

Sport in Society: Issues and Controversies



Chapter 13

Sports and Politics – Part 2

How Do Governments and Global Processes Influence Sports?

Olympism and the Olympic Games

Are they special?

To answer this question we must look at the ideals and the realities of the Olympic Games, and determine if they meet or can be changed to meet the ideals.

From the Olympic Charter:

“Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.”



Have multinational corporations hijacked the Olympic Games and used them for purposes other than promoting peace and friendship?

In the United States, about 20% of the programming consists of commercial messages from corporations, many of which claim

The Olympic Games: How to control nationalism and commercialism (I)

Suggestions include the following:

(these are offered for debate)

1. Eliminate national uniforms
2. Revise the opening ceremonies to highlight events, not nations
3. Eliminate national anthems and flags during awards ceremonies

(continued)

The Olympic Games: How to control nationalism and commercialism (II)

4. Eliminate medal counts for nations
5. Eliminate or revise team sports
6. Add to the games “demonstration sports” that are native to different cultural regions around the world
7. Use multiple sites for each Olympics

(continued)



There is great potential to work toward global unity during and through the Olympics, if only there was the will to do so.

The Olympic Games: How to control nationalism and commercialism (III)

8. Emphasize global responsibility in media coverage and commercials
9. Provide TV time to human rights groups that work with athletes and sport organizations to promote social justice
10. Integrate the Olympics and Paralympics

OVERALL GOAL: Take Olympism seriously; make the Olympics more than a global marketing opportunity for corporations and a global stage for wealthy nations to promote their ideologies

Medal counts distort the purpose of Olympism and advantage large, wealthy nations.

Note the number of medals won in relation to “per capita!” Table 13.1.

Liechtenstein significantly leads the medal count in this regard.

Table 13.1 Olympic medal count by total medals and medals per capita, 2007

Total medals rank		Medals per 10 million people*	
Nation	Medals	Nation	Medals
1. United States	2309	1. Liechtenstein	2669
2. France	670	2. Norway	864
3. United Kingdom	664	3. Finland	839
4. Sweden	577	4. Sweden	641
5. Italy	568	5. Hungary	448
6. Germany	560	6. Switzerland	382
7. Hungary	449	7. Austria	303
8. Finland	438	8. Denmark	298
9. Norway	398	9. Bulgaria	269
10. Australia	354	10. St. Kitts & Nevis	257
11. Canada	326	11. Estonia	217
12. Japan	296	12. Bahamas	199
13. Switzerland	286	13. New Zealand	185
14. Netherlands	282	14. Australia	176
15. Romania	266	15. Netherlands	172
16. Austria	248	16. Bermuda	153
17. Poland	247	17. Belgium	140
18. China	245	18. Jamaica	135
19. Russia	214	19. Cuba	120
20. Bulgaria	200	20. Romania	119
21. Korea, South	174	21. Greece	118
22. Denmark	162	22. France	111
23. Belgium	145	23. United Kingdom	109
24. Cuba	137	24. Luxembourg	106
25. Greece	126	25. Trinidad & Tobago	102
		(31. United States	79)

(Source: Adapted from four data sets provided by NationMaster: http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/spo_sum_oly_med_all-tim-summer-olympic-medals-all-time (retrieved June 10, 2008). The data cover all medals won from 1896 to 2004. This is problematic because many countries today did not exist prior to the end of World War I and World War II when the victors split or combined existing nations to meet their interests and concerns.

* In the per capita list, the United States ranks #31 (79 medals per 10 million people), behind Iceland (#26), Canada (#27), Italy (#28), Virgin Islands (#29), and Tonga (#30). If per capita income were also taken into account, the list would shift and the United States would drop much lower than #31 (see <http://www.symworld.com/medals/index.php?sort=totalnormal> and http://www.billmitchell.org/sport/medal_tally_2008).

Political realities in an era of transnational corporations (I)

- Nation-states and **transnational corporations** are joined in global power relations.
- Nationalism exists in international sports, but **consumerism** may replace patriotism when it comes to identifying with athletes and teams.
- **Corporations** tend to use sports to “fuse” their interests with national and local symbols with which people identify.

(continued)

Political realities in an era of transnational corporations (II)

- The Olympics and other international sport events are showcases for **transnational corporations**, their products, and the ideology of consumerism.
- **Corporations** pay billions to sponsor global sports so they might develop “global outposts” in people’s heads.
- **Corporate images** tied to sports do not determine what people will think, but they influence what people will think about.

Efforts by the NFL to export football to other nations have generally failed.

The meanings and ideologies that are associated with football are tied closely to U.S. history and are not easily integrated into other cultures.

