David Black and Byron Peacock

Sport and Diplomacy

pp. 708-725

Oxford University Press

Staff and students of University of London - School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken. This Digital Copy has been made under the terms of a CLA licence which allows you to:

- access and download a copy;
- print out a copy;

Please note that this material is for use ONLY by students registered on the course of study as stated in the section below. All other staff and students are only entitled to browse the material and should not download and/or print out a copy.

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this Course of Study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

All copies (including electronic copies) shall include this Copyright Notice and shall be destroyed and/or deleted if and when required by University of London - School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).

Except as provided for by copyright law, no further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder.

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.

Course of Study: 15PFFH001 - Sport and Diplomacy: 'More than a Game'
Title: The Oxford handbook of modern diplomacy
Name of Author: edited by Andrew F. Cooper, Jorge Heine, and Ramesh Thakur.
Name of Publisher: Oxford University Press
CHAPTER 39

SPORT AND DIPLOMACY

DAVID BLACK AND BYRON PEACOCK

The domains of sport and diplomacy have had a long, often fraught, and generally under-appreciated relationship, at least since the emergence of the modern Olympic movement in the late 19th century. Given the unparalleled visibility, popularity, and mobilizing potential of modern sport, accompanied by intense manifestations of identity (national, regional, local, sectarian, ethnic, etc.), it is hardly surprising that sports teams, events, and venues have been viewed as compelling vehicles for the political and diplomatic ambitions of both governments and the range of actors engaged in ‘network diplomacy’. Yet particularly in the various societies of the Anglo-American world (including the Commonwealth), a full engagement with the politico-diplomatic possibilities of sport was long inhibited by what Lincoln Allison has termed ‘the myth of autonomy’. This is the idea ‘that sport was somehow separate from society; that it transcended or had “nothing to do with” politics and social conflict’, underpinned by the paradoxical convictions that it was ‘both “above” or “below” the political dimensions of social life’. This myth has proven highly durable, despite much contradictory evidence. The result was that for many governments, there was a deep reluctance to explicitly engage the ‘world of sport’ as a focus of diplomatic analysis and practice. 1

Authoritarian regimes of all stripes—fascist, communist, military, etc.—have on the whole been considerably less reticent about embracing sport as a tool of international diplomacy. 2 Here and elsewhere, however, would-be ‘users’ have encountered another challenge: the limited and erratic fungibility of sport as a diplomatic currency. In short, investments in sport do not reliably generate the anticipated benefits and, in some cases at least, can positively recoil on their users in unanticipated ways. A particularly striking example is the 1988 Seoul Olympics, which rebounded on the country’s authoritarian regime—though the objectives of this public diplomacy have evolved substantially in the post-cold war era of globalization. We will analyse these trends and transitions in the sections that follow. First, however, we will introduce some of the distinctive features of ISOs.

39.1 INTERNATIONAL SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS AS DIPLOMATIC ACTORS AND FORUMS

The politico-diplomatic nature of international sport is, in part, the result of the formative role of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Olympic movement it spearheads, and its social mission—Olympism—in world politics. Though international and transnational sporting engagements were not uncommon prior to the IOC’s founding in 1894, Pierre de Coubertin (the reviver of the Olympic Games in the modern era) imbued this resolutely non-governmental organization with the overtly diplomatic aim of promoting a prominent sort of cultural ‘internationalism’. 3

Given the de facto privileges and immunities (e.g. extraterritoriality, legal exemptions, treaty-making and monitoring, etc.) it has consistently enjoyed, the IOC has functional equivalence to an IGO; in fact states respect its decisions and jurisdiction more reliably than many IGOs. 4 In addition, commercialization of the Olympic ‘brand’ over the past several decades has made the IOC an exorbitantly wealthy NGO, so much so that much of its behaviour, policies, and accounting measures more closely resemble a large MNC. As such, the IOC embodies key elements of three of the four actor types that characterize contemporary network diplomacy (i.e. NGOs, IGOs, and MNCs). This peculiar but powerful role makes the IOC and the Olympic movement singularly relevant to international diplomacy and curious (yet attractive) to those who study and engage it.

The IOC is only one of many international sports organizations (ISOs) however. There is a veritable alphabet soup of organizations that (1) govern essentially all sporting disciplines, (2) regulate legal, media, medical, or other technical matters necessary for international
sport, and (3) oversee international sporting events that involve multiple disciplines. Unlike the IOCs driving social purpose, however, many of these ISOs did not necessarily evolve out of (but may have later adapted to) a devotion to Coubertin's brand of internationalism. Rather, these ISOs usually emerged as a response to the rationalizing, bureaucratizing forces that made international and transnational competition possible through standardization, calendar coordination, mediation through due process, and, often, centralized communications and deliberations. The increasing popularity of sports (and particularly spectator sports) at the end of the 19th century made bureaucracies such as the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF; changed to the International Association of Athletics Federations in the contemporary, professional era), the Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG), and other ISOs a virtual necessity. As the complexity of international sport increased throughout the 20th century, second-order organizations emerged to handle the technical matters that proved too specialized, too legally intricate, or too broad-based for any one sports organization to control.

