

## Dhiraj Soma and Sons

### A Family of Sportsmen

"The Dhiraj home, on Ninth Street near the corner of Mogul Street - that was our headquarters. Everybody would meet there and everything happened there. The father was very sports-minded so all his sons got involved and took the lead in sporting activities. And we looked up to them."[1]

When Dhiraj Soma and his sons first took up and promoted sport in the location, it was for purely recreational purposes. Because sport is recreation. Or is it? Does it have other dimensions? For the Dhiraj family in the thirties and forties, it did not, and they had no idea that they were embarking on a quest that would force them to confront the monster of apartheid. As Dhiraj's sons rose in the ranks of soccer and tennis, a remarkable story emerges of a family that fought to take sport beyond narrow ethnic boundaries, beyond racial boundaries and into the arena of equal opportunity.

But they were people who came from humble beginnings. Dhiraj Soma, like most Indian immigrants, began life as a hawker. He was born in the village of Nabalia, Karadi-Navsari near Bombay in Gujarat and when he was eleven years old, his father brought him to South Africa, to 46 Eighth Street in the Asiatic Bazaar. Dhiraj's father, who had been in Pretoria since 1905, was a successful hawker who had started with a barrow and had graduated to a horse and cart. By 1922, he was doing well enough to go back to India to fetch his son, Dhiraj, and in 1923, his younger son, Morar.

He sent the boys to school at the Muslim Masjid in Mogul Street, an old corrugated-iron structure that accommodated the two hundred pupils and two teachers of the English school. Though they were doing well at school, the boys didn't get beyond the primary level because their father's homesickness got the better of him. He had come to South Africa to make his fortune and set his sons on the path to wealth, but after two decades, he still missed the life in India and when he felt his sons were old enough to take care of themselves, he went back to Nabalia for good. Dhiraj and Morar, a couple of teenagers, took over the hawking trade, made a success of it and sent money back to their parents in Nabalia. When Dhiraj turned twenty-one, his parents arranged a marriage and he went back to India to marry Ratanbhen. After his first child, Magan, was born in 1933, he came back to Pretoria with his family and set up home at 478 Ninth Street. Over the years, there were eight more children, and in all he had six sons and three daughters.

Soon after his return to South Africa in 1933, Dhiraj threw himself enthusiastically into sport, which was fairly well established in the location. Football, the most popular sport, had been the first to receive serious recognition when, in 1905, a little more than ten years after Indians had settled in the Coolie Location, the Pretoria District Indian Football Association (PDIFA) was

established with three teams: Pretorians, Swaraj and Market Greens. In the early years, progress was slow and it was only after the First World War that there was real growth. By the mid-1920s, there were six teams in a league that competed for the RK Pillay League Trophy and the Mooloo's Knock Out Shield.

“Soccer in those days was played on the old ground in Marabastad and the field was known as the ‘Razor's Edge’ because there was no grass on it, just sand and a lot of stones.”<sup>[2]</sup> By the end of a game, players were covered with cuts and bruises even though they wore pads on the sides of their pants to protect them from the rough surface. Boom and Barber Streets formed the north-south boundaries, and Lorentz and Third Streets, the east-west boundaries of the Razor's Edge. The old ABC Bakery was adjacent to the ground and Mooloo's Café was nearby.

Soccer players of those early days, Dhiraj's contemporaries, didn't think much of the footballers that succeeded them in the fifties and sixties and played on turf. They would say to Dhiraj's sons, “Listen, you fullas don't know anything about football. We played football in our time. We kicked the ball harder, we tackled harder, we can take a fall. Football was a tough game. Football in those days was not for sissies. We had guys that could kick and the bars would split.”

