

## **British Fair Play: Sport Across Diasporas at the BBCWS**

Kath Woodward, David Goldblatt and James Wyllie

### **1. Introduction**

Sport, is a mass global phenomenon, which at times receives limited critical recognition because of its associations with 'play'. However, sport carries powerful links to identity, especially to national identities, which in the context of Britishness have frequently been expressed through the prism of empire. The BBC World Service, formerly known as the Empire Service, has played an important role in the contact zone of sports broadcasting, in which identifications are made and re-made. This article explores the construction of Britishness through sports broadcasting on the BBC World Service, drawing upon material from the BBC Archive at Caversham, from the start of sports broadcasting at the BBC and the establishment of the Empire Service, in 1932, up to the late 1970s, in order to present an understanding of the legacy of Britishness in sport, especially as configured around ideas of impartiality and 'fair play'. This article explores how the BBC's strong claims to objectivity and impartiality cohabit with the service's associations with colonialism by focusing upon the field of sport. This research is part of the AHRC, *Diasporas, Migration and Identities Programme* project, *Tuning In: Contact Zones at the BBC World Service*, which is investigating the role of the BBCWS as an intra- and cross-diasporic "contact zone", and documenting its activities of transnational cultural brokerage and diplomacy.

Sport is a very significant, if sometimes elusive, aspect of BBC World Service broadcasting.

Sporting events have featured in schedules since the advent of the service, having already been

a central aspect of the BBC output, but sport as a genre is more difficult to pin down in the literature on the BBC. As part of the Sport across Diasporas theme of the AHRC Tuning In: Contact Zones at the BBC WS project, this paper draws out what is distinctive about sport on the BBCWS by exploring its development in the period up to the 1970s in order to explain some of the histories and meanings of sport, through pivotal sporting moments, scheduling regimes and production minutes and communications.<sup>1</sup> We have focused on particular sports and sporting events, the Olympic Games, cricket, tennis and boxing, although the research is also informed by our work on men's football world cups<sup>2</sup> and rugby. We have conducted close archival research to try and create a picture of the way in which the presentation of sport was cast and its relationship to the service's wider mission of broadcasting of the "British way of life" and, especially how notions of fair play' in sport feed into the wider constitution of British, World Service impartiality.

A major concern for the investigation is the notion of fair play which has become associated with the identifications with Britishness that are made and re-made through a broadcasting service that has both strong links to impartiality and to empire and particularly to the reiteration of Britishness as a national identity. The diasporic audience of sports broadcasting has been primarily an expatriate one, and thus the service could be construed as concerned with a reinstatement of British colonial values rather than opening up the possibilities for a more diffuse diasporic audience, but the objectivity and impartiality claimed by the service are also in play in sport, leading to some more diverse and less predictable outcomes in the story of sport on the BBCWS.

## 2. Empire

In the discussion of setting up the World Service in the archive material on the establishment of what was then called the Empire Service, the centrality of the ideological role of the service was explicitly identified as a primary objective. The language of empire was deployed and there is direct expression of an ideological purpose. For example, at the Imperial Conference of 1930, the service was supported in terms of its political powers of 'strengthening ties' between parts of the Empire<sup>3</sup>. This view is reflected in a speech by John Reith, the BBC's first Director General, which was broadcast when the Service opened. In this speech, broadcasting is identified as having come to involve, a 'connecting and co-ordinating link between the scattered parts of the British Empire'<sup>4</sup>. Empire and nation are re-instated through the routine coverage of cyclical events, which Scannell and Cardiff describe as follows:

Nothing so well illustrates the noiseless manner in which the BBC became perhaps *the* central agent of national culture as its cyclical role; the cyclical production year in year out, of an orderly, regular progression of festivities, rituals and celebrations-major and minor, civic and sacred-that mark the unfolding of the broadcast year' (1991:278, italics in original)

Sport plays a big part in these 'noiseless' cycles, along with religion, which is another key element in the making of the nation. Sport marks out time for the listener

Sport, of course, developed its own calendar very quickly. The winter season had its weekly observances of football, rugby and steeple-chasing, climaxing in the Boat Race, the Grand National and the Cup Final. Summer brought in cricket and flat racing, the test matches, Derby Day, Royal Ascot and Wimbledon' (ibid.:279)

The BBC is 'noiseless' because the time-table is assumed and taken for granted as not only what *is* but what *should* be. Sport assumes the mantle of legitimacy which might also be sanctioned, by association with religion and the state. These events are, of course, the ones that feature in the archive and in the General files and demonstrate the importance of particular sports as included in the making of the nation and also, by setting one agenda, indicate silences and absences. The coverage of sport is predominantly of men's sport at this point, coding the legacy of empire, as well as the reconfiguration of nation, as masculine and suggesting associations between particular versions of embodied heroic achievement in an alliance with patriarchy, as 'an exclusive respect for the genealogy of sons and fathers and the competition between brothers' (Irigaray, 1987:202). However, women are not entirely absent; they too can 'play the game', or, at least, some games.

Empire, like nation, operates as an 'imagined community', too big to be grasped by individuals (Anderson, 1983), as well as a material actuality. Sport is very capable of bringing the individual into the body of the nation and creating a sense of what it means to be British through its powerful identifications, embodied heroic acts and competitions which resonate with conflict and combat as well as its more subtle injunctions. The routes of identification can be circuitous, however (Clifford, 1999) and sport carries both positive and negative elements, for example in the extent to which it promotes or damages social inclusion ( Gilroy, 2004). At its most negative it might appear to present a pastiche of democratic processes of cohesion (Žižek, 1997) although the dynamics of identification are rarely linear and, as we aim to demonstrate there are inconsistencies and disruptions even when the voice is officially that of empire. The associations of sport with empire and nation demonstrate some of the mechanisms of assumption and the processes through which the discursive field becomes regulated and regulates itself in the re-production of a Foucauldian regime of truth (1971). Sport, at the outset was closely linked to empire and nation, but the experience of sport on the world service is much more diverse and nuanced.

