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SCOTLAND AND MOROCCO ON AND OFF THE PITCH

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Introduction

1. The 2026 FIFA Men's World Cup kicked off in Canada, Mexico and the United States on the 11 June and will run to 19 July. Subsequent tournaments having been scheduled for 2027 (Brazil Women's World Cup); 2030 (Spain, Portugal and Morocco Men's World Cup) and 2035 (Women's World Cup sole bidders United Kingdom). The 2026 tournament involving 104 matches and 48 teams across 16 stadiums^[2], make it the largest FIFA World Cup in history.

2. Beyond its sporting significance, the tournament represents a major platform for international visibility, economic activity, tourism promotion, investment attraction, and diplomatic engagement. As one of the most watched global events, the FIFA World Cup provides participating nations with a unique opportunity to showcase their culture, values, institutions, and international ambitions to billions of viewers worldwide.

3. Increasingly, this World Cup tournament, and other sports events serve not only as a football competition but also as a strategic arena in which countries seek to enhance their international reputation, strengthen bilateral relationships, and advance broader economic and diplomatic objectives.

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[2] The 16 cities and stadiums being Vancouver, Canada: BC Place; Toronto, Canada: BMO Field; Mexico City, Mexico: Estadio Azteca; Monterrey, Mexico: Estadio BBVA; Guadalajara, Mexico: Estadio Akron; New York, USA: MetLife Stadium; Dallas, USA: AT&T Stadium; Kansas City, USA: Arrowhead Stadium; Houston, USA: NRG Stadium; Atlanta, USA: Mercedes-Benz Stadium; Los Angeles, USA: SoFi Stadium; Philadelphia, USA: Lincoln Financial Field; Seattle, USA: Lumen Field; San Francisco, USA: Levi's Stadium; Boston, USA: Gillette Stadium and Miami, USA: Hard Rock Stadium.

4. Scotland has access to a wide range of international engagement opportunities through sport. Not only through Scotland House and the Scottish Office but also an extensive UK diplomatic network. Unlike other sport mad nations Scotland does not have a dedicated sports diplomacy and external affairs strategy to leverage the infrastructure that it has access to. Scotland's future maybe outward looking, ambitious and connected to the world but it's failure to have a dedicated and specific international engagement framework for sport remains a lesson that Scotland can learn from Morocco and closer to home Ireland.

5. 1.5 billion people tuned in to watch the 2022 World Cup Final between France and Argentina in Qatar[3] [4]. The tournament as a whole reached 5 billion people across all media platforms confirming that football has incredible scale and international reach when compared to other major sporting events and other sports[5]. The second most watched match was the semi-final between France and Morocco which saw viewing figures of more than 325 million[6].

6. Having defeated Haiti in their opening match of the 2026 World Cup, in what was Scotland's first World Cup appearance in 28 years, and first World Cup win in 36 years, Scotland face Morocco on 19 June 2026 in Boston.

7. Both teams being drawn In Pot 3, in Group C alongside Brazil and Haiti. Morocco arriving as AFCON champions, 2025 Arab Cup champions, 2025 U-20 World Cup champions, 2025 CHAN champions, 2024 Olympic bronze medallists, and 2022 World Cup semi-finalists — arguably the most comprehensively successful African footballing nation at this moment in history.

8. At the beginning of the tournament Scotland were ranked 42ND and Morocco 7TH in the FIFA World Rankings of June 2026[7]. The two nations bring very different but equally instructive approaches on and off the pitch. The match offers a lens through which to examine the role of football not merely as a sport, but as a strategic asset capable of supporting diplomacy, trade, tourism, investment, and nation branding.

9. Of the pitch the question for both Scotland and Morocco is not whether football can act as a soft power asset, it demonstrably can, but whether the respective governments and football associations are strategic enough to seize the moment. In this regard Morocco strategically has the lead. Other countries have long since recognised that football have strategic value beyond just spectacle or short-term profits. Mega-events are national investments in diplomacy, commerce and soft power — platforms to project influence, foster collaboration and generate long-term economic and social benefit. Some countries do it better than others.

