

The Birth of the sport nation: sports and mass media in Fascist Italy

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Summary. A repeated object of historiographic investigation, the instrumental relationship between fascism and mass media continues to spark particular interest, especially with the involvement of a third element: the sporting event. This article proposes a «triangular» view of fascism, mass media and sport. It clarifies, on one side, the role of the press and the radio within the fascist politics of promotion and diffusion of the sport-spectacle as an instrument of propaganda within the fascist machine of consensus, and, on the other, the role of sports news in favoring the development, both qualitative and quantitative, of these means of mass communication. In addition to the existing bibliography on the history of sports and mass media during the years of the regime, this topic will be investigated with regards to propaganda during the same period.

Keywords: fascism; sports; journalism; radio; Italy

El naixement de la nació esportiva: Els esports i els mitjans de comunicació a la Itàlia feixista

Resum. Objecte freqüent d'investigacions historiogràfiques, la relació instrumental entre el feixisme i els mitjans de comunicació continua encenent un interès particular, sobretot amb la implicació d'un tercer element: l'esdeveniment esportiu. Aquest article proposa una visió «triangular» del feixisme, els mitjans de comunicació i l'esport. Clarifica, d'un banda, el paper de la premsa i la ràdio dins les polítiques feixistes de promoció i difusió de l'espectacle esportiu com a instrument de propaganda en la maquinària feixista del consens i, de l'altra, el paper de les notícies esportives a l'hora d'afavorir el desenvolupament, tant qualitatiu com quantitatiu, d'aquests mitjans de comunicació de masses. A més de la bibliografia existent sobre la història de l'esport i els mitjans de comunicació durant els anys del règim, s'investiga aquest tema pel que fa a la propaganda durant aquest mateix període.

Paraules clau: feixisme; esports; periodisme; ràdio; Itàlia

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Introduction and objectives

There is no longer need for a demiurgic vision of fascism as the creator of sports in Italy; it is undeniable that there remains a crucial relationship between the fascist regime and sports, which is crucial to understanding Italian social history in the twentieth century. In order to demonstrate that the role of sports in Italy reached an epic turning point during the fascist years, one must look at just a few pieces of numeric data. One in particular deals with the development of football under fascism. Football societies, numbering 1,040 in 1922, grew to 1,276 in 1925, and 2,539 in 1939, while their membership went from 15,420 to 50,455 (Papa & Panico, 1993). At the end of the 20's, 83 of the 94 provincial capitals had their own football teams (Papa & Panico, 1993).

The regime undertook the effort of spreading the practice of sports among the masses, which began with a penetration of sports education in all levels of schooling from 1926 and through the 1930's, and which exalted the recreational and educational functions of physical activity. Parallel to this process, fascism was dedicated to promoting the affirmation of the sport-spectacle as an instrument for consolidating consensus, intervening in a process that began automatically in the first years after the war. For example, the 67 football teams that had contended for the title in 1919 grew to 88 in just two years (Papa & Panico, 1993). The regime understood right away that the sport-spectacle, even more so than that practiced in free time, worked at distracting Italians from political interests, keeping them far from every possible idea of opposing the regime (De Grazia, 1981). In fact, the regime's plan backfired, as the «championism» of the sport-spectacle exalted the individual at the expense of group sentiment. Italians ended up preferring the sport-spectacle over the «sport for everyone».

Fascism, rather than withdraw at this apparent defeat, decided to seize the opportunity. The successes of these sports champions allowed the regime to look beyond certain ideological resistances and not let this occasion for creating propaganda and gathering consensus slide. For this reason, from 1926 and most importantly during the beginning of the 1930's, fascism seized every opportunity that it could to involve the masses in the spectacle of sports, which began with a (re)construction of stadiums that could seat tens of thousands of spectators united in their passions, on a national level. It is in this light that the potential of sports for the distribution of information was reached. The fascist regime was able to take full advantage of available instruments of propaganda for perfecting the nationalization of the country, choosing to make the sport-spectacle a privileged channel of transmission. It is noteworthy that in Italy the history of sports and of mass media developed in parallel, from the end of the 19th century, along a strongly intertwined path. The most resounding example is that which ties the first Italian sports newspaper, the *Gazzetta dello Sport*, to the

Giro d'Italia, the national cycling race disputed for the first time in 1909 as an initiative by the aforementioned newspaper.

However, what occurred during the years of the regime goes well beyond these early links and must be read in the light of a dictatorial regime in constant and desperate search of support.

This article proposes a «triangular» view of fascism, mass media and sport. It clarifies, on one side, the role of the press and the radio within the fascist politics of promotion and diffusion of the sport-spectacle as an instrument of propaganda within the fascist machine of consensus, and, on the other, the role of sports news in favoring the development, both qualitative and quantitative, of these means of mass communication.

