

From Dust to Glory: The Origins of Cricket in Lenasia

(Aslam Khota)

Cricket thrived in many parts of South Africa within already segregated communities during the latter years of the 19th century. Black, Coloured, Malay, and Indian communities each administered the game within their respective ethnic groups, while White cricketers managed the sport independently. Throughout the 1900s, there were numerous efforts to unify the non-White cricket establishments.

When the National Party came to power in 1948, it swiftly implemented strict laws of apartheid - formalising racial segregation in all areas of life. Until then, segregation had largely been enforced through provincial government regulations rather than national legislation.



Despite this, sports such as rugby, football, cricket and others saw inter-group collaboration emerge over time, with matches played among Black, Coloured and Indian communities. However, deep-rooted mistrust often led to the formation of breakaway leagues - much to the satisfaction of the apartheid regime, which had entrenched itself firmly within South African society. After the Group Areas Act was enacted in 1950, forced removals became a harsh reality, yet they seemed to further strengthen the resolve of non-White sports administrators to resist the system and seek unity through sport.

As early as 1947, racially divided cricket boards anticipated that impending apartheid laws would further fragment the game. In response, they acted decisively to form the South African Cricket Board of Control (SACBOC) - an inter-racial organisation comprising representatives from the Coloured, African, Indian and Malay communities. SACBOC facilitated national competitions among these groups.

By 1960, SACBOC took a bold step forward. Shedding ethnic labels, they rewrote their constitution and officially became the first non-racial national cricket body in South Africa, governing the sport until 1976. In 1950, football had already established the South African Soccer Federation (SASF), and after years of division, rugby also united under one body in 1966 with the formation of the South African Rugby Union (SARU).

Facilities and the Reverend

Acquiring sports facilities for non-Whites in the greater Johannesburg area was always an immense challenge. Bernard Sigamoney, a former teacher from Durban, was a political activist, trade unionist, minister, sportsman, and one of the founding members of SACBOC. He spent four years in the United Kingdom, where he qualified as an Anglican pastor. Upon moving to Johannesburg, he founded a mission, promoted Indian sport, and played a key role in establishing clubs and schools for the local community.

As early as 1927, Sigamoney began campaigning for dedicated sports facilities for Indians in Johannesburg. To this end, he established the Johannesburg Indian Sports Ground Association, which was eventually recognised by the all-White city council. A respected clergyman and astute negotiator, Sigamoney successfully lobbied the council for a piece of land he had identified for a sports ground on the eastern outskirts of Johannesburg. After six years of persistent and often frustrating negotiations, the Natalspruit Sports Ground was officially opened in June 1934 by the then-Mayor, Mr D Penry Roberts.

The ground was large enough to accommodate two football fields and two cricket pitches. By the early 1960s, the local community had raised funds and built two additional tennis courts on the property. Alongside Durban's iconic Curries Fountain and Cape Town's Green Point Track Stadium, Natalspruit became one of the premier sporting facilities for non-Whites in South Africa for several decades.

However, the apartheid regime's campaign of mass removals escalated during the 1950s. A deliberate effort was made to reduce access to sporting facilities in urban suburbs, forcing non-White communities to play sport only in the newly designated ethnic townships. Natalspruit was among the first to be affected, officially closing in 1973. The much-revered Queenspark fields in Vrededorp - still affectionately known as Fietas - hosted its final football and cricket fixtures in 1975.

Cricket takes root in Lenasia

The period between 1955 and 1963 saw a gradual trickle of families relocating to Lenasia. As the apartheid government accelerated its forced removals, families were compelled to leave areas such as Fordsburg, Sophiatown, Vrededorp, Newclare, Ophirton, Doornfontein, Ferreirastown and Newlands - often with deep reluctance.

By the mid-1960s, Lenasia had transformed into a rapidly growing suburb, becoming a central resettlement zone. In 1955, there was a small but significant breakthrough for local sportsmen and women with the establishment of the first sports field at the newly

built Lenasia High School. Much like the grounds at Natalspuit and Queenspark, it was a hard gravel surface, devoid of grass, but spacious enough to accommodate two simultaneous football matches and seasonal cricket games.

Cricketers who had moved to Lenasia remained members of their original clubs scattered across the Witwatersrand. However, the need to establish a local base soon became clear. In response, the Western Districts Indian Cricket Association (WDICA) was founded in 1965, with Mr Solly Patel elected as its first chairman. He was later succeeded by Yusuf 'Nalabhai' Cajee. Other founding officials included Solly Chothia as secretary, Ahmed Goondiwala as treasurer and Salie Bhikoo as record clerk.

