

THE ROLE OF SPORT IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA - NATION-BUILDING OR NATIONALISATION?

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1. INTRODUCTION

The potential of sport as a nation-builder in a divided and fragmented society has been the topic and focus of many scholars (Cronin and Mayall 1998, Hargreaves 1986, Jarvie 1994). Since the formation of national sport federations, such as the International Olympic Committee, and the laying of the foundation of international sport, scholars have widely accepted that sport will be inseparable from nationalism and a powerful tool in the hands of politicians (Chandler 1999:138).

In the past politicians have interfered in sport for a variety of reasons and this will also be the case in future. This is a reality of the nature of politics and for this reason the pledge by many politicians and sport people alike, that politics should be kept out of sport, is unrealistic. Much more realistic is the utterance by Lord Killanin, the former president of the International Olympic Committee, who once said that it is impossible to keep politics out of sport and that the energy of sport administrators should rather be spent to keep the political content of sport at a manageable and controllable level (Killanin and Rodda 1979:115).

However, as Houlihan (1997:61) indicates, sport was only of a marginal interest to most governments in the 1950s or early 1960s. During this era governmental intervention was generally a reaction to specific problems, such as military requirements, where sport was used to improve the military preparedness of the state.

While each country has its own distinctive pattern for intervention in sport there is a considerable commonality of motive. The survey by Houlihan (1997) indicates that governments view sport almost exclusively in instrumental terms, as a convenient and malleable means towards some policy objective.

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Various reasons exist in the modern era why politicians use sport as an instrument to further their own purposes, for example, to improve the international prestige of their countries and also as a diplomatic resource (Riordan 1993). To a large extent politicians also use sport for social integration and in the process of nation-building. Houlihan (1997:63) cites the recent example of the French government in the 1980s, that turned to sport and other forms of leisure as a way of confronting the serious risk of social problems resulting from social tension in the cities.

2. SPORT, NATIONALISM AND NATION-BUILDING

Jackson and Jackson (1997:36) define nationalism as a shared sense of loyalty, a psychological attachment and a collective identification within a nation. These attributes are very powerful emotional and psychological building blocks in a process of nation-building. In this regard sport is a very powerful mechanism to evoke such feelings and has been used in the past to great effect to unite ethnic diversity in society.

The most recent example of this phenomenon is in Fiji, where the divisions in society between the Indian and Fijian population were overcome through the means of sport. Pio Bosco Tikoisuvo, the chief executive officer of the Fiji Rugby Union, claimed that Fijian Rugby is binding the native Polynesians and the Indians together in one nation (**Die Beeld**:2003).

In South Africa sport has also played an important role in society, firstly to divide society during the apartheid years and then, after 1990, to unite people. It has therefore been accepted beforehand that after the first democratic election, the post-1994 government and civil society would both be challenged in their efforts to unite the ethnic diversity in South Africa. During the initial process of nation-building sport did play a major role, as evidenced by the wave of nationalism that swept through the country following the successes of the 1995 Rugby World Cup and the Africa Cup of Nations.

The media played a major role with expressions such as 'how we are going to fare' and 'how we have done'. When a gold medal or a major competition was won, sport transcended from a separate reality to a general one, which achieved the status of national news. In the process the ceremonial rituals played an important role in advertising the arrival of the 'new state' in the international community. During these occasions new national symbols, flags and the anthem were displayed. The participation of élite statesmen and politicians in the victory ceremonies were also very important in highlighting the potential that sport offers as a nation-builder. This signalled symbolic messages of nation unity or nation-building which for the

first time invoked powerful feelings of identity in South Africa (Hargreaves 1986:155).

3. NATION-BUILDING OR NATIONALISING SOCIETY?

As Jackson and Jackson (1997:35) indicate, a nation, as opposed to a state, is a cultural entity. A nation is not necessarily the same as the citizenry of a state, nor is it restricted to those who possess a common language, ancestry or cultural heritage, although these components are usually involved. It is essentially subjective, a sense of social belonging and ultimate loyalty amongst a group or groups of people.

