

# A HISTORY OF COLLEGIANS RUGBY CLUB'S SURVIVAL: FROM APARTHEID TO DEMOCRACY

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## Abstract

*Since the establishment of democracy in 1994, South African sport has been influenced deeply by socio-political and economic changes. Political transformation and professionalization emerged as elements that define the sporting fraternity. Sport became a vehicle for nation-building. South Africans are encouraged to show patriotism through support for national teams but, at the same time, many township sports clubs are struggling to survive. This article relates the history of Collegians, a Mitchell's Plain-based rugby club, formerly from District Six. It asserts that since its establishment, Collegians experienced two threats of extinction: apartheid, which they survived; and democracy, which brought uncertainty and a sense of insecurity. The research question addressed is, "having survived apartheid, what are the club's future prospects in the face of sport transformation in democratic South Africa?" Semi-structured interviews, newspaper sources and self-reflexivity provided data. Drawing on rugby memory from District Six to re-establish the club in Mitchell's Plain, the present malaise in the club can be ascribed to a combination of factors such as political, economic and structural changes in the rugby fraternity. Recommendations are made concerning the current impasse in the club.*

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**Keywords:** Amateurism; Collegians; District Six; "Kanala dorp"; nation-building; professionalism; rugby; sport; transformation.

**Slutelwoorde:** Amateurisme; Collegians; Distrik Ses; "Kanala dorp"; nasiebou; professionalisme; rugby; sport; transformasie.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Post-apartheid South African society at a national level exhibits a deeply-rooted conviction that sport creates a sense of nationhood. But given the lack of facilities and support for poor communities, sport administrators are challenged not only by historical deprivation and inequalities, but also by the rampant professionalization and commercialization of amateur sport at community/township level. Sports clubs situated in poor township communities cannot easily compete with clubs that reaped the fruits of apartheid. Clubs from privileged communities are usually well provided with facilities such as playing fields and club houses, which were mostly non-existent in townships created under apartheid. Currently, the democratic government focuses mainly on sport as a nation-building vehicle.

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However, the process seems to be “top-down”, instead of promoting sport as a community development strategy from the “bottom-up”. Township sports clubs are still suffering the aftermath of apartheid, while government shows more interest in national sports codes such as rugby, soccer and cricket. The expectation is that these national sports codes will allow their financial successes to trickle down to benefit poorer communities. Local sports clubs, however, struggle to survive and neglect to play their traditional role as community builders, thus rendering the nation-building objective of sport a pipedream.

To substantiate the role of government in sport, a single instance suffices. South African Minister of Sport and Recreation, Mr Fikile Mbalula, made two points in his speech on the occasion of the 2012 South African Sports Awards. He stated that sport makes a contribution to the Gross National Product of the South African economy and that a new netball initiative that involves two million members would be launched. He commented that, “if you got money, buy a franchise”.<sup>2</sup> The minister announced lucrative financial rewards for top-performing athletes; money that could have been used to assist previously disadvantaged communities deprived of the most basic sports facilities and amenities. Collegians Rugby Club, located in Mitchell's Plain but formerly from District Six in Cape Town, is an example of a community club with a history of survival and resilience, but which now faces an undeservedly uncertain future. Given the expectations of a better life for all in the post-1994 era, Collegians is, ironically, facing the threat of annihilation. They lived through the trauma of apartheid and forced removals, but the question now is, “how will the local community club survive in a democratic South Africa?”

The phenomenon of community sports struggling to survive is not unique to South Africa. Well-known rugby clubs in England have similar experiences. The force behind this neglect seems to be economic in nature and driven at a global level. The International Rugby Board in August 1995 sanctioned professionalism in rugby to establish the corporate and commercial future of the sport.<sup>3</sup> New developments in the Rugby Union subsequently altered the game: world-wide competitions such as the Rugby World Cup, the influence of sponsorship, television coverage and payment of players. Rugby seems to have become a commodity; players are its raw material in the production process.<sup>4</sup> Professionalism and commercialism were not confined to the top echelons of rugby, but filtered down

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2 South African Broadcasting Corporation. Broadcast on SABC, SABC TV 1: SA Sports Awards, 4 November 2012.

3 B Hutchins and M Phillips, “Globalization and the Rugby World Cup”. In: T.J.L. Chandler and J. Nauright (eds), *Making the rugby world: Race, gender, commerce* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), p. 157.

4 Cf. Chandler and Nauright (eds).

to club level, which is a core issue addressed in this article. According to Howe<sup>5</sup>, transformation in attitudes of rugby players has been the catalyst for the shift towards a professional game. Howe claims that the failure of the game to embrace professionalism has resulted in the financial ruin of several of the larger clubs in Wales and England.<sup>6</sup> The Welsh club, Pontypridd, has been aware of the impact of changes in the Rugby Union and tried to maintain the balance between amateurism and professionalism. In South Africa, politics contributed to the weakening of clubs. Some of the oldest black rugby clubs disappeared during apartheid, mainly under the pressure of the Group Areas Act and forced removals. Clubs that survived were confronted with professionalism, which is not a sustainable option. For example, after a period of two decades of “professional amateur”<sup>7</sup> rugby, the Villagers Rugby Club, established in 1876, resolved to revert to the amateur game.<sup>8</sup> Due to economic factors, Collegians was compelled to operate on an amateur level but forfeit their reputation as a top-performing club in the Western Province (Green Point track-based) Rugby Union.<sup>9</sup>

