Chapter 10: Politics & Government

# 10.1. Politics in organized sports

This reading contains full explanations of the seven major realms in which politics exists in sports.

## What Qualifies as a Sport?

There is no universal agreement on the definition of *sports*. What is considered a sport in a society or a particular event, such as the Olympics, is determined through political processes.

The criteria used to identify sports reflect the ideas and interests of some people more than others. In the Olympics, for example, a competitive activity or game for men must be played in at least seventy-five countries on four continents to be considered for inclusion in the Olympic Games; an activity or a game for women must be played in at least forty countries on three continents. It also must have an officially designated international governing body, a requisite number of national governing bodies, and a history of international championships before the IOC will consider recognizing it as an Olympic sport. However, IOC decisions about what qualifies as a sport can be changed, as seen in 2005 when baseball and softball were eliminated from the program for the 2012 Olympics in London.

In these days of multibillion-dollar media contracts, an activity or a game is more likely to be recognized as a sport if it is attractive to younger viewers who bring new advertisers and corporate sponsors to the Olympics and television coverage of the Games. It also helps if women play the activity because more women than men watch the Olympics and the IOC knows it must highlight gender equity if it is to avoid bad publicity for the Olympics as a whole.

This method of determining what qualifies as a sport favors nations that historically have emphasized competitive games and had the resources to export their games around the world. Former colonial powers are especially favored because they used their national games to introduce their cultural values and traditions to people in the regions that they colonized.

Wealthy and powerful nations today not only have their national sports broadcast on satellite channels around the world but also have the resources to subsidize the development of these sports worldwide. Therefore, when the IOC uses its method of recognition, the sports from wealthy nations are at the top of the list.

When these sports are recognized as official Olympic sports, the cultural values and traditions of wealthy and powerful nations are reaffirmed. In this way, the sports in wealthy and powerful nations become part of an emerging global culture that favors their interests. This also is why native games in traditional cultures are not a part of the Olympics. Games played only in limited regions of the world don’t qualify for recognition as sports. Therefore, if people from nations with traditional cultures want to participate in the Olympics, they must learn to do sports as they are done in wealthy nations.

If people in traditional cultures lack access to the equipment and facilities needed to train in their homelands, they must depend on support from people and organizations in wealthy nations to become athletes in recognized “international” sports. In this way, sports enable people and organizations in wealthy nations to gain a cultural foothold in other nations and use it to promote changes that foster their interests.

This type of political process also occurs in other contexts. For example, for well over a hundred years, the men who have controlled athletic departments in North American high schools and colleges have used a power and performance model to designate certain activities as varsity sports. They have organized these sports to emphasize competition and physical dominance, so they reaffirm male notions of character and excellence.

This way of defining and organizing sports seldom has been questioned, but if power and performance sports attract fewer girls and women than boys and men, it may be time to ask critical questions about what qualifies as a varsity sport and why. When we ask these questions, we become sensitive to the politics that have long worked to the advantage of men in sports.

Trying to change taken-for-granted political realities always creates resistance among those who have benefited from them. Ironically, many men say that people who challenge traditional realities are slaves to “political correctness.” What they mean, however, is that they don’t want to change the insensitive and self-interested ways of doing things that allow them to ignore the needs of others.

The development of criteria underlying the meaning and organization of sports also occurs on a global scale. Sociologist Peter Donnelly illustrates this in his analysis of how they have been combined to form a global sport monoculture, which he calls “prolympism.” Prolympism is now the model for determining what qualifies and is funded as “sport” in nations around the world. This occurs even in nations where prolympism is inconsistent with traditional games. In this way, the politics of defining *sport* have local and global impact.

## What Are the Rules of a Sport?

Sports are social constructions because people create them as they interact with one another within the constraints of culture and society. The rules that govern sports also are social constructions created through political processes.

Why should first base be 90 feet from home plate in Major League Baseball? Why should a basketball rim be 10 feet above the ground? Why should the top of a volleyball net be 881⁄8 inches off the ground in international women’s volleyball?

Why can’t pole vaulters use any type of pole they want? Why can’t tournament golfers use any golf club or golf ball they want? Why is 6 centimeters the maximum height for the sides of bikini bottoms worn by women in beach volleyball when men wear long shorts?

This list of questions could go on and on. The point is that the rules of sports can be based on many concerns, and this makes them political. Because sports have more rules than many human activities, they are especially political.

## Who Makes and Enforces the Rules in Sports?

The rules of an “official” sport are determined by a recognized governing body that makes decisions affecting the sport and its participants. The process of becoming recognized as the *sole* governing body is highly political because it is related to power, status, and control over resources.

