

# The Case for Inter-national Sport: A Reply to Gleaves and Llewellyn

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## Abstract

*In their recent contribution to JPS, Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) argue on lusory and ethical grounds that elite sporting competition should cease to be predicated on competitions between nations. From a lusory perspective, they argue that inter-national sports' limitation on who can compete (due to it being based on national and cultural criteria) undermines some of the central principles of elite sport, such as athletic supremacy and merit. From an ethical perspective, they argue that inter-national sport is categorically unethical because the national and cultural narratives that frame such contests are inherently untruthful and inauthentic. In this paper, we challenge Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) on both these grounds, and argue that national identity and representation are worthy values that can be achieved through sport, and that inter-national sport, far from being categorically unethical, has the potential to stimulate meaningful cultural conversations, both within and between national communities.*

**Key Words:** Inter-national sport, elite sport, identity, nationalism.

## Introduction

Gleaves and Llewellyn's (2014) objection to inter-national sport is based on both lusory and ethical grounds. From a lusory perspective, they argue that elite sport is crucially and definitively about realising principles such as athletic supremacy and merit. Inter-national sport undermines such principles because not all the best athletes or teams are allowed to compete, only the best (or best few) from each country. Consequently, competition structured around national representation is incompatible with the values of elite sporting competition. Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) also claim that inter-national sport is 'categorically' problematic from an ethical perspective. In terms of the ethical consequences of inter-national sport, they accept that such competition sometimes facilitates international peace and cooperation, but that it can also fuel jingoistic and xenophobic displays of vulgar nationalism. Instead of addressing this theoretical and empirical impasse, Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) argue that inter-national sport is 'categorically' unethical because the national and cultural narratives that supposedly frame such contests are inherently untruthful and misleading.

In this paper we will critically evaluate Gleaves and Llewellyn's (2014) lusory and ethical arguments. With respect to the lusory perspective, we reject the logic of Gleaves and Llewellyn's (2014) claim that inter-national sport undermines athletic excellence and supremacy. The lusory harms they identify seem to be an inherent part of most sporting competitions (be it inter-national or otherwise), and it is difficult to see how elite sport could be structured plausibly according to Gleaves and Llewellyn's perspective. We also question the deeper perspective that Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) adopt here. Even if inter-national sport is not the ideal manifestation of elite sport, we reject that, for this reason, it is normatively defective. By drawing on Kretchmar's (2015) pluralistic account of sport, we argue that Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) adopt an overly narrow and idealistic conception of the purpose and value of sport in general, and elite sport in particular.

In the second section of this paper we will challenge Gleaves and Llewellyn's (2014) ethical argument that inter-national sports are 'categorically problematic' because they represent necessarily inauthentic cultural narratives. Whilst we do not deny the moral harms that *sometimes* accompany inter-national sport, Gleaves and Llewellyn's (2014) focus on conceptualising cultural narratives solely in terms of their truthfulness and falsity, and their questionable conceptualisation of national identity and national community, means they fail to recognise that inter-national sport, far from being categorically unethical, has the potential to bring to life significant moral discourse between cultural communities. The broader problem here is that Gleaves and Llewellyn are claiming to present a philosophical and conceptual argument (the categorical imperative), but which is really an empirical one. We do not question the moral significance of the categorical imperative, but Gleaves and Llewellyn's use of such a principle to deny the relevance of empirical evidence regarding the narratives that surround inter-national sport is misguided.

### **Inter-National and Elite Sport: Lusory Perspectives**

As Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014: 12) state, 'lusory arguments rely on some Archimedean point' that explains what sport, or a particular manifestation of sport, 'is fundamentally about'. Lusory arguments also rest on the idea that one manifestation of sport, or style of play, is superior to alternatives (Gleaves and Llewellyn, 2014). This lusory perspective shares much with the internalist or interpretivist position within the philosophy of sport literature. It supports the claim that sport must have some definitive purpose(s) and that these can be described after careful reflection and deliberation (Kretchmar, 2015). According to Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014: 12), the lusory dimension that underpins elite sport is about establishing athletic supremacy, and such contests are distinguished by their focus on determining athletic merit over values such as inclusion, enjoyment, identity or religion. The problem for Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) is that elite-level contests also assume an inter-national variant.