In order to fully understand the significance of sport in international diplomacy, it is necessary to understand the two roles of international sports organizations in the diplomatic order. On the one hand, most ISOs (beginning with the IOC but extending to other ISOs as well) now frequently declare that their bureaucratic structures serve a supremely diplomatic purpose: international peace and tolerance through athletic exchange (or some variant thereof). On the other hand, ISOs also function as multilateral organizations or arenas for diplomatic intercourse in and of themselves. Since universalism is the cardinal norm among ISOs, the individual national members that usually comprise the organization can and often do act as diplomatic delegations representing the interests of their constituent countries or governments. Thus, ISOs are both diplomatic actors in their own right, pursuing social causes in world politics, and forums for diplomatic exchange among internal and national units that generally follow the contours of traditional 'club' diplomacy.

The International Olympic Committee provides examples of both types of diplomatic activity. Formally, it has often portrayed itself as the United Nations (or, as Coubertin put it in an earlier era, a 'miniature League of Nations') of global sport. In many ways the IOC has constructed a parallel universe of global power (albeit confined to the world of sport) that shadowed the political realities of international diplomacy, but does not mimic them exactly. James Rosenau and Hongying Wang have called the IOC 'virtually a world government unto itself and one whose authority and autonomy have not been seriously challenged.' Like the UN (or some hypothetical 'world government') the organization of the so-called 'Olympic Family' is divided into national units—the National Olympic Committees (NOCs). The Olympic world is also extremely hierarchical, far more so than the ' anarchic' international diplomatic order. Virtually all key decisions are made by the unelected, non-representative IOC and its decisions must be respected by all NOCs (and other Olympic Family members) at the risk of expulsion (which has occurred on numerous occasions). The hierarchy of the Olympic movement defined clear roles and channels of communication between Lausanne and its worldwide Family. Also, not unlike the traditional 'club' diplomacy of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the IOC was for decades (and remains, to a considerable extent) an 'old-boys club,' with membership heavily drawn from aristocratic circles and prone to brokering backroom deals through elitist power networks.

As the scope, the number of actors, and the complexity of diplomacy have increased in recent decades however, ISOs have struggled (sometimes belatedly or unsuccessfully, other times adroitly) to adapt. New actors, issues, levels of engagement, and complexities have all changed the substance and delivery of ISO-led diplomacy as well as the diplomatic practices that occur within the organizations. Nowhere is this clearer than in the increasingly competitive and high-stakes processes by which major sporting events (above all the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup) are awarded to host cities and countries—and in the related nexus between ISOs, commercial broadcasters, and privileged corporate sponsors. We will expand on these themes in the next two sections, concerning club diplomacy and network diplomacy respectively.

### 39.2 Sport in 'Club' Diplomacy

In the predominantly state-centred world of club diplomacy, which also prevailed in the realm of sport until the 1980s, governments and their diplomatic representatives attempted to instrumentalize sport for a variety of public diplomacy purposes. These purposes included propagandistic and prestige-seeking activities; relatively low-cost, high-visibility forms of protest and punishment; precursors and facilitators of improved diplomatic relations; and means of pursuing diplomatic recognition or signalling rehabilitation within the international 'community of nations.'

The pursuit of status or prestige is an under-appreciated objective of much international diplomatic activity. There is no more obvious instance of this than the 'Nazi Olympics' of 1936 in Berlin, which were comprehensively conceived and orchestrated as a vehicle to project the glories of Nazi Germany both to the world and to Germany's own citizens. This example highlights the degree to which sport diplomacy is often a 'two-level game,' targeting international and domestic audiences simultaneously. As noted earlier, this objective may be particularly compelling to authoritarian or revolutionary regimes. Yet even in countries that historically adhered to a more apolitical public view of sport, such as the UK, governments have long been mindful of its potential role in 'reflecting and enhancing, as well as diminishing, British prestige at home and abroad.' An example was the decision to carry through with the 1948 London Olympics at a time when Britain was reeling from the impacts of war and reconstruction.

In the context of the cold war, international sport became a proxy for 'hotter' forms of conflict. Indeed, George Orwell's famous remark that international sport was nothing more than 'war minus the shooting' was made in reference to a set of particularly nasty football matches (and fan reactions) played between a Soviet team (FC Dynamo Moscow) and an all-star English team at the very beginning of the cold war. Perhaps the most prominent manifestation of cold war sporting animosity were the tit-for-tat
boycotts of the 1980 Moscow Games (in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan) by the US and fifty other countries, and of the 1984 Los Angeles Games by the USSR and thirteen of its allies. Because these boycotts were principally symbolic in their impact, it was hard to assess their 'success': clearly the first was felt as a blow to the prestige of the Moscow organizers, while the latter was arguably counterproductive since it reinforced the orgy of patriotism that accompanied the Los Angeles Games, with US dominance unchallenged by its East bloc rivals. Nevertheless, the fact that the Moscow boycott did not cause the USSR to waver in its occupation of Afghanistan led many to construe it as a failure, and as further evidence of the ineffectuality of the Carter administration's foreign policy. This case illustrates both the tendency toward unanticipated repercussions of diplomatic interventions in sport, and the relative lack of understanding by professional diplomats in the State Department (and elsewhere) of the peculiarities of the world of sport.

