

Sport as Opportunity for Community Development and Peace Building in South Africa

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The Global Millennium Development Goals and the Magglingen Conference in December 2005 both affirm sport as a “beacon of hope” for peace building and development efforts throughout the world. For this International Conference on Sport and Development at University of the Western Cape, this paper will focus its attention on the “home-front” and consider if and under what conditions sport can play this important role in South Africa.

The Past

In the struggle against the diabolical system of apartheid in South Africa, sport played a crucial role as a dynamic part of civil society. Allison (2000:69) remarks that “In few countries could institutions of civil society (such as sport) outflank and manipulate what appears to be a powerful state in this manner; in no other country, perhaps, could sporting institutions have played so large a part in forming the direction that the state would take.” In its’ struggle *against* an unjust system, sport was victorious. Yet in the struggle *for* a new South Africa, in the effort to *create* better communities, a better society, a better life for all, I am saddened that sport has been relegated to a seat in the back of the peoples’ bus. I am not the only observer to comment that government initiatives like the bid for the Soccer World Cup in 2010, while laudable and important, remain driven by economic desires and neglect the tremendous social transformative capacity inherent to them. Nor am I the only observer to notice the continued lack of support for sport and recreation programmes in our public schools and communities at the same moment that millions are invested into star players for international competition. National Teams have their role in nation-building. What makes me uncomfortable, though, is when most peoples’ relationship to sport is reduced to being spectators – not even spectators in the stands, but due to their socio-economic situation standing outside shops and cafe’s that have television sets, watching from the street, not

allowed to enter – or hear the sound – without making a purchase. Where, I must ask, are our priorities? What happened, I wonder, to that remarkable agenda of social transformation that was sure to bring us a safer, more peaceful, more caring nation?

The Present

South Africa's transition to democracy has brought great progress to many of its people and numerous untold advances have been made in bridging past divisions. However, many tensions and inequalities are still present that contribute to the high level of conflicts over a variety of issues ranging from employment to land, housing and scarceness of resources and facilities. Ten years after the start of democracy in South Africa, poverty is still rife. According to studies in 2002, 75% of Cape Town's township residents lived below the poverty rate of \$45 a month (<http://www.wissen.swr.de>: Globalisation). Youth are the most disadvantaged. According to Molo Songololo, 60% of South Africa's children are presently living in absolute poverty. (ibid : 3) The majority live in townships on the periphery of the cities, many under inadequate living conditions in shacks and informal settlements.. Many come from big families, where regular meals, healthy nutrition, and appropriate leisure activities are unknown luxuries. If the parents do have work, the long distances which many have to travel to and from their place of employment take them out of the home for long hours and undermine a healthy family life. In 2005, the unemployment rate was estimated at 26.5%, with life expectancy for South African females as 50.7 years and for males 45.1 years. ([http:// www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za) 2005 iii and 2004 :2). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) 22% of the population is HIV positive (<http://www.aidsfocus.ch>: 2004, (<http://www.avert.org>). According to a 2004 study by the University of Cape Town, the violence rate against women in South Africa is the highest in the world. At least every minute a woman is raped in South Africa ([http:// www.taz.de/pt/2004/11/16](http://www.taz.de/pt/2004/11/16)) and every fourth woman experiences domestic violence. Every six hours a woman is killed in South Africa by her partner or ex-partner. Fewer than 40% of homicides lead to conviction. (Stoddard,E., Reuters, 24/05/2005 and [Entwicklungs politik](http://www.entwicklungs politik.de).Online 2005).

The Potential of Sport

There are no “quick fix” solutions for South Africa’s problems. There are, however, means which can facilitate the process and thus contribute to community development and peace-building. I refer to sport.

Sport plays a vital role in modern contemporary society. Its prominence in the media which devotes considerably more coverage to sport than politics or economics demonstrates its expansion during the last century. This phenomenon has had different impacts on the development of nations, cultures and communities. For the majority of people, sport forms an integral part of life whether as active participants or passive spectators.

Sport is not only a physical activity but an area where people interact socially. Jarvie and Maguire (1994) state that sport and leisure activities form an integral part of social life in all communities and are intricately linked to society and politics (ibid:2).

Popular culture attaches numerous positive values to sport. Sport:

- improves health, fitness and education
- creates business opportunities and employment,
- fosters non-violence, fair competition, teamwork and respect
- bridges cultural and ethnic divides
- contributes to cross cultural dialogue, understanding, unity, tolerance and peaceful-coexistence

Sport is also praised for its important role in the era of the New Millennium Development Goals and globalization. It is seen as a tool for conflict prevention, peace building and development by United Nations agencies.

In this context, sport is seen by many as a more cost-effective approach for dealing with social problems than correcting the consequences of aggression, crime, violence, and abuse through police, correctional or social services.

