

FPL - The football league that time forgot

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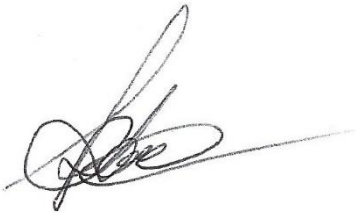
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I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report in the Department of Journalism, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Rajiv Kamal
12 February 2023

Ethics clearance no - JOMS2022/4

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ABSTRACT:

I chose to do my Master's long-form essay on the Federation Professional League (FPL). I have charted the legacy the league has left behind in terms of its history, players and impact. The FPL used sport as a tool to promote non-racialism and bring different racial groupings together. Despite there being not much recorded history about the league, the popularity and memories of it among some communities endures. While weaving in some aspects of history, which is essential to contextualise the overall story, I focused heavily on the players themselves and their experiences. Their motivations for playing in the FPL, their triumphs and defeats, the adversity they faced and what playing football in that particular league meant to them. It resulted in some incredibly varied and interesting stories – many of the former players and administrators have sharp memories and recall much of their experiences. I've also obtained a 'third-eye' perspective on the FPL, from former Post Newspaper Editor Brijlall Ramguthee who covered the league and knew many players and administrators. It was important for me to record the accounts of those still available before that history is lost forever. From a research perspective I focused on the popularity of soccer/football, nostalgia around the beautiful game, how psychology plays a role in how someone chooses to support a sports team or league, the significance of the World Cup in 2010 and the mythology behind sport – why do we remember players and sport events in a certain way and if that memory may not be perfectly accurate, does it diminish the story any less?

1. INTRODUCTION

The Federation Professional League (FPL) was established in 1969 in the wake of three major events that impacted South African football. The first, was that the Football Association of South Africa (FASA) fell afoul of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) following the events of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 where 69 people were killed for their anti-pass law demonstration.

Henley (2013, 10) writes that the sanctions FIFA imposed were some of the first aimed at the apartheid regime. South Africa could not enter a team for the World Cup. No soccer relations with any other FIFA member were allowed. It could not host tours with anyone in good standing with FIFA and any players who visited South Africa from FIFA-associated countries would be automatically suspended.

Then, in 1966, the anti-racist South Africa Soccer League (SASL), which was considered a rival to the whites-only National Football League (NFL) folded due to a lack of playing grounds. “Ten African, Indian, and Coloured soccer officials formed SASL in February of 1961 to protest the government’s post-Sharpeville crackdown. Known as the ‘People’s League’ for its popularity in the townships, its supporters identified closely with players who faced subordination, racial segregation, and economic hardships in the face of government repression. Supporting the ‘People’s League’ meant taking a stand against apartheid because it gave players and supporters alike an outlet for black self-validation and identity in a society that disenfranchised and exploited them” (Henley 2013;18).

In 1969, FASA instructed ‘African’ clubs to deregister Coloured and Indian players. The NFL and the National Professional Soccer League (NPSL) which was the largest league and represented ‘Africans’ both adhered to the apartheid policy of playing on their own and not mixing teams or leagues. But the FPL, a sort of spiritual successor to the SASL, was formed to challenge that status quo. “Opposed to this was the non-racial Federation Professional League which rejected the idea of racial classification and played sport on an integrated basis outside formal government structures. This was the professional arm of the non-racial SASF, which was in turn affiliated to SACOS” (Henley 2013;55).

The FPL would eventually go on to incorporate clubs from the former NFL after it collapsed in 1977 due to what Henley (2013;55) refers to as “economic and operational pressures.” Those very same economic pressures would eventually be felt by the FPL. In 1978 several clubs indicated they wanted to leave for the NPSL which offered better financial prospects. The off-pitch concerns didn’t end there. The South African Council on Sport (SACOS) was angry with the FPL for accepting sponsorship from SA Breweries and engaging with the NPSL. SACOS took a ‘no-prisoners’ approach to non-racial sport and refused to compromise its ideals, even if clubs complained they were struggling financially.

In October 1978, the FPL and the SA Soccer Federation (SASF) which was formed in 1951 to counter FASA were booted out of SACOS. “In light of the fact that – at organisational level – no agreement was ultimately reached between the NSPL and SASF/FPL in terms of establishing a single league, the NPSL became the de facto *Super League* in South Africa” (Venter 2018;63).

The FPL's 90 minutes would ironically be up in December 1990 and six-years later the Premier Soccer League (PSL) would be formed incorporating all other existing leagues. Some of the former FPL teams such as Manning Rangers went straight into the NPL and NPSL until the latter also folded, paving the way for the PSL. *Federation football* as many players refer to it was initially played with 12 teams in the league spread across South Africa. The clubs were primarily from Durban, Gauteng and Cape Town.

Later on, teams from Port Elizabeth, Newcastle and Pretoria (one of them being the original Sundowns) were integrated into the league. However, this was also because clubs left to join the NPSL and then NSL in the 1980s. There were also inter-provincial tournaments where the best players from that region (from clubs) would be picked. The Western Cape for example played against Natal and then Southern Natal player against Northern Natal and so on. These were few and far between. In addition, there were knockout cup competitions like the current Telkom Knockout Cup or English Premier League's FA Cup.

The FPL enjoyed good support with thousands of people filling up venues such as Curries Fountain in Durban or the Lenasia Stadium, south of Johannesburg. Many of the pictures and newspaper articles at that time show the huge number of people that attended games. Durban City FC played in NFL, NPSL and FPL. But the matches were held at Kingsmead and not Curries Fountain. Despite that fact, the club regularly welcomed numerous fans. The club's former goalkeeper Doug Coetzee recalls that "at some of the games we would have around 40,000 spectators" (Da Costa;2002).

2. HISTORY AND ACCOMPANYING THEORIES

2.1 THE 'BEAUTIFUL GAME'S' POPULARITY

Football or what we refer to as 'soccer' in South Africa is estimated to have around 3.5 billion fans worldwide. Cricket falls a billion behind with about 2.5 billion fans. Indeed, football also has millions of players worldwide, from amateur leagues to elite European teams. The FIFA World Cup and other major tournaments draw huge audience numbers and revenue associated with football is astronomical. But why is football so popular compared to cricket or even the American version of football which is also a huge money-spinner? "Soccer performance depends upon a myriad of factors such as technical/biomechanical, tactical, mental and physiological areas. One of the reasons that soccer is so popular worldwide is that players may not need to have an extraordinary capacity within any of these performance areas, but possess a reasonable level within all areas" (Stølen, Chamari K, Castagna C & Wisloff U, 2005).

Speaking about football development and the 2010 World Cup, Luginaah & Kefa (2010;5) point out that "football is the most accessible sport on the continent because it's relatively cheap in terms of capital requirements especially in comparison to rugby and hockey". While there is a social and entertainment value to football what's also undeniable is how the sport has shaped economies. Dolles & Soderman (2015;5) discuss how football as a business activity has risen in countries who promote it as a national sport. It can represent a large chunk of their GDP. "The globalisation of the football industry has provoked a concentration of resources in the hands of a few big European and South American clubs, which have had the ability and, most of all, the economic resources to face enlarged competition from foreign clubs and other businesses in the entertainment industry" (Dolles & Soderman, 2015;5).

But finances in football, while undeniably important, is only one part of the story. "Football matches are important social events that provide recreation and escape from the challenges of everyday life for many poor and not so poor people" (Luginaah & Kefa, 2010;5). While not having the ability to ever be considered a professional, I played in numerous football matches with friends and family which often resulted in bonding, braais and camaraderie. Soccer is the excuse to get to know people better and enjoy the company of others. It's possible this is the reason many people remember the matches and characters of the FPL.

Gafa (2014;4) quotes theorist Paul Willis, a leading name in British Cultural Studies who applied a Marxist understanding of commodities to the world of sport and to the relations formed through its collective consumption as popular culture. Willis believes that football's popularity is a half-formed commodity that he calls *quasi-modo commodities*. So, when a spectator buys a ticket to sports event, they are making that purchase for the total experience and just the package as it initially looks. The meaningfulness of the commodities depends largely on the active participation of consumers, which more often than not has passionate fans.

Perhaps it's Italian film director, poet, writer and intellectual Pier Paolo Pasolini that best sums up football's popularity. The enjoyment of watching artists at work with their canvas being the football pitch. "There are moments during a game that are

exclusively poetic and these are the moments when goals are scored. Every goal is always an invention, a subversion of the code: every goal represents agility, pleasure and satisfaction and thus, according to him, the top scorer of every league is always the best poet of the year. Dribbling also represents poetry and the greatest dribblers in the world – hence” (Gafa, 2014;7-8).

2.2 FOOTBALL NOSTALGIA

“The use of heritage is particularly established in sport, where it provides to the modern-day fan a link between past and present. Sport heritage draws from the sources of history, nostalgia, memory, myth and tradition ‘in order to meet the demands of the present” (Thomas, 2018;82). It’s no wonder that when clubs or teams harken back to their greatest triumphs or glory days fans are stirred, remembering those occasions, players or moments with fondness.

However, those memories are not always completely accurate and fans normally only recall the good parts of the past. This is something academics have theorised as the *Reminiscence Bump*. “The reminiscence bump shows that when individuals over 40 years of age are asked to remember important life events from their life, they disproportionately recall positive events from their adolescence and early adulthood. This lifetime period is favoured in memory” (Dolan, 2020). An article published in oldschoolfootball.co.uk (2020) likened reminiscence bump to memories of watching or experiencing football at a younger age. Thus, people are likely to remember football of their youth with fondness and perhaps even with more affection that it deserves.

Many of the FPL’s players, administrators and fans are well into their advanced years and so would naturally recall the best moments of the league with rose-coloured spectacles. Describing the skill and ability of some player might even be exaggerated. Not because these individuals are lying about it, but because that’s what their memories are telling them. However, there also seems to be an element of truth since some articles and comments exist speaking about players. “In football every team in the world has had his glory days and during a bad period, it is normal for the fans to feel nostalgic for the past achievements of their respective teams. Hence, even in this global game, nostalgia is something that is being taken very seriously and this feeling has the power to transform old football places in world heritage sites, some even housing museums” (Gafa, 2014;10).

For many who participated in the FPL, a heritage site would undoubtedly be Curries Fountain in Durban. Numerous league matches were played there and it became a mecca of football for fans and players alike. “The league brought together a number of high-profile football teams from around the country like Orlando Pirates, Berea, Sundowns and Avalon Athletics. The stadium, which is steeped in history, was the battleground for a number of sporting codes and was graced by some of South Africa’s most talented athletes. Decades on, and the magical moments of that era have started to fade from the memories of those who flocked to the stadium in Durban’s Warwick Junction precinct” (Asmal, 2014).

2.3 THE PSYCHOLOGY OF A SPORTS FAN

People support teams and clubs at different commitment levels. Thomas (2018;68-69) outlined this by using Daniel Funk and Jeff James' *Psychological Continuum Model*, published in 2001. The model outlines four stages or *floors* as a conceptual framework to explain the psychological connection and levels of commitment between individuals, a sport, club or team. In the first stage of awareness, an individual forms a connection with a sport or team by learning that they exist, finding out more about rules and being able to differentiate between teams and players. In the second floor, attraction, an individual picks their favourite team. A number of factors could influence this such as the level of entertainment, excitement, acceptance from one's family or community or even simply supporting a winning team. However, these individuals can be accurately described as *fair-weather fans* because some of those very same factors may lead them support another team entirely. The third floor is attachment. Here the individual forms a *stable psychological connection to a sport or team*. Factors include the team's level of success, players and stadium and a sense of community and pride. If this connection becomes stronger then the individual moves on to the final floor, allegiance. In the final floor the individual's relationship with the club or team is strong, *stable and continuous*. This reflects an attitudinal basis of loyalty to that club. The loyalty factor has been built over time because of the persistence of that attitude.

The commercial aspect has played a role this because they are constant reminders of a club or teams past. Support for football clubs or teams often starts with the geographic proximity – 'I support Mamelodi Sundowns because I grew up in Mamelodi'. Advertising and marketing have seemingly reinforced the loyalty aspect by serving to reignite the nostalgia aspect and bombarding fans with merchandise and products to display their allegiance. "During the last two decades, football became increasingly merchandized, internationalized and largely penetrated by commercial issues. Football is becoming an advertising medium, a brand in a multinational fight. The brand community concept states that fans can never be abandoned. A football club has an eternal life for its supporters" (Dolles & Soderman, 2015;23).

In the case of the FPL, there was no merchandise and marketing in football had not reached a modern-day level of sophistication. Many players and fans only have their memories, pictures and printed media to remind them of the league's heydays. If one considers the initial Champions League tournaments in Europe won by Real Madrid, there are videos, documentaries and many other forms of media to call upon. That is not so of the FPL. Despite that, the legacy endures for those who loyally remember it.

2.4 THE WORLD CUP COMES HOME

In 1991, SAFA was formed in Durban and in 1992 the soccer body formally applied to be admitted back into FIFA. "That April, President Havelange and General Secretary Blatter travelled to South Africa to meet with SAFA officials. On July 3, 1992—two full years before the nation's first democratic elections—South Africa officially became a full member of FIFA, marking a significant victory for a nation's struggle to regain international support. SASA's admittance embodied the seemingly boundless potential of a liberated and united South Africa" (Henley, 2013;24-25).

