

Reading 3.2 Toby Miller, Geoffrey Lawrence, Jim McKay and David Rowe, 'Sports media sans frontières'

God wore number 23. (*De Morgen*, Belgium)

The 'Michelangelo' of sport shoes will not return. (*Faz*, Germany)

His royal Airness will never fly again. (*Telegraaf*, The Netherlands)

God is going home. (*Yedioth Ahrnonoth*, Israel)

[B]asketball is alone. (*La Repubblica*, Italy)

The King is Leaving. (*Sport*, Spain)

Earthquake. (*El Mundo Deportivo*, Spain)

A myth that has gone beyond sports. (*El Periodico*, Spain)

Tell us it is not true. (*El Pais*, Spain)

[H]e's the greatest. (*Herald Sun*, Australia)

King Mike Abdicates. (*Age*, Australia)

God will never fly again. (*Asahi Shimbun*, Japan)

God finally to retire. (*Tochu Sports*, Jordan)

[His] name is engraved on the heart of everyone. (*Beijing Morning Post*, China)

Año Uno D. De J. [Year One After Jordan]. (*Ole*, Argentina) (quoted in 'The World Bids', 1999)

These responses to Michael Jordan's retirement testify to three things – his exceptional athletic ability, the success of Nike worldwide, and the spread of the NBA across TV screens: *Rafaga NBA* in Mexico, *La Magia de la NBA* in Argentina, *Give Me Five* in Belgium, *NBA Mania* in Japan, *NBA Jam* in Taiwan, and *Zou Jin* in the PRC (Andrews, 1999: 508). Just as Nike and the NBA built their strategies for growth around Jordan, so his career can only be understood in terms of those institutions. While this is perhaps the most spectacular instance of the media-sports link, TV in particular is inseparable from global sport, as both a marker of globalization and one of its prime movers.

IOC official history marks the Olympics in terms of broadcast revenues – a total of US\$1.25 billion for the 2000 and 2002 Games – and their status as 'a social, even sociological event, which more or less reflects the state of the world' (Macleod, 1996: 23; Verdier, 1996: 34). This sense of sport standing for more than itself, always both representing and being represented, has a pre-commercial heritage. In its nascent medieval form, and as it matured in the moment of early modernity, sport was above all a local cultural pursuit, linked first to the 'rough play' of mainly young men in the festival seasons and later through more formal, regular contests between settlements in particular regions (Elias, 1986). While never disappearing entirely, local sport has progressively given way to regulated professional competitions organized on national and international lines. The forces that, above

all others, have transported sport from local pitches to the global stage are the mass (and especially electronic) media (Cunningham and Miller, 1994; Rowe, 1996). If a professionally-based economy of sport was first established by the enclosure of sports grounds and charging for attendance at matches against visiting teams, then the capacity to carry sports action, advertising, and promotional messages enabled that economy to take on first a national and then an inter- and transnational character, as the game was transformed from a practice to a spectacle (Bourdieu, 1999: 16).

In this chapter we examine how contemporary sport articulates with advertising, promotion, and commodification as it connects, disconnects, and reconnects collective experiences of space and time within and between nation-states. We are concerned with how local, regional, and national cultures are projected by the sports media into the domain of the global and, in turn, how the reception of globally mediated sport affects those levels of culture. We have selected five sporting cases – black athletic protest, British (especially English) soccer, Canadian ice hockey, Australian rugby league, and women's tennis – to demonstrate how certain contemporary sports seek to accommodate, mediate, or resist globalizing pressures according to their specific histories and geographies, institutional frameworks, and structures of culture. Each site shows the influence of television and enduring and shifting patterns of identification.

Mediated sports cultures

Sports reporting in the print and electronic media is deeply reliant on imaging the body. Still photography provides a sense of 'having-been-there' (Barthes, 1977), often through minute attention to the bodies of athletes. Photographic presentations of sporting bodies are largely limited to rigorous motion (during competition) and inertia (for example, at a medal ceremony). The latter image carries most efficiently the idea of the nation. For many spectators, the medal ceremony at major international events like the summer Olympic Games epitomizes national identification and affect. Such rituals are tableaux of bodily dispositions. The athletes, their bodies draped in the colours and insignia of nation and corporation, are led to the ceremony by a functionary. The different heights of the blocks on which they stand spatially signify hierarchy. They bend to receive their medals as in a military service, then turn their gaze to their national flags, also hierarchically arranged, while the national anthem of the winning athlete/team reinforces visual supremacy with aural presence. Apart from flags fluttering in the breeze, the moment is still. At this point, athletes frequently cry – moved perhaps by a sense of individual and, heavily imputed by television and radio commentary, national

achievement and responsibility. The stately nature of the ceremony demands that spectators and viewers be serious. It is not unusual for patriotic viewers at home to stand for their national anthem, disciplined, as Foucault (1977) argues, most effectively not by external repression but through externally induced and internally accepted discourses of the social self. If tears well up in their eyes, this discourse of nation has become powerful enough to produce involuntary physiological responses in those subject to it.

