POLI20900 Politics Research Project

The role of sport in British diplomacy

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**Abstract**

Sport and diplomacy have been interlinked since the early days of mankind and the history of this relationship is rich; but in the case of the United Kingdom, it is yet under-explored academically. This paper will seek to understand whether the gap in the literature reflects a wider gap in the practice of sport diplomacy by the United Kingdom. Using the 2012 London Olympics as a reference, it will explore the use of sport in British diplomacy across history prior to, during, and after the Olympics in order to understand to what extent sport has been consciously used in British diplomacy and how effective this relationship has been. It will then provide an informed comment on the potential for sports diplomacy in the modern British diplomatic context.

**Introduction**

For decades, the discussion of sports diplomacy has been a synonym with table tennis. In April 1971, the visit of the US Table Tennis team to China marked the first time an American delegation set foot in Beijing since 1949. The ensuing exchanges paved the way for a visit by National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger to China in July 1971 and later a visit by President Richard Nixon in February 1972. What started with a mere sporting exchange led to a rapprochement between the two countries and the 1970s ping pong diplomacy became the paradigm of what sport can do for the statesmen.

However, the relationship between sport and diplomacy is much richer than that particular episode alone, and it goes well beyond the ping pong table. For example, during the Ancient Olympiad, a cultural and sporting festival which lasted from 776 BC to 394 AD, the Truce was an ideal that offered athletes and fans travelling to the games protection. It also “forbade all states participating in the games to take up arms, to pursue legal disputes or to exercise death penalties” for the duration of the event (Scrambler 2005, 15). In the sixteenth century, King François I of France and Henry VIII of England along with their aides would meet for a period of two weeks to compete in a series of archery and wrestling activities. The purpose was to reduce tensions and strengthen bonds following the Anglo-French treaty of 1514 (Mattingly 1938). Despite the often proclaimed idea that sports, politics and diplomacy do not mix, evidence from across history suggests that they do and have done for a long time.

Much has been written on the politics of sports, sports as foreign policy and the politicization of sporting events. However, the association of international sport and diplomacy was until recently largely unexplored in international relations with the exception of a few episodic, mostly anecdotal case-studies which concerned familiar topics such as ping pong diplomacy or sport in apartheid South Africa. Recent works, however, have invigorated the field, filling theoretical gaps and organizing frameworks that can provide a base for further enquiry.

Sports diplomacy’s potential is vast, particularly in the modern diplomatic environment. The forces of globalization mean that diplomacy now involves a range of new players and is characterized by a plethora of different layers and networks, which have been described as “polylateral” (Wiseman 1999), “multistakeholder” (Hocking 2006), “volatile and intensive” (Rana 2011). Traditional diplomatic services are being forced to reform, adapt and experiment. In this sense, the use of sports diplomacy can change the image of a country’s diplomacy from elite, aloof, “out-of-date” (Murray 2012, 581), “dead” (Ramsay 2006) and “fossilized” (Modelski 1972) to fresh, advanced, proactive, original and transparent. Soft power, the term coined by Joseph Nye which describes the use of influence and persuasion as opposed to coercion in international relations, is now seen as a serious matter. Soft power initiatives in areas that were until recently regarded as niche such as art, culture and indeed sport can be seen as valuable and powerful tools which promote a country’s identity abroad.

Sports diplomacy can tap into areas where traditional forms of diplomacy do not reach. Sport has a worldwide audience and speaks a universal language. As Walters (2007) notes:

“Only certain cultures or segments of society show strong interest in speaking English, travelling to the United States, attending a classical music event, or participating in a discussion on human rights. On the other hand, virtually all cultures and all citizens have an interest in and appreciation for sport. This makes it one of the best methods for exchange – especially for diplomats operating in an age when the opinions of foreign publics are so crucial for success.”

When consciously and effectively managed by governments, sports diplomacy can spread positive ideals, break down cultural barriers, change stereotypes, reduce animosity and enhance development. It is also “low-risk, low-cost and high profile” (Keech and Houlihan 1999).

