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Guilène Révauger

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The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games: Where from, What for, and Where to?

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Abstract:

Regarded by some as the second most important multi-sport competition after the Olympic Games, the Commonwealth Games are a periodical event organized every four years. Also known as the “Friendly Games”, they are only open to athletes from the Commonwealth of Nations. The 2022 Commonwealth Games will be held in Birmingham, England. As tradition has it since the 6th British Empire and Commonwealth Games held in Cardiff in 1958, the Queen’s Baton Relay was launched prior to the competition. Carrying out a message from the Head of the Commonwealth, currently Queen Elizabeth II, the Queen’s Baton flew out from Birmingham airport in October 2021. It thus began a journey around the world during which it is expected to cover more than 140 000 kilometers (90 000 miles) and to visit 72 Commonwealth nations and territories. The final batonbearer will then return the Baton to the Queen during the Opening Ceremony on 28 July.

The aim of this paper is to provide historical beacons to help students understand what is at stake with the 2022 Commonwealth Games. We will be looking at history and the origins of the Commonwealth Games, starting with the first Empire Games held in Hamilton in 1930. The paper will then focus on the purpose of the Games, and sports diplomacy within the Commonwealth. Contemporary concerns and controversies will eventually be mentioned to provide food for thought.

Guilène Révauger is an Associate Professor in Anglophone Studies at the Institute of Education (INSPE), University of Reunion Island. She is a member of the research center DIRE, (Displacement, Identity, Revision, Expression). Her fields of interest include anglophone civilization, British foreign policy and Commonwealth studies, as well as didactics and digital technologies for language education.

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1. Introduction

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope, where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination.” These words were uttered by Nelson Mandela (2000) and they have a particular resonance here. This paper will focus on the Commonwealth Games, an extra-regional competition more famous than their French equivalent “Les Jeux de La Francophonie”, and regarded by some as the second most important multi-sport competition after the Olympic Games. The aim of the paper is to provide historical beacons to help students understand what is at stake ahead of the 2022 Commonwealth Games. We will humbly ask three straightforward questions: Where from? What for? And where to? We will thus begin with a historical analysis before turning to the purpose of the Games and discussing the extent to which they can be considered as a soft power resource of sports diplomacy. We will then highlight certain points of interest overlooking the contemporary Games.

2. Where from?

a. The Commonwealth of Nations

Only athletes holding a Commonwealth passport can partake in the Games. Let us begin with a portrayal of the Commonwealth of Nations in its contemporary form: The Commonwealth is home to 2.5 billion people, it includes 54 countries in Africa, Asia, North and South America, Europe, and the Pacific. These countries may be independent territories, or dependent territories governed by the UK, Australia or New Zealand. Britain has 14 “dependent territories” which are now called “overseas territories”¹ (“BOTs” or “UKOTs”). There are seven Australian External Territories, yet only five are inhabited: Christmas Island, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands (600 people), the Coral Sea Islands, and Norfolk Island. The Ashmore and Cartier Islands, as well as the Heard and McDonald Islands are uninhabited. New Zealand has one dependent territory (Tokelau, with a population of approximately 1500 people), and two associated states which are self-governing states in free association with New Zealand (the Cook Islands - 17 500 people, and Niue – 1600 inhabitants).

The Commonwealth of Nations, or simply put “The Commonwealth”, is a political and free association. It is a network of states rather than a union since no government exercises power over the other countries. It is not ruled by any formal constitution. Its members are very different, they include major industrialized nations as well as smaller developing countries. Not only do they share ties of friendship, educational or cultural links, but they enjoy practical cooperation, targeting health and economic development. Preferential trade relations ensure important overseas investments for Britain. The Commonwealth is an organization run by formal institutions: the Commonwealth Secretariat (a central institution dedicated to inter-governmental relations), the Commonwealth Foundation (dealing with extra-governmental matters), and other organizations such as the Commonwealth of Learning (CoL). Since 2013, the Commonwealth Charter has set out the values of The Commonwealth. It ensures its formal

¹ Anguilla; Bermuda; British Antarctic Territory; British Indian Ocean Territory; British Virgin Islands; Cayman Islands; Falkland Islands; Gibraltar; Montserrat; Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands; Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan de Cunha; South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands; Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia; Turks and Caicos Islands.

commitment to equality, democracy, and human rights values. Great Britain remains a prominent member of the Commonwealth, however the question today is whether it is still calling the tune or not.

