

Michał Marcin Kobierecki\*

### **SPORT IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS EXPECTATIONS, POSSIBILITIES AND EFFECTS**

**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this article is to show how sport can matter in international relations. Sport can be a subject or a tool of international relations. It can be used by states or geopolitical blocks to display their alleged superiority or any other desired characteristic. Governments may desire athletic victories, which are meant to imply, for example, the power of the state and its political and economic system. Participation in sport can also be used for political reasons on an international scale; a number of political objectives can be achieved by states by participating (or not) in sports events. Not only is sport affected by a country's policies, but on certain occasions sports events can influence states.

**KEY WORDS:** sport, politics, international relations, sport as a political tool.

Sport can be considered as one of the most exciting modern phenomena—modern because, in its current form, it was born no longer than 150 years ago, exciting because it wins the interest of millions of people. It is estimated that the London 2012 Olympic Games' opening ceremony was watched on TV by 900 million people.<sup>1</sup> Poland's most viewed television broadcasts were the European Football Championships in 2012 in which the opening match between Poland and Greece was watched by 15.5 million viewers, and the Salt Lake City 2012 Olympic ski jumping

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\* Department of Political Theory and Thought, Faculty of International and Political Studies, University of Lodz, E-mail: [michal.kobierecki@gmail.com](mailto:michal.kobierecki@gmail.com).

<sup>1</sup> London 2012 opening ceremony audience hit 900 million predicts IOC, 7 August 2012. Web. 4 October 2012 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/olympics/news/london-2012-opening-ceremony-audience-hit-900-million-predicts-ioc-8015361.html>>.

contest, watched by 14.5 million viewers.<sup>2</sup> No wonder sport has become very attractive for business because of its commercial possibilities. Sports stars earn millions for advertising products, and sport broadcasts are among the most lucrative for advertisers. The great popularity of sport could not be missed by the world of politics. If sports celebrities and victors can be profitable for business, then they can also be good for politicians searching for voters' support, for state leaders searching to foster national pride, and even for political systems in need of accentuating their superiority.

The aim of this article is to show how sport can matter in international relations and to make a prognosis for the future relationship between these two fields. The international sports system can even be seen as a part of the international political system, which means that both systems mutually influence one another and cannot be examined apart from each other, according to system theory. The author will therefore try to describe both how sport influences international politics and how politics influences sport.

Firstly, though, the subject of this article needs to be defined. Sport is, in fact, a term that relatively often tends to be confused. One can distinguish recreational sport, high-performance or elite sport, amateur sport, professional sport, etc. Recreational or leisure sport is performed by the largest group of people, and its main purpose is to enhance society's health (*Wybrane zagadnienia z podstaw rekreacji i turystyki* 67). Elite sport, on the other hand, is meant to be more demanding and sophisticated, includes hard training and requires high quality performance, and is often a full time job (Aman 660). In other words, most sport that can be seen on television and that gains the attention of both media and spectators at sports venues is elite sport, and it is the dimension of elite, high performance sport's physical rivalry that is the subject of this article. High performance sport can, however, have different levels: regional, national and international. For the purpose of examining the associations between sport and international relations, it is international sport that will be my focus.

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<sup>2</sup> "TVP podała wyniki: rekord oglądalności pobity!," 9 June 2012. Web. 4 October 2012 <<http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/621527,TVP-podala-wyniki-rekord-ogladalnosci-pobity>>.

Sport and international relations should have little in common, apart from an international dimension. However, it is commonly known that world politics influences sport, and the opposite, sports events can sometimes catalyze political ones. It was not always like that, however. It is important to outline that sport as a social phenomenon is relatively new. Although its origins can be dated back to ancient times to the sports of Ancient Greece, modern sport appeared in the middle of the nineteenth century. Initially it had a very amateur character and was not popular, so its significance for international relations was rather marginal. That situation changed radically in the first half of the twentieth century, mainly due to the International Olympic Committee and the Olympic Games, which transformed sport to a higher level. The growing popularity of sport during this time can be easily illustrated by the number of athletes participating in the Olympics. A remarkable increase can be observed: Athens 1896—241 participants, Paris 1900—997, Los Angeles 1932—1332, Berlin 1936—3963.<sup>3</sup> The rising popularity of sport could also be seen in the media. Taking British newspapers as an example, *The People* in 1924 sold 600,000 copies with 4 pages of sport, whereas in 1946, 1/3 of each issue was about sport and sales rose to 4,600,000 copies (Holt 309). This radical increase in interest in sport led to an enhanced role of sports in international relations. As Jay Coakley stated, when sport gains popularity, government involvement usually increases (Coakley 439). Jean-Loup Chappelet and Emmanuel Bayle explain the rise of government interest in sport, claiming that sport became a socioeconomic phenomenon that affects a remarkable proportion of the population (Chappelet, Bayle 20). It can be stated then that the mutual influence between sport and international relations was initiated when sport gained vast popularity, which allowed politicians to profit from it and sometimes even sports officials to influence politicians.

Sport can play a key role in international relations in various ways. It can, for instance, be used by states or geopolitical blocks to display their alleged superiority or any other desired characteristic. That type of sport-international relations tends to be the most common and the most significant at the same time.

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<sup>3</sup> The exact numbers of participants in the Olympic Games differ according to various sources. The author decided to cite information publicized by the International Olympic Committee on its website. Web. 8 October 2012 <[www.olympic.org/olympic-games](http://www.olympic.org/olympic-games)>.