According to their definition, inter-national sport constitutes sporting competition where the participants represent their own nation and play against participants from another nation. Eligibility for national representation may be based on a myriad of factors (legal nationality, birth, residency, ancestry), and a fundamental premise is that the participants are national representatives. This is a problem for Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) because the regulations and principles that underpin inter-national sport (where participation is based on national affiliation) are incongruous with the ultimate purpose and focus of elite sport (which is to determine athletic supremacy). They make their case by pointing out that many inter-national sporting competitions, such as the Olympic Games, limit the number of places awarded to athletes from any one nation. In Olympic track and field events, for example, a nation can only enter a maximum of three athletes per event. Consequently some of the best athletes in the world are not allowed to participate, for it may be the case that the fourth best Jamaican sprinter is also the fourth best sprinter in the world. On such occasions, some 'talented athletes are left home simply because of their nationality, not their athletic merit' (Gleaves and Llewellyn, 2014: 13). A similar situation occurs when inter-national competitions limit the number of teams a nation can enter (which is usually one) or organise qualifying tournaments on a regional basis. If the

fundamental purpose of elite sport is to determine athletic supremacy, Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014: 12) conclude that the nature and structure of inter-national sport 'precludes it being the best venue or even a good one, for elite-sport'.

To clarify, there are two key claims being made here. The first is a *logical* or *conceptual* argument that inter-national sport is inferior to de-nationalised versions in terms of pursuing the ideals of athletic supremacy, merit and excellence. Secondly, they claim that for this reason, we ought to prefer de-nationalised elite sport. The fact that inter-national sport is a poorer version of elite sport lends a rational justification against such competitions. This represents deeper *normative* and *evaluative* claims regarding the nature and value of (elite) sport.

Gleaves and Llewellyn's (2014) *logical* or *conceptual* argument holds that omitting better athletes or teams in favour of lesser athletes or teams, is the inevitable consequence of structuring elite sport on national grounds. Selecting teams or athletes according to nationality therefore inherently undermines sports' capacity to determine athletic excellence and supremacy. There are three key questions that must be asked in order to evaluate this *logical* or *conceptual* claim. Firstly, does inter-national sport allow the best athletes or teams to win? Secondly, does inter-national sport provide an accurate indication of the comparative rankings of, for example, the top ten athletes or teams in the world? Thirdly, is there any evidence that de-nationalised sport is better on any of these grounds?

With regards to the first question, Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014: 13) accept that there are no logical reasons why inter-national sporting competitions would deny the best athletes or teams in the world to win. As long as all nations have the opportunity to compete or enter athletes, and everything else being equal, then the best athlete or team should win. In terms of the second question, inter-national sport does not necessarily provide an accurate reflection of comparative rankings. As previously stated, the 4<sup>th</sup> best sprinter in the world may well be omitted from the Olympic Games because three of his compatriots are better sprinters. So whilst inter-national sport should give an accurate reflection of who is the best team or athlete, it might not provide an accurate narrative about who is, for example, the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> best. But this brings us the third, and crucial question, of whether de-nationalised versions of elite sport fare any better?

Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) argue that de-nationalised versions of elite sport 'already exist and flourish' and they cite the cosmopolitan mix of riders taking part in the Tour de France and the diverse nationalities of footballers in the UEFA Champions League as their preferred examples. With regards to the first question, there is no reason to think that de-nationalised versions of elite sport are any better than nationalised versions in terms of determining the best athlete or team (that is, if such competition is open to all). In terms of the second question, it seems that most de-nationalised elite sporting competitions are as culpable as nationalised versions in terms of providing an inaccurate or incomplete account of comparative rankings. For example, whilst national allegiance of individuals usually plays no role in determining who can enter the Tour de France, it is often, if not always, the case that talented cyclists (who could realistically finish in the top 10 of the general classification) are omitted because there are even more talented athletes on their team. Moreover, the Yellow Jersey is awarded to an individual athlete, but often the best individual cyclist does not win the race as they have a comparatively weak team. In such instances, the omission of athletes due to team strategy or strength presents lusory harms in

similar ways to the nationality issue. If structuring sporting competitions based on nationality ‘casts doubts on the outcome’s accuracy’, then so does the present structure of elite cycling. Given the wealth of issues that could undermine the value of athletic merit and desert in sport, it seems unfair and inconsistent that Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) focus on nationality only.

