From Quarantine to Cure:  
The New Phase of the Struggle Against Apartheid Sport

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During the last 2 years the campaign against apartheid sport has taken a new turn, shifting from the blanket boycott of “no normal sport in an abnormal society” to a more carefully nuanced “two-track” strategy, which attempts to strengthen nonracial sport in South Africa while maintaining the international quarantine of proapartheid establishment sport. These efforts are being mounted within the highly fluid dynamic of a society-wide assault on the structures of racist domination. This paper examines ongoing changes in South African sport, the new strategy and organizations developed by the liberation movement in response to the changes, and the promise and problems of the future. It is argued that the antiapartheid campaign provides an important example of effective human intervention in the sphere of modern sport.

The century-old struggle against racism and racist sport in South Africa has entered a new phase. During the last 18 months, in a series of dramatic breakthroughs few thought imaginable, the liberation movement has gained important new ground. The combined effect of the defeat of the South African Defense Force by joint Angolan-Cuban forces in Angola, the achievement of independence in Namibia, continuing international economic sanctions, and the growing mobilization of the mass democratic movement has forced the apartheid regime to abandon outright repression as a strategy of survival and to concede (at least in terms of its rhetoric) the necessity for the end of apartheid. In February, the De Klerk government released Nelson Mandela and lifted the ban on the African National Congress (ANC) and other liberation organizations. It has ended the draconian Emergency in most parts of the country and begun to negotiate (on negotiations) for restructuring state power. Though the government still uses the Internal Security Act to detain opponents without trial, and the police tacitly condone murderous attacks on activists, it is now possible for the democratic forces to campaign more openly for the abolition of apartheid than at any time within the last 30 years.

In sport, the repression of antiapartheid sports leaders has been significantly curtailed. The white sports establishment has begun to seek negotiations with the nonracial bodies for the purpose of creating new, unified sport struc-
tures. A few of the white sport federations have even endorsed the nonracial movement’s moratorium on international competition. In August 1990 the government allowed one of its most implacable enemies, Sam Ramsamy, to return after 18 years abroad to meet with his family and consult with comrades. Ramsamy is leader of the long-banned South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC), the group of South African sportspersons-in-exile that has organized the campaign to boycott apartheid South Africa. The Ramsamy visit set the stage for an historic meeting in Harare in November. At that meeting, Olympic leaders from the rest of Africa met with and informed the South African sports establishment that if they ever want to return to international competition they must meet the terms set by the nonracial movement.

The meeting was the result of increasing international pressure. In the last few years the international campaign to isolate South Africa in sport has been intensified. The United Nations International Convention Against Apartheid in Sport has been ratified, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has implemented a full ban against contacts with South Africa, and a growing number of countries have denied entry to South African sportspersons. Today, white South African sport enjoys fewer international contacts than ever before. Such universal rejection has shown South African whites the international abhorrence to apartheid and has powerfully affirmed the resistance of the black majority.

In addition to breakthroughs at the political level and the success of the international quarantine, the mass democratic movement has brought the pressure against apartheid in sport to South Africa itself. In the past, no matter how much criticism and censure those athletes who flouted the international sanctions received in their own countries, once they stepped off the airplane in South Africa they could expect a hero’s welcome, luxurious hospitality, and little contact with opponents of apartheid. In January 1990, opposition to the visiting British cricket team was so widespread that the tour had to be canceled prematurely. In many towns the cricketers and their white sponsors were directly confronted by thousands of demonstrators. In Johannesburg and Kimberley the players were forced to cook their own meals because the hotel staff would not wait on them (Weekly Mail, 1990, Feb. 2). Stopping the cricket tour has proven to be a watershed victory. The white sports establishment realized that it could no longer count on “rebel” tours and was forced to seek negotiations.1

The purpose of this paper is to discuss ongoing changes in South African sport, the new strategies and organizations developed by the liberation movement in response to the changes, and the promise and problems of the future. The campaign against apartheid in sport provides an illuminating case study of how shrewd intervention by sportspersons, under even the most difficult conditions, can effect significant change. It also points to the possibility that changes in sport can contribute to the transformation of society.

