Title
London 2012, Glasgow 2014 and athletes as political symbols – the precarious positioning of athletes within the evolving contemporary politics of the United Kingdom

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Abstract

This article considers the implications for athletes who hold a position as a 'political symbol' in the context of the United Kingdom (UK), and specifically Scotland, particularly those who publicly stated their personal political opinions during the periods of the London 2012 Olympic Games and the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. These two major international sporting events were hosted during a period of political upheaval within the UK, evidenced in the return of Conservative-led Westminster governments in 2010, the referendum on Scottish independence in 2014 and the referendum on European Union membership in 2016. English media coverage of the 2012 London Olympic Games revealed a propensity to critically frame 'Scottish' athletes, competing in 'Team GB', as potential resistors to overt expressions of British nationalism. This centred on Scottish athletes who failed to sing the British national anthem. During the campaign for Scottish independence in 2014, the establishment of the pro-independence 'Sport for Yes' group sought to harness sporting issues and personalities in favour of Scottish independence. In contrast, the pro-union 'Better Together' campaign promoted athletes discussing the potential negative impact of Scottish independence on the funding and organisation of Scottish sport. Accordingly, by critically considering the discursive framing of athletes who publicly announce their political positions, this article provides a review of the political significance of such pronouncements amidst a politically fraught UK.

Keywords: sport, politics, Scottish nationalism, British nationalism, Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games

Introduction

This article considers the implications for athletes who publicly stated their personal political opinions during the periods of the 2012 London Olympic Games and the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games. These two major international sporting events were hosted during a period of political upheaval within the United Kingdom (UK), evidenced in the return of Conservative-led Westminster governments in 2010, the referendum on Scottish independence in 2014 and the referendum on European Union membership in 2016.

Set against this context, this article considers the discursive framing of athletes who publicly announce their political positions, whilst also scrutinising the extent to which such pronouncements are of political significance, drawing upon past academic analyses of the interrelationship between sport and politics. In doing so, this article elaborates upon the relationship between athlete identity, nationalism, sport and British identity politics, by exploring these themes in relation to Scottish independence and the British state. More importantly, this analysis will signpost how this relationship is both precarious and contingent, whilst drawing upon the work of Edensor (2002).

Academic analyses of the relationship between sport, politics and nationalism have continued to identify the importance of sport as both a medium for expressing nationalist sentiment and a vehicle for examining contemporary nationalism (Bairner, 2001, 2015; Black, 2015; Maguire, 2005; Silk, Andrews, & Cole, 2005). These analyses endeavour to debunk the 'myth of autonomy' which perpetuates arguments

that sport and politics should not mix (Allison, 1993), instead contending that the sporting domain constitutes a rich source of evidence to illustrate evolving trends and phenomena relating to the expression of nationalist political ideologies, whether on an explicit or implicit basis.

In particular, sporting 'mega-events', such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup, 'second-order' major international sporting events (i.e. Commonwealth Games, IRB Rugby World Cup, ICC Cricket World Cup), and 'third-order' regional or continental events (i.e. Pan American Games, Asian Games, African Cup of Nations) offer individual nations the chance to showcase themselves on an international stage, in both a sporting and a wider political sense (Black, 2008). In fact, such events are often said to unite the host nation's population via media spectacles 'that embody contemporary society's basic values… initiat[ing] individuals into its way of life, and dramatiz[ing] its controversies and struggles' (Kellner, 2003, p. 2; see also Dayan and Katz, 1992; Ismer, 2011).

Given this, and the temporal interconnection between the London 2012 Olympic Games, the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, and the Scottish independence referendum, which took place in September 2014, it is possible to explore the complex and nuanced relationships between these events vis-à-vis existing literature on the relationship between sport, politics and nationalism. In what follows, we critically examine British and Scottish nationalism by separately considering English (London-based) and Scottish media (printed press and digital) framings of Scottish athletes as well as digital (social) media responses to and from Scottish athletes who

explicitly advocated a ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ position to Scottish independence. In doing so, we hope to extend discussions on the supposed non-relation between sport and politics as well as its significance for British identity politics and sporting nationalism.

Sport and Nationalism at London 2012: National Anthems and the ‘Scotsman’ Andy Murray

Given the enhanced degree of political autonomy afforded to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland followig the establishment of devolved parliaments and assemblies in these respective nations, some have alluded to a growing lack of support for British culture, ideas and values within a post-war Britain which accommodates a variety of conflicting forms of national identity (Colley, 2014; Nairn, 1977; Perryman, 2012; Rojek, 2007; Ward, 2004). In fact, ‘stemming from the emergence of a stronger (or at least more politicized) notion of Englishness as Scotland and Wales have moved towards devolution’ (Malcolm, 2012, p. 1073), numerous commentators have highlighted how devolutionary measures have ‘imprint[ed] an indelible question mark on what remains of a tattered and torn Union Jack’ (Perryman, 2012, p. 203). As a result, debates on the future of the UK have remained a prominent topic since the Scottish National Party’s (SNP) overall majority in the 2011 Scottish Parliament elections; a victory which allowed the SNP to successfully pursue their mandate on holding a Scottish independence referendum.

