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**The ‘Great Game’ and Sport: Identity, contestation and Irish-British relations in the Olympic movement**

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**Biographical Notes**

Dr Katie Liston is a senior lecturer in the social sciences of sport, based at the Sport and Exercise Sciences Research Institute at Ulster University. She has published extensively on the nexus of sport and identity, including gender, national identity, and pain and injury.

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## **Introduction**

In his classical study *On War* (1832) Carl Von Clausewitz established observations universal to all wars and he developed a theory of cause-effect relations (Lillbacka, 2019). Though war was a social phenomenon that forcibly imposed one's will on an opponent, he also noted that war had *different manifestations* through history, depending on actors, purpose, and even available means. While von Clausewitz is more usually associated with the phrase that defines war as 'the continuation of policy *by other means*', James Holmes (2014) clarifies a mistranslation of this from the original German. Crucially, for von Clausewitz, war was/is a continuation of policy "*with other means*". For Holmes then, 'pursuing political objectives "with" other means connotes the addition of armed force 'to a mix of diplomatic, economic, and informational implements rather than dropping them to pick up the sword' (2014).

These observations are of central relevance to the struggles that characterized twentieth-century Irish-British relations. The strategic competition evident therein was expressed somewhere along a continuum from peacetime diplomacy to armed conflict, in which sport was war with other means and a different manifestation when the armed force phased abated. This is no surprize to those who understand the sociogenesis of violence and warfare in relation to civilizing processes and cultural, symbolic and physical force forms of violence (e.g. Fletcher, 1997; van Benthem van den Bergh, 1992). In this, sport was seen as mutually reflective and reinforcing of these broader processes (Elias and Dunning, 2008).

That a new phase, involving international sport, emerged in Irish-British relations is also a compelling case when consideration is given to the role of modern sport as a

highly visible manifestation of nationalism (Campbell, 2000; Mangan, 2003; Maguire, 2012): a source of unity and division, within and between countries/nation-states and regional units; mobilized or even weaponized (Coates, 2017) in battles for political and cultural supremacy. Indeed, by the 1980s, the sixth President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Lord Killanin, an Irishman who served as Brigade Major in the British Army in World War Two, acknowledged his ‘complete defeat in [...] attempts to make the spirit of the Games less nationalistic’ (1983: 9). War and sport were thus potent forces in the creation of imagined communities (Hobsbawm, 1990; Mangan, 2003; 2003a) in which sportspeople were patriots at play. Indeed, as Mangan has observed (1985), the games ethic underpinned notions of imperialism and military endeavour. Sport was therefore central to twentieth-century questions of identity, diplomacy, and statecraft, and to understanding war *with other means*.

Set in this context, three fundamental questions underpin this case study. Who represented ‘Ireland’ at the 1948 London Olympics, as competitors and officials, and for what purposes? Who was attracted to or repelled by this representation, and why? And, what does this reveal of international sport as war with other means? These questions were directly connected to political, diplomatic and international relations, whose relevance was important for the trajectory of Irish state formation. The actions of protagonists in our case study demonstrate that Olympic and international sport was, for them, a diplomatic, cultural and symbolic means of projecting a 32-county ‘Ireland’ on the international stage in the aftermath of World War Two (WWII). Here, we focus on the quest for exciting significance by non-state actors / sportive diplomats, who were the forerunners of a more specialized diplomacy of international sport today – sportcraft (Liston and Maguire, 2020). This was both a ‘patriot game’ and a struggle for ‘soft

power' (Nye, 1990) and those involved were cultural intermediaries (Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2012).

The paper also makes two other important contributions: to the historiography concerning the complex bureaucratic imposition of political borders in international sport, and to the history of protest at the Olympics (Cottrell and Nelson, 2010). Both can only be understood fully by 'looking behind the scenes' (Berger, 1963: 10-11); i.e. seeing beyond what was perceived by elites to run contrary to normative expectations about how nations/states should behave. The elites and those who aspired to be so, were by their beliefs and actions, a means for nations to increase their appeal, power and scope, at 'home' and 'abroad': by practicing statecraft.

Let us first consider the historical context of Irish-British relations; for the legacy of Empire and colonialism comprized a 'Great Game' (Liston and Maguire, 2020), between Great Britain and Ireland, a restless dominion (Harkness, 1969). For a key battleground in this was the Olympic movement of the twentieth century and the related quest for dominance, symbolic and exciting significance.

### *The 'Great Game' of Irish-British relations*

With the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, the 800-year 'war' between Ireland and Britain was officially over but a new phase began that centred on the consequences of the formal division of the island. A 'low-level' armed struggle continued throughout the inter- and post-WWII periods, led by the Irish Republican Army (IRA), former members of played important roles in the Irish Olympic and athletic movements. This hard power struggle ran parallel with a 'soft power' effort between Irish diplomats and

their counterparts in London and unionist/loyalist politicians located in Belfast. Irish-British relations were centred around key political events: the Treaty and confirmation of its border provision in the 1925 Boundary Commission, and the formal secession of the Republic of Ireland (RoI) from the Commonwealth in 1949 (Mansergh, 1991; Ferriter, 2019). This diplomacy was a new phase in Irish-British relations, involving official and non-state diplomats. Travelling in the same direction, there were differences in emphasis in their practice of statecraft, including the practice of sportcraft (Liston and Maguire, 2020).

