

Review of international sports and diplomacy history essay



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In international relations sports was given very few significance, quoting Trevor Taylor "...international relation scholars show little sign of considering the place of sport in global human affairs..." and he further advised that "...international relations should take more account of sports..." But there has been no such change because it was considered that sports affected not as much of the human activities and the significance of sport has been largely undermined, though sports always had an international dimension since the very inception. A broader notion among the individuals is that sports and politics are separate entities and should not be intermingled. This notion, at times, could penetrate to such an extent that the entire act of inviting the Prime Minister Gilani by his Indian counterpart at a recent cricket match between India-Pakistan was severely criticized by the Leader of Opposition (Lok Sabha), Sushma Swaraj. She insisted that "cricket should remain a sport and not construed as a medium for dialogue and diplomacy"[2], on the contrary this meeting between both the prime ministers is being talked as "an important political moment"[3] for both the neighboring nation-states in the South Asian region. Nonetheless, this has not been the case throughout the history of human civilization. In the hands of both state and non-state actors (international sport federations) it has remained an important tool of politics, an institution to garnish the notion of nationalism. Nelson Mandela, exploiting the opportunities from the 1995 Rugby World Cup, united the 'blacks' and 'whites' and got them to forge one single team. One also cannot forget the exclusionist policy adopted by the winners of world wars preventing losers to participate in Olympic Games for several years. The kidnapping and killing of the Israeli athletes by few Arab terrorists during the Munich Olympics in 1972 till day remains a sad moment for the sporting

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world. The Mexican government shot and killed students protesting the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. A total of thirty-two nations boycotted the 1976 Olympics in Montreal because New Zealand agreed to maintain sports relations with South Africa. Gabon, the Congo, Honduras, and El Salvador have gone to war over the outcome of soccer games; 1969 soccer war between Honduras and El Salvador. The United States refused for two decades to issue visas to East German athletes to compete in this country. On the other hand, the Americans utilized table tennis to open relations with the Peoples' Republic of China, which today is well known as the Ping-Pong Diplomacy. Argentina and Brazil sought success in soccer to improve the image of dictatorial regimes. Austria used the Winter Olympics as a sales vehicle to lure tourists and promote the sale of Austrian ski equipment. The Soviet Union and the United States attempted to proclaim the superiority of their political and socioeconomic systems by winning as much of medals at the Olympic Games. American sportsmen have protested racial discrimination with black power protests. Indonesia tried to fight imperialism by organizing its own political Games of the New Emerging Forces.[4]

Sport has been used as an effective political tool at the hands of the states. The invitation extended to the Prime Minister of Pakistan by his Indian counterpart to visit India n watch the World Cup semifinal between India and Pakistan is the latest in the history of sports diplomacy. The most significant being the boycott of South Africa during the Apartheid regime. Numerous sports sanctions by the international sports' governing bodies actually helped in compelling South Africa to open up their society and to end global isolation. A much less talked about state in today's international system is

Australia. Like China, Australia too is very enthusiastic about using sporting actions/events as a political tool to serve its national interest. Its admission to Asian Football Confederation, one of FIFA's six confederations, in 2006 marks Australia's curiosity in people to people connection with Asia, especially after the entire incident of racial discrimination against the Asians within the island state. The role of sports in promoting a badly shaped Japan-Korea relationship cannot be undervalued. The 2002 football World Cup was jointly hosted by Seoul and Tokyo. It was an effect of co-hosting the World Cup that the two nations agreed upon " sharing intelligence to ensure an incident-free World Cup" which further got translated into resuming of military dialogues. The exchanges were suspended following the history textbook Yasukuni Shrine controversies.[5]Another significant showcase of sport as a mean of diplomacy and engagement was the Ping-Pong diplomacy in the early 1970's. The visit by the U. S. national table tennis team to Beijing was widely accepted as a high-profile, low-politics event that portrayed the openness of American public to greater dialogue with China. [6]This created friendly environment for the American president, Nixon, to be able to visit Beijing and the beginning of Sino-American rapprochement. In 1998, a group of five American wrestlers and the same number of officials visited Iran to participate in the international Takhti Cup tournament which became known as Wrestling Diplomacy due to its political implications (Goldberg, 2000)[7]. Cha comes up with another lesser known but yielding great dividends of sports engagement. He talks about China and South Korea engaging into talks in the early 1990s which was channeled through the medium of sports.

