

On October 12, 1968 a football hero from South Africa named Steve Mokone, and myself, a professional baseball player from New Jersey, left New York for a week of lobbying at the Mexico City Olympics. Steve and I are both members of the American Committee on Africa and during our week in Mexico City we were the spokesmen for that Committee. We were met at the airport by the other half of our team, Dennis Brutus, a former South African cricket player and President of SAN-ROC (South African Non-Racial Open Committee for Olympic Sports) and Chris DeBroglie, a South African weightlifter who is also a member of SAN-ROC. Dennis and Chris stayed at a hotel downtown and Steve and I stayed nearby at a private residence. Our days would begin at 8 or 9 o'clock with breakfast and a strategy meeting and would end sometimes as late as 11 in the evening when we would compare notes on the events of each day.

Our long range goal is the elimination of racism in South African sports. Our immediate goals in Mexico City were to influence and educate the sports delegates and the public from all over the world to the apartheid that exists in South Africa and the ways in which they should contribute to the solution of those problems as they affect athletics. Our appeal was directed to the International Olympic Committee and to the various world sports federations which control international competition in such sports as boxing, basketball, track and field, swimming, and most other sports. Since these bodies are responsible for setting and upholding the standards of international conduct in athletics we felt that a direct appeal to them was a logical step. Most of the international sports federations as well as the IOC itself have charters and constitutions which forbid discrimination based on race. Unfortunately these anti-discrimination provisions have always been interpreted loosely and in favor of the ruling white South African sports organizations. We felt that if we could get the IOC and the world sports federations to adhere to their own charters they would then have to suspend South Africa from international competition because of her well-known violations of the provisions on discrimination. Knowing how important athletics is in the life of South Africa, we felt certain that if she were suspended from international athletic competition in a significant number of sports then she would be forced to change her apartheid policies, at least in the area of sports.

Our strategy was directed roughly in three parts. One part was to inform the sports delegates of the problem that existed in South Africa and exhort them to vote against those resolutions which might be favorable to the existing white South African sports structure. A second part of our strategy was to enlist public sympathy by calling attention to the problem through the news media. The other area of our work involved organizing and coordinating the delegate strength we did have in order to insure maximum effectiveness on the floor during the congresses or meetings of the various sports. Dennis and Chris concentrated on organizing delegates at the caucuses and helping to plan types of resolutions and other strategy for use in the congresses. Steve and Chris did most of the speaking with the delegates and handing out literature. I devoted most of my efforts to the American delegates and keeping the news media informed of our activities. However, all of our duties overlapped and each of us did a little bit of everything.

We faced a number of problems. At first we were unable to locate where many of the delegates were staying, and in some sports we didn't even know who the delegates were. Some advance checking here at home could have eliminated this. Many of the delegates who were aware of the situation in South Africa had strong opinions and we weren't able to change the minds of these men in such a short time. Indeed, I doubt if some of these men will ever change positions which have been hardened by the years. However, we were able to enlighten some delegates who had been unaware of the gravity of the problem and in any case we were able to make them all aware that people were concerned about this problem and that their positions were being recorded. At times we became very frustrated because we were not able to sit in the IOC or federation meetings and offer our own opinions and resolutions since we were not representing any country in an official capacity. As a result, our influence was confined to the back rooms and the caucus work I described earlier. We wanted to be more than stagemanagers. Another difficulty we had to overcome was the apathy and ignorance which we found at all levels concerning this question of South Africa. Some members of the press for instance felt that we were beating a dead horse since South Africa had already been uninvited to the 1968 Olympics. Also many of the delegates didn't think things were so bad in South Africa and it was impossible to spend the time necessary to educate them.

The most astonishing obstacle we faced was the direct opposition of the U.S. Olympic Committee officials to our presence in Mexico City. The American press chief, Bob Paul, refused to allow us use of the bulletin board at the press headquarters so we could announce press conferences, and he claimed we were at the games to disrupt the athletes. The president of the U.S. Olympic Committee, Douglas Roby, even suggested that we were "being paid by the Russians" or were "mixed up with the Commies."

In spite of the language problems, our limited resources, our lack of real power, two cases of "tourista," and the hostility we ran into, we felt we made some significant gains. The IOC did decide to review the South African question at their next meeting in Warsaw, Poland. This decision was reached after a meeting with the National Olympic Committees in which the NOCs demanded the expulsion of South Africa. The NOCs are a democratic group made up of representatives from all countries. They only have the power to make suggestions to the IOC. The IOC is not at all democratic in nature or structure. This willingness to consider the question is a step, however small. We may have had some indirect influence here. Also, a number of sports federations, among them wrestling and boxing, agreed to investigate the problem more thoroughly and to order expulsion if they found sufficient discrimination. Many of the sports federations had not concluded their final meetings by the time we had to leave Mexico City so the final results of some of our work will not be known until the minutes of the meetings are published. Probably our most significant impact was simply our presence which had the effect of making every delegate aware that their days of operating in secrecy are over. The combination of this awareness on the part of the delegates and a more informed and concerned public will, I believe, force the changes necessary in South Africa. A lot of groundwork has been laid for the future.

Jim Bourson