Not playing around: global capitalism, modern sport and consumer culture

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Abstract *The development of modern sport is bound up with processes of economic and cultural transformation associated with the global diffusion of capitalist forms of consumption. In this article I draw attention to aspects of the globalization of modern sport that were becoming apparent towards the close of the nineteenth century and then move on to consider the factors that contributed to sport becoming a truly global phenomenon in the course of the twentieth century. Consideration is given to the development of international sport and sports goods companies, the growth in media interest and the increasing significance of sponsorship, consumer culture and sporting celebrities. The global diffusion of modern sport that gathered momentum in the course of the twentieth century involved a number of networked elements, including transnational communications media and commercial corporations for which sport, especially through the iconic figure of the transnational celebrity sport star, constitutes a universally appealing globally networked cultural form. Association with sport events and sporting figures through global broadcasting, sponsorship and endorsement arrangements offers commercial corporations unique access to global consumer culture.*

Keywords SPORT, GLOBALIZATION, CAPITALISM, CONSUMER CULTURE

Throughout the twentieth century leading sporting figures, chairmen of economic corporations with direct and indirect interests in sport, think tanks, and social analysts preoccupied with making sense of the contemporary world recognized the unique local appeal and global significance of sport. At the beginning of the present century, in the context of a wide-ranging analysis of the consequences associated with the global implementation of neo-liberal free-market economic policies, sport was described as 'the most important thing in the world' (Beck 2000: 62).

Early in the last century Walter Camp, a formative figure in the development of American football, reportedly referred to sport as '"the broad folk highway" of the nation' (Pope 1997: 3). In 1939 Mass Observation confirmed the status of sport as a key social institution by pointing out that sport-related economic activity represented 'the biggest English industry' (Kuper 2003: 147–8). In 1985 the Henley Centre estimated that sport constituted the sixth largest employment sector in the UK (Mason 1989: 10). In the closing decade of the century the founder and chairman of *Nike* commented that sport was at the heart of contemporary culture and increasingly defined 'the culture of the world' (cited in Katz 1994: 199).

Sport is an economically significant, highly popular, globally networked cultural form. It occupies a prominent place in a 'deep area of the collective sensibility' (Eco 1987: 160) and is able, as Nelson Mandela reportedly suggested, to mobilize the sentiments of people in all countries in an unrivalled manner (Carlin 2003). The Secretary General of the United Nations subsequently endorsed this view when he remarked of one sport, football, that it is 'more universal' than the UN and that the FIFA World Cup brings the 'family of nations and peoples' together 'celebrating our common humanity' in a way that few other cultural events can equal (Annan 2006).

As the century progressed, the commercial world drew increasingly on sport's cultural capital value to raise the global profile and appeal of corporate brands and to expand the global market for their products. Taking stock towards the close of the twentieth century, one analyst remarked that professional sport, the media and corporate sponsorship constituted a seemingly indivisible trinity, 'a golden triangle' from which each of the parties was able to derive substantial profit (Aris 1990: 9). Subsequently, professional sport became more closely articulated with the media, in particular television, commerce and the world of corporate sponsorship (Smart 2005). This state of affairs received a ringing endorsement from FIFA President Sepp Blatter who, speaking in defence of the growth in World Cup sponsorship money in the run-up to the 2006 tournament, remarked that '[w]hat is important is a partnership between soccer, the economy and television which benefits all sides' (Anonymous 2006). Without doubt, the growth of a global sport network has been very closely articulated with the pursuit of economic interests and the promotion of consumer culture (Jarvie 2006: 94).

The popular appeal of sport increased significantly during the course of the twentieth century, becoming truly worldwide in scope and intensity with the growth of international sporting bodies, competitions, tournaments, migratory flows of competitors and associated globally extensive forms of media representation, especially in the form of terrestrial (later satellite) television and the internet (Maguire 1999). Its closer links with the corporate world over this period transformed the institution of sport. It was not just a case of business values intruding into sport, of sport being turned into a business, and sport events and participants becoming commodities. It was also a matter of recognizing that the distinctive qualities sport and its participants possessed, notably its popular cultural appeal and unrivalled aura of authenticity, were of potential value in the increasingly competitive process of capital accumulation in a fully-fledged consumer society. It was about its unique value in enhancing corporate brands, global marketing, and the promotion and sale of products associated with popular sport events and iconic celebrity sporting figures (Hickey 2000; Klein 2001; Smart 2005).

The formative roots of the close contemporary relationship between professional sport, corporate sponsorship, the media, and consumer culture, which has contributed to the growth of a globally extensive popular culture of sporting celebrity, lie in the 'take-off' phase of the globalization of sport. The discussion is directed to an analysis of key interconnected aspects of the formation of a global sport network. This includes turn-of-the-century manifestations of sport's globalization exemplified by developments in tennis and the Olympics, the establishment of sports goods companies in Europe and the USA, early signs of an emerging culture of sporting celebrity, as well as the growth in media interest and associated developments in sport sponsorship.

Institutional manifestations of sport's globalization

From the late nineteenth century, the global diffusion of modern sport gathered momentum. The period from the 1870s to the 1920s represented a 'take-off' phase, an important period in which international competitions, tournaments and tours began to occur with increasing frequency. Spectatorship grew and numerous international sports governing bodies were established (Maguire 1999). A number of inaugural international sport events took place in this period that served to reduce local variations in sporting activities and promote forms of global standardization (Van Bottenburg 2001). These included the first international rugby and football matches between Scotland and England held in Edinburgh (1871) and Glasgow (1872) respectively, the first cricket test match between Australia and England (1877), the first England international football team tour to continental Europe (1908) and the first Wallabies tour of the UK and USA (1908/9). In addition, a number of international sports organizations, including the International Football Association Board (1886), the International Rugby Football Board (1886), the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (1904) and the International Amateur Athletic Association (1912) were established. There were a number of other manifestations of a steadily accelerating process of sport globalization during this period and it is to particular developments in respect of both tennis and the Olympic Games that we now turn.

Tennis: the first global sport?

