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# Sports Diplomacy: A Timeline

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# Sports Diplomacy

## A Timeline

# Objectives (1)

In this presentation, we aim to highlight past and present sports diplomacy events. Sports diplomacy can be defined in many ways, but three main perspectives will be used here:

- Firstly, the use of sport as a national tool of *soft power*. This is related to how countries use sport to enhance their image and prestige, but also how they can use it to punish other states and put some diplomatic pressure on them.
- Secondly, the power of sport as a means to bring people together around international competitions. This includes especially the Olympics, World and Continental Championships.
- Thirdly, the power of sport as a means to bring people together around diverse projects. Such initiatives emerge from the civil society, in particular NGOs and associations, but also from people.

# Objectives (2)

Sports diplomacy also operates at different levels. More information on this topic is available in our report on the blog. Some examples are given in the table below:

<i>Level of the initiative</i>	<i>Examples</i>
National Reconciliation Process	U-17 Rwandan National Team
Bilateral Reconciliation Process	Ping-pong / Cricket Diplomacy
Multilateral Constructive Process	ASEAN Basketball League
International Initiatives	UN General Assembly Resolution 54/34
International Events as Forums for the Promotion of Peace	The Olympics, FIFA World Cup

# Objectives (3)

In order to make the political and social context clear, we will divide the presentation into three main parts:

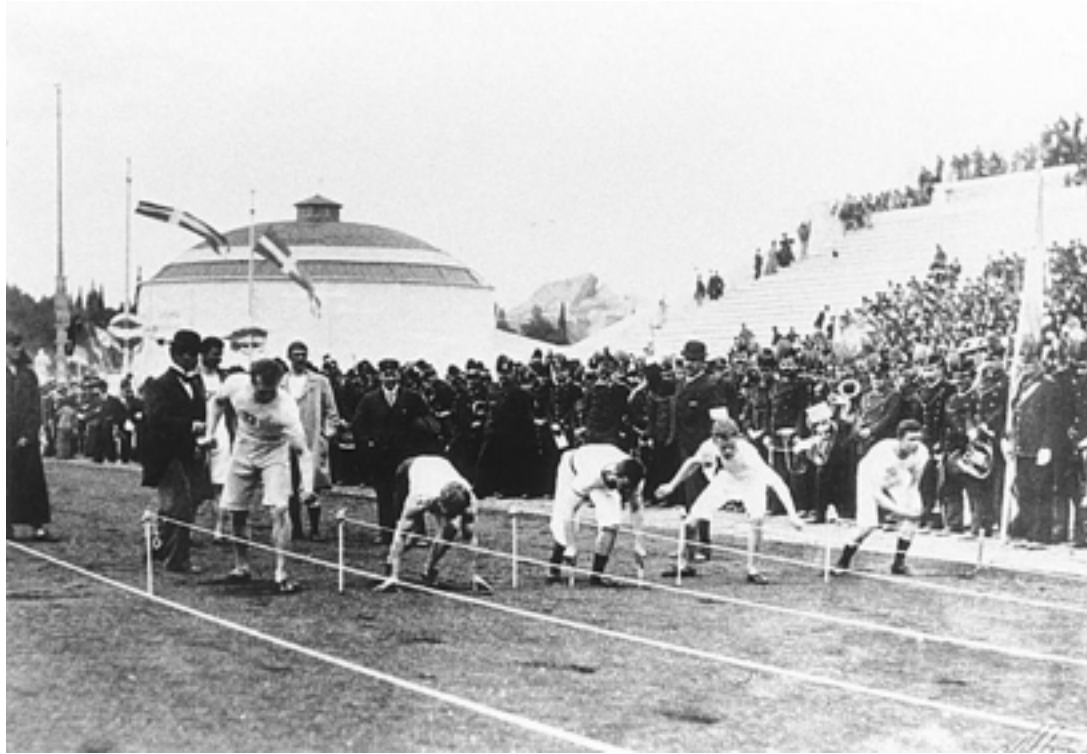
- The era before World War II. This period witnessed the emergence of modern sport, the first Olympics and the establishment of several international institutions, such as FIFA.
- The Cold War period (1947-1991). Sport was largely conditioned by the evolution of international relations and the ideological struggle between the East and the West.
- The post-Cold War period. In a fully globalized world, major sporting events are followed all over the world. They are also increasingly held outside Europe and North America. Moreover, conflicts remain, some of them being inherited from the Cold War.

