

# **THE GLOBAL POLITICS OF SPORT**

**THE ROLE OF GLOBAL INSTITUTIONS IN SPORT**



**Edited by  
LINCOLN ALLISON**

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# The Global Politics of Sport

Sport presents one of the most advanced cases of 'globalisation', arguably because there are fewer cultural and political obstacles to the development of trade and international power in sport than there are in other fields. Thus there has been a change in the nature of the politics of sport since the end of the Cold War; the subject must be rewritten to acknowledge a twenty-first-century world in which international sporting organisations and transnational corporations have become far more important than states.

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**Lincoln Allison** was the founding Director of the Warwick Centre for Study of Sport in Society. He is currently Visiting Professor in the politics of sport at the University of Brighton and will be Emeritus Reader in politics at the University of Warwick.

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# **The Global Politics of Sport**

The role of global institutions in sport

**Edited by  
Lincoln Allison**



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## Preface

This volume is a successor to *The Politics of Sport* (1986) and *The Changing Politics of Sport* (1993). The pace of change requires an entirely new body of work and the range of the subject prohibits a singly authored volume.

I would like to thank the University of Warwick and particularly the Department of Politics and International Studies for the support they have offered in the production of this volume and especially for financial assistance in bringing the contributors together to discuss the issues and themes raised by the book. I would also like to thank my son Michael for his help with the editorial task and my wife Ann for her support, particularly in bringing the contributors together.

Lincoln Allison  
Leamington Spa

## Series editor's foreword

According to Richard Vinen, '...all social history and sociology and social anthropology is political in that all history is about power',<sup>1</sup> while according to Robert W. Stern, '...change is the condition of everything that lives (and) the condition of social continuity'.<sup>2</sup> *The Global Politics of Sport* bears witness to the prescience of both remarks.

'While everyone else was changing, so were we. We were changing too'!<sup>3</sup> *The Global Politics of Sport* is the third volume of a trilogy on the politics of sport and reflects the editor's latest change of approach in response to changes in the relationship between sport and politics. Mutant moments characterise all change. Of course, continuity in this relationship continues as the present furore over Mugabe, morality, politics and cricket demonstrates. Change and continuity in history go hand in hand.

In the changes that characterise modern sport, globalisation is a 'leading player'. Consequently it receives due prominence in *The Global Politics of Sport* and the term is adapted to circumstance rather than circumstance adapted to it. The quality of analysis is thus enhanced.

The 'Great Universal Churches' of the IOC and FIFA, as *The Global Politics of Sport* makes very clear, now exert a powerful doctrinal, liturgical and 'theocratic' influence—with their propensity for architectonic control—over countless millions. FIFA has indeed created a borderless international community. The English Premier League illustrates this perhaps too well. In one weekend of April 2004 'foreign legionnaires' outnumbered 'native footsoldiers' heavily. Only 65 of the 220 who started in the games were qualified to play for England. The top 5 teams had a mere 14 English players!<sup>4</sup>

Arguably *The Global Politics of Sport* leaves the best till last in the question it poses: is global sport moving into an era of a post-Westphalian or even a neo-Medieval system of international politics far more autonomous of state systems than in the twentieth century? This question stimulates others. Does this shift, if true, have future dramatic consequences for the use and abuse of power? What have the IOC and the European Union in common, in addition to canonical texts, centralisation, corruption and unaccountability? In fact, are such organisations linked, not divorced (as *The Global Politics of Sports* suggests) in their use of power? Do Blatter and Chirac share the dystopic 'papal qualities of haughtiness, self-righteousness and pretension'?<sup>5</sup> Do the politicians of power-bloc politics and sports politics systematically construct distancing mechanisms from accountability? Is it time therefore for 'un certain tour d'esprit' involving atomistic resistance in the global politics of sport?

Academic analysts of sport can only watch and wonder.

It is all a long way from the ideals if not the practice of Corinthianism, 'fair play' and amateurism.<sup>6</sup>

The great attraction of *The Global Politics of Sport* is that its questions raise questions.

J.A. Mangan

Series Editor

*Sport in the Global Society*



# 1

## Sport and globalisation

### The issues

*Lincoln Allison*

What follows is a second sequel to *The Politics of Sport* in 1986 and *The Changing Politics of Sport* in 1993.<sup>1</sup> The 'Politics of Sport' in its 1986 sense can now be seen as the 'Old Politics of Sport', its assumption being of a 'Westphalian' system in which states were the dominant actors in international politics. To discuss the politics of sport required describing the policies of communist and African states in using sport to achieve greater recognition and legitimacy, the use of sport in contests over the relationship between nationality and statehood and the consequences of state policies—primarily apartheid in South Africa—which challenged assumptions about the 'autonomy' of sport and its irrelevance to politics. If there is a single word with which to label the era, it is 'boycott', in reference to the numerous and escalating attempts by states to withdraw their competitors from international sporting contests in pursuit of broader diplomatic goals.

