



Special issue on sports diplomacy

James Pamment¹

Published online: 26 July 2019
© Springer Nature Limited 2019

Sports diplomacy has, over the past few years, developed into a vibrant field of inquiry relevant to both practitioners and scholars. Sitting at the intersection of many fields, it raises fundamental questions of politics, diplomacy and statecraft. Diplomacy is, for example, central to the questions of recognition and governance that enable representatives of countries to come together to compete. Organisations such as the International Olympic Committee and Fédération Internationale de Football Association predate the United Nations and are subject to political manoeuvrings every bit as complex as major international organisations.

The cost of hosting contemporary sporting mega-events is typically in excess of \$15 billion, and the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar is expected to exceed \$200 billion. Consequently, sports diplomacy awakens interest as a tool of statecraft associated with tremendous marketing potential. Governments perceive sporting mega-events as an opportunity for positioning their country and cities in the global consciousness. Questions of soft power, public diplomacy and national image mingle naturally with questions of place branding, tourism and destination development. It is perhaps not surprising then that the two theoretical pieces in this special issue by Mahdi Talebpour (“Identifying Sports Diplomacy Resources as Soft Power Tools”) and Yoav Dubinsky (“From soft power to sports diplomacy”) seek to better understand the soft power potential of sports insofar as this can provide opportunities and benefits to countries who choose to play the game.

Sports have tremendous potential to create meaning, and that meaning can be harnessed by governments seeking to make the most of their soft power resources. For example, sports create superstars who are capable of transcending national, cultural and racial boundaries. Andrew Cooper’s article (“U.S. Public Diplomacy and Sports Stars”) discusses

the past, present and future of African-American goodwill ambassadors, taking us on a journey from Jesse Owens through to Dennis Rodman’s forays into the Korean peninsula. Tiffany Bourgeois (“London 2012 Olympics: Exercises in Cultural Diplomacy”) assesses the cultural programming of the 2012 Olympics in order to shift the debate from purely economic outcomes to questions of cultures, norms and mutual understanding.

To what degree can sports influence the national image? In a detailed case study of a specific country (“Israel’s Country Image in the 2016 Olympic Games”), Yoav Dubinsky unpacks the themes and narratives that emerged around Israel’s participation in the Rio Olympics. Taking a 15-year perspective, Yongrong Cao (“The Image of Beijing in Europe”) explores how Beijing was represented in European broadsheets, including an assessment of the significance of the 2008 Olympic Games for influencing those representations. Together, these articles offer a taste of the issues that sports diplomacy offers the broader study of place branding and public diplomacy. For those interested in further reading, several important volumes have been published in recent years. Suggestions for further reading are included below.

Further reading (in chronological order)

Aaron Beacom, *International Diplomacy and the Olympic Movement* (Basingstoke, 2012).

Stuart Murray, “Sports Diplomacy”, *Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 8/3-4(2013), 191–195.

Håvard Mokleiv Nygård and Scott Gates, “Soft power at home and abroad: Sports diplomacy, politics, and peace-building”, *International Area Studies Review*, 16/3(2013), 235–243.

Public Diplomacy Magazine, “Winter 2013: Sports Diplomacy” (USC Center on Public Diplomacy), <https://www.publicdiplomacymagazine.com/s/SportsDiplomacy.pdf>.

✉ James Pamment
james.pamment@isk.lu.se

¹ Department of Strategic Communication, Lund University, Helsingborg, Sweden



Geoffrey Allen Pigman & J. Simon Rofe, “Sport and diplomacy: an introduction”. *Sport in Society*, 17/9(2014), 1095–1097.

J. Simon Rofe & Heather L. Dichter, “Prologue: Diplomacy and Sport”, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol 27 (2015), 207–211.

Heather L. Dichter, Andrew L. Johns, *Diplomatic Games: Sport, Statecraft, and International Relations Since 1945* (University Press of Kentucky, 2014).

Jonathan Grix, *Sport Politics: An Introduction* (Macmillan International Higher Education, 2015).

Stuart Murray, *Sports Diplomacy: Origins, Theory and Practice* (Routledge New Diplomacy Studies, 2018).

J. Simon Rofe (ed), *Sport and Diplomacy: Games within Games* (Manchester University Press, 2018).

Publisher’s Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

James Pamment (PhD Stockholm University, 2011) is an Associate Professor at the Department of Strategic Communication at Lund University and a Senior Analyst at the Centre for Asymmetric Threats Studies (CATS), a governmental think tank at the Swedish National Defence University. He is co-editor in-chief of *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*.

