

Arms Race, Space Race, Track Race: An Analysis of Sports and
Politics in Russia and the Soviet Union

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Suzanne Wallach

Mentor: Professor Jonathan Cristol, Political Science Department

To my parents, thanks for making Miracle (2004) a staple at home. This paper wouldn't have existed without it.

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Introduction- A Vignette

If you have ever had a job interview, somebody probably told you to arrive five minutes early. *He* was there two days early. *He* is typically *hours* late.

The International Olympic Committee met in Guatemala City to decide which country would host the 2014 Winter Olympic Games. The decision was between Russia, Austria, and South Korea— Russia was clearly intent on securing the bid.

Russian President Vladimir Putin was involved in the Olympic bid from the start and was the driving force behind it. He arrived two days before the meeting to talk with IOC President Jacques Rogge and members of the IOC executive board.

Putin opened the final presentation for the Sochi bid. In his five-minute speech, he cracked jokes, personally guaranteed that there would be no traffic jams, and promised that Olympic infrastructure would be completed on time. He spoke about the beautiful location and the real snow he skied on seven weeks prior. He delivered his impassioned speech in English and French. The chancellor of Austria and the president of South Korea attended the event, but Putin was the star. His passion, stature, and charisma secured Sochi the 2014 Winter Olympic Games.

Sports Diplomacy or Sports and Diplomacy?

The role of sports in global affairs and international diplomacy is understudied. Thomas Gift and Andrew Miner (2017) dedicate thirty-four pages to this issue, its causes, and possible solutions. Their analysis shows that sports are studied and written about in many academic disciplines. The academic study of sports is not limited to sports medicine and sports

psychology; many social scientists study sports as well. However, there are relatively few studies of the relationship between sports and politics. Gift and Miner show that the interaction between sports and the political sphere is rarely mentioned in major political science journals; and when that interaction is mentioned, it is often a brief throwaway comment or inconsequential remark. Michał Kobierecki (2020) addresses this issue and explains that there is no universally accepted definition for 'sports diplomacy.' Therefore, the lack of a broadly accepted definition makes it difficult to discuss this topic and to build upon prior research, especially if each researcher defines the term differently. The paucity of academic research undoubtedly leads to many unanswerable questions and gaps in understanding and analysis.

Thus a clear definition of the phrase sports diplomacy is critical for this paper. Sports diplomacy is generally understood to be international communication and the establishment of international connections through sports. Sports diplomacy could be viewed as either a type of public diplomacy or as something distinct or parallel to public diplomacy. Diplomacy is defined as, "[The] process by which direct relations are pursued with a country's people to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented" (Sharp 2005, p. 106). Trunkos and Heere (2017) and Murray (2018) believe that sports diplomacy falls into the category of public diplomacy. Thus the traditional views of diplomacy frame actions and provide insights into the politics of international sports. In this paper, I will incorporate the notion that sports diplomacy falls into the category but not limit sports diplomacy to only be defined through traditional diplomacy.

Another question about sports diplomacy concerns the role of non-state actors. International mega sporting events (MSEs) or bilateral events are typically facilitated, organized,

or hosted by non-state actors. International non-governmental organizations, like the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), multi-national corporations, like Nike and Adidas, and athletes themselves are involved in, impact, and control many aspects of international sports and thus play a role in sports diplomacy. But should these types of actors be considered a part of sports diplomacy or apart from sports diplomacy? 'New public diplomacy,' as described by Jan Melissen (2005), incorporates non-governmental organizations (NGOs) into 'traditional' public diplomacy, and Kobierecki (2020) argues that the field of international relations is moving towards a greater acceptance of the idea that while states may be the central actors, they are not the only actors.

'Nation branding' is another important concept for the study of sports diplomacy. Nation branding both overlaps with and is distinct from public diplomacy. There are elements of both nation branding and public diplomacy within sports diplomacy. If nation branding is viewed as a subcategory of public diplomacy, then it becomes difficult to make a distinction between a state's use of nation branding through sport, and more straightforward sports diplomacy. Kobierecki (2020, p. 23) attempts to link these concepts and defines 'sports diplomacy' "as a category [that] confirms complementarity and mutual interfusion of public diplomacy and nation branding." In this paper I define 'sports diplomacy' as a subcategory of public diplomacy that shares some features with nation branding.

The definition of sports diplomacy may differ along with the goals of a state. If the goal is to use sporting events to create a dialogue with another state, then sports diplomacy is defined as using sports as a tool to signal the desire for closer relations with another state (L'Etang 2013). Sports diplomacy becomes, "[a] reasonably safe and benign way of making friends and

managing conflicts” (Rowe 2011, p. 115). This definition reflects a limited goal because it fails to include “negative sports diplomacy” or, as some call it, “no sports diplomacy” (Rofe 2018). Negative sports diplomacy is when states use sports to bring negative attention to a state or issue by: non-participation in a particular event; barring an actor from participation in a particular event; or using the world stage that sports can provide to bring attention to problematic state policies.

Rofe (2018) understands sports diplomacy as “sports and diplomacy,” and describes three elements of sports diplomacy: sports diplomacy as an aspect of typical public diplomacy; the use of sports as a means to achieve particular policy goals; and negative sports diplomacy as a diplomatic tool. His understanding incorporates NGOs. Kobierecki (2020) identifies three types of sports diplomacy which he understands as a source of diplomacy instead of an aspect within diplomacy. Those types are: (1) a means of shaping interstate relations; (2) a means of building international image and prestige of states; and (3) as a diplomatic activity of international sports actors.

