities at dams and rivers that can be used for recreational and competitive swimming; and secondly, the introduction of economically feasible portable swimming facilities at schools in rural areas. This will create opportunities for athletes in rural areas to bid for a place in international swimming teams.

*Drowning and rural areas* The challenge of transforming swimming in South Africa is linked to the development of resources and facilities throughout the country. Swimming remains largely an urban sport, since urban municipalities with the necessary resources are more likely to have the capacity to build and maintain these facilities.

However, the introduction of open-water swimming into the Olympic programme provides an ideal opportunity for the development of talent in rural areas, by using the presence of rivers and dams as an opportunity to develop and hone swimming skills among those living in the vicinity

of these sites. This will address the critical issue of swimming skills development within rural areas, where more than 80 per cent of drownings in the country occur each year.

Innovative resources need to be mobilised to address this skills gap. While the development of sufficient facilities in rural areas is unlikely in the medium term, there is a need to look at other options. The production of cheap portable pools creates an ideal opportunity for the development of swimming skills amongst rural residents, and for the identification of potential talent that can be nurtured.

The emergent relationship between SWIMSA and the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAFF) around the Portapool Project and the Rural Splash programme is an encouraging signal. The Portapool Project is designed not only to teach learners to swim but also to make the school an important part of community life. The pilot study for this project was launched at Bolata Primary School in Qwaqwa in the Free State. SWIMSA provided training for the local unemployed youth and mothers so that they could deliver the Learn to Swim programme to all learners.

Alongside this, SWIMSA's Rural Splash programme was launched on 3 November 2006 at Germiston Lake in Gauteng, also in partnership with the DWAFF. Centred on natural water resources such as rivers, lakes and dams, it focuses on education and skills development activities.

While the immediate result might not be a black Olympic medallist, this programme will impact on national statistics, which reveal that fatalities through drowning are the second-highest cause of accidental death in South Africa. Over 50 per cent of these drowning victims are children under the age of 15 years, and some 70 per cent of these tragedies take place in still water.

### Centres of aquatic excellence

South Africa will always have limited resources for the development of elite aquatic athletes, far less than the vast amounts of resources that are available to athletes in the top aquatic countries in the world. In this context, we need

to develop innovative South African solutions that will allow us to utilise the limited resources that we do have, and at the same time develop the great pool of talent that exists.

Centres of aquatic excellence should be established in four or five regions across the country, with one national centre. These centres should provide world-class training facilities for the top athletes in the country, and also provide additional technical and scientific support for the development of athletes and coaches working at local and provincial levels.

### Financial resources

A clear financing strategy needs to be developed that includes national and provincial government, the National Lotteries Board, the South African Sports Confederation and the Olympic Committee. This strategy needs to ensure that a multi-year (preferably four-year) funding strategy exists so that both development and elite programmes are sustainable over time.

### Conclusion

The debate over swimming transformation has swung between the hysteria generated by national squad selection processes and racial quotas, and acknowledgement of the necessity of building the sport at the grassroots level. As this chapter has shown, these complexities lie at the heart of the fractious process of unifying black and white swimming and simultaneously working to transform the sport.

Much of the transformation struggle taking place within SWIMSA is reflective not only of South African sport generally, but also of the emergent social struggles in post-apartheid South Africa that revolve around the search for a balance between immediate demographic representivity in all social spheres, including sport, and the building of the necessary infrastructure for the sustainable transformation of society.

Generally, the policies adopted in sport have resulted in the investment of inordinate amounts of resources in a limited number of

individuals who are groomed to become the standard-bearers of the 'new' South Africa in the domain of sport. As we have seen, this creates an imbalance in the allocation of resources between elite and mass-based sport.

These tensions have been evident in SWIMSA. A transformation agenda has been embarked upon that simultaneously addresses mass-based sport and the creation of an elite group of black swimmers, but success has varied over time – black elite athletes have emerged outside a mass-based context, only to retire from the sport, which then awaits its next black star.

While at the elite level SWIMSA has not produced black gold medallists, it certainly has put in place a transformation agenda that is creating and spreading a culture of swimming at the grassroots. But transformation is not a smooth process, and trying to challenge the racial composition of teams at, say, provincial level can lead to a number of unintended consequences and to scenes that read as if they were part of a Monty Python script.