Team sports in general seem inherently problematic with respect to Gleaves and Llewellyn’s argument regarding comparative rankings. They claim that FIFA’s regional qualification process for inter-national tournaments mean that talented teams are left home while lower-ranked teams receive entries. But their preferred de-nationalised version, the UEFA Champions League, has similar qualification processes and criteria. Some of the best football teams in Europe are left out of the Champions League because they play in a high quality domestic league, whilst some relatively weak teams are included because they play in relatively weaker domestic leagues. Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) also criticise inter-national sporting competitions such as the Football World Cup because ‘many talented individuals, who should be competing among the best 32 teams in the world, stayed at home either because of their national side’s depth’ or because of their national side’s failure to qualify. But this is a ‘problem’ shared by elite sport in general. Wealthy professional teams have the ability to stockpile much of the best talent, which inevitably means some talented athletes (who would be good enough to represent lesser teams in the competition) are left out. Similarly, there are plenty of talented footballers that are often omitted from competitions such as the Champions League because their team haven’t qualified. If the ideal of sport is ‘the best competing against the best’, and that ‘omitting better athletes in favour of lesser athletes harms competitors who miss out on better athletic challenges, and the spectators, who miss out on witnessing the best athletic contests’, then it is unclear how team sport could be organised at all (Gleaves and Llewellyn, 2014: 14). It would seem that the only acceptable version of elite football for Gleaves and Llewellyn would be a game between the 22 best players in the world.

There is much that could be said and developed here, but we can summarise by arguing that Gleaves and Llewellyn’s *logical claim* does not withstand scrutiny. There is no logical basis or evidence to support their claim that de-nationalised elite sporting contests provides a more accurate reflection of comparative rankings and athletic excellence than inter-national versions. Indeed, it remains unclear to us how sport could be organised to ensure the integrity of what Gleaves and Llewellyn take to be the lusory ideals of elite sport. Whilst Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) may argue that eliminating nationality is the first of a number of needed reforms, it is difficult to see where one could draw the line without it becoming a reduction to absurdity.

Even if Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) could rescue their *logical argument* there is a more fundamental issue with their lusory perspective; namely, their *normative claim* that sport which focuses purely on athletic excellence, merit and supremacy (if such a thing could exist), is superior to sport which may also celebrate identity and representation. This type of evaluative claim is central to any lusory perspective, which holds that sport must have some definitive purpose(s) that can be defined and defended. Attempts to define this logic of sport have varied, but Simon’s (2000: 9-10) claim that sport is a test of athletes abilities to meet a challenge set by the rules, and also a place where we compete against others, is fairly typical and uncontroversial. Some notion of athletic merit and supremacy, therefore, seems to be a universal and logical requirement to the concept of sport. The key question is how this abstract philosophical logic

translates to its real life cultural instantiation(s) and therefore guides normative evaluation of concrete sporting practices?

Kretchmar (2015) has recently defended a position, termed 'Pluralistic Internalism', which holds that the universal logic of sport is compatible with being instantiated fairly broadly and flexibly. This position defends the internalist/interpretivist notion that sport must be about something but is also receptive to the conventionalist claim that it needn't be about one thing only. It is, as Kretchmar (2015: 2) argues, a 'pluralism with constraints' and a 'rational characterization of sport in its several best lights'. In making his case for this pluralistic account, Kretchmar (2015: 4) outlined six models of sport that represent considerable differences in how sport is 'encountered, played and valued'. For example, the first model that Kretchmar (2015) outlines is where sport is seen as a means of testing and contesting, where the focus is on achievement and excellence. Whilst some notion of contesting and achievement is central to all manifestations of sport, Kretchmar (2015) argues that other versions of sport might also emphasise values such as opportunity and participation (model 2) or indeed personal expression, creativity and authenticity (model 5). The sixth model that Kretchmar (2015) outlines is particularly relevant to inter-national sport, as it outlines the role that sport can play in fuelling communal identity and a sense of belonging and thus an opportunity to participate in something that transcends the individual. Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) seem sympathetic to such a pluralistic account for they contrast elite sport to other manifestations of sport such as recreational sport, and also to competitions such as the Maccabiah Games or the Gay Games, where the focus is not only on winning, but also on identity or culture. Considering that Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) make such comparisons, it is unclear why they are unwilling to consider inter-national sport as manifestation of sport that is different to, or perhaps an extension of elite sport?

