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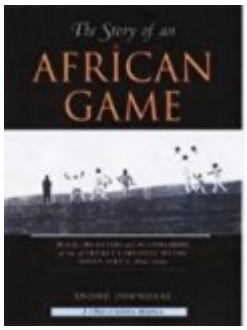
AndrÖ© Odendaal. *The Story of an African Game: Black Cricketers and the Unmasking of One of Cricket's Greatest Myths, South Africa, 1850-2003.* Cape Town: David Philip, 2003. 368 pp. No price listed, cloth, ISBN 978-0-86486-638-7.



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This is a massive book. Weighing in at over five pounds and foolscap size, it is more a replacement for the coffee table than a coffee-table book. It is also beautifully produced, with over three hundred photographs in black and white--many of them rare or historic--and a well-spaced and highly readable text. Endorsed and subsidized as an official publication of the United Cricket Board of South Africa, *The Story of an African Game* was published as part of the celebrations to mark the staging of the International Cricket Council World Cup in South Africa in 2003. Although the language is often journalistic in style, marked by short, punchy sentences which are clearly designed to appeal to a popular readership, no compromises have been made in the scholarship which infuses the text, and which is carefully detailed in endnotes and an accompanying annotated bibliography on the author.

The text is divided into eight parts and no less than forty-three short chapters. It traces the development of African Cricket in South Africa from its unlikely origins in the aftermath of the Xhosa Cattle Killing of 1856 to the eve of the Cricket World Cup in South Africa in 2003, detailing along the way with the years of struggle against the vicissitudes of segregation and apartheid in the twentieth century and the renaissance of "the African game" in post-apartheid South Africa under the guidance of United Cricket Board.

It is hard to imagine anyone better equipped to write this history than André Odendaal. As he explains in the acknowledgements at the head of the book, its writing was "part of a long personal and intellectual journey" for him. This is borne out by the extensive biographical and bibliographic note appended to the book, which describes that journey. The son of an Afrikaner father, he learnt to play cricket as a school boy in the Eastern Cape, before going on to complete a B.A., B.A. (Hons) and a Masters in History at the University of Stellenbosch. During his years as a student he lead the University's cricket team (which included Kepler Wessels and Garth le Roux among others) to the Western Province Cricket Union league title. However, in 1983 he turned his back on the white establishment to become the first and only white South African first-

class cricketer to join the non-racial South African Cricket Board before the end of apartheid. "He completed his doctoral thesis on 'African political mobilization in the eastern Cape, 1880-1912' at the University of Cambridge in 1983. His pioneering study of early African politics, ***Vukani Bantu! The Beginnings of Black Protest Politics in South Africa to 1912*** was published the following year." In the immediate post-apartheid era, Odendaal played a leading role in planning and establishing the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape, and was first Director of the Robben Island Museum, opened in December 1996. On the cricketing front, he has held several important positions, including chairing the United Cricket Board's "Transformation Monitoring Committee" from 1998 to 2002.

Given this pedigree, it is not surprising that ***The Story of an African Game*** is a highly personal book, notwithstanding its status as an "official publication." It is a work in which love of cricket and hatred of injustice are present in equal measure. Only a true cricket lover would have felt it necessary to provide so many statistics on runs scored and wickets taken--not to mention the team lists and match reports that populate these pages in such loving detail. Those less enamored of the sound of bat on ball may find themselves skipping over some of this material. Yet, as the subtitle to this book makes clear, part of the purpose of the book is to recover and record the forgotten achievements of generations of black cricketers, in a context in which many diehard white South African cricket fans, players and administrators still regard African cricket as a recent, nebulous phenomenon, forced down their throats by doctrinaire disciples of "transformation." Odendaal's anger at the neglect or denial of this history is at times palpable and sets the scene for some fascinating comments on the current state of South African cricket, which are to be found in the closing pages.

In structural terms, the book really falls into three sections. The first one hundred pages or so (parts 1 through 3) trace the "broad social history and organisational development" of the African game from the 1850s to the 1940s. It provides a concise, compelling and wonderfully readable synthesis of Odendaal's research and that of others on the origins of black cricket. It should be pointed out however, as Odendaal himself makes clear, that there is no attempt to include all aspects of "colored" and "Indian" cricket in this history, since the main focus is on Africans. It seems to me that black cricket in provinces other than the Cape also receives rather short shrift. However, the author promises that "the broader, more in-depth history will be told in the soon-to-be published official history of South African cricket" (p. 13). He traces the formal origins of the African game from its inclusion on the curriculum provided for the education of the sons of chiefs sent to Zonnebloem College in Cape Town by Sir George Grey in the wake of the Xhosa Cattle Killing. From there, he traces its spread through the mission schools of the Eastern Cape and its propagation by a new educated African elite to all parts of the country. Where formal facilities were lacking, they made do with roughly marked out pitches and improvised equipment; often rush matting ("the mat from Yokohama") was the nearest they came to the neatly flattened and manicured strips used by their white counterparts.

The second section (parts 4 through 7) makes up the greater part of the book and takes--at first glance--a somewhat idiosyncratic turn. It follows the sporting fortunes (cricket and rugby) of the Majola family of New Brighton, Port Elizabeth during the apartheid era and after. The legendary Eric Majola was a "black Springbok" (the national team drawn from the black community) in both cricket and rugby during the 1950s. His sons, Khaya and Gerald, were nationally recognized players and prominent in the struggles for non-racial cricket in the 1970s and 1980s. Both broth-

ers became senior cricket administrators in the post-apartheid era.

