



Invictus: Nelson Mandela and the Game That Made a Nation

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Beginning in a jail cell and ending in a rugby tournament--the true story of how the most inspiring charm offensive in history brought South Africa together. After being released from prison and winning South Africa's first free election, Nelson Mandela presided over a country still deeply divided by fifty years of apartheid. His plan was ambitious if not far-fetched: use the national rugby team, the Springboks--long an embodiment of white-supremacist rule--to embody and engage a new South Africa as they prepared to host the 1995 World Cup. The string of wins that followed not only defied the odds, but capped Mandela's miraculous effort to bring South Africans together again in a hard-won, enduring bond.

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Invictus: Nelson Mandela and the Game That Made a Nation Details

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From Reader Review Invictus: Nelson Mandela and the Game That Made a Nation for online ebook

Becca-Rawr says

'Playing the Enemy' is one of those non-fiction pieces that you scarcely would have allowed yourself to believe to be true, lest you know it was. It is also one of these texts that you pick up, completely prepared for on subject, and soon you are delivered something that you did not expect.

The novel follows the famous south African Nelson Mandela, president, human rights activist and, as accordance to the subject matter of the book, a dedicated rugby fan. The first half, if not more, of the book takes the reader on a tour of his life as well as the lives of millions of South African residents as they lived during the time before, during, and have human rights reform in the once turmoil African nation. It tells of the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela, his distinct social power and abilities, and how they eventually led to his release from prison.

There is also significant mention and accounts of the social and physical abuse suffered by the blacks under the powerful white government, and how Mr. Mandela was able to persuade them to not retaliate with anger, but with such emotions as love and forgiveness.

During this telling, the book is punctuated with 'where-is-he-now' points concerning the life of Francois Pinaar, who would become the captain of the South American rugby team during the 1995 Rugby World Cup, of which the book speaks.

Finally, the book turns to the concern of rugby. (I have my single grievance with this book because it was supposed to be about 'Nelson Mandela and the Game That Changed a Nation, but over half of the book seemed a pre-requisite to this idea. Although it was not as if the first section of the book was not informative. On the contrary, it was quite intriguing!)

Watching the nation of South Africa change was awe-inspiring. From a government headed entirely by whites to a country governed by President Mandela, a black former-prisoner, was a true testament to human forgiveness. The way he dealt with the people around him, of all races and of all intentions, may have been the deciding factor in the fate of his country. As was his attention to rugby, at first shunned by the black population for its connection to the white rule, it was now something that he could use to pull together his people with. All of his people.

The South African rugby team prevailed in the world cup, thanks to the support of Mr. Mandela, and 43 million South Africans. The rest, as they say, is history.

This is a fantastic novel for all those who want to not only read more on the history of South Africa, the amazing and inspiring life of Mr. Nelson Mandela, but also for those who want a read a book with surprising real events and an ending that will leave you feeling hopeful for the future.

Neha Mehta says

As a child of segregation, this book brings back some very real memories and emotions. It also shows the greatness that lives within all men. Nelson Mandela has always been one of my heroes and this book shows his understanding of human nature as well as his political acumen. He united the rainbow nation at a time whenever everyone thought it would go the way of so many of the other African countries. This was an extremely powerful and humane story. It showed the power of understanding your enemy, the power of forgiveness, the power of sport to unite a fractured nation and the power of a single man to change the destiny of a nation.

Fern says

I had tears in my eyes remembering that incredible day in Johannesburg as if it were yesterday. I remember during the rugby World Cup final that the streets were eerily silent as every South African sat rapt in front of their television, hoping against all hope that our team could accomplish the impossible. I was 12 years old as I sat with my dad, all nerves and raw emotion, watching the game. The joy that erupted in the streets after we won is a sight I will never forget. The whole country, black and white, celebrating together. It was something like the Rio carnival for days on end. The new South Africa in action. Reading about the events that went on behind at the scenes leading up to this day and our incredible champion Nelson Mandela made me more proud than ever to be a South African! The whole story just sounds far too good to be true, but the best part is that it is true! I hope that we can inspire our next generation to get this rainbow nation to fulfill the incredible potential we have to become even greater.

smetchie says

Invictus

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

*Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.*

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:*

I am the captain of my soul.

