



Getting in the Game? A Rising India and the Question of Global Sport

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One of the most visible examples of the growing importance of BRICS economies is their emergence as hosts of the world's top sport mega-events. These countries have become the frontline for the "global sports industrial complex," which, furthering the mutually beneficial interests of sports organizations and governing bodies, media corporations, and transnational brands, has transformed global sport into a cultural and economic force. India is alone among the BRICS countries in that it has not hosted—or bid to host—an Olympics or Fédération Internationale de Football Association World Cup, and is the least athletically accomplished in such venues. This article situates India within the wider political economy of global sport by analyzing media debates around the country's potential to host a mega-event. This case demonstrates how global aspirations are articulated through sport, and addresses commercial and development implications stemming from the adoption of sport as a global benchmark.

Keywords: BRICS, global sport, Olympics, emerging middle class, India

When the United States and Portugal's men's soccer teams squared off in an early-round 2014 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup game in the small Brazilian city of Manaus, there was much for broadcasters to discuss. The game featured the world's best player, Cristiano Ronaldo, and the two teams were part of an enormously difficult pool, which fans had dubbed the "Group of Death." Although reporters drew from these storylines in their coverage, much of the discussion was not solely about the players on the field, but about the field itself. When the remote Amazonian city was named a World Cup venue in Brazil, Manaus spent US\$300 million to construct a state-of-the-art, 40,000-plus-seat stadium to host a total of four games, using borrowed federal funds that must be paid back over 20 years by the State of Amazonas. Before any matches were played on the pitch, local officials began expressing concern, with the mayor quoted as saying that unless the stadium was sold to private investors, it could become a "white elephant" (Lee, 2014).

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This situation represents a larger trend among cities and nations making massive investments to host sport mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup or Olympics. These events are often understood as opportunities for cities and countries to rebrand themselves to a worldwide audience and become recognized as members of a global elite. The perceived potential for nation-branding, alongside opportunities to attract foreign investment and trade partnerships, is an enticing lure, especially for emerging economies looking to better position themselves globally. Staging such an event requires a considerable financial outlay—a choice governmental and business leaders justify by pointing to potential returns via increased tourism and investment dollars. Many analyses, however, show that the return on investment is often not worth the expense, and such events frequently leave cities and nations saddled with debt and steep costs to maintain newly built sporting facilities (Bray, 2011; Molefe, 2014; Rein & Shields, 2007).

Hosting sport mega-events has historically been the domain of North America and Europe, but starting with the 2008 Beijing Olympics international sport entered a new era in which “many future or aspirant hosts are based in the developing world” (Cornelissen, 2010, p. 3009). This trend is nowhere more salient than among the BRICS countries, which have become the darlings of international sporting bodies such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and FIFA, which organize the Olympics and World Cup, respectively. In 2008 through 2018, BRICS countries will have hosted all three World Cups (2010 in South Africa, 2014 in Brazil, and 2018 in Russia) as well as three Olympic Games (2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, and 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro), indicating the heightened status of BRICS countries in the international sporting community and beyond.

Journalists and politicians alike contribute to a perceived link between hosting sport mega-events and improving global stature. In the case of Brazil’s winning bids for the World Cup and Olympics within two years of each other, a *Financial Times* columnist wrote, “this is a moment like no other for Brazil to advertise its global status” (Blitz, 2012, para. 3); meanwhile, the country’s former president, Lula da Silva, said winning the right to host an Olympics demonstrated that “We are not a second-rate country, we are a first-rate country. . . . All those who thought we had no ability to govern this country will now know we can host the Olympics” (Gibson, 2010, para. 7).

Within a discourse that connects hosting to achieving a pinnacle of success in global economic and political spheres (see Butterworth, 2009; Maguire, 2005), a surprising exception stands out: India. Although it is the world’s second fastest growing economy, which a JP Morgan analyst recently referred to as the “best bet” of the BRICS (Ordoñez, 2014), India is the only BRICS country that has not yet hosted or even bid to host one of the top-two global sport mega-events: an Olympics or World Cup. In this article, we consider India as a case study in this context through a review of international and domestic media commentaries around the country’s readiness (or not) to enter a bid to host one of these top-tier events. Rather than contributing to an ideological discourse suggesting that emerging nations should host, and therein supporting the notion that India must somehow be next in line, we use this article to critically reflect on the implications of the presumed “hosting imperative” as a precursor to achieving global status. The article takes a global view, situating discourses of “When India?” in the broader political economic context of emerging markets, international sporting events, and a global sports industrial complex.