This is why it is common for more than one organization to claim that it is the rightful rule-making body for a sport. The simultaneous existence of various governing bodies creates confusion for athletes and spectators. Professional boxing, for example, has at least four governing bodies (the WBO, the WBU, the WBF, and the IBO), each with its weight categories and championships and each claiming to be the official rule-making body for boxing.

“New” sports, such as skateboarding, snowboarding, in-line skating, and BMX (biking), each has had at least two organizations vying to be official governing bodies. As organizations seek power over sports and the athletes who participate in them, they battle one another to recruit dues-paying members and sponsor competitive events, especially national and international championships. In the process, their policies confuse athletes and limit participation opportunities. When this occurs, people see politics in sports.

When rules exist, there is a need for rule enforcement. This adds another political dimension to sports. Anyone who has ever refereed a game or match will tell you that rule violations are seldom clear-cut. Identifying violations is difficult, and few people see violations the same way.

Rule violations occur regularly in many sports, but the best referees learn when to call fouls or penalties in connection with these violations. Referees and officials discuss when they should or should not call fouls during games and matches. They realize that it is a political challenge to make sports appear to be fair to athletes and spectators.

Enforcing off-the-field rules is also a political challenge. The process of investigating rule violations, determining innocence or guilt, and punishing rule violators involves judgments based on ideas about fairness, moral principles, economic interests, personal reputations, organizational prestige, or other factors. How these factors are considered and which ones prevail in the rule enforcement process are political matters. Recent cases of NCAA investigations of rule violations clearly show that politics is involved in rule enforcement.

## Who Organizes and Controls Sports Events?

Representatives of official governing bodies often organize and control sports events. Standards emerge when the governing body is stable, but standards don’t exist once and for all time. For example, even though governing bodies devise formal standards for judging performances in figure skating, diving, and gymnastics, research shows that the votes of judges are influenced by political loyalties, personal connections, coercion, and bribes.

These issues have created serious problems in many Olympic Games. When international politics influence judges, it is disheartening to athletes, but it should be no more disheartening than the knowledge that “cuteness,” “hairstyles,” “body build,” and “eye color” can also influence judges when it comes to female athletes in certain events. This is a form of cultural politics that forces some athletes to spend thousands of dollars on everything from braces to straighten their teeth to plastic surgery if they wish to be successful. Politics come in many forms.

Now that sports are heavily commercialized, official governing bodies and a combination of corporate sponsors and media production people organize and control events. The location and timing of events, event schedules, the awarding of press credentials, and the choices of which television companies will broadcast the events and which corporate logos will be displayed are resolved through political processes. The participants in those processes and their interests change from one event to the next; this means that there is never an end to politics in sports.

## Where Do Sports Events Take Place?

Site selection decisions have become increasingly political recently because more “places” now bid to host teams and events. The selection of Olympic sites has always been political as clearly demonstrated by the site selection process and a vote-buying scandal involving the IOC and the Salt Lake Olympic Organizing Committee during the 1990s. As the stakes for hosting the Olympic Games have increased, bid committees have been willing to wine, dine, bribe, and pressure IOC members, whose votes determine which city is chosen as the host.

The politics of site selection also operate in many ways. For example, when Atlanta was selected to host the 1996 Games, it was clear to many people worldwide that the selection process was influenced by the television rights fees anticipated from NBC and the location of Coca-Cola’s international headquarters in Atlanta. Coca-Cola had a sixty-seven-year history of paying hundreds of millions of dollars to support the IOC and sponsor the Olympics, and IOC members felt indebted to the corporation. During the Games, the red-and-white Coke logo was so evident in Atlanta and Olympic venues that many observers described them as the “Coca-Colympics.”

The selection of Beijing, China, for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games involved political considerations and complex political processes. China was desperate to host the games because it wanted to showcase its culture, solicit tourism and business investments, and claim political legitimacy as a global power.

The members of the IOC selection committee were influenced by many considerations: China was home to nearly 20 percent of the world’s population, it had never hosted an Olympic Games, bringing Olympism to China would strengthen the Olympic movement, and the potential economic benefits of awarding the games to China were very high because corporate sponsors would see China as a prime site for capitalist expansion.

NBC, the U.S. network with the rights to televise the 2008 Games, saw China as an attractive site for marketing its coverage. NBC knew that by 2008 many Americans would be very interested in China because of its size, power, culture, and economic growth potential. NBC also knew it could use that interest to boost ratings and sell high-priced advertising time to transnational corporations.

