

Towards a Welsh sports diplomacy strategy

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Key Messages

- Considering the Welsh Government's 2020 International Strategy the time is right to ask what role sport plays in Wales' international engagement and diplomatic activities.
- Sports diplomacy presents a unique opportunity for Wales to lead the way in terms of innovative, sub-state policy. Should the Welsh Government be taking advantage?
- In terms of sporting soft power assets, Wales stands above a veritable but untapped goldmine of talent, resources and opportunity.
- The nature, responsibilities and power of diplomacy and sport are changing. Wales needs to think about what it means to be a sporting and outward facing nation today.
- Coupling foreign policy objectives with sport is a low-risk, relatively low-cost and high-profile method of raising Wales' international profile, growing the Welsh economy and establishing Wales as a globally responsible nation.
- Sport interacts with and can amplify other soft power assets. Sport can be a vessel to showcase a nation's values and sense of global responsibility.
- Wales could join a growing list of countries with sports diplomacy strategies, offices, officers, incubators and hubs. In doing so, Wales would be the first sub-state government in the world to have a specific sports diplomacy strategy.
- Increased partnership between government, the sports industry, Welsh and UK international agencies and the Welsh people themselves is vital to unlocking Wales' sports diplomacy potential.

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The Wales women's national football team take on Russia at the FIFA World Cup Qualifier. Newport Stadium, June 2018. Credit: Influential Photography

Foreword

by Professor Laura McAllister

In the Institute of Welsh Affairs magazine *Agenda*, I wrote about the need for Wales to better establish how we project ourselves on the global stage. I explored which components of our long history and national identity might be utilised for so-called “soft power” gains. Of course, I made special mention of our bilingualism and our proud, ancient language (that has miraculously survived with the odds so heavily stacked against it), our magnificent, natural landscape with its vast – often untapped – tourism potential, and our music, poetry and wider culture. However, in thinking about our strongest assets, it’s hard to think beyond sport. My own career in sport, politics and academia has convinced me that sport is a powerful, but under-used tool that can not only make people’s lives better but contributes to a more inclusive playing field for all. Significantly, it can also be a platform for promoting Wales’s profile across the world.

From community and grassroots sport to our inspiring performances at Euro 2016 and the 2019 Rugby World Cup, from our gold medal winning Commonwealth, Paralympic and Olympic medalists, sport is woven into our DNA. It is the glue that binds our nation together. Our sportspeople are our best ambassadors. They represent all that is good about Wales. It communicates and cements our values like excellence, family, humility, and friendliness, with a touch of fun and flair too, of course.

Sport generates opportunities to engage with people across the globe. It builds the informal networks that create and strengthen formal and official relationships. Sport not only plays a key role in expressing who we are, but also what we stand for politically, as an open and accessible trading partner, a good global citizen with an inclusive and welcoming people. For too long however, matching sporting objectives with Welsh social, trade, or foreign policy objectives has been a story of missed opportunities and under investment in time, effort and resource.

I hope this report helps to change this story. The research team has undertaken a major audit and review of the nature, capacity and potential of sports diplomacy in Wales. They engaged with over one hundred key stakeholders across the Welsh, UK and international sports sectors, as well as government, academia and beyond.

They’ve scoured the planet for the best literature and policy practice and have presented a series of bold evidence-based recommendations. The report should prompt greater collaboration between the Welsh Government, Sport Wales, and the Welsh sports industry on new, more muscular sports diplomacy initiatives. After over twenty years of devolution, it’s time for Wales to confidently look out and better engage with all of the world. Allying our new International Strategy with the global success of our sports people, teams and administrators is a powerful way to achieve that.

If we are serious about capitalising on sport as our top soft power asset, it is vital to continue the momentum established by this report. We need to keep the conversations going and build the infrastructure required to translate good ideas into sustainable progress and measurable outcomes. This report should mark the beginning of an innovative, new era in Welsh sports diplomacy.

I am absolutely convinced that Wales has all the ingredients to become a successful sports diplomacy nation. It has the industry know-how, the right connections, medals and success, aligned with a passion for sport that is woven into the fiber of our nation. All that’s missing is some team captains to champions us, a sponsor and a proper game plan. We know how to win on the field. Now, we need to ensure we can win off it.



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Introduction

Sports diplomacy is a new term that describes an old practice: the unique power of sport to bring people, nations and communities closer together via a shared love of physical pursuits. It is a young field of studies and growing area of practice for governments the world over. It can be defined as the strategic use of sport to build relationships and amplify profile, policy and attractiveness as a place to invest or study in, trade with, or visit. The term encapsulates a more inclusive method of policy formulation: governments, non-state actors and sports organisations working together for win-win outcomes.

Sports diplomacy is also a response to the changing nature of power and responsibility in the twenty-first century, especially for devolved, regional governments.¹ In the United Kingdom, for example, hard power, defense, and foreign policy remain the ambit of Westminster and Whitehall. However, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast all have unique cultures, international priorities and a significant degree of autonomy when it comes to soft power and paradiplomacy; the “international activities and foreign policy capacities of substate political units and regional governments.”² This report follows the 2018 *Wales Soft Power Barometer*³ and *International Showcasing Strategy for the Arts of Wales*⁴ as the third piece in the *Imagining Wales' Global Future* series commissioned by British Council Wales, adding to the conversation about Welsh soft power assets and their ability to further Wales' international ambitions.

Coupling policy to sport creates informal opportunities to build formal relationships, and generates access and influence. Sports diplomacy unlocks economic opportunity, augments international development and creates pathways for student, spectator, athlete, or coaching exchanges. It also provides strategic direction, a common vision and can reduce costs by integrating international sport and government systems.

The argument for a Welsh sports diplomacy strategy is a compelling one. In terms of sporting soft power assets, Wales possesses an embarrassment of riches: Tour de France winner Geraint Thomas carrying Y Ddraig Goch (the Welsh flag) along the Champs-Élysées in 2018, Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson named by the BBC as an ‘icon’ of the twentieth century, the Welsh men’s football team breaking records and making friends at Euro 2016, Jess Fishlock winning the UEFA women’s Champions League twice with FFC Frankfurt (2015) and Olympique Lyonnais (2019), and the Welsh men’s rugby team, the 2019 Six Nations Grand Slam champions, turning Tokyo red during the Japan Rugby World Cup. These are just some examples of the global profile generated for Wales through its sportspeople, success and proud sporting culture.

Furthermore, following the UK’s decision to leave the EU the time is right to innovate in terms of foreign policy; to play to our strengths and the things that make us stand out: our people, flag, creativity, language, culture and, of course, our sport.



Geraint Thomas celebrates his Tour de France 2018 win. Cardiff, August 2018. Credit: Ian Fairclough

Section 1

Framing sports diplomacy

This section contextualises and defines the term sports diplomacy and provides a brief literature review. It also describes the benefits and pitfalls of using sport as a tool for diplomacy.

1.1 Context and definition

International relations are no longer the exclusive domain of professional diplomats. Effective, twenty-first century diplomacy is a plural effort involving civil society organisations, multinational corporations, intergovernmental institutions, and even influential “celebrity diplomats.”⁵ In this dynamic setting music, art, sport, and even food are universal soft power languages which facilitate contact among diverse stakeholders at home and abroad. As the British Council’s *Wales Soft Power Barometer 2018* and *The Sources of Soft Power 2020: How perceptions determine the success of nations*⁶ reports note, factors like sport, cuisine, culture, political and socio-cultural values, friendliness, global responsibility and liveability create opportunities for international engagement, trade and nation branding.

Sports diplomacy focuses on areas where sport, politics and international relations overlap. This is nothing new. They have been overlapping since the Ancient Olympiad (776 BCE. to 393 CE), the Fields of Cloth of Gold Summit (1520), ping-pong diplomacy between the USA and China (1971), or the cricket diplomacy employed by India and Pakistan to keep a line of communication open during tensions. These are but a few of the dozens of examples of the “games within games”, the interplay of the sporting world and global politics.⁷

More recently, the USA has used sport to complement its international aid programs, China employed the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games to project an image of a progressive, prosperous, civilised, urban, modern, worldly economic powerhouse, and in 2015 the Australian Government launched the world’s first sports diplomacy strategy. This new wave of practice can be defined as the;

...conscious, strategic use of sportspeople and sporting events by state and non-state actors to engage, inform and create a favourable image among foreign publics and organisations, to shape their perceptions in a way that is (more) conducive to the sending group’s goals.⁸

Increasingly, sport is playing a major role in the international relations between states, non-state actors and people all over the world.

1.2 The benefits of sports diplomacy

Governments are attracted to sport as a tool for diplomacy for several reasons. These can be summarised as follows:

- Sports diplomacy is “low-risk, low-cost and – often – high profile.”⁹
- Informal relationships instigated through sport can lead to formal, long term relationships.
- Sports diplomacy builds familiarity, favourability and trust, amplifying a nation’s culture and values to broad overseas public audiences as well as governments.
- The concept is innovative and generates public interest in international affairs at home and abroad.
- Sport draws interest. It is an attractive and popular vessel through which to conduct diplomacy, with officials keen to attend events and large audiences for public diplomacy campaigns.
- Bespoke sports diplomacy initiatives offer governments a comparative advantage over similar regions or countries not using sport as a diplomatic tool.
- Sports diplomacy creates sustainable partnerships between government and national sports organisations, and encourages mutually reciprocal, win-win policy outcomes.
- Many sports organisations already have mature and extensive international networks. Government are simply aligning interests.
- Many sports people are “diplomats in tracksuits.”¹⁰ They represent their country on the pitch. Why not off it too (to be ambassadors for their country, building trust and representing values – laying the foundations for diplomatic and business relations, for example)?
- Using sports diplomacy strategies raises the international profile of a nation’s cities and regions.

These benefits are amplified if the region, nation or state has a strong sporting brand, presence and capacity. Wales, as this report demonstrates in section 3, has invested in and developed a strong bedrock of sporting talent, culture and facilities.

Currently, however, any benefits to Welsh society or economy are ad hoc rather than part of a long-term strategy and allied to Welsh or wider British policy objectives. If Wales desires to use sport to raise its international profile, or boost investment, tourism and trade, it must have a sports diplomacy strategy or applied approach.