One paradox of the weakening of the primacy of the state is that in many cases in Western states government is considerably more involved in the domestic politics of sport now than it was twenty years ago. Certainly in the United Kingdom (as Terry Monnington and I argue later) government is involved in programmes to achieve sporting success and acquire major championships to a degree that was almost inconceivable in the 1980s. It is difficult to conceive of the events of 1980, when Mrs Thatcher's government attempted to boycott the Moscow Olympics but the vast majority of British sports federations ignored the boycott, taking part. In Africa, we shall argue, there was a heyday of successful intervention lasting from the 1960s to the 1980s during which governments were able to achieve goals of international prestige and internal unity through sport. This capacity has now diminished considerably, partly because of general economic failure, but also because the competitors themselves have been spirited away beyond the control of domestic politicians in the direction of American campuses and European football clubs, though in some countries, such as South Africa and Ethiopia, there is still clearly a 'sports dividend'.

The broad truth is that within the international system states are much less important than they were. In sport, they generally (and to a remarkable degree) compete with each other within agendas set by transnational corporations and global non-governmental organisations. Imagine—if it is not already the case—that you are concerned about some aspect of the future of sport. It might be the shape and survival of test match cricket or the development of surfing or the survival of small town football clubs or the use of drugs in track and field athletics: all of these are matters which concern the contributors to this volume. Almost entirely, at the time of writing, your concerns would not lead you to monitor the activities of governments, but they would lead you to want to know more about what was going on at Newscorp, at the Federation Internationale de Football

Association, at the International Olympic Committee and at the World Anti-Doping Agency, among others. This stands in sharp contrast to the situation in environmental politics or human rights where states remain much more important and international organisations much less powerful.

The pace of change has been remarkable. A good proportion of the policies and contests which defined the politics of sport in 1986 had disappeared by the time *The Changing Politics of Sport* was published in 1993, replaced by a situation of much greater fluidity with a much less 'Westphalian' shape. There was talk of a 'new world order', but it seems more realistic to describe it as the collapse of an existing order without the emergence of anything very clear to replace it. Everywhere—inside and outside the academic world—the concept of 'globalisation' was invoked. I will not here define 'globalisation'; different, though broadly similar definitions will be invoked by individual contributors in this volume. But there are two points which must be stressed about the importance and unavoidability of the concept.

First, the use of the concept of globalisation is 'self-fulfilling'—to use Robert Merton's term—which, in a sense, means self-realising. People assume and perceive a 'global' reality where once they assumed a 'Westphalian' state system, though it is important to note that 'globalisation', like 'charisma', 'elite' and others and unlike 'Westphalian' is a term now well-imbedded in a variety of ordinary languages. Demonstrators on the streets now conceive what they oppose in terms of globalisation where previously they might have conceived it in terms of free trade or imperialism or thought of it at all only in terms of a lower level of generality and abstraction. Second, we would expect a priori that globalisation in sport would be relatively well developed and the evidence suggests that it is. The aspirations of sport, from the start and as represented in the constitutions of such bodies as FIFA and the IOC, are parallel to those of a 'great universal church'. But the hostility to sport within national and globally regional cultures is markedly less than to the proselytising of a real church and the opposition both to the general idea of modern sport and to specific sports has declined markedly in the past century. It is much less subject to cultural defensiveness than are institutions concerned with language and the arts. 'Borderlessness' is easier in sport, particularly since the collapse of communism. In the labour market 'professional' footballers can cross borders with none of the limitations—not even language—that limit their contemporaries in the older professions. There exists a global system of cores and peripheries in which, for example, leading Irish, African and Scandinavian footballers rarely play in their countries of origin. In the capital market, the governor of Siberia can become the owner of Chelsea Football Club. In the image market it becomes possible to choose between three different live cricket matches on television while living in the United States, a society which has an historic disdain for cricket, while the England footballer David Beckham acquires fans in East Asia on a different scale from the followings for players in previous generations. In the political dimension it is normal to conceive of globalisation in terms of the development of 'systems of governance' and the emergence of effective 'regimes'. Here again the broad judgement must be that the major sporting bodies operate at a level of coherent global power unknown to aspirants in fields such as the environment and human rights. Compare, for example, the way in which the People's Republic of China treats representatives of the International Olympic Committee with its treatment of international non-governmental organisations in the other fields mentioned! For whatever reasons—

and those reasons will be discussed in this volume—it is clear that states find it much easier to ‘pool’ sovereignty in the regulation of sport than they do in other fields.

