

Breaking Post-War Ice: Open Fun Football Schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Football is merely a continuation of war by other means.

(Franjo Tudjman, from Karl von Clausewitz)

In recent years, many scholars have examined how sports in general, and football in particular, influence identity and social relations in different parts of the world. A complicated picture emerges: in some situations sport contributes to social harmony, and in others it feeds conflict. In spite of this ambiguity, many still have strong faith in sport's potential for mending social cleavages.

This faith is not a new one. For centuries governments and leaders have used sport as a tool to overcome old divisions and mould new identities; the idea that sport can foster peace between nations has been enshrined in the Olympic concept. What's new is how the international community is recasting the strategy to fit current problems, identifying sport as an important element of civil society and adopting it as a tool within international peace-building strategies. A growing number of programmes are designed to use sport to strengthen links between polarized communities, and are funded by international organizations.¹

Making ideals fit reality is often quite a challenge. Peace can be a complicated matter, and the tools of sport are not always user-friendly. A survey of initiatives to foster peace through sport produces a number of examples of good intentions gone awry.² For those

¹ See <http://www.sportdevconf.org> for examples

² See A. Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, 2000) p.3 on the Taliban use of UN-renovated stadiums for executions; see also D. Tuastad, 'The political role of football for Palestinians in Jordan' in G. Armstrong and R. Giulianotti (eds) *Entering the Field: New Perspectives in World*

responsible in planning, implementing, or funding programmes that are intended to help integrate divided communities, or to promote peace in other ways, these failures raise important questions: How do you know whether a 'peace-building through sport' programme is really building peace? Which strategies work, under what conditions? How do you prevent peace-building through sport initiatives from being derailed and actually contributing to inter-group tension? What are the warning signs, and how might these be effectively challenged? In short, exactly what are the best usages of the tools that sport can offer, if one wants to foster the peaceful co-existence of hostile groups? While much has been written on a theoretical level about different aspects of the intersection of sport and politics, it is still hard to find information at a practical level on the successes and failures of programmes designed to help reintegrate divided communities.

The Open Fun Football Schools (OFFS) is one such programme. A grassroots youth football programme that works to encourage the reintegration of divided communities, it was opened in 1998 to help re-weave the social fabric of communities that had been torn by conflict in Bosnia & Herzegovina. Since then it has expanded to FYR Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia and Georgia, and has organized tens of thousands of children from antagonistic communities to play football together. This article will describe the OFFS schools in Bosnia & Herzegovina, highlighting elements of its success and identifying the challenges that will mark its future.

BACKGROUND: FOOTBALL IN THE BALKANS

Football came to the Balkans at around the beginning of the twentieth century, when the region was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. When the First World War ensured the collapse of that empire, Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were grouped into a kingdom that struggled to unify these peoples through the new national identity of *jugoslavs* (southern Slavs). By the 1920s, football had become the region's most popular sport, and it was intimately entwined with national identity struggles that pitted Serbian monarchists against Croat nationalists.³ During the Second World War, the struggle escalated into a bloody civil war between the *Ustasha* (Croat nationalists led by Ante Pavelic), the *Partisans* (communists led by Tito) and royalist groups including the *Chetniks*.

The *Partisans* emerged victorious. Under Tito's leadership, they established the Federal National Republic of Yugoslavia, joining the republics of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Montenegro under the rule of a strong state apparatus. Tito suppressed nationalist opposition,⁴ and mobilized mechanisms of the State, including control of the media, education, and economy to bury ethnic animosity, encourage contact between groups and develop interdependence as a means of reinforcing the Yugoslav identity that was the basis for the country's unity. Becoming a leader of the international movement for non-alignment, he established a distance from the Soviet Union that set Yugoslavia apart from the Eastern bloc. Sport was recognized as an important tool for reinforcing the State and strengthening the multiethnic Yugoslav identity. Sports clubs were closely linked to the arms

³ During this period the Yugoslavian football association was moved from Zagreb (Croatia), to Belgrade (Serbia), the capital of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia; its name changed from *Jugoslavni nogometni savez* (using the Croat word for football) to the *Jugoslavni fudbalski savez* (using the Serbian word).

