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Playing Games: The Two Koreas and the Beijing Olympics

Brian Bridges¹

Abstract

Inter-Korean sporting contacts in and around the Olympics over the past 60 years suggest that there is a close relationship between politics and sports. For divided nations such as the two Koreas, which by their very rationale are involved in a highly-charged competition for legitimacy with their other 'part-nation', the Olympics have been a particularly potent arena for political posturing and manoeuvring. This paper examines the troubled history of the two Koreas' endeavours to enter the Olympic movement and then out-do each other; the fruitless efforts to agree on a joint Olympic team (from early negotiations in Hong Kong in 1963 through to the present day); and the potential Chinese role in the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, which means so much to China.

The Olympic Games, to be held in Beijing in August 2008, are already much in everyone's minds. As nations from around the world prepare, select and finally send their athletes to Beijing, one focus of attention will be the representation from China's neighbours, the two Koreas. With the support and encouragement of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the two Koreas'

¹ Brian Bridges is Professor and Head of the Department of Political Science and Director of the Centre for Asian Pacific Studies, Lingnan University. This is a revised version of a paper presented at the International Conference on 'China and Korea: A New Nexus in East Asia?' hosted by Lingnan University's Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, 30-31 May 2007.

National Olympic Committees (NOCs) have already raised the possibility of fielding a joint team for the first time ever at an Olympics Games. However, despite several rounds of discussions both bilaterally and with IOC involvement, at the time of writing there is still no definitive agreement on this joint team. This paper, therefore, aims to examine the prospects for the creation of a joint team against the background of six decades of sporting and political competition and cooperation between the Republic of Korea (hereafter South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereafter North Korea).

Despite the ideal that 'sport has nothing to do with politics' – which was a central tenet of the founding father and other early leaders of the Olympic movement – scholars and observers have frequently commented on the deep linkages between sport and politics. Therefore, it would be naïve to expect the Olympic Games, the premier international sporting event, to be free of such political influences. As one senior IOC official has recorded, 'in practice, it is evident that sport and politics do indeed mix, at many different levels'.² Moreover, sport can be used both internally and externally, for in the words of Richard Espy, 'sport can provide a malleable foreign policy tool indicating various shades of political significance depending on the intent, and perceived intent, of the parties concerned'.³ As such, in a world still characterised by international tensions between ideologies and states, it is not surprising for 'participant units in transnational institutions like the Olympic Games to behave as if these are, to paraphrase Clausewitz, an extension of politics by other means'.⁴

² Richard Pound, *Five Rings Over Korea: The Secret Negotiations Behind the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul*. (New York: Little Brown & Co, 1994), p. 50

³ Richard Espy, *The Politics of the Olympic Games*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 4.

⁴ J. Hargreaves, 'Olympism and Nationalism: Some preliminary considerations', in Eric Dunning and Dominic Malcolm (eds). *Sport: Critical Concepts in Sociology. Volume IV, Issues in the Sociology of Sport*. (London: Routledge, 2003), p.21.

For divided nations, which by their very rationale are involved in a highly-charged competition for legitimacy with their other ‘part-nation’, the Olympics inevitably became such an arena for political posturing and manoeuvring.

Two Koreas and the Olympics

Since their formal foundation in 1948 the North and South Korean states had been involved in a highly competitive struggle, which had found expression not just through the military clashes of the Korean War but also through diplomatic, economic and cultural means in the subsequent years. Both governments initially adopted a ‘one Korea’ policy, which in the Cold War environment meant that the South was recognised and supported by the United States and the West Europeans, while the North was similarly endorsed by the Soviet Union, China and the East Europeans. Neither Korea was admitted to the United Nations, but both worked hard to achieve support and recognition amongst the emerging ‘Third World’ countries. Sport was no exception to this struggle for advantage, prestige and legitimacy.

