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Claremont McKenna College

Mixing Sports and Politics:  
How Totalitarian Regimes Used Sports  
to Achieve the Goals of the State



submitted to

Professor Jordan Branch

by

Caroline Phillips

for

Senior Thesis

Fall 2021 – Spring 2022

April 25, 2022

### **Abstract**

This paper explores how sports were used by totalitarian regimes to achieve the goals of the state. The three case studies involve the totalitarian governments of interwar Europe: Italian Fascism, German Nazism, and Spanish Francoism. Three main trends were identified. Sports were used to improve their nation's health and fitness for military preparation, construct a national identity, and as a diplomatic tool to improve their international reputation. I also explore what ideological themes lent themselves to construction of these three specific goals.

**Keywords:** totalitarianism, Western Europe, sports, regime, Nazism, fascism, Francoism

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Professor Jordan Branch for advising me all year long and allowing me to write on a topic that I am incredibly passionate about.

I would like to thank my family for encouraging my obsession with sports and providing me support throughout this process.

I would like to thank my friends, especially my roommates, for indulging in my endless rants and rambles about football and racing, even though most of the time you don't know and/or care about what I am saying.

Lastly, a special shout out to the Men in Blazers podcast for making the political side of sports so powerful and compelling that I decided to spend a whole year writing about it.

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## I. Introduction

On October 7, 2021, Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) purchased a controlling stake in English Premier League Football Club Newcastle United for \$408 million. The takeover makes Newcastle the wealthiest club in England, if not the world. PIF is "essentially a state savings account for the Saudi Arabian government," and is chaired by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salmand.<sup>1</sup> The announcement of the takeover on the fateful Thursday resulted in Twitter being spammed with Saudi government-controlled disinformation accounts pumping out tweets, one of which reads: "Whoever loves MBS [Mohammed bin Salman] supports Newcastle."<sup>2</sup>

A deal to sell the club to PIF was first agreed to in April the year prior, but was stopped by the organizing body of the Premier League due to an issue during the "fit and proper test" – a director's test aimed to prevent corrupt or untrustworthy people from taking control of English football clubs. Doubts arose regarding the independence of PIF from the Saudi government, to which the fund responded with the claim that they were an "autonomous and purely commercial investor."<sup>3</sup>

The Saudi crown prince then asked UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson to intervene to "correct" the Premier League's "wrong" decision that prevented the £300 million takeover in order to protect UK-Saudi relations from being damaged. Johnson and his

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Kelsey, "Newcastle United Takeover: What Is PIF, the Main Owner of the Club?," *BBC*, October 10, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-58842557>.

<sup>2</sup> Iyad El-Bagdadi, "The Saudi-led Takeover of Newcastle United Is a Victory for Autocrats Everywhere," *The Washington Post*, October 14, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/10/14/newcastle-united-takeover-mbs-saudi-arabia-wealth-fund/>.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Wintour, "Saudi Crown Prince Asked Boris Johnson to Intervene in Newcastle United Bid," *The Guardian*, April 15, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/15/saudis-asked-boris-johnson-to-intervene-in-newcastle-united-bid>.

ministers showed public sympathy for PIF and their rejected bid and the Foreign Office held meetings with the Premier League to discuss it, but the government does not hold the direct power to overrule the Premier League decision. Upon the completion of the deal months later, the government denied any official involvement in the change of decision by the Premier League and refused to provide details about discussions between Saudi Arabia, the UK, and League officials because it could "harm" relations with Saudi Arabia.<sup>4</sup>

The successful takeover of the club came just five days after the three year anniversary of the political assassination of Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Ahmad Khashoggi. The chair of PIF, bin Salman, was named as the man who approved the operation, according to US intelligence reports, and private jets owned by PIF were used in the assassination.<sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup> During the investigation of the assassination, the Newcastle Central member of Parliament, Chi Onwurah, called on the UK government to acknowledge that Mohammed bin Salman was “the autocratic ruler of what is now shown to be a murderous state.” Three years later, MP Onwurah celebrated Newcastle fans for their “persistence & determination” in getting the Premier League to overturn their original rejection of the bid from that very same “autocratic ruler” of a “murderous state”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Colin George and Kate Whannel, "Newcastle United: UK Blocks Details of Premier League Talks to Protect Saudi Relations," *BBC*, October 8, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-58840820>.

<sup>5</sup> Hannah Ryan, "Their Club Became the Richest in the World. But These Fans Are Worried at What It Means for Newcastle's Soul," *CNN*, November 27, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/09/football/newcastle-united-fans-against-saudi-ownership-spt-intl-cmd/index.html>.

<sup>6</sup> El-Baghdadi, "The Saudi-led."

<sup>7</sup> Chi Onwurah (@ChiOnwurah), "Not commenting on #nufctakeover until confirmed – too many false starts in the past – but any u-turn by the @premierleague is due to the persistence & determination of #nufc fans to expose their anti-competitive & unaccountable behaviour, rather than changes in media rights!," Twitter, October 7, 2021, 2:25 a.m., <https://twitter.com/ChiOnwurah/status/1446044116295589893>.

While Newcastle fans were overjoyed with the potential of billions of dollars of investments into their poorly performing club, human rights groups around the world called upon the UK government and the Premier League to adopt stricter regulations to prevent corrupt and controversial figures from owning sports clubs to prevent regimes from *sportswashing*. Sportswashing is a term that has become popular in the past two decades, and describes when a regime or actor on behalf of a state, usually with a poor human rights record, uses sport to improve their image.<sup>8</sup> While actors on the highest level of the international stage, such as Mohammad bin Salman, have been accused of sportswashing, the pandering on the local level, as seen in the case of MP Onwurah, can also be seen as a form of sportswashing. The Saudi government, in fact, has been accused of spending upwards of \$1.5 billion dollars of sportswashing, including staging the annual Spanish Supercopa football match in Riyadh, building a brand new racetrack to host Formula 1 races in Jeddah, hosting international men's and women's golf tournaments, professional wrestling, and many others.<sup>9</sup>

This heavy investment in sportswashing raises questions about why politicians at all levels of government and non-state actors have been increasingly tying themselves to and investing in sports. By examining the political history of sports, we can gain a better understanding of this growing phenomenon. The political use of sports is not new by any means. Ancient Greek and Roman civilizations pushed political and ideological beliefs through sporting events that celebrated the human body and physical culture. However, the political exploitation of modern sports and the cultural and economic benefits of a

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<sup>8</sup> HJ Mai, "Saudi Arabia and China Are Accused of Using Sports to Cover up Human Rights Abuse," *NPR*, December 2, 2021,

<https://www.npr.org/2021/11/29/1058048696/saudi-arabia-formula-1-china-olympics-human-rights-sports>.

<sup>9</sup> Mai, "Saudi Arabia."

nation's participation in them as we understand it nowadays developed over the course of the past century.<sup>10</sup> Associative modern sports in Europe followed the industrial revolution and Enlightenment period with the creation of a bourgeois public sphere. The mid-eighteenth century saw the creation of sports such as cricket, golf and horse racing, which would give way to later modern sports such as baseball, European football (hereinafter football), basketball, and tennis.<sup>11</sup> The popularization, internationalization, and commercialization of sports would follow the foundation of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), founded in 1894 and 1904 respectively.<sup>12</sup> The strategic manipulation of modern sport for the political goals of the state would quickly follow with the rise of totalitarianism in Europe.

Totalitarian ideologies, specifically fascism – a right-wing totalitarian ideology, came about in Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century. Political theorist Franz Borkenau posited that totalitarianism grew “as a response to structural conflicts and crises of the modern world, and as a result of historical processes which brought specific societies and traditions face to face with the modern predicament.”<sup>13</sup> Following major social, political, and economic shifts due to industrialization, the rise of individualism from the Enlightenment, and the fall of colonial powers resulted in the atomization of society which is “the tendency for society to be made up of a collection of self-interested

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<sup>10</sup> Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young, "Culture, Politics, and Spectacle in the Global Sports Event—An Introduction," in *National Identity and Global Sports Events: Culture, Politics, and Spectacle in the Olympics and the Football World Cup* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Stefan Szymanski, "A Theory of the Evolution of Modern Sport," *Journal of Sport History* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 2, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26404949>.

<sup>12</sup> Tomlinson and Young, "Culture, Politics," 1.

<sup>13</sup> Vassil Girginov, "Totalitarian Sport: Towards an Understanding of its Logic, Practice and Legacy," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5, no. 1 (2004): 30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1469076042000223392>.

and largely self-sufficient individuals, operating as separate atoms.”<sup>14</sup> This atomization of society, as explained by Hannah Arendt, contributed to a significant loss of tradition, particularly of the “Roman trinity of authority, tradition and religion.”<sup>15</sup> Totalitarianism offered a solution to this “crisis of modernity” with an “escape into wholeness,” which promised happiness, a harmonious life, and plenitude for everyone in a new society based on traditional ideas in opposition to the nineteenth century’s positivism and liberalism.<sup>16</sup>

Italian historian Emilio Gentile described totalitarianism as:

an experiment in political domination undertaken by a revolutionary movement, with an integralist conception of politics, that aspires toward a monopoly of power and that, after having secured power, whether by legal or illegal means, destroys or transforms the previous regime and constructs a new State based on a single-party regime, with the chief objective of conquering society; that is, it seeks the subordination, integration and homogenisation of the governed on the basis of the integral politicisation of existence, whether collective or individual, interpreted according to the categories, myths and values of a palingenetic ideology, institutionalised in the form of a political religion, that aims to shape the individual and the masses through an anthropological revolution in order to regenerate the human being and create the new man, who is dedicated in body and soul to the realisation of the revolutionary and imperialistic policies of the totalitarian party, whose ultimate goal is to create a new civilisation beyond the NationState.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Andrew Heywood, *Global Politics* (New York: PalgraveMacmillan, 2011), 138.

<sup>15</sup> Ulrike Ehret, "Understanding the Popular Appeal of Fascism, National Socialism and Soviet Communism: The Revival of Totalitarianism Theory and Political Religion," *History Compass* 5, no. 4 (2007): 1238, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2007.00438.x>.

<sup>16</sup> Ehret, "Understanding the Popular," 1238.

<sup>17</sup> Emilio Gentile, "Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5, no. 3 (2004): 327, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1469076042000312177>.

Key elements of totalitarian ideology include a revolutionary party, a monopoly of power, a political religion, a palingenetic worldview, an anthropological revolution, and expansionist ambitions.

In order to support these elements, totalitarian regimes needed a united and fanatical group of supporters. Totalitarian regimes sought to bring together all aspects of society under strict organization and micro-organization to create one cohesive collective identity. While historians for many years focused on the charisma of totalitarian leaders or the structures of their society, historians in the 1960s began to focus on totalitarian cultures. Although the success of totalitarianism relied heavily on demagogy, opportunism, and terror, the regime also had to create a singular shared identity to appeal to aspirations and desires of the collective.<sup>18</sup> One compelling understanding of how culture played a role in fascism is provided by Emile Gentile:

The fascist conception of life gave rise to fascist behaviour in the way of doing politics, organising social existence, conceiving the overall objectives, not on the basis of logic and persuasion, but by appealing to the instinct, to faith, feeling, and imagination, to the magnetic attraction of the leader. The fascist group was conceived as a group bound by the ties of the faith. A fascist did not choose or discuss doctrine because he was primarily a believer and a fighter. Fascism appeared an escape from all that gave substance and measure to social existence, and hence deprived it of its Romantic, mystic, heroic, and adventurous dimension. Adventure, heroism, the spirit of sacrifice, mass rituals, the cult of martyrs, the ideals of war and sports, fanatical devotion to the leader – these were the characteristics of fascist collective behaviour.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Gentile, "Fascism, Totalitarianism," 333.

<sup>19</sup> Gentile, "Fascism, Totalitarianism," 338.

Thus, it was the regimes who could engage the masses through the manipulation and adoption of a state-organized culture were able to succeed. As explained by George L. Mosse, one of the leading theorists on totalitarian culture: “Economic well-being was subordinate to the stress upon art, literature, indeed the total cultural endeavor. Fascism was a revolution, but one which thought of itself in cultural, not economic terms.”<sup>20</sup>

Sports were (and are) deeply intertwined with the cultural traditions of Europe and had strong, distinct relationships with other aspects of society, such as character-building, community-building, education, war, business, and the international community.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, as did all aspects of culture under fascism, sports came directly under the control of the state. Under these fascist regimes, sport was not an end in itself, but rather became a means to an end. Sports became a political instrument to achieve the goals of the state.<sup>22</sup>

In this thesis, I will explore how Western European totalitarian regimes utilized sport to support the goals of the state. German Nazism, Italian fascism, and Spanish Francoism dramatically differed in their manifestations of totalitarianism, which includes their national sports policies. Despite their unique and distinctive characteristics, the three regimes utilized sports to achieve three major goals: improving their nation’s health and fitness for military preparation, constructing a national identity, and as a diplomatic tool to improve their international reputation. By analyzing these three recurrent themes regarding the politicization of sport by totalitarian regimes, we can get a foundational

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<sup>20</sup> George L. Mosse, "Introduction: The Genesis of Fascism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 1, no. 1 (January 1966): 22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200946600100103>.

<sup>21</sup> Girginov, "Totalitarian Sport," 25.

<sup>22</sup> Raquel Mirabet and Xavier Pujadas, "Intellectuals and Warriors: The Ideological and Political Basis of Francoist University Sport, 1933–1946," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 35, no. 11 (2018): 1183, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2019.1582523>.

understanding of the nature of sport as a political tool. Despite the over 3.5 million viewers that tune in to watch major sporting events such as the World Cup, the study of the influence of sport in the political context has gone largely unresearched.<sup>23</sup> In fact, across three premier political science journals, *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, or *International Organization*, not a single research article has been published with the word “sport” in the title. Thus, the foundational understanding of how regimes originally politicized sports can provide a basis and grounding for future research in more modern cases of sportswashing.

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<sup>23</sup> "More than Half the World Watched Record-breaking 2018 World Cup," FIFA, last modified December 21, 2018, <https://www.fifa.com/tournaments/mens/worldcup/2018russia/media-releases/more-than-half-the-world-watched-record-breaking-2018-world-cup>.

## II. Health and Military Preparation

As highlighted in Chapter One, totalitarian ideology includes elements of a monopoly of power, a palingenetic worldview, and expansionist ambitions. These three aspects of totalitarianism caused many regimes to militarize society in ways the world had not seen before. In order for a violence-backed regime to achieve their promised ‘national rebirth’ and expansionist goals, the state had to invest heavily in improving their national military.

As part of the palingenetic worldview, the state sought to “replace gerontocracy, mediocrity and national weakness with youth, heroism and national greatness, to banish anarchy and decadence and bring order and health.”<sup>24</sup> This manifested in the myth of the ‘new man’ characterized by traits of courage, discipline, and virility.<sup>25</sup> In most regimes, nationalist and racist qualities were also applied to this myth. In Germany, the ‘new man’ was embodied in the Nazi’s Aryan *ubermensch*; in Italy, the *Italiano nuovo*; and in Spain, the soldier-monk. These utopic visions of the national stock relied on the improvement of the overall health and fitness of the nation’s citizenry.<sup>26</sup>

Totalitarian regimes pursued territorial expansion for international prestige and financial gain. As had been established by early colonial powers, colonial possessions afforded governments economic privileges and international prestige as a so-called “great power.” Since some of the most powerful empires, such as Britain and France, still held a significant portion of their colonies at the time of the rise of totalitarianism, territorial expansion became a *sine qua non* for international political ascendancy and domestic

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<sup>24</sup> Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 2006 ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), 39.

<sup>25</sup> Girginov, "Totalitarian Sport," 45.