South Africa would be accepted back into the international community, hosting and winning both the 1995 Rugby World Cup and the 1996 African Cup of Nations. Arguably the country's crowning achievement in football was playing host to the 2010 World Cup. "South Africa will never be the same again. *The Beautiful Game* has inspired ordinary folk, lifted some out of poverty, and a new era of hope fills the air. The decision by football's world governing body to give the continent and the land of Nelson Mandela 'a piece of their rich pie' means so much to a nation that is obsessed by sport, especially the round ball game which came to our shores from Britain during the mid-19th century" (Rath, 2010).

But it wasn't just South Africa that was in the limelight. The event served as a beacon for Africa's potential as a whole. "Besides showcasing South Africa's (and by extension Africa's) ability to host major international events, the event signalled the arrival of South Africa and Africa on the world stage. It provided South Africa and Africa with over a month of invaluable positive media coverage that could pay dividends for years to come. Moreover, it demonstrated the extent to which football can unite a nation if not an entire continent" (Luginaah & Kefa, 2010;10).

2.5 MYTH AND SPORT

"The spectacular figure of the contemporary athlete evokes an inevitable approximation with the myth of the hero because it is used as a reference for the projection of someone who, even having faced the hardest trials and the worst enemies, brings with it the mark of victory" (Rubio, 2018;23). This is especially true of FPL players who had to endure the watchful eye of the apartheid regime while juggling their day jobs and still competing. Playing soccer in decades past was not considered a stable full-time career.

Rubio (2018;25) further explains that "heroes are often honoured by their community by virtue of their deeds and remembered through oral tradition. They're also represented from a moral or physical standpoint, depending on the goal". This may be representative of mythological heroes such as Odysseus, David (vs Goliath) and many others. But how exactly does this narrative feed into the figure of modern-day sport heroes? "For contemporary society the mythical referential of the hero has been widely used as a justification for competitive attitudes. In the specific case of sport, which stands out as one of the cultural manifestations of greater visibility, this reference gains doubled strength, since the maxim for the athlete is to win" (Rubio, 2018;28).

The FPL had numerous heroes that are remembered either in collective myth or memory. Dharam Mohan, Maniraj Singh, Shakes Mashaba and Ralph Henderickse among many others. Some of the words used to describe players include, magic, wizardry, stars and skilful. Irrespective of what the reality actually was, fans and the football community during that era remember players in their own way – as heroes who brought them joy, ecstasy and a welcome distraction from the humdrum of their lives. "The athlete's archetype experience of the hero is experienced in all its power in the many situations in which its virtues are proved in the demonstrations of strength and courae. And it cannot be denied that it is at the top of the podium, at the moment

of the celebration of an achievement, that the rite affirms the myth, and the athlete becomes a hero" (Rubio, 2018;22).

2.6 COLLECTIVE MEMORY

According to Roediger & DeSoto (2016) "collective memory refers to how groups remember their past". Expanding on the concept, Brown, Kouri and Hirst (2012;1) explain that collective memory help to shape a community's collective identity. They cite the example of World War 2, where Americans consider D-Day as the most important battle of the war, Russians consider the Battle of Leningrad to be the most critical. Wojcicka (2019;23) describes *Collective Memory* as being social, generational and communal. You would think that with so many people remembering something it would increase the accuracy of those memories. However, Roediger & DeSoto (2016) says that's not the case – in fact they refer to *collective forgetting* and cite the example of a study conducted in 1974, 1991 and 2009 and found varying results with how quickly certain US Presidents were forgotten.

Now, the FPL players, administrators and even fans recall certain aspects of the league. The players were very talented, the league was intent on sticking it to the apartheid government and that there was a sense of camaraderie and brotherhood. However, collective memory can also be a pitfall, because people remember things either inaccurately, or simply the way they want it to. "When people collectively recall the past, the act of retrieval has the potential to induce forgetting across individuals in similar ways, and like social contagion can also be an effective means for creating collective memories" (Brown, Kouri and Hirst 2012;1).

I found when speaking to the interviewees, many shared the sentiments about playing ability, the atmosphere and the nature of the sacrifices they had to make in order to keep the league going. I asked similar or the same questions in order to get their perspective on a topic as well as their personal accounts. Since there is little literature, television broadcasts or other media widely available on the FPL, it makes verifying claims and memories difficult. It's also possible that because of the community nature of the league and how it was run that a bias from those communities come into play. Hirst & Coman (2018:89-90) explain that group-bias can occur within communities and members of the same group because listeners are motivated to enhance their social relations with the speakers or their own communities. Then there is the *Mandela Effect* coined Paranormal Researcher Fiona Broome in 2009. She had believed former South African President Nelson Mandela had died in prison in the 1980s, despite him being released in 1990 and only passing in 2013. Prisco (2023) says numerous communal false memories have emerged that have cut across communities and countries and that according to psychologists, people remember things how think they are, rather than how they actually are. It's highly possible that is has occurred with the interviewees.

3. NARRATIVE AIM

The FPL's history is not as prominent as the NPSL or National Soccer League formed in 1985. Indeed Reiners (2017) wrote in an article that the 'FPL's influence had been airbrushed out of local football history'. While researching the topic further I found several Facebook groups and some community newspaper articles paying tribute to the players, administrators and clubs during the FPL's era. There are also occasional meetings and galas held through the FPL Legends group, who bring them together. However, many of the FPL's heroes are only celebrated by those who remember them.

And, there's no hall of fame beckoning posturing them like the Vikings ascent to the Halls of Valhalla. This is despite the fact that the FPL had some famous figures in its ranks. "There was a fantastic football culture in the FPL – top-class players, historic grounds and fantastic crowds – and, yet, speak to anybody who played during the FPL era (1969-1990) and they will tell you that football unity did them no favours. They feel left out, discarded, and their contribution to democracy in South Africa not recognised. There's a smattering of high-profile FPL stalwarts still around, like former Bafana Bafana coach Shakes Mashaba, Boebie Solomons and even Sifa president Danny Jordaan, who cut his administrative teeth in the Federation" (Reiners, 2017).

In this project I profiled some of those *forgotten heroes* and got their insights into the league, what motivated them to keep playing and the aura of mythology that surrounds the league. I included some of my own personal reflections of growing up hearing about these players. As a journalist in Durban, I'd often hear about the prowess of the FPL's players and the magic that spectators remember from the league. It was interesting to go on that journey down memory lane since I'm a football fan myself.

Another aspect I focused on was the mythological status enjoyed by the league and its players. Why did communities feel this way about them? Why are tribute matches and teams still organised and why do they continue to invest so much in memorialising the league? I believe the methodology used in terms of interviews and the Constructivist/Interpretivist approach definitely worked for this long-form project. The aim was to find out the players/administrators lived-experiences in the FPL while also getting historical perspectives, and to that end, it's largely successful. I toyed with the idea of adding in more people but I felt the narrative was already started to become too lengthy, especially because each *character* has to be introduced and the include their views. I used key themes and questions to section the narrative and structured it according to the historical timeline of the FPL. I added in some subjects and topics simply because the interviews sometimes went in that direction and I tried as much as possible to balance out the historical with the personal. I wanted to chart the saga of the league but an interesting way and interspersed with the reflections of players and administrators. The idea of how people remember the players and league is not just limited to the FPL, many people remember sporting heroes and football teams in their own way around the world. Fans often indulge themselves in nostalgia going back to a time when they enjoyed watching a match, player or football. The questions I asked and obtained more insights into were about, the importance of the FPL to non-racial football, it's success despite the apartheid government's policies, the motivation of players and administrators to take risks and what were some of the personal sacrifices that they made to keep playing the game they loved. It resulted in fascinating historical accounts and personal stories.

4. RATIONALE

“As far as today’s football is concerned, there has never been a body called the FPL. And, as such, because of the status quo, most former FPL footballers and officials have turned their backs on the sport. So, think of all that intellectual property that has been lost to the sport – the experience, the knowledge, the potential coaching nous and the principled administrative vision” (Reiners, 2017). My main motivation for this project is because I believe that it’s incredibly important to tell the stories of those involved in the FPL to give the so-called *forgotten league* wide prominence. The matches drew huge crowds and cemented soccer or football and South Africa’s most popular sport.

The league also made Currie’s Fountain in Durban a shrine to local football since many of the games were played there. The FPL was established after the Sharpeville Massacre (1960) and a few years before the Soweto Uprising (1976). Those two or three decades before the lifting of apartheid was a critical juncture in piling pressure on the regime. That resistance from players, clubs and even supporters was a key reason why FIFA eventually imposed some of the first-ever sanctions on the apartheid regime. It even had an impact on football’s world governing body itself. Henley (2013; 21-22) details how the third-world had become fed-up with then President Sir Stanley Rous who continuously supported FASA. In 1974, with the backing of numerous African countries, Joao Havelange President of the Brazilian Football Federation defeated Rous to take the helm at FIFA. His campaign, appealing to African countries by saying he would ostracise South Africa if he was successful. Havelange famously stated, “So long as I am in charge and apartheid still exists, South Africa will never come into FIFA”. He reaffirmed his support for the SASF.

Henley (2013, 22) notes that Havelange’s Presidency signalled a shift in FIFA which was “moving from an elitist Eurocentrism to a more global model”. But of course, the FIFA ban wouldn’t last. Sport had already been used as a way to fight for non-racial principles but it became even more critical in the 1980s when the threat of civil war was a real possibility. “South African Council on Sport (SACOS). SACOS was a key anti-apartheid institution in the context of state repression and economic subjugation. SACOS used sport at the local level as a platform to respond to central state policy in the political, economic and cultural domains, using sport to agitate for a non-racial society beyond sport” (Maralack 2010;44).

Then in 1990, came the day many South Africans had waited for. Then President FW De Klerk lifted the ban on banned political parties and apartheid’s 90 minutes were up. Sport and politics were intrinsic during the negotiation periods between 1990 and 1996 writes Maralack (2010;83). And that then ANC President Nelson Mandela argued that importance and the role sport had to play – “sport ... is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers”. In fact, most international sports bodies were happy to allow South Africa back into the fold once apartheid laws were repealed. Madiba even called the Jamaican Cricket Council to ask for their support in allowing the country back into the International Cricket Council. So, the role that the FPL played in getting South Africa back into World Soccer and perhaps even other codes of sport cannot be understated.

Apart from the broader context I also lasered in on the people of the FPL since many made personal sacrifices because the symbolism of what they were doing and their principles meant more to them than money and some cases, their safety. "A football official such as RK Naidoo took out a mortgage on his family home to help subsidise the non-racial South African Soccer Federation. Which sports official does that today?" (Roberts, 2015). In fact, many of the players and administrators I spoke to recalled the hand-to-mouth nature of the league. While Osman's Spices, Datsun and Mainstay were sponsors it wasn't enough and club owners and managers would often have to put in their own money just to keep things running or to pay players and staff. I further detailed this through accounts from players and administrators since there's basically no documentation available to refer to. This is not to say that all administrators and players made sacrifices because of league's non-racial stance. Indeed, for some of them, it was just about playing soccer and being remembered in the annals of the country's football history.

But that element of sacrifice remains and for all their efforts many of those who were in the FPL feel they've been side-lined in the modern era. The NPSL and NFL enjoyed much better sponsorship (the latter became defunct because of pressure from FIFA). Alegi (2006;421) points out that television played a huge part in making the NPSL commercially viable, something the FPL never enjoyed, "Television sparked soccer's commercial boom. Sponsorships increased substantially in the 1980s and top players began to earn a living wage. Vigorous corporate support and rising gate income underpinned the game's financial growth". The FPL thrived through a combination of sponsorship, self-funding and sacrifice. It would have been far easier for players and staff to throw in the towel and just join one of the other leagues. But they took into account the communities they were based in and the message they wanted to send. The SA Federation Soccer Legends was formed to honour, celebrate and remember the players and administrators who played critical roles in the FPL.

A further strong component of why I've undertaken to focus on football and the league in my project is because there isn't a dearth of writing that has been done on soccer in general in South Africa. "It is striking to note the limited number of academic (and non-academic) works on South African football. A major reason for the underdeveloped state of soccer scholarship in this country is a neglect of the game in intellectual and academic circles" (Alegi & Bolsmann, 2010).

The fact they thrived under such difficult conditions despite the difficult period they lived in and lack of resources and training is also an important element. "Most African, Coloured, and Indian players developed their skills as youths in township streets and school playgrounds. these spaces, individual ball control, grit, guile, and improvisation weighed the importance of off-the-ball movements, combination positional specialisation" (Alegi 2006;423).

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 FOOTBALL PRE AND POST APARTHEID

There are several scholarly and academic articles written about football in South Africa, its origins and throughout apartheid. Although football research in terms of what's been done with this project, is quite rare, whether academic or non-academic.

C Bolsmann (2010) has written extensively about football before and during apartheid between 1892 to 1977. This was my starting point and gave me really good insight into the history behind the different leagues and sporting bodies. Especially because I wanted to chart how football/soccer came to South Africa, its impact and the sort of identity role that it played during the apartheid era, since the leagues were separated. Similarly, P Raath (2002) wrote about the history of soccer and apartheid from 1862 to 2002 in his book *Soccer Through the Years 1862-2002*. He chronicles soccer's introduction to South Africa by the British all the way up to the World Cup in Korea/Japan, ironically the last of those tournaments Bafana Bafana qualified for as non-hosts. He goes into much detail about how some of the leagues were formed, conditions at the time, some player and coach anecdotes and generally the major flashpoints of football through the years. He's done extensive work to make the book one of the de facto readings on the South African football history.