Modern, or rather Western, sports had only been introduced into Korea in the late nineteenth century, but these were actually seen by some Korean modernizers as a useful means of promoting national solidarity. The later Japanese colonisers also introduced some sports such as judo and table-tennis as part of their attempt to ‘Japanize’ Korean society.⁵ After liberation from Japanese rule, the Koreans on both sides of the border sought international sporting recognition just as avidly as they campaigned for diplomatic recognition.

⁵ For sport in Korea under the Japanese rule, see Gwang Oh, ‘The Political Significance of Sport: An Asian Case Study – Sport, Japanese Colonial Policy and Korean National Resistance, 1910-1945’, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, July 2005, pp. 649-670.

Ha Nam-Gil and J.A.Mangan have commented that post-1945 South Korean sport was ‘closely linked to political priorities, purposes and personnel’ and was ‘politically-driven, resourced and endorsed and it was the direct product ofideological purpose’.⁶ This assessment could equally validly be applied to North Korean priorities too. Sport represented a tangible means to showcase the proclaimed superiority of each political system in this intense bilateral rivalry for national and international legitimacy.

The South Korean National Olympic Committee (NOC) quickly applied for IOC recognition and even sent athletes to the 1948 London Olympics. As James Grayson comments, ‘this was clearly done for the purpose of promoting awareness of the existence of the Korean state’.⁷ The North made repeated attempts to gain IOC recognition for its own NOC, but was rebuffed on the grounds that there could not be more than one recognised NOC in any one country. In the late 1950s, however, pressure began to build up from the Soviet Union and East European countries, which, drawing on the experience of the two Germanies, argued for recognition of the North Korean NOC and the creation of a unified team for future Olympics.

In 1957 the IOC gave provisional recognition for a North Korean NOC, but only for ‘internal affairs’ not international events. At the IOC session in May 1959 the Soviet and Bulgarian members strongly argued for the full and separate recognition of the North Korean NOC, but IOC President Avery Brundage still preferred a joint Korean team on the German model for the 1960 Rome

⁶ Ha Nam-Gil and J.A.Mangan,, ‘Ideology, Politics, Power: Korean Sport - Transformation, 1945-92’, in J.A.Mangan and Fan Hong, eds, *Sport in Asian Society: Past and Present*, (London: Frank Cass, 2003), p.214.

⁷ James Grayson, ‘Sport in Korea: Tradition, Modernization and the Politics of a Newly Industrialized State’, in J. Binfield and J. Stevenson eds. *Sport, Culture and Politics*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p.166.

Olympics.⁸ No progress was made, however, and the North Korean athletes were left out in the cold and did not participate in the Rome Olympics; only South Korean athletes took part.

Consequently, not until the 1964 Tokyo Olympics did both South Korea and, for the first time ever in the summer Olympics, North Korea send athletes. Yet, the latter actually withdrew after its athletes had arrived in Japan, when some of them were disqualified, providing a last minute twist to what had been a series of complicated and contentious efforts over the previous three years to try to secure either at best a joint Korean team or at least the separate participation of both Koreas in the Tokyo Olympics.

The Hong Kong role⁹

In 1962 the North Korean NOC was given full IOC recognition along the same lines as East Germany, namely that a unified team should be formed as a result of joint competition.¹⁰ For the first time ever since the division of the Korean peninsula the two Koreas held sports talks, albeit under the auspices of the IOC, at Lausanne, Switzerland, in early 1963. The South Korean NOC then proposed a bilateral meeting just between the two Korean NOCs, with no formal IOC participation, to be held in ‘neutral’ Hong Kong. The first meeting - the first of their kind ever involving solely North and South Koreans – was held in May, but a second follow-up meeting, in July, broke down on the first day, as each side accused the other

⁸ Christopher Hill, *Olympic Politics*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992). In the 1956, 1960 and 1964 Olympics, an all-German team competed, composed of athletes from both West and East Germany. Wallace Irwin, *Politics of International Sport: Games of Power*, (New York: Foreign policy Association, 1988), p. 38. South Vietnam participated in some post-1948 Olympics, before the Vietnam War became too intense, and the united Vietnam was admitted to the Olympic movement in 1979.

