Event: Towards a Welsh sports diplomacy strategy; international perspectives

4 August 2021 Event aims:

- Share international perspectives of the report and sports diplomacy more widely, not just the Welsh experience
- Create a forum for discussion of sports diplomacy as a tool of international relations
- Discuss practical examples of policy and practice
- Illustrate the breadth of sports diplomacy initiatives and the type of organisations who participate

Title: Advancing International Engagement and Co-operation through Sport

Professor Grant Jarvie will be talking about how sports diplomacy can be used as a ‘toolbox’ to help achieve policy aims (for example, to contribute towards achieving the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals). Crucially he will suggest and evidence that sport is a pillar of connectivity that can help with international engagement. Sport currently has an international mandate that gives it a lever to enable change. He will offer fresh perspectives on how sport diplomacy approaches could be applied more effectively to meet the challenges of a post Brexit and post Covid world. He will use the evidence from the report and one other Celtic nation to illustrate the points being made.

Contributors:
Chair: Bryn Law @BrynLaw
A former pupil of Ysgol Rhiwabon in north Wales, Bryn has enjoyed a near 30 year career in sports broadcasting, initially with the BBC, then Sky Sports and now in a freelance capacity. A major part of his role at Sky was covering all the Wales’ internationals as the channel’s Welsh football correspondent. He’s also the author of two books on Welsh football and has worked as a coach educator on the Football Association of Wales’ highly regarded A and Pro licence courses for many years. Bryn is currently commentating on Leeds United matches for the club’s own TV channel, combining that with media and social media lecturing and training for a number of clients. He continues to support Wrexham and Wales, travelling from his home in Leeds to watch them whenever possible, home and away.

Silvija Mitevska @SilvijaTakt
Silvija Mitevska is an advisor to the Prime Minister of North Macedonia on sports. Sports diplomacy is high on her agenda and her portfolio includes numerous projects on sports diplomacy and grassroots sports diplomacy. She is also a prominent advocate for gender equality in sports and chair of the Working Group for gender equality within the Olympic Committee of North Macedonia. She holds a master’s in political science and human rights and has a vast experience in sport and civil society sector. She is an emerging leader of Global Sports Mentoring Program- Empowering women through sport supported by the U.S State Department and the New Leaders program supported by IOC.

Professor Grant Jarvie @GrantJarvie1
University of Edinburgh Chair of Sport, founding Director of the Academy of Sport (Dedicated sports think-tank) and visiting Professor with the University of Toronto. He has held ministerial appointments in both sport and education served as University Vice-Principal and Acting Principal and is currently Director with a Scottish Premier League Football Club.

Andrew Hunter @AndrewHunter
Andrew worked as General Manager (China Engagement) at Port Adelaide Football Club between 2015 and 2020 and documented this experience in his first book: Port Adelaide to Shanghai: Taking Australia’s Game to the World. Andrew is also a professional athlete and national team representative in indoor volleyball.

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Introductory Remarks

Thank you for these introductory remarks and thank you to the British Council- Wales for inviting me to be part of this event.

Towards a Welsh sports diplomacy strategy\(^3\) – international perspectives is a great piece of evidenced work that is helping to build, national and international momentum and alliances around the idea of sports diplomacy.

The work of Murray and Price the architects of this report has helped with this momentum but they are not alone.

Wales is to be congratulated for recognising how sport can help Wales in the World and I am envious of the Welsh Governments International Relations through public diplomacy and Soft Power 2020-2025 Action Plan\(^4\).

All this aside: The message that I have for you today is that sport is a great toolbox, a pillar of connectivity that can help with international engagement, dialogue, and co-operation. At its best, it is a truly international language that transcends borders, culture, religion and helps us overcome estrangement and build enduring ties.

Such a message can be given will still recognising that sport itself has challenges. Sport detractors often call out the dark side of sport without actually doing anything.

As Mandela reminded us “it always seems impossible until it is done”. Dark calls should not get in the way of building the common good and intentionally using sport to help.

So, I repeat the message that I have for you today is that sport is a great toolbox, a pillar of connectivity that can help with international engagement, dialogue and co-operation.

While I will draw upon Scotland to help advance such a proposition, the examples used are illustrative. The arguments could and are being made by other places.

