



Women And Sport

Reflections And Opinions Of A Black Woman's Participation In Sport

By Cheryl Roberts



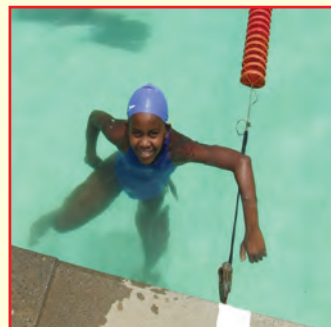
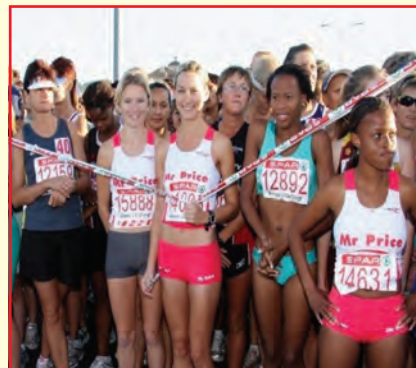
Cheryl Roberts



“Women And Sport: Reflections And Opinions Of A Black Woman’s Participation In Sport” is a collection of articles, opinions and letters, written by Cheryl Roberts and published, over the past few years, either in **‘SA SportsWoman’** publication, **‘South African Sport’** or several South African newspapers.

This collection of articles represents the struggles, hardships and hurdles that must be overcome and adversity which sportswomen face and encounter as they participate in sport, from the grassroots base to international level, either as players or sports fans. This collection of writings on women and sport represents another valuable contribution to increasing the media representation of women in sport and should further encourage much more additional opinions, about women’s participation in sport, to be expressed, written and published extensively.

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South Africa's Sports Queens Compete On Global Stage With Chains

Over the next few years a small number of our sportswomen will participate in the Olympic and Paralympic Games, having emerged from school sport competitions to provincial representation and ultimately international selection. Participation in an Olympic event is a life-time achievement and dream come true for most of our elite sportswomen. At these Games women will compete with sportswomen from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds and countries like Germany, Australia, Sweden who give large support to women's participation sport. Although unified by their gender, the women will be rivals at every event as they seek to attain personal and national sports glory.



Whether an athlete, coach, referee, each sportswoman will have a personal story to tell; the ones from disadvantaged countries will have some sad, yet inspiring tales to reflect upon as they appear on the global stage. Not all sportswomen would have traveled an equally resourced route to the Olympic Games. And amongst the disadvantaged sportswomen would be our own South African sportswomen.

As we watch the sports prowess of Sanya Richards, Paula Radcliffe, Janet Jekosgi, Christina Ohuruogo, Pamela Jelimo, the beautiful women sprinters from Jamaica, Bahamas and United States, swimmers from Australia and United States, football skills of Marta, Brazil's women's world footballer of the year, tennis skills of Venus and Serena Williams, long distance supremacy of African women athletes, we should also reflect on the possibility of South Africa producing several world and Olympic women champions.

South Africa's women in sport have over the decades been engaged in a contest and battle for resources and financial and media support. They are on record of saying they get too little media coverage and financial assistance. It is one thing to create opportunities and bring more girls into sport but it is something else if we fail to assist the many talented girls and women in sport, especially the financially and socially disadvantaged who struggle to eat healthily, let alone play sport and realize their potential. Our sportswomen take whatever comes their way although they may not agree with it. Their love for their chosen sport and desire to achieve their best potential is what drives them against tremendous odds.

How many of South Africa's international sportswomen are contracted to a sponsor or offered endorsement packages and how many sportswomen are ever interviewed by the media? Whilst we applaud the efforts of our sportsmen, we ask, how much longer will our sportswomen continue to be ignored and not taken seriously? After all we also buy the cars, airtime, houses, use services of airlines financial institutions, support supermarkets and several other business houses. Yet these very same businesses continue to ignore sportswomen as non-entities.

Make no mistake, government and corporates are well aware of the financial inequalities when it comes to sports spend. They acknowledge vast inequalities exist but very few assist with sponsorship of women in sport programmes and development.

I can go on about how oppressed and disadvantaged women are in sport because of their gender. I can go on and tell you that sportswomen are deprived of facilities and infrastructural support. Besides our sports prowess, skills, talent and dedication to our chosen sport we fail to attract the attention of those in charge of corporate power - and we remain victims of those who have the power to change power relations in sport.