It was against this political backdrop that the UK hosted the London Olympic Games in July 2012. While a sense of anxiety would pervade the national press, especially in the days before the Olympic Opening Ceremony – particular attention was given to Britain's economic problems and the increasing cost of the Games, with some reports questioning Britain's ability to successfully host the Games – debates on 'Britishness' proved salient in analyses of and commentaries on the Olympic opening ceremony and the multi-national 'Team GB' (Black, 2015, 2016a; Bryant, 2015; Ewen, 2012; Poulton & Maguire, 2012). Indeed, representations of 'Britain', during the opening ceremony's performances, were noted for their perpetuation of an English-centric depiction of Britain and its history (Baker, 2014; Black, 2016a; Bryant, 2015; Collins, 2012; Crompton, 2012). Indeed, such conflation between Britishness and Englishness has been frequently identified in past analyses of the complexities of national identity in the UK (Colls, 2002; Groom, 2006; Kumar, 2003), with sport specifically identified as a domain in which this conflation occurs within media framing (Bairner 1994; Whigham 2014, 2017).

As a result, whether discussions of the Olympic opening ceremony sought to commend its display of British history, culture and identity, or, deride the cultural dominance of England, both the ceremony and the Games provided a significant moment, from which the future of the UK remained under question. Indeed, before the Games had finished, the then British Prime Minster, David Cameron, argued that 'the Olympics [had provided] a boost for the Union' (Shipman, 2012, p. 8). 'In a move that will infuriate the Scottish Nationalists', Shipman noted that Cameron had heralded 'the two-week sporting spectacular' as one that 'had brought the nations of the UK closer together' (p. 8). Consequently:

> in a calculated intervention aimed squarely at those seeking a referendum on the future of the Union between Scotland and the rest of the UK, he [Cameron] said the whole country had united behind the sight of athletes from the four corners of the land. (p. 8)

Such sentiments were continued by Moss (2012). While commenting upon Andy Murray's gold medal win in the men's single tennis, Moss noted that, 'Murray Mount was a sea of union flags, and there was hardly a saltire in sight – this has been a tricky week for Alex Salmond, with a vibrant new Britishness born before our eyes' (p. 5). Evidently, portrayals of a united and 'vibrant new Britishness' were predicated upon the tensions between the UK's separate nationalism and the success of 'Team GB'. Whereas Moss's comments draw attention to the former Scottish First Minister, Alex Salmond – who attempted to capitalize on the success of Scottish athlete's competing in 'Team GB' by referring to them as 'Scolympians' – other examples of English derision centred on the British national anthem, and, in particular, the refusal of some athletes to sing it.

National Anthems - the Complex Symbolism of 'God Save The Queen'

In his work on nationalism, Anderson (2006) noted the collective power of the national anthem in uniting the national 'imagined community'. Indeed, as argued by Hobsbawm (1983), national anthems – much like various other national 'symbols' (flags, art, language) – can be viewed as deliberate 'inventions' used to promote an identification with the nation and indoctrinate populations with a particular set of national values (McCrone & Bechhofer, 2014). As a result, national anthems occupy 'a special cultural status' (Daughtry, 2003, p. 46), forming an integral part of the

national competitiveness of Olympic competition (Schechner, 2006). In such instances, singing the national anthem reflects a 'recognised for[m] of embodied practice' whereby 'emotional attachments' can be 'displayed and witnessed' (Skey, 2015, p. 272).

This was particularly apparent in English newspaper coverage of those athletes who refused to sing the British national anthem, 'God Save the Queen'. In one example, Platell (2012) argued:

> two of Team GB's women footballers, Kim Little and Ifeoma Dieke, refused to sing the National Anthem because they are Scottish. They were playing in the very first event in the 2012 Games – the greatest sporting occasion many of us will ever witness in our country. Frankly, this mean-spiritedness was not just disgraceful but a national embarrassment. (p. 21)

The sweeping assertions made by the Daily Mail's Platell that the footballers' lack of participation in the singing of 'God Save The Queen' could be attributed to the fact that "they are Scottish" illustrates the propensity of certain publications within the English-based press to discursively frame such (in)actions as a deliberate symbolic act of anti-British defiance, despite the numerous alternative explanations for such non-participation. Certainly, tensions regarding the British national anthem remain a contentious issue within sporting competitions where the British home nations compete as a united British team (Holt, 2012).