<sup>26</sup> Girginov, 34.

legitimization.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, since Germany, Spain, and Italy had been constructed by the unification of distinct city-states or regions, territorial conquest was a valid, if not celebrated, tool for state-building. Furthermore, economic crises in the late 19th century gave rise to a wave of neomercantilism, which pushed the idea that economic growth could not be created, but instead was achieved through territorial acquisition and high exports.<sup>28</sup>

Italy and Germany, as relatively new states having been unified in the mid-19th century, did not have the opportunity to participate as their modern nations in the era of European colonization. Their unification under Piedmont and Prussia, respectively, contributed to their belief that territorial acquisition was part of their national tradition.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, because Italy and Germany had lost land as part of their punishments after World War I, both regimes identified the reconquering of former territories as crucial to the restoration of their nation's glory. All of these factors culminated in the practice of *irredentism* and *lebensraum*, respectively.<sup>30</sup> Spain, as a former colonial power, and Italy, as the historical descendant of the great Roman empire, also aspired to re-establish their imperial status as part of their nation rebirth.<sup>31</sup>

These totalitarian regimes' ambitions to become great imperial powers and create nations of virile, young soldiers called for significant military investment. Physical education and sports had widely been used as part of military training for both the

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<sup>27</sup> Aristotle A. Kallis, "Expansionism in Italy and Germany between Unification and the First World War: On the Ideological and Political Origins of Fascist Expansionism," *European History Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (October 1998): 438, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026569149802800401>.

<sup>28</sup> Kallis, "Expansionism in Italy," 439.

<sup>29</sup> Kallis, 442.

<sup>30</sup> Alan Cassels, "Was There a Fascist Foreign Policy? Tradition and Novelty," *The International History Review* 5, no. 2 (May 1983): 256, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40105294>.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Gale Woolbert, "Spain as an African Power," *Foreign Affairs* 24, no. 4 (July 1946): 724, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20030007>.

psychological and athletic benefits. Physical education programs began to be introduced in schools around the world throughout the 19th century for the improvement of the health and fitness of society, but failed to be implemented widely.<sup>32</sup> Sports, in the western, democratic countries, remained on the periphery of commercial culture, and were confined to the bourgeois class for both participation and spectatorship. In contrast, outside of the western world, sports became regulated by the state, making access to sports much easier.<sup>33</sup> It was not until the fascist regimes of the 1920s and '30s that the mobilizing capacity of sport and physical education was extensively invested in as a means of improving national health and providing military preparation for the masses.

### Italy

Mussolini's faith in sport as a tool for general public fitness and pre-military training can be traced back to the Futurist movement in early twentieth century Italy. Futurism was an artistic and political movement that advocated for revolutionary and non-conformist ideas surrounding youth, speed, and technology. Futurists heavily focused on the strength of the youth, a culture of the body, and encouraged the discipline that came along with physical fitness and sport. In their *Programma Politico Futurista* (Futurist Political Programme), which examined the educational system, they called for the introduction of daily gymnastics programs at schools and the increased training of physical education teachers.<sup>34</sup> This strength was crucial for the colonial wars that Futurists believed were necessary and inevitable: "We will glorify war—the world's only

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<sup>32</sup> Timothy P. O'Hanlon, "School Sports as Social Training: The Case of Athletics and the Crisis of World War I," *Journal of Sport History* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 13, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/43611462>.

<sup>33</sup> Szymanski, "A Theory," 3.

<sup>34</sup> Gigliola Gori, "Supermanism and Culture of the Body in Italy: The Case of Futurism," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 16, no. 1: 160, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523369908714061>.

hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for.”<sup>35</sup>

One of the founders of the Futurist movement Filippo Tommaso Marinetti identified the merits of sports as preparing the youth for both the mental and physical aspects of military service. As a cyclist himself, Marinetti served in World War One as a volunteer in the *Corpo Nazionale Volontari Ciclisti Automobilisti* (National Corps of Volunteer Cyclists and Motorists), which promoted cycling for the development of team spirit and discipline that would facilitate joining the army.<sup>36</sup> Cycling, along with certain other sports such as boxing and gymnastics, as opposed to the increasingly popular football, facilitated the physical culture necessary for a war-focused society.<sup>37</sup> Italian magazine *La Gazzetta dello Sport* also identified track and field as important to military training in their comparison between javelin throwing and grenade throwing:

Throwing a hand grenade randomly in an enemy area is like sowing coriander or confetti on ungrateful terrain, nobody is hit and no jams are born. The effective and precise gesture of the launch has been taught [...] by sports training [...]. Now that the hand grenade is so powerful a means of the coming offense and of the immediate attack—in which everything depends on the visual and athletic qualities of the pitcher—it is still and always the school of sport that takes care of providing the Army with the best and more numerous champions.<sup>38</sup>

After difficult and arguably unsuccessful negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference and serious post-war economic problems, Italians sought a new government that would lift

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<sup>35</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*, trans. R. W. Flint (New York: Viking Press, 1973),

[https://archive.compart.uni-bremen.de/2014/website/fileadmin/media/lernen/Futurist\\_Manifesto.pdf](https://archive.compart.uni-bremen.de/2014/website/fileadmin/media/lernen/Futurist_Manifesto.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> Francesca Gatta, "Sports and the Military in Italian Newspapers from the First World War," in *Italy and the Military: Cultural Perspectives from Unification to Contemporary Italy*, ed. Mattia Roveri (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 80, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57161-0>.

<sup>37</sup> Simon Martin, *Football and Fascism: The National Game under Mussolini* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 27.

<sup>38</sup> Gatta, "Sports and the Military," 86.

them from their crises. Marinetti's *Partito Politico Futurista* merged with Benito Mussolini's *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento*, and he wrote the original Fascist Manifesto in 1919.<sup>39</sup> Though he would leave politics just a year later, Marinetti's influence over the importance of sport to Italy's fascist regime is undeniable.

Utilizing the values propagated by Futurists, Mussolini sought to address what he believed to be one of the most pressing issues facing Italian society upon his rise to power. World War One brought to light the terrible health and fitness conditions of Italian people. Especially amongst the lower and working classes, mass conscription revealed how poor living conditions and diets had taken a toll on the men of Italy. There was widespread illness, such as heart problems, rickets, mental illness, and skin diseases, many of which were worsened by congenital defects.<sup>40</sup> Considering that many of the healthiest and fittest Italians were killed in World War One and another 600,000 were killed during the 1918 Spanish Flu, when Mussolini came to power, he had great concerns about the national stock, the impact that would have on future military endeavors, and the general international perception of the Italian people.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, a series of abject athletic performances preceded the nation's poor military performance during World War One. Thus, popular belief suggested that stronger athletic performances would lead to better performance during war.<sup>42</sup> The *Partito Nazionale Fascista* party secretary Augusto Turati identified sporting success, specifically on an international level, as directly tied to future military success:

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<sup>39</sup> Marinetti, *The Founding*.

<sup>40</sup> Patrizia Dogliani, "Sport and Fascism," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 5, no. 3 (2000): 326, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2000.9728258>.

<sup>41</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 39.

<sup>42</sup> Martin, 30.

In some years, when the legions of young that will have been able to train in all of our cities and regions have reached physical maturity, Italy will be able to count on a mass of wisely prepared athletes that, in international competitions, will hoist the tricolour up the flagstaff of the Olympic Stadium; and it will have an army of men in which desire and courage will equal military force and virtue.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, Mussolini quickly established that fascist governments were best suited to protect the health and well-being of its people. During his 1927 Ascension Day address, Mussolini claimed that, “in a well ordered State, the care of the physical health of the people must occupy first place.” This would be dramatically different than the “suicidal theory” of laissez-faire, liberal governments’ belief in “let well alone.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, Mussolini put forth that the fascist party sought to restore the health and well-being of the Italian people. Influenced by the aforementioned Futurists, the regime looked towards mass participation in sports and physical education to achieve this goal.

Equally as important as the general fitness of the Italian population in case of mass conscription was the restoration of former glory of the Roman Empire and the image of ‘Latin athleticism.’ Mussolini was interested in the creation of an Italian war state, populated by citizen-soldiers that were physically and mentally prepared to fight. Sport was meant to create not just physically stronger Italians, but also to reinstill their former virility and aggression, thus creating the *Italiano nuovo*.<sup>45</sup> The regime’s offensive military goal meant that the propaganda of sport was mainly pushed towards Italian males, rather than females.

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<sup>43</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 48.

<sup>44</sup> The New York Times Company, "Full Text of Mussolini's Speech Outlining His Plans for a Greater Italy," *The New York Times*, May 29, 1927, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1927/05/29/106926131.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Sarah Morgan, "Mussolini's Boys (and Girls) Gender and Sport in Fascist Italy," *History Australia* 3, no. 1 (2006): 2, <https://doi.org/10.2104/ha060004>.

In order to strengthen the physique and character of young men, three main governmental sporting organizations were created: the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* (OND), the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* (ONB), and the *Comitato Olimpica Nazionale Italiano* (CONI). The organizations dealt with different aspects of sport: the OND and ONB both developed mass participation in sports for adults and youths, respectively, while CONI focused on professional competition. The OND operated under the slogan: "Many participants and few spectators," emphasizing the importance of engaging as many people as possible, instead of "seeking champions or grooming exceptional athletes to break records."<sup>46</sup> The goal of the OND was explicit:

To teach the working masses in a practical way that, with relatively little effort, they can better their physical condition, strengthen and reinvigorate themselves, build up their resistance to diseases and, finally, ready themselves for the fatigue of work, and if necessary, that of war.<sup>47</sup>

In conjunction with the ONB, the Italian government became the first European state to create a centralized and comprehensive athletic program in schools. Previously, physical education had been taught in just a handful of military and civil institutes in gyms. Mussolini's Minister of Education Giovanni Gentile consolidated these under the National Institute for Physical Education in 1923.<sup>48</sup> Physical education shifted from training regimens to open-air team sports. Physical education teachers switched from army officers to trained athletes. All students had to take physical education classes and could not attend school unless they were officially members of an authorized sports

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<sup>46</sup> Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 173.

<sup>47</sup> De Grazia, *The Culture*, 173.

<sup>48</sup> Dogliani, "Sport and Fascism," 328.

club.<sup>49</sup> Beyond school, sporting societies grew dramatically under Fascist control. Football clubs grew from 1,040 in 1922 to 2,539 in 1939, while their membership increased from 15,420 to 50,455.<sup>50</sup> This new structure was meant to create a larger sporting culture and instill a sense of camaraderie and discipline amongst the youth.

The promotion of team sports, specifically, was short-lived. By the mid 1930s, as Italy prepared to invade Ethiopia, the Spanish Civil War broke out, and World War Two was on the horizon, the national sports agenda shifted towards sports that would provide skills necessary for war. This included combat sports, such as wrestling and boxing, as well as riflery and musket shooting.<sup>51</sup> The most significant development was the introduction of women in these more militarized sports. Prior to the mid-'30s, much of the rhetoric surrounding women's sports focused on improving their health in preparation for maternity and birthing young soldiers. Therefore, the sports they partook in, such as gymnastics, were meant to emphasize elegance and femininity.<sup>52</sup> For example, a 1928 target-shooting competition for young women hosted by the ONB was heavily criticized by both the sporting world and society at large. The Pope even wrote a letter condemning the event.<sup>53</sup> Opinions on women's involvement in more aggressive sports changed as war became imminent. The militaristic elements of mens sports, such as choreographed goose-stepping and uniforms, were adopted by women's sporting society. By 1939,

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<sup>49</sup> Angela Teja, "Italian Sport and International Relations under Fascism," in *Sport and International Politics: Impact of Facism and Communism on Sport*, ed. Pierre Arnaud and James Riordan (London: Taylor and Francis, 1998), 148.

<sup>50</sup> Eleonora Belloni, "The Birth of the Sport Nation: Sports and Mass Media in Fascist Italy," *Revista de Psicologia, Ciències de l'Educació i de l'Esport* 32, no. 2 (2014): 54, <http://www.revistaaloma.net/index.php/aloma/article/view/228>.

<sup>51</sup> Dogliani, "Sport and Fascism," 330.

<sup>52</sup> Dogliani, 331.

<sup>53</sup> Morgan, "Mussolini's Boys," 5.

almost all women's groups were preparing for war and the regime began calling on them to support troops in Spain.<sup>54</sup>

### **Germany**

Germans had a long history of participation in fitness and exercise. Throughout the 19th century, Germans took part in *Turnvereine*, which were gymnastic and fitness clubs around the country that celebrated German culture and liberal politics. By the beginning of 1914, the *Duetsche Turnerschaft* (DT) was the largest physical exercise organization in the world and boasted over 1.4 million paying members in Germany. Turnen had been espoused by its founder F.L. Jahn for its benefit of military preparedness and the strengthening of the Germanic race.<sup>55</sup> Thus, as World War One began, many Turnen members left to fight in the trenches.

Following their failure in World War One, Germany sought to improve their military capabilities. It appeared as though British military preparations for the war had been more successful, and the Germans had identified their heavy participation in sports as part of their key to success.<sup>56</sup> This decision would result in moving away from Turnen to begin the 'sportification' of Germany that would precede their entrance to World War Two. During the Weimar Republic, despite attempts to increase sports involvement among society, little was successfully completed.<sup>57</sup> Germany was in the unique position, in comparison to Spain and Italy, that they had lost the military privileges in the Treaty of

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<sup>54</sup> Morgan, "Mussolini's Boys," 5.

<sup>55</sup> Arnd Krüger, "The Role of Sport in German International Politics, 1918-1945," in *Sport and International Politics: Impact of Facism and Communism on Sport*, ed. Pierre Arnaud and James Riordan (London: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 32.

<sup>56</sup> Krüger, "The Role," 80.

<sup>57</sup> Krüger, 80.

Versailles. This meant, previous compulsory training had to be stopped, and sports were elected to replace it. In 1921, daily physical education lessons were introduced into school, but poor economic conditions and a lack of governmental coordination meant that these lessons were never fully implemented.<sup>58</sup>

The Nazis, however, would be able to implement the sports policies that the Weimar Regime never had the strength or funds to complete. Hitler had long advocated on behalf of a sport for the creation of young soldiers. In his 1924 manifesto *Mein Kampf*, Hitler writes:

Not a single day should be allowed to pass in which the young pupil does not have one hour of physical training in the morning and one in the evening; and every kind of sport and gymnastics should be included. There is one kind of sport which should be specially encouraged, although many people who call themselves Völkisch consider it brutal and vulgar, and that is boxing [...] There is no other sport which equals this in developing the militant spirit, none that demands such a power of rapid decision or which gives the body the flexibility of good steel. [...] Generally speaking, the function of sport is not only to make the individual strong, alert and daring, but also to harden the body and train it to endure an adverse environment.<sup>59</sup>

Physical fitness, according to the Nazi Party, was crucial in forming a “hygienic Aryan race” with the “mentality of a soldier.”<sup>60</sup> Athletic ability in ‘combat’ sports, such as football, handball, and boxing, were highly praised for demonstrating the supreme ‘strength’ and ‘vigor’ of the Germanic race. While sporting success was important, the

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<sup>58</sup> Krüger, "The Role," 82.

<sup>59</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002).

<sup>60</sup> Roland Naul, "History of Sport and Physical Education in Germany, 1800–1945," in *Sport and Physical Education in Germany*, ed. Roland Naul and Ken Hardman (London: Routledge, 2002), 25.

more heavily celebrated traits were a disregard for personal injury and a willingness to commit to the team.<sup>61</sup>

When the Nazi party came to power in 1933, they prioritized the school and club sports systems. Many people involved in sport prior to World War One volunteered to be soldiers.<sup>62</sup> Following their return home, they became disenfranchised with the liberal goals of the Weimar Republic and found comradeship under the Nazi values. The Nazi Party praised the courage and strength they displayed on the front lines and promised them higher status within the party structure.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, in the years leading up to the Nazi's seizure of power, members of the Nazi Party began taking high positions of power within German club and school sports during the Weimar Republic, such as Dr. Carl Krümmel who was elected president of the German Organization of Physical Educators in 1925. Many of these positions were able to easily transition under the Third Reich. This made the improvement of the physical education and sporting systems a preeminent concern for the Third Reich when they took control.

