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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.18820/24150509/SJCH46.v1.5>

org/10.18820/24150509/
SJCH46.v1.5

ISSN 0258-2422 (Print)
ISSN 2415-0509 (Online)
Southern Journal for
Contemporary History
2021 46(1):86-106

PUBLISHED:

23 July 2021

“A PARTNERSHIP IN THE CHALLENGES FACING US” – APARTHEID AND SOUTH AFRICAN-ISRAELI RUGBY RELATIONS, C. 1948 – 1989

ABSTRACT

By all accounts, South Africans played a critical role in the establishment and development of rugby in Israel from the 1950s onwards. According to the available evidence, a formal relationship between the South African Rugby Football Board and the Israel Rugby Football Union was only concluded 20 years later. Because of this friendship, various reciprocal exchange tours involving both university and provincial rugby union teams and the Israeli national team took place. In addition, between 1981- 1994, the South African Maccabean rugby team successfully participated in the Maccabean Games. Since this contact was in contravention of the international sports boycott against the apartheid state, the United Nations Committee Against Apartheid blacklisted various Israeli sports organisations and individuals at a time that Israel found itself at odds with a significant number of countries globally about the Palestinian Question. Given the international dilemmas faced by both countries as isolated and pariah states, their relations eventually extended beyond rugby. This article investigates the intersection of apartheid and Palestinian politics, rugby and the relationship between South Africa and Israel against the backdrop of increased diplomatic, military and other sanctions. It is argued that the rugby relations forged, made no direct contribution to enhance South Africa's competitiveness within the sport arena but merely served as an additional instrument to assist in shielding both countries from total isolation.

Key words: South Africa; Israel; rugby; apartheid; Palestine; Maccabi; sport.

1. INTRODUCTION

At the height of the international sports boycott against apartheid, and starved from meaningful international contact, the South African Rugby Board (SARB) and its predecessor body, the South African Rugby Football Board (SARFB), actively started to build relations with emerging but low-ranking rugby nations. While the reciprocal tours of national, provincial and university tours to and from Israel made no direct contribution to enhancing the competitiveness of South African rugby, they afforded the Israelis (and others) a critical opportunity to learn from one of the world foremost proponents of the sport. This was aided by the continuous involvement of scores of South Africans in the promotion of rugby in Israel. Their involvement, combined with that of the formal programmes of the SARB/SARFB and the political initiatives of the apartheid government, drew the nascent rugby nation wholly into the whirlpool of apartheid politics and the international sports boycott.

South Africa's sporting relationship with its major allies in the West, such as the United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA), France, Australia and Australia during the years of apartheid (1948-1993), has been well documented.¹ Similarly, rugby union, the number one sport of apartheid South Africa for nearly a century,² has been extensively researched and continues to attract the interest of historians the world over.³ In contrast, the country's relationship with second-and third-tier rugby countries such as Israel, Germany, Republic of Taiwan, Belgium and the Netherlands has been totally ignored.⁴ This omission has not only left a significant gap in the

1 See for example, J O'Conner and M Hannan, *Once were Lions* (London: Harper Sport, 2009); J Nauright and D Black, "Hitting them where it hurts: Springbok-All Black rugby, masculine national identity and counter-hegemonic struggle, 1959-1992". In: J Nauright and T.J.L Chandler (eds.), *Making men: rugby and masculine identity* (London:Routledge,1996), pp 205-226; SJS Potgieter, "Barbed-Wire Boks"- The Long Shadow of the 1981 Springbok Tour of New Zealand and the United States of America (MA, Stellenbosch University, 2017).

2 M Bose, *Sporting Colours: Sport and politics in South Africa* (London: Robson Books, 1994).

3 Current research and ongoing amongst others includes the work of Bernard Cros on the history of French-South African rugby relations; Derek Catsam who is researching the 1981 Springbok tour of the United States as well as Hendrik Snyders study of apartheid and South African -United States of America Rugby relationship, 1976 - 1991.

4 World rankings for rugby union was introduced for the first time in 2003 by the then International Rugby Board. The ranking order for the top nations at the time were England (Six Nations Champion), New Zealand (Tri-Nations champions), Ireland (Six Nations runner-up), Australia (defending Rugby World Cup champion), and South Africa fifth. The rankings, according to a report in the Irish Times, "were tested against a database of more than 4 500 international matches dating back to 1871". This meant that nations like Israel with virtually no international competition record, were located at the bottom of the table. See, "England top rankings, Ireland third", Irish Times, 10 September 2003, available from <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/england-top-irb-rankings-ireland-third-1.498206>, accessed 5 June 2021.

historiography of South African rugby between the years 1976-1991 but has also denied the countries in question access to a fully contextualised version of their sporting past. Such omissions should be countered in line with the recognition that world rugby found itself in the midst of “changing seasons”.⁵

The sporting relations between South Africa and the Zionist Movement and its settlement in Palestine dates back to the early 1930s, and according to Ian Maltz, former Life President of South Africa Maccabi Council represented a partnership “in the challenge facing us”.⁶ South Africa missed the first Maccabi Games in 1932 because of lack of organisation and distance.⁷ Despite its awareness of the criticism from the Arabic and British concerns about the use of the games to promote illegal Jewish immigration to Palestine⁸, the South African Maccabiah Union (SAMU), with the official blessing of the government of Prime Minister General James Barry Hertzog, sent its first contingent of 19 athletes to the second Games in 1935. Arguably also filled with “an ardent desire to join in this great collective effort of Jewry throughout the world to spread the message of Zionism whenever and wherever the opportunity offered”, the team which participated in six codes (athletics, wrestling, boxing, gymnastics, swimming and tennis), returned home with nine gold medals.⁹ After that, South Africa maintained a regular presence at the Maccabiah Games. Indeed, in the period before and in the aftermath of the Second World War, South Africa, after an initial attempt to restrict the numbers following a perception of Jews as an “unassimilable” and “unabsorbable minority”, became one of the preferred destinations for Jewish immigrants.¹⁰

Notwithstanding this history, Haim Kaufman and Yair Bar-Eli, who have studied the factors that shaped the development of Israeli sport, completely

5 D McRae, *Winter Colours: Changing seasons in world rugby* (Edinburgh and London: Mainstream Publishing, 1998).

6 A Goldman (ed.), *More than fun and games: A Maccabi miscellany* (Johannesburg: SA Maccabi Council, 1972), p. 106.

7 See for example, M Sasson and B Schrodt, “The Maccabi Sport Movement and the Establishment of the First Maccabiah Games, 1932”, *Canadian Journal of History of Sport* 16 (1), 1985, pp. 67-90.

