

KAREN VAN ROOYEN

THE plight of a group of boys desperate to play soccer at their school has triggered an investigation by Minister of Sport Fikile Mbalula.

Last month, the Sunday Times reported that boys were not allowed to play soccer at Hoërskool Bekker in Magaliesburg, northwest of Johannesburg.

This was despite the fact that the school had received a multi-million-rand revamp to host Portugal during the 2010 World Cup.

Now things have changed. Not only are the eager pupils at Hoërskool Bekker at last getting their chance to play the beautiful game, but a multiparty probe is under way to look into how soccer can be introduced at all schools across South Africa.

Mbalula's spokesman, Paena Galane, said the minister had instructed the department's director-general, Vermeil Petersen, to investigate donations to Bekker and any other schools that received contributions during the World Cup.

Such money, the minister said, played an important role in unleashing and improving talent in school sport and the department was now working with the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic body and South African Football Association to roll out soccer programmes at schools.

"Our point of departure is that school sport and community sport are the basis for sport development and transformation," said Mbalula.

Safa and the Gauteng Department of Education have launched separate investigations.

The school's authorities were not allowed to comment. Parent Wenda Scheepers said previous attempts to introduce soccer at the school had fallen on deaf ears.

The school underwent a R9-million revamp including new floodlights and an underground irrigation system.

Education department spokesman Charles Phahlane confirmed that the school would start running a soccer programme in the second term of the year.

These boys at Hoërskool Bekker in Magaliesburg have reason to jump for joy. Their wish to play soccer at school has been granted at long last — and they have opened the door for the beautiful game to become part of the sports scene at all schools in South Africa



Picture KATHERINE MUICK-MERE

THE GAME IS ON!

Safa technical director Serame Letsoaka has been to visit the school.

Safa spokesman Morio Sanyane said he had met with principal, Theo Scholtz, and the school's sports and marketing director Jimmy Kruger.

By the end of the meeting, they had resolved that:

- The school will compile a list of players interested in playing football and e-mail it to Letsoaka;

- The school will allocate a field used previously for rugby for football; and
- Safa will identify a local coach or coaches to assist the school.

In addition, Safa will submit a competition management tool to help the school to run its own league as an introduction.

"Hoërskool Bekker mirrors a number of schools around the country so whatever decision or policy that we come up with, it

should encompass the entire country. It should be a solution for the entire country," said Sanyane.

"We can use it as a model to replicate throughout the country for kids in rugby schools who want to play soccer."

About 100 boys and 30 girls are interested in playing soccer at the school.

The boys this week received a donation of soccer kits from Patrick Maphoso, a South

African living in Ireland. Maphoso established an organisation aimed at assisting sports in Africa.

Matriculant Amogelang Kgaladi has been leading the struggle to have soccer introduced at the school for three years.

"I'm really a soccer fan and I'm happy for anything we can get. It's been in the pipeline for too long," he said.

Among those who signed up to play soccer are two of the

schools under-16 rugby players, Mark Nhlapo and Kyle Collard.

"Before I came to boarding school, I played soccer for a club. I enjoy rugby and soccer, but I prefer soccer," said Collard.

John Perlman, founder of the Dreamfields Project which aims to take soccer to township and rural schools, said there were many spinoffs to introducing sport, including soccer, at school level.

"Sports make for better

schools in all sorts of ways. It creates a positive atmosphere. It gives not only the kids who are playing, but the other kids as well, a focus," he said. "And if you have better schools, you have better communities because there is a lot of life around schools."

Perlman said introducing soccer at an earlier age would help players turn professional sooner and improve the standard of national teams.

African adventure will pump up water

BUYEKEZWA MAIKWABE

AN adventure-seeking couple set off today on a 28 000km drive from Cape Town to London to raise cash for charity.

Cape Town-born David Gittelton, 29, and his British wife, Naomi Ruben, 30, hope their six-month journey will bring drinking water to people in southern Africa.

Cash raised during the journey will pay for the installation of the PlayPump Water System in communities with no access to water. The pump harnesses the energy of children: when they play on the roundabout, water is pumped to the surface.

The trip will take the couple through 28 countries including Botswana, Namibia, Sudan and Egypt in Africa and 15 European countries. Once they reach the Mediterranean, their second-hand Land Cruiser 4x4 will be shipped by sea from Africa to Europe.