Hans von Tschammer und Osten, a former soldier and colonel of a paramilitary group, was named *Reichssportführer* (Reich Sports Leader) just months after the Nazi's seizure of power. He hoped to ensure mass participation in sport as it was "an indispensable condition for the education of youth for military readiness."<sup>64</sup> Under his control along with the aforementioned Krümmel, physical education became the most important subject in school. The Weimar Republic's promise of daily physical education

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<sup>61</sup> Arnd Krüger, "Coach Education and Training," in *Sport and Physical Education in Germany*, ed. Roland Naul and Ken Hardman (London: Routledge, 2002), 117.

<sup>62</sup> Krüger, "Coach Education," 121.

<sup>63</sup> Krüger, "The Role," 83.

<sup>64</sup> Krüger, "The Role," 90.

lessons was fully funded and implemented by the Nazis. Physical education became mandatory and a general fitness certificate became a prerequisite for graduation and going to university. By 1937, physical education was allocated five hours of lesson time per week and those who failed it were not permitted to continue their studies.<sup>65</sup> Nazi authorities sought to train young Germans through organizations like Hitler Youth and other paramilitary organizations. The Hitler Youth brought all youth sporting clubs under their control to ensure both the proper physical development and the mental indoctrination needed to create soldiers.<sup>66</sup>

Sports clubs for adults followed similar requirements for physical and mental preparation as the Hitler Youth. Sport clubs were required by law to offer military and paramilitary defense and attack sports which were considered as developing characteristics necessary for war.<sup>67</sup> Sports such as mountain climbing and alpine skiing were also encouraged to recruit soldiers for mountain divisions in the military.<sup>68</sup> Members of the sports club had to first fulfill military preparation requirements prior to participating in normal sports activities. If at least one year of military training was not completed, athletes could not participate in championship competitions for their sport. Military training included philosophical indoctrination in Nazi ideology.<sup>69</sup>

Sports leaders saw the start of World War Two as the ultimate test of their physical education: "This struggle is at the same time the test of the national-socialist

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<sup>65</sup> Naul, "History of Sport," 25.

<sup>66</sup> Andrew D'Anieri, "Defining the Boundaries of the Nation: Nazi Soccer Policy in the Third Reich," *Undergraduate Journal of Humanistic Studies* 6 (Spring 2018): 4, [https://d31kydh6n6r5j5.cloudfront.net/uploads/sites/111/2019/07/danieri\\_definingboundaries.pdf](https://d31kydh6n6r5j5.cloudfront.net/uploads/sites/111/2019/07/danieri_definingboundaries.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> G. A. Carr, "Sport and Party Ideology in the Third Reich," *Canadian Journal of the History of Sport and Physical Education* 5 (1974): 4.

<sup>68</sup> John M. Hoberman, *Sport and Political Ideology* (Austin, Tex.: Univ. of Texas Press, 2014), 162.

<sup>69</sup> Carr, "Sport and Party," 7.

education. It will be a proof of character of the first order. Who could know in advance that our political physical education could show its quality so soon?"<sup>70</sup> Shortly after the war began, Germany's physical education declined rapidly because many teachers and educators were fighting on the front lines. In most cities, physical education classes were closed after two years of war and many sports facilities were destroyed by Allied attacks.<sup>71</sup>

### Spain

Despite coming to power over five years after Hitler and over fifteen years after Mussolini, the roots of fascism in Spain trace back long before Franco's rise to power. The *Falange*, Franco's fascist political party, was composed of four main ideologies: the monarchical conservatism, authoritarian Catholicism, radical national syndicalism, and the regenerationism of José Antonio Primo de Rivera.<sup>72</sup> The last of these, regenerationism, provided the most insight into the purpose and potential of sport in early 20th century Spain.

The shame and dishonor stemming from Spain's 1898 defeat during the Spanish-American War spurred a search to cure the country's 'national asphyxia' to which the defeat was attributed. Regenerationism was an intellectual movement that sought to find scientific and objective causes for Spain's decline and find solutions. Regenerationists offered sport as a cure to the nation's perceived weaknesses. Sport, they believed, would help restore their masculine, imperial vigor through hyper aggression

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<sup>70</sup> Krüger, "The Role," 90.

<sup>71</sup> Dogliani, "Sport and Fascism," 343.

<sup>72</sup> Martin Blinkhorn, *Carlism and Crisis in Spain 1931–1939* (Cambridge University Press, 1975), 168, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511561047>.

and strength. Sports provided space to construct a national identity of virility and physical superiority, as well as shape morals necessary for a nation's military survival, such as courage and sacrifice.<sup>73</sup> Regenerationists argued that:

For a nation to flourish, it is necessary to have men, but it is necessary to make those men, and they will be best found in sports centres where each one physically educates himself, strengthens his muscles and develops his understanding, in the sport which he prefers.<sup>74</sup>

Football, specifically, stood out as the sport that would help achieve regenerationists' goals as a hyper aggressive, team sport. Out of this movement, some of Spain's most important football clubs, including Fútbol Club Barcelona, Athletic de Bilbao, Real Madrid Club de Fútbol, and Atlético de Madrid, would arise.<sup>75</sup> In addition to the growth of football, military sport organizations opened to allow mass access to fitness and sport. In 1919, the Army Gymnastics School opened in Toledo. This institution, and institutions similar to it, served the explicit purpose of improving the fitness of current soldiers as well as developing new generations of soldiers.<sup>76</sup>

Spain's first dictator, Miguel Primo de Rivera, emerged from the regenerationist movement. He was viewed by regenerationists as the "iron surgeon" who would cure Spain of all their ills.<sup>77</sup> Primo de Rivera adopted regenerationism's physical education proposal. In 1924, a Royal Order tasked *delegados gubernativos* (government delegates)

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<sup>73</sup> Mariann Vaczi, "'The Spanish Fury': A Political Geography of Soccer in Spain," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 50, no. 2 (2015): 201, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690213478940>.

<sup>74</sup> Teresa Gonzalez Aja, "Spanish Sports Policy in Republican and Fascist Spain," in *Sport and International Politics: Impact of Facism and Communism on Sport*, ed. Pierre Arnaud and James Riordan (London: Taylor and Francis, 1998), 102.

<sup>75</sup> Aja, "Fascists and Christians!," 103.

<sup>76</sup> Aja, 99.

<sup>77</sup> Antonio S. Almeida Aguiar, "Regenerationism, Physical Education and Sport as Symbols of Modernity in the Canary Islands, 1898–1930," *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2020.1729747>.

to distribute newly created “gymnastic record books” to everyone in their district so they could track their daily physical activity.<sup>78</sup> A year later, compulsory gymnastics for all students between age six to eighteen was introduced to schools with “biometric cards” to track their progress. The National Physical Culture Committee also encouraged participation in gymnastics and shooting sports.<sup>79</sup>

Despite the ambitious proposals Primo de Rivera offered during his reign, their execution would fall short. Most of the delegados gubernativos never received the gymnastics record books and, therefore, never distributed them to their districts.<sup>80</sup> Many of the poorer regions of Spain lacked the resources to introduce compulsory physical education in schools. Infrastructure projects meant to create gyms and sporting grounds were never funded by the regime.<sup>81</sup> Ultimately, in comparison to Mussolini’s physical education plans, the failure to commit funds to these public expenditures resulted in the regime's inability to fully engage Spanish citizens in a sporting culture. Primo de Rivera eventually lost the support of the military and was forced to step down.

In the wake of Primo de Rivera’s departure, a republican government was established. While the left-leaning republicans and socialists were able to take the majority in Parliament, right-leaning activists were not dissuaded by the failures of the former dictator. In 1931, Ramiro Ledesma Ramos and Onesimo Redondo Ortega formed the *Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista* (National Syndicalist Offensive Juntas,

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<sup>78</sup> Alejandro Quiroga, *Making Spaniards: Primo De Rivera and the Nationalization of the Masses, 1923-30* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007), 97.

<sup>79</sup> Brian D. Bunk, "Sport in an Authoritarian Regime: The Primo de Rivera Era in Spain, 1923-30," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies* 42, no. 2 (2017): 95, <https://doi.org/10.26431/0739-182X.1244>.

<sup>80</sup> Quiroga, *Making Spaniards*, 97.

<sup>81</sup> Bunk, "Sport in an Authoritarian," 100.

JONS), a nationalist and syndicalist organization, comprised of workers and students.<sup>82</sup> Redondo had studied in Germany and had taken part in the creation of the German *Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* (National-Socialist Student Association, NSDStB). Ramos founded a Spanish version of the Italian fascist magazine *La Conquista dello Stato* called *La Conquista del Estado*, in which he propagated fascism and fought against the republican government.<sup>83</sup> From their respective fascist influences, they recognized the importance of an established fascist party, rather than the less organized military-backed dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. Thus, they created JONS, which would be the first official political organization in Spain with the national syndicalist label.<sup>84</sup> In 1933, Miguel Primo de Rivera's son, José Antonio Primo de Rivera founded the Falange Española, another nationalist and fascist political party. The Falange and JONS would merge in 1934 due to their common political goals.<sup>85</sup> Having previously worked with the NSDStB, Redondo advocated for a revolutionary nationalist youth organization that was prepared for violence: "Youth should take exercise in physical struggle, should love violence as a matter of course. National violence is just, is necessary, is convenient. One of our permanent watchwords is that of cultivating the spirit of violence, of military conflict."<sup>86</sup> Thus, the Falange advocated for the incorporation of sports into Spanish society, predominantly through the introduction of physical education at schools for the preparation for military conflicts.

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<sup>82</sup> Mirabet and Pujadas, "Intellectuals and Warriors," 1178.

<sup>83</sup> Mirabet and Pujadas, 1179.

<sup>84</sup> Aja, "Fascists and Christians!," 122.

<sup>85</sup> Mirabet and Pujadas, "Intellectuals and Warriors," 1179.

<sup>86</sup> Aja, "Fascists and Christians!," 122.

Since JONS had started as an organization predominantly made up of students and intellectuals, there was a close link between the Falange and higher education institutions. The Sindicato Espanol Universitario (SEU) was a student union that formed under the Falange in opposition to the republican Federacion Universitaria Escolar (FUE).<sup>87</sup> During the Second National Council of the SEU in 1935, the Falange laid out its primary political initiatives, which included education reform. Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera sought to establish sports as mandatory in the universities in order as part of a student's service to the nation.<sup>88</sup> Considering the proximity to the outbreak of civil war, it is clear that the use of physical education was a tool to aid the Falange in achieving its goals. The SEU would affirm its prerogatives with regard to university sport after the war in their magazine:

The Falangist mindset does not conceive of hunched over and near-sighted intellectual, who does not know how to hold a rifle or how to overcome with his heart the obstacles that can appear. To avoid this, our task has been arduous. First of all, we had to create what didn't already exist: a sporting organization with broad, national objectives. Having obtained this, we base our mission at University on preparing and physically developing students for the best service to the Nation. As sport is not a purpose by itself, it was necessary to use it in the true Spanish sense and give it the great importance it really has. For us, sport is another weapon ready to serve Spain, and its practice is as necessary as the existence of Falange.<sup>89</sup>

In 1939, Francisco Franco and the Falange successfully overthrew the Second Republic. The transition from a democratic republic to fascism was all encompassing, and sports were no exception. Influenced by his regenerationist and Falangist

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<sup>87</sup> Mirabet and Pujadas, "Intellectuals and Warriors," 1179.

<sup>88</sup> Mirabet and Pujadas, 1182

<sup>89</sup> Mirabet and Pujadas, 1183.

predecessors, Franco recognized the importance of sport in improving the health and fitness of Spaniards. Following decades of war, political instability, and economic downturn, Franco sought to reestablish the image of the Spanish people. The idea Franco specifically desired for his Catholic fascist society was the ‘soldier-monk’. The ‘soldier-monk’ image was meant to embody the perfect gentleman, willing to sacrifice themselves for their country, while maintaining a deep faith.<sup>90</sup> Sport and physical activity would shape the fitness and values of the younger generation, to prepare them to become the ‘soldier-monk’. Through sport organizations and physical education programs created by the Falange, the government sought to attract and recruit young men into the party

The primary organization through which young Spaniards received their physical education was the *Frente de Juventudes* (Youth Front, FJ). The creation of youth organizations was learned from Spain’s fascist neighbors and had been a practice of the Falange even before they took control of the government. During the civil war, the Falange Youth Organization and the SEU received paramilitary training and physical preparation to fight for the Nationalists.<sup>91</sup> Once Franco took power, he established a formal party organization similar to that of the Hitler Youth or the Opera Nazionale Balilla. These organizations would provide physical education and sport in accordance with the changing needs of the regime

The Falange officially established the FJ in December of 1940. The establishing law clearly establishes the primary directive of the institution: “Esa unidad de las juventudes al servicio del Movimiento, debe tener una de sus más relevantes expresiones,

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<sup>90</sup> Aja, "Fascists and Christians!," 138.

<sup>91</sup> Juan Carlos Manrique Arribas, "Juventud, Deporte y Falangismo: El Frente de Juventudes, la Sección Femenina y los Deportes del 'Movimiento,'" in *Atletas Y Ciudadanos: Historia Social Del Deporte En España, 1870-2010*, by Xavier Pujadas i Martí (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2011), [Page #].

en la estrecha colaboración del Frente de Juventudes con la Milicia del Partido para las tareas de instrucción premilitar.” (“This youth unit at the service of the Movement must have one of its most relevant expressions in the close collaboration of the Frente de Juventudes with the Militia of the Party for the tasks of pre-military instruction.”)<sup>92</sup>

Though also contributing to the “espíritu católico [y] español” (“Catholic and Spanish spirit”) of their members, the actual education the FJ provided was primarily physical.<sup>93</sup> The FJ offered physical education in schools as well as at camps, which students were required to attend. The training at these camps mirrored military training, in order to ensure the youth were capable of enduring combat. The camps usually lasted twenty days and took place at military-like barracks. The days consisted of gymnastics, marching, and various sports competitions, namely basketball, volleyball, fencing, and track and field.<sup>94</sup> The FJ also hosted sports competitions in schools beginning in 1949, as part of the *Juegos Nacionales Escolares* (National School Games). These games encouraged more participation in sport because of the platform it gave athletes.<sup>95</sup> The various opportunities and obligations to participate in sport under Franco’s regime would ensure that “el amor y la idea del servicio a la Patria” (“the love and idea of service to the Homeland”) was instilled in all young people.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Francisco Franco, *Ley de 6 de Diciembre de 1940 Instituyendo el Frente de Juventudes*, 1, December 6, 1940, <https://www.boe.es/datos/pdfs/BOE/1940/342/A08392-08394.pdf>.

<sup>93</sup> Franco, *Ley de 6 de Diciembre*, 1.

<sup>94</sup> Marta Mauri Medrano, "Mens Sana in Corpore Sano: La Educación Física del Frente de Juventudes y el Disciplinamiento de los Cuerpos," *Actas del XVIII Coloquio de Historia de la Educación* 1 (2015): [Page #], <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321429886>.

<sup>95</sup> Marta Mauri Medrano, "Disciplinar el Cuerpo Para Militarizar a la Juventud. La Actividad Deportiva del Frente de Juventudes en el Franquismo (1940-1960)," *Historia Crítica* 61 (July 2016): 99, <https://doi.org/10.7440/historit61.2016.05>.

<sup>96</sup> Francisco Franco, *Ley de 17 de Julio de 1945 sobre Educación Primaria*, 387, July 18, 1945, <https://www.boe.es/datos/pdfs/BOE/1945/199/A00385-00416.pdf>.

### **Conclusion**

Through the creation of national physical education programs, youth organizations, and sports clubs, the totalitarian regimes of Italy, Germany, and Spain prepared the masses for military mobilization. While the loss of World War II and Spain's non-involvement in the war suggests that the extent of the military preparation on the physical front may have been insufficient, the regimes did succeed in improving the overall health and fitness of their countries. Italy's physical education program, specifically, would become the basis for a number of other countries's programs.