8 I Khalidi, “The coverage of sports news in “Filastin”, 1911-1948”, *Jerusalem Quarterly* 44, 2012, p. 54. See, also L Schalit, “Impressions of the First Maccabiah, 1932”. In: A Goldman (ed.), *More than fun and games: A Maccabi miscellany* (Johannesburg: SA Maccabi Council, 1972), pp. 94 - 6.

9 I Maltz, “South African Maccabi- a partner in the challenge facing us”. In: A Goldman (ed.), *More than fun and games: A Maccabi miscellany* (Johannesburg: SA Maccabi Council, 1972), p. 106. See also, South African Olympic and British Empire Games Association, *Springboks Past and Present* (Pietermaritzburg: SAOBEGA, 1947).

10 M Shain, *A Perfect Storm: Anti-Semitism in South Africa 1930 – 1948* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2015), p. 19.

ignored South Africa as a factor in this regard.¹¹ They further appeared to be blissfully unaware of the remarks of a correspondent of the *New York Times* in 1973 that apartheid, politics and racism, in general, had a dampening or "somboring" effect on Jewish sport.¹² This omission, therefore, contradicts their own thesis, which states that "development of sport in any country is not a process in and of itself, but rather a reflection of historical, social, economical, political, and ideological processes that continuously shape the character of that country".¹³ It also stands in complete contrast to the arguments of former South African - USA Maccabiah athlete, and medalist Lorraine Lotzof Abrahamson who stated that apartheid, "intertwines the three elements of her identity – as an athlete, a Jew, and a white South African - into a braid, or "plait".¹⁴ Nathan Marcus, who have studied Zionist football and Jewish identity in Weimar Germany, further suggested that the study of Jewish sport in different contexts "might be able to improve the historian's understanding of Jewish life in a non-Jewish society".¹⁵ This sentiment is supported by David Dee who noted that new incursions into the topic help to move "the limited amount of previous historiographical debate from sport being seen solely in terms of the process of Jewish immigrant acculturation, and highlights how growing interest in physical recreation became a significant aspect of discourses surrounding religious and ethnic identity".¹⁶

This study, using a combination of official archives such as that of the SARB, United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, various newspaper archives, personal and organisational archives hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand Historical Archives and secondary literature, therefore, aims at providing new insights into a previously unresearched topic with a view to contribute to the broadening of both South African and Jewish-Zionist sports history.

11 H Kaufman and M Bar-Eli, "Processes that shaped sports in Israel during the 20th Century", *Sport History Review* 36, 2005, pp. 179 – 192.

12 *New York Times*, 8 July 1973.

13 Kaufman and Bar-Eli "Processes that shaped sports in Israel", p. 179.

14 *New Jersey Jewish News*, 1 September 2010. See also, LL Abrahamson's book titled *My Race: A Jewish girl growing up under apartheid in South Africa* (New Jersey: DBM Press, 2010).

15 N Marcus, "Zionist football and Jewish identity in Weimar Germany", *Judaica* 61(2), 2005, p. 148.

16 D Dee "Nothing specifically Jewish in athletics'? Sport, Physical Recreation and the Jewish Youth Movement in London, 1895–1914", *The London Journal* 34 (2), 2009, p. 98.

2. ROOTING THE ISRAELI GAME¹⁷

Marcus noted that rugby, soccer and a range of other sports found their way into German schools at the end of the 19th century. Despite initial resistance amongst some sections of the Jewish community in the diaspora, it established a strong foothold over time.¹⁸ Similarly and roughly during the same period, Eastern European Jewish immigrants in London were exposed to a range of British sports through the physical education programmes presented by various youth clubs that were sponsored to aid their moral improvement and integration into the host society.¹⁹ Some Jews, as a result, became “thoroughly anglicised”.²⁰

The establishment of football (soccer) associations and football clubs in Palestine dates back to the founding of several missionary schools during the last decade of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.²¹ Following the establishment of school-based teams, the game spread to the surrounding communities and beyond in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Haifa; resulting in the founding of some clubs along religious lines. However, a small number maintained a mixed membership – whether it was as a result of a similar situation within schools is, based on the available evidence, not certain.²² According to recent research by Kaufman and Yair Galily, the first football (soccer) rulebook in Palestine, was published in 1913, whilst the first recorded game of soccer was played a year earlier as part of the Rehovot Games.²³ However, Khalidi pointed out that the first formal games between schools were played between 1908-1910 and that the first club, an Arabic football club, was established in 1908.²⁴ Galily further observed that during the early years of sport development in Eretz Israel, the Zionist establishment maintained a “standoffish and indifferent attitude”.²⁵

During the Great War period (1914-18), troops from all over the British Empire stationed in Palestine introduced a range of British and other sports, including cricket, rugby and rugby league. In addition, soldiers also engaged

17 *Jerusalem Post*, 14 December 2014.

18 Marcus, “Zionist football and Jewish identity”, p. 152.

19 Dee, “Nothing specifically Jewish in athletics?”, pp. 82, 87.

20 DG Dee, *Jews and British Sport: Integration, Ethnicity and Anti-Semitism, c1880-c1960* (PhD, De Montfort University, 2011), p. 107.

21 I Khalidi, “Sports and Aspirations: Football in Palestine, 1900-1948”, *Jerusalem Quarterly* 58, 2014, pp. 74-5.

22 Khalidi, “Sports and Aspirations”, p. 78.

23 H Kaufman and Y Galily, “The early development of Hebrew football in Eretz Israel, 1910-1928”, *Soccer and Society* 9 (1), 2008, p. 82.

24 Khalidi, “Sports and Aspirations: Football in Palestine”, p. 75.

25 H Kaufman, and Y Galily, “Sport, Zionist ideology and the State of Israel”, *Sport in Society* 12 (8), 2009, p. 1021.

in games of Australian football, a sister code, during rest periods and between skirmishes.²⁶ One of the most prominent rugby competitions was for the Moascar Cup that was donated to the educational authorities by the last holders, the New Zealand military, at the end of the war.²⁷ Despite this exposure, no significant rugby tradition developed in Palestine. Kaufman and Michael Bar-Eli have suggested that this is attributable to the fact that "Yishuv" (Zionist settlements) in pre-statehood Israel created autonomous frameworks for itself that were quite independent of British culture.²⁸ In contrast, Jews in the diaspora in countries such as Australia and South Africa actively played the game. Jewish Australians, for example, established a distinctively Jewish rugby league competition in Sydney, Australia, that survived for three years in the period 1924-7.²⁹ Similarly, immigrant Jews in Britain established a rugby league and union presence in areas such as Manchester, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne and Birmingham, both as players and fans.³⁰ In addition, successive waves of immigrants (including South Africans) acquainted with the game further strengthened the sport after arriving in Israel in 1948.