The lack of a consensus definition for sports diplomacy makes it is necessary to outline how it is defined in this paper. Sports diplomacy is the utilization of international sports by governments and non-state actors to achieve policy aims and goals. This definition includes both negative and positive sports diplomacy and situates sports diplomacy as both a subcategory and extension of public diplomacy.

In addition to providing a definition of sports diplomacy, it is also important to show how it can be used. Trunkos and Heere (2017) identify seven strategies or explanations as to why states would use sports diplomacy: (1) to provide an unofficial reason for international leaders to

meet and begin a dialogue; (2) to provide insight into a country and to educate others about the country; (3) to bridge cultural and linguistic differences between nations; (4) to create a platform to promote legislation or trade agreements; (5) to create awareness of international relationships through ‘sports ambassadors’— who can help normalize the popular perception of a state or of an interstate relationship; (6) to create a legacy for the host country and to improve its image; and (7) to provide legitimacy for a new nation.

It is easy to understand sports as an apolitical vacuum where the purpose of the activity is for team A to outperform team B; but nothing is truly is truly apolitical. In this paper I show that sports is not an apolitical vacuum, but rather it is a powerful tool that can be utilized to bridge political divides in instances where traditional diplomacy may fail to do so.

Communism, Conscription, and Contests

The literature regarding sports diplomacy and sports in the political sphere typically contains historical examples that accompany the theoretical and political discussion. Another, less prevalent, method is to examine a state and its utilization of sport within a certain time period. Common topics include: Cold War ice hockey; ping pong diplomacy and China; and Russia’s post-Olympics 2014 invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. There is a lack of a comprehensive (or even a detailed) longitudinal overview and analysis of a particular state’s use of sports diplomacy. This kind of study can provide greater insight into sports diplomacy, its norms, and how states and non-state actors act, in addition to allowing us to: better understand a state’s actions; find behavioral patterns; and to create a new method of prediction and risk assessment in an international system rife with uncertainty.

The history of Russia and Russia's use of sports diplomacy as a political tool make it an ideal case study to examine the applications and outcomes of sports diplomacy. The 1990s change in political regime and consequent approach to sports in politics highlight the differing approaches to sports diplomacy from both state and non-state actors. From the Tsarist government to modern-day Russia, team sports and physical activity played (and continue to play) ever-changing roles in Russia's society and government. Before 1917, sporting activities were mainly concentrated in large cities like St. Petersburg, Moscow, Odesa, and Kyiv and were enjoyed mostly by the middle and upper classes.¹ During this time period, sports did not receive any significant government funding, unlike what was seen after World War II.

After the 1917 Revolution, sports and physical education became important in Soviet propaganda. The idea around sports shifted from a focus on individual achievement to collective and "non-elitist" sport. The concept of *fizkultura*, an internal mobilization by the state for physical activity and collective sports among the population, was introduced to Soviet culture in the 1920s. In *fizkultura*, the focus on sports was two-fold: 1) to become ideologically distinct from the "bourgeois" and "elitist" sports; and 2) use sport as paramilitary training. Instead of focusing on individual achievement and success found in bourgeois sports, *fizkultura* was mass-oriented, collectivist, class-based, and not focused on competition. The Soviet government promoted *fizkultura* through journals, television broadcasts, an increase in sports infrastructure, and by the organization of sporting events. Revolution and changes of government resulted in drastic shifts in the importance of sports and in its role in society. Sports went from an activity of the urban elite.

¹ In 1917 Odesa and Kyiv were part of the USSR.

In the 1930s, the role of sports evolved further in Soviet culture. It was no longer enough for sports to be played by Soviet citizens; sports must be used to further ideological goals. In 1934 the slogan “catch up and overtake bourgeois records in sport” was released as part of the understanding that success in competition over other states would strengthen Soviet legitimacy and bring “ideological agitation” to other states (Emellantesva 2011, p. 363).

After World War II, the Soviet Union increased its investment in this strategy. It focused on global competition and athletic success as a means to secure and maintain superpower status. Thus the Soviet Union began to join international sporting organizations. Before 1945, international sports were not used by the Soviet government because the state was isolated and weak internationally. Following the shift in power after the war and the growth of domestic sports communities that could take on international competition, the USSR steadily became involved in the international sporting sphere.

Athletic dominance became part of the Soviet ideological and political plan and was rooted in the idea that sports and competition could serve as another platform for the ideological battle between Moscow and the West. Every defeat of a Western team at the hands of the Soviets showed ideological strength and the superiority of the socialist system. A party resolution on sports explained that a victory for Soviet athletes is significant because “it provides irrefutable proof of the superiority of socialist culture over the decaying culture of the capitalist states” (quoted in Riordan 1988, p. 586).² The increase of Soviet participation in international sports started with a domestic reclamation of sports and a new focus on success in sports as a collective rather than individual achievement. This shift came about as a result of change in ability rather

² After extensive searches the source quoted by Riordan could not be found online. The only references to the quote come from Riordan articles available online.

than ideology; victory on the field could be used as proof of ideological strength. It is important to note that participation in international sporting organizations requires a state to follow the rules and guidelines of such organizations; therefore, Soviet participation in international events entailed competing under Western rules—the antithesis of sports culture in the Soviet Union.