Bolsmann and P Alegi (2010) have written about football research in academic circles. While discussing some of the works that have been done, they lament the fact that other sports codes such as cricket have far more research input compared to football. They believe this is because researchers find football (and even sports research) "superficial and banal". This is only fuelled my reasons for wanting to do this project, because within sports of football research itself lies social, political and even economic underpinnings which tell an entirely different story on their own. Indeed, Alegi P (2006) wrote about the plan to create a football heritage complex in KwaZulu-Natal to honour the legacy of the game's greatest players and shed more light on the country's footballing past. He argues that football being a sport of the black majority (Africans, Indians and Coloureds) provided an outlet to mobilise the sport in order to contribute meaningfully to the liberation of South Africa. The idea of the complex would act as a way to not only showcase football history, but account for the social and political power it had to fight the apartheid government.

It was also important to understand policies and how they worked during apartheid era and how this would have impacted players and the league itself. C Rademeyer (2013) charted the sporting policy of the National Party during the 1980s which I also read about to give me a better idea of the conditions for athletes during that time. This was also critical because the idea of SACOS and the FPL was to challenge the very foundations that the segregated football was built upon. The 80s as he writes was also a time where the final nail was starting to be hammered into the coffin of non-integrated sport, since the various leagues had already started to combine with each other. Many countries came on fact-finding missions to South Africa to see how different types of sport were being played and were less than thrilled at what they found. This only served to place more pressure on the regime at the time and showed intertwined politics and sport had become. T Henley (2013), focused on the politics around FIFA

where I drew a lot of information on the historical elements in terms of the development of the FPL and other leagues in terms of the wider context of the geopolitics at that time. He writes that the winds of change were not just blowing in South Africa but globally since football was becoming less euro-centric and more of a worldwide game. This was due to the fact that countries such as Brazil had become far more influential, winning World Cups, while the commercial element of revenue from football had started to take off. Non-European nations had also begun to see the importance of football in a political and social context and had put South Africa firmly in their cross-hairs because of the apartheid regime.

D Maralack (2010) meanwhile discussed the transformation of sport in post-apartheid South Africa and what it means for identity. He deliberates on the fact that transformation in sport had still not been fully achieved by 2010 and why challenges still persist despite 16-years of democracy. And, the idea of a post-apartheid national identity through the use of sport. He's off the belief that sustainable sport transformation should be a multi-scaled project rather than a single national project and conducted by multiple players. This was essential because I drew a link from the previous regime all the way to hosting the World Cup and development itself in football. Speaking of the World Cup I Luginaah & K Otiso (2010) was my reference point for the World Cup itself and the effect it had. This again speaks to the development aspect because South Africa hosting the tournament as the first African nation was a momentous one. They argue that the perception of Africa, in some ways, had not come full circle and that the image of the continent would change with the hosting of the World Cup. Further, Lunginaah & Otiso chronicle the social influence football has had in many African countries. I felt I could not do this project without at least mentioning the soccer spectacle since the FPL and other leagues which eventually culminate in what many consider to be South Africa's greatest soccer victory, at least off the pitch.

5.2 THE FPL

Scholarly or academic articles on the FPL are basically non-existent. There are smatterings here and there of opinion articles, some by former administrators, players of fans but otherwise almost nothing.

There's information available in terms of who the top scorers were, team sheets and scores. However, these do not for a good narrative piece make. Also, I came across a book that describes numerous players in the league with an accompanying photo, but it does little to flesh out the actual story. I looked at some old newspaper articles, tributes at official gatherings over the years and even social media where possible. However, actually speaking to the people who were part of the league proved to be the best way to flesh everything out. Their insights and memories were invaluable.

However, something I definitely wanted to mention in this project is Curries Fountain, which I knew from growing up in Durban and considered a haven for sport, especially during the apartheid era. T Asmal (2014) tribute book provides an insight into what was known as *the mecca of non-racial sport*. "I had heard so many interesting and passionate stories about all the events at Curries but was amazed that it was not documented" (Asmal, 2014).

5.3 MYTH, NOSTALGIA & COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Myth and nostalgia play an important role in this long-form piece. For the idea of myth and sport I looked at K Rubio's (2018) writing. He discussed contemporary figures, who through their deeds, became mythological figures whose status was elevated to that of a hero. I thought his contribution, in particular, was important for the story I wanted to tell, when considering the memories that players evoke for fans of the FPL. Further, I thought it was critical to have the myth and nostalgia themes since my work relied on collective memories and where possible, written content, to recount heroic feats. The nostalgia element for many is why, despite there not being a lot of mainstream media available, the FPL remains in the hearts and minds of people. FE Thomas's (2018), *The visual culture of football – heritage and nostalgia in ground moves*, allowed me to understand the idea of nostalgia in sport. Thomas uses the example of Scunthorpe United, which in 1988 became the first English football club in 33 years to move to a new stadium (this has happened quite often since then). He discusses the notion of identities that contribute to how people feel, regarding the new and the old environments and the transference of old and new – in other words a sense of nostalgia. In addition, I also considered a succinct article by oldschoolfotball.co.uk that speaks about the social connection that football brings to fans and interacting with each other. It was written in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the fact events, and especially sport events were not allowed.

Collective Memory is something I also wanted to look at and how and why people remember things in a certain way. This led me to something referred to as the *Reminiscence Bump*. As I read more, I came across E Dolan's (2015) writing about this psycho-social paradigm that while not rooted in football or soccer, certainly has applications to sports through the eyes of fans, players and administrators. Research has shown that our memory can be faulty and we may not remember things the way they actually happen, but how we thought it should have happened. A Brown, N Kouri & W Hirst agree with that sentiment writing about how memory shapes collective memory and social identity, since it has been shown that even large groups people can remember events incorrectly. W Hirst & A Coman explained that remembering is an act of communication. While HL Roediger KA DeSoto conducted studies to test the collective memory of university students over a number of years. Finally, M Wojcicka's book looks at collective memory and oral text and how they play a role in the relationship between memory and language.

5.4 PSYCHOLOGY AND ECONOMICS

Two other aspects I considered are psychology and economics of football. R Giulianotti & R Robertson (2014) examine the globalisation of football and the sociological impacts and the so-called 'cultural connectivity' it creates. Further, because of particular identities, for example if people grow up in a town that supports their local team, it's expected that individual members will identify what team and continue supporting them. This formed part of my own considerations in terms of how and why the FPL was supported and still retains some form of popularity. D Gafà's (2014) research cites the powerful impact nostalgia can have, specifically for football fans and attempts to answer the question many have asked - why is football so

popular? At the same time, he considers how football has harnessed its commercial power to become a huge money-spinner.

5.5 METHODOLOGIES

Methodologies on how to approach the long-form project were also key. V Jupp's SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods was critical in enabling a better understanding of conducting social research. C Kivunja & AB Kuyini (2017) gave me a better grasp of research paradigms. I relied on S Mashuri, MSA Rasak, F Alhabsyi & H Syam (2022) to learn more about semi-structured interviews which were used to speak to role-players. R Miller & J Brewer's (2003) take on the Constructivist/Interpretivist paradigm was used as part of my research approach. BE Neubauer, CT Witkop & L Varpio (2019) explained more on the phenomenology approach to collecting information through qualitative methods as did DW Smith (2018). LJ van der Walt was the point of reference for epistemology and the subjectivity of people who are interviewed. C Nickerson (2023) helped with the methodology of Hermeneutics which involves asking open-ended questions and establishing relationships with subjects, which is something I wanted to do. Finally, C Wagner, Kawulich & M Garner's (2012) academic book on social research was used for various parts of the methodology of research, it's a reading that comes highly recommended by many universities because it simplifies

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1 RESEARCH

Using essays, research and available material, I managed to reconcile historical and personal accounts of the people I interviewed. This was important because there's actually not a lot of written material on the FPL. There have been some studies done on football research in South Africa as a whole, but as previously stated there isn't a dearth available. There are several research papers that have been written on sport and soccer during the apartheid era that include historical flashpoints, policies and developments. My literature review also encompasses the popularity that surrounds football and soccer as well perspectives on nostalgia, myth and the psychology of sports fans. Instead of this being a more historically aligned project, I found out who the characters, famous figures and people were. I managed to get some newspaper clippings and other material but disappointingly I couldn't use these in the essay since they were about the matches themselves (match reports) and not about the league itself. However, it was useful look at, in terms of how the league was covered and its seeming popularity.

6.2 INTERVIEWS

I interviewed several of the players and one former administrator. They gave me their accounts and were open to discussing not only football, but the politics at that time and even their personal history. This certainly helped flesh out the story and place them as characters in a wider story of the league and part of South Africa's footballing history. It was extremely important to do face-to-face interviews since my primary questions were "open-ended and longer, and more in-depth responses were sought" (Maruyama 2014; 400). According to Guthrie (119; 2010), unstructured interviews can be used to gather qualitative data, can be in-depth, used to obtain sensitive information as well as factual information. This was important because I not only wanted information on the league itself, but the lived experiences of those I spoke to as well.

I prepared a question sheet beforehand to help guide me through the interviews and I asked additional questions in the process. I was unable to speak to all the interviewees face-to-face because of availability and location (James George for example, lives in Cape Town). However, this did not diminish their enthusiasm and willingness to speak. I used semi-structured interviews which according to Mashuri Rasak, Alhabsyi & Syam (2022;24) "enable a researcher to go deep for a discovery". It's useful for exploring the life story of a person and allows for new questions to be brought in. I tried in earnest to reconcile the personal accounts with histories during the interviews but this wasn't always possible because there is not a lot of information available on the FPL. So, the idea of collective memory and possible inaccuracy is present but that does not diminish the story any less. While memory may be imperfect, the lived experiences and how these players remember them is very important.

6.3 CONSTRUCTIVIST/INTERPRETIVIST PARADIGM

I reasoned that the Constructivist/Interpretivist approach would work for this project because I wanted to chronicle how those who participated in the FPL, experienced the league, their life at the time and the world. “Constructivism and Interpretivism are related concepts that address understanding the world as others experience it” (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner 55; 2012).

According to (Miller & Brewer 2003;66) in constructivism, knowledge is gained from social processes and interaction and the normal knowledge and social knowledge do not differ. “Terms through which we understand the world and ourselves are social artefacts, produced over historic time through exchanges between people within cultures” (Jupp 69; 2006). Further, it is a research paradigm that “encompasses participant observation, interviews, document analysis and narrative analysis” (Nickerson, 2023), all of which were important components of my project.

6.3.1 Ontological Assumptions

The Constructivist/Interpretivist paradigm subscribe to reality being social constructed and that reality is dependent on an individual's mind – in other words a personal or social construct (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner 56; 2012).

6.3.2 Epistemology

According to van der Walt (2020;61-66) Constructivist/Interpretivist paradigm is concerned with subjectivity, of the person being interviewed or literature studies, as well as the interpretation of the data. The researcher expresses their understanding of how the world works and the value of subjectivity is greater than objectivity.

6.3.3 Axiology

“Constructions assert that, since reality is constructed and mind dependent and knowledge is subjective, social inquiry is in turn value-bound and value-laden” (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner 56; 2012). Further, Kivunja & Kuyini (2017;33) state that the researcher interprets data through their own meaning that's often determined by interaction with participants and therefore constructs knowledge socially with those personal experiences.

6.3.4 Methodology

Hermeneutics was originally the study of sacred texts to determine the meaning of phrases from those texts but evolved into understanding “human context in action” (Nickerson, 2023). The method of research usually involves open-ended questions and attempts to understand people's experiences and the researcher needs to establish their own subjectivity, values and ideologies and relationships to those they are interviewing (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner 56;2012). “An emphasis on the context, particularly the historical one, as a frame for understanding, because human behaviour and ideas must be understood in context, rather than in isolation” (Nickerson, 2023).

6.3.5 Phenomenology

“Phenomenology studies structures of conscious experience as experienced from the first-person point of view, along with relevant conditions of experience. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, the way it is directed through its content or meaning toward a certain object in the world (Smith 2018; 3). Lester (1999;1) states that Phenomenology is concerned with gathering information through qualitative methods such as interviews and using their experiences to present those perspectives in research. “Hermeneutic phenomenology, then, seeks to *understand the deeper layers of human experience that lay obscured beneath surface awareness and how the individual’s lifeworld*, or the world as he or she pre-reflectively experiences it, influences this experience. Hermeneutic phenomenology studies individuals’ narratives to understand what those individuals experience in their daily lives, in their *lifeworlds*” (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio 2019;94).

6.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

THE EXPERIENCES OF THOSE WHO WERE INVOLVED IN THE FEDERATION PROFESSIONAL LEAGUE AND WHY ITS LEGACY ENDURES TODAY

Sub questions

WHY IS THE LEAGUE NOT WIDELY REMEMBERED THE WAY OTHERS ARE?

WHA ROLE DID THE LEAGUE PLAY IN NON-RACIAL SOCCER IN SOUTH AFRICA?