While rugby struggled to establish a strong foothold, soccer flourished and, due to continued growth, established the Palestine Football Association (PFA) in 1928. The PFA joined the Federation of International Football Associations (FIFA) a year later. However, after a problem-free start, issues with the use and display of religious-historical names and symbols by Zionist clubs bedevilled relations. This was further aggravated by the defiant behaviour of overseas teams who continued to display the Zionist (current Israeli) flag in breach of the British regulations. As a result, some Arab members broke away and established the Arab Palestine Sports Federation.³¹ Against this background, rugby in Israel embarked on its slow and tortuous development path.

3. JEWS, IDENTITY AND SOUTH AFRICAN RUGBY

The first Jews arrived in South Africa during the seventeenth century, and by the end of the nineteenth century, Jews were an integral part of the population.³² They participated "fully in the social, artistic and sporting life

26 *The Evening Post*, 21 April 1919.

27 *The Northern Advocate*, 9 August 1924.

28 Kaufman and Bar-Eli, "Processes that shaped sports in Israel", p. 186.

29 A Hughes, "Muscular Judaism and Jewish rugby league competition in Sydney, 1924 to 1927", *Sporting Traditions* 13, 1996, pp.61-80.

30 Dee, "Jews and British Sport", pp.159, 222.

31 Khalidi, "Sports and Aspirations: Football in Palestine", pp. 78- 80.

32 L Herrman, *A History of the Jews in South Africa from the earliest times to 1895* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: SA Jewish Board of Deputies, 1935).

of the little dorp, and their efforts appear, judging by newspaper accounts, to have been greatly appreciated”.³³ As a highly organised community “on the basis of a number of religious, cultural and philanthropic issues”, they successfully managed the twin tasks of integration and maintained a distinctive community life based on a firm set of values in their new environment.³⁴ Because of their “seamless sense of community in all areas of life”³⁵, Jewish success on the rugby field became almost a non-issue with no consideration paid to their ethnic/cultural identity. Over the space of a century, at least ten Jewish-born players, the so-called “Springbok Minyan”³⁶ and two international referees made their mark on the rugby field and in the boardroom as South African representatives.³⁷ Rugby fans in South Africa were also “weaned” on the folkloric belief that every Springbok rugby team needed either a Jewish doctor or player as their lucky token.³⁸ Such was the Jewish integration into the South African rugby landscape. Unlike soccer, no evidence exists of any exclusive, predominantly Jewish rugby club or controlling body anywhere in South Africa.³⁹ A small number of distinctive Jewish clubs for other sports in addition to those mentioned above, however, existed in amateur wrestling (for example, Maccabee Amateur Wrestling Club - Cape Town), tennis (for example, Jewish Guild Lawn Tennis Club – Johannesburg) and table tennis (for example Jewish Centre Table Tennis Club – Johannesburg).⁴⁰

Rugby, an imperial game, from the onset of its launch in South Africa in the 19th century, served to promote a gendered racial identity – white masculinity. Of particular importance was the longstanding ideal of building strong and healthy individuals who could demonstrate through their prowess

33 I Abrahams, *The birth of a community: A history of Western Province Jewry from earliest times to the end of the South African War, 1902*, Volume 2 (Cape Town: Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, 1955), p. 117.

34 BM Casper, *A Decade with South African Jewry* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1972), p. 13.

35 S Marks, “Apartheid and the Jewish Question”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30 (4), 2004, p. 889.

36 A Shea (ed.), *The glory of the game: Rugby and the Jewish Springbok Minyan* (Cape Town: Kaplan Kushlick Foundation/ SA Jewish Museum, 2009). The Springboks in question are Morris Zimmerman, Fred Smollan, Louis Babrow, Okey Geffin, Cecil Moss, Wilf Rosenberg, Joe Kaminer, Syd Nomis, Alan Menter and Joel Stransky.

37 J Kaplan and M Behr, *Call it like it is* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2014); M Baise, *Mister Ref: Test Referee Max Baise's Story* (Riversdale: Amanda Botha, 2015).

38 See for example, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 19 October 2011; *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 6 July 1995.

39 During the 1960s, the National Football League of South Africa's Division II North featured the Jewish Guild Soccer Club amongst its Transvaal membership. No similar club was identified from amongst the other provincial affiliates. See for example, E Litchfield, *Eric Litchfield's Book of Soccer* (Johannesburg: Hugh Keartland Publishers, 1965), p. 124; E Litchfield, *Goals in the Sun* (Johannesburg: Simondium Uitgewers/Publishers, 1963), p. 218.

40 See for example, A Donaldson, *The South African Sporting Encyclopaedia and Who's Who*, First Edition (Johannesburg: Donaldson's Publications, 1949).

both the cultural superiority and political dominance of the settlers.⁴¹ The SARFB, one of the key cultural institutions of apartheid South Africa and "a powerful, if informal, disseminator of nationalist sentiment and a source of identification with the *volk* at large", was particularly active in this regard.⁴² These objectives were in some respects similar to the main ideals of the World Maccabi Union (WMU) established in 1921. On that occasion, the WMU, in line with their intention to advance muscular Judaism, formulated its objectives as to "foster physical education, the belief in Jewish heritage and the Jewish nation and to work actively for the rebuilding of our own country and for the preservation of our people".⁴³ Kaufman and Galily noted that, "athletics and sport, were seen as means of developing group spirit, controlled movement, and discipline, and for serving the goal of nationalism by cultivating unity and cohesion".⁴⁴ "The restoration of the people" (or the 'New Jew') was of critical importance since they were to serve as "the idealised symbol[s] of national renewal" of a new Israel that could refute the "denigrating biases regarding the Jews' inherent physical inferiority".⁴⁵ Integration within the South African rugby landscape, therefore, poses no real difficulty.

4. APARTHEID, RUGBY AND INTERNATIONAL ISOLATION

On 26 May 1948, 12 days after David Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of the State of Israel despite significant opposition from Arabic countries, the National Party led by Dr. Daniël Francois Malan won the whites-only South African general election on a platform that promised strict racial segregation of the different racial groups. Within its ranks were John Vorster, an acknowledged former Chief-General of the pro-Nazi Ossewa Brandweg (Ox Wagon Sentinel) and a staunch Eastern Cape rugby man.⁴⁶ During the preceding election campaign and the years prior especially during the period 1930 – 48, a strong wave ("barrage") of anti-Semitism swept the country.⁴⁷ The Jewish population around this time numbered just over 104 000 or

41 J Nauright, *Sport, Cultures and Identities in South Africa* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Phillip, 1997).