Generically, three types of issue arise out of the globalisation of sport, though it would be only proper to acknowledge that they could be classified in alternative ways. First, there are issues of regime development. Parallel to the theory that in the development of states a gangster-like central power is a necessary stage before the rule of law, is the idea that a raw global power is bound to develop before mature regulation is possible. The issue is whether global power can be turned into a mature regime capable, for example, of dealing successfully with problems like doping and of aspiring to spread the benefits of the regime to a global public. The context is one in which the personnel and practice of international organisations often look more Robber Baron than Civil Service. The chapters by John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson on FIFA and by the latter on the Olympics are concerned with these generic issues. As a sports lawyer, Ken Foster offers an important perspective on these issues by contrasting American perspectives on the regulation of sport with those in Europe. American law (predictably?) conceives professional sport as a primarily commercial activity, though it has to accept some odd implications of that assumption. European approaches to the regulation of sport, after a brief flirtation in the mid-1990s with the idea that the regulation of such matters as the regulation of the labour market in football should be the same as in other commercial activities, has reverted to the more typical European idea that sport, including football, should be handled primarily as a ‘social’ or ‘cultural’ activity, albeit one with a commercial dimension. To some degree these alternative models are competing for hegemony at the global level. In general, the prognostications for the development of global sporting regimes in this book offer a mixed picture, though not without a good deal of pessimism.

A second sort of issue concerns the relationship between emerging global institutions and existing institutions, including states, but also including nationalist parties and movements and national sports’ associations. The chapter by Terry Monnington and myself falls under this heading, as does Alan Bairner’s analysis of the relationship between globalisation and nationalism. To some degree—to borrow a favourite academic analogy—the story here is of a dog that doesn’t bark: there are surprisingly few conflicts between the institutions of sporting globalisation and other movements and authorities. But this is a situation which may change.

Finally, to borrow a German term with no precise English equivalent, there are the issues of ‘*Kulturkampf*’, cultural political struggles arising out of the tendencies to create a global culture, the contests over them and the opposition to them. Belinda Wheaton’s analysis of ‘lifestyle’ sports like surfing is an account of sub-cultures which are often in opposition to the idea of globalisation and to the defining ideas of modern sport, but which are also themselves global and subject to global commercial pressures. There is a political contest for the ‘soul’ of surfing and also for many other sports which offer a ‘lifestyle’ and a specialised relationship with natural phenomena. Paul Gilchrist’s essay, by contrast, investigates the idea of the hero, till now mainly conceived in a national and even nationalist context. My own chapter on the ‘curious’ position of American sport in the global context presents what is in some ways and from some angles the inversion of the idea of ‘coca-colonisation’ and Eurodisney as the ‘cultural Chernobyl’, in which we find American cultural conservatives berating the challenge of ‘soccer’. Though at a



deeper level, I argue, in fairly close resemblance to Ken Foster's account of a challenge from an American model of regulation, American ways are setting a radical agenda for global sport.

These issues will be at the heart of the politics of sport for the foreseeable future and perhaps for the twenty-first century. They make it a fascinating subject.

## 2

# Sport, prestige and international relations

*Lincoln Allison and Terry Monnington*

In an essay written in the mid-1980s, Trevor Taylor concluded that, '...international relations scholars show little sign of seriously considering the place of sport in global human affairs' and prescribed that '...international relations should take more account of sport...'.<sup>1</sup> We might have expected some change in the period since then, not least because the academic study of sport has established itself in such fields as politics and law and has made further advances in sociology and social history. The 'myth of autonomy', which suggested that sport should and did have little effect on other human activities, has been largely undermined; indeed we would argue that in some cases there has been an overreaction against it. Modern sport is increasingly and perhaps essentially international and has had an international dimension almost from the outset. It has developed highly autonomous international organisations, most notably the International Olympic Committee and FIFA, the international (association) football federation. Sport is unusually free from constraints on the development of global markets in images and labour. Sport is an important part of the images of nations and states and of the process of socialisation of young people into global society: Lothar Matthaus, Michael Schumacher and Bernhard Langer have been more importantly formative of young people's images of Germany in the last generation than have Fichte, Hegel and Bismarck.

