

From the Aurora Cricket Club to Mbalula



By [Ed Herbst](#)

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A media chronology: 'Any form of discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender or otherwise is incompatible with belonging to the Olympic Movement.' - Article 6 of the [Fundamental Principles of Olympism](#).

Verwoerd used the quota system, therefore we should too! We unashamedly say we will use quotas." Enoch "Canyon Springs" Godongwana, [chairman](#) of the ANC's 'transformation' committee.

Article summary: *While Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu successfully used sport to heal and reconcile, the ANC of Jacob Zuma and people like Fikile Mbalula and Butana Komphela have used and are using sport as a political tool.*



As someone who has reached the biblical three score years and ten, I am struck more and more with each passing day by the uncanny resemblance in the jointly-shared predilections and philosophies of the ANC and the NNP - perhaps unsurprising given the extraordinary ease with which the ANC, with the help of "Kortbroek" van Schalkwyk, happily absorbed the rump of that party in 2001 ...

The SABC devoted much of its main 7pm English TV news bulletin on 6 April to a harangue by sports minister [Fikile Mbalula](#).

In the run-up to the elections he was critical of ["White" sport](#), in a week when Blade Nzimande [accused whites of telling "lies" about Nkandla](#). All of this is light years away from the broad South Africanism for which Nelson Mandela stood and for which he was willing to sacrifice his life.

Nowhere in the SABC's coverage of the story did there appear to be the slightest questioning of whether Mbalula's blustering race-based threats were legal, [constitutional](#) or contravened a sacred tenet of the Olympic Charter.

Mbalula used the immense reach of the state broadcaster to threaten boycotts against all sporting codes if they did not restrict the numbers of white sportsmen and women hoping to represent their country at the Olympic Games and who wished to gain the necessary skill by playing competitively. The Olympic Code regards any restriction on sports participants on the basis of race or ethnicity as anathema and demands immediate and severe sanction for this sort of transgression, which would contravene not only the Olympic Charter but our [labour legislation](#) as many white sports stars and their employers are bound by contracts.

I have been a media and politics junkie for 60 years and it struck me that Mbalula was ploughing a furrow that, since 1994, has become something of a donga. In making the point, I will refer to various media reports and my own career as a reporter and the occasions when I covered sport-related stories.

(We can all learn, though, from Thuli Madonsela's Ghandian serenity and she is probably right when she says the ANC's increasing and increasingly virulent attacks on her relate to the coming election. Is it in this light, though, that one should see Mbalula's recent statements that have veered hysterically between references to [Adolph Hitler](#), wolves, witches tsunamis and [Satanism](#)?)

Mbalula's tirade took me back to the halcyon days of my youth, most specifically October 1973.



Mbalula: "Who's going to stop me holding a Sports Awards evening for millions of rands?" (Image: GCIS)

Security police

I was a reporter/photographer in the Natal Mercury's Pietermaritzburg bureau at the time and I was sitting in my VW Beetle, which was parked next to the Forsyth ground in the Alexandra Park sports complex. The Aurora Cricket Club was having an impromptu practice session and that was why I was not the only person there with a camera. I spotted other interested spectators and recognised them as members of the security police. But they had both cameras and binoculars and seemed as much interested in recording the people who were watching as the people playing. It was a moment of political and sports significance because the Aurora Club contained Coloured and Indian players and Alexandra Park was an area designated White by the [Group Areas Act](#). In the end, the Nats blinked because the price of a kragdadige intervention would have been too high in terms of adverse publicity but it was another, albeit different, attempt by politicians on the basis of [skin colour and hair texture](#), to govern and dictate who should take the field - no different, in essence, to what is happening now.

It's the Arch!

More recently, I remember walking backwards down Adderley Street, an esoteric and somewhat risky endeavour but there is method to such madness. Ahead of me, and also walking backwards was my camera-operating colleague and you do this to clear the way and to prevent him/her inadvertently going arse over tip into, say, an ornamental fishpond.

Walking towards my colleague was a man wearing a Springbok rugby jersey and his trademark cackle drew delighted Capetonians towards us like iron filings to a magnet.