### III. Construction of a National Identity

Totalitarian regimes relied heavily on their ability to control and gain support from the masses. This type of mass manipulation manifested itself in the creation of a national identity directly linked to the state. The regime used the national identity to foster a culture of consent and culture of evasion.

Totalitarian governments didn't have the explicit backing of the public to rule like democratic governments to legitimize their regime, nor did they have the resources or institutions to create significant public services or policies to win over the public by improving societal conditions. Therefore, regimes had to foster a nationwide political culture, or civic religion, to shape values that could transcend economic issues and political warfare to cultivate ultra-nationalist sentiment that would translate into support for the regime. This creation of a civic religion was identified as a culture of consent. The support and participation in cultural practices advanced the values of the state and appeared to legitimize the regime's rule.<sup>97</sup>

Alternatively, rather than trying to attract state support through the development of culture, totalitarian regimes also used culture to distract from their political failures. Wherever totalitarianism existed, so did oppression, humiliation, and suffering. Therefore, the regime sought to promote or highlight the more positive aspects of their national culture. The daily practice of cultural celebration acted as what Karl Marx called the "opiate of the masses."<sup>98</sup> Cultural practices helped consume the time, energy, and interest of people who may otherwise be concerned with political issues. This created a

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<sup>97</sup> De Grazia, *The Culture*, 178.

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Gift and Andrew Miner, "Dropping the Ball": The Understudied Nexus of Sports and Politics," *World Affairs* 180, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 143, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0043820017715569>.

national culture of evasion. As explained by journalist David Zirin, “many of us watch ESPN to forget at all costs what they are doing on C-SPAN.”<sup>99</sup>

Prior to the totalitarian regimes of the 1930s, sports took place largely outside of the political sphere. Beyond some allusions to the government during the games of national teams, sports occurred without any reference to a regime. Even after the politicization of sports by totalitarian regimes, democratic governments clung to the cliché of politics not mixing well with sports.<sup>100</sup> British Home Secretary Sir John Simon emphasized in 1935 that, “the introduction of political feeling into what should be a purely sporting contest is ... most undesirable.”<sup>101</sup>

Germany, Spain, and Italy all utilized nationalist sentiment to foster cultures of consent and evasion to varying degrees. However, one consistency between them was their use of sports to shape their national identity. Totalitarian regimes identified sport as a valuable and unique cultural practice that could assist in the consolidation of the nation. Sports, unlike other forms of cultural practice such as art, literature, and theater, connected citizens of all socio-economic statuses, occupations, races, and religions.<sup>102</sup> It required no education or language, and was still relatively cheap, especially when the state began to subsidize it. Stadiums could hold tens of thousands of fans in a shared space, and, with the introduction of radio and television broadcasts, games could be easily projected to massive audiences.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Gift and Miner, "Dropping the Ball," 153.

<sup>100</sup> Juan Carlos Castillo, "The First Quixotic Sports Hero: Federico Martín Bahamontes and National Identity Creation in Spain," *Sport in History* 41, no. 4 (April 11, 2021): 555, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17460263.2021.1913444>.

<sup>101</sup> Brian Stoddart, "Sport, Cultural Politics and International Relations: England versus Germany, 1935," *Soccer & Society* 7, no. 1 (2006): 39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970500355579>.

<sup>102</sup> Gift and Miner, "Dropping the Ball," 143.

<sup>103</sup> Gift and Miner, 143.

Sports also helped form bonds between communities. As explained by Norbert Elias, sport participation and spectatorship can often be framed through an “us” versus “them” mentality, in reference to a favored group and their competitor. Fans and players alike identify with one another due to their relationship with sports teams.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, when a regime aligns itself with a team, usually done at the national level, the bond created between supporters extends to include a bond created with the state, and can transcend local and regional affiliations. Furthermore, sporting events can help form popular memories and sporting heroes and mythology, which are essential in creating a collective identity and culturally significant images of a nation.<sup>105</sup>

Sports were especially persuasive due to their apolitical nature. Sports are largely meritocratic and appear difficult for outside forces to manipulate. However, it is not necessary for a regime to interfere with the outcome of the game for it to be used for propaganda. Rather, it is the spectatorship that provides a valuable venue for subtle and covert state influence. In his work on banal nationalism, Billig identifies how regimes are able to subtly and covertly remind their citizens of their national identity through daily experiences devoid of obvious politics. These occurrences help ideologies embed themselves in the psychology of the masses. This passive form of mindless indoctrination helps establish unity against outside challenges.<sup>106</sup> Sports games provide spaces to display flags, state colors, and national anthems. Stadiums show architectural prowess,

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<sup>104</sup> Stuart Whigham, "Editorial: Sport, Nationalism, and the Importance of Theory," *Sport in Society* 24, no. 11 (August 31, 2021): 1840, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2021.1969072>.

<sup>105</sup> Castillo, "The First," 555.

<sup>106</sup> Castillo, 554.

technological advancement, and are decorated with images of the state. Even the style of play could reveal the values of the regime.<sup>107</sup>

### Italy

Mussolini subscribed to Gustave Le Bon's thesis *The Crowd - A Study of the Popular Mind*. In *The Crowd*, Le Bon offers a tempting political strategy: "to know the art of impressing the imagination of crowds . . . is to know as well the art of governing them."<sup>108</sup> Mussolini's understanding of psychology of the masses led him to choose sport as a vehicle for nationalist propaganda. If he could impress the masses with sporting success, he could govern them.

Mussolini's regime was one of the first modern governments to understand how to use sport as a means of political propaganda. He recognized that "the road to power lay through the mastery of collective psychology, the manipulation of mass passions," and, as a passionate sportsman himself, Mussolini recognized the ability of sports to engage and impassion the masses.<sup>109</sup>

The Fascist regime took on the challenge of uniting the young and deeply fractured nation. Sports provided a subtle, yet exciting way to educate and engage Italians in unified cultural experiences. For example, the cycling race Giro d'Italia would pass through important geographical landmarks that were highlighted in radio broadcasts and news reports. The subtle use of propaganda helped both educate Italians about different regions of their countries, as well as show off important nationalistic markers.<sup>110</sup> The race

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<sup>107</sup> Castillo, "The First," 555.

<sup>108</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 102.

<sup>109</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 102.

<sup>110</sup> Dogliani, "Sport and Fascism," 334.

was lauded for its “patriotic work of familiarization [and] brotherhood”, which “penetrated” Southern Italy with “competitive enthusiasm, industrial vigor, and organizational ability.”<sup>111</sup> Cycling was able to easily engage mass audiences in Italy because most spectators did not need to purchase tickets to watch from their homes or the road side.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, the distance aspect of cycling meant people across the country were able to spectate the same event, rather than a sport that would be contained in one stadium in one city. Similarly, the Mille Miglia (Thousand Miles) car race helped show off the nation’s development through its advanced road network and skillful building of cars. Success in motorsports helped build an image of a futuristic and competitive Italy.<sup>113</sup>

No sport, however, was used as a unifying force more so than football. The Italian manipulation of the nation’s most popular sport would set a precedent for totalitarian rulers to come. Mussolini’s investment in football transformed the sport into its modern national format and developed a strong sense of shared identity among the Italian people.<sup>114</sup> One of the most significant divides in Italian society was that between the North and the South. While Northern Italy, mainly Turin and Milan, had developed a robust sporting culture, southern Italy lacked the infrastructure and economic resources to invest heavily. Separate football leagues meant there was little to no engagement between the geographical regions, and, when there was, the North dominated. This further contributed to the Northern perception of Southerners as “inferior” Italians. Mussolini recognized this divide as detrimental to the national identity and sought to correct it.

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<sup>111</sup> Anthony Cardoza, "Making Italians"? Cycling and National Identity in Italy: 1900–1950," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 15, no. 3 (June 2010): 358, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545711003768576>.

<sup>112</sup> Dogliani, "Sport and Fascism," 334.

<sup>113</sup> Dogliani, "Sport and Fascism," 333.

<sup>114</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 69.

The most significant alteration to Italian sport came with the 1926 Carta di Viareggio, which established professional football at a national level with the creation of the *Serie A* league.<sup>115</sup> The league merged the regions of Italy by taking the top eight clubs from the north and the south to create one national, top flight league. The integration of *Serie A* would contribute to that standardization of the Italian style of play and, in turn, create a more cohesive national identity.<sup>116</sup> Clubs that had previously been restricted to competing in lower profile, regional leagues were now able to “officially enter into the Italian football family,” thereby affirming their Italian identity.<sup>117</sup> It would also lead to increased interaction between northern and southern fans as games between teams from the different regions would be played more regularly. The Carta di Viareggio also banned non-Italian players from the league as foreign players were deemed untalented and lacking the necessary commitment in comparison to their Italian peers. The regime also banned English football terms and translated them to Italian. These nationalist rules were a part of the regime’s racial ideologies.<sup>118</sup> All the structural changes helped improve the Italian national team through the development of Italian players across the nation, rather than just the north and the formation of a distinct style of play.<sup>119</sup>

The Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio (FIGC), the governing body of Italian football, was moved south from Turin to Rome. This move was seen as an opportunity to centralize the game, to further integrate southern football officials into the federation, and align the federation more closely with the regime.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Christos Kassimeris, "Fascism, Separatism and the Ultras: Discrimination in Italian Football," *Soccer & Society* 12, no. 5 (2011): 678, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2011.599586>.

<sup>116</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 69.

<sup>117</sup> Martin, 74.

<sup>118</sup> Kassimeris, "Fascism, Separatism," 678.

<sup>119</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 75.

<sup>120</sup> Martin, 68.

The success of the regime's plan was seen during the national team's first ever game in Rome in 1928. The central location brought together northern and southern fans for the first truly national game, and was intended "to strengthen and extend to the southern regions that unification of national sporting activity [...] makes a notable contribution to the political and spiritual unification of Italy."<sup>121</sup> The event was described as an "organizational success that confounded many unwise prejudices against the southern crowd."<sup>122</sup> It was clear from early on in Mussolini's reign that football could serve as a powerful unifying force in Italian society.

Le Bon's theory of the management of the masses further materialized under Mussolini with the construction of the management of football stadiums. Sport spectatorship promised an opportunity to distribute fascist propaganda to an audience of tens of thousands united in their passion for sport.<sup>123</sup> Football stadiums, unlike many other cultural activities, brought together thousands of people of all different socio-economic backgrounds from different regions of the country. No other venue provided a space of guaranteed engagement and excitement like a football stadium. Thus, the Commissione Impianti Sportivi (CIS), part of CONI, identified stadiums as important investment opportunities for the regime: "Each sporting work, from the most modest to the monumental, is always a potent and efficient method of propaganda. Thus it largely needs to satisfy not only the technical demands of who trains there, to encourage him to persevere in his noble work, but also the needs of the spectator."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 71.

<sup>122</sup> Martin, 71.

<sup>123</sup> Belloni, "The Birth," 54.

<sup>124</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 85.

The architectural design of stadiums carried their own clear propaganda. To display the efficiency of the Italian regime, the massive structures were built with incredible speed: the Stadio Mussolini in Turin was completed in just six months.<sup>125</sup> Stadiums symbolized Italy's Roman imperial past, present Fascist technological strength, and future promise. A description of the Littoriale in Bologna stated: "towers, in general, were striking symbolic features of Fascist architecture which represented a combination of the medieval civic power and an abstract symbol of authority."<sup>126</sup> Statues and art honoring fascist icons decorated the stadium "to transform comradeship into tribalism, pride into a sense of superiority, a sense of belonging into hatred of outsiders."<sup>127</sup>

Since stadiums were such important venues of propaganda for the regime, they were granted a privileged position in the allocation of public funds. The government underwrote the stadiums in Rome, Bologna, Turin, and Florence and offered football teams that played in them subsidies and tax breaks.<sup>128</sup> The massive stadiums, seating tens of thousands of people, provided the ideal opportunity for all Italians to participate in the collective struggle, joy, and drama that played out in each game. Steep terraces ensured that no onlooker would be alienated from the action on the pitch.<sup>129</sup> Each game further ingratiated the masses in a celebration of Italian strength and culture.

Nationalistic sentiments were spread beyond the confines of a stadium with the rise in sports broadcasting in the late 1920s. Prior to the radio in the early days of fascism, newspapers and magazines represented the most widespread means for disseminating

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<sup>125</sup> Kassimeris, "Fascism, Separatism," 678.

<sup>126</sup> Kassimeris, 678.

<sup>127</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 80.

<sup>128</sup> De Grazia, *The Culture*, 177.

<sup>129</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 107.

information in Italy. Mussolini's background as a journalist meant he was especially in tune with the importance of media as an instrument of propaganda.<sup>130</sup> Sports press proved to be an extremely effective way to subtly push propaganda due to the seemingly apolitical and meritocratic nature of sports. Sports journalism appeared on the surface to have more freedom of expression and less government control in comparison to other forms of news. However, the totalitarian nature of the regime meant all aspects of life, including sports, were politicized.<sup>131</sup> Sports journalists, under Mussolini, promoted the moralization of sports and the integration of fascist values into Italian athletic culture.

Sports magazines were an important part of fascist propaganda in Italy, but high illiteracy rates and low levels of urban living during the early years of Mussolini's reign meant written propaganda did not reach a wide audience.<sup>132</sup> While written sports reports and commentaries were certainly an effective piece of propaganda, the radio made the transmission of this information easier, quicker, and more engaging. Radio broadcasts in Italy began just two years after Mussolini came to power in 1924. The first sports broadcast, an Italian win over Hungary, took place in 1928.<sup>133</sup> From then on, radio use skyrocketed. The number of radio subscribers increased from an estimated 27,000 in 1926 to over one million at the end of 1939.<sup>134</sup> Millions would gather at local bars, cafes, and recreational centers to listen to games their favorite teams play. Much like stadiums, the tradition of listening to games in public locations fostered a sense of collective identity.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, unlike written sports journalism, the radio was able to transmit

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<sup>130</sup> Belloni, "The Birth," 54.

<sup>131</sup> Belloni, 56.

<sup>132</sup> Belloni, 58.

<sup>133</sup> Belloni, 58.

<sup>134</sup> De Grazia, *The Culture*, 155.

<sup>135</sup> Cardoza, "Making Italians?," 368.

the passion and spirit of football through the voices of sports commentators. This passion encouraged the celebration of Italian sporting success and a triumphant physical culture.

### Spain

As with many other totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, the Franco regime came to power through war and maintained its power with terror and violence. However, fear alone is unsustainable for the long-term governance of a nation. The Franco regime relied on the active collaboration of different sectors of society in order to both engage and placate Spanish citizens. Franco sought to develop what has been referred to as the “acquiescence to the dictatorship” amongst Spanish society, meaning Spanish society would grow to accept the fascist regime, not with glowing praise, but with silent consent.<sup>136</sup> This passivity would afford Franco one of the longest reigns of any totalitarian leader in modern Europe.

To achieve this level of acquiescence, Franco adopted the Roman philosophy of “bread and circuses”, and almost no other activity provided the “circus” that Spanish football offered. The daily drama and passion that sport provided at all levels of the games for both active participants and spectators would become an incredibly popular distraction and source of joy for all classes of Spanish society.<sup>137</sup> Football, specifically, was the primary focus of the Franco regime.

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<sup>136</sup> Alejandro Quiroga, "Spanish Fury: Football and National Identities under Franco," *European History Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (2015): 509, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265691415587686>.

<sup>137</sup> Duncan Shaw, "The Political Instrumentalization of Professional Football in Francoist Spain 1939-1975" (PhD diss., Queen Mary University of London, 1988), 130, <http://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/xmlui/handle/123456789/1899>.

