

# Unpacking Nelson Mandela's Sports Legacy: An Examination of Press Discourses During the FIFA 2010 World Cup in South Africa

**Tendai Chari**

## Summary

The late Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first democratic president is perhaps the most revered political leader globally. His legacy spawns fields such as politics, sports and society and portends different interpretations by different people. His name is invoked during elections and sporting events, and instrumentalised, if not "commodified" for electoral power gains with reckless abandon. Because Mandela symbolises many things, there are varied interpretations of his legacy, a conundrum that remains unresolved after the global icon's death. Theoretically grounded on Berger's (2014) "myth model", this article examines the discursive construction of Nelson Mandela's sports legacy in the context of the FIFA 2010 World Cup, the maiden world cup extravaganza on African soil, in order to gain insights on how symbolic power is embedded in and is naturalised through texts and discourse. Empirical data for this article was gleaned through a corpus of purposively sampled archival press cuttings from three main South African newspapers, namely *The Sunday Times*, *Mail & Guardian* and *The Sowetan*. Data was coded thematically and subjected to discourse analysis using the hermeneutic approach. The article argues that the discursive constructions of Nelson Mandela in these newspapers during the 2010 FIFA World Cup projected Mandela's sports legacy through a mythological lens that accentuated his individual rather than collective contributions towards bringing the World Cup to South Africa/Africa. The article further argues that Mandela's sports legacy is depicted as inseparable from his larger legacy in politics and society, thus demonstrating the intricate link between sports and politics in post-colonial societies.

## Opsomming

Wyle Nelson Mandela, die eerste demokraties-verkose president van Suid-Afrika, is waarskynlik die mees gerespekteerde politieke leier ter wêreld. Mens kan met moeite sy nalatenskap, wat 'n weerklank vind in die politiek, sport en oor gemeenskappe heen, beperk tot 'n enkele interpretasie. Verkiesings en sportbyeenkomste word in sy naam aangedurf – 'n naam wat met roekelose ywer as instrument of kommoditeit selfs gebruik word om stemme te werf. Omdat die naam 'Mandela' baie simboliek inhou, kan mens sy nalatenskap op verskillende wyses interpreteer, met die gevolg dat dit steeds raaiselagtig is, jare na die afsterwe van dié alombekende ikoon. Hierdie artikel, wat teoreties begrond is in Berger (2014) se mite-model ("myth model"), het dit ten doel om diskoersiewe konstruksies van Mandela se nalatenskap aan sport te

*JLS/TLW* 33(4), Dec./Des. 2017  
ISSN 0256-4718/Online 1753-5387  
© *JLS/TLW*  
DOI: 10.1080/02564718.2017.11868



ondersoek teen die agtergrond van die 2010 FIFA Wêreldbeker, die eerste keer wat hierdie skouspel op die kontinent van Afrika aangebied is. Daar word gepoog om lig te werp op die wyse waarop die pers te werk gegaan het om simboliese mag in beide tekste en diskoers te anker en te naturaliseer. Die empiriese data vir hierdie artikel is verkry uit 'n korpus van doelbewuste steekproewe, van uitknipsels vervat in die argiewe van drie toonaangewende Suid-Afrikaanse koerante: die *Sunday Times*, *Mail & Guardian* en die *Sowetan*. 'n Diskoersanalise, waartydens 'n hermeneutiese benadering gevolg is, is voorafgegaan deur die tematiese kodering van die data. Die outeur voer aan dat al drie koerante gedurende die toernooi 'n mitologiese lens gebruik het om hul gekonstrueerde diskoers oor Mandela se nalatenskap aan sport te projekteer – 'n lens wat sy individuele bydrae beklemtoon het, eerder as kollektiewe pogings om die Wêreldbeker na Suid-Afrika en die Afrika-kontinent te bring. Die outeur beweer dat Mandela se nalatenskap aan sport onlosmaaklik deel is van sy groter erflating aan die politiek en die samelewing, wat daarop dui dat, sover dit post-koloniale gemeenskappe betref, hierdie twee terreine deurweef is.

## Introduction

South Africa's first democratically elected president, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, is one of the most revered political leaders globally. He is a legend, and was one of the most canonised African political leaders while he still lived. In literary fiction and popular media narratives, he symbolises many things to different people. On the one hand, he is a “fighter”, an epitome of the African liberation “struggle”, of “resistance”, “determination”, “resilience” and “perseverance”. On the other, he is a symbol of “wisdom”, “hope”, “reconciliation”, “peace”, “unity”, “tolerance”, “dignity” and “forbearance”. Mandela's legacy, therefore, spans many fields and any attempts to pigeonhole him are likely to be futile.