# Objectives (4)

Since most of the examples shown in this presentation are discussed in further details in the blog, our objective here is to provide only an introduction to major sports diplomacy events. We will first give an overview of the situation, and then comment on some of the most significant events which occurred during the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The case studies mentioned in this presentation will be linked to the articles and videos related to them on the blog. Pictures of the events are also available in the photo gallery.

If you have any comments or suggestions, please send them to us!

Our email address: [sports4diplomacy@googlemail.com](mailto:sports4diplomacy@googlemail.com)



Before World War II

# Overview (1)

- **1894** - Establishment of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) by founder baron Pierre de Coubertin. There are 13 original members, coming from European countries, former British colonies and Argentina.
- **1896** - The first modern Olympic Games take place in Athens. They are exclusively reserved for men.
- **1900** - The second Olympics, held in Paris, are open for women.
- **1904** - The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) is founded in Paris by the Football Associations of France, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.
- **1908** - Irish athletes refuse to compete as British citizens during the London Olympics.
- **1912** - For the first time ever, the 5 continents are represented at the Olympic Games, in Stockholm.



# Overview (2)

- **1920** - States defeated in World War I are not invited to participate in the Olympics in Antwerp.
- **1936** - Following Hitler's accession to power in Germany in 1933, the Berlin Olympics are used to promote the Nazi ideology.
- **1940** - Former *Mousquetaire* Jean Borotra from France is the first Minister of sport appointed by a government.

# Highlights (1)

## **Athens (1896): The “Olympic Truce” revived**

Inspired by the ancient Greek Games, French baron Pierre de Coubertin and Demetrios Vikelas, a Greek citizen, aim to organize an international gathering at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, focusing on noble strife and mutual respect. Such values formed the predominant spirit of the ancient games. In order to achieve this Olympic ideal, only amateurs are allowed to take part in the first Games in Athens. The fundamental idea is to use sports to foster humanism and promote brotherhood among peoples of the world. The international variable is therefore central, and Coubertin insists on this dimension in 1892: “We must cause sport to be international” he says, adding that “we must organize Olympic Games again”. He won his betting, the International Olympic Committee being founded two years later, and the first Games being held in 1896. The Olympics are therefore the opportunity for athletes from all nations to gather in a peaceful context. Since the first edition of the Modern Games, the original momentum has not been lost, despite interruptions due to the two World Wars.

More information: [www.francophonie.org/IMG/pdf/Le\\_francais\\_langue\\_olympique\\_2004.pdf](http://www.francophonie.org/IMG/pdf/Le_francais_langue_olympique_2004.pdf)

# Highlights (2)

## **Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Football in Central Europe: A case of national pride**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many countries belong to vast European empires. Regarding the realm of sport, the establishment of FIFA in 1904 gives the opportunity to emancipate themselves from the imperial authority. This is especially the case with the Czech and Slovak people, who are part of Austria-Hungary. In 1901, the Czech Football Association was formed as 13 clubs united. In 1907, it gained FIFA membership (along with Slovakia), out of any imperial control. This example shows how sport can be used by a country to affirm its pride and seek recognition. This will be the case again after the Prague Spring, when Czechoslovakia played a ice hockey match against the USSR and expressed its patriotism. Paradoxically, an international competition for Central European teams was set up in 1927 (the Mitropa Cup). The use of sport as a tool of soft power still exists today, as Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou said stars like tennisman Lu Yen-hsun are stretching Taiwan's image accross the world. More recently, South Sudan marked statehood with a game against a Kenyan club. Once again, sport is not a driving force, but can help support processes of reconciliation, national emancipation, etc.

# Highlights (3)

## **The Berlin Games: An emblematic case of the political use of sport**

In 1936, Berlin hosts the Summer Olympics. The capital city of Germany was awarded the Olympics Games by the IOC in 1931, signaling the country's return to the international community after its isolation in the aftermath of the defeat in World War I. In 1933 Adolf Hitler, the leader of the Nazi party, becomes chancellor of Germany. His policies concentrate on the myth of Aryan racial superiority and the persecution of Jews, Roma and other communities. Together with the racist statement of Aryan superiority, physical prowess fuelled the German sports imagery of the 1930s. Many countries envisaged to boycott the Games. From the organizer's perspective, the Olympics were an opportunity to show a peaceful and tolerant Germany. Hitler even said about the Olympic torch: "It [...] helps to connect the countries in the spirit of peace". Nevertheless, he used the biggest sporting event to reinforce his party's popularity within the state, and tried to promote his ideology through sports. Germany won 89 medals, but the victories of other athletes, and especially Jesse Owens, the most popular hero of these Games, prevented the Nazi ideology to fully succeed.



