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Beyond “An Iron Fist in a Velvet Glove”: American People-to-People Sport Diplomacy during the Late and Post-Cold War Eras (1980-2020)

Committee:

Thomas M. Hunt, Supervisor

Tolga Ozyurtcu, Co-Supervisor

Janice S. Todd

Matthew Bowers

Brain M. Mills

Toby C. Rider

**Beyond “An Iron Fist in a Velvet Glove”: American People-to-People
Sport Diplomacy during the Late and Post-Cold War Eras (1980-2020)**

by

Sam Thomas Schelfhout

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2023

Dedication

To my family

For their encouragement, love, and patience.

Acknowledgements

Writing a dissertation is an intensely personal experience, and loneliness can certainly arise as part of the research and writing phases. This experience was intensified by a global pandemic, working primarily from home, and accepting an academic position in an area where I had zero connections or roots. This project is, by far, the most challenging pursuit I have ever embarked upon. As I look back on this (very long) journey, no matter how lonely I felt, I know I have a fantastic support network, without which I could not have done this.

Upon embarking on my educational journey at the University of Texas at Austin, I did not realize I would surround myself with scholars and colleagues who shared similar academic interests in sport and history. I want to start by thanking Tommy Hunt, who has consistently been a fierce advocate and compassionate leader throughout my graduate education. Tolga Ozyurtcu is one of the most intimidatingly intelligent professors I have had the pleasure to work with. He continually challenged me to approach materials from different perspectives and take pride in my academic interests. To Jan and Terry Todd – without their influence during my master’s education, I would not be embarking on this path. To Brian Mills and Toby Rider, two talented scholars I am incredibly fortunate to have been involved in this project. I would also like to thank Conor Heffernan, Emily Sparvero, Cindy Slater, and Kimberly Beckwith for their support during my time at UT Austin. Finally, to Matthew Bowers, whom I consider my most influential mentor as a student and teaching assistant for his introductory sport management courses; whether he knows it or not, he has taught me several lessons that I now incorporate into my teaching and learning.

I could not have done this without my network of colleagues at UT Austin. I regret that our time working and collaborating on our independent projects had been cut short by the pandemic. Your encouragement, zeal, and frequent trips to bars in Austin emboldened me to be the best version of myself I could be. Thank you to Austin Duckworth, Andrew Hao, Alec Hurley, Ciera Jones, Tanya Jones, Ryan Murtha, and Lauren Osmer for not only challenging me to become a better scholar but for the combination of camaraderie, fervor, and commiseration of embarking on this unique educational pursuit.

The content within this dissertation was illuminated by an exceptional group of practitioners and scholars in the fields of public diplomacy, sport diplomacy, and sport management. On the academic side, I would like to thank Robert E. Baker, Craig Esherick, Sarah Hillyer, Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff, and Carrie LeCrom for their kindness and expert insight. I would also like to thank Heidi Blair, Elliott Bloom, Ryan Murphy, Joshua Shen, Kelsey Stamm Jimenez, and Jill Stephens for illustrating their first-hand experiences of sport diplomacy programming, narratives that this dissertation would languish without. I want to extend special thanks to Trina Bolton, whose enthusiasm for the work done at SportsUnited and the Sports Diplomacy Division manifested in each conversation with me throughout the research process. Her insights undoubtedly illuminated the final product, and I cannot thank her enough for her time and willingness to help.

Special thanks go to the faculty and staff at Sacred Heart University, who probably did not know what they were getting into when they first sent the job offer to the ABD student at UT Austin. The dissertation took longer than expected, but I cannot thank them enough for their patience and encouragement. Josh Shuart has been inspiring and considerate throughout my short time in Fairfield, and I look forward to working with him and my other SHU colleagues in the coming years.

Finally, I would be remiss in thanking my father, Tom, my mother, Debbie, and my brother, Riley. Although they did not fully understand what I was writing about, and I had to consistently correct them of the name of my degree (it's not sport management!), they have been my most prominent source of support and my primary motivation for pushing this project over the finish line. I cannot thank them enough.

Abstract

Beyond “An Iron First in a Velvet Glove”: American People-to-People Sport Diplomacy during the Late and Post-Cold War Eras (1980-2020)

Sam Thomas Schelfhout, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2023

Supervisor: Thomas M. Hunt

Co-Supervisor: Tolga Ozyurtcu

As the debate surrounding the relationship between sport and politics remains heated in American popular discourse, the conundrum permeates the field of sport diplomacy and sport’s legitimacy as a political instrument. Nations popularly wielded the propagandistic power of sport since the beginning of the Cold War, using sporting events to achieve foreign policy objectives. States, governing bodies, and other nonstate actors use public diplomacy to understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior; build and manage relationships; and influence opinions and actions to advance interests and values. Sport is increasingly becoming an attractive option in public diplomacy, and the incorporation of uniform mechanisms for achieving cultural mediation objectives across governments has become the norm in several governments worldwide.

In the United States, the mission of the Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and the Sport Diplomacy Division is to develop relationships between Americans and citizens from nations worldwide by sharing a common goal through sports. While sport diplomacy is primarily used to advance interstate relations and foreign policy

objectives on behalf of national governments, private actors have increasingly embraced the practice in achieving a broader range of benefits. Leaders within the Department of State and an increasing number of non-state actors must continue to harness the unique power sport possesses in bridging differences, developing positive associations with foreign countries, and advancing the myriad of benefits that sport can present. Emerging trends, such as digital diplomacy and esports diplomacy, influence program leaders to continuously improve and adapt programming to reach as many global citizens as possible.

This project will focus on how the United States government and non-governmental actors interpret and implement people-to-people sport diplomacy in the post-Cold War era. This research employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing oral histories, content analyses, and official documents from physical and digital archives to illuminate how people-to-people sports exchanges are conducted in the U.S. and abroad. Reflecting on the history of people-to-people sports exchanges and insights from professionals who have previously steered such programs, governmental and non-governmental agencies should explore and encourage opportunities to engage in people-to-people sport diplomacy initiatives.

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List of Abbreviations

<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>Meanings</i>
AAU	Amateur Athletic Union
ABA	American Basketball Association
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AOC	American Olympic Committee
CAC	Cyberspace Administration of China
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CSPS	University of Tennessee's Center for Sport, Peace, and Society
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
ECA	Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
EMS	Electric Messaging System
FHI 360	Family Health International
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
FREEDOM	Freedom for Russia and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets Support Act of 1992
GMU	George Mason University
GSMP	Global Sports Mentoring Program
IIP	The Office of International Information Programs
IOC	International Olympic Committee
ISO	International Sports Organization
ISPI	International Sports Program Initiative
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
LAOOC	Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee
MELI	Monitoring Evaluation Learning and Innovation Unit
MLB	Major League Baseball
MNE	Multinational Enterprise
NASCAR	National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing
NBA	National Basketball Association
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
NFL	National Football League
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
POGI	Project Objectives, Goals, and Implementation
S4C	Sport for Community
SDP	Sport for Development and Peace

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USIA	United States Intelligence Agency
USOC	United States Olympic Committee
VOA	Voice of America
WNBA	Women's National Basketball Association
YES	Youth Exchange and Study Program

Chapter 1: Introduction

For anyone in the United States of America who does not live under a rock, it is nearly impossible to underestimate the mass appeal of sport throughout the nation. For many Americans who have spent their youth clad in the cultural fabric of sporting activities and continue to participate, casually or competitively, in sporting competitions into their adult lives, crossing paths with like-minded enthusiasts of a particular activity is an effortless matter. The capability of sport to cultivate social networks, provide an engaging approach to physical activity, and build bridges between diverse populations has possessed generations of Americans and set them on undeviating life paths.

However easy it may be to build these bridges to budding contemporaries through sport, presenting the indomitable values and unique quirks of a specific sport to an unaccustomed community offers a perplexing challenge. Florida Southern College head volleyball coach Jill Stephens experienced this first-hand when she, along with former Olympian Robert “Butch” May, traveled to Zambia in 2010 to conduct volleyball clinics throughout the country. Joining them were members of the non-profit organization Stop the Spread, whose stated mission “was to help reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS and poverty with education, counseling and economic self-reliance.”¹ With additional assistance provided by the U.S. Embassy in Lusaka, the sports envoys embarked on a week-long journey and introduced roughly 500 girls and boys to the sport of volleyball, nearly all of whom had never experienced the game in their lifetimes.

Initially, the prospect of teaching the basics of volleyball constituted a challenge to the soccer-crazed nation, but the logistics of the visits presented their own issues. Several

¹ Emmett Hall, “VanZwieten Family Spreading Volleyball Love in Africa,” *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, Mar. 4, 2010, para. 3. <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-2010-03-04-fl-pbf-volleyball-0304-20100304-story.html>.

sites did not have the proper infrastructure to host these clinics, as Stephens recalls local guides cutting down grass up to five feet tall to set up nets. With equipment provided by the envoys and Stop the Spread, the group would conduct two to three-hour clinics for Zambian children before packing up and heading to the next location. While Stephens remembers having anywhere between 20 and 30 children at each clinic, some events were attended by as many as 50 or 60. “There were some aged four or five where little brothers and sisters were coming, and they were awesome. But all the way up to ... maybe 14-year-olds, 15-year-olds were the target group.”² While some time was spent with local coaches, the nation’s volleyball federation, and an assorted number of officials in government affairs, most of the time spent on the trip was spent working with the Zambian children. “They were thrilled. They had no idea what they were doing, but they were excited to learn and excited to meet somebody... you know, because we were just so different looking from everybody.”³

Stephens and her delegation were also accompanied by the U.S. Department of State, which joined the volleyballers with its own operational goals in conjunction with the clinics. SportsUnited, the Department of State’s Sports Diplomacy Division, allied with public speakers and experts who discussed gender-based violence issues with the Zambian teens and children, a topic that Stephens recalls the children were not well-versed in. She notes that there were speakers who attempted to challenge perceptions of abuse and how to identify mistreatment: “It was heartbreaking. So many times, they would ask questions about, you know, ‘Has anyone ever touched you in a way that you didn’t like?’ And everyone raised their hands. So, it’s ... trying to change the norm of what is acceptable and

² Jill Stephens, interview with author, telephone call, July 15, 2021.

³ Ibid.

what's a crime.”⁴ The appeal of volleyball attracted children from the surrounding area to participate in such clinics, which created substantial congregations for SportsUnited to advocate for democratic values through its programming. Stephens notes, “We got to eat their food and join in their culture, which was amazing. The people from the Department of State ... they drove us around in a van and just kind of set up all the different experiences. So, it was an amazing, life-changing experience for me, for sure.”⁵

This duet of sports envoys and Department of State officials worked harmoniously together to improve the quality of life of the Zambian children through volleyball and education on gender-based violence. Given its stature in world affairs, the American government could have had its pick from an arsenal of policy options to affect public policy in the realm of gender-based violence, including lobbying Zambian government officials who have the power to push policies that improve the general welfare of its nation. Instead, SportsUnited was tasked with making an impact through public diplomacy, using sport to communicate these strategic directives with average Zambian citizens.

Stephens appreciated the opportunity to interact with ordinary citizens rather than diplomats or Zambians who came from more privileged environments:

I wouldn't have wanted it any other way. I think when I had that experience to go over there, I didn't want to stay in a nice hotel. What impacted me way more was to go out to these remote villages ... I can't imagine spending our whole time in Lusaka where there's greater wealth. Nothing extreme, but [it] was really cool to visit the people in the remote villages in Zambia.”⁶

Stephens has not returned to Zambia since this inaugural trip in 2010, but she hopes another future voyage is in the cards. “Hopefully, someday, I'll get back there and be able

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

to do something to get back. Just how privileged we are here in the United States and all the benefits we have. Trying not to take those for granted and trying to give back. It was definitely a life-changing experience and one I love talking about.”⁷

SPORT DIPLOMACY BEFORE 1980

This is one example of the extensive programming that the Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) and the Sports Diplomacy Division at the U.S. Department of State have executed since its incorporation in 2002. While this approach of bringing together people from disparate backgrounds and expecting them to bond over an activity as seemingly rudimentary as sport may be perceived as a bootless errand, the Department of State has capitalized on such initiatives and has found substantial value in this approach. As journalist Warren St. John notes in his book *Outcasts United*, “Self-interest might have put these disparate souls into close proximity, but proximity bred human connections that, while occasionally complicated and certainly complex, were real and elastic, able to withstand the normal tensions that characterize all human relations without losing their shape.”⁸ While reaching the maximum potential of realizing these relationships requires further investments in time and consideration, sport has a unique power in opening the door to developing these connections on a deeper level.

The division has initiated hundreds of sport-related programs involving citizens worldwide along with its partners. Foreign Service Officer John W. Finn explains that such programs are a cornerstone of U.S. public diplomacy efforts. He states, “Because they are required by law to present a balanced view of America’s diverse society and opinions, these

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Warren St. John, *Outcasts United: An American Town, A Refugee Team, and One Woman’s Quest to Make a Difference* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2009), 184.

programs create the understanding and trust that help people all over the world put U.S. policies in context and create confidence in American leadership.”⁹ With a balanced mix of goals produced by the Sports Diplomacy Division, which range from promoting disability rights to educating children about the risks of drug use, sport has been championed by the Department of State as an effective medium to advocate for marginalized communities across the globe.

Although people-to-people sport diplomacy programming can trace its origins before it was popularized during the Cold War, nations wielded the propagandistic power of sport at the conflict’s onset, using sporting events to achieve foreign policy objectives. Of course, activities categorized as “sport diplomacy” are not unique to the late twentieth century. Governments have utilized sport throughout the world to achieve a range of various policy and diplomatic objectives. International relations scholar Christopher Hill points out that historians of diplomacy have shown that “diplomats were quick to see the importance of sport for national prestige from the 1930s if not before.”¹⁰ The benefits of sport in the international sphere are safer than other high-level diplomatic activities, as sport historian Barrie Houlihan notes that sport has historically been used “as a low-cost, low-risk and high-visibility opportunity for diplomacy.”¹¹ Rather than proving superiority through military might on the battleground, sport was implemented on the ideological battlefield. Concerningly, the countries who exhibited this success through sporting

⁹ John W. Finn, “The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs: Building Trust With People-to-People Exchanges,” *State Magazine*, May 1999, 17.

¹⁰ Christopher Hill, “Prologue,” in *Sport and International Relations: An Emerging Relationship*, eds. Adrian Budd & Roger Levermore (London: Routledge, 2004), 3.

¹¹ Barrie Houlihan, “Building an International Regime to Combat Doping in Sport,” in *Sport and International Relations: An Emerging Relationship*, eds. Adrian Budd & Roger Levermore (London: Routledge, 2004), 69.

prowess tried to spin this as evidence of philosophical supremacy outside the boundaries of the playing field. At a 1956 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) meeting in Paris, representatives from New Zealand reinforced this view, stating, “In some cases, athletic or games supremacy has become the sine qua non of general national superiority. For example, the Olympic Games are now regarded by many as merely a testing-ground for two great political units, and some international soccer matches seem to be a contest between rival political ideologies rather than games of football.”¹²

The U.S. and the Soviet Union each utilized sport throughout the Cold War to exhibit national superiority and exert their respective ideologies’ influence on nations who were “unaligned,” or did not have established alliances, with either power. President Dwight D. Eisenhower was the first U.S. president to experiment with the political use of sport and attempted to imbed it as a cornerstone of American foreign policy, which became evident following a foreign policy speech delivered as part of his election campaign in 1952. “Our aim in ‘cold war’ is not conquest of territory or subjugation by force ... We are trying to get the world by peaceful means to believe the truth... the means we shall employ to spread the truth are often called ‘psychological.’”¹³

Sport scholars David L. Andrews and Stephen Wagg claim that “international sporting competition provided a hitherto unprecedented - and, arguably, cathartic - vehicle for the expression of the new order of nation-based antagonisms within the post-war

¹² New Zealand member state, quoted in United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *The Place of Sport in Education: A Comparative Study* (Paris: UNESCO, 1956), 55.

¹³ Toby C. Rider, “The Olympic Games and the Secret Cold War: The U.S. Government and the Propaganda Campaign Against Communist Sport, 1950-1960” (doctoral thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2011), 80. Additionally, a 1948 Soviet Party resolution on sport stated, “We must raise our level of skill so that Soviet athletes win world supremacy in the major sports in the immediate future.” See James Riordan, *Sport, Politics and Communism* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1991), 141.

world.”¹⁴ Top officials of the hegemonic powers recognized this, as then-U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy penned in “A Bold Proposal for American Sport,” “But in this day of international stalemates nations use the scoreboard of sports as a visible measuring stick to prove their superiority over the “soft and decadent” democratic way of life ... athletics can become an increasingly important factor in international relations.”¹⁵ Propaganda experts during this era sought to paint their respective nations in a positive light to promote affiliations with as many other nations as possible, and demonstrating sporting prowess emerged as an influential element in the extensive toolkit of public diplomacy initiatives.

Sport historian Toby Rider notes that how each nation framed its sporting endeavors to foreign publics was critical in winning over impartial individuals. He notes that propaganda experts in each country believed that “...if overseas audiences could understand how their nation played sports they could understand the nation itself, or at least a better version of it.”¹⁶ It was critical during this time that sport was not only to be visible but also displayed at the highest level to show superiority over both the adversary’s sporting and political structures.

Despite this competitive nature, the U.S. and the Soviet Union utilized person-to-person exchanges to promote American-Soviet relations. Eisenhower recognized the need for mutual understanding between U.S. citizens and people across the world, including citizens of the Soviet Union. He appointed Olympian Eddie Eagan to head the People-to-

¹⁴ David L. Andrews & Stephen Wagg, “Introduction: War Minus the Shooting?” in *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War*, eds. Stephen Wagg and David L. Andrews (New York: Routledge, 2007), 2.

¹⁵ Robert F. Kennedy, “A Bold Proposal for American Sport,” *Sports Illustrated*, July 27, 1964, 13.

¹⁶ Toby C. Rider, “Projecting America: Sport and Early US Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960,” in *Defending the American Way of Life: Sport, Culture, and the Cold War*, eds. Toby C. Rider & Kevin B. Witherspoon (Fayetteville, Ark.: University of Arkansas Press, 2018), 14.

People Sports Committee in 1956, who asserted, “To create a greater general awareness among people interested in sports of the tremendous contribution they have to make in resolving the problems of expanding international understanding precedent to any real peace in the world.”¹⁷ As Eisenhower expressed, for such exchanges to be effective in bringing together citizens from different backgrounds, the initiatives “must have the active support of thousands of independent private groups and institutions and millions of individual Americans acting through person-to-person communication in foreign lands.”¹⁸ Bringing together swaths of Americans proved to be a noble challenge, but working harmoniously with the opposition was also required to achieve the most outstanding possible results.

The first significant pact between the two superpowers, the Cultural Exchange Agreement, was signed in January 1958, which “exchanged visits of doctors, scholars, students, scientists, agricultural experts, artists, musicians, dancers, and all manner of other performers. The agreement also called for mutual visits of athletes and coaches and dual meets in a variety of sports.”¹⁹ Several sports ambassadors represented the U.S. throughout the late 1950s and into the 1960s, including prominent names such as middle-distance runner Mal Whitfield, weightlifter Tommy Kono, and tennis stars Althea Gibson and Arthur Ashe. As sport historian Thomas M. Hunt notes, however, the number of cultural and athletic exchange programs dwindled toward the end of the 1960s, as “The resources

¹⁷ Letter from Edward P.F. Eagan regarding the People-to-People Sports Committee, December 25, 1957, Jacqueline Cochran Papers, 1930 – 1975, General Files Series, Box 89, People-to-People Program 1957 (1), Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Kevin B. Witherspoon, “America’s Team: The US Women’s National Basketball Team Confronts the Soviets, 1958-1969,” in *Defending the American Way of Life: Sport, Culture, and the Cold War*, eds. Toby C. Rider & Kevin B. Witherspoon (Fayetteville, Ark.: University of Arkansas Press, 2018), 101.

afforded to these undertakings had been under threat since at least 1964, when Congress began to contemplate a reduction in the appropriations for the State Department's cultural exchange initiatives."²⁰ This dissertation will focus on the re-emergence of people-to-people sport diplomacy initiatives following the frigid détente of such programs during the Jimmy Carter administration from 1977 to 1981, characterized by the administration's clumsy boycott of the Summer Olympic Games in Moscow in 1980. As discussed later in the outline, the onset of a partnership between private enterprise and sport diplomacy initiatives in the 1980s led to a reemergence of people-to-people sports exchanges conducted by a diverse range of actors with a greater variety of strategic ambitions.

BEYOND "AN IRON FIRST IN A VELVET GLOVE": AN INTRODUCTION TO THE DISSERTATION

From ping-pong diplomacy between the U.S. and China in 1971 to the recent Major League Baseball game played between the Tampa Bay Rays and the Cuban national team in 2016, sport has played an overlooked role in conducting diplomacy between nations across the world. Once viewed as "an iron fist in a velvet glove" during the Cold War, the U.S.'s use of sport as a tool for diplomacy has invariably evolved with the global political climate throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As the debate surrounding the relationship between sport and politics remains heated in popular discourse, the conundrum permeates the field of sport diplomacy and its legitimacy as a political instrument. Sport diplomacy, as defined by sport scholar Stuart Murray, is "...the *conscious, strategic* and *regular* use of sport, sportspeople, sporting events and non-state sporting actors by [Ministries of Foreign Affairs] and their diplomatic staffs to create collaborative, long-term

²⁰ Thomas M. Hunt, "Sport and American Foreign Policy during the 1960s," in *Defending the American Way of Life: Sport, Culture, and the Cold War*, eds. Toby C. Rider & Kevin B. Witherspoon (Fayetteville, Ark.: University of Arkansas Press, 2018), 197.

and mutually beneficial partnerships.”²¹ Sport diplomacy is a smaller piece of public diplomacy, defined as official efforts to convince targeted sectors of foreign opinion to support a government’s strategic objectives. Specified by scholar Bruce Gregory, public diplomacy is “used by states, associations of states, and nonstate actors to understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior; build and manage relationships; and influence opinions and actions to advance interests and values.”²²

Sport is increasingly becoming an attractive apparatus in public diplomacy, and the incorporation of uniform mechanisms for achieving cultural mediation objectives across governments has become the norm worldwide. Bringing together individuals into proximity through the common denominator of sport has a unique power in bridging differences and developing positive associations with foreign countries. It has the potential to advance a myriad of individual benefits, ranging from the maturation of interpersonal communications skills to career advancement. American journalist Warren St. John eloquently builds on this benefit of proximity in his reflection on sport diplomacy, writing that this “proximity [breeds] human connections that, while occasionally complicated and certainly complex, [are] real and elastic, able to withstand the normal tensions that characterize all human relations without losing their shape.”²³ The U.S. has taken a unique approach in how it conducts public diplomacy compared to other countries, such as France and Brazil, which have separate branches of government dedicated to youth affairs and sports. While sport diplomacy is primarily used to advance interstate relations and foreign

²¹ Stuart Murray, *Sports Diplomacy: Origins, Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2018), 94.

²² Bruce Gregory, “Public Diplomacy: Sunrise of an Academic Field,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (2008), 274.

²³ St. John, *Outcasts United*, 184.

policy objectives on behalf of national governments, private actors have increasingly embraced the practice in achieving a broader range of benefits.

The importance of sport diplomacy in the twenty-first century cannot be understated, as U.S. influence abroad has gradually diminished following the presidency of Donald J. Trump from 2017 to 2021. As sport diplomacy scholar Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff points out, the country's fifth overall ranking in the 2019 Global30's annual Soft Power 30 Rankings (down from first overall in 2016) has resulted in the diminishing of the country's "ability to be liked, to persuade, and to lead ... While these are problems for U.S. foreign policy, loss of cultural cachet also directly affects the sports world in its cultivation of overseas fans, markets, and growth."²⁴ While the economic impact of this loss of soft power cannot be discounted, this only composes one component of why both governmental and non-governmental organizations employ sport diplomacy initiatives. This dissertation will outline the plethora of challenges organizations seek to overcome through such initiatives.

This project will focus on how the U.S. government and non-governmental actors interpret and implement sport diplomacy in the post-Cold War era. In addition, a historical examination of the acceleration of globalization in the 1980s will discuss how many actors, ranging from multinational enterprises (MNEs) to non-governmental organizations, were inclined to incorporate sport diplomacy into their agendas. The political, economic, and technological advancements that spurred globalization in the 1980s allowed for the penetration of Western ideas and capital into the Soviet Union and its satellite states. Following the Cold War, the flashpoint of the September 11 attacks acted as an alarm regarding the consequences of neglecting public and cultural diplomacy. This resulted in

²⁴ Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff, "Sports Diplomacy as an Engagement Tool." *Sports Business Journal*, Nov. 25, 2020, <https://www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/SB-Blogs/COVID19-OpEds/2020/11/25.aspx>.

the revival of several diplomatic efforts and, most notably for this dissertation, the incorporation of SportsUnited in 2002, the Department of State's sports diplomacy division. Also worthy of discussion is how sport diplomacy can be interpreted in the 2010s, as emergent technologies and cultural trends will force state and non-state actors alike to adapt sport diplomacy initiatives to broaden their reach, local or global.

Select chapters of this dissertation will include oral histories, which historian Lynn Abrams defines as “the act of recording the speech of people with something interesting to say and then analysing their memories of the past.”²⁵ Sport historians Carly Adams and Mike Cronin expand on this base definition, asserting that oral history “...centralizes how and why individuals, groups and communities explain, rationalize, and make sense of their experiences. It offers new insight into the choices that are made, actions taken.”²⁶ Given that much of this dissertation focuses on how sport diplomacy operated in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, traditional research methods such as archival research are not yet available for this given topic. Expanding on these insights, sport historian Douglas Booth features this research method as “unique in the questioning of informants and in evoking recollections and understandings of individuals and groups largely hidden from documentary sources.”²⁷ Throughout this study, excerpts of interviews conducted by the author are carefully incorporated to provide context and to detail the experiences of those who have experienced the uniqueness of U.S. sport diplomacy firsthand in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

²⁵ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1.

²⁶ Carly Adams & Mike Cronin, “Sport and Oral History,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 36, no. 13-14 (2019), 1131.

²⁷ Douglas Booth, *The Field: Truth and Fiction in Sport History* (London: Routledge, 2007), 94.

The utilization of archival sources is regrettably scant due to the closure of physical archives due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Fortunately, some archival sources have been deployed throughout the text from site visits before the worldwide shutdown. Digital archives were also made available in place of the closure of physical archives. Notably, the White House Office of Records Management has digitized select files from the George W. Bush Administration, the governing administration of SportsUnited in 2002. In addition, the U.S. Department of State has digitized several materials, including archive websites of presidential administrations dating back to the William J. Clinton Administration and every issue of *State Magazine* (1999 to present).

DISSERTATION OUTLINE

Chapter 2 of this dissertation will open with a literature review that will explore the theoretical foundations of people-to-people sport diplomacy, which is rooted in the broader concepts of soft power, public diplomacy, and cultural diplomacy. People-to-people diplomacy and sport diplomacy exist independently of one another, and their origins are explored separately before investigating why governments implemented people-to-people sport diplomacy programs in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This chapter provides a foundation for the subsequent overview of how the U.S. government and non-government organizations (NGOs) utilize sport for diplomatic aims.

Chapter 3 investigates the shift away from sport diplomacy as a tool to exhibit national superiority and toward how American MNEs began to use sport abroad to infiltrate Soviet (and Soviet satellite state) markets starting in the 1980s. Transnational corporations, such as Nike and Coca-Cola, increased their dependence on world markets for profits. As historian Walter LaFeber points out, transnationals of the late twentieth century depended

on “massive advertising campaigns to make people want their products.”²⁸ This emergence of soft power took many forms, from traditional print advertising to new technologies fueled by the upsurge in the World Wide Web usage. Transnationals included sport diplomacy under this umbrella of persuasive techniques to penetrate these markets and establish long-term revenue streams for new generations of consumers. This marked shift from using sport as propaganda to using sport as a soft power tool generated momentum in this period and planted the foundation for how sport diplomacy is interpreted in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 4 analyzes the period between the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 to the beginning of the millennium. The conclusion of the Cold War continued to persist through the realm of international sporting events in the years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The reason for this was sporting events’ appeal in pitting “capitalism versus communism,” as famous examples ranging from the Soviet victory in the 1972 Olympic men’s basketball final to the 1980 “Miracle on Ice” ice hockey match. As sport scholars David L. Andrews and Stephen Wagg demonstrate, “Nothing ... can rival the Cold War for the tension, the ideological import, the sense of Us and Them, nor on occasion the ugliness, that it brought to international sporting encounters.”²⁹ In addition, the role of sport easily fits within the prevalent public mindset as it fits within the “soft-core” realm of culture and outside of the diminishing “hard-core” issues of the operation of the military-industrial complex; in other words, “the soft side of the Cold War was ideological; the side

²⁸ Walter LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2002), 56.

²⁹ Andrews & Wagg, “Introduction: War Minus the Shooting?,” 8.

of the Cold War that took centre stage in public discourse and imagination.”³⁰ This easily-delivered narrative was chiefly driven by the media, who continued to employ Cold War narratives well after 1991 in several major sporting events between the two powers. This chapter will analyze sport diplomacy efforts taken during the 1990s and how the persistence of Cold War narratives continued to impede the coverage of these events.

Chapter 5 discusses the history of the incorporation of SportsUnited, the U.S. Department of State’s official sport diplomacy arm. Incorporated in 2002, SportsUnited uses sport to help youth worldwide develop essential off-the-court skills, including leadership, mutual understanding, and academic achievement. The impetus for the programs that would define SportsUnited “stemmed from the concepts that sports programs could be an avenue for transcending national, cultural or even linguistic boundaries, and that sports are a unique vehicle for cross-cultural learning and mutual understanding.”³¹ This chapter identifies focusing events such as the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks for the implementation of the department. In addition to a contextual background on U.S. post-9/11 diplomatic strategy, oral histories from Department of State staff regarding the incorporation of SportsUnited will illuminate this chapter.

Chapter 6 takes a more in-depth look at specific initiatives that the Sports Diplomacy Division (formerly SportsUnited) has taken and is currently undertaking in the 2010s and 2020s. Specifically, four initiatives will be discussed and focus on the program’s inception, the policy objectives tied to the program’s success, and a reflection on the

³⁰ Michael L. Silk, Bryan Bracey, & Mark Falcous, “Performing America’s Past: Cold War Fantasies in a Perpetual State of War,” in *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War*, eds. Stephen Wagg and David L. Andrews (New York: Routledge, 2007), 292.

³¹ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Office of Policy and Evaluation, Evaluation Division. *Study of ECA’s SportsUnited Programs: Sports Visitor Program, Sports Grants Program, Sports Envoy Program* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2013), 8.

program's overall efficacy. The Sports Envoys and Sports Visitors programs are the flagship programs of the department, with athletes and coaches who travel overseas to lead programs that U.S. embassies and consulates developed in over 50 countries with 1,344 non-elite youth athletes and coaches visiting the U.S. since 2002 to participate in two-week exchange programs. Then, the discussion will shift to focus on the International Sports Program Initiative (ISPI), the Sports Diplomacy Division's grant competition that opens funding to U.S. public and private non-profit organizations seeking to design sports exchange programs serving global youth. Finally, The Global Sports Mentoring Program, launched in 2012, consists of two pillars that focus on advancing gender equality and disability rights. Five-week immersive mentorship experiences "focus on empowering international delegates to serve their local communities by increasing access to and opportunities for participation in sports."³²

Lastly, the **conclusion (Chapter 7)** will explore the future of sport diplomacy and how it is used today. Esports has emerged as an alternative to traditional sports, and its rising popularity has uniquely intersected with global politics. Scant scholarly attention has been given to the relationship between esports and diplomacy. This section will also extend past esports into how national actors (governmental and non-governmental) today use sport for diplomatic aims. Will the techniques used continue into the next decade or beyond, or will how we view sport diplomacy today change in the future? This chapter will also briefly cover how sport diplomacy initiatives have adapted to the world during the covid-19 pandemic. The Sports Diplomacy Division has shifted several programs to digital formats, discussing topics ranging from youth empowerment to its "GET FIT" initiative, which promotes fitness and social change initiatives.

³² "The Basics of the Program," Global Sports Mentoring Program, accessed February 27, 2022, <https://globalsportsmentoring.org/global-sports-mentoring-program>.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Foundations of People-to-People Sport Diplomacy in the United States of America

Before exploring the field of people-to-people sport diplomacy, the theoretical foundations of this study must be addressed. First, traditional diplomacy is “the conduct of relations between sovereign states with standing in world politics by official agents and by peaceful means.”³³ At its base, sport diplomacy is an extension of soft power, which political scientist Joseph S. Nye Jr. defines as “the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes one wants.”³⁴ He expands on this definition by describing soft power as “The values a government champions in its behavior at home (for example, democracy), in international institutions (working with others), and in foreign policy (promoting peace and human rights) strongly affect the preferences of others.”³⁵ Scholars have endlessly debated the efficacy of soft power in relation to hard power, which is a coercive approach taken by nations that usually involves military power.

Regarding soft power, Nye concedes that these soft power sources do not always translate to actualized power that governments can substantially use to push their agendas. Nye believes “the objective measure of potential soft power must be attractive in the eyes of specific audiences, and that attraction must influence policy outcomes.”³⁶ There is no solidified method of measuring soft power, which disenchants world leaders in advancing such power. However, power in the global information age must “include a soft dimension

³³ Stuart Murray, “The Two Halves of Sports-Diplomacy,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 23, no. 3 (2012), 578.

³⁴ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

of attraction as well as the hard dimensions of coercion and inducement.”³⁷ Nye defines this blend of power as “smart power.”

Academics in sport studies had yet to incorporate soft power into their research when Nye first popularized the concept in his 1990 book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. Sport researchers, such as Geoffrey Allen Pigman and J. Simon Rofo, argue that a scholarly investigation of sport diplomacy is overdue, given “the relative rise in the importance of soft power, the power to persuade and attract, as a major development in international relations since the end of the Cold War.”³⁸ Sport scholars Jonathan Grix and Paul Michael Brannagan conceptualize soft power through sports mega-events, finding that to maximize the efficacy of soft power in this sphere, leaders must “build long-term relationships based on trust and credibility, eventually leading to an enabling environment for effective government policies.”³⁹ As political scientist Victor D. Cha argues, sport has the potential to translate into soft power: Sport can create “a positive reputation in sport [and] can augment a country’s global status and position on the world stage.”⁴⁰

The United States is uniquely positioned to advance this degree of soft power simply due to its capitalistic foundations. As journalist Charles P. Pierce states, “An America is created that is neither military hegemon nor corporate leviathan – a looser place,

³⁷ Joseph S. Nye Jr., “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (2008), 107.

³⁸ Geoffrey Allen Pigman & J. Simon Rofo, “Sport and Diplomacy: An Introduction,” *Sport in Society* 17, no. 9 (2014), 1096.

³⁹ Jonathan Grix & Paul Michael Brannagan. “Of Mechanisms and Myths: Conceptualising States ‘Soft Power’ Strategies Through Sports Mega-Events,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27, no. 2 (2016), 256.

⁴⁰ Victor D. Cha, “A Theory of Sport and Politics,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 11 (2009), 1590.

less rigid and more free, where anyone who works hard shooting a ball or handling a puck can become famous and (yes) rich.”⁴¹ Nye notes, “Though it is true that America’s size creates a necessity to lead and makes it a target for resentment as well as admiration, both the substance and style of [the country’s] foreign policy can make a difference to [its] image of legitimacy, and thus to [its] soft power.”⁴² Some scholars, including communications scholar Eytan Gilboa, have gone as far to argue that key elements of soft power, including a positive image and global reputation, have “become more important than territory, access, and raw materials, traditionally acquired through military and economic measures.”⁴³

Soft power is manifested in public diplomacy, defined as official efforts to convince targeted sectors of foreign opinion to support a government’s strategic objectives. As diplomatic scholar Bruce Gregory clarifies, public diplomacy is “used by states, associations of states, and nonstate actors to *understand* cultures, attitudes, and behavior; *build and manage* relationships; and *influence* opinions and actions to advance interests and values.”⁴⁴ Public diplomacy itself is a relatively new concept, first utilized in 1965 to “the process by which international actors seek to accomplish the goals of their foreign policy by engaging with foreign publics and has gained international currency only since the end of the cold war.”⁴⁵ Despite its recent introduction to diplomatic studies, public

⁴¹ Charles P. Pierce, “The Goodwill Games,” *Boston Globe*, Sept. 21, 2003.

⁴² Nye, *Soft Power*, 68.

⁴³ Eytan Gilboa, “Searching For a Theory of Public Diplomacy,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (2008), 56.

⁴⁴ Gregory, “Public Diplomacy: Sunrise of an Academic Field,” 274.

⁴⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, “Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (2008), 31.

diplomacy has been attracting increasing interest among governmental and non-governmental agencies for its power to build relationships and develop networks between disparate communities.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Communication is stressed as a foundational element of public diplomacy. Nye notes that effective public diplomacy is “a two-way street that involves listening as well as talking.”⁴⁶ He emphasizes the implementation of exchange programs to bridge common values between nations. Public diplomacy has been historically synonymous with the negatively-connotated term “propaganda,” which was prevalent in both the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Propaganda, defined by historian Walter L. Hixson as “the attempt to influence behavior by shaping the behavior of masses of people,” has played a role in the conduct of U.S. foreign relations as early as the Revolutionary War in 1776 and became customary at the beginning of World War I.⁴⁷ According to sport scholar Damion L. Thomas, “by 1952 the United States annually spent \$88 million on propaganda, whereas the Soviets invested about \$1.5 billion.”⁴⁸ As Hixson notes, “psychological warfare had stirred unrest behind the Iron Curtain ... As a result, U.S. policy began to shift toward an evolutionary approach emphasizing straight news and information programs, cultural exhibitions, and East-West exchange programs.”⁴⁹ Efforts to distinguish

⁴⁶ Nye, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,” 103.

⁴⁷ Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 1.

⁴⁸ Damion L. Thomas, *Globetrotting: African American Athletes and Cold War Politics* (University of Illinois Press, 2012), 82.

⁴⁹ Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, xiv.

propaganda from public diplomacy have been undertaken in the post-Cold War era with varying success. As U.S. Foreign Service officer John Brown delineates, public diplomacy “Encourages international understanding; Listens and engages in dialogue; [and] Objectively displays national achievements overseas, including in the arts.”⁵⁰ This typically contrasts with the devious nature of propaganda, which frequently sensationalized and distorted political messaging during the Cold War.

Public diplomacy’s prevalence and increasing importance are not limited to times of ideological conflicts, such as the Cold War. Public diplomacy is also a crucial (if not more crucial) tool for nations to wield in peaceful times. Geopolitical analyst Shaun Riordan argues:

Diplomacy in the twenty-first century will increasingly be public diplomacy, because the only way to effectively deal with contemporary global issues such as terrorism, environmental degradation, the spread of epidemic diseases, and financial instability would be through public diplomacy and close collaboration among governments, [nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)], and individuals.”⁵¹

Communications scholars Geoffrey Cowan and Amelia Arsenault emphasize the importance of monologue, dialogue, and collaboration in public diplomacy, as they are “essential at certain times and under certain situations.”⁵² Public diplomacy scholar Nicholas J. Cull further delineates his classification of public diplomacy by identifying listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange, and international broadcasting as

⁵⁰ John Brown, “Public Diplomacy & Propaganda: Their Differences,” *American Diplomacy*, September 2008, <https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2008/09/public-diplomacy-propaganda-their-differences>.

