

Sport and secessionism in Scotland

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Introduction

Following their resounding victory in the 2011 Scottish Parliament elections which gave the pro-independent Scottish National Party (SNP) a parliamentary majority, the SNP-led Scottish government entered into negotiations with the coalition Westminster government. These negotiations eventually resulted in the signing of the ‘Edinburgh Agreement’ in October 2012 which legislated for a single-question referendum before the end of 2014, in line with the SNP’s preference for a referendum date in autumn 2014. However, much to the disappointment of the pro-independence ‘Yes’ campaign, the result of the 2014 Scottish independence saw 55.3% of the electorate voting ‘No’ to Scottish independence as opposed to 44.7% voting ‘Yes’. Nonetheless, further succour for advocates of Scottish independence has been provided by the outcome of the UK-wide referendum on European Union (EU) membership which resulted in a victory for the anti-EU ‘Leave’ campaign which supported the UK’s withdrawal from the EU, despite strong electoral support in Scotland to ‘Remain’ within the EU (McEwen, 2018). Regardless of the outcome, the very occurrence of the referendum on Scottish independence in September 2014 undoubtedly illustrated that political nationalism and

support for the prospect of Scotland's secession from the United Kingdom has increased in recent years.

Given this, this chapter seeks to critically examine the long-term development of rising support for Scottish independence, and the specific role of sporting issues in relation to Scottish political nationalism at various historical junctures, up to and including the present state of affairs in the Scottish political context at the start of the 2020s. A number of historical and contemporary issues which illustrate the complex interconnection between sporting, cultural and political nationalism in Scotland are considered, demonstrating that a simplistic conflation between these contrasting forms and domains of nationalist sentiment is highly problematic in the Scottish context.

The chapter will firstly explore the impact of Scotland's comparatively privileged status within international sport as a 'stateless nation' which possesses independent, representative national teams in sports such as football and rugby union, considering the extent to which this historical anachronism has reinforced a notion of a distinctive Scottish 'nation' within the UK. The existence of this privileged sporting status for Scotland is temporally contextualised within the historical context which led to Scotland's incorporation into the United Kingdom through the 1707 Act of Union, illustrating how the symbolism of Scotland's sporting independence during the global spread of international sport in the post-Union period of the 18th and 19th century simultaneously reinforced and undermined the nascent claims for a 'restoration' of Scottish political independence.

Attention will then turn to various examples which illustrate the interconnection between modern sport and political nationalism in Scotland in the 20th century, including the 'Home

Internationals' between Scotland and England which exposed political and social conflicts between these two nations, the dualistic symbolism of international sporting events such as the Olympics and Commonwealth Games, and the oft-cited interconnection between Scotland's failure in the 1978 FIFA World Cup and the unsuccessful campaign to (re)establish a Scottish parliament in 1979. These developments are charted alongside the fluctuating, but gradually increasing, support for Scottish political sovereignty which prevailed throughout the 20th century, culminating in the eventual establishment of a devolved Scottish Parliament in 1999.

Finally, turning attention to the contemporary period from the turn of 21st century to present, exploring the use of sport as a means for political campaigning during the historically unprecedented events of the Scottish independence referendum of 2014, as well as the political and constitutional turmoil which has continued to prevail in Scotland given the UK's protracted withdrawal from the European Union following the 2016 UK-wide referendum result on 'Brexit'. To this end, discussion of the domain of sport will focus on various contemporary sporting issues and phenomena which occurred during this constitutional and political maelstrom, such as the London 2012 Olympics, the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games, and the use of sporting personalities within the various constitutional plebiscites during this period.