The nation state is a form of political organisation and a political ideal, bound together by the overlapping bonds of citizenship and loyalty. This ideal type is reflected in Mazzini's goal: every nation is a state, only one state for the entire nation. For liberals and most socialists the nation state is largely fashioned out of civic loyalties and allegiances. For conservatives and integral nationalists it is based on ethnic and organic unity (Heywood 2002:121).

Subjectiveness, social belonging and loyalty are very important in the nation-building phase. Nation-building is a process whereby a collectivity of people become politically conscious and mobilised, often have a clear sense of territory, and aspire to self-government or independent statehood (Jackson and Jackson 1997:35).

In South Africa the process of nation-building is understandably a very complex one because of its past history. Nation-building is a sensitive process that requires a building process over decades and centuries to unite divisions in society and to develop social belonging and loyalty to one country. Understandably this extremely lengthy process cannot be forced through nationalisation, which is a process of steam-rolling in which minorities are of lesser importance.

Roger Brubaker equates team selections by enforced assimilation with the process in post-communist Europe where minorities were subjected to the customs and values of the majority regime. He points out that most of the new states (in post-communist Europe) will be nationalising states to some degree and in some form (Brubaker 1996:433). It is important to understand that Brubaker attaches a different meaning to nationalising states as that which is generally understood. This will be explained in a subsequent section of the article.

Brubaker (1998:277) believes that post-communist Europe will undertake *political action to remedy the national legacies inherited from the communist era*.

In his useful contribution to the present knowledge on nation-building and the nationalisation of states, Brubaker (1994-1996) outlined the major difference between nation-building and nationalising states in a number of publications.

One of the central themes in Brubaker's exposition (1996) on nation-building is the notion of dividing states into three types, namely civic, nationalising and bi-ethnic.

- Civic states. In these states ethnicity is not a factor because of its ethno-cultural nature and because the state is defined in terms of liberal democratic individual rights. The controversial aspect of this viewpoint is that not all civic states have ethno-cultural cores.
- Nationalising states. This concept of Brubaker was broadened by Linz and Stepan defining nationalising as states where élites attempt to homogenise the multicultural nature through a process of nationalisation.
- Bi-ethnic or multinational states.. These states comprise of two or more ethno-cultural core nations. Here ethnicity plays an important role in state policies, but to accommodate the pluralistic nature through a process of nation-building and not in terms of nationalising policies.

In addition to Brubaker, Linz and Stepan define 'nationalising' policies as follows:

- Restrictions are placed on the non-official (state) languages in civil society education and the mass media.
- Citizenship laws are exclusive, leading to the over-domination of the titular nation in political office.
- Members of the non-titular nation are gradually forced out of the state bureaucracy due to the extended usage of the official language.
- Ethnic factors are influential in the economy.
- The legal system favours the customs, practices and institutions of the titular nation.

In other words, the majority group is favoured and the minority groups are forced into the larger community by a process of forced nationalisation.

Linz and Stepan believe that nationalising policies will harm democratic consolidation and the process of nation-building. A state is implicitly defined as non-nationalising if it adopts multi-cultural policies which is the opposite of nationalising. From a multi-cultural approach strategies such as nation-building through sport could be adopted. According to Brubaker (1996:433) nationalising countries that adopt nationalising policies are following in the footsteps of interwar Central-Eastern Europe.

4. SPORT POLICIES IN SOUTH AFRICA - NATION-BUILDING OR NATIONALISATION? SPORT AS A NATION-BUILDER DURING THE POST-1994 ERA

During the early afternoon of 24 June 1995 the changing room doors of the Ellis Park Stadium suddenly opened without warning. Moments earlier the Springbok players in the changing-room, awaiting the Rugby World Cup final against the mighty All Blacks, had been shaken by the almighty roar of the South African Airlines Boeing 747 that performed an astounding flypast barely 120 metres above the roof of the stadium (Griffiths 1996:103).