⁵¹ Shaun Riordan, “Dialogue-Based Public Diplomacy: A New Foreign Policy Paradigm?” In *The New Public Diplomacy*, ed. Jan Melissen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 180-95.

⁵² Geoffrey Cowan & Amelia Arsenault, “Moving from Monologue to Dialogue to Collaboration: The Three Layers of Public Diplomacy,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (2008), 11.

primary components of the theory.⁵³ Instituted initially to distance itself from the term “propaganda,” public diplomacy has established itself as a general idea stretching across multiple fields of study. Incorporating several academic disciplines, ranging from communications to political science, Gilboa notes that public diplomacy is “one of the most multidisciplinary areas in modern scholarship.”⁵⁴ Because of this, increased collaboration between researchers and practitioners across varied academic fields is encouraged to continue developing this underappreciated but crucial field of study.

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

Whereas one primary function of public diplomacy is to persuasively explain American policies and monitor policies of friendly nations in relation to U.S. aims, the political objective of a related concept, cultural diplomacy, is viewed more indirectly. According to Cull, cultural diplomacy is “an actor’s attempt to manage the international environment through making its cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad.”⁵⁵ Put more succinctly, American diplomat Richard T. Arndt refers to cultural diplomacy as “the art of getting the right people together at the right time under the right circumstances with the right supporting materials.”⁵⁶ The U.S. chose not to implement cultural diplomacy programs until World War I. The earliest documented use of cultural diplomacy was in 1917, when President Woodrow Wilson established the Committee on Public Information with help from newspaperman George

⁵³ Cull, “Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories,” 31-54.

⁵⁴ Gilboa, “Searching For a Theory of Public Diplomacy,” 56.

⁵⁵ Cull, “Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories,” 33.

⁵⁶ Richard T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Dulles, Virginia: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 550.

Creel. As the Cold War came into focus in the late 1940s, cultural diplomacy came to the forefront for the U.S. and “was considered a central part of its strategy,” with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) covertly initiating cultural activities ranging from conferences to financially supporting international publications.⁵⁷ Along with the CIA, the State Department’s Division of Cultural Relations was also considered a primary funding source for such initiatives.

American use of cultural diplomacy flourished during the Cold War, implementing several programs across various activities to accomplish a collection of objectives. Historian Penny Von Eschen highlights the high-profile tours by African American jazz artists in which American agencies “pursued a self-conscious campaign against worldwide criticism of U.S. racism, striving to build cordial relations with new African and Asian states.”⁵⁸ Hixson recognizes that the Eisenhower administration brought the initial acceleration of the mission of cultural diplomacy in the mid-1950s, noting that the end of World War II resulted in “The emergence of the United States as the most advanced consumer society in the world accounts for much of the appeal of the nation’s culture abroad.”⁵⁹ The propensity to use culture as a diplomatic tool was leveraged as a natural inclination for the U.S., a chief exporter of various forms of culture during the era, including film, music, and sport.

While cultural diplomacy programs were standard during the Cold War, the degree to which the U.S. government operates cultural diplomacy abroad in the present day has

⁵⁷ Helena K. Finn, “The Case for Cultural Diplomacy: Engaging Foreign Audiences,” *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 6 (2003), 16; Cynthia P. Schneider, “Culture Communicates: US Diplomacy that Works,” in *The New Public Diplomacy*, ed. Jan Melissen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 154.

⁵⁸ Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 3.

⁵⁹ Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, xi.

significantly decreased since the conflict cooled. As scholar William Glade notes, “...the fall of the Soviet government and the chaotic finances of the new Russia meant that [fairly expensive] exhibitions— some of the most successful instruments of cultural diplomacy— tapered off dramatically into extinction.”⁶⁰ Separate from its heyday during the Cold War, the need for programs involving cultural diplomacy decreased as competition with Russia dissipated. The methods for best implementing such programs became lost with this new-found absence of hegemonic opposition. American diplomacy scholar Cynthia P. Schneider notes several factors for why cultural diplomacy has not reached its full potential in American diplomacy efforts in the twenty-first century, which include “federal disinvestment, lack of a cohesive strategy, absence of interagency or public-private collaboration, and a general ignorance of the significance of arts, culture, and media in shaping the landscape in which international politics operates.”⁶¹ As twenty-first century international squabbles between the U.S. and several countries, including China and Russia, increasingly mirror the sentimentality of the relationships of the Cold War, a renewed investment in such soft power efforts could prove to benefit the U.S. and its partners.

Scholars argue that returning to Cold War levels of cultural diplomacy could result in a boon of positive international relations with allies and adversaries. Some, such as senior American diplomat Helena K. Finn, contend that a boost in investment in cultural activities abroad could “could help prevent wars that cost many, many times” the current level of spending, which has dipped from over one billion dollars per year during the

⁶⁰ William Glade, “Issues in the Genesis and Organization of Cultural Diplomacy: A Brief Critical History,” *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 39, no. 4 (2009), 247.

⁶¹ Cynthia P. Schneider, “The Unrealized Potential of Cultural Diplomacy,” *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 39, no. 4 (2009): 262.

Reagan administration below three-quarters of a billion dollars at the turn of the century.⁶² Schneider lists several factors that she considers “best practices” in public diplomacy, which range from collaborative partnerships to “flexibility, creativity, and adaptability – all necessities in an era of diminished funding.”⁶³ In addition, emphasis on the impact the private sector can contribute to U.S. cultural diplomacy has also been advocated in recent years.⁶⁴ Schneider argues that if cultural diplomacy was “fully funded, and part of an interagency, public-private coordinated strategy, such an entity might be able to demonstrate to the world that the U.S. understands that ‘civilizations don’t clash, they interact.’”⁶⁵

Like public diplomacy, however, governments are apathetic to restoring cultural activities to levels seen during the Cold War since the effects are not easily measurable. Glade notes, “one is dealing with long term variables, summarized in mutual understanding, and such variables are notoriously difficult to grasp with testing instruments.”⁶⁶ In addition, Schneider notes that in the post-9/11 era, “the current climate of insecurity about national security, cultural diplomacy is easily dismissed as too soft and peripheral to the real issues of security.”⁶⁷ These issues hinder how the public will receive

⁶² Finn, “The Case for Cultural Diplomacy,” 17.

⁶³ Schneider, “The Unrealized Potential of Cultural Diplomacy,” 265.

⁶⁴ Hyesun Shin, “Post-9/11 International Artist Exchanges Between the United States and the Middle East,” *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 43, no. 4 (2013), 210; Schneider, “Culture Communicates,” 168.

⁶⁵ Schneider, “The Unrealized Potential of Cultural Diplomacy,” 261.

⁶⁶ Glade, “Issues in the Genesis and Organization of Cultural Diplomacy,” 257.

⁶⁷ Schneider, “Culture Communicates,” 168.

such efforts and how success can be measured, which has long been a crutch for the legitimacy of soft power initiatives.

PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE DIPLOMACY

The linkages between cultural diplomacy and exchange diplomacy referred to in this paper as “people-to-people diplomacy” provides the foundation of how the U.S. primarily conducts sport diplomacy in the post-Cold War era. Cull defines people-to-people diplomacy as “an actor’s attempt to manage the international environment by sending its citizens overseas and reciprocally accepting citizens from overseas for a period of study and/or acculturation.”⁶⁸ Considered a key component of public diplomacy, Nye explains that this process involves the “development of lasting relationships with key individuals over many years through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences, and access to media channels ... help[ing] to educate world leaders like Anwar Sadat, Helmut Schmidt, and Margaret Thatcher.”⁶⁹ This method predates modern conceptions of diplomacy, as interactions between estranged peoples have provided the basis for interpersonal relations throughout human history. However, people-to-people diplomacy in the present day and age can take several forms depending on whether initiatives are introduced by governments or non-state actors.

One widespread assumption among advocates of people-to-people diplomacy is that when a sour diplomatic relationship develops between two nations, the healing process can accelerate if mutual understanding and the development of peaceful relationships between private citizens of the nations is established. Political scientist Houchang E.

⁶⁸ Cull, “Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories,” 33.

⁶⁹ Nye, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,” 102.

Chehabi notes that in the relationship between the U.S. and Iran, who have not had a formal diplomatic relationship since 1980, there was “popular hostility on both sides, hence the need to reconcile the two ‘peoples’ by means of friendly exchanges before the governments can follow suit.”⁷⁰ Echoing the thoughts of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* editor Richard D. Lambert, political scientist Nancy Snow advances the adage, “To know us is to like us. Anything deeper, like love, would be far too narcissistic. In other words, the prevailing opinion was that the more foreigners understood the specific manners, mores, and relationship patterns of the people of the United States, the more likely calmer waters would prevail in international relations.”⁷¹ The stress on personal contact in public diplomacy and people-to-people exchanges is emphasized to achieve diplomatic goals.

The Dwight D. Eisenhower administration recognized people-to-people diplomacy as a crucial tool for promoting mutual understanding and furthering peace. Plans for a revolutionary program focusing on the relationship between sport and international exchange programs sprouted in the U.S. in 1956 when the People-to-People Sports Committee was established as an outgrowth of President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s People-to-People Program. The program was initiated to incentivize American citizens to foster relationships with similar “regular” citizens from nations across the globe. According to sport historian Toby C. Rider, the program was “based on a host of independent citizen committees, with each focused on a particular area or segment of society, such as hobbies,

⁷⁰ Houchang E. Chehabi, “Sport Diplomacy between the United States and Iran,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 12, no. 1 (2001), 90-91.

⁷¹ Nancy Snow, “International Exchanges and the US Image,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (2008), 200.

fine arts, advertising, health, and insurance.”⁷² At its height, the Cold War witnessed several exchanges between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in the late-1950s. As Cull notes, “U.S. airports saw the spectacle of wispy Soviet dancers, brooding concert virtuosos, implausibly enormous wrestlers, and earnest scientists bound for academic conferences. Delegations from the American steel and plastics industries, and Philadelphia Orchestra, and assorted U.S. athletes toured the U.S.S.R.”⁷³ According to Snow, the early years of the Cold War “held the potential to be the halcyon days for the foreign exchange of persons.”⁷⁴ With the 1960 election of John F. Kennedy, alongside his “sophisticated” wife Jackie, the new administration confronted the image of the “Ugly American” by projecting a “big heart” theme, which reflected how Americans wanted to view themselves as much as how others viewed them.⁷⁵

Snow details that American implementation of people-to-people diplomacy peaked from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s and was “inspired by government-sponsored programs such as the G.I. Bill and the Marshall Plan.”⁷⁶ These two programs complemented the institution of the Peace Corps in 1961, which not only aimed to promote the U.S.’s Cold War diplomacy objectives but also “represented America’s commitment to

⁷² Toby C. Rider, *Cold War Games: Propaganda, the Olympics, and US Foreign Policy* (University of Illinois Press, 2016), 145.

⁷³ Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 162.

⁷⁴ Nancy Snow, “International Exchanges and the US Image,” 206.

⁷⁵ *The Ugly American*, notes sociologist Paul Hollander, conveyed the notion that “Americans abroad, and officials in particular, were both totally ignorant of local customs, social norms, and culture and cheerfully insensitive to the feelings and beliefs of the peoples they were seeking to patronize and defend from the communist threat.” For more, see William J. Lederer & Eugene Burdick, *The Ugly American* (New York: Norton, 1958), and Paul Hollander, *Anti-Americanism: Irrational and Rational* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1995), 399.

⁷⁶ Snow, “International Exchanges and the US Image,” 215.

economic aid and knowledge transfer in the spirit of collective security.”⁷⁷ Then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Cultural Affairs, Harold E. Howland, went as far as to pledge, “If we Americans are sincere and devoted to making this exchange of persons a two-way street then we must present all facets of our life ... Not only must we exchange the professor, the lawyer, the trade unionist, the member of government, but also our athletes.”⁷⁸ However, as Snow notes, popular support for person-to-person exchanges dwindled in the 1960s in “the face of a virulent antiwar movement and race riots.”⁷⁹ Following the fall of the Iron Curtain, the number of exchanges between the U.S. and other nations decreased sharply.

SPORT DIPLOMACY

The preceding overview of soft power, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and people-to-people diplomacy all provide the foundations of sport diplomacy. Several definitions of sport diplomacy have been presented in recent decades, overlapping in many ways but delivering specific minutia as the field evolves. Sport scholar Stuart Murray’s textbook *Sports Diplomacy: Origins, Theory and Practice* is one of the first texts to provide a comprehensive, accessible overview of sports’ role in international relations and diplomacy. He defines sport diplomacy as “the conscious, strategic and ongoing use of sport, sportspeople and sporting events by state and non-state actors to advance policy, trade, development, education, image, reputation, brand and people-to-people links.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Harold E. Howland, quoted in Rider, *Cold War Games*, 86.

⁷⁹ Snow, “International Exchanges and the US Image,” 208.

⁸⁰ Murray, *Sports Diplomacy*, 94.

Sport diplomacy is categorized as a subset of public diplomacy because of its shared initiative to, “engage, inform, and create a favorable image amongst foreign publics and organizations to shape their perceptions in a way that is more conducive to achieving a government’s foreign policy goals.”⁸¹ However, the only difference between the two is that sport diplomacy uses sports and sportspeople as the primary diplomats. Cha notes that this elevates sport as a tool of diplomacy, arguing that “Sport offers a symbolic, high-profile, and yet tactful tool for diplomatic statecraft that can accomplish what a standard embassy demarche could not dream of accomplishing.”⁸²

Sport scholars Verity Postlethwaite and Jonathan Grix identify two significant strands of sport literature that require clear definitions. First, “sport as diplomacy” frames sport as “a site of diplomacy in more multi-actor and specialized circumstances.”⁸³ In this case, sport is not typically used transactionally or to further a specific government’s diplomatic objectives. One example may include sport-specific NGOs or non-profit organizations using sport to address and advance issues specific to their organizations. “Diplomacy in sport” concerns “how governments consciously employ sport as an instrument to leverage their interests in wider diplomacy.”⁸⁴ People-to-people sport diplomacy, which is the primary focus of this paper, falls in the category of “diplomacy in sport” since the ends of this practice concern the leverage of diplomatic interests in a nation’s foreign policy objectives or, in the case of a private entity employing sport

⁸¹ Murray, “The Two Halves of Sports-Diplomacy,” 581; Stuart Murray & Geoffrey Allen Pigman, “Mapping the Relationship between International Sport and Diplomacy,” *Sport in Society* 17, no. 9 (2014), 1101-1102.

⁸² Cha, “A Theory of Sport and Politics,” 1592.

⁸³ Verity Postlethwaite & Jonathan Grix, “Beyond the Acronyms: Sport Diplomacy and the Classification of the International Olympic Committee,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27, no. 2 (2016), 298.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 297.

diplomacy, to advance private interests by spreading the entity's mission through the medium of sport.

Research on sport diplomacy has primarily focused on the use of case studies. Murray notes that “the relationship between diplomacy and international sport is akin to its practice: anecdotal, sporadic articles that are case specific.”⁸⁵ Case studies help identify essential benefits in the field, which will be outlined in the next section. Case studies typically follow the model of scholar John W. Creswell, in which cases must be clearly identified, identify and provide insight into an issue or a problem, must include multiple sources of data, and provide analysis.⁸⁶ Gilboa explains that in the field of public diplomacy, similar to sport diplomacy, case studies may be systematized into various categories, including “actors, such as a particular state, international organization, or NGO; public diplomacy instruments such as international broadcasting or cultural diplomacy; target states or regions such as the Middle East; and individual leaders.”⁸⁷ In Postlethwaite and Grix's analysis of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and its involvement in sport diplomacy, the use of case studies found that, “the understanding of the IOC in contemporary diplomacy can receive interrogation that is more credible.”⁸⁸ Such sentiments affirm the aim of exploring the organization through a socio-legal standpoint to further the classification of the IOC. Another exemplary use of sport diplomacy is detailed in Thomas' numerous accounts of the African American athletes and artists sent to the

⁸⁵ Murray, “The Two Halves of Sports-Diplomacy,” 577.

⁸⁶ John W. Creswell, *30 Essential Skills for the Qualitative Researcher* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2015), 265-266.

⁸⁷ Gilboa, “Searching For a Theory of Public Diplomacy,” 70.

⁸⁸ Postlethwaite & Grix, “Beyond the Acronyms,” 308.

Soviet Union as cultural ambassadors, providing excellent insight into how the State Department sought to influence diasporic political alignments during the Cold War.⁸⁹

Although the use of sport for diplomatic reasons was popularized during the Cold War, NGO involvement in engaging in sport diplomacy predates that. One prime example of sport diplomacy conducted by NGOs comes as early as the 1930s when the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) organized several endeavors to send U.S. athletes on tours worldwide. It may come as a surprise that the State Department was not initially involved in these tours. Rider explains, “Government officials expressed support for these tours and their role in contributing to ‘international accord,’ but nothing more.”⁹⁰ What is striking about Rider’s analysis is that the government had not shown prior interest in utilizing athletes for political gain before the onset of the Cold War. Still, the State Department drifted from this position once it realized the potential benefits it could deliver. With criticism over the use of these athletes for political gain, the State Department needed to rethink its strategy. According to Thomas, the Soviet Union depicted the U.S. as a nation that was “too busy preparing for war and too materialistic to be concerned with attending international competitions. The reality was that the United States ... did not send representative teams because it did not allocate adequate funds for this purpose because it thought sports activities were the responsibility of the private sector.”⁹¹ Practitioners of diplomacy recommended sending competitors to countries where they could do the “most good,” but the State Department emphasized that, “invitations were to be extended through nongovernmental organizations – i.e., the AAU – because public knowledge of government

⁸⁹ Thomas, *Globetrotting*.

⁹⁰ Rider, *Cold War Games*, 38.

⁹¹ Thomas, *Globetrotting*, 89.

association with the plan was not ‘desirable.’”⁹² From this analysis, we can conclude that governmental and non-governmental actors had the potential to establish sport diplomacy programs that were mutually beneficial for each set of organizations.

As the debate surrounding the relationship between sport and politics remains heated in the popular discourse, the conundrum permeates the field of sport diplomacy and its legitimacy as a political instrument. Nations have popularly wielded the propagandistic power of sport since the beginning of the Cold War, using sporting events to achieve foreign policy objectives. Rider details this in his work surrounding the U.S. government’s involvement during the early years of the Cold War, centering his argument on the fact that “government officials became increasingly alarmed by Soviet attempts to exploit the Olympic Movement and met this postwar challenge earlier, and far more aggressively, than scholarly examination has previously acknowledged.”⁹³ Essayist Lincoln Allison has termed the “myth of autonomy,” which holds that sport is “somehow separate from society, that it transcended or had ‘nothing to do with’ politics and social conflict, underpinned by the paradoxical convictions that it was ‘both “above” or “below” the political dimensions of social life.’”⁹⁴ This desire to bar sport from politics is warranted by critics and fans alike. Rofo finds that “Sporting competition always carries social and political messages for these audiences; at times these are simple even vulgar, at times complex, subtle, and mixed.”⁹⁵ As Murray notes, sport diplomacy can cause a “visceral reaction” as it mixes both sport

⁹² Rider, *Cold War Games*, 58.

⁹³ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁴ Lincoln Allison, *The Changing Politics of Sport* (Manchester University Press, 1993), 1-14, quoted in David Black & Byron Peacock, “Sport and Diplomacy,” In *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, eds. Andrew F. Cooper, Jorge Heine & Ramesh Thakur (Oxford University Press, 2013), 708.

⁹⁵ J. Simon Rofo, “Sport and Diplomacy: A Global Diplomacy Framework,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27, no. 2 (2016), 220.

and politics. Still, he argues that diplomacy, “has nothing to do with the nationalist fervor and competition-short-of-war that international sport can generate.”⁹⁶

Despite this ideological constriction, scholars have noted the importance of the impact sport can play in international relations and foreign policy. Sport scholar Steven J. Jackson and political scientist Stephen Haigh argue that “within the context of an increasingly interconnected world, there is little doubt that the global spectacle, commodity and cultural phenomenon that is modern sport influences, and is influenced by, politics and foreign policy.”⁹⁷ When identifying the contrast between politics and sport, French writer Robert Redeker defines the former as “the pursuit of power – power being any reality that amplifies liberty of action, the condition of independence and also of security,” while paradoxically presenting sport as playing, “the exact opposite role – not that of limiting, but rather augmenting power by wowing minds ... States are well aware that sports are the key to the minds of contemporary men and women. Sports are utilized to increase the *imaginary* power of the state.”⁹⁸ Allen Pigman explores this relationship by mapping “the role of sport in public diplomacy to raise questions about its effectiveness as a public diplomacy instrument, how that effectiveness can be measured, and to generate normative prescriptions for policy makers going forward.”⁹⁹ As a result, he finds that “International

⁹⁶ Murray, “The Two Halves of Sports-Diplomacy,” 577.

⁹⁷ Steven J. Jackson & Stephen Haigh, “Between and Beyond Politics: Sport and Foreign Policy in a Globalizing World,” *Sport in Society* 11, no. 4 (2008), 349.

⁹⁸ Robert Redeker, “Sport as an Opiate of International Relations: The Myth and Illusion of Sport as a Tool of Foreign Diplomacy,” in *Sport and Foreign Policy in a Globalizing World*, eds. Steven J. Jackson & Stephen Haigh (London: Routledge, 2013), 148.

⁹⁹ Geoffrey Allen Pigman, “International Sport and Diplomacy’s Public Dimension: Governments, Sporting Federations and the Global Audience,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 25, no. 1 (2014), 111.

sport ... is a uniquely well-suited global platform for diplomatic representation of and communication between global publics.”¹⁰⁰

In his exploration of state-to-state relations between the U.S. and Iran in the twenty-first century, Chehabi claims that relationships between governments do not define the overall relationship between two nations. He instead indicates that through tools such as sport diplomacy, “Citizens of two nations relate to each other independently of their governments, either as individuals or as members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the emerging transnational civil society.”¹⁰¹ Highlighting a tour taken to Nigeria and South Africa in 2012 through Venus and Serena Williams’ “Breaking the Mould” initiative, Allen Pigman notes that “sport generates a huge amount of non-state actor public diplomacy by international sporting federations that arguably have a greater impact upon international relations than governments’ use of sport in public diplomacy.”¹⁰² The strengths of NGOs cannot be understated in conducting sport diplomacy, and the presentation of case studies to illustrate this point continues to reinforce the field in the present day.

While sport diplomacy is primarily used to advance interstate relations and foreign policy objectives on behalf of national governments, private actors have increasingly embraced the practice in achieving a broader range of benefits. This shares similarities with Snow’s analysis of more comprehensive uses of exchange diplomacy using non-sportsmen and women, where she concluded, “The future promise of exchanges in service to public diplomacy objectives may therefore rest at the level of the private individual and private

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Chehabi, “Sport Diplomacy between the United States and Iran,” 91.

¹⁰² Allen Pigman, “International Sport and Diplomacy’s Public Dimension,” 103.

institutions (for-profit and nonprofit), and not exclusively within the corridors of government agencies.”¹⁰³ In their analysis of the role of public diplomacy in the Paralympic Movement, sport scholars Aaron Beacom and Ian Brittain evoke political scientist Brian Hocking’s concept of “multi-stakeholder diplomacy,” which establishes its framework based on the “diplomatic process being increasingly concerned with the creation of networks embracing a range of state and non-state actors focusing on the ‘management of issues demanding the application of recourses in which no single participant possesses a monopoly.’”¹⁰⁴ Communications scholar James Pamment explores this concept by bringing together literature from an amalgam of fields, including sport diplomacy, sports development, development communication, participatory communication, public diplomacy, soft power, and theory-driven evaluation, to “demonstrate their relevance to one another ... [and] to question the basis for instrumentalist diplomatic objective setting and to explore the theoretical basis for participatory models of multi stakeholder diplomacy.”¹⁰⁵ This multidisciplinary approach can broaden the scope of diplomatic studies and sport diplomacy, opening new research avenues and opportunities for research in various fields.

As political scientists David Black and Byron Peacock point out, one result of using non-governmental influence for diplomatic aims is international sport experiencing “the

¹⁰³ Snow, “International Exchanges and the US Image,” 220.

¹⁰⁴ Aaron Beacom & Ian Brittain, “Public Diplomacy and the International Paralympic Committee: Reconciling the Roles of Disability Advocate and Sports Regulator,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27, no. 2 (2016): 275. For more on multi-stakeholder diplomacy, see Brian Hocking, “Multistakeholder Diplomacy: Forms, Functions, and Frustrations,” in *Multistakeholder Diplomacy: Challenges and Opportunities*, eds. Jovan Kurbalija and Valentin Katrandjiev (Geneva: DiploFoundation, 2006): 13–29.

¹⁰⁵ James Pamment, “Rethinking Diplomatic and Development Outcomes through Sport: Toward a Participatory Paradigm of Multi-Stakeholder Diplomacy,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27, no. 2 (2016), 245.

rise of many NGOs that pursue issue-specific or country-specific mandates.”¹⁰⁶ The result of this rise opens a plethora of avenues for how actors can choose to employ sport diplomacy. Jackson highlights interactions between nation-states, non-governmental organizations, and transnational corporations in the process of diplomacy and how “the unique features of sport as a cultural site and practice in relation to diplomacy.”¹⁰⁷ Many organizations, encompassing both governmental and non-governmental spheres, have embraced the benefits generated by sports diplomacy programs. The following section will discuss the range of justifications developed by scholars and practitioners alike for implementing sport diplomacy programs.

REASONS WHY GOVERNMENTS IMPLEMENT SPORT DIPLOMACY PROGRAMMING

Governments and their diplomatic representatives instrumentalize sport for various public diplomacy purposes. These purposes, according to Black and Peacock, include “propagandistic and prestige-seeking activities; relatively low-cost, high-visibility forms of protest and punishment; precursors and facilitators of improved diplomatic relations; and means of pursuing diplomatic recognition or signaling rehabilitation within the international ‘community of nations.’”¹⁰⁸ In Murray’s article, “The Two Halves of Sports-Diplomacy,” he lists seven reasons governments are increasingly attracted to using international sport as a diplomatic tool.¹⁰⁹ This framework is beneficial for the purposes of this chapter because it is the most comprehensive tool (thus far) to discuss the

¹⁰⁶ Black & Peacock, “Sport and Diplomacy,” 716.

¹⁰⁷ Steven J. Jackson, “The Contested Terrain of Sport Diplomacy in a Globalizing World,” *International Area Studies Review* 16, no. 3 (2013), 275.

¹⁰⁸ Black & Peacock, “Sport and Diplomacy,” 711.

¹⁰⁹ Murray, “The Two Halves of Sports-Diplomacy,” 581-583.

rationalizations of using sport as a diplomatic tool. As the following chapters of this dissertation show, broad support of sport diplomacy programs and seeking governmental funding for such programs is the most significant roadblock in the concept's quest for legitimacy.

The first reason Murray lists is that the "Post-Cold War diplomatic environment has forced governments to change how they conduct diplomacy."¹¹⁰ Modern sport as we know it today attracts broad swaths of populations across the globe, and its ability to captivate audiences has only grown stronger since the end of the Cold War. As Black & Peacock note, "...it is hardly surprising that sport is viewed as compelling vehicles for the political and diplomatic ambitions of both governments and the range of actors engaged in 'network diplomacy.'"¹¹¹ As this dissertation will show, the number of governments engaging in sport diplomacy programs in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has soared due to the ever-rising appeal of sports worldwide.

As Murray and Allen Pigman point out, sport is also open to greater scrutiny given that it is "very public, unpredictable, fluid and, at times, highly uncivilized."¹¹² Theodore Streibert, then-director of the United States Intelligence Agency (USIA), went as far as to argue that sports were one of the most important Cold War weapons during the mid-1950s, testifying that sports exchanges were "the most effective thing we're doing in the Orient."¹¹³ Sport development expert Jeremy Goldberg's analysis paints an image of "a

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Black & Peacock, "Sport and Diplomacy," 708.

¹¹² Murray & Allen Pigman, "Mapping the Relationship between International Sport and Diplomacy," 1104.

¹¹³ Theodore Streibert, quoted in Thomas, *Globetrotting*, 95.

post-Cold War world largely devoid of ideological conflict [where] sports offer new promise in advancing global integration and cooperation.”¹¹⁴ As this sentiment has evolved to include ideological tensions between the U.S. and China and the U.S. and Russia in the 2010s and 2020s, diplomacy is ever-changing. The importance of Murray’s first point is that the continuous ebbs and flows of twenty-first century international relations force governmental and non-governmental actors to embrace a myriad of tools within the diplomatic arsenal to encourage mutual support between nations. Sport diplomacy is one of many tools in this arsenal.

Murray’s second reason governments use sport diplomacy is that “sport and sporting institutions are increasing in scope, power, and appeal.”¹¹⁵ This upsurge in visibility is thanks to technological advances, which historically have advanced diplomatic pursuits through essential inventions such as the printing press, the radio, and the internet, to name a few. Rofe points out that these technological advances have also helped sport, as the past 25 years in digital technology advancement has “allowed for huge increases in the breadth of coverage and its simultaneous consumption of sports wherever they may be taking place on the planet.”¹¹⁶ He summarizes that technology has not just impacted the coverage of sport, but sport overall.

Murray’s third point highlights the efficacy of uniting estranged nations through sport. Although he frames this point mainly in the context of the post-Cold War era, this principle dates back to the origination of the ancient Olympic Truce. Dating back to the eighth century B.C., governments engaged in international conflict(s) suspended all

¹¹⁴ Jeremy Goldberg, “Sporting Diplomacy: Boosting the Size of the Diplomatic Corps,” *Washington Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2000), 63.

¹¹⁵ Murray, “The Two Halves of Sports-Diplomacy,” 581.

¹¹⁶ Rofe, “Sport and Diplomacy,” 214.

fighting in hopes that competitors and spectators would travel safely to and from the sites of the Olympic Games. Complementing this hallowed tradition, Allen Pigman advocates, “sport is integral to diplomacy’s mission of mediating estrangement and overcoming alienation between governments and between peoples.”¹¹⁷ During the Cold War, sport was primarily viewed as a vehicle to exhibit power between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. However, despite this competitive nature, Russian studies scholar Victor Peppard and sport historian James Riordan note that “...staging a competition between two countries that have been at odds with one another for a period of time may be a palpable signal that their leaders intend to embark on a definition of relations.”¹¹⁸ Cowan and Arsenault illustrate this point through an example of tennis players from Pakistan and Israel who formed a doubles team despite the bitter feud between their two countries. Pakistani Aisam-Ul-Haq Qureshi and Israeli Amir Hadad played together in the U.S. Open and Wimbledon in 2002 despite criticisms at home and abroad, winning the Arthur Ashe Humanitarian Award for promoting “tolerance through tennis.”¹¹⁹ Where traditional diplomatic strategies fail, sport diplomacy can make advances, big or small, to build common ground between citizens of politically disconnected nations.

Where sport can work to bridge bilateral relations between nations, it can also attract mutual understanding between nations. The fourth reason governments use sport diplomacy is that “sports are a major part of modern life and has a worldwide audience.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Allen Pigman, “International Sport and Diplomacy’s Public Dimension,” 94.

¹¹⁸ Victor Peppard & James Riordan, *Playing Politics: Soviet Sport Diplomacy to 1992* (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press Inc., 1993), 8.

¹¹⁹ Cowan & Arsenault, “Moving from Monologue to Dialogue to Collaboration,” 25.

¹²⁰ Murray, “The Two Halves of Sports-Diplomacy,” 581.

Mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games can offer host nations significant opportunities to boost engagement with foreign publics through the medium of sport. As Murray depicts in his analysis of China hosting the 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing, the city “proselytised an image of China as a rising, modern economic, and sporting powerhouse aligned with the gracious values the Olympic movement aspires to embody.”¹²¹ Thomas quotes former U.S. ambassador Taylor Belcher, who was stationed in Cyprus and Peru, who noted that in the case of people-to-people diplomacy, “Sports sell themselves ... they are a real people-to-people program reaching right down into a cross-section of the community – touching the interest of people in all economic strata and all age levels.”¹²² As this dissertation will demonstrate, sport diplomacy is unique in its power to attract people across the globe regardless of demographics or socioeconomic status.

Transitioning to his fifth reason why governments are keen on adopting programs focusing on sport diplomacy, sport also “represents honorable qualities and values that appeal to governments and their diplomats.”¹²³ Murray describes this general point in his own words by stating that “the institutions of sport and diplomacy are global in scope and nature and, working in tandem, they can disseminate positive values such as mutual respect, comity, discipline, tolerance, and compassion amongst both established and acrimonious diplomatic relationships.”¹²⁴ An example of this is presented by sport historian Robert J. Sinclair, who illustrates an example of baseball diplomacy between the U.S. and Japan during World War II. He argues, “Strong everyday associations, such as those

¹²¹ Ibid., 582.

¹²² Thomas, *Globetrotting*, 96.

¹²³ Murray, “The Two Halves of Sports-Diplomacy,” 582.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 577.

established through sport, reinforced the ideological foundations of both the United States and Japan. Reciprocal gestures of amicability were expressed through the medium of baseball.”¹²⁵ These values were sometimes subjective, as was the case when American Olympic Committee (AOC) president James Sullivan explained that the American Olympic team “went on a mission” at the 1912 Stockholm Games: Sullivan opined, “This mission was to create a good feeling; to show the type of man this great country of ours produces; to bring to them the type of sportsman that comes from this glorious nation of ours, and to show the world that we play the game fairly.”¹²⁶ This may have appeared as a legitimate statement to Americans and their allies during this period but could have been interpreted differently by adversaries or direct competitors at the Games. Beacom and Brittain present an interesting case in promoting diplomatic objectives through Paralympic diplomacy, as countries invest resources into the “twin perceptions that improved performance will promote international prestige and states supporting disability in such a visible way will see a more positive light shine on them regarding their social and cultural policies is implicit in such increased investment.”¹²⁷ This strategy is finding success among some of the least expected states, like China, which has invested heavily in improving its performance in the medals tally.

Murray’s sixth point argues that “sport and diplomacy share loose affiliations amplified by globalization.”¹²⁸ To further expand on this point, Murray explains that the

¹²⁵ Robert J. Sinclair, “Baseball’s Rising Sun: American Interwar Baseball Diplomacy and Japan,” *Canadian Journal of History of Sport* 16, no. 2 (1985), 45.

¹²⁶ Mark Dyreson, *Making the American Team: Sport, Culture, and the Olympic Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 175.

¹²⁷ Beacom & Brittain, “Public Diplomacy and the International Paralympic Committee,” 278.

¹²⁸ Murray, “The Two Halves of Sports-Diplomacy,” 583.

roles typically fulfilled by diplomats are ever-changing and continuous adaption to an increasingly globalized community requires many skills to thrive in the global community. “Just as the soldier is no longer a soldier but also an aid worker, a construction worker, a diplomat, and so on, the same is true of both the diplomat and the sportsperson. Their roles are changing, and public demand exists for more awareness of social responsibility by both professions.”¹²⁹ Throughout this dissertation, several examples express the numerous roles American sportspersons adopt when traveling to unique global locales. For many, expectations of simply performing sport were dashed when arriving in a foreign country. They required a skillset suited outside the realm of sports, and that flexibility to serve American interests outside of sport added to the success of each individual endeavor.

Contextualizing this point through a global framework, Black and Peacock explain that modern sport can be viewed as a “uniquely apt strategic response to globalization, simultaneously celebrating and promoting values of competitiveness at home while reinforcing constructed national identities for internal and external audiences.”¹³⁰ Interestingly, peace and conflict scholars Håvard Mokleiv Nygård and Scott Gates have argued that as globalization expands, nations are beginning to use sport as a policy instrument for domestic policies. They explain that running smaller-scale events can encourage an environment where “sport can be used to build trust, and through trust-building build peace ... Through this bottom-up approach, peace is to be secured through the interaction of individuals from different communities.”¹³¹ While outside of the context

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Black & Peacock, “Sport and Diplomacy,” 717.

¹³¹ Håvard Mokleiv Nygård & Scott Gates, “Soft Power at Home and Abroad: Sport Diplomacy, Politics and Peace-Building,” *International Area Studies Review* 16, no. 3 (2013), 239.

of this dissertation, the ability to implement sport programs domestically can achieve similar outcomes to programs catered towards international audiences.

Murray's final point asserts that "estranged states can use sport as a way of exploring the normalization of diplomatic relations."¹³² Murray highlights this in his own words by stating that sport can benefit estranged states, potentially transforming "layers and networks into positive diplomatic relationships and, more importantly, offer an alternate channel for entrenched relations to move beyond the status quo. Sports-diplomacy does so in a unique fashion: by demonstrating that peoples share affinity through a love of sport."¹³³ Black and Peacock argue that "governments and their representatives have attempted to use sport to secure recognition – both formal and informal – and to signal rehabilitation or 'arrival' as legitimate and/or developed countries in international society."¹³⁴ This is the case for both estranged nations and nations seeking recognition in concert with other public diplomacy objectives. Sport scholar Barrie Houlihan notes this is attractive for countries that are not as savvy or resourceful in international diplomacy since sport can be utilized as a "cheap and easily deployed resource ... often the objective of sports diplomacy is simply to seek acknowledgment of their existence within the international system."¹³⁵

Goldberg's example of sports exchanges between the U.S. and estranged countries such as Cuba, North Korea, or Iran "can break down stereotypes, increase understanding,

¹³² Murray, "The Two Halves of Sports-Diplomacy," 583.

¹³³ Ibid., 588.

¹³⁴ Black & Peacock, "Sport and Diplomacy," 713.

¹³⁵ Barrie Houlihan, "Politics and Sport," in *Handbook of Sports Studies*, eds. Jay J. Coakley & Eric Dunning (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2000), 219.

and confine battles to the playing field rather than the battlefield ... They are a 'safe' way to ease a country out of isolation, acting as a first step of engagement."¹³⁶ Whereas estranged states may have issues in leadership transition or domestic policies, Cha finds that sport can provide momentum to achieve diplomatic breakthroughs that traditional forms of diplomacy could not. He explains that sport can do this by "creating new channels of communication, providing a vehicle for displaying goodwill, and tapping public opinion's support for a change in policy that might otherwise meet with entrenched bureaucratic interests."¹³⁷ Despite these benefits that sport diplomacy can bring, there remain difficulties in fully embracing the positive values that it promises.

Since sport maintains a high degree of autonomy even under the auspices of national and international organizations, Black and Peacock contend that this illustrates sport as "difficult to control and manipulate with durable political effects."¹³⁸ Considering how sport diplomacy actors can affect the overall diplomatic relationships between nations is interesting. Still, scholars such as Chehabi contend that sports "cannot, in and of themselves, lead to better relations."¹³⁹ As Black and Peacock note, international sports organizations (ISOs) also have difficulties fully implementing sport diplomacy efforts. The introduction of "New actors, issues, levels of engagement, and complexities have all changed the substance and delivery of ISO-led diplomacy as well as the diplomatic practices that occur within the organizations."¹⁴⁰ In the case of cultural diplomacy, it is

¹³⁶ Goldberg, "Sporting Diplomacy," 63.

¹³⁷ Cha, "A Theory of Sport and Politics," 1593.

¹³⁸ Black & Peacock, "Sport and Diplomacy," 708.

¹³⁹ Chehabi, "Sport Diplomacy between the United States and Iran," 103.