Yet the sporting dimension of international relations still often plays almost no part in education in the subject. We might expect to find no mention of sport in a collection called *Classics of International Relations*<sup>2</sup> but it does seem strange to find it entirely absent from recent monographs, textbooks like Michael Nicholson's *International Relations*<sup>3</sup> and William Nester's *International Relations*.<sup>4</sup> An honourable exception might be Joshua Goldstein's *International Relations*, which manages two references to international sporting organisation in over six hundred pages.<sup>5</sup> It is not as if sporting relations are part of some new study of 'globalisation', of international organisations separate from the state and a global 'civil society' which fits oddly with the traditional study of relations between states. They are, but it is also the case that states have used sport in a variety of ways in their foreign relations. As a preliminary categorisation we can note that states have used sport in two principal ways: to sell themselves and enhance their image and to penalise international behaviour of which they disapprove. Even at this preliminary stage it must be remarked that each of these categories divides further into two. The 'image enhancement' effect can be a question of success or merely of acceptance. A Soviet academic account of Soviet sports policy insisted that 'each new victory is a victory for the Soviet form of society and the socialist sports system. It provides irrefutable proof of the superiority of socialist culture over the decaying culture of the capitalist states'.<sup>6</sup> In this case the success of the policy was entirely dependent on success on the field of play; we shall be suggesting some doubts about the efficiency of

this form of policy and even whether it was what it purported to be as a policy. But many states have looked to sport merely to symbolise their acceptance in the international community. In the strict diplomatic sense this has been an issue most notably in divided countries such as Korea, China, Germany and Ireland. It must be remembered that in 1969 only thirteen states recognised East Germany and in the Olympics of 2000 Taiwanese athletes paraded under the banner of 'Chinese Republic—Taipei', an appellation which might be thought to suggest that Taiwan was ultimately a 'special region' of China, like Hong Kong. But even some established nations whose existence is not in doubt look to sport to express their status. It has been widely argued that China's enthusiasm for the Olympics is principally motivated by a desire to secure and demonstrate its acceptance as a mature state in the international system.<sup>7</sup> This desire must be seen in the context of China's fragile self-image as an ancient culture whose proper status is not fully acknowledged by the established (Western) powers.<sup>8</sup>

The politics of international sport has been more overtly coercive where states have instituted sporting boycotts as sanctions against the behaviour of other states of which they disapprove. The largest of these have been the US-led boycott of the Moscow Olympics in 1980, the Communist reciprocation four years later and the series of boycotts primarily by African and Commonwealth countries of the South African regime in the quarter century before it collapsed. Of these, the South African boycott was easily the most important and is generally attributed with a direct effect in bringing down the *apartheid* regime.<sup>9</sup> It included a number of secondary boycotts of countries which had allowed sporting contacts with South Africa, of which the most prominent was New Zealand. But there have been other, lesser boycotts and until it was overthrown in 2001–02 a variety of global sporting organisations were boycotting the taliban regime in Afghanistan.

It has often been remarked that sporting boycotts appealed to governments as strategic low-cost alternatives to other political methods. Trade sanctions against South Africa by Britain, for example, would have imposed high costs on some British workers and capitalists, whereas sporting contacts with South Africa proved largely substitutable. This remark applies also to the secondary and weaker sense in which governments seek to apply sanctions through sport, by their influence on the allocation of games. For example, a British parliamentary committee in 2000 recommended that the British government oppose the allocation of the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008.<sup>10</sup> The rationale was that the Chinese economy was becoming too important for a serious trade embargo and that the 'New' Labour government's stated aspiration to pursue a 'moral' foreign policy would have to be pursued by other means in the case of a state which had become (especially in relation to its policy in Tibet) one of the major violators of Western human rights doctrines.

In short, sport seems to claim some attention even according to a traditional definition of international relations. That it should be so thoroughly ignored does seem to require further explanation and the most obvious hypothesis is that it does not have to fit into the established paradigms and debates of the discipline. These have been couched to a considerable degree as a contest between 'realists' and 'idealists' with (of course) a number of interpretations and revisions of each approach. A 'classic' version of realism, as put by Hans Morgenthau in 1960 has it that:

International Politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim... When we speak of power, we mean man's control over the minds and actions of other men.<sup>11</sup>

Correspondingly, idealism suggests that there is at least a dimension of international relations which consists of genuine attempts to create or maintain an international order based on shared values. The degree to which idealism or realism is the assumption of a foreign policy can be a political issue in itself. In the late 1870s and early 1880s the clear difference between Benjamin Disraeli as Conservative leader and his Liberal opponent W.E.Gladstone on foreign policy was that Disraeli thought that British policy should be based unequivocally on British interests whereas Gladstone thought it should be based on the aspiration to a universal, Christian morality of international affairs. Turkey appeared as a natural ally of the United Kingdom from a Disraelian perspective, but as a morally errant despotism in Gladstone's eyes. There are shades of this dispute in the differences of emphasis (at least) between Democrats and Republicans since the end of the Cold War.

