The Gambling Games
under-the-radar, unofficial and most popular soccer practices of South Africa

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So, the [soccer] union had two different kinds of structures now: there’s the organised structure and there’s the unorganised structure. The organised structures are this, where the competitions being endorsed by SAFA [South African Football Association], and the unorganised structure is this: where anyone can come and organise a competition for money and any team can come and play.

Extract from an interview recorded with an Executive Member of the Local Football Association (December 2012)
EM: But SAFA say that they are not allowing clubs affiliated to the union [LFA] to play unorganised soccer, and vice versa. You have to belong to SAFA in order to benefit from SAFA. If you don’t belong, you don’t benefit.

T: That’s a good point you raise. What’s the benefit of being with SAFA?

EM: That is something we all still want to see [laughs!] We don’t know! We are being told that the benefits are being promoted to Castle [now SAB (regional)] league, Vodacom (provincial) League, and the possibility of one day playing PSL [Professional Soccer League], getting sponsorships from SAFA. …

… But there is more money being invested in unorganised soccer than there is money being invested in organised soccer.

T: But that is private money, no?

EM: Yes, that is not SAFA’s money, that’s private money! …

… According to the constitution, they [SAFA] are in charge of all soccer in South Africa, but they are not managing it. Why not? Because they don’t make soccer inclusive for everybody. They only make it inclusive for a small part. And to be included you have to be affiliated. And you cannot always afford affiliation being paid, transport for games and stuff like that. I would rather play for R500 this afternoon, than for R200 at the end of the season. You understand that? That is the mind-set that we have in our region for soccer.
Disputes over money just before the [official soccer] games not only made us late to the field, but all the players started to feel demotivated. Normally, when we played a soccer match, we all would talk about playing strategies, and laugh and joke around before our games. But now, we were just quiet, frustrated, and not in the same spirit ... We could not understand why he [coach] was … [asking for money for transport and referees’ fees] just before the [league] game. If money was the problem, he knew that we could earn him money from the gambling games, but he would not let us play the gambling games.

Thoba, 2017