The interruption this time was a more welcome one, because it was President Mandela, newly elected leader of a new democratic South Africa. Mandela, resplendent in a No. 6 Springbok jersey, walked briskly to the Springbok captain, Francois Pienaar, to assure him that the entire country was behind the team.

At that moment, and indeed for the first time, South Africa's fragmented society, so deeply divided by years of civil strife, was united as a nation. Just more than an hour and a half later the Springbok victory spilled over the walls of Ellis Park Stadium into the streets of Johannesburg and into every town, village and the rural areas of South Africa. The slogan of 'One Team, One Country', used by the team, reflected the moment (Griffiths 1996:103).

A nameless prisoner in Zonderwater prison was cited by Griffiths (1996:145) who referred to the unashamed emotion in the prison after the Springbok victory and the camaraderie between the inmates and wardens, which was as never witnessed before: "We were united."

The strong feeling of togetherness and being a nation spilled over as a driving force to other sport codes as well. Bafana Bafana followed with a victory in the African Cup of Nations. At the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta it was time for the South Africans to rejoice again, when Joshua Thwugane was triumphant in the marathon. No one doubted the emotional impact of sport as a nation-builder in the week(s) following the World Cup.

The late Steve Tshwete, who was then the Minister of Sport, exclaimed: "When we won the Rugby World Cup in 1995, never once in the history of our country, never for a single moment before were the people so solidly united. Never!" (**Mail and Guardian**:1997).

The recollections of the triumph of the 1995 World Cup and the aftermath, when for the first time a shared loyalty existed in South African society, are still relatively fresh in the minds of most people. The question is what happened since then and how effective, on the longer term, sport is as a nation-builder in South Africa.

Only two years after the World Cup victory, in October 1997, Tswete moved to the opposite extreme when he stated: "When the Springboks arrive (in Edinburgh Scotland) in November, I can tell you that there is going to be jubilation at home every time they lose, make no mistake about that. We have lost the moment. It is sad" (**Mail and Guardian**:1997).

The two above-mentioned examples are typical of two extreme positions on the role that sport as a nation-builder fulfil in a divided society. This equates with Jarvie (1994:115) that sport is nothing more than a 'ninety minute patriotism'.

In the light of the shifting perceptions on sport as a nation-builder, it will be worthwhile to look at sport and its potential as a nation-builder in post-apartheid South Africa.

There are clear signs in South Africa of a growing discontent with the process of transformation of sport. The one view is that the highly controversial system of sport quotas is undermining the nation-building capacity of sport and that it is also detrimental to the ability of teams to compete successfully at international level.

The opposite view, articulated inter alia by Pres. Mbeki, is that the representativeness of South African teams is more important than victories and that transformation should be speeded up. This statement signalled more drastic changes in the sport policy and shortly after this view had been expressed, the Minister of Sport, Ncondo Balfour, announced his intentions to evoke legislation to enforce sport codes to transform more quickly.

This proposal by the minister is a drastic form of social engineering in sport that will surpass the impact that sport quotas had on the potential of sport as nation-builder. This very controversial and drastic step will seriously undermine the autonomy of sport and its ability as nation-builder to bridge gaps between groups in society. The possibility exists that society will become more fragmented as a result of the effect of the bulldozing tactics of nationalisation. Political intervention will again, as during the apartheid years, reach unacceptable and uncontrollable high levels. If this happens, sport will in the future again be just a manipulating instrument in the hands of the ruling regime.

In post-apartheid South Africa three definite consecutive patterns in its sport policies are identifiable:

- (1) Initially, during the period 1990-1995, the policy in sport was to unite the different sport codes in one regulatory administrative unit. Sport codes enjoyed a high level of autonomy, but limited expectations were stipulated that teams must be more representative of the broader society.
- (2) Secondly, around 1995-2003, a growing discontent with the process of transformation in sport was visible. This led to the formal and informal introduction of sport quotas, which created a certain amount of controversy and friction, but did not completely frustrate the potential of sport as a nation-builder.
- (3) Currently, the policy process is being taken to a new height of controversy by the Minister of Sport, Ncondo Balfour, with the announcement of his intentions to institutionalise legislation to coerce sport federations to make their teams more representative of the demographics of society (**Die Beeld**:2002). In fact, this could criminalise non-compliance with the proposed legislation.