The first major step the USSR took to join the international sporting community was to participate in the Black Sea area soccer competition, the Baltic Cup weightlifting championship, and to join their respective organizations. These sports were chosen first because of the belief that these competitions would give Soviet athletes the best chance to achieve international success. The next step was toward the ultimate goal—Olympic gold medals. However, before the Soviet Union could participate in the Olympics, the problem of amateurism had to be solved. In order to be eligible for Olympic participation, an athlete had to be deemed an “amateur” in their sport. Before 1947, the Soviet government paid its athletes as a reward for athletic performance. In order to be eligible for Olympic participation, an athlete had to be deemed an “amateur” and was not allowed to receive payment for athletic participation. In July 1947, the Soviet government issued a special resolution that eliminated the payment to athletes as a reward and instead gave the athletes gold and silver medals for breaking national and world records and success in competition. Athletes were designated as “state amateurs” and given government “no show” jobs to replace their compensation. Their true job was to be an athlete for the state. The next Olympics following this resolution was the 1948 Summer Olympics in London, and while no team from the Soviet Union competed, representatives from Moscow were sent as observers. Moscow formed the Soviet Olympic Committee and it was approved by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1951. The following year the Soviet Union made its Olympic

debut in the Helsinki games. Participation in the Olympics brought the Soviet Union one step closer to its ultimate goal— athletic success on the world stage as a means to strengthen the international appeal of its ideology.

The first glimpse of the completion of this goal came in 1954, not on the Olympic stage, but at the International Ice Hockey Federation World Championship, the premier global hockey championship outside of the Olympics. In its debut, the Soviet team beat highly favored Canada to win the tournament. This unanticipated victory was not the only success that the Soviet athletes would see. The 1956 Winter Olympic Games, held in Cortina d'Ampezzo, were the first Winter Olympics attended by a Soviet team. In its Winter debut, the Soviet Union won more medals than any other team— five more than second-place Austria. It defeated the United States and Canada for gold in ice hockey, won two golds in cross-country skiing, and won three golds in speed skating; the Soviet Union dethroned existing and established Olympic champions and created a new era of Soviet athletic dominance.

The success continued into summer games as well. In the 1956 Melbourne Summer Olympics, the USSR won more medals than any other country (96 total) and won the most gold, silver, and bronze individual medals as well.

	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTAL
URS	7	3	6	16
AUT	4	3	4	11
SWE	2	4	4	10
FIN	3	3	1	7
USA	2	3	2	7
SUI	3	2	1	6
NOR	2	1	1	4
ITA	1	2	-	3
CAN	-	1	2	3
GER	1	-	1	2

Fig. 1
Cortina D'Ampezzo 1956 Medals Table
 Top 10, Arranged by Total
 olympics.com

	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTAL
URS	37	29	32	98
USA	32	25	17	74
AUS	13	8	14	35
HUN	9	10	7	26
ITA	8	6	8	22
GBR	5	7	9	21
SWE	5	5	6	16
ROU	5	3	5	13
GER	4	10	6	20
JPN	4	10	5	19

Fig. 2
Melbourne 1956 Medals Table
 Top 10, Arranged by Gold
 olympics.com

The Soviet goal of dominance in international sports was achieved, and Soviet leaders immediately noticed. The recognition of the importance of athletic performance by state leaders can be seen following the Melbourne Olympics, when 27 athletes, coaches, and sporting officials earned the supreme honor of the Order of Lenin. The recognition, resources, and awards given to the athletes highlights the importance of athletic success to the leaders of the Soviet Union.

Not just a game, but a valuable tool

Soviet sports culture began as both a criticism of and a diversion from typical Western sports practice and culture and it sought to gradually join and to dominate those same Western sports and institutions. Why would Moscow seek entrance to a culture that it is critical of and that it opposes? The answer lies in how the Soviet government used sports, why sports became a go-to tool, and the outcome of their involvement in the system.

Soviet sports teams were state-controlled, and were created to pursue specific domestic and foreign policy goals, and used methods designed to fulfill the interests of the state. Any involvement with international bodies was part of bigger-picture policy goals for the state.

Riordan (1988) analyzed this relationship and found that while sports had varied importance in the Soviet Union over the years, there were consistent broad goals pursued by the Soviet Union in regard to sports. He specifically identified five foreign policy aims. Those aims were:

1) prompting relations with pro-Soviet and potentially sympathetic groupings abroad and undermining 'bourgeois' and social democratic authority; 2) promoting good-neighborly relations with states bordering on the USSR for strategic reasons and for demonstrating the progress made by kindred people under socialism; 3) winning support for the USSR and its policies among developing states in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; 4) maintaining and reinforcing the unity of the socialist community and the Soviet 'vanguard' position within it; and 5) attaining world sporting supremacy as a nation-state, particularly through the Olympics, principally for enhancing the status of the USSR and Soviet communism abroad.³

The first aim was pursued through annual sporting events and festivals. The festivals and events enabled the Soviets to create contacts with communist organizations abroad to help sponsor and organize events. They were used to create contacts and interactions with trade and professional associations. This aim included the goal of diminished social democratic authority, but there was no significant push to replace or provide an alternative to existing Western sports federations. Under the guise of sports, the Soviet Union enhanced relationships and strengthened contact with pro-Soviet countries and associations globally.

The second identified goal was to promote good relationships with neighboring states for strategic reasons and to demonstrate the progress made in the Soviet Union under socialism. The

³ See Riordan 1988, pp 570-585.