# The Cold War Period

# Overview (1)

- **1952** - For the first time since the Russian revolution in 1917, the USSR takes part in the Olympic Games, held in Helsinki. Germany and Japan are back at the Olympics.
- **1964** - The Olympics are held for the first in Asia. Tokyo is the host city.
- **1968** - Following the Tlatelolco massacre, athletes protest against racial segregation in the U.S. during the Mexico Olympic Games.
- **1969** - “Football war” between El Salvador and Honduras. Riots erupt after a match, leading to a four-day armed conflict between the two countries.
- **1971** - The American ping-pong team is invited by their Chinese counterparts for a tour in China. This event contributed to a *détente* between the U.S. and China, President Nixon visiting Mao in Beijing in 1972.
- **1972** - Israeli hostages are retained by a Palestinian armed group in parallel to the Munich Olympics. That year, Canada and the USSR organize a 8-game “Summit Series” between their respective ice hockey national teams.

# Overview (2)

- **1974** - During the World Cup in West Germany, the host country is to meet with East Germany in the first round. The game takes place in a peaceful context, mirroring Willy Brand's *Ostpolitik* vision.
- **1980** - 60 countries, including the United States, do not participate in the Moscow Olympics. They are protesting against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.
- **1984** - For the first since 1952, China takes part in the Olympics. However, 14 countries from the Eastern Bloc, including the Soviet Union, do boycott the Los Angeles Games.
- **1987** - Pakistani President, General Zia ul-Haq, attends a test match between India and Pakistan in Jaipur, showing goodwill from his side and achieving a first step towards appeasement between both countries.

# Highlights (1)

## 1947-1980: “Ice hockey diplomacy”

In the early stages of the Cold War, the attitudes of countries towards ice hockey competitions were closely linked to geopolitical events. Canada and the U.S. decided to boycott the World Championships in Moscow in 1957, following the Soviet invasion of Hungary. In 1962, the East German team could not travel to America and take part in the World tournament in Colorado. This was later interpreted as a retaliation from the western countries against the construction of the Berlin Wall. Both the USSR and the Czechoslovakians refused to participate in this event. Several games between the Soviets and the Czechoslovakians were very brutal in the 1960s, especially after the Prague Spring in 1968. Riots even erupted after one match in 1969, leading the Soviet military to crack down on the protesters and make the USSR less popular in Czechoslovakia. In the 1970s, the *détente* which prevailed in international politics led to contacts between Soviet and North American players. But the most flourishing period for “ice hockey diplomacy” occurred in 1972, when Canada and the USSR organized a 8-game “Summit Series”, aiming to closer the ties between both states.

More information on the blog: <http://bit.ly/AfNHzx>



# Highlights (2)

## **1958-1985: Track and Field diplomacy between the Superpowers**

During 28 years, a dual track meet series occurred almost annually between the two strongest national track powers in the world: the USSR and the U.S. Diplomacy between the two superpowers was crucial for the future of the world. Regarding sports, an agreement between the Soviet and American sport federations was hammered out in 1958. A first exchange occurred in Moscow that year, followed by another one in the U.S. in 1959. The track meets were the most popular ones; 153,000 spectators attended a two-day meeting in 1962. Nevertheless, these events could not resist geopolitical tensions. The USSR boycotted the 1966 meet, protesting against American military actions in Vietnam. One must add that some of the athletes were also strong patriots but, at the same time, were respecting the rules and the spirit of fair-play. In 1962, athletes from both countries walked arm in arm around the stadium, receiving a tremendous ovation from the audience. Thus, sport may play a strong role in bringing people together. However, this event did not prevent the Cuba crisis some months later. Therefore, the role of sport in international relations should not be overestimated.

