

Defectors not heroes “Cycling”

I'm taking the liberty to express my point of view on those 'one-time' sports people who were aligned to SACOS but decided to join the pro-government 'multinational' sports bodies when Apartheid was ravaging our communities.

I started cycling in 1975 at the age of 11 for a Western Cape cycling club Suburban Wheelers. My family history in cycling started way back in the 1940's with my father Ralph Williams and his elder brother Basil who were champions on the road and track and cycled for the love of the sport without financial gain or support.

My father Ralph was also an excellent rugby player and wrestler. He went on to become a member of Suburban Wheelers as an administrator and coach to many underprivileged disenfranchised cyclists. I was very fortunate to have him in my camp as he was also my personal coach.

In cycling, as in many other sporting codes that stood their ground within the South African Council on Sport (SACOS) under the banner 'No Normal Sport in An Abnormal Society', we opposed competing or riding against racist clubs that supported apartheid policies – those classified 'white' - whether it be at local club or the very highest level. As a result, I for one did not even contemplate riding on the other side at the time. In addition, there was an international boycott of South African sport that involved a ban on SA sportspeople competing overseas or international sportspersons competing here.

Now just before the dawn of democracy in the late 1980s, some of our leading sports persons broke from SACOS to form the National Sports Congress (NSC) in the hope (as the argument went) of joining and then 'transforming' the resourced 'whites-only' facilities including the high profile administrative positions in a supposedly new 'unified' sports structure. Astoundingly, these same people not only broke-rank, they went on to ostracise and discredit SACOS and attempted to break it down with the intent to eventually destroy the principled non-racial sports body.

I'm writing this extract because these same people who decided to 'cross the line' to the 'other side' did so even when they were treated as second grade citizens. In fact, some of these defectors even accepted being labelled derogatively 'hotnot' by their so-called 'white' counterparts. These self-same turncoats are now remarkably seeking recognition within the existing SACOS sports community by attempting to creep back into the fold to gain undeserved prestige. In cycling, which is my focus, we presently have the situation where a few veterans who participated and competed with the beneficiaries of apartheid sport are endeavouring to bask in the light of those who actually selflessly sacrificed and weathered the apartheid storm against all odds to attain a free non-racial sports dispensation.

To date a Facebook page 'Cycling Memoirs' has been set up to recognise the history of our struggle heroes in SACOS. However, it is apparent that slowly the images and stories of the DEFECTORS are appearing as if they belong on the site. This is not just simple political talk – people in non-racial sport had worked hard and tirelessly on the ground while caring and sharing without compensation over decades despite the extreme dangers from the apartheid regime. Those who left SACOS on the other hand, abandoned us for what they perceived as a better sporting life with racist sports bodies under a repressive apartheid government.

This blatant opportunism to now embrace the SACOS tradition and therewith alter the struggle history of our past must be rejected outrightly. It unashamedly denigrates and undermines those countless principled sportspersons who in actual fact made the ultimate sacrifice – the many Fallen Heroes who have yet to be properly recognised; notables in cycling include: Ivan George Williams (WP), Oom Pikkie Edwin Crotz (Boland), Jetha Jacobus Hendricks (Boland), William Cloete Snr and Jr (WP), Werner Erasmus (WP), Ralph Williams (WP) plus many others who refused to sell us out and proudly carried their non-racial SACOS principles to the very end.

Let's not forget nor erase the hard-earned sacrifices of those who truly fought for our liberation in sport and other areas of society – Memory is the weapon!

Michael Williams