
The Sports Minister Is Dead Wrong! - Winning Matches Is Not Governance

Minister Gayton McKenzie's claim that South African football is in its "best period ever" reflects a troubling misunderstanding of what sports governance actually means.

*By Dennis A. Mumble
12 March 2026*

When the Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture, Gayton McKenzie, stated in an interview broadcast on Metro FM's *Sports Night Amplified with Andile* on 11 March 2026, he made a bold assertion: that South African football is currently enjoying its "best period ever". His argument rested largely on the recent performances of the national teams and the renewed interest of sponsors and supporters.

Yet this claim reveals two fundamental misunderstandings.

The first concerns the Minister's own role: he is not the political defender of the leadership of sports federations but the constitutional custodian of the integrity of sport on behalf of the South African public.

The second concerns the role of the South African Football Association itself. A football association exists not merely to celebrate the results of national teams but to govern the entire ecosystem of the sport — from grassroots structures and democratic

processes to financial stewardship and constitutional accountability.

National team success is one outcome of that system, not the measure of whether the system is functioning properly. Confusing performance with governance is therefore not simply an analytical error; it risks obscuring the very institutional failures that the Minister is duty-bound to confront.

Success on the field is not the same thing as good governance. The Minister cannot simply reduce the problems in SAFA to electioneering.

And confusing the two is one of the most dangerous mistakes a public official responsible for the integrity of sport can make.

The Minister must also bear partial responsibility for the disgraceful physical altercation that recently erupted at a SAFA NEC meeting. His public dismissal of legitimate governance concerns has sent a dangerous signal into the football community. Several NEC members, already frustrated that their repeated pleas for accountability had fallen on deaf ears, feared that the Minister's remarks would be interpreted by the SAFA leadership as political cover — a green light to continue the Association's steady descent into autocracy.

The Minister's Misplaced Projection of His Role

The problem with the Minister's remarks is that they project a wrong image of his constitutional role.

The Minister is not the political patron or cheerleader of football leaders, as he ably showed in reaction to the challenges in basketball, netball, and athletics. He is not the defender of the delinquent incumbents who hold office in these organisations.

He is the Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture of the Republic of South Africa, and his constituency is not the leadership of sports federations alone but the citizens of the country — us, the millions of South Africans who play, support and invest in sport.

In law, sports federations are not merely private associations.

South African courts have repeatedly recognised that national sports federations perform public functions because they regulate national sport, select national teams, and administer resources and opportunities that affect the public.

That is precisely why Parliament enacted the National Sport and Recreation Act.

The Act places a clear responsibility on the Minister and on the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC) to ensure that national federations comply with principles of good governance, transparency, accountability and democratic administration.

These responsibilities are not optional.

They are part of the constitutional architecture that protects the integrity of sport in South Africa.

Against that background, the Minister's dismissive response to complaints about poor governance in the South African

Football Association (SAFA) is deeply troubling.

The Fiction of the “Ghosts”

During the interview, the Minister responded to questions about criticism of SAFA by saying that he had never heard anyone declare that they would challenge the current leadership in elections.

“Not one”, he said.

He then concluded that critics were essentially “ghosts”.

This characterisation is astonishing.

The governance concerns surrounding SAFA are neither imaginary nor secret. They have been documented extensively and communicated to the Minister, to Parliament and to SASCOC by key stakeholders within football.

These concerns include a detailed constitutional analysis and blatant lies told to Parliament, prepared by myself and a number of dossiers of maladministration authored by Gladwyn White, a serving member of SAFA's National Executive Committee.

To dismiss such documented concerns as the complaints of “ghosts” is not merely flippant; it trivialises the serious governance questions that have been raised about the organisation.

And those questions go far beyond elections.

Complaints About Governance Failures Are Not Election Campaigns

The Minister appears to believe that there is a causal relationship between criticism of SAFA and electioneering.

But that assumption is dead wrong!

Many of the individuals raising concerns about the governance of the organisation — including myself — are not candidates for office and have no intention of seeking positions within SAFA.

Our concerns are rooted in something much simpler: the belief that the governance of South African football matters to the public.

And the evidence that the organisation has serious governance problems is substantial.

In the recent past, SAFA has:

- used the Emergency Committee as a substitute National Executive Committee;
- jerry-rigged its constitution to entrench incumbents;
- interfered routinely in regional and local football elections across the country, effectively pre-selecting voters;
- experienced chronic financial instability, including being technically insolvent for at least the last three years;
- centralised power in the President, who has used it to his political advantage;
- taken key decisions through round-robin resolutions to evade democratic debate;
- taken draconian measures by suspending or effectively banning officials who disagree with the President.

These are not minor administrative issues.

They go to the heart of whether the federation is governed in accordance with internationally recognised governance standards.

When Results Become a Smokescreen

The Minister's central defence of SAFA is that national teams are performing well.

But this is precisely where his reasoning collapses.

Sporting success does not necessarily prove good governance.

Athletes often succeed despite administrative dysfunction.

History provides countless examples of sports organisations where teams achieved success while governance structures were deteriorating behind the scenes.

Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of poorly governed sports federations is precisely this contradiction: results on the field may mask deeper institutional decay.

To claim that South African football is in its "best period ever" based solely on recent qualifications for tournaments is therefore not only historically naïve; it is analytically unsound.

Football in South Africa has experienced far more successful periods in the past — including the era surrounding the 1996 Africa Cup of Nations victory and the country's hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup — despite its notorious governance problems.