Though they believed they played better football, they used force to win and many games, particularly cup matches and important league fixtures, were marred by intimidation and violence fomented on the ground and continued in the streets after the matches were over. Cambridge, the most aggressive team, was also the most feared. When Cambridge players threatened their opponents on the field, very few stood up to them; most felt it was not worth their while to get into a fight and some were even too scared to play to their full strength. They knew that if they tackled and outplayed Cambridge, they were in for trouble. People used to say, “If you beat Cambridge in a cup final you must start running home immediately after the game.” When there were grudge games between Cambridge and Pretorians, both powerful teams, they would tell the referee before the match, “We're going to win today, man.” But a referee, like Andrew Anthony, couldn't be intimidated. Though he was threatened on many occasions, he remained very strict and fair.

His sons often teased Dhiraj, who had played soccer for Swaraj FC, but only briefly, “You were too frightened to play football.”

“It's truth,” he would reply. “I wasn't prepared to get beaten up after every game.” Nevertheless, he remained a faithful supporter and went to watch soccer matches every Sunday.

But his game was cricket. In the mid-1930's, he was the wicketkeeper for Azad's Cricket Club that competed against teams like Kismet, Old Boys, Clydes and Navyugas. Cricket was also played at the Razor's Edge on the very hard pitch that was bouncy and dangerous. On one occasion when the ball rose unexpectedly high, it hit Dhiraj in the mouth and knocked out his

front teeth. But that did not dampen his enthusiasm for sport. He loved all games, formal and informal, and drafted his sons and all the boys living in Ninth Street into the excitement of sporting competition.

Jeram Bhana's eyes still light up as he recalls those early days. "We lived in Ninth Street, the same street as the Dhiraj family. There were so many boys just in that one street alone that we could make our own team. The Dhiraj brothers took the lead in forming a club, giving it a name and making arrangements to play other football clubs. We were the All Bharats. At first we were called All India. When India changed its name after independence and became Bharat, we changed our name to All Bharats."

"We played everything from kennetjie to soccer and cricket. It's amazing! With hardly any facilities in those years, sport became a vibrant activity in the location. We had to raise funds for our equipment and everything was organised from the Dhirajs' house. I can remember we used to make plumes over the Christmas period so that we could buy the jerseys and all that. And we would go around selling these plumes in town for tickey and sixpence and make quite a packet. Afterwards, all the chaps would get together and go on a picnic to Warmbaths. We would ride to Warmbaths on our bicycles! When I look at the life we led then - we were living in the real sense."

All Bharats also played against clubs in Atteridgeville. "We would catch the bus in location, then go to Atteridgeville. The first time we went to Atteridgeville Stadium, we came back to the change room after the game to find all our clothes gone. The officials of the club said, "Why didn't you tell us you were going to leave your clothes here, we would have locked the room. Anyway, just wait here.' We waited for about an hour and a half and then the officials came back with all our things. 'We're sorry about this. Here's your stuff.' They had gone straight to the thieves and retrieved everything from them. 'We know who these people are. So don't be afraid to come back here. You won't have trouble again."

All Bharats was a team of Gujarati boys. As Gujaratis, they were expected to attend the community functions that usually fell on weekends and clashed with sporting events. As Dhiraj had encouraged his sons to take up sporting activities, he didn't insist on their attendance at these gatherings. "He never restricted us and said, 'You can't go play soccer this week because I'm taking you to a wedding.' No, he gave us that freedom." It was perceived as release from social obligations but it really was recognition of individual freedom, and therefore a challenge to convention and to ethnicity, the thin end of the wedge that would eventually go further than Dhiraj had anticipated. As his sons began to invest more and more time and energy in sports and sports administration, their ties with the traditional, cultural core of the Gujarati community would weaken.