Of course, the 'war minus the shooting' paradigm is by no means limited to the cold war. Ryszard Kapuscinski labelled the four-day war between Honduras and El Salvador in 1969 the 'Soccer War' because of the role that a World Cup-qualifying match played in sparking mutual animosities, overheated rhetoric, and nationalist sentiment. Thus, while the match itself saw no bloodshed, it seems to have led directly to the breakdown of diplomacy. Other geopolitical rivalries that have 'played out' in international sport include the 'blood in the water' water polo match between Hungarian and Soviet teams (set against the backdrop of the 1956 Hungarian revolution and Moscow's brutal response) or the more recent eruption of violence between Egyptians and Algerians who, after a contentious set of World Cup-qualifying matches, attacked each other's football teams, embassies, national symbols, and fans. Such riotous incidents test and sometimes rupture the limits of diplomatic deference between countries.

Sports sanctions, such as the Moscow and Los Angeles boycotts, arose regularly in the era of club diplomacy. A more successful example of the use of sport sanctions was the international campaign to isolate apartheid South Africa from international competition. This case is intriguing because it illustrates the hierarchical nature of international sport governance, and the way in which this can lead to more enforceable decision-making within its limited domain. In short, once ISOs finally determined that the apartheid regime should be excluded from international competition (a protracted and contentious process), they were able to enforce this decision among their national 'constituents' far more comprehensively than virtually any other sanction against South Africa. Moreover, this case provided an early example of the potential of transnational social movements to affect international diplomatic outcomes. In this instance, anti-apartheid sport activists mobilized around the exiled, shoestring South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SANROC) and made common cause with newly independent 'third world' governments to successfully lobby for an enforceable sport boycott. Nevertheless, it took several decades of escalating pressure before the apartheid regime was supplantcd, and the role played by the sport boycott in this outcome remains contentious.

In the 'club era', various governments made intermittent use of sport as a form of cultural diplomacy, in an effort to foster goodwill and understanding as the basis for more cooperative international relationships. Precisely because of the myth of autonomy, sport was often viewed as a relatively benign precursor and precedent for improved relations. In addition to the well-known ping-pong diplomacy of the 1970s, 'wrestling diplomacy' between Iran and the United States in the 1950s and 'cricket diplomacy' between India and Pakistan more recently have had a significant, and sometimes a very public influence on political leaders and the societies of these respective countries. Such sporting overtures are, if anything, becoming more frequent. However, as noted earlier in this section, given the fiercely competitive nature of much international sport, the effects of such cultural diplomacy can prove counterproductive. The behaviour of touring Canadian amateur ice hockey teams in Europe in the mid-1960s, for example, was characterized in an official Canadian Department of External Affairs memo as 'brutish' and 'reprehensible'. As goodwill exercises, the Department clearly regarded these tours as failures.

Finally, governments and their representatives have attempted to use sport to secure recognition—both formal and informal—and to signal rehabilitation or 'arrival' as legitimate and/or developed countries in international society. In this, they have been aided and abetted by the desire of ISOs to promote their cardinal norm of universality. For example, the former Axis powers of the Second World War pursued the hosting of Olympic Games with the objective of diplomatic rehabilitation, in 1960 (Rome), 1964 (Tokyo), and 1972 (Munich) respectively. Mexico sought to use the 1968 Summer Olympics and the 1970 FIFA World Cup in an unsuccessful effort to transcend its identity as a developing country, while South Korea was more successful in using the 1988 Summer Games for this purpose, though with unanticipated domestic political consequences.

In addition to the aspirations associated with mega-event hosting, having a recognized NOC or other national sports body (e.g. a football association) can legitimize the very existence of a state or a state-like polity. From the very earliest days of the IOC (when Finns and Czechs wanted separate NOCs from the imperial Russian and Austrian ones), ISO recognition of national sports associations has aided many polities in making de facto claims to diplomatic recognition. During the cold war, the use of sporting recognition to presage diplomatic recognition was particularly noteworthy. The long, persistent, and successful efforts of East Germany (GDR) to be recognized and compete independently of West Germany as well as the decades-long exclusion of the People's Republic of China (PRC) are emblematic. So influential can sporting recognition be that the words and even the letters used to signify various polities elicit heated debate. Israel, for example, tried to insist that the NOC representing Arab Palestinians be called the 'Palestinian Authority' rather than 'Palestine', since the latter might imply sovereignty.24 The famous solution (known as the 'Olympic Formula') to the long exclusion of the PRC was the inventive tactic of renaming the Republic of China/Taiwanese NOC the 'Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee' (thus implying that Taiwan is under PRC sovereignty but still allowing autonomous participation). Adoptions of the Olympic Formula have been used by non-sporting international organizations as a means of including both polities, and the same rhetorical devices were used when Hong Kong reverted to PRC sovereignty.
Recognition by ISOs (especially the IOC and FIFA) continues to be a fervent goal of many territories with contested, emerging, or otherwise ambiguous sovereignty.26