The growth of WDICA was remarkable. Within a short time, a wide range of teams affiliated, including Arsenal, Azad, Bank Sports, Cambridge, Cavaliers, Evaton United, Heidelberg Indian CC, Klipriver Social, Lenz United, Lenasia Chelsea, Somerset, Surrey, Vereeniging City, Vereeniging Indian Sporting, Young Stars, Queensland, Musketeers, Kliptown, Newlands and Roslands. In just two years, WDICA had registered the highest number of teams and became the largest body affiliated to the Transvaal Cricket Federation (TCF). This signaled the rise of Lenasia as the new hub of cricket in the Transvaal.

Initially, teams played a single round of fixtures. Due to high demand, WDICA's enterprising administrators began arranging friendly matches with established clubs in Johannesburg and beyond. However, a major obstacle remained: the severe lack of sports facilities. As football and cricket clubs continued to grow, the need for more grounds became urgent.

In 1967, four fields in Extension 6 were allocated and shared between the Lenasia Football Association, WDICA and the TCF. During the early stages of the Lenasia Stadium project, two temporary gravel fields were established on the current site of Rose Park and were named Moosa Park 1 and Moosa Park 2. Due to the continued shortage, the Dadabhay family from Vereeniging generously provided a temporary playing facility on their farm as well.

A landmark tournament and the Lenasia cricket and football stadiums come to life!

Back in 1965, the Johannesburg City Council had promised to provide sports facilities in Lenasia. However, the suburb's unprecedented growth and the escalating demand for housing made land allocation for sport increasingly difficult. Despite these challenges, by 1970, work on the long-awaited Lenasia Sports Complex finally began in earnest. This development was largely made possible through the efforts of Mr W Lever, described as "a diligent representative of the Transvaal Board for the Development of Peri-Urban Areas". He proposed the project and secured an allocation of R140 000.00. Such was his influence that the Lenasia Consultative Committee even expressed a wish to name the stadium in his honour - though records thankfully show that this naming did not materialise.

In 1967, the enterprising officials of the Western Districts Indian Cricket Association (WDICA) made history in non-White South African cricket by launching the inaugural **Lenasia Cricket Tournament**. It was the first tournament of its kind in Transvaal province held outside of SACBOC's official annual centralised events. Staged over the Easter holidays, the tournament proved to be an unprecedented success. Teams from Natal, Western Province, Griqualand West, Eastern (Rand), Lowveld and Western Transvaal were invited to compete. The WDICA was widely praised for the high standard of organisation, and the tournament quickly became an eagerly anticipated annual event, with unions from across the country requesting to participate.

After successfully hosting four tournaments in Lenasia, anticipation reached fever pitch in 1971 - only for the tournament to be relocated to Natalspruit due to construction at the Lenasia Stadium precinct. The upgrades included a fully turfed outfield and South Africa's first-ever turf pitch for non-White cricketers.

SACBOC restructured its competition format and introduced a three-day national championship. The Dadabhay Trophy was granted first-class status. In December 1972, the great Abdul Latief 'Tiffie' Barnes became the first batsman in non-racial cricket to score a first-class century at the new, pristine Lenasia Cricket Stadium.

The eccentric and charismatic Solly Desai was the stadium's first official grounds curator. His dedication and expertise led to the preparation of top-tier playing surfaces, making the Lenasia Cricket Stadium one of the finest in the country.

The Transvaal Cricket Federation (TCF) included the WDICA to play in the inter-zone competition in which their five affiliates played two rounds of fixtures. Standout performers were then eligible for provincial selection. This competition threw the net wide and more cricketers got the opportunity to earn selection for the Transvaal 'A' and 'B' teams in SACBOC's three-day Dadabhay Trophy and two-day competitions. The introduction of this format, however, meant that WDICA had to discontinue the Lenasia Cricket Tournament.

The TCF and WDICA jointly played host to Dadabhay Trophy matches for five consecutive seasons. SACBOC's prestigious end-of-season North vs South Zone fixtures - featuring the best players in the country - were also held there. The North Zone, comprising cricketers from Transvaal, Natal and Griqualand West, faced off against the South Zone, represented by players from the Eastern and Western Provinces. These encounters produced some of the most memorable moments in the history of non-racial cricket.

