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SPORT, GENDER AND MEGA-EVENTS

Edited by

KATHERINE DASHPER

Sport, Gender and Mega-Events

Emerald Studies in Sport and Gender

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Sport, Gender and Mega-Events

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

For Frank Brady

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Contents

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List of Figures and Tables

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List of Abbreviations

ASA	Athletics South Africa
CAS	Court of Arbitration for Sport
ESIM	Elaborated Social Identity Model of crowd behaviour
FA	Football Association (UK)
FBOs	Football Banning Orders
FWC	Football World Cup – FIFA Men's Football World Cup
IAAF	International Association of Athletics Federation, now World Athletics
IOC	International Olympic Committee
LET	Ladies European Tour (golf)
LPGA	Ladies Professional Golf Association
RCT	Role Congruity Theory
SRT	Social Role Theory
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
USWNT	United States Women's National Team (soccer)
WWC	Women's World Cup – FIFA Women's Football World Cup
WWGR	Women's World Golf Rankings

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Sport, Gender and Mega-Events

Katherine Dashper

Introduction

Sport mega-events form a regular part of life, providing a pinnacle for elite sports careers and moments of fun, excitement, pride and sometimes disappointment for fans around the world. Sport mega-events punctuate our lives in a regular, dependable pattern (notwithstanding major international crises, such as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, see Chapter 13, Conclusions). Every four years we enjoy the Summer Olympic Games, followed two years later by the Winter Olympics. The same pattern is evident with the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Men's World Cup, followed two years later by the Women's World Cup. Regional multisport events follow a similar four-year pattern, such as the Commonwealth Games, Pan American Games and the Asian Games, while some events occur biennially, such as the Africa Cup of Nations and World Athletics Championships. Others occur annually, such as the Super Bowl, or even as a series of events, such as Formula 1. Sport mega-events have thus 'established an enduring presence, popularity and memorability in modern society' (Roche, 2008, p. 286), providing rhythm to global sporting and media calendars.

Sport is a central feature of contemporary societies, a ritualised, highly commercialised practice that is focused on the body (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006). As such, it is a prime site for the production and reproduction of gendered identities, discourses and practices that can both constrain and empower groups and individuals. This book examines some of the complex, ambiguous issues around gender and sport mega-events, which are understood here as paradoxical phenomena that are simultaneously sites for traditional and restrictive gender performances *and* opportunities for disruption and even transformation of those same norms.

The book is, thus, a contribution to two fields. First, to the sociology of sport, a field which has long questioned the role of organised sport in perpetuating and amplifying traditional gender discourses that serve to marginalise and exclude many from full participation and recognition (Hargreaves, 1994; McDonagh &

Sport, Gender and Mega-Events, 1–29

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Pappano, 2007). Sport mega-events have been a prime site for these practices, in part due to their global mediatised nature that can transmit messages to billions of people around the world. However, with a few exceptions that tend to focus on the Olympic Games in particular (e.g. Lenskyj, 2013), sport sociologists have placed less focus on 'the mega-event phenomenon' (Roche, 2008) itself as a gendered entity and the ways in which these particular forms of sport spectacle lead to both restrictive and potentially transgressive gender practices. This book, thus, positions the mega-event phenomenon itself as an important factor in the ways in which gender is done, redone and potentially undone in the context of sport (Dashper, 2016). Second, the book is also a contribution to the field of critical event studies which attempts to include questions of power and representation in understanding the various roles planned events play in different communities (Spracklen & Lamond, 2016). However, there has been limited sustained focus on gender in relation to events (Dashper & Finkel, 2020), and certainly not in the context of mega-events, so this book helps extend understanding of the importance of gender and power to critical examinations of planned events.

Consequently, this book aims to draw together insights from a range of fields to question how sport mega-events are sites of struggle and contestation in terms of gender and identity, sometimes resulting in the entrenchment of restrictive and prohibitive gender norms and practices, but sometimes leading to change and transformation. The primary analytic focus for the book is gender, but gender can never be considered in isolation and chapters explore various ways in which gender intersects with other axes of power related to race, class and nationhood in and through sport mega-events. This introduction sets the scene for the discussions in subsequent chapters, by examining what sport mega-events are and their social, cultural, economic and political significance, and introducing some of the complex and fraught gender issues prevalent in organised sport within and beyond mega-events.