-William Ernest Henley

Edwin says

Basically put, Nelson Mandela is the MAN. We tend to reduce people to symbols, to say-- oh yeah, him, he's the guy that did this, or she's the "that" girl, or whatnot. And that was basically the nature of my knowledge of Mandela-- a vague sense of his wisdom and love of freedom or something.

I don't know if this is the best book ever written about Mandela. But reading it definitely has given me a fuller appreciation of a man I had once thought of only as a symbol. He is a master manipulator, ambitious, pragmatic. He is endlessly self-aware and self-assured. He is a cosmopolitan world leader. But without doubt, the thing I found most remarkable about Mandela is that he spent 27 years in prison by the decree of a racist white government, yet emerged proclaiming that Afrikaners were "sons of Africa." That he could say such words and mean them signals to me such a depth of wisdom, courage and compassion. In his eyes, the "solution" to South Africa's problems didn't include expelling or taking revenge against whites, but rather meant reaching out to them, forgiving them, and alternately manipulating, forcing, seducing them to embrace justice and true democracy.

Which is where the rugby part comes in. Rugby, it turns out, had been perceived as the white man's sport, and therefore derided by blacks as a state symbol of Apartheid. For years, the African National Congress (Mandela's political party) forbade international rugby games to take place in South Africa. Mandela, though, had the foresight to imagine that rugby could become a unifying point for all South Africans. And so he repealed the international ban on South African rugby, and the country hosted the 1995 world cup, setting the stage for a spectacular outcome both in the game and for the country.

Petra X says

Nelson Mandela is my hero. Rugby is my game (I'm from the South Wales valleys, 'nuff said).

Simply the best book I've read all year, it was absolutely awesome. Mandela's methods for disarming and charming everyone were inspirational - this is the only inspirational book I've read (I can't get into that genre at all).

I've just been chucked out without notice from a private group 'Back in Skinny Jeans' on Goodreads where some member/s don't like non-Americans, non-Republicans, non-Christians and perhaps non-Whites and really wanted me to know their views. I fit it into all those groups, so did Mandala. He would have disarmed them and made them think again, he had a way of bringing out the most decent parts of even despicable people. I may never have his charisma, but following the lessons he developed transforming himself from an advocate of violence to one of reconciliation, I may become just a bit of a better person.

The Pirate Ghost (Formerly known as the Curmudgeon) says

I'm not going to belabor the point here, as I usually do.

We often act, despite everyone's acknowledgement to the contrary, as if our generation invented racism, homosexuality, godlessness, greed, gluttony, and, sometimes hate. If we don't buy in to that common portrayal of who caused history's woes we sometimes still seem to see these things as "ours to fix" and take ownership where it's difficult to establish who is responsible for what. "We must stop this NOW!" yet, if the problem has lasted for centuries, why bring the same arguments and tools to the table that have never worked in the past?

Now we sit in ivory towers under white buildings, that look as if someone has set an overturned coffee cup on top of a rectangular white box, and draw battle lines on paper instead of in the sand. Money becomes blood. Law becomes the sword, and we call ourselves civilized while, in practice, little changes save what one side or the other's needs for a new battle.

Try as we might, we look back at our history, in our past, and scour present with fine toothed combs, struggling to find heroes with perfect faces that can be mounted on milk cartons and billboards to show off dazzling smiles. Failing to do that, we make up our own, and post their images, choosing to believe as truths that really came from the darkest imagination in which they had been created. In ignorance, we ignored the true heroes who toil in obscurity to overcome massive mountains of trumped up thought with ages of experience at believing imagined rights and wrongs. Faces that failed the test of photogenics and lighting, or voices that seemed droll and ordinary instead of heroic.

While most of us in the US were absorbed in our own misery and joy, either make believe or real, in South Africa from 1985 to 1995 a battle raged. Sometimes the battle involved blood and bone, blade and bullet. Sometimes these battles involved paper and law, authority and anarchy. Sometimes it involved thoughts and emotions, both real and self-cultivated, and, sometimes, politics. This was nothing as simple as a war of guns and bullets, though there was plenty of that to go around, this was a war for hearts and minds. A war over that fragile, illusive thing we choose as our Identity as a person and a nation and the relationship between us.