Acting as a 'musical sign of the UK's asymmetric constitution' (Withers 2012), 'God Save the Queen' is the official national anthem of the UK. Despite this, during political, national and sporting events, Scotland ('Flower of Scotland') and Wales

('Land of my Fathers' [Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau]) choose to sing their own national songs. In Northern Ireland, the official national anthem is 'God Save the Queen', apart from the Commonwealth Games, where the lyrics for 'Danny Boy' are set against the tune for 'Londonderry Air' (Bairner, 2001). Officially, England has no associated national anthem, despite the Opening Ceremony playing 'Jerusalem' as England's national song (Bryant, 2015). During the start of the opening ceremony, 'Flower of Scotland', 'Land of my Fathers', 'Londonderry Air' and 'Jerusalem' were all sung by choirs (MacDonald, 2012). Given this, it could equally be argued that the non-participation of Scots such as Little and Dieke could be attributed to the fact that they had never sang the words of 'God Save The Queen' in the past, rather than as an act of symbolic defiance.

Despite this complexity, the English press endeavoured to portray the protests of particular Scottish and Welsh athletes, and their associated nationalisms, as antithetical to both a unified display of British nationalism, but, also, the Olympic spirit:

> What a pity that a small minority of Scottish and Welsh athletes, while prepared to play under the banner of team GB, have so sourly refused to sing the national anthem – cheap, parochial point-scoring that is the very antithesis of the Olympic spirit. (Daily Mail, 2012, p. 18)

This was echoed by the British Olympic Association who, according to Faulkner and Madeley (2012), were 'furious' about Little's decision not to sing the anthem. Faulkner and Madeley added that:

> a spokesman for the association – which has previously stated that all athletes should learn the National Anthem – gave a terse statement saying it was Miss Little's choice whether or not to sing but that all British athletes should 'show respect' (p. 4)

Notwithstanding reports on the lack of passion presented by English footballers during international events, most noticeably, the lack of singing by England striker, Wayne Rooney (Kelly, 2015), Scottish and Welsh objections proved particularly enraging for the English press. Consequently, while marginal groups can assert their own grievances 'by deforming the symbolic order' of public displays (Zuev & Virchow, 2014, p. 197), the above examples highlight how national anthems can be perceived as performative rituals, enveloped with symbolic meaning that, in certain situations, can be perceived as a political act. While sporting contexts provide notable opportunities for the performance of political acts (Butterworth, 2014), such occasions reveal how national codes, or, in other words, appropriate and legitimate forms of national performance, can be determined by established patterns and practices (Black, 2016b).

In fact, while drawing upon the work of Butler (1999), Lavi (2013) has highlighted how 'the notion of performativity' has been applied to the study of 'national identity' (p. 698), citing various studies (Calhoun, 1997; Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008; Edensor, 2002) which have examined the ways in which national identity is performed in various contexts, often via banal and everyday routines such as, speaking, but, also, during particular events, whereupon national flags and anthems are used as part of a larger, ceremonial performance (Billig, 1995; Edensor, 2002). Here, the performativity of identity and, specifically, national identity, is produced through

repetitive forms that help to contingently frame those who are 'included' and 'excluded' from 'the nation':

> In order to retain their power, performative norms need to be continually enacted, whether these are the spectacular disciplinary performances of national identity or the unreflexive habits of everyday life. And prescriptive conventions and common-sense values are rarely disrupted if they are performed unreflexively and uncritically. The continuance of normative performances reveals the ways in which power can define and inscribe meaning and action on bodies. (Edensor, p. 99)

In line with such thinking, Lavi (2013) states that if 'national identity, just like gender identity, is the result of repeated acts, lacking an ontological origin' then 'it cannot achieve stability and coherence' (p. 699).

On the contrary, we contend that particular performances, in this instance, national performances – such as singing the national anthem – can become so over-performed and entrenched that, despite their lack of 'ontological origin', they can be perceived as natural and, as a consequence, be used to delineate between those who 'know' how to perform correctly and those who do not. It is in this way that the boundaries between the (national) 'self' and 'other' are drawn, not just *between* different national groups, but also *within* multi-national states, such as, the U.K. Notwithstanding the contention that national identities are neither fixed, stable nor innate, it is, nevertheless, with regards to the nation that national communities seek a sense of ontological security in the face of global/'foreign' uncertainty (Craib, 1998). In the following section, it is the press' framing of these contingent boundaries which will be considered in relation to a notable Scottish, 'Team GB' athlete, Andy Murray.

