

THE ROLE OF SEISA CT RAMABODU IN SPORTS AFFAIRS AT MUNICIPAL LEVEL IN MANGAUNG AT BLOEMFONTEIN, 1948-1979

Charl le Roux¹

1. INTRODUCTION

The decision to research the role of Seisa Clement Tsoane Ramabodu in sports affairs at municipal level in Mangaung, the black township at Bloemfontein, from 1948 to 1979, was inspired by two important considerations. The first is the fact that a large sports stadium in Mangaung, erected in 1981, was named after Ramabodu by the Administration Board of the Southern Orange Free State (SOFS). This concrete expression of appreciation for the work done by Ramabodu in the field of sport in Mangaung served as a strong instigator to determine the extent and nature of his contribution justifying this great honour. His nomination becomes even more important in view of the fact that the stadium is the largest of six stadiums in the township, accommodates 10 000 spectators, provides facilities for soccer, boxing, athletics and tennis, and has ablution amenities and security fencing. It was uprated at a cost of R160 000 in the 1990s and another R110 million after 2000 to accommodate the World Cup Soccer Tournament in 2010.²

The second consideration for this research is the apparent, almost complete, absence of literature or documentary evidence in the archives of local governments on the contribution of blacks in the administration of sport generally in South Africa. At municipal level sports affairs were never a point of discussion in meetings of the City Council of Bloemfontein, its Native Affairs Committee or the Native Advisory Board (the latter representing the interests of Mangaung's residents). The only official indication that sport was an issue at municipal level is the monthly report (about one page) of Ramabodu to the manager of the municipal Department of Native Administration and a short paragraph (supplied by the manager) in the annual report of the mayor. Even bodies at national level like the government Department of Native Affairs, the Institute of Administrators of Black Affairs, the South African Bureau of Racial Affairs and the Location Advisory Boards Congress, who all

1 Research Fellow, Department of History, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. E-mail: leroux@shisas.net

2 *The Friend*, 25 September 1981. "Stadium named after Ramabodu"; *Volksblad*, 11 May 2006.

convened at various centres in the country on an annual basis, got hooked on critical social welfare issues like housing, health, education, influx control and related crime crises at the cost of sports development. Ostensibly the curing effect of sport and recreation which could play a decisive role in easing the pressure of some of these issues like crime, health and education, was overlooked.³

The neglect of sports affairs of blacks coincide with the traditional preference of white historians for the political role of the white inhabitants of South Africa and the ascendance to power of the racially inclined National Party in 1948. Sport was part and parcel of the government policy of separate development and racial segregation after 1948. The consequent refusal of white sports administrators to allow blacks to participate freely on a non-racial basis in sport caused a spirit of antagonism on the side of black sportsmen, only to bedevil cooperation between white and black sports administrators and the development of sport in the country. The outcome in the years after 1948 was that black sportsmen were not able to fully experience the formative value of proper sports facilities and specialised coaching necessary for outstanding achievements, denying sportsmen and sports organisers like Ramabodu the general competitive spirit of sportsmanship.⁴

In the 1970s Prime Minister BJ Vorster realised that South Africa would have to make some concessions for multiracial sport so as not to be isolated from the sports arena of the world. The consequent founding of the South African Council on Sport (SACOS) in 1973, aiming at non-racial sport in South Africa, however, only served to politicise sport in the country completely because the mind-set of black politicians locally and abroad was a black majority government, democratically elected to run, among others, the South African sports scene – a reality that only materialised in 1994 – 15 years after Ramabodu had left the municipal sports scene.⁵

The overpowering white presence in the South African political scene did not prevent blacks to take the lead in sports activities in their own urban communities as far back as the 1890s – a fact that served as inspiration to Ramabodu as municipal sports official to persevere under severe work pressure and political and financial constraints to organise sports activities in his community and later even country-wide. The black clerical and politician, Walter Rubusana, served as an excellent role player to Ramabodu. Rubusana acted as president of the East Londen Native Cricket Union in the early 1900s. Albert Luthuli, the last president of the African National

3 Compare Free State Archives, Bloemfontein (FAB), MBL 1/2/4/1/54, Report Manager Department Native Administration, September 1954, pp. 4-5.

4 JEH Grobler, *Die rol en betekenis van ontspanning in swart gemeenskappe: 'n historiese perspektief* (Universiteit van Pretoria, 1987), p. 32; JPJ Smit, *Die ontwikkeling van die Suid-Afrikaanse sportbeleid en sy politieke implikasies, 1948-1979* (MA, UOVs, 1987), pp. 174-178.

5 *Ibid.*

Congress (ANC) before it was banned in 1960, acted as the first secretary of the South African Football Association. Indeed, Ramabodu followed in their footsteps by becoming an office-bearer of various sports associations like soccer, boxing, athletics and cricket, locally and nationally.⁶

How important sport was to blacks was stressed by sports commentator Ali Gu Twale in 1974 when he remarked that “sport in the townships served not only as a pastime, a form of recreation or a kind of entertainment. It was all things together, but most of all it’s part of the town’s man’s way of life – food for thought and body.” These considerations have to be seen against the backdrop of a large National Party majority in the City Council of Bloemfontein, reigning in favour of its white electorate even if it was at the cost of its black residents in Mangaung where Ramabodu struggled to keep up his sports and social work in the face of financial constraints and staff shortages.⁷