⁴ Many of the survivors fled the country to Canada, Australia, and Western Europe, in communities where opposition to Tito's government remained strong. For explorations of the role of football clubs in maintaining community identity and nurturing nationalism in Australia, see P. Mosely, 'Balkan Politics in Australian Soccer', *ASSH Studies in Sports History*, volume 10, 1994; R. Hay, 'Croatia: Community Conflict and Culture: the Role of Soccer Clubs in Migrant Identity', in M. Cronin and D. Mayall (eds) *Sporting Nationalisms: Identity, Ethnicity, Immigration and Assimilation*, (London, 1998); and R. Hay, 'Those Bloody Croats: Croat Soccer Teams, Ethnicity and Violence in Australia, 1950-99', in G. Armstrong and R. Giulianotti (eds) *Fear and Loathing in World Football*, (New York, 2001).

of state,⁵ and sporting activities, in providing one of the most important faces the country presented to the outside world, were accorded priority for funding. The good facilities and good-quality training and organization within Yugoslav sport paid off. In the 1960s, Yugoslavian footballers won the Olympic title in Rome, and over the years achieved impressive results at club and national team level in European competitions. Clubs sponsored youth teams that were also competitive internationally. School sports programmes, run by trained sports teachers, gave school children good access to sporting activities around the country.

Starting with the death of Tito and ending with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the developments of the 1980s shook the foundations of Yugoslavia's polity and economy. Yugoslavia tumbled with the rest of Eastern Europe into an economic downspin; nationalism re-emerged and gained ground, led in Croatia by Franjo Tudjman and in Serbia by Slobodan Milosovic. The federal structure of Yugoslavia weakened as independence movements in Slovenia and Croatia gathered momentum. During this period football fan violence was gaining visibility around Europe; in the Balkans it was, as elsewhere, often oriented around ethnic tensions.

The fostering of football to intensify nationalistic sentiment has been most thoroughly documented in Croatia, where fan violence was instrumental in setting off violence that spread to the streets.⁶ The famous football riot that occurred in Zagreb Maksimir stadium in May 1990 during a game between Zagreb Dinamo and Belgrade Red Star is still remembered

⁵ Leading teams were those supported by the army, including the Belgrade football team, *Partisan*, and their leaders were often high-ranking officials.

⁶ For the role of football in Croatia see A. Sack and Z. Suster, 'Soccer and Croat Nationalism', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 24 (1999), pp.305-21; and also S. Vrcan and D. Lalic, 'From the Ends to the Trenches, and Back: Football in the Former Yugoslavia' in G. Armstrong and R. Giulianotti (eds) *Football Cultures and Identity* (Basingstoke, 1998) and S. Kuper, *Football Against the Enemy*, (reissue, London, 2001), pp.228-235. For more on links between Arkan and his Serbian paramilitary group the Tigers, one of the key groups in ethnic cleansing in both Croatia and Bosnia Herzegovina, and the football fan club Deliye, see J. Borgber, 'Serbia's dark prince of war dies as he lived: by the sword', *The Age* (23 January 2000); T. Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*, (New Haven, 2000), p. 186; and C. Stephen, 'Arkan raises "cleansing" fears', *The Irish Times*, (29 March 1999).

by some as the start of the war; a photograph of the Dinamo captain kicking a policeman became a symbol of nationalist heroism for many young fans. Before Croatia was recognized as a state, the formation of a national team was a landmark in Croatia's symbolic assertion of its independence. On both sides, members of football fan clubs were among the first recruits of the new fighting groups and paramilitary forces that were at the fore of hostilities. On frontlines and in war ruins, the names of football clubs were mingled with symbols of nationalistic extremists: swastikas, the 'U' used by Ustashas, and the symbol of the cross employed by Serbian paramilitary groups.

At many different levels, then, football imagery and symbols were associated with the struggle between Serbs and Croats that sparked the war in Croatia and soon engulfed Bosnia Herzegovina. There, Muslim Bosnians, led by Alija Izetbegovic, constituted the third group in what quickly became a brutal war. As violence escalated, these groups competed for control of areas; where domination was achieved, competing groups were driven out in what the press dubbed 'ethnic cleansing'. At first fighting together against Serbian groups, Croats and Bosnians eventually fought each other, and the Croats declared their own state of Herceg-Bosna.

