Myths of Nation in the Champions League

Ryan Cox, Laura Hills and Eileen Kennedy

Abstract

The UEFA Champions League (UCL) tournament has become a showcase for the most elite and well-resourced clubs in Europe. In this paper we explore whether the European flavour of this competition and the multi-national composition of the teams involved influence the sport media's well-documented nationalistic discursive traditions. The analytical frame draws on Barthes' work on mythologies and Wenner's conceptualisation of communicative dirt to analyse discourses relating to nation found in the coverage of the 2011 UCL tournament. We identified the presence of nationalistic discourses in the form of symbolic Englishness, intertextual references to insider English knowledge, football history and conflicts, and 'othering' representations of England's opponents. The re-imposition of war imagery, stereotypes, and ideological Englishness in UCL media coverage was conceptualised as the importation of communicative dirt into a multi-national context. We argue that the presence of this pervasive nationalistic discourse tarnishes the contemporary sporting landscape and suggest that ethical reporting could entail creating more creative and inclusive journalism.

Introduction

"This is a great moment for English football, even if its representative is multi-national". [1]

The UEFA Champions League (UCL) is an annual competition involving the top clubs from European football leagues. The competition was launched in the 1992/93 season, replacing the European Champion Clubs' Cup. The UCL is a competition between teams made up of elite international athletes, playing for European clubs often owned by global business magnates, courting a pan-European and worldwide fan base. The UCL has becoming increasingly prestigious, well-supported by fans and well-represented by the media who have played a role in the success of the UCL and contributed to its popularity and to its financial and symbolic successes. [2] As Lury observed, the brand is a new media object in its own right - a frame that organises the dynamic exchange of "affect, intensity and the re-introduction of qualities" that both connects and separates the producer and consumer. [3] Chadwick and Holt discussed the various challenges involved in the effective management of the UEFA Champions League (UCL) brand. [4] They pointed to the segmentation of UCL spectators into the following clusters: glory hunters, iconographs, retrospectives, and stress seekers. Some fans want to support a winning team, some want to be associated with glamorous players, some hanker for history, and some thrive on a suspenseful game. The brand that can simultaneously satisfy these competing demands needs to be flexible and adaptable, with one foot in football's past and one in the future.

Within this environment, issues of national identity might seem slight. The UCL might be considered to 'alter the general patterns of orientation not only of the club's representatives, but also of the supporters/spectators, arguably leading to more Europeanized mindsets…' [5] In the UK context, the European flavour of the UCL and the multi-cultural background of owners, players and coaches on Premier League teams could potentially lead

the media to employ new forms of discursive strategies designed to capture the European-ness of the tournament.

Yet, the UCL brand does not involve straightforward producer-consumer interaction. Rather, following Lury, it can be better understood as site of organised interactivity: the UCL brand reveals certain relationships and keeps others hidden. Nostalgia may be preferred to commercial considerations that shaped the current competition[6]. In other words, the brand controls the interaction by *allowing* consumers to interact with it on its own terms.[7] Mythologies of nation have been traditionally integral to sports competition.[8] So, while the UCL may encourage a transnational perspective in some spectators, UCL brand managers and journalists may not wish to abandon the formulaic narratives of nation that have traditionally helped to orientate fans' affective investments in sports.

This paper will explore the ways that national identity has been re-introduced into the UCL to reveal and conceal UCL's relationships to past and present football mythologies. In his analysis of sport advertising, Wenner suggested that the sport media abounds in communicative dirt – cultural meanings, associations and logic transported from one context into another, where they become 'matter out of place'.[9] For example, war metaphors infiltrate football commentary, stripped of the seriousness of their original context. Thus, war is evoked but without any adequate, meaningful response. The paper considers the extent to which mythologies of nation in the UCL could be understood as communicative dirt – intertextual associations that have become stuck to representations of football to be reimagined and repurposed within the UCL.[10]   In so doing, it will contribute a deeper understanding of the production of nationalist discourses by the sport-media nexus, which may be particularly salient at a time of increasing struggles for and against supranational identifications within Europe.