So what about the thousands of women in sport and the millions who have not had the opportunity to enjoy sport? Women in sport is not only about 9 August, National Women's Day when men are at their most patronizing and acknowledge that the second class status of women in society must be eradicated. Women in sport, the challenges accompanying this gender in sports involvement, is an all year affair, lifelong challenge and should never be let off any agenda of transformation.



The Power Of Women In Sport And In Football



Football participation by the girls and women occurs within an exciting and crucial time of transition of South Africa's sports apparatus. Yes, sports unification and the dismantling of apartheid sport has been achieved and all sport is played under single controlling structures. The fact that we have moved on and together as one, irrespective of colour, is something to celebrate. For that is victory.

By bringing all South Africans together, sports unity gave us an unmatched belief and confidence in ourselves. No more are we pariahs of the international world. For now we play sport around the world with our heads held high, even though we may record defeats, but realizing that every defeat encountered is a stepping stone to our future successes. Our nation-building contribution to a society emerging from a turbulent and divided past is applauded all over the world.

Each and every sports event, no matter on what level it occurs, plays a significant part in the transformation of South African sport. There is no doubt that each and every one of you must have recorded some memorable moments cherished and enshrined forever in your mind. Participation in sport reveals much; it also blurs that which embarrasses officialdom of sport.

Tonight as we celebrate a season past of glory and participation in sport we could be forgiven for thinking that sport has been transformed to everyone's satisfaction. As we lose ourselves in the euphoria of sporting success and subsequently claim each achievement as a victory for nation-building, it is quite easy to

to forget the deprivation, discrimination and imbalances which exist in sport. As we prepare to enter the new millennium we need to ask ourselves: would the previous century set the precedent for the next 100 years? And if the 20th century is to characterize the 21st century then what are we doing to ensure that the years and decades ahead will be spearheaded by women and for women.

The days of sitting around, complaining, criticizing and waiting for things to happen are over. No one is going to make things happen for you. You must spearhead your own leadership, propelled by your own vision and surrounded by the goals and objectives you hope to achieve as women in sport.

Football is a global sport; the world's biggest sport, played by women and men. Yet in most people's minds it is a sport played by men only. Women footballers are not taken seriously. Because of your gender, the fact that you are women and girls with a passion for kicking a ball, is a major disadvantage to the successful development of women in football.

The 21st century is around the corner. Need I ask how you would like to see the positioning of women in sport?



2010 Football World Cup: Consolidating Male Hegemony?

And now we come to South Africa's hosting of the 2010 Football World Cup Finals, an event that has generated much optimism and self-belief in our country, and its impact on development of sport and gender and power relations in sport and society. Challenges there will be aplenty, but South Africa should deliver a highly successful and pride-drenching championship, the first to be held on the African continent.



We must be aware though, in our euphoria, optimism, self confidence, that this is a men's football championship which would ultimately further advance men's participation in football. Nothing wrong with that as we are not against development of boys and men in football. But we must consider the implications of South Africa staging this football spectacle, the resources that are being allocated to its successful delivery and subsequent legacy.

How is gender equity being taken of, how is women in sport going to benefit and does this event not further consolidate male hegemony of sport and society?

SA's elite sportswomen are on record saying they get too little media coverage and too little financial assistance. It's one thing

to create opportunities and bring more girls into sport but it is something else if we fail to assist the many talented girls and women in sport, especially the financially and socially disadvantaged who struggle to eat healthily, let alone play sport and realize their potential.

Make no mistake, government and corporates are well aware of the financial inequalities when it comes to sports spend. They acknowledge vast inequalities exist but very few assist here and there. And how are we to go forward as a sports nation? How are we going to be fair and assist both genders? How can we, as a non-racial, unified, democratic country, applaud and celebrate the successes of our men and then allow our girls and women to struggle, literally with chains around them, and still expect sporting glory from them?

Government is giving unconditional support to the staging of the event which should unite our non-racial democratic society come 2010 and strengthen our pride as Africans. Most South Africans have their heart firmly entrenched in this event and a good few are already seeing the millions that are scheduled to come their way.

Whilst caught up in 2010 preparations and hosting of a sports event which will forever be etched in our hearts and national pride, we must be aware of the further inequalities that such an event may throw out. Make no mistake; this is a men's event, for and about men. It's about men entrenching their power, their hegemony and their greed as they engage in battle to make more and more profits.

