

SPORT & NATION



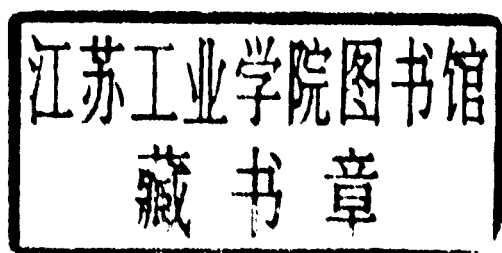
# Sport, Cultures and Identities in South Africa



JOHN NAURIGHT

# **SPORT, CULTURES AND IDENTITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

JOHN NAURIGHT



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## **Sport and Nation**

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Books in this series concentrate on individual countries or, where appropriate, groups of countries, and focus on the historical, sociological and political aspects of sport. They consider issues of class, gender, ethnicity and globalization in the context of attempts to define national identity through sport, and cover both theoretical issues and case studies.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABM	American Board Mission
ADC	Aide-de-camp
ANC	African National Congress
AWB	Afrikaner Resistance Movement
BMSC	Bantu Men's Social Centre
BSC	Bantu Sports Club
CABTA	Citizens' All Black Tour Association
CSRU	City and Suburban Rugby Union
DDAFA	Durban and District African Football Association
DSR	Department of Sport and Recreation
FA	Football Association
FAK	Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings
FASA	Football Association of South Africa
FIFA	Federation of International Football Associations
FNB	First National Bank
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GWCRFU	Griqualand West Colonial Rugby Football Union
IAAF	International Amateur Athletic Federation
ICC	Imperial (later International) Cricket Council
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union
IOC	International Olympic Committee
IRB	International Rugby Board
JAFA	Johannesburg African Football Association
JBFA	Johannesburg Bantu Football Association
JCC	Johannesburg City Council
MCC	Marylebone Cricket Club
NEAD	Johannesburg Non-European Affairs Department
NGK	Dutch Reformed Church
NNFA	Natal Native Football Association
NOCSA	National Olympic Committee of South Africa
NP	National Party
NSC	National Sports Congress/National Sports Council

NPSL	National Professional Soccer League
NSL	National Soccer League
NZRFU	New Zealand Rugby Football Union
PAC	Pan African Congress
PFP	Progressive Federal Party
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RWC	Rugby World Cup
SAACB	South African African Cricket Board
SAAFA	South African African Football Association
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SACA	South African Cricket Association
SACB	South African Cricket Board
SACBOC	South African Cricket Board of Control
SACCB	South African Coloured Cricket Board
SACOS	South African Council of Sport
SACRFB	South African Coloured Rugby Football Board
SACU	South African Cricket Union
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SANROC	South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee
SAOCGA	South African Olympic Commonwealth Games Association
SAONGA	South African Olympic and National Games Association
SANZAR	South Africa New Zealand Australian Rugby
SARB	South African Rugby Board
SARFU	South African Rugby Football Union
SARU	South African Rugby Union
SASA	South African Sports Association
SASF	South African Soccer Federation
SASF-PL	South African Soccer Federation Professional League
SCSA	Supreme Council for Sport in Africa
TRFU	Transvaal Rugby Football Union
UCBSA	United Cricket Board of South Africa
UDF	United Democratic Front
WDNFA	Witwatersrand District Native Football Association
WPCC	Western Province Cricket Club
WPCRU	Western Province Coloured Rugby Union



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# INTRODUCTION

To my mind only a fool would pretend to understand comprehensively what South Africa is really about, or be objective and far sighted enough to glimpse its future course.

Breyten Breytenbach, *Return to Paradise* (1993): xviii.