Discursively, his legacy spawns diverse facets of life, politics, religion, economics, sports and the social. Both the African National Congress (ANC), the political organisation he once headed and opposition political parties in South Africa have been accused of trying to “embellish” their credibility by capitalising on the potency of his brand (*Mail & Guardian* 2013). During the May 2014 general elections, Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) president, Julius Malema, accused the ANC of “abusing Nelson Mandela's name in their campaign material”. Malema reportedly said: “They (ANC) must say vote for Jacob Zuma because they are doing it for Zuma, we cannot do it for Mandela, and Mandela is no more.”

Some scholars have criticised the mainstream Mandela narrative, particularly the cinematic genre for viewing Mandela through a parochial and essentialist framework, whereby Mandela is depicted as a “mythical figure, a character from a fairy tale” or simply a “teddy bear old man” (Bromley 2014: 54). Bromley argues that such narratives about Mandela side-step questions linked to existing socio-economic challenges in South Africa, such as inequalities, poverty, “health, land scarcity, continuing racism and exploitation as well as the links between white corporations and ANC leaders” (Bromley

2014: 52). Such narratives fail to critically interrogate Mandela's finding solace in hagiographic narratives couched in sainthood, thus narrowing the lens through which Mandela's legacy should be understood.

This article contributes to the body of knowledge which seeks to unpack Nelson Mandela's legacy through a critical examination of the symbolic representation of Nelson Mandela during the FIFA 2010 World Cup. The article uses Arthur Berger's "Myth Model" in order to gain insights into the symbolic signification of Mandela during the FIFA 2010 World Cup, the maiden football World Cup extravaganza on African soil. It seeks to address the following questions: How was Nelson Mandela symbolically signified during the 2010 FIFA World Cup? How can that symbolic signification enhance understanding of his legacy? How does the concept of "myth" and "mythmaking" help gain broader insights on Mandela's legacy?

Since this article is mainly concerned with the way in which Mandela was discursively constructed in the press, empirical data was obtained from a corpus of a purposively sampled hard news and feature articles published in three major South African newspapers, namely *The Sunday Times*, *the Mail and Guardian* and *The Sowetan*. The articles were published between 11 June and 31 July 2010, being the period during which the FIFA World Cup was staged in South Africa plus an additional two weeks after the tournament had ended. The press articles used in this study were part of a larger corpus of data retrieved online during a major study on press narratives on the FIFA 2010 World Cup. Only those hard news, feature articles and letters to the editor (totalling 35) in which Nelson Mandela's name was evoked were selected for this study. The analysis entailed reading each article at least three times, circling, underlining and highlighting the key words linked to Mandela's attributes, character and legacy. Further, data was thematically coded, and subjected to discourse analysis and interpreted using the hermeneutic approach.

### **The Myth Model: A Conceptual Framework**

The article uses Berger's (2014) "myth model" to explain the symbolic signification of Nelson Mandela in press narratives during the FIFA 2010 World Cup, in order to gain insights into his legacy. The article contends that press representations of Nelson Mandela during the 2010 FIFA World Cup recall a panoply of myths whereby Mandela is depicted as the singular "principal magician" (Posel 2014: 73). The concepts "myth" and "mythmaking" lie at the core of this article.

Berger (2014) uses the term "myth model" to explain how myths inform various aspects of human culture. The word "myth" has its origins in the Greek word "mythos" which means "word", "speech", "tale of the Gods" (Berger 2013: 2). According to Berger (2013: 2) a myth is a "narrative in

which the characters are gods, heroes and mystical beings, in which the plot is about the origin of things or about metaphysical events in human life, and in which the setting is a metaphysical world". This implies that myths are tales that are distanced from reality. Berger further notes that the use of mythic themes in the representations has become common to the extent that it is taken for granted. Danesi (cited in Berger 2013: 2) argues that anything that gets "media air time" is mythical. Myths play a critical role in shaping social life and sometimes they serve to "validate or authorise" (Patai cited in Berger 2014: 2-4) particular customs, rites, institutions, beliefs. Although some scholars view myths as false or unfounded beliefs, myths have a material existence, are historically situated and in many ways "inform all cultures and have a profound, though hidden impact" on everyday human existence. Berger argues that narratives of one kind or another pervade the media and human beings "swim like fish, in a sea of narratives" and they walk through a "forest of narratives" every day (Berger 2014: 3). The ubiquity of myths in society has been underscored by Berger (p. 3) thus:

Narratives of every genre, pervade our lives – from the conversations we have with friends to the television drama and films we watch ... generally speaking there are myth elements hidden in our stories of all kinds ... we find mythic traces in the elite arts, in popular culture, and even in everyday life, because (at least some people do some of the time) we live mythically though we are generally unaware that this is the case. That maybe because many of these myths are lodged deep in our conscious and not available to inspection by us.