When fighting ended, some 200,000 people had died and two million had been forced from their homes. The 1995 Dayton Accord established Bosnia Herzegovina as a single country with two entities: Republika Srpska and a Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina (comprising Croat and Bosnian cantons). The entities had separate armies, administrations, criminal justice and educational systems. Even if Croats and Bosnians were united officially, most power lay at the cantonal level, leaving Croats in full control of areas formerly declared Herceg-Bosna; tension remained high between Croats and Bosnians. In many areas, those in control of law enforcement, courts, and security forces had personally supported or even conducted the inter-group hostilities during the war.

Aiming to establish Bosnia Herzegovina's economic and political viability, and to solve problems of refugees and displaced persons by permitting them to return to their homes, international organizations including the UN and the EU supported the vision of a multiethnic state. Through their control of reconstruction funding, they worked to undo the effects of ethnic cleansing by re-integrating polarized communities. Their programmes, however, depended for implementation on the cooperation of local governments who often had a competing vision of maintaining the ethnic boundaries that they had fought to create. People showed little willingness to cross the 'ghosts' of frontlines that divided Serbian, Croat and Bosnian communities in order to renew severed social and economic ties. If they did dare, they were often met with hostility, both from the public and from local authorities and police. In situations where the destruction of housing left a severe shortage of shelter and a devastated economy offered little employment or tax base to provide funding for basic public services, communities scrambling for scarce resources had little desire to share anything with the groups who had recently been shooting at them, and whom they blamed for their predicament.

The football establishment, like the rest of society, had been weakened by the economic decline that preceded the war and by the devastation of the conflict itself. Halting all play within Bosnia Herzegovina, the war already had created a strong 'push effect', driving out the area's considerable football talent; in 1995 the Bosman ruling added a 'pull effect' by enabling more players to join clubs in neighbouring European countries. The Football Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina (FFBH) was formed, and became a member of FIFA in February 1996, and of UEFA in 1998; both bodies provided considerable assistance to help rebuild structures needed to re-establish play. The Republika Srpska formed its own football federation and organized a separate football competition; its teams rarely played FFBH teams. The Serbian federation was not recognized by FIFA and UEFA. Croat and

Bosnian cantons, though joined in the FFBH on paper, still maintained separations at ground level, with clubs only competing with those from their own ethnic groups until they met in playoffs. Tensions between them led to squabbles over the use of stadiums.⁷

Football clubs, like most other organizations, were in a shambles: they had no money and were weakened by not only the flight of talent, but also the 'ghettoization' created by ethnic divisions that limited match attendance, media coverage, and the standards of competition. The clubs could barely manage to maintain professional play that provided their funding; youth activities lagged far behind in priority. Schools, whose few resources were controlled by segregated municipalities, also had difficulty re-establishing sports activities. In spite of the talent drain, many well-trained coaches and sports teachers remained in Bosnia Herzegovina, but clubs and schools lacked the funds to employ them. As was common throughout the Balkans, club leadership was often closely linked to the local political leadership, and without independent means of finance, clubs sometimes depended on funding from municipalities.

It was in this environment that the Open Fun Football Schools first began to operate. Fighting had stopped, but the struggle to 'win the peace' was still very much alive between those subscribing to two opposing visions. On one side were the nationalists, who strove to maintain the recent separation into different ethnic-based units that had been achieved in the war and who preferred to orient themselves (at least in the case of Serbs and Croats) toward neighbouring states with the same ethnic origins. On the other side were those who strove to preserve the integrity of the Republic, and to establish independence as a multiethnic nation. In the service of this second vision, the OFFS was designed to give children from Serb, Croat, and Bosnian communities the chance to move over the old frontlines, breaking invisible

⁷ The playoffs for the UEFA club championships were cancelled in 1999 because of disagreements between Croats and Bosnians about stadium use in Mostar.

barriers to play with children from nearby communities that were recently considered as enemies.

OPEN FUN FOOTBALL SCHOOLS

The Open Fun Football Schools programme was initiated by Anders Levinsen, who also founded the NGO Cross Cultures Project Association (CCPA) to organize them.⁸ In a five-day grassroots football programme which is organized during school vacations, the OFFS brings together children from different ethnic groups, with different skill levels, to play football together on the same teams. Using a variety of games and exercises, not limited to football, the OFFS works to develop confidence, skills, and teamwork. In addition to the schools, the programme organizes three- to five-hour street events. These may include children in the OFFS, but are not limited to the schools, and can be organized independently.

