

Contents

VOLUME 1: FOUNDATIONS

<i>List of Contributors</i>	xxi
<i>Introduction</i>	xxvii

Part I: Disciplinary Perspectives

Chapter 1: History of Sports	3
Gerald R. Gems	
<i>Professor Emeritus of Kinesiology</i>	
<i>North Central College, Naperville, IL</i>	
Chapter 2: Geography of Sports	43
Lisa M. DeChano-Cook	
<i>Associate Professor</i>	
<i>Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo</i>	
Steven P. Ericson	
<i>Adjunct Professor</i>	
<i>The University of Oklahoma, Norman</i>	
Chapter 3: Philosophy of Sports	69
R. Scott Kretchmar	
<i>Professor Emeritus, Department of Kinesiology</i>	
<i>Pennsylvania State University, University Park</i>	
Chapter 4: Politics of Sports	93
J. Simon Rofe	
<i>Reader in Diplomacy and International Studies, Global Diplomacy</i>	
<i>Programme; Director, SOAS</i>	
<i>University of London</i>	
Verity Postlethwaite	
<i>Research Associate</i>	
<i>University of London</i>	
Chapter 5: Sociology of Sports	115
Joseph Maguire	
<i>Professor Emeritus, School of Sport, Exercise, and Health Sciences</i>	
<i>Loughborough University, Leicestershire, United Kingdom</i>	
Chapter 6: Social Psychology of Sports	137
Gretchen Peterson	
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<i>University of Memphis, TN</i>	

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Not For Sale

Not For Sale

CONTENTS

Chapter 7: Economics and Sports	157
Stefan Szymanski <i>Stephen J. Galetti Professor of Sport Management, Department of Kinesiology University of Michigan, Ann Arbor</i>	
Chapter 8: Law and Sports	179
Glenn Wong <i>Distinguished Professor of Practice, Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law Arizona State University, Phoenix</i>	
Cameron Miller <i>Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law Arizona State University, Phoenix</i>	
Chapter 9: Media and Sports	209
Raymond Boyle <i>Professor of Communication, Centre for Cultural Policy Research University of Glasgow, Scotland</i>	
Part II: Divisions and Discrimination	
Chapter 10: Aging, Sports, and Society	231
Elizabeth C. J. Pike <i>Professor and Head of Sport, Health and Exercise University of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom</i>	
Chapter 11: Class, Sports, and Society	253
Ian Ritchie <i>Associate Professor of Kinesiology Brock University, Ontario, Canada</i>	
Chapter 12: Race, Ethnicity, Sports, and Society	275
Ben Carrington <i>Associate Professor of Sociology and Journalism, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism University of Southern California</i>	
Courtney M. Cox <i>Doctoral Candidate, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism University of Southern California</i>	
Chapter 13: Disability, Sports, and Society	299
Parissa Safai <i>Associate Professor, School of Kinesiology and Health Science York University, Ontario, Canada</i>	
Shauna Cappe <i>PhD Candidate York University, Ontario, Canada</i>	
Chapter 14: Gender, Sexuality, and Sports: Shifting Attitudes in Snowboarding Culture	321
Mari Kristin Sisjord <i>Professor, Department of Cultural and Social Studies Norwegian School of Sport Sciences, Oslo</i>	

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CONTENTS

VOLUME 2: SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

List of Contributors xxi
Introduction xxvii

Part I: Class, Inequality, and Social Mobility

Chapter 1: Sports and Social Inequality 3
 Grant Jarvie
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 University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom*

Chapter 2: Sports, Gender, and Social Capital 15
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 Monash University, Melbourne, Australia*

**Chapter 3: Sports, Social Class, and Cultural Capital: Building on
 Bourdieu and His Critics** 29
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Chapter 4: Inequality and International Sports Policy 47
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Part II: Socialization and Identity

Chapter 5: Socialization through Sports: Applying a PYD Perspective 63
 Nicholas L. Holt
*Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation
 University of Alberta, Canada*

Shannon R. Pynn
*Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation
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Chapter 6: Action Sports 79
 Holly Thorpe
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 Performance
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Chapter 7: Sports, Lifestyle, and Masculinities 95
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Not For Sale

CONTENTS

Chapter 8: Sports, Violence, and Society: Some Sociological Observations	113
Christopher R. Matthews <i>Senior Lecturer, School of Science and Technology Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom</i>	
Joseph Maguire <i>Professor Emeritus, School of Sport, Exercise, and Health Sciences Loughborough University, Leicestershire, United Kingdom</i>	
Chapter 9: Sports, Pain, and Injury	127
Katie Liston <i>Senior Lecturer, School of Sport and Sport and Exercise Sciences Research Institute Ulster University, Northern Ireland</i>	
Chapter 10: Social Issues in Sports Coaching in the United States	145
Brian T. Gearity <i>Assistant Professor of Sport Coaching, Graduate School of Professional Psychology University of Denver</i>	
Clayton R. Kuklick <i>Clinical Assistant Professor of Sport Coaching, Graduate School of Professional Psychology University of Denver</i>	
Part III: Crosscultural Perspectives	
Chapter 11: Sports and American Society	163
Gerald R. Gems <i>Professor Emeritus of Kinesiology North Central College, Naperville, IL</i>	
Chapter 12: Sports, Nationalism, and the Body: Gymnastic Culture and National Identity in Denmark	181
Lone Friis Thing <i>Associate Professor, Department of Nutrition, Exercise, and Sports University of Copenhagen, Denmark</i>	
Andorra Lynn Jensen <i>Research Assistant, Department of Nutrition, Exercise, and Sports University of Copenhagen, Denmark</i>	
Chapter 13: Sports, Diaspora, and Gaelic Games	197
Paul Darby <i>Reader in the Sociology of Sport Ulster University, Jordanstown, Northern Ireland</i>	
Chapter 14: Sports in Postcolonial Societies	209
Brent McDonald <i>Senior Lecturer, College of Sport & Exercise Science Victoria University, Australia</i>	
Chapter 15: The Making of Modern Sports: Diffusion, Emulation, and Resistance	223
Joseph Maguire <i>Professor Emeritus, School of Sport, Exercise, and Health Sciences Loughborough University, Leicestershire, United Kingdom</i>	

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CONTENTS

Part IV: The Media

Chapter 16: Sports and the Media: Key Issues and Concerns 239
 Garry Whannel
*Professor Emeritus, Research Institute for Media, Arts and Performance
 University of Bedfordshire, Luton, United Kingdom*

Chapter 17: Sports and Media Globalization 257
 Mark Falcous
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Chapter 18: Sports, the Media, and Gender 267
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Chapter 19: Sports, the Media, and National Identity 281
 Mark Falcous
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Chapter 20: Sports and the Media in the Arab World 295
 Mahfoud Amara
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Chapter 21: Sports and the Media in the United States 307
 Thomas P. Oates
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Part V: Global Developments and Approaches

Chapter 22: Sports and Development: Critical Approaches 323
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Chapter 23: The Evolution of Sport-for-Development Policy 337
 Fred Coalter
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Chapter 24: Sports, Gender, and Development 355
 Kari Fasting
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Chapter 25: Sports and Peace Building 371
 Alexander Cárdenas
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Chapter 26: Sports, Development, and Health: Reflections from Southern Africa 389
 Cora Burnett
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 Movement Studies; Director, Olympic Studies Centre
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Not For Sale

CONTENTS Not For Sale

Chapter 27: Sports and Development in South Africa: Fostering Peace
and Respect for Diversity 409

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VOLUME 3: COMMUNITY

List of Contributors xxi

Introduction xxvii

Part I: Politics and Policy

Chapter 1: Managing Elite Sports Systems and the Development
of Athletes 3

Veerle De Bosscher
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Vrije University Brussels, Belgium*

Chapter 2: A Toothless Tiger? Sports, Title IX, and Gendered Bodies 19

Sarah K. Fields
*Professor, Department of Communication
University of Colorado Denver*

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Chapter 3: The Politics and Policy of Anti-doping Efforts in Sports 33

