

SEPARABILITY AND INSEPARABILITY OF SPORT AND POLITICS: THE REALITY IN AFRICA TODAY

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ABSTRACT

The widely known argument by sport sociologists that sport and politics must remain water and oil that should never mix is the philosophy that has led this study to be undertaken to assess the truth in the sport fraternity to date. News is awash with incidents when politicians and the state influence the administration of sport and national sports associations survive on political support, leaving the sport-politicization matrix so complex that one could believe that the two cannot be separated. On that course, sport should be free from political interference, and politics should only support sport development. This study aims at assessing the separability and inseparability of sport and politics from a qualitative worldview and adopted a case study as a deemed appropriate study method. Data generating instruments such as interviews, observations and group discussions were used in this study. The objectives of this study are i) to identify supporting evidence of incidents where politics lead sports activities, ii) to explain how sport is weakened by political interference, iii) to show how politics support sport development, iv) to describe the modern relationship between sport and politics. Research participants involved were seating political constituencies' members of parliament, ward councilors, sport administrators, youth in sport and sport clubs in communities. Data were analyzed through thematic approach and transcriptions of verbatim. This study has found out that sports and politics in African perspective are same sides of the same coin, one cannot thrive without the other. It is difficult to separate sport from politics since sport or politics is benefiting much from each other for development and success. However, it emerged that there is misconception in the definition of "intervention and interference". From these findings the research highlighted these recommendations: sport administrators should redefine political interference and intervention, governments must establish sport techno-parks in districts, sport administrators should take advantage of politics that support sport participation, sport integrity should be protected and finally it is not necessary to separate politics from sport.

Keywords: interference, sport, political power, separation.

INTRODUCTION:

Interference is an act of coming in or hindering by a powerful body when either an unacceptable or acceptable situation is prevailing. The power dynamics stand to dominate the trajectory of the development for the benefit of those with power. Politics has been regarded as an external force that should not interfere with sport activities. Sociologists in Eshuys, Guest and Lawrence,(1987), Rowe (1995) in Amusa et al (2005), argue that the relationship between sport and orthodox politics is marked by a contradiction between denial of politics in sport and political mobilization of sport. Further to that, there is an existing and unresolved controversy between governments and sport administrators, many argue that politics has no place in sport and some say it is impossible to separate politics and sport.

The constructive or positive use of sport in politics began with the ancient Greeks. Leading athletes were paid the equivalent of thousands of dollars to enhance the prestige of their city-states. In Rome, according to Davis, Kimmet and Auty (1986), political groups used charioteers to parade their political causes. During the Middle Ages, both in East and West, jousting and other ritualized sports tested the administrative strengths and loyalties of court retainers. Nineteenth century has seen sports and games used to encourage desirable social characteristics.

The two, politics and sport seemed to cordially work together for the good of each other but a wave of change was precipitated by the Black September's Fedayeen smash into the Olympic Village by terrorists in 1972, (Davis et al, 1986). So the Munich massacre marked a paradigm shift that saw sport authorities agitating for the separation of sport and politics, as states wanted to take advantage of sport to settle their political misunderstandings. The competitive power with sport has been singled out by nations as a fertile ground and opportunity to demonstrate expression of political grievances. Nations have joined international sport bodies not for show-casing sport excellence only, but even for advancing political mirages. Consequently, sport has suffered and also benefited at times. However, sport sociologists have remained adamant that political interference is detrimental to sport development. Therefore, this study is motivated by this argument, thereby, elaborating the connectedness between sport and politics today, the bad side of political interference into sport and the way forward.

Individual athletes have their careers been shuttered if their nations have been banned from participating in international sport events. For instance, the controversy over South African-born Zola Budd (Eshuys et al 1987:127) and whether she should have been issued with a British passport in order for her to compete for Great Britain, the Russian military presence in Afghanistan was protested by Britain and USA by asking sportsmen and women not to take part in Moscow in 1980, thus, sport became a weapon of foreign policy. Developing nations suffered economic under development once they are excluded from sport competitions globally, for example, South Africa during its apartheid rule until 1994. Sport could be used as a tool to bring political independence, development and fair practice of human rights by states to their people that is the goodness of the interference, but could be used by those privileged to power to advance their minority supremacy, that is the worst side of it. With that note, this study aims to draw the reality on the ground, that is, the relationship between sport and politics and the way forward.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Political interference finds expression in sport today as politicians demand appearance and their visibility during sport events. Sport authorities find themselves at cross-roads whether to avoid politicians during sport development in order to abide by sociological perspective or to include them for the development and success of sport, that leaves out an unanswered question, "Is sport and politics mixable?".