Although myths are ever-present in all forms of narratives, the fact that they are hidden implies that their effects are not easily felt or seen. Hence, they are taken for granted. They could be accosting us but we may not know. One needs to dig deeper, in order to understand how these myths function. Berger (p. 11) explains:

I believe that if you scratch deep enough beneath the "surface" of many texts you often find a myth – an example of intertextuality (that is the relation of the specific text or work to other texts that preceded it) that explains one of the reasons that certain texts resonate with us .... Let me suggest that not only do many texts have mythic content, but also the genres in which we find these texts often have a mythic base, and it may be that a given genre has an appeal that we don't recognize assuming that it is the text and only the text that is important.

Because myths are often buried in narratives, one has to go that extra-mile to decode them. This decoding may depend on whether the person doing the decoding is familiar with the cultural codes in which the myths are encoded. As pointed out earlier, the main assumption in this article is that press narratives about Nelson Mandela, during the FIFA 2020 World Cup, are imbued with mythical elements which find expression through interdiscursive and

inter-textual references that seek to immortalise the persona of Nelson Mandela. This resonates with Berger's "myth model" whereby a myth is conceived as a "sacred narrative that validates cultural beliefs and practices" (Berger 2014: 14). Berger further argues that "many things that people do in contemporary society are actually camouflaged or modernised versions of ancient myths and legends" (p. 14). Because myths are camouflaged, they are often taken for granted. Media texts such as the ones studied in this article can "legitimate and naturalise" certain political positions through their discursive representations (Don & May 2013: 760). Citing Peters, McEachern (2002: 61) notes that

Every representation ... is partial, a major work of selection and interpretation on the part of the media brokers yet one aspect of cultural power is its ability to appear complete .... It is this that provides authority and credibility and underpins the role of the media in setting the agenda and nominating those processes which are important for public contemplation at any one time.

Similarly, Roland Barthes (cited in Clarke, n.d.) equates myths to ideology which naturalises "what is in fact humanly constructed". Barthes argues that humans "have always used the adjective 'natural' to justify their own fabrications". He uses the term "myth" to refer to all the interpretations (such as narratives, pictures etc.) which human beings, particularly the bourgeoisie impose upon events "that are in and of themselves neutral in an effort to bolster their own social dominance". Barthes uses the term "mythology" to refer to the process by which neutral events (we can add humans and objects to this list) "are made to connote something beyond their overt meaning ...". Thus, the myth-making process entails attaching particular meanings to an "inherently insignificant something" (Clarke n.d.).

By the same reasoning, through their interpretative frameworks on events (objects and humans), news texts fabricate and impose particular meanings or readings on those events. Clarke (n.d.) adds that:

Myths are not read as statements of particular actors, but as outgrowths of nature. They are seen as providing a natural reason – rather than an explanation or a motivated statement. They are read as "innocent" speech – from which ideology and signification are absent. Therein lays the connection between myth and ideology.

Thus, seemingly ordinary (and natural) events such as Barack Obama strolling in the park with his family, or President Robert Mugabe falling on a "misaid" carpet, or Libyan rival political leaders shaking hands, become iconic, signifying something beyond itself. However, myth does not mean lies or falsehoods but any symbolic signification whereby an event or object ritualistically acquires a second level meaning through narrative.

Thus, the FIFA 2010 World Cup became a site upon which Nelson Mandela was mythologised by accentuating certain narratives which elevate him “into a plinth of singularity” while at the same time silencing narratives of “collectivity and solidarity” (Bromley 2014: 44). Bromley (2014) notes that, before he died, Mandela asked that his legacy must be interrogated (Bromley, 2014). He is reported to have said that: “I am not a saint, unless you think of a saint as a sinner who keeps on trying” (*News in Review* 2014: 10). Although Mandela was part of the World Cup bidding team that went to Switzerland in 2004, his public appearances were very minimal by the time the World Cup tournament was held in June 2010, and he had become frail due to old age. However, his name continued to feature in the media and public discourses. When the country won the bid on the 16th of May 2004 Mandela’s name featured widely in the news media and he is reported to have said that “the World Cup would be a perfect gift for South Africa as it celebrates a decade of democracy” (*The New York Times* 2004). A critical examination of the narratives about Nelson Mandela during the world cup reveals that Mandela’s legacy was pivoted around his “singular” effort of bringing the World Cup to South Africa, rallying the South African nation around a singular national identity, inspiring the national team, as well as generating a spirit of positivity and euphoria about the tournament, all of which were a symbolic recall of his “magical” performance in the political sphere.