6.5 SAMPLING

It didn’t make sense for me to use random sampling or other methods since the population size I wanted to use was only those involved in the FPL. Purposive Sampling was decided to be the best method. “The researcher relies on his or her own experience, previous research or ingenuity to find the participants in such a manner that they can be considered to be representative of the population and usually uses specific selection criteria to identify the most suitable individuals (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner 56; 2012). I used Vincent Pillay as my starting point since he is the admin of the SA Fed Soccer Legends and knows numerous players and administrators. This led me to find others who could be interviewed but having access to them was also based on their own availability/willingness to be interviewed and not all of them were keen. I kept the sample size small (8-10 people) to avoid the narrative part of the long-form project becoming too bulky.

7. NARRATIVE APPROACH

I've told the story of the FPL using accurate historical information available but going deeper into the story of the league and the people who participated in it. I managed to get their views on why people flocked to the league and it being a sort of distraction from what was happening during the apartheid era. In the final write-up I divided the piece into several sections while introducing each character and then linking their views to the particular theme of what was being discussed. This aligned with my prepared questions and is ultimately what I wanted to get out of this.

8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since sport, segregation and race are highly charged subjects, I was very careful in my approach. I obtained ethical clearance from Wits and introduced the topic to my interviewees providing them with the relevant documentation in order to proceed.

Copies of the recordings, notes etc can be made available to them on request.

Data/interview notes have been stored on a password protected computer.

Since some of the administrators and players who will be mentioned and discussed have already died, I've taken great care in how I represent them.

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FPL - The football league that time forgot

“The FPL legacy’s is that the players from there are irreplaceable. That legacy is going to remain for years. When the last generation of the FPL fades, that will be the end of the league” – Bharath Harisunker.

It’s an overcast day in Durban, in January. Despite the sun not being able to peek through the clouds, it doesn’t make the city I grew up in less humid. The beachfront is busy despite it being the middle of the week, with people walking on the promenade. I look across the blue sea glittering a like sapphire waiting for a group of people to finish their thrice-weekly walk.

Most of them are in their mid to late 70s now, but retain the vigour of men half their age. No doubt, a result of their constant training and fitness from years gone by. Along with that, their strides evoke a sense of pride and purpose. When I think back at seeing them, it was like looking through blurred glasses, the outlines of formidable figures, that quickly fade away when the picture becomes clearer. An indication of what was once, but is no longer.

Attempting to acclimatise myself to the Durban humidity after years of living in Johannesburg, I make my approach. The people who stand before me are former players and administrators of the Federation Professional League (FPL). A football league during the apartheid era that played an instrumental role in promoting non-racial sports. A league was responsible for some of the first sanctions ever being imposed on the apartheid regime. A league that stood up for its principles and beliefs.

But, if you ask most people now about the FPL, their response would be, ‘what’s that?’, or ‘did something like that exist’? That reaction is where the story ends. But it’s also where another story begins. To tell that story, we need to travel back in time, more than half a century in fact, to a different era, where South Africa was as foreign as Timbuktu compared to how it is now.



Bharath Harisunker (blue shirt) was with Manning Rangers for nearly 50 years

Frankenstein's Monster

It's alive!!! That's what Dr Frankenstein screamed when his monster, created from spare body parts, wakes in the classic Mary Shelley horror. It was a similar situation for the FPL. Although the horror, or monster in this case, was the apartheid system. The FPL was brought to life after the disbandment of the South African Soccer League (SASL) in 1967.

Under the banner of the South African Council on Sport (SACOS), the FPL kicked-off in 1969. Unlike the whites-only National Football League (NFL) and National Professional Soccer League (NPSL), which mostly comprised of black players, the FPL was intent on giving the apartheid government the proverbial two fingers, by allowing anyone to join and play, irrespective of their race.

Now, you wouldn't initially get that feeling from the group that I spoke to at Durban's beachfront. There's a twinkle in their eye when they talk about the FPL, but they seem more like calm retirees rather than rabble rousers. However, that defiance in itself paved the way for the football and sport that many people get to experience today.

Sitting under the shade of a tree I listen to their stories recalling their heydays. Bharath Harisunker is 74 now but spent 48 years of his life involved with Manning Rangers Football Club. Rangers was one of the clubs that eventually joined the Premier Soccer League (PSL) that unified all leagues. He grew up watching football matches with this father at the Mayville Grounds.

Harisunker was initially involved with the SASL and Avalon Athletic Football Club. However, he left when Avalon folded and got involved at the supporter's club of Manning Rangers in the late 60s. He never played football professionally, but worked in the background as an administrator in various roles. He recalls how the FPL began.

"When the SASL folded, the SASF still continued and they came up with the Federation Professional League. Division one had the amateur teams, where you had twelve teams and then you had all the big guns".

He admits it wasn't easy to set up the FPL and a lot had to be done to get it off the ground, considering that the then government didn't even want it to happen.

"If you look at it, the time of the SASL, the people who fought tooth-and-nail for non-racial football, they really burned the midnight oil. They left no stone unturned. Because we were marginalised, no facilities, nothing, we just had to make do with what we had", Harisunker says.

After meeting with them I'm on my way to another destination. Just a few streets from the promenade near Durban's infamous Mini-Town is Somtseu Road. Its claim-to-fame is the Durban ice-rink. The irony of having an ice-rink in one of the hottest cities in South Africa is not lost on any Durbanite.

I'm on the 10th floor of an apartment building overlooking the ice-rink. Scattered across couches are old newspaper clippings, articles and printed tribute books. They belong to Vincent Pillay. A teacher and then principal, he spent 40 years of his career in

education. He's part of the SA Fed Soccer Legends, a group created to remember FPL players and administrators and celebrate their legacy.

He grew up in Sydenham in Durban and football was always in his blood. He played on sandy pitches, sometimes well after dark when the sun had already set. At a young age, he was already collecting trophies. He won the Junior Footballers League and the KO Cup with the Admiral Lads.

He then joined the team they had beaten in that specific final, Sparks United. He was with them for two years when Pillay was approached by a team with which he would go on to spend a decade with.

"At the end of my second year, I was approached by Verulam Suburbs, together with Preston Julius. We were sitting at Curries Fountain watching a soccer game and Valiant Ally was there with Preston. We were always together, Preston and I. Valiant was speaking to Preston saying they're going to sign him as a Centre Forward for Verulam Suburbs. Valiant was there inside right. In those days you had five forwards. Valiant was number eight, Preston would be the number nine. They were looking for a number seven, which was right winger. So, Preston told him, why are you looking high and low, when there's a right winger sitting right next to you? So, I told Preston if you're going to (Verulam) Suburbs then we'll go together because we were teammates at Sparks United".



Vincent Pillay (left) in his prime

Looking back, the move was prophetic. Pillay would be remembered as one of those people quoted in football trivia. When the English Premier was launched in 1991, Brian Deane scored the league's first ever goal for Sheffield United in a 2–1 win against Manchester United. It was exactly the same for Pillay.

“I spent ten years at Suburbs as a number seven and played a lot of lovely games. The most memorable was when I represented Suburbs against Transvaal to launch the FPL. That was in July 1969. I scored the opening goal after 20 minutes. So, technically speaking, I launched the FPL by scoring the first goal. At the end of that year, we won the Southern Grand Challenge Series, unbeaten. We also won the FPL”.

It's not just players and administrators who recall the spectacle of the FPL. Brijlall Ramguthee is a veteran journalist whose career spanned around 45-years. He calls himself a ‘country bumpkin’ having grown up on a farm near the Umgeni River.

Ramguthee was initially a freelancer, then clerk worker for now defunct Leader Newspaper. He turned down a wage clerk position elsewhere to follow his passion of becoming a full-time journalist. He joined The Post Newspaper in 1969, back then called the Golden City Post and never looked back.

“I did all sorts of things, on a mission to learn as much as I could. I freelanced as a news reporter. I then got full time into news and then into sport. That eventually led to my growth. I held the position of news and sports editor at one stage. Eventually, I became Editor of Post in 1988 which was then Post Natal. In 1989 I was appointed to the full-time position of Editor until my retirement in 2010”.

He initially covered amateur football but was thrust fully into all fields of sport when the then Sports Editor at the Post, Devan Moodley moved to the Sunday Tribune. That's what led to Ramguthee covering the FPL.

“I covered among others, the FPL soccer league. I covered every other sport. Prior to that I covered the SASL, that was the overarching body of non-racial soccer. Then of course it was the Federation Professional League which featured teams like Berea, Manning Rangers, Verulam Suburbs, Tongaat Crusaders, Cape Town Spurs, Vereeniging Old Boys, Swaraj, Blue Bells, Martizburg United, Real Taj of Pietermaritzburg”.

Cross-country

If you travel around 625km north on the N3, you'll find yourself in the smallest province in the country with the largest population - Gauteng. Before you get into Johannesburg, there's a town to the south of the city called Lenasia. I often lament that having to go there feels like travelling to another province without having left Gauteng.

However, ‘Lens/Lenz’ as it's more colloquially known is an important piece of the FPL puzzle. Arguably, the two biggest teams in the province played there – Blue Bells and Swaraj FC. Dynamos was another. Speaking to a work colleague who grew up in Lens, he tells me that football in the area actually helped development because it brought various communities within Lens together.

Sam Reddy played for Swaraj in the 60s. He lives in Tongaat, just north of Durban, but grew up in what were known as the ‘Barracks’. They were essentially compounds created for poor families who couldn't afford housing of their own. Reddy lived in the

Sugar Cane Mill Barracks in what is now known as Mount Edgecombe, one of Durban's more affluent areas.

Life wasn't so sweet back then except for being able to play soccer, something Reddy relished. "The only thing about the Barracks life is that there was a football ground and there were trees all around the ground. In the event that we played, we got a crowd. In the barracks there was nothing else to do. No electronic games, even radio and radiograms it was few and far between. After school or holidays or weekends, there's nothing to do besides going to the grounds".

Because life was tough, Reddy and his friends would fashion footballs from brown paper packets and newspapers. They would tie it with twine and then kick it. After learning the art of control from the makeshift-ball he then went on to play for his primary and high school sides, which earned him various nicknames.

"I had lots of energy, they called me Horse, for my energy and they called me Sugar Cane Boy. They also called me Black Sam because we had one guy, Sam Brown, who played for us in the 70s, very good midfielder. And we had Sam Murdoch. So, we had one brown, we had white, and I was in the middle", he says.

But Reddy wasn't really interested in having a football career. After landing a teaching college job in Fordsburg, he trained with Swaraj's second team. An attorney that he was boarding with asked the club why he wasn't being given a chance to play. He was then picked for a match in Boksburg and came on when the regular left back was injured. The rest was history.

"From the bench they said Sam go play left back. I had never kicked with my left leg in my life. I played and then the next match I took over left back and became first-choice. At that time, we didn't play in the FPL, it was freelance. We only joined the FPL in 1974. I was never put on the bench, I was never replaced or substituted. The right back got injured and then I went there".



Sam Reddy and I pictured together at his home

Durban and Gauteng were not the only places that had FPL teams. Cape Town did too. The FPL initially comprised of 12 teams from around the country and various football associations would also host annual or bi-annual matches between different regional soccer bodies.

Cape Town Spurs were the most successful team in the FPL, winning the league for a record seven times. James 'Yataghan' George was part of that history. He grew up in Woodstock and his first club was Squares AFC. Clubs such as Blackpool and Hotspurs would play under the auspices of the Western Cape Football Association.

Cape Town Spurs was then formed and was owned by officials from the Western Cape. George says because of this, they picked the cream of the crop, in terms of talent. He joined the club after a recommendation by a fellow player.

"They came and beat us, I think 3-1, and Dougie Carelse had just come from England and he was with Cape Town Spurs and Dougie said to Don Richards, we need to get this guy into the team. I started with all great players, Rashid Khan, Joey Lawrence, the list was endless. That's when I started and gained momentum".

George would eventually make his way to Durban and join Berea FC in 1975. That's because the dominant Cape Town Spurs team that won four titles up until then started to dismantle itself.

"In 1974 we played Berea FC in a knockout cup final at Curries Fountain. We were leading 3-1, they beat us 4-3. After that, there was an exodus of players from Cape Town Spurs who left for Durban. It was the big five – Sieraaj Abbas, Boebie Solomons, John Leguma, Rashid Khan and Mansoor Abdullah. That was the nucleus of the Cape Town Spurs team who left", he says.



James George was a speedy winger

George never went back to Cape Town except to get married. In addition to joining Berea FC, he was also offered a job and accommodation - as long as he continued his dominant displays on the left wing. It even earned him a nickname - Yataghan.

“The late Mr Naidoo who was the PRO for the breweries in Cape Town. He called me Yataghan, that horse won the July handicap. The most famous horse at the time. That name stuck. They made the announcement at the Athlone stadium or wherever I went, the name just stuck”.

Brijlall Ramguthee even recalls George’s moniker.

“James had a nickname called Yataghan, it was the name of a horse. And James used to gallop like a horse. The very astute manager Don Moodley was responsible for signing him”.

Helping the apartheid government score own-goals

The apartheid regime did itself no favours when it came to sport during the 60s and 70s. FIFA suspended South Africa from the body after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960. 69 people were killed for anti-pass law demonstrations.

