CHAPTER 8

Politics and Nationalism in Sport

As we referenced in Chapter 1, if you have attended a live sporting event in the United States, you have most certainly participated in a ritual that has special resonance in this country. Prior to the beginning of a game or event, officials, players, broadcasters, and fans all stand, face the American flag, and listen to (and sometimes sing along with) "The Star Spangled Banner." The performance of the national anthem serves not only as an expression of national unity but also as an announcement that the action on the field, court, or track is about to begin. Our familiarity with this ritual, in fact, makes it likely that we take it for granted, viewing it simply *as a part of the athletic event itself.*

Is it possible to imagine an American sporting event *without* the anthem? If a *Monday Night Football* game in 2007 is any indication, probably not. Following a severe storm in Pittsburgh that prevented the Dolphins-Steelers game from starting on time, National Football League (NFL) officials decided to cancel the performance of the national anthem so they could avoid any further delay to kickoff. The decision prompted angry responses from fans and organizations like the National Flag Foundation (NFF). A spokesperson for the NFF said, "I think that it's important to sing [the anthem] whenever we have opportunity and certainly as we assemble publicly that certainly is a wonderful opportunity to do that collectively" ("Some Angry," 2007, para. 8).

Perhaps you agree that "The Star Spangled Banner" should be sung whenever Americans gather publicly. But *why* do Americans do this and

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President Truman preparing to throw out the first ball at the opening game of the 1951 baseball season, flanked by Washington Senators manager Bucky Harris, Senators president Clark Griffith, and New York Yankees manager Casey Stengel, at Griffith Stadium in Washington

other things like it, and what does it *mean* as a communicative phenomenon within the world of sport? How is it that we've come to expect presidential first pitches and military flyovers at sporting events? And why are so many sports fans uneasy when their favorite athletes talk openly about politics? We open this chapter with these questions to prompt your thinking about the relationship between politics and sport, a relationship that many deny or resist. Ask the average sports fan in the United States if the pregame performance of the national anthem is *political,* and you're likely to be told that the song is "just patriotic," *not* political. Yet if the anthem is *not* performed, or if someone dares to *challenge* the standards of the ritual, then those acts of transgression are often described as political. During the 2002–2003 college basketball season, for example, Manhattanville College player Toni Smith expressed her opposition to U.S. foreign policy by refusing to face the flag during the pregame ceremony. Her actions receive heightened attention when Manhattanville played a game against the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy and were seen as especially controversial given that the United States was still reeling

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from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and was gearing up for war in Iraq. In this context, public reaction to Smith was overwhelmingly negative, with many claiming that she inappropriately brought politics into a nonpolitical space.

Yet communication and sport scholars would note that politics are present *both* when the anthem is performed *and* when it is challenged. The key is to recognize how and why politics and sport are interrelated and to examine critically the broader significance of sport as a political arena. In the case of the national anthem, its presence is political because it defines a game in terms of nationalism, suggesting that a sporting event is an appropriate place to affirm the principles that bind Americans together as a people. By contrast, its absence, or a protest against its presence, is political because it calls those very principles into question. Politics, then, must be understood in both moments of affirmation and moments of contestation.

The national anthem serves as a specific example of a broader phenomenon. Olympic Games are largely interpreted as competitions between nations. Golf's Ryder Cup and tennis's Davis and Fed Cups are both explicitly designed to highlight national affiliations. Major League Baseball's (MLB) World Baseball Classic has followed the model of soccer's World Cup, using nationalism as a central theme in the advertising and promotion of the event. In spite of these, and other, examples, many sports fans remain hesitant to acknowledge any presence of politics in sport. They prefer to think of sport as a *diversion,* a place for *escape* from "real world" issues. On the one hand, this makes sense, for it can indeed be a distraction to go to a game or forget about the world's problems while analyzing fantasy statistics. Yet, on the other hand, such a view ignores that sport is a cultural *institution,* one that is inextricably linked with larger economic, political, and social structures. As Wenner (1989) points out, "the symbiotic relationship between politics and sports has yielded both recurring sports themes in politics and recurring political themes in sports" (p. 160). In this chapter, we examine five specific relationships between sport and politics: (a) how sport has been used by elected officials as a political resource; (b) how sport has worked its way into the language of politics, including war; (c) how sport becomes a means of fostering national identity; (d) how sport has dramatized the effects of globalization; and (e) how sport has been used as a site of political resistance. In this chapter, we examine not only how these functions are political but also how they are expressed communicatively.

Before we move forward, it is important that we define what we mean by "politics." You may have specific images in mind: elected officials,

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campaign commercials, voting, and so on. Although these certainly are components of politics, it is important to think more broadly. Political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2000) argues that there is an important distinction between the terms *political* and *politics*. The "political," she maintains, reflects the unavoidable conflicts that are inherent in human relations. "Politics," meanwhile, encompasses the practices, discourses, and institutions in and through which we seek to address those conflicts and establish order. Politics, therefore, is the means by which we come to terms with conflict and construct collective identities.

Theoretically Speaking: Hegemony

Scholars in a variety of disciplines have sought to understand how "power" is acquired, maintained, or lost. Hegemony theory addresses these concerns, as it is interested in determining the cultural and social practices that enable political institutions to hold power. The term *hegemony* comes from the writings of Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci (1971), who in the 1930s defined hegemony as the "spontaneous consent" given by the public to the interests of the dominant social order (p. 12). This definition is in contrast to power gained through means of violence—military dictatorships, for example—and focuses more on cultural practices that endorse a dominant ideology. As an institution, sport rarely resists dominant practices and instead favors rituals and symbols that provide "consent." Butterworth's (2010) book, *Baseball and Rhetorics of Purity,* provides an example of communication scholarship that is influenced by hegemony theory. He argues that in the years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, baseball's symbolic role as the "national pastime" was enacted and performed through multiple rituals and discourses, including memorial ceremonies, museum exhibits, congressional hearings, and more. He concludes that "baseball as rhetoric articulated with a political order that justified preemptive military action, dictated the terms of democratic governance around the world, and restricted democratic practice within the United States" (p. 3). Such a critique is designed to identify symbols of power and to consider alternative ways of communicating about political issues.

