

# Making Sense of Global Patriot Games: Rugby Players' Perceptions of National Identity Politics

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## **Abstract**

In this article we aim to explore the complex inter-relationship between sport and national identity politics with particular reference to rugby union. Rugby union, a sport currently undergoing accelerating globalisation and professionalisation processes, is explored within the peculiarly complex 'British' context. The British Isles, and especially England, have once again found themselves at the focal point of the rugby world with the growth of 'European' rugby and the inward migration of foreign talent being juxtaposed against the more traditional national identities demonstrated in the Five Nations Championship. To probe these issues interviews were conducted with, and questionnaires sent to, a sample of elite players from the four 'Home Nations' of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. This article focuses on their observations.

## **Introduction**

The aim of this article is to investigate the complex inter-relationships between sport, globalisation processes and national identity politics. This is undertaken with specific reference to the responses and observations given by international rugby players from the British Isles. This collection of emotions, attitudes and feelings provides some original evidence for viewing national identities 'at play' through the eyes of elite sportsmen. In conjunction with these findings we are advocating that a figurational approach to national character and habitus codes can help develop our understanding of 'invented traditions' and provide valuable information on 'British' identity politics.<sup>1</sup>

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is based on a figurational approach to issues surrounding national identity, and how this can interlink with the work on nationalism of Benedict Anderson (1983), Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) and Anthony Smith (1991, 1995). Norbert Elias' study of the Germans (1996) contains a significant passage which, we maintain, is a valuable aid for conceptualising 'the nation'. He writes:

A striking example in our time is that of the we-image and we-ideal of once-powerful nations whose superiority in relation to others has declined. . . . The radiance of their collective life as a nation has gone; their power superiority in relation to their groups . . . is

irretrievably lost. Yet the dream of their special charisma is kept alive in a variety of ways – through the teaching of history, the old buildings, masterpieces of the nation in the time of its glory, or through new achievements which seemingly confirm the greatness of the past. For a time, the fantasy shield of their imagined charisma as a leading established group may give a declining nation the strength to carry on. . . . But the discrepancy between the actual and the imagined position of one's group among others can also entail a mistaken assessment of one's resources and, as a consequence, suggest a group strategy in pursuit of a fantasy image of one's own greatness that may lead to self-destruction. . . . The dreams of nations . . . are dangerous (Elias, 1996: xliii).

This study attempts to utilise this previous research to investigate national habitus (the sub-conscious process of 'belonging' to the nation) and national identity politics (the complex struggle for power through the establishment of dominant national identities) from within a sporting context.

We suggest here that international sports are forms of 'patriot games' and that the individuals representing 'their' countries therein become highly visible embodiments of these nations – they are 'patriots at play'. These 'patriots at play' are significant actors who both define and reflect the 'special charisma' of nations writ large and, through their practices, sport becomes one of the 'fantasy shields' whereby 'imagined charisma' is both fuelled and protected (Maguire & Poulton, 1997). The main focus involves an investigation of this 'placement' of such sportsmen as active embodiments of national habitus by exploring the views of international rugby union players from the British Isles.

Several main themes emerge from their observations. Firstly, rugby union appears to be significantly connected to the national habituses of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Secondly, the players are, in many ways, symbols of national pride and patriotism. Thirdly, national anthems, styles of play and national stereotypes are used by players to differentiate between the nations. Finally, rugby in the British Isles appears to foster a complex of I/we and us/them relations. It is our contention that this evidence can help 'make sense' of the role sport plays in the construction of 'invented traditions' and 'national character'.

### **Sport, National Habitus and 'British' Identity Politics**

Writing on the internalisation of identification, Bloom asserts that:

National identity describes that condition in which a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols – have internalised the symbols of the nation – so that they may act as one psychological group when there is a threat to, or the

possibility of enhancement of, these symbols of national identity (Bloom, 1990: 52).

National identities, through the ability to transmute between the political and the cultural, remain powerful forces in today's 'global era' (Smith, 1995). In connection to this, national cultures provide individuals with one of their main sources of self identity. Elias observed that:

In the present day world, nations . . . appear to have become the dominant and most powerful of all . . . supra-individual influences on people's feelings of meaning and value. . . . [Individual people] are coming to recognize more and more clearly the functions of nations or national groups as the guarantors, guardians, embodiments or symbols of a great part of that which they perceive as of lasting value in their individual existence (Elias, 1996: 352).

Interlinked with these views are a range of figurational concepts that we explore. These include: the multi-layered nature of personal identity and the role of national habitus; the concept of established-outsider relations; the use of personal pronoun pairings as a means of establishing I/we and us/them images; and the place of identity politics within the context of globalisation processes.<sup>2</sup> In Elias' work on established/outside relations some of the processes at work in the relations between established (the 'we' element) and outsider ('they') groups are explored. The 'problem' that interested Elias in this connection was:

how and why human beings perceive one another as belonging to the same group and include one another within the group boundaries which they establish in saying 'we' in their reciprocal communications, while at the same time excluding other human beings whom they perceive as belonging to another group and to whom they collectively refer as 'they' (Elias, 1994: xxxvii).

These observations are connected more explicitly to national 'character' by Elias in his work on the Germans. Here, Elias intertwines theoretical reasoning and substantive evidence to produce an investigation of the deeply embodied aspects of German habitus, personality, social structure and behaviour and how these features (the we-image of the Germans) can be seen to have emerged from the nation's history. The fortunes of the nation become sedimented, over many years, into the habitus of its citizens – individuals and the nation become interlinked. This emotional bond between individual and nation has been described as 'sleeping memories which tend to crystallise and become organised around common symbols' (Maguire & Poulton, 1997: 4). These memories are the very building blocks of the 'narrative of the nation' which, through the

‘remembering’ of shared collective experiences and ‘invented traditions’, defines I/we relations which, by reference to an ‘imagined community’, imparts meaning to the nation. Yet, through the actions of members of social groups, these traditions can also become ‘lived’ rather than just invented or imagined.<sup>3</sup>

Such observations imply that national character is defined through interconnected social funds of knowledge. In effect, national character is bound up with ways of knowing, which, borrowing from Anthony Giddens, can be termed ‘practical consciousness’ and ‘discursive consciousness’ (Giddens, 1984). National communities are more than imaginary, notional collectives – they are not simply the products of ‘discursive consciousness’. Concepts such as ‘imagined community’ and ‘invented traditions’, whilst valuable, appear to neglect the interplay between these two levels of consciousness. Whereas Hobsbawm and Ranger’s (1983) work emphasises a greater degree of discursive consciousness, in contrast it could be argued that Anderson (1983) through the appreciation of kinship, language and literacy in defining the nation, pays greater attention to both the practical and discursive levels, albeit with a privilege on the latter. It should be noted here that discursive practices *are* real, our point is that practical consciousness is rooted in the actions of people that have greater affective dimensions of human behaviour. Indeed, habitus codes are not simply ‘imagined’, they are lived experiences that provide a powerful emotional vocabulary for communities. The ‘mental traffic’ conducted between the two levels of consciousness can reawaken sleeping memories and, through the practical actions of people, make the nation ‘real’.

We argue that the nation remains one of the strongest formants of I/we feelings and that ‘national character’ represents one layer of social habitus that is embedded deep in the personality of the individual. The construction, and reinforcing, of our I/we identity, through an unnoticed blend of discursive practices and practical actions, enables ‘us’ to share things in common whilst also separating ‘us’ (the established) from ‘them’ (the outsiders). These group dynamics are particularly relevant to our understanding of what has become termed ‘national identity politics’. When established ‘we’ groups are confronted with outsiders, national habitus codes tend to harden and become more explicit. Intercourse between discursive practices (such as the production and consumption of media sport discourse) and ‘practical consciousness’ intensifies. External processes of globalisation (including Europeanisation) and internal politico-cultural processes may work to either weaken, strengthen or pluralise a dominant national habitus. Our work here represents a small contribution to this school of thought and attempts to relate the processes involved to the arena of sport in the British Isles (see also Maguire 1993a; 1993b; 1994a; 1994b; 1996; Maguire & Tuck 1997).

