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# Global games: culture, political economy and sport in the globalised world of the 21st century

## JOHN NAURIGHT

ABSTRACT During the past three decades sport has assumed an ever greater role within the globalisation process and in the regeneration of national, regional and local identities in the postcolonial and global age. With much of global culture displayed by the media, events, particularly significant sporting ones such as the Olympic Games or the soccer World Cup, have become highly sought after commodities as developed countries, and increasingly some leading developing countries, move towards event-driven economies. In the process, however, many countries are left behind without the necessary infrastructure or visibility to compete successfully. Furthermore, the process of displaying a culture in the lead-up to an event and during the event itself has had to focus on ready-made markets, thus reinforcing stereotypes about a place and its people. This paper discusses the paradoxes and inequalities brought on by the sport-media-tourism complex that drives the emphasis on global sporting events.

Since World War II and the advent of the television age there have been significant transformations in sport and sporting cultures (see Whitson, also in this issue). During the 1980s and 1990s this process intensified as governments increasingly diverted large sums of money into national sporting programmes aimed at succeeding on the international stage. As demonstrated in Australia, countries with the resources to dedicate to elite programmes can generate a greater profile through sporting successes in international competition. Sportive nationalism intensified in the late 20th century as states sought ways to position themselves in the global hierarchy of nations.<sup>1</sup> The number of nations that can spend the necessary resources on elite sporting programmes across the board, however, is limited to a small minority of the over 200 participants in the Olympic Games and nations must often choose whether to divert limited public resources into supporting international sporting success or the attraction of international sporting events.

During the 1990s and early 2000s media corporations invested at unprecedented levels in sporting coverage and team/league ownership, particularly as pay television companies became global entities and media corporations sought

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cheap and ready-made programming.<sup>2</sup> In the case of rugby league this led to one media corporation virtually buying the entire sport globally. In rugby union the result was near immediate professionalisation, while in soccer greater media ownership fostered expanding pan-European competitions, premier leagues and the concentration of wealth among high profile European clubs to the detriment of smaller clubs in Europe and leading clubs in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Media magnate Rupert Murdoch, for example, almost succeeded in adding the world's best known sports brand, Manchester United, to his stable of sports and clubs.<sup>3</sup> Soon afterwards, however, United formed a marketing partnership with the USA's most successful franchise, the New York Yankees, to synergise the global marketing strategies of these two brands.

Sports and sporting events have become integral components of a global political economy, which has seen production shift from developed to less developed societies and an expanding focus in the developed world on the 'branding', 'theming' and consumption of image and lifestyle.<sup>4</sup> From the restyling of individual matches as entertainment extravaganzas to specialised tournaments like the Olympic Games, sporting competitions have become spectacles as they compete with other leisure activities for the consumer dollar. In addition, these large-scale events have become key factors in local and national development strategies. In this process traditional sports fans, local communities and democratic practices are often ignored as growth is promoted, and business and governments align in support of events-driven economies.<sup>5</sup>

#### Sporting events and competing interests: a level playing field?

Increasingly, major sporting competitions and tournaments are regarded as 'events' to be 'marketed' and 'managed', and terms such as 'hallmark' and 'mega' suggest that size really does matter.<sup>6</sup> The lure of large and spectacular events is thought to be an expedient way to attract media interest in a host city, which, it is hoped, will translate into an influx of capital through tourism and new investment.<sup>7</sup> At the same time sporting events have begun incorporating cultural elements, such as opera and art exhibitions, in an effort to present themselves as broader events. These events are commonly used in tourist promotions to present cities and nations as exciting destinations with interesting cultures for tourists to consume. It is appropriate, therefore, in the 21st century to speak of a sport-media-tourism complex that is at the centre of many local, regional and national development strategies. Although this process has been highly uneven and confined principally to Europe, North America, Australia and, more recently, Japan, developing economies such as Mexico, Brazil, South Korea, Malaysia, India, South Africa and others have increasingly sought major events by which to promote their countries on a global stage.

