

Sports-Diplomacy: a hybrid of two halves.

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Abstract:

Sports-diplomacy growing in practice, and yet the debate over whether diplomacy and sport should mix continues. This debate is not settled because a theoretical exploration of the term has so far been absent in the Diplomatic Studies field. This paper's theoretical investigation throws up a number of new observations and consolidates a few old ones relating to sports-diplomacy. The argument is simple: an enhanced theoretical understanding of sport-diplomacy will lead to enhanced practical application and a sustainable, durable and permanent relationship between sports and diplomacy.

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Introduction:

The question ‘do the benefits outweigh the dangers in mixing diplomacy and sport?’ generates an informative debate over the increasing practice of sports-diplomacy. On the one side of the debate, sports-diplomacy is lauded as a panacea by government, a largely untapped yet powerful diplomatic tool that can reduce estrangement and promote sustainability, development and dialogue. The institutes of sport and diplomacy are universal in scope and nature, and working in tandem can spread positive sporting values such as mutual respect, discipline, tolerance and compassion among acrimonious political relationships.

On the other side, the hybrid term causes a visceral reaction. If politics and sport do not mix, then why should diplomacy and sport? Diplomacy as the business of negotiation, compromise and peace has nothing to do with the nationalist fervour and competition-short-of-war that international sport generates. For sporting puritans the world over, when ‘the suits’ encroach on hallowed sporting grounds it is nothing more than a photo-op. These fanatics thrive on the despair and elation that intense, meaningful sporting competition demands and generates. Staged events with back-slapping and beaming politicians, exhibition matches or talk of peace stemming from sport is anathema for such publics.

If the debate endures, sports-diplomacy will fail to realise its potential. To settle this debate, this paper argues, is to better understand the term theoretically. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to conduct a theoretical investigation into the theory and practice of sports-diplomacy.² Such a study is timely and necessary for several reasons. Sport and diplomacy are hybridising - the ‘diplomatization’ of sport is a unique, expanding feature of the modern diplomatic environment and demands attention. A gap in the literature is also addressed. Much has been written on sport and politics and sports as foreign policy, for example, but the relationship between sport and diplomacy is largely untapped. What has been written of sports diplomacy is akin to its practice: sporadic articles that are case specific.

There are three main benefits to this theoretical inquiry. First, the reasons driving the growth, interest and debate in sport-diplomacy can be elucidated, understood and settled. Second, this topographical process throws up some novel ideas about the relationship

² This paper is the beginning of a research agenda into sports-diplomacy by several members of the Diplomatic Studies Section of the International Studies Association. Elements of this research will be presented at the ISA San Diego Convention in 2012, or the joint BISA/ISA session in June 2012, Edinburgh, Scotland.

between sport and diplomacy. Third, conditions for success and failure of sports-diplomacy can be extracted and lessons for future sports-diplomacy ventures introduced.

There are also parameters to this study. The state, its diplomacy and their relationship to sport are the key referent objects for inquiry. The paper does not explore the relationship between domestic sport and diplomacy, or between non-state actors and sport (but readily admits that these are fecund areas of intellectual and practical endeavour). The paper focuses on how and why governments use sport to enhance, complement and boost their *diplomacy*. This paper's level of analysis is on international sport and traditional diplomacy. Finally, this conference paper is a work in progress.

Structurally, the paper begins by describing the reasons why sport and diplomacy are hybridising. It then presents the government perspective on sports-diplomacy and outlines why it is attracted towards sport as a diplomatic vehicle or tool. The third section of the paper theorises on the negative side of the debate, before concluding with a number of future recommendations toward realising the potential of sports-diplomacy.

Traditional Diplomacy: From Westphalia to Euthanasia

This section describes the evolution of traditional diplomacy from Westphalia to the twenty-first century. It establishes the reasons why governments the world over are changing the way they ‘do’ diplomacy.

Traditional diplomacy³ can be defined as ‘the conduct of relations between sovereign states with standing in world politics by official agents and by peaceful means.’⁴ Where foreign policy concerns a state’s *ends*, the practice of diplomacy is the *means* to those ends. Diplomacy is the ‘engine room’⁵ of international relations, the ‘master-institution of international society.’⁶ In a general sense, diplomacy is antithesis of war; the two institutions are mutually exclusive.⁷ As Butterfield notes, diplomats can work:

‘by means of promises, appeals to interest, attempts at striking a bargain, devices of cajolery. They have resorted sometimes to taunts and to bullying, sometimes to quiet blackmail or impudent bluff. Even the threat of war may be one of the counters which the diplomat uses... Diplomacy may include anything short of actual war, therefore, and sometimes the kindest thing that one can say of it is that it is better than having the guns actually firing.’⁸

The range of tactics and methods the diplomat has at their disposal is vast. However, traditional diplomacy’s foundations – to promote and protect a nation’s core values and interests, for example – do not change. In this foundational sense, diplomats represent their state, international society and, through the Diplomatic Corps,⁹ a symbolic unity of mankind; they are specialists in precise and accurate communication, and experts in negotiation; they

³ This author argues that there are different schools of thought and ways of theorising about modern diplomacy. See Stuart Murray. (2008). Consolidating the Gains made in Diplomacy Studies: a taxonomy. *International Studies Perspectives*, 9 (1): 21-39.

⁴ Hedley Bull. (1977). *The anarchical society: a study of order in world politics*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 156.

⁵ Raymond Cohen (1998) Putting Diplomatic Studies on the Map. *Diplomatic Studies Program Newsletter*, Leicester: Centre for the Study of Diplomacy: p, 1.

⁶ Wight, Martin and Butterfield, Herbert. (1966). *Diplomatic Investigations*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 10 -12.

⁷ For further discussion on the exclusivity of war and diplomacy see Sasson Sofer. (2005). Guardians of the Practitioners’ Virtue: Diplomats at the Warriors Den. *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 16, p. 2). and Barry Steiner. (1998). Preventive Diplomacy in Historical Perspective. *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9 (1), pp, 1 – 23.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See Paul Sharp and Geoffrey Wiseman (2008) *The Diplomatic Corps as an Institution of International Society*. New York: Palgrave.

gather and disseminate information; and, unless it runs contrary to their state's foreign policy, seek to minimize friction in an anarchical and competitive international relations environment.