As famous South African author Breyten Breytenbach suggests, South Africa is perhaps one of the most complex of modern nations and made up of so many competing cultures, identities and ideologies that close analysis is always fraught with danger. Any study will be criticized from some angle as not being inclusive enough of this or that group or issue, in particular sport and its role in identity-formation in South Africa is also a difficult topic to understand. Many believe that South Africa is a sports mad nation and few will not have heard about the boycott movements, and its segregated sports system during apartheid. A number of writers have observed that sport, along with *braais* (barbeques) and sun bathing are the main cultural activities of white South Africans. Nelson Mandela and the ANC-led government view sport as one of the key areas of reconciliation in the 'New South Africa', and as perhaps the best cultural activity through which to promote or generate a new national identity. Millions of people around the world saw Mandela in a Springbok rugby jersey as he supported South Africa in the 1995 Rugby World Cup Final in Johannesburg. While these images had contradictory meanings, given the role of Springbok rugby as a racially based sport in the old South Africa, it is clear that the change from apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa has not affected, and may even have enhanced, the significant public role that sport plays in South African society.

This book is an attempt to explain and understand the various meanings that sport, and in particular team sport, has had in the diverse communities that comprise present day South Africa. A particular concern of this book is the role that sport played in shaping group and 'national' identities. For different groups and at different times, the same sport has had numerous meanings depending on the social positioning of particular individuals, and

has played an important role in popular culture for a long time. Sport has served to both unify and divide groups, it has been closely interwoven with the broader fabric of South African society and has been at the forefront of social and political change. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, sport moved ahead of negotiations between political parties, creating unity and eliminating the vestiges of apartheid. Despite that, it remained firmly entrenched within power structures generated by the 'old' South Africa and ideologies developed out of the British imperial sporting inheritance.

In 1997, whites remained the majority in the administration of rugby, cricket and netball, while blacks controlled many similar positions in soccer and the National Olympic Committee of South Africa. Even though there have been changes in the make-up of top sporting officials, and a new government dominated by the former banned opposition, the discourses surrounding elite level sports remain similar to those of the segregation and apartheid eras, but cloaked in non-racial language and under the guise of promoting a new national unity.

International elite sporting success is one of the key ways that countries can promote themselves internally, and also to the rest of the world, as successful and powerful, and South African sport must be understood within the broader processes of globalization. Nowhere is the global system more evident than in the Olympic Games run by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). It is ironical that in the campaign for Cape Town to be awarded the Summer Olympic Games of 2004, President Nelson Mandela, who gave so much of his life to fight apartheid, had meetings with President Juan Antonio Samaranch of the IOC, a former stalwart supporter of the fascist leader General Franco in Spain. As former South African Council of Sport (SACOS) leader Joe Ebrahim stated in reference to sport in 1993, 'we defeated apartheid, but we could not defeat capitalism' (Ebrahim interview, 1993). The commercialization of sport in South Africa appears to have been too great, and the links between South Africa and the global system in the 1990s are such, many argue, that the government has little choice but to support international and elite level sport, thus retaining many structures of sport that existed in the apartheid era.

This book is not meant to be a comprehensive 'history' of South African sport, as such an endeavour would require more detailed groundwork and numerous local and regional histories yet to be written. Unfortunately, South African sporting history has had fewer analysts than places such as Britain, Australia or North America, and what exists is almost all about the white minority. It is possible, however, to reconstruct much about its black sporting history from popular sources, academic studies which have begun to appear in recent years, and some historical documents that shed light on the development

