

[ch]2 Sports mega-events

[chsub]Mass media and symbolic contestation

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[tx]New developments in the technologies of mass communication, especially the development of satellite television, have created the basis for global audiences for sports mega-events. The expansion of mega-events has been facilitated by the formation of a sport–media–business alliance that transformed professional sport generally in the late twentieth century. Through the idea of packaging (via the tri-partite model of sponsorship rights, exclusive broadcasting rights and merchandising, sponsors of the Olympics and the two biggest international football events – the FIFA Men’s Football World Cup and the UEFA Men’s Football Championship, or Euro) have been attracted by the vast global audience exposure that sporting mega-events achieve. Interest in hosting sports mega-events has proliferated because they have become seen as valuable promotional opportunities for nations, cities and regions – the aim being to generate increased tourism, stimulate inward investment and promote both the host venues and the nation of which they are a part to the wider world as well as internally. Much research has since documented and theorized the transformation of sports’ most important tournaments from physical contests and local festivals into global mediated spectacles (for example see Gruneau and Horne, 2016; Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006; Horne and Whannel, 2012; Roche, 2000; Rojek, 2013).

In this context, it is valuable to ask: What are the possibilities and scope for contestation and resistance to dominant media messages about sports mega-events? How is symbolic contestation played out? What different media are used? What alternative readings (“decodings”) of media content are possible? It is beyond the scope of this chapter to answer these questions in detail, but it is possible to indicate why such questions are important and some of the ways in which they might be explored. The chapter will suggest that the work of Stan Cohen and Stuart Hall, two of the most influential British postwar social scientists, have contributed different ways of understanding the role of the media in constructing social reality. They provide insights into the media’s role in both over-reacting to as well as exaggerating (amplifying) social concerns or social issues and also, at times, under-reacting and downplaying (denying) others (Cohen, 2001, 2002; Critcher, 2003; Hall et al., 1978).

This chapter will first examine the nature of contestation and specifically symbolic contestation with respect to sports mega-events. Second, it will look at the mediated social construction of sports mega-events. Third, it will consider what a decoding of sports mega-events might entail, utilizing the ideas of Stuart Hall and Stan Cohen. Fourth and finally, it will examine some examples of symbolic contestation at recent sports mega-events and indicate where further research and study of symbolic contestation could develop our understanding of the mediatization of sports mega-events.

[a]Disenchantment with and contestation of sports mega-events

[tx]It has long been recognized that the Super Bowl is “a spectacle of American ideology collectively celebrated” (Real, 1975, p. 42; see also Chapter 14, this volume). A subsequent study, *Contesting the Super Bowl* (Schwartz, 1998), examined the work of a team of ethnographers and documentary photographers who sought to critically examine the XXVI Super Bowl between the Washington Redskins and the Buffalo Bills held in Minnesota/Minneapolis-St Paul in 1992. Author Dona Schwartz (1998) stated that her intentions were thus: “Aware of the intense boosterism surrounding the Super Bowl, we hoped to take a more penetrating look at the unfolding spectacle and produce an