Site bids for events such as Super Bowls, All-Star games, NASCAR races, the NCAA men’s and women’s basketball tournaments, and large international events may not cost as much as bids to host the Olympics, but they are just as political. In many parts of the world, these politics reflect environmental issues. For example, the use of open space or agricultural land for golf courses is being contested in Europe, Japan, and even North America. As one researcher claims, “golf has acquired the status of a four-letter word because of the havoc it has wrought across the globe.”

The former Global Anti-Golf Movement was fueled by widespread objections to the use of chemical fertilizers and massive water resources to keep grass soft and green for golfers representing the economic elite in societies. Ski resort expansion in North America, Europe, and Japan also has been resisted for environmental reasons. The organizers of the 2000 Sydney Games faced severe criticism when they failed in important ways to live up to the environmental principles developed by the original bid committee. Such examples highlight the fact that the politics of place in sports often involve local opposition to hosting events and building sports facilities.

## Who Is Eligible to Participate in a Sport?

Yamile Aldama was born in Cuba, she lives in London, and she is a citizen of Sudan; soon she will also be a British citizen. To make things more interesting, let’s imagine that she married a Jamaican and gave birth to a child in the United States. As an elite athlete, Ms. Aldama asks where her national team is because she wants to compete in the Olympics.

Such questions are increasingly common today as athletes have parents from different nations and a birthplace that differs from the nations where they live, train, attend school, or get married.

Who plays and who doesn’t is a hotly contested issue in sports. As people in governing bodies make eligibility decisions, they use criteria such as gender, age, weight, height, ability (and disability), place of residence, citizenship, educational affiliation, grade in school, social status, income, or even race and ethnicity to determine participation eligibility.

Although eligibility policies often are presented as if they were based on unchanging truths about human beings and sports, they are grounded in political agreements. This is true in local youth sport programs and the Olympics.

People often debate the seeming arbitrariness of eligibility rules. For example, NCAA eligibility rules are so complex that the organization publishes brochures and supplements explaining who may and may not play under various conditions.

Lawsuits are filed when people feel that they’ve been denied eligibility unfairly. High school students challenge eligibility rules when their families move from one school district to another and they are declared ineligible to play varsity sports. The “no pass, no play” rules in U.S. high school sports also are being debated.

Even in youth sports, there are frequent debates about the age and weight rules used to determine eligibility. These have increased as children of immigrants want to play youth sports and have none of the formal birth records that are routinely kept in the United States.

Athletes with disabilities regularly challenge rules prohibiting their participation in certain sports. Within events such as the Paralympics there are frequent debates about disability classifications and eligibility.

There are hundreds of other noteworthy cases of eligibility politics in amateur and professional sports. For example, eighteen-year-old basketball players may be denied an opportunity to make money playing in the NBA, but eighteen-year-old golfers can obtain their PGA or LPGA tour cards and win money in tournaments, and tennis players can earn prize money as young as fifteen years old.

The meanings given to age vary from one context to another as eligibility is determined. As global mobility increases, there will be more questions about eligibility as it is related to citizenship, nationality, and place of residence.

Amateur sports have long been the scene for debates over the meaning of *amateur* and who qualifies as an amateur athlete. Because these meanings are socially and politically determined, they change over time and from place to place. This is another reason why politics will always be a part of sports.

## How Are Rewards Distributed to Athletes and Others?

The distribution of rewards is an issue at all levels of sport participation. Coaches, league administrators, sportswriters, judges, team owners, arbitrators, tournament committees, and parents decide who will receive special commendations, certificates of accomplishment, trophies, scholarships, contracts, pay increases, and so on.

“Who gets what?” is a political question, and the answers are not always clear-cut. People discuss and sometimes argue about rewards. As the level of competition increases, so do the stakes associated with decisions. At the highest levels of competition, these decisions can involve massive amounts of money and status.

With the increased commercialization of sports, there are heated debates about the ways that revenues should be distributed among sports organizations, organization officials, owners and promoters, athletes, and others connected with sports. The political processes associated with the distribution of revenues in commercial sports are complex and never-ending. These processes take various forms and come to different resolutions in different countries and sports.

An important “who gets what?” issue in U.S. sports concerns pay for intercollegiate athletes. Why should a talented intercollegiate football player who risks his health and endures pain and injury while generating millions of dollars for his university be limited to receiving an athletic grant-in-aid worth only a fraction of what NFL players are paid? Why, until very recently, was this player not allowed to make money selling his image on shirts or coffee mugs, while the university uses his image to market everything from the school itself to merchandise with the university logo on it?

Athletes in revenue-producing sports say this is unfair; university spokespeople say that there is no fair way to pay all athletes who play on varsity teams, and no way to determine the dollar value of the contributions made by athletes in revenue-producing sports. Regardless of current policy, the debate will continue, and athletes will continue to lose unless they organize and obtain more power.