Considering the context of club rugby in the Western Cape, the legacy of apartheid continues to benefit historically advantaged clubs. In the absence of a political strategy to redress inequalities, township communities continue to suffer socio-economic deprivation.<sup>10</sup> Historical deprivation, compounded by contemporary neglect, prevents the eradication of social inequalities and blocks the nation-building role that sport is ostensibly playing. Disproportionate investment in sport at national level, as opposed to investment at community level, arguably contributes to perpetuate inequalities of the past. Although the country can claim world-class sporting facilities to compete internationally, township clubs are often deprived of basic amenities.<sup>11</sup> South Africans are yet to experience normal sport in a normal society, the inverse of the anti-apartheid slogan, “no normal sport in an

5 PD Howe, “Professionalism, commercialism and the rugby club: The case of Pontypridd RFC”. In: Chandler and Nauright (eds), p. 165.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Professionalism in sport is used to imply playing sport for money rather than just for fun, which is regarded as amateur sport. Club rugby is supposed to be organized at amateur level, but top performing clubs are paying their players, based on performance. Many clubs are guilty of “buying” players by offering them incentives to join.

8 <<http://www.villagersrugbyclub.com>>, accessed 13 May 2014.

9 During the period of apartheid, the Western Province (Green Point track-based) was an affiliate of the non-racial sports fraternity, South African Council of Sport (SACOS), while the Western Province Newlands-based union represented whites-only rugby. In this article, the use of Western Province Rugby Union refers to the non-racial, mainly “Coloured” formation.

10 P Labuschagne, “The 2010 FIFA World Cup and nation-building in South Africa: Missing the goal post?”, *Commonwealth Youth and Development* 9(1), 2011, pp. 53-68.

11 Bill Nasson, “She preferred living in a cave with Harry the snake-catcher: Towards an oral history of popular leisure and class expression in District Six, Cape Town, 1920s–1950s”. History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, 9-14 February 1987.

abnormal society".<sup>12</sup> The dominant discourse in sport and transformation is more one of representation in national teams and achieving honours in international competition and concomitant economic benefits, than the provision of facilities and opportunities to play sport at community level.

Consequently, the Rugby World Cup (1995), the Cricket World Cup (2003), the FIFA World Cup (2010), the African Cup of Nations (1996, 2013) and the Nelson Mandela Sport and Cultural Day (17 August 2013) have papered over the cracks of a divided and unequal nation. The mega-sized sports stadia built to host the 2010 FIFA World Cup are inaccessible to the majority of South African sports people because they cater mainly for premier events and are too expensive for local clubs to hire.

The South African government spent R27 billion on the 2010 FIFA World Cup.<sup>13</sup> Large amounts of revenue which could otherwise have been spent on local development are now required to maintain these white elephants. An analysis of the FIFA World Cup 2010 shows that its financial impact was not permanent, but rather a ninety-minute spectacle which largely evaporated in the harsh realities of South Africa's political dynamics.<sup>14</sup> It could be described as a national vanity project. Labuschagne argues that for sport to contribute towards nation-building, tangible socio-economic benefits for society must be provided. The national discourse about sport seems to be driven by political interests: at the community level it is about transition from the legacy of apartheid to overcoming even larger challenges presented by the new political dispensation and the impact of professionalization on sport.

This article deals with the history and experiences of the Collegians Rugby Club, which is now based in Mitchell's Plain, Cape Town. The club originated in District Six in the 1950s, but had to relocate because of forced removals during the apartheid era. The author focuses on two separate periods in the club's history: the apartheid era (1950s to 1990s) and the post-1994 democratic period. These two periods are historically different, but inseparable and have a common focus: the club's survival and sustainability. Research sketches the club's resilience on the one hand, and on the other hand, the club's experiences in facing an economically driven environment in democratic South Africa. The first period tells a story of the

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12 This was the SACOS slogan. The formation of the South African Council of Sport (SACOS) in 1973 and the implementation of the double standards policy and the rejection of the permit system, provided a clear distinction between those participating in apartheid sport (i.e. "establishment" sport) and those supporting non-racial sport. See C Roberts, *Sport and transformation* (Cape Town: Township Publishers, 1989), p. 19.

13 Department of Sport and Recreation. *History of sport in the struggle: A human rights' perspective exhibition*, 2013, <[www.srsa.co.org](http://www.srsa.co.org)>, accessed 20 March 2013.

14 *Business Day*, 29 November 2012.

club's successful survival given the traumatic effects of apartheid and the second analyses its endurance to exist in a democratic South Africa.

