

Sports, society and collective identity in contemporary Catalonia*

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ABSTRACT

In Catalonia, the introduction of modern sports in the late 19th century was considered tantamount to a quest to modernise society. Clubs organised by civil society played a key role in consolidating sports as both practice and entertainment, and in league with Catalanism these clubs sought to put forth Barcelona's candidacy to host the 1924 Olympics. The Franco dictatorship subjugated all sports activities and strove to eliminate the Catalanist and democratic meaning of organisations like Futbol Club Barcelona. The resumption of democracy rekindled all sports, with the drive for "sports for everyone" and the international recognition of the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

KEYWORDS: sports, Olympism, Barcelona, Catalonia, Catalanism, club

Sports have become one of the defining features of the contemporary world. Ever since the earliest episodes which served as the harbinger of modernity in mid-19th century England, their expansion has run parallel to the growth and dissemination of what Norbert Elias defined as a "civilising process". In fact, this renowned British sociologist and Eric Dunning provided a detailed explanation of the role that sports played in this process,¹ a topic that has also been researched by authors like Pierre Arnaud, Richard Holt, Stefano Pivato and many others in

the field of historiography. The spread of modern sports is a far-reaching process entailing the expansion around the entire planet of a highly determined pattern of physical activity laden with social values ranging from the equality of individuals to fair play and competitiveness. Thus, the phenomenon of sports is a fundamental characteristic when analysing society. This cultural homogenisation started very slowly among a minority in the late 19th century and gradually gained momentum all over the world in the second half of the century. It is a process in which the patterns that emerged from Britain interacted with the cultural and social underpinnings of each region, with differing outcomes. Sometimes ancient practices became sports that coexisted alongside their counterparts with British roots, such as in the Basque Country or Japan, where there is a distinction between traditional and modern sports. Yet there are also other cases in which the British model was transported wholesale, as in its Asian colonies. In other places, traditional sports and games virtually disappeared, due to either their weakness or the strength of the new sports. This holds true in many places in Europe, among them Catalonia.

SPORTS AS A FACTOR IN MODERNITY

In 19th-century Catalonia, games with traditional roots still survived, such as skittles, tip-cat, tug-of-war and certain ball games, along with footraces, nautical races with small boats and animal races.² The common feature of all of these games is that they were transmitted orally and were deeply embedded in the local culture, rendering them totally unique. Thus, they were never codified and consequently could not spread. They were closely associated with festivals and had no central organisation or set

* In this article we strive to report on the most important studies on contemporary Catalan sports. In the end notes, we mention the titles that have served as the basis of this report's main arguments. However, in addition to these publications, we would also like to cite books on certain topics that we cannot cover in this article due to space limitations or because they refer to specific sports. These latter titles include the book by Joaquim MOLAS. *Passió i mite de l'esport*. Diputació de Barcelona, Barcelona 1986 on the cultural aspects of sports; and the collective work *Art i esport a Catalunya*. Generalitat de Catalunya, Barcelona 1992; as well as M. Lluïsa BERASATEGUI, Francesc FONTBONA and Carles SANTACANA. *L'esport s'anuncia, 1912-2002*. Generalitat de Catalunya, Barcelona 2003. The interrelationship between sports and urban planning has been examined by Xavier PUJADAS and Carles SANTACANA. *Esport, espai i societat en la formació urbana de Barcelona (1870-1992)*. Fundació Barcelona Olímpica, Barcelona 1999, <http://www.fundaciobarcelonaolimpica.es/pdf/catala/beca971cat.pdf>. This same topic has been examined more briefly in Xavier PUJADAS. "Sport, Space and the Social Construction of the Modern City: The Urban Impact of Sports Involvement in Barcelona (1870-1923)". *The International Journal of the History of Sport* (2012), pp. 1-18. Regarding the most popular sports, we should cite Antoni CLOSA, Jaume RIUS and Joan VIDAL. *Un segle de futbol català (1900-2000)*. Federació Catalana de Futbol, Barcelona 2001 on football, and the three volumes of Lluís PUYALTO. *El bàsquet a Catalunya*. Fundació del Bàsquet Català, Barcelona 2000 on basketball. Regarding track and field, see the recent work by Xavier PUJADAS and Carles SANTACANA. *Història de l'atletisme a Catalunya*. Federació Catalana d'Atletisme, Barcelona 2012. And for car racing, see, Javier del ARCO. *Història de l'automobilisme a Catalunya*. RACC, Barcelona 1990.

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rules. The status of sports in England was quite similar in the 19th century, precisely when change got underway with the advent of modern sports. The difference is that the process that started in Great Britain did not take root in Catalonia until almost 50 years later. Catalan sports were thus defined as a series of imported practices, mainly from Great Britain but also to a lesser extent from Germany, France and Switzerland. These sports began to reach Catalonia in the last two decades of the 19th century and would come to eclipse all free-time physical activities and displace the traditional games, which continued to reflect a local mindset.