Another term that helps us understand the relationship between sport and politics is *ideology.* Ideology can be defined in various ways, but it generally refers to the "system of ideas" of a given class of people (Eagleton, 1991, p. 63). In other words, ideology incorporates the dominant ideas, values, rituals, and history of a group. The more homogeneous a population, the more acceptance there is of a shared ideology. In a

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populous and diverse country like the United States, there are numerous groups and, thus, numerous ideologies that coexist. Accordingly, many political conflicts are the result of competing ideologies. But not all ideologies operate equally, and it is typically the case that some form of *dominant* ideology exercises greater control. That control might be exercised through formal political institutions, such as government, but it also can be found in cultural institutions, such as Hollywood cinema or sport. As will become clear below, sport is indeed a prominent institution through which ideology is communicated and politics is engaged and enacted. As we proceed, we want to remind you that our focus in this textbook is on American sport. This does not mean that we believe the relationship between sport and politics is relevant only to a U.S. audience, but this chapter is restricted primarily to an American context.

SPORT AS POLITICAL RESOURCE

In 1971, the American table tennis team unexpectedly received an invitation to visit China and compete against the Chinese team. Since formal relations between the two countries had long been antagonistic, the subsequent trip to China was seen as a positive development for each government. The moment was popularly described as "ping-pong diplomacy," and President Richard Nixon eagerly capitalized on the new spirit of cooperation by using sport as a springboard for his own subsequent visit to the People's Republic. In this way, the U.S. president recognized that sport could be a valuable political resource.

Nixon was, in fact, acutely aware of sport's significance. His Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) codename at one point, after all, was "Quarterback." Moreover, he was the president who began the tradition of phoning victorious coaches and players after major championship victories. Decades later, presidents and other elected officials continue to recognize the symbolic importance of sport. It is commonplace for candidates for elected office to attend live sporting events in the effort to connect with voters. President Barack Obama, for example, has used his love of sports to build identification with fans, through things such as ESPN's annual feature that reveals the president's picks for the NCAA basketball tournament, arguing for a playoff system in college football, or throwing out the first pitch at the 2009 MLB All-Star Game.

The use of sport by politicians is risky, however, for fans are quick to interpret such actions either as manipulations of the sporting context or as awkward attempts to invent a likable persona. As for the former case, President Bush is yet again a suitable example. When the Iraqi National

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Soccer team qualified for the 2004 Summer Olympic Games and later experienced unexpected success, the American president claimed that the team's victories were a direct result of U.S. military actions in the Middle East. As Butterworth (2007) demonstrates, this claim was highly controversial, and the majority of the Iraqi players themselves disapproved of Bush's efforts to communicate the triumph of American ideology. Rather than helping to advance American foreign policy, therefore, Bush's use of the Iraqi team instead intensified international criticisms of the president and the U.S. war in Iraq.

Observers generally are unenthusiastic about presidential interventions in international sporting events. President Jimmy Carter was heavily criticized when he decided the United States would boycott the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow. The decision was motivated by the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, but many believed the boycott harmed American athletes more than anyone. A similar debate emerged in 2013 as athletes prepared for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia. Various groups called for a boycott in response to two politically charged issues: first, Russia passed oppressive legislation authorizing the persecution of gays and lesbians; and second, the Russian government provided asylum to Edward Snowden, an American citizen who leaked information about the U.S. government's surveillance programs. The strongest voices opposed to the boycott were those who drew upon the memories of 1980 and worried that American athletes would be unfairly punished.

A different kind of moment from 2004 shows the awkwardness that can emerge from politicians' efforts to reach the public through sports. President Bush's challenger in the presidential election was Massachusetts Senator John Kerry. When Kerry attended a Boston Red Sox game that summer, he was asked to name his favorite player. Stammering through his answer, the senator replied with a hybrid of superstars David Ortiz and Manny Ramirez: "Manny Ortez." The gaffe was perceived as more than a mere slip of the tongue. Rather, it suggested to many observers that Kerry lacked the necessary authenticity to *communicate* effectively about sports. As you will recall from Chapter 2, sport generates an important sense of *community.* By making such an obvious communicative error, then, Kerry marked himself as an outsider to the community of sport and, given the role sport plays in the country more broadly, as a person out of touch with American culture.

Baseball's symbolic importance to the presidency is a product of several rituals, most notable of which is the presidential first pitch. As mentioned above, President Bush was able to communicate strength and resolve by standing at the center of the diamond in a time of national crisis.