⁹ The following section draws heavily on my article, ‘Reluctant Mediator: Hong Kong, the Two Koreas and the Tokyo Olympics’, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol.24, No.3, March 2007, pp. 375-391.

¹⁰ Hill, *Olympic Politics*, p.193.

of bad faith. After further frustrating interventions by the IOC it was decided that since the negotiations for a joint team were making no progress then there would be two Korean teams allowed to participate in Tokyo.¹¹

The inter-Korean meetings in Hong Kong in 1963 provided ample evidence that the intense bilateral competition between the two Koreas, backed by their respective supporters and superpowers, had already been projected into the Olympic movement. While South Korea had initially held the edge, in terms of being the first of the two countries to be formally admitted into the IOC, the North later found powerful voices amongst the Soviet and East European countries to argue its case. From the late 1950s onwards the Korean representation issue was to become as difficult for the IOC as the issues of the two Germanies and China-Taiwan.

For both the South and North Korean governments the negotiations about forming a joint team for the Tokyo Olympics became significant components of their respective political and foreign policy aspirations. For both countries - a centrally-planned North and an authoritarian South - it was unrealistic to expect that their NOCs would be able to carry out policies which did not conform to these governmental objectives. At that period the intensity of the rivalry, barely a decade after the end of the internecine Korean War, was such that it was perhaps naïve of IOC officials to expect either side to make sufficient concessions for a compromise to be reached.

¹¹ *Olympic Review*, 1964, <http://www.aafila.org/OlympicInformationCenter/OlympicReview/1963/BDCE85/BDCE85n.pdf> . Six members of the North Korean athletic team were banned from participating, because they had taken part in the so-called 'anti-imperialist' GANEFO Games (Games of the Newly Emerging Forces) in Indonesia the previous September. When the IOC insisted on the ban, North Korean officials withdrew their whole team and left Japan without competing.

Intensifying competition

However, subsequently, despite intermittent discussions over the following decades, the two Koreas have never fielded a joint team at the Olympics. The North gained more from these failed talks in the early 1960s than did the South, since from the 1968 Olympics the North was able to compete on an equal footing with the South, but in the 1970s it was the South which was to become more adept diplomatically, waging a campaign which was to culminate in the 1981 IOC decision to award the 1988 Olympic Games to Seoul.

In fact, during the 1960s and 1970s the South Korean government of President Park Chung-hee used sports promotion as one of several means to create a national revival after the traumas of colonization and civil war. Labelled by some as the ‘father of modern sport’, Park introduced a number of innovative sports policies at both the elite and mass level and even the idea of winning the right to host the Olympics originated during his period in office.¹² In North Korea too sporting activity became an important part of societal mobilization and development. Mass sports, involving usually gymnastics, became a regular feature of North Korean society. Nonetheless, both Koreas had been relatively low-key in terms of participating in international sporting events during the 1960s and 1970s (apart from the notable example of the North Korean soccer team’s almost legendary exploits in the 1966 World Cup in England¹³).

Periods of relative rapprochement between the two Koreas frequently led to some discussions on joint teams for sporting events, but as the political atmosphere soured again so too did the sporting talks splutter and fail. Even after the political breakthrough of the 1972 North-South Joint Declaration, efforts made to develop

¹² Ha and Mangan, ‘Ideology, Politics, Power’, pp. 219-220, 225-231.

