

Carabiners to Cricket Bats:

The important role of sports in catalyzing cooperation and conflict resolution

The Rise of Sports Diplomacy in the 21st Century



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IUCN
The World Conservation Union

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WORLD COMMISSION
ON PROTECTED AREAS



The Origin of Sports Diplomacy

The Olympic Truce

The coexistence of sport and politics dates from the 9th century BC, when the institution of the truce, or "Ekecheiria", was established in Ancient Greece by an "international" treaty signed by three kings: Iphitos of Elis, Cleosthenes of Pisa and Lycurgus of Sparta.

All the other Greek cities eventually ratified this agreement, which recognized the permanent political immunity of the sanctuary at Olympia.

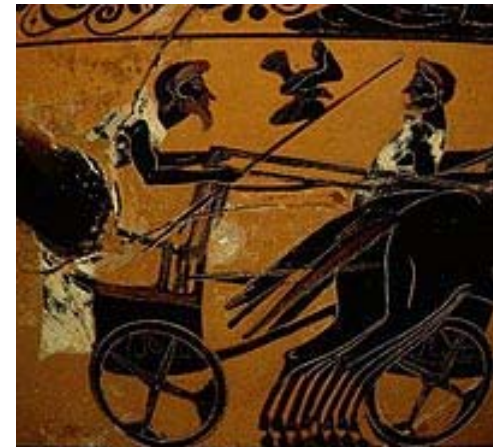
The truce, now known as "**The Olympic Truce**", allowed competing athletes, artists and their families safe passage through the various kingdoms while traveling to and from the Olympic Games.

Sport continues to offer a type of "**political immunity**" to participants. It operates under its own logic and power, which is not necessarily that of governments. It is more than a mere instrument: it is becoming an end in itself, with its own values and progressive aspects.



"May the Olympic Truce, inspired by the ancient Greek tradition of Ekecheiria, serve to promote dialogue, reconciliation and the search for durable solutions to all conflicts destroying peace around the world."

-- Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch, former President of the International Olympic Committee.



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The Power of Sports to Change People, Nations, and History

Sport is a universal language that can be a powerful vehicle to promote peace, tolerance and understanding.

Through its power to bring people together across boundaries, cultures and religions, it can promote tolerance, reconciliation and cooperation.

Sport helped to re-initiate dialogues when other channels were struggling:

- Table tennis set the stage for the resumption of diplomatic ties between China and the USA in 1971
- North and South Korea merged their athletes into a common team for the 2000 and 2004 Olympic Games
- Today, Israeli and Palestinian children regularly come together to play soccer or basketball



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The Value of Sports to People and Societies

On a communication level, sport can be used as an effective delivery mechanism for education about peace, tolerance, and respect for opponents, regardless of ethnic, cultural, religious or other differences.

Its inclusive nature makes sport a good tool to increase knowledge, understanding and awareness about peaceful co-existence.

Sport and physical education teach essential values and life skills including self-confidence, teamwork, communication, inclusion, discipline, respect and fair play.



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Sports can break down barriers and create a sense of freedom

Access to and participation in sport and physical education provide an opportunity to experience social and moral inclusion for populations otherwise marginalized by social, cultural or religious barriers caused by gender, disability, or other forms of discrimination.

Sport and physical education can represent an area to experience equality, freedom and a dignifying means for empowerment. Through sport, girls are given the chance to be leaders and improve their confidence and self-esteem.

The freedom and control over one's body experienced in the practice of sport is particularly valuable for girls and women, for people with a disability, for people living in conflicted areas, for people recovering from trauma.



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Validation from the United Nations

International Year
of Sport and Physical Education

www.un.org/sport2005



The United Nations declared 2005 as the International Year of Sport and Physical Education and affirmed that “Sport as a universal language has been found to bridge social, religious, racial, and gender divides, hence contributing to lasting peace...[and] is an important way to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.”



“Sport is a universal language that can bring people together, no matter what their origin, background, religious beliefs or economic status.”

-- Kofi Annan
UN Secretary-General

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The past 40 years have clearly demonstrated the increasing power of sports to transcend differences of race, religion, and national origin and unite people across borders.

From an unlikely genesis improving relations between the US and China in 1971 at the height of the Cold War, **this power of sports to bring people together—**“Convening Power”— has grown rapidly with the global spread and improvement of modern communications technologies.