independent interpretation of the events we witnessed” (ibid., p. 7). She concluded however that that there was “no essential Super Bowl to be laid bare, hidden beneath the layers of hype and fabrication” (ibid., p. 8). Rather, Schwartz and her co-researchers were confronted by a mediation process in which there was a “struggle over the production of meaning” (ibid.). While in the build-up to the event the American Indian Movement (AIM) was offered a platform for protest (about the use of Indian mascot names by sports teams, among other things) by the presence of the media “the riotous jumble of sights and sounds overpowered their voices, and the celebration absorbed dissent” (ibid., p. 114). Schwartz concluded that the Super Bowl offered a “gaudy, deformed tapestry of extravagance and want, hegemony and resistance that expands while threatening to unravel” (ibid., p. 136). The Super Bowl continues to be one of the biggest globally mediated sports events but, arguably, that description of a “deformed tapestry of extravagance and want, hegemony and resistance” finds echoes in a general disenchantment with the hosting of other sports mega-events that has been spreading in recent years – at least in democratic nations. In the past five years, the Winter Olympic Games, the Commonwealth Games, and the Summer Olympic Games have all seen either a low uptake of opportunities to host them, or results from plebiscites or referenda in places as diverse as Munich, Oslo, Edmonton, Vienna and Boston, have indicated that politicians and the citizens of certain cities are no longer interested in hosting them. This does not mean that there are no locations interested in hosting these mega-events, but it is interesting to consider why this disinclination to host has happened. Possibly the reluctance to be involved with sports mega-events is connected to a recognition of the systemic crisis in the governance of international sport – in addition to the corruption allegations surrounding FIFA, the IAAF and the IOC in recent years, there are ongoing concerns about the integrity of the governing bodies of volleyball (FIVB), weightlifting (IWF), handball (IHF), swimming (FINA), boxing (AIBA) and tennis (ATP). Alternatively, it may be a response to the spread of austerity as a central ideological feature of neoliberalizing governing regimes that has led to sharp reductions in public expenditure on welfare and other social support mechanisms. It may be, therefore, that citizens recognize the “new right two step” identified by Giulianotti et al. (2015, p. 103) and ushered in by hosting sports mega-events, that also involves state-led privatization (Raco, 2014). Perhaps the disenchantment toward the hosting of sports mega-events has spread because of increasingly effective symbolic contestation of the promises and rhetoric of mega-event boosters?

Giulianotti et al. (2015) provided a valuable examination of different types of public opposition surrounding the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. They did not, however, focus on the forms that this contestation and opposition took in the mass media, and therefore did not analyze symbolic contestation itself. While symbolic contestation can sometimes be treated as less “real” or serious, it can take different forms and may have different degrees of impact. Two broad categories are humorous and evidence-based forms of symbolic contestation. Humorous contestation can take different forms in different media: lampoon, comedy, satire, parody, and mimicry via images, prose, song, and cartoons. Hence the adoption of names such as “Fatso,” the alternative mascot, and “Pissoff” (People Ingeniously Subverting the Sydney Olympic Farce), one of the opposition groups, during the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games (Cashman, 2006; Lenskyj, 2002) can be seen as poking fun at the serious symbolism of the Olympic mega-event. Prior to the Beijing Olympics in 2008 the “curse of the fuwa” became an Internet meme amidst condemnations of human rights abuses and other conditions in China, again suggesting that the choice of five mascots (fuwa) ahead of the 2008 Games had not been propitious (Eimer, 2008). A year before London 2012, the disturbances in cities across the UK led to the creation of widely circulated images mocking the security and stability of the London event. Polluted water in Rio de Janeiro and the possibility of pollution from the nuclear disaster area in Fukushima in Japan have also given rise to depictions of

mutated animal life related to the 2016 and 2020 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games via the Internet.

Factual, evidence-based contestation occurs in several different ways as well. The production of dossier identifying human rights and other abuses, for example through the Popular Committees in Brazil since 2013, reports by charities and combined campaigns such as Playfair, websites such as RioOnWatch, blogs by academics and journalists such as Hunting White Elephants and Rio Gringa, as well as academics operating as “public sociologists” involving their scientific work with public activism, are all examples of the forms that factual symbolic contestation can take (for an example of the factual dossier produced by the Popular Committee in Brazil see RioOnWatch, undated; for discussion of some of these websites and blogs see Millington and Darnell, 2014). Occasionally this work feeds into the mainstream media. Investigative journalism, such as that of Andrew Jennings (2015), is another example of this. Occasionally such reporting appears in unexpected places in the mainstream media – for example, the normally right-wing and conservative British newspaper *The Daily Mail*. During an event itself, however, media of all political persuasion tend to support the games, as we will see shortly.

