

Soccer and Human Rights:
Chief Luthuli, Alan Paton, Dennis Brutus and the 2010 World Cup

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It is a great honor to have been invited to give the 17th Alan Paton Memorial Lecture. Thank you to the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archive and to my hosts at the UKZN History Department, and to all of you for taking time out of your busy lives to come here this evening.

In exactly 28 days, Bafana Bafana and Mexico will kick off the 2010 World Cup finals – the first-ever on African soil. The attention of the planet will be focused on this country like never before. As David Goldblatt has noted, a television audience of *three billion* people watched the 2006 final between Italy and France; never had half of humankind done anything simultaneously before.

How did a former pariah of international sport become World Cup host? To begin answering this question let us journey into the past and explore how the ‘liberal’ ethics of sport inspired and guided Albert Luthuli, Alan Paton and Dennis Brutus as they connected soccer with human rights in support of South Africa's larger quest for freedom and democracy.

These liberal ethics of sport had their origins in Victorian Britain, where modern sports grew out of a social and economic revolution brought about by industrialization. British public schools spawned a movement devoted to using sport for academic education and moral training. Discourses about sportsmanship, fair competition and merit-based achievement entrenched themselves in British sport. When the rules of soccer were codified and standardized between 1848 and 1863, they embraced the liberal principle of universal human equality under the law, a prerequisite for soccer's rapid global spread.

Modern sport arrived in Africa (and Asia) in the 19th century with European imperialism. Indeed, the origins of soccer in Africa are to be found in the Cape and Natal, where the earliest documented matches took place in 1862. Interestingly, Pietermaritzburg is the cradle of organized soccer on this continent as Pietermaritzburg County FC was founded around 1879. The Natal Football Association was formed in 1882, more than a decade before cricket leagues started in Pietermaritzburg and Durban (1894-95). Due to colonial rule, only whites were allowed to participate in these pioneering soccer organizations.

Yet there were missionaries, teachers, philanthropists who believed that football was also potent enough to keep the devil at bay and could provide a healthy and moral outlet for Africans' supposedly savage instincts. In mission schools, an important meeting ground for Western and local culture, soccer was as central to boys' sports as netball and tennis were to girls' sports.

Chief Albert Luthuli

Albert Luthuli revealed his passion for football in his autobiography *Let My People Go*: "I became a compulsive football fan," while teaching at Adams College in Durban in the 1920s. "To this day, I am carried away helplessly by the excitement of a soccer match." The origins of Luthuli's passion for the game are unclear but he is likely to have played some football and tennis as a student in the 1910s at John Dube's Ohlange Institute and at the Edendale Methodist School.

What we do know is that Luthuli's involvement in soccer grew considerably after he began teaching at Adams College in 1920. (Known as Amanzimtoti Training Institute before 1914, Adams was founded in 1849 by Congregationalist missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, based in Boston, Massachusetts.) The school football team, the Shooting Stars, was among the oldest and most prestigious African sides in Durban, having competed against outside opponents beginning in the 1890s.

Luthuli took the helm of the Shooting Stars in the 1920s. He internalized the liberal view of sport and embraced the muscular Christian value of 'healthy mind in a healthy body'—an ideological pillar of sport at Adams. 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,' Luthuli opined in *Iso Lomuzi* (Eyes of Our Village), the school magazine. 'Games develop and call for the exercise of those qualities which contribute to the highest manhood,' Luthuli wrote, 'and for most of us they help to keep us occupied in our leisure moments when otherwise the devil would be finding work for our idle hands.'

In 1921 Shooting Stars won the Marshall Campbell Cup of the Durban & District Native Football Association and earned a share of the city title. (The club that won the most trophies in a season was crowned champion.) Luthuli credited a supportive white teacher, Louis Elliot, for leading the side to victory. Under Luthuli's stewardship, Shooting Stars won the city title in 1925 and 1926; in 1927 the Shooting Stars, triumphed in the only competition completed and in 1928 won three cups to remain Durban champions. They lost their title to Rebellions in 1929, despite winning two trophies, but reclaimed it in 1930, winning three of five competitions.