Participation in athletic competitions hosted by each country provided a useful means by which to express goodwill and an interest in expanding growing economic relations from the 1980s. China's decision to participate in the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympics in South Korea (despite North Korean protests) was greatly appreciated by Seoul as it made these games among the most well-attended in recent history. Seoul reciprocated by strongly supporting the 1990 Asian Games held in Beijing. This was particularly significant for China as it sought to establish a degree of normality amid the international ostracism in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre. In total these were significant goodwill- and transparency-building events that enabled the normalization of relations in 1992.[8]

Sport has played a great political role during the cold war era. The erstwhile East Germany harnessed the most of it. The communist half of Germany exploited sport to break the blockade by West Germany and NATO forces imposed upon it as a result of the Hallstein Doctrine. Andrew Strenk throws brilliant light upon this phenomenon citing such interesting facts:

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) poured nearly two percent of its annual Gross National Product (about 400 million dollars in 1970) into sports development and research programs with the goal of producing the world's best athletes. Numerous state organizations, such as the Free German Labor Federation (FDGB), contributed as much as 13 percent of their budgets to the GDR sports program. East German athletes piled up medal after medal in international competitions; each medal and record earned them invitations to further events. By 1976, they had garnered 92 gold, 94 silver and 86

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bronze medals in the Olympics. In fact, in Montreal in 1976, they won more gold than the perennial Olympic contender, the United States. This small nation of seventeen million people had won, in addition, some 340 world and 263 European titles by 1976. More importantly, the GDR athletic success paved the way for their international diplomatic and political recognition. The isolation imposed by the West was broken.[9]

The usage of sports as a political and diplomatic tool was not an unknown occurrence in the German history. Adolf Hitler grasped the “ possibilities of using sports as political, diplomatic, propaganda, and prestige vehicles.”[10]He didn’t let go one single chance of encasing the 1936 Berlin Olympics to gain legitimacy, to the extent that he asked the streets of Berlin to be made free of the slogan Jews not wanted.

The Soviets have also viewed international sports from a similar perspective and have dominated the international sports scene since 1952, winning every Olympic Games since then, except for 1968.[11]Adamant on achieving greatest possible international prestige and demonstrating the superiority of their socioeconomic system and political ideology, the USSR, too, like East Germany, have devoted immense riches to sport. Great insight is again thrown upon the expenses of the Soviet Union on sports by Andrew Strenk:

During the 1960s, the Soviet government spent some 55 million dollars a year on sport. In addition, the state insurance fund, trade unions, consumer cooperatives, the police, the military, various governmental agencies, voluntary sports societies, and local Soviets devoted annually between six and twenty percent of their funds to sports during that same time period.

The contribution by trade unions in 1971 alone was about 440 million dollars.
[12]

For most of the post-Second World War period, as argued by Merkel, sport diplomacy would largely fall into two major categories: first, as a low cost but high profile means of publicly voicing disapproval of another state's action, for example, through boycotts or attempts to exclude countries from the international scene; and second, as a vehicle for establishing a national identity and subsequently gaining international recognition. The latter was caused by the increased decolonization and the changes to the political world order in the aftermath of the Second World War.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the international sporting encounters are a safer way of moderating a state out of isolation, thus creating appropriate platform for the necessary engagement. The contribution of well known Ping-Pong Diplomacy in significantly improving the Sino-American relations in the early 1970s still remains an exemplar to the international community. In spring 2004, the Indian cricket team toured Pakistan for the first time after a gap of almost 15 years. The tour worked as a confidence building measure and was followed by an agreement between the South Asian neighbors on constituting a timetable for sustained peace talks over various disputed issues. Sooner than later the initiative was taken by Pakistan as the then Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf paid an informal visit to watch a cricket match in India. The Indian government responded positively to this initiative and the match was also attended by Indian P. M. and Foreign Minister Natwar Singh. The symbolic potency of

sport in conveying diplomatic signs on an unrestricted stage makes it such a cherished foreign policy tool.

