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The Importance of Reception: Explaining Sport's Success in Early Twentieth-century Spain

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This paper considers the reception and growth of sport in Spain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period during which the new activity developed from a novelty into part of the national culture. I focus on who exactly gravitated to sport and why, to explain this growth and ground that explanation in the larger national and regional history. Several factors and early groups spurred Spanish interest in sport including the movement to 'regenerate' the country around the turn of the century, the support from the medical community, and organizations such as the Institución Libre de Enseñanza and the Federación Gimnástica Española. Sport was also attractive to the emerging urban, Spanish middle classes who embraced it as a form of conspicuous consumption and for whom sport served a similar social purpose as art in cities such as Barcelona. In the 1910s and 1920s, the masses also became receptive to sport and football in particular for various reasons. In particular, clubs created local identities that drew in members and allowed teams to serve as community leaders, like Athletic de Bilbao and F.C. Barcelona do today.

Introduction

By the end of 1898, Spain was the veritable poster child across Europe for national decline and decadence. By that year the nation had lost the last remnants of its once great empire in the Spanish-American War, had only produced small pockets of industrialization during the nineteenth century, and had endured a century of government instability and political chaos. Yet this image of a collapsing

nation contrasts significantly with the rapid growth of modern sports introduced to the country in the same time period, and the vital role they played in culturally reconnecting Spain to the European mainstream. As early as the 1920s, the nation had produced several successful football clubs and an international star in Ricardo Zamora, and by the 1950s Real Madrid C.F. was dominating European competition despite the nation languishing under the Franco dictatorship and severe economic hardship. Roughly 100 years after 1898, Spain had become one of the continent's most accomplished sporting nations. It hosted the hugely successful 1992 Barcelona Olympics, produced the FIBA World Basketball champions in 2006, won Euro 2008 and the 2010 World Cup in football, claimed European Champions League titles at the club level through Real Madrid and F.C. Barcelona in 1992, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2006, and 2009, and even chalked up a Wimbledon championship thanks to Rafael Nadal in 2008. Further, clubs such as Real Madrid and Barcelona have become multi-million dollar organizations that own massive compounds and stadiums, their own television networks, and are two of the wealthiest and most successful institutions Spain has produced in the modern world, with incomes that rival several small countries.

Clearly then, Spain has embraced sport thoroughly and sport has become an important part of the national culture. This article discusses why this happened, how sport as an activity flourished after its early introduction to Spain, and considers the causes for this success when so little else in the nation modernized successfully. In particular, it will modify the predominant thesis among historians of sport that many modern sports (and football in particular) were codified by the British and then spread throughout the British Empire and the rest of the world, driven by the combination of British prestige and economic influence. While there is certainly some merit to this explanation, the donor-recipient model is increasingly seen as outdated and places too much importance on Britain as the donor nation. More emphasis needs to be placed on the reception of sport in each country because it did not grow from a novelty in the 1880s and 1890s into a powerful player in Spanish culture by 1930 based on foreign influence alone. Instead, to understand sport's success, emphasis must be placed on the chords it struck within the nation. Focusing on who exactly gravitated to sport, and why, should both help explain its success more clearly and also ground that explanation in the larger national and regional history, thus establishing the role and importance of sport within the wider community. Emphasizing reception should also promote comparisons with other nations to ascertain what common characteristic led nations to embrace sport as an activity. Moreover, one of sport's greatest strengths is its chameleon-like ability to replicate existing identities of almost any sort within the framework of a completely new activity. In Spain at least, this ideological flexibility played a key role in allowing sport to spread and become deeply embedded in local cultures. People from almost any political,

class, or regional perspective could imbue their clubs with the values they wanted, and in a painfully decentralized country like Spain this was a tremendous asset.