The Global "Sports Industrial Complex"

Professional Western sport leagues and organizations have launched an aggressive expansion across the globe during the past half-century. Over that time, the synergistic relationship between corporate interests and sporting bodies has manifested itself through the simultaneous growth of Western sports and associated mega-events, as well as the media systems delivering those sports to global audiences (e.g., Jackson, 2013; A. Tomlinson, 2005). This interplay of mutually reinforcing interests is known as the *global sports industrial complex*, which plays a powerful role in how global sport develops and its related consequences (Maguire, 2011).

The formation and rise of the Indian Premier League (IPL)—a made-for-TV cricket league that has exploded in both popularity and revenues (Mitra, 2010)¹—has quickly become reflective of the logic of the sports industrial complex: Every component of the game is branded to maximize the league's profit potential, leading one writer to call it "the most naked commercial broadcast seen in this country," (Scott-Elliott, 2011, para. 8). In a short time, the IPL has become enormously profitable. Transnational corporations have invested in the league and the market it reaches; in 2012, PepsiCo became the IPL's title sponsor, a distinction that comes with a number of branding and marketing benefits ("IPL: Pepsi," 2012). Sales of licensing and broadcasting rights, combined with other sources of revenue including gate receipts, have been successful enterprises for league owners.²

The development of the IPL follows what has become a typical trajectory in the media-centric sports industrial complex. As Manzenreiter (2007) documented, while broadcasting rights for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics generated US\$1.6 million, but 40 years later, revenues had increased nearly a thousand-fold. Manzenreiter also pointed to FIFA, which saw total annual revenue from broadcasting and sponsorship increasing from US\$6.4 million in 1989 to US\$653 million in 2002. More recently, the Organizing Committee for the London 2012 Olympic Games announced final revenues of GBP2.41 billion ("London Publishes," 2013). Both the Olympics and FIFA World Cup have a larger audience spanning more countries than ever before in history, underscoring that sports have become the most lucrative of all media commodities. For example, the official broadcasting report released by the Organizing Committee for the London 2012 Olympic Games stated that Olympic broadcasts reached 3.6 billion people worldwide,

¹ The commercialized version of cricket has evolved since officials began exploring ways to shorten the game as early as 1963, and introduced a condensed, TV-friendly format known as Twenty20 in 2003; the IPL, founded in 2008, is widely credited with exploiting that version to achieve commercial success (A. Gupta, 2009). Cricket's evolution, from colonial beginnings to contemporary iterations, has represented a fruitful area for scholars exploring postcolonialism, political economy, and cultural studies (cf. Appadurai, 1996; Guha, 2003; A. Gupta, 2009, 2011).

² In 2013, franchisees collectively made Rs1,060 crore (nearly US\$164 million; S. D. Gupta & Malvania, 2014). The league itself continues to grow financially; U.S. consulting group American Appraisal valued the IPL at US\$7.2 billion ("Clearing the Fence," 2014). Although the moving of many games to the United Arab Emirates in 2014 hurt gate receipts, IPL returned to India for the 2015 season.

with the average viewer watching 7.5 hours of coverage; 190 websites carried broadcast coverage available to 2.4 billion people ("London Olympic Games," 2012).³

Mega-events are touted as having a "ripple effect" throughout local sports cultures, and one legacy of such events is said to be an increased viewership and overall interest in local leagues. Although such coverage does not deliver the ratings numbers of such a mega-event as the Olympics, the potential for market reach is still enticing (Krishna, 2013). Furthermore, because of sports' supposed universal appeal, yet ability to adapt to local styles and values, they have been called the ultimate "battering ram" for penetrating new television markets (Miller, Lawrence, McKay, & Rowe, 2001). Recently, foreign corporations have looked to sell televised entertainment content in India, including sport. For example, in 2013, a group of mainly U.S. investors launched the Elite Football League of India, a professional "American football" league made up of Southeast Asian players. In a country with no organic demand for the sport and no existing infrastructure of youth leagues to facilitate participation and cultivate fandom, the effort to launch a professional league there may seem a curious one. But the Elite Football League of India and a host of endeavors like it make sense when considered within the context of the growing Indian middle class, proliferation of sports-based television channels, and regulatory changes that make the country more open to foreign brands (Polson & Whiteside, 2014)—an intersection of interests that can be understood as part of the larger political economy of global sport.

Even definitions of the term *sport* do important ideological work on behalf of the sports industrial complex, as corporations, sporting bodies, and nations produce a discursive framework imagining sport as a unifying force that transcends borders, promotes peace and economic development, assists in building relationships between countries, and facilitates learning and appreciation of disparate cultures and peoples (e.g., Butterworth, 2009; Coakley, 2004). Although opening doors to Western sport, such discourses work to facilitate resistance against alternative interpretations of sport, eclipsing, for example, arguments that point to a decivilizing force that invites exploitation of disparate cultures and aggressive reaction to outsiders (Maguire, 2005).