Andy Murray's Golden Moment at London 2012

Andy Murray is notable for traversing the hero/villain distinction via discourses that frequently question his national allegiance. In many ways, representations of Murray echo work on ethnicity and national identity, by pointing to the contingent nature of his acceptance (Black, 2016b). With regard to the 'Team GB' track athlete, Mohamed 'Mo' Farah, Black highlighted that newspaper emphasised Farah's 'assimilated Britishness … through his promotion as a symbol of Britain's achieved multiculturalism' (ibid: 991). Similarly, Fletcher (2011) has argued, with reference to the work of Back et al. (2001), that discussions on the English cricketer, Monty Panesar, positioned him as a 'contingent insider'. The contingency which underlies British sporting performances is echoed by King (2014) who states that while '[Murray] has won the Olympic gold medal (competing for Team GB) and the 2012 US Open and is supported by many English tennis fans, … he is a Scotsman who left the UK tennis system to train in Spain' (p. 252).

Accordingly, when viewed alongside those non-English athletes who failed to sing the British national anthem, a degree of 'variation and paradox' was reflected in English press coverage of Murray's ('the Scotsman') success. While Peck (2012) admitted that 'the man has occasionally had a difficult relationship with the English, mainly because his words have been misrepresented' (p. 4), his efforts to sing the national anthem during the medal ceremony provided a stark contrast to the derision which met those Welsh and Scottish athletes who refrained from singing (Daily Mail, 2012; Platell, 2012). Instead, Peck (2012) noted that 'when the medal was placed round his neck and the national anthem played. … His lips at least moved in pattern with the

words of "God Save the Queen"' (p. 4). Echoing these remarks, Shipman (2012) added: 'Andy Murray, who once said that he would support anyone but England at football, … wrapped himself in the Union Flag and even sang the first few lines of God save the Queen when he won Olympic gold' (p. 8). In such instances, Murray's construction, within the English press, was negotiated in accordance with his ability to display and perform those normative codes, which were believed to signify his 'Britishness' (Black, 2016b).

Indeed, these examples expose how the 'socio-dynamics of stigmatisation' (Sutton & Vertigans, 2002, p. 64) are embedded in newspaper discourses. Here, encoded messages and established cultural codes seek to define appropriate forms of British identification (Black, 2016b). However, while such codes can serve to stigmatise and degrade 'outsider' individuals/groups who do not conform to established practices, they can also reveal how such constructions are not fixed, but, instead, are subject to processes of change and negotiation (Black, 2016b; Engh, Agergaard & Maguire, 2014; Loyal, 2011).

That is, once Murray's actions were eventually perceived as aligning with the established status quo, his rather unfavourable media image was noticeably reconstructed (Harris, 2012; Peck, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Addley, 2014). Murray's performance highlighted how 'Murray went in as the underdog and emerged as the victor, and there's nothing a British crowd likes better than that' (Harris, 2012). Similarly, Mitchell (2012) noted that 'the mutual affection has grown since he wept openly on Centre Court at Wimbledon after losing with grit and style to Roger Federer in the men's final. How typically British is that?' (Guardian, 2012). Murray's

outsider (re)construction was negotiated within the English press coverage to such an extent that his underdog image was constructed as being 'typically British'. In doing so, Murray's Scottishness was ignored, and, consequently, his Britishness, emphasised, further emphasising the contingent nature of his perceived identity.

Sport and Nationalism at Glasgow 2014: Murray's 'Yes' and Sharp's 'No'

The close temporal proximity between the 2012 London Olympic Games, the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games (which took place in July-August 2014) and the Scottish independence referendum which was held in September 2014, meant that both sporting events were also scrutinised in terms of their political implications and symbolism. Certainly, in the years following the 2012 Olympic Games and in the run-up to the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, references to the success of 'Team GB' were widely used by politicians to promote pro-union and pro-independence agendas. Notably, in February 2014, the south coast of England suffered severe weather conditions that resulted in major damage to transport networks, homes and businesses. In commenting on the storms, the Scottish independence referendum and the 2012 Olympic Games, The Observer (2014) stated:

> Vast areas of Somerset are under water. Dozens of flood warnings come and, occasionally, go. Cornwall's rail artery is suddenly severed. More gales and lashing rain spiral across the Atlantic. Meanwhile, in Stratford, east London, the prime minister delivers an eloquent speech asking people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to get on the phone and urge their friends and relatives in the north not to break away. Mr Cameron, wrapping himself in the glories of Chris Hoy, wants Team GB to win again. At which point, Alex Salmond, beginning to sense momentum for his own referendum dreams of Scottish independence, snorts that Mr Cameron would be better off visiting Somerset, and certainly better anywhere but preaching to Edinburgh from London, the rich city state of national disconnection (2014).

Evidently, while the 2012 Olympic Games provided an important moment to promote a united sense of Britishness and British unity, such comments revealed an underlying disparity between England and Scotland.