What Are Sport Mega-Events?

Competition is integral to contemporary forms of sport – between individuals, teams and nations. Elite sport is built around notions of excellence, where the best athletes compete for the number one position. As such, events are fundamental to the operation of high-level sport, and consequently in any given year, thousands of events occur across a broad range of sports. Events are temporal, occurring in a pre-defined time and space, with a clear beginning and end, and a programme of activities that is publicised in advance to allow participants – athletes and their support teams – and spectators to choose if they want to attend (Getz & Page, 2016). The field of events management/studies has contributed to understanding of the broad array of different types and scale of sport event, ranging from small, local sports tournaments where many elite athletes begin their competitive careers: to hallmark events associated closely with a specific place, such as the Wimbledon Tennis Championships; to major events, that are large in scale and

attract widespread interest from athletes and spectators alike, like the Six Nations competition in rugby union; to so-called mega-events that have global impacts and reach and require substantial investment, like the Summer Olympic Games (Bowdin, O'Toole, Allen, Harris, & McDonnell, 2006; Dashper, Helgadóttir, & Sigurðardóttir, 2021).

Definitions are important for helping to describe a field and focus attention. The focus of this book is on sport mega-events, but the ways in which 'mega-events' are defined and distinguished from 'major events' and some 'hallmark events' are contested. Roche (2000, p. 1) described mega-events as 'large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events, which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance'. Building on this, Horne (2007) proposed that two factors are central to contemporary mega-events. First, they have significant consequences for the host city, region or nation. Second, they attract widespread media attention. Roberts (2004) also stressed the scale of mega-events, the importance of global media attention which facilitates the spreading of promotional messages worldwide (about the host, the sport, the organising body, etc.), and the fact that they are 'discontinuous' and, therefore, out of the ordinary, supporting Roche's (2003) argument that such events are important collective rituals that help mark the passing of time.

Müller (2015) argued that there is ambiguity around what make an event 'mega' and acknowledges that 'not all mega-events are "mega" in the same dimensions and to the same degree' (pp. 627–628). He identified four key dimensions that mega-events share:

(1) Visitor attractiveness – although Müller (2015) notes that it is impossible to accurately assess visitor numbers (ticket sales are one approach, but they likely over-estimate numbers as some people attend more than one session), mega-events are appealing to visitors from outside the local area who come to spectate and join in with the overall event atmosphere.
(2) Mediated reach – in line with numerous other scholars (e.g. Horne, 2007), Müller (2015) notes that an event cannot be considered 'mega' if it does not attract widespread, possibly global, media attention. The extent and reach of this will vary by event, but the mediated (re)production of events is an important contributor to their 'mega' scale and popularity.
(3) Cost – the first two factors focus on the output side of mega-events, but the input side is also important, that is, the significant costs of staging these tournaments. Direct costs include spending on infrastructure like venues, transport, and associated facilities, and staffing and logistics related to event operations, security etc. Müller (2015) also highlights the importance of opportunity costs related to hosting mega-events, where money that is spent on the event is not spent on other projects and needs. Mega-events are expensive.
(4) Urban transformation – a major theme of research on mega-events is their capacity to affect the host city or region, with large impacts on the built environment and the local population. Indeed, many cities and countries bid

to host mega-events in order to support urban transformation (Hiller, 2000; Smith, 2012). However, although mega-events are sold to populations as opportunities for positive transformation, they also frequently result in negative outcomes for local people, such as displacement, gentrification, and environmental damage (see Watt, 2013).

Müller's (2015) dimensions reflect many of the issues frequently identified in relation to the hosting of mega-events in terms of potential gains and losses. As large, complex, highly commercialised phenomena, mega-events pose complex logistical and strategic issues for hosts. Gursoy and Kendall (2006) illustrated the importance of local community support for ensuring the success of mega-events, and Lee Ludvigsen (2018) underscored the role of security and safety. Whitson and Horne (2006) suggested that the benefits of hosting mega-events are often overestimated, while costs are underestimated. Mega-events frequently exceed their original budgets – the 1976 Montreal Summer Olympics and the 1984 Sarajevo Winter Olympics exceeded initial budgets more than tenfold (Baade & Matheson, 2016). It took Montreal 30 years to pay off the debt incurred by cost overruns in 1976, and the cost overruns and debt of the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens contributed to the Greek economic and financial crises of 2007–2012 (Flyvbjerg & Stewart, 2012). Yet many cities and nations still desire the prestige and global visibility that mega-event hosting can bring (Caiazza & Audretsch, 2015; Grix, 2012).