Sport and secessionism in Scotland – the historical roots of the Scottish ‘nation’ in sport

The fragmentary nature of Scotland’s early history presents significant foundational challenges to any attempts to identify the origins of the Scottish ‘nation’. For example, it could be argued that the true origins of the Scottish nation stem from the delineation of territories through the construction of the Roman frontier walls, or through the joining of the Scottish and Pictish lands by Kenneth Mac Alpin in 843, or by the signing of the Treaty of York in 1237 which legally defined the border between Scotland and England (Mitchison, 1970). Although the Treaty of York acted to establish the border between Scotland and England, the onset of the ‘Wars of Independence’ between the two countries at the end of the thirteenth century again represent a historical development which still carries resonance for contemporary reflections on the origins of the Scottish nation and Scottish nationalism, in terms of both the mythology of Scotland’s historical struggle for independence and the framing of England as the ‘Auld Enemy’ in this historical struggle.

The first such example is the popular Scottish revolt led by William Wallace in 1297, culminating in the Scottish success over the English forces at Stirling Bridge in September of that year (Maclean, 2000). The endeavours of Wallace and his army gained heroic and legendary status in popular Scottish history throughout the centuries since the defeat at Falkirk, epitomised by the popularity of the 1995 film ‘Braveheart’ with mythologised Wallace’s historical endeavours (Edensor, 1997, 2002). Following Wallace, the second major Scottish uprising against English forces was led by Robert Bruce, culminating in conflict with a mass English army under Edward II, meeting Bruce’s forces at the battle of Bannockburn in June 1314 (Maclean, 2000; Mitchison, 1970). Despite being significantly outnumbered by the

English forces, the battle ended with a resounding underdog victory for Bruce's forces and re-established the independence of the Scottish kingdom.

The narrative trope of Scotland's underdog status invoked by Bannockburn continues to resonate within its political and sporting endeavour to this day (Whigham, 2014). The recurrent framing of Scotland as an embattled, oppressed, but valorous nation throughout its pre-Union military and political battles with its English is easily translated to the domain of sport, whereby Scotland's relatively scarce sporting resources have resulted in an approach to sporting competition which is peppered with 'glorious failures' where Scotland has offered a plucky yet ultimately unsuccessful attempt in various sporting competitions. Furthermore, to this very day, England continues to act as the significant other for Scotland in terms of sporting competition in sports such as football and rugby union (Bairner, 1994; Massie, 2000; Moorhouse, 1986, 1987, 1995; Whigham and Gibbons, 2018). In sum, despite the fact that the opportunities for formalised sporting competitions between Scotland and England did not commence until well after the political union between the two nations, the symbolic foundations for the sporting rivalry between the two nations and its resonance for secessionist nationalist movements can be easily identified in Scotland's pre-union history as a sovereign, independent nation.

The 1707 Act of Union marked the end of Scotland's existence as an independent and sovereign nation. Through the provisions of the Act, the separate Scottish and English Parliaments ceased to exist, replaced by a unified Parliament of the kingdom of Great Britain to sit at Westminster (Devine, 1999; Hanham, 1969; Maclean, 2000). Despite the numerous economic benefits to Scotland which harnessed the support of the Scottish Parliament to agree to the Act, a great deal of animosity and reluctance to support Union was demonstrated prior to and following 1707 (Devine, 1999; Hanham, 1969; Harvie, 1998). Despite the significant losses for the

governance of Scottish society in the Act, provisions were made to ensure that numerous elements of Scottish civil society were able to retain an element of autonomy and distinctiveness within the Union. The Act legislated for the maintenance of the ‘holy trinity’ of independent church, legal and educational systems following the Union (McCrone, 1992), ensuring that the Presbyterian and Episcopalian systems of worship would remain as the ‘established’ churches of Scotland and England, respectively (Larkin, 2011; Maclean, 2000, Pittock, 2012). Devine (1999) and Mitchison (1970) argue that the stability of the Union was secured due to the economic benefits which Scotland exploited during the eighteenth century, ensuring that the Scottish elite maintained their support for Scotland’s constitutional status. Furthermore, for Harvie, this was due to the continued existence of ‘semi-independence’ for Scotland within the Union, echoing the arguments of McCrone (1992) regarding the importance of the ‘holy trinity’ of independent Scottish civil society.