Despite this general love for sports, underfunding and poorly run state-controlled agencies lead to the underdevelopment of Spanish sports.<sup>138</sup> In the six Olympic Games that Franco's Spain participated in, they won just one gold medal, two silver and two bronze. Beyond a handful of outstanding individual athletes, like gymnast Joaquín Blume, cyclists Guillermo Timoner and Federico Bahamontes, or tennis player Manuel Santana, the regime relied on private football clubs to cover up their lack of sporting success.<sup>139</sup> Even the Spanish national football team performed incredibly poorly during Franco's regime, as private clubs were largely composed of foreign football stars, and Franco was unwilling to invest in the development of the Spanish game.<sup>140</sup> The national team failed to qualify for the 1954, 1958, 1970 or 1974 World Cups and were eliminated early in the 1962 and 1966 Cups.<sup>141</sup> Thus, domestic football, and the most successful Spanish club at the time Real Madrid, would become the "circus" that Franco would exploit and manipulate to unify and placate the masses.

Franco took control of an extremely fragmented nation. Spain encompasses a number of historical nationalities and ethnicities, the most dominant being Castilian, Catalan, and Basque. Castile is the dominant nationality in Spain, as Spain was united under the Crown of Castile; however, the remaining nationalities retain unique geographical distinctions, languages, and cultural practices. With the loss of colonial Cuba in 1898, many Spaniards sought to reshape their national identity.<sup>142</sup> This period of

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<sup>138</sup> Quiroga, "Spanish Fury," 514.

<sup>139</sup> Aja, "Spanish Sports," 107.

<sup>140</sup> Quiroga, "Spanish Fury," 517.

<sup>141</sup> Ramón Llopis Goig, "Identity, Nation-State and Football in Spain. The Evolution of Nationalist Feelings in Spanish Football," *Soccer & Society* 9, no. 1 (January 2008): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970701616738>.

<sup>142</sup> Frans Joachim Schrijver, *Regionalism after Regionalisation: Spain, France and the United Kingdom* (Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

national transition inspired Basque and the Catalan nationalist movements. Emerging industrial bourgeois classes in the regions espoused an anti-Madrid, anti-Spain sentiment and began investing in their respective regions.<sup>143</sup> Cultural renaissances transitioned into fierce political movements, largely founded upon decentralization and autonomous regions.<sup>144</sup>

General Miguel Primo de Rivera's seizure of power in 1923 brought a halt to the growth of Catalan and Basque regionalism. The authoritarian regime banned regional movements and autonomous governments within Spain. The strict enforcement of this ban reverberated through all of society, including football.<sup>145</sup> After FC Barcelona fans booed the Spanish national anthem, Primo de Rivera closed the team's stadium for six months and forced the club president to resign. It was during this period of political repression that football began to take on symbolic significance.<sup>146</sup> Football clubs, such as F.C. Barcelona in Catalonia and Athletic de Bilbao in Euzkadi, or Basque Country, became some of the few symbols of regional identities that were legally permitted. For example, the banned flag of Catalonia, the Senyera, was substituted with the flag of FC Barcelona during political demonstrations.<sup>147</sup> After the fall of Spain's first dictator, the regional clubs retained their political significance. Under the Second Republic, FC Barcelona and Athletic de Bilbao both actively backed their respective region's

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<sup>143</sup> Vaczi, "The Spanish," 203-4.

<sup>144</sup> Schrijver, *Regionalism after*.

<sup>145</sup> Christos Kassimeris, "Franco, the Popular Game and Ethnocentric Conduct in Modern Spanish Football," *Soccer & Society* 13, no. 4 (2012): 558, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2012.677228>.

<sup>146</sup> Goig, "Identity, Nation-State," 60.

<sup>147</sup> Jorge Tuñón and Elisa Brey, "Sports and Politics in Spain – Football and Nationalist Attitudes within the Basque Country and Catalonia," *European Journal for Sport and Society* 9, no. 1 (2012).

autonomy. When the Civil War broke out in 1936, many players joined the fight against Franco's military.<sup>148</sup>

Franco identified these schismatic tendencies as a challenge to his region, and necessary to shut down for the long-term success of his reign. Furthermore, creating a strong national identity would help legitimize the regime and overcome periods of struggle the nation may face. Football was identified as a tool that could both benefit and harm the regime. Bilbao-based Falangist Jacinto Miquelarena recognized the importance of Athletic de Bilbao in Euzkadi and warned that football, “has a great defect, which is the bad thing about it: it stimulates regionalism.”<sup>149</sup> Alternatively, he suggested that:

The State must appropriate sports. Sports have the capacity to found a nationality, and to reduce an old Empire to microscopic segments. There is the “love for the club,” a poor feminine love, an attraction to colors and ribbons; and there is or there can be the “love of the great patriotic idea.” [...] A state that exploits the great torrent of sport will be a powerful State.<sup>150</sup>

Thus, the Franco regime manipulated football in Spain to construct a unified national identity.

Like his Italian counterpart, Franco applied fascistic rule to the world of Spanish football. Club leadership was required to cooperate with the regime, or be replaced. As president of Real Madrid, Nationalist Civil War veteran Santiago Bernabéu’s close ties to the dictatorship turned his football club into Spain’s unofficial “national team” and became Europe’s most successful team. On the other hand, FC Barcelona’s president at the beginning of the Civil War was Josep Sunyol, one of the most visible members of anti-Spanish political organizations “Acció Catalana” and “Esquerra Republicana de

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<sup>148</sup> Goig, "Identity, Nation-State," 58.

<sup>149</sup> Vaczi, "The Spanish," 203-4.

<sup>150</sup> Vaczi, 203.

Catalunya.” Sunyol was killed by Nationalist forces in 1936.<sup>151</sup> A series of Francoists would be appointed to fill Sunyol’s role after his assassination. Members of the Falange were assigned to executive boards and upper management roles across football clubs in Spain. The regime also made Castilian the official language and banned the use of minority languages. This meant all football clubs were required to Castilianize their names. Futbol Club Barcelona, which was Catalan, was changed to Club de Fútbol de Barcelona. Athletic de Bilbao and Sporting Gijón, which had assumed the English name out of homage to its British roots, were changed to Atlético de Bilbao and Deportivo Gijón.<sup>152</sup> Traditionally foreign sports terms, such as ‘corner’, ‘amateur’ and ‘match’, were similarly translated to Castilian.<sup>153</sup> Regionalist symbols were also banned. FC Barcelona’s crest, which contained the Senyera, had to be changed. Sports fans that carried any symbols of regional identity could be punished with imprisonment.<sup>154</sup> The regime completed the transformation of Spanish football in 1943 when the domestic cup competition, the Copa del Rey, was renamed the Copa del Generalísimo in honor of the dictator.<sup>155</sup>

Perhaps more so than eradicating regional identities, the regime pursued the manipulation of them and their relationship with the central government. For example, the national football teams of Castile and Catalonia played a reconciliatory match two years after the end of the civil war.<sup>156</sup> The game was meant to display a tolerance for regional identities and help reduce regional tensions. It also aided in the impression that

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<sup>151</sup> Vaczi, "The Spanish," 202.

<sup>152</sup> Kassimeris, "Franco, the Popular," 559.

<sup>153</sup> Quiroga, "Spanish Fury," 511.

<sup>154</sup> Vaczi, "The Spanish," 204.

<sup>155</sup> Kassimeris, "Franco, the Popular," 559.

<sup>156</sup> Quiroga, "Spanish Fury," 511.

sports under the regime would be an apolitical, neutral venue. Furthermore, while Real Madrid would become the most successful football club in Europe, both Athletic de Bilbao and FC Barcelona would have immense success and fame internationally as well. Their international achievements would contribute to the diplomatic goals of the regime, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Football was identified by the regime as distracting from the ails of society. Especially in the post-Civil War era, the victors sought to distract from the trauma of the three year long conflict and misery and repression that followed. The demand for cheap entertainment was incredibly high, and football seemed to be the ideal solution. Despite the quality of play being exceptionally poor due to many leading players being killed in the war or exiled by the regime, football stadiums were almost always filled to capacity. The lack of skilled players mattered little to the war-weary spectators.<sup>157</sup>

During the 1950 World Cup, one of the few World Cups that Franco's Spain did well in, the media was blanketed with news of their success. Films of Spanish victories leading up to the 4th place finish were flown back from Brazil two days after the game and projected on large screens around the country. The propagation of nationalist ideas through football only continued to grow throughout the 1960s with the use of television transmissions. State-owned television company Televisión Española (TVE) brought football to the whole of Spain and football was undoubtedly one of the most popular showings.<sup>158</sup> With the streaming of football, more so than ever, sport was used as a distraction and to project the successes of the regime for all of Spain. Spain showed more football matches annually than any other country for most of the '60s. Nearly 80% of

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<sup>157</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 142.

<sup>158</sup> Quiroga, "Spanish Fury," 515.

those matches were watched by an audience of between ten and fifteen million. More important matches, especially *El Clásicos* (matches between Real Madrid and FC Barcelona) and cup finals, had viewing audiences of nearly half of the Spanish population, over 15 million. On five occasions, the audience exceeded 20 million Spaniards.<sup>159</sup> Major games, such as Spain's victory in the 1964 European Nations' Cup, were replayed for more than a week after the final so that fans could "relive the sensational Spanish triumph."<sup>160</sup>

The regime didn't simply want to distract from the day-to-day repression and misery. The regime also sought to suppress and hide protests to give the appearance of domestic peace. The first Secretary for Information and Press after the Franco regime reflected on the regime's use of sport:

For years, Spanish sport was effectively reduced to football, always employed as a drug to make the man in the street forget his everyday problems, and used systematically on the eve of the most conflictive public holidays. Manuel Fraga, specifically, combined the fiestas of football and bulls for all of the May Day public holidays, culminating a few years ago, one 30 April, in a television transmission of all of the goals ever scored by the Spanish national team.<sup>161</sup>

During the Franco regime, May Day, the Spanish version of Labor Day, was characterized by illegal demonstrations of opposition parties and the independent trade unions. To distract from the massive protests, TVE populated its schedule with live matches and highlights of the best games. At least four football matches, live and replayed, were played over the span of the annual protests.<sup>162</sup> For May Day in 1966, the

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<sup>159</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 160.

<sup>160</sup> Quiroga, "Spanish Fury," 515.

<sup>161</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 126.

<sup>162</sup> Quiroga, "Spanish Fury," 517.

government requested that the Spanish basketball league championship game between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid be brought forward three days to coincide with the protests. The game was watched by approximately 14 million Spaniards.<sup>163</sup>

### Germany

Unlike in Italy and Spain, professional sports and sports clubs had not taken hold in Germany when Hitler came to power. Despite a similar love for sports, the professionalization of the sport had not been allowed in the post-World War One era by the government. Rather, the highest level of sport remained amateur. This amateurism would become an important aspect of Nazism. Nazi ideology celebrated membership in the racial collectivity of the *Volk*, and individual sporting excellence clashed with the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft*, national unity.<sup>164</sup> Therefore, when Hitler instituted sporting programs for the promotion of nationalism and Nazi ideology, the main focus of the policies would be on uplifting and indoctrinating the entire Aryan population, rather than the success of a few sporting stars.

The first step in uplifting the Aryan population was ensuring that non-Aryan people, mainly Jewish people, could not play organized sports. By giving Jews space to compete, Hitler would be giving Jews space to prove his anti-semitic ideology wrong, which he did not want to risk. Furthermore, the sporting clubs of the 1920s and early '30s had largely formed around political, religious, or cultural identities, and Hitler feared Jewish clubs would spread and promote community building and shared identity amongst

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<sup>163</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 150.

<sup>164</sup> Carr, "Sport and Party," 1.

“the most dangerous enemy - perhaps the only enemy able to destroy our culture.”<sup>165</sup>

Jewish people were also accused of being a threat to the Volksgemeinschaft in that they were believed to be promoting professionalization and the individualist glorification of athletes, as well as introducing foreign sports into German society. Nazi Bruno Malitz wrote of Jews in sport:

[A]ny people who hypocritically glorify sports should be driven out... Whatever a Jew holds up as being of value is poisonous. Look at the newspapers that glorify sport - they're all Jewish. Page after page of it. One minute... for the people, the next for profit. Jewish sport leaders... the Jewish poison in sport.. have no place in German sport. They are worse than cholera, lung disease, syphilis, worse than the rampaging hordes of the Kalmucks, worse than a flaming conflagration, famine, floods, drought, locusts and poison gas - worse than all these because these kill only Germans whereas the latter kills Germany itself.<sup>166</sup>

The Third Reich banned non-Nazi political sports clubs and began encouraging sports teams to purge Jewish and communist members the year Hitler came to power. Sports clubs were not allowed to have more than 20 percent of their members come from already banned organizations. In 1935, the regime banned religious football clubs to officially purge the sport of Jewish teams and players.<sup>167</sup> Only Nazi-sponsored clubs and associations would be allowed in Germany after this. Some of Germany's most famous footballers, including German National Team player Julius Hirsch, were banned from the sport and murdered by the Nazis due to their Jewish heritage.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Carr, "Sport and Party," 2.

<sup>166</sup> Carr, "Sport and Party," 3.

<sup>167</sup> D'Anieri, "Defining the Boundaries," 3.

<sup>168</sup> Macon Benoit, "The Politicization of Football: the European Game and the approach to the Second World War," *Soccer & Society* 9, no. 4 (October 2008): 535, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970802257606>.

This practice was also extend into Nazi-occupied territories. Austria, who were one of the great footballing nations at the time, were home to famous Jewish club Hakoah Wein.<sup>169</sup> Hakoah Wein was founded in 1909 by Zionists. They play with the Star of David on their blue and white jerseys. The team played in the top professional league in Austria and attracted Jewish players from all of Europe with higher wages and a dynamic Jewish community. Hakoah won the 1925 league season and were lauded for breaking negative stereotypes about Jewish athleticism. German sporting magazine *Fussball* praised the team's success because it “helped do away with the fairy tale about the physical inferiority of the Jews.”<sup>170</sup> Following the Austrian Anschluss, Hakoah Wein was shut down by the Nazis. Their match results were scrubbed from record books. All of Hoakah’s games that had already taken place in the 1938 season were rewritten as forfeits and opponents were awarded 3-0 wins. Six former Hakoah players would die in the Holocaust, a complete erasure of Jewish athletic excellence.<sup>171</sup>

The high levels of participation in sport due to the mandatory nature of physical education mentioned in Chapter Two, as well as the general popularity of sports meant that athletic associations were prime locations to indoctrinate people with Nazi ideology. Nazi propaganda and indoctrination was present at all levels of German sport. At the highest level, the regime changed the title of sporting events and festivals to honor the new dictator. The National Championships was changed to the National Socialist Championships, distance marching competitions became "Adolf Hitler pack-marches",

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<sup>169</sup> Benoit, "The Politicization," 535.

<sup>170</sup> D'Anieri, "Defining the Boundaries," 6.

<sup>171</sup> D'Anieri, 6.

and a new stadium in Stuttgart was named "Adolf-Hitler-Kampfbahn". The re-titling of stadiums and competitions reinforced the presence and leadership of the Third Reich.<sup>172</sup>

The regime also created a *Dietwart* office which would work with the National Physical Education Union and the Office of the People's Enlightenment in Political and Racial Questions to provide an ideological education to athletes.<sup>173</sup> Sport club directors became known as Fuhrers and each one was assigned a "Dietwart," who were responsible for the indoctrination of their club members. Dietwart commissars were educated at Nazi Institutions on party philosophy, attended monthly training courses in regional party training centers, and instructed to educate clubs on the historical and philosophical background of the Nazi party, as well as current political events.<sup>174</sup> Players would be tested on important facts like the date of Hitler's birthday, the origins of the swastika, and Jews as an enemy of the German race.<sup>175</sup> The Nazis also brought all club youth programs into the Hitler Youth. The Hitler Youth, similarly to the Dietwart program, provided an ideological education for the young players. By 1936, no independent youth clubs remained.<sup>176</sup>

Sport became especially important during war. Sports as popular as football were originally an area of concern for the Third Reich because they viewed it as a dangerous alternative passion to Nazism. The social capital that some football clubs held worried the regime for its potential to cause division within society.<sup>177</sup> However, this passion became an important distraction from the long and arduous fighting that occurred during the war

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<sup>172</sup> Carr, "Sport and Party," 7.