The first two sections of the article outline a pair of the most influential cultural aspects that made early twentieth century Spaniards receptive to sport. First, there was the movement for national regeneration around the turn of the century with its incumbent interest in modernization, medicine, and health. Attention turns, secondly, to the growth of significant urban middle classes who often embraced sport as a means of asserting their social distinction. The third section connects these influences to two institutions that were vital to promoting the new activity, the Institución Libre de Enseñanza (ILE) and the Sociedad Gimnástica Española/Federación Gimnástica Española (SGE/FGE). The final section, addresses some of the elements that helped sport in general, and football in particular, grow from a middle-class into a mass activity in the 1910s and 1920s. In a comprehensive overview of these developments, the article emphasizes the importance of understanding the confluence of interests within each nation that made sport an attractive, culturally vibrant, and socially significant new activity.

Regeneracionismo and urban fears

Although some educators and military leaders were interested in physical education in the 1880s and earlier, it was during the 1890s that modern sport spread beyond small groups of educators and reformers and gained significant numbers of popular adherents in Spain. There were several factors that made Spaniards receptive to the new activity and led a few early groups to embrace it for reasons that were sometimes unique to Spain and at other times common throughout Western Europe, although usually altered in the national context. Most of these reasons were at least loosely related to Spain's general failures as a nation in the nineteenth century, which led Spanish intellectuals to look for answers to their nation's weakness. As early as the 1850s, but especially in the 1880s and 1890s, it became clear that Spain had failed to modernize and industrialize along with the rest of Western Europe. Such weakness and underdevelopment produced a period of severe self-analysis and criticism at the turn-of-the-century, generally referred to as *regeneracionismo*. Discussions of regeneration permeated every forum imaginable, ranging from political debates to neighborhood cafes and literature, and led to a desire for political reform by the end of the 1890s that continued through the first two decades of the twentieth century. This movement strove to understand the country's fall from power by looking for ways to 'regenerate' the nation and return it to international importance.[1] For many thinkers, *regenerationismo* required reflection upon the 'soul' of the country, the significance of the nation's history, and Spain's future direction, as exhibited by works such as Lucas Mallada's *Los males de la patria y la futura revolución*, Miguel de

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Unamuno's *En torno de casticismo*, and Ángel Ganivet's *Idearium español*, which all strove to identify what Spain and the Spanish race should embody.[2,3]

These established discussions intensified and gained public attention in 1898 when Spain's humiliating defeat by the United States in the Spanish-American War made the nation's weakness embarrassingly clear to everyone both in and outside the country. The war provided popular support for reform that drew heavily on middle-class intellectuals with ideas from across the political landscape, and produced a new collection of books on the topic between 1898 and 1901 of which the most important were Joaquín Costa's *Reconstrucción y europeización de España* and *Oligarquía y caciquismo*, Ricardo Macías Picavea's *El problema nacional*, Luis Morote's *La moral de la derrota*, and Rafael Altamira's *Psicología del pueblo español*.[4] These works and others strove to explain the defeat, continued to develop archetypes of the Spaniard, and generally looked to Europe and North America for ways to revitalize the race and the nation, making *regenerationista* writers particularly open to European ideas, including recognition of the importance of physical education. These writers often conflated modernization, industrialization, and urbanization under the general term 'Europeanization' because they saw Spain as weak in those areas in contrast to the rest of Western Europe collectively, and I have occasionally copied their usage to replicate this perspective.

In one strand of *regenerationista* conversation, numerous academics and doctors became concerned about urban decline, physical health, and changing gender roles within Spain's cities, a set of problems that were seen as increasingly important across Europe at the time. Concerns about public and private health were part of the reputed 'social question' that every European nation dealt with in the late nineteenth century as cities expanded rapidly, bringing a general decline in the sanitary and hygienic conditions of urban life. In Spain, city death rates often ranked closely with those in East Asia, and in 1892 Valladolid reported a death rate higher than its birth rate, a situation more characteristic of medieval cities than modern Europe.[5] Further, soldiers repatriated en masse from Cuba and the Philippines in 1899 and brought back numerous tropical diseases that threatened urban populations and bred instability and immorality, a change highlighted by the growing numbers of prostitutes who became a common aspect of city life. For example, in 1900, Madrid held upwards of 17,000 prostitutes, while in Barcelona the young Pablo Picasso lived in a poor neighborhood and his early paintings are filled with veiled references to prostitution.[5] Two young contemporary doctors wrote books about these problems, namely *Madrid bajo el punto de vista médico-social* (1902) by Dr Ph. Hauser and *La vivienda insalubre en Madrid* (1914) by Dr César Chicote.[6] Both works focused on the neighborhoods of Madrid and identified the population densities, illness rates, and generally poor sanitary conditions across the city. By illustrating these conditions they hoped