1.3 The dark side of sports diplomacy

For balance, those interested in using sport as a diplomatic tool need to be mindful of its darker side. Sport has an association with violence, terrorism, jingoism, ideology, cheating, doping, gambling, and corruption. Some nations have crossed the line on fair play. For example, a 2016 World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) report asserted that more than 1,000 Russian athletes across more than thirty sports were “involved in or benefited from state-sponsored doping between 2011 and 2015.”¹¹ In December 2019, WADA banned Russia from major international sporting events for four years on charges of tampering with doping-related reports.

International sporting events can backfire, sometimes in catastrophic fashion. The 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics, for instance, were meant to show the world a thriving, modern Brazil. Instead, the world bore witness to a public diplomacy disaster. The world’s press widely reported on spiralling budgets, urban riots and the contamination of Olympic water courses. Brazil’s President Dilma Rousseff was also impeached during the Rio Games for illegally manipulating government accounts, which further hampered the national brand.

The behaviour of some international sporting representatives can also, on occasion, embarrass a nation. It is a lucrative and highly competitive industry which brings with it the risk of cheating and greed from its participants. In 2012, the cyclist Lance Armstrong was banned from the sport for life, stripped of his record seven Tour de France titles and publicly lambasted. Speaking of the “biggest crisis” the sport had ever faced, International Cycling Union (UCI) President Pat McQuaid said that “Lance Armstrong has no place in cycling ... he deserves to be forgotten.”¹² In 2018, three Australian cricket players, including the captain Steve Smith, were caught ball-tampering during a tour in South Africa, charged with bringing the game into disrepute, and banned from all international and domestic cricket for twelve months. The Australian Prime Minister at the time, Malcolm Turnbull, described the scandal as a “shocking disappointment that beggars belief.”¹³

These examples provide a reminder that things can and often do go wrong in international sport. Fortunately, however, these dark episodes are the exception rather than the rule. Sport does far more good for international relations than harm.

Section 2

Approaches to sports diplomacy – best practice review

This section describes the practice of sports diplomacy and details different approaches that small nations with large sporting footprints, nations with established sports diplomacy strategies, intergovernmental regimes, and non-state actors have undertaken to achieve foreign policy outcomes. These case studies help substantiate the concept of sports diplomacy. Should Wales invest in sport as a vehicle for international relations, they provide examples of best practice to learn from and avoid.

2.1 New Zealand: a small nation with a large sporting footprint

For a small nation of around five million people, New Zealand (NZ) has carved out an impressive niche as a good global citizen with a positive outward profile. The NZ Government's integration of sports diplomacy initiatives into its wider programme of international engagement is integral to their international brand. Chiefly, the All Blacks rugby union jersey is one of the most recognisable cultural symbols in world sport, especially when coupled with the iconic Haka (an ancient posture and war dance of the NZ Māori). Such rich heritage has been leveraged to promote the nation as a welcoming, fun-loving and inclusive player on the international stage.

A recent example of government, commerce and sports partnerships is the creation of a safety video for Air NZ flights. This beautifully produced video features the All Blacks squad, Air NZ staff and fans, and was released ahead of the 2019 Rugby World Cup in Japan. As Jodi Williams, Global Branding expert at Air NZ, notes

Changing our name to 'Air All Blacks' is a fun demonstration of our support for the boys in black. Our people feel a great sense of pride flying the team around the world and both organisations consistently show the world what a huge impact a small nation can make on the world stage.¹⁴

Other compelling examples of NZ sports diplomacy in action include:¹⁵

- Integrating sport into the lobbying process for a seat at the United Nations (UN) Security Council. NZ diplomats hosted a group of Ambassadors during a 2013 match between the Māori All Blacks and the US Eagles in Philadelphia.
- Taking advantage of the All Blacks' partnership with UNICEF (2014) to bring together two global brands to raise awareness and funds for vulnerable children. This included All Blacks' squad members Victor Vito and Ryan Crotty hosting diplomats and their families at an event at the UN headquarters in New York.
- Sending a NZ Parliamentary delegation to Tokyo in 2018. The programme included watching the All Blacks vs Japan test match alongside senior Japanese Parliamentarians; engagement with Japanese political, business, and sporting leaders; and meetings with the local university community to support enhanced academic links between Japan and NZ.
- Playing a football international against China in Shanghai in 2012 to mark 40 years of diplomatic relations between the two nations. Preceding this fixture, a team of NZ diplomats played a friendly game against Chinese counterparts, with the core aim of using football diplomacy as a platform to discuss improving relations and opportunities for Chinese-NZ trade, commerce and cross-cultural initiatives.¹⁶

While NZ does not have a sports diplomacy strategy, such activities form part of a renewed foreign policy approach to the Pacific region. In 2018, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) was given a NZ\$150 million (c.£73m) additional operational spending over four years – and a 30% increase in funding for NZ's aid programme. Such investment enables New Zealand to deliver on their 'Pacific Reset' program and "bolster their efforts to tackle priority issues like climate change in the region."¹⁷ Sport will be used to complement revised foreign policy pursuits, create networks, and to "assist our partners to make progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals; support youth across the region with access to health services, education and training; and promote the sustainable and inclusive growth of Pacific economies," in the words of Winston Peters, the Minister for Foreign Affairs.¹⁸

In addition, NZ sports brands will be deployed as public diplomacy tools in the Pacific region to counter China's "increasing presence in the region through a form of chequebook diplomacy, offering loans and the building of key infrastructure projects throughout a number of island nations."¹⁹ This new approach is aimed at developing partnerships and bolstering influence with like-minded countries such as Australia and Fiji. Considering the love of rugby union in the Pacific Islands, and the fact many islanders have played for the All Blacks, rugby offers New Zealand a tool to gain traction.

2.2 Larger nations: megaevents, the informal sports summit and sporting ambassadors

This section describes the sports diplomacy activities of large nations. Even though these are examples of global initiatives supported by significant budgets, Wales can still learn lessons. Informal sports summits allied with trade interests at the Principality Stadium are not difficult to conceive of, for example. Considering our spirit of innovation, and our friendly and creative people, these examples could be scaled down, adapted and given a Welsh flavour.

Megaevents such as the Summer or Winter Olympics, the Rugby World Cup, or the Commonwealth Games provide a shop window for host nations to showcase their athletic prowess, organisational capacities, culture, values or ideology. The opportunity to host such an event creates significant avenues for public diplomacy.

The governments of China (2008 Olympic Games), South Africa (2010 Football World Cup) and Russia (2014 Winter Olympics and 2018 World Cup), for example, coveted megaevents as “relatively cheap means of improving (their) image, credibility, stature, economic competitiveness and ability to exercise agency on the international stage.”²⁰ Over the course of a tournament millions of people tune in and if the diplomatic posture, brand and message are thoughtfully crafted, foreign publics can be engaged and influenced, not to mention the trade opportunities that arise. The same theory applies to smaller events such as the Commonwealth Games, which are easier – and relatively cheaper – to bid for and host yet create similar opportunities.

International sporting events also generate ad-hoc, informal sporting summits for high profile politicians, leaders and businesspeople to meet. During the 2014 Brazil World Cup final between Germany and Argentina, the following heads of state rubbed shoulders in the VIP suite: Dilma Rousseff (Brazil), Angela Merkel (Germany), Ali Bongo Ondima (Gabon), Gaston Brown (Antigua and Barbuda), Viktor Orban (Hungary), Jacob Zuma (South Africa), and, last but certainly not least, Vladimir Putin (Russia). This created an opportunity for wider bilateral and multilateral conversations, alongside engaging with the event itself – a dull affair settled by a German goal in extra time. The logic is similar to other unconventional diplomatic forums where leaders gather (royal weddings, inaugurations, or funerals, for example): “regardless of the occasion, informal meetings and discussions between leaders often lead to formal agreements between diplomats.”²¹

Similarly, 120 heads of state attended the £27m opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympic Games. An event which the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) saw as a “magnet for high value foreign investment” and “the biggest corporate networking event in the world”²². The programme of diplomacy included use of British Olympic athlete ambassadors who spread the 2012 messages globally, a series of sector events, rolling trade expos and an on-site British Business Embassy.

One of the more poignant summits occurred during Barack Obama's 2016 visit to Cuba, the first USA presidential trip to Havana since Calvin Coolidge in 1928. After a highly successful three-day visit, Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro symbolised the warming of the relationship by sitting in the front row of the *Estadio Latinoamericano* where they watched a few innings of a friendly baseball match between the Tampa Bay Rays and the Cuban National Team. Sporting events can be used to complement and amplify foreign policy positions, the normalisation of USA/Cuba relations under the Obama presidency in this case.

A final area where sovereign states are active is the occasional use of sportspeople to complement their diplomacy, culture and values. The theory is simple. Sportspeople are force multipliers and can build trust and connections when it comes to foreign policy goals, human rights, development, or environmental, social or ethical issues.

The Americans best embody this practice, first employing the famed sprinter Jesse Owens and the brilliant tennis player Althea Gibson in the 1960s as goodwill ambassadors to, respectively, India, the Philippines and Malaysia, and India, Pakistan, Burma and Thailand. More recently, the State Department employed two openly gay athletes – Billie Jean King (a retired tennis player) and Caitlin Cahow (a hockey player) – in the US delegation for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. Their inclusion was both a response and challenge to Russia's draconian anti lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI+) policies.

China is also adept at using sports emissaries. Before the 2008 Olympic Games, the giant basketball player Yao Ming was able to attract millions of Chinese fans to the National Basketball Association (NBA) and, vice-versa, expose millions of Americans to the 'new' China. During his time with the Houston Rockets (2002 – 2011), reporters from China followed his every move, American fans wore Chinese national team jerseys and many arenas welcomed the humorous, genial giant with dragon dances. As James Sasser, the former US Ambassador to China, noted, "Yao Ming gave the Chinese people and China a human face in the United States."²³

Ambassadors for sport play a valuable role in raising a region's profile and promoting a nation's values. In the Welsh context, men and women such as Sam Warburton, Jade Jones, Geraint Thomas and Anna Hursey embody diplomatic personality traits and are fittingly described as ambassadors for their sport. Gareth Bale has 18.3 million followers on Twitter, and Aaron Ramsay – a modern day John Charles – is single handedly charming Italy. Nigel Owens, Jess Fishlock and Gareth Thomas are powerful, capable advocates for the LGBT+ community, openly speaking out against homophobic behaviour and antiquated attitudes to an individual's right to be happy. This is an area in which we feel Wales has a particular advantage.

