15 International relations

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For a century presidents and foreign ministers have debated issues and formulated policy about sport. ‘Mega-events’ such as the Olympic Games and soccer’s (football’s) World Cup have long been highly sought-after platforms for countries to project messages to huge global audiences. The globe’s biggest corporations use them as prime marketing tools, and television networks compete to pay hundreds of millions of dollars to broadcast them. International sports organizations claim more members than the United Nations and influence the international system in untold ways. Despite the long-standing and profound connections between sport and international affairs, the study of these ties was for decades a mere backwater in sports studies and in diplomatic history. In the 1970s, as social and cultural history flourished while diplomatic history stagnated, histories of sport overwhelmingly focused on sport’s role in society – its relationships to class, ethnicity, race and gender, and its uses in constructing local and national identities. Few sports historians tackled the international dimensions of sport, and the scholarship they produced before the 1990s tended to focus on decrying unwanted political ‘intrusions’ into sport.

Historians of international relations, for their part, showed no interest at all in sport until very recently. In textbooks, surveys and monographs on international history, sport’s rare appearances took the form of perfunctory asides. A survey might mention President Jimmy Carter’s boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games in a list of US responses to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, but sport’s deeper significance went unnoticed. This neglect paralleled that of top diplomats and policymakers themselves, who saw sports issues come across their desks but rarely recognized them as anything other than peripheral to the main concerns of diplomacy. Henry Kissinger, for example, was a passionate soccer fan and dealt with a number of important issues relating to the Olympic Games, including the 1972 terrorist attack in Munich, during his tenure as National Security Adviser and Secretary of State. Yet aside from a discussion of the ‘ping-pong diplomacy’ that led to the opening to China, Kissinger mentions sport just twice, both times only in passing, in nearly 4,000 pages of detailed memoirs. His thick account of the art and history of diplomacy contains no reference to sport.

For realists like Kissinger, sport was irrelevant to the real sources of power in international affairs. Mere games could play no role in foreign policies that were shaped by hard, tangible national interests such as security and economics. The realist theory espoused by Kissinger reigned supreme in the academy during the Cold War. Its attendant neglect of sport was reinforced by an intellectual disdain for matters of the body, which in turn was rooted in a Western belief in the separation of the spheres of work and leisure. The myth, deeply embedded in most Western democracies, that sport exists in the realm of play, free – at least in ideal terms – from political and economic ‘taint’, also contributed...
to a longstanding inclination to exclude sport from the study of ‘real’ politics.6 The widely held assumption that sport is a ‘natural’ activity, rather than an historically contingent one, meant that scholars also failed to see global sport as the result of an astonishingly successful process of cultural transmission deserving of explanation and analysis.7

The end of the Cold War accelerated the rise of new forces in global affairs and, at the same time, challenged long-standing modes of thinking about international relations. As a result of these trends, the deep-seated mutual indifference between sports studies and diplomatic history began to dissolve, and in recent years the study of sport’s international connections has undergone dramatic changes. Rising interest in globalization and the role played by non-state actors in global affairs is propelling new interest in sport’s international dimensions. Increasing numbers of historians from other specializations are turning their attention to sport’s economic and political ramifications, and sport’s evident position as a central element of global culture has resulted in an explosion of studies on sport’s connections to globalization. The paradigms that shaped Cold War-era interest in sport and foreign policy – sport boycotts, superpower rivalry, and the quest for recognition and prestige – are being supplanted by new avenues of research on the ways international sport shapes domestic politics, processes of ‘internationalization’ and the global community.

This chapter surveys developments in the historiography of sport and international relations since the 1960s, including its connections with fields outside history and treatment of the subject in the discipline as a whole. Any effort to delineate this historiography is necessarily artificial and imperfect, for determining where the ‘national’ ends and the ‘international’ begins is virtually impossible in the case of sport. Sport, after all, is almost everywhere a foreign import and is typically regulated by international bodies, and its powerful role in identity-formation is always at least implicitly shaped in an international context. As a result, much, if not all, work done on sport in any context has some relevance for foreign relations, and many of the other chapters in this volume are relevant to an understanding of sport’s international dimensions. For the sake of coherence, however, this chapter covers only studies that focus explicitly on international affairs. It makes no attempt to survey all sports, all regions of the world, or all aspects of international relations; instead it chronologically charts major thematic shifts and historiographical trends, looking first at the predominant themes and assumptions of studies produced during the Cold War and then attempting to delineate the explosion of work in the post–Cold War era. Its purview is limited to the 20th century, when international events proliferated and became major factors in global society, even though sport had implications in the realm of foreign relations well before then.8

One of the observers at the first Olympic Games in Athens in 1896 was Charles Maurras, an extreme right-wing French nationalist and founder of the political movement L’Action française. He had opposed the efforts of his compatriot Pierre de Coubertin to create a modern Olympic Games, because Maurras believed the event would promote unhealthy ‘mixing’ of different nationalities. On his trip to Athens, however, he was delighted to find that the Olympic Games inflamed ‘patriotic passion’ and exacerbated national rivalries. ‘In the past’, he wrote, ‘nations dealt with each other through ambassadors … Now peoples confront each other directly, insulting each other face to face’.9

Maurras’s assessment was the first salvo in the intellectual debate over the meaning of international sport. His conclusions were echoed in George Orwell’s famous remarks some six decades later. Orwell, a prominent British writer and intellectual at the other end of the political spectrum from Maurras, was dismayed by boorish and unruly
behaviour by players and spectators during a Soviet soccer team’s goodwill tour of Britain in 1945. Not inclined, as was Maurras, to celebrate displays of nationalism, Orwell wrote that international sport was ‘an unfailing cause of ill-will’ which led ‘to orgies of hatred’. In words still often quoted, he continued: ‘It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, and disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence; in other words it is war minus the shooting’.10