SUB-QUESTIONS:

1. What is sporticization of politics?
2. How is politics interfering with sport today?
3. To what extent does sport benefit from politics?
4. How can the situation be ameliorated for the benefit of both sport and politics?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

Once the relationship of politics and sport has been clearly drawn, and parameters for each have been given, this study would act as an ameliorating vice between sport fraternity and politicians. Sport becomes a major

beneficiary as sport administrators, sponsors, politicians and athletes would operate with clear freedom without encroaching into each other's area of influence and observed organizational rights.

ASSUMPTIONS:

The researcher assumed that:

- Politicians are misdirecting their political power for the detriment of sport development.
- Sport can strive better without political interference.
- Beneficiaries of these study findings will assist in demystifying the controversy between sport and political relationship.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

Sporticization of Politics:

Lapchick (1986) in Amusa et al (2005:266) retorted that it is a 'myth' that politics can be kept out of sport. Sporticization of politics was evidenced as far back as 1968 until 1994 in South Africa when sport was used to isolate South Africa on the basis of practising apartheid system. In other words sport was used as a vehicle for gathering world support for political change and the abolishment of apartheid, targeting sport as an influential cultural institution of "conservative wealthy whites", (Allen, 1988 in Amusa et al 2005). It proves that South Africa became an epicenter where politics interfered clearly with sport. Also, the then Rhodesia was eased out of Olympic competition in 1972, for a Rhodesian athlete to participate in Olympic competitions, one had to do so under the banner of queen of England. This was an attempt to let sport thrive. The major reason being that their racial policies had become increasingly unacceptable internationally, Amusa et al, (2005).

Davis, Kimmet and Auty (1986), further observed that in the 20th century the post-World War 1 sports carnivals run by the Allies celebrated the victory of one way of life over another, the superiority of a political and social system. Even Hitler then used the 1936 Berlin Olympics to proclaim the emergence of his new social order, (Davis et al 1986).

Another example of sporticization of politics was noted at the first Asian Games in 1951, post-colonial states like India and Indonesia used sport to display their new political and cultural independence.

Furthermore, the then United States of Russia (USSR) used sport as a major contributor to the new social order following the 1917 Revolution. Sport was used to promote health, state objectives and form character, back up military training, and to display international social superiority in Russia, (Davis et al 1986). Centrally, Germany had a different regard on sport, as her ideology on sport was to use sport as a serious social issue with a positive international advertisement function, (Davis et al 1986) noted.

It is noted by Davis et al (1986), that some players could become political as well as athletic resources and symbols, for instance, from 1960s on, athletes like Bikila, Temu, Bewott, Gammoudi, Yifter, Keino, Akii-Bua, Romo and Bayi whose absence could be engineering to protest against some policy or other political agendas. This was witnessed in 1976 when more than 20 countries (mostly African) boycotted the Montreal Olympics to protest against New Zealand's rugby union contacts with apartheid practising South Africa.

Given that background, it is undeniable that sport and politics have been inseparable forces for a time immemorial.

Political interference in sport Today:

Several arguments have emerged creating an unending debate about politics and sport. Amusa et al (2005) posit that emerging African nations in the years following their independence or democratization have experienced limited resources to develop nationhood, and sport was perceived to be important in developing a national identity and internal cohesion. Once sport administration is state controlled, for instance in Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe controls sport through Ministry of Sport, the Sport and Recreation Commission is a government entity, sport and politics become impossible to separate.

The interference is an act of a powerful hand from the state that dictates what should be done in sport in order to achieve a political advantage whether for the goodness of sport or not. At times the world sport bodies' power to deter state interference is felt. For example, Football International Federation Association (FIFA), in the Herald 2015, demanded the government of Zimbabwe to stand aloof from ZIFA affairs when the deputy Minister of Sports and Culture tabled the issue of sacking out Cuthbert Dube, (the then ZIFA chairperson) in parliament, on allegation of football maladministration. Zimbabwe was threatened of 2018 CAF ban by FIFA once it

interfered, and ultimately the government obliged.

A critical look of a common practice in African countries is that politicians take advantage of the power of sport to gather their electorate and advance their campaign rallies. Some tournament venues could be manipulated to target those cities and districts where politicians want to stage political campaigns. It is observed that some companies are made to sponsor certain sport trophies by the state.

Sport benefits from Politics:

As postulated in the United Nations General Assembly resolutions 58/5 of 3 November 2003, 59/10 of 27 October 2004 that sport is viewed as a strong tool to promote nationhood, health, education, peace and development, governments are persuaded to promote sport with the intention to reap several advantages. Winning a bid to host an international sport event is a blessing to the government of the hosting country as that would mean economic development; therefore, sport authorities in a country have to seek political support in order to persuade the international world to agree to that bid. Once an important international sport event bid is won, that host country's sport facilities benefit immensely in terms of refurbishment of stadia, roads, shops, hostels and other service utilities. Even a 'political truce' could be agreed upon in order to allow sport to prevail (Olympic.com)

It is common in Zimbabwe that we have political sport trophies for example, the Bob 99 trophy, Independence trophy, Heroes Trophy. At these games political agendas are advanced to the nation as people enjoy the glamour of sport. The rationale for these competitions is not to promote fitness, but cementing a political ideology among people, that is why other sport disciplines are irrelevant at that time other than soccer which is a crowd puller.