[3] FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Global Engagement and Audience Report:

<https://inside.fifa.com/tournament-organisation/audience-reports/qatar-2022> [Accessed 10 June 2026].

[4] Anagnostopoulos, C and Polymenopoulou, E. (2025). Cultural diplomacy through sports: the case of the state of Qatar- Vickery, J, MacDonald, S and Cull, N. (2025). Cultural diplomacy and international cultural relations. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp183-186.

[5] FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Global Engagement and Audience Report:

<https://inside.fifa.com/tournament-organisation/audience-reports/qatar-2022> [Accessed 10 June 2026].

[6] FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Global Engagement and Audience Report:

<https://inside.fifa.com/tournament-organisation/audience-reports/qatar-2022> [Accessed 10 June 2026].

[7] FIFA World Cup Rankings 2026- <https://inside.fifa.com/fifa-world-ranking/men> [Accessed 10 June 2026].

10. The Scotland–Morocco fixture provides another opportunity not only to compare two footballing nations, but also two distinct approaches to the strategic use of sport in international relations.

Sport and International Relations

11. Soft power is a funny term and there are numerous evolving debates. It is evident that soft power is but one element of contemporary international relations. It certainly implies communication, often one way communication as in brand nation y or x but recent discussions have also allowed for a more co-operative two-way mode of communication which is helpful. Is it about strategic attraction certainly and is it about international engagement, co-operation and building relations definitely[8]. For nations large and small, sport provides a unique platform through which values, identity, culture, and international ambitions can be communicated to global audiences in ways that traditional diplomacy alone cannot achieve.

12. A growing number of states have been mobilising their diplomats on sporting issues and sport for diplomatic purposes, to the extent that the concept of ‘sports diplomacy’ has become established in a prescriptive, if not forward-looking, sense in the international public sphere. Increasingly, governments recognise that sport can provide access to audiences, networks, and partners that traditional diplomatic channels may struggle to reach. As a result, sport is being used to support foreign policy objectives, strengthen bilateral relations, facilitate trade and investment opportunities, enhance national reputation, and promote cultural understanding. Major sporting events, international competitions, and sporting exchanges have become important platforms through which countries project their values, ambitions, and international identities. In this respect, sport has evolved from being merely a recreational activity into a strategic instrument of soft power and economic diplomacy.

13. Football matters here for a number of reasons. The contemporary world needs spaces that can hold a plurality of politics. Spaces that engage with ordinary people and cultures with all their varied histories and disagreements. Sport is one such space. The sporting toolbox is deep and varied and in this case the tool is football with its significant scale reach and popularity. That is in part why it matters. The Chair of Scotland’s sustainable growth commission arguing that “I can think of no other business that has the communication reach of football”[9].

14. The deployment of sport as an instrument of soft power and public diplomacy is not new but is ever present in the geo-political economy of today’s sporting landscape. Sport can help to shape national narratives and strengthen international engagement. The experiences of both Morocco and Scotland illustrate how football, in particular, has the capacity to serve not only as a sporting endeavour but also as a vehicle for international influence, economic opportunity, and strategic engagement.

[8] Vickery, J, MacDonald, S and Cull, N. (2025). Cultural diplomacy and international cultural relations. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing.

[9] Wilson, A (2020). Football must be the foundation stone as we rebuild.

<https://www.nutmegmagazine.co.uk/issue-18/andrew-wilson/> [Accessed 14 June 2026].

15. Sport has long served as a conduit for soft power, allowing nations to project cultural values and foster international goodwill without the coercive mechanisms associated with hard power[10]. Sport's role in soft power is more pertinent than ever, given the current geopolitical landscape. The term "soft power" itself, though debated in its efficacy, remains a crucial rhetorical tool for encapsulating non-military influence efforts[11].

16. The experiences of Morocco and Scotland illustrate two contrasting approaches to the mobilisation of football as a soft power resource, with Morocco pursuing an increasingly coordinated strategy and Scotland still seeking to define the role that sport might play within its wider international engagement framework.

