Sport and Peace? The continuous search – Liberia, West Africa

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The Hypothesis/Contention

- Can sport encourage practices of nationhood?
- Can sport undermine the same practices?
- Who is a war-devastated people’s political representative?
- The sporting hero-heroic masculinity
- The role of football in interventionist policies of
  - Charities
  - NGOs
  - FIFA
Liberia: The African exception?

- Liberia: the African exception?
- Football
  - Arrival in 1930s – Atlantic coastal shipping
  - The main occasions for cessation of conflict
  - Africa Cup and World Cup Qualifiers
  - Migrating professional players: returning heroes?
- Traditional heroic masculinity: from political and narrative acumen to celebration of the warrior and mass murderer
- The County Meet: 1964
Military Players: Charles Taylor

- Big Man politics and military entrepreneurs
- A war of all against all? 8 factions
- Low level munitions/highly theatrical/child soldiers
- ‘Chief Patron of Sport’ - Taylor exile to extradition (2006) to face 11 counts of war crime
- The war continuum 1997-2002 LURD
- UN Presence – 15,000 personnel 2004
Lessons in football?

- Child soldiers – dispossessed; nihilistic
- Tradition is destroyed
- Little love for children
- How and where are rules of civil society taught?
- Has football a role in this milieu?
Football and Child Protection

- Child soldiers – dispossessed; nihilistic
- Tradition is destroyed, little love for children
- How and where are rules of civil society taught?
- Salesians of Don Bosco
- Night shelters – daytime football
- Child protection responsibilities
- Rights-based training
- Educational narratives
- A success story?
King of the Republic: George Weah

- ‘The King’ of the Republic?
- Born 1966 – Kru ethnicity – Clara Town slum (quintessential rags to riches)
- Young Survivors – Invisible Eleven – Tonerre Yaounde
- AS Monaco – Paris St. Germain – AC Milan – Chelsea
- Manchester City – Olympic Marseille – Al-Jazeera
- FIFA World Footballer of the Year & African Player of the Year
- Funder of the Lone Star? (philanthropist?)
- The symbol of the male hope in Liberia (the only statue in Monrovia)
- Resident of Miami
- Unicef ambassador for football
- FIFA accolades
- CAF representative
- Relatively inarticulate/elementary education
- Lauded by Nelson Mandela
- Converted from Christianity to Islam – and back again!
The President Elect?

- The chaos of the LFA
  - Izeeta Wesley (the first woman football president in Africa)
- 2005 National Elections

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<tr>
<th>Weah</th>
<th>Sirleaf – Johnson</th>
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<tr>
<td>Footballing hero</td>
<td>Harvard Economist</td>
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<td>‘The King’</td>
<td>‘The Iron Lady’</td>
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<td>UNESCO Ambassador</td>
<td>UN Development Programme</td>
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<td>‘You know no book, we vote for you’</td>
<td>‘Motherly sensitivity’</td>
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<td>‘All the men have failed Liberia..’</td>
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Sport For All

- Sport has an internationalist ethos and sporting practice can be pivotal in communicating pro-peace and anti-discriminatory messages.
- Over the past decade sport and popular culture have been particularly effective in assisting the dispossessed and traumatised.
- Sport is the cultural arena – without parallel – for the making of global citizens.
- Sport is therapeutic – it provides lessons in rule-governed behaviour and assists those traumatised by violence.
- Sport enables divided communities to agree boundaries and tolerate differences.
- Sport enables peace and reconciliation, but other strategies must be in place.
Sport, Competition and Success

- Sport success – especially at international level – can bridge divisions, and create shared positive experiences for divided societies.
- Sporting success provides an experience of kinship/togetherness – often providing an unusual experience of moving in the same direction and, wanting the same thing.
- At the same time some populations within nations will not share the sporting joy. They retain a sense of 'otherness'.
- Great sporting success is a transient moment. The long-term effects of victory are usually varied and hard to predict.
Sport and peace – be cautious

- Sport involves competition which sits on a spectrum with war at its most dangerous extreme.
- Sport works with metaphors and symbols of invasion and conquests.
- Perhaps sport can be adapted by some to promote hatreds without too many casualties.
- At times, sport has reflected hostilities and even exacerbated hostilities.
Sport Projects that Build Peace – Checklist