The third pattern, the institutionalisation of sport quotas by means of legislation, will have serious consequences for sport as a potential nation-builder. It represents a drastic turnaround from a basic multi-cultural approach to sport as in (1) above to (3) which is a strategy that aims to nationalise states. This is part of a more comprehensive process, where ruling élites of majority groups attempt to homogenise the multi-cultural nature of sport.

The question that needs to be answered is whether step (3) ... *is a process of nation-building or a drastic form of forcing nationalisation on minority groups in South African society?*

Sport has been always part of the cultural, social and political expression of different, sometimes opposing, groups in South Africa. Sport is not a general blanket phenomenon in society, sport is group-based, a cultural and social expression of a specific group. It is not the intention to argue this phenomenon, this was done in various publications locally (Grundling 1995, Booley 1998) and internationally (Nauright 1999). The focus of the article is rather to explain the nature of the policy process that is taking place and the possible consequences for nation-building in South Africa.

With reference to the basic assumptions of Brubaker, Stepan and Linz, the question that needs to be clarified is whether South Africa's sport policies have crossed the threshold from nation-building through sport to the nationalisation of sport by the dominant élites to promote their own values. Furthermore, to which degree or level of nationalisation will South Africa conform as a nationalising state, as prescribed by Brubaker?

In essence sport quotas, just like its big brother affirmative action policy, are aimed at rectifying past injustices. This was the first challenge that faced the new controlling bodies in South African sport. Sport had to be made accessible to everybody, to bridge the gap in terms of inequalities and in general to level the playing fields. This was a daunting task, because of South Africa's past history of separate codes for different ethnic groups.

However, the nature and the use of a quota system is to go beyond a position of just levelling the playing fields. It is in essence giving someone preferential treatment, because of earlier discriminating practices against people of colour. In the process it is going to impact negatively on someone, because of his or her skin colour. Furthermore, a quota system will have wider ramifications in the broader society, because it transmits a signal into society which perpetuates and strengthens underlying negative preconceptions about the nature of transformation in South Africa.

Are quotas in sport just growing pains in a nation busy with transformation as Oppelt (**Sunday Times**:2002) suggests? In Oppelt's view the argument that black players will never know if they are really the best, if they are quota players in the team, is flawed. She argues that white players also never had to face challenges from players of colour, when nation squads were selected in the past.

The counter argument is that if sport divided people, rather than united them for that reason, sport should then learn from past examples and fulfil a more meaningful role in society. Judged on its past history and the provided examples, it is fairly safe to say that sport quotas contributed very little to the role sport really could play as a nation-builder.

Oppelt's argument may be true, but the problem is that the perception of unequal treatment is not going away and it impacts negatively on players individually and the nation collectively. So-called merit black and coloured players are also complaining, because the lingering perception is created that they fill their positions only because of their skin colour. Conrad Jantjes, former Springbok fullback, said

that he had to prove himself over and over again. Building team spirit and unifying the supporters of teams in such a manner remain a problem.

For example in cricket a quota system is in place, although officially it has been abandoned. When the South African team left for Australia at the end of 2001, the team management was told in no uncertain terms that Makaya Ntini, because of transformation reasons, had to play. Ntini, a top fast medium bowler in his own right, is a black player who made the team on merit, but at that time was really out of form. The Aussies targeted him and it took him a long time to rebuild his confidence.

On the morning of the third test, the white opening batsmen, Jacques Rudolph, with a season's average of more than 100 runs, was told by the United Cricket Board president, Percy Son, to vacate his position in the team. Rudolph was to be replaced by a coloured player, Justin Ontong, with an average of 30 runs. According to the coach, Graham Ford (**Sports Illustrated**:2002), the team afterwards went silent in the dressing-room. The negativity in cricket as a result of this incident still lingers almost two years after the incident.