Cosmetic unity derails non-racial cricket and 'abnormal' cricket finds a foothold

By 1975, cricket in South Africa was heading into uncertain and turbulent waters. On the surface, there was much to celebrate - club cricket was thriving, and the WDICA team had performed admirably in inter-zone fixtures. The provincial side, led by Abdul Bhamjee and featuring former West Indies captain Rohan Kanhai, triumphed in SACBOC's prestigious Dadabhay Trophy and was the last province to win the competition. Tragically, this would be the final season of the much-loved competition.

Behind the scenes, however, major developments were underway. The leadership of South Africa's cricketing bodies had begun secretive negotiations to "unite" the sport - talks that now included the exclusively White-run South African Cricket Association (SACA). The South African African Cricket Board (SAACB) and SACBOC entered the discussions in earnest. After nearly a year of negotiations, provincial affiliates under all three national bodies were instructed to dissolve and unify under a new single entity: the South African Cricket Union (SACU).

This marked the abrupt end of a golden era for non-White cricketers in Transvaal. The WDICA and other affiliates under the Transvaal Cricket Federation (TCF) were disbanded. Despite the upheaval, many standout players from the WDICA era had already left their mark. Former teachers and elegant all-rounders Ahmed Bhabha and Ismail 'Miley' Kara powered Arsenal Cricket Club to dominance. Other stars such as Akbar Moola, Chota Sader, Ahmed Khan, Biza Naidoo, Mobin Bhikoo, Bowan Patel, Devindra Parbhoo, AB Surtee, Venilal Pitamber Solanki, Vick Cajee, Ace Saloojee, Sam Nana, Hussain Sader, Farouk Akoojee, Hamid Sarang, Yusuf Moola and Farouk Patel were among the most consistent performers in WDICA.

The merger scattered both players and administrators. Tragically, some would never return to the cricket field again.

The new mandate required all provincial structures to meet with their White counterparts and begin grassroots-level club integration. This step, approved by the apartheid government under Sports Minister Dr Piet Koornhof, was touted by some as a move to "normalise" cricket. In reality, it was designed to convince the International Cricket Council (ICC) and other global sports bodies that South African cricket was unified under a single, multiracial body.

All affiliates under the TCF, including the influential WDICA, endorsed the merger. Many of the clubs under its jurisdiction accepted the decision, and after decades of loyalty to SACBOC, it was understandable that the merger proceeded with minimal resistance. This trend echoed across the country as other unions followed suit.

Yet not everyone was convinced. Several individuals, anti-apartheid groups and sports activists warned of the broader implications of this decision in a deeply divided society. Their concerns were supported by the South African Council on Sport (SACOS), founded in 1973, and the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC), which operated in exile from New York and London. While some welcomed the changes, the so-called experiment was ultimately doomed to fail. The now-iconic phrase coined by a Cape journalist, "There can be no normal sport in an abnormal society", captured the sentiment of the masses and gained worldwide traction.

Just a year into the so-called "normalisation" of cricket, a controversial comment by White cricket official Billy Woodin threw the fragile alliance into crisis. "Dr Koornhof," he said, "spelled out the new policy several times. The Minister and we (SACA) agreed to club cricket matches between clubs of different races. We never agreed to multiracial clubs." The illusion of unity crumbled.

Dr Abu Baker Asvat, chairman of Crescents Cricket Club, responded with outrage: "If Woodin's remarks are true, Black cricketers will pull out - and there will be no going back. All my trust has gone. We've been misled. But by God, never again!"

This was just one of many flashpoints that confronted the newly formed Transvaal Cricket Council. Across the country, similar disillusionment and frustration followed. What was meant to be a step toward unity had, in many ways, exposed the fault lines that apartheid had embedded deep within South African sport.

Non-racial cricket rises from the ashes

In Johannesburg, several concerned clubs, organisations and individuals voiced strong opposition to the merger with the apartheid-backed cricket associations. Within months, a rival body began taking shape at the national level in response to this discontent.

History was made in July 1977 when the South African Cricket Board (SACB) was officially launched at the AEL Centre in Johannesburg. Hassan Howa was the popular and unanimous choice to lead the new non-racial organisation. In rapid succession, provincial bodies aligned themselves with SACB's vision. That October saw the birth of the Transvaal Cricket Board (TCB).

The formation of the TCB was spearheaded by the Azads Cricket Club, under the leadership of Mr PJ Bhana and Dr Rasik Gopal, who stood firm in their refusal to join the White leagues. Their campaign quickly gained momentum and support from clubs such as Thistles, Riverlea, Potchefstroom, Actonville, Newmont and Protea. The TCB was officially constituted at the Tamil Hall in Fietas, where Mr Percy Pheffer was elected as the first President. The new body quickly expanded, attracting teams from as far afield as Heidelberg, Zeerust and Klerksdorp.