¹⁴⁰ Black & Peacock, "Sport and Diplomacy," 711.

difficult to measure the efficacy of sport diplomacy given its absence of measurable outcomes, failing to convince diplomats and lawmakers incentive to implement diplomatic programs involving sport.

Another aspect of sport diplomacy that merits discussion is the use of the practice to promote national identity or flaunt national prowess. This concept is a double-edged sword for nations who wish to promote national ideals on a global stage but have the potential of backfiring if such countries are too firmly attached to international sporting outcomes, whether they are successful or not. Cha eloquently points out that “Sport is not just a game, but a mode of social interaction among citizens around the world that can create cooperation (or conflict) that transcends state boundaries. Because sport performance is a source of pride, one cannot underestimate the extent to which sport becomes interwoven with a nation’s view of itself.”¹⁴¹

Nation-state boundaries can be reinforced through what sport management scholar Roger Levermore defines as the “inter-state worldview.” He argues that the language and ceremony surrounding international sporting events “provide a catalyst for this process, reinforcing the idea of nation-state boundaries.”¹⁴² International sport can project a positive image of the nation abroad. Houlihan notes that modern states “want not only national unity and distinctiveness but also an international stage on which to project that identity.”¹⁴³ Allen Pigman affirms this by stating concurring benefits of sport diplomacy, noting that using international sport as a diplomatic tool “falls under the rubric of place branding and

¹⁴¹ Cha, “A Theory of Sport and Politics,” 1583.

¹⁴² Roger Levermore, “Sport’s Role in Constructing the ‘Inter-State’ Worldview,” in *Sport and International Relations: An Emerging Relationship*, eds. Adrian Budd & Roger Levermore (London: Routledge, 2004): 16-30, quoted in Aaron Beacom, *International Diplomacy and the Olympic Movement: The New Mediators* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 21.

¹⁴³ Houlihan, “Politics and Sport,” 216.

its concomitant promotion of investment, trade, and tourism ... devoting increasing resources to building, shaping, and managing the image of their nations in the minds of the global public.”¹⁴⁴ The number of nations recognized by the IOC (206 at the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro) has also eclipsed the number of recognized countries by the United Nations (193 sovereign states as of May 2019). Black and Peacock note, “In addition to aspirations associated with mega-event hosting, having a recognized NOC or other national sports body (e.g. a football association) can legitimize the very existence of a state or a state-like polity.”¹⁴⁵

Thomas notes that the U.S. implemented sport diplomacy during the Cold War to align targeted countries further toward Western values. He notes that “The sporting contest and exhibitions were analogous to mass rallies because they helped the participants increase their identification with the West and presumably increased the hostility and opposition to the Soviet Union, which was depicted as a threat to the extension of democracy worldwide.”¹⁴⁶ Rider complements this analysis by noting that Soviet and U.S. sports exchanges were extremely popular for the citizens of each nation. Quoting Hixson, he notes that “the State Department arranged for U.S. athletes to compete in Eastern Europe, ‘to remind the captive peoples of U.S. interest in their ultimate freedom’ and to in some way correct the “distorted image of the West as mirrored in communist propaganda media.””¹⁴⁷ Each nation was prompted to advance sport as a tool for legitimization for

¹⁴⁴ Allen Pigman, “International Sport and Diplomacy’s Public Dimension,” 99.

¹⁴⁵ Black & Peacock, “Sport and Diplomacy,” 713.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas, *Globetrotting*, 99.

¹⁴⁷ Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 110, in Rider, *Cold War Games*, 144.

several decades. Using sport diplomacy both for improving the image of itself and damaging that of the “other” proved to be a powerful device.

Sport has played an underappreciated role in diplomacy between nations worldwide. While government agencies such as the Department of State have formalized policy relating to people-to-people sport diplomacy initiatives in the late twentieth century, countless examples from participants in American civic society, including multinational enterprises and NGOs, have taken the mantle in promoting American values abroad. The following chapter examines the influence of such actors as the Cold War entered its final decade.

Chapter 3: Utilization of People-to-People Sport Diplomacy Programs by American Multinational Enterprises in the Late-Cold War Period (1980-1991)

The game of basketball holds considerable sentimentality for many sports fans across the United States. Whether playing pickup on the blacktop after school or huddling around the television to watch the men's national basketball team at the Summer Olympic Games, the game is interwoven into many facets of American life. The cultural influence of basketball stretches into worlds many sports have not been able to breach, including music, fashion, and gaming. It is only natural that the most popular basketball league in the world, the National Basketball Association (NBA), evolved into a globalized force, as the influence that permeated throughout the U.S. found footholds in the cultural fabrics of nations across the world. It is no accident that basketball is celebrated as a widespread pastime in countries such as France, Australia, and The Philippines.

The NBA enjoys a long, storied history of high-profile stars, historic rivalries, and memorable storylines since its first season started in 1949. As the game's popularity spread to new markets within the U.S., the subsequent growth of the league cemented itself as a "Big 4" sport in the country. The league's domestic success across its first few decades of existence continued to thrive despite challenges from competitors, such as the American Basketball Association (ABA). Although the ABA disbanded in 1976 and relinquished four of its franchises to the NBA, the NBA had its own sets of problems heading into the 1980s, including image problems related to player drug use, low attendance, and declining television ratings.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ After the ABA merged with the NBA in 1976, the four ABA franchises that were absorbed into the NBA were the Denver Nuggets, the Indiana Pacers, the New York Nets, and the San Antonio Spurs.

The problems that plagued the NBA during this time began a gradual reversal when David Stern began his tenure as commissioner in 1984. The emergence of stars such as Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, and Michael Jordan led to a marketing strategy focused on the star power of the league's players, resulting in a surge in ratings and the revival of the NBA as a marquee enterprise. This re-emergence of the NBA intersected at a time of increased mediatization in the 1980s, with Stern tactfully designating the league as "a far-flung entertainment and media conglomerate."¹⁴⁹ Increasing market saturation within the U.S. forced the league to approach new marketing strategies abroad. Sport scholar David L. Andrews argues that the NBA was taking a page from the American entertainment industry during the time by "...developing a global market for its products, thus becoming a transnational corporate concern."¹⁵⁰

As sport media scholar Steven Secular details, the evolution of the NBA from a sports league into a global media conglomerate opened countless possibilities for expanding the league's market on a worldwide scale. Focusing on the NBA as a media product, the league "...saw an opportunity to distribute its television programming on a global scale via emerging commercial television operators."¹⁵¹ The methods in which the league promoted its players and teams varied, from the induction of NBA Entertainment in 1982 to airing league-related programming in countries that had historically blocked American programming on government-run airwaves.¹⁵² The strategy to export the NBA

¹⁴⁹ David Stern, quoted in Steven Secular, "Beyond Basketball: NBA Entertainment and the Sports League as Global Media Empire, 1982–1990," *The Velvet Light Trap* 87 (2021), 23.

¹⁵⁰ David L. Andrews, "The (Trans)National Basketball Association: American Commodity-Sign Culture and Global-Local Conjunctualism," in *Articulating the Global and the Local: Globalization and Cultural Studies*, eds. Ann Cvetkovich & Douglas Kellner (London: Routledge, 2018), 78.

¹⁵¹ Secular, "Beyond Basketball," 28.

¹⁵² As media historian Michele Hilmes points out, following "the rise of market-based political ideologies ushered in during the Reagan and Thatcher era ... public broadcasting systems were privatized and

through media content proved to be a prosperous venture. Sport historian Mark Dyreson notes that basketball was accelerating in global popularity during this time: “A new world order was emerging: a structure that still bore the imprint of American designs but one that increasingly centred on global markets and global power rather than national markets and national power.”¹⁵³

The league’s global dispersion introduced unique tactics to continue building the league’s brand, which included sending NBA players and teams to countries to introduce potential fans to the game of basketball firsthand. Although this strategy was first implemented in 1978 when the Washington Bullets visited Maccabi Tel Aviv in Israel, overseas efforts ramped up during the early years of Stern’s tenure. As the end of the Cold War gradually became imminent, Stern sought to introduce the NBA to previously fortified media markets. According to Secular, the commissioner met with state-run China Central Television (CCTV) in 1987 and “offered to give away a package of NBA telecasts for free, a deal too good to refuse.”¹⁵⁴ Stern would enact a similar strategy in 1988 when he traveled with the Atlanta Hawks to tour the Soviet Union. As Secular notes, “the free packages eventually paid off in more lucrative and more extensive agreements.”¹⁵⁵ Stern used such tours to expand the league’s media presence worldwide, a strategy that would attract scores of global fans heading into the twenty-first century.

restructured to compete in the marketplace.” For more, see Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁵³ Mark Dyreson, “The Republic of Consumption at The Olympic Games: Globalization, Americanization, and Californization,” *Journal of Global History* 8, no. 2 (2013), 259.

¹⁵⁴ Secular, “Beyond Basketball,” 29.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

Although television was the driving force for expanding the NBA's image worldwide, the presence of players and teams embarking on global excursions introduced novel methods of using sportsmen and women to expand corporate interests and branding worldwide. This success excited the league's corporate partners, such as Nike and Coca-Cola, to use sport to promote their global presence. The NBA provides an exemplary case of how major corporate entities used sport to expand international revenues and, in some cases, implement people-to-people sport diplomacy to further these aims.

This chapter seeks to investigate the process in which international U.S. sport initiatives transitioned from being used as a tool to exhibit national superiority during the Cold War to being embraced by American multinational enterprises (MNEs) to infiltrate Soviet (and Soviet satellite state) markets, which began to flourish in the final decade of the conflict. At a fundamental level, MNEs such as Nike and Coca-Cola increased their dependence on world markets for profits during this time. Advertising campaigns were crucial in reaching the largest scale of global consumers and produced substantial revenues from markets across the world.

This method of reaching consumers manifested in many forms, but displaying American culture at the forefront of advertising campaigns, including through American celebrities, music, and, for the purposes of this chapter, sport, proved a reliable method for corporate entities during this time. These promotions appealed to consumers worldwide and resulted in the rapid expansion of American multinational enterprises and, subsequently, their net incomes. This familiar emergence of American soft power was distributed through several newer methods of the era, from older methods such as traditional print advertising to new technologies fueled by the upsurge in usage of the World Wide Web. MNEs included sport diplomacy under this umbrella of persuasive techniques in hopes of penetrating these markets and establishing long-term revenue

streams for new generations of consumers. This marked shift from using sport as propaganda to the use of sport as a soft power tool generated momentum beginning in this period and planted the foundation for how sport diplomacy is now interpreted in the twenty-first century.

This chapter provides a theoretical background of globalization and multinational corporations' increasing interest in conducting sport diplomacy programs in the 1980s. Special attention will focus on the 1984 Summer Olympic Games hosted by Los Angeles and the role of the U.S. federal government in promoting private enterprise through sporting exhibitions. After analyzing both the commendations and criticisms of these methods, both domestically and internationally, the chapter proceeds to examine a case study focusing on American-based fast-food chain Taco Bell's relationship with the Soviet Union national baseball team in the 1980s and 1990s. Concluding thoughts will reflect on the legacy of such programs and look forward to how MNEs continue to experiment with sport diplomacy programs in the twenty-first century.

EARLY HISTORY OF COMMERCIALISM IN SPORT

The linkages between commercialism and sport cannot solely be associated with this late-Cold War period, as the influential force of American entrepreneurs to promote their products through sport entities existed long before the advent of the conflict. Recognizing the potential of sport to generate revenue dates back centuries, sport historian Tony Collins notes. The commercial expansion witnessed in the 1980s was "...merely the latest of several equivalent developments over the past 250 years ... Unashamedly part of the entertainment industry and played for profit, it became a fashionable bauble for super-rich patrons."¹⁵⁶ Entrepreneurs such as Albert Goodwill Spalding built a sporting goods

¹⁵⁶ Tony Collins, *Sport in Capitalist Society: A Short History* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 121.

empire as early as the late nineteenth century. As sport historian Barbara Keys notes, the U.S. federal government sought to aid these businesses in several ways. For example, the U.S. Department of Commerce “...asked its foreign services to compile information on sports in foreign countries, in response to inquiries from American manufacturers of athletic and sporting goods.”¹⁵⁷ While interest in international sporting competitions such as the Olympic Games began to ramp up in the early twentieth century, U.S. government entities realized the potential of increasing access to such industries.

Keys notes that as early as 1928, the relationship between American corporations and sporting organizations began transforming the global sports environment. One early example of this is the Coca-Cola Company’s corporate relationship with the U.S. Olympic team, where its desire to expand the company’s brand and product resulted in the shipment of “...a thousand cases of the soft drink along with the U.S. Olympic team to Amsterdam, where special Coca-Cola® kiosks staffed by vendors with Coca-Cola® caps and coats wooed more customers than competing ‘health drinks.’”¹⁵⁸ The motivations for corporations to engage with sport are not only limited to revenue generation. In the years before the outbreak of World War II, Keys argues that sport embarked on a “moral crusade” to spread the American way of life globally. “American sport enthusiasts believed that by disseminating their vision of sport and sportsmanship, they could implant a moral code that would bring other nations toward democracy and peace.”¹⁵⁹

Sport attracted significant attention compared to other forms of American culture during this period. Still, the values developed through sport participation made it both

¹⁵⁷ Barbara Keys, “Spreading Peace, Democracy, and Coca-Cola®: Sport and American Cultural Expansion in the 1930s.” *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 2 (2004), 188.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 193.

attractive and accessible to citizens of nations worldwide. Sport scholars Michael L. Silk and David L. Andrews build on the use of sport to create cultural values through their logic of “cultural Toyotism,” a term developed within the framework of Japanese industrial and economic competence. Relating this term to sport, the authors claim that “...sport is mobilized as a major cultural signifier of a nation that can engage national sensibilities, identities, and experiences. As such, sport is used as de facto cultural shorthand delineating particular national sentiments.”¹⁶⁰

There are examples of MNEs implementing diplomatic ventures involving sportspeople disguised as commercial endeavors. As sport historian Kevin B. Witherspoon notes in the example of American track and field athlete Mal Whitfield, companies such as the Mobil Oil Company awarded seven-figure grants in 1956 to “...hold a training camp for seventeen African states in West Africa.”¹⁶¹ Initiatives such as these continued well into the Cold War and will be discussed in detail later in the chapter. Still, it is interesting to note that people-to-people sport diplomacy initiatives were undertaken at this time. While there are countless examples of governments and private citizens engaging in sport diplomacy programs during this early period of the Cold War, it is rare to find MNEs implementing such programs before trending upward in popularity in the 1980s.

The resulting fear becomes the reimagining of distinct national cultures into a conglomeration of a singular “global” culture spurred by corporate capitalism. As Keys concludes, “the spread of American sport practices throughout the world did not, as many proponents believed it would, lead to peace and democracy; it led instead to Coke,

¹⁶⁰ Michael L. Silk & David L. Andrews, “Beyond a Boundary? Sport, Transnational Advertising, and the Reimagining of National Culture,” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 25, no. 2 (2001), 191.

¹⁶¹ Kevin B. Witherspoon, “‘An Outstanding Representative of America’: Mal Whitfield and America’s Black Sports Ambassadors in Africa,” in *Defending the American Way of Life: Sport, Culture, and the Cold War*, eds. Toby C. Rider & Kevin B. Witherspoon (University of Arkansas Press, 2018), 135.

commercials, and the cult of consumption.”¹⁶² Dyreson concurs with this analysis, contending, “Instead of serving as icons of resilient pluralism and evangelical republicanism – America’s athletic missionaries – in the 1920s, American teams became advertisements for a republic founded on consumption.”¹⁶³ The conviction that consumption was at the center of American culture bled into international sport initiatives during this era, a sentiment that would persist well into the Cold War.

“CULT”-URE OF CONSUMPTION: THE RISE OF AMERICAN COMMERCIALISM ABROAD

The impact of American commercialism in the global landscape would not be possible without emphasizing the rise of globalization in the twentieth century. Globalization is defined as “a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transaction – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and the exercise of power.”¹⁶⁴ The revival of the modern Olympic Games in the late nineteenth century reinstituted a global stage for sport and, according to Dyreson, provided not only a backdrop for expressing nationalistic messaging but also “served as early conduits for a certain form of globalization by providing international opportunities for economic, political, and cultural exchange.”¹⁶⁵ International sporting events, ranging from competitive spectacles such as the Olympic Games to diplomatic exchange programs involving smaller groups of players

¹⁶² Keys, “Spreading Peace, Democracy, and Coca-Cola®,” 196.

¹⁶³ Dyreson, “The Republic of Consumption at The Olympic Games,” 264.

¹⁶⁴ David Held et al., “Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture.” In *Politics at the Edge: The PSA Yearbook 1999*, eds. Chris Pierson & Simon Tormey (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 15.

¹⁶⁵ Mark Dyreson, “The Republic of Consumption at The Olympic Games,” 262.

or teams, were seen as opportunities by American corporate and governmental entities to enter international markets and create networks of new generations of consumers.

Innovations in American commercialism were primarily pioneered by MNEs that sought to expand their markets beyond U.S. borders. Castells explains that “the real challenge for individual firms and capitalism as a whole was to find new markets able to absorb a growing productive capacity of goods and services.”¹⁶⁶ American economist Theodore Levitt explained that one critical component of the globalization process for MNEs required a shift in what was being sold. He posits, “...companies have moved from emphasis on customizing items to offering globally standardized products that are advanced, functional, reliable—and low priced ... Only global companies will achieve long-term success by concentrating on what everyone wants rather than worrying about the details of what everyone thinks they might like.”¹⁶⁷

In the process, these economies of scale promote the homogenization of products used daily by people across the world, reevaluating how global consumerism affects distinct cultures. Political scientist Deane Neubauer explains that this sentiment is especially distinctive due to increased perceptions of global congruence in the latter half of the twentieth century. He notes, “Within the frames of globalization, dominated by economic reductionism, the meaning of progress has itself been reduced from its historical implications of providing a better life for all within a framework of an expanding public good, to the far more limited meaning of the expansion of goods.”¹⁶⁸ Public diplomacy

¹⁶⁶ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 95.

¹⁶⁷ Theodore Levitt, “The Globalization of Markets,” *Harvard Business Review*, May 1983, <https://hbr.org/1983/05/the-globalization-of-markets>.

¹⁶⁸ Deane Neubauer, “Modern Sport and Olympic Games: The Problematic Complexities Raised by the Dynamics of Globalization,” *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies* 17 (2008), 29.

scholar Rhonda S. Zaharna adds to this by discussing the role of “cultural awareness” in this late-Cold War period, stating, “U.S. public diplomacy’s attempts to promote American culture runs counter to people seeking to assert their own culture, and by extension, their cultural identity. Paradoxically, rather than fostering mutual understanding, aggressive cultural promotion can magnify cultural differences.”¹⁶⁹ This manifests itself not only in consumer goods but also in the experiences exported from nations like the U.S. in several cultural forms, including, for the purposes of this dissertation, sporting experiences.

The dangers of increasing corporatization and its impact on national cultures have been addressed in academic literature; as sport scholars Silk, Andrews, and Cheryl L. Cole assert, “global capitalism seeks to, quite literally, capitalize upon the nation as a source of collective identification and differentiation.”¹⁷⁰ Although the expansion of American involvement in international sport encouraged other nations to follow suit, the aims of this growth hid intentions of cultural assimilation. Dyreson warns, “...other civilisations need to understand that the fundamental assumption of most Americans is that the international exchanges taking place around the world through sport are primarily conduits for the Americanisation of global cultures.”¹⁷¹ The influence of “Americanization” is a ubiquitous hazard, with the dominant force of commercialism bleeding into countless facets of national cultures. As sport sociologist Joseph Maguire concurs, “...what is at stake is ... whether globalization is leading to a more cosmopolitan embrace/emotional identification

¹⁶⁹ Rhonda S. Zaharna, *Battles to Bridges: US Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy After 9/11* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 119.

¹⁷⁰ Michael L. Silk, David L. Andrews, & Cheryl L. Cole, “Corporate Nationalism(s)? The Spatial Dimensions of Sporting Capital,” in *Sport and Corporate Nationalisms*, eds. Michael L. Silk, David L. Andrews, & Cheryl L. Cole (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 7.

¹⁷¹ Mark Dyreson, “World Harmony or an Athletic ‘Clash of Civilizations’? The Beijing Olympic Spectacle, BMX Bicycles and the American Contours of Globalisation,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 9 (2012), 1233.

between people, societies and civilizations or if it has unleashed a new wave of ethnic defensiveness, nationalism and a rejection of other cultures and civilizations.”¹⁷² Throughout this dissertation, American sport diplomacy initiatives grapple with this issue as they attempt to balance showcasing culture and acculturation.

Following World War II, the U.S. and the Soviet Union emerged as the world’s most immense imperial powers. According to sport scholar Rick Gruneau, “each was caught up in a drive to expand its markets in order to speed up post-war recovery at home.”¹⁷³ Tracing its origins in the U.S. to the 1950s, the progression of neoliberal economic policies defined post-war growth as Cold War tensions began to intensify. Neoliberal policies inspired the economic policies of the Carter administration in the 1970s and were further embraced by the Reagan administration in the 1980s. According to Gruneau and communications scholar Robert Neubauer, neoliberalism was “envisioned as a global process, contingent on the establishment of a deregulated market system to facilitate the global mobility of capital across regions and nations.”¹⁷⁴ Due to a confluence of political and economic circumstances heading into the 1980s, the influence of these policies spread not only between Western economies but outside of them as well. Sport scholars Trevor Slack, Silk, and Fan Hong report that such policies “had held sway in many Western economies since the end of World War II began to unravel and corporations, aided and abetted of course by the Reagan and Thatcherite regimes of the time, began to operate

¹⁷² Joseph Maguire, “‘Real Politic’ or ‘Ethically Based’: Sport, Globalization, Migration and Nation-State Policies,” in *Sport and Foreign Policy in a Globalizing World*, eds. Steven J. Jackson & Steven Haigh (London: Routledge, 2013), 108.

¹⁷³ Rick Gruneau, “Commercialism and the Modern Olympics,” in *Five-Ring Circus: Money, Power, and Politics at the Olympic Games*, eds. Alan Tomlinson & Garry Whannel (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 7.

¹⁷⁴ Rick Gruneau & Robert Neubauer, “A Gold Medal for the Market: The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, the Reagan Era, and the Politics of Neoliberalism,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Olympic Studies*, eds. Helen Jefferson Lenskyj & Stephen Wagg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 143.

beyond their national boundaries.”¹⁷⁵ Hosting the 1984 Summer Olympic Games was particularly advantageous for the Reagan administration to evangelize such neoliberal reforms, leading to increasing corporatization of the Games.

“THE HAMBURGER OLYMPICS”: THE 1984 LOS ANGELES SUMMER OLYMPIC GAMES

In several cases throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, host cities of the Summer Olympic Games had earned unsavory reputations for mismanaging organizing budgets, leading to severe cost overruns and damaged Olympic legacies. For example, the 1976 Summer Olympic Games in Montréal first estimated the cost of hosting the Games at C\$120 million in 1970 but, due to an extensive list of internal and external factors, later spent over thirty years paying off a staggering C\$1.5 billion deficit.¹⁷⁶

Externalities such as the tragic massacre involving the Israeli Olympic team at the 1972 Summer Olympic Games in Munich pressured organizing committees of future Games to expand security costs, while political circumstances such as the 1980 boycotts of the Moscow Games added uncertainty to the cost efficiency of such events. When the Summer Olympic Games was awarded to Los Angeles in 1978, financial forecasts varied, and economists worried about similar consequences befalling the city. At the time, economic analyst Susan Fields expressed caution when considering the necessity of local taxes to finance the event. “There are a lot of ifs ... You’re going to need Federal or state subsidies or a lottery or something else.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Trevor Slack, Michael L. Silk, & Fan Hong, “Cultural Contradictions/Contradicting Culture: Transnational Corporations and the Penetration of the Chinese Market,” in *Sport and Corporate Nationalisms*, eds. Michael L. Silk, David L. Andrews, & Cheryl L. Cole (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 254.

¹⁷⁶ Ashish Patel, Paul A. Bosela, & Norbert J. Delatte, “1976 Montreal Olympics: Case Study of Project Management Failure,” *Journal of Performance of Constructed Facilities* 27, no. 3 (2013), 362.

¹⁷⁷ Robert Lindsey, “Los Angeles Debates 1984 Olympics’ Cost,” *New York Times*, August 7, 1977.

For this reason, the Games were presented as an opportunity to those in charge of the federal government at the time. Elected two years following the successful Los Angeles bid, Ronald Reagan entered the White House eager to implement new economic initiatives dubbed “Reaganomics” to reverse the years-long effects of stagflation and promote economic expansion. This concept was centered around four pillars that would promote stable growth: “cutting personal and corporate taxes, slashing expenditures on domestic programs (while increasing resources to the military), creating a regulatory climate more favorable to business, and reducing the share of the federal government in national income.”¹⁷⁸ The administration believed these economic instruments could find applications both in federal monetary policy and the enclosed environment of mega-events such as the Summer Olympic Games.

The novelty of such applications to U.S. economic policy earned its share of detractors. Therefore, the Olympic Games presented a unique opportunity for public evidence of the success of such policies. In need of a “private sector win,” sport historian Bradley J. Congelio argues, “The financial success of the 1984 Olympics was an indicator that Reagan’s aggressive economic policies were beginning to take root and proof to skeptics about his neoliberal agenda that the policy could be successful in America.”¹⁷⁹

Working directly with the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC) and its chairman, former Major League Baseball commissioner Peter Ueberroth, the Reagan White House “undertook many initiatives both to support Ueberroth’s efforts to

¹⁷⁸ Norman J. Glickman, “Economic Policy and the Cities in Search of Reagan’s Real Urban Policy,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 50, no. 4 (1984), 472.

¹⁷⁹ Bradley J. Congelio, “In Defense of a Neoliberal America: Ronald Reagan, Domestic Policy, and the Soviet Boycott of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games,” in *Defending the American Way of Life: Sport, Culture, and the Cold War*, eds. Toby C. Rider & Kevin B. Witherspoon (University of Arkansas Press, 2018), 214.

stage a perfect edition of the Games and to present a positive image of the United States to the world.”¹⁸⁰ The irony surrounding the Reagan administration’s involvement in the Los Angeles Olympic Games was manifested in the government’s direct involvement in supporting and coordinating efforts in planning the Games while championing the event as a showpiece of the triumphs of private enterprise. This association between the executive branch and the LAOOC led critics of the relationship to rename the Los Angeles-based Olympics the “‘Hamburger Olympics,’ where the only thing that was missing was the hamburger-shaped Olympic swimming pool.”¹⁸¹ Despite this condemnation, the groups pushed forward to present the U.S. as a bastion of free enterprise.

In January 1983, National Security Directive Decision 75 outlined a new strategy to navigate U.S. and Soviet affairs, stating that the “primary focus of American foreign policy would be to contain and over time reverse Soviet expansionism by competing with Moscow in military power and in international diplomacy.”¹⁸² Following the boycott of the Soviet Union and fourteen other Eastern Bloc nations just months before the opening ceremonies, American foreign policy was also at the forefront of the Reagan administration’s priorities, which also tied into the Games. This emphasis on foreign policy included people-to-people exchanges initiated by federal agencies. In a January 1984 speech, Reagan emphasized, “Expanding contacts across borders and permitting a free exchange or interchange of information and ideas increase confidence; sealing off one’s

¹⁸⁰ Umberto Tulli, “‘They Used Americana, All Painted and Polished, to Make the Enormous Impression They Did’: Selling the Reagan Revolution through the 1984 Olympic Games,” in *Sport and Diplomacy: Games Within Games*, ed. J. Simon Rofe (Manchester University Press, 2018), 224.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁸² James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 30.

people from the rest of the world reduces it.”¹⁸³ As Tulli notes, the administration’s partnership with the LAOOC presented “incredible public diplomacy opportunities,” including one project initiated in coordination with the United States Information Agency (USIA), which “established its own ‘Olympic team’ in August 1983. In a few months, the USIA became a fundamental partner to promote the LAOOC abroad, spreading information on the Olympic Games and prioritising the private sector initiatives to organise them.”¹⁸⁴ This tactic of promoting the neoliberal values championed by select private sector enterprises abroad became common in this late-Cold War period, strengthening the ties between sport and international business.

Sport historians widely concur that the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympic Games was presented “as a harbinger of a new era for the Olympic movement, an era in which corporate sponsorship, international audience, global markets and TV broadcasting envisaged large margins of profit and made the Olympic bandwagon truly global.”¹⁸⁵ Gruneau and Neubauer emphasize the event’s impact at an international level, arguing that the Los Angeles Games “...helped to legitimate a sweeping neoliberal political project in the United States, with repercussions that have been felt across the globe.”¹⁸⁶ In addition

¹⁸³ Ronald Reagan, “Address to the Nation and Other Countries on United States-Soviet Relations” (speech, Washington D.C., January 16, 1984), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-nation-and-other-countries-united-states-soviet-relations>.

¹⁸⁴ Tulli, “‘They Used Americana, All Painted and Polished, to Make the Enormous Impression They Did,’” 232.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 223. For more perspectives on this assertion, see Gruneau & Neubauer, “A Gold Medal for the Market,” 134-162; Robert K. Barney, Stephen R. Wenn, & Scott G Martyn, *Selling The Five Rings: The International Olympic Committee and the Rise of the Olympic Commercialism* (University of Utah Press: 2004); Garry Whannel, “The Five Rings and the Small Screen: Television, Sponsorship, and New Media in the Olympic Movement,” in *Global Olympics: Historical and Sociological Studies of the Modern Games*, eds. Kevin Young & Kevin B. Wamsley, 161-178 (Oxford: Elsevier Press, 2005).

¹⁸⁶ Gruneau & Neubauer, “A Gold Medal for the Market,” 134-135.

to the global economic impact of the Games, the U.S. successfully delivered a positive public relations campaign that spawned several smaller-scale initiatives revolving around sport and American enterprise. This became a critical tool as the battle for hearts and minds raged between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

The public/private strategy of organizing the Games resulted in massive success. As Tulli summates, “the LAOOC and the Games were a shining emblem for the Reagan revolution – a neoliberal revolution yearning for limitation of the role of the state in the economy, in order to allow a free society, as American society was, to create the talents and resources needed to reaffirm American primacy.”¹⁸⁷ Despite the economic and social benefits the Reagan administration boasted after the Games, Gruneau notes that equating success with fiscal restraint was problematic. He states, “...there is a still deeper statement about the idealised moral economy of capitalism: profitability is the ultimate factor in determining the value of human endeavour and the marketplace is the fairest judge of human capacity.”¹⁸⁸ Despite these concerns, American MNEs discovered the potential of sporting events such as the Olympic Games to drive new revenue streams. The Los Angeles Games simply offered a taste of how MNEs could implement sport in commercial campaigns.

The most popular route for companies to associate with the Games was through sponsorship opportunities, which were not unique to this event’s latest edition. However, the contribution of major brands evolved as the Games embraced expanding forms of private enterprise. As Tulli notes:

¹⁸⁷ Tulli, ““They Used Americana, All Painted and Polished, to Make the Enormous Impression They Did,”” 238.

¹⁸⁸ Gruneau, “Commercialism and the Modern Olympics,” 3.

Private sponsors had a long record within the Olympic movement and especially with the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) but, for the first time, they were the only financial partner of the Games and their presence was more visible than ever. Corporations' slogans and their Olympic connections occupied the pages of major American newspapers and magazines ... Through a peculiar mix of patriotism and internationalism, their advertisements produced a positive and dynamic perception of the Los Angeles Olympic Games, thus contributing to the success of the LAOOC.¹⁸⁹

The LAOOC's approach to sponsorship was essentially laissez-faire: as Gruneau and Neubauer note, Ueberroth "took the position that virtually everything at the Games was available for sponsorship or naming rights, including facilities, services and even the various stages of the Olympic torch relay."¹⁹⁰ However, Los Angeles differed in the types of sponsorship that transpired, signifying an evolution of what sponsorships had developed in the past. Fast-food empire McDonald's financed the construction of the aquatics venue that hosted the swimming, diving, and synchronized swimming competitions. Telecommunications conglomerate AT&T set up an electronic messaging system (EMS), the first of its kind. This development comprised a network of "1700 terminals, 300 printers, and 7000 paging devices, all connected to 14 minicomputers by a communications system that includes almost 300 miles of light-guide cable."¹⁹¹ As AT&T spokesperson Bob Ford noted, "The scale of the system is Olympian in itself ... Most of these people, especially the foreign athletes, have never even seen a computer before."¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Tulli, "They Used Americana, All Painted and Polished, to Make the Enormous Impression They Did," 228.

¹⁹⁰ Gruneau & Neubauer, "A Gold Medal for the Market," 148.

¹⁹¹ Walter L. Corwin, "A Communications Network for the Summer Olympics: Behind-the-Scenes Communicating at the Games in Los Angeles Seemed a Complicated and Thankless Task, Yet AT&T Took it On," *IEEE Spectrum* 21, no. 7 (1984), 38.

¹⁹² Jon Wertheim, "How the L.A. '84 Olympics Changed Everything," *Sports Illustrated*, June 3, 2021, <https://www.si.com/olympics/2021/06/03/la-84-olympics-changed-the-games-daily-cover>.

The advertising at the Los Angeles Games became a spectacle within itself. Dyreson notes that “the republic of consumption so thoroughly dominated the staging of the 1984 Olympics that domestic and international critics delighted in condemning the overcommercialization of the spectacle.”¹⁹³ Tulli notes that MNEs celebrated largely successful advertising campaigns both domestically and internationally, having lucratively “promoted a dynamic and colourful image of the United States.”¹⁹⁴ The over-commercialization of the Los Angeles Games was interpreted as an enormous victory for the MNEs allowed to promote within this inner sphere, but this phenomenon also raised concerns.

The chief critic of this over-commercialization was the Soviet Union, which opposed the over-saturation of free enterprise in the Olympic Games. While this condemnation from a hostile Cold War hegemonic power came as no surprise to the U.S., prominent voices within the IOC and surrounding it were concerned with the latest developments of the Los Angeles Games. IOC executive officer Monique Berlioux “complained about the over-commercialisation of the Games and American chauvinism.”¹⁹⁵ Then-mayor of Olympia, Greece, Spyros Fotinos, expressed, “The Olympic flame is not a dollar sign and we are determined to prevent its commercialization.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Dyreson, “The Republic of Consumption at The Olympic Games,” 276.

¹⁹⁴ Tulli, ““They Used Americana, All Painted and Polished, to Make the Enormous Impression They Did,”” 228.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹⁹⁶ Peter H. King, “L.A. Olympic Aide Dispatched to Explain: Greeks Leery of Games Torch Relay Program,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 1984.

Other perspectives arose from the American scholarly community, as cultural studies scholar Henry A. Giroux noted that such MNEs should “be seen as a pedagogical and policy-making enterprise actively engaged in the cultural landscaping of national identity and the ‘schooling’ of the minds of young children.”¹⁹⁷ Sport scholar Alan Tomlinson provided a more unrestrained analysis of the Games’ commercialization, noting that the “ruthless commodification” of the event was “only possible in a wholesale abandonment of the amateur principle and ethos underpinning earlier Games, alongside a recognition that just as the Games themselves were fully exploited for their commercial potential.”¹⁹⁸ Despite such consternation, the influence of this phenomenon stretched into future endeavors marrying the increasingly connected worlds of sport, commercialism, and federal involvement.

Following the culmination of the Los Angeles Games, the Cold War entered a new stage after Mikhail Gorbachev assumed power in the Soviet Union in March 1985. Gorbachev’s policy of *perestroika*, first announced in February 1986, which introduced market-like reforms throughout the Soviet Union, was a harbinger for the nation’s transition from a state-controlled command economy to a market economy. This shift allowed MNEs to enter this previously state-regulated space in ways previously inaccessible. As the following case study exemplifies, MNEs capitalized on the commercial success of the Los Angeles Games to experiment with new advertising methods for global markets.

¹⁹⁷ Henry A. Giroux, “Memory and Pedagogy in the ‘Wonderful World of Disney,’” in *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, eds. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, & Laura Sells (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1995), 65.

¹⁹⁸ Alan Tomlinson, “The Commercialization of the Olympics: Cities, Corporations and the Olympic Commodity,” in *Global Olympics: Historical and Sociological Studies of the Modern Games*, eds. Kevin Young & Kevin B. Wamsley (Oxford: Elsevier Press, 2005), 186.

“LET’S GO FOR IT AND SEE IF WE CAN BECOME A PART OF HISTORY”: TACO BELL’S FORAY INTO PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE SPORT DIPLOMACY

When Gorbachev assumed power as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the dual policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* impacted several echelons of Soviet life. New guidelines also affected Soviet Union athletes seeking to play sports abroad. Sergei Pryiaxhin was drafted by the Calgary Flames of the National Hockey League in 1988, becoming the first athlete living in the Soviet Union to receive permission to play with a North American professional sports team.¹⁹⁹ According to Monica DeHellerman, then-owner of sport consulting firm International Sport Summit, this marginal expansion of autonomy resulted in expanded revenues for Soviet athletes taking their talents abroad: “The Soviets made over \$100 million between 1985 and 1988 in such revenues ... the Soviets are also benefiting from American expertise in sports like baseball and swimming and are receiving thousands of dollars worth of equipment.”²⁰⁰ Companies such as McDonald’s and Alamo Rent a Car also found value in these people-to-people sports exchanges, having hosted gymnastics and swim meets.

The *New York Times* noted that people-to-people sports exchanges between the Soviet Union and the U.S. were considered a “hot ticket in the United States, the Madonna of the Eastern bloc.”²⁰¹ As the Iron Curtain slowly began to open during this late-Cold War period, mutual acceptance was found through the language of sport. The Soviet Union primarily found value in such exchanges through a performance perspective; journalist Martin Lader noted, “The Russians intend to use the games as a learning experience to

¹⁹⁹ Pryiaxhin played 46 games with the Flames, recording three goals and eight assists in his stretch with the club from 1988 to 1991.

²⁰⁰ Peter Alfano, “For Soviet Athletes, A Greater Presence in American Sports,” *New York Times*, April 30, 1989.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

improve their baseball skills.”²⁰² Some skeptics believed the Communist Party leveraged Soviet athletic talent for propaganda reasons. There is some truth to this, as baseball was set to return to the Summer Olympic Games in 1992, and the publicity surrounding the medal race had pertinent publicity value. Sportswriter Peter Alfano noted that “...the Soviets also appear interested in solidifying their place in the world athletic community. This participation will enable them to obtain needed currency for their troubled economy.”²⁰³ Depending on the player, team, or level of Communist Party involvement in sports exchanges, an assortment of motivations allowed for expanding people-to-people sports exchanges for the Soviet Union.

However, for American MNEs involved in these excursions, motivations were more capitalistic. Corporate sponsorship of people-to-people sports exchanges was not uncommon during the late 1980s. Still, the involvement of MNEs did not become interested in the potential of these exchanges until financial opportunities materialized in the economically fragile Soviet Union. Drew Mearns, then-president of Cleveland-based Heritage Sports, a company that sponsored Soviet tours throughout the 1970s and 1980s, noted that “These corporations see a huge Soviet market open to their goods and services.”²⁰⁴ Like the Soviet motivations for engaging in such exchanges, these MNEs discovered a myriad of benefits that were realized not only before embarking on trips but also as the exchanges were taking place.

²⁰² Martin Lader, “Baseball: Teenage Baseball Team to Tour Soviet Union,” *United Press International* (Washington), July 30, 1988. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1988/07/30/Baseball-Teenage-Baseball-Team-To-Tour-Soviet-Union/9380586238400/>.

