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Vincent, John and Ted Kian. Sport, new media, and national identity. Routledge Handbook of Sport and New Media. Billings, A. and Marie Hardin. eds. New York. Routledge. 2013. 0415532760. pp. 299-310.

Date prepared: 01/06/2014

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SPORT, NEW MEDIA, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

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Globalization has added significant impetus to media coverage of major international sporting events such as the Olympic Games and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup. More than half of the world's population watches both these quadrennial international sporting events (Associated Press, 2008; FIFA, 2011). For the duration of the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup, the symbiotic relationship between sport and the media intensifies as both traditional and new media compete to attract readers, viewers, and advertisers. This chapter provides insight into what Rowe, McKay and Miller (1998: 133) described as the "sport-nationalism-media troika," or the intersection between elite national athletes and teams, mass media, and national media audiences. The sport-nationalism-media troika is an important arena where dominant cultural ideologies about national identities are (re)produced and challenged (Crolley and Hand, 2006).

In this chapter we examine how mass media frame an overt nationalistic "us versus them" rhetoric to generate interest and excitement in the "imagined community" through the lens of English newspaper coverage of the English national soccer team competing in the World Cup and European Championship tournaments. This is then compared with the less jingoistic support of the home nation in National Broadcasting Company's (NBC) sportscasts of the United States athletes and teams competing in the Olympic Games. Finally, we provide several insights about the sport-social media-national identity nexus from the UEFA 2012 EURO tournament and the 2012 London Olympiad. These were among the first major international sporting events to feel the global diffusion and captivating, interactive influence of Twitter and Facebook.

National identity and sport

Guibernau (2007: 23) defined a nation as a "...community, sharing a common culture, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, having a common past and a common project for the future, and claiming the right to rule itself." Guibernau's definition emphasized both the territorial

demarcations and the political components of a nation state while also acknowledging the importance of a shared sense of history. It also recognized the collective sense of belonging, and the distinguishing characteristics and traits that form the national culture. Von der Lippe (2002: 374) articulated how national identity is largely defined by "how a citizenry sees and thinks about themselves in relation to others." Thus, national identity itself is a multifaceted social construction of history, which is neither "...fixed and unalterable nor wholly fluid and amenable to unlimited construction," but rather "is both given and constantly reconstituted" (Parekh, 1994: 5–6).

Guibernau (2007) outlined how national identity is important because it allows citizens to "...regard as their own the accomplishments of their fellow nationals" (p.169). In this regard, of particular cultural significance are major international sporting competitions where collective identity has been (re)constructed through athletes and teams since the Greek Olympic Games (Hill, 1996). Traditionally, male athletes playing for their country are usually the representatives of popular national identity. Accordingly, a national sports team's performance at major international sporting events can reawaken the visceral emotions of national identity politics (Bairner, 2001).

While the original ethos of both the World Cup and the Olympic Games was to promote positive international relations and foster mutual understanding, in practice they can also provide nations with opportunities to demonstrate athletic superiority and, by association, political, economic, and cultural exceptionalism. As such they are often used as a forum to (re)present narratives and images of a nation and provide a stage for a country to be seen as strong and vibrant. Major international competitions provide an opportunity for a nation to publicly bask in the reflected glory of national successes (Coakley, 2009). The successes or failures of a home country's athletes or teams can be reported as a symbol of the nation's overall health and well-being (Tuck, 2003). That is one reason many nations, regardless of their political persuasion, invest significant resources in nurturing elite athletes and teams (Cashmore, 1996). As such, international sport is a site where political ideologies are contested. International sport is also an arena replete with contradictions and tensions, which enables marginal groups to potentially use it as a platform to galvanize support for symbolic forms of resistance (Coakley, 2009).

The "sport-nationalism-media troika"

Billings (2008: xi) articulated, "sports media matter because they are the way most of us consume sports." The universal appeal of major international sporting events makes them important arenas to examine various cultural identities, with collective, national identity being preeminent. In contrast to most local and regional sport, which is often viewed live at the event by supporters, the consumption of major international sporting events is done predominantly through mass media, via either television or radio broadcasts, internet live streams, and newspaper accounts. Billings (2008: xi) noted that international "... sports bond societies and cultures in ways that nothing else can" and this is underpinned by the pivotal role of sport media in creating collective cultural memories. Guibernau (2007) articulated how nationalism is created through mediated accounts and images of shared history and culture from glorious bygone eras.