National mythologies prosper when internal fissures – class, gender, race, ethnicity, locality, age, sexuality, and so on – are submerged. The risk of displaying differences and divisions to a global audience, rather than asserting the existence of a unified nation, makes the medal ceremony and other less formal aspects of major sporting events subject to strict official control over communication in all its forms – verbal and non-verbal, abstract, and corporeal. Athletes are pressured by national sports committees and media organizations (especially those who have paid for privileged access to them) not to be controversial about issues ‘back home’ – to preserve the illusion of the united nation for the duration of the event. The IOC, state-licensed and -funded national sports bodies, and the sports market’s lucrative sponsorship and endorsement contracts, are decisive in disciplining athletes. The sporting body’s marketability is significantly, but not exclusively, influenced by its degree of political quiescence. Race, gender, and sexuality also have a substantial impact on its place in the international cultural economy of sport. We shall examine now the vast and complex infrastructure that is hidden behind these sports tableaux of winners and losers.

Modern sport and the media developed simultaneously and symbiotically, supplying each other with the necessary resources for development: capital, audiences, promotion, and content. The sports media emerged out of a need, first, for the reporting of sports information through the print media and, later, through presentation of sports events via the electronic media (Rowe, 1992a, 1992b; Rowe and Stevenson, 1995). In Britain and Australia, print sports journalism developed from notices about the time and place of forthcoming local sports events, match descriptions, results, and, rather quaintly, the hospitality (usually by ‘the ladies’) afforded to visiting players (Brown, 1996). As sport became increasingly professional and commodified, it did not disappear from the local print media, but became secondary – even in provincial newspapers – to national and international sport (Rowe, 1999). This progressive detachment of sport and place was first supplemented and then accelerated by radio and television. National public broadcasting organizations like the British Broadcasting

Corporation (BBC), the Australian Broadcasting Commission (later renamed a Corporation) and the CBC used such major sporting occasions as the FA Cup Final, the Melbourne Cup horse race, and the Stanley Cup play-offs, to develop outside-broadcast techniques and to engage in state-sanctioned processes of nation-building (Gruneau and Whitson, 1993; Hargreaves, 1986; Haynes, 1999; Whannel, 1992). Once the nation could be reached through the public and commercial sports media (Wilson, 1998), its boundaries could be exceeded as those media carried the nation to distant and dispersed sports events, further building a sense of national identity by encouraging readers, listeners, and viewers to support their national representatives in international sporting competitions.

There has been a dramatic shift in the nature of world television over the past decades. It has been transformed from a comparatively scarce resource to a common one in most parts of the world, moving from a predominantly nation-based and state-run medium towards internationalism and privatization. The global fashion for neoliberalism has: (a) cut down cross-ownership regulations (encouraging capitalists to invest in various media); (b) reduced public-sector budgets (drawing labour, product development, and technological initiative to profit-centred services); (c) opened up terrestrial TV to international capital (undercutting local production); and (d) attacked the idea of public broadcasting as elitist (blurring distinctions between education and entertainment) and inefficient (crowding out investment in the private sector).

Sport has been crucial to these recent developments. As the idea of a universal service that provides broad coverage of news and drama is displaced by all-entertainment networks, sport turns into a cheap source of hours and hours of TV time. At the truly expensive, top end of TV sport, it offers a method of enticing viewers to make the massive monetary and technological shift to digital television (thereby rendering consumers' personal archives obsolete and making them guinea-pigs in the search for economies of scale) by showing favoured sports only on digital systems. France's Canal+ estimates that 40% of its subscribers pay their monthly fees purely to watch soccer (Williams, 1998: M3; Williams 1999: 104). In 1999, the rights to cover European soccer on television cost over US\$2 billion as part of this enticement (Crocchi and Ammirante, 1999: 500).

The IOC (n. d.) proclaims television as 'the engine that has driven the growth of the Olympic movement'. Just as shifts in capitalism are associated with new technology (early nineteenth-century national capitalism and steam, late nineteenth-century imperialism and

electricity, twentieth-century multinational capital and electronics: Jameson, 1996: 3) so we might write a history of sport connected to technology – wire reports and the radio describing play across the world from the mid-twentieth century and television spreading cricket, soccer, and the Olympics since the 1960s, communicating ideologies of nationalism and the commodity. At Sydney 2000, not only was the internet popular, but TV placed moving images of Olympic winners from seconds before into commercials. The satellite and digital era promises to erase and rewrite relations of time and space in sport once more. This latter-day profit-making targets audiences defined and developed as part of nation-building by public services.