to spur the adoption of hygienic reforms and physical education programs. Other important contributors connected these concerns even more directly to physical education, such as Eduardo Utor Sotomayor who received his doctorate from the Universidad Central in 1901 for a dissertation on scholarly gymnastics and the need to introduce them to Spain. Similarly, Rafael Rodríguez Ruiz completed his dissertation in Barcelona in 1902 with a focus on gymnastics internationally and their hygienic benefits, that gained support from the Gaceta Médica Catalana.[7]

As a result of such works, the movement to introduce physical education into Spain built a strong base of support within the Spanish medical community and by the 1920s it was led by doctors such as Joaquín Decref, Manuel Bastos Ansart, and Emilio Porras. Joaquín Decref was a member of the Real Academia Nacional de Medicina and speaker at the 1919 conference of the Sociedad Española de Gimnástica. Decref's contemporary, Manuel Bastos Ansart, added his voice by giving several radio broadcasts on the benefits of physical fitness in 1927 before going on to become a well-known authority on orthopedics and military injuries at the National Institute for the Reeducation of Invalids at Carabanchel. Similarly, Emilio Porras wrote an important book in 1925 on the importance of physical education, *Educación física: Concepto general, desde el punto de vista higiénica, de los deportes actuales y su acción benéfica o perjudicial en el desarrollo de la juventud*.[8] Its publication was supported by the Sociedad Española de Higiene and represents one of the most complete Spanish approaches to the topic in the pre-Civil War period. These doctors represent a few examples of the growing connection in Spain between the medical sciences and the promotion of sport across the country. As mentioned above, in Spain this was a logical alliance because both were seen as modern activities developed by their more successful European neighbors that broke through political and cultural divisions because of the benefits they brought. As such, medicine and sport contributed to the 'modern' and the 'European' being connected in the perspective of Spanish *regeneracionsita* reformers.

Middle-class emergence, art, and identity

Underlying these hygienic and *regeneracionista* arguments was the slow emergence of an urban, Spanish middle class at the turn of the century that had a much more practical reason for embracing sport: class consciousness. The two most economically advanced areas of the nation were the cities of Bilbao and Barcelona, with Madrid also developing but driven more by government and clerical work than industrialization. In all three cities, sport developed clearly as an activity of the urban middle classes and provided this group with a new form of conspicuous consumption using both disposable income and free time in a very public way. Sports such as cycling, which particularly thrived in turn-of the-century Catalonia, gave the participants a certain identity and camaraderie that

set them off from the common classes in a very visual manner as they zoomed along the streets of Barcelona or Bilbao and into the countryside on their modern and, from a Spanish perspective, decidedly 'European' machines. All participants clearly had the free time to engage in such activities and the resources to purchase and maintain bicycles, special sets of football clothes, and other sporting goods, and the sudden appearance of bicycle shops and kit stores in middle-class neighborhoods in Barcelona exemplified this change.[9]

Bicycle transportation, as well as the excursionist and mountaineering societies that developed at the same time, also took individuals outside of their urban homes to see the countryside around them to which they were currently building Spanish, Catalan, or Basque national attachments. Essentially, Spanish sportsmen (re)discovered the actual land and people of the nation they wished to regenerate. By the 1910s, these sportsmen were bringing back pictures of almost every region in Spain and publishing them in journals for people to enjoy vicariously. The Madrid journal *Heraldo Deportivo* is an illuminating example of this, publishing between 1915 and 1930 scores of pictures of the Pyrenees, La Mancha, the mountains of Asturias and Galicia, and the Alhambra in Granada, which provided tangible images around which people could imagine their communities.[10]