Since the mid-seventeenth century, diplomacy has been the state's vanguard institution for international affairs. As the state went from strength to strength, the diplomacy mutually evolved and came to monopolise international relations until well into the twentieth century. For centuries, state-to-state diplomatic interaction was the only game in town: 'few institutions have remained so stable and enduring as the diplomatic.'¹⁰ The players – the diplomats – acted *above* the domestic state, physically, culturally and philosophically; like some elitist gatekeepers of a hermetically sealed privileged club with sacrosanct historical traditions that utterly escaped the man on the street (or so we were told). Although over time, the institution of diplomacy took on unique characteristics – the development of a diplomatic culture, for example - it was axiomatically linked to its realist state master. As one millennium drew to an end and another began, however, diplomacy's monopoly on foreign affairs came under threat.

The post-Cold War environment, with its volatile mix of new threats and old attitudes to countering those threats, has not been kind for states and their diplomatic institutions, partly because of their inability to cope with transnational security threats set free after 1989: climate change, terrorism or various financial crises, for example. Other unprecedented features of the modern diplomatic environment have also changed statecraft and diplomacy. For example, the 'democratisation' of diplomacy - the increasing public demand for greater transparency in international relations, fuelled by the virtual revolution in information and communications technology – is significant. The appearance of 'new' diplomatic actors – NGOs, MNCs,¹¹ IGOs and even influential celebrities – has led to the introduction of terms like plural, 'polylateral'¹² or 'multi-stakeholder'¹³ to describe the vertical and horizontal

¹⁰ John Robert Kelly, *The New Diplomacy: Evolution of a Revolution*, in *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 21, 2010, p. 286.

¹¹ For example, Multinational corporations such as Microsoft, Philips, Sony, Mitsubishi, and General Motors all intervene in international affairs to protect and promote their interests and values. To do so, means to use diplomacy as a means to ensure they met their responsibilities beyond making computer software. Microsoft's Critical Infrastructure Partner Program (CIPP), for example, fosters partnership between national governments based on mutual trust, common goals, and collaboration; and the software giant also has Disaster & Humanitarian Response plans, built on diplomatic partnerships with the Department of State, the American Red Cross and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees..

¹² See Geoffrey Wiseman, *'Polylateralism' and New Modes of Global Dialogue*, Discussion Papers No. 59. Leicester: Leicester Diplomatic Studies Programme, 1999.

¹³ See Brian Hocking (2006) 'Multistakeholder Diplomacy: Forms, Functions and Frustrations,' in Jovan Kurbaliga and Valentin Katrandjiev (eds.), *Multistakeholder Diplomacy: Challenges and Opportunities*, Malta: DiploFoundation.

networks that characterise modern diplomacy. Where the state and its diplomats have found trouble, non-state actors have stepped in and proliferated, neatly filling the vacuum of responsibility left by the state.¹⁴ These non state actors range from the messianic to the mad, and have affected change to the international relations system – bringing into question the relevance and effectiveness of the state to solve the growing pains of globalization.

Questions that were asked of the relevance of the state were also asked of diplomacy: ‘were diplomats still necessary?’¹⁵ or ‘Is Diplomacy Dead?’¹⁶ Like the state, traditional diplomacy was accused of being obsolete, irrelevant and archaic,¹⁷ doing little more than providing ‘dubious solutions to long-forgotten or outdated problems.’¹⁸ The diplomats also came under criticism. They were stereotypically labelled as blue-blooded public schoolboys, ineffectively operating somewhere between the tropical and the alcohol and having a jolly good time abroad at the expense of the taxpayer. In an era where ‘every man is a diplomat, painful though it may be for professional diplomats to acknowledge,’¹⁹ diplomacy has been under sustained attack.

Modelski, for example, claims that contemporary diplomacy is ‘technologically redundant, self-centred, inbred and fossilized’ as well as ‘impervious it is to its general environment.’²⁰ Ross, a former UK Diplomat, writes in a chapter entitled *The End of Diplomacy* that there is ‘nothing special about diplomacy’ save its ‘snobbery and elitism.’²¹ For Ross, diplomacy is afflicted by ‘a lack of accountability and responsiveness’ conducive to a ‘crisis of diplomatic legitimacy’ shrouded behind a self-perpetuating ‘veil of privilege and secrecy.’²² Realising the true potential of modern diplomacy, according to Ross, may

¹⁴ In 1997 Jody Williams, the co-ordinator of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, won the 1997 Nobel Prize for Peace. In a subsequent interview she noted that not only had: ‘we won the Nobel Prize but we changed the way diplomacy is done’ (Williams in Cooper, 2000:365). The most tangible achievement for the global ban on anti-personnel land-mines was to have had 122 countries sign up to a conference that was held in Ottawa in 1997. The work of a group of like-minded countries received much credit and remains a firm example of the symbiotic relationship the state has with NGOs.

¹⁵ Kelly, op. cit., p. 287

¹⁶ Allan Ramsay (2006) *Is Diplomacy Dead?* Contemporary Review, 288 Autumn, p. 273.

¹⁷ See, for example, Hoffman, John. (2003). *Reconstructing Diplomacy. British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 5 (4), 525-542. Hoffman claims that ‘the state is incoherent, and that this incoherence necessarily extends itself to statist diplomacy...traditional or conventional notions of diplomacy’ must be avoided if we are to utilize the plural nature of modern diplomacy.’ p. 526.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 619.

¹⁹ Ramsay, op. cit.

²⁰ George Modelski. (1972). *Principles of World Politics*. New York: Free Press, pp, 187 – 190.

²¹ Carne Ross (2007) *Independent Diplomat: Dispatches from an Unaccountable Elite*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 207 – 222.

²² *ibid.*

require going as far as ‘abolishing the idea of diplomacy itself.’²³ Jackson views traditional diplomacy as a ‘self serving barrier to progress’ and ‘standing in the way of an urgently needed international revolution’.²⁴ He goes on to argue that the nascent, plural diplomatic system ‘must not be merely fitted into the state system. It must displace the politically pragmatic and morally compromised arrangements of conventional diplomacy’.²⁵

In the past, diplomats were able to laugh off such sentiment. As a former Canadian Ambassador remarked of Modelski’s opinion of his profession: “he must have failed the entry to the foreign service!”²⁶ Today, such flippancy is less assured. Budgets are being tightened, outside consultancy firms are ‘brought-in’ to streamline and downsize and diplomacy and diplomats stand on the brink of backwater status (again). Amidst this hostile environment and evolving international relations system, traditional diplomatic institutions are faced with a simple choice: reform and innovate or face irrelevance.