Though sport is about competition, it is also about interaction. And at school, in inter-class, inter-house and inter-school games, teams consisted of children from diverse backgrounds who mixed freely together and in embracing one another, learned to embrace one another's differences. In addition, school fixtures on Wednesday afternoons interfered with vernacular classes and forced awkward choices that challenged traditional loyalties. "When there was a fixture for my standard, I used to dodge Gujarati School. I used to say. 'I rather go play

football.' And the next day my teacher would call me, 'Come here. You were not here yesterday. Why did you stay away?' I became targeted as far as that went. We used to play at least one Wednesday a month and I knew I was going to be punished the next day. I usually got a couple of whacks on my hands.&quot;

Involvement in sport was carrying the Dhiraj boys into wider social settings where they were mixing freely and forming friendships outside the Gujarati community and when they married they did not stay within ethnic confines. &quot;Almost all of us are married to Tamil girls. My father was of course very disappointed, and mother too, but that was part of life and today we're a very close family. The Gujarati community recognises us, Dhirajbhai's sons, and is proud that we are Gujaratis. When you look at sport, the Gujarati community is not so prominent, especially at national and provincial level. So they feel very proud and they say, 'That's Dhirajbhai's son.'&quot;

But in the early 1950's, Dhirajbhai's sons, still teenagers, were developing their skills, proving themselves as sportsmen and taking the games as they came without any consideration of social and political consequences. Their focus was on immediate developments in the tiny world of the Asiatic Bazaar. And when the Asiatic Bazaar got a new turf sports ground in 1954, there was great excitement in the location! A new turf sports ground! Turf! As a result of the efforts of Bob Maharaj, Ramlall Mooloo, Bhai Singh, Siva Chetty and Solomon Ernest, members of the Sports Board, who had approached the City Council for better grounds, two beautiful fields were laid out next to one another at the lower edge of Marabastad where the market is today. No stands, no seating of any kind was provided, but the sporting community was thankful just to have playing fields with surfaces that wouldn't cause injuries. But they had to get used to the new pitch so different from the Razor's Edge, where the ball had been much faster and had bounced very much higher. The new grounds were opened by the Sporting Board and inaugurated with exhibition matches between the existing PDIFA teams, Stellas, Swaraj, Pretorians and Delfos.

After the new grounds were opened, junior club fixtures were organised for Sunday mornings as curtain raisers for the main matches in the afternoon. Although there were efforts to accommodate junior soccer in the fifties, a properly organised Junior League would only come into being in the 1970's; too late for Dhiraj's boys, who were already playing in the Senior League in the late 1950's. Magan had joined Pirates FC and Delfos FC recruited Diar, the star footballer of the family, when he turned seventeen. &quot;There were no coaches, in those days, in the fifties, no coaches. You went to the grounds, you ran round for stamina building, you kicked the ball as much as you possibly could, you played 'pick-and-play' football. Everything you learnt on your own and by watching others playing. I was never one that went and watched games that whites used to play. Others picked up a lot from that. I never could go. I never wanted to support white soccer. But I did watch overseas teams that came to the Caledonian Grounds and I always supported the visitors.&quot;

The managers of the teams, who told their players how and where to play, never came to the grounds to coach players. Bala Pillay, who had played for Transvaal and was &quot;a

right-winger, fast, very fast, and intelligent," was manager of Delfos. But the players did not expect him to interfere with their individual styles or try to weld them into a team. Each one nurtured his unique talent, believing that that was what counted. They were a team of individualists tied together by their desire to win. Tall, well-built Diar, Delfos's striker, who stood out from the other players on the field, had a powerful kick and great speed but it was his ability to think on his feet that made him such a valuable player.

At the time that Diar was playing for Delfos, he was studying at the Johannesburg Institute for Indian Teachers. When he qualified, he was posted to a school in Standerton and couldn't play for his club. Young men in those days had to spend several years in the 'bundus' before they could get a posting near home. One weekend, when his club was to play Farouk Rangers in a final, Delfos manager, Khandabhai Niccha, knew that they would have to pull out all the stops if they were to beat Rangers with the powerful Moosa brothers in their side. There was only one thing to do. He sent his car all the way to Standerton to fetch his star player and with Diar in the team, Delfos beat Farouk Rangers and it was Diar, who scored the winning goal.