²⁰³ Alfano, “For Soviet Athletes, A Greater Presence in American Sports,” April 30, 1989.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

Elliot Bloom, then-Senior Director of Public Affairs at Taco Bell, offers an alternative perspective of the value of such tours during people-to-people sports exchanges conducted during this time. Bloom traveled with a New Jersey-based group of high school baseball players known as the “Hoboken Seventeen” on their tour of the Soviet Union in 1988 and was instrumental in the everyday affairs of the Soviet national team’s visit to the U.S., acting on behalf of Taco Bell. Having gone public in 1970 and acquired by PepsiCo in 1978, the corporation’s growth was boundless but still had unrealized potential with ambitions of saturating not only the American fast-food market but the international market as well. When explaining the company’s decision to sponsor baseball exchanges between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, Bloom recalled, “How do we become more mainstream in America? And what sport aligned with ‘mainstream’ more than baseball?”²⁰⁵

Thus began the first steps to an enthralling example of corporate involvement in people-to-people sport diplomacy: an exchange program between the Soviet national baseball team and a team of high school-aged players from Hoboken, New Jersey, who were crowned the state’s Sandy Koufax League champions in 1987. The historic exchange was first suggested by U.S. Senator Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey following a trip he made to Russia a year before. However, there were no reports of federal funding or sponsorship of the exchanges. The American team, which won a 1987 Northeast Regional competition as part of the Sandy Koufax League, traveled to Kyiv, Tbilisi, and Moscow in 1988, while the Soviet national team arrived in Annapolis, Maryland, the following year and embarked on a two-week excursion down the east coast, concluding its tour in Florida. Both legs of the exchange were principally sponsored by Taco Bell, the company’s first program involving sports exchanges.

²⁰⁵ Elliot Bloom, interview with author, telephone call, September 17, 2021.

Initial discussions with members of the company's executive managers to get involved as a sponsor were met with positive feedback. Recalling a conversation he had with one of Taco Bell's executives, Bloom noted that the company was exploring new avenues for growth:

We were doing a lot of things on the marketing side to mainstream our brand ... [executive John Martin] said, 'PepsiCo has this former history of working with Russia and I get what you're saying there, Elliot, I think there's something to this ... let's go for it. It didn't seem like a lot of money... let's go for it and see if we can become a part of history.' And we did that.²⁰⁶

Taco Bell sponsored the first U.S. baseball team to play the sport on Soviet Union soil. Sports journalist Josh Chetwynd notes that during the Soviet national team's visit to the U.S., Taco Bell "...purchased uniforms for the squad (complete with "Taco Bell" patches), and the players made a number of publicity stops for the Mexican fast food company during their tour."²⁰⁷

Despite being far younger than the Soviet baseball players, the Hoboken-based high schoolers found success because they had more years of cumulative experience playing baseball than the adult-aged Soviet players. However, this did not phase the Soviets. As journalist Jim Brady reported, "Nobody was certain of the scrimmage's score, and it didn't matter. What did was that the Soviets displayed good fundamentals and a knowledge of the game, qualities they didn't have nine months ago."²⁰⁸ As Bloom observed during his time in the Soviet Union, the Soviet team was achieving a primary mission of the tour,

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Josh Chetwynd, *Baseball in Europe: A Country by Country History* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2019), 132.

²⁰⁸ Jim Brady, "Soviet Baseball Team is Improving," *The Washington Post*, Apr. 11, 1989. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/sports/1989/04/11/soviet-baseball-team-is-improving/e3ed6b63-9882-4f00-8c74-dafeddd75d56>.

which “was to learn about baseball, because they had great athletes... all sorts of terrific athletes, but they didn’t have knowledge about the strategy of baseball and their athletes were not throwing baseballs, catching baseballs, or any baseballs.”²⁰⁹ Learning the game first-hand from American players with many more years of experience offered an invaluable learning experience for the fledgling Soviet team.

The opportunities for exchange were not limited to in-game experiences, either. As American high schooler Derek England clarified, “We want to teach them about life in the United States. We’ll try to see how their culture and lifestyle is different, and we’ll tell them about ours.”²¹⁰ Soviets considered American baseball the “pinnacle” of how the game should be played. Much of the American tour focused on both on-the-field and off-the-field components of the sport, including when, as Brady details, employees at the Soviets’ hotel provided each Soviet player with baseball cards: “...they spent much of the game showing them to the Howard [University] players. The Soviets also posed for numerous pictures with the Bison.”²¹¹ The Americans also learned a substantial amount about the culture and lifestyles of Soviet citizens during their time in the country. Riding an undefeated streak through their time beyond the Iron Curtain, the young players also acknowledged that “Culture, history, and knowledge became more important than the game itself, which, according to coaches, was such an unexpected outcome.”²¹²

²⁰⁹ Elliot Bloom, interview with author, telephone call, September 17, 2021.

²¹⁰ Lader, “Baseball: Teenage Baseball Team to Tour Soviet Union,” July 30, 1988.

²¹¹ Brady, “Soviet Baseball Team is Improving,” Apr. 11, 1989.

²¹² Dennis Sevano, “Mile Square to Moscow: Teens of Sandy Koufax League took a Memorable Trip,” *NJ.com*, Advance Publications (New York), January 18, 2021. <https://www.nj.com/hudson/2021/01/mile-square-to-moscow-teens-of-sandy-koufax-league-took-a-memorable-trip-opinion.html>.

Taco Bell's involvement with baseball did not stop following the conclusion of the tours in 1989. The exchange opportunity could be viewed as a precursor towards a future partnership between Taco Bell and Major League Baseball (MLB), formally initiated in 2003. Bloom notes, "You just have to look at the 'end of the movie:' They're a major sponsor in sports ... From a marketing standpoint, it began that. You're talking about maybe a \$50,000 investment that's now ... [a huge, multi-million-dollar partnership]." ²¹³ Taco Bell remains an official sponsor of the MLB at the time of writing. However, musing on the legacy of the exchanges, Bloom believes the legitimate impact of the original sponsorship was in the attention all parties gained through the experience. "It was simply to raise the profile of Taco Bell as a sponsor of baseball ... [the sponsorship] was historic because it was the first time an American team was playing on Soviet soil. The historic aspect was thought to be quite interesting for the media. That was really the pitch." ²¹⁴

Bloom also reflected on the tour as an opportunity for personal growth. Many Americans during this late stage of the Cold War remained uninformed and "basically wary" of the Soviet Union and, as political scientist Robert H. Hinckley describes, "The limited knowledge Americans have of the Soviet Union and their reliance on television for news of that country make American opinion susceptible to change." ²¹⁵ As a result, Bloom had limited expectations of what to expect when he touched down in Moscow with the American team. He notes the importance of visiting such locales firsthand to fully immerse in the culture and values of the Soviet people. "It was just a great realization for myself and my wife to gaze upon this country and its people and its athletes and say, 'Wow. This

²¹³ Elliot Bloom, interview with author, telephone call, September 17, 2021.

²¹⁴ Elliot Bloom, interview with author, telephone call, September 17, 2021.

²¹⁵ Ronald H. Hinckley, "American Opinion toward the Soviet Union," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 1, no. 3 (1989), 242.

is not the black and white photograph I have in my mind.”²¹⁶ As discussed earlier, there are many motivations for embarking on such exchanges. The value of sports exchanges during this time was multifaceted, creating distinct motivations for many parties to embark on their own programs.

CONCLUSION: THE CONTINUING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMERCIALISM AND SPORTS EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

Soviet athletes successfully took opportunities to showcase their athletic talents in the U.S. during their nation’s experiment with *perestroika*. Following the Taco Bell exchange, the Soviet team followed up with another trip to Seattle to participate in the 1990 Goodwill Games. Following several other U.S. tours, including a 1990 trip to Amarillo, Texas, American observer and journalist Michael Kimball noted that “the Soviets, by all accounts, had a great time, learned the game, and went on to spread it widely. A couple of the players went on to minor league careers in the Angels’ system, and many kept investing time and energy in the Russian baseball program.”²¹⁷ These “friendly invasions” acted as “one of the more visible signs of the political and economic reforms initiated by the Soviet leader, Mikhail S. Gorbachev.”²¹⁸ The lessons the Soviet team acquired during their time in the U.S. and the players’ experiences hosting the

²¹⁶ Elliot Bloom, interview with author, telephone call, September 17, 2021.

²¹⁷ Michael Kimball, “The Comrades of Summer: The 1990 Soviet Baseball Team,” *Uni Watch*, July 28, 2021. <https://uni-watch.com/2021/07/28/the-comrades-of-summer-the-1990-soviet-baseball-team>.

²¹⁸ Alfano, “For Soviet Athletes, A Greater Presence in American Sports,” April 30, 1989.

American team from Hoboken the year prior resulted in the expansion of baseball among the Soviets in the late-Cold War period.

The influence of the 1984 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles cannot be understated when analyzing the rise in international commercialism throughout these late and post-Cold War periods. Dyreson notes that the emergence of China's manufacture of BMX cycles and mountain bikes in the 1990s blossomed to attract an international market, signaling "the eagerness of the regime to embrace global markets and the radical shifts in ideology regarding consumerism that have taken place since the end of the Cold War."²¹⁹ In a separate analysis, Dyreson compartmentalizes American cultural traits such as consumption as embedded in Olympic programs, noting tactics to spread such values at events such as the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games "are embedded in the US-based corporate interests that partnered with the IOC to increase their penetration of Chinese markets through China's Olympics."²²⁰ The visibility of consumerism is unmistakably synonymous with the Olympic Games, and the 1984 Los Angeles Games propelled this sentiment into the twenty-first century.

The legacy of this expansion of exchange programs is also pertinent in the post-Cold War period. On October 24, 1992, President George H.W. Bush signed the Freedom for Russia and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets (FREEDOM) Support

²¹⁹ Mark Dyreson, "Conclusion - Olympic Spectacles in the Next 'American Century': Sport and Nationalism in a Post-Cold War World," in *Defending the American Way of Life: Sport, Culture, and the Cold War*, eds. Toby C. Rider & Kevin B. Witherspoon (University of Arkansas Press, 2018), 226.

²²⁰ Dyreson, "World Harmony or an Athletic 'Clash of Civilizations?,'" 1234.

Act of 1992 into law, which coordinated assistance between the U.S. and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, including authorizing appropriations for exchanges administered by the USIA and Fulbright Exchange Programs. The following discussion in Chapter 4 covers moments of national reinvigoration following tragic events such as the September 11 attacks and summons the need for programs to bridge relations on a people-to-people basis.

It is essential to emphasize the shifting nature of exchanges during this time and the justifications for implementing and sponsoring international sports exchanges. Sponsorship of sports exchange programs continues into the twenty-first century. Mission France is a sport development organization based in Paris that leverages partnerships with MNEs such as the National Basketball Association, Nike, and Spalding to develop and finance people-to-people sport diplomacy programs across the country. Sport for Development scholars Peter Donnelly et al. also point out that “Corporate initiatives are also increasing, as SDP [Sport for Development and Peace] becomes a part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies.”²²¹

As studies into corporate involvement in sport diplomacy programs warrant future research, some scholars warn against denoting these initiatives as “diplomacy.” Sport historian Heather Dichter notes that “While the field of diplomatic history has expanded to include non-state actors, which naturally includes the actions of national governing bodies and international federations, the simple act of having sporting relations between

²²¹ Peter Donnelly et al., “Sport for Development and Peace: A Public Sociology Perspective,” *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2011), 592.

citizens of different countries, or the spread of a sport across state borders, does not in itself constitute sport diplomacy.”²²² Whether the preceding ventures are considered diplomacy or something closely related, MNEs’ influence on sport diplomacy is cogent and remains popular in the twenty-first century. Scholars must recognize the impact these firms have on large-scale events, such as the Olympic Games, and smaller-scale sports programs, such as the Soviet-U.S. baseball exchange programs sponsored by Taco Bell. As the relationship between corporate interests and sporting entities strengthens, it becomes increasingly difficult to interpret these entities’ role in sport diplomacy. Studies such as this one hope to elucidate this phenomenon as it evolves.

²²² Heather L. Dichter, “The Diplomatic Turn: The New Relationship between Sport and Politics,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 38, 2-3 (2021), 12.

Chapter 4: “Monster” Hunting: United States Media Narratives of International Sporting Events in the Post-Cold War Era (1991-2000)

When the Wall came down it was just pure joy. Personally I was one of the first who had a look at West Berlin, because I noticed already in the night of November 9 what had happened ... It was very good for everything.

–Wolfgang Matthies, East German footballer²²³

A city divided no more. In a remarkable shift of global dynamics, the Berlin Wall fell on November 9, 1989, allowing citizens of East Germany to travel between West Berlin and East Berlin freely and signaling the disbanding of the Eastern Bloc, ultimately kickstarting the end of communism in Eastern and Central Europe.²²⁴ Some scholars colloquially refer to this date as “11/9,” a marked shift in the relationship between the U.S. and the crumbled Soviet empire. The formal dissolution of the Soviet Union as a sovereign state occurred two years later, on December 26, 1991, following Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev’s formal resignation and transfer of presidential powers to Boris Yeltsin.

However, signals for the Soviet Union’s collapse were predicted years before the hammer and sickle flag was lowered for the final time. Historian Jeremi Suri notes that an October 1986 meeting between U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Gorbachev in Reykjavik, Iceland, to discuss nuclear disarmament provoked reasoning that “Change ...

²²³ Paul Rhys, “Iron Union Behind the Curtain,” *Al Jazeera*, January 28, 2010, <https://www.aljazeera.com/sports/2010/1/28/iron-union-behind-the-curtain>.

²²⁴ Political scientist John Mueller verifies the end of the Cold War during the year 1989, “judging from the public rhetoric and actions of important observers and key international actors at the time.” For further detail of the end of the Cold War, see John Mueller, “What was the Cold War About? Evidence from its Ending,” *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 4 (2004), 609.

seemed inevitable. Events after 1986 reflected particular choices not about *whether* to end the Cold War, but about *how* to end it.”²²⁵ A few years later, in 1988, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher became the first prominent world leader to proclaim that the Cold War had ended. Political scientist John Mueller notes that “she was entirely sensitive to the possibility that progress could be reversed, suggesting that the West be prepared to make a reassessment and return to confrontation should Gorbachev be toppled or become stymied.”²²⁶ However, such signs of reversal never materialized, and the opening of the Iron Curtain was set in motion by East Germany on 11/9, eventually leading to the gradual cessation of communism throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

Despite the transition period from the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation, the U.S. remained wary of the nation’s intentions entering the post-Cold War period. As noted in the previous chapter, President George H.W. Bush promoted relations between the U.S. and Russia and ex-Soviet satellite states despite the uncertainty of Gorbachev’s intentions in a post-conflict climate. As political scientists Melvyn P. Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro note, the U.S. “...reacted cautiously yet improvised brilliantly to bring about German unification inside [the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.] Rather than disbanding the alliances of the Cold War and the multilateral institutions and networks of global capitalism, they sought to build upon them.”²²⁷

For the United States, the 1990s ushered in a peculiar era without a capital adversary to quarrel with militarily, politically, and ideologically. The relatively swift

²²⁵ Jeremi Suri, “Explaining the End of the Cold War: A New Historical Consensus?” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 4 (2002), 81.

²²⁶ Mueller, “What was the Cold War About?,” 611.

²²⁷ Melvyn P. Leffler & Jeffrey W. Legro, “Introduction: Navigating the Unknown,” in *In Uncertain Times: American Foreign Policy After the Berlin Wall and 9/11*, eds. Melvyn P. Leffler & Jeffrey W. Legro (Cornell University Press, 2011), 10.

implosion of the Soviet Union “had removed what had been for nearly two generations the central focus of international politics and the overwhelmingly most pressing U.S. national security priority—the worldwide confrontation between communist East and democratic (or at any rate, noncommunist) West.”²²⁸ Now that one of the two primary adversaries of this classic Cold War opposition had disintegrated, U.S. federal agencies struggled to identify a pervasive threat on which to focus its attention and resources.

There were also some less-threatening aspects of the Cold War that Americans could not be shaken off as easily. There was a belief among political scientists that the collapse of the Soviet Union led to *problem depletion*, which is a decrease in the number and severity of foreign policy problems facing the U.S. With the dual manifestations of the Soviet Union no longer threatening the security of U.S. allies and with the appearance of democracies throughout eastern Europe, the “rationale for containment, the bedrock principle guiding U.S. foreign policy for forty years, ceased to exist.”²²⁹ As Henry A. Grunwald writes in *Foreign Affairs*, the prolonged confrontation with the Soviet Union furnished an “organizing principle for analysis,” where “Virtually every foreign policy move and world event, from a coup in Central America to cultural legislation in France, was to a great extent judged by its relation to the Cold War.”²³⁰ Americans were only interested in foreign affairs if they perceived the event to garner national interest. The Cold War could “turn anything into an issue of national interest if communism was somehow

²²⁸ Walter B. Slocombe, “A Crisis of Opportunity: The Clinton Administration and Russia,” in *In Uncertain Times: American Foreign Policy After the Berlin Wall and 9/11*, eds. Melvyn P. Leffler & Jeffrey W. Legro (Cornell University Press, 2011), 78.

²²⁹ James M. Lindsay & Randall B. Ripley, “U.S. Foreign Policy in a Changing World,” in *U.S. Foreign Policy After the Cold War*, eds. Randall B. Ripley & James M. Lindsay (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 4.

²³⁰ Henry A. Grunwald, “The Post-Cold War Press: A New World Needs a New Journalism,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993), 14.

implicated.”²³¹ This was partly fueled by the U.S. media, which would elevate the impact of particular issues or events to improve print circulation. Although journalists criticized this tactic as facile, they “usually followed it willy-nilly.”²³² This tactic would not only be employed by journalists writing about international affairs and geopolitics but would also stretch to the Cultural Cold War that similarly occupied this period.

Echoing political scientist Warner R. Schilling’s observation that foreign policy objectives unceasingly invite “simplicity and spook,” Mueller notes that the end of the Cold War “...expressed itself in quests to identify, evaluate, and confront new threats—or monsters.”²³³ Simply put, the institutions and resources created to counteract Soviet information and military advances lie dormant now that the Soviet Union has faded from existence. Therefore, new justifications for finding new threats avoided the sentiment of “sunk costs;” the U.S. government had already invested significant amounts of funding and time to counter such threats, necessitating to direct these resources toward new “monsters.” Mueller compounds this theory by noting that the conclusion of the conflict had spurred “a quest to identify things to worry about,” as Central Intelligence Agency chief James Woolsey summated, “We have slain a large dragon, but we live now in a jungle filled with a bewildering variety of poisonous snakes.”²³⁴ Among tangible issues such as nuclear

²³¹ Ibid., 15.

²³² Ibid., 14.

²³³ Warner R. Schilling, “Surprise Attack, Death, and War: A Review,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 9, no. 3 (1965), 389; John Mueller, “Questing for Monsters to Destroy,” in *In Uncertain Times: American Foreign Policy After the Berlin Wall and 9/11*, eds. Melvyn P. Leffler & Jeffrey W. Legro (Cornell University Press, 2011), 117.

²³⁴ Mueller, “Questing for Monsters to Destroy,” 120. These “snakes,” as Central Intelligence Agency chief James Woolsey characterized in his 1993 nominating hearing before the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, included “the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the ballistic missiles to carry them; ethnic and national hatreds that can metastasize across large portions of the globe; the international narcotics trade; terrorism; the dangers inherent in the West’s dependence on Mideast oil; new economic and environmental challenges.” For more, see *Nomination of R. James Woolsey Jr. to be*

proliferation, terrorism, and environmental challenges, ghosts of the Soviet Union persisted in the memories of Americans in a multitude of ways. This was spurred by U.S. policymakers, Leffler and Legro note, because “they wanted to persuade other powers to embrace an American vision for the international order.”²³⁵

This absence of the Soviet Union also affected the sporting relationship between the two hegemonic powers. Despite sharp criticism of the faltered nation’s system of government, American fans could not help but admire the passion and skill Soviet athletes displayed throughout several decades of intense rivalries, especially in men’s ice hockey. Sportswriter Joe Lapointe describes American fans “grudgingly admiring the skill and teamwork of the [Soviet Union] athletes. That flag, that song and that nation brought sharp ethnic and ideological focus to this most passionate of sports.”²³⁶ However, following the redistribution of Soviet athletes between the new Russian Federation and fourteen other separatist states, the East-versus-West rivalry of old did not provide the same level of intensity as it did during the Cold War. Sport historian Mark Dyreson notes this dilution of competitiveness in his analysis of the 1992 Summer Olympic Games in Barcelona, in which twelve of the fifteen former Soviet Union republics chose to compete as a “Unified Team.”²³⁷ Although this Unified Team outnumbered the U.S. team in both gold medals (45

Director of Central Intelligence, Before the Select Comm. On Intelligence, 103rd Cong. 76 (1993) (statement of R. James Woolsey).

²³⁵ Melvyn P. Leffler & Jeffrey W. Legro, “Conclusion: Strategy in a Murky World,” in *In Uncertain Times: American Foreign Policy After the Berlin Wall and 9/11*, eds. Melvyn P. Leffler & Jeffrey W. Legro (Cornell University Press, 2011), 180.

²³⁶ Joe Lapointe, “Gone With Communism Is One Team’s Character,” *New York Times*, September 6, 1996, B18.

²³⁷ The Unified Team consisted of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. The remaining three ex-Soviet republics, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania chose to compete individually.

to 37) and total medals (112 to 108), the factions “could not reignite the East-versus-West rivalry that had made Olympic stadiums Cold War battlefields since the end of World War II.”²³⁸

This chapter investigates how sports exchanges continued to be framed as “us-versus-them” contests by Western media outlets following the conclusion of the Cold War and the absence of the Soviet Union within those contests. Aside from infrequent meetings between the U.S. and Russia on the competitive stage, such as during the Olympic Games or the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup, news outlets periodically rhapsodized over friendly sports exchanges between the U.S. and countries formerly associated with the Cold War. Although the frequency of sports exchanges in the 1990s slowed, sport scholar Bruce Kidd notes that Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) programs broke through the “ideological polarization” of the Cold War and emphasized “...a new focus on entrepreneurship as a strategy of social development, creating new openings for the creation of non-governmental organizations and private foundations.”²³⁹ As a result, meetings between the U.S. and ex-Soviet states continued to take place, creating opportunities to frame such events as “East-versus-West” or “capitalism-versus-communism,” despite capitalist advances in Central and Eastern Europe. Despite this, the old-fashioned narratives were chiefly driven by the media, who continued to employ Cold War narratives well after 1991 in several major sporting events between the two powers.

This chapter will analyze the broad objectives relevant stakeholders sought in implementing international sport programs and how the persistence of Cold War narratives obstructed the coverage of these events. The methodological approach of this chapter

²³⁸ Dyreson, “Conclusion - Olympic Spectacles in the Next ‘American Century,’” 222-223.

²³⁹ Bruce Kidd, “A New Social Movement: Sport for Development and Peace,” *Sport in Society* 11, no. 4 (2008), 374.

primarily involves media analysis of sports exchange programs during the period, with particular attention focusing on two specific occasions. Although not traditionally thought of as a typical “sports exchange,” the 1994 FIFA World Cup is highlighted since it was the first major sporting event hosted by the U.S. that involved both U.S. and Russian teams, inviting many noteworthy perspectives from American media. The 1999 Baltimore Orioles–Cuba national baseball team exhibition series is also covered in this chapter, with attention given to a complementary sport diplomacy initiative involving American children ages nine to seventeen. Press coverage from the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times* shows how frequently the clichéd use of this Cold War perspective persisted nearly a decade after the conflict’s conclusion.

PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE SPORT DIPLOMACY AFTER THE COLD WAR

Before discussing Western media’s influence in covering sports exchange programs during the 1990s, it is worth examining the state of sports exchanges following the Cold War. Entering the post-Cold War period, sports exchanges conducted by the U.S. dropped precipitously due to many circumstances. Despite steady expansion throughout the conflict, funding and resources suffered immensely due to the absence of the threat of the Soviet Union. As public diplomacy scholar Rhonda S. Zaharna sums up, “the number of Foreign Service officers practicing public diplomacy dropped 40 percent during this period. During this same period, the State Department’s appropriation of educational and cultural exchange programs declined in real terms by more than 33 percent. In October 1999, the USIA was incorporated into the State Department, along with its budget and resources.”²⁴⁰ Adding to these figures, American Enterprise Institute scholar Joshua

²⁴⁰ Zaharna, *Battles to Bridges*, 74.

Muravchik commented, “In the 1990s, we unilaterally disarmed ourselves of the weapons of ideological warfare.”²⁴¹ As the political motives for funding public diplomacy programs dwindled, both existing programs and privately sponsored exchanges continued to justify the benefits that could be achieved in a post-Cold War climate.

As discussed in Chapter 3, American multinational enterprises sought to capitalize on the expansion of capitalism in ex-Soviet satellite states. As Suri points out, Russian President Boris Yeltsin embraced the expansion of capitalism within the newly recognized Russian Federation, which continued to seek opportunities to “build capitalist and liberal institutions. Instead of threatening American and West European interests, it embraced them as its own.”²⁴² The growth of domestic sport programs during the Gorbachev years proved promising, but the acceleration of the free market within Russia threatened a few existing programs. As sport historian James Riordan details, grassroots sport organizations such as senior fitness associations and programs for disabled sportspeople “were soon to be steamrollered by a “revolution” as far-reaching as anything in the past: exposure to the “free” market and selling out to the global economy.”²⁴³ The importance of sports exchanges manifested in multiple ways for the U.S. and Russia during the 1990s.

One familiar rationalization for implementing sports exchanges during this period was building bilateral relations through people-to-people exchange programs to improve

²⁴¹ Joshua Muravchik, “American Loses Its Voice,” *On the Issues*, American Enterprise Institute Online, June 1, 2003.

²⁴² Suri, “Explaining the End of the Cold War,” 90; As Mueller notes, the transformation of post-Communist countries in Europe towards adopting capitalism and democracy was “historically unprecedented,” executing a transition that was “hardly problem free, but, compared to the gloomy predictions common at the time about minds that had been permanently warped by decades of Communist indoctrination ... a quite remarkable success.” For more, see Mueller, “Questing for Monsters to Destroy,” 119.

²⁴³ James Riordan, “Sport After the Cold War,” in *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War*, eds. Stephen Wagg & David L. Andrews (New York: Routledge, 2007), 281.

relations between the two nations they represented. A clear illustration of this was exhibited through the New York-Tokyo Friendship Baseball Series in 1996, organized by the public foundation Sister City Program of the City of New York Inc., and sponsored by a host of corporate sponsors, including the New York Mets, the Los Angeles Dodgers, Japan Airlines, the Police Athletic League of New York, and Zagat Survey. The event's success is centered on its objective of "increasing goodwill and global awareness among youth in New York and Tokyo. It has encouraged the players to develop an enthusiastic attitude toward excellence and winning while helping them to discover the importance of teamwork and cooperation."²⁴⁴ Focusing events on the development of mutual understanding and shared values maintains the justification for hosting such exchanges in the first place.

Specific to U.S. strategic objectives related to sports exchanges, another justification was to promote the construction of sport infrastructure in visited countries. California-based youth sports organization Kalos Kagathos embarked on a trip to Vietnam in 1992 to promote recreational surfing with ambitions of "establish[ing] a national physical fitness program around competitive surfing."²⁴⁵ In turn, the U.S. Vietnam Friendship Assn. of San Francisco was instrumental in organizing the other leg of the exchange, facilitating visa approval and travel of a contingent from Japan, South Africa, and Indonesia to participate in surf programs in the U.S. Echoing Dyreson, sport scholars Michael L. Silk, Bryan Bracey, and Mark Falcoux note that introducing a capitalist interpretation of "athletism" to connect to "the newly urbanized masses to nature, distance the republic from its colonial past, integrate immigrant populations to *the* 'American way,' control "unruly" youth, and, mold a productive and functional worker to ensure the growth

²⁴⁴ *New York Amsterdam News*, "N.Y. Tokyo Friendship Baseball Series Coming to the Plate Soon," June 8, 1996, 51.

²⁴⁵ John H. Lee, "A New Wave in Vietnam," *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1992, SDB3.

of the new urban industrial republic.”²⁴⁶ While, at face value, such ventures appear to be innocuous in facilitating the growth of a beloved sport internationally, combating this colonial institution with the introduction of an unfamiliar pastime raises questions about this type of justification for sports exchanges.

Finally, exchanges were (and continue to be) often pursued as entrepreneurial endeavors to introduce athletes to different global cultures. Jim Crumpton founded the nonprofit organization International Sports Exchange in 1975 following a trip he made to South Korea for the Asian Track and Field Championships. According to the organization’s articles of incorporation, the foundation’s purpose was to “foster national and international amateur sports competition and provide the best possible coaching for amateur athletes.”²⁴⁷ While athletes were generally required to self-raise funds for trips, the foundation provided instructions for how to behave abroad. In its first decade, the foundation had “taken over 10,000 athletes to compete in such counties as: Mainland China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Austria, Kenya, Germany, New Zealand and China.”²⁴⁸ Organizations like International Sports Exchange spread not only within the U.S. but also attracted the incorporation of replicas worldwide.

To assume all sports exchanges during this period ran smoothly would be an overstatement, as ongoing political conflicts between nations frequently produced issues for athletes and coaches traveling between countries. A collaboration between a U.S. alliance of public and private entities and the government of Iran exemplifies the

²⁴⁶ Silk, Bracey, & Falcous, “Performing America’s Past,” 292.

²⁴⁷ James Crumpton, “Articles of Incorporation of International Sports Exchange Foundation, Inc.” (articles of incorporation, Irvine, Calif., 1986), <https://businesssearch.sos.ca.gov/Document/RetrievePDF?Id=01366746-3731007>.

²⁴⁸ *Precinct Reporter*, “Local Youth Invited to Play In China,” San Bernardino, Calif., July 15, 1993, C-1.

frustrations organizations experience when conducting such exchanges. Following a successful visit of a U.S. delegation of wrestlers to Iran in 1998, Iranian wrestlers were “incensed” when they were required to be fingerprinted and photographed by immigration officers.²⁴⁹ The confusion was due to a 1991 policy that “...required [U.S.] immigration officers to fingerprint first-time visitors from Iran, Iraq, Libya and Sudan – countries that the U.S. government accuses of supporting terrorism.”²⁵⁰ According to American officials coordinating the exchange, the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, “complained that the first group of wrestlers ... had been ‘treated like criminals’ and threatened to halt the exchanges.”²⁵¹ As this dissertation will discuss in the following chapters, it is critical to ensure that operational hang-ups are limited before trips occur. Incorporating support staff into the planning process is crucial in guaranteeing the mutual satisfaction of both parties of a given exchange.

With the gradual decline of sports exchanges during the 1990s and keeping the above justifications for the promotion of such programs in mind, organizations could have stood to benefit from positive press coverage of sport programs implemented during this period. As discussed earlier, local, regional, and national media organizations’ contributions are fundamental to the continuing success of programs since they generate positive exposure and can lead to increased funding. However, as the below section will illustrate, such exchanges were typically subjected to subtle references to the Cold War, peppering American media coverage, and sensationalizing goodwill attempts to build international bonds, all in hopes of striking a nostalgic chord with readers.

²⁴⁹ William Branigin, “U.S. Eases Immigration Rules to Boost ‘Wrestling Diplomacy’ With Iran,” *The Washington Post*, Aug. 7, 1998, A3.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

MEDIA DEPICTIONS OF POST-COLD WAR RIVALRY BETWEEN THE U.S. AND RUSSIA

Why were sport and sports exchanges allegedly the most attractive mediums in reinforcing this fading Cold War rivalry, as opposed to other forms of cultural production such as film or art? The globalization of spectator sport during this period flourished in conjunction with the rise of global commercialism, as discussed in Chapter 3. Sport historian Peter J. Beck superbly depicts the appeal of sport during this era of increasing media propagation:

Sport fits in perfectly with the emerging global, multi-identity, consumer-driven televisual world, for it provides strong images and high drama based upon an irresistible blend of predictability and surprise reaching directly out to the feelings and emotions of spectators and television viewers, whether watching in London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Athens, New York, Beijing or Tokyo. Nor are words required to enable people to follow the storyline.²⁵²

As the proliferation of television continued to skyrocket worldwide, the attention-grabbing storylines of sports naturally found a place in households in the form of local, national, and international sporting events.

Of course, framing coverage of sporting events within the context of the Cold War rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union goes without saying. Echoing sport historian John Hoberman, Media studies scholars Karen Riggs, Susan Tyler Eastman, and Timothy S. Golobic note that “the presence of television, beginning with the 1952 games, was a watershed moment for the politicization of the spectacle. Because of worldwide television, he says, the Olympics have become an increasingly useful mechanism managing international conflict.”²⁵³ For example, sport historian Mary G. McDonald explored the

²⁵² Peter J. Beck, “‘The Most Effective Means of Communication in the Modern World’?: British Sport and National Prestige,” in *Sport and International Relations: An Emerging Relationship*, eds. Roger Levermore & Adrian Budd (New York: Routledge, 2004), 88.

²⁵³ Karen E. Riggs, Susan Tyler Eastman, & Timothy S. Golobic, “Manufactured Conflict in the 1992 Olympics: The Discourse of Television and Politics,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 10, no. 3 (1993), 255.

media narratives surrounding the “Miracle on Ice” ice hockey game, which pitted the U.S. and the Soviet Union in the 1980 Winter Olympic Games semifinal round at Lake Placid, New York. Viewed by many Americans as an ideological victory over the communist political system, McDonald notes that “conservative and neoliberal forces” mobilized the narrative to emphasize the Cold War rivalry between the nations the two teams represented. She suggests the spectacle surrounding the match provides evidence that “the dominant US representations of the ‘miracle on ice’ were imagined symbolically to reverse an alleged loss of American self-confidence and global political influence.”²⁵⁴ Her overall argument suggests that sporting events between the U.S. and the Soviet Union were not limited to this focusing event, arguing that proponents of these narratives asserted, “athletic battles between nations including those waged throughout the Cold War between the USSR and the US served as important cathartic substitutes for war.”²⁵⁵ While rationalizations can be claimed for such attitudes during the conflict, the appearance of such storylines after the cessation of the ideological struggle is quite peculiar at face value.

Whether these references to the Cold War were intentional or not is dubious. Some media outlets were explicitly called out for promoting these tropes, as sportswriter Dave Anderson argued in the leadup to the 1992 Summer Olympic Games in Barcelona, “...from where these XVI Olympic Winter Games are being beamed to the world on television, the CBS network is still trying to create us-against-them theater for its United States viewers.”²⁵⁶ In addition, Riggs et al. note that nationalism in Olympic coverage is

²⁵⁴ Mary G. McDonald, “‘Miraculous’ Masculinity Meets Militarization: Narrating the 1980 USSR-US Men’s Olympic Ice Hockey Match and Cold War Politics,” in *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War*, eds. Stephen Wagg & David L. Andrews (New York: Routledge, 2007), 224.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 232.

²⁵⁶ Dave Anderson, “The Olympics Don’t Need Us vs. Them.” *New York Times*, Feb. 16, 1992, S1.

“inescapable,” based on a confluence of factors including “Professional and institutional news values, the rigid nature of the sports/ media complex, the enduring tendency for media discourse to construct national enemies, and the ritual nature of a spectacle based on opposition among nation-states.”²⁵⁷ As the methods by which Americans consumed media during the 1990s also evolved, the blame was not limited to television networks. As sportswriter George Vecsey notes in his reflection on the 1999 FIFA Women’s World Cup, “In a shrinking world, where everywhere is only a click of the television zapper or the Internet mouse away, nationalism thrived on elegant fairways and lush soccer pitches.”²⁵⁸ Whereas assumptions for Cold War allusions could be limited to singular events, networks, or commercial properties, these schemes flourished in many ways to attract eyeballs to the event.

However, mentioning events such as the “Miracle on Ice” and interchangeably utilizing Cold War storylines in contemporary sporting events allowed American journalists to achieve proper positioning in the bylines of major newspapers in the immediate years following the conflict. Following a quarterfinal victory for the U.S. against Russia in the 1994 Men’s Ice Hockey World Championships, the *Associated Press* noted in its recap, “It was not another Miracle on Ice. Still, the United States’ 3-1 victory against Russia today over the remnants of the Big Red machine rekindled memories of the 1980 Lake Placid Olympics and one of hockey’s most startling upsets.”²⁵⁹ The “Miracle on Ice” messaging was also implemented to publicize future events, such as the *New York Times* implemented in the U.S.’s next semifinal match against Finland: “Dan Jansen’s how-

²⁵⁷ Riggs, Eastman, & Golobic, “Manufactured Conflict in the 1992 Olympics,” 257.

²⁵⁸ George Vecsey, “More Nationalism in the Next Century,” *New York Times*, Dec. 19, 1999, SP10.

²⁵⁹ *Associated Press*, “Victory Not Quite A Miracle,” *New York Times*, May 5, 1994, B20.

to video helped the United States Olympic hockey team into the medal round tonight. Next up, possibly, for the Americans: ‘Miracle on Ice.’”²⁶⁰ Despite the hype, the Americans were crushed by Finland, 8-0.

MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE 1994 FIFA WORLD CUP

For select international sporting events, especially in contests involving both U.S. and Russian squads, the American sports media attached its coverage of sporting events to lingering frameworks of the outmoded Cold War rivalry. This was particularly emphasized in media coverage of the 1994 FIFA World Cup, in which the U.S. and Russian squads qualified but never directly competed against one another. Beyond the feel-good stories and dramatic performances on the field, some American media outlets framed the event in the context of the Cold War, which had concluded years before the beginning of the matches. Silk, Bracey, and Falcous explain that “...the prism of the Cold War formed an important framing device through which both American and Soviet sport (media) coverage readily reflected and reproduced patterns of inequality, polarization and serve to clearly ‘mark off’ the ‘other.’”²⁶¹

The “palpable sense of nostalgia” for the Cold War was a driving force for American media sources during the World Cup, given the absence of the highs and lows of international sporting competition during the conflict, giving the tournament the image of an “articulated and experienced ... pyrrhic event.”²⁶² The absence of direct competition between the U.S. and Russia did not halt the Cold War fantasies projected by the American

²⁶⁰ Harvey Araton, “U.S. Squad Now Looks For Miracle,” *New York Times*, Feb. 22, 1994, B7.

²⁶¹ Silk, Bracey, & Falcous, “Performing America’s Past,” 293.

²⁶² Andrews & Wagg, “Introduction: War Minus the Shooting?,” 7.

media. Coverage achieved three objectives to complement this behavior: It framed the event within the context of American exceptionalism and nationalism; it depicted an inexperienced, underdog U.S. squad as a team desperately needing to perform well; and it defined the Russian squad as a “fading enemy” that was viewed in relation to greater American foreign policy objectives.

In an interview with sports agent Leigh Steinberg following the first week of matches at the World Cup, the desire to return to the days of the intense sporting rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was identified as a missing component to the 1994 competition. Steinberg recognized this during his interview with the *New York Times*, as he attempted to appeal to this desire by stating, “It doesn’t yet have the Lake Placid hockey team impact, but it’s like that.”²⁶³ This less-than-convincing comparison is recognized by the *Times*’ interviewer, Jere Longman, who warned against the comparison between soccer and hockey while acknowledging the missing political intrigue that amplified Cold War contests between the two superpowers.