South Africa is ploughing the country's resources into a sports event, for the pride and self belief of an entire South African

nation and African continent but through this euphoria we must remove our blinkers and assess the real impact and hidden consequences, primarily that of consolidating male hegemony and entrenching power relations which benefit men.



We should not stage a sports spectacle which benefits men and forgets about the women. Just as our country initially endorsed and supported South Africa's 2010 bid and is now driving 2010 preparations, so too should we support a women's world sports event being staged in SA. The one sport that must be considered is netball, followed by women's football and road running as these sports boast high women's participation rates, particularly that of black women, our society's most disadvantaged gender.

It should be a non-negotiable condition that we support a men's world championship in return for a women's world event, with the objective being to use the event to create a plethora of initiatives which would improve and advance girls and women's participation in sport.

The Football Prowess Of Brazilian Women's Footballer, Martha



Fifa's 5th edition of the Women's World Cup Finals played recently in China was supported by packed stadiums and a television audience of millions around the world. South Africa failed to qualify for the global women's football spectacle

and print media coverage of the event was sparse, with a picture here and there and some results. For the fortunate who have pay television, every match of the month long championship was broadcast live.

Whilst surfacing much talent and organizational finesse, the most glaring being the team expertise of defending champions Germany, the championship awakened a whole world of sports consumers to the skills and raw talent of one Marta Vieira da Silva, a 21 year old Brazilian, who believes she was born to play football. A football prodigy who began capturing headlines and interest when she represented Brazil, as a 16 year old, in the Fifa u19 championship in Canada in 2002, Marta is FIFA's 2006 Women's Footballer Of The Year.

Marta's passion and skills helped Brazil reach their first gold medal match of the women's world cup finals and she finished as the tournament's top goal scorer. But the championship match proved a major disappointment for Marta, dubbed the 'Pele in skirts', something she will live with until her next appearance in a gold medal match where she can correct the

'wrong'; that wrong being her missed penalty which would have levelled the scores and who knows what the final result could have been. Marta and her teammates wanted the championship desperately, so too did every other team. But for Brazil a World Cup championship would have meant recognition for women footballers finally from their country and Brazilian Football Federation which ploughs all emotional, financial and infrastructural resources into men's football.

I write about this experience because like Brazil, or any other 'third world' or developing country, South Africa's women in sport also struggle for recognition. And just like Marta struggles for recognition in her native country Brazil, so too are South Africa's sportswomen involved in a contest and battle for resources and financial and media support.

The life story of 21 year old Marta is the story of millions of disadvantaged girls and women. Marta's world class status in women's football and subsequent accolades have come after an intense struggle within her family, her community and country for a girl's right to participate in her chosen sport. It was outside of Brazil, in Sweden, a bastion of gender equality that Marta has found the support and recognition that she so desperately wants to further develop support for women's football in Brazil. She plays professionally in the Swedish national league and UEFA women's cup.

Marta was largely ignored and almost rejected by her beloved Brazil, that was until she demonstrated what she could do with the ball at her feet. Throughout the World Cup she enthralled millions of viewers, I being one of them. But her spectacular and breathtaking football skills went beyond just a round ball, it was about the demand for attention and development of girls and women in football in Brazil. Marta's crusade is not isolated; it has been encapsulated by disadvantaged, poor sportswomen from all developing and colonized countries in their struggle to participate in sport.

Should Women In Sport Also Take Blame For Caster Semenya's Forced Gender Verification?

Amidst the public outcry for Athletics South Africa president Leonard Chuene to resign because of his serial lies to the South African and international world about gender verifications tests on Caster Semenya, on reflection, we should also look at laying the blame at the absence of a significant, strong and public voice which speaks on behalf of women in sport.

I had for so long been waiting for this moment when a black South Africa woman would triumph on the sports stage and emerge as a world champion. As I followed the breaking of the news about Caster Semenya I could not help but wonder if a women and sport or gender equity representative body, representing the interests of women in sport, could have better advised and assisted athletics how to further proceed regarding gender verification and subsequent action.

Caster Semenya is not the first South African or African sportswoman to have undergone some sort of gender verification tests. Gender verification had already reared its ugly head here on our very own African continent, at a previous All Africa Games and women's football tournament.

So consumed are we with sport being just about winning and beating each other that issues like gender verification are nowhere near being on South African sport's radar. At the heart of the matter is the very real issue of gender verification and now we are confronted with the question: Should gender verification in sport be allowed and tolerated or should it be banned altogether?