While most of the United States continued about their lives in blissful ignorance, tipping the metaphorical hat at news stories and other odd things in press and on television, the most important battle of our time had been started, fought, and won, stemming the tide of bloodshed, rather than causing more to bleed. It was perhaps the most important battle of all time about human rights and human dignity and the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness with no barriers or glass ceilings decided by the colour of your skin and no privileges ripped away by an angry fledgling government of wounded victimized warriors.

This book reads like a 300 page newspaper article. John Carlin is, after all, a journalist. It starts with a long history lesson, that is as distasteful as it is interesting and wicked as it is wise. In the middle the book turns to a tale of manipulation, cunning and charm. By the end, it's a tale of triumph. A bloodless coup where there were no casualties and the enemy joined the victors in celebration, dancing in the streets...and the rest of the world slept with only a few even registering the importance of what was going on. Our acknowledgement of what had passed held in check our need to have villains and faces to rail at and call shameful names, and make believe heroes to occupy our guilt.

This book reads like the weather in Maine. The first part is the cruel winter that seems to last well more than its fair share. A brief spring that is far too short, a blistering summer and a beautiful autumn with gold and red leaves dancing in the wind. As they say in Maine, "If you don't stay for the winters, then you do not deserve the spring and summer."

Let no man be so foolish as to think that sports, a national sport is only a thing of fancy or a bottle passion for sale to the highest bidder. Surely, those things can happen, but here, the galvanizing agent that started a

healthy conversation about how Blacks and Whites in South Africa could live in peace without fear of each other started with a "A Hooligan's sport played by gentleman." A brutal sport of Contact and bone jarring collision, amazing speed and skill played by strong men with the hearts of lions.

For Whites, as one Rugger in the book put it. "For once we were not the bad guys, everybody's favorite villains. The people were behind us. The whole world was behind us and we felt it. We had regained our dignity after years of being everyone's enemy." For blacks, led by Nelson Mandella, it was a chance to show, that victors are not always vengeful. Sometimes they are thoughtful and caring and understanding of simple pleasures. That your fears of us are not warranted, this is how we prove it.

It's a great book. Everyone should read it.

Chris says

This book is both inspiring and boring. If you want to know about how South Africa was able to avert THE civil war that all the experts proclaimed was inevitable then read this book. If you want to know about rugby and the game then don't read this book. This book is a "paean" to Nelson Mandela, who was truly the right man at the right time in the right place. Mandela makes Clinton and Reagan look like lightweights with his ability to charm, rebound, and chart the right course at critical decision points. He completely disarmed his jailers and the Afrikaner culture with not only his political savvy but his humanity. I'm looking forward to seeing the movie now and reading more about Mandela.

James Clancy says

Was attracted to read this book having watched the film 'Invictus'. A very well written account – albeit not exhaustive – of South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy and Nelson Mandela's manipulation (in a very positive way) of the 1995 Rugby World Cup as a means of promoting that transition.

James says

Playing The Enemy is a journalistic popular narrative of the impact of the 1995 Rugby World Cup Championship in forming a post-Apartheid South African nationalism, and the efforts of Nelson Mandela embracing white dominated rugby in order to avert a civil war. John Carlin, who is a longtime British journalist, centered the story on Nelson Mandela's journey from resistance fighter, to longtime political prisoner who was the symbol of Apartheid repression, to the President of a fledgling multiracial state which could move either to factional war or forward as a nation. While an entertaining narrative written in a classical journalistic style, aimed for public consumption as opposed to academic study, its lack of sources throw into question some of its basic arguments, as one cannot confirm nor deny his assertions. Since the point of popular nonfiction narratives is to provide an entertaining story set in the real world, writers are free to take some liberties or exaggerate. Some of Carlin's assertions, at the gut level, seem to be in this category, as well as his overall conclusions about South Africa's problems since the 1995 game. As a book, it is an undeniable example of the connections between the importance of sports in forming imagined communities, and shifting notions of social progress. As Mandela asserted, sport have the power more than governments to break down racial barriers (3).