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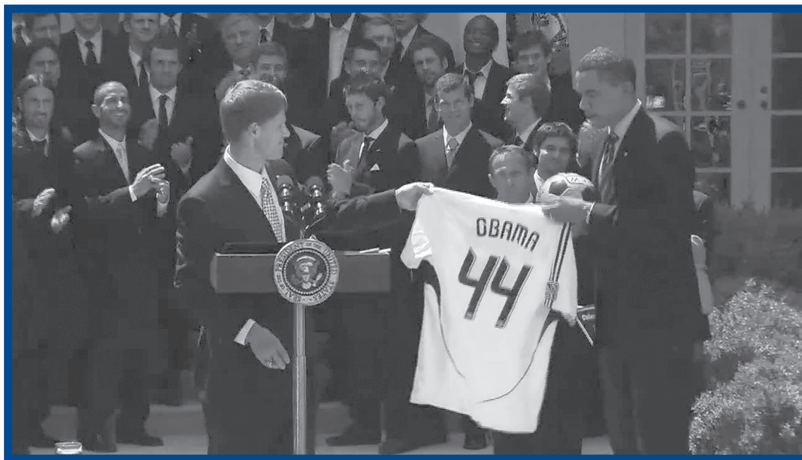
In that moment he was calling upon a history dating back to 1910, when William Howard Taft became the first president to toss a ceremonial pitch from the stands of Washington's National Park. Since that time, nearly every president has thrown at least one ceremonial first pitch. Given that baseball has a long history as the "national pastime," these presidential appearances are important communicative rituals that reinforce baseball's mythological connection to essential American values (as we discussed in Chapter 5).

These values are often most important at times of crisis, especially when the nation is at war. After the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor, MLB Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt to ask if the president wanted the league to suspend play during the 1942 season. "I honestly feel," Roosevelt responded, "it would be best for the country to keep baseball going." These words demonstrated the president's belief that playing baseball *communicated* important messages about strength and community. Years later, in the wake of 9/11, President Bush's campaign echoed this theme during the 2004 election. At the Republican National Convention, the party presented a video demonstrating the president's leadership. The most dramatic story line in the video was the retelling of Bush's first pitch at the World Series in 2001, a gesture that the convention audience was told encouraged Americans to "keep pitching, keep pitching."

Presidents also use sport to communicate values when they invite championship teams to visit the White House. Hester (2005) terms these visits "presidential sports encomia," through which presidents "draw attention to examples of athletic achievement that they claim support their



MLS champions Columbus Crew visit the White House.

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visions of national unity and American values" (p. 52). The *encomium* is a classical rhetorical gesture of praise, which points to the fundamentally *communicative* nature of these White House visits. As Hester notes, presidents invite an average of seven sports teams to Washington, D.C., each year, demonstrating the extent to which elected officials recognize sport's symbolic power in American culture.

Case Study: Meeting Mr. President

On average, the president of the United States honors roughly seven championship teams each year with an invitation to visit the White House and celebrate their achievement. This has included high school teams, collegiate athletes, professional franchises, and even Olympic gold medalists, who relish the opportunity to visit with the nation's "number one fan." At the ceremony, the president offers a customary set of remarks about the coach, players, and organization, and he is then presented with a #1 jersey from the team's primary representative.

Yet what would happen if a player decided to turn down the invitation by the president? This is actually more common than you would think. For example, after a late-game rally in the fourth quarter of the 2009 Super Bowl, the Pittsburgh Steelers defeated the Arizona Cardinals to win the franchise's sixth Lombardi trophy. An important play during the game occurred at the end of the first half when the Cardinals were within striking distance of the end zone. James Harrison (linebacker for the Steelers) intercepted a pass and returned it for a touchdown as time expired. After taking office, President Obama decided that the Steelers would be the first team he would invite to the White House, and team officials graciously accepted the offer to attend. Arrangements were made, and the team was scheduled to attend shortly after President Obama concluded his first 100 days in office.

Shortly after receiving news about the invitation, James Harrison declined to attend. Many questioned why Harrison would refuse to attend the celebration with his teammates. Did he have a political agenda? Was it a political statement against the president's policies? As an African American player, wouldn't he be honored to be the guest of the first African American president? When pushed on the issue, people failed to accept his rationale for declining the offer. He argued that the president wouldn't be interested in meeting him if his team had failed to beat the Cardinals in the closing minutes of the Super Bowl, and he just wasn't interested in making the trip. Losing teams aren't invited, as it would cause serious political repercussions if the American people began to associate losing with the presidency. Upon further review, it became

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evident that Harrison had also declined to attend a reception hosted by President George W. Bush 3 years earlier after the Steelers had won their fifth Super Bowl. At the time, the media failed to take note, and his record-setting performance during the 2009 Super Bowl had made him stand out this time around.

1. Does the average American make any assumptions about the president based on his affiliation with a sports team?
2. Is it appropriate for an athlete to turn down such an invitation if he or she does have a conflict with the president's political views?
3. In what type of situations would the president be warranted to invite a losing team to the White House?

SPORT AND THE LANGUAGE OF POLITICS AND WAR

Even when sport is not being used overtly by politicians, it is often seen as a metaphor for politics itself. Sport and politics share some obvious features: They involve contests, and they usually produce "winners" and "losers." Using sport as a metaphor for politics is problematic, however, as it runs the risk of trivializing serious political issues or short-circuiting substantive debate. Communication scholars, therefore, have focused considerable attention on investigating whether sports metaphors are simply *descriptive* or if they have the capacity to *shape* our understandings of political issues themselves.

At one level, sport is used as description in order to give language added vitality and force. As Segrave (2000) explains, boxing metaphors have allowed politicians to embody toughness and determination through their language, while baseball metaphors depend on the familiarity of Americans with their national pastime. Meanwhile, media often refer to political campaigns as a "horse race" by emphasizing candidates' positions in the race—that is, "front runner," "long shot," et cetera. Yet with the rise of the NFL as the nation's most popular sport, it is football that has become "the root metaphor of American political discourse" (p. 51).