The enormous costs previously meant that hosting was dominated by nations in the Global North. However, as Lauermann (2019) notes, spiralling costs, questions about legacies and long-term benefits, and negative reactions from local communities have led to many of these nations stepping back from bids; between 2013 and 2018, 13 cities withdrew or cancelled plans to bid to host the Olympics, following negative referenda or in response to political pressures. In contrast, emerging nations are increasingly stepping up to host mega-events as part of strategies to project a global image and announce their position as major players on the international stage. As Black and Van Der Westhuizen (2004, p. 1200) argued, 'hosting major sports events is one of the few relatively accessible means through which developing nations may seek to enhance their global appeal'. Knott, Fyall, and Jones (2017) have suggested that, for emerging nations in particular, hosting sport mega-events remains an attractive proposition despite rising costs and global scandals related to event rights holders, like the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and FIFA. Drawing on the example of South Africa hosting the 2010 FIFA Men's World Cup, they suggested that mega-events create valuable nation-branding opportunities. It is the scale and global reach of mega-events that make them attractive propositions in this way, and mechanisms for the exercise of soft power (see also Grix & Brannagan, 2016).

Similarly, Black (2007) illustrated how sport mega-events provide unique opportunities to pursue what he calls 'symbolic politics' – a chance to reframe dominant narratives, to signal a change in direction and/or to reinforce key messages about a nation or a region. Drawing on three mega-events that all

occurred in 2010 – the FIFA Men's World Cup in South Africa, the Commonwealth Games in Delhi in India, and the Winter Olympics in Vancouver in Canada – he argued that, despite some significant differences in context and circumstances of the hosts, all three locations sought to use mega-event hosting to signal their global significance as 'world-class' hosts, cities and nations.

Sport mega-events, thus, present (would-be) hosts with a complex mix of opportunities and costs. This leads Müller (2017) to position mega-events as paradoxical; they celebrate universal humanity (through ideals such as Olympism) yet clearly separate participants and spectators into distinct nations; they are heavily rule-bound, but there are frequent examples of rule-bending (not least in relation to use of performance-enhancing drugs); they claim to be based around inclusion and communal participation (e.g. through volunteering) but are also highly exclusive, focused on the very best of the best; they cause destruction – of neighbourhoods, communities, the environment – but they also create – new stadia, new images, new communities. This ambiguity is part of the enduring attraction of mega-events, as they 'spark the perhaps most fundamental of human paradoxes: a love-hate relationship. We love them, we love them not' (Müller, 2017, p. 238). The 'mega-event phenomenon' (Roche, 2008) is, thus, a complex and contradictory spectacle through which a variety of contemporary social, cultural and political issues play out on a global stage.

Roche (1994, p. 1) described mega-events as 'short-term events with long-term consequences for the cities that stage them'. However, the consequences of sport mega-events not only are relevant to host cities and nations but also affect a range of other groups, including event rights holders, sport governing bodies, sponsors, spectators, event staff and volunteers and, importantly, athletes. Much of the research that focuses on mega-events as important social, cultural, political and economic phenomena focuses more on issues related to event hosting, as outlined briefly above, more than on athletes and sport-related aspects of mega-events. Sport sociologists have explored many facets of the sport-related aspects of mega-events, but, with some exceptions, tend to place limited focus on the mega-event as a specific phenomenon. This collection seeks to combine focus of the sport aspects of mega-events – athletes, support teams, fans and spectators – with consideration of how the ambiguous, contradictory, highly commercialised and mediatised phenomena of mega-events provides a lens through to which to explore issues of gender and identity.