In addition to the existing biography on the history of sports and mass media during the years of the regime, this topic will be investigated with reference to propaganda during the same period. In particular, I will examine *Lo sport fascista*, a magazine founded in 1928 and directed by Lando Ferretti. This magazine—which has been little studied—quickly became the official «voice» of the regime and it illuminates the official position of fascism on numerous aspects of its relationship with the sport phenomenon, beginning with the management of sports information.

The development of sports journalism in the fascist years

As fascism was rising to power in 1922, newspapers represented the most widespread means for disseminating information in Italy, while at the same time it is difficult to speak of a complete system of mass communication. If it is true that a political rationale of control of the means of communication represents an area of mandatory governmental interference in every dictatorial regime, it is also true that, in the Italian case, his experience in journalism made Mussolini particularly sensitive to the importance of media as an instrument through which he could make himself known to the nation and the world. This can be understood as a true «journalistic revolution», which was put in act by the regime (Allotti, 2012).

This can be described as an act of encirclement which was carried out along two directives: on one side, it was a purely repressive act, focused on subjecting all printed materials to fascist control. A series of actions was undertaken with the sole goal of suppressing the freedom of the press, which until that moment had been recognized and protected by the Albertine Statute. In July 1923, a decree was sent out that gave prefects the discretionary power to close any newspapers they thought dangerous to the interests of the nation (Regio Decreto-legge n. 3288 del 15 luglio 1923); which was then reinstated and widened in July 1924 (Regio Decreto-legge n. 1081 del 10 luglio 1924). In December 1925, in the light of the fascist laws, a new norm permanently abolished freedom of the press (Legge n. 2307 del 31 dicembre 1925). Meanwhile, in

1924 the national union of fascist newspapers was created, and in 1928 the professional registry was created. Luigi Albertini and Alfredo Frassati, directors of the *Corriere della Sera* and the *Stampa*, respectively, were the first «victims» of these freedom-destroying laws (Allotti, 2012).

Yet the regime did not stop at the repressive phase. It was necessary to mold public opinion through an action of control and direction of the content spread through mass communication. Following the act of repression was the insertion of the press within the fascist machine that organized public consensus, which was in some respects more complex and modern. Taking this direction, in 1924 Mussolini assured himself the control of the Agenzia Stefani, nominating as president and delegate administrator his most faithful Manlio Morgagni. However, the press office of *Duce*, directed initially by Giovanni Capasso Torre, was the true instrument of control of journalistic information: from this place came all the directives for the newspapers, the so-called «veline». In order to show the importance of the regime to this office, in 1928, Lando Ferretti (president of *Coni* from 1925 to 1928 and substituted in 1933 by Galeazzo Ciano) was called to direct it. In 1934, the Office of the Press was transformed into the Undersecretary of the Press and Propaganda (Regio Decreto n. 1434). In 1935, it became Ministry of the Press and Propaganda (Regio Decreto n. 1099), and finally in 1937, it became the Ministry of Popular Culture in 1937 (Regio Decreto n. 752).

With the institutionalization of the system of the «veline», the regime thus passed from the passive phase to the active phase of the control of printed materials (Tranfaglia, 2005). The first orders to the press can be traced back to 1924. Most importantly, from 1926 and throughout the 1930's, this method of direction and of orientation became more generalized, until it became one of the principal instruments of the «construction of consensus».

It is in this organized sense that the role of sports news in the years of the regime must be taken into consideration.

The origin of sports news in Italy can be traced back to the last decades of the 19th century, when the first periodical publications reserved for the most fashionable disciplines of the moment were released (Facchinetti, 1966; Ghirelli, 1976). Even following the Great War, there were only 14 sports associations, while in national newspapers, sports were relegated to the fourth and last page, next to the weather and cultural news, in a context that was still dominated by topics tied to the consequences of the just-finished conflicts. From that moment, however, the development of sports news accelerated in a surprising way. In 1919, 10 new associations were born, and sports in newspapers began to occupy an entire column, thanks to the driving force of the Italians' Olympic success in Antwerp in 1920. From 1919 to 1922, there were 34 new associations. At the end of 1924 45 new associations offered the following publications: 21 weekly, 15

monthly, three tri-weekly, two bi-weekly, one quarterly, one bi-monthly, one daily and one with irregular releases (Facchinetti, 1966; Grozio, 2009).

