

Commonwealth Games Lecture for 31 July¹

Slide 1 The Power of Sport

Members of the Commonwealth, friends, and colleagues it is an honour to be standing here before you.

I am conscious of sports deep and wide roots across, Scotland, the Commonwealth and beyond.

Sport is important to Scotland. Some of our streets are named after sports. Scotland lays claim, sometimes a hotly contested claim, **to have given the world at least** 5 sports not to mention the Daily Mile, the Co-creation of the Homeless World Cup and more recently the founding of the first national para football association in Europe.

Sport has been part of Scottish life for a long time with written evidence going back to **at least** 1272.

But it has never been just about sport:

When John Hope founded the first organised football club in the world in 1824, in Edinburgh, **it was never just** about football it was about helping the Edinburgh poor become healthier.

Many Scottish Highland Games grew out of 19th century welfare societies. The purpose was not just to celebrate the harvest being collected but to raise funds for local people who could not afford a proper funeral at the time.

So, I am here today with a sense of purpose. I believe sport can be a force for good if we are intent in making the world a better place.

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Slide 2 Eric Liddell Sitting on Chair

I have the privilege of being the first Professor and Chair of Sport at the University of Edinburgh.

This picture shows the 1924 Olympic Gold Medalist Eric Liddell being carried by University of Edinburgh students.

It reminds me that more able athletes than me have sat on Chairs throughout the history of the University.

Some of you may recall the Hollywood Oscar winning film *Chariots of Fire* about Eric Liddell. It told the story of the athlete refusing to run on a Sunday and going on to win Olympic Gold in an event for which he was not originally selected.

What the film did not capture so well was the humanity of the athlete. Something that was picked up by the Chinese ambassador on a recent visit to Edinburgh. The ambassador talked of the Spirit of Eric Liddell, the athlete, the friend of China who helped children and fellow prisoners, organised sport and physical education classes in concentration camps in China where Liddell was ultimately to pass away in 1945.

A sporting ambassador of which there are many, being used as a bridge to help countries to talk to one another.

I simply ask you the question, Is this part of the sporting toolbox? Is this something sport offers the world today? If the answer is yes that is powerful.

I consider myself to have been incredibly lucky to have had a career involving sport.

Slide 3 The Sporting ToolBox

And I use the word in the *inclusive sense* of the term to include all forms of physical activity, play, recreation, indigenous sports and games as well as competitive sport. **The same way as the United Nations defines sport.**

It is a fantastic area to work in because it can reach out to so many people. It can take you into interesting areas of discovery. It can open doors for people, communities and indeed countries.

I have been fortunate to see sport achieve many great, and some not-so-great things in different parts of the world.

For Example: I was impressed by the leadership given earlier this year by Dr Chipande, Coordinator of the **African Union Sports Council** on the question of child labour in Sport.

The Centre for Sport and Human Rights Chaired by Mary Robinson the former President of Ireland is a welcome addition to the international sporting landscape.

I was impressed by the leadership given by sportscotland over the past year on the question of racism in cricket in Scotland.

It reminded me that more than 30 years ago ***I stood in this city*** having helped the then West Midlands Sports Council launch an anti-racism sport policy advocating with British Asian women for more opportunities.

To talk of the power of sport is not to ignore the work that is ongoing in building better sports systems. It is not a naïve reflection on sport in the world- we all know challenges exist.

But I am equally impressed by 2 of the Scottish athletes here in Birmingham, Eilish McColgan and Laura Muir, who asserted earlier

this month that we need to be “properly presenting just how incredible our sport is **in the world**” – **I agree**

So let me nail my colours to the mast. I’m all for sport. I should add I am also for universities. Both at times should lead in the societies in which they play a part.

The Power of Sport This morning I’m going to extol the virtues of the power of sport. If you harbour doubts, I hope I can persuade you.

We are living in challenging times. But as we learn to cope and adapt, we are getting better at understanding how this toolbox called sport can be used.

Slide 4 Sport and Covid

The consequences of living with Covid, rising inflation rates, the invasion of Ukraine, shifting geo-political tensions are vivid reminders we do not live in a vacuum. Nor does sport.

The consequences at every level are diverse: from local authorities finding it difficult to get supplies of chlorine to keep swimming pools open, to a world that is tense and desperately in need of dialogue and better cultural relations.

Sometimes you don’t recognise what you have until it is taken away. The global crisis that was/is Covid-19 has in some ways illuminated the impact of sport both in terms of presence and absence.

Restrictions designed to curb the spread of the pandemic affected the provision of community sport.

