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The Falkland Islands, international sporting competition, and evolving (post-Brexit) paradiplomacy

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the Falkland Islands’ participation in international sport. Argentinean opposition has frustrated the Falklands’ attempts to join bodies such as the IOC and FIFA, but the Islands themselves are nevertheless participants in the Commonwealth Games, Island Games, and other tournaments. First, this article discusses how sport reflects changes in post-1982 Falklands society. It also examines challenges related to personnel and logistics. Next, it interrogates why the Falklands participate in tournaments, including asserting “Britishness” and sovereignty. Finally, this article discusses prospects for new facilities, the likelihood of hosting an Island Games, and Pan-American competition. These developments are driven largely by Falkland Islanders themselves. Aside from the purported health and social benefits of sport, in the era of ‘Brexit’ they represent a means through which paradiplomacy is performed.

Keywords: Commonwealth of Nations, British Overseas Territories, Commonwealth Games, Falkland Islands, Island Games

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Introduction

In 2019, Mark Nightingale, then the sport development officer of the Falkland Islands Overseas Games Association (FIOGA), introduced a piece in the 6 September issue of Stanley weekly newspaper the *Penguin News* by stating that:

We can deservedly celebrate a great winter of sport; the Island Games in Gibraltar and the Bisley Rifle shooting competition to name but two. We’re also competing in hockey in Miami as we speak; not bad for the little old Falklands” (*Penguin News*, hereafter *PN*, 6 September 2019).

Nightingale then discussed a wide range of activities taking place as the Islands entered the summer – badminton, football, squash, table tennis, netball, swimming, running, hockey, and target sports – along with information, for both adults and children, on where and when these sports were played. It hints at a vibrant sporting culture. Outside observers, British and otherwise, have long noted the Falklands as a society which enjoyed both outdoor and indoor sport (McDowell, 2020). As is typically the case with the Falklands, however, the subject of the 1982 War and the continuing dispute over Argentina regarding the Islands’ sovereignty, is not far from the conversation. This is especially the case for the Falklands’ participation in international sport, where sport – beyond health and development considerations – is continually used to telegraph the Islands’ citizens’ “Britishness” and overwhelming preference to remain a British Overseas Territory. Despite the ongoing fallout over the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union (hereafter referred to as ‘Brexit’), Falklands sport officials have widened their ambitions for competition, rather than limited them, and this must accordingly

be seen as an effort driven by Islanders themselves to advance their own agenda regarding sovereignty, in an era where the mother country is increasingly viewed by British Overseas Territories as erratic and unreliable. This article examines sport and the Falklands: its post-1982 history, the politics of international sporting participation, the logistics of competition, and its future prospects, especially with regard to sporting participation within the framework of institutions dominated by Latin American and Caribbean polities.

Historical context and literature

Within “second-order” sporting competitions (including the Commonwealth Games, in which the Falkland Islands participate), academics have noted that *hosting* them has been viewed by policymakers in peripheral polities as a (risky) means of attempting to gain geopolitical power and recognition (Black, 2008). Benwell (2016), whilst believing that the Falklands’ participation in the Commonwealth and Island Games was “not overtly diplomatic in nature”, nevertheless noted it brought exposure to the Islands, particularly to youth. The mere existence of a Falkland Islands national team has a dual function in terms of what Xifra (2009) states is paradiplomacy as a “noncentral” governmental actor, and what Grydehøj (2011) notes as strategic “place branding” from a small-island polity. According to Baldacchino and Milne (2006), sub-national island jurisdictions (SNIJs) such as the Falklands have considerable benefits in terms of governance, particularly in the ability to create social policies and tourism strategies whilst relying on security nets provided by the “mainland” states. Androus and Greymorning (2016), however, believe this pays little attention to the individual circumstances of SNIJs, especially the history and demographics of indigeneity versus settlement. This tension is reflected in sport. Sotomayor (2016) argues that Puerto Rico’s status as a sporting “nation” has allowed the US commonwealth to gain voting and logistical power within world sporting bodies aligned to the Olympic movement. However, Menary (2017) believes that, whilst many nations have had their postcolonial identity acknowledged via sport’s governing bodies, this has paradoxically solidified some quasi-colonial relationships. He states that *French* professional football, including the French men’s national team, has benefitted in terms of migration of talent from its Caribbean and Pacific colonies having national associations and development programmes of their own. More relevant to British Overseas Territories, the Confederation of North, Central America, and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) membership of the Turks and Caicos Islands was heavily expedited by now-disgraced chair Jack Warner as a means of getting pliant votes on the Confederation’s board (Menary, 2017).

