

Sport in the Sixties by Stanley Loon

Being a sports mad kid growing up in the sixties in Cape Town, here are my reminiscences of sport back then.

Kicking off with soccer, Cape Town had two teams in the National Football League. One was Cape Town City, a team that was formed in 1961 from the best players of the local clubs. They entered the NFL in 1962 and played at Hartleyvale, Observatory. The reason for their straight entry into the NFL was to make the league, which was started in 1959, nationwide. The other team was Hellenic who won promotion in 1964. They also played at Hartleyvale but later moved to Green Point.

At the age of seven in 1962, I went to my first ever game. It was a Saturday afternoon match between Cape Town City and Johannesburg Rangers. We sat behind the goal in the railway stand. What fascinated me was how old the Rangers' 'keeper looked and the pickup games played at the side of the field at half time!

What can you expect from a seven-year-old?

I'm not sure when City's games switched to Friday nights, probably at the start of the following season. Friday nights became known as soccer nights. It did not matter who the opposition was, if it was one of the top clubs like Highlands Park or a team like Olympia, the ground was usually filled, close to its 17,000 capacity. From 1964, City and Hellenic played on alternative Fridays. My heroes were Voetjies Taylor – a wizard with the ball, Jose de Nobrega who became a heart surgeon, Richard Allen, Fernando Custodio, Jingles Pereira, Big Ben Anderson to name just a few. Many English players from the lower divisions, came over to South Africa. Those that came to City and Hellenic soon became household names. A number of first division players who were winding down their careers or who came for guest appearances played for the 2 teams. Geoff Hurst, Ian St. John, George Eastham, Budgie Byrne, Gordon Banks quickly come to mind. Three top German players, in their prime, came to play for Hellenic: Arno Steffenhagen, Wolfgang Geyer and Volkmar Gross. All 3 were banned from playing in Germany for 2 years because of match fixing!

A number of Israelis played in South Africa. A few played for Rangers; Highlands Park had Rafi Levi and Cape Town City had Leon Cubic. City's managers included Reg

Smith, Roy Baily and Frank Lord. Hellenic's managers included Harry Game and Budgie Byrne. Being such an emotional game, many managers are often at loggerheads with each other, especially on match days when there is some controversy. Frank Lord and Highlands's Joe Frickleton were always best of friends before a game between the 2 teams, but seldom at the end of the game.

The Durban clubs played on a Sunday. One Monday morning, I went to my folks' bedroom and saw my dad sitting on the side of the bed looking stunned. He pointed to the headlines on the back page of The Cape Times which read: 'Durban United 12 Cape Town City 1'!

City's goalkeeper was Vic Lovell, a good, solid player. Apparently, he lost his contact lenses and didn't have a spare pair and City didn't take a reserve 'keeper with them! The next game was at home and I remember City's players running onto the field without Vic and then he came out, running onto the field. The crowd gave him a sympathetic cheer. They had forgiven him. However, he did not have a good game and looked as though his confidence was shot. From then on, for a couple of seasons, Albert Uytendogaardt who had played for South Africa a couple of times in the 1950s and who had played for Charlton Athletic in the English first division, became the number one goalkeeper.

In the first half of the sixties, a number of overseas clubs toured South Africa, amongst them were Arsenal, Tottenham, Eintracht Frankfurt and Real Madrid. I went to watch Eintracht play a Western Province XI at Hartleyvale. The game was goalless for a long time and then Neville Thornley for the home team, made a great diving save. Pity he was not the goalkeeper. Eintracht scored from the resulting penalty and won the game comfortably. I also saw Real Madrid play a team mainly of Hellenic players - I remember there being just one City player - at Green Point. Can't remember the score but Madrid won.

For the record, City won the league in '73 and '76. Hellenic won it in '71.

To finish off the soccer, a mention of 2 great English players I met. The first was Jackie Charlton. In 1968, I was doing poorly health wise. I was diagnosed with a rare disease – only 4 people in SA were known to have it – called Crohn's Disease. How times have changed! Thousands have it today. I was taken to England where the doctors had more experience with it and I had an operation at the Leeds Infirmary. A patient there was a heavyweight professional wrestler who went by the name "Big Daddy". To digress a bit, I

often played dominoes with him. One time, a dietician interrupted the game and he gave her a hard time, demanding that beers be included in the diet. He was friends with Jackie Charlton who played for Leeds United and England. Jackie often came to visit him and that is how I met him.

I asked him about a South African by the name of Albert Johanneson (see photo) who played for Leeds. I have just taken a break and looked him up on the internet. Wow. Johanneson was one of the first few Blacks of any nationality to play in the English first division. He made history in 1965 becoming the very first Black player to play in the FA Cup final which that year was between Leeds and Liverpool. In 1995, at the age of 55, he died in his home in Leeds a broken man. His body was only discovered a week later. In 2019, a plaque was made in Leeds commemorating his football achievements and in 2020, a picture of him, another South African who played for Leeds, Lucas Radebe and another player was erected on a wall of a building in Leeds.



Talk about digression, what was I writing about?

