



THE SUNDAY
independent

dispatches

A CONTEST OF THOUGHTS

13

AUGUST
18 2013



KASRILS

Tribute to
an unlikely
Struggle hero/15

MAKGOBA

Our dream
will survive
Marikana/16



MONARE

Vavi must fall on the
sword he
sharpened/16



BOOKS

Frailties of
living on
the edge/18



Sex is a nice but costly pleasure

HERE WE go again. Last Sunday, Tiger Woods tried and failed to break a five-year majors drought. When it comes to majors, the most dominant athlete of his era, just three victories shy of Jack Nicklaus's majors record and Sam Snead's 82 total victories, is no longer a sure bet.

Sport's first athlete to take \$1 billion in career earnings, in 2007 Woods earned \$23 million (R229.7m) in prize money and \$100m in endorsements. To Nike, the one company that never deserted him, he is not just a great golf player, but their whole golf business.

Due to the infidelity scandal Woods became embroiled in, shareholders of firms that Woods endorsed lost \$5bn-\$12bn billion relative to firms that Woods did not endorse. Woods tumbled down the rankings to an all-time lowly 50. Sex, lots of it, with as many as 10 women, cost him and those he endorsed dearly.

At the height of the scandal, his sponsors – including Accenture, AT&T and Gatorade – and those he once considered friends and confidantes (including his caddy Steve Williams with whom he won 13 of his 15 majors) distanced themselves from him.

Some of his past sex partners saw an opportunity for a quick buck and publicity.

While athletes and celebrities are often involved in sex-related downfalls, it is said Woods's thud was the hardest. Many recover, somewhat, ultimately.

Rob Lowe and R Kelly, once accused of having sex with minors, have bounced back to their matinee idol status – sort of.

David Beckham's sex scandal didn't affect him for long.

The same does not apply to the ailing Springbok legend Joost van der Westhuizen who came close to losing his family, his Supersport job and several sponsorships.

It is claimed that Martin Bashir's *Living with Michael Jackson* interview was the final nail in the coffin for the legend's reputation and earning ability. It portrayed him in a way that led him to be tried as a child molester. Court proceedings during his family's wrongful death lawsuit against AEG reveal that the pop legend died with debts of up to \$500m.

Even though Woods is once again the top player in the world, many believe he is not quite the same. His peers say he's lost that bite, the aura and a once-certain invincible edge.

Sex does that.

It's been wreaking havoc since Adam and Eve. It fears no status, poverty or wealth, rank or file, class or place, intelligence or moral compass.

When it's done, it often leaves a career, reputation, an ego or even a bank account worse off.

A rather snotty pastime, it would seem sexual scandals favour the better or privileged ones among us.

Biblical legend has it that King David impregnated Bathsheba, wife of his best general, Uriah. Having failed to lure Uriah to immediately re-consume his marriage, David sent him in harm's way where he died at the hands of the enemy in the front lines.

It is written that consequently David's life was beset with bad luck.

Preying on the weakness of the powerful, sex has brought mighty men to their knees, who end up desperately fighting for their future and longing for their past.

The charming one-time French presidential shoo-in Dominique Strauss-Kahn's New York maid escapades and Italian Silvio Berlusconi's bunga-bunga sessions cost them their marriages and political careers.

It almost got former US president Bill Clinton impeached and put South African president Jacob Zuma on trial at which he was eventually found not guilty.

It is alleged that Zimbabwe's Morgan Tsvangirai lost because his focus was on his complex marital

From King David to Oscar Pistorius, history is replete with instances of sex scandals having lead to the downfall of prominent people or sport stars, mostly with great financial implications, writes **Thebe Ikalafeng**



POOR REPUTATION: Tiger Woods, David Beckham, Jacob Zuma and Zwelinzima Vavi.

“

SEX IS EXPENSIVE –
WHETHER IT IS A
COMMERCIAL OR
CONSENTING DEAL

woes since his beloved Suzan died in a car accident, while the veteran Robert Mugabe consolidated and swelled his base to a two-third election romp. Mugabe's campaign capitalised on and publicised Tsvangirai's alleged indiscretions.

Sex sent renowned former Sunday Times columnist Jani Allan into exile in London after a 1988 scandal involving the late rightwing AWB leader Eugene Terreblanche. Her apartment was bombed.

The late Princess Diana divorced Prince Charles because, as she famously put it, “well, there were three of us in this marriage, so it was a bit crowded” in reference to Charles's then mistress, Camilla Parker Bowles.

The people's princess lost her title and died with her wealthy playboy lover Dodi Fayed in Paris, far from the Buckingham Palace throne for which she was destined in 1981 when she married her prince charming.

The Catholic Church, which has survived secessions, descensions

and wars, was brought to its knees too because of sex.

The church, which has long prided itself in the vow of chastity, now has a litany of priests who have taken a liking to the forbidden fruit of underage boys. Even fellow priests (as in the case of Scotland's Cardinal Keith O'Brien who quit as Edinburgh's archbishop after allegations he had engaged in inappropriate sexual conduct with junior priests) have cost the church millions in members. Some priests have been jailed.

The 1.2 billion church is now bleeding members. It is often distracted from offering spiritual guidance and food to the poor, to having to defend and settle multi-million-dollar sexual transgression lawsuits.

