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Sports as an Instrument of Foreign Policy Pursuit: A Case of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, sports have been used in the global world to integrate people of various cultures and have also been used as a unifying force to connect culturally diverse people. Sports, on the other hand, have also been used to drive the economic interests of state actors, since investments in the sports industry are worth billions of U.S. dollars. The size of the contemporary sports arena makes it a priority for state actors to use the instruments of foreign policy to promote their national interests. This paper therefore explores the sport and how it was used by state actors as a weapon to achieve their foreign policy objectives. The paper relied on a qualitative knowledge gauging process. The paper shows that the sporting arena is also a real space for the interplay of state interests. The paper advises that the condition of Nigeria needs to

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1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, a foreign relation is dependent on many entities since states will continue to compete to attain recognition and influence by indisputable act of accomplishing something. Given the objective of the United Nations to preserve better international ties, stability and protection, nations are now taking on a certain shape, attributing policies, tactics or preparing fair ways to peacefully legitimize their dominance and the use of sports as an instrument of the

pursuit of foreign policy by most countries. And for this reason sports can be regarded among the most thrilling contemporary phenomena, it is highly acknowledged because of its present form (Danyel, 2014). Sports are all types of competitive physical activities or games that are typically aimed at utilizing, sustaining or enhancing people's physical skills and abilities. The match or game is typically carried out between two cultures, each seeking to overpower the other. Some sports make it possible for a tie game; others include tie-breaking procedures to guarantee one winner or one loser. Many sports leagues make an annual champion by arranging games in a regular sports season, followed in certain instances by playoffs, if a number of such two-sided tournaments can be organized in a champion-making tournament. Hundreds of sports exist from those between single athletes, although multiple competitors may participate, each against one champion, to those with hundreds of simultaneous participants, either in teams or competing in certain sports such as racing as individuals.

Being part of the global community, sport is an important tool for bringing various people together in the world. It is an operation that leads to world peace. In order to positively impact social and moral benefits as well as physical benefits, it can be characterized as a totality of activities carried out. The sport does not have a classic stereotyped definition, but several distinct meanings. Ekmekci et al describe the sport: "the sport is essentially a reality created by people to remain healthy, to have fun and to assess the free time. Sport implies play, distraction, amusement, relaxation, distribution of melancholy and staying away from the normal work with the full meaning of the world (Ekmekci et al; 2013). It comes from the Latin term "Desportave and Desport," meaning to "distribute to distinguish from each other." These terms became sport in the XVIIth century. "The sport is defined by the Britannia Encyclopedia as follows:" Competitive and entertaining activities that involve a certain level of strength and skill. Sport is an integrative and competitive phenomenon that transforms an individual's natural environment into a human environment and creates individual or collective leisure activities, with or without a vehicle, in compliance with unique rules (Kilcigil, 1985). Some people regard sport as a balanced life secret; some as a complete step in the direction of group motivations; some as a listening or advertisement tool (Cankaya, 2001; Marcin, 2019).

Nigeria has a rich culture, and sports have added a significantly to these traditions, beginning with the popular sport called Dambe Boxing, a festival host of Hausa Matials sports. Dambe Boxing means learning military skills in the early days, but the games are now completely played as a way to gain personal glory, it displays masculinity, and bring honor to one's family and village. The country was able to be competitive at the sports in Nigeria, along with many other counties where football is a common sport. Super Eagles of Nigeria is considered one of the best teams in Africa and ranked 10th in the world in global sports competitions Nigeria might lack sports milestones, but many Nigerians are excited about getting festivities and activities held annually. Some of these are the 1934 Argungu Fishing Festival, which was quickly held and the competitions aim was to catch the largest fish. The Abuja International Engine Fan is an event showcasing the latest in the world. Nigeria's foreign policy practice was in the making shortly before the independence of the country (Owusu, 2014), while since independence it took an Africa-centered dimension, but has retained good international ties with other countries through various instruments such as sport, culture, religion, education e.t.c.