The apartheid government wanted to field an all-white team in the 1966 World Cup which FIFA flatly rejected. In 1976, South Africa was expelled from the body after the Soweto Uprising. Hundreds of black school pupils were killed in a protest of Afrikaans being introduced as a medium of instruction.

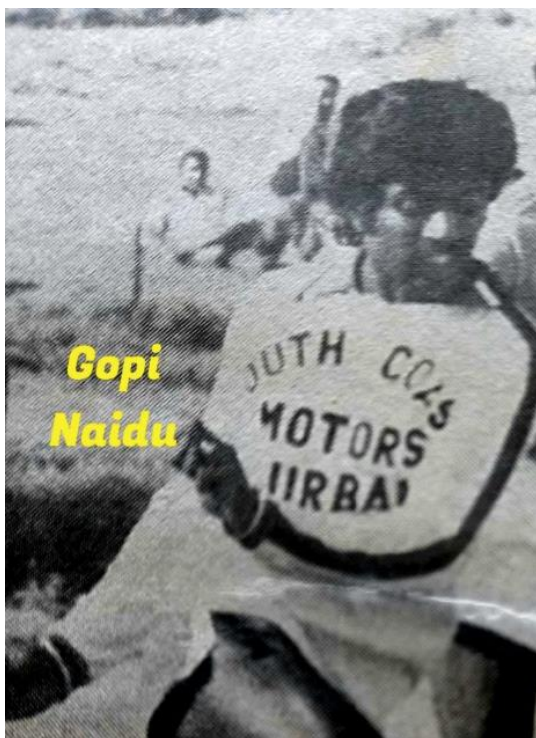
The FPL and SACOS were at the forefront of fighting for inclusive football. SACOS even had a tagline ‘no normal sport in an abnormal society’. By challenging the status quo, the FPL showed people that on and off the pitch, racial segregation was not the way forward.

“There were groups of people who used politics and sports as a tool to bring unity in this country. One of the groups was SACOS. One of the experiences I had was that I was picked for the SACOS national side. While at that tournament I witnessed an official asking a player to leave the arena. I asked what’s going on. They said we don’t want him here, because he’s a top baseball player but he’s joined the white league.

This is a non-racial league and we don't want him here. That was the staunch views that SACOS had", says Gopi Naidoo

Naidoo came from a family of athletes where being a sportsman was as natural as breathing air. He played in a number of positions through his career from amateur to the professional ranks. Naidoo's career kicked-off after a group of players he played with spoke well of him while in a team based in Stamford Hill.

"They recommended me to my uncle, who was the manager of Stamford Hill. Please come have a look at him and we can sign him. On a Saturday, he came home, stayed over. We went to the grounds and while my uncle was standing there, the players came up to him and he said, where's this player you're talking about? They said, he's standing next to you. He said this is my bloody nephew!"



Sport was a strong facet of Gopi Naidoo's family

For many of the players, the stance against racial football was an important component of why they chose to play in the FPL. The other side of it was that they just wanted to play soccer and give something back to their communities.

"It was linked to SACOS and that's how they started, they catered for non-racialism. I wasn't too involved on the political side, we just wanted to play soccer. It afforded Blue Bells an opportunity to do that. Because my brothers played for Swaraj, when Swaraj joined the Federation, I went back to them".

This was certainly the case for Goona Padayachee. He grew up in what he refers to as the 'ghetto' in Vererstown. It was perhaps more famously known as Malay-cap. He lived alongside Chinese, Black, Lebanese, Coloured and Indian neighbours. When the Group Areas Act was introduced, Padayachee's family moved to Overton.

He then found himself in Lens and became involved with Swaraj FC, first as a midfielder and then in various other positions on the pitch.

“Swaraj was a touring team and they would invite predominantly teams from the Black and Coloured communities. In those days we were only allowed to play against the Black and Coloured teams, we weren’t allowed to play against the White teams. We’d get teams like Hungry Lions, Pirates and Moroka Swallows and City Blacks. We were the only mixed team”, says Padayachee.



Goona Padayachee had a very long career

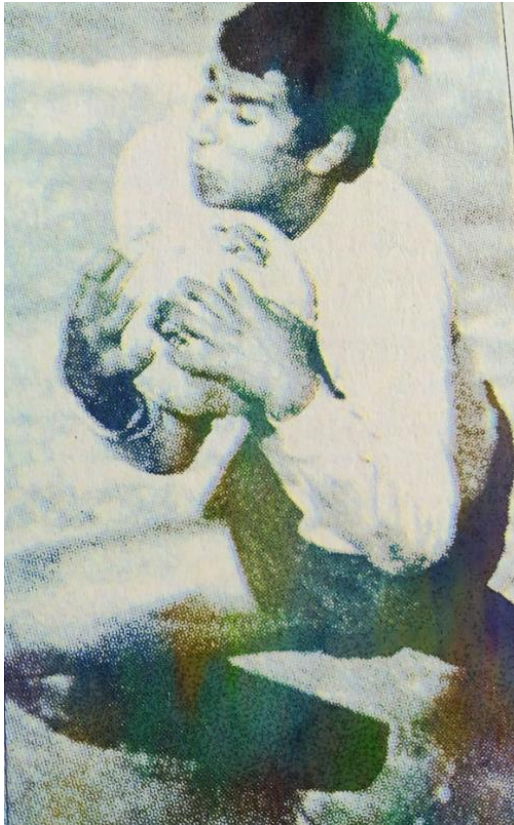
One of his teammates at Swaraj was Baboo Kalichuran. A well-respected goalkeeper, Kalichuran became involved in soccer because of this father. He began playing in the amateur and then semi-professional leagues in Vrededorp. He played for Blue Bells after he was approached by them. That lasted six weeks until he decided to rather pursue his studies.

He joined Swaraj in 1974 but could only manage a few years before a serious knee injury cut his career short. Kalichuran says being part of a non-racially aligned league was never a problem.

“I played in the Southern Transvaal Football Union and that was multi-racial. Playing under a multi-racial one wasn’t a problem. I was playing multi-racial football from the age of seven. So, it was nice playing with different people”.

He recalls that while some players decided to join the NPSL, he decided not to go that route.

“We took non-racial football very seriously. I was offered to play for Kaizer Chiefs which I didn’t go to. You got to know a lot of players among Coloureds and Blacks. A lot of the players in the FPL were Coloureds and Indians, but then it opened up,” he remembers.



Baboo Kalichuran was considered a safe pair of hands

Bharath Harisunker remembers a defining moment from the 60s, where clubs, players and administrators made a choice to stick it to the NFL. In Durban, the main NFL teams were Durban City and Durban United. The irony of two clubs being in a Whites-only league, is that the spectators were mostly people of colour.

“In the mid-60s Viv Grangier was the President of the NFL. He banned black spectators from coming and watching the games. We had to take a stand. Why must we follow Durban City, Durban United? We’ve got Avalon, Berea and Aces here. We started drifting and just when the drift started, then they tried to put the resources back”, Harisunker says.

Ramguthie says they would often cover the politics of sport, even though there was the constant threat of reprisal from the regime. He explains that while the FPL was initially regarded as a league just for Indian and Coloured players things eventually changed.

“There were players from the black community who played football and so where players from the white community. It was a slow process but they eventually came and joined. At one stage a team like Durban City, which was considered all white, also played in the FPL. So did Durban United. It was integration at its best”.

For Sam Reddy the idea of playing with other races started when he was still a child.

“When it came to sport, there were two White boys, they used to play with us. Sometimes they would take across the fence to their park. One of them had a big

house and the yard was like a golf course. He would take a few us and play football in that yard”.

That theme continued during his career with Swaraj.

“When I went to play for Swaraj, we had Black players, we had Indian players, we had Coloured players. In 1976, White players came in. For me, racism and racial segregation it never hit me”, he says.

He acknowledges that the administrators of the FPL were the unsung heroes who made inclusive football a reality.

“The officials of the FPL, RK Naidoo, our top office bearers. They sacrificed a lot. How we now think of Mac Maharaj, Phyllis Naidoo and how they were against the apartheid regime. They were in the same situation. They were not in politics, but politics was in the game now. Their lives were on the line. They could have been targeted. But still they stuck to what they believed in, non-racial football”, he says.

Vincent Pillay says even merely speaking about non-racial football could get them into trouble. He recalls that during Eastern tournaments, especially in the Transvaal, they would sit in darkness during awards evenings and even block out the windows. There was a fear that the police would arrest them.

Being principled on the field was one thing, but Pillay says there were times where they had to do something off the field as well. They couldn’t go into townships to fetch their Black teammates and normally couldn’t even have meals together. But there was one day when they decided enough was enough.

“So, one evening we were quite late from training and went to the Imperial Hotel for supper. When they saw the Black players, they said sorry, you have to leave the Black players out. Only Indians and Coloureds can come in. So, we told them you either accept us as a team or accept no one. We went in and had our meal, all hush, hush. That’s how bad it was”.

But according to Pillay ultimately sticking to their guns is what actually helped South Africa back into FIFA’s good graces.

“In 1990, South Africa was still banned from world football and the FPL held the trump card, we were multi-racial. Our officials were having secret meetings in then Rhodesia to discuss the readmittance of South Africa into world football. And the only way they can allow that is by unifying the NPSL, the FPL and NFL. We were the drawcard, we were non-racial”.

Gopi Naidoo says that despite the tense atmosphere at the time, as well as the fear of reprisal for speaking out, some people gave no quarter. He recalls attending an athletics function in Cape Town where an administrator lambasted the mayor who was invited to this event.

He recalls what was said: “I want you to remember this, we’re taking part in athletics at the Green Point Track. We had applied two years ago for the Green Point Stadium,

everything was going off well until you realised a month ago that you're having a function there and now moving us to Green Point Track. I dare you to come to Green Point Track and have a look at the conditions. It's an absolute disgrace to stop young children from playing. I was shocked because at that time there was a feeling that Whites were superior and here you have somebody who was the mayor of the city. The mayor just said thank you for the invitation, I wish you well and left. He couldn't face that".

The mecca of non-racial football

I was disappointed as a child to learn there was no fountain of curry at Curries Fountain. But why name it that then, I thought? The name comes from H.W. Currie who, in 1978, devised a water pumping plant to save Durban from a serious water famine.

Curries Fountain, the shortened name being just 'Curries', is not like the Moses Mabhida Stadium built for the 2010 World Cup. It's not shiny, or new and doesn't have state-of-the-art facilities. In fact, if you've ever been there, you'd be mistaken for thinking that it's some sort of normal school ground.

However, it's actually one of the most historic sites in Durban and, by extension, South Africa. When Queen Elizabeth II visited the city in 1947, the parade was at Curries. It was increasingly used for political rallies in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. When liberation movements were unbanned, they used Curries as a meeting place. Exiled leaders too were welcomed at the stadium.

But apart from Curries political significance, a strong facet of its usage was sport, in particular football. It hosted numerous soccer games including FPL matches. It's why Curries was given the moniker, 'the mecca of non-racial football'.

People who were around in the heyday of the FPL recall the atmosphere at the ground, which thrilled thousands of spectators.

Bharath Harisunker, who worked behind-the-scenes to attract fans to the ground, is particularly proud that the turnout at Curries was regularly larger than the local NFL matches.

"The games were electrifying. Kingsmead used to play at 3, Currie's used to play at 3. At Currie's Fountain, you've got 20 000 at Kingsmead you've got 2 000. What they did was switch their games to Sunday morning at 10, then supporters can take a walk or bus and go to Currie's and watch their team play. They tried it, it did not work. Eventually when it failed and the crowd's started dwindling, the NFL had to fold. They had no option".

As a player, Gopi Naidoo says there was something special about playing at Curries Fountain and that any issues on the field stayed there.

"It was fun to be part of that because whether your team won or lost, the camaraderie and atmosphere was good. While you're there you're fighting each other, but once the

game was over, you grabbed each other and walked out. It was the same with spectators, the banter while the game was on was very bitter, but once the game was done, it was back to being friends”.

They say a crowd often makes a game and can even impact a team's morale. Standing at the centre of Curries Fountain, I close my eyes and try to image throngs of people cheering on their favourite team. When I spoke to Baboo Kalichuran, he gave me an idea of what that was like.

“It was like playing at Wembley. You know you're going to get a crowd. Today, your crowd makes matches and you're thinking about it and getting very excited. You couldn't wait for the game to start. It was a lovely and heart-warming experience”.

Since Ramguthee covered numerous matches at the ground his mind is still sharp about the sights and sounds from there.

“There was a buzz before the big matches. Very colourful and the fans were fanatical. Watching the crowds and the colourful attire making their way to the stadium and the outer fields, it was a spectacle to behold. It was more like a social outing on a Sunday”.

As important as Curries was, it doesn't hold the monopoly on being the only FPL stadium of import. The Lenasia Soccer Stadium was equally critical in gathering support for the league and ensuring that spectators enjoyed games.

“We played in Lens, at the Lenasia Soccer stadium. But the atmosphere used to be roaring when Swaraj played Blue Bells. Because both teams are from Lens. For about a week or two weeks it was the talk of the town. There the camaraderie was good even though we were from the same area”, says Kalichuran.

Another facet of the stadium was that it brought together people of different socio-economic backgrounds to enjoy a mutual experience. Since there wasn't television in the early 70s and many people couldn't afford TV, even after it came to South Africa in 1976, watching football matches was their only form of entertainment. Goona Padayachee says people would relish watching a match at the end of the work-week.