Ivan Waddington
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University of Chester, United Kingdom*

Chapter 4: Sports and National Identity 51

Steven J. Jackson
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Chapter 5: Sports, Politics, and Consumption: Olympic
Ceremonies 67

Toby Miller
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Chapter 6: Sports, Ethics, and Integrity 85

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CONTENTS

Part II: Community and Connection

Chapter 7: Religion through/and/in Sports 101
 Andrew Parker
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Chapter 8: Sports and Disability 115
 Laura Misener
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Western University, London, Ontario, Canada

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Western University, London, Ontario, Canada

Chapter 9: Sports and Mental Health 129
 Andy Smith
Professor, Department of Sport and Physical Activity
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Chapter 10: Sports and Indigenous Peoples 145
 Chris Hallinan
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Charles Darwin University, Australia

Barry Judd
Professor in Indigenous Social Research
Charles Darwin University, Australia

Chapter 11: Sports and Indigenous Peoples: Canada 159
 Victoria Paraschak
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University of Windsor, Canada

Part III: State and Nonstate Actors

Chapter 12: Gendered and Sexual Politics in Olympic Sports 179
 Helen Jefferson Lenskyj
Professor Emerita
University of Toronto, Canada

Chapter 13: The Business of MLB Player Development in the Caribbean 193
 Thomas F. Carter
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and Leisure Cultures Research and Enterprise Group
University of Brighton, United Kingdom

Chapter 14: Sports and Identity in China: Nationalism and the National Games 207
 Liu Li
Anhui Normal University, China

Not For Sale

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CONTENTS Not For Sale

<p>Chapter 15: Sports and the Post-9/11 American Nation</p> <p>Michael L. Butterworth <i>Professor, Department of Communication Studies</i> <i>The University of Texas at Austin</i></p> <p>Chapter 16: Sports, the “State,” and Peace Building in Northern Ireland</p> <p>Katie Liston <i>Senior Lecturer, School of Sport and Sport and Exercise Sciences</i> <i>Research Institute</i> <i>Ulster University, Northern Ireland</i></p> <p>Stephen Bloomer <i>Research Associate (Institute for Research in Social Sciences)</i> <i>Ulster University, Northern Ireland</i></p> <p>Chapter 17: Sports and the Development of Youth: Canada and the United States</p> <p>Jay Coakley <i>Professor Emeritus, Department of Sociology</i> <i>University of Colorado, Colorado Springs</i></p> <p>Part IV: Diplomacy</p> <p>Chapter 18: A Global Sports-Diplomacy Framework</p> <p>Geoffrey Allen Pigman <i>Research Associate, Department of Political Sciences</i> <i>University of Pretoria, South Africa</i></p> <p>Chapter 19: Sports as Diplomacy: Sports, Empire, and “Ireland”</p> <p>Katie Liston <i>Senior Lecturer, School of Sport and Sport and Exercise Sciences</i> <i>Research Institute</i> <i>Ulster University, Northern Ireland</i></p> <p>Joseph Maguire <i>Professor Emeritus, School of Sport, Exercise, and Health Sciences</i> <i>Loughborough University, Leicestershire, United Kingdom</i></p> <p>Chapter 20: Sports Mega Events as a Soft Power Resource</p> <p>Jonathan Grix <i>Professor of Sports Policy, Head, Sports Policy Unit, Department of Economics, Policy and International Business</i> <i>Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom</i></p> <p>Paul Michael Brannagan <i>Senior Lecturer in Sport Management and Policy, Department of Economics, Policy, and International Business</i> <i>Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom</i></p> <p>Chapter 21: The International Paralympic Movement and Public Diplomacy</p> <p>Aaron Beacom <i>Senior Lecturer in Sport Development, Faculty of Sport, Health and Wellbeing</i> <i>Plymouth Marjon University, United Kingdom</i></p> <p>Ian Brittain <i>Research Fellow, Faculty Research Centre for Business in Society</i> <i>Coventry University, United Kingdom</i></p>	<p>225</p> <p>241</p> <p>257</p> <p>273</p> <p>289</p> <p>305</p> <p>319</p>
---	--

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CONTENTS

Chapter 22: The Diplomatic Role of Sporting Cities: A Case Study
of London 2012 337
Daniel Bloyce
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Part V: Organization and Representation

Chapter 23: Sports Governance Models around the World 353
Trevor Meiklejohn
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Unitec Institute of Technology, New Zealand*

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Performance Indicators
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Chapter 24: The Court of Arbitration for Sport 369
Jack Anderson
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Chapter 25: Sports, Mega Events, and Security 383
Christopher Gaffney
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Chapter 26: Sports, Gender, and Representation: The Women's
Gaelic Players' Association 399
Katie Liston
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Chapter 27: Sports Participation in Norway 413
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Not For Sale

CONTENTS

Not For Sale

Chapter 28: International Sports and Match Fixing 429
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VOLUME 4: GOVERNANCE

List of Contributors xxi
Introduction xxvii

Part I: Business, Economics, and Governance

Chapter 1: Economic Rationalities and Sports Analytics: Beyond Moneyball? 3
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Chapter 2: Sports Mega Events and Legacy 19
 Scarlett Cornelissen
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Chapter 3: Sports, Neoliberalism, and Democracy 31
 Matthew G. Hawzen
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 Michael D. Giardina
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Chapter 4: Labor Relations and the Sports Business 49
 Christopher M. McLeod
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 Texas Tech University, Lubbock*
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Chapter 5: The Economic Impact of Sports Facilities 63
 Andrew Zimbalist
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CONTENTS

Chapter 6: Global Sports Governance and Politics: Learning from the FIFA Story 77
 Alan Tomlinson
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Part II: Democracy and Protest

Chapter 7: Sport for Development and Democracy 93
 Simon C. Darnell
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Chapter 8: Sports, Democracy, and Protest 105
 Jon Dart
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Chapter 9: Gender, Sexuality, and Sports Organization 123
 Lourdes Turconi
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Chapter 10: Sports Mega Events and Democracy: Socio-spatial Dynamics in Rio 137
 Christopher Gaffney
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Part III: Ownership

Chapter 11: Sports, Media Ownership, and Control 155
 David Rowe
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Western Sydney University, Australia

Chapter 12: Global Elites and Sports Ownership: Emerging Economies, “Foreign” Owners, and New Strategies 167
 Jan Andre Ludvigsen
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Chapter 13: Franchise Relocations: The Big Four Professional Sports Leagues in the United States and Canada 181
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Not For Sale

CONTENTS Not For Sale

<p>Chapter 14: Not for Sale: The Development of and Resistance to Fan-Owned Sports Clubs 193</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Sean Hamil <i>Lecturer, Department of Management Birkbeck, University of London, United Kingdom</i></p>	193
<p>Chapter 15: The Growth Effects of Sports Franchises, Stadiums, and Arenas 211</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Dennis Coates <i>Professor, Department of Economics University of Maryland, Baltimore County</i></p>	211
Part IV: Advertising and Marketing	
<p>Chapter 16: Sports Marketing: Key Issues and Contexts 227</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Simon Chadwick <i>Professor of Sports Enterprise University of Salford, Manchester</i></p>	227
<p>Chapter 17: Sports Advertising and Celebrity 243</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Garry Whannel <i>Professor Emeritus, Research Institute for Media, Arts and Performance University of Bedfordshire, United Kingdom</i></p>	243
<p>Chapter 18: Advertising, Sports, and Gender 257</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Sarah Gee <i>Assistant Professor, Faculty of Human Kinetics University of Windsor, Canada</i></p>	257
<p>Chapter 19: Sports, Beer, and Promotional Culture 273</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Catherine Palmer <i>Head of School, School of Social Sciences University of Tasmania, Australia</i></p>	273
<p>Chapter 20: Sports Marketing: The National Football League and Social Media 285</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Jeffrey Montez de Oca <i>Associate Professor University of Colorado, Colorado Springs</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Christopher Dehart-Reed <i>Graduate Student University of Colorado, Colorado Springs</i></p>	285
<p>Chapter 21: Sports Tourism: Marketing Places 301</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">James Higham <i>Professor, Department of Tourism University of Otago, New Zealand</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Tom Hinch <i>Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport and Recreation University of Alberta, Canada</i></p>	301
Part V: Environmental Impact, Responsibility, and Sustainability	
<p>Chapter 22: Sports and the Challenges of Sustainability 317</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">John Karamichas <i>Lecturer, School of Social Sciences, Education, and Social Work Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland</i></p>	317

