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International Development and Sporting Celebrity

Introduction

In June 2010, the Sport Information Resource Centre (2010) issued a press release detailing a fund-raising event in support of SDP NGO Right to Play. According to the statement, the event, a golf tournament held at the Silvertip Golf Course in Canmore, Alberta, Canada, featured title sponsorship from electronics manufacturer Samsung as well as support more generally from ‘corporate Canada’. In addition, the tournament featured a host of Canadian Olympic and Paralympic athletes, many of whom had won medals at the recently completed Winter Olympics in Vancouver. Dubbed the ‘Red Ball Celebrity Golf Classic’, the event featured a charity giveaway in which the winner received ‘a weekend back-country helicopter fly-in trip to the spectacular Mt Assiniboine Lodge, which is operated by the family of Olympic silver medallist Sara Renner’ and also included a silent auction as part of a gala evening. The event was hosted by sports broadcaster Mark Connolly of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) with all proceeds from the event benefiting Right to Play, described in the press release as an organization ‘supported by an international team of more than 300 Olympic, Paralympic and professional athletes from more than 40 countries ... empowering children and communities to look after themselves and each other’. As further evidence of Right to Play’s efforts, the release made reference to the fact that Canadian Jon Montgomery, fresh off his gold-medal win in the skeleton in Vancouver, would be leaving immediately after the event to travel to ‘a Right To Play field location in Uganda where he will visit two schools and one refugee camp’.

A central theme of the event, evidenced in part by the name ascribed to the tournament itself – the Red Ball Celebrity Golf Classic – was the central position of high-profile or even celebrity athletes as part of its attraction and strategy for mobilizing awareness, support and capital for Right to Play and their aid and development programmes and initiatives. As such, it set out the role of Canadian athletes in using their sport-based public profile to support international development. The press release quoted Canadian Olympic Medallist Becky Scott:

As Canadians we often take for granted how fortunate we are to have access to sport which plays such a critical role in our personal and social development.

This incredible gathering of Canadian role models will be used to celebrate their remarkable achievements in sport this year, while raising crucial awareness and funds in support of our Sport For Development and Peace projects in the most disadvantaged areas of the world. We look forward to once again celebrating the Red Ball Movement in Canmore.

Scott's quotation and the Red Ball Celebrity Golf Classic in general are one example of the ways in which well-known athletes, whose exploits are reported and oftentimes celebrated through media and corporate communications, increasingly connect and contribute to international development initiatives and SDP. The event also served as evidence of sport connected to development through acts of corporate sponsorship (in this case Samsung), the cultural consumption of celebrities by audiences via media, the purchase of products with a mandate to support development and the act of consumers giving to charities that are constructed and supported by famous sportspeople. In this chapter, I examine the phenomenon of corporatized sporting celebrity in international development focusing on the ways in, and the extent to, which celebrity athletes are active in international development and the sociopolitical implications thereof. The focus of the chapter is a critical consideration of how celebrity athletes, and the 'celebritization' of sport more broadly, are now connected to development initiatives. I examine what this connection means for (a) understandings of development, including SDP, (b) the likelihood that SDP can or will deliver sustainable change and (c) the ways in which these processes effect the construction and consumption of development as well as that of athletic celebrity in general. The chapter draws on recent critical analyses of celebrity development, and celebrities *in* development, particularly the ways in which the phenomenon of celebrities taking interest and action in development issues and initiatives connects to the 'sexification' of international development (Cameron and Haanstra 2008) and a propensity towards marketized international philanthropy (Nickel and Eikenberry 2009). I also draw on the sociology of sport literature that has demonstrated athletic celebrity to be more than a neutral or benign by-product of an advanced media and consumer culture and, more accurately, a product of connected media and corporate sectors that identify athletes' marketable components and commodify their images in service of audience building and product endorsement (Darnell and Sparks 2005; Gilchrist 2005). I argue that while mobilizing (sporting) celebrity towards development positively increases the attention paid to development issues – particularly struggles in the Global South as understood from the perspective of northerners – this progress is also limited by the ways athletic celebrity secures the political economy of inequality and justifies attempts to 'give back' to those less fortunate in ways that are potentially narcissistic and/or paternalistic.

The chapter proceeds in three subsequent parts. In the next section, I offer an overview of recent literature in the social sciences concerned with celebrities,

in relation to development, philanthropy and internationalism as well as sport and sport culture. This is intended to extract some of the key theoretical and analytical debates in this literature, most pointedly the extent to which the celebritization of development contributes to or detracts from the ability or likelihood of achieving sustainable change. This is followed by analyses of the process of celebrity participation within SDP from the perspectives of those in the SDP field. The final results section offers a critical reading of media coverage of a particularly socially active celebrity athlete – two-time National Basketball Association Most Valuable Player Steve Nash of the Phoenix Suns – as a way of exploring the centrality and indispensability of media within celebrity culture and of drawing out a host of critical issues and implications regarding the celebritization of sport, development and SDP. The chapter concludes with some critical reflections, particularly regarding consumption, and the importance of ongoing research into the multifaceted and complex relationship between celebrity, sport, media, aid and development.

Celebrity, development, sport: Possibilities and pitfalls

Recent years have seen increased scholarly attention paid to the relationship between celebrities and development as well as to the associated global media coverage of development issues and the activities of corporations in supporting or ‘sponsoring’ development efforts. For example, the endeavours of global rock star Bono to fight debt and poverty on the African continent, actress Angelina Jolie’s work to combat world hunger and support child adoption, and the efforts by actors George Clooney and Don Cheadle to raise awareness of and mobilize a response to the conflict in Darfur have all been exemplary of this move towards the ‘celebritization’ of development. In addition, the Product (RED) campaign, supported by the likes of Bono, has engaged companies with world-recognized brands (like American Express, Gap and Armani among others) to dedicate a percentage of profits from RED-branded products to The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Similarly, the ONE campaign (known as such in North America and as Make Poverty History in the United Kingdom) has employed a host of celebrity activists to mobilize efforts in the North in order to combat poverty in other parts of the world.

