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**COMMONWEALTH GAMES AND THEIR IMPACT
ON SCOTLAND'S FUTURE IN OR OUTSIDE
THE UNITED KINGDOM**

ABSTRACT: It is more than probable that the Commonwealth Games in 2014 will be used by the Scottish government as a tool in the battle for independence. For the Scottish National Party (SNP), sport events constitute another opportunity to underline Scottish autonomy. During the last Olympic Games, SNP ministers refused to use the name “Team GB” in their message to the Scottish athletes. Nurturing Scottish pride during the Games has already begun, with the official mascot—the Clyde Thistle, which is Scotland’s national flower and emblem. The mascot of the Commonwealth Games has never waved the patriotic flag as it does now.

KEY WORDS: Scotland, Salmond, Cameron, Hoy, Murray, Commonwealth Games, independence, referendum.

The year 2014 is crucial for Scotland for two reasons: the Commonwealth Games and the independence referendum. Glasgow is the host of the 20th Commonwealth Games, which are quite often compared to the Olympic Games. The event will be attended by 6,500 athletes from 71 nations, competing in 17 disciplines over 11 days. The main organisers (Commonwealth Games Scotland, the Scottish Government, Glasgow City Council and Glasgow 2014 Ltd) are committed to delivering the Games to the required standard within the approved £524 million budget. The scale of the event is reflected also in the number of volunteers

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who are going to co-organise the Games: 15,000 people (Lach 1). In comparison, the Olympic Games in London had 70,000 volunteers (Hall 1) and the UEFA EURO 2012, organised by Poland and Ukraine, 5,500 volunteers.

During the Commonwealth Games, the sense of *Britishness* is almost tangible. Initially they were called the British Empire Games, and were renamed the British Empire and Commonwealth Games in 1954 and the British Commonwealth Games in 1970, before finally gaining the current title in 1978. The first Commonwealth Games were held in 1930 in Hamilton, Canada, where 11 countries sent 400 athletes to take part in 6 sports and 59 events. Bobby Robinson, a major influence within Canadian athletics at the time, finally brought about the event that had been talked about amongst Commonwealth nations for over thirty years, with the City of Hamilton providing \$30,000 to help cover the travel costs of the participating nations. The inaugural games were very utilitarian and did not approach the scale witnessed today. The athletes' village was the Prince of Wales School next to the Civic Stadium, where the competitors slept two dozen to a classroom. Despite missing some basic comforts, the participants were unanimous in their praise for the Games and Hamilton's hospitality. The games have been organized (with one 12-year gap due to war) every four years starting from in 1930.

Only six teams have attended every Commonwealth Games: Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales.

Interestingly, the Commonwealth Games are also often referred to as the "Friendly Games." From 1930 to 1994 the Games programme included only single-competitor sports. The 1998 Games in Kuala Lumpur saw the introduction of team sports, with nations taking part in cricket (50 over game), hockey (men and women), netball (women) and rugby 7's (men). In Manchester in 2002, hockey, netball and rugby 7's graced the programme again, and, at the 2006 Games in Melbourne, basketball accompanied hockey, netball and rugby 7's on the programme. In Delhi in 2010, hockey, netball and rugby 7's again were featured.

The Games are still growing and introducing new competitions. The 2002 Games in Manchester also saw for the first time, indeed a first for any multi-sport event in the world, a limited number of full medal events for elite athletes with a disability (EAD), in a fully inclusive sports programme. EAD events were organised again during the Melbourne Games, with

new competitions added, i.e. athletics, swimming, table tennis and power lifting. In the year 2000, the Commonwealth Games Federation took on the added responsibility of the Commonwealth Youth Games, open to athletes between 14 and 18 years of age. The Commonwealth Youth Games have now been organised three times, and they have grown in stature, as is evidenced by the awarding of the 2011 Commonwealth Youth Games to the Isle of Man.