Nigeria's foreign policy was described as 'according to Owusu (2014). Democracy, peaceful unification of Africa, conflict resolution, non-alignment and non-fundamental intervention in other countries' internal affairs, and economic cooperation and growth in the

region. The African Union, the Economic Group of West African States (ECOWAS), the Commonwealth of Nations Non-Align Movement, and the United Nations are active in Nigeria in adopting these values. Sports have been a significant instrument in shaping Nigeria's international relations, contributing to the curiosity to investigate sport as an instrument in Nigeria's foreign policy pursuit (Keech and Houlihon 2009; Alairu, 2016).

Exchanges of sports diplomacy promote dialogue and cultural understanding between individuals around the world. The use of sports has introduced participants to diverse cultures while providing them with an incentive for athletes and peers from around the world to build luck (McClary, 2016). Sports as an instrument, in particular, defines the use of sport as a way of shaping and bringing people together in international policy, social and political affairs (keys, 2016). In South Africa and a significant summary of the social system of the nation (Laventy, 2010). Sport can also help to blend distinctions. Numerous athletes have pursued political office at either the national or sub-national level (Laventy, 2010).

2. THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

The national interest theory was adopted for this work. Hans Morgenthau popularized the national interest principle in his globally widely acclaimed *Among Nations* treatise policies. The struggle for power and peace The theory of national interest, published in 1948, is a theory that states participate in international affairs in order to protest and pursue some goal called national interest, which is necessary for the security and promotion of their citizens' welfare. However, in the principle of natural interest, there are several measurable defects.

A fundamental principle of theory operations, as Dham (2008) relations, which states only extend their recourses on operations that will give them real benefits in the global system. This study adopts this theory, despite the weakness listed above, since it offers a broad structure for examining the reason for state foreign policy.

An analysis of the priorities of Nigeria's and new foreign policy would show that all of them can be summed up in the need to ensure the security and protection of sovereignty as a sovereign state and internal harm, the promotion of the well-being of its citizens, the enhancement of its image as the giant of the continent of Africa and the force to be reckoned with in the international system. Therefore, the natural interests of Nigeria can be better secured and promoted if the price role in the formulation and implementation of Nigeria's foreign policy is granted to sports.

2. 1. Sport and Politics

Sporting rivalry has helped human society mediate alienation, overcome disputes and sublimate competitive instincts since the era of the ancient Olympic Games. Through their athletes, sports states have willingly showcased their dominance. This allows for sports to play a crucial role in power articulation and consolidation. According to Mac Chancy, "these teams of opposing sides and the people who help them come to know each other, creating opportunities to create and establish enduring, ongoing and peaceful relationships". Sports and politics are inextricably intertwined and often operate to demonstrate social economic or political dominance over another country, Houlihan states. At the same time, sports participation with each state and people creates and reinforces their own identity. States have occasionally found it beneficial to use sporting ties throughout history to give both positive and

negative diplomatic signals. The creation of for several governments, international sporting activity has created a low-cost, but high-profile resource for publicising their policies on international issues or for individual states. Although some argue, however, that sports provide a flexible and productive resource, others will agree with Kanin that sport is peripheral to international relations and offers, at best, poor symbolism.

In Nigeria, sports have been used as an instrument of foreign policy pursuit quite immediately and have played several major roles in improving Nigeria's reputation and power position in the international structure and funding for the process of nation-building, national integration and state unity of Nigeria.

2. 2. Nigeria`s Performance in the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup finals

In improving Nigeria's sports, several significant roles in the international system's prestige and power status, in assisting with building the nation, reconciliation and national integration in the country. Nigeria been a member of the international sport, has taken part in two international sport organizations and their foremost competitions, this study examines the effect of sports in Nigeria. We have the 'International Olympic Committee' (IOC) organizing the Olympics and the Federation 'Internationale de Football Association' (FIFA) organizing the World Cup for men's football.

