

# 'RACE' AND SPORT IN SOUTH AFRICA

## *The politics of Social Exclusion: Transformation of Cricket in Gauteng Cricket*



UNIVERSITY OF THE  
WITWATERSRAND,  
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Lewis Manthata, Bsoc.Science (Rhodes) Hons MA (Wits)  
Ph.D. candidate (Wits), Housemaster and History master- St  
Johns College, SA

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**Abstract:** Transformation is a topical issue within cricket circles in South Africa and will continue to remain so until there is redress. The study of cricket and transformation can be viewed as a social metaphor that allows for the analysis on socio- economic issues in the country. The main aim was to establish whether the cricket fraternity has succeeded in reshaping the game, and in contributing to building a new national culture in a democracy. Despite the efforts to level the playing field through development initiatives, the reality of an unequal society continues to determine the 'codes' of behaviour and action of South African cricket. The paper aims to show that the game has struggled to navigate the waters of transformation and change even in post -apartheid South Africa. The paper seeks to understand and analyse the reasons that prevent effective transformation as stipulated by the constitution of the country.

### **Introduction**

Cricket, like much of South African society, has a history of racial compartmentalisation. While the history of White cricket - often paraded as the sum total of cricket history in our country- has received significant publicity, the history and the ethnography of Black cricket has largely been hidden from the public view. As Naidoo (2002) points out, *there lies hidden a rich and exciting history that demands greater exploration*. This division between Black and White cricket reflected the broader divisions in South African society. It was only White South Africans who played test cricket and rugby, and in the process enjoyed has access to the best facilities at well- resourced institutions and schools. Given these imbalances within our society and sporting structures, it was inevitable that when one thinks of South African Cricket, the names that roll off the tongue are Pollock, Procter, Clive Rice, Barry Richards, McGlew and in later times ; Snell, Jack, Cronje , Rhodes, Wessels, Van Zyl and many more. The inauguration of the United Cricket Board of South Africa (UCB) in 1991 - a few years before the advent of democracy - did not deal with issues of redressing the historical imbalances of the past , including the ushering of the cricketers of colour in the system. In fact, the new system represented the continuity with the White cricket past and tradition, picking up from

the rebel tours of the 1970s and the 1980s. One of the misconceptions in South African Cricket was that every time Black cricket was discussed, its history was only considered to stretch back to the 1980s when Ali Bacher – as the story is narrated – introduced the game to Blacks. Both Desai (2002) and Odedendaarl (2016) point out that the history of Black cricket in South Africa became part of the liberation movement, and it refused to ‘killed’, and its values and ethos continued to challenge the prevailing agenda of the new regime of cricket around the critical questions of race, merit and transformation. The UCSA (United Cricket Board of South Africa) responded to this pressure by convening a Vision seminar in July 1997, which focused on the Africanisation, demographics and the development of the game. This marked the beginning of a new era of change within cricket. Transformation seminars were held across the country in 1998. This resulted in the signing of the Transformation Charter on the 03 January 1999 (UCBSA January 1999). It became quite clear that the emphasis was on the development of those on the margins without fundamentally addressing the ‘traditional’ power relations, representations and the rituals of cricket, which were exclusionary.

### **Research Question**

This study will attempt to sketch a broad outline of the development of Black African cricket in Gauteng the area previously known as the Transvaal, within a rapidly changing socio-political context. It seeks to investigate whether the transformation process has delivered on its mandate by asking the following question regarding the post-apartheid period;

Is there an institutional relationship between race, class and how players are trained and promoted in South African cricket?

### **Theoretical Framework**

CLR James begins the discussion by pointing out that cricket like most social institutions is a contested terrain. He writes; “Cricket had plunged me into politics long before I was aware of it. When I did turn to politics, I did not have much to learn” (James: 1963). By this, he was arguing that the game of cricket provided a social platform where racial images, ideologies and contradictions are constructed and contested. James’s autobiography, *Beyond the Boundary* (1963) provides us with the base in which we can understand the relationship between sport and race in the 21st century. Cricket, according to James (1963), inherited a unique racial form, history, identity and tradition. It is quite clear that James’s lessons on *Beyond the Boundary* do not appear that easily as the book is essentially a body of literature that seeks to unpack the complexities of social theory. James seeks to understand cricket as both a sporting form, and a political force. As a part of social formation, James (1963) attempts to make a point that cricket is part of society, it does not exist in isolation. It is people and individuals within a particular historical context and time, with a set of characteristics who play the game. Players therefore bring their experiences and subjectivities to the game. The game of cricket therefore goes beyond the activities of the boundary; it becomes a terrain

where racial stereotypes and misconceptions were reproduced. James's publication (1963) provides an opportunity where these reinforced hierarchies about race and class in cricket can be questioned and challenged. The views of James allow us to understand the racial form and structure of South African cricket and sport in general.