Football plays a vital role in political language for at least two reasons, Segrave (2000) maintains. First, it is grounded in a set of values that make teamwork, unity, and respect for authority central to success. The emphasis on "team" is especially important for politicians who seek loyalty and

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wish to reinforce hierarchy (Bineham, 1991). Second, especially through its mediated production, football cultivates heroic mythologies wherein great men perform great deeds for the benefits of their fellow citizen-fans. These men are great, at least in part, because they are highly specialized at what they do. Thus, the increased specialization found on the football field serves as a metaphor for the technical expertise required of politics and governance.

Left at the level of description, these metaphors provide communicators with colorful figures of speech. Yet communication scholars have noted that metaphors commonly work on a deeper level, at which they are capable of shaping how we come to see the world. As Beer and de Landtsheer (2004) contend, "The power of metaphor is the power to understand and impose forms of political order. Metaphors reflect, interpret, and construct politics" (p. 30). Consequently, we should reconsider some of the metaphors noted above to examine how they may construct politics in problematic ways.

Let's begin with the horse race metaphor. The idea that journalists reduce political campaigns to a "play-by-play" account of who's winning and losing at any given moment has received considerable attention. In a recent study spanning nearly half a century, for example, Benoit, Stein, and Hansen (2005) discovered that the horse race metaphor was *the most common* topic of newspaper coverage of political campaigns. Although it is important to understand where candidates stand in relation to one another during a campaign, the overemphasis on the race comes at the expense of discussions of substantive issues. Thus, when viewers tuned in to the 2008 presidential debates between Barack Obama and John McCain, rather than hearing about policy differences between the two candidates, they were more likely to hear that McCain needed a "game-changing" performance because he was trailing in the polls. In this way, the use of sport as a political metaphor may actually do damage to the political process, reducing any discussion to "Red Team versus Blue Team" and any policy stance to the role of a game tactic.

Another concern arises when we revisit the football metaphor. In addition to communicating values of toughness and teamwork, football also is commonly used to describe the military and/or war. Football's emphasis on territorial control, offense and defense, and militaristic language—such as "bombs," "trenches," and "blitzes"—has produced an almost seamless relationship between the game and warfare. This metaphor is obvious to anyone familiar with the highlight reels of NFL Films or the pregame narratives that hype big games. Yet if it is familiar to you that war is an apt

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descriptor for football, you may be surprised to see how often football is used to describe warfare. Therein lies the potential problem.

Especially since the first Persian Gulf War (1991), communication and sport scholars have attended to the use of football language to describe war. Perhaps the most famous reference came from U.S. General Norman Schwarzkopf, who referred to a specific military strategy as an attempt to throw a "Hail Mary pass." Not only does this language choice unwittingly position the strategy as one of desperation—a "Hail Mary" is also an attempt to complete a deep pass for a touchdown as time expires, a play with a very low percentage of success—but it also makes the consequences of military action seem no more significant than the outcome of a football play. The idea that sports metaphors trivialize the seriousness of war is one of the strongest criticisms against using this kind of language.

Sports metaphors also risk equating good citizenship with good fanship. If good fans wear their team's colors and root for their favorite players in good times and bad, and despite any questionable decision making, then the language of sport in politics may also position citizens to acquiesce in the decisions of their elected leaders, whether or not these decisions are in the best interests of the people. Writing about the Persian Gulf War, for example, Herbeck (2004) worries that "football metaphors discouraged substantive discussion of alternatives by casting the American public in the subservient role of the fans" (p. 129). Once again, efforts to use sport as a dramatic figure of speech may end up limiting, or even eliminating, the open discussions of policy that are essential to a democratic society.

Butterworth argues that such limits on democratic deliberation have become commonplace in highly commercialized sports. In his essay (2012) about an exhibit called "Pro Football and the American Spirit," on display at the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2008 and 2009, he considers how the valorization of wars from the past reduces Americans' willingness to contemplate the role of war in the present. He especially focuses on the display about Pat Tillman, the former NFL player who gave up his career to join the Army Rangers after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Tillman's death in 2004 became a rallying cry for heroic sacrifice, but later details revealed not only that he had been accidentally killed by one of his fellow Rangers but also that Tillman's own feelings about the war in Afghanistan were complicated. Nevertheless, Tillman's memory was routinely used by the NFL and the broadcast networks to tap into feelings of patriotism and nationalism. By presenting a sanitized narrative about

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Tillman's sacrifice alongside other memorials to professional football players who served in the military and by completely omitting any reference to resistance or dissent from war, the Hall of Fame exhibit "reduced citizenship to flags and anthems and foreclosed honoring dissent as a critical democratic function" (Butterworth, 2012, p. 254).

Meanwhile, although militarism has largely been understood as an *American* phenomenon, it is clear that alignments between sport and the military have gained favor elsewhere. Scherer and Koch (2010), for example, explain that practices from the United States have influenced Canadian sport. They argue that the Ticket for Troops event, sponsored by the National Hockey League (NHL) and broadcast on national television, provides symbolic support for a war (Afghanistan) that was highly controversial among Canadian citizens. The high-profile platform of the most popular sport in Canada, therefore, provided "high-ranking military officials, Canadian soldiers, and Conservative political leaders . . . an uncontested platform to speak to a national audience and promote Canada's role in Afghanistan as a matter of national interest for *both* countries" (p. 16). Studies such as these, therefore, remind us that although sport can be a form of diversion, it often participates in the very problems and issues from which we wish to escape.

A Matter of Ethics: Politics, Sport, and Sponsorship

In the wake of the horrific December 2012 shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, American citizens and lawmakers vigorously debated the virtues of gun control. Although most agreed that child safety was crucially important, there was little agreement as to what, if any, laws were needed to prevent future acts of mass violence. Beyond public discussions, then, the debate was waged between lawmakers, including President Obama and the U.S. Congress, and public organizations, such as the National Rifle Association (NRA). The president and the NRA were understood to have deep disagreements that reflected profound divisions among members of the American public.