This is a particularly interesting historical ‘moment’ to be studying ‘British’ national culture and identity, for Britain is currently languishing amidst a ‘crisis of identity’. This has been coloured by four inter-related

developments. First, sections of British society are still haunted by dreams of its imperial past, when Britain was truly 'Great'. Second, processes of inward and outward migration have transformed Britain into a multicultural society, primarily through the mass immigration of former colonial subjects. Third, the so-called 'Celtic fringe' (Ireland, Scotland and Wales) is reasserting its nationalist claims and some are advocating the full dissolution of the United Kingdom. And, finally, the gradual integration of the UK into a single European Union, has led to the generating of fears surrounding a possible loss of 'sovereignty'.<sup>4</sup>

We contend that sport forms one of the most significant arenas by which nations become more 'real'. Particular sports often come to symbolise the nation – a process that dates back to the third phase of sportisation in the late nineteenth century (Maguire, 1994a). The close bond of sport with national identifications has made it an important conduit for a sense of collective resentment and popular consciousness. For example, the health of Wales as a nation is perceived as inseparable from the success/failure of the national rugby team. Sports can also become metaphors for national character – for example, cricket is the embodiment of a 'quintessential Englishness', imparting meaning to the nation.

Within the British Isles, the 'Celtic fringe' nations have employed sport in various ways as a means of asserting their own identities. In the late nineteenth century, Irish cultural nationalists, eager to reclaim their cultural identity and forge a new Irish nation, rejected 'British' sports and established their own Gaelic games under the auspices of the Gaelic Athletic Association, formed in 1884.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, the Welsh and the Scottish have used traditional 'British' sports to challenge the political and economic dominance of England by trying to beat them at their own game(s). For example, in rugby union the Calcutta Cup is played annually between Scotland and the 'Auld enemy'. Indeed, rugby union also provides one of the main sources of 'I/we' identity politics by which the English identify the Welsh, and the Welsh identify themselves.

Clearly, rugby union in the British Isles represents a unique arena for the construction, reproduction and contestation of national identities. The sport provides a series of national cultural paradoxes. These include: juxtaposing the Anglo-Saxon English against the Celtic nations in the annual Five Nations Championship, whilst also uniting the best players from the Home Unions as British and Irish 'Lions' every four years; and appearing to unite the people of a politically divided nation – Ireland.<sup>6</sup>

One only has to observe the way in which players clutch their national symbol on the rugby jerseys and sing 'their' national anthem vociferously before the match to understand that these players see themselves, and are seen as, the embodiment of their various nations. The role they play in the relationship between rugby union and national identity should not be taken lightly for

in playing for the rose, thistle, shamrock and the three plumes we see them representing nations writ large.

### **Oval Ball Nationalists? Players Making Sense of Patriot Games**

The aim of this section is to analyse the data generated from the responses of players to our survey. From their observations, five main themes emerged: the importance of rugby union to the nation; players as ‘patriots at play’; the place of ‘national’ anthems; the characterisations of national playing styles; affinities and aversions – feelings of ‘us’ and ‘them’. To maintain confidentiality, the players are categorised by an initial (signifying the nation they represent) and a number.<sup>7</sup> The evidence we collected suggests that many of the players regard rugby union as a central part of their particular national cultures. The strong tie between rugby union and the nation was emphasised by Player E.5 who said that a successful England rugby side ‘instils a certain amount of national pride amongst the . . . public’. Similarly, Player E.3 who, when asked who benefited most from a successful international rugby side, commented that ‘the sport itself certainly benefits and national pride as well. Certainly for England to be winning is good for the English nation’.

Of course, one reason for this perceived importance of rugby could be that currently the national rugby union sides of the British Isles are, arguably, the most successful internationally. This is particularly the case for the most successful of the Home Nations, England. The English players were well aware that as a result of recent failures in the other (traditionally labelled) ‘national’ sports of England, most notably the male versions of cricket and soccer, the rugby team had become the chief source for sporting pride and patriotism. Player E.6 viewed rugby union as England’s sporting saviour. He said that:

I think as a nation we need something really. [Our] football isn’t very good at the moment, cricket is an absolute joke and I suppose we haven’t done anything in rugby league have we? They are all professional sports – this is the last amateur one. I know the sport will be changing . . . but I think we are probably the last of the ‘professional amateurs’. . . . I think it would be beyond everyone’s wildest dreams, as a nation, to have [us as] World Champions. . . . We know we’ve got to go out . . . and . . . do a job but I know the lads will . . . do it. I think they’ll do it for themselves first . . . but they are [also] representing England. . . . I [can’t] . . . think what would happen if we actually came back with the World Cup. It would just be the biggest thing since 1966. . . . I just really hope it does something for the country. . . . We haven’t had anything to shout about recently and it would be nice . . . to say we were . . . World Champions.

Here, Player E.6 highlights that sport can be perceived as being a central element of national habitus and that perhaps the more historically ‘amateur’ sport of rugby union touches the nation in ways different from other, ‘professional’ sports. The ‘dream of the nation’ he makes reference to is that of becoming (once again) ‘champions of the world’ by winning the 1995 Rugby World Cup (a dream that had not been realised since the England association football team won that sport’s World Cup in 1966). Player E.1, referring to the sense of national pride that can be generated by an England victory on the rugby field, declared that ‘it has this “national” sort of thing with the fact that it has got so well supported it has generated a feel-good factor on a Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday the following week. Everyone’s talking about it’. This ‘sense of well-being’ (Player E.4) referred to by the players is frequently associated with a sporting triumph. It can provide a powerful, if only temporary, panacea to the nation’s ills.

It appeared, however, that there were other reasons behind rugby’s importance in Ireland, Scotland and Wales and these appeared to complement the successes of the national side. For example, the Irish players highlighted the opportunity to compete as a united Ireland, and the Welsh spoke of the traditional importance of the sport to their national identity.

The significance of rugby to the nation was also expressed by the Scottish players, most of whom referred to the fact that rugby is ‘highly regarded in Scotland and the people are very passionate’ (Player S.11). Player S.7 declared that it was especially important to the Scottish public as it ‘gives them something to cheer about . . . if other parts of their lives aren’t going well, or if other [national] sports [teams] are not being so successful’. Player S.6 further commented on the impact of a successful Scottish rugby team on the morale of the Scottish public: ‘We need the [Scottish] people to feel that they’re part of a winning nation . . . thus giving themselves more pride and confidence’. However, from a more general viewpoint, Player S.9 stated that whilst ‘a country’s morale can be lifted by sporting success’, it was no more important for Scotland to have a successful rugby union team than it was for any other nation. His views suggest that perhaps the temporary character of the ‘feel-good factor’ does not hold significance for longer-term national confidence. Similarly, Player S.10 referred to the importance of Scottish rugby to the nation as being somewhat less significant (and, to a degree, transient) as a result of the combination of patriotism and pessimism that he perceived to exist amongst the Scottish people: ‘as a country we are patriotic, and sporting success does lift morale; but there does seem to be a feeling that we are bound to fail soon after achieving success’.

