



0. RUGBY and the SPRINGBOKS - Story Preface

1. APARTHEID in SOUTH AFRICA

2. NELSON MANDELA

3. MANDELA and APARTHEID

4. MANDELA at ROBBEN ISLAND

5. FREE MANDELA

6. MANDELA BECOMES PRESIDENT

7. RUGBY and the SPRINGBOKS

8. FRANCOIS PIENAAR

9. ONE TEAM, ONE COUNTRY

10. PLAY FOR THESE PEOPLE

11. THE GAME THAT MADE A NATION

12. MADIBA and PIENAAR - POST-WIN

This image depicts the logo of the South Africa National Rugby Union Team, known as the Springboks. The team's emblems are the Springbok and the Protea. The logo is copyright, Springboks, all rights reserved, and is provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

Rugby has been around a long time - longer than America's version of football. The game (in which only backward passes are legal) is named after the British town of Rugby, in which its oval-shaped balls are still made.

It's an incredibly rough and potentially exhausting game where players wear no protective gear - at all - and take no time-outs except for injuries. Mostly large and powerful young men play on teams which brutalize each other for two forty-minute halves. Players get one break - for ten minutes - between each half.

In South Africa, before 1995, rugby meant one thing to whites and another thing to blacks. Afrikaners, especially, were passionately devoted to the game. The country's most well-known Rugby team - the Springboks - was filled with big, strong Afrikaners. But to South African blacks:

... rugby was a puzzlingly savage sport, one in which players were stretchered off the field like soldiers from battle; in which the inevitably large, inevitably drink-sodden spectators, in their game-ranger Boer uniform of khaki shorts and shirts, heavy socks and boots, chewed with ferocious gusto on their traditional boerwors [beef sausages] and drank their favorite drink, brandy and Coke. (John Carlin, *Playing the Enemy*, page 68.)

Fifteen players make up a team. Eight are forwards; seven are backs. Scoring works like this:

...you got five points for a try - which meant transporting the ball physically over the goal line, as in rugby's cousin sport, American football; ...you got two points for a conversion - which meant kicking the ball between the two posts - again, as in American football; ..you got three points for a penalty kick between the posts and three if, from loose play, you did the same with a dropkick - making contact between boot and ball on the half volley, at the precise instant it touched the ground. (Carlin, pages 195-96.)

For countries "mad" about Rugby - like Britain, Australia, New Zealand, France and South Africa - there is no better way, in the sports world, to cheer-on one's national team. Except ... in apartheid-era South Africa, blacks (if they attended rugby matches at all), cheered for the other side. They were happiest when their national team lost.

The reason was apartheid itself. Before 1995, the Springboks, representing all of South Africa, were drawn from fifteen percent of the entire population. Although blacks played on other national teams, none played for the Springboks (until Chester Williams, nicknamed "The Black Pearl," joined the team in 1995).

In 1985, New Zealand's team - called the All Blacks because of their uniforms - were scheduled to tour South Africa. Pressure at home, however - where New Zealanders loathed all that apartheid meant for black South Africans - resulted in the tour's cancellation.

Despite so much anger, directed at both the sport and the Springboks, President Mandela had an idea. Here's how he describes it:

Let us use sport for the purpose of nation-building and promoting all the ideas which we think will lead to peace and stability in our country. (Carlin, page 163.)

It was time for the President to summon the captain of the Springboks - an Afrikaner named Francois Pienaar.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/RUGBY-and-the-SPRINGBOKS-Invictus>

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Media Stream



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Springboks - Basis of Name

Springbok logo online, courtesy Springbok rugby team.

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Rugby - In Detail

Video clip describing the details of rugby.

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