Mega-events have differential long-term financial and social benefits for various groups in host communities. Post-apartheid South Africa provides a useful example of the way that large-scale sporting events have been sought in an effort to promote tourism and economic development. South Africa bid unsuccessfully for the 2004 Olympics and 2006 soccer World Cup (see Swart and Bob, and Cornelissen in this issue) following its successful hosting of the

1995 Rugby World Cup (RWC) and 1996 Africa Cup of Nations soccer tournament. Recently South Africa was awarded the 2010 soccer World Cup. The 1995 RWC was presented as bringing together 'a world in union' in a 'rainbow nation' finally free from the vestiges of apartheid. Desperate to stimulate foreign investment, the African National Congress-led government supported a tournament in a sport that remained central to the identities of the white minority, and which had traditionally alienated black South Africans.<sup>8</sup>

In an effort to unite the nation behind the national rugby team, an 'inclusive' theme song, 'Shosholoza', was chosen for the Springbok team. Yet, ironically, the song was traditionally sung by migrant workers as they travelled from Zimbabwe to work in South African mines. Thus, a workers' song sung by men who went to their early deaths in the gold mines was a central cultural element in the presentation of the new and unified South Africa.<sup>9</sup> While the event and ultimate victory of the national team succeeded in temporarily bringing South Africans together across massive cultural divides, the terms of engagement were clearly one-sided and the national euphoria proved illusory.

The organisation of the RWC ceremonies presented South Africa in ways that resonated with white rugby supporters. Ceremony architect Merle McKenna tried to create a ceremony that would 'make every South African feel proud and that was difficult because we are so diverse'.<sup>10</sup> In the final product history was eliminated from the display: timeless African 'natives' appeared clad in traditional dress and were paraded in after the African wildlife segment. As John Newsinger argues, 'Darkest Africa is a powerful metaphor for the white man's own repressed fears which he embodies in the form of the peoples and creatures that inhabit its vast unfathomed forests.'<sup>11</sup> South African novelist and University of Cape Town Professor of English, JM Coetzee, wrote a detailed critique of the RWC and its representations shortly after the tournament's conclusion. Coetzee acknowledged the brief moment of unity created by the Springboks yet described the entire event as 'a month-long orgy of chauvinism and mime-show of war among nations'. He argued that the making of history in the new South Africa is so contentious that the organisers decided to be 'history-less'. The ceremonies:

presented a de-historicized vision of Tourist South Africa: contented tribesfolk and happy mineworkers, as in the old South Africa, but purified and sanctified, somehow, by the Rainbow. When it got to the paler end of the spectrum, however, it found that it could not proceed without becoming, intermittently, not only a pageant but an historical pageant as well. And so to the procession of timeless Sotho in blankets and timeless Zulu in ostrich feathers it had to add what looked very much like happy eighteenth-century slaves and slaveowners in knee-breeches, bearing baskets of agricultural produce to the Rainbow feast.<sup>12</sup>

Vicky Paraschak shows that the presentation of native peoples in the four Canadian Olympic and Commonwealth Games ceremonies held between 1976 and 1994 all likewise portrayed native cultures in a 'pre-history' state.<sup>13</sup>

Coetzee's critique lamented not only the absence of history, but also that South Africa was constructed in the RWC ceremonies in the voice of the foreigner, in images and packaging more reminiscent of American hype than South African realities. He argued further that: 'Now that rugby has fallen into the hands of an international cartel embracing a "philosophy" of growth, we can expect the inherent intellectual muddle of the Rainbow Project to be compounded by floods of images of South Africa as an exotic sports-tourism destination, different certainly, but only in a piquant, easily digested way.'<sup>14</sup>

The case of the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics in 2002 is further evidence of the packaging of an imagined vision of local culture for global consumption. The focus of broadcasters and image makers upon the Mormon history and identity of the city and the state of Utah was misrepresentative. Despite the presence of the Mormon Tabernacle of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in the city centre, only some of the inhabitants of Salt Lake City belong to the Mormon Church. In contrast to the South African RWC case, history was not written out, but rather *a* history was written *in*, one that prioritised the Mormon migration to the West in general, and Utah in particular, at the expense of non-Morman Utahans. This demonstrates how global sports events can lead to the promotion of imagined, partial and fictional representations of local identities and histories. Whether it be 'timeless natives' or an in-group-focused history, ceremonies have done little to alter pre-existing stereotypes about places and peoples.