## **Mandela as a Unifier**

Press narratives about Nelson Mandela during the FIFA 2010 World Cup drew heavily on well-known symbolic significations of him as a great unifier. There was surfeit of rhetoric and references to the ability of the world cup to bring together South Africans from all walks of life in celebrating the hosting of the most prestigious football extravaganza. It was claimed that the world cup would and had boosted national reconciliation which had been driven with “such fervour by Mandela” (*The Herald* 10-06-10) when he became the country’s first democratic president in 1994. Bafana Bafana,<sup>1</sup> the national team’s support was embraced by people from diverse racial and class backgrounds in new football frenzy. Thus the national team was embraced by “all sections of the population” including “those more accustomed to watching a 15-man game and an oval-shaped ball will be in front of their television sets this afternoon” (*The Herald* 10-06-10), an allusion to the longstanding racial divisions in South African sport.

Inter-discursive and inter-textual references to how Mandela had used sport to unite the nation were made and the commonest such reference being the

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1. The name Bafana Bafana is an IsiZulu word which means “the boys”. Zulu is an indigenous language which is spoken by the majority in South Africa.

1995 Rugby World Cup which Mandela reportedly used to rally all and sundry behind a sport “long abhorred by blacks” to transcend “historical and political overtones and for the first time held everyone in the young nation in a communal embrace” (*The Sunday Times* 09-06-10). The allusion to the 1995 Rugby World Cup served as a discursive strategy to elevate Mandela’s contribution towards the 2010 FIFA World Cup above that of everybody, and consequently out of the realm of the ordinary. Thus, Mandela became the “principal magician” (Posel 2014: 73) behind the hosting of FIFA 2010 World Cup, the same way he had been the “principal magician” behind South Africa’s transition to democracy. Thus, in 2010, Bafana Bafana became a symbol of the Rainbow Nation,<sup>2</sup> the same way the Springboks, the national Rugby team became a symbol of national reconciliation during the 1995 Rugby World Cup.

Similarly, Mandela became a metaphor of unity, peace and reconciliation. Farquharson and Marjoribanks (2013: 28) argue that the 1995 Rugby World Cup had “great symbolic value for the country, representing an irrevocable break with the apartheid past and a positive vision of the future”. However, there were some limitations in “translating this symbolism into institutionalised practice” in the sense that the composition of the team did not and still does not demographically reflect the diversity of the South African population<sup>3</sup> (Farquharson & Marjoribanks 2013: 28). It was reasoned that the “Soccer World Cup was uniting South Africa, in the same way the 1995 Rugby World Cup victory helped break down racial barriers (*Mail & Guardian* 06-06-10). Like the Springboks, Bafana Bafana, a predominantly black team was supposed to symbolise the further cementing of national unity and social cohesion, a practical expression of the mantra “one team, one nation” which supposedly inspired the Springboks to lift the World Cup in 1995. In this discursive scheme of things, Mandela, Bafana Bafana and the World Cup acquire meanings and attributes that go beyond their denotative meanings. The spirit of “unity” experienced during the 2010 FIFA World Cup was compared to the “unforgettable rush of belonging and relief at Nelson Mandela’s inauguration in 1994” (*Mail & Guardian* 10-06-10) thereby, invoking the singularity of Mandela’s effort of uniting South Africa. The spirit of unity and togetherness witnessed in South Africa during the World Cup is attributed to Mandela’s reconciliation policy.

The World Cup thus resembles a “national picnic”, a convergence of a mosaic of cultures whereby people from different ethnic groups, classes, and age-groups are brought together to pay their allegiance to Bafana Bafana and the national anthem, *Nkosi Sikelela iAfrica* (God Bless Africa). It was claimed that the enthusiasm prevailing during the world cup had not been witnessed

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2. The term Rainbow Nation was coined by Nobel Peace Laureate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu to refer to South Africa is racially diverse population.
  3. The only non-white player of the team at the time was Chester Williams.

“since President Nelson Mandela was released from prison ...” and that the tournament would have the same effect as “the image of Mandela-who spent 27 years in jail under apartheid” had when Mandela handed over the Rugby World Cup trophy to captain Francois Pienaar in 1995 wearing Pienaar’s number 6 Springbok jersey (*Mail & Guardian* 06-06-10). Invoking Mandela’s name during the FIFA 2010 World Cup was a crucial discursive device that elevated Mandela’s name to the realm of the extraordinary. The statement about Mandela spending “27 years in jail under apartheid” recalls the singularity of his liberation struggle contribution mentioned earlier. However, it is his “reconciliatory spirit” which is given more significance in the context of the national exuberance and the euphoria of the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Mandela’s legacy and the discourse around unity have not been fully interrogated. Although his contribution, both in the liberation struggle and in South Africa winning the bid to host the 2010 FIFA World Cup cannot be doubted, discourses about his legacy tend to overemphasise his singular effort at the expense of the collective efforts of many people who worked hard to ensure that the tournament became a success. Portraying Mandela as a singular “star in the galaxy” has the effect of silencing alternative discourses that seek to counterbalance these dominant narratives. Questions have been raised about such banal claims like the “world cup united South Africans”. Such claims are allusions to the “reductionist” (Bromley 2014: 52) and equally banal statements by Mandela, that “Sport has the power to change the world”.

