

# SPORT AND THE REPUDIATION OF THE GLOBAL

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**Abstract** Sport, especially its most spectacular manifestation during mega-media sports festivals like the summer Olympic Games and the football World Cup, is often viewed as a key exemplar of globalization. Sociologists of sport have increasingly questioned this assessment, citing various empirical instances of resistance to, or amelioration of, globalizing forces in sport. This article explores a more radical theoretical possibility: that sport may be constitutively unsuited to carriage of the project of globalization in its fullest sense. It asks whether the social institution of sport is so deeply dependent on the production of national cultural difference (however the ‘nation’ might be constructed and conceived) that it repudiates the possibility of comprehensive — that is, cultural — globalization.

**Key words** • culture • globalization • nation

## Introduction: Conceptions of Globalization

The phenomenon of sport is consistently presented as a prime instance of the gathering force of globalization, especially by extending and reconfiguring national cultural practices as global phenomena. As a result, ‘What may at first seem a national preoccupation takes on global implications’ (Wenner, 1998: 3). While there can be no doubt that the vast expansion of sport and its associated institutions does, indeed, resonate at the global level (Maguire, 1999), the precise character of these ‘implications’ is nonetheless highly contestable. Not least among the reasons for this analytical uncertainty is the mutability of sport itself as a cultural form and the mantra-like status of the concept of globalization, which is compulsively invoked with varying meanings in different discourses.

In this article, I want to raise the question of whether sport, despite appearances and, especially, the spectacular instances of global mega-media sports events like the Olympics and the football World Cup (not forgetting the more routine forms of mediatized sport circulated around the globe), may be constitutively unsuited to carriage of the project of globalization in its fullest sense.<sup>1</sup> This is a stronger, perhaps more provocative position that goes beyond an apparently emerging consensus in the sociology of sport that cultural nationalism and (g)localism resist globalizing processes, and also that the progress of globalization is unevenly developed across space and time. It suggests, more radically, that

the social institution of sport is so deeply dependent on the production of difference that it repudiates the possibility of comprehensive globalization while seeming to foreshadow its inevitable establishment. The first analytical task in canvassing this argument is briefly to secure the 'floating signifier' of globalization.

The master concept of globalization has, in less than two decades, passed from a technical term circulating among a limited number of academic economists, political scientists and sociologists to an all-purpose buzz-word deployed by bank economists, politicians and 'lay' social commentators (Waters, 1995). As I (with co-authors) have argued elsewhere, globalization has also largely supplanted 'postmodernity' in sociology (and, indeed, in cultural studies) as an omnibus concept used to explain transformations and to describe their outcomes in totalizing fashion (Miller et al., 2001: 6–7). The analytical utility of the concept of globalization is similarly compromised when it is used, mechanically and teleologically, to describe all manner of developments from growing homogeneity to fragmentation.

At an abstract level, globalization can be regarded as a long-standing tendency within modernity that compresses time and space, and so links, in new and accelerated ways, localities that hitherto had little direct connection (Giddens, 1990). Such a synoptic approach leaves open the task of teasing out the manifold, directional complexities of globalization as it is played out 'at ground level', and the multiple permutations of, in the case of sport, its impacts on reception, interpretation, organization and practice. These developments have unfolded through complex intrication with the processes of governmentalization, Americanization, televisualization and commodification operating in the context of a developing new international division of cultural labour in sport and other cultural forms (Miller et al., 2001).

Hence, not only are there competing theories of globalization, but also contending accounts of how this process interacts with others — and, indeed, the extent to which it is separable from them. At one end of the theoretical spectrum, globalization is a technical term describing the greater economic, political, technological and communicative connectivity that has been evolving for centuries. While this enhanced connectivity is seen as imposing new constraints on individual societies (in relation to trade barriers, the cost of labour and so on), its cultural consequences can be regarded as indeterminate and, indeed, as capable of liberating local people from their inherited cultural particularities in new, unpredictable, 'unscripted' ways. At the other end of the spectrum, globalization is figured as a transformative process at every level, accelerating rapidly since the late 20th century, systematically eroding locally specific structures and practices, and imminently ushering in a common global culture. In both accounts, the entity standing between the local and global spaces is the nation, conceived as both a politico-juridical organization and as a representational focus of culture that may or may not overlap with it.