Open Fun Football Schools were first organized in the communities of Bosnia Herzegovina that were divided by the recent conflict. By the end of the 2003 season, there had been 99 Open Fun Football Schools in the country, involving 20,000 children and almost 1,700 trainers.⁹ Over 60% of the municipalities in the country have participated in the programme. The OFFS expanded in 2000 to FYR Macedonia, in 2001 to Serbia and Montenegro and in 2003 to Croatia and Georgia. By the end of 2003, over 3,900 local leaders and coaches had organized a total of 237 OFFS schools for 48,000 children. In 2003, activities included 78 football schools with leaders, trainers and children from 173 municipalities and 264 football clubs. The OFFS is now formulating plans to expand to

⁸ For more information on the OFFS, see <http://www.openfunfootballschoools.org.mk>

⁹ The actual number of individuals involved is smaller, since the statistics do not reflect repetition of the same person from one summer to the next.

Azerbaijan, and Armenia. In what follows, we focus on the experiences of the programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The OFFS is based on the concept of ‘fun football’, as developed by the Danish Football Association. Their philosophy is derived from the Danish public sport culture that is characterized by a strong local focus, democratic principles, volunteerism, parent support, and the basic principle of ‘sports for all’. Levinsen got the idea of setting up OFFS when he returned from working for the UN in war-torn Bosnia Herzegovina, and witnessed how Danish children benefited from attending the summer fun football camps.¹⁰ Applying the concept to the Balkans and other areas of Eastern Europe, he has also taken inspiration from the work of Danish sport sociologists Henning Eichberg and Claus Bøje.

Fun is at the heart of a pedagogical method that has been developed in close detail. Competition is played down to preserve the joyful, playful aspects of the game. There is no physical or tactical training, but rather a focus on techniques children can refine after leaving the school: the unusual strike on the ball, the delicate pass, or the elegant dribble. Exercises are not limited to football skills, but also include other play sports such as robe games, balancing games, communication games, and floor hockey. The coaches are trained and the activities designed to make participants feel that they succeed many times during each game or practice; the schools are set up to nurture community spirit and social relations fuelled by the positive energy generated by this sense of success. Deliberately designed to create the feel of festivity and foster a sense of the magic of the game, the schools pack the activities of twelve teams into a single playing field, using upbeat piped-in music. De-emphasizing the competitive aspects enables schools to be more inclusive in a ‘sports for all’ philosophy.

¹⁰ Lars Barendt, Head of Communications for the Danish Association, points out a special connection between Fun Football and the Balkans: the Danish camps were developed largely with money that the Association received from the Euro 1992 Championships, which Denmark won. Denmark only entered the tournament because Yugoslavia had been disqualified due to the imposition of UN sanctions.

Developing the concept of ‘attentive areas’¹¹ the OFFS aims to sharpen trainers’ abilities to develop children’s social skills, confidence, and trust. The goal is to encourage children to dare to use their imagination and play freely, reassure them that mistakes are permissible, and teach them to take responsibility and to make a positive contribution.

Each school in Bosnia Herzegovina involves around 200 children and 15 leaders, and is jointly organized by the OFFS, local football clubs, school leaders and municipalities. Through a national office, staffed exclusively by national employees, OFFS provides equipment and educates the trainers. Local organizers (clubs, municipalities) choose trainers and participants, organize events, and cover costs such as stadium rent, transport of children, and meals. Cooperation is based on agreement drawn up for each school: it specifies the geographical, social and ethnic balance of trainers and children, trainer requirements (being unpaid volunteers and attending training courses), and contributions of each party, including the quantity of equipment to be provided by OFFS. The supplies and equipment are left behind afterwards for clubs and trainers. An advisory board which determines the location of football schools includes donors, senior OFFS group leaders and senior football organization representatives from the different Balkan states. Sports faculties from local universities are involved in training events, and local OFFS leaders/trainers are involved in designing training materials. The whole scheme of cooperation is outlined in a letter of mutual intent signed by ministries of sports and national football organizations.