42 AM Grundlingh *et al.* (eds.), *Beyond the try-line: Rugby and South African society* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1995), p. 119.

43 Quoted in A Hughes, "Muscular Judaism and the Jewish rugby league competition in Sydney, 1924 to 1927", *Sporting Traditions* 13 (1), 1996, p. 62.

44 Kaufman and Galily, "Sport, Zionist ideology and the State of Israel", p. 7.

45 H Kaufman, "Jewish Sports in the Diaspora, Yishuv, and Israel: Between Nationalism and Politics", *Israel Studies* 10 (2), 2011, pp. 147, 151.

46 CJ Wilken, "Sport and politics – John Vorster and the Park Rugby Club in Port Elizabeth, 1940-1942", *S.A. Journal of Cultural History* 14 (1), 2000, pp. 17-18.

47 Shain, *A Perfect Storm*, p. 177.

around 4.4 per cent of the total white population.⁴⁸ This, notwithstanding, the new government was amongst the first to officially recognise the new state of Israel.

Over the subsequent years, as the National Party started implementing their programme of legalised and institutionalised racism, Jews found themselves on both sides of the political divide as anti-apartheid activists and as a complicit community.⁴⁹ Under this programme, sport officially became a segregated affair with the right to represent South Africa internationally, formally reserved for White athletes.⁵⁰ Against this background, the SAMU, send its team to the historic first games hosted by the State of Israel in 1950, motivated to contribute to “enhancing the prestige of World Jewry and giving us a feeling of pride and confidence everywhere”.⁵¹

The “pride” and “confidence” of all of white South Africa were soon challenged as the Black community, supported by a significant number of South African Jews represented in various civil and political rights groups, embarked on a civil disobedience campaign, the “Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign” in 1952 to signal their rejection of apartheid. Represented in various organisations, including the Black Sash, Liberal Party, South African Communist Party, and Progressive Party, were notable figures such as Joe Slovo, Albie Sachs, Helen Suzman and others.⁵² As the Defiance Campaign got underway, former Durban resident Leo Camron, a South African war veteran (both World War II and the Israeli War of Independence) and a member of the new Israel Defence Force (IDF), started to promote rugby in his new homeland. In addition to overcoming various bureaucratic obstacles, Camron also had to deal with a general lack of rugby coaching literature and equipment. Unperturbed by these challenges, he wrote his own manual, translated it into Hebrew and organised a rugby match between a group of conscripted soldiers and a team of officers in 1952, shortly after his appointment to the sports department of the Israeli Defence Force. The latter team, clearly signifying the South African roots and influence of the initiative, played under the name of “Springboks Plus”. Camron used a shoe and an American football to prepare his charges for the historic match to compensate for the lack of rugby equipment. The soldiers defeated their officers by 18-6

48 PC Sakinofsky, *Imprints of memories, shadows and silences: shaping the Jewish South African story* (PhD, Macquarie University, 2009), p. 11.

49 FH Adler, “South African Jews and apartheid”, *Patterns of Prejudice* 34 (4), 2000, p. 23.

50 Amongst these laws were the *Population Registration Act* (Act 30 of 1950) which separated the population along ethnic lines, the *Prohibition of Mix Marriages Act* (Act 55 of 1949), the *Group Areas Act* (Act 41 of 1951) which provided for separate residential areas, and the *Reservation of Separate Amenities Act* (Act 49 of 1953).

51 Goldman, *More than fun and games*, p. 108.

52 H Suzman, *In No Uncertain Terms: Memoirs* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1993).

and laid the foundation for the further growth of the game in its new context.⁵³ Progress, however, remained slow within the military setup. This, according to Shlomo Mizrahi *et al.*, with reference to a different context, could firstly be ascribed to the status of sport during the formative years of the Israeli State, as an insignificant, marginal and top-down activity controlled by political appointments. Secondly, as far as they could ascertain, sport did not form part of the "expectations or specific interests and preferences" of most citizens.⁵⁴ Kaufman largely concurred with this view and further noted that "sports activity was never a leading factor in Jewish national revival in the Homeland, even though "muscular Judaism" was a central concept in the emerging Zionist ethos."

Ambiguously though, the Israeli state, during its immediate post-establishment years, used representative sport as a means to advance its national interests, gained recognition and "attaining prestige and honour".⁵⁵ Camron's initiative probably suffered from rugby's lack of embeddedness within the agendas of the main rival sporting structures ("Hapoel", "Beitar", "Elitsur", and "Maccabi") and their political principals. Furthermore, his attempt as an ordinary rugby fan to promote the game for its own sake rather than in support of a particular ideological stance further alienated some within the structures who traditionally used other sports as an instrument to recruit new members for both sporting and political purposes.

Following the Defiance Campaign, black sports organisations established the Coordinating Committee for International Recognition (CCIR) in 1955 in an attempt to secure the institution of non-racial sport and international recognition for black athletes. The South African government responded with vehemence and unleashed a campaign of intimidation and bullying against the leadership and members of the CCIR. It also enacted new legislation and progressively applied harsh measures to counter the burgeoning domestic anti-apartheid movement. By 1958, the CCIR ceased to exist because of state repression, and its membership morphed into the newly established South African Sports Association (SASA). However, SASA's attempts to negotiate fundamental change internally failed dismally, forcing a change of strategy. In addition, the organisation's attempt to persuade corporate sponsors to make rejection of racism a precondition for their support of white sports events also failed.⁵⁶ This was met by further state

53 *Canberra Times*, 24 June 1984.

54 S Mizrahi *et al.*, "Sport Policy in a Transformed Socio-Political Setting: The Case of Israel", *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 27 (5), 2008, p. 3.

55 Kaufman, "Jewish Sports in the Diaspora", p. 156

56 See, University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers Archive, South African Institute of Race Relations Collection, AD 1715: DA Brutus (South African Sports Association - Appeal

repression and the denial of travel documents to black anti-apartheid sports administrators. As SASA started to lobby the various international control bodies in the hope of forcing change, the SAMU started preparations for its participation in the sixth Maccabiah in 1961.