Sport can bring old enemies together, as in the 2002 Football World Cup, which was successfully co-hosted by Japan and South Korea. It can change international perceptions of a country and communicate a rejuvenated identity, as happened for China following the Beijing 2008 Olympics. And it can effectively stop wars, as happened during the 1966 Football World Cup, the first one broadcast on television, when soldiers on both sides of the colonial wars in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea would effectively stop fighting to watch their heroes play (Vasconcelos 2004). As US Secretary of State John Kerry states: “Anywhere I go, either in South Sudan, Indonesia or Afghanistan, all you need is a ball.” (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs 2014).

The sporting and diplomatic institutions are also highly compatible. Diplomats and international sportspeople are both an elite group who go abroad for their countries, representing a home audience and showcasing their values and abilities. Both are a manifestation of a world where civility and order must prevail but winning is privileged above almost anything else and mediocrity is not tolerated. What sportspeople do in the stadium, diplomats do in grand governmental buildings, both competing in challenging atmospheres according to sets of rules, strategies and opponents. “Boots instead of briefcases, but diplomats still”, as a newspaper title during the 1950 Football World Cup read. (Rofe 2015).

On the other hand, a number of theoretical and practical challenges to sports diplomacy exist. Soft power is a notoriously difficult concept to measure, which makes the job difficult for diplomats eager to experiment with sports diplomacy but who want to report to their governments with career-advancing results. Moreover, sportspeople and diplomats both go abroad for their countries, but the clamor and almost war-like adrenalin of the stadium can hardly compare to the quiet and peacefully-conducted events at the embassy. While in sport winning is everything, in diplomacy it is often the mutually beneficial agreements that work best.

Controversial behavior by sportspeople, too, can often have a negative international impact. An example of that is the polemic friendship between former NBA star Dennis Rodman and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, whom Rodman calls “an awesome guy” (*The Telegraph* 2013). Doping, cheating and gambling are also all part of the sports environment and do not bode well with diplomatic expectations. Furthermore, the sporting public is the most important component in sports diplomacy and yet the most unpredictable one. During the 2004 Asian Football Cup, hosted by China, Chinese fans sang racist songs against the Japanese and displayed banners reading “Look into history and apologize to the Asian People” and “Return the Diaoyu Islands!” (Manzenreiter 2008, 423). For them, a positive international political image is of no concern and politicians largely “remain ignorant of the true nature of sport” and its fierce, unapologetic environment (Redeker 2008, 499). Issues like hooliganism can further impact on the security of athletes and fans, even turning sport into a stage for crime.

There are also several inherent theoretical questions to the field: sport and diplomacy do mix, but should they mix? Do the benefits offset the dangers of mixing the two? What exactly is a sport? Where should the boundaries of government influence in sport be? There is no clear answer to these, and the literature on sports diplomacy is only now beginning to tap into some of its most fundamental questions.

When looking at the relationship between sport and diplomacy, it is also important to distinguish between two different areas of sports diplomacy. The first, which can be called “diplomacy of international sport”, is the more traditional one, where governments consciously use international sport for diplomatic purposes – for example by employing athletes in public diplomacy initiatives or hosting particular events which can be used to spread a diplomatic message. The second one is less familiar, and in contrast can be named “international sport as diplomacy”. It involves diplomatic activity conducted by a range of non-state actors as a result of the existing international sporting environment.

It is important to note that this paper takes a traditional approach. It will use a definition of sports diplomacy as a concept which falls under the umbrella of public diplomacy and involves diplomatic activity taken by sports people on behalf of or in association with their governments, for the purpose of communicating with foreign publics and creating a favorable image abroad which is more conductive to achieving foreign policy goals (Murray 2012, 581). Where diplomacy is the vehicle for a country’s foreign policy goals, sports diplomacy is one of the many wheels for that vehicle.

The sports diplomacy literature concerning the United Kingdom specifically is limited. What exists comes mostly from a history or sociology background, focusing on specific events of British sports history which may have had a significance for international politics and the society. A holistic analysis of the role of sport in British diplomacy from a diplomatic studies perspective, looking at the fundamental processes and patterns of the British case, is virtually inexistent.

This paper is an attempt to fill that gap in the literature. It will seek to map the extent to which sport has been consciously used by the United Kingdom in its diplomacy, and how effective its approach has been. It ultimately aims to understand the potential for sports diplomacy in the modern British diplomatic context.

The paper will start by doing an analysis of the relationship between sport and diplomacy in the UK prior to 2012, by looking at government documents and sports history literature in order to understand how the British government engaged with sport prior to the 2012 London Olympics.