Steinberg pushes ahead with his comparison, however, believing there are legitimate similarities between the two events: “Some [Americans] are feeling an economic pinch, self doubt, that we are being passed in international affairs by other countries ... When you have unexpected success in an international forum, it can have the same kind of impact.”²⁶⁴ In other words, the problems exacerbated by the American economy and political climate at the time could momentarily be replaced by the patriotic feelings inspired by U.S. national team’s success. Sport scholars Andrei S. Markovits and Steven L. Hellerman concur that this strategy is a global phenomenon not solely restricted to the

²⁶³ Jere Longman, “Think Positive! It’s the Motto for U.S. Team,” *New York Times*, Jun 24, 1994.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

situation of American fans. They argue there is “no substitute for the ingredient of nationalism and localism in the world of hegemonic sports cultures ... it was not appreciation for world-class soccer, but patriotic rooting for an underdog with a reasonable chance for some success that attracted the American audience.”²⁶⁵ This attraction for the underdog has characterized American sporting passions for generations, and, luckily for unattached American soccer fans, they had the biggest underdog representing their home nation.

Subtle references to war were also interspersed throughout American news articles concerning the World Cup, drawing illusions to Cold War imagery that would attempt to strike nostalgic chords with its readership. Allusions to multiple Cold War activities, ranging from the covert United States Strategic Air Command bombing campaign conducted in eastern Cambodia in 1970 to the twentieth century “space race” between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, were inserted into articles discussing the actions of World Cup organizers and athletes.²⁶⁶ American media perspectives were sympathetic to the U.S. and hostile towards Cold War adversaries, constructing an “enemy” to which American viewers could antagonize. In their content analysis of American commentators involved in the 1992 Winter Olympic Games coverage in Albertville, France, Riggs et al. note that “Germany, the Unified Team/Soviets, and Japan, were generally portrayed hostilely roughly one-third of the time. These results suggest that part of the requirement of constructing an enemy has been met within the discourse of the Olympic telecast.”²⁶⁷ While

²⁶⁵ Andrei S. Markovits & Steven L. Hellerman, *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 226.

²⁶⁶ Filip Bondy, “Kissinger hit by press on ‘94 U.S. Cup,” *NY Daily News*, July 7, 1990, Henry A. Kissinger Papers, MS 1981, Box 864, Folder 15, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT. <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/digcoll/1223041>; Michael Janofsky, “Hungary Dominates United States, 2-0,” *New York Times*, Mar 21, 1990.

²⁶⁷ Riggs, Eastman, & Golobic, “Manufactured Conflict in the 1992 Olympics,” 263.

these commentators used such portrayals innocuously to promote coverage of the event, creating this false façade of the Cold War adversary is problematic as it runs counter to why sporting exhibitions like the Olympic Games are held in the first place: to build international comradery and to educate global citizens through sport without discrimination.

1999 BALTIMORE ORIOLES-CUBAN NATIONAL TEAM EXHIBITION SERIES

Despite frequent allusions to the Cold War rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in the coverage of sporting events throughout the 1990s, references between the U.S. and another Cold War adversary were remarkably amplified when Major League Baseball (MLB)'s Baltimore Orioles visited Cuba in 1999. In the months leading up to the two teams' historic meeting, U.S. President Bill Clinton loosened the U.S. trade embargo against Cuba, which had been in effect since 1962. The blockade was eased through numerous devices, including allowing Americans to send cash payments to nongovernmental organizations, allowing the sale of food and agricultural supplies to the island, and expanding charter flights between the two countries. Of note, the president also introduced measures to facilitate the expansion of academic, athletic, and cultural exchanges between the U.S. and Cuba.

The approval to allow the Orioles to play in Cuba was met with bipartisan support from U.S. Congress. As news correspondent Susanna Rodell noted in an editorial for *The News and Observer* of Raleigh, North Carolina, the decision "is a move that even rabid Castro-hater Sen. Robert Torricelli doesn't object to, and it could just create a surge of interest and affection for the tiny country that continues to produce some of the world's

best ballplayers.”²⁶⁸ Coverage leading up to the event was unsurprisingly political, given that it was announced alongside diplomatic reforms. The expectations for the meeting between the two teams possessed prospects for change within Cuba’s communist system, as an editorial from the *Detroit Free Press* poked fun at the Baltimore squad while opining, “Given the Orioles’ showing last season, it may not be great baseball, but it’s smart diplomacy. Let the fans in Cuba ... contemplate a few free agents in action. They’ll get the point, which is less about money than about the rewards of liberty and self-determination.”²⁶⁹ These broad yet elusive antiauthoritarian objectives these pundits sought overshadowed the participants’ goals of the opportunity.

Orioles team owner Peter Angelos lobbied the U.S. federal government to approve this series between his franchise and the Cuban national baseball team for several years leading up to the event, finally receiving his wish following last-minute negotiations with the U.S. State Department.²⁷⁰ He noted, “There is no political dimension to this visit ... It’s to promote friendship. It’s been a long journey, but if the purpose of the two games is realized, it will have been worth it.”²⁷¹ The terms were finally agreed upon between the

²⁶⁸ Susanna Rodell, “Clinton’s Half-Steps toward Cuba,” *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, N.C.), January 8, 1999, A17. National Archives Identifier 134757752, “National and Regional Response to the 01/05/1999 Cuba Measures [Binder] [3],” Records of the Office of the Public Liaison (Clinton Administration), 1993-2001, Maritza Rivera’s Files, ca. 1998-ca. 1999, National Archives Catalog, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/134757752>.

²⁶⁹ *Detroit Free Press*, “EDITORIAL,” *The Augusta (Ga.) Chronicle*, January 11, 1999, A5. National Archives Identifier 134757752, “National and Regional Response to the 01/05/1999 Cuba Measures [Binder] [3],” Records of the Office of the Public Liaison (Clinton Administration), 1993-2001, Maritza Rivera’s Files, ca. 1998-ca. 1999, National Archives Catalog, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/134757752>.

²⁷⁰ As journalist Richard Justice noted, the final stage of negotiation concerned how “revenue from the games would be spent ... The State Department insisted that there could not be an arrangement that allowed the Castro regime to pocket any money.” For more, see Richard Justice, “Orioles are Cleared to Play Cuba: Sport’s ‘Cultural Exchange’ Upsets Anti-Castro Groups,” *The Washington Post*, March 8, 1999, D1.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

State Department, the Cuban government, MLB Commissioner Bud Selig's office, and the Orioles for Cuba to host one exhibition game in Havana on March 28, 1999. Representatives from the Orioles branded the event as a "mission of friendship," while Commissioner Bud Selig concurred by labeling the historic meeting as a "cultural exchange ... that transcends baseball."²⁷² Although negotiations involved the governments of both the U.S. and Cuba, both legs of the exchange were not attended by government officials of either nation.

In addition to the major league team's appearance in Havana, a group of eighty children from the Baltimore-D.C. metropolitan area, ages 9-17, embarked on a chartered plane that weekend to engage in people-to-people diplomacy. The costs were chiefly covered by Angelos, who "pledged \$12,500 to defray a portion of the expenses, and other donors pitched in to cover the costs of some players."²⁷³ In addition to playing scheduled baseball games with Cuban ballplayers of similar ages, the Americans "also toured a sports academy for gifted athletes, attended a practice session by the Cuban all-star team and went to a national championship baseball game."²⁷⁴ Sentiments from the American visitors were overwhelmingly positive, centering the benefits of the trip on the international connections between the players. One eleven-year-old stated, "It is great to come to a country and play baseball with people you never met... but it has also been great besides baseball. The most important part of the trip is that I am having fun."²⁷⁵

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Serge F. Kovaleski, "Diplomacy on a Smaller Scale," *The Washington Post*, March 29, 1999, B1.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, B2.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

American media coverage of the largely successful trip to Cuba aroused harsh criticism for its reverberation of Cold War terminology. Referencing the nation's discrepant cultural attachment to baseball, scholar Thomas Carter notes, "The U.S. media emphasized an interpretation rooted in Cold War economics and politics while the Cuban media framed the games within a Cuban nationalist, not socialist, discourse."²⁷⁶ When the Cuban national team visited Baltimore a few weeks later, on May 3, the Orioles had accumulated a disappointing 7-17 record and sought to reset a rough start to the season with its second exhibition contest. Unfortunately, the home team was walloped by the visitors, 12-6, in front of a crowd of 47,940 fans. Orioles relief pitcher Mike Fetters summarized his thoughts with reporters following the loss, stating, "I'm very embarrassed ... We were representing the United States, Major League Baseball, our friends and family. We were trying, but they took it to us in our house. That's the most embarrassing thing."²⁷⁷ The weight of hosting the Cuban all-stars pressured the lowly Orioles, who had the second-worst record in the MLB at the time, to symbolize the entirety of American baseball. Ridiculous as this sounds, no other team in the MLB obtained access to face the Cuban national team, and reasonable terror resided in the realization that the American media could lambast the result in jingoistic terms.

Instead of receiving a roasting from an American media that had historically framed such sporting events as "capitalism-versus-communism," reception of the loss was relatively apathetic. Local sportswriter Richard Justice framed the loss mainly in terms of the Orioles' performance, claiming that the team "...succeeded only in adding to a growing list of embarrassments as they were out-played, out-hustled and out-smarted by a team of

²⁷⁶ Thomas Carter, "The Political Fallacy of Baseball Diplomacy," *Peace Review* 11, no. 4 (1999), 581.

²⁷⁷ Richard Justice, "Orioles Get Smoked by Cubans, 12-6," *The Washington Post*, May 4, 1999, D1.

Cuban all-stars.”²⁷⁸ Carter notes that the lack of outrage in press coverage following the loss was significant. “The game was not important to U.S. legitimacy. If the game had been played 30 years ago, at the height of the Cold War, however, being beat at ‘our national pastime by a group of communists’ would have been lamented. In the political realities of 1999, the game was essentially irrelevant to the U.S. government. Instead, there was a collective shrugging of shoulders.”²⁷⁹ Perhaps this was a signal of an evolution away from coverage of the Cold War “monsters” that media outlets were dependent on for readers. Ultimately, a confluence of factors ranging from the athletic quality of the American representatives to the absence of government officials offered alternative frameworks to portray the exchange.

CONCLUSION: PUSHBACK ON THE PROLONGATION OF THE U.S. RIVALRY WITH RUSSIA

This chapter sought to analyze nationalistic press coverage focusing on post-Cold War legacies, namely, how the U.S. media sought to frame international sporting events and the countries participating in such circumstances to suit political ends. The role of sport during this new age easily ingrained itself within the American public as it was situated within the “soft-core” realm of culture. Nostalgic attitudes toward the Cold War competition drove fan interest when traditional storylines, such as strictly reporting on matches and scores, were ineffective for most readers who may not have paid attention to a specific sporting event otherwise. This approach was not limited to the above events, as other sporting events in the post-Cold War era, including the 1992 America’s Cup yacht

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Carter, “The Political Fallacy of Baseball Diplomacy,” 581.

racing championship and men's volleyball at the 1992 Barcelona Summer Olympic Games, received similar coverage from the American media.

Opportunities for future research can investigate how this media phenomenon has applied to other events (both sport and other types of cultural expression) and if such coverage continues to the present day, especially considering existing political rivalries between the U.S. and other global superpowers at the time of this writing. One of the most significant limitations of this research is that it is geographically restricted to American media sources, so future research may also examine if this perspective exists outside of the U.S. Sport scholar Roger Levermore explores similar sentiments in British media, noting that narratives during the 1998 and 2002 World Cups, along with Euro 2000, was “unsurprisingly reveals that the ‘zero-sum game’ contest between states is largely reinforced, either in the form of a match between national teams, or occasionally between national supporters.”²⁸⁰

While the search for “monsters” during the decade following the Cold War pushed forward, Cold War discourses eventually faded to allow new storytelling devices to attract potential consumers. Riggs et al. reference the opinions of political scientist Murray Edelman, noting, “as one enemy falls away in media discourse, another emerges to take its place, because government interests and audience expectations continue to encourage the “construction” of nationalistic enemies.”²⁸¹ As coverage of international sporting events evoking Cold War narratives eventually faded, as displayed by the Cuban national baseball team's victory over the Baltimore Orioles, the tables turned as the U.S. was met face-to-face with a new “monster”: The September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001. While references

²⁸⁰ Levermore, “Sport's Role in Constructing the ‘Inter-State’ Worldview,” 19.

²⁸¹ Riggs, Eastman, & Golobic, “Manufactured Conflict in the 1992 Olympics,” 263; Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (University of Chicago Press, 1988).

to past conflicts, including World War II and the Cold War, resurfaced in media coverage of this tragic event, the following chapter focuses on people-to-people sports exchanges' role in (re-)building positive images of the United States.

Chapter 5: Sports Exchange Programs after 9/11 and the Impetus for the Establishment of SportsUnited

It was the “calm before the storm.” In the decade following the fall of the Soviet Union, U.S. leaders embraced a tranquil lull in the global political landscape, irreproachably serving as the world’s sole superpower. Entering the new millennium, American leaders took solace in the fact that the state of international affairs appeared to be relatively benign compared to the threats emanated by the Soviet Union, which had collapsed nearly a decade earlier. Now that the U.S. was the sole hegemonic power in global affairs, the political and economic ideologies that elevated the U.S.’s standing throughout the world during the Cold War became unrivaled in their possibilities to further spread even further.

Without the looming threat of communism that dominated international relations throughout the Cold War, American leaders shifted their attention to promoting democratic values abroad, having “been driven by a relentless affirmation of liberal democracy’s moral superiority.”²⁸² As political scientists Melvyn P. Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro explain, the U.S. sought to spread the “American vision” worldwide, pushed forward by American values such as “the productivity of the American economy, the strength and reach of U.S. military forces, the latent appeal of open trade, the impact of the communications revolution, and the lure of consumer capitalism.”²⁸³ When George W. Bush was elected president in 2001, his priorities primarily lined up with this post-Cold War vision of American foreign policy, emphasizing the promotion of democracy in the Western Hemisphere and the merits of capitalism that, he felt, pushed the American economic

²⁸² Michael L. Butterworth, “The Politics of the Pitch: Claiming and Contesting Democracy through the Iraqi National Soccer Team.” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (2007), 188.

²⁸³ Leffler and Legro, “Conclusion: Strategy in a Murky World,” 180.

system above all others. An unclassified draft from the National Security Council dated July 23, 2001, underscores President Bush's strategy by summing "...the promotion of a peaceful environment in which there are incentives for countries to choose democracy, open economies and respect for their neighbors is a global concern and global project for the United States, its friends and allies."²⁸⁴

However, when the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, introduced a chaotic deviation to this American vision of democratic prominence, a shocked U.S. government forced its focus onto a new "monster:" Jihadist terrorism. The aftermath of the attacks would affect American foreign policy priorities over the next few decades. The Bush administration and governments worldwide swiftly passed legislation to combat this new threat. President Bush signed the USA Patriot Act into law on October 26, 2001, just six weeks following the attacks. This act expanded the surveillance abilities of law enforcement, facilitated information sharing and cooperation among government agencies, and amplified the severity of penalties for those who commit terrorist crimes. A year later, the Department of Homeland Security was created by the Homeland Security Act of 2002, with a primary mission to "prevent terrorist attacks in the United States; reduce the vulnerability of the United States to terrorism; [and] minimize the damage, and assist in the recovery, from terrorist attacks that do occur within the United States."²⁸⁵ This incorporation of the Department of Homeland Security was the most significant federal government reorganization since the National Security Act of 1947 led to the establishment of the Department of Defense.

²⁸⁴ U.S. National Security Council, "National Security Strategy" (unclassified staff draft, July 23, 2001), 11. <http://web1.millercenter.org/firstYear/media/zelikow-file1.pdf>.

²⁸⁵ *Homeland Security Act of 2002*, Public Law 296, U.S. Statutes at Large 116 (2002), 2142.

While U.S. counterterrorism efforts ramped up, critics of the federal government's response to the attacks cautioned that the waning presence of public diplomacy was vital in restoring the perception of the U.S. in regions of the world that did not view the superpower fondly. This became evident following the September 11 terrorist attacks, as public opinion firm Zogby International found that, in September 2003, "American popularity in the Arab and Islamic worlds had reached 'rock bottom,' affecting perceptions of America as a whole as well as its policies."²⁸⁶ This revulsion was not all-encompassing, as Rhonda S. Zaharna notes, citing previous surveys that showed "...while the Arab public disliked U.S. policies, it liked American people, values, science, technology, and democracy."²⁸⁷ The sad irony of the decline in U.S. public diplomacy efforts was that such actions were crucial in shaping U.S. opinions on the "ideological battleground" of the Cold War but quickly dissipated at the conflict's conclusion. As international communications scholar Molly Bettie notes, "The task of 'Telling America's Story to the World' no longer seemed to be necessary after the end of the ideological struggle, the outcome of which was considered by many to have been an American victory."²⁸⁸

When the United States Information Agency (USIA) merged with the Department of State in October 1999, the demise of U.S. public diplomacy programs accelerated, and the future of such programs was cast into doubt. The dissolution of the USIA did not come as a complete surprise, as cuts to the agency's budget began shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and continued throughout the 1990s. American Enterprise Institute scholar Joshua Muravchik notes, "In the 1990s, we unilaterally disarmed ourselves of the

²⁸⁶ Zaharna, *Battles to Bridges*, 18.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Molly Bettie, "Ambassadors Unaware: The Fulbright Program and American Public Diplomacy," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 13, no. 4 (2015), 368.

weapons of ideological warfare.”²⁸⁹ The dissolution of the USIA proved to be an enormous hit to American public diplomacy; as public diplomacy scholar Nicholas J. Cull notes, “It is difficult to overestimate what was lost with the merger of the USIA into [the Department of] State. Agency hands with decades of field experience took early retirement, young people with an eye to career prospects avoided public diplomacy work; budgets withered and skills grew rusty.”²⁹⁰

The revival of such programming became a point of discussion as the U.S. faced emerging threats in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Foreign Service officer Fred A. Coffey Jr. notes that the attacks served as a wake-up call, signaling that American public diplomacy was “broken” and leading many U.S. policymakers to question the “government’s ability to influence foreign public opinion.”²⁹¹ Recognizing the powerful potential of public diplomacy despite its wilting presence in U.S. diplomatic efforts, the federal government actively sought to implement public diplomacy initiatives to restore its image abroad. Recognition that the communications environment had vastly changed since the Cold War was crucial; as former Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes delineates, the primary difference between the Cold War and the post-9/11 environments was that during the Cold War, officials tried “to get information into largely closed societies whose people were hungry for that information. [Following the September 11 terrorist attacks], we are competing for attention and credibility in an incredibly crowded communications environment. There aren’t too many people sitting

²⁸⁹ Muravchik, “American Loses Its Voice,” cited in Zaharna, *Battles to Bridges*, 75.

²⁹⁰ Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 484.

²⁹¹ Fred A. Coffey, Jr., “Our Crippled Public Diplomacy,” *Publicdiplomacy.org*, September 1, 2002, <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/crippledpd.htm>.

around just waiting or hoping to hear from us.”²⁹² One avenue to restore U.S. public diplomacy programs utilized following the September 11 terrorist attacks was through a familiar method that had previously proved that it could attract attention across the globe: sport.

This chapter will explore the history of the incorporation of SportsUnited, the U.S. Department of State’s official sport diplomacy arm. Established in 2002, SportsUnited uses sport to help youth develop essential off-the-court skills, including leadership, mutual understanding, and academic achievement. The impetus for the programs that would define SportsUnited “stemmed from the concepts that sports programs could be an avenue for transcending national, cultural or even linguistic boundaries, and that sports are a unique vehicle for cross-cultural learning and mutual understanding.”²⁹³ In addition to detailing the rise of SportsUnited, this chapter provides a background of public diplomacy programs implemented following the September 11 terrorist attacks, explores the role that sport played in the Bush administration’s foreign policy agenda, and highlights adjacent programs that promoted sport diplomacy and sports exchange programs in the first decade of the new millennium.

U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY EFFORTS FOLLOWING SEPTEMBER 11 TERRORIST ATTACKS

The September 11 terrorist attacks introduced an unprecedented existential threat that consumed the attention of American lawmakers, resulting in novel approaches to squelch these new anxieties. As political scientist Ban Wang notes, the event “rudely

²⁹² Rob Wiley, “Inner View: Q&A With Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes,” *State Magazine*, January 2007, 15.

²⁹³ U.S. Department of State, *Study of ECA’s SportsUnited Programs*, 8.

awakened and thrown back to the rugged terrain of Cold War conflict, to the paranoiac security needs, the bloody conflict

of giant powers, the tightening of boundaries, and the hysterical assertion of national identity.”²⁹⁴ President George W. Bush, who had been in office for under a year when the attacks happened, sought to establish principles that would transform the relationship between the U.S. and nations in the Middle East. The U.S. war in Afghanistan and the Iraq War provoked democratization efforts in the region. International relations scholar Katerina Dalacoura notes that by fostering democracy in nations previously dominated by authoritarianism, the U.S. could “drain the pool from which terrorist organizations draw recruits in their ‘global struggle’ against the US.”²⁹⁵

While the conflicts were primarily driven by this newfound U.S. strategy of fighting a “war on terror,” Dalacoura observes that forceful attempts to induce democratic reform resulted in adverse effects. Recognizing that both the U.S. and the Arab region were taking steps backward in promoting democracy, she notes that this was “because the war on terror has made Arabs, and other Muslims, defensive about identity and has further radicalized Islamist movements. Ultimately, the war on terror ... may be pushing the Arab world since 2001 towards more, not less, authoritarianism.”²⁹⁶ Further criticism of the Bush administration from political sociologists Peter McLaren and Gregory Martin emphasize the president’s strategy of “seiz[ing] upon the sympathy and fear afforded by that day’s tragic events to push their preexisting reactionary agenda: imperialist aggression abroad

²⁹⁴ Ban Wang, “The Cold War, Imperial Aesthetics, and Area Studies,” *Social Text* 20, no. 3 (2002), 46.

²⁹⁵ Katerina Dalacoura, “US Democracy Promotion in the Arab Middle East since 11 September 2001: A Critique,” *International Affairs* 81, no. 5 (2005), 963.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 972.

and fascism at home, an agenda not even remotely connected to terrorism.”²⁹⁷ Therefore, alternative strategies focusing on soft power were implemented to counteract the following methods of hard power that the U.S. continued to promote.

Before sport diplomacy programs gained a foothold in U.S. diplomatic strategy, numerous strategies to implement public diplomacy programs arose following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Government officials, such as former Clinton Administration official Richard Holbrooke, signaled the need for such programs by stating in a *Washington Post* op-ed, “Call it public diplomacy, or public affairs, or psychological warfare, or – if you really want to be blunt – propaganda. But whatever it is called, defining what this war is really about in the minds of the 1 billion Muslims in the world will be of decisive and historical importance.”²⁹⁸ As previously mentioned, the motivations for increasing direct communications with populations across the Middle East stemmed from negative perceptions of the U.S. following the execution of intense military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Citing attitudinal polls from Gallup, Zogby International, and Department of State and Council on Foreign Relations/Pew surveys, then-chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations Peter G. Peterson notes that “there is little doubt that stereotypes of Americans as arrogant, self indulgent, hypocritical, inattentive, and unwilling or unable to engage in cross-cultural dialogue are pervasive and deeply rooted.”²⁹⁹ As Zaharna concurs, “International sentiment toward America quickly went from an outpouring of global sympathy and support immediately after the 9/11 attacks to a palpable wave of anti-

²⁹⁷ Peter McLaren & Gregory Martin, “The Legend of the Bush Gang: Imperialism, War, and Propaganda,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 4, no. 3 (2004), 285.

²⁹⁸ Richard Holbrooke, “Get the Message Out,” *Washington Post*, October 28, 2001, B7.

²⁹⁹ Peter G. Peterson, “Public Diplomacy and the War on Terrorism,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 5 (2002), 75.

Americanism.”³⁰⁰ The image problem the U.S. suffered in the years following the terrorist attacks reached a palpable capacity, and identifying specific approaches to reverse this sentiment was no simple task.

As a result of this waning global reputation, foreign policy strategies shifted to restoring the international image of the U.S. This general antipathy was not only sentimental but, as Zaharna notes, the decline in U.S. public opinion also limited what the U.S. could achieve in its overall foreign policy agenda. For example, “Militarily, hostile public attitudes toward America meant nations were less willing or able to commit troops in the U.S.-led military operations. Economically, anti-Americanism diminished the appeal of American brands, products, and services.”³⁰¹ In addition, apprehension of the U.S. affected how nonstate organizations, such as terrorist groups, comprised their public diplomacy strategies. As sport diplomat Omari Faulkner notes, Al Qaeda “amplified their efforts to target disenfranchised youth in the Muslim world, exploiting their lack of knowledge about America.”³⁰² Counteracting these strategies required cooperation between nations throughout the region and the U.S.; thus, a need for public diplomacy initiatives and other mechanisms to promote U.S. soft power was justified.

Seeking solutions to counteract negative sentiments of the U.S., American policymakers explored numerous soft power options to employ throughout the Middle East. As international relations scholar Laura Mills argues, following the September 11 terrorist attacks, increased attention was placed on exchange programs, which were “lauded

³⁰⁰ Zaharna, *Battles to Bridges*, 11.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁰² Omari Faulker, “CultureConnect and the U.S. Department of State: A Gateway to the Future of Sport Diplomacy,” in *Case Studies in Sport Diplomacy*, eds. Craig Esherick, Robert E. Baker, Steven J. Jackson & Michael P. Sam (Morgantown, WV: FiT Publishing, 2017), 43.

for their ability to cultivate cross-cultural understanding through people-to-people connections.”³⁰³ The optimal method for achieving these connections was by proving that Americans and the rest of the world shared common values and interests. Former Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes stated that U.S. diplomatic policy in this post-9/11 period attempted to “nurture the sense that Americans and people of different countries, cultures, and faiths have much more in common than the issues that divide us.”³⁰⁴ Following the dissolution of the USIA, policymakers faced an uphill climb in justifying and implementing public diplomacy programs to achieve such goals. Political scientist Nancy Snow highlights the ideal methods of optimizing programs to strengthen relations with foreign publics during this period:

...the best public diplomacy emphasizes a two-track process of informing, educating, and understanding global publics in the interest of the nation state. U.S. public diplomacy promotes the national interest and national security of the United States through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics abroad and broadening the dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad.³⁰⁵

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE SPORTS EXCHANGES IN THE POST-9/11 ERA

Outlined in an unclassified report developed by U.S. foreign policy specialist Susan B. Epstein for the Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division of U.S. Congress, U.S.

³⁰³ Laura Mills, “Empire, Emotion, Exchange: (Dis)orienting Encounters of/with Post-9/11 US Cultural Diplomacy,” *Cultural Studies* 34, no. 5 (2020), 764.

³⁰⁴ Karen Hughes, “Waging Peace: A New Paradigm for Public Diplomacy,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Spring 2007), 20.

³⁰⁵ Nancy Snow, “The Resurgence of U.S. Public Diplomacy after 9/11,” in *The Impact of 9/11 on the Media, Arts, and Entertainment: The Day that Changed Everything?*, ed. Matthew J. Morgan (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 82.

public diplomacy strategy executed three broad categories of activities to promote public diplomacy during this period: international information programs, international nonmilitary broadcasting, and educational and cultural exchange programs. Information programs were conducted by The Office of International Information Programs (IIP), a strategic communications office that put out “a variety of information in a number of languages and forms, including print publications, Internet reports, and in-person or video-conferencing speaker programs.”³⁰⁶ International nonmilitary broadcasting involved old and new broadcasting services, such as the Voice of America (VOA), established during World War II and engaged with foreign publics in 47 different languages through affiliate stations across the globe. Whereas existing broadcasts had thrived primarily through radio throughout the twentieth century, utilization of the Internet was crucial in reaching “significant numbers of people in Asia and the Middle East.”³⁰⁷

This chapter will primarily focus on the latter activity, educational and cultural exchange programs. Mainly utilized by The Bureau for Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), the objective of these programs is to “build friendly, peaceful relations between the people of the United States and the people of other countries through academic, cultural, sports, and professional exchanges, as well as public-private partnerships.”³⁰⁸ As Hughes remarked at the Council on Foreign Relations, exchange programs had the most significant impact of all public diplomacy tools following 9/11. “There is no substitute for direct contact ... There’s no doubt in my mind that our exchange programs have been our single

³⁰⁶ U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Background and the 9/11 Commission Recommendations*, by Susan B. Epstein, RL32607 (2005), 5.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁰⁸ Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, “About ECA,” U.S. Department of State, accessed September 26, 2021, <https://eca.state.gov/about-bureau>.

most important and most successful public diplomacy tool over the last 50 years.”³⁰⁹ In the immediate years following the September 11 terrorist attacks, the ECA ramped up exchange programs involving groups from American and Afghan civic life, including political activists, journalists, and lobbyists. Groups interested in numerous aspects of American and Afghan cultures also traversed between countries, including musicians, writers, artists, and athletes.

The advent of the twenty-first century invited such unique exchanges, particularly with sport diplomacy and people-to-people sports exchanges. According to sport development expert Jeremy Goldberg, the evolution of the use of sport for diplomatic aims has increased in prevalence due to the overall expansion of globalization and the converging of international cultures. “If the playing field can provide a stage for political grievance and conflict, certainly it can also facilitate cooperation and understanding. Sports are now free from the tensions and limitations of the Cold War, allowing them to play a new, positive role in international politics.”³¹⁰ As stated in earlier chapters of this dissertation, the use of sport to bridge cultural gaps was a conventional tactic on the global stage. However, several actors have interpreted sport to pursue this goal in a myriad of methods.

Where the ECA promoted sports exchange programs as an arm of the Department of State, the Bush administration had different visions of how sport could be utilized for political aims. President Bush primarily sought to use the public relations power sport to exemplify the “American spirit,” evoking patriotism and American pride through the

³⁰⁹ Karen Hughes, “Remarks at the Council on Foreign Relations” (2006), in Zaharna, *Battles to Bridges*, 150.

³¹⁰ Goldberg, “Sporting Diplomacy,” 65.

repeated emphasis on the typical values of neoliberalism and free market capitalism. This approach was commonly utilized before 9/11; for example, collegiate and professional sports teams visited (and continue to visit) the White House to be honored by the president. When preparing for a visit from the 2000 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) women's volleyball champion University of Nebraska in May 2001, President Bush prepared statements not only celebrating the players' athletic and academic feats but also their accomplishments serving as citizen diplomats abroad, emphasizing that "they served as distinguished American ambassadors while competing in China last summer."³¹¹ The 2002 Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City, awarded to the U.S. before Bush entered office, also provided a substantial opportunity to celebrate American principles. In a February 2002 letter to the Salt Lake Olympic Organizing Committee's domestic dignitary program manager, Anne Bovaird, Bush asserted, "These Games came at a perfect time for the country. In our time of sadness and determination and resolve, we have again shown the world the very best of the American spirit."³¹² Exploiting such messages depicted the U.S. through a duality of a nation in mourning and one of unabashed courage in the face of tragedy. Aligning such motivational sentiments with sport as a backdrop, the Bush administration found efficacy in using sport to disseminate messages of recovery.

However, the significant difference in the Bush administration's promotion of sport compared to prior administrations was that the president advanced sport initiatives primarily through the Department of Defense rather than the Department of State.

³¹¹ Ed Walsh, "NCAA Women's Volleyball Champions – University of Nebraska Cornhuskers," May 25, 2001, Subject Files – RE (Recreation – Sports), 449057 – 453873, George W. Bush Presidential Library, National Archives Catalog, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/37209077>.

³¹² Letter from George W. Bush to Ms. Anne Bovaird, Domestic Dignitary Program Manager, Salt Lake Organizing Committee, February 23, 2002, Subject Files – RE (Recreation – Sports), 512111 – 512171, George W. Bush Presidential Library, National Archives Catalog, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/37209255>.

Following 9/11, President Bush sought to utilize sport to justify its military responses in Afghanistan and Iraq and emphasized the shared values of sport. The military created a unique collaboration between the executive branch, the military-industrial complex, and professional sports organizations. As sport scholar Michael L. Butterworth and communications scholar Stormi D. Moskal note, President Bush successfully blurred the lines between sports and war, creating a synergistic relationship between sport and state throughout his two terms as the commander in chief. They contend that in the years following the September 11 terrorist attacks, “American identity is constituted in and by a culture of militarism, wherein Americans are implicated in a structural relationship between government, the military, and entertainment industries to the extent that it has become functionally impossible to live outside the rhetorical production of war.”³¹³ While such relationships were not unique, sport scholar Samantha King noted that this renewed association created “an intensified depth and mutuality to the sport–war nexus in the present moment—a shift that might be understood as a further indication of the militarization of everyday life, and, simultaneously, of the ‘sportification’ of political life.”³¹⁴ The partnerships between these entities epitomize the confluence of sport and the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

As Butterworth and Moskal note, euphemisms for these conflicts manifested themselves in several American sporting events, including “through baseball stadium rituals, NFL ‘kickoff’ ceremonies, NASCAR (auto racing) displays of belligerent patriotism, and an almost endless list of military appreciation events at college football

³¹³ Michael L. Butterworth & Stormi D. Moskal, “American Football, Flags, and ‘Fun’: The Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl and the Rhetorical Production of Militarism,” *Communication, Culture & Critique* 2, no. 4 (2009), 412.

³¹⁴ Samantha King, “Offensive Lines: Sport-State Synergy in an Era of Perpetual War,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 8, no. 4 (2008), 528.

games.”³¹⁵ Also included was the Armed Forces Bowl, an annual postseason college football bowl game hosted in Fort Worth, Texas. Sponsored by defense giant Lockheed Martin since 2014, the event has been criticized for promoting militaristic demonstrations in sports. As Butterworth and Moskal note, the game represents “a rhetorical production that masks America’s deepening dependence on the defense industry, as well as its expansion into more and more aspects of public culture. Consequently, this rhetoric of identification not only promotes the culture of militarism, but it also has the capacity to blunt the growing resistance to the ‘war on terror.’”³¹⁶ The connection between American sport and war was not fully realized until a joint oversight report from U.S. Congress, released in 2015, found that professional sports teams from the National Football League, Major League Baseball, the National Hockey League, and Major League Soccer received USD 6.8 million from the Pentagon to promote patriotic displays during pregame ceremonies, halftime shows, and throughout games to promote recruitment campaigns. The report’s co-sponsor, Arizona senator John McCain, stated, “Fans should have confidence that their hometown heroes are being honored because of their honorable military service, not as a marketing ploy.”³¹⁷

As a result of this asymmetrical proclivity to invest federal resources into promoting sport in conjunction with support for the “war on terror,” criticism increasingly focused on the diminishing investment in sport programs through traditional means of exchange and diplomatic missions. In 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell testified that

³¹⁵ Butterworth & Moskal, “American Football, Flags, and ‘Fun,’” 416.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 429.

³¹⁷ Eyder Peralta, “Pentagon Paid Sports Teams Millions for ‘Paid Patriotism’ Events,” *National Public Radio*, November 5, 2015, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/11/05/454834662/pentagon-paid-sports-teams-millions-for-paid-patriotism-events>.

the Department of Defense possessed a budget 400 times that of the Department of State, remarking, “For every dollar of military spending today, 7 cents is spent on diplomacy and a quarter of a penny on public diplomacy.”³¹⁸ Countering the abysmal level of spending on such programs, Powell is credited for reinvigorating the necessity for sport diplomacy programs in the post-9/11 era. Faulkner notes, “Under Secretary Powell’s leadership, support for sports diplomacy emerged from the top floor of the Department of State in Washington D.C. to U.S. embassies and consulates all over the world. This top-down approach had allowed for positive growth in the practical usage and the primary responsibility of implementation of sport as a diplomacy tool for engagement.”³¹⁹ Reflecting this assertion, two programs spurred the ascendancy of sport diplomacy following 9/11: sport programs through CultureConnect and SportsUnited, the U.S. Department of State’s sports diplomacy division.

THE GENESIS OF CULTURECONNECT AND EARLY GOVERNMENTAL ATTEMPTS AT FORMALIZED SPORT DIPLOMACY PROGRAMMING (2002-2008)

While the Bush administration possessed its own methods of incorporating sport into American foreign policy objectives, the Department of State developed sports exchange programs to increase mutual understanding between U.S. citizens and citizens of nations throughout the Middle East. While the bulk of sport diplomacy and exchange programming conducted by the Department of State was developed through its flagship program, SportsUnited, the department engaged in sports exchanges through various mechanisms.

³¹⁸ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Government Reform, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, *Public Diplomacy in the Middle East*, 108th Cong., 2nd sess., 2004, Committee Print 108-153.

³¹⁹ Faulker, “CultureConnect and the U.S. Department of State, 49.

The department's initial foray into sports exchanges was through CultureConnect, developed by then-Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Patricia S. Harrison in 2002. According to Zaharna, CultureConnect was created "to reach younger audiences by sending accomplished American artists, athletes, and businesspersons as cultural ambassadors or envoys to conduct classes, concerts, and discussions in other countries."³²⁰ In her justification for starting CultureConnect, Harrison specifies, "We need to reach a younger population beyond the elites and this program enables young people throughout the world to have a conversation with average Americans who have achieved in their chosen professions."³²¹ By conducting "master classes" in select countries and following up with individuals using online forums, these presentations sought to build mutual understanding between the U.S. and visiting countries in the years following 9/11.

Programming was typically conducted through CultureConnect's ambassador programs, which recruited Americans acclaimed in their fields to travel abroad to visit specific countries and conduct clinics for its citizens, particularly youth. The program primarily enlisted Americans admired for their work in arts and media, with prominent examples including cellist Yo-Yo Ma, author Frank McCourt, dancer and choreographer Debbie Allen, and actress Doris Roberts. The program also conscripted the support of figures whose work related to the reconstruction efforts of the World Trade Center in New York following its destruction in 2001. This includes architect Daniel Libeskind, the master plan architect for the reconstruction of the World Trade Center site, and photographer Joel

³²⁰ Zaharna, *Battles to Bridges*, 36.

³²¹ Pat Harrison, "Ask The White House," The White House, March 12, 2004, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/ask/20040312.html>.

Meyerowitz, whose photos depicting the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks garnered praise worldwide.³²²

Hughes stressed the importance of outreach to Middle Eastern countries after 9/11, and sport provided a fun and interactive way to attract children from countries throughout the region to engage with American ambassadors. For example, summer camps in Iraq allowed Iraqi children “to develop their baseball and basketball skills in addition to their English language abilities; they learned a great deal about U.S. sports and culture and engaged in open conversations with American coaches and teachers.”³²³ CultureConnect was one of the first after the 9/11 attacks to implement sports programming to build mutual understanding between the U.S. and select countries not only in the Middle East but also in Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America. American sports stars such as basketball player Tracy McGrady and New York Yankees star Bernie Williams served as ambassadors for the program. Following a trip to Colombia in February 2005, Williams provided a retrospective of what he was doing as an ambassador for the program and what it meant for his personal growth. “As much as I was impacting them, it was even more for me ... I was profoundly impacted by this experience. It was an eye-opener. It opened up the boundaries of the world I live in. The world I used to live in.”³²⁴

³²² According to TIME’s Neil Harris, Meyerowitz “was the only photographer with regular access to Ground Zero in the weeks and months following 9/11.” The photos taken at Ground Zero were eventually published in his 2006 book *Aftermath: World Trade Center Archive*. In addition traveling as an ambassador for CultureConnect, Meyerowitz embarked on a tour of fifty cities worldwide promoting the pictures taken in an exhibition titled *After September 11: Images from Ground Zero*. For more, see Neil Harris, “Joel Meyerowitz: Ground Zero, Then and Now,” *TIME*, September 10, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110925174949/http://lightbox.time.com/2011/09/10/joel-meyerowitz-ground-zero-then-and-now>.