<sup>173</sup> Carr, 7.

<sup>174</sup> Carr, 8.

<sup>175</sup> Carr, 8.

<sup>176</sup> D'Anieri, "Defining the Boundaries," 4.

<sup>177</sup> Benoit, "The Politicization," 543.

or the trauma from occupation by Nazi forces. Before war broke out in Poland, the German National team toured the Nazi-occupied territories to play reconciliatory matches against local teams and raise morale. These games would continue until 1942 when some national team players were called upon to help with war efforts. The domestic league would continue play throughout the entire war.<sup>178</sup>

Hitler had to rely heavily on football as a distraction during the war because the cause of the war seemed largely unjustifiable to many Germans. Whereas Allied forces could justify war efforts as necessary to stop the encroachment of Nazis, Hitler had few tangible justifications for such a costly and devastating war.<sup>179</sup> Especially with the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, many Germans questioned if the potential philosophical and financial benefits of the war would be worth it in the end. The regime hoped to distract its people of misery wartime Germany and make them “feel their lives had been only mildly disrupted, as in a rail strike or a snowstorm.”<sup>180</sup> Football matches seemed to be the obvious answer as a distraction because it had become one of the most popular pastimes in European society and it was much easier to provide than money, food, or safety. Famous German footballer Fritz Walter recalled being mobbed by German soldiers in the middle of the war: “For them I am the embodiment of concepts lost forever: peace, home, sport.”<sup>181</sup>

Domestic football continued amidst Allied air raids and attacks. In fact, air raids were so frequent that exact kick-off times would be kept secret until a few hours before

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<sup>178</sup> Benoit, "The Politicization," 543.

<sup>179</sup> Simon Kuper, *Ajax, the Dutch, the War: Football in Europe during the Second World War* (London: Orion, 2004).

<sup>180</sup> Kuper, *Ajax, the Dutch*.

<sup>181</sup> Benoit, "The Politicization," 542.

the game. Despite the risk, thousands would still show up to cheer on their teams, including an audience of seventy thousand people at the 1944 league final just days after Allied troops landed in Normandy.<sup>182</sup> In the nazi-occupied Netherlands, football flourished. Spectatorship and participation soared after the occupation began. During the year of the invasion, over four million tickets for sporting events were sold. By 1943, that figure had doubled.<sup>183</sup> Football “seemed to have become a basic human need, almost like eating and sex. The Dutch weren’t about to give it up just because of a genocide.”<sup>184</sup> Despite the Allied forces knocking on the doors of Munich at the end of April 1945, 25,000 fans attended a friendly match between the city’s two biggest clubs.<sup>185</sup>

### Conclusion

Sports helped foster a celebratory culture of consent that legitimized the regime and backed its ultra-nationalist sentiments. Sports provided a space to both learn and espouse national identity, as well as unite citizens in shared passions. Sports also contributed to a culture of evasion that allowed regimes to distract and suppress larger political, economic, and social issues. Technological advances that overlapped with the reign of European totalitarianism, such as radios and televisions, provided new mediums to push propaganda.

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<sup>182</sup> Kuper, *Ajax, the Dutch*.

<sup>183</sup> Benoit, "The Politicization," 543.

<sup>184</sup> Kuper, *Ajax, the Dutch*.

<sup>185</sup> Benoit, "The Politicization," 543.

#### IV. International Diplomacy

The militarization and nationalization of totalitarian society inevitably lent itself to the desire to assert the regime's international dominance. Spain, Germany, and Italy were all recovering from international humiliation and took every opportunity to improve their standing on the global stage. Though the three regime's had dramatically different diplomatic goals, and goals that varied throughout each leader's reign, sports were central to their achievement.

International sports provided an invaluable tool for promoting international prestige due to the standardization of success. Unlike almost all other forms of culture, international sport offered a universal set of rules that determined a clear and meritocratic winner. Sport provided an objective and tangible metric to compare two nations, and did so on a platform that attracted extraordinary levels of public attention.<sup>186</sup> Thus, for regimes who could not compete economically or politically, sports were one arena in which they could try to excel.

International competitions, the most significant of which were the Olympics and the FIFA men's football World Cup, provided more opportunities for regimes to impress foreign countries than just the game on the pitch. Hosting international competitions afforded nations the platform to show off their culture, history, and organizational capacity. Regimes aligned themselves with rhetoric of mega-sports events as a space for cosmopolitanism, peace, and international harmony, even if that was not an accurate reflection of their government outside of the bounds of the event. Fans and athletes acted

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<sup>186</sup> De Grazia, *The Culture*, 189.

as ambassadors for the regime and would help achieve the state's strategic objectives.<sup>187</sup> Hosting and participating in international sporting competitions became valuable opportunities for totalitarian regimes to push their ideology and the image of a peaceful and successful nation.

### Italy

Though Italy hadn't always performed well in athletic competitions, Mussolini's investment in sport for the general improvement of health and military preparation (highlighted in Chapter Two) had the added benefit of improving overall athletic competitiveness in domestic and international sporting competition. While early fascist sporting performances returned poor results, the militarization of the masses would help with "manufacturing champions" that would turn Italy into a dominant sporting force in the 1930s.<sup>188</sup> This transition was highlighted in top sports magazine *La Gazzetta dello Sport*: "Athleticism has made great progress among the young. The [1928] Amsterdam Olympics will certainly not confirm it, but the reserves are being created and the future will show that a good wine is coming."<sup>189</sup> Mussolini would use his country's high-profile sporting successes to gain international prestige by projecting an image of a strong, well-developed, and united nation shaped by a skilled and popular fascist government.

While Italy did not perform spectacularly at the 1928 Olympic Games, it was one of the first major international sporting events Mussolini used as international propaganda. Italian athletes drove in a convoy of over fifty cars from top racing teams in

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<sup>187</sup> Tomlinson and Young, "Culture, Politics," 4.

<sup>188</sup> Gigliola Gori, "Model of Masculinity: Mussolini, the 'new Italian' of the Fascist Era," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 16, no. 4 (1999): 42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523369908714098>.

<sup>189</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 174.

Milan and Bologna to show the “national solidarity that reigns in Italy today . . . of how much youth and fervor has brought this country to life.”<sup>190</sup> Italy’s performance was highlighted by a semi-final finish in the football competition in which the *Azzurri*, Italy’s national football team, narrowly lost to Uruguay. Italy’s overall medal count tallied up to just 18 medals, but with France, England and Belgium’s performance seemingly in decline, Italian media saw this mediocre success as the beginning of Italy “marching at the vanguard of modern sport.”<sup>191</sup>

Sport assumed even greater propagandist significance in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics. Dressed in black shirts like soldiers in Mussolini’s army, the Italian team marched in a choreographed Fascist parade during the opening ceremony and performed the fascist salute. The second place finish in overall medal count proved even greater progress in Italy’s sporting ability.<sup>192</sup> The 1932 Olympics was followed by nearly a decade of sporting success: Italian drivers won the European Drivers Championship in 1931 and ‘32; Italo Balbo flew across the Atlantic to Chicago in June 1933; Primo Carnera won the world heavyweight boxing title in July 1933; the *Azzurri* won the World Cup in 1934 and 1938, as well as the Central European International Cup and Olympic title in 1936; and Gino Bartali won the Tour de France in 1938.<sup>193</sup> <sup>194</sup> Italian football clubs also enjoyed success in this period, especially the Bologna FC, which won the

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<sup>190</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 175.

<sup>191</sup> Martin, 175.

<sup>192</sup> Dogliani, "Sport and Fascism," 335.

<sup>193</sup> Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young, *National Identity and Global Sports Events: Culture, Politics, and Spectacle in the Olympics and the Football World Cup* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 42.

<sup>194</sup> Dogliani, "Sport and Fascism," 332.

Mitropa Cup in 1932 and 1934 and beat English side Chelsea in the Paris Exhibition Tournament in 1937.<sup>195</sup>

The Azzurri also played a series of politically significant football matches during this period to symbolize diplomatic alliances. Matches were regularly held between Italy and central European countries. This region was of particular importance to the Italian regime due to the power vacuum that emerged following the fall of the Austro-Hungarian empire after World War I.<sup>196</sup> Regular competition between the nations provided an opportunity for the regime to develop relations with the new nations in the volatile area. The aforementioned Central European International Cup, founded in 1927, ensured games between the participating nations: Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The same year the Cup was founded, a series of bilateral peace agreements between Italy, Austria and Hungary were also signed.<sup>197</sup> Italy's relationship with Austria was especially important because the small country of Austria relied on Italy for protection against German aggression. In 1934, Italy would even subsidize the Austrian Football Association so they could afford to play in the World Cup.<sup>198</sup>

Similarly, an important game was played against Britain in 1933. Britain was hoping to improve their relationship with Italy to counter the sway of Germany, where Adolf Hitler had just come to power.<sup>199</sup> Italy, who had not formed an alliance with the new fascist regime, also hoped to improve their relationship with the Home Nations in case of German expansion. Mussolini sought to show the regime's apparent mass support

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<sup>195</sup> Tomlinson and Young, *National Identity*, 42.

<sup>196</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 176.

<sup>197</sup> Martin, 177.

<sup>198</sup> Kay Schiller and Stefan Rinke, *The FIFA World Cup 1930-2010: Politics, Commerce, Spectacle and Identities* (Goettingen: Wallstein, 2014), 76.

<sup>199</sup> Schiller and Rinke, *The FIFA*, 74.

through fan attendance at the match. The strategy seemed to work because the head of the English party remarked after the match, “I was profoundly moved by the warm demonstration the crowd gave to the head of government . . . today I had the true impression of the fondness the crowd has for the Duce.”<sup>200</sup>

This relationship between the Italy and European democracies, the mutual desire to improve their relationship, likely contributed to the 1932 decision to allow Mussolini’s regime to host the 1934 World Cup. Another important factor that contributed to the decision was Italy’s willingness to take on all financial obligations because Mussolini wanted to present the regime as reliable and financially successful. However, by 1934, the relationship between Great Britain and Italy had deteriorated while Mussolini and Hitler were beginning to form their alliance. The Brits decided not to attend the 1934 World Cup due to increasing hostility between the two governments.<sup>201</sup> It is important to note that Great Britain did not fear retaliation for the decision to not to participate in the event, whereas the Brits would make a very different decision with the 1936 Olympics Games for fear of backlash from the Third Reich.

Regardless of the presence of the Home Nations, Italy would go all out to impress the visiting countries because Mussolini knew the “attention of the world of sport will turn itself on Italy.”<sup>202</sup> Italy set aside a budget of an astonishing 3.5 million lira for the tournament. Notably, the 1934 World Cup would be the first time FIFA’s payments would be in a currency other than the sterling or dollars. The decision to use the Italian lira

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<sup>200</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 181.

<sup>201</sup> Apostolos Matsaridis and Vasileos Kaimakamis, "Sport at Fascism's Disposal: the 1934 Football World Cup as a Case of Ideological Propagation and Political Enforcement," *Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism* 19, no. 3 (2012): 118, [http://www.wbc.poznan.pl/Content/239646/PDF/4\\_Studies\\_2012\\_3\\_117.pdf](http://www.wbc.poznan.pl/Content/239646/PDF/4_Studies_2012_3_117.pdf).

<sup>202</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 183.

suggested an “official recognition that Italian currency offers a greater confidence and guarantee than that of other foreign currencies.”<sup>203</sup>

The regime organized the World Cup to display Italian fascist strength and power. No aspects of the tournament were left to chance. All cities that would host games were selected for their beauty and strong presence of imperial Italian culture interlaced with modern fascist innovations. The eight chosen cities also had newly constructed stadiums constructed in accordance to the fascist aesthetic, as discussed in Chapter three, three of which were specifically designed for the tournament.<sup>204</sup> From a tourism point of view, Mussolini had invested in Italy’s crumbling railway system. Therefore, Mussolini encouraged railway travel to Italy for the World Cup to show off their advanced rail network.<sup>205</sup> He even offered fans from France, Holland, Switzerland and Germany discounted train travel to and throughout Italy, as well as subsidized hotel rooms.<sup>206</sup> The Italian World Cup had the highest number of foreign fans in attendance of any football tournament at the time.<sup>207</sup> The Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche (Italian Body for Radio Broadcasting) would, for the first time ever, sell international radio rights so the tournament could be broadcast throughout Europe and South America to ensure that those who couldn’t attend in person could still listen in.<sup>208</sup>

To complement the impressive setting of the tournament, the regime also invested heavily in a merchandising campaign. Tickets to the tournament were decorated and

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<sup>203</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 186.

<sup>204</sup> Matsaridis and Kaimakamis, "Sport at Fascism's," 119.

<sup>205</sup> Nicola Sbeti and Daniele Serapiglia, "Was Football Fascist? The 1934 World Cup in the Postwar Memory," *Soccer & Society* 21, no. 8 (July 19, 2020): 891, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2020.1793624>.

<sup>206</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 184.

<sup>207</sup> Matsaridis and Kaimakamis, "Sport at Fascism's," 119.

<sup>208</sup> Schiller and Rinke, *The FIFA*, 68.

printed on high quality paper to be kept as commemorative souvenirs. 100,000 posters and 300,000 postcards were printed for mass distribution.<sup>209</sup> The government commissioned a limited edition brand of cigarettes called “Campionato del Mondo.” Commemorative postage stamps featuring fasces and images of the stadiums were also issued. These items were believed to be “a great work of world propaganda for Italianità, connecting in everlasting signs the characteristics of sport with the Fascio Littorio, reconfirming to all the world that Italian Sport had been strengthened by Fascism.”<sup>210</sup>

There would be no greater piece of propaganda, however, than the Italian National Team winning the entire tournament. Their victory seemed to prove Mussolini’s claim of “racial superiority that [is] destined to reflect in many fields outside of sport.”<sup>211</sup> Despite criticism of the Azzurri’s aggressive style of play and rumors of Mussolini fixing the games, the international community did seem to accept that Italy was the best football team in the world, or at least second to the unproven British side.<sup>212</sup> French journalist Maurice Pefferkorn praised the Italian Football team for their “model of play, a dazzling example of style, and an Italian school is already talked of, to which one needs to aspire. This is perhaps the greatest recognition, the most significant eulogy: the azzurri have become the masters.”<sup>213</sup> There was also immense praise for the modern stadiums and impeccable organization of the tournament that seemed to translate into the general acceptance and perhaps even admiration for the fascist regime. An official from the powerful Hungarian Football Association praised the regime because “from Torino

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<sup>209</sup> Schiller and Rinke, *The FIFA*, 68.

<sup>210</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 185.

<sup>211</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 175.

<sup>212</sup> Sbeti and Serapiglia, "Was Football," 890.

<sup>213</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 192.

and Trieste to Tàranto and Palermo, Italy shakes with healthy sporting enthusiasm, while ten years ago sport, as it is understood today, had not reached Rome.”<sup>214</sup> The tournament would also prove to be significant in that it would host the first meeting between Hitler and Mussolini. Germany’s third place finish brought the German dictator to Italy. Four days after the closing celebration, Hitler would meet Mussolini for the first time in Venice.<sup>215</sup>

Italy’s gold medal in the 1936 Olympics football tournament and domination in the 1938 France Cup seemed to confirm Italy as a footballing world power. Their successes seemed to prove that their previous victory on home turf had not been due to home field advantage. Their 1936 win in conjunction with the Nazi success at the Games affirmed the fascist regimes as sporting powerhouses. Furthermore, amidst growing Franco-Italian tension, the victory in 1938 was even more significant because it was a victory in “hostile territory.”<sup>216</sup>

### **Germany**

Following World War I, Germany faced a period of isolationism. As the assigned initiators of the Great War, Allied Powers sought to exclude the nation from the international sphere. It wasn’t until the signing of the Pact of Locarno and their entry into the League of Nations five years after the end of the war that Germany began slowly being accepted back into global politics.<sup>217</sup> Under the democratic Weimar Republic, it appeared as though Germany would become a natural ally to its neighbors to the west,

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<sup>214</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 184.