¹³ Memorably recalled in the documentary film, ‘The Game of Their Lives’ [now available on DVD].

greater sporting exchanges and even form joint teams failed. Sports organisations and facilities in the South had developed to the stage that it could host some international competitions, but, under pressure from the North, communist country athletes did not participate.¹⁴ Agreement failed to be reached for a joint team for the 35th World Table Tennis Championships, held in Pyongyang in 1979 (the first major international sporting event hosted by the North) and South Korean table tennis players were not admitted into Pyongyang.¹⁵ This failed negotiation (and what was perceived internationally as North Korean intransigence) had two results: firstly, international sporting federations became wary of the North, which was not again asked to host a major international sporting event, and, secondly, during the 1980s, socialist allies of the North slowly became more willing to send their athletes to international sporting competitions in the South.¹⁶

In the early 1980s, government-level meetings were held to discuss sending joint teams to the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics and the 1986 Asian Games in Seoul,¹⁷ although in the end North Korea boycotted both of these events (it should be noted that South Korea had boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics).

It was the partial boycotts of the 1980 and 1984 Olympics and the IOC's determination to secure a boycott-free Olympics in Seoul that made the 1988 Olympics a particular focus of political controversy. The North Koreans, with particularly vocal support from Cuba, criticised the choice of Seoul on safety grounds, but the IOC held firm and refused to change venue. Consequently, the North then

¹⁴ Ralph Clough, *Embattled Korea: The Rivalry for International Support*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), pp.318-319.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp.319-320.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.320.

¹⁷ Choi Dae-souk., 'Building Bridges: The Significance of Inter-Korean Sports and Cultural Exchange'. *East Asian Review*, Winter 2002, pp.107-115. Pyongyang had also bid to host the 1986 Asian Games, but withdrew at the last moment when it seemed clear that Seoul would win selection.

asked for a co-hosting arrangement. Both the South and the IOC rejected this proposal (not least because the Olympics are awarded to only one city), but the IOC at the same time showed some willingness to discuss the possibilities of some events being held in the North. There then followed during 1985-88 a series of convoluted discussions, which are described in impressive detail in Richard Pound's insider account.¹⁸ At one stage the two Korean NOCs and the IOC did come close to agreement over some preliminary rounds of sports being held in the North, but the offers were never sufficient to satisfy the North and, despite IOC willingness to keep the door open until the very last minute, North Korean athletes did not participate in the Seoul Olympics. However, with the exception of Cuba, the various socialist allies of the North all sent athletes to Seoul and in the process helped to lay one of the foundations for what would become their diplomatic recognitions of the South during the course of the following four years.

The road to Beijing

The dream of a joint Korean sporting team continued to remain just that, a dream. In fact, only twice, in the same year of 1991 at the World Table Tennis Championships held in Japan and the Junior World Football Championships in Portugal has a joint Korean team been fielded in a major international sporting event.¹⁹ Incidentally, this achievement came at a time of renewed North-South political dialogue, at the prime ministerial level, but also seems to have a Chinese dimension, since joint cheering of each others' athletes by South and North Korean supporters attending the Beijing Asian Games in 1990 was an important impetus. Nevertheless, the joint teams were the result of 'government contacts rather than purely

¹⁸ Pound, *Five Rings Over Korea*. See also Park Seh-jik, *The Seoul Olympics: The Inside Story* (London: Bellew Publishing, 1991).

¹⁹ Choi, 'Building Bridges', p.109.

civilian exchanges’.²⁰ In fact, the 1990s did not see any successful follow-up in terms of joint participation in Olympics nor indeed much in the way of inter-Korean sporting exchanges at all.²¹ It is against this background that we must consider the more recent Olympics.

The historic June 2000 summit between Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong Il, in Pyongyang, undoubtedly opened the way for greater cooperation and collaboration in North-South Korean relations. Consequently, at the 2000 Sydney Olympics the two Koreas entered the Olympic stadiums under a joint flag (the so-called ‘unification flag’, consisting of a blue outline of the undivided Korean peninsula on a white background) and wearing identical uniforms at the opening ceremonies. It was an emotional moment for the Koreans and for the watching crowd. Nonetheless, the athletes competed in the various sport events as two separate national teams.