Indeed, a select handful of academic studies have explicitly considered the interconnection between the 2014 Games and the independence referendum in juxtaposition to the 2012 Olympics. In particular, the fact that Scotland competes as a separate nation at the Commonwealth Games, in contrast to the unified UK-wide representative team at the Olympic Games, facilitated an opportunity to illustrate the potential for Scottish sporting success as an independent nation. The differing nature of the representative teams at London 2012 and Glasgow 2014 therefore reveals the dualistic symbolism of major sporting events such as the Olympics and the Commonwealth Games, given their associations with both Britishness and Scottishness (Ewen, 2012; Iorwerth, Hardman, & Rhys Jones, 2014; MacRury & Poynter, 2010; Ochman, 2013; Thomas & Antony, 2015).

Here the work of Ochman (2013) has highlighted the possible political exploitation of Scottish athletes vis-à-vis the referendum, citing the example of former Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond who, as previously noted, attempted to brand Scottish athletes at London 2012 as 'Scolympians' rather than members of 'Team GB'. Harris and Skillen's (2016) chapter on the interconnection between sport and the independence referendum raised similar arguments, observing that "[w]ith the referendum looming ever closer, it was clear that competing claims for these medal winners was going to become an ever-present issue" (ibid: 84).

Andy Murray's 'Yes' and the 2014 Independence Referendum

Murray's aforementioned victory at the 2012 London Olympics constituted something of a turning point for his career, both in the sense of being his most high-profile achievement to date (at the time) whilst simultaneously helping Murray to increase his popularity amongst British tennis and sports fans. However, his victories at the London 2012 Olympics, the 2012 US Open and the 2013 Wimbledon competitions led to accusations of political exploitation of his successes by politicians such as Alex Salmond, who emphasised Murray's 'Scottishness' following his 2012 successes and controversially waved a Scottish saltire flag at the Wimbledon final; and, David Cameron, who emphasised Murray's 'Britishness' following his 2012 Olympic gold medal (Channel 4 News, 2012; Harris & Skillen, 2016; Sharp, Cumbers, Painter, & Wood, 2014).

Despite Murray's dissatisfaction of Salmond's attempts to politicise his sporting successes, Murray was more willing to explicitly identify his own political positions later in the autumn of 2014 in the run-up to the independence referendum. As noted earlier, this period witnessed both the pro-independence and pro-union campaigns citing support from sporting personalities for their respective political goals (Harris & Skillen, 2016; Jarvie, 2017; Ochman, 2013). In light of this, a great deal of speculation regarding Murray's views on the referendum emerged in the media, despite his refusal to be drawn on the issue during his interactions with the media. However, on September 18th 2014, in the early hours of the independence referendum

polling day, Murray explicitly expressed his support for a 'Yes' vote supporting Scottish independence via Twitter, tweeting:

> Huge day for Scotland today! no campaign negativity last few days totally swayed my view on it. excited to see the outcome. lets do this! (https://twitter.com/andy_murray; 18th September 2014)

Unsurprisingly, Murray's bold expression of his views on the referendum resulted in a great degree of media coverage, with the official pro-independence 'Yes Scotland' campaign group quickly pouncing on his remarks as evidence of a high-profile sporting endorsement for Scottish independence. Murray's older brother, Jamie Murray, a world-leading player on the ATP tennis doubles tour, expressed similar sentiments to Andy Murray, tweeting:

> Love UK..love the Royals..but it's time for Scotland to stand on its own 2 feet and control their own destiny. (https://twitter.com/jamie_murray; 18th September 2014)
>
> Scotland is full of smart, talented, hard-working, humble people. Have faith in them to run our country successfully. (https://twitter.com/jamie_murray; 18th September 2014)

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). The attempts of pro-independence campaigners to exploit Murray's comments as a means for boosting the likelihood of a 'Yes' vote,

successfully caught that attention of the media, with widespread coverage of his comments across both print and electronic media.

However, this coverage also resulted in negative repercussion for Murray in light of his comments, again illustrating the precariousness of his contingent identity which was challenged with this overt expression of Scottish political nationalism. Firstly, the fact that the vast majority of both Scotland-based and London-based newspapers had adopted a pro-union editorial position with regards to the issue of Scottish independence (Dekavalla, 2016) resulted in some negative coverage of Murray's comments. For example, the politically centrist publication The Independent ran with the headline 'Andy Murray branded 'irresponsible' for revealing 'extremely ill-advised' Scottish Independence view on Twitter' (Alexander, 2014), whilst the staunchly pro-union, right-wing Daily Mail elaborated further on this theme in an extended article entitled 'Will the British public ever love Andy Murray again after expressing his support for Scottish independence?' (Dickson, 2014). The latter of these two articles portrayed Murray's comments within a narrative of betrayal and hypocrisy, remarking that:

> This huge groundswell of goodwill for Our Andy may now have evaporated for many and will take an awful lot of recovering. Not just outside Scotland but also inside as well, where previously unconditional devotees supporting the No campaign will feel aggrieved. Retribution was swift in coming on social media and some of it sickening, although the backlash from the Cybernats would have been even more vicious if he had come out supporting the union. (Dickson, 2014)

Whilst Dickson's commentary contained an element of praise for Murray's bravery in expressing his political views when his sporting compatriots had often erred on the

side of caution, the analysis continued to speculate on the public relations and commercial implications of such an intervention in the political domain.