[a]The media circuit and the social construction of news about sports mega-events

[tx]On Friday, July 27, 2012, thousands of people attended the Opening Ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games; at its peak, *The Independent* newspaper reported that an audience of 27 million watched the ceremony live on TV in the UK, and an estimated 900 million people watched it worldwide (Independent, 2012). At the same time, an incident was taking place near to the London Olympic Stadium involving over a hundred people on bicycles taking part in a regular “Critical Mass” event (Lezard, 2012, pp. 24–25; O’Hagan, 2012). According to Shiv Malik (2012, p. 16) writing in *The Guardian*: “A man who cycled 9,320 miles from India to join Olympic celebrations in London was held by police as part of a mass arrest of cycling campaigners during last week’s Opening Ceremony.” Malik continued:

[dq]Aedewan Adnan from Malaysia, who had joined his father in Kolkata in November to raise money for charity and support the Malaysian Olympic team, was held by police with 181 others including a 13-year-old boy after participating in last Friday’s Critical Mass – a monthly event which seeks to promote safe road cycling by riding in numbers– after getting too close to the Olympic stadium.

[dqs](Malik, 2012, p. 16)

[tx]Aside from coverage in *The Guardian* and *The New Statesman*, however, there was little attention paid in the media to the impact heightened security concerns during the hosting of London 2012 had upon the Critical Mass ride. The fact that coverage of the opening of the mega-event took precedence over a regular event is not surprising, but it does indicate the difficulties posed for any symbolic contestation or alternative media narrative to find space, especially during the mega-event itself. Analysis of the media circuit in general has asked who says what, how, to whom, through which media, and with what effect. Media analysis has focused theoretically on production, messages, and reception, while empirically it has engaged with institutions, content, and audiences respectively (Rowe, 2004). This has led to the recognition of the mediated social construction of sports mega-events. News and reporting about sports mega-events is framed such that primary and secondary definers of a situation are differently valorized and positioned with respect to the events. Following the work of Stuart Hall and others it has become a sociological axiom that the mass media coverage of any large news story involves a process of struggle between competing groups: essentially between

the primary and secondary definers (Hall et al., 1978). The site of the struggle is to define social reality and this struggle involves uneven power relations – of resources, timing and legitimacy. Those propagating different discourses about mega-events include what I will here call legitimizers, de-legitimizers, revisers, and transformers (see Table 2.1). The “hierarchy of credibility” (Becker, 1967) favors the organizers and legitimizers of sports mega-events. In the past fifteen years or so professional sport has witnessed a dramatic increase in the use of public relations expertise (Boyle, 2006). This expertise has been widely deployed by the organizations responsible for the staging and encouragement to stage sports mega-events – including the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Federation Internationale de Football (FIFA) – and especially since the early 1990s and two decades of investigative journalism that offered to *de*-legitimize and reveal the “dark side” of sports mega-events (e.g. Simson and Jennings, 1992; Jennings, 1996, 2006; Jennings with Sambrook, 2000).

[tab]Table 2.1 The field of mega-event discourse.

[insert Table 2.1!]

Mega-event discourses – spoken by planners, architects, engineers, policy makers, journalists and academic social scientists – tend to be technocratic or critical, top-down or bottom-up. In the case of sports mega-events “boosters” and “supporters” (legitimizers and revisers) tend to have greater resources and influence over media coverage, such as the Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (OCOG), the IOC, politicians and athletes, but they still need to manage public opinion and potential threats to reputation from “skeptics” and “activists” (de-legitimizers and transformers) and thus try to manage reputational risk (Jennings, 2012). All Olympic Games organizers “begin in the bright sunshine of publicity when the bid is won and then for the next six years have to face a blizzard of critical coverage” (Horne and Whannel, 2012, p. 18). Skeptics and activists may try to use the “platform” of a mega-event to promote causes by “hijacking” or “piggybacking” the event (Price, 2008). While the old principle that “bad news” makes bigger headlines applies to sports mega-events, the skeptics’ arguments can in turn be incorporated, defused or dismissed as those of “naysayers” or “party poopers” by those considered primary definers, that is, the organizers of the games.