It would be another two decades before sustained scholarly analysis of international sport began, but when it did, it would be shaped by the debate launched by intellectuals like Maurras and Orwell. The key task would be defined as elucidating the relationship between sport’s ostensibly contradictory roles as a vehicle for international understanding on the one hand, and nationalist rivalry on the other – what I call the ‘peace or rivalry paradigm’. These studies typically took as their starting point the founding myth of the modern Olympic Games, one taken up (to lesser degrees) by other international sports bodies as a core element of their legitimizing strategy: the idea that international sport promotes peace and mutual understanding among nations. Some neo-Marxist philosophers and sociologists – Jean-Marie Brohm is perhaps the most notable – took the opposite tack, arguing that international contests such as the Olympic Games were inherently repressive and imperialist, but most of the historical work produced in the Cold War began from the premise that sport was a force for good (or could be, if only the politicians stopped meddling).11

Taking their cue from the most visibly politicized elements of international sport around them, Cold War-era scholars focused their attention on proving, often with breathless indignation, that the ‘reality’ departed from the ‘ideal’. Their emphasis was on government use (almost invariably characterized as ‘misuse’) of international sport competitions for political ends. Studies focused on politically inspired sports boycotts, the use of sport as a vehicle of political propaganda, and the quest for national prestige and recognition through sport victories and the hosting of major sports events. Most of these approaches implicitly embraced the assumptions that sport itself was politically neutral, or an ‘empty vessel’ into which political messages could be poured, and that it was a ‘tool’ or ‘mirror’ of larger forces in the international system.

The first major treatment of sport and international politics was authored by British politicians Philip Goodhart and Christopher Chataway in 1968. Drawing largely on newspaper accounts, War Without Weapons was a journalistic exposé of political interference in sport. Devoting the bulk of their attention to sport in the Cold War, the authors covered issues such as South African apartheid, and Soviet and US uses of sport diplomacy. Echoing the kind of public criticisms that had become common since the 1920s, the authors deplored what they saw as a growing distance from the original Olympic ideals of amateurism and international amity. They described ‘the Olympic Frankenstein’ as ‘one of the main manifestations’ of nationalist chauvinism in the world and argued that sports contests ‘mirror’ political conflicts among nations. Despite the disapproving tone, in the end the authors put a positive spin on sport’s ‘ politicization’. Drawing on ethologist Konrad Lorenz’s theory that sport was a means of discharging aggression, Goodhart and Chataway argued that the Olympic Games and other major international sports contests served to promote peace by providing a safe outlet for tendencies that might otherwise be channelled into war with weapons.12

Preoccupation with the ‘peace or rivalry paradigm’ was reflected in most of the works produced in the next two decades. In his 1971 book on the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, Richard Mandell wrote: ‘I tried to determine whether the 1936 Games as an episode and the modern Olympics as a movement have been forces for peace’. His
answer was a resounding no. He wrote of athletes as victims and tools of ‘abrasive patriotism’ and urged a ‘return’ to celebration of individual achievement rather than national competition. He portrayed the 1936 Games as a stunning success for the Nazis, who efficiently staged a magnificent pageant that diverted the world’s attention from their evil intentions and increased their legitimacy at home.

The Nazi years were a major focus of sport research in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s. Germany had one of the oldest traditions of sports historiography and German scholars were then at the forefront of sports history. Initial scholarship shared the view that sport was fundamentally apolitical, and historians like Hajo Bernett condemned the ‘misuse’ and politicization of sport by the Nazis. In 1972 Arnd Krüger, who would become a leading authority on European sport, published a detailed examination of international opinion on the 1936 Olympics that took a more sceptical view of the event’s success than Mandell. Krüger concluded that at home the Games led Germans to believe they had gained international respect, but abroad the events had tended simply to reinforce pre-existing opinions. East Germany’s carefully constructed and ultimately successful quest to use international sporting success as a vehicle for gaining international recognition as an independent state also attracted attention. In a 1980 study of sport competition between the two German states, political scientist Ulrich Pabst described sport as a tool in the competition for international recognition and as an element that created links between the two states. In France the inter-war years and sport’s use in building national prestige were the focus of what little attention was devoted to sport and foreign affairs.

The socialist ‘workers’ sport’ movement of the inter-war years attracted attention as a foil to Nazi sport and the growing commercialization of elite sport. Two international organizations had contended for leadership of workers’ sports in the 1920s and 1930s: the socialist Lucerne Sport International and the communist Red Sport International run by the USSR. Each staged its own version of Workers’ Olympiads; each regarded Coubertin’s Olympic festival as an elitist, national chauvinist and militaristic spectacle that served the interests of the ruling classes. Scholarly interest in these groups was in part a logical outgrowth of the new labour and social history. Scholars tended to portray workers’ sport in sympathetic terms, seeing it as a worthy international cultural movement and an admirable effort to promote international fraternity rather than national rivalry.

Considerable scholarly attention was directed to sport boycotts over the issue of racism, reflecting the issue’s prominence in public debates. Beginning in the 1950s, South Africa had been the subject of controversy because of apartheid, reflected in its refusal to field or play against racially mixed teams in international competition. Newly independent African states pressed international sports organizations and the United Nations to enforce bans on South African participation and in 1970 South Africa became the first country expelled from the Olympic Games. Richard Lapchick’s 1975 study was the first of many to chronicle the history of such boycotts and exclusions. Lapchick showed that international pressure was a powerful influence in South Africa because of the country’s strength of interest in sport and that international exclusion was perceived internally as condemnation of racism. However, the conclusions of Lapchick and others were challenged in the 1990s by David R. Black and John Nauright who argued that the scholarship on sports boycotts and their efficacy placed too great an emphasis on the Olympics when the sport that really mattered to the target group of white South Africans was rugby union.