The 1960s witnessed a renewed push by black political organisations to force political change. One of the key campaigns, an anti-pass law march aimed at forcing the abolishment of restrictions on the freedom of movement of blacks, ended tragically on 21 March 1960 with the police killing 69 demonstrators at Sharpeville on the Witwatersrand. In its wake, various political organisations, including the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) were outlawed under the Unlawful Organisations Act (Act 34 of 1960). The subsequent state of emergency increased the law enforcement powers of the state security establishment to aid its repression of the anti-apartheid opposition. These were used to good effect to either detain, kill or exile scores of activists in the aftermath of a number of so-called “backlash demonstrations”.⁵⁷ The Sharpeville shootings gave fresh impetus to the worldwide anti-apartheid struggle.

As South African sport entered the 1960’s, the doors to international competition gradually started to close because of the global rejection of its racial policies. In contrast, the Maccabiah World Union (WMU) gained status as an “Organisation of Olympic Standing” with status and recognition of the Maccabiah Games as a regional sports event under the “auspices and supervision of the International Olympic Committee and its associated International Sports Federations” in 1961.⁵⁸ The South African chapter of the WMU hailed this as a “good reason to be overjoyed at” and a “proud achievement” while ignoring the preceding debates within the International Olympic Committee’s (IOC) Congress about South Africa’s racial policies and breach of the principles of the Olympic Charter.⁵⁹ Although the country remained a member of the IOC, the tide concerning continued membership of various international sporting control bodies started to turn. Against this background, the fifth South African Maccabiah team, representing 12 sports codes, left for the sixth Games in Israel. Amongst the represented codes were table tennis, a sport from which the white controlling body was suspended in 1955.

to All Olympic Councils, 1 January 1962 and DA Brutus (South African Sports Association) - The Manager: Hullett’s Sugar Refinery, 16 July 1962.

57 RA Francisco, “The dictator’s dilemma”. In: C Davenport *et al.* (eds.), *Repression and mobilisation* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 71.

58 International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame, “The Maccabiah Games”, <http://www.jewishsports.net/>, accessed 29 November 2017.

59 Goldman, *More than fun and games*, p. 15.

In October 1962, the South African Sports Association, following increased state repression, transformed itself into the South African Non-racial Olympic Committee (SANROC) with the objective of challenging the continued membership of the whites-only body to the IOC. With the assistance of the international movement in Africa, Europe, Asia, the Americas, Australia and New Zealand, South Africa was expelled from the Olympic Games in 1964 for its refusal to change its policies and for resisting both mixed-race and non-racial competitions.⁶⁰ In addition, SANROC, which was banned and driven into political exile in 1966 for its part in the suspension of the all-white body, joined the collective call and campaign for a worldwide boycott of all-white South African teams.⁶¹ In addition, the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa (SCSA), Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), Citizens Association for Racial Equality (CARE) and the American Committee on Africa (ACOA) threatened to disrupt all scheduled events with a South African presence.

Because of the coordinated anti-apartheid action, the number of official rugby tours to and from South Africa decreased significantly as they entered the new decade. This notwithstanding, the SARFB declined ongoing invitations from a variety of second and third-tier rugby countries such as Czecho-Slovakia and Romania for stronger relationships in the form of reciprocal tours. Instead, its preference was for tours from its traditional allies in Europe and Oceania and failed to appreciate the potential value of relationships with emerging rugby nations. Rugby in Israel, at this point, faced extinction because of little official and community support.

On the political level, 1963 saw the further strengthening and deepening of the ties between South Africa and Israel. When the United Nations (UN) instituted an arms embargo against the apartheid state, Israel assisted with the circumvention of the campaign by supplying South Africa with much-needed weaponry and other military equipment. Indeed, noted Jane Hunter, the two had a symbiotic relationship: "technology and finished weapons from Israel were exchanged for raw materials and money from South Africa".⁶² This prompted the UN General Assembly to condemn what they at the time

60 See for example, D Booth, "Hitting apartheid for six? The politics of the South African sports boycott", *Journal of Contemporary History* 38 (3), 2003, pp. 477-493; R Nixon, "Apartheid on the run: the South African sports boycott", *Transition* 58, 1992, pp. 68-88; I Henry and M Al-Tauqi, "The development of Olympic solidarity: West and non-west (core and periphery) relations in the Olympic world", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 25 (3), 2008, pp. 355-369; C Merrett, "In nothing else are the deprivers so deprived": South African sport, apartheid and foreign relations, 1945-71", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 13 (2), 1996, pp. 146-165.

61 American Committee on Africa (forthwith ACOA), Brochure, 1966/67. "Announcing Dennis Brutus: Poet, teacher, sportsman speaking on: I was a prisoner on Robben Island and topics related to apartheid". MC Van Zyl, *Noord Transvaal Rugby 50* (Pretoria: NTRU, 1988), p. 234.

62 J Hunter, "Israel and the Bantustans", *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 3, 1986, p. 55.

labelled the “unholy alliance”.⁶³ Four years later, the roles were reversed when Israel, in the aftermath of the Six-Day War and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, became the target of an arms embargo. South Africa, based on their longstanding relationship, had no hesitation in supporting her most-valued ally. Based on their strategic mutual interest, Israel officially took an appropriate anti-apartheid stance, even reducing its diplomatic relations with South Africa to a consular level, but otherwise maintained a strong and comprehensive relationship with the apartheid state.⁶⁴

At the start of the 1970s, Israel received a new wave of foreign immigrants that settled in areas such as the *Kibbutz Yizre’el* near Afula in the North West and Ra’anana in west Central Israel and Jerusalem. Crucially, the two areas benefitted from the presence of a significant number of South Africans, some of whom left the country because of their discomfort or rejection of apartheid, and British population respectively that almost immediately led to the establishment of a number of clubs, including the Hebrew University, Kibbutzim Tzora and Nachshon, Haifa Technicon and Ramat Gan. As a result, a national league was set up in 1972. Three years later, the IRU, under the presidency of former Johannesburg resident Max Miodownik was established.⁶⁵ During this period, various other Israeli sports teams visited South Africa to compete in various sports, including judo, basketball, athletics, Federation Cup tennis, and gymnastics that in nearly all cases, competed against all-white teams.

Two years after the establishment of the IRU, four more rugby clubs were founded following the arrival of a new group of immigrants. These included the Tel Aviv RFC, Hebrew University RFC, Haifa RFC and the Kibbutz Yizre’el RFC.⁶⁶ The enlargement of the national league competition coincided with the quadrennial Maccabiah Games in Tel Aviv where 150 South African athletes participated. Unfortunately, due to South Africa’s expulsion from a number of international sports organisations, wrestlers, track and field athletes and weightlifters were excluded from the team and from participating in the event.⁶⁷ Although the Maccabiah movement deplored this situation, there was nothing they could do to reverse the situation without jeopardising “the future eligibility of all track and field athletes in Maccabiah

63 United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, “Relations between Israel and South Africa”, *UNCAA Notes and Documents, No. 5/77* (New York: UNCAA, 1977).