Football, national identity and globalisation

The UCL can be considered a consequence of the increasing globalisation, commercialisation and spectacularisation of sport, processes which have led to national boundaries becoming "less relevant in sports...they [athletes] go where their sports are played".[11] For some commentators, globalisation constructs an idea of the world as one united community, "in which regional, national, and local elements are tied together in one interdependent whole"[12] and has been described as the "axial theme of contemporary times".[13] However, Maguire suggests that globalisation is "best understood as a balance and blend between diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties, a commingling of cultures and attempts by more established groups to control and regulate access to global flows".[14]

The extent to which processes of globalisation serve to weaken individuals' national identities has been debated. Since the late nineteenth century, sport has created a platform where processes of personal habitus/identity can be displayed, and multiple notions of community, regional and national identity can be represented.[15]As processes of globalisation became more prevalent, an intensification of sentiment towards the nation has been symbolised through various sporting practices such as use of the national flag and singing of the national anthem.[16] This movement suggests, as national boundaries were broken, people became more aware of their local lives, reinforcing the notion of national identity.[17] As Bairner states, there is no implicit suggestion that the process of globalisation will, in part or completely, eliminate the role of national identity in the contemporary world.[18] While national identity is subject to an array of interpretations, with ethnicity, geography, language, religion and shared experience all acting as fundamental determinants,[19] the charged interaction ritual characteristic of sport helps to establish a clear sense of nation.[20] More recently there have been discussions on the potential Europeanization of fan identities in football as a result of the national diversification of club teams and the increasing

consumption of the UCL by the fan base illustrated through rising attendance figures and increasing mediation.[21] Millward investigated whether fans were constructing European identities through their engagement with Champions League football by analysing discussions on an internet forum for Liverpool supporters.[22] He suggested that the majority of discourses were pro-European club competition with fans discussing their enjoyment of opportunities to travel, to strive for the title of best club in Europe, the excitement, and the potential income generation for the club. Alternative less positive comments bemoaned the perceived reduction in the value accorded to the domestic league and concerns about the potential for a European super league. Millward argued that there is evidence of the development of a weak European identity emerging in discourses of fans from the most elite Premiership clubs which was linked primarily to their positive experiences of travel to matches and the transformation from hooliganism to an appreciation of the 'carnivalesque' atmosphere surrounding matches.

Critics argue that globalisation of sport has been achieved at the expense of the less affluent nations.[23] Athlete migration is an example of how globalisation has benefited the more developed countries, with faster results made possible by buying up the world's top athletes rather than nurturing young home-grown talent. The regularly cited motives for athletes to migrate include financial compensation, better coaching, equipment and support services.[24] If athletes are to achieve their ultimate goals, whether to win medals, play in the 'best' leagues, or get selected to represent their country, it may be that their only option is to migrate. The UCL, regarded by many as "even bigger than the World Cup"[25] has simultaneously attracted the world's football talent to top teams in Europe, while helping to provide clubs with financial resources to afford them.

While athlete migration can be seen to benefit athletes, coaches, teams, leagues, organisations and nations through access to better talent and resources, other accounts

suggest the process is problematic.[26] Bale and Maguire stated that the migration of athletes has led to the deskilling of 'donor' countries and argue that "Latin and Central American countries...regularly experience the loss of baseball and soccer players to the USA and Europe".[27] So whilst less affluent nations nurture young talent, the more financially powerful leagues in the more developed countries snap up the talent as it reaches maturity. Thibault argued that the internationalisation of the top European football leagues may have enhanced the profile of teams in such leagues among fans, media and sponsors worldwide but has consequently weakened the success of domestic leagues in certain countries.[28] An example of this is the Brazilian football league, where there are approximately 5000 Brazilians with football contracts outside of Brazil.[29] *Sports Illustrated* writer Wertheim asserts that even though Brazil is the largest producer of football talent in the world, it is the wealthy European clubs that are able to purchase all the best players.[30]

A contributing factor to the influx of foreign players to the English leagues is the increase of foreign ownership of English clubs. Half of the 20 top-flight English clubs are in the hands of foreign owners, such as the Glazers at Manchester United and Abramovich at Chelsea, all investing vast amounts of wealth into their clubs, giving them access to the world's best players, regardless of their nationality.[31] In addition, the 1995 Bosman Ruling enabled clubs to field as many European players as they wished and increased opportunities for migration by allowing players to move clubs at the end of their contracts. There has been a noticeable rise in foreign player migration in English football, particularly in the Premier League, since commercial interests in the 'football business' have escalated over the past two decades.[32] This was particularly evident in the team rosters for the English Premiership teams in their opening group matches in the 1999/2000 UCL; Chelsea only fielded one English player, Dennis Wise, whilst Manchester United and Arsenal fielded nine between them.[33] These numbers have not changed in more recent years, in the 2006/07 season out of the 498

players that started Premier League games, only 191 were English, a mere 38%;[34] an issue that was linked to the England national team's failure to qualify for the 2008 European Championships. Neimann and Brand have similarly argued that the German national team and the development of young talent have suffered as a result of the Bosman Ruling and the influx of foreign players in the Bundesliga.[35] So, despite the rising quality of football within the European leagues, there have been concerns about the lack of space for 'home grown' players to play at this level with a resulting diminution of the national squads. Critics have argued, therefore, that while the globalised nature of contemporary football may represent a unifying and equalising force, a balance needs to be struck to ensure the sporting identity of the nation is sustained.[36] One way this has been proposed is by introducing a quota system into the Premier League to ensure a minimum number of 'home-grown' players feature in squads.[37]

