SPORTS APARTHEID IN 1977: NEW NAMES FOR OLD GAMES- Richard E. Lapchick

To read the full-page adds in the New York Times and the Washington Post each week, you would think that sport in South Africa is as integrated as it could be. Under the heading, "This is how we discriminate in South Africa," a black boxer stands over his fallen white victim.

In the text of the add it bluntly states that, "Sport is simply used by some as a means to try and change South Africa's politics, while Russia, Uganda, Cuba, Angola and many others - some of whose internal politics others may also not like - participate with impunity."

Depending on which side you profess to be on, there are always going to be some countries whose internal politics are repugnant to the beholder. Even so, it is true that South Africa - and Rhodesia - have been singled out by the international sports community as objects of special condemnation. While the sponsors of the expensive pro-South Africa press campaign may not understand, the reason is unclouded for others: the foundation for sport - and all other aspects of life in South Africa - is apartheid. Whereas most nations call themselves capitalist or socialist, South Africa calls itself an apartheid state. This means that the races are legally separated and that the minority white group legally dominates the three non-white groups in South Africa.

In sports this has been translated into separate and terribly unequal treatment for non-whites in training and coaching facilities, administration of sport, ability to represent South Africa in international competition, and even in the opportunity to witness events as spectators. As a result of these policies, South Africa has been almost completely isolated from the international community in the world of sport. It took a concerted effort of the Third World and Socialist nations to achieve this. Throughout the campaign to isolate South Africa, athletic representatives from United States sports bodies either supported or quietly abstained whenever votes on the issue were taken.

On the infrequent occasion when these representatives would explain their actions, one of two explanations was usually given. The most typical was that, "politics has no place in sport." The more sophisticated explanation was that it was only through competition with South Africa that the South Africans would change its apartheid sports policy. This group maintained that bridges must be built and that isolation must be avoided.

KEEPING POLITICS OUT OF SPORT

In the Olympic summer of '76 we heard a crescendo of "why are the Canadians bringing politics into sport by banning Taiwan," and "why are the Africans bringing politics into sport by boycotting New Zealand for its competition with South Africa?" These questions were posed as if there never had been any political influence in sport with the image of a pure child being brutally raped. Sportsworld lost its virginity many years ago, but the fraud of the untouched innocent has been perpetuated by the sports establishment - from the administrators and owners through their humble servants, the media people.
The truth is that from the moment the Olympic games were reborn in 1896, politics has been an integral part of the games. Even the noble idealist, Baron de Coubertin - the man responsible for rekindling the Olympic flame - had politics on his mind. The decline of the French spirit after the Franco Prussian War was a primary motivating factor in his work to rebuild the games. He even worked behind the scenes to keep Germany out of the first games.

Since that time, most of the major powers have used the games for political advantage. The United States refused to acknowledge the King of England in the opening ceremonies of the 1908 games. The Berlin Olympics was a propaganda festival for Hitler and the Nazis in 1936. During the height of the Cold War, the games became testing grounds for the superiority of political ideologies. The People's Republic of China and Taiwan have had a seesaw battle to determine which regime represents the Chinese people. It was of little consequence to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that the PRC was recognized by most of the world's governments and the United Nations. Political groups in host countries of the last three games have demonstrated against the diversion of resources that resulted from financing the games. The tragedy of the Munich Olympics could be viewed as result of focusing so much international attention on the games which had by 1972 become an ideal stage for political actors with causes.

But all of this was of minor consequences when compared to the drama surrounding South Africa's participation in the Olympics. They were first banned in 1964, readmitted in 1968 only to be excluded a few months later, and, finally, dismissed from the Olympic Movement altogether in 1970. More than 90 nations were involved at one time or another in the dispute. Decisions were consistently made by government organizations and not by sports bodies on this question.

Even after all of this, Sportsworld was ready for a sublime Olympics in 1976. Naivete is still in its ascendency. The people who cry "keep politics out of sport" clearly cannot do so with any degree of wonder that it is happening. If they sincerely want such change as opposed to wanting to keep this particular kind of politics out of sport, then a complete overhaul of the sports establishment and the Olympics is the only answer.

Beyond this, it is a fair question to ask who brought politics into sport in the case of South Africa. After all, it was the government there that banned integrated sport. The rule was in sharp focus when the Prime Minister Vorster told his Parliament, "I, therefore, want to make it quite clear that from South Africa's point of view no mixed sport between whites and non-whites will be practiced locally, irrespective of the standard of proficiency of the participants...our policy has nothing to do with proficiency or lack of proficiency." This statement was made while the IOC had an investigative team in South Africa to see if they discriminate against non-white sportsmen. The Prime Minister left no doubt.

It is the position of those who oppose apartheid sport that it was the South African government that brought politics into sport and the opposition groups are reacting against this.

The very make-up of the IOC is political. During the 1960's, 61 percent of the representatives from non-white nations were admitted to the IOC. However, with only 33 percent of the voting power on the IOC in 1970, only a minor change had been affected. To achieve their 67 percent control, it was necessary for eleven of the white nations to have two or more representatives on the IOC. Moreover, of the national olympic committees (NOC's) without an IOC representative - which, in effect means they are powerless, only 12.4 percent were from the white nations while 87.6 percent were from the non-white nations.
To the idealist who might believe such figures to be meaningless if sport and the Olympic movement are above politics and race, a survey made in 1970 (the year South Africa was dismissed from the Olympic Movement) asking the NOC's their position on South African participation should be instructive. Sixty-eight percent of the white nations were not opposed to South Africa's participation. The 32 percent of the white nations opposed were all from the Socialist bloc. Ninety-eight percent of the non-white nations opposed South Africa's participation without complete sports integration in South Africa. Race and politics were an integral part of international sport.