Other debates revolve around questions such as these: Why should professional sport team owners make more money than the best players on their teams? What percentage should agents receive when they negotiate player contracts? Why should prize money in a NASCAR race reflect how many times a driver has raced during a season in addition to how the driver finishes a race? Why should Olympic athletes not be paid for their participation when they collectively generate over a billion dollars during the Games? Why should the IOC receive 33 percent of the revenues from every Olympics, and why should the USOC receive 12.8 percent of the money paid by U.S. television companies for the rights to broadcast the Olympics (about $114 million in 2008) when the United States already has more athlete-training money than any other nation? Should athletes receive compensation when their images and uniform numbers are used in video games? These and hundreds of similar questions show that the “politics of rewards” are an integral part of sports.

Sometimes rewards involve status or prestige rather than money, such as being selected to a Hall of Fame or an All-American team. Even youth league teams have “politics of status” awards for “the most improved player of the year,” “the most valuable player,” “the most dedicated player,” and so on. When people agree on who should receive these awards, they forget that the selection process is political. It is only when they don’t agree that they complain about politics in sports.

# 10.2. Protests and boycotts: Politics and the Olympic Games

The Olympic charter tells the world that “No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas.” This was reaffirmed in 1936 when Avery Brundage, chairman of the U.S. Olympic Committee and later the president of the International Olympic Committee from 1945 to 1972, said: “One of the basic principles of the Olympic Games is that politics plays no part whatsoever in them.”

But history suggests otherwise, as nation-states have unceasingly used the games for political purposes. Additionally, there have been striking cases of political protests and boycotts through the history of the modern games, which began in 1896. Here are the major examples:

## 1922—Women protest against exclusion

Women were excluded from the first modern Games in Athens, Greece. In Paris in 1900 they were allowed to participate in sports such as swimming and archery because they were deemed by the men in the IOC to be “ladylike” sports; but were not allowed to participate in any of the track and field events, the most popular events in the games, which were deemed to be unladylike. Women protested with little success for the next twenty years (through games held in St. Louis, London, Stockholm, and Antwerp), and in 1922, led by Alice Milliat, a French athlete-activist, nearly 1,000 women track and field athletes held their own Women’s Olympics in Paris. By 1928, the IOC added a few track and field events for women into the Olympic Games, and most women ended their boycott of the games. But women have continued to struggle to the present day for full inclusion, leading the IOC to gradually add women’s events that were previously deemed “overly strenuous” for a woman’s body.

## 1920 and 1924—The IOC bans Germany

As punishment for its role in World War I, the IOC and other member nations ruled that Germany could not send teams to the games in Paris and Amsterdam. Additionally, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was banned in 1923 due to the Bolshevik revolution and the formation of a Communist government. As a result, the USSR and its major allies, including the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) did not send teams to the games until 1952 in Helsinki, Finland where it would have been strategically difficult to prevent the USSR, the second most powerful nation in the world at the time, from playing a role in the games being held only a few miles from its border.

## 1936—The Republic of Spain boycotts the “Nazi Games” in Berlin in 1936

The Olympic Games in Berlin remain a contentious issue for many people. With the Nazis in power and with their obvious commitment to racism, anti-Semitism, and military buildup, there was pressure exerted on many nations and the IOC itself to boycott the games. The only nation that boycotted was the new Republic of Spain that elected to hold an alternative People’s Olympics in Barcelona. However, fascists challenged the government of the new republic, and the ensuing civil war canceled the games in Barcelona, even after many athletes had already arrived ready to compete. (The war ended in 1939 with a new fascist government; one of the officers in that totalitarian government, Juan Antonio Samaranch, went on to be the president of the IOC from 1980–2001).

## 1956—Boycotts over communist repression and the Israeli invasion of Egypt

The Olympic Games in Melbourne, Australia were held as the heat of the Cold War was felt worldwide. An anti-communist revolt in Hungary had recently been quelled by a brutal response on the part of the Soviet Union (USSR); additionally, tensions in the “Middle East” reached a peak as the Israeli military invaded the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, which threatened the border of Egypt and the Suez Canal, which had been built by Egyptians. In response to brutal Soviet tactics in Hungary, the games were boycotted by Spain, Switzerland, and The Netherlands. At the same time, Egypt, Iraq, and Lebanon boycotted the games to protest Israeli military action and the crisis related to the Suez Canal and related disagreements with the United States over the control of the canal that was used to transport oil from the part of the world to the United States.

## 1964—The IOC bans South Africa from the games in Tokyo, Japan

Protests over the brutal racist apartheid regime in South Africa led the IOC to ban that nation from the Olympic movement in 1964. This wasn’t done only because Avery Brundage and the rest of the IOC objected to racism. They also feared boycotts and disruptions of the games as protests against South Africa grew worldwide.