It is commonly known that in the late 19th century, the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic cultures offered two clearly distinct patterns of cultural and physical education. Briefly, the emphasis in the British Isles was on outdoor sports, especially football, rugby and track and field, while the backbone of sports in the Germanic world was gymnastics, which was less leisurely and practised indoors in gymnasiums. The concepts of play and exercise were also notably different, and this divide was quite vivid at that time. Outdoor sports were known as athletic or British sports, which gives a sense of how all the concepts were identified and to what extent their British roots coloured their perception around the world, especially in Europe. To the contrary, German gymnastics were viewed as lacking a leisure component and were instead identified with an edifying purpose which had emerged from German universities and was closely associated with the formation of German nationalism. The distinction between these two models prompted debates in the countries which were observing the advances in sports and gymnastics from the outside. As Pierre Arnaud has noted, in France they signalled the appearance of two clearly distinct pathways organised around sports clubs and gymnastics societies. The discussion also took on a political dimension which debated the proper approach to physical education classes in primary school curricula. In both France and Spain, the positions were quite clear: while the conservative sectors leaned towards German gymnastics, which they viewed as military preparation, the progressive sectors clearly preferred English sports.

In Catalonia, these two visions of physical activity were not seen as incompatible; rather both were adopted and fused without compunction. The beginnings of Catalan sports³ were marked by total permeability to both models, whose *raison d'être* was that the promoters of sports viewed them both as yet another component in the modernisation process which they sought for Catalan society. Seen from the more dynamic social sectors, Catalan society had joined the modern world with a form of industrialisation that followed the dominant model of the textile industry in the mid-19th century. This process had made halting progress, but the social and political conflicts in the country derived from this industrialising dynamic, along with the political instability brought about by frequent coups d'état and the Carlist Wars (civil wars for-

mally linked to the dispute for the Spanish throne but which pitted the defenders of the Old Regime against those who supported pushing for a liberal society), proved to be an enormous hindrance to social modernisation. For this reason, the earliest signs of the new sports did not appear until the last two decades of the 19th century with the advent of the first gymnasiums, especially in Barcelona, the creation of the first clubs (Gymnastics Club of Tarragona, 1886; Sailing Club) and the impact of the sports demonstrations at Barcelona's 1888 Universal Exposition.

However, we must stress that the introduction of sports in Catalonia was consciously viewed as yet another way of drawing closer to European society, which was associated with the way to attain social, economic and cultural modernity, and largely as the logical correlate of the industrialisation process that the country had been experiencing since the mid-19th century. In this vein, the first cycling groups emerged in the 1880s, as cycling was an enormously appealing sport among the small nuclei of wealthy citizens, for whom bicycle rides were a sign of social distinction. The origins of cycling were crucial to the early structure of the first groups of athletes who organised themselves into clubs and who also interacted via newsletters and magazines. What is more, we should note that the practice of bicycling prompted an idea of modernity via the bicycle itself, a mechanical apparatus that many referred to as a "machine". In this sense, modernity, technology and sports thus achieved their utmost expression yet were seen as strange and snobbish by many of the lower classes, who had closer ties to traditional life. The wealthy class also promoted nautical sports, even though they were not so clearly clad in the aura of the new. In all of these cases, clubs were the societal constructs that reflected the phenomenon. At first, the majority of clubs had an elitist social standing in which practising the sport was equally important as launching the elitist social life needed for the emerging bourgeoisie.

This scenario was rounded out by hiking (specifically *excursionisme* in Catalan),⁴ a practice which initially stemmed from a scientific interest in discovering the country, such that hikes were a form of physical exercise yet were also meant to study the land, in line with the Romanticism which had gripped all of Europe. In Catalonia, the unique feature of *excursionisme* was that this recognition of the land identified a country – Catalonia – that was not officially recognised, such that *excursionisme* was one of the earliest movements that sought to claim Catalonia as its country and make the Catalan language its means of expression. To the creators of the *Associació Catalanista d'Excursions Científiques* (Catalanist Association of Scientific Hikes, 1876), traipsing through villages and mountains could cultivate everything from geography to history, not to mention art and geology. Despite these beginnings, *excursionisme* gradually shifted into a sport focusing more clearly on the physical component, including climbing, and later winter sports, particularly skiing.

Thus, in the late 19th century, sports were restricted to turning traditional practices into sports per se, especially horseback riding and nautical sports, the unique case of *excursionisme* and the new sports of gymnastics and bicycling. The meaning of *excursionisme* was clearly linked to cultural Catalanism, while horseback riding and nautical sports had social connotations that were elitist. Gymnastics and bicycling, in turn, signalled modernity. Therefore, these different practices also had different inherent values, as is clearly visible not only through the activities themselves but also, and more importantly, through the networks of sociability they constructed, based on elitist forms of interaction or formulas that stressed the physical practice. Two new disciplines emerged at the turn of the century, tennis and football, which would develop in quite different directions precisely because of the social connotations attributed to them. In the case of tennis, the Lawn Tennis Club Barcelona was founded in 1899; it was known as the “English team” and was always closely associated with elitist forms of sociability.