At first, soccer was played only at local level and all competition was between teams in the PDIFA. When Diar began playing in the fifties, Indian soccer had reached provincial level and competition was with teams from all over the Transvaal. "At Sooboo's Café, they used to put up the League positions and the results as they came in by phone. On Sunday evenings, there was always a crowd at the café waiting to hear the results. In 1957, we (Delfos FC) were running for the League and everybody used to rush in there to find out what was happening. And there was great excitement when Delfos became the first team to win the Transvaal Football League Cup in 1957." It was a specially proud achievement for young Diar, the Vice Captain of the winning team.

With the establishment of the Sam China Cup Tournament, Indian soccer advanced to inter-provincial level. This bi-ennial tournament, held every two years in a different province, gave players the opportunity to represent their provinces. "For every Indian it was a real honour and privilege to be selected to play in the provincial side. A number of players from the Asiatic Bazaar played for Transvaal at different times: Boet Gamer, Bala Pillay and Nithia Moodley of Delfos FC and Rajendran Pillay from Swaraj FC."

At that time, soccer was racially segregated. Africans, Coloureds and Indians had separate associations and did not play against each other as they had before apartheid began to be more strictly enforced. But the need for more competitive soccer was driving the sport to the next logical development - inter-race competition. With racially based associations, however, winning and losing were linked to racial superiority or inferiority and competition reinforced prejudice. Inter-race games were played at local, provincial and national levels. At the top level a South African Indian side, a South African Bantu side, and a South African Coloured side competed for the Godfrey Williams Cup. Diar represented the Transvaal Indian Football Association in 1959.

At the time, there wasn't a Coloured FA in Marabastad as the Coloured community had been

moved to Eersterust. So Coloured football players joined the Indian Association even though this was against the law. They simply adopted Indian surnames and registered with the Indian Association. As inter-marriage between Coloureds and Indians was common, they could get away with it. But there were occasions when protests were registered against teams with Coloured players, especially if those were winning teams. This was a way to get them disqualified and overturn their victories. "In sport you like to win; sometimes you use any tactics to get a win. So we even promoted racialism to a certain extent. And we always wanted to prove, 'We Indians are better than Bantus, or better than Coloureds'";

This attitude led to racial violence at games.

Realising that inter-race matches stimulated and reinforced racism, administrators, took the next step forward. When the call for non-racial sport was raised, the attack on apartheid that had been incipient became a recognised objective.

This is when Gonaseelan Pillay entered the scene. Gono, as he was popularly known, came from a family of political activists. Being Thailema's[4] son, he brought the struggle for democracy into soccer.

Gono's family played for Swaraj, the club of mostly Tamil players. "His cousin, Rajendran Pillay, Krishnannè's son, was a top footballer in the club so naturally Gono started playing for Swaraj. He was a goalkeeper but was never selected to play. The team had an experienced and competent goalkeeper and they didn't want to take a chance with the inexperienced Gono." He began to feel he was wasting his time in the club. Aware of his frustration, Delfos officials, Bala Pillay, Teelak Singh, Boet Gamer, Karia Moses and Bhai Singh invited him to join their club. Without hesitation, Gono left Swaraj and went to play for Delfos. "Gono was a hit from the very beginning, a fantastic goalkeeper. Afterwards, they (Swaraj) would come to him and say, 'Hey, come play for us.' He'd say, 'No, I'm sticking with Delfos.' So he stuck with Delfos and was selected to represent Transvaal. And many of us felt that he should have represented South Africa as well."