The reform of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and traditional diplomacy has been underway for some time now (as part of the reform of many countries entire public administration systems). Ministries have learned from business, for example, that people are the only real resource in diplomacy; that these people can be fast tracked if they show potential, or, if they show signs of turning into a modern-day Sir Les Patterson,²⁷ phased out under aggressive ‘up or out’ promotion policies. Ambassadors today are more akin to CEOs, project managing diverse networks of official and unofficial diplomats in tackling new security threats that do not respect the traditional international landscape. Diplomatic training, once antiquated, is now be outsourced to many specialist institutions providing esoteric training for fledgling diplomats.²⁸ And the ongoing revolution in information and communications technology continues to offer new ‘virtual’ ways to conduct diplomacy. Chief among the long list of reforms, however, has been the mass government stampede toward public diplomacy.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Robert Jackson (2002) Martin Wight’s Thought on Diplomacy. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 13 (4), pp. 14-15.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ Interview with Ambassador Claude Laverdure, Paris, September, 2005. At the time of the interview, H.E. Laverdure was the Canadian Ambassador to France.

²⁷ Dr Sir Lesley Colin Patterson is an obese, lecherous and offensive fictional character – the Australian cultural attaché to the Far East - portrayed by the comedian Barry Humphries. In Humphries’ words, ‘The English merchant bankers and commodity brokers and Australian accountants there all recognised Les as someone they knew in the Australian diplomatic corps, and took him to their hearts.’ Barry Humphries (1982) *A Nice Night’s Entertainment: Sketches and Monologues*. London: Harper Collins, pp. 178-83.

²⁸ Dr. John Hemery’s Centre for Political and Diplomatic Studies (cpds.co.uk) or the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy (apcd.anu.edu.au/) are two strong examples of experienced and specialized diplomatic training centres.

Public diplomacy is not an entirely new term nor practice, but it is only in the last decade that the conditions have been ideal for its (re)emergence. Today, most advanced diplomatic services – from the Chinese to the Australians – are investing in public diplomacy, and think tanks are also springing up.²⁹ Its popularity relates to its adaptability. Gareth Evans, well ahead of his time, defined public diplomacy as “an exercise in persuasion and influence that extends beyond traditional diplomacy by leveraging a much larger cast of players both inside and outside government.”³⁰ For Evans and many others, the scope and means of public diplomacy is limitless and the cast of players diverse. For example, Canada identifies artists, teachers, students, travellers, researchers, experts and young people as public diplomats, alongside their more recognisable traditional diplomatic brethren. In the context of sports-diplomacy, this push toward public diplomacy is important: it created fertile conditions for such hybrid forms of diplomacy to emerge.

The attraction of sport to diplomacy

Increasingly, traditional diplomats are engaging with sporting organisations and sports people. This emerging network has led to the introduction of the term sports-diplomacy to the diplomatic studies lexicon. This section begins by defining sports-diplomacy, before establishing why traditional diplomacy is drawn to sport in the modern era. This exercise alludes to the type of networks diplomacy is creating in order to stay relevant.

Sports-diplomacy falls under the wide umbrella of public diplomacy. It involves representative and diplomatic activities undertaken by sports people on behalf of and in conjunction with their governments. The practice is facilitated by traditional diplomacy and uses sports people and sporting events to engage, inform and create a favourable image among foreign publics and organisations, to shape their perceptions in a way that is (more) conducive to the sending government’s foreign policy goals.³¹ While traditional diplomacy is the means to a state’s foreign policy ends, sports-diplomacy is the means to the means of

²⁹ The University of Southern California’s Centre for Public Diplomacy, for example.

³⁰ Evans G., Grant B. (1995) *Australia’s Foreign Relations in the world of the 1990s*. Melbourne: Melbourne Uni Press, p. 66.

³¹ Thanks to Dr. Caitlin Byrne of Bond University for help with this definition.

those ends. There are six reasons driving what this paper refers to as the *sporticization* of diplomacy.³²

First, changes in the diplomatic environment have forced diplomacy to adapt and experiment. Engaging with sports-diplomacy demonstrates a proactive government response to the post-Cold War irrelevance, obsolescence and deliquescence arguments. By employing sports as an indirect means to foreign policy ends, the image of a state's foreign policy can change among a public from aloof, hermetic and irrelevant to one that is innovative, effective and public (and fun even).

Second, sport and sporting institutions are increasing in scope, power and appeal. Governments, always savvy to the whims of the public, are keen to coat tail on the growth in sport and the relevance of powerful non state actors such as FIFA or sporting demi-gods like David Beckham. Nobody is opposed to sports: it has a global, universal quality: 'Who is against sport? No one, or almost no one. The Inuits are as interested in the World Cup as the Argentinians, Congolese and Europeans.'³³ Among the public there appears to be a collective moral myopia³⁴ when it comes to sport: if only the public saw politicians and diplomats in the same light. Governments are hoping to tap into some of that sporting magic and who can blame or criticise them: better sport than nukes.

Third and related, publics the world over seem exhausted after the extraordinary amount of violence of the twentieth century. These publics are more likely to be engaged by soft power overtures from nations, such as cultural or sporting exchanges. In the post-modern information age, sport, culture and diplomacy are no longer niche or backwater institutions but powerful foreign policy tools. Expressions of hard power through diplomacy based on traditional, high politics of arms treaties, border demarcation or alliances (while still

³² A future paper will explore the reaction to government's encroaching on sport - the 'diplomatisation/politicization' of sport. While governments are reaching out to sporting publics across the globe, sporting organisations such as the IOC are growing in diplomatic influence, stature and efficacy. Such organisations benefited from the 'feeling of sports' from Cold War ideological straitjackets, to the point where it can be argued that FIFA, for example, is now a political and diplomatic actor of some significance. FIFA represents not only the 'world game' but its concomitant values - again, at least on paper, fair play, sportsmanship, citizenship and so on.