Making a Play for the BRICS

It is a logical outcome of the relationship between corporate interests, sporting bodies, and nation-states that events such as the World Cup and Olympics have become mediated spectacles and, ultimately, spaces where forces of globalization play out. This is nowhere more dynamic than in the BRICS countries today, which emerge as favorites to host these events in a substantial shift in sporting policy. For the BRICS, hosting or bidding to host a global mega-sport contest has both symbolic and material dimensions that are imbricated with larger debates about globalization and neoliberalism.

³ The pursuit of profit via the global sports industrial complex came to a criminal juncture in 2015 when more than a dozen people were indicted on corruption and bribery charges related to negotiating sponsorship and media marketing rights within FIFA.

Symbolic Dimensions

The sports industrial complex has helped position sport as much more than simple competition, and sporting success is often conflated with cultural and political superiority. As Brownell (1995) put it, "the Olympic Games have become the world's largest single event for the production of national culture for international consumption" (p. 314). Hosting is understood as a way for cities (and their nations) to present themselves on a world stage and engage in a kind of strategic brand messaging in which they can "signal" their place in a powerful core of elite countries; this signaling may include showcasing economic achievements, asserting diplomatic stature, and projecting "soft power" (Cornelissen, 2010).⁴ In fact, hosting is so powerful an indicator of national might that Freeman (2012) has suggested that it be understood in the context of militaristic *swaggering*, a term historically defined as the peaceful display of force "without the potentially messy side effects" (p. 1261). These symbolic dimensions make hosting especially attractive for BRICS countries as they jostle to position themselves as attractive for foreign investment and trade.

For late-capitalist societies, attention around a sport mega-event is typically focused at the level of the host city, with hosting meant to bring attention and revitalization to a specific urban area rather than as a national endeavor. For emerging powers, however, mega-events are seen as an unprecedented platform for nation-branding, with implications at both the domestic and international levels.

When Beijing hosted the Summer Olympics in 2008, for instance, the country turned the games into a celebration of Chinese history and culture, as well as a demonstration of China's worthiness of inclusion in the new world order (Short, 2008). As Xu (2006) noted in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics,

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is determined to turn this sporting mega-event into the celebration of a Chinese renaissance and the harmonization of world civilizations under the theme slogan "One World, One Dream." In the making is a new history—as the low politics of sport is conspicuously connected with the high politics of national identities and international relations. (p. 90)

R. Tomlinson (2010) argues that in addition to overtly using Beijing as a "showpiece to project the country's identity and modernity internationally" (p. 139), the Chinese Communist Party used the Olympics to certify its governing legitimacy. Because success requires financial and other resources (just putting together a bid costs millions), as well as influence in international sport associations, Swart and Bob (2004) claim "a country's ability to succeed in the arena of hosting mega-events depends on international recognition [of] its economic, social and political capacity" (p. 1312).

Hosting not only signals international stature outward, but also within a country's borders; emerging economies also see events as a way to unify the populace around a single national identity or theme (Freeman, 2012). For example, a key success of the Beijing Olympics was in fostering Chinese

⁴ For a range of articles exploring diplomacy in relation to hosting sport mega-events, see Nygård and Gates (2013).

nationalism (King, 2010). South Africa is perhaps the most salient example of mobilizing global sport for a domestic cause. Black (2007) noted how sport mega-events play an important role in South Africa's ongoing efforts to build a new multiracial, democratic identity that transcends historic divisions; the 2010 World Cup was of particular symbolic importance in that it is "the historic sport of the black majority" (Cornelissen, in Black, 2007, p. 267).

Material Issues

The price for a worldwide symbolic display of competence and prestige is steep because of the upgrade or wholesale production of facilities to accommodate the demands of the event itself. This capital investment, reaching into the many billions,⁵ represents a choice by the host city and country to direct resources away from addressing domestic issues. For example, prior to and during the World Cup, groups protested Brazil's priorities, questioning how the state could build massive football stadiums while millions of its citizens still struggled with homelessness and hunger (O'Brien, 2014).

Host cities and countries justify costs by pointing to a projected influx of tourism and investment, as well as the prospect for upgrading—or building from scratch—key infrastructure elements reflective of economic progress. However, such assertions are largely unfounded, with studies showing investments are not normally worth the expense and suggesting that hosting is a very risky business.⁶ The 1992 Barcelona Olympics is an exception; those games revitalized the city, creating more than 20,000 permanent jobs and doubling tourism from 1986 to 2000. As Bray (2011) points out, this "Barcelona Effect" has been an enticing carrot, as a similar transformation is "coveted by host country hopefuls" (p. 99) but generally not achieved.⁷

Despite the discrediting of claims that sport mega-events achieve large-scale economic development, themes of development and progress play a key role in bids put forth by aspiring hosts from emerging markets. In an analysis of Cape Town's failed bid to host the 2004 Olympics, Hiller (2000) noted how the city used a focus on "human development" to support its candidacy, arguing that the city would be completely transformed and inequalities lessened through an Olympics whose legacy would include