In that context, governments may desire athletic victories, which are meant to imply, for example, the power of the state and its political and economic system. That aspect is exceptionally important for non-democratic countries. That message can have both an internal and external dimension. The first one is addressed to the state's society, whereas the second is connected with international relations. Hosting sporting events can in this aspect play a very similar role to sports victories themselves. Nowadays organizing the most popular sports events such as the Olympic Games, Football World and European Championships, etc. are enormous ventures. Therefore, only rich and powerful countries are able to cope with hosting them. What is more, some countries, the ones that are chosen to host world sports event, try to organize the best event of its kind in history, and show at the same time their superiority and power to the world.

Participation in sport is also a very important aspect of sport's connections with international relations. Although at face value sport is a competition among athletes, when we look at its international dimension, athletic competition is less important than competition among nations. A number of political interests can be achieved by states by participating or not participating in sporting events. This can be vitally important for newly emerging states struggling for international recognition. On the other hand, resigning from such participation a —sports boycott—can also be used as a powerful means of influencing other countries or sports organizations.<sup>4</sup>

As mentioned, the correlation between sport and governments is not one-way only. On certain occasions it was sport that affected the main actors in international relations, the states. Organizing great sports events has enormous economical, political and social significance for the host country. The choice of which country or countries are granted the right to host a sporting event belongs to a sport organization, which obviously represents the world of sport. Situations whereby sports events triggered political events have also occurred, such as the Football War between El Salvador and Honduras (Stradling 198).<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting, then,

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<sup>4</sup> Sports organizations should also be considered as actors in international relations, as they can both affect and be affected by states' politics.

<sup>5</sup> In the late 1960s, relations between Honduras and El Salvador were tense due to immigration and border disputes. Both countries met in the football World Cup Qualifiers in June 1969. The matches ignited a growing hatred and shortly afterwards war broke out.

that the dependence between sport and international relations is mutual.

Sport's role in international relations can be seen most clearly when countries struggle for victories. Obviously they do so to achieve certain political goals, and manifesting power is probably the most important. The explanation is relatively easy. It is quite difficult to achieve sports success on a world scale. Sport has become so professional and sophisticated that considerable amounts of money and many people are behind every victory. Hence, not every country is capable of achieving such a level in sport, and, among those that are, there can be harsh competition for winning even more.

The struggle for achieving sport victories that can be used for political purposes takes different forms. One of the most popular, and probably the most effective at the same time, is the Olympic Games medal table count (Senn 108).<sup>6</sup> Why is this so important? The Olympics are the biggest sporting event in the World, with the greatest number of spectators, TV viewers, and athletes. It is also a multisport event, so during the games athletes compete in many different sports. That gives a perfect statistical opportunity to decide who is the best. Defining a country's power by its sports abilities seems the fairest. An occasional win can always be a matter of fortune or accident. A country can win an Olympic gold due to having an exceptionally talented athlete who could have been born anywhere. Wins can also be achieved by a sportsperson who was naturalized or who lives and trains abroad and only participates in sports contests under their homeland's flag. There can also be states with extraordinary traditions in particular sports, such as Jamaica in short distance running or Kenya and

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<sup>6</sup> The medal table takes into account medals won by a country during a sports event, for instance the Olympic Games. There have been many ways of counting, some also taking into consideration further positions rather than just the top three. In general though, the most common way of counting positions in the medal table is taking gold medals into account. If more than one country have the same number of golds, silvers are counted, and if there remain draws, bronze medals are taken into consideration. It is worth mentioning that the Olympic medal table is unofficial in a way. The International Olympic Committee does not approve constructing them, according to the modern olympism rule of separation from politics, and constructing the Olympic medal table obviously has such a connotation. As the IOC has stated repeatedly, the Olympic Games is a contest between individuals.

Ethiopia in long distance running. Their victories in these disciplines do not necessarily mean political power. It is much more difficult to achieve victories in many different events. According to various researches, the Olympic medal table is affected by such factors as population, income per capita, advantage of being a host, and the political system (Bian 37-38). These factors could obviously be at the same time used as determinants of a state's overall power, which could confirm the thesis of the Olympic medal table as a reflection of a country's power.

The Olympic medal count has not always played an important role in international relations. During the first years of the modern Olympic Movement, sport did not draw enough attention. Although countries competed with the aim of winning the most gold medals for the first time in London in 1908,<sup>7</sup> the medal table really mattered for the first time in 1936 during the summer Olympic Games hosted by Germany under Adolf Hitler's rule. Nazi ideology praised physical fitness, so sports victories during Berlin's games seemed to be more important than in previous games. In fact, Germans saw it as a matter of honour. As Hitler stated, by performing "honourably," Nazi Germany could show the world that its commitment to breeding and training a new elite of athletic warriors was rendering the entire nation physically and spiritually superior to the "soft and decadent" Western democracies (Large 165). This quotation perfectly summarizes the purpose of winning in sports—the state shows both to the world and to its own society that it is powerful and strong, and this is especially important when that country is in conflict with other states, and Germany at that time, at least ideologically, was indeed in such a conflict.

Nazi Germany did achieve its goal and won the Olympic medal table during the Games that it hosted. The Germans won 33 gold medals, considerably more than the second place Americans—24 (Miller 613). They owed it to special preparations, the popularity of sport in Germany, and partly to not fully obeying the amateur principle by giving athletes additional, forbidden vacations before the Olympics (Walters 136, 336). Nevertheless, despite some mild controversies, Nazi Germany achieved its goal of promoting the

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<sup>7</sup> The United States of America and Great Britain competed to win the most medals.

Aryan race and its undemocratic political system at the same time.