Throughout Semenya's public gender challenge we have heard only from the male officials in sport, be it administrators, coaches, sports scientists, medical practitioners and government officials.

Some women did respond but they were outside of organised sport, they were the academics, researchers, activists. All this support is very good because the more voices supporting an injustice the stronger and better our confidence. But where were the women sports officials and leaders?

After decades of political and social activism, South Africa should by now be having a strong voice existing in the interests of gender equity in sport. The question is: when and where are South Africa's women in sport going to take charge of their existence and destiny in sport? Who are we waiting for to speak on our behalf, to demand gender equity in sport, to ensure the interests of sports girls and sportswomen are advanced? What revolutionary leaders are we waiting for to emerge and to advance the sportswoman's revolution?

I have over the years written and spoken much about the gender, social and financial inequalities existing in sport when it comes to sportswomen but I also recognise that many, many women, compared to over three decades ago, have been developed through the system and have achieved much via the various sports structures. The problem with our sportswomen is that we take as much as can out of the system, in our own interest, and don't give anything back, for all the good that we received. South Africa has produced sportswomen of high quality, with academic prowess as well as ability on the sports fields and boardrooms, but seemingly, most elite sportswomen are just in sport for their own personal ambitions and opportunistic behaviour.

Now this opportunistic behaviour has taken root, a malaise has set in and we continue to grumble a bit here and there and not do much more. Some women are quite contented once they reach a certain position of office in sport and forget to even mention gender equity in sport. Most women are in sport just for the love of being involved in sport generally and not necessarily to advance the interests of women specifically.

Black Women Have For Decades Been Supporting And Are Passionate Supporters Of Rugby

A few months ago Nomatyala Malamba, a black woman, was not only inducted into the South African Sports Hall of Fame but she was inducted as a rugby legend. In our South African male rugby world it may well be difficult to believe that a black woman could be acknowledged as a rugby legend. But indeed, she is right there, together with other legends such as Naas Botha, Francois Pienaar and Joel Stransky. Many people may ask: what, why and how has a black woman been inducted as a rugby legend.

Black women have been supporting and loving rugby for over six decades and more, it's just that this has not been recorded and popularized as not only the history of sport in South Africa, but as a vital contribution. This interest in rugby, and awesome passion of black women, grew immensely over the years and was passed down to future generations. In our post-apartheid society much more black women are being drawn to the game and follow it closely.

Whenever the South African nation is either gripped with rugby fever or celebrating our rugby prowess, be it our male world champions or local club teams, it seemingly appears that black women are not part of this rugby euphoria and spectator package. And neither does the packaging by the rugby media, brand or public relations companies, do justice or reflect the reality of the passion for rugby by thousands of black women. This is because it's mainly white women who are flashed across our television screens as the supporters of rugby and black women are not seen much at live rugby matches such as the Currie Cup, Test matches and Super 14. But supporters indeed they are,

especially at club matches, district rugby festivals and localized rugby events.

Black women support rugby in a big way and this support didn't just start a few years ago, it goes back decades ago, particularly in the Eastern Cape and Cape Town, where thousands of black men engaged in rugby activities.

Whether it was a match played in the rural village or the urban areas, black women passionately supported rugby. They played a pivotal role as fundraisers, as cheerleaders, as protectors of blazers and kit, passionate supporters and entertainers at rugby matches. Nancy Jacobs, from Langa, who recorded the hit song "Meadowlands" performed at a rugby tournament in 1958 and went on to marry rugby and cricket international, Ben Malamba. Women supporters also came up with the nicknames given to the outstanding black rugby players who brought so much pride to rugby-mad black communities.

And the women didn't just cheer the male players, they also coached from the sidelines and gave their instructions as to how the game should be played. After the match, they would give their post-match analysis and say how it should have been done. If you were a wife or girlfriend you would continue throughout the week about how the game should be played.

Some of the women who have been supporting rugby for over 6 decades include Mrs Jumartha Majola, wife of rugby legend Eric Majola, Mrs Qe Qe, wife of Dan Qe Qe, non-racial rugby legend and anti-apartheid sports activist, Rosina Paarwater, grandmother of rugby coach Jerome Paarwater, Nomatyala Malamba, the sister of Ben Malamba who married Western Province player, Hewlitt Pongola and Rosie Zembetha. Langa resident Nomatyala died almost two years ago, aged 93, and remained a fervent rugby supporter until her death.

