

The Controversial Story Behind the 1969/70 Springboks Tour of Britain and Ireland

The 1969/70 Springboks Tour of Britain and Ireland was not just an ordinary rugby tour. It was a tour that ignited intense uproar and political turmoil around the world. The apartheid policies in South Africa at the time sparked protests and led to one of the most controversial sporting events in history. This article delves into the captivating story behind this infamous tour, shedding light on the historical context, the protests, and the lasting impact it had on society.

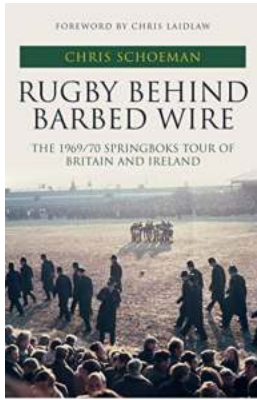
The Historical Context

In 1969, South Africa was still under the oppressive grip of apartheid, a system of racial segregation and discrimination. The regime aimed to maintain white minority rule, enforcing strict laws that limited the rights and opportunities of non-white citizens. The international community, increasingly critical of the apartheid system, started to protest against South Africa's policies on various fronts.

The Decision to Tour

Amidst this growing tension, the South African Rugby Union (SARU) decided to send their national rugby team, the Springboks, on a tour of Britain and Ireland in 1969/70. The decision was met with outrage, both within South Africa and globally. Many argued that hosting a sports team from an apartheid regime would give legitimacy to a discriminatory government.

**Rugby Behind Barbed Wire: The 1969/70
Springboks Tour of Britain and Ireland**



by Chris Schoeman (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.2 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 2854 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

Word Wise : Enabled

Print length : 287 pages



The Protests

The announcement of the tour led to mass public demonstrations and protests in both Britain and Ireland. Anti-apartheid activist groups saw this as an opportunity to raise global awareness about the atrocities of apartheid. They organized rallies, sit-ins, and public meetings, demanding the cancellation of the tour.

Notable figures, such as Archbishop Trevor Huddleston, joined the protests. Huddleston, known for his anti-apartheid activism, actively campaigned against the tour, emphasizing the need for countries to stand unified against discrimination and racism.

The Political Response

The British and Irish governments faced a dilemma in deciding whether to allow the Springboks to tour. On one hand, they didn't want to alienate such an important trading partner as South Africa. On the other hand, they also faced immense pressure from anti-apartheid campaigners and their own citizens.

In an attempt to appease both sides, the governments proposed that the Springboks should only play against teams that were racially integrated. This

proposal was rejected by the South African Rugby Union, who insisted on maintaining their team's policy of selecting players solely based on their race.

The Tour Begins

Despite the protests and pleas, the tour ultimately went ahead, starting in November 1969. The Springboks played a series of matches against various rugby clubs and national teams across Britain and Ireland. Each match was met with a mix of enthusiastic supporters and furious protesters.

The Continuing Protests

The protests against the Springboks continued throughout the tour. Demonstrators disrupted matches, chaining themselves to goalposts, and creating a scene of chaos. Both players and spectators were affected by the unrest.

The Cancellation of a Match

The increasing severity of the protests led to the cancellation of a scheduled match between the Springboks and a team made up of players from Scotland, England, and Wales. This decision was made by the respective rugby unions, driven by concerns for the safety of players and spectators.

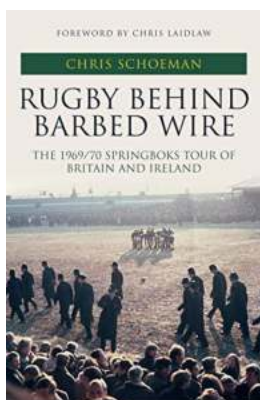
Legacy and Impact

While the tour was contentious and faced strong opposition, it also played a significant role in drawing global attention to the injustice of apartheid. The protests and turmoil during the 1969/70 Springboks Tour of Britain and Ireland highlighted the necessity for political change in South Africa.

Years later, in 1995, the Springboks won the Rugby World Cup, a moment that symbolized reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. Nelson Mandela, the

country's first black president, famously wore the Springboks jersey to unite a nation divided by racial tension.