Within a year, non-racial cricket experienced a resurgence as clubs began to leave the White leagues en masse. By 1980, the majority had returned to their roots, reigniting boycott campaigns and intensifying the broader struggle against apartheid. Dr Abu Asvat succeeded Pheffer as chairperson for one year, after which Ahmed 'Agie' Mangera took the reins for a seven-year tenure. Ajit Gandabhai, the first secretary, brought vital administrative expertise and played a key role in strengthening the board's foundations.

Reggie Feldman, a respected figure in SA Schools, SACOS and the Transvaal Council of Sport (TRACOS), was instrumental in drafting the board's constitution, lending his decades of experience. Other notable figures who served the board included Zainul Nagdee, Ebrahim Talia, Gulam Abed, Ashraf Kolia, Haroon Nosarka, Ali Osmany, Mohamed Sibda, Cassim Suliman, Dr Bismillah, Essop Kara, Bhama Khan, Ahmed Hans, Ahmed Mather, Shahed Wadvalla, Justice Mahomed Jajbhai and Yusuf Rajah.

Dr Asvat's brief tenure was followed by Mangera, but his leadership eventually became contentious. Legal action ensued over disputes related to personal loans he had extended to the board. Further division arose when Mangera and a few executive

members controversially negotiated a lease for the Lenasia stadium with officials from the Johannesburg City Council - referred to by many as "sell-outs". These issues led to the eventual dissolution of the TCB, with Dr Gulam Karrim later taking the reins of the Cricket Association of Transvaal (CAT), which continued until the national unity process began in 1991.

The merger in 1976 of SACBOC, SAACB and SACA had nearly decimated the cricketing landscape in Lenasia and much of Johannesburg. Junior cricket bore the brunt of this disruption, with nearly five years passing before any meaningful development resumed.

Rebuilding from the ground up, the TCB faced immense challenges. Fields had to be renegotiated for use, and funding was scarce - some companies offered as little as R10 or R20 when approached for sponsorship. Yet, the board triumphed over these odds. By 1983, the TCB had grown to 43 teams across three divisions.

In 1980, the Transvaal Junior Cricket Board was established under the guidance of Dr Gopal, his brother Pravin, Dr Asvat, Ahmed Moonda, Ebrahim Alli, Ross Mangera, Ali Osmany, Ranie Adams, Jaydew Parbhoo, Yunus Gardee and Zubair Yusuf. Their efforts filled the developmental vacuum, and soon a new generation of cricketing talent emerged.

Youngsters such as Mohammed Moosajee, Nezier Dindar, Ahmed Dinath, Imran Munshi, Ahmed Surtee, Hussein and Mohamed Manack, cousin Jack Manack, Iqbal Khan, Alwie Barnes, Shaun Noble, Rustam and Ijtihad Khan, Jitesh and Tarun Parbhoo, Nazeem Saloojee, Padmesh and Kamal Devchand, Atish Lala, Lyle Adriaanse, Rustum Adam, Andrew Mentor, Akash Poonee, Faizel Wadee, Fazel Rajah, Hassan Gangat, Amit Bagoon, Goosen Rasdien, Imraan Omar and Mohamed Sarang began rising through the ranks, earning their spots in senior club teams.

And then schools get on board, again

This revival breathed new life into cricket at Lenasia and Nirvana High Schools, which had shared a longstanding rivalry dating back to the late 1960s. Passionate educators such as Hoosain Ayob and Yusuf Wadee played a pivotal role in sustaining this tradition, organising mid-week matches and ensuring that promising players were selected to represent Transvaal Schools and the Under-19 teams.

Throughout the 1980s, a significant number of schoolboys went on to represent Transvaal High Schools in the annual South African Schools' Sports Association (SASSA) tournaments. The arrival of Mr Abdulhaq 'Blikkies' Bismillah from Roodepoort High, marked a turning point. His influence, in collaboration with the TCB Junior Board, was instrumental in inspiring young cricketers and elevating the standard of junior cricket in Lenasia. This period became the most progressive era for junior cricket, with a surge of emerging talent.

The Transvaal High Schools team consistently ranked among the top contenders at national competitions. Several players earned SA Schools caps, with Mohammed Moosajee notably captaining the SA Schools side in his final two years of high school.