This in turn, contributed to increased rates of social isolation, fear, anxiety, boredom. Put explicitly – a protective shield for mental

health was lost. Communities affected differentially by the social gradient.

Faced with an unprecedented global crisis sport also responded by showing leadership. Sporting bodies, local authority trusts addressed mental health needs and more.

They went to extreme lengths to create sporting bubbles.

They converted facilities to shelters, vaccine hubs and hospitals.

They provided food to families in local communities.

They partnered with governments to spread health messages.

They strived to keep communities connected, albeit sometimes remotely.

I am not arguing that sport is the solution to the world's problems.

I am not arguing that we should stop trying to build better sports' systems.

Indeed, I would like to acknowledge and **thank Stewart Harris** for helping to lead Scottish sport for the past sixteen years. Expanding community sports hubs, sustaining active school programmes helping to build a world class sports system and who has recently announced his retirement.

But what I am arguing, and I believe Stewart and Mel and others share this belief, is that sport can be a positive force, a toolbox, a resource, an enabler, an influence.

It has an incredible reach from Birmingham to Bangladesh, from the Global South to the Global North and beyond.

It is a force often taken for granted but almost always there in some shape or form.

Much of the great work that sport does often goes on quietly below the radar often in non-formal settings.

When I say sport can be a positive force. I believe I am in good company. Nelson Mandela's 2000 Laureus speech comes to mind.

But as well as the good and the great Listen to the voices of these ordinary women equally great

The street soccer player:

"I want to feel like I have control in an aspect of my life again... At the moment soccer gives me this. Street Soccer believed in me until I could believe in myself"

The female Muslim football fan talking about Mo Salah the Liverpool footballer:

"He has changed the many different negative perceptions that people hold about the Muslim community and Muslim players

The Scottish Para Footballer:

"I still get anxiety about the future, but I know I can do this. Football saved my life because if I didn't have football, I would be a shell of myself" [Female para football player]

Voices talking about the impact of just one tool from the toolbox.

And it is not just football what about athletics?

The Scottish female athlete:

“For me as a child, running was an escape from the lifestyle that we had. I had quite a tough upbringing and brought up to believe that nothing in life was given to you. There was a lot of poverty and running just took me away from all that”

SLIDE 5 Kenyan Female Runners

The Kenyan female athlete: Who when asked what motivates her to run replied “I run for my children, my brother, my cousins – a runner in Kenya runs to escape poverty that is why I run”.

Slide 6 Local Women Selling Vegetables

Or local Kenyan women selling vegetables and talking about how they have been inspired by runners:

quote “women runners who struggle to get that recognition through running”. They ran and they struggled. So, it motivated us – if they could get that freedom to do what they wanted, why not us? ...Because she came from a poor background, she inspired me”

“A Candle that brings a ray of hope” was how one newspaper described the work of a former women’s 800m Olympic champion from Mozambique who regularly sent much of her winnings home to fund scholarships, equipment for farms, medicine, and much more.

It is worth remembering the difference that some athletes make in the lives of those less fortunate than themselves.

We have become much more nuanced and critical about the legacy word, **but what a legacy that is**. This is the power of sport.

Slide 7 International Mandate Given to Sport- SDGs

In 2015 sport was also given an international mandate by the United Nations as an enabler of the sustainable development goals

A mandate that was hard fought for. An opportunity to show sceptics that sport could be effective That sports aid alone is insufficient.

That inspiration is not enough and that the enhancing of sports participation must go hand in hand with enhancing overall social development.

It would be remiss of me at the onset of the Commonwealth Games not to acknowledge the part played by the Commonwealth Countries, the Commonwealth Movement, and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Key areas of focus have been:

- Sport's impact on the Sustainable Development Goals
- Developing national policies and strategies
- Building the capacity of leaders and officials
- Sport and Human Rights

The Commonwealth Sports Foundation with a stated focus upon Youth Empowerment; Equal Rights; Historical Injustice; Small States & Island States; Sustainable Cities & Communities.

Dame Louise Martin, President of the Commonwealth Games Federation is a strong voice and advocate for gender equity and sport development.

- 86% of Commonwealth Games Associations have acknowledged the role of sport in delivering SDGs.

A shift of emphasis to harness the potential of sport to enable social change at an individual, community and global level.

Or as one CGA put it:

“Our CGA has been charged by the Government to create a National Sports Policy that will detail how the country will address the sustainable development goals”.

A shift of emphasis that includes the sharing of resources, knowledge exchange and capability building within and across borders to help build better policies, programmes, and outcomes.

