

# THE S.A. BARBARIANS RUGBY TOUR TO BRITAIN – A CLOSER LOOK

by Peter Davis

Looking through old newspaper files, one thing stands out clearly — Dr Danie Craven, president of the South African Rugby Board, has been the force that has kept South African rugby in its racial state.

His comments over the past five years show he is reluctant to play non-racial sport, but, perhaps, he is the whipping boy of a government dedicated to keeping the various people of South Africa in their ethnic places.

It is Dr Craven who has made such comments as:

- The leaping Springbok has been associated with the white since 1891 and it is their traditional emblem . . . if all races played with the Springbok badge, what would the whites wear when they play on their own? . . . They are not going to take the Springbok away from us.
- When the day dawns that there are only mixed South African teams and whites, coloureds and blacks decide to have the Springbok as our emblem for such teams, we shall gladly share it with them.
- The South African Rugby Board can suspend white players who disregard the sports policy and play in matches between mixed teams. We have ways of dealing with such defiance.

With words such as these from the man who leads official South African rugby, it is little wonder that rugby lovers, both here and abroad, regard Dr Craven with suspicion.

It is this same suspicion which greeted the Barbarian team in the United Kingdom and no matter what the president of the South African Barbarian Club and manager of the side, Mr Chick Henderson, said about the Baabaas being an invitation side, the eight whites, eight coloureds and eight blacks were drawn only from clubs which come under the auspices of the SARB and none of the players come from the South African Rugby Union, which has far more support on a non-racial basis.

Mr Henderson's claim that the team was a multi-racial one is quite correct, but he seems to have difficulty in recognising the call for a non-racial side.

Again, it is little wonder that the president of the S.A. Rugby Union (SARU) and talented players from unions such as Kwaru in the Eastern Cape, spurn "multi-national" sides such as the Baabaas.

Dr Craven has repeatedly tried to impress foreign governments that South Africa is entering an era free from apartheid, but governments in Europe seem to be growing increasingly cynical of his statements — hence the French ban on the Springbok team last year and the fiasco of the proposed Transvaal tour.

The S.A. Non-Racial Olympic Committee (Sanroc) has had more success in persuading the outside world to reject South African sports teams and their views are unequivocal: white sportsmen must stay in isolation until they have put their house in order. They cannot expect to mix with the world of sport until they have thrown out the cancer of apartheid.

In reply to this stand, Dr Craven announced in February 1977 that mixed rugby would be played at all levels in South Africa, but that turned out to be "multi-national" rugby, ethnic groups playing against each other, and not non-racial or "normal" rugby.

Even at that time, Saru's president, Mr Abdul Abass, said he was dubious that "mixed rugby" would be acceptable to his union and Dr Craven had "jumped the gun as usual".

As it turned out, Mr Abass's doubts were right. Dr Craven's attempt in 1977 to form a controlling body for rugby under the umbrella of SARB, the black S.A. Rugby Association and the coloured S.A. Rugby Federation failed because it did not attempt to "normalise" sport.

This attempt caused Mr Abass to warn that there was no longer any thought of non-racial rugby in South Africa from club level upwards. In fact, Dr Craven destroyed any hope of meaningful dialogue between his SARB and Mr Abass's SARU.

SARU started in 1897, only six years after the SARB, with a policy that would allow all the people of South Africa to play rugby on a non-racial basis.

Its history has been up and down, but in recent years it has held talks with the multi-national SARB in an effort to normalise sport. Mr Abass and SARU delegates discussed the problem four times with Dr Craven's SARB and in July 1977, agreement was reached that there would be non-racial rugby at all levels.

A declaration was signed by both parties and this was taken to the then Minister of Sport, Dr Piet Koornhof who, verligte or not, refused to accept the agreement, although he had asked Mr Abass and Dr Craven to find a solution to the problem.

"The whole exercise ended in Dr Koornhof's lap and Dr Craven has not been back to me since", Mr Abass said in an interview.

"He did not continue with non-racial rugby as we had agreed but, rather, multi-national rugby which is unacceptable to us".

Mr Abass said he could find no solution to the rugby impasse until such time as laws such as the Group Areas Act and the Liquor Act (both of which prohibit players from entering "white" grounds and being entertained in "white" clubs without permits) remained on the statute book.

"Do you know the Liquor Act prevents a person who is not white from going into a pub for a drink of water to slake his thirst? And that's only part of the problem".

Saru is affiliated to Sacos (S.A. Council of Sport) and Mr Abass agrees with the Sacos stand that there can be no normal sport until such time as there is a normal society, but he is prepared to discuss the definition of "normal society".

"We are out to prevent South Africa's isolation in sport, but we can't do this until we have a free society and this can't happen until the government gets rid of legislation such as the Group Areas Act for the good of rugby, not only in South Africa, but all over the world," Mr Abass said.