Carlin argued that Nelson Mandela, while in prison, made an effort to know his enemy, and learned Afrikaaner history, culture, and language, and realized that rugby was what glued Afrikaaner people together. Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) pushed for a boycott of all things South African, especially its national teams, and especially its national rugby team, the Springboks, whose green jersey colors were as much representative of Apartheid as the old South African flag and national anthem. When Mandela became President, Carlin argued that he realized how close South Africa was to a civil war, as heavily armed right-wing Afrikaaner militias and members of the military threatened to overthrow the newly elected ANC dominated government or carve out an Afrikaaner state. Though only 10% of the population, the fact that they were heavily armed and financed meant that they had the power to make or turn South Africa into a wartorn hellscape. Mandela sought to make a multiracial South African nationalism by pushing for black South Africans to embrace the same Springboks in the Rugby World Cup which had been heavily protested and boycotted. He met regularly with the mostly apolitical white members of the team, who by the end see him as much a part of their team as any other, and Mandela wears the green jersey and Springbok cap during the run. By embracing their former enemies, the teeth of anger at the loss of privilege is numbed since white South Africans see black South Africans rooting for their team. The final victory is one shared by nearly all South Africans.

Divided into time periods providing the background, two thirds of the book is a setup for the 1995 World Cup, in explaining how the moment was a true crossroads, which could have led easily to war. The book, as many journalist narratives do, follow a number of individuals throughout besides Mandela. Justice Bekebeka was a longtime black nationalist ANC operative who was one of the few South Africans, he noted, that refused to embrace the Springboks, as he had forgiven enough. The embrace of the green jersey was something he could not do, which made him a lonely man on game day. Niel Barnard was a Afrikaaner intelligence director who had defended the old regime but realized it was untenable and began working towards transition to the new, which made him as a hard defender of post-Apartheid as he had been of Apartheid. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who is a sort of a backdrop of a longtime Anglican bishop who pushed for nonviolent boycotts to fight Apartheid. Francois Pienaar is the captain of the Springboks, described as a typical apolitical Afrikaaner who always voted Nat (the Nationalist Party, the ruling Apartheid party dominated by Afrikaaners.) Linga Moonsamy was a former ANC guerilla who became the head of the Presidential protection unit, tasked with guarding Mandela. He was on hand as a stadium of 62,000 Boers, described as rednecks with khaki clothes, potbellies, and Budweiser drinkers, chanted "Nelson! Nelson!" and sang Shosholoza, the new South African national anthem, which had originally been a black protest song. The book quite well set up that scene, as since the mid 1980s, South Africa steadily moved towards war, as it sent the military into villages to suppress protest and revolt, and right-wing Afrikaaners moved to balkanize South Africa if the Apartheid state was untenable. By combining the symbol of Mandela with the symbol of Springbok, he helped create the post-Apartheid state nationalism. Carlin's thesis is summed up nicely, "For decades Mandela had stood for everything white South Africa most feared; the Springbok jersey had been the symbol, for even longer, of everything black South Africans most hated. Now suddenly, before the eyes of the whole of South Africa, and much of the world, the two negative symbols had merged to create a new one that was positive, constructive, and good. Mandela had wrought the transformation, becoming the embodiment not of hate and fear, but generosity and love" (223). Mandela had that unifying quality, where he sought out human commonality, which he believed sports to be a bridge between people of vastly different positions and backgrounds.

Besides lacking the academic rigor of having checkable sources, Carlin overplayed how much rugby united South Africa over the long term. While it certainly helped alleviate a critical period after the ascension of the ANC through the 1994 election, which met their basic demand of "one person, one vote", one day of sports unity will not restructure overall racial bigotry, to say nothing of racial institutions, which will take at least a few generations to change. Carlin hinted at the bigger problems of post-Apartheid South Africa, that of deep poverty, the AIDS epidemic, widespread violent crime, and corruption as being the standard problems of any country as opposed to the racist brute of international relations, which seems to be somewhat of a cop-out.

He never mentioned the extreme neoliberal embrace of the ANC, which embraced the IMF and World Bank's edicts that it privatize as much as possible to bring investment to South Africa, which, as it has in much of the world, actually deepened the poverty of the country. Mandela, while a man of deep reverence and vision, is but one man, and it usually takes decades, if not centuries, to rectify systemic, informal oppressions without the violent birth pangs of revolution.