It will then look at the British hosting of the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games. The reason why the 2012 Olympics are paid significant attention in this paper is that all evidence points towards the fact that in the preparation for and during the management of the event, the most significant investment ever by the British government was made in sports diplomacy. Understanding its effectiveness can show the relationship between investment and results in the British context. In order to evaluate effectiveness, this paper will use a range of primary data including government reports and journalism pieces, and secondary data mostly from independent research and monitoring bodies. One of the methods used in this section will be a discourse analysis of the reactions in international media at the end of the event, looking at whether the aims of the Foreign Office were reflected in twelve online publications from across the world. These publications were chosen for its international reputation as accredited quality journalism sources.

Lastly, in its third section the paper will provide an informed comment on the potential for British sports diplomacy in the modern diplomatic context, post-2012 Olympics. It will do so based on extensive research of sports diplomacy theory and practice, particularly strategies and initiatives of countries such as the United States, Australia, Canada, Pakistan, as well as the United Kingdom itself.

**The relationship between sport and British diplomacy pre-2012**

In order to understand to what extent sport has played a role in British diplomacy prior to 2012, it is crucial to note that there is no evidence to suggest that the United Kingdom has ever in its history had a long-term sports diplomacy strategy. However, the United Kingdom has dabbled with sports diplomacy initiatives throughout most of its history. These can be split into four different periods: before the Second World War, sport was not acknowledged in any way to be a part of the government’s interest; from the Second World War to the 1970s, sport was acknowledged as part of the remit of the Foreign Office but was still ignored by most officials; from the 1970s to the end of the Cold War, the period marked the transition into the embracement of sport as a relationship that the government felt comfortable with; and from the Cold War to the present, sport now “touches virtually every British government department’s agenda” (Moynihan 2013, 17) and has been a part of the growing interest in public diplomacy.

Despite its different periods, however, the use of international sport in British diplomacy has had similar traits across history. An overarching analysis of existing data shows that the British experience of sports diplomacy across history has had three defining characteristics.

First, it has been uncoordinated. Disorganization among British officials and departments in acknowledging who deals with sport has meant that rarely has it been clear who is in charge. Sport was officially recognized by the Foreign Office as part of its remit during the Second World War, when it was acknowledged to be an “interest” of its Cultural Relations Department (Polley 2006). However, the guideline for British diplomats for most of the twentieth century was that beyond the usual statement that national interests must be protected, there was no space for sport in British diplomacy. Foreign Office leaders would happily state that sport “is not a Foreign Office question at all” and grand events such as the Olympics “are no business of ours” (Mangan 2006, 242).

This naturally led other bodies to fill in that gap. At different times – and often on the same issue – British sports diplomacy has been led by, or by a combination of, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Education (or its predecessors), the British Council, and the Foreign Office. For example, the 1966 Football World Cup, which was hosted by the UK, was supposed to be entirely under the responsibility of the Department for Education and Science. However, as the competition approached, British diplomats noticed that thanks to a boycott by most Asian countries, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea had qualified for the finals. The UK did not recognize the DPRK and the presence of its national team in an international event on British soil could present a number of diplomatic challenges. In this situation the Foreign Office immediately attempted to take over control of the competition from the Department for Education and Science. What ensued for a number of months until the competition was over was a struggle for power between the two government departments. Officials spent hours fighting over minor issues such as the payment of flagpoles for North Korean flags (Polley 1998). This lack of coordination inevitably led to inefficiencies and lack of coherence in the message being conveyed abroad.

But not just the horizontal spectrum of power has been uncoordinated. Vertically, as well, there has been a lack of coordination in British sports diplomacy, between the core at the government and the posts oversees. One of the most successful initiatives in modern British sports diplomacy took part when Sir Nigel Sheinwald, the then British ambassador to the US, invited the Manchester United football team to spend a day at the Washington embassy during one of the team’s tours. Sheinwald then invited children from one of Washington’s poorest suburbs to spend the morning at the embassy with the likes of Wayne Rooney, Michael Owen and Ryan Giggs – an unmissable photo opportunity which made it to the national media. In the afternoon, Sheinwald hosted a luncheon in the lawn of the embassy where he invited all of the foreign ambassadors in Washington, their wives and children to spend an afternoon of football and comradeship. That event proved to be widely successful, both as a public diplomacy and traditional diplomacy initiative – it was attended by more ambassadors than any other event during the four years that Sheinwald headed the embassy (Rofe 2015). Crucial to note in this event is that it was entirely conceived, orchestrated and led by an individual ambassador, without a governmental strategy behind him. Sheinwald’s event was a success, but it was a lone one. A lack of coordination within the vertical spectrum of power has meant that British sports diplomacy has failed to learn from its mistakes and capitalize on its successes.