Imagined histories and the incorporation of cultural difference within the production of events is now commonplace. The process of appropriating indigenous cultures to brand destinations is a significant feature in postcolonial settler societies. South Africa differs in that the aboriginal peoples are the majority, although South Africa's global tourism and investment marketing strategies are still largely shaped with a predominantly white Western audience in mind. It will be interesting to see whether alternative visions of South Africa and South Africans can be sold successfully to the international market by the time of the 2010 soccer World Cup, when South Africa will receive its largest and most sustained level of international attention since the anti-apartheid struggles of the 1980s.

Dean MacCannell argues that the global system and its dominant ideologies are the products of several centuries of development, particularly of 'white culture'. He argues further that, within this white culture, 'ethnicity' is the only form that indigenous groups can assume in order to be part of the totality of white culture.<sup>15</sup> This 'ethnicity' has also become a powerful marketing tool in the branding of destinations as exotic through ceremonies surrounding major sporting and other events, advertising and in the promotion of ethno-tourism, as the South African and Canadian cases of major event ceremonies have clearly demonstrated. Just how to interact with this historical reality while selling destinations during events and for investment is a dilemma that South Africa and any other society hosting a major global event faces (see van der Westhuizen, and Dimeo and Kay in this issue).

'Ethnicity' has become significant in event marketing and destination branding, with bid and organising committees increasingly seeking to harness previously excluded groups when promoting events. An indication of this trend took place in Sydney during the lead-up to the 2000 Olympics. Organisers of Sydney's Olympic bid used Aborginal Australians in their campaign for the Games, sending Aborigines to perform at the bid presentation. The then Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Deputy Commissioner Sol Bellar argued that the performers were 'tourist curios—like koalas and kangaroos'.<sup>16</sup>

Sydney's Olympic bid documents emphasised that Aboriginal peoples and multicultural communities fully supported the bid and would be included through an Olympic cultural programme.<sup>17</sup> The Aboriginal human rights campaigner and former government bureaucrat Charles Perkins was appointed to the Sydney bid committee and he and Aboriginal tennis great Evonne Goolagong-Cawley were used in Sydney's formal presentation to the International Olympic Committee in 1993. Through the incorporation of many leading Aborginal personalities the bid committee sought to pre-empt any protests. At the time of the 2000 Games many groups-ethnic communities in particular-were not given the chance to contribute effectively to the decision making for cultural programming. As Darren Godwell points out, no Aboriginal Australian was included as one of the directors for the bid or on the subsequent Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG). Rather, SOCOG created the National Indigenous Advisory Committee (NIAC) and developed a list of Aboriginal 'elders' to liaise with indigenous communities. SOCOG also created a Multicultural Commission but, as with NIAC, its role was merely advisory and poorly adjusted to the changeable agendas of decision makers.<sup>18</sup>

Once they reach local communities, sporting events are about much more than merely boosting tourism, local investment and employment, however. They can provide opportunities to challenge dominant social structures. For example, from the moment the Games were awarded to Sydney, local resident groups and indigenous people more broadly responded.<sup>19</sup> Protests and meetings took place in the lead-up to the Games; yet these voices were quickly silenced within Australian public debate. Indeed, many academics and universities decided to pursue a largely uncritical stance, choosing rather to exploit the presence of the Games and Australia. The University of New South Wales, for example, purchased a corporate box at Stadium Australia, the main Olympic venue, in order to entertain officials from leading international universities.<sup>20</sup>

Internationally, however, a critical eye turned to Australia and its policies towards Aboriginal Australians and its treatment of asylum-seeking boat people. Without the Olympic focus there would have been much less international awareness of these issues. Australian Olympic, business and governmental figures clearly anticipated this possibility and attempted to forestall or silence internal opposition. In the run-up to the Sydney Games, Australian Prime Minister John Howard labelled protests an 'un-Australian' hindrance to promoting a successful Games as evidence of Australian unity of will, spirit and expertise, and of its love-affair with sport. In promoting national characteristics for domestic and international consumption, Howard and other public figures placed sport at the centre, thus helping to legitimate the vast sums of public money diverted into the elite athlete production system and the building of facilities and infrastructure to support the Games.<sup>21</sup>

