

Where did our winning spirit go?

FOR when Fifa penalises Ethiopia for fielding an unregistered player against Botswana and South Africa, and as hoped Bafana Bafana qualify “through the back door” for Brazil 2014, it would be honourable for the country to decline it. We didn’t earn it.

Football – like all sport – should be won on the field of play, by scoring goals and not on a technicality. Even in boxing, the most brutal of all sports, a “technical knockout” means a person is struck down three times – for good measure. There’s a certainty of the outcome and implications.

It was astounding to read former National Prosecuting Authority head Vusi Pikoli tweeting that he “wouldn’t mind if Bafana Bafana goes to WC (World Cup) via back-door”. Perhaps, as a lawyer, he is apt to look for a technical way out of challenges.

Many disappointed South Africans also hopefully welcomed the off-field prospects.

But even in law, technicals are never final. Nor do they leave a good after-taste. Even in local parlance, “back-door” does not amount to an honourable way to earn anything.

For a nation that faced the evil and perils of apartheid and emerged victorious out of the disadvantageous abyss of isolation without relying on Western aid, UN resolutions, no-fly zone or weapons – unlike the Libyan rebels who toppled Muammar Gaddafi and the Syrians attempting to remove Bashar al-Assad – a back-door or “technical” victory is an insult to the reserve of complacent non-achievers.

This is not the South Africa of the all-conquering 1996 Africa Cup of Nations of Lucas Radebe, and the 1995 Rugby World Cup of Francois Pienaar; or the diminutive world-beating Baby Jake Matlala, who delivered on the promise of a daring nation that caught the world off-guard with its audacity against the odds.

This is not the South Africa that repatriated the precious gold exported out of the depths of Anglo Gold and Goldfields and the labour of migrants who built this country – and returned them as medals of honour for Josia Thugwane and Penny Heyns in Atlanta 1996.

This is a nation that leads the Boston Consulting Group’s African Challengers – a list of the 40 fastest-growing global African companies, with 18 blue-chip “Made in South Africa” businesses such as Allied Anglo American, MTN Group, Naspers, Old Mutual, SABMiller, Sappi and Sasol – way ahead of the populous regions (not countries) of North Africa (13) and West Africa (2).

This is the nation of MTN, a brand that created the world-standard “pay as you go” model and which, in spite of connecting only 150 million people (out of 7 billion globally), all in Africa and the Middle East), is the 79th (MilwardBrown

We have become a complacent country, blaming instead of struggling. It’s time for a wake-up call, says Thebe Ikalafeng



WINNERS: Bafana’s Neil Tovey lifts the Africa Cup of Nations in 1996, flanked by former presidents FW De Klerk and Nelson Mandela. According to the writer South Africa has faced the evil and perils of apartheid, and emerged victorious. The nation has however become complacent, is no longer competitive and many people have simply become spectators.

BrandZ) and 188th (Brand Finance) most valuable brand in the world, up against the omnipresent Google and Coca Cola.

This is the nation of FNB, recognised this year as the world’s most innovative bank.

Amid all these triumphs, writer Marianne Williamson must have had this nation in mind when she wrote that “our deepest fear was not that that we were inadequate but that that we were powerful beyond measure”.

The world may have defined us

as a third world country, but we never thought of ourselves as third-rate citizens. This is the South Africa of “can do” spirit. Of ubuntu – an African belief that our humanity is intertwined. With a collective responsibility.

Our sports teams have not failed. They’re merely reflected the failures – or challenges – we have as a nation to build a consistent and sustainable winning culture.

South Africa’s position in the Global Competitiveness Index has remained virtually stagnant in the

bottom third out of 144 countries. The ranking of our micro-economic environment has deteriorated from 43rd to 69th and of our Labour Market Efficiency from 97th to 113th. Our higher education ranking has deteriorated from 75th to 84th – not surprisingly, as the threshold to exit high school is an embarrassing 30 percent.

While “Made in South Africa” companies account for 75 percent of the market capitalisation of the African Business Top 200 Companies, the survey shows a slowdown

in growth relative to West African and East African nations.

Foreign Policy magazine’s inaugural Baseline Profitability Index, which measures frontier markets that offer high returns and improving economic institutions, features South Africa at 41, compared to Botswana (2), Rwanda (5) and Ghana (10). It’s the same with the Economist’s fastest-growing economies; seven of them are African, but South Africa is not among them.