Ameliorating politics and Sport:

There could be several attempts to transform the schools of thought that agitate the separation of politics and sport. However, a notable stance by Australian government is worth adopting as cited in Davis et al (1986). The establishment of the Australian Institute of Sport in 1981 is a showcase of a combined initiative of the Fraser Liberal-National Party government, athletes and private funders to develop sport. This effort brought harmony between politics and sport, to the delight of every Australian (Sports World, September 1985).

Davis et al (1986) citing Simon Balderstone in *The Age*, Melbourne, 25 March 1981, advise that governments should continue to support sport for the development of national health, participation and enjoyment. The same view is propounded in the UN, Treaty Series, and Volume 1577, No.27531 resolutions 60/1 of 16 September 2005, 60/9 of 3 November 2005, 61/10 of 3 November 2006 and 62 /271 of 23 July 2008, when urging states to harness the power of sport as it promotes education, health and peace among people.

Unfortunately, critics like Alfred (1997) in Amusa et al (1999) are quick to warn centralization and elitism of sports administration much practiced by autocratic and undemocratic states. This scenario nurtures politics-sport conflict that leads sport sociologists to demand separation of politics and sport.

Since sport is a unifier among communities of diverse backgrounds, (Mitchell, 1997, Jordaan 1998) cited another strategy to weaken political interference or persuade politics to assist sport development is by way of making sport a tool for nation-building, as depicted by the chanting of songs like 'Shosholoza', an African workers song and a new 'Africanized' anthem 'Nkosisikelel'i-Africa, 'Ishe komborera Africa'. These songs are sung during sport events, though they enchant political sovereignty of a nation, they motivate every citizen to love sport and want to associate himself/herself with sport successes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The study adopted a qualitative paradigm and this method enabled the study to infer meaning from rich informants through interviews, observations and documentary analysis. The participants deemed vital and information rich included political councilors in the province of Mashonaland East, National Sports Associations, officials from Sports and Recreation Commission, National Heads of Secondary Schools and National Association of Primary schools, sport officers in the Ministry of Sport and renowned soccer sponsors from corporate world. These information-rich participants were purposively selected. Telephone interviews were conducted to some participants in inaccessible areas; face to face interviews were self-conducted by the researcher. Observer- participation was favored in this study to personally witness and triangulates the generation of data. Documentary review was done to those who were office bearers who keep documents.

SAMPLING :

Proponents of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009, Silverman 2010) argue that a qualitative research needs to specify a sample size as this paradigm cannot exhaust information-rich people in a study. However, this study has adopted the same method and continuously solicited data from groups thought to be privy of the relevant data in sport and political spheres.

DATA ANALYSIS:

After the data were collected, the researchers analyzed the data using a thematic approach and transcriptions. The study used these two approaches to allow patterns and thematic connections to emerge out of the data and do not address the material with a pre-determined theory or hypothesis in mind.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

Sporticization of Politics:

Data has indicated that there is invisible line between politics and sport in provinces. Participants are saying “Sports are led by civil servants, politicians spearhead sport tournaments to advance government ideologies”, (*masports anoitiswa nevashandi vehurumende saka varidzi vehurumende mapolitisheni, masports vanoashindisa kuitisa zvido zvehurumende*). This assertion stands to show that as long as sports governance is under the auspices of the state, there is nowhere political interference can be ruled out.

Another scenario in practice in the province is that politicians have associated themselves with sponsoring sport tournaments as they are the only ones with resources to finance sport activities, companies are incapacitated financially, therefore in view of this situation study participants see politicians as drivers of sports success. It could be that politicians capitalize on the power of sport to gather the electorate and publicize themselves. Furthermore, people in Zimbabwe are convinced that you cannot successfully stage sport games without getting assistance and permission from politicians who are always given the platform to officially open these tournaments as a way to respect and recognize them in their constituencies. This relationship becomes evidence that sport and politics cannot be separated in reality.

The sporticization of politics is epitomized in Wedza District where both political constituencies (Wedza North and Wedza South) were won by Mr. Samuel Musanhu of Musanhu Tournament and Mr. Michel Madana of Madana Tournament in 2013 general elections in Zimbabwe. Therefore, a school of thought has emerged that at other times politicians intervene in sport for its success, whilst other politicians interfere using their political influence to bent the administration of sport to their advantages. All the same, other research participants argue that even politicians interfere or intervene; sport is eventually done and succeeds as a result. Therefore, the ultimate result is that sports benefit from politics and the two are inseparable.