Carlin's work has become very popular after *Invictus* premiered, which is based on *Playing The Enemy*. It is a story, as Carlin related, that is easily transferable to a fictionalized narrative. The serious historian should be troubled by the lack of sources in Carlin's book, yet one cannot deny that he captured a pivotable moment of unity and possibility within South African history. Where the academic historian may overlook this moment, the journalist may overplay and romanticize the same moment. Is this where the sports historian comes in, making the links between social, cultural, political, and standard histories? What lessons from journalism, besides writing well, can an academic take away? I fear that historians will often throw out the baby with the bathwater in dismissing books like Carlin's, which are clearly very popular, even if it is rightfully criticized for sources that are not accountable, which private interviews seldomly are. The accessibility of works like Carlin's, which is the best selling rugby book in history, points to the necessity of engaging with strategies that journalists use.

Emily says

1994 was a critical year for South Africa. A president had been elected by almost two-thirds of voters in the first truly democratic, one-person, one-vote elections the country had ever had. Tensions were simmering just barely under the surface, not infrequently erupting into violent neighborhood rallies, bloody skirmishes, and even assassination. Many of the white Afrikaner minority were worried about reprisals from the black majority, some of whom were undoubtedly eager for revenge or at least eager to see whites "put in their place" after so long in power. Extremist elements from both ends of the spectrum were arming themselves for what they deemed the inevitable civil war that would come. Even among the more moderate South Africans, doubts that a lasting peaceful government could be forged ran rampant.

And then there was Nelson Mandela.

Almost three decades of incarceration might be expected to have a hardening effect on a person, particularly when the initial conviction was unjust. However, Nelson Mandela used his time in prison to come to understand his adversary. He learned to speak Afrikaans, studied Afrikaner history, developed friendships with his Afrikaner jailors, and continued to reach out to the government leaders who had put him in prison. Eventually, this approach not only secured his release from jail and his election to the presidency, but also set his country on a path toward equality and reconciliation.

In the midst of this time of upheaval and radical change, South Africa was also preparing to host the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Rugby, for those who are as unfamiliar with the sport as I am, is sort of a cross between soccer and American football, but without any pads to cushion the ferocious impacts. Mr. Carlin explains the Afrikaner passion for rugby as "the closest they got, outside church, to a spiritual life" and Mr. Mandela himself once described it as "a religion" for Afrikaners. The black South Africans generally viewed the gold and green uniforms of the Springboks, along with the old national flag and national anthem, as a symbol of the oppression they had suffered under decades of apartheid. For years, they had cheered for whatever team the Springboks were playing against, urging a global boycott on South African rugby while apartheid was still law. And then Mr. Mandela determined that the best possible use for the sport of rugby is as "an

instrument of political persuasion [and] reconciliation.”

To this end, Mr. Mandela worked with the disparate elements of South Africa, tirelessly lobbying, inspiring, charming, persuading and cajoling Xhosa, Zulu, English and Afrikaners alike into supporting the Springboks and his vision of South African unity: “One Team, One Country.” He encouraged the more vengeful anti-apartheid activists to soften their stance against the symbols they loathed and to give the country a chance to come together. He convinced General Constand Viljoen, the former overall commander of the South African Defense Force who led a right-wing group determined to take up arms against the new government, to stand down and renounce war. He motivated the almost-completely Afrikaner rugby team to learn the Xhosa words to the new national anthem “Nkosi Sikelele” and sing it and the old national anthem with equal gusto before each match during the tournament. In a triumphant ending worthy of a Hollywood film (which, as a matter of fact, it now is), the underdog Springboks defeated the heavily favored New Zealand All Blacks to win the World Cup and the entire country celebrated rapturously, regardless of color. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu explained, “That match did for us what speeches of politicians or archbishops could not do. It galvanized us, it made us realize that it was actually possible for us to be on the same side. It said it is actually possible for us to become one nation.”

Mr. Mandela's optimism, charisma, and determination to engage all South Africans in the process of peace and justice prevailed against the fear and suspicions so prevalent at this turbulent time. And the sport of rugby was his instrument of choice in this extraordinary reconciliation.