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CONTENTS

Chapter 23: Environmentally Sustainable Design in Sports 329
Timothy Kellison
Assistant Professor, Sport Administration
Georgia State University

Chapter 24: Sustainability, Greenwashing, and Sports Environmentalism 345
Adam Ehsan Ali
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Chapter 25: The Olympics and Environmentalism 359
Jon Helge Lesjø
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Chapter 26: University Sports Facilities and Environmental
Sustainability: Realities in Water Stewardship 371
Cheryl Mallen
Associate Professor, Sport Management
Brock University, St. Catharines, Canada
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Athletic Director
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Chapter 27: Sports and Environmental Sustainability:
Water Use during Times of Drought 383
Cheryl Mallen
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Index 395

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CHAPTER 4

Politics of Sports

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Overview: *Rofe and Postlethwaite explore the relationship between politics and sports by looking at the evolution of the relationship and considering the intersectionality of politics and sports across a range of development issues. They use several examples to illustrate these points, including the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia and relations between world leaders, the International Olympic Committee, and the successful United 2026 bid to host the FIFA World Cup.*

“Politics is almost as exciting as war, and quite as dangerous. In war you can only be killed once, but in politics many times.” Winston Churchill’s likening of politics to war could just as easily be applied to the realm of sports, given the year-round, year after year nature of the sporting calendar, as well as the capacity for sports to inculcate emotions that are characterized as matters of “life and death.” Churchill’s contemporary George Orwell famously wrote in the *Sporting Spirit* ([1945] 2007), that “sport is war minus the shooting”; and to complete the troika (or podium) of sage maxims, Carl von Clausewitz’s memorable adage that “war is the continuation of politics by other means” can justifiably be edited to read that *sports* are often the “continuation of politics by other means.” These aphorisms illustrate that “politics” and “sports” exist in overlapping domains, reflecting both their place in society and the multidirectional bonds between them.

THE POLITICS OF SPORTS

In engaging in the study of either politics or sports, one quickly comes to realize the idea that “sports and politics don’t mix” is, as Lincoln Allison (1993) notes, mythical. Instead, they are intimately intertwined at numerous points, and this chapter will outline the contours of that relationship. It will first look at the evolution

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Chapter 4: Politics of Sports

KEY CONCEPTS

Global geopolitics
 Governance
 International Olympic Committee (IOC)
 International relations
 Ping-pong diplomacy
 Politics and sports
 Power
 Sports and diplomacy

of the relationship and consider the intersectionality of politics and sports across a range of development issues. It will then review the current focus of research in the field. Finally, the chapter concludes by identifying future trends in this relationship. In pursuing this course of action, the authors will provide insight from a number of different academic fields, such as, politics, international relations, history, and sociology, as well as their own perspectives.

Politics and sports can be explored from many different perspectives, given that politics pervades every aspect of the human condition. Politics is not just the preserve of elected officials in a grand parliament, congress, or other governmental body, it is also about the allocation of resources in every facet of society. “Resources” in this sense includes, and often focuses on,

finances; but the term encompasses much more than this. There are physical resources in the shape of spaces to exist in, and emotional resources that individuals and groups of individuals—polities, from family units to nation-states—attach to events and outcomes. The means by which politics is manifest in each of our lives is through a form of diplomatic practice, where diplomacy is not the preserve of foreign ministers or grandiose diplomats. Instead, diplomacy, as the triumvirate multidirectional relationship between communication, representation, and negotiation, can be understood as a global phenomenon that operates across national boundaries and among a range of polities, and that addresses issues that impact upon us all. Diplomacy is therefore in a symbiotic relationship with politics, with—in simple terms—the latter as ends and the former as means.

The relationship of politics to sports, and of sports to politics, is regularly overlooked. This is because sports are generally considered trivial and beneath the “high politics” of government. All sports, that is, are generally viewed as participatory leisure activities. Therefore, it is worth stating that there are resource implications to sports across a wide range of categories. There are clear financial implications, for one thing, from elite sports all the way through to the local playing field—indeed having a “playing field” is an explicitly political decision for any polity, given that the spaces that such fields occupy could easily be used for other activities. Equally true is that there is a clear emotional dimension to sports, involving the consumption of sports through either participation or spectating. Furthermore, the amount of money involved in sports has spurred and legitimized their inclusion in conversations about politics from both practitioner and academic perspectives. It also allows us to contemplate the scale of sports globally: the wealth of a body such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC); the costs of hosting a sports mega event (SME); and funds raised for charity through sporting events or investments from corporate sponsors—these all represent significant capital flows across the globe that contribute to national gross domestic products (GDPs). So, in a number of senses at least, politics is an omnipresent function of sports.

“Politics” and “sports” are two words that come together in the English language and require further clarification. On the one hand, “politics of sports” is a marriage of two words that act as a shorthand for the superficial coming together of the worlds of sports and politics. The image of a politician appearing at a sporting event can be seen in this light. On the other hand, by recognizing politics and sports as distinct phenomena, the phrase recognizes the intersection of these two realms of endeavor. “Politics of sports” as a specific piece of nomenclature, according to Jonathan Grix, “is the area of study where politics and sport meet” (2016, 1–2). The adjoining of politics and sports speaks to the two-way process that takes place whereby sports can be politicized and politics can be shaped by sports.

For an example of the former, of sports being politicized, one can look at the way sports were often at the forefront of the boycott of apartheid South Africa. With respect to the latter, the shaping of politics via sports, the politics of the Korean peninsula was significantly shaped by the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang in February 2018. Yet these examples serve as cliché and require immediate qualification to acknowledge they are useful only to a point. That is because such examples feed into a popular perception of what the politics of sports entails that only covers part of the story. The expanded narrative provided in this chapter explores the perceptions, distinctions, dynamism, and tension that the politics of sports embodies.

MAIN AREAS OF KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT

The main areas of knowledge development can be analyzed in terms of the disciplinary orientation and decade in which they were written. For example, in 1979, a working journalist (at the time of publication) with a special interest in the Olympic Games and international politics, Richard Espy, published his seminal book *The Politics of the Olympic Games*, postulating the following: “The effectiveness of sports as a foreign policy tool derives from its essential neutrality. It is basically a cultural exchange, but unlike a traveling art exhibition, for example, sport exhibits the state’s relative sense of political and economic strength through its prowess as a competitor on the playing field” (Espy 1979, 4).

Espy went on to discuss the mirroring of the world political structure by global sporting structures, including the role of international sporting organizations, a nation-state’s ability to participate in international sports, and the business interests of global sporting movements. The central argument of our analysis is to show that the interests of sports and politics mix, and that the Olympic Games reflect the structure of international politics. Espy’s 1979 piece represents the dominant scholarly debate before the 1990s, in which scholars and writers responded to the concurrent growth in global sports and sports mega events, and to contemporaneous geopolitical challenges such as the dynamics of the Cold War, the decolonization of European empires, the evolution of the United Nations (UN) system, the growth of global economic relationships, and the technologically driven enhancements to personal and mass communications.

Not For Sale

Chapter 4: Politics of Sports

In 1984, John Hoberman wrote about the concepts of political ideologies and sports. In *Sport and Political Ideology*, he attempted to understand the relationship between sports and politics as deeply rooted in twentieth-century ideologies of both the Right and the Left. At the time, Hoberman viewed sports as a site where political doctrines could be expressed. His text represents a raft of scholarship from the 1970s and 1980s that focused on the United States, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union as sites where sports and politics mixed. The dominant theme of these works was an exploration of power. This path of exploration is generally attributed to the trends within academia in international relations and political science, which at the time were shaped significantly by attempts to understand the geopolitics of World War II and the Cold War.