In the context of the Olympic Games, a prime example of how a moment of mediated sport became ingrained collective memory for most Americans is the "Miracle on Ice." With an inexperienced team of amateur collegians, the US ice hockey team's victory over the experienced Soviet Union in the 1980 Winter Olympic Games, became known as the "Miracle on Ice,"

after commentator Al Michael's famous line, "Do you believe in miracles?" Occurring in the context of the Cold War, Butterworth (2009) noted how important a cultural form mediated international sport is because of its ability to shape public opinion about social and geopolitical issues.

Similarly, for Canadians, the fabled "shot heard around the world" resonates. In 1972, an historic ice hockey series dubbed the Summit Series took place between the Soviet Union national team and Team Canada, which consisted of the best Canadian players from the North American-based National Hockey League. This series illustrated how a hockey tournament can create ardent nationalism. The contest represented a pivotal meeting between two hockey superpowers for world hockey supremacy and comprised eight games (the first four in Canada and the last four in the Soviet Union), with many prognosticators expecting Canada to win all eight games. Heading into the eighth and final game, each team had three wins and one tie. However, because the Soviets led in goal differential, only a win in game No. 8 would deliver victory for Canada in the series. For many Canadians, one of the most famous collective memories in their nation's sport history occurred with 34 seconds left when Paul Henderson scored the winning goal, dubbed the "shot heard around the world." Earle (1995) noted how 15 million Canadians "shared in the vicarious climax" (p. 114), and how "for once, disparate notions of class, ethnicity and gender were welded into a rare Canadian moment" (p. 108). More recently when Sidney Crosby scored the winning goal for Canada in the gold medal game against arch nemesis, the United States, in the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games, sport journalist Roy MacGregor suggested Crosby's goal would become a marker of Canadian-ness for future generations and drew on the 'invented tradition' of Canadian hockey nostalgia by writing: "This winning goal will stand with the ones scored by Paul Henderson, hero of the 1972 Summit Series, and Mario Lemieux, hero of the 1987 Canada Cup... He will be forever known for it ..." (MacGregor, 2010: A1)

A lasting impact of the English football (soccer) team's victory over West Germany in 1966 and the ensuing patriotic celebrations was that football, and in particular the final game between England and West Germany, became an important signifier of English national identity (Weight, 2002). Kenneth Wolstenholme's famous commentary as Geoff Hurst scored England's final goal against West Germany, "Some people are on the pitch ... They think it's all over ... It is, now," has become an important part of English folklore (Weight, 2002). English media has replayed it during every subsequent tournament reminding the nation of the success of the "boys of summer" in '66. These evocative sound bites have become ingrained in the habitus or deep-set memory of the 'imagined community,' thus illustrating the profound effect mediated sporting broadcasts can have in unifying citizens around a collective national identity.

Major international sporting competitions have the power to generate interest even among casual sports observers, who can become gripped by the collective experience that is so powerful in shaping national cultural memory (Billings, 2008). Roche (2000) noted how major international sporting events have the power to transcend news and entertainment by making history (p. 167). Billings (2008) described NBC's coverage of the Olympic Games as "... the biggest show on television" (p. 1), while also noting how media coverage of the Olympic Games provides "... a global perspective by routinely introducing mass audiences to cultures they have never witnessed before" (p. 10).

"Inventing traditions" for the "imagined community"

Hobsbawm (1983) noted how historians, politicians, and journalists create the customs, myths, symbols, and rituals that form the national culture. He claimed that national identity is both

reinforced and reinterpreted through the construction of an almost idealized lexicon about the nation in historical and mythological accounts, which he called “invented traditions.” Hobsbawm (1983: 1) defined “invented traditions” as “[a] set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual of symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.” The selective recollection of history plays an important role in creating and reaffirming a shared sense of national consciousness and identity. This identity is reinforced through the selective celebrations of past successes and becomes a part of the collective national consciousness that serves to differentiate the nation from other countries. This selective use of history and the shared sense of destiny it imparts serve not only to differentiate but also promote a sense of exceptionalism or superiority.