One of the first modern sports to go international and begin to develop a global profile was tennis. An early semi-official international tennis tournament, including players from America, Canada and England, was staged in 1878 in Newport USA by Dr James Dwight. The tournament was a forerunner to the first international team tennis competition established in 1900, officially called the International Lawn Tennis Challenge Trophy, donated by American doubles champion Dwight Davis, and subsequently known as the Davis Cup. The competition was open to all nations that had established official tennis associations to govern the organization and development of the sport. At the time, only a few nations were eligible to compete for the trophy, namely Australia (including New Zealand), the British Isles, South Africa (under British rule), Canada, India and the United States. Of these, only the British Isles took up the first challenge, losing 3–0 to the USA team. In 1904 France became the third nation to participate in the Davis Cup and in the same year the Lawn Tennis Association of Australasia (including New Zealand) was established. For many years Great Britain, Australia, France and the USA were the only countries to compete for the Davis Cup. Only with the opening up of tennis at the end of the 1960s as professionalism was finally accepted did the Davis Cup become truly global in scope as teams from more than 50 nations began to compete for the trophy (Gillmeister 1998).[1]

In addition to formally designated international tournaments such as the Davis Cup in which players competed against one another in national teams, towards the close of the nineteenth century other tennis tournaments were becoming more international. American players were competing at Wimbledon and English players were taking part in the Newport, Rhode Island tournament, which in time was to become the American Open. In 1913 the International Lawn Tennis Federation was established and when America joined in 1923 the championships of the four leading member states, England, France, Australia and the USA, were raised to the status of 'official championships', later to become known colloquially as the Grand Slam tournaments (Gillmeister 1998).

The growing worldwide appeal of tennis in the 1920s is partly attributable to the emergence of two outstanding players. They were Suzanne Lenglen in France and Bill Tilden in America and their dominance over women's and men's tennis respectively during this period is regarded as marking 'the beginning of an age in which tennis players became public celebrities' (Rader 1983: 220). Lenglen and Tilden were highly controversial figures who drew spectators to tournaments and attracted the attention of international journalists. Lenglen, a very successful and powerful player who was considered to hit the ball 'like a man', was said to be 'hot tempered' and to have a 'racy private life', and for good measure she flouted the tennis dress code convention for women, electing to wear more 'colourful and sensual' clothing (Bouchier and Findling 1983). Tilden was a no less controversial figure who, while winning seven US national singles championships and three Wimbledon singles championships, continually came into conflict with the USLTA for not complying with the rule forbidding players from profiting directly from tennis by endorsing equipment, teaching, or writing about the sport (Walker 1989).

What ultimately contributed most to the global transformation of the status and image of the sport was the acceptance of professionalism and the establishment of 'Open' tennis from the late 1960s. In addition, increased public access was made possible by an extensive worldwide tournament calendar, developments in broadcasting technology, especially television, and the availability of jet travel allowing players to move relatively easily from one country to another to participate in events. As one former Grand Slam winner remarked, 'With tournaments in every continent and with the players often moving to a different country each week, tennis is a sport dependent on jet travel. … Flying certainly allowed our tour to become more global and it's opened up new horizons for tennis' (Courier 2004).

In tennis and a number of other sports, including association football and athletics, a global network of tournaments has grown in tandem with developments in air travel and television coverage. Corporate commercial interest in acquiring a cosmopolitan image for products and brands through sport event sponsorship and endorsement contracts offered to players in the wake of playing success and the achievement of a popular cultural profile has also helped (Smart 2005).

The Olympic Games and globalization

At the annual conference of the Union des Sociétés Françaises des Sports Athlétiques in 1892, the secretary general of the organization, Baron de Coubertin, who considered international sporting events to have the potential to promote peace and understanding between nations, proposed a revival of the Olympic Games of Ancient Greece. An international sport congress in Paris in 1894 led to the foundation of an International Olympic Committee, which proposed that the first Olympics of the modern era be staged in Athens in 1896 (Coubertin 1896; Gillmeister 1998).

De Coubertin campaigned around the world to gather support for the idea of nations joining together to engage in a global competitive sport event. He noted that an international network of sporting events was developing, that Switzerland had 'invited rifle marksmen from abroad for its federal competitions', that cyclists were racing against one another 'on all the cycle tracks of Europe', that French and Italian fencers were meeting in international events, and that Britain and the USA had already 'challenged each other upon water [sailing] and grass [tennis]' (Coubertin 1896: 1). Evidence of increasing international competition in a growing number of sports convinced de Coubertin that a successful revival of the Olympic Games was a real possibility. It duly came to pass, as he had hoped, although the IOC's eager embrace of private enterprise, sponsorship and commercial marketing techniques to fund the games in the latter part of the twentieth century ultimately thwarted his wish to see the Olympics 'purify' sport of the 'commercial spirit' that he recognized was developing (Coubertin 1896: 2; Preuss 2006).

In Athens, in 1896, more than 200 male athletes drawn from 13 nations participated in 43 events in track and field, weightlifting, rifle and pistol shooting, tennis, cycling, swimming, gymnastics and wrestling. The Summer Games has been held every four years since then, with the notable exception of the war years of 1916, 1940 and 1944. The number of countries participating has increased steadily, reaching 203 by 2006, a figure just below FIFA's 207 member associations, but in excess of the 191 state membership of the United Nations.[2]

The first Winter Olympic Games was held in 1924 at Chamonix, France, although some 'winter events', such as figure skating and ice hockey, had already featured at the 1920 Summer Games at Antwerp, Belgium. Subsequently, the Winter Games has been held every four years, with the exception of the Second World War years and 1994, when following the IOC's policy decision in 1986 the game's schedule was changed to improve the financial prospects and reduce the organizational load on National Olympic Committees. The year 1992 was the last time the Winter Games

(Albertville, France) and Summer Games (Barcelona, Spain) were held in the same year. The 1994 games in Lillehammer, Norway, marked the beginning of a separate, four-year cycle for the Winter Games, which, with fewer countries participating, has remained less popular than the Summer Games.

The Summer Olympics ranks alongside the FIFA World Cup as one of the world's most popular sporting festivals. Both are truly global sporting events that attract substantial interest from the public, broadcasting organizations and commercial corporations alike. The 2004 Athens Olympics exceeded all broadcasting expectations with 3.9 billion people accessing television coverage of events. Given the scale and reach of global television coverage it is not surprising to find that the Olympic Games is now regarded as one of the most important events for commercial corporations seeking to promote their brands, particularly as consumers tend to associate Olympic sponsors with leadership in their respective product fields (McCall 2004).