In the United Kingdom in 1985, scholars hosted a panel on “the politics of sport” connected to the annual meeting of the Political Studies Association. The collection that culminated from the conference, edited by Allison and titled *The Politics of Sport* (1986), represented a much broader exploration of the topic than either Espy or Hoberman engaged in, as it went beyond the nation-state system and political ideologies. The volume includes papers on issues such as hunting, sports in divided societies, sporting autonomy and the law, and the politics of black African sports. The contributing scholars came from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. It is worth noting that in the volume’s biography section, a number of the contributors are credited with having “pioneered a course on sport and world politics” (Allison 1986, viii), demonstrating the paucity of focus on the study of politics and sports in academia up to that point. Allison discussed his own interpretation of the politics of sports as being twofold; first, he pointed to the ability for sports to generate political resources; second, he addressed the divisive essence of sports as an agent of social disorder. Moreover, the authors called for further scrutiny on the politics of sports from politics-based scholars, arguing that in the 1980s the topic was focused on primarily by the “sports historian, sociologist or the philosopher,” but neglected by political and international relations scholars. Trevor Taylor addressed this issue, stating that the reason for this lack of scholarship in the 1980s was that “many international relations scholars still view their subject solely in terms of an inter-state struggle for security and power” (1986, 29).

Moving on from the 1980s, the study of the politics of sports continued to grow, with scholars such as Barrie Houlihan publishing further monographs on the topic, such as *The Government and Politics of Sport* (1991) and *Sport and International Politics* (1994). Houlihan developed the topic further by critiquing previous literature that viewed sports through a particular lens and focused on political aims and conflicts, whereas he felt the politics of sports offered a way to consider major societal issues, such as racism, sexual discrimination, or religious tolerance. Thus, for Houlihan, “sport displays the same cultural characteristics as the rest of society” (Houlihan 1991, 10). Houlihan’s 1994 text is described by Roger Levermore and Adrian Budd (2004, 7) as offering a broader dimension to the politics of sports by using an international relations lens, supplemented with pluralist, globalist, and realist international-relations theory.

So while power remained a central theme, these approaches were joined by other considerations, such as the onset of the digital economy and internet

Chapter 4: Politics of Sports

usage, increased concerns about the global environment, and the liberation and resistance of non-state actors addressing sexuality and disability. In turn, this approach shaped widely held views on the politics of sports. As such, the importance of exploring sports through the theoretical perspectives used by international relations or political science scholars challenged the neglect of sports as a credible and useful topic of debate and study. Moreover, the increased variety of perspectives that were put into play, particularly going beyond viewing the state as an all-powerful central actor, and the international state system as the primary structure in the relationship between sports and politics, allowed scholars to consider the evolution of that relationship. Put simply, the challenge of understanding knowledge developments in the politics of sports, therefore, came to include and acknowledge areas of continuity and change across historical, societal, economic, political, and cultural vectors.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, there have been several overviews and handbooks published that develop and explore the debates, theories, and empirical cases connected to the politics of sports (e.g., Bairner, Kelly, and Lee 2017; Grix 2016; Jarvie, Thornton, and Mackie 2018). Key knowledge developments in the recent decades have involved expanding the theoretical and empirical perspectives of the politics of sports. For example, there are chapters in Alan Bairner, John Kelly, and Jung Woo Lee's (2017) handbook that use feminist theories, the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, or mainstream policy theory to consider domestic, regional, and global issues that connect to sports. In addition, attention is placed on emphasizing the sporting connection to societal issues around social justice, political activism, and citizen voices. One shift in scholarship from the earlier texts is that the debate is less about pioneering the topic or showing its neglect in wider political scholarship but is instead now a more established area where multiple perspectives and understandings of the politics of sports are developed and discussed.

The significance of knowledge development in discussions of the politics of sports is magnified by its intersection with a breadth of academic disciplines. For example, from the field of sociology, Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning (1986) have had a significant influence on shaping the theoretical understanding of sports, politics, and development through the civilizing process (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007; Maguire 2011). Within political science and international relations, Joseph Nye features prominently for scholars who consider the role that sports play in global geopolitics (see, for example, Nye 2013), particularly as a form of soft power (e.g., Kelly and Brownell 2011; Manzenreiter 2010). Scholars of diplomacy, meanwhile, have recognized in the international sporting landscape diplomacy's triumvirate characteristics of representation, negotiation, and communication (Murray 2018; Rofe 2018). What this means is that one needs to be mindful of the various overlapping fields of study that address the politics of sports. Knowledge of this overlap has spawned a raft of interdisciplinary subfields that combine traditional academic fields and sports, such as sociology and sports, history and sports, sports and diplomacy, and, of course, politics and sports. The point is to recognize that the politics of sports is not limited to one academic discipline. Furthermore, this spreading out of the field transfers into groups and collectives of scholars, which can be illustrated by the variety of

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Chapter 4: Politics of Sports

academic journals that engage with the politics of sports, such as *Sport, Education and Society*; *Sport in Society*; the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*; the *International Journal of the History of Sport*; the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*; and the *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*.

That said, the expansion of knowledge around the politics of sports has been grounded in embracing the traditional concepts associated with studying political science, international relations, and diplomacy. From the texts that have been cited so far, the frequently used concepts are:

- *Nation-state*: A sovereign entity dominated by a single nation. It is the primary unit in the study of international relations.
- *Power*: The ability to make people (or things) do what they would not have otherwise done. Often classified into five principal forms: force, persuasion, authority, coercion, and manipulation.
- *International relations*: The interactions between and among nation-states and, more broadly, the workings of the international system as a whole.
- *Community*: A group of people or network connected by a particular common characteristic or condition of sharing or having certain attitudes.
- *Citizen*: The status of being a citizen of a nation-state, usually determined by law.
- *Governance*: The process of collective decision-making and policy implementation.

In applying the literature development and these definitions to areas around politics of sports research, two of the dominant standpoints are (1) the use of sports by traditional political agents, such as nation-states, to govern and exert influence; and (2) the use of sports by a variety of communities to yield power and influence around particular topics or interests. The examples given throughout this chapter represent both standpoints. However, we need also to note the contested nature of the academic discourse that gives rise to these particular schools of thought. This chapter advocates the more contemporary and robust stance taken by Grant Jarvie, James Thornton, and Hector Mackie: “The politics of sport is not just about whether sport reflects a particular political system, but whether sport should be viewed as a set of values, or as a social movement or political practice or a resource of hope” (2018, 99).

These remarks signal that sports are part of a particular way of viewing the world, and of the political outlook that shapes decisions. Themes and examples within the politics of sports are often used across disciplines, particularly when they involve crises or headline-grabbing achievements. Many of the authors cited in this chapter will often point to iconic moments in international sports, such as Nelson Mandela wearing a “Springbok” jersey in handing over the 1995 Rugby World Cup to Francois Pienaar as a symbol of postapartheid South Africa; the tit-for-tat boycotts of the Summer and Winter Olympics during the Cold War (1980 and 1984); the ongoing debate around doping and the historical use of drugs in elite sporting competitions; the role of grassroots organizations in contributing to the health, employability, and well-being of citizens; or the more recent influence of esports and the rise of transnational communities through online gaming and

social media. The key to understanding the politics of sports, therefore, is not to know or analyze every example or theme within the topic but rather to have an awareness of the positions, scales, and lenses various authors have used to discuss the different cases.