The quota system has thus far failed to state that a minimum number of 'home-grown' players must appear in starting line-ups. The former England manager, Glen Hoddle, has argued that the effect of "foreign owners, who bring in foreign managers, who bring in foreign players above English players" in the Premier League reduces the capacity of the national team by "blocking the way for the country's next generation".[38] For the clubs, however, the international players draw a broader, global audience causing their fan base and revenue to grow considerably. In the case of Manchester United for instance, the signing of Park Ji-Sung, the then South-Korean captain, generated huge revenue in Manchester United merchandise sales in Asia, with three-quarters of South Korea's football fans reporting to support Manchester United, a market which may not necessarily been reached without his signing.[39]

The existence of the UCL, therefore, is arguably incompatible with the aspirations of the European national teams, since it promotes athlete migration over 'home grown' talent.

Nevertheless, the clubs are representative of the best of their domestic leagues, and an elision of signification of local and national may be expected to occur, albeit undermined by the international character of the teams. The question for this paper is, therefore, what role if any does national identity play in the construction of the UCL brand? In order to explore this, we ask, how is national identity figured in representations of the UCL in the British press?

National identity and sport in the print media

Previous research into national identity has centred on its representation in the media during major sporting events such as the Olympics or FIFA World Cups. The print media, especially newspapers have been a major focus for analysis.[40] Maguire and Poulton found, in their study of print media coverage of Euro 1996, that stereotypical views of other nations were created by alluding to historical legacies, past encounters and wars.[41] This was particularly evident in games between 'old enemies' such as England and Germany with plentiful reference to the World Wars and the 1966 World Cup final.

The English media's stereotyping of other nations has been a regular finding in previous research on national identity, alongside the clichéd representation of Englishness itself. Maguire and Poulton, for example, analysed newspaper coverage of England's match with Spain at Euro '96 and found that the game was described in *The Sun* as "the biggest battle since Sir Francis Drake saw off the Spanish armada".[42] Crolley and Hand documented the ways other nations were stereotyped.[43] They found that the British press emphasised the elegance, flair, individualism and sophistication of the French, the skilful, technically superior yet defensive, negative style of play of the Italians, and the efficiency, power and determination of the Germans, qualities simultaneously undermined by characterisation as boring. Crolley and Hand provided a quote from *The Times* during the 2002 World Cup which stated "Germany are dull, dull, dull and desperately hard to watch".[44] By contrast,

press coverage of England has tended to focus on the English lion-heart spirit[45] with the emphasis being on fair play and sporting behaviour, a concept not often attributed to more 'continental' nations.[46]

War has been a constant reference point for the press when reporting on football matches between England and Germany. For example, Maguire et al. studied the media's portrayal of Germany during Euro 96 and highlighted key issues commonly featured in the fixture, in particular the political situation and the sport-war connection, thus making contests between the two nations seem more than just a football match.[47] The sport-war connection often surfaces through the use of war-related words and the media's use of the I/we and us/them attitude to evoke national unity.[48] Characterising sport as 'war minus the shooting' was a common feature during Euro 96 which showed the importance the media would put on fixtures between England and Germany.[49] Sports journalists used combative imagery and martial metaphors to dramatise their reports; linguistic techniques designed to appeal to readers as well as to unite the nation in support of England. Such reporting was subject to criticism from the National Heritage Select Committee who referred to it as "xenophobic, chauvinistic and jingoistic gutter journalism".[50] Despite criticism, xenophobia has continued to feature in newspapers and the sport-war connection has steadily escalated in the media as newspapers compete for readership.[51]

English players thought to embody the values of the nation in their character (honest and hard working) and style of play (aggressive and utilitarian) are 'lionised' in the British press – traits tied to an obsolete British imperial past.[52] Nostalgia increases during major tournaments: past triumphs on and off the football pitch are rekindled, most notably through reference to England's World Cup victory of 1966 and the Second World War[53] – a technique often used to overshadow a lack of progression and demonstrate a longing for past glories.[54]

Vincent et al. noted that coverage of national tournaments in the English broadsheets and tabloids have blurred traditional boundaries between tabloid and 'quality' press, with the same themes appearing in all newspapers.[55] They concluded that a sense of English national identity is reflected in the media regardless of the local, regional and transnational identities globalisation has produced. Similarly, Boyle and Monteiro state that tabloids and broadsheets continued to promote a sense of unified national sentiment of imagined community by taking an 'us vs. them' attitude[56] and also by using language styles designed to appeal to English readers.[57] This paper will consider the extent to which these stereotypes are deployed in relation to participants in the UCL, despite their lack of coherent national affiliation.

