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*Media Sport*

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Our first and last objection to the League is that they exist. The entire rules stink of finance, money-making and money grabbing. (*Scottish Sport*)<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The comment quoted above has a familiar ring to it, drawn as it is from a belief that commerce and greed are somehow to blame for despoiling the nature of sport. This particular quote comes from the *Scottish Sport*, part of a burgeoning sporting press of the 1890s railing against the formation of the Scottish Football League and the rise of professionalism in football. To any regular consumer of Scottish sports journalism – print and broadcast – the critical, almost self-righteous tone serves as a reminder that the Scottish media have rarely shirked their role as the arbiters of how sport in Scotland is meant to be organised and managed. The entrenched feel for the meaning of sport in Scotland's cultural history and among Scots is well documented (Jarvie and Burnett 2000) and its public consciousness is laid bare in its media. Above all, the passion for football, mainly but not exclusively among working-class men in the central belt of the country, has been ritualistically reflected in the voluminous coverage it receives on the pages of newspapers and the hours of coverage it warrants across broadcasting schedules. The national passion for sport, and the social and cultural cleavages that are pervasive within and through sport in Scotland, are – to use Michael Billig's phrase (1995) – 'flagged' on a daily basis by the Scottish media's similar obsession with covering the latest news, scandal and gossip for a ready and willing audience.

As the outlets for sports news and coverage have expanded, so too have the complexities in the media and their audiences' relationship with sport. The arrival of digital broadcasting in radio and television, dedicated sports supplements and associated newspaper websites, fan websites, discussion forums and blogs, and the delivery of sports-related content to mobile phones have meant the communicative space of Scottish sport – its media ecology – has never been greater. Yet, as we plan to explore, the economic cost of these new developments means that media sport in Scotland is not as ubiquitous as some might expect; and this arguably has wider social and cultural implications for how media sport is produced, distributed and consumed.

#### WAY BACK WHEN

In 1996 we reviewed the ways in which these emerging patterns of extended media coverage, allied with processes of globalisation and hyper-commercialisation of mediated sport, were having complex and contradictory influences on the political economy of sport in Scotland and how it was being organised and governed (Boyle and Haynes 1996). We had been keen to critique the theoretical argument that global sports events were eroding more localised aspects of sport as popular culture, thereby effectively chipping away at notions of national identity and sentiment around sport. We felt that much of the rhetoric that surrounded the arguments about globalisation and sport was too heavily dependent on generalised observations of emergent, new media sport practices, such as the rise of the BSkyB-fuelled English Premier League from 1992, and the television-led innovation of the UEFA European Champions League from 1993.

Our empirical evidence showed that while there certainly were new transnational relationships in the media coverage of sport, some of these developments needed to be contextualised in a national frame. More crucially, in terms of televised sport in Scotland, we argued that 'Scottish audiences are seen to identify with television programmes and broadcasters which appear to address their specific locale, interests and culture' (Boyle and Haynes 1996: 562). More than a decade on, we want to revisit the interplay of the specific political, economic and cultural circumstances of media sport in Scotland, particularly given some of the distinctive changes in the set of technologies, organisations and media practices that have been used to deliver a wide range of mediated sports to Scottish audiences and readers since the mid-1990s.

Our original analysis presented a snapshot of televised football in Scotland at an interesting juncture in the evolution of sports broadcasting in general. This process, prompted by an increasingly deregulated television market and new distribution channels, was characterised as moving from a 'cosy duopoly'

between the BBC and ITV to intense rivalry and cut-throat competition for the rights to broadcast sport in an era of dedicated sports channels. BSkyB and other niche sports channels around the world were, by the mid-1990s, transforming televised sport into highly marketised, glossily packaged entertainment.

In Scotland, where the spoils from professional sport were relatively small in comparison to the competitions of its larger, immediate neighbour, the economies of scale and scope to expand interest in the country's professional leagues and competitions were very limited, and the globalising tendency of media-driven sport was viewed as a threat. The response was a series of reactive and protectionist policies on the part of Scottish sports administrators at a time of major upheaval in the British media sport landscape during the early 1990s, including attempts to ban the screening of live, English club football on Scottish screens during the 1993–4 and 1994–5 football seasons (Boyle and Haynes 1996). The next decade saw immense upheaval in the governance and economic viability of football in Scotland, with the formation of the Scottish Premier League (SPL) in 1998; changes in the structure of the Scottish Football Association Council in 1999; a planned and aborted SPL-led, pay-per-view television channel in 2002; and an increasingly outward economic turn of both Celtic and Rangers, the 'Old Firm', who planned for success in Europe and beyond, in the context of what they clearly viewed as the restrictive practices of the Scottish League and Cup competitions (Boyle and Haynes 2004: 118–37).