Naturally the 30 years when Ramabodu acted as municipal sports organiser (and social welfare worker) in Mangaung will come under the spotlight, including his relations with colleagues and superiors, namely the manager of the municipal Department of Native Administration, GJ Viljoen and his assistant, Superintendent CM du Plessis. Ramabodu was in almost daily contact with them. The government Department of Bantu Administration and Development stressed the importance of teamwork and friendly relations between officials in local government and with the department to improve the interests of urban blacks as they were all legally directly responsible for the well-being of these people. This was more easily said than done because Ramabodu’s section of sport and social welfare in the municipal Department of Native Administration came second to the critical sections of housing, health, education and influx control. Nonetheless, these were the criteria to measure the success of Ramabodu’s actions for the sake of sport in Mangaung—a township growing from about 40 000 residents in 1948 to about 85 000 in 1979.⁸ More in particular these criteria expected of Ramabodu to exert excellent spiritual characteristics like a flair for diplomatic intercourse, friendly relations with colleagues and superiors, commitment and perseverance in the face of constraints such as insufficient money and personnel resources. Lastly, but not least, organisational capability and a sincere love for sport were essential. To what extent Ramabodu succeeded to meet these criteria remains to be seen in the article.

6 Grobler, pp. 29-30.

7 P Becker, *Tribe to township* (Panther, Suffolk, 1974), p. 227; K Schoeman, *Bloemfontein, die ontstaan van 'n stad 1846-1946* (HAUM, Kaapstad, 1980), pp. 298-302.

8 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/76, Report Manager, Department Native Administration, September 1965, p. 50; *The Friend*, 25 September 1981. “Stadium named after Ramabodu.”

During the early years of his life Ramabodu was a family man who urbanised to improve their living circumstances — revealing himself as loyal to his family and employer, ambitious and perseverant to achieve success in his career. Being a Southern Sotho speaker, he was born at Marquard in the Eastern Free State on 7 August 1910. This was also the town where he preferred to be laid to rest nearly 90 years later, dying in Qwaqwa on 5 January 2000. Ramabodu initially qualified as a shoemaker at Ficksburg, but relocated to Mangaung in 1928 where he studied part-time for the matriculation certificate. He married Manisa Louisa Lusu, a Xhosa speaker of the Fingo tribe in the Eastern Cape. They had six children – two sons and four daughters.⁹

2. THE APPOINTMENT OF RAMABODU AS SPORTS ORGANISER AND SOCIAL WELFARE WORKER

Owing to the difficulty experienced country-wide to obtain the services of qualified social welfare workers who could also manage sports activities, the government Department of Native Affairs decided to temporarily appoint non-qualified but experienced applicants in vacant subsidised municipal posts until academically qualified and suitable applicants would be available. In pursuit of this policy Ramabodu, though unqualified, was appointed by the City Council of Bloemfontein as full-time social welfare worker and sports organiser with effect from 1 November 1948.¹⁰

Ramabodu was no stranger to the municipal Department of Native Administration and the residents of Mangaung. The manager of the Department, GJ Viljoen, described him as “trustworthy and diligent in his work” as he had already been actively involved as administrative clerk in the Department and with the organisation of soccer on a non-official basis since 1932, acting not only as the co-founder of the Basutoland Lads, a soccer club which served as forerunner to Mangaung United, established in 1981, but also as founder of the Lereke High School. Ramabodu soon became known as “Old Clem” (deduced from his second name “Clemence”) as he was fondly called by the Mangaung community – a humble and soft-spoken man, who exerted himself by selfless attempts to promote the social welfare and sport spirit of his people.¹¹

9 Interview with E Ramabodu (son), Phuthaditjaba (Qwaqwa), 2 August 2006.

10 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/39, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 9 March and 11 May 1945; Report Manager Department Native Administration, April 1945; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/54, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 14 April 1954, p. 5.

11 *Ibid.*; *The Friend*, 25 September 1981. “Stadium named after Ramabodu”; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/44, Report Manager Department Native Administration, February 1948, p. 3.

Manager Viljoen pinned his hopes on Ramabodu to pull the office of sports and social welfare in Mangaung from the pit of inactivity it had subsided into during the preceding years when it had been run by unenthusiastic employees. The job description of Ramabodu included a broad spectrum of sports and social welfare duties which kept him busy even after normal working hours and which he attended to, where necessary, by bicycle. Leaving the social welfare section aside as it falls outside the scope of the article, Ramabodu attended to the organisation of all sports activities except school sport. This involved the founding of sports clubs, interviews with black sportsmen and women, organising regular sports exercises and matches locally and interprovincially, including arrangements with the Department of the City Engineer, in consultation with the manager of the municipal Department of Native Administration, for the preparation of sports fields and the erection of amenities like entrance gates, pavilions and ablution.¹²

At the start of his career Ramabodu acted as sports promotor by serving on the executive committees of various sports organisations like the African Football Association, the Boxing Club of Mangaung and, quite importantly, the Bantu Social Institute (BSI) catering for indoor and outdoor sports for juveniles like film shows and boxing respectively. As secretary of the BSI, sorting under the auspices of the municipal Department of Native Administration, Ramabodu organised the Boys' and Girls' Clubs of the Institute to supplement the sports programmes of the high schools in Mangaung, involving soccer, boxing, tennis, athletics, netball, softball, cricket and basketball. To keep up their sports spirit he distributed reading material on sport and social matters at the BSI and schools on a monthly basis "to find its way to the hands and minds" of these juveniles. Due to his multiple sports and social welfare duties he was relieved of his secretarial duties in 1958, after succeeding to canalise a substantial number of juveniles through these clubs from the streets to sports activities and school attendance on a more regular basis.¹³

The question of juvenile delinquency figured quite prominently in the sport and social welfare work of Ramabodu. Apart from his involvement in the Boys' and Girls' Clubs at the BSI, he also addressed high school and public meetings, the Juvenile Affairs Board, the Girl Guides and the Red Cross on delinquency and other social questions like the misuse of drugs. He never neglected to bring home to the juveniles and their parents the augmenting and healing power of regular sports exercises. In his own words his ideal was to expose "the sportsmen and women of Mangaung to as many kinds of sport as possible to improve their health and social

12 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/45, Report Ramabodu, Annexure C, 28 February 1949.

