

Global Watch
Tokyo Sexwale
(left) carries on
the legacy of
Nelson Mandela.

“Racism is a monster”

Take a stand, say No to racism the Nelson Mandela way. Tokyo Sexwale, a freedom fighter who stood side by side with Nelson Mandela, has called for the first global anti-racism-discrimination summit in sport. On November 20 and 21 in Johannesburg the newly launched initiative “Global Watch” will introduce a global charter backed by a barometer to fight discrimination in all sports.



Mr Sexwale, how much of Nelson Mandela is there in Global Watch?

Tokyo Sexwale: We regard this initiative very much as a Nelson Mandela legacy for a non-racial, peaceful and prosperous world. Of course we are inspired by his famous quote on the subject. “Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination!”

Was Mandela excited by this initiative?

We briefed Madiba, as we call him, long before he passed away. He was aware of the 2006 FIFA campaign to fight racism and discrimination. Together we took the decision to fight racism – not just in sport,

but in the whole world. Focusing only on football gives the impression that racism is a FIFA problem. This is erroneous. Motor sports, rugby, cricket, basketball, netball, tennis etc have people being victimized. The problem is much wider. Racism is a society problem. It’s like a monster that is trying now to infiltrate sporting fields. It’s not borne out of the sporting field, but it can definitely destroy the field of sport. If we don’t stand up, if we allow racism to overpower sport, we will be doomed to existence in a hostile world.

There are various initiatives and institutions which take a firm stand against racism. What makes Global Watch different in comparison to those initiatives?

We applaud them all. The European Parliament, the United Nations, FIFA, IOC, etc. All have declarations on how to tackle racism in sports

and in football and we have looked at them. With the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on 21st March, the football community reinforced the importance of eradicating racism. Yet to date there is no global, centralised and coordinated leadership in this battle in all sport. That is what’s missing and this is what Global Watch will provide. That’s the difference.

But you are not starting from scratch?

Certainly no, we are going to build upon the good work and long involvement of many organisations, large and small, and individuals across the world. Global Watch itself arises from the “Say No to Racism in Football” campaign which was launched by FIFA during the 2006 World Cup in Berlin. At that time I already felt that it needs a hub, an umbrella organisation, a unique platform to fight racism. It was

suggested that South Africans must take the lead in this initiative. At the first Global Watch summit in November in Johannesburg the objective is to launch a roadmap based on a basic set of principles to address racism and discrimination in sport. We also aim at proposing national summits to produce national codes of conduct of each country. Above this, we are going to launch a Global Charter and a Global Barometer.

What are those tools supposed to be?

The Global Charter which will be presented to the UN for “adoption” will be a short document with all the do’s and don’ts for all sports. This charter will be monitored by a barometer. There are various barometers on poverty, health, wealth, corruption, you name it, but there is no barometer on racism in sports. The Global Watch barometer is an index

Denzil Maregele/Getty Image



Bananas are for eating Barça star Dani Alves on April 27, 2014.



A strong No to racism Fifa President Sepp Blatter in Berlin standing side by side with Tokyo Sexwale, Franz Beckenbauer and other high ranking officials before the 2006 World Cup.



Fighting for human rights Kevin-Prince Boateng at the United Nations in Geneva.

which will show which countries are serious about eliminating racism in the sporting areas of the world. It will monitor adherence to the charter, country-by-country, and will ensure that this process gains the highest possible transparency and credibility. This index is to be administered by an internationally recognised and independent body through an annually published report. The Mandela Foundation, inter alia, will play host to the barometer for Global Watch.

You have criticized the appointment of Carlo Tavecchio as the new president of the Italian Football Association. In Tavecchio's speech about the mass influx of foreign players in Italy he literally said: Here instead we get Opti Pob, who previously ate bananas and then suddenly becomes a first-team player with Lazio. Where will Italy end up on the Global Watch barometer?

Let me just preface by saying that Global Watch will resist very strongly – the Mandela way – the temptation by anybody from using the charter or the barometer for vindictive purposes. We will always be very, very careful and sensitive because inappropriate allegations can destroy lives. In any event, even the comments of this gentlemen, if true, are inflammatory – especially as they were directed at our young and innocent people. It's completely the wrong signal to send. People such as Nelson Mandela, Sepp Blatter, Beckenbauer, Pele and many others clearly agree on a zero-tolerance approach to racism. Italian football has, by electing the gentleman concerned, therefore put itself up for serious scrutiny.

Italy had a number of high profile incidents of racism recently. Former Milan player Kevin-Prince Boateng walked off the pitch in protest at racial abuse during a friendly match. Mario Balotelli continues to be the victim of racial chants. Are walk-offs an appropriate reaction?

We recall what happened to Balotelli and that his gesture raised a lot of questions. Walk-outs although understandable should not be encouraged as they can play into the hands of people who want to destroy sport. Racists will celebrate whilst the real fans lose out. At the same time, I do not always agree with the rules and guidelines which say that if a player walks out under these conditions he or she can be fined or suspended. Nevertheless associations and governing bodies have to look at the circumstances. I can understand that such a man wants to walk off. Once a player has been racially abused this breaks his or her soul and spirit to play.

