

Giochi diplomatici. Sport e politica estera nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra, by NICOLA SBETTI, Treviso-Rome, Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche-Viella, 2020, 463 pp., €30.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-3313-287-7

Italian passion for sport, all sorts of sport, goes back to the invention of Florentine soccer in the late medieval times as an element of civic identity. Similar competitions were played in most Italian towns to reinforce their sense of belonging and a rivalry between neighbourhoods. During the twentieth century, the traditional class divide between sports of the leisured happy few and the working class was superseded by professional sport. Exceptionally skilled athletes, salaried by privately-owned companies and by the public sector, fulfilled the need of the nationalised masses to find symbols and heroes with which to identify themselves.

Since the industrial revolution of the 1880s, the mass breakthrough of professional sport in Italy has been undeniable. The experiment of Fascist totalitarianism further boosted a network of associations, organisations and funding opportunities that paved the way for the successes of Italian sport in the 1930s, particularly in soccer and cycling. In addition, Italy created a literary culture around sport which has led to the foundation of numerous weeklies and daily newspapers, focusing exclusively on sporting events. An important cultural movement like Futurism paid special attention to sport as an expression of modern dynamism. In republican Italy, sporting victories (and even defeats), primarily in soccer, often acquired a distinct political value that spoke to the national community. Sport writers such as Gianni Brera and Giovanni Arpino produced literature that had great impact well beyond the audience of fans.

Nicola Sbeti's research investigates a specific aspect of Italian sport: the history of Italy's readmission to international institutions after 1945, beginning with the Olympic Games, which made it possible to compete at an international level again. *Giochi diplomatici* is first and foremost about the history of international relations in the postwar period, rather than the history of sport as a social phenomenon. It is organised in three very extensive chapters (a more agile structure would have been preferable), based on a detailed and painstaking investigation of contemporary printed sources and unpublished archival material at various locations in Europe. Sbeti's book is, therefore, valuable and reliable.

The first two chapters deal with the institutional dimension of Italian sport from 1943 until 1953, when it became clear that Italy as a sports powerhouse was fully accepted. The designation of Rome to host the 1960 Olympics marked the end of Italian diplomatic isolation. What made this unmistakable diplomatic success possible? Sbeti tells the story of how Italy overcame isolation and widespread scepticism by examining two fundamental factors. First, the analysis of the diplomatic position of Italy, an enemy nation of the Allies and co-belligerent but not allied after the armistice of September 1943, is fundamental. Sbeti highlights the continuity of the institutions and of prominent politicians, like Paolo Thaon de Revel and Alberto Bonacossa, who, after serving Mussolini, remained active in sports diplomacy after the end of the war. Their role was key. The continuity of the institutions representing Italian sport allowed them to make use of the ambiguity inherent in political-military settlements and maintain a dialogue with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), before the signing of the peace treaty. The principle that national bodies had to be legally recognised by the IOC did not apply to Italy, unlike Germany and Japan. The fact that the president of the IOC, the Swedish Sigfrid Edström, belonged to a neutral state and had maintained good relations with the German government during the war, eased dialogue, especially with Count Bonacossa.

Second, Sbeti stresses the innovation that allowed Italian sport to find a way of rapid international legitimisation. The creation of the national football pools system (eventually called

totocalcio) gave the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI) a constant and abundant budget of resources that would finance all sports. As a consequence, the principle of autonomy of sport from politics had a semblance of verisimilitude. It was argued, generally, that the break with the Fascist overpoliticisation of sports had been accomplished. Was it really a neat break? Sbeti is not explicit about this (see for example p. 60). On one hand, he analyses the transition mostly by emphasising the departure from the Fascist model of constant patronage and interference. On the other hand, the narrative per se highlights how political demands shaped the field of international (and national) sport. This is exemplified by the third chapter (pp. 303–423) about sport in Trieste and the (very delicate) relations with France during the Tour de France in 1950. In Trieste (Free Territory of Trieste, TLT), a city divided between the Allied troops (Zone A) and Tito's army (Zone B) until 1954 (the London Memorandum), the administration of sports clubs was run according to the political agenda of Italy and Yugoslavia. Sport and especially professional soccer in Trieste became instruments for the Italian and Yugoslavian sides to affirm that the city belonged to one or the other state. The history of sport in Trieste gains meaning only if it is placed within the context of the Cold War, while the history of sports diplomacy with France must be seen in the intricate context of relations between the two countries throughout the twentieth century. France did its best for years to hinder Italy's return to international competitions, since it considered Italy to be an enemy country on a par with Germany. Emotions ran high especially in cycling after 1945, because the dominance of the Italian cyclists Fausto Coppi, Giuseppe Bartali and Fiorenzo Magni was overwhelming. Their participation meant economic income to the organisers of the races in France but also irrepressible resentment from the French fans because of the Italians' evident superiority. During the 1950 Tour de France the hostility of the French manifested itself in physical aggression against Bartali, who withdrew from the race, together with the entire Italian team. The sporting crisis provoked a diplomatic crisis, which politics resolved (p. 376).

Sbeti's research is accurate and thorough. As stated in his concluding remarks, his book 'aims to serve as a starting point for scholars who will deal with this subject in the future' (p. 431). A critical remark is, however, in order here. *Giochi diplomatici* is quite Italo-centric. Against the backdrop of the latest studies in 'global sports', it would have been advisable to pay more careful attention to the comparative dimension, especially with post-1945 Germany, where, as in Italy, 'sovereignty in sport' was a crucial political objective. From a comparative view, the Italian peculiarities would then have emerged more clearly and convincingly.

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Fame di guerra. L'occupazione italiana della Grecia (1941–43) by PAOLO FONZI, Rome, Carocci, 2019, 215 pp., €24.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-430-9948-1

Fame di Guerra. L'occupazione italiana della Grecia (1941–43) covers the Italian invasion of Greece, society under occupation, and repression of resistance from October 1940 to September 1943. It is organised sequentially with clearly defined chapters on many aspects of occupation policy and with a focus on the devastating famine which stemmed primarily from the Axis occupation.