The study of sports and politics is influenced further by the unit of analysis (i.e., “what” or “who” is being studied) and scale (i.e., the size of the population being studied). The phrase “sports and politics” encapsulates multiple units and scales. For example, in England, the Premier League is a UK-based football (soccer) league, owned by private shareholders and holding the rights to the domestic football league. In addition, there is the publicly accountable Football Association, which has the rights to the domestic football cup and national teams. The Football Association sends representatives to the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), which governs the annual European-based domestic cups and the national team competition that occurs every four years. Above that regional layer, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) governs and owns the right to global competitions, such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Football Tournament. Connected to FIFA is Sepp Blatter, who was the eighth president of FIFA (from 1998 to 2015) but was then spectacularly accused of multiple corruption charges by the Swiss Attorney General’s office and subsequently banned from FIFA activities for six years. The governance of world football, as illustrated by Table 1, shows the units of analysis and the scale involved in considering the governance aspect of sports and politics.

The governance structures of world football, and the multiple units of analysis and scale, have led to a rich variety of scholarship. Alan Tomlinson (2014) has focused on the role of individuals and leaders within the governance of the international governing body FIFA, which is the gatekeeper to the largest world football spectacle, the FIFA World Cup. This SME has dominated a raft of scholarship, too, from authors such as Scarlett Cornelissen (2008), who discusses the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa in terms of nation building and foreign policy, or Paul Brannagan and Richard Giulianotti (2015), who discuss the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar in terms of soft power in the international relations system. These works intersect with political issues around nation branding, economic

Governance of World Football

Unit of analysis	Scale	Football institution	Founding date
International governing body	Global	FIFA	1904
Continental confederation	Regional	UEFA	1955
Private organization	Domestic	Premier League	1992
National governing body	Domestic	Football Association	1863

Table 1. This table shows the types and scale of football (soccer) governance and includes examples of institutions fitting each one. GALE.

Not For Sale

Chapter 4: Politics of Sports

impact, human rights, international media narratives, and the governance of this major sporting event. Furthermore, they intersect with the understanding of politics as involving the practices of nation-states and the practices of influential non-state actors, such as sports governing bodies, individuals in power, or media flows.

The governance of world football is an exemplar for many other sports, and it highlights a number of factors involved in studying sports and politics, namely around social, economic, or cultural measures that contribute and intersect with the political dimensions of sports. As noted in the preceding discussion, the politics of sports goes beyond the nation-state and traditional understandings of political interactions. It ventures into the realms of individuals, national governing bodies, organizing committees of SMEs, and numerous other stakeholders. These different perspectives are supported by a variety of empirical sources used to inform the knowledge base. As noted above, the scholarship linked to world football is informed by documents around governance of the international federation. As seen in Table 1, the English Football Association was formed in 1863, over forty years before FIFA was founded. As such, the sports, governance, and current political situations surrounding international football are grounded in a rich and complex history (Goldblatt 2007; Hughson 2016).

A feature of modern international sports more broadly is the language used to connect the histories, structures, and politics of sports. Academics, media, practitioners, and the general public may suffer from historical amnesia regarding particular sporting memories and thus excessively romanticize or blindly overlook the past. Therefore, sports are an important vector in the construction of the past. As an example, the role of the British Empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the spread of sports is, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, wrapped up in debates about decolonialization that identify the retention of power in imperial mechanisms as the key problematic. The nineteenth-century governance structures of sports remain dominated by the former imperial powers of the West and North and are thus in the line of fire—as are their gendered characteristics (on the impact of empire, see, for example, Liston and Maguire 2016). Empire is now often cited as evidence of the projection of power and identity through sports on the global political stage. In other words, “empire” has evolved, and it continues to do so from its pre-twentieth-century focus on territorial subjugation to its transactional and economic dimensions in its twenty-first-century form.

The development of the British Empire Games, renamed in 1978 as the Commonwealth Games, from the 1930s onward points to sports’ parallel capacity for change. The 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games will see the United Kingdom invest over £750 million to promote “British” identity. This will be done through a newly reinvigorated “Great” campaign, and ongoing discussion about British soft power in a post-Brexit era as “Global Britain.” The thread between the British Empire “then” and an image of the modern British state “now” raises questions with respect to identity in sporting history (e.g., Stoddart 1988; Holt 1990). The history, and the historicization—the dialectic aesthetic—of sports is a prominent area of debate in politics and sports, with key academic journals, such as the *International Journal of the History of Sport*, now in its fourth decade, and numerous academic associations providing a platform for further discussion.

Moreover, speaking of the politics of sports from the standpoint of history and identity, the relationship between the two is not a one-way street, as both are deeply embedded within societal structures and interconnected with other issues, such as gender and health. The historical moments that are often symbolic of sports and politics actually reduce the complexity of the relationship. The black power salute of the track athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos on the podium of the 1968 Mexico Olympics overly simplifies the relationship between politics and sports. As powerful an image as it was at the time, it did not carry a single message but rather multiple ones to multiple audiences—inside the stadium, within the United States, across the continent, and across the globe. As Cornelissen (2008) argues, there is more than a linear narrative to the “use” of sports to transcend and get to the means of uniting and rupturing particular racial tensions within a nation. However, if we fast forward the 2010 Football World Cup in South Africa, economic and social data showed that although the nation was again “celebrating” international sports, in this case with the presence of the first FIFA World Cup in Africa, showcasing the nation revealed deep-rooted and growing levels of poverty and social deprivation, which in turn contributed to ongoing racial tensions (Dowse and Fletcher 2018). The politics of sports are complex. They are Janus-faced in being able to carry two seemingly opposing views simultaneously; that is, while they can bring hope, they cannot masquerade as being able to provide solutions to broader societal problems. Moreover, as noted throughout this section, the interpretation of empirical data and sources used to form knowledge about the topic will influence the way it is viewed and analyzed.

MAIN TRENDS IN CURRENT RESEARCH

Beyond the discussion points above, in terms of the areas of knowledge development and how that development has been applied in a variety of ways, this section considers in more detail the main trends in current research of the politics of sports.

As noted above, scholars addressing the politics of sports often focus upon nation-states, SMEs, and elite athletes as focal points. For example, the so-called ping-pong diplomacy of the early 1970s is viewed as a triumphant example of sports and politics impacting the macropolitical situation, whereby the exchange of table tennis teams was a precursor to rapprochement in the Sino-US relationship (Griffin 2014) between the respective political leaderships of US President Richard Nixon and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. In contrast, some have focused on the individual elite athlete and the relationship between political tensions of representing a nation-state. For example, the historian Eric Morgan (2012) points to the case of Arthur Ashe and the way he used his position as an African American Wimbledon champion to challenge apartheid in South Africa. The important thing to note here is that the scholarship of politics and sports is reflected in the respective units (states, individuals) and levels of analysis (local, national, global) that different authors take. The perspective taken by the range of those contributing to the topic is then shaped by the language they use in their descriptions and explanations. In other words, the ongoing social

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Chapter 4: Politics of Sports

construction of language influences the way that politics of sports are regarded in society, and in the scholarship that emerges from it.

A trend in current research is a Western- and European-centric focus that serves to illustrate that although the relationship between sports and politics has a rich past, it is remembered and recorded in a particular way and for a particular purpose (see, for example, Espy 1979; Hoberman 1984; Houlihan 1994; Markovits and Rensmann 2010). This remembering can also be attributed to one of the main actors in sports politics, if not the main actor—the IOC, the Lausanne, Switzerland-based nongovernmental organization that is a manifestation of the modern Olympic movement. The IOC, the Summer Olympic Games, the Winter Olympic Games, Olympism, and spin-off games such as the Paralympics or the Deaf Olympics are some of the most frequently used examples of the politics of sports in academia. This trend can be attributed to the scale, attraction, and historical origins of the Olympic movement.

The term *modern Olympic movement* is contested, but it is usually considered to be in contrast to the “ancient” Olympic Games, which ran for over a thousand years, from 776 BCE through the Greek and Roman civilizations in homage to the Greek god Zeus. The French aristocrat Pierre de Coubertin revitalized the Games in the late nineteenth century. The IOC’s importance in contemporary times as the preeminent administrative organization of global sports is seen in the direct partnership it has had with the UN since the closure of the UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) in April 2017. As such, there is an important link to note between the history of the IOC and the modern Olympic movement, on the one hand, and the broader administration and governance of sports politics on the other. Furthermore, this discourse has the knock-on effect of shaping the scholarship on the history of sport (see Black and Peacock 2013; Keys 2013).