In light of the development already underway, the years of the regime saw an even more marked affirmation of sports press. At the moment of fascism's rise to power, in Italy there was only one published sports newspaper, the *Gazzetta dello Sport*, founded in Milan in 1896. It was released biweekly, but became a daily newspaper in 1913. It was in 1922, with the rise of fascism, that the direction of the *Gazzetta dello Sport* passed to Emilio Colombo. At that time, the administrative management went to a new editing society under the direction of DeVerzoni, a lawyer from Biella. The fascists in any case succeeded in taking possession of the company, placing the board of directors in the hands of a group of hierarchs with Arnaldo Mussolini as their head. They also temporarily substituted Emilio Colombo with Lando Ferretti, a representative of the field of sports, who then left his post to Colombo in 1924 (Ghirelli, 1976). At the fall of the regime, there were two sports newspapers: in 1924 the *Corriere dello Sport* was born, at first triweekly, then daily in 1927 with the name of *Il Littoriale*, and *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, which already existed before fascism. The newspaper, under the guidance of Leandro Arpinati, became the regime's official «voice» for sports, privileging minor sports and publishing heated debates about female sports and sport jargon (Fabrizio, 1976; Grozio, 2009). However, in the fascist era, above all, sports periodicals thrived; such as the *Guerin Sportivo* and *Il Calcio illustrato* (Murialdi, 1986). Others that were founded in the years of the regime showed their clear intent of propaganda: *La Palestra Fascista*, *Gran Sport*, *Milizia e Sport*, *Sport Fascista* (directed by Lando Ferretti), *Lo sport littorio*, *L'illustrazione sportiva italiana*. Between 1924 and 1934, 129 new publishing companies were founded, including 73 between 1925 and 1928 and another 44 between 1932 and 1934, after a relatively static period (only 12 new companies) in the three years from 1929 and 1931 (Facchinetti, 1966). At the same time, the space dedicated to sports within daily newspapers was growing. The apex of this growth occurred in 1936, which was dedicated to the news of the Olympics in Berlin. From that moment, first the campaign for Ethiopia and then the approach of the war, progressively reduced the space for sports news. From 1936 to 1943 there were only 14 new companies, while 51 had closed (Grozio, 2009).

The quantitative data, in any case, although important, do not sufficiently do justice to the turning point of sports press during the fascist era. One can cite many new qualitative characteristics, along with the growth of the number of companies and space dedicated to sports in the daily press: specialization within disciplines, diffusion of local sports press, diffusion of companies that united sports to world issues and current events, large headlines at times underlined in red and blue, the spread of the use of photos, but also of drawings and caricatures (Facchinetti, 1966). Through-

out its evolutionary process, the sports press ended up serving as a pioneer, anticipating tendencies that, in most cases, the political and informative press used only in the years following the war.

This quick descriptive frame seems to confirm the idea of a regime that moved forward with the conscious intent of strengthening the value of the sports press to make of it an instrument for spreading the sport-spectacle and taking advantage of its potential in terms of consolidating consensus. Lando Ferretti's June 1928 editorial for *Lo Sport Fascista* – one of the most relevant sport-journalistic creations of the regime – illustrated well the task assigned to the sports press by the regime. The task of sports press – it explained – was that of offering a «non-fleeting documentation of what Fascism had created, and was creating, in the field of sports: a non-ephemeral documentation that speaks to people of the past, of today, and of generations to come» (Programma, 1928, June, pp. 3-4). This work of «documentation» began with the exaltation of Mussolini as the «prime athlete of Italy» (Ferretti, 1933, January, pp.1-3), and passed through the enthusiastic account of the sports exploits that seemed to lend themselves perfectly to the mission of spreading the image of a fascist Italy which was modern and victorious.

Validating and confirming the intuitions of the regime regarding the instrumental power of the sport-spectacle was the hold that the topic of sports held on its younger readers: «the soul of these readers – written in *Lo Sport Fascista* – is like a clay ball that the artist's thumb is to model. In fact, they are the pupils for which the newspaper must act as a teacher. The educative influence of the newspapers that land in the hands of young people is universally known» (La stampa sportiva, 1929, July, pp. 110-111). After a first and brief phase of relative disinterest, thus, fascism recognized the important role that sports journalism played within the propaganda machine of the regime, thus giving them the task, according to the world of the secretary of the *Coni* Enrico Beretta, of «cooperating with seriousness and passion for the moralization of sports» (Grozio, 2009). The regime's insertion of the sports press into the politics of control institutionalized and generalized the system of the «veline» to the press. Relatively few during the 1920's, the «veline» with a sports theme grew as the others did, from the beginning of the 1930's. The orders for the press were to emphasize the news that could in some way exalt the sporting endeavors of fascist Italy («It has been recommended to the newspapers to prepare greatly for the *Coppa delle Mille Miglia*», March 31, 1932; «It has been recommended to the newspapers to pay more attention to the automobile and motorcycle gathering», March 31, 1932; «Count Ciano has complained that the newspapers weren't able to put the victory of Carnera in a good light [...]», October 24, 1933; «Starting from today, to put as much emphasis as possible on the football championship, dedicating part of this to the first page, in order to catch the public's attention and interest in

