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Sport and History: Continuity and Change. Local Stories to Explain Global History

The International Journal of the History of Sport

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A collection of quality papers selected among the essays presented at the 2021 joint Congress of the European Committee of Sports History (CESH) and the International Society for the History of Physical Education and Sport (ISHPES) in Lisbon, Portugal, has been gathered to bring an array of perspectives on contemporary sports history. Hosted by the Institute of Contemporary History at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa and following the model of the 2020 Sapporo Congress, the organizers made it possible to present papers online with an interesting hybrid approach. The meeting aimed to explore the historical configurations of the sports field and its relationship with a broad range of political processes, a contested affair, and a source of multiple and conflicting arguments. In the last decades, a growing body of literature has focused on this relationship, and this collection of papers deals with some of these concerns. The chosen manuscripts address issues related to the Congress theme, “Sport and History: Continuity and Change”, and underline the good health of the global debate among sport historians with contributions from Turkey, France, Israel, Japan, Brazil, Austria, Spain, Italy, Poland and China and very different approaches from international relations to military history, from diplomacy to cultural history, from modernism to Olympic history.

Initial contributions focus on diplomacy and sport. The modern sport has been defined as a key tool of political influence and a clear example of soft power inside modern political diplomacy.¹ Its development has led to the concept of sports diplomacy as a way of making politics and seeking peace.² The idea, often repeated throughout the twentieth century, that sports and politics are separate domains not mutually influential is not tenable anymore. Heather L. Dichter alludes to a diplomatic turn in contemporary sports history and provides for the diplomatic use of sport as a concept to deal with overcoming this complexity.³ Following Stuart Murray, sports diplomacy could be considered the conscious political use of sport, sportspeople or sport events for strategic purposes and on a regular basis.⁴

Kuruloglu takes up this issue discussing the role of sport as a tool of cultural diplomacy during the early Republic of Turkey after the First World War. New policies were developed in the political, cultural and social fields to improve the negative image of Turks in the world public opinion. Based on Turkish State archives and press material, the author studies the use of sports diplomacy to achieve the Republican state’s international political goals, being one the prime targets to erase the traces of the Ottoman past, even if Kuruloglu finds a continuity in sports diplomacy practices. He concludes that the efforts of the Republican government to develop diplomatic ties using international sports were achieved alongside the Republic’s foreign policy prerogatives in Central and Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and neighboring countries, simultaneously providing the integration of

Turkish, Russian and Greek peoples. However, Turkey did not build similar diplomatic relationships with Western European nations.

Loudcher and his associates analyze sport as an element in developing political relations between France and England, which have not always been friendly throughout history. Following in the traces of the formation of the Entente Cordiale, the authors begin the narrative with the visit of the Lord Mayor of London, Joseph Renals, to the XIII Bordeaux Fair, organized by the Philomathique Society in 1895. In this visit, besides all the commercial relations established, there was an emphasis on sporting events, which allows us to understand the role of sports diplomacy as a contribution to this alliance between the countries. In this respect, the visit of the Lord Mayor, supported by solid networks on both sides of the Channel, led to the creation of a British association Entente Cordiale which acted in favour of closer relations. Even if, in the aftermath, international events - in the field of both political and sporting relations - have transformed and made such relations tenser, the study of the visit of the Mayor and its effects on the Entente Cordiale highlights the conditions surrounding a diplomatic use of sport. Sport, in its broadest definition, was a very good vehicle for transcending politics and attaining a social level of interaction, an important element in this context. In summary, the authors point out that there is a fundamental distinction between sports diplomacy - the classic vision of sporting events as an element of state international cooperation - and diplomacy through sport - the real instrumental use of sport in a state's foreign policy - which can be better studied in history with the help of the relations pointed out in this article.

Chin-Fang and Hsien-Wei explore the influence of sports culture of martial arts from China to the Nanyang's immigrant societies through the bloodline propagation. Authors focus on the Chin Woo Athletic Federation, the first non-governmental sports organization in the Republic of China after the feudal monarchy. In the 1920s it began to expand its organizational territory to Southeastern Asia, reaching its peak in the 1930s. They analyze the dissemination of Wushu to Nanyang as part of the Republic of China strategy to counteract the rise of overseas Chinese nationalism. Authors explain how the Chinese immigrant nationalism was embodied, especially contextualizing the conflict between tradition and modernity in the early twentieth century. The results show that the bloodline dissemination of Chin Woo organizations was a clone mode, being the links among different Chin Woo Athletic Associations a kind of umbilical relationship network. The physical training and performance of the Chin Woo members was a manifestation of Southeastern Asia Chinese immigrant nationalism with Wushu as a historically relevant cultural element of it.