³³ R. Redeker. (2008). Sport as an opiate of international relations: The myth and illusion of sport as a tool of foreign diplomacy, *Sport in Society*, 11 (4), p. 495-496.

³⁴ Consider the case of French cycling star Richard Virenque. Despite being convicted of cheating, taking drugs and lying by the courts, and sentenced to forfeitures that were tantamount to a prison term, Virenque saw his popularity soar to unprecedented levels. For Redeker (2008) 'a single one of these infractions, on the part of a political figure, would have had the opposite effect of increasing the hateful suspicion directed toward politicians.'

important, obviously) does not hold the same amount of attention among the public as they used to.

Fourth, sport is a major part of modern life and, driven by an Akira-style media, is worldwide in its audience. If the diplomatic posture, image and message is thoughtfully crafted and aligned to positive sporting values, the perceptions of foreign publics can be significantly altered. Beijing's 2008 'coming out' party where they used the Olympic Games to foster an image of China as a rising, modern, economic powerhouse is a strong example. Despite the at times farcical build-up to the most expensive Games in history, China's image has gone from strength to strength since the 2008 Games. Using sport, it is likely that Brazil will proselytize a new image of a South American regional leader and powerhouse on the back of the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics.

A fifth reason that sports and diplomacy are moving closer concerns representation. As an institution, diplomacy represents the business of peace, and the notion of international society amidst international anarchy. Through negotiation, compromise and conciliation based on clear and accurate communications it embodies noble values (at least on paper), and diplomacy's 'open, genial and civil'³⁵ practitioners are men and women that personify 'calm, self-control, patience and good temper.'³⁶

Likewise, sport represents noble qualities and values that appeal to governments and their diplomats. Former United States Ambassador to Denmark, H.E. Jim Cain, said as much at the 2nd Hague Conference in Diplomacy in 2009:

"Sports can be a powerful medium to reach out and build relationships...across cultural and ethnic divides, with a positive message of shared values: values such as mutual respect, tolerance, compassion, discipline, equality of opportunity and the rule of law. In many ways, sports can be a more effective foreign policy resource than the carrot or the stick."

The U.S. Department of State typifies Ambassador Cain's rallying call "to aggressively use sports as a diplomatic tool" through programs like their *SportsUnited* initiative.³⁷ After 9/11, the U.S. Government used sport as a way to engage young Muslims

³⁵ Satow in Bull, op. cit., p. 175.

³⁶ Nicolson in Bull, op. cit., p.175.

³⁷ *SportsUnited* is an international sports programming initiative designed to help start a dialogue at the grassroots level with non-elite boys and girls ages 7-17. The programs aid youth in discovering how success in athletics can be translated into the development of life skills and achievement in the classroom. Foreign participants are given an opportunity to establish links with U.S. sports professionals and exposure to American

across Africa, the Middle East and South Asia – a demographic that had previously been difficult to reach. As Walters notes of the reasons behind the attraction of State to sport:

‘Only certain cultures or segments of society show strong interest in speaking English, travelling to the United States, attending a classical music event, or participating in a discussion on human rights. On the other hand, virtually all cultures and all citizens have an interest in and appreciation for sport. This makes it one of the best methods for exchange - especially for diplomats operating in an age when the opinions of foreign publics are so crucial for success.’³⁸

Today, the Department of State regularly employs ‘Sports Envoys’ such as former figure skater Michelle Kwan and baseballer Cal Ripken Jr. to engage in sports-diplomacy. Where the US hegemon leads, other nations will follow. Sports-Diplomacy exchanges can promote international understanding and friendship, as well as dispel stereotypes and prejudices. Not to mention they are also ‘low-risk, low-cost and high profile.’³⁹

Diplomacy and sport, sixth, share other loose affiliations and these have been amplified with globalization. Just as the soldier is no longer a soldier but also an aid worker, a construction worker, a diplomat, etc., the same can be said of both the diplomat and the sportsperson. Their roles are changing and more awareness of social responsibility is being publicly demanded of both professions. Under such conditions, sport and diplomacy naturally gravitate toward one another: both institutions are staffed by patriots representing their state as a privilege of international duty and whether it is the roundtable or the running track, both sports people and diplomats want to win for their state. Therefore, there is an obvious symbiosis.

Seventh and finally, sports-diplomacy can be a ‘soft’ way of exploring or signalling a foreign policy shift between estranged states. The best example of this is, of course, the 1971 case of Ping-Pong Diplomacy, however a more recent example involves the cricket-

life and culture. Americans learn about foreign cultures and the challenges young people from overseas face today.

³⁸ Caroline Walters, ‘Sports Diplomacy is the New comeback Kid,’ August 3, 2007, viewed on 29th April, 2011, http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/newswire/cpdblog_detail/070803_sports_diplomacy_is_the_new_comeback_kid/

³⁹ Marc Keech and Barrie Houlihan (1999) Sport and the end of apartheid. *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 88 (349), pp. 109 – 121.

diplomacy between Pakistan and India.⁴⁰ In March, 2011, Pakistani Prime Minister Gilani accepted an invitation from his Indian counterpart, Manmohan Singh, to attend the Cricket World Cup semi-final match between the South Asian rivals. After, years of acrimony, suspicions and duplicity brought on by the 2008 Mumbai Terrorists attacks the occasion was ‘an attempt to use sport to create a feel-good atmosphere between the two countries at a time when the atmosphere of suspicion and hostility towards Pakistan in India is very strong.’⁴¹ Tapping into the ‘Mohali Spirit’ – the special atmosphere - gave bilateral ties a firm push between the two nations and paid dividends. The Singh-Gilani talks are to be followed by a meeting of foreign secretaries by mid-2011 and commerce secretaries even sooner.