### **3. Sport on the BBCWS: an overview of the schedule**

Sport is rarely classified as such in the literature of the BBCWS (for example, Briggs, 1995, Scannell and Cardiff, 1991 Born, 2005,). The classificatory systems deployed partially demonstrate the status of sport in the schedules; for example, certain sporting events are included unquestioningly in the schedule and, although the rationale is un-stated, the interconnections between dominant discourses remain unacknowledged. Sport is still

associated with play and whilst coverage is linked to community, solidarity and national identifications are assumed, it does not occupy the overtly moral high ground of drama and discussion programmes, which attract more explicit ethical direction, as evidenced by the production minutes. However, sport has its own distinctive features and reproduces its own identifications.

The coverage of sport at the BBCWS, during the period up to the 1970s, while retaining its corporate stance of objectivity, consistency of voice, attention to detail and thoroughness of preparation, was also fluid, flexible and responsive to changes in technology and audience, reflecting changing public tastes. Although the aim remained to offer something for everybody, the documents chart the rise and fall of particular sports and their popularity.

One key document which provides a revealing window on the service resulted from the BBC General Advisory Council's production of a closely researched report on the coverage of sport across the BBC, in 1966, including both television and radio, and within BBC Radio looking at both the domestic and the external service.

As the report itself notes, the BBC's overseas service was alone amongst the various global external services (such as Voice of America, Deustchewelle and Radio Moscow) in providing regular coverage of sporting events. It was able to do so because it alone, could utilize the coverage of a major domestic sports broadcaster for both expertise and live transmissions.<sup>5</sup>

By the mid 1960s, the domestic broadcasting of sport was spread across the BBC's three national networks; the Home service, the Light network and the Third network, with the bulk of output on the Third. However, sport amounted to only just over 3% of total broadcast hours of

which three-quarters were live commentaries and the remainder predominantly results and round-up shows, though they were supplemented by the very occasional quiz or feature. Of the live broadcasts, the core was provided by football and cricket commentaries. These are two sports with strongly inflected ethnicised, racialised, gendered and classed associations; cricket having powerful links to Empire (James, 1963, Gupta, 2004)) and British football representing a popular working class sport (Giulianotti, 1999, Giulianotti and Robertson,2004).

The report notes that, by the mid 1060s, audiences were certainly down from the pre-television era. However Test Matches, League and FA Cup football, Wimbledon and the major horse races could still get ratings in the millions. The 1966 World Cup Finals had a domestic radio audience of over two and half million. For major events that were not covered on television, like the 1963 Cassius Clay-Henry Cooper fight, the audience could balloon. The report records that 21 million tuned in to hear the fight. Even at home the idea of a monolithic or single British sports culture was subtly challenged by the coverage of sport on BBC regional radio. The report's notes on BBC Wales suggest that local events and sporting preferences reshaped the content of the networks programming.

The BBC's External Services appears similar to the domestic services. In 1965 about 3% of total output was sports coverage, predominantly live commentaries, supplemented by news and results services and the very occasional feature. The core of the network's sports programming was *Sports News* a fifteen minute results and news digest broadcast three times a day, plus one half-hour sports magazine programme a week. On the English-language overseas service, Saturday afternoon was given over to the third network's *Saturday Sport* show.

In scheduling terms, sports coverage was developed to meet listeners' demands. In promoting 'fair play' the BBC aimed to provide what listeners were seen to want. There was considerable variation across the sporting season and across the different language services, with sport constituting over an eighth of broadcasts to Australia and less than half a percentage point of air time on the German service. On the English language overseas service, sport actually made up 7.5 % of output, but in the summer, when cricket dominated the schedules, this could climb to over 10% of air time. Two years later, an internal analysis by the BBC revealed that the audience for these English-language broadcasts was considerable. The African audience, especially in West Africa was the largest, followed by the Asian audience, though the report noted that there remained a significant contingent of British expatriate listeners.<sup>6</sup>

Cricket's leading place in the schedules can be seen from the data for 1965 when live Cricket was aired for 133 hours, football for just 32 hours (although in 1966 this doubled with full coverage of the World Cup) and horse racing for 12. Alongside these three mainstays of the schedule External Service coverage included the entire major World and Commonwealth boxing title bouts and live coverage from the leading tennis tournaments.

Across all of the language services, the report describes a unity of purpose and recognition of 'the season' in British sport:

“...they all report major news and deal with sport in programmes reflecting the British way of life and events in this country. Accounts of major British sporting events such as Wimbledon, Henley or the Cup Final are featured in all the services; reports on international contests takes place in this country in which either the UK or teams from



the target areas are broadcast regularly. When an international event of first class importance takes place in this country...the most recent example is the World Cup competition – this claims attention from all the External Services.”<sup>7</sup>

One aspect of the British way of life which had spread and in which foreign audiences took a close interest was the pools:

“By taking advantage of the wide dissemination of British football pools coupons and relying on our reputation for accuracy, the World Service gains many listeners for its service for football results.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, even when attending to the core external service mission of representing the British “way of life, in this case through sport, there was also considerable sensitivity to the diversity of the audiences actually being addressed. Acknowledgement of local audience needs meant that, at major sporting events where a local athlete was performing, coverage on the language services could soar as high as 25% of a week’s output. Over the previous decade, the Far Eastern service had made a point of covering badminton and the Asian games, the Persian and Bulgarian services had covered wrestling and winter sports were reported more assiduously on the Europe language services.