- Projects must be aware of particular cultural contexts and the needs of local people.
- Projects must be connected to other strategies for building peace.
- Do the hostile peoples really want change?
- Do the people welcome outside agencies, with external policies and solutions?
- Do these communities want sport?
- Which sports are effective in facilitating peaceful communication?
- How can sports be adapted to assist peaceful relations between divided communities?
The Contexts of Conflict

- Devastated infrastructure
- Displacement of populations
- Widespread grieving/trauma
- The displaced/dispossessed/disgruntled
- Seeking indications of normality
- Uncertainty
Good Practice Implementation - Checklist

- Get to know the context – what is traditional?
- When might participation offend family structures/social reputation?
- When is sporting participation considered radical?
- Safety issues – transport to and from events, trainers, coaches and reps must be above suspicion
Grassroots Sports: Issues in Peace Building

- Grass roots sport creates networks – often with easy access to young men (the most likely participants in sport and conflict)
- Are these networks being occupied by those proactively looking to move towards reconciliation or those with other ideas, or neither?
- Are these networks monitored to watch who is in control – and by whom?
- How do grassroots sports interact with the political infrastructure (whether national sports organisations / schools etc.) and to what extent does politics play a role – for example do some districts receive less help than their neighbours from the state. Is there a mismatch and if there is, how does this affect the relationships between the villages?
Indicators of social exclusion in communities experiencing conflict

- Despairing and fearful population with high instance of expectation of crime/violence against the person
- Absence of essential supplies or controlled by militia
- Poor infrastructure for all daily essentials (including sport)
- Inertia in the population; fear of public spaces
- Sectarian/gang violence
- State-sanctioned violence
- Easy access to weapons
- High level of substance misuse (militates against physical activity)
Sport and Social Inclusion

- Does the project place equal value on all cultures to produce a new cultural mix?
- Does the project protect and promote minority sports and sports associations?
- Does sporting practice serve (and fund) the needs of particular minorities?
- Sport can produce a positive mindset, sport can widen our networks and induce trust in others
Children and Sport - Checklist

- What protection is offered to children in your sports organisations and clubs?
- Are there procedures in place to refuse entry to adults considered inappropriate?
- Are there awareness seminars offered on the issue of child rights and protection?
- What age group do you envisage your projects addressing? Why?
Target populations: Women

Barriers:
- Religion and ancestral tradition
- Family structures
- Cultural norms re gender segregation
- Male domination of most sports
- Duties re children and care of elders
- Safety from abuse both at sports clubs and travelling to and from...
Target populations: ethnic minorities

- Race: inherited, visible, unchangeable
- Integral to explorations around ideas of race and character (temperament, intelligence, morality)
- Sport: often a platform for racist sentiments/discrimination by clubs and institutionalised racism
Considerations for Inclusion

- One size does not fit all
- Those seeking shared identities through sport continue to be thwarted by issues of ethnicity
- Sport can offer a temporary sanctuary as a social ‘no-man’s land’ but this often lasts only for the duration of the tournament
- Obstacles of residential and educational segregation frustrate peace and sport projects
- Optimism can be found in carefully controlled situations involving small numbers of people
- Team sports codes are more effective than individual sports codes in promoting the integration of populations
Conclusions

- Despite the success of small groups, no project can reach all those affected or in need of support
- Long term initiatives need sustained and continuous support
- Sport is the hook – catch the excluded and disaffected and add life lessons in addition to the lessons on sport
- Complex social outcomes (social inclusion, empowerment, rehabilitation) are difficult to identify or to deduce the specific contribution that sport has made.
The future?

- Teaches life skills, rule-sharing, honesty
- Prevention – intervention – rehabilitation
- Engagement – motivation – inspiration

BUT

- From whom do you accept funding?
- How can we move from emotion to evidence?
- What does reconciliation hope to achieve, and how do we measure it?
- “If you cannot feed our children, do not bring us sport”
The Best?

- A workable metaphor
- Organisational talent
- Sense of pride
- Connects neighbourhoods
- Inspires a sense of justice
- Avoid the next call to arms
- The game cannot solve... can it mediate?