

From Redemption to Recidivism? Rugby and Change in South Africa During the 1995 Rugby World Cup and its Aftermath

Albert Grundlingh

This article tries to disaggregate the changes in South Africa's rugby ideology during and after the Rugby World Cup tournament of 1995. The nature of support for the victorious Springbok team which in a rare historical moment seemed to transcend race, is explained in the light of contextual influences. Likewise, the significance of subsequent events till the middle of 1997 which appeared to contradict the sense of unity generated during the tournament is assessed.

Repackaging South African Rugby Ideology

Saturday 24 June 1995 was a red letter day in South Africa. Before a capacity crowd at Ellispark stadium in Johannesburg and with millions watching the finals of the Rugby World Cup, the Springbok team narrowly managed to beat the much vaunted New Zealand All Black team in extra time through a drop goal by the fly half, Joel Stransky. South Africa was the new rugby champion of the world. On hand to present the Cup to the victorious captain, Francois Pienaar, was South Africa's most celebrated prisoner-turned-president, Nelson Mandela, decked out, in an unmistakable show of identification and support, in Pienaar's spare number 6 jersey. It was the perfect climax to a tournament which saw South Africa taking pride of place in the rugby world after the international sports isolation of the apartheid years.

Unprecedented scenes of mass euphoria followed the Springbok victory; unleashing a celebration of exhilarating excess, of hugs and hurrahs, of merriment and madness. From the usually staid tree-lined, predominantly white suburbs, to dusty black township streets, black and white South Africans seemed to have discovered a sense of common unity as the victory was toasted across the land. For a country with a long and painful history of division and conflict, and in the sporting arena

rugby in particular being perceived as the game of the Afrikaner oppressors, such celebrations were thrillingly extraordinary.¹

Not only the revellers in the street, but also normally reserved and taciturn academics had outspoken opinions. Wilmot James, a sociologist, expressed what he regarded as the significance of the Springbok victory as follows:

South African sport teams have excelled beyond expectations and in doing so have elevated the concept of national unity in a way that 1000 lectures and community workshops could not have begun to achieve. President Nelson Mandela, too is a major party to the lifting of the national spirit ... Some people wonder aloud how deeply athletic excellence can penetrate the spirit. However, it is a mistake of the intelligence to think that prowess on the sports field evokes merely a momentary sentimentality for the masses. It sets an unmistakable example, involves millions of people in collective forms and celebrations,² and is in fact a powerful example of spontaneous ideology.²

Is this notion of 'spontaneous ideology', however, a useful tool in analysing the enthusiasm which the Rugby World Cup victory has generated in South Africa? While admitting that 'spontaneity' can have a life of its own, once it is accorded the status of an ideology it calls for disaggregation. For a fuller understanding of this ideology and the contextual forces which helped to shape the public sphere during the time of the World Cup, one has to begin with an examination of the attempts to re-model the Springbok rugby ethos along appropriate post-apartheid lines.

Springbok rugby has long been associated with the Afrikaner and apartheid. The unification process between anti-apartheid rugby organisations and establishment mainly white organisations which followed in the wake of political changes after 1990 was a painful and slow process. Moreover, during a crucial time of sensitive political negotiations the game seemed incapable of ridding itself of an appalling public image: during a Test match at Ellispark in 1992, which marked South Africa's return to the international arena, many spectators openly and blatantly displayed crude forms of racist behaviour. The impression was created that rugby as a sport revelled in and reinforced unreconstructed attitudes towards change in the country.³ Given these perceptions and the generally volatile situation in the country, some World Cup Organising Committee members had reservations whether

the tournament should be staged in South Africa at all.

The South African rugby hierarchy was alive to the problems and the real possibility that the tournament could be disrupted by dissent and conflict. Louis Luyt, President of the South African Rugby Football Union (SARFU), was not a man that tolerated failure easily. For all his bluster and at times bombastic behaviour, he fully understood the need to work in a different political environment after the outcome of the 1994 elections.⁴ For the World Cup to be a success, one of the prerequisites was that rugby had to project a more positive image of embracing the new order in South Africa, which after all, made it possible for the tournament to be held in the country. 'Rugby', it was reported, 'is known to be keen to improve its poor image and portray itself as a catalyst for change ...'⁵ To this end a new management structure had to be deployed; stodgy Afrikaner functionaries of the old order had to be replaced with more progressive officials. As the wording of the advertisement for a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) made clear, they were now looking for someone who was capable of taking the union 'into a new phase of its operations'.⁶

Out of 1000 applications Edward Griffiths, a noted sports journalist, was appointed to the position of CEO. It was a significantly different type of appointment. Usually such positions were reserved for Afrikaans speakers from the inner circle of rugby administrators with years of service to the game. Griffiths was English-speaking and at 32 relatively young with little direct experience of rugby administration. He was born of British parents in what is today Zimbabwe, and was educated at Charterhouse and Newcastle University. In 1985 he moved to South Africa. Griffiths quickly familiarised himself with the nature of the South African sporting ethos and subtly infused his knowledge of local sport with the fresh perspectives of an outsider. From this vantage point he wrote critical yet constructive articles on South African rugby. This brought him to the attention of the SARFU and in 1994 he was appointed as media liaison officer for the Springbok team of Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Wise to the ways of the media, a confident and articulate Williams wore the mantle of 'spin-doctor' with distinction. Louis Luyt, so often in the centre of public relations disasters, was impressed; in Griffiths he saw the ideal person to refashion the image of South African rugby during the forthcoming World Cup tournament.⁷ With the not inconsiderable weight of the President of the SARFU behind him, Griffiths was virtually assured of the position.