17. The rationale for the use of football, might recognise several policy drivers: attraction, national brand, promoting national culture, promoting co-operation and international engagement, regional influence, diaspora engagement, geopolitical influence, domestic engagement, building networks, strengthening outreach and supporting the domestic economy. The extent to which these opportunities are realised, however, depends upon the existence of a coherent strategy capable of aligning sporting ambitions with wider diplomatic, economic, and national development objectives.

Wales

18. When the Wales participated in the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, the Welsh Government hosted a series of international events via the Welsh Government's Overseas offices, enhanced its marketing campaign in key markets including the United States, Qatar and parts of Europe, and introduced a number of Lleisiau Cymru World Cup Ambassadors who worked to raise the profile of Wales internationally. These activities helped increase traffic to the wales.com website by 600% during the World Cup, improved perceptions of Wales and led to strengthened international networks, including at a Ministerial level, in a range of fields including business, science and the arts[12].

19. An international strategy for Wales stating that: "We will by coordinating our international activity with key cultural and sporting organisations help to open doors and enter new, difficult-to-access markets to amplify the Welsh voice abroad"[13]. The Welsh example demonstrates that even sub-state nations with limited formal diplomatic powers can utilise sport strategically to enhance international visibility, strengthen external relations, and support economic objectives.

[10] A number of recently commissioned comparative reviews of how different countries do soft power and cultural relations points out that different models are at play in different parts of the world. Whether it be a public diplomacy model (USA, Russia, Korea); a cultural diplomacy model (France, Brazil, Qatar, UAE, Turkey, India, Japan); a cultural relations model (UK, EU, Germany,) or a distinct Chinese model, sport operates as a tool within all of these models albeit in different ways.

[11] MacDonald, S. (2023) Sport and Soft Power. Edinburgh: Academy of Sport: University of Edinburgh.

[12] Murray, S. & Price, G. (2020, October). Towards a Welsh Sports Diplomacy Strategy. British Council. Retrieved from:

https://wales.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/towards_a_welsh_sports_diplomacy_strategy_0.pdf

[13] Welsh Government (2020). International Strategy.

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-10/international-strategy-for-wales-v1.pdf>

[Accessed 10 June 2026].

France

20. France's Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE) uses sport to enhance its international offer through a wide range of means, including hosting major sporting events, supporting French candidacies in sporting bodies, sports aid, hosting conferences, forging mutual bilateral relationships through sport, and the use of sports ambassadors. France has used French sports expertise to strengthen its international offer, including through deploying international technical experts (ITE) in sport to Africa[14]. As with other countries there is both a diaspora that connects to France through sport but also a sports diaspora that has significant international presence.

21. Krasnoff's study of Basketball in bilateral Sino-French relationships concludes that basketball diplomacy sent messages to foreign publics about Sino-French relationships[15]. Basketball was a prism through which France learned more about China, its people, culture and aspirations. The relevance for Scotland and Morocco is that football provides a similar platform through which perceptions can be shaped, relationships strengthened, and opportunities created that extend beyond the ninety minutes of play.

United States of America[16]

22. The USA has had a long history in this space. In 2003, the State Department established Sports United (renamed the Sports Diplomacy Division in 2017), charged with undertaking sports diplomacy programming [17]. These efforts included sending Sports Envoys overseas to engage with local communities, bringing Sports Visitors to the US to learn about the US Sports Industry and practices, and facilitating Sports Exchanges to foster greater understanding. The then US ambassador reminding us that "sports are more than games they are bridges to peace"[18].

Ireland

23. When Ireland launched its International Sports Diplomacy framework last year the use of sport, including traditional sports, it certainly recognised the value of sport in fostering and developing diaspora engagement[1]. It talks about investing in sport for our diaspora but also bringing an international perspective to our local communities through sport. This is a co-ordinated stated vision, strategy and set of goals to leverage benefits for Global and Local Ireland. It states up front the value of sport in building connections between communities around the world, it states up front the economic benefits of sport to Ireland but also that the framework was a stepping stone to a full-blown Sports Diplomacy Strategy for Ireland[20]. This is about positioning Ireland through sport.