We do not deny that inter-national sport is a form of elite sport. It is clear that a central tenet of inter-national sport is determining athletic excellence and supremacy. But inter-national sport is also premised on national representation, and the regulations governing participation in such competition are primarily based on the concepts of nation, state and identity. Inter-national sports are clearly a hybrid form of sporting competition which shares some values and purposes of competitions such as the Maccabiah Games (identity and cultural affiliation) but is also clearly a form of elite sporting competition (focus on determining athletic excellence and supremacy). The existence of hybridized forms of sporting competition is reflected in Kretchmar's (2015) pluralistic account, where it is emphasized that the various models outlined are not pure or free standing species or types of sport. Rather it should be considered a heuristic taxonomy, which outlines the various 'normative emphases that can be realized in physically demanding testing and contesting acts' (Kretchmar, 2015: 5). Particular sporting activities are likely to involve a 'blend of these six clusters of purposes, supporting values, and related behavioural implications' (Kretchmar, 2015: 5). The difference between various manifestations of sport is thus likely to rest on the degree of emphasis placed on the various values and purposes identified in Kretchmar's account.<sup>1</sup>

There are two key points to emphasise with regards to this pluralistic account outlined by Kretchmar. Firstly, the internal logic of sport (or what sport 'is about') should be interpreted broadly and flexibly, and thus encapsulates more than the pure quest for athletic excellence and merit. Sports that do not aim at the exceptional 'are not, for that reason, normatively defective'

(Kretchmar, 2015: 11). Because different manifestations of sport emphasise various values and purposes, it follows that they have a degree of independence and thus require apposite evaluative criteria. Secondly it is important to recognise that these various manifestations of sport overlap considerably and cannot always be separated neatly. What this emphasises is that no sporting activity can be about one thing only. If this pluralistic account is applied to inter-national sport, then it seems that such competition can be distinguished from elite sport by its focus on identity and culture, in addition to athletic excellence and supremacy. It therefore follows that it makes no sense to criticise inter-national sport by using the values associated with de-nationalised sport as a frame of reference. Participatory Sunday league football or work softball competitions would fall considerably short on such grounds as well, but surely this does not amount to arguments against such competitions. Even if we do loose out in pure athletic excellence terms during inter-national sport, this does not represent an argument against inter-national sport. If one believes, as we do, that cultural identity and representation are worthy ideals that can be achieved through sport, then the lusory argument of Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) has little purchase.

The crucial point for us, which seems to be in line with Kretchmar's (2015) pluralistic account, is that we can have inter-national sport as well as other forms of (elite) sport that do not emphasise national or cultural affiliation. These various manifestations of sport can clearly coexist, and our sporting world is far richer and more interesting as a result. Why Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) insist on viewing it as an either/or dichotomy is not at all clear. Whilst we agree that not all manifestations of sport are necessarily of equal merit, the value and purpose of sporting activity (even its elite manifestations), can encapsulate more than the narrow focus on determining athletic excellence and supremacy. We therefore follow Kretchmar (2015: 15) in promoting an inclusive and broad understanding of the nature and value of sport and athletic excellence:

...I like the fact that this pluralistic account is reasonably inclusive...the quest for excellence is certainly defensible and attractive, but so are the quests for drama, narrative unity, knowledge, opportunity or serendipity, individual identity, and solidarity or community. In fact, it pleases me to no end that the gratuitous test and contests of sport carry so much potential.

Whilst the pluralistic account promotes the diversity of various manifestations of sport, it is probable that each of the models identified has, on occasions, been the platform for morally dubious behaviour (Kretchmar, 2015). For instance, the desire to achieve athletic excellence has often resulted in athletes using performance enhancing drugs or cheating and it could be similarly argued that patriotism has often been the stalking horse for ethnocentrism and jingoism. The pluralistic account of Kretchmar (2015) provides no guarantee that the purposes, values and behaviours that are central to various manifestations of sport are morally desirable. The integrity of lusory excellence (whatever that may be) must therefore reside within, and be discussed in the context of, a more comprehensive moral framework.