It seems that as the rest of Africa is rising, it’s casting a dark shadow

on its complacent South African counterpart. In retaliation, we’ve responded with xenophobia and denial of our identity as Africans.

We are no longer competing. We have become spectators. We have become the blaming, striking and begging nation Nelson Mandela never imagined. We have become complacent.

We are blaming Bernard Parker for scoring for South Africa and for Ethiopia – an equal opportunity pan-Africanist, the jokes go around. We are blaming Gordon Igesund for not getting more out of the faulty hand he was dealt. We are blaming the Zimbabweans (who are leading South Africa’s prized blue-chip organisations and the low-paying jobs alike), Somalis and Congolese for lost or no jobs. And we are blaming Jacob Zuma and the ANC government for just about everything else that doesn’t work.

No one is taking responsibility.

We have arrived – and the world must deliver: We have relinquished our right to hold those we put in leadership, in government, sport and society, to deliver their mandate.

Bafana Bafana, indeed all South African sport, is a microcosm of brand South Africa – unequal and inconsistent despite the enormous talent and resources at our disposal.

Former national cricket coach Gary Kirsten says we need to be honest with ourselves and accept that we are chokers. “Maybe it is a good decision I’m leaving,” he says. Adieu Gary, we should say. This nation was not built by quitters – or chokers.

Nor should we stand by and merely observe the internal fights between Sasoc and Athletics South Africa that are robbed our promising, albeit under-achieving, athletes of funding to prepare to take on the world. We should not be excited by the prospects of getting to Brazil through the back door thanks to the misfortune of another.

Irrespective of Fifa’s rules, Ethiopia fielded 11 players in the game against Botswana and South Africa. It’s the same opportunity South Africa got.

The failure to qualify on merit for Brazil should be an inspiration and a catalyst for reimagining the future through hard work. It should inspire us to go back to the drawing board, set an ambitious vision for success, and work our way back to the top – as an African giant and a world-beater.

“ THIS NATION WAS NOT BUILT BY QUITTERS – OR CHOKERS

Many people seem to be disappointed not so much by Bafana’s failure to qualify for the World Cup in Brazil but by the prospect of losing out on a sure corporate freebie under the pretext of supporting the national team.

But of course we should be headed to Brazil – as keen observers. To observe and learn how Lula and Dilma Rousseff grew the economy by 7.5 percent and catapulted 29 million Brazilians into middle-income status while creating 2.5 million jobs.

To observe and learn how young Neymar is mesmerising football fans and working hard to reclaim the No 1 position that Pele and Ronaldo put Brazil in – winning five World Cup trophies between 1954 and 2002. To observe and learn how millions are challenging Rousseff to deliver more social services, better incomes.

We should reflect on what type of future we are creating. What it will take is to work together to create “a better life for all” as the ANC promises, “one nation, one future” envisioned by the DA and to restore the promise of our great nation and offer the hope of a better future for every South African, as Mamphela Ramphele challenges us all.

Global sports brand Nike recently launched an ad to mark Tiger Woods’s return to No 1 in the world with a simple truth – “winning takes care of everything”.

It is time to demand more of ourselves – even in sport – because our future demands it. It’s time to win – again – by rallying around a singular vision and identity as (South) Africans.

■ *Ikalafeng is a global Africa adviser and author in brand and reputation leadership and director SA Tourism, Brand South Africa, WWF and Mercantile Bank.*

Forum

Nuclear disarmament has to be taken seriously by everyone

PRESIDENT Barack Obama’s call for a reduction in the world’s nuclear arsenals has to be taken seriously.

The road to nuclear disarmament is not a four-lane highway to Utopia, where distance from the goals is marked on roadside panels in terms of weapons destroyed.

It is a crooked trail weaving its way past many dangers.

Nuclear weapons are instruments capable of massive annihilation and can be considered instruments of power and prestige only in cultures that are numb to the potential consequences of such technologies of death or that go beyond such numbness to affirm and glorify the wanton destructiveness they represent.

Nuclear weapons present humankind with an immense challenge, one far greater than most people understand.

These weapons go beyond suicide and genocide to omnicide – the death of all.

In a cataclysmic strike, resulting in the destruction of present life forms on the planet, these weapons

would also obliterate the past and the future, destroying both human memory and possibility.

Some 2,000 of the US and Russian nuclear weapons remain on high alert, ready to be launched on warning in the event of a perceived attack, within a decision window for each president of 4 to 8 minutes.