A whole new level of Olympic medal table competition appeared with the outbreak of the Cold War. In the years following World War II, international relations acquired a bilateral character, with the USA and Soviet Union as major superpowers. Both were in ideological conflict, with the Americans representing liberal democracy and the free market, and the Soviets representing communism. Both had nuclear weapons in their armoury, so a “hot war,” apart from some peripheral conflicts, was rather undesirable due to the risk of complete mutual annihilation. Alternative means of competition were then needed, and the sports race became one of them, along with the space and arms races.

The Soviet–American sports race began just as the USSR joined the “Olympic family” and debuted during the Helsinki Olympic Games in 1952 (Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society* 367).<sup>8</sup> It was almost certain that these games would mean mixing politics with sport. Soviet leaders demanded victories, as A. Nikolai Romanov<sup>9</sup> recalled in his memoirs: “Once we decided to take part in foreign competitions, we were forced to guarantee victory, otherwise the ‘free’ bourgeois press would fling mud at the entire nation as well as at our athletes. In order to gain permission to go to international competitions I had to send a special note to Stalin guaranteeing victory” (Riordan, “Rewriting Soviet Sports History” 249). The desire for victories was at the same time the main reason why the Soviets had resigned from participating in the previous Olympics in London in 1948. Americans, on the other hand, dominated world sport by the 1950s, so the competition was fierce.

The Olympic debutant Soviet Union brought to Helsinki athletes in all sports apart from field hockey (Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society* 367), and the western press described their preparations as the most secret in the history of sport (“How Reds ‘Mobilized’” 16). The USSR was especially successful in weight lifting as well as in women’s sport, which was not well financed in the West. Many of the medals won by the Soviet Union and its

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<sup>8</sup> Earlier, the Soviet Union resigned from participating in the Olympic Games and international sport as a whole, calling it bourgeois.

<sup>9</sup> Soviet Chairman of the government Committee on Physical Culture and Sport.

satellite states were won by women, and those medals were of the same value as those won by men (Jay 55). The Americans, on the other hand, had the advantage in track and field and swimming (Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record* 97-98).

The Helsinki Olympics medal table was won by the USA with 40 gold medals. The USSR was second with 22 gold medals (Miller 612-614). Using different ways of calculating the table, the Americans were also victorious apart from in one case, where there was a draw. Nevertheless, the Soviets in their own media called themselves winners by creating more alternative ways of counting or by citing false figures (Tikander 143, *Kultura Fizyczna i Sport w Związku Radzieckim* 10). It was, however, only for propaganda purposes. But in terms of international relations, the sports race had definitely started. Americans won the first confrontation, but the great performance of the Soviet national team could definitely be seen as a predictor of their future supremacy, especially taking into consideration that it was their debut.

The Helsinki Olympics were just the beginning of a series of fierce sports confrontations during consecutive summer Olympic Games.<sup>10</sup> The victories were swinging from one superpower to another, as the table below shows:

Table 1: Summer Olympic Games medal table positions of the USA and the USSR

Olympic Games	USA rank	USA medals	USSR rank	USSR medals
Helsinki 1952	1	40-19-17	2	22-30-19
Melbourne 1956	2	32-25-17	1	37-29-32
Rome 1960	2	34-21-16	1	43-29-31
Tokyo 1964	1	36-26-28	2	30-31-35
Mexico 1968	1	45-28-34	2	29-32-30
Munich 1972	2	33-31-30	1	50-27-22
Montreal 1976	3	34-35-25	1	49-41-35
Moscow 1980	Did not start		1	80-69-46
Los Angeles 1984	1	83-61-30	Did not start	
Seoul 1988	3	36-31-27	1	55-31-46

Source: Miller, David, *Historia Igrzysk Olimpijskich i MKOl. Od Aten do Pekinu 1894-2008*, Poznań 2008, 614-617.

<sup>10</sup> The Summer Olympics were taken into account because during the Winter Games this bilateral competition was never that fierce.



The USA and the USSR remained at the forefront of the Olympic medal table until the end of the Cold War Era, most of the time being ranked first or second, with a slight advantage to the Soviets. Some games turned out to be the arena of particularly fierce competition, such as the Melbourne Games. This sports event had a special political background; the Hungarian Revolution and the Suez Crisis occurred in the same year. The atmosphere was tense and the Games were like a giant match between the American, Soviet and Australian teams.<sup>11</sup> New, scientific methods of selecting and training athletes were used in preparation for the Games (Młodzikowski 204). It was obvious that the “sports cold war” had become important not just for communist countries. The West began to care as well. The American press often claimed that the Soviet Union won the Olympics only by dirty determination and without any of the democratic joy and enthusiasm that characterized American champions (Jay 55). Such propaganda was present all the time on both sides. After the Rome Games in 1964, the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* explained Soviet supremacy as follows: “The secret of our victories is sport for the masses, for the people. For instance, Americans did not win a single medal in gymnastics—a very important sport for general health” (Maraniss 384-385). Soviets claimed openly that Olympic victories spoke for the power of the socialist system (Senn 146).

Sport at that time was a matter of international prestige. The Americans seemed to have noticed this at the beginning of the 1960s, when the domination of the Soviet Union, and communist countries more broadly, became more evident. Americans managed to win the most gold medals during the two following Games in 1964 and 1968, but it is important to remember that American individual victories did not necessarily mean communist losses. In Mexico, for instance, 6 Eastern European countries apart from the USSR won 120 medals (40 gold) while the 6 best Western European states won 81 (25 gold) medals (Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society* 370). The situation changed again in favour of the Eastern bloc in the 1970s, especially after the 1973 oil crisis that naturally hampered Western sport in a much

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<sup>11</sup> The role of sports event host is worth mentioning here. Host countries usually achieve good results. It also has its political significance, as the wins are conducted in front of the eyes of their own people. International relations are more connected to organizing sports events, which will be discussed later.

greater way than Eastern sport. Communist countries had economies centrally planned, and since sport was seen as an important propaganda instrument, money simply had to be found. The 1980s, the end of the Cold War Era, can be called the era of sports boycotts, so the medal table rivalry was not so fierce, maybe apart from the Seoul 1988 games, where communist countries simply confirmed their advantage.