It is in this context that James explains his passion for the game of cricket. James skipped school, forged papers and defied his parents only to play a game of cricket. James explains: *all I wanted was to play cricket and soccer, not merely to play but to live the life, and nothing could stop me* (James) 1963; 28. James uses the phrase "deep play", as articulated by Clifford Geertz (1972/3), in his paper on cockfighting in Bali. In this text, Geertz explains cockfighting as an art form, an art form that renders everyday experiences comprehensible (Geertz: 1972/3; 443). He deconstructs this extreme passion for participation in sport by coining the term "deep play". Geertz was more concerned about the social values, moral import and the themes expressed in cultural forms such as sport.

### **Affirmative Action in South African Cricket**

Commentators and writers in South Africa have conceded that affirmative action has achieved nothing more than "the lowering of standards and the promotion of historically disadvantaged players". Most quota system programs in South African cricket have been plagued by problems created by the effort to relieve the guilt and to be politically expedient. The White paper on sport (1997:12), articulates that the concept of sport is for every South African and it is based on the values of equity and access, which can only be realised through a concerted effort of integrated programmes that will include people from disadvantaged communities. Indeed, in terms of the transformation in South African cricket, at the heart of Cricket South Africa values and operation, is the goal of contributing through cricket to transformation, reconstruction and nation building in society. The exercise is about restorative justice and reconciliation.

Basson (2007:5) justifies the Affirmative Action policy from a moral and ethical point of view; "The transformation road embraces the choice made to transcend the divisions, strip off the past and make things right between those who have been locked in an adversarial relationship ". The Affirmative Action policy has remained largely controversial in cricket circles largely because of the concerns about the lack of change and delivery in various areas of cricket, particularly in the highest levels, where provincial and national teams remained largely white. In November 1998, the federation of cricket, The United Cricket Board of South Africa adopted a Transformation Charter, which had two key elements.

1) That it was the moral duty to ensure that cricket grows and flourishes among the truly disadvantaged of its society, with the recognition that the

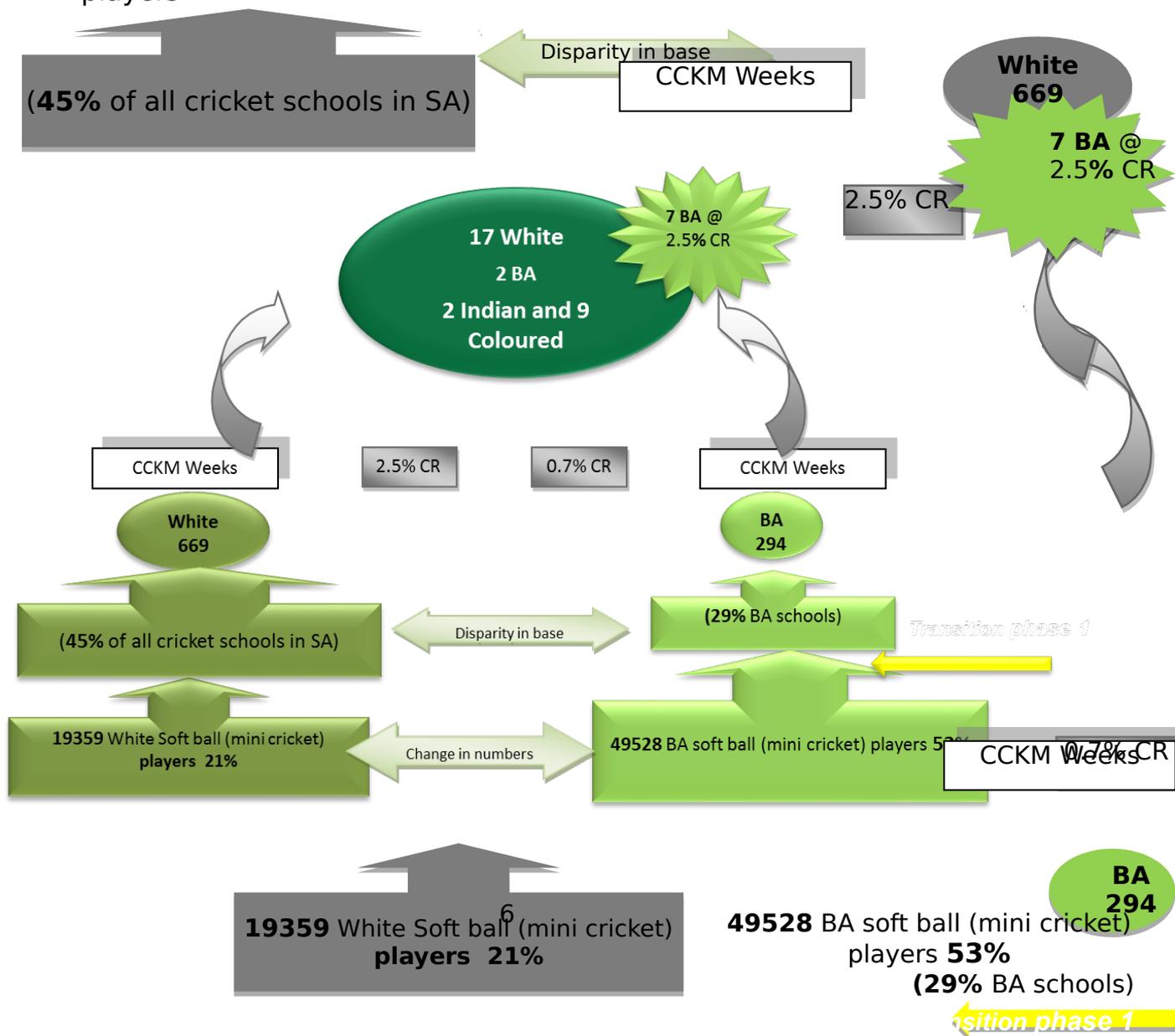
majority of disadvantaged people come from the country's Black African communities.

