

No easy Oscar for 'brand' Pistorius

THIS has been a big Oscar week. For Africa, it has been a glorious time at the Oscars with the triumph of Kenyan Lupita Nyong'o and diasporan Steve McQueen for their stand-out Best Picture, *12 Years a Slave*.

For Paralympic star Oscar Pistorius, it has been the an unimaginable beginning of his trial for the alleged premeditated murder of his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp.

It is the beginning of the emergence of new heroes – Nyong'o and McQueen, and the demise of another, Pistorius.

Nyong'o and McQueen's brands are on the rise.

Irrespective of whether he is acquitted or convicted, this is the end of Brand Pistorius as we've known it.

It is another tragic episode in the celebrity brand soap opera that's claimed the reputations of American football great OJ Simpson and Lance Armstrong, and scalped Tiger Wood's pristine brand.

During his trial, Brand Oscar will haemorrhage like no celebrity brand before him.

The damage to his person and brand will be more devastating than Armstrong's doping scandal and last longer than Woods's infidelity shock.

Even if he is acquitted, like Simpson, it will leave an indelible public scar and be the personal burden of a lifetime.

While Barry Roux, his advocate – at a reputed cost of R31 900 a day – will do his utmost to limit the criminal damage, he will not be able to do much for Pistorius's reputation.

The legal counter-punches between Roux and prosecuting advocate Gerrie Nel, and the array of more than 100 State witnesses, will puncture Pistorius's carefully orchestrated public image – revealing a flawed human being with a private image that's very contrary to his public one, which earned him global adoration and millions in the

bank.

At stake is not the millions he stands to lose.

At the height of his global repute and athletic exploits, Pistorius commanded a reputed R21 million a year through appearances and sponsorships income as the lead pitchman for British Telecom (BT), global sports brand Nike, French designer Thierry Mugler, sunglass manufacturer Oakley, and South African media brand M-Net.

When the trial is over and Roux and his team have submitted their invoice, there won't be any money left.

If acquitted, Pistorius could find another way to recoup those millions – in another business or by peddling his murder and trial experiences in a tell-all memoir (à la OJ Simpson) or appearances.

But his valuable heroic reputation as "part man, part god" or the regrettable "bullet in the chamber", respectively by Mugler and Nike, is no longer.

All dropped him in a heartbeat after the fatal shooting. Any continued association would have been detrimental to their brands.

This was not the Oscar for which they signed up.

At stake is not his athletic career. Pistorius confounded doubters, broke barriers and triumphed over adversity – turning his disability into an ability to inspire millions, becoming an athlete to compete in abled and disabled sport at the 2012 London Olympics.

If acquitted, Pistorius can always resume his athletic career.

The lucrative invitations may be few, but with an acquittal and a forgiving or even morbid public he should still be able to compete.

At stake is not his freedom. Whether he is acquitted or convicted, unlike his victim Reeva Steenkamp, he will still have the freedom of life.