[14] MEAE actively worked to support France's economic attractiveness and outreach abroad. Between 2021 and 2023 decentralized co-operation through sport enabled the financing of 35 cooperation projects between French and foreign local government bodies, with the support of French embassies and consulates being valued at about £2.7 million.

[15] Krasnoff, Lindsay (2023) Les Bleus' basketball in China. Case Study 364. Washington: Institute for the study of diplomacy.

[16] Baxter, K. (2023). The best kept secret in the State Department- How sports help U.S. diplomats. Los Angeles Times, Jan 29, 2023.

[17] Krasnoff, L. (2025) "Why the US Needs a better strategy for sports diplomacy". The Times Magazine 9 December 2025. <https://time.com/7339500/us-sports-diplomacy-strategy-world-cup/> [Accessed 10 June 2026].

[18] See <https://www.linkedin.com/posts/sports-are-more-than-gamestheyre-bridges-ugcPost-7286088357007241217-zd4N/> [Accessed 10 June 2026].

Australia

24. Australia provides one of the clearest examples of a country that has explicitly incorporated sport into its foreign policy and international engagement strategies. Through initiatives such as Sports Diplomacy 2030 and the Australian Government's broader sports diplomacy agenda, sport is actively recognised as a vehicle for strengthening regional relationships, enhancing Australia's international reputation, supporting development objectives, and promoting national interests abroad[1]. Australian policymakers have viewed sport as a means of building trust, fostering people-to-people connections, engaging with neighbouring countries, particularly in the Pacific region, and creating opportunities for cooperation in areas extending beyond sport itself[22]. The Australian experience demonstrates that when sport is integrated into a coherent foreign policy framework, it can contribute simultaneously to diplomatic, social, cultural, and economic objectives.

25. A question for all of this is what works where and when and under what circumstances to meet what ends. It is not being suggested that sport is a one size fits all or that sport or any one sport is a solution, it is not, nor should it be. The challenge for policymakers is therefore not whether sport matters, but how best to align sporting assets with clearly defined diplomatic, economic, and international engagement goals.

26. But if sport is going to be maximise its potential for business, trade, influence, co-operation and the pursuit of international engagement we need to go beyond certain things. We need go beyond seeing sport as just aid, we need to go beyond culture without sport; beyond seeing sport as just one-off major events; beyond seeing sport as just nation branding and beyond seeing sport as just diaspora engagement. In reality it all of these and a very least it is a pillar of connectivity around which other things can be built.

27. Every, athlete, coach, training session, match, medal, title, club tour, grass roots exchange programme, whether it be city to city, region to region, bi-laterally or multilaterally has the opportunity to help build co-operation, profile and reputation abroad. Risk has to be managed. But opportunities will be lost if the role of sport in diplomacy and or cultural relations building is not strategic, not intentionally planned and leaves embassies, consulates and national houses abroad during events wondering what to do.

[19] Ireland (2026). Ireland's International Sports Diplomacy Strategy- <https://www.ireland.ie/en/sports-diplomacy/> [Accessed 14 June 2026].

[20] Ireland (2026). Ireland's International Sports Diplomacy Strategy- <https://www.ireland.ie/en/sports-diplomacy/> [Accessed 14 June 2026].

[21] Australian Government (2026). Australia's Sports Diplomacy Strategy 2032+- <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australias-sports-diplomacy-strategy-2032.pdf> [Accessed 14 June 2026]. See also the work of the Australian Sports Commission- <https://www.ausport.gov.au/>

[22] Leary, S. (2025). Australian Sports Diplomacy in Vickery, J, MacDonald, S and Cull, N. (2025). Cultural diplomacy and international cultural relations. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing: pp192-197.

