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Women, war and sport: The battle of the 2019 Solheim cup

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Abstract:	One of the most significant and/or prevalent symbols of nationhood is to be found in the international (men's) sporting arena. Sport is often imbued with notions of national identity and war, although the sport of golf is generally devoid of flags and nationalistic tendencies and is thus often considered relatively insignificant in inculcating national sentiments – except in the exceptional cases of team golf events such as the Solheim Cup. This paper considers the way in which the competitors in the 2019 Solheim Cup were represented in the British print media. Results highlights that national identity is a key descriptor of the female competitors, legitimising their position in the battlefield of international sport. We conclude that, in an era of increasing significance of women's sport, there exists an ideological space for women to be seen as 'proxy warriors' in sport.
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Title Page

Women, war and sport: The Battle of the 2019 Solheim Cup

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Women, war and sport: The Battle of the 2019 Solheim Cup

Introduction:

The world of inter-national sport, defined as sport that involves athletes competing for 'their' country against athletes from another country (Gleaves and Llewellyn, 2014), is often imbued with notions of national identity and war, although some sports lend themselves more obviously than others to these concepts. For Liston and Kitching (2019, p. 6) however, the sport of golf is unaccustomed to the displays of nationalism that are more commonplace in more combative team sports. This is due to the lack of both direct competition formats and nation versus nation contests in golf, as well as the absence of the physical confrontation that characterises other sports.

Golf is generally devoid of flags and nationalistic tendencies and is thus often considered relatively insignificant in inculcating national sentiments, with Steen (2015, p. 349) noting that golf is 'lacking the passions, physical confrontation and tribal loyalties that underpin mass appeal'. Harris et al (2017) subsequently highlighted how, perhaps unsurprisingly, little research has considered the place of the nation in relation to golf, with professional golfers playing on global tours defined as 'borderless athletes' who transcend national, racial and ethnic borders, de facto sports citizens of the world (Chiba, Ebihara and Morino, 2001). Despite this, Bairner (2003) notes that the sport does have links to identity politics, and there have been instances where professional golfers have taken on cultural significance and become viewed as embodiments of the nation (Kitching and Bowes, 2020; Liston and Kitching, 2019). This paper aims to investigate the print media's role in connecting golf, this case, women's, to national identity. More specifically, the paper examines the relationship between golf and national identity, using the 2019 Solheim Cup as a case study and drawing upon the notion of athletes as proxy warriors for their nation.

Golf and national identity

Although Liston and Kitching (2019) explain that golf has little to do with national identity, they also note that golf's recent return to the Olympic roster and the biennial Ryder Cup/Solheim Cup matches provide exceptions[1]. Dating back to 1926, the Ryder Cup has been claimed to be one of the most important and prestigious events in international sport and is considered 'the oldest

[1] The number of golf tournaments organised around national representation is increasing. Examples include 32 women, in 8 national teams comprising of 4 players, compete for the International Crown every 2 years, and the biennial men's Presidents Cup, pitting a 12 man Team USA against a 12 man non-European 'Rest of the World' team in a Ryder Cup format.

competition of nations in professional golf, involving [since 1979] the two golf superpowers: the United States and Europe' (Kali, Pastoriza and Plante, 2017, p. 102). The women's version of the event, the Solheim Cup, was founded in 1990. Both events are team golf tournaments that pitch 12 Americans against 12 Europeans in match-play format[2]. The prestige surrounding both the Ryder Cup and the newer Solheim Cup derives not only from them being the most significant competitions of nations in professional golf, but also from the fact that no prize money is awarded for winning it. As Kali et al (2017, p. 103) state:

> Playing for one's country is a great honor for which even very wealthy professional golfers vie. Being part of an elite groups of golfers who have the privilege of representing their countries, and not a direct monetary gain, is considered the Ryder Cup's own reward.

Furthermore, these events are unique in providing professional golfers with an opportunity for national representation not often found in their sport: players representing (supra-)national teams, wearing (supra-)national uniforms, playing in front of swathes of fans waving (supra-)national flags, with their faces painted in (supra-)national colours. However, for both the players and fans of the Ryder Cup and Solheim Cup's European teams, the notion of national identity is complex. Despite representing Europe, there are often overt displays of national allegiances alongside the team's European identity, with fans getting behind this unique and complex tribalism in golf. Bairner (2001) highlights that there is a presence of both national and European flags waved by fans, and Maguire (2011) notes that the Ryder Cup, and subsequently the Solheim Cup, are central in the somewhat tentative emergence of a European sports identity, although the degree to which athletes feel any strong sense of identification to the geographical continent is as yet unexplored.