The second defining characteristic of British sports diplomacy has been its amateurism. Prior to the 2006 Football World Cup hosted by Germany, the Foreign Office unveiled an initiative aimed at reducing tensions between British fans traveling to the event and the locals, called “Avoiding Penalties”. One of its components urged British fans to sing their chants in German, rather than English, to reduce the communication barriers between the British and their hosts. The government actually produced a web page specifically for the purpose of posting the translations to all major British football support songs. The whole initiative was naturally picked up by tabloid newspapers who ridiculed the Foreign Office and criticized it for being aloof and detached from the sporting reality (*The Sun* 2006).

The Foreign Office has for most of its history been dominated by white males who went from major public schools such as Eton to the elite universities of Oxford and Cambridge (Milburn 2014). Polley (2006) makes the case that thanks to a limited variety in terms of staff, British diplomacy has suffered from a lack of variety of expertise and innovation in what concerns sport. The gap between the governmental and sporting fan’s perception of what sport entails has certainly been one of the major obstacles to British sports diplomacy initiatives.

If British sports diplomacy is amateur from the sporting perspective, it is not less so from the diplomatic perspective. More or less successfully, the UK has used international sport for a variety of high politics purposes, from partially boycotting the 1980 Moscow Olympics to using sport as a retaliatory tool against apartheid South Africa. However, the realm where sports diplomacy can work to its full potential – that of soft power ventures, in working and building on a country’s image and influence abroad – has comparatively been disregarded by the UK.

Where this approach has been proactive, it has not been done by the Foreign Service, but by some posts abroad in episodic projects or, to a greater extent, by the British Council. A partnership between the British Council and the English Premier League to train football coached worldwide, for example, has reached 500,000 people in 25 countries. Among its remit are the goals of using sport to enhance development, empowering women and promoting inclusion (British Council 2015). Initiatives like this one are highly effective but they have been the exception rather than the rule. British sports diplomacy has been mostly reactive rather than proactive, coming into play to resolve or prevent conflict situations but rarely being employed in the maintenance of normal relations and as a tool of soft power. British diplomats have failed to prioritize the use of sports diplomacy in its most effective role.

The third characteristic of British sports diplomacy has been the fact that it suffers from a lack of investment at the administrative and policy level. The available data suggests that the word “sport” has never figured as part of the name of any Foreign Office department and sports diplomacy has rarely been politically discussed in its own right.

Since the late twentieth century, at its highest point within the Foreign Office, the discussion of sport has fallen within the government’s public diplomacy strategy. Two major reviews of the government’s public diplomacy work have been so far produced: the “Wilton Review” in 2003 and the subsequent review by Lord Carter of Coles in 2005. The two focused on the role of the BBC World Service and the British Council in British public diplomacy. They expanded little beyond recommending further investment in and liaison with these two bodies and the implementation of a monitoring board which could report on the progress of these relationships. Sport is acknowledged as one of the areas into which these bodies can tap but there is no discussion of what this can entail. At the policy level, sports diplomacy has been neglected within the umbrella of public diplomacy.

On the other hand, this underinvestment is not seen in terms of financial availability for sports diplomacy initiatives. 20 per cent of the funding of the British Council comes from the Foreign Office, and a significant part of it goes towards projects that involve, to a greater or lesser degree, sport (British Council 2016). Since the turn of the century, the United Kingdom has also invested widely in hosting international sporting mega-events, including the 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games, the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games, the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games, the 2015 Rugby World Cup and the upcoming 2017 Athletics World Championships. With the exception of the Olympics, which is discussed in greater detail in the second part of this paper, all these events suffered from a lack of involvement of British diplomats and the strategic planning phase. There is a government wish of “bringing the Olympics and other major sporting events to Britain” (Department for Culture Media and Sport 1998) but the specific aims involved with this and how to achieve them have been underexplored.