Oh, yes. On the Friday after I was discharged from hospital, we heard that Jackie Charlton was in the pub in the hotel we were staying at. We went down and he came out and chatted with us. A hell of a nice, down to earth guy, Jackie. He invited me to sit on the bench Leeds, United vs Everton. Because of the freezing weather and being in poor health, I could not go. The second English great player I met, was George Eastham. He is notable for his involvement in a 1963 court case which proved a landmark in improving players' freedom to move between clubs. He came to play for City and then Hellenic. He met my dad once who invited him over to our house. I played snooker with him on a quarter size table. Like Jackie, a good guy.

If Friday nights were soccer nights, then to me Saturday afternoons were rugby days. I often went to Newlands to watch either club or provincial rugby. Stellenbosch University, known as the Maties, attracted the cream of the crop rugby players from all parts of the country, so Western Province were always strong. Thinking about some of the players from the sixties, H.O. de Villiers, (see photo), Manneljies Roux, Gertjie Brynard, John Gainsford, Jannie Engelbrecht, Dawie de Villiers, Tiny



Naude, Jan Boland Coetzee quickly come to mind. Saw a couple test matches. France in '67, the British Lions in '68. The French game was a bit of a write off as I stood the whole time in front of the main grandstand and being small, hardly saw any of the game. Against the Lions, I had at least a good seat. The Welsh club, Cardiff, toured the country in '67. I went to watch them at Newlands. The highlights were that they played the Welsh anthem before the game – beautiful – and in the game itself were the tries scored by Fanie Brynard, brother of Gertjie. Fanie sadly died about a year and a bit later from cancer.

In 1970, we went on holiday to relatives in Johannesburg. My dad and I went one day to Pam Brink stadium in Springs to watch the All Blacks play Eastern Transvaal. Shortly after the start of the game, the NZ lock, Colin Meads, injured his arm. Later after the game, X rays showed he had broken his arm just above his wrist. That broken arm did not stop him from playing the whole of the game! There were some New Zealand supporters sitting behind us. They were terribly confused when Easterns went on the attack and they asked us why the crowd were shouting “no, no, no”. We of course explained to them that they were shouting the Afrikaans “nou, nou, nou”. I have just looked up on the internet if there was anything about Meads' broken arm and I see that it became legend in New Zealand. Meads was asked if he knew his arm was broken and he said “not sure, all I know is we won the bloody game!”. You must look it up: Meads' broken arm. There is an audio of a radio programme discussing it. Now that I think about it, it was a bloody dirty game.

Summer was of course cricket at Newlands - the cricket ground being opposite the rugby ground separated by a railway line. New year's day was traditionally the start of the match between Western Province and Transvaal. With so many people coming from up north to the Cape on holiday, the ground was usually overflowing. Province players in the '60s included Andre Bruyns, Peter Swart, Des and Frank Drummer, Tony Catt, Howie Spiro, Len Weinstein, Kelly Seymour and Grahame (correct spelling) Chevalier. Seymour and Chevalier were spin bowlers and batted number 10 and 11. The crowd used to love the times they batted together. To put it kindly, they were clueless. There used to be a loud cheer if either managed to survive not being out to any ball.

The first test I went to was against England in 1965. When a test was played, a temporary stand was erected in front of Castle Corner (a tent where drinks were sold, named after Castle Lager beer). That stand was where I sat for this test. The game

ended in a draw. Ken Barrington was given 'not out' to a ball he had nicked to the wicketkeeper, Denis Lindsay. Ken walked which was unheard of.

Have I just stopped to look up if it is in the internet? Of course I did. Look up Ken Barrington Wikipedia in section "under MJK Smith" for the full story in the paragraph for the 3rd Test.

The day after the game, he went to Muizenberg's 'swing beach'. He was surrounded by people asking him why he walked. He was so pleased when I came up and changed the subject by asking him for his autograph.

They used to sell wonderful steak and kidney pies at the cricket. They were made by EB bakery. When Eddie Barlow later came to play for and captain Province, these pies were only known as Eddie Barlow pies. Such was his charisma and confidence that when he came on to bowl, you just expected him to take a wicket. When Province won, the crowd used to gather at the players' pavilion chanting "we want Eddie, we want Eddie". He would then come out and give a little speech.

Tennis was at Rondebosch where major tournaments in Cape Town were played. Players I remember seeing there, included Hewitt and Macmillan, Cliff Drysdale, Manuel Santana, Rod Laver, Ken Rosewall, Fred Stolle to name just a few.

Swimming galas were at Newlands pool. Used to go when Karen Miur swam there.

To finish off, a sentence or two about the radio commentators. There was the incomparable Gerhard Viviers, a great Afrikaans rugby commentator. His classic commentating was when Sid Nomis was running to the line unopposed in a game between SA and NZ and Gerhard shouting "Siddee, Siddee, Siddee".

Charles Fortune was an expert at giving detailed descriptions of everything but the game. CK Friedlander describing an up and under in his rugby commentaries "And the ball is going up and up and up...". The soccer commentator, Antony Handly, had the superb ability of being able to cure an insomniac. The Western Province cricket commentator, Martin Young, never failed to describe the Newlands pitch as a featherbed. And to mention some other commentators Kim Shippey, Neil Adcock, Trevor Quirk

Those were the days.

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A word about me:

I live in Israel, am married +2. My Std 8 English teacher, Mrs Biesenbach, said to me I should take up writing and in my spare time just write something down. Now that I am close to pension and will have spare time, I am going to take her up on her suggestion.

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