
International Sport as a Vehicle for Peace

DANIEL E. DOYLE, JR.

At the conclusion of the 1967–1968 basketball season, I was selected to join a team of New England prep school players to tour Europe for three weeks. The team was led by Donald “Dee” Rowe, my enlightened coach at Worcester Academy who understood that the impact of sport extended well beyond the court. On the morning of March 13, we gathered at the Belmont Hill School for a practice session and orientation, administered by People to People Sports Ambassadors, an organization founded in 1956 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to encourage cultural and sports exchange programs among nations. The news that day was dominated by the results of the March 12 New Hampshire presidential primary, in which Senator Eugene McCarthy had won a surprising 42 percent of the popular vote. For the first time in a presidential primary, the “winner,” incumbent President Lyndon B. Johnson, was considered the loser due to his lower than expected tally.

At the orientation, the People to People representative related the New Hampshire results to our forthcoming tour, pointing out that “The Vietnam War has divided much of Europe as it has divided our country. You should be aware of a strong anti-American sentiment among many Europeans.” The message I drew from the speaker’s comments was a sentiment that was confirmed during the trip: for the first time since World

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War II, Americans were looked upon by many Europeans not as welcome visitors but as intruders. As we headed for Logan Airport, the mood on the team bus was a combination of foreboding and vitality that, at least for me, piqued my interest in the political issues of the day in a manner far greater than I ever had experienced.

The key objectives of the trip, as set forth by People to People, were not merely to play games, but to learn about other cultures and to be introduced to an important leadership principle: being able to look at the world through the eyes of others, including those with whom we may have little in common.

On March 16, following our first game in Norway, we took part in a tradition of European sport, a post-game social for players from both teams, as well as others in the community. During the reception we learned that Senator Robert Kennedy had declared his candidacy for the presidency of the United States. I recall several of our Norwegian hosts expressing their fond hope that Kennedy, if elected, would end the Vietnam War, bring about social changes, and heal the wounds of division that pervaded North America and Europe. Over the next two weeks, we played nine games and participated in each post-game social. The socials provided the dual opportunity to engage in conversation about

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tunity to engage in conversation about issues that transcended sport and to reflect on our common interest in sport that had drawn us together.

speech, which was supposed to be confined to the status of the Vietnam War, President Johnson had called his speechwriter, Harry McPherson, to inform McPherson that he was rewriting the conclusion of the speech. The conclusion, of course, was that he would not seek reelection.

At the social following our last game, we discussed this decision with our British hosts and heard the following comment by a British coach, one I have never forgotten: "On this trip, and throughout your lives, always look for lessons from sports, for there will be many." The specific lesson I took at that time has lasted to this day: sport is a vehicle for social inter-

Very early on the morning of April 1, we checked into a London hotel. As we entered the lobby, an Irish porter said to us, "Lads, you may wish to have a look at the telly. Your President is getting ready to make what looks to be an important speech." Years later, I learned that several hours before the

action among people of different nations that can stimulate meaningful discussion on a variety of topics, including world issues.

INTEGRITY IN SPORTS

As a young coach, I was drawn to international sport's unique capacity to build relationships, to teach lessons, to cross political divides, and—as a result—to create the potential to effect change. In 1975, I took my Kingswood-Oxford boys' basketball team to compete in the Prague Christmas Festival Tournament. We were the first American team to compete in this tournament, and during the finals of the competition, I observed an extraordinary act of integrity.

The championship game pitted our Kingswood-Oxford team against the talented Club Sparta of Prague, which was the *de facto* Czech Junior National Team. With less than one minute remaining in the game and the score tied, one of our players stole the ball from the Club Sparta point guard and raced toward the basket. The Club Sparta player quickly regained his control, caught up to our player, and knocked the ball out of bounds. The referee's vision was blocked, and rather than guessing on the call, he asked the Club Sparta guard who had touched the ball last. Before I could register my displeasure with the referee for placing this decision in the hands of the opponent, the Czech athlete indicated that the ball belonged to the U.S. team. The boy did this in front of a sellout crowd with live television coverage. We scored on the next possession and went on to win the championship by two points. When considering the courage and integrity exhibited by that young man, our triumph seemed almost inconsequential. He displayed the real meaning of honorable competition better than any athlete I have ever observed. As the photographer Ansel Adams once proposed, it sometimes takes an act that touches the conscience to clear the vision.