When it comes to coverage in the media, sport and sports mega-events especially blur the usual journalistic categories of news, education and entertainment (Billings, 2008). Treating news as a “social product” means recognizing the various institutional, organizational, commercial, contractual and situational influences on reporting, coverage and presentation. Hence selection, representation and meaning are all aspects of the mediated form of sports mega-events. There is a tendency for broadcasting to be more celebratory, with print media more critical (Moragas et al., 1996). Having paid large sums for the rights to cover a mega-event, it is hardly surprising that some TV channels will not allow anything other than a positive image to suffuse their coverage. The print media have fewer constraints, but specialist journalists rarely leap to criticize those they depend on. Non-sport journalists often lead the reporting on major critical issues and scandals. Internet journalism, although offering an alternative, can be equally for or against mega-events.

The Olympic cycle has become an ever-present media story. In any one year the Summer or Winter Olympic Games is being hosted – or decisions are being made about hosting one or the other. The Olympic story, like a lot of sport itself, remains the ideal news story – featuring as it does an unpredictable event occurring within a predictable time frame. Different newsworthy issues emerge at several different stages: before a decision is made to bid to host an event, the bid process itself, what happens at decision time, the build-up to the event, “Games-time,” in the immediate period after an event, and the longer term “legacy.”

In the long build-up to any Olympic Games or other sports mega-event, “the media coverage is often focused on two central questions: “will it go over budget?” and “will the facilities be ready in time?”

The answer to both questions is usually “yes” (Horne and Whannel, 2010, p. 766). After the Games commence, however, “there is a massive turning inward of the media to events in the arena and the stadia” (ibid.). As Whannel (1984, p. 30) stated 30 years ago, the Olympics is the “ultimate media festival.” Additionally, sports journalist Rob Steen perceptively commented before London 2012:

[dq]The tone within the UK press ... will depend on the medal count and the impact of the Coalition Government’s spending cuts ... The expense of an Olympic Games must be justified by glory and, at the very least, organizational competence. Broadcasters ... are inclined to exaggerate the good.  
[dqs](Steen, 2012, p. 225)

[tx]Issues raised in the media in the twelve month build-up prior to London 2012, for example, included concerns over legacy promises, a potential crisis of legitimacy because chemical company Dow was a sponsor of both the IOC and the London Games, civilian surveillance by drones and rocket launchers on the roofs, the potential for transport congestion, and ticket scandals. During the Games, initial concern at the lack of a Team GB gold medal after four days of competition led to the publication of a “Keep calm and carry on ... We’ve still got Wiggo” poster in *The Guardian*, referring to cyclist Bradley Wiggins, who had become the first British rider to win the Tour de France the weekend before London 2012 began (Guardian, 2012).

Undoubtedly after the Games began the British media began to act as flag-waving fomenters of the “feel-good factor” rather than dispassionate critics. Despite the fact that the BBC sport budget had been cut by 20 per cent as the license fee was frozen by the Coalition Government, the BBC produced 2,500 hours of live Olympic TV, and used 765 reporters during the Olympics alone (compared with 550 Team GB athletes). There was blanket coverage from 6 am to 1 am daily across multiple digital TV and radio channels. It was estimated that 90 per cent of the population watched at least 15 minutes of coverage (Thomas, 2012).<sup>1</sup> The British print media devoted an average of 46 pages daily to Olympic coverage, with Olympic stories appearing on front, news, and feature pages, as well as sport pages (Edgar, 2012). Newspapers that were generally wary and skeptical of the Games – such as *The Guardian* – also came out to support them – “Leave go your cynicism and let the Games commence” (Kettle, 2012, p. 1). As Steen (2012, p. 215) noted, “the atmosphere created on the ground by the crowd and the sense of occasion may lead to the suspension, or outright surrender, of one’s critical faculties.”<sup>2</sup>

The outcome also confirmed Steen’s statement that “In any nation hosting a major [international event] ... the media’s default position is patriotic, even blindly nationalistic” (Steen, 2012, p. 225). This appears to have become far more marked – in the UK at least – than it used to be. Furthermore the British media continued to set the agenda for future mega-events – including the Football World Cup Finals in Brazil in 2014 and Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 – by focusing on security, environmental, and health concerns rather than the impact of evictions and the denial of housing rights in places designated to host the events in Brazil (see Zirin, 2014; Horne and Whannel, 2016).