In what follows we aim to map this terrain further and analyse the manner in which the age of multi-channel television and the Internet has opened up new vistas and commercial opportunities to Scottish sports organisations to market their sports to recently disaggregated audiences. After a review of technological advances in the coverage of sport, highlighting the analytical tools with which to understand these processes, we concentrate our attention on specific empirical studies of key changes and developments in Scottish media sport in the areas of the press, broadcasting, the Internet and mobile telephony. We conclude by suggesting renewed ways of understanding the changing relationship between the Scottish media and sport.

#### SHRINKING SCOTLAND: SCOTTISH SPORT ON TELEVISION

For a country supposedly obsessed with sport, one of the most striking aspects of the terrestrial television schedules in 2007 is the invisibility of Scottish sport. On free-to-air television, a substantial amount of sport is given airtime. For example, in an average week in late March, early April of that year across BBC1, BBC2, STV, Channel 4, Five and ITV 4, there was a mixture of live

and recorded material. Live television sport included rugby league Challenge Cup action featuring the Warrington Wolves, Hull Kingston Rovers, the Widnes Vikings and the Wigan Warriors; World Track Cycling from Majorca; the US Masters golf from Augusta; the Davis Cup tennis match between Britain and the Netherlands; and UEFA Champions League football from Milan and Eindhoven. Highlights packages included the World swimming championship from Melbourne; the Cricket World Cup from the West Indies; two programmes of football highlights from the English Premiership; and a range of football preview programmes focused on English football and the UEFA Champions League. Although Scottish athletes featured in some of these contests, the framing of such events was distinctly British and produced from a largely English perspective.

For sporting insomniacs, Channel Five ran a night-long sports schedule from about 1am to 6 am which that week predominantly featured highlights of American-based sports events: NHL ice hockey, golf from Texas, speedway from Virginia, IndyCar racing from Florida, NBA basketball from Memphis; and live major-league baseball. It also carried highlights of French, Dutch and Argentinian football, boxing and even a European poker tournament. Domestic Scottish sport enjoyed a 90-minute highlights package of SPL football broadcast at 11pm on a Monday night on STV, the main Scottish commercial television franchise of the ITV network. Aside from material broadcast on BBC and STV/Grampian news bulletins, this was the sum coverage of Scottish domestic sport on terrestrial television.

Such is the invisibility of live Scottish football on free-to-air television that most non-football fans would probably be hard-pushed in 2007 to name a dozen players from outwith the Old Firm playing for other clubs in the SPL. These players may get discussed in the sports pages of newspapers and perhaps in football phone-in programmes, but their absence from mainstream television means, as far as the wider viewing public is concerned, that the players of Bolton or Aston Villa in the higher-profile English Premiership are likely to be better known in Scotland than those playing in the lower echelons of the SPL.

What is striking looking back at some of the regulatory arguments regarding the broadcasting of live sport that we discussed in the mid-1990s is how obsolete many of these now are. Technology has simply driven a coach and horses through the vain attempts by the SFA and UEFA to prevent live matches being beamed into other national territories and impacting on attendances at live football in the home countries. In 2007, unless you have access to pay TV, you cannot watch any live Scottish Premier League football, but you can throughout the year see live English FA Cup matches and UEFA Champions League games (which can include Scottish teams) scheduled for primetime evening slots. Many of these games coincide with Scottish football games. So,

on the night in April 2007 that STV was showing live coverage of the UEFA Champions League semi-final between Manchester United and AC Milan (watched by up to 9.4 million viewers across the UK), just over 8,500 people were turning up for the Scottish Cup semi-final reply between Hibs and Dunfermline at the national stadium, Hampden Park. Live Champions League football on STV attracts on average up to 700,000 viewers and in some cases can boost its audience share in Scotland to nearly 40 per cent.

You can also watch regular preview and highlights packages of English Premiership football scheduled at reasonable times as opposed to the late-night, limited highlights coverage of the Scottish game on STV. It is worth noting that this is not a reflection on the *Scotsport* programme itself, which is the longest-running sports programme on UK television and celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2007. Rather, STV is highly restricted in what it can schedule in its own highlights package by the rights owners, the SPL. That in turn took the view that a live pay-TV deal with Setanta Sports would need to be protected by limiting the exposure given to football on terrestrial television.