Mrs Majola, 75 grew up in a rugby family with her great grandfather, grandfather and father playing rugby and it was no co-incidence that she married a rugby player. In recalling how she and Mrs Qe Qe ardently followed rugby, Mrs Majola says: “Mrs Qe Qe and I never missed a rugby match, even if it rained. We watched all matches in the Eastern Cape and travelled often to the Western Cape. The Green Point Track would be packed when our provincial teams played. We shouted for our players and teams from the sidelines and coached them as well. Nowadays I prefer watching rugby on television so I can kyk weer and miss nothing at all.”

Rugby in South Africa and the world over is dominated by men and imaged as the game for men. But women, particularly black women, are also emerging at all levels of rugby, be it on the field as players, spectators, administrators, officials coaching or refereeing, and not forgetting, in the great role of supportive wife and partner to their rugby-married husbands.

Border woman rugby administrator Thobekga Xaphe grew up watching in the rural area of Alice where rugby was the most popular sport. Alice has a proud rugby tradition and Thobekga comes from Ngqele.

“Rugby was very, very popular in Alice and throughout all villages. We played it barefoot, with long grass, bumpy grounds, with the cows and goats grazing but we played it with passion and for the love of the game. Ours was non-racial rugby under the non-racial South African Rugby Union and we didn’t have much in facilities but we had our hearts which were very big for the game,” says Thobekga.

The participation of black women in rugby over the decades is recorded much in village and township tales of rugby when memories of rugby matches are recollected and remembered but much more acknowledgement must be accorded to the role of black women in South African rugby.

Woman Spectator Victim Of Gender Violence And Stereotyping of Rugby As A Male Domain

The ‘racial attack’ on a black woman by three white men at a rugby Test match last Saturday has seemingly sent into shock the South African Rugby Union, custodians of that sport of the bastion of male supremacy, arrogance and superiority. It’s a male’s response to an attack on not only a woman, but a black woman. This was not just a racist attack, as SARU and the media are reporting. It was a brutal attack of gender violence of men on a woman and it was about the sport of rugby being portrayed as a powerful sport for men and by men.

Media across the globe have reported this as a racist attack, but not as one of sexual and physical abuse. However, if we unpack this ‘racial attack’ we should see that it was an attack on the right of any South African woman to enjoy participation in sport on whatever level. This was an attack against all women, whatever their skin colour, qualifications, social positioning or sexuality. It may have been another woman on Saturday but come the next sports event and you or myself may become another victim of assault because of our gender.

In South African society women have been and are under continuous attack from men be it in sport, home, work environment, social spaces. Sexual, emotional and physical abuse of women in sport is rife and on the increase and some of the victims of abuse such as black gay sportswomen have not only been verbally or physically abused, but gang-raped and murdered by men who deem it their responsibility to say how sportswomen should act and behave.

This 'incident' should not be viewed as a once-off and neither should SARU be satisfied with tracking down the perpetrators and banning them from Test rugby matches. Don't forget that many other people were witness to such an incident and did nothing to protect the woman victim. I would think that thousands of black women are now afraid of going to a rugby match and this would be because of the potential of being attacked by men who are claiming rugby as their space and domain.

The sport of rugby has a powerful partner in the media, in propping up and consolidating the stereotype portrayal of this sport as a man's sport. During the apartheid era rugby was constructed as an Afrikaner sport, the sports religion of Afrikaners. During the post-apartheid years it has attempted to become constructed as growing sport which has the interests of all South Africans at heart, but in real sports discourse it's a man's sport.

According to rugby's male stranglehold, the sport of rugby is for men and about men. They are extremely patronising in their acknowledgment of the role of women in rugby, as supporters, players and officials. The media, corporate sponsors and advertisers have ensured the consolidation of male hegemony within rugby

Whilst I don't believe that any male official or employee of SARU would advocate or propagate racism, the men who control the direction and consolidation of rugby are out of their depth when it comes to eradicating sexism in sport. They may be able to handle a media release here and there but they are not knowledgeable, neither have they displayed any intention, about how to eradicate gender inequalities in sport let alone rugby.

SARU needs to do much more than issue press statements, offer



financial rewards or exhibit some public anger. They are going to have to revisit the role of rugby in advocating the superiority of males in South African society and, not only say they are against sexism in rugby, but they must visibly exhibit their role in eradicating the media profile of rugby as a bastion of men's superiority.

But is SARU capable of doing this? Stickers against racism my foot! SARU needs to undertake a serious education of the entire rugby paradigm about racism, sexism and abuse, against people and particularly against women.

