

“The Unifying Power Of Sports”

Sport has the power to change the world...

By Alexia Cousoulas

Growing up, I have always felt an enduring pull toward the water. It started with my first race, standing on the block, awaiting the whistle. For a moment, everyone is silent. The whistle blows. I propel my body forward, reaching for the water below me. As soon as my head submerges, the world above me fades into the distance. The race is my only focus; every sense becomes enhanced. It is quiet, but I can hear my steady breaths and the rhythm of my strokes. As a swimmer, I have felt the same feelings as all athletes around the world; focus, determination and the drive for the intensity of the challenge.

Sports are the one universal language that people from all backgrounds can understand. In a world where division is often louder than unity, sports are the language that we can all follow. We are able to see something remarkable in packed stadiums, arenas, and even in our own living rooms: the togetherness that connects people. It is in these places and moments, where we find the true essence of unity. Despite our differences, we are not just individuals, but a collective force that can transcend the barriers created by our society.

Today, I want to speak about how sports unify us. Sports inspire shared passion and purpose, break down cultural and social barriers, and build stronger communities.

To begin, sports are crucial to the solidarity of our world because they ignite passion and purpose. Whether it is the fans' enthusiasm, the anticipation of a last-minute score, or the crowd's euphoria when a team wins, these are the feelings that sports evoke.

"The Nike ad *'You Can't Stop a Sport'* illustrates the strength of perseverance through sports. It visually shows athletes testing their limits and reminds us how sports can unite us. For example, Colin Kaepernick's protest during the national anthem in 2016, sparked a global conversation on social injustices using his sports image as a platform for change. In these instances, athletes use their influence to raise awareness, reminding us that sports are not just for crowd entertainment. They are a powerful vessel for responding to social issues and for initiating global conversation.

Secondly, sports have the unique ability to surpass cultural and social barriers. A great example of this is the legendary U.S. hockey team's victory over the Soviet Union at the Winter Olympics in 1980. During the Cold War, this victory wasn't just about hockey, it was about two nations competing against one another, but upholding a strong respect and integrity even in the presence of political conflict. According to Factual America, "the U.S. team, composed entirely of amateur players, pulled off a stunning 4-3 victory over the Soviet powerhouse in a game that would become known as the "Miracle

on Ice". This unexpected triumph captivated the American public and became a symbol of hope during a challenging period for the nation.”

More recently, in the 2023 Winter Olympics, North and South Korea recruited athletes to compete as one team in women’s ice hockey, representing the unity of two conflicting nations in the face of years of political division. The power of sports to exceed these boundaries was also seen during the 2018 FIFA World Cup, where, despite political tensions, fans from all around the world came together to celebrate the sport. According to The Brock Press, “In particular, the match between Mexico and South Korea became a highlight of fan unity. When South Korea defeated Germany, a result that allowed Mexico to advance to the next stage, Mexican fans in Russia celebrated with South Korean fans — a rare and heartwarming display of unity between two nations.” These examples remind us that despite efforts by politicians and history to separate us, sports diplomacy provides an opportunity for humility.

Finally, sports help create stronger and more connected communities. During dark times, like the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, sports can act as an avenue for resilience. The return of the New Orleans Saints to the field in 2006 wasn’t just a game, it was a game of hope after a massive disaster. When the Saints then won the Super Bowl in 2010, it became clear that sports had played a crucial part in uniting the people of New Orleans. As Life in Harmony Today notes, “challenging times often bring emotional and psychological stress. Sports provide an outlet for individuals to cope with these pressures, whether as participants or spectators.”

Sports also was a unifying force during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the world shut down. While many social events and gatherings were put on pause, sports still brought us together. Even though people were watching sporting events from home, the passion for the game gave the world a much needed sense of normalcy that we desperately needed at the time.

To conclude, as a world inhabited by people from all cultures and backgrounds, we are continuously able to dissolve our differences in these intense moments. It also inspires another level of passion that we share. This passion is unique to each individual, like my own for swimming, but in the end, we all bond over a shared love. Sports have been and will continue to be a testament to the *timeless* truth that we are capable of overlooking our differences.

Thank you.