

The Politics of Sport: An Institutional Focus

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The study of the relationship between sport and politics has become increasingly popular in recent years. The work in this area, however, has failed to follow the evolutionary path of the parent discipline, political science, which, at least in its beginnings, is clearly revealed.

This paper, therefore, is an attempt at such a foundational effort. It focuses on the political institutions in the nations of the world dealing with sport, particularly those executive institutions at the cabinet-level with the word "sport" in the formal title.

It seems safe to say that sport can be used as a political tool, and that this utility extends to both the international and domestic political spheres. In comparison to other political tools, such as military power, economic power, or ideological power, sport can be classified as a rather "cheap" political tool.

Since 1960, a number of new nations have emerged onto the world scene. These emerging, new nations have altered world politics in both a quantitative and qualitative way. As a result of these changes in the world order, the studies of international relations and comparative domestic politics have also been altered. The foci of study in both of these areas have broadened considerably allowing sport to become a possible focus of study.

This study assumes that sport can be used both internationally and domestically as a means of promoting national unity and identity. In the changing world scene of the last two decades, there has been an increased awareness of the political importance of sport. This increased awareness has resulted in the use of sport as a political tool by an increasing number of countries throughout the 1960's and into the 1970's.

The bulk of the empirical hypothesizing in this study deals with countries that have been designated as developing. The developing countries are those countries from non-Western areas chiefly located in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, excluding the countries of North America, Europe, and the older Commonwealth countries. Sport is considered to be politically important in a country if there exists a body at the cabinet-level with sport in its formal title.

The study predicts that more developing countries than non-developing countries will have sport bodies at the cabinet-level. It also predicts that late political maturity, as measured by entrance into the United Nations after 1960, is related to the political importance of sport.

The *Europa Yearbook* and other reference sources are used to identify the make-up of the cabinets of the nations of the world. The membership of the United Nations (133) on September 18, 1973 is used as a sample. The data are presented on a simple percentage basis.

The results show that 26.3% (N=35) of the nations of the world have sport bodies at the cabinet-level. 88.6% (N=31) of the countries with sport bodies at the cabinet-level are classified as developing while 75.2% (N=100) of the total sample is classified as developing.

Of the 31 developing countries with sport bodies at the cabinet-level, 67.7% (N=21) are African; whereas, the African nations represent 39% (N=39) of the developing countries.

Of the total sample, 39.1% (N=52) joined the United Nations after 1960; whereas, 62.9% (N=22) of those nations with sport bodies at the cabinet-level joined the United Nations after 1960.

The data show a tendency to support the hypotheses that the developing countries are more likely to have sport bodies at the cabinet-level, and that there is a connection between late political maturity and the political importance of sport.

The African nations seem to show a greater political interest in sport. This may be related to their late political maturity and their need for cheap political tools. The connection between later political maturity and sport as a cheap political tool may be a fruitful, yet illusive area for future research.