2.3 Countries with sports diplomacy strategies: USA, Australia and France

This section considers three nations with specific sports diplomacy strategies: the USA, Australia and France.

The USA

As one of the responses to the 9/11 tragedy, the US Department of State introduced a suite of sports diplomacy operations. Sport was co-opted to reach areas and create connections where traditional public diplomacy devices such as the Voice of America radio station had clearly failed to reach: young, disenfranchised Muslim men across the Middle East, Africa and South East Asia. Sports diplomacy was introduced to augment US public diplomacy and is being used by the USA to compete for 'hearts and minds' in the Long War on Terror. This brief example outlines the three key stages of sports diplomacy policy: design, implementation and measurement.

US sports diplomacy is housed under the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Its flagship initiative is *SportsUnited*, part of an effort "to build ever-strengthening relations between the United States and other nations which uses the universal passion for sports as a way to transcend linguistic and sociocultural differences."²⁴

SportsUnited focuses on three main activities: Sports Visitors, where American Ambassadors nominate sports people from their host countries to travel to the United States for specialised training and clinics; Sports Envoys, where U.S. athletes and coaches are selected to become global ambassadors of sport; and Sports Grants, which facilitate sport and education and training for non-elite children under seventeen years old.

Significantly, the US regularly measures success via data collection, analysis and surveying participants involved. Since 2005, for example, the United States has sent around 300 Sports Envoys to 70 countries including Afghanistan, Myanmar, Japan and Venezuela; more than 1,100 young athletes and coaches from 140 countries have travelled to the US to participate in Sports Visitor programmes and over 90 grants to US-based non-profit organisations implementing programmes in 60 countries have been given.²⁵ Measuring success is important, particularly when trying to convince sceptics of this new type of diplomacy.

The process of creating a strategy: Australia

The first country in the world to launch a specific sports diplomacy strategy was Australia, a country where sport is often touted as the national religion. The aim of this journey was to ensure that Australia's domestic culture, identity and love of sport was included in its diplomacy. In addition, sport was identified by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as a key soft power asset alongside education, science and research, the arts, media and broadcasting, and disaster management, to name but a few. Working in tandem with Australia's overseas embassies, posts and missions, sport and soft power were seen as vital "to help shape an environment that is positively disposed to Australian foreign policy interests and values over the long term."²⁶ The Pacific Sports Partnerships, a flagship sport for development programme, would also be incorporated into the new strategic approach described below. The Australian Government's journey alludes to a process that Wales may wish to learn from. For the purpose of expediency, it is broken down into seven steps.

Step one: why should we do it?

The argument for why sport should be used as a tool to complement Australia's diplomacy first had to be made. This was relatively easy: if, indeed, sport mattered so much to the Lucky Country's culture, values and identity then why did it not feature in its diplomacy? Diplomacy, after all, is representation of the nation projected abroad; who they think they are.

Step two: challenge the culture

The culture of DFAT then had to be challenged. A common refrain encountered in the early days of lobbying the Department was "we're diplomats. We don't do sport!"²⁷ This attitude was countered via a series of workshops and information packs run and written by a team of diplomats and academics.

Step three: form a team of champions

A small group of sport-loving employees then championed the cause. In Australia's case, five DFAT employees drove the entire process.²⁸ From the outset, this team communicated that they were not out to infringe or impinge on other department's territory.

Instead, they sought to develop mutual areas of interest, to "work together and coordinate with other agencies such as Austrade or the Office of Sport to inform and influence foreign publics and partners, to promote sports for mutual and strategic advantage."²⁹

Step four: form a whole-of-government working group

To formulate an effective Strategy, as well as avoid internal power struggles, DFAT next established a sports diplomacy working group. This included representatives from Austrade, the Australian Sports Commission (re-named Sport Australia in 2018), the Departments of Health and Tourism, and, from time to time, external sports organisations such as Football Federation Australia. The purpose of the working group was to explain sports diplomacy, delineate territories, assign roles, share resources, coordinate activities, and, where possible, avoid duplication.

Step five: figure out how sport relates to foreign policy goals

It was important to also relate any sports diplomacy endeavour to traditional foreign policy goals. The timing for this was serendipitous considering the 2012 launch of the *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*, which touted sport as a way to "deepen and broaden" engagement with the region and "build greater understanding, foster cultural appreciation and offer commercial opportunities."³⁰ It is important that any sports diplomacy initiatives relate to traditional foreign policy objectives.

Step six: get powerful allies on board

Ministerial support was equally important. This was not a hard sell for DFAT. The Prime Minister from 2013 to 2015, Tony Abbott, was a very active sportsman, often competing in triathlons, marathons, surfing events, and long-distance cycles. Similarly, Julie Bishop, the Minister for Foreign Affairs from 2013-2018, is a keen runner and has a deep, personal connection with sport. She is a huge fan of the West Coast Eagles Australia Rules Football team and served as a board member from 2008 to 2013.³¹ Abbott, Bishop and Susan Hayne, the Minister for Sport at the time, were supportive of the concept from the start.

Step seven: launch

The *Australian Sports Diplomacy Strategy (2015-2018)* was officially launched in June 2015 by the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Sports Minister at Parliament House, Canberra. Over eighty Ministers were present as well as media personnel and luminaries from the world of sport.

As Foreign Minister Julie Bishop (2015) noted at the launch, the Strategy

*Signals a new era of partnership between the Australian Government and sporting organizations. Together, we will leverage our outstanding sports skills, facilities and knowledge to promote Australia and strengthen our links with countries and communities in the region.*³²

A world's first, DFAT's 2015-2018 Strategy recognised that people around the world 'saw' Australia not through its foreign policy but through its sport. It also celebrated sport as a vehicle for showcasing Australia's capabilities and credentials, ensured Australia's leadership in sport innovation and integrity, and ultimately boosted the nation's diplomatic influence and global reputation.

Megaevents and methods: France and l'équipe qui gagne³³

The gold medal for sports diplomacy – outside of Australia, that is – goes to France. Their journey began in 2012 while watching London host the Olympic Games, a tournament they narrowly lost out on hosting. A long period of reflection within government then crystalized into a sports diplomacy strategy launched in 2014 by Valérie Fourneyron, the then Minister of Sports.

The temporal aspect is important to mention. France did not rush the process, they horizon scanned, and adopted a medium-to-long term approach to building a sport diplomacy strategy. Acknowledging that “sport plays a major role in attracting visitors to France and showcasing the country’s international outreach” the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs first established a working group consisting of government departments, sporting federations, major sporting businesses and the National Olympic Committee.³⁴ The sports industry was then mapped and measured, and several more innovations followed: the world’s first Ambassador for Sport (Philippe Vinogradoff),³⁵ an Office for the Economics of Sport, and a new French Olympic Committee, which aimed to promote French sport internationally, increase French presence in international sporting bodies, and ensure French continued as the official language of the Olympic Games.

So far, activity has centered on bidding, winning and hosting major sporting tournaments. Stung by the loss of the 2012 Olympics to the British, France “learned to lobby”.³⁶ As figure 1.1 illustrates the investment has certainly paid off.

In short, France has matched success in sport with diplomatic success off the pitch, so to speak. They look set to innovate further, especially in the hosting of major events. The 2018 hosting of the Ryder Cup, the world’s third most watched sport after the Olympics and football World Cup, symbolised the French culture of innovation, being different, and the new strategic direction. Played at the Golf National in Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, a course purpose built for the unique atmosphere the match generates, over 300,000 fans turned out to watch the underdog Europeans comfortably beat an American team 17½ - 10½ (and there wasn’t even a Frenchman playing in the European team).

It should come as no surprise that France understands the power of sports diplomacy. The annual Tour de France race endures as one of the world’s most successful, most watched examples of sport, culture and tourism. In 2019, 3.5 billion people in 190 countries tuned in to watch the Tour de France and it is one of the best-attended annual sporting events on the planet, with 12 million roadside spectators cheering on cyclists. Just imagine if Wales was able to bid for and host the Grand Depart, something Yorkshire did with great aplomb in 2014.

Figure 1.1. Major sporting events in France 2015- 2024

- 2015 World Rowing Championships
- UEFA Euro 2016 Football Championship
- 2017 Ice Hockey World Championships
- 2017 Canoe Slalom World Championships
- 2017 World Handball Championships
- 2018 Ryder Cup (Golf)
- 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup
- 2023 Rugby World Cup
- 2024 Summer Olympic Games

2.4 Intergovernmental organisations and sport for development and peace

Wales can think of vertical, as well as horizontal, networks for opportunities to build international connections and have their voice heard. As the UK negotiates its future relationship with the EU sport and sports diplomacy offer a positive way to maintain links and networks with the EU and to share best practice.

Intergovernmental organisations also engage with sport, mainly in the area of Sport for Development and Peace (SDP). These case studies are important for Wales because the expertise, knowledge and best practice in sport for development lies with intergovernmental organisations, and not states. Moreover, if a globally responsible Wales was to invest in a sports diplomacy strategy, it should include a work stream which considers sport for development.

The original pioneer in SDP was the United Nations Office on Sport Development for Peace (UNOSDP), which was launched by Secretary General Kofi Annan in 2001. This office led the way in developing a comprehensive, global policy of inclusive access for all to sport, physical education and physical activity.

The UN is also responsible for facilitating the high level International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS) meetings (which recently launched the 2017 Kazan Action plan³⁷), protecting the integrity of sport, and promoting research-based evidence for SDP and the role sport plays in addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

With the closure of the UNOSDP in 2017 as part of Secretary General Guterres' reform agenda, The Commonwealth Secretariat became the custodian. Most of its work focuses on the practice of SDP, that is, how to craft, implement and measure effective policies. Recent publications and policies relate sport to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Kazan Action Plan and the United Nations 2030 Agenda. Enhancing the Contribution of Sport to Sustainable Development, crafted by Oliver Duffield, is a good example of a body of work that provides guidance on policy and strategy development for governments, as well as advice, tools, and best practice for each to maximise the contribution of sport to national development objectives and the SDGs.