The diplomatic struggle centred on issues of ‘identity, legitimacy, symbolism and status’ (Cruise O’Brien, cited in Dudley Edwards, 1969: 104), and on whose terms success would be judged. Francis Carroll (2016) has correctly highlighted the role played by Irish diplomats and elected officials, with varying degrees of success, in the governments of William Cosgrave, Eamon De Valera and John A. Costello.<sup>1</sup> Though knowledge of international affairs in Ireland was, until the 1970s, ‘reputedly confined to “a small circle of cognoscenti”’ (McGee, 2020: 1), there was a role for sport in augmenting formal state policy to achieve recognition and projecting the ‘nation’: not only in IFS support for the *Aonach Tailteann* (Cronin, 2003)<sup>2</sup> but also in the portrayal of national emblems such as anthem and flag, through rugby for instance (O’Kelly de Gallagh to Walshe, National Archives Ireland (NAI) DFA GR 1489). Indeed, members of the first Irish *Dáil* were said to have contacted J. J. Keane, inaugural President of the Irish Olympic Council (OCI), to discuss the role of the international Olympic

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<sup>1</sup> They led successive governments from 1922-32 (Cosgrave); 1932-48, 1951-54 and 1957-59 (De Valera), and; 1948-51, 1954-57 (Costello).

<sup>2</sup> The *Tailteann* Games was an Irish sporting and cultural festival held in 1924, 1928 and 1932, and a means of projecting Gaelic attributes of the new Irish state.

movement in projecting a 32-county 'Ireland' onto the international stage (Correspondence from Keane to De Coubertin, 10 April/8 May 1922, IOC Archive).

Yet the crucial roles played by non-state actors in cultural affairs in general, and sport in particular, has been overlooked in this regard. Ireland was a distinctive case, for as IOC President Killanin noted, not only was it divided politically, but in sport too. Some sports presented an all-island team, such as boxing, and others were, as he put it, 'without the North, whose affiliations were with the UK' (1983: 23). And, within certain sports, internal divisions too were a further complication that came to bear on the 1948 Olympics. In athletics for instance, there were three associations on the island: the National Athletic and Cycling Association (NACA) who claimed 32-county jurisdiction, the Amateur Athletic Union of Eire (AAUE) who had 26-county status, and the Northern Ireland Amateur Athletic Association (NIAAA). Only the latter two were official affiliate members of the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF).

### *Political borders in sport*

In the 1930s the IOC and the IAAF adopted a political boundary rule that cemented internal divisions and was the regulatory basis for a bifurcated governance structure in Irish sport. This rule was a confinement of the original 32-county (all-island) jurisdiction of the NACA, to 26 Irish counties. It was also brought about by political and sportive intervention from political leaders in Belfast with the British Olympic Association (BOA) in the early 1930s. The BOA produced an official memo in 1931, approved by the Dominions Office (DO), which formalized their (preferred) interpretation of this practice since at least the early 1920s, when Ireland first joined

the IOC and the IAAF. The DO supported the 1931 position on sporting citizenship in Northern Ireland (NI) (National Archives UK, HO45 15758; C462369) and formulated a stance on how their various departments would refer to Ireland (DO 130/92).<sup>3</sup> The IOC's and IAAF's acceptance of this rule was influenced strongly by British claims to a longer-standing political and sportive jurisdiction over Ireland prior to partition and independence. Debates over Irish Olympic recognition pre-dated this case study. Irishman Peter O'Connor's protestations to the Crown Prince of Greece prior to the 1906 Intercalated Games in Athens, and his subsequent protest during the award of his Olympic medal, forcibly revealed the intense desire of early modern Irish Olympians to compete under the representative colours of Ireland, which was thwarted by the BOA (McCarthy, 2010; Llewellyn, 2012).

Central actors in the production of the BOA's memo were Harold Abrahams (Olympic gold medallist, President of the Amateur Athletic Association/AAA and member of the Achilles Club) and Lord Desborough (a politician opposed to Home Rule in Ireland, hands-on and charismatic BOA chairman (Jeffreys, 2014)). This memo asserted that an athletic association, not a country, obtained membership of the international federation and favoured the replacement of the term country with unit. These issues the British sports elite managed successfully at this point, thereby resisting Ireland's claim, to title and to the birthright of every person born on the island in Irish constitutions of 1922 and 1937, in the 1936, 1948 and 1952 Olympics. Yet, within international sport, officials were expressing other views on the 'Irish question'.

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<sup>3</sup> The DO wrote in November 1948 that, in reference to the use of titles in bilateral agreements, 'the sooner we know our own minds ... the better' (DO 130/92; DO 35/3977).

De Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympic movement had, for instance, expressed reservations, when consulted on the IOC's changing position on 32-county Irish Olympic jurisdiction. In IOC correspondence (26 November 1935), his view was that they were inscribing countries and not states when 'Ireland in its new form was qualified as such and could not be properly split in two'. IOC Executive member Avery Brundage also disagreed with aspects of the handling of the 'Irish question' prior to London 1948, suspecting rightly that IOC President Edström had coordinated a response with Lord Burghley (Brundage to Edström, 7 July 1948, Brundage Collection/BC). Neither did Brundage want to cede power to the international federations or the national Olympic committees. Crucially, he had already recognized that a solution satisfactory to all was difficult because other international federations had accepted the island of Ireland as a member without objection from the British (Brundage to Edström, 1 June 1948, BC). Burghley was successor to Desborough, longest serving Chair of the BOA and led the 1948 London Games Organizing Committee; also, President of the IAAF (from 1946 to 1976) an IOC executive member, British Olympic medalist, peer, and Conservative politician.

Such was the influence exerted by the British, in the IOC and especially the IAAF executive at this point, that they countered resistance to the political boundary rule, and its implications for national eligibility. Correspondence published here (official and marked personal) confirmed that, in the practical imposition of the political boundary ruling at the 1948 Games, the decisive intercessor was Billy Holt (Director of the 1948 London Organizing Committee and IAAF honorary secretary from 1946-1952): expertly positioned to enforce the rule in athletics and in other sports. Thus, a political and sportive dye was already cast for the handling of the Irish Olympic entry. The IAAF

would ensure that their official Irish member, the AAUE (formed after the IAAF's suspension of the NACA) would not be excluded, even when (as they correctly anticipated) the OCI did not countersign their entry, and that the NIAAA would retain eligibility over any athletes from NI. Meantime the Organizing committee would impose Eire (written without the accent by the British) as the team title and prevent NI athletes from competing in any Éire (Gaelic use) team.