However, while this ‘holy trinity’ of Scotland’s independent religious, legal and educational systems are little known phenomena outside of Scotland, sport has been argued to have mimicked the impact of the ‘holy trinity’ in terms of reinforcing a distinctive sense of Scottish nationhood, and has in many ways been more efficacious in portraying Scotland’s distinctive status on an international stage (Bairner, 1994; Jarvie and Walker, 1994; McCrone, 1992). Indeed, the origins of Scotland’s privileged status as an independent sporting nation lie within this very same post-Union era in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, wherein the ‘home nations’ of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland emerged as rare examples of internationally-recognised representative teams in sports such as football and rugby despite their lack of independent statehood. This historical anachronism derives from the central role played by the British nations in the codification, establishment and internationalisation of sport such as football, rugby, cricket, golf, tennis and hockey (amongst others).

The unique status afforded to the ‘home nations’ in the domain of international sport also allowed for an opportunity to symbolically perpetuate the historical rivalry between Scotland and England during this period. Indeed, the first ever international football fixture in 1872 was between Scotland and England, marking the start of the sporting rivalry between the Scotland and the ‘Auld Enemy’. As alluded to above, these fixtures retained a special status for Scottish fans in particular, with the pre-Union history of political and historical enmity between the two nations increasing invoked throughout the historical and symbolic development of this rivalry (Bairner, 1994; Massie, 2000; Moorhouse, 1986, 1987; Whigham, 2014; Whigham and Gibbons, 2018). At this point, sport can thus be seen to replicated the growth of ‘romantic’ cultural nationalism in Scotland in the early Victorian era (Devine, 1999; Harvie, 1998; Pittock, 2008a), captured in Nairn’s (1977) contentions regarding the ‘Caledonian Antisyzgy’ which is epitomised by a head’ versus ‘heart’ debate in the Scottish constitutional debate and the nature of Scottish national identities, whereby Scots can maintain a cultural identification with a distinct Scottish nation whilst rejecting claims of secessionist nationalist movements seeking to achieve Scottish independence.

Nonetheless, the 1880s saw the issue of home rule for Scotland gaining prominence in political discussions. 1886 saw the establishment of the Scottish Home Rule Association which aimed to engender cross-party support for Scottish home rule and the establishment of a Scottish parliament (Devine, 1999), with some Liberals in Scotland beginning to endorse the policy (Harvie, 1998). James Keir Hardie, the founder of the Scottish Labour Party in 1888 and a co-founder of the UK-wide Labour Party, was also a keen supporter of Scottish home rule, ensuring that the cause began to receive cross-party support (Maclean, 2000; Mitchison, 1970). Given this growing prominence for Scottish political nationalism in the late nineteenth century,

whether in the form of claims of additional devolved powers for Scotland within the Union or secessionist nationalism which sought to re-establish an independent Scottish nation-state, attention will now turn to charting the development of the relationship between sport and secessionist nationalism in the twentieth century.

Sport and secessionism in Scotland in the 20th century

Secessionist nationalist sentiment in Scotland continued to grow in the early twentieth century, bolstered by the electoral momentum of parties sympathetic the cause of Scottish ‘home rule’ movements during this period. Indeed, had it not been for the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, it has been argued that the Scottish Home Rule Bill which has progressed to its second reading before the start of this conflict would have likely progressed into law (Devine, 1999; Hanham, 1969; Harvie, 1998). The conflict of 1914 to 1918 initially appeared to have decimating effect on the progress of secessionist nationalist political movements in Scotland, whether due to the economic and human costs of the War or the symbolically unifying effect for Scots participating in large-scale conflict with compatriots from the rest of the UK. Nonetheless, concurrently with the economic decline suffered across the UK in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the inter-war period witnessed these establishment of nationalist movements in the form of the National Party of Scotland (NPS) in 1928 and the Scottish Self-Government Party (SSGP) in 1932 (Harvie, 1998), effectively replacing the floundering home rule movement supported by the established political parties represented at the Westminster Parliament. In 1934, the NPS and the SSGP merged to form the Scottish National Party (SNP), which has developed into the most effective political vehicle for Scottish secessionist nationalism throughout the twentieth century.