Organisations like SACOS and SANROC came into being and were calling for non-racial sport. But with Group Areas relocations, clubs were finding it difficult to put mixed teams together. The African population of Marabastad had been removed to Atteridgeville and the Coloured population to Eersterust. When Gono became President of Delfos FC and soon after President of the PDIFA, his leadership gave soccer in Pretoria the impetus that was needed to propel it into non-racialism. First, he challenged the PDIFA for maintaining the Indian tag and got the organisation to agree to be called the Pretoria District Football Association (PDFA). "It was quite an intense fight at the time with the old crowd, especially Mr Siva Chetty who had been the President for quite a number of years. The old establishment - Ponsamy Chetty, Pullai Chetty, Perithumbi and Moothoo - was fighting to retain the Indian way of life. For these old people change was very difficult." Eventually, they gave way to the youngsters and a united association, the PDFA, was established in Marabastad. Thereafter, mixed teams represented districts rather than races and selection for these teams was made from Indian, Coloured, and African players. But the move to non-racial soccer led to the dissolution of the old Transvaal Indian League, brought the Sam China Cup tournaments to an end and left a gap.

Various football associations then took it upon themselves to organise tournaments.

Between 1965 and 1967, the PDFA organised four non-racial tournaments.

"The first tournament - the first time that Marabastad was holding a tournament - was on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the PDFA, formerly the PDIFA, that was founded in 1905. And we celebrated in style. We organised a tournament to be held over two days and invited teams from Johannesburg and Lens. From Pretoria, we had our local teams, Delfos, Pretorians, and Sundowns, and it was really a big social event. There were marches through the streets: the Pretoria Muslim Brigade in front and our girls, the drum majorettes, marching behind. We held a beauty competition and chose a queen for the tournament. We went from street to street throughout Marabastad making announcements with a loud hailer. Then you had people flocking to the tournament. The whole community took part in it - ladies selling foodstuffs and things."

Meanwhile, Gono was working on the Northern Transvaal Indian Football Association (NTIFA), which had accepted the government's racial policy - now called multi-nationalism - and had refused to merge with the non-racial PDFA. As Gono was dealing with a very conservative group, all his efforts failed. But in 1967, the NTIFA elected a new President, Sathia Pillay, who was willing to listen. That wasn't enough, however. And Gono, who was quite prepared to relinquish the presidency of the PDFA in order to achieve his goal, took the bold step of offering the NTIFA all the executive positions in the organisation if it would merge with the PDFA and adopt a non-racial policy. This did the trick. The NTIFA agreed but offered to share the cabinet positions and Gono became Secretary of the PDFA under Sathia Pillay, the President.

While the PDFA was fighting to establish non-racialism in the district, it also had to contend with the move towards professionalism. 'Professional' in those days meant sharing the gate. In 1960, Delfos was invited to turn professional but did not and instead began playing friendly matches against pro clubs. This kept the team alive. Other clubs were losing players to professional teams and amateur competition was beginning to decline. When they saw this, the old guard in the PDFA, began to hanker for the Sam China Tournament and Indian soccer. They did not prevail.

Then Delfos and the PDFA suffered a great loss. In 1968, Gono became ill and died. He was only thirty-five years old and still at the beginning of what had promised to be a brilliant administrative career. For twelve years, he had been the inspiration behind progress in soccer and the establishment of non-racial soccer among Africans, Indians and Coloureds in Pretoria. He didn't live long enough to tackle the last barrier, the barrier between black and white soccer. His club and his teammates, Diar, in particular, felt his loss keenly and today, after thirty-five years, Diar is still in mourning for his old friend. As a tribute to Gono, Delfos organised the Gonaseelan Pillay Tournament, an event that took place annually from 1972 to 1977. Only the first one was held at the Indian Grounds in Marabastad; the rest were at the Laudium Stadium.

Dhiraj Soma's sons were active sportsmen at a time when progress in sport was on a collision

course with apartheid objectives. Sport is about trying out and testing physical and mental skills. Dedicated sportsmen don't give up until they have reached the maximum of their potential and competition is the driving force that takes them as far as they can go. This intrinsic feature of sport was inimical to the apartheid policy of restricting and confining black endeavour. Despite apartheid restrictions, however, organisations like SACOS and people like Gono were able to move soccer out of the ghettos even if they could not bring it into the mainstream. The attempt to break down the last racial barrier in sport was left to Jasmets, the fourth of the Dhiraj boys.