Nuclear disarmament is in vogue again.

Relinquished in the “dustbin of history” after the Cold War, it has risen like a phoenix to become one of the most pivotal concerns of the contemporary world.

Nuclear weapons were born out of fear, nurtured in fear and sustained in fear.

They are dinosaurs, an evolutionary dead end.

The trend in warfare today is towards manufacturing smaller, smarter, more effective precision-guided weapons.

Nuclear weapons are extremely dangerous and not very useful.

They are the wave of the past.

Farouk Araia
Johannesburg

Why is context conspicuous by its absence in anti-Obama diatribe?

ISN’T IT interesting how Professor Esack’s diatribe against President Barack Obama leaves out much context needed for understanding US policy, irrespective of whether one actually agrees with it?

No mention is made of the genocidal crimes against humanity carried out by Sunni extremists. They are anti-Islamic blasphemy. The 3,000 plus lives lost on 9/11 included Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

I do not agree with the manner of the retaliatory taking of the jihadist bait by the Bush administration, resulting in more than a decade of war and lives lost and brutalised in western Asia. But Islamist extremism bears the bulk of responsibility for these and a continuing string of atrocities all over the world.

In 2008, candidate Obama warned in a speech at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars that if Pakistan was unable and/or unwilling to prevent attacks against US forces in Afghanistan, he would authorise attacks against terrorist sanctuaries inside Pakistan.

Islamabad has demonstrated its inability in this regard given its duplicitous support for jihad by Pakistan’s military intelligence complex and resulting culture of intolerance. Hence, the drones.

Alternatives Professor Esack? This background is missing from his diatribe, devoid as it is of understanding American politics and the



Barack Obama

expectations Americans have of a “commander-in-chief”. But Esack and UJ anti-Obama demonstrators have no interest in knowing any of this as they care not about Obama’s role as an anti-apartheid university student activist, or even the fact that the American anti-apartheid liberation support movement was one of the leading such movements in the world. All they know is their obsession for demonising Obama must not be complicated by informed efforts to understand him and America. Simplistic, stereotypical, cardboard images of their chosen demon is all that counts. This is hatred masquerading as religion.

Francis Kornegay, Jr
Johannesburg

SA should be grateful for the deeds and miracles that are Madiba’s life

THAT Nelson Mandela lived to see nearly two decades of freedom is in itself a miracle, considering that he assumed the presidency at a late stage in his life.

South Africans, now in a virtual pre-mourning state, will have to accept that 95 years is more than life can offer – and collectively the nation should be grateful that the legend has put this great country on the global radar, putting him among history’s famous.

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Khoisan, the forgotten people, also deserve a place in the sun

Open letter to Jacob Zuma

IN NEARLY 20 years of our democracy and freedom, there are many issues that have been left omitted and uncategorised. The isolation of Khoisan people must be attended to by our government.

It is afflictive that these ancient people of our nation have not been at the plan or top agenda of the South African government.

I say this because it is largely visible that they have not been liberated, empowered and built proper housing, health and educational facilities in their rural communities.

The enormous dissimilarity between them and our people in our townships, villages and suburbs with the Khoisan can’t be measured. They live under vicious conditions in the bushes. Your government, Mr President, was supposed to have accommodated and provided these people with much-needed building material to improve their living conditions in the developing world.

The Khoisan have children who will grow up less skilled. They won’t fit in the highly technological society. They will be in the dark like their ancestors who we always left ignored.

I know that they are very traditional and very proud of their roots and I am not saying let us change

their ways of living, but they must be engaged and consulted.

I want them to enjoy the fruits of our freedom – they deserve it.

We do not understand their languages. There are boundaries in our communication and understanding, but we all live in one land.

That must stop and we must find ways to be one people, united and together.

I want to see schools, libraries and sports facilities in the Nama and all other Khoisan areas.

I have a dream and it could be possible – a vision of a Khoisan president, minister or a notable leader in any influential field. But that won’t happen if we don’t unleash their talents.

Khoisan have an astonishing knowledge of African healing.

They have powerful organic medicine, which I believe if well researched can heal many diseases that Western methods of healing can’t cure and this can have a positive impact in our economy.

These are people like us from God. They deserve better living conditions and care from the government. Msholozhi.

Africa belongs to all those who live in it.

Our resources must be enjoyed by all.

Lonwabo Busakwe
Khayelitsha