Anderson (1983) articulated that the nation is an imagined community “because the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 6). Anderson concluded that a sense of national belonging can be developed through the mass consumption of mediated reports such as newspaper articles, which are read almost simultaneously by thousands of people, who are aware of each of their fellow citizens’ collective existence even though they have never met each other. Anderson’s theory of the imagined community illustrates the pervasive influence mediated accounts have in (re)producing the socially constructed impression that their readers have of their national identity. In the context of a major international sport, Anderson’s concept about a nation being an “imagined community” becomes particularly relevant because of the interaction between media narratives and images of national teams competing in major international sporting events.

Several of these scholars (e.g. Anderson, 1983; Guibernau, 2007; Hobsbawm, 1983) noted that national identity is not fixed, but rather evolves and is re-invented to fit with contemporary culture. However, national identity is highly selective. National characteristics, drawn from “invented traditions,” are often ascribed to a nation’s athletes and teams. Journalists draw on “invented traditions” to generate interest, unity, and patriotism. This often manifests itself in the liberal use of personal pronouns in newspaper articles. Personal pronouns describe “our” athletes or “our” team, in comparison with the “other” nations’ athletes or teams. This is often done in an “us versus them” invective, as the “imagined community” follows the fortunes of athletes who have become symbolic national warriors during international competition. The use of personal pronoun binaries can serve to create tension and conflict, which could translate into intolerance and even xenophobia (Tuck, 2003; Vincent, Kian, Pedersen, Kuntz and Hill, 2010).

We provide brief glimpses into how the sport media national identity nexus plays out in the context of newspaper coverage of the English national men’s soccer (football) team competing in the World Cup and European championships, the NBC’s televised coverage of the United States in the Olympic Games, and finally how social media added to the milieu in the 2012 Olympic Games and UEFA EURO tournament.

“England expects”

Forty years after England’s only World Cup victory in 1966, Vincent *et al.* (2010) examined English newspaper narratives about the English national men’s football team competing in the 2006 World Cup. Newspaper narratives radiated optimism at the beginning of the 2006 World Cup, buoyed by the perception that a ‘golden generation’ of English players could fulfill the

nation's destiny to repeat the glory of the "boys of '66." At the outset of the 2006 World Cup tournament, the front page of the *Daily Mail* urged the nation to unite in support of the English team with a headline of "England expects," in reference to Admiral Horatio Nelson's inspirational signal to the fleet before the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Similarly, newspaper narratives elicited support for "the Eng-er-land" by drawing the invented traditions of Churchillian wartime speeches and Shakespearean lines from Henry V, from scenes from the Siege of Harfleur, and the 1415 Battle of Agincourt.

"Don't mention the war"

Contradicting the official theme of the 2006 World Cup, "a time to make friends," the English newspapers mobilized support for the English team from the "imagined community" by drawing on "us versus them" simplistic dichotomies. Although the coverage was not as egregiously xenophobic as in 1996, it was punctuated with negative German stereotypes. Several newspapers featured prominent articles about English comic John Cleese's alternative 2006 World Cup anthem, 'Don't Mention the War,' which mischievously plays on German sensitivity about World War II. It is a catchphrase made famous by Cleese's alter ego character, the notoriously bigoted Basil Fawlty in the iconic British comedy television show, *Fawlty Towers*. Vincent *et al.* (2010) suggested that these discourses, at least in part, reflected the compensatory defensive anxiety and insecurity of a nation in decline. The nation appeared to be threatened by the creeping supranational influence of the Economic European Union, Celtic devolution within the Union, and relative economic underperformance in an increasingly competitive globalized economy.

"Our finest hour"