Sports played a role in helping people in the Newtown area feel they were supported by others around the country. In particular, the National Football League held ceremonies to honor the memories of the children whose lives were lost. In March of 2013, as the public debate about guns and "gun culture" continued, the NRA announced that

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it would sponsor its first sporting event, a National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) race at the Texas Motor Speedway. With that announcement, NRA CEO Wayne LaPierre stated, "NRA members and NASCAR fans love their country and everything that is good and right about America. We salute our flag . . . volunteer in our churches and communities . . . cherish our families . . . and we love racing!"

In light of the Sandy Hook incident and the subsequent debate, the NRA's timing raises important questions. Should a political organization (the NRA lobbies for legislation on behalf of its constituents) sponsor a sporting event? Was the NRA's timing insensitive? What kind of politics does LaPierre suggest is shared between the NRA and fans of NASCAR? Is such a worldview consistent with your understanding of sport's role in American culture?

SPORT AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

One manifestation of politics is the ability to cultivate and maintain a national identity. Indeed, because it is often seen as an idealized symbol of a collective identity, sport's relationship to nations and nationalism has attracted the considerable attention of communication and sport scholars. What is a "nation"? Your initial response may be to think in terms of a "country," a place governed by a shared economic and political system with discrete physical borders. In fact, this is the conventional understanding of the "nation-state," a concept that finds its origins in the 17th and 18th centuries. Upon further reflection, however, it may occur to you that the term *nation* is often used to describe alliances of sports fans—for example, "Red Sox Nation" or "NASCAR Nation." Can we understand each use of the word in similar terms? Perhaps, in part because the concept of nationalism is more fluid and dynamic than traditional definitions might allow.

One influential theory of nationalism comes from Anderson (1991), who argues that a nation is a symbolic construct, what he calls an "imagined community." This suggests that national identity is less a product of geography or government and more a product of shared histories, myths, and ideology. You may recall from Chapter 5 that mythology plays a large role in communicating values shared by many Americans. For instance, the idea that the United States is a place where freedom and opportunity are available to an extent that has no precedent in history contributes greatly to the collective identity of its citizenry. In other words, by *imagining* that

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Team USA at 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics opening ceremony

America fosters a particular kind of *community,* a national identity begins to emerge. Sport is especially important in this process because its shared experience makes it one of the few institutions capable of developing a "collective consciousness" (Rowe, 1999, p. 22).

Allison (2000) argues that "national identity is the most marketable product in sport" (p. 346). A primary reason for this is that when a sporting event has a national appeal, it draws much higher ratings for television. Consequently, when communication scholars examine the relationship between sport and nationalism, they often do so by studying mass media. The Olympic Games provide arguably the most obvious site for researching how television influences our understanding of national identity. As Billings and Eastman (2003) state, "The Olympics represents a mix of nationalism, internationalism, sport, and human drama unmatched by any other event" (p. 569). Their study examined the National Broadcasting Company's (NBC) coverage of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah. Particularly because the Games followed so soon after 9/11, "NBC created an unabashedly patriotic telecast" (p. 570). Even with 9/11 now more than 10 years in the past, Olympic coverage continues to emphasize these themes; as Billings, Brown, and Brown (2013) conclude, heavy viewers of the 2012 London Games "were more likely to exhibit higher levels of nationalism, patriotism, internationalism, and smugness than light viewers of Olympic media" (p. 579).

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Interview: Christine Brennan, *USA Today* Sports Columnist

Q: George Orwell argued that sport is like "war minus the shooting." How true is this statement in international sporting competitions?

A: Pretty true, but I say that with a smile—most of the time. In 1994, Sweden won the Olympic gold medal in men's ice hockey. I was in the press center, and we would hear this roar from the offices of Swedish newspapers and news organizations when Sweden would score a goal. For smaller countries that don't win that often, that is one of the great charms of the Olympics.

For me, it was the 1980 Miracle on Ice hockey game. That's the metaphor—war minus the shooting—in this case, Mike Eruzione scoring the winning goal. All of our nation's problems melted away for a few hours, and we celebrated as a country. Years later, I was discussing the game with a Russian figure skating coach, and she didn't know what I was talking about. The loss didn't resonate for them the same way the win did with us. It's about context.

Q: If assessing nationalism within sports media, to what degree is it still "us versus them"?

A: Certainly in print and on air, the U.S. press never uses *us* or *we.* For me, it may slip in casual conversation, but anything for the record—never. Many other nations don't make the distinction, but the U.S. is so big and wins so many medals, plus, most important, our press is not run by our government, so we avoid it. I understand why South Africa or Nigeria would use *us* or *we.*

The other big point is that major rivalries no longer exist since the fall of the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, East Germany. We're glad it's gone; nobody's lamenting the loss of the Soviet Union. Still, we all love the concept of "your team versus the hated enemy." You live for that. China wants to be a player but will never mean to the U.S. what the Soviet Union did. No U.S. citizen can muster the immense dislike and even hatred toward China that we had then.

Q: What role does politics play in events such as the World Cup and the Olympics?

A: I'm amused when people or commentators say there is no place for politics in sports. It's never *just* about sports in international competition. Flags and anthems make it special. Watching such events even helps children learn about geography

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and other global issues. At the Ryder Cup in 1999, there is a prickly memory because the American golfers celebrated too early before a match was over, but no war started, obviously. If the big battle is who jumped around on the 17th green in Brookline, we're OK.

Q: For women, what impact does an athlete's citizenship have on the opportunities she has within sport?