Table 1: Hosts of the Commonwealth Games

Year	Name	Host
2014	Commonwealth Games	Glasgow, Scotland
2010	Commonwealth Games	Delhi, India
2006	Commonwealth Games	Melbourne, Australia
2002	Commonwealth Games	Manchester, England
1998	Commonwealth Games	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
1994	Commonwealth Games	Victoria, Canada
1990	Commonwealth Games	Auckland, New Zealand
1986	Commonwealth Games	Edinburgh, Scotland
1982	Commonwealth Games	Brisbane, Australia
1978	Commonwealth Games	Edmonton, Canada
1974	British Commonwealth Games	Christchurch, New Zealand
1970	British Commonwealth Games	Edinburgh, Scotland
1966	British Empire & Commonwealth Games	Kingston, Jamaica
1962	British Empire & Commonwealth Games	Perth, Australia
1958	British Empire & Commonwealth Games	Cardiff, Wales
1954	British Empire & Commonwealth Games	Vancouver, Canada
1950	British Empire Games	Auckland, New Zealand
1938	British Empire Games	Sydney, Australia
1934	British Empire Games	London, England
1930	British Empire Games	Hamilton, Canada

Source: "Past Commonwealth Games." Commonwealth Games Federation.

Although there are 54 members of the Commonwealth of Nations, 71 teams participate in the Commonwealth Games, as a number of British overseas territories, Crown dependencies, and island states compete under their own flag. The four Home Nations of the United Kingdom—England, Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland—also send separate teams.

However, it is more than probable that the Games will be used by the Scottish government as a powerful tool in the battle for independence. For First Minister Alex Salmond and his Scottish National Party, sport events constitute a unique occasion to underline Scottish autonomy. This was clearly visible during the Olympic Games that took place in London in summer 2012. SNP ministers, who are hoping Scots will vote for independence from the UK, refused to use the name "Team GB" in their video message to athletes from north of the border. First Minister Alex Salmond had taken to referring to Sir Chris Hoy and his compatriots as "Scolympians." "The eyes of the world are on the Olympics and the whole of Scotland is united in supporting our Olympians and Paralympians—our 'Scolympians'—to go for gold," said the First Minister on July 27, 2012, i.e. at the very beginning of the Games (Johnson 8).

Undoubtedly, the Olympic Games proved to be a great success in terms of strengthening the so-called sense of *Britishness*. Labour MP Douglas Alexander, who represents the Scottish constituency of Paisley and Renfrewshire South, claimed the £27 million open ceremony undermined the Yes Scotland campaign with a message that there was nothing better than remaining in the Union:

Friday's opening ceremony was a big cultural moment that will impact on our sense of ourselves and politics here in Scotland even after the athletes have headed home. To win the referendum the Nationalists need to convince us that the rest of the UK has become so foreign a place with such different values that we should split apart. (Ponsonby 12)

With three weeks of unashamed enthusiasm demonstrated by thousands of Union Jacks flying around each and every Olympic arena, wiping tears during the National Anthem, astonishing opening and closing ceremonies, and so many people speaking unaffectedly of their pride to be British, there was no doubt that British patriotism was rekindled (Sandbrook 10). Paul Hayward, Chief Sports Writer at *The Telegraph*, described the Games as "a triumph for warmth, civility, excellence and enthusiasm—hosted by a nation in love with sport, and happy in its own skin" (Hayward 1).

However, Alex Salmond did not feel well in this British skin. The First Minister and SNP liked to point out that 13 out of Team GB's 65 medals (including seven golds) were won by Scottish athletes. These statements were aimed at one clear target:

convincing the Scottish citizens that they are able to function independently from London. On July 19, 2012, Alex Salmond underlined his hopes regarding an independent Scotland team during the next Olympic Games: "An independent country would compete as an independent nation at the Olympics in Rio 2016. Of course, before then as part of the UK or not, Scotland will be competing as an independent competitor nation in the Commonwealth Games" (Johnson 11).

