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# SPORTS, RACE, AND COSMOPOLITANISM

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In July 2021, Italy defeated England to win the European Soccer Championship. Fans across the European Union cheered the underdogs Italy, which scored its first win at the European championship since 1968. While Italy's win against England, post-Brexit, subtly represented European Union pride, the English team was more diverse: a photograph from the Museum of Migration showed that only 3 of the starting 11 players did not have an immigrant parent or grand-parent. The English team exuded enthusiasm among England's minorities. Both sides of the story here reveal rising beyond parochialism: minority populations in England cheered for a sport that is often associated with England's white work-ing class, and continental Europeans overlooked their own national identities to cheer for the Italian team. Nevertheless, as this chapter shows this ideal version of sports and cosmopolitanism is problematic and untenable, especially when it comes to questions of race and racism.

The cosmopolitanism often associated with sporting events arises out of lib-eral thought: successive interactions lead to people getting to know each other and overcoming their prejudices (Deutsch 2015, Norris et al. 2009). A sporting event, easily understood among the viewers through its shared rules and under-standings, therefore, embodies the possibilities of cosmopolitanism. The socially integrative role of sports is often acknowledged (Alkemeyer & Bröskamp 1996), and in the United States most star athletes are African-Americans (Anderson 1995). The celebrations around megaevents such as the Olympics or the Football World Cup, despite displays of nationalism, can be viewed from the perspective of cosmopolitan thought. The best person or team wins, and "sportsmanship" entails that all players respect each other and the results.

Despite international and multicultural sports teams and events, cosmopolitan-ism can be quite thin, and racism is quite culturally entrenched in sports. British soccer fans are frequently racist: for example, 83 per cent of the 2500 anonymous

responses in a 2011–2012 survey noted that racism was "culturally embedded" in British soccer and 67 per cent of the respondents had personally witnessed it (Cleland & Cashmore 2016). Despite the professed multiculturalism of British soccer teams, black players suffer subtle or overt discrimination through their position assignments and are often stereotyped (Maguire 1988). The minorities that cheered the English soccer team in 2021 were, therefore, more of an exception to its fandom than the rule. Similarly, Northern Europeans cheering on a Mediterranean country is not a regular practice. Racial divisions also work within the same team. *The Economist* tweeted the following after the Euro Cup: "The most striking aspect of Italy's 26-man squad before it took to the pitch was that, alone among the main contenders, it did not include a single player considered as being of colour" (The Economist 2021). The tweet was itself critiqued for racism, with Italians pointing out that they were once treated as people of colour.

The story of race and cosmopolitanism in sports is complicated, but this chapter argues that racism is especially noticeable and controversial in times of rapid cultural change. Eighteen African-Americans players accounted for 14 of the 56 medals the United States won at the 1936 Berlin Olympics (Wang 2016). Athlete Jesse Owens' four gold medals are often heralded in history as the perfect riposte to what has been called "the Nazi Olympics". History repeated itself during the Trump Presidency when American football players "took to the knee" while the national anthem was played as a form of protest against discrimination at the height of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Trump supporters labelled the players unpatriotic and directed racist vitriol towards them.

Sports comprise a set of cultural rituals that are well understood among practitioners, both fans and players, through times of stability. To understand racism in sports, a study of the cultures of sports with a racial lens is necessary. While sports are cultural events, they perform double duty in culture: not just as symbolic representations (like art) but also being deeply embedded in ways of life.

Cultures are often understood as a repertoire of options or a toolkit (Swidler 1986, Kymlicka 1995). Sociologist Anne Swidler (1986) notes that cultures present "diverse often conflicting symbols, rituals, stories, and guides to action" that are mobilized through times of cultural stability and change (p. 277). Simplifying cultural ideologies that present binary or divisive choices often manifest themselves through instability. Rather than understand the context of the athletes taking the knee, a simplifying ideology might suggest that they are ungrateful and unpatriotic.

Arguably, sports may even present a case of cultural stasis rather than change, especially in matters of race. Sports are often cast as reflective of society's underlying values than changing them. Following Geertz (1973), culture is about public meanings of values and traits that are held among groups of people. Socialization processes embed these public meanings through everyday language (Berger & Luckmann 1966). Further, culture is the "social unconscious" (Eagleton 2016) that represents sedimented traditions passed on through intergenerational transfer as a form of "social lineage" (Patten 2011).

Understanding culture then means tracing the lineage and traditions deposited deep within the unconscious. The public meanings of culture can reveal deep histories and private reservations. Catalans associated Real Madrid with the Franco regime in the past and Spanish nationalism at present. One of the most bitter rivalries in football is, therefore, between Real Madrid and FC Barcelona, popularly known as Barça. The most American of all sports are baseball and American football. Those who do not follow long-standing rituals set themselves up for scorn, even when the ritual being questioned is society's racism.