South African sport is infested with abusers of all colour, men who rape and sexually and physically abuse women, either in the sports network or outside. Several of these men are portrayed as heroes of South African sport. But what heroes are these who abuse and perpetuate abuse and violence against women?

There is no doubt that a rather disturbing, shameful culture exists amongst male-dominated sports in how women are perceived and its these negative perceptions which are further entrenched when sports such as football, rugby, cricket are consolidated as 'the male supreme sports'. Women love their male sports heroes, particularly in rugby, cricket and football, but this certainly does not give men the right or any authority to abuse women in sport or outside. Our sportsmen must know that rape is abuse and against the country's constitution, that sexism is outlawed and that, even they are perceived as 'the main manne', they are not to abuse any women.

Non-Racial, Anti-apartheid Sportswomen Deserve Recognition For Their Unselfish Contribution To Sport



With South Africa caught up in just everything that involves the hosting of the 2010 Football World Cup and men's sports events it has become very easy to forget the contributions of those in non-racial, anti-apartheid sport who got us into the era of our non-racial, democratic sports dispensation. Whilst some tributes have taken place around South Africa for those who reached the sports pyramid under harsh apartheid conditions, they have been largely focused on the sports prowess of sportsmen. The women pioneers of non-racial sport, who contributed immensely to the opposition of apartheid sport, have not appeared on the radar of tributes, honour and recognition.

Women pioneers of non-racial sport who participated in all levels of sport should be applauded and acknowledged for their contribution in travelling a very difficult journey that would eventually open more opportunities for girls and women in sport.

It was a committed journey which saw the sportswomen give their heart and soul, with no financial gain or assistance and no material rewards, to the consolidation of non-racial sport and the creation of opportunities for disadvantaged, oppressed girls and women and men. For every woman who participated in some level of sport, whether as a spectator, tea-maker, club player, wife or girlfriend many more girls and women were attracted to sport because of the other women who were already there.

Whilst much more opportunities have today been opened and created, because of our non-racial, democratic South Africa, for millions of girls and women to participate in sport, the thousands who participated in non-racial, anti-apartheid sport have not been accorded the recognition and honour which they deserve and which is justifiably owed to them in lieu of their contribution to a free, non-racial democratic South African society.



Black women played league tennis in Langa in the 1940's, coloured women played basketball, table tennis, tennis, badminton, hockey, softball from the 1940's. Coloured and black women have been involved in rugby from

the turn of the 20th century. Yet, the outstanding talents of South Africa's elite black sportswomen, as well as the dedication of women officials, coaches, volunteers in sport, for most of the time has gone unnoticed.



If the majority of South Africans did not have adequate sports amenities and facilities, government funding or sponsorship from business, imagine what meagre and little resources were hanging around for black girls and women? Yet they organised and developed sport in the disadvantaged, oppressed and severely deprived communities. Talented sportswomen emerged from these communities but they received very little financial or infrastructural support. The women who chose non-racial sport put principles above money and chose to advance a non-racial, democratic society where all South Africans are one nation, living in one country and are treated equally. Blacks got very few facilities at school and in communities under the apartheid regime but we played non-racial sport and contributed to the creation of our non-racial, democratic society. Millions of people fought for non-racial sport and for the liberation of South Africa. Today, when we enjoy international sport we must not forget those who made it possible for us to achieve international legitimacy and play international sport.

Women who were involved in sport from way back in the 1940s are still involved in sport today, still giving their time to sport and still loving sport. Post-apartheid SA has gone on to record international sport victories and the sport prowess of our sports has surfaced with the eradication of apartheid. Elite and professional sports stars abound in all sports and SA derives much joy and pride from international sport. And through all of this our women are still involved in sport, still organizing and still loving sport but never

forgetting where we came from and what got us to where we are today. Millions of girls and women enjoy sport with the elite going on to participate internationally. We must not forget those who fought apartheid in sport and made it possible for the creation of a new sports era.

Recognition and honour should be bestowed upon our sportswomen and women in sport, including the spectators, kitchen assistants, tea and coffee makers, players, officials, wives, girlfriends, mothers, coaches who chose to play and support non-racial, anti-apartheid sport and who struggled to reach the top of the sports pyramid because of all the obstacles they encountered. But demonstrate their talent they surely did! The non-racial sportswomen of the 50's, 60's, 70's, 80's, contributed greatly to the creation of non-racial sports structures and to the eradication of apartheid in South African society.