Manchester City's U-21 team walked off the pitch against NK Rijeka in Novigrad. Global Watch afterwards released a statement mentioning that the youngsters have shown courage. Why?

Those young men have taken a strong and courageous moral stance. But we need to help them even further. As I have said before, walking off the field of play is an act of desperation. There must be a body that stands up for those people. This is where Global Watch comes into play – to liberate sporting officials and administrators from having to focus on something which is not their real core business and which diverts them from their field of expertise. We are here to educate, prevent, monitor and raise awareness, if needs be calls may be made for punishment.

“We all agree on a zero-tolerance approach to racism”

Balotelli's teammate Immobile said: In 2014, we should not need to be talking about racism again.

I wish it were like this. The journey is a long one to eradicate this evil. Our goal is to end racism in the 21st century. There is still plenty of work to do. I recall Boateng speaking in front of the United Nations. He said: Racism won't go away like a headache. Instead it's more like malaria. It's contagious and spreads. Global Watch will combat racism inside the playing field and in society generally. We have to treat its real cause. We have to take appropriate strong measures that can have an impact, like a medicine, but without destroying the whole body.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter said football associations should make more use of their right to ban clubs and deduct points to them instead of monetary penalties.

Blatter is perfectly correct. FIFA passed a resolution and we agreed to come up with sanctions at the FIFA Congress in Mauritius 2013.

However sanctions alone are not going to change racism. It needs more. Racists must feel the pressure. We have to put pressure on them via all possible means, otherwise nothing will happen. Right now Blatter has taken the lead in the world showing the red card to racism. Many others have to stand up more as well. Emptying a stadium is not necessarily the most appropriate punishment. With this you may be punishing 20,000 - 80,000 people and even more. Should thousands, suffer because of one fool who threw a banana or because of a small group of people who painted their faces and started monkey chants? Locate the banana thrower, ban him or her, but surely not a whole stadium. Relegation is tricky as well. What if the person throwing a banana onto the pitch has been paid to do so?

Bayern Munich were hit with a partial stadium closure for their Champions League quarter-final against Manchester United over a homophobic banner.

From what I learned Germany has red-carded racism and taken a very strong position on discrimination. I feel that Germany is much more intolerant to racism today. For me Franz Beckenbauer as the chairman of the LOC of the World Cup has played a very special role in this process. Germany in 2006 invited the world with a great message: It's time to make friends. I remember us standing together at the Berlin stadium and launching the “Say No to racism campaign”. Isn't that ironic! There we were, 70 years later, in the same stadium where Hitler during the Berlin Olympic Games of 1936 wanted to prove to the world his horrible theory of the Master Race – yet this time round, we were uniting as a force for good!

Are we still too cautious to take actions in sports?

Look at what happened to the owner of the Los Angeles Clippers basketball team. In fact it was within a few days that NBA commissioner Adam Silver banned Donald Sterling from the NBA for life after a recording emerged of him making racist remarks. He was forced to sell his shares in the team. Sterling is a billionaire, a very powerful person, not just a banana thrower. But he was strongly dealt with. We admire what the NBA did there, it was very swift, just and firm. That is what we would like to see happening more often – of course after proper and thorough investigation.

Barcelona's Brazilian defender Daniel Alves was commended for his response of eating a banana thrown at by a racist fan during Barcelona's 3-2 away win at Villareal on April 27. Afterwards he called for the banana-thrower who sparked a global anti-racist uproar to be given his job back after he reportedly lost it due to the incident.

The Dani Alves example shows maturity. That's how the world should react. That is very much the Nelson Mandela way. Alves is a victim who feels for others. I always highlighted that we need leaders, warriors, strong and tough people to fight racism. They have to lead by example and Alves has proven to be one of them. “If Alves is a monkey then we are all monkeys.” Neymar said at the time. Great stance by Barcelona in following him! We said to all of them: well done gentlemen! Their call for action is part of the education we want to provide. Again, Global Watch is not about vindictiveness. It's not about destroying people. We want to educate people. We want to build a better society.

So are there any right sanctions?

That's what we will discuss at the summit. FIFA, for example, brought in heavy sanctions for South Africa due to the racist and discriminatory Apartheid system. South Africa was suspended in 1964 and subsequently expelled in 1976. Our primary objective is education and awareness and to monitor and prevent and with sanctions and punishment applied only as a last resort. ☺

Tokyo Sexwale was speaking to Bernd Fisa

The NELSON MANDELA WAY

The Global Watch summit takes place on November 20 and 21 in Johannesburg. Global Watch is a Nelson Mandela legacy project. Mandela died last year on December 5 at the age of 95. “Sport has the power to change the world.” This is the heritage and message of Nelson Mandela. The Global Watch initiative is an association of the Mandela, Doha Goals and Sexwale Foundations.

For more information:
www.nelsonmandela.org, www.globalwatch-racism.org