It is worth noticing that the USA was ranked third twice, losing not only to the USSR, but also to another communist state—East Germany (GDR). This small state needed to struggle for international recognition due to the fact that the Western World recognized West Germany. The GDR had little influence in that conflict, so its leaders decided to use sport as a means of gaining international attention, prestige and eventually recognition. Once East Germany was permitted to participate individually in international sport,<sup>12</sup> it amazed the world with its performance. However, many of its wins were unfortunately gained due to the use of drugs. It was not proved at that time and the propaganda effect was achieved.

The end of the Cold War Era did not mean that the significance of the Olympic medal table was dramatically reduced. International relations have changed from bilateral to multilateral, but countries can still gain international prestige by performing well in sport, and, as was mentioned, the Olympic medal table is probably the most transparent evaluation of sports competition. In current times China is probably the state that most strongly desires to win the Olympic medal table due to political reasons. The host of the 2008 Summer Olympics not only wanted to organize the best games in history, but also sought to achieve a sports victory. Once Beijing was made host of the 2008 Games, a number of government actions were undertaken in order to win Olympic medals in various classifications (Houlihan 46). Sports events were divided into groups according to the chance of winning, all focused on winning gold medals, those that matter the most in the medal table. The most promising athletes were sent to special venues where they could prepare for the Olympics with the help of scientists and coaches (Lewandowski). All was

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<sup>12</sup> At first, international sports organizations recognized West Germany only and did not allow the GDR to participate. In the 1950s there was a joint German team in world sport. East Germany could first compete separately in the Olympics in 1968, and in 1972 it was allowed to use its national flag and anthem.

handled within an Elite Sports System called Juguo Tizhi, which was based on the old Soviet model (Hong, Wu). There was only one aim—winning the Olympic medal table, while at the same time defeating the United States, the world's greatest sports power in past years.

The Chinese fulfilled their aim and won the Olympics with 51 gold medals. The USA was second with just 36 gold medals. On the whole, the Americans won more medals (China—100, USA—110)<sup>13</sup>, but, as was mentioned, the Chinese focused on winning gold medals as this matters most, and the results proved them to be successful—most of the medals won by them were gold. Accusations of unfair actions by Chinese athletes appeared, but none of them were confirmed, so it can be stated that China simply won the Olympics it hosted, fulfilling its aims.

In more recent times, a similar process can be seen taking place in the latest Summer Olympics host country—Great Britain. There are, however, a number of differences in comparison to earlier examples. Firstly, the struggle for a medal table victory usually concerns non-democratic countries, or at least democratic ones in rivalry with non-democratic ones. The UK was in neither situation. It's one of the oldest democracies and, in the race for sports victories, does not necessarily have the aim of winning against any particular state. It was more a matter of national pride. As a matter of fact, the 2012 Olympics host performed relatively poorly in the post Cold War Olympic Games. Concerning the Olympic medal table, it was 13<sup>th</sup> in Barcelona 1992, 36<sup>th</sup> in Atlanta 1996, 10<sup>th</sup> in Sydney 2000 and Athens 2004 (Miller 617-619). In 2005, London was chosen as the host city for the 2012 Olympic Games, and at that time a completely new sports policy was introduced in Great Britain. A huge amount of money was invested in Olympic sports preparations. Before the Beijing 2008 games it was between 235 and 265 million GBP, while for the 2012 Olympiad, Britain invested—264 million GBP. The money came from the National Lottery, which funded Olympic sports preparations since the Atlanta Games at which Britain performed so poorly (Anderson).<sup>14</sup> As a result, in Beijing UK came in 4<sup>th</sup> with 19 gold medals, while in London it did even better, finishing

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<sup>13</sup> Web. 15 June 2009 <<http://en.beijing2008.cn/>>.

<sup>14</sup> House of Commons Debate. 6 October 2008. Web. 18 January 2009. <<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm081006/debtext/81006-0001.htm>>.

3<sup>rd</sup> with 29 gold medals and 65 in total.<sup>15</sup> It was the UK's best result since the 1908 Olympics, also in London. What were the political and social results? Most of all, the Games encouraged a rise in national pride. As the post Olympics poll showed, the society's association with UK's flag rose by 10% and is now at 84%, a figure just 1% behind the bond with the monarchy (Hennessy). These figures seem to be a good indication of how sports victories can affect societies, in this case in relation to national identity.

Naturally, sports victories that matter politically are not only those counted in the Olympic Games medal table. Other sports events are also important, such as, for instance, World football championships. There is also another sort of athletic competition important to international relations—prestigious wins over opponents who can be described as political foes. Such events evoke extraordinary emotions among both viewers and athletes, and a win is considered not only as the win of a sports person or a team, but of a whole country, sometimes even of a geopolitical bloc or socio-political system.

No wonder plenty of such politically affected contests took place during the Cold War. But one of the first of such events occurred earlier, before World War II—two boxing fights between American Joe Louis and German Max Schmeling, in 1936 and 1938. American president Franklin D. Roosevelt said to Louis: Joe, we need muscles like yours to beat Germany (Ferenc 30-31).