## 1968—proposed boycott by the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR)

The 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City came at a time when worldwide awareness of civil rights abuses reached a high point. This awareness was especially intense in the United States where the civil rights movement was in full swing. San Jose State sociology professor/activist Harry Edwards and others organized the international OPHR and called for a global boycott of the 1968 games. The global boycott didn’t occur, but many high-profile African American athletes refused their invitations to the games. Others who competed in the games intended to voice public support for OPHR, but only Tommie Smith and John Carlos, medal winners in the 400-meter race, publicly protested on the podium with their infamous – now famous – bare feet and raised gloved fists. They were expelled from the Olympic Village and sent back to the United States where they were condemned for being political. But their fates were less dramatic than the fates of many college students in Mexico City; as they protested the use of public money to fund the games while Mexican poverty was stifling the rest of the nation, over 200 of them were gunned to death by the Mexican military.

## 1972 and 1976—Anti-apartheid boycotts

The 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, Germany were the scene of a terrorist attack by Palestinian commandos who kidnapped 11 Israeli athletes. Several African nations threatened a boycott over the IOC approval of participation in the games by teams from South Africa and Rhodesia, both of which maintained white racist regimes. However, the boycott was called off when the IOC expelled both nations from the Olympic membership. Commitment to a boycott was renewed before the 1976 games in Montreal, Canada over the anticipated participation of the national team from New Zealand, a nation that had officially sponsored a rugby tour of South Africa, despite an IOC ban against all sports competitions with South African teams. When New Zealand was not expelled, 28 nations, mostly from Africa, boycotted the Montreal games. Additionally, the Republic of China (Taiwan) withdrew from the 1976 games in Montreal because they refused to participate if the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was allowed to participate under the flag of China. Until 1976, the PRC had boycotted the Olympic Games because Taiwan was a participant. It wasn’t until the games in Moscow in 1980 that the PRC sent a national team to the games because Taiwan had joined with the United States to boycott the Moscow Games. But Taiwan participated in the 1984 games in Los Angeles because the PRC had joined the boycott led by the USSR and its allies. When Taiwan came to the games, they did so under the new name of “Chinese Taipei.”

## 1980—The United States and its allies boycott the games in Moscow

When troops from the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan without UN approval to quell terrorist activity (as the United States did in 2001), then-President Jimmy Carter stated that the United States would boycott the games in Moscow if Soviet troops were not withdrawn. The USSR maintained troops in Afghanistan, and the United States, along with 65 allied nations, refused to allow their national teams to compete in Moscow. This left only 81 nations to compete in Moscow, and the USSR suffered a massive debt due to the lack of tourism and television revenues. Twenty-nine of the boycotting nations held an event called the “Liberty Bell Classic,” also referred to as the Olympic Boycott Games, at the University of Pennsylvania. The Republic of China (Taiwan) boycotted the 1980 Winter Olympic Games in Lake Placid because they refused to use the name “Chinese Taipei.”

## 1984—The USSR and its allies boycott the games in Los Angeles

In a move to spite and get even with the United States, the USSR and its eastern-bloc allies, except for Romania, boycotted the games in Los Angeles and held their Friendship Games in Moscow where there were existing Olympic venues from four years earlier. Representatives of the United States convinced, coerced, and “bribed” its allies to participate in the games. The absence of teams from the USSR, East Germany, Cuba, and other sports powerhouses enabled the U.S. team to sweep a disproportionate number of medals. This created a chauvinistic fervor that turned the 1984 games into a major financial success – the largest in Olympic history, despite little competition for medals.

## 1988—Boycott over hosting the games in South Korea

When the 1988 games were awarded to Seoul, Korea, the regime in North Korea argued that they should be named as a co-host for the games. When this did not occur, North Korea along with Ethiopia and Cuba boycotted the games.

## 2000—Gender testing and a threatened boycott

A year before the games scheduled for Sydney, Australia in 2000, a delegation representing female athletes worldwide threatened the IOC with a boycott and a disruption of the games if it continued the practice of gender testing. The delegation was armed with scientific data proving the inadequacy of the tests and with support from major international sport governing bodies, such as those for soccer and track and field (FIFA and IAAF). The IOC feared violence over this issue, so they suspended the testing and said it would be done only in individual cases when there was a serious question about an athlete’s gender. Additionally, the IOC banned Afghanistan from sending a team due to the Taliban government’s repressive policies against women.