Regarding British overseas territories and crown dependencies, Johnson (2015) examines contemporary matters, notably the struggle to find an appropriate “national” anthem for Jersey for sporting occasions, and how international sport allows non-state polities opportunities for articulating their own identity. So too do Pinkerton and Benwell (2018), who note the irony of Gibraltar hosting the 2019 Island Games after the UK’s 2016 Brexit referendum. The 2019 Games, while not themselves sitting within a “European” institution, were the culmination of Gibraltarian ambitions regarding sporting recognition; hosting them was precipitated by the recognition of Gibraltar as a “nation” by UEFA, and this in turn was possible (from a legal standpoint) due to Gibraltar’s then-membership of the EU. The work of Gold (2002) and Stockey (2012), however, acknowledges that sport, historically, reflects a dynamic Gibraltarian-UK-Spanish relationship regarding both sovereignty and culture; and, linked to this, Grocott and Stockey (2012) have noted since the 1980s the creation of a “Gibraltarian” identity which is linked to “Britishness”, but exists independently of it. Aside from a small

chapter in Menary's 2007 book, however, there is comparably little focus in English-language literature on how sport reflects the Falklands' shifting place within the international order.

Historical and contemporary sport in the Falkland Islands are reflective of the geography and the political situation of the British Overseas Territory. Sport is certainly not the only external representation of Falklands' nationhood, but it is significant enough for (amongst others) Argentinean scholars to have taken notice of it (Ciccone, 2017). The Falklands' own unique sporting history has been driven by broader geopolitics: its proximity to South America, and by Argentina's continuing claims of sovereignty over what they refer to as *las Islas Malvinas*. But, indeed, sport in the Falklands is also reflective of its own internal geography and citizens' understanding of the Islands' spatiality, power, and sovereignty (Bale, 2003; Koch 2016).

Before the 1982 conflict, sporting culture in the Falklands was well-developed, and largely influenced by three key factors: an agricultural economy, a military presence, and the near-Antarctic climate. Since the late nineteenth century, annual horse-racing events have been held in Stanley and in Camp (the Falklands countryside) on East Falkland: the former on Boxing Day, and the latter near the end of February, at the conclusion of the sheep-shearing season. Races were primarily between horses used in agriculture, and other contests often featured tests of appropriate skill, amongst other sports such as foot races. Despite the trickle of population away from Camp, and the replacement of horses as beasts of burden by motorcycles, both the Stanley Christmas Sports and Camp Sports continue to be held annually and are major events on the Falklands social calendar (Watts, 2012). Falklands farmers also compete in annual international sheep-shearing competitions, sheep-shearing being a sport where the Falklands enjoy recognition as a sovereign polity. Rifle shooting, though, has a long history which dates from the mid-nineteenth century, and since 1908 the Falklands' volunteer soldiers have taken part in the annual tournaments of the UK's National Rifle Association (NRA) at Bisley, Surrey (Ellerby, 1990; *PN*, 23 October 1980). Meanwhile, a harsh winter climate is largely responsible for the considerable participation in badminton and darts. Badminton especially enjoys considerable participation for both men and women; and, since 1956, the Stanley Badminton Club (nominally recognised as the Falkland Islands' national badminton squad) has paid membership subs to and been recognised by the International Badminton Federation, now the Badminton World Federation. Football was also a very popular men's recreation, with local players often taking on sailors from the Royal Navy and other passing scientific and fishing vessels (McDowell, 2020).

Methods

The primary research here utilises both archival and digital research in the Stanley-based *Penguin News* and *Teaberry Express*, as well as digital material from the Uruguayan online news service MercoPress, and the newsletter of Falkland Islands Association, the primary Westminster lobby/pressure group purporting to support the Falkland Islanders' right to self-determination regarding their constitutional arrangements. Archival research was performed in the Jane Cameron National Archives in Stanley in December 2017. Further digital research was performed in the *Penguin News* and MercoPress in the run-up to completing the manuscript (November 2021), and the author continued to pursue significant news items on the Falkland Islands within the digital editions of UK newspapers.

Significantly, primary research also includes interviews with present and former Falkland Islands team officials, athletes, and politicians. In total, twenty individuals were spoken to.

Email contact was established with some interviewees during the (northern hemisphere) summer and autumn of 2017, in preparation for a visit to the Falkland Islands. During this time, two interviews were performed with respondents over email, both of whom were based outside of the UK and the Falkland Islands. Over the course of December 2017, when in the Falklands, the researcher organised thirteen separate sessions, with sixteen respondents interviewed: ten were interviewed individually; one interview was with a married couple; three people each were interviewed in two separate group interviews (the latter of which were under eighteen, and whose interview was supervised by an adult, with written consent from parents). Some of these respondents had been contacted before the researcher's visit, whilst others were contacted via snowball sampling. Once the researcher returned to the UK, in February 2018, one interviewee responded to questions over email, whilst another was interviewed at their home. Patrick Watts, Mike Summers, and Sarah Allan have been de-anonymised with their consent.