Celebrity-led efforts such as these have become important sites for analysis by critical scholars. While some of these analyses have argued that media-supported celebrity involvement in development, diplomacy and internationalism more generally does an important service in building awareness, mobilizing funds and securing change within a relatively stagnant political system (see Cooper 2007, 2008), others have argued that celebrities in development primarily serve to depoliticize or oversimplify development (Dieter and Kumar 2008)

and/or recreate, if not maintain, the most traditional colonial narratives of saving distant others (Magubane 2008).

Before analysing this debate in some depth, clarification of the term ‘celebrity’ is called for. American cultural analyst Daniel Boorstin (1961) is generally credited with the foundational analysis of celebrities, developed in his 1961 text *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America*, in which he coined the oft-cited notion that the celebrity is one who is ‘known for being well-known’. While this analysis still holds purchase to an extent, it is important to recognize that the radical changes within the media and cultural economy since the 1960s have had an impact on the culture of celebrity and the scholarly analysis thereof. For the purposes of this chapter, therefore, I follow the more recent work by Graeme Turner (2004: 8) within cultural studies and his assertion that the contemporary celebrity is best understood as a public figure who takes on a celebritized persona through media representations that move beyond coverage of his/her public role (i.e. actor, hockey player, singer) to include his/her private life as well. A result of such processes is that the promotion of individual stars (i.e. authors, actors, athletes) through press reports, marketing and advertising regularly takes precedent in the media and popular culture over and above what is ostensibly the primary work that celebrities do (i.e. writing books, making films, playing sports) (Turner 2004: 36–7). This point is relevant to the study of celebrity athletes in development, given, as I argue below, that their work in development has become newsworthy in and of itself, beyond just their performances of the ice, field or court.

Two further points from Turner’s analysis are worthy of attention here. First, contemporary celebrity is both produced and exists at the nexus of a dense process of cultural and capital production and consumption. It is a mistake, or at least an oversimplification, to assert that celebrities are solely a media product or that only the corporations who hire celebrities to endorse products are responsible for the entrenchment of celebrity culture. In practice, these forces are undoubtedly influential, but so too are the strategies and desires of celebrities themselves – notably for this chapter, including their desires to be good citizens and support international development – as well as the interpretative and consumptive practices of audiences, many of which are underpinned by their own desire to consume responsibly and/or effect change through consumptive practices (Littler 2009). The activities of both celebrities and consumers are further supported and influenced by (shifting) media technologies that affect the flows of information and capital required to make someone a celebrity. The strategic connection of issues of international development to this media–celebrity nexus has likely only served to make it more complex, and I strive to embrace this complexity in this chapter by considering celebrity in its material, ideological and discursive forms.

Second, Turner, drawing on literature from the sociology of sport (particularly the works of Andrews and Jackson 2001; Giles 2000; Whannel 2002), makes

the case that while celebrity athletes share much in common with celebrities from other professional fields, they are also uniquely constructed and have characteristics and implications that stand alone, at least to a degree. For example, celebrity athletes arguably still connect to a notion of meritocratic achievement in the sense that they can, through their athletic performances, 'prove' their ascendancy or excellence. Furthermore, athletes are laid bare to audiences in a way that actors who often perform in character are not, and celebrity sportspeople continue to have a connection to nationalism and patriotism not expected of, or afforded to, other celebrities. Similarly, the celebrity athlete seems ready-made for cross promotion in that their athletic persona can (and often does) extend beyond sport while the same does not necessarily hold for celebrities who cannot or do not perform athletically (Turner 2004, drawing on Klein 2001).

Of course, as Gilchrist (2005) has argued, the relationship between the performance and the representation of a star athlete is not straightforward, nor automatic and, particularly when connected to a community or nation, can produce tensions between the meanings of high-profile athletes as legitimate heroes or merely ephemeral 'stars'. Neither, it should be stated, is the consumption of celebrity athletes by audiences a linear or universal process but always based on cultural positions and relations of power (Andrews and Jackson 2001: 5), a point to which I return below. Crucial for this chapter, therefore, is the understanding that the (global) celebrity athlete is firmly embedded in the (global) political economy as both product (a sellable brand) and process (a link in the endorsement/advertising chain) (Gilchrist 2005: 28). This confluence, I suggest, increasingly affords celebrity athletes access and agency in relation to international development as they are materially privileged but also come to represent important cultural and political arbiters. In this respect, the celebrity athlete should be understood as constitutive of, and constituted by, the elective affinities between news reporting, advertising and endorsing within the broader vortex of media production (Darnell and Sparks 2005). In turn, when connected to issues and activities of international development, the celebrity athlete represents more than a mere response to the political economy of development inequality but a part (and a product) of the same globalized, economic and mediated processes that underpin the challenges of international development itself.

Indeed, it is from this perspective that much of the recent critical analysis of the celebritization of development has proceeded. In the broadest sense, the criticism of celebrities in development, and celebrities within activist politics, suggests that the attention paid to celebrities renders the politics of development superficial and facilitates the popularization or mobilization of policies that are often ill-conceived but legitimized nonetheless in and through celebrity endorsement (West 2007). The nuance required to make sense of the incredible complexity, both material and political, of the challenges and

struggles of international development is likely lost when celebrities, supported by media and corporate fanfare, become the centre of the discussion on development issues and purport to have solutions to development (Dieter and Kumar 2008). Cameron and Haanstra (2008) have argued that these processes are part of the recent construction of 'development made sexy', signifying both the popularization of development through celebrity culture and also interest in development that is literally based upon the sexual appeal of celebrities and global stars that tends to usurp the politics of development itself.