And we should honour and pay tribute to our anti-apartheid sports struggle and remember the sacrifices and principles of our leaders, officials, heroines and heroes who chose a difficult journey and sacrificed a lifetime for an equitable, non-racial sports dispensation in South Africa. We should not allow our struggle stalwarts to be easily erased or omitted from celebration and commemorations.

We should also create much more space and engage those who have the financial and media power about the development of women in all levels of sport. We must also take our opportunities to applaud our girls and women in sport, particularly with the advent of the 2010 men's Football World Cup Finals and men's cricket and rugby World Cups because the focus is all on the men with the sportswomen struggling for financial assistance, spectator support, media recognition and overall national support.

Government Intervention Needed To Assist Gender Equity In Sport

Elnita Kamies is a teenage football enthusiast residing in Hanover Park where she attends Mountview High. Like the teenage Benni Mc Carthy, a fellow Hanover Park resident, dreamed of playing on the best world's football pitches and for the championship clubs of Europe, Elnita, also has her teenage dreams. She, too is dreaming big and wants to pursue a professional career as a woman footballer.

A few months ago in Bloemfontein, Elnita, together with over 4000 participants experienced the SA Games, a biennial sports event hosted by government and co-ordinated by all nine provincial government departments. At the week-long SA Games, Elnita, representing Western Cape, not only displayed her prowess as a teenage footballer, but played with passion, determination and love for her chosen sport of football.

She was not the only girl athlete, another 2000 girls also displayed similar passion and enjoyment, for its out of this national experience, explicitly conceptualised by government to create opportunities for emerging and developing youth players in sport, from all urban and rural communities of South Africa, that the girls hoped to be selected for higher levels of participation in the sports pyramid.

Both national and provincial government spared no effort in not only making the event possible, but also in ensuring that no participant would not be eligible for participation because of financial challenges. Every expense was taken care of by a total expense budget well over R40 million. For most of the participants, it may well have been their first trip outside of their residential

town and the experience should be a life long memory, one they will cherish and be inspired by. Much talent surfaced at the SA Games, after all this is South Africa's premier youth event, aptly described as finding tomorrow's talent today and surfacing our future Olympians and world class sports people.

The SA Games is strong on gender equity, with female participation not only encouraged, but supported and achieved. Provinces are represented by as many females and males and girls and women are being given as fair a chance to experience the SA Games as athletes, managers, coaches or team support.

As a grassroots, emerging athletes sports event, the SA Games is an ideal platform to bring youth players through the sports pyramid. But somewhere through this pyramid, the dreams of teenage footballer Elnita and thousands of other teenagers are going to be shattered because of their gender.

And this because whilst opportunities have been created for girls and women to participate in sport, South African women in sport still struggle to achieve world class status, that being precisely because of their gender. Secondly, they struggle because of their colour. Millions in financial resources are made available by both government and corporates to support and maintain men's participation in sport but a much smaller percentage is allocated to women in sport. Netball, hockey and women's athletics have a corporate backer which assists the elite women to compete internationally but the financial discrimination across all sports is enormous.

SA's elite sportswomen are on record as having said they get too little media coverage and too little financial assistance. It's one thing to create opportunities and bring more girls into sport but it is something else if we fail to assist the many talented girls and women in sport, especially the financially and socially

disadvantaged who struggle to eat healthily, let alone play sport and realize their potential.

A Sports Bill for South African sport is about to be introduced in parliament and, it is my opinion, that an imperative of this bill should be a gender equity component. We should not leave the future of South Africa's sportswomen at the mercy of corporates. Some government intervention and support is needed! And may I add we should not be afraid of government intervention if it is going to assist the development, progress and advancement of a discriminated gender in sport.

South Africa's post-94 Ministers of Sport, whilst being strong on transformation of sport, have sadly not been as vocal or demanding when it comes to the elimination of gender inequalities in sport. These gender inequalities are massive, glaring and inhuman. Is it not something for the Human Rights Commission to consider as a human rights abuse when corporates allocate sponsorship to sportsmen without allocating assistance to sportswomen?

Thousands of dreams were created at the 2007 SA Games and thereafter thousands are likely to be shattered. The worst affected are going to be the girls, not because they have no talent, but because of their gender. Perhaps the talents of Elnita Kamies will be developed and we will see her represent South Africa at a Women's Football World Cup. Or maybe we will see her, ten years down the line, in a factory in Cape Town, talking about 'when I played football....'