This early sporting community also had connections to the artistic avant-garde within the Barcelonan bourgeoisie, and both art and sport were popular forms of conspicuous consumption amongst the city's urban, professional middle classes. An excellent example of this connection can be seen in an 1898 article published by *Los Deportes*, the city's most important early sports publication. The article reported on a collection of bicycle races in the early Barcelona velodrome and also noted that one of the popular meeting places for club members was none other than the cafe Els Quatre Gats (The Four Cats).[11] Although only open from 1898–1903, this famous cafe was the centre of Barcelona's internationally-recognized art community and was frequented by key figures of the city's bohemian culture, such as Miguel Utrillo, Pere Romeu, and the young Pablo Picasso.[12] The cafe served as meeting point and clearing house for Barcelona's avant-garde artists, who strove to portray new ideas in both old and new artistic forms, including sculpture, painting, architecture, music, poetry, and even puppeteering. It was run and organized by the painters Santiago Russinyol i Prats, Ramón Casas i Carbó, and Pere Romeo, all of whom were influenced by Parisian styles and had pro-Catalan sentiments that led them to champion the region's traditional skilled craftsmen, including metal workers and ceramic makers. Partially because of these international leanings, Els Quatre Gats also served as a social center for several of the city's cycling clubs. Indeed, not only did cyclists frequent the cafe, but Casas made a painting of himself and Romeo pedaling a tandem bicycle through the countryside. The picture overlooked the cafe's central room for a period of time.[13] This image illustrates how bicycle clubs and

excursionists combined the new values of physical fitness and the modern technology in trips to see their region's countryside, so bringing them into closer contact with the *patria*. Such forms of sport-based mobility paralleled the desire of the artistic avant-garde to connect the past and the modern age in their work.

Nor were Barcelona's middle classes alone in developing such interests. Some members of the city's conservative, Catholic elite also became interested in sport, even including the leaders of the growing movement for Catalan self-government and independence. The powerful Güell family provides an ideal example of this through their patronage of both the architect Antoni Gaudí and the Catalan Olympic movement.[12] The Güells rose to prominence in the late nineteenth century as an industrial family that inserted itself into the Catalan elite over several generations. Gaudí's patron, Eusebio Güell, became a count in 1908 and carried himself in the manner of a mercantile knight in society. On the other hand, Eusebio's oldest son, Joan Antoni de Güell, was interested in sport and became a leader of the Catalan Olympic committee in the 1920s, a significant group that repeatedly sought to bring the Olympic Games to the city and built the first stadium atop Montjuic by the end of that decade. In other words, both artistic and sporting endeavors were expressions of the new identities the Barcelonan elite and bourgeoisie were creating. This also tied in with the growth of Catalan regionalism and political activism between 1890 to 1920 that saw the foundation of the Lliga Regionalista political party in 1901 and the attainment of limited regional autonomy from Madrid by the 1910s. The confluence of sport, art, and politics particularly makes sense because Catalan *modernisme* styles of art and architecture emphasized strong connections to the traditional past and nature, but recast them in very modern and stylized forms (the work of Gaudi himself is a prime example). Sport, in a similar way, often took ancient or at least traditional physical competitions and activities, such as running, hiking wrestling, sailing, etc, reshaped them with modern rules and equipment, and sent athletes into the natural world, even if that 'natural' world itself was increasingly reshaped into constructed environments like stadiums. The sports movement, then, developed in accord with Barcelona's political and artistic communities and was another important side of the city's expansion and self-expression. In fact, the connections between sporting and artistic communities existed in cities across Spain wherever the growing urban, professional middle-class gained enough numbers to carve out its own new identity, especially after 1910 when the pace of Spanish economic and social modernization increased.

Pioneering organizations: the ILE and the SGE/FGE

Two institutions championed these changes more than any other in Spain, the Institución Libre de Enseñanza (ILE) and the Sociedad Gimnástica Española/

Federación Gimnástica Española (SGE/FGE). The ILE of Madrid educated an entire generation of (mostly liberal) Spanish intellectuals and political leaders in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and introduced programs of physical education within the school in the 1880s, a decade before sport gained popularity amongst the general public, while the SGE/FGE built the first and most wide-ranging physical fitness organization in the country with branches in almost every major urban area by 1910. Both played a large role in sport's early spread through the country, making major contributions to the consolidation and expansion of sport and physical education's cultural profile and social significance.