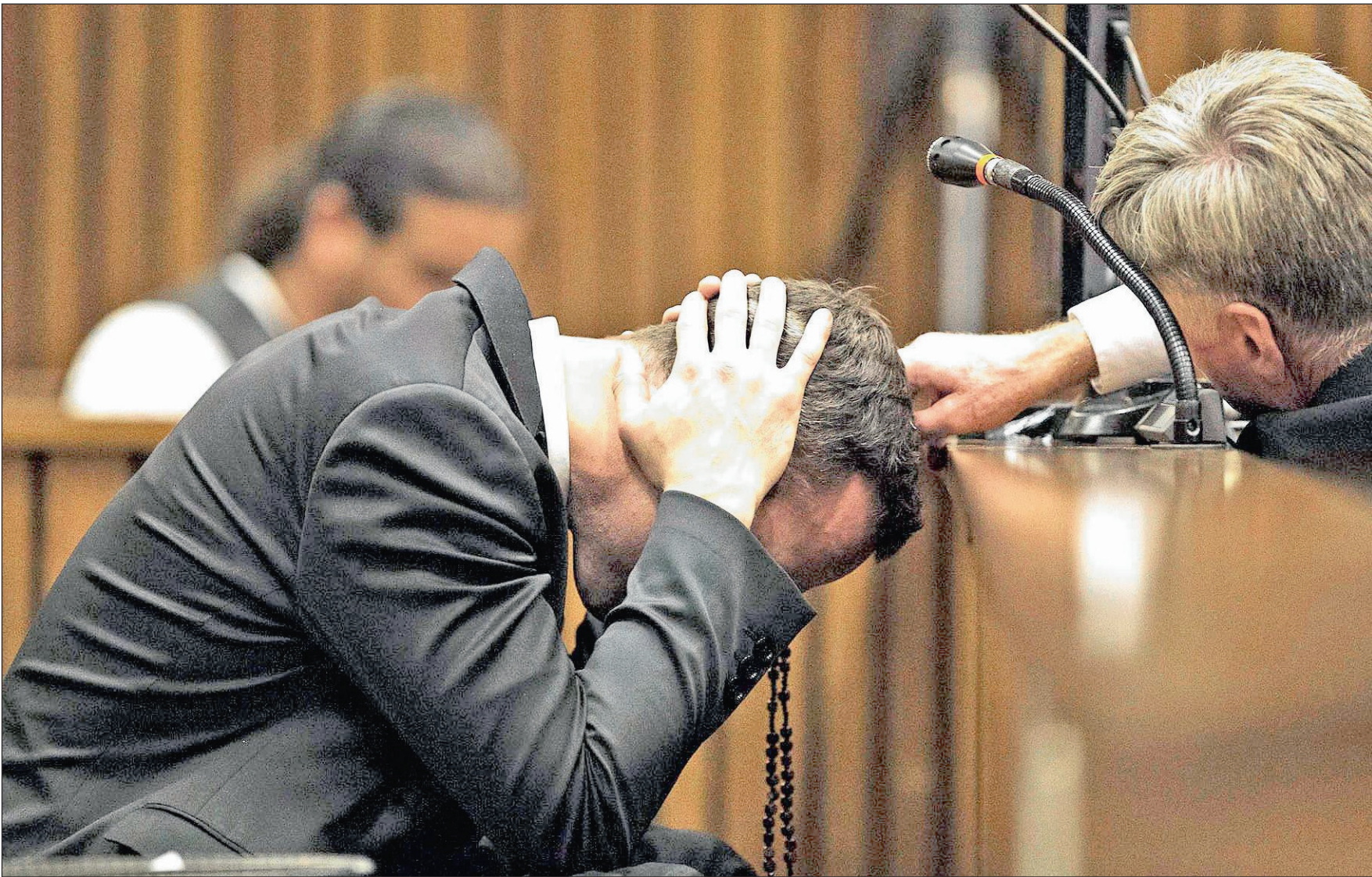
If acquitted, as he has already done before the start of his trial, he will be able to go to his old joints and jaunts, on holiday, and even find love

Even if he is convicted, the Paralympian will still have life, unlike Reeva Steenkamp, even if it is behind bars, writes Thebe Ikalafeng



TROUBLED: A member of the defence team reaches out to Olympic and Paralympic track star Oscar Pistorius during the fourth day of his trial for the murder of his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp, in Pretoria this week. The writer says that even if Pistorius is acquitted, the damage he has done to his reputation can never be repaired.

PICTURE: REUTERS



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HOPEFULLY HE WILL NEVER FORGET THE DAMAGE HE DID TO BRAND SOUTH AFRICA

or companionship again.

If convicted, he will still be able to receive visits from friends, family and fans, to work out, to study – to create a new life behind bars.

At 27 years of age, if he receives at worst a life sentence – 25 years – he'll still be able to resume his life at 52.

At stake is reputation. In his

short 27 years, Pistorius's mesmerising athletic performance and triumph over his disability has earned him a reputation as a winner. And everybody loves a winner.

This tragedy and evolving trial have painted a new picture of a manipulative, volatile, aggressive and violent Pistorius.

While his petulant outburst after losing to Brazilian Alan Oliveira at the London Olympics painted him a sore loser, his eventual *mea culpa* and record-breaking closing performance reaffirmed his reputation as a winner – on the athletic field.

A brand is a reputation. It is a legacy. At its best, a clear, consistent and desirable reputation in any field – athletic, artistic or business – can generate unimaginable returns.

It is a valuable asset.

A recent survey of Africa's wealthiest celebrities indicates just how much that is worth.

While not nearly as stratospheric as their American and European counterparts, African sportsmen, mostly in football, are not doing too badly.