Billings and Wenner's (2017) definition is useful in relation to this broad conceptualisation of mega-events that includes focus on athletes and their supporters as integral to the mega-event phenomenon. They identified four key characteristics of sport mega-events:

(1) They represent the pinnacle of sport competition. Although some mega-events are technically open to amateurs, such as the Olympic Games, they represent the elite of athletic performance.
(2) They are regular and predictable occurrences. Sport mega-events are scheduled years in advance, often occurring at regular intervals (such as every one, two or

four years) and so are something that a range of stakeholders – from athletes, to spectators, to sponsors – can anticipate and plan for.

(3) They are opportunities for historical comparison. The format and regularity of sport mega-events allow for comparison across iterations of the same event, both year-to-year and across generations.

(4) They provide moments which transcend traditional meanings of sport. Just to compete at a mega-event is an enormous achievement for an athlete and is often the pinnacle of a sporting career. In such emotionally charged contexts, human stories often come to the fore, whether this be in personal or sometimes political terms.

For some, the only true 'mega' sports events are the Summer Olympic Games and the FIFA Men's World Cup. While these events certainly are 'mega' on every scale, to limit discussions of the ways in which gender is performed, negotiated and sometimes transformed through major events to just these two would be limiting, particularly given that one – the World Cup – is open only to male competitors. Rather, in this book a broader definition of mega-events is adopted that encompasses major events of different scale and magnitude. Black (2008) argued that only a handful of truly 'global cities' can credibly bid for 'first-order' events like the Summer Olympic Games and the FIFA Men's World Cup. He defined 'second-order' events as 'of international scope but lower-level participation and profile' (p. 468), like the Commonwealth Games and the Rugby World Cup, and 'third-order' events as 'of regional or continental scope' (p. 468), like the Asian or Pan American Games. The events discussed in this book encompass first-order mega-events (the Summer Olympics and the FIFA Men's World Cup), second-order mega-events (like the FIFA Women's World Cup and Formula 1) and third-order mega-events (like golf's Solheim Cup and the Union of European Football Associations [UEFA] European Championships). These mega-events of different scale and scope share the characteristics identified by Billings and Wenner (2017) and Müller (2015), and all are occasions through which gender identities are performed, (re)negotiated, and, at times, transformed.

Sport and Gender

Sport is a strongly gendered institution that was 'created by and for men' (Messner & Sabo, 1990, p. 9). Although girls and women have been playing a wide range of competitive sports for many years, the underlying norms, rules and expectations of what it means to be a 'real' athlete remain strongly masculine. This has implications for the ways in which sport mega-events have developed and how all athletes (and fans, officials and support teams) have been and continue to be represented.

The Olympic Games was initially founded by Pierre de Coubertin as a male-only event, where women's only role was as spectator, applauding male athletic achievement (Lenskyj, 2013). Although women now compete in a wide range of

sports at the Olympics and at other mega-events, perceptions of women as lesser competitors, or as fit to occupy only supporting and decorative roles, continue (see Sturm, Chapter 6). The other 'first-order' mega-event, the FIFA Men's World Cup, is open only to male participants, although female football fans are increasingly claiming space within this masculine world (see Raduszynska, Chapter 9). The FIFA Women's World Cup has run eight times, since the inaugural event in China in 1991 (then called the FIFA Women's World Championship). Caudwell (2011) argued that while FIFA has been vocal about supporting women's participation in football, they have also been very forceful about keeping men's and women's football separate and differentiating between masculinity and femininity. As Caudwell (2011, p. 335) noted, for FIFA, in women's football, 'femininity is foremost'. Mega-events, thus, play a powerful role in helping to maintain gender differentiation and hierarchy in sport, although they may also provide opportunity to challenge current practices (see Darvin and Pegoraro, Chapter 3; Turtiainen, Chapter 7).