The evolution of the IOC reflects the development of international politics during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Aaron Beacom (2012) identified the concept of “Olympic diplomacy” as the Olympic movement and international affairs came to be “interwoven.” Beacom defines Olympic diplomacy as “how the Olympic Movement engages in and with international diplomatic discourse” (235). The original participants in the modern Olympic Games of 1896 were largely Western European nations, with the addition of Australia and the United States making up the 14 participating countries, with 241 athletes competing. During the mid-twentieth century, this had risen to 68 countries, with 3,936 athletes at the 1952 Helsinki Summer Games (Toohey and Veal 2000, 25). At the Summer Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, this had nearly tripled to 207 countries, with 10,568 athletes participating (IOC 2016b).

The growth in the size and scope of the Olympic Games has meant that the IOC—with varying degrees of success—has had to concentrate on the governance of its operation in ways that de Coubertin could not have imagined. The structure of the IOC, and of many other international sporting federations, can be likened to a federal political system, because, like a federal system, it is a form of multilevel governance that is shared among varying stakeholders (for further information on political systems, see Hague, Harrop, and McCormick 2016). From a governance perspective, the IOC is governed by the committee itself,

IOC Presidents

Name	Presidential term	Nationality
Demetrius Vikelas	1894–1896	Greek
Pierre de Coubertin	1896–1925	French
Henri de Baillet-Latour	1925–1942	Belgian
J. Sigfrid Edström	1942–1952	Swedish
Avery Brundage	1952–1972	American
Lord Killanin	1972–1980	Irish
Juan Antonio Samaranch	1980–2001	Spanish
Jacques Rogge	2001–2013	Belgian
Thomas Bach	2013–present	German

Table 2. This table lists each president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) with their nationality and term as president. GALE.

and its members are appointed by the committee for indefinite periods, although members are expected to retire at age eighty. The original committee was made up of 14 men; in 2018, it was made up of 102 members, 1 honorary president, 42 honorary members and 2 honor members (IOC 2018b). In 1921, de Coubertin created an executive board for the IOC, with the rationale that the committee overall was becoming too big, and that there should therefore be a nucleus of “dedicated active members,” comprising the IOC president, 4 vice presidents, and 10 other members that are voted on by secret ballot and serve a 4-year term.

The IOC epitomizes and envelopes the Western- and European-centric trend within the politics of sport, as scholars focus on the power of the Western-dominated institution and the cases of SMEs that have been hosted by a select number of nation-states (Gold and Gold 2016). To illustrate the ongoing Western dimension of the IOC, Table 2 shows the pattern of leadership at the presidential level of the IOC.

The European and Western domination of the IOC’s top job is symptomatic of the “old boys’ club” (Black and Peacock 2013, 711) dynamic of the organization. Moreover, the individuals involved have a high opinion of the influence and power of the organization. For example, Juan Antonio Samaranch, as quoted by Alfred Senn (1999), was misunderstood in a media interview for saying “we are more important than the Catholic religion.” He later recanted the statement, but still claimed that “some say that the Olympic Movement is almost a religion, but we do not say that. But the Olympic Movement is more universal than any religion.” Multiple scholars have explored this power and influence, such as Allen Guttman in *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games* (2002), and John Horne and Garry Whannel in *Understanding the Olympics* (2016). However, rather than positioning the Olympics against international politics, these authors suggest that

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Chapter 4: Politics of Sports

the IOC and the Olympics are an essential topic for understanding the wider relationship between sports and society. The landscape of the Olympic movement has become a main trend and focus of the politics of sports.

External but connected to the IOC, in a federal sense, are a series of satellite polities. First are the international sports federations (ISFs), which represent the individual sports that compete to be on the program for the Games. Each ISF is accountable to the particular sport's national governing bodies. Given that there are more members of the IOC than there are member states in the UN, this can lead to some confusion in what Fiona McConnell (2016) has identified as "liminal diplomatic spaces." Instances and examples of sports being used in nation branding and nation building, endeavors have been explored by a number of commentators and scholars, most notably Simon Anholt on strategic level, while Dario Brentin and Loïc Tregoures (2016), have paid particular attention to the strategy and endeavor of Kosovo. The country carefully used its acceptance into the Olympic movement as a way to leverage its acceptance into the society of states at the UN. In October 2014, the IOC welcomed Kosovo as its 205th full member (Skendaj 2014), prior to its acceptance into the UN. (In 2014, the UN had 193 members; see UN 2018). As such, ISFs offer a platform for states and individuals to express nationalism and citizenry through the governance structure of the IOC, through its Olympic Charter.

In the Olympic Charter, the ISFs (called IFs in the charter) are designated with a specific mission and role: "to establish and enforce, in accordance with the Olympic spirit, the rules concerning the practice of their respective sports and to ensure their application" (IOC 2016a). The Olympic spirit is enshrined in the IOC Charter, a document used to promote the philosophy of the Olympic Games and uphold their sporting values. For example, Principle 1 states: "Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sports with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles" (IOC 2016a).

The use of terms such as "universal" and "fundamental" has fueled the academic pursuit of understanding if this is possible, useful, and/or problematic. A trend in scholarship in this area has been around the connection of human rights, politics of sports, and the Olympic movement. Sebastian Coe, an Olympic gold medal winner, British Member of Parliament, chair of the 2012 London Olympic Committee, and president of the International Association of Athletics Federations as of 2018, stated at the most recent Olympic Congress that sports are a "hidden social worker . . . a source of international understanding . . . uniquely powerful bridgehead in addressing seemingly intractable problems" (2009, 141). However, the parameters of what qualifies as human rights in a sporting context, as it is elsewhere, is contested. Giulianotti and Roland Robertson contend that sports have a role to play here, stating that they can be a beneficial area of analysis to elaborate on the "ideas and inherent problematics of the global political community" (2004, 56). However, they caution that sports are not a silver-bullet solution; setting up a charity football match or distributing

basketballs will not bring about world peace, but sports do provide a space in which prevailing theories and ideologies of global relations can be challenged.

National Olympic Committees (NOCs), the apogee of the Olympic movement at the state level, have become a focus for those looking at the financial and resource patterns of the IOC and the Olympic movement. NOCs are based in the nation-states that the IOC recognizes, and they have control over the selection and performance of the athletes that compete for those nation-states at the Olympic Games. Until the 1980s, there were few NOCs that were financially independent of their national governments, and this situation triggered reform and commercialization in order to achieve greater levels of independence (see Girginov and Parry 2005, 99–100; Houlihan 1994, 128). A good portion of this commercialization has come from selling media rights—initially television rights but increasingly other forms of media as well—and so has brought another polity into the picture, namely major multinational media corporations. As an example, “in 1997, the IOC signed an agreement with NBC (National Broadcasting Corporation), selling exclusive United States television rights to the Games of 2004, 2006, and 2008 for \$2.3 billion” (Senn 1999, 15).

A further dimension to the IOC’s relationship with the NOCs is the establishment in 2015 of a fund to support refugee athletes, which will be distributed by the NOCs. Such a move illustrates the traditional importance of the nation-state—the “national” context—to the IOC, and means the organization is directly linked to nation-states but not fully dependent on them.

So, while nation-states are not directly involved in the IOC, as many scholars have argued, they are still an integral factor in the activities of the IOC and the Olympics (Houlihan 1994; Black and Peacock 2013). In particular, scholars note the prominence of national symbolism through the Olympic Games as athletes compete for and represent their nations. Here a tension is revealed within the IOC, reflecting the evolving state of international affairs. De Coubertin’s nineteenth-century sense of Corinthian spirit saw him eschew national symbols. To him, sports were to rise above such trivialities as nationalism, and the IOC in the early twentieth century sought “to prevent the calculation of a medal league table” (Houlihan 1994, 112), instead wanting to focus on the achievements of individuals. The IOC lost this battle as contemporaneous newspapers did the arithmetic concerning medal tallies and published them, but to this day the IOC does not publish national results itself. Thus, the IOC can still say that it does not openly advocate state versus state competition and that the principal aim is still for individual pursuit.