### The State of Play Within South Africa

South African sport has been deeply divided by apartheid and its opponents. Historically, the sharpest antagonisms have separated what is referred to as “establishment sport”—the white-dominated network of clubs, national bodies, and umbrella federations whose leaders have connections with the apartheid state—from the antiestablishment, antiapartheid, nonracial sector led by men
and women of color. Each has its own facilities, competitions, champions, and publications. Rarely, until very recently, did the two communicate. On the contrary, establishment sport repeatedly spoke against their nonracial counterparts on the grounds that they had "politicized" sport. For its part, despite constant harassment and very meager revenues that have kept facilities poor and playing opportunities uneven, the nonracial movement has militantly opposed apartheid.

There are further demarcation lines within the establishment sector. The various governing bodies, leagues, and clubs are hierarchically organized by race. For example, the South African Rugby Board (SARB) is a membership organization of primarily white clubs that also incorporates and paternalistically controls the "coloured" South African Rugby Federation (SARF) and the black South African Rugby Association (SARA).^3

Under the reign of "petty" apartheid,^3 it was against the law for athletes from the different races to play against each other, and athletes of color had no chance to excel. Even spectators were rigidly segregated. But in the early 1970s, in response to South Africa's growing international isolation (the white South African National Olympic Committee, SANOC, was expelled from the Olympic Movement in 1970), the apartheid state sought to give establishment sport an integrated look in the hope that photographs of blacks and whites playing on the same fields would bring sanctions to an end. The policy that it developed, and which remains essentially in place to this day, was multinational or multiracial sport. In contrast, antiapartheid groups adopted the color-blind term, nonracial.

Under multiracial sport, the government created special occasions whereby athletes of different pigmentation could compete together. Initially, because of the apartheid premise that members of different races within South Africa are members of different nations, integrated competition was only allowed if international competitors were present. In the late 1970s, integrated competition among just South Africans was allowed if the players obtained a government permit. In the 1980s, as the sports boycott further restricted South African competition abroad, the government extended the policy of multiracial sport, dropping all direct legislative restrictions upon sport "mixing."

It is these changes that have enabled the propagandists of establishment sport to claim that they are autonomous from the apartheid state and that South African sport is fully integrated. This is clearly an improvement over petty apartheid. Athletes of all races have benefited from a measure of integrated competition and some blacks have been able to enter and win at the highest levels of competition. In rugby for example, some blacks are members of predominantly white clubs, and SARF and SARA teams play teams from the SARB.

However, it would be misleading to conclude that this represents significant change. When the totality of South African sport is considered, it is clear that the few concessions made by establishment sport have had little effect on grand apartheid. The ideology of multiracialism perpetuates the myth that differences in skin color require different—and grossly unequal—conditions of citizenship. Under autonomy, sports bodies are still free to differentiate by race, and most continue to do so. The overwhelming majority of athletes still train and play in racially segregated schools and clubs just as their parents did 30 years ago. One recent study found that only 4 of 56 surveyed establishment sports bodies had any antidiscrimination regulations (Booth, 1990). In many cities and towns, whites fiercely resist any attempt at integration. When the recent abolition of the Sepa-
rate Amenities Act required the opening of public swimming pools, sports grounds, and libraries to all races, many town councils found new ways to continue segregation (Dunn, 1990). Even in the few sports where rules now prohibit racial discrimination, such as rugby, most athletes still compete in racially separate organizations. Most SARF and SARA teams play their games within their own leagues (Australia, 1988).

For establishment sport as a whole, less than 1% of competitions are actually integrated (Financial Times, London, 1990, Jan. 18). This is hardly surprising, given that players learned the game in racially segregated school systems, live in racially segregated, geographically separated areas, and enjoy vastly unequal resources. The reality is thus very different from that presented by apologists for apartheid. The contradiction between the persistence of effective segregation and the white establishment’s claims of integration has become a source of great bitterness. In 1988, the Black Tournament Players’ Association withdrew en bloc from the South African golf tour. Their president, Ben Kgantsi, told the press that,

They tell visiting golfers that there is no apartheid in golf, but what they forget to tell them is the lack of facilities in the townships—where our players live.