Not all international federations agreed with this position: NI-born rower and boxer, Danny Taylor and Alf William Barnes, competed on the Irish team and the International Amateur Boxing Association took a different view to the IAAF. This can be attributed, in part, to the role of its (Irish) President, Major-General WRE Murphy.<sup>4</sup> Acrimony was perhaps inescapable in 1948, and there was evidence of subterfuge in how the Irish entry/team was handled that, in some ways, echoed wider British 'black' propaganda efforts (McMahon, 2008; O'Halpin, 2008). Before we examine the 1948 Games, it is first necessary to conceptualize the role of those non-state actors and cultural intermediaries. This is because questions of power, culture and control lie at the heart of global sport processes more generally and underpin the struggle for recognition, jurisdiction and identity. This was the case for OCI officials in the inter- and post-war periods. Though part of civic society, some with strong military links and involved in a form of public diplomacy, their actions were not simply carried out at the behest of the Irish state. Their day-to-day practices, knowledge and attitudes framed the expansion of the Olympic movement in Ireland but also differed by degrees from the

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<sup>4</sup> He was brought up in Belfast, fought in World War One, was awarded the military cross and a distinguished service order, joined the IFS army where he was second in command, and then became Deputy Commissioner of the *Garda Síochána* until his retirement.

tastes of some international Olympic elites. Implicated in the contestation of legitimacy, they, and their adversaries, were active cultural intermediaries.

### *Non-state actors and cultural intermediaries*

In the wider study of state cultural propaganda (Maguire, 2020), conducted either by intelligence agencies or non-state actors, a more nuanced appreciation of those involved in state/civic networks can be drawn upon. OCI Presidents and officials pursued their objectives with a high degree of relative autonomy from the state. This stemmed in part from the general position of sport in civic society – formal Irish state policy on sport was absent throughout the first half of the twentieth century – but also the composition of the executive boards of the OCI and the NACA during this period. The OCI executive was part of the cultural elite of Irish society, some with direct links to the nationalist struggle.

Membership of the first OCI, formed in 1922, was drawn from the Presidents of Irish university colleges (excluding Trinity College, Dublin), mayors of the major cities of Ireland, including Derry, and others from medical, political and sporting background. Some were descendants of the older Anglo-Irish elite. They can be viewed as opinion formers who framed the values and knowledge associated with Olympism and the place of Ireland within the IOC. Though their political and cultural views may well have been reflective of, and shaped by, the policies pursued by the Irish governments of Cosgrave, De Valera and Costello, the OCI maintained a degree of autonomy from the state.

But there was also a dawning appreciation of what involvement in international sport could do in achieving wider diplomatic objectives in the new phase following the

abating of armed conflict with the British. In turn, the relative autonomy enjoyed by senior OCI officials from the wider council allowed them to be more assertive if/when required. Either way, their actions were part of the wider struggle for recognition and all-Ireland jurisdiction and international status. Of the OCI Presidents most implicated in this ‘Great Game’ were JJ Keane (1922-1929, also IOC delegate from 1922-1951), General Eoin O’Duffy (1929-33, Irish nationalist political activist, fascist, prominent Gaelic Athletic Association official in Ulster, NACA President, soldier in the IRA and *Garda* commissioner), Colonel Eamon ‘Ned’ Broy (President 1933-1950, *Garda* Commissioner, athletics official)<sup>5</sup> and Lord Killanin (President 1950-1973, IOC delegate from 1952-1972, IOC President 1972-80). OCI general secretaries and treasurers also played their part, such as Paddy Kilcullen (St. Andrew’s boxing club, secretary and treasurer of the Irish Amateur Boxing Association - AIBA),<sup>6</sup> Patrick Carroll (President of AIBA from 1939-1975; a high ranking *Garda*; trained barrister; OCI member (1947-75), secretary (1958), treasurer (1946-58) and OCI President 1972-1975)<sup>7</sup> and Commandant John Chisholm (Irish national army, Ireland’s Olympic chef-de-mission in 1948) (see image one).<sup>8</sup>

Thus, key OCI members had served in various capacities within the IRA, had fought in the subsequent War of Independence, became prominent *Gardaí*, crime/special branch

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<sup>5</sup> Broy was a penetration agent who worked in the British secret service in Dublin. He joined the intelligence branch of the British-controlled Dublin Metropolitan Police, after Michael Collins recruited him. Broy travelled with the 1921 Irish treaty delegation as Collins’ private secretary and bodyguard. He became adjutant of the IFS army air corps. On being elected President of the OCI on 5 March 1935, Broy held a meeting with De Valera the next day.

<sup>6</sup> Kilcullen wrote to the IOC in January 1938 directing attention to the new Irish constitution, which provided that ‘the name of the state is Éire, or, in the English language, Ireland’ (IOC Archive).

<sup>7</sup> Carroll was active in the IRA during the War of Independence and a military policeman in the Civil War. He joined the *Garda Síochána* in 1923. He was called to the bar in 1932 and during WWII he worked closely with military intelligence.

<sup>8</sup> The National Archives, Kew, contain a reference to Chisholm being ‘nothing if not a colourful character’ (DO 35/3977).

officials, with responsibility for political crime, state security and who worked closely with military intelligence during WWII (e.g. Carroll). That some of these cultural intermediaries (as well as members of the 1948 Olympic team, including 12 of the 13 basketballers and the entire equestrian team) were connected to the military reflected its role as an important mainstay, not only of the newly formed IFS but also of a desired Gaelic Ireland movement. This movement transcended military events and engaged with civilians in sporting and social functions (Hora, 2017),<sup>9</sup> in which army and *Garda* personnel began to dominate the OCI's decision-making processes (Byrne, 2018).