Analytic Framework: Communicative dirt

Wenner's 'dirt theory of narrative ethics' provides a frame for analysing the commodification of sport through advertising narratives and the concomitant construction of the 'imagined' readers of these texts.[58] Wenner invokes Douglas' discussion of dirt as 'matter out of place' in order to discuss the displacement of sporting narratives into the sphere of advertising in ways that allow the appeal of sport to transfer onto consumer products. This transfer of association is an ethical issue because it enables advertisers "to have their way with us",[59] to involve us in dirty transactions, which we have an ethical duty to reflect upon.

In this paper we 'dirty' the original discussions of dirt theory and its application to television by moving it into the sphere of the analysis of newspapers. We argue that myths of nation in the sports pages can be read through the lens of communicative dirt analysis. Invocation of the nation within the UCL represents 'matter out of place' since teams and coaches may be based in an English league on teams which are not constituted by a majority of English or British players, managers or owners. The ambiguity of Europeanization, however, leaves plenty of space for dirt to penetrate the discursive construction of nation.

An important element of communicative dirt is the presentation of preferred meanings and the construction of the readership or, in this case, fans. Hartley draws on Barthes' concepts of nominative/ex-nominative subjectivities to explore how the media draw on "the marginal, ambiguous edges" of social identities and "offer what looks like a settled, positive, natural 'inside' for 'us' to access as our own selves."[60] His discussion identifies hegemonic processes which position 'non-English' identities as nominative, while dominant English identities remain ex-nominative serving as a position from which to identify ambiguous 'outsiders'. The norm (the ex-nominative) remains an unnoticed, unmarked and silent presence, whereas those outside the norm as clearly named as such. The strategies employed by the media to create the semblance of a cohesive identity despite this complexity can be conceptualised as strategic communicative dirt. An element of analysis therefore is the identification of these ex-nominated positions and how they serve to position the reader as a particular, necessarily artificial 'us' in relation to a potentially more ambiguous, disruptive, and scandalous 'them'. However, Barthes observed that there is no fixity in mythical concepts: "they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely"[61]. Myths of Englishness, therefore, may also shift and it is revealing to consider under what conditions those previously named as outsiders may be allowed in.

These concepts can be used to help unpack myths of nation. Myths are defined by Barthes as systems of meaning which are connected to discourse.[62] These myths are effective as they appear to work without interpretation by invoking common-sense understandings of identity based on shared significations. Within our analysis we identified the discursive utterances that constituted myths of nation in the coverage of the UEFA Champions League. We paid particular attention to the description of English Premier League teams, players and coaches in relation to teams based in other European countries to explore whether myths of nation were ported into the media coverage of the Champions League.

Methods

We conducted a discourse analysis of the newspaper coverage of the UCL. In this analysis, stories related to the UCL matches from the 2nd round of the tournament to the final were read. The data for this study were English newspaper coverage of the UEFA Champions League 2010/11. The data constituted a mix of tabloid and broadsheet newspapers including: The Sun, The Guardian, The Mirror, Daily Express, and The Times. When weekend newspapers were collected during the final, Saturday and Sunday sister papers were used in exchange for their weekly counterpart, for example the News of the World instead of The Sun. These particular papers were chosen because of their national prominence, extensive sports coverage, and because they represent different strands of the English newspaper market appealing to a variety of demographic segments. A mixture of both tabloid newspapers and broadsheets were chosen because of their differing styles and use of linguistic signs which are, in part, determined by the target audience. The reader is invited to identify with the style of language being used in their preferred newspaper and becomes part of the imagined community the newspaper creates.[63] Therefore each newspaper may interpret situations during the matches differently and construct differing points of view on the nation.

In all, 29 days of UCL newspaper coverage were analysed for each of the four newspapers, totalling 116 newspapers. Foucault[64] considered discourse to be made up of groups of statements. The newspaper coverage of UCL was analysed for reference to Englishness, including war and conflict, national character, history and tradition, emphasis given to English players, managers and teams, and use of English idiom and puns in newspaper headlines. In addition, references to other national identities were identified, including references to German, Italian and Spanish stereotypes. This process yielded 314 references related to national identity, which were understood as discursive statements, or claims to the 'truth' of national identity. These statements were then analysed for patterns of

regularity or discursive formations. The discursive formations are identified in the results section below.