In order to demonstrate how the realist-idealist dichotomy might unduly marginalise sport, it is useful to consider an example. There was a vigorous contest, resolved in 1993, as to which city should hold the 'millennial' Olympic Games in the year 2000. The endgame involved Sydney and Beijing with Sydney being awarded the games despite the clear commitment of the President of the International Olympic Committee, Juan Samaranch, to the Chinese cause. The whole issue presented an interesting reversal of fortunes for the Olympic movement insofar as the games held less than a decade earlier, in 1984, which were ultimately held in Los Angeles, had at one time been threatened by cancellation because of the unwillingness of any suitable city to hold them. The decision was influenced by both China's suppression of democracy, especially the brutal response to a student demonstration in Tiananmen Square in 1989, and its reputation as a haven for sports coaches who used drugs. The result of the decision was particularly offensive to the Chinese: here, after all, was a country which is small in population and peripheral in world politics being awarded its second games (the first being Melbourne in 1956) before the world's most populous country had even hosted the games once.

What did Australia get out of hosting the games? Sydney 2000 was considered a great success: the atmosphere and organisation were adjudged by the great majority of those who could make the comparison to be clearly superior to those in Atlanta in 1996. This image was enhanced by the success of the Paralympics in Sydney shortly afterwards and the comparison between the genuine enthusiasm for this event in Australia with the tokenism and lack of interest in Atlanta again went Australia's way. A sense of what Australians thought they had gained from Sydney 2000 can be judged from the comments of Peter Fitzsimmons, Australian sportswriter and former rugby international, on the aftermath of the games.

And did I mention already that Sydney has never seen the like, never done it better, never been so exuberant and I mean never? Never mind that the Olympic flame has been doused—the city remains agog with how well everything went, the reception it seems to have received from an

international audience and the simply staggering brilliance with which we pulled the whole thing off!...don't think this is just me raving on. One of the most influential sports writers in the world, Rick Reilly of *Sports Illustrated*, devoted an entire column last week to mounting the argument that Sydney should keep the games for perpetuity; that it 'was the most beautiful city in the world' and made 'Paris look like Lubbock, Texas'. He also raved about the hospitality, how efficiently everything worked, the sheer Aussie panache and everything else Down-Under delicious he could think of.<sup>12</sup>

Even allowing for a certain (self-confessed) over-writing, we must surely concede that the games allowed the 'happy country' to be seen as it wanted to be seen by the rest of the world and that the vast majority of Australians would share some of Peter Fitzsimmons' pleasure and enhanced self-esteem as a result of them. The success would also prove beneficial in terms of tourism and investment (though the figures remain highly contested) and at least marginally in terms of the status and opportunities for individual Australians. Getting the Olympics and holding them successfully was good for Australian individuals, Australian society and the Australian nation and the benefits in these terms clearly outweighed the damage done by Australia's immediately previous appearance on the world stage as a society with something of an identity problem, deeply divided on the fundamental question of monarchy or republic.

At the same time it would be absurd to assess these benefits primarily in terms of the enhanced power to the Australian state in its important relations with Indonesia and the United States, just as it would be risible to think that China's achievement of third place in the medals table at the games in any way strengthened the hand of the Chinese state in its negotiations with the World Trade Organisation. We must surely allow that there can be benefits in status or prestige which are distinct from power. If the distinction is allowed it would also follow that in the absence of 'great games' like imperialism and the Cold War, the importance of prestige would increase at the expense of power. A less state-oriented international society might contain many states and regions whose interest lay primarily in their brand image rather than in any sense of 'power' or 'control' they might seek to exercise over the rest of the world. A Welsh person, whose country lies within the United Kingdom and the European Union (as well as being part of the state-like England and Wales) can coherently and patriotically welcome enhanced Welsh prestige as a result of the success in the rugby field or in the Commonwealth Games while being entirely opposed even to the existence of Wales as a player on the international stage.

There are at least two ways in which a defence can be mounted for the sort of 'realism' put forward by Morgenthau. He allows

First, not every action that a nation performs with respect to another nation is of a political nature. Second, not all nations are at all times to the same extent involved in international politics...,<sup>13</sup>

In this light, realism is not so much false as arbitrary, misleading and increasingly trivial, suggesting an analogy with the traditional ethical thesis that all human beings are selfish.