<sup>215</sup> Tomlinson and Young, *National Identity*, 57.

<sup>216</sup> Martin, *Football and Fascism*, 193.

<sup>217</sup> Krüger, "The Role," 81.

and Great Britain, France, Belgium, and Italy were all warming up to the idea of improving their relationships with the country.

This mending of relationships during the 1920s was reflected in international sports. The Olympics Games organizing committee, largely helmed by Frenchmen and Britons, excluded the ‘arch enemy’ from the 1920 and 1924 Olympic Games. England requested that FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) remove Germany, Austria, and Hungary on the grounds that they had been responsible for the First World War, but the private organization was not persuaded so the Home Nations withdrew from FIFA in protest.<sup>218</sup> While protecting their status as an international footballing country was an important win for the Germans, FIFA was still in its infancy, having not even held their first World Cup. Germans had long valued the Olympics as the premier international sporting event and strove to regain entry. The Germans had long viewed the Olympics as tantamount to war:

The Olympic Games are a war, a real war. You can be sure that many participants are willing to offer—without hesitation—several years of their life for a victory of the fatherland...The Olympic idea of the modern era has given us a symbol of world war, which does not show its military character very openly, but—for those who can read sports statistics—it gives enough insight into world ranking.<sup>219</sup>

In their first Olympics after the Great War, the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics, Germany sent the largest team, had massive crowd support, and proved themselves to be a sporting nation with the second-highest medal count.<sup>220</sup> The awarding of the 1936 Olympic Games

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<sup>218</sup> Krüger, "The Role," [87].

<sup>219</sup> Sandra Heck, "Modern Pentathlon and the First World War: When Athletes and Soldiers Met to Practise Martial Manliness," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, nos. 3-4 (March 2011): 417, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2011.544860>.

<sup>220</sup> Krüger, "The Role," 82.

to the Weimar Republic's capital city, Berlin, in 1931 affirmed Germany's status, not just a valued competitor in international sports, but as a trusted political partner.<sup>221</sup>

Much changed, however, from the awarding of the Olympics to Berlin and the nearly five years of political and economic turmoil that preceded the Games. When Hitler came to power in 1933, he sought to use sport to further break Germany's international isolation, disguise the nature of his regime abroad, and promote Nazi ideology. During the Weimar Republic, Germany participated in less than 20 international sporting competitions each year. In 1933 and '34, Nazis increased participation to over 30 events annually. In 1935 alone, they competed in 78.<sup>222</sup>

The most significant of these 78 events was the December 4th international friendly between the German and English football teams. The match was organized by England's Football Association (FA) and would be played in London, the first time Germany would face England on British soil.<sup>223</sup> The match seemed to symbolize the mending of Anglo-German relationships and, at least for Germany, the acceptance of the Nazi Regime by one of the regime's most vocal political adversaries.

Despite concern from Home Secretary Sir John Simon that this game would be "a piece of political propaganda in the interest of Nazis", the FA moved forward so as to not provoke German retaliation if the game were to be canceled.<sup>224</sup> Even as Hitler reclaimed the Saar region and renounced the 1919 Treaty of Versailles by rearming his country, the FA

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<sup>221</sup> Mario Kessler, "Only Nazi Games? Berlin 1936: The Olympic Games between Sports and Politics," *Socialism and Democracy* 25, no. 2 (July 26, 2011): 125, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300.2011.579476>.

<sup>222</sup> Krüger, "The Role," 87.

<sup>223</sup> Stoddart, "Sport, Cultural," 39.

<sup>224</sup> Stoddart, "Sport, Cultural," 37.

defaulted to the international policy of appeasement by moving forward with game as if nothing were happening.<sup>225</sup>

On the day of the match, 10,000 German supporters arrived in London for the match. They were volunteers of the *Kraft durch Freude* ('Strength through Joy') program, a mass tourism organization meant to promote Nazism in Germany and abroad. For such a large group to make this trek, it was clear that the official Nazi party funded this excursion.<sup>226</sup> The secretary of the General Council of the Trade Union Congress Sir Walter Citrine noted that "such a large and carefully organised Nazi contingent coming to London might confirm the impression among people in this country that the event is being regarded as of some political importance by the visitors."<sup>227</sup> Upon reflection, 'some political importance' was a clear understatement.

The Germans sought to establish themselves as kind and cooperative to disguise their increasingly violent anti-semitic and racist policies that had drawn international criticism. German authorities discouraged the carrying of swastikas or singing of patriotic songs. German players were almost excessively polite to their opponents and their fans mixed happily with their English counterparts – a far cry from traditional English soccer hooliganism.<sup>228</sup> The match passed without incident and England won 3-0. The loss seemed to lend itself perfectly to Germany's non-threatening appearance, and the British press praised their decent and respectful visitors.<sup>229</sup> The President of the Anglo-German

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<sup>225</sup> Stoddart, "Sport, Cultural," 31.

<sup>226</sup> Stoddart, 42.

<sup>227</sup> "Visit of German Footballers," *The Observer* (London), December 1, 1935, <https://www.theguardian.com/observer/englandfootball/story/0,9565,540901,00.html>.

<sup>228</sup> Stoddart, "Sport, Cultural," 43.

<sup>229</sup> Stoddart, 44.

Fellowship and British politician Lord Mount Temple proclaimed the match to be a turning point in relations between the two countries.<sup>230</sup>

Across the English Channel, however, the event was viewed differently. A German newspaper described the match from its viewpoint as an “unrestricted political, psychological and also sporting success.”<sup>231</sup> While it seems unlikely that any football fan would regard a 3-0 loss a ‘sporting success’, they were correct that the Nazi were triumphant in propagating a ‘political’ and ‘psychological’ image of a peaceful and cooperative nation. Nazi ideologues, who had long identified sports as a valuable state building tool, exploited the conservative English belief that politics had no place in sport for their propaganda.<sup>232</sup> The 1935 match would act as a testing ground for the cultural offensive Germany would employ in the impending 1936 Olympic Games.

Hitler’s regime sought to use the Games to disguise the true nature of the regime abroad. The primary criticism of the Third Reich prior to the games was their treatment of German Jews.<sup>233</sup> The increasingly blatant oppression of Jews startled many countries around the world. As foreign Olympic Committees began raising concerns about possible human rights abuses to the IOC, the Germans invited Avery Brundage, the President of the US Olympic Committee, to visit Germany to investigate the conditions of anti-semitism in Germany.<sup>234</sup> Von Tschammer und Osten guided Brundage through Germany’s preparation for the Games and succeeded in impressing Brundage. Upon his return to America, Brundage expressed that reports of anti-semitism in Germany had

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<sup>230</sup> Stoddart, "Sport, Cultural," 43.

<sup>231</sup> Stoddart, 44.

<sup>232</sup> Stoddart, 44.

<sup>233</sup> Kessler, "Only Nazi," 126.

<sup>234</sup> Daniel Shorkend, "Nazism and Sport: The Dangers of Art Aesthetics," *International Journal of Innovative Studies in Sociology and Humanities* 4, no. 7 (July 2019): 25, <https://ijissh.org/storage/Volume4/Issue7/IJISSH-040704.pdf>.

been exaggerated and the games would go off without any problems. Following US support for the games, an international campaign to boycott the Olympics failed.<sup>235</sup> The Germans also claimed to demonstrate their loyalty to Olympic principles by including Jewish athletes in their Olympic team – just one “half Jew” participated under the German flag. Nazi leadership had been successful in their first hurdle in disguising the true intentions of their regimes. No further complaints were raised when the Nazis moved troops into the demilitarized Rhineland just months before the Games.<sup>236</sup>

The Third Reich used the 1936 Olympics to show off the coordination, strength, and success of this new German society. The 77 million mark *Reichssportfeld* was constructed to hold all sporting events. The primary stadium, the *Olympiastadion*, could accommodate over 100,000 spectators. Huge nude figures of athletes decorated the stadium in homage to Greek heritage of the Olympics, but with distinctly “Aryan” features to promote Hitler’s agenda. The opening ceremony was directed by the most famous living German musician, Richard Strauss, who led three thousand German performers in “Deutschland Über Alles”, the Nazi Party Anthem “Horst-Wessel-Lied”, and a new piece composed for the 1936 Games called the “Olympic hymn.” The IOC would use the “Olympic hymn” in all future Olympic Games.<sup>237</sup> Dramatic and technically complex lighting, strict choreography, and some of the most famous German music wowed the opening ceremony’s audience. Visitors left the ceremony with an impression of a creative and artistically skilled nation. Throughout the Games, the state ordered party members to show extreme courtesy to the visiting tourists – “even when they were visibly

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<sup>235</sup> Kessler, "Only Nazi," 134.

<sup>236</sup> Shorkend, "Nazism and Sport," 25.

<sup>237</sup> Shorkend, 26.

recognizable as ‘non-Aryans.’”<sup>238</sup> A memo was distributed throughout SA leadership that instructed: “In these coming weeks of the Olympics we want to show foreigners that it is a lie spread abroad that the persecution of Jews is a daily occurrence in Germany.” In the midst of the 1936 Olympics, just over 20 miles north of the event, the concentration camp Sachsenhausen was opened.<sup>239</sup>

Further improving their image was the Nazi’s sporting success. The Nazis topped the medal count with 89 medals overall, 33 of which were gold. The Nazis were 33 medals ahead of their closest competitor, the US, and third place was taken by fascist ally Italy.<sup>240</sup> The high medal count, internationally, demonstrated German strength and the success of Nazi physical education and, domestically, appeared to confirm Hitler’s racist and anti-semitic beliefs surrounding the superiority of the Aryan race. Ultimately, the 1936 Olympic Games showed the world a peaceful, yet powerful Germany united under a fascist regime. Ideologically and physically, Nazi Germany appeared to be ready to compete with their democratic neighbors on all fronts, not just on the field.

## Spain

Spain differed from Italy and Germany in their use of international sport. Franco’s isolationist status during World War Two and his ability to maintain power after the fall of the Axis powers meant Spain’s position on the global stage was drastically lower than their former fascist peers. Rather than seeking to assert their dominance in Europe, Spain had to improve their overseas image and diplomatic position just to participate in an

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<sup>238</sup> Kessler, "Only Nazi," 139.

<sup>239</sup> Kessler, 140.

<sup>240</sup> Michał Marcin Kobierecki, "Sport in International Relations Expectations, Possibilities and Effects," *International Studies: Interdisciplinary Cultural and Political Journal* 15, no. 1 (2013): 54, <https://doi.org/10.2478/ipcj-2013-0004>.

increasingly globalized and Americanized world. For a country that was widely ostracized for its political system, sports provided Spain a space to integrate themselves into the new world order.

Franco came to power five months before the Nazis invaded Poland. Germany and Italy still looked like formidable fronts against their quick-to-appease neighbors on the continent. Hitler and Mussolini's on-going success in annexing territories, along with their support of Franco during the Civil War, translated into a natural alliance between the three nations. Therefore, while the weakened Spain declared themselves to be "non-belligerent" during the war, its bonds with the Axis powers remained strong.<sup>241</sup> One of the ways Spain maintained these good relationships with their totalitarian allies was through football. The Spanish national football team took on an ambassadorial role and played exhibition matches with Germany and Italy, as well as Salazar's Portugal and Vichy France at the behest of the National Sports Delegation (DND). The Spanish National Team, dressed in Franco's blue jerseys, played their first game after the war in Lisbon against the Portuguese side in 1941.<sup>242</sup> The following year, Spain's Foreign Ministry proposed a series of exhibition matches in Milan and Berlin as a show of international Fascist solidarity. The game against the German national team was rife with Fascist symbolism as a mass expression of solidarity between the two regimes.<sup>243</sup> The avenue that led to the venue, the Berlin Olympiastadion, was decorated with thousands of German and Spanish flags. The German team gifted Spanish ensigns to members of the Blue Division, the Spanish troops that volunteered to fight alongside the Nazi on the

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<sup>241</sup> Alex Viuda-serrano, "A Diplomatic Mission: Spain and the 1948 London Olympics," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no. 6 (April 2010): 1081, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523361003656282>.

<sup>242</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 257.

<sup>243</sup> Quiroga, "Spanish Fury," 509.

Eastern front. The audience of 100,000 sang both nation's anthems and performed the fascist salute. Reichssportführer von Tschammer praised the match for its display of "the beautiful and loyal friendship between two peoples who are united in combat against the world enemy in the Russian battlefields."<sup>244</sup> The Royal Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) proposed future games against the Italian and German sides, but it soon proved impossible due to the worsening conditions of the war.<sup>245</sup>

Following the war, Spain's ties to the Axis powers led to their ostracization by the winning nations. By December 1946, Spain was expelled from most international organizations and the United Kingdom's ambassador to Spain was recalled.<sup>246</sup> Although Spain was still technically a member of FIFA, only Portugal and Catholic Ireland would agree to play them. Amidst threats of embargoes and sanctions from the UN and powerful governments, Franco sought to change the international image of Spain.<sup>247</sup> The regime tried to redefine itself as a Catholic government and leave behind their fascist symbols. This shift could be seen with the national team. The blue jersey, which symbolized the Falange and were heavily associated with the military division that fought alongside the Nazis, were abandoned for pre-fascist, traditional red jerseys. The fascist salute at the beginning of games was also abolished.<sup>248</sup> Despite these cosmetic changes, foreign nations were not quick to forget Spain's alliance with Hitler. The RFEF's invitations for

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<sup>244</sup> Quiroga, "Spanish Fury," 510.

<sup>245</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 107.

<sup>246</sup> Viuda-serrano, "A Diplomatic," 1083.

<sup>247</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 260.

<sup>248</sup> Carlos García-martí, "Reshaping Spanish Football Identity in the 1940s: From Fury to Tactics," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 33, no. 10 (July 2, 2016): 1120, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2016.1232250>.

friendly matches with England, France, and Italy were rebuffed by their football associations.<sup>249</sup>

Franco's first significant opportunity to rebuild Spain's relationship with the Allied powers came in 1948 with their invitation to the London Olympics. Rising tensions between the west and the Soviet Union meant western nations had to change their strategy regarding their relationship with Franco to ensure they did not ally themselves within the communists.<sup>250</sup> Spain sought to use the invite, not to win medals or to show its strength, but to earn other countries' respect through their athlete's good behavior and good sportsmanship.<sup>251</sup> Spain had a poor national sporting program due to a near decade at war and low investment in sports. The regime had enough athletes to participate in just nine sporting events. Sporting success and medal count, however, were a secondary thought for the regime and instead instructed their athletes that, "in London, all eyes will be on Spain. Any unfortunate behavior would be used by the foreigners who are hostile to our colors and any inadequate behavior from our athletes would be pleasing to them."<sup>252</sup> The national sports delegate and coach of the Spanish National Team, General Moscardó, was perhaps even more explicit in his directions for athletes in a speech given just before athletes left for London:

Every Spanish sportsman must give his best performance and the best qualities of our race, courage, enthusiasm and vigour, must shine in every moment. I expect and demand that everyone, because they are Spaniards, will not only do his duty but will also excel at it, if necessary. . . . They must behave properly, abiding the rules of courtesy and displaying the traditional Spanish gentlemanliness. . . . They

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<sup>249</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 261.

<sup>250</sup> García-martí, "Reshaping Spanish," 1127.

<sup>251</sup> Viuda-serrano, "A Diplomatic," 1081.

<sup>252</sup> Viuda-serrano, "A Diplomatic," 1096.

must abstain from making statements outside of sport. . . . No matter what the results, but how honourable the victory is, since not winning is not a defeat in sport, although this word has been rarely written in our language.<sup>253</sup>

Spain performed abysmally, winning just one silver medal. However, they did leave a very good impression. Spanish runners would stop and help up other runners who fell. Their hockey team was not overly aggressive. They continuously praised the Brits for their generosity and hospitality.