Soviet Union targeted its neighbor states, developing nations, and newly independent nations. Their neighbors became strategically essential to the Soviet Union. Specifically, during the interwar period, this policy was rooted in the Soviet foreign policy of creating good neighborly relationships through treaties and the principles of “non-intervention,” “non-aggression,” and “neutrality” (Beloff, in Riordan 1988, p. 573). In the 1920s, the Soviet Union’s foreign policy also prioritized the strength of the state over the spread of the revolution; this idea was present in Stalin’s pursuance of alliance with ‘bourgeois’ states that were neighbors with the Soviet Union — done to increase the nation’s strength and security. These policies are reflected in the Soviet utilization of sports to promote policy goals and to be “one of the most suitable vehicles for Soviet cultural diplomacy.” Riordan quotes an “unnamed Soviet sports leader,” who said, “Sports effectively helps to break down national barriers, create international associations, and strengthen the international sports movement. It is an immense social force helping to establish and promote international contacts between national sports associations of countries with different political systems” (Riordan 1988, p. 574).⁴ In these states, sports had been viewed as apolitical by the public and by groups targeted by the Soviet Union. This preconceived view made sports diplomacy an easy way for the Soviets to create relations with both pro-Soviet and bourgeois countries.⁵ Soviet diplomatic actions were better received because they were seen as different from traditional diplomacy— “Foreign publics are more likely to be engaged by soft power overtures from nations, such as cultural or sporting exchanges” (Murray & Pigman 2014, p. 1102). Since sports cuts across demographic divides, it can be used among and between diverse

⁴ See Footnote 3.

⁵ “Sport being evidently ‘apolitical’ easily understood and enjoyed, cutting across social, ethnic, religious, and ethnic barriers, was seen as one of the most suitable vehicles for Soviet cultural diplomacy.” Riordan 1988, p.574

populations; diplomatic actions do not need to be catered to each demographic. Sports can be used to normalize relations and to increase contact and cooperation with neighboring countries.

This policy continued after World War II, even with the changed attitudes towards the capitalist world. The USSR focused on neighboring states and promoted regional competitions such as the aforementioned Black Sea area soccer competition and the Baltic Cup weight-lifting tournament. These competitions hosted Soviet neighbors such as: Bulgaria; Estonia; Finland; Norway; Poland; Sweden; Turkey; and West and East Germany. Sporting ties for strategic reasons extended to the Middle East, where the USSR had bilateral sporting agreements with Egypt. They hosted tournaments and meetings with athletes from various Middle Eastern states. Sporting relations also created a connection between the USSR and non-neighboring capitalist countries. For example, the USSR established long-term ties with Austria and Japan and an exchange of Soviet coaches and players to those countries, specifically with ice hockey.

The third identified goal was the use of sports to gain support for the USSR and its policies among developing nations. The USSR took up an interest in developing nations and provided sport-related aid in order to gain favor with these states. The sport-related aid generally consisted of funds for new facilities and travel, new coaches, and joint 'sports friendship' weeks with the USSR. This aid was given to these developing states free of charge and was used to open political talks and foster relationships. According to Riordan, the ultimate aim of the USSR was to sign sports cooperation treaties with these developing states. He contends that the heavy involvement of the USSR in developing these countries' sporting systems was because "the Soviet leaders evidently regard sport as an important weapon in the 'battle for people's minds' " (Riordan 1988, p. 581). The Soviets used sporting aid in developing nations to demonstrate the

strength and possibilities of a socialist system. This form of outreach cost the USSR around 2.5 million rubles annually. They spent more than any other country on sporting outreach and aid. The funds and personnel put into the Soviet sporting outreach programs show how important a tool sports were to the USSR in terms of cultural outreach and to the possible development of cooperative relationships. The potential partnerships and the victories in the 'battle' for these citizens' minds in the context of the Cold War ideological battle made the financial cost worth it for the Soviet Union.

The fourth aim focused on unity among and between Moscow and other socialist countries. Sports were integrated into the political systems because sports increased friendship and cooperation among these states, and a centralized system streamlined the bureaucratic process. The Soviet Union used sports to integrate the various socialist communities and to bind them within the fixed policies and structure of the sporting system, and thus placed the USSR at the center of the system. The Soviet Union also provided aid to other communist countries, such as Cuba, as a way to link sporting success with political and ideological success. The significant material and systematic support to other communist countries shows "how seriously the leaders of these states regard sport as an eminently efficacious means of advertising the advantages of socialism and demonstrating the superiority of their system" (Riordan 1988, p. 585). In all Soviet sporting ventures, the goal was not only to win and show the strength of socialism, but also to defeat Western governments and thus boost Soviet prestige.

The fifth aim was to be successful in international sporting events, specifically the Olympics, and to defeat capitalist countries in these events. These victories were thought to, boost the reputation of the Soviet Union and of communism in front of a broader audience.

The fifth aim is inherently different from the previous four. The first four were based on the philosophy of cooperation and interaction with both pro-Soviet and Western countries through sports and the use of those relationships and Soviet support to show the strength of the communist system. This final aim differs from the rest by setting the communist bloc directly against the Western bloc. The Cold War was waged in proxy wars, space race, arms race, and track races. Sports culture is full of allusions and references to war. Athletes get ready to battle with one another, they wear uniforms, and some sports contain the physical elements of battle and aggression. There is a notion that sports acts as an outlet for aggression and provides an outlet for conflict short of war. Battles can occur between teams, cities, and athletes without an actual war between the two parties: “The ability of sport to pacify, or to provide an outlet for aggression, or to mimic war, conflict and battle short of violence, is irrefutable and a view widely shared by prominent psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists and many others” (Murray 2018, p. 52). Olympic competition is not about athletes born in certain countries; it is about athletes representing certain countries. The Soviet focus on direct competition between other countries was not just a display of Soviet strength; it was also about ideological strength. Any sports victory was equivalent to a political victory— It helped spread communism, and strengthened Soviet national pride. The “win at all costs” mentality formed from the importance of athletic success in international competition and the overarching ramifications of a victory and, more significantly, a loss.