The ILE was founded in 1876 as a 'free school' dedicated to intellectual freedom by Francisco Giner de los Ríos (1839–1915), a *catedrático* of Law at the University of Madrid. Its pedagogical approach drew on the works of the German philosopher Karl Friedrich Krause with its emphasis on human agency, rational thought, individual trial and error, and other ideas that challenged the conservative, Catholic pedagogy that still dominated the nation.[14] The school was also influenced by British Public school pedagogy through limited personal ties and numerous visits by ILE educators to Britain to observe schools and attend education conferences.[15] These connections brought together both an emphasis on the individual student and an interest in the benefits of sport and physical education. Not surprisingly then, the ILE developed a commitment to physical education and many of its leaders explicitly advocated 'active learning' that took education beyond the classroom. This can be seen in the organ of the ILE, the *Boletín de la Institución Libre Enseñaza (BILE)*, whose pages, between 1879 and 1906, are filled with over 148 articles that address physical education, the frequency of which rose from the mid-1880s onwards as the regeneration movement coalesced. Original articles on the topic were published by Francisco Giner de los Ríos himself, Manuel Cossío (one of Giner's most important deputies), F. Lagrange (1895), Ricardo Rubio (1893), and Adolfo Buylla (1890) to mention only a few key authors.[16] These writers covered an impressive range of topics including: fatigue and the effects of altitude on physical performance, the themes of muscular Christianity, including the ability of sport to teach morals and team play, and excursions from the classroom and summer camps. Others, such as Concepción Arenal and Berta Wilhelm de Dávila, focused on the appropriate role for girls in physical education, a volatile topic in conservative, Catholic Spain.[17]

The members of the ILE did more than just write about physical education; they participated in it and encouraged their students to join in as well. As early as 1877, games of running and jumping were played by students in the streets around the school and gradually coalesced into more formal activities over time. Working together, Cossío and a visiting Scot named Stewart Herbert Capper introduced rounders and other games to the school as early as 1882 and by 1893 football had become the most popular among the students.[18] By the late 1880s,

some afternoons were intentionally left open for organized games and several fields near the school were used regularly for matches, such as those near calle Puente de Fernando.[19] As a result, the ILE produced not only some of Spain's most important academics and politicians of the age, but also some of its most important athletes. Many of those students and educators moved directly into the SGE in the 1890s and 1900s or founded other clubs that focused on specific sports such as bicycling and football. Most famously, it was ILE alumni who established a group called 'Foot-ball Sky' in the 1890s that gradually evolved into what is today Real Madrid FC.[20]

While the ILE was the seat for the first serious discussion of physical education in Spain, the Sociedad Gimnástica Española/Federación Gimnástica Española (SGE/FGE) also played a vital role in introducing it. This group started as the *madrileño* Sociedad Gimnástica Española (SGE) in 1887 and expanded outward in every direction, establishing and incorporating gymnastic clubs in other regions until a national federation was founded in 1898 as an umbrella organization. By 1900, the FGE had local branches in every large urban area in the nation and was advancing into many small towns. Its leaders had become prominent members of the sports community and remained so until well into the 1920s.

The SGE's original founders were all young men in their twenties who worked together in the Madrid offices of the French petrol company Deustch de la Meurthe and became interested in gymnastics after being introduced to several French gymnastics magazines.[21] These founders began organizing their friends and families, founded their own gymnastic society in Madrid, and became some of the movement's most important leaders for the next three decades. For example, Narciso Másferrer Sala returned to his native Barcelona in 1899, helped found and organize the sports newspapers *Los Deportes*, *Vida Deportiva*, *Mundo Deportivo* and *Vida Moderna* and served as an occasional contributor of sports columns to the mainline broadsheets *El Liberal* and *La Vanguardia*.[21,22] Organizationally, he played a leading role in establishing the Federación Catalana de Atletismo, the Asociación Catalana de Gimnástica, and the Club de Natación in Barcelona. He even helped establish in Barcelona the pioneering Sindicato de Periodistas Deportivas (a sports reporters' union) in the 1910s, an organization that supported sports writers, promoted charity events, and generally elevated football's profile in the city. Similarly, the SGE's founding secretary, Emilio Coll, became an important leader in the wider sports movement. He collaborated in Barcelona papers such as *Los Deportes*, *Mundo Deportivo* and *Stadium*, but also Madrid's *España Sportiva*, *Boletín de la Unión Velocipédica Español* and *El País*. Coll developed a particular interest in cycling that led him to become president of the Comité de la Unión Velocipédico in 1908 and was awarded a silver medal at the Centenario de la Independencia in Zaragoza for his leadership. Other important activists within the SGE were a pair of gymnasium owners,