Sport in a changing Falklands

The Falkland Islands are regular participants in the Commonwealth Games, an international sporting competition which started in 1930 in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada as the British Empire Games (Gorman, 2010). The Falklands' participation in the Commonwealth Games, which is held every four years, began in 1982, in Brisbane, Australia, when two riflemen attended the Games only weeks after the end of the War. Two shooters also attended the 1986 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh (*Teaberry Express*, 13-20 January 1990). The Falklands would return to the Commonwealth Games in 1990, in Auckland: with two long-distance runners in the 10,000m, trained at Stanley Airport, who were coached by physical education teacher Sarah Allan (né Dixon), and with a delegation led by Falkland Islands Broadcasting Service (FIBS) manager Patrick Watts, more typically noted for his role at the controls of FIBS on the morning of the Argentinean invasion in April 1982 than for his prominent positions in Falklands sport (Pinkerton, 2008). The Falklands have attended every Commonwealth Games since and have primarily sent athletes in target sports and badminton, though have not achieved any medals.

However, since 1993, the Falklands have also regularly participated in the Island Games. This competition, held every two years, was first initiated in 1985 as part of the Isle of Man Year of Sport. Participation here is dominated by British crown dependencies and territories, UK council areas, and island polities within Scandinavia, most notably Danish territories the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Early on, it also included Iceland and Malta (Corlett, 1995; McDowell, 2022). A chance encounter with tourists from the Isle of Man gave Stanley shopkeeper Burned Peck the idea of the Falkland Islands taking part in the 1993 Games at the Isle of Wight. For the purposes of facilitating travel to these games, the Falkland Islands Overseas Games Association (FIOGA) was created, and would soon end up the *de facto* governing institution of sport in the Islands. (Athletes' travel and accommodation is paid for in the Commonwealth Games, but not in the Island Games.) In the Island Games, the Falklands *do* sometimes medal, primarily in target events. The nation's one gold medal comes courtesy of police pistol shooter Graham Didlick at the 1999 Island Games in Gotland (*Falkland Islands Association Newsletter*, hereafter *FIAN*, October 1999).

Sport was reflective of changes which occurred in the post-1982 Falklands. The War dramatically changed the demographics, economy, and governance of the Islands. 1986 saw the creation by the Falkland Islands and UK Governments of a Royal Navy-enforced fishing zone, and an according windfall for the Islands resulted from payments for fishing licenses for overseas boats and the exploration for oil in Falklands waters. Later, a new constitution for the

territory was written in 2008, which created a new, fully elected Legislative Assembly. Post-1982 assistance from the UK Government included ordering a second report from Labour party peer Edward Shackleton (son of the explorer Ernest) on the economic feasibility of the Falklands: the implementation of some of Shackleton's recommendations on the break-up of the ownership of farmland has led to a slow, steady depopulation of Camp, and the increasing urbanisation of Stanley, the islands' only major settlement (Royle, 1994; Royle, 2010; Dodds 2012a; Dodds 2012b). Entry into international sporting competitions was precipitated by these changes, which had a significant effect on the sporting culture of the Islands. In terms of the depopulation of the countryside, aside from less horses now taking part in races, golf courses which used to exist near the farm settlements of Goose Green and Port Howard have since been abandoned. The opening of the Stanley Leisure Centre, attached to the Stanley Senior School, though, was a significant milestone in Falkland Islands history (Royle, 1994). Not only did it replace Stanley's ageing gymnasium with purpose-built squash and indoor football facilities, but it included one significant addition that never before existed in the Falkland Islands: a swimming pool, 25 feet long (the standard for Island Games competition) available to be used by the public. Previous to this, people born and raised on the Falkland Islands rarely swam.

Sport has also formed a part of the wider geopolitical framing of the Falklands dispute: martial rhetoric around the Falklands has dominated England-Argentina men's football encounters before and after the 1982 War (Dodds, 2002; Poulton, 2003; Hughson and Moore, 2012). Outside of football, a provocative film (endorsed by then-Argentinean President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner) in the run-up to the 2012 Olympics in London showed an Argentinean hockey player and Olympic hopeful training on the streets and hills of Stanley, with the tagline: "To compete on English soil, we train on Argentinean soil" (Pinkerton and Benwell, 2014). There have been other incidents of intrusion related to sport: one in 2011 involving a rugby game played by Argentineans in Stanley, and a 2019 attempt by the Argentinean Chess Federation (FADA) to hold an official chess match in "Puerto Argentino", a name hastily created for Stanley by Argentinean occupiers in 1982 (the match was afterwards refused sanction by the World Chess Federation, FIDE) (MercoPress, 7 July 2019). Here, then, sport and other popular-cultural forms are tools weaponised from outside of the Falklands and reflect a means of what Benwell and Pinkerton (2020) believe are symbolic violations of the Islands' territory and sovereignty. Little of this, however, has anything to do with Falkland Islanders themselves.