The long tradition of Welsh international rugby, going back to the famous defeat of the New Zealand All Blacks in 1905, coupled with the extraordinary dominance of the Welsh in the 1970s appears to have ensured that rugby union has become firmly embedded within the Welsh national

culture as one of the chief elements of Welsh national identity.<sup>8</sup> The importance of rugby and its centrality to the Welsh national habitus was illustrated repeatedly throughout the interviews with the Welsh players. This was typified by the interviewees' responses who declared that rugby was 'the national game of Wales' (Player W.1) and identified the history and tradition that lies behind playing rugby for Wales. Player W.2, indicating the unique position of the sport in the country, stated that: 'We have something other countries don't have – the Welsh heritage and the place the sport of rugby holds in the Welsh nation. [Representing Wales is] something special that every Welshman wants to accomplish'. However, the Welsh players found that this tended to create a sense of false-expectancy amongst sections of the Welsh public who, perhaps reflecting a sense of wilful nostalgia (Maguire, 1994a), demand that the Welsh recreate the domination of the sport that they enjoyed in the 'good old days' of the 1970s. Player W.3 commented that 'the nation does expect . . . [and] playing for Wales, with . . . all the tradition . . . [and] history, the Welsh public has expectations which are far higher than . . . many other publics'. Player W.1 spoke further of the importance of a win to a fanatical Welsh public and their traditional response to both defeat and victory:

it's very important for the Welsh public as a whole to win. I think it's very important to the country. . . . I mean everybody responds to a winning team but it's a big fault in Wales that when the national side loses everyone's head goes down. . . . Unfortunately . . . when Wales have lost everyone's in a massive state of depression and that has [tended to] last three or four months – which is ridiculous. When Wales win everyone's smiling.

Rugby union also occupies a very special place within Irish national identity – the sport is perceived to have a unique ability in Ireland to transcend both political and religious divisions.<sup>9</sup> The centrality of rugby to Irish politics was displayed in the 1996 'Peace International', which was played at Lansdowne Road in Dublin between Ireland and the Barbarians, and which was designed to contribute to the ending of the troubles in Northern Ireland. Rugby union thus provides one of the few sports in which a united (albeit invented) 'All-Ireland' can compete on a world stage against other nations. This is important as the 'traditional' Gaelic sports, whilst still very popular, do not give the Irish this opportunity to compete internationally on a regular basis. Player I.1 stated that:

Everybody looks to national teams. . . . One of the few team sports [in which] you can compete at the world level is rugby football and we are competing in a World Cup as a national team in an international arena. It's very important to do well . . . it helps to

keep Ireland in world focus . . . [and] any successful sporting team gives the nation . . . a sense of pride.

Player I.5 made reference to the tremendous support for the Irish at Lansdowne Road ‘through two different nations’ and remarked on the fact that perhaps rugby does not therefore mirror the divisions in Irish society. Player I.4 commented that ‘rugby’s one of the only sports in Ireland where you have guys from the North and South playing under the same title with the same colour jersey. So having a successful rugby team is important, not only for rugby, but for the country as a whole’. When victorious, the Irish team was seen by the players to generate a sense of national pride in both Northern Ireland and the Republic. Additionally even during the darkest moments in North-South relations, the players could not recall the troubles ever materialising in a rugby context. When probed about the effect of the political situation on rugby in Ireland, Player I.1 (from Northern Ireland) remarked that:

I don’t want to get too controversial about the Northern Ireland-Republic of Ireland thing. It’s a funny situation . . . for someone outside Ireland . . . [who] don’t [sic] really understand it. We have just got to accept that there are two different countries – but in rugby terms we are one country. . . . Nobody has ever made a political issue out of it and they never will because rugby is bigger than that. In terms of the way rugby was set up, it was always . . . on a provincial basis (i.e. Ulster, Munster, Leinster, Connacht). . . . So. . .with the provincial set up there could be a division but it didn’t have the same effect because we played for Ulster (even though Ulster is Northern Ireland). But it is not, never has, and never will be an issue – not in sport.

These observations imply that rugby does indeed serve at one level to bring the two Irelands together but, in contrast, the players did not make too many references towards a truly united Ireland. On closer inspection it is also evident that there is still a degree of ‘them and us’ feeling, as illustrated in the previous statement by Player I.1, between the Northern Irish (or Ulstermen) and those from the Republic. This division in the island is perhaps most apparent in terms of language (the Southern Irish mainly speaking English but having a Gaelic language as well whilst the majority Protestant North speak only English). In rugby union, this manifests itself in issues surrounding the choice of anthem played at Ireland’s international matches. These issues are dealt with in more depth in the section dedicated to national anthems.

## **Eighty Minute Patriots?**<sup>10</sup>

This section investigates both what it means to the players to be representatives of 'their' nation and how they perceived other countries' national traits. Through these findings it is possible to shed more light on the concepts of 'Englishness', 'Irishness', 'Scottishness' and 'Welshness'. It was not surprising, given their responses to the centrality of rugby union to Wales, that the Welsh players also displayed the strongest sense of national identity, pride and patriotism. Player W.3 offered a typical response when he said that he was unequivocally '100 per cent Welsh' whilst Player W.2 stated that: 'Because I was born and bred in Wales (and especially down in West Wales) . . . I think rugby is half of Wales. . . . I'd rather be Welsh than English, Scottish or Irish, definitely'. For him the Welsh are characterised by their hospitality and friendship; being Welsh is something special that gives him a good feeling about himself. In addition, the Welsh players also saw themselves as the most 'British' of the representatives of the Home Nations – a feeling that has been evident since the early 1900s (Andrews, 1991; Williams, 1991). When asked about his patriotism, Player W.2 declared that it was possible for him to be both Welsh and British. When probed on this issue he replied that: 'I think . . . when I'm in Wales I am Welsh but when I travel outside Wales . . . to other countries, maybe when I'm representing a Wales team over a foreign country, it seems to me I'm Welsh *and* British'. This conflict between national identities in the British context provides some indication of the multiple layers of self-identity.

A layering of identity was also evident amongst the Scottish players. When asked how Scottish he felt, Player S.10 replied: 'Very. I know a lot about Scottish history and I am proud to be Scottish. I . . . live there and consider myself Scottish first and British second'. These comments demonstrate, albeit simplistically, that personal identity (and indeed national identity) is a complex phenomenon that can operate on more than one level at any one time in different environments (Jarvie & Walker, 1994; Maguire, 1994a). It does appear that when a British identification is present it tends to reside in a layer beneath that of the individual's sub-national identity. Thus 'Britishness' can be said to be acting at a 'supra-national' level. The dynamics of identity formation also suggest that I/we and they/them identifications are configured and reconfigured according to the situational context and the opponents involved. For example, a match between England and Scotland is likely to evoke more feelings of Englishness and Scottishness than it is a British identity.

Strong sentiments of national pride were echoed by the majority of the Scottish players in our sample. Eight out of the eleven questioned stated that they were '100 per cent Scottish' (Players S.2,3,4,5,6,7,8,11). This was qualified by some by confirming that they were Scottish 'born and bred' (Players S.5,7) and by others who indicated their pride in being able to say that they are Scottish (Players S.2,3,9). This was a particularly significant statement by Player S.9 as he only qualified to play for Scotland through his Scottish

grandparents. Player S.3 epitomised the players' attitude when he said: 'I am very proud to say I'm Scottish. I am always a great supporter of Scottish sports people who I feel succeed "despite the system". But I don't know enough about the political aspects to comment on, for example, devolution. I am always keen to say what a great country Scotland is and how much I enjoy living there'. Whilst it is apparent, from these comments, that he has an awareness of a relationship between sport and identity politics, this particular Scottish player does not actively link the two. Interestingly for such a 'patriotic . . . country' (Player S.10) four of the eleven Scots (only one of whom was a 'dual national') stated that they did not display their patriotism overtly. In contrast just two of the eleven proudly wore the kilt (the most definitive symbol of Scottishness) to demonstrate their patriotism, and one of these held dual nationality.<sup>11</sup>

The English players surveyed by us tended to be more muted about their national identity. Remarking on how 'English' he feels, Player E.4 stated that: 'I'm not patriotic in a Falklands flag-waving way. . . . I'm proud of a lot of things in this country but they're not things like the World Cup or two World Wars. Really it's things like the English civilised way of life . . . the sense of justice and the sense of humour which I think is . . . the best in the world'. This illustrates the traditionally understated (and mainly middle-class) style of nationalism that has tended to underpin the expression 'Englishness'. English national identity appears to be comprised of a more reserved sense of national pride rather than the demonstration of overt patriotism. Whilst this understated nationalism – which has been historically coupled with a degree of contempt for foreigners – does not make the English identity any weaker than a national culture that encourages more brazen displays of 'flag-waving'. It can mean that 'Englishness' is both hard to define and frequently misunderstood due to the typically more reserved displays of patriotism and national identity that underpin the national culture.