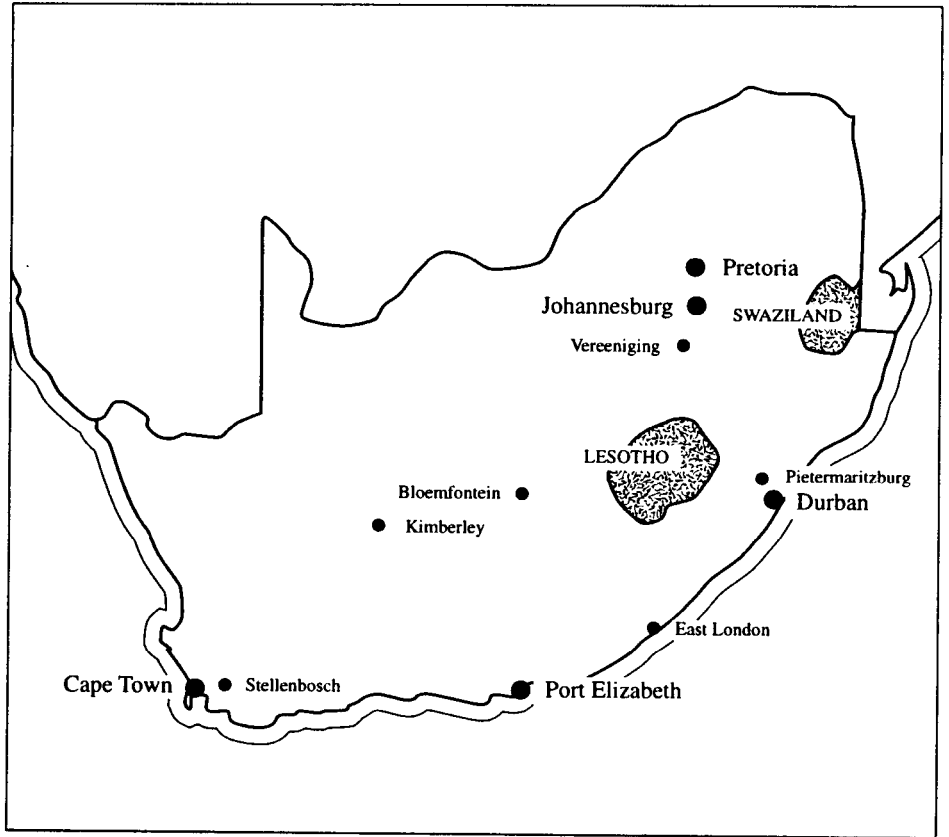
and role of sport in black societies. South African society has been divided by class, geography and gender as well as by race and it is therefore important to examine the range of meanings given to particular sporting and cultural activities by different groups in different places and at different times. Before discussing the broad contours of sporting development it is necessary to have a basic understanding of major processes in South African history, and these are discussed in detail in Chapter 1.

When writing about South Africa, it is impossible to overlook ethnic and racial divisions that were categorized and became part of the dividing programme of apartheid. Four main racial groups existed in the periods of segregation and apartheid which, in terms of most common usage, are: 'African'; 'Coloured' (referring to mixed-race South Africans and those who are descended from slaves brought out from parts of present day Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, sometimes further divided into a sub-group called 'Cape Malays'); 'Indian' (descendants of those brought out from the Indian sub-continent in the late nineteenth century to work on the Natal sugar plantations); and 'white', those descended from the peoples of Europe. When the term 'black' is used, it refers to all those who are not full descendants of European peoples or who could not pass as white during the apartheid era.<sup>1</sup> Both Africans and whites are spread throughout the country, while the majority of Coloureds live in the Western Cape and the majority of Indians in Natal. The book will follow the general usage of these categories, though they are by no means entirely satisfactory.

The book is constructed in three main sections, with the first chapter providing a short, but very necessary, overview of South African history and the writing of social and sporting history in South Africa. The second section examines the rise of sporting cultures during the imperial and apartheid eras, concentrating on the rise of a British-influenced sporting culture among whites, the development of sport among the urban black elite, the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and its links to rugby, and the place of soccer as the dominant sport in urban black communities. The final section considers the contradictory identities that emerged through support or opposition to non-racial sport and sporting boycotts, followed by an examination of sport, culture and identities in the new South Africa as it returns to international sporting competition.

#### NOTE

1. During apartheid hundreds of people were reclassified by race and others applied to have their racial status changed. Some whites were reclassified 'Coloured', for example as their hair was too curly or other features were thought to be too similar to blacks.



Map of South Africa

## THE MAKING OF MODERN SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY AND SPORT

For white South Africans generally, sport is much more than mere escapism or an opportunity to demonstrate individual or team excellence. It is more than a religion, it is a total strategy against a total onslaught; it is the guardian of our national character; the barometer of our despair or hope.