In the early 1960s the service had covered the East African Rally competitions; it was noted that this was at least in part designed to help give exposure to British car manufactures in key African export markets. The External service would also provide ball-by-ball coverage of Test Matches in England for the visiting nations and even covered events not broadcast in the UK but of key importance elsewhere, for example the International Hockey Championship in

Hamburg which was avidly listened to in Kenya, Pakistan and India. The External Service also continued to provide live coverage of major international sporting events, like the Olympics, for the many developing nations who had no independent coverage of their own.

In addition to taking live coverage, foreign radio stations had, for many years, been re-broadcasting External service output. Here sport was central to the network's success in promoting its cultural diplomacy:

“Indeed, in some countries such as South Africa, Ghana , India , Pakistan and Malaysia sports programmes are the chief , if not the only ones, which are selected for rebroadcasting from the World Service. The fifteen minute Sports-Round Up broadcasting in the World Service three times a day is re-broadcast by twenty two different stations.”<sup>9</sup>

These twenty-two stations included countries as diverse as Kenya, Guyana, Malawi and New Zealand, while much of South Africa's radio sports coverage on a Saturday afternoon through the 1960s was provided by the BBC.

Further research into specific events and sports reinforces the evidence of the 1966 report that the cosmopolitan model of Britishness, the sensitivity to diverse audiences and their needs revealed within it were in evidence twenty years prior to its publication. The files on the service's coverage of the 1948 London Olympics and the ongoing coverage of Test Cricket, Tennis and Boxing are particularly revealing.

### **3.1 The Olympics**

We focus upon two sets of Olympic files, from the massive coverage of this sporting event in the archive for purposes of comparison and to demonstrate some of the transformations of Britishness that can be seen as taking over this period. Such big moments make enormous demands on the organization of the system and demonstrate the massive scope of the service as well as the detailed work which went into providing coverage and the Olympics have the advantage of including clear classifications of the nation and a diverse range of sports, as well as explicitly, at this point, incorporating the amateur ideal.

### **3.1.1 The 1948 London Olympics**

Lord Aberdare, President of the British Olympic Committee and the main mover in bringing the games to London in 1948, used the External Service as an element of his campaign, broadcasting his appeal to the IOC to give London the games in 1946. Aberdare was successful in his mission and alongside the Labour government of the day cast the Olympics in the same mold as the Festival of Britain as a pageant of creativity that would lighten the gloom of postwar austerity Britain, a public event that would capture something of the heroic spirit for the age, in building peace rather than making war. The 1948 Olympics presented the opportunity for a reconfiguration of Britishness, in which the BBC was strongly implicated.

The BBC External services were the centre of the media coverage of the games. Television, by contrast was absent. The scale and the scope of coverage, given the economic and technological limits of the era, were immense. The BBC alone was broadcasting the games on its Latin American, Arabic, Turkish, and English to India, Eastern, Far Eastern, North American,

Pacific, South African, Colonial, and European Services. The far Eastern service was broadcasting in seven languages –Korean, Kuyou, Chinese, Japanese, Siamese, Burmese, Malay, the European serviced in 21 languages. The importance of the BBC External service coverage can be seen from the transmission data below. The Overseas service transmissions exceeded all other broadcasters combined. In addition foreign radio stations were rebroadcasting the Overseas Service’s transmissions themselves , in Latin America on- and-a-half hours of BBC material was played daily on over 100 Latin American stations including many who had their own representatives at the games as well.

**Radio Transmissions from BBC transmitter at Wembley Stadium: London 1948 Olympics <sup>10</sup>**

<b>Transmission Types</b>	<b>Radio Transmissions from Wembley</b>
<b>BBC Overseas Service</b>	831
<b>BBC Home Service</b>	54
<b>BBC Light Programme</b>	53
<b>European Radio Stations</b>	545

**BBC Overseas Services: Broadcasting of the 1948 London Olympics <sup>11</sup>**

General Overseas Service	28h 40m	English
North American	34h 25m	English and French
Eastern	13h 47m	English, Hindustani, Turkish, Arabic, Persian
Far Eastern	11h 35m	English, Kuoyu, Korean, Burmese, Japanese, Chinese, Malay, Siamese
Latin American	30h	Portuguese, Spanish
African	3h 45m	English, Afrikaans
Pacific	4h 35m	English
Colonial	3h 30m	English

Given such a central place in the media production and transmission of the first great internal sporting event of the post war era, the BBC external service adopted a remarkably open minded attitude to its role. On the one hand the traditional purposes of the service were emphasized in a Memo from the head of the European Service, who argue that the BBC should be:

- “ (1)to reflect in its output the great international sporting event taking place in Britain;
- (2) to provide a service for European broadcasting organizations by enabling their reporters to cover the games.” <sup>12</sup>

But his was immediately counterbalanced by the note:

“..our commentators should try to give a balanced picture of the whole games...always bearing in mind that our reporting must not be on narrow nationalistic lines.”<sup>13</sup>

This was a point made even more strongly in a memo from John Arlott of the Eastern Service reflecting on the commentator’s who provided Olympics coverage for the Indian sub-continent:

“...it was the intention to establish at the outset of the games our commentator as broadcasting specifically the views of the games most interesting to India and Pakistan. The instructions that I gave to Mr. Edelston were to place himself above all Indian and Pakistan listeners, to identify himself with them, to make it clear that he was catering for them only...”.<sup>14</sup>

Impartiality does involve endeavouring to enable full access to a range of listeners as possible, or at least the acknowledgement that the listening constituency does not only comprise expatriate communities.