Furthermore, the growing impact of social media within contemporary society and the sporting domain was also illustrated in this instance, as alluded to by Dickson's (2014) commentary. Well before the traditional press had been able to respond to Murray's comments, a wide variety of responses to his intervention became evident on Twitter as well as other social media sites. Unsurprisingly, pro-independence social media users were delighted by Murray's interventions, with the 'Yes Scotland' campaign group remarking that his "declaration in the early hours of this morning sending social networks ablaze. By 9am his Twitter message had been re-tweeted (reposted) more than 10,000 times" (Yes Scotland, 2014). However, given the often confrontational nature of social media interactions for public figures, individuals on the opposite side of the political spectrum were equally quick to condemn his remarks. The responses of pro-union social media users ranged from relatively restrained negative comments about the 'irresponsible', 'ill-advised' and 'hypocritical' nature of his 'Tweet' (Alexander, 2014; Blundy, 2014; Dickson, 2014) to more reprehensible comments:

> @andy_murray Wish you had been killed at Dunblane, you miserable anti-British hypocritical little git. Your life will be a misery from now on (https://twitter.com/sportingharry; 18th September 2014)
>
> @andy_murray seriously you are a fucking cunt...after the last clanger about supporting whoever England are facing aswell..get in the bin you (https://twitter.com/grifter30; 18th September 2014)
>
> @SpineyWoods @LetUsDoItNow @andy_murray However, I suspect most Englanders would be very glad to see him f-off back to Scot (https://twitter.com/AndrewStoneman; 18th September 2014)

Given the vitriolic nature of the abuse levelled at Murray, as evidenced particularly in the first example, which exploited the fact that Murray attended Dunblane Primary School at the time of a horrific mass shooting which resulted in the murdering of 17 5-year-old pupils by lone gunman Thomas Hamilton, the increasing risks of negative responses to political interventions, such as Murray's, have been exacerbated by the growing status of social media in contemporary society. Indeed, Murray later expressed regret about the manner of his comments on the referendum being released via social media (McLeman, 2016; Prynne, 2014; The Guardian, 2014), whilst equally defending his rights to express his political views and standing by his support for a 'Yes' vote.

Lynsey Sharp's 'No' and the 2014 Independence Referendum

Andy Murray was not the only Scottish sportsperson to fall foul to a negative backlash to their political comments during this period. In terms of mirroring the experiences of Andy Murray from the opposing pro-union perspective, the case of Lynsey Sharp, an 800m runner who represented Great Britain at London 2012 and Scotland at Glasgow 2014, is the most comparable in terms of the media and public reactions to the political intervention of Scottish athletes in the referendum campaign. Unlike Murray, whose intervention into the referendum debate came at the very last moment, Sharp was vocal about her support for a 'No' vote throughout the final weeks of the referendum campaign. Although Sharp possessed a considerably lower profile than Murray, both in Scotland and internationally, her achievement of a silver medal in the 800m event at the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games had resulted in an increased level of media interest in her career. This provided Sharp with a platform to explain her concerns

about the potential negative implications of Scottish independence for the nation's future sporting success.

During the period of the 2014 Commonwealth Games, Sharp had refused to be drawn on the independence referendum question, in line with the vast majority of other members of 'Team Scotland' at the Glasgow Games. Indeed, in response to media speculation about whether Scottish representatives at the Games had been explicitly ordered to avoid political comments, an official spokeswoman for 'Team Scotland' responded:

> We believe that all our athletes are entitled to express their opinion on any subject, but we have advised them to bear in mind that there is a heightened interest in the independence referendum this year… I am sure some of them will nail their colours to the mast and, indeed, some of them have already done so. All we would do is remind them that it's important not to let anything become a distraction. (Coates, 2014)

However, in the post-Games period, Sharp became a vocal advocate of a 'No' vote, appearing on a BBC-hosted radio debate on 9th September 2014 to illustrate her concerns about the implications of a 'Yes' vote (BBC, 2014). In particular, Sharp cited concerns about the levels of funding and sporting infrastructure available in an independent Scotland, in comparison to the existing UK-wide arrangements, arguing that:

> …my particular concerns are whether Scotland, as an independent country, would have the funds, time and the resources to achieve the same sporting success as we're able to do so at the moment through a British team. Secondly I think… it's unlikely that the Scottish athletes would be able to compete for Scotland at Rio. (The Herald, 2014)