The Commonwealth is described by Encyclopaedia Britannica as “an evolutionary outgrowth of the British Empire”. The Commonwealth can indeed be perceived as a legacy of the Empire, it began by coexisting with the Empire, and it has recently been joined by countries which have never been British colonies (Mozambique – a former Portuguese colony; Rwanda – a former Belgian colony, and a member of La Francophonie; and Gabon, a former French colony and a member of La Francophonie, is expected to be the 55th Commonwealth member in 2022).

Let us look at three turning points in Commonwealth history: the Balfour Declaration of 1926, the 1931 Statute of Westminster, and the London Declaration of 1949.

The Commonwealth began as a “white man’s club”, an association of the White Dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. The first mention of the Commonwealth was made in 1926 in the Balfour Declaration at the Imperial Conference. The Declaration outlined the Dominion status: the Dominions would thus be equal in status, they would enjoy autonomy in internal and external affairs, they would be united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and they would be freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

Another key document is the Statute of Westminster, an Act of Parliament passed in 1931 and ratified by the Dominions. It renounced British rights over self-governing dominions, it confirmed parliamentary sovereignty for the dominions and thus increased the sovereignty of the Dominions. It also paved the way for practical and economic cooperation. After the promulgation of the Statute however, allegiance to the British monarch was the sine qua non for Commonwealth membership.

Although the last British colony of significant size, Hong Kong, was handed over to China on 1 July 1997, the British Empire began its transformation after WW2, and more precisely from 1947 onwards, with the Independence of India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, following Nehru and Gandhi’s peaceful national campaigns in India. The third fundamental beacon we will now look at is the 1949 London Declaration. It was issued at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers conference. Upon independence, India adopted a republican constitution; despite this transition to republicanism, it remained a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. The Declaration stated that Prime Ministers agreed upon continued membership for India, and that the government of India accepted to recognize the King (King George VI) as head of the Commonwealth (as opposed to head of state), and as the symbol of the free association of the independent member nations. At the time, the Declaration regarded India as an exception; it however laid the foundations for the New Commonwealth: newly independent territories choosing republicanism would not be denied Commonwealth membership.

From then on, the “New Commonwealth” was joined by the newly independent territories: all former African colonies gaining independence in the 60s joined the Commonwealth. Among our neighbors, we may think about Kenya (1963); Mauritius, in 1968 (Mauritius became a republic in 1992); and the Seychelles in 1976 (also a republic). Mozambique joined the Commonwealth in 1995, despite no former colonial or constitutional links with the UK (it had gained independence from Portugal); Rwanda also joined the Commonwealth in 2009, although never part of the British Empire.

b. 72 teams expected

72 nations and more than 5000 athletes are nowadays expected to participate in the Commonwealth Games. Competitors are eligible to represent a Commonwealth country when they are « in possession of a current valid passport of the Commonwealth Country which enters

them; or are a subject who can demonstrate ‘Belonger Status’ in Great Britain or relevant British Overseas Territory of the Commonwealth Country which enters them. » (Constitutional Documents of the CGF, 2020). Athletes competing for a common passport country (Great Britain, New Zealand, and Australia) at the Olympic Games or other major sporting events are allowed « to choose to represent their home Affiliated CGA (e.g., Turks and Caicos) at the Commonwealth Games ». (Constitutional Documents of the CGF.) Thus, the official British Olympic team actually breaks apart during the Commonwealth Games. A symbol for Britishness, “Team GB” gathers athletes from the four home nations (Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, England), Crown dependencies (Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey), and some British Overseas Territories (the “BOTs”, such as Anguilla, Turks and Caicos Islands, Montserrat, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar...). Three overseas territories, British Virgin Islands, Bermuda, and the Cayman Islands represent themselves at both events.