When asked about the pride in representing his nation on the rugby field, Player E.4 commented on his particular perception of English identity and thought it important to clarify the difference between nationalism and national identity. He stated that:

There's a huge sense of pride and patriotism. . . [but] I think . . . there's been a lack of that passion in the past. it's not necessarily in the English nature to be too boastful or overt about . . . national pride. I think far too many people confuse national pride with jingoism – the two are different and it is important to distinguish between the two because mindless nationalism is not to be encouraged but correct pride in your country and your team is.

The more jingoistic expression of nationalism referred to by this respondent has, however, inevitably been employed by the media in accompaniment

to the recent successes of the English team. Player E.1, demonstrating a degree of detachment from the rugby union/national identity interface and speaking of his dislike for those who abuse the power of national sentiment, commented that: 'One element of nationalism that I'm not happy about is the way our victories are used by an element of people that are "supporting" England . . . to further their egos and [their] "nationality trip"'.

These comments refer both to the journalists who tend to amplify nationalism and the politicians who tend to jump on the bandwagon of successful sporting teams and use sporting victories for their own personal ends. Some of these elements come together in the various satirical cartoons that appear in the media and often lampoon either the national team or certain national dignitaries. The blending of political and sporting disasters was very evident in a cartoon published in *The Times* during the 1995 Rugby World Cup where a heavy defeat of the England team coincided with internal strife in the Conservative government. The cartoon neatly alluded to England's previous match in the tournament (the Quarter-Final versus Australia) in which one player in particular (the English fly-half, Rob Andrew, wearing Number 10) achieved notoriety by winning the game with a last-minute dropped goal. However, this success was followed by a comprehensive defeat by New Zealand in the semi-final, and this created an opportunity for John Major's stewardship of Number 10 Downing Street to be brought into sharper focus by the media. In this cartoon, Major (the 'Little Englander') is cast in the role of the defeated (and now belittled and ineffectual) Rob Andrew facing a *haka* of Cabinet members vying for his power.

Player E.1, born outside of England, showed a more diluted sense of national identity and also illustrated just how easily, and typically, English identity can be inflated to 'British' proportions by, for example, assuming that the Union flag is the flag of England. He commented that: 'I'm not an archetypal Englishman I have a cosmopolitan background. . . . I'm not a fervent Union Jack wearer or flier of the flag, but I am proud to represent England. Paraphrasing his views, this player has seemingly developed a strong national sporting identity whereby his main source of national pride is experienced on the rugby field. A quiet confidence is evident. Consequently, outside of representative sport the nation becomes less meaningful for him and so he does not see himself as a typical Englishman off the rugby field. Such statements concretise the importance of rugby to national identity but may also endorse the notion that international rugby players are, to some degree, 'eighty-minute patriots'.

The pride and patriotism evoked within the context of rugby union has frequently been likened, most notably in the tabloid press, to that experienced within an environment of war. The media are quick to amplify these linkages and by using sport as a metaphor for war can effectively intensify feelings of nationalism and xenophobia. Some of the players interviewed employed

military-style language and the vocabulary of war in order to define the confrontation of nations on the rugby field. One example of this was offered by Player E.3 who hypothesised that: 'I think playing [international] rugby against each other in the Five Nations symbolises doing battle and it is the one time when the nations can get together and tight it out in a sporting manner'. This view clearly illustrates the Orwellian notion that modern sport is, in fact 'war minus the shooting' and establishes a relationship between sport, violence and international relations (Sipes, 1973; Elias & Dunning, 1986). These linkages are exploited by the media who frequently refer to past battles (such as Waterloo and Culloden) that are being re-fought each year on the rugby pitch in the Five Nations Championship.

### **God Save 'Our' Queen Versus Nationalist Sentiments?**

From the perceptions of the players it became apparent that feelings of national pride tended to flow more openly during the build-up to the game and especially during the playing of the national anthems. Player E.5 encapsulates what goes through his mind when the anthem is played: 'It can be quite stirring at times . . . It can actually focus your mind a little bit more and . . . it reminds you of what you're there for . . . I . . . actually sing [the anthem] because I am quite nationalistic. I'm proud of my country and also of the Royal Family as well'. Player E.4 reinforced this notion of focusing by remarking that the singing of the anthem was important as it acted as a 'psychological tool' that the players could latch on to, in a similar vein to the New Zealand *haka*. He added that it could be any stirring song 'as long as it had the right identity' and that: 'the actual National Anthem as regards to what it means . . . the royalty the class system and so on – it doesn't mean anything to me at all'.

Clearly 'God Save The Queen', which is the British national anthem, but which has been used by the English for sporting occasions, is imbued with reverence for the monarchy. Some of the players argued that they could not identify with the anthem and that this particular song was no longer representative of the nation. Player E.1 stated that 'we could probably find a better anthem to sing' and others proposed that perhaps 'Jerusalem' would be a more appropriate song for the English team to sing before a match.

All the Scottish players cited the playing of 'Flower of Scotland' before a match as an emotional experience that, as one put it, 'puts a lump in my throat [and] moistens my eyes' (Player S.11).<sup>12</sup> Four players experienced feelings of 'great pride and strength' (Player S.1) during the playing of the anthem whilst others found it simply had a 'calming effect' (Player S.3). Player S.5 revealed the impact of the anthem on his experience of national identity by stating that it evoked 'very strong emotional feelings and belonging to one's country'. Similarly Player S.8 described that 'it stirs the passions in the belly, and Scots can relate to it historically'. These views are brought together by the views of Player S.10 who said: 'The history and background of the words [to 'Flower of

Scotland'] are emotionally recalled. Also the fact that 60,000-plus supporters are singing with you makes you stand taller and makes the . . . hairs stand up on the back of your neck'. These two anthems are very different and the contrast between 'God Save The Queen' (a rather dour celebration of the British monarchy) and the more passionate nationalistic 'Flower of Scotland' mirrors the wider social awakening in a nation where sections of the population desire political independence from England.

Issues surrounding the anthem perhaps received their strongest expression amongst the Irish team. The existence of two Irish nations (with two different languages) outside of rugby union has also created some problems in both the selection and rendition of the 'Irish' National Anthem in the context of rugby internationals. Up until the 1995 World Cup, the official anthem sung by the Irish rugby team was, in most instances, 'The Soldier's Song', which, sung in Gaelic, was essentially the anthem of the Republic of Ireland. This was adopted as it was the anthem of the Republic, the nation in which Ireland's home international rugby matches were played. However, the National Anthem for players from Northern Ireland, part of the United Kingdom, is 'God Save The Queen'. Player I.1 stated in this connection that: 'I can't sing the Anthem because I don't know the words. . . . Me being from the North, it's not my Anthem so I don't sing it. I respect it, I stand still for it . . . but it's in Gaelic . . . so I don't know it'.

The players from Northern Ireland all commented on how difficult it was for them to sing the traditional Gaelic anthem. As a sort of 'in' joke, some of the Ulster players spoke of the coaching they had received in the past from the Southern players who had attempted to teach them suitable replacement lyrics in English so that they could sing along (albeit in meaningless terms) to 'The Soldier's Song' and keep their mouths in time with the others. Although the Ulstermen did not understand the meaning of the anthem, they all admitted that it did move them and put them 'in the mood' (Player I.2). Player I.6, another Ulsterman, declared that: 'The Anthem is officially played because the game is played in Dublin, not because it's the team anthem. . . . But they've brought the new song ['Ireland's Call'] out . . . to give the team a sense of identity so that all the members of the team could associate themselves with this song, with Ireland, with Irish pride'. Indeed one of the Ulster players, Player I.5, stated that he was playing for 'his country' and that he had always supported Ireland as a 'whole nation', however, an Ulsterman who plays for 'his country' is technically representing the Northern Ireland part of the United Kingdom whereas Player I.5 clearly perceives that he is playing for Ireland (which he would like to be a single nation). Such contradictions were manifest in the language of many of the Irish players and these provide a valuable illustration of the complex duality of Irishness for people from the North.