For more book reviews, come visit my blog, [Build Enough Bookshelves](#).

Sarah says

Fascinating. I'm a huge rugby fan and I have a strong interest in SA politics. I've read Mandela's autobiography, but this was a close-up on a short period of time, with a different focus. I've seen the footage of the 1995 Rugby World Cup, and I've heard firsthand accounts of the way it brought the country together, but this book gave me a new perspective on the attitudes pre-Mandela. It shows the vision that Mandela had of sport as a unifier, the chances that he took, and the dramatic changes that took place in the blink of an eye, politically speaking. I'll be interested to see if they capture half of the impact in the Morgan Freeman-Matt Damon-Clint Eastwood version that is coming out later this year. If they're smart they'll incorporate documentary footage, like van Sant did with Milk; I'm not sure there's any way to capture this emotion through staged scenes.

John says

August 17, 2008
Entering the Scrum
By BILL KELLER
PLAYING THE ENEMY
Nelson Mandela and the Game That Made a Nation
By John Carlin
Illustrated. 274 pp. The Penguin Press. \$24.95

The heart-lifting spectacle of South Africa's first free election in April 1994 was, for Nelson Mandela and his followers, a triumph unimaginably sweet, but perilously incomplete. Mandela was keenly aware that his party's victory, secured by a landslide of black votes, lacked the endorsement of alienated whites, and that whites retained sufficient wealth and weaponry to endanger his new democracy if they felt threatened. As John Carlin puts it in "Playing the Enemy," paraphrasing Garibaldi on the birth of Italy, the election had created a new South Africa; now Mandela's task was to create South Africans. This wonderful book describes Mandela's methodical, improbable and brilliant campaign to reconcile resentful blacks and fearful whites around a sporting event, a game of rugby.

That South Africa's first patch of common ground might be a rugby field was preposterous on the face of it. Rugby was the secular religion of the Afrikaners, the white tribe that invented and enforced apartheid. It was a sport that most blacks considered — if they considered it at all — "the brutish, alien pastime of a brutish, alien people."

The anti-apartheid movement had fought passionately for a world boycott of South Africa's team, the Springboks, knowing that this, as much as economic sanctions and domestic unrest, would drive home to ordinary Afrikaners that their dominion was untenable. Now, in an attempt to reassure the defeated minority that they had a rightful place in the new order, Mandela agreed to host the 1995 rugby World Cup games in South Africa. More than that, he set out to transform black South Africans into Springbok enthusiasts by lending his personal charisma to the loathed sport and by mobilizing all races in pursuit of a world championship.

A caveat is required: the premise that a single rugby game, even a championship game, could heal three centuries of racial division, dispelling accumulated terrors and hatreds in a magic Mandela moment, is romantic overstatement. South Africa is still a generation or two from racial reconciliation. But Carlin summons many witnesses, from ardent liberation firebrands to white racist bitter-enders, who testify that the 1995 championship match was a profoundly formative moment in the young country's move away from the threat of civil war. By the time Carlin is finished, you'll be inclined to grant him his poetic license.

Carlin is a Briton who reported on South Africa's transition for *The Independent* of London. (We were amiable colleagues at the time.) Now a globe-trotting writer for the world's leading Spanish daily, *El País*, he is an industrious reporter and gifted storyteller.

"Playing the Enemy" begins on the morning of the fateful game, in which the South Africans were underdogs against the gargantuan New Zealand All Blacks (so named for their uniforms). Carlin introduces an assortment of characters, some familiar, some obscure, victims and villains of apartheid, all of whom would feel themselves and their country transformed by the day's end. We meet François Pienaar, the Springboks' captain, a 6-foot-4 model of Afrikaner manhood who "carried his 240 pounds of muscle with the statuesque ease of Michelangelo's David," and Linga Moonsamy, a former anti-apartheid guerrilla who would be Mandela's No. 1 bodyguard that day. We meet Niel Barnard, the former head of the sinister apartheid-era intelligence service, and Justice Bekebeke, who had spent much of his young life on death row for killing a policeman. We meet the irrepressible Anglican archbishop and Nobel Prize winner Desmond Tutu, stranded in San Francisco and looking for a bar that might broadcast the rugby game, and Constand Viljoen, the retired head of the South African Defense Force who became the leader of a white separatist resistance front. These and other deftly sketched characters make up both an audience for the big game and a gallery of South Africa, through which Carlin will recount the absorbing story of a country emerging from its cruelly absurd racist experiment.