As a result of its shambolic attempts to create its own television channel (Boyle and Haynes 2004) at the height of the boom in sports rights at the turn of the century, and its subsequent capitulation to the BBC as it eventually struck a deal, the SPL felt that an exclusive Setanta deal in 2004 was its only option if it was to attempt to generate serious revenue through selling its rights. An initial four-year deal to screen thirty-eight games worth £35 million was extended a further two years in April 2006 to include sixty live games per season. This brought the total investment in Scottish football from the Irish broadcaster to £71 million to the end of the 2009–10 season. By way of comparison, individual clubs finishing bottom of the English Premiership in 2007 will receive in the order of £20–25 million for that season alone (a figure which will rise to £30 million in 2008). Never has the competitive financial advantage of English over Scottish football been greater.

#### THE RIGHTS MARKET

Interestingly, the extension to Setanta's deal in 2006 occurred at the same time as the blind-auction for Premier League rights which was being heavily monitored by the European Commission's Competition Directorate in an attempt to bring plurality to the licensing of television rights in football, and to break BSkyB's grip on exclusive live coverage. Similar pressure had been placed on football television deals across the major leagues of Europe. Here, Setanta stole a march on its competitors, picking up two of the six Premier League packages available from 2007–8 to 2009–10 for £392 million. However, the SPL's exclusive dealings with Setanta and the marginalisation of terrestrial coverage

failed to appear on the Commission's radar screen. Despite the heady economic developments in the media sports market since the early 1990s, the value of Scottish sports rights has stagnated by comparison.

Therefore, any regulatory interest in balancing plurality and public interest in Scottish television football deals has also been negated. In a libertarian sports market, some of the reasons for this are simply down to economics. Scottish-only sport does not have the economies of scale afforded to England due to the size of its population. In March 2005 *Scotland on Sunday* ran the headline 'Setanta fails to match BBC as viewers desert live SPL coverage in droves' (Wilson 2005). Although Setanta has remained coy over its viewing figures since its entry into Scotland, the newspaper reported that with 70,000 subscribers the channel had an average 161,000 household viewers which peaked at 450,000 for Old Firm games when group viewing in pubs was taken into consideration. Such figures are not wholly reliable, but if taken as a general trend, and compared to the coverage of sport on mainstream or terrestrial channels, they do suggest a proportional decline. Old Firm games on BBC Scotland attracted nearly 700,000 viewers in households alone, without taking into account any public viewing figures across Scottish pubs and clubs. Setanta Sports aims to compete with Sky through securing English Premiership football rights and hopes to have a subscription base of one million by the start of the 2008 football season. It will need substantive growth, given that in June 2007 it was estimated that its UK and Irish subscription base was about 200,000 (*Media Guardian* 18 June 2007) and its Setanta Sports 1 channel had an audience share of 0.1 per cent (BARB, 5 June 2007).

Even the consumption of domestic Scottish sport outwith Scotland is arguably limited chiefly to two clubs. The value of clubs such as Celtic and Rangers, both with an undoubted large support across and beyond Scotland, remains limited because of the overall value of the league that they play within (Moorhouse 2002). One of the ongoing stories since 1996 has been the recurring threat, currently in abeyance, that the Old Firm would leave Scottish football and play in either the English Premiership or some form of European league. In the foreseeable future, the former is unlikely because English clubs will not want increased competition, the latter because national associations and UEFA are unwilling to sanction structures likely to weaken their powers.

So while the English FA enjoys a £425 million four-year deal to show the FA Cup and England internationals from 2008 on ITV and Setanta Sports, the Scottish FA's four-year deal with Sky from 2006 to 2010 is worth only £26.5 million and includes live coverage of the Scottish Cup. What is significant about this deal is not only the relatively low value placed on the rights, but the fact that it includes all home Scottish internationals. While the BBC has rights for a number of away games, the Scottish national team playing at Hampden

Park has disappeared from free-to-air television and we would argue that the impact on public consciousness more generally has lessened as a result – maybe not among the self-styled Tartan Army of Scotland supporters, but certainly among those non-football fans who engage with big national and international sporting events when they are available for all to watch and participate in. Therefore, one of Scotland's most memorable performances in the past twenty years – a one-nil victory at home over World Cup finalists France in the Euro 2008 qualifying round – was missed by the majority of Scottish viewers. While Scotland has failed for a decade to qualify for a major tournament since 1998, the absence of the national team playing at home from the majority of television screens has contributed to a growing invisibility and lack of recognition of many of the stars of the team, something unthinkable throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Ironically, one of the reasons ITV's Chief Executive Michael Grade was so keen to secure England matches was that in the digital multi-channel ecology with a fragmented and segmented audience, sports events like this are among the most watched broadcasts. So, for example, six of the top rated programmes in 2006 were football matches from the FIFA World Cup (*Broadcast*, 21 December 2006). These sports transmissions are viewed as 'event TV', part of a small group of programmes that cut across demographic audience profiles and pull an increasingly disaggregated audience together.