The words to 'Ireland's Call' mirror the provincial nature of rugby union in Ireland and how the players perceive it. As some of them mentioned, in Irish

rugby there is no North-South divide – everything is organised on a provincial basis and it just so happens that one of the provinces, Ulster, which is composed of nine counties, is frequently assimilated to Northern Ireland, which on its formation had only six counties.

As a response to the delicate political situation in Ireland, a mutual agreement was made between the Rugby Football Unions of the Irish and English not to play any Irish anthem when Ireland play England at Twickenham. Even with the more ‘neutral’ anthem represented by ‘Ireland’s Call’, this practice remains in place today. The issues surrounding the playing of the Irish Anthem were commented on in a personal correspondence from the Administrative Officer of the Irish Rugby Football Union, Martin Murphy:

The Irish Rugby Football Union is the governing body for the game of Rugby Football throughout the four Provinces of Ireland. Thus, its activities span two political jurisdictions on the island and the Irish team is selected from both. This obviously creates difficulties in relation to the Anthem to be played at international matches in which Ireland is playing. To meet these difficulties, the Irish Rugby Football Union decided some years ago that the Anthem played at international rugby matches under its control would relate directly to the jurisdiction of the ground in which the match is played. Thus, at Lansdowne Road only the Irish anthem is played whereas at venues such as Twickenham no Irish anthem is played. This practice is in accordance with an agreement of some years’ standing between the countries involved.

This ‘official’ response illustrates how contemporary Irish identity politics can be demonstrated writ large in a sporting context. It also highlights the complexities of ‘Irishness’ and the problem of national symbolism that has been an issue in Irish rugby since the founding of the Irish Free State in 1922. In addition, these changes further illustrate the significance of the interlinkages between identity politics, national anthems and international sport.

The rendition of the Welsh Anthem ‘Land Of My Fathers’ (*Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*), before international matches is perhaps one of the most famous features of Welsh rugby. During the anthem it is almost as if two great Welsh passions, rugby and song, are united in magical symbiosis in a mass celebration of Welshness that serves to make the nation appear more tangible than an ‘imagined community’. All the Welsh players saw the anthem as having the ability to ‘lift’ the whole team and ‘switch them on’ to the occasion. The three interviewees, all Welsh-speakers, emphasised the pride they felt when they sung the anthem wholeheartedly and the sense of togetherness it generated among the team. Player W.3 commented that: ‘knowing that the Anthem is just played for you representing your country is absolutely outstanding’.

As with the Irish, the Welsh anthem is not sung in English. This has raised questions related to the Welsh language debate which has had a vociferous lobby campaigning for greater awareness and recognition of Wales' mother tongue. Whilst being able to speak Welsh was seen as still being advantageous and 'something pretty special' (Player W.1), it also became evident that not all the Welsh squad could speak Welsh, a fact that clearly hampers their participation in the ritual singing before matches and raises the question of the extent to which this can be said to be 'their' anthem? Player W.1 offered assurances that there were no Welsh-speaking cliques within the team and that everyone, irrespective of whether or not they could speak Welsh, got on well together. He stated that: 'It would be good if we could all speak Welsh but the thing is the boys who can't, it's not their fault. They were brought up to speak just the English language – they just try their best to sing the Anthem, that's the good thing'.

It appears that singing an anthem has become a central part of an international rugby team's identity. Amongst the Irish and Welsh players in particular, whose anthems were sung in an 'ethnic' tongue, it was clear that the team rallied together during 'their' anthem to ensure that those members who had been brought up to speak only English were not ostracised. In addition, the employment of 'Flower of Scotland' by the Scottish Rugby Union, which recounts the defeating of the English in battle, provides the players with a passionate pre-match reminder of the Scottish fighting heritage and demonstrates what can be achieved if all the clans can unite.

The complex relationship between sport, the nation and anthems has also been played out writ large in other rugby contexts. For example, in South Africa the dawn of Nelson Mandela's 'Rainbow Nation' has challenged the position of rugby union as an Afrikaner (white) tribal religion. Trans-racial national patriotism in South Africa was promoted during the 1995 Rugby World Cup through the adoption of the Zulu work song 'Shosholozza' as the promotional song for the Springboks. This was sung at matches in addition to South Africa's national anthems. (Black & Nauright, 1998). These examples provide useful evidence for the unifying function of a 'national' anthem and its relevance to sport.

### **'Savage' Celtic Warriors and 'Conservative' Anglo-Saxons**

The various stereotypes and styles of play mentioned by the players during the interviews indicate that a general division exists in the islands, in terms of both national and sporting characteristics, between the Celtic fringe and the English. Although some of these differences may have been fuelled at a superficial level by England's recent dominance of rugby in the British Isles there is some evidence of a more deep-seated Celtic/Anglo-Saxon divide.

The current, more 'professional', 'win-at-all-costs' attitude of the English towards rugby was contrasted with the earlier, more amateur, 'unlucky,

we tried our best' mentality of the English. The English team were seen by its players to be a clinical, robust, disciplined and efficient side which, when the time was right, could play a more expansive game. But as Player E.6 pointed out:

what would the nation rather have, a Grand Slam . . . or just losing the game playing . . . expansive rugby? I know which the majority wants, they want to win. At the end of the day Jack Rowell's view is obviously everyone wants to see an expansive game . . . but he would be very happy to hold it down 21 points to 20 in the World Cup Final. The most boring game in the world – but England won it.

Of course, for many people who are involved with or follow the national rugby team, winning is everything and the style of the victory is only a secondary concern. However, during this period a degree of discontent was developing, from both within and outside England, regarding the manner of their 'domestic' triumphs. Some experts pointed out that, although this style could win a Five Nations Championship (albeit unconvincingly), it could not win a World Cup. The underlying problem for the English national team (and indeed the English nation as a whole) appears, in the eyes of the media, to be a strong resistance to change and this induces a reluctance to fully embrace a more expansive playing style. The tradition of the Five Nations, allied with an emphasis on England's seemingly annual success, remains strong and this tends to militate against any radical change of what are, after all, winning tactics. This conservatism, however, is not generally shared by the Celtic nations who, perhaps with less to lose, have displayed few doubts in using the Five Nations as a proving ground in which to develop younger players and adopt a more modern approach to the game which, by embracing southern hemisphere coaching and playing styles, is seeking to promote fifteen-man rugby at international level in order to produce more competitive challenges within the World Cup.

Of the other teams, the English saw the Welsh as being in a stage of transition but as having been in the past very passionate with a lot of talented individuals playing with *hwyl*. The Irish were perceived to play more 'off the cuff' rugby thriving on chaos and mayhem. The Scottish, because of their smaller but extremely fit forwards, had adopted a hard rucking style like the New Zealanders but lacked some of the direction of the latter. The Scots were described by Player E.6 as playing 'harum-scarum' rugby, chasing and harrying the opposition. Drawing on some historical, 'Braveheart-esque' imagery he said that: 'You can imagine them in past times, coming down from the Highlands with their kilts on'.

The Irish and Scots were both seen by the English as groups of extremely fervent individuals who, although unlikely to make it into an England team,

always upped their game once they donned their national jerseys and played as a unit. Player E.1, referring to the Irish and Scottish teams' ability to have a whole stronger than the sum of its parts, stated that: 'They're fifteen individuals who, while wishing them well, would probably not get into the England side . . . The difference is . . . as soon as they put on their national shirt . . . they become a different player'.

The Irish players characterised their style as fast, aggressive hustle and bustle. As Player I.5, put it, they are 'chasers and scavengers' The Irish game was described by Player I.6 as 'purposeful chaos' and the situation was neatly condensed by Player I.4:

we may not have tremendous flair but the team has great spirit and when you put on an Irish jersey you'd die for each other on the pitch. You realise when you come up against the likes of England . . . that you can't outplay them, the only way you can really take it to them is to test them out, see if they have the same sort of spirit you have.