After that overture, the book steps back to its real beginning, in 1985. That was the year Nelson Mandela, then 21 years into a life sentence for conspiring to overthrow the regime, made his overture to the white government, beginning the long negotiation that would ultimately turn South Africa right side up. That was also the year activists scuttled a planned All Black tour of South Africa — which, along with riots in black townships and a rising chorus of international opprobrium, helped convince realists in the white government that they needed Mandela as much as he needed them. As the narrative steams forward, taking on interesting passengers and traversing some tumultuous history, the game of rugby becomes a recurring symbol. Carlin,

who has worked in America and knows that rugby scarcely registers here, goes easy on rules and jargon while managing to evoke the drama of the game — “like a giant chess match played at speed, with great violence,” as he puts it.

There are scenes that will open your tear ducts, like the chapter in which the muscle-bound Springboks — “Hollywood central casting’s overenthusiastic response to a request for 26 Roman gladiators” — set out to learn how to sing “Nkosi Sikelele iAfrika,” the thrilling Xhosa-language liberation hymn that became one of South Africa’s two national anthems. Or when, on the morning of the climactic match, the rugby captain leads his men from their hotel for a warm-up jog, and four black children selling newspapers recognize them and call out to them by name — adoring fans from the other side of history. Or when the uniformly white crowd greets Mandela with a rapturous chorus: “Nel-son! Nel-son! Nel-son!”

This is, of course, Mandela’s book. Carlin portrays him as the master politician he was, a man who manipulated allies and adversaries alike with the charming calculation of a benign Machiavelli. It is a close call which was the bigger challenge: standing up to the more vengeful impulses of his own movement or winning over the fearful white minority. But he essentially restrained his side by defanging the other side. Having read their history and studied their sport, he astonished the Afrikaners by addressing them in their language (learned in prison), but mostly by not hating them. “You don’t address their brains,” he advised his comrades, speaking of the Afrikaners. “You address their hearts.”

Mandela was, Carlin demonstrates, “a canny strategist, a talented manipulator of mass sentiment. His gift for political theater was as sophisticated as Bill Clinton’s or Ronald Reagan’s.” If “Playing the Enemy” were not so well written, it would deserve a place among the management tomes and self-help books that dominate business best-seller lists — a guide to leadership that plays to people’s better angels.

Carlin has already sold film rights to Morgan Freeman, who seems born to play Nelson Mandela. Matt Damon is signed up to play the Springbok captain, and Clint Eastwood (a rugby fan) is directing. In those hands, there’s a chance the movie will do justice to the story.

But don’t wait for the movie.

Bill Keller, the executive editor of The Times, was the paper’s Johannesburg bureau chief from 1992 to 1995 and is the author of the children’s book “Tree Shaker: The Story of Nelson Mandela.”

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Marvin says

Good if flawed account of Mandela’s struggle to unify South Africa. The author did a good job in showing how tenuous the country was during Mandela’s term as president and Mandela’s role in stabilizing a very dangerous period in history. However there are just too many flaws in this book to thoroughly enjoy it. First, there is the formal and stiff writing style of the author. It tends to be unfocused in describing the events. Secondly, while The author sincerely admires Mandela, and there is much to be admired, the adulation tends to be a bit heavy. Third, The Rugby part of the book doesn’t really become important until the last quarter. This is probably good since I know nothing about Rugby, however I found it more inspiring to read about how Mandela worked with his past enemies to unify a country. In the scheme of things even this Rugby game seemd to be a bit exaggerated in its importance. This is a good example of the movie being better than the book.

Cath Duncan says

Nelson Mandela is the epitome of Agile Living and Agile Leadership, which is essentially about living in a way that exercises your freedom and expands freedom for others. Exercising your mental and emotional freedom is the foundation of Agile Living and creating all the other types of freedom that you might want for yourself and the people around you. In spite of having many of his freedoms severely constrained and restricted, and having his loved ones tortured and killed in terrible ways, Nelson Mandela chose to exercise mental and emotional freedom and to think and feel from a place of love and peace rather than fear, hatred and revenge. And this is in my view the reason he was able to be such a transformational leader.