Cricket at the primary school level also flourished, thanks to targeted development programs. Teachers Farouk Mahomed and Ismail Baker led these efforts, igniting widespread interest in the game. As a result, Lenasia fielded teams across all age groups, participating in development fixtures both locally and across Johannesburg.

Pitch vandalized and a subsequent invasion wins back facility for TCB

There were a few significant incidents involving the Lenasia Cricket Stadium are worth highlighting. When the Transvaal Cricket Board (TCB) was established, the stadium was declared off-limits to the SACOS-aligned board. The Johannesburg Cricket Council (JCC), formed during the so-called "normal" (more accurately, *abnormal*) cricketing era, retained control of facilities - even though nearly all clubs had returned to the TCB. As a result, Transvaal had to host its provincial Howa Bowl and Booley Bowl fixtures in places like Newlands, Benoni, Roshnee and the Tech Grounds in Lenasia.

The Pirates Cricket Club leadership made a bold move to reclaim the stadium by defying the JCC's restrictions. Previous attempts had resulted in threats of imprisonment. The stadium's once-celebrated pitch lay bare and neglected. After the initial threat was issued, the pitch was then deliberately destroyed - ripped up by unknown forces - clearly intended to prevent the TCB from staging matches. A barbed-wire fence was even erected around the square to block any repairs. Eventually, the City Council took responsibility and spent an entire winter restoring the pitch to playable condition.

At the time of the merger in 1976 between national cricket bodies began, a grand pavilion was being constructed at the stadium - driven solely by the controversial SACU President, Mr Rashid Varachia. Once a widely respected leader, Varachia had been instrumental in SACBOCS rise to power, but his eventual co-operation with White administrators during the formation of SACA drew much criticism. Over the following decade, the pavilion - still bearing his name - became a point of contention. Some factions refused to use the facility purely because of its association with him.

In 1983, Pirates and Crescents clubs launched a planned "invasion" of the stadium. They were so prepared that funds were set aside for bail, should arrests follow. On that tense morning, the teams tossed the coin, took to the field and played their match - without incident. That symbolic act led to the return of provincial cricket to the stadium. Varachia's name was removed, and for a brief time, the venue was renamed in honour of Dr Abu Baker Asvat before reverting to Lenasia Cricket Stadium.

During this period, Transvaal's team was rebuilt around a few seasoned veterans. Initially, with only a handful of clubs in the TCB, the provincial sides lagged behind their counterparts from the other major provinces. However, celebrated former captains and players from the SACBOC era came forward to help, including Ossie Latha, Morris Garda,

Moosa Mangera, Aboo Manack, Sam Nana and Owen Visser. Their involvement triggered a surge of clubs joining the fledgling organisation.

The A and B provincial teams began to grow in strength and stature. Notably, players from neighbouring provinces joined the ranks, enriching the standard of cricket. Among them were Vincent Barnes, Barney Mohamed, Haroon Lorgat, Nylton Miller, Siraj Gabriels, Armien Jabbar, Nasser Kemp, Navin Ramnarain, Johnny Kleinveldt and Jesse Chellan. By the mid-1980s, players like Jack and Hussein Manack, Barnes, Mohamed, and Iqbal Khan had taken their talents to leagues in Scotland and England, where they also qualified as coaches. Upon their return, the improvements in their games had a transformative impact on both club and provincial cricket.

For the record - and for the sake of posterity - here is a list of clubs and teams that upheld the banner of non-racial cricket in the province between 1977 and 1991 (in no particular order):

Azads, Bank, Crescents, Proteas, Lenasia Spurs, Lenasia United, Zulfiqar, Cavaliers, Pirates, Actonville, Ottomans, Delfos, Potchefstroom, Klerksdorp, Krugersdorp Old Boys, Zeerust, Thistles, Newclare, Riverlea, Shakti, Vredons, Heidelberg, United, Young Aces, Queensland, Roshnee and Tasmanians.

From 1977 to 1991, the Howa Bowl provincial team was captained by an impressive list of leaders: Zainul Nagdee, Sam Nana, Ebrahim Amod, Owen Visser, Moosa Mangera, Aboo Manack, Neil Edwards, Ahmed Rajah, Munir Saley, Haroon Lorgat and Jack Manack.

Democracy dawns on a new nation, but some were not happy

February 1990 marked a watershed moment in South African history. The Nationalist government announced the release of political prisoners, the unbanning of the ANC, PAC, SACP and 33 other organisations, and the imminent return of political exiles. Newspapers previously banned under apartheid laws were reinstated, and the release of Nelson Mandela was imminent, signalling the dawn of a new era.