Apart from Griffiths, another significant appointment to the management team was that of Morné du Plessis as manager. Du Plessis, a Springbok rugby captain from 1975 to 1980, was one of the few Springboks of the apartheid era who was sensitive to the iniquities of the system and the rationale behind the sporting boycott. Although he was careful in not making overt political statements, his decision in 1981, at the height of his sporting powers, to decline the captaincy of the boycott-breaking and, as it turned out, demonstration ridden and divisive tour of New Zealand, spoke volumes for his wider insights. Subsequently he was wooed by the Progressive Federal Party, the white parliamentary opposition to apartheid, as a possible candidate. In 1994 rumour had it that he was also approached by the African National Congress (ANC) to stand as a candidate in the country's first democratic election. Du Plessis steered clear from direct political involvement, but his sympathies were fairly widely known. Former anti-apartheid sporting activists regarded him as an ideal choice as manager because of the almost unique combination of sporting and 'progressive' political credentials.⁸ Appointing someone of Du Plessis's calibre was a further important step in the effort to enhance the image of Springbok rugby in a new political environment.

Equally important was the marketing potential of someone like Francois Pienaar, the 1995 Springbok captain. Pienaar, a friendly, accessible and articulate individual, who during the World Cup tournament was to enjoy a good relationship with President Nelson Mandela, was well aware of the wider ramifications of his role.

With the key personnel in place, the rugby show was about to embark on what Griffiths later described as 'an exemplary public relations campaign'.⁹ Griffiths considered the Springboks to be in the 'entertainment industry', but their responsibility extended 'far beyond the rugby field'.¹⁰ In the world of public relations where perceptions tend to determine reality, the Springboks had to project an image of being 'humble, excited and unashamedly proud of their new democracy', and this had to be repeated at 'infinite press conferences and public appearances'.¹¹ Whatever some Springboks might have thought privately, in public they certainly played their roles well. A British journalist was impressed: 'The 1995 Springboks are politically correct, user-friendly, polite and accessible, they offer daily photo opportunities, attend regular press conferences that provide stage-managed sound-bites'. Yet he was not completely convinced and added pointedly: 'But doubts exist as to whether they

really represent reality'.¹²

Amongst other reasons, such doubts were bound to persist in the absence of any attempt to add, even on a symbolic level, a distinctive African dimension to South African rugby. The tournament, after all, was taking place in a 'new' African country. A good starting point to begin addressing this was to ensure that the Springboks knew the words of the 'new' part of the national anthem, 'Nkosi Sikeleli: Africa', as well as they knew the 'old' part, 'Die Stem', which many South Africans associated with the apartheid order. Television closeups zooming in on the facial expressions of players before Test kick-offs, at times embarrassingly revealed that some players regarded 'Nkosi' at best as superfluous or at worst with disdain. Morné du Plessis was determined to change this. He even obtained the services from an African languages lecturer from the University of Stellenbosch to coach the players in the pronunciation of the Xhosa anthem. 'Most of the guys can't even remember the words of pop songs', he said, 'but they will know the words of the anthem'.¹³

In a further bid to lend more African colour to the team, an African workers' 'chain-gang' song, 'Shosholozza' (literally meaning 'pushing' or 'running' together) was adopted as a theme song. It was also widely publicised that the Springboks supported a community-driven campaign, 'Masakhane' ('let us build together') in the black townships.¹⁴ The 'Africanisation' drive received an unexpected fillip when a black newspaper, the *Sowetan*, coined the term 'Amabokoboko' for the Springboks. This African derivative rapidly gained currency. The degree of cultural fusion implicit in this term helped to contribute to the subsequent retention, amidst some controversy, of the springbok as an official emblem, despite its earlier apartheid associations, of South African rugby.¹⁵ Dovetailing with these developments, the Springboks also had to be seen as standard bearers of national unity; hence the official slogan of 'One Team: One Country'. All these various strands neatly tied together in the notion of South Africa as a 'Rainbow Nation' — a metaphor for ethnically diverse and much pedalled by one of South Africa's Nobel Prize winners, the often theatrical Archbishop Desmond Tutu.¹⁶

While the refashioning of the symbolic imagery of South African rugby was meant to showcase the changes in internal emphases in the country, it was difficult to give substance to these claims if the Springbok rugby team as such, consisting of white men only, looked suspiciously the same as before. Twenty years earlier some rugby administrators

could happily proclaim that a black person would never don a Springbok jersey; in 1995, as a result of changed circumstances, there was an almost desperate search to find a black body who could on playing ability, be put into a Springbok jersey. Those who seek shall find. In stepped Chester Williams, a coloured winger from Western Province. Williams was certainly a good enough player to qualify on merit, but more important on the public relations front he was a priceless asset as the face that could launch the newly integrated South African rugby ship. Despite being a reserved person, Williams received a disproportionate amount of media attention as the only black player in the Springbok squad. Feted in the press and routinely referred to as the 'black pearl', Williams rapidly became an icon for rugby in the 'new' South Africa; he was the emblem of achievement, hope, reconciliation and recognition for the fledgling nation. That Williams played his earlier rugby under the auspices of the white dominated Rugby Board and not under the umbrella of the anti-apartheid activist unions — a fact which in the apartheid era would have made him a collaborator in many quarters -was conveniently forgotten. All that counted was that Williams was black.¹⁷

But then disaster struck. Williams was injured and it seemed as if this would rule him out of the tournament; all too sudden the politically correct advertising campaign began to falter. It nevertheless started to build up steam again when Pieter Hendriks, Williams's replacement, was eliminated from the tournament as a result of dirty play. This opened up the way for Williams who in the meantime had recovered from injury to regain his place, and to carry on where he has left off in the frontline of rugby's public relations campaign. It was strongly rumoured at the time, and also subsequently alleged by Luyt, that Griffiths had taken it on himself to offer Hendriks R15 000 not to appeal against the expulsion from the tournament as that could have jeopardised Williams's return.¹⁸