Hobsbawm (1990) noted the emotional appeal and role of supporters in the (re)construction of national identity: "The imagined community of millions seems more real as a team The individual, even the one who only cheers, becomes a symbol of the nation himself" (p. 143). Accordingly, Vincent and Hill (2011) examined discourses about the English national team and their "army" of supporters during newspaper coverage of the 2010 World Cup by *The Sun*, England's most widely read "red top" newspaper. *The Sun* featured many photographs of English supporters' performance of Englishness in fan zones and at England games in South Africa. English supporters with painted faces and torsos or wearing 1966 replica jerseys are popular signifiers of popular English identity. English supporters were also photographed dressed in Crusader outfits or with face masks of members of the English royal family, all of which seemed to portray parodies of a historical, idealized form of English identity. However, with the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Britain about to be celebrated, a nationalistic "us versus them" tone was created in the build-up to the England versus Germany round of 16 match, where English fans were photographed posing in RAF uniforms and plastic Tommy helmets, inflatable bomber planes, and Churchill facemasks. Approaching half a century after the English men's national soccer team's only World Cup title, it still nostalgically resonates and the English versus Germany rivalry is still defined through an English frame by the nation's sporting "finest hour," winning the 1966 World Cup. Many of the pervasive narrative themes and images found in the coverage of the 1966 World Cup were still (re)produced in an almost formulaic fashion 46 years later.

Cheering for the Stars and Stripes: NBC's Olympic coverage

The potential of major international sporting events to facilitate a spirit of internationalism and peace consistent with the founder, Baron de Coubertain's original ethos of the modern Olympic Games has frequently been undermined in practice. Generally the Olympic Games "... have been a forum for fervent nationalism" rather than "peaceful competition" (Butterworth, 2007: 187). Illustrating this, Billings, Angelini and Wu (2011) noted how, in the lead-up to the 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing, the Chinese declared their goal was to finish atop the collective medal standings, which would symbolize its emergence as a super-power.

Olympic television broadcasts are often replete with simplistic "us vs. them" dichotomies which serve to differentiate, for example, "... West and East, Democratic and Totalitarian, Christian and Godless, Good and Evil" (Butterworth, 2009: 137). Indeed, any notions of cosmopolitan internationalism have been frequently subverted with nationistic displays of flag-waving, and other acts of what Billig (1995) termed banal nationalism. This celebration of collective identity replete with national flag-waving and dramatic incidents and tensions created in us vs. them binary discourses and images has been captured and reflected in exhaustive media broadcasts. An examination of NBC's coverage of the Olympic Games found a profound national or home-nation bias (Billings, 2008). Between the 1996 Summer and the 2006 Winter Olympic Games, the amount of coverage the US athletes received on NBC ranged between 57% and 40.2% of the total references to all Olympic athletes, which was not merited by performance since US athletes only won approximately 11% of the medals over that span. During NBC's broadcasts of those same Olympiads from 1996–2006, Billings (2008) reported that 44 of the 60 most-mentioned athletes represented the United States. Further, the remaining athletes on the most-mentioned list were often the top rivals from other nations competing with US athletes for medals.

In an effort to generate interest from the "imagined community" of US viewers, NBC's Olympic broadcasters were also more likely to provide background information about the US athletes' hometowns or region. Billings *et al.* (2011) revealed that greater background knowledge with home nation athletes led to a deeper, more nuanced commentary, which resulted in positive, but subjective broadcasters' attributions for athletic success. In comparison to the greater depth of commentary about home nation athletes, "other" nations' athletes were described in more one-dimensional ways and portrayed almost as though they were "... emotionless cyborgs" (p. 263). Billings (2008) concluded that these examples of NBC's nationalistic bias were driven by mass media ratings and advertising rates. Broadcast rights fees have grown exponentially since NBC paid \$456 million to broadcast the 1996 Summer Olympic Games. NBC paid the International Olympic Committee \$1.2 billion just for the US broadcast rights to the 2012 Summer Olympic Games in London (Coakley, 2009).

The pressure on media executives to attain high prime time Nielsen ratings and advertising rates has resulted in NBC (re)packaging taped-delayed events as though they were occurring live in the evening prime-time slot over successive Olympiads. One of the most egregious examples occurred in the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games. Most viewers already knew the outcome of the women's gymnastics competition and Kerry Strug's final vault before it was (re)presented as though it were occurring live in NBC's prime-time evening coverage (Andrews, 1998). This issue was exacerbated in the era of social media and generated criticism in the two most recent summer Olympiads, Beijing 2008 and London 2012. As Tang and Cooper (2012) noted, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games were considered the first online Olympics with NBCOlympics.com providing more than 3,500 hours of online coverage and

2,200 hours of live video coverage. By the 2012 London Olympiad, in partnership with YouTube, NBC streamed events live on its website enabling viewers to watch NBC on the internet through their smart-phones (Taylor, 2012). Compounding this, the popularity of social media meant that most people had received instantaneous tweets or posts about Olympic events long before they aired on evening prime-time television. Nevertheless, despite angry sport fans generating acerbic tweets with a hashtag of *nbcfail*, NBC still reported its 2012 Olympic Games television coverage broke all previous US Nielsen ratings (Carter, 2012).

