

By Keith Wattrus

AS South Africa moves irrevocably along the path towards a negotiated future, "non-racialism" and "democracy" are two concepts set to generate much discussion. Indeed, they are central to the debates which must permeate every level of South African society before that future can, successfully, become a reality.

These two concepts are already the focus of attention in the sporting arena, where administrators of several codes of sport have begun to grapple with the obstacles which prevent them from uniting under one non-racial umbrella. When administrators of a particular sport believe they have always run their sport along non-racial and democratic lines, it comes somewhat as an affront to discover that the same perception is not shared by the disenfranchised majority.

This is a problem which has not only been encountered by "establishment" sporting bodies, but has also in a certain sense been encountered by the South African Council of Sport (Sacos). Consequently, careful unpacking of the concepts is required before the foundation is reached, upon which unification talks can thereafter be built.

Largely because of entrenched positions, little has been achieved in the past decade towards uniting sport in South Africa. The sport moratorium, which effectively isolated South African sport from international sport, was the axis around which all sport policy turned. "No normal sport in an abnormal society" was the cry of the disenfranchised, while establishment codes responded with: "We'll do what's best for our sportspersons." And so it seemed that exploration of neutral territory would remain impossible as long as semblances of apartheid existed in South African society.

"An idea whose time has come" could be a way of describing the emergence of the National Sports Congress (NSC). Set up primarily to address the stalemate referred to above, the NSC however remains committed to the development of sport, particularly in underprivileged areas. Its more flexible approach has seen the initiation of talks between sports bodies along a wide range of fronts; talks which are already beginning to bear fruit insofar as progress towards unification of certain sporting codes is concerned.

The National Sports Congress has never believed that to achieve its task it has to turn sportspersons into politicians; in fact, it respects the real political limitations of most South African sportspersons. The NSC does however suggest that most sportspersons underestimate the impact which they can have by simply standing out publicly for non-racialism; that they place too many constraints on themselves, believing that

their limitations curb them more than they in fact do.

Naturally, therefore, "white" sporting bodies entering into their first discussions with the National Sports Congress are bound to find the level of political discussion more dominant than in their own organisations. Similarly, they will find that the concepts of non-racialism and democracy take on a far more politically-active connotation than the passive apolitical meaning which they have grown accustomed to.

# Unity talks: NSC might get the ball rolling

But they will also find that commonalities with majority-thinking are not too difficult to find; and they will find the mere symbolical gesture of recognising the need of talking to "the other side" induces a warmer response than they might have anticipated. Above all, they will encounter a process which, although never deviating from firm established principles, will prove to be pragmatic and constructive, always having the best interests of the particular sport in mind.

This has been the experience of administrators in the fields of soccer, road-running, cricket and, latterly, hockey. That each code of sport is emerging from the process with different results, is often indicative of the differing expectations with which they entered it; and always indicative of the peculiar problems which each sport faces.

While in most instances obstacles have been surmounted, "rebel" tours remain the major stumbling-block. In whatever code of sport, a refusal to distance one's body from such tours is the ingredient for certain failure of the recipe; these tours are seen to be no more than defiant acts in contravention of the sports moratorium.

The progress which soccer unification talks have made has been well documented in the press, and little more will be said here. Suffice however to say that by April 1990 there is every chance that South African soccer will be organised by one non-racial controlling body.

Road running's series of meetings with the National Sports Congress have, to date, followed a programme of exposing as many as possible of the South African Road Running Association's (Sarra) senior administrators to the ideals of the National Sports Congress. Talks have now advanced to the stage where serious negotiations about unification are set to begin and Sarra is currently establishing a committee which will be mandated to explore this avenue.

Road running has recently become a sport which has shown a distinctly non-racial face and, with enlightened administrators at the helm of Sarra, there are promising indications that progress towards unification will continue at a steady pace. Sarra, to its credit, has resolved not to be involved in any further "rebel" tours, such as the Stellenbosch 100km race which took place this year.

A further benefit of the talks between the NSC and Sarra is that certain administrators of road-running also play an active role in athletics (which, like road running, is autonomous), and this augurs well for later talks in this field of sport.

An entirely different set of circumstances finally compelled the SA Cricket Union (Sacu) and the NSC to meet one another. When they met, early in November, only one item was on the agenda and that was the cancellation of the proposed "rebel" tour by English cricketers in 1990.

Sadly, despite the meeting, Sacu refused to call off the tour even though very imaginative suggestions were made which would have facilitated this. Unity talks can unfortunately not even get out of the starting blocks while one party is defying the very instrument designed to hasten such talks.

Cricket unity talks are thus deadlocked around the issue of the rebel tour and one fears that, by the time the tour has run its course, much goodwill will have been lost; goodwill which might have become the essential catalyst in ensuring a successful outcome.

**HOCKEY** and tennis are two further codes of sport which are currently the subject of exploratory talks with the National Sports Congress. Executive members of the Eastern Cape and Border regions of the SA Men's Hockey Association recently met with the NSC and resolved to press for talks at a national level between their body and the National Sports Congress.

All in all, sport appears to be paving the way as far as the question of national unity is concerned. Goodwill is much in evidence and the foundation for an apartheid-free sporting society in the near future is very clearly being laid right now. We trust that all other sporting bodies will see the wisdom of following the same route.

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