Measured against those milestones, the present moment hardly qualifies as the pinnacle of South African football history. It is also not the first time that the national teams have qualified for international competitions.

But the deeper problem is not historical accuracy.

It is the suggestion that national team results alone should determine whether governance concerns are legitimate.

That is a dangerous standard.

Because if winning matches becomes the sole measure of success, then governance failures become invisible — until they eventually explode into crises, like what happened in the SAFA NEC meeting on 7 March 2026.

The Ethics Question

The governance concerns surrounding SAFA have also been amplified by the arrest of the organisation's president.

While the criminal justice system must follow its course, responsible organisations usually apply a basic ethical principle in such circumstances: leaders facing serious allegations step aside temporarily to protect the integrity of the institution. For the Minister to use the innocent-until-proven-guilty refrain rings very hollow.

This principle is widely recognised in corporate governance and public administration.

It is not a presumption of guilt. It is a demonstration of institutional responsibility.

Governance is not only about legality.

It is about ethics, fairness, accountability, transparency, and maintaining the public trust – all vital elements of good governance.

The Problem of Selective Governance

What makes the Minister's position even more puzzling is the apparent double standard it creates.

In other sports federations, governance failures have prompted intervention and decisive action.

Athletics South Africa and Netball South Africa have both faced strong scrutiny over governance concerns.

Basketball South Africa has also been subject to the Minister's direct intervention for administrative dysfunction.

Heck, the Minister himself temporarily suspended his own second-in-charge in his political party in July 2025 for merely the appearance of wrongdoing.

Yet, the Minister has now discarded that standard for SAFA, exposing a glaring double standard, when he himself temporarily suspended his own second-in-command in his political party in July 2025 for merely the appearance of wrongdoing.

The Minister's distinction therefore misses the point.

Consistency matters in governance.

If poor governance justifies intervention in some federations, it must justify scrutiny in all of them.

The Cricket Precedent

South African cricket offers a clear precedent.

Over the past two decades, Cricket South Africa (CSA) has repeatedly faced serious governance crises: allegations of financial mismanagement, boardroom power struggles, executive misconduct, and institutional instability. Yet throughout many of those same periods, the national team — the Proteas — remained one of the strongest sides in international cricket.

At the height of the most recent governance crisis between 2019 and 2021, South Africa's cricket administration was widely regarded as being in institutional meltdown. The CEO, Thabang Moreo, was suspended amid allegations of misconduct. A forensic investigation revealed serious governance failures. Some sponsors withdrew their support. The organisation faced financial instability. Eventually, the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC) intervened and demanded that the CSA board step aside, while the government signalled that it might impose formal administration.

None of these interventions were halted simply because the national team continued to compete internationally.

Neither SASCOC nor the government argued that the performance of the Proteas on the field somehow absolved CSA of its governance failures. On the contrary, the crisis demonstrated a crucial governance

principle: sporting performance can never be used as a substitute for institutional accountability.

The R2 Million Question

Another issue raised during the interview concerned the alleged payment of R2 million in government funds to SAFA for a Soccer Indaba, allegedly paid to SAFA by Government in 2020.

According to former SAFA Acting CEO and Vice-President Gay Mokoena, the funds were indeed received by the association during his tenure. If that is correct, the public is entitled to know why it was not used for its intended purpose.

The Minister appeared surprised by the claim and suggested that even if the payment had occurred under a previous administration, it was not his responsibility.

That response raises troubling questions about public accountability.

Public funds allocated to sports bodies do not belong to individual ministers. They belong to the public.

Ensuring that such funds are used for their intended purpose is not optional.

Why Governance Matters

The central responsibility of a national sports federation is not merely to organise competitions or celebrate victories. Its primary duty is to govern the sport.

Governance determines whether resources are used responsibly, whether opportunities

are distributed fairly, and whether the sport develops sustainably.

If the governance system fails, the federation fails in its most fundamental mission.

This is precisely why South Africa's governance frameworks — including the King IV Code on Corporate Governance — emphasise ethical leadership, accountability and transparency.

These principles apply just as strongly to sports federations as they do to corporations and public institutions. Ignoring them because teams are winning matches is a profound mistake.

A Minister's Oath

When a minister assumes office in South Africa, they swear an oath to uphold the Constitution and to serve the people of the country. That oath carries responsibilities. It requires vigilance in protecting public institutions.

It requires impartiality when assessing governance failures. And it requires the courage to confront uncomfortable truths.

Sport occupies a special place in South African society. It inspires young people, unites communities and reflects the aspirations of the nation.

But that role can only be sustained if the institutions that govern sport operate with integrity. The Minister of Sport should be the foremost defender of that principle. Not its most casual critic.

Sport holds a unique place in South Africa's democratic story. It helped unite a divided nation, inspire generations of young people, and project the country's identity to the world. But sport can only play that role when its institutions are governed with integrity.

When a Minister sworn to uphold the Constitution dismisses serious governance concerns as the complaints of "ghosts" and measures the health of the nation's largest sporting federation solely by the results of national teams, something fundamental has gone wrong.

The duty of the Minister of Sport is not to defend the powerful within federations; it is to defend the principles that keep those federations accountable to the public.

If South African football is truly to thrive, it will not be because of comforting narratives about its "best period ever". It will be because those entrusted with safeguarding the game — including the Minister himself — recognise that good governance is not optional, and that silence in the face of its erosion is a betrayal of the very public they swore to serve.

Does this mean "die Minister baiza nou"?

###