Despite scholarly emphasis on sport’s role in enhancing national prestige, relatively few studies examined the use of sport as a tool of nation-building by newly emerging states.
in the era of decolonization. Henning Eichberg’s perceptive 1984 critique of Olympism as neo-colonialism was one of the few such works to appear in the Cold War.23 Third World challenges to European dominance of the Olympic Games, such as the Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEFO) set up by Indonesia in 1962 and the 1976 Olympic takeover bid mounted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and supported by many Asian and African nations, attracted little attention and to this day await thorough examination.24

The first survey of Olympic sport and international relations appeared in 1979. Focusing on the years 1944–76, Richard Espy’s The Politics of the Olympic Games provided a competent account of the extended controversies over East German, Chinese and South African participation. Espy’s framework was signalled in his first sentence: ‘The modern Olympic Games symbolize the struggle between man’s ideals and the reality in which he must live’. Concluding unhappily that sport has not encouraged peace but more often has promoted conflict, Espy’s tale was one of the politicization of Coubertin’s ‘noble’ ideals by governments intent on using the Games to advance national interests. Although Espy perceptively noted the importance of international sport organizations to the international system, his claim to see the Olympic Games as an actor in world politics was not substantiated in the book, which largely described Olympic politics as ‘a mirror’ or ‘microcosm’ of international forces, which merely used sport as a ‘tool’.25 Based largely on The New York Times and the papers of Avery Brundage, who had served as head of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) from 1952 to 1972, the study was also limited by its reliance on perspectives from within the IOC and the USA.

David Kanin’s 1981 Political History of the Olympic Games offered a briefer and less factually reliable, but conceptually more sophisticated, analysis. The book sprang from a PhD dissertation on ‘The Role of Sport in International Relations’ completed at Tufts University’s Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. A political scientist and analyst for the US Central Intelligence Agency, Kanin argued that the Olympics were not an empty vessel occasionally ‘injected’ with political content; rather, he asserted, ‘political content … is a fundamental underpinning of the Olympic system’. As Kanin rightly saw, every international sports event is an inherently political event, and the common habit of lamenting ‘the intrusion’ of politics in sport was futile. The book debunked the ‘Olympic mythology’ of apolitical sport by showing the pervasive imbrication of politics and the modern Olympics since their founding in 1894.26

The Olympic boycotts of 1980 and 1984 attracted surprisingly little serious scholarly interest. Political scientist Derick Hulme, Jr, who would later go on to write on terrorism and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, wrote one of the few academic books on the subject. The product, like Kanin’s work, of a Fletcher School PhD dissertation, the book examined why the Games had become ‘highly susceptible to political intrusions’. ‘States, terrorists, and minority groups’ now sought to use the Olympics as a political tool, Hulme lamented. Sport’s politicization, he argued, was due to its similarity to the competitive international system – it provided a means of competition with low risks and costs – and because ‘the ideal of sport [has] been impinged upon, and perverted, by wicked statesmen’.27 Although Hulme argued that the Games were used for political purposes with little risk because of their ‘politically peripheral nature’, his evidence showed that the Carter Administration’s failure to persuade most of its allies to join the boycott harmed America’s self-confidence and global image.28

Brian Stoddart’s seminal 1985 article on the politically fraught soccer match between England and Germany held in London in 1935 criticized superficial treatments of sport
and international politics that depicted sport as ‘symbolic’ or peripheral to major political concerns. He argued that when studied in its cultural context, sport could be seen to influence political thinking – in this case, even ‘help[ing] contribute’ to British appeasement of Germany.29 Stoddart’s piece was a rare exception, however, both in its estimation of sport’s autonomy and in using soccer to illuminate international relations. The Olympic Games garnered most of the attention devoted to sport’s international ramifications, even as soccer became the premier global sport. As Bill Murray has noted, ‘the serious study of soccer has almost been in inverse proportion to the game’s popularity’.30 Like the Olympic Games, however, soccer was entwined with international politics – in this case, almost in direct proportion to the devotion with which its proponents claimed otherwise. The international soccer federation (the Fédération Internationale de Football Association, or FIFA) has pushed ideas about sport as a factor for world peace with slightly less fervour than the IOC, but it has been equally devout in its adherence to the line that sport is apolitical. When the academic study of soccer began in the mid-1970s, however, it focused almost exclusively on local and national aspects of the game. It was not until the 1990s that significant scholarly attention was paid to soccer’s international political and cultural dimensions (see below).

The true measure of the significance of sports studies must be its penetration of mainstream scholarship. Until the 1990s, sports studies remained ghettoized as a marginal sub-field within history and the social sciences. The dizzying expansion of sub-fields and specializations in the 1970s and 1980s was partly to blame; even generalists could no longer keep track of every topic. Sport, though, was marginalized to an unusual degree. Unlike other sub-fields, sport had virtually no advocates within the mainstream disciplines. Most of the scholarship on sport and international relations produced before the 1990s was written by scholars who specialized in sports studies, many of whom worked in sport institutes and physical education departments. They wrote primarily for each other, publishing articles in the proliferating journals devoted to sports history, where their work was easily ignored by outsiders.31 Articles on sport and international relations very rarely appeared in mainstream scholarly journals, and scholars outside sports studies almost never felt compelled to engage with the literature on sport, which often lacked the conceptual sophistication and deep research base found in other fields.

The relatively narrow parameters of the studies that dealt with international sport before the 1990s can be explained in part by a preoccupation with the issues that were making the headlines. Boycotts, terrorism and superpower rivalry were matters of significant popular interest and deserved scholarly attention, but scholars in other fields could too easily dismiss these manifestations as merely showing that sport was a political ‘tool’. The quest for national prestige was clearly an important element of international sport and one that garnered much attention, but scholars made little headway in showing that it had net effects on the international scene except in rare cases such as East Germany. Meanwhile, less visible manifestations of sport’s power in global affairs were unduly neglected.