Political Interference in sport Today:

However, interviewees in this study had a point to put across as they defined intervention and interference. Intervention has a reason to bringing positive progress whilst interference has a connotation of disturbing.

All strata of rich informants in this study have indicated that most sport tournaments in their districts have some political agendas at the end. One focus group discussion said “*matournaments arikuitiswa nevemusangano, hapana mamwe mapato ezvematongerwo enyika anobvumirwa kusponsor matournaments esport kupi zvako*” (All sports tournaments are sanctioned by party members of one political party, since members of any other parties could be afraid of victimization if hosting a sport tournament under their banners anywhere else). This observation suggests a political interference in sport, as other political parties might have the capacity to sponsor sport and that brings development to sport, territorial permission cannot be granted by arms of the government.

Another argument was that once those parties were allowed to sponsor sport tournaments in those districts, it could also throw sport into chaos as fighting could erupt after other more powerful political parties would ban sport tournaments after discovering that more electorate is skewed their favour to a rival political party.

On ways to ameliorate politics and sport conflict, rich informants have argued that politics and sport have a strong relationship which is difficult and unnecessary to destroy. They agreed that political interference is healthy for sport development all over the world. Once sport governing bodies fail to participate in any sport event, they appeal to their states to intervene, for instance, ZIFA has been barred by FIFA from playing in the 2018 World Cup qualifiers after failing to pay former warriors coach Valinhos of Brazil his salary (The Herald 11 November 2015 page 12). The Minister of Sport and Recreation Makhosini Hlongwane has promised to appeal to Zimbabwe parliament to negotiate the uplifting of the ban, whether to succeed or not but it is a clear testimony of political intervention for the good of sport.

Data indicate that sport enables political agendas to thrive since sport has the power to gather people in large numbers. Also government projects like Youth Education through Sport, Sport for All and Community Sport have succeeded due to utilization of sport and eventually people learn life-long ideas through sport.

Another interviewed group cited political sport trophies like the Bob 99 trophy, Independence trophy, Heroes Trophy and Unity trophy in Zimbabwe. Government facilitates these trophies with the aim of propagating political ideologies then later people enjoy the games. Therefore, sport thrives through politics. This might suggest that sport resources can be availed by politicians in order for these trophies to be successful and eventually people enjoy participating, thus “at the end, sport is a winner”.

Participants noted that sport develops a national identity and internal cohesion, as noted in Amusa et al (1999). Therefore, it is imperative for the states to deploy state funded sports trainers who spearhead the establishment of sport techno-parks in both rural and urban communities and such sport centers must be owned by the communities until a stage that the communities would rent these centers to sport associations and the monies are ploughed back to community development projects.

On the same vein, the community sport centers reach an era whereby they run their own sport activities without state taking a share of gate-takings; this could convince people that there is no state interference in their sport.

Data also pointed out that people would be happy if politicians do not appear as if they bring sport to the communities, but that the communities should invite politicians to assist in developing sport in the communities.

CONCLUSION:

Given the study findings in this research, the researcher made the following conclusions:

- Interference and intervention have been wrongly perceived as they are viewed as both destructive actions yet intervention by politics means bringing positive development to sport as politicians have the resource capacity to make people participate in sport, while interference is destructive to sport administration and participation to some extent, but not always the case.
- It is correct that politics and sport cannot be separated as sport or politics thrive because of each other to date.
- Political interference in sport activities depends with the people in a particular situation to call it bad or good. For instance, during apartheid era black South Africans viewed politicization of sport as a necessary tool to bring their independence.
- In poor economies, politicians are well resourced to sponsor sport activities, and this has been construed as political interference by rivalry opinions.
- State ideologies also succeed through harnessing the power of sport as seen during mass displays in African countries.
- Sport builds nationhood; therefore, it is impossible for the state not to utilize it in its development endeavour.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The study made the following recommendations:

- Sport administrators should redefine political interference and intervention as these are constantly viewed as having a destructive motive yet sport development and participation are at times achieved through these.
- The establishment of provincial sport techno-parks spearheaded by state arms e.g. universities, could ameliorate the relationship between politics and sport development.

- If politics make the ordinary populace enjoys participating in sport, sport administrators should take advantage of that, but if politics deter sport participation, sport administrators should voice against it through supreme sport bodies.
- Since sport is believed to be a powerful tool for the state to realize its ideologies, the African governments should protect the integrity of sport.
- It is not necessary to separate sport and politics since the two thrive on each other in African states today.

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