A similar opportunity presented itself with the 1950 World Cup in Brazil. FIFA was tasked with organizing the qualifying groups to ensure that all nations would be willing to play one another. Spain had to be placed in a group with Portugal and the Irish Republic as they were the only two nations willing to play the fascists. General Moscardo, once again, encouraged an ambassadorial approach from the players. Player Luis Molowny described the instruction from the government official:

During the training camp at El Escorial before flying to Brazil, we were told countless times that we should think of ourselves as ambassadors for Spain, shunned by the rest of the world for daring to be different. We were instructed about how to behave ourselves in Brazil, for example, always to wear an official suit, to say the right thing to foreign Pressman, and even to pick your opponent up off the floor with a smile if you had fouled him.<sup>254</sup>

The fourth place finish at the games, surprise win against footballing powerhouse England, and impressive style of play portrayed an advancing and strong Spain, which only continued to boost their international image. Spain's improving reputation was

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<sup>253</sup> Viuda-serrano, "A Diplomatic," 1096.

<sup>254</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 262.

evidenced by the election of RFEF President and former Blue Division doctor Armando Munoz Calero to the executive committee of FIFA.<sup>255</sup>

The Spanish National Team would go on to perform poorly after the 1950 World Cup, which meant they couldn't be used as a diplomatic tool very often. However, there were a few politically significant games, the most significant was against the Soviet Union in 1964. In 1960, Spain was drawn against the Soviet Union in the quarterfinals of the first European Nations' Cup. Franco banned the team from playing what he considered to be the communist enemy and forced them to withdraw from the competition.<sup>256</sup> Four year later, however, when Spain met the Soviet Union in the finals of the tournament, with the game to be played in Madrid, Franco could not refuse. Both teams, recognizing the political significance of the event, were lectured prior to the game of the importance of maintaining good sportsmanship throughout the match. The Spanish national team went on to beat the Soviet Union 2-1 in front of Franco, his ministers, and 125,000 fans at Real Madrid's impressive Estadio Bernabeu.<sup>257</sup> The game was also played on television in fifteen European countries, so the Spanish regime could show off, "the image of a happy and hospitable Spain, basking in the social peace established by our good protector and Caudillo, Francisco Franco."<sup>258</sup> Unfortunately for the regime, the ambassadorial significance of the Spanish national team was confined mainly to these two achievements in Brazil and Madrid.

While the national team would seem like the natural sporting ambassador for a country as the official team of a country, Spain's national team lacked the winning ability

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<sup>255</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 263.

<sup>256</sup> Quiroga, "Spanish Fury," 516.

<sup>257</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 270.

<sup>258</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 270.

to compete on high international platforms. Rather, it would be the private sports club Real Madrid that would pave the way for international sporting integration for Spain. Real Madrid first established itself as a politically significant team during Primo De Rivera's reign. *Los Blancos* were the first Spanish team to face English teams on English soil in 1925.<sup>259</sup> Two years later, they toured North and South America over the course of four months. While the tour had a sporting and financial purpose, there was also a clear nationalist objective, with the director, Santiago Bernabéu, explicitly calling the tour "Spanish propaganda."<sup>260</sup> Though these international trips were not directly associated with the regime, it did afford Real Madrid access to the most elite financial and political circles in the nation's capital.

Their political significance would continue to grow during the Francoist period. After Franco came to power in 1939, the regime took control over the appointment of top club officials and board members. The aforementioned director, Bernabéu, was appointed to be the club president. Bernabéu had left his post as director to fight for Franco's Nationalist during the Civil War alongside the man who would become Franco's deputy prime minister.<sup>261</sup> Raimundo Saporta, close friend of Real Madrid member and Franco's Foreign Minister Fernando Castiella, was selected to be Real Madrid's vice president. The rest of *Los Blancos'* board was "armored" with high profile military officials and Nationalist politicians.<sup>262</sup> Beyond the boardroom, Real Madrid was the favorite team of many politically significant figures. Paying Real Madrid members, known as *socios*,

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<sup>259</sup> Eduardo González Calleja, "El Real Madrid, ¿'Equipo del Régimen'? Fútbol y Política Durante el Franquismo," *Esporte e Sociedade* 5, no. 14 (Spring 2010): 2, [https://ludopedio.org.br/wp-content/uploads/024133\\_es1401.pdf](https://ludopedio.org.br/wp-content/uploads/024133_es1401.pdf).

<sup>260</sup> Calleja, "El Real," 2.

<sup>261</sup> Calleja, 6.

<sup>262</sup> Calleja, 6.

included the Minister of Tourism Manuel Fraga Ibarne, the Secretary General of the Falange José Solís, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Gregorio López Bravo.<sup>263</sup> The president of city rival Atlético Madrid, Jesús Gil, famously complained that the “the directors’ box at the Bernabéu is worse than the General’s hunting trips.”<sup>264</sup> In other words, Real Madrid leadership was essentially a who's who of powerful men in Spanish politics.

Real Madrid’s board of powerful directors, however, did not guarantee success on the field. For the first decade of Franco’s reign, Los Blancos split the spotlight with FC Barcelona, Athletic de Bilbao, and neighbor Atlético de Madrid.<sup>265</sup> It wasn’t until the 1952 signing of Argentine Alfredo Di Stefano that Real Madrid would become the powerhouse team that Franco could use as a diplomatic tool. Alfredo Di Stefano, one of the greatest players to ever grace the beautiful game (who was allegedly stolen away from FC Barcelona and given to Real at the behest of the dictator), would lead Real Madrid to not just domestic success, but also international domination.<sup>266</sup>

Real Madrid’s first international win in July 1952 at the prestigious Pequeña Copa del Mundo in Colombia earned the team a glowing report from the Spanish ambassador in Bogota:

The behavior of the components of the Real Madrid party, from the first director to the last player, has been irreproachable in every aspect, and the impression that they have left behind, thanks to their impeccable correctness, sporting gentlemanliness and patriotism, has been practically perfect.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Lowe, *Fear and Loathing*, 191.

<sup>264</sup> Lowe, 192.

<sup>265</sup> Aja, "Spanish Sports," 111.

<sup>266</sup> Lowe, *Fear and Loathing*, 194.

<sup>267</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 274.

A Latin Cup title followed in 1955 and the Franco regime awarded the entire Real Madrid team with the Falangist Medal of the Imperial Order of the Yoke and Arrows, a distinction not granted to FC Barcelona for their wins in the same tournament in 1949 and 1952. It was the five consecutive European Champions Clubs' Cup wins between 1956-60 after Real Madrid took on a truly diplomatic role for the regime.<sup>268</sup>

The dictatorship capitalized on Real Madrid's victories in the European Cup and, from the mid-1950s onwards, Real Madrid became the unofficial 'ambassador' of Spain abroad. Prior to any international travel, Real directors would inform the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of their commitments and would be sent valuable information and instruction on how the team should act. In appreciation for Real Madrid's cooperation with the instructions and perhaps to ensure the positive outcome for the game, diplomats would send reports on the opposition teams and players, information that was difficult to collect at the time.<sup>269</sup>

Real Madrid's early diplomatic role largely looked like a public relations tour to put forth a positive and humane image of the dictatorship. During a South American tour in 1958, for example, Real Vice President Saporta gave a check for a thousand US dollars to the Argentine President to aid flood victims. In 1961, the Real players distributed Spanish oranges at a Manchester children's hospital before a friendly match against Manchester United. For all international games, the team would carry out both the Spanish flag and the flag of the host country out onto the field.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Calleja, "El Real," 10.

<sup>269</sup> Calleja, 12.

<sup>270</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 253.

As Madrid's role of ambassador developed, Franco's Foreign Minister Castiella would send his close friend Saporta specific diplomatic objectives for their international trips. For example, just nine months before Spain first tried to enter the European Economic Community, Castiella requested that Real Madrid go to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg while they were there for a match.<sup>271</sup> Saporta gave a speech in which he proclaimed that "it is an honor to have been called to play in the 'European Capital', because this demonstrates that even this Council, where Spain is not at the moment represented, consider us as Europeans."<sup>272</sup>

Real Madrid's sixth European Cup win in 1966 held perhaps the most significance of any of the wins. Following the retirement of Di Stefano, the '66 team was comprised of only Spanish players which translated into strong nationalist sentiment and the feeling of Spanish footballing dominance. The Spanish ambassador to Brussels wrote of the win: "I wore Madrid's badge with pride and happiness because, as a representative of my Patria [Fatherland], I consider the presence of the Merengues in cities across the world to be a genuine expression of our reborn, virile Spain, young and enthusiastic."<sup>273</sup> Furthermore, the final game was again, Partizan Belgrade. Partizan Balgrade was effectively the Slavik army team, and were the first team from the eastern bloc to make the final. Therefore, Real Madrid's defeat of the side symbolized not just a Spanish victory, but a Western bloc victory.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Sid Lowe, *Fear and Loathing in La Liga: Barcelona vs Real Madrid* (New York, NY: Nation Books, 2014), 190.

<sup>272</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 278.

<sup>273</sup> Lowe, *Fear and Loathing*, 186.

<sup>274</sup> Lowe, 183.

The regime also used Real Madrid to cultivate relationships with countries that were identified as potential allies and trade partners for the regime. Throughout the '60s, Castiella encouraged Real Madrid to play friendly matches against teams in Egypt and Syria.<sup>275</sup> Similarly, Real Madrid would take a trip to the United States where they would play three exhibition matches in New York, Philadelphia and Washington DC in front of three members of Eisenhower's cabinet. While it is unclear if Real Madrid was the direct cause, Eisenhower did change his plans to spend time in Madrid after this American tour. Real Madrid's basketball team would also sign a number of American basketball stars, further tying the two nations together.<sup>276</sup>

### **Conclusion**

For Italy and Germany, international sports provided an opportunity to mask the true nature of their totalitarian regimes and assert their dominance in not just sporting competitions, but also in the power and success of their fascist regimes. Germany's 1936 Olympics, specifically, has proven to be an infamously effective piece of state propaganda, and influenced Olympic host city selections for decades after. Spain, on the other hand, used sports primarily to to rebuild relationships with other countries and overcome the shame and dishonor of having been so closely tied to the Axis powers.

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<sup>275</sup> Shaw, "The Political," 280.

<sup>276</sup> Shaw, 279.

## V. Conclusion

In my thesis, I have identified three major goals that the totalitarian regimes of Germany, Italy, and Spain sought to accomplish through the utilization and manipulation of sports: improving their nation's health and fitness for military preparation, constructing a national identity, and as a diplomatic tool to improve their international reputation.

Following the destruction and humiliation of World War I and the political and economic instability of the interwar period, all three regimes promised to revive the citizenry to their historical, imperial standards. They sought to reclaim land they believed to be historically their own and to achieve the status of a great colonial power through territorial expansion. These promises required improvement in the overall health and fitness of society and the growth and advancement of their military forces. All three regimes engaged in the "sportification" of their societies, which involved the creation and implementation of some of the world's first national physical education programs, a requirement for the participation in sports for all, and the introduction of state-sponsored youth organizations.

The three regimes relied heavily on the support of the masses to legitimize their rule and overlook the government's failures. Since regimes could not gain support through economic success or majority vote, they sought to create a political culture that fostered ultra-nationalist sentiment and, in turn, reinforced the regime. Sports had become an incredibly popular cultural institution, and became a venue for banal nationalism and a distraction from any failures of the government.

Sports also provided a space where the totalitarian regimes could improve their international reputation and mask the true nature of their regimes. Hosting and

participating in international sporting events, the most significant of which were the 1934 Italian World Cup and the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, allowed regimes to portray themselves as welcoming, cosmopolitan countries, rather than deeply racist and nationalist regimes that oppressed anyone believed to be the “enemy” of the state. Athletes and spectators that traveled internationally acted as ambassadors for the state and pushed the political agenda of the regimes.

This thesis contributes and compiles valuable and under-studied information regarding the manipulation of sport by three Western European totalitarian regimes for the achievement of state goals. Analyzing the strategies and policies of these regimes allows us to better understand the oppressive, racist, and destructive mechanisms of the state from a cultural perspective that has often been left out of traditional social and cultural international studies. This study allows us to consider how modern totalitarian regimes, or any regime with totalitarian features, may be similarly using sports as a means of achieving their own goals.

The manipulation of sports for political purposes by totalitarian regimes has inspired governments of all types to do the same ever since. The commercialization and privatization of clubs and teams, coupled with the ever-growing popularization and amplification of sports in all forms of media, has brought the pastime to the forefront of society. The lack of understanding and awareness of sports' relationship to politics raise significant concerns regarding the ethics surrounding the industry in all contexts, but most noticeably at the elite, international level. Russia's hosting of the 2018 World Cup prompted important questions about the safeguarding of sport from malicious and violent regimes. Russia's subsequent invasion of Ukraine seems to directly confirm that the

international and open country that was on display during the Cup four years ago was far from a true depiction of Russia and their government.<sup>277</sup> Similar concerns mar this year's World Cup in Qatar, where 6,500 migrant workers have died during Qatar's preparation for the event and questions still linger about whether or not the nation will accept LGBTQ fans.<sup>278</sup>

Amidst all the manipulation and exploitation, however, the politicization of sport can also help bring light to a very dark world. And there is a team that personifies that light more so than most others. The city of Kiev plays an important role in both the fascist era and the modern era. Between the Nazis and current Russian forces, Kiev has had to face devastating attacks from two dictatorships. But despite the 80 years between the events, FC Dynamo Kiev has remained resilient in the face of oppression. Kiev fell to Nazi forces in September 1941 and began a nightmarish existence under Nazi occupation.<sup>279</sup> One consolation for the residents of Kiev, however, was their celebrated football club. Though the team lost a number of players in German blitzkrieg, the squad was reformed as Start FC in the Nazi league that was used for political pacification as described in Chapter Four. They dominated the league, racking up impressive victories over Nazi teams. The team took on an overtly political dimension, one of rebellion and resistance against their totalitarian occupiers. Tragically, within a week of a dominant performance of the Nazi Luftwaffe team Flakelf, all of the members of Start FC were arrested and sent to concentration camps.<sup>280</sup> The legend of the Dynamo players and the

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<sup>277</sup> Minky Worden, "Russia's Bloody World Cup," Human Rights Watch, last modified July 13, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/13/russias-bloody-world-cup>.

<sup>278</sup> "World Cup 2022: How Has Qatar Treated Stadium Workers?," *BBC*, April 5, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60867042>.

<sup>279</sup> Benoit, "The Politicization," 544.

<sup>280</sup> Benoit, 545.

story of the ‘death match’ was a source of inspiration for the millions of Ukrainians during and after the war, and a statue honoring Start FC stands outside Dynamo Kiev’s stadium today.<sup>281</sup>

Over 80 years after the beginning of Nazi occupation, Ukraine faces attack from another oppressive regime, this time from the east. Russia’s assault on the country, however, has inspired Dynamo Kiev to reclaim their role as a symbol of joy and pride for their nation. The team relocated to Bucharest, Romania when the war began and have started training.<sup>282</sup> Though the Ukrainian league has been halted indefinitely, Dynamo plans to travel to Europe’s biggest stadiums to play the world’s most prolific teams, such as AC Milan, FC Barcelona, Paris Saint Germain, and Borussia Dortmund, and raise money for Ukraine. The purpose of the tour was best summarized by Dynamo coach Mircea Lucescu:

This is not about football, football is just our vehicle. An invitation to play is a sign for those who are in Ukraine, for those fighting or suffering, for those who need to hide because of the shelling. It's not just a game [...] We must not forget. We must not go back to our daily routine and forget about Ukraine. These games come to honor the victims and to give hope and comfort to all in Ukraine.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Benoit, "The Politicization," 545.

<sup>282</sup> Emanuel Rosu, "Dynamo Kyiv: Ukrainian Champions Decamp to Bucharest to Spread Story of Grief and Hope," *BBC*, April 11, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/61055280>.

<sup>283</sup> Rosu, "Dynamo Kyiv."

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