If Williams had to be kept in the centre of the frame, it is equally true that those with potential to sully the carefully constructed representation of rugby in post-apartheid South Africa, had to be kept outside. One such person was the Northern Transvaal forward, Henry Tromp, who had served a four months jail sentence on a manslaughter charge for his part in the death of a black youth who had been caught stealing from the Tromp family. Tromp was a strong candidate for inclusion in the Springbok World Cup squad. However, the opinion prevailed that it could do the public image of the Spingboks infinite harm if a man with Tromp's past

were to be part of the tournament.¹⁹

It was not only players like Tromp who were to be kept out of the public eye. In the 'national interest' trade union and other disgruntled groups who threatened to disrupt the opening ceremony of the tournament at Newlands, Cape Town, were dissuaded from doing so; it would have been embarrassing for the new government if some of its own supporters were to be seen by the outside world as acting in a disruptive manner.²⁰ In trying to present a sanitised view of South Africa on the eve of the World Cup, the ANC Government followed a pattern of well-established state behaviour in countries where international sporting events with a worldwide audience were to be staged. Thus pre-Olympian suppression of dissidents had occurred in Berlin in 1936, Mexico in 1968, Moscow in 1980 and Seoul in 1988.²¹

In events of this nature, the opening ceremony assumes a significance all of its own. Before the Olympics in Seoul the organising committee and international broadcasters had committed considerable resources to the planning and rehearsing of the opening ceremony. The reason for this, as the planners indicated, was that they had been well aware that the degree of favourable publicity for the country and the Games hinged in part on public reaction to the opening ceremony.²²

For the Rugby World Cup organisers in South Africa, the opening ceremony of the tournament was even of greater importance as the principal vehicle for the self-representation of a newly born society. Given the country's deeply divided past, the whole ceremony had, as far as possible, to be drained from history. On a bright sunny Cape day a colourful pageant unfolded as happy, smiling and dancing South African ethnic groups cavorted around the field, representing the 'rainbow nation', while the official World Cup song, 'A world in union', was belted out. When President Nelson Mandela appeared on the field to make a short speech he was warmly and enthusiastically welcomed with chants of 'Nelson, Nelson'.²³ The 'rainbow nation' vehicle seemed to have clicked into gear.

Edward Griffiths has described the ceremony in glowing terms as one of 'outstanding quality, emotion and creativity', and as a most significant 'expression of the new South Africa as a rainbow land at peace with its own diversity'.²⁴ More soberly it can be seen as a well choreographed public spectacle which gave the dark and dangerous South African past a wide berth, and as a result was able to create the illusion of a new country

born and received without sin. Reflecting on the ceremony, the noted South African novelist and academic, J M Coetzee, pertinently observed that such a 'de-historicized vision of Tourist South Africa' (consisting of 'contented tribesfolk', 'timeless Sotho in blankets', 'timeless Zulu in ostrich feathers', 'happy eighteenth century slaves and slave owners in knee-breeches' and 'half-a-dozen lost looking lads in khaki shirts and shorts') should be viewed purely as the product of image-makers and image managers intent on creating a consumable commodity for the World Cup tournament.²⁵ The public representation of South African society might have been a parody, but it was not a departure from the norm as far as such sporting occasions are concerned; the ceremony merely conformed to the way in which events of this nature are generally contextualised in the public domain. In the literature dealing with sport and identity it is described as 'eternalisation', whereby 'social-historical phenomena are deprived of their historical character by being portrayed as permanent, unchanging and ever-recurring ...'²⁶

The manufactured magic of unity created by the opening ceremony was, however, shortly afterwards, in a rather unexpected way, exposed for what it really was — just a show. In the week after the ceremony, the 'happy' representatives of the rainbow nation on the Saturday before, many of them black youngsters from Langa and Guguletu near Cape Town, complained bitterly that they were not compensated for their participation and threatened to disrupt further World Cup proceedings.²⁷ These threats did not materialise, but in a wider sense the unhappiness of the participants demonstrated the hollowness of the ceremony. The protests failed to attract much media attention, allowing the general public to continue basking in the afterglow of the ceremony sealed with a Springbok victory over the reigning Australian champions.

Purchasing the Product

While it is important to identify those constitutive elements that at the time of the World Cup contributed to the remake of the South African rugby ethos, it cannot be regarded as a full explanation for the euphoria that had swept South Africa and touched even those who earlier on were either hostile to or apathetic about the game. In short, why did the South African public, white and black, endorse the refashioned product so enthusiastically? It does not follow that just because image-producers have carefully repackaged a product, it will necessarily have an impact

on the cultural market place. A more searching explanation of the reasons why rugby appeared to transcend hitherto existing cultural boundaries is thus required.