In this article I will focus on the cultural dimensions of globalization as they apply to the idea of nation, threading some reflections on the 2002 FIFA Korea/Japan World Cup through the discussion by way of illustration. While recognizing the inseparability of culture from other components of the social formation, it

is the cultural nation that, in the case of sport (especially that of an international, competitive kind), is simultaneously problematized and mobilized by globalization. The nature and durability of this dynamic tension needs to be assessed in the light of claims that sport is a key agency of globalization.

## Globalization and the National Cultural

Alan Bairner (2001: 1) notes at the commencement of his book *Sport, Nationalism, and Globalization* that, while many tentative propositions can be presented concerning sport, identities and social practices:

One theory, however, that is put forward with a greater degree of confidence suggests that, as a result of the process known as globalization, the relationship between sport and *national* identity is self-evidently unravelling to reveal an increasingly global sporting culture.

This is a powerful and persuasive theoretical position that appeals both to commonsensical observation and empirical evidence. Bairner's book, however, repays some close attention in revealing the theory's limitations through its seven national case studies drawn from Europe and North America, laying bare the invented traditions of many competing, contradictory 'ethnic' and 'civic' nationalisms in the process. These include the sporting practices and affiliations of those Protestants of Northern Ireland who are loyal subjects of the British monarchy and hostile to the Irish republic, but who are also involved in 'all-Ireland' sports like golf, tennis, cricket, field hockey and rugby union, some of which have 'national' representative status.

The sporting nation, then, has deep historical roots that may cross nation-state boundaries and divisions of identity influenced by class, culture, education, gender, religion and politics, creating here 'a tripartite distinction between British, universal, and Gaelic games' (Bairner, 2001: 28) that marks out different relations to such sports as rugby, soccer, basketball and hurling. These distinctions and permutations are multiplied by international representative sport regulations that can see citizens of different countries playing as teammates, while in other cases competing against each other. In addition, there are distinct affiliations of the nationalist and Catholic minority in the Six Counties, historic religion-based connections with Scotland, and some support for the more glamorous English and continental European football teams and African American-led basketball teams in the USA.

In examining Scotland and Ireland, traditional Gaelic Games are shown to be limited for the former by region and by their incapacity to play the Old Enemy (England) in asserting Scottish national identity, whereas in Ireland, Gaelic games like handball and *camogie* have been of greater national significance through the encouragement of the Gaelic Athletic Association (Cumann Lúthchleas Gael). Yet Protestants (some of whom were Irish nationalists) are shown to have been instrumental in the formation of the Association (which still operates in the North). While football has made considerable inroads into the Irish sporting formation (with, for example, considerable support evident for its well-performing team in the 2002 World Cup), it is by no means an 'open

market' for imported sports. Bairner, for example, observes that 'With the exception of basketball, American sports have had a negligible impact in Ireland' (2001: 89). The case of Sweden displays both similarities and differences, with a historical rejection of 'excessive' sporting nationalism and celebration of an anti-competitive ethos favoured by the Swedish Sport Confederation (Riksidrottsförbundet), counterbalanced today by vigorous displays of support by Swedish football and tennis fans, their faces painted with the national flag. Here there is evidence of support for both a traditional sporting ethos within the nation and an aggressive assertion of national identity in the arena of global sport.

In Bairner's North American case studies, ice hockey is shown to be even more crucial to the maintenance of Canadian identity (see also Miller et al., 2001: 74–8) as franchises and players migrate south and Canadian dominance has been threatened by other nations. At such moments, key sporting figures like 'Number 99' Wayne Gretzky become bearers of 'Canadianness' (Jackson, 2001). The USA, in contrast, so routinely regarded as culturally imperialist (often in the name of globalization), is shown to be culturally protectionist in the mobilization of myths of nation through sports such as American football and baseball (Juffer, 2002). Bairner's case studies demonstrate, then, neither the successful insulation of national sporting culture nor its obliteration by sporting globalization. Among its many complexities, however, is a clear pattern that perceptions of external threat — mainly the erosion of the national by a malign combination of Americanization and globalization — provoke defensive responses that may be effective through strategic adaptation and new combinations of sporting forms, practices and personnel in national contexts.