The author draws on Desai's<sup>15</sup> work on sport and the pace of transformation in "townships". Desai argues that inequality is the consequence of a policy of reform and social reproduction rather than the implementation of transformation initiatives which might have resulted in fundamental change and a greater sense of equality.<sup>16</sup> This argument is complicated by the role of the state that has embraced new policies that impact on the provision of social services and amenities. In the context of sport, a neo-liberal approach was adopted. This means that the role of the state is to create conditions for entrepreneurship that are meant to sustain sport in all its forms at a community level.<sup>17</sup> But sport has come to be regarded as a commodity that is exchangeable in a sports economy. In a sports economy, individual accumulation of wealth takes centre stage and is valorised, even amid impoverished communities with a history of unequal access to resources and opportunities.<sup>18</sup> Rugby is seen to be part of a "global flow" that concerns cultural commodities that move within a market framework.<sup>19</sup>

Professionalism in sport manifests itself differently in different countries. Power struggles have been between the "old boys" administrators/guardians of the game and new entrepreneurs who seek to profit from the game or control it for their own ends.<sup>20</sup> Utterances from the Minister of Sport and Recreation in the opening paragraph of this article highlight the neo-liberal approach to sport in South Africa. The South African state has endorsed global professionalism and commercialism in sport at a national and local level. Yet, it is the support and participation at grassroots level that ensure the success of sport at a global level.

A brief methodological note follows on how different sources provided evidence for the arguments developed in this article. The researcher's role is discussed and a narrative of the club's earlier history and current experiences then follows. The article concludes with a brief summary, reflections on transformation and prospects for the future.

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15 A Desai (ed.), *The race to transformation: Sport in post-apartheid South Africa* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2010).

16 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

17 SM Maistry, "Confronting the neo-liberal brute: Reflections of a higher education middle-level manager", *South African Journal of Higher Education* 26(3), 2012, pp. 515-528.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Hutchins and Phillips, p. 149.

20 Chandler and Nauright (eds), p. xxiv.

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

The interview technique, newspapers, focus-group discussion and self-reflexivity were used to generate data. The interview technique was used largely to obtain information and experiences from past and present members. Oral history has been an important feature of social history in South Africa. An interpretive study aims to understand interviewees' experiences as expressed in their own words.<sup>21</sup> Six semi-structured interviews with influential individuals, a focus-group discussion and one telephonic interview were conducted. Interviews included founding members and senior officials, of whom one gave a telephonic interview. While recognising the socially constructed nature of memory as a valid source of data,<sup>22</sup> multiple interviews were used to validate the accuracy of historical information. Kaden,<sup>23</sup> drawing on Nancy Wood, claims that individual memories can be subsumed by the social milieu in which they operate: together they form collective memory. The early club history is referenced in newspaper clippings until 1976. As an ex-resident of District Six, the researcher's personal experiences, knowledge and memories informed the earlier history of the club.

The author's research position can be described as participant observer. His role oscillates between that of "insider" participant and "outsider" observer. As an initial "insider" he was an active member of the club, but became an "outsider" for the past twenty years, which helped to adopt a researcher's role. The author could differentiate between the "familiar" and the "strange" while conducting the research. The "familiar" was experienced when conducting interviews with the founding members with whom he had common experiences. His "insider" position became useful especially in constructing the early history of the club. The "strangeness" in the research was experienced when interviewing two of the contemporary members who are "new" to the club. Permission to conduct this project was granted at a constituted meeting of the club after explaining the nature of the study and its potential to formulate the plight of the club, government's responsibility for its situation and grounds for compensation or assistance in the future. This is the first comprehensive article on the club's history. Under the rubble and barren land in District Six lies the history of many other clubs and institutions now forgotten. This article is a prototype to excavate the suppressed and unrecorded history of a once-vibrant community. The research recognizes that the history of

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21 EG Guba and YS Lincoln, "Competing paradigms in qualitative research". In: N Denzil and Y Lincoln (eds), *Landscape of qualitative research* (London: Frank Cass, 1998).

22 Rober Kaden, "This will help in healing our land: Remembering and forgetting Quatro in post-apartheid South Africa", *Journal for Contemporary History* 37(1), 2012, pp. 103-104.

23 *Ibid.*

the historically oppressed communities is an integral part of nation-building and transformation towards democracy.

### 3. TRANSFORMING THE CLUB, TRANSFORMING THE NATION: UNEQUAL PLAYING FIELDS

Playing rugby under a new political dispensation raised expectations of better facilities and prospects for the future. In his review of the progress made to “level the playing fields” in post-1994 South Africa, Desai notes that the role of sport could be part of social transformation through fundamentally transforming the way society is structured; a bottom-up, socially integrated approach with an emphasis on “growth through redistribution”.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, a top-down programme of social reform was implemented in South Africa. The benefits of economic growth were meant, as in many capitalist models, to trickle down to the masses.<sup>25</sup> In practice, this policy of hyper-capitalization promotes the creation of a black middle class, a new plutocracy through the instrument of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). In sport, this policy translates into the commercialisation of sport at the highest level with large amounts of money invested in mega-sports events and facilities.<sup>26</sup> At the lower levels, clubs have to promote brands and products of corporate companies; if they are successful enough to attract sponsorship in the first place.

