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IT COULD not have been easy for South African cricket writers of the likes of the late Rodney Hartman (he passed away last week) to damn their national side – a side that's consistently scored glory for the country in the past 16 years – as a bunch of chokers. Since shedding its pariah status and its re-admission to international competition, few teams seemed to get even close to the Proteas' level of play.

Don't forget the resonance of that description pariah to the ethnic Indian ear – a pariah means an outcast, a locally derided variant of the discarded whose home is much further than even the fringes of society.

So what happened – that the centrepiece of the erstwhile Springbok pride earned such a malign metaphor? Probably an all too human trait called “taking it too far”. White sportsmen and women, especially, had to play hard and still do. They loved even more that playing hard brings them victory. Winning has been their great goal. How they got there didn't make a difference.

White sportsmen and writers muttered scorn on allegations that they were racist. They spat on such charges. But then a sub-plot unfolded in 1994, when the Republic made the transition from a white dominated regime to a non-racial democracy. Despite the prohibition of racial restrictions it was clear the majority of blacks (Africans, coloureds and Indians) were not getting the better of their near world-beating white counterparts and a smattering of privileged blacks because they were essentially still better prepared on the field of play.

THE RACE TO TRANSFORM SPORT IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA was already on the starting blocks in 1994 and is today the title of a book of eight contributors edited by Ashwin Desai. Some of the authors are Desai himself; Zain Nabbi, eTV sports correspondent; Prishani Naidoo, lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Wits; Vishnu Padayachee, senior Professor and Head of the School of Development Studies at UKZN; his col-

league in the Department of Historical Studies, Associate Prof Goolam Vahed; Justin van der Merwe – a researcher at the Human Sciences Research Council and Ahmed Variawa, writer and researcher.

Launched at Durban's Absa rugby stadium over the weekend, it examines elements of change in a number of sporting codes, including football, cricket, rugby, swimming and athletics.

Oregan Hoskins, President of the South African Rugby Union, in his keynote address, set the tone for the launch when he posed and sought to address a number of questions about reform and transformation in sport. His concerns as well as those of the other speakers, viz Desai and Nabbi, arose from the perversion of priorities shown by government agencies and sports administrations, to the complete insensitivity to the real problem being faced by masses, and a readiness for unconscionable reckless expense which could and should be utilised for the uplift of poor millions.

The canard that ventures like the 2010 FIFA World Cup being hosted by South Africa add to development of infrastructure in the country and to the encouragement of sports

among the mass of poor people, is puerile and not borne out by actual experience, they averred.

Sports victories have not improved. Some stadia remain unused and then put to non-sports and even for temporary residence for foreign visitors, (the Aussie fans will be camping on the grounds of the Kingsmead Sahara Cricket Stadium for next month's football extravaganza) while millions face the bleak reality of apartheid's legacy – no playing fields; athletic tracks or swimming pools.

The concerned writers rightly asked: “Are the changes in South African sport actually reinforcing a form of class apartheid in sports? And ultimately, will the present trajectory deepen inequalities rather than progressively mitigate them?”

Other chapters explore the neglect of black swimming and the pressures to produce Olympic qualifiers and medalists; the struggle to survive by the Jaguars, the only black rugby club in KwaZulu Natal's premier league; the inner workings of the SA Football Association within the context of billions of rands spent on new stadiums for the 2010 FIFA World Cup; the “journey” of cricket since 1990 and its chang-

ing face, internationally.

Just before the book launch ceremony got underway, Hoskins and I stood outside the Umgeni suite and gazed at the Moses Mabhida Stadium, one of the extravagant beautification projects that obsessed politicians, sports administrators, advisers, consultants, Durban's city fathers and a whole new generation that drove change in the big cities. The bonhomie between the contractors and some of them are beginning to emerge. This “iconic” showpiece begged the question: was there a need for a second stadium immediately next to the equally impressive rugby venue? After all, the bid to host Fifa matches in Durban was won, initially on the Absa Stadium facility, albeit with adjustments. For how much longer will the poor tolerate the vulgar display of such extravaganza to satisfy the vanity of the well-connected, while denying the neglected the common necessities and asking them to continue wallowing in poverty and filth?

THE RACE TO TRANSFORM SPORT IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA – a relentlessly intelligent and provocative book that eschews simple-minded projections on sports transformations in SA. '

A vulgar display of extravagance?