³²³ Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, “Public Diplomacy in Action: Stories from the Field,” *Public Diplomacy Update*, Volume 2, Issue iii, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/documents/organization/93420.pdf>.

³²⁴ Jack Curry, “Plucking at a Star’s Heartstrings: Bernie Williams Gives His All on Trip, and Receives Perspective,” *New York Times*, February 18, 2005, D1.

One unique case of a sport diplomacy program conducted by CultureConnect was through its Cultural Envoys program, which was established in May 2004 in “an attempt to reach global youth through sports, utilizing previously unknown athletes.”³²⁵ Former Georgetown University men’s basketball players Omari Faulkner and Courtland Freeman were selected to participate in the initiative’s basketball programs. Faulkner notes that the primary difference between the Cultural Envoys program and the Cultural Ambassadors program was that programming opportunities were “limitless” compared to the much more high-profile athlete ambassadors that had to balance trips with the program with their professional sporting careers with rigid playing schedules. The increased flexibility allowed the envoys to travel to several countries within a few months and, as Faulkner notes, “visit[ing] multiple cities in each country, many of which had not had many U.S. visitors.”³²⁶ This was a significant achievement for the organization, as it expanded the reach of diplomatic programming sponsored by the Department of State while expanding its goal to reach as many global youths as possible.

The Cultural Envoys program of CultureConnect sought to use sports like basketball to instill core principles of the given activity to youth in the communities the envoys visited. These principles included building teamwork, inspiring leadership, and promoting a positive work ethic. While the diplomatic duo of Faulker and Freeman sought to achieve such objectives through clinics and public speaking opportunities, objectives unique to specific countries visited were also prioritized. For example, when the pair visited Dhaka, Bangladesh, in October 2004, one of the primary focuses was “encouraging the active participation of young girls, to increase their interest and to promote the continuation

³²⁵ Faulker, “CultureConnect and the U.S. Department of State,” 40.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

of the lifelong benefits of sports.”³²⁷ Government officials praised Faulkner and Freeman across the world for their service. Following a trip to Malaysia, cultural affairs officer Jamari Salleh lauded the pair for “opening doors for us with the future generations of Malaysia. This program needs to be continued if we are going to reap its long-term impact.” The long-term potential of the program was promising.

The program was short-lived, however. Following a speech by Powell honoring ambassadors and envoys of the program on December 13, 2004, the program suddenly ceased operations, and all records of its existence on the world wide web were silently wiped. Despite this apparent end to the program, ambassadors continued to make trips on behalf of the Department of State throughout 2005. In his remarks, Powell stressed the program’s widespread influence, noting its importance for the U.S. “because American art and American athletics are invaluable windows into the movements of our society, into the heart of our nation and into the very soul of our citizenry.”³²⁸ He did not indicate any warning of discontinuing the program, celebrating the success of the venture by summing, “This is the kind of outreach we need in the twenty-first century: meaningful cultural connections that cement lasting friendships and shape the way that we think about one another. In today’s world, the cultural exchange between peoples is just as important as the official diplomacy between states.”³²⁹ No official statements signal the program’s culmination, but this did not mean the end of sport diplomacy and sports exchange programs conducted by the Department of State.

³²⁷ Ibid., 46.

³²⁸ Colin L. Powell, “Remarks at an Awards Ceremony Honoring CultureConnect Ambassadors and Basketball Envoys,” press release, U.S. Department of State, Dec. 13, 2004, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/39721.htm>.

³²⁹ Ibid.

Outside of CultureConnect, countless opportunities for sport diplomacy in the Middle East were advanced by numerous entities associated with the Department of State in the initial years following the 9/11 attacks, most notably from regional embassies in the region. In May 2006, the U.S. Embassy in Basra hosted an event attempting to unite the Christian, Shiite, Sunni, and Mandaean religious communities through soccer in response to the al-Askari Shrine bombing in Samarra. Held at the largest mosque in the city, the event was “a resounding success,” with stars such as Zinedine Zidane providing balls and paraphernalia from his club, Real Madrid Football Club, to participating children. Summing up the impact of the event, deputy regional coordinator for the embassy, Mark Marrano, acknowledged that the embassy:

...was able to organize an event emphasizing reconciliation, yet free of political and religious strings during a period of heightened tension and strife between the Shia and Sunni communities. More important, with the help of soccer great Zidane, the office was able to bring smiles to the faces of Iraqi children who have had little to smile about in the past.”³³⁰

Embassies across the world found ways to incorporate sport into their own events and diplomatic goals, and the use of stars like Zidane was a common practice for offices with the means of developing such relationships. The U.S. Embassy in Chile received assistance from Los Angeles Dodgers manager Tommy Lasorda to inaugurate a Little League baseball organization in Santiago. At the same time, multinational enterprises such as Nike and the National Basketball Association supported programs in South Sudan and Indonesia, respectively.³³¹ While these attempts are deservedly celebrated as successes, endeavors involving sport were sporadic and usually required a stroke of luck for all the

³³⁰ Mark Marrano, “Soccer Matches,” *State Magazine*, May 2006, 11.

³³¹ Craig Kelly, “Baseball Diplomacy: Chile Catches Little League Fever,” *State Magazine*, September 2005, 18-19; Makila James, “Standing Up,” *State Magazine*, February 2008, 20-21; *State Magazine*. “NBA Star Employs Slam-Dunk Diplomacy,” January 2009, 3.

right pieces to fall into place. To limit these inconsistencies and maximize the full potential of the diplomatic power of sport, the Department of State to invest resources into a permanent operation: SportsUnited.

SPORTSUNITED

Recognizing the potential for sport diplomacy following the September 11 terrorist attacks, employees at the Department of State developed a strategy to promote people-to-people linkages between U.S. citizens and citizens in nations throughout the Middle East. The emphasis on establishing these connections was critical in achieving this mission, as State Department officials Cindy Gire and Trina Bolton note, “To ensure that athletes who are not among a nation’s elites are not left out of the Department’s people-to-people programs, ECA identified sports diplomacy as a potential driver for U.S. outreach.”³³² As this dissertation has shown thus far, while American sport diplomacy programs have been implemented by numerous actors in various settings over the course of decades in both official and unofficial capacities, instituting an official state-sanctioned hub for sport diplomacy and sports exchanges needed careful planning and justification.

When SportsUnited was established in 2002, its mission was to conduct people-to-people sports exchanges to “open doors in hard-to-reach places and engage communities at the grassroots level.”³³³ Under President George W. Bush, the division was opened as a branch of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, which possessed its own mission of cultivating “mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange that assist in the

³³² Cindy Gire & Trina Bolton, “Sports United,” *State Magazine*, March 2012, 30.

³³³ “Sports Diplomacy,” Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, accessed February 11, 2023. <https://eca.state.gov/sports-diplomacy>.

development of peaceful relations.”³³⁴ The catalyst for establishing the program was to connect with Muslim youths following 9/11, chiefly as “a means of reaching out to Muslim youth through soccer, [and] also to dispel negative sentiments of Americans.”³³⁵ Initial programs conducted through the department primarily focused on a localized region (the Middle East) through a singular medium (soccer). Still, the immediate success of these programs allowed SportsUnited to both expand geographically and diversify its programming so that it was suitable to the audience it was attempting to build connections with. Over the next few years, SportsUnited piloted sports exchange programs worldwide involving dozens of sports, attracting citizens with programs curtailing specific demographic categories such as gender, religion, national origin, sexuality, and age.

In its first few years of existence, however, SportsUnited was inaugurated with the primary purpose of appealing to youths aged 7-17. This was a deliberate approach to establishing programs in targeted countries, as sport scholars Carrie LeCrom and Melissa Ferry justify that if such programs can “reach, teach, and engage with youth in a positive way, that information will have a multiplier effect when taken back to their families and communities. The youth are the future leaders of their countries – the ones who will be driving their nation’s economy, making policy decisions, and influencing the next generation.”³³⁶ This was not a unique tactic. As exemplified in Chapter 3’s example of Taco Bell sponsoring high school-aged baseball players, the benefits garnered by the

³³⁴ “History and Mission of ECA,” Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, accessed February 11, 2023. <https://eca.state.gov/about-bureau/history-and-mission-eca>.

³³⁵ Trina Bolton, “Sports Diplomacy as a Key Tool in U.S. Foreign Policy,” guest speaker, International Business Webinar Series, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA, April 1, 2021, 11:15. <https://ciber.robinson.gsu.edu/webinar-sports-diplomacy-as-a-key-tool-in-u-s-foreign-policy>.

³³⁶ Carrie LeCrom & Melissa Ferry, “The United States Government’s Role in Sport Diplomacy,” in *Case Studies in Sport Diplomacy*, eds. Craig Esherick, Robert E. Baker, Steven J. Jackson, & Michael P. Sam (Morgantown, WV: FiT Publishing, 2017), 31.

younger participants allowed for the dissemination of such exchanges to spread throughout the communities where they lived, attended school, and played sports. The once-in-a-lifetime experiences created lasting legacies, whereas contrasting trips made by professional athletes had a lesser impact and had a higher potential to be viewed more unexceptionally.

These early triumphs were evident in real financial terms and in the influence the department began to garner. According to public diplomacy researcher Carrie Walters, SportsUnited's sports grants and programming budget grew from approximately \$600,000 in 2002 to over \$5 million from 2002 to 2007.³³⁷ In addition, the recruitment of high-profile athletes, such as figure skater Michelle Kwan and baseball Hall of Famer Cal Ripken, Jr., elevated the division to new heights. Authenticating his involvement in the program and recognizing the appeal of sport on a global level, Ripken stated, "I happen to think that sport -- baseball, in particular -- is very magical. It can go across cultural lines. It can appeal to all kids and all people."³³⁸ The umbrella of SportsUnited programming expanded into four distinct programs, which will be discussed further in Chapter 6 of this dissertation: Sports Envoys, Sports Visitors, Sports Grants, and the Empowering Women and Girls through Sport Initiative. By sending American representatives to local sites to connect in grassroots efforts with everyday citizens of foreign countries, mutual understanding could be achieved. This understanding had the mass potential to spread across communities with hopes of reaching widespread commendation, perhaps up to the federal level.

³³⁷ Carrie Walters, "Sports Diplomacy is the New Comeback Kid," *The CPD Blog*, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, August 3, 2007, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/sports-diplomacy-new-comeback-kid>.

³³⁸ Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, "Secretary Rice and Under Secretary Hughes Appoint Cal Ripken, Jr. Envoy for U.S. Public Diplomacy," *Public Diplomacy Update*, Volume 2, Issue iii, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/documents/organization/93420.pdf>.

EFFICACY OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE SPORTS EXCHANGES IN THE EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Government officials and public diplomacy scholars alike commended the approach of SportsUnited amidst its induction into the ECA's constituted programming. Specific to the organization's activities following the September 11 terrorist attacks, Mills coincides with the mission of SportsUnited by affirming, "Exploring the everyday sites, practices and performances that comprise post-9/11 US cultural diplomacy thus also reveals how exchange encounters are highly affective, additionally imbued with a series of incitements and rewards that encourage exchange participants' performative enactment of these particular identities."³³⁹ Sport scholar Lindsey C. Blom, sport development practitioner Paz A. Magat, and LeCrom stress that programs such as SportsUnited are beneficial due to their efforts connecting with communities on a small scale: "For a long-lasting impact, soft power diplomacy has to be performed at the local level and not just at the ambassadorial, elite athlete, or staff level."³⁴⁰ Sport's unique power in connecting with populaces worldwide makes it a powerful device for promoting consensus in values between even the most disparate populations. As these scholars emphasize, this cannot be accomplished using traditional modes of diplomatic exchange. Technological advances in globalization made such small-scale exchanges possible. Capitalizing on such opportunities using sport heralded a new era in how sport diplomacy and exchanges could be implemented.

However, how the U.S. framed sport in the post-9/11 period provoked critical assessment from some. The Bush administration's coupling of sport with its own foreign

³³⁹ Mills, "Empire, Emotion, Exchange," 766.

³⁴⁰ Lindsey C. Blom, Paz A. Magat, & Heather L. Dichter, "Grassroots Diplomacy through Coach Education: Americans, Jordanians and Tajiks," *Soccer & Society* 21, no. 5 (2020), 535.

policy strategies concerning the “war on terror” startled Americans grappling with significant changes in the world order. As sport scholar Mary G. McDonald notes in her analysis of the conjoining sporting militarism with nationalism, she argues that Bush used “vivid language and imagery to portray himself and by extension the nation as capable of decisive and swift action in response to external threats to the American way of life.”³⁴¹ In McDonald’s opinion, sport was an extension to promote this formula, citing examples from Major League Baseball’s “business as usual” approach to encourage this “idealized way of life” following the traumatic events of September 11.³⁴² Overall, such strategies were not concerned with restoring national anxiety following the traumatic attacks but achieved the opposite effect: silencing matters related to international affairs and endorsing consumerist attitudes, as Butterworth explains. “In the post-9/11 moment of crisis, perhaps more than at any other time in the nation’s history, US citizens needed to participate in an earnest debate about the future of American foreign policy. Instead, the president reduced the struggle to religious terms of good and evil, and the public largely fulfilled its patriotic duty by embracing consumer culture.”³⁴³ Such perspectives signified the exploitative nature of sport, ultimately expressing skepticism of its power to reach global populations without bias or imperious influence.

³⁴¹ Mary G. McDonald, “Imagining Benevolence, Masculinity and Nation: Tragedy, Sport and the Transnational Marketplace,” in *Sport and Corporate Nationalisms*, eds. Michael L. Silk, David L. Andrews, & Cheryl L. Cole (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 135-136.

³⁴² Bush promoted recovery efforts in the post-9/11 period through the promotion of consumerism: “Rather according to Bush the promise of American recovery is best achieved through both a strengthened military and a continuation of his economic policies of privatization (except for security and military purposes), tax cuts for the wealthy and reinvigorated consumption.” This was frequently utilized through MLB games in 2001 and 2002, in which patriotism was promoted significantly through the overindulgence of patriotism, primarily through profusion of American symbolism (flags, anthems, fighter jets roaring above stadia, etc.). For more, see *Ibid.*, 135-136.

³⁴³ Butterworth, “The Politics of the Pitch,” 198.

Sport diplomacy and exchange programs were also the subjects of ire from some scholars due to how the Department of State approaches public diplomacy programs, including those involving sport. Snow stresses that public diplomacy programs should be designed to complement, rather than transform, foreign policy objectives, warning that exchange programs “are not too closely aligned with any particular foreign policy outcome; otherwise we risk propagandizing when we intend to engage.”³⁴⁴ Zaharna complements this sentiment by stating that the absence of a clear organizational structure amplified such problems. Many government agencies engaged in public diplomacy activities with their own interpretations of how such programs would affect broader foreign policy strategies. These structural problems “hampered U.S. public diplomacy’s responsiveness, the coordination problems among the various agencies within the U.S. government appeared to be undercutting U.S. public diplomacy’s effectiveness.”³⁴⁵ Regarding how the U.S. operates sport diplomacy and exchange programs, the institution of SportsUnited was critical in containing the strategic goals and methods of such programs to maximize their effectiveness.

Finally, some groups feared the monocultural attitudes sports exchange programs would promote, especially in their ability to propagate Islamophobia following the 9/11 terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Islamic extremist network Al ‘Qaeda. Mills notes that the “cosmopolitanism” ingrained in exchange programs is “framed as a somewhat unquestionable benevolence but are in fact riven with asymmetries that have colonial echoes and make themselves felt – and felt keenly.”³⁴⁶ In her analysis of the Youth

³⁴⁴ Snow, “The Resurgence of U.S. Public Diplomacy after 9/11,” 84.

³⁴⁵ Zaharna, *Battles to Bridges*, 57.

³⁴⁶ Mills, “Empire, Emotion, Exchange,” 771.

Exchange and Study (YES) Program sponsored by the Department of State, she found that “hosts are given helpful tips to align and ‘correct’ behaviours in order to generate more palatable, affective encounters in the US. Hosts are not reciprocally open-minded or respectful of ‘culture’ but rather must encourage students to drop such behaviours and conform to a US superior ideal.”³⁴⁷ Such concerns apply across many exchange programs and cannot solely be corrected by policy alone. Sports exchanges conducted by the Department of State seek to bridge cultural gaps by introducing sports popular with Americans to foreign publics and engaging in the sports popular in visiting countries. This issue occasionally garners attention when the former strategy is implemented in exchanges.

CONCLUSION

Several decades following the tragic events that took place on September 11, 2001, Americans continue to grapple with the legacies that (re)shape their worldviews, both physically and symbolically. Some responses to the attacks were retaliatory, with the Bush administration unleashing military might upon the nations of Afghanistan and Iraq. Others (knowingly or unknowingly) embodied anti-Muslim sentiment, directed not only toward the Islamic extremist networks that perpetrated the attacks but also ordinary Muslims in the U.S. and abroad.

What is admirable about the influx in American exchange programs during this period is that instead of attempting to demonize outsiders for their differences, they sought common ground by building mutual connections through common cultural interests, such as music, food, and sport. The importance of U.S. exchange programs is neatly summed up by Snow, who emphasizes the importance of listening as much as unilaterally

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 778.

articulating diplomatic messaging. “We Americans need to listen more and talk less ... there is a two-to-one ratio between ears and mouth, something I need to keep reminding myself.”³⁴⁸ As the following chapter will detail, building communal bonds between ordinary Americans and everyday citizens throughout the globe required not only promoting American values and messaging but also learning about and considering the cultures with which these people are interacting.

In the years following the attacks, U.S. policymakers recognized the powerful potential of sport as a diplomatic tool through past examples of sport diplomacy and exchanges and the numerous programs implemented in this period. The long-term potential of sport to promote American values, as well as bridging cultural gaps between ordinary citizens of both the U.S. and visiting countries, was recognized in the post-9/11 period through organizations such as CultureConnect and SportsUnited. As sport scholars Michael L. Silk and David L. Andrews note, “...through locating or articulating sport as an element of the cultural terrain within a wider cultural politics, critical interrogation can begin to understand it as a site through which various discourses are mobilized regarding the organization and discipline of daily life in the service of particular political agendas.”³⁴⁹ As SportsUnited programming continued into the 2010s, it was later rebranded as the U.S. Department of State’s Sports Diplomacy Division and continues to deliver sport-related programming in the present day. Chapter 6 dives into the organization’s goals in the 2010s and 2020s, detailing specific programs that the division offers domestically and internationally.

³⁴⁸ Snow, “The Resurgence of U.S. Public Diplomacy after 9/11,” 85.

³⁴⁹ Michael L. Silk & David L. Andrews, “Sport and the Neoliberal Conjuncture: Complicating the Consensus,” in *Sport and Neoliberalism: Politics, Consumption, and Culture*, eds. David L. Andrews & Michael L. Silk (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 5.

Chapter 6: “Advocating for Someone Different than Us”: The Sports Diplomacy Division and U.S. People-to-People Sport Diplomacy in the Twenty-First Century

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair.”

–Nelson Mandela

“You think of a place where we’re trying to develop better relations, and we’ve had a sport diplomacy group from that country.”

–Craig Esherick, Associate Professor, George Mason University³⁵⁰

Sport participants frequently allude to the “universal language” of sport, which provides an appropriate catalyst for developing bonds through mutual understanding and cultural transmission. This is because sport can be communicated without the concern of language or other significant cultural barriers. A suitable illustration of this allusion occurred when women’s basketball coaches from Argentina assembled for a two-week coaching workshop at George Mason University (GMU) in Washington, D.C., in the summer of 2017. The workshop, organized to expose participants to American basketball coaching techniques and skills, also surprised them when they discovered the acquisition

³⁵⁰ Sarah Larimer, “This Unique George Mason Program is for Those who Understand the ‘Universal Language’ of Sports,” *The Washington Post*, July 10, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/this-initiative-at-george-mason-is-for-those-who-understand-the-universal-language-of-sports/2017/07/10/0d69eea0-6321-11e7-a4f7-af34fc1d9d39_story.html.

of valuable life lessons they could apply to their lives off the court.³⁵¹ Through an interpreter, Argentine participant Celeste Cabañez explained, “It’s been such a comprehensive training thus far ...It looks at not just the sport but also the individual. And not just the basketball player but the individual, the coach, as a whole person.” Despite traveling to the U.S. without fluency in English, the coaches were confident they could learn lessons they could take back to their respective homes in Argentina.

This example is just one of many conducted by the partnership between GMU and the Department of State’s Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA), which started in 2009 and hosted over 1,200 participants from 83 countries over the course of its seven-year tenure. GMU had three full-time employees devoted explicitly to organizing and implementing these programs. Overall, the university’s Center for Sport Management received \$7.3 million in funding from the ECA as part of the Sports Diplomacy Division’s Sports Visitor Program to conduct these exchange programs and promote sport diplomacy. While that number appears mind-boggling, this significant amount of financial backing was used efficiently, according to GMU sport management professor and principal investigator of the grants, Dr. Robert E. Baker. “When you’re talking about air travel back-and-forth and all the hotels and everything else ... we made each dollar go really far, which then comes back to the Department of State as the bang-for-the-buck they’re spending was really significant.”³⁵² Signaling the success of the GMU programs, the grants that the researchers received were renewed multiple times to host sport-related visitors from around the world.

³⁵¹ As Esherick notes, these “off-the court” lessons manifest in several forms, including lessons about American systems of government, legislation such as Title IX, and discussions regarding “athletic programs for those with disabilities.” For more, see *Ibid.*

³⁵² Dr. Robert E. Baker, interview with author, video phone call, June 22, 2021.

The success of these exchange programs relied on the innate power of sport to bridge connections between various groups of people from diverse backgrounds and walks of life. When discussing the strength that sport has in establishing these connections, Baker notes, “What makes sport different is that there are definable goals: whether it’s learning the sport, functioning together on a team, engaging as a fan ... You have these components of sport that fit really well into theoretically bringing people together to break down barriers, break down stereotypes, and see how other people do interact and pursue common goals together.”³⁵³ As emphasized in previous chapters, the efficacy of sports exchanges conducted by the Department of State lies exclusively in its ability to recruit participants who come from pedestrian lifestyles. GMU sport management professor Craig Esherick notes, “These are normal people. These are not diplomats. These are not foreign service officers. These are not presidents, prime ministers, members of Congress ... These are ordinary Americans meeting ... And that interest in sports develops a bond between them and us immediately.”³⁵⁴ Recognizing the power of citizen exchange initiatives, the Sports Diplomacy Division at the ECA directed its resources to the cultivation of developing connections between “ordinary” citizens, using sport as the primary vehicle to promote dialogue and comradery between the U.S. and international individuals.

While the previous chapter covered the establishment of SportsUnited and how sport diplomacy and exchange programs were initially instituted within the Department of State, this chapter will primarily cover SportsUnited’s successor, the Sports Diplomacy Division, and thoroughly examine the programs that have defined how the federal government conducts American sport diplomacy in the twenty-first century. The ECA

³⁵³ Dr. Robert E. Baker, interview with author, video phone call, June 22, 2021.

³⁵⁴ Larimer, “This Unique George Mason Program is for Those who Understand the ‘Universal Language’ of Sports.”

accomplishes its objectives through four distinct programs, each with different methods and aims. The Sports Envoy Program employs elite American athletes “to promote cross-cultural understanding, engage underserved communities, and empower the next generation of athletes as leaders through sport.”³⁵⁵ The Sports Visitor Program, as detailed through the example of GMU, utilizes the knowledge and experience of coaches and administrators, both in the U.S. and worldwide, to conduct clinics and workshops to spread knowledge of their craft and promote dialogue with individuals in similar roles. The Sports Grants program, also known as the International Sports Programming Initiative (ISPI), is open to all U.S. public and private non-profit organizations to develop and conduct thematic exchange programs, typically for youth programs. Finally, the Global Sports Mentoring Program, which consists of the dual pillars of the Empowering Women through Sports and Sport for Community initiatives, primarily utilizes mentorship and cultural exchange programs to connect international leaders in promoting social issues, such as equality and inclusion.

The U.S. federal government’s approach to utilizing sport as a diplomatic tool differs from many countries across the globe; The U.S. has taken a unique approach in how it conducts public diplomacy compared to other countries, such as France and Brazil, which have separate branches of government dedicated to youth affairs and sports. Sports Diplomacy Division program officer Trina Bolton expands on this contradistinction by highlighting American exceptionalism through the diversity of programs that contributes to its exemplary status in using sport to craft domestic policy. “It’s part of the reason we are a powerhouse to a certain degree because we have intramurals, grassroots, NCAA sports programs, and all of the leagues and federations ... we have a patchwork approach

³⁵⁵ Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, “Sports Envoy Program,” U.S. Department of State, accessed September 29, 2021, <https://eca.state.gov/sports-diplomacy/sports-envoy>.

in that we work with other bureaus within the U.S. Department of State.”³⁵⁶ This broad approach promotes a sense of American grandeur regarding using sport to promote American values, championing diversity through the distinct entities that characterize the American sports system.

While sport diplomacy is primarily used to advance interstate relations and foreign policy objectives on behalf of national governments, private actors have also increasingly embraced the practice in achieving a broader range of benefits. This chapter will dissect these four distinctive initiatives that the Sports Diplomacy Division (formerly SportsUnited) has implemented and is currently executing in the 2010s and 2020s. This section primarily focuses on each program’s inception, the policy objectives tied to the program’s success, and a reflection on the program’s overall efficacy. Source material is primarily utilized through the method of oral history: the individual voices of officials from the Sports Diplomacy Division, as well as directors of programs receiving grant money from ISPI, detail both the efficacy of twenty-first century sport diplomacy and areas for improvement moving forward. Sport is increasingly becoming an attractive option in public diplomacy, and the incorporation of uniform mechanisms for achieving cultural mediation objectives across governments has become the norm worldwide.

REBRANDING TO THE SPORTS DIPLOMACY DIVISION

The legislative foundations of the style of programming conducted by the Sports Diplomacy Division date back to 1946, when Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas introduced his namesake Fulbright Program, which requested the proceeds from the sale of surplus World War II property to fund cultural exchange programs between U.S. citizens

³⁵⁶ Bolton, “Sports Diplomacy as a Key Tool in U.S. Foreign Policy,” 26:40.

and citizens from countries worldwide. Two years later, the US Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, also known as the Smith-Mundt Act, co-sponsored by congressmen Karl E. Mundt of South Dakota and H. Alexander Smith of New Jersey, was signed into law by President Harry S. Truman to establish a statutory information agency to “promote the better understanding of the United States among the peoples of the world and to strengthen cooperative international relations.”³⁵⁷ This legislation spawned the Foreign Leaders Program, later consolidated into the International Visitor Program in 1952.

These initiatives provided the foundation for the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, also known as the Fulbright–Hays Act of 1961, which, extending into the twenty-first century, remains the basic charter for all U.S. government-sponsored cultural and educational exchange programs. The influence of the Fulbright–Hays Act was monumental upon its enactment by President John F. Kennedy, as it merged “all previous laws and [added] new features that strengthened the program’s authorization for supporting American studies abroad and promoting modern foreign language and area studies schools and colleges in the United States.”³⁵⁸ When President Bush established the Sports Diplomacy Division’s predecessor, SportsUnited, in 2002, the foundations for the program were embedded in this act. While the name has changed, the program’s mission focuses on developing relationships with global audiences through sport.

Whereas the operation of sport at the international level has historically focused on national superiority, Bolton notes that the modern mission of the Sports Diplomacy Division focuses on establishing and sustaining people-to-people diplomatic ties at the

³⁵⁷ U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948. Pub. L. No. 80-402, 62 Stat. 6.

³⁵⁸ Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, “An Informal History of the Fulbright Program,” U.S. Department of State, accessed January 21, 2022, <https://eca.state.gov/fulbright/about-fulbright/history/early-years>.

grassroots level. “The U.S. Department of State is able to reach a new demographic that otherwise may not be tuned in on what a bureaucrat or a U.S. Embassy representative is saying. So we reach out at this grassroots level to promote our democratic foreign policy priorities and to get to a new audience.”³⁵⁹ This emphasis on reaching new demographics is especially significant given that one primary overarching strategic goal of the Department of State is to promote democratic values and participation through foreign service and diplomatic missions.

Given the variability of political parties represented in the executive branch and frequent transitions in power typically experienced in four-year intervals, challenges assumedly arise due to shifts in governance and the ideals these leaders seek to promote in diplomatic strategies at the Department of State. However, Bolton demonstrates that broader Department of State strategies are highlighted through the Sports Diplomacy Division’s programming regardless of executive-level and Department of State leadership, noting that “No matter what politics may be out there, no matter what administration... we keep our eye on the prize to promote democratic values of respect for all, inclusion, and respect for diversity. And using sports really is the way to show that.”³⁶⁰ It is important to note that the Sports Diplomacy Division works with a multitude of governmental and non-governmental organizations to establish and execute its strategic objectives, including the United Nations, the President’s Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition, and bureaus located within the Department of State, including the Bureau of International Organizations and the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Therefore, overall division strategies avoid fluctuations due to the vast number of partners the division works with.

³⁵⁹ Bolton, “Sports Diplomacy as a Key Tool in U.S. Foreign Policy,” 10:25.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 48:40.

As the quote from Nelson Mandela at the beginning of this chapter emphasizes, sport has a mystical capacity to unite people from all walks of life in an easily transmissible way that transcends language, race, gender, and class barriers. The operation of global sports programs shines primarily through sport's innate ability to be enjoyed by all who participate. U.S. Foreign Service Officer Joshua Shen highlights that American sport has considerable global reach due to its popularity, displaying efficacy "in difficult programming environments when other outreach activities are curtailed or blocked completely."³⁶¹ The division has received commendations from government officials due to its programs' accessibility and broad appeal, doing things that other diplomatic programs have had difficulty achieving. Former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton noted in 2011, "Our sport's [*sic*] exchanges are the most popular exchanges we do. And when I go to other countries around the world and we talk about what kind of exchanges that people are looking for, very often a leader will say, how about a sports exchange?"³⁶² Sports Diplomacy Division conducts sports exchange programs through its four pillars: Sports Envoy, Sports Visitor, the International Sports Programming Initiative (ISPI), and the Global Sports Mentoring Program (GSMP).

SPORTS ENVOY PROGRAM

The Sports Envoy Program began three years following the institution of SportsUnited in 2002, in which it partnered with two of its corporate sponsors, the National Basketball Association (NBA) and clothing manufacturer Reebok, to send athletes to

³⁶¹ Joshua Shen, "Harlem Globetrotting: Basketballers Help Embassies Reach Out to Youth," *State Magazine*, December 2017, 9.

³⁶² Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks on the Launching of the Women's World Cup Initiative" (speech, Washington, D.C., June 6, 2011), U.S. Department of State, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2011/06/165054.htm>.

conduct basketball clinics for youth in Nigeria, Senegal, and Algeria. Nigerian-born NBA player Obinna Ekezie directed the first clinic run by the ECA in Nigeria in August 2005, while NBA journeyman Jim Jackson (then with the Phoenix Suns) and Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) legend Cynthia Cooper went to Senegal to conduct basketball clinics for Senegalese youth in September 2005. WNBA All-Stars Shameka Christon and Andrea Stinson, along with NBA veteran Sam Perkins, finished the trifecta of tours for children aged 7-17 in the Algerian cities of Algiers and Tipaza. Over the course of the three tours, the WNBA reported that "more than 12,000 youth in Nigeria, Senegal, and Algeria have received new basketball shoes as part of this initiative."³⁶³

The ECA has recruited high-profile American athletes to participate in such tours, including Hall of Fame baseball player Ken Griffey Jr., seven-time Olympic Gold Medalist swimmer Katie Ledecky, and two-time Olympic Gold Medalist snowboarder Chloe Kim. The star power of these American athletes results in positive outcomes for participants of ECA programs abroad, raising awareness for targeted issues and expanding participation in sports championed by such athletes. When three-time U.S. men's figure skating champion Johnny Weir visited Japan in 2011 to conduct a skating clinic alongside two-time Japanese figure skating world champion Miki Ando, he spoke about his experiences as a gay man and raised awareness for LGBTQ+ issues. One participant at the clinic noted, "It was like a dream to get to talk to Johnny Weir, and it was the first time I ever spoke about LGBT issues with a mixed audience."³⁶⁴ The presence of professional athletes who advocate for such issues provides a more welcoming environment for underrepresented

³⁶³ WNBA, "Christon Handing Out Hoop Tips and Shoes in Algeria," Nov. 28, 2005, <https://www.wnba.com/archive/wnba/liberty/news/SCAlgeria.html>.

³⁶⁴ *State Magazine*, "Ice Skating Clinic Raises Awareness," December 2012, 7.

youth, and the State Department has identified sport as an effective tool to advocate for human rights and create these environments both domestically and internationally.

Much of the success of the Sports Envoy Program owes credit to how the ECA leverages celebrities to attract media attention and enthuse populations in countries that the program's athlete envoys visit. Theoretical research into celebrity diplomacy has explored the effectiveness of such leveraging, as high-profile actors, musicians, authors, and other types of celebrities possess the ability to amplify a wide array of issues to a world audience. However, the role of the professional athlete in this type of diplomacy has been underexplored, primarily as the ECA has employed hundreds of professional athletes to utilize their platforms to raise awareness for issues championed by the State Department. In his book *Celebrity Diplomacy*, political scientist Andrew Cooper briefly touches on the impact athletes have as global personalities, noting that "Sports figures entered the world of universal celebrity in a manner that rivals and sometimes surpasses the glamour of movie stars."³⁶⁵ The combined star power of professional athletes and the sport's unique capability to transcend economic, cultural, and language barriers coalesces into an effective diplomatic tool that can be delivered globally.

Several scholars have argued that athletes operate as celebrities to increase public consciousness, particularly for development issues.³⁶⁶ According to sport sociologist Simon Darnell, programs instituted by the Sports Diplomacy Division's Envoy Program have primarily sent professional athletes to work with children in visiting countries to

³⁶⁵ Andrew F. Cooper, *Celebrity Diplomacy* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 17.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.; Antoaneta M. Vanc, "The Counter-Intuitive Value of Celebrity Athletes as Antidiplomats in Public Diplomacy: Ilie Nastase from Romania and the World of Tennis," *Sport in Society* 17, no. 9 (2014): 1187-1203; Liza Tsaliki, Christos A. Frangonikolopoulos, & Asteris Huliaras, eds., *Transnational Celebrity Activism in Global Politics: Changing the World?* (Bristol, United Kingdom: Intellect Books, 2014); Mark Wheeler, "Celebrity Diplomacy: United Nations' Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace," *Celebrity Studies* 2, no. 1 (2011): 6-18.

“deliver high-impact programming and improve bilateral relations.”³⁶⁷ Contextualizing his views within a Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) framework, Darnell claims that professional athletes “are not only in a position to act as catalysts for change through their activist work but the success of high-profile athletes is also attractive and useful to those working with youth as a way to encourage youth involvement in SDP programmes and pass on the key messages of individual action.”³⁶⁸ Whereas other vehicles of celebrity diplomacy have focused on broader populations within a particular celebrity’s visiting country, the focus on youth engagement and inspiration sets international sports programs apart from more traditional diplomacy programs, especially if a distinguished athlete is present to generate attention for such programs.

The Sports Envoy Program remains one of the bastions of the Sports Diplomacy Division in the 2020s. Karate champion and sport sociologist Soolmaz Abooali notes that athlete involvement in programs like the Sports Envoy Program serves as a form of “meaning-making,” tapping into the unique power that sport possesses to promote the values that diplomats intend to dispatch on the international stage. She notes that sport is effective in “counter stereotypes, assumptions, and imposed or adopted worldviews. Through mass attention and the prevalence of social media in the twenty-first century, they penetrate the public mindset regardless of government opinion.”³⁶⁹ Sport diplomacy is

³⁶⁷ Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, “Sports Envoy Program.”

³⁶⁸ Simon Darnell, *Sport for Development and Peace: A Critical Sociology* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 126.

³⁶⁹ Soolmaz Abooali, “Wrestling with Diplomacy: The United States and Iran,” in *Case Studies in Sport Diplomacy*, eds. Craig Esherrick, Robert E. Baker, Steven J. Jackson, & Michael P. Sam (Morgantown, WV: FiT Publishing, 2017), 147.

evolutionary and habitually transforms to meet the needs of the participating organizations and the global environment in which it is situated.

Not only do specific programs devote exceptional time and effort when envoys are present in a unique community, but efforts to build legacies through subsequent programming and funding are a priority for the ECA and State Department. For instance, tennis stars Venus and Serena Williams promoted the revitalization of the Naija Girls Got It project when they visited Lagos, Nigeria, in late October 2012, which “combines athletics and leadership skills to encourage girls to challenge harmful traditions that impede their physical and mental development.”³⁷⁰ Following the visit’s success, the U.S. Consulate in Lagos and its partners sought to expand the Naija Girls Got It project to encourage Nigerian girls “to participate in sports, excel in education and pursue their full potential.”³⁷¹ The visits are designed to catalyze permanent, local programs that can continue providing positive outcomes for children and teens within these communities.

Many envoy visits have focused on promoting sport within underserved communities worldwide, especially within disability rights. Paralympian wheelchair basketball Gold Medalist Dr. Andrea Woodson-Smith, along with Dr. Becky Clark, traveled to Guangzhou, China, in 2013 as the first Sports Envoys with disabilities. Woodson-Smith recounts, “The purpose of this trip was to promote inclusion and equality of persons with disabilities, especially women and girls in sports, and to discuss disability policy with Chinese leadership.”³⁷² In addition, Paralympians such as Lonnie Hannah and Bradley Emmerson (sledge hockey) and John Register (swimming, track & field) have

³⁷⁰ *State Magazine*, “Tennis Stars Launch Girls’ Project in Nigeria,” January 2013, 4.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

³⁷² Andrea Woodson-Smith, “My Life as a Sports Envoy,” *Sportanddev.org*, July 15, 2020, <https://www.sportanddev.org/en/article/news/my-life-sports-envoy>, para. 4.

each traveled for tours representing the U.S. State Department to promote and advocate for disability rights in and out of sport. Discussing the importance of fostering disability rights through public diplomacy, Register explains:

What we're there for in the first place, to try to open up doors and open up thoughts around people with disabilities ... It's really putting these things in practice because there's some value that we're missing if we can't get people just into the door and you don't have to say a word about it, it's just there right in front of you, and we struggle with it. And we do that with so many things. And I think that is why these programs that we have that State has, are so critical for not only our country, but for us to learn around the world.³⁷³

In 2020, the ECA commemorated the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) with a slew of programs celebrating the landmark legislation. While sport is not explicitly mentioned in the 1990 act, practitioners of sport diplomacy programs have expressed appreciation for sport's innate capability to operate as a universal language and promote inclusion among adults, youth with disabilities, and other underserved groups. Bolton notes, "We find that involving disability serving organizations and people with disabilities in design, implementation, and follow-up is an effective way to lead by example and communicate the hurdles and triumphs of inclusion in the United States."³⁷⁴ Partnering with specific organizations and foundations that focus on disability rights is critical to the success of such programs.

This emphasis on disability rights also manifests itself in the Sports Visitor Program, which will be detailed in the next section. Amal Amjahid, a Brazilian jiu-jitsu black belt who participated in a Sports Visitor exchange in February 2020, found that one

³⁷³ John Register, interview with Chris Wurst, 22.33, podcast audio, July 24, 2020, <https://anchor.fm/2233/episodes/Showing-Your-Metal---John-Register-eh59u0>.