### **3.1.2 Mexico 1968**

The 1948 Olympics were probably the high water mark of the BBC as a sports’ broadcaster. Comparison with later games suggests a diminished role, registering the impact of transformations in networks of power that occurred across the globe and especially the decline of empire. 1948 offered a unique historical moment: not only did the BBC have the best technical facilities, they also had the legitimacy conferred by their role in the defeat of Nazism, reflecting Britain’s post war position as a victor who fought for a culture that embodied fair-

play, impartiality and civilized values, (Germany and Japan had been excluded from the Games, while the USSR boycotted them). The dismantling of formal properties of empire for example through the independence of India did not of course diminish many of the political and cultural force of imperialism and the BBC retained the authority to speak on behalf of and to the rest of the world.

Twenty years later in Mexico it was a different story. Britain's Imperial power had receded in the intervening years while the globalization of sport had continued at a rapid pace. The gulf between the BBC's perception of its mandate and the actuality of a post- colonial world widened. This, combined with the arrival of television, which accelerated the global appetite for sport and the spread of the technologies to disseminate it, gave rise to a much altered scenario in the preparations for 1968, where decisions about coverage were influenced by machinic technologies as well as political considerations.

The European Broadcast Commission, which had organized a consortium of European broadcasters to carry coverage of the 1964 games in Tokyo presented a rival service. The BBC refused to join, preferring to remain aloof of this organization and to differentiate itself from the European venture while stressing the singularity of the British project; a trend that was confirmed by the BBC's decision to form a separate Commonwealth Pool.

In a report later that year<sup>15</sup>, Max Muller head of outside broadcasts, wrote that, "these arrangements had two main advantages. We were able to pool certain programme resources with other Commonwealth organizations. Secondly, the BBC was able to deal direct...instead of having to work through the slightly cumbersome machinery of the EBU. This resulted in the

Corporation obtaining far superior broadcasting facilities at venues to those provided for the other EBU radio organizations”.

Meanwhile, the Commonwealth operation had been of great benefit to the participating nations, “although the major Commonwealth broadcasting organizations could have worked as well on their own as working through the parent group, the people who really gained from the formation of such a group were the newer Commonwealth Broadcasting organizations, such as Nigeria, India, Hong Kong etc. Isolated on their own many of the single-handed teams would have experienced considerable difficulties without the help and backing of the parent group”<sup>16</sup>.

The heavily paternalistic tone appears again in his comments regarding their European rivals, “If it is felt that BBC Radio must work through the EBU, I suggest that some safeguard should be made for other Commonwealth members not in such a strong position as ourselves”.

At an EBU meeting of the Sound Broadcasting Committee, an Expert Working Party on the Mexico City Olympics 1968, held in Geneva on the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sept 1965, including German, Belgian, French, Italian, Norwegian and Swiss representatives, Max argued for and won special consideration from the Commonwealth. Assuming there would be another broadcasting pool, the minutes noted that “bound by a common language, the Commonwealth Group would like its own representative in the EBU Operations Group, so that not only could facilities be negotiated for it but also...a steady flow of relevant information could be continually fed to its members”<sup>17</sup>.

Having chosen an Australian in as Operations Manager, Arthur Povah of ABC, the BBC then opted out of the EBU in the early 1967, “in order to run the Commonwealth Pool”, still



confident that the former colonies would rally round the flag. The initial feedback was encouraging if not a stampede of interest, as noted in a report by the Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference Secretariat, “ of the 19 Commonwealth Broadcasting organizations consulted four ( Cyprus, Malawi, Sierra Leone and Tanzania ) are unwilling to participate; two ( Kenya and Pakistan ) have made no reply at all: five ( Ceylon, India, Malta, Uganda and Zambia ) are agreeable in principle but are considering the cost factor in relation to national participation and policy etc: and eight ( Australia, Britain, Canada, Ghana, Jamaica, Malaysia, New Zealand and Nigeria ) definitely support the project”<sup>18</sup>. However he was confident that the seven neutral states would comply.

The reality was somewhat different in a world of emergent nations shrugging off their colonial heritage, more complex and harder to predict. As Max Muller conceded in a report written after the Games, “the response from Commonwealth organizations in the end was disappointing”. Only four members joined with the BBC, the Australian Broadcasting Commission, New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation, All India Radio, Jamaica Broadcasting. This put pressure on resources and staffing leading to the minor humiliation of working “very closely with the European Broadcasting Union”. Although Muller admits that “in many instances this was of considerable benefit”, he is quick to remind us that it was also of “considerable benefit” for the Pool members “not to be tied to the much larger EBU operation”<sup>19</sup>.

While trying to maintain a positive outlook, “the operation was well worth doing”, it is clear the concept of creating a separate Commonwealth bloc that could form a large broadcasting nucleus for BBC coverage of such major events, maintaining the influence and independence of

its voice, its father figure persona and its universality, was redundant, “Whether similar facilities are required for the 1972 Games in Munich is for discussion. It might be thought better to let individual organizations deal with the German Broadcasting Consortium set up to look after broadcasters”<sup>20</sup>.