A question, then, is what affect does celebrity culture, and do celebrities themselves, have on development processes? At the least, the claim can be made that celebrities are poorly positioned, as non-elected officials, to mobilize change and may in fact undermine processes of governance by circumventing such processes (Dieter and Kumar 2008). Similarly, but from a more discursive position, regardless of the various ways that consumers interpret them, the fact that celebrities are the product and centre of media attention may serve to position famous people like Bono as the focus of development initiatives, a process that Magubane (2008) refers to as 'Applied Hegelianism', owing to its construction of the (northern) Self through the (southern) Other. Similarly, trying to effect change through consumption, such as through the purchase of fair trade products, does not necessarily attend directly to the question of what constitutes fair practices and therefore is open to criticisms of consumer navel-gazing or attempts to secure northern innocence (see Littler 2009). From this perspective, campaigns like Product (RED) have been criticized for mobilizing celebrities and corporations to take on a responsibility to attend to development issues but primarily in a manner that trades on cultural notions of hip consumption in the name of 'solving the problem of "distant others"' (Pontey, Richey and Baab 2009: 301). These distant Others are rarely named or known, and their social and political history and context is rarely explained. Indeed, as Fain (2008) has illustrated, Product ONE's use of celebrities to raise awareness of global poverty tends to construct northern saviours, reinforce individual consumption and objectify the absent poor. At the least, questions of social justice and relations of power that sustain inequality and underpin development initiatives tend to fade when the (sexual) appeal of the celebrity is made central to the development mandate (Cameron and Haanstra 2008).

In sum, there is a strong post-colonial and post-development analysis to be made regarding the celebrityization of SFD, particularly in its construction of racialized hierarchies, a process that I have explored in some detail elsewhere (Darnell 2007). There are two other points of critical analysis that need to be made as they relate directly to the analysis offered in this chapter.

First, while a general sense holds that it is important to raise awareness about international development issues via the media, *in practice* the media/celebrity culture of development has actually been shown to have some negative effects upon the processes and programmes that attempt to make

a positive contribution or change to development inequality. As Cottle and Nolan (2007) have argued, contemporary NGOs increasingly compete for a 'brand' identity in and through media coverage of their work and in support of the development issues to which they attend. To this end, NGOs increasingly expend significant resources seeking celebrity and publicity, and avoiding media-based scandals, in ways that often overshadow if not undermine local development efforts and participation and generally undercut the ethics of international humanitarianism that NGOs ostensibly champion. As a result, development and humanitarian NGOs can be viewed as embedded within a 'media logic' by which these organizations require media coverage of their work to attract resources but employ 'communication strategies which practically detract from their principal remit of humanitarian provision and symbolically fragment the historically founded ethic of universal humanitarianism' (Cottle and Nolan 2007: 863–4). Media coverage of development and the operation of development initiatives and practices (including SDP) within a media culture are not inherently positive and are worthy of critical analysis.

Second, there are material limits to the marketization of philanthropy that seeks market and consumptive-based solutions to development inequalities, an ethos in which celebrities are increasingly central figures by way of their connection to product-based charity. Nickel and Eikenberry (2009), in particular, argue that marketized philanthropy, based on the twin cultural engines of consumption and celebrity, encourages First World citizens to buy their way to guilt-free transnational equality and depoliticizes the relationship between the market, distributive justice and the general well-being of humans around the world. Philanthropy through consumption and/or celebrity requires conformity to the market in order to raise funds, but it does so in ways that push the focus first and foremost to the consumption of products or stars and not to ending poverty or building international solidarity. In a somewhat polemical form, Nickel and Eikenberry (2009: 981) assert that 'celebrity philanthropy is an uncritical celebration of celebrities and their production of an elite society that can only be philanthropic by virtue of its ability to distance itself from poverty'. From this perspective, the argument that market-driven solutions to development issues are, at the least, better than no action at all does not hold. On the contrary, the privileging and entrenching of market relationships through marketized development may actually contribute to and exacerbate development inequality by normalizing a political economy of northern resource extraction and overconsumption versus southern underdevelopment. From this perspective, initiatives like Product (RED) may feed a notion of cosmopolitan consumption underpinned by international altruism in ways that do little to challenge privilege and imperial benevolence. When combined with Cottle and Nolan's work, these critiques illustrate that it may in fact be possible to worsen the struggles against development inequalities by invoking celebrities and their supporting media/marketing apparatus.

Of course, it is important to note that some scholars and analysts are more sympathetic to the role and contribution of celebrities and celebrity culture within the struggles for international development, and such arguments are not without merit. Cooper (2007), in particular, has argued that given the increasingly fractured nature of media and politics, and the incredible complexity of the challenges of globalization, celebrities actually serve as important surrogates or conduits by which to hold the public's attention and raise awareness of important issues, many of which connect to development. 'Celebrities possess some clear presentational advantages especially in the form of branding and popular appeal', and it is the analysis of this effect, according to Cooper, that has proved superficial, not the efforts of celebrities themselves (Cooper 2007: 17). In response, what is needed is not the dismissal of celebrity activism, or celebrity *diplomacy* as Cooper prefers, but a more nuanced understanding of what celebrities can or cannot do in development or what we, as citizens and consumers, should or should not expect them to do, within the shifting terrain of global governance and policy (Cooper 2008). Cooper's arguments are important here to the extent that they remind not to simplify, generalize or conflate the implications of different celebrities (such as pop stars like Bono versus 'celebrity' economists like Jeffrey Sachs) or to assume an understanding of the motivations of, or strategies employed by, celebrities and celebrity athletes in service of international issues and development.

This, in fact, leads to the final theoretical issue for outlining the role of celebrities and celebrity athletes in development, namely that of consumption, both cultural and material. In this way, I refer both to the consumption of celebrities by audiences and also the recent trend towards material consumption itself as a basis for change and/or response to inequality (see Littler 2009). It is important to address consumption in some regard here if only because of the wildly different perspectives espoused by scholars and critics in recent years. On the one hand, 'celebrity from below' – the construction and maintenance of celebrities and celebrity culture through modes of consumption – does exist and is an important feature of our cultural and political economy, and one not to be dismissed out of hand (Turner 2004). Indeed, the consumption of celebrity can be enriching, if not fundamental, to the constitution of the contemporary subject and is therefore influential in identity politics. The consumption of celebrity can also constitute a response to the social conditions in which people find themselves (Turner 2004), a point that holds important implications from a neo-Marxist perspective. Similarly, while the notion of shopping for social change does produce a series of tensions, not the least of which is the tendency for the question of moral action to be reduced to a moral proscription of political correctness, there do remain opportunities for change in and through participation, material and discursive, in the cultural economy (Littler 2009). For example, the popularity and profile of Steve Nash and the work of his foundation may, in addition to raising funds, offer an

important cultural repository for fans, consumers and/or citizens to connect to development and act on an impetus of change in relation to development inequalities. Such opportunities are undoubtedly important.