2012 London Olympics: The Twitter Games

In its infancy at the previous 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the 2012 London Olympic Games were widely acknowledged as the first social media games. In contrast to the carefully framed and choreographed televised programming and almost formulaic coverage by the traditional print media, Twitter and Facebook provided a democratizing spontaneity, intimacy, and excitement that made it a compelling and indispensable medium during the London Olympiad. The athlete-fan interactive experience was redefined by Twitter as many Olympic athletes bypassed the traditional, meticulously scripted public relations releases and tweeted directly to their "imagined community" of followers throughout the 17-day duration of the Olympic Games. This enabled the fans to feel closer to their favorite athletes, many of whom connected with their followers through an eclectic mixture of mundane, insightful, personal, and even bizarre revelations. The very spontaneous and public nature of tweets and posts meant that many uncensored off-the-cuff comments and sometimes divisive and controversial opinions were unfurled by athletes and followers alike in this new social space. Several such examples of the sport-social media-national identity nexus are provided below.

The "plastic Brits" furor: Is she "one of us?"

In the context of the Olympic Games, British athletes representing their nation in some ways become personifications of the national identity and culture. This makes their deportment and behavior as national role models and "patriots at play" the subject of much media scrutiny (Vincent and Crossman, 2012). Guibernau (2007) noted how traditionally the image of the nation is usually told in narratives about the indigenous population and dominant racial and ethnic group. However, in the context of the 2012 Olympic Games, many of the athletes representing Britain, such as Jessica Ennis and Mo Farrah, reflected the evolving hybridity and multicultural makeup of the population.

In a quest for athletic success on home soil in 2012, British Athletics appointed Charles van Commenee, a Dutchman, as Head Athletics Coach. Under his guidance, Britain selected numerous foreign-born athletes who qualified to represent Britain through their British parents or naturalized citizenship. One such athlete, Tiffany Porter, is the embodiment of the modern diasporic athlete. She was born in the United States, the daughter of a Nigerian father and an English mother. She was eligible to compete for Britain through her London-born mother, and switched her allegiance to Britain from the United States in 2010. Several months before the London Olympiad, van Commenee controversially announced that Porter would be the British women's team captain for the World Indoor Championships. The initial controversy was compounded when journalists found that the previous summer, on American Independence day, Porter had tweeted: "It's the 4th of July!!!!!! Wishing I was in the States to celebrate this special day! I'm definitely there in spirit though : -)" (McRae, 2012). This faux pax generated discussion about the hybridity of British athletes. Much traditional tabloid and social media

commentary was critical about the importation of foreign-born and, in some cases trained, athletes, dubbed in the British media discourse “plastic Brits.” It was argued that the transnational “plastic Brits,” who were not really “one of us,” were stifling opportunities for “homegrown” British athletes. Typifying the media furor, under the inflammatory headline, “Brit skip is a Yank!”, *The Sun*, known for its parochial “little Englander” ideology, reported how at a press conference, Porter, when pressed to demonstrate her British credentials by a journalist, could not recite the first few lines of the British national anthem, *God Save the Queen* (*The Sun*, 2012). Van Commenee responded to the media firestorm by reporting that he would make sure every foreign-born British athlete competing in the London Olympiad would know the words to the national anthem (Hart, 2012). Ultimately, though, it took a traditional broadsheet newspaper with a reputation for its impartial and balanced reporting to put the social and tabloid media frenzy into a more nuanced, reflexive perspective. Sport journalist Donald McRae quoted Porter:

“I probably should have explained myself a little better. But it’s hard on Twitter. That’s the beauty and the curse of 140 characters. You think you’re saying one thing but it can be interpreted in so many ways.” Even if she had cut out the exclamation marks and the smiley face, Porter would not have been able to explain in a tweet what she says more expansively and candidly in person. “The point I was trying to make was that I am very much American. I am very much British. I am very much Nigerian. I am extremely proud to be all three. I’m not apologising for that. It’s who I am. I embrace it. It’s very important to be true to myself.”