As soon as everything is over, blacks are not allowed to use white courses: it is back to square one on the dusty courses in Soweto and other townships. (The New Nation, Johannesburg, 1988, Aug. 18)

In 1989 the SARF president complained that,

the presence of non-white clubs and teams in [SARB] competition is only outshined by their absence. The number of Federation players taken up in representative teams over the past decade can be numbered on the fingers of two hands. . . . Competitions and provincial teams are holy cows in which the occasional and symbolic presence of non-white players are intrusions to be tolerated rather than encouraged. (Rugby World and Post, 1989, June)

Continuing segregation is accompanied by persistent inequality. The Human Sciences Research Council (1982) reported that while whites make up just 15% of the population, they control 73% of all running tracks, 83% of the swimming pools, and 82% of the rugby fields. In Natal, the 330,000 blacks in the townships of Umlazi and Lamontville share six soccer fields and two swimming pools. The 212,000 whites living in nearby Durban share 146 soccer fields and 15 swimming pools. In 1984 a University of Potchefstroom study found that the annual per capita spending on white sport was between R7.13 and R19 while the expenditure for blacks was R0.82 (cited by Confederation of South African Sport, 1990). While the South African government continues to fund white sport (and major corporations are granted significant tax deductions for the sponsorship of rebel tours), it has used the excuse of “depoliticizing” sport to cut back on its already limited grants to black sport. In 1988 the director of sport in “coloured” areas estimated that it would cost R239 million to upgrade facilities. The government voted just R20 million. A civil servant responsible for sport in the townships reported recently that “the shortage of facilities will never be overcome. At present even essential maintenance has become a luxury” (Booth, 1990, p. 157).
Several establishment sports bodies have launched highly publicized coaching and development schemes for blacks. The best known is the heavily sponsored grassroots program started in the townships by the South African Cricket Union headed by Ali Backer. There are obvious benefits from the infusion of energy, expertise and money into township sport. But here too the political motivation seems dominant. Last year Backer tried to use the township program to justify the 1990 rebel tour. When the tour went ahead against their objections, many black leaders withdrew support for the program (Hill, 1990).

The Squash Rackets Association is quite open about the fact that it tries to convince the 8- to 12-year-olds it recruits that "sport and politics do not mix." Most programs are imposed from above with little if any consultation with black leaders and athletes. Some critics suggest that the white sports bodies "are introducing thousands of black children to sport only to discard them if they do not show potential for competition or if they cannot be transported to decent facilities in white areas" (Booth, 1990, p. 171).

Given the depths of racial separation and inequality underlying the surface change, black sport leaders continue to press for a full moratorium on international sport as a means of intensifying the pressures for change. Their call is supported by the major liberation organizations, the ANC, the United Democratic Front (UDF), the Pan African Congress, and the trade unions as well as student and women's organizations. Most international observers take the same position. A report by the Australian Embassy in Pretoria (1988) concluded that,

as long as black South Africans do not have rough equality of opportunity in all aspects of life—health, education, housing, employment, welfare, access to leisure time and facilities—including equitable per capita expenditures by the government in all these areas, and underpinned by non-discriminatory laws, it will never be possible for them to participate in sport in a fair and equal basis. . . . The [Australian] Government continues to believe that sporting sanctions delivers a powerful message to white South Africans of the need for fundamental change.

After a tour of the SACU coaching scheme for black youngsters, David Sheppard, the Bishop of Liverpool (England) and a former national team cricket player, observed,

however much "petty apartheid" has been removed, "grand apartheid" is firmly in place. Issues of policies about land, segregation, education, the police and how decisions are made all come to the surface. Any substantial numbers of boys cannot have facilities to play cricket, because the Group Areas Act confines black people, coloured people and Asian people to inadequate land. The crowding is such that it would be impossible to provide good cricket grounds until the Group Areas Act is removed and land is shared more equitably. . . .