After the Soviet Union joined international sports competitions and the Olympic Games, single sports contests with political meaning appeared in vast numbers, and Soviet-American clashes amazed fans and spectators. At the Helsinki 1952 Olympics, one of them was the rivalry between Horace Ashenfelter (USA) and Vladimir Kazantsev in the steeplechase. The contest was very exciting, and Ashenfelter won due to the fact that Kazantsev fell while jumping the final hurdle, but the run was even more interesting due to the fact that the American was an FBI agent and the Soviet was a policeman (*Kronika Sportu* 480).

Team sports were always very important in terms of the political prestige of a win. Basketball was one of the most exciting competitions between the USSR and the USA, and those two teams played against each other in Olympic finals five times. The

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<sup>15</sup> Web. 30 June 2009 <<http://en.beijing2008.cn/>>, Web. 15 October 2012 <<http://www.london2012.com/>>.

most exciting game took place in 1972 during the Munich Olympics. After a very controversial referee's decision and two replays of the last seconds of the match, the Soviet Union won, but the Americans declared a protest. After 14 hours of deliberations, a jury consisting of Polish, Hungarian, Cuban, Italian and Puerto Rican members decided that the USSR was the winner of the match, voting by 3-2 (Stradling 138-139). Although the vote was secret, the nationality of the judges may have played a role. The American players did not accept their silver medals. The match is remembered as one of the most controversial, and Americans still consider its result as unjust.

Among American-Soviet clashes, a hockey match from the Lake Placid 1980 Olympics is also worth mentioning. In a match remembered as a *miracle on ice*, the American amateur team won 4-3 over a pseudo amateur Soviet team, considered to be the best in the World, having won 14 out of 17 annual World Championships since 1963 and consecutively 4 previous Winter Olympics (Miller 599, *Kronika Sportu* 899). Besides the surprising victory, the match was politically important due to its international relations aspect. Shortly before the Lake Placid Olympics, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, which evoked intensive anti-Soviet reactions in Western societies and at the same time ended the *détente* period. Although odds for the win were poor, American media expressed deep hopes for a victory and, once it happened, it was described as the symbol of an American victory over the Soviet Union in the Cold War, while American president Jimmy Carter described the hockey team as modern day American heroes (Billings, Butterworth and Turman 137, Hill 126).

During the Cold War, prestigious sports wins did not apply only to the USA and the USSR, but also to other countries of various geopolitical blocs, and sometimes also within them, although such examples had more informal and spontaneous aspects than governmental dimensions. One of them worth mentioning took place in 1952 during the Helsinki Olympic Games. The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were in conflict after the latter's leader, Josip Tito, introduced a more independent policy. Football teams of these two states played against each other twice during the games. The first match ended with a 5-5 tie despite a 5-1 Yugoslavian lead. Soviet authorities considered the second match as extremely important. Before it, Joseph Stalin sent a telegram to the team, encouraging it to win. On the contrary,

the Soviets lost 3-1, immediately after which the Soviet team representatives were summoned to Moscow (Tikander 143). It is worth noticing that Soviet media did not report the loss until 1953, after Stalin's death (Edelman). That match was no exception. In 1956, during the Summer Olympics in Melbourne, the Soviet and Hungarian water polo teams met in a semi-final match. The international context was very important here, as just before the Games the Soviet Union invaded Hungary. The atmosphere was very tense, and the match was full of fouls, especially with the Soviets as aggressors. But after Ervin Zador, one of the Hungarian players, was hit and started bleeding, Australian viewers supporting Hungary were outraged and the Soviets had to be defended by the police (Grzegorzółka 23, Rinehart 131). The match ended with a 4-0 victory for Hungary, the team that later won the whole tournament. This was a classic example of a political clash inside a geopolitical bloc that was exemplified in a sports match, although it probably was not expected by the governments of the two countries.

After the Cold War ended, politically important sports contests became increasingly rare and definitely had a milder dimension. Nevertheless they still happen and still are usually connected with particular political events. The Beijing games, for instance, began on the same day as war between Russia and Georgia. It was expected that athletes from the two countries might express their mutual animosity if they met, even though the International Olympic Committee strictly forbids such actions. The world media drew attention to a women's beach volleyball match between Russians Natalya Uryadova and Alexandra Shiryaeva and Georgian Saka Rtvelo.<sup>16</sup> However, on the pitch a political clash could not be seen, partly because the Georgian athletes were in fact Brazilians with no ties to Georgia apart from their passports. Despite that fact, the international media were exceptionally interested in the match. Probably more politically charged was a World Cup football match between the USA and Iran in 1998. It was described by the US Soccer Federation President as the "mother of all games." Tensions were high. Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei ordered the Iranian team not to walk towards their American counterparts to shake hands before the match even though according to FIFA rules Team B (USA was Team A) was

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<sup>16</sup> DS: "Wzrasta nieufność wobec Gruzji," 14 September 2008. Web. 9 June 2009 <<http://www.wprost.pl/ar/138609/DS-wzrasta-nieufnosc-wobec-Gruzji/>>.

supposed to. Iranian supporters also managed to piece together a huge banner around the pitch, but TV cameras did not show it.<sup>17</sup> The match itself, however, was peaceful and ended with Iran winning 2-1. In modern times, however, such matches have become very rare and, in terms of prestigious sports clashes, they tend to be seen as more a thing of the past.