The 1969/70 Springboks Tour of Britain and Ireland was far more than a sporting event. It became a battleground for political activism and global awareness in the fight against apartheid. The protests surrounding the tour served as a catalyst for change, pushing the international community to reevaluate their relationship with South Africa and stand up against racial discrimination. Despite the controversy, the tour left a lasting impact, reminding the world of the power of unity and the need for equality.



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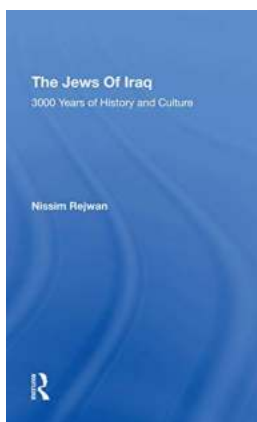
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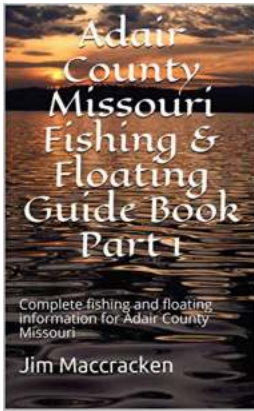
‘We spent all our time surrounded by police cordons and barbed wire, never mind having our bus hijacked.’ – Tommy Bedford, Springboks No. 8 2019 and 2020 mark the fiftieth anniversary of the controversial 1969/70 Springbok rugby tour of the British Isles – a landmark event on both a sporting and political level. Taking place during the time of South Africa’s apartheid dispensation, the tour was characterised throughout by violent demonstrations against the ‘ambassadors of

apartheid'. Scenes of chanting demonstrators at the players' hotels and airports were not uncommon, nor was the sight of protesters being dragged off the field of play by police. Smoke bombs and flour bombs also became a match-day fixture. These were wild and unnerving times for the players on tour, whose movements were badly inhibited and who had to play hide-and-seek to avoid possible violence between games of rugby. During a demanding tour that lasted more than three months and took them to and fro between England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, they endeavoured to sustain a proud tradition of highly successful Springbok tours through the Isles. Through personal interviews with the players, including team captain Dawie de Villiers, vice-captain Tommy Bedford and other senior members of the squad, as well as key figures such as anti-apartheid campaigner Peter Hain, *Rugby Behind Barbed Wire* takes readers into the inner circle of a besieged group of sportsmen who just wanted to play rugby despite concerted efforts to deny them. The author also looks at the political context of events, and why so many felt that disrupting the tour was a matter of moral and political necessity.



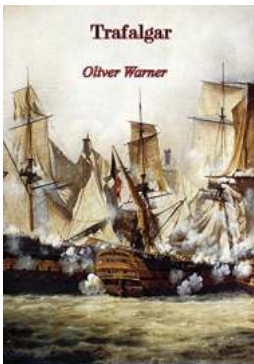
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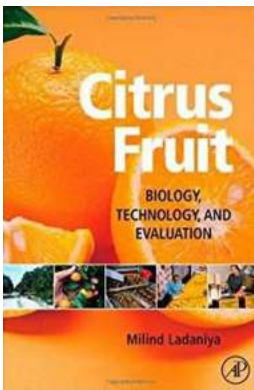
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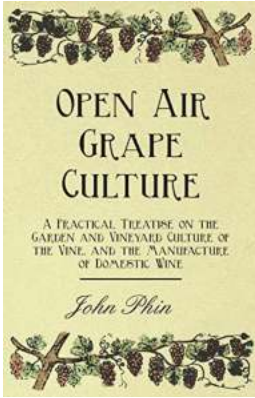
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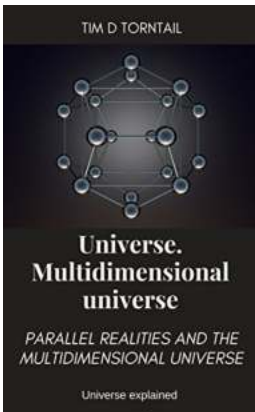
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