This has manifested itself in the contemporary rider that accompanies public press releases on the IOC website, which makes no mention of nations despite their preeminence in global affairs: “The International Olympic Committee is a not-for-profit independent international organisation made up of volunteers, which is committed to building a better world through sport. It redistributes more than 90 per cent of its income to the wider sporting movement, which means that every day the equivalent of USD 3.25 million goes to help athletes and sports organisations at all levels around the world” (IOC 2018a). A statement such as this shows a conscious objective to position the IOC as having a clear engagement strategy—a public diplomacy approach—in

Not For Sale

Chapter 4: Politics of Sports

international relations. In sum, the IOC is the preeminent international sporting federation, acting as standard bearer for all sports, whether or not they appear in any given Summer or Winter Olympic Games. The universal and growing power of the IOC demonstrated here is a significant factor in its dominance as a site for the politics of sports.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The significance of politics and sports to international relations has ebbed and flowed over time, but one often ends up referring back to the remarks of Mandela: “Sport has the power to change the world.” At certain points, this has certainly been true, and the impact of sports on politics can be huge, but at other times sports can seem peripheral to international events and politics. The importance of sports may well be in the eye of the beholder, to put it simply. Nonetheless, twenty-first-century scholars have considered two prime examples of how sports, particularly SMEs, can influence and shape the politics of individual nations and global affairs more broadly. Herein lies the likely future direction of the politics of sports as varying moments in global affairs and sporting spectacles continue to shape each other. The future direction, therefore, will be based on the interpretation and consideration of the extent and impact the politics of sports has on global affairs, societal climates, and community relations. The two examples below illuminate this from the perspective of the IOC, FIFA, and future SME hosts.

The first example of how sports can shape international politics was manifest from the outset of the XXIII Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang in the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in February 2018. The appearance of the slight, smiling, and silent figure of Kim Yo-jong, the sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, at the opening ceremony alongside the president of South Korea, Moon Jae-in, was a revelation to many. North Korea has been in a self-imposed exile for large parts of its existence, following the cease-fire in the conflict on the Korean peninsula in 1953, supported only by the People’s Republic of China. Kim Jong-un’s appearance, the inauguration of a joint Korean women’s ice hockey team, and North and South Korean athletes marching in unison at the opening ceremony, although not wholly without precedence, signaled a significant change of tone to the international status of North Korea, brokered in large part by a non-state entity, the IOC, and its chair in Lausanne, Thomas Bach. Just six months earlier, US secretary of state Rex Tillerson stood only meters from Kim, and US president Donald Trump had labeled Kim Jong-un “Rocket Man” at the UN General Assembly. Subsequent to the Winter Olympics and the diplomatic opening that the Games provided, Kim and President Trump met for the first time in Singapore (on 12 June 2018), and agreements were made concerning denuclearization in North Korea, an end to joint US–South Korean military exercises, and the return of the remains of prisoners of war from either side of the demilitarized zone. Whether the agreed outcomes are delivered will take time to judge, but the opening that sports provided, and the diplomatic negotiation that ensued, has—perhaps more significantly for relations on the Korean peninsula than for US–North Korea relations—changed the international politics of the region.



Russian president Vladimir Putin presents medals to players of the French national football team following their victory in the 2018 FIFA World Cup, Moscow, July 2018. Putin used the 2018 World Cup to enhance Russia's place on the international stage while positioning himself as the orchestrator of a football tournament that mirrored a geopolitical contest. DOKSHIN VLAD/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM.

A second example of the intertwining of politics and sports is the 2018 FIFA World Cup hosted by Russia, and particularly the role of the sport and Russian president Vladimir Putin. By hosting the World Cup, Putin helped to enhance Russia's place on the international stage, positioning himself as the orchestrator of a football tournament that mirrored a geopolitical contest for the duration of the tournament. The image of the Russian president presenting FIFA World Cup medals to the successful French team on 15 July 2018, at a venue formerly known as Lenin Stadium, will be an indelible one—not least for how he was protected from the Moscow summer rain by an umbrella, while his fellow dignitaries were left without protection and drenched by the downpour. It may well have been the vindication Putin sought for investing millions of rubles over a ten-year period for a diplomatic platform to address a global audience, while barely uttering a word. The final cost for the event may turn out to be as high as \$14.2 billion.

The audience for the World Cup likely amounted to half of the planet's population—well over 3 billion people watched some part of the tournament. The income to FIFA amounted to over \$6 billion; and many more millions of rubles were spent in Russia by overseas fans, broadcasters, and media, allowing for “people to people diplomacy,” as Simon Kuper (2018), a columnist for the *Financial Times*, noted in his contribution to the SOAS Global Sports Conversations podcast series. Alongside these social and economic connections was the

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Chapter 4: Politics of Sports

increased domestic spending by Russians buoyed by the unexpectedly strong performance of the national team, which, together with the contributions from overseas visitors, was estimated to add 0.1–0.2 percentage points to Russia's GDP for the year of the tournament, according to the Russian news agency TASS. Throughout the tournament, Putin said nothing about Russia's domestic political challenges; international concerns over Syria; Sergei Skripal, a former Russian military officer and double agent who was poisoned, allegedly by Russian agents, in England; or allegations of Russian interference in US elections. Neither did he have to share the stage with Trump or China's leader Xi Jinping, only appearing to concede the international spotlight to the former once the tournament had finished, at the Helsinki summit of the two leaders (seemingly another Russian "win").

Even when faced with political challenges during the tournament, Putin was not derailed. These arose under various guises, from the perhaps frivolous but heart-warming case of the red-and-white-checkerboard-adorned Croatian president Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, who paid out of pocket to attend her country's matches in the latter stages, to a potentially divisive matter that arose out of the Switzerland-Serbia contest. This match saw the Swiss win 2–1 with a last-minute goal by Xherdan Shaqiri. Like his fellow goal-scorer Granit Xhaka, Shaqiri is of Kosovar descent, and upon scoring his goal both players made hand gestures of a double-headed eagle akin to the image on the Albanian flag. To Serbia, which fought a war over Kosovo and was subject to NATO bombing in 1999, the gesture was highly provocative. The Swiss pair were sanctioned by FIFA with a fine of 10,000 Swiss francs each, but they were allowed to continue to play in the tournament (though to minimal effect, as the Swiss exited in the next round after losing 1–0 to Sweden). At the same time, three English players, Dele Alli, Eric Dier, and Raheem Sterling, were fined 70,000 Swiss francs for wearing unauthorized branded ankle support socks during their win over Sweden in the quarterfinals. The outcome of FIFA's judgment on the Swiss pair drew little attention, and despite Serbian kinship with Russia, the incident did not detract from the master narrative of a football-focused event at which international politics was minimized. As such, the capacity of the 2018 World Cup to focus attention on football was staggering if unremarkable. What is perhaps remarkable is the enduring mark Putin made on the tournament in the decade preceding its opening match: a 5–0 triumph for the hosts against Saudi Arabia. So Putin's World Cup will not be remembered for his central role during the tournament but for efficient logistics, welcoming hosts, happy fans, and high-quality football—none of which was ensured beforehand.

France, the tournament's eventual winner, gave prominence to the issue of identity in debates around the politics of sports. As with France's previous victory in the World Cup in 1998, much has been made of the multiracial, multicultural background of the team in English-language media. In 1998, Zinedine Zidane's Algerian ancestry, Patrick Vieira's Senegalese background, and Marcel Desailly's Ghanaian heritage were given particular prominence in the aftermath of victory. Likewise, the 2018 team was spearheaded by Kylian Mbappé, Paul Pogba, and N'Golo Kanté, who have Cameroonian, Guinean, and Malian backgrounds,

respectively. Cutting across race, religion, and age while revealing France's colonial heritage, but also the dynamism of its twenty-first-century guise under Emmanuel Macron, its youngest-ever president, France's win highlights a mixing up of France's bleu-blanc-rouge identity with a black-blanc-beur identity. Former US president Barack Obama stated of the French team, "Not all of those folks looked like Gauls to me. But they're French! They're French."