64 JK Haasbroek, *A Historical perspective of the Information Scandal* (MA, University of the Free State, 2016), p. 79.

65 *Soul Sport Magazine*, December 2014, p. 31.

66 *Jerusalem Post*, 8 December 2016.

67 *New York Times*, 8 July 1973.

Games". Arguments about the Games' unique, non-racial and apolitical nature also failed to persuade the International Amateur Athletics Federation.⁶⁸

During the 1970s, the number of official rugby tours to and from South Africa further decreased. Following a conflict-ridden rugby tour of Australia and the termination of Australian relations with South Africa in 1971, the writing was on the wall for the local rugby authorities. Better coordination and the pooling of resources in the ranks of the anti-apartheid rugby lobby which consisted of Halt All Racist Tours (HART – United Kingdom), Citizens Association for Racial Equality (CARE – New Zealand) and Stop All Racist Tours (SART – New Zealand), further forced the SARFB to develop new playing relationships with rugby countries in South America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East (Israel). Although the British Isles rugby team came to tour in 1974 and a Springbok team toured France at the end of the season, the outlook for future tours was poor. Left with no better alternative, the SARFB started experimenting with limited racial integration and allowing overseas tours to the new destinations by its affiliates to strengthen new relationships. These events also coincided with the start of a comprehensive South African propaganda campaign aimed at countering the global anti-apartheid and boycott movement.⁶⁹ Israel, with whom South Africa established formal diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level in 1975, became a key ally.

The propaganda campaign aimed to improve the country's global image and influence the state of geopolitics to South Africa's benefit. Key in this regard was the Department of Information (DOI), Foreign Affairs (DFA), Sport and Recreation (DSR) and the Bureau for State Security (BOSS) supported by the so-called National Security Management System that coordinated intelligence gathering and containment of the opposition until the 1990s.⁷⁰ In addition, several secret front-organisations such as the Committee For Fairness in Sport (CFFS), Foreign Affairs Association (FAA), South Africa Foundation (SAF) and the Southern African Freedom Association (SAFA) who were ultimately answerable to the Prime Minister, Balthazar Johannes Vorster, had a responsibility for a range of sectoral tasks.⁷¹ The DOI was assigned both the tasks of lead department and determiner of methods, resources and actions and the coordination of cross-border activities with the Department of

68 *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 18 June 1973.

69 E Rhodie, *Die Ware Inligting Skandaal / The True Information Scandal* (Pretoria: Orbis SA, 1984), p. 85.

70 A Seegers, "South Africa's National Security Management System, 1972-90", *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 29 (2), 1991, pp. 253-273.

71 Stop the Apartheid Rugby Tour, New York, "Press Release: *Muldergate Scandal figure is directly tied to South African rugby tour of the United States*", New York, 18 August, 1981, http://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=32-130-2E7, accessed 31 September 2017.

Foreign Affairs.⁷² The secret campaign targeting Israel was named “Operation David” and attempted to build a comprehensive network of politicians, businessmen, academic institutions and influential individuals (internationally) to counter global sanctions and a Middle East oil embargo.⁷³

One of the key propaganda instruments at the disposal of the apartheid regime employed in their fight to prevent South Africa’s expulsion from the international sports arena was the Committee for Fairness in Sport (CFFS), established by the Bureau of State Security (BOSS) in 1974. From 1975, this body, under the leadership of former provincial rugby player and Johannesburg executive Louis Luyt was tasked with promoting South Africa’s sports bona fides across the world.⁷⁴ Beyond the regular publication of progress reports about integrated sport in targeted newspapers as a means to “regain lost ground as a result of the anti-apartheid pressures”, the CFFS supplied information to sports administrators, editors and politicians globally.⁷⁵ Aided by the South African diplomatic corps internationally, the CFFS (and other front organisations) also used advocacy and lobbying through paid agents such as advertising and public relations firms, lobbyists, government-funded publications, businessmen and women, organisations and documentary filmmakers to promote the country.⁷⁶ It also used sympathetic and often well-meaning pro-apartheid personalities such as golfer Gary Player to promote a narrative that the sports boycott was detrimental to the aspirations of blacks.⁷⁷ It also brought New Zealander Robert Fenton of War Against Recreational Disruption (WARD) organisation to South Africa to obtain the support of black sports administrators to encourage a sports exchange between the two countries.⁷⁸ Despite the ongoing campaigns of the anti-apartheid movement, this work created a positive impression about South African sport in certain quarters.

In January 1976, the Northern Transvaal Rugby Union visited Israel and became the first official South African rugby team to tour the country. This allowed the aspiring Israeli national team to measure itself against one of the world and South Africa’s strongest sub-national rugby outfits. This visit also

72 Rhodie, *Die Ware Inligting Skandaal*, pp. 53 – 54.

73 Rhodie, *Die Ware Inligting Skandaal*, p. 81.

74 Luyt was a renowned and successful industrialist and former provincial rugby player. In subsequent years, he served as President of the Transvaal Rugby Football Union before becoming the President of the non-racial unified SA Rugby Football Union / SA Rugby Union in 1994.

75 L Luyt, *Walking Proud: The Louis Luyt Autobiography* (Cape Town: Don Nelson, 2003), p. 91.

76 Haasbroek, *A Historical perspective*, p. 40.

77 J Brickhill, *Race against Race: South Africa’s “Multinational” Sports Fraud* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1976), p. 51.