Even polities which do not claim sovereignty use formal sporting recognition or informal participation in sporting events to reinforce cultural, historical, or economic autonomy. Gibraltar has been in a long-running battle to have its football association recognized (over strenuous Spanish objections), and numerous other (mostly small-island) dependencies of the UK, France, and the United States have eagerly embraced independent participation in global sport. More informally, some sub-national groups maintain distinctive teams that are not recognized by ISOs but nevertheless afford diverse ethnicities, language groups, or regions a sense of autonomy. The Catalonia region in Spain, for example, has a ‘national football team’ that competes in non-tournament matches against FIFA-recognized national teams, or, sometimes, other sub-national teams such as the Basque country or Provence in France. The fact that the Catalan team has employed Johan Cruyff (one of Europe’s most successful players and coaches of all time) as its manager is indicative of the seriousness with which Catalonians take their separate football identity.

39.2.1 Club Diplomacy and ISOs

Although it preceded the explosion of civil society and non-governmental influence in diplomatic circles, the IOC has, throughout its history, played a significant role in international diplomacy as an institution with its own diplomatic identity. In order to carve out institutional space for itself, the IOC inhabited the environment of traditional diplomatic practices and norms. For example, early versions of what became the Olympic Charter referred to the ambassadorial precedence that was to be accorded to the Olympic Family during the Games:

No special [foreign] embassy can be accepted by the organizing country on the occasion of the Games. For the duration of the Games precedence belongs to the members of the International Olympic Committee, the members of the organizing Committee, the presidents of the national Olympic Committees and the presidents of the [ISOs]. They form the Olympic senate.27

The space of the Games sites have also been accorded a kind of extraterritoriality or inviolability that resembles the territorial privileges normally enjoyed by foreign embassies, consulates, and missions. In one of the more prominent examples of this, the IOC president during the 1936 Games in Berlin successfully ordered Hitler to remove anti-Semitic signage from highways, stadia, and other venues with the injunction that: ‘When the five-circled flag is raised over the stadium, it is no longer Germany. It is Olympia, and we are the masters then’.28

Athletes at the Olympic Games form a type of Olympic diplomatic corps. East German officials used to advise their departing competitors, ‘you are sports-diplomats in track suits’.29 Of course, such messages as these from the GDR and other governments were frowned upon by the IOC as ‘politicizing’ the Games (in this case with Marxist–Leninist ideology), but the mission of Olympism is actually strikingly similar. The IOC’s diplomatic efforts have been primarily based at the state level and have involved encouraging decision-makers and enthralled populations alike to come to better know and respect their counterparts in other countries. Olympic athletes, as some of the world’s earliest celebrity diplomats, are the fundamental bearers of this mission, which is to be carried out through honourable, meritocratic performance and gracious and reflective winning and losing. In one sense, the Eastern bloc’s instrumentalization of international sport to promote a Soviet-style political economy was nothing more than an effort to familiarize the world with the normative and cultural features (and ostensible superiority) of their countries. Regardless of the ideology or the context, however, Olympic athletes are in some respects the foreign service officers of the Olympic movement, meant to spread Olympic values that paradoxically include the mutual glorification of national cultures. The primary political level to which these values are addressed is that of the nation state, as reflected in the celebratory ‘parade of nations’ that initiates each edition of the Games and the stylized national pageants staged by host countries at the opening and closing ceremonies.

Both the formal practices and the substantive diplomatic message of the Olympic movement reflect a time (late 19th and early 20th centuries) and a place (Europe) in which the practice of diplomacy was of the more exclusive ‘club’ type. Most other ISOs adopted, to a greater or lesser extent, the internationalist–pacifist stance of the IOC, at least rhetorically. Given the inferior prominence, visibility, and popularity of most other events and sports (excepting the FIFA World Cup and occasionally other events such as the Commonwealth Games) however, most ISOs cannot aspire to the de facto diplomatic status and privileges of the IOC.

In addition, most ISOs more closely resemble the UN and other IGOs than does the IOC. FIFA, the IAAF, and most other ISOs such as the Fédération Internationale de Ski or the International Archery Federation have a confederated structure in which membership is open to all national units (duly accredited), each of which has an equal vote on substantive matters. Such a structure frequently produces many of the same dynamics seen in large and inclusive IGOs: bloc and tactical voting, gridlock and a failure to produce sufficient majorities, etc. Despite the ostensibly non-political nature of the matters under consideration and the formal banning of government officials or influence, the isolation of Israeli national federations, the boycotting or expulsion of the Rhodesian and apartheid South African national federations, the support for enemies of enemies, and many other examples highlight how diplomatic dynamics within ISOs reflect the broader diplomatic dynamics of world politics.