At first each school was organized by a single municipality, but in 2000 the OFFS adopted the ‘twin city’ approach. With this new approach, neighbouring municipalities from differing ethnic entities (i.e. Muslim, Serb, or Croat) were obliged to work together to organize each school. Adopting the twin city approach in BiH broadened the utility of the programme as a peace building tool, applying it not only to promote contact between children, but establishing sustainable contacts which foster relationships between the adult trainers,

¹¹ This is detailed in the 2003 *OFFS Manual for Trainers and Leaders*.

schools, clubs and municipalities that are involved in organizing the school, and potentially even spectators (presumably mostly parents) from antagonistic communities. Trainer seminars are multiethnic. Football Schools are led by three leaders each, at least one from each community involved, and the hosting of the school rotates between stadiums in participating towns in a system which serves to divide responsibilities equally, assure that no single group is excluded by a hostile arena, and demystify 'enemy territory' by bringing both children and adults over the ghosts of the old frontlines. OFFS aims to engage all participants sufficiently to help them forget, at least for a while, the fear and discomfort of crossing the lines.

PARTICIPANTS

Children

OFFS camps are open to boys and girls from ages 8 to 14. The Balkans has not been one of the areas of the world where children were recruited to participate in armed conflict, but they were often victims: many have strong memories of the war and its effects on their families,¹² but with each passing year, fewer are old enough to remember living in a peaceful multiethnic Bosnia Herzegovina, sharing activities and experiences and having fun with members of groups now cast as enemies. They generally go to segregated schools and have few opportunities for contact with children from other ethnic groups who live in nearby towns or neighbourhoods. Their motivation to join the programme is straightforward: fun speaks to children around the world, and in their post-war communities, group activities for children have been rare. OFFS aims to use fun to strengthen their confidence and encourage them to play football, and to enable the contacts and generate the warmth that are needed to demystify

¹² In an open street event organized in Srebrenica, forty of the sixty Muslim child participants had been expelled from the city; twelve had lost parents.

‘enemy territory’ and to thaw the psychological freeze between groups. To accomplish this, it has to maintain balance across the ethnic groups of participating children, and to preserve an apolitical and informal forum where everyone is welcome.

Trainers

The creation of the apolitical and informal forum depends entirely on the schools’ trainers and leaders, in terms of their skills and motivation. Creating and maintaining the proper atmosphere is the focus of their training, which goes to great lengths to emphasize the coaches’ duty in creating an environment where everyone is comfortable and feels secure enough to participate. The training of coaches also provides detailed exercises and methodology for practical use as educational tools. Trainers and leaders are very often teachers, particularly sports teachers. Unlike the children, many of the trainers participated actively in the fighting; but while they may have shot at each other over the frontlines, before being divided by the war, they spent many years going to school, working, and often playing and watching sport together. Trainer training is obligatory, and workshops are always run jointly with trainers from all sides. A survey that examined the motives of trainers for participating in the programme showed that many were attracted by the chance to meet old friends and associates at training workshops.¹³ Another motivation is the love of football: because OFFS was started at a time when football activity was nearly dead in Bosnia Herzegovina, many well-trained professionals (coaches, trainers, players, sports teachers) were jobless and desperate to become active in football in any way possible. As reconstruction progresses and the football establishment is rebuilt, the programme has to retain a high professional standard to maintain interest. OFFS has achieved this largely through the training and experience of instructors.¹⁴

¹³ Other motivations attracted the children, such as obtaining footballs and enjoying the ‘fun football’ ethos.

¹⁴ In 2003, OFFS instructors included seven current or former national team coaches.

OFFS does not choose school trainers and leaders nor does it demand a particular political orientation: it simply requires proper ethnic balance, and depends on that balance and everyone's mutual commitment to playing football to maintain the fairness and transparency needed to make the schools work.

Clubs and Municipalities

Clubs and municipalities host OFFS, providing the stadiums, buses and other 'hardware' that are essential for running the programmes. They also choose the participants and trainers. In return they get footballs and other equipment left behind after the schools are over. Often closely linked to local political forces and oriented more to the competitive approach of elite sports, clubs are not necessarily in line with the philosophy of the OFFS. On the other hand, football is their *raison d'être*, hence there is a strong convergence of interest in a setting where football activity requires re-establishing. By 2003 OFFS had left more than 17,000 balls to clubs in Bosnia Herzegovina (based on football association estimates) - that constitutes approximately 70% of all balls in the possession of clubs. While most are the number four balls used for children's football, they always include some number five balls suitable for adult competition. In this way OFFS encourages and enables clubs to set up youth activities, but at the same time provides some perks to help them develop their priority area - professional football. With municipalities, OFFS leverage comes not only from the support it offers to the local football team, but its provision of youth activities: municipal leaders might have diverging political visions, but they only stay where they are by providing valued services to their communities. Being able to choose trainers and participants also empowers clubs and municipalities. The participation of clubs and municipalities is voluntary; they only apply if it offers something that is valuable enough for them to comply with OFFS conditions by working with clubs and communities 'from the other side'.