³⁷⁴ Trina Bolton, "Dignity for All Through Sports," *Sportanddev.org*, Nov. 27, 2020, <https://www.sportanddev.org/en/article/news/dignity-all-through-sports>, paras. 14-15.

of the greatest strengths in designing clinics and sessions for sport practitioners with disabilities is the information disseminated applied to programs for both disabled and able-bodied athletes. She notes that providing this degree of inclusion can empower instructors to “transcend their disability.”³⁷⁵ Each pillar of the Sports Diplomacy Division configures programs revolving around various issues, including disability rights, to produce rewarding outcomes for adults, teens, and children at all levels of the sporting experience.

SPORTS VISITOR PROGRAM

While the Sports Envoy program primarily focuses on utilizing the expertise of elite athletes and coaches in programs offered outside the U.S., the Sports Visitor Program provides the flip side of the Envoys program by inviting non-elite participants to the U.S. to not only engage in sport programs but to also taste American culture and lifestyle through both sport and non-sport experiences firsthand. The Sports Visitor Program operates under a cooperative agreement between the ECA and Family Health International (FHI 360). This nonprofit human development organization administers projects chiefly relating to public health and international development. Within FHI 360 is a department designated Global Connections, which is the primary arm of the organization that works with the ECA “...to develop high-level, innovative international exchange programs for emerging leaders from around the globe and across a wide range of disciplines and sectors; including sports programs.”³⁷⁶ The program is constructed to advance the values and foreign policy priorities of the U.S. State Department and its embassies.

³⁷⁵ Amal Amjahid & Mable Nedziwe, “Perspectives on the Americans with Disabilities Act and Adaptive Sports from Zambia and Belgium,” *Sportanddev.org*, August 4, 2020, <https://www.sportanddev.org/en/article/news/perspectives-americans-disabilities-act-and-adaptive-sports-zambia-and-belgium>, para. 18.

³⁷⁶ Sports Visitor Program, “About,” accessed September 21, 2021, <https://sportsvisitor.org/about>.

This pillar of the Sports Diplomacy Division has received high praise from participants and organizers alike. A December 2020 evaluation report from the Evaluation Division of the ECA found that the Sports Visitor Program was “well-run, well-regarded, and highly impactful, as reported by participants. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive and painted a picture of the experience as one that benefited alumni both personally and professionally in meaningful and lasting ways.”³⁷⁷ The program maximizes its value by offering sport-related content, building leadership and communication skills, promoting cross-cultural understanding, and immersing into American culture through guided tours, attending professional and collegiate sporting events, and informal interactions with American citizens.

Each visit made by these non-elite participants, which include youth athletes, coaches, and sport administrators, generally lasts for two weeks within one or multiple cities throughout the U.S.³⁷⁸ A typical program outline consists of a vast selection of activities, including active sports sessions, volunteering, workshops, and classroom sessions, and visiting American cultural sites. Groups may be composed of participants from a single country outside the U.S. or in multiple-country cohorts. One unique aspect that applies to 68 percent of program participants is the opportunity to experience the U.S. from the perspective of a host family.

The benefits of this arrangement are widespread among all parties, allowing participants to interact directly with “average” Americans in an informal and inviting

³⁷⁷ Evaluation Division, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, *Evaluation Report, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Sports Visitor Program*, December 2020, https://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/sports_visitor_program_evaluation_report_final_december_2020.pdf, iv-v.

³⁷⁸ According to the ECA’s Evaluation Division, 73 percent of programs included visiting multiple cities FY 2017 and FY 2018. For more, see *Ibid.*, 7.

setting and for hosts to learn about different cultures through a multicultural lens. Speaking of the comforts a host family could provide, one youth participant from Haiti noted that the arrangement also provided an opportunity to strengthen English-speaking skills. They state, “My host family was Jamaican and they knew about the Haitian culture. It was like we’d already met. My English was not very good at the time, so it was a good opportunity for me to have full immersion and be challenged in speaking English.”³⁷⁹ This example shows that participants enter this program with expectations of what they anticipate gaining from the two-week exchange but come away from a particular experience finding that previously unidentified advantages, like strengthening language skills, can also be gained from the experience.

The program content and organizational objectives of the Sports Visitor Program significantly overlap with those of the International Sports Programming Initiative (ISPI). Both programs implement sport-based exchange programs that align with the goals of the U.S. State Department and other special initiatives, which vary by program. These can include (but are not limited to) the promotion of disability rights, countering violent extremism, mental health and well-being, and empowering girls and women in sport. These programs also primarily invite non-elite athletes and coaches to the U.S. to participate in workshops, clinics, camps, and American sport and non-sport cultural activities, as explained above. In addition, both programs rely heavily on goals and objectives set by the State Department and participating U.S. embassies, which vary based on the countries involved, relevant U.S. foreign policy objectives, and the participants’ demographics.

As similar as these programs seem, each shares several key differences. While the State Department provides the primary source of funding and grants for both programs, the

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 11.

decision(s) on how to disburse that money across activities is administrated by different parties. Whereas the ECA and Sports Diplomacy Division staff are more intimately involved with the Sports Envoy and Sports Visitors Programs, ISPI distributes control of programs to participating grant-winners, which primarily consist of U.S.-based non-profit organizations, such as institutions of higher learning, non-governmental organizations, and charities. The following section features a brief description of ISPI, formerly Sports Grants.

SPORTS GRANTS AND THE INTERNATIONAL SPORTS PROGRAMMING INITIATIVE

The third pillar of the Sports Diplomacy Division is the International Sports Programming Initiative (ISPI), which is an open-grant competition designed for U.S. public and private 501(c)(3) organizations to submit applications to receive funding to conduct people-to-people exchange programs revolving around sport.³⁸⁰ The Sports Diplomacy Division receives funding directly from Congress to implement a planned number of international sports exchange programs each year. According to the ECA's website, the initiative "uses sports to help underserved youth around the world develop important leadership skills, achieve academic success, promote tolerance and respect for diversity, and positively contribute to their home and host communities."³⁸¹ Examples of programs that fit the ECA's standard of people-to-people exchange programs include

³⁸⁰ A 501(c)(3) organization, commonly referred to as a "charitable organization," is one that is tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. To identify as a 501(c)(3) organization, the organization must "be organized and operated exclusively for exempt purposes set forth in section 501(c)(3), and none of its earnings may inure to any private shareholder or individual. In addition ... it may not attempt to influence legislation as a substantial part of its activities and it may not participate in any campaign activity for or against political candidates." For more, see "Exemption Requirements - 501(c)(3) Organizations," Internal Revenue Service, Feb. 17, 2022, <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/exemption-requirements-501c3-organizations>.

³⁸¹ Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, "International Sports Programming Initiative (ISPI)," accessed September 25, 2021, <https://eca.state.gov/programs-initiatives/initiatives/sports-diplomacy/international-sports-programming-initiative>.

“structured mentoring programs, small grant competitions, alumni reunions or workshops, monthly web discussions, reverse exchanges, cooperative publications by participants and their American peers, and distance learning opportunities for alumni.”³⁸²

As mentioned in the previous section, the 501(c)(3) organizations that win grants to administrate these exchanges are the primary executors of the programs implemented instead of the ECA itself. According to Bolton, the advantages of this program composition are manifold. While several arms of the State Department, including embassies, are closely involved, Bolton contends that ISPI is a “way to contract out a little bit more, expand our network, and really leverage the expertise of American organizations involved in sport for social change.”³⁸³ Allowing for this more “hands-off” approach provides American organizations the agency to implement sport diplomacy programs from perspectives that the Department of State may not have considered.

Grant recipients also have the privilege of working with partner institutions already on the ground in the selected host countries. Partner organizations are selected by either the grant recipient, the U.S. embassy in the host country, or the State Department. For example, the University of Montana’s Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center directly implemented two programs in Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) in 2018 and Peru in 2019. Program manager Heidi Blair notes that the direction of these programs, including which organizations are involved, is decided on a case-by-case basis, usually with the embassy’s priorities in the forefront. “We listened to what [the State Department’s] priorities were. Sometimes there’s more clear direction than others where

³⁸² Office of Citizen Exchanges: Sports Diplomacy Division. *Project Objectives, Goals, and Implementation (POGI) FY 2020 INTERNATIONAL SPORTS PROGRAMMING INITIATIVE (ISPI)*, accessed February 11, 2023. https://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/fy20_ispi_pogi.pdf.

³⁸³ Bolton, “Sports Diplomacy as a Key Tool in U.S. Foreign Policy,” 16:55.

they already have a partner institution picked out, so it could come about in many different ways, but it's ultimately a collaborative decision with the embassies leading the way.”³⁸⁴ While partner organizations prioritize their own organizational goals, their presence also benefits visiting diplomats by acquainting them with the local environment and cooperating to discover and achieve bilateral objectives.

One of the most successful programs to operate sport diplomacy programs using ISPI money is George Mason University's (GMU) Center for Sport Management, which utilized over USD 7 million in grants from 2009 to 2018 and hosted over 1,200 participants from 81 countries. Program director Dr. Robert E. Baker notes that while the number of funds was substantial, the program followed strict procedures to maximize efficiency. “We made some long-term partners, we got a lot of donations... we made each dollar go really far, which then comes back to the Department of State as the bang-for-the-buck they're spending was really significant.”³⁸⁵ Programs like GMU's Center for Sport Management exemplify how the ECA can efficiently outsource programming that suits the division's goals in a cost-effective and mission-specific manner.

Unlike the Sports Envoy and Sports Visitor Programs, ISPI has undergone several transformations since its inception in 2005. In its first decade, ISPI offered any non-governmental organization the opportunity to apply for open competition grants (typically valued between USD 60,000 and 225,000) by submitting proposals for sport diplomacy projects in specified geographic regions selected by the ECA. Grant proposals were required to include an application, a budget narrative, a project narrative, and budget information that lined out all estimated expenses, including for (but not limited to)

³⁸⁴ Heidi Blair, interview with author, video phone call, June 18, 2021.

³⁸⁵ Dr. Robert E. Baker, interview with author, video phone call, June 22, 2021.

personnel, travel, equipment, and supplies. Until 2014, the estimated program funding for these grants totaled \$1.8 million and was usually split between 10 organizations.³⁸⁶ According to Bolton, the ECA typically receives 70 to 80 applications in its annual notice. While organizations are asked to submit original program plans as part of the grant process, the ECA has the right to make any modifications to the program that suit its objectives.

The State Department's methodology in awarding grants was redesigned in 2014 when it began to offer larger grants to fewer entities. These new grants range from \$700,000 to \$2.1 million, but the distribution of this compensation is typically split among fewer entities. According to Ryan Murphy, Program Officer at the Sports Diplomacy Division, the shift was considered a "blessing and a curse ... It can be great to mix it up and get new organizations involved ... but the amount of funding did not change."³⁸⁷ Due to the increased number of grants, recipients must have 501(c)(3) certification and an established track record in conducting exchange projects.³⁸⁸ This increased level of credentials allows more freedom for the Sports Diplomacy Division to entrust programming to the hands of established organizations, reducing the time needed to train and supervise grant recipients.

Recipients of these cooperative grants are also required to have sub-awardees who work in concert with recipients to provide specialized knowledge of the sponsored sport,

³⁸⁶ *Grants.gov*, "ECA-PE-C-SU-12-15 International Sports Programming Initiative (ISPI) Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs," December 16, 2011, <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppId=134573>.

³⁸⁷ Ryan Murphy, interview with author, telephone call, July 13, 2021.

³⁸⁸ The ECA requires a minimum of four years of conducting exchanges for organizations to be considered the total grant amount. According to the FY21 ISPI open grant solicitation, "Bureau grant guidelines require that organizations with less than four years of experience in conducting international exchanges be limited to \$130,000 in Bureau funding." See *Grants.gov*, "SFOP0007532 FY 2021 International Sports Programming Initiative," January 7, 2021, <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppId=330746>.

region, and organizations involved in the program. Kelsey Stamm Jimenez, Director of International Programs at the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center at the University of Montana, notes that developing relationships with embassies and other regional partners is hugely beneficial. “It’s certainly easier from our end, but when they’re involved, they can recommend good partners, they can recommend activities or locations... they have access in a way that we don’t have access, and it’s different from the kind of access that a local partner might have.”³⁸⁹

The length and scope of each grant also transformed following the ECA’s redesign. In contrast to how exchanges were conducted before 2014, grant recipients no longer target specific countries in which to run their programs. Instead, the ECA awards grants to institutions to execute programs with a broader regional focus. This allows grant recipients to expand programming within a broader geographic scope. Grants typically have a two-year lifecycle, but extensions due to outside factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, may lead to the approval of a third year. Due to this expanded focus and extended lifespan of grants, only eight grants are active at any given time. Bolton notes that despite the limited number of active programs in operation, extraordinary progress is made to achieve the program’s goals. “They are pretty sophisticated programs. They are full-fledged two-way exchanges, where there is a whole delegation that goes overseas, and there’s a whole international group that comes over. They do multi-city stuff. So that’s where ISPI stands now.”³⁹⁰ As ISPI continuously evolves and regulates its scope to achieve its foreign policy goals, the mission remains to reach and serve as many underserved global youths as possible and propagate the positive values of sporting programs.

³⁸⁹ Kelsey Stamm Jimenez, interview with author, telephone call, June 28, 2021.

³⁹⁰ Trina Bolton, interview with author, telephone call, June 19, 2021.

THE GLOBAL SPORTS MENTORING PROGRAM AND EMPOWER WOMEN THROUGH SPORTS

The final and newest pillar of the Sports Diplomacy Division is the Global Sports Mentoring Program (GSMP), which commenced with the primary vision of advancing gender equality through the Empowering Women through Sports program. Introduced in 2012 by then-Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, the program utilizes mentorship opportunities. It mobilizes the ECA's Sports Envoys and Sports Visitors programs to empower marginalized populations through sport. The program was rooted in a partnership between the Sports Diplomacy Division (then-SportsUnited) and the Secretary of State's Office of Global Women's Issues. In her remarks introducing the GSMP, Clinton established the vision of the program:

Our goal is to identify women worldwide who are emerging leaders in sports: coaches, managers, administrators, sports journalists, marketers, and then match them with American women who are the top leaders in these fields. Through mentoring and networking, we want to support the rise of women sports leaders abroad, who, in turn, can help nurture the next generation of girl and women athletes.³⁹¹

Consistent with the program's inaugural aims, the GSMP continues to pair foreign sport leaders with female executives twice annually to build strong mentoring relationships. The program has recruited mentors across several categories of sport enterprises. It has also partnered with espnW, ESPN's media platform for female athletes and fans, to recruit executive-level women to fill these roles. The cohorts of 16 to 17 sport leaders spend five weeks in the U.S. to learn how to develop and empower their local communities through sport. GSMP participants are nominated by staff members at U.S. global embassies and are "typically between 25 and 40 years of age, proficient in English,

³⁹¹ U.S. Department of State, "Secretary Clinton Empowers Women and Girls Through Sports." YouTube, June 21, 2012, 5:10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4z1hXIZGfTw>.

and have three or more years of work or volunteer experience with a sport-based development program or organization.”³⁹²

Ashleigh Huffman, former co-director of the GSMP, notes that individuals are recruited from diversified specialized backgrounds. “It’s incredible to see the crossover that doesn’t necessarily have to be a sports organization, but the power of sport and athlete-to-athlete, former athlete-to-athlete, that connection that’s developed. When you put two women on a mission, it’s unstoppable.”³⁹³ Throughout the five-week cycle, delegates work alongside mentors and accumulate skills and connections from American sport organizations. They also typically spend time developing an action plan to confront challenges in their home programs and develop solutions to utilize sport to improve the lives of the marginalized communities they serve.

One aspect that epitomizes the success of the GSMP’s Empowering Women through Sports program is its recruitment of high-profile women’s sports stars, including (but not limited to) Olympic Gold Medalists and World Cup winners. For example, Olympic Gold Medalists and FIFA World Cup champions Julie Foudy and Brandi Chastain traveled to São Paulo, Brazil, in 2013 to conduct a series of soccer clinics for young girls while promoting GSMP objectives, such as health promotion and inclusion, through informative sessions. Foudy stresses that the envoys did not travel to Brazil to rub elbows with six-time FIFA World Player of the Year, Marta Vieira da Silva, but rather “to

³⁹² Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, “Global Sports Mentoring Program,” accessed September 18, 2021, <https://globalsportsmentoring.org/global-sports-mentoring-program/>.

³⁹³ Ashleigh Huffman, interviewed by Jennifer Simpson Carr, “Creating Sustainable Models for Social Change with Ashleigh Huffman, Ph.D., U.S. State Department,” *JD Supra*, Oct. 28, 2020, <https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/creating-sustainable-models-for-social-95600/>.

encourage Brazil to support programs that would help produce the next million Martas.”³⁹⁴ By directing programs with stars such as Foudy and Chastain, female participation in soccer results in pronounced boosts. As State Department program officer Matt Ferner emphasizes, “These programs provided many girls with their first experiences of being coached by women or participating in organized, all-girls sporting events.”³⁹⁵ While the increased number of girls playing soccer is propitious, the overall objective of female empowerment provides ripple effects that offer substantial benefits outside of sport.

Aside from the Empowering Women through Sports program, State Department initiatives to combat gender-based violence are also implemented through sport diplomacy programs. The U.S. Mission in India, an arm of the U.S. embassy in New Delhi that conducts sports exchange programs, has implemented programs addressing the role men and boys can play in combating gender-based violence. In particular, its 2015 “Hero Project” attempted to confront the relationship between masculinity and violence by implementing small-scale projects to improve the safety of girls and women in local communities. Salman Khan, a political officer for the embassy, notes, “Some male beneficiaries of the program developed action plans to reduce alcoholism in their communities, involve girls in sports programs, and ensure women’s safety and equality.”³⁹⁶ Through such examples, both men and women can promote inclusion in sports and within the broader communities in which they live.

³⁹⁴ Amanda DeCastro, “Julie Foudy spreads love for women’s soccer in Brazil and the U.S.,” *ESPN Front Row*, June 17, 2013, <https://www.espnfrontrow.com/2013/06/julie-foudy-spreads-love-for-womens-soccer-in-brazil-and-the-u-s>, para. 2.

³⁹⁵ Matt Ferner, “Goal!!! Sports Diplomacy Scores Big for Mission,” *State Magazine*, October 2014, 8.

³⁹⁶ Salman Khan, “Timely Focus: Mission Promotes Gender Equality in India,” *State Magazine*, May 2015, 42.

The program's continued success is reflected in the women who have completed the five-week mentorship, as well as those who have marked progression in action plans they developed while in the U.S. According to Huffman, "The success rate for implementation — the number of people who have implemented at least one phase of their action plan — is 92%. The ripple effect of the program is a huge investment."³⁹⁷ Program alumnae, such as Carla Bustamante, the first-ever female public relations director for the Naranjeros de Hermosillo Baseball Club in Mexico, convey the tremendous benefits of working closely with mentors and assessing new ones approaches to sport development in their home countries. Bustamante summates, "I now see the world in a different way. I want to continue inspiring women in my region to take on sports careers, despite the stereotypes and obstacles."³⁹⁸ The capability of the GSMP to establish and maintain connections with these global sports leaders is evident, and the legacies of program impact are just as important, if not more important, than the programs themselves. This will be discussed in length later in this chapter.

Starting in 2016, a second pillar of the GSMP was introduced to include a component to advocate for disability rights and destigmatize disability in sports. The Sport for Community (S4C) program launched in 2016 using the same mentorship model championed by the Empowering Women through Sports program, pairing disability rights advocates and executives with professionals from U.S. organizations in this field. As Bolton notes, S4C employs an identical five-week program outline like the Empowering Women through Sports program but also works to provide "...opportunities for

³⁹⁷ Huffman, interviewed by Simpson Carr, "Creating Sustainable Models for Social Change with Ashleigh Huffman, Ph.D., U.S. State Department."

³⁹⁸ Henry Baker, "Hermosillo: Consulate Confronts Great Promise and Striking Complexities," *State Magazine*, March 2018, 30.

underserved communities in sports: not just participation, but also at the leadership level.”³⁹⁹ In contrast to the previously mentioned diplomatic programs conducted by Sports Envoys and Sports Visitors, S4C commits its resources to host delegates involved in disability sport programs from outside the U.S. For five weeks, mentorship and workshop activities seek to disseminate relevant skills and strategies that the delegates can apply to their own programs.

The GSMP has maintained a cooperative partnership with the University of Tennessee’s Center for Sport, Peace, and Society (CSPS) since its inception in 2012. The CSPS, founded and directed by Dr. Sarah Hillyer, is “a social enterprise committed to creating a more peaceful, equitable, and inclusive world through sport-based social innovation.”⁴⁰⁰ Through leadership programs, international outreach, storytelling projects, and scholarly research, the CSPS has “impacted more than 400,000 women and girls, persons with disabilities, refugees, and people from marginalized populations worldwide.”⁴⁰¹ The center leverages a partnership with the Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame, also located in Knoxville, to assist with facilities and administrative tasks. According to Hillyer, this allows the CSPS to focus “...on the relationships, the content, the curriculum, the human side of things, instead of us being buried in administrative tasks. I think that’s why we’re able to make such a crazy impact because we just get to do what we do best, which is help transform lives.”⁴⁰² The CSPS also manages a separate grant

³⁹⁹ Bolton, “Sports Diplomacy as a Key Tool in U.S. Foreign Policy,” 20:35.

⁴⁰⁰ Center for Sport, Peace, & Society, *2020 Annual Report: Center for Sport, Peace, & Society* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee, 2020), http://sportandpeace.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2020/11/CSPS_AnnualReport_2020-SinglePage.pdf, 6.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁰² Dr. Sarah Hillyer, interview with author, video phone call, July 22, 2021.

program to directly support initiatives spurred by alums of the GSMP program, distributing USD 381,500 in 2020.

Hillyer emphasizes the interdisciplinary approach that not only drives the center's success but also sport diplomacy more broadly:

We are tackling really pressing, complex social issues. In order to solve those, sport in and of itself is not going to solve that ... Just like a basketball team, we're not going to put five point guards on the floor. We're going to put different strengths and different looks. So we're going to work with journalists and business students and sport management students and therapeutic recreation and political science ... because when they come together, they rally around the project-based work.⁴⁰³

The importance of this statement is self-evident, as the diversity of skill sets that can introduce new approaches to challenging issues in sport diplomacy can simultaneously merge and thrive in various settings. However, this perspective also blends the future views of practitioners and academics, which is a critical collaboration to consider as each aspires to implement interdisciplinary approaches to meet the challenges of sport diplomacy in the twenty-first century.⁴⁰⁴

EVALUATION METHODS OF SPORTS DIPLOMACY DIVISION PROGRAMMING

One method of evaluating post-program impact shared across all Sports Diplomacy Division programming is the publicization of program accomplishments. Lined out in the ISPI Project Objectives, Goals, and Implementation (POGI) guidelines, award recipients are expected to “Develop and implement a media and marketing plan that includes, but is not limited to, program branding, press strategy, press/media packets, program website and

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ See Murray, *Sports Diplomacy*.

social media plan.”⁴⁰⁵ Due to the Sports Diplomacy Division’s limited full-time staff, the department’s ability to promote its many programs is limited and requires creative and cost-effective measures. This not only helps promulgate the mission of the Sports Diplomacy Division, but it also helps attract potential sponsors and legitimize programming for lawmakers, leading to continued or increasing governmental spending on sport diplomacy programs. As Hillyer emphasizes, “We have to tell the story; if no one knows the story, no one is going to invest in it.”⁴⁰⁶

The Sports Diplomacy Division promotes people-to-people programming through its websites, educational events, and traditional media, such as newspapers and radio. One method increasingly utilized in the 2010s is promoting programming through social media. For example, a 2015 article by sport for development scholars Carrie W. LeCrom and Brendan Dwyer praises *Facebook* as a platform that significantly drives engagement before, during, and after events. “The story-telling ability of blogs with a strong audience response feature has really worked well to help document and even narrate the experience. Pictures and short narratives from participants are easily uploaded to the web. Even video options are available.”⁴⁰⁷ While Facebook remains a popular tool for both current and former participants of programs, platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram, have also become popular options in the 2020s.

Dave Moyer, then-assistant information officer at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, notes that his department’s approach to social media is to “use lighter postings about

⁴⁰⁵ *Project Objectives, Goals, and Implementation (POGI) FY 2020 INTERNATIONAL SPORTS PROGRAMMING INITIATIVE (ISPI)*, 2.

⁴⁰⁶ Dr. Sarah Hillyer, interview with author, video phone call, July 22, 2021.

⁴⁰⁷ Carrie W. LeCrom & Brendan Dwyer, “From Evaluator to Insider: An Academic’s Guide to Managing Sport for Development Programmes,” *Sport in Society* 18, no. 6 (2015): 652-668.

sports and culture as a sort of ‘candy’ to attract new followers to whom we then feed healthy portions of ‘vegetables,’ or policy messages.”⁴⁰⁸ While the strategies and platforms for promoting programming have evolved since the Sports Diplomacy Division’s inception, the messaging has remained consistent: sport possesses enormous power to bridge cultural and linguistic barriers, promote mutual understanding, and connect people with different backgrounds to pursue common goals.

The overall impact of programs implemented by the ECA and the Sports Diplomacy Division cannot be understated by program officers, lawmakers, grant recipients, scholars, and participants. Firmly established as a hallmark of the ECA, the Sports Diplomacy Division has garnered widespread acclaim for its capacity to improve relationships between nations and their citizens. In the programs she leads at CSPS, Hillyer emphasizes the power of physical activity and sport in bringing disparate peoples together, summing up, “When we sweat together, and we share something together, and we’re playing by the same rules, and we’re vulnerable together in sport, it gives us a reason, and emotional connection to then become an advocate for someone different than us.”⁴⁰⁹ Speaking specifically about the Sports Envoy program, Woodson-Smith expresses that such programs are crucial since they can provide “an opportunity for countries to engage in strategies, increase inclusion within their organizations and agencies. It creates so much growth in people and communities as a whole.”⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁸ Dave Moyer, “Winning Combo: The Right Mix of Content is Key to Social Media Success in Mexico,” *State Magazine*, October 2014, 5.

⁴⁰⁹ Dr. Sarah Hillyer, interview with author, video phone call, July 22, 2021.

⁴¹⁰ Woodson-Smith, “My Life as a Sports Envoy.”

LeCrom and Dwyer analyze this sentiment on an individual level, emphasizing the effectiveness that “plus-sport” initiatives have in sports exchanges:

Simply by being present and observing or interacting with sport in another country, one can see and learn much about that society’s culture. The relationships between coaches and players, the communication that occurs, and even the style of play depicted on the field can teach participants as much, if not more, about a country’s society, than a more formal setting might. This research indicates that sport can serve as an even greater social tool in educating others on cultural understanding and awareness.⁴¹¹

Simply engaging in the same space as those from cultures different than one’s own can make for a practical cultural immersion experience, no matter how much time is spent in this space. Blair mentions in her experiences as an exchange program manager, the impact cannot be immediately measured but instantly perceived:

I’ve heard people say things like, “Wow, I am so surprised how similar I am to this person from this place that’s so different.” ... That stuff is powerful because people share those experiences with those around them, and hopefully then that shapes their perception of anyone who’s different from them because then they have that point of reference of, like, “I really bonded with this person who I didn’t know I would have anything in common with.” Maybe that can happen over and over.⁴¹²

It is also essential to discuss which aspects of the sports exchange experience have the most significant impact. A typical sports exchange can range from several days to several weeks, and the diversity in experiences that hosts and visitors partake in is abundant, both within and outside of sport. For example, LeCrom and Dwyer note that “the greatest transformation of cultural understanding took place in the host families’ home.”⁴¹³ As participants explore new countries through sports exchange programs, it is pivotal to

⁴¹¹ Carrie W. LeCrom & Brendan Dwyer, “Plus-Sport: The Impact of a Cross-Cultural Soccer Coaching Exchange,” *Journal of Sport for Development* 1, no. 2 (2013), 11.

⁴¹² Heidi Blair, interview with author, video phone call, June 18, 2021.

⁴¹³ LeCrom & Dwyer, “Plus-Sport,” 6.

highlight that cultural integration occurs not only on the field, in the gym, or on the pitch. In addition to staying with host families, successful programs implemented by the Sports Diplomacy Division also allocate time for participants to attend professional and collegiate sporting events, explore local landmarks and historical exhibits, and engage in other sport and non-sport cultural activities as decided by program officers and host families.

For others, including Hillyer, substantial effects resonate after participants complete exchange programs, noting that participants who completed programs sponsored by the GSMP and CSPS gain access to a wealth of resources that help them embark on or improve sport programs in their home countries. ISPI POGI guidelines recommend that program proposals provide plans for follow-up activities to ensure that programs are not one-time occurrences. These include (but are not limited to) “structured mentoring programs, small grant competitions, alumni reunions or workshops, monthly web discussions, reverse exchanges, cooperative publications by participants and their American peers, and distance learning opportunities for alumni.”⁴¹⁴ Discussing the intimate relationships that the CSPS maintains with its alumnae, Hillyer comments, “When we send them home, we stay *so* connected. We’re constantly writing letters of recommendation, helping them with grant submissions, and sending flowers for somebody that passed away.”⁴¹⁵ Keeping in contact with past participants can be a powerful networking tool for both programs and participants.

Following the conclusion of any given program conducted by the Sports Diplomacy Division, various evaluation methods are employed by both program officers and grant recipients to measure the effectiveness of their programs, receive feedback from

⁴¹⁴ *Project Objectives, Goals, and Implementation (POGI) FY 2020 INTERNATIONAL SPORTS PROGRAMMING INITIATIVE (ISPI)*, 3.

⁴¹⁵ Dr. Sarah Hillyer, interview with author, video phone call, July 22, 2021.

participants, and determine what should stay the same and what can be improved. While it is essential to measure program effectiveness, evaluations are also analyzed by lawmakers and fundraisers to justify the continued existence of programs. While some entities measure feedback using qualitative measures, the norm for many evaluators is through surveys. Baker notes that this is partly due to the linguistic barriers inherent in international exchange programs. He explains that his program at George Mason University uses a “Very simplistic evaluation because we’re dealing with 40 different languages and, in some cases, dealing with 14-year-olds. You couldn’t make it complex. We had a pre- and post-test that basically revolved around six or seven points.”⁴¹⁶ Blair also recognizes the difficulty in effectively measuring the impact these programs make, observing intangible benefits attained at a personal level:

The question of measuring impact is a challenging one because I think, just from my experiences as a program manager, I see the impact. I can tell that it’s meaningful just from the friendships that develop, the connections between coaches who start sharing resources or bringing in new ideas, or, at this point, knowing people who were here a few years ago, I still hear from participants who are, like, “That was a life-changing experience.”⁴¹⁷

Within the ECA, the Monitoring Evaluation Learning and Innovation (MELI) Unit is responsible for assessing the efficacy of the department’s programs, utilizing the following “six mutually supporting mechanisms: 1) monitoring, 2) evaluation, 3) promoting learning, 4) capacity-building, 5) facilitation and 6) innovation.”⁴¹⁸ In addition,

⁴¹⁶ Dr. Robert E. Baker, interview with author, video phone call, June 22, 2021.

⁴¹⁷ Heidi Blair, interview with author, video phone call, June 18, 2021.

⁴¹⁸ Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, “ECA Monitoring Evaluation Learning and Innovation (MELI) Unit,” U.S. Department of State, accessed October 10, 2022, <https://eca.state.gov/impact/eca-monitoring-evaluation-learning-and-innovation-meli-unit>.

Bolton points out that the division also employs the expertise of its partners, embassies, and consulates to complement the results obtained by the MELI Unit:

We look at what we've done over one-year, two-year, three-year, four-year... up to ten years. We have a monitoring and evaluation office within the State Department. We have evidence of effectiveness. We have anecdotal and both quantitative and qualitative surveying, follow-on, and tracking from a variety of angles, but in our very microcosmic space. Our Sports Diplomacy Division works with our cooperative grant partners like the University of Tennessee, like FHI 360, to really do the daily, monthly, and yearly surveying and tracking as it relates directly to our programs: what worked, what didn't ...⁴¹⁹

While the individual participant's experiences are both valuable and easily discernible, evaluating success from an international relations perspective may not be immediately identifiable. Due to disparate standards offered in program evaluation and monitoring, a significant challenge people-to-people sport diplomacy efforts face is stressing the importance of success experienced at the programming level to those at the governmental level. This can introduce more substantial challenges when leadership changes, whether at the embassy level or the nation's executive level, occur and diplomatic priorities change. LeCrom notes that programming led by the Sports Diplomacy Division is conducted in two- or four-year cycles, which are occasionally impacted by any leadership changes. "While that, in theory, is not that bad if they just picked up where the other person left off, the problem is, sometimes, priorities of the embassy change. And that can be really problematic."⁴²⁰ This lack of external legitimacy leads to pessimism about why people-to-people sports exchanges should be conducted.

However, as sport scholars Lindsey C. Blom, Paz A. Magat, and Heather L. Dichter note in their article focusing on American sport diplomacy programs in Jordan and

⁴¹⁹ Bolton, "Sports Diplomacy as a Key Tool in U.S. Foreign Policy," 54:55.

⁴²⁰ Dr. Carrie LeCrom, interview with author, telephone call, June 25, 2021.

Tajikistan, a small-scale change implemented by such programs can make substantial ripple effects that allow lawmakers to take notice. They found, “Global power dynamics may not shift, but the understanding of each country’s values may contribute to better diplomatic relations and consideration when addressing challenges of conflict, trade, and migration.”⁴²¹ Whereas people-to-people sports exchange programs, like the ones championed by the Sports Diplomacy Division, emphasize transformational experiences at the individual level, each particular episode can enact meaningful change at higher echelons of social and governmental strata.

There is also hope that positive change at the individual level can affect program participants’ perception of the U.S. and participating countries. A series of wrestling and volleyball exchanges connect the positive shift of perceptions between citizens of the U.S. and Iran through sports exchange programs in 2014 to “a different kind of interaction and competition” occurring as part of the negotiations that eventually led to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran nuclear agreement, in 2015.⁴²² According to Bahman Baktiari, executive director of the Salt Lake City-based nonprofit International Foundation for Civil Society, Iranians who attended a wrestling exhibition in Tehran in May 2014 exhibited a discernible connection with their American guests. “Iranians inside Iran connect with visiting American teams, and this is the only connection they can feel with the United States on their home soil.”⁴²³ Americans

⁴²¹ Blom, Magat, & Dichter, “Grassroots Diplomacy through Coach Education,” 538.

⁴²² Barbara Slavin, “American Athletes Get Star Treatment in Iran,” *Al-Monitor*, July 10, 2014, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/us-athletes-diplomacy-iran.html>, para. 2. The JCPOA was negotiated between the nations of Iran, the European Union, and the P5+1 countries (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and the U.S., along with Germany as the “plus one”).

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, para. 5.

encountered similar sentiments when Iran's national volleyball team visited Los Angeles in August 2014. In addition to exposing Iranian athletes to American styles of play, Baktiari emphasized that the visit said "a lot about the changing atmosphere [toward Iran]."⁴²⁴ Such exchanges exemplify the mantra that small actions can lead to monumental changes. Although evidence that sports exchanges between the U.S. and Iran led to improved relations between the two nations' governments is dubious, the JCPOA was agreed to a year later in Vienna, Austria.

CONCLUSION

The accomplishments of the Sports Diplomacy Division and, more broadly, people-to-people sports exchange programs are undoubtedly worthy of commendation. The department's efforts since its inception in 2005 have set a high standard for how sport can act as a powerful diplomatic tool in an increasingly global landscape. However, practitioners and critics of sports exchange programs have identified several growth areas that can elevate the department's operations to greater heights. As mentioned in the previous section, a lack of external legitimacy can make or break justifications for funding sports exchange programs. Other common critiques of how the Sports Diplomacy Division handles sport diplomacy programs include the under-utilization of already limited funding, ignoring those who could benefit most from such programs, and the extent to which program participants are engaged.

The first common critique involves funding. Utilizing their experiences of U.S. exchanges with Tajikistan, Blom, Paz, and Dichter stress that "For programs to have the greatest potential for impact, however, more frequent funding and support needs to be

⁴²⁴ Barbara Slavin, "Iran, US Try Volleyball Diplomacy," *Al-Monitor*, Aug. 14, 2014, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/08/iran-volleyball-team-united-states-sports-diplomacy.html>, para. 5.

provided for relationship building and contextual understanding trips.”⁴²⁵ When the Sports Diplomacy Division shifted its funding model in 2016, the number of organizations interested in administering people-to-people sports exchange programs increased. Still, the amount of funding approved by U.S. Congress remained the same. Murphy emphasizes that the reduced number of awards resulted in a rejection rate approaching nearly 80 percent, omitting organizations that would be positioned as prime candidates to conduct such programs.

In addition, due to the introduction of more stringent requirements for grant recipients after 2016, many past grant recipients, primarily universities, could no longer fulfill Baker provides an example of how universities like George Mason University could not abide by regulations introduced as part of the Sports Diplomacy Division’s shift: “They needed a group that could do some things that a university couldn’t do, like take money and provide grants to former participants in countries all over the world. [For example,] George Mason University cannot send \$50,000 to a 15-year-old in Iraq. We can’t do it.”⁴²⁶ This change ultimately pushed out several qualified organizations with proven track records of delivering exceptional programming. Some, including George Mason, no longer engage in sports exchange programs through the State Department due to such changes.

Second, some SDP scholars argue that providing rewarding sport experiences may exclude underprivileged populations, depending on the types of organizations that conduct or sponsor events or what program goals are set to be achieved. Sport scholar Bruce Kidd provides examples of programs led by multinational enterprises, fundamentalist churches,

⁴²⁵ Blom, Magat, & Dichter, “Grassroots Diplomacy through Coach Education,” 546.

⁴²⁶ Dr. Robert E. Baker, interview with author, video phone call, June 22, 2021.

and individual entrepreneurs that are limited in scope due to those organizations' self-interest in recruiting or developing experienced athletes. Kidd notes that such programs:

...do little to engage the majority of people who currently have little opportunity to participate in sports, but devote most of their resources to helping the very best athletes and coaches in [low- and middle-income countries] to climb higher up the pyramid ... If sport has the potential to transform entire communities, these programmes do little to fulfill that potential.⁴²⁷

However, even after identifying underprivileged communities that sports exchanges could empower, programs can only succeed if it connects with the target communities or if visiting country leaders are consulted beforehand. SDP scholars Peter Donnelly, Michael Atkinson, Sarah Boyle, and Courtney Szto note that SDP programs have been criticized as “neocolonialist ... reproducing the patronising principle that the former colonisers still ‘know best’ what is needed.”⁴²⁸ One astounding example that follows this interpretation occurred when Olympic gold medalist rower Matt Deakin visited Burkina Faso, a landlocked country, in 2013. Framing his Olympic experience stressing the importance of values such as perseverance and teamwork during his team’s gold medal win in Athens, Greece, in 2004, such lessons led his audiences astray, considering most youths in the country had little to no experience with water sports. However, during one of Deakin’s interviews, a man named Moustapha Thiombiano, director of a local radio station, provided an isolated model from the rest of Deakin’s congregation by “displaying his rowing medals and speaking fondly of his time in the United States.”⁴²⁹ Examples such as these beg the question of who stands to benefit from the expertise and personal experiences

⁴²⁷ Kidd, “A New Social Movement,” 372.

