

# Marathon man Bruce explains THAT black armband

**BRUCE FORDYCE** — winner of the 1981 Comrades Marathon — doesn't only win athletics meetings. He has run for the Wits SRC and has been elected. He has also run against white opinion and has come through with flying colours.

Before setting out to challenge the country's best in the premier race of the year Bruce donned a black armband to protest against the celebration of twenty years of the Apartheid Republic.

Despite having abuse and tomatoes thrown at him during the race Bruce took the trophy.

**Q:** Why did you wear an armband when you ran the Comrades?

**A:** I saw it on two levels — firstly, the festival aspect and secondly, just the running aspect. I agree with the view that there's no cause to celebrate in *all* spheres, social, political, economic and sporting. If Comrades was not linked to the festival I probably wouldn't have worn the armband.

Since the 1960 Olympic Games — the last that South Africans went to South African sportspeople have had to schlenter their way into international sport and each of them have had individual difficulties competing.

Because of its affiliation to the Republic Day Festivities, the Comrades forced everyone who ran it to make a choice. The average businessmen, lawyer or executive will just take part unthinkingly. For people like me they were forcing a withdrawal. But I had been training for the race for ages, so I refused to do that. I was going to make a statement to the press but then the armband idea came up, so that's why I wore it. The statement was there throughout the race, not just for a moment as would have happened with a press statement. It also became a group protest, not an individual stand.

The comments I made indicated that people didn't know what the armband meant. People would clap as my armband was shielded, then they'd see it and say "What's that for?" They thought it was black power or something. To others it was anti the Comrades being linked to Republic Day insofar as the race went. To me it was obviously more. It was forced on me. The Comrades has never before been ruled over or dictated to. Not that it's had such a great past either. The 1975 Comrades was the first which allowed blacks to run — a 'great breakthrough'. Then some official said that they must wear ethnic tags. Vincent Rakabele had to wear 'Sotho' on his chest or something. The officials also made too many 'Zulu' tags and not enough 'Sotho' so when they ran out of one they just used the other. It was a total farce.

The same happened with women (when they also first ran in 1975) — Isavel Rosch Kelly finished 75th this year and the Comrades is thought to be too tough for women.

**Q:** Do you think sport and politics should be separated?

**A:** You can't divorce the two. Everyone approves of the fact that Comrades is a 'multi-racial event'. But that is not the same as non-racialism. But you try to explain the difference to people on the side of the road.

**Bruce Fordyce:**  
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You have to make choices every minute in South Africa, but at some stage you have to turn inwards as well. That is what I did — I refused to pull out, but at the same time I made a statement. There is no alternative body that is good enough so I made the statement an individual one. I don't know enough about Sacos to comment on them.

Whichever way you look at it sport is competitive. People challenge one another in sport and one has excellence — which is not a bad thing. It's for the good of the sport. I haven't discarded Sacos. One thing I can say — they need the Jomo Sono's of the world. It would boost them.

**Q:** Do you support Sacos' policies with regard to sport?

**A:** They say you can use educational facilities but not sporting facilities. But sport is education of the body. If a person goes to university to further his or her education then playing sport is an important aspect to that — even just a social game of squash. I can't see the use of sports facilities on campus as propping up the system any more than just using educational facilities.

**Q:** What do you see as being the distinction between multi-racial sport and non-racial sport?

**A:** To have non-racial sport in South Africa is impossible because people come from different backgrounds with different laws governing them. South Africa is proud of its multiracial sport but they're making people compete on the basis of colour — 'mixed teams' are based on colour. For example Errol Tobias should be chosen on merit not because of his colour. Every time someone is chosen who isn't white, the press goes berserk. In this country at present there are laws which exist which entrench inequality. And since sport is part of society you can't have equal sport within an unequal society.

**Q:** What do you think of the international boycott against South Africa?

**A:** I think it is a tragedy for the individual sportsperson but it has been instrumental in getting changes made in South Africa. Sports people then leave South Africa and people begin to feel the pressure. Because of this officials are being forced to make changes. We tend to forget our history — in the late '60's they wouldn't allow a New Zealand team with Maori's in it to come over. Now a Maori comes to South Africa and they herald the fact.

**Q:** How did your interest in running develop?

**A:** The first time I heard about the Comrades Marathon was at school. At school I wasn't pushed so I was really enjoying running and learnt how to enjoy it. But then I came to varsity and lost interest until 1976. I played a rugby game and felt exhausted. Just after that I saw the Comrades on TV. I thought about running it then but I never dreamt of winning. In '77 I ran my first Comrades and came 43rd, in '78 I came 14th. In '79 I got serious and came third, in '80 second and '81 first. My times improved every year as well. I'll go again because I'm getting better. Danny Biggs (who was also wearing an armband) came fifth and was the first novice home.

**Q:** What do you think of the press coverage of the Marathon?

**A:** The press and PFP supported the Republic Day Festivities in the last instance, so I'm not surprised about their coverage. The SABC TV were perplexed about what to do about the armband. I felt it during the race when they were filming and commentating. The Comrades was shown at 6.00 pm and not again I am told. From a sporting angle they gave it fair coverage but they dropped the issue of the armband. If they were an independent service they would have ex-

plained the stand we took but they are controlled. They were also short on coverage of Danny Biggs who wore an armband and all others wearing armbands were cut out. The liberal press didn't cover it well either. They didn't try to explain the issue but rather went for the sensational aspect. SABC asked me about it but it hasn't been on the air.

**Q:** How do you feel about the future of sport in South Africa?

**A:** South African sport is good, incredible if one looks at their performance without international competition. Football is the sport in South Africa — the mass sport is not rugby.

Apartheid will be dropped in sport but the societal background will not be improved. And, as we all know, the background conditions are most important in the striving for non-racial sport in a racial society.

Athletics appears to be 'multi-racial' but when we (Wits) went down to Durban, the first time we woke up to the fact that we had a black in the team was when we went to the beach. Things on the 'periphery' of the sporting world make you more aware of the racial society in which we live.