SACOS, which had pioneered the anti-apartheid sporting movement since its inception, had long wielded tremendous influence. It stood as a guiding light through the turbulent 1970s and 1980s, relentlessly championing the principle of *no normal sport in an abnormal society*.

As the winds of political change gathered momentum, a series of national meetings took place, driven by the rise of the National Sports Congress (NSC), a newly formed body aimed at unifying South African sport. In Lenasia, intense discussions unfolded as SACOS and the NSC engaged directly in search of common ground. There were growing calls to unify sporting bodies and forge an integrated sporting landscape in anticipation of the country's looming political transformation.

However, SACOS held firm to its non-negotiable stance, refusing to abandon its principles prematurely. The NSC, on the other hand, was resolute in charting a new course for South African sport.

Amid this tidal wave of historic change, just eight months after the government's announcement, cricket in South Africa was, for the first time, unified under a single, legitimate governing body: the United Cricket Board of South Africa (UCBSA).

This development left SACOS feeling marginalised. A significant internal rift emerged, as some members and regional units participated in the formation of the new board. In Transvaal, several long-standing SACOS stalwarts walked out in protest. They opposed unifying sport before South Africa held its first democratic elections and refused to compromise on their lifelong principles simply to hasten re-entry into the international sporting arena.

The walkout left the Cricket Association of Transvaal (CAT) severely understaffed - reduced to just four officials - and placed it at a disadvantage when entering negotiations with White cricketing bodies. Unlike other provinces, which entered unity talks with balanced delegations, CAT's team, led by President Dr Gulam Karrim, Shahed Wadvalla, Ashraf Kolia and Haroon Nosarka, faced an uphill battle. To strengthen their position, they co-opted lawyer Mahomed Jajbhay and veteran administrator Goolam Rajah. It was the beginning of a new dawn - for both life and cricket in South Africa.

As the curtain closed on TCB/CAT cricket, one team stood out: Crescents Cricket Club. They were the dominant force, winning 8 league titles in the 14 seasons during the TCB/CAT era, a testament to their consistency and excellence. Pirates won the league and knockout double for two consecutive seasons and Proteas were the last team to win the league when the CAT and TCC entered negotiations.

The long and winding road

As the new unified leagues took shape, there was fierce competition for spots. Proteas and Crescents, champions and runners-up respectively, secured places in the Premier League. Both clubs strengthened their squads with top players like Iqbal Khan, Jack Manack, Nezier Dindar, Naseer Khota, Mohamed Sarang, Mohamed Desai and Yaseen Begg. Early form saw Hussein Manack, Jack Manack and Dindar earn provincial call-ups.

Teams from CAT were placed in lower divisions, and non-racial cricket was finally underway. A youth development programme was launched, spearheaded by Hoosain Ayob, with national-level coaching initiatives involving ex-SACBOC and SACB stalwarts. While the transition seemed smooth, issues soon surfaced around the non-selection of non-White players and the issue of unequal voting rights. Dr Gulam Karrim responded by expanding his advisory panel to address the growing concerns.

Meanwhile, Ashfaq Aboowath joined the provincial ranks, and Lenasia Spurs schoolboy prodigy Ahmed Omar made headlines. After excelling as a wicketkeeper-batsman, he was selected for the national U15 team that toured England - becoming the first South

African of Indian descent to represent the country post-democracy. He later made the U19 team and became the first player of colour to score a century in a youth Test against England.

Former CAT teams struggled to match the top-tier competition. Recognising the problem, Justice Mahomed Jajbhay proposed that clubs merge to strengthen teams and provide better opportunities to play provincial cricket. In 1995, several Lenasia clubs with over 150 years of collective history adhered to the call and formed the Lenasia Cricket Club (LCC). Ashraf Kolia the first chairman with Ali Osmany as his secretary. Later Yusuf Dinath lead the club. Coaching support from Moosa Mangera and West Indies legend Alvin Kallicharan helped promote young talent. Spurs and Tasmanians later joined, further boosting the merger.

By the late 1990s, enthusiasm began to wane. Complaints from unions across the country prompted the UCB to launch a review. Led by Professor André Odendaal and Imtiaz Patel, each province hosted a Transformation Indaba that revealed widespread dissatisfaction in policies and racial discrimination. The UCB responded by introducing a binding Transformation Charter to promote equality in the game.