It would not be amiss, in this respect, to mention what actually happened on the rugby field itself. Often sports historians are so intent in exploring the wider dimensions of sport and society that the significance of the outcome of matches tends to go unnoticed. The fact that the Springboks won all their games ensured that the public interest was kept alive. To argue counterfactually, if the results were different there would not have been much cause for nationwide celebrations. What further added to the occasion was that the victory was achieved in South Africa's first participation in the World Cup tournament.²⁸

Casting an analytical gaze away from the rugby stadium, one has to look at the prevailing public mood at the time of the tournament. The notion of public mood may perhaps be considered rather too nebulous for analytical purposes, yet it is a useful concept when understood as a category of social behaviour that 'involves expectations about collective life or feelings of group efficacy'.²⁹

After years of apartheid and civil turmoil the country had in 1995 emerged from a tense period. The first democratic elections had taken place barely a year earlier and the fact that it was concluded without major upheavals was cause for considerable relief. The transition to democracy was widely hailed as a major achievement after all the earlier dire predictions of a bloodbath. The public mood was positive; for once it seemed as if South Africans of every hue had managed to succeed as a group. Accolades from the international community were all very novel. The satirist, Pieter-Dirk Uys commented gleefully:

They no longer throw our Outspan oranges down London toilets, or our Granny Smith apples into the *grachts* of Amsterdam. They no longer secretly decant our KWV wine into Spanish plonk bottles or scream anti-South African slogans. In fact ... we are now the Good Guys ... We're the democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, non-sensical New South Africa. Hallelujah!³⁰

The World Cup tournament then, coincided with a ground swell of buoyant public opinion; in 1995, 'if ever a country was in need of a party, a good time ... it was South Africa'.³¹ It was indeed a rare historical moment. Public space for interaction on a different level than what was

possible under apartheid had opened up; black and white could, in a relatively harmless way, express a common sentiment without either side sacrificing or risking too much.³²

Most Afrikaners, excluding those on the right, adapted much quicker to the new dispensation than many observers had anticipated. In part this was because they still had representatives on the highest level in the Government of National Unity. Moreover they believed, given the assurances of Vice-president F W de Klerk of weights and counterweights, that the transformation process was well under control. As such the new dispensation was not yet too threatening. On the contrary, as sociologist, Heribert Adam, explained at the time:

By endorsing the ANC rule in a negotiated settlement, and in turn being praised for pragmatic foresight, Afrikaner nationalists wallow in a self-congratulatory mood of having achieved the ultimate triumph of survival as a recognized minority in a hostile environment. In their self-perception, Afrikaners have not handed over power, as it appears to the outside observer, but ... secured a much more stable and amiable environment for future greatness.³³

The perception that political negotiations had worked to the benefit of Afrikaners, had its parallel in the connections between sport and society. There was more than an element of truth in the observation of one journalist that 'Afrikaners had swapped apartheid for rugby, and there was every sign they thought it a fair deal'.³⁴

The ANC, in turn, has just moved into office and still had to demonstrate that they had effectively made the transition from a liberation movement to a responsible government committed to order and reconciliation. Furthermore, as far as economic and social policies were concerned, the ANC was put on 'capitalist probation and subjected to unrelenting pressure to prove its reliability to business interests that will help shape its fate'.³⁵

At the time of the World Cup then, there was every reason for the ANC to conduct itself in an exemplary fashion. Steve Tshwete, the Minister for Sport, was of the opinion that the 'importance of the World Cup could not be over-estimated'. It offered 'a wonderful opportunity and also sets a considerable test. If we pass this test, there could be important benefits for our country and people as a whole'.³⁶ The ANC, like most other governments, clearly regarded sport as an essential element of foreign

and domestic policy in as much as it could confer prestige and promote national unity.³⁷ All of this fed into the need for creating a favourable climate for international investments.³⁸ Through the publicity of the World Cup the ANC could shore up its credibility 'in a way that millions of advertisements worldwide would not have been able to buy'.³⁹

A central figure in the new government's blessing of the World Cup tournament was Nelson Mandela. It is common practice, as the American academic Allen Guttman has noted, for governments to 'collect political prestige by staging extravagant sports spectacles and democratic leaders seldom miss an opportunity to throw out the first ball, to telephone congratulations to the winners, and generally to bask in the reflected glory of athletic achievement'.⁴⁰ In the case of the South African rugby team, however, the Springboks probably stood more to gain by the association with Mandela than the other way round; Mandela already had a long established international reputation as an anti-apartheid icon, while the Spingboks still had to prove their international credibility. Mandela's strategic appearances and his identification with the team helped elevate them, a virtually all-white team, to a symbol of nationhood.

It turned out to be a marketing masterstroke. One media specialist commented that Mandela — 'he of the perpetual smile and the studied stoop of humility' — has 'instilled and enthused the brand image of South Africa with his personality'. What was particularly striking was the break from the past. Gone was 'the hateful image created over decades by that amorphous polymer of bald, grumpy old men pointing fingers and frowning under their black trilbies'. Now a new perception was about to take root:

Instead of that dull country with its dour leaders and bloody conflicts, the world sees Nelson Mandela adorned with the inevitable shirt from a selection — it becomes apparent — of infinite colour and variety, making a speech at the opening game of the Rugby World Cup. They hear the mostly white South African crowd ... chanting Nel-son, Nel-son, praising him in their own boorish rugby manner. Later infinitely compassionate and forgiving, he calls to wish the team luck — a subtle reminder of why they are playing in the tournament at all. The jibe missed, they are duly impressed and they win.⁴¹

Mandela's involvement with the team and the tournament generally, can also be seen as an excursion into the field of cultural politics. The closed

cultural space occupied by rugby, hitherto a predominantly Afrikaner preserve, was sufficiently prised open to allow at least a partial re-inscription of the game's narrow cultural identity. Moreover, the 'public ownership' of rugby was symbolically democratised and extended. Afrikaner claims of possession were compromised with Mandela's anointment of the game; the metaphorical message was that the game belonged to the new South Africa and the old order had passed. Perhaps slightly exaggerated, a British journalist nevertheless made the point well:

Mandela had ... pulled the political magician's trick of all times; to have allowed his rivals the most precious of prizes they could ever wish for and — swish — with one sweep of the cloak represented the prize unchanged, yet suddenly belonging to not the minority but the majority.⁴²