Although the SNP failed to achieve any significant electoral successes until the 1970s, due to the dominance of the Labour Party in post-war era of Scottish politics, a further period of economic stagnation in the 1970s saw the SNP begin to achieve greater success in winning representation within the ‘first-past-the-post’ electoral system of Westminster (Harvie, 1998) (Leith and Soule, 2011). The growing electoral success of the SNP has been argued to have revolved a number of complementary ideological and symbolic arguments, such as: 1) a narrative regarding the ‘democratic deficit’ which sees the Scottish electorate ruled by Conservative governments at Westminster despite a majority of Labour MPs in Scotland (Leith and Soule, 2011; Pittock, 2012); 2) the ‘It’s Scotland’s Oil’ campaign of the 1970s and 1980s which emphasised a lost economic boon for Scotland following the discovery of vast reserves of oil and gas in Scottish territory in the North Sea (Devine, 1999; Nairn, 1977); and, 3) a post-colonial narrative which represents Scotland as a once-independent nation which was subject to a process of ‘internal colonialism’ by England through the 1707 Act of Union (Hechter, 1975; Mycock, 2012).

Sport continued to play a role in symbolically perpetuating a number of these narrative tropes of secessionist nationalism in Scotland during this period. For example, the work of Moorhouse (1986, 1987) argued that Scots suffered from a form of ‘repressed nationalism’ in the domain of sport, expressed through resentment of their English neighbours in the annual ‘Home International’ football fixtures between Scotland and England. Similar arguments have been made by numerous other scholars of football and Scottish nationalism during this period (Bairner, 1994; Jarvie and Walker, 1994), whilst others have extended these arguments to the sport of rugby in discussions of the symbolism of the annual ‘Five Nations’ competition between the four home nations and France (now ‘Six Nations’ following the addition of Italy in 2000), which pits Scotland against England for the ‘Calcutta Cup’ trophy (Bairner, 2000;

Jarvie, 1993; Jarvie and Reid, 1999; Jarvie and Walker, 1994, Kowalski, 2004; Massie, 2000).

Furthermore, the portrayal of Scotland's economic exploitation by their English neighbours in the 'It's Scotland's Oil' and 'internal colonialism' narratives has also been argued to have proved analogous to the world of sport during this period, exemplified best the loss of Scottish sporting talent to English leagues due to greater sporting and economic opportunities available in England (Moorhouse, 1987).

The exploits of Scottish sportspeople in individual sports such as tennis, golf and the Olympic sports also provided an opportunity to reinforce a sense of distinct Scottish national identity. In particular, the successes of Scottish sportspeople during this period were often given additional attention by the Scottish media and spectating public, thus reclaiming the 'Scottishness' of these achievements even when representing the United Kingdom as whole (Whigham, 2014). The conditional nature of the support offered by the Scottish media and sports fans to athletes in individual sports is further complicated in the case of the Commonwealth Games, given that the home nations split off to compete against other in this event (Haynes and Boyle, 2008; Jarvie and Reid, 1999). The political symbolism of the Commonwealth Games, wherein the participant nations are traditionally all past territories of the British Empire, can thus be viewed as resonant with the 'internal colonialism' narrative espoused by some Scottish nationalists with regards to the United Kingdom. The existence of an independent Scottish team at this event both simultaneously can be exploited as evidence of Scotland's 'junior partner' status within the Union as well as a symbolic marker of its distinctiveness as a nation, thus acting in a Janus-faced manner with regards to the validity of the claims of secessionist nationalists (Black and Whigham, 2017).