“That was the only outlet for a lot of people. After working the whole week in the factories and the store rooms and shops. That was an avenue for their entertainment. The players had an obligation to play well, so the supporters could enjoy it. That's what we did. It pleased the supporters to see good soccer and see teams from outside of Lens, from Soweto and so on. There were terrific players that we played against”.

Despite the excitement of playing Sam Reddy says there was also tension about what would happen if they fell afoul of the establishment.

“You'd play these matches and wonder when you come and be arrested. But life went on. There was this passion for the game. We got supporters, thousands at Lens stadium. The ground was full. When you're playing you can hear a rumble. When I played, I didn't know what people were shouting, I'd just hear a hum”, he remembers.

One of the lesser-known, but rather interesting links to Curries Fountain is that of gangs and gangsters. Legendary photographer, Ranjith Kally, was often at the ground snapping up pictures. Author Riason Naidoo authored a book *The Indian in Drum Magazine in the 1950s*, which depicts the life and times of the Indian community in Durban.

Both Manning Rangers and the Crimson League FC had gangster links. The latter had 300 gang members among these were football players and supporters. Even Padayachee recalls gangsters attending matches.

“Currie’s Fountain was the hub of Federation soccer. It was a fantastic atmosphere with the gangsters even there. Even at Athlone Stadium there was a nice vibe. Curries was the mecca of Federation soccer. Although Lens could rival it, because there was a fantastic atmosphere when Blue Bell and Swaraj played each other”.

Problems off the pitch

Although players and fans enjoyed gathering at stadia for matches to enjoy themselves, once they left those grounds it was back to reality - the reality of living in a segregated society. The old SASL was already under the scrutiny of apartheid authorities which is why it was eventually disbanded.

It was much the same for the FPL. The Riotous Assemblies Act, Act No 17 of 1956 prohibited some gatherings in open-air public places if the Minister of Justice considered they could endanger the public peace. The Act was amended in 1974 to remove the reference to ‘public’ and redefined what was considered a ‘gathering’.

Because of the FPL’s non-racial stance and their affiliation SACOS, they came under intense scrutiny of apartheid intelligence officials. They were concerned matches would be used as political meeting spaces, or used to fuel anti-apartheid sentiments.

Harisunker recalls how tense it was.

“Have you been to the Curries Fountain boardroom? If you go into the boardroom you’ll see a photo display, the special branch used to park at Mansfield High School on the roof with the snipers and they would film Curries Fountain. Who’s entering, who’s leaving the field. Next thing, they’d storm the pitch”.

Naidoo also remembers a few incidents.

“Initially they were there every week monitoring, and because of the fear-factor they put a stop to that. If a White player played in any of the other leagues, they went and took him out. If there were gatherings of more than 15 people, they would shut it down”.

That impact was also felt in terms of training facilities. Kalichuran says there would be serious repercussions if they were caught using facilities that were designated as Whites-only.

“Where we played semi-professional, across the road was a well looked-after professional soccer ground which was never used by them. It laid vacant, yet we played across the road, big-time football on gravel. And, God forbid if you are even caught training on those grounds, then you had a serious problem. We flourished under extreme conditions. That was apartheid, you had to make do with whatever you had”, he says.

Even travelling and trying to buy something as simple as a meal wasn't easy. Vincent Pillay recalls a trip to Cape Town to play a match.

“One morning we were travelling through the Free State in the Karoo. We were at Bloemfontein at about 5 or 6 in the morning. We went to a café to buy coffee. We pulled the chairs out to sit and they said sorry you're not allowed to sit there; you'll have to go sit on the pavement. We even had to buy our meals through pigeon holes at Wimpy”.

Apart from the football aspect, there was a personal element for Goona Padayachee. He was evicted from his area when the Group Areas Act came into effect. Former anti-apartheid activist Helen Suzman even tried to take up his case.

“I phoned my ex-boss and she was in Miami and she was so upset about it. She said why don't you come to America, I'll sort out everything? We stayed there for a while but my wife never settled. So, we came back. We left in 1988 and in 1989 we came back”.

For James George, the personal and professional collided. He had to make a decision to follow his heart to play football or his principles. The decision was a difficult one but, in the end, he went with the latter.

George joined the so-called White league for about two-years in Cape Town. He was ostracised and even had to paid a fine to the FPL to be reinstated. He describes the experience as making him heartsore but also accepts that's it's now history and not much can be done about it. George's mind changed about playing in that league when a work colleague appealed to him to leave.

“My work mate, whose uncle was on Robben Island said, James you a famous player, you cannot do this. You must make a decision. As the only non-White in this team, what room are you going to stay in? The next day I told them I've giving up, I'm quitting”.

Most of the people I spoke to accepted that political resistance was at the forefront of what the FPL was all about. But they always tried to keep the two apart. While recognising what the league stood for, they also wanted to just play football and entertain the crowds from their communities.

“We believed in one thing, politics and sports must never meet. We were totally two different bodies. Although I was involved in the Natal Indian Congress, I never brought it onto the field. I never said, guys there's an NIC meeting on Tuesday I'd like to see you there, it was their decision if they wanted to come”, says Harisunker.

He also remembers a pivotal moment where it became clear that the apartheid government did not want sport to flourish in other communities.

“The South African Indian team was going to tour India. At Durban harbour, they were not even allowed to wear the Springbok blazer. They even asked the apartheid government, at least give us an opportunity, we’re going to represent your country. They didn’t say our country, they said YOUR country because of apartheid. And, you know what they did? On the day of departure, the Minister of Home Affairs walked in and withdrew all their visas, you’ll can’t go. That’s the type of struggle we were going through”.

Risky business

Part of having limited facilities meant that players had to train wherever they could. Since sport for people of colour wasn’t that well-funded, or funded altogether, makeshift pitches became the norm.

Gopi Naidoo says that lack of progress meant there would also be a ceiling for how high a sports-person could go.

“At that time, it was separate development. Indians and Coloureds played soccer together, some Black players would play. Those who played in those leagues had unbelievable skills. There was no amateur athletics. If there was nothing at school, then there was nothing. Cricket and soccer were the main things but you had volleyball coming in. It was limited to an extent, because there were no honours received, you couldn’t move to the next level, international teams or things like that”.

Sam Reddy admits that despite playing professionally, he never owned a pair of football boots in his life. There were no coaches at that time, or proper structures. They just did everything they needed to do on their own.

“We never had coaches. We trained at the Greyville School grounds, there were no flood lights there. Today’s children must think of us as being self-developed. We didn’t have people coming and telling us how to kick a ball. Now, I can tell you how to kick a ball. Our days we did through trial and error. We come from a generation where we were either born with football, or we evolved with football, or improved ourselves with football, the skill. Those who were determined like myself. I didn’t have too much skill but I worked on my stamina. It all came out innately and whatever we had, we developed”.

It was revelation for Padayachee to play on a proper pitch. Growing up, he never had that opportunity.

“We grew up on sand grounds and the first time we played on grass was in the Federation. In our young days, we grew up either playing in the street grounds. There was one ground where on a patch you would see nails and glass and things. We had to control the ball on those types of surfaces. For training, the teams would go out of their way to try and get the schools to let them use their grounds. We never had proper training facilities. We’d go to work, come back from work, have a cup of tea and slice

of bread and go back to training. The next day we needed to go to work and take a train from Lenasia. I don't think any of the players of that generation regret doing what they did because they enjoyed it. I'm not unique, it happened to everyone".

In the 1970s Brazil legend Pele coined a popular phrase "Joga Bonito" which translates to "play beautifully." Many people feel that Brazilians, with their dance styles such as Samba, are the best footballers in the world.

Another interesting fact about Brazilian footballers is that many of them play street soccer, with some of the most gifted players emerging from slums or favelas that litter the South American country.

James George looks at the lack of facilities in a different light and believes that being forced to play on the street is what improved their skills and ultimately helped in their success.

"If there was unity back then, it would have been a different ball-game. We had grit, irrespective of lacking the training facilities. We matched them in every aspect. You can only play football if you've played street football, period. If you haven't played street football, no scientific technology is going to make you a player like a Messi or whatever. They all started with street football", he says.

But that wasn't where the difficulties began and ended. Players back then were literally putting their bodies on the line. Modern day football has a team of sports-medical professionals to help players if they're injured. Back then, you were on your own.

"If we were injured, there was no medical aid, there was no doctor. Just put on a bit of ointment, compound and rub it in. The odds were stacked against us and we had nothing else, but we had to do it", says Padayachee.

In fact, Vincent Pillay had a serious ankle injury in his career, but says because of his speed at that time, it was one of the only ones.

"I got injured in Port Shepstone. I went to see an Orthopaedic surgeon and he said there's nothing wrong with it and just bandaged it. Meanwhile, the bone had chipped (there were no x-rays then). Every time I played, I had a shooting pain, but over time it fused. If you get injured, the club may do something but mostly, you're on your own".

Criss-crossing the country to play matches also meant long-distances and sometimes breakdowns or accidents. George says it was nothing short of a miracle that nobody died on a trip to Durban.

"We used to travel by bus, or kombis which used to break down. We travelled one day in two kombis from Cape Town to Durban. We had an accident in Colesburg, the kombi turned over. The kombi careened for about 100 metres and landed on a farm. None of us were critically injured, we survived. We had to come back to Cape Town that Saturday evening and cancel the game".

He also thinks about the impact that moving to Durban had on his personal life. His wife joined him there after they were married but didn't like it. George laughs, telling me how she berated him saying 'you're chasing after the wind'.

"Up until this day she tells me that. We all made wrong decisions at that time, I was only 20, 21. But I didn't give two hoots because I was single and could mingle. But the repercussions after that take an effect. My wife didn't like it and left back for Cape Town. I stuck around for two years afterwards and then quit Durban and also came back".

Principles don't pay the bills

The money involved in football now is astronomical. It's the world's most-watched and supported sport. To put it into context, more than 3.5-billion people watched last year's football World Cup win in Qatar. The tournament generated 7.5-billion-Dollars - around R135-billion.

That's not to say that football wasn't popular during the time of the FPL, it definitely was. But funding wasn't as easy to come by, especially when you're sticking to your principles.

Bharath Harisunker worked in the background for Manning Rangers and his job included trying to get sponsors and to raise funds.

"The most important thing, we had to do our own fund-raising no matter how difficult it was. Raffles, fun-runs, dinner-dances, we'd go the to the main club and say you don't have R2000 to buy a player, here's R2000 to buy that player. Financially, as an administrator, that fell onto us in the fund-raising committee. We worked very closely with the chairman and the treasurer of the club. That was our biggest hurdle. Whatever was in the kitty we would say use it towards a player's wage or something. If we had 10 000 spectators at R2 each. From that 20 000, you would only be left with R2000. What could you do with that? You'd need to pay ground levies, transport etc".

By contrast the NFL and NPSL were much better funded and sponsored (the NFL at least until it started to experience financial problems). The PSL has the Nedbank Cup which now has prize money worth R7-million. In the 70s it was called the Life Challenge Cup, then the Benson & Hedges Trophy and then the Mainstay Cup before the PSL was formed. When television arrived in the 70s, more money rolled in for the NPSL.

Even the players knew how hard it was to keep cash in the kitty. Baboo Kalichuran says sponsorship was another challenge.

"You never got sponsors, the main sponsor for the FPL was Mainstay and Osmans spices, the local guys. No one wanted to sponsor you. You would start going out and looking for sponsors from local businesses which wasn't much. For many of us players, the game was bigger than the player. We enjoyed it whether we got paid or not. Sponsors were obviously needed to run the club efficiently, but you never got sponsors either for the club and the league used to battle sometimes".

Sam Reddy agrees. He recalls that players even had to sometimes help the clubs or pay for travel expenses.

“There was a lack of money. The clubs didn’t have a lot of money. They stayed where they were and chose players from there. They didn’t choose from the whole of South Africa like Sundowns would do. Cape Town Spurs would choose players from their precinct. Dynamos would choose from the Fordsburg area. There were no sponsorships. How without sponsorships can you keep this going? Players were committed to their passion and devotion to the game. At that time, the club had no money, the association had no money. Some of the players had to put in petrol money, etc”.

The newspapers in Durban had an intrinsic link to the FPL at that time. Brijlall Ramguthee says the Post’s coverage of the league would help keep up its popularity.

At the time, there was rivalry between two managers, Don Moodley and as Ramguthee describes, a very colourful manager Mike Royapen, who was nicknamed Sir Elf. Their comments helped served as a marketing exercise to draw fans.

“They had their own rivalry but that was just for the promotion of football. They would needle each other give us beautiful quotes and then we would have all the buildup of the needle for a big game”.

But it wasn’t always enough. The league often ran into financial difficulties and Ramguthee says they had to step in to help.

“I ran what was called the Save the Fed Drive. It didn’t get millions but got enough sponsorship to keep the FPL afloat in those very difficult times. Thereafter the tide changed and there was sponsorship. It what was its predicted death, Save the Fed played a meaningful role in keeping the turnstiles clicking by way of sponsorships. And, they came from individuals. Whether it was R20 or a R100 it all helped to keep the wolf from the door”.

Apart from administrators and officials, the players themselves were all too aware that money, as Simply Red once sang, was too tight to mention.

Goona Padaychee remembers his transfer fee which wasn’t a lot. That speaks to the hand-to-mouth nature of the league’s finances.