Frederick van Zyl Slabbert, *The Last White Parliament* (1985).

The Springboks are our boys. I ask every one of you to stand behind them because they are our pride, they are my pride, they are your pride.

President Nelson Mandela, during the Rugby World Cup 1995.

These quotes vividly illustrate the significance of sport in both the old and the new South Africa. Although many sportspeople from South Africa have been successful in the international arena, until recently only a small minority were allowed to represent their country in international events. Since readmission to international sport in 1992, its athletes have won the Rugby World Cup, the Africa Nations Cup of Soccer (both hosted by South Africa), gold and silver medals in the Olympic Games, achieved success in international test and one-day cricket and reached the final of the netball World Championships. Excitement about sport among officials and business leaders culminated in Cape Town's bid for the 2004 Olympic Games, the ultimate international sporting prize in most people's estimation. In addition, there has been discussion about a bid for the 2006 World Cup of Soccer pending the outcome of the Olympic bid. In preparation for such global sports events, Greater Johannesburg will host the All-Africa Games in 1999. Sport is being promoted as a unifier for a new 'Rainbow Nation' that is, at least on a discursive level, inclusive of all people. Despite the rush to forgive the past and to move to the future, the development of sport cannot be readily separated from its history.

This chapter explores social divisions in South Africa, brought on by invasion, conquest, settlement, capitalism and racially- and gender-based social ideologies, that have shaped the contours of modern South African society, as well as social practices such as sport. A brief historical overview is followed by an analysis of specific issues related to the creation and maintenance of social divisions and various attempts to create forms of social unity.<sup>1</sup> Finally, writing about sport in South Africa and internationally is discussed.

The history of the country has been characterized by continuing waves of immigration and the progressive conquest of land. The first Africans arrived in the country at least 2000 years ago, migrating down from Central Africa. These migrants only settled as far south and east as the Fish River in the eastern Cape region about 800 kilometres up the coast from Cape Town. Because of the lack of reliable rainfall, settled populations could not be sustained further east and, as a result, only small groups of hunter-gatherers lived in the area around Cape Town when Europeans first arrived in 1652. A series of battles were fought between Dutch soldiers at the Cape and local residents as the Dutch continually expanded their use of land. By the 1680s, however, the Dutch held the upper hand and settled on farms beyond Table Mountain and out to present-day Stellenbosch. White settlers enslaved some locals and imported others from Madagascar, the Indian sub-continent, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Malaysia. White farmers pushed westward along the coast until the 1770s when they came upon the Fish River and the densely settled Xhosa people.

Many border skirmishes ensued with neither side advancing very far as neither side had the military strength to subdue the other. In the late 1700s the Cape featured in the problems of Europe, leading to a shift in power relations in favour of whites. As part of the Napoleonic wars, the British occupied Cape Town in 1795 and then permanently from 1806. In order to stabilize the frontier, the British brought settlers to the Eastern Cape region in 1820 and also provided military power to subdue the Xhosa. From this point, South African history for the next eighty years was dominated by struggles over land and for control of the vast mineral resources that were discovered in the interior. Clear tensions emerged between different groups, local white capitalizing interests and the British imperial state concerned to minimize costs of administration.

The British abolished slavery in 1834 which many Afrikaner settlers opposed. This resulted in several thousand trekking out of the area of British control in search of land where they could be in charge of their own destiny and maintain the social relations of production that they had established on their farms and in their communities, before the onset of British