In the post-apartheid period, South Africans expected to be equal citizens, entitled to the same rights, privileges and benefits for all.<sup>27</sup> Given a history of discrimination and oppression, the provision of facilities and resources for historically deprived communities is deemed a national priority. According to Desai,<sup>28</sup> South Africa is presently following the “redistribution through growth” approach which sometimes, in practice, effectively denies the previously disenfranchised majority the fruits of liberation. An implicit framework for the development of sport has been established; administrators and authorities are expected to work towards its fulfilment. Unequal and inferior facilities inherited from the past are no longer regarded as the responsibility of the national sporting authorities. Oregon Hoskins, President of the South African Rugby Union (SARU), was asked about his role as black president of SARU, given the unequal provision of rugby facilities and transformation at community level. Hoskins maintained that SARU was not going to build infrastructure, because it is regarded as the

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24 Desai, p. 2.

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*

27 Republic of South Africa, *The Constitution, Act 108 of 1996*, p. 3.

28 Desai, p. 3.

government's responsibility.<sup>29</sup> It seems that Hoskins and Fikile Mbalula espouse the same mercantilist provisions with respect to transformation in sport.

As a conceptual lens, transformation provides an analytical framework to interpret contemporary experiences of Collegians in the context of sport and transformation. In order to grasp the social history pertaining to Collegians, a brief background of District Six is necessary. Memory of District Six offers a historical framework to this article. The section below conflates a social and historical context of Collegians' experiences.

#### **4. DISTRICT SIX: FROM "KANAALDORP" TO LENTEGEUR (MITCHELL'S PLAIN)**

District Six was situated within walking distance of the Cape Town City central business district. The history of the Collegians Rugby Club cannot be grasped without reference to District Six, its birthplace. The vast majority of Collegians' members and supporters have their family roots in District Six, which was proclaimed a "whites-only" area in 1966. The majority of its 60 000 mixed-race residents were forcibly removed. Among the victims of forced removals were the majority of rugby clubs that constituted the Western Province Rugby Union, which was affiliated to SACOS. Clubs with long histories going back to the late 1800s either dissolved or were substantially weakened. Thousands of uprooted enthusiasts, administrators, players and spectators were lost to the rugby fraternity.

Rugby was the main sport played in District Six. The "spirit" of the place was often tangibly expressed in, and lived through, the social fibre of the clubs. About 200 years ago, Castle Bridge provided access over a number of canals into the legendary Hanover Street which was the bottom entrance to District Six, hence the District's unofficial name, "Kanaaldorp" (Canal Village). The area officially came into existence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>30</sup> Originally a settlement for "free blacks" and emancipated slaves, the area was home to a vibrant community with the majority being "coloured": descendants of the Khoi-Khoi, "free blacks" and settlers. Over a period of time, the area became known as "Kanaladorp" which is derived from a Malay (Muslim) word "kanala" meaning "please".<sup>31</sup> In local parlance, if someone asks for a favour and uses the word "kanala", it invariably signals an appeal for help

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29 A Desai and Z Nabi, "Inside 'the house of pain': A case study of the Jaguars Rugby Club". In: A Desai (ed.), *The race to transformation: Sport in post-apartheid South Africa* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2010).

30 C Soudien, "District Six and its uses in the discussion about non-racialism". In: Erasmus Zmitri (ed.), *Coloured by history, shaped by place: New perspectives on Coloured identities in Cape Town* (Cape Town: HSRS Press, 2001).

31 *Ibid.*



without compensation.<sup>32</sup> The author endorses Soudien's sentiment, that given the dominant ethic of "kanala", District Six's reputation as a place of refuge or a place where help would be found, is inscribed in its very origins.<sup>33</sup> Over a period of time, Collegians attracted many homeless and destitute persons, an expression of the spirit of generosity in the area. "Kanala" has a social justice dimension to it, similar to Ubuntu – I am because you are! A response to "kanala" cannot be negative, as it will deny your human dignity. A person in need must be shown compassion and care – an essential aspect of modern day living so much eroded during times of economic hardship. There is certainly a place for the spirit of "kanala" to be revived today. In Kanala dorp, nobody went hungry at meal times – "etenstyd". Certain homes had an unofficial "open door policy" – whoever is present, must eat! Such was the communally responsible spirit of District Six, tangibly experienced by many rugby players and embodied in the ethos of clubs such as Rosedales that became Collegians.

According to Nasson,<sup>34</sup> District Six was known as an area with an identity and imagery rooted in a sense of socio-cultural community and communality. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the District was a cosmopolitan space where immigrant Jews, Britons and Italians lived "cheek-by-jowl" with the majority of "coloureds" and a trickle of Africans.<sup>35</sup> The area was strewn with churches, mosques and schools, tenements, communal halls, cinemas and a library. Hanover Street was its main artery and business hub. These institutions became the defining markers of District Six's cosmopolitan culture. All this came to an end in the 1970s with the unilateral destruction of homes and institutions. Bulldozers razed District Six to the ground. The only remaining buildings were habitable houses, cottages and flats that were renovated for "white" foreign immigrants, two churches (Moravian and St Marks) and three mosques (Gallilol Ragman, Zinatul Islam and Al-Azar). Over a period of 20 years, rugby enthusiasts were forcibly resettled in Cape Flats townships such as Bridgetown, Hanover Park, Lavender Hill, Lotus River, Gatesville and Langa. In the late 1970s, Mitchell's Plain was unilaterally and unethically "developed". Some of the last residents were moved to Lentegeur, which is one of its many sections. Lentegeur is now the home of former District Six-based clubs such as Collegians and Silvertrees. The history of the oldest club Roslyns, established in 1882, remains no more than an unrecorded memory. What follows below is the formative history of Collegians.