The day after we won the championship, we played an informal scrimmage against another Czech team. Prior to the scrimmage, I proposed to the Czech coach that the first half be Kingswood-Oxford versus Czechoslovakia, but that in the second half we mix the teams. The contrast in dynamics was apparent, and I could easily see that my players enjoyed getting to know their new Czech teammates and forging relationships of a different sort than one nation versus another. The seed of an idea was implanted in my mind, one that I would call upon years later.

A Clarified Vision

In December 1979, I took my Trinity College men's basketball team to Montreal to compete against the McGill University men's team. Following the game, a McGill coach informed me that the Cuban Basketball Federation was receptive to the notion of a visit by an American college team. I had developed a friendship with Chris Dodd, then a young congressman in Connecticut, who had visited Cuba and met with Fidel Castro. Working with Chris, I arranged for my Trinity College team to play in Cuba the following year. We became the first American team to travel there since the revolution of 1959, and our trip drew national and international media coverage. During the eight-day stay, I engaged in many conversations with Cubans, from heads of sport federations to our tour guide, who secretly shared with me his desire to defect. Four months later, our guide joined thousands of other Cubans in the infamous Freedom Flotilla Escape.

The day before our departure, I tested the "mixing" idea—which had been so successful in Czechoslovakia—with the Cuban Junior National Team. It was clear this concept could be applied on a larger scale. After the final dinner, hosted by the Cuban Basketball Federation, I contemplated well into the night the notion of leaving coaching and somehow making international sport my career.

My decision to leave coaching a year later surprised many; my Trinity team was nationally ranked, and it was fairly well-established in the coaching fraternity that I was on the "fast track." I was well-aware of future financial opportunities that coaching would present, and I felt confident in the profession. But a situation with our autistic son, Danny, as well as my desire to pursue this murky notion of international sport, caused me to make the change. In order to pursue such an endeavor, I knew that I needed more grounding in international relations. At the recommendation of Chris Dodd, I applied to The Fletcher School.

Coubertin's Influence

During the Fletcher application process, I paid several visits to the West Hartford, Connecticut library to read about a man whose name I first had heard during the Cuban trip: Pierre de Coubertin. In 1894, Coubertin hosted a grand gathering at the Sorbonne University in Paris to revive the Olympic Games, which had been dormant since 393 AD. For seven glorious days, the delegates were wooed in grand style. Lunches at the Parisian townhouses of titled men, Fêtes de Nuit at the Racing Club of Paris, and other elegant extravaganzas were put together by Coubertin to convince

the delegates to support his proposal. One of Coubertin's key selling points was that the Olympic Games would serve as a facilitator of peaceful interaction among nations. At the final session, his proposal for revival was carried by acclamation by the 79 delegates representing 12 countries and others who had gathered in the Sorbonne Amphitheater. Coubertin closed the gathering with the following toast: "I raise my glass to the Olympic idea, which, like a ray of the all-powerful sun, has pierced the mists of the ages to illuminate the threshold of the 20th century with joy and hope."¹

Despite Coubertin's lofty objectives, it is my view that the Olympic Games and other elite athletic competitions have had little real impact on world peace. This is not to propose that the Olympic Games lack value. While navigating through such challenges as steroids and excessive nationalism—and this year, the Olympic torch relay protests in restive Tibetan regions—the Games remain an example of international élan unmatched in the sports world. But two realities stand in the way of elite competition having any substantial effect upon peace.