[a]Decoding sports mega-events

[tx]To make theoretical sense of these empirical developments it is helpful to recall the work of two leading sociologists of mass communication, Stuart Hall and Stan Cohen. Stuart Hall’s (1973) essay, “Encoding and decoding in the television discourse,” drew upon the political sociology of Frank Parkin (1972), who argued that the normative order of a society could be conceived as composed of three “meaning-systems.” These offered different moral interpretations of class inequality and, in turn, acted as key social sources of stability in society. He identified the dominant value system, the subordinate value system and the radical value system. Each influenced the “social and political

perceptions of the subordinate class” and variations in the attitudes of individuals and groups within this class were “dependent on differences in access to these meaning-systems” (ibid., pp. 81–82). Adopting these insights, Hall argued that the mass media encoded meanings according to these different systems, suggesting three broad “interpretive” or “reading” positions. Following Hall, regarding sports mega-events, we can identify three possible readings of sports mega-events:

[nl]1 People who believe they (and the local community and, indeed, the nation) benefit from the events, economically and socially – the “dominant” position.

2 People who have an ambivalent or “negotiated” position about mega events, believing them to be good in some ways but not necessarily so in others, with benefits that are mixed or are unevenly distributed; this means that you can enjoy some aspects of the spectacle, while disliking others, yet feel the whole issue is really beyond the actions/powers of individuals.

3 People who believe that mega events benefit the upper classes but this is hidden behind a veil of ideological rhetoric suggesting the events benefit everyone. For this reason public expenditures on them should be opposed. Similarly, the themes emphasized in media accounts of the events act as powerful modes of legitimation for a host of ideological standpoints associated with class, gender, race and, most importantly, a blind commitment to meritocracy within the ideological confines of neoliberalism. The use of public expenditures for such events is therefore a travesty – the “oppositional” position.

[tx]These positions are caricatures, and, of course, even the most superficial research would reveal them to multiply into a number of other complex variations; this was Parkin’s argument as well (Parkin, 1972, p. 82). Hall (1973, p. 13) introduced a Marxist interpretation to this complexity. His point was that the whole system of meaning is “structured in dominance,” and, therefore, that negotiated and oppositional positions tend to be marginalized or articulated in ways that never threatened the dominant or hegemonic position. The role of social science, however, is to investigate how these different readings operate in specific circumstances.

#### [Q1]

In two of his most celebrated books, Stan Cohen explored the way the media over-report and under-report certain social issues and circumstances. In *States of Denial* (Cohen, 2001) and the foreword to the thirtieth-anniversary (3rd) edition of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (Cohen, 2002), he explored the way that the concept of “folk devil” focused on the symbolic contestation over marginal and deviant subcultures, while “moral panics” suggested the exaggerated coverage given to specific episodes and issues involving them – that is media *over-reaction*. “Moral panic” suggests that something not fully deserving of important and lengthy treatment is acknowledged as critical. “Denial,” on the other hand, is about cover-up, evasion, and giving too little importance to some issue or concern – that is media *under-reaction*.