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32 *Ibid.*

33 *Ibid.*

34 Bill Nasson, "The great changing room of colour", *South African Journal of Science*, 1987, p. 7.

35 *Ibid.*

## 5. THE FOUNDING OF COLLEGIANS (ROSENDALES RFC) 1955

Collegians' original name was Rosendales Rugby Football Club (est 1955) and it produced its fair share of legendary players that have been honoured as “forgotten heroes”.<sup>36</sup> Rosendales arose from the cobblestone streets of District Six in the area bound by Constitution Street to the south, Horstley Street to the east, Lewis Street to the west and Hanover Street to the north. At that time, Rosendales, one of the younger clubs in the District, became the new rugby sensation that connected with other clubs in the area through family and friendship ties going back many generations.<sup>37</sup> Rosendales' reached their peak in Western Province Rugby Union (Green Point-based) in 1976. A news reporter crowned that year as the “golden year of Rosendales” and provided the following article which is a free translation from Afrikaans,

“Rosendales was established in 1955 and played in the Gleemore Rugby Union. The club joined the Western Province Rugby Union (Green Point-based) in 1960. In 1964 Rosendales played their first knock-out competition against Walmers, but lost and twelve years later (1976) played the same final and beat Silver Trees 9 – 7. Last Saturday, Stars were beaten 12 – 7 to make Rosendales the winners of the Kagee Moosa trophy. Rosendales began playing rugby as a Sunday club. When they played a curtain-raiser at the old Athlone stadium for a provincial match, the Gleemoor Union was impressed with the quality of rugby and invited them as a club. The first coach of Rosendales was Mr E Bassier. The first chairperson was Ernest Kleinsmith. Mr Afaan Davids was the secretary and Ismail Carr the treasurer. The club suffered its greatest traumatic experience when their star lock forward, Noor Neethling was fatally injured when a scum collapsed against Caledonian Roses in October 1966. This was the first recorded fatality in the Western Province Union since its inception in 1886. Rosendales produced many top WP players, which included the (then) coach and SARU referee Moegsien Davids, Ronnie le Roux, Gasant Levy, Ebrahim Manuel, Yusuf Richards, Brain (Balla) Fredericks and Armien Masoet. Many players were selected for the WP – Union's B-team.”<sup>38</sup>

A strong, competitive spirit existed between the clubs, which were bound together by common geography, cultural affiliation, educational institutions and workplaces. The close-knit community would often be strengthened when a member married a girl “outside” the club or when a girl supporter of a club married an “insider” who would further strengthen existing relations.<sup>39</sup> Other than the personal identity of a person, it was not uncommon to refer to individuals and families by a “rugby identity”. Some family names have often been associated with certain rugby

36 Manie Booley, *Forgotten heroes: History of black rugby 1882–1992* (Cape Town: University of the Witwatersrand, 1998), p. 55.

37 Interview with Junaid Mathews (Nynie), founding member of Rosendales and first organizer of the Junior club, Bridgetown, 14 June 2013.

38 *Rapport*, 10 October 1976.

39 Interview with Noor Carr, player and administrator of Rosendale/Collegians, Grassy Park, 21 June 2013.

clubs. Collegians (Rosendales), for example, had eight brothers (Davids) playing for the club.<sup>40</sup> In another instance, five brothers (Masoet) living in one house, were all playing for different clubs at one time.<sup>41</sup> In this case their choice of club was influenced mainly by friendship ties. At one stage more than ten rugby clubs operated in close proximity of each other, which made rugby an intimate part of District Six families.

The death of Noor Neethling in 1966 left an indelible mark on the club and community. This was many years before the establishment of the Chris Burger Fund (1980) and later the Petro Jackson Memorial Fund (1987). The two funds amalgamated in 1992 to form the “Chris Burger/Petro Jackson Players Fund”. One of the aims of the Fund is to collect monies and distribute those funds to rugby players who had suffered severe rugby-related injuries.<sup>42</sup> In the earlier Rosendales years, a special fund-raising event was organized to benefit the parents of Noor Neethling and express community support and the social value of sport. Gate fee was 20 cents and all players were urged to pay their dues.<sup>43</sup>

Based on the newspaper source,<sup>44</sup> Rosendales joined the Western Province Rugby Union at Green Point Track after playing in the Gleemore Union.<sup>45</sup> According to some founding members, the junior division was the dynamo for the club’s rapid growth. In the brief space of three years, since its establishment in 1955, junior membership grew rapidly from 25 to 139.<sup>46</sup> At that time, Rosendales became one of the few clubs with a youth division. The administration of the club realised that the junior section was to become a vital growth-point. Consequently, more attention and resources were invested in the youth. The club’s major boost came with their participation in a Junior Rag competition against Silvertrees Rugby Club. This event enlarged their membership and popularity, securing a supply of players for a long time to come. Twelve junior teams participated in the Rag competition which involved about 200 players.<sup>47</sup> The surrounding community was in support of the club; most of the players were drawn from the area. Investment of time and resources in the junior division significantly shaped the club’s future. When Collegians became the champion club in the Western Province Rugby Union (before unification) most of the WP players were *bona fide* Rosendales junior

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40 *Ibid.*

41 *Ibid.* The clubs were: Rangers, Hamediahs, Caledonian Roses, Young Stars and Rosendales (now Collegians).

