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Sports politics

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Abstract

Politics and sports or sports diplomacy describes the use of sport as a means to influence diplomatic, social, and political relations. Sports diplomacy may transcend cultural differences and bring people together. The use of sports and politics has had both positive and negative implications over history. Sports competitions or activities have had the intention to bring about change in certain cases. Nationalistic fervor is sometimes linked to victories or losses to some sport on sports fields. While the Olympics is often the biggest political example of using sports for diplomatic means, cricket and association football, as well as other sports in the global arena, have also been used in this regard. In the case of Apartheid, sport was used to isolate South Africa and bring about a major overhaul in the country's social structure. While ethnicity and race can cause division, sports can also help blend differences. Additionally, numerous athletes have sought political office, some of them unsuccessfully, on either the national level or the sub-national level.

Keywords: Sports politics, influence diplomatic, social, political relations

Introduction

Sports Politics

Sports politics (or the politics of sport and recreation) are integral to life here at the Alliance. Groucho Marx believed that politics is the art of finding trouble. At the Sport and Recreation Alliance we see things a bit differently. Sports politics is very important to us. And as a result, we engage positively with Parliamentarians, civil servants, councilors and opinion formers to find solutions to the challenges facing the sector. We also highlight the valuable contribution of sport, recreation and dance to individuals and communities across the country. Our political engagement takes many forms. As well as monitoring developments in Parliament, we regularly hold meetings with MPs and Peers and provide briefings on a wide range of issues which stretch right across the sport and recreation sector. We provide the secretariat for the All Party Parliamentary Group for Sport and support similar sport and recreation groups where we can. We actively engage with Parliamentary Committees and respond to government consultations which affect the sport and recreation sector, all of which are detailed on our consultation tracker and past consultation responses page. The Alliance also has a presence at the political party conferences every autumn, allowing us to make new connections and influence the leading figures in each of the major parties helping them recognize the importance of sport and recreation. To support our members' efforts to make their voice heard in Westminster we are always on hand to offer advice and guidance on effective lobbying for sports and recreation causes. Our monthly policy update also aims to keep our members informed about what's happening in the world of sports politics. For further information about sports politics and the Sport and Recreation Alliance's work in Parliament, please don't hesitate to get in touch with our parliamentary liaison officer, Simon Butler.

The Tragicomedy of Politicians and Sports

On August 19, Tulsi Gabbard, who represents Hawaii's second congressional district, missed a Senate field hearing in Honolulu on veteran's affairs. U.S. Senator Mazie Hirono, who frequently collaborates with Gabbard, had to run the hearing herself. Four days later, Gabbard's office put out a vague excuse about a prior commitment and traffic. Gabbard's no-show was a minor disappointment to those involved, but it didn't set off flags because congresswomen are busy people. But it turns out Gabbard missed the hearing because she was

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surfing Waikiki with Chris Moody for a Yahoo! News profile, not because she was glad-handing donors or waiting in a traffic jam.

Gabbard is an uncommon figure in American politics and it's easy to see why a national reporter like Moody would be interested in profiling her. When she was elected in 2012, she became the first Hindu and first person born in American Samoa to serve in the House. She's a decorated Captain in the National Guard, who spent most of 2004-2005 in Iraq, and 2009 in Kuwait. In 2011, she helped train the Indonesian Army. Her main political work is with the veteran community, unsurprising given her status as one of the first female combat vets in Congress. Gabbard spoke at the 2012 Democratic National Convention and she remains a national media favorite given her unique history in a House mostly populated with white men.

The Honolulu Civil *Beat* broke the surfing story on Monday, a week after Gabbard sent out the profile to supporters and campaign contributors. Moody's story is heavy on the sports. He portrays Gabbard's passions for surfing and yoga as necessary release valves from the stress of Congress. The story was part of the "Extreme Recess" series that Moody is working on, in which he attempts to chip away at the "vener of Beltway stuffiness" and show that the stars of Congress are just like us, mostly because they like playing sports. Moody and Gabbard were a perfect fit.

The whole scuttlebutt is more absurd than it is sinister. Imagine a frantic meeting of staffers scrambling to try and cover up for their boss because she was surfing. It's the most charming and mundane of Watergates, like something straight out of *Veep*. The hearing in question wasn't even Gabbard's, even if it was on her main issue. However, it speaks to the theater of American elections that politicians prioritize getting some PR for their surfing exploits over talking to veterans.

Sport and Politics Ever Mix? 11

1. An Unlikely Alliance

The history of modern sport has been littered with high-profile incidents in which politics have played a major part. While sporting successes can offer politicians good PR and a valuable 'photo op', there are often serious repercussions when the worlds of sport and politics collide.