78 Historical Papers Research Archive, AG3403, Non-racial Sports History Project Transvaal – South African Council of Sports, 1975, University of the Witwatersrand.

formed part of an extended European seven-match tour that was scheduled to include encounters in Israel, Germany, Spain and Belgium. In addition, South Africa was in the process of preparing for the visit of an American rugby team, the Eastern American Eagles. These tours were meant to break "new ground" for South African rugby and was an admission of the effectiveness of the international boycott campaign.⁷⁹ Although the Israelis suffered a massive 78-8 defeat at the hands of Northern Transvaal, one player noted that this "trying experience" offered them an important learning opportunity.⁸⁰ This was followed by a four-day visit by Vorster in April during which a number of bilateral agreements were concluded in the fields of diplomacy, military collaborations, mutual investment, airlines and shipping, culture and sports and more importantly, the country gained, in the words of the *Rand Daily Mail*, contained in the newspaper clippings of the United Nations record, "a public friend, an avowed ally".⁸¹

In the aftermath of the Soweto Uprising in 1976, the anti-apartheid campaign started to impact the Federation of International Rugby Associations (FIRA) activities. The Soviet Union and Romania demanded that France, a fellow member, terminated her continued relationship with South African rugby.⁸² The French, however, were not yet ready to end a relationship that started nearly eight decades ago. However, on-going media reports of punitive international measures against transgressors of the sports boycott increased and caused further uneasiness amongst the white rugby fraternity.⁸³ During the second half of the year, Dr Israel Peled, Chairman of the Maccabiah World Union, visited South Africa for discussions with local leaders, both in the sports movement and the Zionist Federation. Against this background, the University of Cape Town (UCT) played four games in Israel in 1977 as part of an extended European tour. Like their counterparts two years before, the various combined selections and representative teams (Combined Kibbutzi's; University of Israel; University of Tel Aviv and the Israel National XV) were no match for their experienced visitors and suffered significant defeats.⁸⁴ A year later, the University of Pretoria defeated the Tel Aviv XV, by 80-10 as they made their contribution to solidify the new relationship.

Despite the frequent defeats, playing matches against visiting teams from a reputable rugby country such as South Africa raised the game's profile significantly. Moreover, it contributed to laying a strong platform for its further

79 Q Van Rooyen (ed.), *SA Rugby Jaarboek / SA Rugby Annual 1976* (Pretoria: SARWS, 1976), p. 6.

80 Kaplan and Glassman, "Keeping the ball "in touch", p. 31.

81 United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, "Relations between Israel and South Africa".

82 *Die Burger*, 4 March 1976.

83 *Die Burger*, 3 March 1976.

84 Van Rooyen (ed.), *SA Rugby Jaarboek / SA Rugby Annual 1977*.

growth. In 1981, rugby in Israel received a significant boost when it was included in the programme of the 11th Maccabiah Games scheduled for July. This attracted entries from several significant rugby countries, including South Africa, who sent a national team selected by the South African Maccabiah Council instead of the SARB. The latter body, however, formally endorsed the team.

Two months before the Maccabiah Games on 25 May, Israel played its first official “test” or international game against Switzerland. The various incoming tours provided players with an opportunity to hone their skills and enhance their competitiveness as they competed for inclusion into the national side. On the political front, Hertzal Katz, the Chairman of the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) in Israel, and Lieutenant –General Mordechai Gur (former Chief-of-Staff of the IDF) as well as General Chaim Herzog (former Ambassador to the UN) visited the republic of South Africa during the course of the year. In turn, Israel hosted the South African Minister of Finance, Owen Horwood, and the political heads of the so-called “homelands” of Bophuthatswana and Venda. During these visits, various agreements, partnerships, joint ventures and mutual strategic projects of both an economic and military nature and in the fields of sports and culture were concluded. Therefore, the Maccabiah movement found itself listed as an apartheid collaborator in the first special report of the United Nation Special Committee on Apartheid published in September 1981.⁸⁵

During the course of the 1981 season and after a decade of existence, the IRU formally affiliated to the Federation of International Rugby Associations (FIRA), the European rugby body headquartered in France. This coincided with the country’s entry into the international rugby arena and after having drawn its first official test against Switzerland with nine points each. To sustain the momentum, the IRU also cultivated new relationships through the hosting of British military teams based in Cyprus, France and Australia, such as the “Cyprus Lions” and Maccabiah Australia. This helped to fill the gap for full international status whilst it awaited formal recognition and affiliation from the International Rugby Board. Association membership to this body, however, only followed in 1988. In the meantime, FIRA remained its home and the Maccabiah rugby competition its official platform for the further promotion of the game.

During the decade, two representative Israeli teams toured South Africa. The SABRA’s, a representative team of native Jews born within the State of Israel (also referred to in some correspondence of the SARB as the

85 United Nations, First Special Report of the Special Committee Against Apartheid: Recent developments concerning relations between Israel and South Africa, A/36/22/Add.1, 17 September 1981, New York: General Assembly Security Council

"Maccabiah Team"), first visited the country in 1982.⁸⁶ Despite a search of the official records, other than for an official team photograph taken at the SARB offices in Cape Town, no details of the first tour matches or the opponents it played could be traced. Significantly, on their extraordinary general meeting in November of that year, the SARB adopted a resolution "that countries like Taiwan, Israel and Chile be assisted in respect of coaching". Although coaches were sent to Chile and Taiwan, a similar gesture was not extended to the Israelis. This was probably easier to use the existing South African network of influence within Israeli rugby and therefore represented a cheaper option. The same meeting also noted and endorsed as a principle a statement from the President that "he was on the point of departing abroad and appealed for refraining from speculation as to the reasons and the places being visited".⁸⁷ Furthermore, in December 1982, the 97th plenary meeting of the UN's General Assembly adopted a range of resolutions aimed at isolating South Africa. Although Israel reaffirmed her opposition and rejection of racism and racial discrimination during the debate, the country's delegate abstained from voting. This was in direct protest against the harsh criticism of Israel's continued relationship with the apartheid state and in response to efforts to debase "the high purpose of our concern for those who still suffer racial discrimination".⁸⁸ Rugby, in a manner of speaking, thus formally entered the cloak-and-dagger arena.

Although the core membership of the Israeli rugby clubs in 1984 was located within the kibbutzim and the main universities, its participants came from diverse origins and included players from South Africa, Argentina, Britain, Romania and Australia. The game also received a major boost when steps were finally taken to introduce it into the Israeli Defence Force for its educational value. Cyril Morris, an instructor of sports instructors in the Army and the man responsible for teaching his colleagues the "art of rugby football" almost three decades after the efforts of Camron, specifically noted the game's value for instilling and promoting "self-discipline, fairness, dignity in both victory and defeat, endurance and respect for opposition".⁸⁹

During the 1985 Maccabiah Games, South African participation became a major issue within the Jewish State. Before the Games, Canada and many other member countries objected to South Africa's continued participation. Although the SAZF decided to withdraw the team officially, this organisation,

86 See, *Guardian*, 19 November 1948.

87 SA Rugby Board Archives, Stellenbosch University, Abridged Minutes of the Extraordinary General Meeting of the South African Rugby Board, November 12, 1982 at 09h00.

88 United Nations General Assembly, Thirty-seventh Session, 97th Plenary Meeting, Agenda Item 33 – Policies of Apartheid of the Government of South Africa, Thursday 9 December, New York: Official Records, p.1614.