the matches of the championship», May 29, 1934) (Tranfaglia, 2005); and to avoid, on the other hand, those potentially able to obfuscate the victorious image of the regime («Do not publish photographs of Carnera on the ground», June 28, 1935). Under this pressure, as one can see, the space dedicated to sports in newspapers grew rapidly, both in the morning and evening editions. A directive to give value to sports on the printed page initially generated hesitation among newspapers, which feared losing more traditional and older readers. However, after this initial reaction, the directors of the principal journalistic associations seemed to bend willingly, since it was evident that sports contributed in growing the circulation of the newspapers (Murialdi, 1986).

In any case, the sports newspapers and sports pages within national newspapers give the impression of a regime that intervened rather little in the transmission of sports news, and this impression seems confirmed by the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the sports «veline». This would seem to confirm the idea according to which sports journalism enjoyed more freedom of expression, or in any case, was less controlled, with respect to political or daily news. Everything was a part, in some way, of political journalism. At least in the beginning, fascism expected a complete fascist transformation of the most political aspects of the society, reserving a more gradual and bland control to the «cultural» sphere: «taking away the most political questions and the others that are fundamental to the Revolution – affirmed Mussolini in his speech to the directors of the daily newspapers in October 1928 – critics can freely work in all other aspects» (La stampa sportiva e il Regime, 1928, October, pp. 1-2).

However, the impression is that, when discussing sports journalism, the idea is much more complex, and should be investigated paying close attention to the peculiarity of the phenomenon of sports as sociocultural. It was as if, once sports were given value, and following their spread through the media, the organizational machine of fascism had moved to the side, allowing the success of sports to speak for itself. One could say that the sports journalist who wanted to avoid getting stuck in the patchwork of the repressive directives of the regime was confronted with an easier task than his colleagues: he certainly did not have to work very creatively to invent victories, successes and champions. Italian sports succeeded by themselves to produce generously and abundantly throughout the course of the fascist era. Two world titles in football, glorious Olympic medals, and exalted adventures in cycling and automobile racing spoke for themselves. At this point, knowing how to exalt and amplify the material that already existed was enough. By avoiding giving too much credit to foreign victories and simply doing his job, the sports journalist would become the perfect instrument in the hands of the propaganda machine of the regime. A «consensus» effect, probably exaggerated by the perception of this limited servility

that it left to sports – at least in appearance – an aura of a utopia – non fascist, and belonging to everyone.

Behind this appearance a much less linear reality is hidden. While the sports press celebrated the victories of fascist Italy, it was, at the same time, affected by internal problems that are easy to notice if we analyze the internal debates of those months. Such debates should be seen in light of a sports journalist in search of legitimization. Up until that moment sports journalism had been barely recognized: the collective idea was that the sports journalist was a low-quality journalist or an amateur prone to improvisation. The battle for the legitimization of the sports press intertwined itself with other problems posed by the process of the fascist transformation of the press itself. Again it was *Lo Sport Fascista* that welcomed a debate that touched on openly polemical and critical tones regarding political journalism of the regime, which were more deserving of notice if one considers its origin as one of the official sports «voices» of the regime. This debate was probably hiding an extreme attempt to save that «freedom» that sports journalism, beyond the Duce's proclaims of propaganda, must have felt often and more progressively threatened. A battle for «sincerity and seriousness» brought the right of the journalist to criticize, if necessary, athletes with dubious talent, as seen in examples such as the following: «just as Mussolini said that the «membership card doesn't give intelligence to he who does not possess it» you can be sure that neither does it give records to the athlete that does not know how to reach them»), «papier-mâché kings» who were too often praised as having an «elementary level rhetoric», by a «late "Barzinism" that can make the pair with his backdated cards» (*La stampa sportiva e il Regime*, 1928, October, pp. 1-2).