Substantively, as diplomatic actors themselves, many ISOs have pursued agendas that can best be described as ‘niche diplomacy’. Perhaps most notable in this regard is the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF). The ITTF has been active in ways expected within traditional diplomacy as well as the more contemporary network diplomacy. For example, the ITTF was central to the ping-pong diplomacy that prepared the ground for Sino–US diplomatic normalization. ITTF President Roy Evans suggested to
necessity of dispatching a country's highest political officer to win a sport mega-event to process, leaders are routinely humbled and/or aggrandized. Many attribute the near-Shuttle diplomacy at the highest political levels (presidents, prime ministers, royalty, and others) is now pervasive at the conferences where hosting decisions are made. In the 1990s, strongly supported by regional and national governments and their political leaders. High-stakes competitions among many of the world's great cities and aspiring world cities, strongly supported by regional and national governments and their political leaders.

Similarly, when Seoul-then the capital of a repressive military regime on the front lines of the cold war as the pro-Western half of a divided state-was awarded the 1988Games, it was regarded as a politically risky choice and a surprise winner over the only other candidate city, Nagoya. When Montreal Olympics, it was becoming harder and harder to attract viable hosts. When Los Angeles was awarded the right to host the 1984 Games in 1978, it was the only bidder. Montreal, which it continued to recognize throughout the decades of apartheid. Similarly, it was hastyier than most ISOs in facilitating the unification of the white and non-racial federations as apartheid was being dismantled.

The ITTF has made a habit of ushering in and training new, newly independent, and contested countries or polities (e.g. Taiwan), thus welcoming them to the elite club of international sport and demanding sporting-diplomatic recognition by existing national federations. Such diplomatic activism is not inconsequential. The ITTF recognized a Kosovar federation in 2003 (five years prior to Kosovo's declaration of independence) and was the first 'international organization' listed as having done so on the public diplomacy website 'Who Recognized Kosovo as an Independent State' (at <www.kosovothanksyou.com>). When the Kosovar team encountered visa problems prior to the European championships in Belgrade in 2007, the ITTF retaliated by rejecting Serbia's bid to host the World Table Tennis Championship in 2011. Afghanistan, Iraq, East Timor, and others have all been beneficiaries of the ITTF's proactive diplomatic engagement.

It is clear from these examples that club diplomacy was practised both within ISOs and between ISOs and the broader realm of interstate diplomacy. Moreover, many of these practices persist even as they have been increasingly accompanied and complicated by features associated with the network era.

39.3 Sport in Network Diplomacy

It is hard to believe from the vantage of the early 21st century that in the early 1980s the future viability of the Olympic Games—the ultimate sport mega-event—was widely questioned. Reeling from successive boycotts as well as the financially disastrous 1976 Montreal Olympics, it was becoming harder and harder to attract viable hosts. When Los Angeles was awarded the right to host the 1984 Games in 1978, it was the only bidder. Similarly, when Seoul-then the capital of a repressive military regime on the front lines of the cold war as the pro-Western half of a divided state—was awarded the 1988 Games it was regarded as a politically risky choice and a surprise winner over the only other candidate city, Nagoya.

Today, the Games, along with other sport mega-events, are the focus of high-profile, high-stakes competitions among many of the world's great cities and aspiring world cities, strongly supported by regional and national governments and their political leaders. Shuttle diplomacy at the highest political levels (presidents, prime ministers, royalty, and others) is now pervasive at the conferences where hosting decisions are made. In the process, leaders are routinely humbled and/or aggrandized. Many attribute the near-necessity of dispatching a country's highest political officer to win a sport mega-event to British Prime Minister Tony Blair's vigorous lobbying on behalf of London's successful 2012 Olympic bid. By Blair's own account the Parisian bid, with President Jacques Chirac at its head, was comparatively aloof and did not engage in the same face-to-face lobbying of hundreds of politicians and IOC members in the final days, accounting for the failure of what was perceived by many to be the technically stronger bid. In contrast, the newly sworn-in US President Barack Obama was widely perceived as having been snubbed by the IOC despite his face-to-face advocacy of Chicago's 2016 Olympic bid. It was soundly defeated by the Rio de Janeiro bid, strongly supported by extensive lobbying from an emotional President Lula. Thus, although the lobbying of a country's highest-ranking politician may now be a virtual necessity for winning the right to stage mega-events, it is no longer sufficient. FIFA's choice of Russia over England for the 2018 World Cup despite the vigorous advocacy of both Prime Minister David Cameron and Prince William is further evidence of this reality.