There is no data to suggest that there have been significant negative consequences from this mega-events. However there is a strong case to be made that the United Kingdom could have benefited more from the diplomatic opportunities presented by hosting these events if, along with financial investment, there had been administrative and policy investment at the sports diplomacy level behind them.

**The 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games**

The most comprehensive investment yet in sports diplomacy by the UK took place with the 2012 London Olympic Games. Advisors from a variety of sporting and diplomatic backgrounds, both from state and non-state bodies were accessed in order to plan for the event. During the preparation phase, a team of three diplomats was tasked by the Foreign Office with the single task of managing issues which might arise. Sports diplomacy scholars such as Simon Rofe were employed on a full time basis during the event under the role of “counsellors” (Rofe 2015). And besides all of the manpower involved, there was also a solid investment at the policy level, the most visible of which was the full report on the Olympics prepared by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons (*HC* 2011).

The report, and subsequent answer from the government, identified goals for the Foreign Office’s Olympic diplomacy campaign along three main areas: national interest, prosperity and security. An analysis of the aims within these areas and subsequent results following the Olympics can therefore determine the extent to which the biggest investment in sports diplomacy by the UK had positive or negative consequences.

First, in terms of national interest, the report stated that the Olympics should portray the UK as a generous country and conscious of the environment. In terms of showing generosity, the “International Inspiration” program, led by the Foreign Office and implemented by the British Council, UK Sport and UNICEF, was an award-winning Olympic legacy program which used funds from the Olympics to bring sports opportunities to 15 million young people across 21 countries. It started 55 national policy changes across the world, increasing physical education in schooling programs in 19 countries (*British Council* 2015). This initiative and the idea of the UK being generous was rarely mentioned in the international press immediately following the Olympics (Appendix 1). However, that can be explained with the fact that it was an initiative targeted at the months after the Olympics much more than at the event itself. It was a powerful soft power initiative which was covered during the months that followed the Olympics in the local media of the areas targeted (*British Council* 2015). In the words of independent policy advisor Simon Anholt (2012):

“[International Inspiration] was best example of public diplomacy I have ever come across. I have spoken to so many governments when they host events like these and the question on everybody’s lips is always: how can we best benefit from this wonderful opportunity? This was literally the first time I have ever heard a country saying: how can we best share the benefits of this wonderful opportunity? That was breathtaking.”

In what concerns environmental awareness, the government had the target of making the London Olympics the “greenest ever” and achieved it. For example, in the London Olympics at least a quarter of each venue was built with recycled materials, almost no waste from the event was sent to landfill, and carbon emissions were cut by 47% compared to a “business as usual” model, through the use of green electricity and methods of energy conservation (Gray 2012). However, while this issue was given extensive coverage in the British media, especially by the BBC, most international media outlets did not mention the sustainability aspect of the event (Appendix 1). In addition, articles on ecology monitoring outlets by experts such as Antebi (2012) questioning the extent to which the “greenest ever” Olympics were in fact a reality, may have ended up resulting in a mixed message sent abroad regarding environmental awareness.

The second main area of the British government’s goals for the Olympics concerned prosperity, where it was the role of the Foreign Office to ensure the UK was portrayed as a desirable destination for tourism and trade. This goal seems to have been fulfilled. Research by the British Council into eleven countries considered “strategically important” for British trade shows that 36 per cent of people believe that the Olympics have made the UK a more desirable location for business and education while 35 per cent said they were more likely to go on a holiday to the UK (*British Council* 2013). Following the event, 25 per cent of international media outlets analyzed discussed trade initiatives or conditions connected to the London Olympics in their final editorials at the end of the games, while two thirds mentioned the suitability of the UK for tourism (Appendix 1). A range of social business-orientated events were hosted, or led by the Foreign Service during the games, capitalizing on the presence of a range of high-profile visitors. The smooth running of transport links both in London, and in connections between the capital and the outskirts, was also extensively praised by the media. In general, the soft power appeal of London as a place suitable both for pleasure and business seems to have been amplified by the Olympics.