The Irish viewed the Scottish as a rucking team who adopted a similar, very fast wrecking and spoiling game. The English were seen to be organised, technically good and to play a predictable, slow, controlled, mauling game using heavy forwards to wear down the opposition and force errors. The players found it hard to define the current Welsh team. They were seen to have some flair and adventure but were viewed as being in a quandary over which style to play. Player I.3 stated that:

The Scots play very simplistically, get the ball into midfield, kick a great deal, [are] good chasers [and are] very good at spoiling the opposition's ball. It's limited in what they're trying to do but they've been successful with it and they have personnel to do it. The Welsh, it's very difficult to define what the Welsh are up to. They're the same as ourselves, they're in a real period where they're struggling to sort it out for themselves. And England just have the biggest players so they own the ball most of the time and they work a great deal off their back row and as they say 'a big dog will always eat a small dog'. They're the biggest, they throw their weight around and . . . if England play well in the Five Nations Championship they win. Ireland can play well and lose matches – that's the difference.

Player I.4 added to these observations that:

the English can become very predictable. They play a lot around their big pack, they have a good platform to play off and they play their game quite wisely – they don't make many mistakes, they force the opposition into making mistakes. They have the ability to hold possession up and control possession when they are under pressure. . . . The Scots are pretty much like ourselves but they ruck very well. . . . The Welsh . . . seem to be struggling at the moment and they haven't really shown much.

The Scottish players broadly perceived their own style of play as 'always giving 100 per cent and never giving up' (Player S.3). Other commonly used descriptors used were: 'fast, open and expansive' (Player S.8); 'a mobile rucking game' (Player S.6); and 'hard, fast and passionate' (Player S.11). These views contrasted with the Scots' perceptions of the other Home Nations rugby teams. The English were seen by all the Scottish players as the most successful and dominant of the other British teams. This was seen to result from their 'powerful forward platform' (Player S.5) that could wear the opposition down – but because of this the English were also labelled "slow and pedantic" (Player S.1) and guilty of playing a slower, more controlled and "conservative" rugby (Player S.4).

Three of the Scottish players saw similarities between all of the Celtic nations' styles of play – all being seen to be prepared to 'die for the cause' (Player S.3). The Irish style of play in particular was seen as being not dissimilar to the Scottish style. However, the Irish style was characterised as more frantic, 'up and at 'em' (Player S.1) and Player S.6 stated that 'Ireland usually stop opponents playing their game and live off scraps'. The Welsh were seen to possess natural 'flair' (Player S.9) but also, in Scottish eyes, were currently a side in transition with no definitive style as yet.

This 'natural ability' was also remarked upon by the Welsh players who described the Welsh style of play as 'unique' (Player W.2). They saw themselves as trying to out-play the opposition with skill, pace and flair. Player W.3 stated that: 'traditionally, ten to twenty years ago, they used to say they [Wales] played with a bit of style, a bit of guile, [and] a bit of flair'. This tradition has been allied to the 'invention' of Wales' possessing a seam of natural talent. The Welsh characterised the English as a successful and structured side that played extremely controlled but dour rugby, their forwards being used to drive at the opposition steadily wearing them down. Because of their personnel they were viewed as having an ideal balance between forward and three-quarters quality.

The Welsh, as with the Scots and the Irish, perceived that they had more in common with the other two 'Celtic' teams. All three countries were seen to be suffering from having a limited number of 'quality' players available. Both

Ireland and Scotland were seen to play with a passion, employing frenetic kick-and-rush and disrupting tactics that put their opponents under pressure.

The common denominator from the evidence gathered appears to be the existence of some similarities (and affinities) between the playing styles of the three Celtic nations in contrast to those of England. In summary, the members of the Celtic teams appear to be forming a 'we'-identity that is juxtaposed against the dominant Anglo-Saxon English ('them'). These shared national (sporting) characteristics can act as strong identity markers in the development of a shared group charisma/disgrace between the 'Celtic cousins'. In one sense, this marks a reassertion of the Celtic periphery against the Anglo-Saxon political core (England) of the British Isles. This 'tribal gathering' of the Celtic consciousness within rugby reflects a type of ethnic defensiveness, and will be further explored in the following section.

### **Pride and Prejudice or Sense and Sensibility? Affinities and Aversions at Play**

The division identified between the English and the Celtic countries was concretised when the players were asked about their affinities and aversions to particular countries. Whereas the representatives of all the Celtic countries saw themselves as cousins, the English were seen as 'the enemy' and feelings of anti-Englishness were frequently expressed. Interestingly, one of the Irish players commented that this dislike of the English was 'tradition' and bordered on hatred. For the players of the Celtic nations, beating the English in the Five Nations was the main aim and the yardstick against which to judge their ability.

The English players interviewed believed that other national teams saw England as *the* team to beat because they are currently viewed as the best team in the Northern Hemisphere as a result of their recent successful run. Player E.1 gave his alternative explanation for why England remain the chief target of others and the feelings of anti-Englishness that are evident more widely in these islands. It arises, he said: 'because we are seen to be of the stoic 'rule the waves' mentality and . . . are viewed as the arrogant upstarts from England who expect to win and expect to be the best – which provides [the other teams with] a national, natural enemy'. At this time, Scotland were England's chief rivals in the Five Nations Championship and a degree of hostility had been developing between the English players and the Scots. These emotions, encapsulated in the quotation in the introduction, were echoed by Player E.6:

I don't particularly like the Scots – not every one of the players. [When] we were up there for the [1991 World Cup] semi-final [against Scotland], the actual anti-English feeling . . . really got home to you. It was just oppressive, from children to grandmother[s] all gesticulating. . . . You think, hold on a minute, I mean obviously [there is] the history that has gone on before, but this is a

sport. . . . From that day I haven't had a great affection for, or affiliation with, the Scottish. . . . It's just tradition I think. It's whatever England did in history, whatever England has passed down – it's someone [for the Scots] to have a go at.

The Scots also expressed an aversion to the English. Many commented on the fact that 'England are the team you want to beat because they are the most successful in recent years, and they are the Auld Enemy' (Player S.2). Others pointed to the 'tradition and rivalry' between the two sides (Player S.9). Player S.8 added to the anti-English sentiment by commenting that they 'have an arrogance which gets up your nose' (Player S.8). In contrast, three players perceived that the 'grudge' game against England was more to do with the public and with a media 'invented tradition' of defeating the Auld Enemy, and that anti-English feelings were less applicable to the majority of the Scottish players today. Player S.3 remarked that: 'at the end of the day rugby is only a game and it is not important in the bigger picture of life. . . . I am totally against fighting "old" battles on the rugby pitch'.

The majority of the Scottish players also denoted an affinity with the Irish. This was encapsulated by Player S.10 who commented that 'they are a good-natured people, the country is lovely and I know a few players and get on with them well'. Player S.3 added to this by revealing an 'affinity to the Irish because they have a similar style of rugby to the Scots and are very similar in nature. Both also have similar resources and constraints in playing terms'.

All the Irish players, reciprocating Scottish views, expressed an affinity to, and saw some similarities with, the Scots (in terms of playing styles, approach to life and also in terms of the broader national identities). The matches between the Irish and the Scots were seen as fierce but the after-match celebrations were seen as the wildest and the most enjoyable. Player E.2 said this was because they were 'fairly close land masses . . . and Celtic cousins'. In contrast, England were perceived as the 'old enemy' (Player 1.6) and the chief target during the Five Nations Championship. Player 1.1, articulated this aversion by stating that:

Everybody hates the English – it's tradition. . . . I think it's because of their personalities. We tend, as Irish people, to . . . like to be underdogs – I think it's because we always have been. . . . Whereas the English [are] confident, it comes from their history. They're used to ruling the world . . . so they walk about with this . . . attitude and everyone dislikes them for it. They have supreme confidence in their own ability, which is fine, you can be arrogant but you don't have to be impolite with it.