The argument that black and coloured players never had any chance in the height of the apartheid years, is a valid one. Furthermore, past differences stand to be corrected by present policies. But impulsive and not well-thought-through decisions will impact negatively on the average supporter and alienate the ability of sport to heal old wounds and to bridge gaps between ethnic groups in a nation-building exercise.

The former coloured winger of the triumphant Springbok team who won the world cup in 1995, Chester Williams, delivered a bombshell in his biography which was published recently. Williams made revelations of racism and a split between white and coloured players in the South African national team. This claim was backed up by many former coloured team-mates such as Conrad Jantjes.

It is obvious that the interference by government indirectly by insisting on sport quotas will be an inhibiting factor on sport to fulfil its role as nation-builder. However, the proposed legislation by the Minister of Sport to speed up the process of transformation with legislation, will cross the threshold where sport is no longer part of a process of nation-building, but of nationalisation.

5. CONCLUSION: SPORT IN SOUTH AFRICA: QUO VADIS?

It seems that there is much truth in the argument that the impact of sport on nation-building is not permanent and not necessarily a force for the good, if you apply it currently to the situation in South Africa. This concurs with the argument by Jarvie (1994:115) that nationalism associated with sport is a 'ninety minute patriotism'.

With the South African experience in mind, the question is whether events in South Africa support such an argument. Is this a realisation and a natural backlash of the fact that the value of sport as a nation-builder is to a large extent overvalued and superficial? Is it comprehensible that the emotional national feelings that sport evokes sometimes surpasses the political realities of a country? However, the trickle down effect of the togetherness of sport can go a long way to unite people.

It is evident that the value of sport as a nation-builder is limited in scope and clearly will be undermined further by manipulating political agendas, such as the policies envisaged by the Minister. It is a fact that sport is largely defenceless in the face of political interference and a political agenda. The two positions on sport in South Africa are poles apart and so divided that the road to reconciliation is indeed a rocky path. The stark truth is that after almost a decade very little progress has been made in the healing process in sport and the role that sport can play in building a unified nation. The Springbok media director, Mark Keohane, puts it bluntly: "The majority of coaches and selectors (in rugby) come from a conservative background in South Africa and the thing that struck me the most in the past two years working for SARFU is that racism is prevalent and inherent" (**Mail and Guardian:2002**). These are the words of the media director who is supposed to be SARFU's spin doctor.

A change has definitely occurred in the regime's thinking about sport. It is clear that transformation in sport as a flagship for society has been put on a fast track. Nation-building in sport is clearly no longer a priority in government circles. An interesting study was done by Prof. Johan Visser of UNISA (**Rapport:2002**) on the aspect of nation-building and sport in South Africa. He came to the conclusions that sport, as a nation-building mechanism, is on the decline in South Africa. Visser explained that during the first World Cup in 1995 sport was very effectively used by both the media and by former State President Nelson Mandela for nation-building purposes. In his investigation Visser identified themes on sport which were reported in the media and found that national unity, nationhood and nation-building were the top themes of 1995. In contrast during 1999, also a Rugby World Cup year, the State President, Thabo Mbeki, did little to reach out to sport in general and to use it as a

mechanism for nationhood. Subsequently national unity, as a theme in the newspapers, dropped from first place in 1995 to fourth in 1999.

If the collective effect of sport quotas was that the nation-building potential of sport was seriously undermined, then nationalisation of sport will deliver the death blow. Pres Mbeki's statement during 2002 that ethnic transformation in sport is more important than merit, and the proposed nationalisation policies by the Minister of Sport, will hit at the very heart of sport. This indicates the difference between sport as a nation-builder, and as part of a superfluous process.

With the advantage of hindsight it is obvious that the magic colours of the Rainbow Nation in sport faded soon after the jubilation of 'togetherness' brought about by the famous Springbok victory. This undoubtedly reinforces the existing notion that the value of sport to create a national identity is a temporary phenomenon: nothing more than a 'ninety minute patriotism'.

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