Nevertheless, it is not obvious that Scottish sportsmen and sportswomen who today represent Great Britain would be representing Scotland in 2016. According to UK Sport, the body that funds Team GB's elite athletes, using a mixture of money from the National Lottery and the government, it is unlikely that anyone will be forced to switch flags (Worrall 15). Hence, Scottish athletes may face a very basic dilemma—representation of their nation versus access to more money and better facilities. This issue has already been raised after the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 by Sir Chris Hoy, cyclist and the country's (both Scotland's and Britain's) greatest Olympian, who trains in Manchester. "They have to start investing in sport before they can think about anything like a Scottish Olympics team," stated the Olympian (Worrall 19). The Edinburgh government declares that the problem is being appropriately addressed by increasing the number of world-class facilities across Scotland, such as the Commonwealth Arena, the Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome, the refurbished Commonwealth Pool, the Aberdeen Sports Arena, and the Tollcross Aquatics Centre. Holyrood seems to ignore the fact that recent achievements of Team GB and "Scolympians" were possible owing to a huge injection of money, mostly from the National Lottery, in the 1990s. Holyrood underlined that, after a successful referendum, Scottish athletes will not be deprived of money. A Scottish Government spokesman claimed that "under all constitutional circumstances, Sportscotland [Scottish National Agency for Sport—KO] will ensure that high performance athletes continue get the best possible training that is right for the individual, their circumstances and their sport."

Taking all the above elements into consideration, there is no doubt that the Commonwealth Games will be a significant Scottish campaign. Moreover, cultivating and nurturing Scottish pride during the Commonwealth Games has already begun, with, for example, the official mascot of the Games—the Clyde Thistle, the purple-topped plant which is Scotland's national flower and

emblem. It goes by the name Clyde, probably Scotland's most famous river. The mascot was created by 12-year-old Beth Gilmour and, of course, Mr Salmond had no role in the design at all. But the First Minister probably could not have come up with anything more exclusively patriotic and overtly Scottish if he had done the drawings himself. Even during the last Games in Scotland (in Edinburgh in 1986) the mascot did not fly the patriotic flag like it does now. Then it was called Mac and was a scottie dog—again with no saltire or other overt references to Scotland (Macdonell 8).

Salmond has high hopes for the Commonwealth Games, as can be seen from such statements as: "We will make these Games the greatest sporting event our country has ever seen" (speech on Scotland's winning bid to host the 2014 Commonwealth Games) and "London set the bar pretty high this year and Glasgow is going to go over that bar in 2014" (comment at the parade after the Olympic Games in London).

The First Minister spares no effort in support of *Scottishness* during the Games—one of the best examples of this is his declaration regarding the opening ceremony. Namely, Alex Salmond stated that he wants to open the Games in the costume of Clyde Thistle. "I'm going to make my entrance dressed as Clyde. So you'll see Clyde just walk into the stadium, pull the head off and it'll be me inside," said the First Minister (Donohoe 5). Mr Salmond wants to strengthen his message by presenting himself as the leader of Clyde's Clan. That idea both refers to the Scottish tradition of clans and is intended to show that the First Minister is a strong leader, supported by a significant number of people. "To make the Games happen we are creating Clyde's Clan. Our mascot Clyde wants his clan around him and these are the people who will enable the Games and make Glasgow 2014 a fantastic success," added Salmond (Donohoe 6).

Furthermore, despite financial difficulties, the First Minister was one of the strongest advocates of the overall Games expenditure amounting to £600 million, claiming that it is a cost of a "different degree of the multi-billion-pound spending on London's 2012 Olympic Games . . . We need the facilities anyway, it will put Scotland on the map internationally [and the Games would leave a] legacy effect, more than just bricks and mortar."

However, Mr Salmond's ideas of promoting *Scottishness* may be turned to dust by the athletes who proved during the London Games that they do not want to be involved in a political battle.

The best example of that was the behaviour of Sir Chris Hoy, who rejected Mr Salmond's plan to make London 2012 the last Olympic Games featuring a Team GB: "I'm British. I'm Scottish and British. I think you can be both—they are not mutually exclusive. All I can say is I'm very proud I've been part of this team, to be part of the British team, to be alongside my English and Welsh and Northern Irish and guys on the Isle of Man—everybody." He similarly rejected Mr Salmond's plans for a separate team after winning three gold medals at the 2008 Beijing games.