Personnel and facilities

From 2010 onwards, greater ambitions for sport in the Falklands have manifested themselves in having professionals who are either recruited specifically to work in sport development, or migrants to the Falkland Islands who incidentally have experience in the field, being recruited by FIOGA during the 2010s. One interviewee, from Canada, was the capacity support officer for FIOGA from April 2011 to April 2012: her position was funded by Olympic Solidarity and the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF), and she was seconded by Commonwealth Games Canada. Another more recent appointee, a sport development officer resident in the Falkland Islands, was originally from Santiago, and at one point had a career as a semi-professional footballer with a major Chilean club: he has since played in the Falklands' national football squad, including at several Island Games.

Like development officers, coaches and specialist demonstrators have been recruited from abroad on a volunteer basis, with their travel to the Islands and some expenses usually funded via the Shackleton Scholarship Fund, a programme of the UK Falkland Islands Trust.

This has included recruiting coaches for specific competitions. One interviewee, a swimming coach on the Isle of Man, came to the Falklands via the Shackleton route in 1997. Ultimately Falkland Islanders' external networks are also crucial. Take, for example, the recruitment of assistant men's football coach Rene van Rijswijk – brought to the Falklands with Shackleton monies for the run-up to the 2009 Island Games in Åland. Watts, who usually spends the austral winters in the Dutch summertime with his wife, was able to recruit van Rijswijk through his contacts in Dutch football, most specifically in this instance at SC Cambuur in Leeuwarden (Watts, 2009). Similarly, Scottish golfer Bernard Gallacher's instructional trip to Stanley in 1997-98 was arranged by the late Rex Hunt, Governor of the Falkland Islands at the time of the 1982 conflict (*FIAN*, January 1998). Hunt was a member of the Wentworth Club in Surrey, where Gallacher was a professional. More recently, Level 3 badminton coach and Commonwealth gold medallist Rebecca Pantaney, from England, who was badminton coach for a variety of Games cycles, was recruited via a different sponsorship route: with monies from the CGF, the Falkland Islands Company, and the Caribbean Alliance Insurance Company (the primary provider of insurance in the Falklands).

For all that the Falklands have been successful in bringing sportspeople and coaches to the Islands, the Islands themselves have historically lacked both qualified home-grown coaches and the ability to train intensely. Most of the Falklands' squads leave home for a training camp well ahead of the actual events themselves. In badminton's case, sustained training means trying to spend some time amongst world class athletes and coaches in the world's top programmes. Before each Island Games, the badminton squad typically spend a few weeks in Denmark. Here, however, it was noted that high Danish standards of training and attainment are something that the Greenland badminton squad, considered one of the best in the competition, have far easier and more consistent access to, in terms of travel, personnel, and organisational support. Badminton athletes are not alone in undertaking extra training at a European site before a competition. Before the Falklands' archery squad headed to the 2017 Island Games in Gotland, they first headed to Surrey for a week, and trained with the Nonsuch Bowmen, some of whose members were Team GB archery coaches.

With such a small population, and with considerable logistical difficulties, both sport officials and many coaches accept that the Falkland Islands are not usually medal favourites. Standards and benchmarks between individual sports still vary a great deal. The swim team, which has never medalled in the Island Games, focuses on personal and Islands bests as outcomes for its swimmers. Falklands' golfers typically compete in the Island Games with handicaps, and Stanley Golf Club – with wild winds, no bunkers, and fairways, tees, greens, and a caravan clubhouse which are maintained by volunteer members of the club – is far removed from the kinds of courses encountered in the likes of Jersey, whose teams often include golfers *en route* to becoming professionals. The Falklands are not likely – at least not anytime soon – to produce an athlete of the calibre of Flora Duffy, the triathlete from Bermuda who won gold at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, perhaps (at the time of writing) the British Overseas Territories' most successful athlete (*Daily Mirror*, 27 July 2021). Falkland Islanders have rarely made it into Team GB and/or England squads; a rare example was the Stanley-born Louis Baillon, member of Great Britain's Olympic hockey squad at the 1908 Olympics (Palmer, 2018). [It is unlikely that Baillon faced the same kind of press hostility about being a "plastic Brit" that Anguilla's Shara Proctor faced when she represented Team GB in 2012 (Poulton and Maguire, 2012).]