42 Pat Tebbut, *Samaritan of South African Rugby 1980–2010: History of the Chris Burger/Petro Jackson Players Fund* (Grassy Park: Sun Press, 2010), p. 88.

43 *The Cape Argus*, 5 April 1967.

44 Refer footnote 39, *supra*.

45 *Ibid.*

46 Interview with Junain (Nynie) Mathews and Gasant Levy, Bridgetown, 14 June 2013.

47 *Ibid.*

players.<sup>48</sup> Many Collegians players are today third-generation descendants of Rosendales players.

## **6. FORCED REMOVALS TAKING ITS TOLL: FROM ROSENDALES (DISTRICT SIX) TO COLLEGIANS (LENTEGEUR, MITCHELL'S PLAIN)**

As a direct result of forced removals, many clubs faced closure due to diminishing membership and support. The Western Province Rugby Union took the initiative to save some clubs by proposing a “merger” solution. Rosendales had to merge with Silvertrees and in 1977/78 Collegians was formed.<sup>49</sup> The merger lasted for a brief period because Silvertrees decided to break away and re-constitute their old club. Rosendales remained Collegians and went on to become one of the top-performing clubs in the country, producing many Western Province and South African (non-racial SACOS) players.<sup>50</sup> Clubs such as Hamediahs and Watsonians posed some resistance to the merger for historical reasons and survived. Their memory as strong rugby clubs has become part of the almost-forgotten legacy of the once-mighty Western Province Rugby Union.

In 1980 Collegians relocated to Lentegeur in Mitchell's Plain. Members of Collegians reconvened spontaneously.<sup>51</sup> To re-establish the club, members drew on their experiences and invited ex-players to assist them. A new leadership emerged to continue the club's operations.<sup>52</sup> In Lentegeur ordinary members assumed official responsibilities. Coaches for all the teams were supplied from their own ranks. Unlike many clubs that closed down, Collegians survived. As a Mitchell's Plain-based club, Collegians became the pride of SACOS/SARU rugby. The late Noortjie Khan, President of Roslyns and the Western Province Rugby Union became an ardent supporter of Collegians.<sup>53</sup> The days of apartheid were, ironically, the brightest days for Collegians rugby which became synonymous with Western Province Rugby.<sup>54</sup>

At the time of rugby unification in 1994, Collegians were the cream of Western Province rugby (Green Point track-based). The club played entertaining

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48 *Ibid.*

49 Interview with Noori Carr, Grassy Park, 21 June 2013.

50 Players such as the late Yahya Sakier, Cassiem Noordien and Mahdi Jappie, attained national colours. Chris Nickles, Brain (Balla) Fredericks, Ebrahim (Homer) Manual, Faried Theunisen, Neil Davids (late) were regular provincial players.

51 Interview with Cassiem Smith, President of Collegians for more than three decades, Mitchell's Plain, 7 June 2013.

52 *Ibid.*

53 Interview with Noor Carr, Grassy Park, 21 June 2013.

54 Interview with Cassiem Smith, Mitchell's Plain, 7 June 2013.

rugby that brought them the highest honours.<sup>55</sup> With the advent of democracy, a brighter future was anticipated. During the interim period, some of the older members, who had served the club for many decades, died; adversely affecting the club. Consequently the quality of play, discipline and size of the junior division appeared to be in decline.

When rugby “unification” was established in the Western Province, Collegians had to play their way from the bottom to the top division. They began to play in a lower league, yet gradually progressed to the higher division where they competed against and also beat established teams. “For the past twenty years, we had to play seven years in the lower division. Only after seven years we could reach super league status where we played for another seven years. For the past seven years we are again playing in the lower league.”<sup>56</sup> The club has aspirations to return to its former glory, but the democratic period seems to have presented its own challenges. The government and rugby authorities’ reckless recourse to capitalist style professionalisation of the game is its worst enemy.

## **7. TO PAY OR NOT TO PAY – PROFESSIONALISATION OF AMATEUR RUGBY: POST-APARTHEID NIGHTMARE**

The corrosive consequences of professionalising amateur rugby compelled the club to look for sponsorship to cover its running costs. The professionalisation of sport has trickled down to club level, but not in the beneficial sense intended. In practice, “professionalisation” means that players are contracted to play amateur competition yet gain financial compensation for doing so. This was an uncalculated consequence of professional rugby at national and international level. Talented players became a sought-after commodity at all levels of play. Professionalisation has spoilt the game; for many, rugby seems to have lost its traditional attraction as a form of entertainment, leisure and community life. There is, for instance, little incentive to play rugby as an ordinary player. Recently, SARU instituted the Community Cup, which is a national club competition to re-ignite interest in club rugby.<sup>57</sup> Andy Capostagno reviews the role of the Community Cup rugby competition, which he claims is for the cast-offs who play in a competition that offers no future for its players.<sup>58</sup> Club rugby has become the playing ground for the “has beens” who failed to make it as sponsored professionals in the national teams.