The Tokyo Olympics of 1964 were the very foremost 'Olympic Games' in which the country took part as an independent state. Nojim Maiyegun, a young Nigerian, helped improve Nigeria's place in the international system at the Olympics by winning a bronze medal in a boxing event at the Games. This feat drew worldwide attention to Nigeria as a potential powerhouse in the community of sporting states and helped to improve its sovereign state status (Akinboye & Basiru, 2014). While at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, Nigeria won no gold, her involvement was a big boost to her effort to maintain her indivisibility as she was struck by a Civil War that posed a significant challenge to her territorial integrity and sovereignty. There was another young Nigerian on the medal list at the Olympics at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games; in the boxing event, Isaac Ikhuoria won a bronze medal as well. Not only did this accomplishment strengthen after three harrowing years of civil war, Nigeria's place in the international community also acted as a major healing balm, as all Nigerians, regardless of their ethnic or regional affiliations, felt a sense of pride in the achievement (Adesina, 2016, Ngobua, 2016; Shaagee, 2016).

Nigeria was able to bring other African states together to boycott Montreal in 1976 Olympics to pressure the international community to make South Africa a pariah state before stopping its disgusting ethnic discriminatory apartheid rule regime, which made second-class black Africans quote, on these accomplishments that it heralded her as an African foreign sports champion. It is also instructive to remember that this boycott marked a landmark in the fight against colonialism on the African continent, also inequality and has significantly supported the Nigerian State's key foreign goals.

Nigeria's credibility as a major player on the international stage of sports and politics has earned a huge boost in the first place. Secondly, it affirmed the role of Nigeria as the regional force on the African continent and, thirdly, it also reinforced Nigeria's argument as the champion of all people of African descent as its actions sent a powerful message that when any African is subjected to discriminatory treatment, she would not sit idly by. Despite the fact that it was under military rule, rule by the Nigerian state, all of these were accomplished by sports.

Nigeria did not win a medal at the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games, but its participation was an important foreign policy statement. The United States of America boycotted the Olympics with its allies to protest against the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union. (Cohen, 2015; Deos, 2014). Nigeria's involvement was therefore a sign that she was not tied to the U.S. and her European allies' apron strings. Similarly, Nigeria's determination to be separate from both the U.S.-led Western Bloc and the Soviet Union-led Eastern Bloc was also confirmed by its participation in the 1984 Olympics hosted by the U.S Los Angeles, the American city. The Soviet Union also boycotted the 1984 Olympics in a reprisal move (Deos, 2014).

The presence of Nigeria was therefore a straightforward policy statement of non-alignment. At the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, Nigeria also affirmed its reputation as a sports country. In the boxing event, by receiving a silver medal, Peter Konyegwachie improved the records of both Maiyegun and Ikhuoria. Nigeria's male 4 x 400-meter relay team kept the entire world spellbound by winning a bronze medal. However, at the 1988 Seoul Olympics, Nigeria did not win any medals. Nigeria improved its medal haul and, by implication, its international prestige at the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992. In the boxing ring, the pair of David Izonritei and Richard Igbinebu each won silver. By winning silver, the male 4 x 100 meters relay team improved their 1984 record, while their female compatriots won a bronze medal (Adesina, 2016, Ngobua, 2016 & Shaagee, 2016).

It was during the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta that Nigeria made a giant leap to sporting stardom. In the women's long jump, ChiomaAjunwa won a gold medal and the football team tagged "the Dream Team" won gold in football, too. The female 400 x 400-meter relay team won a silver medal, while in the 200 and 400-meter events, Mary Onyali and FalilatOgunkoya won a bronze medal each. A bronze medal in boxing was also won in Duncan Dokiwari's case (Jeroh, 2012a). In addition to improving the international image of Nigeria, this achievement also helped to alleviate after the cancelation of the 1993 presidential election results, allegedly won by MKO Abiola, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) presidential candidate, and the subsequent arrest of Abiola by the Abacha military regime in 1994, internal political tensions within the Nigerian State.

These acts created Civil unrest within the Nigerian State and the Nigerian contingent's Osterling performance at the 1996 Olympics was a major boost to the preservation of law and order within the state as the 'feel good factor' and the pride that accompanied the success of one's national sports teams in international events made Nigerians hope to have a better future for the Nigerian State. Nigeria won gold in the men's 400 x 100-meter relay event at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, while Gloria Alozie and Ruth Ogbeifo won a silver medal each in the 100-meter running and weightlifting events. Nigeria won two bronze medals at the 2004 Olympic Games hosted by Athens, courtesy of the 400 × 100 and 400 × 400 m male relay teams. In the 2008 edition of the Beijing Games, the men's football team, the women's 400 × 100 relay team and Blessing Okagbare each won the silver medal in the women's long jump. Chika Chukwumerije and Mariam Usman both won a bronze medal each in weightlifting in Taekwondo.