What is interesting in a country that supposedly places such importance on the cultural and national impact of sport in general and football in particular, is that the absence of live SPL football from Scottish screens, and its general invisibility, have largely passed unremarked by critics and politicians alike. Although the Scottish Parliament has instigated reviews of Scottish football and its sustainable development (Enterprise and Culture Committee 2005, and Scottish Executive 2006), its lack of remit in the area of media and communications means that there is little scope for a national debate on public access to the broadcasting of key Scottish sporting competitions. Broadcasting remains a reserved power located squarely within the Department for Media, Culture and Sport, with the only concession to civic national pride being the protection afforded to the Scottish Cup Final on the A Listed Events in the 1996 Broadcasting Act.

Professional Scottish club rugby has also endured increasing economic strain in comparison to its English counterpart. From the origins of professional rugby and the launch of the Celtic League in 2001, the governing body; the Scottish Rugby Union (SRU), has struggled to make professional rugby in Scotland sustainable and credible among Scottish fans. The financial pressure of running a professional game – the SRU was £23 million in debt in 2007 – came to a head when the SRU decided to close one of Scotland's three



professional clubs, the Border Reivers, after only five years of existence. The decision was met with dismay in the Borders region, traditionally viewed as the hotbed of rugby union in Scotland and with a large amateur club membership that had produced household names such as coach Jim Telfer and long-time BBC rugby commentator Bill McLaren. The fear was that the loss of a top-flight professional club with wide European exposure would impact on the profile and development of the sport in that region among future generations.

Although the Borders had a thriving local club scene, including clubs like Melrose and its internationally renowned Sevens tournament, the commercial power of the sport resides in the SRU offices at Murrayfield in Edinburgh. That body's decision to focus resources on the two remaining professional clubs in Edinburgh and Glasgow smacked of central belt bias against the Borders region, but it also raised the question of why professional rugby in Scotland was floundering. Part of the answer, at least, had been a perceived lack of marketing of the Borders club to the region.<sup>2</sup> But more importantly, it could be said that, much like top-level Scottish football, professional rugby in Scotland had a very marginalised presence in terms of television coverage. In spite of the Celtic League obtaining a titled sponsor in 2006 from the brewers of Magners Cider, and the SRU signing a deal with Setanta to show Scottish professional games, the wider identification of rugby fans with the sport has been found wanting.

This predicament highlighted the problems of launching new professional league competitions without any historic embedded spectator base, a fact revealed by the marketing director of the SRU, Dee McIntosh. In a letter to the online magazine *Scrum*, McIntosh explained why there was no terrestrial television coverage of professional rugby in Scotland in contrast with the rights deals struck by BBC Wales which showed eleven live games during the 2006–07 season:

I suspect this contrast of broadcasting priorities between BBC Wales and BBC Scotland reflects the fact that rugby is the number one sport in Wales, whereas football dominates life in Scotland and the Scottish TV schedules as a result. (*Scrum* 2006)

The statement is revealing, not only in terms of BBC Scotland's lack of desire to cover the professional game, but also in the lack of confidence the administrator has in the appeal of rugby to a wider Scottish audience.

The crisis in Scottish professional rugby had the potential to deepen further in spring 2007 with the threatened boycott of the European Heineken Cup by English and French clubs over a dispute with the European Rugby Union about commercial shares in the competition. While this crisis was averted, it highlighted through the potential loss of revenue for Scottish rugby – reportedly

£2 million, an amount which would have jeopardised the whole fabric of the professional game – the extent to which Scottish rugby is beholden to the commercial imperatives of its English counterpart.

Here we have an example of the potentially destabilising force of commercial sport, driven by profit rather than grassroots development, and a misplaced perception that pay TV can deliver financial security. Miller et al. (2001) have argued with respect to other national sports leagues that such pressures represent the invidious power of global market forces and what they term the New International Division of Labour (NICL). In a relatively small European nation, professional rugby is drawn upward by the potential economic rewards of transnational capital and television rights fees, but does not have the indigenous audience to sustain the initial investment required to realise this value. Unfortunately, as is evident from the threatened withdrawal of bigger market players in England and France, it is the domestic clubs in smaller nations that will be hit hardest.