Such close and reflexive analysis indicates the necessity of going beneath the surface sheen of globalization rhetoric and media sport economics to the socio-cultural sphere that reveals sport's less-than-smooth accommodation to the disciplines of global production, consumption, mythology and identity. Certainly, from the case of the 2002 Korea/Japan World Cup Final between Brazil and Germany, with an estimated global audience of 1.5 billion collectively exposed to the corporate logos of such global brands as Nike, Adidas, Yahoo!, McDonalds, Budweiser, Philips and Fujifilm, it appears self-evident that sport is globalization's most attentive handmaiden. Such sporting mega-events are especially dramatic presentiments of a fully developed global culture of the future, in which the 'whole world is watching' (in an ironic echo of the civil rights slogan of the 1960s) the same thing at the same time. Viewed in a negative light, sport emerges here as the social institution that has taken over the function analogous to that of the school as characterized by Ivan Illich (1971: 48), with its ideological and organizational diffusion making it 'eminently suited to be the World Church of our decaying culture'.

Less apocalyptically, sports mega-events are, as Maurice Roche (2000: 227) argues, important constituents of an 'evolving global cultural economy'. Within this framework of 'interconnected political, economic and cultural institutions, systems and processes' (2000: 226), sport interpellates 'the world', requiring more countries to invest in professionalized participation in selected sports, and inducing more people to consume the paraphernalia of sports culture (like Chicago Bulls and Manchester United shirts) circulating as cultural capital in

previously unlikely places. Again, in the 2002 World Cup, television images were generated of a potentially postnational sports fandom, with some Japanese fans (although especially after the Japanese team had been eliminated) adopting the stylistic inscriptions and accoutrements of selected elements of a distantiated English football culture. So, where sport can be detached from strong, spatially limited identities, the prospect of global sport — and so of global society, culture, economy and polity — comes into clearer view.

Yet this picture may be deceptive, and sport seen as stubbornly resistant to the ‘harder’ forms of globalization because of its dependency on the robustness of the *idea* of the sporting nation. Sport certainly has manifest advantages for the project of globalization: it is a cultural practice that, at the elite level at least, takes place according to standardized rules in delimited time and space with a ready-made ‘on-site’ audience. It is readily amenable to televisualization — or if it is not it can be modified to make it so — allowing a massive inflation of audience size for the purposes of exposure to advertising of a heavily branded kind. But at the heart of sport’s ethos is the idea of competition. This is what provides sport with its drama, but its affective force derives directly from the connotative attachment of competition to identity.

## The Sport and Identity Paradox

Sports events and their outcomes become most meaningful and powerful — and so most amenable to capital accumulation and political exploitation — where there can be an extrapolation of sociocultural significance from the action on and around the field of play. This split discourse of sport is produced in the interplay of tensions between ‘noble’ universalism and ‘base’ partisanship. Sport’s reliance on passionate national differentiation and celebrity is so thoroughgoing as to question its suitability as an exemplar of global culture. In this sense, sport is rather less sympathetic to globalization than other cultural forms, such as music (Rowe, 1995) or film, which may be more easily communicated as universal in nature and, even when deeply connected to notions of identity, do not necessarily foreground the idea of hierarchically based, competitive national performance.