"Dhiraj (Jasmets), born in Marabastad ... had no interest in tennis during his early years and only played football in the dusty streets of Marabastad. Then, at the age of 14, an uncle of his, Mr D.D. Patel, bought him a tennis racquet and taught him the game. He so impressed Mr Patel that he was included in the Indian High School team."[5] But Jasmets did not restrict himself to tennis; he continued to compete in athletics, played football in winter, cricket in summer and in between was serving and smashing his way to top tennis honours.

In Marabastad, there were gravel tennis courts for Africans near the Dougall Hall and for Indians and Coloureds on the corner of Cowie and Struben Streets in the Cape Location. When Africans were relocated to Atteridgeville, Saulsville and Mamelodi, the Dougall Hall and the tennis courts were taken over by the Indian and Coloured communities. Jasmets and Hiralall, the fifth of the Dhiraj boys, played at the Cowie Street courts. Herman Abrahams from the Cape Location, who would become Jasmets's doubles partner in the late sixties, learned his tennis at the courts near the Dougall Hall. There was no coach and people learned the game from books and each other. They simply picked up a ball, began hitting around and developed enough competence to have fun and enjoy some friendly competition. There were no clubs, just individuals playing individuals. This was Sunday tennis.

But DD Patel was serious. Though he himself was an average player with mostly book knowledge, he could spot talent and undertook the training of Jasmets and his brother, Hiralall, who went on to become national champions. In 1960, Jasmets only eighteen, created a stir when he beat Parbhoo Roopnarain to win the South African (Indian) Open Men's Singles title in Durban. He made a clean sweep of it that year, taking mixed doubles and men's doubles titles as well. He was singles champion for three successive years, 1960, 1961 and 1962. "In 1962, Dhiraj, who possesses a wonderful temperament, physical fitness, and a large variety of fluent strokes, retained his men's singles South African Open title at Newlands."[6]

Jasmets won these titles while still a student at the Johannesburg Institute for Indian Teachers. After he qualified as a teacher of History and Physical Education, he was appointed to the Pretoria Indian Boys' High School in 1964. Four of the Dhiraj boys were teachers; sport was their vocation but not their livelihood. At the same time as he was beginning his career as a teacher, Jasmets was having to adjust to new challenges in tennis.

Like soccer, tennis, having gone through the phases of local, provincial and national racial competition, had moved through inter-racial competition and was now non-racial among Africans, Coloureds and Indians. Though Jasmets was the top Indian player, it took him a couple of years to get into his stride in non-racial tennis. But his belief in himself and his dedication to the sport, eventually took him to the top. In 1966 and 1967, he won the Southern African Lawn Tennis Union's singles championship. The Southern African LTU had been set up in opposition to the white South African LTU. "Jasmets was one of the youngest champions of the South African Tennis Association. He played against people like David Samaai and there was great competition between the Transvaal and the Cape: the Samaai brothers from the Cape and from the Transvaal, Herman Abrahams, Jasmets and Hiralall Soma[7]."

Once they had proved themselves in their home country, these champions, with Wimbledon in their sights, were ready to conquer the world. The Samaai brothers, the first to make their way to the UK, were followed in 1968 by Jasmets Dhiraj and his partner, Herman Abrahams. Playing in county tournaments, they discovered that even at local level the standard was much higher than anything they had experienced at home. Though they met with little success at first, their enthusiasm and willingness to learn brought them some reward when they became the North of England doubles champions and gained admission to the qualifying rounds at Wimbledon. Though they were knocked out, they were not discouraged. Despite the realisation that they were ill prepared for international competition, having tested themselves in the arena, they did not feel that it was out of their reach. Confident that with proper coaching and the requisite experience, they would succeed, they spent three months in the UK playing in various local championships before returning to South Africa.