Racism in sports can take especially virulent forms because deviations from ascribed roles are interpreted as deviations from culture's symbolic and everyday life aspects. Compounding all this are two other dimensions of culture: difference and power. Culture addresses group identities, but it is also about "othering". Even as African-American athletes won at the Berlin Olympics and highlighted the racist underpinnings of Nazism, racism was rampant in the United States society with de facto segregation and lynchings in the US South. Racist attitudes in sports might then mean allowing for a special place for African-Americans or other minorities in sports but otherwise assigning African-Americans an unequal status in society. Racist attitudes in the United States, often abetted through media, ascribe superior athletic abilities to African-American bodies while perceiving them to be intellectually inferior (Anderson 1995). In other places, such as racist jaunts and epithets directed at non-white football players in France, their sports ability itself may play second shrift to deep-seated racism among the fans.

Racism in sports may be widely diffused in times of cultural stability. Therefore, athletes not playing their assigned roles at any time can make fans angry and upset through unravelling the racist codes underlying fandom. During times of cultural instability, this can lead to boycotts and threats of violence as was the case during the BLM protest with athletes taking the knee. For perspective, consider cultural representations (or symbols) where socially ascribed roles may be questioned: theatre is one such space. Judith Butler (1990) notes that since gender is socially constructed and performed with cues, drag queens through their performances can unravel the meanings of what it means to be feminine. One can then understand, even if in the most troubling of ways, how an African-American athlete who, unlike a drag queen, has not been "authorized" to unravel the social meanings of race is then reviled by racist white fans.

Cultural meanings are often backed with powerful institutions. Spectacle sports are especially important for the powerful institutions that back them: national governments, big business, media, and star-studded personalities. The co-editors of this volume have called this the geo-political economy of sport. This chapter provides the racialized underpinnings of this political economy. If racist meanings have been well-ascribed and understood within sports spaces, then questioning them openly may not lead to empathy, understanding, or acceptance. President Trump's frequent lashing out at African-American athletes who did not stand up for the national anthem is an example of the institutional context.

By the same token, given that sports as spectacle draws great crowds and attention, questioning racism at these events can also carry double value: it can appeal to fans who are already questioning racism, or it can present an alternative perspective to those who are not doing so – especially at a level that is hard to ignore – from athletes that they may admire. The symbolic power of sports and star athletes is important here, but in the opposite direction from the cultural forces of the status quo. The suggestion here is not that athletes are perfectly poised for questioning racism in society but that their ability to do so must also be acknowledged. It is for this reason that the presence of 18 African-American athletes was a powerful symbol at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. African-American athletes who "broke the colour barrier" are remembered and admired for their ability to do so. These include Jackie Robinson's entry into major league baseball in 1947 after 60 years of segregation (the first African-Americans in major league baseball date back to 1879). The reaction of minority fans about the immigrant lineages of the English football team at Euro Cup 2021 must be seen in similar ways.

Sports teams and their backers can also respond powerfully to the underlying progressive trends in society. An example is the renaming of many professional teams in the United States recently. Washington Redskins became the Washington Football Team in 2020 after pressures from activists, and in 2021 Cleveland Indians became the Cleveland Guardians. In 2020, the National Basketball Association took a strong stance on racial justice without harming its ratings. In June 2020, a Pew Research Poll showed that 67 per cent of the Americans supported the Black Lives Matter movement. National Football League (NFL) quarterback Colin Kaepernick, the first athlete to take the knee in 2016, was "fired" though technically he was told his contract would not be renewed. He opted out of doing so and was blackballed out of NFL. Kaepernick went on to be featured in anti-hate campaigns for Nike. Other businesses joined similar campaigns later with minority athletes (Ivry 2020).

This chapter has emphasized the cultural importance of sports for analyzing racism: sports are symbolic forms that speak to ways of life. Although questioning entrenched racist ways of life is not easy, the chapter suggests that athletes as symbols can make a difference. Markovits and Rensmann (2010) reach a similar conclusion about the potential of sports for globalization: they are reflective of globalization, but sports also deepen it. Millward (2011) notes that English football fans can simultaneously exhibit "thin cosmopolitanism", "mild xenophobia", and "cultural racism". For Millward, cosmopolitanism and racism/xenophobia are not in binary opposition to each other. Fans can, for example, accept and promote non-British members on their teams while expressing xenophobic views towards the country of the athletes' origin. Despite these mixed views, the consensus seems to be that sports literatures have often overlooked racism and domination in sports in favour of speaking to multicultural sports teams: "such

accounts tend to overlook the broader issues of power and domination in society, but at a more concrete level, they tend to ignore changes that have or have not taken place at the level of organizational control" (Jarvie 2003, 2).

Racism and cosmopolitanism are both socially understood, and each is "performed" as a ritual within groups who understand its meanings. Some of the most powerful and inspiring stories in sports are those that have questioned both the endurance of racism and the artificiality of cosmopolitanism.

## Note

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