

# World Cup maketh man, not woman

*Again women have to sit on the sidelines as the spotlight focuses on men, write Cheryl Roberts and Nadia Sanger*

IT MAY be a bit late to raise this issue with South Africa fewer than 100 days from the World Cup kick-off. Nevertheless, it must be put on record that it has not gone unnoticed that everything to do with this global sporting event has been in the interests of men.

This includes the consolidation of male power, business opportunities and putting men in the driving seat as those able to perform, achieve and deliver.

Taking into account that the historic hosting of the first World Cup on African soil needs the support of our nation, particularly amid much anti-African sentiment and doubt among Europeans, it does not mean one should overlook the negative implications of such a global event.

Of interest here is how 2010, in many ways, reinforces sexist thinking and gender inequalities – how masculine and feminine identities are articulated.

For about eight years, South Africa has concentrated on bidding for and successfully hosting this significant men's event.

But amid our euphoria, optimism and self-confidence, we must not lose sight of the fact that this is a men's football championship that will ultimately further advance men's participation in football.

Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with supporting the development of men who play football.

But what does this development mean to women? And what about boys and men who do not conform to the particular masculinity espoused in the soccer hero ideology and celebrated through the World Cup?

The government has given unconditional support to this event as an opportunity to unite our non-racial democratic society and strengthen our pride as Africans.

However, while we are caught up in the preparations and hosting of an event that will forever be remembered with pride, we must be aware of the gender 'inequalities that it might reinforce or promote.

Make no mistake, this is a men's event, for and about men. It's about men entrenching their power and performing a dominant sports-hero masculinity. It's about their skill, capabilities and prowess, all of which men have historically learnt to acquire through socialisation, while women have been pushed into more "feminine" sporting activities, none of which benefit the magnificence of a World Cup.

For the past decade, considerable national effort has concentrated on this



**MEN ONLY:** Fifa president Joseph Sepp Blatter, Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, CAF president Issa Hayatou, Irvin Khoza, Bafana Bafana and coaching staff during the 2010 Fifa World Cup LOC 100 Days Roadshow at Moses Mabhida Stadium last week in Durban. The World Cup is an event for and about men, entrenching their power and hegemony, say the writers. PICTURE: 2010 ORGANISING COMMITTEE

giant global sporting event. It has given huge attention to the achievements of men.

Over and above the contribution to developing men's football, this event has greatly benefited the superior image of men, who are constantly in the spotlight.

The danger is that the 2010 World Cup is all about a certain kind of masculine image – one that excludes women in general, as well as men who do not fit in this narrow image of the male sporting hero.

Aware that we are dominated by a patriarchal society, where power is largely dictated and pursued by men, we note that we

have allowed the superior imaging of men to derive great benefit.

This echoes the historical imaging of white and black South Africans, where the former commanded much media space. Now it's about men.

All along women have chorused support for a male sporting event, but what is in it for women?

With the event not even 100 days from kick-off, we may be asked why we are only asking this now.

While there has been criticism of the potentially negative effect on women's con-

sciousness and abilities, these concerns have not been conveyed in a more forthright manner.

Almost eight years down the line, South Africa has, through the staging of the World Cup, lost some vital ground for gender equity and advancement of women.

Much of this negligence must be blamed on the absence of strong and powerful organisational voices representing women, and broader women's interest structures, which might have been there to ensure that women were not further done in by any event in South Africa.

The 2010 Local Organising Committee might correctly argue that they were charged with the responsibility of delivering a successful event – not protecting women's interests, but that of men's football.

There are women involved in the 2010 operations, but, with a few exceptions, are there for their own ambitions, and have not put any energy into advancing and protecting women's interests.

So, given the massive media spotlight on this event, men must count themselves lucky to be benefiting once more at the

expense of women.

Now we are left with the challenge of how to ensure that women are given the opportunity on a large scale to display their potential.

And although millions of women are supporting this event because of their love of the sport – and of the male brotherhood – one does wonder whether men would give such support to women.

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