In 1934, Luthuli organized a historic coaching clinic at Adams by Motherwell FC, a professional team from Scotland then touring South Africa. Motherwell had a profound impact on black South African football in the 1930s, soundly beating white teams to the delight of black fans watching in segregated pens at stadiums around the country. Several African clubs quickly adopted the Scottish short-passing game and proudly advertised themselves as playing 'Motherwell' style. The coaching clinic at Adams was forced

indoors due to heavy rain. Nevertheless, Luthuli's detailed report about the event in *Iso Lomuzi* describes the Motherwell captain giving specialized coaching advice to the enthralled students. The climactic conclusion to this 'memorable gathering' featured the Adams students belting out the school song and "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika," followed by the Scottish visitors' rousing rendition of "Hail, Caledonia"!

The strongly populist appeal of soccer stoked Luthuli's interest in the game: 'what has attracted me as much as the game,' he recalled in *Let My People Go*, 'has been the opportunity to meet all sorts of people, from the loftiest to the most disreputable.'

Soccer enabled Luthuli to cut his teeth in politics many years before joining the African National Congress. In 1929 he was elected vice-president of the DDNFA. Luthuli's managerial and leadership skills reinvigorated African soccer in Durban at a difficult time. He prized accountability, which he fostered by introducing the practice of compiling annual reports, presiding over a Commission of Inquiry into the affairs of the association in 1932-33, by which time he had also become the association's financial auditor. Luthuli worked tirelessly to heal factional divides within the association, and frequently stressing the need for "brotherly love and no individual recriminations." In 1932, he supported making English the official language of the DDAFA partly to avoid discriminating against members who could not (or chose not to) speak isiZulu.

Luthuli linked soccer and human rights by defending Africans' right to play. Soccer was part of the larger struggle for equality and self-determination. For example, when the Durban City Council moved aggressively in the early 1930s to gain control of black soccer, Luthuli politely, but firmly, fended off the authorities. Even though the white council was extremely reluctant to pay for any African social welfare, including sport, it simultaneously tried to undermine African self-reliance. So Luthuli vigorously defended his association's policy of charging admission fees for marquee matches in order to generate revenue to pay for maintenance of the grounds, referees, and travel expenses for Durban teams playing inter-town matches in Pietermaritzburg and Ladysmith.

While institutional racism hardened in the inter-war period, Luthuli and the DDAFA executive worked assiduously to get municipal funding for the construction of a Native Recreation Ground at Somtseu Road, which was completed in 1935-36. The new ground produced better football, attracted larger crowds, and improved the financial prospects of the African game. Somtseu Road also stood as a visible symbol of African claims to urban rights and human rights (despite Natives Urban Areas Act and other racially discriminatory laws).

Luthuli also supported a move to change the name of the Durban & District *Native* Football Association in 1932 to Durban & District *African* Football Association. This reflected a rising African political consciousness that could be traced back at least to 1923, when the SA Native National Congress adopted the title of African National Congress. Radical and progressive Africans also increasingly used the more assertive term "African" in the 1920s and 1930s.

Luthuli made two final contributions to soccer and human rights after he left Adams to assume the elected chieftanship of Groutville in 1936. First, in partnership with Rev. Bernard L. E. Sigamoney, an Indian Anglican pastor and passionate advocate of mixed sport, in 1946 Luthuli established the Natal Inter-Race Soccer Board. Aimed at overcoming the racial balkanization of the game, this pioneering body organized competitions between African, Indian, and Coloured teams in the province. The Natal Inter-Race Board, together with its predecessor in the Transvaal (1935), represented an initial, perhaps necessary, step towards the formation in 1951 of the antiapartheid South African Soccer Federation, which proudly counted on Luthuli as official patron.

Clearly, Luthuli did much to transform sport into a potent force for racial integration, equality, and human rights. 'Over twenty-five years,' Luthuli wrote in reference to the years before joining the ANC, 'I have played what part I could in organizing African and inter-racial sport.' His soccer activism helped build a foundation for the sport boycott during apartheid. 'I confess that when I watch matches between White South Africans and visiting teams', Luthuli would point out in later years, 'I invariably want the foreigners to win. So do other Africans.'