External presentation

National identity and sovereignty feature prominently in Islanders' discussions of sporting participation in international competition. This performance of "Britishness"/"Falklandness" is not aimed at Argentina. Instead, as befits the Falklands' participation in the Commonwealth Games and Island Games, the most important audiences are within the United Kingdom itself, other nations of the Commonwealth of Nations, and other island polities on the Atlantic Rim. Sarah Allan noted regarding her participation in the 1990 Commonwealth Games in Auckland that publicity was an important element of the trip: a photograph of her in her coaching role made it onto the front page of *The Times*. She saw the trip as a way to, in her words,

show the Islanders, show the *world*, that the Falkland Islands are still there, and that we are British, and we are proud, we are a viable country, and the UK didn't waste millions of pounds and hundreds of lives on an insignificant little rock; there's more to it than that. The Falklands have still got to get themselves out there, to let people know they're still around. So, that was a great publicity opportunity. And, from my point of view in sports development, fabulous: it gives these kids [the idea, that], if you keep working at this, you could represent your nation...

Just before the pool opened, in 1989, Allan – originally from Rochester, Northumberland, UK – was hired as a physical education/swimming teacher. She was the first such instructor to be employed in the Islands. Previously, students were aware of football and badminton; but, aside from tuition in these sports and swimming, students in Allan's classes were also taught to compete in volleyball and netball – sports many Falkland Islanders had never seen before. Around the same time as the 1990 Commonwealth Games, Allan created the first half-marathon to be held in the Falklands, held in April 1990.

Watts, an original committee member of FIOGA and Chair for its first seventeen years (and chef de mission and general manager, respectively, at all Commonwealth and Island Games delegations during that period) noted that recent Commonwealth Games, particularly the 2014 Games in Glasgow, which featured Jamaican sprinter and global superstar Usain Bolt, were "a worldwide event on the sporting calendar", at which Falklands athletes would get to participate and be televised, despite little chance of medalling:

I think the Government now realise the importance of having the Falklands attend international sporting events, because it gives the Islands a higher profile. It also, when we go to Commonwealth Games in particular, which is a big event, and is watched by 500 million people worldwide, on the television coverage – it reminds the people that the Falklands are still British, and we are not part of Argentina, and that's very important, particularly at the Opening Ceremony when the Falklands flag is paraded in the arena.

Mike Summers, the Chair of FIOGA and later the National Sporting Council (NSC), a former member of the Legislative Assembly, noted that he reiterated Falklanders' position on the sovereignty dispute whilst representing the Islands in the capacity of a sporting official:

If you're a Falkland Islander – or if you're my type of Falkland Islander – everything is political. Everything I do is about advancing the benefits of the Falkland Islands, and the people of the Falkland Islands, and the Argentine issue. So, in a subtle way – it doesn't have to be that overt – it's always about that. You spend quite a lot of your time making

sure that people you know, people you've known for years, or people you've just met just understand the issue. You don't have to prattle on about it: just make sure they understand what the issue is, and what our perspective is.

Visibility here has been crucial. Depending on the nation of the opponents and the particular sport, the television audience can often be much greater than merely the spectators at the arena. Another interviewee, who attended many Commonwealth and Island Games as a badminton player (and some Island Games as a footballer), remembered hearing at the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur, just before his opening-round badminton individual matches against Malaysian superstar Wong Choong Han, that 17 million people would be watching the match on television.

If "being there," politically, is one of the aims of the Falkland Islands' participation in the Commonwealth Games, it faces a threat from the oft-mooted proposal of the CGF to bring in qualifying standards for the competition. Falklands officials have vociferously opposed this. Another former FIOGA officer, a former recreation manager in the Islands and a competitor in shotgun shooting, believed that the "one nation, one vote" principle of the CGF allowed the Falkland Islands to punch above its weight within the Federation: he noted that the strength of voting rights in *some* international governing bodies (his example was badminton) was determined by a nation's population. In this scenario, a nation of 3,000 people such as the Falkland Islands would be irrelevant, whilst currently in the CGF the Falklands' vote counts as much as those of sporting powers like England, Australia, Jamaica, or Canada.

For many participants and some policymakers, however, there is more than statecraft at work. Interviewees also hinted that sporting competitions were a means of forging relationships beyond the political arena: in part, a relationship forged through a common understanding of island life, but possibly even overcoming elements of the Falklands' popular mythology as a location of war and tragedy. One interviewee, a golfer who had competed in the majority of Island Games since 1993, stated that his love of the competition had a great deal to do with camaraderie and friendship. He had watched generations of different families from other islands take part in the Games, and even outside of the tournament had visited one of his friends – from the island of Gotland, off the southeast coast of Sweden – made whilst playing Island Games golf. "Whenever we go to the Island Games," he stated, "people will remember us because of the Island Games, not 1982." Another interviewee, involved in the swimming setup, noted that social media allowed the teenage members of the Falklands swim team to keep in touch with friends they made at the Island Games. Policymakers also routinely cited health and youth socialisation as reasons for investing in sport.