Parents/public

As the ones most invested in the welfare of the children, and as community members and constituents, parents are an important vector for the programme's impact on the community. They too are drawn across lines when they come to watch their children play and have fun; once there, they find themselves cheering with former enemies who have children playing for the same team. When successful, the football event has made parents' mutual concerns for their children outweigh the mutual hostility bred by the war; this can have a symbolic value in restoring confidence that public life can be normal again. If it works, it is because the community is war-weary enough to tip the balance toward peace. The success of the event, the imagery of children having fun again in normal activities, is an effective tool to build confidence that people can live and work together again. This symbolism is spread beyond the stadium by media coverage, both local and international.

Football Association

The OFFS depends on the football establishment for its long-term survival. If they are to take over funding from international donors, national level football officials have to be involved in planning and decision-making from the beginning. Since 1998, the OFFS Advisory Board has included members from both football federations concerned. Although the Serbian federation did not officially participate before 2001, it was through individual connections within the federation that the OFFS held a trainer-training seminar - the city's first interethnic event after the war - in Pale in 1999. In May 2002, the two federations agreed to a unified competition structure, the *Nogometni Futbalski Savez-BiH* (using both languages' terms for football!).

Donors

The programme in Bosnia & Herzegovina has been funded by UEFA, the Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden), the UN High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), and ECHO (EU). The interest of these donors lies in the social impact of the programme, and they depend on expatriate staff to ensure that the programme reinforces integration of ethnic communities.

THE PRACTICAL ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS AND POTENTIAL PITFALLS

The OFFS builds upon a double agenda: a political one (integrating communities) and a sporting one (promoting grassroots youth football). Local football organizations, players, and communities, from the grassroots level up to the national level, also have double agendas, both political and football. By finding common ground in the sporting agenda, OFFS aims to bring them together to find compromises with the political agendas that oppose reintegration. Making it work depends on two things: preserving the ethnic balance, and maintaining the motivation that springs from the love of football and the commitment to children's welfare. Programme success lies in preserving both. In OFFS, this has depended on maintaining a delicate balance between local and international control.

Local control ensures that the programme provides something communities need, in a way that matters to them. OFFS has fostered local ownership by including local and national groups and individuals at all levels, in all stages of programme planning and implementation. This has depended on engaging the considerable talent, experience, passion and infrastructure that existed already and only needed a relatively small international input to be tapped. Because there is enough local know-how to organize events, and enough motivation to do it

even under the conditions imposed, the programme works with minimal expatriate input in funding or expertise: until 2003, the OFFS had only one expatriate staff member. Because it depends on the trainers' voluntary contribution of time, and the infrastructure of clubs and municipalities, the OFFS preserves local leverage: clubs, municipalities and trainers only participate for as long as their own interests in football and children are served. A heavier dependence on international resources or expertise would weaken local leverage and thus dilute motivation. It would also compromise the very popularity of the programme that provides the source of international leverage. A heavy international hand in shaping the programme would smother the popularity that powers the programme's success. Paying trainers, or providing infrastructure or in other ways relying on more external resources could have the effect of 'buying' cooperation that would evaporate as soon as the money stopped.

But maintaining some international control, through conditionality of funding, is important in early stages to ensure that quotas are respected and that ethnic balance is preserved so that all groups profit by working together. It is here that the expertise of expatriate staff counts: not football expertise, but an intimate knowledge of the country and its politics, to anticipate problems, to activate the right parts of the local and international power structure to navigate around them, and to insist that on the points of ethnic balance and the politically neutral forum of the stadium, there are no compromises. Reliable statistics are key to keeping an eye on what is going on everywhere, without having to monitor everything: the OFFS collects figures for each school on the number of trainers from each area, attendance at trainer training, and the ethnic group of children participating. It also monitors media coverage of its events.