In contrast, the British diplomatic corps was well established but bound to the changing international climate in the first half of the twentieth century and their decline as a world and imperial power. Though not acting in the mode of traditional diplomats working on behalf of government, British sporting power brokers and elites engaged with government officials to ensure they operated in conjunction with policy of the day. There was no doubt that the OCI's British-English adversaries were part of an Oxbridge elite (e.g. Lords Desborough, Aberdare, Burghley), in which title, university college, membership of the Achilles Athletics club (a hub for past and present members of Oxford and Cambridge athletics, whose elite membership was by invitation only),<sup>10</sup> and possibly masonic order connections, all played a part. The apparent absence of state structures devoted to sport did not mean that British government policy was entirely absent or benign. As we have seen, the DO colluded with the BOA in the early 1930s. Foreign Office (FO) records also show that British government officials were marginally involved in pre- and interwar Olympic matters e.g. in the withdrawal of

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<sup>9</sup> The Irish Army Athletic Association debated the inclusion of imperial-associated sports such as golf and tennis, promoted boxing and army equestrian members excelled internationally in the 1930s.

<sup>10</sup> This club supplied one third of Britain's 1928 Olympic team and Cambridge the two medal winners.

London's application to host the (cancelled) 1940 Games for reasons of 'high policy' in the Far East (Polley, 1992).

British sporting power brokers and elites first sought to impose, and then to resist the diminution of their dominance. These intermediaries held different views to the OCI about their past and future, especially about the form of normative rules governing international jurisdiction and identity that prevented nations/states from being recognized *on their own terms*. Lord Burghley, President of the AAA, was 'a trusted link' between the IOC and the British government by the early 1950s (Jeffreys, 2014: 80). He was not a diplomat according to his IOC colleague, Killanin (1983), but he did have political sensitivity, reflected in his role as intermediary between the IOC and Soviet sporting officials for example (Parks, 2016; Noel Baker papers). With three British members on the IOC, including one always on the executive after 1931, British influence in the Olympic movement was considerable, and became particularly apparent during and after WWII.

### **Insert Figure One: International Olympic Sport – A Zone of Prestige, Emulation and Resistance**

In international sport, Swede Sigfrid Edström was a central power broker who colluded with Burghley to secure British interests: first President of the IAAF (1912-1946), and holder of the IOC equivalent role (1942-1952). These roles overlapped at the 1948 Games. Burghley was regarded by the elites as an acceptable successor to Edström in the IAAF (Edström to Brundage, 28 December 1945, BC). He was also considered for IOC President (Dawes to Edström, 7 March 1952, BOA Archives), a role given instead

by secret ballot to Brundage. Brundage was a former Olympian, successful businessman and President of the US Olympic Association and committee (1929-1953). He was IOC Vice-President (1945-1952), and a member of the IOC commission established at the 1948 Games to consider the Irish case. Such a consistent preservation of influence was critical to how the 1948 entry from Ireland was handled.

That these protagonists recognized each other in adversarial terms can be seen in the myriad of descriptors contained in archival records concerning 'Ireland'. National, state, sporting, newspaper library and personal records were infused with prejudice and contention, including references to 'the troublesome Irish question' (Brundage to Killanin, 1 February 1954, BOA Archives) and 'perfidious Albion' (Carroll to Mayer, 31 August 1951, IOC Archive). Carroll's suspicions of collusion between UK government and sporting officials were also borne out. One step removed were officials from the British DO and Commonwealth Relations office (CRO) who, in correspondence with the FO, noted confidentially that 'in 1948 and 1952 our views prevailed, and their entry was described as "Eire" and "Republic of Ireland" respectively' (Blair/CRO 12 Aug 1959, to Haigh, FO DO 35/5435).

1948 was one of a series of examples of the perceived political utility of sport as an instrument of soft power (Nye, 1990) in the 'Great Game' of Irish-British relations. In this, Olympic representation and success was a proxy of national vitality and international standing for the newly independent IFS. The British FO acknowledged that this was the case, in general terms, on 16 July 1959 saying that 'the Olympic Games have immense prestige and offer a unique stage for the demonstration of national prowess' (National Archives (NA), FO371/145547/W1801). Some of the intricate

details of the treatment of the OCI 1948 entry are made possible here by casting fresh light on known archival material (those of the BOA, AAA, OCI minutes/reports; national/public records in Belfast, Dublin and London) and on current analyses (e.g. Jeffreys, 2014; Hampton, 2008; Hunt, 2015), but also by presenting new insights gleaned from original analysis (e.g. the Brundage Collection). Taken together, this evidence reveals an already complex international nexus between sport, politics and statecraft that predated the 1948 Games. It also illustrates the ways in which international sport was war with other means, in the post-WWII era generally, but especially in the context of Irish-British relations. Let us examine these Olympics further.

### *The 1948 Olympics and statecraft*

The London Games was a twin relaunch: for the IOC after an enforced hiatus, and for Ireland's competitive re-entry, following two gold medals in 1932. Though some (e.g. Baker, 1994) regard the Games as comparatively free from political rancour, the OCI entry warranted an ephemeral pre-Games intervention by Irish political leader (*Taoiseach*), De Valera, with Noel-Baker in November 1947 (National Archives UK, DO/35/3956). This was in the context of sustained post-war correspondence between Olympic and sports officials in Dublin-London-Belfast that also involved IOC and IAAF Presidents and international executive members. The main issues – around jurisdiction, identity and team selection – were forerun in the 1934 British Empire Games, also held in London (Liston and Maguire, 2016). There, the organizers' views on keeping to the political style and title of respective territories by which they were known (National Archives, HO 45 15758) held sway over the matter of an all-Ireland swimming entry. This was a prelude of what was to come.