Slide 8 Sport and Sustainable Development Goals MOOC

This example depicts **just one intervention** a programme is which massive in scale, open and free. Connecting people across 170 countries and attracting about 5,000 people every time it runs.

Of course, such interventions are not without their struggles, and we all know how budgets are hotly contested. Lessons must be learned including those from past sports’ aid failures.

Good will is insufficient to ensure equitable effective outcomes.
Learning from and listening to communities is key.

So, the power of sport, the power of the toolbox **is not a given.**

But get it right and the benefits are evidenced, worth fighting for: Enhanced education, health and well-being, social cohesion, opportunities, pathways to escape poverty.

PAUSE SLOW: A former Chair of the Commonwealth Ministers Advisory Board on Sport once said sport like music or food is one of the great cultures to share with people everywhere. That sport provides some of the greatest joys of contemporary life and that it is important that opportunities are opened, and barriers removed. **I agree.**

Get it right and sport is in a powerful position to grasp its international mandate.

The choices are there to be made:

We can choose to put sport back in its box and say it just about sport – in my opinion that would be a lost opportunity.

We can choose to live in and fight for a world defined not by our differences but by our common hopes.

We can choose to fight to make sport for all more of a reality.

We can choose to help a world defined not by conflict but by peace, justice, and opportunity.

Sport can continue to play a significant role in achieving these honourable goals. This is the power of sport.

Sport and Mental Health: But let's move on. I would like to say a little bit more about sport and mental health.

I hope you would acknowledge we have a huge mental health challenge nationally and internationally.

Mental health disorders have been a permanent Top 10 cause of global disease burden for more than 30 years.

We know participation in sport directly improves mental health. It reduces the impact of depression and anxiety through physical fitness, social engagement, and skill building.

Mental health benefits extend not only to sports participants, but also spectators, fans, volunteers, and broader communities.

A report evidencing the powerful and influential role that sport has in the mental health space will go directly to the World Innovation Summit for Health and indirectly to the World Health Organization later this year.

It will assert that sport is an example of a globally powerful, yet locally adaptable community model. Including support in care homes and charities tackling dementia. Sport affording new kinds of mental health care treatments aligned with psychosocial care models is an achievable goal if we all put our weight behind it.

The sport and mental health space is greatly enhanced by the advocacy brought to it by athletes from so many sports.

When Naomi Osaka, Simone Biles and Michael Phelps make public statements about their mental health challenges millions of people around the world hear those messages.

There are times when sport can and does lead. It is not just mental health. A new wave of sporting activists are on the march and need to be supported long after the protests fade.

The public can't always depend on sport stars like Marcus Rashford or Andy Robertson, the Scotland Captain, to champion free school meals or child poverty. Nor should they.

But what is the power of sport?

We know it enjoys popular appeal. Politicians and commentators employ its imagery, its people, and its ideologies to get their messages across.

Everyone seems to have an opinion on sport and in some senses that may be its strength.

When researchers have tried to answer this question, they have suggested many things.

I have mentioned some of them already:

- Sport's popularity makes it an ideal enabler, around which you can build other things.
- Sport provides for many people an adventure of self-discovery and expression.
- Sport can be effective in reaching young people not attracted by other interventions.
- Sport can help with building inter-generational networks.

But there are others:

- Sport has its own a language, an appeal and vocabulary shared around the world.
- Sport enables membership of a community, offers opportunities for civic and civil engagement.

Maybe more, if you were to believe the words of a former Secretary General to the Council of Europe:

"That the hidden face of sport is also the tens of thousands of enthusiasts who find, in their football, rowing, athletics and rock-climbing clubs, a place for meeting and exchange, but above all, the training ground for community life"

But why do so many people want to touch the Commonwealth Baton or watch the opening ceremony Or the event itself?

Researchers will tell you it is because people want to share and be part of a worldwide experience.

People, places, and communities want to make a connection.

To be part of something bigger than your own community.

When national teams and individuals take on the rest of the world, everyone with an interest in sport, **and many more**, will watch. **Sport has scale.**

Time after time figures bring home the possibilities of sport:

- 3.05 billion viewers watched a covid impacted Tokyo Olympic Games.
- Football with a fan base of five billion people across 212 countries.
- Golf with 66 million participants across 206 countries.
- 24 million people watched the World Athletics Championships.

Sport has scale; it is a pillar of connectivity; it has an international mandate; It can deliver sporting and non-sporting outcomes locally and globally.

There is one other area I should like to touch upon prior to ending.