But in Johannesburg, resistance to change remained strong. Justice Jajbhay, then chairman, brought in civic leader Dr “Ram” Salojee to drive transformation of the body. As Governor of Transformation for the newly named Gauteng Cricket Board, Salojee helped redraft a constitution to ensure fair representation. However, continued resistance from White clubs that then led to a dramatic walk-out at the AGM by Dr Mohammed Moosajee and the sitting chairman, Justice Jajbhay.

The impasse drew national attention. Cricket South Africa (CSA) appointed Emeritus Justice Pius Langa to lead a commission of inquiry. His recommendations formed the basis for a new governance structure. Though intended for five years, implementation took eight, culminating in a new Memorandum of Incorporation (MOI) and constitution that finally delivered a more balanced and inclusive system.

The storied stadium looks tired, and the Tech grounds become an eyesore

In 1994, a packed Lenasia Stadium hosted the world champions Pakistan in a colourful welcome festival match against a Transvaal Invitation XI that included Hussein Manack, Jack Manack, Imran Munshi and Ahmed Omar. This was followed by a match against the Barbados national team and a UK school XI. Hampshire County Cricket Club held coaching clinics, and later, the England team, led by Nasser Hussain, enjoyed a memorable outing with large crowds once again turning out to watch their heroes. The Sri Lankan national team also opened their South African tour with a three-day warm-up match at the stadium. Throughout these events, Lenasia Cricket Club in collaboration with the Board played a key role in hosting the matches.

By the early 2000s, however, the stadium had fallen into disrepair. A lack of interest and action from local councillors meant that the facility, once the pride of non-racial sport had deteriorated. The Sri Lankans were the last international team to play there.

Requests for improvements, such as enlarging the dressing rooms and repairing the site-screen (damaged by a mini-tornado), were ignored. A plea from 1990 to install floodlights has also gone unanswered.

Then in 2009, the council allocated R1.2 million for floodlights to be procured for the Lenasia facility, but instead, the funds were reallocated to complete the FNB Stadium for the World Cup, which cost a staggering R3.3 billion. Despite repeated requests, it took 15 years before the council added an additional turf wicket. Meanwhile, money was spent on numerous occasions at the facility without consulting the board, Lenasia Cricket Club or Crescents Club. One particularly unnecessary expense was a large wall built along the narrow road leading into the ground.

In 2019, R4 million was allocated to revitalize and secure the Tech Grounds, but no action was taken, and to date, there has been no response from the Council. The Abu Asvat Institute requested an investigation through a formal litigation process, but still, no reply has been received. For years, the Institute has hosted an annual junior tournament under the LIONS banner, yet they have faced delays due to inadequate facilities.

Over the past 20 years, Lenasia Cricket Club (LCC) has spent over R800 000 maintaining the stadium and ensuring it meets the requirements for premier league matches. It repaired the practice nets, sprinkler systems, and even purchased its own rollers and mowers. Recently, with the help of the Lions CEO, paint was donated, and the LCC contracted a team at its own expense to repaint and improve the entire complex. The club has also recently replaced public toilets, shower rooms, urinals and toilets at its own expense

Due to the poor condition of the Tech pitches and outfield, the LCC has been forced to host their lower-league teams' home matches outside of Lenasia, incurring significant transport costs on an already stretched budget.

Facilities remain a crucial issue in improving the standards for aspiring sportspeople. This has been a longstanding challenge - one that existed before democracy and continues to affect sports clubs and schools in previously disadvantaged areas.

Lenasia remains relevant despite the struggles

- After Hoosain Ayob's 14 years as national director of coaching in South Africa, he was recommended by the ICC to oversee and promote the game in Africa. Initially only 8 countries were playing cricket on the continent. Ayob recruited his old Transvaal teammate Ahmed Gabru to assist and within a period of 12 years, another 12 countries were introduced to the game. A few more have since joined the ranks and have been incorporated into the ICC's Associate divisions.
- Shaylin Pillay was the second cricketer from Lenasia to be capped for the South African under-19 team. He was followed by Yasin Valley, who enjoyed personal and national success when the team under Aiden Markram won the ICC Under-19 World Cup!