The dominant assumptions and conceptual underpinnings of many Cold War-era studies of sport and international politics helped to limit the subject’s relevance and significance. The assumption that international sport could or should be apolitical led, as Trevor Taylor noted, to ‘the role of politics in the Olympics frequently being resented rather than understood’.32 As long as sport scholars maintained that sport was a ‘mirror’ or ‘tool’ of larger forces, scholars outside the field had little reason to attend to sport when they could study those larger forces directly: if sport was merely a reflection of
international politics, why not simply study the thing itself? The peace or rivalry paradigm lent support to the idea that the key issues in the international arena were conflict and war, which again could be studied without reference to sport. The framework suggested that the test of sport’s relevance was whether it averted or provoked war, which was surely too much to pin on a cultural activity, the 1969 El Salvador–Honduras ‘soccer war’ notwithstanding. Sport scholars, moreover, had tended to discuss sport within a narrow frame of reference, often situating their work primarily in dialogue with other sport specialists rather than in the context of larger historiographical debates.

In 1997 the anthropologist and prominent Olympic scholar John MacAloon levied a sharp critique of scholarly preoccupation with ‘the boring old curriculum of topics: fascist, socialist, and capitalist Olympics; government “interference” in sport; Cold War battles between “East” and “West”; terrorism, boycotts, and so on’. He called instead for attention to international sport’s connection to other ‘macro-political forces and trends’, including new social movements and non-governmental organizations. Drawing on his own ethnographic fieldwork, he described the Olympic Games as an ideal venue for certain kinds of political activity. ‘Nowhere else’, he wrote:

… do such favorable conditions exist for otherwise difficult meetings – on an invisible, informal, and agenda-less basis – among such a total range of global political elites, including from nations at war or having no diplomatic relations with one another…. When diplomatic and national security historians and analysts put aside their cultural and scientific biases and explore this context, they will make some very interesting discoveries.

Scholars were slow to heed MacAloon’s call. After the Cold War, the old themes continued to dominate the agendas of many books, articles, conferences and symposia in sports history. Scholars and journalists, writing exposés of new and deeper levels of corruption in international sport (bribery scandals, rampant commercialization), continued to adopt tones of ill-informed outrage at how far sport had strayed from its allegedly pure roots. Gradually, though, the field has moved toward the position that international sports competitions and organizations are actors in their own right, which influence both international politics and domestic affairs, adding substance to the claim that sport is worthy of study in its own right. Scholars from other fields have taken up the subject of sport, bringing with them the central historiographical concerns of their primary fields – the role of consent in the German Democratic Republic, for example – and helping to place sport more clearly in the mainstream of historical debates.

The field’s rigour and conceptual sophistication has grown along with its intellectual respectability. Newer studies of time-honoured topics, such as a recent collection of essays on the 1936 ‘Nazi Olympics’, go further in illuminating the political contexts in various nations, showing how the Games affected politics and society. Studies of sport diplomacy grew in number, delved further into the archives and took more nuanced views of sport’s utility as a tool of foreign relations. At the same time, diplomatic historians began to take up the subject of sport. In 1999, two diplomatic historians with distinguished records of publishing on traditional economic and political topics breached the long-standing intellectual barrier with books on sport: the British Peter Beck, with a book on British soccer and international diplomacy before World War II; and the American Walter LaFeber, with a study of basketball star Michael Jordan as symbol and agent of the ‘new global capitalism’.
Uta Balbier’s recent work on inter-German relations is indicative of the new directions sports history is taking. Balbier sees sport not merely as a theatre of Cold War politics, but as a form of soft power that helped to shape national politics and identity. Expanding on previous studies of the German Democratic Republic’s use of sport to attain international recognition and internal legitimacy, her account shows how the IOC and international sports federations were key actors in the political drama. Most interesting is her portrayal of the reaction within the Federal Republic of Germany. Although West Germany defined sport as ‘non-political’ in the 1950s, by the 1960s, as the GDR’s success in international competitions drew increasing recognition, West Germany began to fashion its own strategy of sporting self-representation. By 1972, when Balbier’s study ends, the West had largely embraced sport as a matter of state. Balbier’s analysis moves beyond the formula of sport as an arena for nationalist competition to show elements of mutual influence and interdependence.40

Sandra Collins’s 2003 dissertation exemplifies the ways the new international history of sport draws on exhaustive, multilingual archival research to provide fresh assessments of sport’s importance at key historical junctures. Extending themes developed in earlier work on Fascist Italy and Germany, she carefully demonstrates that the 1940 Tokyo Olympic Games, though eventually cancelled due to war, were central to ‘the production of ideology’ in 1930s Japan. They were seen in Japan as a key opportunity both to shape public attachment to the expanding empire and to influence the world order by securing recognition of Japan as a legitimate world power.41

The either/or formulation of the ‘peace or rivalry agenda’ has been supplanted by a recognition that nationalism and internationalism are not mutually exclusive but mutually interdependent forces that operate in tandem. Guoqi Xu’s superb book on China and international sport in the 20th century demonstrates that sport has been central to China’s ‘internationalization’, which Xu defines as the ways countries ‘engage in and are engaged by the international system, ideas, forces, and trends’. As Xu demonstrates, during a century when the Chinese were obsessed with their country’s international standing, participating in sport competitions became a key means of joining the international community. His study is unusual in its success at tying together the ways sport acts jointly to construct national identity and to promote internationalization.42 Along similar lines, my own recent study of international sports competitions in the 1930s argues that the growth of sport was fuelled by nationalist rivalry but simultaneously propelled internationalism. Nations attempted to use international sport for their own purposes, but found that participation also entailed acceptance of norms and values with domestic social and political consequences.43