In a series of publications between June and July 1929, *Lo Sport Fascista* brought forward a battle against the «political prejudice that the command posts have to trust exclusively the most loyal black shirts». The «tried and documented loyalty of membership» did not seem to guarantee those «technical prerequisites and that "sixth sense" that distinguishes a genuine sports journalist from the one who makes do or the one who finds a good opportunity». With the disadvantage of «composure and measure in eloquence» in the majority of sports news «hyperbole, verbose rhetoric, ungrammatical emphasis» seemed prevalent as did «swollen and huge praise» towards «men of sports, that have strong muscles but not much intellect». Against «the Magnificent Flyers, the Superb Athletes, the prestigious Champion, the insuperable Idle» and other hyperboles reserved to the heroes of the press, the magazine evoked a sports journalism that knew how to capitalize on the heroism of the «true» athletes, of the «typical Italian» (*Stampa sportiva*, 1929, June, p. 133). The sports press, thus, would have revealed all of its shortcomings, demonstrating its non-comprehension of the delicate mission with which it had been entrusted. If, against what Vittorio Varale had defined as a «physical illiteracy», no less dangerous than edu-

cational illiteracy, fascism had the merit of defining sports as a «problem of the State» (Varale, 1929, June, pp.1-6). Sports press, on the contrary, risked transmitting a «terribly antifascist» idea of «sports for sports» that contrasted with the athletic message of the regime, cutting itself off from the national reality «with the excuse of technicality and the news report» (*La stampa sportiva*, 1929, July, pp. 110-111). This kind of sports press was lacking in such a way that the educative mission became even more necessary given its diffusion amongst young people.

It is not by chance that, in these same months, the magazine directed by Lando Ferretti emphasized a critical position on another theme that appears central in the business of sports journalism during the fascist years. As with journalism in general, even sports journalism became fully involved with the battle for linguistic autarchy promoted by the regime against the «barbarous dominion» of foreign words. The fact is that it couldn't have been any other way, if you consider sports jargon may have been invaded more than others by foreign terminology, above all for more modern sports typically «imported», as in football. In the case of football (*calcio* in Italian), then, the Italianization of the language strongly desired by fascism in the light of a more nationalist language, bordered on condemning a linguistic invasion that would have violated the original Italian-ness (whether real or presumed) of the game of football (it is not by chance that the regime recovered the antique «historical» Florentine football, retracing the roots of the modern game of football to medieval traditions; Martin, 2006).

In 1929, the Journalist Union promoted the compilation of a «sports dictionary» in order to eliminate the use of «foreign and barbarous terms not necessary and not comprehensible to the public». *Lo Sport Fascista*, aligning itself principally with a battle that it claimed to be just and necessary, did not fail in raising the fear that the operation, promoted by certain people oblivious to sports culture, could be counterproductive and contradictory. For this reason it was suggested that an «authentic athlete» «not lacking culture and good sense» be present in the committee charged with redirecting the dictionary (*Il dizionario degli sportivi*, 1929, December, p. 96). These fears, in fact, were not unfounded: the battle for the language ended up in producing, above all in the field of sports, quite comical results. In 1933, the collection of the rubric kept by Paolo Monelli was published in the *Gazzetta del Popolo*, in which every day a new «case» of linguistic substitution was presented. Yet, even those who had waged the battle in some cases had to recognize the difficulty of Italianizing terms that had already entered into common use. This was the case, for example, of the word «dribbling», substituted by the Italian «scartare», but – it had to be admitted – «in order to indicate the movement itself, the deprecated word dribbling remains; its use, however, is restricted only to this case, and will have a limited influence, if any, on the purity of the language» (Monelli, 1933, pp.110-111).

Internal debates of sports journalism testify to a animated atmosphere and reveal that sports journalists were anything but flatly aligned with the political journalism of the regime. Still, these facts do not take away from the reality of a sports press that undeniably had the advantage of being aligned with the politics of the regime that had foreseen the press as one of the most essential instruments for the construction of the sports nation. The quantitative data reported beforehand support this claim.

Sports and the radio

If, as we have seen, the press represented, during fascism's rise to power, the most diffused means of mass communication, it remained, however, an elite instrument. In a country in which, at the beginning of the 1920's, the percentage of illiteracy was over 30% for men and closer to 40% for women, and in which the level of urbanization was still low, it was natural that the messages of the press reached only a relatively slim portion of the population (Forno, 2005). Fascism, aware of these limits, turned its attention to other instruments of the spread of information.

Even more than in the case of sports and printed material, it is maybe within radio and sports that the ties between the sports politics of the regime and the means of mass communication appear most evident (Monteleone, 1999).

As it has been affirmed, the birth of the sports nation most likely would not have been possible without the presence of the radio (Papa & Panico, 2002). It was the passionate Sunday radio news stations that promoted sport among Italians, transforming it into a show and making it enter «even in houses where there was barely enough bread» (Bosco, 1991, p.11). After the launch of the radio, sports crossed the borders of the pages of the specialized press and thus entered definitively the daily life of Italians.