administrative authority. During the first three decades of the nineteenth century a widespread process of state formation took place in the interior of southern Africa. In Zulu, this process was called the *mfecane*, or the time of crushing. By the 1820s the Zulu Kingdom appeared under the leadership of Shaka, and other large states such as the Basotho and Swazi kingdoms consolidated their power, while many smaller groups were either incorporated or forced to flee to other areas of the continent. As a result of dispossession, conquest and struggle over the land, elements of an agrarian-based capitalist economy began to emerge as large-scale white-owned farms appeared in the interior between the areas controlled by African kingdoms. Many dispossessed Africans obtained work and places to live on these farms by the middle decades of the nineteenth century, while some African chiefs participated in the supply of labour in exchange for secure positions as local or regional leaders. Land struggles continued through the nineteenth century with white settlers ultimately establishing four political and geographical entities; two controlled by the British – the Cape Colony and Natal, and two Afrikaner republics – the Orange Free State and the South African Republic (Transvaal).<sup>2</sup>

During the nineteenth century emerging racial ideologies conditioned thinking about the different groups of people within what became present-day South Africa. Afrikaner religious and political leaders promoted the idea of an Afrikaner *Volk* that was divinely ordained to rule over southern Africa as a 'chosen-people' and be masters of Africans whom they believed God had chosen to be 'hewers of wood and drawers of water'. In other words, Afrikaners began to believe that they had Biblical justification for restricting Africans to menial and service positions. While the basic tenor of Afrikaner attitudes towards blacks appeared to be somehow timeless until the 1980s, Afrikaner history and ideologies were re-shaped many times in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Much historical writing from a conservative and liberal British perspective sought to lay South Africa's racial divisions and problems at the feet of an Afrikaner pathological hatred of blacks. Such an analysis is far too simplistic and belies the fact that it was emerging capitalist relations of production that led to hardened racial attitudes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Keegan, 1996). In the first half of the nineteenth century, British racial social philosophies began with attempts to socially uplift Africans through a 'civilizing' process based on Christianizing and 'de-tribalizing' Africans, or to make Africans more like the British. This process was based on concepts of European supremacy but towards the end of the nineteenth century such attitudes shifted as whites began to fear being swamped by blacks. In other colonial settings where whites settled in large numbers, native peoples were decimated by disease



and war, but in southern Africa there were too few whites and too many densely settled Africans for whites to become a majority of the population. As a result, whites had to devise other methods for maintaining their dominant position which they believed was scientifically, religiously and culturally justified.

#### THE MINERAL REVOLUTION AND INDUSTRIALIZATION

During the 1870s and 1880s, South Africa underwent dramatic transformations brought on by the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley in 1867 and gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886. As a result, it experienced an industrial revolution and the movement of tens of thousands of people to the mines and the cities around them. In addition to thousands of immigrant miners from Britain, Australia and elsewhere, some mission-educated Africans moved into lower level administrative posts, setting themselves up as an urbanized African elite in Kimberley and Johannesburg. This group adopted many elements of British culture, including sporting practices, as Chapter 3 discusses. In addition to an African elite, thousands worked in the mines as unskilled migrant labourers. Because of the high cost of mining and the necessity of importing equipment from overseas, the only way that mine owners felt they could control their costs was through the use of large numbers of cheap African labourers. Officials and mine owners worked together to create a migrant labour system whereby the cost of reproducing the labour force would be met in rural areas, rather than by state and capital interests in the cities. Despite these attempts to keep Africans away from permanent settlement in the cities, thousands flocked to the rapidly developing cities, initially settling in urban slum areas and taking jobs in service, supportive industries and the informal economy.

The rapid expansion of the gold mining industry, and the resultant changes it brought to demographics and economics, ultimately caused a war in South Africa. Due to the gold mines being located in the South African Republic (Transvaal or present day Gauteng), an area controlled by Afrikaners, mining magnates urged the British government to assist in the securing of greater long-term profits through taking control of the area. The mine owners believed that a British administration would be more favourable to them and they resented the policies of the Republic and its president Paul Kruger. Although the causes of the South African (or Anglo-Boer) War of 1899–1902 are complex and have been hotly debated amongst historians, it is clear that the control and profitability of gold played a key part in the outbreak of war. The South African War was fought between the British Empire, its local colonies of the Cape and Natal and the two Afrikaner republics in the Orange