Although the 2010 FIFA World Cup might have put South Africa on the global map, generated a significant amount of business for the country and possibly fostered the emergence of a new “constructed imaginary of the country” (Wise 2014: 152), expecting a transient mega sports event such as the world cup to wipe out racial and class divisions whose roots date back to centuries of colonialism and subjugation would be unrealistic, if not delusional. It is trite to say that more than twenty years after democracy, inequality and exclusion are endemic in South Africa (Keeton 2014: 26; Blaine 2013). Oxfam reports that inequality had gone up in South Africa “in the last 20 years” (Blaine 2013). Ngonyama (2013: 168) notes that South Africa still grapples with challenges such as “lack of adequate accommodation and proper housing” and “many families live in substandard conditions” without basic services such as water and sanitation, thereby underscoring the persistence of the ugly legacy of apartheid in the new dispensation.

There were also a number of events during the world cup which contradicted the unitary discourse and highlighted the exclusionary nature of the 2010 FIFA World Cup. These ranged from allegations about the eviction of small traders and poor communities from their traditional hawking areas near stadiums and others who were evicted in order to “beautify the vicinity of FIFA zones” (Chari 2014: 97). This narrative runs counter to the inclusive “Rainbow Nation” rhetoric promoted by officialdom. Desai and Vahed (2010:



158) expunge the myth of inclusivity during the FIFA 2010 World Cup, citing the exclusion of small traders who operate outside soccer stadiums who were completely shut out by the “FIFA oligarchy” (Desai & Vahed 2010: 158). Carroll supports this view, arguing that “marginalising and excluding citizens does not breed national unity, while removing people from their homes without warning will not improve national image”.

Carroll adds that:

The theoretical underpinnings of using mega-sports events as a tool for nation-building runs contrary to how such events are organised. A fundamental basis for nation building relies on national unity, but it is not possible to unify a nation when governments are subjecting their citizenry to human rights abuses. National unity is grounded in the belief that common cultural experiences will lead to cooperation that benefits the state, but that cannot happen when the experiences throughout a nation are drastically different.

The discursive construction of Mandela's legacy through the prism of unity and national building is couched in rhetorical, depoliticised, oversimplified and sentimental language which is emptied of its historicity. Calland (2010) exposes the porosity of official rhetoric about the world cup having engendered unity and social cohesion among South Africans when he says that:

... the real question is whether the World Cup, akin to 1994 has broken the mould in some way, shaken the sinews of the muscles that contort this society to breaking point, and thereby recalibrated the way in which the inhabitants of South Africa relate to each other .... That a game involving a simple leather ball – albeit one as misguidedly sculpted as the rightly maligned Adidas Jabulani – could prompt such ambitious thoughts is a testimony either to the surreal escapist tendencies of the game or to its extraordinary universalist powers.

For Calland, the “miraculous” achievements of the World Cup mask the “delinquency” of the South African public services sector and the country's socio-economic quagmire epitomised by poverty and “the lack of basic social services by the majority of the population and the inexcusable gulf between the quality of life enjoyed by the minority and that of the poverty stricken majority” (Calland 2010).

Robinson (2009) contends that the function of myths is “to empty reality of the appearance of history and of social construction. Thus the singularity of Mandela's effort in uniting South Africa is made to appear commonsensical. Mythologizing entails eliminating both causality and agency” (Robinson (2009), since such phenomenon are simply supposed to exist. Distiller and Steyne (cited by Dvornak 2010: 4) argue that dominant myths have often been incurred at crucial “moments in South Africa's political history”. According to Dvornak (2010: 4) “myths aimed at racial and cultural reconciliation are

evident in South African cultural and political discourse”, an example of this myth being the “Rainbow Nation” myth which became in vogue in 1994 as a way of promoting “national-building and national unity”. Dvornak further adds that myths, such as the “Rainbow Nation”, obfuscate the complexities in the arena of racial identity (2010: 4).