The India-Pakistan episode of cricket-diplomacy suggest that sports-diplomacy has strong potential. Individuals are excited about its prospects. FIFA President Joseph ‘Sepp’ M. Blatter, outlining his future vision for sport, argues that:

‘FIFA is no longer merely an institution that runs our sport. It has now taken on a social, cultural, political and sporting dimension in the struggle to educate children and defeat poverty. At the same time it has also become a powerful economic phenomenon.... Football can move mountains.’⁴²

After privately meeting with Mr. Blatter in 2009, U.S. President and self-confessed sports nut Barrack Obama, lauded FIFA’s ‘determination to break down social barriers, promote tolerance and encourage harmony between people around the world by spreading a message of hope by means of football.’⁴³ Whether it is Queen Elizabeth in her 2010 Christmas Speech⁴⁴ or David Beckham using his fame and sport to raise awareness of Children’s

⁴⁰ By inviting a team from then archenemy the US to visit and play a few matches, the Chinese demonstrated they might be willing to engage with the U.S. The invitation came to be known as ‘the ping heard around the world;’ no wonder, no groups of American had been invited to China since the Communist takeover in 1949. The story is well known: three months later, U.S. President Richard Nixon visited Beijing to begin the diplomatic process of normalising sino-U.S. relations.

⁴¹ James Rupert, ‘Cricket Diplomacy May Smooth Tension Between India, Pakistan,’ March 28th 2011, viewed, 28th April, 2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-03-28/cricket-diplomacy-at-world-cup-may-smooth-tension-between-india-pakistan.html>.

⁴² Joseph Blatter, ‘Football has a socio-cultural dimension,’ august 12 2009, viewed on April 29th, 2011, <http://www.fifa.com/aboutfifa/federation/president/presidentialcolumn/news/newsid=1089403.html#blatter+football+socio+cultural+dimension>,

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ In a roving 2010 speech about the King James Bible and sport, H.M. Queen Elizabeth – a keen sportswoman herself - said ‘one of the most powerful’ ways to ‘build communities and create harmony, ‘is through sport and games.’ She has seen firsthand ‘just how important sport is in bringing people together from all backgrounds,

rights,⁴⁵ the medium of sports to spread a diplomatic message is proving increasingly popular. More and more governments are using sport to amplify their diplomatic message. However, beyond all the soft and positive rhetoric, the negative side of the debate over mixing sport and diplomacy threatens to spoil the comeback.

from all walks of life and from all age-groups.’ She speaks fondly of ‘how important sport and games were to become in promoting harmony and common interests.’

⁴⁵ Speaking of his 2008 visit to Sierra Leon in his capacity of UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador to raise global awareness of the issue of Child Survival, Beckham noted that ‘Saving these children’s lives is a top priority for UNICEF – and as an Ambassador, I hope I can help to draw attention to this issue across the world.’

But wait...it's a game of two halves

The second half of the debate describes a different, more awkward relationship between sports and diplomacy that its advocates choose to ignore. Despite the endorsement from powerful figures and institutions, there are several negative – and more obvious – issues that result by ‘mixing’ sport with diplomacy. If these issues continue to be ignored, sports-diplomacy will be regarded with suspicion by the global sporting public and fail to realise its potential. This section has two sub-sections that outline several outstanding issues that are holding back the development of sports-diplomacy.

If sport and politics don't mix, why should diplomacy be any different?

If sport and politics do not mix, then why should diplomacy – as the international representation of that polity's interests – and sport mix? There are five observations relating to and informing this persistent question.

The first is that, of course, politics and sport do mix: that most countries have a Minister of Sport sort of gives the game away. When sport provides a useful function, it is usually ‘co-opted by politics.’⁴⁶ International sport provides an arena for governments to demonstrate various types of superiority, from their athletic prowess to the ideology of a particular system of state. Governments are well aware of the audience, reach and power of the opiate of the masses and have long been drawn toward sport and sporting festivals. All kinds of governments, as Allison notes:

‘have endorse international sporting competition as a testing ground for the nation or for a political “system.” German Nazis, Italian Fascists, Soviet and Cuban Communists, Chinese Maoists, western capitalist democrats, Latin American juntas – all have played the game and believed in it.’⁴⁷

In this respect, governments use sport as a tool, a diplomatic vehicle to spread a political message or to antagonize rivals, for example. Or, conversely, a government can insist upon selective mixing of politics and sport, as was the case with the Chinese Government and the lead up to the 2008 Olympic Games.

⁴⁶ Steven J. Jackson and Stephen Haigh (2008) *Between and Beyond Politics: Sport and foreign policy in a globalizing world*, *Sport in Society*, 11 (4), p. p. 354.

⁴⁷ L. Allison (1993) *The Changing Politics of Sport*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 17.

When politics and sports do mix, however, it is rarely with the blessing of the sports fan. A second observation this paper makes is that while politics/diplomacy and sports inevitably can and do mix, perhaps they shouldn't? After all, other than a ping-pong match, a rugby boycott and some cricket, the collusions between sport and diplomacy are hardly myriad. They do not suggest a sustainable pattern.

The reason is that sport is sacrosanct. Set free by globalization and driven by increasingly powerful and relevant organisations like UEFA or the IOC, sport has a 'spiritual power'⁴⁸ and exists in hallowed realms, 'above' government.⁴⁹ Sport is something magical, an 'ideal not to be tainted by the corrupt and divisive elements of society.'⁵⁰ When governments and their diplomats encroach into this realm – talking up sport as a foreign policy tool, a means to an end – it suggests that they see sport as 'below' them: 'a trivial diversion from any serious human purpose, pursued by 'muddied oafs on flannelled fools' in Kipling's famous phrase.'⁵¹ For the sporting public, politics 'remain ignorant of the true nature of sport.'⁵² Confusing sport-as-sacred with a sport-as-a-tool for political or diplomatic purposes is sacrilegious and disrespectful. Sport is neither 'above' nor 'below' governments – it is *beyond* them and there it should be left, pure, untouched and untapped.⁵³

A related third theoretical observation concerns the sports-diplomats themselves: who are they? Where sport and 'new' diplomacy gains traction and substance is in non-competitive, non-state and non-political environments. Facilitated by IGOs and non-state actors, sportspeople act more like celebrity diplomats,⁵⁴ using their star power to draw the world's attention to international, global issues such as poverty, debt eradication, and pandemic diseases without a state agenda.⁵⁵ This confusion produces more theoretical

⁴⁸ Redeker, op. cit., p. 499.

⁴⁹ Allison, op. cit., p. 5.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 5 -6

⁵¹ Allison, 5-6

⁵² Redeker, 499.

