

Thokozani Football Club (TFC)

Background

Thokozani football club is currently comprised of 21 black lesbian-women athletes ranging in ages from 18-41, a coach, and a team administrator. All of us come from Umlazi Township, Kwa-Zulu Natal.

Historically, the black townships of South Africa are a product of our Apartheid past, which formally fell in 1994 when Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the first black president of the Republic of South Africa. However, while political apartheid ended, our country is still greatly divided and plagued by racialized poverty, chronic under/underemployment, lack of affordable housing, education, and adequate health care. As black women and as lesbians, we are the most adversely affected demographically. Despite our new and progressive 1996 Constitution that legally protects us against discrimination based on race, gender, or sexual orientation, the everyday realities are that we live in a society that is racially stratified, patriarchal and misogynist, and heterocentric/homophobic.

As black women and as lesbians in South Africa, we are challenged daily by under/unemployment, chronic illness including HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, hate crimes and other forms of lesbophobic sexual violence. South Africa is known globally as the rape capital of the world, while our province of Kwa-Zulu Natal has an HIV+ adult population of almost 40%. The HIV transmission and infection rate among black women between the ages of 34-39 is now the fastest growing in the country, followed closely by women aged 24-29. It is not by accident that the rate of transmission is highest among a demographic that is also hardest hit by unemployment. While the national average unemployment rate for black African men is at 27%, the rate of unemployment among black women increases to 33% in the urban areas and to 58% for rural women.

As an all black lesbian-women soccer team, we at Thokozani believe that through sport and soccer, we can make a difference in the lives of other young and queer women struggling against homophobia and violence. We play for peace. We want to educate each other and our families, friends and communities that we exist, that we contribute to building a physically, socially, and emotionally healthy and democratic South African society, and that we deserve a life free of discrimination and violence due to homophobia. We have the right as athletes to play and compete in a safe and supportive environment no matter what our gender, race, class, or sexual orientation.