Paralleling developments in this take-off phase of international sporting events, matches and tournaments were increases in the number of spectators paying to attend events, the formation of international governing bodies exercising jurisdiction over international competitions, and far more media interest exemplified by the emergence of sports magazines, press coverage and radio broadcasting. A significant commercial market for sports goods also began to emerge as 'falling real prices and rising wages brought an increase in prosperity' and innovations in sporting equipment and specialized sports clothing attracted growing consumer interest (Flanders 2006: 435).

The establishment of sport goods companies in Europe and USA

In the globalization take-off phase a largely unregulated, free-market capitalist economic system sought to shift emphasis away from catering for elite forms of conspicuous consumption. To realize the potential of mass-production techniques it was necessary to promote forms of mass consumption, including activities and commodities associated with sport, which was growing rapidly in popularity and already beginning to display the potential to become 'a great and profitable industry' (Polanyi 1968; Vamplew 1988: 55). A reduction in working hours and recognition that the prospect of continued capitalist economic development was less bound up with saving than spending led to the nurturing of mass consumerism, the development of commercial recreation, and increases in associated forms of consumer expenditure (Goldman 1983–4).

It was in this context, stimulated by the growth of professional forms of sport, that evidence of the existence of a growing audience for sports events around the world became apparent. With the rising demand for sports goods and equipment, among amateurs as well as professionals, a number of sports goods companies began to emerge in Europe and America. They included Spalding, Slazenger, Dunlop, J. W. Foster & Sons (subsequently to become Reebok), Converse, Wilson, and Gebruder Dassler (later to split into Adidas and Puma). All these companies subsequently went on to achieve a significant economic and cultural profile as global sports brands (Flanders 2006).

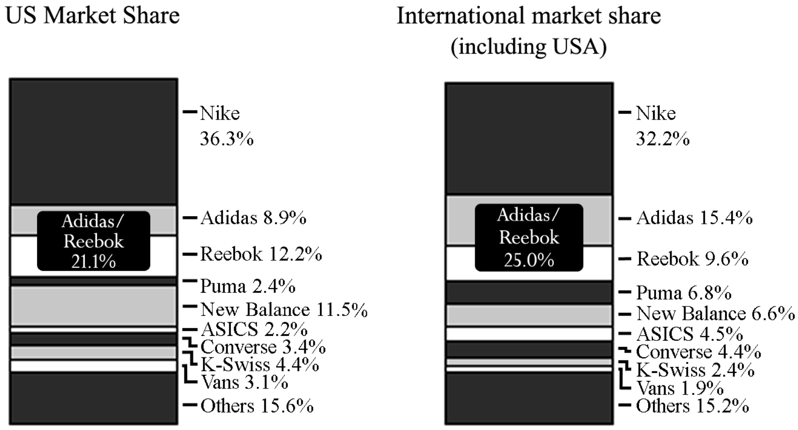
The world's first major sports goods company was established in the USA in 1876 by Albert G Spalding, a major league baseball pitcher and self-confessed 'father of American baseball' (Levine 1985: xi). The company initially concentrated on manufacturing baseballs but soon diversified into manufacturing golf clubs, tennis rackets, basketballs and other products connected with sport. By 1909 it had retail stores in thirty American cities plus another six overseas (Levine 1985). In England in 1881 the Slazenger brothers moved to London from Manchester to manufacture rackets and balls for a new game, 'Sphairistike', developed a few years earlier in 1874 by Major Walter Clopton Wingfield. In due course, the game would become better known as lawn tennis. Slazenger has been official supplier of tennis balls to the Wimbledon Championships since 1902 and this represents possibly the oldest sporting sponsorship in the world. The Slazenger brand is now prominent not only in the world of tennis but also in squash, cricket and golf.

In 1888 John Boyd Dunlop, a Scottish vet living in Belfast, developed the pneumatic tyre that would 'revolutionize cycling and harness racing in the next decade' (Betts 1953: 248). In 1900 the Dunlop Rubber Company Ltd was established and began to produce car tyres and then, in 1910, aeroplane tyres and the first Dunlop golf ball (Jones 1984). In due course Dunlop produced a range of other sports goods, including tennis and squash rackets, balls, golf clubs, sports clothing and footwear. To date, Dunlop has 'won' more Grand Slam tennis tournaments than any other brand and like Slazenger it is an integral part of British sporting history.

The Wilson Sporting Goods Company provides a comparable American example. In 1914 the Ashland Manufacturing Company began to produce sports goods and, following the appointment of Thomas Wilson as president of the company, it was renamed the Thomas E. Wilson Company. In 1931 it became the Wilson Sporting Goods Company. The company began by making golf equipment and in 1922 appointed golf star Gene Sarazen to its advisory staff. The company diversified into manufacturing balls and racquets for tennis and squash, as well as footwear and other sporting goods, including jerseys and uniforms. Wilson has a reputation for innovative manufacturing and marketing strategies and was among the first of the American manufacturers to use sporting celebrities – Knute Rockne (football), Gene Sarazen and Sam Snead (golf), 'Lefty' Gomez and Ted Williams (baseball) and Jack Kramer (tennis) – to endorse its products (Sullivan 2005). Wilson now makes sports equipment and clothing for golf, racquet sports (badminton, racquetball, squash and tennis), and team sports (baseball, basketball, football, soccer and volleyball).

The market for specialized sports clothing was growing rapidly as the century drew to a close and a number of new companies sought to make their mark by introducing innovative sporting footwear. For example, in 1893 Joseph Foster, an English athlete, customized some running shoes by adding spikes and, on receiving considerable interest from other runners, he set up a shoe company. By 1895 his company, J. W. Foster & Sons, had acquired an international reputation and clientele and was regularly supplying distinguished athletes with handmade shoes. The company was moderately successful, providing the running shoes worn at the 1924 Summer Olympics, but its profile remained relatively low. In 1958 Foster's grandsons created a companion company, named Reebok, that later took over J. W. Foster & Sons to create a unified brand. In 1979 Paul Fireman secured the North American distribution licence and started the company known as Reebok USA taking their global sales from $300,000 in 1980 to $1.4 billion in 1987 (Smit 2006). In 2006 Adidas, the German sports goods company, acquired Reebok, giving the combination a market share that closed the gap on the market-leader, Nike (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Branded athletic footwear market share for 2004



Source: Sporting Goods Intelligence cited in Associated Press (2006).