Scotland and Morocco

28. Prior to the 19th of June match Scotland and Morocco have previously met twice with each side winning once. In 1998 Scotland's World Cup Campaign ended with a 3-0 defeat to Morocco. In 2025 Morocco's women's team lost an international friendly to Scotland in Casablanca on 24th October 2025. Scotland winning 2-1.

29. While the historical head-to-head record is limited, these encounters illustrate the growing sporting links between the two countries. The 2026 World Cup meeting in Boston therefore represents not only a competitive football fixture but also a symbolic moment bringing together two nations whose football journeys have taken markedly different paths in recent years. For Scotland, it marks a return to football's biggest stage after a twenty-eight-year absence; for Morocco, it represents another opportunity to build upon the international recognition generated by its historic FIFA World Cup semi-final appearance in 2022 and its preparations for co-hosting the 2030 FIFA World Cup.

30. Beyond the pitch Scotland as a devolved sub-nation of the United Kingdom has a number of routes of action. Such routes would include (i) enabling the Scottish Government's own international framework, international offices and engagement priorities; (ii) contributing to the UK Government's network of embassies, foreign policy and international relations efforts and/or (iii) a mixture of both and more. Scotland will have at least 4 serving members of the Scottish Government at the World Cup. A mixture of cheers and less flattering noises were heard in Boston as the First Minister addressed a star-studded Tartan Army event ahead of the game with Haiti[23].

31. In this regard, the World Cup provides Scotland with a platform through which sporting visibility can be translated into broader forms of international engagement and influence but whether Scotland grasps the potential leverage that football in particular and sport in general provides it with remains open to question?

32. The irony perhaps being that having had 20 years of a Scottish National Party (SNP) government Scotland is arguably politically stronger in a nationalist sense but does not know how to use football fully as a strategic cultural asset. When it comes to international influence today Scotland occupies an unusual position with a formal international brand and limited formal diplomatic machinery given foreign policy is a reserved matter. Such current arrangements might suggest that Scotland should use every international engagement and cultural relations tool that it has at its disposal and football is one such tool.

33. Anyone who was in the vicinity of Scotland never mind Hampden Park, the national football stadium on the night Scotland beat Denmark to qualify for the 2026 World Cup would have been left in no doubt about how important football is to Scotland and how important World Cup Qualification is to Scotland. The challenge for Scotland is how to translate this undeniable passion for football into a more strategic asset capable of supporting wider objectives relating to international engagement, soft power, and economic diplomacy.

[23] Kay, K. (2026). Mix of cheers and boos as FM addresses Tartan Army. Scotland on Sunday 14 June. 2026, p3.

34. Football is Scotland's most popular sport for both men and women; per head of population more people come through the gates to watch football in Scotland than any other country in Europe; the game in Scotland and ideas from Scotland influenced the spread of the global game; the Scottish Football Association (SFA) were in at the start and remain with other associations as guardians of the rules of the game; and football is an important part of Scotland's efforts to bring major sporting events (It is part of the UK Euro 28 football championships and is part of a sole bid to host the 2035 Women's World Cup) to Scotland.

35. The value of Scotland's Tartan Army of football supporters is not incidental[24]. When thousands of Scots arrive in Miami or Boston, dressed differently, singing loudly, and then quietly donating to a local charity as they have in the past. They are projecting a version of Scotland as generous, self-deprecating, and outward looking that no marketing campaign could manufacture. In many respects, the Tartan Army exemplifies how football supporters can become carriers of national reputation, transforming sporting participation into a form of public diplomacy and people-to-people engagement.

36. Following on from the European Football Championships in 2024 tourism experts reported a surge in German visitors to Scotland, with some attributing this trend to the friendships forged by the Tartan Army during Football European Championships[25]. Visit Scotland stated that searches in Germany for Scotland as a holiday destination surged by 57% during the tournament. The number of Germans visiting Edinburgh post tournament increased the following year. Scottish fans brought warmth, kindness, and humour to Germany - qualities that local Germans truly admired[26].