Sports for more than Diplomacy

In a “win at all costs” system, losing is not an option, which created a precarious situation for Soviet athletes. If an athlete must win at all costs, there is pressure to resort to means other than talent, preparation, and luck. The first public cheating scandal came during the 1976 Olympics in Montreal when Boris Onischenko, a member of the Soviet team, was disqualified from the pentathlon for modifying his épée. As the news of Onischenko’s disqualification spread, the Soviet team’s spokesman was quick to say that the team and its trainers had no knowledge of his plan and that cheating was not the Soviet way. The *Guardian* reported that Onischenko was fined 5,000 rubles, stripped of all his sports honors, and dismissed from the Red Army. This public scandal was met with an equally public and scathing punishment of Onischenko by the Soviet system. The punishment was due to the embarrassment he caused, not due to the cheating. The Soviet Union’s plan was to use sports to demonstrate superiority through success, not to bring shame and besmirch its reputation.

Onischenko was not the last Soviet athlete to cheat; and various cheating schemes and scandals soon came to light. Before 1989, few Soviet athletes and coaches admitted to illegal steroid and drug use. Yury Vlaslov, chairman of the USSR Weightlifting Federation, made the first notable accusation. In a TV interview, he accused Soviet athletes of taking steroids for decades, and he named names. The newspaper *Leninskoe Znamya* (Lenin’s Banner) corroborated Vlaslov’s accusations. The newspaper revealed that 290 coaches and athletes had been punished for banned substance consumption in the three years before the 1988 Olympics in Seoul. The number of positive tests from Soviet athletes was greater and more prevalent than had been seen in any other country up until that point.

The other great scandal that emerged was Soviet ‘shamateurism’ (*sic*). Until 1992, athletes participating in the Olympics were required to be amateurs and could not be full-time athletes. On paper, Soviet athletes were students or members of the military; in practice, they were trained as if they were professionals. This practice was known to the outside world, and when it was coupled with the doping scandals, it signaled the end of Soviet sports supremacy. The Soviet Union itself would end just a few years later.⁶

Russia maintained Soviet culture and ideals. Russia participated in various international athletic competitions, but the new “Russian Federation” did not maintain the Soviet Union’s athletic success and dominance. 2014 saw the most notable moments in the brief history of the Russian Federation (Russia). Russia hosted its first Formula One race, and the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. In addition to Formula One and the Winter Olympics, Russia planned to host the 2018 FIFA World Cup, which would cement its status as a host of MSEs.

The bidding procedure for the 2014 Olympics was a two-year process. There were seven applicant cities. The Committee examined the bids and applications of each city and narrowed the field to three candidates: Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea (ROK); Salzburg, Austria; and Sochi, Russia. The final step of the 2014 Olympic bid process was a presentation to the 119th IOC Session in Guatemala. It was clear from the beginning that Russia was intent on winning the bid since this had become something of importance to president Vladimir Putin. He was heavily involved with the process insofar that he led the formal presentation in Guatemala, guaranteeing that there would be no traffic jams. He even spoke French and English, which he rarely does. Pyeongchang was viewed as a clear frontrunner throughout the selection process; and the

⁶ There could be no Soviet sports supremacy when there is no Soviet Union.

commission raised few objections to its bid. Pyeongchang led the voting in the first round, but since it did not have a majority, a second round needed to be held. The ROK's bid was still the favorite, and thus the final result was unexpected. After the second round of voting, on July 4, 2007, Sochi secured the bid for the 2014 Winter Games.

Round	1	2
Sochi	34	51
Pyeongchang	36	47
Salzburg	25	-

Fig. 3
Election Results for Host of the XXII Olympic Winter Games
olympics.com

Prior to the Olympics, the city of Sochi underwent massive changes. New facilities, hotels, roads, and bridges were built for the event; and even after the expensive COVID-related accommodations made for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the 2014 Sochi Olympics remains the most expensive Olympics ever held (\$50 billion, compared to \$35 billion in 2020). This tremendous amount of money went to new facilities and urban infrastructure to facilitate and demonstrate that Russia could hold a seamless and impressive Olympics. Russia's intent was to showcase Sochi as a location for future international sporting events. This intention is outlined in the IOC factsheet about the 2014 Sochi Olympics, which contains extensive lists of investments Russia made in Sochi's athletic infrastructure as well as possible future uses for the newly constructed Olympic venues.

Three years after Sochi won its Olympic bid, it was announced that the first Russian Grand Prix would join the Formula One racing calendar for the 2014 season. The race took place

in the Sochi Autodrom, which was constructed from roads built for the Olympics. Russian leader Vladimir Putin (in BBC 2010) when asked about the new Formula One race, said, “For us it’s an important event because it would be possible to use effectively everything we have created for the Olympic Games in 2014.”

The 2014 Sochi Olympic games signaled a change in policy and behavior within Russia. Russia’s creation of a sports infrastructure designed for continued use, rather than the typically temporary Olympic villages, indicated Moscow’s intention to become a significant player in this area of international cooperation— But what was the motivation behind this increased involvement?

Major sporting events require extensive planning, funds, and resources. These events can have a positive, if short-lived, effect on the local economy as the events create jobs and increase tourism. These events also leave the Olympic villages with unused athletic complexes and infrastructure that have no purpose outside an MSE. States clearly believe that there is a benefit to hosting an MSE that outweighs any potentially costly and adverse side effects.

