

## AMBASSADORS AND ATHLETES: SPORT, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY IN THE 20TH CENTURY, A NEW APPROACH FROM SPORT HISTORY

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This special issue of the journal *Materiales para la Historia del Deporte* is focused on the study of international relations and sports from a historiographical perspective. One of its main objectives is to present readers with a collection of innovative research that initiates a transnational debate, focusing on themes that have not yet claimed the attention of specialists until now.

In recent years, there has been a noticeable exponential increase in the number of publications focusing on the study of intersections between sport, diplomacy and international relations. As an example of this trend, a search in early 2024 on the website of the prestigious journal in the history of sport, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, using descriptors such as ["sport diplomacy" OR "olympic diplomacy" OR "international relations"], yielded a total of 339 articles. Among these, 256 had been published in the period between 2010 and 2023 within this journal.

This international trend has also had a significant impact, albeit at a somewhat slower pace, on the Spanish context, and it can be affirmed that it is currently experiencing a period of considerable growth. This development was evident at the latest congress organized by the Asociación de Historia Contemporánea (AHC) in September 2023, where historians Santiago de Pablo Contreras and André Gounot coordinated a workshop on the history of sport, featuring thirteen presentations. Notably, six of these presentations were specifically focused on the history of sport and international relations. Nevertheless, it is still observable that there are very few researchers who have undertaken the study of this theme in a substantial portion of the countries in Southern and Eastern Europe, as well as in Latin America.

The ground-breaking works of authors such as Pierre Arnaud and James Riordan (1998), Martin Polley and his studies on the utilization of sports by the Foreign Office (1991), along with Riordan's collaboration with Arnd Krüger (1999) on the history of Soviet sports, and Peter Beck's publication (1999) titled *Scoring for Britain: International Football and International Politics, 1900-1939*, have been instrumental in shaping the framework since the early nineties within which a diverse array of research has unfolded throughout the 21st century. Concerning Arnaud and Riordan's mentioned work, it is worth noting that this publication was the culmination of results from various seminars in which, at the end of the 1990s, a group of the most prominent international sports historians participated. From this book, shortly thereafter, a French edition (Arnaud and Riordan 1998) and a Spanish edition (González Aja 2002) emerged. The latter was edited by the emeritus professor Teresa González Aja and is a key work for understanding the dissemination that historiographical studies on sports, politics, and international relations have achieved in recent decades, both in Spain and Latin America.

While this text does not aim to conduct an exhaustive analysis of the myriad publications addressing the intersections between sports and international relations in recent decades, it is essential to highlight some of the texts that have played a pivotal role in redefining this thematic area of study.

For this reason, it is essential to highlight the influence that the research of authors such as Roger Levermore and Adrian Budd (2004), Barbara Keys (2006), Stephen Wagg and David L. Andrews (2007), or Robert Edelman (2009) has had on contemporary sports historians. Building upon these foundations, subsequent works of significant interest have emerged, such as the volume edited by Heather L. Dichter and Andrew L. Johns (2014), *Diplomatic Games: Sport, Statecraft, and International Relations since 1945*, the book specifically focused on football and international relations, also coordinated by Dichter (2020), as well as the monograph by Philippe Vonnard, Nicola Sbeti, and Grégory Quin analyzing the Cold War period in Europe (2018), and the latest work by Sylvain Dufraisse (2023), which similarly focuses on this historical period and includes a detailed analysis of the significant role played by sports as a diplomatic tool for communist countries. Similarly, one cannot overlook the positive influence of research that has emerged in other areas of study, such as political science and international relations, through the contributions of scholars like Aaron Beacom (2012), Simon Rofe (2018), and Stuart Murray (2018).

The twelve articles comprising this special issue aim to invite readers to question and engage in discussions on aspects of significant historiographical relevance. These include, for example, the importance of using major sporting events beyond the Olympics as instruments of international relations; the role of sports officials as new diplomatic actors; moving away from a Eurocentric perspective to explore views from different geographic realities, and the incorporation of new study themes on sports and international relations in totalitarian contexts such as Francoism.

In this manner, the articles by André Gounot and Iker Ibarrondo delve into the diplomatic significance of the creation of the Euzkadi national football team during the Spanish Civil War and its tour of friendly matches across Europe and Latin America. Gounot's research focuses on analyzing the support that this team of Basque players received from political authorities in both Mexico and Cuba, serving as a symbol of the Republican Spain amidst the context of armed conflict. His study explores the sojourn of the Basque team in these countries and the endorsement that both nations expressed for the Spanish Republic through the official and public diplomacy of their respective governments. In contrast, Ibarrondo's article centers on describing what could be termed the paradiplomacy of the Basque Country and the sports-diplomatic campaign that unfolded during the Euzkadi team's tour. The author presents an intriguing thesis, identifying this team as one of the instruments that shaped a specifically Basque diplomacy, which, alongside its support for the Republic, aimed to reaffirm its identity.

Next, we can highlight three articles that, from different perspectives and themes, delve into the study of sports and international relations during the Franco regime. In the first of these, Ramiro Cabañes analyzes, using significant primary sources such as documentation produced by the Spanish Consulate in Shanghai, the development of industrial frontons in China and the role of Basque emigration in promoting this mass spectacle in the 1940s. Basque pelotaris quickly became one of the most representative groups of the Spanish colony in Shanghai. Cabañes examines the labor conflict that arises during this period among the pelotaris and its connection to the confrontation between the Falangist entrepreneur Teodoro Jáuregui and the consulate representatives, as well as the attempts to control the organization of the Falange in China.