The Welsh, players and public alike, are sensitive to certain ‘traditions’ within rugby union that put further emphasis on the annual ‘must-win’ game against the English. This was reinforced to some extent by the comments of Player W.2: ‘everyone wants to beat the English . . . they have such self-confidence . . . and they think they’re better than the other countries. So I think . . . that’s the big game in the Five Nations . . . [and] if we only beat England it would be . . . not a disastrous season’.

This provides another good example of the use of personal pronouns to identify both insiders and outsiders in everyday speech. In this instance, Player W.2 refers to the English as a ‘they’ that clearly implies that the English are perceived as outsiders and, therefore, as an enemy. In contrast the use of ‘we’ in talking about the Welsh implies a bond that binds the people of the Welsh nation together. However, this general level of what we have termed ‘anti-Englishness’ did not apply equally to all the Welsh players. Player W.3, whilst appreciating that a lot of Welsh people have this all-consuming animosity towards the English, seemed quite frustrated by the level of parochialism in Wales which he saw as holding back the development of Welsh rugby. Player W.1 stated that: ‘I don’t think Wales-England is anything special. A lot of people do think it but it’s just another game. . . . Say last year if we had beaten all the other teams [but] . . . not beaten England then a lot of the Welsh public would have said it’s been a bad season because we lost to England’. In this instance, Player W.1 was not only down-playing the I/we, they/them identity issue but was trying to break out of the identity cycle that, especially within rugby, produces such nationalistic tension between the Welsh and English. The evidence here also suggests that rugby has a role in establishing a strong we-identity amongst the Celtic countries more generally. The majority of the players from Ireland, Scotland and Wales demonstrate strong affinities with each other, noting similarities in national characteristics. Powerful images of England as ‘them’, or the old (or Auld) enemy, also exist, these being interspersed with explicit anti-English sentiment from some of the players.

### **Conclusion: Patriots, Group Charisma and Sporting Fantasy Shields**

Our work here provides an insight into the complex relationship between sport, identity politics and national habitus construction. Sport is clearly one of the nation’s most prominent fantasy shields and, being deeply interconnected with the fortunes of the nation, offers a valuable site for the study of national identity politics. As an arena in which the nation can awaken, sport provides an important source for representations of national ‘character’. The transformation of group charisma from the ‘imaginary’ to the ‘real’ in sport also provides evidence of the interdependence between discursive and practical consciousness, and the processes (both constitutive and constituting) by which the nation becomes more than a notional community.

From what we have highlighted it is clear that a relationship exists between rugby union, national habitus and those who play 'for' the nation. The players, visibly acting as embodied representatives of the nation, are central figures in activating the mental traffic flowing between discursive and practical consciousness. Through their exploits on the 'fields of dreams' it can be said that the nation leaves the imaginary, rises from behind its fantasy shield, and becomes (at least for eighty minutes) a lived experience.

In the players' eyes, rugby is seen as an important source of national pride and as a central part of their particular national cultures. For the English, the importance tended to be related to the lack of success in other 'traditional' sports. In other words, rugby provided a means by which the English were less likely to be beaten at their own game. In contrast, the Celtic nations' relationship with rugby appeared to be founded on different grounds. The Welsh players inferred that rugby's importance to their nation was due to the traditions (both invented and real) of the sport in Wales. The Scottish players were of the opinion that rugby was an important panacea for their small and pessimistic nation. The Irish remarked that, for them, it was because rugby provided a unique opportunity for the nation to unite and compete on a world stage.

The players from the Celtic countries also tended to be more passionately patriotic than the English about representing their nation. Among them, the Welsh were perhaps the most patriotic and proud. These feelings can be related back to the particularly deep-seated relationship between I/we identity and rugby in Wales – for the players concerned rugby *was* Wales. Of these nations, the Welsh might be said to have a greater symbolic stock of 'sleeping memories' regarding this sport – sections of the nation dream of rugby. The English appeared to demonstrate a more 'introverted' patriotism. The general decrying of overt nationalism by the players is clearly related to the traditional imagined charisma of the English. This might be one reason why some players viewed the, often blatantly jingoistic, tabloid press with such suspicion.

It emerged from the interviews that *the* principal moment which tended to raise both levels of national identity amongst the players and awareness of them was when they lined up for the national anthems as the final part of the pre-match build-up to an international match. All agreed that, whatever anthem was played, it can act as a great psychological tool for both focusing the mind on the task at hand and for remembering whom you are representing. In this context, the anthem provides the most significant format of I/we identity and group charisma.

Some of the English players expressed the view that 'their' national anthem 'God Save The Queen', was meaningless to them as few of them saw themselves as royalists. In contrast, the Celtic nations' anthems appeared, to the players, to be more central celebrations of 'their' national cultures. For example, the Scots, singing the emotional 'Flower of Scotland' (containing lyrics such as 'but we can still rise now and be the nation again'), are reciting a

brave-hearted call for a long-lost Scottish nationhood. The rendition of the chosen Welsh anthem '*Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*' before rugby internationals is as important to the Welsh tradition of rugby as the playing of the game itself. The players become part of a mass celebration of Wales as the two largest aspects of Welsh national culture (rugby and song) are united in harmony. In moments such as these the discursive and practical consciousness of the nation appear very closely linked.

There is clearly a divide between players who represent the Anglo-Saxon English and those from the Celtic nations. This divide is even more apparent when we consider how the players perceive the playing styles and characteristics of their (and other) nations, and their construction of us/them identities. The English were frequently referred to as 'the enemy' and anti-English sentiment was frequently expressed. The English, clearly identified as the best team in the British Isles at present, were seen by others as 'controlled' and as having the ability to wear the opposition down. The English players tended to share these descriptions, seeing themselves as 'clinical' and 'efficient'. The players from the Celtic nations had a clearly defined them-image of the English and for a whole variety of reasons 'they' were the team to beat.

The Celtic nations were seen to have much more in common and there is clear evidence for the formation of an imagined Celtic charisma and we-identity. In contrast to the English style, the Welsh were perceived by others to play with a lot of passion. Their players were believed to possess more 'natural' talent; they viewed themselves as trying to outplay the opposition with their 'traditional' flair, pace and skill. The Scots and Irish were described as Celtic 'cousins' and they were seen to share many playing characteristics. The Scots were seen to have adopted, and mastered, the rucking game whilst the Irish were seen as generally less talented individuals who, when playing for Ireland, could 'up' their game and produce displays full of aggression amidst a fog of chaos.

What is clear from the evidence gathered is that national identity forms one of the primary signifiers of the multi-layered personal identity of these elite sportsmen. Their responses indicate that identity politics and feelings of national charisma are 'at play' on the rugby field. Their observations as international rugby players, and the variety of habitus codes they have revealed, appear to lend credence to the notion that they are, indeed, highly visible embodied representatives of 'their' nation. As 'eighty minute patriots' these representatives of the nation are bridging the gap between discursive and practical consciousness and awakening the nation.

Recent developments within the sport also pose interesting questions relating to the relationship of rugby union to national habitus in the British Isles and clearly merit further research. Since the beginning of the 1995/96 domestic season we have witnessed the de-amateurisation and formal professionalisation of the sport. Could it be that the increasing commodification of the game will

see players showing more pride in their earnings and their club, and less in their country?<sup>13</sup>

Since the 1996/97 season, we have witnessed two new interlinked movements gathering momentum in British rugby. Firstly, there has been an increasingly frequent swapping of rugby codes by league and union players (due to rugby league's rescheduling as a mainly summer sport, it has become possible for some of its better players to participate in both codes).<sup>14</sup> Secondly, with increased financial backing, there has been a dramatic increase in the recruitment of foreign migrant labour to English club rugby.<sup>15</sup> These developments are also occurring in association with Europeanisation processes that are threatening both the nature of the Five Nations Championships (by inviting other European national teams such as the Italians and Romanians to join) and the continuance of British Lions tours (by the expansion of European club competition and the rugby playing season leaving no time for Lions tours).<sup>16</sup>

This study of identity politics at play within the sport of rugby union has provided some illustrations of the complex nature of national habitus. Through such studies it is hoped that a clearer understanding of the inter-relationship between sport, globalisation and national identity can be developed. What is certain is that rugby union is a global game in flux and whatever happens in the next few years will undoubtedly have profound implications for the centrality of the sport within the national cultures of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. Or will it?