### **3.2. Test Cricket**

The files on the BBC External Services coverage on test match cricket, particularly the tours of overseas teams to the UK are amongst the richest and most complete in the archive reflecting the high level of coverage accorded these events and the high prestige in which they were held at home and abroad. Cricket also offers the closest links between colonialism and Britishness, in this case largely encoded as Englishness. Despite the huge popularity of football in the post-war period, the football league recording record levels of attendance for five years after the end of the war, its place as the national game was challenged by cricket. The scheduling dominance of cricket and its coverage suggest that the game more effectively embodied the national character than football. Writing in the 1930s, the Guardian’s music and cricket correspondent, Neville Cardus, was able to write:

“If everything else in this nation of ours was lost but cricket – her Constitution and the laws of England of Lord Halsbury – it would be possible to reconstruct from the theory and the practice of cricket all the eternal Englishness which has gone to the establishment of that constitution and the laws aforesaid.”<sup>21</sup>

However, even amongst the cricket fraternity there had been for some considerable time a sense that the game was not wholly English or British, but part of the essential cultural fabric of

the wider British Empire. Englishness and Britishness elide frequently in these sporting stories and it is not chance that it is English cricket with its histories of gentlemen and players and the English cricket team, rather than teams of any of the nations that make up the UK that carries the most powerful imbrications of empire. Australia had demonstrated the potency of colonial cricket over sixty years before when they won the first test match series against England . Since then South African, Indian, West Indian and New Zealand teams had all shown considerable prowess in the game, although as yet unable to defeat England in a test series, and had amongst the elite of commentators, demonstrated their own distinctive styles of playing the game.

Given cricket's central place in the construction of both national and imperial identities, it is hardly surprising that the 1946 tour by the All-India side attracted considerable interest and ideological baggage. At a point of political disruption wrought by the processes of decolonization and fragmentation along religious and ethnic lines, the all India teams' tour was emblematic of both Indian unity (the ethnic make-up of the team was remarkably balanced drawing on Hindus, Christian and Muslim) and the umbilical linkages between centre and periphery.<sup>22</sup>

It was an event of sufficient importance and interest inside the BBC for a memo to be issued stating that for reasons of expense and time only a very limited number of people would actually be able to attend the Indian team's arrival. Coverage of the tour began on the team's arrival in London with a special broadcast of fifteen minutes consisting of personal messages. It would continue through the summer with daily reports, on the spot interviews and summaries

being delivered, in three languages, from all the team's test matches as well as a considerable number of games against the MCC, Oxbridge varsity sides and county teams. The following year, the external service would broadcast the South African Tour at an even higher level of coverage including games against the combined services team and all three days of the Gentleman vs. Players game at Lords as well. Commentary and summaries were broadcast alternately in Afrikaans and English on the African service, in three languages on the Eastern services as well as specially tailored reports in English for the Pacific and General Overseas networks. The appetite for cricket was so great that only the most minor of matches were deemed superfluous. As one internal memo noted:

“DCA feels that the African service is approaching saturation point with cricket and suggests that unless you have strong feelings about it, we should tell Northern Ireland we have decided not to broadcast”<sup>23</sup>

In a memo from Director of Eastern Services in January 1946 to the Director of Outside Broadcast, requests for at least this level of coverage were emphasized –

“The tour of the all-India team this summer is going to be matter of outstanding interest for our broadcasts to India. We are already getting correspondence asking for maximum coverage in Eastern Services.”<sup>24</sup>

India was not the only place calling for more cricket on the radio. The next decade saw a steady growth in the level of cricket coverage on the BBC's domestic and external services. By 1951 the corporation had begun to experiment with ball-by-ball commentary of test Cricket. Parts of the 1951 South African tour received this treatment as did the 1953 Australian tour. By 1957 the

format had been settled and test match Special was launched offering all-day, ball-by-ball coverage on both domestic and external services, while in 1959 the England tour to Australia was the first “overseas tour” broadcast back to the UK and around the world.

While cricket carried a diverse set of meanings in different parts of the Commonwealth and what was left of the empire, the External services were most alert to the sensitivities of India. In the same memo calling for maximum coverage the author goes on to say:

“New Delhi office says, “Cricket commentaries, especially in English, creating greatest interest yet in Eastern Service programmes and widely acclaimed and publicized. Will cable further reactions but already obvious Hindustani commentaries high prestige value”.”<sup>25</sup>

That value was in part political.

“I would point out that a very high proportion of the listeners to our Eastern Service in English are Indians; and that at the present time there are genuine and urgent reasons for fostering anything which promotes goodwill towards Britain amongst Indians, even in modest realm of sport”.”<sup>26</sup>

The recognition of the political and cultural value of these cricket broadcasts to Britain suggests, at one level a direct and instrumental imperialism. However, the most revealing document in the files suggests quite the contrary. An internal memo written in January 1946 raises the idea that the BBC Eastern Service could round off the tour of the Indian cricket team by holding a studio based discussion comparing and contrasting Indian and English cricket.<sup>27</sup>

The proposed members of the panel were Prof D.B Deodhar, Abdul Hamid, John Arlott, Arthur Russell and as Chair of the conversation, black Caribbean cricketer, Leary Constantine then playing professionally in the Lancashire cricket leagues. It is not clear from the files whether the programme was made, though notes in the margins suggest general approval. More significantly, it is hard to imagine anywhere else in the British public sphere in 1946, that a conversation could be held between Indians, Britons and a black West Indian on within so equitable a framework of expertise.

The balance of power between colonizer and colonized had shifted even further by 1952, five years after Indian independence, Rex Alston, the Director of Outside Broadcasts sent a memo to commentators and announcers at the BBC covering the Indian cricket tour that summer:

“The Anglo-Indian fraternity is both irritable and vociferous and we shall cause much annoyance both at home and overseas if we do not adopt it.”<sup>28</sup>

A similar sensitivity can be detected in the discussion notes of the 1951 South African tour which made clear that the sound of bow bells was not to be broadcast on the Afrikaans service<sup>29</sup>, while the desire not to antagonize the subcontinent’s enormous cricket audience were expressed in a memo considering the first test tour to England by Pakistan in 1954.