The top five are reputedly

Ghana's Asamoah Gyan at \$16m (R170m), Liberia's American football player Tamba Hali (\$16m), Ivory Coast's Yaya Touré (\$15m), Togo's Emmanuel Adebayor (\$13m) and Cameroon's Samuel Eto'o (\$13m).

Globally, Tiger Woods leads the rankings with an estimated \$78m a year, followed by Roger Federer (\$71m), basketballers Kobe Bryant (\$61m) and LeBron James (\$59m) and American footballer Drew Brees (\$51m).

The key difference between European and American athletes compared with African athletes is that they often earn as much as 80 percent of their income from endorsements.

The athletes with the best reputations, ability and following attract the largest share.

But it is not just limited to sports. Global athletes such as Woods and Pistorius, who can transcend their occupation, command enviable wealth beyond their needs and styles.

George Clooney's deal with Nespresso, which gave him shares in the business instead of fees, has

added to his enormous wealth.

Rapper 50 Cent is reputed to have made \$500m when, instead of taking a fee to endorse Glacéau Vitaminwater, he opted for shares and ultimately sold his stake when Glacéau sold the brand to Coca-Cola for \$4.1 billion.

Forbes Magazine estimates that Beyoncé and Jay-Z earned a whopping combined \$78m in 2012.

Woods is the first athlete to earn more than \$1bn in winnings and endorsements.

Local comedian Trevor Noah is reputed to have earned as much as \$300 000 for endorsing Cell C's ill-fated endorsement campaign.

In business, Virgin maverick Richard Branson is an undisputed business brand.

But such wealth comes with mutual obligations.

When celebrities engage with one another's brands, they are essentially leveraging one another's images and reputations, and thus have a responsibility to live up to them, and to protect them. It's a commercial contract.

As superstar Jay-Z put it: "I'm a

business, man."

Pistorius's business has been dealt a devastating blow.

If acquitted, he may be able to recover it somewhat – albeit never to what it once was. But Reeva Steenkamp's family will never be able to recover their loss.

Unlike his "amnesia" over his iPhone password, hopefully Pistorius will never forget "the pain and anguish he has inflicted on me", as a broken June Steenkamp, Reeva's mother, pleaded.

Hopefully he will never forget the damage he did to Brand South Africa.

As Shakespeare wrote in *Othello*, "But he that filches from me my good name robs me of that which not enriches him and makes me poor indeed."

Oscar's actions have robbed him of his once-valuable name. This tragedy is now his legacy.

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Media scramble over Pistorius trial not exactly what Brand South Africa needs

THE UK is running extensive coverage of the trial, both in the broadcast and published media spaces. All the tabloid and broadsheet newspapers are carrying daily reports on the trial.

BBC News is covering the proceedings using all media platforms, including live feeds from Pretoria with a team of journalists on the ground, daily feeds on to the BBC News Africa and BBC News London broadcasts, daily tweets from I-Reporters on the ground in Pretoria, and a series of online platforms including a trial timeline. Sky TV News is also running a 24-hour news update, with live coverage reports from Pretoria, plus tweets and blogs through their online platforms.

The judicial process in South Africa is receiving fairly positive media coverage from the UK, but negative coverage potentially impacting on Brand SA has been received around issues such as the poor quality of South African interpreters at high-profile events (this trial, and also the interpreter at the Nelson Mandela funeral service), and the wider issue of prevalent gender violence in South Africa.

The media in the US is also running wall-to-wall coverage of the trial in the broadcast, published and online media environment, with comparisons being made with the OJ Simpson trial in terms of its global media interest level. Interestingly, in the US, some mainstream magazines are covering the story from the angle of South Africa's culture of violence towards women.

Time magazine published a cover story titled *Pistorius and South Africa's Culture of Violence*, and Vanity Fair



published a feature about the Oscar Pistorius case titled *Oscar Pistorius – What really happened?*

Mainstream documentary makers in the US have also homed in on the story, with Discovery Networks International acquiring the broadcast rights to a programme titled *Blade Runner, the Untold Story*, and Channel 5 aired two hour-long documentaries on the case.

Broadcast channels such as CBS have looked at South Africa's criminal justice system as part of the story, and the issue of gun culture in the country, a thorny topic in the US.

Although the coverage is predominantly daily news based with reports being taken from the daily court proceedings, feature stories are also picking up on South Africa's violent crime statistics and culture.