## NOTES:

1. It should be remembered that the 'British Isles' is composed of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales whereas 'the United Kingdom' includes England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and 'Great Britain' pertains to England, Scotland and Wales. 'British' identity is therefore a complex, and somewhat confusing construct. In addition, clearly habitus codes are not simply the preserve of those who perform at the elite level. In a more wide-ranging analysis we would wish to examine the practice of playing rugby at a number of levels from elite to school and in these contexts probe the habitus codes of those who play, officiate, spectate and consume the game.
2. *Habitus*, a term often associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu, is used here in its Eliasian sense. It refers to those dispositions that have internalised and deeply embedded in the subconscious. These thoughts and perceptions then become second nature. Elias first employed this term in 1939 when his original work on civilising processes was published (although when translated between 1978 and 1982 from German to English the word "habitus" was interpreted as "personality makeup"). The term also appears, as "habitus" in his later publications, such as *The Society of Individuals* (1991).
3. This Eliasian approach seeks to explore the complex processes surrounding the multi-layered characteristics of national habitus and personal identity. The sociogenesis of this deeply sedimented I/we identity is seen to be complex and dynamic, containing

'real' as well as 'imaginary' groupings built (but never fixed) on a series of dominant, emergent and residual habitus 'codes' (a combination of sleeping memories and invented traditions). This conceptual framework has been employed with reference to Euro 96 by Maguire & Poulton (1997). The concept of identity and its relationship with the nation has also been extensively investigated by other authors such as Bloom (1990), Smith (1991) and Hall (1992). The notion of the nation as an 'imagined community' was first employed by Anderson (1983).

4. Nairn (1977) writes extensively on the 'crisis of identity' in Britain and links the desire to return to the past to the 'Janus-face' of nationalism.
5. The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) is arguably the most important organisation in the figuration of sport and Irish identity. Its history has been documented by, amongst others, Sugden and Bairner (1993) and Mike Cronin (1998), though Cronin critiques the exclusive focus on Irish nationalism in histories of the GAA.
6. The 'Home' Unions refers to the governing bodies (or Rugby Unions) of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. These countries are collectively known within the British Isles as the Home Nations. The British Lions are a rugby union team who tour the southern hemisphere every four years during the summer months and are composed of the best players from all four Home Unions. Their proper name is the British and Irish Lions but this is usually abridged to give the impression of a side which represents Great Britain (i.e. not the Republic of Ireland). The existence (and increasing media profile) of a British rugby union team raises questions regarding the degree to which a British identity exists within the sport. This particular theme remains an avenue for further research.
7. Responses from the players were gathered in two ways. Firstly, in-depth interviews were carried out with players from England, Ireland and Wales prior to the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Secondly, questionnaires were distributed to players in the Scotland squad for the 1997 Five Nations Championship. A short-list of 'central' candidates (six from each country) to interview was drawn up based on their background, role in the squad, position and their likely availability to the researchers. These players were contacted personally and, when possible, interviews arranged at their convenience at a suitable location. The remainder of the interviews were arranged through the use of classical 'gate-keeper' strategy and 'snowball' sampling (Mason, 1996) by utilising those players who willingly agreed to be interviewed and contacts close to, and within, the various Rugby Unions. The interview schedule was divided into sections which addressed: general perceptions on national identity; relations between, and perceived characteristics of, the Home Nations; personal identity; emotions on the pitch; dual nationalism; and the British Lions. Eventually fifteen interviews were successfully carried out, six with English players, six with Irish players and three with Welsh players. To alleviate the problem of not having been able to interview any of the Scottish players, questionnaires (based on the interview schedule) were distributed to all the Scottish squad who had taken part in the 1997 Five Nations Championships. Twenty-two questionnaires were sent to the players at their clubs and a total of eleven were returned. Whilst by no means providing an ideal solution (due to the difficulties in comparing interview transcripts to questionnaire responses) this strategy did, nevertheless, allow for some important comparisons to be made between all four Home Nations.

The twenty-six players who took part in the study all participated in the 1995 World Cup and represented 25 per cent of the 'British' players present at the tournament.

8. Rugby union has been likened to an expression of denied nationhood in Wales. The Welsh tradition in the sport and its relationship with Welsh culture and society has been well documented by Williams (1991), Smith (1981), and Smith and Williams (1980).
9. The relationship between sport, culture and society in Ireland has been investigated at some depth by Sugden and Bairner (1993).
10. The phrase 'ninety minute patriots' was coined in 1992 by Jim Sillars (an ex-Member of Parliament for the Scottish National Party) to describe the way in which the Scottish public only seemed to express their national identity at sporting events. This phrase was also used in the title of the book edited by Jarvie and Walker which explored Scottish sport and national identity. However, in this instance, as rugby union is not played over a ninety minute period it is more accurate to refer to the players as 'eighty minute patriots'.
11. The term 'dual national' refers to a player who hold dual nationality and can thus have the opportunity to play representative rugby for more than one nation.
12. The Scottish Rugby Union adopted "Flower of Scotland" as their 'official' anthem in 1990. This popular Scottish folk song replaced the more traditional 'national' anthem "God Save The Queen". Interestingly, this new anthem was first heard when the English team visited Murrayfield.
13. The conflict between the English Professional Rugby Union Clubs (headed by Peter Wheeler of Leicester) and the Rugby Football Union (who are represented in this regard by their executive chairman, Cliff Brittle) is a by-product of an amateur game trying to convert to a professional sport. The EPRUC represents the top twenty four English rugby union clubs and is calling for its players to boycott the RFU by taking 'industrial action' and refusing to play representative rugby for England. An uneasy peace deal was reached prior to England's first Five Nations match in 1997, allowing a full-strength representative side to play Scotland in the Calcutta Cup. The clubs have willingly embraced the new era of professional rugby and are making it work, but the RFU seems reluctant to shed its control (and amateur ideology) too hastily. However, this unrest is likely to continue until the power struggle between the two organisations is finally resolved. Currently, the organisation of English rugby seems precariously balanced between a fragile stability and anarchy.
14. The return of rugby league players to the union fold has undoubtedly boosted the strength of the Welsh national side. Traditionally the most vulnerable nation to 'poaching' by the league code, Wales fielded some notable 'returnees' in the squad for their first Five Nations match in 1997, against Scotland. They included: Alan Bateman (formerly of Warrington), Scott Gibbs (St.Helens), Scott Quinnell (Wigan), and Jonathan Davies (Warrington).
15. There has also been a significant movement of players from within the British Isles to England where more commercial opportunities exist. International players such as

Doddie Weir and Gary Armstrong (both Scotland) have moved south of the border to Newcastle. The 'exiles' teams such as London Irish have also received a healthy influx from their 'home' nations. Other notable transfers to the English Courage National League include: Joel Stransky (from South Africa) to Leicester, Federico Mendez (Argentina) to Bath, Laurent Cabannes and Thierry Lacroix (France) to Harlequins, and Shem Tatupu (Western Samoa) to Northampton. This movement is also likely to lead to an increase in the number of 'dual nationals' (i.e. players eligible to play for more than one country) which will also have an impact on a national team's identity.

16. These Europeanisation processes are, perhaps, most evident in the development and growth of The Heineken European Cup (inaugurated in 1995/96). The culmination of the 1996/97 competition was a final between Leicester and Brive played at Cardiff Arms Park before a near-capacity crowd. The success of this pan-European club competition is likely to continue and will create even more fixtures for the region's top players.

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