

Jambo

Then there was a time that a team from Kenya, the Impalas, came through town. The Houston and oil economies were booming and touring sides were coming from everywhere. The Kenyans arrived on a Wednesday. They would play us Thursday and then move on to play the Hurricanes on the weekend.

We billeted them in our various abodes and, of course, the usual “soften them up” routine was in order. We met at O’Malley’s for the introductions then off to Cowboys for a little western themed fun – the standard extra-curricular activities. Two of the Impalas were staying with me, Shaddrack and Walter. Shaddrack was captain and played center. Walter was the flyhalf. Both were lithe, and very good-natured.

The three of us crammed into my little car and we were on our way. At Cowboys, we did the requisite things: bull-riding and two-stepping. The Kenyans struggled at both but were good sports about it.

Then there was the drinking, er, softening up. I don’t think they were used to drinking in such copious quantities, but we kept them at it. That’s not to say we weren’t at it, too. In this routine, everyone gets soft.

The Simonton rodeo wasn’t until the weekend, so we had to skip that in favor of popping into a few more bars. Finally it was back to O’Malley’s for a nightcap or two. When we were pushed out of O’Malley’s at closing time what else was there to do but go to Antonio’s for a little Mexican breakfast? We rolled back to the apartment about three-thirty or four.

Shaddrack, as captain, got the couch and Walter, a blanket and the floor. Even though I got my bed, it was scant comfort for the three hours I had before having to get up for work. Sorry to say, this was back when I still had an office job. I had had some practice at this, though. I got up when the alarm went off, headed to the office and went through the motions.

We had arranged for me to leave the car with Shaddrack and Walter so they could get around on Thursday. They were having a team run in the morning to get ready for the Thursday night game. I left the keys on the table and rode the bus to work.

Well, the softening-up worked, on my two billets, anyway. When we met

back at the apartment after work I learned that they had slept through until noon. They totally missed their ten o'clock training session. They're coach was none too pleased. Both were demoted to the bench for the game.

While that was the intended result, I still had to feel sorry for them. They were both such nice guys and I felt that I had done them dirty. I shouldn't have worried. They ended up coming in to the game after about twenty minutes and had a huge impact. You see, they didn't really have the size or weight to compete with our forwards. Their backs on the other hand were a different story: quick, smooth and flat-out fast in a straight line.

We went up by two tries in the first twenty, our forwards controlling possession and keeping the pressure on until we could make a break. As soon as Shadrack and Walter came in, the game changed. They started shifting the ball away from the pack, keeping it alive out wide until they found their gap. Then they were through. They scored one try before half-time and then one after to tie the game back up.

In the end, we were able to hold on and win by a try. It was a classic battle between power and speed. This time, power won out. It might have been a different story if Shadrack and Walter had played that first twenty minutes. That might have tipped the balance.

Anyway, after our game on Thursday, it was back to O'Malley's. We had a barbeque prepared with the usual entertainment. It was set up on the patio in the back, brisket, beans, potato salad, corn on the cob and beer. Visitors first, then players, then the hungry masses. We were doing our part to fatten up the Impalas, make them beefier for their upcoming match with the Hurricanes on Saturday. It was their job to get back from the bars at a reasonable hour and make sure that all of the players were available for the game. In fact, that might be more important than the little extra weight we were putting on them.

After dinner, we sang a few songs together, then the Kenyans asked that the lights be turned down. The sun was already down so when the lights were dimmed it got quite dark. They started with a few of the team beating a drum line out on the picnic tables, then a chorus started to chant:

Sisi nani – nani (Who are we?)
 Sisi Impalas – Impalas (We are Impalas.)
 Hao nani – nani (Who are they?)

Hao phak – phak (They are phaks.)
Sisi deadly – deadly (We are deadly.)
Hao shady – shady (They are shady.)
Sisi crazy – crazy (We are crazy.)
Hao messy – messy (They are messy.)
Sisi rugby – rugby (We are rugby.)
Hao ping pong – ping pong. (They are Ping pong.)¹

We were transported to Africa. In the dark, sheltered back-patio of O'Malley's we were moved to another place. We were experiencing the proverbial African safari campout, somewhere on the savannah, a little singing around the campfire. I swear I heard a lion from the nearby zoo grumble in sympathetic harmony.

The rhythm is African. But, the feel is still rugby, a uniting influence. Then they go back to something even more common:

Na mboro ya Michael ni ya ajabu.
Na mboro ya Michael ni ya ajabu.
 (Michael's gadget is amazing.)
Ya kwenda juuu, kwenda Chiniiii
 (It can go up, it can go down.)
Yaweza kwenda mbelee kwenda nyuma .
 (It can go forward, it can go backward.)
Upande upande kwa matako yoyote kama wiper.
 (It can go from side to side on any piece of action like a wiper.)²

Obviously, we aren't the only ones who can sing. I don't know, but maybe rugby isn't the only thing that bonds men from all over the world, from the different parts, the different cultures, the different circumstances. It seems that music, or at least our taste in crude, basic, ribald rugby songs can inspire anyone, anywhere. Relax and enjoy it. It'll be even better if you take part.

On the weekend, we were to find out how good the Kenyans were in a game that didn't require the forwards. We went to watch them play the Hurricanes

¹ Anon., Kenyan rugby chant.

² Anon., Kenyan rugby song.

ONLY A GAME

on Saturday. After they finished, they challenged us all to a little sevens. We put the best backs together from both the Gents and the Hurricanes and still got smoked.