The first is that the time and effort required of elite athletes to maintain their competitive edge leaves the vast majority with little opportunity to engage in meaningful social entrepreneurship. "As much as many of us would like to be part of peace-related initiatives or other worthy undertakings, the elite training model is all-consuming," states Stanford University graduate Erica Wheeler, a 1996 Olympian and presently a member of the U.S. Track & Field Board of Trustees.

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As for the governing bodies of each sport, most are so devoured by fundraising and winning medals that little time is left for the higher aims set forth by Coubertin. "If there was ever a job where idealism is compromised by pragmatism, it is mine. As much as I would like to be a driver of Coubertin's ideals, I am judged on two things: medal count and fundraising," confided a CEO of a major sports governing body.

INTERNATIONAL SPORT AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL

If elite competition does little to bring nations together, grassroots sports programming can serve as an effective link for international comity, and its potential is only beginning to be tapped.

In 1981, as I prepared to enter The Fletcher School, I founded the Irish-American Sports Foundation (IASF). The foundation set and achieved such objectives as constructing the Irish National Basketball Arena in Dublin, a \$4 million project. The IASF sent over 700 American basketball coaches to Ireland to conduct clinics over a 10-year span, ranging from such National Basketball Association (NBA) luminaries as Hubie Brown and Dr. Jack Ramsey—both Hall of Fame members—to hundreds of high school coaches skilled in teaching the fundamentals. We hosted nearly 150 Irish teams in the United States during that time span, and we sent a roughly equal number of American high school and college teams to Ireland. The IASF even made arrangements for over 500 Americans of varying ethnic and religious backgrounds to invest in the Irish National

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But as those of us who were deeply involved in the project reflect on that invigorating decade of effort and success, we view the most important achievement to be the establishment of thousands of relationships that, in many cases, still exist and prosper today. These relationships have produced innumerable business deals, scholarships, and other partnerships of myriad sorts, even including a number of marriages. And since basketball was played with equal zest in both

the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, unlike the “Catholic sports” of the Gaelic Athletic Association, such as Gaelic football and hurling, or the Northern Ireland Protestant-dominated sport of rugby, the IASF experience encompassed the opportunity for many of us to get a birds-eye view of the unique and complex culture of both regions.

The Institute for International Sport

The success of the Irish-American Sports Foundation and the encouragement I received at The Fletcher School from such sterling professors as Alan Henrikson, Leo Gross, and John Roche inspired me to write a position paper that would, employing some of the concepts of the IASF and the mixing lessons that I had drawn from those informal scrimmages in

Prague and Havana, lead to the creation of The Institute for International Sport.² At the core of the Institute's mission was the use of sport as a medium to build bridges and to cross both cultural and religious divides on an international scale.

In 1986, I presented the position paper to Rhode Island Governor Edward DiPrete and University of Rhode Island President Ted Eddy. The governor and president agreed to a one-year seed grant, with the understanding that a separate, non-profit foundation on the University of Rhode Island campus would result and, after the first year, be fully responsible for all fundraising and programming. On July 1, 1986, the Institute for International Sport officially opened in a one-room office on the University of Rhode Island campus. The initial program of the Institute was Sports Corps, launched in September 1987, when the Institute sent Sports Corps volunteers to Ireland and Czechoslovakia. Our Sports Corps volunteers worked with impoverished youth, setting up a variety of sports education initiatives, ranging from a highly successful program for handicapped athletes in Prague to an equally successful basketball and soccer program for at-risk youth in County Kildare, Ireland.

Expanding on the Sports Corps model, the Institute launched Belfast United in 1989. The idea of Belfast United began at a Dublin luncheon meeting with then Ambassador of the United States to Ireland, Margaret Heckler. During the luncheon, Ambassador Heckler and I watched with horror as a live television report inadvertently caught the brutal killing of two British soldiers who, in front of millions, were murdered in violent retribution for the prior killing of an Irish Catholic by a British soldier. In a heartbreaking twist, those murders took place during the funeral march for the Irish Catholic.