### **Ethical Perspectives on Inter-national Sport**

The reason why Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) believe inter-national sports are categorically unethical is because the national and cultural narratives that frame such contests are inherently

untruthful and misleading. To them, these narratives do not amount to truthful cultural dialogue, but rather are inauthentic overgeneralisations based on fictitious and often derogatory stereotypes. Accordingly, the very idea that national teams and athletes tell us anything meaningful about the wider national community and the peoples they supposedly represent, is deeply misleading and problematic. The substitution of fiction for truth is the inevitable consequence of such contests according to Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014), and thus the reason inter-national sporting competitions are categorically unethical. In the discussion that follows, we will challenge Gleaves and Llewellyn's (2014) categorical argument on two interrelated grounds. First, we argue that their focus on truthfulness and falsity is a misleading starting point from which to evaluate the narrative capacity of inter-national sport. Second, their argument presupposes a misleading and oversimplified conceptualisation of national identities and communities. Once this argument is put in its proper conceptual context, we argue that it becomes primarily an empirical matter whether inter-national sport is unethical or not. From this perspective, we reject the claim that inter-national sport is categorically unethical by drawing on empirical examples to demonstrate that inter-national sport *sometimes* leads to significant moral discourse within and between national communities.

The notion that inter-national sporting competition often serves to harden misleading and stereotypical images of nations and their members is accepted by most, if not all, scholars who have discussed this issue. Morgan (2000), for instance, has examined the way in which the athletic success of African nations in sport is often explained with reference to stereotypical and racist narratives of natural athletic ability and lack of cultural sophistication. Similar narratives are often raised with respect to afro-Caribbean sprinting success, or indeed as Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) point out, their apparent lack of swimming ability. Gleaves and Llewellyn's (2014) claim that these narratives are untruthful, and thus deserve our moral reproach, is clearly right and has already been discussed in detail by several scholars (O'Donnell, 1994; Morgan, 1997; 2000). It is, however, unclear how Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) move from the reasonable claim that sport sometimes gives voice to fictitious stereotypes and narratives, to the exaggerated and largely unsubstantiated claim that this is the inevitable consequence of such competition.

When discussing the above examples, it is clear to see what Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) mean when claiming that such narratives are untruthful. On other occasions, however, the question of truthfulness and falsity is premature if not inappropriate, and the more significant issue is whether the narratives that surround inter-national sport are meaningful or not. Some narratives are untruthful (such as those mentioned above), but yet could be considered meaningful, if only in the sense that it is important that they are challenged and rejected. Other narratives that emerge through inter-national sporting competitions, however, are both untruthful and largely insignificant. Stereotypes about English grit and determination and German efficiency might be examples of narratives that are grossly over-exaggerated and probably untruthful, but these are not particularly meaningful or significant in most instances. There are other narratives, nonetheless, that are clearly meaningful and significant, but which are not really apt to be evaluated on their truthfulness and falsity. It is these latter narratives, which are obscured by Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) conceptual framework, that provide as examples that undermine their claim that inter-national sport is categorically unethical.

Let us first make our point with respect to Gleaves and Llewellyn's (2014) chosen example, namely the United States men's ice hockey defeat of the Soviet Union at the 1980 Olympic Games. They argue that victory for the United States was used as a vehicle for larger political issues, in this instance that capitalism defeated communism and that it represented a victory for democracy. For Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) the narrative is untruthful for at least two reasons. Firstly it miserably failed to reflect the huge diversity that existed in terms of the political views and values of the people of the United States and the Soviet Union. Secondly, victory for the United States against the Soviet Union did not, in any way, reflect on the rightness and wrongness of the United States' and the Soviet Unions' respective political structures and policies. On both these counts Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) are clearly correct, and they would be hard-pressed to find anyone who disagreed with them. Where Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) are incorrect is to think that those inspired by the narrative potential of inter-national sport (or indeed the general spectators) succumb to such a superficial and oversimplified understanding of events.