⁵ As mentioned, Russia spent US\$51 billion to host the 2014 Winter Olympics (Clarey, 2014) and the final cost for the Beijing Olympics is reported as US\$44 billion (Rishe, 2011). World Cups are not as expensive, but are still extremely costly, nonetheless. The final cost to Brazil for hosting the 2014 event was between US\$15 billion and US\$20 billion (Zimbalist, 2014), and the 2010 World Cup in South Africa cost US\$3.5 billion (Goldblatt, 2014). Costs do not end with the event itself: Cape Town's Green Point Stadium, built specifically for the 2010 World Cup, now costs taxpayers US\$32 million a year in upkeep (Molefe, 2014).

⁶ Montreal took three decades to pay off debt from hosting the 1976 Summer Olympics (Rein & Shields, 2007). Despite promises of economic progress, the 2004 millennial games in Athens left the city with a debt equivalent to 5% of the country's gross domestic product, and a considerable yearly cost simply to maintain largely unused facilities (Bray, 2011).

⁷ According to Bray (2011), much of Barcelona's success came because of the relatively small percentage of the overall capital expenditure that went into building new sporting facilities. Rather, the city dedicated the vast amount of resources to upgrading critical infrastructure.

affordable housing, an integrated transportation system, support for small-business development, and construction of sporting facilities in poor areas. Although Hiller admired the gesture to use an Olympics to rebuild and unite a divided city, particularly in comparison with the priority on creating leisure and entertainment spaces that had been the focus of typical bids, he pointed out that such a massive effort would have seen the city "preparing for a 'circus' when people need 'bread'" (p. 455). This has been the crux of protests over BRICS spending on mega-sport, coming to the fore with mass dissent over Russia's Sochi Winter Olympics and Brazil's World Cup, both in 2014. Considering Rio de Janeiro's Olympic bid, Millington and Darnell (2014) pointed out that the Olympics have created opportunities for citizens to gain visibility for critiques against the encroachment of neoliberal policies by pointing to how the IOC and other event stakeholders promote "neoliberal and modernist notions of development" (p. 190).

Despite massive protests, critics have not held sway against a promotional torrent endorsing the notion that in winning the right to host, emerging market aspirants will be rebuilt and reborn, receiving an outpouring of investment, tourism, and acclaim. Such rhetoric is consistent with other discourses produced through the global sports industrial complex, which promise the local populace a vision of development and progress while obscuring global power relations that see sporting federations and brands benefiting much more than national hosts through the development of new leisure markets.

Investment in the Olympics, for instance, has elevated the games to unparalleled international visibility, which favors the global sports industrial complex. Organizational sporting bodies and leagues—the IOC, FIFA, the IPL, other commercial sporting leagues, corporate sponsors, and media organizations that deliver sporting content and brand messages to a growing and more globally diverse audience—all have a vested interest in the expansion of international sports. Sporting organizational bodies have benefitted from escalating broadcasting and merchandising rights over the past 30 years (Manzenreiter, 2007), and in tandem with that success, media companies are reaping enormous revenues from selling advertising to an increasingly large audience.⁸ Although advertising at sport mega-events is costly, the payoff is lucrative. For example, following the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, Procter & Gamble reported a US\$100 million rise in incremental sales in the United States (Whitehead & Reynolds, 2010); at a recent advertising conference, one VISA executive explained that his company's biggest challenge was not the cost of sports sponsorship, but "finding enough sporting events of sufficient stature to sponsor" (Buchan, 2006, p. 5).

India's Sporting Landscape

As India's role in the global economy has shifted, so has discourse about its place in the international sporting community. As part of these evolving narratives, the country is simultaneously touted as a potential event host while criticized for its poor sporting reputation and lack of infrastructure to produce elite athletes and foster a lifelong love of sports among the general populace (Majumdar & Mehta, 2009). Although it is true that India has not performed well at such venues as the Olympics or FIFA World Cup, the country has a long and successful history with several sports that it has dominated on

⁸ Before the 2012 Olympics began, for example, NBC had already booked more than US\$1 billion in advertising revenue (Greyser & Kogan, 2013).

a global scale, most notably cricket. Despite the success of the IPL, critics continue to lament India's lack of athletes who may successfully compete in myriad sports against international competition, and argue that the country lacks an overall sporting culture.