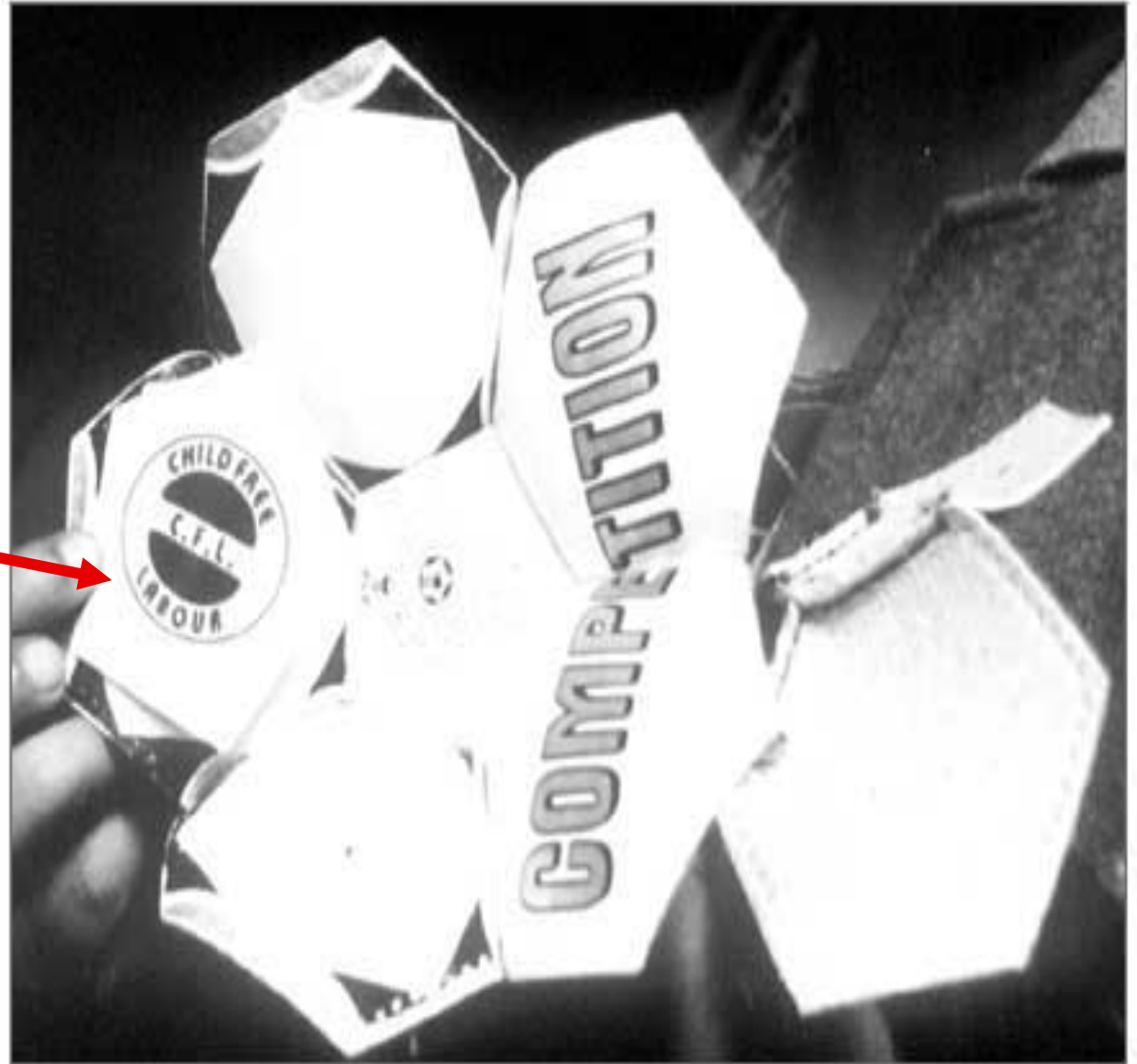


Sports and global political issues

- Athletes as global migrant workers
 - Raises issues of personal adjustment, labor rights, national impact of talent migration, and national identity

- The production of sport equipment and apparel
 - Raises issues of international labor exploitation and the need for international labor rights organizations and monitors

Children in India
have produced
soccer balls with
the label, “Child
Free Labour.”





As workers in Southeast Asia form unions or use other means to demand better working conditions and salaries, companies move their manufacturing operations to Africa where they contract with people who work in their homes or community centers.



These work centers are difficult to monitor, but the people are desperate and will work for less than others worldwide.

Making sense of new political realities

- As the meaning, organization, and purpose of sports have changed, there are new questions to be asked about sports as social phenomena.
- The most helpful research on the realities of global trends has presented data from both global and local levels.
 - This helps us understand local expressions of and responses to global processes.

Politics in sports (I)

Political processes in sports revolve around these issues:

1. What qualifies as a sport?
2. What are the rules of sport?
3. Who makes and enforces rules?
4. Who organizes and controls events?

(continued)

What qualifies as a sport? Sepak Takraw is popular in Southeast Asia, but it's not played in enough nations to become an Olympic sport.



Politics in sports (II)

5. Where will events take place?
6. Who is eligible to participate
7. How are rewards distributed?

Conclusion: Politics and political processes are inherent in organized sports; our goal is to make them fair and just.