Whilst false ideas and beliefs such as 'capitalism defeats communism' are often shored-up through shallow, jingoistic propaganda, the potential of inter-national sport as a form of moral discourse runs much deeper than this. The USA vs USSR ice hockey game was linked to larger political issues, and we argue that this is partly what makes sport, and inter-national sport in particular, such morally relevant terrain. But it is unclear why Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) insist that an event's moral significance is associated with a contest's competitive outcome. In one sense, the result mattered, but clearly not in the sense that victory had anything to do with the truthfulness/falsity of the accompanying narrative concerning rival political, ideological and moral outlooks. The substantive point here is not that the United States won, but rather that sport acted as a forum that brought to life hugely significant issues and debates that have significant implication on the lives of millions of human beings. Sports narrative capacity lies with its ability to facilitate such important conversations rather than being the arbitrator of such discussions. On the notion of truthfulness, one need not claim any more than the fact that there existed real and tangible tension between opposing viewpoints and political ideologies. Beyond this, it is not at all clear what it would mean to question whether this narrative is truthful or not, or to argue that narratives of the sort are universally and 'categorically untruthful'. One can legitimately accept that shallow propaganda claims such as 'capitalism defeats communism' are untruthful, whilst maintaining that the wider discourse that surrounds such sporting competition remains morally significant. And one can also make such claims without succumbing to a simplistic account of national identity that ignores the inherent diversity, contradictions and tensions that exists within national communities.

Another example might be the sporting narratives that accompanied the South African rugby side towards the end of their apartheid era. Such competition brought to South Africa, and a great deal of the world, the hugely significant debate regarding racial politics, equality, morality and ultimately about a world order. When the South African rugby union failed to distance themselves from those who supported apartheid, the resulting boycott from other national rugby unions was a fundamentally important form of moral discourse. But the success or failure of the South African team during this period clearly did not reflect the rightness or wrongness of their racial policies, and similarly did not mean that all South Africans shared such racist views. In a

similar vein, the transition of South African rugby's stance on apartheid, and their eventual triumph at the 1995 Rugby World Cup in no way represented the eradication of racist bigotry in South Africa, or elsewhere. But few could deny that the iconic image of South Africa's rugby Captain, Francois Penoir, and Nelson Mandela lifting the cup together was, and still remains, a hugely significant and influential moment for cultural and moral discourse. The focus on truthfulness and falsity, however, miserably fails to capture the intricacies and depth of the narrative potential of inter-national sporting competitions.

Whilst Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014: 1) seem to think otherwise, their position contradicts the body of work that Morgan (1997; 1998; 1999; 2000) has developed regarding the narrative potential of inter-national sport. Morgan (1998) has discussed at length about sports capacity to initiate significant forms of moral discourse between various cultural communities. One of Morgan's (1998) examples is the case of Algerian athlete Hassiba Boulmerka, whose decision not to abide by Muslim modesty rules when competing led to significant controversy among a vocal group of Muslims in Algeria. According to Morgan (1998) the inter-national athletic community served as the vehicle for meaningful cultural dialogue about cultural and religious differences, and ultimately about democracy and freedom. Unfortunately, many of Boulmerka's compatriots do not share her capacity (or even desire) for freedom of expression, but it is precisely for this reason that such discourse is significant and meaningful. It is the capacity to challenge, to raise questions, to demonstrate alternatives that underpin inter-national sports' moral significance. In this instance, the cultural discourse that surrounded Boulmerka's narrative conspicuously conveyed to Algerians, to Muslims and indeed to the rest of the world, that things could be different, an indeed better. It is from such a perspective that one could argue that inter-national sports sometimes exemplifies what a liberal and constructive inter-nationalism aspires to as a moral ideal (Morgan, 1998).<sup>ii</sup>