We can examine football as a way of understanding how these sports with English roots were introduced into Catalan society. Sometimes Catalans were the ones who had discovered them on their sojourns in England or Switzerland and then spread them among their social circles upon their return home.⁵ There were also cases of British citizens living in Catalonia who wanted to continue practising their favourite sport and did so either among themselves or with locals. The first Catalan football club was Palamós FC, founded in 1898 by businessman Gaspar Matas after a journey to England. In 1899 and 1900, a dozen such clubs were founded in the city of Barcelona, including FC Barcelona (1899)⁶ and RCD Espanyol (1900). Even though the earliest practitioners of football

were from the wealthy class, afterward they clearly sought to capture new athletes and were far removed from the practices of the traditional wealthy sociability.

All of these initiatives by the earliest practitioners needed a form of institutionalisation, which included associations and clubs. These associations and clubs gradually shaped the basic fabric of sports, but they were always reinforced by the role of the specialised press,⁷ including titles like *Ciclista* (1891) and more importantly *Los Deportes* (1897). The press played a key role in the development of sports in these early years with publications that had close ties to the clubs. Some of them were actually the organisations’ newsletters which also published general information, while others were magazines that listed internal club information. In fact, both forms were confused because there were only a handful of sports promoters and they were active on many fronts at once, such that we can often find the same person founding a club and later working as a sports journalist, while also being a practitioner, often of many sports. We can call these individuals the apostles of sports because their main goal was to spread these new practices, which they viewed as essential to the country’s modernisation. Seen in this light, even though they emerged from a social minority, from the very start they sought to spread sports throughout all of society. And for this precise reason, communication strategies, even rudimentary ones, were extremely important. What is more, this special relationship between publications and clubs meant that newsletters and magazines were crucial and sometimes became the tool that introduced and translated rules, promoted competitions and brought together promoters of the sport, who had a profound sense of being a minority.

Despite their elitist roots, as the new practices gradually gained ground, other social sectors began to take an interest in them. It is clear that since the majority of workers had gruelling workdays, it was difficult for them to find the time to play sports. Nonetheless, pioneering initiatives did emerge, such as the Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular (Popular Encyclopaedic Athenaeum), which established a gymnastics and sports section in 1909, and CADCI (retail workers’ union), which created a sports and hiking section for its members in 1903. While these initiatives did not yet signal the massive influx of the working class into sports, they did at least pave the way for more inter-class participation in Catalan sports.

In fact, this presence of the more working-class sectors of society was closely tied to the waning importance of sports as an element of social distinction in favour of viewing them a means of social regeneration. To the former, the social act surrounding horse races or yacht club events was extraordinarily important, and their goal was not to increase their ranks but to retain the segregation inherent in their activities. The high fees paid to join these clubs were a significant factor, just like the fees for tennis clubs and the first automobile club, Automòbil Club de Catalunya (currently RACC), created in 1906. In contrast,



Figure 1. Poster from the Mountain Sports Section of the Centre Excursionista de Catalunya (J. Llongueras, 1911)



Figure 2. Race organised by the Catalan Sport Cycling Club, running under Barcelona's Triumphal Arch. Mercè festival, 1916.

other clubs stressed practice, especially football, bicycling and swimming clubs. The Club Natació Barcelona (Barcelona Swimming Club), created in 1907, only required its applicants to know how to swim or to pledge to learn to swim within one year. And the earliest bylaws of FC Barcelona stated that one of the members' rights was to play football in the club.

SPORTS, MASS SOCIETY AND CATALANISM (1914-1939)

The efforts of sports promoters, the success of introducing different disciplines and kinds of sports and the incipient recognition of these sports in the press gradually led this minority activity to gain a public presence that occupied spaces in a society that was in the midst of modernisation, especially in the urban nuclei. Thus, by the 1910s, sports already had a place of their own in the general press, and the authorities even participated in certain sporting events, attracting recognition and attention.

This surge in sports dovetailed with the spread of political Catalanism and especially with its institutional rootedness. As a cross-cutting and ideologically plural movement, the roots of Catalanism dated from the 19th century *Renaixença*, or Catalan cultural Renaissance, which emerged at the same time as European Romanticism and would hark back to Catalonia's mediaeval past, its governing institutions and its language, which had been banished from official life after Catalonia's 1714 defeat, which officially marked the end of the Catalan state within the Crown of Aragon.