Alan Paton

We do not usually connect Alan Paton with the struggle against apartheid sport. In fact, not much is known about Paton's involvement in sport, although his experience as a student and teacher at Maritzburg College must have made some impression upon him. However, we do know that soccer was played at Diepkloof Reformatory in Johannesburg during Paton's thirteen years tenure as Principal. Much like the liberal reformers of 19th-century Britain, Paton believed in the character-building and educational power of the game, and so the young teenagers at Diepkloof played the game regularly amongst themselves and against teams from area schools, including St. Peter's in Rosettenville.

For the purposes of this lecture, I will focus on Paton's 1959 keynote address at inaugural meeting of South African Sports Association (SASA) – the first anti-apartheid sport coalition and a precursor to the South African Nonracial Olympic Committee (SANROC). Significantly, about 50,000 of SASA's 70,000 members came from the ranks of the South African Soccer Federation, which boasted Luthuli as a Patron. Soccer was central to SASA's existence.

Speaking to the audience at the Tamil-Vedic Hall on Carlisle Street in Durban, Paton remarked that, 'My past [sporting] performances, though vigorous, were average, but I think I was asked here . . . because I am thought to have some knowledge of fair play.' Paton praised SASA's commitment to practise sport on a nonracial basis and fight to have elite 'non-white sportsmen' included in South African national teams. Apartheid in sport, Paton said, had harmed 'the spirit of fair play that should underlie all sport.' Not only did racial discrimination violate the liberal ethics of sport, it also violated the rule of law, such as Article 1 of the Olympic Charter, which explicitly prohibits discrimination based on race, colour or creed.

Paton stated his full support of the Federation's fight to become South Africa's representative at FIFA. He commended George Singh and the Federation leadership for turning down 'subservient affiliation' (i.e. membership without voting rights) to the white Football Association of Southern Africa (FASA). Paton also dismissed the myth propagated by conservatives in South Africa and overseas that sport and politics occupied separate spheres. 'It will be said of course that you as an Association, and I as a speaker,' he said, 'are bringing politics into sport; they are already there in the colour bar, they are already there in the policy of the SA Olympic Committee to bar non-white athletes from international competition. It was not you, Gentlemen, who brought politics into sport in fact you are trying to get politics out.'

Paton concluded his speech by reiterating the reasons for his support of SASA's struggle for equal rights in sport: 'To my mind sportsmanship and the colour bar are incompatible. Sport is supposed to teach all those virtues that the colour bar destroys. Sport is supposed to teach people to know and respect one another, and to want to see fair play for all. Sport is supposed to teach us to admire the prowess of others, not to want to restrict it . . . Sport teaches self-respect, but the colour bar is contemptuous of self-respect.'

The liberal ethics of sport fueled the opposition of Paton, SASA and the ANC to the 1959 proposed tour of South Africa by the West Indies cricket team captained by Frank Worrell, the first black captain in the history of West Indies cricket. (The great Trinidadian radical intellectual and cricket writer C. L. R. James criticised Paton and Canon John Collins (IDAF) for taking this stance.) As Christopher Merrett has explained, Paton believed the sport boycott 'was undoubtedly liberal in principle and practice: a non-violent means to support the oppressed and bring pressure to bear on a police state that was becoming increasingly authoritarian and violent in its methods.' For Paton, Father Trevor Huddleston and later Peter Hain in the Stop the Seventy Tour (of Britain by South Africa's cricketers), the boycott was a powerful way of critiquing white supremacy and hitting white South Africa where it hurt: on the playing fields.