Broadcasting was born in Italy in 1924 with the foundation of URI (*Unione Radiofonica Italia* – Radio Union of Italy), which became EIAR (*Ente Italiano Audizioni Radiofoniche* – Italian Entity of Radio Auditions) in 1927. In 1926 there were about 27,000 subscribers to URI, which grew to 61,500 in 1928 and over 1000,000 in 1929. After the initial difficulties tied to the high cost of radios and the mandate to pay an annual subscription fee, in the 1930's there was a true boom for the radio, thanks in addition to fascist politics of diffusion of the radio. In 1933 the regime created the «Rural radio entity», with the task of distributing radios to schools in the countryside; in 1937, with the «radio balilla» program, radios were being offered for 430 lire payable in 18 monthly payments (Cannistraro, 1975). From 1930 to 1931 the hours of transmission grew from 17,776 to 29,875; the 176,332 subscribers from 1930 became 438,733 in 1934, and over one million in 1940.

Already in 1926, just two years after the beginning of radio broadcasts, the Milan station began to intro-

duce the first sports results, still «timidly inserting them in a strongly cultural schedule that privileged lectures, classical and symphonic music and theater» (Grozio, 2009, p. 192). 1927 was the year of broadcasts running «at the same time» as sporting events, in which the results of the events were communicated while they were occurring (Papa, 1978).

Another year passed before the first radio news sports transmission was broadcasted: Italy vs. Hungary 4-3 by Giuseppe Sabelli Fioretti and Enrico Sergentini on March 25, 1928. From that moment, radio news became part of the radio show schedules, thanks to the experimentation introduced by sports programs. Only two years later the new radio genre would be released from the stadiums to arrive in the squares.

I maintain that the success of radio sports news had a key role in convincing fascism – which was not fully aware of the value of the radio as a means of propaganda – of the efficiency of this new means of communication as an instrument for news, and thus, of the necessity of strengthening it and taking advantage of it as much as possible. If the technicians of the EIAR had succeeded in obtaining good results with the broadcast of sports news from noisy and chaotic stadiums, why not apply these same techniques to the crowds singing the praise of Mussolini during fascist assemblies?

Meanwhile, the popularity of radio sports news was steadily growing. In 1928 the boxing match for the Italian title between middleweights Bosisio and Jacovacci from Flaminio Stadium, the Italian rowing championships and the III Grand Prix of Europe were broadcasted. Following the transmission of every sporting event satisfied listeners sent letters to *Radio-rario* – the first Italian magazine dedicated to radio programs – which expressed their «stupefied wonder» at the sensation «of not being next to their radios, but on the field» (*La trasmissione dei campionati italiani di canottaggio*, 1928, July 15).

Radio football news, at the same time, continued to be limited to international matches, because of the prohibitions posed by the FIGS to the diffusion of the championship games, in the fear that it could keep fans from coming to the stadiums. Only a few years later the great success of radio sports news encouraged the EIAR to pressure the *Federcalcio* and get rid of the resistance to this new means of communication. In 1933 the football clubs finally allowed the broadcasting of the entire second half of a championship game of *Serie A*, with the choice of the game kept a secret until the last minute. The news of the second half concluded with the reading of the results from other matches, leaving the listeners in suspense through long, interminable pauses.

The bond between radio and sports revealed itself to be symbiotic, with the former guaranteeing the latter an audience that it would have hardly reached, and with the latter being able to exercise a capacity of attracting a greater audience than any other kind of spectacle. A 1930 survey indicated sports broadcasts

ranked second for listeners of «talk» radio (music, in its various genres, dominated the praises and tastes of the listeners), directly following religious conversations (Referendum. Il programma ideale per le giornate festive, 1930). Since the radio was still too expensive for the majority of Italian families, listening in public places was more common (such as bars or political centers) because they had large radios and became theaters of interminable discussion among fans. This radio-sports bond succeeded in changing the habits of Italians indefinitely, in particular on Sundays, with the morning still dedicated to religious rituals, but with the afternoon monopolized by new, pagan, sports rituals.

The popularity of radio news extended right away to the voices that spoke about sports endeavors. Yet, being a sports radio announcer was not the easiest profession, because of the precarious technological (and at times purely atmospheric) conditions in which the first radio announcers found themselves. The location of the football announcers, at the beginning along the side lines, presented the first of a series of inconveniences: the view of the game was compromised and the shouts of the fans and the athletes often interfered with the voice of the announcer, forcing him to get closer to the microphone, which damaged the quality of the sound. In order to facilitate the work of the announcers, and at the same time the public, they developed the habit of dividing the playing field into a grid of 24 zones with alphabetic and numeric codes that were reproduced in maps inserted in *Radiorario*, or distributed by kiosks, so that the listener could follow the announcer on the map, knowing where the ball or the action was at all moments. The solution of the grid – «rather complex and ridiculous, vaguely military» (Isola, 1990, p.180) – risked compromising, more than anything, with its impersonal technicalities, the poetic mark of radio news, and thus was quickly abandoned in favor of the evocative abilities of the radio announcer, on which the task of creating an «event-like climate» fell, as he captured listeners' attention by stimulating the imagination.