In 1908 the Converse shoe company was established at Malden, Massachusetts. By 1910 some 4000 shoes were being produced each day and in the period 1915–18 the canvas tennis shoe business doubled in size. The first sneaker to be mass produced in North America, subsequently known as the 'All Star', appeared in 1917 and after 'Chuck' Taylor, a basketball player for the Akron Firestones, started wearing them in 1918 the shoes rapidly grew in popularity. Taylor joined the Converse sales team in 1921 and travelled across the country promoting the game of basketball, allegedly selling his favourite sports footwear from the boot of his Cadillac. In 1923, in acknowledgement of his role in promoting the All Star shoe, modifying its design, and increasing its popularity with consumers, his name was added to the ankle patch.[3]

A later generation of basketball stars, including Larry Bird, Magic Johnson and Isiah Thomas, endorsed leather versions of the company's All Star sneakers and the brand retained its popularity as market leader until the mid-1980s. That was when Nike launched its high performance sports shoes, employing Michael Jordan, the figure whose endorsements would in due course transform the company's profile, the game of basketball and the nature of sports representation, as their 'signature athlete' (Smart 2005). Converse could not keep pace with its new corporate competitor and, in 2001, after being declared bankrupt, Footwear Acquisitions Inc bought it out and shifted production to Asia. Demand for Converse's 'retro' shoes subsequently grew and in 2003 the company was acquired by Nike, by which time it was estimated that over 580 million pairs of All Star 'Chuck Taylor' sneakers had been sold.

In 1920 in Herzogenaurach, Germany, Adolf 'Adi' Dassler made his first sports shoe for runners and, four years later, he set up Gebruder Dassler with his brother Rudolph. While production was initially directed to track and field footwear, from 1925 onwards they produced football boots and then in 1931 the company manufactured its first tennis shoe. Dassler was one of the first companies to use sports stars and sports events to promote innovative sports footwear. The mere fact that stars competing in a prestigious event were seen to be wearing a particular design of footwear effectively served to advertise and endorse the product.[4] At the Amsterdam Olympic Games in 1928 many of the participating athletes wore Dassler footwear and, by the mid-1930s, 100 employees were making 30 different styles of footwear for a total of 11 sports. The track successes in the 1936 Berlin Olympics of the African-American athlete Jesse Owens, who won four gold medals wearing Dassler spikes, convinced athletes and trainers around the world of the quality and value of the company's footwear and enhanced its reputation.

After the Second World War growing tensions led to a feud between the two brothers and in due course the business was split with Adi Dassler setting up a company with the name Adidas in 1948 and in the following year registering the three stripes trademark. His brother Rudolph established Puma Aktiengesellschaft Rudolf Sport, which quickly became Puma (Adidas n.d.; Smit 2006). Subsequently, both companies established a significant share of the sports goods market (see Figure 1).

Until the mid-1980s Adidas monopolized the sports footwear business and a measure of the company's dominance can be gauged from the fact that 80 per cent of medal winners at the Summer Olympic Games in Montreal in 1976 were wearing Adidas products. Horst Dassler, the only son of Adi and Kathe Dassler, recognized the commercial potential of sport and the prospect of building partnerships between sports federations and commercial corporations keen to promote their brands through sponsorship of sports events. To exploit this he founded International Sport and Leisure (ISL) in 1982, the first global marketing company dedicated to sports events, which soon acquired the global marketing and television rights to the Olympic Games, the World athletics championships and the FIFA World Cup (Smit 2006).

In the course of the 1980s, however, Adidas faced growing competition and, needing investment to counter a deteriorating debt to capital ratio, became a limited partnership in 1989. This change followed the rapid growth in market share of Reebok and, more significantly, Nike, an American sports goods company established in 1962 as Blue Ribbon Sports, but renamed in 1968 after the Greek goddess of victory, securing its trademark logo, the Swoosh, in 1971. By 1990 Nike had overtaken Adidas in global sales of sports footwear, securing 33 per cent of the American market compared with the 3 per cent held by Adidas. The purchase of Converse in 2003 increased Nike's share of the global sports shoe market and strengthened the product and brand range. Adidas's subsequent acquisition of Reebok in 2006 was part of its global strategy to make up ground on Nike.

The signs of commerce are now a prominent feature of global sports events. The logos of sponsors promoting their brands through sports events and sports star endorsement are a routine part of the landscape of sport, adorning the walls of stadiums, the perimeter of playing areas and arenas, the clothing worn by players and the equipment that is used, as well as influencing the titles of television sports programmes. As competition between corporations for a bigger share of the global market for sportswear, sports goods and equipment became increasingly intense in the late twentieth century, so recognition of the value of association with sports events and sporting figures grew. Companies like Nike and Adidas increased their investment and elevated sports stars to the status of celebrity figures and global icons by virtue of the enhancement their public profiles received from involvement in commercial endorsement and advertising campaigns targeted at a growing consumer market.

In some respects contemporary sports events have come increasingly to resemble a contest between competing corporate brands – the ‘swoosh’ versus ‘the stripes’, or Nike versus Adidas. When the USA played Brazil in the 1994 FIFA World Cup Finals in the USA, Phil Knight, the American chief executive of Nike, demonstrated that corporate loyalty took precedence over national identity by declaring: ‘I rooted for Brazil because it was a Nike Team. America was Adidas’ (cited in Coakley 2003: 399). In a comparable manner, in the build up to the 2006 FIFA World Cup held in Germany, Herbert Hainer, the chief executive officer of Adidas, unlike Nike one of the official event sponsors, remarked that ‘the two companies are “fighting like sports teams”’ (Islam 2006).

Consumer culture and the emergence of sporting celebrity

During the take-off period in the globalization of sport, which lasted from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s, the prestige of economic liberalism was at its height. Society was being run ‘as an adjunct to the market’ (Polanyi 1968: 57) and America and Europe were experiencing an economic boom. As the development of the capitalist market economy accelerated, ‘society [became] preoccupied with consumption, with comfort and bodily well-being, with … spending and acquisition’ (Leach 1994: xiii; see also Flanders 2006) and, in turn, the signs of an emerging global sporting network could be clearly discerned (Van Bottenburg 2001).