However, media examinations during the tournament have questioned the collective identity generated. Steen (2015, p. 348) described the USA – Europe match play event as 'the oddest of major sporting competitions'; the USA in 'red-white-and-blue' competing against a team 'under a little-recognised flag […] popularly referred to – and with no irony whatsoever – as 'Team Europe', a multinational collective with little or no mutual identity to speak of beyond a professional rivalry with the Americans'. The concept of a European team has increasing interest in the hosting of the Solheim Cup in Scotland in 2019, given the fact that it took place at the time of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, and the against the wishes of the majority of Scots who had voted in

[2] Whilst not always the case, the current structure of the two events are exactly the same: the first two days involves players from each team competing in fourballs and foursomes matches, followed by a day of singles matches on the third and final day. Fourballs involves four balls on the course: two players per team go head to head. The player that scores the lowest on each hole wins the hole for their team. Foursomes involves two balls on the course: two players per team go head to head. However, each team only has one ball and players will hit alternate shots until the ball is holed. The team that scores the lowest on each hole wins the hole.

the 2016 referendum on EU membership. This bought interesting considerations about Europe, the European Union and what it means to be a European. However, despite these identity nuances and contestations, there remains a significant national dimension to the Solheim Cup, something which is evident in inter-national sport more broadly.

International sport, national identity and narratives of war

Most elite level sport involves contests between national teams or athletes representing their individual nations and is thus imbued with nationalism as part of its competition (Gleaves and Llewellyn, 2014). Many authors who are concerned with the relationship between sport and national identity suggest that the nation appears to become more 'real' in the domain of sport, on the terraces or on the athletics tracks (Jarvie, 1993). Hobsbawm's (1983) theory of 'invention of tradition', Anderson's (2006) work on 'imagined communities' and Billig's (1995) banal nationalism have been central in debates surrounding the nation and have been used extensively in considering the role of sport in fostering a sense of nationhood. Anderson (2006) believed that 'all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to face contact are imagined' (2006: 6). His argument is that members of large communities will almost certainly never have direct contact with everyone in that community, yet they perceive themselves to be connected to them. Similarly, Hobsbawm's (1983) work discusses 'traditions' which appear, or are claimed, to be old, but are in fact often quite recent in origin, and sometimes invented. His notion of 'invented tradition' refers to a set of ritual or symbolic practices used to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour and implies continuity with the past. Hobsbawm highlights how national flags, images, ceremonies and music are historically novel and largely invented. It is this linking of national symbols with practices which aids the development of an 'invented tradition'. For Billig, flags (both waved and unwaved) and other national symbols are central in the persistence of national identity, and that 'hot nationalism' makes little sense without its banal form.

In recent times, it would be fair to say that one of the most significant and/or prevalent symbols of nationhood is to be found in the international sporting arena. Gleaves and Llewellyn (2014: 3) highlight how inter-national sport often turns athletes into cultural representatives, promoting an 'implied solidarity with the citizens of the nation they represent'. It is here where nations are embodied, and where they do battle in the world's sports stadiums. Smith and Porter (2004), writing in the context of England, note that having made the requisite leap and accepted that the eleven men who appear in white shirts at Wembley, or the fifteen at Twickenham, are 'England', the possibilities for defining and redefining what it means to be 'English' are inextricably linked to what

happens on the field of play. Likewise, Tuck and Maguire (1999) indicate that men on the international sports field are highly visible embodiments of their nation, becoming 'patriots at play'. Some have further likened international athletes to 'proxy warriors', embodying their nation and fighting a symbolic battle on the front line (Hoberman, 1984; Bairner, 2001).

George Orwell would have found nothing surprising in this. Orwell (1945/1970, p. 62) explained that 'at the international level sport is frankly mimic warfare'. He wrote that 'even if one didn't know from concrete examples (the 1936 Olympic Games, for instance) that international sporting contests lead to orgies of hatred, one could deduce it from general principles' (pp. 61-2). The whole thing, according to Orwell, 'is bound up with the rise of nationalism - that is, with the lunatic modern habit of identifying oneself with large power units and seeing everything in terms of competitive prestige' (p. 63). One thing that Orwell did not mention was that when he assessed the negative role of international sporting competition, he was almost certainly referring only to men's sport. Whether Orwell was correct or not, war and (men's) sport have often been used as metaphors for each other. The media play a key role in strengthening this association between sport and war, with Jansen and Sabo (1994) highlighting how both the language of sport and the language of war often overlap and intersect, and present central values of hegemonic forms of masculinity, such as aggression, competition, dominance, as desirable.

For Kaufman and Messner (1999: xii), male athletes are heroes, eulogized as modern-day warriors. Burstyn (1999: 4) attributes sport as a hypermasculine realm, exaggerating an ideal of manhood 'linked mythically and practically to the role of the warrior'. Bairner (2001: 177) states, bearing in mind Hoberman's (1984) description of sports people as 'proxy warriors', the fact is that, throughout the twenty-first century, sport has been one of the most valuable weapons at the disposal of nationalists, whatever their situation or respective aspirations. In addition, if sport can be likened to war, then, as we have seen, it is likely that we are considering only male athletes as the proxy warriors.

What about the women?

Given the increasing visibility of the world's best sportswomen in newspapers and on television, it is worth considering where they fit into the sport, nation and war nexus. As Chiang et al (2015) and Bowes and Bairner (2018) emphasise, discussions on sport, the nation and warfare have tended to almost exclusively feature men, thereby leaving women on the margins. This is in spite of there being a significant literature on the relationship between women and the nation and women and war.