# Highlights (3)

## **1969: “Football War” between El Salvador and Honduras**

In July 1969, El Salvador invaded Honduras after a series of World Cup qualifying matches between the two neighbouring countries. At that time, the situation was extremely tense at the border. For more than 30 years, land disputes had impeded any improvement of the relations between both states. Nevertheless, football games had to be played. Haiti was waiting for the winner to play the qualifying final. Riots erupted in the streets, while players from both sides had to travel in armoured cars. After the decisive game, which was played in Mexico City, tensions rose significantly. A real war started just two weeks after this match. Over 2,000 people died in this conflict, which lasted four days. A final peace treaty was signed in 1980. However, the countries' presidents only agreed on a frontier in 2006. In this case, sport did not cause the war. Once again, it worked as a mirror of social problems and was used to serve political purposes. The games were essential to the rising nationalist anger, which helped spark the conflict into action. The example of “Football War” shows how sport can be used by politicians and people, sometimes leading to dramatic outcomes.

More information: <http://es.pn/p7UTx7>

# Highlights (4)

## **1971: Ping-pong diplomacy**

Recently, the most impressive example of sports used as a diplomatic tool is the so-called “Ping-pong diplomacy”. In April 1971, in the context of the Cold War, the American ping-pong team visited China despite the fact that Washington did not recognize the People’s Republic. Invited by their Chinese counterparts, the U.S. squad toured the country for one week. Following this remarkable achievement, American President Richard Nixon received an invitation from Mao. According to the Chinese Premier at that time, Zhou Enlai, “Never before in history has a sport been used so effectively as a tool of international diplomacy”. In 2011, “Ping-pong diplomacy” was almost revived as Qatar hosted the *Peace and Sport* Table Tennis Cup, aiming to improve relations between nations and foster dialogue between them.

More information on the blog: <http://bit.ly/yB4qrL>

# Highlights (5)

## **1976-1984: Massive boycotts of the Olympic Games**

Sport can sometimes be a powerful tool of *soft power* for states. Indeed, most of them are using sport to enhance their image and boost nationalism, or show their disapproval towards other countries' policies. Such disapproval is best expressed through the boycott of the Olympics, especially in the context of the Cold War. During this era, sport offered a unique opportunity to blame the other Bloc (and ideology) for its actions. In 1980, President Carter pressed the U.S. Olympic Committee to boycott the Moscow Games, due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In total, following the logics of the Cold War, 62 states did not travel to the USSR, including West Germany and Japan. Four years later, 14 Communist countries did not attend the Los Angeles Games. One should also keep in mind the Montreal Games boycott in 1976, which occurred for other reasons. 26 African nations refused to participate because the New Zealand rugby squad had undertaken a 3-month tour of South Africa. At that time, segregation still prevailed under the apartheid regime.

More information: [www.topendsports.com/events/summer/boycotts.htm](http://www.topendsports.com/events/summer/boycotts.htm)



After the Cold War

# Overview (1)

- **1992** - New countries take part in the Olympics, following the destruction of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa.
- **1998** - That year, a U.S. wrestling team travels to Iran for a competition. This was the first time Americans were represented, even though unofficially, since the 444 day-long hostage crisis of 1979-1981.
- **1999** - In baseball, the Baltimore Orioles play the Cuban national team, first in Baltimore and then in Havana. One year later, the Californian team Lost Coast Pirates also play in Havana.
- **2001** - The United Nations Office for Sport on Development and Peace (UNOSDP) is set up by the UN. The first UNOSDP Special Adviser to the Secretary-General is former Swiss President Adolf Ogi.
- **2002** - In the course of the World Cup, Japanese Prince Takamado attends the opening ceremony in Seoul. This is the first official visit to South Korea by a member of the Japanese Imperial family since World War II.

# Overview (2)

- **2005** - The European Commission launches the “European Year for Education Through Sport” (EYES).
- **2008** - China has to face many critics, especially from the West, with regard to the repression in Tibet. When it comes to the Beijing Olympics, it seems that sport and politics are strongly interrelated.
- **2009** - A qualifying game between Armenia and Turkey leads to the first visit to Armenia from a President of modern Turkey. This event happens four days after both countries have reached an agreement on the re-opening of the borders and on the establishment of diplomatic ties.
- **2010** - For the first time ever, the FIFA World Cup takes place in Africa, South Africa being the host country.
- **2011** - Ping-pong diplomacy 2.0. Invited by the *Peace and Sport* Foundation, in cooperation with the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) and the host country, Qatar, both Koreas, India and Pakistan paired together in doubles.