Even more interesting is the battle over Andy Murray, currently the 3rd-ranked tennis player in the world, who won the Olympic Games in London. Murray, who often underlines his Scottish roots, draped himself in the union flag after winning a gold medal at Wimbledon. But if Murray had chosen a saltire instead of the union flag, his gesture could have been seen as provocative—and an ill-advised foray into pre-referendum politics—following the comments he made as a 19-year-old in 2006. Asked whom he would be supporting in the World Cup, in which Scotland were not represented, he replied: "Anyone who England are playing" (Mott 5). This was seen by some as an anti-English barb, but in his defence Murray said that he was joking. Since that time Murray has been unpopular among a number of English people. Perhaps that could be one of the reasons why Murray placed himself so unambiguously in Team GB.

Nevertheless, Murray's success was treated as another great achievement of Team GB and it found reflection in the comments of popular politicians. Right-wing politicians did not miss their occasion to sting Alex Salmond and the Scottish National Party. "Andy Murray, great Scot and Olympic champion, holding a gold medal and proudly draped in the union jack—eat your heart out Alex Salmond!" wrote Tory MEP Struan Stevenson on Twitter (Small 5). "As we watch Andy Murray singing our National Anthem, never forget that there are small-minded Nationalists who want to destroy Team GB," commented Murdo Fraser, Deputy Leader of the Scottish Conservatives (Abbas 4).

It seems that Alex Salmond did not eat his heart out because together with his party he continued to cheer for Murray after his triumph in the US Open in September 2012. "Andy Murray is the first adult Scot to win a singles major title since Harold Sergerson Mahony in Wimbledon in 1896. Congrats," wrote Angus Robertson, the SNP's leader in Westminster (Stevenson 8), on Twitter, whereas the Scottish First Minister declared: "Now Olympic and

US Open champion, Andy truly is a Scottish sporting legend and I'm certain that more grand slam titles will follow" (Weldon 1).

While Salmond underlined Murray's *Scottishness*, David Cameron referred to his *Britishness* and wrote: "It is a huge achievement. Seventy-six years Britain has waited for a Grand Slam win in tennis and Andy has done it in huge style. Andy Murray is continuing a golden summer of sport" (Watson 2012). The English media reported that Murray was the first Briton to win a tennis grand slam since Fred Perry in 1936 (ignoring the achievements of female tennis players).

During the Olympic Games, opinion polls showed declining support for Scottish independence. According to an exclusive poll for *The Mail on Sunday*, which was conducted during the Olympics, only 27% of Scots said that they support Scottish National Party plans to separate Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom. A further 13 percent were undecided (Picken 3). This means that support for independence has nearly halved since a high of 52 % in 2006, and dropped three points during the Olympics alone.

But a poll published in *The Sunday Times* on August 12, 2012, specifically mentioning the Olympics, produced something just as interesting. The London Olympics, which were hailed as a reaffirmation of *Britishness*, have in fact made Scots more likely to support independence, it suggested. The Panelbase survey found that 12% of respondents said that the Olympics had made them more likely to vote in favour of independence, as opposed to just 8% of Scots who say they feel more British because of Team GB's performance (Small 8). The poll of almost 800 Scots also showed that 29% believe Scottish athletes should compete for Great Britain after independence, while double that, 58%, say Scotland should represent itself.

Professor Murray Pittock, head of the College of Arts at Glasgow University, said the Games were "politically difficult" for the SNP because Mr Salmond "wants to be associated with sporting success, but does not want to condone the union." Therefore, the Commonwealth Games will be for the Scottish First Minister far easier, taking into consideration the very fact that Scotland will represent itself on its own territory. It can certainly be stated that the Scottish National Party will do everything to fuel independent thinking in Scots, and Alex Salmond will try to use celebrities—not only those connected with sport—as informal ambassadors for his vision of an independent Scotland.

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