In a special issue on nationalisms and national identities in the *Feminist Review*, Whitehead et al (1993: 1) explain that 'nationalism is gendered – women's bodies are the boundary of the nation, and the bearers of its future.' The significance of women in the imagining of the nation is acknowledged, although their roles are considered to be restricted by popular understandings of gender appropriateness. Nira Yuval-Davis (1997), who has been central in feminist interpretations of nationalism, outlines how most hegemonic theorisations about nations and nationalism have treated gender relations as irrelevant. Pettman (1996: 187) explains, however, that the gender politics of nations and nationalism are complex, 'including both the gendering of the nation as female and the construction of women as mothers of the nation, responsible for its physical, cultural and social reproduction'. Women's roles in the nation are often linked to their reproductive capability; thus, Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989) identified five ways - some of these seemingly relevant in a sporting sphere too - in which women have participated in national and nation-state processes and practices:

1. as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities;
2. as reproducers of the (normative) boundaries of ethnic/national groups;
3. as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture;
4. as signifiers of ethnic/national differences;
5. as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles.

This framework highlights not only the practical but also the symbolic character of women's national positioning. However Nagel (2008: 900) contends that 'the idea of the nation and the history of nationalism are intertwined with the idea of manhood and the history of manliness'. The close association established in the men-nation-war nexus means that both the nation and war are typically seen as male domains. Furthermore, it is equally apparent that modern sports have been powerful sources of male imagery, rendering women's involvement problematic.

Like the nation, it is a common consideration to position sport as a preserve of men (Theberge, 1985). Adams (2016) notes that sport remains an institution dominated by men, and rife with discriminatory gender practices to the extent that, throughout history, women's struggles to participate in and be accepted as athletes have been constantly evident (Hargreaves, 1994). Adams (2016) draws attention to the way in which change in sport has become a legacy of second wave feminism, with more women participating in a broad range of sports than ever before. Indeed, women continue to make inroads into traditional male sports and, in so doing, actively redefine

readings of women's sports by blurring the boundaries erected by the traditional binary of masculinity and femininity. However, as a symbol of male power and privilege, sport still serves to consolidate mainstream gender expectations of men and women alike, situating femininity in opposition not only to masculinity but also to athleticism.

Gender and National Identity in the (Golf) Sport Media

Although sport clearly plays a central role in the formation of national identity, the sport that is central to recreating the national imagined community is often considered a male-only domain. Hobsbawm (1990, p. 143) had concluded that 'the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people', although it is hard to conceive that he thought those eleven people were anything other than men. Indeed, Hobsbawm argued that sport, at least for males, has proved uniquely effective in generating a sense of belonging to the nation. Sport, including golf, is also constructed as a male domain in the mass media, with Kane (2013) highlighting the symbiotic relationship between the sports media and hegemonic masculinity. Women's inclusion within the sports media is thus problematic; when women do find themselves on the sports pages of the popular press, they are often represented in ways that restrict our imagination about women's sport and maintain men's hegemonic position in sport, through sexualisation, feminisation and the downplaying of their achievements (Bruce, 2016).

Portrayals of female golfers in the sports media have similar problems. Although Billings et al (2008: 65) highlight that rising audience interest in women's golf have brought about challenges to golf's 'masculine hegemonic entrenchment', both televised and print media coverage of golf have continued to offer representations that reinforce divisions of gender, class, disability and race (Billings et al, 2006; Billings et al, 2008). There are, however, examples that offer some evidence of resistance to the gendered norms and traditional depictions of women in golf media. Research found that although the media coverage of Annika Sorenstam's involvement in the men's 2003 PGA Colonial Tournament retained a gendered angle, there were also examples of non-gendered explanations of her successes (Billings et al, 2006). More recently, Bowes and Kitching (2019) describe the print media representation of professional female golfers (again, when competing alongside men) as a double-edged sword, with positive informed coverage juxtaposed with gendered language and framing. Kitching and Bowes (2020) then later describe how the print media presented Irish golfer Leona Maguire in non-gendered ways, as a model citizen representative of her nation.

There have been a few notable pieces of work that have considered the role of national identity in media coverage of women's sport. Wensing and Bruce (2003) note that coverage of female representatives during international sporting competition may follow different 'rules' than one would usually see in their representation. They explain that women competing for the nation 'may be less likely to be marked by gendered discourses or narratives than reporting on everyday sports' (Wensing and Bruce, 2003, p. 393). Bruce (2008, p. 62) later demonstrated, in the context of New Zealand, that 'women who win for the nation are highlighted as worthy of attention'. She notes that concepts of gender marking, compulsory heterosexuality, appropriate femininity, infantilization, downplaying sports and ambivalence, fail to help us understand fully the way that female athletes are represented, drawing attention to the fact that 'nationalism almost completely overrode the usual ways that the sports media report on female athletes' (Bruce, 2008, p. 67).

