

Sport as a Resource of Hope

By Grant Jarvie

The capacity of sport to contribute to change must not be overstated, it is limited but possibilities do exist within sport to provide some resources of hope. Sport has helped (i) to change some people's lives, (ii) symbolize change but also (iii) contribute to and facilitate social change.

While it is important to explain and understand the impact and legacy of major sporting events such concerns should not ignore the transformative capacity of sport to produce social change. Historically the potential of sport lies not with the values promoted by global sport since are invariably unjust and uneven. The possibilities that exist within sport are those that help with radically different views of the world perhaps based upon opportunities to foster trust, obligations, redistribution and respect for sport. To ignore the capacity of sport to assist with social change is not an option for policy advisers, international think tanks and the world of sport itself.

Sport, Aid and International Development

The Norway Cup has taken place every year since 1972. It is one of the world's largest football tournaments for children. Every year more than 25,000 children play in the Norway Cup. In 1979 a team from Sao Paulo consisting entirely of children aged between 10-19 from the poorest areas of the city participated for the first time. In 1998 1,325 teams from 34 nations played 3,500 football matches in 49 fields. The aim of the tournament is to create bonds between participants across nations through education and sport, a foundation of friendship between clubs from the West and particularly poorer areas of the world such as parts of Africa. The Norwegian Minister of International Development values the role that such a project plays in 'producing internationalism and co-operation between Norway and many other countries such as Brazil, Kenya, Palestine'.

The establishment of sport within the international development portfolio signifies a shift in emphasis within the international development assistance agenda. Olympic Aid was founded in Norway in 1994 as part of the legacy of the Lillehammer Winter Olympic Games. The strategic objectives are to deliver programmes in situations of disadvantage around the world, develop education programmes and to advocate on national and international levels for the inclusion of sport and play as recognized and well-supported strategies of child and community development. Olympic Aid raises funds to support its programmes from governments, foundations, individuals and from members of the Olympic Movement and the Olympic Family including: athletes, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), National Olympic Committees (NOC), organizing committees of host countries, and corporate partners.

The concept of an Olympic Truce is noteworthy in terms of recognising the role of International Non-Governmental Organisations in influencing and brokering international

relations. An Olympic Truce was launched on 24 January 1994 to cover the period of the Lillehammer Winter Games given the then continuing conflict in Yugoslavia. This Olympic Truce involved representations from the World Health Organisation (WHO), UNICEF, the Red Cross, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the Norwegian Government that had to resolve the issue of evacuating NOC leaders and athletes from Sarajevo so that they could compete in the Winter Olympic Games. In 1998, during the Nagano Olympic Games, the observance of Olympic Truce allowed the UN Secretary – General Kofi Annan to intervene to seek a diplomatic resolution to the crisis in Iraq. At 2004 Athens Olympic Games, North and South Korea marched under the same flag of the Korean Peninsula. Thereafter an item on any potential Olympic Truces arising out of any global, local, national or international situations is permanently on the agenda of the UN General Assembly in the year prior to an Olympic Games. The UN flag also flies at all Olympic Games competition sites.

Sport in a number of ways has been part of a programme of social intervention and welfare aimed at supporting people who have been traumatized by conflict; in the promotion of programmes of conflict resolution and by helping in situations of military conflict where sport is used to draw people out of routines of violence.

The Twic Olympics which have been staged in Twic County (Sudan) since 2000 and are aimed at encouraging a moment of tolerance and compassion in an area of the world which has experienced conflict for more than half a century. For nations competing in this years 2008 Beijing Olympic Games the Twic Olympics offer a surreal parallel.

At the opening ceremony, each district has a flag bearer at its head, carrying a homemade banner with stars, or leopards or bulls crayoned on it. Behind them march the athletes and an effort is made to keep colours uniform within each district. Few in Sudan can afford to choose their clothes with care, few of the athletes wear shoes and yet the significance is not the dress of the athletes but that it is taking place at all. Each January teams of athletes gather to compete at football, volleyball, dance, athletics and tugs of war. The competitors are full of people like James who was drafted into the army at the age of 11, 'does not smile and in playing sport points out that nothing is normal for us'. At the end of these Twic Olympic Games the district with the most medals is declared the winner with the prize being a mechanised flour grinding mill. In a country with few roads or even brick buildings or that which is deemed the norm by other standards and values such forms of capital are worth competing for and it is sport that is the mechanism for this to happen.