2) The commitment to promote and develop cricket among Black African people at all levels of the game (Basson: 2007; 8). Basson (2007) motivates that the competitive advantage of South African lies in the existing rich historical traditions of the Coloured community in the Cape, Xhosa people in the Eastern Cape, among the Whites across the country and the vast unexplored Africans in the townships of Soweto, Sebokeng, Dayveton, Mamelodi and the Greater East Rand.

### Data Analysis and Conclusion

The respondents concentrated on the following themes that are critical in the transformation discourse:

1. Lack of support commitment of the GCB (Gauteng Cricket Board), the CSA (Cricket South Africa), business South Africa, and the schools system towards Black African cricket.
2. Racial divide and the emergence of a class divide within Black players



*Cricket South Africa transformation*  
(2014)

The statistical analysis provided by the official brochures of various cricket school boy and university festivals has shown that relative number of black African cricketers transitioning from the u19 to semi-professional and then the franchise and national level decreased disproportionately, compared to the other race groups, to the number at high school level.

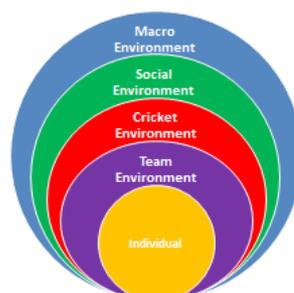
The aim of this study was to explore the following:

- (1) The low representation of black African cricketers in South African cricket, including the reasons and perceptions for low representation.
- (2) Experiences of career progression of African cricketers in South Africa.
- (3) Insights into a few African cricketer's personal traits and characteristics that have made them successful.

The study included the ethnographies of players with the context of the following themes: Cultural context, representation, player management, mind-set of stakeholders, Institutional structures, senior and junior level experiences, coaching attitudes and traditions, batmen vs. bowler debates. The interpretation of results must be seen in the context of the following integrated approach:

## Cricket South Africa transformation conference

- Macro socio-economic environment
- South Africa's history
- Cricket as a perceived middle class sport
- Societal changes across all race groups
- BA cricket culture
- Cricket development and transformation



*booklet (2014)*

There was a general understanding by interviewees that there were too few cricketers at a higher level, and that there was a limited number of batsmen across the levels. The progress of young African players varies between provinces with the inland provinces struggling the most. The Eastern Cape is still largely seen as a breeding ground of black players, even though there has been minimal support of historic structures because sponsors like Mercedes Benz have withdrawn their support for the development programmes in the area. The study shows that there are African players across the schools system in the country (with the exception of the Western Cape), but these players are not progressing as expected.

The interviewees agree that there was a performance gap of African cricketers between the junior and senior levels and that this manifested itself after school and upon entering semi-professional cricket structures. Many African cricketers pointed out that they dropped the game because of socio-economic reasons such as; performance pressure, lack of family support, hostile (unfriendly) cricket environment, education, family pressures and team environment.