The European Union is the most advanced of the supranational entities in terms of sports diplomacy. In 2015 the European Commission established two high-level groups on sports diplomacy. These were composed of athletes, academics, representatives of think tanks, media personnel, and sport executives (from businesses such as Adidas and organisations such as UEFA). One group focused on "sport (sic.) diplomacy" and the other on "grassroots sports diplomacy" (every day, non-elite sport, regardless of their gender, age, physical ability and ethnic background).³⁸ The aim was to "assess the value of sport in EU external policies, identify how sport can help the EU reach its external political ambitions (e.g. fostering relations with partner countries) and be an element of dialogue with third countries and regions as part of EU public diplomacy."³⁹

The EU is important to consider because they are the most advanced of all the European 'players' in sports diplomacy. They offer advice, help and, similarly, partnerships. A good example is the relationship between the European Union Peace and Reconciliation Programme, the Irish Football Association (IFA) and the official Northern Ireland (NI) Supporters Club. EU funding was used to facilitate anti-sectarianism and racism awareness. Self-regulating measures were adopted to ensure positive crowd behaviour and transform the atmosphere at NI international football matches. The programme also enabled the IFA to develop partnerships with key stakeholders such as Sport NI, the Community Relations Council, the NI Council for Ethnic Minorities, supporters, government and academics who provided guidance for the programme as part of the Football for All Advisory Panel.

This world-renowned initiative remains one of the best examples of sport for reconciliation and peace and is a reminder to Wales of the value of an inclusive and nationwide partnership approach to sports diplomacy.

2.5 Government agencies, public bodies and NGOs

Government sports agencies such as UK Sport also play a considerable role. They are large, well-funded organisations that combine once separate national and international sports portfolios into one hub and have become increasingly sophisticated political actors. Their strategies outline core values, objectives, and mission statements relating to medals, major events, and development milestones, all of which are funded by multi-million-pound budgets.

An organisation like UK Sport provides a good example. It was created after a poor performance at the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics when the UK won just one gold medal. Operating on an annual budget of 144.3£ million (2018/2019 budget),⁴⁰ this organisation has been pivotal to Britain's subsequent sporting success, its ability to bid for and host major events, and the delivery of several well-known sport for development programmes.

As part of its core mission of “driving and showcasing British medal success on the world stage,” UK Sport is responsible for “activities best delivered at a UK level, such as: bidding for and staging major sporting events through its Gold Event Series; increasing sporting activity and influence overseas; and promoting sporting conduct, ethics and diversity.”⁴¹ To realise these goals the UK Sport business plan lists no less than seven policy objectives, nine strategies, and eleven key performance indicators. Notably, Sport Wales is one of UK Sport's sub-national hubs (as is Sport Scotland, Sport England, and Sport Northern Ireland). Should the Welsh Government develop a sports diplomacy strategy UK Sport and Sport Wales would need to be included.

Many non-departmental public bodies and independent consultative bodies to the Welsh Government are carving out niche areas of expertise in sports diplomacy, including the Welsh Sports Association (WSA) and Youth Sports Trust. The British Council, which is the UK's organisation for cultural relations, has delivered grassroots sports programmes all over the world with notable impact. Flagship initiatives such as *Premier Skills*, *Try Rugby* and *International Inspiration*⁴² have enriched over 25 million young people, 7,600 coaches, and created fifty-five national sports-based policies. Collaboration, innovation and integration have been vital to these programmes. As Jenny Scott, Director, British Council Wales, noted, “effective partnerships have been at the heart of this success, working with a range of national and international organisations in the commercial and public sector to meet mutual objectives.”⁴³

Besides the programmes mentioned above, the British Council brokers international connections, provides introductions and facilitates many programmes involving sport, development and diplomacy, via their 100 plus offices all over the world. Any future Welsh sports diplomacy strategy should tap into such networks, expertise and support.

2.6 Best practice review summary

Our review of best practice in sports diplomacy confirmed that stakeholders are using sport as a means to a range of diverse ends; from foreign policy to the delivery of international aid to the realisation of the SDGs. They recognise the allure of sport for public diplomacy and have crafted specific policies to work with, learn from, and harness the power of sport.⁴⁴

This is positive news for Wales. There is plenty of best practice literature and policy on which to base the world's first sports diplomacy strategy for a devolved government.



The Welsh football team receive a heroes' welcome in Cardiff after their historic run at the Euro Football championship. Cardiff, July 8th 2016.
Credit: Ian Francis

Section 3

Wales, sport and international engagement – where are we now?

To investigate the feasibility of a Welsh sports diplomacy strategy, we first reviewed Welsh literature on the topic and collated practical examples of what might be termed Welsh sports diplomacy from the past and present. This exercise confirmed that Wales holds a veritable but largely untapped goldmine of sporting soft power assets.



Clive Sullivan, a Cardiff born Great Britain and Wales international player. He became the first black captain of any national British sporting team when he was given the Great Britain captaincy and led the Lions to victory for the World Cup 1972. He went on to captain for Wales in 1975.

3.1 Brief literature review: Wales, sport and international engagement

This part of the literature review began with a simple question: has there been anything written about the relationship between Wales, sport and international engagement? In short, no. There are, however, a few tangential sources worth considering. Seen through a scholarly lens, Martin Johnes's *A History of Sport in Wales* provides a useful starting point.⁴⁵ Amongst an array of historical themes, this book charts the role immigration has played in introducing new sports to Wales. Sport, as the book argues, was a vital tool in bringing disparate communities together and forging a sense of Welsh nationhood. As the author notes,

...sport has not only helped the Welsh see themselves as a nation, it has also helped others accept Welsh nationhood too. Wales may not have a presence on the international political stage, but it does have a long history of its own national teams and associations, many of which have attracted considerable media attention.

Such opinion confirms the historic role sport plays in expressing nationhood, at home and abroad.

John Davies' *A History of Wales* offers a more definitive account of the wider political, social and cultural variables underpinning the making of the modern Welsh nation.⁴⁶ For Davies, the development of Welsh international sport has influenced how Wales sees the world, as well as how the 'other' – that is, foreign people, nations and states – 'sees' Wales.

To underline this point, Davies cites the esteemed academic, Merfyn Jones, who reminds us that

to many people outside of Wales...Wales exists by virtue of those who represent her through sport...In nation building, there can be few institutions as influential as Wales' national teams.⁴⁷

Like Davies, many authors point to Wales' membership in international sporting networks, particularly in international governing bodies such as UEFA, FIFA, World Rugby and the Commonwealth Games Federation. Such a presence enables Wales to further legitimise itself as an active and influential sporting nation on the world stage.

To summarise, sport as a device, or tool, has been examined in the domestic Welsh sphere but not as an international, diplomatic tool. A gap in the literature exists as to the value of sport to Wales' international profile. Such an academic study, book, or paper has yet to be written.

This is not surprising considering the British Council Wales commissioned the first investigation into the topic. Moreover, Wales is a young, devolved nation that is beginning to look outwards. The position of Minister for International Relations and Welsh Language, it must be remembered, was only created in December 2018. It would, however, be unwise for the Welsh Government to invest in a sports diplomacy strategy without engaging Welsh academics to first research the topic.

3.2 Gold medals, champions and legends: past and present

The practical terrain is more obvious. Wales' world-class sports administrators, referees, fans, teams and athletes confirm that Wales is a small nation with a disproportionately large sporting footprint and a powerful, distinct and internationally recognisable sporting brand. The dragon, red shirt, national anthem, and slogans in the Welsh language are world-renowned symbols.

Welsh teams and athletes are powerful sports diplomacy brands. There are many past and present examples of how Welsh sport raises the nation's international profile:

- Cardiff City's 1-0 victory against overwhelming favourites Arsenal at Wembley in 1927 remains the only time the FA Cup has left England.
- Lynn 'the Leap' Davies being crowned long jump champion at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.
- Ray Reardon winning the snooker World Championship in 1978 aged 45 (he remains the oldest winner to lift the trophy, a six-time winner and one of the game's greatest players).
- Ian Woosnam's dramatic, one-stroke victory over José María Olazábal at the 1991 U.S. Masters.
- Colin Jackson's stunning performance in the 110 metres hurdles final at the 1993 world championships in Germany (Jackson won gold and set a new world record that stood for 13 years).
- Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson's eleven – yes, eleven! – gold medals accrued over five Paralympics, plus two World Championships and dozens of other accolades.
- The globetrotting Jess Fishlock, who has won football titles, friends and fans in France, Australia, Scotland, the Netherlands and the USA.
- Our 'team' of world-beating boxers: Joe Calzaghe, for example, retired in 2009 as an unbeaten world champ. Other, former world champions include Enzo Maccarinelli, Gavin Rees, Howard Winstone, Jim Driscoll, Steve Robinson, Robbie Regan and the multitalented Lauren Price who is also a champion international kickboxer and former Welsh international footballer.

- The pioneering work of Laura McAllister, a trailblazing Welsh national football team captain, distinguished academic, and current Deputy Chair of UEFA Women's Football Committee.
- Gareth Thomas is a champion on the pitch and off it. With over 100 Wales, British and Irish Lions and Barbarians' caps, Thomas was the first openly gay professional rugby union player, voted the most influential gay person in the UK through The Independent on Sunday's Pink List, and, in 2010, received Stonewall's Hero of the Year award. He continues to be an advocate for wiping out homophobia in sport.⁴⁸
- John Toshack is one of the most experienced football managers in the world game. He has managed clubs in Wales, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Italy, Morocco, Azerbaijan, Iran and France; and, as national team manager, of Wales and Macedonia. A remarkable career saw him take Swansea City from the bottom to the top tier of English football, win multiple domestic and European titles at Liverpool and secure La Liga as Real Madrid coach. After winning Spain's Copa del Rey as Real Sociedad's first ever non-Basque manager in the modern era, he is revered in San Sebastián (Donostia) where he still lives. An invaluable source of knowledge on the world and sport, he could play a bit, too.
- Former Wales and Liverpool forward Ian Rush was the ambassador for the 2017 UEFA Champions League final in Cardiff and is a distinguished ambassador for Liverpool FC where he regularly works with overseas governments, dignitaries, sporting federations and clubs to champion football as a force for good. He remains the record marksman at Liverpool and, until recently for Wales (he was overtaken in 2018 by Gareth Bale).
- Welsh teenage table tennis sensation, Anna Hursey, has accepted an invitation (2020) to put her growing sporting profile and personality to work to help save the planet as a Young Champion of the UNFCCC Sports for Climate Action Framework. As the youngest ever athlete to compete at any Commonwealth Games and media darling of Gold Coast 2018, Hursey has also encouraged deeper cultural ties between Wales and China through her prodigious sporting talent and family heritage.