Events of the late 1980s and 1990s lent support to those who saw sport as a factor of real consequence in international relations. The earlier consensus that sport was merely an ancillary factor gave way to an appreciation of sport as a potent political force (with some observers claiming the pendulum had shifted too far toward exaggerated claims of sport’s influence).44 The 1988 Seoul Olympic Games triggered interest in the question of international sport’s potentially catalytic effect in spurring democratization. The political reforms in South Korea that followed on the heels of the Olympic Games provide potentially powerful evidence that international sport, far from being a mere ‘mirror’, can be a transformative influence. Political scientist Jarol Manheim, in an article exploring South Korea’s use of the event as ‘public diplomacy’, was one of the first scholars to argue that the Seoul Games created ‘overwhelming pressure’ for political reform.45 In similar fashion, the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 suggested that sports boycotts
had helped undermine the racist system. Douglas Booth, Black and Nauright, and others concluded in the 1990s that although other factors were more important in ending apartheid, sport boycotts were an important cause of the deracialization of South African sport that began in the 1970s, which in turn helped undermine support for apartheid.46

Political scientists have also begun to turn their attention to sport. In 1986 Trevor Taylor characterized the relationship between sport and the field of international relations as one of ‘mutual neglect’, but new challenges to the realist paradigm have opened up space for an appreciation of sport’s role in international relations.47 Barrie Houlihan, a professor of sport policy, published a valuable overview of sport and international politics in 1994, which supported a pluralist approach to understanding international politics. Focusing on diplomacy, ideology, nation-building, access to international audiences, and commerce, Houlihan’s careful analysis persuasively attributed greater significance to sport than had been commonly recognized.48 A more recent collection offers primarily non-realist perspectives on sport’s relationship to key issues in international relations, including gender, capitalism and international political economy.49 In a case study of relations between South Africa and New Zealand, and the international anti-apartheid movement and those opposed to sporting boycotts, David Black and John Nauright argue for an understanding of the special circumstances in sport where otherwise-marginal societies can have a global impact in international relations, a fact widely overlooked in the international relations literature.50

As they suggest, single sports can make a difference in particular contexts. French international relations scholar Pascal Boniface has become perhaps the most vigorous advocate of the view that soccer is an important part of foreign affairs. The definition of statehood, he writes, used to include territory, government and population; now, he claims, a fourth category must be added: a national soccer team. Because of its power to shape a nation’s popular image, soccer must rank as an important element of ‘soft power’. Its influence should not be overrated, Boniface cautions; soccer will not produce peace or war, but it can promote or influence rapprochement or splits already underway.51

The ‘cultural turn’ in diplomatic history has, after a long lag, begun to provide a new agenda for the study of sport. Since the 1970s diplomatic historians have increasingly broadened their conception of the subject matter that falls under their purview. Once caricatured as the study of ‘what one clerk said to another’, diplomatic history now embraces subjects as diverse as environmental problems, human rights and gender. Horizons have widened so much that practitioners have moved to adopt a new name for the field: international history.52 A key element driving the expansion of diplomatic history has been the introduction of culture alongside politics and economics as a significant area of international interaction. The pioneering scholar of cultural relations, Akira Iriye, offered the following definition:

Cultural relations [are] interactions, both direct and indirect, among two or more cultures. Direct interactions include physical encounters with people and objects of another culture. Indirect relations are more subtle, involving such things as a person’s ideas and prejudices about another people, or cross-national influences in philosophy, literature, music, art, and fashion.53

(One might add sport, too!) Since Iriye’s pioneering call in 1978 to incorporate culture in diplomatic history, studies of cultural relations – tourism, World’s Fairs, film, music – proliferated, and in recent years sport has finally made the list as well.54
Although culture’s utility as an explanatory factor is not universally accepted by scholars of international history, cultural relations offers sports studies a promising alternative to the conceptually sterile framework that sees sport as a ‘mirror’. If ‘culture is power’, as culturalists assert, sport, too, is power. Sport is implicated in the three major categories culturalists have identified: language, identity and values. As diplomatic historian Andrew Rotter notes, ‘[h]ow a state sees itself affects the ways in which it relates to other states, how it defines national security and how it comes to understand its interests and objectives’.

Such perceptions, both of self and others, have been shaped significantly by sports contacts. Imagine, for example, where Brazil’s international reputation would be without soccer, or the status of ideas about gender without the rise of women’s sports in international competition. Studies of government use of sport for national prestige, of course, always privileged matters of perception. However, a cultural-relations approach provides both a theoretical underpinning for showing how influence operates and allows us to move beyond governments as actors. Demonstrating how insights from cultural relations can productively be applied to sport, Sayuri Guthrie-Shimizu, for example, shows that baseball’s diffusion in Meiji Japan created a transnational community of players, spectators and organizers that helped sustain ‘an enduring undertow of affinity’ between the USA and Japan despite the vicissitudes of war and conflict.

The Cold War, long treated as a politico-ideological conflict, is now seen also as a cultural battleground. Walter Hixson and Yale Richmond have highlighted the significance of cultural exchange – ballet, art, music, film – in the competition between the superpowers, suggesting that cultural infiltration played a role in the Soviet collapse. Sport, which provided the most sustained contact, was clearly a potentially significant vector for such cultural infiltration. Yet, as Soviet historian Robert Edelman noted, despite the enormous resources and attention the Soviet regime devoted to sport, academics virtually ignored the subject until very recently. It was only in 2004 that the first Russian-language, archive-based study of the politics of Soviet sport appeared, detailing the wide-ranging influence exerted by the Communist Party and the Soviet State on international sport contacts. Edelman’s pioneering study of Soviet spectator sport concluded that the sporting triumphs of the ‘Big Red Machine’ helped to conceal the Soviet system’s weaknesses, an assessment that suggests the USSR’s sport success may have played a role in Western overestimations of Soviet strength.

Race is another issue where culture, domestic affairs and foreign policy overlapped with significant consequences. In the Cold War in particular, racial issues were never purely domestic affairs; for the USA, racism at home became a major foreign-policy issue. Like Penny von Eschen’s study of the ambivalent role African Americans played in US State Department-sponsored jazz tours in the Cold War, Damion Thomas’s work shows that official goodwill sport tours, though intended to sell ideas about progress in race relations, had the unintended consequence of politicizing black athletes. Amy Bass’s excellent work on African American athletes, centring on the famous ‘black power’ salute by sprinters John Carlos and Tommie Smith on the podium at the 1968 Olympic Games, provides evidence for the effects global affairs had on the civil rights movement at home.