The literature review has pointed out that Black African people in South Africa have a 150-year-old tradition of playing cricket, particularly in the mines and in the coastal towns of the Eastern Cape. The political history of our country has prevented the Black majority from representing their country at national, provincial and semi-professional level. It is accurate to argue that the development initiatives of the late 80s were relatively successful in spreading and popularising the understanding of the basics of the game, but they have not entrenched a culture of excellence that would produce players of national standard and class. The analysis points out that the number of Black African batsmen is particularly low compared to bowlers. Only 10 Black African have represented the national team in all formats of the game since 1992. The quantitative and statistical analysis points out that the relative number of African players transitioning from u19 to semi-professional and franchise / national level decreases disproportionately compared to other race groups, to the numbers provided by the school system and the u19 national weeks. The interpretation of this research in Gauteng must be seen against the context of the South African history, the socio-economic environment, transformation and the perception of cricket as a middle class/elite sport. In Gauteng, the interviewees pointed out that there has been a very slow progression of Black cricketers in the province since 1992. The athletes pointed out to the performance gaps between junior and senior levels, and that the gap plays out after school upon entering the senior phases of amateur and semi-professional cricket. This pressure culminates to a major drop-out of Black cricketers because of the following reasons: support, socio-economic factors, and hostile cricket environment in the change rooms, playing fields and poor coaching structures. The cost of equipment was seen as a major factor preventing the progression of young Black African cricketers through the structures. There was a common point between all the Black African cricketers who have represented Gauteng and Transvaal schools (after 1992); they were mostly awarded bursaries and scholarships to attend some of the finest boy's schools in the province. In these schools, they were exposed to the

best coaches and the finest methods of practice. In the boarding houses, the township men were guaranteed three healthy meals a day, pastoral and medical support, academic and financial support for tours, extra tuition, clothing and accessories required by a growing young man. The boys are generally exposed the best cricket education and culture at the former model C and private schools. The few interviewees who remained in the townships highlighted the complexities of playing the game in the a hostile environment epitomised by gangsterism, drug abuse (nyaope, marijuana, coke), HIV/Aids, broken homes without male role models and financial support, poor diet and nutrition, crime and poor facilities which are poorly looked after by the municipality. The interview with Sonnyboy (Kagiso Cricket Club) points out that accessibility to provincial training sessions in the suburban schools and the Wanderers stadium was always a challenge because of the volume of cricket bags, accessibility and availability of taxis, distance and time.

In an interview held with Corrie Van Zyl (General Manager of CSA) in June 2014 at the CSA offices, he pointed out that there are few Black African cricketers in the system, and that the acceleration process on non-white cricketers in senior teams is hampered by the coaching personnel who are largely white. He made key points that the presence of an all-White coaching staff (managers and coaches) demands of Black African cricketers to leave their culture at the door of the change room. The change room environments are unfriendly and hostile to Black players who are a minority.

Here is a summary of the structural challenges pointed out by respondents during discussions and interviews:

**Socio-Economic:** The interviewees pointed out those black African players were always under pressure to support the family structure, more so after leaving school. The demands of the family are that most players had to provide for their younger siblings as most of the family members were unemployed. The young player who is drafted into the amateur systems is now seen as a 'source of income' by the family and the community.

**Quality of Opportunities:** Most of the elite coaches in the system are white, and have not given the necessary support to African players who mostly come from challenged backgrounds and environments. The respondents pointed out that most semi- professional coaches were most likely going to bat a top order batsman in the lower middle order because there is a lack of trust in the abilities and the skill levels of black players.

**Structures and pipeline of development:** An u14 cricketer at a traditional cricket school is likely to play 100 schoolboy games in a year. This excludes club games, tours (both overseas and local) and school festivals. On the other hand, township cricketers only play cricket games during trial games arranged by different provinces to choose representative teams. At most, township cricketers are more likely to play less than ten official games throughout the year. The lack of facilities in local grounds do not allow inter-township matches to take place. Most respondents pointed out that the maintenance of grounds and facilities in the townships is not seen as a priority by the local municipalities, and the quality of coaches is not very good to produce cricketers who will compete at a higher level.

**Team Culture in Cricket:** white middle class men who speak English, and unaccommodating to Black players from the township conduct most coaching sessions at provincial level. This cultural misunderstanding founded in the historical narrative of South Africa has produced a plethora of stereotypes and misconceptions about black players, who are clearly misunderstood most of the time. The respondents point out that they are expected to assimilate a team culture, which was one- dimensional and biased to the white culture. This has entrenched a horrid culture of black cricketers who have battled with their identities, or who have suffered a cricket identity crisis leading up to an inferiority complex affecting their ability to perform.

**Quota System:** Both African coaches and players have mixed feelings about the quota system. Most players from the model C system feel that the system undermined their ability, and degraded them before their white counterparts who were at school with them. They hated the idea

that they were making teams because of their skin colour, not their ability and skill level. On the other hand, retired players reflected on their experiences and believed that the coaching structures and the cricket environment in general suited the agenda of white cricketers, therefore the only mechanism to institute and force change is the quota system.

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