The surging influence of heterogeneous Catalanism in Catalan society was a slow process. In the 19th century, it had stressed cultural and linguistic factors, but by the waning years of the century it had begun to generate political formulas, either regionalist (particularist claims within the Spanish state) or federal (a confederal reformulation of the Spanish state in which Catalonia would be one of its components). Catalanism's claims took spe-

cific shape in programmes like the Bases de Manresa (1892). In the early 20th century, numerous Catalanist sectors had taken yet another step by planning to run in the elections. They were extremely successful at the urns in 1901, which was particularly valuable in breaking with the prevailing *caciquism* in the Spanish electoral system. Thereafter, Catalanism generated numerous political parties, both conservative (*Lliga Regionalista*) and progressive (various nationalist republican groups). In 1914, the *Mancomunitat de Catalunya* was established, a body stemming from Spanish legislation which enabled the four Catalan provinces to join together in a single administration. Even though the *Mancomunitat's* competences and budget were extremely limited, it did galvanise the energies of Catalanism.

In this way, after 1914 the country was in a phase in which sports had already carved a niche for themselves in Catalan society and were experiencing growth parallel to the incipient mass society and to the spread of a Catalanism whose defining elements included social modernisation, with its sights set on the most advanced European societies. Thus, the bonds between Catalanism, sports and social regeneration were quite visible. This happened naturally in the clubs, which were now more prominent than at the start of the century. Furthermore, numerous publicists theorised about these close ties in the press, which avidly reported on sports. However, the firmness of this progress could only be endorsed by large-scale projects, and thus emerged two initiatives. The first was the bid for Barcelona to host the Olympics.⁸

However, the city's Olympic aspirations stumbled upon a huge problem: the apathy of the Spanish Olympic Committee (COE). Even though it did not yet legally exist, members of the Spanish aristocracy served as the delegates to the International Olympic Committee (IOC). In contrast to this passivity, in a lecture delivered in 1913, Josep Elias i Juncosa,⁹ one of the most prolific Catalan sports activists, proposed that a Catalan Olympic Committee be organised to promote the participation of Catalan athletes in the Berlin Olympics slated for 1916. But the



Figure 3. Poster commemorating the Catalonia Rowing Championship (Ricard Canals, 1917)

European war put an end to this plan, and after the conflict the core of pro-Olympic activists channelled their actions towards Barcelona hosting the 1924 Olympics. Men who had been forged in the Catalan sports associations and clubs promoted this candidacy by forming a Catalan Olympic Committee (COC). The COC was not recognised by the COE or the IOC, but it did serve as the operational base of action. A COC delegation travelled to the 1920 Olympics in Antwerp to submit Barcelona's candidacy to Pierre de Coubertin, who welcomed them. In 1921, a stadium was tentatively opened by the COC just to host the Olympics. The Mancomunitat and the Spanish government supported them, but the COE posed a host of obstacles and Coubertin ultimately chose Paris. Even though it had failed, that attempt clearly proved the common goals of Catalanist politicians and sports promoters, who saw the Olympics as a chance to consolidate the push for sports while also turning Barcelona into an international referent.

These similar approaches lead us to yet another major Catalanist sports undertaking. The Mancomunitat, created in 1914, held enormous symbolic value for Catalanists, who viewed it as the seed of a gradual process of securing political sovereignty. For this reason, it was the focal point of many hopes and was given an important role in planning the future. One of the Mancomunitat's most important projects was in the field of education, and thus the Consell de Pedagogia (Education Council) was created. At that time, there were no public sports policies in Europe, as sports were still regarded as basically a private affair. The states only intervened in physical education at school, but they did not organise sports. Through the Education Council, in 1921 the Mancomunitat created *Ponència d'Educació Física i Esports* (Department of Physi-

cal Education and Sports)¹⁰ with the support of both conservative and republican deputies. The Department had a short life given that it was abolished by the Primo de Rivera dictatorship in 1923; however, in this short life it laid the groundwork for a sports policy by identifying which sports needed to be promoted and how a public aid policy for clubs and associations should be organised, and by fostering international outreach with a clear focus on Barcelona's candidacy to host the Olympics. Even though the military dictatorship dissolved the Mancomunitat, the Department's activity was yet further proof of institutional Catalanism's interest in the phenomenon of sports.

The Catalanisation of society logically included sports organisations. Even though this dynamic was quite widespread, not all clubs had equal social prominence, and we could pinpoint this as the time when the athletic rivalry between the two leading football clubs in the city of Barcelona – FC Barcelona and RCD Espanyol – also took on a socio-political dimension.¹¹ In 1919, the Mancomunitat promoted a campaign to back a draft charter of self-government that was to be submitted to the Spanish Courts. That draft charter had sweeping majority support among the Catalan political forces, which also spread to associations of all sorts. Many sports clubs joined the petition, including FC Barcelona. Its adhesion would probably have not been overly noteworthy were it not for the fact that its main rival, RCD Espanyol, chose not to sign the petition. This was highlighted by the press, and one article even avowed that FC Barcelona had become the club of Catalonia. Even though this statement can be considered overblown, it certainly signalled the acknowledgement of an attitude which would only be reinforced in 1925, when the Primo de Rivera dictatorship shuttered¹² the club for six months because the audience had whistled when the Spanish anthem was being played. This was an unheard of move: the government of the dictatorship closing a sports organisation because the audience had used the football match to demonstrate its rejection of the anthem of the Spanish monarchy, which had backed the dictatorial, anti-Catalanist military coup of General Primo de Rivera. The political significance of the football club became loud and clear and was closely associated with Primo de Rivera's policy against Catalan culture, language and institutions.¹³