South Africa and 2010 Football World Cup

Football remained an extremely contested space during the struggle for national liberation in South Africa. It was suspended from FIFA in 1961, which kept this nation out of international football for some three decades, until 1992 to be precise.[13] This was perceived as a great victory to the anti-apartheid movement. On the other hand, as discussed in earlier chapter, East Germany used sports to deal with the international sanctions, the apartheid regime deployed sport diplomacy in an attempt to promote minor reforms intended to end international isolation. To this Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovua argues,

...in the wake of South Africa's expulsion from the Olympic movement in 1970, Prime Minister John Vorster announced a new 'multinational' sport policy: 'Europeans' and 'non-Europeans' (i. e. Africans, Indians and Coloureds in apartheid language) would be allowed to compete against each other as individuals in the open 'international events' (the Olympic Games, the Davis Cup, and so on) but not permitted to participate in racially integrated South African national teams. 'Non-racial' sport within South Africa, however, was not allowed at club, provincial or national levels. Vorster's multinational policy led to one of the most politicized international events involving apartheid sport: the 1973 South African Games. The original list of participants read much like the continuation of the Cold War in the sports arena. It included West Germany, Britain, Ireland, Netherlands,

Belgium, Austria and Rhodesia. Among Cold War allies, the South African Games elicited the reaction the regime had hoped for.[14]

However, most countries withdrew from the event after much pressure was exerted by the anti-apartheid groups. In the case of Nigeria, Adebayo Olukoshi argues that sports have been an important and effective instrument of Nigeria's foreign policy since the country's independence from Britain in October 1960. Nigeria used sport for the purpose of attaining a foreign policy objective in 1976 when it boycotted the Montreal Olympic Games (along with 26 African nations and Iraq) in protest against New Zealand's rugby contacts with South Africa.[15] Later, in the year 1978, Nigeria and few other African nations of the Commonwealth boycotted the Edmonton Commonwealth Games because New Zealand's continued sporting engagements with South Africa, which apparently were in breach of the 1977 Gleneagles Agreement. [16] In the late 1980s, due to the efforts of Dennis Brutus and other members of the liberation movements negotiations between the African National Congress and the National Party took place and began to change sport's role in South Africa's foreign policy. In the early 1990s when the negotiations to end the apartheid were in progress, South Africa's foreign policy and international relations were already changing. The usage of sports diplomacy, as it has been the case in the past, remained in a continuation to assert country's African-ness even by the democratically elected leaders of post-1994 South Africa. They also used sport to promote South Africa's 'soft power' - that is, according to Joseph Nye, 'the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies.' [17] Such

efforts were directed towards achieving strategic goals, such as the political and economic integration of the continent keeping the European Union's example in the consideration. This historical background underscores how the liberation movement's deployment of sport in support of the anti-apartheid struggle partly explains the ANC's contemporary enthusiasm for sport as cultural diplomacy in the democratic era. As Pahad's testimony suggests, forces like the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC) in exile, led by Dennis Brutus, as well as the ANC and other organizations, used platforms provided by the United Nations (UN), Organization of African Unity (OAU) and other international fora to enforce a sport boycott against the apartheid regime.[18]

The understanding that political liberation meant only the beginning of freedom and there are miles to go in the actualization of genuine freedom, inducing Julius Nyerere's conceptualization of liberation as a four-stage process will be useful here: (1) freedom from colonialist and racist minority rule; (2) freedom from external economic discrimination; (3) freedom from the poverty, injustice and oppression imposed upon Africans by Africans; (4) mental freedom - an end to the psychological subjugation which makes Africans look upon other peoples or nations as inherently superior, and their experiences as being automatically transferable to Africa's needs and aspirations.[19]Nyerere's conceptualization of the struggle for freedom in the case of South Africa is quite enlightening as it rightly contextualizes the broader reasons for South Africa's desire to stage the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