Howard's reaction demonstrates that nationalism is often harnessed to reduce difference and promote commonality of purpose in imagining the nation for global consumption. Joseph Maguire's study of globalisation and sport concludes by speculating on the tensions between the global, national and local. As Maguire argues, 'a question that arises is whether...as a result of Europeanization and globalization, I/we [in the sense of individual and collective] national identities are being strengthened, weakened, or pluralized'. Drawing upon Hall and Cohen, Maguire speculates on the potential for globalisation to provoke an 'ethnically assertive and defensive nationalism'.<sup>22</sup> More research is needed to test Maguire's assertion, although it is clear that attempts to promote national identities through events such as Sydney 2000 or international soccer tournaments are often narrow and nationalistic. Importantly, Maguire argues that globalised sport can lead to a strengthening of local cultures by re-marketing the same global product within a new niche. While the brand may be global, the sell is local.

Globalisation does not produce homogenisation; quite the contrary. Globalisation reveals the inadequacy of sameness as communities assert their uniqueness, although this process is uneven and is often produced by conservative impulses launched from above. In discussing the concept of 'glocalisation', Roland Robertson argues that what is known as the 'local' is 'in large degree constructed on a trans- or super-local basis'.<sup>23</sup> The assertion that global sport can yield a greater opportunity to re-image the local seems crucial to the importance of hosting prestigious sporting events (see Black and van der Westhiuzen in this issue). As the most fully global example of a localised event, the Olympic Summer Games is championed as a means to entirely reinventing a city, as has been argued in the cases of Barcelona 1992, Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000.<sup>24</sup>

In many cases the bid to host international events takes place as part of a national strategy where more than one city in a nation initially submits a bid, as is the case for the European Capital of Culture event under the auspices of the European Commission. The UK was selected as host for 2008, and British authorities were left to choose the city that would be honoured with the title. Twelve UK cities applied. In the lead up to the selection process for the 2012 Olympics, the US Olympic Committee (USOC) ran an internal competition in which at least 10 cities or groups of cities vied for the USOC's support, some of which had already established organising committees and websites as early as 1997, some 15 years out from the event.

Sporting events provide opportunities to try and force a sense of community through a collection of values that often has little to do with the people who are supposed to adopt them. Arguably, the values associated with the Olympics—humanity, peace, fair play—are easily transferable between communities. Indeed, this is an important reason why the Olympic Games are able to sustain a collective and unified veneer of support from one city to the next. In principle, the broad liberal values of the Olympic Movement allow for the appearance of a unified community, consolidated by the celebration of sport, culture and the environment, the three dimensions of Olympism.<sup>25</sup> In practice, however, the Olympic Games deal in global values that are external to local communities and which are unable to reflect their particularities. The consequences are an event that is valued more for its financial pay-off than for worldly ideologies, although each host city does seek to differentiate itself from previous hosts.

Global cities increasingly resemble one another in terms of their architectural

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features and the services provided, and yet individual identities are 'imagineered'.<sup>26</sup> Multinational corporations are aware of this and 'micromarket' their products differentially to consumers in various locales because diversity sells. Cities employ major spectacles to promote their national and global images, thereby differentiating themselves from other cities in the hope of attracting new investment and tourism and gaining competitive advantage over rivals. As with the promotion of host venue uniqueness, diverse traditions are constructed and even invented to sell products and promote tourism.<sup>27</sup> This strategy is also employed through professional sporting teams located in cities.

#### Commodification, community and resistance

During the 1980s and 1990s rapid changes in the organisation and function of professional sports leagues matched the focus on events as central elements in urban economic regeneration. In North America this led to a bidding war between cities for new and existing sporting franchises, while in Europe new stadiums were built to replace dilapidated grounds that were in many cases nearly a century old. This process was in many cases linked to bids for major events such as the building of the Stade de France in Paris for the 1998 Football World Cup. As part of this process of change, sporting leagues sought to attract greater corporate interest and increase the broader appeal of particular events by selling them as wider leisure experiences.