The list goes on and on. If Wales was to create a sports diplomacy strategy, it would do well to study and invest in the concept of the sports ambassador, particularly retired players. Such a body of research would not only add value to Wales' international profile, it would be a world's first (no study has yet investigated this appealing concept with any rigour).

Some of the great moments in sport have occurred on Welsh soil: Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay training for Everest at the Pen-Y-Gwryd hotel in Snowdonia, Garfield Sobers hitting six sixes at St Helens, Swansea, Gareth Edwards skidding across the old greyhound track at Cardiff Arms Park after his remarkable solo-try against Scotland in 1972, and Steven Gerrard's 2006 FA Cup final thunderbolt are but four sporting events seared into the collective sporting memory.

Wales also knows how to put on a good show. The 2010 Ryder Cup, held at the Celtic Manor Resort in Newport, was sporting drama at its finest with Graeme McDowell eventually beating Hunter Mahan in the final anchor match 3 & 1. Three hundred and eighty additional aircraft brought 300,000 visitors to Cardiff to watch Real Madrid take on Juventus in the 2017 UEFA Champions League final (netting Cardiff a neat £45 million).⁴⁹

Sixty-four teams competed in the 2019 Homeless World Cup whilst over 2,000 endurance athletes from around the world came for the Ironman Wales (generating £3.5m for the local economy and drawing 10,000 visitors to Tenby).⁵⁰

In addition, and in a world saturated by clichéd public diplomacy campaigns, it would be remiss to ignore quixotic Welsh events such as the World Bog Snorkelling Championships, Race the Train, The World Bathtubbing Championships, and the strangely appealing Man Versus Horse Marathon (an annual race held over twenty-two miles; spoiler alert – the humans are not doing too well). There are new events too, like the Nitro World Games, Wales 2020 (exploring rescheduling due to Covid-19). This exciting event brings together the world's best athletes from rally cross, FMX, BMX, Skate and Scooter. And, if all goes to plan, Ynys Môn's successful bid to host the International Island Games in 2025 will deliver a once in a generation international showpiece event to North Wales.

Wales also knows how to attract sporting talent, players and coaches. Football Association Wales' pioneering, world-famous UEFA Coaching course lists Patrick Viera (France), Michael Ballack (Germany), Tim Cahill (Australia), Roberto Martinez (Spain), Freddie Ljungberg (Sweden), Peter Crouch (England), Tracy Hamm (US) and many others as recent, superstar graduates. As Thierry Henry (France) from the class of 2015 noted, "the way they do things in Wales, the philosophy, is the perfect match."⁵¹ Again, this is a model, an asset, that can be studied and replicated.

New Zealander Warren Gatland took charge of the National Rugby team in 2007, leading the team to four Six Nations Titles (including three Grand Slams). The Welsh Rugby Union then pulled off three more Kiwi coups, attracting Wayne Pivac (Head Coach), Johnny McNichol (winger) and Hadleigh Parkes (centre), two of which debuted in the 2020 Six Nations competition. Football Association Wales (FAW) has a similar track record, particularly in convincing dual qualified (England-Wales) youngsters to pull on the red shirt: Ethan Ampadu (Chelsea), Ben Woodburn (Liverpool), Dan James (Manchester United) and David Brooks (Bournemouth), are all good examples of players that – because of a specific, world-renowned program introduced by the FAW – made a conscious decision to play for Wales and not England.



Alessandro Del Piero meets his hero, John Charles, during his emotional return to Juventus F.C. where he played for four seasons from 1957 – 1962. Welshman John Charles is rated by many as the greatest footballer to ever come from the UK. He was one of the first UK players to sign for an overseas team when he joined Juventus in 1957. In his first season with Juventus he was named Italy's Player of the Year, and was twice a finalist for European Player of the Year. Known to his Italian fans as *Il buon gigante* ("The Gentle Giant") for his kind and calm disposition, he was never once cautioned or sent off through his entire career. He played for Wales at the 1958 FIFA World Cup in Sweden, in total representing Wales 38 times in international matches. Credit: Gianni GIANSAANTI/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images

3.3 Sport Wales

The institution that steers the Welsh domestic sporting juggernaut is Sport Wales. This quasi-autonomous organisation is responsible for developing and promoting sport and physical activity in Wales. It is the main advisor to the Welsh Government on sport and has experience in creating, implementing and measuring sport policies. The *Vision for Sport in Wales* and the *Sport Wales Strategy* allude to a rich body of experience in working with multiple partners, across all levels of society.

This organisation sits under the aegis of UK Sport. While Sport Wales concentrates on the national level, UK sport focuses on the international via its International Relations Strategy (2017-2021). This has four main goals:

- Strengthening National Governing Bodies' (NGBs') voice within their International Federations through the development of bespoke International Relations investment strategies
- Supporting credible, high calibre individuals from the UK to attain leadership positions in international sporting organisations
- Advocating and influencing for the highest standards of professional and ethical conduct in international sporting organisations
- Strengthening our alliances and developing partnerships between NGBs and strategic counterparts overseas.

The relationship between UK Sport and Sport Wales is a crucial one in terms of a potential Welsh sports diplomacy strategy. Should Wales follow this path, the relationships and responsibilities between the Welsh Government, Sport Wales and UK Sport would need to be clarified.

3.4 Welsh sports diplomacy in action

There is promising evidence of sports diplomacy partnerships between Welsh sporting representatives and Welsh diplomats. As a devolved government, Wales has its own officially accredited diplomats. Around forty officials represent the nation in twelve countries abroad, championing Welsh interests, communicating core policy messages, and negotiating trade and investment deals.

Already, Welsh Government officials are engaging in forms of sports diplomacy, though currently on an ad hoc basis. In May 2018, for example, the Welsh Government hosted a reception for the Welsh Rugby Union at the British Ambassador's residence in Washington DC. This event took place ahead of the first Wales v South Africa international rugby test played on American soil. The guest list for this informal sports diplomacy summit included business, political and diaspora contacts from across the region. Rugby was the drawcard, bringing together a more diverse stakeholder group than conventional business receptions normally attract.

Similarly, in 2019, Wales took two squads to the Japan Rugby World Cup: the team and one of its biggest ever overseas trade delegations. Led by First Minister Mark Drakeford, the delegation cut deals with other sports-business teams from all over the world, presented the best of Welsh business, culture and food, and networked with sports, government and industry from Japan at the purpose-built Wales House dome in Tokyo. As the International Strategy notes of the special occasion,

the 2019 Rugby World Cup in Japan was a great example of Wales on the world stage – who could have imagined a stadium full of 15,000 Japanese rugby fans singing the Welsh national anthem at a training session in Kitakyushu as Welsh businessmen met Japanese investors nearby?



First Minister of Wales Mark Drakeford gives a speech next to Wales rugby team captain Alun Wyn Jones and head coach Warren Gatland during the celebration for Wales' Six Nations victory at the National Assembly for Wales on March 18, 2019 in Cardiff, Wales. Credit: photo by Athena Pictures/Getty Images

The programme of events used the power of sport to deepen Welsh, cultural, trade and people-to-people links with the host nation.⁵² In terms of legacy, a sports diplomacy strategy would align activities and ensure that these informal relationships built through sport lead to longer-lasting, deeper and more formal relationships.

The Welsh sporting community has also commendably responded to the Covid crisis. Setting an exciting benchmark for the future of Welsh sports diplomacy, numerous national sporting legends such as Ryan Giggs, Jayne Ludlow, Gareth Bale, Aaron Ramsey, Helen Ward and Geraint Thomas partnered directly with the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales on social media channels to emphasise to domestic and international audiences the vital importance of the need to #StayHomeSaveLives.

Likewise, Welsh international rugby union players Megan Webb, Paige Randall, Angharad de Smet and Abbie Fleming all returned to coronavirus support roles in the National Health Service (NHS), alongside the 94 capped Wales and Western Stormers (South Africa) centre, Jamie Roberts, who offered his services as a fully qualified doctor. Hallowed Welsh sporting venues also featured in the emergency response with Cardiff's Principality Stadium transformed into Ysbyty Calon Ddraig (Dragon's Heart Hospital), Llanelli's Parc Y Scarlets into Ysbyty Enfys (Rainbow Hospital) and Newport's Rodney Parade repurposed as a testing centre for health and social care staff. When coupled with the countless inspirational fundraising activities of many athletes and sports clubs of all levels across the nation, the Welsh sporting ecosystem has assisted significantly in demonstrating to the world that Wales' wellbeing and recovery focus is centred on the innate values of community, unity and social inclusion. As the world moves beyond lockdown into a post Covid world, the "Together Stronger" approach that has served Wales so well on the sporting field will also offer a powerful positive message to the global community moving forward.

Perhaps the most encouraging sign for the future of Welsh sports diplomacy is the Welsh Government's January 2020 International Strategy. This strategy alludes to a new era of partnerships in creating, implementing and evaluating policy, and shows signs of what might be termed Welsh sports diplomacy. Significant references to sport are weaved throughout the strategy document. Alongside the "Welsh passion for culture, creativity and music," sport is identified as a "crucial" factor in "raising Wales' profile as a small, creative nation, brimming with talented and friendly people on the world stage."⁵³

The Welsh Government is also promising to engage with sport through a formal commitment to "hold two meetings a year to ensure we are coordinating our activities across government and with other organisations working abroad, including local government, civil society, sports and cultural organisations to ensure, where possible and appropriate, we can coordinate our work and build on each other's experience and international platforms."⁵⁴ Clearly, leadership in Cardiff Bay is thinking innovatively about how sport, art, music and culture can be engaged and synergised to assist in raising Wales' profile abroad.