Subsequently, the North Koreans participated in the September 2002 Asian Games in Busan, the first ever such occasion for North Korean athletes to participate in an international sporting event in the South. That success seems in part to be due to the South’s strategy of avoiding the complicated questions of a joint team and instead focusing on joint parade at the opening and the separate participation of North Korean athletes in sports.²² The attractive female North Korean cheer-leading troupe seems to have gone down particularly well with the South Korean media and public.²³

²⁰ Gabriel Jonnson, *Towards Korean Reconciliation: Socio-Cultural Exchanges and Cooperation*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 119-120.

²¹ Byun Jin-Heung has argued that effectively there was an eight-year break in inter-Korean sports exchanges in the 1990s. Byun Jin-Heung. ‘Inter-Korean Exchanges and Peace on the Korean Peninsula’, in *Peace on the Korean Peninsula through Sports Exchange*. (Seoul: Sports Institute for National Unification, 2003), pp.131-132.

²² Choi, ‘Building Bridges’, p.112.

²³ A later, unsubstantiated, report said that 21 out of the 270 cheerleaders had been sent to a labour camp for apparently talking too publicly about the advanced level of development they had found in Busan. *South China Morning Post* [hereafter SCMP], 29 November 2006. See also Jonsson, *Towards Korean Reconciliation*, pp.120-121.

The newly-established ‘tradition’ of a joint team entry was carried on to the 2003 Asian Winter Games in Aomori and the 2004 Athens Olympics Games. Although international tensions had been raised because of the crisis over the North’s suspected nuclear-weapon development programme, from October 2002, both sides were willing to continue to come together for these sporting events. For both countries, however, a desire to pass a political message to the United States may have contributed to this cooperation. The North certainly would have wanted to show the United States, so ‘hard line’ in the North’s view, that it could coordinate with the South,²⁴ while the South may also have wished to distance itself from the worsening political atmosphere in US-North Korean relations.

This, in turn, led to the revival of ideas to form a joint team for the 2006 Asian Games in Doha and the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Representatives of the two Korean NOCs met in Guangzhou in September 2005 (where they agreed in principle on a unified team), in Macau in November 2005, and in December 2005 when they began a series of bilateral meetings in Kaesong, on the North-South Korean border. As had been the case in earlier talks, the IOC has been actively encouraging bilateral talks and occasionally hosting trilateral talks. In June 2006 IOC President Jacques Rogge wrote to both Kim Jong Il and South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun urging them to cooperate in forming a unified team. The missile tests by the North brought a halt to exchanges, but Rogge later, in September, hosted the heads of the two NOCs at a meeting in Lausanne and included an offer to increase the number of athletic spots open to Koreans if there were to be a unified team²⁵ Once again, after the October nuclear test by the North and the absence of any last minute

²⁴ Song Young-Dae, ‘The Political Situation on the Korean peninsula and the 2010 Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games’, in *Peace on the Korean Peninsula through Sports Exchange*. (Seoul: Sports Institute for National Unification, 2003), p.30.

²⁵ Agence France Presse, 23 June 2006, and Yonhap News Agency, 7 September 2006, both in LexisNexis database.

agreement over a joint team, the two Koreas' athletes marched in together at the opening ceremony but competed separately at the Doha Asian Games. Nonetheless, at this time North Korea did openly convey to the IOC its support for South Korea's Pyeongchang's bid to host the 2014 Winter Olympics.²⁶

This year, the latest round of formal inter-Korean talks on a joint Olympic team took place in Kaesong in February, with more informal contacts in Kuwait in April and in Hong Kong in June 2007, but still no solution has been achieved. There is a considerable degree of agreement, on issues such as the flag (the much-used unification flag), the national anthem to be played when medal winners are on the podium (the 1920s version of the traditional Korean folk song 'Arirang'), and the uniforms (following earlier designs but all supplied by the South). One key area remains outstanding – and it is an issue that has remained since those early days back in Hong Kong in 1963 – how to choose the athletes to compete.