This dualistic symbolism of sport with regards the advancement of secessionist nationalism in Scotland during this period is also evident in other examples. This argument is best captured in the comments of the SNP's former leader, Jim Sillars, after his defeat in the 1992 UK general election, where he badged Scots as '90-minute patriots' who failed to translate their sporting nationalism into support for secessionist nationalist politics (Jarvie and Walker, 1994; Kowalski, 2004). Such sentiments illustrate the fact that, notwithstanding the above arguments regarding the use of nationalist symbolism within the sporting domain, the general consensus within academic analyses of this period is that Scottish sporting nationalism did not correlate with political nationalism and, specifically, support for the re-establishment of an independent Scottish state (Bairner 1994; Jarvie 1993, 2017; Jarvie and Walker 1994).

Indeed, one of the myriad reasons why the expression of nationalism in the domain of sport failed to translate into the support for political nationalism lies in the traditional ethnoreligious and political divide between the supporters of the two largest football clubs in Scotland, Rangers and Celtic. During the twentieth century, the 'Old Firm' clubs gradually captured a hegemonic position within Scottish club football, both in terms of their sporting successes and the size of their respective fanbases. However, the polarised nature of the ethnoreligious, political and societal characteristics of the supporters of these two clubs, and the heated rivalry between them, negated the possibility of football acting as a unifying force with respect to secessionist nationalist sentiment. For example, historically Rangers supporters have frequently been associated with overt expressions of Protestantism, Orangeism, Conservativism, and unionism (in relation to both Scotland and Northern Ireland) (Bairner, 1994; Bissett and McKillop, 2014; Flint and Kelly, 2013; Kowalski, 2004), whilst in contrast Celtic supporters were more strongly associated with Irishness, Catholicism and republicanism (Kelly, 2011; Flint and Kelly, 2013). Whilst this generalisation undoubtedly runs the risk of

over-simplifying and homogenising the more nuanced and varied nature of the two clubs' fanbases, it would be naïve to suggest that Scottish identity in the domain of football and sport more generally was unified in any way, shape or form.

Despite the relative impotency of sport with regards to harnessing secessionist nationalist sentiment throughout the twentieth century, events in the political domain during the later decades of the twentieth century which led to the re-establishment of a devolved Scottish parliament in 1999 were still frequently linked to sporting events and analogies. The aforementioned 'democratic deficit' in Scottish political representation was finally redressed through the election of Tony Blair's 'New Labour' government in 1997, additionally significant for Scottish politics as the party had committed to a second devolution referendum following the unsuccessful 1979 referendum on the same question (Devine, 1999; Leith and Soule, 2011; Maclean, 2000). Indeed, with regards to the 1979 referendum, despite the aforementioned fallacies regarding the impact of sport for securing secessionist nationalist sentiment, the unsuccessful 1979 referendum was speculated by some in the media and politics to have been at least in part influenced by Scotland's failure at the 1978 FIFA World Cup (Bairner, 1994; Jarvie, 1993; Jarvie and Walker, 1994).

However, in the intervening period between 1979 and the second referendum on Scottish devolution in 1997, Scottish politics witnessed an increase in what Leith and Soule (2011) have termed as 'small 'n' political nationalism', whereby a number of the traditionally unionist parties, including Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish Green Party, and the Scottish Trade Unions Congress coalesced around the idea of securing devolved powers for Scotland *within* the United Kingdom. The resounding success of the 'Yes-Yes' campaign in the 1997 devolution referendum was thus attributed to the cross-party cooperation of all of the major

political parties in Scotland, except from the Conservatives who pursued an anti-devolution campaign (Devine, 1999; Harvie, 1998). However, sporting nationalist sentiment was again argued to have at the very least partially contributed towards the success of the 1997 referendum by some nationalist politicians, with the former SNP leader Ales Salmond suggesting that the ‘feel-good factor’ of Scotland’s qualification for the 1998 FIFA World Cup Finals may have boosted the ‘Yes’ vote (Kowalski, 20004). The subsequent (re)establishment of the Scottish Parliament in Holyrood, Edinburgh in 1999 thus marked an important constitutional milestone at the end of the twentieth century; attention now turns to the era of post-devolution Scotland to examine the interconnection between sport, politics and secessionist nationalism in recent years.