Hosting great sports events has fairly similar objectives to winning on the sports field. As was mentioned above, organizing such competitions as the Olympic Games or the Football World Cup and European Championships requires plenty of investment, and not every country can cope with it. Certainly there are a many motivations that drive countries or cities to apply for hosting such events, most of which are of economic and political origin. States and cities usually desire to make a profit out of such events, although it is very difficult these days. The turnovers can come from television rights, ticket sales, and sponsoring. Countries or cities organizing sports events promote tourism as well, with the hope that sports fans will visit them again and recommend them to friends and families. Sports events organizers may also create a positive image that can help, for instance, in attracting foreign investment. Finally, there can also be political reasons for hosting sports championships. Organizers sometimes decide to try to host the best event of its kind in history, which considering the difficulties in hosting at all, proves a country's power, so hosting plays the same function as sports success. Here also the undemocratic factor seems to appear—non-democratic states seem to try to display their strength and power more often.

The first instance of such a case were the Berlin 1936 Olympic Games, mentioned above, organized by Nazi Germany. The Germans decided to amaze the world with architecture and infrastructure. The Olympic Stadium, prepared for the 1916 Olympics which did not occur due to World War I, was completely rebuilt. Organizers were also proud of the swimming pool and the Olympic Village. Transport was described as perfect, and new technologies were introduced, such as the photo-finish and television broadcasts (Miller 125). Germany and Berlin were supposed to show Germany as a country of peace and happiness. Berlin was decorated with Olympic and Nazi flags, and Berliners

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<sup>17</sup> "Top 10 football Stories: 3- Iran vs USA," no date. Web. 15 October 2012 <<http://starscene.dailystar.com.lb/world-cup-scene/2010/07/top-10-football-stories-3-iran-vs-usa/>>.

were told to smile and be kind to visitors. This plan turned out to be successful, and the Western press quickly began to praise Germany as a country of happiness and wealth, and Hitler was described as one of the greatest living political leaders, and Germany as a hospitable, peaceful state (Walters 269, 333).

The Moscow 1980 and the Beijing 2008 Olympics have many similarities to Berlin. Both of them were organized by undemocratic states, and both were meant to be the best games in history and showcase the host countries<sup>18</sup> as great powers. Both countries also decided to use architecture for showing the greatness of the Games. The Soviets renovated Lenin's Stadium, built a Palace of Sports, and demonstrated their famous outstanding cuisine (Miller 259). The Chinese, on the other hand, were proud of their "Bird's Nest" stadium and swimming pool described as the "Water Cube." Also outstanding were the opening ceremonies, which are in fact a perfect way of sending particular messages to the world, as everyone is watching. The Chinese message, for instance, was to pay tribute to Chinese civilization, but also to show China as a peaceful state: "Don't worry, we mean no harm," as the *New York Times* described it (Yardley).

Sometimes sending a message to the world can be the main objective of sports event organizers. Such an impression could be derived from the Munich 1972 Olympic Games, though they are remembered for a terrorist attack. By hosting the Games, the West Germans wanted, in a way, to improve their image after the full-of-politics Berlin games, and at the same time use the occasion as a means of global reconciliation after World War II. Therefore, apart from great organization, the Germans introduced plenty of peaceful symbols in the Games. Olympic venues were located in Oberwiesefeld, where British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain landed in 1938 on his way to meet Hitler (Porada 163, Młodzikowski 319). In the Olympic Park, streets were named after athletes of various nationalities. During the opening ceremony, West German president Gustav Heinemann spoke of erasing the war that Germany started from the world's memory (Lipoński 56). Regaining international trust was then the main political objective of organizing the Munich Olympic Games.

Major football events have also given their hosts the opportunity to send messages to the world. The FIFA World Cup

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<sup>18</sup> Although it is the city that hosts the Olympic Games, it is obvious that organizing them is a mission for the whole country.



2010 was held in the Republic of South Africa and was the first to be held in Africa. Therefore, African symbols were all around, and as former RSA president Thabo Mbeki stated, the aim was to organize an event that would make people from Cape Town to Cairo more confident and that, in the future, historians would think of the World Cup as the moment when Africa arose, definitively leaving behind ages of poverty and conflict (Runciman). It is hard to evaluate if this aim was fulfilled, or if it was possible to fulfil it at all. Yet it seems certain that the first African state to host the world's second biggest sports event managed to do so, and the World Cup was a success.

The latest European Football Championship in Poland and Ukraine seems to have a lot in common with the African World Cup. For the first time such a big sports event was granted to Eastern European states. Partly it was also a matter of national pride—to show the world that “we also can,” and at the same time to show that Poland and Ukraine are not so very different from Western Europe, even though Western societies may have such an impression. The Championship's aim was to change this impression and allow as many people as possible see how these countries really are. This aim was probably fulfilled, as foreign media in the vast majority described EURO 2012 as very well organized.

Hosting sports events is a great way of showing that it is not only politics that influences sport. The relationship is a two-way one, and in some aspects the world of sport can affect states, the most important actors in international relations. Since many aims can be achieved by hosting sports events, it may be very important for states to have such an opportunity, and the decision belongs to sports federations and organizations.

There are certain criteria for selecting a host city or country for a sports event, taking into account geographic, traditional, economic and political issues, and the capability for organizing such an event. There can be various political reasons for granting organization of a sports event to a particular state. For instance, the Belgian city of Antwerp was chosen as the 1920 Olympic Games host in memory of victims of World War I,<sup>19</sup> as Belgium was perceived as the victim of the war that defended the right

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<sup>19</sup> No date. Web. 16 October 2012 <<http://www.olympic.org/antwerp-1920-summer-olympics>>.

cause, especially considering it was attacked though being a neutral state.