"It's the Arch!" they chorused in amazed delight and so it was and not only was it the Arch but he was proudly wearing a Springbok rugby jersey.



Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu successfully used sport to heal and reconcile. (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

Tutu, like Mandela used sport to reconcile us, to transcend racial barriers and proof of their success in that regard can be seen in the way sports fans, regardless of race, jointly rejoice in the triumphs of our sports stars from Hashim Amla to Bryan Habana and Chad le Clos and are united in their shared sadness when someone like Baby Jake Matlala dies.

At the time, the ANC was demanding that the Springbok cease to be a sports emblem and Tutu's Adderley Street walk was to successfully highlight the evil of that polarising approach.

One of those then leading the charge against the Springbok was the [Butana Komphela](#) who was [typically](#) deployed to the sinecure of [chairperson](#) of the parliamentary portfolio committee on sports despite apparently not knowing a great deal about sport.

Confiscate passports

Before the Springboks left for Europe to start their victorious 2007 Rugby World Cup campaign Komphela suggested that if the team composition did not then reflect what Mbalula is demanding now - that at least 60% or more be black players - he would ensure the team's removal from the tournament by the ANC intervening to [confiscate the passports](#) of all players and officials. It was an absurd suggestion because such a step would have been illegal and unconstitutional and it would have made the country as much of an international pariah as it was during the BJ Vorster/PW Botha era.

To nobody's surprise, Komphela was silent when, after the victorious campaign and a 15-6 victory against England in the Stade de France, former President Thabo Mbeki said that the factor preventing South Africa competing at the highest level was the ANC's failure to develop sport as part of our education system. "*We don't put sufficient development in sports and we haven't committed resources needed and this is one of our biggest mistakes,*" he said when he was handed the William Web Ellis trophy.

This is the crux of the matter. The money budgeted for sports development at junior level is stolen or wasted.

As Mbalula said when criticised about his wasteful expenditure: *"Who's going to stop me holding a [Sports Awards evening](#) for millions of rands? The Democratic Alliance? Keep an eye on the invitations. The Razzmatazz is about to become a Humdinger. Bring your party shoes, nicest suits and dresses and rock up at the door."*

Perhaps Mbalula, should have studied his department's official and publicly articulated policy in this regard:

"The racial composition of national teams should not be advocated, nor should National Federations be prescribed to on how they should select their teams. National teams should be selected on merit but transformation should be implemented at school/youth levels to prepare a broad basis of athletes for participation at higher levels in future" - Department of Sport and Recreation's 2013 *White Paper on Sport and Recreation*.



Many people reckon the treatment meted out to SA Hockey is disgraceful. (Image extracted from the [South African Hockey Association website](#))

And perhaps he should have consulted his predecessor [Makhenkesi Stofile](#), who was sports minister from 2004 to 2010 and is now our ambassador to Germany.

National disquiet

Stofile told parliament in 2007 that sports quotas were out and that R200m was needed to develop and nurture promising young black rugby players. What, one wonders, does Stofile make of the fact that Mbalula saw fit to blow R65m of that on single banquet - and if Beyoncé had been available it would probably have been R100m. Springbok swimmer [Ryk Neethling](#) summed up the national disquiet: "R65m for one night and the majority of our athletes who represent SA internationally have to fund themselves!"

The Democratic Alliance pointed out that R65m could have funded

- 86 multi-purpose sports fields at R750,000 each
- 3,250 swimming pools at R20,000 each
- 11 rugby fields at R5.5m
- 13 soccer fields at R5m each
- 1,625,000 soccer balls at R40 each
- Support to 541 Mass Participation, Opportunity and Access, Development and Growth (MOD) centres at R120,000 per annum each.

Sports activist Cheryl Roberts, in a letter to newspapers, said that the highly televised sports like soccer, rugby and golf can rely on corporate sponsorship but the rest relied on government and lotto funding just to survive let alone thrive: *"Usually sports federations have to beg for their funds because your very own department takes months to deposit the funds allocated to sports federations."*

"How do you expect sports federations to develop and grow when they are being stifled and strangled by the very department that you preside over? Why do you insist on using financial resources on mega events costing millions when those very same millions could be used to develop grassroots sport?" (Cape Times 9/4/2014).