⁵³ As an example, consider the World Cup, which 'the victors, like officiating priests, lift triumphantly to the heavens on the day of victory. No spiritual or intellectual message is conveyed, no hope for humanity, no promise for the human condition comes from this ceremony, where only the law of the strongest are celebrated.' Redeker, op. cit., p. 495.

⁵⁴ See Andrew Cooper (2007) *Celebrity Diplomacy*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

⁵⁵ NGOs and IGOs are crossing into areas that would once have been deemed the preserve of the nation-state. For example, UNICEF is demonstrating that there is a correlation between sport, diplomacy and development by introducing a 2004 Sport For Development programme that is still going strong. Part of this program is to use high-profile athletes to raise awareness of core UN issues such as peace, development and security. The relationship is 'win-win.' more and more sports stars are beginning to realise they have both the responsibility and the power to affect international publics. Soccer star and mega-brand David Beckham's excellent work as a

headaches: the practice is neither sport (because it is not competitive) nor diplomacy (because the state is absent). Perhaps it is too soon to vernacularly speak of the hybrid sports-diplomacy. Diplomacy through sports, sports with diplomacy, sports and diplomacy, are more accurate combinations. Hardly very catchy, but far more accurate. Respecting both the essence and the boundaries between sport and diplomacy is crucial to weaving a more durable relationship than currently exists.

The other sports-diplomats that appear at grander occasions are also not really diplomats, nor Ambassadors, but heads of state and other powerful figures that – frankly – are no strangers to the limelight. While the pre-negotiation and publicity stage of an episode of sports-diplomacy involves mandarin diplomats and diplomatic exchanges, the big moment does not. Instead, powerful figures swoop in to toss the coin or declare the ‘games to begin.’ For the critics of sports-diplomacy, a head of state’s interest in sport is nothing more than a sham, a photo-op, a politician pretending to have a common interest with their subjects to secure a few votes.⁵⁶

Moreover, and fourth, these displays constitute the practice of statecraft and not diplomacy.⁵⁷ Among diplomatic practitioners and theorists, there is agreement that meetings between heads of states are bad for diplomacy. De Commynes, writing in the 15th century, notably remarked that ‘two great princes who wish to establish good personal relations should never meet each other face to face but ought to communicate through wise Ambassadors.’⁵⁸ More recently, Watt comments that ‘heads of government, with their massive egos, their ignorance of the essential details and their ingrained belief in the value of back-slapping ambiguity, simply mess everything up.’⁵⁹

Sports-diplomacy, in this respect, generates the sort of criticism that summit diplomacy attracts. For example, that ‘carefully orchestrated meetings’ between heads of

UN Goodwill Ambassador and Messenger of Peace serves as a case in point. In 2009, for example, Beckham was in South Africa to highlight the global progress that has been made on preventing Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) of HIV. Previously, in 2008, Beckham travelled to Sierra Leone with UNICEF to draw attention to the issue of child survival. Beckham has been involved with UNICEF since 1999.

⁵⁶ Rule 101 of getting into office is to feign interest in a sport or sporting team, but not too successful a figure. For example, former UK PM and rugby fanatic Gordon Brown, a staunch Rangers F.C. fan, fooled us all for about five seconds when he spoke of his ‘love for Raith Rovers’ (perennial under achievers).

⁵⁷ There are subtle differences between the two: a statesman has the choice between both war and peace, whereas the diplomat does not, unless at the behest of the state.

⁵⁸ G. R. Berridge (2002) *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*. London: Palgrave, p. 170.

⁵⁹ Watt in Berridge, op. cit., p. 171

state constitute nothing more than ‘dramatic theatre’ with a sporting backdrop.⁶⁰ In addition, diplomatic meeting conducted in the media and public glare is anathema to sound diplomacy, which requires privacy to breed trust and build relations. The media and public have a derogatory effect on both heads of state and the quality of diplomacy because, usually, ‘all rational discussion is abandoned in favour of interminable propaganda speeches’ addressed not to one’s political opponent but to the national electorate at home and the public abroad.⁶¹ Add to the venues where sports-diplomacy occurs ‘the power of television and sprinkle the surface with exotic locations of great symbolic significance,’ and sports-diplomacy is ‘an irresistible dish’ for statesmen.⁶² There are other issues: any diplomatic meeting generated by a sporting event is bound to be too short, or that possibilities for negotiation are limited because the heads of state outlines their objectives before the meeting has taken place (and to renege will be viewed as a weakness by their electorate), or who foots the exorbitant cost of securing the venue? Or, how does sports-diplomacy deal with losing? If the event is competitive – as in the case of North Korea’s 7-0 drubbing by Portugal in the 2010 World Cup – then how does that affect the diplomatic mood?

Back-slapping heads of state pretending to like sport does not bode well for sports-diplomacy as a positive, neutral force for good. The sporting public are no fools and images of fireside chats or high-fiving politicians will struggle to be seen as little more than a political sham.

If sports-diplomacy doesn’t work in theory, how can it work in practice?

There are other issues beyond the ‘politics and sport don’t mix’ rhetoric. These theoretical anomalies and observations also stand to affect the development and practice of sports-diplomacy.

First, the two terms are theoretically paradoxical. To understand this paradox the two terms must be accurately defined. Diplomacy certainly exists in the context of a hostile and competitive international relations system however its essence is peace, a foreign policy tool short of war.

⁶⁰ Costas M. Constantinou (1996) *On the Way to Diplomacy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 95-97.

⁶¹ Berridge, op. cit., p. 6.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 173.