At the same time, the politics and implications of these consumptive processes are not easily reconciled within cultural studies, and several analysts have argued that material and cultural consumption *as it is currently practiced* does little to make the world a better place. As part of his recent diatribe against the illusory nature of contemporary Western culture, journalist and critic Chris Hedges argued that the ubiquity of celebrities results in a culture based on anxiety and insecurity in which citizens are never fully actualized but trapped in comparing themselves against the standards of the celebrities they consume. Sport is implicated here insofar as celebrity athletes are promoted and paid so that, through the exploits of celebrities, consumers may know themselves better. This consumptive relationship, when taken to its extreme, constitutes or renders celebrities (whose every peccadillo is reported and broadcast) 'cultural slaves' in that their remuneration stands as exchange for consumers' negotiations of their personal failures (see Klosterman 2009: 71). The result of such a relationship, according to critics like Hedges (2009), is the proliferation of 'junk politics' or the analysis of the consumptive individual's moral failings at the expense of deeper scrutiny regarding the structural or institutional dimensions of social justice. From this perspective, the politics of international development for the northern citizen are increasingly (only) interpreted in terms of consumption (whether to, or not, and by how much) as a way to make the world better. In turn, as Hedges argues, as material conditions and political processes deteriorate, both domestically and internationally (evidenced through the 2008 financial meltdown, the proliferation of intense political partisanship, wars seemingly without end), the more consumers seek refuge within the illusory culture of celebrity, which ultimately supports a downward spiral towards eternal consumption and away from a political engagement with social change.

This process connects to sport and development not only because athletes like Nash are now celebritized as development activists but more importantly because the invocation of sport and sporting celebrities has the possibility, owing to its mass popularity and commercialization, to subsume politics, where sport comes to be considered a political end as opposed to an integral part of broader political processes (see Redeker 2008). When placed within the momentum towards SDP, the celebrity athlete can draw the attention towards sport and celebrity and not towards – or even actively away from – international development. In an illusory culture, sport comes to be a goal to be achieved (sport as *evidence* of development) as opposed to a social institution in the service of politicized development struggles.

For critics like Hedges then, the focus on celebrity culture, and the consumption thereof, is fundamentally destructive. Such insights are important,

but from the perspective of neo-Marxist theory, it is problematic to claim that the celebrity phenomenon experienced by cultural actors renders them dupes. There is a limit to theorizing the celebrity consumption experience as a one-way failure or as an authentic or creative lack on the part of the consumer. Not only does this perspective do a disservice to the agency or complexity of cultural consumption but it also stands in marked distinction from social analyses of sports media and advertising audiences which shows people understanding what they are consuming, even if they are not in a political or cultural position to act on these understandings with complete freedom (see Wilson and Sparks 1999). So while critics of popular culture like Hedges, and to a lesser extent Chuck Klosterman,¹ likely overstate the ideological power of the celebrity and understate the interpretative agency of the audience, they do make an important contribution in illustrating that the celebrity is connected to a broader cultural dynamic. What requires attention, therefore, is how the celebrity philanthropic icon, and the celebrity athlete who 'gives back' through development activism, is produced through a complex social relationship underpinned by (a) the connections between sport and international development, (b) the construction of celebrity athletes, (c) the celebrity as philanthropic, conscientious activist and (d) the media economy.

While I do not dismiss the importance of consumption in these relationships, I do here focus on the particularities of the social and political economy that produce athletic celebrity in the service of development and use this analysis to raise a series of critical, consumptive cautions. In so doing, I follow Turner's (2004) assertion that the cultural and political account of celebrity culture needs to recognize its role in reproducing individual capitalism as well as the ways in which consumers of celebrity construct identities within the broader structures in which they find themselves. In other words, any analysis of attempts to secure change through consumption cannot be reduced to the impulses of individuals, but neither can the actions of individuals be understood outside of the political economy that produces the need and desire for different social and material relations (Littler 2009).

Sporting celebrity in SDP: Insights from the field

Interviews with those working in the field of SDP yielded five themes regarding the role of celebrity athletes.

Drawing attention to development

The role of the celebrity athlete in development can be conceptualized as one whereby celebrities principally serve to bring awareness to key development

issues, awareness that is useful in turn for those in the field seeking to build social and political momentum and mobilize funds towards effecting change. From this perspective, it is clearly the case that sport constitutes and offers a relatively novel approach to international development, one that requires some measure of justification and validation. The cultural profile, if not authority, of the celebrity athlete is useful in this regard. A primary means of development work that the celebrity athlete provides is the celebritization of development itself, meaning increased interest in the topic, and concomitant attention drawn to the importance of development inequalities and attempts to redress them. From this perspective, sport becomes less a tool for development practice (although it certainly is still approached as such) and more useful in establishing the importance and need for development and change.

[Sport is] still more of, as I say, a raising awareness and advocacy tool. There's the Goodwill Ambassadors which are appointed by the various UN agencies, the famous athletes that I think get the messages across, but as a programmatic tool within the development work of the agencies – Jennifer (SDP advocacy organization).

While this relationship of raising development awareness through celebrities and mobilizing celebrity media coverage and relationships towards development work is not unique to sport or SDP, it is important to note that the role of the celebrity athlete is particular in securing and justifying the place of sport within development. If SFD and SDP is not yet accepted within the broader development community and not yet recognized internationally, the celebrity athlete brings a measure of justification and significance to the sector. Particularly from the perspective of NGOs, the utility of celebrity athletes within their work is positive; it affords a higher profile and greater visibility, contributes to securing a reputation and maintains the momentum of the organization.

Being involved with famous footballers has ... only served to increase the visibility and the image that we get. Um, and I mean obviously having people like David Beckham come and say 'I really appreciate the type of work that this project does' is something that really boosts our reputation um, and y'know, well we'll be having a big footballer come out and deliver a course for us in June, and it generally serves to just increase the visibility and the reputation of the project – Julia (SDP NGO).