In short, the attempts to turn Barcelona into an Olympic city, the impetus of the Mancomunitat's sports policy and the meaning of clubs like FC Barcelona beyond the realm of sports endowed Catalan sports with clear symbolism among the society they sought to represent. What is more, over the course of those years a new sports press was being minted with close ties to the Catalanisation process in the world of culture. We should stop to consider the efforts of the Catalan-language press to forge a sports vernacular that largely derived from English and had to be transferred to a Catalan language which sought to be modern but was not regularly learnt at school or used as the language of the public administration. What



Figure 4. Poster commemorating the 25th anniversary of Futbol Club Barcelona (J. Segrelles, 1924). A girl seated upon the club's coat-of-arms is waving the "blaugrana" (red and blue, Barça's colours) flag over a background of flames. Source: Biblioteca de l'Esport de la Generalitat de Catalunya.

stands out in this process is the prevalence of satirical and humoristic sports publications such as *Xut!*, which had a unique journalistic style, along with others which reported on the debate on the social role of sports, and especially on the need to democratise access to the practice of sports, as preached by the weekly *La Jornada Deportiva*. On the other hand, the undeniable importance that sports were gaining in Catalan society forced the country's intellectuals to weigh in and write about them. The relationships between the worlds of sports and culture were very fluid, and we can just as easily find a sports federation hosting lectures and literary prizes as we can find intellectuals¹⁴ reflecting on the value of sports, as historian Antoni Rovira i Virgili did in 1926 in *Revista de Catalunya*, a publication which was a high mark of Catalan culture.

With the end of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship and the proclamation of the Second Republic, Catalonia achieved the instatement of the Generalitat, a self-governing institution within the Spanish Republic. A brief period of freedom began which would last from 1931 until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936. The new political juncture and the underlying changes that had taken place in



Figure 5. Barcelona International Exposition (P. Capuz, 1929). Athlete with a javelin and the Montjuïc stadium in the background. 102 cm x 71 cm. Source: Biblioteca de l'Esport de la Generalitat de Catalunya.

the 1920s led to the emergence of a vigorous discourse on the cultural values of sports and inter-class participation.

In the preceding years, the Catalanists had stressed sports as an element of modernisation and social regeneration through educational and international outreach projects such as Barcelona's bid to host the Olympics. Likewise, republicanism had stressed the need to allow everyone access to the practice of sports. Both avenues of discourse had begun before sports were truly a mass spectacle in Catalonia. But now, in the second half of the 1920s, things were changing: mass society was fully formed, and many of the transformations that came with it remained hidden behind the political control of the dictatorship.

Despite the apparent normality with which sporting events took place in Barcelona's 1929 Universal Exposition, with the flamboyant Montjuïc stadium, underneath it all a new discourse had arisen which began to spread in the waning days of the dictatorship. This new discourse was recognised through the slogan "esport i ciutadania" (sports and citizenship), which had been promoted and disseminated by the weekly *La Rambla*¹⁵ since early 1930. No specific organisation was behind it; instead it sprang from the businessman Josep Sunyol i Garriga and a group of journalists, including Lluís Aymami i Baudina, editor-in-chief of the weekly. To Sunyol, the goal was to assert that sports were an inseparable part of a society's activities and that consequently this society should be permeated with values that must be clearly expressed, including the democratisation of access to the practice of sports by all social sectors, meaning not only all the social classes but also marginalised groups, especially women;¹⁶ the ties between the world of sports and just causes, at that time



Figure 6. Poster commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Swimming Club (K. Cerny, 1932). Bust with a laurel wreath symbolising the triumphant athlete. Source: Biblioteca de l'Esport de la Generalitat de Catalunya.

specifically against the dictatorship; and the indissoluble tie between the world of sports and social behaviours in favour of democracy.

With the onset of republicanism in 1931, the ideologues of “sports and citizenship” believed that the mission of the individuals, platforms and organisations behind sports was to support the republican institutions and take advantage of the new dynamic of freedom to spread their discourse far and wide. All of this further dovetailed with the advent of sports as a public spectacle. The 1920s was the era of stadiums. In the city of Barcelona, FC Barcelona’s stadium in Les Corts was built with an initial capacity of 22,000 spectators, as was the RCD Espanyol stadium in Sarrià, and in 1929 the Montjuïc stadium was built for the Universal Exposition. Sports boosters’ interest in stressing the practice of sports was now eclipsed by the masses attracted to the spectacle of sports, especially

football, bicycling and boxing, coupled with the advent of athletes who became media figures avidly followed by the press. Meanwhile, the practice of sports had not risen, particularly among the working class. For sports lovers, this situation was a contradiction that was difficult to accept which had arisen in parallel to the professionalisation of the major sports stars.