During the tournament much was made of black support for the event, yet the dynamics of that support was seldom explained. There were those whites who believed that black enthusiasm was proof of rugby's, and by implication, white proselytising power.⁴³ It was an oversimplistic view, conveniently ignoring shifts in power relations. In fact, it was only because there was a black government in power that South Africa was able to host the tournament; the cultural trickle down effect of this was that black South Africans could now afford to demonstrate greater largesse. The change was neatly explained by one commentator who pointed out that it was as if black people were in the position of 'senior school kids, indulging the junior standards', and similarly with 'benign generosity' black people 'allowed white South Africa to have its fun while they applauded'.⁴⁴

The support that black people expressed for the Springboks was of a very specific nature. For historical reasons the majority of black people only had a superficial acquaintance with the culture of rugby; for many of them it was the spectacle of the occasion that mattered more than anything else. In addition the new South Africa had opened up a wider range of possible identifications. Under apartheid it was not possible to identify with a team associated with the oppressors, but with apartheid officially out of the way it was less problematical to support a team that claimed to represent the whole of South Africa. Culturally black support for the Springboks generally found expression in uninhibited dancing and praise-singing of the 'Amabokoboko'. The significance of such celebratory exuberance can, however, be overestimated. One woman described her

support for the Springbok team in a novel manner, delightfully capturing the strangeness of the game for the uninitiated, but ultimately giving cause to reflect on the durability of support which is based only on a carnivalesque experience of the game:

I have no idea of what they're doing or why, or which way they're supposed to be running. I can't see why they spend all that time on each other or making themselves into that tortoise thing. All I know is that I am glued to the screen and when I see the team in green hugging each other I get damp in my eyes; these are my boys, that's my team.⁴⁵

Such sentiments constituted one of the elements of the social adhesive that bonded the nation during the World Cup tournament. But was the adhesive sufficiently strong to prevent the product, so carefully assembled by Griffiths and company, from disintegrating after the tournament?

Putting the Product to Test

The post World Cup period did not start off very auspiciously. In his post-dinner speech Louis Luyt as the host suggested that had the Springboks participated in the two previous World Cup tournaments, they could have won those as well. Luyt later claimed that it was meant as a joke but the All Blacks did not think so and some of them, taking umbrage at what they considered a gloating and arrogant attitude, left the dining room.⁴⁶ The earlier well-oiled publicity machine of the World Cup tournament was beginning to splutter slightly.

South Africa's rugby image was further tainted by a rather rough transition from semi-amateurism to full professionalism which involved drawn out and often unsavoury wrangles over contracts and salaries. To the general public, not particularly concerned about the finer details, it seemed as if the players who had given life to the slogan, 'One Team: One Country', now had a far greater interest in money than in the team or the country.⁴⁷

If the magical white wash of the World Cup began to flake in the latter part of 1995, it was seen to be peeling off quite rapidly in 1996. During the 1996 All Black tour some rugby supporters in Bloemfontein dusted off their old South African flags, associated with the apartheid order, and merrily proceeded to wave these with gusto during the Test match. It was in contrast to the World Cup tournament when very few old flags were seen and the new multi-coloured South African flag attained almost cult

status. Now, it appeared as if there was still some symbolic life left in the old flag. Morné du Plessis as manager tried to undo some of the damage by claiming that the Springboks did not play for those who carried the old flag. This only served to create a furore in the Afrikaans press. Neither did the comments of Trevor Manuel, Minister of Finance, calm matters; he said that if certain rugby supporters behaved in the same way as they did during the apartheid days, he could not see his way clear to support the Springboks, but would as he had done under apartheid, shift his allegiance to those who opposed the Springboks. The incongruous situation of a Minister of State refusing to support his own country on the sporting field, and subsequent threats that the old flag may be banned, gave the impression that the harmonious image of a rainbow nation of barely a year before had been supplanted by a more discordant image of a nation rent asunder by thunder and lightning.⁴⁸

Not only was South Africa defeated by the All Blacks in the 1996 series, but key people of the 1995 triumph fell beside the wayside. Amidst fierce controversy the captain, Francois Pienaar, was dropped from the Springbok side, and so was Joel Stransky, the 1995 match winner. Moreover, the principal designers and purveyors of the refashioned rugby ideology during the World Cup tournament became casualties in 1996. Du Plessis more or less left of his own accord, while Louis Luyt bluntly dismissed mastermind Edward Griffiths per fax as CEO.

Griffiths, as a skilled media person, was quick off the mark and made much of his dismissal in the press and elsewhere, projecting himself as the crusading saviour of South African rugby, fighting tirelessly against a reactionary establishment only to be stopped unceremoniously by that well-known and insensitive juggernaut, Louis Luyt. It subsequently became clear that Griffiths had oversimplified matters.

Although Luyt could undoubtedly have handled the situation with greater tact — an attribute that never seems to come to him easily — the fact that he has failed to do so does not necessarily mean that he was entirely in the wrong. Griffiths, fired up with missionary zeal after the World Cup, had apparently acted rather rashly on several occasions by making commitments to build stadiums in black areas for more than R14 million without ascertaining whether the funds were actually available for such projects. He also had altercations with Frikkie Erasmus, the attorney acting on behalf of Chester Williams, as to Williams's reluctance to sign a contract with the SARFU. Williams was in part Griffiths's own

media creation, and the latter resented the fact that Williams had chosen to plan his financial future outside the structures of the SARFU. Allegedly he then threatened to plant a story in the press that Williams was not prepared to assist rugby development in black areas. Besides these criticisms, Luyt also listed nineteen other reasons why Griffiths was dismissed.⁴⁹

