

# ***Sport in Society: Issues and Controversies***



## **Chapter 13 – Part I**

### **Sports and Politics:**

### ***How Do Governments and Global Processes Influence Sports?***

# Definitions (I)

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- **Politics:** *Processes of organizing social power and making decisions that affect the lives of people in a social world*
- **Governments:** *Formal organizations with the power to make and enforce rules in a particular territory or collection of people*



Politics were clearly evident in connection with the torch run for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Protests worldwide raised concern about China's treatment of Tibet.

# Definitions (II)

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- **Power:** *The ability to influence people and achieve goals even in the face of opposition from others*
- **Authority:** *A form of power that comes with a recognized and legitimate status or office in a government, an organization, or an established set of relationships*

# Reasons for connections between government and sports (I)

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1. Safeguard the public order
2. Insure fairness and protect human rights
3. Maintain health and fitness
4. Promote the prestige and power of a group, community, or nation

*(continued)*

# Reasons for connections between government and sports (II)

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5. Promote a sense of identity, belonging, and unity among citizens
6. Reproduce values consistent with dominant ideologies in society
7. Increase support for political leaders and government
8. Promote economic development

# Safeguarding public order

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Governments make rules about:

1. What sports are legal or illegal
2. How sports should be organized to protect rights and well-being
3. Who has the right to play sports
4. Where sports may be played
5. Who can use public facilities and when they can use them





To protect public well-being, skateboarding is banned in many public areas, such as Philadelphia's "Love Park."



A place for everything, and everything in its place in this London park



# Maintaining health and fitness

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- Past government support was based on beliefs that
  - Playing sports improves fitness.
  - Fitness improves health.
  - Good health reduces medical costs.
  
- Recent government support often takes into account research showing that
  - Illness is related to environmental factors more than worker fitness.
  - Competitive sports have few benefits for productivity.
  - Concerns about sport performance may increase athletes' demands for health care.

# Promoting prestige and power

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Government support is based on the belief that success in sports provides recognition and status for the sponsoring government unit/agency.

- National teams bring international recognition.
- Local teams bring publicity to communities.