Amidst this complex and contradictory development in the world of sports, a new notion emerged, one that somehow stemmed from the slogan “sports and citizenship”. It was popular sports, a concept that was imbued with specific meaning after 1933, a new juncture marked by political radicalisation in both Catalonia and in the rest of Spain and all over Europe, with Hitler’s ascent to power looming as an ever-present threat. Popular sports were promoted by sports sections of recreational and cultural organisations, along with specific sports clubs, especially

those with ties to the working class. The promoters of popular sports stressed the need for the democratisation of sports, which fundamentally consisted of ensuring that all sectors of society were able to practise sports. At that time, it was very difficult to bring this goal to fruition given the lack of facilities and a standard of living among workers that was barely more than subsistence. What is more, popular sports also stressed including women in the desire for majority access to the practice of sports, although this notion was not very widely accepted in society. In fact, the defence of this right took place in a context in which sports were increasingly a mass phenomenon, especially sports as a public spectacle. For this reason, the defenders of popular sports criticised what they regarded as the mercantilisation of sports and instead preferred emphasising the practitioners, regardless of their results, scores or excellence. Indeed, this became a sort of forerunner of the “sports for everyone” mentality that would sweep Europe after World War II.

This entire movement took shape in the *Comitè Català Pro Esport Popular* (Catalan Popular Pro Sports Committee, CCEP), which was set up in early 1936. The CCEP took the initiative of organising alternative Olympics to the ones that the IOC was hosting in Berlin in the summer of 1936. The initiative of the *Olimpiada Popular* (People’s Olympiad)¹⁷ can only be understood if we take several factors into account. First, Berlin had been chosen as the site of the 1936 Olympics in competition with Barcelona’s candidacy, which had been thwarted by the advent of the Republic, a regime that in the eyes of many of the aristocratic members of the IOC was dangerously democratic. The decision had been taken in 1931, before Hitler had reached power, and the ascent of the Nazi dictatorship changed many things in the eyes of the international sports community. Many believed that the limitations that the Nazis were imposing on the practice of sports among citizens with Jewish roots were incompatible with the Olympic spirit. The fear of political manipulation of



Figure 7. Poster with the flag of the People’s Olympiad held by three athletes representing all the races (F. Lewy, 1936). The 1936 People’s Olympiad were organised by the Retail Workers’ Union Centre (CADCI) as an activity to protest against the Berlin Olympics that same year, which Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist Party had taken over for his own purposes. The People’s Olympiad, a merger between culture and sports, struggled against fascism. Source: Biblioteca de l’Esport de la Generalitat de Catalunya.

the Olympics in the hands of the Nazis led to a major opposition movement, which particularly crystallised in 1935 with intense debates in many organisations, including the United States Olympic Committee and the International Athletics Federation. The Olympics were eventually held, and the CCEP managed to rally together all the different nuclei against the Berlin event.

In this way, the Catalan popular sports movement took on an international dimension with an event that stressed the authenticity of the Olympic values and overcame the divisions that were currently plaguing the Olympics as promoted by the IOC and the grass-roots Olympics. However, on the 19th of July 1936, the date on which the People's Olympiad were slated to open, Barcelona awoke to the rumble of the weapons of the rebel soldiers who triggered the Spanish Civil War. The People's Olympiad, which were framed as the utmost exponent of the equality of individuals, the proclamation of peace as the supreme value and the fight against racism, were shaken to the core precisely by the outbreak of war. From then until the end of the Civil War, Catalan sports had to abandon their main aims to become subsidiary to the needs of war.

SPORTS UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE FRANCO REGIME AND THE RESPONSE OF "MORE THAN A CLUB" (1939-1975)

General Franco's 1939 victory signalled the instatement of a dictatorial regime which would remain in place for almost 40 years, until 1975. The Civil War had radically divided the country, and after the military victory was secured the division between winners and losers was shifted to civilian life. The Franco dictatorship was a political system that formally fluctuated between fascism and an ultra-conservative dictatorship yet was always based on the supremacy of the military which had won the war. Its fascist formulation was more rhetorical than real, but it was organised around the existence of a single party, called the Falange Española Tradicionalista (FET), and any outside political activity was outlawed. The role of the FET was crucial in formulating the dictatorship's sports policy. In fact, until the Civil War, sports had been privately organised, with a horizontal, democratic structure in which freely established clubs agreed to found federations that made competitive organisation possible. In contrast, the Franco regime totally altered this structure and form of interaction. It put an end to many organisations, forced leaders and athletes identified with the losing side into exile and liquidated the democratic operations that had underpinned Catalan sports since their inception.