Our Indian Ocean Commonwealth neighbors participate in the Commonwealth Games, and they have regularly achieved medal success. South Africa has won an overall total of 389 medals; Kenya 220; Tanzania 21. Mozambique has a total of 6 medals, including two golds in 1998 and 2002 for legendary athletics athlete Maria Mutola. The Seychelles have taken home 6 medals in boxing, athletics, and weightlifting.

As for our sister island, Mauritius, since 1998, it has bought home 12 medals. It first took part in the CG in 1958, in Cardiff, but won its first medals in Kuala Lumpur in 1998, with a gold, a silver and two bronze medals in boxing. In Melbourne (2006) they again won two medals in boxing. There was a bronze medal in Judo in 2002 (Manchester); three silvers in boxing and on the running track in 2006 (Melbourne); 2010 (Delhi) yielded two bronze medals in boxing; a silver in boxing and a bronze in judo were won in Glasgow in 2014.

c. From the British Empire Games to the Commonwealth Games

Let us now adopt a historical perspective. The Games are a periodical event held every 4 years. They are a multisport competition. Although the origin of the Games is associated with the 1911 Festival of Empire, the first Games were conveyed in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1930; 400 athletes from 11 countries were gathered. The event was then referred to as “The British Empire Games” and it retained this name until 1950 (there were no Games during the War, in 1942 and 1946). Between 1954 and 1966 the Games were called “The British Empire and Commonwealth Games”, between 1970 and 1974 they were known as “The British Commonwealth Games”, before eventually becoming “The Commonwealth Games”.

The British Empire Games Federation was established in 1932 following the success of the first Games in Hamilton. From then on, the federation would be in charge of the organization of the games, it would control the program and select host cities. The name has now been changed to the “Commonwealth Games Federation” (CGF) or “Commonwealth Sport”. The Federation also organizes the Commonwealth Youth Games and it is the governing body of the “Commonwealth Games Associations”. The different partners involved in the Games are the Commonwealth Games Federation, the Commonwealth Games Associations, the international sports federations, and an organizing committee set up for each Games. In 2013, Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamallesh Sharm, during a speech to the CGF General Assembly, explained: “Our mandate in relation to Sport for Development and Peace aligns with the CGF vision which is to ‘develop sport for the benefit of the people, the nations and the territories of the Commonwealth, and thereby strengthen the Commonwealth’... Are the games about strengthening the Commonwealth then?”

3. What for?

a. May the best win

What are the Games for? Well, unsurprisingly, some may see the Games first and foremost as a sport competition for the sake of sport and performance. The schedule of the 2022 Games includes 286 sessions across 19 different sports (some sports are split in different disciplines: aquatics thus comprises diving, swimming and para swimming; cycling includes mountain bike, road race, time trial, track and para track. Among these sports, some are not Olympic Games sports. This is the case for lawn bowling², netball, cricket, squash... The rules are however planned to change in 2026. Currently, Byelaw 14 entitled “Sports in the Programme of the Commonwealth Games” and published in the 2020 constitutional documents of the CGF, lists the compulsory core sports³ to be found within the program. This list includes, to quote but a few, swimming, athletics, cycling, boxing, or lawn bowls...

Optional sports, such as archery, cricket, and disciplines like clay target, full bore, pistol or small-bore shooting may also be selected from a list⁴. There is a limit of four team sports on the program (with some exceptions concerning cricket and basketball para). However, a specific clause states that “The CGF Executive Board from time-to-time may recommend to the CGF General Assembly the recognition of International Federations governing and developing a sport practised in the Commonwealth which are not compulsory or optional sports (disciplines) on the Commonwealth Games sports programme. Such recognition will be granted with the designation of ‘CGF Recognised Sport’.”