13 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/55, Report Manager Department Native Administration, January 1955, pp. 5-6; FAB, MBL 3/1/40, Mayor's Minute, 31 March 1948, p. 18; FAB, MBL 3/1/41, Mayor's Minute, 31 March 1949, p. 37; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/47, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, March 1950.

well-being”. Such an ideal of course also coincided with his general aim to reach out to the sporting instincts of all residents of Mangaung.¹⁴

The City Council, by mouth of his Native Affairs Committee, regarded the work done by Ramabodu’s Sport and Social Welfare Office in the face of the escalating crime and juvenile delinquent figures as important and desirable. Indeed, the chairman of the Committee tasked Ramabodu to guide the juveniles in “the right direction” – a task which Ramabodu rightly interpreted in terms of proper sports facilities and welfare work, sustained by sufficient money and staff and the active cooperation of the Department of the City Engineer who had to supply the necessary sports structures – a prerequisite for sports practice.¹⁵ To what extent the City Council and its relevant departments/officials cooperated to enable Ramabodu to carry out the tasks approved by the Council, will be discussed in this article.

3. RAMABODU AND THE GENERAL PROGRESS OF SPORT UNTIL 1970

Ramabodu embarked in all earnest on the organisation of his multiple sports functions after his appointment in November 1948. As early as February 1949 he already had several interviews with various sports associations like the African Football Association, the Mangaung Bantu Football Association, the Boxing Club of Mangaung and the juvenile sports clubs at the BSI. His work programme also included regular visits on a weekly basis to the sports fields to report to the manager if any upgrading of facilities was necessary.¹⁶ Indeed, his involvement with the general progress of sport in Mangaung taxed his organisational abilities to a far greater extent than was the case with the BSI and the schools which constituted an organised environment, disposing of sports facilities catering reasonably well for the sports needs of the juveniles.

Being involved with sport in Mangaung since 1932 and having high hopes to combat crime and juvenile delinquency, Ramabodu was well aware of some serious obstacles in his way, such as a lack of proper and sufficient sports facilities. The author, R Graser, indicated that the high incidence of crime in black urban centres could be ascribed, among others, to the absence of sports and recreational facilities. The City Council of Bloemfontein was under the impression that it provided adequately in the sports needs of its black residents, ignoring the rapid increase of the population of Mangaung necessitating more sports facilities after World War II (1939-1945). Indeed, the Committee on Adult Education appointed by the Minister of Education,

14 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/46, Report Ramabodu, Annexure C, 31 August 1949.

15 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/41, Report Manager Department Native Administration, December 1945, p. 8.

16 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/46, Report Ramabodu, Annexure C, 31 August 1949; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/63, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 2 November 1959, pp. 4-5.

found that an urgent need for sports facilities for blacks existed, especially in the larger urban areas like Mangaung and the present-day Gauteng region as early as 1945. For the smaller centres like Ladybrand and Trompsburg facilities were almost non-existent, whereas facilities for whites were inadequate. Scarcely seven years later, in 1952, the City Council admitted the dire need for sports and recreational facilities in Mangaung, consisting of 56 500 residents then, and the important role of such facilities to combat crime and juvenile delinquency.¹⁷

A problem closely related to the question of proper and sufficient sports facilities was the delays in the provision of sports facilities by the Department of the City Engineer in the face of rising club memberships of sports associations. This was a major handicap which Ramabodu encountered throughout his career as municipal sports organiser. In his monthly reports he regularly drew the attention of Manager Viljoen to these frustrating delays which only served to discourage sportsmen and women, as well as spectators, from attending sports matches. The timely provision of sports facilities within an enclosed area promotes the general progress of sport.¹⁸ However, it would be unfair to only blame the City Engineer for such delays as he was (like Viljoen) responsible to the City Council, prioritising the municipal interests of its white, racially inclined electorate.

A second major handicap to Ramabodu's sports plans was the low salary scales of black municipal employees. The social welfare workers preceding Ramabodu resigned after some months on account of these low salary scales (even lower than those of unskilled municipal workers) and the enormous extent of the sports and social welfare work, involving also night-time work.¹⁹ These handicaps, discouraging qualified and dedicated social welfare workers and sports organisers, inevitably frustrated Ramabodu, Manager Viljoen and the members of the Native Advisory Board, representing the interests of the residents of Mangaung, albeit only on an advisory basis. However, they never voiced their frustration openly as they were paid officials of the City Council who was responsible to its white electorate.

Ramabodu probably heaved a sigh of relief when an improved salary scale for sports and social welfare workers was at long last introduced by the City Council in 1964, enabling Manager Viljoen to appoint three assistants in Ramabodu's office to relieve him of some of his sports obligations. The situation further eased in 1973

17 R. Grazer, *Die oorsake van die hoë misdaadsyfer in Suid-Afrika* (Nasionale Instituut insake misdaadvoorkoming en rehabilitasie van oortreders, W.O. 313, S.A.), pp. 7-8; FAB, MBL 3/1/33, Mayor's Minute, 31 March 1942, p. 20; Publication of the Union Government, UG 35-1945, Verslag oor die opvoeding van volwassenes in Suid-Afrika (Departement van Onderwys, Pretoria, 1945), pp. 75, 78; FAB, MBL 3/1/44, Mayor's Minute, 31 March 1952, p. 15.