If you're curious to learn more and want to get the 19 leadership strategies that Nelson Mandela used which I've extracted from *Invictus*, you can get my Bottom-line, along with an interview with the author, John Carlin, and an ex-freedom fighter who spent 10 years in prison at Robben Island with Nelson Mandela, over at The Bottom-line Bookclub - <http://www.bottomlinebookclub.com/201...>

Clinton Hutchings says

I don't know much about rugby, South Africa, apartheid or Nelson Mandela's story. This book provided me with a good working knowledge of all of these topics. Phenomenal story of reconciliation and forgiveness. It gives me a little hope for the future, for what could happen, on a big scale. But I think you'd really need someone like Mandela to orchestrate it - otherwise, unfortunately, civil war, prejudice and racism will rule the day. Anyway, amazes me that sport can be so influential in bringing people together. Another reason to be a die-hard sports fan I guess!

L says

The author is a journalist - if you are a fast reader you will speed through this book. Reading more like a longer magazine article, Carlin lays an informative foundation of the events leading to Mandela's release from prison and his vision to unite South Africa through rugby. If you do not know anything about this event, I would say it's a must-read - if you do have knowledge of the event or are into heavy non-fiction it may be on the lighter-reading side; but it doesn't take anything away from the beauty of the event. Highlights of the book include the quotes from not just Mandela and the other people that drove these events forward (e.g. the twins, and Piennar).

Nora Lockett says

I became interested in this book in a very roundabout way. I am a fan of rugby, and the South African team the Springboks in particular, and picked up this book for that reason. I was not prepared for the sheer power of what I read. I must say that I never realized how very evil apartheid was until I read the details in this book. For part of the time, tears streamed down my face as I grieved the injustices suffered by the black African people of South Africa. Central to the book is the one injustice that nearly everyone realizes, and that

is the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela. The miracle of the narrative is the forgiving spirit of Nelson Mandela as he used the Rugby World Cup to unite a nation. I cried through this narrative as well. If you would like to experience this story before you read it, I highly recommend the movie "Invictus". The movie remains very faithful to the book. Another choice would be to see "The Thirteenth Man", a documentary about this story that is part of ESPNs "30 for 30" series. And to my delight, they got the rugby scenes correct! So, enjoy the book and the film, and try watching rugby (Rugby Union is best in my opinion, far superior to Rugby League).

Nicolás Mendoza. says

El grito Sudafricano «¡AMANDLA!» que significa poder y la respuesta de la multitud: «¡AWETHU!» -para el pueblo-. Esta es la historia de una nación, de un hombre que "liberó" a los "blancos" del "miedo" y a su vez "liberó" a los "negros" de uno de los sistemas de segregación más absurdos inventados por el hombre, sistema cruel e injusto llamado "Apartheid". Es la historia de los Afrikaners, la historia de Mandela y de la reconciliación entre "enemigos" fundiéndose en "una sola nación. De este libro me llevo muchas cosas entre esas ese "factor" que nos indica que muchas veces hay que apelar a los corazones y algunas veces a la razón, es menester nuestro saber cuándo es necesario cada "aplicación". Es un abrazo y John Carlin es un gran escritor. Tener el carisma y la inteligencia para ganar inclusive a su "enemigo", derrumbar prejuicios en cuestión de segundos por medio de la amabilidad, el respeto y buen trato. Es una de las tantas cosas que hicieron grande a Mandela. Es un libro maravilloso, real y emocionante. Leanlo, mi pequeño review no cubre ni el 5% de todo lo que se encuentra y queda al leer este libro.

Nicole says

I just love that book!!!!

First because it is about rugby, a sport I really enjoy. And also because it is about Nelson Mandela, a man who succeeded to save a country from civil war. He was a hero and a great man. Instead of choosing the easy option and go to war, he made peace with the enemies.

I watched the movie first and I really loved it but I didn't know there was a book about it. And when I found it I thought it would talk a lot about rugby but on the contrary! You learn so much more about the history of South Africa!