South Africa's sportswomen face many challenges and very few sports dreams are realized. But should we not review how we are assisting or being detrimental to South African sport, be it with media exposure or financial allocation? Are sportswomen asking too much if they ask not to be discriminated against? And is it not in our interest as a unified, democratic nation that we assist and celebrate the sporting success of both genders.

Not Much Jewels For Cape's African Sports Queens

Several Western Cape sportswomen are amongst the best on the African continent but, instead of being known as high profile sportswomen, they are much better known as "African Sports Queens Without Jewels" and that's because, amidst the celebrations for our sportsmen and 2010 World Cup events, South African elite sportswomen are sandwiched in between, trying desperately to achieve world class status and the ultimate prize of gold medals and prize money on the international stage against tremendous challenges.

The Western Cape has produced several African sports queens over the past years but few of them have managed to become world status. 2007 has produced another outstanding year for our emerging and elite sportswomen but it's a matter of same script, different actors.

Some of South Africa's leading elite sportswomen are based in Cape Town and surrounding areas, amongst them being, Portia Vries and Babalwa Ndeleleni (weightlifting), Janice Joseph and Geraldine Pillay (athletics), Tarryn Bright, Vidette Ryan and Lenise Marais (hockey), Wendy Trott and Jessica Pengelly (swimming), Michelle Edwards (badminton), Marie Rabie (triathlon) Ronel (taekwondo), Antonio Carelse (football).

They have emerged from school sport competitions to provincial representation and ultimately international selection. They have competed in various African and international sports events around the world with commendable results but they are still pursuing the ultimate prize of world champion, Olympic medal champion and medal and top ten world ranking whilst our sportsmen have all the support.

Because they are South African and African champions it all seems okay for our elite sportswomen. But no it's not. Speak to them and you will hear a plethora of grievances, hurdles, negatives and disappointments which affects them because of their gender and subsequent gender inequalities in sport. They all agree on one thing and that is South Africa's elite sportswomen, black and white, get far too little media and financial support. And without this support they find it an upward battle for them to compete on the world stage whilst their legs are in chains, compared to their international counterparts.

South Africa's women in sport have over the decades been engaged in a contest and battle for resources and financial and media support. Whilst women the world over struggle for recognition and support it's just much more difficult and challenging for severely disadvantaged and financially challenged women in sport. It's not difficult to figure out why disadvantaged women the world over struggle to participate and survive in sport, given their deep-rooted socio-economic challenges and realities.

SA's elite sportswomen are on record saying they get too little media coverage and too little financial assistance. It's one thing to create opportunities and bring more girls into sport but it is something else if we fail to assist the many talented girls and women in sport, especially the financially and socially disadvantaged who struggle to eat healthily, let alone play sport and realize their potential.

Something else our elite sportswomen agree upon is for them to compete as full-time athletes which would see them undertaking no employment, just concentration on sport full-time, just like our male footballers, cricketers and rugby players. But this means their employment income should be derived from sport and this is where the problem arises. They are unable to compete full-time unless they have the financial assistance to do so

Our netball team has just competed in yet another World Championship and this time they finished sixth, they even lost their Africa no.1 status. Amongst the reasons for their dismal performance is the fact they don't compete in netball as full-time athletes such as New Zealand and Australia. SA's national women's hockey team has the same grievance and so too do our footballers, badminton players, and any other elite sportswomen.

"We do get some assistance from our federations but because they don't get much support for the sport it means our support as athletes is not much," says Babalwa Ndeleleni, SA's first black woman to medal at a Commonwealth Games. "We go to events in Africa and world championships but we need to compete much more and then it's the same story of not enough money. How can we improve all the time if we not competing regularly?"

African weightlifting champions, Ndeleleni and Portia Vries, African long jump and sprint champions Janice Joseph, Geraldine Pillay, triathlon champion Marie Rabie are on SASCOC's Operation Excellence Programme, an elite athlete assistance programme in preparation for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Falling under the 'possible participant level', through this programme they get a monthly stipend of not more than R4,000 a month. The programme only kicked in about a year ago and after one payment the sportswomen failed to see another for a good few months. Payment hitches along the way was the explanation given to the athletes. Through it all they are expected to practice and compete on the world stage. No medal results or top ten placings means less financial assistance. The women take whatever comes their way although they may not agree with it. Their love for their chosen sport and desire to achieve their best potential is what drives them against tremendous odds.