Talking about just one sport the Chair of Scotland's Sustainable Growth Commission recently stated: "I can think of no other business, institution or organisation with the communication reach of football”\(^5\).

That is just one sport in this toolbox of resources – so we have a global toolbox and we are still working on what works where and when and under what circumstances. This is not a one size fits all enabler.

Sports diplomacy is not new but in the chaos of today’s highly networked and anarchic world we are looking for old and new tools to help navigate today’s problems – For example – Chicago’s Department of Public Health (CDPH) announced a marketing campaign to encourage the public to "Join the Team" by getting their COVID-19 vaccine staff to team up


with Chicago Bears, Blackhawks, Bulls, Cubs, Fire, Red Stars, Sky, and White Sox, climate change, England’s Forest Green Rovers have become the first UN certified carbon neutral football club and the Refugee Olympic Team is participating at the Olympic Games with 29 athletes competing in 12 sports thanks to scholarships provided by the IOC through Olympic Solidarity.

These are just a few of many examples of how sport diplomacy is being deployed as an enabler for positive change to address systemic problems challenging society today.

I also want to suggest to you that an opportunity exists and encourage you to get on board and I will try to explain why.

The Opportunity

In 2019 almost two years ago an assessment of the Scottish Sporting Landscape was requested by the then Minister of Public Health, Sport and Well-being. One of the recommendations within that report was that Scottish sport be supported to develop its potential as a soft power asset and to advance Scotland’s cultural relations.

Other places are on the move Wales, Australia, France, North Macedonia all grasping the potential of sport to advance international engagement and co-operation. Supranational level also – EU Grassroots SD (Silvija Mitevska a key player) or the UN through the Kazan action plan linking SDs to the SDGs.

The opportunity for Scotland and other places still exists and it exists for at least four reasons.

Firstly although 2030 is approaching the advent of the sustainable development goals through the United Nations has provided sport with mandate to deliver on intentionally planned outcomes beyond sport. Sport has an international lever, an opportunity to talk across ministries and beyond for an extended period of time about what it can and cannot do in terms of delivering non-sporting outcomes.

Secondly there is Brexit. The advent of Brexit has only further served to underline the fact that Scotland needs to optimize every tool that it has at its disposal to help with cementing and advancing Scotland’s influence, attractiveness, and capacity and capability to win international friends and partners. It might be different tools for different places but why should Scotland not use its knowledge about sport as basis for exchanging and forging mutually sustainable relationships.

Thirdly there is the advent of Covid-19 pandemic. The virus has potentially caused a rethink about the world, the importance of community and that relationships and connectivity matter. The Covid-19 crisis has shaken the foundations of many of the things that people take for granted, including sport and communities. It has provided a window of reflection. A crisis often provides the potential for a level of creativity and step-change innovation that if capitalised upon could help to shape the future in a way that is more resilient, more equitable and in a way that might not have been conceivable under normal circumstances.

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Building back better requires lessons to be learned and one of these lessons is that sport is a valuable pillar of connectivity within and beyond Scotland. A harsher lesson might be that such a crisis has not lead to the level of international collaboration that might have been needed.

Fourthly, while it is not new a whole raft of contemporary sporting ambassadors and activists Lewis Hamilton, Naomi Osaka, Laura McAllister Megan Rapinoe, Andy Murray, Marcus Rashford, Mel Young, Gareth Thomas, Coco Gauff, Laura Montgomery and more have all added voice to contemporary injustices.

The use of sport to make a difference, carry a message, deliver statements on a scale that few other areas of public life can. Sport providing a platform for social and political advocacy. A new generation of sporting activists should not be underestimated.

New opportunities and new voices, involving sport are building upon old opportunities, old voices and different world contexts have opened the door for sport to be taken more seriously and provided with a mandate beyond just the world of sport itself.

So, an opportunity exists, we have a sporting toolbox and a raft of sporting events, sporting ambassadors, sports organisations, sports knowledge to exchange, a growing interest in sports diplomacy –

Why should nations, organisations – governmental and non-governmental not use any means at our disposal to strive to make the world a less tense, more just, more connected, and better place?

If sport works and I am suggesting to you that it does then why would you not use something that has scale, popularity, reach, variety and much more?

Let me return to Scotland to make the case further.

**The Proposition: International Engagement through Scottish Sport**

There is no doubt that Scotland gets sport, is a sporting nation by whatever way you want to demonstrate or measure such a proposition.