A: It's about creating role models. For me growing up, I had my own personal Title IX—my father and mother—but for many others, it was about watching your countrywomen and cheering for them. President Obama recently said, "My girls look at the TV when I'm watching *SportsCenter* and they see women staring back. That shows them that they can be champions, too." I can imagine this is even truer for women from other countries.

Q: Thomas Friedman argues that "the world is flat." How true is this in sports?

A: It's true, but with way more advantages than disadvantages. There will be growing pains. We've seen that in the LPGA as they took a lot of criticism for how they were insisting their international players speak English. It was handled poorly, but you need a common language. You can't just go on hand signals; communication is essential.

You also run into this at the U.S. college level, where many international athletes are now taking scholarships at NCAA institutions that could have gone to American student-athletes. Still, the university is a place to come and learn, and this is another moment for that. I can see the concern, but are we opening up our world to others or are we not? So, it's not just the world that is flattening, it's also the field of play.

A component of these studies is the use of *framing theory,* an approach to media studies that examines how print and broadcast journalists tell stories so that particular themes or values are featured over others. Delgado (2003) also uses this theory in his study of newspaper coverage of a match between the United States and Iran during the 1998 World Cup finals. Because the two countries had a poor relationship, many sportswriters positioned the match as a symbolic contest over competing ideologies. Even as most players and coaches insisted that they were not interested

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(or even aware of) the match's politics, newspaper accounts used political terms to create a dominant frame. Some stories interpreted the match as a diplomatic effort between the United States and Iran, not unlike the "ping-pong diplomacy" we discussed at the outset of the chapter. Thus, as Delgado argues, this narrative frame used politics and nationalism as rhetorical strategies to make this sporting event seem important to American sports fans who otherwise largely ignore soccer.

Narrative cinema also is a prominent site for expressing national identity. Movies such as *Seabiscuit* (2003) and *Cinderella Man* (2005) are popular largely because they use historical events to celebrate the core values that comprise American ideology. *Seabiscuit* recalls the story of a thoroughbred race horse that became a symbol of hope for Americans in the midst of the Great Depression. *Cinderella Man,* meanwhile, is the story of boxer Jim Braddock, who also became a depression-era symbol of triumph over adversity. In the case of these films, the celebrated values are those of individualism, hard work, and perseverance. The 2008 film *The Express,* meanwhile, highlights Ernie Davis as the first African American Heisman Trophy winner, and the 2013 film *42* dramatizes Jackie Robinson's story as the first African American to play Major League Baseball in the modern era, with both films therefore celebrating the democratic virtues of inclusion and social progress that are prominent components of identity in the United States.

There is a fine line between fostering national unity and cultivating an attitude that either stereotypes or denigrates other identities. Too often, sports narratives overemphasize the "us" versus "them" story line to the point of influencing political attitudes (Jhally, 1989). Once again, reactions to 9/11 in the United States provide a useful example for communication scholars. When sports leagues returned to action after the terrorist attacks, they each used their games as a means to show resolve, patriotism, and unity. Brown (2004) notes that "sport can be seen as providing solemn opportunities to mourn the dead, patriotic messages to inspire, salutes to honor the life-saving efforts of all involved, messages to re-enforce unity amongst Americans and remind everyone that life must go on" (p. 41). Yet he also points out that the emphasis on military imagery brought risks of positively associating sport with war. Butterworth (2005) extends this theme by arguing that patriotic ceremonies at baseball games quickly moved from rituals of healing to expressions of militarism and an endorsement of war. The transition was perhaps best illustrated by the inclusion of "God Bless America" as a mandatory performance during the seventh-inning stretch of all baseball games. The song guaranteed not only a nationalistic element would be present at games but also conflated

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national unity with the military because it was commonly performed by members of the U.S. Armed Forces. As a result, Butterworth maintains that sport communicated a hostile and belligerent attitude at a time when the United States was engaged in controversial military actions in the Middle East. In each case, these scholars emphasize that sport, far from being a distraction from matters of politics, served the political function of affirming national identity at a time of crisis.

SPORT AND GLOBALIZATION

Because nationalism is frequently on display during international sporting events, such as the Olympics, World Cup, or a Grand Slam tennis tournament, it is also important to think about politics and national identity in the context of *globalization*. Maguire (2006) concludes that globalization can be understood as "the growing network of interdependencies—political, economic, cultural, and social—that bind human beings together, for better and for worse" (p. 436). Although globalization is not a new phenomenon, it has intensified in recent decades. Among the consequences of this development is that individuals are exposed to multiple forms of media, politics, and economics, thus calling their "national identity" into question. Miller, Lawrence, McKay, and Rowe (2001) note that, because of globalization, "What constitutes a national game or a contest between representatives of local, regional, and national identities is subject to constant reformulation" (p. 11).

Representative World Cup soccer ball

One of the central debates regarding globalization has to do with the extent of American influence around the world. Perhaps you are familiar with Barber's (1995) *Jihad vs. McWorld,* in which he describes the global influence of American corporations such as McDonald's or MTV. Critics of such influences are likely to worry that the United States is engaged in a project of "cultural imperialism," wherein the integrity of national identity is threatened by the penetration of U.S. popular culture and ideology into native cultures. The presence of a LeBron James jersey in Spain may sound like good marketing to the National Basketball Association (NBA), but to some Spanish

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citizens it could feel invasive. For an example of how Americans react to the "intrusion" of an unpopular domestic sport, consider the outpouring of criticism against soccer each time it appears the sport may gain exposure in the United States. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this was the attention given to British superstar David Beckham's arrival in the United States to play for Major League Soccer (MLS). Much of the American sporting public felt it was much ado about nothing, while many international fans mocked Beckham's choice to play in a lesser league. Meanwhile, many fans and players have grown resentful of the NFL playing regular season games in England or MLB playing regular season games in Japan because these decisions appear to destabilize these sports' central place in the nation. The Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) has been trying to adapt to a "Korean invasion"; some deem the tour less palatable because of the unfamiliar names at the top of the leaderboard. The point here is that globalization does not operate in only one direction. Indeed, the United States *feels* its effects as much as it *produces* them.