Nicolò Carosio, a true father of radio sports announcing, distinguished himself at this task. After a stay in London where he listened to the Arsenal coach Champan on the BBC news, back in Italy he began to work in the back of an appliance store and on the sidelines of the Sant' Elena stadium in Venice, until he felt prepared enough to propose his idea to sports journalist Emilio De Martino (Bosco, 1991). He won a contest through EIAR in 1932; he debuted announcing the Italy-Germany 3-1 match, broadcast from the new Littorio stadium in Bologna on January 1, 1933. From that moment he was unstoppable: «Italy won the match 3-1 – Carosio remembers his first broadcast in an interview – I won my personal trial, EIAR won over the hesitations it may have had until that moment for similar broadcasts, and football news became a part of every Sunday for Italians» (Bosco, 1991, pp. 22-23). His almost 40 years of radio announcing, and then televi-

sion announcing, began in this way, and ended officially in 1971.

The world football championships of 1934 confirmed his role as the «voice of football». The Italian victory contributed without a doubt to this affirmation, but it remained tied to the originality that Carosio knew how to express in his broadcasts, creating what remained his inimitable «trademark».

The world championships of 1934 were also the chance for strengthening the system; in Rome they replaced the old radio station with new antennas that could serve North America, South America and the Far East (Minerva, 1990), demonstrating how the marriage of radio and sports was founded on reciprocal convenience. Through this strengthening, EIAR succeeded in covering nine nations with its services: Hungary, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, France, Germany, Argentina, Holland and Italy.

The definitive consecration of Carosio occurred a few months later, with the broadcast of the England-Italy game from the London stadium of Highbury on November 14, 1934. The game was touted as «a kind of final match for first place in world football» (Isola, 1990, p.181), given that England, the homeland of football, hadn't participated in the World Cup won by Italy. It ended with the defeat of the Italians 2-3 after a powerful comeback that secured the game's place in history. Carosio was widely praised for having transformed the match into an epic endeavor. At his return from London he had become a hero, and he found himself giving interviews on the same level as the athletes that had been on the field.

The voice of Nicolò Carosio became one of the most powerful instruments in the hands of the regime in its project of taking advantage of the sport-spectacle for propaganda. The success of the radio announcers and the growing passion fed the growth of a new sort of star, in which champions of football were placed alongside the divas of cinema and song, transforming simple sporting events into true shows (Marchesini, 2006). Serving as a sounding board capable of transforming «memorable endeavors into legends and champions into heroes», the radio sports announcers contributed to «bring to completion the imperfect nationalization of the masses initiated in Italy after the Risorgimento» (Grozio, 2009, pp. 193-194).

Obviously radio news did not cover every type of sport. In the schedule other educational sports broadcasts had been added: in 1929 Bruno Roghi began to broadcast from Radio Milano *Lo sport in pillole* (Sports in pills); from 1933-1938 *Cronache del Regime* (News of the Regime) dedicated a weekly broadcast to sports; in 1941 Aldo Fabrizi dedicated an act to the world of football, thus bringing sports into the world of fiction.

Football found a privileged place within the relationship between radio and sports, probably because some of its characteristics rendered it the sporting event best adapted to the times and the radio broadcast: its periodicity, fixed matches that spanned almost the entire year, and obviously its ability, which it had

already demonstrated, to attract a mass audience, allowed it to be the privileged target of radio's aims. In addition, football incarnated the value of team spirit; the impressive quantity of national and international successes (World Champion of 1934 and 1938, the Olympics of 1936, Bologna's two victories in the Central European Cup, Juventus' five consecutive *scudetti*) made it the ideal business card for a regime that was searching to affirm its own victorious image in Italy and abroad. Not only football celebrated the fortunate marriage between radio and sports. The broadcasts of several others became as legendary as those of Carosio: Mario Ferretti in cycling, a sport that incarnated fascist values of will and determination. Ferretti knew how to demonstrate to the Italians the passionate challenges between the old Girardegno and the young Binda, among these the fighting Guerra. In boxing, a fascist sport *par excellence*, Primo Carnera, World Champion America in 1933, became a broadcasting legend. Also other sports that lent themselves to radio broadcasts grew in popularity, such as tennis during the first Davis cups, equestrian with the broadcasts of Alfredo Gianoli, and the automobilism of the Mille Miglia.