Sport is a broad, slippery term to define. Etymologically speaking, the origins of the English word 'sport' lie in the French word *desport*, roughly translated as *leisure*. And for Kyle:

“sport” is a non-ancient and vague term at best. “Athletics” usually suggests competition, training, prizes and the goal of victory. “Physical education” implies instruction and the exercise of the body. “Recreation” or “leisure” applies to non-work, relaxation and rejuvenation with pleasure or fun as a goal. “sport” is used as a general rubric for all these areas as well as hunting, dance and even board games.’⁶³

Sport is a complex phenomena and to generalise is difficult: sport can be amateur/professional, junior/senior, local/national/international and on and on. However, where diplomacy and sport diverge is that the latter is can be viewed ‘simultaneously and without contradiction as unifying, universalizing, progressive and liberating, or as divisive, fragmenting, constraining and destructive.’⁶⁴ The essence of sport - from the Greeks through to the present - is unmistakable: competition based on winning, at any costs. Therefore and second, sport-as-competition contradicts diplomacy as the business of peace.⁶⁵

Defrance and Chamot suggest other points of divergence:

‘the two cultures – sporting and diplomatic – are poles apart...in the former, agents express themselves through their body, in the latter, they work with words: while the former show themselves, the latter act with discretion: the rise of ‘adrenalin’ among sportsmen differs from the quiet gestures of diplomats, the clamour of the stadium is the opposite of the peaceful atmosphere of embassies.’⁶⁶

⁶³ Doug Kyle (1983) Directions of ancient sport history, *Journal of Sports History*, 10 (1).

⁶⁴ Jackson and Haigh, op. cit., p.355

⁶⁵ There are more general difference between sports and traditional diplomacy . There are other difference between diplomacy and sport that also have to be acknowledged and reconciled if sports-diplomacy is to further develop. Traditional diplomacy occurs in a highly structured environment where the outcome is often decided before the process takes place. Sport, on the other hand, is unpredictable and fluid. Diplomacy is ‘oratical game of cunning and manoeuvre’ that occurs between the ‘professionals,’ officially accredited representatives of a state, whereas sporting exchanges involve a wide range of government and increasingly powerful non-governmental actors. A final difference between traditional diplomacy and sporting exchanges is that the former takes place behind closed doors, far away from public and media scrutiny, while acts of sport and diplomacy take place amidst the public and are open to scrutiny.

⁶⁶ Jacques Defrance and Jean Marc Chamot. (2008). The Voice of Sport: Expressing a foreign policy through silent cultural action: The case of French foreign policy after the Second World War, in *Sport in Society*, 11 (4), p. 395.

While sports-diplomacy promotes catchphrases like ‘it’s not the winning, it’s the taking part that counts,’ sport is actually built on *Lombardisms* like ‘winning isn’t everything – it’s the *only* thing.’ Sports fans do not watch the accoutrements of sport - their heroes training, or the arrival of the dignitaries at the stadium: they watch battles, ‘war minus the shooting,’ as Orwell commented in 1945.

In the present, as in the past, sport is associated with suffering and war – the antithesis of diplomacy.⁶⁷ Sport is universally imbued with references to war, battle and tribalism. For Fischer sport ‘imitates’ war, ‘a sampling of the daily sports page reveals conquest, battle, war, destruction, victory...the taking of manhood, honour and prestige.’⁶⁸ Hardly, the sort of values that sports-diplomacy champions. Virtues, values and ‘humanitarian gestures,’ Redeker writes, ‘have no place in sports;’ they ‘blatantly contradict sportive logic.’⁶⁹

Through sport-as-competition, sports fans become emotionally involved with their national team – and the anthems, mass shows of patriotism and symbolism certainly heighten the sense of nationalism. In this respect, sport again contradicts diplomacy, which serves to minimize friction. International sporting exchanges are emotive and charged occasions where the suggestion of using sport as a means of bringing estranged nations closer together can seem far fetched. As Delay notes, ‘completion merely intensifies enmity; sport severs itself from the civility required by rules and diplomacy, becoming a prelude to incivility and, in the worst case, violence.’

This inherent violence contradicts the essence of diplomacy-as-peace whether it be riots or, in the worse case, war and terrorism.⁷⁰ Sport’s competitive and at times tribal essence mean that unsavoury actors can – similarity –use sport to publicise their cause, to spread fear

⁶⁷ Segal informs that during the ancient Olympics, the word for competition was *agon*, where the English word agony is derived from; similarly, the etymology of the words athlete and athletics come from the Greek word *athlos*, a contest taking place in a stadium or on a battlefield. See Waldo E. Sweet (1987) *Sport and Recreation in Ancient Greece*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

⁶⁸ Norman Fischer. (2002). *Competitive Sport’s Imitation of War: Imaging the Completeness of Virtue*, in *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, XXIX, p. 16.

⁶⁹ Redeker, op .cit., p. 497 - 8

⁷⁰ One oft touted example of sports fanning the flames of conflict instead of mitigating differences are the “Football Wars” between El Salvador and Honduras in 1969. Rising tensions between the two states stemmed from a flow of immigrants from El Salvador into Honduras. As economic problems worsened, many Hondurans blamed the immigrants. The Honduran government finally kicked out the immigrants from El Salvador. As the two countries became entwined in an increasingly tense conflict, qualifying matches between the two nations began for the World Cup. After the matches, violence erupted from both sets of fans. Although the conflict between El Salvador and Honduras went much deeper than sports, the ultra-nationalist sentiments of the clashing fans gave the war its name.

or to distribute a message to a vast sporting audience. For example, between 1972⁷¹ and 2005, ‘171 sport-related terrorist attacks have been logged.’⁷² These numbers confirm a negative aspect of sports-diplomacy: just as sport serves for the dissemination of positive sporting values, there is a ‘strong underlying connection’ between using sport to publicise anti-diplomatic messages.⁷³ Writing on the attraction of soccer to terrorists, for example, Kuper notes that:

‘the main allure of soccer to terrorists is the game’s global reach. Terrorism is a form of public relations. The aim is to spread as the greatest fear with the least effort. To do that, terrorist seek out the most public places and events. That means sport.’⁷⁴

The beauty of sport is only given relevance by its ugliness – in the case of the Munich Games, the fact that they went ahead, despite such tragic beginnings. This timeless dualism is the reality of sport. Terrorism, war and violence are manifest in sport. Sport is more closely associated – in the sports fans mind, at least – with competition, winning, war, violence, than it is with the business of peace.