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55 *Ibid.*

56 Interview with Abu Bakr Ariefdien, Mitchell’s Plain, 15 April 2014.

57 “SARU” refers to the present day South African Rugby Union which controls rugby in the country. It should not be confused with the old SARU which was the SACOS affiliated rugby body. The latter’s counterpart during apartheid was the South African Rugby Board (SARB). They merged to form the new SARU.

58 *Mail & Guardian*, 25 May 2014.

“Like it or not, club rugby is no longer a breeding ground for first class rugby. These days, if you haven't cracked a provincial contract by the age of 21, you are almost certainly never going to make it. Province contract players straight from school and the clubs get the castoffs.”<sup>59</sup>

Rugby clubs in poor, working-class communities are often boosted with teams playing in the Western Province Super League, a competition where amateur players are playing rugby for money. Collegians must cope with inferior facilities, which have improved minimally, but are still far inferior to clubs in previously declared “white areas”. A member lamented,

“We had a barren piece of land. Our practice ground was an open public space. I remember our first game against Correctional Services. When they came to play against us they turned at the gates because we had no dressing room facilities and they refused to play against us. That was a first-hand experience for me. We had to play against the enemies and when we went to travel to their grounds we looked like intruders – we went as activists and they saw us as the enemy.”<sup>60</sup>

The club consistently resisted to pay players. Payment to play went against the cultural grain of the club. Ironically, the lyrics of their “war cry”, which they chanted for many decades, win or lose, reaffirmed amateurism as their rationale for playing rugby, “*As ons wen of ons verloor, maak dit g'n saak by ons, want ons speel net vir plesier, ja ons speel net vir plesier*” (Translated: Win or lose does not matter to us, because we only play for the pleasure of the game, we only play for the pleasure of the game).<sup>61</sup> Soon, increased professionalisation took its toll on this community-based club. The hard work of entering the Super League A was short-lived; some key players were lured to other clubs that offered financial compensation. The club gradually became no more than a feeder for established clubs, thus losing most of its home-grown talent and community ethos. Traditional loyalty of players was challenged by incentives offered to talented players. Located in a working-class community, Collegians lacked the financial means to offer or match financial lures. Poor facilities and travelling costs posed major problems for the club and players. Fortunately, Collegians was able to put its reputation to good use when it reached out to the business sector for financial assistance to sustain the day-to-day running of the club. The club's historical record provided them with a credible profile to impress certain sponsors.

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59 *Ibid.*

60 Interview with Amien Brink, Mitchell's Plain, 14 April 2014.

61 Interview with Junain Mathews, 21 June 2013. In 1965 Junaid (Nynie) Mathews composed the lyrics of the tune of *Gaudeamus Igitur*.

## 8. RICH CLUB, POOR CLUB: COLLEGIANS TO “ALWAYS COLLEGIANS”

With the acquisition of the first sponsorship, the club’s amateur status shifted slightly towards a corporate identity. The club negotiated a modest sponsorship (R15 000 p.a) with a confectionery company. The sponsorship lasted for two seasons. Subsequently they were offered a sponsorship of R150 000 by an investment company, but this bore little fruit.<sup>62</sup> The management of Collegians resented demands for regular reports by the sponsor outside the initial agreement and this eventually led to conflict and termination of the sponsorship. The club did not see any tangible benefits from this relation.<sup>63</sup>

A second investment company offered a substantially higher annual sponsorship.<sup>64</sup> The club was proud of their new-found “corporate identity”. There was mutual benefit in the name change – from Collegians to “Always Collegians” (pseudonym). This sponsorship provided a sense of financial security although conflicting views were expressed as to its actual value to the club. Despite the sponsorship’s annual pledge of a substantial amount, the club was never free from financial constraints. Control of funds remains largely with the sponsor. Concern and unhappiness amongst some members have been expressed about power relations between the sponsor and the club. The new sponsor was less demanding than the previous one. The club was expected only to do, “their best on the field, as long as they displayed the company’s logo”.<sup>65</sup> Unhappiness set in when payment for new track-suits was not forthcoming. An alternative funder was found, which strained relations with some members. “We were treated like beggars when we needed money”,<sup>66</sup> said one of the ex-officials who subsequently resigned from the club’s administration. Funds from sponsorship were not deposited as a lump sum, but invoices had to be submitted for payment. The sponsor, on an occasion, had to provide legal costs when the club was forced to defend itself in a court case which might have compromised the club’s independence.