37. The fundamental significance for Scotland and Morocco ahead of their 19 June 2026 World Cup clash in Boston is the recognition and opportunity that World Cup football brings on and off the pitch. Both countries recognise that the bi-lateral meeting carries with it opportunities for trade, business and international positioning. The World Cup gives both Scotland and Morocco elevated global profiles. For Scotland, it is their first World Cup appearance in 28 years — a huge moment of national pride that brings international eyes to Scottish culture, products, and business. For Morocco, having stunned the world with their run to the semi-finals in 2022, they arrive as serious contenders. This mutual visibility can enable business conversations.

38. Morocco serves as an example of where sport is embedded into long-term national transformation. Under a strategy orchestrated by the Royal Moroccan Football Federation (FRMF) and King Mohammed VI. For Morocco football is a central pillar of foreign policy. The Academy has been undeniably successful supplying members of national squad that reached the World Cup semi-final[27]. Capitalising on their historic 2022 World cup semi-final run, Morocco has aggressively expanded its diplomatic reach utilizing football to secure continental leadership in Africa and project an image of a modern, stable, and trusted global hub. Morocco has already signed a strategic cooperation agreement with the UK Government to tie its co-hosting of the 2030 World Cup to British business infrastructure, transport, and stadium technology.

[24] Elliot, C. (2026). How the Tartan Army effect is helping to sell Scotland plc. Scottish Daily Mail. June 10, 2026.

[25] Elliot, C. (2026). How the Tartan Army effect is helping to sell Scotland plc. Scottish Daily Mail. June 10, 2026.

[26] Elliot, C. (2026). How the Tartan Army effect is helping to sell Scotland plc. Scottish Daily Mail. June 10, 2026.

[27] Wilson, J. (2026). Doubt of Africa. Nutmeg. March 2026:148-153.

39. Morocco's approach demonstrates that football can be leveraged not merely to win matches, but to strengthen international influence, attract investment, support economic modernisation, and enhance the country's global standing.

40. Football has successfully paved the way for hard geopolitical returns. The scale of the 2030 World Cup infrastructure partnerships has directly correlated with major European allies and the UK proving that stadium deals can solidify borders and alliances[28]. Morocco seeks ultra-modern digital infrastructure and stadium logistics for 2030. Scotland should be actively looking to export exactly those kinds of digital sports technologies and event management skills. The match on the 19th of June provides the ideal corporate backdrop to turn football into a mutually beneficial supply-chain partnership.

41. Viewed through the lens of economic diplomacy, the match represents an opportunity to transform sporting engagement into commercial collaboration, demonstrating how football can create pathways for trade, innovation, investment, and long-term strategic partnership.

42. The UK Government has specifically highlighted investment opportunities ahead of the 2030 FIFA men's World Cup. The June 2025 UK–Morocco Strategic Dialogue produced a series of Memoranda of Understanding covering World Cup infrastructure, ports, water systems, healthcare transformation, and sustainable urban development — signalling Morocco's interest in UK expertise in engineering, green technology, hospital design, and event delivery. Over \$5 billion worth of opportunities over five years have been identified. Scotland-based companies could actively pursue a UK share of this, and it is this sort of opportunity that the match on the 19th of June should further enable.

43. The opportunities for Scotland are concrete in terms of expertise in renewable energy, infrastructure and engineering, agriculture and food and drink, and financial and professional services. For Scotland, the challenge is less about identifying opportunities and more about coordinating government, business, academic, and sporting stakeholders to ensure that such opportunities are strategically pursued and converted into long-term economic and cultural relationships.

44. Yet while football might be an enabler to foster co-operation in such areas what is often forgotten in all of this is sports specific cultural and external affairs opportunities both for sport and through sport. Scotland has sport specific expertise in a number of areas including (i) Event management and sports event expertise; (ii) Coaching, sports science, sports diplomacy and fan engagement consultancy; (iii) Sports technology and sports data analytics building upon Scottish University expertise in artificial intelligence and ethics; (iv) Golf and outdoor sports; (v) University student exchanges in sport and knowledge exchange in sport and (vi) youth and grassroot sport exchanges. That being said Scotland's approach lacks Morocco's strategic coherence. Morocco is strategically executing a state-led sports diplomacy strategy that leverages its co-hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup (alongside Spain and Portugal) to structurally transform its trade relationships with Europe and the UK and position Morocco globally.