At the same time, the utility of athletic celebrity in development is not restricted to mobilizing sport itself in development, but it is also evident in the ways that celebrity athletes are concerned with development more broadly and use the opportunities afforded them to support more traditional development issues and initiatives. As the director of a celebrity athlete foundation described in an interview, the tendency is for celebrity athletes to focus on sport in the service of development, whereas the opportunity also exists for celebrity

athletes to contribute to development more broadly and in ways that do not necessarily mobilize or focus on sport.

A lot of your typical athlete foundations ... focus on improving sports programmes in at-risk communities and I think that's typical of athletes; they'll use their charities to build basketball courts or have basketball leagues those kind of things. And that was one thing that made us say, OK, we don't really need to do that, other people are handling that – Helen (Celebrity athlete foundation).

In either case – employing athletic celebrity specifically to mobilize sport and sport programmes in development or using the opportunities of sporting celebrity to meet development goals in a more traditional manner – it is important to note that for NGOs working in SDP, celebrity athletes in development appear to be principally representative of sport – and its cultural and media profile – more so, in some cases, than celebrity entities in and of themselves. That is, celebrity athletes are useful to the extent that they represent the utility and importance of sport itself in contributing to development. The advanced media culture of sport – particularly when commercial sport and celebrity athletes are involved – also makes it easier for those working in the field to mobilize and justify the use of sport towards development ends. This phenomenon constitutes the celebrity exceptionalism of athletes of the kind Turner (2004) describes; Bono is rarely presented as an advocate on behalf of music, but David Beckham comes, or at least is asked, to represent and justify the benefits that sport can contribute to the challenges of international development.

I think when people hear the word sport, you talk to government and mention the word 'sport' they see the bright lights and the famous people, and it's maybe a much more attractive medium even though it's going to only be used for development or its going to be used to bring a message to a community within a context. I think they still see the bright lights (of sport), and ... that allows them to be a little bit more open in certain contexts to sport as a tool for development instead of some of the more traditional means – Teresa (SDP NGO).

It is reasonable to suggest, then, that this utility of the celebrity athlete stems, at least in part, from the extent to which the SDP sector is embedded in a media culture in ways similar to those described by Cottle and Nolan (2007). Particularly in the cases where celebrity athletes themselves are the face of development organizations (i.e. charitable foundations) or serve as spokespersons for development causes, the profile afforded them in and through their sporting performances, supported by the sport/media relationship, serves them well in mobilizing attention and securing a positive reputation. The celebrity athlete's intimate relationship with media is key here; the better the relationship, the better the results for charitable work.

We never have a problem getting coverage for [our programmes], and whether that's because [celebrity athlete] is behind a camera 82 nights a year just for his

job or whether it's because he's a good guy and he has a reputation as someone who's respectful to the press that helps us. But I think just generally his visibility of course would help any endeavour, and the fact that it's positive visibility helps his charity – Helen (Celebrity athlete foundation).

The celebrity athlete can serve development in two explicit ways: mobilizing awareness, in and through the sport/media complex, of the importance of particular development issues (awareness that can be constructed both within SFD and without) and also, from a more practical or pragmatic perspective, serving the NGOs and charitable foundations that work for change in SDP or development more broadly. The same representative of a celebrity athlete charitable foundation explained both of these phenomena to me:

[‘Celebrity athlete’ has] been able to start dialogues [about development issues] among professional athletes, the corporate world, and the media ... I’m not saying that he tries to be provocative all the time, but he does ask people to think and formulate their own opinions on things. Um, and I think that’s a role that celebrity can be playing.

In my previous job with a non-profit, you’d knock on somebody’s door and they had no idea who you were. [Now] you call somebody from the ‘Celebrity Athlete’ Foundation and people typically answer the phone – Helen (Celebrity athlete foundation).

For those working towards development goals, particularly within the increasingly competitive field of international non-profit organizations and NGOs, the social and political cachet and distinction that the celebrity athlete affords is clearly of benefit. So too, does the celebrity athlete generally come to stand in for that which sport has to offer – materially, socially and politically – to development. As a representative of broader sport culture, celebrity athletes represent, and even actively model, the successes possible in and through contemporary sport, particularly at its intersections with media, capital and celebrity (discussed further in the next section). In this sense, the celebrity athlete becomes a type of billboard for what sport can do and transmits a message that is important and attractive to those working in development and SDP, particularly as they strive to build political capital within development and institutionalize SDP.

With these points in mind, at least three critical cautions are worth making. One, through a dependency lens, the celebrity athlete represents what is possible through sport but not what is possible *for all* through sport. The fame, media coverage and material benefits afforded the celebrity athlete are fundamentally exceptional; as a result, any notions of the celebrity athlete as representational of the development possibilities of sport are limited at best. Second, the practical fact that the celebrity athlete does lend a certain credence to development issues, or to the work of SDP NGOs, does little to reconcile the limits of celebrity authority when it comes to the importance,

and political dimensions, of development issues in the first place. The point here is not that the efforts of SDP NGOs or sport-based charitable foundations are ignoble, only that the credentials of the celebrity athlete to act as arbiter of such work are at best limited or even spurious. Even though they generally perform well on the court or field (although, as tennis player Anna Kournikova infamously proved, even this is not always required for contemporary athletic celebrity) given that celebrity athletes are produced and constructed through media/marketing processes, they therefore stand as representatives of the disproportionate benefits, both material and political, accrued to some over others. Put differently, (why) should citizens or organizations concerned with development inequalities concern themselves with what celebrity athletes have to say on such matters when they are able to say something at all principally because of the ways in which their images have been produced amidst the inequitable structures of the cultural and political economy? Similar to my argument of sports mega-events, it is more accurate to think of the celebrity athlete as a product of the same political economy that sustains development inequality; invoking them then as important stakeholders (if not experts) in the redressing of inequalities is at the least ironic, if not flawed.

In turn then, and third, the act of the celebrity athletes raising the importance of development issues, or ‘opening doors’ politically as described by those in the SDP field, runs the risk of centring the celebrity athlete himself/herself within development issues, a form of Hegelianism of the kind argued by Magubane (2008). While the balance of such processes is difficult to determine (i.e. do the benefits of the awareness of development issues raised by celebrities outweigh the detriments of securing the focus upon the celebrity himself/herself?) any discourses which attempt to redress inequality by focusing primarily on those in relative positions of privilege and authority may do little to challenge the relations of power that sustain inequality.