The niceties of the Griffiths case, however, did nothing to dispel the growing impression that unity of spirit and purpose in South African rugby was merely a transient phenomenon. It was given further credence by on-going accusations and counter accusations over the pace and direction of rugby development. Some former activists who felt left out in the cold after the merger of the earlier 1990s, threatened to break away from SARFU, claiming that with the advent of full professionalism even less than before was done for rugby development in disadvantaged rural areas.⁵⁰ If any additional evidence of disharmony was required, it was provided by the embarrassing resignation of Springbok coach, Andre Markgraaff. In an unguarded moment he was caught on tape railing against the 'f****g K*ff*rs' involved in the administration of sport.⁵¹ Markgraaff's crude and racist outburst was in sharp contrast to the silky smooth discourse which had emanated from the rugby management during the World Cup tournament. To crown it all, in mid 1997 relations between sports administrators and the government had deteriorated to such an extent that the government was preparing a bill with a view to curbing the autonomy of sporting bodies and the almost unfettered power of people like Louis Luyt.⁵² Rugby in South Africa in 1997 was clearly not rugby in 1995.

But then, in a wider sense the South Africa of 1997 was not the South Africa of 1995. Black resentment has grown in reaction to what is considered an imperfect and inadequate process of societal transformation and little signs of greater overall economic equality. Afrikaners have become increasingly disenchanted with an ANC government. The National Party had left the Government of National Unity, and there is widespread concern about retrenchments in the civil service and semi-state organisations, affirmative action and the diminishing status of the Afrikaans language in public life. One Afrikaner who was involved in the flag controversy in Bloemfontein made a clear connection between political and social developments, and the resurgent support for the old flag when he stated that the 'new South Africa has now become an embarrassment

and a threat to us, so how can we identify with the new flag?⁵³ Indeed, the public mood has changed. Patti Waldmeir, after a fairly optimistic and positive analysis of the South African transition, felt compelled to add the following postscript to her recent book:

South Africa's euphoria has faded leaving South Africans with a massive post-liberation hangover, and a painful case of depressed spirits. They have awakened to a world where Nelson Mandela has begun to lose his aura of sainthood: a world where corruption and incompetence have emerged to taint the new administration; where fear of crime and violence is a constant companion; and where the arrogance of power has begun to claim its victims. (They even lost at rugby).⁵⁴

Given these shifts in the public mood, it is perhaps not at all surprising that rugby, already affected by internal divisions, found it difficult to maintain its position in the nation-building stakes.

Conclusions

This analysis has tried to explain the euphoria around the World Cup phenomenon in South Africa in 1995, questioning the notion of 'spontaneous ideology'. In addition subsequent development after the tournament which seemed to negate the advances that were made in terms of national unity, were explored.

The fact that rugby's image had become tarnished after the World Cup cannot be considered an unusual occurrence in the world of sport and society. In the literature dealing with the social impact of sporting events, it is generally accepted that 'while sport possesses a powerful symbolism that can be exploited on occasion to great effect, the malleability of sports symbolism often undermines its capacity to exert a lasting effect on national identity'.⁵⁵ What made the South African World Cup experience distinctive, however, was that it had to deal with a deeply divisive past, and that it only had a narrow cultural resource base — rugby before the tournament was mainly associated with Afrikaners and apartheid — to work from and to mould into a more encompassing whole upon which a degree of unity, however transient, was constructed.

Writing on the dynamics of rugby and nation-building the editor of the *Weekly Mail and Guardian* perceptively commented, albeit with a touch of chauvinism, on the state of play in 1996:

When South Africa characterises itself as 'one nation' it is less

a statement of fact than the expression of an aspiration. Only a fool would imagine that ours is a united country. It was, in fact, the recognition of the fractured nature of our society — and the violently destructive consequences if we did nothing about it — that led us to the constitutional settlement. Inherent in that settlement was a vision of national unity fabricated in the hope that the wish would prove to be the father of a future reality — that if we repeated the mantra often enough on ‘one people, one nation’ we would in time create the society that would allow the survival of our children. At this early stage in that exercise in nation building it is easy to ridicule the pretension, to cry out like the little boy that ‘the emperor has no clothes on’. Some foreign observers do so, priding themselves on their perspicacity in seeing through our delusions. They are also fools for failing to understand the desperate game we play.⁵⁶

The way in which the Springbok victory embodied the often unexpressed aspirations of many South Africans and the implications thereof, adds a necessary cautionary note to any analysis simply wishing to dismiss the World Cup euphoria as a case of a gullible public being misled by a persuasive media. To be sure, as indicated, it was in many respects an orchestrated media affair, and there were also very specific reasons for the enthusiasms displayed by the public. But this should not be constructed as reflecting negatively on the desire of many South Africans to purchase a re-designed cultural product, with all its possible latent flaws, in the hope that it will serve the future better than the past. How much are they to be blamed for failing to read the small print that was to become operative as soon as the political and social context began to shift?

Furthermore, can the setbacks subsequent to the World Cup tournament be seen as a complete reversal and a return to the earlier rigid positions? Joel Stransky regarded by some journalists as a liberal, had a firm opinion on this: ‘We seemed to have turned the clock back 20 years. Guys have done so much to improve the image at the World Cup were removed from office. It was as if you’d built up a million-dollar corporation and then just let it go bust. It was a huge step backwards.’⁵⁷ On face value Stransky’s view is difficult to fault. But in making the exceptionalism of the World Cup tournament — a result of very special circumstances — the norm, all else is per definition bound to fail.

