

Cricket

A SERIES PROBLEM

Slow transformation

A still predominantly white team leaves the selectors red-faced

In early 2000, when we were also playing a home series against England, there were two players who were not white in the national side: Herschelle Gibbs and Makhaya Ntini.

Five years on, the two black people in the side are still Gibbs and Ntini. In transformation, as in politics, a year must be regarded as a very long time, which makes the lack of numerical advancement even more stark.

So we have a situation where transformation seems to have made no progress – or actually to have gone backwards, in that there are

no new faces – while the national team is much weaker than it was in 2000 (no Gary Kirsten, no Allan Donald). For the first time since 1992 (and, indeed, since 1964/1965), we have lost a series at home to a team other than Australia.

This season the selectors brought in two promising black players in Thami Tsolekile (wicketkeeper) and Hashim Amla (middle-order batsman). Well before the end of the test series against England, each had lost his place.

If you are absolutely sure, as a selection panel, that the player you have chosen is the best available, you will stick with him.

That is what happened with Jacques Kallis, whose early career with bat and ball was mediocre. The selectors persevered, and now Kallis is the best allrounder in the world and one of an elite group of batsmen with a test average of over 50.

The present selection panel clearly did not have that confidence in Amla and Tsolekile. The selectors felt the

need to pick these two – but under the pressure of possibly losing the series against England, they soon brought back Mark Boucher (arguably SA's best wicketkeeper/batsman of all time and still full of international cricket) and Andrew Hall (who had scored a fighting century just a few weeks before against India).

It is not hard to find reasons that neither Boucher nor Hall should have been left out in the first place. Once they were omitted, the pressure on untested players like Amla and Tsolekile was all the greater.

It is possible that more damage was done to the confidence of these two undeniably talented players by picking them at this stage and then dropping them, than by not picking them at all and giving them time to mature.

A glance at the list of boys that played for SA Schools, in the old apartheid era and since the advent of democracy in 1994, shows that most went on to senior provincial representation, and not a few

to national level. So selection for SA Schools is a good predictor (though no guarantee) of success.

But what is the predictor of success at national schools level?

Again, a glance at the origins of talented schoolboys reveals the answer: it is overwhelmingly the fact they attended one of the traditional boys' schools.

Ntini was at Dale College; Gibbs could be considered very much previously advantaged through having been to Bishops; Victor Mpsiang, who blazed briefly as a possible future Allan Donald, was at Grey College; Amla was at Durban High School, which produced such luminaries as Barry Richards, Lee Irvine and Trevor Goddard.

Most black boys do not attend such schools, and most boys who play for those schools' first teams are white. This is not a moral issue, simply a fact to be reckoned with when transformation targets are drawn up.

David Williams

Art

PAST AND PRESENT

Moshekwa Langa (Goodman); Jacki McInnes, James de Villiers (Gordart); group (Stewart)

Langa's *Backlash Blues* certainly shows off his versatility: drawings, collages and digitalised photographic and video works. Much is stream of consciousness art: lists of names, places, phrases, words, even chemical elements that flow from his memory and, in his words, "fuse historical timelines with the present".

In another series of abstract collages, hanks of hair are dyed and plaited on to the ground. These are simply lush and sensual, while at the other extreme the photographic works make strong socioeconomic comment. In mood as well as medium, Langa runs the gamut.

The most powerful artist on show at the moment is McInnes, whose *The Vocabulary of Ambiguity – For Her* explores a woman's decision to abort a pregnancy. Meshed copper strip sculptures, cast salt reliefs and lead artefacts (baby shoes, dresses) relate visual icons to the issue.

Some works are in wire cages, symbolising woman's struggle against oppression. Study the mesh sculptures carefully and you can piece out semi-observed aphorisms, such as, "No woman sets out

to create then terminate a potential life". Thought-provoking stuff.

De Villiers uses the style and palette of 17th-century Dutch still-lives to recycle Christian symbolism. Loaves and fishes, as well as more overtly domestic images like a peeled naartjie, a pomegranate split open, or a hatchet.

He works on a small scale, but his technique is good and the impact appealing, in a low-key sort of way.

Stewart is kicking off the year with a broad cross-section of new work from a number of its familiar stable of artists.

Among the more eye-catching exhibits are Hockneyesque monoprints of palm trees by Collin Cole, Elaine Cowley's oils of a young girl swimming, and Joseph Capelle's colourful *commedia*



Dyed hanks of hair Langa's sensual abstract statement

dell'arte figures, but the work is generally of a good standard.

Michael Coulson