Globalisation does of course have complex rhythms, and the economic reasons for axing the Border Reivers created a groundswell of localised support in defence of the club which also raised wider cultural politics of identity and difference within Scotland. Rugby, often defined as a 'way of life' among some communities in Border towns, became a terrain for political campaigning and petition, interestingly, aided and supported through local media such as the *Border Telegraph* and Radio Borders. The importance of local media to represent local and regional sporting cultures should not be underestimated, and it is to radio coverage of sport we now turn.

#### RADIO TALKS BACK

Radio figures prominently in Scottish sporting culture. Radio phone-ins and irreverent sports-related talk programmes are important features of the Scottish media environment and are key elements in the branding of stations and the building of audience ratings. The dominant force in sports coverage in Scotland is BBC Radio Scotland, with a weekly audience of just over one million listeners. In the west of Scotland it receives stiff competition from the two dominant commercial radio stations Radio Clyde (1 and 2) owned by Emap, and relative newcomer Real Radio Scotland owned by Guardian Media Group. It was Radio Clyde which introduced the sports radio phone-in to the UK by developing the programme *Saturday Super Scoreboard* in 1978. The programme was created by producer Richard Park after a trip to the United States where the format of sports phone-ins had taken off in the early 1970s. Park, along with the now managing director of Clyde, Paul Cooney, used the programme with great effect to exploit a well established tradition of talking about

sport, especially 'fitba', to build interest in commercial radio in Scotland (Boyle 2006: 64–5). The football phone-in is now a staple diet of Scottish football fans.

New entrants have increased their pressure on established commercial operators like Clyde which lost ground to Real Radio after the latter launched in 2003. Both carry phone-ins through the week and at weekends which form the mainstay of their sports output. This is largely because BBC Scotland has had exclusive rights to the SPL since 2004. The Scottish radio environment is also characterised by a large number of intra-media performers. At BBC Scotland the irreverent programme and chat show *Off the Ball* is presented by Stuart Cosgrove and Tam Cowan. Cosgrove, Director of Nations and Regions with Channel 4, also hosts BBC Scotland TV's *Sportscene Results* at Saturday teatime. Cowan, a food columnist for the *Daily Record*, also presented BBC Scotland's light entertainments review of football, *Offside*. Finally, Jim Traynor, sports editor with the *Daily Record*, hosts the Saturday post-match phone-in *Your Call* for BBC Radio Scotland. Scottish sports media can thus be seen to be populated by a select range of 'actors' who have increasingly enjoyed popular status in Scotland as minor celebrities. The insular nature of Scottish football coverage has itself been the focus of comic parody in BBC Scotland's intermittent, long-running television comedy sketch show, *Only an Excuse*, written and produced by Philip Differ, himself a journalist for the *Glasgow Evening Times*.

Wit and humour provide the key elements of most radio output outside live commentaries and match reporting. Through the playful and sometimes subversive use of Scottish football vernacular, radio is both a centrifugal and centripetal force in Scotland's sporting culture. By this, we mean that it both draws upon the wider subcultures of football fan practices and, at the same time, plays into the 'sports chatter' (Eco 1990) of Scottish society, setting agendas and circulating gossip. In an analysis of language used by fans and presenters in Radio Clyde's *Super Scoreboard*, Hugh O'Donnell (2002) has suggested that football radio programmes provide rare outlets for variants of Scots dialect. Crucially, O'Donnell sees the debates and discussions of the phone-in as having 'much broader social, economic and political significance' (O'Donnell 2002: 223). Radio phone-ins, comic reviews and light entertainment formats that centre on sport can therefore be seen to have dialectical or 'porous' relationships with wider political debates on Scottish sport and culture.

#### NEW COMMUNICATIVE SPACES FOR SPORT

The political undertones of this now well established form of Scottish sporting popular culture and a willingness to share experiences and raise contemporary

issues have now been transported to the Internet through e-zines, discussion forums, blogs and, increasingly, online multimedia spaces. These include social networking sites such as MySpace and Bebo, digital photography sites like Flickr, or personalised video clips and mash-ups of famous televised moments in Scottish football on YouTube or Google Video.

While mainstream media outlets, including broadcasters and newspapers, have integrated online material and interactivity into their programming and output, the new communicative space of sport is driven by fans for fans. Again, these new spaces of debate around sport have their precedents. The fanzine phenomenon that mushroomed in the mid-to-late 1980s carried features now found in radio programmes and online communication. The issues raised in forums are perennial talking points around sport, particularly football, in Scottish fan culture: television and other media coverage; club ownership and stadium development; players and managers, especially the relationship between wages and performance; ticketing policies and other commercial 'rip offs' like the cost of replica kits; other fans and rivalries; the governance of the game by the SPL, SFA and the Scottish League; and the national team, who is in, who is out, and what the tactics should be.