Montagu (1945: 41) rightly notes that “we may realize that a myth is a faulty explanation leading to social delusion and error, but we do not necessarily realize that we ourselves share in the mythmaking faculty ...”. Because myths are sustained by partial truths (Bromley 2014), the rhetoric about the world cup uniting South Africans silences alternative interpretations of the World Cup that debunk South African exceptionalism and the rhetoric about South Africa being a nation of miracles where Mandela is the “principal magician” in those miracles (Posel 2014: 73). However, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013: 410) posits that critiques that attempt to “disentangle the mythical and the symbolic from the real and material” miss the point in the sense that they ignore the fact that some symbolic aspects of mega-sports events like the FIFA 2010 World Cup, such as patriotism (one could add, national cohesion) are as important as the substantive issues even if they cannot always be reduced to the material and concrete. This shows how the imaginary is intricately enmeshed with the material in society.

### **“Madiba Magic” and the Spirit of Inspiration**

A key trope upon which the discursive construction of Nelson Mandela’s legacy was pivoted during 2010 FIFA World Cup was Mandela’s “extraordinary” ability to inspire people to achieve great things. Thus, in press discourses the World Cup in 2010 was depicted as miracle similar to South Africa’s transition from apartheid to democracy of which Mandela was the chief architect. It was stated that the world cup had the power of a “grand national pageant” imbued with “myth-making” potential (*Mail & Guardian* 10-07-10). Mandela is affectionately called “Madiba”, his clan name, and as Posel notes, this connotes, “simultaneously his elevated station and popular accessibility ... the avuncular elder whose appeal breached the sedimented South African divides of race, class, gender and ethnicity” (Posel 2014: 71). Posel (2014: 71) further states that “Mandela Magic” signified the vocabulary of the “new” South Africa and his singular powers of surprise and the ability to break the apartheid political culture through Mandela’s captivating charisma and charm. In the newspapers, Mandela was constructed as an oracle oozing contagious “magical” powers which could propel those with whom he came into contact. The mere presence of Mandela at the stadium was expected to turn an ordinary football team like Bafana Bafana into a magical goal scoring machine, implying that Bafana Bafana team members became some “Mandelas” as well. This is clearly captured by a writer in the *Mail &*

*Guardian* (10-07-10) who notes that “you cannot just say its football that makes people proud, every day we have Mandela ... there are lots of South African artists and leaders who are making us proud”. This implies that everybody who reaches a milestone becomes a Mandela.

Thus, Bafana Bafana, the national team, looked up to Mandela for inspiration and his mere attendance at the opening ceremony at Soccer City Stadium was highly anticipated (although he did not manage to attend). When he met Bafana Bafana at the Nelson Mandela Foundation on the 3rd of June 2010 he “donned the captain’s jersey ... injecting them with ‘a little of his magic’ ” (*Sowetan* 04-06-10), a replay of the 1995 Rugby World Cup when Mandela emerged wearing the Springbok captain’s number 6 jersey. The Springbok went on to win the Cup and the photograph of Nelson Mandela handing over the trophy to the captain became iconic. *The Sunday Times* (10-06-10) reported that Bafana Bafana were “ready to roll back the years to 1996 when they last tasted glory and hope a slice of Madiba Magic will shine on them in the opening World Cup Group A showdown against Mexico”. It was stated that the team had already met Nelson Mandela for a “motivational chat”. The newspaper further reported that “Madiba will be the main guest of honour at the new multi-billion rand world class Soccer City”, adding that his presence would “help inspire” the national team to win the match.

In the context of the FIFA 2010 World Cup, Mandela commands massive symbolic powers to such an extent that his mere presence at football matches can lead to victories. Such victories are attributed to his “magic”, and “lucky charm”. Former Bafana Bafana and Leeds United Captain, Lucas Radebe, for example wrote a paid tribute to Nelson Mandela through his letter in *Kick Off Magazine* (06-12-13) thanking Mandela for his inspirational personality. Radebe wrote that:

The sports history books in South Africa will show statistics and victories. What they don’t show, however, was that it was Madiba Magic that forged those results and performance; and united a country and its people along the way. No doubt, that Madiba Magic will live on.

Mandela is thus discursively constructed as a person who possesses supernatural powers that can inspire positivity. He was the invisible “extra” player and “game changer” at the World Cup bidding in Switzerland in 2004 and was equally expected to play the same role during Bafana Bafana matches in the FIFA 2010 World Cup. Desai (cited in Edwards 2013) acknowledges Mandela’s mystical powers when he points out that:

The presence of Mandela when we were making our bid was very, very powerful .... We were up against some big, powerful nations, such as Morocco and Egypt, so to beat Morocco meant there had to be an extra player on the team-and certainly the major game-changer was Mandela.

Chairperson of the Local Organising Committee, Danny Jordan concurs with this view, adding that:

It is thanks to Mandela that the world could finally trust us to deliver this event at a world class level .... He gave us a momentum and self-belief that we could achieve what many thought was impossible and we, and this country, will be forever grateful.