“this is just to let you know that our various broadcasts on the coming test matches will be heard in India as well as Pakistan. In view of the difficult political situation which at present exists between these two countries would everyone avoid invidious comparisons between Indian and Pakistani cricket standards.”<sup>30</sup>

A final coda in the files to this steady drift of opinion with the external services comes in an exchange of letters in 1959 over the employment of Indian commentators and summarizers on the English-language world service coverage of India's tour of England including the Maharajkumar of Vizianagaram and Pearson Surita. Vizzy as the Maharaja was colloquially known got the gig, but there were real doubts about Surita, who in a complete reversal of the older colonial expectations, was deemed too English for the role. The head of the overseas general services referred to him as "more English than English". While another senior figure wrote <sup>31</sup>

"With regard to Surita – although he is by far the best commentator, I can see little point in your using him in GOS as he sounds like "a retired Indian colonel."<sup>32</sup>

The archive reveals both perceptive awareness of the wider social and cultural context, as well as well as the assumed reiteration of very traditional British values, through the enormous attention to detail in the decision making process to ensure what is stated as fair treatment in accordance with the principles of the service. Britishness and Englishness elide in cricket more than in many sports, for example rugby, which is not only played by Wales, Ireland and Scotland, but also has different meanings in relation to social class in these nations and between union and league. Cricket is implicated in a particular version of empire, but the earlier discussion of the need to accommodate different diasporic audiences prefigures more recent, 2007, shifts in the power geometry of sport towards the Indian sub Continent<sup>33</sup>.

Coverage of sport demonstrates some of the ambiguities of 'fair play'; the divisions of class, gender, race and ethnicity muddy the field of play and it is these tensions with which the world

service has to deal. Whilst these factors always articulate together there are moments and sports in which sport offers more opportunities for democratization and broadcasting space opens up possibilities for different voices to be heard. The impartiality that is pivotal to the version of Britishness promoted by the BBC WS opens up some possibility of disruption and transformation and is often played out through the inclusion of these new inflections.

#### **4. Impartiality: Inclusion and Exclusion**

Just as impartiality and an adherence to a code of practices drawing on notions of honour and fair play are key components of the field of play in sport, so too do they underpin the language of policy making at the BBC World Service. Impartiality is coded in a variety of ways one of which is the discourse of inclusion and there is meticulous detail given to the project of being fair. Impartiality is interpreted with different weightings; clearly the emphasis in the archive material upon which we draw in this study, is upon production and broadcasting which provides the main trajectory for the values of objectivity in the version of Britishness expressed in the voice of the BBC. The relationship between impartiality and authority is mediated by the service's commitment to both the reinstatement of British values and the desire to make the service widely available to a diverse diasporic audience. Some sports belong more in the colonial tradition than others. Cricket has strong links to empire and other sports also have powerful class-based connections, for example tennis, which, in this section is set in contrast to a sport with particularly meaningful associations with the opposite of the class hierarchy and with migrant peoples often from dispossessed groups, boxing. One aspect of inclusion can be demonstrated by gender, for example through scheduling more egalitarian sports, such as



athletics and, in the case of the BBC, tennis. However, sports such as tennis which offer greater opportunities for gender inclusion may also deny other aspects of inclusion, for example in terms of class and geography.

#### **4.1 Tennis**

Post-war tennis has held a tenuous, fluctuating place in the nation's heart, largely due to Britain's failure to produce champions or even contenders at an international level. Tennis also carries the burden of its class associations within the lexicon of Britishness, which elide with those of gender, race and ethnicity. Tennis was acknowledged to be a 'niche market'<sup>34</sup>, defined by its exclusive and narrow social base in Britain. Unlike cricket or football, it rarely became a focus for collective aspirations or patriotic fervor. The BBC's radio coverage of tennis endorsed rather than challenged the aura of gentility and middle-class manners that permeated the sport, perpetuating an introverted and elitist vision, most dramatically displayed in its relationship to Wimbledon, the jewel in the broadcasters' tennis crown.

Referred to simply as "The Championship", a title conferred on the competition by its organizers and reproduced by the BBC in its correspondence, Wimbledon became exclusively the preserve of the BBC, as the only broadcaster deemed worthy of dealing directly with the All England Club. Social class based networks resulted in it having a monopoly of access to the courts, seats, broadcasting channels and facilities, which it then distributed to broadcasters from all over the world and from foreign services at the BBC, (the Hebrew section, Arab, Latin American etc), making them the effective custodians of the tournament and what it

represented and signified. The BBC became the guardian of this particular version of British fair play, celebrating its insularity.

Glaringly there was no attempt to broadcast the other three Grand Slams, French, Australian, American. Over twenty odd years of documents there is not a single memo even raising the notion. In terms of dedicated BBC coverage they did not exist. The only tournaments other than Wimbledon that merited attention were defined by their nationalistic, patriotic identifications: the Davis Cup and the Wightman Cup, Britain v USA, both team competitions in which the nation took precedence over the individual.

However, the BBC did show some of the flexibility and sensitivity to wider, more inclusive concerns that it demonstrated when dealing with other sports, reflecting the need to maintain a balancing act between competing national and international interests and claims on airtime by different audiences for different events. This is illustrated by the clashes that are noted in the schedules, whether because match duration can be unpredictable and coverage might interfere with other items like the news<sup>35</sup>, or music<sup>36</sup>, (tennis usually prevailed over music on Radio 3) or, more interestingly, when one sport clashes with another.

