

PROPOSAL TO THE NAMING COMMITTEE OF RHODES UNIVERSITY

SUBMITTED BY: Professor Steve Olivier, Vice-Chancellor, Robert Gordon University, Scotland, Rhodes 1981.

SUPPORTED BY: Judge Lex Mpati, Chancellor, Rhodes University, Rhodes 1979; and Izak Smuts SC, Rhodes 1974.

Proposal

We would like to formally and respectfully propose to name the Great Field after the late Ally Weakley, with naming possibilities including: the Ally Weakley Memorial Field; or the Ally Weakley Great Field. We do so in full recognition of the importance of considering diversity (including gender) in institutional names, *at the same time being mindful of the views of alumni and the meaning and relevance of the changed name to both past and future alumni (italics – our emphasis)*. It is our view that the goodwill and recognition generated by the naming, among alumni in particular, would be significant for the University.

Motivation/Rationale

Alastair James Weakley (born in Queenstown, 1950), remains a deeply respected and well-remembered name at Rhodes and in the Eastern Cape. He was an iconic figure at Rhodes for a significant period of time and is still remembered with both admiration and fondness.

As the longest ever serving captain of the Rhodes 1st XV rugby team during one its golden eras, and one of the University's legendary sportsmen, he is just as highly regarded for his Anti-Apartheid politics and his fierce support for non-racial sport at a turbulent time in South Africa's history.

A fluent isiXhosa speaker, Ally graduated from Rhodes in 1974 with an Honours degree in African Languages. He taught as a graduate assistant in that department and later at St Andrews College, where he established the first isiXhosa course. He later enrolled for a LLB at Rhodes and was admitted as an attorney in 1984.

An uncompromising flanker for Rhodes and for the Border provincial team, he defied the South African Rugby Board by advocating non-racial rugby in what was then a deeply divided society, and by playing in mixed-race teams despite warnings from the authorities. He abhorred racism, and notably, despite threats from Dr Danie Craven to ban him and others from rugby, he played in the historic and well-publicised non-racial match between KWARU and SEDRU at the Dan Qeqe stadium in 1976.

In terms of his contribution to a non-racial, democratic South Africa, Ally played an important role as a member of the local peace committee during the troubled times of the early 1990s. He also spent much time coaching in the local townships, helping to realise the potential of disadvantaged young people. As a lawyer in the then Grahamstown, he took on cases for the downtrodden and the dispossessed and campaigned for a just South Africa.

The tragedy of his political killing has been well-documented, both then and at the present time. Authors such as the late Shaun Johnson have lauded him, as have Hamilton Wende, Grant Fowlds, and most recently and more extensively, Justice Malala in his book titled "The Plot to Save South Africa" that documents the efforts of Nelson Mandela to restore peace during 1993.

Why the Great Field? That of course is one of the arenas where Ally Weakley exhibited some of his finest qualities, such as leadership, courage, endeavour, perseverance, humility in victory, and grace in defeat. That is where he led the Rhodes team to its first ever historic win over what was then called the University of Port Elizabeth, and it is also where he became the longest ever serving captain of the Rhodes University 1st XV.

A true son of the Eastern Cape, growing up in Cofimvaba district and educated in Queenstown and at Rhodes, Ally understood right from wrong, and he acted on his principled convictions. He was a man who embodied the notion of Rhodes as the University "Where Leaders Learn". Ally Weakley was and should remain an exemplar of the values that underpin Rhodes University – naming the Great Field, which does not have any other recognised historical significance, after him will cement that legacy.