India's poor showing in sports valued by global elites resonates beyond sporting circles, given the symbolic link between a nation-state's sports culture and its place in the global order. As Butterworth (2009) wrote, "Olympic triumphs have routinely been upheld as demonstrations of national superiority" (p. 136). Thus, when Abhinav Bindra won a gold medal in rifle at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing—the first individual gold medal in the country's history—he quickly became heralded as an example of the country's move toward athletic excellence, with the *Indian Express* calling his achievement emblematic of "India's grassroots aspirations" (Sengupta, 2008, para. 5). More than that, his achievements sparked a wave of nationalism and bravado among local media outlets, which touted the medal in a frenzy of coverage that was full of "gung-ho chest thumping . . . and iconographic imagery" (Majumdar & Mehta, 2009, p. i).

Athletic achievements such as Bindra's are often understood as necessary in helping to promote India as a credible host for events such as the Olympics and World Cup. The country has held a number of other events on a smaller scale, with the goal—among some promoters—to position itself for a major event bid in the near future (Black, 2007). When New Delhi hosted the 2010 Commonwealth Games (CWG), for example, it was a first for the country; and India recently won a bid to host the 2017 FIFA Under-17 World Cup, which will mark the first-ever international soccer tournament within the country's borders. In fact, Indian cities have hosted a variety of smaller international events, including the inaugural Asian Games (1951, and then again in 1982), the South Asian Games (1987 and 1995), and the Cricket World Cup (1987, 1996, and 2011), as well as several field hockey and kabaddi World Cups.

Following the Olympic achievements of India's athletes in Beijing, which they built upon in London with two silver and four bronze medals, as well as the fact that other BRICS countries have successfully secured sport mega-events, questions about India's position to similarly host an Olympics or World Cup have begun finding their way into international and domestic media discourse, in which the pros and cons of doing so are contested. In the following section, we pull from a wide range of media sources to present the main issues in these debates.

Analyzing Sport Media Discourse

As Maguire (2005) notes, many global sporting events are packaged in ideological narratives of social justice, progress, and friendship—discursive frameworks that create an illusion that sporting spaces are inherently apolitical. Yet, sports are increasingly seen as a realm for studying broader social constructions, with scholars noting the powerful ideological work that popular sport does in the public imagination (e.g., Butterworth, 2009; Coakley, 2004; Messner, 2002). Whereas 20th-century mega-sport was largely an outlet to assert geopolitical power (e.g., Rein & Shields, 2007) and promote national ideologies (e.g., Hiller, 2000), the contemporary context goes beyond political contests and provides an opportunity to comprehend the role sport mega-events play "in the development of a global culture" (Roche, 2006, p. 28). As the atmosphere around mega-sport becomes one of "sportainment" (Goldman &

Johns, 2009), the main drivers of these events are arguably commercial. This raises questions about the motivations behind encouraging bids from BRICS countries and the actual outcomes from hosting events within those nations' borders (Bray, 2011).

The question of whether or not India will "get in the game" to host presents an opportunity to consider a variety of arguments around the pros and cons of doing so. Media reporting on the topic provides a source for understanding the debate occurring among government ministers, international sporting bodies, sports journalists, athletes, and corporate sponsors as they weigh in publicly on India's current and future position in global sport. We see these media voices as both reflecting and shaping overall concerns (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; van Dijk, 1991).

In the following sections, we analyze a variety of Indian and international media voices that have addressed the question of whether and why (or why not) India should host one of the top two sport mega-events. To access a broad view of arguments about India's "preparedness" to host, in June 2014 we used LexisNexis and Google to search for all English-language articles published to date, focusing in detail on the following topics: India's hosting of the 2010 CWG discussed by many as a precursor to an Olympic bid; India's bid for the Under-17 FIFA World Cup; possible Olympic bids (past and future); and the performance of Indian athletes in the Olympics, CWG, and Asian Games, when this performance was discussed in conjunction with India's place in a global sports hierarchy. After separating out the many articles that had been reproduced through syndication, we ended up with a sample of 56 articles from a range of online and print sources in North America, Europe, Australia, and India. We incorporated Braun and Clarke's (2006) interpretation of theoretical thematic analysis to draw out key themes from media discourses. This approach is most suitable when researchers intend to interrogate a specific theoretical concept; in this case, our analysis was driven by a critical perspective of the global sports industrial complex. Using this method, we sought to identify and interpret themes to provide explanation and context from the public debate—both within and outside the country—about whether India should host.

To Host or Not to Host

News commentaries—both foreign and domestic—suggest that the idea of India hosting a sport mega-event is not a question of "if" but "when."⁹ However, hosting represents a unique set of circumstances compared with those faced, for example, by London: India's major cities currently do not have the existing infrastructure to handle the influx of people and athletes such events bring and furthermore, because the country has little experience presenting itself so publicly on a global scale, the stakes are much higher, meaning both the successes and failures in doing so are more "acutely felt" (Black, 2007). Such stakes are a reason that India has not (yet?) submitted a bid for one of the two premier mega-events that would bring the nation into the elite "club" its BRICS peers have joined.