Tokyo was awarded the Olympics in 1964 as the first host city in Asia. Immediately following the Second World War, Japan was occupied by US forces, so in the 1950s it was slowly becoming a respected state again. In 1951 Japan signed a peace treaty with the War World II allies, and in 1956 it joined the United Nations. The International Olympic Committee seemed to have supported this tendency, and in 1958 the Japanese capital was awarded the Summer Olympics (Miller 194). A very similar situation applied to the Munich 1972 Olympic Games, held in the War World II aggressor country. West Germany in the late 1960s was slowly coming to be perceived more like an ally than a foe, especially in the West. They also wanted to have the opportunity to, in a way, compensate for the historical mistakes that they had made. Being awarded the Games, Germans received the possibility to gain sympathy in the world, as atonement for disasters that their former governments perpetrated on civilization (Miller 225). The IOC, a sports organization, acted as an advocate for peace and reconciliation, affecting the shape of international relations.

The world of sport can be an important area of international relations in another very important dimension—participation. States desire to have the opportunity to compete in international sport, especially in big events such as the Olympic Games. This aspect applies mostly to countries that are not well-grounded in the international arena, who have emerged lately, or who do not have universal diplomatic recognition. In such situations states are not necessarily recognized by sports organizations and consequently do not always have the opportunity to participate in grand sporting events. So these states try to convince sports organizations that promote peace and international cooperation, such as the International Olympic Committee, to invite them to compete in or host an event. Being present on the international sports stage can sometimes be a good argument for being accepted into the international community.

Two of the most important cases concerning the struggle for independent participation in international sport relate to post-war Germany and to China. After Germany lost World War II, as a result of the war, the Allies divided the country into two: capitalist West and communist East Germany. Both countries eventually expressed their desire to participate in the Helsinki 1952 Olympic Games, driving the IOC into an inconvenient

situation. Its policy assumed that every country can only have one National Olympic Committee, but it would simply be taking a political stand by recognizing one Germany. Still, West Germany was considered as a continuation of pre-war Germany, so its NOC was granted recognition in 1950 after German representatives publicly apologized for the war (Jucewicz 76). There was, however, a desire on the part of the IOC to accept East Germany as well, but due to unclear events<sup>20</sup> (Hill 38), the relevant meeting did not take place, and East Germany was not present at the Olympics. In the following years, the German situation in sport changed. After a lively debate, a United Team of Germany, consisting of both East and West German athletes participated in the Melbourne Olympics. However, the team participated as the Federal Republic of Germany, so in a way the IOC backed the West in an inter-German conflict. Nevertheless, the outcome was regarded as a great political success of the IOC. As its president Avery Brundage said, "We have obtained in the field of sport what politicians failed to achieve so far" (Espy 43). The joint German team gave an impression of being provisional, concerning the mutual antagonism between the German states, and proved to be relatively stable. Joint German teams appeared at the Olympic Games in 1960 and 1964, despite problems with creating the united representation. The IOC, however, did concede to East Germany, and since 1960 the United German team did not compete under the West German flag, but under a neutral flag and emblem (Miller 177), which naturally seemed fairer. Later, however, as a result of difficulties in creating joint German teams and in a way as a matter of accepting the international status quo, it was decided that East and West Germany should compete in international sport separately. The only provision was that during the 1968 Olympics both teams were supposed to march together at the opening ceremony and use the same, neutral flag and emblem. From 1972 onwards, East and West Germany competed completely separately.

Probably even more difficult was the Chinese question, concerning the communist People's Republic of China and Taiwan. The main difference from the German question was that

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<sup>20</sup> The IOC was to meet East German representatives in Copenhagen in February 1952, shortly before the Helsinki Olympics, but they were late and failed to come to the meeting, while the next day IOC members left for the Winter Olympics in Oslo.

their mutual hatred was much stronger, and they did not see the possibility of participating in the same sporting event. The situation was even more complicated due to the fact that most of the World still recognized Taiwan as the representative of China, whereas communist China had a much bigger population and area. Here again the IOC was in a difficult situation, but it decided to take a more compromising stance and ruled that both countries would be accepted at the Helsinki 1952 Olympic Games. In that situation Taiwan resigned from participating, while communist China made its Olympic debut, even though it came late to the Games and only one Chinese athlete managed to compete (Tikander 142, Hong and Xiaozheng 323). The next Olympics brought a similar situation—again both states were accepted despite their not accepting each other. This time, however, Taiwan’s team appeared in the Olympic village first, and once China found out it resigned from participating in the Games (Guoqi 85). After the Olympics, Beijing continuously insisted on excluding Taiwan from international sport and when this demand was not met it completely withdrew from sport organizations, including the IOC, in August 1958 (Hill 45, Guoqi 86, Espy 63). Although Taiwan still had to struggle with political issues in international sport, such as determining under what name it should compete, for some time it was the exclusive representative of China in international sport. The situation started to change in the 1970s when the PRC again became interested in participating in international sport. Its way back to world sport was slow, as Taiwan remained in sports federations, and both states did not accept each other. Still, in 1971 the People’s Republic made a huge step forward in order to join both international sport and politics—Ping Pong Diplomacy enabled contact with the USA and quickly, in October 1971, the PRC became a member of the UN, with the simultaneous exclusion of Taiwan. The same situation was happening in more and more sport federations, and communist China was coming closer to participating in the Olympics again. Taiwan’s situation was aggravating, but in 1979 a breakthrough appeared, when the PRC suggested it would accept being in the same sports organization as Taiwan, if it would accept a “proper” name, for instance the Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee (Slack, Yuan-min, Chiung-tzu and, Hong 357, Jarvie 111-112). Despite Taiwan’s protests, such a solution was approved, and since the 1980s both Taiwan and the PRC have participated in international sport, completely separately.