Mark Hurd, former chief executive of Hewlett-Packard, resigned abruptly after a sexual scandal because he “realised there were instances in which I did not live up to the standards and principles of trust, respect and integrity that I have espoused at HP”.

Hewlett-Packard's general counsel concurred. “Mark demonstrated a profound lack of judgment that seriously undermined his credibility and damaged his effectiveness in leading HP – and Mark agreed.”

Sex is expensive – whether it's through a commercial or a consenting arrangement – especially when it's covert and ends in a disagreement, crime or the relationship is just over.

In one of the most expensive divorces, Australian media mogul Rupert Murdoch paid his former wife of 33 years, Anna Murdoch, \$1.7bn when he divorced her to marry Wendy Deng, 38 years his junior;

17 days later.

Mel Gibson settled for \$425m with his wife of 31 years and the mother of his seven children, Robyn, following the release of photos showing the actor in an embrace with Russian singer-songwriter Oksana Grigorieva.

Arnold Schwarzenegger settled with his wife of 25 years, Maria Shriver, for \$250-\$375m after it was revealed he had fathered a child with the couple's domestic helper.

Woods is said to have settled with Elin Nordegren for around \$250m.

Simon Cowell, the *American Idol* guru, is said to be facing a claim of up to \$70m in what in Africa we'd call “damages” for impregnating his best friend's wife.

This week, Oscar Pistorius, once the poster boy of overcoming adversity who reputedly earned over R25m a year in endorsements and fees, goes to court to fend off a murder charge.

One of the central untested allegations doing the rounds too involves sex – or an SMS from a former sex partner of the beautiful Reeva Steenkamp that apparently enraged Pistorius. And yet, after all these cases, here we are again – as it's always been.

After 16 years of warding and sometimes laughing off all kinds of attempts to dethrone him from his Cosatu pedestal, the most prominent and vocal unionist of our generation has now fallen to the oldest trick in the business.

He gave his enemies the easiest ammunition, and is now battling to safe a reputation as a tough non-compromising unionist that is now in tatters.

Sex is like that. Irrational, emotional and instantly reactive. Often

with delightful, and sometimes regrettable consequences.

Warren Buffet once said, “It takes 20 years to build a reputation, and five minutes to ruin it.”

When it evolves, it might not even take long. Boris Becker's brief romp in a broom cupboard cost him his marriage, a fair bit of cash and a once pristine reputation.

While a court of law can clear the name as it did in the case of Zuma, it is never the same in the court of public opinion. A sex scandal – whether an untested allegation or a proven crime, often impairs a reputation beyond repair.

Despite all of man's ability to solve the most unimaginable of human problems, the lure and dangers of sex is beyond his reach.

Celibacy and fidelity, as ideal as they sound, has not been able to do it, because in itself it does not mean the absence, but rather the deprivation of or avoidance of sex. Neither did the 12th century crusaders' practice of chastity belts for their wives, mistresses or daughters in fear of others “invading their property” while invading foreign lands to the east. Neither has HIV/Aids or many other related dangers.

Humans beings are rather weak sexual beings, and always at the risk of succumbing to this most basic of primal human instinct. When it comes to sex, all logic flies out of the window, and the best moral compass loses its calibration. Neither is the potential monetary or reputation cost considered.

Sex is an old script, and never short of characters. The plot and consequences is always the same. In many other cases, as in the case of Jimmy Saville, the script rears its ugly head posthumously.

“

LUCKILY FOR VAVI,
MEDIA ARE
NOTORIOUS FOR THEIR
SHORT MEMORY

Vavi will survive the scandal but he'll never be the same person again. If he is a good negotiator – and he's proven his mettle there before – like many before him, he may leave with a bucket-load of the worker's proceeds in a hush settlement, even if he'll have to hide in shame to spend it, while he rehabilitates his reputation. But this too shall pass, until the next character. There's only one positive in this whole saga.

While he initially confessed to claim a moral high ground, at least he didn't deny the “brief standing encounter” as many before him such as president Bill Clinton who famously told the world, “I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss (Monica) Lewinsky.”

Clinton later confessed that he did indeed have an “improper physical relationship” with the then 24-year-old White House intern.

While men are obviously the undisputed lead characters, some women, as the story of Samson and

Delilah and many similar others show, have at times too allowed themselves to be used in this mess, in exchange for money, prestige, power or authority.

But more often than not, they've been the victim of men's money, prestige, power or authority.

Depending on the severity of the sexual indiscretion – especially in the case where there is no crime – many scandals don't necessarily impair an ability to continue earning an income. Many go on to greater monetary success, sweeping the reputational damage under the carpet. Others aren't so lucky.

What society should never tolerate is that the powerful, privileged and rich use their position to take advantage of the desperate and powerless – and get away with it, as is often the case with a sexual or other crime, while the victim lives with the scars for the rest of their lives.

Luckily for Vavi, African media, and people, desperate to move on to the next headline, are notorious for their short attention span and memory. All will soon be forgotten or at best forgiven.

It's said money makes the world go round, but sex was invented before money. It may sound politically opportune to take the moral high ground in relation to Vavi, but while there are men and women with active libidos, power or money, there will always be another sexual scandal. Until then, as it says in John 8:7, let him without sin cast the first stone.

■ *Ikalafeng is a global African advisor and author on branding and reputation leadership and founder of Brand Africa and Brand Leadership Group. @ThebeIkalafeng.*