Results

The British press coverage of the UCL 2010/11 season used various techniques to mythologise Englishness. These included repeated references to national symbolism (particularly of the lion), to war and to mythologised styles of play.

"THROWN TO THE LIONELS: United are given a right mauling"[65]: Myths of the lion-hearted

"Now we can finish Nou off roars Wenger"[66]

"THE LIONEL KING"[67]

The newspapers drew on aspects of English character by making frequent reference to their brave, honest approach as well as the lion-hearted spirit of the English, a feature which has become an established synonym of English patriotism.[68] Its origins lie with King Richard I, known as 'the Lion-heart', who earned the tribute after his military exploits in the 12th century during the Third Crusade. An emblem showing three lions has been worn on the England national team's shirts since their first international match (against Scotland) in 1872. During the 1996 European Championships hosted by England the Lightning Seeds' pop song, 'Three Lions (Football's Coming Home)' became the tournament's anthem for home supporters. The English Football Association has since incorporated the three lions logo frequently in their marketing and promotional developments.[69]

Vincent et al. found that references to the traditions of the English lion-heart spirit resounded throughout the 2006 World Cup where newspapers featured headlines such as "Let's Roar!: The Hearts of our Nation are with You".[70] There were also consistent references to the English 'lion-heart' throughout the newspapers' coverage of the UCL. For

example, Tottenham were cast as "White Hart Lions"[71] and players such as Wayne Rooney

were repeatedly characterised as roaring: "RED ROAR...Rooney on the charge"[72] and

"WAYNE ROONEY roared 'Bring on Barcelona'".[73]

The emphasis on English players (particularly those in the England national team) and

managers of English clubs was a common occurrence throughout the tournament. English

players often took centre stage in pre- and post-match reports. This was evident in two

examples from *The Sun*; the first read "there is no more patriotic Englishman than John

Terry. And, probably, no better leader"[74] whilst the second stated "United hero Roo was in

control and kept his cool. Torres' self-confidence looked shot to pieces. Rooney always

works hard and tackles back. Chelsea's Spaniard looked uncomfortable and weak."[75] Both

examples are congruent with Hand's findings that patriotism and heroism are often used by

the media to emphasise traditional English qualities.[76]

The lion-hearted spirit was not only used to characterise English players but also for

non-English players and managers considered to exhibit worthy behaviour in support of an

English club; as a result, other nationalities were incorporated into English symbolism by the

British press. For example, *The Sun* referred to Tottenham Hotspur's Scottish assistant Joe

Jordan as "the lion-hearted Jordan" due to his reported self-control during a confrontation

with Milan's Gennaro Gattuso.[77] The word 'roar' was also used to describe non-English

managers with *The Sun* reporting Arsenal's French manager Arsène Wenger to be "roaring

with pride"[78] and Manchester United's Scottish manager Alex Ferguson as having "roared

'this will be the final of the decade'".[79]

In addition to the lion-heart references, descriptors connoting honesty and courage

were regularly deployed, particularly during Tottenham's fixtures against AC Milan and Real

Madrid. Despite Tottenham losing the game, The *Daily Express* used the phrases

"Tottenham's brave effort" and "Spurs' brave fight" in two reports following the Real

Madrid match.[80] A report in *The Guardian* praised the 'honesty' of the team's performance: "Tottenham Hotspur's performance was all dogged determination and honest team play. They fought to the end of an enthralling tie".[81] These stereotypically English characteristics have been frequently used when the England team have been involved in international tournaments, with fighting spirit, work rate and courage being essential components in determining whether the team has performed to a satisfactory level regardless of the result, constructing a mythology of the way the English must play.[82] Similarly, Alabarces et al. noted that as a nation England take pride in winning through honest hard work,[83] a notion supported by Vincent et al.,[84] who cite a report of the former England player Michael Owen in *The News of the World* saying "as a nation we are very honest. We try to win the right way".