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***When Beijing, China hosted the 2008 Olympic and Paralympic Games many***

***people worldwide protested against China’s treatment of Tibet – something***

***that was not covered much in the media in the United States.***

## 2008—Threatened boycotts over China’s treatment of Tibet

Human rights activists worldwide were incensed when the IOC voted China as the host of the 2008 games. Protests around the world objected to China’s treatment of Tibet, but Tibet was used by many as a symbol of China’s larger record of human rights abuses. Although the protests involved millions of people around the world and disrupted the global torch run sponsored by China and the IOC, a boycott never materialized, mostly because many of the nations in which protests were held had less than shining human rights records – and there also was much money to be made on the games by people in those nations, especially the United States.

## 2014—Threatened boycott of games to be held in Sochi, Russia

The government of Georgia, a former republic of the USSR, announced in mid-2008 that it would recruit support for a boycott of the winter games in 2014. The games were hosted by Russia, which invaded the territory of Ossetia, a disputed part of Georgia that borders Russia and is an area through which a pipeline transports oil used in Europe and North American. The US supported Georgia because the pipeline would reduce US dependence on oil from western Asia – "the Middle East” – while avoiding contact with Iran and Russia.

# 10.3. There’s nothing so over as the World Cup

One of the perceived and publicized advantages of hosting a sport mega-event is the opportunity to invest in projects that will create a legacy – that is, things that will exist and benefit the population after the event is over.

There is one legacy that appears to be constant in connection with the World Cup (and the Olympic Games), and that is a massive public debt that will take years if not generations to pay off. The debt is so great in many cases that people who were not even born when it occurred will eventually pay taxes to pay off the debt.

When a country hosts the World Cup, it must have 10-12 stadiums that meet FIFA standards. It must have sufficient hotels located strategically to house nearly a million foreign visitors. It must have transportation infrastructure that can move people between the hotels and stadiums, and there must be a network of airports to handle people traveling from stadium to stadium as their World Cup teams play in different locations during the 4-week tournament.

Additionally, there must be tens of thousands of trained service workers and volunteers who can respond to the wants and needs of visitors, many of whom will not speak the native language, know local norms or feel comfortable with some local customs.

To convince the population of a country that the investment of their future taxes into such an event is warranted, promises are made about what will be left for them after the event is over. When boosters are initially promoting a bid to host the event and when money is allocated after a country is awarded the event, many promises are made about the event’s legacy and how the legacy will benefit everyone in the country.

But there is so much work, time, effort, and money that goes into the event that little or nothing is left after it is over. Promises about legacies cannot be kept. Money is gone, people are tired, motivation has long since disappeared, and memories of what was promised fade.

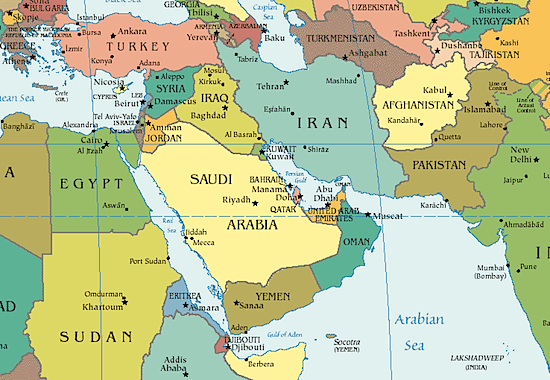
This is the way it was in South Africa in 2010 and Mumbai after the 2010 Commonwealth Games. It is also the way it was after the 2012 Olympics in London, the 2014 Olympics in Sochi (Russia), and in Brazil after the 2014 World Cup and in Rio de Janeiro after the 2016 Olympic Games.

In other words, there is nothing so over as the World Cup, the Olympic Games, and other mega-events.

# 10.4. Qatar and Slovenia: Two approaches to using sports as a developmental strategy

Many countries use sports as sites for public diplomacy, as vehicles for exporting and selling products, and as a way to generate national recognition worldwide. Long established nations with large populations have done this for over a century. And today, there are relatively new nations with small populations for which sport is seen as an attractive tool in international relations.

**Qatar** is a sovereign Arab emirate – that is, a nation long ruled by a Muslim monarch. It is located on the northeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula in Western Asia. It shares a border with only one other country – Saudi Arabia.



Qatar

***Qatar is a country slightly smaller than Connecticut in area. It has a population***

***of 2.1 million people – about one-half the population of Connecticut. Its***

***capitol city is Doha, which has a population of about just over 1 million people.***

***Can it use sport to create allies that will protect it if it is under external threat?***

Major oil and natural gas deposits means that Qatar enjoys the 2nd highest per capita GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in the world. Fourteen percent of Qatari households have assets of a million dollars or more, and in terms of purchasing power, Qatar is the wealthiest nation in the world.