Slide 9 Sport and Cultural Relations

We need to take advantage of sports 'global currency, and the part sport can play in cultural relations today.

I touched earlier upon Eric Liddell's role in bi-lateral relations.

A Director of Asian Affairs for the White House once said that:

- **Sport matters** because it can provide opportunities for interventions.
- **Sport matters** because it can be less aloof than some forms of diplomacy.

- **Sport matters** because it can help to influence winning friends.

Some of our own work has evidenced the incredible international reach of Scottish sport. Fan bases all over the world talking about Scottish sport but not necessarily having a relationship with Scottish sport.

PAUSE The Norway Cup is helping Norway to win friends. It has taken place every year since 1972.

The aim of the tournament is to create bonds between children and nations - particularly low-income areas of the world.

The Norwegian Minister of International Development talks of it as one of the best soft power tools Norway has. *Stating that "We want countries and young people to remember that it was Norway that helped, and sport is a great way to do this".*

This should be of interest to all countries whether or not they have full control over foreign policy.

Slide 10 UK, Wales, Australia, USAID

Some nations have used sport in the exercise of soft power for decades while some are now waking up to the possibilities of sport. Reports have recently been released evidencing the role of sport and soft power in driving trade and investment. But is much more than this.

We should not confuse the use of sport for soft power purposes and the use of sport for cultural relations purposes. They are slightly different concepts requiring different strategies, arrangements, and skill sets.

I mentioned earlier that a lot of what sport does well goes on quietly under the radar. **Can sport help to offer a sustained long-term continuum of solidarity, shared practice, and international fellowship between an enlarged number of communities? Universities do this very well.**

I simply ask you the question again Is this part of the sporting toolbox? Is this something sport offers the world today? The answer is of course yes, we need it and it is powerful.

Slide 11 Sport En Commun

The French have launched an impressive Sport En Commun intervention, funded through a collaboration of thirteen public banks and designed to enable closer working relationships through sport between France and Africa.

President Macron has taken a close interest in sport. In a speech in 2018 he said: "I have entrusted to the Agence Française de Développement the creation of a digital platform specialising in incubation, funding and partnerships for inclusive sport in Africa."

Following his speech, the impressive Sport en Commun (Sport in Common) digital platform was launched, which builds bridges between the different stakeholders within the sport for development ecosystems, ranging from project managers to funding institutions.

President Weah of Liberia said: "This platform is a good initiative to help our young people gain access to education and employment through sport. It is important because it gives young people the opportunity to have ownership, to feel love, to feel respected, and that is the best way forward."

Foreign diplomats, ambassadors, civil servants, cultural agencies, communities, countries, and individuals need to recognise they have

a wide variety of tools at their disposal, not just to win friends or enable health, but maintain and foster relationships and understanding.

Sport is one of these tools and we all need to be smarter about what tools to take out of this box and where and when we use them.

The choices are there to be made: I ask you.

Why would we not choose *to use all the tools* at our disposal to keep open spaces for dialogue & co-operation in a tense world?

Why would we not use something that has scale, reach, and a proven means of international engagement as a pillar of connectivity?

Why would we not use the network that is sport itself to open doors?

SLIDE 12 Concluding Remarks SLOW DOWN

So, in conclusion I hope I have convinced you about the power of sport in today's world.

I am sorry if I have not mentioned your sport, your country, your local authority- I am sure I could have. I could have said more about the proven social return on investment, the need to keep forging forward with innovation, the importance of open, safe, free spaces, OR impressive community foundation funding models ***but we would have been here all day, and this is long enough. I can see you agree.***

**But what I have tried to do is champion the power of sport
A fantastic toolbox that can help all walks of life. Has scale and reach rarely matched by any other area of public life. That can**

deliver sporting and non-sporting outcomes, is a pillar of connectivity and has a recognized international mandate to enable.

We need to recognise it more, advocate for it more, fund it more, so that it can work and create opportunities for more people, more places, more often.

PAUSE: A well-known rector of one Scottish university once stated that those working in universities should take their place in the vanguard of a movement for the bettering of humanity.

May I suggest that those working in and with sport are just as well placed.

We are Stronger Working Together than Apart

If we acknowledge the first and we act on the second, then we could do so much.

Together making the art of the possible- possible. Making sports policy, sports investment, sports research, sports advocacy, sports programmes, commitment, alignment, and the power of sport to work for more people, places, and communities more often.

That leaves me just to say **thank you** to the Scottish Government for inviting me to give this talk, thank you Maree Todd Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport for supporting this event and once **again thank you for being here this morning** - it is appreciated.