The 'twin city' concept has been the essential mechanism in OFFS for maintaining local control without sacrificing ethnic balance. This permits the programme to give local leaders, regardless of their political orientation, a good deal of leeway in planning and

implementing the programme; the counterweight of other groups' equal participation, rather than the interference of expatriate staff, ensures that the programme is run in a way that benefits all groups. The OFFS, in clear terms set out in agreements ahead of time, will participate in areas where its conditions are accepted, while sharing the venue and responsibility for covering costs maintains each local group's power within the overall equation. Once power-sharing is established, clubs and trainers get on with working out between them how they will make schools happen. The expatriate staff's only role is to monitor results in the atmosphere of training and events, the respect of quotas, and the preservation of transparency. OFFS conditions can only be imposed so long as the popularity of the schools maintains high demand, so that it can turn down clubs and communities that do not agree to its conditions. It has cancelled plans with communities that would not accept its conditions or did not abide by them. In a few cases trainers from specific localities have resisted attending multi-ethnic training seminars; OFFS has also had to resist pressure to include the symbols or terminology of a single side, which would be interpreted as excluding other sides' ownership.

EVALUATING SUCCESS

Staging a large number of football schools which have good participation from all ethnic groups is already an accomplishment. One only has to know a bit about the conflict in Bosnia Herzegovina to be impressed to hear the names of places where OFFS schools have been held not only without incident, but with enjoyment. Only a few years after fierce fighting and brutal ethnic cleansing there, in periods when hostility still ran high and there was little interaction between communities, OFFS held multiethnic events in Gorazde, Mostar,

Sarajevo, Bjeljina, Sanski Most and many other sites that had been the focus of the conflict. When OFFS brought Muslim children into Srebrenica UN forces considered that the risks justified not just vehicle escorts, but helicopters; while emotions on all sides ran high, the event was a success. Participation rates have remained high, and ethnic balances, closely monitored through programme statistics, have been respected. It is enough to attend the events to be caught up in the fun that kids, spectators, and trainers are sharing: fun may not be quantifiable, but it is real, and at OFFS schools it is palpable. Apart from this subjective evaluation (which is the most important real test of success, even if not quantifiable), the OFFS systematically collects information on the number of events; the number of staff, monitors, school leaders and coaches deployed; the ethnic balance of children and coaches participating in the schools; the number of children participating in the schools; the number of street events organized; and an evaluation of press coverage. These, however, only chart performance: they tell us that the programme did what it planned and for how many people, not whether it had the impact it promised. While a prerequisite for long-term impact, good performance does not alone guarantee it.

MAKING A LONG-TERM DIFFERENCE

The future of the OFFS lies in the national football establishment. Its challenge in Bosnia Herzegovina is to create a sustainable platform for the programme within the new unified football association, one that preserves its commitment to grassroots football and which will preserve its inter-ethnic, social, and pedagogical premises. Balance and transparency are keywords in the process of building a financial platform that allows international input to be gradually replaced by local funds. Setting itself a goal of financial and institutional

sustainability within three or four years, the success of the OFFS 'football agenda' will be reflected in how much OFFS funding is assumed by actors from Bosnia Herzegovina, how much its pedagogical concept is adopted by local educational institutions, and how youth football activities have developed in areas where OFFS has been active.

In terms of the 'social agenda', anchoring progress is trickier. Once international funding dries up, how do you preserve ethnic balance? OFFS faces the same question that hangs over every 'peacebuilding' activity based on an international initiative. While it has been designed from the beginning to ease this transition away from international control by basing as much as possible on local motivation and resources, it is clear that OFFS has also depended on its contribution of balls as a key motivator. Even if commitment to grassroots youth football survives the transition away from international funding, will youth football activities continue to be organized on a multiethnic basis and serve to reintegrate communities, or will they be used to freeze barriers between groups, leaving the OFFS accomplishment of interethnic cooperation just a short parenthesis in an ongoing story of inter-group hostility?

This returns us to the issue of impact, as opposed to performance. Even if it is a roaring success at getting children to play football and have fun together, and spectators to cheer together, and organizers to work together, what is the impact of OFFS outside the stadium? The idea that it can have a lasting effect on interactions that are not sport-related is based on several assumptions that are articles of faith for many of those designing or funding sport programmes with social goals. These assumptions include that playing football together, having fun together or cheering for a team together has a positive and lasting effect on interactions in other domains; that personal relations at grassroots level either have an impact on the decisions and developments leading up to violence, or at least are a factor that can modify them; and that symbolic gestures and acts in this one domain have an impact on

peoples' behaviour and beliefs elsewhere. It is only to the extent that these assumptions are correct that a successful sporting programme will have an effect on the community at large.

