

## Black betrayal offers stark reminder of divided country

The light of the passing day had dimmed and the gloaming had descended by the time he arrived. For sure, he was a South African rugby player but his was a world far removed from that of the sponsored kit, the soft leather boots and the myriad training ground equipment.

For a start, he had walked five kilometres in his bare feet, a journey that took him well over an hour. But that was not the greatest peril confronting Chume Notshe. He had passed grim alleyways, dark, lonely fields and streets where muggers roamed. All for his love of rugby.

We had travelled there in the back of a people carrier, rattling along the rough old roads of the Lagunya Township to reach the local rugby club. You turn off the highway from Cape Town, enter the notorious Cape Flats area where death is a daily assailant for so many. There was not much to announce this particular rugby club. A couple of burnt out tyres lay abandoned near the entrance, the wreck of a smashed car nearby. As the dark closes in, you feel an insidious threat.

But Chume has made it, together with his younger brother, Sikhmduzo, good enough at 14 to play on the wing for Western Province Under-15s in Craven Week. And they're out on the field in the growing dark, these 60-odd kids ranging from Under-14s to Under-19s, a ball being thrown around amid shouts of glee and delight.

But there is hardly a rugby boot between them, and most don't have any footwear at all. The club "gym" is a converted container, brought here from the docks at Cape Town. They cut off one side, put a few rudimentary weights and metal bars inside and a couple of the township lads are working out on them. No lights, of course, inside.

We search for our contact to explain this humbling scene. Louis Mzomba's eyes light up when you ask him how long he has been involved with this game. "I have loved rugby for more than 20 years," he smiles. "And to see these boys coming and being happy is what makes me smile."

But this weekend, as South Africa stand on the verge of winning the World Cup, Mzomba is far from smiling. For a start, this school teacher-cum-rugby coach who works at Nomlinganiselo High School in New Cross Roads, not far from Lagunya, was held up at gunpoint in his classroom last week, cell phones and other valuables seized. Crime in the townships, he reports, is escalating.

But it is not even that which induces a sense of no-hope in Mzomba. It is what he calls "the betrayal" of black South African rugby. "South Africa may be about to win the World Cup but nothing has changed in South African rugby in terms of hope for black people," he says. "There is no sense of excitement at all about them playing in this final. When you look at the Springboks team now, it is not a team that is representative of this country. It is always a white team.

"The young boys who come to training at Lagunya cannot relate to players like Schalk Burger and John Smit. What do they have in common with them? The top rugby players of South Africa or even of Western Province in Cape Town never come here to coach, or to offer advice or even support us. And there are none of our guys in their senior teams. So they have lost interest in rugby because of the political things. They supported the New Zealand team or the Australians because there were black players, like Lote Tuqiri.

"Rugby in South Africa is a game for white people. Racism is naked in South Africa and interest in the game among black kids is decreasing steadily."

Mzomba admits a growing sense of despair at what he has seen since 1992 when South Africa's status as the pariah of world society ended. In 1995, when the World Cup was held there, new president Nelson Mandela urged unification and black and white came together.

"In 1995, people of all colours wore green jerseys and there was a feeling of unification. But 12 years later that has all gone. I remember then, Nelson Mandela called for us to support the Springboks and we did, we were right behind the team. But today we don't have that excitement."

The reasons are clear, according to Mzomba: "In 1995, there was only one black player in the Springboks team, Chester Williams. But we accepted that, we expected it to change. But 12 years down the line it is no different: it is still not representative at all. There are five non-white players in the whole South African squad at this World Cup: four coloureds and one black player, Akona Ndungane, and he only played one game. He is there for a holiday.

"They tell us there are no blacks who can play in this team yet about 80 per cent of South Africans are the black population. But you look at the Springboks and there is not one black man. It doesn't make sense."

Of course, a will is needed to effect a transformation. With a few notable exceptions, that will does not yet appear to exist. As Mzomba wonders, how else to explain the absence of players such as Gcobani Bobo, Solly Tyibilika, Hanyani Shimange and Lawrence Sephaka from this South Africa squad? All have been tried and discarded.

Mzomba says the other problem is the provinces. They, he asserts, have not changed either. "There is only one black player in the Western Province team. The rest are white and coloured. In fairness to Jake White South Africa's coach, he does not have a huge number of black players to choose from because even the provinces themselves don't bring on the black players."

Mzomba has experienced himself the difficulties. A referee for many years, he discovered in 2005 he was the only black referee officiating in the Vodacom Cup or Super 12 competitions. The best any other black officials were was touch judges. He kicked up a stink and led a strike by the black officials.

It led to Mzomba being hauled up on a disciplinary charge before the South African Rugby Union. He answered by revealing in the media how statistics showed, allegedly, that black officials were being ignored. An inquiry was called for but no progress was made, despite some fine words and promises.

Mzomba was fired as a referee in 2006. The explanation given by Andre Watson, convenor of the South African referees? "He said I was too old. At 40. But Watson handled a World Cup final at 46. I expected the decision. But what happened to me doesn't matter. It is the bigger picture about the black community in rugby in this country that matters more to me."

Perhaps former England coach Dick Best, who coached Western Province in the late 1990s, hit the nail on the head: "South Africans are going to Paris in their droves this weekend and the reason is, they feel it may be the last time they can seriously entertain the prospect of winning the World Cup. Certainly for many years, anyway. Forced integration will put the Springboks well down the world rankings. They have seen this in other sports."

It is dark and quiet as we prepare to leave the township's club. You fear for Chume on his five-kilometre walk home. He'll be back here again in two days' time for training. Mzomba's love for the game has been infectious.

But for how much longer? Mzomba reports that fewer black state schools are playing rugby. If this trend grows, soon South Africa will have no choice but to field a side purely of white boys from the rich schools where they excel Bishops and Rondebosch at Cape Town, Grey College, Bloemfontein.

That would be a lot more than a sadness, given the enormous levels of natural talent waiting to be developed among the poorer kids of South Africa. It would be a crime.

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