The third and final main area in terms of goals for the Olympics concerned security. It was not the role of the Foreign Office to assure the security of the event, but it was its responsibility that the games would reinforce the view of the UK as a safe country while still promoting the British values of freedom and tolerance. It order to assure the image of safety, a News Coordination Centre was used, working closely with Foreign Office diplomats on the ground (*HC* 2012). This coordination was important, for example, when the window screen of the Russian weightlifting team’s shuttle bus accidentally shattered due to a pebble from the road smashing into it. The Russian delegation thought it had been caused by a bullet rather than a pebble, and the situation ended up escalating to the point where Vladimir Putin called David Cameron to enquire about the issue (Rofe 2015). The rapid response by the News Coordination Centre, under advice from Foreign Service diplomats, in terms of effectively controlling the dissemination of information to the media, meant that the repercussions of that minor incident did not have a significant impact on the image of the UK as a safe country. The success of the UK in terms of security is reflected on the international media coverage, with 11 out of 12 outlets analyzed discussing the issue (Appendix 1).

The image of safety was maintained while promoting the British belief that freedom and tolerance need not be sacrificed in order to have security. 75 per cent of international media outlets analyzed discussed the importance of freedom and tolerance in the London Olympics (Appendix 1). This discussion focused mostly on two areas: freedom of speech, which was evident as the people of London were able to express their opinions and stage protests despite the increased security measures in place; and opportunity, due to the fact that the London Olympics were the first in which every participating country had a woman, with women making up 45 per cent of athletes – the highest percentage ever (*IOC* 2006). The epitome of the promotion of these ideals was the highly successful opening ceremony, watched by 620 million people worldwide (Murray 2015). One reporter noted:

“There was a sneaking worry the whole thing would be uptight and just a touch joyless. Those fears shrank during an unusually honest and witty opening ceremony, when Danny Boyle celebrated Britain as the free, messy, diverse and open society it is.” (Wilson 2012)

Looking at the prevalent discourse evident in the international media, there was a general agreement that the opening ceremony was highly effective and that London was in general one of most successful Olympic Games in the last three decades, only matched, depending on the source, by Sydney or Barcelona.

**The potential for sports diplomacy in the modern British context**

Since the end of the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games, sport has once again returned to the shadows of British diplomacy. This is to the detriment of British foreign policy efforts. As shown with the Olympics, when there is investment at the administrative and policy level, it is likely that the results will appear. The potential for British sports diplomacy is vast, and as the Foreign Office slowly undergoes the most significant structural changes in, perhaps, its history, it is clear that the UK would benefit if the readjustments came with a more significant space for sport. The final section of this paper, thus, will provide an informed comment on what are the main advantages for and challenges to sports diplomacy in the modern British context. It will then finally look into what form of long-term strategy for British sports diplomacy could be implemented.

The UK has four main advantages that it can use to its benefit in sports diplomacy endeavors. The first is British sport’s values. In 1922 Lieutenant Colonel Temperley, military attaché at the British embassy in The Hague reported regarding an international fencing tournament which he attended:

“I was approached very early and informed that the organizers regarded the presence of an English team essential not so much on the account of their fencing abilities, but because the fact of our team being there would raise the whole tone of the meeting.” (Polley 2006)

Politeness, good sportsmanship, generosity and gentlemanly behavior are all seen as features of British athletes and can be a powerful soft power tool abroad.

The second advantage is British sportspeople. From David Beckham to Andy Murray, Lewis Hamilton to Jessica Ennis-Hall, Sir Alex Ferguson to Paula Radcliffe, in the twenty-first century the UK has an almost unparalleled array of stars which are idolized and respected across the world. Used in ambassadorial roles, these sportspeople can considerably amplify a diplomatic message. They can promote British identity, values and culture abroad, either it being at diplomatic meetings, sporting events or international development projects.

The third advantage is an institution called English Football Premier League. According to research by McClory (2015), the Premier League is of the three most powerful soft power tools of the UK, along with the monarchy and the BBC. The Premier League is watched by 4.7 billion people worldwide (British Council 2015) and 10 per cent of the world’s population are said to support Manchester United, a club which has been academically defined as “a diplomatic non-state actor in international affairs” (Rofe 2014). Potential partnerships between the British government and the national football industry could, undoubtedly, originate a significant impact on international perceptions.