Mariano Marcos Ordax and Marcelo Sanz, who became forces within the sports community in their own right. Ordax ran a small gymnastics school in Madrid out of his gymnasium after the closure of the short-lived Escuela Central de Gimnástica in 1892 and continued to be instrumental for two decades, providing the SGE's best facilities until 1922.[21] At the same time, Sanz ran a 'hygienic' gymnasium and weapons practice room at number 10 calle del Prado just down the street from the Ateneo de Madrid, an institution founded in 1820 of which almost every important intellectual in Madrid was a member. The location of Sanz's gymnasium suggests that many of these intellectual reformers patronized his establishment and that it may have been a link through which interest in physical education was promoted throughout the Spanish political and intellectual elite. Sanz also wrote numerous books (such as *Ensayo de una higiene deportiva ó los deportes ante la higiene* published in 1913 by La Correspondencia Militar) supporting the positive benefits of physical competition and breaking down the values of specific sports.[23]

Gradually the SGE expanded over the late 1880s and 1890s and into the first years of the 1900s. In 1888, the society produced the first sports newspaper in Spain, *El Gymnasta*, which launched the careers of Másferrer and Coll as sportswriters.[21] By 1898, the SGE had established executive committees to run branches in Tarragona, Lérida, Alicante, Huelva, Salamanca, Sevilla, Baleares, Burgos, Gerona, Ávila, Logroño, Murcia, Albacete, Cádiz, Alicante, and Badajoz[24] and also taken steps to connect the four most significant gymnastic organizations in the nation: Club Gimnástico de Tarragona, Sociedad 'El Gimnasio' de Vigo, the Asociación Catalana de Gimnástico (Barcelona), and itself, under one national umbrella.[25] As a result of these efforts the national Federación Gimnástica Española was formed on March 1, 1898 with the explicit goal of uniting the nation's gymnastic societies.[26] The new federation's members also used their political pull to raise the organization's visibility by bringing in as honorary president José Canalejas Méndez, a prominent member of the Liberal Party who served as the minister of Hacienda, Gracia y Justicia, and Fomento and later became prime minister in 1910. Similarly, the organizers appointed Dr Alejandro San Martín as honorary vice-president because he provided a high-profile figure in the fields of science and medicine as a professor on the Facultad de Medicina de Madrid, editor of two scientific journals, and an active member of the Spanish Liberal party, soon to serve as the Minister of Public Instruction in 1906. It is also worth noting that there was not much friction between promoters of gymnastics and sport as in Germany and other countries. Some writers did note that sports such as cycling more prone to injury and the overuse of specific muscles, but those differences did not produce large divisions and gymnastics, cycling, football, and other physical activities usually coexisted peacefully.

After its establishment in 1898, one of the federation's first acts was to plan a national conference for 1899 with representatives from all the executive committees