Between 1909 and 1929 there was a rapid increase in the provision of commercial recreation and the development of the business of sport. One can witness the growth in professional sport (and also in US collegiate sport) and associated increases in spectatorship, the construction of stadiums and arenas, the dedication of more and more space to sports reporting in the press, and the expansion of the sports goods industry (Goldman 1983–4; see also Flanders 2006). In this period, there was a growing recognition that the cultural capital that high-profile sporting figures had accumulated through their sporting prowess might be profitably invested in product promotion. Initially, it was the sports goods companies that sought to imply that the success of the players in their advertisements was, in part at least, attributable to the use of a particular product – a golf club or ball, a sports shoe or boot, a racquet and so on. The implication here is that an ordinary consumer’s performance would also be enhanced by using the product (Goldman 1983–4). Increasingly, companies and organizations beyond the world of sport come to recognize that the marketing and sale of their products could benefit from association with successful athletes and performers, in short that endorsement by and/or association with sports stars would accord products an invaluable aura of authenticity (Smart 2005).

The 1920s has been described as the 'Golden Age of American Sport', a period in which, in a range of popular sports, outstanding individuals emerged to be greeted by journalists and radio broadcasters eager to transform them into larger than life celebrity figures. 'Babe' Ruth (baseball), Jack Dempsey (boxing), 'Red' Grange (grid-iron football), Bobby Jones (golf) and Bill Tilden (tennis) each became publicly feted figures, the recipients of promotional and marketing skills that served to 'sell' them to the public (Danzig and Brandewein 1948). In turn, the popular profile such sporting figures enjoyed drew the interest of companies eager to convey the impression of some form of association between their products or services and the authentic achievements and attractive accompanying qualities of outstanding athletes and players. For example, Ruth's playing successes led him to be offered lucrative commercial opportunities, including ghost-written articles in newspapers and magazines, vaudeville tours, fees for appearing at banquets, openings and celebrity golf tournaments, and endorsement contracts for a wide range of goods – hunting and fishing equipment, men's clothing, baseball gear and cars (Rader 1983). To handle his commercial affairs Ruth appointed a business adviser. In a comparable manner 'Red' Grange appointed an Illinois promoter C. C. Pyle, often regarded as the first 'sports agent', who later would establish the first professional tennis tour.[5] Pyle negotiated a $3000 per game contract for Grange to play for the Chicago Bears who drew record crowds to professional football (Shropshire and Davis 2003). Grange's playing success led to a range of commercial opportunities, including endorsement contracts for sweaters, shoes, caps and soft drinks, a film contract, and the manufacture of a 'Red' Grange football doll and 'Red' Grange chocolates (Rader 1983).

The adoption in the USA of managers and/or agents to handle the commercial activities of leading sporting figures exemplified the growing consumer ethos and developing celebrity culture that was becoming a more prominent part of social life in general and sports in particular. By the 1940s it was becoming clear that as the development of consumer culture was gathering momentum, the idols of the masses were increasingly celebrity figures, 'idols of consumption' from the worlds of entertainment and sport (Lowenthal 1961). In the course of the twentieth century corporate interest in the global commercial potential of sport increased significantly and from the 1960s as leading sporting figures became more and more aware of the lucrative opportunities open to them they increasingly appointed agents to handle their affairs (Smart 2005).

In 1960 Mark McCormack established the International Management Group (IMG) and it relatively quickly became the leading organization as far as the representation of sports celebrities was concerned. The rapid growth in the influence of agents in sport is generally attributed to McCormack, described in 1990 by *Sports Illustrated* as 'the most powerful man in sport' and in a BBC obituary in 2003 as the 'king of sports marketing'.[6] McCormack was confident that the global popularity and economic marketing potential of successful sport performers would render national borders and differences of language, custom, and culture commercially irrelevant, and that leading sporting figures would be known and held in high regard around the world even by those with little or no interest in sport. The establishment of IMG is considered to have 'changed the face of professional sport', but it is the media, and terrestrial and satellite television in particular that have significantly raised the global profile of commercially sponsored sport, enhancing its popularity by presenting it to the world with an increasingly spectacular 'face' (Kelso 2003).

Growing media interest in sport

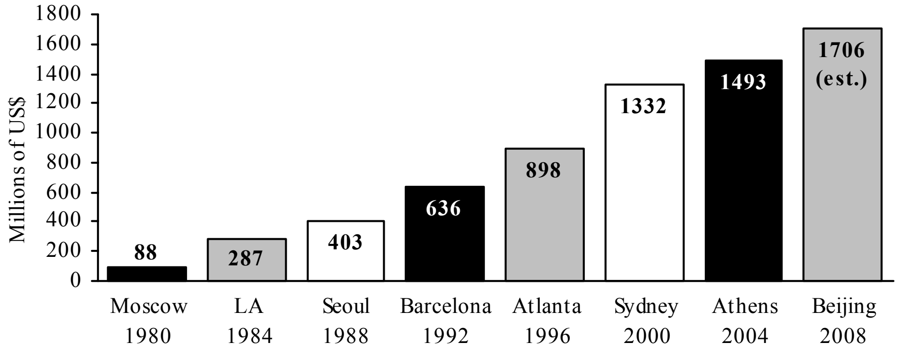
Since the late nineteenth century, the development of modern professional sport has been bound up with a succession of communications media that have reported on sporting events and the deeds of sports participants. The growth in global television coverage and the increasing commercialization of sports has provided the corporate sponsors of sports events with a compellingly persuasive platform to achieve a global profile for their brands. Press, radio and television have not only communicated information and images about sport to the fans, they have also served to promote sport to a wider public. They have increased its popularity and made the names and, in the case of the visual media, the faces of sporting figures known even to those with little real interest in sport (Smart 2005). Developments in television technology, particularly the emergence of satellite television broadcasting, have contributed significantly to the globalization of sport. Worldwide live coverage of events, and digitalization and pay-per-view, along with the emergence of new media delivery platforms, including the Internet and mobile phone, have contributed further to the global diffusion of sports information and images.

From the mid-twentieth century television broadcasting media have created a cultural-commercial force field that has radically transformed sport. The FIFA World Cup tournament was televised for the first time in 1954 and the Summer Olympic Games in 1960. Television coverage has significantly increased the global popularity of both events and competitive bidding for broadcasting rights has radically transformed the political economy of these and other sporting events (Smart 2005). The IOC has been a major beneficiary of the bidding war for broadcasting rights and since 1980 has concluded agreements worth more than US$ 10 billion (Figure 2).