The 1948 Olympics featured a series of complaints by OCI representatives (in football, swimming, cycling and athletics, and before the opening parade) involving clashes with British organizers and the local representatives, about team designation and selection. As a consequence of the OCI's perseverance before and after WWII, the IOC were forced to establish a commission to consider Ireland's case at the Games. Central to the lengthy correspondence on the 'Irish question' was the legal position of *jus soli* – the granting of British citizenship to those born within the monarch's realm – which was reflected in the BOA's claim to the selection of NI athletes, prior to the 1948 enactment of two citizenship classes (UK and colonies, and independent Commonwealth countries). For example, on 12 May 1933, Colonel Hunter (BOA) wrote to Berdez (IOC Secretary) that:

So far as the Olympic Games are concerned the position taken up my association [on the qualification of dominion athletes representing GB] is that the competitor has the choice of representing the dominion in which he was born or lives, or Great Britain. It is not possible for a man born in South Africa, Australia or Canada to become a naturalised British subject because he is one already!' (IOC Archives)

This denied those born or living in NI the right to be nationals of the IFS / Éire, to be selected for the Irish Olympic team or, in an unusual variant of this claim enforced at the 1948 Olympics, being ineligible owing to possessing voting rights in NI only.

The sportive issue came to the forefront of British and Irish government discussions in late 1947 when, as Noel Baker put it, the (Irish) partition issue reappeared 'in new form'. Towards the end of a 90-minute meeting, held on 4 November, between him and

De Valera, for which the former wrote a handwritten agenda, the Irish *Taoiseach* raised ‘the question of Irish representation in the Olympic Games’ (National Archives, DO/35/3956). In this, De Valera was in sync with the direction of Irish foreign policy initiatives seeking membership of, and recognition by, international bodies. Noel-Baker, in the CRO, recorded that having taken up the question with the BOA and AAA, “‘*Ulster* (sic) has always been included as part of the United Kingdom and [...] we have no precedent on which we could base any request to these authorities to exclude *Ulster* (sic) athletes from the United Kingdom teams’ (emphasis added).<sup>11</sup> Such sensitivity by government officials to interference in non-governmental organizations belies the conventional view of the Nobel Prize winner. Though revered in British sport through his Olympic career, Noel-Baker was not averse to entering the political affray and putting British interests first.<sup>12</sup>

His handling of De Valera’s intervention meant that, officially, an emphasis remained on the autonomy of British sport, free from formal government intervention. This also preserved the BOA’s capacity to maintain the status quo regarding sporting jurisdiction and to frame any ongoing questions within their sphere of influence exerted in international sport. From a British perspective, the politics of Olympic participation (Beck, 2008) in 1948 largely focused eastwards on Germany, Japan, Italy and the Soviet Union. Events across the Irish Sea appeared to be of far less concern. That the IOC and British organizers denied what the NACA and the OCI saw as their right to national

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<sup>11</sup> In 1938 the (Belfast) Stormont cabinet considered a change in NI designation to Ulster (PRONI CAB/4/390/15794). Instead, the Imperial government used Eire to refer to the area known, prior to the new Irish constitution, as the IFS. See also DO 35/3968.

<sup>12</sup> He was president of the Achilles club (1946-1979), opened the 1948 IOC Conference and chaired several Olympic events. In July 1952, Noel Baker decried the OCI ‘refusing to send a team’ to Helsinki ‘on purely political grounds and we all greatly disapprove’ (Noel Baker to Haddleton, 14 July 1952, Churchill Archives)

representation at the Games vested even greater symbolic and political importance to the team designation – Ireland/Éire – and to who was selected on the Irish team, and why. Yet in this, the IAAF had effectively already ‘forced Ireland as a geographical unit off the map [...] while rugby, boxing, swimming tennis etc continue(d) internationally to represent the whole island and not a politically dismembered unit of it’ ( Fleming/NACA to Brundage, 4 January 1935, BC).

### ***London 1948: soft power and cultural diplomacy***

The 1948 Games were a ‘herculean task, but the spirit of the people had come through the war ... and the same was true of its belief in all those great ideals of amateur sport, where followed in sport or in life’ (IOC, 1948). The Games were the second Olympiad to be held in London and reaffirmed the claim that sport could indeed rise above political (and commercial) issues, particularly in the shadow of post-war austerity and the overtly political edge characteristic of Berlin in 1936.<sup>13</sup> Neither Germany, Italy nor Japan participated.<sup>14</sup> The Games were considered a success by the British hosts (Phillips, 2007); sportively, politically and in economic terms – a modest £30,000 profit was generated (approximately £750,000 today). In his introduction to the Official Report of the 1948 Games, Burghley highlighted:

the remarkable way in which the Olympic spirit fired all those who worked in the organisation [...] they contributed [...] not only in the saga of sport, but also in the achievement of youth *to rise above the jealousies of the world* and lay a

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<sup>13</sup> For a wider discussion of the continuation of politics by other means as it applied to Anglo-German relations, see Hughes and Owen (2009).

<sup>14</sup> Though Burghley visited Moscow in July 1947, the Soviet Union did not join the IOC. It was by then affiliated to FIFA.

cornerstone in that *building of tolerance, understanding and friendship* (IOC 1948, emphasis added).

Such a view, then, seems disingenuous now in light of his involvement behind the scenes to thwart Irish aspirations. Eire (British use) was the second IOC member to accept the 1948 Olympic invitation (Olympic Newsletter, July 1947).