There are numerous opinions about and explanations for why states are motivated to host an international sporting event. It could be to create a legacy and improve its global image. Non-democracies often use major sporting events to gain prestige. These events can generate positive news coverage about the host nation and can allow the state to project itself as a strong and modern country. MSEs are typically major global cultural events, and, as a host, a state can become the center of that culturally significant moment and can generate significant soft power.⁷

The host nation can showcase its culture to the thousands of athletes, coaches, and fans in

⁷ Nye (2004) defines soft power as “getting others to want the outcomes that you want— co-opts people rather than coerces them.” Nye contends that soft power comes from culture, political values, and foreign policies.

attendance, and to the millions of people watching at home. The cultural influence and soft power generated from hosting a major sporting event may make the benefits outweigh the significant costs,

The Soviet Union's increased involvement with international sporting events signaled a change in political strategy and a utilization of sports to improve its global image and to create cooperation with other states. Russia's motivation for increased involvement in international sporting events is somewhat less clear. The positive press and sentiment generated by the 2014 Sochi Olympics were immediately overshadowed by Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea, Ukraine— just one month after the Olympics. The international goodwill from the Olympics disappeared along with Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea. The motives and rationale behind these actions are puzzling because they appear to work against each other.

There are various understandings and hypotheses about the motives behind these seemingly incongruous actions. As stated above, states host MSEs to display power. Similarly, the annexation of sovereign territory and territorial expansion, an intentional violation of established international norms, is also a display of power because it shows that the state does not feel bound by conventions and repercussions. In this respect, the two events are perhaps not in as much conflict as they might be at first glance. Russia not only has the material means and power to construct new facilities and infrastructure for the sole purpose of sports, it also has the political power to violated established norms with near-impunity. Russia's target audience was the international community. Both actions are an outward display of Russia's capabilities and the limited roadblocks it faces in pursuit of its goals. At least, that is one possible interpretation of events.

Another possible interpretation of events is that the actions of the Russian government were intended for its domestic audience. Both events could be seen as part of Russia's internally-focused soft power project to create national pride and to establish a national and cultural identity among its citizens. The Sochi Olympics were considered Russia's first global "coming out party" after the fall of the Soviet Union. It used the Olympics to foster the nationalistic feelings among its citizens that Moscow believed to be in short supply after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Jonathan Grix and Nina Kramareva (2017, p. 16) argue that:

These two events served as a force of 'domestic consolidation' behind Putin's aims and a trigger for *domestic* soft power; that is the attempt to influence a domestic audience by providing them with a growing sense of Russian national narrative.

In another work, Jonathan Grix and Louis Grix (2018, p. 3) identify "dual soft power strategy," a strategy whereby a state seeks both domestic and international soft power. They argue that this strategy is used in authoritarian states because they need to create domestic political loyalty and cannot do so through conventional democratic means. Russia created two international events that may appear to cancel each other out; but it is possible to view the events as part of one strategy designed to create positive sentiment among its citizens towards its government.

Root for the Home Team: Sports and Politics Outside of Sports Diplomacy

The Russian Federation is the undeniable successor of the Soviet Union. In many ways, Russia continues to emulate the Soviet Union and preserve various elements from the previous government. A similarity noted in this work is the utilization of international sporting events and relationships for political means. The Soviet Union used sport to connect with other countries, whether they were ideologically similar or not. Russia took advantage of the impression that

sports are an apolitical vacuum to create relationships and cooperation between potential allies through sports and sharing of coaches and facilities. The USSR used sports diplomacy to forge external connections with developing states, neighboring states, and potential allies.

Conversely, as examined within the 2014 events, Russia used international sporting events as an internal political tool. The Soviet Union began its focus on sports with *fizkultura*. With an already established sports culture in the country, it was able to use sports to connect to other states. Russia did not have the same established domestic connection and culture through sport; therefore, the 2014 Olympics was used to generate domestic culture and soft power. A renewed sense of national pride came with hosting the various international events; Russia was the country all these states flocked to, not just the Olympics but various other sporting events too. The Soviet Union used sports to connect to external actors, while Russia used sports to facilitate domestic cultural growth and foster domestic soft power.

The athletic complexes and infrastructure in Sochi were built with more than the 2014 Olympics in mind. After the Olympics, Russia hosted various international sporting events in Sochi, including an annual Formula One race. The goal was to become a consistent host for global athletic events, whether it was FIFA or smaller regional competitions. Sochi was built to be continuously used and could guarantee that Russia would be a prominent player in these athletic events. Consistently hosting these events would keep Russia centered in these competitions within the continued trend of the Olympics being less about international cooperation and “more about a host’s international political purposes or global competition” (Steinbach 2016, p. 39). The Soviet Union also worked to become a central figure in global sports and cemented this position through competitive dominance. The Soviet athletic system of

state-sponsored amateurs and the training regimens created and sustained this success. While the 1980 Olympic Games were held in Moscow, the Soviet Union did not host the event to establish Moscow as a consistent host for sports competitions; it was not made to be a sustained complex showing there was no intent to remain a host. In direct contrast, the complexes were constructed in Sochi by Russia with the intent to be a continuous and, perhaps ultimately, the default host for athletic events. The Soviet Union trained and sent athletes to competitions, and Russia created Sochi to bring in athletes from other states to compete in competitions.

The Soviet Union used athletes and coaches as diplomatic tools to be sent to other states. Competitive success against Western athletes was used to show the strength of the communist ideology. The Soviet Union utilized sports to achieve foreign policy aims, the definition of sports diplomacy. Russia utilized sports to achieve its foreign policy aim of establishing itself as a player in the international sporting system, but more importantly, it utilized sport to gain domestic soft power. Russia primarily used sport as a political tool domestically, not with sports diplomacy.