It is this collective identity, of a unified France, that the French media and the players themselves have focused upon. Equally, Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff, author of *The Making of Les Blues: Sport in France, 1958–2010* (2012), writes that for the French Republic, sports have become a symbol of national status in ways that few other countries can match. Krasnoff notes that France's investment in sports—and it comes at considerable expense, as the fabled Clairefontaine, France's national football training center, costs almost 10 million euros annually—carries with it diplomatic opportunities. Engaging in high-level sports provides opportunities for exchange in ways not immediately evident in national sports. The French talent production line has provided players to many other countries; indeed, fifty-two players at the World Cup were born in France, many in Paris and its suburbs, thus multiplying the points of connectivity across national boundaries.

The Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang refocused attention on the opportunity for sporting events to serve as platforms for diplomatic reconciliation. While the meeting in Singapore on 12 June 2018, between President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un may not in itself have resolved the tensions between the United States and North Korea over the latter's nuclear program, the conversation would not have taken place without the opportunity provided by the smiling appearance of Kim's sister, Kim Yo-jong, at the Olympics just four months before. There will need to be much more diplomacy to denuclearize the Korean peninsula, but the platform provided by the Winter Olympics as a "site" of diplomacy, along with the IOC's brokering of that space, illustrates the importance that sports can have in the diplomatic realm. Such importance and influence are often time-specific, but the cycle of sports—that there is an agreed-upon "fixture list"—means that the opportunity will come around again. In short, while the nexus of politics, sports, and diplomacy—the *sports diplomatique*—is at its most visible in the midst of a sports mega event, there is a less visible dimension that is equally worthy of consideration in exploring the role of sports in international affairs.

Away from the field of play, there is much diplomacy involved in hosting an SME. The interrelation between diplomacy's three components—negotiation, communication, and representation—impact on the basics of sports. The "rules of the game," whatever the sport, are an outcome of negotiation: How long is the race? How many players are involved? How will the contest be scored? Equally, the route to hosting a sporting event is a challenging one that involves a full panoply of diplomatic traits such as gift giving, the visits of official delegation, the exchange of expertise and practice.

Since the 1980s, both the IOC and FIFA have infamously fallen foul of corruption, whether legal or moral in nature. The process of being selected to host an Olympics or a World Cup is a long and costly one. While the first

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Chapter 4: Politics of Sports

decade of the twenty-first century will come to be seen as a high point in terms of the number of states and cities seeking to host these events, the subsequent period has seen numerous potential hosts step back from the prospect, leaving only one city in the running for the 2024 and 2028 Olympics (Paris and Los Angeles, respectively), while the 2026 World Cup will be cohosted by Canada, Mexico, and the United States, which put forth a continent-wide North American bid.

In the meantime, the focus of the footballing world is on the next host of the month-long jamboree, Qatar, where the World Cup will be held in 2022. With the tournament having been moved to November and December to avoid the heat of the Gulf summer, and the bid process having been scrutinized by a variety of sources, it is noteworthy that Hassan Al-Thawadi, secretary general of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, was quick to comment on the success of Russia 2018. “Everybody said the Russia World Cup wouldn’t be great,” but “it blew people’s minds,” Thawadi argued. Seeking to build upon Putin’s achievements, he added, “by the same token, we’re confident of what 2022 is going to show—and it will be a fantastic World Cup.” He ended by saying, “we’ll build upon Russia’s success.” With Qatar having been subject to a Saudi-led blockade since June 2017, the country’s geopolitical relationships will be woven into the narrative of the 2022 World Cup. As the sole host, this small but well-resourced country, deeply vested in its public diplomacy, has a notable opportunity to lead in developments in the politics of sports and diplomacy and sports mega events.

The triumvirate approach to hosting the 2026 World Cup is a first, and while the United States will host the majority of the matches (60, compared to 10 each in both Canada and Mexico) including the final, the United 2026 bid runs counter to the narrative of inter-American relations that has emerged since the election of Trump in 2016. His campaign rhetoric of building walls, and of scuppering the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), has come closer to reality with an immigration policy on the southern border that has seen families forcibly separated and the Trump administration seeking a substantial restructuring of NAFTA while pursuing a protectionist trade policy that has seen tariffs rise with the country’s major trading partners in Europe and Asia. The 2018 G7 summit hosted by Canada in Charlevoix, Quebec, saw Trump stand alone—in a “G6+1” formation, as described by French commentators—and post disparaging remarks about Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau as Trump departed, palpably early. His contribution to the United 2026 bid was similarly contested. A tweet prior to the 68th FIFA Congress in Moscow in June 2016, which was held to decide the successful bid, was barbed in seeking endorsement for the bid from “countries that we always support” but who might be tempted to “lobby against the US bid.” The extent to which Trump’s tweet had any effect is debatable, but on 13 June the FIFA Congress endorsed the United 2026 bid over that proposed by Morocco, 134 votes to 65.

At a time when Trump has talked down and walked away from many facets of the international system, and many have questioned its ongoing relevance, the success of the tripartite United 2026 bid illustrates once more that sports have the capacity to run counter to the prevailing trends of global affairs. It is perhaps

Chapter 4: Politics of Sports

the distance that sports can offer from political strife that allowed the three countries to host the world's greatest footballing extravaganza while the US leader trades blows with the other hosts on Twitter. Clearly, the symbiotic relationship of sports and diplomacy is a dynamic one.

So, while sports aficionados will always be able to console themselves by looking out for the next fixture on the never-ending merry-go-round of sporting contests, Putin's next destination after leaving the platform in Moscow was Helsinki, where he met with Trump for a summit complete with the trappings of the Cold War. This meeting saw Putin present Trump with an official match ball from the tournament, acting as the masterful midfielder, directing play even after the tournament had ended in an attempt to carry forward the influence of the World Cup into bilateral relations with the United States. The summit has been extensively debated already and will continue to be studied in the years ahead, but what cannot be ignored is that by passing the ball to Trump, Putin reinforced the notion that sports and politics are indelibly mixed.

CONCLUSION

The individuals and communities quoted and cited throughout this chapter have provided an overview of some of the dominant voices and trends within the politics of sports. As noted at the very beginning of the chapter, sports can be seen as exciting, a unique cultural exchange, and a neutral way for nation-states and communities to compete. However, as the varying cases have shown, these ideas can be contested. Largely, they can be contested by viewing the politics of sports as “beyond a political system” but also containing a multifaceted range of uses to nation-states, communities, movements, non-state actors, business interests, or individuals. Consequently, rather than viewing the politics of sports as similar to the traditional state-to-state relationship, this chapter has offered examples that support and challenge a more robust understanding of this relationship. Current and dominant trends of using sports mega events, international sporting organizations (in particular, the IOC and FIFA), and diplomatic relations to frame the politics of sports offers students and observers a way to interpret independently their own view of the topic.

The variety of academic disciplines, lenses, and empirical sources addressed further contributes to the take-home message that the politics of sports is a multi-directional and intersecting topic. Examples in this chapter from East Asia, Russia, South Africa, and the United Kingdom go some way to highlighting the global extent of the politics of sports. However, as noted, more needs to be done to move beyond a Western- and European-centric framing of the politics of sports. Moreover, expanding beyond the IOC and FIFA cases and considering the growing significance of other political sporting spaces, such as esports, the Commonwealth Games, or the Asian Games, is necessary.

Granted, a cautionary notion throughout has been not to homogenize or reduce examples of political moments in sports into the same category or analytical conclusion. There are numerous directions, narratives, actors, units of

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Chapter 4: Politics of Sports

analysis, and scales to the politics of sports. As a student and observer, it is important to have an awareness of the greater landscape and academic debates, while also independently thinking about what political elements of sports interest you.

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Chapter 4: Politics of Sports

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