The cry for non-racial rugby, as opposed to the Barbarian-type of "invited multi-racial" rugby, has not been entirely in vain. In the conservative city of Port Elizabeth, ground has been broken in non-racial sport by the Watson Brothers, but their lead has not been followed by others. However, the stand taken by the Watsons has made them heroes in the Port Elizabeth townships and has brought wide publicity to non-racial rugby and their own side — the Kwazakele Rugby Union (Kwaru) which has just won the S.A. Cup for the third time.

Kwaru joined Saru in 1972 and because it is dedicated to non-racial sport, it refused to use grounds provided by the East Cape Administration Board for blacks only. It took over a large piece of ground in New Brighton and is slowly developing it, brick by brick and blade of grass by top dressing, whenever it has a few rand available from its weekly gate takings.

Behind this independence is a group of people led by Mr Dan Qeqe who have poured time, energy, money and an impressive toughness into the project.

This year's drawn Currie Cup final played at Newlands, attracted about 38 000 spectators — the S.A. Cup match, won by Kwaru on the same day, drew 30 000 people in a stadium with primitive facilities. With the same facilities as Newlands, Kwaru officials estimate that 60 000 people would have squeezed into the Dan Qeqe Stadium.

The best the Sara teams can manage at their administration board's field in New Brighton is about 5 000 people. Kwaru attract 8 000 to 10 000 people to their club matches every Saturday and Sunday.

The media, generally, have failed to see this spectator power and newspapers (with the possible exception of the Daily Dispatch) have treated the Saru games pretty poorly so that their credibility and market has suffered. What little the media has picked up has come from the Watson brothers, who run clothing stores in Port Elizabeth.

Cheeky Watson and brother Vallence have been arrested and charged with entering a township without permits and they have ignored it all to play non-racial rugby.

Why do they put up with this harassment and consequent social pressure?

"Our whole life is non-racial because of our biblical beliefs," said Cheeky Watson. "In James, Chapter 2, we are told to regard our neighbours as equal above all else, and that is enough for us."

The Watson brothers realised there was a dangerous communication gap in sport between black and white, and to show this up, they realised they had to do something.

"We decided we would have to make a name for ourselves, so we went out to play rugby as best we could," said Cheeky.

To get status, Cheeky played himself into the Gazelles side. In 1977, the brothers made the switch to Kwaru from their club, Comrades.

"People do call us anti-South African, but we usually manage to get our views across and the people we talk to usually go away with new ideas."

"In the townships, we are treated like jewellery, because we have done something for non-racial sport and all we can hope is that a little truth will filter through."

"Our other motive was to focus attention on Kwaru and that we've managed quite successfully. Media overseas often contact us to get the truth about South African sport and we never hesitate to give it because we speak on behalf of non-racial sport."

Kwaru's standard of rugby has improved, enhanced by the Watson brothers who all play for different clubs under the Kwaru wing to spread their talents. Vallence is Kwaru coach, but also plays for Wallabies. Cheeky plays for Spring Rose and another brother, Ronnie, plays for Park Rovers.

Vallence said the brothers had embarrassed the SARB and Dr Craven was unlikely to forgive them.

"The SARB threatened to ban us, but we don't care we've no desire to go back there."

Vallence said it was difficult for whites to break away from their facilities and give them up for the crude facilities in the townships.

"Also, they are scared of government policy, harassment and the malicious gossip that we suffered."

Vallence warns that people cannot play sport without getting involved in politics, "you've got to be both player and politician because you either agree with government policy or you don't and both are political decisions and both require action."

The Watson brothers are convinced they are right.

"Everybody says 'well done, Vallence' but they don't do anything, it's all idle talk. We are a non-racial union and we are correct. Because of this, it is up to the SARB to discuss the sports problems of this country with us, but, as usual, they always do too little too late and one of these days it will be too late to do any talking", Vallence said.

#### Footnote:

During his TV debate with Peter Hain, Barbarians' Manager Chick Henderson denied a statement by the programme chairman that Cheeky Watson had been arrested for entering a black area without a permit. According to the Sunday Times he said "That was in 1976. Watson no longer needs a permit to play rugby where he wants to."

Confronted with this statement Watson told the Sunday Times "That is just not true . . . in fact it is a blatant lie. There are still signs outside black areas stating that a permit is needed to enter. I was last arrested in 1978 for entering a black area without a permit. I was found guilty in court, cautioned and discharged. Earlier this year my appeal to the Supreme Court failed."

He went on to say "You can go to the Government statute book and you will see clearly, in black and white, that you must have a permit. That is the law. It is not what Mr Henderson says it is."

Watson said that in 1977 the former Minister of Sport, Dr Piet Koornhof, had said in an interview that "anyone could play rugby anywhere".

"But when I appeared in court in 1978 and told this to the Magistrate, I was told that this was the Minister's opinion, but it was not what the law said." □