

Sport and Peace? The continuous search – Liberia, West Africa

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The Hypothesis/Contention

- Can sport encourage practices of nationhood?
- Can sport undermine the same practices?
- Who is a war-devastated people's political representative?
- The sporting hero-heroic masculinity
- The role of football in interventionist policies of
 - Charities
 - NGOs
 - FIFA

Liberia: The African exception?

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- Contested identity – ‘glocalisation’, ‘Americanisation’, ‘indigenisation’, ‘core-periphery’
- Football
 - Arrival in 1930s – Atlantic coastal shipping
 - The main occasions for cessation of conflict
 - Africa Cup and World Cup Qualifiers
 - Migrating professional players: returning heroes?
- Traditional heroic masculinity: from political and narrative acumen to celebration of the warrior and mass murderer
- The County Meet: 1964

Military Players: Charles Taylor

- Big Man politics and military entrepreneurs
- A war of all against all? 8 factions
- Low level munitions/highly theatrical/child soldiers
- ‘Chief Patron of Sport’ - Taylor exile to extradition (2006) to face 11 counts of war crime
- The war continuum 1997-2002 LURD
- UN Presence – 15,000 personnel 2004

Lessons in football?

- Child soldiers – dispossessed; nihilistic
- Tradition is destroyed
- Little love for children
- How and where are rules of civil society taught?
- Has football a role in this milieu?

Football and Child Protection

- Child soldiers – dispossessed; nihilistic
- Tradition is destroyed, little love for children
- How and where are rules of civil society taught?
- Salesians of Don Bosco
- Night shelters – daytime football
- Child protection responsibilities
- Rights-based training
- Educational narratives
- A success story?

King of the Republic: George Weah

- 'The King' of the Republic?
- Born 1966 – Kru ethnicity – Clara Town slum (quintessential rags to riches)
- Young Survivors – Invisible Eleven – Tonerre Yaounde
- AS Monaco – Paris St. Germain – AC Milan – Chelsea
- Manchester City – Olympic Marseille – Al-Jazeera
- FIFA World Footballer of the Year & African Player of the Year
- Funder of the Lone Star? (philanthropist?)
- The symbol of the male hope in Liberia (the only statue in Monrovia)
- Resident of Miami
- Unicef ambassador for football
- FIFA accolades
- CAF representative
- Relatively inarticulate/elementary education
- Lauded by Nelson Mandela
- Converted from Christianity to Islam – and back again!

The President Elect?

- The chaos of the LFA
 - Izeeta Wesley (the first woman football president in Africa)
- 2005 National Elections

Weah	Sirleaf – Johnson
Footballing hero	Harvard Economist
‘The King’	‘The Iron Lady’
UNESCO Ambassador	UN Development Programme
‘You know no book, we vote for you’	‘Motherly sensitivity’
	‘All the men have failed Liberia..’
1 st 28%	20%
2 nd 38%	61%

Sport For All

- Sport has an internationalist ethos and sporting practice can be pivotal in communicating pro-peace and anti-discriminatory messages
- Over the past decade sport and popular culture have been particularly effective in assisting the dispossessed and traumatised
- Sport is the cultural arena – without parallel – for the making of global citizens
- Sport is therapeutic – it provides lessons in rule-governed behaviour and assists those traumatised by violence
- Sport enables divided communities to agree boundaries and tolerate differences
- Sport enables peace and reconciliation, but other strategies must be in place

Sport, Competition and Success

- Sport success – especially at international level – can bridge divisions, and create shared positive experiences for divided societies.
- Sporting success provides an experience of kinship/togetherness – often providing an unusual experience of moving in the same direction and, wanting the same thing.
- At the same time some populations within nations will not share the sporting joy. They retain a sense of 'otherness' .
- Great sporting success is a transient moment. The long-term effects of victory are usually varied and hard to predict

Sport and peace – be cautious

- Sport involves competition which sits on a spectrum with war at its most dangerous extreme
- Sport works with metaphors and symbols of invasion and conquests.
- Perhaps sport can be adapted by some to promote hatreds without too many casualties
- At times, sport has reflected hostilities and even exacerbated hostilities

Sport Projects that Build Peace – Checklist

- Projects must be aware of particular cultural contexts and the needs of local people
- Projects must be connected to other strategies for building peace.
- Do the hostile peoples really want change?
- Do the people welcome outside agencies, with external policies and solutions?
- Do these communities want sport?
- Which sports are effective in facilitating peaceful communication?
- How can sports be adapted to assist peaceful relations between divided communities?