Testing those assumptions with regard to OFFS, though, is difficult when the desired outcomes depend so much on factors beyond the programme's control. It would be interesting to evaluate community relations in the areas where OFFS has football schools, to see how these relations have changed since 1995, and to investigate how contacts made through the schools have contributed to the inter-ethnic order. But how would you control for the effect of other factors to isolate the impact of football schools? The contact that the schools facilitate is only a prerequisite: just breaking the ice doesn't guarantee that people will jump in the water, whose temperature depends far more on the economic situation, the criminal justice system, and the political climate. Having fun playing and watching sports together may help rekindle relationships and influence visions of group identity, but if it were enough to keep people from fighting each other, then this war would never have happened. The tragic irony of the 1984 Winter Olympics, which less than a decade before the start of the war had projected Sarajevo throughout the world as a symbol of interethnic harmony, was often highlighted during the war. Now it serves as a cautionary tale.

CONCLUSION

The OFFS in Bosnia Herzegovina has been strikingly successful, not only in getting children from across frontlines to play together, but also in getting their families and communities to cheer for them, and their local football clubs and town leaders to cooperate so that they can play. This makes it one of the most noteworthy in a growing range of projects that use sport to address social problems in post-conflict settings.

In the pursuit of both its 'football agenda' of supporting grassroots youth football, and its 'social agenda' of helping re-establish ties between communities recently opposed in war, the OFFS has depended heavily on several factors peculiar to the Balkans. In football, these have included the widespread popularity of the sport, the availability of highly-qualified human resources with much experience and training in the fields of football and youth sport, and a well-developed (if sometimes damaged) football infrastructure. In working to develop inter-group contact and cooperation, the OFFS has taken advantage of the fact that communities' isolation from each other is not longstanding, or hostilities deeply ingrained: only a few years ago, people now cast as enemies were playing, watching sports events, working and going to school together. Compared to some conflicts where hostilities have isolated populations for generations, the historical ice that has to be broken to re-establish contact and cooperation is relatively thin.

OFFS has been designed to profit from these resources and advantages, limiting international input to what was necessary to maintain the ethnic balances required to make the programme work, and offering maximum local control in all other aspects of running the programme. Demanding that trainers are volunteers and that communities and clubs cover a portion of expenses and provide infrastructure, has helped ensure that cooperation is not merely bought, and that schools are driven by local interests. The football establishment from all sides has been involved in planning and decision-making since the beginning. At the same time, providing highly-valued equipment that helps them re-establish their own football activities, and facilitating the establishment of professionally organized and fun youth activities that offer something to both communities and leaders and trainers, has given the OFFS the leverage it needs to impose conditions of inter-ethnic cooperation. Points of no compromise have included the twin-city organization of schools, the ethnic quota of participants and the integration of trainer training.

While OFFS achievements have been impressive, its longer-term impact and sustainability have yet to be seen; and it will be instructive to follow how it navigates the transition to local funding. The final outcome depends heavily on the interactions between local, national and international players as they struggle to advance their multiple agendas in both the little game (football) and the big one (winning the peace). OFFS long-term success hinges on the successes of the local officials, international organizations, international and national sporting bodies and others who work to develop Bosnia Herzegovina as a multiethnic nation.

Though it has its moments of magic, football is not Quidditch:¹⁵ it is played on the ground. As a terrain for re-integrating communities polarized by war, football is something like frontline farmland: fertile, but likely to be mined. Those who choose to support football in post-conflict settings need to navigate with care, keeping their eyes wide open and using all available knowledge regarding the successes and failures of strategies in other settings. They also need to have intimate knowledge of their own terrain and its particular risks and advantages. Without a heavy input from local actors at all stages of planning and implementation, programmes run the risk of being designed only to reinforce donors' image and ideals, backfiring at the expense of both; and worse, at the expense of the communities involved.

¹⁵ Quidditch is Harry Potter's favourite sport, played with other sorcerer students, in the air, on magic broomsticks.