Bowes (2020) describes how international sporting competitions open up an avenue for sportswomen to be presented as legitimate national representatives, in both their media representations and their self-presentations. Further, Bowes and Bairner (2018) highlight that sportswomen on the international sporting field *can* become active embodiments of their nation, fulfilling a role of proxy warriors in sport. However, while Bowes and Bairner (2018; 2019) note that female athletes have a role to play in embodying the nation, this is often in team sports that are already closely aligned with a sense of national identity. This paper extends that argument and previous research on women professional golfers (Kitching and Bowes, 2020; Liston and Kitching, 2019), to consider the way in which the competitors in the 2019 Solheim Cup were represented in the sports media. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to present an overview of the competition itself.

The Story of the 2019 Solheim Cup

Considered the pinnacle of professional women's golf, and marketed as the biggest rivalry in women's golf, the Solheim Cup, prior to the 2019 iteration, has been dominated by the United States 10-5. In September 2019, the sixteenth edition of the event was held at Gleneagles in Scotland. The 2019 teams were announced approximately a month before the tournament started. Team Europe was made up of the top three players on the LET Solheim Cup points list, followed by the top five LET members on the Women's World Golf Rankings (WWGR) not already qualified, and four captains' picks (see Table 1). The team was captained by nine-time Solheim Cup player Catriona Matthew of Scotland. Team USA was announced on the 26th August 2019 and consisted of the top eight players from the LPGA Solheim Cup points list, followed by the top two American players on the WWGR not already qualified, and two captains' picks (see Table 2). Team USA was led for the third time in a row by Juli

Inkster. As the holders, Team USA needed 14 points to retain the Solheim Cup, with 14.5 required for Team Europe to take the trophy.

Table 1: Team Europe

Player	Country	LET Points Rank	WWGR (12th Aug)	Solheim Cup Apps
Catriona Matthew	Scotland	Non-playing captain		9
Carlota Ciganda	Spain	1	13	3
Anne Van Dam	Netherlands	2	93	0
Caroline Hedwall	Sweden	3	116	3
Charley Hull	England	4	29	3
Georgia Hall	England	8	33	1
Azahara Munoz	Spain	N/A	36	3
Caroline Masson	Germany	N/A	52	3
Anna Nordqvist	Sweden	14	60	5
Celine Boutier	France	6	61	0
Jodi Ewart Shadoff	England	N/A	78	2
Bronte Law	England	N/A	25	0
Suzann Pettersen	Norway	N/A	644	8

Table 2: Team USA

Player	LPGA Points Rank	WWGR (26th August)	Solheim Cup Apps
Juli Inkster	Non-Playing Captain		9
Lexi Thompson	1	3	3
Nelly Korda	2	10	0
Danielle Kang	3	15	1
Lizette Salas	4	17	3
Jessica Korda	5	18	1
Megan Khang	6	46	0
Marina Alex	7	32	0
Brittany Altomare	8	40	0
Angel Yin	10	31	1
Annie Park	16	42	0

Morgan Pressel	20	55	5
Ally Macdonald[3]	9	57	0

Prior to the tournament starting, Team USA were strong favourites: the average WWGR for Team USA was 31, with 5 of the world's top 20 players, compared to Europe's 103 (or 54, if you remove the anomaly of Suzann Pettersen's world ranking[4]), with only one player inside the WWGR top 20. After the first two days of play, the match was all square at 8-8. On the third and final day, there were 12 singles matches to contest. The tournament outcome came down to the last match left out on the course, where Suzann Pettersen had to hole a birdie putt on the 18th green to reach the target of 14.5 points for Team Europe – miss and the competition would be tied at 14-14 and Team USA would retain the trophy. She rolled the putt in for victory, which led renowned women's golf journalist Ron Sirak to proclaim: 'you'd have to search far and wide to find a more dramatic finish anywhere in the history of sports' (Sirak, 2019).

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The event was hailed as a great success and saw significant press coverage in terms of print media, online media and television coverage. Two of the authors (*removed reference*) have highlighted evidence of the continued positive media shifts in the representation of women's sport, and golf more specifically with a more obvious framing of female athletes *as* athletes. Concurrently, it was found that media representations emphasised of national (and supra-national) identification, and framed the golfers using battle narratives (*removed reference*). So, addressing a lack of academic attention to in relation to golf and national identity, women's professional golf, and the Solheim Cup more specifically, this paper aims to develop the analysis of this aspect of coverage, shining a light on the intersection of women, nation, war and sport using British media coverage of the Solheim Cup as a case study.

The paper adopts a critical feminist theoretical approach, as seen throughout the introductory discussion which highlights how the privileging of men and men's activities result in the reproduction of institutionalised practices where women are excluded, marginalised and perceived as less important. In theorisations of the nation, and much like Maguire and Poulton (1999) contend,

[3] Ally Macdonald was initially a travelling reserve, but Stacy Lewis, Juli Inkster's initial captains pick, had to withdraw due to injury.