From the second half of the 1930's, however, a change in the cultural politics of the regime occurred in its managing of the radio, with a more accentuated presence of fascist ideals even in the lighter genres. Radio, thus, began to assume «that clear political role that Mussolini had recognized in it later» (Monteleone, 1999, p.81). This also had a reflex in the characterization of sports broadcasts. Programs such as *Cronache dello Sport* and *Radiosport*, if just «apparently evasive [...] betrayed a totalitarian conception of sport considered an essential factor for the education of the masses» (Monteleone, 1976, p. 137).

With the arrival of the war, the space dedicated to sports within the radio schedule, as within the pages of the newspapers, underwent a drastic reduction, in line with the tendency of the regime to put in second place everything that could be seen as frivolous and thus as clashing with the sacrifices imposed on the nation and its war effort. A «velina» from January 18, 1941, recited, «One remembers the disposition to not give too much space to sporting events» (Ottaviani, 1999). Thus the sports «veline», from an instrument of «direction», became an instrument of censorship: it was prohibited to publish all news that could in some way clash with the sensitivity towards the soldiers on the front and of the families suffering from sacrifices for the war effort («The news of the ski championships will be given in a sober tone, avoiding signs of celebration, and mundane tones», January 25, 1941; «Do not take from the *Littoriale* the news of an eventual comeback of equestrian activity», November 13, 1942), and in general making note of «large sporting reunions and manifestations for amusement» that during times of war could appear «inappropriate and inopportune» (Ottaviani, 1999; Tranfaglia, 2005). Only on rare occasions was sports news given three columns instead of

two, imposed by the austerity of war. There was no more space, then, for the heroes on paper: the country in war now needed valorous and motivated fighters in the flesh.

Tied down by the needs of propaganda of the regime, neither sports nor other modern means of mass communication would have exhausted their energies with the fall of fascism. Certainly not by chance, it was Nicolò Carosio, the news announcer of so many battles on the playing field, to announce to the Italians, on May 6, 1945, that the war was over, recounting the parade of the partisans in Milan. This symbolized that the past twenty years was left to the Italians, along with many other ruins, both moral and material, two new passions that would have accompanied them through the difficult reconstruction of the country: radio and sports. The rebirth of the country started (also) from the birth of the sport nation.

Conclusions

The goal of this contribution is to investigate the management of the communication of the sporting event by the Fascist regime, paying particular attention to two forms of communication: press and radio. This analysis confirms that the years of the regime represented a period of change for the sport phenomenon in Italy, not only in the sense of individualizing the birth and development of sports in these years – that, realistically, was already a rooted tradition in both Italy and Europe – but also in the sense of individualizing the fundamental moment of recognition of mass sports in Italy.

Fascism, fully aware of the potential of the sport phenomenon as a form of propaganda, favored the spread of mass sports through the affirmation of the sport-spectacle, and most importantly, thanks to its forward-looking management of communication of sports and its «manipulation» through means of communication.

The role of sports as an instrument of «construction of consensus» is revealed by the analysis of the management of the sports press, which underwent both a quantitative change during the years of the regime, and also an evident qualitative change. It was fully involved in the system of control «from above» of journalistic information through the system of the «veline.»

The triangular relationship between political consensus, sport phenomenon and mass media is perhaps the most evident result in the analysis regarding the radio. On one hand, the sport phenomenon rendered the regime fully aware of its propagandistic potential as a new means of communication. Whereas, on the other hand, the regime had an undeniable role in favoring the birth of the sport nation, lending itself to the goals of the regime and revolutionizing forever the use of the sporting event by Italians, with results that endured well beyond the survival of the regime itself.

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El nacimiento de la nación deportiva: Los deportes y los medios de comunicación en la Italia fascista

Resumen. Reiterado objeto de investigaciones historiográficas, la relación instrumental entre el fascismo y los medios de comunicación continúa creando cierto interés, especialmente con la implicación de un tercer elemento: el evento deportivo. El presente artículo propone una visión «triangular» del fascismo, los medios de comunicación y el deporte. Por un lado, aclara el papel de la prensa y la radio en el marco de las políticas fascistas de promoción y difusión del deporte espectáculo como instrumento de propaganda dentro de la maquinaria fascista del consenso y, por otra parte, el papel de las noticias deportivas en la promoción del desarrollo, tanto cualitativo como cuantitativo, de dichos medios de comunicación de masas. Además de la bibliografía existente sobre la historia del deporte y los medios de comunicación durante los años del régimen, se investiga esta cuestión en lo referente a la propaganda durante el mismo período.

Palabras clave: fascismo; deportes; periodismo; radio; Italia