The history of sport in modernity is conventionally written as a process of cultural diffusion from Victorian Britain, with rationalized and regulated physical play either directly exported as part of the apparatus of imperialism and/or absorbed through the unfolding process of (post)colonialism. The commodification of sport, perfected in the United States, then produced second and successive waves of sports diffusion, as much through appropriation and advocacy by the state as by the market. The development of the apparatus of sport in each country varies according to the specific character of its historical social formation, but there are few sports that have not — either voluntarily or under duress — been aligned with some conception of nation. This is because international sporting competition functions so effortlessly as metaphor for the state of the nation at the popular political level, while at the level of cultural economy ‘indigenous’ sports are less tradable within the burgeoning ‘media sports cultural complex’ in all but the largest and most affluent sports markets (Rowe, 1999). In

fact, despite the success of sport in the institutionalized diffusion of the framework for regulated, competitive physical play, the record of the actual 'export' of national sports is much less impressive. Truly international sport consists only of a relatively small set of games that are regularly and readily translatable as the 'Esperanto' of mediatized entertainment. Nonetheless, any sport can claim to be 'international' even where contested by a limited set of territories marked by geopolitical and/or sporting systems of governance (for example, rugby league), or where it is dominated by one country while attracting overseas fan interest and foreign labour (as in the case of US baseball and its domestic World Series).

This structural importance of the nation persists despite the increasing circulation of sportspeople around the globe as part of the new international division of cultural labour. For example, more association football players operate outside their countries of origin than ever before, and their clubs complain of the loss of, and potential damage to, their labour power caused by international demands (while frequently threatening to set up rival, cross-national club competitions such as a European Super League). Football more than any sport can lay claim to be the 'global game' (Giulianotti, 1999). Yet the clubs still retain a 'national' brand irrespective of the composition of their playing and coaching staff and of their shareholder register, and their players are still expected to return to 'home base' in their respective continents for peak international sports tournaments like the World Cup. Furthermore, as Patrick McGovern (2002) has recently noted in analysing patterns of recruitment of foreign players<sup>2</sup> to the English football leagues between 1946 and 1995, labour-market trends have been international rather than global in nature, and the range of supply countries highly limited. His study (albeit one that stops just before the crucial 1996 Bosman European Court of Justice ruling that deregulated footballer movement within the European Union)<sup>3</sup> shows that:

... the changes that are taking place do not suggest that a single, global labour market either has, or is, emerging. Rather, markets are expanding along different international patterns that have national elements as the English case suggests. (McGovern, 2002: 39)

In particular, a preference is shown for players who socially, culturally and linguistically resemble those who are hiring them — a case of 'homosocial reproduction' (Kanter, 1997).

The nation, therefore, is never far below the surface of sports discourse, always threatening to assert itself and to circumscribe the free circulation of sports personnel and the meanings that can be derived from its operation (see e.g. Duke and Crolley, 1996; Stevenson, 2002). As Dayan and Katz (1992) note, media sports events generate 'contest' narrative forms that are perfectly suited to articulations of nation. Sport's dependency on the nation, therefore, always reinserts the restrictive framework of modernity into the fluid workings of post-modernity. In so doing — and in a highly emotional manner — sport operates as a perpetual reminder of the social limits to the reconfiguration of endlessly mutable identities and identifications.

This does not have to be the literal invocation of the nation state. As noted above, the sporting nation is not coterminous with the sovereign, legal nation. In

events like the football World Cup, the non-existent English nation, as symbolized by the flag of St George, can materialize in international sporting competition (see following discussion), just as Catalan nationalists strategically capitalized on the opportunities afforded by the 1992 Barcelona Olympics (Hargreaves, 2000). International sport can, then, be a key marker of national fantasy or aspiration, but above all it is generative of a symbolic entity that comes into being by affixing a notion of identity that is likely to be an impediment to the free-floating cosmopolitanism so crucial to the ethos of globalization.

It could be objected that, in an adaptation of a classical Marxist economic base-cultural superstructure model, sport's fixation on the nation functions as cover for more profound changes occurring at the political economic level. Sport can, therefore, be seen as a sop to sovereignty and difference, masking the creeping control of global institutions. On screen, the world secular religion of football might appear to fuse with branded transnational capitalist consumption, leading the football teams of nations to resemble just so many niches in a global market. Mega-media sports events do, indeed, reflect the domination of the North America-Europe-Japan triad in trade and foreign direct investment (Hirst and Thompson, 1999). Of the 15 partners (that is, major sponsors) of the Korea/Japan 2002 World Cup, 14 came from the Triad (six from the USA, two from Europe, and six from Japan), with the remaining partner coming from co-host Korea, in a tournament organized by FIFA (the acronym for the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association*), the historically Francophile peak governing body (Tomlinson, 1986).