The fourth and final main advantage, is stability. The UK has been in the top ten places of every major soft power ranking, including first place in the IfG-Monocle Soft Power Index, which was the first holistic analysis of global soft power ever conducted, and the Portland Group soft power ranking (McClory 2010). Foreign perceptions of the country are positive and solid, which means that the UK can afford to plan carefully and wisely, and only tap into the most profitable of sports diplomacy ventures. It is in no rush to change perceptions abroad.

Stability is, however, also one of three main challenges to British sports diplomacy. Successes in such measurements of soft power can mistakenly lead British officials to assume that current strategies in place will continue to work for the future. Failure to acknowledge that a reputation is only rented, never owned, can be a challenge to the full embracement of sport as one of the ways to adapt to the undergoing changes in the international diplomatic environment.

The second challenge concerns financial investment. Due to austerity, the Foreign Office has stated that it expects further cuts to be made to its budget (FCO 2011). These can lead both to cuts in public diplomacy funding and restraints in what concerns diplomatic innovation, under which sport would inevitably suffer.

The third and final main challenge has been widely discussed in the first part of this paper. It concerns the traditions and engrained preconceptions within the British public sector concerning sport. While these have slowly changed during the last few decades, the idea that “sport and politics don’t mix” and the belief that sport is an issue bellow the importance of statesmen still exist in the Foreign Office, and can constitute a challenge to more modern, innovative diplomats who wish to experiment with sports diplomacy.

Taking into consideration these advantages and disadvantages, and the examples of sports diplomacy strategies from other countries such as the USA, Australia and Canada, it can be suggested that a long-term sports diplomacy strategy for the UK should include three different aspects.

First, it should have a clear leader. The Foreign Office should establish itself as the leader of a whole of government approach to international sport, and delegate tasks to posts overseas and bodies like the British Council when appropriate. Policy should be formulated by the Foreign Office, and other bodies should report back to the Foreign Office with results. For this to work, there will be a need for investment in the training of British diplomats to deal with sport, and a sports diplomacy department will have to be formed. This can be as small as one person, but this person must be a full-time officer in charge of both using sport for solving crisis and managing normal relationships.

Second, it should have clear goals, and detailed plans of how to achieve them. Taking into consideration the success of the Olympics, hosting international mega-events may be at the center of British priorities, but the strategy should go well beyond that. A set of five broad goals could include: using sport for international development; showcasing the United Kingdom; empowering women and girls; supporting innovation in health and physical education; and connecting sporting institutions.

Third, there must a monitoring and marketing system in place. Monitoring is essential to avoid repetition of mistakes and exploit successes, and should be done under a full review at least every five years. Though soft power is notoriously difficult to measure, it can be done through an analysis of the media, tourism numbers, pro bono support, sponsorships, advocacy and even business matches. Marketization of the existence of the sports diplomacy strategy itself is essential, as it doubles the results: the UK does sports diplomacy, and through marketization people get to *know* that the UK does sports diplomacy. Producing a short YouTube video where major sporting starts say short, snappy sentences about British sports diplomacy, for example, could be a powerful method.

**Conclusion**

Sport alone is no solution to major challenges faced by the United Kingdom such as terrorism, climate change or energy security. However, in a period of growing globalization where integrity and influence are strong currencies, sports diplomacy can be a valuable addition to a country’s traditional diplomacy. It can be a powerful soft power tool which reduces estrangement, promotes positive values and brings people together.

Sport has played a limited role in British diplomacy. The UK has for most of its history resisted the notion that sport and government can have a healthy and profitable relationship. British sports diplomacy has been uncoordinated, amateur and has lacked administrative support. As a consequence of that, the Foreign Office now does not have a degree of influence in sport proportional to its responsibility.

Where there has been a professional e sustained investment in sports diplomacy, however, as in the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic games, results have been highly positive at all levels. In order to achieve British sports diplomacy’s full potential, which is vast, a long-term strategy under a whole of government approach led by the Foreign Office would be necessary. If an appropriate investment is done both in policymaking and training of British diplomats in the field, then there can certainly be a bright and promising future ahead for sport within British diplomacy.

Words: 6008

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**Appendixes**

Appendix 1. Table showing whether the issues identified by the Foreign Office as crucial for the Olympic campaign were mentioned or discussed in 12 international media outlet’s closing reviews of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, where “yes” means they were mentioned or discussed, and “no” means they were neither mentioned nor discussed