18 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/63, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 2 November 1959, pp. 4-5.

19 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/52, Report Manager Department Native Administration, January 1953, p. 5.

when the Wage Board of the Department of Labour recommended higher wages for the industrial sector with the City Council of Bloemfontein following suit – a step which also made possible a higher standard of living for Ramabodu and his family.²⁰

Fortunately his work-load was in important respects also relieved by the cooperative assistance of Viljoen, using his influence with the Native Affairs Committee to exert pressure on the City Council for long-awaited sports improvements such as the allowance of the erection of the Bantu Sports Arena, financed by the National Memorial Health Foundation in 1955, to supplement the facilities for soccer, boxing, tennis, cycling, basketball and athletics. Regulations for the hiring of the new arena was drawn up by Ramabodu, after being appointed by Viljoen as a member of the board of management of the arena. Viljoen also requested Ramabodu to organise the official opening of the arena in 1956 – a sure token of Viljoen’s trust in his administrative and organisational capabilities.²¹

In full control of the organisation of sport in the township Ramabodu became increasingly aware of the limited facilities for the different kinds of sport in the late 1950s and 1960s. The 28 sports grounds for ball games and the Bantu Sport Arena (the latter being only able to accommodate 3 000 spectators in the face of a potential of 10 000 and more), did not meet the basic requirements for sports exercises and matches, such as proper fences to prevent trespassing by malicious persons or roaming cattle damaging the surface of the fields, competent supervision, ablution blocks, pavilions and gates to collect entrance monies.

These years were extremely difficult ones, sharpening Ramabodu’s diplomatic skills and teaching him to exercise patience and perseverance. He approached Viljoen on an almost continuous basis for more sports facilities for newly founded soccer and boxing clubs. Viljoen concurred with him that the lack of facilities for popular kinds of sport like soccer, boxing and tennis only served to instigate the resignation of disheartened assistants, thereby increasing incidences of crime and juvenile delinquency. He often had to carry on with only one or sometimes no assistant in the face of Mangaung’s rapidly rising residential figure (rising e.g. from 44 000 in 1958 to 64 000 in 1964 – about 20 000 in six years). To worsen matters this happened at a time when Afrikaner nationalism and its partiality for the interests of whites reached a peak with the founding of the Republic of South Africa in 1961.

20 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/68, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 8 January 1962, p. 26 and 7 March 1962, pp. 16-17; *The Friend*, 24 May 1973. Leader; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/77, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 3 May 1966, pp. 12, 69.

21 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/55, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, April 1955, p. 17; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/57, Report Ramabodu, Annexure E, May 1956, p. 29.

At local level the effect of these political developments was less enthusiasm and money for black sport and social welfare improvements from the General Revenue Account of white Bloemfontein. Ramabodu had to rely exclusively on the Native Revenue Account made up of stand, lodgers and service contract fees and house rents which were usurped by the critical housing and health projects in Mangaung. Requests by him, in consultation with Viljoen, for money from the well-filled General Revenue Account of white Bloemfontein, boasting annual surplusses, were vetoed by the City Council of Bloemfontein which in the first place represented the interests of its white electors. The budget at his disposal consequently was so little that he had to cut down on the remuneration of the coaches of the different clubs and the lay-out and fencing of new soccer fields. He was obliged to get money for balls from the affiliation fees of the clubs to prevent the ball games from coming to a halt. To worsen matters the unscrapped and unfenced fields of the recreation grounds rendered the taking of gate monies to buy balls impossible. The outcome was that he continuously had to apply his diplomatic and motivating skills to soothe the roused feelings of club members while he conversed with Manager Viljoen and Superintendent CM Du Plessis to convince the Finance Committee of the City Council to budget for these bottomline necessities being prerequisites for the conduct of tournaments.²²

Ramabodu refrained from drawing attention to himself or his two colleagues but diplomatically relied on the press to make public the deteriorating state of sport facilities in the early 1960s, hoping that such publicity would convince the City Council to make money from the General Revenue Account available for sports improvements in Mangaung.

Ostensibly Ramabodu's call for help to the press and his and Manager Viljoen's conversations with the Committee for Native Affairs, instigated some City Councillors to visit Mangaung in June 1962 to make themselves acquainted with socio-economic conditions in the township. These councillors encouraged the Native Affairs Committee, the Social Welfare, Health and Housing Committees to bring sports, housing and health facilities in Mangaung to a standard of which the Council and the residents of Mangaung could be proud. However, it was more easily said than done. As Ramabodu so many times in the past had pointed out – his office was immobilised by insufficient money resources such as the continuously depleted Native Revenue Account due to the excessive budgets of the housing and health sectors (R23 000 as against R260 for sport in 1962) and the monetary restrictions of government to counter inflation. Probably in an effort to soften the blow of these disheartening circumstances which would be expensive to be remedied, the councillors resolved

22 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/56, Report Manager Department Native Administration, Annexure F, February 1 1956; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/63, Report Manager Department Native Administration and Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, September 1959, p. 34; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/64, Report Ramabodu, Annexure E, February 1960.

to increase the number of contractors involved in the transport of black sport teams in and outside Mangaung during the next four years. This concession was utilised by Ramabodu to organise sports activities not only in Mangaung, but intertown in the province. These tournaments, usually over weekends, enabled him to canvass potential sportsmen and women outside Mangaung, opening up opportunities for these people to socialise on a provincial basis.²³