It is unthinkable that there should be any relaxing of sporting, political or economic pressure at this critical moment. (Sheppard, 1989, p. 26)

**The International Response**

The international campaign against racism in South African sport has a long history. The first efforts actually preceded the imposition of apartheid by
the Nationalist Government in 1948. In 1934 the British Empire Games Federation (the predecessor to the Commonwealth Games Federation) refused to award its next Games to Johannesburg because the South Africans declared that black athletes from the other dominions and colonies would not be welcome (National Archives of Canada, 1934). But it took much longer for the international community to accept the need to isolate South Africa altogether as a means of combating racism in sport. It was not until 1956 that an international federation, Table Tennis, expelled white South Africa from membership. Although suspended by the IOC in 1963 and expelled in 1970, South Africa still enjoys membership in 15 Olympic federations (see Table 1). For the most part, international sport federations are controlled by white upper-class males from western countries with traditional ties to South Africa. The sports boycott goes against their impulse to compete whatever the circumstance, their belief in noninterference, and the admirable hope that sport could teach tolerance by example.

Gradually, through the leadership of the nonracial leaders (expressed through SANROC after 1963), the persistent lobbying and campaigning of supporters in many countries, and the willingness of athletes and coaches from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the socialist countries to sacrifice their own sporting opportunities in boycotts of solidarity, the international sports governing bodies agreed to sanctions. Three arguments have been particularly effective in this long and painstaking struggle: the moral claim that sport be free from racial discrimination, the arrogant refusal of the white South African sportsleaders to contemplate significant change, and the overwhelming evidence that the sports boycott has been effective. Every single Olympic federation has taken some action to restrict South African participation. Governments have extended these prohibitions, by barring entry to South African athletes and officials and by requiring their own athletes and sports associations to boycott all sporting contact with South Africa as a condition of public support (Archer & Bouillon, 1982; Brickhill, 1976; Hain, 1971; Kidd, 1988; Lapchick, 1975; Ramsamy, 1982; Thompson, 1975).

After 1986, as international opposition hardened with the introduction of the Emergency, the campaign has gone from strength to strength. The biggest victories were in cricket and tennis, both popular sports among South African whites. South Africa has always had influential contacts in English cricket. Many cricketers traveled to South Africa to play during the English winter, and some of the best-known players are active in the proSouth African lobby, Freedom for Sport. The governments of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Caribbean countries, and most recently New Zealand sought to discourage these exchanges by barring those with South African links. In 1988 for example, an English cricket tour of India, Pakistan, and New Zealand had to be canceled because the team included several members who had played in South Africa. However, efforts to force the governing International Cricket Conference (ICC; now Council) to ban contacts with South Africa repeatedly failed when English and Australian delegates used their founders’ veto. But in 1989, as a result of lobbying by Asian and Caribbean cricket powers, the ICC unanimously established a ban from international competition for players who compete in South Africa. The decision seems to have significantly reduced the number who played in the South African season, from an estimated 70 (in the years before the ban) to 19 in 1989 (The Times, London, 1989, Jan. 25 and Sept. 26). It also resulted in the worldwide opposition to the 1990 rebel English tour.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archery</td>
<td>Member with voting rights only (i.e., not allowed in international</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>competitions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badminton</td>
<td>Voting rights only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>Not a member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>Expelled in 1980</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bobsleigh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boxing</td>
<td>Expelled in 1968</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canoeing</td>
<td>Suspended in 1970</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cycling</td>
<td>Refused membership in 1970</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equestrian</td>
<td>Voting rights only</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fencing</td>
<td>Voting rights only</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>Voting rights only</td>
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<tr>
<td>Handball</td>
<td>Refused membership in 1982</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hockey</td>
<td>Member but status unclear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ice hockey</td>
<td>Voting rights only</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judo</td>
<td>Not a member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luge</td>
<td>Not a member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pentathlon</td>
<td>Voting rights only</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rowing</td>
<td>Voting rights only</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shooting</td>
<td>Suspended</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skating</td>
<td>Member but status unclear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skiing</td>
<td>Not a member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>Expelled in 1976</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>Expelled in 1973</td>
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<tr>
<td>Table tennis</td>
<td>Expelled in 1956; antiapartheid SATTB a member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>Suspended in 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track &amp; field</td>
<td>Expelled in 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>Not a member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weightlifting</td>
<td>Expelled in 1972</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wrestling</td>
<td>Expelled in 1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yachting</td>
<td>Member, but competition restricted</td>
</tr>
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The International Olympic Committee (IOC) suspended the establishment South African Olympic Committee (SANOC) in 1963 and expelled it in 1970. On the other hand, it has officially recognized the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee, giving it privileged status on its Commission on Apartheid and Olympism. The Association of National Olympic Committees of Africa (ANOCA) recently recognized the antiapartheid National Olympic and Sport Congress (NSC).