⁴²⁸ Donnelly et al., “Sport for Development and Peace,” 597.

⁴²⁹ LaSean Brown, “Going Gold DS Agent’s Olympic Win Motivates Youth,” *State Magazine*, October 2013, 31.

of sports envoys – those who have previously benefitted from sporting experiences or those who have yet to be inspired.

Finally, the extent to which program participants are engaged with Sports Diplomacy Division programming is disputable. Initially introduced by psychologist Gordon Allport, the concept of “contact theory” theorized that, under appropriate conditions, prejudice “may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports ...”⁴³⁰ However, scholars such as Hillyer believe that the mere fact of exposing sports exchange participants to American culture falls short of what programs initially seek to achieve:

We’re just exposing them, but we’re not equipping them or engaging them in a way where there’s real intentionality around the reciprocity of knowledge exchange ... The answer is for them to go home transformed and equipped and empowered to bring some of the lessons that they can learn ... It is going far beyond contact theory, which I think is where sports diplomacy often fails: We just see it as contact theory. That if we just bring people and they meet without any intentionality around what we’re going to get out of that meeting and how we’re going to leverage it, I think we’re missing the boat.⁴³¹

Despite these criticisms, the prestige of people-to-people sports exchanges conducted by the Sports Diplomacy Division is legitimate. In Murphy’s words, the constant evolution of the department “Tells the story of where we are and where we fit in the foreign landscape.”⁴³² He also notes that similar departments worldwide have consulted with the ECA on how to build their own sport diplomacy programs.

⁴³⁰ Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1954), 281.

⁴³¹ Dr. Sarah Hillyer, interview with author, video phone call, July 22, 2021.

⁴³² Ryan Murphy, interview with author, telephone phone call, July 13, 2021.

Potential solutions have been proposed to combat the shortcomings of people-to-people sports exchanges. Sport policy is not centralized in the U.S. like in many other national governments. Any national decisions related to sport, whether it concerns the Olympic Games or policies on physical health promotion, do not have authoritative decision-making mechanisms at the federal level. Although the Sports Diplomacy Division is not directly involved with decisions related to the Olympic Games, the department convened at the behest of the federal government to discuss issues surrounding a potential boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games, which involved discussions of the Olympic Truce and other problems stemming from a possible boycott.

However, some practitioners of sports diplomacy programs have expressed interest in formalizing U.S. sport diplomacy. Conceding that such action would prove complicated, Bolton believes a department with equal numbers of sport policy professionals and experts in people-to-people exchanges would be ideal at the federal level. “I feel like there’s so many organizations and people doing it now, [that] we would have more power if we were under one umbrella.”⁴³³ Sport historian Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff also praises the efficiency of a formalized sport diplomacy policy. She states, “Because once it becomes part of policy, it becomes part of ingrained strategy. It is something that can be continuously, if not financially supported, then there’s at least some continuity there.”⁴³⁴ Such efforts to involve diplomatic initiatives in the policymaking process will require further discussion and approval from lawmakers, practitioners, and scholars alike.

No matter what the structure of the Sports Diplomacy Division looks like in the future, the mission of people-to-people sports exchanges remains: to develop relationships

⁴³³ Trina Bolton, interview with author, telephone call, June 19, 2021.

⁴³⁴ Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff, interview with author, telephone call, August 11, 2021.

between Americans and citizens from nations worldwide by sharing a common goal through sports. When stressing the unique power of diplomatic efforts' involving people-to-people sports programs, Esherick sums up the overall outlook of these exchanges by emphasizing, "These are normal people. These are not diplomats. These are not foreign service officers. These are not presidents, prime ministers, members of Congress ... These are ordinary Americans meeting ... ordinary Indians or Pakistanis that have a common interest in sports. And that interest in sports develops a bond between them and us immediately."⁴³⁵ Though the Sports Diplomacy Division and the types of programs will continue to evolve, the core mission will remain firm for decades to come.

⁴³⁵ Sarah Larimer, "This Unique George Mason Program is for Those who Understand the 'Universal Language' of Sports," *The Washington Post*, July 10, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/this-initiative-at-george-mason-is-for-those-who-understand-the-universal-language-of-sports/2017/07/10/0d69eea0-6321-11e7-a4f7-af34fc1d9d39_story.html, para. 5.

Conclusion: The Future of United States People-to-People Sports Exchanges

Sport contributes tremendously to promoting American ideals and values and will continue to do so as the twenty-first century progresses. Its innate power to inspire, accelerate social development, and promote healthy lifestyles (to name only a few benefits) is worthy of spreading to as many global citizens as possible. The U.S. has developed the capacity to do so through its numerous sports exchange programs administered by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) and the Sports Diplomacy Division. The time-tested capacity of sport to bridge cultural gaps and increase international understanding at the individual level has been actively championed by the U.S. government for nearly a century and shows no signs of slowing down.

For some critics, however, the U.S.'s current approach to public diplomacy requires significant modifications. One reason for this is attributed to the rise of non-state actors wresting primacy from state-sponsored public diplomacy programs, such as the Sports Diplomacy Division. International relations scholar John Robert Kelley questions the government's role if diplomacy increasingly becomes controlled by non-state actors. He presses, "If government does not provide the necessary mandate for diplomatic action, then who does? Can the institution of diplomacy survive without state stewardship? ... diplomacy is now well beyond the point of opening itself to the public—it is becoming enmeshed within the public domain."⁴³⁶ While organizations like the Sports Diplomacy Division have embraced partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), these alliances have been utilized to promote the mission of the U.S. Department of State and,

⁴³⁶ John Robert Kelley, "The New Diplomacy: Evolution of a Revolution," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 21, no. 2 (2010), 288-289.

by association, “American” objectives and values. If non-state actors usurp this type of messaging, this creates considerable ramifications for diplomacy.

The question of who dictates diplomacy is also influenced by forces outside of national control. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced several challenges to how public diplomacy and sports exchanges are conducted. Several scholars and diplomats have suggested reforms for how governments, NGOs, and sport organizations can adapt sport-related programming to the post-pandemic world.⁴³⁷ In particular, sport scholars Jonathan Grix et al. worry that the reallocation of public funds away from sport programs towards pandemic relief efforts may need to pay more attention to both the health and social benefits that sports can provide. They claim, “...mounting national debt is likely to mean further cuts rather than investment in much needed sport provision, at the expense of those most reliant on community provision for their access to participation opportunities, and the significant social return on investment that often flows from it.”⁴³⁸ Public diplomacy scholar Jian (Jay) Wang asserts that the pandemic “will likely further expose the fault lines between national and cultural communities, heightening the existing tensions in globalization manifested in the mobility of goods, information and people.”⁴³⁹ The challenges presented by the pandemic require diplomatic efforts to adapt to ensure the livelihood and continued efficacy of U.S. public diplomacy.

⁴³⁷ Jian Wang, “Rethinking Public Diplomacy for a Post-Pandemic World,” *The Foreign Service Journal*, July/August 2020, <https://www.afsa.org/rethinking-public-diplomacy-post-pandemic-world>; Matthew E. Perks, “Self-Isolated But Not Alone: Community Management Work in the Time of a Pandemic,” *Leisure Sciences* 43, no. 1-2 (2020): 177-183; Jonathan Grix et al., “The Impact of Covid-19 on Sport,” *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 13, no. 1 (2020): 1-12; Liz Galvez, “Public Diplomacy in the Time of Corona,” *Diplo* (blog), DiploFoundation, April 6, 2020, <https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/public-diplomacy-time-corona>.

⁴³⁸ Grix et al., “The Impact of Covid-19 on Sport,” 6.

⁴³⁹ Wang, “Rethinking Public Diplomacy for a Post-Pandemic World.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has also revealed crucial impediments in how the U.S. conducts public diplomacy in the twenty-first century. Diplomacy scholar Roland Wilson reminisces that U.S. public diplomacy championed itself as “the envy of the world” but, contextualizing current public diplomacy measures with recent decisions to suspend and revoke foreign student F-1 and M-1 visas, has since “eroded to a shell of its former self.”⁴⁴⁰ Wang asserts that the public image of the U.S. has impeded the efficacy of such diplomatic efforts, especially considering “as the global political and economic order continues to evolve and the primacy of the United States continues to be contested.”⁴⁴¹ Instead of surrendering diplomatic programming due to global crises, public diplomacy agendas should be redesigned to adapt to new challenges.

The Sports Diplomacy Division was also heavily hit by the pandemic. Given that international programming is a hallmark of the department, restriction of international travel and the introduction of preventative measures, such as social distancing, have introduced challenges for how sports could be played safely with the looming threat of the coronavirus. For example, Sports Diplomacy Division program officer Ryan Murphy noted that travel restrictions included quarantine periods that lasted longer than the planned program dates. “Restrictions still exist, and the status quo is different everywhere.”⁴⁴² As a result, such adaptations could necessitate funding increases to cover travel expenses and

⁴⁴⁰ Roland Wilson, “Further Demise of US Public Diplomacy,” *The Korea Times*, July 23, 2020, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/opinion/2020/07/137_293259.html. Both F-1 and M-1 visas are required for non-U.S. citizens to study in the U.S. F-1 visas are required for students who attend university or college, high school, private elementary school, seminary, conservatory, or another academic institution as determined by the U.S. Department of State. M-1 visas are required for students who attend vocational or other recognized nonacademic institutions in the U.S. See “Student Visa,” U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, accessed July 1, 2022, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/student-visa.html>.

⁴⁴¹ Wang, “Rethinking Public Diplomacy for a Post-Pandemic World.”

⁴⁴² Ryan Murphy, interview with author, telephone call, July 13, 2021.

related quarantine costs. At this time, quarantine requirements have been relaxed in many countries. However, these lessons should be considered if similar public health crises arise.

Considering sports exchanges have persistently been used as a diplomatic tool over past decades without significant revamps, ideas to modernize the practice should be embraced. This dissertation has carefully explored past events and strategies in how people-to-people sport diplomacy has flourished. To continue this trajectory, emerging methods must be examined to ensure promising progress. The following section will conclude by briefly discussing emerging methods for promoting people-to-people sport diplomacy programs in the twenty-first century, including digital diplomacy, webinars, and esports.

DIGITAL DIPLOMACY

The seemingly endless number of technological advances in the twenty-first century continually changes how humans live their lives. Recognizing the expansion of technologies to developing countries, such as the World Wide Web, the U.S. government has taken progressive steps to advance “digital diplomacy,” defined as “the growing use of social media platforms by a country in order to achieve its foreign policy goals and proactively manage its image and reputation.”⁴⁴³ Combined with the dominant influence of the World Wide Web, such technological breakthroughs find increasing uses for governmental organizations and NGOs. As Wang notes, “...digital technology is transforming the tools and platforms for public diplomacy. Digitization and advanced analytics are changing the way people seek information and stay connected.”⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴³ Ilan Manor & Elad Segev, “America’s Selfie: How the US Portrays Itself on its Social Media Accounts,” in *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, eds. Corneliu Bjola & Marcus Holmes (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 90.

⁴⁴⁴ Wang, “Rethinking Public Diplomacy for a Post-Pandemic World.”

Communication is vital to performing diplomatic activity. Capitalizing on digital diplomacy in an increasingly globalized world opens new and easier ways of communicating with the target populations diplomats seek to influence.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the Sports Diplomacy Division and its partners utilize social media platforms to promote sports exchange programming. Beyond social media, program managers embraced other forms of digital diplomacy as the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift to virtual spaces. Sports Diplomacy Division program officer Trina Bolton cites examples of the department's celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the United Nations' International Day of Sport for Development and Peace that successfully utilized the Internet and social media. "I will say that the sports and fitness industry really exploded with its virtual activities, but we worked with our U.S. embassies on a series of programs that tapped into technology and to stay in touch with our alumni."⁴⁴⁵ Continuation of such programming will offer unique ways of promoting physical fitness and exercise. Following lockdowns spurred by the pandemic, the popularity of virtual programming can potentially establish itself as a mainstay.

The U.S. is one of many nations realizing the benefits of digitalization and how it can be used to further public diplomacy goals. For example, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) recognizes the monumental influence the world wide web possesses in shaping public sentiment domestically and abroad. In 2021, the country's first "Internet Civilization Conference" was held to promote structures for how Chinese citizens should utilize the world wide web. The term "internet civilization" emphasizes the moral standards to which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) holds its citizens. Sheng Ronghua, deputy

⁴⁴⁵ Bolton, "Sports Diplomacy as a Key Tool in U.S. Foreign Policy," 24:30.

head of the CAC, asserted that the event's mission was to "promote all sectors of society in unifying their thoughts and actions with the decisions and deployments of the Central Committee on the construction of online civilization."⁴⁴⁶

However, this sentiment is familiar, as game studies scholar Marcella Szablewicz indicates that the CCP sought to advance this concept decades before the 2021 conference. Szablewicz references then-CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin, who said in 2001, "Both domestic and foreign enemies will try to use [the Internet] to vie with our party for [control of] the masses and youth. We must research its characteristics and adopt effective measures to face this challenge; we must launch an active attack on the enemy and strengthen our positive publicity work and influence on the Internet."⁴⁴⁷ While this strategy primarily seeks to control public opinion, such aspirations are crucial in promoting a broader public diplomacy agenda for China and creating an online culture viewed as morally upstanding aims to promote the country's image abroad.

There remains hesitancy from governments to adapt to the digitalization of public diplomacy. British diplomat Liz Galvez notes that the unexpected nature of the COVID-19 pandemic immediately forced diplomats into adapting to new ways of working and communicating. She observes that "many governments have only slowly embraced the new tools and working practices, perhaps because of IT infrastructure difficulties, perhaps because of nervousness about confidentiality, while some remain reluctant to set aside the diplomatic protocols and rules of procedure appropriate for a non-digital era."⁴⁴⁸ The threat

⁴⁴⁶ David Bandurski, "Civilizing Cyberspace," *China Media Project*, Nov. 19, 2021, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2021/11/19/civilizing-cyberspace>.

⁴⁴⁷ Jiang Zemin, quoted in Marcella Szablewicz, *Mapping Digital Game Culture in China: From Internet Addicts to Esports Athletes* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 111.

⁴⁴⁸ Galvez, "Public Diplomacy in the Time of Corona."

of inaccessibility and limited interaction in public spaces can create opportunities in digital spaces.

Examples of how the State Department and U.S. embassies worldwide have utilized digital diplomacy appear on many virtual platforms. The Embassy of Spain USA hosted a “virtual café” with then-Charlotte Hornets player Willy Hernangómez Geuer on Twitter, which featured a Q&A with the center in May 2020.⁴⁴⁹ Additionally, that same month, the Sports Diplomacy Division featured Jen Welter, the first woman to coach in the National Football League (NFL), on a Facebook Live session as part of its “GET FIT” series.⁴⁵⁰ Murphy emphasizes the importance of moving forward with digital diplomacy even as the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic recedes. Traditional forms of public diplomacy begin to reemerge as prominent options for practitioners. Speaking of the partners that the Sports Diplomacy Division works with, he notes that they “...have learned that there will be some component of virtual learning moving forward ... It’s never going to replace in-person, but it can be a great component.”⁴⁵¹ There are several ways of promoting virtual learning, but webinars have emerged as one of the most popular ways to do this in the pandemic and post-pandemic periods.

WEBINARS

One popular method of digital diplomacy that the Sports Diplomacy Division implemented in the immediate months of the pandemic was webinars, which are

⁴⁴⁹ Embassy of Spain USA, Twitter post, May 11, 2020, 7:46 p.m. (CEST), <https://twitter.com/SpainInTheUSA/status/1259902687593799688>.

⁴⁵⁰ *State Magazine*, “Sports Diplomacy Hosts Virtual Fitness Sessions,” June 2020, <https://statemag.state.gov/2020/06/0620ib03>.

⁴⁵¹ Ryan Murphy, interview with author, telephone call, July 13, 2021.

synchronous interactive events hosted by organizations that are broadcasted to individuals through the Internet. Through the Center for Sport, Peace, and Society (CSPS) at the University of Tennessee, the Global Sports Mentoring Program (GSMP) created “learning labs,” in which alums of the center’s mentorship program led webinars focusing on content that could benefit other program alums. Dr. Sarah Hillyer, director of the CSPS, recollects, “We did one on grant-writing. We did one on non-violent communication and negotiation skills ... they were getting to share their own expertise with the brothers and sisters and then we recorded those and now those will always live and be a resource.”⁴⁵² Although this emphasis on professional development is not specific to sport, such programs highlight the range of benefits that can be obtained by association with sports exchange programs. These skills can be applied to the management of sporting and non-sporting endeavors.

In addition, the Sports Diplomacy Division’s grant recipients also utilize webinars as part of the International Sports Programming Initiative (ISPI). World Learning, a nonprofit focusing on international development and exchange programs, hosted webinars through its Virtual Together program. Developed shortly following the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, this program “aims to engage the sports community globally, to creatively problem solve, share digital tools and work together, follow health guidance, and continue to promote active, healthy lifestyles both physically and mentally throughout this crisis.”⁴⁵³ Heidi Blair, program manager at the University of Montana’s Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center, notes that the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 required creative solutions for families to stay active. Such solutions have spread more easily since participants could connect regardless of their physical location. She notes, “To get people

⁴⁵² Dr. Sarah Hillyer, interview with author, video phone call, July 22, 2021.

⁴⁵³ *Sportanddev.org*, “Sports with an American Flavor,” May 20, 2021, <https://www.sportanddev.org/fr/event/sports-american-flavor>.

to do things at home ... I think that some of the people who had been more at the forefront of developing these types of things shared with the rest of the group with anyone who wanted to come, which was most of them.”⁴⁵⁴ While the pandemic forced many to constrict their physical presence, the ability to connect over the world wide web presented a silver lining to those who wished to remain connected.

This avenue of connecting people through like interests is also employed at the federal level. For example, the ECA has partnered with NGOs such as Games for Change to sponsor a series of webinars that connect companies with video game developers. The U.S. Embassy in Tunisia hosted a webinar series in 2020 with the non-profit organization iCivics, which develops educational video games and lesson plans to advance civil learning. Joshua Shen, the Strategic Designer of Interactive Media and Games at the ECA, emphasizes the efficacy of partnering with credible organizations to deliver quality content. “How do we engage this community and enter this space with credibility? We do that by enlisting people who are, just like sports envoys who are already well-respected in this field.”⁴⁵⁵ Webinars are a safe and efficient way to connect program participants, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns in 2020. The success of such programs challenges program designers to further incorporate sporting-adjacent activities, such as video games and esports, into existing programming frameworks that can be delivered online or on the ground. Esports diplomacy is one such activity that has advanced how digital diplomacy continues to evolve in the present day.

⁴⁵⁴ Heidi Blair, interview with author, video phone call, June 18, 2021.

⁴⁵⁵ Joshua Shen, interview with author, telephone call, June 21, 2021.

ESPORTS DIPLOMACY

The twenty-first century signaled a boom for esports, and the activity's increasing popularity has challenged traditional notions of what is defined as a sport. Metaphysical debates aside, shifts toward digitalized methods of diplomacy have opened the door for the digital pastime. Esports, defined as competitive video games played for spectators, is a phenomenon that has expanded worldwide, especially in the twenty-first century. Esports wields considerable influence in an increasingly digital global sphere, particularly among youth. As game studies scholar Tobias M. Scholz iterates, esports "is a socio-cultural phenomenon that is enabled by digitization and globalization. The eSports ecosystem evolved from the concept that people were able to play video games against anybody in the world through the Internet."⁴⁵⁶ As long as an individual possesses a personal computer or mobile device and a stable Internet connection, they can access esports content from anywhere, including the comfort of their home.

As municipalities across the world issued emergency orders for mobility restrictions to restrict the transmission of COVID-19, the number of available leisure activities dwindled, especially those that required face-to-face contact. For this reason, the popularity of digital activities, such as video games and esports, was increasingly promulgated throughout the United States and regions across the globe where access to hardware was widely available. The highly individualized nature of esports and digital culture allows participants to fervently engage with fellow participants, whether they are friends or strangers. East Asian Studies scholar Milan Ismangil discusses this unique phenomenon in the context of nationalism and fandom, detailing the different modes of communication participants to engage in. "Individuals take in messages and articulate them

⁴⁵⁶ Tobias M. Scholz, "Deciphering the World of eSports," *International Journal on Media Management*, 22, no. 1 (2020), 2.

in their own way, negotiating meaning and truths. This forms a two-way stream in which the narrative influences and strengthens individuals, who in turn internalize this narrative and recreate it through activity on social media (e.g. posting on social media) or passive engagement (viewing media streams).⁴⁵⁷ Providing accommodating options in a world where options became increasingly limited contributed to the rise of gaming and digital communication during the early months of the COVID-19 crisis.

In addition, the popularity of esports and online gaming exploded during the COVID-19 pandemic due to its accessibility to social networking. Mike Sepso, co-founder and CEO of esports infrastructure platform Vindex, notes, “Unique to gaming is that it has both interactive and linear consumption models, and the activity of watching gaming video streams and video-on-demand has become nearly as big as gaming itself ... In the COVID-19 era, all of this activity has increased dramatically because of both the new time available to people and their need for social interaction, which gaming provides.”⁴⁵⁸ Commonly misconstrued as a solitary activity, scholars argue that sociability has not only found a place in video gaming but is considered a “driving force in their development.”⁴⁵⁹ This aspect of social interaction overlaps with the Sports Diplomacy Division’s emphases on inclusion and engaging communities, which makes the incorporation of esports and video games into the department’s diplomacy tactics an attractive prospect.

⁴⁵⁷ Milan Ismail, “(Re)creating the Nation Online: Nationalism in Chinese Dota 2 Fandom,” *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5, no. 3 (2018), 205.

⁴⁵⁸ Mike Sepso, quoted in Stefan Hall, “How COVID-19 is Taking Gaming and Esports to the Next Level,” *World Economic Forum*, May 15, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/covid-19-taking-gaming-and-esports-next-level>.

⁴⁵⁹ Shane Murphy, “Video Games, Competition and Exercise: A New Opportunity for Sport Psychologists?” *The Sport Psychologist* 23, no. 4 (2009), 490; Perks, “Self-Isolated but Not Alone;” Dmitri Williams, “A Brief Social History of Game Play,” in *Playing Video Games Motives, Responses, and Consequences*, eds. Peter Vorderer & Jennings Bryant (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 197-212.

Academics are increasingly developing theoretic frameworks marrying sport diplomacy with the continuously emerging popularity of esports and video games. Sport scholars Stuart Murray, James Birt, and Scott Blakemore have taken the lead in developing a definition of “esports diplomacy” from existing discourse from sport studies and diplomacy studies literature. They define esports diplomacy as “conscious, strategic and regular use of diplomatic techniques, skills and functions to inform and create a favourable image among the general public, states, and organisations to shape their perceptions in a way that is (more) conducive to the esports industry’s desired goals.”⁴⁶⁰ In their preliminary findings, the group found that esports diplomacy possesses the potential to complement existing programming in sport diplomacy initiatives. They argue, “Esports diplomacy fosters diplomatic skills that can be learned and applied to the key battlegrounds for esports: for example, how to negotiate with the IOC, governments and traditional sporting bodies in a way that can produce mutually reciprocal outcomes and turn esports from a threat into an opportunity.”⁴⁶¹ Prudent incorporation into traditional sport diplomacy opportunities could help further the mission and objectives of the Sports Diplomacy Division and similar programs worldwide.

The influence of online gaming and esports should also force policymakers to reconsider which activities can be successfully utilized in sport diplomacy programming. For many, the COVID-19 pandemic forced recreational activity to shift away from the playing field, and, as a result, many flocked to the virtual battlefield of competitive gaming. Game studies scholar Matthew E. Perks explains that during the pandemic, “many have had to seek out new leisure activities and an increasing number are turning to online

⁴⁶⁰ Stuart Murray, James Birt, & Scott Blakemore, “eSports Diplomacy: Towards a Sustainable ‘Gold Rush,’” *Sport in Society* 25, no. 8 (2020), 1431.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1432.

gaming.”⁴⁶² Professional sports leagues worldwide experimented with pivoting content to the virtual world through esports competitions when social distancing measures forced competition away from the physical world. For instance, the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) partnered with the online racing simulation video game iRacing to debut the NASCAR iRacing Pro Invitational Series race on March 22, 2020, allowing professional drivers to race synchronously from their homes. Examples like these avoid the worst-case scenario for these leagues to cancel events definitively and provide alternatives for audiences to stay engaged with the league’s content.⁴⁶³ As Miah and Fenton argue, this leads to a future where traditional sports will fully immerse with esports, as “an increasing amount of sports participation becomes located in and driven through digital experiences.”⁴⁶⁴

Not only are playing video games and competing in esports competitions increasingly preferable activities, but watching organized esports competitions and streams on websites such as Twitch.tv and YouTube soared in popularity during the pandemic. Several scholars in sport management and interdisciplinary sport studies have already explored the rise of spectatorship in esports, which has emerged as a phenomenon beginning in the early 2000s.⁴⁶⁵ These websites that host esports content also host

⁴⁶² Perks, “Self-Isolated but Not Alone,” 177.

⁴⁶³ See Gregory Loporati, “For Veteran Broadcasters, Esports is a Whole New Ballgame,” *Washington Post*, May 8, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/video-games/esports/2020/05/08/veteran-broadcasters-esports-is-whole-new-ballgame>.

⁴⁶⁴ Andy Miah & Alex Fenton, “Esports in the Olympic and Paralympic Games: The Business Case for Integration,” in *Routledge Handbook of the Olympic and Paralympic Games*, eds. Dikaia Chatziefstathiou, Borja García, & Benoit Séguin (London: Routledge, 2020), 162.

⁴⁶⁵ Kenon A. Brown et al., “Intersections of Fandom in the Age of Interactive Media: eSports Fandom as a Predictor of Traditional Sport Fandom,” *Communication & Sport* 6, no. 4 (2018): 418-435; Kirstin Hallmann & Thomas Giel, “eSports—Competitive sports or Recreational Activity?,” *Sport Management Review* 21, no. 1 (2018): 14-20; Bob Heere, “Embracing the Sportification of Society: Defining E-Sports through a Polymorphic View on Sport,” *Sport Management Review* 21, no. 1 (2018): 21-24; Donghun Lee

“streamers” that attract audiences that act as alternatives to traditional sports and television. As sport scholars Sam Schelfhout, Tolga Ozyurtcu, and Jan Todd highlight, “While e-sports occupy a significant portion of live streaming activity due to its entertainment value, many individual streamers do not focus on the highest level of play but rather on developing entertaining personas.”⁴⁶⁶ This paradoxically casual environment has garnered significant attention during the pandemic as a lower-pressure alternative to the highly competitive sphere of esports, allowing viewers to develop communal bonds and relax with other viewers in stream chatrooms and related social media websites such as Twitter and Discord.

Sepso expresses one silver lining of the pandemic: it is increasingly leading to the “normalization” of esports. He notes, “Among younger demographic groups, a prolonged shutdown for traditional sports leagues may drive more fans to esports on a regular basis – which globally would represent tens of millions of new consumers for the industry.”⁴⁶⁷ As Americans gradually embrace playing and spectating esports, diplomats must consider how this emerging form of competition can fit within existing programming frameworks. Bolton extols this sentiment, citing the excitement generated by esports and video games in other nations. “I think that countries are using it not just in a soft power way, but also seeing the advantages of having a healthy competition in all the ways, not just the mega sporting event ways, but really in that true, human, health, wellness space.”⁴⁶⁸ The U.S.

& Linda J. Schoenstedt, “Comparison of eSports and Traditional Sports Consumption Motives,” *ICHPER-SD Journal Of Research* 6, no. 2 (2011): 39-44; Anthony Pizzo et al., “eSport vs Sport: A Comparison of Spectator Motives,” *Sport Marketing Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (2018): 108-123.

⁴⁶⁶ Sam Schelfhout, Tolga Ozyurtcu, & Jan Todd, “Streaming, Spectatorship, and the Sportification of E-Sports,” in *Das Phänomen E-Sport*, ed. Annette R. Hofmann (Aachen, Germany: Meyer & Meyer Verlag, 2020), 171.

⁴⁶⁷ Mike Sepso, quoted in Hall, “How COVID-19 is Taking Gaming and Esports to the Next Level.”

⁴⁶⁸ Trina Bolton, interview with author, telephone call, June 19, 2021.

has already experimented with incorporating esports-related content in its programming, as discussed later in the chapter, but further attempts should be explored moving forward.

Esports Diplomacy in Action: 2019 NBA 2K Trip to Guangzhou

The ECA and the Sports Diplomacy Division recognize esports' power to drive change in international relationships and advance department objectives. Global interest in esports and video games exceeds enthusiasm in the U.S.: According to a report released by market researcher Newzoo, roughly 55 percent of the 3.2 billion people worldwide who play games live in the Asia-Pacific region, while 15 percent live in the Middle East & Africa, 13 percent live in Europe, 10 percent live in Latin America, and seven percent live in North America.⁴⁶⁹ Recognizing the popularity of esports and video games outside the U.S., opportunities to connect citizens at the people-to-people level present a window of opportunity for diplomats. As with traditional sports and physical activities, bonding participants through gaming and technology can create meaningful experiences for Americans and foreign audiences.

Organizers of such opportunities acknowledge the array of benefits that building relationships between gamers and esports enthusiasts can produce results. According to Shen, one of the ECA's primary goals in its efforts to incorporate video games and interactive media into its public diplomacy strategy is to increase global connections, bolster democratic principles and civic society, counter disinformation, and expand access, mainly through mentorships, competitive esports gameplay, and technology skills

⁴⁶⁹ Newzoo, *Global Games Market Report* (Amsterdam: Newzoo, July 2022), <https://newzoo.com/products/reports/global-games-market-report>.

training.⁴⁷⁰ Similar to how traditional sports connect participants in sport diplomacy initiatives, video games and esports can join groups of people with no prior personal connections. Shen emphasizes, “In a similar way [to other forms of soft power], two people from different parts of the world can both say, ‘Oh, we can both talk about ... the stories behind these video games.’ It really means a lot to people.”⁴⁷¹ With over two billion gamers across the globe, this medium has the potential to establish such connections.

Diplomats within the ECA emphasize the urgency to connect and build relationships with gamers. In an interview with VentureBeat, Shen explains, “If we’re not there, building those relationships, then when do we start doing this ecosystem? This is like where social media was 12 years ago. Gaming is where people are. If you’re not going to engage with them, you’re going to miss a sizable chunk of the audience.”⁴⁷² As the popularity of video games and esports has reached its apex, there is no better opportunity to embark on opportunities to connect Americans with like-minded participants in diplomatic programs.

Though the sport status of esports is debated inside academic circles and out, ECA programs that engage populations through esports and video games share commonalities with how sport diplomacy programs are executed.⁴⁷³ In September 2019, the ECA, in

⁴⁷⁰ Dean Takahashi, “The DeanBeat: The State Department’s Gaming Man Wants More Citizen Diplomats,” *VentureBeat*, July 16, 2021, <https://venturebeat.com/2021/07/16/the-deanbeat-the-state-departments-gaming-man-wants-more-citizen-diplomats>.

⁴⁷¹ Joshua Shen, interview with author, telephone call, June 21, 2021.

⁴⁷² Takahashi, “The DeanBeat.”

⁴⁷³ Michael L. Naraine, “Actually, Esports is Sport: A Response to Parry’s (2019) Misguided View,” *Sports Innovation Journal* 2 (2021): 33-44; Jim Parry, “E-Sports are Not Sports,” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (2019): 3-18; Anne Tjønnndal, “‘What’s Next? Calling Beer-Drinking a Sport?!’: Virtual Resistance to Considering eSport as Sport,” *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal* 11, no. 1 (2021): 72-88.

partnership with video game publisher Take-Two Interactive, embarked on a public diplomacy initiative that sent former NBA player Bonzi Wells and the 2019 NBA 2K League MVP, Michael “BearDaBeast” Key, to the Southern Chinese cities of Shenzhen, Foshan, and Guangzhou. In addition to connecting these envoys with Chinese participants through the NBA 2K video games, the ECA sponsored nine events across the three cities, including basketball clinics, panel discussions, classroom visits, gaming demos, and a press roundtable.

Each program component was carefully curated by a collaboration between the ECA, the NBA, Take-Two Interactive, and the U.S. Consulate General in Guangzhou. The aforementioned parties spearheaded the trip with the primary goal of rebalancing U.S. trade and economic ties with China and generating positive press coverage to counter separate Chinese government efforts to undermine U.S. public diplomacy efforts throughout the Chinese province of Guangdong. The selection of sending an envoy representing the NBA 2K League was also intentional, as both the game and the sport of basketball attract millions of fans across China. A report from the U.S. Consulate in Guangzhou noted, “The NBA 2K Online Franchise represents the #1 PC sports online game in China with a registered userbase that exceeds 40 million players.”⁴⁷⁴ Gearing programming to the tastes and interests of local audiences is crucial in sport and esports diplomacy initiatives.

The program was highly successful in achieving its pre-established goals. As the consulate report summarizes, “The overall warm reception by Chinese hosts to the program stands in stark contrast to almost all other public diplomacy efforts of this scale in Guangdong, demonstrating that access in southern China is contingent specifically on what

⁴⁷⁴ William T. Brent (AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU), *South China Full-Court Press: NBA and NBA 2K Sports Envoys Open Doors*, Cable: 19 Guangzhou 930 (Redacted), Oct. 29, 2019, Unclassified, 2.

we are offering. Basketball's long history and popularity in China means that NBA-related programs can still open doors that would otherwise be closed."⁴⁷⁵ BearDaBeast concluded his thoughts on the trip in a video published by the NBA 2K League, stating, "Being American and being in China... we come from completely different backgrounds, but we have common goals, we have common loves, we share some of the same values. It felt like home to me. It's unbelievable, and I can't thank the people from China enough."⁴⁷⁶ The Sports Diplomacy Division's Sports Envoys program in Guangdong province exemplifies how esports diplomacy can operate. Future programs focusing on esports diplomacy can look to this program as a model for how esports can achieve public diplomacy objectives.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: EXPANDING PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE SPORT DIPLOMACY PROGRAMS

The rising popularity of digital diplomacy provides sport diplomats with a new tool in the diplomatic arsenal to reach populations worldwide. However, without a collaborative strategy to integrate the above forms of digital diplomacy into the U.S.'s comprehensive sport diplomacy strategy, ambitions of affecting change are limited. In the case of esports diplomacy, Murray, Birt, and Blakemore characterize the esports industry as a "Wild West gold rush," in which instability and lack of institutionalization allow a small number of participants to reap the positive outcomes to arise from the growth of the industry. The authors note that the esports ecosystem "is characterised by disconnection, disorganisation, fragmentation, missed opportunities and questionable practices (analogous to Deadwood in the 1870s)."⁴⁷⁷ Much of this volatility is controlled by factors external to program

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ NBA 2K League, "#YearoftheBear: BearDaBeast Represents the NBA 2K League in China," YouTube, 0:19, October 3, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHsEMldXyDE>.

⁴⁷⁷ Murray, Birt, and Blakemore, "eSports Diplomacy," 6.

leaders. To maximize the benefits of engaging participants with esports and other forms of digital diplomacy, diplomats must recognize a degree of risk when utilizing such technologies to meet policy objectives.

Such risks accentuate the increasing influence of the non-state actor in sport diplomacy initiatives. As power is progressively distributed to more non-governmental organizations, the future of people-to-people public and sport diplomacy is exciting, albeit with such new power asymmetries presenting new challenges. Political scientist John Robert Kelley argues that this empowerment of the non-state actor in diplomacy is apparent in how diplomatic programs are designed and conducted. The progressive influence that global civil society possesses in diplomatic affairs threatens the primacy of governmental actors, profiling that these “new” diplomats represent an “epistemic and entrepreneurial aspect of civil society performing diplomatic deeds *de facto* by adopting its behaviours, as opposed to *de jure* sanctioned by the state. They are displaying uncanny abilities to shape and influence state behaviour by advancing agenda items and negotiating at high levels.”⁴⁷⁸ Such actors provide developing innovations to sport diplomacy programming, as observed by the rapid inclusion of digital diplomacy measures and in broader sport diplomacy initiatives at large, which possesses the potential to strengthen people-to-people programs moving forward.

U.S. governmental and non-governmental leaders who promote and initiate people-to-people sport diplomacy initiatives must continue to harness the unique power sport possesses in bridging differences, developing positive associations with foreign countries, and advancing the myriad of benefits discussed throughout this dissertation. Emerging trends, such as webinars and esports, and threats, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic,

⁴⁷⁸ Kelley, “The New Diplomacy,” 302.

force program leaders to continuously improve and adapt programming to reach as many global citizens as possible. While these developments catalyze broader shifts away from in-person programming to digital programming, embracing an agenda that emphasizes both is crucial. As public diplomacy scholar Jian Wang stresses, “The COVID-19 pandemic makes it apparent to us that, despite the ease of communication through digital tools, something fundamental is missing when we are removed from our physical environment.”⁴⁷⁹ As nations cautiously reopen borders to international guests following the peak of the pandemic, people-to-people sport diplomats must reintroduce physical programming in ways that can productively co-exist with digital programs.

In the U.S., the Department of State and the ECA should not be the only agencies assuming primary responsibility for the success of people-to-people sport diplomacy programming. Sport development scholars Carrie LeCrom and Melissa Ferry note that while the Department of State has pioneered the formalization of sport diplomacy programs, other government agencies effectively engage in this space, including the Pentagon, Department of Defense, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).⁴⁸⁰ As this dissertation shows, pioneers of this type of diplomacy also emerge from various sectors of American civic society, including (but not limited to) multi-national enterprises, social movements, faith-based organizations, and NGOs.

Several limitations in the present study that merit future studies in American people-to-people sport diplomacy programming. While the COVID-19 pandemic presents exciting opportunities for organizing and implementing people-to-people sport exchange programs, the limited access to archival materials due to stay-at-home orders and facility

⁴⁷⁹ Wang, “Rethinking Public Diplomacy for a Post-Pandemic World.”

⁴⁸⁰ LeCrom & Ferry, “The United States Government’s Role in Sport Diplomacy.”

closures in 2020 and 2021 hindered the process of data collection during the primary research phase of this dissertation. While such materials could have enhanced the quality and depth of the present study, future research can incorporate materials from these archives and databases that shut down during this period. Obtaining archival resources and identifying individuals involved in people-to-people sport diplomacy programming before 1980 would indubitably present a natural extension of the present research.

The potential for future research in sport diplomacy is boundless. This dissertation focused on sport diplomacy programming based on specific contexts and locations. Due to the multidisciplinary nature of sport diplomacy discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, ample opportunities to explore this field from several academic disciplines are available. While the primary focus of this study was on people-to-people sport diplomacy programs in the U.S., researchers from outside the U.S. are encouraged to explore how people-to-people sport diplomacy programs are organized and conducted in their own countries. In addition, as people-to-people sports exchanges continue to take place further into the 21st century, frameworks and theories for how this type of programming operates will require consideration from scholars in how this phenomenon evolves. Innovations such as digital diplomacy and esports diplomacy are certainly not the final frontier in how people-to-people sports diplomacy operates, so further attention is suitable in determining how the field will further shape itself.

Moving forward, opportunities for public and private sectors to engage in people-to-people sport diplomacy initiatives should be explored and encouraged. Conformity of shared objectives and mission can further broaden the reach of sport programs worldwide, signaling the justification of such programs for years to come.

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