

PROLOGUE

On May 15, 2004, Nelson Mandela wept tears of joy as the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) awarded South Africa the right to host the 2010 World Cup finals—the first on African soil. “I feel like a boy of fifteen,” he told the audience in Zurich. In South Africa, people of all races erupted in simultaneous, raucous celebration of the much-anticipated announcement. “To some extent this outburst of euphoria surpassed 1994,” the year of the first democratic elections in South Africa, writes Ahmed Kathrada, a former political prisoner incarcerated with Mandela for twenty-six years. “The scenes of jubilation, the spontaneous outpouring of celebration following FIFA’s decision, the solidarity of pride and unity evoked by a sporting event should serve as a shining example to black and white alike.”¹ Winnie Madikizela-Mandela later explained South Africa’s intention to use the planet’s preeminent sporting event as political theater: “The 2010 World Cup is about nation-building, putting us on the global map and making us a nation to be reckoned with. The event is going to make us proud. We are going to show the world wonders come 2010.”² How did an African country come to host the World Cup?

This book tries to answer this question by telling the little-known story of football in Africa and how the continent changed the world’s game. Played almost everywhere, in the center of huge modern cities and in isolated rural villages, football (or soccer) is the most popular sport in Africa and possibly the most popular cultural activity on our planet.³ According to a survey conducted in 2006 on behalf of FIFA, the game’s governing body, 46 million of the world’s 265 million registered players—more than one in six—are African.⁴ This simple, fun, and accessible game captures the attention of ordinary Africans, men and women, children and adults, workers and students, political leaders and apolitical masses, the business elite and the unemployed. Not many other African social practices are so tightly bound up with local, national, continental, and global dynamics.

African Soccerescapes is one of the first academic studies to connect Africans’ intense passion for the game to their experiences with European

domination; the growth of cities and towns; the struggle for independence and nationhood; migration; and globalization.⁵ Drawing primarily on published sources in English and French, the book looks at the ways in which Africans appropriated football from European colonizers and transformed it into a professional industry shaped by transnational capital and mass media. Firmly situating teams, players, and associations in the international framework in which Africans have to compete, I focus on how the game influenced, and was influenced by, racial, ethnic, and national identities, cultural values, economic interests, and power struggles. Selected case studies from around the continent highlight differences and similarities and bring out connections between sport and society. My central argument is that African players, coaches, officials, and fans have written crucial chapters in the history of football and therefore any interpretation of the game's global past must address the interaction of African practitioners and fans with this exciting and nearly universal expression of human culture.

The book is divided into six narrative chapters arranged thematically and chronologically. Chapter 1 opens with the arrival of football with European imperial expansion in the late nineteenth century and traces the game's spread beyond port cities by means of railroads, colonial military forces, and mission schools. Chapter 2 examines how Africans from Algeria to Zululand wrested control of football from the hands of the colonizers during the interwar period, turning it into a distinctively African activity featuring magicians and healers, innovative playing styles, and an indigenous fan culture. The three case studies presented in chapter 3 demonstrate how football contests and organizations fueled Africa's broader quest for political and cultural liberation in the mid- and late twentieth century and helped to construct a sense of nationhood among diverse populations.

Chapter 4 begins with an examination of the ways in which stadiums and national leagues bolstered a sense of nationhood after independence. It then goes on to probe how the Confédération Africaine de Football (CAF) fostered pan-African solidarity and democratized world football through antiapartheid activities and its campaign to expand the number of African teams in the World Cup finals. Chapter 5 looks into the causes and consequences of African player migration overseas—a historical process that has disproportionately rewarded Europe at Africa's expense. Chapter 6 analyzes the increasingly commercialized and globalized African football of the 1990s and 2000s, as seen in privatized clubs and competitions, as well

as in the launch of youth football academies and the growth of the women's game. The book's epilogue is devoted to the run-up to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. A discussion of the significance of this sporting megaevent illustrates how race and racism, nationhood, and capitalism continue to play an important role in African football today.