

The soft power of sport can win friends

We need to take advantage of sports' global currency, and further the part that sport can play in winning friends for countries writes Professor Grant Jarvie from the University of Edinburgh.

In 2009 Victor Cha, the former Director of Asian Affairs for the White House writing provided one of the few inside accounts of sporting diplomacy in which he argued that:

- Sport matters because it can provide opportunities for interventions
- Sport matters because it can help to influence winning friends;
- Sport matters because it can be less aloof than some forms of diplomacy

The House of Lords report Persuasion and Power in the Modern World that was published earlier this year supports such observations.

International sport can have a direct and indirect effect upon winning friends, easing tensions and helping countries talk to each other.

The episodic cricket diplomacy between India and Pakistan demonstrates how a shared common interest in cricket has from time to time helped to cool relations despite decades of bitterness.

Governments can make countries more attractive to others through their policies, their diplomacy, and the deployment of resources including development assistance through sport.

The Norway Cup has taken place every year since 1972 and is one of the world's largest football tournaments for children, aged 12–19. There are around 30,000 participants, 52 nations, 1200 volunteers and in 2012 3,800 matches across 62 pitches. The aim of the tournament is to create bonds between children and nations – and win friends for Norway through sport.

The Norwegian Minister of International Development talks of the role this project plays in producing internationalism and co-operation between Norway and for example, Brazil, Kenya, and Palestine.

China's support for Africa was demonstrated in the build up to the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa through providing additional resources, knowledge and capability around infrastructure projects.

In the 8 years between October 2003 and October 2011 the UN General Assembly passed 23 resolutions advocating a greater role for sport within international development and peacekeeping efforts. The 6th of April (2014) was the official International Day of Sport for

Development and Peace. When The United Nations General Assembly made the announcement back in August 2013. It encouraged Member States to recognize the role of sport in peace building and conflict resolution.

Many sports that were once forged in the UK have an almost universal appeal that crosses languages and cultural barriers, which makes it, in the British Council's eyes, "one of the most accessible and exportable of the soft power assets".

UK trade opportunities in Brazil that have arisen from the 2012 London Olympic Games. UK sporting, transport and security experts are working alongside authorities in the host nation, Brazil, and that to date over 37 UK firms have won a total of £130 million through 62 sports contracts in Brazil.

Many countries have set targets for the % of GDP they are prepared to spend on overseas development assistance. Canada has set this at 0.7% and is suggesting that 1% of this money should be allocated to international development work through sport.

Norway funds sport and development scholarships for international students to attend Norwegian universities where you can learn about sports policy, management and international development, and yet this can be done at places like the University of Edinburgh where Professor Jarvie will argue in a speech to be delivered on the 30th April that UK governments, including the Scottish Government should formulate planned policy initiatives funded by the state to win friends through sport.

He will ask if Scotland considers the attractiveness Scotland's commercial, educational, cultural, sporting and media assets, as a means of forging international links, and maximizing the soft power and economic benefits that this could bring to the Scotland?

Yet not just Scotland but the rest of UK have much to learn from other countries in terms of how they deploy sport as a form of soft power to influence the winning of friends. We have much to learn from the Norwegians, the Dutch, and China all of whom recognize the soft power potential in sport.

Diplomats need to know how to develop legitimacy from the ground up through sport and what works where and when and under what circumstances.

A degree of sporting competency may also be needed. The then Australian Prime Minister John Howard while visiting Pakistan in 2008 failed to land a ball remotely near the wicket and Australia was embarrassed.

Whether it is winning friends, influencing outcomes, resolving conflicts and tensions sport can help Scotland and the United Kingdom to be outward looking

For example The McLeish review of Scottish sport needs to address such matters specifically and not simply be an inward looking set of recommendations.

More than just a game sport in cultural relations not as an agent on the side-lines but as an active resource. Sport as a resource of hope – sport opening doors for people, places and communities sport making the art of the possible – possible, Sport as part of the art of persuasion in the modern world. We should use it to both persuade but also win friends.

**Professor Grant Jarvie
University of Edinburgh
Grant.Jarvie@ed.ac.uk**