In the late 1980s the English Football Association (FA) published its *Blueprint* for the Future of Football, which promoted the conversion of 'going to a match' on a Saturday into having 'integrated leisure experiences'.<sup>28</sup> The FA envisaged that, in the style of North American sport, future attendees at football matches would be attracted by a festive atmosphere. At a cursory level this approach appeared successful. In the post-1990 Taylor Report era of stadium reform in England, many long-serving grounds were abandoned and modern facilities were constructed to meet the Report's requirements following the 1989 Hillsborough Stadium disaster in Sheffield. Attendances increased as the game's image improved, and stadiums were transformed in the public mind from being sites of hooligan battles to venues for family entertainment. This change resulted in a near tenfold increase in ticket prices, which placed significant strains on the ability of working-class men, football's primary constituents, to sustain regular attendance. Pay television operators and clubs capitalised on this by trying to convert many to virtual spectatorship. During the 2001–02 season, for example, Sky TV offered special pay-per-view packages for Premier League matches at £8-£12, well in excess of 1980s ticket prices.

In the process of branding football, clubs in England have taken steps to diversify their product and sell a wide range of leisure and entertainment activities and financial services to their supporters. Manchester United has an official e-betting site (Coral Eurobet) where punters can wager on matches, while their main website advertises the Manchester United Visa Card under the slogan 'share in our success, carry the card of champions'. The promotion of the club's financial services further entices its supporters to enlist: 'you've supported us all the way, now it is our turn to support you!'.<sup>29</sup> Before reaching the supporter

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pages of the Leeds United website, web-browsers are directed via the Leeds Television home page, where fans can subscribe to one of two pay channels to watch Leeds United. The club also has its own official betting site, travel and financial services.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Chelsea offers its supporters an on-line TV service, as well as travel and financial services including loans, insurance, credit cards and savings accounts.<sup>31</sup> The Liverpool FC television website advertises an e-season ticket for a cost of 11 pence a day. The club also organises weddings in themed rooms named after Liverpool legends or great moments in club history.<sup>32</sup> These clubs all operate their e-channels in conjunction with Sky and are not permitted to broadcast FA Cup footage while the BBC holds the rights.

At the same time cyberspace has provided opportunities for football fans to create new supporter networks and in several cases has enabled supporter associations to mobilise support for clubs under threat. In the mid-1990s the supporters' club of Brighton and Hove Albion used the internet to distribute posters, to arrange boycotts of team matches and to organise a national campaign to ensure the future of their team in Brighton, particularly after the team's matches were relocated some 70 miles away to Gillingham.<sup>33</sup> On a larger scale fans of the Cleveland Browns team in the US National Football League (NFL) ran perhaps the largest e-campaign to date in their opposition to the relocation of 'their' team to Baltimore in 1995. The fans' efforts resulted in the NFL awarding an expansion franchise to Cleveland, and the new Browns began playing in 1999.<sup>34</sup> Supporter campaigns have had some success in mobilising support against mergers and relocations; however, the main structures of the media–sport complex remain largely unscathed.

#### Reward and alienation in the age of cyberspace

It is slowly being realised that the extraordinary integration of sport with global capitalism and its transparent dependence upon commercial sponsorship is alienating to local communities, as supporters of many professional sporting teams can attest. As with supporters fighting to protect their teams and spectating spaces, new possibilities of electronic communication are enabling campaigns of resistance and challenge, such as the international campaign against Nike's production practices. Examples of e-petitions and informative websites provide powerful tools that have forced responses from corporations such as Nike, and organisations such as the NFL in the USA. Regardless of whether such technology allows for the possibility of democratising power, the Internet has provided a feeling of excitement about individual capability and what new technology can offer for enhancing communication between disparate groups and individuals. The cyber-community is thriving and makes possible connections in sport that previously did not exist. However, the spread of Internet technologies is highly uneven and serves to reinforce differences between developed and developing countries and segments of populations within countries.