This typology is not exhaustive and indeed could be broken down further to reveal some of the more nuanced issues and debates that circulate among fans at different times and places. But the list does stand as a firm reminder that talk around sport, especially as it proliferates in online discussion forums, does enable debate and political probing of issues *through* sports cultures.

There is also something important about the changing social relations of fandom and the media which online communication and digital technology have brought to Scottish sporting cultures. The web and associated technologies have enabled a level of disintermediation in Scottish sports media. Both fans and sports that once found the barriers to entry into media production too high or editorially exclusive (in a mainstream media dominated by football) have now been able to circumvent the dominant channels of media production to create websites, online radio stations such as Scottish Rugby Radio ([scottishrugbyradio.com](http://scottishrugbyradio.com)), podcasts like Aberdeen fan site AFC Podcast ([afcpodcast.co.uk](http://afcpodcast.co.uk)) and streaming video from fans' travels and viewing experiences on YouTube and social network sites which meet their needs to communicate to their specialised audience. There are important issues raised by these new forms of sports content, not least the fact that they are niche productions for niche audiences. Gauging why fans create such material, for whom it is created and how it is consumed requires further empirical research. Analysis of online sports content by Sandvoss (2004) emphasises the ways in which these new spaces provide greater scope for communication, but by and large they merely reflect the wider rationalising processes of global popular

culture as 'the fan' becomes just another form of sports consumer. It is certainly the case that Scottish football fans' online activity mimics much within wider media consumption.

However, we might also suggest that the creative empowerment of digital technologies – with ease of production, manipulation, copying and distribution to pre-ordered communities of interest – raises interesting questions about the experience of sport and how fans make sense of it in a Scottish context. As noted above with regard to radio phone-ins, the discursive accounts of football, and for that matter other Scottish sport, in online media suggest that media sport does not only operate in a top-down fashion. Again, this is something O'Donnell (2002) noticed in phone-ins, but we could make an even stronger case for it in terms of the proliferation of content and messages seen on the Internet.

At the same time as the Internet has grown, the past decade has also seen a major growth in newspaper space devoted to sports journalism. This has been particularly clear in the broadsheet/compact market, where editors feel that expanded sports coverage is a driver of sales and speaks to a changing, more literate sports readership (Boyle 2006). UK national newspapers such as *The Guardian* or the *Daily Telegraph* have also extended their sports journalism brand identity onto the web successfully, although both give minimal coverage to Scottish sport. Indeed, in any discussion of the representation of Scottish sport in the media, it is hard to disentangle debates about cultural and national identity from those of political economy and the endemic structural weaknesses of the Scottish media industries. Put another way, Scottish-based national newspapers such as *The Herald* and *The Scotsman* simply cannot compete in terms of journalistic resources with their UK national rivals when it comes to sports coverage. They survive in the market because the attention given to Scottish sport by London-based newspapers is relatively poor, but it is not uncommon to find *The Herald's* daily sports supplement carrying multiple pieces from the same journalist as its small team try to cover the waterfront of Scottish sport. By way of comparison, *The Herald's* supplement looks flimsy and lightweight when set against the substantially better resourced daily sports supplement in, say, *The Guardian*.

If *The Times* does invest in a distinctly Scottish edition scheduled to be launched in 2007, coverage of Scottish sport and football in particular will be a key element of its pitch to attract readers away from *The Herald* and *The Scotsman* (it signalled its intent by poaching the top sportswriter of *The Herald*, Graham Spiers, early in 2007). In many ways this is an extension of a longer process by which editionised tabloids have eroded indigenous newspaper sales. To this end, if London-based, upmarket newspapers ever got really serious about moving into the Scottish market, investing in sports journalism would

seriously weaken the position of the current dominant players, in much the same way as *The Scottish Sun* has eroded the position of the *Daily Record* since the 1980s. Economics matter, and attempts by Newsquest Scotland, owners of *The Herald* and the *Sunday Herald*, to cut £2–3 million in their budgets in 2007 can only weaken their sports – and other – journalism (*Press Gazette*, 4 April 2007). In the next decade, expect the debate about merging the Glasgow-based *Herald* with the Edinburgh-based *Scotsman* to re-emerge.

#### CONCLUSION: BACK TO THE FUTURE

The most striking aspects of the media sport environment over the last decade have been the pace of technological change, the struggle of regulatory bodies to keep pace and the establishment of a new culture and tradition of watching sport on television. There is also an ongoing process of continuity and change in how Scotland engages with, reports, mediates and represents Scottish sport.