Where there was undoubtedly a failure to build on the momentum of the World Cup, it does not necessarily follow that rugby has returned to

its former Afrikaner and apartheid enclave. A number of external forces run counter to the possibility of such a development. Afrikaner culture has been so fragmented in the 1990s after its uncoupling from official political power that even if rugby wanted to return to the past, it would be difficult to find a home at all." In addition, with the general globalisation of sport rugby can no longer claim to be an exclusive Afrikaner project; ownership has now to a great extent than before shifted to large television corporations and sponsors. 'From Boere — glasnost came rugbystroika', one journalist commented, 'the focus of rugby moved from the scrum to the criss-cross beauty of the fourth, fifth and sixth wave of rucking ... much more in tune with the cathode-ray world of computers and TV'.⁵⁹ Moreover, it would be political suicide for rugby even to contemplate reverting to a pre-1990 apartheid order; the ANC would simply stifle any move by calling off all international tours, and in any case there are few, if any, rugby administrators who would seriously consider such an option.

Rugby's development program is furthermore well in place. Admittedly it is often criticised for various reasons, some of which are more convincing than others, but this does not detract from the fact that the SARFU has actually made a firm commitment to address the imbalances of the past.⁶⁰ What is often overlooked, is that rugby, because of the world champion status of the Springboks and particularly because of the game's historical associations with the old order, is more subjected to public trials of political correctness than some other sports. Rugby cannot hide behind the perceived multi-racial past of a game like soccer in South Africa, or the liberal facade that cricket has erected so effectively.⁶¹

Through the World Cup tournament rugby sought to redeem itself and for a brief period it appeared as if it had done so successfully. However, the sheer weight of expectations and rugby's remaining historical baggage, proved to be a liability. But the situation has not deteriorated to such an extent that the baggage that has already been discarded, is now being retrieved. Rugby has neither been fully redeemed, nor has it completely fallen back on old ways. What seems clearer though, is that with the advent of the professional era, the game is less likely to be driven by ethnic politics and more by the dictates of capitalist interests. This in turn may have significant implications for possible future clashes between the state and the SARFU pertaining to ownership of the game.

NOTES:

- 1 There is no shortage of reports on the euphoria which accompanied South Africa's Rugby World Cup victory. All the newspapers carried banner headlines and extensive commentary. I found the reports in the Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, *Rapport*, 25 June 1995, to be the most graphic.
- 2 *Democracy in Action*, Mar. 1996, p. 3.
- 3 For an analysis of the links between rugby, Afrikaners and apartheid see A Grundlingh, A Odendaal and B Spies, *Beyond the Tryline: Rugby and South African Society*, Johannesburg, 1995, chs 1, 4 and 5.
- 4 *New Nation*, 23 June 1995. See also E Griffiths, *One Team, One Country: The Greatest Year of Springbok Rugby*, Johannesburg, 1996, p. 5.
- 5 *Sunday Times*, 12 Feb. 1995.
- 6 *Sunday Times*, 12 Feb. 1995.
- 7 The information on Griffiths is drawn from the *Cape Times*, 27 June 1995 and the *Sunday Times*, 12 Feb. 1995.
- 8 The paragraph on Du Plessis is based on Griffiths, *One Team*, pp. 46-50; *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, May-June 1995.
- 9 Griffiths, *One Team*, p. 114.
- 10 *Sunday Times*, 19 Nov. 1995.
- 11 Griffiths, *One Team*, p. 114.
- 12 Quoted in *Eastern Province Herald*, 24 June 1995.
- 13 *Economist*, 27 May 1995; see also Griffiths, *One Team*, p. 49.
- 14 Griffiths, *One Team*, p. 114; *Star*, 20 June 1995.
- 15 For these developments see D Booth, 'Mandela and Amabokoboko: the Political and Linguistic Nationalisation of South Africa?', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Sept. 1996, pp. 457-77.
- 16 For the 'rainbow nation' notion see J M Coetzee, 'The Rugby World Cup of Rugby' in *Southern African Review of Books*, July 1995.
- 17 *Argus*, 16 June 1995; *Rapport*, 23 July 1995; *Sowetan*, 15 June 1995; *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, May-June 1995; *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 6-12 June 1997.
- 18 *Die Afrikaaner*, 27 July-1 Aug. 1995; *SA Sports Illustrated*, 22 July 1996. Griffiths, *One Team*, pp. 81-2, does not address this allegation in his book.
- 19 On Tromp see *Beeld*, 10 Apr. 1995; *Die Afrikaaner*, 13-20 Apr. 1995; *Rapport*, 16 Apr. 1995; *Sunday Paper*, 17 Aug. 1996; Griffiths, *One Team*, pp. 31, 203.
- 20 *Natal on Saturday*, 20 May 1995; *Die Burger*, 20 May 1995, *Citizen*, 21 Apr. 1995.
- 21 B Houlihan, *Sport and International Politics*, London, 1994, p. 13.
- 22 J F Larson and H-S Park, *Global Television and the Politics of the Seoul Olympics*, Boulder, 1993, pp. 194-5. For a description of television coverage of the tournament see L Strelitz and L Steenveld, 'Sport en Nasiebou in Suid-Afrika: Die Betekenis van die 1995 Rugby Wereldbeker'. in *Ecqui Novi*, 17, 2, 1996, pp. 137-58.
- 23 For example *Die Burger*, 26 May 1995; *Cape Times*, 26 May 1995.
- 24 Griffiths, *One Team*, pp. 62, 63.
- 25 *Southern African Review of Books*, July 1995.
- 26 N Blain, R Boyle and H O'Donnell, *Sport and National Identity in the European Media*, Leicester, 1993, p. 11.
- 27 *Argus*, 30 May 1995; *Star*, 2 June 1995.
- 28 Griffiths, *One Team*, p. 114.
- 29 W M Rahn, B Kroeger and C M Kite, 'A Framework for the Study of Public Mood, in *Political Psychology*, 17, 1 1996, p. 49.
- 30 *Sunday Times Inside*, 22 Oct. 1995.
- 31 Griffiths, *One Team*, p. 51.
- 32 Compare Griffiths, *One Team*, p. 113.