Raising capital

Following from the insights and critical analysis in the previous section, it is not surprising that the celebrity athlete was also recognized by those working in the field of SDP as having a particular utility regarding the opportunity to mobilize economic capital towards meeting development goals. While the authority or contribution to development of the celebrity athlete derives to a significant degree from his or her media constructed persona, closely related to this is the fact that celebrity athletes are both comparatively wealthy and enjoy access to further wealth in and through the corporatized underpinnings of celebrity culture. Celebrity athletes are therefore in a unique position to make a financial contribution to redressing development inequalities and uniquely suited to support SDP programmes. These contributions can take

place through partnerships with government or with civil actors like NGOs, as the following quotations exemplify:

[‘Celebrity athlete’] from Brazil, he’s a fairly well-known athlete ... he’s trying to get all the Brazilian athletes to contribute to a fund, which then helps development in Brazil. They have worked with the Ministry of Works ... so rather than implementing sport-for-development programmes themselves as famous athletes, which many of them do anyway, it’s rather pooling their resources which are fairly substantial to then be able to work with the government, to then be able to meet the development agendas of the governments – Jennifer (SDP advocacy organization).

We didn’t start as a youth development through sport organization. It really [started] through our partnership with the (‘Celebrity athlete’ foundation) when we became the first NGO in the world to benefit from his financial support. That was quite big for us, to have the number one in the world support us, and that then led pretty naturally to us starting sports programmes in the sense that after he was on board, we had [‘Corporation’] on board, which is his main sponsor, and various other stakeholders that are in that field of sports and development through sport – Henry (SDP NGO).

At issue here are not the objective benefits of mobilizing capital, as this is undoubtedly needed in the many cases where governments or civil actors strive to meet development goals, including in and through sport. As a result, few would criticize celebrity athletes simply for giving money to charities or development efforts or working to raise funds. Similarly, few would find SDP officials wanting for accepting such funds in the face of formidable development challenges. What is called for, though, is an analysis of the movement of such capital within the broader politics of development and the limits of marketized philanthropy as articulated by critics like Nickel and Eikenberry (2009). With regard to market logic, the injection of capital raised by celebrity athletes back into the programmes of social change through sport does little to challenge the structures by which celebrity athletes became disproportionately wealthy in the first place. In fact, the case can be made that the underwriting of development projects and NGOs by celebrity athletes constructs a hierarchical development industry in which the deliverance of basic social needs comes to rely on northern benevolence. Such programmes are questionable in relation to the sustainability of their practices and efforts, well meaning as they may be. In turn, the broader politics of development are potentially reinforced along lines of benefactors and recipients, lines that continue to run along axes of North/South, White/racialized as they intersect with capital and wealth. This is the significance of the limits of market and celebrity-based philanthropy; at the moment when the structures of inequality are most in need of critical analysis and/or resistance they are potentially secured through a process of raising and distributing funds. Relying on celebrity athletes to underwrite development may limit the chances of

achieving future sustainable development that does not require celebrities and their access to money.

Sport organizations and philanthropy

Given that the analysis of sporting celebrity in this chapter includes the analysis of media and corporations (since the celebrity philanthropist and the broader celebrity culture are produced and sustained by corporate and media flows, both cultural and material) it is also germane to analyse the interest in development of professional sports organizations and clubs. Indeed, perspectives of professional sports were captured in interviews both from the interview with a professional sports club that supports international development efforts through its charity work and from the point of view of an SDP NGO that derives funding from one of the world's richest and highest profile professional sport leagues.

Both organizations shared the perspective that the work to be accomplished in and through the funding of development – in this case the funding of SDP programmes specifically – needs to be done locally, through partnership with local individuals, organizations and communities. In this sense, the funding of SDP programmes by northern professional sports does not necessarily result in northern NGOs setting the research agenda or asserting undue authority or control over local efforts in the South. Even though the desire to support social change in and through sport leads northern sport organizations to 'look South' for the best place to spend their money, the political orientation of this charity is clearly progressive to the extent that partnerships and local agency are recognized, if not paramount.

We're an award-winning [pro sport club] here and the charitable foundation of this club is without a doubt one of the strongest in the [northern country], so it's quite natural that we would broaden our scope to take in something more of a global element. However, I would say that in actual fact, every single sport-for-development organization I've met in the last 4–5 years, they fundamentally rely on the strength of their partnerships, and we're absolutely no different in that – David (Professional sports club).

Athletic celebrity figures in this process. The backing that NGOs receive from the charitable endeavours of northern professional sport is solidified by the star athletic power that professional sport can lend to development. In turn, the professional sports leagues themselves benefit by attaching their sport, their stars and their strategic endeavours, to development efforts and the work of NGOs.

We're quite fortunate because we're the [northern pro sports league's] charity. They provided some of the initial funding to get [SDP NGO] on its feet and has been providing significant core backing to our programme in the last couple of years and also providing access to certain personalities and figures. Essentially

the [northern pro sports league] came to us and said, 'OK look, we're trying to support the [bid for major sports event] and [celebrity athlete] is our new ambassador and we'd love to promote the work that you do by bringing him into your programme and also highlight the work that we're doing with you through him' – Julia (SDP NGO).

It should come as little surprise that professional sports, fortified with the celebrity presence of famous athletes, would enter into support of international development projects with some measure of return expected on their contribution. The point here is that such practices are similarly open to the criticisms of celebrity and corporate-led development discussed elsewhere in this chapter. The charity-based model of development funding is clearly limited in terms of sustainability, particularly given the ongoing instability of international markets. The positioning of international development as a charity wing of northern professional sports by which they attempt to secure their own strategic goals may undermine the long-term stability of such programmes. The establishment of development initiatives based on northern funding may, in turn, secure the relations of northern dominance that underpin development inequalities rather than challenge or deconstruct them. And finally, given the popularity of northern professional sport, and the regular criticism of its culture and operations as elitist and overpaid, the contributions to development initiatives may constitute attempts at the 'greenwashing' of northern sports – and the rehabilitation of professional sports in general – more so than attempts to improve the lots of people in the South. From this perspective, celebrity athletes/professional sports as a basis for SDP and international development initiatives is open to the same criticisms of development education more broadly; its political orientation suggests a strategy of maintaining notions of northern dominance through benevolence/southern degeneracy rather than reconstructing the system by which such dichotomies are constructed and maintained (Biccum 2010).