More promising developments followed in 1963, stimulating Ramabodu's sporting spirits. The Amendment Act on Bantu Legislation (Act 76 of 1963) empowered the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development to request a report from a local authority on any black municipal issue he deemed necessary such as sport, whereafter, in terms of sections 22 and 41 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act (Act 25 of 1945) the Minister, on recommendation by inspectors appointed by him, could order the local authority in writing to meet its lawful obligations towards its black residents such as the provision of sufficient and proper sports facilities. To strengthen his hand further in this regard the 1963 Act empowered him to formulate regulations/guidelines on black municipal issues for local authorities – formerly a prerogative of local authorities (section 38 of the 1945 Act).²⁴

Clearly the 1963 Act endowed the Minister with wider powers, but it soon dawned upon Ramabodu that even such ministerial powers were no guarantee for the progress of sport at municipal level. No trace can be found of any requests directed to him or Manager Viljoen to report on sport in Mangaung, nor were any inspectors in contact with either of them. Even more discouraging was the report on physical projects envisaged until 1975 by the Department of the City Engineer. This Department, which was supposed to play a crucial role in the upkeep of the sports grounds, made no reference to new projects like sports stadiums, concentrating only on projects for housing and its infrastructure.²⁵

On the eve of the 1970s Ramabodu realised that he could neither rely on the support of central or local government, nor on the Native Advisory Board as housing and health were priority issues to the residents whose interests the Board members represented. He had to rely increasingly on his spiritual and intellectual capabilities to make some headway for sport in Mangaung: firstly to maintain friendly work relations with his senior colleagues in the municipal Department of Native

23 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/69, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 5 October 1962, pp. 31-35; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/61, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 2 October 1958, p. 3 and Report Ramabodu, Annexure E, September 1958, p. 24.

24 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/71, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 6 March 1963, pp. 4-5.

25 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/69, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 6 June 1962, p. 17; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/76, Report Manager Department Native Administration, September 1965, pp. 77-81; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/73, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 4 February 1964, pp. 19-27; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/69, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 5 October 1962, pp. 31-35.

Administration (Manager Viljoen in particular), secondly to apply his knowledge of sports matters generally to convince these officials, including the Department of the City Engineer, of the sincerity of his requests for sports improvements and thirdly, to persevere in his conviction that sport is crucial for the health and social welfare of Mangaung's people. Ramabodu also pinned his hopes on the reorganisation of the Department of Native Administration in 1963, making provision for a second superintendent (JEF van Zyl), leaving Manager Viljoen with more time to assist him with sports matters.²⁶

Ramabodu was not disappointed in his expectations of Viljoen to render him more personal assistance after the reorganisation of his department. He drew the attention of Viljoen and the Native Affairs Committee to the well-funded General Revenue Account funded by the white tax payers who received salaries comparing favourably with the cost of living – which was not the case in Mangaung where about 80% of the residents lived below the breadline, rendering them unable to pay the continuously rising taxes necessary to fill the Native Revenue Account. These were statistics he had to cope with in the course of his social welfare work every day.²⁷

Viljoen, concurring whole-heartedly with Ramabodu on sports matters, agreed to enlist the support of the Native Affairs Committee and the English press to pressurise the City Council to request more funds from the government Department of Bantu Administration and Development to supplement the Native Revenue Account. This would enable them to provide two fenced-in sports grounds, one for soccer, cricket and athletics erected in 1968, and the other for boxing, dancing and choir performances, erected the next year. Section 19 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act of 1945 stipulated that the monies of the Native Revenue Account could be spent on any service which was to the benefit or welfare of the residents of a township. Money to improve sports facilities to combat the increasing crime numbers, as indicated by Ramabodu, was certainly in the interest of the residents of Mangaung. The irony of the situation was that Ramabodu could report that public support improved dramatically after the erection of these sport facilities, but the pavilions still fell short of accommodating the growing number of spectators or to serve as central venues for approximately 60 active soccer clubs and their combined membership of several thousands. Matches and exercises still had to take place at more than 12 soccer fields and 40 unscrapped fields spread over the township.²⁸

26 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/72, Report Manager Department Native Administration, September 1963, pp. 11-12.

27 FAB, MBL 3/1/61, Mayor's Minute, 31 March 1969, pp. 1-2; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/54, Minutes Native Affairs Committee, 14 July 1954, p. 19. Also compare C le Roux, "The provision of sports facilities and the management of sports participation in Mangaung 1945-1990", *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(1), June 2006, pp. 71-72; FAB, MBL 3/1/57, Mayor's Minute, 31 March 1965, p. 10 and 3/1/58, Mayor's Minute, 31 March 1966, p. 20.

28 Le Roux, pp. 71-72.

The erection of an attractive recreation centre for white Bloemfontein at Loch Logan to cater amply for different kinds of sport in 1969, despite the white residential figure counting 12 000 less than Mangaung's in 1970, only served to convince Ramabodu once again of the City Council's preference for the sports interests of its white electorate. He realised that the National Party had an overwhelming majority in the City Council and would inevitably prioritise sports facilities for its white electorate. Indeed, the mayor's omission to refer to sports matters in Mangaung in his annual reports only served to accentuate the Council's disinterest in the sports matters of its township and the consequent neglect thereof in the 1960s.²⁹ It was ostensibly under the impression of these political circumstances that Ramabodu refrained from putting his position as black subordinate employee at risk by publicly criticising the racial preference and consequent laxity of the City Council to provide in the sport needs of the underprivileged residents of Mangaung. He nonetheless resolved not to despair, but to keep on requesting similar facilities for the residents of Mangaung in the 1970s.

