

**The Sport Success of Iceland:
A sociological analysis of how the national teams of a tiny nation emerged on the
international sports scene**

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The achievements of the men's national football team of Iceland have attracted widespread international attention. The team reached the quarterfinals of the 2016 European Championship and further qualified for the 2018 World Cup Finals – becoming the smallest populated nation to do so. How such a small nation - with a population of around 330.000 - could compete among the best, is the intriguing question that puzzles the football world. Interestingly however, Iceland has not only punched above its weight in men's football but in all its major team sports, at the same time. This presentation is built on a case study on sports in Iceland – which has been published in the book “Sport in Iceland: How small nations achieve international success” - and consisted of formal and informal interviews, ethnographic observations and the use of published material. The results show how Icelandic national sport teams in different sports are driven by the same motivations, display the same characteristics and represent a similar style of play, giving way to common underlying cultural elements of the different teams. The results further indicate that Iceland has presently been able to exploit major weaknesses of more elite sports systems providing Iceland with an important advantage in team play. This study is an example of how sociology can shed important light on understanding collective sport achievement.