These trends in diplomatic activity at the highest political levels reflect the degree to which, in the post-cold war era of neoliberal globalization, international sport and sport mega-events have become coveted prizes in the quest for global visibility and 'marketing power'. Indeed, international sport can be seen as a uniquely apt strategic response to globalization, simultaneously celebrating and promoting values of competitiveness at home while reinforcing constructed national identities for internal and external audiences.

The increasing salience of sport in this distinctive form of public diplomacy has been underpinned by a number of key trends. These include the dramatic increase in the profitability of sport, sport franchises, and sporting events, and the concomitant rise of the 'sport-media complex'. The unique synergy between sport and electronic media heighten the reach, visibility, and influence of sports events, iconic sports teams and rivalries, and individual sporting 'heroes', many of whom have become (as noted earlier) among the most famous celebrity diplomats of the age.

Virtually no other form of international communication short of responses to large-scale natural disasters or armed conflicts can command a comparable degree of international attention—although, as always, the opportunities come with risks of very public 'failure' (witness the negative publicity generated by the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games or the question of whether the venues for the 2010 Delhi Commonwealth Games would be safe and ready in time). Moreover, there is a chronic tendency to exaggerate the potential benefits of international sporting success, whether competitive or organizational. These trends have, in turn, led to the rising salience of many new players in the sport diplomacy arena, even as the old practices of club diplomacy persist.

39.3.1 Network Diplomacy, ISOs, and 'New Actors'

Over time, a plethora of diverse actors have come to occupy the diplomatic space of international sport. As with the broader trend towards non-governmental influence in diplomatic networks, the world of international sport has seen the rise of many NGOs that pursue issue-specific or country-specific mandates. A vibrant and much-discussed community of actors who apply sporting practices to the task of 'international diplomacy'...
development' has arisen in recent decades; a perusal of the database of organizations maintained by the International Platform on Sport and Development reveals NGOs addressing everything from HIV/AIDS to post-conflict peace-building and reconciliation. Many of these NGOs are financed or sponsored by governments, national sporting bodies or leagues (e.g. the English Football Association or the American National Basketball Association), or private firms (e.g. major sports wear MNCs), thus further complicating the layers of diplomacy and the interests in play. For example, Right to Play—perhaps the most prominent 'sport for development' NGO—receives significant funding from (inter)governmental agencies (e.g. the Canadian International Development Agency and the United Nations Children's Fund), multinationals (e.g. Goldman Sachs), other NGOs (e.g. Save the Children) and sports organizations (e.g. the International Ski Federation and the Chelsea Football Club). The question of diplomatic space becomes dramatically complicated by the fact that Right to Play is, at once, perceived to represent Canadian and Norwegian values as well as the interests of Goldman Sachs, UNICEF, and Chelsea FC.

Within this growing panoply of players, the leading ISOs have adapted and indeed thrived, notwithstanding periodic scandal. They, in turn, have elicited new interest and roles on the part of other non-governmental as well as government actors. Though the IOC was not the first ISO to commercialize its product or to allow professionals into its historically amateur ranks, these decisions had monumental effects upon the entire universe of ISOs. When Juan Antonio Samaranch—a controversial former Falange politician in Franco's Spain and later Spanish ambassador to the USSR—became the IOC president in 1980, the organization was nearly bankrupt. His decision to invite commercial sponsors to bid for the right to associate themselves with the Olympic movement and to raise the stakes significantly for aspiring television broadcasters made the IOC one of the richest NGOs on the planet. It also incorporated MNCs and their interests firmly within the international sporting scene. Many other ISOs and NCOs followed the IOC's example (though few as profitably), and even those who retained amateur features or attracted little commercial interest have benefitted financially because of the distribution of IOC resources throughout the Olympic system. As a consequence, MNCs have become integral to the Olympic movement, notably through exclusive and lucrative sponsorship arrangements that give these privileged corporate 'partners' a major stake in the preservation and propagation of the internationalist image and ideology of Olympism. They have also often influenced or made demands upon Olympic actors, as manifested in the National Broadcasting Corporation's insistence that certain high-profile events be scheduled for primetime viewing in the United States or critics' suspicions that host city selections are at least partially determined by the presence of attractive markets for Olympic sponsors. Corporate sponsors, in turn, have enabled the IOC to attain unprecedented reach and power from its already privileged position. In many ways then, as noted a moment ago, the IOC's decision to market its 'brand' has transformed it into a virtual MNC in its own right.

The ability of the IOC and other ISOs to act as diplomats has been constrained somewhat by the rise of non-governmental actors that limit or oppose their actions. Some of these NGOs have arisen from within the international sports world. The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), for example, serves as a check on the power of ISOs by introducing due process and sound jurisprudential practices to international sport. Athletes, teams, NOCs and other national federations, ISOs, and other relevant actors can (and in many cases are obligated to) bring disputes before a CAS legal panel for arbitration. Sometimes the panels decide against the IOC or other ISOs. Likewise, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) is composed of representatives from the world of international sport and from governments around the world who make decisions about legal substances, prosecution, discipline, national legislation, and other matters related to doping. WADA's hybrid structure allows it some independence from ISOs. Both organizations have become significant actors in the prosecution of international diplomacy through sport. The CAS, for example, has ordered FIFA (on two separate occasions) to allow the application of Gibraltar for an accredited national football (soccer) federation to progress through the normal process, over strenuous objections from the Spanish government and football association.