Those two examples show how international relations can influence the possibility of participating in sport, even though it should theoretically be granted to everyone. Sport is now very closely related to politics; even so, countries not recognized internationally can sometimes freely send their athletes to sporting events. Palestine, for instance, participates in the Olympic Games even though it is not an independent state. So there are some exceptions. Kosovo still does not have a recognized National Olympic Committee although it declared independence in 2008.

Participation in sport and in international relations is related not only by the desire of states to be able to compete. The opposite situation—boycotting an event—can have even greater significance. History shows a number of types of sports boycott, individual or group, as a protest or as a means of exerting pressure. The reason can also vary. It can be the politics of the host of the event, of the sports organization, or sometimes even of a completely different actor. Furthermore, the event can be boycotted by the lack of presence of athletes, but in a milder way it could be the officials that in protest do not appear at the opening ceremony, for instance. The variety of boycotts is vast.

The most recognized boycotts are obviously the group ones of the Moscow 1980 and Los Angeles 1984 Olympic Games. They were obviously a part of the Cold War, but the official reasons were more particular: Moscow was boycotted by the USA and some of its allies due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Hazan 124), while the Communist Bloc did not go to Los Angeles, claiming it was not safe there, although it was probably a matter of revenge (Guttmann, *The Olympics* 157, Reich 20). There were, however, many other boycotts. African countries united in the Supreme Council of Sport in Africa, for instance, used a boycott threat as a means of influencing international relations, since they were too weak to do it otherwise. By this weapon they managed to exclude the Republic of South Africa from the Mexico 1968 Olympic Games and Rhodesia from the Munich 1972 Olympics. These two states were the only ones in Africa to be ruled by “white” governments and were traditionally condemned by other African countries for their politics of racial segregation. Taking advantage of sport enabled other African states to tackle these two states very directly. African states used a boycott threat again in 1976 against New Zealand for keeping sports contacts with the Republic of South Africa, and demanded that New Zealand be excluded from the Montreal Olympic Games. The IOC

this time did not step aside, and as a result in 1976 the first massive boycott occurred by African states. These states did not want to resign from participating, they were just used to winning political concessions through a boycott threat, but this time it just did not succeed (Monnington 168, Miller 242).

These were the biggest sports boycotts, but in fact there were many others, most of which related to international relations. The Melbourne 1956 Olympics were boycotted by Spain, the Netherlands and Switzerland, in protest against Soviet intervention in Hungary, and by Egypt, Lebanon and Iraq against the French, British and Israeli action that caused the Suez Crisis. This is an example of a boycott in protest against actors completely unrelated to the host. Currently sports boycotts still occur, but in a rather milder version. China, whose capital city was the host of the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, was condemned by the international community for a number of reasons, such as trading with Sudan, the occupancy of Tibet, and not respecting human rights (Ramzy). No country resigned from competing, but a number of political leaders did not appear at the opening ceremony, such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Italian President Silvio Berlusconi.<sup>21</sup> This is probably the modern type of sports boycott, which as a matter of fact focuses on the aim of the protest, but does not punish a country's own athletes by not allowing them to compete.

It appears that sport has political significance due to two facts. Firstly, it is very popular and generates interest in many people. This fact makes using sport for political reasons sensible. Secondly, sport, thanks to its natural character of competition, perfectly fits a non-political determining of superiority, which may play an important role especially in situations when a sort of antagonism between states occurs, but other means of competition, such as war, are not desirable. This applies both to the past and the present. In the past, during the Cold War for instance, war was undesirable due to the risk of mutual annihilation. Nowadays, on the other hand, in times of multilateral international relations, economics is the main field of competition. Still, sport can be a great way of demonstrating power, which could be seen during the Beijing Olympic Games when China

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<sup>21</sup> "Kto pojawi się na otwarciu igrzysk? Kogo nie będzie?," 8 August 2008. Web. 7 July 2008 <[http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/Wiadomosci/1,80708,5563036,Lista\\_obecnosci\\_\\_Pekin\\_2008.html](http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/Wiadomosci/1,80708,5563036,Lista_obecnosci__Pekin_2008.html)>.

amazed the world both with the great Olympics it hosted and with athletic performance. The Chinese have their ambitions of being regarded as a powerful state, which, at least economically, it is. Nevertheless, sport gave them the opportunity to enhance their self-esteem.

Countries with no general international recognition will struggle to compete in sports, hoping that participation will somehow help them to attain recognition eventually, and there will always be some newly appearing states, established, for instance, by autonomist or separatist movements. On the other hand, great sports boycotts seem to be more a matter of the past. Countries that have participated in the boycott of a great sports event usually do not decide to do so again, knowing the boycotter is usually the main victim and, apart from some exceptions, concessions are hard to achieve through a boycott. Nowadays there is a tendency to express disapproval to, for instance, a sporting event's host country's politics by a more symbolic means of protest, such as boycotts by officials. This was seen at the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games or the Poland-Ukraine Football European Championships in 2012 regarding Ukrainian politics towards its former Prime Minister, Yulia Tymoshenko. Apart from single states like North Korea boycotting the Seoul 1988 Olympics, massive boycotts are rather improbable in modern times.

To sum up, it can easily be stated that once sport achieved a certain level of popularity, it became an important means of international politics, playing a significant role in propaganda and in changing the shape of international relations. During the Cold War era sport's role in international relations was especially important. Nowadays international relations can be described as multilateral, with many centres of power and little desire for war. The world focuses on cooperation, and sport's political role will probably be limited. But it seems likely that the political significance of sport that was attained in the interwar period will be retained, and states will keep using it for the sake of political goals.

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