[4] Whilst on paper her world ranking might lead one to question her involvement, Suzann Pettersen was the most experienced player in the field and is one of Europe's greatest ever Solheim Cup players.

there are limits to the use of both Hobsbawm's 'invented traditions' and Anderson's 'imagined communities', especially when considering the status of women. Thus, while feminist perspectives that focus on equality and discrimination are criticised for oversimplifying females' diversified dispositions, critical feminisms write about power structures wherein gender relations are often defined by hegemonic masculinity and supported by cultural norms of male domination and female subordination. Thus, critical feminism as used in this paper acknowledges the normalisation of patriarchal power relations in the sport of golf and also in the sport media.

Data for this paper were collected via the online electronic news database Nexis UK by the fourth author, searching for full text newspaper articles from publications in the United Kingdom, using the keywords 'Solheim Cup' (anywhere in the text). Articles were collected between 12th August 2019, the day of the first Solheim Cup team announcement, until the 22nd September 2019, a week following the tournament (and thus the commencement of a new tournament week on the professional circuit). An initial search yielded 244 articles but filtering for repetitive content and irrelevant content such as television schedules and articles under 50 words, this was reduced to 136. The following print media outlets were included: *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mirror (Ireland)*, *Daily Star*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Express*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent and i-Independent*, *The Observer*, *The Sun*, *The Sun (Scotland)* and *The Sun (Ireland)*, *The Times*, *The Times (Scotland)* and *The Sunday Times*, and online articles from the same sources (that were not repeated in print versions). As part of the data collection, the authors recorded a number of details about the data, including the date, newspaper, page number and/or section (if provided), journalist and headline.

All articles were subjected to a process of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019). The lead author implemented a theoretical thematic analysis, a process which acknowledges the researcher's role in knowledge production (Braun and Clarke, 2019). The lead author went through the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013), including familiarisation (an initial reading of the articles), reading and re-reading, coding, and then developing and reviewing themes. At this point the co-authors were then consulted to verify the accuracy of these themes, and, in light of this special issue, centred the analysis on both national identity and war narratives. In relation to this, the following themes were identified and will be discussed in more detail:

- The significance of national identity
- Supra-national identity
- National proxy warriors

This paper will present the analysis of the data in line with the above themes, using both qualitative and quantitative measures to describe the patterns of media coverage during the Solheim Cup.

The significance of national identity

The role of national identity has been identified as central in legitimating women's position as national representatives in sport (Wensing and Bruce, 2003; Bruce 2008, 2016; Bowes, 2020). It was the most common descriptor of the players in the print media coverage of the Solheim Cup. Of the 136 articles that were analysed in depth, 91 (or 67%) mentioned the specific national identity of the European players. Indeed, in the very first article of the data set highlights the central position of national identity: 'The eight players to qualify automatically include England's Georgia Hall and Charley Hull, plus rookie Anne van Dam from Holland, the longest hitter in the game' (*Daily Mail*, 12 August 2019).

14 further articles referred to Team USA players as American, without any reference to a European player, highlighting that national identification was present is over three quarters (77%) of the print media coverage. Only 11 of the articles referred to the players of Team Europe as 'European', with no mention of their individual national identification. This demonstrates how important national identity is, not only as part of the supra-national European identity that being part of Team Europe instigates, but as a media strategy in their representation of the athletes. Of the remaining articles, only 20 did not mention the national identity of either the European or American players; many of these articles focused on the tournament itself, such as the number of fans in attendance, or as a subtext to an article on men's golf.

The overtness of national identity descriptors for the European team members within the body of text demonstrates that national identity is significant when describing (in this instance, female) athletes on the international stage. Furthermore, national identity is seemingly more significant in describing athletes than their supra-national team identity. For example, prior to the tournament, there was a focus on the composition of the European team, most notably around the Captain's picks: 'Matthew also gave wild cards to English duo Bronte Law and Jodi Ewart Shadoff and France's Celine Boutier to complete the 12-strong team' (*The Express*, 13 August 2019)

In relation to the makeup of the team, there was a notion of 'home support' for any Britons included in the team. Despite the competition being held in Europe, the selection of Gleneagles as the European venue increased the significance of the inclusion of any British players: 'There are no Scots in the European team, but there are four English players for the home support to rally round' (*The Times*, 12 September 2019).

The national descriptors then continued throughout the coverage:

> Dutch dazzler van Dam linked up with Norwegian Suzann Pettersen to get the afternoon fourballs off to a flier. They silenced US big noise Danielle Kang and Lizette Salas 4&2. (*The Sun Scotland*, 14 September 2019)

> With respect to the likes of Georgia Hall and Bronte Law - the latter being the English first-timer whose guts essentially set up Pettersen's grandstand moment – and to Catriona Matthew, the Scottish captain, this was the Norwegian's time. (*The Daily Telegraph*, 16 September 2019).

There was a handful of references to more localised identities (although only for Bournemouth's Georgia Hall, North Berwick's Catriona Matthew and California's Danielle Kang), again offering further evidence of the greater significance of national identification as a descriptor. According to Wensing and Bruce (2003) and later Bruce (2008, 2016), for female athletes, media coverage of events where athletes are marked by their nationality may be less likely to subject them to gendered media discourses. Thus, the centrality of national identity is significant here in legitimising the 'bending of the rules' in terms of how gender was less likely to be used to frame female athletes (*removed reference*). The national descriptors tie sportswomen to the nation, thus increasing their national significance and indicating that those who compete (and even better, win) for the nation are worthy of attention. Much as Bruce (2008) found over a decade ago, and Bowes (2020) more recently, nationalism almost completely overrides the usual ways in which the sports media report on female athletes, and international sporting competitions open up an avenue for sportswomen to be presented as legitimate national representatives.