Journalist Franklin Foer captured the fascination with sport’s role in globalization in the delightfully hyperbolic title of his 2004 bestseller, How Soccer Explains the World. The boom in globalization studies, more than any other development, has propelled a massive surge of scholarly interest in sport. Sociologists, media scholars and historians have investigated sport’s powerful ties to global media – newspaper sports pages,
magazines, literature, film, advertisements, radio and the internet. It is, of course, above all television that made sport into a global business of behemoth proportions. (Television rights to the 1960 Rome Olympics sold for about US$ 1.2 million. By 1988, NBC paid $300 million for the US rights to the Seoul Olympic Games.) Christiane Eisenberg, a German historian of European social history who has written extensively on sport, has ably explored the tight inter-relationship between the growth of soccer and the rise of modern media over the last century. Anthropologist and globalization theorist Arjun Appadurai has suggested that the media transmission of spectator sports such as cricket creates ‘imagined worlds’ along transnational lines. With attention to the role of corporate sponsors, the entertainment industry and journalists, he explores how cricket – implanted by the British as a tool of colonization – became indigenized in India as a nation-building, anti-colonial tool. Globalization in general and television in particular can also retard the development of sport: in India, for example, the availability of cable and satellite broadcasts of European soccer matches has stifled the local game.

Globalization significantly affects flows of people as well as information. Sport tourism (leisure-based travel to participate in or watch sports, or to sightsee at places of sport-related interest) is a rich topic with connections to economics, perceptions and cultural flows. It has been explored by scholars in tourism and sports management, but, except for studies of soccer hooliganism, has yet to receive sustained attention from historians. Mostly unstudied, for example, are the ways that travel to international tournaments shapes new understandings of hosts and neighbours for tens of thousands of fans. Migration and Diasporas offer another important new terrain of study: immigrants bring sporting traditions to their new countries and the growing international labour market in sport affects athletes, fans and their societies.

Ties between sport and the globalization of commerce and media brought eminent historian of US foreign relations Walter LaFeber into the sports history fold with his 1999 book on basketball superstar Michael Jordan. In fact the book is less about sport than about commerce: the protagonist of LaFeber’s book is not Jordan but US capitalism, in the guise of a sports shoes company, and LaFeber’s driving interest, as in his earlier studies, remained the economically motivated expansion of US power. For LaFeber, the Nike Corporation epitomized a new and uniquely powerful agent of capitalism: the ‘transnational corporation’, which harnessed the technological developments of the post-industrial age (like satellites and cable television) to dominate world markets in novel ways. LaFeber charts how Nike, Ted Turner’s Cable News Network (CNN), and clever manipulation of Michael Jordan’s global celebrity combined to build ‘the new global capitalism’. Similar studies could be written about the powerful transnational links great soccer celebrities like Pelé and David Beckham have created around the world.

Economic globalization is also the focus of Thomas Zeiler’s excellent recent study of Albert Spalding’s 1889 world baseball tour. Zeiler, the second established scholar of US diplomatic history to produce a book on sport, framed the significance of his subject along lines similar to LaFeber: the tour, according to Zeiler, contributed to the building of an American imperial identity. Viewing the baseball players and their entourage as ‘tourists’ who disseminated American culture abroad and brought global influences back home, he deftly sets the tour in the cultural and political context of the time.

Scholars of cultural globalization have turned their attention to sport as a major element of global culture. Debates have raged over globalization’s homogenizing and localizing effects. One sociologist has labelled the spread of Western sport and its supplanting of non-Western body cultures not merely cultural imperialism but ‘cultural genocide’.
alternative view suggests that sport resists globalizing processes and is ‘deeply dependent on the production of difference’.\textsuperscript{79} As yet, this debate has primarily involved sociologists, and historians have devoted little attention to empirical studies explicitly testing these theories. Allen Guttmann’s 1994 \textit{Games and Empires} remains the key historical treatment of ‘ludic diffusion’ and its relationship to cultural imperialism, one that concludes that the process has had largely beneficial effects.\textsuperscript{80} Such views are probably shared by most sports historians. Bill Murray’s pioneering books on soccer around the world, for example, though highlighting inequalities, emphasize soccer’s importance as a vehicle for expressing local and national distinctiveness; he titles one chapter ‘colonialism by consent’.\textsuperscript{81}

The ‘Americanization’ of the world, especially the influence of American popular culture and media, has produced an explosion of scholarship, but Americanization has been less obvious in sport than in other forms of popular culture.\textsuperscript{82} Although the major team sports in the USA are unusually parochial (with the exception, recently, of basketball), the political economy of global sport has been increasingly shaped by the US model. As Richard Cashman and Anthony Hughes caution in the case of Australia, however, popular myths of cultural dominance can be overstated. Michael Jordan was more famous than any Australian athlete in the 1990s, but the dominance of rugby, Australian rules football, and cricket mean that American sport has had only limited influence ‘down under’.\textsuperscript{83}

Historians, political scientists and sociologists have devoted considerable attention recently to the role of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in international affairs, and it is here that scholars have been most forthcoming in acknowledging sport’s role. The IOC and international sports federations are highlighted as significant players in two major studies of INGOs.\textsuperscript{84} Both the IOC and FIFA have more members than the United Nations, and membership in these organizations is recognized as a prerequisite to nationhood.\textsuperscript{85} The important roles these bodies play in the international system is now widely recognized.