'I look to the day when some white champion will join a non-racial Union,' Paton told the Durban audience in 1959. 'But until that time comes, I wish all the success to SASA, in its efforts to build up non-white sport, in its efforts to prevent non-white sport from solidifying into racial compartments, in its efforts to secure for non-white sportsmen the right to represent South Africa abroad if they qualify to do so, and in its effort to remove racial discrimination in sport.' Paton's words struck at the heart of why millions of ordinary sportspeople around the world would come to sympathize with the plight of black South African athletes—men and women denied the basic human right to play and to compete on a level playing field simply because of their dark skin.

Dennis Brutus

Listening attentively to Paton that January evening in 1959 was Dennis Brutus, the founding secretary of SASA. Sadly, the poet, teacher and activist passed away of cancer five months ago. But I was lucky to have met Dennis on several occasions in the past and

he generously shared his knowledge and wisdom with me as I dug deep into South African soccer's riveting history.

I discovered that Dennis Brutus shared Paton's belief in sport's liberal ethics. At the 'Sport and Liberation' conference held in East London a few years ago, Dennis told me how he and his radical cohort at Fort Hare had 'completely bought into this Victorian ideal of sport: the freedom and equality and fair play it supposedly entailed.' Partly inspired by Father Huddlestone's first call for a sport boycott of white South Africa, in 1955 Brutus incorporated sport into South Africans' quest for freedom and human rights. In Port Elizabeth, he founded the Coordinating Committee for International Recognition of Sport, which 'based itself on a single, simple principle: That all South Africans should be allowed to represent their country—if they are good enough.' While this organization lasted only a year or so, due to police intimidation and harassment, it popularized the idea that all-white teams did not have the right to call themselves 'South African'.

SASA picked up where the Coordinating Committee left off. Brutus was instrumental in forcing the cancellation of a soccer match in Cape Town in 1959 between a local white team and *Portuguesa Santista*, a professional Brazilian club on its way to Mozambique. The Brazilian club had reportedly agreed to drop several black players and field an all-white side against the South Africans. Brutus caught wind of this acceptance of racism and sent a telegram in protest to the Brazilian consul in Cape Town. The consul, apparently after communicating with Brazilian president Juscelino Kubitschek, prohibited *Portuguesa Santista* from playing the game—the first official protest against apartheid by the Brazilian government.

Brutus was the main architect of SASA's 'Operation Support Only Nonracial Events In Sport' (SONREIS) in June 1961 ('sun rays' in Afrikaans, the literary in him could not be suppressed). The objectives of SONREIS were twofold. First, it attempted to curtail black people's attendance at white sporting events (especially Indians' support of NFL teams in Durban). Second, it called for a boycott of racially exclusive associations. One of the only successes of the SONREIS campaign was keeping many black fans away from a racially segregated league for Africans in the early 1960s, a key factor in that league's rapid demise.

Brutus also worked closely with the South African Soccer Federation on the campaign to kick South Africa out of FIFA. The world governing body's suspension of South Africa in September 1961 dealt a significant blow to the apartheid regime. It was the first time that a major international organization had sanctioned Pretoria, which raised global awareness of the injustices of apartheid and instilled hope among the liberation movements at a time of brutal government repression.

In the wake of Sharpeville and the banning of the ANC and PAC, SASA gave birth to SANROC in October 1962. Invigorated by the FIFA suspension, Brutus spearheaded a global campaign to isolate apartheid South Africa from world sport, a risky and dangerous undertaking for a man under a banning order and out on bail. In 1963 he was arrested in Mozambique on his way to a meeting of the International Olympic

Committee in West Germany. Turned over by the Portuguese security police to their South African counterparts, Brutus was shot in the stomach while trying to escape in central Johannesburg. As he lay bleeding on the pavement in front of Anglo American's headquarters, surely a sign he was about to die he would say jokingly years later, the first ambulance was turned away: it was for 'Europeans' only. Finally, the right ambulance arrived, Brutus was taken to hospital and his wounds attended to. He was then sentenced to eighteen months hard labour, during which he worked in the lime quarry on Robben Island with Nelson Mandela and the Rivonia trialists. Prison guards assaulted and abused Brutus, most likely because of his role in keeping South Africa out of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

Upon his release in 1966, Dennis Brutus resurrected SANROC in exile in London (with the assistance of Chris De Broglie). Thanks to Brutus and SANROC South Africa was expelled from the Olympics in 1970 and from FIFA in 1976. Dennis was particularly proud of his participation in the Pan-African coalition that led the world governing body of soccer to issue clear guidelines for South Africa's return to international competition: an end to apartheid and the formation of a single racially integrated soccer association in the country.