4. RAMABODU AND THE EVENTFUL YEARS OF THE 1970S

The 1970s turned out to be the most eventful years in the career of Ramabodu, bringing hope for a better dispensation for sports-minded urban blacks. It started off with the Act on the Administration of Bantu Affairs (Act 45 of 1971) introducing, among others, a new dispensation for sport at local level in South Africa. The motivation for this legislation was the realisation, at long last, by the National Party Government that permanent black urban communities had been established in the townships and that the development of sports facilities for the residents necessitated much more attention and money.³⁰

In terms of the Act on the Administration of Bantu Affairs, 22 Bantu Affairs administration regions were proclaimed including administration boards to manage all black affairs in the townships of these regions. Such a board was also proclaimed for the Southern Orange Free State Region (SOFS) in 1973, which included Mangaung and smaller townships. Significant to Ramabodu was the Section Sport and Recreation being separated from the Section Social Welfare Services, both resorting under the Director of Labour and Housing of the Administration Board, which replaced the Departments of Native Administration of the respective townships, but retaining their staff and the assets and liabilities of their revenue accounts.³¹

29 FAB, MBL 3/1/61, Mayor's Minute, 31 March 1969, pp. 1-2.

30 Grobler, p. 9.

31 FAB, MBL 3/1/65, Mayor's Minute, 31 March 1973, pp. 49-51; FAB, BOD 35, Minutes Southern OFS Administration Board, 28 June 1974, pp. 2-3.

Ramabodu retained his position as social welfare worker on account of his more than 20 years' experience. His duties as sports organiser, however, were taken over by a newly appointed regional sports organiser and three assistants. Nonetheless, Ramabodu was requested by the SOFS Administration Board to carry on as a key-figure in sports promotion in Mangaung. This was actually not an unexpected request, but indeed an appreciative recognition of his valuable sports experience. To appreciate the request of the Administration Board it is opportune to have a look at Ramabodu's extensive sports experience. Besides his ongoing social welfare work, he then served in an advisory capacity on the boards of the various sports organisations countrywide. In Mangaung he acted as an executive official of the Bantu Football Association, the OFS Bantu Football Association and as vice-president of the South African Bantu Football Association. But it was especially in boxing that Ramabodu rendered some valuable contributions. He was president of the Orange Free State Boxing Association for many years. After the introduction of the Administration Board for the SOFS Region in 1973, he was re-elected as vice-president of the South African Amateur Boxing Federation – the boxing umbrella body of which he was a founding member. Two years later, still serving in this position, he became engaged in politics when he was elected Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Qwaqwa Parliament. He acted in this capacity on a temporary basis when Parliament convened annually until 1979 when he was appointed Minister of Home Affairs.³²

Ramabodu welcomed the prioritising of sports facilities by the Administration Board. Priority was to be given to soccer, boxing and tennis, to be followed by the other less popular kinds of sport. Soccer and boxing were the two kinds of sport where he served in an executive capacity locally and nationally. For the Board to cope with the ever-increasing number of sports clubs and their members, he continued to stress at the meetings of sports associations the importance of keeping up facilities at sports centres like the outlay and fencing of sports fields, ablution amenities, ample pavilions and floodlights to attract spectators. The fencing of sports centres facilitating the collection of gate monies was a prerequisite to help finance sports improvements.³³

It was in the spirit of this new sports policy of the Administration Board that the Ramabodu Sport Stadium was erected in 1981 in the suburb of Kagisanong in Mangaung and named after Ramabodu to honour his 30 years of dedication to sport. As senior politician Ramabodu expressed himself in favour of non-racial sport, regarding the sports stadium as a step towards realising this ideal.³⁴

32 *The Friend*, 17 August 1979. "New Minister had interesting career"; Le Roux, p. 73.

33 FAB, BOD 42, UK 9, General Letter Chief Director, 13 September 1974, p. 113; FAB, BOD 45, UK 18, Annexures of expenditure on sport 1973/1974 and BOD 46, UK 47, Executive Committee Meeting, 20 March 1979, p. 5.

34 *The Friend*, 19 January 1980. "Ramabodu's 'yes' to British Lions Tour."

Ramabodu's involvement in sport necessitates a closer look at some specific kinds of sport like soccer and boxing with which he was intimately involved as an executive member of their organisational structures. Soccer and boxing being the most popular kinds of sport, only an occasional look will be casted at the other kinds of sport like tennis, cricket, netball and cycling, which were more in the hands of his assistants with himself in a supervising position.

5. RAMABODU'S INVOLVEMENT IN SOCCER AND BOXING

It was just natural for Ramabodu to become involved in the organisation of soccer. Besides being the most popular sport among urban blacks, the first soccer clubs in Mangaung were established as early as the 1890s. He himself became involved in 1932 when acting as co-founder of the Basutoland Lads from which Mangaung United was born in 1981. One year later, in 1933, he was elected secretary of the local African Football Association and served in an executive position for the remainder of his municipal career.³⁵

Ramabodu stated his aim for soccer (and sport generally) in the years to come in the following words: "I am out to battle to have the public supporting this place (the sport grounds) and rousing interest throughout the country to unite sporting bodies." He regarded intertown and provincial matches and with neighbouring states like Basutoland (Lesotho) as ideal opportunities to whip up the enthusiasm of spectators and potential players for the sport. Soccer progressed due to Ramabodu's unrelented efforts to keep the playing-fields in proper order, propagating the sport at school and club level. Ramabodu capitalised on the sporting instincts of the residents of Mangaung by cultivating close ties with black secondary schools, assisting them in the lay-out of their playing-fields to get their sport curriculum off the ground. On the eve of 1960 he remarked with satisfaction that "the soccer activity is at its best". The average number of soccer matches in Mangaung rose to 26 per week as compared to only ten and less before his appointment in 1948. Under his encouragement independent clubs like those of the South African Railways and the hostel residents in Mangaung, including the local African Football Association, affiliated to the Mangaung Bantu Football Association, preventing them from being absorbed by the so-called Compound Sports, which only served to divide the united force of soccer in the township. He enjoyed the support of Viljoen and the City Council in this respect.³⁶

35 *The Friend*, 25 September 1981. "Stadium named after Ramabodu."

