

0. PLAY FOR THESE PEOPLE - Story Preface

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Poverty is not an accident.
Like slavery and apartheid,
it is man-made and
can be removed by
the actions of
human beings.



- Nelson Mandela

Recognizing the power of people who work together, Mandela urged the Springboks to "play for these people!" In other words ... South Africa's new President believed that the national rugby team could help to unite the country. He urged the team to play for ALL South Africans. His message had a profound impact both on the team and on the national consciousness.

As the Springboks continued to win matches, Mandela unexpectedly visited them while they prepared at [Silvermine Nature Reserve](#) (near Cape Town). He spoke to each man, impressing all of them. Touched by the visit, [Hennie le Roux](#) gave the President his Springbok cap.

Morné du Plessis then decided the Springboks needed an emotional boost, as they prepared for their final match against New Zealand's All Blacks. The players would take a ferry to [Robben Island](#). The purpose of their visit was to see the long-time former home of their President. Everyone was shocked by the small size of Mandela's prison cell.

On the day of the final match - when 62,000 die-hard rugby fanatics (mostly Afrikaners) gathered at [Ellis Park stadium](#) (formerly known as Coca-Cola Park) in Johannesburg - Nelson Mandela walked onto the field to greet his players. He looked like one of them since he was wearing a Springbok cap and a number-6 jersey. The uniform idea had come from an unlikely source - Mandela's number-one bodyguard, [Linga Moonsamy](#).

When the whites in Ellis Park's seats saw Mandela in a Springbok jersey, they chanted his name. "NEL-son. NEL-son." Blacks, meanwhile, had so thoroughly rallied behind the "One Team, One Country" concept, they'd invented their own word for the national team: "AmaBokoBoko."

Those who had doubted the President's ability to help heal his nation, through reconciliation, changed their minds on the 24th of June, 1995.

Both the All Blacks (who began the match with their traditional "[Haka](#)" war dance) and the Springboks played well that day. Everyone knew the Boks were underdogs, but the New Zealanders wanted to be sure their key player - an intimidating man of Tongan descent called [Jonah Lomu](#) - turned in a spectacular performance. In order to keep up, the Boks needed to put more than one man on Lomu - and the tactic worked.

John Carlin describes what happened in the rugby final:

When the game is played well, with pace and skill, the spectacle is both crunchingly gladiatorial and pleasing to the eye. If the game is a close contest, even better, for then art and theater combine. (Carlin, [Playing the Enemy](#), page 234.)

The game was, in fact, close. At the end of regulation play, it was tied. That meant an exhausted group of men had to take the field again - to see if they could break the tie. Francois gathered his men for a pep talk:

Pienaar, the twenty-eight-year-old general, reminded his teammates of their higher purpose in the interval before play resumed. "Look around you," he told his weary troops. "See those flags? Play for those people. This is one chance. We have to do this for South Africa. Let's be world champions. (Carlin, page 237.)

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/PLAY-FOR-THESE-PEOPLE-Invictus>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/PLAY-FOR-THESE-PEOPLE-Invictus>

Media Stream



Hennie le Roux - Springbok Center

Image online, courtesy *Daily Dispatch Online*.

Quoted passage from *Playing the Enemy* by John Carlin, [page 5](#).

Quoted material from *South African Rugby Legends*.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Hennie-le-Roux-Springbok-Center>



Ellis Park Stadium

Photo online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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- Nelson Mandela

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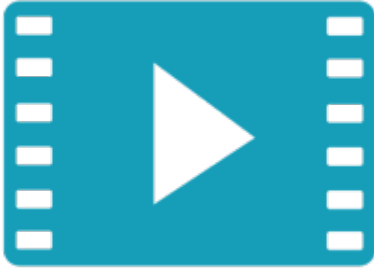


Haka - All Blacks War Dance

Clip featuring the All Blacks performing the "Haka," online courtesy the All Blacks.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Haka-All-Blacks-War-Dance>



Jonah Lomu - Rugby Player

Video clip online, courtesy YouTube.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Jonah-Lomu-Rugby-Player>