Of course, the restricted scope of globalization in such examples provides its own questioning of the globalization thesis, but even if global power were to be more widely dispersed, a left functionalist perspective reduces sport's complex workings within the popular sociocultural sphere to that of a mechanical effect of capitalist ideology. While the potential for ideological manipulation of sport and the tendency towards conservatism of sporting organizations and personnel is readily apparent, the ideological complexion of the institution of sport cannot be so neatly classified, just as expressions of nationalism do not in all instances operate as ideological cement preserving the unity of class-ridden societies for the benefit of their ruling class. Here globalization might be said to have its progressive side as a counterweight to ultra-nationalism.

The rhetoric of globalization does, however, in practice predominantly reflect the drive of global capital to extend and deepen its dominion. But even if its dynamic impulses were more benign, sport's constant evocation of the nation as its anchor point and rallying cry makes for an uneasy relation to globalization advocacy. It is improbable that sport can be reconfigured as postnational and substantially stripped of its 'productive' capacity to promote the forms of identity (local, national, geopolitical, racial and so on) because these are, simultaneously, the source of its affective power and the potentially activated resistive impediments to the globalization process. This paradox was evident in global sport's most recent and spectacular festival.

## Reflections on the Korea/Japan World Cup, 2002

Observation of the recent Korea/Japan World Cup from three different vantage points illustrates how the nation, imagined or real, is so central to sport as to present a constant potential interruption to the smooth passage of globalization. This was not a rigorous methodological exercise, but an attempt to trace elements of national cultural formations during a mega-media global sports event. 'La Coupe du Monde', as the peak spectacle of the self-described 'world game', generating massive broadcast rights fees (although somewhat problematic in the light of the collapse of KirchMedia, which had purchased the rights from FIFA) and recruiting major corporate partners, seems to represent globalization in and through sport par excellence.

But there are limits even to the cultural portability of association football. In countries where it is known as 'soccer', like Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US, the linguistic marker signifies that it is not the dominant code of football. This word choice may also have an explicitly political edge, as in the case of the Irish nationalist preference for the term 'soccer' to demarcate it more effectively from 'indigenous' Gaelic football. Korea/Japan 2002, it could be argued, nonetheless represented a substantial step towards the globalization of football with the appearance for the first time of China, the world's most populous nation. China's involvement, however, also raised the stakes of the nationalist rivalry in east Asia that was so starkly revealed in the difficult relationship between the co-hosts, whose deep historical enmity is well known, and between whom there is continuing tension over the Japanese educational erasure of culpability for Second World War atrocities, and reluctance to make reparation (Horne and Manzenreiter, 2002). Ironically, furthermore, as Korea met Turkey in the play-off for third place, North Korea (recently pronounced part of the Axis of Evil by the US Government) and its southern neighbour were involved in a naval engagement resulting in several fatalities on both sides, and placing the militaries of both nations on full alert. This failure of the World Cup's equivalent of the *Pax Olympica* (the cessation of hostilities during the ancient Olympics) dramatically revealed the limitations of sport as a global pacifier and, in this case, the potential of the World Cup to exacerbate regional national resentment (see Sugden and Tomlinson, 1998).

Mega-media sports events like the World Cup and the Olympics take place at particular sites, and what occurs is relayed to differentiated audiences in customized fashion (de Moragas Spà et al., 1995). Watching the World Cup from the vantage point of three countries with different historical and contemporary experiences of football (as I did fleetingly during the 2002 competition) demonstrated how the same spectacle mutates according to national context and viewing position. The main focus here is on the UK, where interest in the event was (understandably, given England's participation) more intense, with brief observations of contrasting national cultural milieu.