It is crucial to note that the arguments here do not undermine the notions of truth and truthfulness (in morality or elsewhere) more generally, but rather promote the liberal inter-nationalist claim that in a world blighted by division and disagreement, cross-cultural conversation is the pragmatic starting point for human progress and cooperation. Anthony Appiah (2006), in promoting his 'rooted cosmopolitan' stance, similarly argues that changes in (moral) practices are not likely to come as a result of philosophical treaties and rational argumentation, but rather as a consequence to cross-cultural conversation and exposure to difference. Critics might question what makes inter-national sport special in this respect? Whilst it is clear that other manifestations of sport (elite sport for example) also have such a narrative capacity, inter-national sport is salient is because the competition is premised on some notion of national and cultural identity and representation. There is a presumption that that the team or individual somehow represents 'us', 'our identity' and 'our national culture'. Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) believe this relationship between national sporting representatives and those individuals who support them is suspect. But they mistakenly suppose that the argument in favour of national sporting narratives presuppose an overly robust and thus simplistic conception of national identities and communities, when they do not. The argument surrounding the narrative potential of sport actually requires a sophisticated understanding of national identity, and a rejection of the idea that nations are 'monolithic, absolutely disjoint communities' (Morgan, 1999: 56). Of course, national divisions must correspond to real and tangible

differences between groups of people, but this idea of a 'common' public culture or identity need not be all-embracing (Miller, 1995; Walzer, 1996). The narratives crafted during sporting competitions about particular national communities are always contested, and in this sense it is as much a narrative about the nation's self-understanding. There is no reason to suppose that all members of a nation share the same aspirations and understanding of their national culture. What they do share (most of them at least) is the fact that their national and cultural identities are a fundamental part of their own self-understanding and therefore something that they deeply care about (Himmelfarb, 1996; Poole, 1999; Kymlicka, 2001).

The oversimplification and misunderstanding on the part of Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014: 11) is brought to life most clearly in their claim that 'members of a nation have no choice but to accept the results of competitions as reflections of themselves even when they do not wish to'. They draw on the relationship between Welsh rugby and patriotism, claiming that not all Welsh people enjoy rugby or connect with it in any meaningful way, and that the success or failure of the national team has no connection to the majority of the people of Wales. In one sense this is clearly true for most Welsh people have no immediate influence or connection to the Welsh rugby team. But this is largely irrelevant in terms of the debate regarding the narrative capacity of inter-national sports. The key point is that the very existence of the Welsh rugby team (and its conspicuous successes) has played a fundamental role in acting as a platform where issues surrounding Welsh identity can be brought to light and debated. Welsh rugby, for instance, has been a hugely significant active agent in giving some credence to the idea of a Welsh nation in light of British and English hegemonic imperialism. And in claiming this significance, one need not succumb to a crude understanding of national communities that ignore the inherently complex basis of such identities. The people of Wales, for example, have deeply divided views on their nation and culture. Some people in Wales for instance, do not feel particularly Welsh, others feel more British than Welsh, and some more Welsh than British. They also have widely diverging views on politics and the future direction of the Welsh nation and its identity. The social complexity of Welsh national and cultural identity is often played out through sporting contexts, evidenced most clearly by the existence of Welsh representative teams in some sports and contexts (rugby, association football) British teams in others (Olympic Games) and even Welsh athletes representing the English side in some (cricket). Irrespective of where one stands on such issues, even the most disinterested of sport fans would recognise the significance of sport, and rugby in particular, in acting as a forum for important cultural discourses, to those within and outside Wales, about the current state and future direction of the nation, its culture and identity (Johnes, 2004).

The key point here then, is that inter-national sporting competition, and the associated cultural narratives, should be thought of as a forum that asks individuals to consider what they and their culture stand for, and possibly act as a spur to action and change. The notion that there must be a neat and tidy link between those on the playing field and the nation as a whole is misleading and oversimplified, and ignores the fact that those doing the representation seldom offer any view or stance in any case. The cultural narratives are manifold and emerge from various outlets such as the media, symbolic gestures of the fans and general public, and increasingly in contemporary society, in the form social media and social networking. Indeed, the very notion that inter-national sports are a morally significant terrain is premised on the idea that there are

contested narratives and different opinions and values can be debated and pitted against one another, whether this is within or between national communities. The task for the inter-national sports community is to give voice to such diverging viewpoints, particularly with respect to those that have traditionally been marginalised and silenced.

## Conclusions

We have argued that neither of Gleaves and Llewellyn's (2014) arguments against inter-national sport withstand scrutiny. We have criticised the lusory arguments of Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) on two grounds. Firstly, we questioned the logic of their claim that inter-national sport leads to the lusory harms they suggest, especially in comparison to the wealth of issues that might undermine sport in similar ways. More importantly, by drawing on Kretchmar's (2015) pluralistic account of sport, we have argued that issues of identity and cultural representation are valuable ends that can be pursued through sport. It is clear to us that elite sport, its inter-national version, and countless other manifestations of sport, can coexist, and that this diversity should be celebrated.