Regardless of direction, globalization is seen by some as a threat to national identity. The increase of Japanese ownership of American businesses in the 1980s and 1990s produced cultural anxieties about a perceived loss of identity. When this trend affected ownership of baseball's Seattle Mariners, those anxieties were expressed through a fear that "America's pastime" was under siege from "foreign" interests (Ono, 1997). Similarly, in 2010, Russian businessman Mikhail Prokhorov became the owner of the NBA's Brooklyn Nets, prompting some anxieties reminiscent of the U.S.–Soviet Cold War. Across the ocean, British football (soccer) fans were upset when American millionaire Malcolm Glazer purchased the storied Manchester United franchise in 2005. Such moments are reminders that our imagined communities place great emphasis on their sports teams as symbols of their identities.

Part of the outcry in these incidents is surely the concerns about commercialization (for more on this, see Chapter 14). Globalization facilitates the exchange of capital, and, because sport is a valuable commodity, leagues and players alike seek new opportunities across increasingly fluid geographical, economic, and political borders. An exemplary case of this occurred in 2002, when the New York Yankees reached an agreement with Manchester United to cross-market their franchises. As Miller (2004) explains, "The Yankees are world-renowned but world-unwatched, and Manchester United is no doubt covetous of opening up the wealthiest and most protected market in the world—sport in the United States" (p. 244). Although the agreement ultimately produced

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little of note, it is indicative of the cross-promotion and synergy strategies that characterize contemporary capitalism.

More than ever, sport is a truly international affair. Nearly 30% of major league rosters are made up of players born outside the United States. The NBA is wildly popular around the world. ESPN and NBC Sports televise European football (soccer). The biggest stars in tennis come from nearly every corner of the world. Meanwhile, 1.5 billion will watch the World Cup finals, and the Olympics remains the "biggest show on television" (Billings, 2008). All of which makes the ideas of nation and nationalism particularly interesting phenomena for communication and sport scholars. Perhaps most important is to keep in mind that the relationship between sport and globalization reveals important dimensions of international cooperation. As Jarvie (2003) suggests, "the choice between global and local sport" is a false one (p. 549). Instead, contemporary sport is scene of a developing sense of *internationalism* and *cosmopolitanism*.

SPORT AND RESISTANCE

Even in a democracy, politics entails power. Power may be defined in various ways, but our most common understanding assumes that individuals possess power, with which they make decisions about access, opportunity, and resources. Because not everyone will have equal access to power, there will be those who are placed on the margins or even excluded from mainstream society. Consequently, the opposing side to power is *resistance.* More specifically, resistance can be understood as being in dynamic tension with power, for the ability to resist is itself a form of power (Tomlinson, 1998). Resistance can take many forms, some of which we examine in Chapter 9. In this chapter, we address the ways in which athletes have used sport as a means for resisting governments and/or formal political policies. In particular, we look to exemplars of participation in social movements, through which we can better understand the communicative role of sport in the resistance to power and dominant ideology.

Because sport is public and popular, it can become a site for productive political struggle and social change. For example, consider the legacy of Jackie Robinson, who, in 1947, became the first African American to play major league baseball in the modern era. Robinson's presence on the Brooklyn Dodgers—one of MLB's signature franchises—embodied a form of resistance to the social and cultural inequities of the era. Remember that this moment occurred nearly a decade before the advent of the civil rights movement. Given baseball's cultural significance at the time, it is difficult to overestimate the impact Robinson had on affecting American attitudes about

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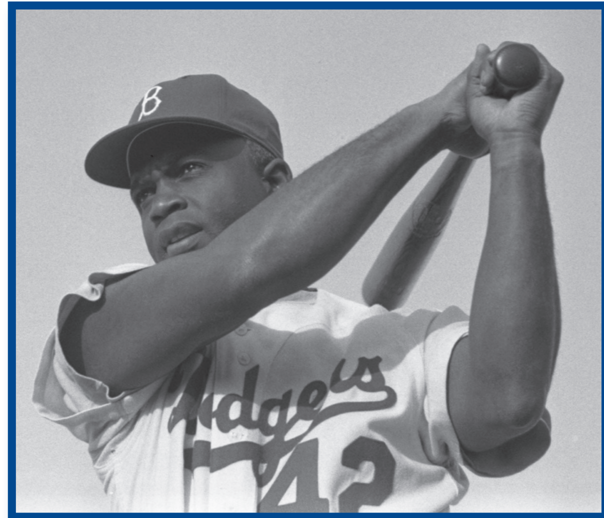

Jackie Robinson

race. Thus, sportswriter Bob Ryan calls the moment "the single most important social happening in American sports history" (Ryan, 2002, para. 5).

As the civil rights movement developed in the 1950s and 1960s, Muhammad Ali (formerly Cassius Clay) used his boxing celebrity as a platform to resist racism and war. When he refused to submit to the draft and serve in Vietnam in 1967, he was stripped of his heavyweight boxing title and banned from the sport for 3 years. A converted Muslim, Ali insisted that war was a violation of his religion, stating, "It is in my consciousness as a Muslim . . . and my own personal convictions that I take my stand in rejecting the call to be inducted in the armed services" (quoted in Lipsyte, 1967, para. 27). Ali had already earned a great many detractors who felt his bravado and showmanship were disrespectful. Yet it was his defiance against the U.S. military that provoked the greatest controversy. However, there was a shared purpose to his fighting both inside and outside of boxing: Ali used violence inside the ring to promote peace and justice outside of it (Gorsevski & Butterworth, 2011).