These examples demonstrate that the Welsh Government understands and is willing to invest in and practice sports diplomacy. They also provide an important body of knowledge and experience to build on and provide case study materials to review and learn from. Most importantly, they illustrate that a sports diplomacy strategy that respectfully and effectively taps into Welsh sporting talent could be a potent combination. Wales has a very strong foundation to build on. In other words, Wales starts the sports diplomacy game from "from a position of strength."⁵⁵

Section 4

An analysis of research findings: Wales, sport and international engagement

A more critical analysis suggests a slightly different picture. Themes that came up time and time again in conversation with key stakeholders indicated that the sporting ecosystem needs to be better understood, and that relationships could be more effective. When it comes to Wales strategically using sport for international engagement it is a story of “missed opportunities”, in the words of Professor Laura McAllister.⁷¹

4.1 Methodology: field work and thematic analysis

Both positive and negative perspectives on the idea of a Welsh sports diplomacy strategy emerged via an extensive fieldwork programme. Our study adopted a mixed methodology approach and used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. From April to December 2019, the following occurred:

- Three focus groups in Cardiff, Swansea and London.
- Nineteen individual interviews with local and international experts.
- An online bilingual survey with 23 respondents.
- Consultations with Welsh Government officials from International Relations, Trade, Major Events and Sport.
- Consultations with UK Government officials from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Department for International Trade (DIT), Visit Britain and British Council.
- Presentations to, and consultations with the Cross Party Group (CPG): Wales International at the National Assembly for Wales (Y Senedd on 10 July 2019) and the ‘Cross Whitehall Geopolitics and International Relations community of interest’ on 19 August 2019 under its ‘Exploring soft power’ seminar series.

In total, the project engaged with over 115 individuals who work at the proverbial coalfaces of international sport, diplomacy and government.

For the sake of consistency, five questions were distilled from the main findings of the desktop review and formed the basis of every interaction. These were:

1. Do you think the Welsh Government is making the most of using sport as a tool for international engagement?
2. If Wales were to use sport as a tool for international engagement, what challenges and opportunities exist?
3. What is your opinion of the relationship between the Welsh Government, British Council Wales and the Welsh sports industry?
4. What does the term sports diplomacy mean to you?
5. If you were to participate in the design, delivery and execution of a Welsh sports diplomacy strategy, what is the one thing we need to know?

Answers to these questions are woven throughout the following sections. Following the fieldwork stage, the research team conducted a Thematic Analysis (TA) of the data gathered. This method focuses on identifying patterns of meaning – or common themes – across the dataset. These were, in turn, grouped under two broad headings – knowledge and relationships.

4.2 Respondent theme: building knowledge, data and shared understanding

By knowledge, we mean the body of specific research required to build a sports diplomacy strategy. Good, objective and peer-reviewed research is essential for strategy-building, as shall become apparent.

First, it is important to figure out what the label ‘Welsh sport’ means. This simple question has a complicated answer. Throughout the fieldwork, it became clear that Welsh sport is not a monolith with a common voice and shared vision. Similar to other sectors, the Welsh sporting landscape is composed of many different layers and types of sport, ranging from the primary school to the amateur to the professional levels. It also encapsulates a multitude of world class adventure pursuits from the Pembrokeshire developed sport of coasteering, through to the world’s fastest zipline at Penrhyn Quarry, or the breath-taking scenic vistas offered by the Wales Coast Path (the only continuous path around an entire coastline on the planet) and countless mountain-bike trails.

Therefore, Welsh sports cannot be referred as a single, unified and measurable sports industry. If it was an industry, it would have a lead body, data sets, and a common voice. If anything, Welsh sport has proved notoriously difficult to holistically measure. While Sport Wales’ annual *State of the Nation* report informs who plays sport, how much, and what type, accurate data on the number of clubs or the economic value of sport to Wales is harder to obtain.⁵⁶

In addition, the sports industry – unlike tourism – is not linked to national satellite accounts,⁵⁷ which is a far more accurate way to gauge the value and contribution of sport to society, economy or international relations. Government funding also differs from club-to-club and sport-to-sport. The industry has yet to be digitally mapped, and – typically – there is internal competition between sports over players, sponsorship monies, fans, TV audiences, and so on.

Of these variables, there is a need to digitally map, measure and evaluate sport and its contribution to the Welsh economy, at home and abroad. The argument to address this challenge came from multiple fieldwork sources, including Kate Evans (recent Head of Policy and Communications, Welsh Sports Association), who flagged:

We need more robust quantitative and qualitative data on the scale, scope and value of Welsh sport, as well as further work on its contribution to Welsh society. Progress has been made in this area, but we need to build on this with partner agencies and consider global examples.

A second area of knowledge that is currently missing is peer-reviewed academic research on Welsh sport and international engagement, or sports diplomacy, in other words. As previously noted, this is unsurprising considering this report is the first attempt to theorise on Welsh sports diplomacy, and that the Welsh Government relatively recently created the post of Minister for International Relations and Welsh Language in 2018. Still, the argument remains immutable: good policy is built from good research.

The strength of the Australian project, for example, stems from a regular working relationship between serving diplomats and academics. DFAT has repeatedly funded academic research into sports diplomacy, meets with academics on a quarterly basis, and has been working with members of the research community since 2013. The relationship is entirely reciprocal: the Ministry gains access to a vast body of knowledge concisely delivered through a group of critical friends, while academics contribute to shaping policy and demonstrating impact and industry engagement.

This collaborative approach was supported during the fieldwork. Anthony Polack, for example, a Geneva based international consultant argued,

if the Welsh sporting sector works in tandem with government, academia and civil society (and vice-versa), it could be a potent mix. Add to this your cool flag, language and culture then it is time to believe on the global stage, there is nothing to lose.

Similarly, Jim Roy, a Welsh native and Director for the PageGroup in Canberra noted,

if you look at the cutting-edge work the Australian Government is doing binding sectors together behind sports diplomacy or the nation branding activities coming out of New Zealand cleverly incorporating the 'All Blacks' brand, then I think why not Wales too?

The third and final area of knowledge currently lacking is a common vision; strategy and operational procedures relating to the concept of Welsh sports diplomacy. If, for example, a Minister wants to ally policy to a sporting event there is no set procedure for them to follow, no shared vision allying government to sporting interests, and no body of data to tap into.

Similarly, if a sporting body wishes to work with Government, who does it call? While some might argue that sport belongs under a major events strategy, we would respond that sport is more than just big events. Moreover, sport gets 'lost' when buried in general strategies and, considering its place in Welsh society and culture deserves singular, premeditated attention and focus.

4.3 Respondent theme: Relationships within the sporting ecosystem

The greater concern to emerge from the field work was the relationships within the Welsh sporting ecosystem and the networks that exist between sport, government and other, related institutions and individuals. The research allowed us to map these out and group key networks.

...between Welsh sports clubs, organisations and government. To repeat, Welsh sport is diverse, multi-layered and power is dispersed unevenly.

... between sport and other forms of Welsh soft power such as the arts, music, language, education and tourism.

... between Sport Wales and UK Sport. This relationship was opaque and difficult to understand. Follow-up questions we asked – does UK Sport internationally advocate on Wales' behalf? How does UK Sport's *International Relations Strategy (2017-2021)* relate to Wales? Who holds the budget for international activities? Who bids for Welsh megaevents? and so on – remain unanswered. If Wales was to develop a bespoke sports diplomacy strategy the question of ownership would inevitably arise.

... between Welsh sport and Welsh Government. There was some cynicism about the idea of government using sport for international engagement, or a feeling of déjà vu, that sport and government had been down this path before. The benefits of teaming up with government were not clear to sport, at all.

...between Welsh Government and Welsh sport. This was a complicated area that can be distilled into five key themes:

1. Many Welsh Government departments – particularly, International Relations and Trade and Culture, Sport and Tourism – already work with sport to realise policy goals, albeit on a case-by-case basis.

2. Some people felt that government should stay away from untested methods like sports diplomacy and maintain focus on traditional, political functions such as trade, welfare, education, security, inclusion, well-being, order and justice.
3. Significant practical concerns emerged in every discussion with government: who would fund such a programme? Where would the human resources come from? Committees and working groups would need forming, and drafts circulated, documents passed up and down command chains. After writing the strategy, it would also need to be evaluated and monitored which, again, would require resources like time, money, and people.
4. Just as representatives from the sports industry asked 'what's in it for us?', so too did people from government. The value proposition of any sports diplomacy strategy for government would need to be carefully thought out and articulated.
5. Difficulty engaging with Welsh Government around key opportunities. As Neil Ward, former CEO of the Football Association Wales Trust, noted, "the Welsh Government has not always worked with us readily enough when we engage with other countries, UEFA, FIFA and other football associations around international football fixtures – unfortunately, it is largely a case of missed opportunities."

...between Wales and Westminster. The structural, sovereign and legal reality of this centuries-old relationship, as well as the parameters set out in 1998, and again in 2006 by the Government of Wales Act and subsequent devolution legislation, often surfaced during conversations with government. An air of caution balanced the enthusiasm for this project. For contributors in government, the message was clear: they would support a sports diplomacy strategy if it leveraged strategically for Wales from Westminster's array of public diplomacy strategies and did not inflame national identity. The concerns raised were about how this could be delivered.

4.4 Field work summary

Most conversations focused on the practical reality of ‘using’ sport: how much will this cost? What does success look like? How would any future strategy be measured and evaluated? How would this economically benefit Wales? How would it add value to current policies like the *Well-being of Future Generations Act*, or the *Wales and Africa* programme? These insights are valuable, especially for illustrating the operational challenges that would confront any designs on a possible Welsh sports diplomacy strategy.

Most were positive about Wales ‘doing more’ with sport as a way to bolster international engagement. This mirrored a conclusion that the British Council Wales’ *International Showcasing Strategy for the Arts of Wales* report also reached, that Wales has been “quiet” for too long and “needs to be bolder and clearer” in terms of innovative soft power initiatives.⁵⁸

Respondents mentioned the assets Wales has in terms of its globally known sports stars. Bryn Law, broadcaster, author, lecturer and member of the FAW Coaching Course team said:

Some players in the Welsh football squad like Aaron Ramsay already act as quasi ‘footballing diplomats’. There’s a golden opportunity for Welsh authorities to work with them in a more structured way. They care deeply about our nation so why not begin this conversation and see what’s possible?

Other respondents spoke of how Wales can ally its sports sector to its policy objectives and aims to be a globally responsible nation. An anonymous survey respondent said:

With investment and planning, there is a golden opportunity for Wales to be seen as a world leader in the social inclusion space. When I consider the original Paralympic and disability sport trailblazers such as Chris Hallam and Tanni Grey-Thompson, we have a rich heritage of elite athletes, who continue to be an inspiration to so many. Events such as the recent Homeless World Cup in Cardiff show what is possible and could align well with our political aspirations through things like the Future Generations Act.