# Highlights (1)

## **1999-2000: “Baseball diplomacy”**

A two-game meet between the Baltimore Orioles and the Cuban baseball national team in 1999 raised reconciliation hopes in both the U.S. and Cuba. The matches attracted huge crowds; the Baltimore and Havana stadiums were packed. The organization of this event was an achievement in itself, considering the extreme difficulties from both sides to travel to each other's country. In 2000, a Californian team played a game in Havana. The first efforts to re-open bilateral relations through sport date back to 1977, when two University of South Dakota basketball squads went to Cuba. Nevertheless, one may always wonder about the sustainability of these projects. Under George W. Bush's presidency, the number of visas delivered to Cubans have dropped significantly. After Barack Obama's election in 2008, the situation has improved, and travel restrictions to Cuba have been relaxed. According to a State Department official, “It is to the U.S.'s advantage to have more and more society-to-society dialogue”. There is certainly a bet, or at least some hope, from the White House that sport exchanges will help break down years of distrust between Cuban and American citizens.

More information: <http://bit.ly/oTOIs6>



# Highlights (2)

## **2001: Establishment of the UNOSDP**

Taking into account the fact that sport can help tackling the problems of conflict and poverty, the United Nations set up an additional institution in its already complex system in 2001. This recent institution concentrates on a vast range of issues, including social integration, peace building and conflict prevention/resolution, the promotion of gender equality and economic development. Since its creation, the UNOSDP has always focused on mass sport rather than elite sport, supporting grassroots projects all over the world. Together with the other big sport institutions, the UNOSDP recognizes the fact that sport is not better or worse than society, but is a mirror of it. However, these organizations are also aware of the great potential of sport to promote social integration, economic development, strengthen social ties and networks, foster intercultural dialogue, and promote ideals of peace, brotherhood, solidarity and tolerance.

More information: [www.un.org/wcm/content/site/sport/home/sport](http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/sport/home/sport)

# Highlights (3)

## 1987-2011: “Cricket diplomacy”

Cricket is a very popular sport on the Indian sub-continent. Although it can exacerbate divisions, it can also unite diverse groups around the same place and sharing a spirit of fair-play. Recently, cricket has been used to create a space for political dialogue. In 1987, Pakistani President, General Zia ul-Haq, attended a game between India and Pakistan in Jaipur. Later, three “cricket tours” have been extensively covered by the media: Pakistan’s tour to India in 1999, India’s tour to Pakistan in 2004, and Pakistan’s return tour in 2005. Politicians seized these opportunities to unofficially discuss crucial issues, while thousands of fans travelled to the neighbouring country. In 2005, Pakistani President Musharraf and Indian PM Singh announced that “the peace process was irreversible”. Nevertheless, the bomb attacks in Mumbai (2008) and the ongoing disagreement about the Kashmir region did rise the tensions again. In 2011, Pakistani PM Gilani and Mr. Singh met at the World Cup semi-final, contributing to a reduction of the level of hostility. That is cricket’s main role, both nuclear powers having to find other ways to deal with *high politics* problems (terrorism, water, Kashmir, etc.).

See a debate on “cricket diplomacy” on the blog (video)

# Highlights (4)

## **2010: The World Cup and the evolutions of South African sport**

Under the Apartheid regime, the South African sport policy had to follow the principle of “separate development”. After World War II, football became one of the most popular sports in the world, and it was the case within the black community in South Africa. On the contrary, rugby was still more important among the whites. Therefore, football played a major role in the liberation movement. It implied the merging of ideas, social gatherings and community connections. Simultaneously, both non-racial sport associations and non-racial anti-apartheid groups emerged. At the international level, FIFA set up a commission of inquiry and suspended South Africa in 1961. Nevertheless, rugby links continued between the country and England and New Zealand until the 1970s. The tour of the South African rugby squad in New Zealand in 1981 led to many demonstrations, and the full isolation of the national rugby team. This evolution had already begun with suspensions from the IOC and FIFA, and several countries’ boycott of the Olympics. As a consequence of the Apartheid regime’s collapse, the international sport community welcomed the “new South Africa”. This process peaked in 2010, when South Africa hosted the first FIFA World Cup on the African continent.

# Highlights (5)

## Some recent initiatives - 1

Recently, many initiatives arising from civil society organizations and NGOs have concentrated on sports. As early as 1998, John Marks, President and Founder of *Search for Common Ground*, managed together with his colleagues, the U.S. Olympic Committee and USA Wrestling to send an American team to Tehran. This was the first delegation to travel to Iran, though unofficially, since the hostage crisis, which occurred about 20 years before. This event did not lead to an immediate reconciliation, and the situation remains tense today. However, the athletes acted as citizen diplomats, who showed an alternative, peaceful model of interaction. In 2007, the world wrestling championship took place in Baku. Some people considered this tournament as an opportunity to revive “wrestling diplomacy”, but the situation proved different, with many Azerbaijani groups opposing public diplomacy efforts. For instance, they would have refused to hear the Armenian anthem. This issue had already led UEFA to cancel a football game between the two rivals earlier that year. The main point of contention is the status and sovereignty over the Karabakh, a disputed piece of land.