Challenges of the Potential of Sport in the South African Context

While popular culture reinforces the belief in the positive potential of sport, research has articulated corresponding factors and conditions that must be met if the positive value of sport is to be enjoyed. In South Africa, these factors have been identified as:

- Multi-cultural sport teams beginning at the community level, led by coaches and trainers who are able to navigate team building to be a process that includes all parties and creates mutual respect between cultures and races.
- Integration programmes between schools
- Public support, political acceptability and viability, cooperation between organizations and multi-cultural exchanges
- Support for physical education in all primary and high schools
- Development of facilities for basic and further training
- Cooperation between schools and sports clubs
- Convenient conditions for public participation, including accessible transport, infrastructure and facilities
- Close cooperation between different government departments such as the Departments of Sport and Education to ensure a united education and sport policy
- Coordination of public institutions and structures of government, organized sport, providers of social services and leisure activities with regard to development measures
- Involvement of the media
- Develop a national policy framework which incorporates sport and recreation and Physical activities into community development policies and peace-building initiatives
- Improving the situation of women in sport
- Introduce a form of assessment as well as a method of evaluation to ensure that stated social and transformational goals for sport and community development are met

Four aspects of sport are often emphasised as favouring its use as a tool for social integration and peace building processes between parties of different cultural backgrounds. (Harms 1982: 6)

1) Sport as so-called non-verbal means of communication

There is a widespread notion that linguistic and cultural barriers are more easily overcome in sport than in other areas of social life. For this reason, sport is often referred to as the “conveyor of culture of the most accessible symbolism.” (Giebenhain 1995:167 and Harms in Adolph, Böck 1985: 63).

Stüwe shares this view, stating that, “Furthermore, sport is marked by a simple and easily comprehensible form of symbolism, which makes it possible to eliminate linguistic barriers and other obstacles to interaction... Sport, with its primarily non verbal and immediately comprehensible interactions, is therefore particularly suited as a medium for overcoming feelings of socio-cultural unfamiliarity and ‘otherness’.” (Stüwe 1984: 303).

However, in South Africa it is not all that easy to “eliminate linguistic barriers and other obstacles to interaction.” Language plays a major role in South Africa, in the sense that, as an unintentional “sub-text,” it indicates that the speaker belongs to a particular group. Multi-lingual coaches, trainers and teachers remain essential to the promotion of multi-culturalism within sport.

2) Sports programmes as occasions of collective experience and direct physical contact

Sport is also regarded as a possible tool of social interaction because it occasions collective experiences, as well as direct physical contact, between the participants. According to Harms, people jointly participating in active sport, especially in team sports, enter into “direct physical contact” with one another, which practically provokes “the emergence of intensive interpersonal relationships” (Harms 1982:7).

The present paper suggests the extension of the above to create opportunities for greater contact between cultural groups and communities. Such an initiative, if properly organized and structured, would foster understanding across cultures and build cohesion between communities.

The logistic framework of the undertaking (selection of venue, coaches, age groups, schools) should ensure a kind of interaction and exchange which will enable the participants to generate mutual acceptance and tolerance, and to reduce the feeling of “bodily otherness.” In earlier studies, dance and traditional games were found to be effective media for overcoming initial obstacles or barriers to interaction. (Keim 2003:155)

3) Sport as a medium which transcends divisions of class

Sport is often described as a medium which transcends class divisions, especially in childhood and youth. According to Heinemann, class-specific differences in sport behaviour only emerge around the age of 20. (Heinemann 1979:163)

In South Africa, however, sport often accentuates class difference. Apart from the poor socio-economic conditions of the still disadvantaged population groups and the deficiencies, if not the total absence of sports facilities in many communities, class differences are apparent where sport is being practised. Facilities, equipment and trained instructors are in short supply in poorer locations to this day.

I would argue that even today, access to participating in sport activities remains restricted for black South Africans in ways that white South Africans do not experience. One reason for this state of affairs was the influence of the apartheid system and the concomitant lack of facilities in African townships, which in turn offered few opportunities for the development of the range of leisure-time activities enjoyed by wealthier communities. Another factor is the traditions of some communities themselves, particularly as these relate to the activities allowed and not allowed for women.

4) Sport as an instrument of culture

Thanks to the benefit of a prescribed set of norms and rules governing all established codes, sport “displays the greatest number of common features, which transcend specific cultures.” As Harms points out, this commonality qualifies sport as a pre-eminent area for intercultural exchange and communication. (Harms 1982:6)

Stüwe (1984:303) describes sport as an “instrument of culture of international character” because of its world-wide presence, which ensures that its rules are known to members of practically all cultures. However, in South Africa obstacles to community development and peace building include ethnic prejudices, racism and Xenophobia, attitudes which were ingrained by apartheid, but which continue to exist even after the transition to democracy and undermine efforts for building more caring communities.

The problem is compounded by the fact that success in team sports does not depend on personal contacts or friendships between team members. Matches between teams or players do not necessarily improve attitudes. Coakley and Lewis believe that normal contests quite frequently reinforce prejudices held by players and/or spectators (*ibid.* 1990:220). Bröskamp is of the opinion that a meeting of cultures on the sports field can lead to the hardening of persistent prejudices (Bröskamp 1993:185).

Joint programmes of mass-based sport for all population groups, as suggested under 2) above, should therefore be established, and the cultural heritage of the various population groups should be included. In doing so, consideration should be given to socio-anthropological factors, (such as age, group membership, language, religion), as well as to the perception of any particular sport in a particular community (past experience, level of competence, significance of sport in the particular community, etc.).