⁹ India does have a history of considering bids: In 1985, the Indian Olympic Association submitted a bid for New Delhi to host the 1992 Summer Olympics, but ultimately withdrew from consideration after a lack of support from the government, along with media reports that questioned the sense of undertaking the substantial costs of hosting (Bandyopadhyay, 2014). The country considered putting forth New Delhi for 2016 and 2020, but ultimately declined to pursue either.

Commonwealth Games as "Dress Rehearsal"

Proponents and detractors alike point to the 2010 CWG as a sort of dress rehearsal that both proved the country's potential and highlighted the many challenges to hosting. Ultimately, the CWG were a success, signaling not just India's ability to stage such an event, but its shift from a poverty-wracked state to one of advancement, cosmopolitanism, and vibrancy (Cornelissen, 2010). The CWG marked a milestone when the country hosted an event that had for years gone only to White-majority countries in the Commonwealth—reflecting racial hierarchies of the former empire—and provided India with the opportunity to showcase its growing acumen in technology and human resources, both markers of economic and democratic progress in the globalizing era (Black, 2007).

Unfortunately, countless problems leading up to the CWG shrouded the event in controversy and placed it, as a journalist from *The Guardian* (UK) put it, "in danger of becoming the coming-out party nobody wants to attend" (Gibson, 2010, para. 1). The planning process was rife with corruption behind the scenes, and several organizers were eventually charged and imprisoned. In the final weeks of preparation, the New Delhi organizing committee was publicly lampooned for primitive conditions in the village that housed the athletes; Canadian newspaper reports in advance of the opening called the village "filthy" (Blakely, Boswell, & Cleary, 2010, para. 16), "unfit for human habitation," and characterized by "squalor" (Cole, 2010, para. 1). Just days before the athletic delegations were set to arrive, a footbridge collapsed at the main stadium and injured site workers. When a last-minute outbreak of the mosquito-borne dengue fever hit Delhi, even that plague was blamed on event mismanagement, with the *Financial Times* (UK) explaining, "mounds of rubble and puddles—a haven for mosquitoes—are still strewn across the city" (Kazmin & Lamont, 2010, para. 9). Furthermore, the quality of the athletic competition was thrown into question as various star athletes decided not to participate. When the women's discus world champion dropped out, she explained to *The Daily Telegraph* (Australia), "Just the thought of travelling to New Delhi, it frightens me. . . . The closer the deadline gets, the scarier the situation has become" (Walshaw, 2010, para. 9–11).

These problems made many question publicly what the disastrous mismanagement meant for India's chances of hosting an Olympics in the future, with critical media coverage undermining the new, modern vision the country had hoped to project to its worldwide audience. In the face of mishaps leading up to the CWG, Canadian sports columnist Clive Dheensaw (2010a) made clear the connection between mega-sport and India's larger ambitions as a BRICS power:

There was a misguided notion that the 2010 Commonwealth Games would be a showcase to launch the new India—that this was to be the subcontinent's Beijing 2008 and South Africa 2010 rolled into one. But the Commonwealth Games are not the Summer Olympics or the World Cup, and India is not China nor South Africa. (para. 1–2)

More sympathetically, perhaps, *The Guardian* lamented, "the Commonwealth Games was supposed to act as a dry run for a bid for the 2020 Olympics and those plans now appear to lie in tatters" (Gibson, 2010, para. 9).

Thanks to some last-minute solutions to myriad problems, the CWG were ultimately deemed a success and even Dheensaw (2010b), one of the harshest commentators, admitted in the *Ottawa Citizen* (Canada) that the "Games pulled off a winner despite early fears" (para. 1). On the heels of that success, questions resurfaced about when India would put forth a credible bid for the Olympics or World Cup, which *The Guardian* argued India must do as a "necessary box to check, the way to cement your arrival on the world stage and prove you are open for business" (Gibson, 2010, para. 1).

The pressure to produce a bid and commit the resources to effectively host an event collides powerfully with the need to address lingering systemic poverty, as well as myriad infrastructure needs that have arisen in conjunction with the country's recent economic growth—needs that are often overshadowed in celebratory discussions positioning India as a player in the global economy.

The Current Debate

Although India abandoned plans to bid for previous Olympics, advocates have continued to connect the country's sporting success—measured by hosting as well as athletic performance—with the potential to emerge as a member of a global elite. Although many seem to take for granted that India will eventually host, discussion centers around when and under what conditions the country should attempt to do so, with even the critics differing on the reasons why India should put off making a bid. As a *Times of India* blogger wrote in 2012, "an Olympics in India is bound to happen one day, there is no denying this fact . . . [but] if it happens sooner rather than later, then God save us from shame and embarrassment" (Ravinder, 2012, para. 4).