A sporting heritage that goes back to the 12th century, election manifestos that according to a former Chair of the Commonwealth Ministers Advisory Board on Sport would be the envy of many countries and a country whose football clubs has a higher dependency upon gate receipts than any other European country are but three of many arguments that support the idea that Scotland gets sport. But does it know how to use it?

The British Council’s (2019) review of Scottish soft power potential specifically points to Scotland’s strong sporting culture in football, rugby, tennis, and golf, and that Scotland should urgently consider employing sports diplomacy tools such as engaging in friendly matches or exchanges with Dubai, Qatar, and the US.

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The Ireland and Scotland bi-lateral review of future relationships talks of enhanced co-operation and collaboration, fails to mention shinty, but suggests that Scotland is most visible in Ireland through sport⁸.

Traditional sports, historically have provided a great opportunity for synergies between Celtic cultures – but not just Celtic cultures.

One of the lessons from the funded research that Academy of Sport is undertaking to help the Scottish Sports Industry build back better is to fully recognise the international reach that players and clubs have and how to help clubs develop these relations.

Between April and June 2021, the online engagement with two Edinburgh football clubs alone accounted for 31 countries.

In one 5-week spell between March and April 2021 Stuart Murray’s hometown Motherwell club had international followings across 21 countries- one club – one sport- a couple of weeks – recording international engagement with 21 countries.

The 2021 Scottish election manifestos⁹ told us that we will:

- “Appoint a Minister for Sport”- Scottish Green Party
- “Develop a New Scotland Active Plan”- Scottish Labour Party
- “Double Sport Scotland’s Budget”- Scottish National Party and Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party
- “Appoint an Outdoor Recreation Champion”- Scottish Liberal Democrats

Similar high-level commitments were made by the main parties in Wales about using sport as a tool to enhance international profile.

Manifesto’s matter and the conventional wisdom suggests that they are an important guide to our politics and priorities in public life. For a governing party it sets priorities, once elected it becomes a programme of work for ministers and a means of holding administrations to account once elected. If required a manifesto can be an important element in reaching a coalition deal.

But if they reflect what Scotland thinks and is aware of what sport could do then there is more work to be done. There was no – we will: use sport to advance international engagement and collaboration or to grow Global Scotland.

Yet, Scotland’s international development reports champion Scotland’s role in the world as global citizen. Scotland’s External Affairs Directorate fronted by a Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture and a Minister Culture, Europe and International Development are accountable for enhancing Scotland’s international relations and promoting Scotland’s ambition to be a global citizen.

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A raft of Scottish engagement strategies and reviews exist designed to drive and enable international engagement with, for example, Canada, USA, China, India, Pakistan, Malawi, Rwanda, Columbia, not to mention Scotland’s Arctic Policy Framework and bespoke strategic reviews for dialogue and co-operation between and together with different parts of the UK.

Yet such strategies or sports council funding settlements don’t talk to an intentional planned outcome for advancing international engagement through Scottish Sport.

There is no Action Plan akin to the Welsh International Relations through Public Diplomacy and Soft Power 2020-2025.

The Commonwealth has CABOS, the previously mentioned review of the Scottish sporting landscape called for a SABOS to help join up the different parts of Scottish sporting landscape and different parts of government in relation to the use of sport – should we have a WABOS to help just to help enable the sport potential across the different Welsh stakeholders who could use this tool?

Scotland, like many other countries, has a significant amount of sporting knowledge in its universities, as does Wales, much of which is not fully recognised in terms of advancing Scotland’s international influence.

The 2019 review of the Scottish Sporting Landscape embraced the Scottish Government’s stated ambition to embed human rights across all areas of policy in a way that makes a difference in the lives of people in Scotland and demonstrate global leadership in setting standards.

It asked if sport and human rights was an area where Scotland could aspire to be a world leader and yet it is another Celtic Nation that holds the Chair of the impressive and expanding Centre Sport and Human Rights – led by Mary Robinson former UN ambassador for Human Rights.

As a devolved part of the UK Scotland does not control foreign policy and sport is part of an inter-dependent set of funding structure. But wherever you stand on that issue logic would suggest that either you have to get more from the proven tools that you have in the international engagement basket or /and work effectively through both Scottish and UK channels.

