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Why Bafana Bafana have to rebrand for 2010

By: Dr Nikolaus Eberl

Two days after the Springboks won the Rugby World Cup in Paris, President Thabo Mbeki went on air stating that the South African soccer team should consider a name change: "These are young people who carry the national colours, the pride and hopes of the nation. I really think we need to revisit names like that. The nation must feel proud, that we identify with these names. Bafana Bafana cannot have such meaning."



Mbeki's call was supporting by soccer legend Jono Somo, who said, "I support the president 100%. We also need to change the colours of the team and get something close to, or similar to the Boks, which is a source of national pride and represents the country. Everyone knows the Springbok is an African animal, and green is our grass in the fields here. But what does Bafana Bafana mean?"

On the other hand, *Business Day* deputy sports editor Mminawa Ntloko joined the debate lamenting that "our beloved obsession with name changes has once again come to the surface ... Yet the name Bafana Bafana is hardly the point here, is it? The team itself is the problem. How on earth is changing the team's name going to help matters on the pitch. That squad is struggling and you'd better believe me, their name is the least of their problems. At this point, they could be called the Flying Ducks and most of us would not care."

Coined by sports reporters

Bafana Bafana, meaning Boys, Boys, was coined by three *Sowetan* sports reporters in 1992, shortly after the readmission of South Africa to world football. According to Neil Tovey, captain of the winning 1996 Africa Cup of Nations team, who was present at the time, "We were doing well and we were rookies in football, and that's what it means."

On the other hand, the nickname 'Springboks' originated during the first tour of the South African Rugby team to Britain in 1906/7. At an impromptu meeting, the tour manager, officials and captain Paul Roos invented the nickname to prevent the British press from coining their own nickname. Roos told newspaper reporters that they were to call the team 'De Springbokken'. The *Daily Mail* then printed an article referring to the 'Springboks'. The team thereafter wore blazers with a springbok on the left breast pocket.

What exactly is in a name? And how important is a name to the brand image of a national team?

According to branding expert Al Ries, "the most important branding decision one will ever make, is what to name your product or service... The name is the hook that hangs the brand on the product ladder in the prospect's mind. In the positioning era, the single most important marketing decision you can make is what to name the product... When you consider your brand, start with your name. If you don't have a good brand name, what can you do about it? You could change it!"

Changed his name

When Ralph Lifschitz wanted to become a famous designer, he didn't start by working 24 hours a day designing clothes. The first thing he did was to change his name to Ralph Lauren. In fact, had it not been for the change of somebody's surname in 1877, world history could have been markedly different during the first half of the 20th century: It was Adolf Hitler's father, Aloys Schicklgruber (the latter meaning sump digger in a local Austrian dialect), who decided at the age of 39 years to change his name to his stepfather's family name. It is hard to imagine that fifty years later, Germans would have been keen to salute their chancellor "Heil Schicklgruber!"

This is the reason why the Nigerian Eagles inspire such dazzling performances from its players and the Indomitable Lions from Cameroon mesmerised millions of spectators at the 1990 FIFA World Cup to go all the way to the quarterfinals, only to be beaten narrowly by England.

In fact, Cameroon were known as the Lions until it lost the Africa Cup of Nations in 1972 in front of its own public. It was then that the president, in a bid to revive national pride, renamed the team Indomitable Lions and this has made the team arguably stronger psychologically. So even when it meet other Lions, like the Atlas of Morocco or Teranga of Senegal, it usually maintains its supremacy.

"Sense of identity"

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A few years ago, the BBC hosted a debate on the subject of naming African soccer teams and invited viewers to give their opinions on the gamut of nicknames such as the Squirrels of Benin, the Hornets of Rwanda or the Chipolopolo (Bullets) of Zambia. Said George Nworie from Nigeria: "Nicknames not only give a sense of identity but also inspire and give players an air of superiority over their opponents. In fact, when properly adopted, nicknames become the 12th man on the field. This is why the name 'Indomitable Lions' has contributed greatly to Cameroon's success in recent years."

Concurred another viewer from Cameroon, Osric Tening Forton: "It appears nicknames were created to instil fear into opponents and, believe me, I know the name 'Indomitable Lions' sends shivers down the spines of my friends when we talk football. "

One of the most evocative nicknames in African football belongs to Gambia whose national team is called the Scorpions while the under-20s are Baby Scorpions, which serves as a reminder that, no matter whether it is an adult or baby scorpion, its sting is just as painful and scorpions do scare the life out of most people.

To put paid to the name change argument, one should remember that in 2002 a High Court judgement ruled that 'Bafana Bafana' was not the exclusive property of South Africa's Football Association and that SAFA could not stop others from using the name. The legal action arose after a clothing manufacturer registered 'Bafana Bafana' as a trademark. SAFA had wanted to register 'Bafana Bafana' as a brand for itself, and had an ambitious plan to use the name to promote a range of products, including cosmetics and fertiliser.

Not owned by SAFA

On appeal hearing, the judges ruled that 'Bafana Bafana' was not owned by SAFA, as the name had been coined by three *Sowetan* sports reporters in 1992. Only after it had become popular with the public did SAFA think about registering it as a trademark. The court said the association did not have sole rights to the name, and the use of 'Bafana Bafana' by a clothing manufacturer would not misrepresent or dilute its meaning.

In considering the new brand name, we should heed the words of Simon Naukala from Namibia: "Nicknames should be a symbol of national pride, unity, identity, love and determination. As for my country Namibia, the name Brave Warriors gives us strength and morale as well as the sense of fighting back. Even if we lose, we fight bravely."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Dr Nikolaus Eberl is the author of *BrandOvation: How Germany won the World Cup of Nation Branding* (Academy Press 2007). His forthcoming sequel is called *BrandOvation< 2010: Hosting the Best World Cup Ever*" (scheduled for release in January 2008). He can be contacted for seminars and keynote addresses at www.brandovation.com or email at nikolaus@brandovation.com.

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- [If your child is not performing well, you dont change the childs name.](#) - Reynold Tsholoane Thakhuli



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