The current debate is largely focused on three key areas: the country's preparedness in terms of managerial competence, the ability to perform well in the sporting events themselves, and—the most emphatic aspect of the argument—whether an event will spur infrastructure development or simply divert funds from other public needs.

Managerial competence. In the wake of financial scandals that rocked the 2010 CWG, for which spending overran original estimates by more than nine-fold and organizers were said to have purchased "\$80 rolls of toilet paper, \$61 soap dispensers and \$125 first-aid kits" (Srivastava, 2010, para. 3), Ravinder (2012) blogged that corruption was a key argument against bidding for an Olympics. Contrasting the siphoning of public funds into managerial coffers with a lack of financial support for developing athletes, she wrote, "unless there is more transparency and accountability, unless we know how to treat our athletes . . . who are struggling to even make a living, there should be no plan whatsoever to even attempt a bid" (para. 4).

Sports culture. The president of the Indian Hockey Federation, however, argued that corruption was easier to overcome than the poor quality of the athletic pool. In an interview with the *Business Standard* (New Delhi), he claimed, "It is always possible to find honest men who can take responsibility for organizing the event in a transparent manner," but said the core reason to avoid hosting is that "our athletes are not up to the standard required for a world-class sporting event like the Olympics" ("Should India," 2010, para. 2). On the other hand, supporters of a bid say an Olympics may be a carrot on a stick

to inspire the creation of a sporting culture, through the legacy of facilities and infrastructure that will be created for both elite and amateur athletes, as argued by blogger Stewart-Robertson (2012) on Firstpost.com, a digital news platform based in India.

National development. An interconnected line of reasoning both for and against mega-event aspirations centers on the wisdom of investing public funds in what an article from Rediff.com, an Indian online news and entertainment platform, called a “two-week sports spectacle” (Ninan, 2010, para. 1). As escalating costs amidst official corruption of the CWG became known, a columnist for the syndicated *Hindustan Times* asked “what good the games are going to bring for the ordinary Indian, who barely secures his daily bread” (Khan, 2010, para. 2). Arguments against hosting allege that mega-sport is mainly an aspirational token for elites, undertaken at the expense of ordinary people and their needs. After the CWG, Shalini Mishra, a senior researcher at the New Delhi-based Housing and Land Rights Network, lamented, “The amount of money that has been spent on stadiums alone could have done so much more for the poor” (Srivastava, 2010, para. 12). And in what he called a “reality check” for India, the country’s Sports Minister claimed that India was a poor country and should not make an Olympic bid in the near future: “Look at the poverty of this country and its urban problems,” he said (in “India Should,” 2009, para. 6).

Supporters, however, draw from development discourses to argue that urban problems may be solved as part of an event undertaking. In the *Business Standard* (New Delhi), sports journalist Ayaz Memon (2010) reasoned the fresh infrastructure would stimulate the economy, create national assets, and generate thousands of jobs at an unprecedented pace. In an argument reflecting growing neoliberalization in India, Memon argued that postevent problems such as useless facilities could be averted if they were later managed through a public-private partnership.

Rely on the Private Sector?

Other enthusiasts also focus on private enterprise as key to success; for example, in Firstpost.com’s business spinoff, author Raghav Bahl (2014) wrote, “India must dare and bid for the 2024 Olympics. And run it as a profit generating, viable enterprise” (para. 7). He argued that an Olympics would be successful if hosted as a “for-profit endeavor executed in public-private partnership by the finest companies and managed by leaders of proven competence” and suggested that the organizing committee need not even be Indian: “Let us scout for international talent . . . if necessary” (para. 8). Despite suggesting that privately organized and/or foreign parties are most qualified to manage a successful mega-event, these commentators use nation-focused rhetoric to support their arguments; for example, Memon (2010) added, “the most important benefit of hosting the Olympics is the sense of pride and unity that it can create in the country. . . . India’s time, too, has come” (para. 13).

It is within this neoliberal line of reasoning—the focus on sport as yet another arena in which private enterprise may generate new business infrastructure under the guise of national development (and drawing from national funding sources)—that the interests of multiple stakeholders in pushing sport mega-events into the BRICS can be best understood. Despite the risks and demonstrated financial downsides of hosting, as well as concerns that even the branding opportunity can go awry when a

mismanaged event receives negative coverage, proponents continue to draw from symbolic and material/development discourses to insist that India can and should aim to host.

To contextualize this debate and in particular its neoliberal components, we conclude by reflecting on the aggressive effort by international sporting bodies to stage events in emerging markets. Considering that arguments supporting hosting continue to thrive alongside mounting awareness of the pitfalls of doing so, we point to the ideological work done by the global sports industrial complex within a public debate, and offer ideas for interpreting these discourses in a context of expanding globalization.