In addition, everyone agreed that sport is vital to Welsh pride, brand and nationhood, and is an industry worthy of engaging, studying and representing. During the fieldwork, this opinion was best articulated by Mike Ruddock, former coach of the Welsh national rugby union team. He argued that;

sport can act as a catalyst to permeate the thoughts of a global audience with cultural snapshots and highlights of a truly proud sporting nation. A nation that has its own language, culture, identity and values. A nation that is proud to be Welsh and can successfully promote its culture, that is, a land of welcome, a land of music, song and Eisteddfods, a land of friendship and a land of hard-working people.

Many respondents noted that Wales has significant soft power assets, but there was no point trying to harness that power if there was no strategic direction, leaderships or team captain. Sustainability must also replace the sporadic nature of the existing relationships between government, Sport Wales and stakeholders from sport.

In short, there were more thematic commonalities to emerge from our fieldwork than points of irreducible contention. No one was opposed to this project, and most were curious about the idea of working together, so long as there was a well-articulated and reciprocal trade off from doing so. The main concern was *how* to turn an exciting idea into a measurable and sustainable reality that adds value to Wales’ international reputation and paradiplomacy? As the following section suggests, these practical concerns can be overcome by practical solutions.



The players of the Wales Rugby Team, Gareth Edwards (left) and Barry John (2nd right) joke with the French customs officers upon their arrival in France at Le Bourget airport on March 26, 1971 for a Five Nations Tournament game. Credit: Photo by STF / AFP



Ironman Wales. Tenby, September 2019

Section 5

Recommendations for moving towards a Welsh sports diplomacy strategy

This section provides a set of evidence-based recommendations for the next steps for Welsh Government and sporting organisations, should they wish to invest in a strategic plan. With good economic data sport should have its own specialised strategy, sitting underneath an international strategy. Having such a strategy or game plan is vital if a sports diplomacy future is to become a reality.

5.1 Measuring and digitising the asset

Before sport can be harnessed, it is important to understand the size, nature and value of the asset to be co-opted. There is currently a lack of topographic, 'big', and economic data on sport. The result is confusion over the purported value of sport's contribution to Welsh society, economy and its international profile. This data is vital if sport is to be employed in a strategic fashion, especially in measuring progress or, in the worst case, regression. In other words, it is important to empirically prove that sports matters.⁵⁹

A solution, once more, comes from best practice and scholarship. In terms of the former, the work recently undertaken by Sport Wales and Sheffield Hallam University into the financial impact that sport has against the overall wellbeing of the population provides a good template of a domestic study that could be applied.⁶⁰ Moreover, while the physical benefits of sport attract most attention of sports academics, there is an increasing body of work relating to other value areas of measurement, such as mental health, economic benefits, and contribution to gross domestic product, tourism and events.⁶¹ There are many "population-level methods" to choose from,⁶² however, we recommend the creation of a Sport Satellite Account⁶³, one that "constructs a statistical framework to measure the value of a specific industry, in this case the sports sector."⁶⁴

The tools of the digital era could also be better employed. Running code, mapping, and employing big data would produce a more accurate picture of the sporting landscape and ecosystem, a closer relationship between sports and government, as seen in the formation of Australia's sports diplomacy strategy, would lead to better use of data and information.

5.2 Research

This type of report is the first step in building a sports diplomacy ecosystem, however, this does not develop overnight. Creating a strategy that reflects the diverse conversations evident in this report is no easy task. It is recommended that key stakeholders engage researchers to address the following crucial areas:

- Design of sports diplomacy strategies
- Implementation of sports diplomacy strategies
- Measurement and evaluation
- What a Welsh sports diplomacy strategy might 'look like'
- Digitally mapping the Welsh sports ecosystem with a view to improving relationships
- Quantifying the value of sport to Wales, at home and abroad
- Clarifying how sport relates to the 2020 International Strategy, The Wellbeing of Futures Generations Act, and the Wales and Africa programme
- Innovative areas of sports diplomacy theory and practice (see recommendation 9)

Wales has some of the best academics and educational institutions in the world. They too are keen to partner. Such academic research can run alongside the operational actions required to create a Welsh sports diplomacy strategy. Indeed, a thriving research-to-practice beltway is a good way to bed down the sort of partnerships required for success in sports diplomacy.

5.3 Form a whole-of-nation working group

To overcome the relationship challenges described in section 4, it is important to form a sports diplomacy working group at the earliest opportunity. This should be composed of representatives from sport, Sport Wales, Welsh Government and other interested parties with international expertise who will benefit from diplomatic relations (universities, NGOs, public bodies etc). Youth and representatives from esports and para sports should also be consulted and included.

This group's purpose would be to articulate the value of Welsh sport to Wales' international image, brand and engagement activities, as well as ascertain the logistics, resources and time required to deliver such an imagined future. This working group would also signal, and represent, a new era of sport-to-government partnership in international engagement. It would also be responsible for horizon scanning to gather, analyse and disseminate information to support decision making around future sports diplomacy initiatives.

Working as a team produces many obvious benefits: reduction in costs by integrating systems, a sense of shared mission, knowledge and resources, and a mutually reciprocal learning environment (where government can learn from sport and vice versa). Unity is important, especially in the international relations sphere. At every turn, Wales has to compete with other regions and nations for talent, events, and medals. It must learn to share resources, knowledge, networks, contacts, money, people, expertise in bidding for matches or tournaments, or best practice in coaching, development work, or tying sport to the work that Visit Wales does. What's true in international sport is also true in international relations: out there, in the competitive, anarchical space, it is Wales versus the world.

5.4 Learn from best practice

There are examples of creating good sports diplomacy policy and strategy that Wales can learn from. The process behind the creation of the first Australian sports diplomacy strategy was described earlier in this report. When this strategy ended in 2018, the Australian Government decided to invest in a second strategy. Entitled *Sports Diplomacy 2030*, it was launched in Sydney in February, 2019 by the Minister of Sport and Women, Marise Payne. There were several differences between how the first and the second strategies were conceived that Wales may wish to take note of:

- An objective, and fully funded, desktop review of the first strategy was commissioned by the Australian Government. This review was carried out by an expert panel of Australian academics from the fields of Sport Sciences, Diplomatic Studies and International Relations.
- While the first strategy was written in-house (or in-parliament), the second was written in consultation with the sports industry. A whole-of-government approach became a whole-of-society approach or, to use the correct academic term, the “national diplomatic system” was engaged.⁶⁵
- This approach was complemented by a nation-wide consultation process that ran during the entire month of August, 2018. The Australian Government sponsored, organised and led a series of roundtable conversations in all major state capitals (Brisbane, Darwin, Perth, Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart).
- No restrictions were put on the range of stakeholders invited to the roundtables. The range of organisations and individuals who attended was diverse: federal government agencies, state government agencies, international and national sports governing bodies, private sector sports businesses, universities, consular officials and a swathe of former elite athletes.
- Sports Diplomacy 2030 was built on four clear priorities: empowering Australian athletes and sports codes to represent Australia globally, including Asia and the Indo-Pacific; encouraging Australian sports codes to build links with neighbours in the region; maximising the tourism and investment opportunities from sport; and using sport to strengthen communities in the Indo-Pacific.
- A central tenet formed the spine of the second strategy: sport helps deliver Australia’s traditional foreign policy goals.⁶⁶ As a result of the national consultations, it became clear that Australian sport was already facilitating specific Australian foreign policy goals. Sport directly contributes to, at least, eight goals mentioned in the 2017 White Paper on Foreign Policy: representing Australia, promoting Australia, engaging in multi-lateral fora, helping others, exploring the world, unlocking economic opportunity, strengthening important alliances, and creating new relationships.
- A “new era of partnership” between sport and government would be a hallmark of Sports Diplomacy 2030. Government could learn from sport, and vice-versa.
- While the first strategy was launched at Parliament House in Canberra, the second was launched at the Women’s World Rugby 7s tournament in Sydney, in front of a far more diverse and inclusive audience composed of people invited from the national consultations.

In short, the Australian Government listened to, and incorporated, the views of sports people, academics, sport-for-development practitioners, sports businesses, administrators, fans, and so on. The Government realised that if the second strategy was to work effectively, its success depended on working in partnership with the sports industry.⁶⁷ As the leader of the expert academic panel, Professor Caitlin Byrne, noted, “a long period of national consultation occurred with the sports industry before a single word of the new strategy was written. We have to remember the strategy is called *sports* diplomacy.”⁶⁸ Should Wales decide to follow a similar path, there is no need to come up with something entirely new. It would do well to reach out to the Australian Embassy in London, other countries operating in this space and UK wide sports bodies to scope out learning partnership opportunities.

5.5 Communicate the value of sports diplomacy to national interests

The value proposition of sports diplomacy to government needs to be clearly articulated. Sport, it should be accepted, complements and enhances official representations of Wales abroad as well as positively shifts foreign perceptions.

Many Welsh sportspeople, coaches, executives and administrators, already engage overseas with highly influential political, business and community leaders. They are well placed to facilitate introductions for the Welsh Government.

Sport can open doors to new markets, establish links to international trading partners, and promote Wales' capacity and credibility as a destination of choice for trade, education or tourism.

As Neil Ward, former CEO of the Football Association Wales Trust, noted during a focus group, there is scope for government and sport to partner more effectively. Mr Ward noted that;

Welsh football could offer a deeper platform for promoting Wales, international business, wider international engagement and so on. This, however, would need to be thought about carefully and there would need to be mutually beneficial elements to bolster the relationship between the FAW [Football Association of Wales] and Welsh Government.

In addition, Welsh sporting networks generate people-to-people connections that, in turn, could support the 2020 International Strategy. Sport builds friendships, links diaspora communities, and creates networks around the world. These connections often endure for life, while seamlessly promoting authentic and accurate perceptions of Wales.

5.6 Communicate the value of sports diplomacy to sport

The value proposition needs to be reciprocal. It is just as important to articulate the value of sports diplomacy to sport as it is from sports diplomacy to government. A closer and more systematic relationship between sports and government, which looked ahead and encouraged collaborative planning approaches would mean that both sport and government could benefit from each other's skills, networks and abilities.

