

Versione Italiana

Syia Kolisi, the captain of South Africa, the new rugby world champion, had just turned three years old on June 24, 1995, the Saturday on which the Springboks won the World Cup in Johannesburg, which they had organized, dominating New Zealand 15 to 12. Fourteen years after that match the entire competition would be transformed into a memorable film: "Invictus" by Clint Eastwood, with Morgan Freeman as Mandela and Matt Damon as the national team captain, François Pienaar.

Mandela was released from prison on February 11, 1990, on the initiative of President de Clerk, who then repealed Apartheid. Once Mandela became president (April 1994) of the nation that had kept him in prison for twenty-seven years, he decided to avoid any form of grievance and revenge, focusing on a typically white game to promote the integration of blacks and the reconciliation of the country. A game, it is worth emphasizing, which had seen South Africa excluded from the first two editions of its World Cup precisely because of the disaster that Madiba had fought against for his entire life.

These were the years of the "Rainbow Nation", particularly dear to both Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, of meeting and holding hands to defeat the horror of racial segregation and ward off the specter of possible retaliation. It is no coincidence that all the national teams involved in the various sports took the name of a flower, the Protea, all of them renamed Proteas. All, that is, except the national rugby team. The leaping antelopes remained the Springboks, as they had been called since 1906, precisely as a statement to the whites: we will never do to you what you did to us.

Mandela focused on the value of sport, on its ability to emancipate people, on its very strong social hold, on the passion it is able to arouse at every latitude and on the beauty of a game that enhanced the best characteristics of its people: determination, tenacity, team spirit, the strength of the individual transformed into collective enthusiasm and, finally, the desire for a comeback which allows you to perform miracles, putting all your heart into overcoming a seemingly insurmountable obstacle.



The Springboks - the green and yellow

Suffice it to say that the All Blacks had a practically unstoppable phenomenon like Jonah Lomu among their ranks and were able to score 145 points in a single match, albeit against Japan, a modest opponent. But most importantly of all: in New Zealand rugby is not a sport but a secular religion, a collective battle, a symbol, you could almost say a moral duty. And being part of that joy was the aspiration of every child, all fans of a very tough but loyal national team, full of talent and positive ambition, formidable on the playing field and almost unbeatable.

Yet, Nelson Mandela found the right formula. He convinced Pienaar that black and white people shared the same destiny and, through him, the rest of the team. And so the sport of whites, which blacks despised to the point of rooting against their own country out of anger and desperation, became everyone's sport.



The Springboks parade in Capetown

At the time, there was only one black player on the team, Chester Williams; twenty-eight years later, a black champion, who hailed from Zwide, one of the townships of Port Elizabeth, raised the William Webb Ellis Cup to the sky, making an entire people happy and proud. Moreover, just like then, this time was also a very close victory, by just one point, a 12 to 11 win which goes hand in hand with the one-point successes against France and England in the quarter-finals and semi-finals, demonstrating of the competitive fury of a group that never gives up, never surrenders, that fights for every ball until the last minute, until achieving a victory dedicated to its people, in the name of a shared ideal that overturns the barriers of a past time.

Today we are faced with a multicultural, multi-ethnic and, as we have seen, very strong national team in which diversity constitutes an added value, and the meeting between former enemies is something that makes not only the triumphs but also the individual matches unique. In fact, every shared adventure has the flavor of redemption, and this often makes the difference. This also happened in Paris, last Saturday, when Handré Pollard, who was not part of the thirty-three squad

at the start of the World Cup due to an injury, and only entered once the tournament was in progress, scored all twelve points which brought about the triumph for the green and gold. And from somewhere up there, Mandela was smiling.

Translation by [Paul Rosenberg](#)

Back to [YtaliGLOBAL](#)