

American Committee on Africa
164 Madison Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10016
April 10, 1968

Below are excerpts from letters to Mr. Steve Mokone, a former South African soccer star now studying at the University of Rochester. These letters are written by black South African athletes and explain how many Africans feel about South Africa's readmittance to the Olympic Games. Also the letters make clear why African athletes in South Africa have been silent in criticism of the International Olympic Committee's decision to accept a South African team in Mexico City. They fear a public statement can lead only to imprisonment. Identifying names have been deleted from the letters for obvious reasons.

12/2/68

Dear Kala,

Last week I was with _____ and we saw this article in Post about S. Africa being admitted into the Olympics. What a joke! What have they done to fulfill the Olympic requirements for admittance? We are all very surprised, and there is a strong rumour that _____ will accompany the team as the African coach. When is he going to grow up?

The grapevine says that everybody is against the idea. The trouble is that no one has the nerve -- Robben Island [a prison off of Cape Town, S.A. known for holding political prisoners] is very near. Dennis Brutus who is in London has criticized the whole idea and we are surprised that his articles were even printed here. Conditions are really bad here, and they are getting worse. Even the white liberals have quieted down due to the 90-day Detention Act.

What is the feeling of negroes in the U.S.? We read some lousy statements purported to come from Joe Louis and Brundage. We can understand that coming from Brundage but not Joe Louis. How does Cassius Clay feel about it? How does the rest of the outside world feel about it? Is there nothing that you people can do to relate our feelings to the world and become our spokesmen. You know the position Steve, our position - this side is hopeless. We would love to go to the Olympics, who wouldn't?

But I strongly feel - and so do all the people here - that if we have to go, we will go as proud Blackmen, knowing we are protected by the Olympic laws.

We don't need the Olympics as much as they do because we have never been there. It hurts them more being thrown out than it does us. So we feel that is a trump card in our hands.

(cont.)

As much as I hate S. Africa, if she is prepared to abide by the rules of the Olympics I and many people here would be happy to see all our fellows go, but not under the present circumstances. This is sheer prostitution of the Olympic Laws.

I guess I have to close, Steve, and I trust this letter will not fall into wrong hands.

Yours,

Dear Mr. Mokone,

I'm sure you will be surprised to receive a letter from someone you do not know. I have known you for a very long time through the newspapers and have been a great fan of yours. Recently in the papers here we have seen South Africa might be readmitted to the Olympics. Everybody here is stunned. But since you know the conditions we are all afraid to comment.

We saw a story by Dennis Brutus in the "Rand Daily Mail" - everybody is wondering what you and _____ are doing about this. None of us want to see them take South Africa back. But what can we do, except to sit and grumble to ourselves in the Shebeens. How do people outside feel about this? Can't they help us? One or two of your old friends _____ and _____ have come out supporting South Africa. Needless to say why you know when Vorster's machinery starts working.

Many of our boxers have hinted they are going to play sick during the trials and you know whose idea that is _____. One or two others like _____ have hinted that they might go and compete if selected and then ask for political assylum.

It's a pity we know so little of what's happening. We get bits and pieces in the Star or Rand Daily Mail. We saw many of the countries are boycotting. We all hope here Russia will join too. We have kind of lost hope in Britain and the U.S. We only hope the African states will stick together for the sake of their brothers here who can't do or say much.
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Thanks brother,