If Russia's goal was simply hosting, a question regarding doping arises. It was seemingly apparent why the Soviet team resorted to doping. There was immense pressure to perform and succeed. The expectations were high, and the consequences of a loss made the cost too high. Performance-enhancing substances used in conjunction with the training and effort put into athletic competition would help secure wins. Why was there a massive cheating scandal in 2014 if Soviet-level pressures did not exist? While Russia is the successor of the Soviet Union, that does not mean that it implemented each element from the old government. The government-run athletic training programs were not reinstated to Soviet levels. The pressure to perform and the

fear of failure were not as high. Russia does not have the same control over athletes' training regimes that the Soviet Union did; some Russians are even based in the US or train in Europe. The pressure to perform was there, as there is with most host states; however, Russia's main aim for the Sochi Olympics was most likely not to win the most medals. In the three Winter Olympics before the Games in Sochi, Russia had not placed about fifth on the medals table. The expectation was not for Russia to place first on the medals table, as they inevitably did. The Soviet Union utilized an outward-looking application of sports diplomacy. They spread excellence outwards by going out and competing and actively sending athletic delegations to countries. Soviet use of aid and delegations represented a more formal sports diplomacy, the application of traditional diplomacy methods to the realm of sports. Russia used sports as a political tool, not through sports diplomacy, to garner inner support. The political action involving sport was centered inward. There was little to no emphasis on athletic success in competition to display the power of the state. Athletes were not sent out to compete and act as informal cultural delegates; instead, Russia built Sochi to receive athletic delegations.

	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTAL
USA	9	15	13	37
GER	10	13	7	30
CAN	14	7	5	26
NOR	9	8	6	23
AUT	4	6	6	16
RUS	3	5	7	15
KOR	6	6	2	14

Fig. 4
Vancouver 2010 Medals Table
 Top 7, Arranged by Total
 olympics.com

	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTAL
RUS	11	9	9	29
USA	9	9	10	28
NOR	11	5	10	26
CAN	10	10	5	25
NED	8	7	9	24
GER	8	6	5	19
AUT	4	8	5	17

Fig. 5
Sochi 2014 Medals Table
 Top 10, Arranged by Total
 olympics.com

	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTAL
NOR	14	14	11	39
GER	14	10	7	31
CAN	11	8	10	29
USA	9	8	6	23
NED	8	6	6	20
KOR	5	8	4	17
OAR*	2	6	9	17

Fig. 6*Pyeongchang 2018 Medals Table**Top 7, Arranged by Total**olympics.com***Olympic Athletes from Russia*

The Olympics, Russia, and Territorial Expansion

One month after the 2014 Olympics, Russia invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea. Eight years later, it appeared that history would repeat itself. At the same time that the Olympics were underway in Beijing, hundreds of thousands of Russian troops were mobilized on Ukraine's border— an imminent conflict loomed over the games. There was speculation about Russia's timeline for a major offensive and about whether the Olympic Games would impact its trajectory.

China and Russia have a strong diplomatic relationship— categorized as a “partnership without limits.” If Russia attacked during the Beijing Olympics, it would rob China of the positive press coverage that the Olympics would bring, and could damage the Russia-China relationship. Moreover, the Olympic Truce was in place.

The Olympic Truce is a tradition over 3,000 years old, in which warfare and violence are suspended during the Olympic Games to allow competitors and spectators to leave their military

positions and attend the games in peace. Before each Olympic Games, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) establishes the date that the truce is in effect. The truce has not historically been effective and is considered a weak international norm. The fragility of the norm was evident in Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia; and while some believed that Russia may abide by the truce in 2022, Russia's renewed offensive and attempt to conquer Ukraine came almost one month before the UNGA-established end of the truce. Russia did wait for the official conclusion of the 2022 Beijing Olympics out of respect for its relationship with China and due to the personal relationship between the two leaders— a relationship cultivated by both sides in the years following the 2008 invasion of Georgia.⁸

The invasion was swiftly met with international condemnation and with significant repercussions for Russia and its citizens. Most prominently, most democracies and many non-democracies imposed major sanctions on Russia. In the weeks that followed, major corporations shuttered their Russian locations. Russians could no longer enjoy a Big Mac, or buy a new pair of Levi's, or buy a new iPhone. Non-state actors joined states in efforts to restrict Russian access to goods in order to pressure Russia and to create discontent among its citizens.

International sports organizations and leagues also enacted bans and imposed other prohibitive measures against Russia and Russian athletes. The IOC released a statement condemning Russia's violation of the Olympic Truce and expressed concern about the safety of the "Olympic Community" in Ukraine. Before the opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) barred athletes from Russia and Belarus from Olympic competition. Although the IPC had initially stated that they would not ban Russian and

⁸ This information comes from a personal conversation with Jonathan Cristol and its provenance is both reliable and confidential.

Belarusian athletes as long as they competed as neutrals, without the name or flag of their state, they revoked that decision. Several federations threatened to boycott the event if Russian and Belarusian athletes were permitted to participate, a typical example of negative sports diplomacy. FIFA and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Executive Committee issued a joint statement suspending Russian teams from all football competitions.⁹ The IIHF suspended all Russian and Belarusian teams, of any level and age group, from participating in IIHF competitions and events. The IIHF also revoked Russia's hosting privileges for the 2023 IIHF World Junior Championships, an annual hockey tournament for the best under-20 players globally.

Formula One terminated its contract with the Russian Grand Prix promoter, and canceled any future Russian Grands Prix. The Haas Formula One team terminated its contracts with Russian driver Nikita Mazepin and with its title sponsor, the Russian fertilizer company Uralkali. Haas stripped the Russian flag-style livery from the car and removed the Uralkali logo from team kits, merchandise, and cars. Haas parted with both Mazepin and Uralkali because Dmitry Mazepin, part-owner of Uralkali (and father of Nikita), is closely associated with Putin. Haas's contract terminations came days before the European Union sanctioned both Mazepins for their close ties to Putin.

