

Sample response C

SPORT IS ONCE AGAIN EXPERIENCING AN INESCAPABLE DECLINE – AND HERE'S WHY IT'S A TRAGEDY

An immediate image conjured up in the minds of many young Britons when they hear the word 'sport' will be that of the pride and excitement of the London 2012 Olympics.

Amidst the slow economic recovery, austerity and political disenfranchisement, emerged a renewed sense of national pride and unity. We all reminisce nostalgically about the spectacular opening ceremony, that brought the best aspects of our country to the forefront of both the domestic and worldwide imagination: the NHS, (the more positive aspects of) our history, and our enriching diversity.

While I'm certainly no endorser of nationalism, or even patriotism for that matter, I like many others, found myself covered in red, white and blue and belting out 'God save the Queen' albeit only marginally more passionately than Jeremy Corbyn.

During those fleeting summer weeks, in which the optimism and hope that intermingled with the air seemed as though it may just be perpetual, sport appeared in its most favourable light. Although patriotism may have been magnified, it also disintegrated national and regional barriers in a display of unity that has not been paralleled since.

Ultimately, that is the crossroads we are facing today. No sporting phenomenon since then has even reached the periphery of the joy, unity and universality of the London Olympics. In a depressing parallel of the political climate of the last few years, sport has become increasingly fragmented, corrupt and toxic.

However, in many ways, this is not a recent phenomenon. Perhaps London 2012 was the exception rather than the rule. Sport has been, is, and will always be, inextricably connected to politics and power.

The Russian doping scandal has come to epitomise the corruption and the increasingly suppressive nature of Putin's regime. Egyptian judo players will not shake hands with their Israeli counterparts. Scandal after scandal involving money laundering, doping or political morality is becoming the ugly face of sport.

Of course this phenomenon has been seen time and time again; history has the habit of repeating itself. You simply have to look at the 1936 Olympics, in which 'enlightened democracies' such as Britain and the USA gave moral legitimacy to the Nazi regime, or the Munich Olympics in which Israeli athletes were murdered, or the Moscow Olympics, which, at the height of cold war tensions, the USA didn't attend, to see that the corruption of sport transcends the boundaries of time.

'But that was in the past,' you say, 'with the fall of the Berlin Wall, this world has become a far more stable place.' This is, or was, true. But the increasing toxicity of sport reflects the fragmented, divided world we once again find ourselves living in.

WHAT THIS MEANS

I'd like to hope that the disparity between the innocence and corruption of sport never closes; that the toxicity of politicised sport will not seep through to the sport which is vital for nourishing both physical and social skills in society. Perhaps all hope is not lost – perhaps the unity and hope of London 2012 will prevail. Perhaps we can avoid another Munich, or Berlin, or Moscow.

Ultimately, however, the sporting world seems to exist in a prolonged state of night. A dark and chilling night that is fundamentally challenging to escape from. I only hope that we will once again soon witness the light of day.