We advocate championing the local over the global in discussing the current state and future possibilities for sport. The social study of events reveals the ongoing need for a broader social scientific approach that challenges the dominant managerial/marketing model of engaging with events and sports operations. New technologies of communication can provide the impetus for change, although at the same time sporting organisations and media corporations are also responding to new possibilities in efforts to further commodify spectating practice. It is important, therefore, to continue to explore the impact of new technologies on sport and spectators before making concrete assessments.<sup>35</sup>

#### Conclusion

As sport emerged out of the 20th century significant structural changes, which accelerated during the 1980s and 1990s, were evident. Teams in professional sporting competitions in developed countries no longer generated the majority of their income from ticket and other sales at the stadium, while spectating practices increasingly were relocated from live viewing to televised consumption. Direct media ownership of clubs and franchises, leagues, events and tours became common by 2000 as leading media companies attempted to corner global communication markets.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, newer and originally alternative physical practices became increasingly 'sportised', mediated and linked to productive and consumptive practices within these new sport forms. As Rinehart argues, the US-based ESPN sports network constructed an audience through its production of the eXtreme Games, begun in 1995, which subsequently developed a global following. Rinehart argues that ESPN drew on accepted television sport coverage practices in constructing a 'sport-familiar terrain for viewers'.<sup>37</sup> Several new sportised forms have been included in the Winter Olympics in efforts to attract new audiences, and skateboarding has followed surfing and snowboarding into structured national and international competitions.

The dramatic changes to sport have pitted economic restructuring against cultural reproduction, as Ian Andrews posits in his analysis of Australian football since 1960. Following Gramsci, Andrews argues that 'traditional cultural and ideological elements exert an influence in the short term, but...are typically rendered impotent in the face of relentless economic forces'.<sup>38</sup> Bob Stewart and Aaron Smith argue that identities that were once based on locality have been 'superseded by identities based on a club's profile or corporate personality, star players, team colours or theme songs...[the] result of strong brand identification'.<sup>39</sup> Thus changes in the political economy of Australian sport have echoed those outlined by Gruneau and Whitson in their analysis of Canadian ice hockey, as sport-fuelled identity is refocused on the consumption of commodities sold as sporting brands.<sup>40</sup>

The branding of destinations as desirable sites for new investment and tourist consumption has included sport and sporting events as key elements of new economic development strategies. Janiskee argues that we live in an age of special events.<sup>41</sup> It is no coincidence that Brand Australia was launched in 1995 less than two years after Sydney was awarded the 2000 Olympic Games. A three-year advertising campaign began in 1998 to maxmise potential returns linked to Sydney's hosting of the Olympics and to draw together Brand Australia, the Olympic Brand and the brands of Olympic sponsors.<sup>42</sup> Under this

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approach, the integration of brands capitalises on the heightened awareness generated by a major event such as the Sydney Olympics and focuses on the development of positive experiences for the visitor that synergies between brands can generate. Sporting events are particularly attractive in this context as they can evoke powerful imagery and elicit emotional responses from spectators.

This is not an easy process, however, as it is difficult to create a global brand beyond pre-held notions of what 'Sydney' or 'Australia' is. Countries with a much lower level of global visibility, particularly in the developing world, face an increasingly uphill battle as the global sport–media–tourism complex solidifies. For example, the combined *annual* income of Tiger Woods for 2003 was US\$76.6 million, while Bhutan's Gross Domestic Product amounted to \$68 million. Multi-year baseball, basketball, American football and European soccer contracts now surpass gross domestic products of countries such as Belize and Botswana, and this is money paid to a single athlete. The value of leading sport franchises such as Real Madrid, Manchester United or the New York Yankees exceeds the GDP of many developing nations such as Paraguay, Honduras or Zambia to name but a few.<sup>43</sup>

In the 21st century sport is an integral part of an increasingly global sport-media-tourism complex that is vastly uneven within and between societies. While resistance to the global expansion and consolidation of media- and event-driven sport is possible, and indeed at times successful, it is clear that the international organisation and presentation of sport serves the interests of global, national and local elites—the cosmopolitans. Sports spectators and participants, on the other hand, are increasingly removed from the sporting product, whether by spatial relocation driven by the need for newly constructed sporting spaces for major events, relocation of teams to larger cities, increasing continentalisation of competitions, or new mediated sport forms.

#### Notes

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