Organised sport has long been a site for the production and reproduction of particular forms of masculinity based around ideals of bravery, toughness, strength and dominance (Magnan, 2000). Connell's (1987) concept of hegemonic masculinity has been widely applied in studies of sport, as sport appears to offer many exemplars of hegemonic masculinity in action (Connell, 1990). For example, MacDonald (2014) illustrated how ice hockey in Canada acts as a site for socialisation of men and boys into the norms of hegemonic masculinity. Men's team sports in particular have been recognised as bastions of hegemonic masculinity, marginalising men who do not fit with this ideal (as well as women) and contributing to negative outcomes for many male athletes, in relation to injury and mental health problems (Anderson & Kian, 2012; Smith, Chapter 4). It is not just athletes who are affected by the hypermasculine norms of sport. Ncube and Chawana (2018) considered how fandom songs and seemingly harmless 'banter' amongst football fans in Zimbabwe illustrate some of the ways in which 'gender inequalities are produced and reproduced in patriarchal establishments' like sport (p. 82). In the context of mega-events, fan violence and hooliganism remain problems in relation to football (soccer), reflecting the ongoing significance of hypermasculinity to some fan cultures (see Sly, Chapter, 5).

Although sport remains a strongly masculine domain, celebrating strong, powerful male bodies, there have been shifts in the ways in which masculinity is performed and (re)produced in and through sport. Anderson's (2010) inclusive masculinity theory has been used to help explain some of these changes, which, in many contexts, appear to result in a wider range of 'acceptable' sporting masculinities and associated behaviours and practices (Dashper, 2012a; Gaston, Macgrath & Anderson, 2018). More male athletes are increasingly willing to be open about mental health challenges associated with being an elite athlete, admission of which would have been seen as unacceptable weakness in earlier years (see Smith, Chapter 4). However, despite these shifts 'the cultural marriage of men to sport' (Wenner & Jackson, 2009, p. 2) remains largely intact. Wenner's (1998) argument remains relevant, particularly in the context of sport mega-events:

> [M]uch of the cultural power of sports is linked to its functioning as male rite of passage and the role sports spaces and places play as refuge from women. Sports explicitly naturalize 'man's place' in the physical. Implicitly, it also appropriates 'woman's place' as 'other', inherently inferior on the yardstick of the physical, and thus life. These dynamic elements allow sports to play a fundamental role in the construction and maintenance of patriarchy.
>
> (p. 308)

The position of women in sport has long been contested (see Hargreaves, 1994, for a discussion of the historical development of women's roles in sport). In the twenty-first century, women remain on the margins in sport in relation to sports management (Burton, 2015), sports coaching (Lewis, Roberts, & Andrews, 2018), as sports journalists (Organista & Mazur, 2020), officials (Forbes, Edwards, & Fleming, 2015), fans and athletes (Pfister & Pope, 2018). Sport has been a key site of struggle over women's appearance and bodies. As Krane (2001, p. 116) has noted, 'sportswomen tread a fine line of acceptable femininity'. Women who become visibly strong and muscular as a result of their sporting practices have been ostracised and criticised for being 'unfeminine', and it is mainly feminine-looking athletes, competing in sports that are deemed feminine appropriate (such as tennis and gymnastics) that attract widespread attention and associated rewards of lucrative sponsorship and endorsement deals that can help support a professional career (Jones & Greer, 2011). Cohen (2013) discussed the example of Beth Tweddle, the first British female gymnast to win an Olympic medal, to illustrate some of the ambiguities that female athletes can face. Despite Tweddle's undoubted success in a feminine-appropriate sport, she received less media and popular attention than many less successful athletes, due in part to her strong, muscular body and powerful, technical style that positioned her outside the norms of sporting femininity in gymnastics. Such is the ambiguous status of female athletes in relation to their bodies and appearance that they frequently engage in impression management tactics to try and reconcile the perceived mismatch between themselves as competent elite athletes *and* feminine women (Bennett, Scarlett, Hurd Clarke, & Crocker, 2017).

Yet, idealised notions of sporting femininity are constantly shifting and are open to renegotiation and transformation. Combat sports offer an avenue through which normative ideas about sporting femininity are being challenged (Channon & Phipps, 2017). However, Hamilton's (2020) research on women in mixed martial arts suggests that, far from challenging gender norms, (hetero-sexual) women involved in this masculine domain actually 'overdo' gender, reflecting feelings of feminine insecurity. Washington and Economides (2016) examined how women participating in crossfit draw on post-feminist ideologies to expand possibilities for acceptable female sporting bodies, yet despite this they conclude that crossfit continues to 'mirror the hegemonic archetype of attractive and heteronormative femininity' (p. 143). In relation to mega-events, Toffoletti (2017) also draws on post-feminism to consider the emergence of new 'sexually