After 1939, the clubs that had survived the repression no longer decided how they were organised, what they did and how they cooperated with other clubs. Now an institution dependent upon the Falange called the Delegación Nacional de Deportes de FET (DND) did all this.¹⁸ This institution was charged with organising and espe-

cially monitoring all sports in Spain, rendering any activity outside its purview impossible. The clubs were forced to undergo a political purification process and were sometimes even required to change their names or the symbols on their coats-of-arms and emblems. This scheme was reproduced all around Spain, but it was particularly virulent in Catalonia because Catalan society was regarded by the dictatorship as particularly hostile, owing to both the predominance of a strong anarchosindicalist union tradition among its workers and the meaning of Catalanism and its different forms of expression in both civil organisations and political self-governance, as embodied by the Generalitat de Catalunya. As an example of this approach it is not irrelevant to mention that in 1940 the Franco authorities convinced the Gestapo to release Lluís Companys, the president of the Generalitat who was in exile in France, so they could bring him to Barcelona and execute him.

In this context, we can note that the instatement of Franco totally changed the arc of Catalan sports until 1936. All the clubs that had participated in the popular sports movement disappeared, women's participation in sports was proscribed and the sports periodicals that had fostered the link between sports and culture and the debate on the very future of sports were also abolished. Indeed, the purpose of the DND was to exert strict control over all sports activity, and in Catalonia it sought to use sports as a powerful vehicle in favour of Spanish, as opposed to Catalan, culture. What is more, it always sought to detach sports from cultural concerns because it saw these relations as potentially dangerous for transmitting ideas that ran counter to the dictatorship.

The strict political control of sports organisations affected all sorts of clubs, from the smallest ones to their larger counterparts with the greatest societal repercussions. One unique case is FC Barcelona, which, as discussed above, had been aligned with the majority Catalanist discourse since the 1910s and whose president, Josep Sunyol, had been killed in the early days of the Civil War after having been detained by Franco soldiers on the Madrid front. Nobody could ignore the symbolic potential of the club, and one Falange newspaper even speculated on the future of the club and its name and symbols. Ultimately, the continuity of FC Barcelona was conditioned upon the expiation its guilt for its Catalanist past. On the 29th of June 1939, in the first match held in the Les Corts football stadium after the war, the authorities organised an event prior to the match presided over by the Captain General, the top authority at the time, in which the club's legal future was linked to the conviction that it had abandoned the pathway of Catalanism and turned its back on its past. Given the identity rivalry between Barça and Espanyol discussed above, the fact that a recognised supporter of Espanyol was appointed to Barça's managerial board and somehow charged with overseeing the content of Barça is laden with significance. With that act of exorcism, the Franco regime believed that could elimi-

nate all the pernicious spirits of Catalanism from Barça's stadium which had come to roost there years earlier. What is more, the club – and all the clubs like it – had to make its name Spanish: the authorities did not like “Futbol Club”, which to their ears sounded foreign, so instead they imposed the Spanish formula “club de fútbol”. Likewise, the four stripes of the Catalan flag had to be removed from its coat-of-arms.

If this was the point of departure, it should come as no surprise that the dictatorship was particularly watchful in its monitoring of everything related to an organisation that was under suspicion and was extraordinarily important given its social mass and the media coverage it inspired. Yet the Franco regime's sports policy ended up modifying and expanding the meaning of Barça beyond the realm of sports. As we have noted so far, Barça's Catalanist identity definition was primarily local, with Espanyol as its rival athletic and social referent. The identification prompted by the Franco regime between its structures and sports leaders substantially modified this situation, especially after the official structures started to take part in sports decisions that objectively harmed the Catalan club, such as the bizarre signing of the Argentine footballer Alfredo Di Stefano for Real Madrid in 1953.¹⁹ Incidents of this sort, coupled with the dictatorship's use of propaganda to herald Real Madrid's successes in the European Cup, turned the specifically sports rivalry between the two most representative clubs of the cities of Barcelona and Madrid into an identity clash, in which FC

Barcelona was perceived by many as the club that represented a persecuted culture, while Real Madrid became the representative of Franco's power in the sports arena which repressed all expressions of Catalanism. From this feeling emerged the famous saying, uttered for the first time by the club president, Narcís de Carreras, in 1968 that Barça is “more than just a club”.

The symbolic value of Barça in the waning years of the dictatorship is particularly fascinating because at that time the idea of sports as a tool for mass alienation that made the masses docile to power was in vogue all around Europe. In Franco's Spain, this kind of argumentation was even more deeply ingrained in the anti-Franco left, given the dictatorship's attempts to harness the athletic successes of the Spanish national team and certain clubs. In contrast, in the case of Barça, one could clearly see a slow but steady attempt to revive the pre-Civil War social meaning of the club, especially after the mid-1960s. This process was accentuated with the presidency of Agustí Montal (1969-1978),²⁰ but it did not solely stem from the entity; even more important was the involvement of a large group of leftist intellectuals, including the writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán²¹ and the historian Josep Termes. They constructed a discourse that turned Barça (especially in its matches with Madrid and the Spanish federation) into a representation of the real Catalonia, which viewed itself as Catalanist and anti-Franco, in contrast to the official world of the dictatorship. In this way, a football club was endowed with a strong socio-political meaning.