The Falklands' pre-War issues with emigration, brought on by the stagnation of the wool economy, means that the Falklands diaspora is considerable across parts of the Commonwealth. The 1990 Commonwealth Games in Auckland and the 1993 and 2011 Island Games in the Isle of Wight were singled out as being opportunities to commune with Falkland Islanders who had moved to New Zealand and the Southampton region respectively, both major centres of Falklands out-migration. The Falklands' 2010 and 2014 Commonwealth Games lawn bowls team was even comprised of Falkland Islanders who were resident in New Zealand. (There are no bowling greens in the Falkland Islands.) Ho and McConnell (2019) have noted a "diaspora diplomacy" and a subcategory they refer to as "diplomacy through diaspora", particularly for larger, more powerful states. Particularly in the context of the Commonwealth Games taking place at Glasgow 2014 under the umbrella of the mother country (albeit during the year of an independence referendum in Scotland), this is arguably reflected in the participation of the

bowlers. If, as ever, visibility was one of the primary aims of participation, at both Games, the participation of these bowlers was discussed at length – positively – in the British and New Zealand press (*New Zealand Herald*, 14 September 2010; *The Guardian*, 27 July 2014). Additionally, Santos (2021) has stated that national diasporas are typically used within both “soft power” and “sharp power” strategies of nations’ sporting diplomacy. With regard to their 1993 and 2011 appearances at the Isle of Wight, no formal effort was made by the Falkland Islands Government to court diplomacy through its supporters, but interviewees nevertheless noted how well-supported they felt by spectators in these tournaments, and how this in turn was significant for building friendships with other athletes from participant island polities. These relationships became even more crucial in the years after 2010, when the British state would begin to face existential crises: first, from the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence; and next (and more acutely) from the 2016 ‘Brexit’ referendum.

The state of play

Outside of sporting institutions which use the Commonwealth as the backbone of their organisational framework, the Falkland Islands are unlikely to be recognised anytime soon by most world governing bodies of sport, in particular the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), due to Argentina’s opposition (Menary, 2007; 2017). The analogous example of a British territory with similar issues of disputed sovereignty is Gibraltar; and, at sporting occasions, this affinity is noted. The parade of nations at the Opening Ceremony of the 2019 Island Games in Gibraltar, for instance, saw the Falkland Islands athletes introduced as “being very close to us in Gibraltar; we have a special bond with – the Falkland Islands” (Gibraltar Broadcasting Corporation, 2019). Gibraltar’s victory in obtaining UEFA membership was an expensive one fought largely in courts, and secured in 2013 in large part as a result of the British territory being part of the European Union (Kaya, 2018): not an option which was ever available to the Falkland Islands with relation to South America’s governing body of football, CONMEBOL, comprised as it is of member states of the MERCOSUR trading bloc (of which Argentina is one of the most powerful members). Besides, some Falkland Islanders think that Gibraltar’s successful battle to join UEFA is a cautionary tale, rather than something to strive for: one interviewee believes that the money spent on legal advice by Gibraltar’s government to enter UEFA might have been better spent on sport development, whilst another notes that membership in UEFA means, in practice, being beaten heavily in most competitive matches.

Strictly speaking, the Falkland Islands’ recent engagement with sport in the Americas and the Caribbean is *coincidental* to Brexit rather than *directly related* to it. (Unlike Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands do not share a border with the EU.) No interviewees cited Brexit as something which affected their calculations regarding participation in international tournaments, and rarely are “sport” and “Brexit” mentioned near each other on the pages of the *Penguin News*. However, in the period on either side of the UK’s 2016 vote, the Falkland Islands have made considerable efforts to participate in sporting tournaments based within the western hemisphere, and this can certainly be viewed *in the context* of Brexit, for participation in sport is obviously reflective of larger tensions regarding both sovereignty and diplomacy. The Falkland Islands joined the International Cricket Council (ICC) as an affiliate member in 2007, and have made several trips abroad, including to Latin America (*PN*, 6 July 2007). Badminton, however, provides an arguably more interesting case. The Falklands continue to be recognised members of the Badminton World Federation. The sport was first codified in British-controlled India, with many now-Commonwealth nations being dominant powers in the sport (Guillain, 2004). In 2016, the Falklands badminton squad travelled to Brazil to take part

in the Badminton Pan Am championships, the premier international tournament amongst nations in the Western Hemisphere. The group withstood a protest from the Argentinean embassy in Brazil, which demanded that the athletes take part in the tournament under an Argentinean flag, and under the name of “Islas Malvinas”. The organisers refused this protest. Argentina once again protested the Falklands’ presence in February 2020’s Badminton Pan Am (also in Brazil), and again the badminton authorities refused the protest, on the basis that the Falklands were a recognised member of the Badminton World Federation (*PN*, 14 February 2020; MercoPress, 18 February 2020).