At times, tennis (Delhi, 2010), or fencing (1950-70) were introduced. “Demonstration sports” or “exhibition games” may also be hosted: Lacrosse, in 1978, in Canada; Australian Rules Football, in 1982 in Brisbane; the martial arts Silat, Wushu and Silambam in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia, 1998...

b. The political significance of sport

But the Games also have another significance. Despite the efforts put forward by the IOC, the political significance of sport hardly needs to be proven. During a webinar entitled “Can the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games help UK’s post-Brexit sport diplomacy get out of the starting blocks?” and organized by The Foreign Policy Center, Grey Thomson (2021, May) declared: “I do find it really strange that we talk about there being no politics in sport. There’s so much politics in sport. (...) The medal table in every game is very political”. Famous examples abound shedding light on the links between sport, domestic or foreign policy. Sport can be considered as a soft power resource, a form of track II diplomacy, backchannel diplomacy, aka non-governmental diplomacy. In other words, sport is firmly linked to politics. For researchers such as Brian Stoddart, sport should not be considered as a peripheral

² le boulingrin

³ Aquatics (Swimming), Aquatics (Swimming Para), Athletics, Athletics (Para), Badminton, Cycling (Road), Boxing, Gymnastics (Artistic), Hockey (Men and Women), Judo, Lawn Bowls, Lawn Bowls (Para), Netball (Women), Rugby Sevens (Men & Women), Squash, Table Tennis, Triathlon, Weightlifting, Powerlifting (Para), and Wrestling (Freestyle).

⁴ Archery (Recurve), Aquatics (Diving), Basketball 3x3 (Men and Women), Basketball Wheelchair Para 3x3 (Men and Women), Cricket (Men and Women), Cycling (Mountain Bike), Cycling (Track), Cycling (Track Para), Gymnastics (Rhythmic), Shooting (Clay Target), Shooting (Full Bore), Shooting (Pistol), Shooting (Small Bore), Table Tennis (Para), Triathlon (Para), Volleyball (Beach).

institution in the evolution of the Commonwealth, but as a central one, since it is “at some level always political” (Stoddard, as cited in Dawson, 2006, p. 6).

Cases of boycotts and the setting up of some competitions illustrate the political significance of sport. Among these, the Games of New Emerging Forces (GANEFO) organized by Indonesia in 1963 and Cambodia in 1966 were open to emerging nations; they were highly political, the GANEFO Constitution acknowledged the links between politics and sport; it emerged as a boycott of the International Olympic Committee after the suspension of Indonesia (Indonesia had hosted the 1962 Asian Games and had refused entry cards for Taiwan and Israel).

Ping Pong diplomacy is another example to illustrate our claim. Preceding Nixon’s visit to China in 1972, American and Chinese table tennis players met during the 1971 World Table Tennis Championships held in Japan; the event remains a famous symbol since it marked the beginning of diplomatic overture between the US and the People’s Republic of China.

Finally, to provide a rather contemporary example of the links between sport and domestic affairs, I would like to recall the Opening Ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games. The event happened before the Windrush Scandal which began in 2018. The 2012 show was directed by Danny Boyle, entitled “Pandemonium”, it pictured social change from the Industrial Revolution to the 60s: suffragettes, soldiers of the two world wars, NHS nurses, and the arrival of Empire Windrush, the troopship which bought 802 migrants to London in 1948 and symbolizes the immigration of hundreds of thousands of African-Caribbean people after WW2, encouraged by the British government to respond to shortages in the labour market. The show was criticized on the right-hand side of the British political sphere; Tory MP Aidan Burley wrote a Tweeter comment calling it “leftie, multicultural crap”, which led David Cameron to hit at his own Tory backbencher calling his view “idiotic” (Rawlinson).

c. The Commonwealth and South Africa’s apartheid policies: The 1978 Edmondon Games and the 1986 boycott of the Edinburgh Games