Supra-national Identity

The unusual character of this specific international competition, with the formation of a supra-national team not often seen anywhere else except in golf and track and field, requires further consideration with regards to the representations of the European players. Writing about the Ryder Cup, Steen (2015, p. 349) notes that the 'continental identity – hitherto unseen in any serious sporting arena and further witnessed in the camaraderie of participants in the women's Solheim Cup – is ripe for further investigation'. There were sporadic mentions of players as European, instead of their individual national identification:

> Carlota Ciganda, the top ranked European at 13th in the world (*The Daily Telegraph*, 13 August 2019)

> Azahara Munoz and Angel Yin are out and about, the European one of the shorter hitters on tour, Yin one of the longest. (*The Guardian*, 15 September 2019)
>
> European rookie Anne van Dam struck the first blow by beating US rival Angel Yin (*The Sun*, 10 September 2019).

Despite these sparse examples, it was apparent that, although when they mentioned specific players it was often the case that the journalists would frame them in relation to their national identity, any discussion that involved a consideration of the collective was different – a strategy that could be important in developing a sense of an imagined community or banal reminders of nationhood. The headlines from the tournament, though, often led with a 'team' identity descriptor for either Team USA or Europe:

> US call up Cup vets (*Daily Mirror*, 27 August 2019)
>
> Solheim Cup 2019: Europe and USA level at 8-8 going into final day (*The Independent*, 14 September 2019)
>
> Europe on the level (*Daily Mirror (Ireland)*, 15 September 2019)

Furthermore, the two teams were framed as 'the Europeans' and 'the Americans'. This language again could be seen as a banal reminder of the (supra-)national collectivity. For example, in an article that discussed the history of the event, the 'home' team was roundly referred to as 'the Europeans':

> The first event was held at Lake Nona, Florida, in 1990. It was a comfortable win for the US team and there were fears that the weakness of the Europeans would be the death of the format. But when the second tournament was held at Dalmahoy two years later, the Europeans were unstoppable, beating the Americans 11½-6½. More than any other event, Dalmahoy was the making of the Solheim Cup (*The Times*, 20 August 2019)

Some further examples were evident as the tournament progressed:

> The Europeans' morale-building efforts have already included a quiz night on Monday, together with a motivational video (*The Times*, 11 September 2019)
>
> In Van Dam and Pettersen - the latter is playing in this event for the ninth time - Matthew had the perfect mix of youth and experience. Pettersen set the tone with a wonderful putt converted from 50ft at the 6th for a two. By the turn this European pair were four up, an irretrievable situation for the US (*The Guardian*, 13 September 2019)

As noted in the introduction, the Solheim Cup is a rare example of the formation of a continental or supra-national team in Team Europe. It was expected, against the backdrop of 'Brexit' and the UK's departure from the European Union, that coverage of the event could be used as a political tool, to either display anti-European bias or promote a European collectivity. However, despite the potential for exploitation of this symbol of European unity at the event, the media framing avoided discussion of its relationship to the fractious debate on Brexit. The only explicit mention of Brexit was in *The Times*, and not for political purposes but as a synonym for slow play after the first day of competition:

> At the end of a day when the pace of play was so slow that it took almost as long as Brexit to reach a resolution, Europe emerged from the struggle with a slim advantage in the Solheim Cup at Gleneagles (14 September 2019)

As such, it appeared that politics was far removed from the media reporting of 'Europeaness' during the event.

Like Hobsbawm (1983) alludes too, the importance of national symbols in instilling a sense of national prestige and significance to the competition and the athletes has been recognised. Throughout the coverage of the Solheim Cup, some (supra-)national signifiers were also evident in the print media in relation the colours of the national or supra national flags. For Europe, this centred on the blue and yellow flag of the European Union, highlighting the significance of 'invented traditions' in developing an imagined community of fans. The media drew on two examples of the blue and gold brigade:

> Catriona Matthew's blue and gold brigade (*Sunday Telegraph*, 8 September 2019)

> At 2½-1½, Europe went into the next session on top and should have built on this in the afternoon. With the galleries topping 30,000, it was all there for blue and gold brigade (*The Daily Telegraph*, 14 September 2019)

Both the players and fans were sporting the blue and yellow/gold colours of the European community:

> Not only was the 2,500 capacity grandstand behind the first tee packed for the start, the opening fairway was lined several people deep. After all the songs and colour, the first match out proved worthy of the attention. Here we had Europe's best player, Ciganda, alongside the irrepressible Law. Sent out to get that vital first point on the board, they were up against rookie Marina Alex and fiercely competitive Morgan Pressel. It was the latter

> dictating the match as it came to the final stages. The Europeans were hanging on by their blue and yellow-painted fingernails (*Daily Mail*, 14 September 2019)
>
> Looking back at the last-gasp miracle of the Solheim Cup, Georgia Hall believes there was a kind of portent of what might happen. It happened at the opening ceremony, when Katie and Sophie, the 12 and 10-yearold daughters of Catriona Matthew, Europe's captain, attempted to hoist Europe's flag. They pulled the cord but the flag became wrapped around the pole. They tugged and tugged, embarrassment turning to despair until at last the flag unfurled and the 12 five-pointed yellow stars on a blue background flew proud. Cheers of relief rang around Gleneagles. (*The Sunday Times*, 22 September 2019).