From the BBC's beginnings in the 1920s, its distinctively public mission has been to unite the nation through live coverage of sport. Quality control in early radio times even included a visually disabled person alongside the commentators who could vouch for the vividness of description (Crook, 1998: 85–86). At the same time, the BBC's payment of £1,500 to telecast the 1948 London Olympics set in train an entirely new relationship between sport and the audiovisual media; a precedent that has grown to consume the resources of its originator ('Sport and Television', 1996). Half a century later, the BBC's 1998 decision to commit vast resources to digitalization caused it to lose the rights to cover English international cricket, leading to Cabinet discussion and public protest. The choice between technological upgrading and a traditional part of the national service was painful. In earlier times, it would not have *been* a choice – both innovation and national service would have been funded from tax revenue.

Sport has long been at the leading edge of TV and technology. When the Communications Satellite Corporation broadcast the 1964 Olympics, a new era began (Kang, 1988) – the very name embracing the technological and the commercial as inseparable technical and social relations. Expansion has continued apace. The number of TV hours watched globally tripled between 1979 and 1991, while more than half the 30 billion people who watched the 1990 men's World Cup did so from Asia, never a football power. The 32 billion viewers of the 1994 event spanned 188 nations, and the 1996 Olympic Games drew 35 billion. The third most significant event is the Commonwealth Games, which draws 500 million viewers. US audiences for NBC's Atlanta Olympics coverage were offered more advertising time than game time, while Hollywood factors in a quadrennial overseas box-office disaster during the weeks when people stay away from the cinema and watch the men's World Cup. And the move into TV time is massive. The NBA is now seen on television in 206 countries across 128 networks and 42 languages, and has its own cable and satellite network ready for digital

interactivity – NBA.com TV. Its start-up operation, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), was broadcast in 17 languages across 125 nations in 1999, its third season of existence. In baseball, MLB is seen in 215 countries. The 1999–2000 NFL season was telecast in 24 languages to 182 countries. Fans in Austria, the Netherlands, and Singapore, where no US football games are broadcast on Sundays, were offered webcasts from that season via broad-band. The NHL is also seen around the world, and has websites in France, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Japan, Slovakia, Russia, the UK, the Czech Republic, and Poland (Herman and McChesney, 1997: 39; Smith, 1997: 114; FIFA, n. d.; Muda, 1998: 223; McAllister, 1997; Pickard, 1997; Wise, 1999; Burton, 1999; 'New Television Deals', 1999; 'International Broadcasters', 1999; 'NFL Full', 1999; Dempsey, 1999a, 1999b; 'Country-by-Country', 1999). By contrast, Australian Rules Football's international circulation is mostly on highlights shows that are given away to networks ('TV Times', 1999).

No wonder that Rupert Murdoch refers to TV sport as News Corporation's 'battering ram' into new markets, while telecommunications corporation TCI calls it 'the universal glue for global content' (quoted in Herman and McChesney, 1997: 75–76). But the energies of the New Zealand/Aotearoa rugby team are also at play here. National and regional identifications bring into question the 'benefits' of new technology and global capital. Even neoclassical economists have argued against satellite exclusivity, on the ground that 'key sporting events, like the Olympics, the World Cup and the FA Cup ... generate positive social network externalities' when they are universally available. Folks talk to one another about the shared experience of viewing, which in turn binds them socially, and this 'social capital' may be lost if only a privileged few received transmission of such events (Boardman and Hargreaves-Heap, 1999: 168, 178).

The state has been bombarded by complaints about the takeover of sport by private networks. Citizens regard national sport as a public good (or at least one for which they only pay profit-making entities indirectly). In Germany, for example, it is likely that parts of the next two World Cups of soccer will only be available locally on pay TV, after the European Broadcasting Union, a consortium of public networks, was outbid by Kirch and Sporis in 1996, despite offering US\$1.8 billion (Hils, 1997; 'Sport and Television', 1996; Boehm, 1998a). When the plan materialized in Germany, there was immediate uproar, with politicians proclaiming free viewing of national-team games as 'a basic right of our citizens' (quoted in Hils, 1997). And when Vittorio Cecchi Gori outbid the Italian public broadcaster RAI for soccer rights in 1996, the Italian

