

# WHEN SPORT BREAKS DOWN WALLS



On the 9th of November 2019, we celebrated the 30th Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall, an event which has become a global icon for positive, disruptive change, a symbol of reunification and justice.

For Save the Dream, an organisation working to promote safe access to sport and its educational and social values, the temptation to associate the power of sport with the demolition of the Berlin Wall and any other barrier between or within nations was so strong that it resulted in the launch of the global campaign “When Sport Breaks Down Walls”, in cooperation with the International Olympic Truce Center (IOTC) and the support of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC).



There have been many moments throughout history, when the universal language of sport has spoken to the world, promoting peace, reconciliation or simply showcasing that a different way of thinking is possible.

Berlin is the city which saw the Afro-American champion Jesse Owens challenging Hitler's myth of Aryan supremacy by winning four gold medals in the sprint and long jump during the 1936 Summer Olympics. Ironically Owens would never be invited to the White House to shake hands with the US President. Nonetheless, his victories remain one of the most powerful messages conveyed by sport in the course of history, along with the support and advice Owens received from his German competitor Luz Long. Long became a symbol of both sportsmanship and peace in a world which was entering into the II Second World War, during which he lost his life fighting as a German soldier.

Let us also be

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reminded about the German athletes who marched together at the Rome Summer Olympics in 1960 as part of the United Team of Germany.

I had the opportunity last April, when we launched our campaign through the organisation in Berlin of a Youth Forum, to meet Hans Grodotzki, a German athlete who competed in the 1960 Rome Summer Olympic Games. His words allowed us to relive the moment the German team entered the stadium during the opening ceremony, wearing black and gold, with no sign of the German Federal Republic or the German Democratic Republic and marching to Beethoven's 9th Symphony instead of the national anthem.

Nelson Mandela's quotes on the power of sport have inspired generations of "sport for peace activists". South Africa's victory of the 1995 Rugby World Cup played in South Africa remains one of most powerful examples of national reconciliation. A divided nation became one when South African President Nelson Mandela strode to the centre of the pitch in a Springbok jersey and shook hands with Francois Pienaar, captain of a team who represented for many years before one of the main symbols of apartheid.

The role of sport in breaking down walls is highlighted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly resolution which, on the 23rd of August 2013, proclaimed the 6th of April as the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, a date which commemorates the inauguration in 1896 of the first Olympic games of the modern era in Athens.

Through the resolution, the UN General Assembly invites States, international organizations, sports organizations and civil society to cooperate, observe and raise awareness of the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace.

The UN General Assembly started to adopt resolutions since 1993, urging its Member States to observe the Olympic Truce from the seventh day before the opening to the seventh day following the closing of each Olympic Games.

The 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, was dubbed the "Peace Olympics" due to athletes from North and South Korea marching together, for the first time under a unified flag. This step to rapprochement can be seen as one of the most recent examples of sport diplomacy.

Regardless of these breakthroughs through the soft power of sport, walls continue to exist.

According to the report we issued on the 9th of November 2019 jointly with the IOTC and with the support of UNAOC, at the end of World War II, there were seven border walls or fences in the world. By the time the Berlin wall fell in 1989, there were fifteen. Today, there are at least 77 walls or fences around the world.

An important question that continues to be asked is whether sport can do more to inspire, facilitate or catalyse political decisions or promote positive change across nations.

The answer is probably “yes” and it is supported by the growing attention paid to “sport for development and peace” or other issues affecting society such as violent extremism by international organisations, sport bodies and, most importantly, by international, regional and national agencies for development and cooperation. Notwithstanding the closure of the UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace, there continues to be positive trends of coordinated actions and platforms where “sport for peace activists” have access to tools, information and interaction.

Many encouraging stories are coming from the world of sport, civil society and sport at the grass-roots level.

An inspiration to us all is the effort by Marathon Legend Tegla Loroupe, who organises the Peace Race in Kapenguria, Kenya every year. The aim is to promote unity between rival tribes in the West Pokot area. Since 2016 he also leads the Refugee Athletes Team which provides an opportunity to refugee athletes to compete in the Olympic Games under the flag of the International Olympic Committee.

Then there is the example of Nelsa Curbelo, human rights activist nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize, who has utilised sport and other soft powers to bring peace among gangs in Ecuador’s city of Guayaquil. The city is home to over 200 gangs, of which some 60,000 disaffected youths are members.

The work of Suad Gallow, a former Somali National Women’s Basketball Team Member is noteworthy. She is developing Women’s basketball from grassroots to elite level in Somalia,

while protecting girls willing to play from extremist groups trying to deny women the right to practice sport in the Country.

The story of Honey Thaljih, today a FIFA official, remains inspiring. Thaljih succeeded in establishing the National Women's Football Team of Palestine.

Katherina Salta, an IOTC official, founded in Greece the Country's first women's refugee team involving nationals from fourteen countries including Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

We have the privilege and the opportunity to work with all these amazing leaders in the world of sport for peace. We can benefit from their support in many of our initiatives aimed at empowering youth leaders through sport and as a result use sport to promote reconciliation and restore hope.

The key is now to consolidate, as it did in other sectors of the international agenda, a long-term approach, making the shift from an emphasis on projects to implementing sustainable programmes, where organisations, key networks and sport for peace activists at all levels are empowered to systematically join forces to break the next wall.

The greatest challenge is to grow the future Mandelas, to nurture the next generation of political leaders by inspiring them through the values of sport and empowering them to embrace sport as a driver to build fair and just societies, to use the values of sport to prevent conflicts and not only as an effort to restore normality in post-conflict or mitigate the consequences of crisis situation.



Please click here to download the Report [When Sport Breaks Down Walls](#)

## The Author

Massimiliano Montanari has over eighteen years' experience in international affairs and innovation in pursuance of global objectives such as peace, inter-cultural dialogue and human development.

He serves as Chief

Executive Officer at the global NGO "International Center for Sport Security" (ICSS) INSIGHT and leads ICSS' initiative Save the Dream as its Executive Director, established to promote inter-cultural dialogue and social innovation through the power of sport values. Montanari's previous position at the ICSS, which he joined in 2012, was as Chief of Cabinet to ICSS the President.

Before joining the ICSS,

Massimiliano Montanari has worked for twelve years for different United Nations bodies, including the UN High-Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, as well as taken part in Task Forces at the UN Secretariat in New York in different fields, such as addressing violent extremism, transitional justice, security in post-conflict zones and public-private partnerships.

Polyglot and creative thinker, Montanari has strong experience in international negotiations and in the development of multisectoral programmes, new ideas and global movements involving different sectors, from government to civil society.