The role of sport in the first decade of Israel's independence is explored by Carmi, discussing the public criticism of the Harlem Globetrotters basketball team's 1955 visit to Israel and its challenge to Israeli sports leaders attempt of maintaining Zionist values tightly aligned with local sports and political interests. Debord's society of the spectacle theory is used to analyze the Israeli critique attitude, which extended beyond strictly sports criticism and reveals the zeitgeist of Israel during the first decade of independence and its prevalent attitudes toward body culture and sport.

Deschamps analyzes the representation of race, gender and culture of sport in a Japanese manga movie: *Kuroko no Basuke: Extra Game* (2017) using different disciplines from cultural history to media studies and gender studies. The work deconstructs Japanese sports mangas and their political dimension to focus on the role of these mangas, as global cultural artifacts, in shaping collective imaginations of masculinity from Japan to French audiences, via the United States. The author analyzes the representation of foreign and Japanese athletes in sports manga publications and studies the visual and textual language used in *Kuroko no Basuke: Extra Game* through the lens of race, gender and culture. He finds a sharp contrast between the representation of American and Japanese masculinities, as well as a deeply stereotyped view of the myth of the Black Athlete, and concludes the impact of these soft power cultural products (mangas) on global audiences, French in this case, focusing on the duel of ethos relayed through them, and the signifying representation of bodies and emotions.

Modern sport originated in the eighteenth century around British industrialization and the consolidation of the bourgeoisie. Most of the formal characteristics of modern sports can be clearly identified in England by that time. Allen Guttmann considered seven characteristics to define modern sport: secularism, equality, specialization, rationalization, bureaucracy, quantification, and quest for records.⁵ Given that the universalization of modern sport has taken place concurrently with the persistence based on local, regional and national physical culture, the sportization processes have occurred quite differently depending on the region of the world.⁶ Local research is fully necessary to address the unjustifiable lack of attention from sports historians to physical cultures in Asia, Africa, South America, the Middle East, and even part of Europe. Two noteworthy contributions help to fill the gap.

Medeiros, the winner of the 2021 ISHPES Gigliola Gori Award for young historians, focuses on the sportization process of rowing and swimming in the city of São Paulo (Brazil) during the first half of the twentieth century. Based on historical sources from the regatta's clubs and press material, she argues that the emergence of clubs and sports federations transformed the practices of rowing and swimming and turned them into proper sports. The adoption of new rules followed the standardization of sports equipment in the case of rowing, the regulation of the river Tietê crossing competitions in swimming, and the organization of aquatic Federations brought both sports closer to the global sporting practices. Even if the São Paulo aquatic practices gained sport features, they conflicted with local elements. The process of sportization, between the local and the global, was not achieved without obstacles, being the geographic peculiarities of the Tietê the most challenging element.

The historical significance of the Otto Herschmann's book, *Viennese Sport*, is the vehicle for addressing the political and social situation of sport in the central European metropolis of Vienna around 1900. Muellner focuses on the class-related sport practices and the importance of British sport diffusion inside the Habsburg societies. In Herschmann's pages, the author finds a unique document to explain the phase of constitution and differentiation of the cultural space of sport in Austria at the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. British sport was imported essentially imbued with a whole set of values, attitudes, and historical traditions belonging to the aristocratic ideology. Being sport an aristocratic phenomenon, the nineteenth century became the arena of the transition to a bourgeois

model of sport in Vienna. Muellner explores the differences between aristocratic sport, including horse racing and lawn tennis, the bourgeois sport, with strength activities and soccer, and the workers' sport, including gymnastics and mountaineering.

Sport in modern warfare is an under-attended research topic. Sport came for the first time to play a major role in armies during the First World War with betting, athletic challenges and sports competitions being commonly organized.⁷ The relationship between sport and war is clear with sport training the young for war throughout history and militarism being an essential element of sport.⁸ Even more, the construction of manliness, especially for the British, has been largely based on the use of sport.⁹ Taking this relationship into consideration, two of the contributions for this collection discuss the topic of sport and war.