A graphic representation of Pan-Africanism and the international struggle against racism was evidently visible in the official 2010 World Cup poster, which purport to use the profile of Cameroonian striker Samuel Eto'o Fils as the contour for the map of Africa. Eto'o was a likely candidate for this campaign since he said: ' I'd like my country to win [the 2010 World Cup] but I am first an African before being a Cameroonian'.^[20]The choice of a global superstar like Eto'o not only celebrated African success on the pitch, but also highlighted concerns with racial abuse of African players overseas. The official World Cup poster also challenges the notion of South African exceptionalism: that the country is culturally, politically and economically outside the continent. By using Eto'o as symbol of unity, the poster presents an image of a symbiotic relationship between South Africans and their brethren elsewhere on the continent.^[21]Some political leaders, football administrators and players aim to capitalize on footballs' potential in promoting social cohesion and peace-building. For example, there have been some successful initiatives in, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Rwanda.^[22]Angola's hosting of the 2010 African Cup of Nations for nation-building purposes after two decades of devastating civil war is another case in point. The publicly funded initiative in Angola features significant development in transport infrastructure (national roads, airports), telecommunication networks, and hospitality industries at the cost of approximately \$1 billion. South Africans are participating in various initiatives.^[23]

A peace mission was launched in March 2009 as a part of South African promotional campaign for the upcoming 2009 Confederations Cup and the 2010 World Cup. The mission to East Africa was undertaken by local football

legends Mark Fish and Phil Masinga, the Department of Sport and Recreation's Director General, Vernie Petersen, and members of the LOC. Other partners in the initiative include the LOC and the German Technical Corporation, a Non-Governmental Organization.[24]The theme to this peace mission was harnessing the power of football as a tool for ' peace-building and social cohesion'. The tour, which began in Kigali, Rwanda, on 9 March 2009, was scheduled to end on 28 March in Tanzania.[25]

The historical 2010 Football World Cup blessed South Africa with an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to the idea of Pan_Africanism through the medium of football. Football, once again came to South Africa's rescue. Earlier it helped in creating and shaping the international support against the Apartheid regime, now the endeavor is laden upon the ideas of African unity and a greater freedom- freedom from poverty, injustice, oppression, discrimination and hatred.

Sports and Soviet Union

The reason why the soviet sports policies gets a mention here as an interesting case study is primarily because of its enormous success in the Olympic Games. In the world divided along ideological lines the Soviet Union and communist German Democratic Republic (East Germany) posed thrilling competition to the American lead western block, which involved Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) as well. A less remarkable, though perhaps more far-reaching, aspect of communist sport, however, was the evolution of a model of sport or physical culture for an industrial modernizing society. Sport in the communist state was employed for more of utilitarian purposes i. e. to " promote health and hygiene, defense, labor productivity, <https://assignbuster.com/review-of-international-sports-and-diplomacy-history-essay/>

integration of a multi-ethnic population into a unified state; what might be called nation building".[26]Sports competition provided these nations with international recognition and prestige. In most of the communist states, which often happen to be based on a vast majority of (illiterate) rural population, sport has played quite a revolutionary role and has been a "catalyst for social change, with the state political leadership as pilot".[27]

Unlike the case of England where the sport was a tool for leisure activity and was promoted by the Victorian bourgeois for their own purpose, the idea of sports gained currency as a tool for mental and physical well being, which eventually would contribute to the "collective well being of the society"[28]In the classic statement on this subject back in 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution, Mao Zedong actually placed physical culture before mental culture:

Physical culture is the complement of virtue and wisdom. In terms of priorities, it is the body that contains knowledge, and knowledge is the seat of virtue. So it follows that attention should first be given to a child's physical needs; there is time later to cultivate morality and wisdom (Zedong, 1962: p. 3).[29]

The 'state-led nationalism' intended for an integrated Union faced several severe challenges like, diverse ethnic groups, different races, languages, traditions, religions, stages of economic growth, prejudices. The diversity is well explained by James Riordan and Hart Cantelon:

...the USSR was a multinational federation of over 290 million people comprising a hundred or more nationalities. The country was divided into 15
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Union Republics (now independent nations), each based on separate ethnic groups, and many other administrative divisions (autonomous republics, autonomous regions, territories, national areas). In Soviet schools children studied in as many as 87 different languages and daily newspapers came out in 64 languages.[30]

From the creation of the first communist state in 1917 till as late as 1948-49 the Soviet Union has dictated the involvement of communist states in various sporting events. Sports had such significance in Soviet history that scholars believe that “ it was the only medium in which they were able to take on and beat the economically advanced nations”.[31]No stone was left unturned in achieving a sports supremacy over the western capitalist world by the communist regimes, especially the Soviet Union, “ particularly through the Olympic Games”.[32]The Soviet Union went a step ahead and the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party adopted a resolution bringing extensive changes to the sports organizations:

“ Soviet sportsmen, in upcoming years will surpass world records in all major sports”, (Resolution, Central Committee, All-Union Communist Party (b), 27 December, 1948).