Fifteen years later, just a few days before the launch of CODESA I in December 1991, the nonracial South African Football Association was officially launched in Durban. On 7 July 1992 a racially mixed South African national side celebrated its return to world football (premature according to Dennis Brutus), with a 1-0 victory over Cameroon at King's Park rugby stadium. When Orlando Pirates and Bafana Bafana became African champions in 1995 and 1996 respectively, soccer captured the seemingly boundless possibilities of a free and democratic South Africa.

The 2010 World Cup and Human Rights

The stories of Chief Luthuli, Alan Paton and Dennis Brutus serve as a reminder of how soccer popularized the struggle against apartheid around the world by (a) sensitizing ordinary people to racial discrimination in sport (b) placing apartheid in the media spotlight, and (c) undermining notions of white supremacy. So what does this history have to do with the impending 2010 World Cup?

The game today is big business. FIFA sold television rights to the 2010 tournament for \$2.8 billion; the English Premier League's current TV contract is worth £2.325 billion; and the South African PSL's broadcasting deal with Multichoice/DSTV amounted to at least R1.5 billion. World Cup preparations have seen the South African government spend R30-40 billion on stadium construction and infrastructural improvements directly related to the event.

Of course, hyper-commercialized soccer is unlikely to go away any time soon, but soccer and human rights remain crucial. The liberal ethics of nonracialism, equality, and fair play are still part of the game, though mostly as part of a rhetorical repertoire serving various interests. The politics of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa revolve around

control of ever-growing revenues and the benefits from marketing “Brand South Africa” to the world.

There is a legal basis for advancing a human rights agenda in football. The South African Bill of Rights (Articles 27-29) guarantees access to health care, education and children’s rights, which should reasonably include access to physical exercise and basic sporting opportunities. In addition, the binding United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child ‘recognizes the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities’ (Article 32). So what needs to be done?

First, we need to keep fighting to ensure equitable access to the professional game at the stadium and on television. Fans should be able to pay fair and reasonable ticket prices, especially when stadiums are built with public funds. We must also continue to put pressure on broadcasters, football bodies, and regulatory authorities to show as many local and international matches as possible on free-to-air TV.

Second, significant investments are needed in the grassroots game. We need to put more pressure on stakeholders, practitioners and corporate sponsors to devise a sustainable long-term soccer development strategy for boys and girls, men and women. It is absolutely unacceptable that the domestic Premier Soccer League ranks among the Top 10 richest leagues in the world while sports facilities in townships and rural areas remain woefully inadequate; coaches’ training is almost non-existent; proper equipment is scarce; and the lion’s share of youth development is left in the hands of corporate social responsibility initiatives, a few NGOs, and passionate, but under-resourced, individuals.

Third, the cultural dimension of the game deserves far greater attention. 2010 must be a catalyst for producing new knowledge about soccer, past and present. This can be done by funding new university programs, research centres, publications, partnerships and a national football museum. These initiatives can deepen understanding of social change while enhancing the ongoing democratization of South African culture. There would be other benefits too, like economic development, helping to create a new sense of South African-ness, and providing lessons for policymakers addressing the legacies of apartheid and the challenges of globalization.

The struggles of Luthuli, Paton and Brutus were predicated on the fundamental idea that playing and watching sport is a human right. On the eve of the first World Cup on African soil something bold is needed to make sure soccer does not become just another product to be consumed by those who can afford it. At stake is soccer’s egalitarian nature and its unrivalled capacity to surprise us . . . so that, to quote Eduardo Galeano, ‘when you least expect it, the impossible occurs, the dwarf teaches the giant a lesson, and a scraggy, bow-legged black man makes an athlete sculpted in Greece look ridiculous.’