state moved in to declare the auction contrary to the public interest, legislating to preclude anyone holding more than 60% of the nation's rights to televise soccer (Tagliabue, 1997: D4; 'Flirtation and Frustration', 1999). Similar legislation was introduced in the UK and France, although cricket authorities persuaded the Blair government that 'their' sport did not belong on the 'A' list in 1998 (Boehm, 1998a; Boyle and Haynes, 2000: 216). But then Telepiu bought exclusive pay rights for the four leading soccer clubs in Italy, forcing audiences to make the digital move and making it harder for competitors to gain custom. When Murdoch announced a second digital platform in Italy for 1999 via partnerships with local football clubs, Mediaset, and Telecom Italia, he was also preparing a US\$2.5 billion offer for six years' exclusive coverage of Serie A and B football, countering pay-per-view arrangements between Canal+, its Italian subsidiary Telepiu, and top clubs. Then he purchased a quarter of Kirch, staking out its non-broadcast rights (Williams, 1998: M3; Zecchinelli, 1998; 'Flirtation and Frustration', 1999; Boehm, 1999; Boyle and Haynes, 2000: 210). The criterion of national interest was being circumvented.

The Olympic Charter, which guarantees 'maximum presentation of the Games to the widest possible global audience free-of-charge' (IOC, n. d.) may eventually be interpreted to mean that the Third World will receive analogue signals and the First World digital. Watching the Olympics on television is meant to be a similar experience for all, as host broadcasters produce the visual text (except for the US, which has its own feed, camera angles, and commentary position). Countries then reterritorialize the text with their own verbal track (Pujik, 1999: 117, 119). Exhaustive studies of the Games as 'a communication phenomenon ... initially produced in a city, but then "reproduced" in multiple places', suggest that locally modulated coverage constructs very different texts and generates very different responses. Local cultural policy regulated by the state also plays a part, notably the insistence by Arabic countries that women's events not be broadcast and that they hence pay on a pro rata basis (de Moragas Spa et al., 1995: xvi, 22).

Disney/ABC's subsidiary ESPN has been a trendsetter in the televisualization of sport. ESPN International, which began in 1983, telecasts in 21 languages to 182 nations and 155 million households. It has 20 networks across Asia, Australia, and Latin America (the latter has four networks of its own) in addition to syndication deals. A single executive sent to Hong Kong to cover Asia in 1993 is now one of 300 employees based in Singapore at a major production facility (Fry, 1998b: A4; Sandomir, 1999). In 1998, ESPN struck a programming arrangement with the Argentinian military to broadcast in the Antarctic, which had long been a target in order for the company

to claim a truly global reach (Fry, 1998a: A1; Fry, 1998b: A4). That reach permits Disney to address a social sector that has conventionally eluded it – middle-class men – and even to penetrate public TV: the PRC's sports network draws half its content from ESPN. The company's slogan is 'Think globally, but customize locally.' That means a degree of local coverage, such as table tennis in East Asia and cricket in India, while Latin American services produce 20% of their programmes (Grove, 1998: A6). But from 1996, ESPN offered 'global buys' to advertisers – the global commodity sign could be attached to the local sports referent (Herman and McChesney, 1997: 83, 63). The network uses Princeton Video Imaging to edit computer-generated visuals advertising goods and services onto real-life stadia, streets, and public space, making it appear as though purely televisual billboards are present at the site of live action (Williams, 1998). As a wonderfully doublespeaking ESPN executive puts it, 'When we say 'local' we don't mean that it has to be from that locality, it can be programming from half-way around the world' (quoted in Grove, 1998: A6). Canal+ describes ESPN as 'one of the leading entertainment companies and brands in the "global information society"' (Lescure, 1998).

Given the crucial role that multinational media-entertainment companies now play in marketing all sports, it is not accidental that a recent NHL expansion franchise in Anaheim was awarded to the Disney Corporation, which also owns the ABC network, MLB's Anaheim Angels, 80% of ESPN, and partial rights to telecast NFL games for eight years. It is not surprising, then, that the 'Official City of Anaheim Web Site' lists Disneyland alongside the Mighty Ducks in projecting its civic profile. Wayne Huizinga, the owner of Blockbuster Video (which subsequently merged with Viacom) bought another new franchise in Miami via the Florida Panthers Holdings company. The Atlanta Thrashers, the NHL's most recent expansion team, belong to the largest media corporation in the world, AOL-Time Warner, which also owns NBA and MLB teams in Atlanta, TNT Sports, the Goodwill Games, World Championship Wrestling, the CNN/SI sports network, *Time*, and *Sports Illustrated*, and is the NBA's cable partner.

Reading source

Miller, Lawrence, McKay and Rowe, 2001, pp. 60–71