"The beneficiaries of the pump will be people who walk 8km to fetch 20l of water that they would probably be carrying on their heads on a trip taking about three hours," Gittelton said.

The University of Cape Town marketing graduate moved to the UK four years ago.

He said he and his wife, a social worker, "decided to do something better for humanity and ourselves", so Ruben left her job, the couple rented out their London flat, and they went to Cape Town.

Shipping line Safmarine is hoping to raise £15 000 and the couple have pledged to match the amount. Each pump costs about R90 000 to install.

The money will be given to UK-based charity Lawrence's Roundabout Well Appeal, which has installed more than 600 water pumps in southern Africa.

MONICA LAGANPARSAD

MORE than R7-billion changed hands worldwide before the first ball of the 2011 ICC Cricket World Cup was even bowled yesterday.

Bookmakers even took last-minute bets during the opening game between co-hosts India and Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

SA bookmakers this week used the words "bonanza" and "jackpot" to describe the flood of bets. Some local punters have wagered between R100 000 and R650 000 on the Proteas to win the tournament.

Local bookmakers have conservatively estimated that between R500-million and R1.2-billion will be wagered in this country alone — of which an estimated R250-million will be gambled in Gauteng. Hundreds of millions more will be spent on illegal wagers.

Newspapers from India to the UK this week reported that billions of dollars would be wagered during the six-week tournament, the third-largest sporting event in the world in terms of TV viewers.

The tournament, with an estimated 2.2 billion audience, will comprise 49 games at eight venues in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

The final will be played on April 2 at Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai.

Gauteng-based bookmaker Lisa Haines said the largest bet she had taken so far was R100 000 on the Proteas to win. "There's a lot of patriotic money coming through," she said.

The Proteas are fourth favourites to win after India, Australia and Sri Lanka.

Johannesburg-based LMB online betting manager Ramon Zoghby said: "If R500 000 were placed on the Proteas now to win the tournament, a successful punter would walk away with R2.5-million. On top of that, he would get his R500 000 back," said Zoghby.

He said the biggest bets had been from punters in India, New Zealand and the West Indies.

"The underdogs are New Zealand, West Indies, Bangladesh and possibly England."

A Cape Town bookmaker said a wealthy punter, who lost R530 000 during the 2010 World Cup, was preparing to place a "substantial amount" in excess of R650 000.

The Proteas have six pool matches in their group spread over about four weeks. Their first match is against the West Indies on Thursday.

GreatOdds MD Tyrone Dobbin said bets had been pouring in since last year.

The World Cup has cricket going to everyone's head . . .



CUT ABOVE THE REST: A cricket fan has his hair shaved into the shape of the Cricket World Cup trophy in the Indian city of Ahmedabad this week. Picture: REUTERS

"But punters only started placing bets in the last month or so. Hundreds of thousands of rands have been spent to date," he said.

But while some bets have been placed on national teams, millions more have been wagered on who will be crowned player of the tournament.

Bookmakers said the odds were stacked in favour of Proteas all-rounder Jacques Kallis, but Indian batsman Sachin Tendulkar and spin bowler Harbajan Singh could steal the show.

Singh, South Africa's Dale Steyn and Australia's Brett Lee are favourites to top the bowling.

Said the Times of India: "This is perhaps going to be the biggest World Cup in terms of betting, with two billion people tuning in from across the globe. Bookies have promised unprecedented betting."

The UK's Guardian newspaper reported that millions of punters in India gambled an estimated R7.2-billion on major games.

"Gambling is illegal in almost all parts of India, and following a string of high-profile match-fixing scandals, bookies are going to extraordinary lengths to avoid detection," said the newspaper.

According to SA bookies, the Proteas have a 5/1 chance of winning their first world cup, with a 2/1 chance of reaching the semi-finals and 4/10 chance of beating the West Indies in their opening match.

India, at 28/10, are the firm favourites to win the tournament, followed by co-hosts Sri Lanka, at 4/1. SA's long-time rivals, Australia, are quoted at 5/1. Outsiders Kenya, the Netherlands and Canada have odds of 1 000/1.

Among the batsmen, Tendulkar tops the betting boards at 10/1, followed by teammate Virender Kohli at 11/1. SA's Hashim Amla is quoted at 12/1 and Graeme Smith at 20/1.

● See *The Gifted Horse*, Page 12 of Sport

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