- Goolam Rajah managed the national team for 20 years. He played a huge role in managing the squad from different backgrounds and race groups, to allow them to coalesce into a formidable team. Rajah's crowning glory was when he was chosen to manage the World XI in Australia.
- Wadvalla was an official CSA umpire for domestic and international cricket for 15 years. He is presently serving as match referee.
- Tiffie Barnes coached for the Board and assisted Hoosain Ayob in Africa. He ended his career as a match referee.
- Haroon Lorgat served Western Province cricket as a financial director. He was part of their transformation team and became the convenor of selectors of the national team. He was appointed as the CEO of the ICC and on his return took up the cudgels with CSA as their CEO. When he resigned the national body was worth over R2 billion.
- Dr Mohammed Moosajee has been a board member at the Lions since the mid-1990s. He was on the selection panel for a short time. Then in 2003, he was employed as doctor of the national team. Upon Rajah's retirement, Moosajee played a dual role as doctor and manager until he resigned in 2019. He held the position as President of the Lions Board in 2023 and recently was elected as Vice President of CSA. He now represents the national body as a delegate to the ICC.
- Hussein Manack played for Transvaal before the introduction of the franchise era. He was an outspoken board member with the Lions, then moved to the selection panel. His bold and brave moves gave impetus to the quota system and his success was immediately evident. That got him the nod to join the national selection Panel that lasted five years. Whilst there he advocated the compilation of a blueprint for selection guidelines which remains a feature today. Hussein is also a much-respected commentator for 18 years for the national broadcaster.
- Having settled in Cape Town, Iqbal Khan was entrusted the role of an Independent Director on the Board of CSA because of an impressive financial background. A position on which he served for 8 years.
- Aslam Moosajee's legal firm are advisors to CSA, and he assists the Lions Legal Subcommittee.
- Aslam Khota has been in mainstream media for 26 years as a commentator and analyst. He began his journey with Talk Radio 702, commentated for Supersport for 8 years then joined the SABC on radio and television. He is currently producing documentaries and commentating for Supersport. Aslam served on CSA's panel of judges for the annual awards for 15 years of which the last 5 were as convenor. He was part of the Strikers selection panel. In a career spanning two decades, Mr Khota's achievements include broadcasting 5 ODI and 8 T20 World Cups, 3 Champions trophies. Thus far he has commentated 148 Test matches, 200 ODIs and 60 T20 internationals on Radio and television. In 2003 he published the book, "Across the Great Divide – Transvaal Crickets Joys, Struggles and Triumphs".
- The Lenasia Cricket Club secured two sponsors that allowed the club to provide cricket for over 100 youngsters. The deal with Epic Foods was clinched by the club's second chairman Yusuf Dinath that ran for 5 seasons. The Suppliers of Big Bom

confectioners and sweets then came on board and were instrumental in pumping their funds towards a thriving number of junior cricketers in the club. After 8 seasons of unbroken sponsorships, the company have shifted its focus on education. The club has a roll call of over 120 juniors and senior cricketers playing in the local leagues. The LCC is the largest club from Southern Johannesburg affiliated to the Lions. Azads, Crescents also compete in the Saturday and Sunday leagues.

Cricket in Lenasia: A Legacy of Passion and Perseverance

Despite the many challenges faced in Lenasia, cricket continues to endure, and even flourish. The rise of T20 cricket has breathed new life into local communities, inspiring renewed interest and participation. Yet, there remains a pressing call: more opportunities must be created. Clubs and individuals are being urged to reopen their doors, to rekindle the flame, and to build a pathway for young players to dream, to play and to belong.

Cricket has always held a profound place in the hearts of Lenasia's non-White communities. Through decades of exclusion and hardship, it was kept alive by a legion of unsung heroes - men who gave selflessly of their time, energy and love for the game. Their names may not appear in record books, and in many cases, their contributions went unrecognised. Yet without them, the soul of cricket here would not have survived.

Among the most pivotal were the men who established the WDICA. Their vision and commitment laid the foundation for what cricket in Lenasia would become. Their tireless efforts in the mid-1960s prevented the game from fading into obscurity. They must be remembered - not just remembered but honoured - for the legacy they built and the pride they instilled.

As we mark 70 years of cricket in Lenasia, we do so with reverence for the many who served in countless capacities. This article has already highlighted figures like Solly Patel, Solly Chothia, Yusuf Cajee and Sallie Bhikoo. Alongside them, in those formative and unforgettable years, were: Abdulhack 'Abie' Choonara, Abdul Gani, Ebrahim Minty, Said and Abdul Samad Makda, Akbar Moola, Aziz and Mobin Bhikoo, Mohamed Jina, Keshav Lalla, Solly Loonat, Dawood and Solly Kara, Solly Nagdee and Ahmed Goondiwala.

Most of them are no longer with us, but their legacy lives on every time a child picks up a bat in Lenasia. They were more than administrators or players - they were custodians of a dream. And in remembering them, we not only honour their past, but safeguard the future of the game they so dearly loved.

Aslam Khota
20 APRIL 2025