International sports leagues and federations rely on international norms and banned Russia as both a punishment for such egregious violations of international norms and as an inducement to return to normal behavior. International federations and leagues function best when there is open dialogue and cooperation among the member states. They depend on

⁹ The governing body of UEFA Champions league, often referred to as UCL

consistency and adherence to the status quo in order to create schedules, plan games, and fill arenas. The various tournaments and leagues would not function if there were constant internal instability and a fluid membership. IIHF president Luc Tardif (2022) said that:

The IIHF is not a political entity and cannot influence the decisions being taken over the war in Ukraine. We nevertheless have a duty of care to all of our members and participants and must therefore do all we can to ensure that we are able to operate our events in a safe environment for all teams taking part in the IIHF World Championship program.

His point is that the primary motivation behind the ban is to ensure safe competition and not to influence the war in Ukraine. The IIHF used negative sports diplomacy and banned Russian athletes, mirroring the sanctions placed by political entities. The IIHF may not be a political entity, but it can wield similar powers to pursue its interests and to secure the continued viability and success of the organization.

An analysis of the responses by international sporting entities to the Russian invasion of Ukraine demonstrate a clear pattern. The aforementioned international sporting organizations emphasized safety, peace, and unity in their condemnations and sanctions of Russia. Sporting events are no longer held in Russia and Belarus due to concerns about the safety of athletes and participants. The Olympic Truce states international competition should not occur during war; but these actions show that the reverse is also true— war should not occur during international competitions. The athletic federations have essentially established their own inter-organizational truce, by removing the aggressor from competition. The IIHF, in its statement about the ban on Russian and Belarusian athletes, references Russia's violation of the Olympic Truce and

subsequent condemnation by the IOC for the violation. The IIHF took into account that Russia did not keep war out of international competition despite the long held international norm. War brings instability and safety issues to competition, and puts the leagues and annual events at risk. Athletic federations used negative sports diplomacy in order to ensure their continued survival. When athletic federations are put at risk due to an external force, they isolate themselves from the source of that risk— negative sports diplomacy is perhaps the greatest tool sports organizations have to guarantee their continued success and perhaps even their survival.

Conclusion

The study of sports and politics through a single state as a case study enables a better understanding of patterns, differing practices, and responses by outside actors. The Soviet Union used sports diplomacy to foster relationships with emerging states, potential allies, and neighbors. Sports were a political tool used to create cooperation and connections that may not have been possible through traditional forms of diplomacy. Additionally, athletic success was viewed and marketed by the Soviet Union as ideological success, and was seen as another battlefield in the Cold War. This viewpoint was used domestically to foster internal pride for the communist system and to use athletic success as evidence to show the world that communism is the better ideology.

The fall of the Soviet Union and rise of the new(ish) Russian Federation presented areas of change and continuity. Russia used the 2014 Sochi Olympics to build infrastructure and athletic complexes in hopes of being a regular host of international events. This role would allow

Russia to promote Russian culture and views to both a domestic and international audience without the need to leave Russian territory.

The shift from the Soviet goal of international athletic dominance to the Russian goal of host to athletic competitions can be understood in various ways— other than the change in the state itself. The shift in policy may have resulted from a change in capabilities. Russia did not have the infrastructure or capabilities to maintain state-run athletic facilities and programs in Soviet style. The Soviet Union used sports to connect with potential adversaries and potential allies and to maintain ties with other communist states. Soviet goals for the use of sports diplomacy did not make sense for Russia. The state system and its borders are not as fluid in 2022 as they were in 1922, and there are few emerging countries that Russia would need to use sports to connect with— other means are available. The current geopolitical environment does not make it possible for Russia to implement the Soviet sports diplomacy policy or to pursue the same goals.

There is an interesting and non-obvious pattern that Russia demonstrates regarding sports, particularly the Olympics, and aggression. During the Beijing Olympics, Russia invaded Georgia. Intense fighting lasted for five days, and Russia retained two regions of Georgia after it was over. Russia faced few repercussions from the international community for this act of aggression and violation of a deeply held international norm. Russian officials interpreted the limited repercussions almost as an invitation to undertake similar actions. Russia invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea just after the Sochi Olympics. Again, Russia faced limited international response and backlash. Russia mounted a renewed offensive and all out war against Ukraine just after the 2022 Olympics concluded. This time, however, the response was swift and

significant and, at the time of this writing, continues to grow. These three acts of aggression are part of a pattern and show that Russia disdains the ideals inherent in international sporting events even as it attempts to capitalize on the tangible and intangible gains that come from hosting these same events and it expresses that disdain by undertaking acts of aggression during or just after significant sporting events.

This recontextualization of the three Olympic invasions illuminates the evolution of responses by both state and non-state actors. The limited response and repercussions to Russian aggression following 2008 and 2014 contrast with the major response in 2022. Athletic federations and international sporting leagues took dramatic actions— and did so in line with states and other types of non state actors. It is clear that these sports actors are INGOs with their own interests and that they both shape and are shaped by international politics and global events.

Sports diplomacy may be understudied, but the Russia-Ukraine conflict is likely to be studied for years to come. By combining the study of sports with the study of diplomacy, peace, and security we can gain new perspectives about both. This combination allows us to see new patterns of state actions and to explain what seems inexplicable. The utilization of sports as a framework to analyze the actions of states is not only useful in the field of sports diplomacy, it can be indispensable to the field of international relations as a whole.

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