Those working to create and manage peace parks and trans-boundary protected areas can leverage this unique power to catalyze cooperation and positive conflict resolution outcomes for their projects.



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How it will shape the future



The International Year of Sport and Physical Education 2005 and young people's strong interest in sport provided an effective way to use sport to help youth promote health, education, respect for rules and cooperation, and help build peace.



Sports will help the next generation of leaders face the tremendous development and leadership challenges of the 21st century.



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Sports that are particularly effective in achieving these goals include *ad hoc* team sports like mountaineering and rock climbing tackling dramatic one-time objectives, as well as organized team sports such as cricket, focused on creating longer-term series of games that increase the level of positive interactions over time.

Exploring the use of sports to catalyze cooperation and resolve conflicts in trans-boundary or international situations can yield very valuable best practices and “Lessons Learned” for those working to create and sustain peace parks and trans-boundary protected areas.

The following are some examples...



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1971 Ping-Pong Diplomacy Success

Unlikely diplomats went to play table tennis, then changed history

On April 10, 1971, nine American players, four officials, and two spouses, accompanied by 10 journalists, crossed a bridge from Hong Kong into mainland China to usher in the age of "Ping-Pong Diplomacy."

The eight-day adventure signaled a joint desire to relax old tensions between Washington and Beijing.

The U.S. table tennis team comprised the world's most improbable—and most naive—group of diplomats. What resulted from these exhibition events was a new era of détente between China and the United States that catalyzed the difficult process of normalizing relations between the two countries which they enjoy today.

Ping-Pong was "an apt metaphor for the relations between Washington and Peking as each nation signaled, in turn, its openness to change".



“The ping heard ‘round the world’”

Lessons Learned: Sport offers the chance for even bitter rivals to initiate changes that can lead to reduced conflicts and improved relationships

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1998 Wrestling Diplomacy Success

Sports diplomacy is a powerful tool for healing conflicted relationships over time. Its power is illustrated by the successful relationship between Iranian and American wrestlers that began in the 1990s. In traditional Persian folklore, their *samurai* were wrestlers. Wrestling skill is an important point of pride for Iranians, an expression of Iranian character. When they compete with the US, the outcome is never predictable.

Conflict is an emotional, as well as an intellectual process. Thus, conflict prevention and conflict resolution must operate on the levels of both head and heart to be truly effective.

The Iranian and American wrestlers were **citizen diplomats** who, through sports, were able to touch deep-seated feelings. In the process, they demonstrated an alternative model for how their two countries could interact:

They competed fiercely, but did so within mutually accepted rules. **They recognized they had differences, but they allowed their common humanity to triumph.**



Lessons Learned: Sport diplomacy is particularly effective when the groups share roughly equal levels of skill, tradition, and passion for the sport



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1999 Asian Basketball Détente Success

Asia has a stronger tradition of using Sports Diplomacy than other regions of the world.

For years, North and South Korea have followed a path to détente using Sports Diplomacy facilitated by South Korean corporations. Song Ho Gyong, vice chairman of North Korea's Asia-Pacific Peace Committee and leader of a sports delegation to South Korea, hailed inter-Korean basketball matches as "good opportunities" that bring the two countries closer to unification.

In a statement read during a welcome ceremony for North Korea's basketball delegation at Seoul's Gimpo international airport in 1999, Song said, "Basketball games will become a good opportunities to promote national reconciliation and solidarity, and greatly contribute to achieving national reunification."

Hyundai Business Group Chairman Chung Mong Hun, at the same ceremony, said basketball matches for reunification "mark the beginning of sports exchanges that are a good opportunity to help restore trust between the two Koreas."

The South Korean city of Busan wants to stage the 2020 Summer Olympics and will invite the North Korean capital Pyongyang to join the bid as co-host, according to mayor Hur Nam-Sik.

Lessons Learned: Sport Diplomacy can overcome the toughest challenges if both sides are willing to take a long-term approach and use every special event and opportunity to take a small step forward to conflict resolution



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2004 Cricket Diplomacy Success

Cricket is a new instrument of diplomacy to bring people and countries together and ease tensions in the Indian subcontinent.

The former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister, Mufti Muhammed Sayeed, has asked the United Nations to use sports to promote peace and development in an increasingly volatile world.