Interest in globalization and international organizations has also fuelled an explosion of studies on international sports contests as ‘mega-events’ and ‘spectacles’.\textsuperscript{86} Pushing beyond older obsessions with the propaganda value of the ‘Nazi Olympics’, some excellent recent work has focused on how countries use such events to shape global perceptions, combat stereotypes and recalibrate patriotism. Eric Zolov, a historian of Mexico, has argued that foreign stereotypes of Mexican underdevelopment shaped the way the Mexican government promoted the 1968 Mexico City Games.\textsuperscript{87} Christopher Young and Uta Balbier have examined the 1972 Munich Olympic Games as an opportunity for West Germany to move beyond its recent past; in a particularly innovative study, Young unpacks the aesthetic dimensions of the Games and the ‘interaction of ideology and spatial and visual design’.\textsuperscript{88} In quite different ways, the 2006 soccer World Cup in Germany offered a platform for a new, unapologetic German nationalism.\textsuperscript{89}

The study of international sport has, by now, moved far from the ‘boring old curriculum’ John MacAloon once decried. The obvious point that sport is everywhere and always politicized needs no further affirmation. Sport’s autonomy as an influence in its own right and not merely a ‘mirror’ of other forces is now well-established. Its imbrication in many of the areas of interest to intercultural historians suggests fruitful new avenues of study. Indeed the wide array of themes, directions and theoretical approaches available, combined with the legacy of decades-long neglect, mean that sport and foreign affairs offer a goldmine for scholars looking for fresh new topics. Many areas have only begun to be explored. The racial implications of international sport remain under-studied; to

\textsuperscript{79} Allen Guttmann, Games and Empires (1994).
\textsuperscript{80} The argument is that sport has had largely beneficial effects.\textsuperscript{81} Bill Murray, \textit{Colonialism by Consent} (1994).
\textsuperscript{82} Although the major team sports in the USA are unusually parochial (with the exception, recently, of basketball), the political economy of global sport has been increasingly shaped by the US model.\textsuperscript{83} Michael Jordan was more famous than any Australian athlete in the 1990s, but the dominance of rugby, Australian rules football, and cricket mean that American sport has had only limited influence ‘down under’.\textsuperscript{84} Both the IOC and FIFA have more members than the United Nations, and membership in these organizations is recognized as a prerequisite to nationhood.\textsuperscript{85} The important roles these bodies play in the international system is now widely recognized.

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cite just one example, the career of famed US boxer Muhammad Ali, a prominent critic of the Vietnam War and a devout Muslim, is relevant for understanding global influences in race, religion and politics in ways that have been barely tapped. The proliferation of studies on cultural and globalized aspects of sport has entailed neglect of some political topics. The use made of the Olympic Games by intelligence agencies remains virtually untouched, though it is nearly certain that intelligence agencies have been present at every Olympic Games since the Gestapo at the 1936 Olympics. During the Cold War the Olympics provided unusually good cover for a wide range of intelligence-related activities, including provocations, defections, propaganda and recruitment. The study of the shaping of images, perceptions and cross-cultural transfer as well as the conduct of sub rosa diplomacy at international sports competitions could keep a gaggle of historians richly occupied for decades.

There are encouraging signs that sport is taking its proper place alongside other significant topics in the new international history. Increasing numbers of fully-fledged diplomatic historians have followed the lead of Walter LaFeber and Peter Beck by writing on sport. Scholars of modern European history, both new and established, are also helping to bring sport and international relations into the mainstream. More so than in other areas of international history, the study of sport entails fruitful cross-fertilization with other fields, notably political science and sociology (and to a lesser extent anthropology), the members of which are also writing about sport in greater numbers. Combined with rising interest in transnational issues among sport scholars, whose numbers and journals continue to grow, these trends promise a rapid increase in our understanding of sport’s international dimensions.

As yet, however, the explosion of scholarship on sport’s connections to international affairs has had little impact on international history or the discipline of international relations. In a recent textbook on 20th-century international history, sport appears only once, in a brief mention of the terrorist attacks at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games. The various editions of William Keylor’s widely used survey of 20th-century international history contain only incidental references to the Olympic Games. In 2004 the eminent British political scientist Christopher Hill noted that international relations scholars continued to lag behind sociologists and historians in treating sport as a subject of academic inquiry. However, there are a few signs of light. In a recent survey of the state of the art in international history, for example, the author of the entry on ‘Non-Governmental Organizations and Non-State Actors’ noted that athletic competition, ‘though generally under-studied by historians, … in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contributed to the growth of international society through events and organizations free from direct state control’. A key compilation of articles about diplomacy includes a chapter on sport diplomacy. Given the increasing range, depth and vigour of studies on international sport, it is only a matter of time before such acknowledgments become standard, and ignoring sport becomes as intellectually disreputable as it was once intellectually acceptable.

Notes

1 I would like to thank Roy Hay and Bill Murray for useful comments on an early draft of this chapter; the rest of the Victorian chapter of the Australian Society for Sport History for helpful suggestions; and Carlos Aguirre for sharing his soccer bibliography.
2 Richard Cox’s recent sport bibliography is suggestive of the state of the field: the table of contents has a handful of entries on general histories and on international competitions such as the Olympic Games.


6 This belief is particularly entrenched in the USA, where sport is regarded as a ‘private’ affair and the government has long adopted a more hands-off approach than in many other democracies.


8 The emphasis is also on literature in English, though I have included references to key sources in other European languages.


14 Ibid., xxvi, 288–89, xii–xxvi.

15 Hajo Bernt, *Sportpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Schorndorf bei Stuttgart: Karl Hoffmann, 1971); Arnd Krüger, ‘Puzzle Solving: German Sport Historiography of the Eighties’, *Journal of Sport History* 17 (Summer 1990), 261; Allen Guttmann, ‘Sport, Politics and the Engaged Historian’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, 3 (2003), 364.


New Zealand. Thompson followed up with his 1975 study \textit{Retreat From Apartheid}, while many others examined the issue of sporting boycotts and South Africa, most from an activist position prior to the 1990s.