The Oscar Pistorius trial is also



NEWS OF THE WORLD: Media coverage of the Oscar Pistorius trial has taken many angles, most of them covering attitudes of South African men to women.



receiving significant coverage in China, with online publications such as China Daily running an event timeline in English with all the latest reports and information from Pretoria and the South China Morning Post doing similarly.

Chinese TV stations such as CCTV (China Central Television) are also covering the story from a news perspective. The coverage is purely factual, with no real analysis of the story or South Africa in general emerging in the stories.

A chance to re-examine our humanity

THE HIGH-profile murder trial of South Africa's Blade Runner, Oscar Pistorius, is shining a global spotlight not only on the athlete himself and his personal reputation, but also on our country, its constitutional state and its legal system, and ultimately puts South Africa's brand reputation on centre stage.

The formal start of the trial this past week has generated unprecedented local media attention and comparisons have already been made with the similarly high-profile and globally televised trial of American football star OJ Simpson.

In the case of the Pistorius trial, thousands of articles have already appeared in the world's press, hours of television and radio coverage have been flighted, with many more scheduled, and non-stop commentary and analysis emanates from the large numbers of international and local journalists and photographers now camped outside the court buildings in Pretoria.

The unprecedented decision taken by Gauteng Judge President Dunstan Mlambo, who ruled that all trial audio, and selected video, could be broadcast on radio, television and online, was groundbreaking, bringing South Africa into line with other democracies around the world.

It also showed the world that South Africa is looking to actively fulfil its commitment to achieving greater transparency with its citizens in regard to the legal system, as embedded in the country's constitution.

As South Africa prepares to



Miller Matola

commemorate 20 years of democratic freedom, this high-profile trial serves to remind both South Africans and the world that South Africa's constitution may still be fledgling.

But it has undoubtedly put in place a substantial framework for a society that is built on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights – the right to a fair trial being one of those rights.

Our strong and stable legal system is a fundamental building block of our constitutional democracy, as is the independence of our courts and our judiciary.

In an age when social media is a powerful force in making information and opinions available to a global audience, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, events such as the Pistorius trial make global headlines and feed the voracious appetite of the public for news in real time, as it happens.

If one looks at the immediacy of international journalists who are able to tweet their reports and

insights ahead of scheduled radio and television news coverage, it means that global audiences are receiving a vast amount of information about the trial process as it unfolds.

They are also being bombarded with televised and photographic images, both negative and positive, of South Africa and its society, not simply its judicial system at work, and such an assault on the senses undoubtedly assists in shaping opinions about the country in the eyes of the world, whether accurate or not.

However, if there is a positive to be taken from this level of media attention on South Africa, it is that there is respect for the right of the country's citizens to expect an open and transparent system of justice. In the 20 years since South Africa achieved democratic freedom, the principle of the right to justice is one that is upheld for the world to see in action.

It is perhaps a testimony to the country's progress during the past two decades that it can welcome the global media to see a world-class constitution and legal system in action, despite the challenges of the past and the long road to freedom well travelled.

The world's media has a responsibility in high-profile trials such as this one to report in a responsible yet engaging manner, and one that is capable of educating the public, not simply providing news and entertainment for the global masses.

Ultimately, as the world watches as the Pistorius trial starts to unfold, public opinions will

inevitably be formed – not just of the lives of those directly involved, but also of South Africa, where this drama is playing out in the public spotlight.

Perhaps as we look to commemorate the country's two decades of freedom, we can take comfort in the robustness and solidity of our legal system and our constitution, which is the cornerstone of that democracy.

It provides the reassurance that South Africa protects the human rights of every citizen – including the right to a fair trial – without fear, favour or prejudice.

This trial also provides an opportunity to encourage the country's own population to gain a better understanding of how our legal system works and how it safeguards the legal and human rights of both the person on trial and the victim.

It hopefully also sends a message to the world that, despite the huge volume of media headlines around the trial, strong legal ethics define the process, with lawyers on both sides of the argument bound by the same ethical standards.

As we wait for the outcome of this trial, we must pay due consideration to the human lives that have been impacted by this incident.

When all is said and done, we must not forget the real people and families at the centre of this court case, for whom our quintessential culture of ubuntu demands we give thought and due respect.

■ Matola is chief executive of Brand SA