Later, claims were made that the overwhelming success of the soviet athletes was no less than the “ irrefutable proof of the superiority of socialist culture over the moribund culture of capitalist states”.[33]The domination of the communist states in the Olympic Games was such that only East Germany was posing threatening challenge to the Soviet Union. The Unified Team dominated the Barcelona Olympics of 1992 even after the Soviet Union

was disintegrated and athletes from many Baltic States did not participate with the Unified Team.[34]

. By large, as a result of its immense control over the sports system/organization, the communist leadership was suitably able to channel its resources to use sport to execute its foreign policy. Though the growth of sports in post socialist revolution (1917) Russia could be closely linked as “integral to the building of a strong nation-state which generated its own motivational forces and patriotism”[35]it blessed one of the greatest examples of women emancipation in world history. The soviets spend huge sums on women athletes, thus providing them with an opportunity “to play and succeed, if not on equal terms with men, at least on a higher plane than Western women”[36]eventually contributing to their social uplift. In fact, some multi-ethnic communist countries quite deliberately used sport to “break down prejudice and gain a measure of emancipation for women”. [37]Sports also server as an important catalyst in channeling Union’s stand on various international issues, the most significant of them all being the its highly successful campaign “against apartheid in sport and the success in having racist South Africa banished from world sports forums and arenas”[38]and was not just limited to bring pride and honor. Sports also helped the Soviet Union, which has lost innumerous men in both the World Wars and which lived under a constant threat of going to another large scale war (during the Cold War), stay physically fit and mentally sound as well as a method to ease out themselves.

Olympics and Politics

With the idea to “ promote peace” and the goal “ to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity” and the intention to fight against the discrimination in any form towards “ a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender or otherwise”[39]the Olympic Games have always played a vital role in rewriting modern history. But the more it tries to remain unperturbed by the international politics and the more it aspires to not become a political tool in the hands of the international community the more the Olympic Games get involved into politics for a lot many times over the decades. Here I would like to talk about four most controversial instances where the Olympic Games were exploited to serve the politics of various nations at different stages in the history.

Before Hitler assumed to power, in 1933, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) publicly announced that the 1936 Olympic Games would be held in Germany. Interestingly this announcement came immediately prior the Los Angeles Olympic Games of 1932. This was the largest of the modern Olympic Games which was to be telecasted over the television for the first time, at least in Berlin.[40]This endowed Hitler with an opportunity to use the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games as an “ aggressive instrument of German propaganda”.[41]The National Socialist regime under the guidance of Diem and Lewald, who recognized the potential of the Games, “ convinced Goebbels to use the Games as propaganda to showcase German accomplishment under Hitler”[42]in an attempt to legitimize his rule, strengthen people’s support for the Nazi regime, and improve the nation’s

image. A common phenomenon of carrying the torch across various nations and continents was first proposed by Diem. He proposed that there should be a relay of marathon runners who would be carrying a lit torch from Olympia, the locality of ancient games, to Berlin. “ Over three thousand runners were needed to cover the distance equally, each runner traveling around one kilometer”[43]carrying a newly invented torch by the Germans “ that would withstand the extreme wind, rain, cold, and heat so that the fire would remain lit as the runner carried it”[44]gaining wider acknowledgement of German supremacy in modern supremacy but that was not the end of the story. Moving a step to propagate the regime’s policies the Berlin Olympic Games were filmed by Leni Riefenstahl. A few limitations to Hitler’s intention to make the Olympics an efficient propaganda tool were there. “ Despite Hitler’s skillful staging of the Games, he was forced into key compromises... he was not allowed to display anti-Semitic signs.” Share this: Facebook
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