The planned one-hour luncheon meeting turned into a three-hour discussion of ways the Institute could help stem the violence that had overrun Northern Ireland. A year later, the Institute established a Belfast United office at the University of Ulster in Jordanstown, Northern Ireland. For over a decade, Belfast United was one of the most effective programs in the history of "The Troubles."

Belfast United allowed the Institute to work with a group of coaches and academics from Northern Ireland. Employing the mixing lessons I learned years earlier, the core concept involved placing equal numbers of Catholic and Protestant youth on the same sports teams. Team members trained together for a period of months and then engaged in competitive games in Northern Ireland, followed, for many in the program, by an all-expense paid trip to the United States. Over the course of the decade, more

than 1,000 Irish Catholic and Protestant youth took part in Belfast United. When Bill Clinton became the first serving U.S. president to visit Northern Ireland during a sustained ceasefire in 1995, Belfast United was praised as one of the most successful programs in bringing about the peace.

Belfast United programming included a number of other Institute activities in Northern Ireland, such as three major Belfast Scholar-Athlete Games and visits by many distinguished coaches to Northern Ireland. One such coach was the legendary Providence College basketball mentor Joe Mullaney, whose stint became the subject of a major Sports Illustrated article on the power of sport to bridge religious divides.³ The Belfast United placement of equal numbers of Protestants and Catholics on the same sports teams served as the core concept for The Institute for International Sport's signature event: the World Scholar-Athlete Games.

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The World Scholar-Athlete Games

My position paper for The Fletcher School called for the creation of an international sporting and cultural event that would involve no national teams—an event that would welcome as many poets as basketball players, as many singers as soccer players. To be called the World Scholar-Athlete Games, the event would consist of men's soccer teams made up of 16 young men from 16 different countries, women's basketball teams made up of 10 young women from 10 different countries, and so on, as well as a choir and a symphony made up of representatives from various countries.

The profound impact that Belfast United was having on Protestant and Catholic youth and their families in Northern Ireland caused me to aggressively move forward with the plan to create the World Scholar-Athlete Games. In February 1990, I traveled to the London School of Education and presented the plan to a group of enthusiastic European sports educators. The receipt of a seed grant in 1991 provided the momentum for the event to become reality.

In February 1992, the World-Scholar Athlete Games were officially announced at a major press conference in Washington, DC. Joining me at the press conference was Senator Bill Bradley, who agreed to chair the

inaugural World Scholar-Athlete Games event. Senator Bradley predicted that the World Scholar-Athlete Games would become a very important part of international sports, similar to the International Special Olympics. Later that year, Senators Claiborne Pell and John Chafee of Rhode Island hosted a reception on Capitol Hill to introduce the concept of the World Scholar-Athlete Games to foreign ambassadors. The strong follow-up activities of Senators Pell and Chafee, as well as foreign embassy personnel, ensured that many countries were well-represented.

The first World Scholar-Athlete Games were held from June 20 to July 1, 1993. A total of 108 countries and all 50 U.S. states sent delegations. At the closing ceremonies, Aretha Franklin joined our multi-national choir in song. Since that time, the Institute has administered three more World Scholar-Athlete Games, two United States Scholar-Athlete Games, and other Scholar-Athlete Games programs around the world, including in Israel, Northern Ireland, and Australia. At the 2006 World Scholar-Athlete Games, the Institute welcomed delegations from 157 countries, making the event the largest sports/cultural event in the world that year in terms of number of countries represented. Featured speakers included former President Bill Clinton and former Senator George Mitchell. From June 28 to July 5, 2008, the Institute administered the third United States Scholar-Athlete Games. Continuing his support, Senator Mitchell delivered the launch address; General Colin Powell the keynote address. To date, 192 countries have sent delegations to the Scholar-Athlete Games, and over 16,000 scholar-athletes and scholar-artists have participated in the events.