After initiating a popular series of trans-boundary cricket matches, India and Pakistan have expressed interest in creating a "soft border" in Kashmir. In a significant coming together, Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said they would work towards this "soft border" in Kashmir to open meeting points for divided families and boost trade, travel and cooperation across the frontier.

Reading a joint statement as he stood next to Musharraf, Singh said the two, "conscious of the historic opportunity created by the improved relations and the overwhelming desire of the peoples of the two countries for durable peace...determined that the peace process was now irreversible".



This photograph was taken in Lahore at the India/Pakistan match in 2004. The slogan translates as 'Love is inevitable'.

Lessons Learned: Sport diplomacy can offer rivals a way to recognize and focus on their commonalities, and move beyond differences

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2004 Basketball Diplomacy Success

Playing for Peace is a non-profit organization that uses the game of basketball to unite and educate children and their communities in South Africa and Northern Ireland.

It effectively blends together proven theories of social modeling, conflict resolution and public diplomacy to operate basketball and life-skills programs in historically divided regions that bring together thousands of children from different religious, racial and cultural backgrounds.

Lessons Learned: Sport can be an effective way to help people, ethnic groups, and nations confront stereotypes and assumptions and learn conflict resolution skills



Playing For Peace has coached Israeli and Palestinian teenagers in the Middle East, and 12,000 10- to 14-year-old Catholic and Protestant children in integrated settings in Northern Ireland.



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2006 Mountaineering Diplomacy Success

“Uniting the World on top of the World”

The Everest Peace Project, composed of team members from different countries, faiths and genders made a profound statement about how diverse groups can work together effectively by "uniting the world on top of the world“.

The team consisted of Palestinian Muslim Ali Bushnaq, Israeli Jews Micha Yaniv and Dudu (David) Yifrah, American Christians Ms. Tonya Riggs and Jerry Price, Indian Hindu Gautam Patil, and South-African Christian Selebelo Selamolela. Co-leader Lance Trumbull, the expedition's sirdar and the high altitude Sherpas are Buddhist. Climbing director and co-leader Jamie McGuinness is from New Zealand and an atheist. Their climbing team achieved summit success.

In harmony with the United Nations' fundamental goals, their project's vision is to promote a Global Community of Peace, Teamwork and Cultural Understanding , through international cooperation. The will use the proceeds of their project go to Room to Read, an organization that builds schools and libraries throughout Asia. They have already established over 2000 libraries and hope to establish many more.



Lessons Learned: Sport diplomacy can show how people from very diverse backgrounds can trust their lives to each other and achieve their highest goals in life



The Everest Peace Project's group of peace mountaineers from various origins and faiths will be a perfect example for the way common solutions must be found to achieve our common goals? What better example for the deeply inter-dependent human community than a rope of mountaineers from various faiths and origins able to rely on each other and to reach the top of the world.

Adolph Ogi, UN Sport for Development Program

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What are the predictions for the value of Sports Diplomacy in the future?

Sports Diplomacy for Mutual Understanding

Sports are a shared cultural passion that bring people together in athletic competition across the divisions of race, religion, and politics. Through sports, we see the proliferation of messages of international understanding, cultural tolerance and mutual respect.

From national teams to youth events, sports act as a bridge between the people and cultures. Its “Convening Power” and healing powers are universal and understood in all languages and cultures.

As our world today becomes more “flat”, with peoples and cultures losing their isolation through advances in technology, communications, travel, and globalization, sports can continue to play an important role in diffusing tensions, misunderstandings, prejudices, and conflicts.

Sports diplomacy can be an extremely valuable tool for creating Peace, Parks, and Partnerships, now and in the future.



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Recap of Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned: Sport offers the chance for even bitter rivals to initiate changes that can lead to reduced conflicts and improved relationships

Lessons Learned: Sport diplomacy is particularly effective when the groups share roughly equal levels of skill, tradition, and passion for the sport

Lessons Learned: Sport can be an effective way to help people, ethnic groups, and nations confront stereotypes and assumptions and learn conflict resolution skills

Lessons Learned: Sport diplomacy can offer rivals a way to recognize and focus on their commonalities, and move beyond differences

Lessons Learned: Sport diplomacy can show how people from very diverse backgrounds can trust their lives to each other and achieve their highest goals in life

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