In 1955 it was decided that the men's singles' finals at Wimbledon should take precedence over short, ten minute reports on the second and third days of a test match in South Africa, which should therefore be reduced to five minutes( letter J.A. Terraine,m 1955, on the Wimbledon Afrikaans coverage). Wimbledon Afrikaans coverage however, occupies some space in the tennis archive and is a concern of overseas language coverage, another aspect of inclusion on the world service.

Where tennis coverage proved the exception to the rule was in its efforts to cover the women's game. Classified as 'ladies' in tennis as in virtually all sport, their matches formed part of the schedule, (although the commentators were all men, the contests were taken no less seriously<sup>37</sup>). Women are also interviewed, as the winner of the women's singles, Maria Bueno, was in July 1959. The same code of conduct in relation to success and failure applies to women as to men and Bueno is asked if her opponent, the US Darlene Hard, was a 'good sport' in losing, a view which Bueno enthusiastically endorses, showing that women's tennis exists on a similar plane, except that she is permitted to display her joy at winning by crying, not largely an avenue open to men at the time<sup>38</sup>.

The different pressures and imperatives at work in the scheduling of tennis on BBC radio offers some insight into the often contradictory impulses governing the decision making process. The BBC's use of Wimbledon as a private member's club few were permitted to join, ran directly contrary to its remit and in the case of the WS, against everything its coverage of other sports, notably cricket, aspired to achieve. However, as the documents demonstrate repeatedly, requests for tickets and broadcast materials from all over the world were treated with the same thoroughness and attention to detail as always, the BBC acted without prejudice. Women were permitted some of the spot light. International considerations and needs could not be ignored.

It was impossible to deny the fact that tennis was no longer owned by the British, the sport was truly global and played almost everywhere to a higher standard than in the mother country, leaving the BBC to claim territorial rights over a quintessentially British tournament which

British players routinely failed to make any impression on. The materiality of sport itself can disrupt as well as conform to the agendas and strategies of broadcasters.

## **4.2 Boxing**

Boxing, with its powerful associations with migrant and diasporic peoples and narratives of escape from poverty and oppression for young men (Woodward, 2007) experienced a revival of popular interest in Britain in the 1960s as evidenced by scheduling evidence; full live coverage of the major bouts for both domestic service and the WS was an unquestioned essential for the broadcasters. Boxing drew the biggest radio audiences in the UK from late 1950s to early 1970s, regularly around twenty million listeners for contests which were then rebroadcast on the WS, often several times the following day<sup>39</sup>.

Boxing was the main arena of collaboration and cooperation between UK and US broadcasters. Arrangements with NBC and ABC meant British reporters could broadcast ringside from Madison Square Garden and Las Vegas, directly to the audience at home. This may well have contributed to the allure of the sport, transmitting the glamour and appeal of the US at the end of the 1950s, offering a chance to take part in the American Dream, experience the exoticism of location in these mythical places, dramatized by the time differences, sitting up in the middle of the night to hear the crackle and fizz of New Yorkers gathered for the big fight.

At 3.09 in the morning, May 26<sup>th</sup> 1965, the WS joined the Light Programme for ringside coverage of the Clay v Liston Smith fight in its entirety. Programmes on the WS due to be

bumped, depending on the duration of the fight, which necessitated a complicated scheduling timetable, were News About Britain, The World Today, Stock Exchange Report, Daily Service, Folk Songs of Britain and London Letter. The rescheduling was repeated twice, suggesting that the BBCWS was maintaining its commitment to responding to listeners' needs and that the service was able to incorporate different sports into its schedules. The particular appeal of boxing during this period is due to a number of factors: the undoubted power and excitement of listening to a fight on the radio (Woodward, 2007). Britishness in the early post war period was reconstituted in specific ways to accommodate the influence of the USA and the popularity of boxing illustrates this aspect of the reconfiguration. It was an era of spectacularly talented individuals within the sport, especially heavyweight fighters, the 'when we were kings' era, plus there was a strong British presence, signified by the emergence of Henry Cooper. His fight with Cassius Clay in 1966 was a massive event, WS providing commentary for outside broadcasters. Boxing also leant itself to a revisiting of particularly gendered versions of Britishness, with a strongly traditional version of masculinity. These are compelling reasons for the appeal of boxing, but they do not fully explain the immense attraction of the "big fights". Although there was extensive coverage these titanic contests, coverage of the sport on both the WS and the Domestic Service was negligible, almost non-existent. The fighters contending the heavyweight crown were mostly African-Americans, offering no direct linkages to Britishness or Empire, but the US influence is temporally specific and in this instance sport forms part of the reworking of post war Britishness demonstrating the advent of a transatlantic 'special relationship'.

Although sport is often manipulated for ideological ends, sports themselves are material in their constitution and broadcasting can be led by sports as well as decisions of policy makers and broadcasters. Sporting endeavour can also exude such fascination, glamour and power that public interest is engaged. Sport can eclipse more narrow national, ethnic and sectarian interpretations, tapping into a massive global audience for the spectacle, the act itself. On radio, heavyweight boxing achieved something like this during the Sixties.

## **5. Conclusion**

This article has focused on particular times, which predate the transforming and often liberating technologies of the internet, but we have sought to show that sport is both typical and distinctive of the BBC world service; something that is part of a wider picture but also a area of experience with a life of its own. Our purpose has been to explore some of the routes the World Service has travelled in its engagement with sport to provide some understanding of the legacy of empire and patriarchy and understanding of the multiplicities of change in the reconstruction of Britishness. This version of Britishness gives particular emphases to 'fair play' and to impartiality as well as, sometimes overtly, sometimes implicitly, representing a colonialist discourse of imperialist identifications.