Mythologies of Englishness were also communicated in the newspaper headlines. Reference points drawn from the UK culture and colloquial language were used to create the effect of English as it would be spoken by 'some of' the newspaper's audience. Bignell argued that the reader is able to identify with the style of language used and becomes part of the imagined community the paper has constructed.[85] For example, *The Sun* included "AV IT" in their back-page headline[86] after they beat Barcelona 2-1, a phrase that mimics the accent of a Londoner, the home of Arsenal FC, as well as referencing the upcoming UK referendum on whether an Alternative Vote (AV) system should replace the current electoral system. Further examples include plays on language which constructed 'insider knowledge' such as that provided by *The Mirror* who headlined "PRINCE WILLIAN"[87] in reference to Shakter Donetsk's Willian Borges Da Silva, whilst the underpinning reference was clearly to English monarch and President of the FA, Prince William. Kennedy and Hills[88] explained that the newspaper assumes the reader is able to apply the absent explanation of the headline

in order for it to make sense and in-turn 'share the joke', making them feel a sense of community.

"THE BOYS OF '68"[89]: The invocation of football past

Another recurring theme throughout the newspapers' coverage of the champions league was the frequent reference to English history which served to reinforce English teams' heritage in European football, promote English teams' successes in Europe, and emphasise Wembley as the venue for the final by recollecting previous European finals at the stadium, (albeit at the former stadium which was demolished and rebuilt in 2007). With Manchester United being the English team the proceeded furthest in the tournament, their European history was featured heavily, particularly in reference to winning the European Cup 10 years after the catastrophic Munich air crash which killed and injured so many involved with the club. For example, the Daily Express wrote "This match is being seen as the biggest of them all for Ferguson because it places him at the heart of the stadium where Busby won United's first European Cup in 1968".[90]

The references to footballing history resonate with previous research on journalistic techniques used during major international tournaments. For example, Alabarces et al.[91] found that previous encounters between England and Argentina were featured heavily in the build up to their second-round knockout match at the 1998 World Cup in France. Particular reference was made to England's 1966 quarter-final victory en-route to lifting the trophy and to Maradona's 'hand of God' at the same stage of competition at Mexico 1986.

Out there on the frontier the Gunners held on[92]: The language of war

  Just as allusions to past encounters on the football field were frequently made, Maguire and Poulton[93] found that reference to war was a common occurrence, a method which has escalated in newspapers as they compete for readership and increase nostalgia by making the event seem more than just a football match.[94] Reference to the war was also a feature during the Champions League but, unlike previous research on international tournaments, a majority of the coverage was restricted to war-related words rather than direct reference to particular wars. Words such as 'attack', 'war' and 'battle' created an aura of intra-national conflict. For instance, *The Sun* included the headline, "WE OWE IT TO ROM – Lamps' battlecry".[95] Other phrases included, "Messi replied with a machine gun rattle of four"[96] and "Lennon's absence disarmed one of Tottenham's weapons and gave Madrid more ammunition"[97]; all of which generated connotations of war and conflict. Journalists frequently used combative imagery and military metaphors in their reports of matches in the UCL. Tuck[98] argued that this method of reporting not only adds drama, but also attempts to unite the nation in support of England by encouraging spectators to identify with 'us' versus 'them'. In the case of the UCL, this technique is transferred from national teams to English club teams left in the competition.

  Any more direct link to wars were restricted to mentioning individual military personnel and adapting their well-known utterances; such reference was made to Napoleon Bonaparte in *The Sun* prior to Barcelona's final clash with Manchester United which read "with Xavi and Iniesta Napoleon-like figures in midfield"[99] and Winston Churchill in *The Guardian* following Tottenham's draw with AC Milan at White Hart Lane which read "From Arthur Daley to Harry Hotspur: this was Redknapp's finest hour".[100] Churchill's finest hour speech was used in praise of Tottenham's grit and determination against experienced opposition, drawing an equivalence with RAF as they defeated the German Luftwaffe's

superior forces during the Battle of Britain. Vincent et al.[101] also found that newspapers would place matches at the 2006 World Cup in the socio-historical context of great battles and wars by playing on quotes from Churchill, such as his Second World War speech, 'We'll fight them on the beaches'. A Churchillian quote was even used to deliver a critique of the Russian winger Arshavin's performance, who played for Arsenal in the UCL:

> "Arshavin has struggled for much of the season and typifies what Winston Churchill once said about Russia – a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma"[102]

"PLAYING THE GERMANS? SO DON'T MENTION THE SCORE"[103]: the focus on Germany

The English Premier League team Manchester United faced a German Bundesliga side FC Schalke 04, in the UCL semi-final. Previous encounters with German opposition were featured heavily in the press build up to the semi-final with Schalke, most noting the Manchester United's poor luck against German teams in the past:

> "Borussia Dortmund, Bayern Munich (twice) and Bayern Leverkusen have all dumped out United in the past 15 years"[104]