Similarly, both the text by Josep Andreu Bosch and José Ricardo March and the research by Pere Fullana and Alejandro Mario Diéguez focus on the use of football as an instrument of international relations during the Franco regime. The first of these works examines the significance of the visits that the Valencia CF football team made to Mexico in the first half of the 1960s, a country with which Spain had no diplomatic relations since the end of the Spanish Civil War. An intriguing aspect of this research is the study of the role played by the Spanish colony in Mexico, particularly the Valencian Republicans exiled in this country. Likewise, Fullana and Diéguez explain in their article the diplomatic implications of the audience granted by Pope Pius XII to the Athletic Club,

and the subsequent tribute to the pontiff held at the San Mamés stadium in May 1958. Examining these events allows for a debate on the instrumentalization of this club by Francoism and the Catholic Church, as well as its role within a broader foreign policy strategy.

As mentioned earlier, one of the most innovative aspects of this special issue is the inclusion of research that goes beyond the Spanish case. In this regard, Livia Gonçalves focuses her work on the biography of João Havelange and his tenure as the president of the Brazilian Sports Confederation (CBD) and FIFA. This researcher delves into the study of Havelange as a diplomatic actor and transformer of football and sports in the 20th century. She also attempts to address darker aspects of his biography, such as his relationship with international political and economic spheres or his role as a proponent of a neoliberal model in the management of international federations. Similarly, Lorenzo Venuti, a specialist in the history of Hungarian sports from the 1920s to the late 1960s, outlines the cultural diplomacy strategy that the People's Republic of Hungary developed from the late 1950s in some African countries that had recently gained independence. The prestige of Hungarian football became the ideal calling card for the country in Africa, but its diplomatic action through sports showed significant weaknesses in planning and organization, limited economic capacity, and strong disagreements between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Hungarian Council for Physical Education and Sports (MTST). Venuti explores how countries beyond the Iron Curtain, beyond the Soviet Union, used sports as a tool to gain influence in the array of African countries emerging from the decolonization process.

Likewise, Javier González del Castillo makes an innovative contribution focused on the use of football by the Islamic Republic of Iran as a means to strengthen its presence in Latin America. The organization of friendly matches and international tournaments since the late 20th century, involving the Iranian national football team and other countries such as Venezuela, Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia, Panama, or Costa Rica, has become a diplomatic tool for various Iranian governments in their efforts to gain prominence in this region, break their isolation, and establish a discourse of international legitimacy.

The Latin American context, particularly in Mexico, also geographically delimits the papers by Alejandro Avendaño and by Omar Gerardo Chanocua and Andrea Torrealba. Avendaño's study of the Formula 1 Grand Prix events held in Mexico from the 1960s to the early decades of the 21st century allows for an interesting exploration of the historical circumstances of different historical periods in which this competition is situated. Simultaneously, it relates them to sports diplomacy and the role that hosting this international event has played in promoting the construction of a national project. In contrast, the article by Gerardo Chanocua and Torrealba focuses on a much more specific case: the visits of athletes from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to the Autonomous University of Mexico in the second half of the 1970s. The arrival of these GDR athlete and coach delegations at the University of Mexico was embedded within the context of diplomatic relations in the Cold War. Their study incorporates new actors and elements that have been scarcely analyzed from an international relations perspective, such as university sports. Through the examination of these visits, the authors delve into the characteristics defining the relations between Mexico and the GDR during these years and the specific role played by culture and sports through university institutions.

The research conducted by Zineb Belmaati and Pascal Charitas meticulously examines the geopolitical backdrop within which the inception of the Mediterranean Games project unfolded. This initiative was originally proposed by Mohamed Taher Pacha, a member of the Egyptian Olympic Committee, in 1947. The chronological placement of this venture coincided with a period marked by the widespread proliferation of Regional Games across diverse corners of the globe, encompassing events such as the Asian Games, Pan American Games, and Central American Games, among others. The genesis of this colossal sporting event, coupled with the establishment of new national Olympic committees in African nations gradually attaining independence, brought to the forefront the diplomatic and political conflicts existing between Israel and Arab countries during the 1950s. Belmaati and Charitas adeptly elucidate in their discourse the significance embedded in the establishment of the International Committee of the Mediterranean Games (CIJM) in 1961.

This strategic move was positioned as a preventive measure, aimed at mitigating the potential competition posed by this event against the Olympic Games. Presiding over the CIJM was Gabriel Gemayel, a distinguished member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), who emerged as a pivotal diplomatic figure endeavoring to maintain equilibrium amidst the intertwined interests of political and sporting dimensions within the Mediterranean basin countries.

Finally, Juan Antonio Simón, Laura Gostian, and Eva Asensio present in their research a study on the diplomatic relations that unfolded between North Korea and South Korea in the context of the 2018 Winter Olympics held in the city of Pyeongchang. Through a comprehensive analysis of information gleaned from some of the major Spanish, French, and English newspapers, these researchers have delineated the prevailing discourses and stances adopted by respective European media outlets regarding the diplomatic relations between the two countries during the 2018 Games. In doing so, they have sought to scrutinize the significance of the media as a player within international relations, capable of exerting influence through its positions and attitudes in the diplomatic arena and shaping national and international public opinion.

This special issue of the journal *Materiales para la Historia del Deporte* aims to continue contributing to the development of studies on the history of sports and international relations. It seeks to provide new analytical perspectives from various territories, utilizing fresh primary sources, and incorporating previously overlooked actors that had not been the focal point of research in recent years. In essence, this monographic issue adds to a more intricate and diverse understanding of the relationship between sports and diplomacy, shedding light on themes that may have been forgotten while simultaneously inspiring and encouraging new proposals, approaches, and debates.

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