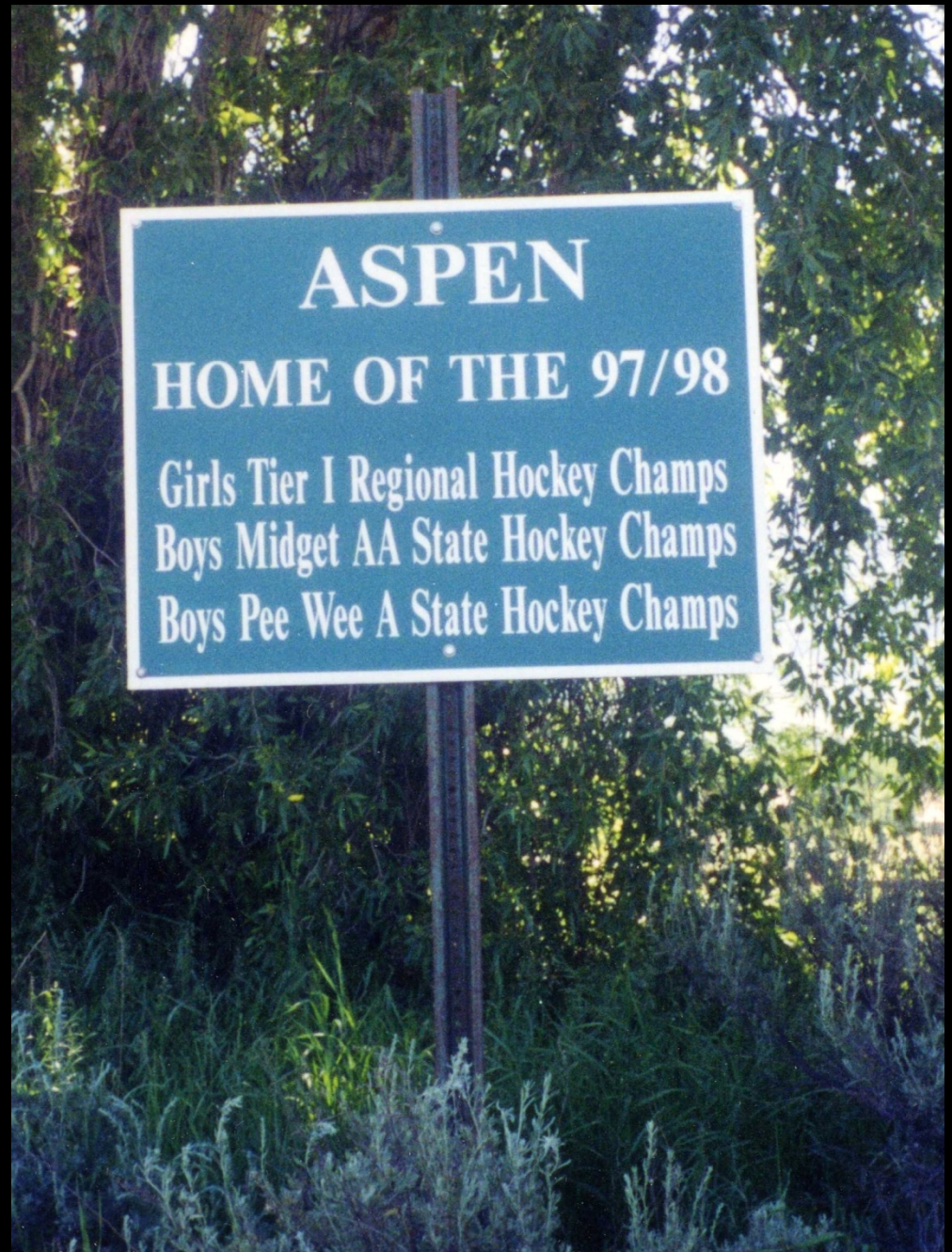




China spent well over \$40 billion to host the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. One of its motives was to gain international recognition and respect and to demonstrate its power.



**Many local communities boast of the success of their high school teams.**







Public schools and school districts use sports to promote their prestige.

# Promoting identity, belonging, and unity

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- ❑ Governments often use sports to promote identity and unity when constituents are diverse or when change is rapid and widespread in society.
- ❑ Sports often are constructed as invented traditions to reaffirm ties to “imagined communities.”
- ❑ Sport-based unity is temporary and superficial.
- ❑ Sports do not change the realities of divisive everyday differences and inequalities.

Australian “identity and unity” were showcased at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. But ethnic disunity in Australia made headlines in 2005, and some people challenged the national identities of others.





U.S. sports at all levels are associated with nation and nationalism.



# Emphasizing values consistent with dominant ideology

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- ❑ **Sports** may be used to promote the idea that success is based on discipline, loyalty, determination, and fortitude.
- ❑ **Sports** in nations with market economies are linked to competition and individualism.
- ❑ Using **sports** to promote values does not work when governments lack legitimacy.



Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party used the 1936 Olympics in Berlin to promote their political ideology and to highlight “Nordic Supremacy.”



# Increasing support for political leaders

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- Some former athletes use their celebrity status from sports to gain popular support.
  - Jesse Ventura (former Minnesota Governor)
  - Bill Bradley (Senator and Democratic Presidential hopeful in 2000 primaries)
- Political leaders use sports to boost their legitimacy in the eyes of citizens.
  - Most citizens “see through” this strategy when leaders lack legitimacy.
  - Leaders like to be photographed with top athletes.



President George W. Bush took many opportunities to show his sporting interests alongside champions or patriots.

# Promoting economic development

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- ❑ Cities may use public resources to bid on and host major sport events.
  - The stated goal is to benefit the entire city by bringing in new revenues and creating jobs.
- ❑ Special interests usually receive the bulk of economic benefits from events, although officials continue to justify public sponsorship in terms of the “common economic good.”
- ❑ Only rarely does an event benefit more than a few powerful interests in a city, region or nation.





City and state governments paid over \$700 million to build a new stadium in Indianapolis in the hope of facilitating general economic development



# Critical issues and questions

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- ❑ Government involvement in sports often fosters the interests of some people more than others.
- ❑ When government support occurs, priority often goes to elite sports.
  - Those who represent elite sports are organized and possess resources for effective political lobbying.

# Ideals underlying international sports (I)

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*There has been longstanding hope that international sports could*

1. Open communication lines between people and leaders from many nations
2. Highlight shared interests among people in different cultures and nations

*(continued)*

# Ideals underlying international sports (II)

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3. Demonstrate that international friendships are possible
4. Foster cultural understanding and eliminate national stereotypes
5. Create a model for international relationships
6. Establish working relationships that would close gaps between wealthy and poor nations

# Realities of international sports (I)

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1. Sports have no influence when it comes to serious diplomacy.
  - Sports do not affect matters of vital national interest.
  - Leaders do not use sports in discussions of vital national interest.
2. Sports may be useful at the level of public diplomacy.
  - Sports provide opportunities to meet and talk.

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International sports have generally been used to foster nationalistic interests rather than international unity.





# Realities of international sports (II)

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3. Nation states often use international sports to foster **self-interests** over international peace and understanding.

We expected to see some forms of protest during the 2008 Olympic games in China ([See Movie of ESPN Comments prior to the games](#))

4. **Ethnocentrism and nationalism** often have been promoted in international sports.
5. **Self-interests** have influenced bid processes, media coverage, and boycotts.