Just like the transition from apartheid to independence is attributed to Mandela's singular effort and magical powers, the hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup is again attributed to his personal charisma and respect in the global arena. Mandela's sports legacy is thus intricately interwoven with his legacy in politics and society. Lin, Lee and Nai note that:

The relationship between sport and politics is one of the most enduring and pervasive examples of society's impact/influence on sport. While there may still be some people who consider sport and politics to be completely separate entities, evidence suggests that it is no longer possible for any serious social commentator to posit a separation between the words of sport and politics.

(2009: 23)

Mandela is not only a political icon, but also a super sports fan. He injects the national soccer team with his "magic" (*Sowetan* 04.06.10) and urges "South Africans to rally behind Bafana Bafana" (*Sowetan* 21-06-10), thereby elevating Mandela to the supernatural realm. For instance, *The Sunday Times* (12-07-10) reported that "Mandela stunned the crowd of 84490 at Soccer City on Sunday night when he appeared and greeted them alongside his wife, Graca Machel".

Mandela is not just a mythical "extra player" on and off the field of play, but he also exhibits a unique brand of fandom whose "magic shines" on the national team as he was instrumental towards Springbok's glory in 1995 and Bafana Bafana's winning of the African nations Cup in 1996. His presence at the new multibillion rand world class Soccer City where he was guest of honour was big news in the press. When Bafana Bafana played its first game against Mexico, it was reported that his mere presence at the Soccer City Stadium would "inspire the players ... and the capacity crowd of Bafana fans" (*The Sunday Times* 10-06-10).

The import of this statement is that football needs something more than the possession of skills in order to win. As a "super" sports fan Mandela does not just inspire the players, but the fans as well. He is discursively constructed as a mythical figure whose "magical touch" could help Bafana Bafana (ranked 83rd in the world) to "neutralise" their superior opponents, Mexico (ranked 17th in the world) (*The Sunday Times* 10-06-10). Discourses about "Madiba Magic" are not just counterpoints to the euphoric celebrations of modernity epitomised by "world class" infrastructural developments made during the

world cup, but they also evoke negative stereotypes about Africa being a land of black magic, witchcraft and gallivanting naked savages. His folkloric portrayal in the press during the 2010 FIFA World cup resonates with his construction as a “political magician” who “miraculously” ushered South Africa into independence.

## **Mandela as a Man of Honour**

A key trope around the discursive constructions of the FIFA 2010 World Cup in the press was the claim that the cup had been awarded to South Africa as an “honour and respect” to Nelson Mandela. According to the FIFA president the tribute was befitting of Mandela because “he had united South Africans when he became the president of the new South Africa in 1994” (*The Sunday Times* 10-06-10). In his closing remarks at the closing ceremony of the World Cup on the 11th of July, 2010, Blatter told the capacity crowd at Soccer City Stadium that:

He brought the World Cup to South Africa. He wanted to be at the opening. He wanted to see that his dream came true. We have to pay homage to the humanist. It is with his name that I close this World Cup with.

*(The Sunday Times 12-07-10)*

To which South African President, Jacob Zuma, added that South Africans had given Mandela “the best 92nd birthday ever. We reserve our deepest gratitude to our founding president, for his leadership and vision. We look forward to the birthday celebrations on July 18 in Qunu” (*The Sunday Times* 12-07-10).

Mandela is thus discursively constructed as an honourable person and the hosting of the World Cup in South Africa was a way of showing him respect and fulfilling his dreams. In reality, the narrative that Mandela was the reason South Africa was awarded the FIFA World Cup bid is contestable because the process of awarding the FIFA bid is very complex, and entails a lot of backroom manoeuvres and lobbying and other considerations, such as the availability of infrastructure, security, and technical expertise, meaning that there is no way an individual could singularly determine the decision of a committee made up of members from diverse backgrounds. Suffice to say that South Africa had lost the bid to host the 2006 World Cup in 2000, a year after Nelson Mandela had stepped down from the presidency (BBC 6 July 2000). The BBC noted that South Africa did not have “a thoroughbred stock of soccer icons of its own” in its bidding team, but had relied “on the global reputation of Nelson Mandela and the symbolic value of the country’s recent transition to democracy” (BBC 6 July 2000). In relation to the 2006 bid, South Africa reportedly failed on the back of perceptions about “high crime on its city streets”, a poor transport system linking to proposed stadiums. This

clearly shows that the awarding of the World Cup had more to do with practical factors than symbolic ones.