89 Thowson, "Rugby union progresses in Holy Land", 24 June 1984.

with the cooperation of the Israeli Consul, decided to circumvent the objections and issued immigration and temporary residential permits and visas to 200 athletes.⁹⁰ Given this action, it was clear that these athletes were viewed as Jews and regarded as eligible to represent Israel. As per special dispensation, this allowed them to become part of the Games by participating for a club called "Maccabi Modi'im" without satisfying the required residency period or needing the permission of the Israel Olympic Committee. This divisive issue caused an intense debate amongst the locals. One group argued for their exclusion as South Africans and the opposition supporting them as immigrant Jews and therefore eligible to participate. Although the IOC held a different view, the team participated in 13 sports codes and won nine gold medals, including rugby.⁹¹

The SABRA returned for its second tour in March 1986 and played six games in the Northwestern part of the Cape Province where the SARB ran a game development programme as a means of the latter body's attempts to rebuild its depleted rural player base.⁹² Grateful to be included in this initiative, some of the local hosts offered partially free accommodation to the tourists. In addition, members of the South African Maccabiah team were invited to be involved with the team.⁹³ Three other games were played in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg, respectively. The visitors recorded six victories over their rural and Cape Town (Uni-Milnerton) opponents but suffered defeats at the hands of Durban powerhouse Collegians (27-15) and Johannesburg-based Wanderers Invitational XV (33-9). All these teams have a long history of playing the game, and the victories achieved by the Israelis, therefore, served as a major stimulus for the game's continued growth within the country. Although the tour that lasted for a month costed the SARB an amount of R140 912 (inclusive of travelling and accommodation and kit), it won them the gratitude of the rural unions.⁹⁴

Shortly after the visit of the SABRA's, the highly controversial New Zealand Cavaliers rebel tour followed. This created its own problems since it lacked official sanction from the International Rugby Board and was regarded

90 Hunter, "Israel and the Bantustans", pp. 62 – 3.

91 *The Southern Israelite* (Atlanta, Georgia), 26 July 1985.

92 P Dobson, *Rugby in South Africa: A history 1861- 1988* (Cape Town: SA Rugby Board, 1989), p. 160. See also, *SA Rugby Annual 1987*, p. 57. Opponents included Uni-Milnerton RFC; Namaqualand Invitational XV; Black Mountain Invitational XV; Upington Invitational XV; Orange Sub Union; Logan Sub Union; North Western Cape President's XV; Durban Collegians and the Wanderers Invitational XV.

93 SA Rugby Board Archives (SARBA), Stellenbosch University, Abridged Minutes of the 96th Annual General Meeting of the South African Rugby Board, March 14, 1986.

94 SA Rugby Board Archives (SARBA), Stellenbosch University, Abridged Minutes of the 97th Annual General Meeting of the South African Rugby Board, Friday April 3, 1987.

as an unsanctioned "rebel" tour. In its wake, the scheduled visits of the British Lions, Welsh and French scheduled for 1986 was also cancelled. During the later stages of the international season, Israel formally entered the qualifying rounds for the Rugby World Cup competition scheduled in 1987. South Africa, in turn, was formally excluded because of the consistent pressure against apartheid from a diverse range of organisations. It also flowed from continued appeals from banned South African organisations such as the SANROC for an active disassociation from race-based rugby.⁹⁵ The existence of the UN blacklist or register of sports contacts with South Africa also played its role. Realising that only a political solution could end its growing isolation, the SARB, with mediation by the exiled African National Congress (ANC), embarked on a four year-programme of negotiation with its rival, the South African Rugby Union (SARU).

The initiative of white rugby to use politics to find a way out of its dilemma followed earlier efforts and exploratory talks between the exiled ANC and a group of white opinion formers in Dakar, Senegal, during July 1987. During discussions, a trio of sportsmen in the delegation, namely Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, Tommy Bedford, and Andre Odendaal, suggested the use of sport, especially rugby, as a mechanism to facilitate political negotiations towards a new democratic order. Although the ANC was receptive to the idea, the apartheid government summarily rejected the idea. However, the international sports boycott forced the white rugby fraternity to take the matter into their own hands.⁹⁶

With the assistance of several parties, the SARB embarked on a series of secret meetings with ANC representatives in various European cities during 1988. These meetings were in direct conflict with official government policy and, unsurprisingly, labelled as treasonous by elements within the rugby establishment, political circles and the Afrikaans press. Undeterred, the organisation's leadership persisted, and thanks to the support of the ANC, started direct negotiation with the SARU in October 1988 in Harare, Zimbabwe.⁹⁷ On 20 March 1992, almost four years later and following a full suspension of all attempts at international participation, the two rival rugby bodies merged to form the non-racial SARFU. In the background, the IRU continued its operations with only eight clubs (and around 400 players) but

95 South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (forthwith SAN-ROC): Correspondence: Sam Ramsammy- HE Mr. Roger Bambuck: Secretary of State for Youth and Sport, Re. Collaboration with Apartheid South Africa, 7 August 1989. See also, *Eastern Province Herald*, 21 July 1989.

96 M Du Preez, *Louis Luyt: Unauthorised* (Cape Town, Zebra Press, 2001), p. 47.

97 Luyt, *Walking Proud*, pp. 174 – 175.

with no formal guarantee of a continued South African friendship, following the latter's readmission into the international arena.

5. CONCLUSION

South Africans played a critical role in the promotion and growth of rugby in Israel and in the process, drew the nascent rugby nation into the whirlpool of apartheid sanctions and the international sports boycott. Starved from meaningful international contact, the SARB and its predecessor body, the SARFB, resorted to building sporting links with second-tier emerging rugby nations. It simultaneously financed rebel tours to the country with various government agencies' aid to provide its players with opportunities to compete against international opposition. These initiatives were closely related to a comprehensive campaign of political propaganda driven by various South African state departments in an attempt to sway world opinion. Israel, who faced international opposition about the Palestinian question, valued this friendship and proved to be a faithful ally over time. The reciprocal tours of national, provincial and university tours to and from Israel made no direct contribution to the enhancement of the competitiveness of the South African national rugby team, the Springboks. However, it afforded the Israelis a critical opportunity to learn from one of the world's foremost proponents of rugby football, which assisted with placing their game on a solid footing. On a political level, this relatively minor and low-key sporting relationship contributed to undermining the international boycott campaign and contributed to South Africa's further isolation that eventually led to a political settlement leading to a fully democratic dispensation.