Unsurprisingly considering what we have just seen, the Commonwealth Games have in turn been highly political. We will now look at two examples involving one of our neighbors. The border between boycotts, withdrawals or absence of attendance is sometimes flimsy. Boycotts and threats of boycotts have been recurrent in Commonwealth Games history. Although not the sole reason, central on stage were South Africa’s apartheid policies. Sport then appeared as an instrument to help break down apartheid. The 1978 Commonwealth Games in Montreal were planned two years after the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal; these Games had been subject to corruption, budget overruns, and doping assumptions. They had been boycotted by 29 countries. Despite calls for sporting embargo, the New Zealand rugby team had toured South Africa earlier in the year 1976; yet the International Olympic Committee refused to ban New Zealand from the Olympic Games. Consequently, when it met in Mauritius in 1976, the Organization for African Unity, the parent body of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa, called for the boycott of the Olympic Games (Macintosh, Greenhorn and Black). In the aftermath of 1976, the Canadians walked a tightrope to avoid a similar boycott in the 1978 Edmondon Commonwealth Games. As Macintosh, Greenhorn and Black explained, “Such a boycott would not only put the Games in financial jeopardy (the federal government had committed some \$12 million to the capital costs of these Games, and goods and services to be at a similar level), but would be damaging to the future of the Commonwealth Games as an institution and to the harmony of the Commonwealth as a whole” (Macintosh, Greenhorn and Black, 1992, p. 26). Diplomatic efforts conducted by External Affairs, the creation of a specific Task Force for the Commonwealth Games, negotiations, the signing of a Declaration in Gleneagles and a policy denying visas to South African athletes finally led to “a diplomatic

triumph for Canada and was to help to set the stage for future Canadian leadership in the Commonwealth in the fight against apartheid in South Africa” (Macintosh, Greenhorn and Black, 1992, p. 51). Nigeria was eventually the only country to boycott the 1978 Games and Canada had managed to avoid economic sanctions. As Macintosh, Greenhorn and Black concluded, contrary to Great Britain, Australia or New Zealand, Canada did not have sporting ties with South Africa’s important sports, rugby or cricket; eventually “sport was a convenient vehicle with which Canada could show its resolve against apartheid without doing either harm to the economy or running into any significant opposition from special interest groups” (Macintosh, Greenhorn and Black, 1992, p. 54).

The following boycott of the Edinburgh Games, in 1986, was again meant to condemn the apartheid regime. The state of emergency was imposed in South Africa in 1985, which implied draconian measures and the use of extreme force by the regime. In October 1985, Commonwealth leaders signed the Nassau Accord. The agreement was described by *The Times* as an “agreement (...) reached after a long weekend of negotiations during which Mrs Thatcher found herself totally isolated over sanctions” (1985). The measures were called by Thatcher “tiny little measures”, and her words upon final agreement were thus reported: “it was worth paying a price to get an agreement, it was worth paying a price to keep the Commonwealth together” (1985). However, the accords remained fruitless and when Thatcher refused to sever sporting contacts and impose stricter sanctions to South Africa, many Commonwealth nations heeded the call for a boycott. Eventually only 27 teams partook in the Games and 32 teams boycotted them. The 1986 Games ended up being a very-white affair and a financial black-hole. Kobierecki considered that “the country that was the target of the protest was also the host of the event, so the boycott struck the proper target, not an innocent victim, which has sometimes occurred during other sports boycotts” (Kobierecki, 2017, p. 40). One should however remember that although the period was that of pre-devolution Scotland, the Games were not played in England, and the city of Edinburgh suffered great financial losses.

d. Sport, Empire, Muscular Christianity

Having looked at the political significance of sport, let us now ask another question: What usage was made of sport by the Empire? In an opening chapter on “Gender and Imperial Sport”, McDevitt mentions “Organized games and the doctrines of Muscular Christianity, which held that athletics in general and team games in particular were uniquely able to foster the manliness which an Empire needed in order to prosper” (McDevitt, 2004, p. 1). Since the 19th century, sport has indeed been seen as a training tool; unsurprisingly team sports and athletics were included in the most prestigious public schools which had been attended by Commonwealth Office diplomats. Team games, and in particular rugby and cricket, were endowed with the promotion of core values such as loyalty and respect. They thus took part in the training of men for the Empire. As Perkin wrote it:

Organized games were at the heart of the public-service ideal. In their combination of individual prowess and group co-operation for a common purpose they fostered the elite virtues of self-confidence, self-reliance, leadership, team spirit, and loyalty to comrades - all inculcated with brutal, arbitrary and corporal punishment, mostly administered by senior boys, which fostered toughness of character, indifference to hardship, and insensitivity to pain and emotional distress, especially in others. These were the ideal qualities for governing a class-ridden nation in which social control was exercised by a small and mainly amateur ruling class over a mass of underfed and ill-educated workers, still more for a multi-racial empire in

which a tiny white minority maintained its ascendancy over a multitude of 'the lesser breeds without the law'. (Perkin, 1989, p. 147).

