

# The pathway to Olympic success

Commonwealth Games is stepping stone to bigger goals

AT THE Glasgow Commonwealth Games Team South Africa were already 15 medals (four gold) closer at 7pm last night to matching and then overhauling our 33-medal performance of Delhi 2010.

Our Commonwealth Games performances always leave us upbeat about our standing in “global” sport, until the Olympics two years later, when reality strikes.

As a global multisport showpiece, the Commonwealth Games are dwarfed in terms of size, and thus medal competition, by the Olympics (71 nations in 17 sports versus 204 and 26 sports in London 2012, for example). The most notable absentees include the US, China, and most of Europe and Asia, who normally share about 70% of Olympic medals.

From the perspective of the athlete this is irrelevant — a medal is a medal — and all should be celebrated equally.

You can only beat the athletes before you, after all.

But if a country has an Olympic focus, then from the perspective of sporting management and leadership, the Commonwealth and Olympic games are linked together by one overarching strategy.

So, I would suggest it matters a great deal to develop a systematic method of benchmarking Commonwealth achievements against desired Olympic performance.

It's a method of calibration, which would prevent the rollercoaster of overhyping Commonwealth success before downplaying subsequent Olympic disappointment, as we have done every time since 1992.

Instead, we need to a) celebrate Commonwealth performances on their own merits, while b) understanding their tactical value and implications within a broader, Olympic-focused strategy.

First, the Commonwealth Games are a pathway. They represent an

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excellent opportunity to expose aspirant Olympians to a multisports event — experience is never a wasted investment. But this differs from how the system — all sports — must evaluate actual performances within a broader strategic context.

A few stats give some perspective

Sevens is the most challenging medal to win

on the situation. The best 10 nations at the last three Commonwealth Games have won 92% of the medals (it's very top-heavy, unlike the Olympics). Those 10 countries have won 15% of the Olympic medals over the same period. Olympic medals are thus six times more scarce to Commonwealth Games nations.

Put differently, for every Olympic medal you target, you should, on average, have six Commonwealth medals as a base.

As expected, this differs by country. South Africa has won 117 medals at the last three Commonwealth Games, but only 13 Olympic medals over the same period. Corrected for total available medals, that's a ratio of 10.4, higher than the average, suggesting that we underperform at

the Olympics compared to the Commonwealth Games.

But not quite as badly as India and Malaysia, mind you. Combined, they've won 318 Commonwealth medals since 2002, but only 13 Olympic medals, meaning they are 28 times more likely to succeed at the Commonwealth Games.

In contrast, Kenya and Jamaica are the most consistently successful nations, winning one Olympic medal for every 2.5 Commonwealth medals. That's because they are so dominant in the narrow range of events where they do win medals (long distance and sprint athletics), that even the addition of American, European and Asian competitors does little to dent their overall medal-winning capability.

There are also, not surprisingly, differences between sports. Rugby Sevens is, objectively, the most challenging Commonwealth medal to win because the top seven teams in the world are all present.

Compare this to technical and combat sports like shooting, archery, wrestling and judo — between zero and 5% of the Olympic medals won in London were won by Commonwealth Nations.

India and Malaysia, incidentally, win most of their medals in these sports, which explains why they are so poor in the Olympics.

South Africa? We struggle to convert because we are strong in aquatics and athletics, but lack the depth of quality to compete when the US and Europe are added.

However, a focus on individuals is not constructive in this discussion. Rather, we need a “systems” view, one that recognises the merits of Commonwealth Games, so that performances can be managed (celebrating them is different from managing them), and the Games can be optimised as the pathway to, hopefully, future Olympic success.

## Baxter, Vlad V ready to play ball with Mashaba

CHUMANI BAMBANI

NEW Bafana Bafana coach Ephraim “Shakes” Mashaba has received backing from the coaches of two of South Africa's biggest clubs.

Orlando Pirates' Vladimir Vermezovic and Kaizer Chiefs' Stuart Baxter threw their weight behind the new Bafana mentor, promising their full cooperation.

Mashaba was appointed the successor to Gordon Igesund on Saturday, moments before the kickoff of the Carling Black Label Cup match between the Soweto giants at Soccer City. Pirates won 6-5 on penalties after the clash ended goalless at full time.

Vermezovic and Baxter confirmed their backing of the national coach and expressed their excitement at working together with Mashaba in taking South African football to greater heights.

“Our job is to help him to perform and to bring SA football to a place where it deserves to be,” Serbian-born Vermezovic said.

“If he needs any help from Orlando Pirates, he will get it for sure.”

Having coached the national team before, Chiefs coach Baxter will know the ins and outs of the position and what is required from the clubs

for Bafana to succeed.

“If SA football is to move forward, then we the coaches, the clubs, the football association [Safa], the PSL, we all have got to really work together,” Baxter said.

“We cannot continue this ‘we have all got our own interests and look after our own things’ attitude, not wanting to release players, games shifting backwards and forwards.

“We've got to be more together. We have got to absolutely start a production line, have one vision. What will we bring to the world? How will we play? What is good for South Africa? What can we improve on? Once we know all of that then everyone has got to get behind it.

“It can't just be Shakes who takes the stick if we don't give him players, if we don't produce players, if programmes and leagues are not helping the kids develop ... Everybody now has to cooperate.

“We all want to help the national team. It will be about cooperation,” the Chiefs coach said.

Mashaba is set to bring in his own technical team, while Safa is also on the hunt for a candidate to fill the post of technical director.

Baxter has been linked as the front-runner for the position.

## Golovkin stops Geale in three

UNBEATEN Kazakh star Gennady Golovkin stopped Australian Daniel Geale in three brutal rounds on Saturday to retain his WBA middleweight title.

Golovkin sent Geale to the canvas in the second round with a barrage of blows.

In round three, he responded to a hard right to the head from the challenger with his own punishing right to the nose, followed by a quick left that sent Geale down.

Geale, a former IBF middleweight champion, had no complaint when referee Michael Ortega called a halt at 2:47 of the round. Golovkin said he wanted a unification bout with WBC champion Miguel Cotto. — AFP

### TV HIGHLIGHTS

**TODAY**  
**Commonwealth Games:** At 11am and 10pm on SABC2, athletics, swimming, shooting, hockey, netball, squash, bowls and weightlifting. From 9.35am on SS4, SS5, SS7, SS9  
**Cricket:** Second Test, final day, Sri Lanka vs South Africa at 6.30am on SS2/CSN; third Test, day 2, England vs India at noon on SS6  
**Soccer:** Varsity games, Kovsies vs University of Limpopo at 4.30pm, North West vs UWC at 6.45pm, both on SSSelect  
**Tennis:** Washington Open at 10pm on SS6