By and large, key events have migrated to pay-TV from free-to-air digital television. While major international events such as the FIFA World Cup remain available to all, Scotland's inability to qualify for the final stages of such events serves to enhance the invisibility of the national team for the non-sporting Scottish audience. In the age of the market, Scotland, like other small countries, simply cannot compete financially, yet other relatively small countries such as Holland and Portugal both operate within limited television markets and still enjoy marginal and sporadic footballing success, so clearly wider and deeper problems remain to be addressed in the ongoing process to re-juvenate Scottish football (Banks 2002; Morrow 2003).

Of course, Scottish sporting success does exist and sporadically gains national and international media attention. Often these successes are focused around individual sports stars such as Andy Murray in tennis, John Higgins in snooker, or Dario Franchitti, in Indy car racing. In some cases these individual athletes are partly defined by their 'Scottishness' (for example, Andy Murray with his saltire sweatbands or comments about his lack of support for England in the 2006 FIFA World Cup), at other times less so. Even the most evergreen Scottish sports stars like golfer Colin Montgomerie only receive intermittent attention from the Scottish media, usually around major tournaments like the Ryder Cup (where there is a strange ellision of national pride into pan-European collectivity) or the Open Championship, which is frequently hosted in Scotland but packaged as a global sports event. In a book celebrating more than 100 years of reporting from the Open, *The Herald* proudly noted that of the 128 championships staged by the year 2000, the paper had carried reports from 123 of them (Lowe and Brownlie 2000). While this reflects a clear pride and natural interest in golf, rarely is the sport given much prominence in

Scottish-based television. Most golf is on pay-TV channels or covered by the network BBC Sports department. In an age of event television, however, it is the global team sports such as football and rugby which become vehicles for wider expressions of national identity on an international stage, and here, of late, Scotland simply has not turned up on the big night. Ironically, while the media may claim this structural failure in football is more to do with the inappetite and lack of long-term vision among those who run the game, the role played increasingly by television as the financial underwriter of a sport left to find its place in the cultural marketplace cannot be underestimated. Nationally, other indigenous sports such as shinty remain largely invisible in the central belt, and, for a range of historical, political and cultural reasons, Scottish Gaelic sport has never enjoyed the countrywide grassroots support and extensive media coverage which, say, Gaelic sport has in Ireland.

Sport still matters to the collective sense of identities that exist in modern Scotland, but these also co-exist with a range of other sporting and cultural identities. Regional and local rivalries are the staple diet of a sporting culture and they continue to be served via a range of local, regional and national newspapers, the Internet and increasingly radio coverage of the live event. At the same time, Scots are happy and keen to watch the best that international televised sport has to offer.

The media have always played a central role in creating the myths which surround the national narratives which countries tell about the role of sport in society. Often these stories are linear in nature and have tended to have any complexities airbrushed away through repeated telling over time. The 2007 Cricket World Cup, best remembered for the extraordinary death of the Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer (not least since his 'murder' subsequently appeared to be a fiction), was also an example of the new more commercial world of international sport. As the ICC attempts to extend the rather limited world map of international cricket-playing countries, so (rather like the recent FIFA football world cups) a number of 'minnows' are allowed into the event in order to encourage the process of extending the international cricket community. In the 2007 tournament both Scotland and Ireland competed. The former displayed all the aptitude associated with their footballing and rugby counterparts when competing at the highest level of international sport: they failed miserably. By way of contrast, Ireland made it to the quarter-finals before being beaten, but far from humiliated, by England. Indeed, the relative closeness of the contest would have been unimaginable even five years ago.

The Scottish and UK media informed us that cricket fever was gripping Ireland as the team progressed in the tournament. In reality, interest was shown during the matches, but the mainstream sports of Gaelic games, rugby and (English) football all continued to command the attention of the sporting Irish.

No doubt had Scotland fared better and reached the latter stages with a match against England, all sorts of traditional stereotypes (and some strange anomalies, such as the unusually high number of cricket clubs once to be found in Aberdeen) would have been dusted down by the media as cricket became invested with elements of a longer historical symbolic battle with Scotland's larger neighbour. The point we want to make is that simply reading media discourses of sport as accurate indicators of wider attitudes is becoming more problematic in a 24/7 digital media environment. As the way people engage with media changes, as the media themselves become more commercially orientated, so the level of trust invested by people in the ability of the media to accurately reflect what is going on in and around sporting events and their hinterland begins to be eroded. At key moments sport retains its ability to give articulation to expressions of collective and national characteristics and feelings, but it is an increasingly complex process as the media themselves struggle to provide a forum for such expression in a crowded marketplace.