Let us assume that in a sport like archery we produce a truly stellar talent - someone who is to archery what Muhammad Ali was to boxing, Ayrton Senna to motor racing, or Pele to soccer but, horror of horrors, that person is white.

Obstacles

It seems that not only would Mbalula do everything possible through sports quotas to prevent that person going to the Olympic Games because they are white - as [happened to the national hockey team](#) before the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 - but the sports minister would proudly call it a ["good story to tell"](#).

- Withdraw any form of funding and support to (sic) federations and sport bodies that do not comply with transformation requirements
- Withdraw the National colours to (sic) any federation(s) who (sic) are hell bent (sic) on the current set up and status quo.
- Utilise (?) bidding and hosting regulations to be illegal to bid (sic) without government approval (huh?)
- Bar sponsorship against (sic) any federation that does not (sic) and/or is hostile to transformation

That this harks back to the era of Verwoerd that saw the security police spying on the Aurora cricket practice back in 1973. The methods now may be less punitive but the principle is the same - your skin colour and ethnicity determine whether or not you get to play for the Springboks, whether or not you get into university and what employment you are entitled to: "*The ANC's representative in the debate, Enoch Godongwana (who also chairs its [transformation committee](#)) agreed. The ANC, he said, would be unapologetic in pursuing "Verwoerdian" tactics and would "unashamedly use quotas in every sector of the economy"*".



Sam Ramsamy, said the hockey squad didn't have enough black players to represent South Africa. (Image: GQIS)

(Enoch "[Canyon Springs](#)" Godongwana, remember, is one of the ANC's leading compradors.)

Yet to benefitt

Someone who has not benefited from the ANC's quota system is the young, black skier from Barkly East, [Sive Speelman](#).

The obvious thing for Jimi Matthews to do is to get an SABC reporter to interview Speelman for the 7pm DSTV channel 404 24-hour news bulletin and ask him what he thinks of Mbalula's ranting about "quotas" and "transformation".

The concluding sentence in Mbalula's 9 April rant reads: "*As we rise from this meeting we would like to call upon all South Africans and sport loving people of our country to travel this journey with us towards the creation of a united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic sport system in South Africa.*"

To which he could have added ... "Ask Kevin Pietersen - he'll tell you about how he went abroad to avoid Verwoerdian sports policies - just as Basil D'Oliveira did before him"

Grubby, grasping administrators

Postscript: I was prompted in some measure to write this article by the experience of the grandson of my best friend whose fate, career and future prospects parallel the experience of D'Oliveira and Pietersen. He displays a startling cricket talent but could not regularly make his team in the Western Province primary school league because he was routinely told that, as a white child, he had to sacrifice ambition for the greater good of "transformation" as Mbalula puts it now and as [Ali Bacher](#) rudely and unequivocally put it to Kevin Pietersen all those years ago.

His parents followed D'Oliveira's example during the apartheid era and did what all parents do who have the best interests of their children at heart - but the sacrifice in every respect was enormous. They moved to Perth a year ago where, aged 14, their son is now playing for the Western Australia under-15 team. He is, in almost every respect a professional sportsman. He is under contract, a member of a sports academy and everything is paid for, his schooling, his education, his medical and travel expenses and his kit. Australia recognises and wishes to nurture his manifest talent regardless of his skin colour. In South Africa, "transformation" has seen administrators like [Leonard Chuene](#) and [Gerald Majola](#) while denying promising young black stars like Sive Speelman the chance to earn experience at international level.

Just as the National Party created a Diaspora of our finest black intellects (Archibald and Phyllis Jordan, the parents of Pallo Jordan), musicians (Miriam Makeba) and sportsmen (Basil D'Oliveira) through discriminating against them on the basis of race and ethnicity, so now are our finest White, Indian and Coloured intellects, entrepreneurs and sports stars leaving SA.

ABOUT ED HERBST

Ed Herbst is an author and a prize-winning reporter. He worked for SABC television news for 28 years but left in 2005 without other employment in prospect because of the pervasive news and other corruption at all levels of the corporation. He is also a fly fishing enthusiast.

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