Aside from these more identity-based factors, it should be noted that despite the DND's power, this did not translate into higher participation in sports, especially because the country suffered from a long and drawn-out post-war period with an underfed population and shortages of all kinds, not exactly ideal conditions for participating in sports. Another consequence of the advent of the Franco regime was the extreme isolation of Catalan sports through Europe's response to the Franco government, especially until the mid-1950s. The old aspiration of hosting the Olympics now seemed impossible, and the Second Mediterranean Games held in Barcelona in 1955 seemed like a huge success in light of the circumstances. In any event, the sports dynamic fostered the development of spectacle sports, most notably football, which was greatly distanced from the other disciplines.

This entire scene began to tentatively change in the 1960s apace with the regime's gradual economic opening to the international economy, which it used to benefit from European development. Through this new situation and the arrival of new generations less affected by the war and the precariousness of the post-war period, a renewed impetus could be felt with clubs that finally emerged from pure subsistence and with incipient expectations of a surge in practitioners. Despite this, this small upswing only served to reveal the absence of a fundamental element, namely facilities, which would become the major



Figure 8. Poster commemorating the 75th anniversary of Futbol Club Barcelona (J. Miró, 1974)

impediment in this period. Even the dictatorship began to articulate a less ideological discourse which stressed promoting the practice of sports, at least in theory. The Barcelona native Juan Antonio Samaranch,²² the future president of the IOC, served as the “National Sports Delegate” from 1966 to 1970. With an approach that was more open to what was happening in Europe, he spearheaded a powerful advertising campaign with the slogan “Contamos contigo” (“we’re counting on you”, or alternatively, “we’re expecting you”) with the intention of summoning many people to practise sports. However, this campaign had a boomerang effect because the conditions needed to put the theoretical goals into practice were missing. In this way, after almost 40 years of dictatorship and official control of sports, the most tangible result was the disjoint between sports as a spectacle and the social practice of sports, even though participation in sports had become more palpable.

EPILOGUE: SPORTS IN DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

The consolidation of democracy signalled a decisive shift in the public and social presence of sports.²³ They were now included in the rights of the fragile welfare state, and the 1978 Constitution made the first explicit mention of them. Since then, apart from the competitive dynamic, the formative and leisure dimension of sports has gained total visibility, as seen in all sorts of activities ranging from school sports to popular races and what is called “sports for everyone”. Briefly, the latter are practices in which the competitive component vanishes or is relegated to the background while the primary idea is the generic promotion of sports targeted at social sectors that had low participation in the past, such as women, and later the elderly. In this sense, it is logical that this kind of practice has chiefly been linked to the efforts of the public institutions, either town halls or the Generalitat, as well as to organisations and clubs whose efforts focus on promotion, giving rise to a mixed management model.²⁴ At the end of the dictatorship, Catalonia once again had a charter of self-government (1979) which stated that sports policy would be the exclusive competence of the Generalitat, so for the first time during peacetime, this regional Catalan institution was able to organise sports. Thanks to this legal framework, the Law on Sports of Catalonia was passed in 1988 and later refashioned in a new law in 2000.

Besides these two new developments – sports recognised as a social need and the Generalitat’s authority on sports matters – the most important factor in recent decades was unquestionably Barcelona’s hosting the 25th Summer Olympics in 1992. The Olympic dreams of the city, and by extension the country, finally came true. There were multiple consequences, ranging from effects on citizens, such as the remodelled urban planning of certain zones of the city of Barcelona, to effects on sports, with a rise in practice, specific programmes to support

elite sports and the remodelling and construction of new facilities in both Barcelona and the Olympic sub-sites. Since the 1980s, Catalan elite sports have hit highs unheard of in the past, not only in the Olympics but also in international motorcycle racing, basketball, roller hockey and tennis competitions, along with the unique phenomenon of the football exploits of FC Barcelona, unquestionably the most famous club internationally.

However, one of the unresolved issues in the consolidation of democracy was the international representation of Catalan sports. Both clubs and federations on the one hand, and the majority of political parties on the other, concurred on the need for this outside recognition, which would materialise in the guise of Catalan national teams, just as the Catalan Olympic Committee had sought official recognition from the IOC in the past. Both goals failed, yet Catalan national teams have regularly participated in friendly international competitions in multiple sports, and to a very limited extent in an official capacity in certain less prominent sports. In the case of football, a series of matches pitting the Catalan national team against other national teams has been continuously held since 1997, with strong claims to for official recognition.

In short, the evolution of Catalan sports in the past 100 years enables us to glimpse the social and political changes that Catalonia has undergone in this period, with a particular emphasis on transformations in the forms of association and the social structure, the definitions of identity and the welfare state and the Catalans’ capacity for self-governance.

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