Sports-diplomacy, therefore and third, has a problem with duplicity. When individuals like FIFA President Sepp Blatter say that football can move poverty, develop and race mountains because it represents peace, good sportsmanship and citizenship, we wonder ‘is he talking about the same game that produces Thierry Henry handballers and Zinedine Zidane head-butters?’ The reality of sport also produces cheaters, rapists, dog-fighters, dopers and gamblers, and a whole host of nasty, nasty characters and elements. So, when a Department of State official says that ‘sports-diplomacy is not really about competition at all. It is about respect for diversity, leadership, teamwork and dialogue,’ it can sound a shade idealistic.⁷⁵

This gap between sporting reality and sporting idealism is bad for sports-diplomacy, because it affects the credibility of the messenger, which means the message – no matter how

⁷¹ 1972 provides a case in point – the kidnap/murder of eleven Israeli athletes by the pro-Palestinian group Black September at the beginning of the Munich Olympic Games.

⁷² Steven J. Jackson and Stephen Haigh. (2008). *Between and Beyond Politics: Sport and foreign policy in a globalizing world*, *Sport in Society*, 11 (4), p. 351.

⁷³ Kristine Toohey. (2008). *Terrorism, sport and public policy in the risk society*, in *Sport in Society*, 11 (4), p. 429.

⁷⁴ Simon Kuper (2010) *Soccer Against the Enemy: How the World’s Most Popular Sports Starts and Fuels Revolutions and Keeps Dictators in Power*, New York: Nation Books. p. 293

⁷⁵ Walters, *ibid.*

positive – will fall on deaf ears.⁷⁶ As Redeker notes, ‘countries think they are using sports for their own purposes, for the furthering of some political strategy, when in reality...people pick up just the opposite message their states think they are sending.’⁷⁷ Words and messages that have some meaning in political reality are nothing more than ‘empty sounds...after passing through the gates of sport.’⁷⁸

An educated sporting public is well aware that the true heroes like John Charles⁷⁹ and teams like the Corinthians⁸⁰ are the exception rather than the norm. Sport is a highly emotive, charged game for its fans. As Liverpool F.C icon Bill Shankly said of football, ‘it’s not a matter of life and death...it’s much more than that.’ While sport can embody the sort of positive values Blatter and Co. tout, it is first and foremost associated with competition and victory at the expense of your opponent. If sports-diplomacy is to have a future, then heralding sport as a soft and fluffy panacea is redundant, because it is not true. The diplomatic understanding of sport seems quite different from the mainstream. Therefore, meaning there is a danger of sports-diplomacy advocates looking quite ignorant, aloof and distantly idealistic.

Fourth, the term sports-diplomacy, its advocates and messengers do seem rather insubstantial. The danger of combining two powerful institutions like sport and diplomacy is that the hybrid often amounts to something lesser than its individual elements. This trend –

⁷⁶ FIFA and Sepp are hardly public favorite number one anyway

⁷⁷ Redeker, op. cit., p. 18.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ John Charles, was a Welsh international footballer best remembered for spells with Leeds United and Juventus. Rated by many as the greatest all-round footballer ever to come from Wales, he was equally adept at centre-forward or centre-back. He has since been included in the Football League 100 Legends and was inducted into the Football Hall of Fame. He was never cautioned or sent off during his entire career, due to his philosophy of never kicking or intentionally hurting opposing players. Standing at 6 feet 2 inches, he was nicknamed *Il Gigante Buono* – The Gentle Giant.

⁸⁰ The Corinthian Football Club was a football team founded in London in 1882 and playing at various venues including Crystal Palace and Queen's Club. The team originally determined to play only friendly matches and often played other amateur clubs, especially teams in the London area. They supplied large numbers of players to the England football team. During the 1880s, the majority of England caps against Scotland were awarded to Corinthian players, and for two England matches against Wales in 1894 and 1895, the entire team consisted of members of the club. Corinthian initially refused to join The Football League or to compete in the FA Cup due to one of their original rules forbidding the club to "compete for any challenge cup or prizes of any description", but they finally competed in a competition in 1900 when they beat Aston Villa, then League champions, in the Sheriff of London Shield. After joining the Amateur Football Association and being banned from playing the top home opposition, all of whom were members of The Football Association, the team increased its touring of the world, popularising football. Real Madrid adopted Corinthian's white shirts and Sport Club Corinthians Paulista in Brazil adopted their name. After a visit to Sweden in 1904, a Swedish tournament called the Corinthian Bowl was set up to commemorate them. In 1904, Corinthian beat Manchester United 11–3, which remains United's biggest defeat.

‘over-hyphenation’⁸¹ - is common in diplomacy and diplomatic studies and suggests a pattern: a journalist comes up with a catchy headline like ‘cricket-diplomacy,’ practitioners pick it up and run with it, and then some academic will come along and deconstruct it, often critically. While the appearance of terms like sports-diplomacy, cyber-diplomacy and trade-diplomacy suggest a welcome ‘renaissance’ in the theory and practice of diplomacy, there is a worry that its form is diluted through hybridisation.⁸² Not to mention, such terms can confuse the role, meaning and purpose of diplomacy at a time when the traditional diplomatic institution can ill afford an identity crisis.

Concluding remarks

Less pedantic, sporting obsessed punters might say who cares what it’s called, so long as it works? Sports-diplomacy works sporadically and on a case by case basis precisely because the sort of questions this theoretical investigation has generated are body-swerved. These issues are important to explore, because if the hybrid does not work in theory, then it is unlikely to have a productive, long-term practical future. They demand further empirical investigation.

This paper believes that sports-diplomacy does have a bright future. For those involved, a new perception is offered to challenge entrenched social constructions of the ‘enemy.’ Sport can transcend borders, security rivalries and break the ice over nuclear standoffs. Through sport, an opportunity can present itself to translate dangerous relations into acceptable, friendly and competitive rivalry. The ‘low’ political agenda – campaigns for sustainable development, worldwide literacy, or human security, for example - can be thrust into the global sporting conscience if a Beckham or a Griffey Jr. offers their substantial representative clout. With further research, respect and practice sports-diplomacy may indeed move mountains. But for the moment, the global sporting public will take some convincing. No matter what the diplomats and politicians may make of sport: ‘we still smell that dust. And hear the trumpets. And feel the glory.’⁸³

⁸¹ Thanks and credit must go to Halvard Leira of the Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI) for this comment.

⁸² K. Rana (2002) *Bilateral Diplomacy*. New Delhi, Manas Publication, p. 8.

⁸³ Erich Segal in Sweet, op. cit., p. vii.

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