(McRae, 2012)

Freedom of speech or political misjudgement?

A second example taken from the 2012 London Olympic Games, which illustrates how an opinionated, divisive tweet, whether intentional or not, can create controversy and elicit criticism, came from a politician’s tweet. In British conservative national identity politics, multiculturalism is often pejoratively perceived to be a euphemism for the dilution of traditional Englishness. After the “plastic Brit” controversy, the multiculturalism issue surfaced again, when Aidan Burley, a British Member of Parliament, tweeted a criticism of English filmmaker Danny Boyle’s Olympic Games opening ceremony. Boyle’s opening ceremony extravaganza provided a kaleidoscope of British history and culture and was generally critically acclaimed. It acknowledged the contributions of black and ethnic minority Britons with a scene artistically recreating the MV Empire Windrush ship, which brought many Jamaicans to Britain. However, during the ceremony Burley tweeted, “The most leftie opening ceremony I have ever seen – more than Beijing, the capital of a communist state! Welfare tribute next?” Burley then added a second tweet: “Thank God the athletes have arrived! Now we can move on from leftie multi-cultural crap. Bring back red arrows (sic), Shakespeare and the Stones!” (Kirkup, 2012). Burley’s tweets sparked strong reactions. They were roundly criticised by leading Conservative politicians, including Boris Johnson (the Mayor of London), and David Cameron (the British Prime Minister). Cameron had previously expressed reservations about spontaneous but ill-considered ideas or thoughts expressed on Twitter by politicians and celebrities alike. A fellow Conservative MP, Gary Barwell, responded with the following twitter: “With respect, us Londoners are rather proud of the diversity of our city” at #nothingleftwingaboutit” (Watt, 2012).

The Twitter troll menace

In the lead-up to the 2012 London Olympiad, British diver Tom Daley was widely considered a genuine medal prospect. After medaling in the Commonwealth Games and the World Championships, British expectations were built up in mediated accounts and Daley was framed as a strong medal contender. The tragic premature death of his father and mentor to brain cancer in 2011 added an emotionally charged human interest angle, and an expectant nation nervously hoped Daley would perform well as a tribute to his late father. On the first Monday of the London Olympiad, Daley competed in the 10-meter men's synchronized platform diving event with his partner, Peter Waterfield. It was the first realistic opportunity of a medal for an expectant, emotionally charged home nation. Although Daley and Waterfield led after the first three dives, which prematurely raised the hopes of the "imagined community," they ultimately finished in a disappointing fourth place. In the immediate aftermath, Daley, who had an enormous following on Twitter, was subjected to abusive and menacing tweets by a Twitter troll. The troll accused Daley of letting his late father down when he failed to win a medal and even threatened to drown him. Although that particular Twitter troll was later arrested and prosecuted, this incident illustrates how Twitter provides a forum for people to publicly express their disdain for and possibly even threaten athletes.

The Twitter troll menace had been aptly illustrated a month before in the aftermath of the England men's national soccer teams exit from the UEFA EURO soccer championships. For the duration of the tournament, the English team's performances were dissected and scrutinized in the English media. Throughout the tournament, though, both the print and online versions of the English newspapers reported Twitter comments from soccer pundits, celebrities, and fans alike to facilitate a feeling of greater connection among the "imagined community." England was eliminated on a penalty shoot-out after a goal-less quarter-final match against Italy. Two of England's players, Ashley Cole and Ashley Young, both men of color, missed their penalty kicks. Illustrating the British red top newspapers' creative use of puns and gallows humor, *The Sun*, headlined "We made an ASH of it," but in the following day's edition the front page headlined "Racist trolls target the two Ashleys" [*The Sun* (online), June 26, 2012]. Investigations editor, Brian Flynn reported two Twitter Trolls "... spewed vile abuse at England's penalty flop players" [*The Sun* (online), June 26, 2012]. These examples of the Twitter troll menace suggest that in the emotionally charged context of major international sporting tournaments, the instantaneous nature of this new medium primes divisive, racist, and even menacing tweets.