For individual sports, the accepted manner is for individual athletes to achieve qualification for the Olympics by reaching the necessary standards set by the IOC. The problems come with team sports. The disagreement basically boils down to the selection of team members. The South argues that the athletes should be chosen on merit (simply the best players from each side), while the North argues that they should be chosen in equal numbers, to reflect the truly unified and egalitarian nature of the team. For the South, one unified team should be stronger than two divided ones, particularly in certain

²⁶ The President of the North Korean NOC sent a letter to Rogge in December 2005 arguing that a Pyeongchang Olympics would enhance reconciliation and cooperation between the two Koreas. *Korea Times*, 22 December 2006. In July 2007 Pyeongchang lost the decision to Sochi, Russia. Another conciliatory gesture from the North resulted in preliminary talks in April 2007 about the two taekwondo associations, the International Taekwondo Federation, backed by the North, and the World Taekwondo Federation, backed by the South, beginning discussions about merging. Significantly, it is the WTF which will be training and supplying referees to the Beijing Olympics.

team sport events.²⁷ For the North, it is a matter of pride that its athletes should be seen as inferior to the South's and should be treated equally. Clearly in some team sports the South is stronger, such as men's soccer and handball, while in others the North has a stronger international reputation, such as women's soccer. Even if the basic principle of selection is agreed, then there still remains the issue of the mechanism for selecting the players through training or practice matches or some other format.

What role can the IOC and China, whether the government or the Beijing Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) play? At the moment, the IOC is encouraging from the sidelines, rather like its role in 1963, but not getting as actively involved as it did in the pre-1988 talks. In addition, to induce some degree of urgency, it has pointed out to both Koreas that the team qualifying competitions are about to begin or already have begun. Maybe soon it will be too late to change already settled finalists.

China clearly has committed significant resources and prestige into hosting a successful Olympics. As such, in the Korean context, China would like to have at the very least the repetition of the joint entry parade at the opening and closing ceremonies. It is also playing already an additional role by announcing that the Olympic torch route will pass from Seoul to Pyongyang next summer. But, in parallel with its role in pushing forward a solution to the nuclear issue through hosting the six-party talks and cajoling the participants towards a solution (the February 2007 agreement, for example) in that aspect, China is probably looking for something more in the sports field too. In other words, the joint entry plus alpha. A real joint team for the first time in Olympic history would at the very least bring reflected glory to China. China has so far remained largely on the sidelines, as the two Koreas deal with the IOC, but

²⁷ One South Korean NOC official argued that 'we would be come stronger in team sports, and not so much in the individual sports'. SCMP, 1 November 2005.

some informal pressure, especially on the North Koreans, may be expected in the coming months.

However, even if the joint team concept is unrealisable, then China may yet try to gain some other diplomatic and political benefits from the Korean participation. Even though a North-South summit meeting between Roh and Kim is planned for October 2007 (after being postponed from late August due to flooding in the North), next year's Olympics in Beijing could provide another opportunity to bring the two leaders together. Invitations to the two Korean leaders, Roh's successor (who takes office in February 2008) and Kim, to attend the opening ceremony might enable an unprecedented three-party summit to take place in Beijing under Hu Jintao's auspices.²⁸

The way forward

Clearly this brief overview above of inter-Korean sporting contacts in and around the Olympics over the past 60 years suggests that there is indeed a close relationship between politics and sports.

For some observers and participants, sporting contacts are a way to overcome or at least ameliorate political difficulties and differences. Certainly, at the general level, sports can contribute to improving international relations. The successes of the 'ping-pong diplomacy' which helped to simulate China-United States diplomatic contacts in the early 1970s, the more recent 'cricket diplomacy' between Indian and Pakistani leaders, and, arguably, the Korea-Japan World Cup soccer finals co-hosting are well-known examples.