The BBCWS appears to play a key role in framing and shaping diasporic contact zones, but this cannot be read as a uni-linear narrative because of the diversity of the diasporic audience and the reiteration of the need to engage with the dynamic of change, in sport and in social

relations. The process is dynamic because sport sports generate their own versions of fair play, ranging from the gentlemanly practices of cricket to the raw, polarized combat of boxing.

What began with BBC Sport merged with BBCWS sport, necessarily given the concentration on global sport and international competition on the network. Coverage of big events was maintained through the 1930s and into the 1960s in the development of the BBCWS. However, it is not only the global dimensions of sporting events that are taken for granted, so too are national identifications, with Britishness or Englishness, all under the aegis of an assumed impartiality of 'playing by the rules' and the fair play of sport. The superiority of British/ English sport is naturalised through its dominance of the BBCWS airways, but the possibilities of re-interpretation and re-accommodation are also made possible. The major period covered in the paper demonstrates that the changing place of sport in the BBCWS can only be understood with reference to wider changes in the relationship between broadcasting and sport and demonstrates the powerful synchronies between social, political, technological, economic and cultural factors. This is apparent even at historical moments, such as during the Second World War when the Empire Service played a particularly important and didactic role in communicating home to the military. However, the narrative of change is not linear and can be more usefully understood as manifesting multiplicities that encompass disruptions and accommodations and, most importantly, the BBCWS provides a space for the pursuit of sporting interests and engagement with the politics as well as the pleasures of sport. Diasporic audiences shape the schedule and so does what is broadcast. There is no single voice of the BBC in sport.

The stories derived from the BBC archive demonstrate a variety of narratives through the development and transformation of the world service's sports broadcasting. There are silences, notably involving those involving women; sport is a patriarchal field. However, different strands interweave through the imperial genealogies of sport inextricably entwined with the social,

political and cultural changes taking place in the wider world. There is no detectable linear narrative but rather a series of tensions and contradictions that are reflected up and re-configured in the texts in which deliberations are made. The relationship of the BBCWS with its listeners is dialogic rather than presenting a univocal imperative expressing the voice of empire in a one way narrative.

Voices of empire underpin the state of play in that sports are played through the genealogy of colonialism, but there are disruptions that represent change and the emergence of more democratic versions of Britishness. The over pervading ethos of the archive material is detailed discussion and engagement with 'fair play' on all counts. Before equal opportunities or diversity policies had been put into discourse the BBCWS was nonetheless concerned with social inclusion, if only because the service has always been responsive to its listeners and also because sport has the potential to open up new, transnational, democratic sources of identification.

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<sup>1</sup> The first stage in this research has focused on textual and discourse analysis of data from the BBC Written Archive at Caversham Park, including the Empire Service and London Calling, , General Files, which include Programme Records, Schedules and Production Minutes . Radio Outside Broadcast files included 1) cricket test matches and series, 1946-1974, 2) Football World Cups (men's) 1946-1978, 3) Olympic Games, 1948-1980, 4) Boxing 1946-1974. 5) Tennis 1946-1970. No scripts of sports' broadcasts were available, although such material is available for drama and talks/discussion programmes. The ephemeral nature of the sporting event, albeit one that has resonance in the collective memory of the nation, may account for this absence.



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<sup>2</sup> Football provides a particular case in which the BBC has no special privileges to cover the world cup, even when it is in the UK as was the case in 1966, an interesting example when all memoranda were about hotel bookings and domestic arrangements, since nobody knew it was to be England's greatest ever moment. The BBC is just another provider, in awe of FIFA which distributes broadcasting rights

<sup>3</sup> 'Opening of the Empire Service', John Reith, 19 December 1932, in 'Empire Service Policy 1932-1933', E4/6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid .

<sup>5</sup> BBC WAC E40/110/1 Sport General

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> BBC WAC R30/2,060/1 Olympic Games 1948.

<sup>11</sup> BBC WAC R30/2,006/1 Olympic Games 1948.

<sup>12</sup> BBC WAC R30/2,046/2 Olympic Games 1948, File 1B.

<sup>13</sup> BBC WAC R30/2,046/2 Olympic Games 1948, File 1B.

<sup>14</sup> BBC WAC R30/2,046/3 Olympic Games 1948, File 2.

<sup>15</sup> R30/4502/1=Olympic games summer 68, EBU

<sup>16</sup> ibid

<sup>17</sup> R30/4503/1-Olympic games Summer 1968, EBU

<sup>18</sup> R30/4502/1 – Olympic Games Summer 68 EBU

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- <sup>19</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>20</sup> R30/4501/1-Olympic Games Summer 1968, Commonwealth Pool
- <sup>21</sup> N.Cardus (1930) *Cricket*, London: Longman, p.6
- <sup>22</sup> R.Guha (2002) *A Corner of a Foreign Field: The Indian History of an English Game*, London Picador.
- <sup>23</sup> BBC WAC R30/3081/1 – Cricket, South African Tour 1947
- <sup>24</sup> BBC WAC R30/1319/1 Indian Cricket Touring Team
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> BBC WAC R30/1319/2 Indian Cricket Touring Team
- <sup>29</sup> BBC WAC R30/3018/1 Cricket: South African team
- <sup>30</sup> BBC WAC R30/2165/1 Cricket Pakistan Tour
- <sup>31</sup> BBC WAC R30/1319/3 Indian Cricket Touring Team
- <sup>32</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/worldhaveyoursay/>
- <sup>34</sup> R30/4538/1, 1967
- <sup>35</sup> R30/4540/3
- <sup>36</sup> R30/4540/5
- <sup>37</sup> R30/3712/5
- <sup>38</sup> R30/3712/6
- <sup>39</sup> BBC WAC E40/110/1 Sport General

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