The World Youth Peace Summit

At the closing ceremonies of the inaugural World Scholar-Athlete Games, I told the scholar-athletes and scholar-artists that their participation in the Games would not be the end of the bonds forged between them and The Institute for International Sport. Naturally, a key objective of the Scholar-Athlete Games is to create a network of gifted young leaders who share a common interest in world peace. From the outset, the Scholar-Athlete Games plan has called for these youth to be invited to participate in a major reunion to rekindle the spirit of friendship and their hope for a peaceful world. I have delivered the same message at every Institute-sponsored Scholar-Athlete Games since 1993. The major reunion will become a reality on the Institute's 25th anniversary when we administer the 2011 World Youth Peace Summit.

In partnership with the United Nations and other renowned orga-

nizations, the World Scholar-Athlete Games World Youth Peace Summit will bring together thousands of alumni from all of the Institute's Scholar-Athlete Games programs. The UN and other partner organizations will also nominate participants. The program, to be held from June 26 to July 7, 2011, will also encompass the administration of the 2011 World Scholar-Athlete Games for scholar-athletes and scholar-artists between 15 and 19 years old.

The key objective of the World Youth Peace Summit is to break down barriers to world peace and to create a network of leaders who will be linked in the future. The Institute for International Sport has created what many feel is the most unique and compelling network of young leaders in the world, both in terms of number of individuals, as well as countries represented. By 2011, there will be approximately 18,000 graduates of the Scholar-Athlete Games, representing every country in the world. We expect to host as many as 20,000 people at the Summit. Thousands more will participate in a comprehensive Internet viewing program. Bridging professional expertise across the board, the Summit's curriculum development relies upon community involvement, Institute for International Sport personnel, and experts in numerous aspects of world peace. Community discussions among schools and organizations will combine with opinions of the principal speakers from the Institute's 2008 United States Scholar-Athlete Games, including General Powell, Senator Mitchell, Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, Vint Cerf—one of the founding fathers of the Internet and recent recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom—and famed environmentalist Claes Nobel, of the family which established the Nobel Peace Prize. The curriculum will offer all participants the opportunity to address in-depth peace-related issues—from arms proliferation and armed conflict to the environment and natural resources, from ethics and leadership to technology and education, from hunger and poverty reduction to sovereignty and security concerns.

The goal of the World Youth Peace Summit is to foster among the participants the commitment to become true "peace brokers" by returning to their home communities and working in diverse ways to achieve this goal. Through empowering the participants to set up social entrepreneurship ventures, their efforts will create a series of pathways to peace. The end result will be thousands of gifted young people and adults returning to their home communities armed with a sense of idealism and a practical knowledge of how to work effectively toward lasting peace. In preparation of the Summit, The Institute for International Sport will launch the World Youth Peace Summit Social Network. The network will afford individuals

interested in participating in the Summit with the opportunity to communicate online with others interested in world peace and to offer ideas to strengthen the program. Prior to arriving, participants will be asked to write a position paper on one key aspect of world peace. In addition, all participants will take part in pre-event training on how to develop a social entrepreneurship project that will foster world peace. This training will be solidified through a series of workshops during and after the Summit.

At many of the Belfast United youth sessions, I recall making the statement: “We are looking at this project as one that creates a chipping effect—one that chips away at the violence and hatred that has permeated this region for too many centuries.” This same concept is at the core of all Institute for International Sport programming. At the closing ceremonies of the 2011 World Youth Peace Summit, the participants will be challenged to leave with an earnest commitment to foster world peace through active participation in a peace project, large or small, aimed at this important objective. Creating an extraordinary network of true “peace brokers” to be reinforced by future summits, the World Youth Peace Summit will generate a profound impact on the issue of world peace well into the future. ■

ENDNOTES

- 1 In a speech given by Baron Pierre de Coubertin at the closing dinner of the Sorbonne Congress, Paris, June 1894.
- 2 Readers who are interested in becoming involved with the World Youth Peace Summit may contact the author at ddoyle@internationalsport.com.
- 3 See Jack Cavanaugh, “Bridge over Troubled Waters: A veteran U.S. Coach brings Catholics and Protestants together in Belfast,” *Sports Illustrated*, November 25, 1991.