Other non-sporting NGOs and social movements have begun to play an increasingly significant role in ISO diplomacy as well. In the wake of severe environmental degradation at the 1992 Winter Games in Albertville, France for example, environmental organizations denounced the IOC for allowing such an outcome. Before long this pressure prompted the IOC to declare 'the environment' to be the third 'pillar' of Olympism (in addition to culture and amateurism) and to demand environmental impact studies (based on recommendations from the United Nations Environmental Programme) of future host candidates. Human rights groups have long protested many of the effects of hosting Olympic Games on local populations; such protests nearly overwhelmed the IOC during the global torch relay preceding the Beijing Games in 2008. So widespread were the protests that current IOC President Jacques Rogge conceded that human rights considerations would play a role in future hosting decisions.

One final set of relatively new actors in international sport diplomacy are intergovernmental organizations. Where organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) were once perceived as rivals and potential threats to the IOC and other ISOs, most UN institutions and other IGOs are now vocal supporters of, and active partners with, sports organizations. The IOC in particular has signed formal partnership agreements with dozens of UN agencies, funds, and programmes to collaborate on areas of mutual interest, to draw upon specialized skill sets, to provide mutual aid, and other such activities. Beginning with Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the UN has even had a senior-level liaison with the international sports world (the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Sport for Peace and Development) and the UN flag now flies at all Olympic Games venues. Nowhere has this IGO–ISO nexus become more prominent than in relation to the aforementioned 'Sport for Development and Peace' movement, which has rapidly developed a diverse following among official aid agencies, non-governmental organizations (large and small), and a growing number of celebrity athletes. Other IGOs have also 'hitched their wagon' to international sport however—few more prominently than the (formerly British)
Commonwealth, whose most visible and vital manifestation in its long, slow decline has become the Commonwealth Games. These Games have become a means by which key ‘rising states’—first Malaysia and most recently India—have attempted to signal their arrival whilst establishing credibility as potential hosts for larger, ‘first order’ events.47

The dramatic rise in actors involved in international sports diplomacy is no surprise given the rapidly increasing scope of tasks that ISOs are now expected to undertake. In addition to the environmental and human rights considerations mentioned earlier, the IOC alone has had to continually address issues of women’s rights, excessive or damaging commercialism, the related issues of corruption and bribery, and terrorism. FIFA has likewise had to address most of these issues, including, very recently, serious allegations of vote-buying bribery as well as systematic complaints about racism and violence in international and transnational football. Given the massive global interest in the FIFA World Cup and similar mega-events, terrorism and security have become particularly acute concerns for ISOs and host governments, ever since the Munich Olympic Games were infiltrated by Palestinian terrorists in 1972.48 In sum, where once ISOs focused on the limited task of delivering sports events, presuming that regular, international competitions would foster tolerance among nations, the prosecution, promotion, and perpetuation of their particular brand of diplomacy has placed increasingly diverse and onerous demands upon them.

ISOs have also had to move beyond their traditional reliance on national delegations or federations as their only level of engagement. The Olympic Games, for example, are hosted by cities, not countries, and the IOC has accordingly become more intimately involved in municipal and sub-national relations than ever before. As urban concerns intersect with mega-event hosting (including housing rights, pollution control, ‘white elephant’ venues, land rights, poverty, etc.), residents, activists, and occasionally a global consensus have become increasingly sceptical concerning the positive public diplomacy potential touted by ISOs. Conversely, urban and regional (provincial, state) governments have become increasingly active in the international diplomacy of courting ISOs and the events they offer. When their bids are successful, they have attempted to orchestrate sophisticated campaigns designed to secure public support at home, and ‘branding’ benefits and tourist promotion abroad. Key players in this new diplomacy of sport are powerful organizing committees (LOCOG in London, VANOC in Vancouver, etc.)—public–private partnerships that enjoy extraordinary access, attention, and resources from governments and corporations alike, while being largely shielded from the conventional means of public accountability to which government agencies would be subject.

In the first part of the 21st century, ISOs are increasingly turning to developing countries to host mega-events, including Olympics in Beijing (2008) and Rio de Janeiro (2016) and FIFA World Cups in South Africa (2010), Brazil (2014), and Qatar (2022). This is consistent with ISOs’ ongoing pursuit of universalism, and the growing ubiquity of mega-event hosting on the path to ‘emerging power’ status. The ramifications of this trend for hosts in terms of development, sustainability, and social equity are far from certain given its historic novelty. Similarly, there will likely be increasing criticisms of ISOs that do not understand or accommodate significant local political and cultural sensibilities.