### **Insert Image One: Irish Olympic team at opening team parade**

The Irish team of 72 competitors (68 males and 4 females) included athletics, basketball, boxing, equestrian, fencing, football/soccer, rowing, sailing/yachting, swimming/diving, and art (Letitia Hamilton won the sole (bronze) medal). A series of complaints and protests began on their arrival. The football team who reported for the pre-Olympic preliminary round on 26 July objected to the appellation Eire in the written programme. Local officials informed them that they were acting on instructions received from the organizing committee (OCI, 1949). The swimming team withdrew after the preliminary round on 29 July (because of how the selection of members from NI – McCartney and Fitzell Jones – was handled by the international federation). Both swimmers held Irish passports. Broy, OCI President, wrote to Edström, at his London hotel, to protest officially at FINA's deletion of these two team members from their official entries (30 July 1948, BC).<sup>15</sup> Apart from being British subjects by birth, Broy pointed out that McCartney was made a citizen of the IFS by the Treaty and Constitution of 1922, this was carried over under the existing (1937) constitution and Jones was a 'natural-born citizen under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act of

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<sup>15</sup> Harold Fern, secretary of the (British) Amateur Swimming Association (1921-1970), and FINA President in 1948, used his influence.

1935'.<sup>16</sup> Three other sports – boxing, football and rowing – also included NI members who were not prevented from competing. Though selected by the OCI, the cycling team never competed, being told by Olympic officials that they were not allowed (because the team was entered by the NACA, no longer affiliated to the international cycling federation).<sup>17</sup> Five NACA-registered track and field athletes – Joseph and JJ Kelly, JJ O'Donnell, Dermot McDermott and Martin Egan – were withdrawn under protest on the opening day of athletics (30 July).

Close quarter meetings between the OCI and high-ranking British organizers buttressed complaints of treatment before and during the Games. Initially Holt (IOC and IAAF envoy) travelled to the Irish team base at Willesden Technical College on 27 July, the day after the complaint made by the football team, and two days before the Olympic opening ceremony. Accompanied by an attendant, he called to Chisholm in person at the Irish team base and wrote what the OCI (1949) report described as an 'order', that their representatives attend the IOC offices on 28 July to explain why entries from the IAAF's affiliated member (AAUE) had not been countersigned.

This Holt and Burghley had anticipated some weeks prior by advising the IOC that, as the overarching federation concerned, the IAAF would accept the AAUE entry. Such was this agreed strategy that, in a confidential letter to a correspondent at a prominent unionist (pro-British) newspaper in Belfast on 29 June 1948, one month before the

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<sup>16</sup> Broy's OCI report (1949) makes clear that they could have objected to the selection of 'several Irish boys' for Great Britain, (such as Sullivan, born in Limerick; Barton in Kildare; Nesbitt in Monaghan; Kelleher in Cork), 'but [...] they themselves desire to go in the British team, and it would be contrary to Irish ideas of sportsmanship to be so petty'.

<sup>17</sup> Mirroring athletic events, in 1947 the British National Cyclists' Union proposed to the *Union Cycliste Internationale* (UCI) that the NACA be confined to 26-county jurisdiction. This motion was passed by the UCI, for whom Southcott was Vice President from GB.

Games, Holt wrote that ‘Lord Burghley and I have given a lot of attention to the matter [of the position of Eire] and the position is *taking the shape we require*’ (IAAF Papers, emphasis added). Burghley’s view was already clear, articulated in correspondence with the same sports sub-editor at the *Belfast Telegraph*,<sup>18</sup> when he said: ‘[...] the Northern Ireland Amateur Athletic Association [...] are bound to the British Amateur Athletic Board according to the rules of the IAAF which can only admit nations by their political boundaries’ (Burghley to Williamson, 4 October 1946, IAAF Papers).

The significance of Holt’s official personal visit to the Irish team quarters could not have been lost on Chisholm given what had preceded the Games, sportively and politically. There was sustained correspondence on the Gaelic team appellation instead of English, French or Spanish, and a meeting between the OCI and London organizers in March 1948. Given their military and intelligence backgrounds, it is difficult to imagine that Chisholm or Carroll were unaware of the backcloth of a ‘black’ propaganda operation conducted by British intelligence against Irish neutrality in the war (McMahon, 2008; O’Halpin, 2008). Chisholm gave Holt a written response for delivery to the IOC: if they wished to hold this meeting on the forenoon of 29 July, Chisholm would ensure representatives were in attendance. He had to attend a pre-scheduled rehearsal and no other OCI officials would arrive to the team base in time to deputize. For yet unconfirmed reasons, involving Holt as the critical Janus-faced emissary, Irish representatives did not meet the IOC commission. Holt claimed subsequently that OCI representatives would not meet the IOC Executive, having been invited twice, and Brundage (a commission member) later indicated to the OCI (in

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<sup>18</sup> This newspaper was the platform of Thomas Moles MP, editor, and a hardline Unionist. Williamson, who also became editor, took up Moles’ role subsequently, and corresponded with the AAA, the IAAF and the IOC.

October 1948) that the organizing committee and the IOC office reported to him that Irish representatives could not be found to participate in the planned commission.