Financial challenges were not the only problems faced by Collegians. One of the interviewees expressed the following sentiments about the club’s future,

“The club survives on the ‘old glory’ of the past. The youth needs to make a mental shift. They need to become loyal to the club. There is a need for a change from the old guard with regard to control and ownership. The juniors perform poorly because of poor coaching and training structures. Old-style approaches are not working in this time of advanced technological and scientific approaches to fitness and training. Some hard decisions need

62 Interview with Cassiem Smith, Mitchell’s Plain, 7 June 2013.

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*

65 *Ibid.*

66 Interview with Erefaan Smith, Athlone, 4 January 2013.

to be taken with regard to the future if the club is to play top rugby. There is enough talent, but they need to be developed and moulded into loyal club members. There needs to be a holistic approach to rugby, not only for the sake of sport, but as a vehicle to personal and community development.<sup>67</sup>

The above statement identified lack of technical rugby knowledge required to play top rugby as a shortcoming for Collegians. According to the above quotation, the club lacks progressive training practices, modern administrative structures and openness in terms of policy and direction. There seems to be dissatisfaction about long-serving administrators who stuck to the old ways while the club from time-to-time attracts new members capable of serving, but unable to introduce new ideas. With the fiftieth commemoration of the formation of Rosendales in 2005, an enthusiastic group of ex-players and supporters established the “Rosendales-Collegians Development Fund” with the purpose of supporting and renewing interest in Collegians.<sup>68</sup> This event presented the club with an opportunity to recruit new administrators, but nothing tangible came of it.<sup>69</sup>

Collegians resisted payment of players, but were compelled to seek financial assistance to fund the day-to-day running of the club. Township-based clubs struggle to provide sport and funding that should have been invested in the development of the youth, but is used instead to pay for contracted talent. There is not sufficient public protestation about professional amateur rugby. Villagers, a historically “white”, privileged club decided to re-embrace its amateur spirit, because professionalism seemed to be unsustainable. Villagers Rugby Club announced their decision to do away with payment for players and to play rugby for the “right reasons”.<sup>70</sup> Villagers Rugby Club rewards their players and spectators with abundant appreciation and offers them the status of association with one of the oldest clubs in the country. This club produced 58 Springboks and 175 Western Province players since 1876; and that through the amateur code. The author had a discussion with Villagers officials in June 2014 and the general feeling among members was that the club is finding its feet as an amateur club which survives without paying their players.

Collegians' experiences do not convey a smooth, beneficial transition from apartheid to democracy. On the contrary, the club lost players due to poaching or travel costs that players had to incur. The club has no attractive facilities or club house and cannot offer an improved quality of service or entertainment to its players and spectators. There is a need to develop an appropriate approach to deal with issues of loyalty, leadership, a needy junior division and lack of technical

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67 Telephonic interview with Shiraaj Gabriels, a Collegians Club official, 2 January 2013.

68 Interview with Noor Carr, Grassy Park, 14 April 2013.

69 *Ibid.*

70 Villagers website, <<http://www.villager.fc.co.za>>, accessed 16 August 2013.



knowledge and support. The club is facing an ambiguous future when it expected and justly deserved security in every sense. It has to take tough decisions. The question remains whether its members will demonstrate the spirit of resilience to meet these issues head-on and find the way forward.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The present state of affairs of the club can be attributed to a combination of factors. Memory of the early history of the club assisted in re-establishing the club. Memory served a positive purpose, but it militated against progressive changes required during transformational times. Lack of grassroots support from government and rugby authorities leave community clubs to survive on their own. Initially it was the club's performance and success on and off the field that contributed to its popularity and its determination to survive.

During the post-1994 period the legacy of apartheid, as well as political and economic factors, posed major obstacles. Rugby at community level has not seen the benefits of a policy of "distribution through growth". Instead, professionalisation at the higher levels has infiltrated the game at club level and reshaped community rugby into a "semi-professional-semi-amateur" format. Home-grown talent is constantly offered financial incentives elsewhere. Competing in a "professional-amateur" league requires dynamic leadership to navigate the ever-changing sporting environment which Collegians have been resisting. The consequences of Villagers' amateurism offer some resistance to professionalism, but whether playing rugby "for the right reason" will be triumphant, remains to be seen. Clubs located in poor communities, such as in sections of Bellville, the Cape Flats area and the Helderberg region, are spending large amounts of money on paying their players, instead of developing the sport and its communal ethic. Some of these clubs do not have suitable playing facilities. Some players are not even properly attired on the field of play, but contracted members are on the pay roll. It seems that economic interests overshadow the primary purpose of amateur rugby by even depriving players and spectators from enjoying decent facilities and conditions of play.

The destabilizing impact of neoliberalism in the form of professionalism and poor government support for local sport exposes the club's vulnerability to the harsh realities of the post-apartheid period. The mediocre performance of Collegians, despite corporate support, illustrates how communities become potential "playing fields" in the hands of business. For sport to contribute to a better sense of citizenship, its traditional value should be recognised. A realistic trajectory should be pursued to engender confidence in the future. A reversal of the top-down approach in favour of a bottom-up approach to nation-building should provide the

broad framework towards sustainable change and transformation. By realising the potential of its membership and by converting potential capital lost to capital gains, a new agentic role could emerge to challenge rampant professionalisation of sport with all its debilitating effects, especially on poor communities. If Collegians could survive apartheid against all odds, why should democracy not “kanala”<sup>71</sup> engender hope for a better future?

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71 “Kanala” means “please”, but has a deeper socio-linguistic meaning. Refer to pp. 151-152, *supra*, for clarification.