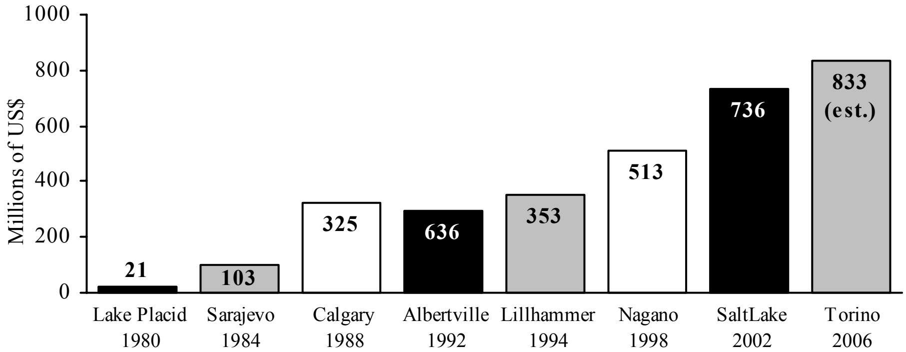
Global research conducted by Sports Marketing Surveys on behalf of the IOC revealed that television broadcasting of the Athens 2004 Summer Games achieved new levels of global popularity with 3.9 billion people having access to coverage compared with 3.6 billion for the 2000 Sydney Games. There were 35,000 hours of coverage of the Athens Games compared with 29,600 for Sydney, 25,000 for Atlanta (1996) and 20,000 for Barcelona (1992). It has been estimated that in 2004 'globally, every individual viewer watched over 12 hours of Olympic Games coverage'. The 2004 games were also notable for the fact that for the first time streaming video and highlight clips were available in a number of countries through mobile phone handsets and over the Internet.[7]

Figure 2: Olympic Broadcast Revenue Charts

Olympic Games



Olympic Winter Games



Source: IOC http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/facts/revenue/broadcast_uk.asp retrieved 10 June 2006; Lee (2005).

The data on broadcasting coverage of the World Cup, the tournament described by FIFA as 'the world's no. 1 sports event', reveal a comparable pattern of increases in broadcasting rights revenue secured, number of global television viewers, and hours of coverage watched. Revenue secured from the sale of World Cup television broadcasting rights increased steadily from 95 million Swiss Francs in 1990 to 135 million in 1998, rising rapidly to 1.3 billion in 2002 and reaching 1.5 billion in 2006.[8] Over the period from 1990 to 2002, cumulative global television viewing audiences reported by FIFA indicated a steady increase from 26.7 billion for the tournament held in Italy in 1990 to 28.8 billion in 2002 when the finals were held in Japan/Korea. Described by FIFA as 'the most extensively covered and viewed event in television history', the 2002 tournament is represented as having set a new record for a sports event for the total number of hours of television coverage watched by viewers worldwide.[9] While the range of data utilized by FIFA may risk overstating the degree of public interest, independent audience research conducted on behalf of potential sponsors and advertisers has confirmed the tournament's unrivalled global appeal by revealing that the World Cup Final between Italy and France was television's most viewed sports event in 2006, attracting 'more than twice as many viewers as any other program' (Cone 2006).

The process of the globalization of sport accelerated with the development of television technology, especially after the establishment in 1979 of the Entertainment Sports Programming Network (ESPN), which first exploited the television transmission potential of channel space on communication satellites (Halberstam 2001). By the mid-1980s, when ABC purchased ESPN, a technological revolution in sport television coverage was well underway and subsequently the quantity, quality and diversity of televised sport have increased significantly (Smart 2005). Alongside such developments in television technology there was in this period an increasing concentration of broadcasting rights ownership by multinational media corporations with interests in the sport field. News Corp, the global media corporation Rupert Murdoch established in the closing decades of the twentieth century, provides one significant example. For him, securing television-broadcasting rights for globally popular sports has served as a '"battering ram" to enter new markets', a means of gaining access through sports-driven viewer subscriptions to the homes of millions of people around the world (cited in Marqusee 2005). Increasingly, a few powerful multinational corporations dominate the sport-media complex. In 2004, the 17 leading sport-media companies were based in either Europe or America and, it is argued, this has led to a 'tendency towards a cultural convergence and homogenisation of … sports television coverage across the globe' that contributes to the impression that there is indeed one world of sport (Jarvie 2006: 134; see also Sugden and Tomlinson 1998: 76).

In the closing decades of the twentieth century, television coverage became an increasingly vital part of the cultural economy of modern sports. With the increasing global exposure and promotion it provided, it simultaneously enhanced the attractiveness of sport and sporting figures to commercial organizations willing to spend increasingly large capital sums on various forms of sports advertising and sponsorship (Smart 2005). For example, FIFA's sponsorship revenue has risen significantly as corporations have come to appreciate that 'embedding advertising' in such a globally popular cultural event as the World Cup, an event that through television coverage reaches more people worldwide than any other, constitutes an 'advertiser's dream and … an unparalleled opportunity' (Maidment 2006).

Global sport sponsorship: the World Cup and the Olympics

Between 1993 and 2003 the global sponsorship market grew from \$10 million to \$27 billion and, in 2003, more than two-thirds of that market, \$18 billion, was attributable to sports related business activity (Smart 2005). Leading global corporations seek to associate their brands with the unique aura of authenticity that is a corollary of the exceptional performances and attributes of sport stars, individuals who through media representation acquire 'image' and the potential to become cultural icons. Well-established, globally popular sporting events are ideal vehicles for corporate sponsors seeking to raise the global profile of their brands. Such events transcend cultural differences and, being universal in appeal, open up access to consumer markets around the world in a way that few other social and cultural practices can equal.

With the increasing choice in communications media and the fragmentation of audiences, reaching consumers through advertising and marketing via broadcasting, billboards and magazines has become a more precarious business. In an over-saturated communications media context, popular sporting events constitute one of the few cultural forms that retain a capacity to attract a global audience to broadcasting programme schedules and thereby they offer businesses a unique global promotional platform, the potential to expose consumers around the world to associated corporate advertising, marketing and branding campaigns (Marqusee 2006). It is not surprising that by 2006 the sports sponsorship market was reported to have increased significantly in value and to be worth $43 billion (Viscusi 2006).