In the second part of this paper, we have argued that the problem with Gleaves and Llewellyn's (2014) ethical arguments ultimately stem from either a misleading focus on truthfulness and falsity, or an oversimplified account of national and cultural identity. Demonstrating the inadequacies of this conceptual framework clears the way for discussion about empirical examples that challenge the claim that inter-national sport is categorically unethical. It is important to emphasise that we do not claim that such competition always results in meaningful cultural dialogue. We accept that inter-national sport sometimes leads to misleading and problematic narratives, often to trivial and uninteresting ones, and sometimes to hugely significant and influential ones. In this sense, we have merely rejected Gleaves and Llewellyn's (2014) claim that inter-national sport *inevitably* results in such mis-recognition, and have attempted to show that *some* of the cultural narratives that are brought to life through inter-national sporting competitions are morally significant and have clear implication for the lives of human beings.

The above points become particularly significant, however, if one takes the view, as we do, that some form of cultural particularity is an inevitable feature of human society. Indeed, this is a core aspect of liberal nationalist political philosophy, which argues that some of the worthy cosmopolitan ideals, such as developing inter-cultural dialogue and global consciousness and harmony, can only bear fruit if we recognise the reality and importance of particular cultural communities (Tamir, 1993; Miller, 1995; Putnam, 1996; Lichtenberg, 1997; Appiah, 2006). Nationalism may well be a transitory manifestation of such particularity, but if liberal nationalists are right that cultural communities will not simply ebb-away, then surely they are also right that working towards a better future requires us to promote liberal manifestations of nationalism and inter-cultural dialogue. It is here, we argue, that sport is ideally suited to realise some of these goals. We are not blindly ignoring some of the obvious problems of inter-national sport, but rather stressing that the future of the inter-national community is not one simply constrained or shaped by history, but also by on-going political and moral debates and actions (Poole, 1999).

This is something that we as actors in the world can influence and change (Poole, 1999). Vulgar manifestations of nationalism are unfortunately all too common, and so are the misleading stereotypes that Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014) rightly deplore. But such pathologies and misunderstandings can only be challenged and changed by accepting and working from our various cultural communities. It is for this reason that Gleaves and Llewellyn's (2014) attempt to shun such inter-national sporting contests outright as being untruthful and meaningless, is short-sighted and ignores the potential sport has in contributing to the greater integration and cross-cultural understanding between the diverse cultures that constitutes the inter-national sporting community.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Accepting the overlapping and complex nature of most manifestations of sport does not mean denying the tensions that often exist between manifestations of sport. There are occasions where the value and purpose of various manifestation of sport become muddled and perverted. For example, the English Football Association recently considered introducing a home-player quota in their domestic leagues. Here, issues of culture and identity take prominence in ways that seems to undermine the core value and purpose of professional domestic football. In much the same way, such is the focus and pressure on achieving national excellence in inter-national sport, it could be argued that the lax eligibility regulations of various governing bodies and national federations that allow athletes to adopt a 'flag of convenience' impinges on some of the important values that ought to emerge through such competition (genuine and meaningful cultural representation). In such circumstances we accept that sports practice communities may need to take action in interrogating and better articulating the central premises and purposes of certain competitions, and indeed their future direction. Such conversations however, need not rest on the misleading idea that any manifestation of sport must be about one thing only.

<sup>ii</sup> Gleaves and Llewellyn's position seems to be at variance with its moral foundations. Kant, the progenitor of categorical imperatives, suggests that there are occasions when patriotism is prohibited, when it is permissible, and when it is a duty. The upshot is that for Kant, the moral universalism associated with cosmopolitanism is an imperfect, rather than a categorical duty. So from this it would seem that our critical or reflective patriotism (where neither cosmopolitanism nor patriotism demand unconditional moral obligations binding in all circumstances) is closer to that of Kant. For a fuller discussion see Kleingeld, P. (2003). Kant's Cosmopolitan Patriotism. *Kant Studien*, 94, 29316.