For Cohen (2001, p. 51) denial “refers to the maintenance of social worlds in which an undesirable situation (event, condition, phenomenon) is unrecognized, ignored or made to seem normal.” Cohen (2010) argues that previously denied realities should be brought to public attention, realities exposed, and consciousnesses raised about the different elements that go into a social problem. Sociologists have no privileged status in pointing this out and suggesting remedial policies – they are just another claims maker – but they can expose “under-reaction (apathy, denial and indifference)” and “over-reaction (exaggeration, hysteria, prejudice and panic)” (Cohen, 2002, p. xxxiv). Cohen (ibid., p. xxxiii) remarked that: “my own cultural politics entails ... encouraging something like moral panics about mass atrocities and political suffering – and trying to expose the strategies of denial deployed to prevent the acknowledgement of these realities.” Moral panics can become a “critical tool to expose dominant interests and ideologies” (ibid., p. xxxiii). Cohen thus identifies the basis for a cultural

politics of moral panics and suggests that *anti-denial movements* may seek to develop their own moral panics about injustices. The next paragraphs briefly sketch these processes with reference to London 2012 in the UK and the build up to the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and the Rio 2016 Summer Olympics and Paralympics.

[a]Contesting sports mega-events

[tx]Changes in resistance and media contestation reflect different phases of the build-up to an Olympic Games or other sports mega-event, as well as the different media forms and technologies that have existed. The opportunities for media-based contestation before TV, since TV, and since the Internet have obviously been different. At the same time, global corporate, commercial and media-oriented “Prolympism” (Donnelly, 1996) has only been in existence since the 1980s. Since the adjustment to the Summer and Winter editions of the Olympics in the 1990s, when the Winter Olympics was held in 1992 and 1994 to introduce a new four-year cycle, the Olympics has become a perpetual media story.

Differences exist between media coverage during the build-up to a sports mega-event (which can take 7 years or more) and during Games time; and also whether the mega-event is at taking place at home or abroad. This influenced the tone for reporting London 2012 in July and August 2012, as it was dependent on the outcomes of the competitions. In the UK the social construction of the Olympics in the print media and broadcasting shifted after the commencement (especially between August 1 and 8, 2012), from when Team GB had won no gold medals, to the “super Saturday” when several track and field gold medals were secured, along with success for cyclist Bradley Wiggins and tennis player Andy Murray. After that the tone of media coverage became more nationalistic and celebratory. Local and national print and broadcast media covered few of the negative issues associated with London 2012 – the removal of the Manor Gardens Allotment Society (MGS) from the Olympic site in east London was one exception that made it onto mainstream BBC TV – for further discussion see Hayes and Horne (2011) and Porter et al. (2009). But the largest amount of coverage given to the negative aspects appeared on networking counter media and especially the website Games Monitor (Cheyne, 2014). Very little coverage was given to the role of the anti-sweat-shop campaign “Playfair 2012” (Timms, 2012).

Sports mega-events in the “global North” in the past fifteen years – Sydney 2000, Vancouver 2010, and London 2012 – have tended to develop brownfield sites, attempt to minimize ecological impact, and have a strong legacy emphasis. Those staged in the “global South” – Beijing 2008, Sochi 2014, and Rio 2016 – have not been so overtly concerned about their ecological impact, despite claims to the contrary, and instead have had a strong developmental and “coming out party” emphasis. Events in the global North have had a relatively low level of displacement and infrastructural impact compared with those in the global South.

Hence prior to the Rio Olympics in 2016 (and the FIFA Men’s World Cup in 2014) there have been a series of land grabs and the removal of thousands of people in marginalized communities (e.g. “favela” such as Vila Autódromo, and Morro da Providência) as part of a broader, accelerated, urban regeneration policy. This has been covered in some mainstream media outside of Brazil, but the main focus has been on security, the completion of stadiums, demonstrations in 2013 and shortly before the 2014 World Cup itself, rather than removals from favelas per se. Again networking counter media – especially the blog Hunting White Elephants and RioOnWatch (Rio Olympic Neighbourhood Watch) – have been regular conduits for information about these developments (see Millington and Darnell, 2014 for a discussion of this; see also [www.geostadia.com](http://www.geostadia.com) and <http://riononwatch.org>).

Occasionally videos and films about these developments have been made available on YouTube, but the reach and audience for these is considerably smaller than the mainstream media (see, for example, Articulação Nacional da Copa Ancop, 2013). Alternative development plans for threatened



communities, the *Mega-events and Violations of Human Rights in Rio de Janeiro* dossier prepared by the Comitê Popular da Copa e Olimpíadas do Rio de Janeiro in 2013 (Popular Committee for the World Cup and Olympics, RJCPCO) and the Brazilian National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Urban and Regional Planning (ANPUR) declaration on mega-events, are hardly mentioned at all outside the networked counter media.