In Australia, the World Cup could be watched on television in prime time as the tournament was taking place in the Asia-Pacific region for the first time. Australia, however, has only once qualified for the World Cup (in 1974), and failed to do so again in 2002. This meant that football spectators in Australia had

a wider repertoire of viewing positions than those of participating nations. These included the universalist appreciation of the world game; 'adoption' of a favourite team (on some grounds of affinity, glamour and so on); the finding of Australian connections (such as an Italian player who had lived in the country as a child) and (as would have often occurred irrespective of Australia's involvement) support for a team of the viewer's national-ethnic origin, such as Italy, England, Turkey, China and South Africa. In the case of Australia, therefore, the *absence* of direct national representation opened up more diverse viewing spaces than would have been possible had the national team qualified, which would have immediately mobilized an intense, nationalist discourse. The nation, present or absent, is then still crucial to the experience of the World Cup. The location, geopolitical position, history and demography of the nation will, in turn, condition responses to the event at the various points of intersection with global forces.

This observation was borne out in a different country visited briefly during the World Cup (not counting the credit card advertisements and screened games in the quasi-postnational space of the airport transit lounge). Holland, unlike Australia, usually reaches the World Cup but also did not qualify for Korea/Japan 2002. Association football is the dominant winter sport in that country (rather than the 'poor cousin' as it is in Australia), thereby seeming to create greater resentment at non-participation. Far distant from the site of the tournament, 'Europeanness' came to the fore in Holland, with a greater concentration on and identification with Dutch- and Europe-based players and teams. Some supporters of the Dutch team were able to express negative identification in the form of the teams that they didn't want to win (and, contra European unity, this seemed mainly to be France or Germany).

In cabled European televisual space, however, British, German, Belgian, French and other nation's viewers could watch their team as presented by their own national broadcasters. Touristic spaces were created for viewing the World Cup, some of which had the quality of postmodern pastiche, as in the cases of the English and Irish theme pubs promising 'All World Cup Games Live'. At a time when the most conspicuous political issue in the European Union (signalled by a turn to the right in France, Italy, Denmark, Austria and Holland itself) was immigration and asylum seekers, there was visible support on Dutch streets for the various nations of origin that comprise the contemporary Netherlands, such as Tunisia, Brazil and Nigeria. As might be expected of viewers of an international tournament, the emblems of nation were everywhere to the fore, and few seemed to take the opportunity to adopt a position of neutrality in the role of global cultural citizen.

This role was even less visible in the next nation state visited — the UK — and, within it, the sporting nation of England. 'Britishness' had been much foregrounded during recent golden jubilee celebrations of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II as a constitutional monarch, although the flag of St George, as an emblem of England, supplemented and often replaced the Union Jack (the sign of the nation state in a now post-Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish devolution Britain) in bedroom and shop windows, and other publicly visible sites. The World Cup offered an even more compelling opportunity for the aggressive assertion of 'Englishness' through the flag of St George and licensed a temporary, symbolic

secession from Great(er) Britain (mirrored, it might be noted, in pre-tournament debates in Scotland concerning the 'traitorous' tendency there to support any team playing against England). As in earlier tournaments (see e.g. Carrington and McDonald, 2001, and Garland and Rowe, 1999, on jingoism during Euro '96), the participation of a team, extracted from the nation state and invested with a specific national character for the purposes of sport, activated conceptions of the nation that were the antithesis of 'progressive' global cosmopolitanism. While it is necessary to be cautious in naively ascribing cultural and ideological representativeness to the tabloid press, the popular media amplified strong, nostalgic and inevitably fantastical myths of nation in and through football.