²⁸ The 2000 North-South Korean Summit agreed that Kim Jong Il would visit Seoul at an appropriate time, but so far he has not gone south. Even though the North-South railway has successfully concluded an initial test run, it seems unlikely that he will visit Seoul in the near future. Some criticism within South Korea has been levelled at the fact that Roh would become the second president to go north, with no reciprocal visit south by Kim. A 'neutral' venue in a third country may be necessary for any incoming South Korean president to justify another summit.

But, it has been argued, sports can have a more specific impact on inter-Korean relations. Park Sung-il, a South Korean NOC official, has argued: ‘We are all brothers, one mind, one soul. And we are confident that through sports we can bring the two Koreas together’.²⁹ A *China Daily* editorial writer has also argued that a joint Korean team for the Beijing Olympics ‘is expected too help achieve new breakthroughs in inter-Korean relations. The significance of such a partnership will go far beyond sports’.³⁰ The basic argument here is that socio-cultural exchanges, of which sport is a key example, can contribute to consolidating the development of co-existence on the Korean peninsula and, ultimately, to unifying the nation.³¹

For others, however, it is politics that drive, distort or obstruct sporting exchanges. A German sports academic, Manfred Lammer, in analysing the reasons why an all-German sports team was possible in the late 1950s-early 1960s, has argued that it ‘owed its existence not to the autonomy of sport, but to the room for manoeuvre provided by politics’, because political and economic contacts between the two Germanies were already ‘intensive and more flexible than for instance in Korea’.³² Byun Jin-Heung, describing specifically the Korean situation, has argued that ‘although the basic principle requires that inter-Korean sports exchange should be freed from the shadows of political manipulations, it has not been able to pull it off’.³³ From this perspective, for socio-cultural contacts to be effective in inducing change at least need some basic convergence in political and economic standpoints is necessary.

²⁹ SCMP, 1 November 2005.

³⁰ *China Daily*, 27 February 2004.

³¹ See Jonsson, *Towards Korean Reconciliation*, pp. 232-234.

³² Manfred Lammer, ‘The Olympic Games: A Bridge to Unification? German Experience and Korean Perspectives’, in *Peace on the Korean Peninsula through Sports Exchange*. (Seoul: Sports Institute for National Unification, 2003), pp. 109-110.

³³ Byun, ‘Inter-Korean Exchanges’, p. 133.

At the very least, in divided societies and countries, where nationalism and political legitimacy become closely inter-twined, it seems that sporting contacts and cooperation are much more likely to be at the mercy of political events and under-currents. In the Korean case, therefore, the nature, pace and intensity of inter-Korean sports exchanges have been dictated by political and diplomatic circumstances.

Koreans both north and south of the border have an undoubted enthusiasm for sport,³⁴ but inter-Korean sporting exchanges have not had a stable and consistent foundation. The ‘special’ sporting events have too much of a one-off feel to them and do not lead to regular sporting exchanges. There are few, if any, opportunities for ‘ordinary’ Koreans to carry out sporting interactions.

On 27 February 1963 then IOC President Brundage wrote to the President of the North Korean NOC that the initial agreement to form a united Korean team for the next Olympics was ‘a great victory for sport’.³⁵ His optimism was to prove premature back then. Can his dream be realised 45 years later?

Now that the joint entry into international sporting events has the marks of becoming a standard or even ‘routine’ procedure, perhaps there is some scope for moving on to other forms of inter-Korean sporting cooperation. However, while the diplomatic and political relationship between North and South remains ‘abnormal’, the prospects for ‘normal’ sporting exchanges remain cloudy. In this context, it remains likely too that once again, in Beijing, there will not be a unified Korean team competing in the Olympics.

³⁴ See James Hoare and Susan Pares, *North Korea in the 21st Century: An Interpretative Guide*. (Folkestone: Global Oriental 2005), pp. 87-88 for comments on sports in the North today.

³⁵ Olympic Studies Centre archives: Avery Brundage Collection, microfilm of papers from Box 138.