Besides the new actors working for or against particular ISOs, the bureaucracies of the latter have nearly universally expanded since the beginning of Samaranch’s tenure as IOC president. The IOC’s administration ballooned from one (particularly infamous) executive director with a small, partially voluntary support team to a professionalized operation with hundreds of employees divided into twelve departments across Lausanne.49 FIFA has likewise expanded its administrative apparatus at ‘FIFA House’ in Zurich. Lausanne in particular and Switzerland in general now have thousands of professionals working in bureaucratic capacities for dozens of ISOs. The pace of expansion and specialization reflects the increasing expectations placed upon ISOs in order to fulfill their self-proclaimed diplomatic missions.

The increasing wealth of many ISOs has enabled this expanded in-house capacity and has also provided opportunities for further diplomatic engagements. For example, the IOC regularly hosts conferences on a variety of topics where sports and international relations intersect. Recent examples include environmental sustainability, women’s rights, health, and socio-economic development and peace.50 Such conference diplomacy, like that of many UN agencies, involves government officials, ISO representatives, academics, celebrities/athletes, advocates and activists, and the like.

Smaller ISOs have continued to play niche diplomatic roles in this more complex, networked environment. The ITTF is again exemplary. Since 1999, it has oversen an extensive ‘Development Program’ that seeks to develop the sport globally, but predominantly in developing countries.51 Alongside the development and expansion of the game, ITTF has fostered a growing ‘Goodwill Fund’ that specifically targets areas of humanitarian disaster or dire need. Examples include a girls-only project in rural parts of Egypt, a ‘Tsunami Rebuilding’ project, and undertakings in Afghanistan, Yemen, and East Timor. Under these two programmes, hundreds of projects are carried out annually, many with funding from the IOC, in all parts of the world.52 The ITTF has thereby made a name for itself in international diplomatic circles, partnering with multilateral organizations (such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and winning awards for its endeavours.

39.4 Conclusion

As with foreign ministries today, ISOs continue to address their diplomatic efforts primarily toward states and/or the accredited national federations and the countries they are supposed to represent. For these organizations, the simplest situation is one in which their objectives and initiatives can be accomplished through the traditional channels of ‘club’ diplomacy, including internal diplomacy among the national federations. However, the increasing number of actors (both supporters and critics) involved in sports diplomacy, the expanding scope of the practice, the increasing specialization...
necessary, and the new formats for engagement all make a more networked approach the only feasible way forward.

Meanwhile, for the traditional state-based actors that have long been at the core of international diplomacy, the increased range, complexity, and prominence of sport diplomacy has generated an array of new demands at a time when, as the editors of this Handbook note, many traditional foreign ministries are facing a dramatic decrease in resources. Much of the work they must now do is ancillary to the international activities of a range of new actors: bid committees, organizing committees, NOCs and national sports federations, ministries of sport and culture, national sports academies and institutes, etc. Likewise, that work must be focused on facilitating coordination among the complex range of tasks and actors that contemporary sporting venues and events require, from consular, to protocol, to security, to public relations and marketing activities. These functions remain as ubiquitous and essential as they are inconspicuous, underscoring the continued salience of diplomatic functions in a very different diplomatic 'ecosystem'.

Notes

2. See, for example, E. Bergbusch, 'Sport and Canadian Foreign Policy', Behind the Headlines 45:2 (December 1987).
3. See, for example, P. Arnaud and J. Riordan, Sport and International Politics: The Impact of Fascism and Communism on Sport (London: E & EN Spon, 1998).
7. Unlike the IOC, which is composed of individuals that are neither selected on a one-member-per-country basis nor representatives of their countries to the Committee, most ISOs that govern individual sports are administered by a congress of each of the nationally-accredited federations.
8. Indeed, there is a nexus of expanding and related causes. For example, many ISOs explicitly promoted non-racialism in the context of the struggle against apartheid and minority rule; more recently, they have sought to promote environmentalism and international development, albeit with limited and contradictory effects.
11. Recent examples of expelled or suspended NOCs include the Afghan committee under the Taliban and Iraqi post-Saddam suspension because of governmental interference. The expulsion of apartheid South Africa’s NOC is perhaps the most prominent.
14. There is an extensive literature on these games. For one example, see A. Gottmann, 'The "Nazi Olympics" and the American boycott controversy', in Arnaud and Riordan (eds), Sport and International Politics.
18. Though 30 eligible NOCs of 140 did not attend the Moscow Games, a number of these had never intended to participate. Bergbusch, 'Sport and Canadian Foreign Policy', 6.
22. One recent example of the continuing tendency to frame sports contests as steps towards diplomatic rapprochement is the 'football diplomacy' that has been widely reported on between Turkey and Armenia. See 'Football diplomacy: Turkish-Armenian Relations', The Economist, 3 September 2009.


33. To review the scope and types of conferences hosted or subsidized by the IOC, see <http://www.olympic.org/conferences-forums-and-events/documents-reports-studies-publications>.