Nigeria was unable to win any medal at the 2012 London Olympics, although it only managed to win one bronze medal at the 2016 Olympic Games in the football an event organized by the city of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. A cursory look at the above will reveal deteriorating fortunes for Nigeria at the Olympic Games after her sterling performance at the 1996 edition of the Games, with detrimental effects on her international prestige and status (Adesina, 2016, Ngobua, 2016; Shaagee, 2016). Although Nigeria did not play in the Federation

International Federation of Football Association (FIFA)'s senior male competition until 1994, generally referred to as the World Cup Finals, she was a force to be reckoned with in the organization.

She was a continental champion in the first case, having won in 1980 and in 1994 the African Nations Cup. She was also a frontline participant of the FIFA Junior World Cup Finals, including the Under-17 and Under-20 categories, which she won on many occasions. In 1974, on the basis of her very impressive credentials on and off the football pitch, she was able to mobilize the African votes to remove the outgoing President of FIFA, Stanley Rous, a native of England, and to install Joao Havelange, a Brazilian (Ndlovu, 2010). This single intervention had a profound influence on the advancement of the foreign policy priorities of Nigeria. First of all, in the African continent, it developed its pedigree as having great influence that served to increase its prestige and position in the global community. Furthermore, this move was a major step towards achieving its goal of fully eradicating in the African continent, colonialism and racial inequality, as Havelange had vowed to ban states from engaging with such policies in FIFA organized competitions.

In 1994, fresh from their conquest of the African continent, the Super Eagles of Nigeria took part in the The United States of America Senior World Cup Finals for the first time. The Nigerian team proved all bookmakers wrong as it qualified with obvious ease from its group for the second round of the competition, which had famous football teams like the national football teams of Bulgaria, Argentina and Greece. In the round of 16, she narrowly lost to Italy, the eventual tournament champion.

However, the exhibition of football art by team members propelled Nigeria as a power in international football into global openness and greatly enhanced its prestige and standing in the world international sports system. (Aiyejina, 2016; Akinola, 2014). Following the World Cup case, she received many invitations from influential states in the international community, including England, to play friendly matches with their national teams, a very clear indication of her increased prestige within the international system. It should be recalled that Nigeria was under a military regime led by Gen. Sanni Abacha in 1994, which hastily sacked the Babangida regime's transitional government on the eve of its forced removal from office in 1993 as a result of the backlash that met with the 1993 presidential election being annulled.

MKO Abiola, who supposedly won the presidential elections in 1993, was also detained and put under house arrest by the Sanni Abacha government. This act, in combination with Abacha's other dictatorial policies, made Nigeria notorious in the international system. Therefore, in the 1994 World Cup, the feat of the Super Eagles was the most impressive it helped to open up positive ways of interaction between Nigeria and other members of the international system.

Similarly, the sterling success of the Super Eagles also helped douse political tensions within the Nigerian state as the mass civil unrest that embraced the actions of the Abacha regime with the arrest of Abiola lost steam as Nigerians resurrected their expectations of a better and stronger Nigerian state with the exhilaration of the accrued prestige from the Super Eagles' success.

In the 1998 World Cup, hosted by France, two powerhouses in the field of international football, Nigeria also swept aside the likes of Bulgaria and Spain to progress to the Round of 16. However, in order to exit the race, she lost woefully to Denmark. In the 2002 edition of the World Cup, co-hosted by Japan and South Korea, Nigeria was unable to advance from the group stages. She was not even able to qualify for the 2006 World Cup in Germany and Nigeria struggled to advance out of the group stages at the World Cups hosted by South Africa, Brazil

and Russia in 2010, 2014 and 2018 (Aiyejina, 2016; Akinola, 2014; Ameh, 2018; Okpara, 2018). Thus, in using its FIFA membership and its participation in the World Cups to improve its foreign policy, Nigeria has reported declining fortunes. Sport is one of the major sectors of the economy in Nigeria. It comprises of:

- 1) Leisure Centers & Sports Clubs
- 2) Sports & Physical education
- 3) Research & Development
- 4) Sales & Trade of sport products
- 5) Construction of sports venues
- 6) Marketing & Advertising
- 7) Organization Sports Events
- 8) Medical Treatment & Rehabilitation
- 9) Sport Tourism

The development of sports seems too commensurate with economic development is an essential factor in the economic growth of the country. The creation of sport provides numerous opportunities for jobs, such as:

- ❖ Producers and retailers of sports goods and equipment
- ❖ Managers
- ❖ Administrators
- ❖ Engineers & developers
- ❖ Various suppliers and providers.
- ❖ Coaches & Sport Doctors
- ❖ Consultants & Advisers
- ❖ Sport journalists & commentators

As we can see from what is stated above, sport is not just kicking the ball, or playing a game of tennis, or even going to the gym or just walking, as opposed to what many might think. Sport was an effective weapon or instrument for fighting the vaccine against polio. Functional cold chain networks and continuing community education on the value of routine immunization were ensured by the Kick Polio out of Africa campaign. Since 1997, through an agreement with the African Football Confederation, leading Nigerian and African football players have engaged in public awareness drives through the distribution of posters, radio interviews and public autograph sessions by the Nigerian Football Federation.

There are approximately 60 million Nigerians between 18 and 40 years of age who participate in active sports betting. Nigeria's sports betting market is estimated to be \$2 billion and is expected to expand mainly due to the rapid spread of mobile phones. The generalized usage of mobile phones in Nigeria was a positive game-changer for the sports betting industry. It's becoming easier to pay, play and win or lose on a daily basis.

The billion-dollar sports betting industry is expanding astronomically in the Nigerian football world. Over the years, many betting businesses have emerged in Nigeria. Nairabet, Merrybet, Bet9ja, Naijabet, Lovingbet, Surebet247, Supabets, 1960bet, Nairastake, Parknabet, 360bet, Sportybet, Plusbet, Skybetnaija, 9jadollarbet, Visabet, Winnersgoldenbet, among others, are here. There will now be betting channels seen in Nigeria's major cities on almost every lane, with new ones springing up daily.

2. 3. Challenges of the 2009 National Sports Policy

As stated earlier, Nigeria's foreign policy was reviewed by the Yar' Adua administration (2007-2010) and a new set of priorities were established with the central objective of articulating a better image of the Nigerian State and the use of the image in the international community to gain political and economic benefits (Aluko, Nwogwugwu & Adenuga, 2018). Many of the challenges facing the 2009 National Sports Policy and, by extension, the Nigerian sports industry focus on the issues of inadequate funding and mismanagement. Yazid (2014) argues that since there is no public-private partnership to channel required funds into the sector, the Nigerian sports sector is not adequately financed. Private individuals and organizations partner with governments around the world, in particular the The European States, the United States of America, most of the South American States, China, Japan and South Africa, are pouring funds into the sports sectors that go a long way in helping to provide the required facilities, training needs, and encouraging athletes and their coaches to offer their athletes continuously.

The reverse is the case in Nigeria, as about 90% of the support for the sports sector is mostly from the government (Nwankwo&Ekechukwu, 2017; Okediji, 2015). However, as compared to the problem of mismanagement, insufficiency of funds tends to be the lesser of two evils. As Okediji (2015: 194) states, "embezzle" characterizes the sports sector in Nigeria. Thus, even the insufficient funds made available to sports by the government end up being mismanaged with the resulting detrimental effects on athletes, other sports workers, sports facilities, and the entire sports industry. Ajom (2017) put the situation in a better light as he notices that "officials siphon the money more frequently as funds are made available, leaving the athletes underfed, underpaid and under-motivated. Mismanagement of funds often has dire repercussions for the growth of sports facilities, as funds for the development of existing facilities and the acquisition of new ones frequently end up in private pockets. Thus, much of Nigeria's sports infrastructure is either derelict or in deplorable circumstances (Ajom, 2017) training athletes is an onerous job because of the deplorable condition of the facilities and this can partly account for the dismal results of Nigerian athletes in international sporting competitions.