[28] Hayes, L. (2026). UK and Morocco strengthen ties ahead of 2030 World Cup. - <https://maghrebi.org/2026/04/25/uk-and-morocco-strengthen-ties-ahead-of-2030-world-cup/> [Accessed 10 June 2026].

45. The Scotland–Morocco fixture represents more than a World Cup group-stage encounter. It provides a platform through which sporting connections can facilitate wider engagement in trade, education, tourism, innovation, cultural exchange, and knowledge transfer. The challenge for Scotland is to move beyond viewing football solely as a sporting event and instead recognise its potential as a vehicle for economic diplomacy, international relationship building, and national promotion. Morocco's experience demonstrates how football can be integrated into a wider national development strategy that delivers both sporting and non-sporting returns.

46. As both nations continue to strengthen their international profiles through football, there is considerable scope for deeper collaboration beyond the 2026 World Cup. Areas such as sports governance, event delivery, sports technology, higher education partnerships, sustainability, and athlete development offer opportunities for mutually beneficial exchange[29]. Whether measured in terms of business opportunities, cultural understanding, or international influence, the Scotland–Morocco relationship illustrates how football can act as a catalyst for cooperation and a bridge between nations in an increasingly interconnected world.

Concluding Remarks

47. The Scottish Parliament is beginning to examine what sports diplomacy and soft power could mean for Scotland's international work — asking what the intended impact of diplomacy and soft power is and how sport can be a soft power asset. Work has only recently begun to map the Scottish sporting landscape but as yet the mapping and utilisation of Scotland's sporting assets for soft power and external affairs purposes remains work in progress.

48. The honest answer is that Scotland has not yet answered these questions with the clarity and commitment Morocco has. Scotland represents a case of relative untapped potential as significant soft power assets exist, but no systematic national approach has been built to deploy them strategically.

49. The question for Scotland is therefore not whether sport can enable diplomatic and economic value, it clearly can, but whether Scotland can develop the institutional coordination, strategic vision, and political commitment to translate sporting success and sporting culture into sustained international influence.

50. As Scotland and Morocco meet in Boston on 19 June 2026, the match provides a compelling illustration of football's contemporary significance. It is simultaneously a sporting event, a cultural encounter, a diplomatic opportunity, and an economic platform.

51. For Scotland specifically, sport diplomacy matters because Scotland has limited formal foreign policy powers under devolution. Sport offers a legitimate, high-visibility channel to build bilateral relationships that can be distinctly Scottish and British. It could align with a Scottish Government's ambition to project an independent international identity while leveraging value for both Scottish sports expertise and other sectors that could benefit from the UN-Morocco bi-lateral trading agreements associated with the 20230 World Cup. Morocco, as a stable, Western-friendly African nation with strong European ties, is a strategically sensible partner for Scotland and Great Britain to cultivate through these soft-power channels.

[29] United Nations – Football for Goals Initiative- <https://www.un.org/en/footballforthegoals> [Accessed 14 June 2026].

52. Morocco is executing an aggressive, state-led sports diplomacy strategy that leverages its co-hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup (alongside Spain and Portugal) to structurally transform its trade relationships with Europe and the UK.

53. In an increasingly interconnected world, nations that recognise and harness these multiple dimensions of sport are likely to derive benefits.

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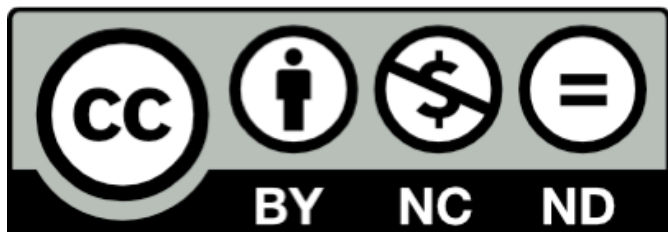
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