Sport and secessionism in post-devolution Scotland

The early years of the new devolved Scottish Parliament appeared to have quashed the progress of secessionist nationalist parties such as the SNP, with the first two Holyrood elections in 1999 and 2003 witnessing the election of two Labour-led coalition governments within the Parliament’s proportional representation electoral system. However, the SNP’s decline at the 2003 election marked a turning-point, with the party making sufficient gains at the 2007 election to become the largest party in the Scottish Parliament, against a background of growing disenchantment with Labour-led governments at both Holyrood at Westminster (Leith and Soule, 2011). The SNP were forced to proceed as a minority government following the 2007 election; although this limited the ability of the SNP administration to implement its 2007 manifesto policies, including a proposed independence referendum, the formation of the first SNP government offered the party the opportunity to demonstrate its ability to govern

competently whilst providing a forum for emphasising the benefits of Scottish independence (Dardanelli and Mitchell, 2014; Johns et al., 2013; Larkin, 2011; Leith and Soule, 2011).

At the 2011 elections, the SNP was able to further exploit dissatisfaction with the Labour government following the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, and the return of the Scottish ‘democratic deficit’ at Westminster with the establishment of the coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats following the 2010 general election (Mycock, 2012). The result of the 2011 Scottish Parliament elections placed the SNP in a position to hold an independence referendum, with its 69 MSPs providing the party with an overall majority. The SNP-led Scottish government entered into negotiations with the coalition Westminster government, resulting in the signing of the ‘Edinburgh Agreement’ in October 2012 which legislated for a single-question referendum in autumn 2014. The preferred date for the referendum immediately sparked press speculation of the reasons for selecting autumn 2014, with various commentators highlighting the association with the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn in June 1314, and the hosting of a number of sporting and cultural events in the 2014 ‘Year of Homecoming’, including the Glasgow Commonwealth Games and the Ryder Cup (Carrell, 2013). The timing of this historical event within the long advance of secessionist nationalism within Scottish politics, with its close proximity to a number of major sporting events in both Scotland and the UK, thus facilitates a critical discussion of the relationship between sport and secessionist nationalism in this important juncture in Scotland’s constitutional development.

The first such event which preceded the 2014 independence referendum was the hosting of the 2012 Olympic Games in London. Given that the Olympics is organised along the lines of nation-states and thus means an integrated Great Britain representative team, London 2012 thus

acted as an opportunity for symbolically emphasising the united nature of ‘Team GB’ in sport, and the UK politically. For Boyle and Haynes (2014), the Games ‘revealed a temporary suspension in the pressing debate on Scottish independence, with hegemonic Britishness and the symbolic flying of the Union Jack more evident across the UK than had been witnessed in recent decades’ (p.91). This was particularly evident within the historical and contemporary portrayal of Britain within the London 2012 Olympic Ceremony directed by Danny Boyle, which was well-received, broadly speaking. However, for some commentators the Ceremony ‘bore little relation to the social reality of the UK under the Coalition… though Danny Boyle’s Britain is a myth, it remains a potent one. It was what persuaded Scots to meekly hand over Scotland’s oil to the British state, in a gesture of almost wilful altruism, in the 1960s and 1970s.’ (Macwhirter, 2012: 34). Despite the SNP’s position on the symbolism of London 2012, exemplified by Alex Salmond’s attempts to distinguish the success of Scottish athletes as ‘Scolympians’ rather than members of ‘Team GB’ (Ochman, 2013), it can be argued that the overall success of the Games added succour to pro-union campaigners in terms sport’s ability to counter secessionist nationalist sentiment.