[a]Conclusions and future research

[tx]Michael Burawoy and Karl von Holdt (2012, p. 198) noted that towards the end of his life sociologist Pierre Bourdieu began to investigate “the conditions under which the weight of social order may be destabilised or challenged.” In *Pascalian Meditations* for example, Bourdieu (2000) argued that the symbolic order constitutes a space of relative autonomy that allows for “struggles over the sense of the social world” (Burawoy and von Holdt, 2012, p. 198). His suggestion was that symbolic contestation becomes a necessary part of engagement with the world for academics that are interested in changing, rather than just interpreting it, and not just the domain of journalists and other media workers.

It was noted earlier how the “struggle over the production of meaning” (Schwartz, 1998, p. 8) has continued with respect to sports mega-events other than the Super Bowl.<sup>3</sup> The shift of the two biggest sports events organizers, FIFA and the IOC, toward holding mega-events in the global South, or developing market economies, in the past decade connects with recent attempts to link sport and social development. But mega-events in the global South are compromised by the weaker position of the host countries to bear the burden of hosting and the opportunity costs being relatively much higher than in the advanced economies. The media presentation of the capacities of the hosts in the global South also becomes an essential part of the outcome.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter has attempted to introduce and set the stage for some of the more specific analyses of sports mega-events to be found in the rest of the book. It has suggested that there needs to be more investigation of the uneven power relations involved – to access to the media, to have media legitimacy, and to define situations through narrative accounts. While there has been recognition that contemporary media audiences are active and have some power, especially via social media, it is also argued that “astro turfing,” the production of fake “grassroots” movements or synthetic positive audience responses, is an ever-present possibility (Glaser, 2011, pp. 46–51). Astro turfing is no less likely to be used to generate excitement about sports mega-events, as in other commercial or political campaigns.

Protests about sports mega-events have mainly been couched in terms of their costs and legacies, human rights and their environmental impacts. The following features of the *symbolic contestation* of sports mega-event needs further examination in the future: media agenda setting, (e.g., the focus on security rather than evictions and housing rights that occurred in both London and Rio); the different forms of media used by sports mega-event “boosters” and “skeptics”; the use of media by social movements – as “oppositional” or “event coalitions” involved in resistance against mega-events in different societies; the imbalance of power and “hierarchy of credibility” associated with different media; the involvement of marginalized people in resistance to sports mega-events; and alternative “readings” and decodings of media output.

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[a]Notes

1 Television channel C4 were exclusive rights holders for the 2012 Paralympic Games and ran a series of advertisements featuring the strapline “Thanks for the warm up” towards the end of the Olympic Games. Using the song “Harder than you think” by American rap group Public Enemy as the theme tune C4 produced almost an equal amount of saturation coverage of the Paralympics in 2012.

2 By mid-July The Guardian was asking “Ten days to go – what could go wrong?” (*The Guardian*, July 17, 2012), but on the eve of the Games it featured a front cover headline: “Time to find out who we are” (Jonathan Freedland, *The Guardian*, July 27, 2012). For the next two weeks the British press as a whole featured increasing amounts of front-page color photographs, souvenir posters, free booklets and other Olympic giveaways.

3 The most recent Super Bowl, in San Francisco in February 2016, attracted protests about the nearly \$5 million public spending on infrastructure, especially a “Super Bowl City” street fair, with protesters using the hash tag #tacklehomelessness on Twitter as an organizing tool to challenge the priorities of San Francisco city authorities (Wong, 2016; Zirin, 2016).

4 For example, in May 2014, less than three weeks before the men’s football World Cup began, British newspapers reported problems with the quality and safety of the food available at the five star hotel being used by the England football team (Philipson et al., 2014).

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