

# SA's rugby team success as catalyst to growing other sports

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The South African national rugby team lifted the World trophy just recently to the joy of the whole nation. It was a victory and celebration waiting to happen.



Make no mistake about it - it wasn't magic, sangomas or wishful thinking; this came as a result of focus, purpose, training and hunger.

The Springboks brought a soothing balm to the South African people to massage their socio-economic pain, no matter how short lived. That the team roared to success was a journey whose destination was well-planned and pursued.

It is interesting to know that South Africa settled for this victory in 2019 when the head coach Rassie Erasmus embraced the cup in Japan. And asked whether he will be headed elsewhere out of SA at the end of that tourney, he let the world know that he had in his hands a bunch of rugged, determined and hungry men who wanted to go for more.

One, two, three, and four. Four times the Springboks have lifted the World Rugby Cup with South Africa's national pride glowing for the globe to see. This has happened in 1995, 2007, 2019, and 2023. The 2023 edition had commentators savouring a good time in France. It was the joy of broadcasters and the media.

No other game has done this honour for the country that has been viewed from different prisms by the international community in the past. SA was seen as non-friendly due to her apartheid policies in the past and divided along colour lines until Nelson Mandela, who was released from prison in February 1990.

A year after Mandela became president of a united South Africa, the rugby team sprang to their first win of the World

Rugby Cup in 1995.

Rugby has been building bridges, from the first victory under a white captain, Francois Pienaar and the first black president, Mandela, celebrating a win that pushed the need for healing of the nation.

Now edging out New Zealand in the final in France in 2023, has yet put another national therapy into motion. Springboks may not be the panacea to the nagging socio-economic problems South Africans are facing, but the victory is good analgesic of sorts. No matter how short-lived the feeling of the massage the team has become an icon of success in the sports arena that all citizens of the rainbow nation have come to look up to every now and then.

And for the president, Cyril Ramaphosa, in what greater way could he show his joy than celebrate in a work-free day for all, announced for December 15 2023?

### **Most popular sports**

Of all the sports, three of them particularly stand out, namely rugby, cricket and soccer (football). The following for rugby dates back to almost a century, and is more grounded in terms of institutional support and promotion. This is perhaps followed by soccer and cricket, though there have been no trophies for the latter.

A continental glory has been savoured by the soccer team Bafana Bafana. For now, the Fifa World Cup is still a target to be reached some day.

### **Shot at the Fifa World Cup**

Bafana Bafana made their debut in the World Cup in 1998 and took part in 2002 and 2010. Though they did not make it beyond the group stage in 1998, Slovenia suffered a loss at the hands of Bafana Bafana in 2002 which was their first victory at the World Cup stage. They did not go beyond the group stage as they also experienced in 2010 when SA hosted the tournament.

Presently they are competing in the World Cup qualifiers as the 2026 Fifa tournament approaches. In a Group C match against Benin Republic, they got a 2-1 victory to go top of the group in which Nigeria is listed.

### **Proteas, the national cricket team**

In spite of the good following of the game of cricket over several years, the Proteas have not yet lifted themselves above the semi-final limit they attained in 1992, 1999 and 2007 competitions. However, in 1998 they won the ICC Champions Trophy.

The Proteas finished seventh position, and lost five matches in the 2023 Cricket World Cup.

Things may be up for good this time around as they are in the second position in Group A with eight points in the 2026 Cricket World Cup qualifiers. They have won four and lost one of the fixtures.

### **Leveraging other sports via Springboks' glory**

It is clear that rugby enjoys a lot of support from everywhere in the nation; success, it is said, has many friends and relatives.

To lift other sports, they are key factors in boosting their popularity. These include increasing media coverage, arranging more tournaments and events, providing adequate and modern infrastructure.

There should be opportunities and resources for all sports people across the country no matter their background. It is of utmost importance to invest in the development of young talent, who must be supported to succeed.

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