To take a small number of examples, *The Sun* opened its front-page text with the anticipatory statement that 'All of England will get up for the Cup tomorrow to see our heroes tackle Nigeria . . . at half past Sven [the given name of the England's Swedish-born manager]' (Clench, 2002: 1), while the back-page headline recorded the 'Beckham Battle-Cry' to 'FINISH THE JOB LADS' (Howard, 2002: 56). For the next game, *The Sun* promised that, 'ENGLAND'S soccer heroes will inflict pain on the Danes today by booting them out of the World Cup' (2002b: 1). As a game against Brazil approached, the wrap-around front and back page consisted of only player and manager headshots and the headline 'YOU CAN DO IT LADS' (*The Sun*, 2002d: 1), while inside stories included 'One Flies Flag for the Lads' carrying a fake internet photograph of the Queen in an England shirt with her face painted with the flag of St George (*The Sun*, 2002c: 3). The story 'BEAT 'EM FOR MY GRANDAD, Says Bobby Moore's [the late, World Cup winning England captain] grandson' (*The Sun*, 2002a: 6) was one of many nostalgic references to England's solitary World Cup tournament win in 1966. The *Daily Mirror* (2002a: 1), for example, on the same day listed 12 reasons 'WHY WE'LL WIN' on its front page, adding that these were all precedents from 1966.

On the day of the game, the front page of the *Daily Mirror* (2002b: 1) consisted of white space, a small flag of St George and the small, centred headline, 'This page is cancelled. Nothing else matters.' Its World Cup supplement noted that, while the 'loyalties' of Japanese fans (we might note, in global postmodern style terms) were 'split': 'The whole of England has been brought together with a dream of victory. We want it, we need it, we crave it. The country is speaking with one voice: DO IT FOR US!' (*World Cup Mirror*, 2002: 1). The next day, after England's loss, the *Daily Mirror's* (2002c: 1) black wrap-around carried a front-page picture focusing on distraught England goalkeeper David Seaman, accompanied by the headline 'Anyone for tennis', while the back page carried an image of a controversial German victory in the same round with the statement 'AND JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT COULDN'T GET ANY WORSE . . .' Within a few days, *The Sun* (2002e: 1) rearticulated football and monarchy with the emphasis on the latter, carrying a prominent front-page image of Prince William in jeans juggling a football.

This brief snapshot of English tabloid media discourse during the 2002 World Cup illustrates the ways in which international sport compulsively reactivates and recirculates long-standing and emergent myths of nation. Constant homages were paid to 'our lads' and 'our heroes', with frequent cross-references

to serving military personnel in Afghanistan such as the Royal Marines, who were ‘hunting Taliban’ while monitoring the progress of the World Cup during their tour of duty (Crossie et al., 2002: 2). Interpellations of the national ‘us’ (despite the fact that the national ‘we’ is an effect of sporting governmentality — and incorporates ‘citizens’ who are not football supporters of any kind) constitute the kind of discourse that is inimical to globalization rhetorics. For example, in Britain, confronted with the prospect of a referendum on the replacement of the national currency (sterling) in favour of the multinational Euro, the World Cup fostered a political and cultural climate that was unlikely to be favourable to changes seeming to infringe national sovereignty by replacing the heavily symbolic pound in the name of cross-border exchange rate efficiency. The cultural atmosphere in early 21st-century England was close to the kind of discourse reflected in much earlier representations of sport and nationhood, such as Geoffrey Green’s famous reflections in the London *Times* on the significance of the English national team’s first home defeat at (the now controversially under renovation) Wembley Stadium by ‘communist’ Hungary in 1953: ‘England at last [were] beaten by the foreign invader on solid English soil’ (quoted in Miller et al., 2001: 43).

During the 2002 World Cup, the English nationalist fetishization of David Beckham’s hair and left foot, and of Michael Owen’s groin; the continuing reference to the Falklands/Malvinas War on the eve of its 20th anniversary in the lead-up to the game against Argentina; and the anxiety about a possible German tournament win, were all examples of the foregrounding of local, idiosyncratic rivalries and identifications. On a wider stage, the victory of first-time participants Senegal over world champions France in the opening match (the country in which most team members regularly play their football) was open to (post)colonial interpretation, just as the first-time hosting of the World Cup in Asia provoked interpretive narratives of the rising nations of the Orient challenging the established hegemony of the Occident (Larmer, 2002). Spectacular expressions of South Korean nationalism (an estimated four million Koreans publicly celebrated their quarter-final win) and the more general carnivalesque presentations of national culture that football generates problematize the meanings and effects of sport. The sport carnival’s turning of the ‘world upside down’ by celebrating the (legal or imagined) nation may be interpreted in functionalist terms as a safety valve for resistance to globalization. But, less automatically, it can clearly operate as a force that provides considerable cultural reinforcement for those who wish to preserve older structures and boundaries — and, indeed, to (re)construct new ones.