Qatar’s population is about 2.1 million people, but less than 300,000 or 14 percent of them are citizens. The rest of the population consists of foreign workers who live there. Additionally, 20 percent of the citizens are members of the Al Thani family which rules the nation.

Despite its wealth, Qatar lacks a defense system that could protect it from external threats – that is, it lacks what political scientists call *hard power*. This means that Qatar needs allies that would come to its aid in the event of a threat – that is, they need to build *soft power*.

This is where sport enters the scene. The royal family decided that if Qatar could host a mega-event such as the FIFA men’s World Cup, the country could recruit allies that would come to its aid when needed. The first step in reaching this goal was achieved when they were named to host the 2022 World Cup. This, the Qataris hoped, would alter their place in international affairs and create valuable allies.



Qatar’s strategy appeared to be working as they received publicity after it was announced that it would host the 2022 World Cup. But as Qatar started to build the infrastructure needed to host the mega-event, they had to recruit close to one million workers from outside the country. Housing and hosting these workers has been a major challenge. Qatari citizens feel insecure, because they control the country and its resources but constitute only 12 percent of the population. If the other 88 percent made a move to acquire more power and resources, the wealth and culture of the native Qataris would be seriously threatened.

Immigrant workers in Qatar are under the direct control of Qatari managers. They have no rights, and they work and live under inhumane conditions. Reportedly, hundreds of Asian workers have died each of the last few years due to working and living conditions. Officials from the Indian embassy in Doha reported that during two weeks of extremely hot weather over 500 workers from their country died in Qatar.

As human rights groups, trade unions, International Labour Organization (ILO), and the United Nations Human Rights Council began to investigate how workers are being treated, their findings were publicized worldwide in 2013 and 2014, and Qatar faced a major threat to its integrity as a nation.

The members of the ruling Al Thani family wanted to retain control over the country, its culture, and its massive natural resources at the same time that they did not want to grant citizenship to immigrant workers who don’t think or act like them. This put them in a difficult position: They need the workers to complete the projects they promised would be ready for the World Cup, but they also desire approval from powerful international labor and human rights groups and the countries on which they are counting to build their soft power.

At this point, it appears that using sport as a developmental strategy has partially backfired. As an upcoming host of the World Cup, they have attracted attention forcing them to be more transparent and accountable for their treatment of workers – two things never before demanded of the royal family. Overall, the World Cup has shined such a bright light on Qatar that they must account for how they treat foreign workers who make up the vast majority of the population.

**Slovenia** is very different than Qatar. It is a parliamentary democracy with a mostly Catholic population of 2.05 million. It has been an independent nation since 1991 when it broke away from socialist-communist Yugoslavia. In 2007, it became a part of the European Union.

Slovenia is about the size of the state of New Jersey. It has impressive geography including mountains (the Slovenian Alps), coast along the Adriatic Sea, and beautiful forest and farmland. But few people worldwide know about it and it is often confused with Slovakia or thought to remain part of now-defunct Yugoslavia.

This is where sport enters the scene. Slovenian people have long enjoyed the outdoors and they have a tradition of Nordic and Alpine skiing, ski jumping, mountaineering, hiking, rowing, white-water canoeing along with soccer, ice hockey, gymnastics, team handball, volleyball, and basketball. For this reason, sports have been a part of the Slovenian national identity for the better part of the past century.

Now that Slovenia is a member of the European Union and its people have easy and full access to the global media, there is a tendency for some segments of the population to look to and identify with forms of mediated popular culture that originate outside the country. Additionally, Slovenia would like to be more fully recognized in global relations.

Sport has been viewed as a vehicle for moving the country forward. If its athletes and teams are successful in international competitions, citizens, as well as new immigrants will take pride in the country and be more apt to identify with it and make contributions to its growth and development. Similarly, people worldwide will learn more about Slovenia through the success of their athletes and teams.



***Slovenia is a country about the same size as the state of New Jersey. It has a***

***population of 2.05 million people – about 1/5th the population of New Jersey.***

***Its capital city is Ljubljana, which has a population of about 300,000. Can it***

***use sport to boost its national identity and recognition around the world?***

But is sport a better means of creating a national identity and global recognition than tourism, higher education and science, music and the arts, targeted economic and technology development, or simply a long-term marketing program that envelops a number of these things?

This is a difficult question to answer because finite resources are available and priorities between identity-generating strategies must be set. In recent years, athletes and teams from Slovenia have experienced a disproportionately large share of success in the Olympics, especially the Winter Games, and in various world championships. The soccer team from Slovenia came very close to beating the U.S. team in the 2010 men’s World Cup in Germany.