“In the Federation there wasn’t a lot of money to go around. I remember when Swaraj bought me back from Blue Bells, it was a mere R500. That was the transfer fee. When we played in Federation and you were the player of the month or the week, you got R5”.

It’s not just tournaments that rack up cash nowadays. Considering the global viewership of European football, and even other regions around the world such as the MLS in North America and South American football.

In South Africa, PSL clubs share almost R40-million between them in the country's top-flight league. The winner of the MTN 8 cup competition receives R8-million.

Individuals also don't earn too badly. Cristiano Ronaldo has become the highest paid footballer in the world. He earns 4.1-million-dollars a week, just under R74-million-rand playing for Saudi Professional League club Al Nassr.

Now contrast that with Kalichuran's career in professional football. He was never paid a cent, but it was by his own choice.

"I actually agreed with Swaraj that they didn't have to pay me. I loved playing the game and I enjoyed it and I didn't require any money to play professionally. So, I played virtually my whole professional career for free. But I enjoyed it, we played for the love of game. Now, it's about the money you can make from a football career", he reflects.

While almost all of the people I spoke to who were involved with the FPL had a career outside of football, that wasn't the case for a lot of others. Gopi Naidoo says many players who were only footballers, made do with what they had.

"I think the monetary gain was not important at the time. Supporters and management honoured you in terms of how you played. It wasn't that important to play for money. Some of the players at that time were unemployed, they just played football only. The money they got was their weekly or monthly amount. I take off my hat to those types of players. The limited resources they got was enough for them".

James George was on the same page when it came to the financial gain of playing in the league, there really was none.

"I think it was the comradery, there was no financial gain. We used to get R35 a month, that was the contract signed. Some players maybe got R500 a month. If we beat the teams from Durban or Joburg by a big score, they'd give us a R5 extra. We played for the love of the game".

In contrast, Vincent Pillay says the amounts they received were huge.
"R8 for a win, R6 for a draw and R4 for a loss".

This leads into another aspect of football's commercialisation. Leagues, players and tournaments earn the money that they do because of ticket and merchandise sales, sponsorships, tournament winnings (or earnings) and television and, more recently, online streaming royalties.

The art of sales has been perfected by clubs throughout the world. Huge local clubs like Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates reveal their new shirts every season. Legacy clubs in Europe like Manchester United and Real Madrid sell retro merchandise from previously won tournaments, legendary players and kits.

This was never harnessed by the FPL, for several reasons. Many of the FPL clubs no longer exist, there is seemingly no market for this merchandise since many people don't know about the FPL anyway. And, the last point which is part of the second - almost no matches were ever televised or broadcast.

The NFL was broadcast on SABC radio and so was the NPSL. The NSL, formed in 1985 also enjoyed coverage. The only real documented histories of the FPL are either through the FPL Legends Group or in newspaper clippings that have been preserved by players.

Harisunker says they tried to do something about that, but it's not easy to change attitudes, especially since so many South Africans support and prefer European football teams.

"If you look at it, the FPL games were not televised, the NFL and NPSL games were. Not one FPL game until 1991 was ever televised. People couldn't afford shirts, we sold our jerseys at Manning Rangers for R90, it's what it cost us. Yet you'll find a guy who will buy a United or Liverpool jersey for R250 and come to the Chatsworth Stadium. I would ask if they were proud of what they were doing and he would say you're not even worth R90".

A more pragmatic view is taken by Brijlall Ramguthee. He confirms that there was virtually no radio or television coverage. But says in terms of newspapers coverage it was only natural that publications would cater for their specific readers.

"I think the problem is that other publications had to look at where their readership came from and because they enjoyed a certain readership, they catered for the NFL teams which happened to be very widely supported by the white community. Eventually, journalists who covered the so-called white NFL matches also came over to cover the FPL games. So, there was an evolution over time".

He says there was a television broadcast that he did alongside that former Bafana Bafana coach Clive Barker and the late Manu Padayachee. But it was a once-off in the 1980s and was seemingly never repeated.

"It was the only one we ever did, covering a cup final. Yes, from a television coverage point of view, zilch, from a radio point of view, almost zilch. There was a bit of radio coverage after the matches but not as widely covered as print media".

There was one match, though, that they remember being broadcast. That was a game between Dynamos and Verulam Suburbs in 1978. An amused Gopi Naidoo recalls how the commentator couldn't pronounce his name correctly. He was in stitches after relating the story to me.

"SABC was recording that game but on radio. They sent one guy to mark me out the game, whenever I had the ball, he was just kicking me. Charles Fortune says 'Nadoo' instead and this other player are having their own battles on the side. The referee was coming to talking to them. So, when I came home, my father said who's this new player you've got Nadoo? I said it's me Nadoo!"

Despite the lack of coverage, George says he's grateful that people came to watch them. Even if their achievements have been lost to time.

“I commend and applaud those people who came to Curries, Lenasia and filled the stadia and sacrificed that afternoon, because there was nothing else. No TV, internet or cell phones. Our games are not recorded, there are just titbits left from newspapers. Fair enough, funding was available to the so-called privileged. You must also realise that we had the cream of the crop of players in South Africa. Everybody wanted players from the FPL. The NFL had all the money, the big stadiums but the majority of people who filled the stadiums were people of colour”.

The NFL gets benched

If all good things come to an end, then the not-so-good things will definitely also end. After sanctions on South Africa's football body, the money began to dry up for the NFL. In 1977, it folded and many players had nowhere to go.

The old NFL and NPSL merged in 1978, meaning the FPL was technically not the only non-racial league anymore. That would later become the NSL in 1985 due to disagreements about how the league was being run.

However, many White players opted to play in the FPL, Bharath Harisunker recalls that pivotal moment when that happened.

“When FIFA booted SA out, that's when the FPL said we have a feather in our cap. Let's move forward. That's when the FPL got stronger and that's when the NFL got defunct at the end of 1977. Half of the NFL players defected to the FPL at that time, and 78 majority of the NFL teams came into the FPL. That's the year Durban City won the league”.

Baboo Kalichuran says it was almost like a Mea-Culpa moment for many of the NFL's players since they didn't have a league anymore.

“We had about three or four White players in Swaraj. The NFL had just finished then. You know the sad thing was when these guys came across, they were looked at like Gods. Although we also had players from the NPSL, Shakes and quite a few of them. It was nice to have them play with us. But it happened when the NFL folded or when they couldn't make it in their teams anymore and came across to the FPL”, he says.

But if the goal was non-racialism, then perhaps it was better than anyone who wanted to play should be allowed to. Goona Padayachee has a more pragmatic view about what happened.

“Look, there were good players who came from there. If they contributed to the betterment of the team, then by all means let the best players play. I don't think the Cape teams had many Black or White players. Swaraj, Blue Bells and Dynamos had quite a few Black players in their teams”.

Harisunker says while there were obvious concerns about White players and teams joining the FPL, some of them made sacrifices too.

“They came in open-heartedly and they didn’t even come in at a price. They were interested in getting a game with people who want to play and people who appreciate them and going to show their skills. During the SASL days, Ivan Saunders, ex-Durban United, he used to coach Avalon Athletic at night. He would duck and dive and coach, because you couldn’t be associated. People like that, they came and put up their skills”.

Myth and legend collide

In most cases nostalgia gives us a fleeting feeling of what we’ve experience before. It’s a window into our past that propels our memories back to a significant event. This is the case for many who were involved in the FPL.

For them, the players were titans of infamy, legends whose mythological status continues to make one wonder how good the players really were. What only adds to that allure is that there are no recordings of the players. This is despite football around the world already being a well-documented sport. Even right now, you can go onto Youtube and find videos of matches from the 70s in the other leagues.

But what the FPL players could actually do, only exists in memory and imagination for those who were never there.

Gopi Naidoo recalls his first match with Verulam Suburbs against Cape Town City at Currie’s Fountain where he was told to mark an England international player they had bought, John Sissons. He’d previously played for West Ham United, Sheffield Wednesday, Norwich City and Chelsea. It was not a good day for Sissons.

“I just followed him everywhere he went. His own team was fighting with him. Because of my fitness, whenever we lost the ball, I went back and could also join the attack. We won the game 3-1 and I scored two goals. When I went to school the following day and mind you, I was a teacher, the Mercury newspaper said *Gopi styles in 3-1 win*. The children were not saying sir, they were saying Gopi. I felt it was disrespectful but I had to accept it at that time. I made a name for myself”.

The question I asked every person I spoke to was just how good the footballers were, in their opinion. By the late 70s, Pele had won the three World Cups, club football in Europe was incredibly strong and football’s popularity was increasing exponentially.

Sam Reddy is adamant they could have cut it anywhere.

“The players in that league would have been able to play at the highest level. Take James George, terrific winger, he was very fast. We had terrific goalkeepers. Smiley Moosa, lots of football skills. You could put five players around him and he would come out of that tangle”.

Naidoo even had a story about one of the SASL’s legendary players.

“In terms of skills, they had unbelievable skills. Looking at a player like Dharam Mohan, the goalkeeper kicked the ball to him, at the centre circle. He takes the ball on this chest, turns and cracks the ball into the net”.

Harisunker points out that some players did go and ply their trade abroad.

“Most of the players could have played abroad. Classic example, Gary Bailey and Bruce Grobbelaar. Bruce Grobbelaar, how did he go to Liverpool? He went via Zimbabwe. He had a Rhodesian passport. Gary Bailey, how did he go the Manchester United? Via Zimbabwe, dual passport. Because if they held a South African passport they couldn't have signed there. They said we're representing the Zimbabwean team.

But he also laments the misfortune that one of his close friends could never realise his dream of playing in England.

“Billy Reddy was my personal friend until his death in 2004. He was supposed to sign for Tottenham Hotspurs, he played on the wings. He was getting married on the day of his departure. He said do I get a wife or do I go? Also, he was the breadwinner of his home. He decided to get married and stay here, so he lost that opportunity of Spurs”.

The genuine belief from the players is that they had some of the best talent at that time. Vincent Pillay says there are too many to mention.

“Dharam Mohan, Bob Pillay, Links Padayachee, Sewnarain Lall, Maniraj Singh, Preston Julius. In my team we had Ralf Hendricks, Hunts Moses, Rashid Khan Frank Prince. These were all top footballers but unfortunately, they were not good enough to play for the South African team. In fact, those players, they were playing for Pirates and suddenly the call went out that only Black players were allowed to play in the NPSL. So, Ralph, Gareth, Rashid, all had to quit. They joined us at Verulam Suburbs”.

He even related a story to me about one player who was hiding in plain sight.

“Also in that squad was Smiley Moosa, he played for Blackpool but also at Arcadia Shepards as a White player because he was very fair. But they caught up with him and he had to leave”.

For Baboo Kalichuran, even though his career was short, he revelled in being able to compete among what they considered to be the best. Especially, during a tournament in 1972, where he was picked for the Transvaal team.

“I played in all of the games as goalkeeper. I was rated as being one of the best goalkeepers in that tournament. That made my football career special, to be rated as one of the many good goalkeepers. It made me proud of myself. That level for me was like playing for Bafana Bafana today”.

Goona Padayachee, though, is a little less convinced. He says the potential was definitely there among players, but whether they could move up to higher levels, is quite another.

“They had the talent, but a lack of coaching. It’s difficult when you don’t have the competition, you can’t really improve. You have to compete against better players. I think it’s a bit stretch to say they could have played against the likes of Maradona. They had the natural talent but to harness that talent to play on the world stage is quite another matter”.

Ramguthee has a similar view.

“While they have taken their chances had they gone over, but it’s difficult to predict. They had raw talent which is may what would have carried them through”.

Unbroken bonds

The FPL succeeded through sacrifice, grit and a willingness to push ahead in order to play the game they loved. Many teams in history have made the records books because of their spirit, togetherness and unwavering commitment.

This is also true of the FPL. The difference is, it wasn’t limited to one team. Everyone I spoke to harkened back to the fact that they treated each other like family.

Sam Reddy recalls that the clubs considered players as such. Sometimes their kindship resulted in some off-field mischief.

“This is the marvel of our time. Every club was a family. If you take Blue Bells, it was a family, Berea was a family. We were very close knit. Even when it comes to going to concert, or movies. The manager would say who’s coming? They would buy the tickets and we would meet at the venue. When you belonged to a club at that time, automatically they’ll be afraid of tackling or harming you, your club officials and players will stand by you. Not only for trouble, for weddings, functions, ceremonies. Even if you didn’t have any money. It was wonderful to get together. On a Friday evening, we’d congregate at someone’s hours and play dice, rummy, etc. We’d play for real money, but after one guy wins, he would say how much did you lose? We’d say R10 or R5, he’d give us back half of the money. He’d take the money and invest it and take the rest and buy a Russian and chips, which was the in-thing. That’s how it was, like family”.

James George says those bonds were the foundation of their success at Cape Town Spurs.

“With Cape Town Spurs the Don Richards, we had a closed bond with all the players. We were respectful of each other. On and off the field. That’s why Cape Town Spurs was the most successful club in the FPL, we won the title seven times. That as the camaraderie we had, it was unbelievable”.

It says a lot that speaking to the players separately, they always talk about their solidarity at that time. Baboo Kalichuran says everyone looked out for each other, even if you were from a rival team.