across the country. Officially the 'Secunda Asamblea y Primero Fiestas Federales', the September 1899 event held in Barcelona, marked a true watershed for the FGE and was one of the first large-scale sporting events in Spain. This conference brought new-found respect and size to the organization both through the vibrant support of its host city and the addition of a wide range of competitions that drew curious observers out to watch and sparked interest in the new activities. Football matches took place at the early Velódromo de la Bonanova, a field adjoining the hotel of the same name that hosted most of the city's first matches. Foot and bicycle races were held in the streets outside the Ayuntamiento and at different locations around the city with crowds of unknown numbers coming to witness the odd spectacle and learn about what they were doing. There was also a small conference attached to the festival, with papers presented on a variety of topics related to physical education, the medical importance of hygiene, and the ways that physical training could be introduced within the nation. The festival ended on September 24, 1899 with a final banquet held in the Salón de Ciento de la Casas Consistoriales, a prestigious hall in Barcelona maintained by the city government.[27] It was presided over by Dr Rafael Rodríguez Méndez (the current president of the FGE) with representatives of the Captain General of Catalonia on his right, the mayor of Barcelona on his left, and most of the executive committee of the FGE surrounding them at the head table. This moment revealed how far the FGE had already come as a recognized national institution, and also provides an excellent example of how advocacy groups in sport – including liberal *regeneracionistas*, doctors, middle-class politicians, and even the Spanish military – could combine together to promote the new activity.

Building identities and the masses

The last section of this article briefly addresses how the masses became receptive to sport, and particularly football, in the 1910s and 1920s. Compared with other countries, this transition went smoothly in Spain because most club founders were businessmen and professionals themselves who understood the benefits of drawing a paying audience, and only clubs in the Basque Country defended amateurism consistently. As a result, club leaders rarely lost control of their organizations, and professionalization in 1926 mostly led to established clubs consolidating their dominance by expanding their infrastructures and emphasizing distinctive local identities.

Several factors combined to create this boom for Spanish football in the 1910s and 1920s. First, Spain's neutrality during the First World War and the economic benefits it brought drove the expansion of football after 1914 by expanding the middle classes and providing some amount of disposable income to workers for the first time. Second, worker participation expanded ever further thanks to

government regulations in 1919, when the eight-hour work week was (finally) established.[3] Third, another new set of government regulations put in place much stricter copyright laws for plays that raised ticket prices for *zarzuelas* and other cheap theater performances, leading many workers to look for new forms of entertainment.[28] Lastly, bullfighting had already blazed the trail of mass outdoor entertainment in Spain as a model for other sports: class-differentiated seating with tickets for *sol* (sun) or *sombra* (shade); poster wall advertisements promoting events; and established social conventions that allowed everyone to cheer, yell, and generally interact once inside.[29] At the same time, bullfighting followed a summer season of festivals, and rarely competed directly with the newer sporting events and activities, and was regularly condemned as a cruel symbol of the decadent past by *regeneracionista* writers. In other words, bullfighting provided sports promoters with the business experience needed to operate mass spectacles, but only a limited amount of competition.

Nonetheless, the most important factor in spurring football's expansion among the working class was the application of nationalism and regionalism to create club identities. This was exceptionally important in Spain because of the country's long history of regional division and rivalry between the Castilian core and the Basque, Catalan, Galician, and other peripheries. By the early twentieth century, these problems were accentuated by the industrial leadership of Barcelona and the Basque Country that both developed significant political movements and embraced internationalism to emphasize their economic success and contrast themselves with Castilian traditionalism. To gain fans, teams consciously fed into these identities, employing regional symbols, political figures and other elements.

Two of the best examples of this approach were the two branches of Athletic, Bilbao and Madrid. On one hand, Athletic de Bilbao became a leading proponent of Basque national identity and drew its *socios* (members) almost exclusively from the city's professional, educated, and small-business-owning middle-class prior to the Spanish Civil War.[30] Informally at least, they even began employing their *cantera* policy of only fielding ethnically Basque players as early as 1912, which they were by no means the only Basque club to do, and such policies directly reflected the strong racial identity that lay at the core of Basque nationalism. In the meantime, Atletico de Madrid started as a branch of Athletic de Bilbao and became the second largest club in the national capital by serving its large and financially successful Basque community. By 1917, the society went far beyond football, having added sections that played hockey, track and field, tennis and other sports, even accepting 300 female members and organizing family-oriented activities regularly.[31] Quite simply, Atletico became an important cultural organization for the entire Basque community of Madrid. This reflects developments in other areas where immigrants carried their local loyalties with them to new places, like C.R. Vasco De Gama in Rio de Janeiro and Gaelic athletic clubs in North American cities.[32]