Sharp's comments about the implications of independence for the Scottish sporting system resonate with the issues raised in Harris and Skillen (2016) and Jarvie (2017) regarding the political economy of the Scottish and British sporting systems. Given that most Scottish athletes would receive their public funding and support networks from UK-wise sources, the knock-on impact of Scottish independence would put such funding and support in jeopardy, despite the Scottish Government's assertions to the contrary (Scottish Government, 2013; Working Group on Scottish Sport, 2014). Sharp was also dismissive of the comments of pro-independence campaigners such as Alex Salmond, accusing 'Yes' campaigners of portraying Scots who vote for the union as unpatriotic (The Herald, 2014). These latter comments again illustrate the dualistic political symbolism of events such as London 2012 and Glasgow 2014, with athletes embroiled with contrasting representations of Britishness and Scottishness at these respective sporting events (Ewen, 2012; Iorwerth et al. 2014; MacRury & Poynter, 2010; Thomas & Antony, 2015).

Whilst the media coverage of Sharp's interventions appeared to be more sympathetic than that of Andy Murray's, the response to her own referendum-day Twitter activity received an equally vitriolic response from pro-independence social media users. Echoing the case of Murray, in the early hours of the morning of September 18th 2014, Sharp tweeted the message "#Scottish #British #bettertogether" in conjunction with two different images of her holding the Scottish flag and the British flag aloft after competition (https://twitter.com/LynseySharp; 18th September 2014). The intended symbolism of Sharp's message took little in the way of deciphering, emphasising both the potential for individuals to display patriotic support for both Scotland and the UK simultaneously, as well as her stance that voting 'No' in the referendum did not

undermine her Scottishness or patriotism. However, as was the case with Murray's tweet, the response to Sharp's message was equally abusive:

> @LynseySharp are you not just being selfish, worrying about your funding? #greed (https://twitter.com/eviesuncle; 18th September 2014)

> @LynseySharp You're no Scot. You are a traitor. #YesScotland (https://twitter.com/GatheringRoses; 18th September 2014)

Conclusions - The Precarious and Contingent Political Positioning of Athletes within the UK

Against this backdrop, media coverage of both London 2012 and Glasgow 2014 offered an important opportunity to consider the construction and framing of 'Britishness', both as a stable and salient referent, but, also, as a wider signifier of the legitimacy of the British state. At the heart of this coverage was the discursive framing of several athletes who became embroiled within wider discussions on national identity, politics and sport. Indeed, the tone of the responses in the media to the political comments from Scottish athletes such as Murray and Sharp, perpetuates the clichéd adage that 'sport and politics' should not mix, a pronouncement that echoes Allison's (1993) 'myth of autonomy'. In fact, athletes occupy a prominent position in providing public engagement, with athletes frequently asked to provide their opinions on political issues (Butterworth, 2014).

To this extent, both the 2012 London Olympic Games and 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games represented an 'opportune moment' for athletes to present

their own opinions on 'Britishness', the UK and the Scottish independence referendum (Butterworth, 2014; Heidlebaugh, 2001). In fact, despite the questionable impact of sports-related political interventions during this important period of British and Scottish political history, in the closing weeks of the Scottish independence referendum campaign a growing trend for endorsements for a 'Yes' or 'No' vote from sporting personalities became apparent (Harris & Skillen, 2016; Jarvie, 2017). In particular, the pro-union 'Better Together' campaign was more successful in securing political endorsements, with the campaign able to cite coordinated 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, suggesting that the potential risks of political interventions such as these were reduced for those who were no longer actively competing.

This suggests that the risks for current athletes who wish to explicitly share their political positions on a given matter are higher, which can arguably be attributed to various core explanations. Firstly, the nature of contemporary social media forms has heightened the likelihood of personal abuse and 'trolling' by individuals from different political positions, as seen in the vitriolic responses aimed at Murray and Sharp. Secondly, but closely linked to the previous point, the potential ramifications of negative public reactions to political pronouncements have implications with regard to the commercial considerations of individual athletes. Given the growing importance of image management and public relations for athletes, often tied to their contractual obligations and sponsorship arrangements, the highly commercialised nature of contemporary elite sport undoubtedly precludes the ability of athletes to

freely intervene in the political domain. Drawing upon the above discussion, we would like to conclude by examining how the issues explored in this chapter correlate with wider debates on politics, citizenship and national identity.

Firstly, what is clear is that 'media personnel' *continue to* 'play a pivotal role' in representing the nation (Poulton and Maguire, 2012, p. 11). Indeed, 'by drawing upon the myths of collectivity and unity, [and by] emphasising the nation as embodied in its athletic representatives' (ibid., p. 11), sporting 'celebrities' are unavoidably linked with a national identity (Malcolm, 2012). Furthermore, whereas athletes can be used to represent national societies, equally, 'the nation is still used as a routine framing device through which to understand the significance of key actors' (Skey, 2015, p. 280). As a result, sportsmen and sportswomen perform the role of 'patriots at play' (Bowes and Bairner, 2016; Tuck and Maguire, 1999).

