

SPORT : THREAT TO THE SECURITY OF THE STATE

by
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It is not generally realised how serious a threat Sport is, or how vigilantly it is watched by the prime guardians of the security of our State — the Special Branch. The fact is that a large body of men have been detailed to keep an un-sleeping eye on our sportsfields and that thousands of man-hours are spent on studying subversive movements in the field.

Of course you will say that I am "shooting a line" and will ask for evidence. There are lots of others though, who would support my statements with amply documented evidence. I will confine myself to my own limited range of experience and let it justify my claim.

In September of 1958 there was a small press announcement that the Weightlifting Federation (Non-White or non-racial — the papers weren't fussy) was to set up a co-ordinating body to fight against racialism in sport. So for weeks before the championships took place in East London, members of the Special Branch haunted Non-White sportsfields brandishing the clipping and making ominous noises. By the time sportsmen had converged on East London for the show it was evident that there were going to be very few East Londoners at the preliminary meeting: the "Fighting Port" was a very frightened port. The limit was reached when the Chairman of the Border Union was visited and questioned about one Brutus — with the chairman frantically disclaiming all knowledge! I phoned the police, asked to speak to the head of the Special Branch and demanded an interview. Eventually we saw the second-in-command — Lt. Schoombie — who apologetically explained that it was his duty to investigate strangers to ensure that they were not "suspicious characters." I didn't ask for a definition!

In the meantime another detective, whom I remember for his remarkable resemblance to a potato, called at our hotel room to ask permission to attend the meeting. As a formality we stated that it had to be referred to our executive.

Sunday morning bright and early, Schoombie and Hattingh arrived and pressed to enter the meeting room: firmly we barred the door. They hung around, offering us gum-drops, arguing and trying to peek around the door. We all got impatient. They threatened us with a warrant. We threatened to blast the story in the newspapers. Reluctantly they drifted from the hotel lounge. Later they were seen hanging around the kitchen cadging tea.

But they had not failed, as we discovered later.

Govender, the friendly well-wisher who had travelled down from Durban later appeared in a press photograph escorting an Emergency detainee to a funeral: Special Branch! And Selepe, who travelled down from Krugersdorp

with an elaborate credential and who made a virulent — and irrelevant — attack on apartheid was found to come from a non-existent body. His real organisation: Special Branch.

This Selepe turned up again at our South African Sports Association Conference in Durban three months later — with six members of the Special Branch at the back busily taking notes. This time we threw him out — though there were some who sportingly called out "Give him a chance!"

The six in Durban in January were to become an accepted feature. I list only a few other occasions:

October, 1959, Port Elizabeth: Sports Conference. White and Non-White S.B.'s occupy front seats in the hall.

May 1960, Port Elizabeth: Homes of SASA officials — president, secretary, assistant secretary and executive member raided; all SASA paper — including blank letter-head sheets seized. Returned only several months later after protest.

October, 1960, Johannesburg: I arrive at Jan Smuts airport at 6.30, at weightlifting show at 7.30. Find Special Branch has already been inquiring about Brutus and Ragansamy. I insist that Taylor (S.B.) explain why he claims he is investigating crime. I offer to see his chief following morning. Offer declined. The home where I was supposed to be staying is visited by S.B..

May, 1961, Port Elizabeth: Home of secretary raided.

October, 1961: Secretary banned under Suppression of Communism Act.

All of this, while no doubt deadly serious to the S.B. has not been without its lighter moments. The day after the SASA stuff had been seized we trotted off to demand an interview with the Chief. Major Heiberg was very busy, but we were persevering. We saw him two days later and asked, naively, for the return of all our material. He feigned ignorance. But the files were spread out on his desk. He refused to return them. Gently, servilely, we probed him. Why? There was a State of Emergency. But why take our stuff? He was only doing his duty. But surely his were POLICE duties? He had to protect the State from all dangers! But how was sport a danger? So it went on. We probed too long and too incisively: he blew up:

"Kyk hierso, ek is die man wat die vrae vra. J't my mos nou onderkruis-verhoor!" (Look here I'm the man who asks the questions. You've got me under cross-examination!) His face tur-

key-red, he bundled us out. (So SASA was born under the watchful eyes of the Special Branch — and has enjoyed their attention ever since!)

There are, as well, unofficial guardians of the security of the State — holding official positions in the big all-White sports bodies.

Massive Ira Emery, until this year secretary of the S.A. Olympic (and Commonwealth) Games Association and the man who boasted that for eight years he saved South Africa from being thrown out of the Olympics because of her racial policies, is a case in point.

When I saw him he complained: "If you've got a good boy, why don't you send him to Tanganyika or Uganda (I don't think he added Timbuktu) instead of causing us trouble?" And in an expansive moment he added: "You know, on the mines, when there's a good Black who does the 100 yards in very good time, they give him a watch or ten bob." Triumphant, "That makes him a professional!" This is admittedly a rather different method but no doubt it is equally effective in preserving the security of the State.

Military Algy Frames, boss of all-white cricket for endless years was more menacing. After the gruff "Sit down my boy" and "What do you want my boy?" came the forbidding question: "Have you ever heard of M1.5?" Nervously I admitted that I had. "Well we've got our own M1.5. We know your cricket is in a mess. We know you haven't got one boy whose good enough to play for South Africa. Besides, you know that if there's one Black boy in our team to England, there'll be trouble." My parting shot was that there would be, if there wasn't, and there was. Boycotts and demonstrations and a loss of £17,000 in England!

God-fatherly Reg. Honey, Q.C. until this year boss of the most powerful sports in the country — the Olympic Association — was more subtle in his means, but the ends were the same. But let the definitive comment come from someone else. It is by James Fairbairn reporting in the New Statesman on an interview with Honey — a classic article called "The Olympic Swindle": said Mr. Honey at the end of an unrewarding interview: "Of course we can't let the Blacks have equality. All this nonsense about one man one vote. Once that happens, the country will go down the drain."

And in a sense they are right. When there is equality on the sportsfield, or when it becomes impossible to stave it off; or when our sportsmen are deprived of the drug of sport and look at the country beyond the sportsfield: then apartheid South Africa will go down the drain.