It was more a visit than a return home. Back in Pretoria, they immediately set up a rigorous training schedule and began to prepare for their next attempt at Wimbledon. In 1969, they returned to Britain, played in the county circuits with greater success this time and even beat one or two white South Africans along the way. Dhiraj knew that in order to make it to the very top, he needed to be involved at this and higher levels of competition all the time. That meant that he couldn't go on dividing his time between tennis, athletics, cricket and football, as he was doing, as his brothers were doing, as all sportsmen in the location were doing. If he wanted to play like a professional, he had to dedicate himself like a professional.

This was the problem when he returned to South Africa at the end of the tour. Having surpassed the challenges of non-racial competition, he had nowhere to go. As a teacher, he didn't have the freedom or the means to come and go as he pleased. If he was to remain in South Africa, there was only one thing left to do; he had to take the battle for normal sport into the white arena. He had to break through the racism that kept the doors of the white SA Lawn Tennis Union closed to black people. It wasn't politics; he just wanted to be the best tennis player he could be.

At the beginning of 1971, he took the unprecedented and immensely courageous step of applying to play in the white South African LTU Championships. "Dhiraj sent in his application after an invitation had been extended to Evonne Goolagong, the young Australian

Aboriginal. At that time, Dhiraj said: 'If Goolagong can play, why can't I? I should have a stronger claim because I'm South African.'

But Apartheid was in its heady days. There was, however, a little uneasiness within the ranks of SALTU and some found it necessary to justify the rejection of Jasmet's application. They began by questioning his competence but he submitted to 'tests', and was pronounced more than eligible by Cliff Drysdale, the number one white player at the time. Despite Drysdale's endorsement, SALTU, comfortable under apartheid policy, would not take the responsibility of a decision and referred the matter to the apartheid government. They passed the ruling on to Jasmet: if he joined the South African National LTU, the black tennis association that had accepted the policy of segregation, his application would be considered. This proposal, with its convoluted logic and its despicable attempt to get him to endorse the government's policy of segregation, was an insult and Jasmet did not pursue the matter any further. Needless to say, he never got to play in the white South African Open.

In the meantime, the Southern African LTU, the non-racial union, had come up with a sponsorship scheme to give talented players exposure to world-class competition and had collected funds to send six of the most promising players overseas. Though Jasmet and his younger brother, Hiralall were included in the squad, this kind of visit didn't really serve Jasmet's purpose. Tennis had become the driving force in his life and he needed to be where the opportunities were.

He decided to emigrate.

Some time after he had left, he learned that a South African Tennis Players' Association had been set up and from London, made one last effort to open up tennis in South Africa; he applied for membership and received the following response.

You are no doubt aware that at the 1971 annual general meeting of the association it was unanimously carried by a quorum of 42 members that should you apply to join the association, you would be welcome as a member and that your application should be granted.

Our constitution contains no racial qualification for admission as a member and the committee's decision is based

solely on the applicant's ability as a tennis player.

However, we have grave doubts as to whether

such a move would be legal and we are accordingly

taking counsel's opinion on the point. We must advise

you that should we be advised by counsel that such a move

is prohibited by Statute, we will have no alternative but to

reject your application.[9]

In the UK, Jasmet and Hiralall became coaches and continued to play tennis. And for the first time, they became political as well as sports activists. They joined Samba Ramsamy in his work, and vociferously and actively supported the sports boycotts and sanctions that SANROC initiated against South Africa.

"Today they represent Great Britain in veterans' tennis tournaments and play in Australia, America and all over the world." [10]

[1]

Interview, Jeram Bhana

[2]

Interview Diar Soma. All further quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from his interview.

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Interview, Jeram Bhana

[4]

Thailema's story Chapter 4

[5]

Newspaper article (from Diar's scrapbook)

[6]

Star Newspaper (article from Diar's scrapbook)

[7]

Soma was the family name of the Dhiraj brothers.

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Newspaper (article from Diar's scrapbook)

[9]

Star Newspaper (from scrapbook)

[10]

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