The Victorian model of civilization included a component of “Muscular Christianity” which flourished in the UK and the US. Muscular Christianity began in London in the 19th century, it gave rise to the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and later spread to other countries. Theodore Roosevelt and Lance Armstrong are among its famous proponents in the US. The notion took root in British literature. In 1859 Thomas Hughes published *Tom Brown at Oxford* in a serial form. Chapter 11, entitled “Muscular Christians”, thus defined the notion:

Our hero on his first appearance in public some years since, was without his own consent at once patted on the back by the good-natured critics, and enrolled for better or worse in the brotherhood of muscular Christians, who at that time were beginning to be recognised as an actual and lusty portion of general British life. (...) Whereas, so far as I know, the least of the muscular Christians has hold of the old chivalrous and Christian belief, that a man's body is given him to be trained and brought into subjection, and then used for the protection of the weak, the advancement of all righteous causes, and the subduing of the earth which God has given to the children of men. (Hughes, 1859).

Victorian Muscular Christianity linked Christian morality to physical fitness and manliness. Physical training was thus portrayed as a necessity to perform service, help others, and develop strength of character. Sport was thus seen as a vehicle for core values deemed indispensable to the running of the Empire.

e. Sport & linkage

Has sport played a part in helping Britain maintain its influence over former colonies? As Kobierecki wrote, this is difficult to prove. However, it seems obvious that sport played a part and generated connections between Britain and its former colonies. Researchers have agreed on the complexity of the connections and the absence of a straightforward link (Dawson, Perkin). Sport did help the colonizers dominate, but it also helped the colonized resist and emancipate from Britain. For Perkin, sport “helped the Empire to decolonize on a friendlier basis than any other in the world's history, and so contributed to the transformation of the British Empire into the Commonwealth of Nations.” (Perkin, 1989, p. 145). Beating the English at a sport game was also highly symbolical. The All Blacks won 31 out of 32 matches in 1905 in the British Isles, and the Springboks (South Africa’s national rugby team) won most matches during their 1906-1907 tour. McDevitt notes that “the rugby defeats struck a warning chime among English commentators and were seen to be a portent of doom for the future of the British Empire” (McDevitt, 2004, p. 1).

4. Where to?

a. Where to for the Commonwealth?

Let us now turn to our last part. Although the questions “where to” or “what next” are put forward, you will not be provided with answers here. The purpose of this paper is to offer beacons and pinpoint elements requiring further attention when the time comes. The significance of the future Commonwealth Games is tightly linked to that of the

Commonwealth, the shape of which is changing. Hence, the first element you should scrutinize is the Commonwealth.

Some nations are still waiting for full decolonization: we mentioned Hong Kong being handed over to China on 1 July 1997, yet the decolonization of Mauritius remains incomplete, with the Chagos islands remaining under British colonial administration despite a UN resolution.

Inversely, others request admission within the Commonwealth: among the countries which have showed interest are Gabon (expected to join in 2022), or our neighbor island Madagascar. The membership criteria to join the Commonwealth have evolved; they now include the 1991 Harare Declaration, which affirmed principles and pledged the Commonwealth countries to protect and promote the fundamental political values of the Commonwealth, including “democracy, democratic processes and institutions which reflect national circumstances, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government; fundamental human rights, including equal rights and opportunities for all citizens regardless of race, colour, creed or political belief; equality for women, so that they may exercise their full and equal rights” (1991). The saying/doing gap has at times been wide, but the declaration has at least attempted to promote values. Another change was made with the 1997 Edinburgh Declaration which was revised in 2007. The declaration initially stated that states needed to have “either constitutional or administrative ties to at least one current member state of the Commonwealth of Nations” to be admitted; it was later amended to allow for the admission of Rwanda; admission is now discussed on a case-by-case basis, and the Commonwealth has now increasingly little to do with the British empire.

b. What for and where to for the Games?