Notably, the limits of the corporatization of SDP can also be seen in the reflections of civil society actors working in the field. When the corporate interests that underpin much of the organization of dominant, contemporary sport culture take up a place of prominence, both representational and material, within SDP and development initiatives, their interests can be difficult to extricate from the goals or mandate of SDP NGOs. At the least, clashes are possible, even likely, as the following quotation explains:

There's a bit of challenge with funders like [multinational corporation], there's the inclination that there will be quite a bit of branding. I think that's one of the big challenges because we don't want to use our programme to sell someone else's product. And yet we do have an obligation to our funders to provide the reports and the impact and the photos. So it's sort of the challenge of mitigating the expectations of both the funders and of the people that we work with because if we're driving around in a [sponsor's] branded vehicle, people are going to come

to us every 5 minutes saying, can you give us kit? And that's not really what we're about – Julia (SDP NGO).

This description points to the difficulty, in practice, of separating sport and athletic celebrity from the consumer culture for the purposes of a more egalitarian, benevolent and community-focused approach to SFD. The political and economic capital that these sports organizations and celebrity athletes have accrued, and which subsequently positions them as contributors to development initiatives, are produced within the same political economy that eventually asks them to 'give back'. Yet checking corporate impulses because the topic or context has turned to southern development proves difficult or even unlikely for northern professional sport. At the least, for a multinational corporation working as a sponsor of an SDP NGO to question the political economy by which they construct and maintain their brand – as might be called for within the ethics of development – is, to an extent, for them to question the capital and expertise which puts them in the position to contribute in the first place. Asking such sponsors to militate against their own corporate and branding goals is akin to asking them to question the organization and hierarchies of global, corporate sport culture at large.

Role modelling

Not surprisingly, those working in the field of SDP also spoke to the importance of well-known athletes, including but not limited to celebrities or international stars, as role models within development initiatives, particularly when the focus of development programming comes to rest upon underserved youth. In this way, successful athletes are not only in a position to act as catalysts for change through their activist work but the success of high-profile athletes is also attractive and useful to those working with youth as a way to encourage youth involvement in SDP programmes and pass on the key messages of individual action. This is hoped, in turn, to secure the social change underpinning development initiatives.

Basically we were founded by professional soccer players who saw that soccer was a huge powerful force that could be tapped into, and engaging the role models was kind of key to that ... it's a way to create that direct connection with [local] role models. Um, and then there's the international role models as well. Even just simple messages from the superstars we've found just kind of help get the messages home and get people excited and interested in the programme – William (SDP NGO).

Such processes are important and apparently effective within the cultural and political terrain of SDP and the challenges of mobilizing change, particularly among youth. That is, sports are meaningful for many (though not all) young people and when mobilized as a means of transferring a message as a basis

of change, role modelling is key. Indeed, role models in SFD may offer young people some form of 'proof' that change is possible and relations of power can be challenged, as in Meier and Saavedra's (2009) analysis of Zambian boxer Esther Phiri and the sporting competencies of women. As the above quotation attests, celebrity athletes are attractive from the point of view of many SDP NGOs. Rather than having to 'construct' role models, the celebrity athlete, by virtue of his/her position at the confluence of capital, media and athletic success comes nearly 'ready-made' to serve as a conduit for such messages. The case of Phiri in particular suggests that such meanings can and do transfer to youth in positive ways depending on the fit.

Still, like much in the current practice of SDP, the political orientation of such processes is open to criticism, particularly the extent to which the mobilization of role models in this way challenges and/or secures neoliberal philosophies underpinned by bio-political solutions to inequality based on a physical self-actualization. The role modelling effect in SDP is difficult to extricate from the processes of commercialization and corporatization or the twin engines of consumption and celebrity that secure marketized philanthropy (Nickel and Eikenberry 2009). Indeed, Meier and Saavedra (2009: 1170) point to such difficulties by suggesting that 'with a celebrity role model the success must receive robust media attention to promote the destination as desirable and the route there as charted and feasible' and that '[r]ealistic, detailed stories' are preferred as a result. While good advice, this is clearly easier said than done for SDP NGOs that operate within a set of material and political constraints. Establishing such 'realistic' and 'detailed' stories that can subsequently be reasonably positioned as opportunities available to the majority of underserved youth requires challenging the dominant, pyramidal structure of sport (in which few, and certainly not all, can win) and challenging the limited access to material and political benefits within capitalism (in which, again, not all can win). Such efforts, however, rarely accompany initiatives that are based principally on the motivational power of celebrity role models. Absent of such efforts (which are undoubtedly often beyond the scope of the average SDP NGO given their purview and limited resources), rather than challenging the political economy that produces and constrains the poverty and lack of education available to many of the world's children and youth, the role modelling approach and effect appears likely to align with and justify a bio-politics of individual consumption and conduct. Such politics can be understood to proceed from the particularities of the political economy of contemporary development inequality and celebrity culture itself. As a result, the role modelling of the celebrity athlete (himself/herself part of a celebrity culture) as evidence of the benefits of elite sport and the promises of SDP potentially reinforces individualized consumption in/through capitalist exchange (Turner 2004). The resulting likelihood of long-term, sustainable change is therefore questionable.

Celebrity athletes and the politics of change

At the least then, the theory, critiques and data in this chapter point to the ways in which even the invocation of athletic celebrity and the work of celebrity athletes in international development are beholden to the politics of development and social change. The experiences of those working in the development field as it intersects with sport and athletic celebrity suggest that SDP officials, while recognizing the opportunities that the cultures of celebrity and sport afford, also negotiate the political possibilities and limits of their work. The work of celebrity athletes to raise awareness of development issues, to mobilize resources and/or to support the use of SFD still occurs within a particular political economy and is therefore beholden to its possibilities and limitations, and places celebrity athletes and their stakeholders/supporters in a position whereby they recognize that they must navigate the political terrain of development. The following quotation is illustrative:

We [went to] the White House two weekends ago and met with President Obama about [an initiative] and talked to them about helping us to get the [pro sports league] involved. And one of the things that we've said to the [pro sports league] is hey, not only is this something that can help in every one of your franchise cities, this would be the first time that a professional sports league anywhere in the world was involved [in an initiative like this]. And I think that that's something that athletes can do and celebrity can do, to say hey, these are where our resources are going. We're thinking individuals and we're part of a big business conglomerate, and that's part of sport, right? Sport is a big part of the world's capital market right now. [So the question is] how do you use that influence, that sphere of influence? Where are you going to direct it? – Helen (Celebrity athlete foundation).