After reviewing Nigeria's results at the 2016 Brazil Olympic Games, Dumo (2017) subscribed to this view. There are some sports that used to be the 'specialization' areas of Nigeria in terms of international athletic competition. Boxing is one of the sports that first won Nigeria its first Olympic medal in 1964, as it was the sport in which Nigeria also excelled in the Olympic Games of 1972, 1984 and 1996. At the 2016 Olympic Games in Brazil, however, it was disheartening to see that Nigeria was represented by only one boxer, Efe Ajagba, who at the end of the day did valiantly but could not get any medals. The deplorable condition of the boxing infrastructure has been due to the declining fortunes of boxing in Nigeria.

In addition, Dumo (2017) noted that weightlifting is also a sport in which many Olympic laurels are involved, have been bagged by Nigeria, even more than those offered to the country by boxing. However, much like boxing, Nigeria was represented by only one weightlifter at the 2016 Brazil Olympic Games Oluwatoyin Adesanmi, who left the Games without a medal as well. The deplorable state of the weightlifting infrastructure in Nigeria was also given as the main causal factor.

The lack of advanced training in sports administration among most sports administrators is another significant manifestation of mismanagement in the sports sector in Nigeria. Yazid (2014) states emphatically that about 83% of Nigerian sports administrators do not have sports

administration experience. This high percentage of managers can only spell doom for the sports sector without the necessary sports cognitive skills, as they will not know where the shoe pinches. Although it can be argued that most sports administrators are passionate about the sports they administer, the argument is self-defeatist, as excitement without knowledge is highly destructive. This phenomenon can be largely attributed to the failure of sports managers to look for talent in the making, who would be properly groomed to fly the flag of the Nigerian State high in international sports competitions. What it gets today is the undue emphasis and emphasis on already-made talents that, when they finally flame out or when the law of diminishing returns sets in, have no successors to hand over the batons to as attempts have not been made to train new talents.

In the unhealthy culture of faulty policy development procedures, policy discontinuities and policy summersaults, another sign of mismanagement in Nigeria's sports sector is also shown. Aibueku & Ogbouma, for instance, (2013) the key stakeholders were not involved in the formulation processes of both the 1989 and the 2009 National Sports Policy, which made it very difficult for corporations to implement the policies. Subsequent governments have often been established to often discontinue or abandon the policies made by their predecessors. A good example can be found in 2009's National Sports Policy. It was rendered under the administration of the late President Umaru Yar'Adua and the successive administrations were not bothered to enforce it.

Ajom (2017) reports that, as a result of the dismal performance of the Nigerian sports teams at the 2012 London Olympic Games, former President Jonathan Goodluck held a one-day retreat in the twilight of his presidency to contemplate the various problems facing the sports sector and to find ways to ensure that Nigeria would not perform woefully at subsequent international sporting events. In the first place, the retreat would not have been appropriate if the administration of Jonathan Goodluck had maintained confidence in the 2009 National Sports Policy.

It is instructive, however, that the Buhari administration that replaced Jonathan Goodluck's administration did not bother either to implement the 2009 National Sports Policy or to publish and implement the retreat decisions of the 2009 National Sports Policy preceding administration. Nigeria has been using sports all over the world as an effective weapon for combating racism. Nigerian athletes such as Leon Balogun, Peter Odewenge, Ayiegbeni, Anthony Joshua, etc. have joined other African countries and other black athletes to fight sports racism. There have been several demonstrations around the globe and even in Nigeria condemning the alleged unequal treatment against Blacks. The movement has added their voices to sports stars and other celebrities.

3. CONCLUSION

It is quite commendable that Nigeria has recorded outstanding success in competitive sports at national and international levels once in a while. This is only a tip of the nation's desired sporting ambitions for the iceberg, as success so far is confined to those sporting. Nigeria has, however, been able to ensure the use of sports to pursue its foreign policy and foster a better image in the international community with these brilliant successes and achievements.

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