Naturally, the second element under scrutiny are the Games. Just like the connections between sport and Empire, the Games are “complex and multifaceted events” (Dawson, 2006, p. 7). Future Games will probably remain significant for various reasons including the fact that mega events can produce positive emotions, a sense of excitement, and have the power to galvanize public opinion.

The message conveyed by the foundation emphasizes friendship, cooperation, and even the family link of the nations. The aim is probably to minimize the nationalist component which is part and parcel of international competitions. Such a message also helps sustain ties, especially when these ties tend to weaken. The Games foster *rapprochement*, hence the appellation “Friendly Games”. The website lexico.com, managed by Dictionary.com and Oxford University Press, traces the origins of this informal name for the Commonwealth Games to the 1960s and identifies the earliest use in *The Times*. The Games were however deemed “friendly” before: in 1930, *Port-Glasgow Express* mentioned the Empire gathering and announced competition “in all kinds of games in friendly rivalry” (1930). By 1986, the name was settled - a *Toronto Star* article began with the following words: “They are called The Friendly Games, but 200 private security guards will protect athletes at the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh, Scotland, July 24 to Aug. 2.”

The Games now seem to take a new direction, and this is partly due to the recent strategic plans adopted. A long-term strategy including guiding principles and strategic priorities has been put forward with the *Transformation 2022* (2015-2022) and *Transformation 2022 Refresh* (2019-2022) which endow sport with a mission to promote social change.

Of course, another question is: “Where to, after Brexit?” Interest in the Commonwealth hasn’t declined; indeed “Global Britain” was an argument used by Brexiteers to emphasize post Brexit opportunities. Our aim here is not to politicize the Games before they are politicized. It will thus be interesting to see whether public opinion and the press focus on Brexit or not during the Games. Also, and this may be a point to scrutinize, Fitzpatrick draws our attention to the

potential dissonance between the diversity emphasized in the Birmingham Brand and the Tories' national anti-immigration policies (Fitzpatrick, 2021).

c. Brum 2022

The 2022 games are the 22nd Commonwealth Games. They had originally been awarded to Durban (South Africa). Financial constraints however led Durban to retire in 2017; the bid turned out to be an easy win, Birmingham being the sole candidate. Birmingham had planned to submit a bid for the following games; proceeding for an earlier bid possibly appeared as a post-Brexit opportunity. "Brum, Brummagem, the City of a Thousand Trades, the Workshop of the World, Second City", Birmingham's various appellations are a reminiscence of the city's manufacturing and industrial past. Games are regularly seen as catalysts for change, participating in the rejuvenation of cities, and in particular deprived cities. Another former industrial city, Glasgow had benefitted from the 2014 Commonwealth Games, and East London was also metamorphosed with the 2012 Olympic Games. Birmingham, the second UK city after London, is also expected to benefit from the Games; infrastructure is to be developed, walking routes are to be upgraded... Probably due to a shorter notice than usual, most venues will take place in revamped buildings rather than new ones, although a new aquatics center is being built. At the moment, the Alexander Stadium Redevelopment is on track; pressure will now increase progressively as the date of the event approaches. The spectre of delays and infrastructure issues threatens the organizers; and even more since it had been part of the controversies over the 2010 so-called "Shame Games" in Delhi.

The Commonwealth Games have been subject to criticism, at times called "a metaphor for empire", or a "reminder of Britain's bloody past" (Cardwell). Kehinde Andrews, Professor of Black Studies at Birmingham City University, said that "the event is seen as a nuisance [by students and colleagues]. There's a genuine apathy otherwise. I don't know anyone who is positive" (Cardwell). In such a context, the way the organizers pitch and present the event is of importance, hence a mission advertised on the website and the publication of a legacy plan resting on five pillars: "A mission to bring people together; to improve health and wellbeing; to help the region to grow and succeed; to be a catalyst for change; to put us on the global stage" (Birmingham 2022 Legacy Plan).