In part the agents for social change involve not just sport but education through sport. Education through sport projects have long since been viewed as agents of social change with the rationale being that they can (i) increase knowledge and skills and in a broader sense contribute to the knowledge economy; (ii) help to provide opportunities for life-long learning and sustain not just education but an involvement in sport and physical activity; (iii) make a voluntary contribution to informal education through sport that can make a positive contribution to helping young people; (iv) that education through sport

can help foster and develop critical debate about key public issues ; (v) support programmes in different parts of the world which involve sport as part of an approach to tackling HIV education and (vi) help to foster social capital through fostering relationships, networking and making connections. These networks through education and sport have the potential to act as a form of resource that can be seen as forming a kind of capital.

It is the ability to combine sport with other social forces such as education through sport that has facilitated an increased profile for sport by UNICEF, UNAIDS and WHO.

Sport as a Resource of Hope

The truth about global and Olympic sport as a universal creed is that it is also an engine of injustice. The social dimension and possibilities of sport remain as empty slogans, and constant historical reminders proclaiming the principles of equality, justice and the eradication of poverty have not sufficed to make a reality of it. There is just one thing that many corporate lobbyists and social movements both understand and that is that the real issue is not trade, whether it is the plundering of athletic talent or mineral wealth from Africa, but power. A fundamental gap continues to exist both within sport and between the outcome of universal, often western prescriptions, and local realities. Sport needs to be more just and less charitable but it continues to provide a pathway for hope for some in different parts of the world.

There is the reality of Maria Urrutia the women from Colombia who lifted 245 Kilos to win Colombia's first ever Olympic Gold Medal at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. The country as you know usually hits the headlines for other reasons but speaking to her nation following her success she was clear about what sport had helped her to do:

'She hoped that her success would reach others like her poor, black and female'- she went on –“ I hope others see that you can make a living, see the world and get an education, through sports, or even in music and other arts' (The Herald 7 October 2000:18).

Every year about 200 million people move in search of employment- about 3 per cent of the world's population (Seabrook, 2003). Legal migrants who leave their homes in poor countries to provide labour or entertainment in other parts of the world are generally regarded as privileged. Many African runners have provided an exhilarating spectacle for global sports audiences but what is often forgotten is that the money raised from these performances often provides pathways of hope for other people. Very little has been written about the part played by some athletes in earning money to support whole families and even villages in their country of origin. When the career of a leading world athlete from a developing country is brought to a premature end, the consequences often extend far beyond the track. Maria Mutola the Mozambican, former Olympic and five-time world indoor 800m champion and world record holder routinely sends track winnings back to her country of origin. Chamanchulo, the suburb of Maputo in which

Mutola grew up, is ravaged by HIV, passed on in childbirth or breast milk to 40% of the children. In 2003 when Mutola became the first athlete to collect \$1million for outright victory on the Golden League Athletic Grand Prix Circuit, part of the cash went to the foundation she endowed to help provide scholarships, kit, education and coaching for young athletes. Farms and small businesses have often been sustained by her winnings on the circuit, which have provided for the purchasing of tractors, fertilisers and the facilities to drill small wells.

Sport continues to hold both a promise and possibility for some in different parts of worlds but it also has the potential to be a symbol of change.

Catherine Astrid Salome Freeman became the first Aboriginal to represent her country at the Olympics, at Barcelona in 1992, its first world champion, and first Olympic champion. In doing so she became a symbol for reconciliation between a black and white Australia in which she had much to forgive. Her grandmother, Alice Sibley, was one of the so-called stolen generation, taken from her parents at the age of eight by a reviled Australian government policy that was designed to help integration. As a consequence of the 1950s programme which saw Aboriginal children removed from their parents and settled with white families Freeman remained unaware of here ancestry on her mother's side. Her father an outstanding footballer left home when she was five, died of an alcohol-induced stroke aged 53, she was sexually molested at 11 and later abused by whites. Her Olympic success has perhaps helped to change the face of prejudice, almost a taboo subject in a modern Australia. Her Olympic reception following Victory in the final of the 400 metres may be viewed in stark contrast to the day she travelled to an athletics meeting aged 13. Waiting outside Melbourne's Flinders Street Station, she was ordered to move on by a group of middle-aged white housewives, when the whole adjacent seating area lay vacant. As Cathy Freeman held the Olympic torch aloft during the opening ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games she did so in an allegedly different Australia from the one experienced by her parents. She herself had become perhaps one of Australia's greatest ever sporting icons but also a symbol of the struggle that aboriginal Australians had to endure in order to win social, civil and political rights.

Sport, Power and the South

Many examples could be drawn upon to reflect the unequal distribution of resources and power between the North and the South. Sport in some senses is no different and before readily accepting all consuming notions of global sport it is vital to note that what is often accepted as global sport does not often reflect the reality of global sport and the Olympics themselves often present western tastes, passions and choices of sport. The struggle that sports such as sumu wrestling and wushu to be represented in the Olympics is an example of this power and influence in practice.