22 David Black and John Nauright, \textit{Rugby and the South African Nation} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), which builds on their work on this issue undertaken throughout the 1990s.


31 Journals that focused on history included: \textit{The Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education}, beginning around 1969; the \textit{Journal of Sport History} in 1974; \textit{Stadion} in 1975; and the \textit{British} (later the \textit{International}) \textit{Journal of History of Sport} in 1984. See Roy Hay, ‘The World and Its Games: Researching and Writing Sport History’, unpublished manuscript, which provides a useful survey of sports historiography primarily from a social history point of view. Outside of foreign affairs, a few historians did bridge the divide: on French sport, for example, Richard Holt and Eugen Weber were important bridge figures. On the situation in West Germany, see Krüger, ‘Puzzle Solving’, 265–66. It is worth noting that the evident partisanship of many sport scholars was regarded with undue suspicion outside the field. Scholars of human rights could be human-rights activists without undermining their credibility, but for a sport scholar to reveal a passion for sport was to impart a whiff of ‘fan’ literature to his or her work.


33 In later years, when historians began to study transnational dimensions of art, music and the like, none of them felt compelled to consider whether or not those cultural activities were forces for peace. On the so-called soccer war, see the brief account in Ryszard Kapuscinski, \textit{The Soccer War} (London: Granta, 1990), 157–59.


35 See, for example, the traditional line-up of topics in James Riordan and Arnd Krüger, eds, \textit{The International Politics of Sport in the Twentieth Century} (London: E & FN Spon, 1999); and Pierre Arnaud and James Riordan, eds, \textit{Sport and International Politics: The Impact of Fascism and Communism on Sport} (London: E & FN Spon, 1998).

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41 Sandra Collins, ‘Orienting the Olympics: Japan and the Games of 1940’, PhD dissertation, University of Oxford, 2003. See also Exner-Carl’s Sport und Politik, based on Finnish, German and Soviet sources; and Barbara Keys, Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), which is based on archival research in four countries and four languages.


43 Keys, Globalizing Sport, 3–4, 89, 188–89.


48 Houlihan, Sport and International Politics.

49 Roger Levermore and Adrian Budd, eds, Sport and International Relations: An Emerging Relationship (London: Routledge, 2004). The editors’ conclusions are somewhat timid: they argue that sport is
worth studying because it is part of the international system and that a deeper understanding of sport ‘may foster greater understanding of the international environment’, 9.

50 Black and Nauright, *Rugby and the South African Nation*.


57 For a fascinating cross-national examination of public opinion and gender testing, see Stefan Wiederkehr, ‘“Unsere Mädchen sind alle Einwandfrei”: Die Klobukowska-Affäre in der zeitgenössischen Presse (Polen, BRD, Schweiz)’, in Malz et al., eds, *Sport zwischen Ost und West*, 269–86. For further introduction to the literature on sport and gender, see this volume’s entries on women’s sports and masculinity.


62 M. Iu. Prozumenshchikov, *Bol’shii sport, bol’shaia politika* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004); see also Jenifer Parks, ‘Verbal Gymnastics: Sports, Bureaucracy, and the Soviet Union’s Entrance into the Olympic Games’, in Wagg and Andrews, eds, *East Plays West*, 27–44. Soviet historians were careful to work on politically safe topics such as the Red Sport International and inter-war sports ties with workers’ clubs in Europe. The few books produced on Cold War sport tended to be celebratory memoirs that carefully toed the party line.


73 For one intriguing recent analysis, see Roy Hay and Tony Joel, ‘Football’s World Cup and Its Fans’, Soccer and Society 8 (January 2007), 1–32.

74 See, for example, Juan Javier Pescador, ‘Vamos Taximaroa! Mexican/Chicano Soccer Associations and Transnational/Translocal Communities, 1967–2002’, Latino Studies 2, 3 (December 2004), 352–76.

75 LaFeber, Michael Jordan.


80 Allen Guttmann, Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 171–88. See also J.A. Mangan, ed., Europe, Sport, World (London: Frank Cass, 2001), which covers the transplanting of German gymnastics to Brazil, athletics to Japan, soccer to the Palestinian Autonomous Areas, and African soccer players to Europe, among many other topics, as windows into cultural contact and diffusion.


82 For an argument about Americanization of the Olympic Games and American influences in amateur sport, see Barbara Keys, ‘Spreading Peace, Democracy, and Coca-Cola: Sport and American Cultural Expansion in the 1930s’, Diplomatic History 28, 2 (April 2004), 165–96; and idem, Globalizing Sport.


85 For a useful brief history of FIFA, see Bill Murray, ‘FIFA’, in Riordan and Krüger, eds, The International Politics of Sport in the 20th Century, 28–47; and John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson, FIFA and
Historians include Martin Geyer, Uta Balbier, Molly Wilkinson Johnson, Jenifer Parks, Stefan


Hay and Joel, ‘Football’s World Cup’, 9.


Philip Agee, Inside the Company: CIA Diary (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 522. On the KGB’s infiltration of the Olympics, see Prozumenschikov, Bol’shoy Sport, 32–33, 58; Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, The KGB and the Battle for the Third World (New York: Basic Books, 2005), xxvii–xxviii (Mitrokhin was a member of the KGB escort to the 1956 Games); and memoirs of Western diplomats. On Britain’s MI6, see Michael Smith, The Spy Game (London: Politico’s, 2003), 183–84. For an interesting look at how Argentine fans sometimes turn to international conspiracy theories involving the CIA to explain losses by the national soccer team, see Jeffrey Tobin, ‘Soccer Conspiracies: Maradona, the CIA, and Popular Critique’, in Joseph Arbena and David LaFrance, eds, Sport in Latin America and the Caribbean (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 51.

Historians include the author, Sayuri Guthrie-Shimizu, Nicholas Sarantakes, Thomas Zeiler and Guoqi Xu.

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