2. Why I Didn't Boycott 1980 Moscow Olympics

I was criticized for going to Moscow. We faced a lot of pressure to boycott the games, including from the government, but I think we absolutely made the right decision. People said to me 'you went to Moscow but you didn't go to South Africa', but I saw those as two very different things. We might have all had our thoughts about the regime in Moscow, but I knew the Russian team would be picked on merit.

I chose not to go to South Africa during apartheid because I didn't feel that I would be competing against the best athletes that were available for selection, as it was a very white sport there. I have Indian heritage on my mother's side so I felt quite strongly about that. If my sport stands for anything it is that we are multicultural.

3. Following Your Conscience

Muhammad Ali risked his career when he objected to fight in Vietnam on the grounds of his religious beliefs and was exiled from the ring for three-and-a-half years. (Bob Gomel/The LIFE Premium Collection/Getty Images)

While I strongly opposed the government's call to boycott the

Moscow Olympics, throughout my athletics career I generally wasn't high profile politically. But I knew I wanted to go into politics long before I became an international athlete. Within a few weeks of retiring I'd become a candidate for the 1992 general election and subsequently became an MP.

There are people in sport who have strong political views. It's probably easier not to express those views or hold office while you're competing, but I would always encourage anyone in sport who wanted to be involved in politics. I can understand why sportsmen and sportswomen will at times feel compelled to follow their conscience, whether it be for political, religious or family reasons, to take a stand that might endanger their careers.

4. 'Black Power' Salute

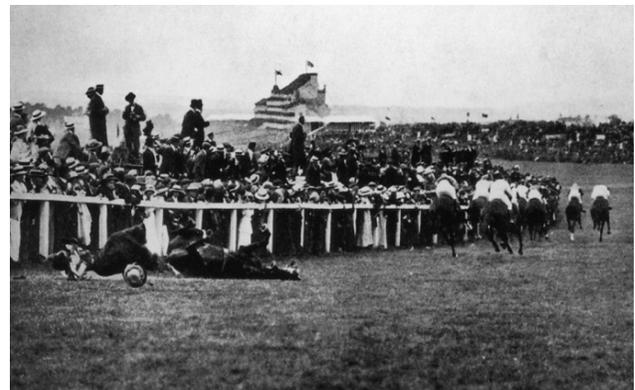
Tommie Smith tells News night in 2012 about why he chose to make the 'Black Power' salute at the 1968 Olympics. (Footage courtesy of the IOC.)

Two sportsmen who risked their careers, and even had their lives threatened, were US athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos after their 'Black Power' salute at the 200m medal ceremony at the 1968 Olympics. Clearly their action came at a deeply turbulent time in the social and political history of the United States.

The International Olympic Committee has clear views about using the Olympic platform for expressing personal or political beliefs, or the promotion of anything during that competitive period. But I think we have to be realistic about the world, it's a political world, and I think it is hard sometimes to hermetically seal yourself away in sport.

I know John Carlos and Tommie Smith and how strongly they felt about the world that they were living in in the 1960s. I can understand, why having performed the way they had at an Olympic games, that they felt it was a moment to express a political point of view. It's for the individual athlete to come to terms with their own instincts, and I have always tended to do that.

5. When Sport and Politics Cross Path



6. A Force for Good

The hugely symbolic moment when Nelson Mandela appeared in a Springbok shirt. (Footage courtesy of IMG Sport Video Archive and the 2003 BBC documentary *Mandela: The Living Legend*.)

When Nelson Mandela walked out in the Springbok jersey in the 1995 Rugby World Cup final we saw what a force for good sport can be in helping to unite a nation. It was symbolic of how far South Africa had come from the apartheid era when athletes were not being selected on merit.

But the point I would always make is that sport brings more

people together than it ever isolates and countries that organize large events must recognize that it throws a spotlight on all sorts of things that the public and the international media are interested in once you are staging that event, and that's actually quite healthy.

In 1980, the British Olympic Association (BOA) took a very independent view and we went to Moscow. The reason I'm chairman of the BOA now is largely out of gratitude to them for defending my right to compete. At the time, people like myself and Colin Moynihan fought tenaciously for the independence of our sport because the risk is if you stick within the parameters of political structures you're comfortable with, then you're not going to have a lot of international sport.

I'm sure there were countries that came to London in 2012 that weren't entirely in line with British or European policy on some things, but that sensibly is set aside. The standard mantra is sport and politics don't mix – but they do, they are the stuff of life. I have never found taking sport to challenging political environments to be an inhibitor over the long haul of social or political change.

7. Vote

This vote is not an opinion poll, merely a way for you to compare your view with those of others. The BBC does not make any claims for the vote's statistical or representative significance.

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