If you have a tool that is a language and has characteristics of scale, popularity and reach then why would countries, non-governmental agencies not exploit it fully to build mutuality and trust that works for the common good.

Scottish sport is not just a commodity, a tourist attraction, a health enabler, a pillar of connectivity - in reality it is all of these – although rarely recognised as such. It could be, working with others, as an immensely powerful vector of change, value, principle, solidarity, a symbol, means and arena through which a plurality of views can be listened to. Sport contributing to an effective international space around which other things can be built.

One of the lessons from the £5 million plus political settlements research programme led by Edinburgh which has examined every peace settlement in the world to date is that the contemporary world needs spaces that can hold a plurality of politics, and which engages with
ordinary people and cultures, with all their varied histories and disagreements- in some cases for a long period of time\(^{10}\).

Can sport be one such space? An effective international space around which other things can be built, perhaps over a longer period of time than a single funding cycle?

We know that the 11 November 1st launch of the Welsh report’s findings and recommendations was one of the most successful in BC Wales history in terms of the numbers and diversity of Welsh, UK and Global attendees for an online event and helps to show the world is clearly interested in sports diplomacy and what small nations have to offer.

Can Scotland be better at making the case for sport outside of the sports world and beyond the health portfolio in a way that releases funding for agreed outcomes across a much broader range of government budgets.

Should there be a sports line in each of these budgets where sport delivers on much more than just health?

Towards a Welsh Sports Diplomacy strategy presents on a plate a unique opportunity for Wales in terms of innovative sub-state policy and Scotland should follow suit.

Indeed, I would like Scotland to get on its bike and catch up with what Wales, Australia, France, North Macedonia and others are doing in the sport and international relations arena.

So a few points to conclude with

I have tried to persuade you that sport is a great toolbox, a pillar of connectivity that can help with international engagement, dialogue, and co-operation. I have suggested that a fairly large window of opportunity exists through to at least 2030 if not longer.

Sport might be able to do some of its best work by keeping one eye on a longer time-horizon than a government ‘of the day’ or an ambassador on a three or four year posting or a short-term funding cycle.

After all, sport offers a continuous ‘staging post’ of opportunities from the local to the regional to the Global – from Grassroots to the elite level of pro sports and mega events – the sporting calendar is fluid and fast paced – trick is to be more strategic and plan SD activities around it, deploying horses for courses. Just around the corner we have the Women’s Euros (England), Qatar WC, ANZ WWC, Rugby League WC and a Cwlth Games in Birmingham etc.

Sport might do some of its most effective work quietly working away below the radar over a longer period of time. Sport might do some of its best work if it is supported to be more to effective in the cross-party agreed space as well as non-governmental space. We have moved well beyond the sports world simply talking to itself.

\(^{10}\) See [https://www.politicalsettlements.org/](https://www.politicalsettlements.org/)
While acknowledging that soft power and cultural relations are different things, Sport itself should fully grasp the opportunity to be part of building more effective international and cultural relations and seen to contributing further to an enlarged common good.

Foreign diplomats, ambassadors, civil servants, cultural agencies, communities, countries, and individuals need to recognise that they have a wide variety of tools at their disposal, not just to win friends but maintain and foster relationships and understanding. Sport is one of these tools and we all need to be smarter about what tools to take out this box and where and when.

So, the use of sport is not new but the contexts in which we are working through are new and the opportunity to develop sports diplomacy tools for the 21st Century, as this Welsh report evidences, should be grasped –

We should of course not be surprised by this Welsh Enlightenment for it was a Welsh writer Raymond Williams who penned an important intervention called Resources of Hope in which it was argued that in art, music, education and more could be found incredible resources to help build a new social world.\(^\text{11}\)

It was ironic that Raymond Williams failed to talk of the importance of sport in Welsh culture when he called for artists, musicians, academics, writers, organisations to balance their freedoms with a duty to strive to help others and contributing to making the art of the possible, possible.

Thankfully due to this report\(^\text{12}\) and if diplomacy in anyway contributes in making the art of the possible sport is at the table and we should thank the British Council Wales, Stuart Murray, Gavin Price, Laura McAllister for another fantastic Welsh Intervention.

@4august2021

\(^{11}\) See [https://fpif.org/sports_as_a_resource_of_hope/](https://fpif.org/sports_as_a_resource_of_hope/)