The above points illustrate the complexity of the South African situation, and the problems inherent in creating sports opportunities that fail to consider the broader complexities and challenges of transformation, community development and peace building. Sport programmes can take us forward as a nation, but if not properly conceived and managed, can reinforce old prejudices, stereotypes and divisions.

The Future

Many obstacles remain to be overcome, many problems remain to be solved in order to speed up the process of community development and peace-building. By way of summary, it can be stated that sport has a meaningful function for social transformation, community development and peace building in the South African society. Whether sport can, in fact, fulfil this function and play this challenging role, depends to a large extent on the specific way in which sport is organised and presented.

In my view there is too little research and therefore too little recognition of how both recreation and professional sport at community level are used as a positive force for reconstruction, development, reconciliation and peace. To counteract the negative impacts of poverty, violence and crime South Africa needs innovative and effective interventions to actively promote community development and peace building and thus create safer communities for all. Those in influential sport positions in my opinion may not yet have come to terms with the important influence they have and can have to make this happen. As 2010 approaches South Africa will attract increasing attention and widespread public interest. The degree to which sport becomes a key part of the solution to pressing social and developmental challenges depends on us.

Yes, sport can be a powerful tool for community development and peace-building. Sport can underpin and celebrate diversity. We have seen it in South Africa with the Rugby World Cup in 1995 and the Cricket World Cup in 1996 and internationally more recently with of a soccer match of the Brazilian team and the Israeli- Palestinian team in December 2005.

However, we need to be cautious of making false claims for sport or raising expectations that cannot be met. On its own, sport cannot reverse poverty or prevent crime or violence, solve unemployment, stop corruption and respect human rights. If we are to build a better future for all, we must not be afraid to engage in some very difficult self-reflection and evaluation.

What is South African Sport doing in our communities to actively contribute to the healing of our past?

What is South African Sport doing to guide each and every one of us towards the realisation of the vision that united people all over the world during the struggle, the vision of a South Africa free of discrimination and violence in any form where people are nurtured to rise to the full potential of who they are and who they can become regardless of race or colour? South Africa should not lose the opportunity sport holds to help participants unlearn old prejudice and build positive values.

How is South African Sport contributing to the transformation of its communities?

South African sport needs to accept some of the responsibility for the social and economic situation of the nation ten years into democracy. It must re-examine its own priorities and agenda. We must honestly ask if sport in South Africa has been too consumed with developing professional players so that it can win international competitions, and if so, what are we losing at home because of it?

Until the priorities of South African sport are realigned to meet the desires and needs of all the people of South Africa for healing, transformation and genuine peace-building, there is no doubt that conflicts due to scarcity of resources, aggression, crime, corruption and violence in the communities and in sport will continue.

We must honestly ask, **what happened to the agenda of national transformation particularly for the youth?** Why is it rather the exception than the rule to have young players who participate from pre-primary school on multi-cultural teams and compete in the many different communities and neighbourhoods that make up South Africa, getting to know their team mates as people, as human beings and not as a colour, a class or a race. Sport has a powerful role to play in the transformation of South Africa, but it means that a true investment in sport programmes and facilities for all our young people must take place.

Let the truly amazing talents of our professional sport teams join in an all-out effort to transform sport and with it, the attitudes and experiences of South Africa's young people. Let South African sport say to the world that all the people of a nation matter, not just the high-paid stars and bright lights of team competition. Let South African

sport invest in all our young people, and in so doing, in the future of our nation. Let the world see that South African sport believes that a world free of prejudice and violence still matters and can still be a reality. Let South African sport be bold enough to lead the world in this way.

I would like to challenge the leaders in sport, be it from the area of politics, business, national or local community leaders, to engage in a new public dialogue about challenges and opportunities of sport, social responsibility and development. I challenge all of us to talk about standards, ethics and values.

My vision is to see coordinated efforts, an interaction of local, provincial and national government as well as civil society with the sporting fraternity in helping to transform the South African society into a united and peaceful society.

I would like to conclude by saying that if mechanisms are put in place, sport has the potential to contribute powerfully to a better world. We have to start a coordinated approach in our communities. Nation-building at home is a prerequisite for peace-building internationally. And only a peaceful community can foster development.

The word peace derives from the Latin word "pax" and is, in the Western World, generally understood as "a contractual relationship that implies mutual recognition and agreement" (Miller 2005:56). In Xhosa the word for peace is uxolo which covers a state of (inner) tranquillity and an atmosphere of peace but also implies 'asking for forgiveness'.

In the context of South Africa's recent history sport has been used as a "tool for forgiveness." Let's now use it as a means for community development and peace-building in a holistic way.

I would like to end with a quote from our former President Nelson Mandela:

"A united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa is the best hope for handing over such a society to our children. It is a vision, which we promote vigorously. It is a vision which we invite you to examine, to refine and to enrich. It is, if necessary, a vision which we invite you all to surpass." (Mandela, N. 1991:13).

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