More information: <http://bit.ly/zlQosJ> / <http://bit.ly/za3Wyf> / See videos on the blog

# Highlights (6)

## **Some recent initiatives - 2**

Other initiatives include projects all accross the globe. For instance, programs for social rehabilitation of child soldiers through football were set up in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Programs for ethnic groups reconciliation were also created in Israel, South Africa and Bosnia & Herzegovina.

More information: see our report and videos on the blog

International organizations are increasingly recruiting sport idols as goodwill ambassadors. Nevertheless, the latter may also have a major role to play within their country. Indeed, football superstar Didier Drogba (and his teammates) has become a symbol of reconciliation in Ivory Coast. Even though the most important peace efforts are made within the political arena, messages and actions emanating from idols and symbols proved vital to the improvement of the situation in the country. In 2007, a temporary civil peace agreement was concluded after the national football team had pleaded in front of television cameras for the Ivorian people to stop the war in their country.

[www.playthegame.org/news/detailed/time-for-didier-drogba-5145.html](http://www.playthegame.org/news/detailed/time-for-didier-drogba-5145.html) / see the report and videos on the blog

# Highlights (7)

## Some recent initiatives – 3

On 21-22 November 2011, Doha hosted a particular competition, which gathered Pakistan, India, North and South Korea, China, Japan, United States, France and Qatar. The International Tennis Table Federation (ITTF), launched this initiative together with the Peace and Sport Foundation and the UN, as Wilfried Lemke – UN Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) – called for friendship and harmony among participants. The *Peace and Sport Table Tennis Cup* was set up with the aim of improving relations between nations and foster dialogue between them. Qualities such as teamwork and alliance were promoted, and showed how sport can be inspiring for easing political tensions and paving the way towards peace. The players from North and South Korea won the men's doubles tournament, and had a photograph taken with Mr. Lemke. This was an attempt to revive the so-called “ping-pong diplomacy”, which took place in the 1970s between the U.S. and China.

More information on the blog: <http://bit.ly/y55VVN>

# Conclusion (1)

As a conclusion, we would like to insist on four main points:

1. Sport does never start a process (of reconciliation, peace, etc.). Most of the time, it can only be part of a broader way to reach a final solution/settlement, or just improve a situation. The only exception is “ping-pong diplomacy” between China and the U.S., when sport almost drove the process of reopening diplomatic ties. However, sport can help achieve objectives, especially in terms of national *soft power* (e.g. Beijing Olympics), peaceful (e.g. “cricket diplomacy”) or confrontational purposes (e.g. “Football War”, Berlin Olympics). It can also help foster cooperation (e.g. “baseball diplomacy”) or serve as a tool to show disagreement (e.g. Olympic Games boycotts).
2. Secondly, can sport make a difference? The answer is yes, but mostly among the civil society. Through peaceful people-to-people exchange, there is an increase in the knowledge of the Other and the Self, which significantly helps reduce stereotypes. The situation seems more complicated at the state level. And after all, would sports and international politics be a good mix? We have seen that sport has served noble purposes, but has also been used by the worst regimes ever, to fulfill their own interests.

# Conclusion (2)

3. Thirdly, how can sports diplomacy prove sustainable? Keeping in mind all the cases presented here, it seems that sporting events are heavily depending on geopolitical events. For instance, new countries are now increasingly hosting major championships, and sometimes games are cancelled because of political tensions. Nevertheless, some current projects might surpass this obstacle, such as sports exchanges between the U.S. and Russia (*Sports United* program).
4. Finally, we have to recall here the fundamental contradiction which lies in the essence of sport: participation and hard competition. Although both phenomena overlap, participation concentrates on humanitarian values, the importance of international gathering and internationalism, whereas hard competition often refers to nationalism, pride, honour and glory. Emotions and perceptions, which are central to any analysis in international relations, can play a dual role and enhance one side or the other. This contradiction also highlights the current debate in academic circles between the liberal (participation) and realist (competition) approaches.