BUILDING BRIDGES TO END APARTHEID SPORT

Again we must turn to history to see the merits of those who claim that continued participation with South Africa will show them by example that multi-racial societies work.

Until South Africa was excluded from the Olympic Movement in 1970, they had frequent sports contacts internationally. It would have been during this time that such bridges should have been built. In fact, between 1948 - the year the Nationalists came to power and apartheid became official government policy - and 1970, there were a total of five incidents where white sportsmen or administrators called for any change in apartheid sport. Instead of moving toward multi-racial sport, the government moved toward more and more segregation.

Once they were actually isolated, a torrent of criticism of government sports policy began to flow from white sportsmen and administrators. A poll taken in 1971 of 925 prominent South Africans indicated that 79 percent favored sports integration. Subsequent polls showed similar results. The conclusion seems evident: with international competition, there were no calls for change and sports apartheid became more severe; with international isolation, virtually everyone had been calling for changes. But have the calls yielded significant changes?

THE VORSTER INITIATIVES

Shortly after the poll mentioned above was taken, Prime Minister Vorster announced the policy of "multi-nationalism" (as opposed to multi-racialism in sport). South African whites and non-whites could compete against each other as members of their own "nations" at international events where several non-South African nations would also be competing. Under this policy, multi-racial sport was still banned on the club, provincial and national levels. Even in the special international events where multi-national competition was allowed, whites and non-whites could only compete against each other and not play on the same team.

South Africa would send integrated teams overseas in four events: the Olympics, the Davis Cup, the Federation Cup and the Canada Cup Golf tournament. However, there would be no mixed trials for selection and the teams could not wear the national Springbok emblem. Dennis Brutus, the leader of the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SAN-ROC), dismissed the changes as meaningless, "it's a new name for the old game." Internal sports apartheid was the same. The international sports bodies recognized this and South African remained excluded.
In 1974, Dr. Koornhof, the minister of sport, announced more "changes." South African sports bodies that had been suspended from international bodies could hold their own "multi-national" events. Thus, they could hold mixed events - still with no mixed teams - even without foreign teams competing in the event. However, this applied only to sports where South Africa had been suspended. The intent was clear. But the power of the Third World bloc was strong enough that South Africa remained isolated.

Therefore, a new sports policy was proclaimed in the fall of 1976. The battle had entered a new stage. It was not only South Africa that was being isolated, but also New Zealand whose government reopened sports contacts with South Africa when Prime Minister Muldoon took office. The Africans announced they would boycott the 1976 Games in the spring; the United Nations approved this at its Conference on Apartheid in May; and the Organization of African Unity agreed in June.

It was the first time that there actually was a mass pull-out from the Games. The American media, ready to praise the US Olympic Committee if it withdrew over Taiwan - which was never a serious possibility - attacked the Africans when they did withdraw on principle. The Africans sacrificed hard training, substantial amounts of money and the prestige that comes from competing in the global spotlight that accompanies the Olympics. The American press tried to obtain interviews with African athletes who would express anger that their governments had done this. There were none to be found. The media of Sportsworld was unable to comprehend that more than gold medals were at stake for Africa.

The 1976 version of the new sports policy allowed for white teams to compete with non-white teams at all levels upon approval of the minister of sport. However, leagues and club teams were to remain segregated. In October of 1976, the Manchester Guardian reported that most black sports administrators in South Africa rejected the new sports policy since it perpetuates the official policy of "multi-nationalism" and does not satisfy black demands.

Dennis Brutus agreed. "The Vorster regime is making a concerted effort to get back into international sports competition by trying to make it appear that sports apartheid has been ended. As long as Africans cannot compete on the same club teams with whites the fight will go on."

The Organization of African Unity took a very strong stand in 1977 when it announced that the boycott against New Zealand had been extended to all nations that compete with South Africa. With the South African Davis Cup team having played the American team in California it just might mean that the United States will not be competing against black African athletes for some time.

While mass protest against apartheid sport has been the norm in white Commonwealth nations - especially Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada - there has never been a sustained effort in the United States. As the liberation movements have finally begun to sweep out the white minority regimes in Southern Africa - Angola and Mozambique are now free, Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and Namibia (South West Africa) will likely be liberated soon, the immediacy of the South African situation has become greater.

ACCESS, the American Coordinating Committee for Equality in Sport and Society, has recently been formed with the aim of ending United States competition with South Africa by the 1980 Olympics. It is a coalition of political, civil rights, religious and activist groups that include the American Committee on Africa, Americans for Democratic Action, the American Friends Service Committee, ARENA, the Institute for Sport and Social Analysis,
Clergy and Laity Concerned the Gray Panthers, the Methodist Federation for Social Action, Operation PUSH, the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee, the South African Students Movement, SCLC, Sports for the People, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

The group has also formed an International Advisory Commission to End Apartheid Sport composed of the leaders of the major international anti-apartheid movements. Leadership of ACCESS includes Dennis Brutus of SAN-ROC, Harry Edwards of the Olympic Project for Human Rights, and Richard Lapchick of ARENA.

ACCESS hopes to influence United States sports federations that allow affiliated teams to compete with South Africa to end their competition on the theory that change will come about only when South Africa is totally isolated in the world of sport. History seems to bear witness to this belief.