36 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/59, Report Ramabodu, Annexure E, August 1957; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/60, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, May 1958, p. 31.

The success achieved by Ramabodu with his affiliation programme caused the number of teams to rise to 40 in 1960, attracting well over 6 000 spectators. These affiliations were a personal triumph for Ramabodu. His idea was to work towards a single body to represent black provincial soccer in South African tournaments. This trend was underlined when the South African Bantu Football Association, of which he was an executive member, was delegated by the multiracial Football Association of South Africa to govern all black soccer in the country in 1963.³⁷

In consultation with the president of the South African Bantu Football Association, Ramabodu, as chairman of the Mangaung Bantu Football Association, ensured that the fixtures were running in full swing. To this end he organised as many matches as possible on a weekly basis to get more gate-money for improvements and to upgrade the coaching of players and the training of referees. Soccer in Mangaung was progressing so well under his guidance that he organised outreach tournaments to the OFS Gold Fields, the other provinces, Basutoland (Lesotho) and South West Africa (Namibia). Indeed, despite the many discouraging obstacles in the way of sport and soccer in particular in Mangaung, which were discussed under the general progress of sport, Ramabodu was still able to increase the number of soccer clubs from 26 in 1949 to 80 on the eve of his departure to Qwaqwa in 1979. His dedication and perseverance to promote soccer are illustrated by the following words to Manager Viljoen when he was preparing a playing-field once: "The problem of goal posts was solved by felling raw trees ... and transporting them on push-cycle. This cost me a full day's drudge, sacrificing a Sunday."³⁸

As with soccer, Ramabodu also acted *ex officio* in a supervising and organisational capacity in the case of boxing. Manager Viljoen appointed excellent trainers, leaving Ramabodu with the task to apply his successful outreach programme to various urban centres within and across the borders of South Africa, such as Pietermaritzburg, Durban and Johannesburg, Maseru in the former Basutoland and as far north as Buluwayo in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). Ramabodu financed these ventures from money grants received from boxing enthusiasts and the monies taken at the doors of the boxing hall at the BSI and the confined open space at the Bantu Sport Arena set aside for boxing.³⁹

37 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/64, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, January 1960, p. 34; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/71, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, March 1963, p. 30; *The Friend*, 1 September 1969. "Non-White soccer in sorry state."

38 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/50, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, October 1951, p. 20; FAB, MBL 1/21/2/4/1/52, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, February 1953, p. 43; March 1953, p. 35 and July 1953, p. 17; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/54, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, July 1955, p. 33.

39 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/54, Report Ramabodu, Annexure E, March 1954, p. 40; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/55, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, March 1955, p. 21.

The Mangaung Boxing Association boasted 150 members in 1956. Under the guiding hand of Ramabodu these boxers achieved excellent results, culminating in the participation of five boxers of the Association in the South African Non-European Championships in Cape Town in 1960 where, as Ramabodu put it, “they proved their ability”. Humble as he was, he credited the trainers for the successes achieved at various centres in the country, not mentioning his part in arranging regular meetings with the boxers and their coaches to infuse spirit into them, including the publicising and catering for tournaments in Mangaung. His appointment as secretary and Superintendent Du Plessis as treasurer on the Executive Committee of the Mangaung Boxing Association in 1959 to represent the City Council of Bloemfontein was a sure token of the trust the boxing fraternity of Mangaung and the Council had in the abilities of Ramabodu and Du Plessis to promote the interests of boxing locally. The first challenge to meet such trust was the request of the Mangaung Boxing Association to select, in consultation with Du Plessis, a team of eight boxers to participate in the South African Games of 1964.⁴⁰

The participation of boxers from Mangaung in the 1964 Games triggered challenges from boxing clubs throughout the country. Ramabodu’s growing involvement to meet these challenges at provincial and national level, such as the intensification of training courses and scholarships for members of clubs and their trainees, culminated in his appointment on the board of the South African Boxing Association in June 1964. His membership was an acknowledgment by the senior boxing fraternity of his commitment to the cause of boxing and the belief that he was well capable of rendering valuable contributions to this sport at local and national level. Indeed, his involvement in the promotion of boxing reached a personal peak when he was invited to attend the annual general meeting of the South African Boxing Council in Mangaung in 1967. This prestigious event was followed by a black Free State boxing team under his management taking part in the national championships at Port Elizabeth that same year. His words after the event: “The boys gave us one of the best fights ever”, manifested his pride in their achievements which in no uncertain terms was due to his sincere commitment to the sport.⁴¹

As in soccer, Ramabodu experienced the realisation of his ideal of multiracial boxing under one managing body in the 1970s, though the unifying process did not run as smoothly as he expected. He was then president of the South African Amateur

40 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/64, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, March 1960, p. 27; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/58, Report Ramabodu, Annexure E, March 1957, p. 28; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/63, Report Manager Department Native Administration, May 1959, p. 19; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/73, Report Ramabodu, Annexure C, April 1964.