Interestingly, alongside three mentions of the 'stars and stripes', the only discussion of the renowned American colours of red-white-and-blue appeared in articles that focused on two of Team USA's multinational team: Megan Khang, whose mother and father were both born in Vietnam, and Jessica Korda, whose mother and father were born in the Czech Republic:

> In America, the Hmong community numbers more than 250,000 and here, at last, is their superstar. "I'm very proud to wear the red, white and blue," Khang said. (*The Telegraph*, 11 September 2019).
>
> Former Australian Open tennis champion Petr Korda played for the Czech Republic but his daughters were adamant he would be feeling no conflicting loyalties. I'm sure you will be able to hear him and I'm sure he will be clothed in red, white and blue,' said Jessica. (*Daily Mail*, 13 September 2019).

Again, evidence of the significance of national symbols and rituals in inculcating or imagining a sense of national or collective belonging (Anderson, 2006; Hobsbawm 1983). There was very little discussion of the concept of the European continent, with the only mention coming at the conclusion of the event, perhaps highlighting the insignificance of Europe as a sporting entity: 'There the 38-year-old stood, over an eight-footer for the win, not only for her encounter against Marina Alex, but for the entire match and her entire continent' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 16 September 2019).

What this section demonstrates is the complexity of international representation in a global world. For the European team, there is a layering of identity, with national identification seemingly the most pertinent. Furthermore, the Solheim Cup also provided a space for both players and fans to embody an imagined (supra-)national community through the symbolism of (supra-)national colours. There was irony in the fact that the flag of the European Union was often on show during the competition in light of the United Kingdom's impending departure from that organisation. That the

winning putt was holed by a Norwegian and, therefore, not by a citizen of an EU country was equally ironic. In many ways, individual sports are curious in relation to identity issues because athletes are normally identified by the country they come from (in the case of golfers from the UK from their home nations as opposed to the UK itself) even though they only seldom unite to form national teams. To what extent, therefore, were members of the European Solheim Cup team playing for Europe as a whole, for the EU, or even for their individual countries? Was there still an element of them playing for themselves as they do throughout most of the year? As we shall see, some players did embrace a collective identity in relation to their opponents before and during the event. More importantly perhaps, the fact that the print media used military metaphors to describe the contest and identified the players as struggling for a national (or supra-national) cause undoubtedly framed them as proxy warriors.

National Proxy Warriors

Developing the work of Hoberman (1984) and Bairner (2001), who presented male athletes as proxy warriors, Bowes and Bairner (2018) applied this concept to women athletes as their presence and significance in the sporting landscape is increasing. Bowes (2020) later described how the media can draw upon a battle narrative to frame female athletes as proxy warriors in international sporting competitions. This was evident in the Solheim Cup coverage, with nearly half (47%) of all articles about the event containing some form of 'fight talk' or 'battle narrative'. The word 'battle' was present 25 times, and 'war' 9 times. In addition, additional language was used to indicate this 'proxy warrior' framing. Pre-tournament, the *Sunday Times* noted: 'Gleneagles can be a happy hunting ground for Europe again' (8 September 2019). The notion of a hunting ground exemplified clear predatory and warrior like imagery.

During the tournament week, there was a headline that focused on the press conference 'quips' from two of the players, America's Danielle Kang and Europe's Suzann Pettersen. Under the headline: Kang looking to 'crush' Europe (*Daily Mail*, 12 September 2019), the *Daily Mail* explained: 'American Danielle Kang has stirred the pot nicely with some provocative remarks about wanting to 'crush' the Europeans and make the home supporters cry when the Solheim Cup begins at Gleneagles tomorrow.' (*Daily Mail*, 12 September 2019)

Referring to the comments, *The Express (Ireland)* ran the simple headline: 'War Cry' (13th September 2019), and the war/battle narrative continued following Pettersen's response: 'Pettersen, who laughed when she was asked about the intensity of the battle and remarks made by America's Danielle Kang, said: "We are going to step on their necks."' (*The Guardian*, 12 September 2019).