Sponsorships and endorsements have been a factor in professional sport for well over a century. In 1898 Nottingham Forest, champions of the English football league, had a commercial contract with the beverage company *Bovril*. In 1903 the *News of the World* sponsored the Professional Golf Association Match Play championship. In 1910 *Gillette* hired an American baseball star Honus Wagner to sell razor blades, and in 1926 *Coca-Cola* was accorded product sampling rights for the 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games (Pope 2003; Smart 2005; http://www.geocities.com/jawo66/olympic.html retrieved 17 July 2006). In the 1920s 'Red' Grange, an American football player, held a number of endorsement contracts with companies manufacturing clothing and soft drinks, as did American golfer Walter Hagen with manufacturers of golf equipment. In the aftermath of the Second World War, leading English sportsmen, notably Dennis Compton, Tom Finney, Billy Wright and Stanley Matthews, had endorsement contracts with companies producing hair products, breakfast cereals and football boots respectively (Smart 2005).

Although one might argue that the first sign of commercial sponsorship in sports was the inclusion of advertisements in the official programme for the first modern Olympics in Athens, only in the last quarter of the twentieth century, in association with developments in sports television broadcasting, did corporate sponsorship begin to have a marked impact on sports (Lasch 1979; Sandler and Shani 1993; Smart 2005). From the mid-1970s corporate sponsorship of sport events with a global popular appeal and commercial potential, for example the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games, has grown significantly.[10]

FIFA was the first global sports organization for which corporate sponsorship became a major source of revenue generation, with the World Cup becoming the main tournament for securing lucrative global commercial sponsorship agreements and for auctioning the sale of global television broadcasting rights. Following the election of João Havelange as president in 1974, FIFA's future development was considered to be bound up with the deployment of appropriate marketing strategies targeted at potential global corporate sponsors. In his campaign for the FIFA presidency, Havelange had promised to increase the number of countries participating in the World Cup Finals, to introduce a World Youth tournament, and to enhance the global appeal of football by establishing a programme to help develop the game in Africa and Asia. Such commitments necessitated significant increases in funding. With the assistance of Horst Dassler and Patrick Nally, who from 1977 to 1982 shared a sports marketing partnership SMPI (Société Monégasque de Promotion Internationale), FIFA and President Havelange set out to establish exclusive marketing rights agreements with major global corporations. They began with the 1978 World Cup tournament in Argentina, for which contracts were negotiated with six major corporate sponsors, including Coca-Cola, Gillette, and Seiko (Sugden and Tomlinson 1998; Smit 2006; Yallop 1999). This established a template that would be followed in subsequent tournaments (Table 1).

From 2007 FIFA's global commercial strategy became even more exclusive as prospective marketing partners were grouped into three categories: 'six FIFA Partners, six to eight FIFA World Cup sponsors and four to six National Supporters'. Appropriately the first to sign up as a FIFA Partner for the period 2007–14 was Adidas, which paid \$350 million, followed by Hyundai, sum undisclosed, Sony \$305 million, Coca-Cola \$500 million (through to 2020), and Emirates Airline \$195 million (Viscusi 2006). The 1982 World Cup tournament held in Spain was the first to have an organized corporate sponsorship programme, with a reported \$19 million being raised in total from nine 'partner' sponsors. For the 2006 tournament in Germany the 15 partner companies paid on average \$35 million each to be a part of the FIFA sponsorship programme (Maidment 2006).

At the 1976 Olympic Games there were 628 sponsors and suppliers but only US\$ 7 million in revenue was generated. For the 1984 games sponsorship was organized into three categories: 'Official Sponsors' (34), companies with 'supplier' rights (64) and 'licensees' (65). The IOC describes the 1984 Games as inaugurating the most successful era of corporate sponsorship in Olympic history.

In 1985 International Sport and Leisure (ISL), the most influential sports marketing agency throughout the 1980s and 1990s, drew on experience gained with FIFA when assisting the IOC to establish a lucrative marketing rights plan, The Olympic Partner (TOP) programme (Smit 2006; Sugden and Tomlinson 1998). The programme offers exclusive global marketing rights to a select group of corporate sponsors who pay a higher premium in exchange for the greater value flowing from an exclusive relationship with one of the world's leading sporting events. The attractiveness of the TOP programme to global corporations can be gauged from the fact that, as the IOC reports, 'the program enjoys one of the highest sponsorship renewal rates of any sports property'.[11] Over the 20-year period that the programme has been in existence the revenue generated from sponsorship agreements with a limited number of global corporate partners has grown significantly (Table 2).

Table 1 Official Partners of FIFA World Cup 1982–2006

FIFA World Cup™	2006	2002	1998	1994	1990	1986	1982
Adidas	X	X	X				
Avaya	X	X					
Anheuser-Busch	X	X	X		X	X	
Coca-Cola	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Continental	X						
Deutsche Telekom	X						
Emirates	X						
Fujifilm	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Fuji Xerox		X					
Gillette	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hyundai	X	X					
JVC		X	X	X	X	X	X
Korea Telekom/NTT		X					
MasterCard	X	X	X	X			
McDonald's	X	X	X	X			
Philips	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Toshiba	X	X					
Yahoo!	X	X					
Canon			X	X	X	X	X
Snickers*			X	X	X		
Opel**			X	X		X	
Energizer				X			
Alfa Romeo					X		
Vini d'Italia					X		
Bata						X	
Cinzano						X	
R. J. Reynolds***						X	X
Seiko						X	X
Iveco							X
Metaxa							X

* 1990 Mars/M&M's
** 1994 General Motors
*** 1986 Camel/ 1982 Winston

Source: FIFA *InfoPlus* http://eur.i1.yimg.com/eur.yimg.com/i/eu/fifa/do/paren.pdf retrieved 18 July 2006.

Table 2: TOP global sponsorship programmes 1985–2008

	Olympiad	Partners	NOCs	USD million
TOP I	1985–1988	9	159	95
TOP II	1989–1992	12	169	175
TOP III	1993–1996	10	197	279
TOP IV	1997–2000	11	199	579
TOP V	2001–2004	11	202	603
TOP VI	2005–2008	11	202	866

Source: IOC Factsheet – Revenue Generation and Distribution December 2005 – http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/facts/introduction/100years_uk.asp# retrieved 17 July 2006.

Global sports events now take the form of recurring spectacular commercial media festivals. Consumer cultural events take place in which sports stars, and those elevated to an iconic global celebrity status, represent local and/or national communities. The celebrities serve as role models, as objects of adulation and identification, but also increasingly as exemplars of consumer life-styles to which spectators and television viewers alike are enticed to aspire. This is achieved through the marketing campaigns of sponsoring corporations seeking to promote their brands through association with the positive qualities displayed in popular sports competitions and expressed by sporting figures granted lucrative product endorsement contracts.