For most of the time, we are addressed as media consumers rather than citizens – something not unique to Scotland and increasingly given a UK institutional voice through the communications regulator Ofcom – and the implications of this approach extend well into all areas of cultural life. If the governing bodies of sport, and football in particular, view supporters as simply consumers, and sport as 'product' rather than cultural activity, then they should not be surprised that an erosion of trust and commitment, often associated with emotions not generated solely by the market, continues apace as a younger generation view sport as just another consumer product.

Going forward, it will be interesting to see how a nationalist government in Holyrood may impact on this situation, and longer term, how an independent Scotland – should it come into being – might involve a substantive recalibrating of the Scottish media industries, and broadcasting in particular. Evidence from the election campaign for the Scottish Parliament in May 2007 suggests that strategic thinking about what broadcasting would look like in an independent Scotland is substantially underdeveloped at this stage. However, given the relative structural weakness of much of Scottish sport, and the dominance of the market-driven discourse across the sporting and media industries, changing the existing media sport ecology may prove to be more difficult than some might anticipate. That said, of course, politics is concerned with the art of the possible and a dramatic re-positioning of the role of sport in Scottish life and an attendant rethinking of the role, impact and importance of the media in society cannot be completely discounted.

Now that Glasgow's bid to host the 2014 Commonwealth Games has proved successful, then the aim of the organisers will be to offer a distinctively Scottish version of the relationship between sport and society (more than may have



been on show at the London-based 2012 Olympics). A major sporting event – and the Commonwealth Games becomes more important for smaller nations, offering as it does the opportunity to compete successfully at international level – held in Scotland, with a Scottish team competing under the country's flag, will focus attention on the wider relationship between sport, society and the media.

Our point of departure was revisiting the 1996 landscape; no doubt, ten years on from now there will be another story to tell. But it is striking just how different things seem now. Mainstream Scottish league and international football has withered away from free-to-air television. The policy debate on whether or not live coverage of English club football matches should be screened in Scotland looks somewhat ridiculous. Indeed, as noted earlier, it is easier across a season for Scottish viewers to watch the likes of Manchester United and Chelsea on free-to-air television than Celtic or Rangers. In 1996 we were witnessing the emergence and consolidation of a new broadcasting power in the UK, BSkyB, largely driven by sports subscription channels. Even after EU and UK government intervention, BSkyB continues to dominate the rights market for sport, and even where it is not the key rights holder, as is the case with Scottish domestic football, it has still prospered as the principal carrier of rival television sports channels like Setanta. All of this means that televised viewing of sport is far more of a niche activity than in previous decades and we would argue that this has had a detrimental influence on how sport is perceived in the wider culture. It could be argued that the overall coverage is far superior, a view with which we would concur, but in a small nation like Scotland the current provision dramatically reduces the number of people engaging through television with top-level sport.

The Internet did not really figure in Scottish sports coverage in 1996, but has clearly evolved to become an important communication tool in terms of reportage and marketing while providing a new communicative space. The most active agents in this new communicative space have been grassroots sport and football fans. Both provide evidence of thriving sporting cultures in Scotland. However, these disintermediated success stories remain marginalised from the wider public consciousness of sport in Scotland. The Internet works best at creating and consolidating niche audiences and communities of sports fans. Until it becomes a mass medium on which live sport is watched, then it is television that remains the crucial vehicle for mediated sport. While the coverage of football continues to fill the back pages and sports supplements of Scottish newspapers and provide hours of debate and discussion on Scottish radio stations more broadly, Scottish sport is crucially absent from the two dominant television channels, outside of news programming. Where it does feature, it is invariably pushed to the margins of the schedule. This cannot be

advantageous to the long-term health of Scottish sporting culture. The political debate is about how to balance the commercial interests of elite sport in Scotland with the role of the media – and television in particular – in providing a public forum through which citizens engage with sports culture.

It is time that debate started.

#### NOTES

1. The quote from *Scottish Sport* is taken from the Scottish Football League website at [http://www.scottishfootballleague.com/scottish\\_football.cfm?curpageid=971](http://www.scottishfootballleague.com/scottish_football.cfm?curpageid=971).
2. With the announcement of the closure of Border Reivers, BBC Scotland hosted an open forum in Kelso (12 April 2007) to discuss the issue among local rugby fans and administrators. A strong feature of the discussion was the lack of support for the Borders team from within the region, largely due to the lack of marketing of professional rugby to local fans whose allegiance was firmly with local amateur club rugby.

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