Viuda-Serrano and Ibarondo-Merino explore the formation, development and significance of the Alpine Battalion to discuss the role of sportsmen in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). It is presented as an example of the leftist social and political organizations' efforts to help the Republican government fight the rightist, catholic and pro-fascist elements joint attempt to revert the progressive political changes to the old status quo in Spain. Authors state that Spanish politicized proletarians understood the civil war as a class-based conflict with sport as a distinctive key element of the working-class and managed to create battalions made up of sportsmen. Based on archival documents and press material, they present evidence of the Alpine Battalion's military relevance in the defense of Madrid but also of its sociocultural task with the creation of the expression means of the battalion, *Cumbres*, including literary products and sports, military tactics and political articles. Being sports and physical activity very important features of the battalion's identity, communist and socialist members joint, despite political tensions, and succeeded in providing a suitable environment for sport, culture, and political discussion among its soldiers in the midst of war.

Connected with war, Pabion analyzes the militarization of physical activities during the French Third Republic giving an insight into the development of sports in France during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth paying particular attention to the First World War. Military preparation, gymnastics and shooting were the leading activities and the number of training societies increased with the support of the republican government which designed official policies to develop military oriented activities. The main objective was to prepare young men for military service and war, but these societies fulfilled a social function by providing leisure activities for citizens even if the distinction between sports activities and militarized activities was not always clear.

The modern Olympic Games were designed as a vehicle for social change. Pierre de Coubertin strongly believed that sport could provide room for personal and moral development of young people. However, the pedagogical vision of Coubertin was a partial failure with politics being a core part of Olympism. The Olympic Games have been influenced by politics at individual, organizational, intra-national, and international levels. Kristine Toohey and Anthony J. Veal define six categories of political interference which appear to dominate the games:¹⁰ i) internal politics within the nation where the Olympics are being staged; ii) international rivalries, based on either political or ideological disputes, between nations with National Olympic Committees; iii) competitors have used the games

as a forum for political demonstrations against their national governments; iv) non-participants have used the games to further their political causes; v) nations with participation National Olympic Committees have attempted to equate Olympic success with their social, economic and political superiority; and vi) politics within the International Olympic Committee have impacted on Olympic policy.

In a perfect example of the use of National Olympic Committees for political reasons to ensure international influence to those in power, Pasko analyzes the attempts to take control over the Polish Olympic Committee by the Communists during the Stalinist period. Based on archival documents and press material, the author describes the historically relevant process of creation of a new Committee in 1950, connected with the dominant Polish United Workers' Party, to control sport in Poland. After having tried to use the Polish Olympic Committee in 1947-48 to convince the Polish people of the democratic form of the new government, authorities unsuccessfully managed to introduce new Polish members into the International Olympic Committee. The Communists took control of the Polish Committee by 1950 with the creation of a new committee leading by aligned officials. However, Communists did not manage to take full control of the Polish Olympic Committee until 1956, despite having tried to deprive Professor Jerzy Loth from his membership at the International Olympic Committee (IOC) at least four times, all of them rejected by the IOC. Loth resistance and courage is also fully analyzed by Pasko.

Olympic ceremonies have been defined as one of the major intercultural and cross-cultural phenomena in our contemporary world, a distinctive feature of the Olympic movement's identity and a revealing lens on the successes and failures of wider intercultural communication processes today.¹¹ The traditional ceremonies organized at the very beginning have turned into major, mass spectacles for the world's largest audiences. Alan Tomlinson described Olympic ceremonies as embodied some central paradoxes in the globalization process and stated that their study offers a revealing basis for the comprehension of the cultural expression of the persisting crises of modernity and globalization.¹² Olympic ceremonies are nowadays a perfect blend of visual and musical experience, representation of the Olympic values and symbols, and expression of the folklore, history and national character of the organizing city.

Scursatone and her colleagues study the role played by mass choreographies in Olympic ceremonies with particular focus on the Olympic Winter Games in Turin 2006, an important example in the search for a continuity of style with the past but also an influence for the subsequent Olympic ceremonies until today. The paper focuses on the two main choreographic spectacles for the 2006 Opening Ceremony directed by the American choreographer Doug Jack. Authors analyze languages, styles and possible influences in the light of the theory of dance to conclude that Turin 2006 introduced crucial substantial changes for the future but did not abandon the desire to seek the right amalgamation between the Olympic ritual and the artistic component.

The diversity and quality of the contributions included in this collection, as well as the variety of the authors' views and perspectives, underline the interdisciplinary approach of the historical studies on sport and provide an understanding of the relevance of international congresses to sports historians as sites of knowledge exchange and active

collaboration which encourage historical research and the quest for possible concomitances with other disciplines like sociology, education and especially politics.

Notes

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