The Contexts of Conflict

- Devastated infrastructure
- Displacement of populations
- Widespread grieving/trauma
- The displaced/dispossessed/disgruntled
- Seeking indications of normality
- Uncertainty

Good Practice Implementation - Checklist

- Get to know the context – what is traditional?
- When might participation offend family structures/social reputation?
- When is sporting participation considered radical?
- Safety issues – transport to and from events, trainers, coaches and reps must be above suspicion

Grassroots Sports: Issues in Peace Building

- Grass roots sport creates networks – often with easy access to young men (the most likely participants in sport and conflict)
- Are these networks being occupied by those proactively looking to move towards reconciliation or those with other ideas, or neither?
- Are these networks monitored to watch who is in control – and by whom?
- How do grassroots sports interact with the political infrastructure (whether national sports organisations / schools etc.) and to what extent does politics play a role – for example do some districts receive less help than their neighbours from the state. Is there a mismatch and if there is, how does this affect the relationships between the villages?

Indicators of social exclusion in communities experiencing conflict

- Despairing and fearful population with high instance of expectation of crime/violence against the person
- Absence of essential supplies or controlled by militia
- Poor infrastructure for all daily essentials (including sport)
- Inertia in the population; fear of public spaces
- Sectarian/gang violence
- State-sanctioned violence
- Easy access to weapons
- High level of substance misuse (militates against physical activity)

Sport and Social Inclusion

- Does the project place equal value on all cultures to produce a new cultural mix?
- Does the project protect and promote minority sports and sports associations?
- Does sporting practice serve (and fund) the needs of particular minorities?
- Sport can produce a positive mindset, sport can widen our networks and induce trust in others

Children and Sport - Checklist

- What protection is offered to children in your sports organisations and clubs?
- Are there procedures in place to refuse entry to adults considered inappropriate?
- Are there awareness seminars offered on the issue of child rights and protection?
- What age group do you envisage your projects addressing? Why?

Target populations: Women

Barriers:

- Religion and ancestral tradition
- Family structures
- Cultural norms re gender segregation
- Male domination of most sports
- Duties re children and care of elders
- Safety from abuse both at sports clubs and travelling to and fro

Target populations: ethnic minorities

- Race: inherited, visible, unchangeable
- Integral to explorations around ideas of race and character (temperament, intelligence, morality)
- Sport: often a platform for racist sentiments/ discrimination by clubs and institutionalised racism

Considerations for Inclusion

- One size does not fit all
- Those seeking shared identities through sport continue to be thwarted by issues of ethnicity
- Sport can offer a temporary sanctuary as a social ‘no-man’s land’ but this often lasts only for the duration of the tournament
- Obstacles of residential and educational segregation frustrate peace and sport projects
- Optimism can be found in carefully controlled situations involving small numbers of people
- Team sports codes are more effective than individual sports codes in promoting the integration of populations

Conclusions

- Despite the success of small groups, no project can reach all those affected or in need of support
- Long term initiatives need sustained and continuous support
- Sport is the hook – catch the excluded and disaffected and add life lessons in addition to the lessons on sport
- Complex social outcomes (social inclusion, empowerment, rehabilitation) are difficult to identify or to deduce the specific contribution that sport has made.

The future?

- Teaches life skills, rule-sharing, honesty
- Prevention – intervention – rehabilitation
- Engagement – motivation – inspiration

BUT

- From whom do you accept funding?
- How can we move from emotion to evidence?
- What does reconciliation hope to achieve, and how do we measure it?
- *“If you cannot feed our children, do not bring us sport”*

The Best?

- A workable metaphor
- Organisational talent
- Sense of pride
- Connects neighbourhoods
- Inspires a sense of justice
- Avoid the next call to arms
- The game cannot solve... can it mediate?