Among the highest expectations are economic benefits; they are three-fold and include benefits ahead of the event, during and after the Games. The documents published (Birmingham 2022 Legacy Plan) imply a public investment of £778 million, among which the city council and regional partners in Birmingham are set to contribute £184 million. However, reporter for *Insidethegames.biz* Liam Morgan wrote last month that Birmingham was "facing a shortfall of £25 million and its Council could be forced to use contingency funds to plug the gap" (2022). A £72 million investment is expected to revamp the Alexander Stadium, and £73 million are devoted to Sandwell aquatics Center. Government investment for business and tourism reaches £23,9 million. More than 1 million tourists are expected in the city. The Brand also advertises the creation of 35 000 games-time jobs, volunteering and skills opportunities. Subsequent economic benefits are expected after attracting prospective investors or companies. Alex de Ruyter, professor at Birmingham City University and Director of the Centre for Brexit Studies, called Birmingham "Global Brum" and described the city as a regional hub of services firms in law, accountancy, architecture, finance, with buoyant universities, and a 14% city economy still relying on manufacturing. He considers that the presence of major companies with Commonwealth connections (HSBC, with Far East connections; Jaguar Land Rover, owned by Indian firm Tata Motors) as well as, in a lesser extent, Commonwealth diaspora communities, "showcase the appeal of the Midlands for other emergent investors from India, East Asia, and

elsewhere in the Commonwealth.” Therefore, he concludes, “the 2022 Commonwealth Games are everything to play for...” (De Ruyter).

The Legacy Plan published provides an evaluation framework split in three phases: phase 1 provides the baseline for further evaluation; phase 2 assesses the immediate impact (beginning March 2022); phase 3 will capture the long-term impact of the Games (beginning mid-2023). With *Transformation* and *Transformation 2022*, the Games have been subject to a post-imperial and more progressive rebranding. Equality, diversity, and inclusion are among the key values advertised. The medal event program shows there are slightly more medal events for women (136) than men (134), which is a first; para sports are fully integrated within the program, and they are more numerous than ever before.

In 2020, in the wake of Black Lives Matter, Commonwealth Games Federation President, Dame Louise Martin, and CGF chief executive, David Grevemberg, produced an open letter to sport #BlackLivesMatter, which ended with the following words: “It is our passionate belief that athlete advocacy and activism humanises, rather than politicises, sport. We must use our voices and continually seek to reduce inequalities and build peaceful communities” (Grevemberg & Martin). Such a stance is rather different from the one taken by the IOC. Although protests will be subject to guidelines, athletes will be allowed to raise a fist on the podium and to wave Aboriginal flags and pride flags during victory laps. This recalls Cathy Freeman’s lap with the Australian flag underneath the indigenous flag after winning the 400 m Gold in 1994, an act for which she had been reprimanded.

5. Conclusion

This paper now draws to a close, we have tried here to offer a few beacons to help grasp the Commonwealth Games, which are due to begin in a few months now. Conjuring sports diplomacy and reminding the audience of the catalytic effect of the games, we have tried to show that the Commonwealth Games were definitely not « just for the sport of it ».

Today, as we offer this analysis, there are no major hazards looming ahead despite increasing tension as the ultimate date is getting closer. Work on venues is on schedule, and despite concerns on certain bus lines and security, the greatest threat of all seems to remain Covid-19. The event was expected to be a post-Brexit and post-Covid one, yet health and security measures or debates on vaccination are very likely to remain central on stage. These are the debates you should probably look for, although it is coherent to reflect on the Commonwealth and the future of the post-Brexit Games. It will also be worth looking at the values and plans marketed, and confront them to what really happens. Creative and cultural events are planned and here again the Brand advertises diversity and a common heritage; it is probably too early to scrutinize these events, but they announce promising reflection on cultural encounter. Finally, whether you are a sports aficionado or not, I recommend watching and analyzing with a sharp eye the opening ceremony of the 22nd Games on 28 July.

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