41 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/80, Report Ramabodu, Annexure E, October 1967, p.78; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/73, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, June 1964, p. 50; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/55, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, April 1955, p. 15.

Boxing Union for Africans, Coloureds and Indians, but received complaints from the Coloured and Indian boxers that they failed to get boxing permits in interprovincial tournaments due to the absence of proper selection criteria for boxers and the selection of separate teams participating in multiracial tournaments. Due to Ramabodu's unrelenting efforts the Coloured and Indian boxers, who established their own South African Coloured Boxing Association, were affiliated to the newly elected South African National Amateur Boxing Federation in 1978. Ramabodu, being elected vice-president of this umbrella body, which also included the South African Boxing Association for whites, assured its multiracial membership that this new federal body would iron out the differences of the past, announcing also that provincial amateur boxing teams were to be selected on merit to take part in multiracial interprovincial and multinational tournaments. For his efforts to normalise boxing relations in the country, the honour of life-president of the South African Amateur Boxing Federation was bestowed on Ramabodu in 1981.⁴²

6. RAMABODU AND OTHER KINDS OF SPORT

The administration of soccer and boxing occupied so much of Ramabodu's time, not to speak of his social welfare obligations, that Manager Viljoen thought it wise to let the two location superintendents and Ramabodu's assistants manage the organisation of the other not so popular kinds of sport, consisting of much less members than soccer and boxing. These were mainly cycling, cricket, athletics, softball, basketball, netball and tennis. However, this arrangement did not absolve Ramabodu from his general obligation to establish clubs for the different kinds of sport and arrange for the preparation of their respective courts and playfields.⁴³

Due to his position as head of the sport and social welfare office, Ramabodu frequently had to act as mouthpiece for complaints of sports organisations, especially these smaller clubs whose voices were easily subdued by the overpowering presence of soccer and boxing. As early as 1949, scarcely a year after his appointment, the Bantu Cycle Club Association, of which he was the secretary for many years, complained to him about the lack of a proper cycling course and trophies to encourage the cyclists, the absence of fixtures, negligent organisation and weak training. The fact that the association, consisting of six clubs, was affiliated to the Mangaung Bantu Football Association of which Ramabodu was also an executive member, brought these complaints under his immediate attention. True to his friendly and diplomatic nature, he succeeded in consultation with Viljoen and his superintendents to solve

42 *The Friend*, 19 September 1977. "Where is boxing heading?"; 26 January 1977. "New boxing control"; 5 May 1978; "Provincial boxing clashes"; 25 September 1981. "Stadium named after Ramabodu."

43 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/62, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, June 1959, p. 28.

these complaints. To keep up their spirits Ramabodu organised various cycling events in Mangaung and excursions to Johannesburg, Kroonstad, Bethlehem and even to Maseru in the then Basutoland. The way he paved for the Cycle Club bore victorious fruit when two cyclists of Mangaung were chosen for the Free State team to participate in the interprovincial tournament in Springs (in the present Gauteng) in 1975.⁴⁴

Ramabodu assisted Superintendent CM du Plessis with the establishment of an Athletics Association in 1954 and a cricket pitch in 1958. To acquire equipment for these kinds of sport, including netball, softball, basketball and hockey, he organised fund-raising functions in the Batho Community Hall. In the case of equipment for cricket and tennis he, quite diplomatically, made use of the enthusiasm of Manager Viljoen and the members of the Native Affairs Committee for cricket and tennis to budget for any further shortfalls.⁴⁵

7. CONCLUSION

The decision of the Administration Board of the Southern Free State to name the sports stadium in the suburb of Kagisanong after SCT Ramabodu is quite justified for various reasons. Ramabodu is no exception to the saying that “his career speaks for itself”, because for about 30 years he distinguished himself as a loyal and able chief municipal officer in the sector sport and social welfare in Mangaung. He served, generally speaking, for many years as president and vice-president of local and national soccer and boxing associations and locally as secretary of the Cyclists and Athletics Associations, including the management boards of the Bantu Social Institute and the Open Air Arena.

Ramabodu was a diplomatic negotiator and hard-working officer who remained loyal to the cause of sport (and social welfare) despite serious economic, human resource and political handicaps. These include insufficient money for critical sport facilities, the lack of qualified and dedicated staff members, not to mention the political pressure exercised by the racially inspired National Party City Council of Bloemfontein, who expected of the Department of the City Engineer to prioritise in the General Revenue Account health, housing and sports projects in white Bloemfontein. Mangaung’s health and housing projects came second, with Ramabodu’s sports section coming third – if any money was left in the account.

44 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/45, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, June 1949, p. 22; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/60, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, June 1958; FAB, BOD 43, Minutes Executive Committee, Administration Board, 4 February 1975, p. 138.

45 FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/58, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, May 1957, p. 22; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/59, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, January 1958, p. 28; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/67, Report Ramabodu, Annexure D, July 1961, p. 26; FAB, MBL 3/1/61, Mayor’s Minute, 31 March 1969, p. 2.

Relying on his excellent organisational abilities and friendly relationship with his senior colleagues in the Department of Native Administration he was able to make the best of the meagre financial and human resources at his disposal.

The press and sports administrators regarding Ramabodu as one of the best-known and longest serving sport administrators in the Free State, comes as no surprise. He was an authority on sport and convinced about its crucial place in the lives of his people, being also a protagonist for multiracial sport. Indeed, Ramabodu's dedication to sport promotion (and social welfare work), leading towards a marked increase in the membership of the different sport clubs, especially soccer, made him a civic leader and key figure in the combat against crime and juvenile delinquency in Mangaung.