The newspapers represented encounters with German teams as having caused emotional trauma. Alex Ferguson (the Manchester United manager) was reported as having "suffered enough misery in Germany without the indignity of losing over two legs to Schalke".[105] Manchester United's 1958 air crash in Munich was woven into the England-German narrative, as a previous unhappy occurrence on German soil. In this instance, reference to the crash predominantly featured in the build up to the final at Wembley, where Manchester United won their first European Cup in 1968:

> "that was much more than the final of the European Cup – it was a date with destiny, a feeling that there was a final chapter to write after the chilling tragedy of the Munich air crash".[106]

The newspapers included reference to German stereotypes during their coverage of the Manchester United versus Schalke fixtures: "Ferguson recognised there is an extra challenge stemming from the mindset of his opponents. 'I think the German desire to win explains why they do so well'".[107] Ferguson was reported widely as having praised Shalke 04 for their self-determination: "They have a self-determination, the German people, and it's reflected on how they approach all sports".[108] While Ferguson's intention may have been to describe a determined approach to play, the phrase "self-determination" evokes the events in the aftermath of the first World War.

"The Milan animals kicked their way through the second half"[109]: Myths of Other European nations

Myths of nation were found in press reports of styles of play and temperament by non-English Premier League teams. For example, Gennaro Gattuso was the centre of confrontation during the AC Milan versus Tottenham Hotspur game, and was described as having "beat the ground with rage".[110] He and his teammates were referred to as 'animals' and 'thugs' evoking negative aspects of the passionate, strong, and hot tempered stereotypical Italian.[111] Mythologies of Italianicity[112] were reproduced even while AC Milan was suggested to have abandoned their 'usual' Italian style: "Stereotypes about Italian pragmatism were ditched last season as a freewheeling side cut loose, with 103 goals in the league".[113]

Myths of nation in reports of Spanish playing style were even more evident. For example, throughout Barcelona's presence in the tournament, frequent reference was made to their 'quick, short passing game' and 'flair'. Less charitably Spanish players were also repeatedly characterised as having a tendency to dive and feign injury, a dominating feature during the semi-final matches between Real Madrid and Barcelona:

"Players plunging to the ground at the merest of touches"[114]

"Barcelona ensure night of the long dives ends on a high note"[115]

Chelsea's Spanish striker Fernando Torres was also criticised for play acting: "there was only a yellow card for diving when Fernando Torres went down".[116] By emphasising this kind of dishonesty, Spanish players were framed in opposition to the mythology of English fair play and sporting behaviour.[117] The tendency to cheat was a trait attributed to players from Romance-speaking countries, in particular of Spain and Portugal, and players associated with their clubs. For example, Barcelona's Javier Mascherano was described in the following way: "The play-acting Argentine was diving like a Nou Camp veteran on Tuesday night with a furious Ronaldo saying: "He wasn't like this at Liverpool. He learned all his cheating tricks at Barcelona"".[118] Thus the overall effect of the 'othering' of other European nationals and their clubs was to confirm the moral superiority of English football and footballers, who took pride in their honest, hard working and spirited approach to win games.[119]

Discussion: Myths of nation as communicative dirt in the UCL

Wenner[120] has argued that the importance of communication about sport lies in the way it affects our identities. Media sport presents a frame through which spectators are asked to view social institutions and their relationship to them. Since sport has become media corporations' major prize, allowing the possibility of reaching the world's biggest audiences, Wenner focused our attention on the ways economic considerations have changed "the stories that are told through sport".[121] Wenner was primarily interested in the way that advertisers make use of sport. He observed that the foundational strategy for advertising something new was to make effective use of 'familiar associations'.[122] The result of this is to import meanings from one sphere of cultural activity (e.g. sport) into another (e.g. banking or beer drinking). Cultural theorists who have investigated advertising have regularly pointed to the

socially unsavoury slippages of meanings that occur as we become subject to the advertiser's discourse, sublimating our desires into their products. Wenner argued that this process could be understood as the accumulation of 'communicative dirt', a phrase which highlighted the "omnipresent dangers in strategically importing meaning from one place, where it may belong, to another where it may be problematic or tainting".[123]

The importation of myths of national identity, constructed initially in relation to war and imperialist national ambitions, into sport could be itself understood as communicative dirt. Military metaphors seem to rub off on sport so readily, and seem difficult to brush off despite their exposure as antithetical to the expressed aims of sport's organisations to unite nations. The invocation of those same mythologies of sport and nation within the UCL can be seen to double the dirt, a result of the imposition of familiar journalistic tropes on a competition that is rapidly replacing in significance the national tournaments within which the myths were formulated. The media in this regard are complicit in the branding of the UCL. While the UCL overshadows national league competitions, and player migration supported by the globalisation and commercialisation of football undermines the quality of national squads, the UCL can capitalise on the refiguring of football's affective ties to nation despite their lack of logical ground.