Kang and Pettersen's press conference discussions continued to make the headlines across a range of print media outlets:

> Europe hit back at US in bitter war of words (*Daily Mail*, 13 September 2019)
>
> Suzann going for the throat (*The Sun Scotland*, 13 September 2019)

During the tournament, the headlines persisted with a battle focus in describing Bronte Law's performance after day one, and Celine Boutier and Georgia Hall's play following day two:

> Bronte in a battle (*Daily Star*, 14 September 2019)
>
> Fightback from Boutier and Hall gives Europe hope (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 15 September 2019)

The symbolic language was evident again at the conclusion of the tournament, where the print media hailed Pettersen as 'heroic' after she holed the winning putt:

> Davies hails Norwegian heroic role but wants her to carry on (*The Daily Telegraph*, 16 September 2019)
>
> You just have to grab the moment,' said Pettersen. She did that all right. A stroke as pure as you like, and when the ball disappeared the 38-year-old Norwegian warrior let out a primal roar. In the twilight of a great career, Pettersen declared the moment so perfect, it would be her final putt. (*Daily Mail*, 16 September 2019).

Garland and Rowe (1999) argue that the language of sport relies heavily on metaphors of war, with Polley (2004) explaining that the use of war imagery and metaphor adds meaning and nationalistic hype to sporting contests. With reference to men's sport and male athletes, sport/war metaphors are deeply entrenched in the narrative structures of the traditional sport media (Jansen and Sabo, 1994). However, we would argue that the sport/war narrative is also used in framing women's sport and helps to position women as legitimate athletes for their nation by framing them in warrior like roles – or as proxy warriors (Bowes and Bairner, 2018), whilst simultaneously expanding frames of reference for female athleticism.

Conclusion

The emphasis in this paper is on providing evidence of the increasing legitimacy of female athletes, through their positioning as nationally significant and importantly, and as proxy warriors on the sports field. Central to their standing in this regard is the role of the media in telling more obviously (and arguably more accurately) the story of women's sport – in this case the 2019 Solheim Cup –

which serves to increase the possibility for even more developed representations. Whilst we are not necessarily advocating for the symbolic, warrior-like descriptions of athletes – which Burstyn (1999) problematises - the positioning of women in this way is a significant change in their usual media representations (Bruce, 2016), where being a warrior was largely beyond the worlds and capabilities of women (Burstyn, 1999).

Previous analysis by two of the authors noted that the print media coverage focused on the Solheim Cup *as golf*, female golfers *as golfers,* and generally on the competition *as sport* (*removed reference*). This marks a shift away from the way in which sexualised and femininised women are often seen in the sport media towards greater legitimation of their inclusion as *athletes*. To do this, the media adopted an approach noted by Wensing and Bruce (2003), Bruce (2008) and more recently Bowes (2020) in foregrounding the national (and in some cases, supra-national) identification of the players, ascribing national importance to their performances and reducing the likelihood that the coverage would be gendered. The women were also presented as proxy warriors in battle – significant for women to be seen both as legitimate athletes *and* as legitimate national representatives.

In western societies, inter-national battles where two (or more) nations (or collectivities such as the Europe) go head to head are often only played out on the sports field – a simultaneous celebration of both international understanding and international rivalry. Whilst that is not to underplay the various national struggles that have occurred and continue to do so, what international sporting competitions do is operate at a mediatised level on a frequent and regular basis. Sport has often been promoted as the antithesis of war, a peaceful and mutually beneficial contact zone between cultures. However, the language and rituals of sport continue to be influenced by structures of warfare, a narrative that the media often perpetuate. This is how athletes are thrust into the position of being proxy warriors. As noted above, although the role of women in national struggles is often dismissed, they play a key role in both the ideological reproduction of the collectivity, as well as an active role as participants in national struggles (Yuval-Davis and Anthias. 1989). Clearly then, there is an ideological space for women to be seen as 'proxy warriors' in sport. That the print media used military metaphors to elevate the importance of the contest and identified the players as fighting for a national (or supra-national) cause undoubtedly framed them as such.

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Table 1: Team Europe

Player	Country	LET Points Rank	WWGR (12th Aug)	Solheim Cup Apps
Catriona Matthew	Scotland	Non-playing captain		9
Carlota Ciganda	Spain	1	13	3
Anne Van Dam	Netherlands	2	93	0
Caroline Hedwall	Sweden	3	116	3
Charley Hull	England	4	29	3
Georgia Hall	England	8	33	1
Azahara Munoz	Spain	N/A	36	3
Caroline Masson	Germany	N/A	52	3
Anna Nordqvist	Sweden	14	60	5
Celine Boutier	France	6	61	0
Jodi Ewart Shadoff	England	N/A	78	2
Bronte Law	England	N/A	25	0
Suzann Pettersen	Norway	N/A	644	8

Table 2: Team USA

Player	LPGA Points Rank	WWGR (26th August)	Solheim Cup Apps
Juli Inkster	Non-Playing Captain		9
Lexi Thompson	1	3	3
Nelly Korda	2	10	0
Danielle Kang	3	15	1
Lizette Salas	4	17	3
Jessica Korda	5	18	1
Megan Khang	6	46	0
Marina Alex	7	32	0
Brittany Altomare	8	40	0
Angel Yin	10	31	1
Annie Park	16	42	0
Morgan Pressel	20	55	5
Ally Macdonald[1]	9	57	0

[1] Ally Macdonald was initially a travelling reserve, but Stacy Lewis, Juli Inkster's initial captains pick, had to withdraw due to injury.