However, in contrast, the afore-mentioned hosting of the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in much closer proximity to the independence referendum created a counter-opportunity for the pro-secession campaigners to draw upon the symbolism of sport to underpin their own political positions. The potential exploitation of the 2014 Games by the pro-independence ‘Yes’ campaign was thus pre-empted by pro-union campaigners who sought to de-politicise the event, such as the intervention of Labour’s former First Minister Lord McConnell who made an appeal for a campaigning ‘truce’ during the period of the Games (Whigham, 2017). On the whole, McConnell’s intervention achieved its desired goal, with politicians across the political spectrum and constitutional debate predominantly avoided

making overt statements regarding the political importance of the 2014 Games for the forthcoming independence referendum, thus neutering the potential for pro-secession campaigners to harness the ‘feel-good factor’ from a successful Games for political means (Jarvie, 2017; Whigham, 2017).

Nonetheless, this ‘truce’ during the 2014 Games period did not completely preclude political framing of the event by pro-secession campaigners. For the SNP, the Games were often used as analogy for broader discontentment with the constitutional status quo in other domains, with the ‘democratic deficit’ of Scotland’s status within the Union used to illustrate the negative impact on the economic benefits of the Games for Scotland due to Westminster policy on Air Passenger Duty and the loss of Value Added Tax receipts to the UK Treasury (Whigham, 2017). For the SNP, the successful organisation of the Games acted as an illustration of Scotland’s capacity for political self-governance, contributing to a longer-term trend of growing confidence due to the perceived success of the devolved Scottish Parliament as part of the party’s ‘gradualist’ movement towards political independence (Casas Adam, 2014; Keating, 2012). The examples regarding APD and VAT are therefore used to reinforce the SNP’s ‘public narrative’ of the constrained economic circumstances of the status quo, with the need for additional fiscal powers ‘in Scottish hands’ to eradicate the ‘democratic deficit’ (Leith and Soule, 2011; Pittock, 2008b).

However, the SNP’s framing of the 2014 Games did not go unchallenged by the pro-union parties. For example, the Labour party used the event to reinforce its central narrative regarding the constitutional status quo as the ‘best of both worlds’, emphasising important of the economic and logistical support from the UK Government for the Games, as well as the aforementioned dualistic symbolism of the event for co-existing expressions of Britishness and

Scottishness (Jarvie, 2017; Ochman, 2013). Labour also used the Games to raise issues relating to the SNP's domestic policy shortcomings, thus creating a political counter-narrative which aims to undermine the SNP's own attempts to illustrate its competence to govern an independent Scotland (Dardanelli and Mitchell, 2014; Johns et al., 2013; Larkin, 2011; Leith and Soule, 2011). Similarly, the Conservatives discourse on the Games placed a significant emphasis on the pro-union symbolism of the event through frequent references to 'Team GB' and the UK sports system, the positive impact of London 2012 as a UK-wide event (Ewen 2012, Jarvie, 2017), and support for the 2014 Games from the UK Government. This approach showed that the Conservatives appreciated that events such as the Games could have both a unifying and divisive effect with regard to Scottish and British identities. In sum, therefore, the 2014 Games could be argued to have acted as something of 'zero-sum game' with regards to its impact on support for secessionist nationalist sentiment in the lead up to the 2014 independence referendum, with the event arguably amplifying the predilections of voters on either side of the constitutional debate rather than persuading undecided voters to align with either pro-secession or pro-union positions.