In tennis, the campaign was helped by the IOC. In 1988 the Olympic governing body established a Commission on Apartheid and Olympism to intensify the isolation of apartheid South Africa. On the Commission’s recommendation, the IOC decided that athletes who competed in South Africa would automatically be disqualified from taking part in any future Olympic Games. It was also made clear that federations seeking Olympic competition should remove
South Africa from membership. The International Tennis Federation, seeking to upgrade its sport from the demonstration status of Seoul, promptly suspended the South African Tennis Union. The Association of Tennis Professionals eliminated South African events from the Grand Prix tour (Cart, 1990, May 10).

The *cordon sanitaire* around South African sport has been tightened in other ways. The professional World Boxing Council (WBC) began to impose sanctions on promoters, boxers, and managers with South African ties. The governments of Belgium, Canada, New Zealand and Spain took steps to bar South African athletes from entry. The Swedish Sports Federation announced an even tougher stand, joining African, Asian, and Caribbean countries in barring athletes listed on the United Nations Register. In many cases the work of anti-apartheid activists was instrumental in pressuring governments to take these decisions, and in reminding athletes who had been to South Africa that they could no longer play with apartheid without censure. In Australia, Britain, Canada, France, New Zealand, and the United States, activists protested apartheid links. A number of sportspersons, too, took positions of leadership. Former Commonwealth boxing champion Nigel Been of Britain turned down a $3 million offer to fight in South Africa (*The Star*, Johannesburg, 1989, Aug. 19). Between April 1, 1988, and April 1, 1990, 162 athletes took a United Nations pledge not to return to South Africa (United Nations, 1990).

But not all sportspersons and governments accept the need for a boycott. Despite the Gleneagles Agreement, which requires Commonwealth countries to stop sports ties, there is a constant two-way flow of British and South African athletes and officials. The Thatcher Government refused to take any action to prevent contact on the grounds that it would be "fundamentally objectionable in a free society." When the ICC voted to penalize cricketers for playing in South Africa, 50 Conservative members of Parliament issued a declaration condemning the resolution. When the International Rugby Board gave South Africa permission to invite a world team for a series of matches in 1989, it was perhaps inevitable that the majority of players came from Britain. Neither the Thatcher Government nor the leaders of the British sports community nor Commonwealth officials were willing to discipline the offenders.

Attempts to expel South Africa from the international federations in badminton and squash failed despite majority support. In both cases, negative ballots from western countries left the vote short of the required majority. Despite the gains in tennis, South Africans can still compete in the Grand Slam of Wimbledon and the Australian, French, and U.S. Open and the professional circuits of those countries. A number of South Africans still circumvent sanctions through passports of convenience and false identification (Cart, 1990, May 8). But by all the measures employed—the shrinking contacts, the declining athletic ability of those rebels who flout the boycott, and the embarrassment heaped upon them at home—the international campaign is very effective.

**The New Strategy of the Liberation Movement**

For most of the last two decades the nonracial sports movement has taken as its target the whole system of apartheid. Led by the South African Council on Sport (SACOS), it countered the cosmetic changes of multiracial sport with the slogan, "No normal sport in an abnormal society." Buoyed by the militancy of
the post-Soweto resistance, it refused to have any dealings with establishment sport (and the various bantustan sports bodies). It urged SANROC and its allies to conduct a blanket boycott against all South African sportspersons, even those blacks who excelled under the policy of multiracialism.