King[124] has analysed the operation of signifiers within the branding of the UCL. Under pressure from the demands of the sport media industry, UEFA discontinued the European Cup because it could not be relied on for the commercial spectacle of a major team final. The commercial partner of UEFA, Television Event and Media Marketing (TEAM) then developed ways of 'branding' the new league. This was done by the process of revealing relationships that were in its interests and concealing relations that were not. The history of the competition it replaced was built into the new brand through its colour scheme. Black, white and silver were chosen to connote the black and white television images of early

European Cup football and the floodlit night time matches. Tradition was made visible, while the recently contrived, 'artificial' nature of the competition was not.

Such appeals to history and tradition, particularly in the context of consumer capitalism, can be seen as the transference of communicative dirt. The meanings of the European Cup were constructed in a less commercialised context, and to make them stick to the global spectacle of the UCL is not unproblematic. It is even more problematic to mobilise spectators' investments in nationalism by heaping national mythologies onto the reporting of a supranational sport event. The intertextual associations of the language used in the British press to report the UCL, reinvigorate exclusionary identifications of 'us versus them' even while they appear to embrace selected 'others' within the English myth.

What is the effect of porting these dirty meanings into the UCL? Wenner's account of communicative dirt illuminates Barthes' conceptualisation of the construction of myth. Barthes suggested that myth was stolen language, and like the notion of communicative dirt, "its form is empty but present, its meaning absent but full"[125]. Communicative dirt is the way in which the UCL builds and sustains mythologies of nation for its consumers. While Millard's research[126] might suggest that fans were open to new Europeanized identities, the reporting of the UCL operates to inscribe them within a much more traditional national identity with its roots in conflict and domination. In Wenner's terms, they are invited to interact with the "authorial dirt imported to the text to encourage preferred readings".[127] It is to be hoped that the readers of the text will mess up these textual strategies, but they may equally be compounded by additional dirt such as that emerging from the growing public discourse of border control and immigration policy. The formulaic approach taken by many sports journalists that involves routinely (and unthinkingly) bringing in dirt from outside the frame has consequences for constructing the identities of the spectator in unwholesome ways. An ethical approach such as that advocated by Wenner would not just seek to identify dirt

and what it does, but to prevent its build up by intervening in the education of sports journalists. Sports journalists must be challenged not to retread the same old dirt, but to sweep it away and start afresh.

Conclusion

The UCL has developed into one of the most prestigious and lucrative football tournaments in the world. Qualification has become a priority for the top football clubs in Europe, often superseding interest in domestic competitions and trophies. These elite clubs are able to attract the best owners, managers and players from across the globe. The English premiership has been routinely criticised for its lack of home players; however, the UCL overall has been successful in rebranding itself as part of Europe's sporting traditions and attracting widespread and increasing enthusiasm from fans and media. We queried whether the multi-national composition of clubs involved in the UCL would catalyse a movement away from the sport media's well-documented nationalistic discursive traditions. The analytical frame drew on Barthes' understandings of myths and Wenner's work on communicative dirt to analyse discursive utterances relating to nation found in the coverage of the UCL. Myths of nation have been identified as routine and persistent features of the media's coverage of international sporting events. We identified the presence of these discourses in the form of symbolic Englishness, intertextual references to insider English knowledge, European history and conflicts, and traditional representations of England's opponents that have repeatedly been identified in reporting on English national competitions. Ultimately, we argued that the re-imposition of war imagery, stereotypes, and ideological Englishness in UCL media coverage involves the importation of cultural dirt into a multi-national context. These nationalistic tendencies seem ever more obsolete in the context of a more diverse, multi-cultural Britain, where there have been increasing efforts to broaden football's appeal to a more diverse population of sports consumers. We conclude by suggesting that the presence of

this pervasive nationalistic communicative dirt tarnishes the contemporary sporting landscape and requires a more ethical approach to reporting that clears the space for more creative, inclusive sporting traditions. However, myths require interpretation, and for Barthes, it would be necessary for fans to become mythologists in order to decipher the construction of the relationships between sport and nation in the UCL. Further research should therefore explore the ways that fans deal with the contradictions, and consider the extent to which they are, in Barthes' terms, "able to voluntarily able to disrupt this turnstile of form and meaning". [128]

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