“A lot of camaraderie. We all looked after each other. We played for our clubs, we were like a family. When got together with other clubs, it was like a family affair. When you played against teams in Durban, after the game they would bring you something to eat. We did it likewise”.

Gopi Naidoo agrees with that sentiment saying they often shared whatever they had.

“The camaraderie was unbelievable. If you bought something you shared with everyone. I’ll give you an example, if you needed a kneed guard or a shoe lace, the guy would give you his. The brotherly love we had was unbelievable”.

Even though Brijlall Ramguthee was not a part of the league but a journalist covering, he couldn’t help but develop a kinship with players and officials. He’d attend team meetings and even interview players in the change rooms after matches.

“For example, a goal scorer who scored a key goal. Or someone who missed a goal, I would ask him, you had an open goal which you could drive a bus through and missed, how come? So, he was not very enamored by that, but I had to ask the question nonetheless”.

Because of that, he became life-long friends with some people involved with the FPL, some of whom he still sees today.

“I was sad to hear of the death of some of them in recent times. Fortunately, I still bump into some of the ex-players like Derek Naidoo former Berea goalkeeper, he plays golf and I occasionally meet him. Sugar Singh and of course the Nelson brothers, every now and then you bump into them”.

If you’re a family then there must be a head of the family. That role in the FPL fell to the football managers and owners.

Naidoo’s manager at Verulam Suburbs was Balu Parekh. He recalls that Parekh took money out of his pocket and even sold off his belongings to pay for the team’s expenses.

“The sad thing is players took advantage of him as well. Whatever you wanted he gave it to you. If you said Balu I need a pair of shoes, he would give it you. If you wanted a suit. He went out of his way to make players happy. He had players who were his favourites because of their ability to play. The sacrifices he made in terms of money and business, he sacrificed a hell of a lot and I take my hat off to him. I was one of the players that had to sacrifice that monetary gain because of our close relationship. Even then I could understand the situation that he was placed in”.

Perhaps the most well-known figure in the FPL was its President R.K. Naidoo. Everyone speaks fondly of him and what did for the league. A popular story told is that Naidoo even mortgaged his own home to help fund the league.



*Dan Twala and RK Naidoo
at a meeting to discuss the formation of the
South African Soccer League*

RK Naidoo was one of the prominent figures of the FPL's history

One of the biggest scandals during the FPL, was when RK Naidoo's son-in-law went to play in the NPL, leaving Manning Rangers. He was so incensed that he refused to attend his own daughter's wedding.

"Deena Naidoo married RK Naidoo's daughter, the President of the FPL. Because Deena defected from Manning Rangers to Durban City, RK told him, you took my crown and put it on the floor", Harisunker says.

Baboo Kalichuran says they all felt for Naidoo when it happened, especially because of how he cared for players.

"It was disappointing, but in the same token it's his decision. I felt for RK Naidoo because he was a gentleman. Par excellence if I could put it that way. He was one person that when we arrived at a hotel he would ask, are you ok, is everything all right? RK was a true gentleman and he didn't deserve that".

It was a huge shock for Vincent Pillay who recalls the sacrifices RK Naidoo made.

"Before that, Deena Naidoo from Manning Rangers went across, why it strikes me because he was the son-in-law of RK Naidoo, the President of the FPL. He was very disappointed that his son-in-law let him down by joining a racial body. People like RK Naidoo and Rama Reddy bonded their homes, sold their cars so the club could run".

Ramguthee says he doesn't know if the story about Naidoo mortgaging his home is true but also doesn't dispute that it could have happened. Regarding what happened with this son-in-law, he has his own views.

"RK was a very strong non-racial adherent. I know that Deena got a lot of flak for going over. There was an opportunity for him and other players to go over and play in another league, to cross-over. It was principles versus an opportunity to play for a bigger audience. In the end it had to be an individual's choice".

The end of the FPL

After years of struggling with sponsorship and the NPL getting the bulk of the attention, the FPL had to call it a day. After December 1990 some of the teams including Manning Rangers joined the NPL. But the league that fought so hard for integrated football became nothing more than a memory.

Every story has its villain. In this case it was the apartheid regime. But some officials did the FPL no favours either. Harisunker says one of the league's key administrators pulled the rug from under them.

"The guy that actually took the sugar out of our coffee was Abdul Bhamjee. When he secured a Nissan sponsorship, he dangled a carrot in front of the NPSL. He said give me the PRO job I've got a sponsorship for you. That's when the clubs defected. He was instrumental in taking quite a few teams with him. He said here you're playing for peanuts, come here and play for corn. That's how the FPL started going down, but we still survived, we filled stadiums, that were bursting at their seams".

Bhamjee would later become a key player in the building of the FNB Soccer City in Soweto. But 'Mr Soccer' as he was known would later be convicted of fraud related to a 7-million-rand NSL sponsorship in 1991. That ended his career as an administrator. He died in 2001, at the age of 82.

But there are some who defend his legacy. Sports writer Sy Lerman wrote that he was gone too soon and that no one ever really replaced him in terms of expertise. In an interview with IOL Journalist Deena Pillay, another former administrator Sam Khan says Bhamjee was used by the NSL and they threw him away when they no longer needed him.

However people viewed him, what's undeniable is the mark that he left on football in South Africa. The PSL noted his passing and mourned his loss.

On a personal level, the FPL folding was painful for many of the players. Even though they could no longer play at that level, the thought of *their* league closing up shop was not a happy one.

"It was really sad. It was like everything was now lost. You felt it was home to you and now you've lost your home. The memories remain forever, the good memories remain forever. I don't regret playing in the era, because it made me a better person. It was an honour and a privilege to play amongst many big games", says Kalichuran.

Thinking back on his journalistic career and covering the federation, Ramguthee says it was like 'a death in the family'.

Speaking about the merger with the NSPL Padyachee believe many of the FPL teams were not on equal footing in the unified league.

"During the 70s and 80s, the Federation in my opinion was the strongest. That's when they got Durban City to join. It was a sad thing, the intention of the Federation was honourable. The teams were never given a fair deal when they joined the NPSL. Some

of the Federation teams were marginalised. Manning Rangers didn't do badly. Blue Bells did ok but played in the second tier of the league. On a few occasions, we were on the verge of getting promoted but it never happened. The other teams, Berea was strong in the early 90s, lots of teams could have held their own in the NPSL league”.

Because of the principled nature of SACOS regarding sponsorships, it caused a major fracture within the FPL. The league would never be the same again and the lack of money coming in meant the end was only a matter of time.

The forgotten league

I had heard about the league and some players growing up in Durban, but information was scant. I played a lot of soccer growing up with relatives and friends. But never really thought of it as being a career one day. And, it was quite the revelation to hear there were great South African Indian footballers. I'd seen many people in my own community who were good cricket, volleyball and table tennis players. But football? No way.

And, therein lies the problem. Football in my community and the history of it seems to have been lost somewhere along the way. Within the centre of that shrouded history lies the FPL. When I spoke to players about it being a so-called 'forgotten league', they were quite adamant the term was a completely accurate way to consider it.

“My parents used to come down to the games and you know what winter is like in Cape Town? Four seasons in one day. Mist covering the Athlone stadium. But people came, smoked their weed and relaxed. We can never erase that from the annals of the history of South African soccer. Without our history, SAFA cannot be existence. Without us they cannot be there. And, now we have been ostracised”, George says.

For Kalichuran, he fears the day that no one remembers the Federation at all.

“The only newspapers that wrote articles were The Leader, The Graphic and the Post. There were no games televised or even commentary on games. We were excluded from everything else. People came to see you at games and people remembered. And, we remember and try to recall things that happened. It's a sad thing, because the soccer was of a high standard. They never got the exposure they should have had. There's a lot of player and administrators who are trying to keep the memory alive. Mainstream news doesn't cover the FPL at all, it's all the local Indian community that can recall the Federation days. But I don't know for how long”.

Despite the lack of coverage many people still remember games, player and incidents. It's like the significance of what happened has been crystalised in the memory. Despite advancing years Vincent Pillay can recall numerous games and events that occurred.

“I remember one night on a Wednesday, people still talk about these games. Verulam Suburbs was playing Berea, the ground was packed. Berea are leading 2-0, people still talk about those two goals, a free-kick from Preston Julius, the goalkeeper said he never saw it. The other was a dynamite from Bob Williams, it was rocket from outside the box. And the scored remained at 2-2. After the game I go to Bob and say, you

were trying to cross that? Because you'll never score a goal like that again. So that game was 2-2 and people still talk about. The replay, we beat them 3-1. But those are the games we remember".

As someone who had outside view looking in, Brijlall Ramguthee believes the federation, administrators and players are a critical part of South African history, especially when it comes to the country's hard-won democracy.

"They played some role in ensuring the equality one achieved after the 1994 elections. Although, it's not all rosy but at least apartheid was booted out at that time. There were those who chose to earn a pittance to play for fed teams rather than go over, which was more lucrative. It was a question of principles before money. For some of them, not for all".

Storytelling and passing it down through speech is nothing new. Cultures have been doing it for thousands of years. However, you get the sense from the players that they wish more had been done, that their videos chronicling their triumphs, their defeats and their joy and pain. Naidoo says watching the FPL was unlike anything else.

"You see, you can't change history. But for it to be retained for the future, there has to be stories told, like Little Red Riding Hood. We need to talk about the Federation and how it began. Talk about the players that played and that people used to pay to watch them. Straight away it's a thing of why should I pay to go watch them? You can go to go the cinema and not get that same kind of effect. Because here there's a personal involvement, personal involvement. The emotions are there as well."

The World Cup

On May 15, 2004 I was in a car with a friend driving through Durban's CBD. We had the radio on as the announcement for the host nation of the 2010 World Cup was being read. Then FIFA President Sepp Blatter announced that it would be South Africa.

I turned to my friend, smiled and clasped hands with him. Around us we could hear people cheering. It was a euphoric moment that I'll never forget. Not in my wildest dreams did I think a tournament the magnitude of the World Cup would be held on our shores.

It was a sign that as a nation we had come full circle. Yes, there were and still are many problems with South Africa and these will probably remain for years to come. But being able to watch the best nations in world compete at our stadiums, would be something to behold.

The FPL Legends, though, have mixed feelings about the tournament.

"The sad thing was that when they had the World Cup here in 2010, the FPL wasn't even recognised. Every other league but the FPL. It was an important league and to have a democratic government, they should have said, these are people who also fought apartheid under the banner of SACOS. Even today, when they have big matches, you know you get people like Shakes Mashaba, who played for Swaraj.

They're being called up, but none of us are being looked at. That's why I always say, we talk about legends. I feel every player than played in the FPL, under the banner of SACOS, they are all legends", Kalichuran laments.

Because of the lack of recognition, he says people don't even know there are former players in their community.

"Some of the young players don't even know about us. People say Baboo you played professional football? I can't believe it. The history is not there. I can show you my articles but you would not have seen all of this".

Vincent Pillay says the reality is that they made sacrifices so others could step on their shoulders.

"When players like Keshav Maharaj or Delron Buckley make it, they must not think it's not because of us, we sacrificed our time. We had meetings in secret places to get rid of this racial football. It's only through the efforts of the officials of FPL and the SASL that we have the World Cup back in South Africa. No one will give us credit in the present regime. Danny Jordan is a sell-out. He was the president of the Eastern Province football Association. His teams from there played in our league. He was also an official of the FPL".

The thing about the insular nature of the apartheid regime, was that major tournaments were never going to be held in South Africa at that time. Naidoo is all too aware that had democracy come sooner, the picture may well have been very different.

"There were mixed feelings because we missed out. If things were done a bit earlier, we could have been part of that. It was new experience of our children. To think that personally I could have been playing if it was 20 or 30 years ago. It was a missed opportunity for a lot of us".

No extra time

I still lived in Durban when I was in my mid-20s and came across a book about legendary Northern-Irish player George Best. Being a life-long Manchester United fan, a club that Best previously played for, I quickly snapped it up.

Within the book, were stories about his life, achievements and also his demons. Best was a virtuoso but struggled with alcoholism. He should be remembered in the same breath as Pele or Maradona (both even said as much), but because of his drinking problems Best retired early. He bounced around for a while afterwards and even played in the Jewish League in South Africa.

When I think of Best, I liken him to a shooting star that burned bright for a period and then faded away. The FPL and its players were much the same but continued in spite of the overwhelming odds against them. The league only survived because of their determination and passion for the game.

Add to that, the sacrifices the players and administrators made to keep the league going. Admittedly not all of them played in the Federation just because it was non-racial. Social pressures to not play in other leagues, the preference of being with your community and simply not being good enough are likely also factors.

But many of the players *did* produce magic even JK Rowling would struggle to describe on the pages of a Harry Potter novel. They were the kings of their backyard, the virtuosos of the community football pitch. But just like Best, they could only do it for so long.

Perhaps former Manchester United manager Sir Matt Busby summed it up best when talking about Best. His quote was impactful but haunting at the same time. It hinted at the mortality that we must all face, the end of all things, no matter the achievements in our fleeting existence.

You would have never have played with anyone like him, and you never will again.

I got the notion that FPL legends feel the same way when they reflect on their football careers.

The passage of time is inevitable. The fact that it never stops is undeniable. But, that any of us has the potential to leave a mark on the world, no matter how big or small, that is irrefutable.