The flow and distribution of resources between Europe and Asia resulting from television broadcasting has been subject to criticism by Asian broadcasters. The way forward, according to Total Sports Asia is firstly to recognise the unique characteristics of the Asian broadcasting market and facilitate local operators controlling the International

sports opportunities that are arising out of Asia. Put more critically each territory in Asia is different and independent and International broadcasting companies located in the West need to recognise that Asia is not a golden goose designed to service European television demands for sport. European companies if they wish to help develop the local in Asia need to show a commitment. The Asian sports market is still expanding and more and more initiatives are coming up with new channels, broadband and video on demand services. There has been a massive investment in infrastructure with the result that Asia, is arguably ahead of other parts of the world. Asia is an increasingly sophisticated television sports market and gone are the days when Asia was a dumping ground for content from the rest of the world. The example of Asian broadcasting is utilized here to illustrate and emphasise the dynamics of sporting capital and the potential of the local in the South to challenge and produce change within broader International sporting opportunities which have traditionally been controlled out-with the South.

The Promise and Possibilities of Sport

Improving life chances requires a co-ordinated effort and as such any contribution that sport can make must also build upon a wider coalition of sustained support for social and progressive policies. The life chances approach to narrowing the gap between rich and poor has a key role to play in producing social change. It requires harnessing a strong political narrative and action plan that fits with many people's intuitive understanding that life should not be determined by socio-economic position and that people do have choices, whilst drawing attention to the fact that some people and places face greater risks and more limited opportunities. Equalising life chances and focusing on areas such as poverty should sit together as part of a vision for a better society. In part the promise and possibilities of sport are encapsulated in the words of the former Olympic and Commonwealth athlete Kip Keino (Interview-with the author 5th February 2007):

'I believe in this world that sport is one of the tools that can unite youth- sport is something different from fighting in war and it can make a difference- we can change this world by using sport as a tool'

'I've run a lot for water charities and children's charities. I believe we share in this world with members of our society who are less fortunate. This is important. We came to this world with nothing and we leave this world with nothing. So we can be able to make a better world for those who need assistance'

The late writer Susan Sontag talking about the novel commented that any novel worth reading was an education of the heart in that it enlarged your sense of possibilities and of what human nature had the capacity to do. She was fervent believer in the capacity of art to delight, to inform and transform the world in which we live. Such arguments are readily accepted about the arts but they need also make sense in relation to other areas of social life such as sport and in particular the possible capacity of sport to fulfill its

potential and to enlarge one's sense of human possibilities, to delight, to inform and ultimately help to transform the worlds in which we live.

Sport it has been suggested should be thought of more as a potential resource of hope in that sport has some limited capacity to assist with social change, can have an impact on life chances, be part of a holistic approach to what a recent report by a international think tank referred to as 'Narrowing the Gap'. Intervention can come in many forms, legislation, policy, writing, investigating, uncovering silences, pressure groups, social forums, campaigns and activism, re-allocation of resources, not accepting injustice in sport, intervention.

Historically sport and education have been key avenues of social mobility and an escape from poverty for some. Thinking systematically about emancipatory alternatives and the part played by sport and is only one way or element in the process by which the limits of the possible can expand and the promise and possibilities of the power of education through sport can become more of a reality for more people.

The social and political challenge is enormous. In 2005, the UNDP published its Human Development Report, which took stock of efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. It makes uncomfortable reading with little evidence of the agreed benchmarks to be achieved by 2015 being on target.

Furthermore the promise of sport should not detract from the fact that increasing competition within some of the poorest areas of the world often depletes social capital and leaves its potential fragmented. The informal sector sometimes dissolves self-help networks and solidarities essential to the survival of the very poor and it is often women and children who are the most vulnerable. An NGO worker in Haiti, describes the ultimate logic of neo-liberal individualism in a context of absolute immiseration (Davis, 2006:184):

'Now everything is for sale. The women used to receive you with hospitality, give you coffee, share all that she has in her home. I could go get a plate of food at a neighbour's house; a child could get a coconut at her godmother's, two mangoes at another aunt's. But these acts of solidarity are disappearing with the growth of poverty. Now when you arrive somewhere, either the woman offers to sell you a cup of coffee or she has no coffee at all. The tradition of mutual giving that allowed us to help each other and survive- this is all being lost'

Sport can be a resource of hope. Its power is limited but the contribution sport has made in relation to developing people, raising aspirations and being a resource of hope, nationally, internationally and locally should not be underestimated either.

As the calendar of international sporting events unfold each year and the spectacle of the Beijing Olympics (2008) is followed by the Football World Cup in South Africa (2010) and the Commonwealth Games in Delhi (2010) and Scotland (2014) it is worth remembering that while there is no single agent, group or movement that can carry the hopes of humanity alone, there are many points of engagement through sport that offer good causes for optimism that things can get better.

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