If you remember these successes and have learned about Slovenia in the process, then sport may be a worthwhile development strategy for the country. Until we have good data on this issue, it is hard to say if Slovenia should invest its resources to use sports in this way.

# 10.5. The soccer stadium as a political protest site: Looking back at the Arab spring

Beginning in December 2010 there was a succession of demonstrations, protests, riots, and civil wars throughout North Africa and Western Asia, often known as the Arab world. In most cases, these actions were directed at undermining the power of autocratic rulers at both national and local levels. People participating in these oppositional actions often used social media to plan, organize, and direct protests. Most of the demonstrations occurred in public squares and other centralized public spaces.

Often ignored in the media coverage of these demonstrations was the role played by soccer fans and soccer stadiums. Because soccer fans in this part of the world are formally associated with soccer clubs and have organized themselves into relatively cohesive groups, they had the social infrastructure to become involved in protests and other oppositional actions.

The members of these groups are young men who are concerned with their futures and how they have been affected by the policies of autocratic leaders. Because they attend and stand together at every game played by the team they follow, they use the soccer stadium as a space to plan, organize, and express their political sentiments.

The stadium is a relatively safe place to do this because fans have often been given wide normative latitude when it comes to expressing themselves. Additionally, the police have usually refrained from trying to disrupt these expressions because it would disrupt an event which is a central focus in the larger community or the nation as a whole. However, there often are confrontations between fan groups and the police in the areas outside of the stadium.

The use of stadiums as a public space for organizing and expressing positions on social and political issues in the Arab world has been described by James M. Dorsey, an award-winning, veteran journalist who has covered ethnic and religious conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America for the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Financial Times* and *Christian Science Monitor*.

Dorsey explains that organized fan groups, often called Ultras, have in many cities claimed the public space of the stadium as a site for organizing, planning, and expressing their opposition to political leaders. Soccer fans were a key component of the protests that eventually led to the ouster of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in early-2011. Today, those same fans continue to constitute one of the larger and most active civic groups in Egypt. They are committed to resisting coercive tactics of the Egyptian government.

Because sports events attract tens of thousands of spectators plus media coverage, it is difficult for police to control political displays if they occur inside a stadium. If the police or military respond with brutal control tactics, their actions merely reaffirm the validity of the oppositional displays.

Over time, some of the Ultra fan groups have become street battle-hardened militants who know how to resist the military and police that suppress political dissent with brutal and deadly force. Fan groups across the Arab world have engaged in similar resistance to government actions perceived as autocratic:

* Militant supporters of three rival soccer clubs in Istanbul, Turkey joined together with union members, leftists, and other government critics to protest the actions of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Numbering in the thousands, the fans have regularly marched in the city’s central square and faced off with police.
* With street protests outlawed in Saudi Arabia, soccer stadiums have become the scene of protests by Shiite Muslims and supporters of imprisoned critics of the government. This worries the Saudi ruling families because the stadiums are more significant gathering places than the mosques, especially for young people who oppose the government.
* A sports journalist in Iran described soccer stadiums as being as important as the Internet in facilitating opposition to the government. The police can’t stop the protesters because there are so many of them in the stadium. To mute the impact of their vocal expressions of opposition, the government has ordered those games be televised without sound.
* Fans in Algeria have used the stadium as a protest point because it is difficult for police to isolate organizers in a space that has always been a sanctuary for free expression. The nationwide focus on soccer prevents the police from violent crackdowns for fear that the general population will object.
* Veteran journalist James Dorsey writes in his blog, *The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer*, that soccer stadiums throughout North Africa and the Middle East have become breeding grounds for political protests and insurrections. He notes that the mood of the people in many of these countries can be assessed by observing the fans at soccer games. Mass protests can be predicted by listening to the fans’ expressions of dissatisfaction and pent-up anger as they long for more open societies.

These examples may seem strange to people in North America where fans have seldom expressed political attitudes or positions inside stadiums. But sports are organized around local clubs in much of the rest of the world, and this immerses them in civic society in a way that does not occur in North America where professional sports teams are owned and controlled by wealthy individuals.

Therefore, spectators attend games as individual consumers rather than members of civic organizations tied to the larger community. This makes it difficult for them to engage in any collective actions other than cheering for their team and deriding the opposing team. This may make them feel unified, but this unity is so superficial that it doesn’t lead to any substantive political expression or action.

**Note:** Material in the latter half of this reading is drawn largely from the reporting of James M. Dorsey who uses soccer as a lens for investigating current events in North Africa and the Middle East. His blog/column, [*The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer*](http://mideastsoccer.blogspot.com/) is an invaluable source of information on the role of soccer in national and local politics.