Recently the movement has adopted a new strategy, one that maintains the pressure against the proapartheid sports bodies while strengthening the nonracial sector in preparation for the entry of democratic South Africa to international competition. In a key shift, the movement opened the possibility of uncoupling the sports moratorium from the overall antiapartheid campaign and began to set sport-specific conditions for international competition and exchange. The most important of these is the creation of single, democratic, nonracial, and nonsexist governing bodies actively committed to the eradication of inequality; that is, establishment sport must join with the nonracial movement to build unified federations in every sport.

The new strategy actually predated the dramatic political breakthroughs of the last year. It grew out of the contradictions of multiracial sport and the harsh conditions of the Emergency, when virtually all political opposition was suppressed and critical discourse was censored. The cosmetic liberalization of sport created an opening whereby some critical public commentary was possible if coded in the language of sport. The democratic movement increased its efforts to agitate against apartheid sport and create new sports opportunities in the townships and rural areas where they have been particularly underdeveloped.

To extend the base of their support, liberation movement leaders sought to win over the black sports bodies that were collaborating with multiracial sport. To do this they had to reconsider the blanket boycott. In establishment track and field, rugby, soccer, and boxing, where the mines, the police, black sports entrepreneurs, and international companies like Adidas aggressively promote black players, the number of accomplished black athletes is growing. Many of these have no choice but to play within multiracial sport. Because careers are short, even a segment in the black community has criticized the international campaign's hard line. In 1988 SANROC persuaded the international soccer federation (FIFA) to bar professional soccer star Jomo Sono from an international fund-raising exhibition game in Harare. Soccer is the most popular sport for black South African males, and the intervention unleashed a fury of criticism against SANROC and the blanket boycott.

The two-track strategy took shape in response to these pressures, in consultation with SANROC and African sports leaders. Placing international assistance and competition on the agenda had several advantages. First, it offered strengthened communications and practical assistance to nonracial sport. These considerations have prompted a similar turn in the cultural and academic boycotts. Second, it created a powerful incentive for unity under the nonracial banner, helping solidify antiapartheid resistance in the black community and perhaps even drawing in white support. Third, and most tantalizingly, it raised the prospect of a new visibility for the antiapartheid movement as a whole. Sports usually reinforce the dominance of the powerful who control them, but they can also dramatize the worthiness and humanity of the powerless. An antiapartheid team in the Olympic Games, organized by the liberation movement under the banner of the liberation movement, while the representatives of establishment sport were forced to stay home, would demonstrate the illegitimacy of apartheid to the entire
world. One can only imagine the excitement that this vision presented at the height of the Emergency!

The new strategy was first signaled in October 1988, when the ANC arranged a meeting between nonracial sports leaders and the officials of the National Soccer League, the powerful black organization that had not previously taken an active part in the antiapartheid movement. The ANC held out the prospect that a unified nonracial soccer body might send teams to international tournaments. Since then the nonracial movement has reasserted its link to the overall struggle, employing the language of the United Nations (1989) to insist upon full sanctions until the eradication of apartheid is "profound and irreversible." But it has taken the campaign to create unified, democratic, nonracial, and nonsexist governing bodies into many other sports. At the same time, through the auspices of SANROC, it has sent a growing number of black coaches and teachers to study abroad and accepted aid from sports groups and governments in Australia, Britain, Canada, and Sweden.

These steps have been coordinated by a new organization, the National Olympic and Sports Congress (NSC), created by the mass democratic movement when SACOS refused to contemplate any change in strategy (SACOS continues to advocate a blanket boycott under the slogan, "no normal sport in an abnormal society"). In July 1989, 475 persons from sports, the ANC and UDF, trade unions, women's groups, teachers' and students' organizations, and the churches attended the first national conference. The largest nonracial sports bodies in the country—in soccer, cricket, and rugby—and nonracial federations in 22 other sports are now involved with the NSC (National and Olympic Sports Congress, July 18, 1989, press release).

