

# Stars robbed of excellence

WHILE South Africans this past week debated R246-million spent on a residence upgrade, sports role-players in Great Britain were engaged in their own questions of funding allocations.

Their “problems” offer tragicomic insights into our own sports funding situation.

In 1996, Great Britain finished 36th on the Olympic medal table (SA were 27th). Sufficiently chastened, it initiated policy changes that would steeply increase the amount of public funding invested in elite sport.

Delivered by UK Sport through their national lottery, then ignited by a successful bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games, Great Britain spent £264-million (R4.7-billion) in the four-year cycle between Beijing and London.

The result was spectacular: 65 medals, 29 of which were gold.

Our investment over the same period, while difficult to quantify with accuracy, was reported at R80-million. That's less than 2% of what was spent in Great Britain.

In fact, the amount allocated to UK rowing each year is the equivalent of what we spent on our entire 26-sport Olympic campaign over eight years.

The optimist in me suggests that

our medal haul of six, on only 2% of the funding, implies that we're athletically better endowed as a nation. Imagine what another R100-million would do. The cynic in me feels it points to just how much unrealised potential exists in SA Olympic sport.

Nevertheless, even the most passionate sports fan cannot justify the kind of money spent on winning medals in the UK. When people live in poverty without employment, healthcare and education, it is obscene to make direct comparisons to infer that similar money should be spent here.

This is a minefield through which Brazil currently walks, having spent billions on football and the Olympic Games over the next two years, despite similar socio-economic circumstances to those faced here.

Even in the UK, less troubled by such concerns, controversy exists. A recent source of angst is their “no-compromise” policy towards the allocation of funding — if you are not a viable potential medalist, you receive literally no funding. That's why basketball, handball and volleyball receive not a cent of lottery money, while cycling, rowing, athletics and sailing receive over R450-million each for the Rio



DOCTOR KNOW

ROSS TUCKER

“Our self-created funding crisis should prepare us for more disappointment

2016 cycle. The unfunded sports argue that this method is killing their chances of revival.

If you're feeling sympathetic to their plea, consider this: in the UK, a second source of funding, Sport England, allocates £300-million for the purpose of coach education, mass participation and grassroots development. Every sport, however “poor”, receives millions each year.

Sports administrators and high-performance managers in South

Africa must weep at these figures.

Our Olympic sports have seen funding cut to R2-million a year since London 2012. There is no needs analysis, which would, for example, show that rowing, such an incredible success story of what can be done when an elite system is put together, should receive more funding than say, table tennis and volleyball. There's certainly no performance evaluation or merit-based audit either.

Current funding scarcity has meant that SA teams will increasingly be denied opportunities to compete internationally. SA hockey, athletics and aquatics have all experienced this recently.

Ultimately, our self-created scarcity of funding means that our historical strategy for medal success, which relies on pockets of excellent individuals rather than a cohesive system, will become even more entrenched by 2016.

Expect disappointment.

In a week dominated by discussions of improper spending, it would be inappropriate to want the billions spent in the UK. But one can't help but wonder how sport would benefit from more efficient spending of what is already there. And an extra R100-million would not go to waste!

## Briefs

### Stuart's broadside at T20 umpires

STUART Broad accused the umpires of putting players' safety at risk after lightning struck England's opening game of the World Twenty20 on Saturday night.

England lost by nine runs on the Duckworth-Lewis method after a rainstorm brought an end to play with New Zealand 52/1 after 5.2 overs, in pursuit of England's 172/6.

That was enough for New Zealand to be declared the winners, but Broad believed that the umpires should have taken the players off when lightning first struck minutes earlier. But they allowed play to continue, after which Brendon McCullum hit a six to put New Zealand ahead on the scoring tables. The rain came two balls later. — © *The Daily Telegraph*

### Matfield's return gets mixed reviews

VICTOR Matfield is not the player he used to be, said Jake White.

Matfield, 36, captained the Bulls on Saturday night for the first time since retiring and inspired their come-from-behind 23-19 win over White's Sharks side in a Super rugby clash at Loftus Versfeld.

“He's not close to the Victor I coached as a 30-year-old. But there's no doubting what he's worth to a team,” said White.

“Victor [Matfield] made a few smart adjustments to our attack in the week [before the game], which paid off,” said Bulls coach Frans Ludeke.

— *Chumani Bambani*

### Stormers not giving up on title race yet

THE Stormers are on the ropes after suffering a fourth loss in five matches, but they're not conceding the Super rugby title race just yet. Pressure is mounting on coach Allister Coetzee, despite the fact the side has only played one home game.

But his squad is also growing thinner by the week. Flank Schalk Burger is back home after tearing a quad muscle in the warm-up on Saturday. He will be out for a month.

“We're not about to give up,” Coetzee said from Canberra following the Stormers' 25-15 defeat by the Brumbies. — *Craig Ray*

### Fifa apologises for humour backfire

FIFA performed an embarrassing U-turn on Saturday and apologised, saying it had withdrawn publicity material for the World Cup in Brazil that poked fun at local customs.

Just weeks after sports merchandiser Adidas pulled from the market two shirts which Brazil viewed as sexist, Fifa has now removed material which depicted Brazilians as unpunctual, impatient and even chaotic.

Having regularly complained to Brazil about the slow pace of construction of stadiums for the June-July World Cup, football's world governing body felt moved to add: “In Brazil, things are largely done last-minute.” Fifa admitted its attempts at humour had backfired. — *AFP*

## Rampant Fiji too good for SA

SWASHBUCKLING Fiji upset South Africa 33-26 in yesterday's Tokyo final to capture their second title of the IRB World Sevens.

Rising star Waisea Nacuqu sprinted 70m to win it at the death for the Pacific islanders, settling a roller-coaster game which served as a wonderful advert for the sport's Olympic debut in 2016.

SA at least had the consolation of regaining top spot above New Zealand in the season's standings after reaching their fifth straight final, the “Blitzbokke” moving to 116 points, two ahead of the Kiwis with three of the nine rounds left.

Dubai winners Fiji have 95 while England's third-place play-off win over defending series champions New Zealand left them on 85.

“We'll keep working hard and if we can knock over more trophies then it will give us momentum for next year,” said Fiji coach Ben Ryan after his side's smash-and-grab triumph. — *AFP*

## Vlad denies Moloi split

MARK GLEESON

ORLANDO Pirates coach Vladimir Vermezovic has moved to quell any rumour of a split after assistant Tebogo Moloi was left off the bench at the weekend.

Vermezovic, who saw his side through to the quarterfinals of the Nedbank Cup with a 2-0 win over Santos in Cape Town on Friday night, said Moloi had not travelled because he needed to stay behind to take charge of training the players who did not make the trip. He was assisted only by Eric Tinkler.

Moloi has been a figure on the bench for many seasons, but his influence seems to have waned since the new coach arrived.

Vermezovic has set out to put his stamp on the team and already looks to be imposing a demanding regime on his new players.

### FEATHERING THE THROTTLE



Honda MotoGP rider Marc Marquez of Spain gets lift-off during the MotoGP meeting at the Losail International circuit in Doha yesterday  
Picture: MOHAMMED DABBOUS/REUTERS