At the end of 2007, for example, the Western Province water polo team was barred on the eve of playing in the finals of the Kramer Competition, because it had no black players or administrators. The rule applied by SWIMSA was that there had to be one black player in a group of thirteen players, or one black person on the management team, and the Western Province team did not meet this requirement. It emerged, though, that this suspension had been preceded by the suspension of five other teams because they did not meet the quota requirement. When *Die Burger* newspaper inquired of SWIMSA's general manager Rushdee Warley how Western Province had been allowed to go through to the final stages of the competition, he replied that 'it was difficult to know from team lists which players were black' (*Die Burger* 11 December 2007).

The consequences for the participants must have been devastating. Yet at the same time, thirteen years into South Africa's democracy, the fact that some six teams could not produce a black team member makes one wonder about the kinds of programmes that have been instituted, if any at all, in black areas. The unintended result of present initiatives could be

that black players are simply put into a team to meet requirements, only to reinforce racial stereotypes and the racial contours of the apartheid era.

While struggles over representation in provincial and national teams will continue, it is vitally important that those in control of swimming keep their central focus on spreading a culture of swimming into schools and rural areas. However, early indications are that the fallout from the dismal performances at the Beijing Olympics is that swimming authorities are bowing to pressure to devote the bulk of available resources to the development of elite swimmers.

A hopeful development is that swimming received a major boost in June 2009 when the National Lotteries Board announced a substantial investment in the sport over three years. It remains to be seen where the emphasis will be placed in using this money, and how the swimming authorities will balance the imperatives of winning medals, nurturing black elite swimmers and pursuing mass-oriented programmes such as Learn to Swim and Rural Splash.

## Notes

- 1 'Black' in this context refers to South Africans classified as 'African', 'coloured' and 'Indian' under apartheid laws.
- 2 Through the 1960s there was a growing call both from inside and outside South Africa for the country to be excluded from international competitions. As a result of this pressure South Africa was expelled from the International Olympic Committee in 1970, and from many other international sporting bodies.
- 3 From an untitled ASASA document of 1992, in the Morgan Naidoo collection of archival material held by his son, Jace Naidoo.
- 4 The memorandum is in the Morgan Naidoo Collection.
- 5 Seotsanyana, cited in an untitled ASASA 1992 document in the Morgan Naidoo collection.
- 6 Seotsanyana, cited in the ASASA 1992 document in the Morgan Naidoo collection.
- 7 Seotsanyana, cited in the ASASA 1992 document in the Morgan Naidoo collection.
- 8 Untitled ASASA document of 1992, Morgan Naidoo collection.

- 9 This term was used to refer to a wide range of organisations that saw the Freedom Charter as their guiding beacon, and the ANC as its main organisational form. They are also sometimes referred to as Charterist organisations.
- 10 A four-day workshop was held in Harare in April–May 1990 at which economists from the ANC-COSATU-SACP (Tripartite) Alliance Economic Trends unit debated ideas about an appropriate economic policy framework for post-apartheid South Africa. The workshop sought to harmonise the different impulses of the Tripartite Alliance, and was a precursor to the formal negotiations with the apartheid government. The workshop ended with a statement of policy recommendations that was published in full in *Transformation* 12, 1990, with the title ‘Recommendations on post-apartheid economic policy’. It is also known as the ‘Harare Declaration’.
- 11 The Labour Party was a coloureds-only political party that participated directly in the racially segregated parliamentary system. It was condemned by many organisations in the liberation movement for its collaborationist policies and acceptance of racial categorisation.
- 12 The resources required to produce a swimmer who is capable of winning a medal at the Senior National Championships of SWIMSA, or who becomes eligible to swim in the final meet of an international competition, are considerable. A competitive swimmer will need to train for between four and six hours per day, for at least six days per week over 10–11 months each year. For this, the swimmer will require modification of his or her education programmes, access to a coach with international experience, access to a heated swimming pool during the winter months, and a proper regulated diet. Critically, parental involvement and support are essential for the success of the individual athlete. The swimmer will also need access to fitness assessment experts and sports psychologists. In addition, biological monitoring tests, such as monitoring of heart rates, lactate assessments and so on, will have to be conducted. Cost estimates to maintain a single swimmer within a top competitive club and participation in selected national competitions are in the region of R16 000 per year. SWIMSA, in fast-tracking selected disadvantaged athletes, invests in the region of R80 000 per year to maintain one swimmer in a high performance centre. These expenses are obviously unsustainable by either the club, provincial affiliate or national federation.

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