## Conclusion: Repudiating the Global?

This article has had one principal aim — to interrogate conventional claims that sport, especially in the shape of mega-media events, is a harbinger of globalization, especially at the cultural level. While the discourses presented display a range of potential applications to the concepts of globalization and of nation, it appears that international sport’s fundamental reliance on localized, nationally

inflected forms of identity inevitably also offers resources for the mobilization of conscious and unconscious anti-globalization perspectives. This position does not mean ignoring the development of a global cultural economy in which sport is a central player, or romanticizing the nation as an inherently virtuous bearer of positive human values. But it does question whether sport's primary organizational framework valorizing identity-based competition, despite its many variations, will inevitably assist the completion of cultural globalization in its most advanced sense.

Thus, perhaps the project of globalization will have to look elsewhere for an ideal sociocultural institution that is not likely to trigger, with considerable intensity, the kind of cultural nationalism evidenced by sport. There is certainly no immediate prospect of the uncoupling of the sport–nation nexus. As has been argued, such a reconceptualization of sport would simultaneously erode (if not destroy) a key component of the affective power that is translatable into economic capital. As David L. Andrews and C.L. Cole (2002: 123) argue in a recent issue of the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* devoted to 'The Nation Reconsidered', the "nation" remains a virulent force in everyday lived experience' despite the current 'global moment'. Under these circumstances sport may not, ultimately, be so much a repudiation of the idea of the global in the fullest — that is, comprehensively cultural — sense, as something of a disappointment to it.

Thus, sociologists of sport need to go beyond the current accumulation of evidence of the resilience of the national, the local and the particular. While useful, this growing body of empirical knowledge tends to be furnished as an indication of the limits to globalization arising from unwillingness or inability to translate global prescriptions into local structures and practices. In this regard, sport is little different from other cultural forms bearing the imprint of globalizing pressures alongside the signs that they have not been completely accommodated. Deeper consideration might be given to the lineaments of the institutional formation of sport itself, and to the analytical possibility that sport may do more than exhibit and resist different elements of globalization. Sport's compulsive attachment to the production of national difference may, instead, constitutively repudiate the embrace of the global.

## Notes

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1. It is important to be precise about the 'mega' concepts analysed here without becoming too deeply immersed in expository debate. The 'global level' is regarded as the supra-national stratum of institutional operation that, at least ideationally, transcends particularist institutions and relations. The 'project of globalization' is proposed as the discursive logic of such 'post-particularism' rather than the desired outcome of any specific set of elite individuals or institutions. For the purposes of the argument globalization is being construed in its strongest, most totalizing sense. It has, of course, been variously argued that the global and the local interpenetrate, conceptually and empirically, as Roland Robertson's (1995) often-cited neologism 'glocalization' reveals. Here, however, the full discursive logic of globalization — which is commonly mobilized in a range of academic and other contexts — is countenanced. The 'nation'

in its various formulations here ('cultural', 'sporting', 'sovereign, legal', 'imagined') is understood not as a fixed empirical object, but as a mutable concept applied to a diverse range of symbolic and material relations invoking an identified 'people' and their variously construed distinctive institutions, practices and values.

2. It should be noted that by far the largest 'foreign' source in footballing terms came from the same nation state — Scotland.
3. Jonathan Magee and John Sugden (2002: 421) note that, by the 1998–9 season, over 500 'overseas' players operated in the English leagues, comprising 45% of squad players in the elite Premier League. They, however, use a more conventional core–periphery model than a globalization model per se.

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