The maestros of identity creation, however, were the directors of FC Barcelona and Hans Gamper in particular. After surviving for a decade and nearly dissolving in December 1908, the club massively expanded in the 1910s and 1920s and did so by consciously courting the conservative, middle-class led *catalanismo* movement and its political party, the Lliga Regionalista, which had recently obtained a limited regional government, the Mancomunitat de Catalunya. Politicians like the Lliga's president and city councilor, Francesc Cambó i Batlle and journalists such as Joan Ventosa i Calvell, the original director of *El Poble Català* the city's most important Catalanista newspaper, were courted and connected to the club publicly to bolster its identity.

In the 1920s, Catalan nationalism radicalized from its conservative, middle-class origins into a more liberal, working-class identity. This change resulted from the gradual breakdown during the 1910s of Spain's system of fixed elections that culminated in the conservative military dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in 1923. Barça was perfectly situated to take advantage of this change and attract a mass following with an identity as *the* Catalan club already established and endorsed openly by several important newspapers. After 1923, the club found itself in regular conflict with the new dictatorship for promoting Catalan nationalism and several incidents led the government to shut Barça down by edict for six months in the fall of 1925 and expel Gamper from the country. However, such events only made the club's identity more authentic to the Catalan masses in a city where gun battles between the police, anarchists, and extreme Catalanistas were the norm for most of the decade. All told, the club expanded from 65 *socios* in 1908 to 12,207 in 1924 and it opened the stadium of Les Corts in 1922 with an initial capacity of 20,000, both numbers that showed the club's new ability to draw a mass audience.[33]

Conclusion

To conclude, a variety of reasons contributed to sport's embeddedness in all levels of Spanish society by 1930. The arguments for sport were introduced to Spain through contact with British public schools, international pedagogical and scientific conferences, German Krausist philosophy, and French and other international firms and publications. However, Spaniards received and reshaped these new activities to suit their own needs. Institutions like the ILE, FGE, and various individuals were driven by fears of national decline, a *regeneracionsimo* movement that often saw Spain's European neighbors as more modern and successful, a rising medical community that provided scientific arguments for the new activity, and an expanding urban, middle class that embraced sport to build its own identity. In the 1910s and 1920s, sport spread to the masses because of a period of economic success during the First World War that gave workers more resources for recreation, new government labor laws, which provided the general

population with more free time, and the exploitation of regional nationalisms that became more radical and populist during the period. Regardless of British prestige and other external factors, therefore, sport had the potential to answer problems and build identities that many Spaniards wanted for their own reasons. The new activity provided an opportunity to bring a modern element into Spanish culture that was unburdened by negative stigmas, very visible, and far easier and less controversial to adopt then other forms of modernization, like industrialization or democratic government. Further, sport strengthened both national and regional identities simultaneously by promoting cultural distinctiveness through specific clubs, while also accepting a common set of rules that bound those clubs to national and international competitions. In fact, the role of sport as an easily adopted form of modern culture and its ability to promote regional, national, and even transnational identities likely made it attractive in many transitional nations across Europe and the larger world. In Spain, these advantages were driven home by the first Spanish national team's unexpected second place finish at the 1920 Antwerp Olympics, a result that made the nation feel good about itself for the first time in many people's lifetimes. When the team returned, they were met at the border in San Sebastián by thousands of cheering fans and King Alfonso XIII to congratulate them in person.[34] Journalists built the myth of 'la furia española' around the team's style of play, most of the players became famous as individuals, and the scene of cheering fans was repeated in train stations across the country as each individual returned to their home. After that galvanizing success, sport in general, and football in particular, were widely embraced throughout the country, with professionalization officially accepted in Spanish football in 1926 and La Liga established to support it in 1928. As a result, when the Franco era began after the Spanish Civil War it brought many changes to the sports world, but the fundamental infrastructure of clubs, stadiums, and the league schedule survived largely intact as a basis upon which to build the successful Real Madrid clubs of the 1950s and the nation's other sporting accomplishments.

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