Concluding remarks

Although the relationship between sport and national identity is both complex and fluid, mass media undoubtedly play an important role in national identity formation and politics, while also serving to (re)construct, reinforce, and naturalize dominant ideologies about this area of popular culture. Media coverage of major international sport generates particular narratives or preferred readings about collective national identity at the expense of alternative, subordinated articulations. The narratives and images of major international sporting tournaments both reflect and stimulate wider cultural and political references. Boyle and Haynes (2000: 154) noted how the "... images and imaginings of a country's past, present and projections of its future, come together to underpin the mediation of sporting discourses."

Mediated coverage of major international sporting events features all components required for compelling viewing, such as partisan supporters, rituals, symbols, ceremony, pageantry, competition, and winning (Boyle and Haynes, 2000). Although coverage of global media sports

events by their very nature have a global dimension, both traditional and social media coverage have a local dimension. To capture the public imagination, media coverage focuses on each nation's own athletes or team performance. Athletes become "patriots at play" in their quest to bring athletic success for their nation and the dramatic, emotional, and tension-fueled narratives and images generate compelling interest. As the examples in this chapter have shown, media coverage of megasporting events contain both overt and covert nationalist sentiment. In terms of national identity politics, traditional media discourses generally promulgate unifying ideologies and draw on shared common cultural beliefs and "invented traditions." These media discourses generally serve to subordinate any political divisions or socioeconomic inequalities that could undermine national unity (Anderson, 1983). However, in the context of the 2012 London Olympiad and the UEFA EURO 2012 tournament, the democratizing, spontaneous soundbite nature of new social media forums like Twitter produced some hyper-nationalized us-versus-them dichotomies, and tensions were heightened with acerbic, divisive, and racist tweets. Our insights suggest that the profound communal and democratizing characteristics of new social media forums provide an outlet for immediately gratifying spontaneous personal commentary. Compounding this, the 140-character limitations of Twitter also makes it an ideal medium for the expression of reductionist, nationalist "us versus them" binary rhetoric or for xenophobic lexicon to flourish. Thus, within the sport-media-nationalism nexus, some tweets may serve to exacerbate what Boyle (2006) referred to as the tabloidization of the media. Brief glimpses from the two mega sporting events from the summer of 2012 suggest this soundbite narrative genre prevails, often at the expense of more nuanced and reflexive analysis.

The mediated accounts of the English soccer team competing at the World Cup and European Championships reveal how the team has become a signifier of popular English identity since 1966. This popular identity has been (re)produced and normalized with each successive media broadcast and newspaper narratives and images, with each drawing on the recollection of the invented traditions or favorable accounts of English history. This selective use of history has promoted a sense of English exceptionalism, and forms the basis of us-versus-them comparisons that underpin divisive, even xenophobic binary discourses. Within national identity politics, politicians from all political spectrums typically work hard to associate themselves with the feel-good dividend of national athletic success (Coakley, 2009). Reflecting this, in the aftermath of the 2012 London Olympiad, David Cameron, the British Prime Minister held a widely publicized reception at his official home, 10 Downing Street, to thank the organizers and volunteers. In his carefully prepared speech, he evoked the "invented tradition" of the halcyon summer of '66: "I think that 2012 will be like 1966, something we'll talk about with our children and grandchildren, something that will continue to delight us long after this time has passed" (Prince, 2012).

Although the partisan tone is generally less overt in television coverage, as this chapter illustrated, nationalistic framing is still present in broadcasts and livestreams of the Olympic Games. The popularity of NBC's coverage of successive Olympic games has been in large part due to the heightened, collective sense of identification, rooting, and pride in home-nation athletes and teams. Set against a contemporary background of increasingly fragmented television viewing and exponentially expensive broadcasting rights fees, NBC's coverage of successive Olympic Games had to transcend the usual sport fan demographic to show a profit. The adoption of a multiplatform approach, with television broadcasts complemented with live-streaming and social media since the 2008 Beijing Olympiad, has made NBC's coverage mesmerizing to a younger demographic, which is particularly attractive to many advertisers and sponsors (Taylor, 2012).

As the 2012 London Olympic Games and the UEFA EURO 2012 tournament were among

the first major international sporting events to occur after the widespread adoption and integration of tablets and smart phones, research in the sport–social media–national identity nexus is in its infancy and should prove a productive area for future research.

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