The second known official meeting of the OCI and high-ranking IOC officials/British organizers was at the invitation of the Royal family to a palace reception for all Olympic teams, held on 3 August. Approximately 300 athletes attended this reception and some 60 IOC officials (*The Times*, 4 August 1948; *New York Times*, 3 August 1948; *Belfast Newsletter*, 4 August 1948). Teams entered the palace in the alphabetical order of nations. Broy, Carroll and two others (Chisholm and Mairin Allen/honorary secretary, art section) also attended the reception when, in the anteroom, Broy was approached by Holt to bring the Irish party to their place under 'E'. This Broy did, despite heated protests about this same instruction at the opening parade on 29 July. However, when next asked by the King's equerry as to their title to be announced when being presented to the royals, Broy replied '*Ireland*'. This was duly done and the 'incident was reported in the Press' (OCI Report, 1949: 11), which prompted Burghley to reprimand Chisholm in writing on 6 August.<sup>19</sup>

On 29 July (image one), the Irish team was forced to parade at the opening ceremony under the title and banner Eire following a 'polemic discussion' (OCI 1949) between the assistant Chief Marshal Colonel Johnstone and Chisholm regarding title. Under pressure of being stopped in the tunnel leading to the stadium, the team agreed to their placement between Egypt and Finland. Such close contact embodied power relations within and between nation-states, regarding sport and domestic or foreign policy

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<sup>19</sup> Burghley was not present at the Palace owing, perhaps, to his diminished standing with the Royals after his divorce and remarriage (Edström to Brundage, 15 June 1948, BC).

objectives and in the world of Olympic sport. We turn our attention to this before concluding our discussion.

### ***Collusion, soft power and sportcraft***

Agitation was growing within athletic and Olympic circles in Ireland prior to the Games but aspirations regarding 32-county recognition were undermined by a lack of internal unity. The OCI and the NACA sought an all-Ireland entry. Meantime the AAUE, anticipating (correctly) that the OCI would not approve their entry, obtained assurance from the IAAF that they could compete as the federation's affiliated (26-county) member. Holt, wrote in an official IAAF capacity, to Edström in the IOC on 11 June 1948 to forewarn him that he was holding copies of AAUE entries for a decision, in the event that the OCI did not approve them.

Some four months prior to the Games, Russell, honorary secretary-treasurer of the international boxing federation, also alerted Irish boxing authorities to a ruling from the IOC (Russell to IABA, 2 March 1948, BC) regarding NI eligibility for Great Britain. Carroll, writing in his capacity for Irish boxing, considered this rule *ex parte* and non-binding because they were not afforded an opportunity to state the merits of their case (Carroll to Russell, 12 March 1948, BC). He also argued it was *ultra vires* the Olympic Charter, in excess of the jurisdiction of any individual executive officer of the IOC, contrary to natural justice and to the spirit of sportsmanship, and in fact not applicable as no boxer had NI status given the 32-county jurisdiction of the AIBA. The conflation of NI and Ulster was an enduring pattern for the IOC, under de Baillet Latour and

Edström,<sup>20</sup> but also a continuing source of success for British sports elites and the NIAAA. As they had done repeatedly pre-and post-WWII, the OCI wrote to the IOC on 17 June 1948 (IOC Archive), again enclosing a copy of the Irish Constitution, and drawing attention to Article 4 which stated that, in the English language, the name of Ireland was the correct appellation and in accordance with the IOC's use of three official languages.

But the BOA had already staked their claim, via the AAA and NIAAA. At the March 1948 meeting between the OCI and London organizers, the question of representation was raised. The OCI was informed, somewhat duplicitously it now seems, that the IOC and its national members controlled the matter; not the British organizers. Broy, who had been present (along with Kilcullen and one other) at a pre-WWII meeting with IOC President de Baillet Latour, in London on 16 June 1939, reminded the British organizers of the undertaking then reached. He put it as follows:

If the British Government and the British Olympic Committee agree that competitors from Northern Ireland may be included in the Irish Olympic teams and that if a competitor from Northern Ireland should be successful that the Irish flag may be flown. The President will recommend to the International Olympic Committee that the present position be altered and that All-Ireland be recognised for the purpose of the Games'.

IOC correspondence indicates that Broy's summary was accurate but de Baillet Latour's subsequent actions were inconsistent with this. He wrote to Aberdare (British IOC executive member) on 20 June 1939 to indicate that he had come 'in a tight corner

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<sup>20</sup> IOC executive member, Kankevsky (Hungary), wrote to de Baillet Latour, in May 1936 that 'a man from Ulster is no longer Irish and Ulster is a constituent part of the British Kingdom' (IOC Archive).

when they [the Irish] said it was a case similar to Bohemia and Finland in the old days'. However, he did not recommend to Aberdare or the IOC that the position be altered it seems. Rather, his 'answer was that it could not be done (for Ireland) without the consent of the British Foreign Office and the British Olympic Association and that it was up to them to reach an agreement' (de Baillet Latour to Aberdare, 1939, IOC Archive). Whether and why Aberdare, an IOC executive member until 1959, cloaked this correspondence from Edström is yet unknown, for Edström claimed he had 'never heard of this before' (23 March 1948, Edström to Brundage, BC). Whether Edström was, in fact, careful with the truth and/or he was wedded to British interests and to primordial notions of nationalism are moot questions. For there was a contradiction between the IOC's treatment of Bohemia and Finland, who had the right of autonomous Olympic representation, and that of Ireland, Catalonia and the Basques. For Edström, only citizens of Eire could participate and there was a nationality of Eire (26 counties).

This 'Great Game' about the question of Irish Olympic and athletic jurisdiction continued after 1948: between Chisholm, Holt and Brundage, and the OCI and FINA, concerning the London Games, and; for Edström, the IOC and the IAAF. Edström regretted 'that so many federations [...] recognized Northern Ireland to be from a sporting point of view a part of the whole of Ireland. The IAAF never did that mistake' (Edström to Mayer, 22 Feb 1949, IOC Archive). A new Irish duo – Killanin, who replaced Broy as OCI President, and Carroll, who replaced Kilcullen as general-secretary – dominated the next phase, in the 1950s. A change to the IOC leadership, from Edström to Brundage, was critical to the subsequent adoption of the appellation 'Ireland' at the 1956 Games and the reinstatement of 32-county jurisdiction for the OCI. Yet Burghley and Holt ensured, via Australian organizers, that *EIR* was displayed on

the athletics scoreboard for Irishman Ronnie Delany's gold medal win in the 1500 metres, and *GBI* (not GBR) for British runner, Hewson (Liston and Maguire, 2020). There was an enduring legacy. If sport and war are not only metaphors for each other, but in fact sport is another means of war with different manifestations (Von Clausewitz, 1832), then the evidence here confirms this: while the gun was holstered in high-end Irish-British armed conflict, the struggle was taken up via state- and sportcraft. Their interplay was very meaningful, not only for 'the Irish' but for others too.