Recent years have also seen Falklands players compete in international ice hockey tournaments, despite there being no ice rink in Stanley. In the past few years, the Falkland Islands Hockey Association has been set up, and began programmes of inline and ball hockey for boys and (later) girls. This culminated in a mid-winter trip to Punta Arenas, Chile in July 2015 to play Chilean – and significantly, Argentinean – sides on ice (*FIAN*, October 2015). In November 2017, an all-male team, the Stanley All-Stars, took part in a small tournament in Costa Rica featuring clubs from California and Canada (MercoPress, 11 November 2017; 17 November 2017). A series of matches in Chile during the austral summer of 2018 featured a small tournament in Puerto Williams, showcasing mixed-gender teams, while the MEGA Patagonian tournament that August featured men’s, women’s, junior, and youth teams from the Falklands, with the men’s team, the Stanley Penguins, winning a nine-team tournament featuring sides from Chile and Ushuaia, Argentina (*PN*, 24 August 2018; *PN*, 31 August 2018). Falklands ice hockey teams have since continued to compete with Latin American and Caribbean squads: the adult men’s team won gold medal in the second division, and an under-16 boys’ team won bronze, at the 2019 Amerigol Latam Cup, held in Miami. This additionally featured a match between the Falklands under-16 team and an Argentinean one which the Falklands lost 6-1. There were no such protests here against the legitimacy of Falklands squad *during* the tournament; here, however, the team was competing not under the Falklands flag, but under the names “Rest of the World” and “Stanley” for adults and under-16s respectively. If the Argentinean teams had competed against “the Falkland Islands”, Argentina’s Ministry of Sport would have refused funding for *their* trip to Miami. (The name “Rest of the World” also referred to the fact that most of the players on the squad had originally come from outside of the Falkland Islands; some were emigres, while others were there on temporary work contracts) (*PN*, 30 August 2019; MercoPress, 18 September 2019; International Hockey Wiki, n.d.). The issues here over names and flags echo more well-publicised struggles within international sport, most notably the continuing dispute over Taiwan (Chiang and Chen, 2021).

The 2018 ice hockey victory received praise from then-UK Prime Minister Theresa May in the annual Christmas address to the Falkland Islands. Previous Prime Ministers David Cameron and Tony Blair confined mentions of sport in their Christmas addresses to the Commonwealth Games (May, 2018; *FIAN*, April 2015; *FIAN*, March 2005). The political context here exists in parallel to events in the UK. Up to the time of writing (October 2021-January 2022), there was continuing official and unofficial angst over Brexit, with Falklands products (especially fish, its primary export) now being subjected to tariffs for sale within the EU (Falkland Islands Government, 2019, in *PN*, 22 March 2019; *PN*, 8 January 2021). In general, in recent years, Brexit has been one significant aggravating factor in the UK’s relationship with overseas territories (Clegg, 2018). As ever, though, there is no appetite whatsoever in Falklands public opinion for any deal on transferring sovereignty of the Islands to Argentina. In fact, Summers believes that the Americas offer another potential avenue for sporting diplomacy, as with badminton and ice hockey, but potentially on a grander scale: the

Pan-American Games. Here is where the financial and political considerations begin to match those of Gibraltar's recent entry into European football:

I've been thinking recently about the Pan-American Games, and if we perhaps ought to try and join the Pan-American Games, and give ourselves another opportunity to compete in international fora. It racks up the pressure, it racks up the amount of money you have to generate every time you try and go to these things, but... And that would be essentially political, going into the lion's den, basically, in South America. But that's definitely worth doing, and it would give you another outlet to know a whole bunch of other people in the Caribbean, Canada, and the US.

Summers also noted his intention to build, with approval from the Legislative Assembly, "a great big shed" – an indoor sporting structure with sufficient facilities for football, hockey, tennis, cricket, climbing, and other activities, to avoid the cold of the Falklands winter, and the wind of the summer. This would also include an outdoor-3G football pitch with floodlights, as a supplement to the Stanley Leisure Centre's football pitch (currently the only purpose-built footballing facility on the Islands). The Legislative Assembly approved the construction of this facility in November 2020 (*PN*, 26 March 2021).

These new facilities could also be used to secure the hosting of a future Island Games. Summers stated that his idea was to bid to hold the competition in Falklands in 2033, primarily for the purposes of visibility. 2033 is significant as the 200th anniversary of the permanent establishment of the Falkland Islands colony. Significantly, the IIGA held their 2020 spring meeting in the Falklands, the first to be held in the southern hemisphere (shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic "lockdown" in the Islands). 2020 also saw the creation of the Falkland Islands National Sports Council (NSC), replacing FIOGA (*PN*, 14 August 2020). This development emulates similar sporting governance structures in the home nations of the UK. As crucial as expressions of Britishness are to those who lead and participate in sport in the Falkland Islands, in the era of Brexit, these developments are also increasingly reflective of Islanders building on their own sporting and diplomatic identity.