Yet discursively, constructing the awarding of the World Cup to South Africa because of Mandela was strategic in the sense that it elevated his individual contribution towards the winning of the bid to host the World Cup above collective efforts, thereby accentuating his extraordinary character. The reality is that winning the bid to host the 2010 FIFA World Cup was a collective effort involving a lot of people some of whom became “the unsung heroes of the World Cup”. A writer in the *Sowetan* (11-06-10) identified former president of the Republic, Thabo Mbeki, as one of such unsung heroes. The writer stated that:

As our beautiful country gears itself for the best World Cup ever and we also celebrated and pay tribute to the country’s favourite grandfather and the icon of our liberation struggle, former president Nelson Mandela, I would like on behalf of many “silent” South Africans to also pay tribute to another great South African who remains an unsung hero in helping our country host the world Cup. As the country’s head of state Thabo Mbeki led the South African delegation in May 2004 when South Africa was awarded the honour to host the tournament. True to his character, he was hands on- with the actual bid and gave Fifa the necessary comforts in terms of guarantees to ensure that South Africa was fully compliant with Fifa requirements. Who can understate the lobbying at diplomatic level that had to take place to ensure that we had other nation’s support. All in all, Mbeki played no insignificant role in securing South Africa the World Cup. In fact, the hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa forms very much part of the Mbeki legacy.

This demonstrates that narratives about Mandela’s contribution towards South Africa’s hosting of the World Cup are pivoted on his singular efforts. This singularity of effort does not only silence narratives about other individuals’ contributions in this historic event, but also undermines discourses about the collective spirit which prevailed before and during the World Cup. Claims that South Africa won the bid to host the World Cup in 2010 in honour of Mandela was a discursive ploy to mythologise Mandela in the sense that myths thrive on glossing over facts. Watts (2000: 33) rightly notes that:

Despite all the factual evidence, the major reason for the survival of myths is that they “fulfil a vital function” in explaining, justifying and ratifying present behaviour by the narrated events of the past.

Accentuating Mandela’s “extraordinary and special qualities” (Posel 2014: 73) was a discursive trope to link his sports legacy with his achievements in the political sphere.

What is instructive to note is that, in relation to the World Cup, Mandela is hardly vocalised although he is ascribed an important role in bringing the World Cup to South Africa. He is more talked about than him talking. This is

partly because by the time the World Cup tournament took place, his appearance in public had become very minimal because of advanced age. Non-vocalisation became a discursive strategy in the production of a mythical Mandela in the sense that whatever was said to be his role in the World Cup was taken for granted. Watts (2011: 3) notes that:

Myths articulate orthodox beliefs, they represent ways of thinking and believing that have been legitimised by social groups. They represent part of what Bourdieu calls symbolic power, by which he means the power to make people believe certain visions of the world rather than others.

Although Mandela's symbolic power was primarily produced in the political arena, its force has been instrumental in shaping his other legacies, including social constructions of his sports legacy. His contribution in the field of sports, particularly during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, was shaped by vocabulary associated with "sites and sightings of politics" in the country. From a discursive construction point of view, this is significant in the sense that it demonstrates how sport intersects with politics and society.

## **Conclusion**

This article sought to examine the discursive constructions of Nelson Mandela in the South African press using the 2010 FIFA World Cup as a lens for gaining insights on how symbolic power is embedded and naturalised through texts. Although Mandela had retired from public life by the time of the World Cup, his name continued to have resonance and currency in discourses around the 2010 FIFA World Cup. The press accentuated three main attributes of Nelson Mandela, namely, a unifier, an inspirer and honour. These discourses mirror the hagiographic representations of Mandela in cinematic texts such as *Invictus* (Bromley 2014) which project the singularity of Mandela's efforts in South Africa's peaceful transition to democracy and subsequent attempts at achieving unity and social cohesion. Discursive constructions of Mandela project Mandela as the "principal magician" (Posel 2014: 73) who singularly brought, or caused the World Cup to come to South Africa, inspired the national team to achieve success and galvanised the nation to rally behind the national team in a show of unity of purpose and nationalism. Mandela is thus viewed as an extraordinary figure imbued with symbolic powers as he can "perform" miracles. Through his "Madiba Magic" he could propel the national to stratospheric heights, the same way he led South Africa through a "miraculous" transition that earned him international accolades. Although he was not a sportsperson of note in his own right, Mandela is discursively constructed as a "game changer" through his symbolic gestures which inspire both players and spectators to achieve milestones and through his mere

presence as a fan. Hence, Mandela's sports legacy is intricately enmeshed with his political legacy, a testament to the fact that sports and politics cannot be separated. The ultimate significance of this study is to demonstrate how political leaders can be invested with powerful symbolism through discourse and representations and how, in turn, those representations popularise and even naturalise certain perceptions about them.

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**Tendai Chari**

University of Venda

tendai.chari@yahoo.com/tendai.chari@univen.ac.za