Conclusion: International Sport at the Front Lines of Globalization

In the debate about India's potential to put up a bid for an Olympics, one of the most supportive voices has come from IOC President Jacques Rogge. Amidst criticism around the controversial 2010 CWG, Rogge was quoted in India's *Deccan Herald* saying to give India a chance ("Rogge Says," 2010); he has been a booster for an Indian Olympic bid for years, having told Agence France-Presse in 2007 that he encouraged New Delhi to bid for the 2020 Olympics ("Olympics: India," 2007). Rogge's overall messages have been conflicting, however. Although he often expresses that the IOC would like to see India host an Olympics, he also cautions that the country needs to develop its sport culture beyond cricket. Writing about Olympic dreams in India's *Outlook Magazine*, Majumdar and Mehta (2012) recalled what Rogge said during a visit to Delhi: "We need more gold medals from the second most populous country in the world before you make a pitch" (para. 15).

Suspended FIFA President Sepp Blatter (currently under investigation for alleged corruption) has also been a major supporter. The *Times of India* reported that after Blatter visited in 2007, he "designated India a 'sleeping giant' when it came to handling the affairs of international football" (Prمود, 2014, para. 2). The Indian edition of a soccer blog, goal.com, said Blatter gave "special attention" to the country's successful bid to host the 2017 FIFA Under-17 World Cup ("Official: India," 2013, para. 8); this support came despite the fact that India is ranked near the bottom in international soccer. Such support is almost certainly tied to the opportunity to open new markets, not just for the sports themselves, but for the corporate sponsors, and the millions of dollars that follow. Discussing Blatter's support for bringing World Cup soccer to India, Prمود explained, "keeping in mind the lucrative possibilities that the game possess [*sic*], he said that land and infrastructure must be allocated for the betterment of football" ("Official: India," 2013, para. 2).

As a *Guardian* sports columnist pointed out, although the IOC and FIFA encourage emerging nations to bid, their focus on a legacy of sports infrastructure and related development cannot be separated from a commercial rationale: "Multinational sponsors now want to target the emerging economies around the world rather than battling over one or two market share points in the oversaturated west" (Gibson, 2010, para. 9). In fact, the *Financial Times* points out, sponsors' imperatives are a significant factor in deciding which bids to accept (Blitz, 2010). As Karen Earl of the European Sponsorship Association explained, "Having proved [the] effectiveness [of sporting events] in connecting successfully with consumers in existing markets, companies are keen to use sponsorship in order to drive awareness in new, sizeable emerging markets" (Blitz, 2010, para. 8).

The support for India from international sporting bodies comes amid a growing reluctance among the more economically developed countries to take on a similar endeavor. Once a sought-after prize, the attraction of hosting has declined among many countries, especially within Europe. This trend is evident in the 2022 Winter Olympics bid race, which one Associated Press (2014) reporter called “in disarray” (para. 1). Rome, Stockholm, Munich, Krakow, and Oslo all retracted bids to host the games, leaving only two cities—Almaty, Kazakhstan; and Beijing, which ultimately won—for the IOC to consider; officials cited finances and environmental concerns as reasons for dropping out. The dropped bids and their accompanying justifications betray the limits of the global sports industrial complex: Hosting is an increasingly risky proposition, even for countries that already have the existing infrastructure and stability to bear the strain on resources.

Antievent advocates are increasingly noting how a global sports industrial complex serves the interests of the global sporting and economic elites—a process that unfolds under the guise of multiculturalism, in which countries like India are touted as new and valued voices in the sporting landscape (Maguire, 2011). Understood in this context, the shift to targeting BRICS countries as hosts represents a new form of hegemony expressed through sport. That expression of power is starkly evident in the persistent question clouding India’s potential bid, iterations of which appear across multiple media: Why is a country with 1.2 billion people unable to produce more internationally successful athletes? It is a question that at once dismisses India’s own sporting culture and ignores the needs of millions still living in extreme poverty. It also further reflects the logic of the global sports industrial complex, which privileges sporting superiority and positions such success as an indicator of global stature. Indeed, this ideological framework requires nations to invest in a sports infrastructure and produce bodies that will serve the interests of key stakeholders.

Interestingly, considering the range of arguments for and against India hosting, it seems that both lines of reasoning gear toward overcoming particular barriers to be in a position to host in the future, and many proposed solutions support the global sports industry. For example, many who see government corruption as a barrier propose the privatization of event management, and those who believe that Indian athletes do not perform well enough to justify hosting propose improving the country’s sporting infrastructure, to build a culture of amateur and elite athletics. In addressing these barriers, the country would be prioritizing the development of a “sports market” at the expense of other investments. Whereas other BRICS countries have already made this leap with varied results, India has the opportunity to make a thoughtful decision, informed by precedent, about when or if to host—provided that the country does not succumb to pressure to “get in the game” too early.

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