



AKBC Webinar Recap

Soft Power: Using Sports Diplomacy to Score Business Outcomes

On Friday 19th June, the Australia-Korea Business Council (AKBC) held the first of two webinars on sports diplomacy. The session was titled, 'Soft Power: Using Sports Diplomacy to Score Business Outcomes.' Moderated by AKBC's Executive Director Liz Griffin, several leading industry experts provided insights into how businesses can engage with sports diplomacy and further Australia-Korea bilateral relations. The panellists included Cam Vale (CEO of Baseball Australia), Andrew Walton (CEO of Rosterfy), Bruce Djite (Director of Football at Adelaide United and former Socceroo) and Trent Smyth (CEO of the Sports Diplomacy Foundation). The session explored how sports diplomacy cultivates partnerships for Australia and Korea - by creating informal networking opportunities and building relationships away from formal business settings. The speakers agreed that sports diplomacy has already mobilised Australia-Korea business partnerships, however we are yet to achieve its full potential.

After popping on his Geelong-Korea Baseball cap, Cam Vale highlighted three key reasons why baseball has succeeded in sport diplomacy:

- Baseball is one of the most popular sports in Korea;
- Geelong-Korea was established as the first all-Korean team to play in the Australian Baseball League (ABL);
- As a summer sport in both Australia and Korea, and with Australia and Korea having opposite seasons, Australia is an attractive place for Korea to host their off-season training camps and competitions; and
- The ownership of sporting teams by Korean conglomerate groups presents an opportunity for Australia to connect with those companies on a sporting and business level.

Mr Vale emphasised how Geelong-Korea's participation in the ABL showcased how Korean professional baseball teams can benefit from additional playing experience in Australia during their off-season. With the support of the Victorian government, Deakin University and Asiana Airlines' Seoul-Melbourne direct flight trial, the ABL hosted the Doosan Bears in Victoria in February 2020. It was a rare opportunity for Team Australia to gain invaluable experience by playing with the Doosan Bears. Mr Vale explained that this sports diplomacy outcome was made possible through patience, commitment, creativity, trust and collaboration between several stakeholders.

Andrew Walton explained the potential for pairing e-sports, a competitive version of gaming, with traditional sporting competitions. Mr Walton explained that currently:

- E-sports is a multi-million dollar industry in Korea, with the highest paid professional players earning almost US\$2.5 million per year in prize money and sponsorship; and
- Australian gamers often travel to Korea to attend boot camps – this presents opportunities for introductions to Korean companies and opens up additional sponsorship opportunities.

Mr Walton explored how the Australian Open (AO) hosted Australia's largest gaming event, the Fortnite Summer Smash, as an entertainment event as part of the 2019 and 2020 Australian Open tournaments. With a grand prize worth \$100,000 and the opportunity to compete with professional gamers, the event



attracted more than 1,500 Australian registrations in the first 10 minutes and 11.3 million YouTube views across all event content. The AO also hosted a charity event which featured professional gamers including SinOoh (신 우) and Minhyung Lee (코아 유튜브) from Korea. Mr Walton concluded that the innovative event showcased how e-sports can be leveraged to attract non-traditional audiences and expand the international viewership of Australian events.

Bruce Djite shared his positive experiences as a professional footballer playing in Korea for Samsung Suwon. Mr Djite described how the shared values of respect, dedication, hard work and passion for sport creates an incredible opportunity for sports diplomacy in the Australia-Korea relationship. However, he emphasised that Australian businesses are underutilising Australia and Korea's frequent engagement on the field to establish long-term, meaningful relationships with their Korean counterparts. He also explored these additional points:

- E-sports will be the “next frontier” in sports diplomacy, particularly as COVID-19 continues to restrict international travel; and
- Sports diplomacy also includes sports science research, technology and sharing ideas and best practices on coaching and governance.

To conclude, Trent Smyth described sports diplomacy as an extremely broad topic which brings together sport, business, communities and government. He concluded that the innate ability to leverage sports diplomacy to score business outcomes is its “unique power.”

The full webinar can be accessed [here](#).