However, as detailed by Poulton and Maguire (2012), there are often 'complex mediated patriot games at play' (p. 19). In the context of both the 2012 Olympic and 2014 Commonwealth Games, this complexity was played out when 'conventional understandings of British sporting heroism' were challenged or undermined (ibid., p. 19). In such a context, the nature of national loyalty revealed an important paradox in identifications with, and, attachments to, 'British identity'. As can be seen from English press coverage of those athletes who decided not to sing the national anthem, such refusal was frequently considered as a direct attempt to subvert the unity of 'Team GB'. In such instances, the failure to 'perform' the anthem was portrayed as a 'political' act that went against the cultural symbolism appropriated to singing the national anthem. Such sentiment was echoed in coverage of Murray, who – in view of

his gold medal success – was afforded extra scrutiny during the medal ceremony. In this instance, Murray's ability to sing the national anthem and his wearing of the British Union flag was highlighted in his positive coverage within the English press. Nevertheless, such positivity was marked by an underlying contingency which emphasised his ability to continue to 'perform', and, subsequently, 'prove', his Britishness.

With regard to Sharp, her support for the 'Better Together' campaign was apparent in her posting a picture of herself hosting a Scottish and British flag, a sentiment that reflected her simultaneous identification with Scotland and Britain. Yet, as evidenced in Murray's support for a 'Yes' vote, such cultural symbols were closely allied with political sentiments that, in the case of social media, proved powerful in inciting abusive responses from certain members of the public. Here, the media's ability to sensationalise and frame cultural and political sentiments, highlighted the ways in which the relationship between cultural and political forms of nationalism can be viewed symbiotically in media coverage of the athletes and sport.

Moreover, we wish to use these findings to help draw attention to the contingent and, indeed, precarious, position of 'national' athletes. While Edensor (2002) highlights that 'the world is increasingly full of diverse performances which spark competing notions about what actions are "appropriate", "competent" and "normal"' – actions that were frequently debated and derided within media coverage of Murray – we highlight that such political affiliations, when related to the nation, bear an overdetermined significance in the media's framing of national identity. That is, while studies on sporting athletes and their national identities tend to focus on the various

ways in which athletes can be heralded for constituting the positive attributes of 'the nation', our examples emphasise that is often those athletes who are deemed as 'other' which provide a formative role in media portrayals of the nation (Edensor, 2002). Indeed, when viewed in relation to the literature on sport, politics and national identity, this takes on an added significance. Given that performances of the nation, such as singing the national anthem, tend to draw upon 'common-sense' and 'everyday' themes (Edensor, 2002; Skey, 2011); their:

> continual re-enaction means that rather than being fixed, performance is an interactive and contingent process which succeeds according to the skill of the actors, the context within which it is performed and the way in which it is interpreted by an audience. (Edensor, 2002, p. 99).

Whereas Edensor's (2002) remarks point to a more holistic understanding of the complex relations underscoring national representations (one that would draw upon print/digital media and audience analysis as well as the phenomenological and ethnographical significance of national identity), it is our contention that it is through the press' framing of those perceived to be 'outside' the nation's boundaries, that a more nuanced, contingent and self-reflexive understanding of *what* constitutes 'the nation' and its national identity can be achieved. This is not to propose a dogmatic conception of the nation, but rather, draws attention to the dogmatic nature of media coverage on the nation and its political justification. To this end, amidst increasing global, cross-national and inter-national tensions, it is through examining *who* and *what* the press deems to be 'other' that a critical understanding of the political 'stability' of national identity can be achieved.

Accordingly, the above sections reveal how the contingent political 'positioning' of certain athletes can hold particular significance in the framing of debates on sport and

politics. Such positioning can allude to a number of important significances in the ways in which athletes are used for political purposes, most notably, the degree of contingency that surrounds the national identity of certain athletes. This level of contingency poses wider problems when considering the relationship between sport and politics. Butterworth (2014) has argued that 'given [… sport's] role in public culture and the myriad ways it intersects with politics, sport can be an ideal site to foster engaged citizenship and critical judgement' (p. 879). However, what echoes across the above accounts, is how a conflation of both ethnic and civic attributes served to link British citizenship with British identity. In each instance, political intentions (civic) were allied with cultural (ethnic) assumptions that could be used to promote a separate Scottish culture in favour of independence, or, as support of the 'Better Together' campaign and a shared British culture. These multiple and contingent media framings of such interventions outlined above thus blunts their efficacy and clarity as political actions, further illustrating the complex interconnection between sport, nationalism and politics.

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