Other athletes of the time embraced similar convictions. Arthur Ashe critiqued the apartheid government of South Africa while his fellow tennis star Billie Jean King fought for women's equality. Yet perhaps the signature image of protest came from two Americans at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. After winning the gold and bronze medals in the 200 m sprint, Tommie Smith and John Carlos used the medal ceremony to protest racial inequalities within the United States. As the national anthem played, the two men bowed their heads and raised fists clad in black gloves. The protest was largely interpreted as a sign of "Black power," and it resulted in both sprinters' dismissal from the Olympics. Nevertheless, it was fundamentally a *communicative* gesture, one that "created a moment of resistance and confrontation with dominant and existing forms of racial identity" (Bass, 2002, p. 239). As Hartmann (2003) details, despite the negative impression the protest made on many Americans at the time,

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people who see the image now typically associate positive values with it. In other words, it was a moment of resistance that has retained significant communicative power, even as social and political conditions have changed over the decades.

The 1960s and 1970s are often remembered as especially turbulent years in American history. During that time, sport was a site for challenging some of the political injustices that had too often been left unexamined. As a result, athletes such as Ali and King were able to use sport as a platform to advocate and advance social movements, such as the civil rights movement or second-wave feminism. In the years since, however, fewer athletes have used sport as an outlet for political resistance. The explanation for this, at least in part, likely has something to do with the explosion of electronic sports media and the incredible rise in player income. In the words of sportswriter Robert Lipsyte (2002), "Forget about expressing yourself politically or socially; just wear the shoes; take the money and run" (p. 28).

The so-called decline of the "activist-athlete" is the subject of a book by Khan (2012), who uses the case of baseball player Curt Flood to argue that contemporary athletes are, in many cases, simply fulfilling the ambitions of the politically engaged athletes of previous generations. When Flood refused to accept a trade from the St. Louis Cardinals to the Philadelphia Phillies prior to the 1969 season, he issued a challenge to MLB's infamous "reserve clause," a policy that gave teams almost complete authority over player contracts. Flood ultimately lost his legal battle in a 1972 Supreme Court decision, but his actions made possible the move to free agency that became institutionalized in professional sports in the mid-to-late 1970s. Khan argues that critics of contemporary athletes who are apolitical often miss that the very thing Curt Flood fought for was the right to personal and economic self-determination. This is precisely what our political system values, and Khan therefore concludes, "Instead of demanding more from the framework of our political culture, we take our shots at Michael [Jordan] and Tiger [Woods] for their refusal to be Jackie [Robinson] and Curt [Flood], when perhaps who they are is exactly who liberalism hoped they would be" (p. 25).

Even if it is rare to see athletes model political resistance that was characteristic of earlier eras, there are those who feel compelled to express themselves politically. Steve Nash of the NBA responded to the American invasion in Iraq in 2003 by wearing a "No War" T-shirt. Carlos Delgado of MLB refused to participate in the orchestrated "God Bless America" ritual in 2004. In 2009, Andy Roddick withdrew from a prominent tennis tournament in the United Arab Emirates because officials refused to allow Israeli

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player Shahar Peer to allow the women's competition. In 2012, NHL goaltender Tim Thomas refused to accept the invitation from President Obama to celebrate the Boston Bruins' Stanley Cup championship at the White House. In 2013, Dwayne Wade posed for an *Ebony* cover with his sons wearing "hoodies" to continue a pattern of protest from members of the Miami Heat who objected to the shooting death in Florida of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent acquittal of his killer, George Zimmerman. Although these moments may lack the dramatic effect of Ali's defiance or the visual impact of Smith and Carlos's protest, they nevertheless serve as reminders that, like people in all walks of life, athletes do have the capacity and, at times, opportunity to challenge political power.

Meanwhile, sport organizations may also begin to play a greater role in political resistance. For example, in 2010, the state of Arizona passed new legislation to curtail illegal immigration. Many argued that the law's language encouraged police to profile Latinos and, as a result, was racist. In response to the controversy, Phoenix Suns owner Robert Sarver had his team suit up for a Cinco de Mayo playoff game in jerseys stitched with Los Suns. Sarver acknowledged his decision was not only to honor the holiday but also as a protest against "a flawed state law." The Los Suns jerseys provoked considerable discussion in the community of sport, making it a significant communicative moment both for those in support of and those opposed to the decision. Moreover, the decision overlapped with efforts from national lawmakers to pressure Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig to move the site of the 2011 All-Star Game from Phoenix (the game was not moved). While these efforts may or may not become a model for other franchises and players to follow, it is nevertheless a compelling moment that makes real the relationship between politics and sport so often believed not to exist.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have reviewed some of the major contributions of communication scholars interested in sport and politics. The symbolic use of sport by politicians, the interplay of sporting and political language, the cultivation of sporting nationalisms, the relationship between sport and globalization, and the necessity for resistance within sport are key features of this relationship. Despite the common claims that sport and politics should be separate, it should be clear that this is impossible. To return to our example of the national anthem, each performance of "The Star Spangled Banner" is a reminder that politics were necessary to make the song possible in the first place, and they will be necessary to determine the

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song's continued significance. Thus, if indeed politics are about managing conflict and constituting identities, the question isn't about whether or not sport *is* political, it is about *how* sport is political. In the words of sportswriter Dave Zirin, "However you slice and dice it, politics are an enduring, constant, and historic presence in sports" (King, 2008, p. 335).

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