The efforts of British sporting administrators to thwart the participation of a unified Irish team at the 1948 Olympics stood in stark contrast to their (failed) efforts to welcome Soviet and Eastern Bloc participation. As Parks (2016) and others have documented, Burghley was a key intermediary between the IOC and Soviet sporting officials. This also raises the question of whether the opposition of British sport elites to a unified Irish team was partly shaped by self-interest: to see Britain finish high in the 1948 medal table. Equally, debates over the imposition of political borders within the IOC were not unique to the Irish question. The acrimonious case of the two-Chinas (or, even the two-Koreas) that played out after WWII is also instructive. Here too, non-state sporting diplomats shaped, directed, and manipulated IOC policy. As these debates over representation reveal, in the immediate post-war decade the IOC was a small, insolvent bureaucratic entity that relied heavily on the guidance of its established elites to help shape policy. For the principle of the self-determination of former colonized countries was clearly at stake after WWII (Charitas, 2015) as was the integration of more national Olympic committees into the IOC e.g. the territories and colonies of the anglophone Pacific, Atlantics and Caribbean.

## **Conclusion**

When Elias and Dunning (2008) argued that modern sport was a mimetic alternative to violence and battles, much less was known of the tapestry of Irish-British relations, in the twentieth century. The case of 'Ireland' in the Olympic movement bears the hallmarks of a quest for exciting significance (Liston and Maguire, 2020). It confirms how sport was regulated internationally by power elites. Questions of identity politics, non-state diplomacy (sportcraft) and statecraft were at the core of the handling of 'Ireland' in 1948, not for the first or last time. This hitherto neglected 'secret' cultural war casts important light onto state formation processes of the fledgling IFS (see also, O'Halpin, 1999) and its emergence onto the international stage. In addition, the struggle highlights the complex and axiomatic role played by sport in international relations more generally (see, for example, Dyreson, 2009).

The paper reveals much more of the role played by (Irish) cultural intermediaries who challenged normative rules governing international sport jurisdiction and identity, and the views of their (elite) adversaries. Some were 'men of strong nationalist sentiment' (Hunt, 2015: 849). Others had differing views by degrees. Some sportspeople were comfortable representing the British Empire *and* Ireland pre-WWII (Liston and Maguire, 2016) but even those who sought to preserve the supposed political neutrality of sport were drawn into the legacy of Irish-British conflict (Rouse, 2020); others became less comfortable with dual sportive representation, in the inter- and post-war eras especially, in light of the wider Irish movement that actively (and forcefully) resisted an identity imposed from 'above'. First suspecting and then realizing British influence at play (both sportive and political), the OCI under Broy sought a more astute struggle for recognition after 1948, through sportive diplomatic channels. In this, the

choice of Killanin, as the new IOC executive member and OCI President, was critical. In his words, he ‘was already known to be sympathizer, whatever form of government we had, with the idea of a united Ireland in politics, business and sport [...] my sympathy with the cause but not all of the methods made me acceptable to the “Green” Irish ... [and] from the Northern point of view my soundness was established by the fact that I had said I would volunteer to fight Nazism if war broke out’ [which he did] (1983: 24). Killanin was also suitable for the IOC executive (notably Edström and Burghley) because of his Cambridge background and peerage. Ironically, Burghley’s recommendation of Killanin as a suitable replacement for Keane (Burghley to Edström, 11 October 1951, IOC Archive, Marked Private and Personal) came to be misplaced: though Killanin had ‘just the right background’ and he did not portray ‘the incurably parochial outlook of the (Irish) people’, in fact he did not ‘let sleeping dogs lie’ as Burghley hoped. The struggle intensified with the actions of Lord Killanin, who proved in his mastery of sportcraft that he was perhaps a more adept opponent than Burghley had realized. By the 1956 Olympics, Killanin had achieved a greater degree of success than would have been thought possible by the events of 1948.

The 1948 Olympics demonstrate that then, as now, the question of representation matters. The symbolic significance of this, and the various protests and complaints it generated, were not only a glimpse into a past about which we now know more but, in addition, a symptom of power struggles and of war with other means that have continued resonance today. In the spotlight of the UK’s exit from the EU, the ‘Irish question’ dominates - a political and sportive legacy of partition that is as equally the ‘English question’. In the ‘Great Game’ of Irish-British relations, such memories are by no means erased. Today, the question of international recognition in athletics

persists. In a May 2020 letter, sent to the current President of World Athletics, Lord Sebastian Coe, also a former Conservative politician, Olympian and organizer of the 2012 London Olympic Games, the Friends of Irish Athletics (including former NACA members) highlighted a persistent ambiguity. Athletics Ireland (formed in 1999 with provision for the NI association on its council) must yet comply with the existing political boundary rule when competing internationally. Resolution of this (via a derogation) would officially bring to close a century-long quest for recognition and jurisdiction on the part of Irish athletics that has evolved within the frame of Irish-British relations. Whether Burghley's claim for the 1948 Olympics – as rising above jealousies and building tolerance, understanding and friendship – is to be taken seriously is now open to some doubt. For not only does the language and rituals of many sports continue to be influenced by the adversarial structures of warfare, but so too are sportive cultural and diplomatic practices. Paradoxically, these are promoted as the antithesis of war while at the same time being used by those in power as a form of contested encounter that promotes mutual understanding and tolerance.

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