- 33 H Adam, 'Ethnic versus Civic Nationalism: South Africa's Non-racialism in Comparative Perspective', *SA Sociological Review*, 7, 1, 1994, p. 26.
- 34 P Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle: The End of Apartheid and the Birth of the New South Africa*, Middlesex, 1997, p. 269.
- 35 M Macdonald, 'Power Politics in the New South Africa', in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 22, 2, June 1996, p. 227.
- 36 *Time*, 29 May 1995.
- 37 Compare D Booth, 'United Sport: An Alternative Hegemony in South Africa?', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 12, 3, Dec. 1995, p. 120.
- 38 *Economist*, 13 May 1995; *Productivity SA*, Mar.-Apr. 1995.
- 39 *Die Volksblad*, 27 June 1995 (translation).
- 40 A Guttman, *Sports Spectators*, New York, 1986, p. 179.
- 41 *Living*, Dec. 1995.
- 42 Quoted in *Cape Times*, 27 June 1995.
- 43 For an example see *Argus*, 23 June 1996.
- 44 *Sunday Independent*, 25 June 1995. See also *Star*, 25 May 1995.
- 45 *Star*, 6 June 1995.
- 46 For example *Sunday Times*, 2 July 1995.
- 47 *Business Day*, 5 July 1995; *Finansies en Tegniek*, 14 July 1995; *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 21-27 July 1995; *Sunday Times*, 6 and 20 Aug. 1995; *Beeld*, 12 Aug. 1995; *Rapport*, 20 Aug. 1995; *Pretoria News*, 11 Sept. 1995; *SA Sports Illustrated*, 16 Sept. 1996. The financial clashes which accompanied the international professionalisation of the game are described in P Fitzsimons, *The Rugby War*, Sydney, 1996.
- 48 *Die Volksblad*, 7 and 8 Aug. 1996; *Beeld*, 14 and 23 Aug. 1996; *Die Burger*, 15 Aug. 1996; *Citizen*, 22 and 31 Aug. 1996; *Die Afrikaer*, 16-22 Aug. 1996; *Sunday Times*, 18 Aug. 1996.
- 49 *Sunday Independent*, 18 Feb. 1996; *Rapport*, 18 Feb. 1996; *Sunday Star*, 17 Feb. 1996; *Sunday Times*, 18 Feb. 1996; *Cape Times*, 25 July 1996; *SA Sports Illustrated*, 22 July 1996; Griffiths, *One Team*, pp. 200-204, 212-13.
- 50 *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 7-13 Mar., 23-29 Aug 1996; *Star*, 22 Aug. 1996; *Sunday Independent*, 4 May 1997; SABC 3 Program, 'Rugby Unity', 6 May 1997; *SA Sports Illustrated*, 14 Apr. 1997.
- 51 *Beeld*, 18 Feb. 1997.
- 52 *Sunday Times*, 8 June 1997.
- 53 *Die Volksblad*, 22 Aug. 1996 (translation); See also *Rapport*, 11 Aug. 1996; *Daily News*, 12 June 1995; *Sowetan*, 9 Aug. 1996.
- 54 Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle*, p. 287.
- 55 For example B Houlihan, 'Sport, National identity and Public Policy', in *Nations and Nationalism*, 3, 1, 1997, p. 113.
- 56 *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 16-22 Aug. 1996.
- 57 *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 18-22 Aug. 1997.
- 58 On Afrikaner culture see WA Munro, 'Revisiting Tradition, Reconstructing Identity: Afrikaner Nationalism and Political Transition in South Africa', in *Politikon*, 22, 2, 1995, p. 27; *Sunday Independent*, 6 Apr. 1997.
- 59 H Pienaar, 'The Boere and the Egg-shaped Ball', in *Sidelines*, Sept. 1996, p. 17.
- 60 Compare *Rapport*, 21 May 1995; *Sunday Times*, 21 May 1995; *Star*, 21 and 22 Aug. 1996; *Die Volksblad*, 22 Aug. 1996; *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 7-13 Mar. 1997; Bop TV Program entitled 'Rugby Development', 8 June 1997.
- 61 For a subtle and perceptive analysis of the underlying ideology informing cricket development see K Johns, 'A Second Innings for Cricket: The Political Economy, Nation-building and Cricket Development Programmes in South Africa', unpub. MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1995.

The 1995 Rugby World Cup Final was the final match of the 1995 Rugby World Cup, played in South Africa. The match was played at Ellis Park Stadium, Johannesburg on 24 June 1995 between the host nation, South Africa, and New Zealand. South Africa won the encounter by three points in their first Rugby World Cup Final, which was also the first to require extra time. Unusually, the points were scored by only one player from each team, with Andrew Mehrtens of New Zealand scoring all 12 of the All Blacks Grundlingh, A. (1998) "From Redemption to Recidivism? Rugby and Change in South Africa during the 1995 World Cup and Its Aftermath", *Sporting Traditions*, 14.2, 67-86. Google Scholar. Hall, S. (1997) "The Spectacle of the 'Other'", in S. Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Thousand Oaks: Sage), 223-279. Google Scholar. Hall, S. (1984) "The Narrative Construction of Reality", *Southern Review*, 17.1, 2-17. Google Scholar. Steenveld, L. and L. Strelitz (1998) "The 1995 Rugby World Cup and the Politics of Nation-building in South Africa", *Media, Culture & Society*, 20.4, 609-629. CrossRef Google Scholar. Steketee, M. (2000) "No Need to be Hazy after All These Years", *The Australian*, 22 September. Google Scholar.