Outside of the two major sporting events of London 2012 and Glasgow 2014, sport has been embroiled in the ongoing constitutional debates in Scotland in other manners. For example, the political positions and endorsements of sporting personalities were frequently courted by campaigners on both sides of the constitutional divide. The pro-union 'Better Together' campaign was more successful in securing political endorsements, citing support from a range of personalities from football (Crichton, 2014), rugby (Whitaker, 2014) and other popular sports. Tellingly, however, the vast majority of these endorsements came from retired Scottish athletes or international representatives, demonstrating the risks for current sporting competitors of making overt political interventions. These risks were illustrated in the

opprobrium directed towards athletes such as 800m runner Lynsey Sharp following her expressions of concern regarding the implications of a ‘Yes’ vote for the levels of funding and sporting infrastructure available in an independent Scotland in comparison to the existing UK-wide arrangements (BBC, 2014), and cyclist Sir Chris Hoy, Scotland’s most-decorated Olympian, following his comments that Scottish athletes might face challenges in terms of competing at Olympic level which were quickly framed as a tacit support for the pro-union campaign despite Hoy’s objections (Roden, 2013).

Pro-secession campaigners found sporting endorsements harder to come by, despite their overt attempts to do so through the creation of the ‘Sport for Yes’ campaign group which only succeeded in gaining endorsements from relatively minor Scottish sporting figures (Whigham and May, 2017). However, the last-minute endorsement of a ‘Yes’ vote from arguably Scotland’s most successful sportsperson at the time of the referendum, tennis player Sir Andy Murray, acted as a significant coup for secessionist nationalist campaigners. The ‘Yes Scotland’ campaign group reacted to these comments by circulating an official press release, harnessing the comments to further boost the media coverage of the brothers’ comments and arguing that “Scotland's leading sportsman Andy Murray today served a major last-minute boost for the independence campaign by declaring for Yes” (Yes Scotland, 2014). This intervention witnessed a similar level of opprobrium towards Murray from pro-union campaigners and social media users. Indeed, Murray later expressed regret about the manner of his comments on the referendum being released via social media, whilst equally defending his rights to express his political views and standing by his support for a ‘Yes’ vote (McLeman, 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion, sport and secessionist nationalism can be argued to be uncomfortable bedfellows within the Scottish context, given the fact that the distinctiveness of Scotland's independent sporting representatives have succeeded in producing sporting nationalist sentiment alone, with a mixed degree of transfer of this sentiment from the sporting to the political domain. As outlined above, the anachronist existence of independent Scottish representative teams within the international sporting system undoubtedly possesses symbolic potential for reinforcing a sense of Scotland's nationhood as distinct from the UK and its other constituent 'home nations'; however, this symbolism is not easily harnessed by pro-secession politicians to advance their political causes.

Indeed, as the support for secessionist political movements has gradually increased across time to the present state of affairs at the time of writing - with the SNP currently campaigning for a second independence referendum in 2020 in light of the UK-wide constitutional turmoil caused by the 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of the EU which lead to the 'Leave' vote – it can be argued that support for Scotland's national representatives in football, rugby and other popular sports has declined significantly. This illustrates that any attempts to simplistically conflate sporting and political nationalism in the Scottish context is highly problematic, given the various contradictory symbolic constructions of identity in Scottish sport, evidenced in the dualistic symbolism of events like the Olympic and Commonwealth Games and the polarised ethno-religious identities of the nation's two largest football clubs, Celtic and Rangers.

It can therefore be surmised that as the level of political engagement in Scotland has been enhanced due to the various constitutional debates which have been presented for consideration

to the Scottish electorate in recent years, sporting issues and identities are rightly relegated to the background for most voters in comparison to more pressing issues such as economic, societal, ideological and environmental factors, amongst others. That is not to say that sport does or should remain an apolitical domain within the Scottish context; instead, the central argument here is that sporting issues do carry symbolic weight in relation to the politics of secessionist nationalism and unionism, but that the dualistic symbolism of sport renders it a ‘zero-sum game’ in terms of its impact on constitutional matters. Nonetheless, sporting issues and personalities will undoubtedly continue to become embroiled in the various unresolved constitutional debates for Scotland which appear likely to fester over the near future; it therefore remains to be seen how the interconnection between sport and secessionist nationalism evolves further during this tumultuous period for Scottish politics and society.

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