Since 1988 the NSC has been at the forefront of every major development. During the 1989 rugby tour it mounted the most effective protest against an international team ever seen in South Africa, demonstrating against games and local branches of the sponsoring National Bank, confronting the players and their manager in their hotel, all with favorable publicity. Later that spring it provided assistance to the democratic movement's mass trespass against "beach apartheid," which ultimately forced the De Klerk government to declare the beaches open to all races. These successful interventions culminated in the massive nationwide protest against the cricket tour in January 1990. Despite media manipulation, police charges, tear gas attacks, and threats of being declared illegal, the NSC and its allies turned the tour into a total failure. The message of these dramatic events was unmistakable: the old order of rebel tours, played out behind the protection of police dogs and baton charges, was finished. Henceforth the only hope of the sports establishment for international competition lay in negotiations with the NSC.

In recent months the NSC has met with establishment sports leaders in boxing, cricket, gymnastics, road running, soccer, and track and field, as well as the still functioning SANOC and some white schools sports associations, in an effort to draw them into a nonracial, antiapartheid alliance. The starting point for these negotiations has been acceptance of the sports moratorium by establishment organizations, an obligation to educate their members in the ethos of nonracialism, and a commitment to "actively participate in the process to destroy apartheid." The Congress has continued to bring the various black associations together. In addition, it has started its own developmental programs in cricket,
tennis, and other sports. In each case it has challenged the South African brewer-
ies and the other large sport sponsors to make good on their antiapartheid rhetoric
and invest in black sport (until now, 90% of all sponsorship money goes to white
sports [National, 1990]). The NSC leadership is determined to extend and enrich
opportunities, not only to athletes of color but also to the millions not presently
engaged in sports, particularly girls and women and the oppressed peoples of the
rural areas and bantustans. The NSC also seeks to transform sports from the
self-assurance of the privileged to the empowerment of the powerless (Roberts,
1989).

These efforts have the support of the international community. Several
western governments have contributed to the cost of NSC activities. The IOC
has frequently said that South Africa must satisfy the African Olympic commu-
nity before it can be accepted into international competition. The Association of
African National Olympic Committees (ANOCA) has said that it is prepared to
admit the NSC as the representative of nonracial South Africa “immediately the
moratorium against international sporting contact is lifted” (Eley, 1990). At the
recent meeting in Harare, ANOCA President Jean-Claude Ganga made it clear
that “the total eradication of apartheid in all its forms” and nonracial unity must
be achieved before the IOC will consider South Africa’s membership. The Harare
meeting established two committees to pursue these goals, one made up of South
African sports leaders, the other a monitoring committee appointed by ANOCA

The Road Ahead

Recent breakthroughs have raised the worldwide hope that the demise of
apartheid is near. While liberation leaders caution that grand apartheid remains
in place, there is an undeniable spirit of optimism. Speculation about the normal-
ization of relations with South Africa has become commonplace. In sports, where
the desire to make friends and build bridges has always been strong, there is
enormous curiosity (as well as admiration and solidarity) about the nonracial
movement and a growing eagerness to see it in international competition. IOC
President Samaranch (1990) has likened the sports boycott to a race and suggested
that the “finish line is very, very near.” He also said that since the Olympic
movement was “the first to say ‘no’ to South Africa, it would be proud to be the
first to welcome its return.” Friends of white South Africa and a number of black
South African sportspersons have encouraged these expectations, suggesting that
a South African team might compete in the Olympics as early as 1992 in Barce-
lona (Osler, 1990).

But from the perspective of nonracial leadership, the gains of recent months
only serve to illuminate the distance still to be covered. The minimum condition
of unified, democratic, nonracial and nonsexist sports bodies has yet to be
achieved in a single sport. Among the black communities, overcoming the ghetto-
ization of forced separation and the jealousies created by multiracialism will
take time. Trust has to be established, tentative agreements worked out, and the
memberships consulted, invariably by volunteers from different regions, with
scarce resources and countless other demands upon their time. The process has
been advanced by the spirit of collective enterprise in recent years, but it cannot
be hurried.
The path to unity with the white bodies will be more difficult. While SANOC, the track and field and road running bodies, and the promoters at Sun City have agreed to accept the NSC’s conditions, including the moratorium on international competition, the powerful white golf, rugby, tennis, and cricket bodies refuse to do so. The establishment Confederation of South African Sport predicts that the white bodies will have to be coerced into opposing apartheid, and if that happens they “will be faced with breakaways to the right of the political spectrum” (1990, p. 12).