According to Odendaal, there are two reasons for this shift in focus. First, he makes it clear that the book was conceived from the outset as a tribute to Khaya Majola, a close personal friend of his and the driving force behind the UCB's transformation initiatives (much of the credit for which was claimed by Ali Bacher) during the 1990s. He died of cancer in August 2000. Second, he seeks to use the experiences of the Majola family as a heuristic device for making "real" the history of the struggle for non-racial sport in the apartheid era. While the various bitter debates surrounding South African cricket in these years, including the various changes in organizational structures; the D'Oliviera Affair; sanctions; Koornhof's "multi-national sports" policy; the Derrick Robbins tours of the 1970s; the "rebel" tours of the 1980s; and the political tensions between the non-racial South African Cricket Board of Control (SACBOC) and the South African Cricket Board (SAACB), are faithfully discussed by Odendaal, it is the story of the Majolas and of Khaya Majola in particular, as he sought to navigate his way through this minefield, that humanizes the story and provides the narrative drive. A brilliant cricketer, whose talent made him a target for cooption by the white cricket establishment, he eventually sacrificed his prospects of a lucrative international career by choosing the path of domestic "non-racial" cricket. During the 1990s, he was an obvious choice as first Director of Development for the UCB. A similar path towards non-racial cricket was followed by his younger brother Gerald, who went on to succeeded Ali Bacher as Chief Executive Officer of the United Cricket Board in 2000. The sporting fame and symbolic importance of the Majola family in the years of struggle is underlined by the fact that when the prisoners on Robben Island wrote to the authorities to request the provision of facilities to play cricket in 1977, they did so under the name of "The Majola Cricket Union" (p. 327).

The third and final section of the book (the later half of part 7 and part 8) reviews the legacy of 150 years of African cricket in South Africa and considers prospects for future development. Odendaal's status as an insider in South Africa's new emerging non-racial cricket establishment, as well as his pedigree as an historian, gives this fascinating overview special force and conviction. Chapter 38 on "The Gains of Unity" sets out the progress made by black cricketers since 1990. Statistically, Odendaal argues, the gains have been significant. By the 2002-2003 season, 86 out of 212 first class cricketers in South Africa were black, with 5 black players (including 2 Africans) selected for the World Cup squad that year. When this is added to a growing cohort of black umpires and cricket administrators, and the rapid development of school and youth cricket among Africans, not to mention the growth of the game among black women under the auspices of the South African Women's Cricket Association (formed in 1996), Odendaal asserts, "No one can gainsay the massive progress that has been made in a relatively short time" (p. 307). Part of the credit for this, he makes clear, is due to the existence of the long established tradition of cricket in black communities in the Eastern and Western Cape.

In chapter 41, "The Cricket and Mission School Legacy" is underlined by reference to the myriad linkages between black cricket and the black political elite over generations. Both had their origins in the "bowl of learning" in the Eastern Cape. As Odendaal explains: "Cricket was the product of a particular African adaptability combined with the influence of the mission schools and their first generation products--as was the ANC, born at more or less the same time and led by and large by the same people who were at the helm in sport" (p. 324). He provides numerous examples of the overlap between the African game

and African political leadership in the family trees of many prominent Africans.

But it is in Chapter 42, entitled "Chains that Still Bind Us," that we learn of the distance that still has to be traveled towards genuine non-racialism in cricket, as in other aspects of South African life. Beginning with an anecdote about watching a match in the 2003 World Cup at Newlands, which exposed the "fault lines" between black and white cricket, Odendaal provides a timely reminder of the long-standing collusion between the white cricketing establishment and the apartheid state, and goes on to argue that this history cannot simply be forgotten, not least because racism continues to "reproduce itself" in white South African cricket today. This is especially evident in the continuing debates over the policy of "transformation" as it impacts on team selection, where transformation is often portrayed as the antithesis of selection based on "merit," and in which white players complain of being "victimised." Citing comments from past and present white cricket stars such as Shaun Pollock, Ray Jennings, Clive Rice, Pat Symcox, Fanie de Villiers and Kepler Wessels, Odendaal declares:

"These people in their denial or blankness of past realities feed the myth that...racial inequalities in cricket evolved naturally. They bolster the old arguments that divisions existed because black people were not interested in the game or were not suited to it psychologically, emotionally and physically. The argument that it will take time is another sign of an attitude that says, "Watch out, this is our game" (p. 337).

The great West Indian writer, C. L. R. James, writing about the battle over the appointment of Frank Worrell as the first black captain of the West Indies team, spoke of the game of cricket as a reflection of wider society "beyond the boundary."[1] Odendaal makes the same connection:

"A whole mentality lies behind the opposition to cricket and broader transformation and the inability to see that the negative impact of the past needs to be addressed actively rather than ignored, wished away or rubbished. This mentality enables whites somehow still to feel the aggrieved party, despite them having blatantly supported and benefitted from apartheid in the past" (p. 338).

In the end, however, despite the struggles and entrenched opposition that continue to meet the efforts at transformation, in the final short chapter of *The Story of An African Game* Odendaal insists that there are signs of hope. He portrays cricket in South Africa today as "a game going into the future aware of the past" (p. 343). This is also true, he implies, for South Africa as a whole. Having read this moving account of the struggle for non-racialism in one aspect of South African society over more than 150 years, I can only add my own fervent wish that he is right.

Note

[1]. C. L. R. James, *Beyond A Boundary* (London: Hutchinson, 1963).

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