Concluding remarks: the serious business of global sport

Since the late nineteenth century, proceeding from England, the birthplace of modern sport, there has been a complex process of diffusion of sports around the world (Elias 1986; Mandell 1984). While in the course of the twentieth century a number of American sports, including grid-iron football, baseball, ice hockey and basketball, began to achieve a degree of popularity in some parts of the world, the difficulties and disappointments encountered to date in attempting to build a significant international following suggest that ‘the outcome of globalization is less likely to be the hegemony of American sports’ (Whitson 1998: 70; Leifer 1995). However, if global television ratings and levels of match attendance for American sports events held overseas have tended to be relatively disappointing, the extensive commercialization of sport that first became evident in America, exemplified by the cultivation of sport as an entertainment spectacle, developments in television sports broadcasting, and the extension of a culture of celebrity to include sports stars, seems destined to continue to exercise a powerful influence over any sport seeking to maintain its ‘place in a mediated global culture’ (Whitson 1998: 71; Leifer 1995).

Global sport is now a serious and increasingly financially rewarding business. In the mid-twentieth century concern was being expressed about the detrimental impact of increasing professionalism, seriousness and commercialism on sport’s ‘pure play-quality' or 'play-spirit' (Huizinga 1949). By the late 1970s, the 'intrusion of the market into every corner of the sporting scene' was considered to be promoting the degradation of sport (Lasch 1979: 117). At the close of the century, concern was being expressed about the challenges being posed to the institutions of sporting governance and sport's credibility by the global sport business (Katwala 2000).

Sport is now an established part of a globally extensive entertainment industry and sportsmen and sportswomen have eagerly embraced the notion that they have a responsibility not only to be successful in competition but also to entertain spectators and viewers by participating in the promotion of sport as spectacle. In turn, sportsmen and sportswomen have come to recognize that the global popularity and media profile that sporting success brings can deliver lucrative opportunities to them. This is done with the assistance of agents, advisers and media consultants who market their images to commercial corporations seeking to raise global awareness of their brands, increase their share of world markets, and gain an edge on the competition through association with prestigious sports events and celebrity sports stars. Global sports events and iconic global sporting celebrity figures have become increasingly important to the promotion of commodity consumption. This is achieved through displaying corporate logos and marketing campaigns at sports events, deploying sporting imagery and prestigious global sporting event trademarks in corporate advertising in the media, and involving the high-profile products of sports celebrities like Tiger Woods, David Beckham, Venus and Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova in product and brand promotion (Smart 2005).

More than 100 years ago it was noted that to expand global trade successfully and to exploit fully the market for goods and services around the world, it was necessary to give a 'cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country' (Marx and Engels 1968: 83). As the twentieth century unfolded, commercial corporations increasingly recognized that few if any cultural forms have as much potential to be cosmopolitan as modern sports. Sports are universal signifiers, they 'travel across borders', rise above differences of politics, culture and religion, and promote a positive feeling of shared experience and a sense of common meaning. They achieve this through the rituals of competitive play, themselves rendered universal by the formation of a global sporting network, to which the growth of media coverage and corporate sponsorship has made such a decisive contribution (Aris 1990).[12] The association of corporate logos, products and services with global sports events and iconic globally popular sporting figures increasingly accords a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country.

At the beginning of the twentieth century it was remarked that the pursuit of business and wealth generation had acquired 'the character of sport' (Weber 1976: 182). By the end of the century the character of sport had been radically transformed, in substantial part by the corporate world, by transnational business activity and the global pursuit of wealth, and by the development of communications media and the growth of consumer culture (Sennett 2006). As modern sport has become global in scope it has largely lost its playful character and its professional practice has become both a global media spectacle and a serious and financially significant global business.

Notes

1. See also http://people.mills.edu/nscott/TennisHistory.html and http://www.all-about-tennis.com/history-of-tennis.html retrieved 13 June 2006.
2. See http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/noc/index_uk.asp and http://www.un.org/Overview/unmember.html retrieved 14 June 2006.
3. See http://www.sneakerhead.com/manufacture-converse.html retrieved 11 June 2006.
4. The tennis player Fred Perry employed a comparable approach to promote his brand of tennis clothing. The Fred Perry brand emerged at the end of the 1940s when Perry, an English tennis player who won the Wimbledon Singles title in 1934, 1935 and 1936, and was the first player to win all four Grand Slam titles, was persuaded to market a sweatband bearing his name. The Fred Perry sweatbands were marketed by giving them away to top players who wore them at tournaments. In 1952 the Fred Perry shirt with laurel logo was launched and successfully marketed in exactly the same way. Perry was not the only tennis player of his era to move into the production of sport and recreational clothing. René Lacoste, who won two Wimbledon, three French Open and two US Open singles titles before retiring in 1929, founded Lacoste to mass produce a shirt embroidered with a logo created for his personal use on the tennis courts (Smart 2005).
5. Late in 1926 C. C. 'Cash and Carry' Pyle offered the French tennis player Suzanne Lenglen $50,000 to tour the USA playing a series of matches against Mary K. Browne, the first American woman to play professional tennis. The tour was so successful that Lenglen was awarded a $25,000 bonus (Smart 2005).
6. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/front_page/3035005.stm retrieved 10 June 2006.
7. See http://en.beijing-2008.org/87/55/article211635587.shtml retrieved 11 July 2006.
8. See http://eur.i1.yimg.com/eur.yimg.com/i/eu/fifa/do/tven.pdf retrieved 11 July 2006.
9. See http://eur.il.yimg.com/eur.yimg.com/i/eu/fifa/do/tven.pdf retrieved 11 July 2006 and http://www.fifa.com/en/marketing/newmedia/index/0,3509,10,00.html retrieved 2 January 2007.
10. As one of the chief executives of a commercial partner to both the IOC and FIFA, Scott McCune, director for worldwide sports at Coca-Cola, has stated, 'The Olympics and the World Cup are the only two [commercially significant sport] properties that are global and that people really care about' (Viscusi 2006).
11. See http://www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/facts/programme/sponsors_uk.asp retrieved 10 June 2006.
12. In his capacity as ISL's deputy managing director with responsibility for marketing the 1988 Olympic Games, Jurgen Lenz remarked that 'There are only four things that travel across borders: sport, music, violence and sex. And it's difficult to find sponsors for violence and sex' (cited in Aris 1990: 169).

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