Even when unity is reached, the maximal goal of equality of opportunity will take years and millions of rands to achieve. South Africa remains a holiday camp for whites, a prison camp for blacks. Grand apartheid still condemns the black majority to separate living areas and housing, separate schooling, separate health care, and vastly inferior incomes and life chances. The Population Registration Act, which determines civil status by race, and the Land Acts, which give the white minority 87% of the land, are still firmly in place. Few whites are willing to grant a significant redistribution of sports facilities and other resources. Nor do all groups endorse the simultaneous commitment to gender equality. It will be difficult to overcome the legacy of discrimination and oppression under these conditions.

Much of course will depend upon the talks at the highest level between the apartheid government and the ANC. If they lead to a democratic reconstruction, then the hoped-for antidiscrimination legislation and redistribution of resources will accelerate the process in sports. But if the existing pattern of land ownership and a web of apartheid regulations, however amended, remains, then the possibilities for genuinely nonracial sport will be significantly reduced. Given the De Klerk government’s refusal to contemplate an unrestricted “one person, one vote” franchise, the most likely scenario is protracted, possibly stalemated negotiations, with further advances only when mass mobilization and international pressure make them inevitable. It should not be forgotten that in both Namibia and Zimbabwe the liberation movements’ ultimate successes at the negotiating table were enabled by military victories in the field.

Until there is major change, the NSC and its allies abroad will continue to insist upon a strong international boycott (e.g., Fourth International Conference Against Apartheid Sport, 1990). They strongly reject the idea that South Africa should be rewarded for the steps taken during last year, arguing that “if anybody needed to be ‘rewarded’ it was those that have for so long been on the receiving end of apartheid” (National and Olympic Sports Congress, Oct. 20, 1990, press release). Even when the moratorium is lifted, the NSC will insist upon nonracial and nonsexist unity as a condition for South Africa’s entry into international competition.

In the meantime the NSC has stepped up its appeal for technical and financial international assistance, pointing out that the historic pattern of inequality ensures that white athletes will benefit disproportionately from international competition for many years to come. If the effort to quarantine apartheid sport involves a commitment to the cure, the international community must not abandon the nonracial movement as it enters this next difficult stage.

Sports scholars have frequently debated the possibilities for effective human intervention (e.g., Ingham, Loy, & Swetman, 1979). The long campaign
against apartheid in sport provides ample evidence that there is scope for human agency. It also shows how social structures both enable and constrain, in a manner that is frustratingly complex, unpredictable, and uneven. While waged in harmony with the overall struggle against apartheid, the sports boycott has set in motion dynamics of its own, often in response to pressures unique to the sports world. None of the other antiapartheid sanction campaigns (or other sports boycotts) have been as effective. It has brought about major changes to the international organization of sports and has assisted the liberation movement’s advance in South African politics. Whether it can further the transformation of South African society awaits the next stage of the struggle.

References


Notes

1While South African whites in many other cultural fields—literature, music, film, and theatre—embraced the antiapartheid cause long ago, few did so in sport prior to 1990. For years the leaders of nonracial sport appealed to the establishment sector in vain for a common front against apartheid (Streek, 1985).

2To add to the confusion of organizations and acronyms, there is also the nonracial South African Rugby Union (SARU).

3"Petty" apartheid refers to the strict segregation of all aspects of South African society introduced by the Nationalist Government shortly after its election in 1948, and brutally enforced until the late 1970s. It has slowly been replaced by "grand" apartheid, under which some liberalization of contact between the races has occurred, while the "pillars of apartheid," such as the Group Areas Act, remain in place.

4In addition, since 1980, annual summaries of the campaign have been published by the United Nations Center Against Apartheid, in its Register of Sports Contacts with South Africa.

5These scruples did not prevent that same government from threatening with dismissal civil servants who wanted to compete in the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

6Language is instructive here: nonracial leaders stress that the real South Africa has never competed in international competition, only the tiny white minority.

7Because of similar circumstances, the first team that newly independent Zimbabwe entered in the Olympic Games—in Moscow in 1980—was entirely white. In newly independent Namibia, the white minority enjoys a virtual monopoly over the Olympic sports.