Conclusion

At the time of writing (October 2021-January 2022), there have been no deaths in the Falkland Islands due to COVID-19 (Benwell, Clegg, and Pinkerton, 2021). As with daily life more generally, however, the ongoing pandemic has had a catastrophic effect on international sporting circuits, most notably with a year's postponement of the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo and the 2020 (men's) European Football Championships (Parnell, Widdop, Bond, and Wilson, 2020). This deprived the Falkland Islands of the opportunity to take part in the 2021 Island Games in Guernsey, which officials in the crown dependency postponed in September 2020; the event is now scheduled to be held in Guernsey in 2023 (*Guernsey Press*, 26 September 2020).

With the Commonwealth Games, however, it is a different danger than COVID which is increasingly being discussed in sport and public policy circles: irrelevancy. The Falklands, as ever, will attend the 2022 event in Birmingham, but question marks hang over the event's future. The 2022 Games were supposed to be held in Durban, South Africa, which eventually baulked at the cost of providing sporting and residential facilities. At the time of writing, no host has been confirmed for 2026. In October 2021, the CGF announced a plan to radically downsize the Games, with hosts being required to hold two compulsory sports only (swimming

and athletics), whilst choosing options from other sports, some with far less of a traditional sporting pedigree (including, potentially, e-sports). UK media commentators see this as symptomatic of a sporting competition with *historical* and *cultural* qualifications, rather than *geographical* ones and (crucially) *ones involving sporting success*, struggling to stay above water (Oliver, 2021; Mackay, 2021; Bull, 2021). The Falkland Islands' recent efforts to participate in sporting competitions aimed at the Americas and the Caribbean need to be seen in this context: that, whilst participating within institutions based on the former British Empire has perceived to have been successful in terms of maintaining visibility and practicing paradiplomacy, in the post-Brexit era that may not be viewed as sufficient.

These efforts have been taking place irrespective of "Brexit". Sport, of course, is only one element of a much larger puzzle, and the Falklands' citizens, particularly in the era of Web 2.0 and social media, are cognisant of their own power as diplomatic actors on the world stage (Pinkerton and Benwell, 2014). Nevertheless, the Falklands' efforts in sport unwittingly highlight the contradictory language surrounding "Global Britain" and amorphous definitions of terms such as "sovereignty". In the immediate wake of the 2016 Brexit vote Peter Clegg (2016) noted the potential for, in particular, the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar to be "more exposed diplomatically going forward". Argentina certainly thought so as well, with its then-foreign minister, Susana Malcorra, believing that the UK's quitting the EU would relieve the EU from being duty bound to support claims over the Falklands from a member state (*The Guardian*, 20 April 2017). When the Falkland Islands use sport to advance recognition of their polity, and as a means of paradiplomacy, it does so with an understanding of "sovereignty" – *a continuing fight for their existence and independence* (Islanders would argue) – which in reality has little overlap with the hotchpotch of issues *internal to the UK* which motivated British (or, more to the point, mostly English and Welsh) voters to exercise "sovereignty" and "take back control" (Menon and Wager, 2020). The "narrative of empire" might play a key role in the UK Government's idea of the post-Brexit "Global Britain", but it is a *UK domestic* narrative which lacks legitimacy abroad, including in countries of the Commonwealth (Turner, 2019). If the Falklands' sporting efforts are not necessarily connected to Brexit, they still need to be viewed in the context of a UK state whose diplomatic and economic – if not yet military – power are diminished, with statecraft increasingly the responsibility of the territory itself.

This article, then, has examined the relationship between the Falkland Islands and sport at a key juncture. It essentially confirms Xifra's (2009) work regarding the ability of sporting teams to act in a paradiplomatic capacity for "noncentral" national polities. Given the specific historical context of colonisation and settlement in the Falkland Islands, the Falkland Islands' sporting squads also accordingly confirm the work of Baldacchino and Milne (2006) and Grydehøj (2011) with regard to the ability of Falkland Islands to strategically carve out a unique identity and strategic position whilst ostensibly continuing to remain under the geopolitical umbrella of the UK. However, as Pinkerton and Benwell (2018) have noted regarding Gibraltar, sport also represents shifting geopolitics: and, much as the legal struggle for Gibraltar's national football squad took its sovereignty fight directly to European institutions, Falklands sporting officials increasingly see the Americas as an appropriate arena through which to articulate their continued struggle for national recognition. It is not likely that the Falklands' continuing sovereignty will, in and of itself, be determined on football pitches, badminton courts, and ice hockey rinks, but what happens on them is nevertheless reflective of much bigger battles, particularly in high-stakes diplomacy of the post-Brexit era. The metrics of success here will not necessarily be in the quantity of medals won, but in the ability of the Falkland Islands to participate under their own flag, in any capacity. Within the next decade, we may have a clearer answer to the question of how successful this has been.

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