Working with government can add value to sport, particularly in boosting the influence of sport and offering access to powerful networks. In other words, just as sport can open doors for government, government can open doors for sport. Employing the diplomatic networks that government has access to can be beneficial when negotiating partnerships, bidding for events, securing governance positions and building business links.

As prestige partners, the Welsh Government can organise mutually beneficial functions such as ambassadorial dinners or embassy receptions, curating guest lists to include stakeholders from the worlds of international business, media partners, international leaders in sports management, coaching and technology. The same brokering role applies in a domestic context, that is, building better lateral relationships between Welsh sporting bodies, as well as links to other cultural, arts and education partners.

Government is also a source of expertise and resource, especially in bidding for events, negotiating international emergencies, and promoting specialist sports and associated programmes such as coaching exchanges with other nations.

With a wide view across the sector, government can identify and coordinate synergies in sport for development, or in wrap-around cultural and education events, as was the case with the partnership between Welsh Rugby and the Welsh Government in Japan, 2019. Teamwork helps create a buzz around Wales, both domestically and internationally, on and off the pitch.

Government possess expertise in the field of international relations, which could be offered to sports administrators, particularly in small-medium sized organisations, in the form of tailored diplomatic training in working internationally, negotiation, representation and communication. Not only would a suite of training courses assist Welsh sporting federations to more strategically negotiate activities such as international fixtures, seats on major sporting bodies and influence sporting regulations and rulings, it could also reinforce the nation's credibility and offering as an international sporting host of choice when bidding for major events.

This approach could be most beneficial to medium sized sporting federations such as Welsh Triathlon Cymru or Welsh Athletics Ltd who have relatively limited resources to devote to international activities, but still attract world class events to Wales. A sports diplomacy mentor and coaching network could be developed over time so that resources, knowledge and skills could be shared across the Welsh sporting landscape (again, key to a Team Wales mantra and approach).

Larger Welsh federations such as the WRU and FAW already have advanced footprints and expertise in global sports diplomacy activities. Consideration of a co-funded international and government relations role in each federation should be considered to ensure opportunities are maximised, and that learning and opportunities are fully exploited and by all parties. This would be a more inclusive approach.

5.7 Name a team captain

If Wales did see merit of sports diplomacy then who would act as custodian and hub? We recommend that if properly resourced, Sport Wales could extend its mission, ambit and capacities to the international sphere. Already a central node in the domestic ecosystem, Sport Wales is ideally placed to work with UK Sport and organise, champion, design, implement and measure any future sports diplomacy endeavours.

Sport Wales could lead on sports diplomacy, acting as a boundary spanning organisation responsible for representing and working with diverse groups of stakeholders in the Welsh sporting ecosystem. International capacity, skills, know-how, outlook and expertise could be provided by think tanks, UK Sport, the British Council, academic institutions and individuals.

Moreover, Sport Wales has a history of innovation. It has led the way in using sport to tackle poverty in Wales as well as other human security issues. Forming a working group to develop a strategy and analyse the resources needed for Sport Wales to explore this possibility would be the start of the process for this.

5.8 Get a few early runs on the board

If a sports diplomacy strategy is created it is important to invest in a few high profile projects that would make Wales stand out in terms of innovative sport policy. Some new, exciting areas of theory and practice this project's Advisory Board of distinguished, global experts in sports diplomacy suggested were:

1. Women and sports diplomacy: what is the relationship between women, sport and diplomacy?
2. Esports diplomacy: despite the rapid growth in esports no one has yet applied a diplomacy lens. This would represent a cutting-edge study in an area where Gareth Bale has recently launched his own professional esports team (Ellevens Esports) and fellow Welsh international teammate Rabbi Matondo has represented Wales online in the 2020 FIFA eNations Stay and Play Friendly Tournament. Esports certainly proved their relevance, value and worth during the recent Covid crisis.
3. Increasing the number of Welsh people on executive committees of national, regional and international sporting regimes should be priority.
4. Diplomats in tracksuits: Wales could become the first nation in the world to sponsor, study and implement this exciting idea.
5. Wales could put in place some of the processes outlined in part two and follow France's example to bid for international sporting events and tournaments. Identify niche events, mid-tier events (such as a Commonwealth Games bid) and perhaps one or two mega-events with a realistic chance of success.
6. In 2014, for example, Yorkshire hosted the Tour de France's Grand Départ. Three and a half million people lined the roads, 18.6 million tuned in on TV (UK audience), and the economic impact totalled £128 million.⁶⁹ Bidding for and, ideally, hosting such an event would cement Wales' reputation for staging world-class sporting events, showcasing for example North West Wales and the Snowdonia National Park. It would also be an ideal opportunity to launch a sports-business incubator to enable strategic pre and post planning for major sporting events in Wales and abroad.
7. Attracting formal sports summits to Wales. In the International Convention Centre at the Celtic Manor Resort, Wales has a world class facility for hosting sports diplomacy summits. Hosting a UEFA, FIFA, or IOC congress, or SportAccord (the world biggest sport and business summit) would further validate Wales on the world stage and, more importantly, might help our chances of increasing Welsh representation on major international sporting bodies. Through hosting the NATO summit Wales has shown that it can host events of this stature.
8. The Welsh Rugby Union and the Urdd, a Welsh youth organisation and largest movement of its kind in Europe, have a long-standing partnership of running annual rugby 7s tournaments. In light of Covid-19, it is proposed that this could be extended to an international competition through inviting partner countries to take part. The emphasis would be on bringing together nations under a banner of friendly unity and assisting young people to recover from the damaging economic and social legacy of the coronavirus lockdown. This undertaking would be aligned with the Urdd's delivery of the Peace and Goodwill Message, which is unique to Wales and has been delivered annually for 98 years by the young people of Wales addressed to young people all over the world. A comparable tournament through the platform of football could be explored with the FAW and Welsh Government given the popularity of the game in priority partner regions such as the Basque Country, Brittany and Flanders and its mass global appeal.

Not only would such a series of important projects make Wales stand out in the international relations arena, they would produce a body of research and procedures that stakeholders could tap into.

5.9 Don't forget Team GB

It is a fact of life that the home nations of the United Kingdom have a somewhat complex relationship in both politics and sport. Wales, for instance, sometimes plays under a national UK banner, sometimes under the Welsh Dragon, and sometimes on the same team (the 'England' cricket team is a good example). This attitude should extend to sports diplomacy. Wales could develop its own sports diplomacy strategy in discussion with UK Sport, DIT and the FCDO.

As Elizabeth Turner, international trade professional and competitive rower, noted during the fieldwork phase:

It is important that Wales taps into the expertise at the FCO, DIT, DfID and DCMS so that it is able draw more strategically on resources and expertise from Westminster and the UK's extensive global network of diplomatic and international development professionals.

Knowledge, resources, partnerships, and so on should also be extended to London, Belfast and Edinburgh. This would be particularly important, for example, if Wales has ambition to be a key stakeholder in a joint British and Irish bid to host the 2030 FIFA World Cup.

Sport could also form an avenue through which Wales might engage with UK international priorities and influence areas of strategic interest as the UK negotiates its future relationship with the EU, such as negotiations on new Free Trade Agreements.

For example, with the UK's recent decision to reopen High Commissions in the Pacific and subsequent agreement with NZ in 2019 to co-locate British diplomats with NZ counterparts in Tonga and Vanuatu⁷⁰, Wales could offer its sporting skills to help deepen this relationship. Inspired by NZ's inventive approach to sports diplomacy, Wales might work with the FCDO and DIT to propose a series of youth rugby or football international fixtures hosted by Pacific island nations. Linked to the games, supporting events could provide a platform for a regional trade mission or a climate and sustainability forum driven by the Welsh Government through the FCDO. After all, both Wales and nations across the region could benefit substantially from showcasing their young people, culture, language, arts and sporting prowess to the world via a 'Sustainability 7s Youth Rugby Series'. In-turn, this initiative would contribute positively towards Wales' global profile and offer a consistent link with its world-class domestic policy framework supporting *The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*.



Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson swept to her fourth gold medal of the Games at the Sydney Paralympics 2000 and became the most successful track athlete in paralympic history. Sydney, Australia. Credit: Andrew Cowie

Section 6

The final whistle

The aim of this study was to audit, review and test the feasibility of a Welsh sports diplomacy strategy. Our research team encountered no resistance to this concept and can therefore unequivocally conclude that a Welsh sports diplomacy strategy is feasible. To turn this vision into a reality, means continuing the conversations this project has instigated, forming a working group, and committing to the idea.

From this body of research, it is clear that Welsh sport already raises the nation's profile on and off the pitch, all over the world. Sports players, administrators, coaches and teams are a vital part of the Welsh international brand. Our research demonstrated that they already promote the nation, help unlock economic potential, engage in multi-lateral forums, build trust and goodwill, strengthen old alliances, and create new relationships from Buenos Aires to Paris to the Gold Coast, Australia.

The timing for imagining a different future for sport, Wales and international relations is ideal. The Welsh government is looking beyond Wales and the UK, evidenced by the **2020 International Strategy**, Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language Eluned Morgan's vision, and a confidence built from twenty years of devolution. A team of Welsh non-state actors – from NGOs, to academics, to business leaders and prominent citizens – are also creating international pathways and networks.

Along with other forms of cultural relations, international sporting activity helps to build trust, recognition and favourability between nations. As the UK negotiates its relationship with the EU and we settle into a post-Covid world, this 'lighter touch' form of diplomacy and international relations offers a relatively low cost and high visibility mechanism through which to leverage the international partnerships vital for growth.

Wales is a small nation with a very large sporting footprint. It has the players, coaches and superstars. It has the will, creative energy and the determination to be different. And it has its champions, across all levels of society, from government ministers to academics and primary school PE teachers. The Team just needs a sponsor, a captain and a game plan. And, sports fans, with that being said, we leave you with one final sporting phrase; gadewch i'r gemau ddechrau! (let the games begin!).



Wales' table tennis champion Anna Hursey. The youngest ever athlete to compete at any Commonwealth Games at a senior level and represented Wales at the Gold Coast 2018 when she was just 11. In 2020 she became a Young Champion of the UNFCCC Sports for Climate Action Framework. She spends much of the year in China training full-time. Credit: Christian Bruna/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock



Wales vs. Uruguay, Rugby World Cup 2019, Kumamoto, Japan, October 2019. Credit Distinctive Shots

Endnotes

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