There is, from such a point of view, a sense of responsibility regarding the ways in which the celebrity athlete recognizes the resources available at his/her disposal and situates this in explicitly political terms. In the case of corporate, media-driven professional sport, there is a political dimension and even a responsibility to the privilege accrued by the celebrity athlete. While the political orientation of how, when and where to wield that influence in order to contribute to sustainable development and make the world better (if not necessarily more equitable) is contestable, the recognition on the part of celebrities, including athletes, of their political authority and resultant opportunities to act is regularly taken up in SDP. Such motives should not be overlooked.

Conclusion: Critical considerations

On 29 July 2009, the following ran in *The Vancouver Sun* newspaper:

Nash gets back to his (grass)roots. Local hero hits the pitch for charity, and will bring his Suns to town in October BY IAN WALKER

Professional athlete. Two-time National Basketball Association MVP. Movie producer. Professional soccer team owner. Professional soccer league owner. Philanthropist. All around great guy.

Steve Nash didn't get to where he is by listening to most people. Good thing. The Phoenix Suns guard may never have played hoops past high school if he had.

So it was fitting a few years back when the Victoria native opted to deep-six the Steve Nash Foundation's Charity Classic basketball game – brought to you only upon the terms dictated by the NBA – in favour of a more grassroots approach to charitable sporting endeavours.

This coverage of Nash and his fund-raising Showdown in Downtown football match in Vancouver, with proceeds benefiting the Steve Nash Foundation and its international development efforts, encapsulate many of the issues of athletic celebrity, corporatization, the media and development explored in this chapter. First and foremost, the connections of athletic celebrity to development extend beyond raising awareness and funds for development aid and initiatives but also incorporate and influence the media construction of celebrity athletes themselves. Athletes who support development are generally viewed and constructed as better people and celebritized through media coverage beyond their exploits on the court and including their (charitable) activities off of it. Celebrity athletes supporting development are not undeserving of such positive media attention, but this process does suggest or illustrate the extent to which development and/or SDP efforts, such as raising money for a charitable foundation, is increasingly reliant upon the media culture and its intimate relations to the construction of elite sport and star athletes. Most pointedly, if sport-based development charity and social change is dependent on the media culture and media coverage, then it raises questions about the sustainability of such efforts, the competition for coverage among SDP organizations and even the media's ability to direct the charity industry, given the need for foundations to appeal to media in order to achieve their goals.

It is also significant that the work of celebrities in contemporary development tends towards the charity and role modelling approaches. I would argue that this softer approach is more culturally attractive and politically palatable to athletes like Nash who are undoubtedly well versed and successful in the political art of fund-raising and image management. The fact remains that it is a different political orientation to mobilize celebrity to raise funds than to work for change through human rights, claims to social justice or a politics of equity, to offer but three examples. It is also arguably different than the political orientation to social change through sport in the tradition of athletic activism, such as the famous black power salutes delivered by Tommy Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics (Zirin 2008). This does not mean that celebrity athletes like Nash are inherently devoid of political engagement or that they avoid controversy² (though the competition for positive media coverage likely militates against courting political controversy at least to some

degree), but it does suggest that when produced and constrained within the dominant political economy of international development – particularly as it is ‘made sexy’ by the presence and attractiveness of celebrities – the discourse of charity is more attractive and palatable than that of resistance or struggle.

In turn, it is also reasonable to question who constitutes the focus of such cultural and political activity. In the celebrityization of SDP, athlete charitable activity arguably becomes the focus more so than the world’s nameless poor. If the point of celebrity athletes in SDP is to raise awareness of development, but such awareness rarely extends beyond the celebrity athlete himself/herself, then has anything significant been achieved in securing sustainable development changes? These tensions illustrate that a type of corporate, media culture surrounds and imbues charity and development in SDP much as we have come to understand it within the broader sports/media complex. The tools are the same here – promotion, marketing, celebrity – even if the goals are to raise money for charity and development rather than for profit. The political challenge, though, as Nickel and Eikenberry (2009) show, is to challenge the corporate competitive system that remains a contributing factor to poverty and inequality. The work of celebrity athletes in SDP may not challenge the political economy of unequal development as radically as possible or required or even hoped.

In sum, there are two sets of implications of the sport/celebrity/development nexus that call for ongoing critical analysis. First, it is clear that celebrity athletes are successful in, and valued for, drawing on their media image and the media/celebrity/sport nexus, to mobilize awareness and money for development programmes and charitable foundations. In turn, few would begrudge the SDP NGOs and celebrity athletes for trading on such opportunities to raise money for charity, particularly in political spaces and climates where public funding for critical health and education is lacking. There are, however, structural limits to this approach to social change and development. Not only is celebrity and corporate-based philanthropy not a radical and sustained challenge to structures of inequality, both international and domestic, but marketized philanthropy may secure such structures (Nickel and Eikenberry 2009). There is little evidence to suggest a move towards development as struggle in and through the celebrity/sport/development nexus.

Two, there are discursive limitations to such politics and policies. It appears to be politically unpalatable for celebrities, and celebrity athletes, to challenge inequality within a development framework in any explicit way. As a result, they tend to mobilize support for development but not to overtly politicize this process. The Steve Nash Foundation is a good example of this. Nash is arguably one of North America’s most politically oriented, engaged and productive celebrity athletes. If the Steve Nash Foundation does not or cannot forward a politicization of SFD, or if Nash has decided that it is better not to, then it will take a major change in the cultural economy and discursive terrain to encourage celebrity athletes to do so (see Darnell 2009). Ongoing critical attention and investigations into such processes are called for.